

FROM 1894: THE PARISH MEETING

Over the closing 30 years of the 19th century, there was a gradual change from the days when the parish vestry was almost like the government of an independent republic to a more centralised and standardised method of local government across the country. After the introduction of County Councils in 1888, the powers of the magistrates at the Quarter Sessions were replaced by elected councillors and a more professional staff.

The year 1894 brought another big step towards the system we know today. All parishes with a population of more than 300 were required under a new Local Government Act to replace the Select Vestry with a Parish Council. The Act also created a new layer of administration by setting up District Councils. Since 1872 there had been Rural Sanitary Authorities, exactly following the Poor Law Union boundaries, with the Poor Law Guardians also being members of the Sanitary Authority. In 1894 the part of the Poor Law Union in Northamptonshire was separated from the Leicestershire part and became Oxendon Rural District Council.

So there was now an elected County Council and below that, an elected District Council. But should East Farndon, with fewer than 300 inhabitants, have a Parish Council? At the end of 1894 a meeting was called to decide this question. Should there be a Parish Council or would the village prefer just to have a Parish Meeting, which had fewer responsibilities and powers than a Parish Council? Arguments both ways were put forward and a vote was taken. It was 9-7 in favour of a Parish Meeting. The first chairman was John Rowlatt.

This 1894 Act marked the moment when civil administration and church administration became completely separate. The Parish Meeting would not deal with church repairs in future. The Vestry continued to look after church matters until 1921, when Parochial Church Councils were created. The Parish Meetings were held in the school, until the new wooden village hall was built in 1924.

In 1895 the Parish Meeting spent time appointing trustees to look after the village charities – the Middlemore, Halford and Ann Brown charities. There was increasing contact with the Charity Commissioners.

In 1902 Local Education Authorities were created, replacing local boards. The Parish Meeting had to elect representatives to sit on the new board of school managers.

In 1905 John A. Hart took over as chairman of the Parish Meeting and he in turn was succeeded by the Rector, Cyril Burges, in 1907. There were generally about 8 villagers attending, though more when a more interesting or important issue was to be discussed. There were 17 there when in 1911 there was discussion about widening the road by demolishing an old mud wall round Mr Cox's property, The Orchards (now Orchard House). A new drainage scheme down the west side of main Street was also discussed and both schemes were approved. Subscriptions were to be called for so the pinnacles on the church tower could be restored to mark the coronation of George V.

The new Rector, William Brooke, became chairman of the Meeting in 1912. In 1914 a sub-committee was formed 'to deal with cases of distress caused by the war'. In 1915 the three village charities were permitted by the Charities Commissioners to be combined into the United Charities. This was partly because the need for apprenticeships, the purpose of the Halford charity, had become almost nil. In 1919 the Meeting heard reports from the War Savings Association, the War Memorial Fund and the Telegraph Office Guarantee Fund.

The District Council built its first council houses in the village in 1920. In the same year the War Memorial was completed and the Meeting appointed Walter Tebbutt to be the caretaker of the

memorial. In 1922 the pump on Back Street (Back Lane) was to be closed, as almost all the houses dependent on it had been demolished.

In 1924 Mr. F.G. Cox offered some land for a village 'room'. Ten trustees were to hold the land as his tenants at a nominal rent of a shilling a year. So the first Village Hall came into being. It was decided in 1925 that some of the proceeds from hire of the village hall should be used to pay for maintenance of the War Memorial. Also that year the Meeting resolved to start a village rubbish collection – it seems strange to us that there wasn't one before this. In March 1925 the Parish Meeting was held in the village hall for the first time. In 1926, for the first time, following the resignation of Rev. Brooke, there would not be a clergyman as chair of the Parish Meeting. J.A. Hart was elected to the position.

In 1927 Miss Hall and Miss Sharp were thanked for re-turfing and shrub-planting at the War Memorial. The Sewing Party offered to look after the memorial and did so for the next few years. Mr J.A. Hart lent his horse and cart for the waste collection in 1929. More council houses were built in the early 1930s. In 1935 the county's rural districts were re-organised, so that Oxendon R.D. no longer existed and Farndon was now to be in Brixworth R.D. The village hall trustees were handed the responsibility for the Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1935 and the Coronation celebrations of 1937.

