

PARISH COUNCILS IN THE RURAL DISTRICT OF BASINGSTOKE: THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS 1894 TO 1914

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ABSTRACT

To what extent were the high expectations and enthusiasm surrounding the establishment of parish councils in 1894 sustained? An attempt is made to answer this question by considering the experiences of those parishes which constituted the rural district of Basingstoke and were large enough, in terms of their population, to have a council during the period 1894 to 1914. Although the picture which emerges is a varied one it would seem that, with certain exceptions, parish councils did not fully realise their early promise. Nonetheless in rural areas they have afforded a mechanism for highlighting local issues and, wherever possible, resolving them either directly or by bringing pressure to bear on other bodies.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years a number of articles have been published on the establishment of parish councils in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 1894 (Slocombe 2005; Woodgate 2006; Ottewill 2008). However, very little, if any, attention has been given to what subsequently happened. The prevailing view appears to be that the initial enthusiasm, excitement and novelty surrounding the reforms of 1894 quickly waned and parish councils and meetings soon faded into ‘undeserved obscurity’ (Arnold Baker 1966, 5). In this paper, consideration is given to the accuracy of this assessment by examining the parishes in one part of Hampshire, namely the rural district of Basingstoke. The choice of Basingstoke reflects the attention being given to the parishes in this area for the new Victoria County History project. To keep the analysis within manageable proportions the period

covered is the twenty years leading up to the outbreak of the First World War.

In 1894 Basingstoke rural district consisted of 37 parishes. See Table 1 for a full list, which also gives populations and acreage for the three census years of 1891, 1901 and 1911. According to the 1891 census, 18 had populations of 300 or more and thus were obliged to have a parish council. Of the remainder just one, Steventon, opted to establish a council. In the others the parish meeting served as the executive body. As the data in Table 1 confirm, during the twenty years to 1914, there were few changes to the acreages of individual parishes arising from boundary adjustments.

In the sections which follow various aspects of parish government are examined. These include the legislative framework regulating parish affairs and the relatively minor changes which occurred between 1894 and 1914; source material for Basingstoke parishes; measures of levels of interest, including press coverage and parish council elections; the recruitment and backgrounds of parish councillors; and parish affairs as highlighted in press reports and elsewhere.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Under the provisions of the 1894 Act the process for determining the membership of the parish council could be a somewhat convoluted one:

Potentially it involved two stages. The first required voting by a ‘show of hands’ at the [annual] parish meeting. A poll could then be demanded, triggering a second stage a few days later in which the choice was made by secret ballot (Ottewill & Slocombe 2009, 51).

Table 1 Civil parishes constituting Basingstoke rural district 1894–1914

<i>Parish</i>	<i>1891</i>		<i>1901</i>		<i>1911</i>	
	<i>Pop</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Pop</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Pop</i>	<i>Acres</i>
Andwell	43	148	54	148	22	148
Basing	1378	5635	1333	5917	1353	5917
Bradley	69	974	63	975	82	975
Bramley	424	2297	415	2297	417	2298
(Church) Oakley	313	1630	251	1630	214	1631
Cliddesden	329	1919	321	1920	324	1918
Deane	121	1586	139	1587	126	1587
Dummer with Kempshot	426	2774	380	2774	376	2774
Eastrop ¹	253	310	—	23	—	23
Ellisfield	259	2349	199	2349	266	2349
Farleigh Wallop	103	1725	106	1725	86	1725
Hartley Wespall	239	1400	213	1399	225	1399
Herriard	367	2978	351	2978	357	2977
Mapledurwell	205	829	201	829	199	829
Monk Sherborne	508	2985	433	2985	494	2985
Mortimer West End	398	2292	452	2292	477	2292
Nateley Scures	175	521	273	521	355	521
Newnham	446	1404	643	1404	577	1405
North Waltham	386	1958	377	1958	372	1958
Nutley	137	1524	130	1524	131	1524
Pamber	709	2185	678	2185	715	2185
Popham + Woodman ¹	114	1440	102	1440	114	1440
Preston Candover	435	3457	366	3457	407	3457
Sherborne St John	751	3972	689	3972	627	3972
Sherfield-on-Loddon	619	2337	608	2337	629	2337
Silchester	456	1945	390	1945	423	1945
Steventon ²	240	2155	229	2155	250	2155
Stratfield Turgis	208	1062	203	1062	188	1062
Strathfieldsaye	541	2743	481	2743	460	2743
Tunworth	98	1105	76	1105	99	1105
Up Nately	116	1149	100	1149	103	1149
Upton Grey	378	2553	319	2553	369	2636
Weston Corbett	22	513	11	513	21	513
Weston Patrick	133	1183	81	1183	93	1183
Winslade	114	712	59	712	87	712
Woodmancott	62	1404	79	1404	65	1404
Wootton St Lawrence	945	4406	909	4406	952	4405
Worting	141	1145	198	1145	316	1145

Notes

Parishes in bold type had a parish council

1 = On 1 September 1891 the urban portion of Eastrop parish was incorporated into the Municipal Borough of Basingstoke and ... the rural portion was transferred to Basing

2 = Steventon's parish council was established in 1895.

Source: *Census Reports* 1891, 1901 and 1911

Initially elections were held annually and a poll could be demanded by a single elector.

A major change to these arrangements was an extension of the term of office for parish councillors from one to three years from 1901, under the provisions of the Parish Councillors (Tenure of Office) Act 1899. Thus, between 1894 and 1914 there were ten election years: 1894, 1896, 1897, 1898, 1899, 1901, 1904, 1907, 1910 and 1913. Another change was that from 1901 onwards it was necessary for five electors, as opposed to one, to request a poll.

To promote the interests and well-being of their communities, the 1894 Act conferred on parish councils the power:

... to provide public buildings for public offices and for meetings; to provide public walks and recreation grounds; to utilise for public convenience sources of water supply within the parish; to deal with offensive drains and ditches, and accumulations likely to be prejudicial to health; to acquire by agreement rights of way that are beneficial to the inhabitants of the parish; to accept and hold gifts of property in trust for the benefit of the parish; and to deal, within certain limits, with parish property not being property relating to the affairs of the church or held for an ecclesiastical charity (Twenty Third Annual Report of the Local Government Board 1893–94, xliv).

