

The Establishment of Parish Councils in Hampshire

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I Introduction

In 1894, after a lengthy gestation period, the last Liberal Government led by Gladstone successfully secured the passage of legislation designed, amongst other things, to democratise the governance of rural parishes in England and Wales.¹ This was the Local Government Act or Parish Councils Act, as it was commonly known at the time. Although the measure enjoyed some cross-party support, there were many Liberals and Conservatives who had significant reservations, particularly on the grounds that it would unnecessarily disturb the established order in rural communities. Hence, the responsible minister Henry Fowler, President of the Local Government Board, was required to make a substantial number of changes before the bill eventually reached the Statute Book. The controversy surrounding the measure is demonstrated by the fact that 'it occupied 57 sittings of parliament during which 619 amendments were moved'. Indeed, it was only Fowler's 'patience, mastery of the ways of parliament, and willingness to compromise [that] helped to secure its passage'.²

For rural parishes the Local Government Act 1894 established two instruments of local self-government, parish meetings and, in larger parishes, elected parish councils. These replaced the vestry which 'had been slowly stripped of ... [its] duties during the previous century'.³ Parish meetings were essentially instruments of direct democracy and parish councils, representative democracy. All parochial electors were entitled to attend parish meetings to elect councillors and discuss parish affairs.

1 Throughout this article the term 'parishes' refers to civil as opposed to ecclesiastical parishes. Urban parishes were excluded from the provisions of the 1894 legislation.

2 T. Larsen, 'Henry Hartley Fowler' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison, 60 vols, (Oxford, 2004), XX, p.581.

3 B. Keith-Lucas and P.G. Richards, *A History of Local Government in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1978), p. 14.

Parochial electors included those, such as owners of property living outside of the parish, lodgers and persons enjoying the service franchise, who did not contribute to the rates of the parish, thereby eroding the principle of a direct link between the franchise and the payment of taxes. Moreover, women were not disqualified by marriage from being parochial electors, as was the case with the franchise for borough and county council elections, provided they were not qualified in respect of the same property as their husbands. Thus, the parochial elector franchise was described at the time as 'the widest and most liberal known to the constitutional law of England'.⁴

Taken at face value, these were clearly far-reaching changes, but what difference did they actually make at local level? Would parish democracy prove to be a reality or a chimera? How have commentators and historians sought to interpret the reform of parish government in 1894? It is with questions of this kind that this article is primarily concerned.

With respect to the historiography, a major strand is the liberal, progressive view encapsulated by Josef Redlich and Francis Hirst in their seminal work on the history of local government in England, which was published in 1903.⁵ As Bryan Keith-Lucas observes, they wrote 'in order to establish a particular interpretation of constitutional history'.⁶ Within the context of debates concerning the nature of Victorian governance, they saw the 1894 Act as a reflection of the inexorable triumph of the principle of self-government at every tier of government, beginning with parliament in 1832 and closely followed by municipal corporations in 1835, coupled with the British genius for incremental change in public policy. For them the Act was 'the last important chapter in the reconstruction of Local Government in England' and served as a vindication of the virtues of British political culture.⁷ There was, undoubtedly, a celebratory and romantic streak within their approach and a strong belief in the value of local autonomy by comparison with that of central control.

The theme of self-government, specifically with respect to the newly enfranchised agricultural labourers, was developed by another contemporary observer, William Blake Odgers:

4 J. Redlich and F. Hirst, *Local Government in England* (2 vols, London, 1903) II p.177. For a full discussion of the differences between the franchises for locally elected bodies see B. Keith-Lucas, *The English Local Government Franchise: A Short History* (Oxford, 1952).

5 Redlich and Hirst, *Local Government*.

6 B. Keith-Lucas, 'Introduction', in idem. (ed.), *The history of local government in England: being a reissue of book 1 of Local government in England by Josef Redlich and Francis W. Hirst* (London, 1958).

7 Redlich and Hirst, *Local Government*, p. 162.

The main cause which led to this change was the admission of the agricultural labourer to the parliamentary franchise in 1884. This extension of the franchise directed attention to the special wants and needs of the rural elector. The parochial system, as it existed in the English country parish, was not calculated to supply any democratic training for self-government, or to promote the recognition of common duties and mutual duties in village communities. The ordinary English farm-labourer was so accustomed to depend on the clergyman in spiritual matters, on the squire for his cottage, and on the farmer for his wages, that he did not realise that he was an independent citizen, although he had acquired a parliamentary vote.⁸

Again this was a somewhat optimistic view since it was unlikely that, at least in the short term, sufficient numbers of labourers would participate in the government of their communities at parish level to make an impression. The influence of the squire, farmer and vicar would continue to be strongly felt in many parishes. As Phillips observes, while the 1894 Act 'presented a wholly new problem to the landed aristocracy' it was anticipated by many that they 'would retain a significant degree of power despite, and independent of, legislation'.⁹ Nonetheless, the reforms did at least have the potential to bring a degree of change to social and political relationships in rural areas.

Later historians have been more measured and less triumphalist in their tone and have tended to qualify the significance of the changes to parochial governance wrought by the 1894 Act. Writing in the mid 1940s, *Finer* argued that the 1894 reforms were necessary 'in order to save the parish from entire neglect,' while acknowledging that a 'sentimental regard for 'village democracy', and the agricultural labourer, also played its part'.¹⁰ Put another way, far from being the culmination of the process of democratisation, the creation of parish councils was something of an afterthought and a sop to rural interests. *Searle* acknowledges that by establishing secular parish councils the 1894 Act 'brought about change', but suggests that 'some of the accompanying rhetoric describing it as a 'New Magna Charta' and 'Home Rule for the village' seems a little overblown'.¹¹ Moreover, as *Chandler* observes: 'Restructuring parish government as a cornerstone of the sub-county system of local government was not a policy favoured by modernists, who regarded the

8 W.B. Odgers, *Local Government* (London, 1901), p. 55.

9 G.D. Phillips, *The Diehards: Aristocratic Society and Politics in Edwardian England* (Cambridge Mass., 1979), pp. 66–7.

10 H. *Finer*, *English Local Government* (2nd edition, London, 1945), p. 113.

11 G.R. *Searle*, *A New England? Peace and War 1886–1918* (Oxford, 2004), p. 223.

units as being too small to have significant powers'.¹² Ken Poole and Keith-Lucas, point out that:

Once the initial enthusiasms had died away, the 1894 Act failed in most places to create a new and active village democracy, or to renew the spirit of self-government that had, in their hey-day, pervaded at least some of the local vestries. It did, however bring some order to the chaos of local administrative areas, strike a blow in the fight for female suffrage, and in a modest way extend representative government. In some villages at least the parish council provided a new interest which contributed to self-reliance and self-respect.¹³

Notwithstanding these qualifications, the reforms can be said to have tapped into what might be described as the zeitgeist of local governance. As Harling comments, during the early part of the century, 'parochial government was more noticeable ... than central government ... [and] most of the civil services were met by what the contemporary poet John Clare called the "parish state"'.¹⁴ Although by the 1890s the parish no longer enjoyed the status and role it once did, nonetheless in rural areas it remained a primary source of individual and collective identity. Hence, from this perspective the establishment of parish councils was of considerable significance at a symbolic and emotional level.

In order to move the debate forward, there is now a need for more systematic archival research to complement the limited amount that has so far been undertaken by historians. To date, the most detailed analysis is to be found in Slocombe's study of Wiltshire.¹⁵ He has examined how the 1894 Act was implemented and 'the tensions and controversies which arose' in the county.¹⁶ There are also a number of less extensive surveys. Patricia Hollis in her book on women in English local government between 1865 and 1914 devotes some attention to parish councils with Norfolk being her primary geographical focus.¹⁷ Hertfordshire is the subject of a short article by Peter Kingsford, but the data he uses relates to both district and parish councillors and it is not possible to separate the

12 J.A. Chandler, *Explaining Local Government. Local government in Britain since 1800* (Manchester, 2007), p. 106.

13 K. Poole and B. Keith-Lucas, *Parish Government 1894-1994* (London, 1994), p. 66.

14 P. Harling, *The Modern British State: A Historical Introduction* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 64.

15 I. Slocombe, 'The Establishment of Parish Councils in Wiltshire', *Wiltshire Studies* 98 (2005) 49-70.

16 *Ibid.*, 49.

17 P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 361-71.

two.¹⁸ Although these studies provide some interesting insights, apart from Slocombe, the coverage is mainly limited to the occupational composition of parish councils. While this is a major concern, it is by no means the only aspect of importance. It is the desire to add to the pool of knowledge concerning the implementation of the 1894 Act which has prompted the investigation on which this article is based.