In 1939 J.A. Hart wanted to resign as chairman and so Lt-Col Denis Sanders was appointed for the following year. However he never took the chair, because he had to join his regiment and was killed while on service. J.A. Hart as Deputy Chair continued to run the meetings. The village had been putting money into a Fire Brigade Fund, but when the Rural District Council set up a fire service, the money was invested in Defence Bonds. It was decided in 1941 that the old minute books would be kept in F.G. Cox's fireproof safe – with a war on, there was always a risk of fire.

Frank West was elected chair of the meeting in 1941, when there was much discussion of whether the village had enough of a water supply in case of fire. In 1942 the village finally stopped appointing constables, as there was no need for them. It's surprising that the appointment of constables continued so far into the 20th century. In 1942 it was reported that a site had been chosen for a burial ground, as the churchyard was full. In 1944 Frank West resigned as chair and John Clifford took over.

The Sewing Party was no longer able to look after the War Memorial from 1944, though they had done so for 17 years. Mr Hurn agreed to take over and there was to be fund-raising to help with the task. In 1947 after John Clifford's resignation, Noel Symington became Chair of the meeting. That year a Burial Board was set up and the site of the new ground was pegged out. The new burial ground occupied much of the Meeting's time over the next year and more.

In 1949 the meeting, with 53 people present, was asked whether it wanted the village to stay with Brixworth R.D. or transfer to Harborough. The vote was 43-9 to stay with Brixworth. Noel Symington left the village in 1950 and Major Denis Cowen was elected Chair of the Meeting. He continued to chair the meetings until 1975 – a quarter of a century. That year there was a vote for a name for the new council estate, in which 'The Lealand' came top. It was also the year in which a mains water supply finally replaced the pumps, the spring and the wells. The burial ground continued to occupy the meeting's time and in 1952 a date was set for the bishop to consecrate the ground.

1953 meant organising Coronation celebrations. Various sub-committees were set up to look after different aspects of the festivities. After it was over there was a surplus of £23/16/1 which was to be used towards street lighting. By 1956 the lighting was in place, so the running costs had to be met.

In 1961 there was anger that the Local Government Commission had awarded the 64 acres including "the Prisoners' Camp and Mr Pick's fields" to Market Harborough, thus moving the county boundary towards Farndon. Mr Hurn's 18 years of looking after the War memorial came to an end with his

death in 1962. Maintenance of the Memorial was undertaken by different volunteers from now on, with no one serving long. For several years there was no parish clerk and Major Cowen had to take notes and chair the meetings. In 1966 the school closed.

Those present at a meeting in December 1970 are recorded as “Major D.J. Cowen in the chair”. It seems that no one else was there but the one-man meeting went ahead. In 1973 the first discussion about changing to a Parish Council took place and Major Cowen undertook to investigate.

Local Government re-organisation in 1974 abolished the rural district councils and replaced them with district councils. East Farndon was to be part of Daventry District. In 1975 Major Cowen resigned and debate continued about whether to change to a Parish Council. ‘Joe’ West took over as chair and there would now be a clerk once more. Ben Cooke took on that position.

In 1976 the long drought caused the water supply to be turned off from 7 p.m. to 8 a.m. on a rota basis. And in December 1976 the decision to change to a Parish Council was finally taken, without any disagreement. The Parish Meeting had been in operation 82 years – since 1894.

In this long period, **general elections and local elections** gradually became much as they are today. 1918’s general election was the first to be held on a single day and also the first at which some (but not all) women were able to vote. Everyone, including women, over the age of 21 was entitled to vote after an Act of 1928. Women had been able to vote in local elections from as far back as 1894. In 1968 the vote was extended to everyone over 18.

The constituencies were re-organised in 1918 and Farndon became part of the Kettering constituency. In the changes of 1974, Farndon became part of Daventry constituency.