

DEMOCRACY IMPAIRED? A REVIEW OF COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS IN HAMPSHIRE BETWEEN 1889 AND 1974

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ABSTRACT

At the time of their establishment in 1888, it was expected that elected county councils would serve as bastions of representative democracy at the county level of local government. In Hampshire, however, like many other counties, these aspirations were not fully met. This was due to shortcomings in the rules governing the conduct of elections, in particular the distortions arising from the use of the 'first past the post' voting system in single member constituencies and, until 1945, limitations on who had the right to stand and to vote in county elections. It was also a consequence of a failure on the part of potential candidates to enter the electoral fray thereby leaving many seats uncontested and, after 1919, of the majority of electors to cast their vote in those contests which did occur. In view of these failings, is it justifiable to describe democracy as being impaired? Although this might be a moot point, the failings of the electoral system highlighted in this paper do beg important questions concerning the efficacy of county democracy between 1889 and 1974.

INTRODUCTION

Representative democracy in the form of regular elections was introduced at the county level of local government in the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century. Until then responsibility for the government of counties such as Hampshire had been vested in the court of quarter sessions. Thus, magistrates had performed a governmental as well as a judicial role. This arrangement was terminated by the Local Government Act 1888. In future, the principle of election was to apply in determin-

ing who should be entrusted with the task of policy making for the county. Such a principle was very much in keeping with the view of Charles Richie, the President of the Local Government Board, that 'the representatives of the constituencies on the county councils should be checked by a healthy test of direct contact with those who elect them' (*Hansard*, Vol 323, col 1654, 19 Mar 1888). However, these aspirations were not initially met in Hampshire, and indeed many other counties, in the sense that until well into the 1960s the majority of elections were uncontested. Moreover, after the First World War in the contests which did occur, turnouts often fell well below 50 per cent. Whether in the light of this it is justifiable to describe county democracy as impaired is perhaps debateable. Nonetheless, it does give rise to a number of questions concerning the efficacy of county democracy. Since elections are one of the most visible indicators of the democratic health of a community, the number of candidates they attract, the percentage of electors who bother to vote, the contribution of elections to the democratic renewal of council membership and the participation of political parties are all matters of interest and concern.

With such considerations in mind, the purpose of this paper is to present, for the first time, data on county council elections in the administrative county of Southampton (Hampshire from 1958) between 1889 and 1974, when there was a significant reorganisation of local government in the county. For convenience, the title 'Hampshire' is used throughout to refer to the area of the administrative county. Since there has never been an official system for maintaining a definitive record of county council

election results it has been necessary to collate the data on which the paper is based from a variety of sources, in particular local newspapers and council documents. These, however, are not necessarily entirely accurate or exhaustive. Moreover, where information about a particular election is available from more than one source, there may also be discrepancies. In the interests of stimulating further work in this field, a detailed record of Hampshire County Council elections is currently being compiled and when completed will be placed in the public domain (Ottewill, *forthcoming*).

In the first part of this paper, consideration is given to the procedural aspects of county elections. This serves to set the scene for an examination of some of the more behavioural aspects in the second. Throughout, the connecting thread is the notion of county democracy and the extent to which it can be said to have been marred in some way.

ELECTORAL PROCEDURES

From the outset there was a detailed legislative framework regulating the conduct of county elections. This covered the designation of electoral units; the composition of the council; the rules determining who could stand for election and vote; the voting system; and how elections were to be conducted. In operating within this regulatory framework, county councils had minimal autonomy. Put another way they had little, if any, scope to adopt alternative arrangements for their elections, even if they wanted to address perceived flaws in them.

ELECTORAL UNITS

Before considering the units into which Hampshire was divided for county election purposes, it is necessary to explain how the area of the administrative county as a whole changed between 1889 and 1974. At the time it was constituted it consisted of 1,041,641 acres. This was the area of the geographical

county, which included the Isle of Wight, less the municipal boroughs of Southampton and Portsmouth. Because of their size, Southampton and Portsmouth both acquired county borough status under the Local Government Act 1888. This meant that for local government purposes they were self-governing. Their inhabitants did not come under the jurisdiction of the county council and consequently did not participate in county council elections. Instead they elected county borough councillors. Subsequent changes in the area of the administrative county between 1889 and 1974 are summarised in Table 1.