To finance these general activities, parish councils were restricted to the proceeds of a rate of up to 3d in the pound or 6d in the pound if approved by the parish meeting. Additionally, if they so wished, parish meetings could 'adopt' various statutes, namely the Lighting and Watching Act 1833; Baths and Washhouses Acts 1846 to 1882; Burial Acts 1852 to 1885; Public Improvements Act 1860; and Public Libraries Act 1892. Adoption would, of course, imply additional expenditure. Although the evidence in only partial, it would seem that for the Basingstoke parishes the adoption of any of these Acts was the exception rather than the rule.

To promote and protect the interests of their parish, councils also acted as institutional pressure groups. This involved making representations to other public bodies, such as the rural district or county council, or private companies, such as those running the railways. For example, in the parish of Basing, at the 1899 annual

meeting candidates for the Parish Council were asked if they 'would do all in their power to get the Directors of the London and South Western Railway Company to give Old Basing a station (applause).' Reference was also made to the steps taken to persuade the Basingstoke Canal Company to provide a replacement bridge (HBG 11.3.1899). Another example from Basing concerned the pollution of the River Lodden resulting from the uncontrolled discharge of sewage. At the 1904 parish meeting the chairman of the council, the Hon C.L Sclater-Booth, reported on the efforts being made to get it stopped and read 'several letters from the Thames Conservancy, Local Government Board and ... (unspecified) others' on this subject (HBG 12.3.1904).

As a further example, in 1907 at North Waltham it was reported that:

In view of the proposed widening of the [railway] line to Southampton, it was decided to remind the directors of their letter of November 15th, 1900, in which they stated that the subject of a station at Steventon should then receive their consideration. It was thought that several other parishes might also be disposed to unite in pressing the claims of the neighbourhood, and the Chairman promised to write to them on the subject (HBG 9.3.1907).

Although the lobbying in these instances was not particularly successful, they do illustrate the role of the parish council in promoting and protecting the interests of its community.

SOURCE MATERIAL

In seeking to determine the degree of interest taken in parish government, information sources are relatively limited. The minutes of parish council and parish meetings for the early years have not always survived and, if they have, relatively few have been lodged with the Hampshire Record Office. Those that are available for parishes with councils are listed in Table 2. Some others may still be held by the requisite parish councils.

Another source is local newspapers, with the *Hants and Berks Gazette* providing most reports for Basingstoke parishes and the *Hampshire Chronicle* and *Hampshire Observer* a

Table 2 Parish council/meeting minute books lodged with Hampshire Record Office

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Ref No</i>
Bramley	Parish meeting minute book 1894–1951	70A04/A1
-ditto-	Parish council minute book 1894–1955	70A04/B1
(Church) Oakley	Parish council minute book 1894–1993	102A13/A
Monk Sherborne	Parish meeting minute book 1894–1976	119M84/1
Mortimer West End	Parish council minute book 1894–1930	19M68/PX1
North Waltham	Parish meeting minute book 1894–1917	201M85/PX1
-ditto-	Parish council minute book 1894–1958	201M85/PX2
Pamber	Parish meeting minute book 1894–1976	15M70/PX1
-ditto-	Parish council minute book 1894–1932	15M70/PX2
Sherborne St John	Parish council minute book 1894–1950	73M98/B1
Silchester	Parish council minute book 1895–1944	98M83/PX1

Table 3 Reports of annual parish meetings and elections in the Hants and Berks Gazette 1894–1913

<i>Parish</i>	<i>1894</i>	<i>1896</i>	<i>1897</i>	<i>1898</i>	<i>1899</i>	<i>1901</i>	<i>1904</i>	<i>1907</i>	<i>1910</i>	<i>1913</i>
Basing	8, 22/12	14/3 4/4	27/3	19/3, 9/4	11/3	9/3	12/3	9/3	19/3	22/3
Bramley	8/12	14/3	3/4	19/3	—	—	—	—	—	—
(Church) Oakley	8/12	14/3	—	19/3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cliddesden	8/12	14/3	—	19/3	11/3	9/3	12/3	16/3	19/3	—
Dummer with K	8/12	14/3	—	19/3	11/3	9/3	19/3	—	—	22/3
Herriard	8/12	14/3	—	19/3	—	—	—	9/3	—	22/3
Monk Sherbourne	8/12	14/3	27/3	19/3	11/3	—	—	—	—	—
Mortimer West End	8/12	14/3	—	19/3	—	—	—	16/3	—	—
Newnham	8, 15, 22/12	14/3	27/3	—	—	—	—	—	—	22/3
North Waltham	8, 22/12	14/3	—	19/3	11/3	9/3	12/3	9/3	—	—
Pamber	8/12	14/3 4/4	27/3	19/3	11/3	16/3	—	—	19/3	22/3
Preston Candover	8/12	14/3	27/3	19/3	11/3	—	—	9/3	—	22/3
Sherborne St John	8/12	14/3	27/3	19/3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sherfield-on-Loddon	8/12	14/3 4/4	27/3	19/3	11/3	9/3	12/3	—	—	22/3
Silchester	8, 22/12	14/3	27/3, 10/4	19/3	11/3	9/3	19/3	—	—	—
Steventon	xxx	14/3	—	19/3	11/3	—	—	—	—	—
Strathfieldsaye	8/12	14/3	—	19/3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Upton Grey	8/12	14/3	—	19/3	11/3	9/3	—	—	—	—
Wootton St Lawrence	8/12	14/3	27/3	19/3	11/3	—	—	—	19/3	—

Key

8/12 = 8 December 1894

— no report found

smaller number. Taking the annual and, after 1899, triennial parish election meetings as a benchmark, the editions of the *Hants and Berks Gazette* in which reports have been found are shown in Table 3. This only lists the parishes which had a council and no attempt has been made to indicate the degree of detail, which can vary considerably, as will be discussed more fully in the next section.