Throughout, the major sources of information are contemporary newspaper reports and official records, mainly the minutes of parish meetings and parish councils. These sources, of course, are not without their limitations, in particular the fact that the material was not produced with the requirements of future historians in mind. Moreover, with respect to newspapers, the comments of Richard Heath, who produced partial analyses of the situation in a range of counties in 1895, are apposite. He regretted:

that so many of the correspondents supplying the information were not alive to the meaning of these elections, and instead of naming the occupations of the councillors elected, contented themselves with merely giving lists of names, conveying no information to any readers but those in the parishes concerned, or at best by adding a letter indicating the political party to which the new councillor belonged.¹⁹

Nevertheless, he argued that the information provided did enable one 'to form a fairly correct idea of the direction' a full account would take and, although it is by no means comprehensive, it does offer the possibility of making observations on which to base a more nuanced narrative of the impact of the 1894 Act at the parish level.

Turning specifically to Hampshire, here approximately 56 per cent of the population lived in rural areas and was therefore directed affected by the reform of parochial government.²⁰ At the time, the rural economy of the county was described in the following terms:

Although much of the soil is poor, the tillage of Hampshire is, on the whole good, and the produce is large: it yields much grain, and on the chalk downs sheep are fed and racehorses trained. The meadows are small. The chalk lands are adapted for pasture. Many hogs are fed in the

18 P. Kingsland, 'Hertfordshire Councillors: the Social Composition of the District and Parish Councils in 1895', *The Local Historian* 19 (1989), 159–61.

19 R. Heath, 'The Rural Revolution', *Contemporary Review* 67 (1895), 182–200.

20 At the time of the 1891 census, the population of the administrative county of Hampshire, that is excluding the two county boroughs of Portsmouth and Southampton and the Isle of Wight, was 371,979. The rural/urban split was 186568/147626. *Census Reports*, 1891.

forests, and Hampshire bacon is well known; the shire yields wheat, barley, oats, rye, peas, trefoil, grass, wool, bacon, honey, chalk, lime, whitening and clay.²¹

This economic base translated into a population that was broadly 'conservative' in its outlook. In many rural areas the landowner or squire and vicar were key figures and a spirit of deference and paternalism prevailed. The following comments from Margaret Holt's history of Caigers Green, Curbridge and Curdridge could be replicated for many parts of the county:

This revered landowner [R.A. Burrell of Fairthorne Manor] was regarded by his/her employees as a protector of their community, safeguarding them from the changeable society. Taking on certain duties such as attending church with the villagers, he also supervised village affairs upholding an almost fatherly and benevolent attitude towards the working class where their welfare was concerned.²²

There were, however, pockets of radicalism and, as will be seen, in a number of rural areas dissenting voices could be heard.

As elsewhere, every Hampshire parish with a population in excess of 300 was entitled to an elected council, in addition to the parish meeting. In the case of parishes with populations of between 100 and 300 a council was established if the parish meeting resolved to have one. For parishes with a population of less than 100, the county council could, if it thought fit, establish a council, but only with the consent of the parish meeting. For parishes without a council the parish meeting served as the sole agency of self-government.

In parishes with a council, determining its membership was a convoluted process. Potentially it consisted of two stages. The first involved voting by a 'show of hands' at the parish meeting. The second was activated if a poll was then demanded, in which case the choice would be made by secret ballot a few days later.²³ Anyone, including women, could stand for election to a parish council provided they were either a parochial elector or had 'during the whole of the previous twelve months preceding the election resided in the parish thereof or within three miles thereof'.²⁴

21 *Kelly's Directory of Hampshire and Isle of Wight 1895* (1895), p. 1.

22 M. Holt, *Burridge – In days Gone By: A Recollection of Hampshire Village Life* (Burridge, 1995), p. 18.

23 Keith-Lucas, *The English Local Government Franchise*, pp. 121–2.

24 Local Government Act 1894, sec 3 (1).

Many of the powers conferred on parish meetings and councils were discretionary. However, meetings and councils did at least have the means to make an impact if they chose to exploit these powers. To promote the wellbeing of their communities, the Act conferred on parish councils the power 'to provide public buildings for public offices and for meetings; to provide public walks and recreation grounds [and allotments]; 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'.²⁵ In addition, parish meetings could adopt any of the following Acts: 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. These arrangements reflected the general approach of the Victorian era with permissive legislation being 'built into the entire structure of local government at every level'.²⁶ To finance expenditure arising from their general activities, that is those not incurred under adoptive acts, parish councils were restricted to the proceeds of not more than a 3d rate or a 6d rate if approved by the parish meeting. Notwithstanding their legislative powers, over time the role of parish meetings and councils as institutional pressure groups, promoting and protecting the interests of their community, was as much to the fore as that of service provider.

In the sections which follow particular attention is given to the preparations for the new form of parish government; the conduct of the initial, or as they were formally known, foundation parish meetings, all of which were held on Tuesday 4 December 1894; the election of parish councillors; the composition of the new parish councils; and the choice of chairman. In so doing, some of the principal similarities and differences between Hampshire and other counties are identified and the significance of what happened in Hampshire for the historiography of the reform of parochial government is highlighted.

25 *Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Local Government Board, 1893-94* (1894), C.7500, p. xlv.

26 J.M. Prest, *Liberty and Locality. Permissive Legislation, and Ratepayers' Democracies in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1990), p. 219.

II Preparation

In view of the controversial nature of the 1894 Act, preparations for its implementation inevitably ran the risk of stirring up further discord. At local level, there were broadly two main tasks. The first was to secure a degree of a rationalisation in the boundaries of civil parishes. The second was essentially educational and involved debating the issues and spreading the word concerning the new arrangements.

Responsibility for the first task was mainly exercised by county councils, with committees being established to exercise 'the powers ... requisite for bringing the Local Government Act 1894 into operation'.²⁷ At the time Hampshire was divided into over 300 urban and rural parishes grouped into 22 poor law unions, some of which included parishes from a neighbouring county.²⁸ Approximately, one third of these parishes had populations of less than 300. As Slocombe explains:

The government ... expected that the smaller parishes would willingly amalgamate to form a unit large enough to qualify for an elected council rather than just a ... parish meeting. However, through their lack of understanding of villages, they seriously underestimated the antipathy of neighbouring parishes to each other.²⁹

This observation resonates with Snell's thought provoking study of 'local xenophobia' in which he remarks that even when the legislation was going through parliament, 'its clauses allowing smaller parishes to be diluted, outvoted or absorbed by larger adjoining parishes evoked intense opposition throughout the country, as parishes balked and cold-shouldered each other' to the extent that they had to be 'heavily modified'.³⁰ Sensitivities could also be aroused by proposals for splitting larger parishes. Traditional local boundaries were sacrosanct. Thus, due to local loyalties and rivalries, county councils needed to tread warily.

Most of the changes made in Hampshire were in response to petitions, memorials and requests from the 'grass roots'. Where there appeared to be a substantial majority for change the request was generally granted, but only after an inquiry held by two or more county councillors. Examples

27 This was the wording used to describe the role of Hampshire County Council's committee, which was chaired by one of the leading county alderman, the Earl of Northbrook, thereby symbolising its importance.

28 For example, 4 parishes from Wiltshire were in the Fordingbridge Union and 3 in the Romsey Union. Likewise, some Hampshire parishes, such as Aldershot, were in unions mainly consisting of parishes from other counties.

29 Slocombe, 'The Establishment of Parish Councils', 49.

30 K.D.M. Snell, 'The Culture of Local Xenophobia', *Social History* 28 (2003), 27.

include the creation of the new parishes of Hook with Warsash, Crofton and Swanmore and the merger of Widley and Wymering to form the parish of Cosham. However, in cases where there was evidence of considerable opposition to the change from within the community itself it was usually rejected. Thus, an application for a separate parish of Ramsdale, which was strongly opposed by the vicar of Wooton St Lawrence, was not approved.³¹

With only 29 new rural parishes being created, changes in Hampshire were relatively modest, certainly by comparison with Wiltshire, where the County Council 'held over 80 time-consuming local consultations'.³² Nine of the new parishes were in the rural parts of parishes which had previously straddled a rural-urban boundary and 19 were the result of dividing relatively large parishes which comprised a number of very distinct communities; while only Cosham involved the merger of neighbouring parishes. Given these relatively limited alterations, there remained enormous variations in the populations of parishes. The overall position, organised by poor law union, is shown in Table 1.

Many of the largest parishes were either suburban or free standing towns or large villages.³³ For example, the three parishes with the largest populations, Farnborough (Hartley Wintney Union), population 8071; St Mary Extra (South Stoneham), 5986; and Winton (Christchurch), 4493 were essentially adjuncts of neighbouring urban centres, namely Aldershot, Southampton and Bournemouth.³⁴ The next two, Ringwood (4119) and Fordingbridge (3191) were market towns that had not acquired either municipal borough or urban district status. At the other extreme there were some parishes with miniscule populations. Dunwood, for example, had a population of only 12 and Upper Eldon, 10. While a few were linked for the purposes of parish government, for the vast majority the *status quo* remained undisturbed. In accordance with the legislation, councils were established in all 188 parishes with a population of 300 or more. Interestingly, only two parishes with a population of less than 300, Chilcomb Without (Population 212) and North Baddesley (211), opted to establish a council at this stage.³⁵ The principal deterrent appears to have been cost.