As can be seen, most of the changes involved a loss of territory. The most substantial reduction was in 1890 when the Isle of Wight secured administrative county status in its own right. A considerable amount of territory was also lost when Bournemouth became a county borough in 1900 and was subsequently extended a year later. Like other counties sharing boundaries with expansionist-minded county boroughs, Hampshire was compelled to yield over 22 thousand acres to Southampton, Portsmouth and Bournemouth, as they expanded outwards. In the process they absorbed a number of second tier local authorities, which had shared responsibility for the provision of services with the county council. These were Shirley and Freemantle and Itchen urban districts, which were absorbed into Southampton county borough, and Pokesdown and Winton urban districts, which were taken over by Bournemouth county borough. By 1974 Hampshire had lost, in total, nearly 11 per cent of the area it covered in 1889.

Inevitably, adjustments to the county boundary had an impact on the number and pattern of electoral divisions which served as the basic unit for county council elections. Each division was represented by a single councillor. For the first county elections, the number of councillors and hence divisions for each county was set by the Local Government Board. It also decided upon 'their apportionment between each of the boroughs which have sufficient population to return one councillor and the rest of the county' (*Local Government*

Table 1 Adjustments to the area of Hampshire

<i>Date</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Balance</i>
01/04/1890	Isle of Wight became a separate administrative county under the provisions of the Local Government Board's Provisional Order Confirmation (no.2) Act 1889.	-94068	947573
1895/96	Wiltshire and Berkshire transfers of territory. Local Government Boards Provisional Orders Confirmation Acts 1895-96.	+5354	952927
09/11/1895	Portsmouth CB extension, Local Government Board Provisional Order Confirmation (No 4) Act 1895. Parish of Great Salterns.	-690	952237
09/11/1895	Southampton CB major extensions, Local Government Board Provisional Order Confirmation (No 16) Act 1895. Shirley and Freemantle Urban District. Parishes of Millbrook (part), Bitterne (part) and South Stoneham (part).	-3006	949231
01/04/1900	Bournemouth became a county borough under the Local Government Board's Provisional Order Confirmation (No. 12) Act 1899.	-2610	946621
09/11/1901	Bournemouth CB extension, Bournemouth Extension Order 1901. Parish of Holdenhurst (part).		Included in total below
30/10/1902	Bournemouth CB extension, Local Government Board Order No 44497. Pokesdown Urban District and Winton Urban District. Parish of Southbourne (part).	-3132	943489
09/11/1914	Bournemouth CB extension, Local Government Board's Provisional Order Confirmation (No.8) Act 1914. Parish of Holdenhurst (part).	-803	945818
01/10/1920	Portsmouth CB extension, Portsmouth Corporation Act 1920. Parish of Cosham (part).	-1914	942686
09/11/1920	Southampton CB major extensions. Ministry of Health Provisional Order Confirmation (Southampton Extension) Act 1920. Itchen Urban District. Parishes of Bitterne (part), North Stoneham (part) and South Stoneham (balance).	-5342	937344
01/04/1931	Bournemouth CB extension. Bournemouth Corporation Act 1930. Parish of Holdenhurst (balance).	-1899	935445
01/04/1932	Bournemouth CB and Portsmouth CB extensions. Bournemouth and Portsmouth Order 1932. Christchurch MB (Part); Parishes of Portchester (part) and Farlington (part).	-235 -1259	933951
01/04/1954	Southampton CB extension, The Southampton (Alteration of Boundaries) Order 1954. Parishes of Millbrook (part), Nursling (part), Rownhams (part), Hound (part) and West End (part).	-1074 -821	932056
01/04/1967	Southampton CB extension, The Hampshire and Southampton (Boundaries) Order 1967. Parishes of Nursling (part) and Rownhams (part).	-204	931527

Source: *Census Reports for Hampshire various years*

Table 2 Classification of electoral divisions

<i>Date</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Urban¹</i>	<i>Rural²</i>
29/01/89	75	28	47
01/04/90	62	21	41
08/03/92	63	21	42
09/11/95	62	20	42
19/09/98	64	22	42
01/04/00	60	18	42
09/11/01	59	17	42
24/03/14	63	20	43
18/07/19	64	21	43
09/11/20	61	19	42
12/11/32	68	32	36
05/04/52	70	34	36
10/04/58	71	35	36
09/04/70	71	40	31

Notes

¹ Divisions constituted from municipal boroughs and urban districts.