At first glance, the data in this table tend to confirm the view that the initial enthusiasm for parish affairs in the years immediately following the 1894 reforms quickly declined. However, such a conclusion requires some qualification.

DEGREE OF INTEREST

Undoubtedly the number and detail of press reports serve as one measure of interest. It is probable that these were written by someone from the locality, possibly the parish clerk. Indeed, in 1909 Pamber Parish Council approved the following resolution: 'That a brief report of all Parish Council meetings should be sent to the Hants and Berks Gazette by the Clerk' (HRO 15M70/PX2, 81).

As the data in Table 3 confirm, for the years 1894, 1896 and 1898 reports appeared for nearly every parish with a council, although

many were relatively brief simply providing the names of the chairman and the councillors. Some, however, provided considerable detail highlighting questions put to the candidates and the issues that were discussed. For example, in the report of the 1904 annual meeting at Basing reference was made to the questioning of the candidates:

Mr Raynbird thereupon asked all the candidates present severally their opinions (1) as to whether the education of the country should be under popular control; (2) whether the Basingstoke Corporation should be allowed to bring their sewage through the parish; (3) whether they were in favour of having a station at Old Basing. There was but little response to the first question [which related to the controversy surrounding the Education Act 1902]. There seemed to be some doubt in the minds of the candidates with regard to the second question, but the answers were mostly in the negative. The reply to the third question was unanimously in the affirmative (HBG 12.3.1904).

Over time there was a marked decrease in the number of column inches devoted to the annual parish meeting and parish affairs more generally.

A further measure of interest was attendance at the annual parish meeting. Although it was relatively rare to give precise figures in press reports, there were some exceptions. Again taking Basing as an example, in 1896 the wording was, 'there was a fairly good attendance of voters, considering the inclemency of the weather, and very evident interest was taken in the proceedings' (HBG 14.3.1896); 1904, 'the attendance was very small only about 25 being present' (HBG 12.3.1904); 1907, 'about thirty electors attended' (HBG 9.3.1907); 1910, 'about 30 electors being present' (HBG 19.3.1910); and, 1913 'an unusually large number being present' (HBG 22.3.1913). It is therefore reasonable to conclude that many annual parish meetings at Basing were reasonably well attended, indicating a sustained level of interest in parish affairs on the part of the residents.

By contrast, in many parishes attendance was problematic. At North Waltham in 1899:

No interest whatever was evinced in the election of the Parish Council and the annual assembly of the Parish Meeting held in the Schoolroom on Monday last. Mr J.W. Taylor, Chairman of the Parish Council, presided, and only four other persons were present (HBG 11.3.1899).

Similarly, at Silchester in 1899:

The parishioners seem to take very little interest in parochial matters, as on Monday evening at the meeting for the election of Parish Councillors only five put in an appearance at 7 o'clock, and even by 7.30 we could only muster 21 all told out of a population of 456 (HBG 11.3.1899).

In some reports, supporting comments confirm a decline in interest by comparing the situation with that of 1894. Thus, at Sherfield-on-Loddon, for example, in reporting the 1899 meeting it was observed that:

Evidently in the public mind, officialism in connection with the Parish Council does not carry with it the power and dignity which was at first anticipated, and what appeared like radical changes for the public good when the Parish Councils Act came into force have dwindled away, as councillors have not altogether a free hand in the business (HBG 11.3.1899).

While two years later:

Attendance was very small, in marked contrast to the interest that was shown when the Act first came into force. There was no rush for seats on the Council, and the probability of demanding a poll at these elections seems, so far as Sherfield is concerned, a remote one (HBG 9.3.1901).

Likewise, in 1904, 'there seems to be but little hope that the important duties of parochial government ... will ever recover the enthusiasm with which the first Parish Council was elected' (HBG 12.3.1904). By 1913, the writer of the report felt moved to comment that 'for some years public interest seems to have gone from bad to worse in the matter of parochial affairs.' Despite the efforts of the Chairman of the Parish Council in advertising the time and place of the annual parish meeting this met with a 'meagre response.' It was acknowledged, however, that 'at the advertised time there was

a continuous fall of sleet, which doubtless had a deterring effect on the attendance' (HBG 22.3.1913).

Although it would seem that the pattern of declining interest, as witnessed at Sherfield-on-Loddon, was evident elsewhere, in certain circumstances there could be a reversal of this trend. Thus, in 1913 at Newnham it was reported that 'not for many years has the Parish Meeting aroused so much interest as the one which was held in the schools on Monday ... and the room was well filled with parishioners' (HBG 22.3.1913). Unfortunately, the report does not indicate the reason for the upsurge in interest. Likewise, at Herriard, also in 1913, 'a record number of electors' attended the annual parish meeting although again no explanation for this was provided (HBG 22.3.1913).

PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Arguably, one of the most persuasive measures of interest relate to parish council elections. Information about these, gleaned from press reports, has been collated in Tables 4 to 6. As can be seen, contests, in the form of either a show of hands at the annual parish meeting or a show of hands followed by a poll, were relatively rare.

With respect to those contests where there was simply a show of hands, as the data in Table 5 confirm, the number of candidates often exceeded the number of seats by only one or two.

In the case of the few polls that were held the situation was somewhat more competitive (see Table 6). Frequently the number of candidates, both at the show of hands and the poll stage, greatly exceeded the number of seats.

Where polls were held the turnout appears to have reasonably high. At Silchester in 1897, for example, the comment was made that: 'Much interest was shown in the election and the electors polled in good numbers' (HBG 10.4.1896). However, in only one instance, at North Waltham in 1894, are precise figures given. Here, of 79 parochial electors 67, or 85 per cent, cast their vote (HBG 22.12.1894).