31 Requests for separate parishes of Pennington and Colden Common were also rejected.

32 Slocombe, 'The Establishment of Parish Councils', 51.

33 Examples of suburban parishes included Cosham (population 2473), which adjoined Portsmouth; Sholing (2248) and Bitterne (2126), Southampton; and Pokesdown (2239), Bournemouth. Amongst the small market towns were Odiham (2667), Whitechurch (2110) and Lyndhurst (1867).

34 All the population figures in this article are from the 1891 census.

35 In early months of 1895, 3 other parishes in this category, Woodgreen (Population 268), Steventon (240) and Hale (154), established parish councils.

Table 1: Number of Rural Parishes by Union and Population

Poor Law Union	Population					Total
	Under 100	100 to 300	300– 1000	1000– 3000	Over 3000	
Alresford	1	11	6	1	0	19
Alton	3	7	8	3	0	21
Andover	2	13	12	0	0	27
Basingstoke	5	15	17	1	0	38
Catherington	0	3	2	1	0	6
Christchurch	0	0	4	1	2	7
Droxford	0	3	7	2	2	14
Fareham	0	1	3	6	0	10
Fordingbridge	2	3	2	0	1	8
Hartley Wintney	0	4	8	7	1	20
Havant	0	1	1	2	0	4
Hursley	0	2	3	0	0	5
Kingsclere	2	7	4	3	0	16
Lymington	1	0	1	5	0	7
New Forest	0	0	8	5	0	13
New Winchester	4	8	11	2	0	25
Petersfield	1	4	7	2	0	14
Ringwood	1	2	2	0	1	6
Romsey	1	2	5	2	0	10
South Stoneham	0	1	5	6	1	13
Stockbridge	4	3	8	1	0	16
Whitchurch	0	4	1	3	0	8
Total	27	94	125	53	8	307

A scale based on population was drawn up by the County Council to determine how many councillors should comprise each council (see Table 2).

However, 75 parishes made a case for a larger number of councillors than allowed for by the scale. This was primarily to ensure adequate representation for all parts of the parish. As a result there were some significant departures from the scale as the data in Table 3 illustrate.

Four parishes were divided into wards.³⁶ Thus, altogether there were 193 'electoral units', with a grand total of 1401 seats to be filled.

36 The four were Christchurch East (3 wards); Kingsclere (2); Milford (2) and Selborne (2). Separate parish meetings were held in each ward.

Table 2: Formula for Determining Number of Parish Councillors

Population	Councillors
Under 500	5
500 to 1000	6
1000 to 1500	7
1500 to 2000	8
2000 to 2500	9
2500 to 3000	10
3000 to 4000	11
4000 plus	12

Table 3: Sizes of Parish Councils

Population	Number of councillors									Total
	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	12+	
Under 500	38	4	9	1	3					55
500-1000		42	7	5	9	8			1	72
1000-1500			14	2	6	4	3	1	2	32
1500-2000			1	4	1	2		2	1	11
2000-2500					7		1	2		10
2500-3000						2				2
3000-4000							1	1		2
4000+							1	3		4
Total	38	46	31	12	26	16	6	9	4	188

Turning to the second task that needed to be undertaken during the preparatory phase, as indicated earlier this was primarily educative in that it involved both the continuation, at local level, of the debate concerning the merits or otherwise of the 1894 Act and explanations of what the reforms would mean in practical terms. For these purposes, many meetings were held, at which a number of underlying concerns were much in evidence. For the keenest supporters of the reforms, a key issue was the extent to which they would secure the representation of the working classes. At a meeting in the parish of Cheriton, for example, W.C. Burley, Secretary of the East Hants Liberal Association, spoke of 'the Act as a splendid machine needing only the application of the motive power to render it an enactment most beneficial to the working classes'.³⁷ Similarly, a meeting was held in Alresford 'under the auspices of

37 *Hampshire Independent*, 13 October 1894.

the Free Churches Federation Society for Hants, to explain the Act from a working man's point of view'.³⁸

An issue which concerned both supporters and opponents of the legislation was that of religion or more precisely the antipathy which still existed in some parishes between Anglicans and Nonconformists. Although on the wane there was a fear that parish council contests might rekindle or exacerbate old animosities. Some Nonconformists were certainly keen to take advantage of the reform of parish government. John Blake, for example, one of the very small number of Nonconformist county councillors, on being elected to the chairmanship of the Hampshire Free Church Federation in November 1894, used his inaugural address to exhort young Free Churchmen to play their part:

It is to the young Free Churchman, who having sipped the cup of religious freedom, but who, tired of country life, has fancied the evening bells call him away from home to greater city: but who at last has caught the sweeter whispers of better music calling him "Home to the village and back to the land". Such men must be our Parish councillors.³⁹

There was an Arcadian as well as a democratic thrust to his appeal, while the reference to 'religious freedom' resonated with Gladstonian ideals. One suspects, however, that it would have had limited impact since there was little indication in Hampshire or elsewhere of a reversal of the inexorable process of urbanisation at this time. More significantly perhaps, at the same time as Blake's appeal, Nonconformists were extending an olive branch to the Church of England. They had approached the Bishop of Winchester, Right Rev. Dr Thorold, with a compromise plan to minimise contests between overtly Anglican and Nonconformist candidates and to avoid them altogether 'where a good representative council can be arranged'.⁴⁰ However, this had to be done openly and in a way which did not exclude any ratepayers, to maintain democratic proprieties. The Bishop reacted positively to this overture, but in terms that echoed a more conservative stance as can be seen in the following extract from his response:

The Act, no doubt means revolution. But it is just one of those revolutions, quiet, timely, matured, constitutional, which again and

38 Ibid., 24 November 1894. Interestingly, D.W. Bebbington records that 'The Hampshire Federation was one of the rural Free Church bodies that organised village meetings to select suitable candidates when parish councils first began in 1894', *The Nonconformist Conscience* (London, 1982), p. 66.

39 *Hampshire Chronicle*, 1 December 1894.

40 Ibid.

again have saved England from political cyclones. Nothing does us more good than bringing us to work side by side for the public welfare ... I sincerely reciprocate your [i.e. Free Church] wish that there may be as little friction as possible in carrying out the Act.⁴¹

While a public exchange of letters did not completely prevent denominational rivalries coming to the surface it may have helped to diminish them.

Others who were more lukewarm about the Act focussed on the issues of cost and party politicisation. Both of these were highlighted in an editorial in the *Hampshire Independent*, which appeared shortly after the foundation parish meetings had been held:

It is satisfactory to find that there was everywhere a great amount of interest shown in the proceedings [i.e. parish meetings] by what is practically a new electorate. In Hampshire as throughout the kingdom generally the cases are very few in which the ultimate result has not been left to be decided at the ballot box. This means a great expense that is probably in numberless cases altogether unnecessary, but at the same time it is perhaps a fact not to be absolutely regretted, provided the elections are not to be conducted on party-political lines pure and simple. The contests will be a great object lesson to uninformed people, and if the result of them is that the best men, representative of all classes are returned, no one will have much reason to complain, for the returning officers' expenses will have to be borne, in the greater part at all events, by the voters themselves.⁴²

Put another way, parish democracy had the potential to be both expensive and politically disruptive.

In addition to the airing of issues and concerns, the main purpose of many preliminary meetings was to inform parochial electors and other interested parties of the procedural aspects of the reforms. A talk given at one of these, which was held at Overton in September 1894, was deemed to be worthy of publication. The speaker was the local county councillor and Vice Chairman of Hampshire County Council, William Portal. In his peroration he added his voice to the appeals for a consensual approach:

I have now done my best to make the act clear to you in an abbreviated and concise form. There is an old saying in this place (and one which I like to bear in mind), to the effect that the people of Overton always "stand together". Let us "stand together" in view of the new

⁴¹ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, 20 October 1894.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 8 December 1894.

responsibilities about to be cast upon us; let us resolve above all things to carry out our new duties with harmony and goodwill, and, thus acting, we may rest assured that we shall be promoting (in the best sense) the welfare and happiness of this place and of its people (Applause).⁴³

In keeping with the wishes of those exercising ecclesiastical and political authority, such as the Bishop of Winchester and William Portal, the establishment of parish councils in Hampshire appears to have been characterised more by concord than discord. This may well have been due more to the respect afforded to the views of figures of authority and a desire not to upset the *status quo* than anything else. It does indicate, however, that even at their inception parish councils were not necessarily the catalysts for radical change that some of their progressive supporters hoped. Nonetheless, as will be seen, even in Hampshire there were a number of parishes where underlying animosities did come to the surface.