² Divisions constituted from rural districts.

Source: H/CXII/1-6

Act 1888, sec. 2 (3) (a)). Boroughs with populations which entitled them to more than one councillor had the privilege of deciding how the divisions should be constituted. In the case of Hampshire, of the boroughs in existence in 1889, only two, Bournemouth and Winchester, were large enough to be allocated more than one councillor. Of the others Andover, Basingstoke, Lymington and Romsey each formed a single division. Elsewhere within the county responsibility for determining the boundaries of divisions was exercised by the court of quarter sessions. Thereafter, the county council became responsible for making alterations to the boundaries of divisions and determining their number, although all changes had to be formally approved by the Local Government Board and its successor bodies – the Ministry

of Health from 1919 to 1951 and thereafter the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

In determining the boundaries of electoral divisions, quarters sessions and county councils were required to take into account a number of factors. In the words of the legislation:

The divisions shall be arranged with a view to the population of each division being, so nearly as conveniently may be equal, regard being had to a proper representation both of the rural and the urban population and to the distribution and pursuits of such population and to the area, and to the last published census for the time being, and to the evidence of any considerable change of population since such census (*Local Government Act 1888*, sec. 51).

Although the language changed, the principles enshrined in the *Local Government Act 1888* did not, thereby ensuring a degree of continuity. In other words, while equality of population continued to be the main criterion in determining the boundaries of electoral divisions, this could be modified to take account of other factors. These included respecting, wherever possible, the boundaries of lower tier authorities, or as it was put in the 1888 Act, 'electoral divisions are to be so formed as not to overlap an urban sanitary district, ward, or rural sanitary district' (*Local Government Act 1888*, sec. 51).

The number of electoral divisions into which Hampshire was divided, on each occasion when there was a change, are shown in Table 2. It also classifies the divisions as either urban or rural.

In the period covered by the paper there were four large scale changes to the pattern of divisions. One was the loss of 13 Isle of Wight divisions in 1890. The second was the reduction by four divisions in 1900 when Bournemouth became a self-governing county borough. These were Boscombe (two divisions), Bournemouth East Cliff and Bournemouth West Cliff. A little later, in 1901, Westover was also lost as a result of the extension of Bournemouth. The third was the comprehensive review of divisions which occurred in the early 1930s (H/CL5/1W/1/1-3). This was required under the provisions of the *Local Government Act 1929* and followed the review of county districts, which led to

Table 3 Smaller scale changes to the pattern of divisions

<i>Date</i>	<i>Division(s) affected</i>	<i>Nature of Change</i>
08/03/92	Lymington Rural	Divided into East and West
09/11/95	Shirley and Freemantle	Incorporated into Southampton CB
19/09/98	Boscombe	New division
19/09/98	Bishopstoke	Divided into two: Bishopstoke and Eastleigh
09/11/01	Westover, Bournemouth	Incorporated into Bournemouth CB
24/03/14	St Mary Extra and part of Hound	Two new divisions: Itchen (Pear Tree) and Itchen (Scholing and Woolston) – net increase of one
24/03/14	Aldershot East and West	Divided into three, Aldershot Central, East and West
24/03/14	Gosport (three divisions)	Number increased to four
24/03/14	Eastleigh and Bishopstoke	Three new divisions Eastleigh North, Eastleigh South and Twyford – net increase of one
18/07/19	Farnborough	Divided into two, North and South
09/11/20	Itchen (Pear Tree) and Itchen (Scholing and Woolston)	Incorporated into Southampton CB
09/11/20	South Stoneham	Incorporated into Southampton CB
05/04/52	Gosport (four divisions)	Number increased to five
05/04/52	Fareham (three divisions)	Number increased to four
10/04/58	Havant and Waterloo (three divisions)	Number increased to four