COUNCILLORS AND CHAIRMEN

Given that one of the principal aims of those calling for the reform of parish governance in 1894 was to enable a range of local interests to be represented on the council, another important and interesting consideration is the backgrounds of councillors in terms of their genders, ages and occupations and whether or not this changed over time. Table 7 indicates the number of councillors where their names are known and thus, potentially, information relating to age and occupation can be obtained from the census returns of 1891, 1901 and 1911. In a few instances, occupational details are included in press reports. As an example, the six successful candidates at the Wootton St Lawrence parish election in 1894 were a labourer, railway signalman, farmer, thatcher, wood dealer, and farm bailiff – representing a good cross section of the local labour force (HBG 8.12.1894).

With respect to gender, it would seem that there were only three exceptions to the male dominance of parish governance in this part of Hampshire. One of these was the redoubtable Mrs Barker elected at Sherfield-on-Loddon in 1894; a second, Caroline Blewden elected at Church Oakley in 1894, 1896 and 1898; and a third, Mrs Sophia Allen elected at Preston Candover in 1899.

The situation in Sherfield-on-Loddon is of particular significance, since in 1894 it was the only Parish Council in the county to elect a female chairman, namely Mrs Barker. However, she only served until 1896 when she gave up her parish council seat on the grounds 'that new blood introduced in the Council would be a benefit and that others should have the opportunity of acquiring the art of parochial government' (HBG 14.3.1896). A year later reference was made to a 'concisely written leaflet by Mrs Barker' and issued by the Women's Local Government Society, which 'summaris[ed] the duties of Councillors and call[ed] the attention of the parochial electors to the advisability of nominating suitable women to serve on the various councils' (HBG 27.3.1897). Although she was nominated, Mrs Barker again declined

Table 4 Parish council elections 1894–1913

Parish	1894	1896	1897	1898	1899	1901	1904	1907	1910	1913
Basing	poll	poll	—	poll	sh	sh	sh	sh	sh	sh
Bramley	nc	nc	nc	nc	—	—	—	—	—	—
(Church) Oakley	nc	nc	—	nc	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cliddesden	nc	sh	—	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc ^{nc}
Dummer with K	sh	nc	—	nc	nc	nc	nc	—	—	nc
Herriard	nc	nc	—	nc	—	—	—	nc	—	nc
Monk Sherbourne	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	—	—	—	—	—
Mortimer West End	sh	nc	—	nc	—	—	—	sh	—	—
Newnham	poll	nc	sh ^{nc}	—	—	—	—	—	nc ^{nc}	sh
North Waltham	poll	nc	sh ^{nc}	nc	nc	nc	nc	sh	—	—
Pamber	sh	poll	sh	nc	sh	sh	—	—	sh	nc
Preston Candover	nc	nc	poll	nc	poll	—	—	sh	—	nc
Sherborne St John	nc	nc	nc	nc	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sherfield-on-Loddon	sh	poll	sh	sh	nc	nc	nc	—	—	nc
Silchester	poll	poll	poll	sh	sh	sh	—	—	nc	—
Steventon	xxx	nc	—	nc	nc	—	—	—	—	—
Strathfieldsaye	nc	nc	—	nc	nc	—	—	—	—	—
Upton Grey	nc	nc	—	nc	—	sh	—	—	—	nc ^{nc}
Wootton St Lawrence*	sh	nc	sh/nc	nc	nc	—	—	—	(nc)	—

Key

poll = show of hands followed by poll

sh = show of hands only

nc = no contest

— = no report

* = In March 1896 Wootton St Lawrence was divided into three wards and the number of councillors increased from 6 to 7; East Oakley (2 councillors); Ramsdale (2) and Wootton (3). In 1897 there was a contest in East Oakley ward but not in Ramsdale or Wootton wards. In 1910 there was not a contest in Wootton ward and for the other wards there were no reports.

Sources: Most of the information has been taken from reports in the *Hants and Berks Gazette*. In a few instances, however, indicated by ^{nc} a report only appeared in the *Hampshire Chronicle*.

Table 5 Parish council elections show of hands only

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Seats</i>	<i>Candidates</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Seats</i>	<i>Candidates</i>
Basing	1899	10	13	1901	10	14
Basing	1904	10	12	1907	10	13
Basing	1910	10	13	1913	10	14
Cliddesden	1896	5	6			
Dummer	1894	5	8			
Mortimer West End	1894	5	6	1907	5	6
Newnham	1897	5	n.r.	1913	5	n.r.
North Waltham	1897	7	9	1907	7	8
Pamber	1894	6	10	1897	6	8
Pamber	1899	6	7	1901	6	7
Pamber	1910	6	8			
Preston Candover	1907	6	7			
Sherfield-on-Loddon	1894	6	8	1897	6	7
Sherfield-on-Loddon	1898	6	7			
Silchester	1898	5	6	1899	5	7
Silchester	1901	5	6			
Upton Grey	1899	5	8	1901	5	6
Wootton St Lawrence	1894	6	10	1897	8	9

Key

n.r. = not reported

Table 6 Parish council polls

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Seats</i>	<i>SH Candidates</i>	<i>Poll Candidates</i>	<i>Change</i>
Basing	1894	7	21	20	2
Basing	1896	10	14	14	0
Basing	1898	10	13	13	n.r.
Newnham	1894	5	9	9	1
North Waltham	1894	7	13	13	0
Preston Candover	1897	6	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.
Preston Candover	1899	6	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.
Silchester	1894	5	11	10	1
Silchester	1896	5	10	8	1
Silchester	1897	5	9	9	1

Key

n.r. = not reported

SH = show of hands

Change = the number of candidates who won at the show of hands stage but lost in the subsequent poll

to stand for election since she had declared her 'willingness to serve on the District Council at a later date' (HBG 27.3.1897).

As the basis for analysing length of service, age and occupation, two years have been selected. One is 1894 and the other 1911, for which, thanks to a surviving 1912 edition of the *Hampshire Year Book*, there is an almost comprehensive listing of councillors for every parish, the only exception being Monk Sherborne. In each case, data have been extracted from the 1891 and 1911 censuses respectively. Of the 103 councillors in 1894, details of 91 (or 88.3 per cent) have been found in the census. For 1911, the equivalent figures are 111 and 85 (or 76.6 per cent).