III Foundation parish meetings

Since parish democracy was a relatively novel concept, it was anticipated that many of the initial parish meetings would be lively affairs. Thus, not surprisingly, press coverage was fairly extensive with a considerable number of column inches being devoted to the subject. That said, press reporting of individual parishes varied from detailed accounts of the proceedings to the simple recording of the names of the successful candidates. Nonetheless, from this source together with the more formal minutes, which again vary in the amount of detail provided, it is possible to make a reasonable assessment of what happened. Indeed, newspapers coupled with the legislative changes can be said to have brought parish affairs into the political arena. Parish meetings in particular provided, to paraphrase Mary Ryan, an occasion for assembling, debating, questioning, posturing, protesting and cultivating a village identity.⁴⁴

Responsibility for convening the parish meeting was vested in the overseers who had been instructed to see that the instructions of the Local Government Board, the central government agency which oversaw the process, were properly applied. To facilitate the attendance of the working class, it was decreed that meetings should 'begin not earlier than six o'clock in the evening'. As evidenced by the numbers attending, the degree of interest shown by the parochial electors and others, whether or

43 Hampshire Record Office [hereafter HRO], TOP 245/1/2. Parish Councils Address. Given at Overton, Sept 1894, by W.W.Portal Esq CC.

44 M. Ryan, 'A Durable centre of urban space', *Urban History* 33 (2006), 457–83.

not they were members of the working class, appears to have been variable. Thus, while as a generalisation it might be accurate for historians, such as Poole and Keith-Lucas, to emphasise the 'initial enthusiasm', this was by no means universal.⁴⁵ For example at Farringdon: 'The meeting was sparsely attended'; at Denny Lodge: 'There was but a small attendance'; and at Romsey Extra the attendance was described as being 'not very large'.⁴⁶ By contrast, at New Alresford: 'There were at least ninety people present – practically one-third of the voting power of the parish' and at Southbourne the parish meeting 'was attended by about 50 out of 141 electors'.⁴⁷ At Vernhams Dean 'over forty electors (including all the largest Ratepayers) besides others were present', thereby highlighting the concern of those who would have to contribute most to the financing of this exercise in grass roots democracy.⁴⁸ Interestingly, the report of the meeting at Ropley makes reference to the fact that it attracted 'some 80 men and a few of the opposite sex, including Lady Blackett'. Similarly at Hursley: 'There were several ladies present'.⁴⁹ Clearly, in some parishes women were keen to take advantage of this new opportunity to venture into the 'public sphere'. Very few of these women, however, were likely to have had working class backgrounds.

A number of accounts draw attention to the necessary distinction between electors and non-electors. Thus, the report of the meeting at Headley referred to the fact that: 'Several ladies, including Lady Wright, and about 100 electors and 50 non electors were present. The Room was so arranged that the voters were on one side and the non-voters on the other – an arrangement which answered well'.⁵⁰ In order to facilitate any subsequent voting it was undoubtedly important to be able to distinguish between those who were entitled to vote and those who were not. To achieve a similar end, at Sarisbury the following resolution was passed: 'That the non voters should quit their places in the Main body of the Meeting and occupy the space along the side of the wall to the right hand of the Chairman'.⁵¹ Non-voters were probably drawn to these meetings out of curiosity and because of their novelty. Their presence in some parishes undoubtedly raised the political temperature, especially during the questioning of candidates and the voting.

45 Poole and Keith-Lucas, *Parish Government*, p. 66.

46 *Hampshire Chronicle*, 8 December 1894; *Hampshire Independent*, 8 December 1894; *Romsey Register*, 6 December 1894.

47 *Hampshire Chronicle*, 8 December 1894; *Hampshire Independent*, 8 December 1894.

48 HRO, 5A04/PX1, Minutes of Verhams Dean Parish Meeting and Parish Council.

49 *Ibid.*

50 *Hampshire Observer*, 8 December 1894.

51 HRO, 64M76PX4/16, Minutes of Sarisbury Parish Meeting.

Once assembled, the overseer generally opened the meeting by reminding everyone of its purpose, namely to elect a chairman and, in those parishes where there was to be a council, to proceed to the election of parish councillors. In most parishes, the chairman was elected unanimously, with the responsibility falling to the local vicar or a distinguished personage in the locality who, in some instances, was the local county councillor or a county alderman.⁵² Elsewhere, the school master or a farmer or a tradesman or occasionally the overseer fulfilled this role. It is noteworthy that in only two parishes, Silchester and Sarisbury, was the meeting chaired by a Nonconformist minister, and in one, Tichborne, by a Roman Catholic priest. Age was apparently no barrier for at Compton, 'Mr William Morgan was unanimously chosen Chairman, and although 80 years of age, he conducted the proceedings with admirable tact and discretion'.⁵³ In the few parishes where there were contests for the chairmanship of the parish meeting, a bone of contention was whether the post should be held by a lay person or a clergyman. At Sway, such a contest was won by the village blacksmith, in competition with the vicar. Once selected, some chairmen sought to influence the proceedings with a few well chosen remarks. At Marchwood: 'The Chairman congratulated the electors present [about 50] upon the apparently great interest they were taking in Parochial matters and expressed a hope that altho' there might be more than six persons nominated for the office of Parish Councillor that a poll might be avoided'.⁵⁴

When it came to nominating candidates for election to the parish council, in just over a quarter of parishes the number of those nominated exactly matched the number of vacancies.⁵⁵ This was sometimes the outcome, as in Wiltshire, of 'either a pre-meeting or some kind of local consultation to agree the appropriate number of nominations before the parish meeting was held'.⁵⁶ At Micheldever, for example: 'It was found

52 Examples of county councillors included George Judd (who represented Clatford on the county council) at Barton Stacey; Montagu Knight (Froyle) at Chawton; Sir Richard Rycroft (Dummer) at Dummer with Kempstoke; John Martineau (Hartley Wintney) at Heckfield; William Roy (Fawley) at Marchwood; and John Bonham-Carter (Petersfield) at Steep. One county alderman, the Earl of Northbrook, managed to chair two parish meetings, East Stratton, where the meeting began at 6.00, and Micheldever at 7.00.

53 *Hampshire Observer*, 8 December 1894.

54 HRO, 1M89/PX1, Minutes of Marchwood Parish Meeting.

55 From the available data, which cover over 90 per cent of parishes/wards, it would seem that contests did not take place in approximately 55 out of 193 parish meetings (28.5 per cent).

56 Slocombe, 'The Establishment of Parish Councils', 56.

that the agreement which had been come to by the parochial electors at their meeting on the 19th of November had been legally adhered to, and therefore the only nomination papers handed in were those of the ten candidates who had been chosen on that occasion'.⁵⁷ Elsewhere, candidates withdrew at the parish meeting in order to avoid a contest. For example, in the minutes of Farlington Parish Meeting it is recorded that: 'It was suggested that the candidates should retire [thirteen in total] and talk the matter over. When the following gentlemen (and Anna Elizabeth Taylor) withdrew their names. Then leaving seven as required'.⁵⁸ Thus, where the number of candidates initially exceeded the number of seats, there was some pressure, moral or otherwise, on candidates to withdraw. It is possible to detect a degree of complacency on the part of some parishes where there was not a contest. This can be seen in the conclusion of a newspaper report on the proceedings at Bramley Parish Meeting:

"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 unhealthy excitement.⁵⁹

Many parishes, however, were not deterred by the prospect of 'unhealthy excitement' and can be said to have relished it. As a result, attempts to avoid a contest were fruitless. At Fawley, this led to a degree of frustration which was reflected in the minutes: 'Eleven candidates having been nominated for the eight seats, efforts were made to reduce the number but being useless' the Chairman proceeded with the show of hands.⁶⁰

In the event, contests took place in over 70 per cent of parishes. Of these there was considerable variation in the degree of competitiveness as measured by the number of candidates per vacancy. At Pokesdown, for example, there were 28 candidates for 9 seats; at neighbouring Winton 32 candidates for 11 seats; at Fordingbridge 25 candidates for 11 seats; and in the St Mary's ward of Kingsclere parish, 16 candidates for six seats. At the other extreme were parishes where there was just one more candidate than the number of seats. These included Rotherwick and Winchfield where there were six candidates for five seats; and Longstock, eight candidates for seven seats. Overall, there were 2245 candidates for 1401

57 *Hampshire Chronicle*, 8 December 1894.

58 HRO, 67M84/PX1, Minutes of Farlington Parish Meeting and Parish Council.

59 *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 December 1894.

60 HRO, 25M60/PX1, Minutes of Fawley Parish Meeting.

seats. Although equivalent figures are not available for other counties, this would appear to be a substantial total.