Source: *HCC Reports and Proceedings*

a reduction in their number from 39 to 26 mainly through merging rural districts. On this occasion there was a net increase of seven in the number of divisions. Following the allocation of the sitting councillors to 61 of the new divisions, the remaining seven – Basingstoke East, Burley, Catherington, Eling, Millbrook, Petersfield and Wickham – acquired their councillors at a series of special elections held on 12 November 1932. The final large scale change occurred in the late 1960s. Although the number of divisions remained the same, following an extensive review, 42 divisions, or

59 per cent of the total, had their boundaries altered and, in some instances, their names changed. All the other changes were relatively small scale and incremental and are summarised in Table 3. Most of these were the result of either the loss of territory due to the expansion of the county boroughs or increases in the population of urban areas.

Despite the changes and the principles supposedly governing the designation of electoral units, throughout much of the period from 1889 to 1974 there were considerable disparities in the electorates of the largest and

Table 4 Electorates of largest and smallest divisions for selected years

<i>Year</i>	<i>Largest Name</i>	<i>Electors</i>	<i>Smallest Name</i>	<i>Electors</i>
1889U	Shirley and Freemantle	2851	Winchester City No 3	648
1889R	Lymington Rural	684	Alresford	382
1919U	Farnborough	5047	Lymington	1858
1919R	Warblington	3806	Broughton	1209
1931U	Basingstoke	6622	Romsey	2342
1931R	Warblington	7601	Broughton	1436
1946U	Fareham East	12175	Gosport Town	2258
1946R	Lymington West	9711	Stockbridge	2440
1970U	Christchurch South	15497	Gosport Town	5995
1970R	Lyndhurst	9198	Highclere	3953

Key

U = urban; R = rural

Source: H/CX8/ ...

smallest divisions, even after making allowance for differences between urban and rural areas. This point is illustrated by the data in Table 4. Consequently some electors were over-represented and others under-represented, thereby injecting an element of inequity into the electoral system. Thus, in this sense at least, democracy was not fully served by the territorial basis of county council elections. Such a state of affairs, however, is a common problem with 'single member constituency' systems of representative democracy.

COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

Until 1974, county councils consisted of two types of member. In addition to the democratically elected councillors, there were a number

of aldermen. Councillors comprised three quarters of the members of the council and aldermen the remaining quarter. Aldermen were intended to provide an element of continuity since they served for six years compared to the councillors' three. They were chosen by the councillors. In their choice they were not restricted to the councillors but to anyone who had the necessary qualifications to be a councillor. For the first aldermanic election in Hampshire, all but two aldermen were chosen from outside the ranks of the newly elected councillors. In time, however, it became normal practice to select most aldermen from among the councillors, often those with the longest service. Half of the members of the aldermanic bench came up for re-election every three years.

The inclusion of aldermen was primarily

Table 5 Membership of Hampshire County Council

<i>Year</i>	<i>Councillors</i>	<i>Aldermen</i>	<i>Total</i>
1889	75	25	100
1890	62	21	83
1892	63	21	84
1895	62	20	82
1900	60	20	80
1901	59	20	79
1914	63	21	84
1919	64	21	85
1920	61	20	81
1934	68	23	91
1952	70	23	93
1958	71	23	94

Source: *HCC Reports and Proceedings*

because county councils were modelled on municipal boroughs, which had been reformed in 1835. Unlike boroughs, however, the councillors were subject to 'complete renewal' on a triennial basis as opposed to a system of 'partial renewal' whereby one third of the members came up for election annually. As and when necessary, by-elections were held to fill casual vacancies, except for those occurring within six months of the next triennial election. The main causes of by-elections were the election of councillors to the aldermanic bench, the death of sitting councillors, and the resignation of councillors before the expiry of their three-year term of office. Interestingly, until the 1930s councillors who resigned were required, under a local by-law, to pay a fine of £1.