With respect to length of service, 24 or just under a quarter were still serving as councillors nearly 20 years later. Out of the 19 parishes with councils in 1894 and 1911, 14 had at least one councillor in this position thereby providing an element of continuity. The exceptions were Herriard, Monk Sherborne, Newnham, Preston Candover and Upton Grey.

The age profile of councillors is shown in Table 8. As can be seen, the great majority were aged 40 and over and there was a marked increase from 71 to 88 per cent in this age group between 1894 and 1911. This is perhaps unsurprising, since arguably the older members of the community would have had not only the inclination but also the time to devote to parish affairs.

Turning to the occupations of parish councillors, data for the years 1894 and 1911 are presented in Table 9. One of the most clearly identifiable groups of parish councillor is clergymen. In the table they are combined with the gentry but disaggregating the figures, there was a notable increase from 3 to 8. All were Anglicans, thus one trend was an element of, what might be termed, the 'clericalisation' of membership over the years. Unlike other parts of the county, no Nonconformist ministers served as parish councillors.

Another trend was the decline in the number of general labourers from nine to one. However, to some extent this was matched by an increase in the number of 'other workmen', such as gardeners and carpenters. Consequently, the

labouring class continued to be represented in reasonable numbers, which was one of the aspirations of the architects of the 1894 legislation. As might be expected, given the rural character of parish councils, farming, including market gardening, remained the dominant occupation.

For parish council members, an initial task was to decide who to appoint to the key post of chairman. In making their decision they were not restricted to one of their number and consequently in some parishes they selected someone who was not a member. Unfortunately, the identity of the first chairmen of seven parishes covered by this paper is not known (see Table 10). For those chairmen where their name is known, one change between 1894 and 1911 was a steep decline in the percentage who were not chosen from the ranks of parish councillors, from seven out of 12 (i.e. 58 per cent) to four out of 18 (i.e. 22 per cent).

Once elected what were the concerns that parish councillors, both chairmen and ordinary members, were expected to address, through taking action either directly where it was within their authority to do so or by bringing them to the attention of other bodies? Although many might be dismissed as the 'stuff of parish pump politics', for the villagers concerned they could be of considerable importance.

PARISH AFFAIRS

Before highlighting a number of substantive issues and concerns it is worth considering the financial position of parishes with councils. For most parishes, the major source of income was a precept levied on the overseer (i.e. rate collector). This was not done on a regular basis but as and when funds were running low and generally the amounts involved were relatively small. Because the availability of overseers' account books is somewhat patchy it is only possible to provide a few examples which are shown in Table 11. In addition to the precept a number of councils received income in the form of rents from allotments and parish property.

One composite issue that appears in press reports and the minutes of a number of parishes

Table 7 Number of parish councillors where names known

Parish	1894	1896	1897	1898	1899	1901	1904	1907	1910	1913
Basing	9	10		10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Bramley	5	5	5							
(Church) Oakley	5	5								
Cliddesden	5	5		5	5	5	5	5	5	
Dummer with K	5	5		5	5	5				5
Herriard	5	5		5				5		5
Monk Sherbourne	6	6	6	6						
Mortimer West End	5	5		5				5		
Newnham	5	5	5							5
North Waltham	7	7		7	7	7	7	7		
Pamber	6	6	6	6	6				6	6
Preston Candover	6	6	6	6				6		6
Sherborne St John	6	6	7	6						
Sherfield-on-Loddon	6	6	6	6	6	6	5			6
Silchester	5	5	5	5		5			5	
Steventon	—	5		5	5					
Strathfieldsaye	7	7		7						
Upton Grey	5	5		5	5	5				
Wootton St Lawrence	6	5	7							
Total	104	109	53	89	49	43	27	38	26	43

Table 8 Age profile of parish councillors 1894 and 1911

Age	1894		1911	
	no	%	no	%
Under 40	26	28.6	10	11.8
40 and over	65	71.4	75	88.2
Total	91	100.0	85	100.0

was that of what might be termed ‘access’, namely bridle ways and footpaths, rights of way, and repairs to paths, stiles and footbridges. For example, at Sherfield-on-Loddon’s annual parish meeting in 1897, the ‘late Chairman’ in his account of the council’s work during the previous year commented that:

At the first meeting he ... had the pleasure to announce that the opposition to the bridle-way through Sherfield Court Farm, and also that to the carriage-way to the Church had been withdrawn, thus completing work of the first Parish Council with respect to bridle ways and footpaths. These had now been marked on the parish map ...

The state of several of the footpaths brought to the notice of the Council called for immediate attention. Some of the defects are already remedied and orders ha[d] been issued for the others to be taken in hand. A strong slab bridge has been placed at the end of Beau Meadow ... (HBG 27.3.1897).

The report continues in far more detail than is usual and indicates the position regarding various repairs that were needed. Another example comes from Preston Candover where in 1907 each of the candidates for election to the Parish Council was asked: ‘if, being elected, would he (*sic*) do his utmost to keep open and inviolate all footpaths, bridle paths, blind roads, etc, belonging to the public.’ Not surprisingly, all answered in the affirmative (HBG 9.3.1907). While at Pamber in 1907 the poor state of the stiles on the footpath leading from Pamber Green to Little London was minuted, with it being reported that on some ‘there were no foot boards or steps and that some of the stiles being high it was difficult for people to get over especially ladies.’ In the circumstances, it was agreed that new foot boards should be erected

Table 9 Occupations of parish councillors 1894 and 1911

<i>Occupational Categories</i>	<i>1894</i>			<i>1911</i>		
	No	Totals	%	No	Totals	%
Farmers and related occupations	31	—	—	32	—	—
Gentry and clergy	8	—	—	12	—	—
Sub-total	—	39	42.8	—	44	51.8
Tradesmen and craftsmen	9	—	—	6	—	—
Shopkeepers and traders	15	—	—	10	—	—
Professional	4	—	—	5	—	—
Clerical and railway employees	5	—	—	4	—	—
Sub-total	—	33	36.3	—	25	29.4
Labourers	9	—	—	1	—	—
Other workmen	10	—	—	15	—	—
Sub-total	—	19	20.9	—	16	18.8
<i>Total</i>	—	91	100.0	—	85	100.0