Once the nominations had been received and either accepted or rejected, often because the person nominated did not have the requisite qualifications, in some parishes electors were invited to put questions to the candidates, a process described, in press reports, as 'heckling'. In a substantial number of parishes no questions were forthcoming. However, in a minority of parishes this proved to be a lively part of the proceedings with candidates being questioned on a variety of topics. For example, at Bitterne: 'The candidates were ... questioned, the replies in several cases causing much amusement, annexation with Southampton, or anti-annexation being a burning subject just now'.⁶¹ At Milford, the local county councillor, Ernest P. King, a staunch Liberal, took the opportunity to ask the candidates a raft of questions, some of which related to the potential powers of the parish council. Those recorded by the local newspaper were:

whether he [i.e. the candidate] would insist on the accounts of the parish charities being audited, printed and published; whether he was in favour of the adoption of the Public Libraries Act; whether he would oppose a resolution in favour of the Parish Meeting being held in private; whether he would urge the Parish Council to draw the attention of the District Council to any house without a water supply, proper drainage and sanitary arrangements [...] and would he favour the meeting of the council being held monthly?⁶²

According to the press report, the candidates, apart from one who was absent, 'appeared to pass a fairly satisfactory examination'. In other parishes, topics included allotments at Bishopstoke; the desirability or otherwise of dual membership of parish and district councils at Fordingbridge; obliterating a footpath at Stockbridge; and the provision of public libraries, allotments, better drainage, public grounds for children and the acquisition of land for allotments, at Winton. Most tellingly, at Netley Marsh candidates were asked: 'Will you if elected do your utmost to prevent any additional taxation in consequence of the Act?'⁶³

For the election itself, the names of appropriately qualified candidates were read out by the chairman in alphabetical order, with the electors being invited to raise their hands to indicate their support. Where meetings were well attended and the number of candidates was relatively

61 *Hampshire Independent*, 8 December 1894.

62 *Ibid.*

63 HRO, 41M90/PX1, Minutes of Netley Marsh Parish Meeting.

large this could take a considerable amount of time. Moreover, while electors only had as many votes as there were vacancies, it was often difficult to check that they did not exceed the number of votes to which they were entitled. Most seriously, however, such an approach was the very antithesis of the secret ballot which had been introduced for other elections in 1872. Whether this resulted in intimidation of a kind mentioned by Slocombe is difficult to assess since, by their very nature, press reports and minutes generally remain silent on such a sensitive issue.⁶⁴ It is likely, however, that in a few parishes the outcome of the contest was affected by the visibility of who voted for which candidates.

Interestingly, and probably illegally, in at least one parish, Winton, the chairman encouraged a poll to be demanded and then dispensed with a show of hands. As reported:

He added that unless a poll was demanded he would be compelled to put the 32 names separately to the meeting, and take a vote on each counting the hands. As there was sure to be a poll demanded why not now, and so save all the time (Applause) ... Messrs Jeffrey, Dredge, Luckham, Philpott, Lovell and Fry then demanded a poll, and on being put to the meeting it was unanimously agreed to.⁶⁵

More conventionally, it was not until after the results of the show of hands had been announced by the chairman, that parochial electors were given the opportunity to demand a poll. In some parishes this proved to be a contentious issue, with there being considerable differences of opinion as to the desirability or otherwise of resorting to the ballot box with, as mentioned earlier, cost being the principal consideration. A good example of this can be found at Odiham (population 2667) the largest parish which did not, in the event, opt for a poll. Here 21 candidates had contested 10 seats. The result having been declared:

Mr Skinner, an elector residing in Hook [who had not been one of the candidates], demanded a poll, as he failed to see how the sense of the parish could be ascertained by a show of hands, and intimated that several electors in the room had voted more than ten times. After a few minutes Mr Fountain rose and suggested that the demand for a poll might be withdrawn. He thought it a pity that the parish should be put to the expense of a poll, especially as all classes appeared to be fairly represented by the gentlemen declared elected. He appealed to Mr Skinner to withdraw his demand. The applause with which Mr Fountain's remarks were greeted showed unmistakably that almost the

64 Slocombe, 'The Establishment of Parish Councils', 55

65 *Bournemouth Guardian*, 8 December 1894.

entire body of electors present were not anxious for a poll ... Mr Skinner explained why he made the demand, but in deference to the evident wish of the meeting would withdraw it. He wished it to be understood that in making the demand he had no vindictive feeling.⁶⁶

It could also have been argued that a poll would have enabled electors who had not attended the meeting to participate in the choice of parish councillors.

Such arguments, however, often carried little weight and as at Odiham those who favoured a poll were dissuaded from pressing for one. At Sherfield upon Lodden, for example, 'one of the unsuccessful candidates was with difficulty persuaded from his intention of demanding a poll', while at Longparish 'other candidates after some persuasion abstained from demanding a poll'.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, the press reports do not elaborate on the mode of persuasion used. In a few parishes where a poll was demanded, such as Ampfield, a subsequent withdrawal of candidates meant that it was not necessary to hold one. Polls were eventually held in 67 parishes and five wards.

In gauging the general atmosphere of parish meetings, there seems to have been considerable variation. At one extreme, they were lively, boisterous and highly charged politically. Put another way, attributes of the 'public sphere' were much in evidence. At such meetings the opportunity was taken to highlight and discuss issues affecting the community, as at Winton. Prior to the Chairman's decision not to have a show of hands, candidates were rigorously questioned and there was a considerable amount of active participation by those present. A flavour of the exchanges can be gained from the press report:

Mr Tuffin was questioned at length, principally about allotments. He said he could not agree to give any working man who asked for it four acres. It would depend on what the Council thought about his circumstances, his ability to till so much ground after work hours and to pay the rent. He wished to keep the rates down, but as far as possible he was in favour of lighting the roads and dark corners. He did not think a free library was needed just yet ("Oh," and "Ain't we to read books then?") "It would keep the young men out of the public houses, " &c). He was in favour of more wards, and thought it was a shame and a blunder that they only had one district councillor. They ought to have had five. (Hear, hear).⁶⁸

66 *Hampshire Chronicle*, 8 December 1894.

67 *Hampshire Chronicle*, 8 December 1894.

68 *Bournemouth Guardian*, 8 December 1894.

By contrast, in other parishes tranquillity was the order of the day. Of the more placid meetings, a good example was that at Highclere in the far north of the county. The meeting, which 23 parochial electors attended, was chaired by the vicar, Rev. F.H. Bowden Smith. As recorded in the minutes: 'The chairman congratulated the meeting on the friendly, peaceable and orderly way in which the proceedings had been conducted throughout and expressed a hope that all future meetings would be conducted in the same amicable spirit'. For the five newly elected parish councillors who, not surprisingly, were chosen without a contest he had these words of exhortation: 'He sincerely trusted that the new body of Parish councillors now called for the first time into existence, would realize their responsibilities, and, casting aside all personal and selfish motives, would endeavour to work harmoniously together for the simple good of the parish'.⁶⁹

In the main, the press adopted a tone that was somewhat self-congratulatory, not to say complacent and condescending, as the following extract from editorial comment in the *Hampshire Observer* illustrates:

The results of the meetings appears to have been on the whole distinctly satisfactory and encouraging; and the prophecies of those who, on the one hand, anticipated discord and faction and on the other hand apathy and incapacity have alike been falsified. No doubt a very great deal of trouble has been taken in our own county conspicuously by squires, clergymen and Nonconformist ministers to put the labouring classes in possession of full information about their powers and responsibilities under the new Act, and the labouring classes themselves have from the first shown a keen and intelligent interest ... by their attendance at the many preliminary meetings, and by coming forward in large numbers for election ... At the same time they have not thrown over their old leaders ... We are glad to know that in Hampshire party politics have entered comparatively little into the matter ... [However] in many places [i.e. other counties] [party politics] are rendered unavoidable owing to some inability in the electors to pull harmoniously together, through the asperities of sectarian, class or political feeling, or perhaps from the impossibility of deciding by other means the merits of the candidates whose only failing was their superfluous number.⁷⁰

Thus, there was a somewhat grudging recognition that the 'labouring classes' were now in a position to challenge and possibly even change

69 HRO, 100A02/A1, Minutes of Highclere Parish Meeting and Parish Council.

70 *Hampshire Chronicle*, 8 December 1894.

the established political order, but relief that this had not happened to any great extent. Against this was a degree of frustration that too many candidates had come forward and too many polls had been demanded.

Although some of the foundation parish meetings in Hampshire lived up to expectations by exemplifying the radical spirit associated the principles of self-government and the independent citizen, as extolled by Odgers, others were more conservative in tone.⁷¹ Consequently, they only partially demonstrated the possibility of challenging the authority of those who favoured, or were well served by, a more compliant approach to parish affairs.

IV Polls

For those commentators, such as Redlich and Hirst and Odgers, who adopted a progressive view of the 1894 reforms, self-government was closely associated with the accoutrements of democracy and by the end of the nineteenth century this included the secret ballot.⁷² Thus, they saw the provision for the holding of polls as essential for the democratic health of parishes. That said it was expected and hoped by those who were less enthusiastic about the changes that cost would serve as a deterrent and minimise the number of parishes in which polls were demanded. As already indicated, in Hampshire there is some evidence to suggest that such considerations had some effect. Nonetheless, polls were held in 67 parishes and five wards. Not surprisingly, perhaps, as the data in Table 4 confirm, there was a close relationship between the population of a parish and the likelihood of a resort to the ballot box for determining the composition of the parish council.