Details of the composition of Hampshire County Council on each occasion when there was a change in the numbers of councillors and/or aldermen are provided in Table 5. The existence of aldermen was in some respects undemocratic, since they were not directly accountable to the electorate, and could be

said to have undermined the representative character of the county council. It is noteworthy that the major reason for the abolition of aldermen in 1974 was to enhance the democratic basis of county government.

During the period under review the rules governing the qualifications for membership of county councils became more inclusive, but only gradually. These were initially based on those for borough councils, specifically the need to be a burgess (see below) or if qualified to be a burgess in every respect except residence to live within 15 miles of the borough/county. However, three additional groups were also included, namely (i) ministers of religion, both Church of England and Nonconformist; (ii) peers owning property in the county; and likewise (iii) parliamentary voters who owned property in the county (Redlich and Hirst 1903, 13).

At the time of the establishment of county councils the position of duly qualified women was unclear, since despite earlier legislation where references to the male gender had been held to include females, subsequent court cases had 'muddled the water'. The eligibility of women for membership of county councils was not formally regularised until 1907, when the Qualification of Women (County and Borough Councils) Act provided that they should not be disqualified by sex or marriage. This was confirmed by the County and Borough Councils (Qualification) Act 1914, under which any person of either sex who had resided for 12 months in a county was eligible for council membership. In Hampshire, however, there were no female candidates until 1919, when there was one who failed to get elected, and no female councillors until 1922. Under the Representation of the People Act 1918, anyone eligible to vote was entitled to stand for election. In addition, anyone owning land within the county was qualified to be elected, although not to vote. Any remaining restrictions were removed in 1945.

ELECTORS

In 1889 the franchise for Hampshire County Council elections, like those of other local

authorities, was restricted to a relatively small percentage of the population. Between 1889 and 1919, the key piece of legislation in this regard was the County Electors Act of 1888. Under its provisions, there were two main categories of county elector. The first was the burgesses who were qualified to vote in municipal elections. At the time the burgess qualification was 12 months' occupation of a house, warehouse, counting house, shop or other building in the borough; 12 months' residence in the borough or living within seven miles if otherwise qualified; 12 months' rating; and payment of rates up to the previous 20 January. The second category was ten pound occupiers, those entitled to vote in parliamentary elections under the Registration Act of 1885. Here the qualification was 12 months' occupation of any land or tenement in the area of £10 yearly value; 6 months' residence within seven miles; 12 months' rating; and payment of rates up to the previous 5 January. This meant that, in a county such as Hampshire, only about 15 per cent of the population was initially eligible to vote in county elections (i.e. 55,940 out of a population of approximately 365,000). Significantly, however, this included any unmarried women (i.e. spinsters and widows) who held the prescribed qualifications in their own right.

The franchise for county elections was substantially extended in 1918, under the provisions of the Representation of the People Act, and standardised with that for other types of local election. However, it remained limited to men who occupied land or premises in the requisite area and to women who were at least 30 years old and either occupied land in a similar manner to men or were married to a qualified man, which meant that it was more restricted than that for parliamentary elections. At the same time, the disenfranchisement of paupers was abolished. For Hampshire these changes meant that the county franchise increased by about 110 per cent, that is from approximately 19 per cent of the population to approximately 39 per cent (i.e. from 75,341 to 158,170 electors). The age restriction for women was removed in 1928, thereby making the qualifying age for both sexes 21. The county franchise

did not become universal, like that for parliamentary elections, until 1945. Thereafter, the only other change was the reduction in voting age from 21 to 18 in 1969.

As illustrated, the rules relating to the franchise gradually became less restrictive. However, it took between 50 and 60 years for democracy in the form of universal suffrage to apply to county elections. Moreover, the counties lagged behind parliament in this respect.