Table 10 Parish council chairmen 1894 and 1911

<i>Parish</i>	<i>1894</i>	<i>Cllr</i>	<i>1911</i>	<i>Cllr</i>
Basing	C. Hoare	Y	Hon C.L. Sclater-Booth	Y
Bramley	A.B. Welch-Thornton	Y	H. Welch-Thornton	Y
(Church) Oakley	W.B. Beach	N	W. Bowden	N
Cliddesden	John Bird	N	Rev J.S. Allen	Y
Dummer with K	Not known	—	Sir R.N. Rycroft	Y
Herriard	Not known	—	F.H.T. Jervoise	Y
Monk Sherbourne	Not known	—	Not known	—
Mortimer West End	Rev A.L. White	N	Rev F.E. Rooke	N
Newnham	William H. Bayley	Y	C. Dearlove	Y
North Waltham	J.W. Taylor	N	Rev J. Housman	N
Pamber	W. Stroud	Y	H. Wiggett	N
Preston Candover	Not known	—	W. Buckley	Y
Sherborne St John	Rev. D.W. Chute	N	Rev D.W. Chute	Y
Sherfield-on-Loddon	Mrs Barker	Y	D.H. Friend	Y
Silchester	Matthew Ford	N	W. Smith	Y
Steventon	—	—	R. Mills	Y
Strathfieldsaye	Not known	—	G.F. North	Y
Upton Grey	Hon C L Sclater-Booth	N	F. Seth Smith	Y
Wootton St Lawrence	Not known	—	W.R. Thomson	Y

at the Council's expense (HRO 15M70/PX2, 61). A few years later in 1913, in the same parish, a 'discussion ... took place on the bad state of certain footpaths', with the parish clerk promising that the matter would be considered at the first meeting of the new council (HBG 22.3.1913). A final example is a resolution

passed at North Waltham's annual parish meeting in 1901: ' " That with the consent of the owner and occupier of the land the public footpath to Steventon across the field known as "Black Deane" be diverted so as to prevent it being ploughed up with every crop " ' (HBG 9.3.1901).

Table 11 Examples of parish council precepts to 31 March 1914

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Reference</i>
					HRO 68M72/DU
Bramley	20/12/02	£7.0.0	20/03/05	£3.0.0	DU 13 1902-1922
-ditto-	20/07/07	£10.0.0	28/06/11	£10.0.0	-ditto-
-ditto-	13/08/13	£5.0.0	—	—	-ditto-
(Church) Oakley	21/08/07	£7.0.0	11/07/13	£7.10.0	DU 15 1901-1925
Cliddesden	12/09/07	£7.15.0	—	—	DU 18 1905-1927
Mortimer West End	07/05/13	£4.0.0	—	—	DU 27 1912-1927
Newnham	12/12/11	£56.17.6	—	—	DU 33 1905-1927
North Waltham	03/09/13	£5.0.0	—	—	DU 46 1913-1927
Pamber	—	—	—	—	DU 34 1911-1927
Sherborne St John	06/05/08	£5.0.0	20/12/10	£6.0.0	DU 37 1908-1927
	18/08/11	£12.0.0	10/07/12	£6.0.0	-ditto-
Sherfield-on-Loddon	22/04/08	£5.0.0	17/08/12	£5.0.0	DU 39 1908-1927
Silchester	—	—	—	—	DU 40 1910-1927
Steventon	12/01/10	£11.10.0	—	—	DU 41 1907-1927
Upton Grey	—	—	—	—	DU 45 1908-1927
Wootton St Lawrence	30/09/10	£18.10.0	02/11/11	£18.10.0	DU 54 1910-1927
	17/01/12	£18.10.0	—	—	-ditto-

Footpaths, of course, crossed parish boundaries which could have implications for relations between councils. Taking Silchester as an example, in 1897, the following proposal was carried unanimously: 'that the Clerk write to the Bramley Parish Council informing them that the Silchester Parish Council intend repairing the footpaths and erect Stiles belonging to this Parish and hoping their council will put in order their portion of the footpath leading from Silchester to Bramley (HRO 98M83/PX1, 32). A few years later in 1908 another proposal was carried unanimously that 'the Clerk write to Mortimer West End Parish Council requesting them to reopen the footpath leading from Little Heath to Stoney Hill' (HRO 98M83/PX1, 95). In each case, the reaction of the other Council is not known but the proposals demonstrate the priority Silchester attached to its responsibilities with regard to access.

A related matter was that of lighting. As mentioned previously, parish councils could adopt the Lighting and Watching Act 1833, but from the available evidence it would seem that very few parishes in Basingstoke rural district did so. One exception was Oakley

Parish Council, which adopted the Act, at least partially. At a meeting in December 1895: 'The Chairman proposed and Mrs Blewden seconded that three lamps should be provided for the village, one near the Post Office, another by the pond and a third near the Parish Room' (HRO 102A13/A1, 3). At later meetings, the proposal was taken forward to implementation.

North Waltham Parish Council, however, took a different approach. In 1900, 'in view of the great trouble of adopting the Lighting and Watching Act it was resolved that the Council take steps to obtain voluntary subscriptions for placing a few oil lamps in suitable places in the village' (HRO 201M85/PX2, 46). This initiative was successful with £8 4s 4d being raised 'which was more than sufficient to meet the expenses which had been incurred' (HRO 201M85/PX2, 49).

In contrast with lighting, one responsibility which a number of councils pursued rigorously was the provision of a recreation ground. These included North Waltham, Oakley, Mortimer West End and Sherborne St John Parish Councils. For some of these, it was necessary to find suitable land and enter into a tenancy

agreement with the landowner. There were also issues concerning maintenance and the uses to which the ground might be put. For example, in 1903 at Sherborne St John councillors had to resolve the issue of the joint use of the recreation ground for both hockey and cricket (HRO 73M98/B1, 45). While a year later in North Waltham when "Cuckoo" meadow was leased from Major Heal for use as a recreation ground it was agreed that: 'The Parish Council shall have power to grant permission for holding teas on the grounds but no roundabouts, swing-boats, cocoa slings or any outside show whatever shall be allowed without the permission of ... [the owner], nor intoxicating drink of any kind' (HRO 201M85/PX2, 63).