In places where polls were held there was often a considerable amount of political activity in the days preceding the election. At St Mary Extra, for example, where 30 candidates were contesting twelve seats, supporters of twelve of the candidates gathered on the Tuesday before the poll at Woolston College. As reported in the local press: 'each of the candidates addressed the meeting explaining their views, and in the end a vote of confidence in them, and pledging the meeting to use every legitimate means to secure their return, was unanimously carried'.⁷³ In the event, the support of those attending the meeting was relatively ineffective with only two of the candidates being successful.

71 Odgers, *Local Government*, p.55.

72 Redlich and Hirst, *Local Government*; Odgers, *Local Government*.

73 *Hampshire Independent*, 15 December 1894.

Table 4: Distribution of Polls by Population of Parish Councils

Population	No of Parishes	Poll	No Poll	% Poll
Under 500	55	5	50	9
500 to 1000	72	24	48	33
1000 to 1500	33	15	18	45
1500 to 2000	12	9	3	75
2000 to 2500	10	10	0	100
2500 to 3000	3	2	1	67
3000 to 4000	4	3	1	75
4000 plus	4	4	0	100
Total	193	72	121	37

N.B. For the purposes of this table, wards are treated as separate parishes

As previously indicated, party politics was seen in many quarters as something which should be eschewed as far as parish council elections were concerned. Thus, in many parishes non-partisanship was undoubtedly the order of the day. However, it is clear that party political considerations did play a part in a few parishes and lay just below the surface in others. At Boldre it was acknowledged that: 'Though politics did not enter into the contest to any large extent, there were two parties, and that which included the popular vicar of the parish secured the first place, though it was in a measure a case of honours divided'.⁷⁴ While in the neighbouring parish of Sway: 'The contest ... was fought very keenly and politics were by no means absent from the election. The Liberals claim to have had the best of the encounter ... We hear that but for a spoilt paper there would have been three ties for sixth place'.⁷⁵ Overall, however, there does not appear to have been the same amount of party politicisation or intensity of party feeling that Slocombe found in Wiltshire especially in parishes, such as Mere and Tisbury.⁷⁶

Although some of the polls were low key affairs, elsewhere they could be quite festive occasions. At Buriton, for example: 'During the last hour [of polling] the village band played in the streets. Having counted the votes, Mr Hall declared the results amid a deal of cheering and other demonstrations'.⁷⁷ Whether or not the band encouraged anyone to vote, 132 out of a possible 160 electors (82.5 per cent) did so. Clearly the electors had been mobilised by the novelty of the occasion. In other

⁷⁴ *Lymington Chronicle*, 20 December 1894.

⁷⁵ *Lymington Chronicle*, 20 December 1894.

⁷⁶ Slocombe, 'The Establishment of Parish Councils', 58.

⁷⁷ *Hants and Sussex News*, 19 December 1894.

parishes, for which data are available, equally high percentages were recorded. At Cosham the turnout was 86.1 per cent; Selborne, 78.6 per cent; and Broughton, 67.3 per cent. It seems probable that these figures were not exceptional.

How then did the results of the polls compare with those of the show of hands? There are some references in the local press to differences in the outcome of the poll compared with that of the contest at the parish meeting. At Bransgore, one of the wards of Christchurch East parish: 'Some surprise was felt at the position of Mr R. Perkins the "Progressive" candidate [with 79 votes], as at the parish meeting he received only 16 votes. The remaining successful candidates were honoured with the confidence of the electors at the meeting as well as at the poll'.⁷⁸ In general, there appear to have been fewer differences than occurred in Wiltshire. Although it has not been possible to find the requisite information for all 72 parishes/wards, it is available for 65 of them.⁷⁹ This is summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Changes in Results at Parish Meeting and Poll

No. of seats on Council	No. of changes in councillors elected									Total Parishes
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not known*	
4	1	3								4
5		4								4
6	4	4	2						2	12
7	1	6	3						2	12
8		2	2		1					5
9	3	5	3	3	1				1	16
10		3								3
11		2	1	1					1	5
12		1	2	2		1		1	1	8
13			1		1					2
15		1								1
Total	9	31	14	6	3	1	0	1	7	72

* Includes Winton where there was not a show of hands

⁷⁸ *Lymington Chronicle*, 20 December 1894.

⁷⁹ One of the seven for which information is not available is Winton where, as mentioned, there was no 'show of hands'. The other six are Colbury, East Meon, Eversley, Idsworth, Milton and Titchfield. It is possible that, although not known for certain, in one or two of these the chairman also dispensed with a show of hands.

The average number of changes in the 65 parishes/wards, for which information is available, was 1.6 compared with 2.2 in Wiltshire.⁸⁰ The parishes with the most substantial reversal of fortunes were Farnborough with seven out of 12 and Whitchurch with five out of 12 elected by 'show of hands' being defeated at the subsequent poll. In Wiltshire, the equivalent parish was Downton with six out of 15.

What these findings demonstrate is that in only a minority of Hampshire parishes was the democratic temper of the 1894 Act manifested in full. Whether through innate conservatism, deference, lethargy, satisfaction with the results of the 'show of hands' or financial considerations, in a majority of parishes electors were denied the opportunity of casting their votes in secret. Thus, the hopes of progressives who favoured a more wholehearted embrace of the tenets of democracy at parish level were not fully realised.

V Parish Councillors

Given that one of the aspirations of supporters of the 1894 reforms was a shift in the balance of power within rural parishes from traditional elites to the newly enfranchised labouring classes, an important consideration is the occupational background of the newly elected parish councillors. Also of interest is the extent to which women took advantage of this opportunity to stand for election.

With respect to occupational background, data for Hampshire have been found for a relatively small number of councillors, certainly by comparison with Wiltshire. While Slocombe managed to obtain information for 1090 councillors, the equivalent figure for Hampshire is 526, just over a third of the total.⁸¹ Nonetheless, as indicated by the data in Table 6 a similar pattern to that of Wiltshire emerges.

Many councils included amongst their membership what might be described as a 'token' labourer or artisan and some a number of working men. Undoubtedly, this reflected the fact that, as indicated earlier, the establishment of parish councils symbolised a move towards a more inclusive view of the nature of representation. However, it is debateable how far labourers were in a position to act as a counterweight to those parish councillors drawn from the ranks of the parochial elite, namely the gentry, members of the professions and the clergy.

As a broad generalisation, many individual councils were composed of a reasonable mix of occupations and backgrounds. Botley, for example,

80 Slocombe, 'The Establishment of Parish Councils', 56 Table 4.

81 Ibid., 59.

Table 6: Occupations of Councillors in Hampshire and Wiltshire

Occupational Categories	Hampshire			Wiltshire		
	No	Totals	%	No	Totals	%
Farmers and related occupations	135	—	—	342	—	—
Gentry and clergy	82	—	—	81	—	—
Sub-total		217	41.2		423	38.8
Tradesmen and craftsmen	112	—	—	225	—	—
Shopkeepers and traders	81	—	—	145	—	—
Professional	39	—	—	52	—	—
Clerical and railway employees	11	—	—	51	—	—
Sub-total		243	46.2		473	43.4
Labourers	38	—	—	128	—	—
Other workmen	28	—	—	66	—	—
Sub-total		66	12.5		194	17.8
Total		526	100.0		1090	100.0

consisted of a member of the gentry, a surgeon, a merchant, a butcher, a brewer and a gardener. While the six members of Owslebury parish council were a farmer, a land steward, an innkeeper, a carpenter, a blacksmith and a gardener. That said, there were councils on which the gentry could be said to have been over-represented. Of the seven members of Netley Marsh parish council, four were gentry and another was a farmer. The other two councillors were a licensed victualler and a gardener. Four members of West Meon parish council were gentry and a further three farmers. The remaining two members were a surgeon and a machinist. In such councils, there was clearly a bias towards the landed and professional classes, which was not surprising given their dominance in other spheres of county life, such as the magistracy and county council.

Where newspapers reported the backgrounds of councillors it was generally without comment. There were, however, some exceptions which suggest that obtaining a reasonable mix was desirable. In the case of Bramshott, the local newspaper observed that: 'The council is considered fairly representative, there being two landowners, five tradesmen, and three working men'.⁸² Interestingly, at Froyle, it was recorded that a newspaper reporter 'put himself forward as a working-man's candidate' thereby increasing the representation of 'working-men' from three to four on an eight member council.⁸³

82 *Hants and Sussex News*, 19 December 1894. The five tradesmen consisted of three grocers, one hotel proprietor and one harness maker.

83 *Ibid.*

One occupational grouping for whom the 1894 reforms represented a particular challenge was the clergy. In view of both their traditional role in matters of parochial governance as well as religious observance and their standing in many communities, it is not surprising that they were much in evidence. However, if they submitted themselves as candidates for election to the parish council, this carried with it the risk of being defeated.

As has been mentioned, in many Hampshire parishes the vicar or rector chaired the parish meeting, thereby contributing to the proceedings but avoiding the ignominy of possible defeat. That said, approximately 65 clergymen did stand for election at parish meetings and of these about 50 were successful, but few came top of the poll. An interesting situation in this respect arose at North Stoneham, where there were eight seats to be filled. As in a number of other parishes, an election committee had selected candidates prior to the meeting, in this case eight out of a grand total of eighteen candidates, including the local rector Rev Kenworthy Browne. Significantly, six of the eight were elected by show of hands. However, the rector was one of the two casualties and he only secured a seat thanks to the withdrawal of another clergyman, Rev W. Rudge, a successful candidate who had not been one of the eight selected by the election committee, and the casting vote of the chairman. Here there was a sting in the tail since Rev Browne was defeated in the subsequent poll.

In at least ten parishes the local vicar or rector failed to secure election. In two of these, Netley Marsh and Sopley, having been chosen at the parish meeting both lost in the subsequent ballot. Perhaps anticipating defeat, a number of clergymen withdrew their nominations at the parish meeting before the show of hands. Only one clergyman appears to have been defeated at the parish meeting but elected in the subsequent poll. This was Rev A Martell at Buriton. In about 20 parishes, including Amport, Bishop's Sutton, Durley, Froyle, Sherborne St John, Upham and Wherwell the local vicar did not contest the election but was subsequently invited to chair the parish council. While the vast majority of Anglican clergy who stood for election were either the local rector or vicar, in two cases, at Church Oakley and Twyford, they were a private tutor and a headmaster respectively.

Among the successful clergymen, there were only five Nonconformists, four Congregationalists and one Baptist.⁸⁴ Two Nonconformists were defeated. At Whitchurch, the Congregational minister was successful at

84 Congregationalists were elected at Alresford, Cheriton, Overton and Titchfield and the Baptist at Lyndhurst.

the parish meeting but lost in the subsequent poll. At North Waltham, a Primitive Methodist minister, having failed to secure election at the parish meeting, demanded a poll only to loose again.

Although anti-clerical sentiments do not appear to have been widespread, they did occasionally surface. One example can be seen in the following extract from a press report of the election of the Chairman of Froyle Parish Council:

At the first meeting ..., Mr Joseph Stockdale, who is probably the largest ratepayer in the parish, was chosen Provisional Chairman and was proposed by Mr Bamford as Chairman till the annual meeting, but he declined the office. Mr Candy then proposed the Rev H. Castle Floud as Chairman [he had chaired the parish meeting] – Mr Bamford protested against the clergyman being elected, asserting that it was contrary to the spirit of the Act for the Parson to have anything to do with the parish council, as evinced in the fact that no churchwarden could be elected as an Overseer – Mr Candy thought the Council could not have a better Chairman than Mr Floud who was a thorough businessman – Mr J. Simpson seconded Mr Candy's motion. Mr Bamford proposed Mr J. Messenger, farmer, of Bonhams, as Chairman; but Mr Floud was elected by four to three.⁸⁵

Both at Froyle and in the county as a whole, all the evidence suggests that Mr Bamford's view was a minority one.

That said, a fascinating insight into concern regarding the potentially tactless behaviour of some clergymen was highlighted in an account by a 'Travelling Correspondent', which was published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and entitled 'Preparations for Parish Councils'. Recounting an incident in an unnamed Hampshire parish where there appears to have been considerable antipathy between the local clergyman and village schoolmaster, he felt moved to comment along the following lines:

Friends of the Church must sincerely regret the foolish conduct of a few exceptional clergymen who get their whole order into disrepute by their foolish quarrels with the teachers. The union of the latter is one of the most powerful trade combinations in the kingdom, and encourages them to be independent and treat ordinary school work as all for which they are legally responsible. In a case before us, where the teacher is a very zealous Churchman, a little gentleness and persuasion would have been more potent than a threat of dismissal which could not be carried into effect.⁸⁶

85 *Hampshire Observer*, 12 January 1895.

86 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 December 1894.

Thus, it would seem that clergymen could sometimes be their own worst enemies, alienating potential supporters and, in the process, damaging the standing of the Church of England and undermining the contribution which Churchmen might make to the institutions of parish government.

Turning to the question of female representation on parish councils, as Harold Laski and colleagues commented: 'The Parish Councils Act marked an important advance in democracy, for it made women eligible as ... parish councillors'.⁸⁷ Moreover, a plethora of distinguished personages, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Mr Fowler, Thomas Huxley and Florence Nightingale encouraged women to participate in parish government.⁸⁸ Although the total number of women elected to parish councils is not known, Poole and Keith-Lucas suggest that it was somewhere between 80, an estimate of the Women's Local Government Society, and 200.⁸⁹ The figure for Hampshire was eleven, nearly twice as many as the six elected in Wiltshire.⁹⁰ There might have been a few more, but four were defeated and another two withdrew their nominations.⁹¹

Of the successful women candidates, seven were married or widowed, and the remaining four were spinsters. Drawing upon information from *Kelly's Directory*, it would seem that two had direct links with the Church, being the daughters of clergymen. These were Mrs Barker, at Sherfield upon Lodden, and Miss Mary Yonge, at Rockbourne. Two women councillors were landowners in their own right, Mrs Harrison Wayne and Mrs Rose Shuttleworth, at South Warnborough and Steep respectively, and another, Mrs Louisa Best, at Abbot's Ann was the wife of the principal landowner.⁹² A further three were in business on their own account. These were Mrs E. Warren at Winchfield, who was as a farmer; Mrs Caroline Blewden at Church Oakley, who combined the occupations of baker, grocer and postmistress; and Miss Alice Lushington at Kingsley, who was the joint proprietor, with her sister, of a boarding school. Thus,

87 H.J. Laski, W.I. Jennings and W.A. Robson (eds) *A Century of Municipal Progress 1835-1935* (London, 1935), p. 52.

88 Poole and Keith-Lucas, *Parish Government*, p. 46.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

90 The parishes concerned were Headley and Kingsley (in Alton Union); Abbott's Ann (Andover); Church Oakley and Sherfield upon Loddon (Basingstoke); Rockbourne (Fordingbridge); South Warnborough and Winchfield (Hartley Wintney); Otterbourne (Hursley); Steep (Petersfield); and Hound (South Stoneham).

91 Women candidates were defeated at Bentworth, Bramshott, Christchurch East (Bransgore Ward) and Titchfield. They withdrew at Farlington and Ropley, where Miss Hagen was amongst those who had polled highest. The reasons for the withdrawals are not recorded.

92 This was Captain T.G. Best, who was to become county councillor for Hurstbourne Tarrant.

there was considerable variety in the backgrounds of the small contingent of women parish councillors. It is particularly noteworthy that Mrs Barker, described by Hollis as one of 'the best known parish councillors', was elected chairman of her council, possibly a unique occurrence.⁹³

The backgrounds of parish councillors and the occupational composition of parish councils in Hampshire demonstrated both the resilience of tradition and desire for harmony in some parishes and the expression of a more radical and questioning spirit in others. This was also seen the manner in which the chairman of the parish council was chosen.

VI Chairmen

In a majority of parishes the choice of chairman was unanimous exhibiting an amicable and consensual approach to the conduct of parochial affairs. Moreover, where more than one candidate was nominated, this did not necessarily signify a strongly held division of opinion within the council since there was sometimes an element of cross nomination. However, there were undoubtedly parishes where the contest for the position of chairman did represent a significant cleavage amongst the councillors, often triggered by the desire of some members to choose a chairman from outside their ranks, which the legislation permitted. In the words of the 1894 Act: 'the parish council shall elect, from their own body or from persons qualified to be councillors of the parish, a chairman [emphasis added]'.⁹⁴

It is notable that in over 40 per cent of parishes for which information is available a chairman was appointed from outside the ranks of the elected councillors.⁹⁵ It would seem that in some of these, the local vicar or other parochial dignitary was promised the chairmanship in advance so there was no need for them to demean themselves by standing for election and run the risk of being defeated. Indeed, many had chaired the parish meeting, thereby making themselves ineligible for nomination.

In a newspaper report of the contest for the chairmanship of Hound Parish Council, some of the arguments for and against the appointment of an external chairman were rehearsed:

Mr C. Homan (who had headed the poll) and Colonel the Hon. H.C.L. Crichton CC [who was not a councillor] were duly proposed and

93 Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 367, quotes at length from an article about Mrs Barker which appeared in *Parish Councillor*, 27 December 1895.