A number of councils also responded positively to the desire for allotments in their parish. Again, this often involved them in having to secure suitable land for the purpose and then determining the rents of the allotment tenants. The importance attached to these tasks by Mortimer West End parish councillors led to them establishing an Allotments Committee. For other councils, however, this was not seen as a priority. At Pamber, for example, councillors 'were of the opinion that there were (*sic*) plenty of land to let in the Parish and that there was no need at present for the Council to take the matter (i.e. allotments) in hand' (HRO 15M70/PX2, 69–70).

Another issue of particular concern was the administration of charities. The accounts were usually presented at the annual parish meeting and a brief mention made in some reports. For example, at Cliddesden in 1910:

Mr Bird asked a question with reference to the condition of the Parochial Educational Charity Funds, and the Rector who is chairman of the Parish Council, stated that the sum now in hand at the bank amounted to about £200. Some conversation took place as to the best method of revising the existing scheme so as to make the charity of substantial benefit to the parish, and the matter will be brought up later on (HBG 19.3.1910).

At North Waltham in 1904 mention was made of the fact that 'owing to the continual accumulation of [charitable] funds, the outfit grants to eligible children would be raised to

30s each, as long as the surplus lasted' (HBG 12.3.1904).

A number of parish councils, in collaboration with Hampshire County Council, were instrumental in promoting what today is known as 'lifelong learning' or what was known at the time as 'technical education'. At Bramley, for example, it was minuted in 1900/01 that:

Mr Belcher mentioned that the first of the series of Nursing Lectures by Miss Taylor had proved satisfactory about 30 had attended altho' it was [a] weekday. Miss Taylor had shown herself an interesting and capable lecturer ... it was suggested that another year the Council should endeavour to obtain lectures on First Aid.

A later minute from 1901 indicates that Miss Taylor's services were again secured to give lectures on "Health Sciences" (HRO 70A04/B1, 55).

Elsewhere, however, there was a marked lack of enthusiasm for this initiative. For example, in 1895 when the Chairman of North Waltham Parish Council, 'presented the scheme of technical education put forward by the County Council ... it found no support among the members' (HRO201M85/PX2, 16). The initial response of Sherborne St John Parish Council was even more negative to say the least. As recorded in the minutes of a meeting held in 1896: 'All the members agreed it was not advisable to adopt the offer of the County Council, and the feeling was expressed that the said C. Council might expend the money in far better ways' (HRO 73M98/B1, 13). That said, by 1899 it is clear that the councillors had had a change of heart because 'Mr Chute mentioned that he had chosen "Nursing" as a subject to be taught ... [with] the aid of the County Council' (HRO 73M98/B1, 30–1).

By contrast, as early as 1895 Mortimer West End Parish Council unanimously agreed 'to form itself into Committee for purposes of Technical Education classes of the Hampshire County Council' (HRO 19M68/PX1, min 22). Clearly here councillors were quick off the mark in seeing the benefits of such provision.

Each year the County Council's Director of Technical Education produced a very detailed annual report indicating the subjects covered and where courses were held. Data from this

source has been used to construct Table 12 which provides a snapshot of provision for the year 1899/1900 as far as the Basingstoke parishes were concerned. Based on the evidence from this source, the parish with the greatest commitment to technical education at the time appears to have been Herriard, closely followed by Basing. Interestingly, in his report for the year 1896/97, the Director includes some quotes from Mr Brown the poultry keeping lecturer, one of which relates to Herriard:

The interest at this centre increased greatly from the first, and it was evident that the people are being awakened to the importance of Poultry Keeping, which they had not hitherto realised. They were not very demonstrative, but the steady attendance and attention were satisfactory to the lecturer (HRO H/CX12/3).

To what extent the Parish Council was instrumental in encouraging adult education amongst the residents of Herriard is not known, but it would seem that the villagers, although interested, kept their feelings about the classes to themselves.

A further sphere of activity was the part played by parish councils in dealing with matters concerning communications with the outside world, specifically the Post Office. For example, in 1911/12 at Oakley in acceding to a request from the Postmaster to close the village Post Office on Wednesday afternoons, the Council asked, at the same time 'if a public telephone call box could be erected at Oakley Post Office pointing out that the telephone is already laid on' (HRO 102A13/A1, 123). Not surprisingly, it was argued that this facility would be a 'great advantage to the district' (HRO 102A13/A1, 124). The immediate outcome of this request, however, is not known. By contrast, at Pamber the minutes for 1907 record that the Council's application to the Postmaster General 'for a midday delivery of letters at Pamber Heath had met with favourable consideration and been granted also that the Sunday delivery would be granted conditionally' (HRO 15M70/PX2, 59). The question of a Sunday delivery was not pursued immediately but the request was made again in 1910. In the same year, the following resolution was passed: 'That seeing that the population

of Pamber Heath has very much increased and that it is a growing neighbourhood, the Pamber Parish Council consider that it is now time that a Post Office should be opened in the neighbourhood and requests that the Post Master of Basingstoke would use every endeavour to have it sanctioned' (HRO 15M70/PX2, 91). The minutes do not record if this appeal was successful.

Certain parishes, such as North Waltham, with support from Basingstoke Rural District Council (RDC), provided a guarantee to secure telegraph facilities. In 1895 it was minuted that: 'Another letter from the Rural District Council intimated that they had agreed to give the necessary guarantee to the Postmaster-General for the extension of the telegraph to the village' (HRO201M85/PX2, 16). However, matters did not proceed smoothly since it would seem that the Post Office would not accept what was described as a 'two part' guarantee. Consequently, the Council proposed that: "The Basingstoke Rural District Council be requested to give the extra annual guarantee of £5 required by the Post Office authorities to extend the telegraph to this village" (HRO201M85/PX2, 21). Eventually agreement was reached regarding the financial arrangements and the telegraph began operating in 1897. Towards the end of the second year of the guarantee scheme, some interesting statistics regarding the use of the telegraph were presented in the minutes:

The number of telegrams sent during the second year of the guarantee given by the parish ended on the 9th February (1899) was stated by the chairman to be 538 and those received 1289 making a total of 2127 for the year. Last year the respective figures were 565 and 869 with a total of 1434, an increase of about 50 per cent is thus shown on the second year's work (HRO201M85/PX2, 40).