94 Local Government Act 1894, sec 3(8).

95 It has been possible to establish the identity of the first chairman for 150 of the 188 parish councils.

seconded as Chairman – Mr Homan begged the council to nominate one other than himself, but this was not done. Those who spoke for Colonel Crichton referred to his experience as a County Councillor, but others maintained that it would be wrong in principle to elect a chairman from outside their own body when they had a capable one inside it. Had Colonel Crichton been a Parish Councillor they said his election would no doubt have been unanimous. Eventually Mr Homan allowed his name to go to the vote, and although he himself abstained from voting the majority were in his favour.⁹⁶

Thus, in Hound, the view that it was more legitimate to select the chairman from the ranks of the elected councillors prevailed, notwithstanding the reluctance of the favoured candidate.

At Crookham, another parish where the chairmanship was a bone of contention, the outcome was different. Here an external chairman, Mr Chinnock, having been nominated, one of the councillors, Mr Britton, who was unhappy about this, proposed the following motion: 'that this council thinks it undesirable to elect a chairman from outside and that one of the councillors be elected'. As reported, in support of his motion Britton argued that:

Mr Chinnock was the most unpopular man in the parish after the vicar. He was not a parochial elector, though as a resident he might have put up as a candidate. He knew, however, that he would not get 20 votes. His time was taken up in his private business. He left Crookham early every morning and returned in the evening. To elect him chairman would produce great dissatisfaction in the parish ... It was an insult to the Councillors suggesting that not one of them was competent to act as Chairman. There was a special reason why Mr Chinnock should not be their Chairman. He had within the past two months or so blocked up the entrance to a public road, and it was very probable that the Parish Council would have to take up the matter and it would be most objectionable to give Mr Chinnock two votes in such a matter.⁹⁷

Mr Britton's strictures notwithstanding, his motion was defeated by 3 votes to 5 and Mr Chinnock was subsequently elected chairman by the same margin.

As these examples illustrate, selecting the chairmen of parish councils brought to the fore the tension between the more traditional view of parochial governance as exemplified by the notion of the chairman being

96 *Hampshire Independent*, 5 January 1895.

97 *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 January 1895.

a figure of such status that electoral considerations did not apply and that of the democratic imperative which lay at the heart of the new arrangements. Thus, in assessing the historical significance of the 1894 Act the choice of chairmen should not be overlooked.

VII Conclusion

Evidence from Hampshire and elsewhere indicates that the 1894 reforms stimulated a great deal of interest and engaged many of those who had previously been excluded from parochial government. Thus, the hopes of Redlich and Hirst and Odgers were, to some extent realised. However, the level of competitiveness as measured by the percentage of parishes/wards in which polls were held, the only indicator for which nationally published figures are available, varied considerably.⁹⁸ Data from this source show that at one extreme was Middlesex where polls were demanded in over 70 per cent of its 28 rural parishes.⁹⁹ The next most competitive county was Buckinghamshire where polls were held in 62.6 per cent of its 107 parishes. At the other extreme was Suffolk where polls were held in less than a quarter of the parishes. The equivalent percentage for Hampshire is 42.5 per cent. However, it would seem that the Hampshire data include the Isle of Wight, and once allowance is made for this the percentage for Hampshire parishes/wards, where there were polls, falls to only 37.3 per cent. This is below the national average of 42.3 per cent and well below Wiltshire on 60.4 per cent.¹⁰⁰

One possible reason for the difference between Hampshire and Wiltshire, and perhaps other counties with higher percentages, is the degree to which party politics played a part in the choice of parish councillors. As previously indicated, although party politics was not entirely absent from parish affairs in Hampshire, it seems to have been less extensive and more muted than in Wiltshire. Unlike Hampshire, the political nature of the parish council elections in Wiltshire was heightened by the partisan involvement of two figures active on the national political stage. These were George Fuller, a Liberal, and Walter Long, a Conservative.¹⁰¹ It was also the case that the Conservative and

98 Unfortunately, equivalent data for contests at parish meetings and ratios of candidates to seats are not available.

99 By this time Middlesex was already heavily urbanised.

100 *Twenty-fourth Annual Report of Local Government Board*, 1894-95 (1895), C.7867, p. 295

101 Fuller was MP for Westbury from 1885 to 1895 and Long MP for Devizes from 1880 to 1892.

Liberal parties were more evenly balanced in Wiltshire than in Hampshire, where the Conservatives were far stronger. This is confirmed by the results of the 1892 general election. Of the four county seats in Wiltshire the Liberals won three and the Conservatives one, while in Hampshire the Conservatives won all six county seats.¹⁰² Partisanship was also well entrenched in Wiltshire's local press, with the *Wiltshire Times* being strongly Liberal, and the *Devizes Gazette*, Conservative.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, further research remains to be undertaken in order to determine the extent to which party politics contributed to the greater degree of competitiveness in Wiltshire and other counties and to assess the role of other factors, such as religious differences.

With respect to the composition of parish councils, in both Hampshire and Wiltshire the percentage of councillors drawn from the labouring classes was perhaps less than might have been expected given that, as Odgers argued, one of the principal aims of the reforms was to give them direct experience of democratic self-government.¹⁰⁴ In comparing Hampshire with East Anglia, Heath observed that 'tested by the Norfolk standard ... [results from 22 contested elections] do not indicate a high measure of success on the part of the Hampshire labourers'.¹⁰⁵ However, it is important to note that he only had access to data from 37.1 per cent of Norfolk parishes, with the equivalent percentages for Suffolk and Essex being 41.7 and 68.3 respectively. On the basis of this sample he claimed that it was in East Anglia that 'the tide of enthusiasm ... reached its highest level'.¹⁰⁶ What he fails to mention is that Norfolk and Suffolk were at the bottom of the league with respect to competitiveness and Essex was not far above them.¹⁰⁷

102 The Wiltshire results were Chippenham, Conservative (majority 3.2%); Cricklade, Liberal (12.2%); Devizes, Liberal (1.8%); and Westbury, Liberal (7.4%). Although at the 1895 general election the Conservatives won three seats and the Liberal Unionists the other one, their majorities were relatively small ranging from 1.0 per cent at Cricklade to 7.0 per cent at Chippenham. By contrast the Liberals did not contest any of the Hampshire county seats.

103 Although some Hampshire newspapers were partisan they were mostly Conservative, with only the *Southampton Times* and *Hampshire Express* adopting an overtly Liberal stance.

104 Odgers, *Local Government*, p. 44.

105 Heath, 'Rural Revolution', 191-2. He calculated that the number of agricultural labourer councillors in Hampshire needed to be 'three times as numerous' in order to achieve a level equivalent to that of Norfolk.

106 Ibid., p. 183.

107 The percentage of parishes in which polls were held were Norfolk, 27.6; Suffolk, 24.4; and Essex, 34.6.

In their assessment of the results, Poole and Keith-Lucas conclude that: 'The Radical cause was advanced but could scarcely be said to have triumphed'.¹⁰⁸ With respect to Hampshire, this may have been due to an ongoing spirit of deference rather than to any deliberate attempt to exclude those who were of a more radical disposition. It was the case, however, that the situation varied considerably from parish to parish. Thus, there is a need for in-depth studies of individual or groups of parishes to supplement the broad overview provided in this article.

One aspect of the electoral arrangements that may have played a part in deterring labourers from standing and which appears to have caused considerable concern in Hampshire, as well as elsewhere, was the show of hands at parish meetings. Contemporary criticism of the procedure, however, tended to focus on its clumsiness rather than its negation of the principle of the secret ballot. According to the *Hampshire Observer*:

there was a general consensus of opinion as to the tediousness and awkwardness ... [of this arrangement] and as to the desirability of adopting some plainer and more distinct method of determining the popular voice. It is practically impossible for a chairman to tell for how many candidates ... [an elector has voted] and though it may be safe to put electors on their honour and trust to that safeguard, it is not businesslike. It is a clumsy system and no doubt will soon be superseded.¹⁰⁹

Awkward it might have been, but in the event it survived until 1948. Thus, the admonition of the editorial writer fell on deaf ears.

Drawing on the evidence from Hampshire it seems reasonable to conclude, as in the case of Wiltshire and other counties, that the experiences of those involved in the establishment of parish councils were more diverse than the grand narratives of Redlich and Hirst and Odgers might allow or accommodate. While the cause of parish democracy and self-government was advanced it cannot be said to have triumphed to the extent that its champions might have hoped. In many parishes, notwithstanding the initial excitement, the established order remained relatively undisturbed. The verdict of the *Hampshire Advertiser*, published four years after the reforms, was that: 'Village life has not been revolutionised; but, on the other hand, they [parish councils] have not been altogether a failure. They have done some good'.¹¹⁰ While it would be true to say that village life in general remained relatively undisturbed

¹⁰⁸ Poole and Keith-Lucas, *Parish Government*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁹ *Hampshire Observer*, 8 December 1894.

¹¹⁰ *Hampshire Advertiser*, 19 March 1898.

by the reforms, they did enable the expression of a more radical spirit in some parishes. Such differences have been recognised by Heath, Hollis and Poole and Keith-Lucas. Arguably, however, their analyses do not go far enough and require further refinement, in the light of the findings of more extensive empirically based studies similar to the one presented here.