In financial terms this meant a deficit of £3 7s 6d in the second year compared with £10 16s 8d in the first.

Alongside the concerns which affected most parishes to some degree, even if their reaction was negative, there was a wide variety of other matters with which councils were involved.

Table 12 Technical education provision in Basingstoke parishes for the year 1899/1900

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>No of Lessons</i>	<i>No Enrolled</i>	<i>Average Attendance</i>
Basing	Dairy School ¹	29	16	11
- ditto -	Home nursing	5	39	36
(Church) Oakley	Home nursing	5	35	28
- ditto -	Woodwork	21	10	8
Dummer	Cookery	10	13	10
Herriard	Home nursing	5	17	13
- ditto -	Woodwork	24	10	8
Pamber	Farriery	10	4	4
Preston Candover	Horticulture	6	—	20
- ditto -	The Horse, Cow and Pig	4	—	25
Sherfield-on-Lodden	Horticulture	6	—	30
- ditto -	Bees	1 ²	—	15
- ditto -	Home nursing	5	56	46.5
Wootton St	Cookery	10	16	14
Lawrence				

Notes

1. Classes provided by a travelling dairy school

2. Afternoon demonstration

Source: Hampshire County Council Reports and Proceedings 1899/1900, HRO H/CX12/5

To give a flavour of these, some examples are shown in Table 13. While such examples are merely indicative, they serve as an antidote to the view that parish affairs are somewhat tedious and uninteresting.

In addition to the concerns considered above, many parish councils also had the power of patronage. Following Hampshire County Council's acquisition of responsibility for education under the terms of the Education Act 1902, parish councillors were enabled to appoint one of the managers of the local school and could thereby make a contribution, however modest, to the administration of elementary education in their village.

Lastly, parish councils served as sounding boards when opinions were sought by other authorities. In 1911/12 Basingstoke RDC canvassed their views on working class housing provision in their parish. Pamber Parish Council recorded the questions and their responses in the minutes:

1. In the opinion of the Parish Council ... is there a deficiency of housing

accommodation for the working classes in the Parish? Answer: Yes

2. If yes, what is the extent of the deficiency? Answer: A slight deficiency at the Pamber End part of the Parish to the extent of 3 or 4 cottages.
3. If yes, are the local landowners likely to supply the deficiency by building cottages in the near future? Answer: Not as far as we know. (HRO 15M70/PX2, 100)

Presumably other councils responded to the RDC's request but while they would have made interesting reading their replies are not known.

While the affairs highlighted in this section might 'appear somewhat minor to the outsider, from the perspective of those living in the community' they can be said to have made a valuable contribution to their quality of life (Ottewill & Slocombe 2009, 48). While it is easy to disparage them as the 'politics of the parish pump', they should not be so lightly dismissed.

Table 13 Further examples of parish affairs

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Example</i>
Basing	How best to celebrate the '60th year of Her Majesty's reign' (HBG 27.3.1897).
North Waltham	At the parish meeting the following resolution, in connection with the planned celebrations to mark the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, which was proposed by the Primitive Methodist minister was passed by a 'large majority': 'That no intoxicating liquor be purchased out of the parish celebration funds should a dinner be provided' (HRO 201M85/PX1, 13).
Oakley	Recognition of the golden wedding of Mr and Mrs Wynham Portal of Malshanger in the form of 'an address beautifully illuminated ... [and] enclosed in an elegant silver casket' (HRO 102A13/A1, 42).
Preston Candover	Gravel being taken without payment from the village gravel pit at Preston Candover for use in neighbouring villages (HBG 11.3.1899).
Sherfield-on-Lodden	'the nuisance of travelling vans encamping on the Green' (HBG 27.3.1897).
Sherfield-on-Lodden	'The formation of a local Volunteer corps' (HBG 9.3.1901).
Silchester	In 1910 proposed that: 'The Clerk should see the police constable & instruct him to apprehend all out-parishioners cutting & taking wood off the common, also all stray ponies belonging to out-parishioners' (HRO 98M83/PX1, 102).

CONCLUSION

From the findings presented in this paper, it would seem that 'relative obscurity' is a reasonably accurate summary of the fate of parish councils in Basingstoke rural district during the first twenty years of their existence. However, like all generalisations there were exceptions, with the parish of Basing being the most notable in this respect. Here elections were regularly contested and the council was active on a number of fronts.

Elsewhere, the parish council could spring into life after years of quiescence when either something of import threatened the well-being of the village as a whole or some of its residents, or major initiatives were planned. The council was often a sounding board or a channel through which views could be filtered prior to taking steps to, for example, construct a village hall.

That said, some of the comments recorded in the press offer perceptive insights into contemporary views on the character of parish

governance. Thus, at Bramley in 1894 it was observed that:

"Cut and Dried" is a favourite phrase with grumblers, but had not our affairs parochial been discussed and partly pre-arranged by competent men who have the good of the parish at heart we might have found ourselves like neighbouring but less favoured communities in the midst of an unhealthy excitement (HBG 8.9.1894).

Of course 'excitement', whether healthy or unhealthy, is an essential feature of democracy at every level.

Another insight is the element of cynicism which was manifest at Silchester in 1899 with the comment that even 'if we don't receive any benefit [from the Parish Council] we shall come to no harm!' (HBG 11.3.1899). As with all institutions of government at whatever level there is always going to be an element of dissatisfaction and/or apathy. However, notwithstanding their shortcomings, in rural areas parish councils have persisted to the present today serving as a resilient expression of grassroots democracy.

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