VOTING SYSTEM

Throughout the period covered by this paper, county council elections were conducted on the basis of 'first past the post'. Although other systems, such as the cumulative vote and plural voting, were in use for elections to other types of public body at the time county councils were established, there was never any suggestion that an alternative should be applied. 'First past the post' could mean, of course, that whenever there were more than two candidates it was possible for the victor to have secured less than half of the votes cast. This happened on a number of occasions in contests for Hampshire County Council. The most extreme example was in November 1932 when four candidates stood for the reconstituted Eling seat, with the winner only securing 34.1 per cent of the votes cast. Sadly, despite the distortions associated with the simple majority system there was never any attempt to experiment with more proportional systems for county council elections. Moves towards proportional representation might well have assisted in strengthening county democracy.

CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS

Until the late 1940s, the County Councils (Elections) Act 1891 and subsequently the Local Government Act 1933 prescribed that the triennial elections for county councillors had to be held between the 1st and 8th March, with the county council able to decide the exact date. Thus, there was some variation between

councils. The dates chosen by Hampshire are shown in Table 6 (below). Under section 57 of the Representation of the People Act 1948 county election week was moved from early March to early April, with councils being required to choose a 'day in the week beginning with the Sunday before the ninth day of April'.

Legislation also determined other key dates in the election timetable, such as the deadline for the receipt of nominations; publication of the list of candidates; and the withdrawal of candidatures. In general, the cut off point for nominations was two weeks before the day of the election.

To oversee the conduct of elections, councils were required to appoint a county returning officer. However, in those divisions which were entirely within municipal boroughs the mayor or someone appointed by him acted as returning officer for the county election. The duties of returning officers included receiving nominations; setting up and staffing polling stations for contested elections; supervising the count; and importantly fixing the dates for by-elections.

Such arrangements were designed to ensure that elections were conducted fairly and honestly. Nonetheless, while these are important democratic values they did not compensate for some of the limitations and distortions associated with the simple majority system of electing council members.

ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR

While the electoral procedures ensured an element of standardisation, there was still the potential for some variation between counties with respect to a number of the more behavioural aspects of county council elections. These included the extent to which elections were contested, that is the degree of competitiveness; voter turnout; the contribution of elections to the turnover of council members; and the party politicisation of the electoral process. In the case of Hampshire, such aspects illustrate other ways in which it could be said that democracy was impaired.

COMPETITION

With respect to competitiveness, there were two main periods, pre and post 1946. This is illustrated by the data in Table 6, which shows the numbers of contested and uncontested divisions for each of the 25 triennial elections held between 1889 and 1974.

Before the Second World War, contested elections were the exception rather than the rule. Apart from the very first elections, the ratio of seats contested never exceeded one in four. From 1946 onwards, however, the percentage of contested seats never fell below 30 and in two years, 1946 and 1964 there were contests in a majority of seats. The average for the nine elections held between 1945 and 1974 was 44 per cent. This pattern has some similarities with that for three other counties for which comparable information is available, Cheshire, Lancashire and Surrey (see Table 7). However, at most triennial elections Hampshire generally had fewer contested divisions than the other three counties and on no occasion did the percentage of contests in Hampshire exceed that for each of the other three counties.

Turning to by-elections, the position for those held during each three year cycle is shown in Table 8. Here the pattern is not so definite, since there was an element of randomness in the divisions where casual vacancies occurred.

As the data for triennial elections illustrate, there were marked variations in competitiveness between divisions. For example, in the years prior to the reorganisation of divisions in 1932, electors in nine divisions, shown in Table 9, were never able to exercise their democratic right to vote at triennial elections, because there was never more than one candidate. By contrast just 11 divisions, also identified in Table 8, accounted for over 37 per cent of contested elections, the most competitive being Whitchurch.

Thus, a key question is why were contested county council elections such a relative rarity in many divisions during this earlier period? Here the *Hampshire Chronicle's* verdict on what happened in 1934 makes fascinating reading:

Table 6 Hampshire County Council triennial elections 1889–1974

Year	Date	Day	Divisions	Contested		Uncontested	
				No	%	No	%
1889	29 January	Tuesday	75	34	45	41	55
1892	8 March	Tuesday	63	10	16	53	84
1895	5 March	Tuesday	63	14	22	49	78
1898	8 March	Tuesday	62	3	5	59	95
1901	5 March	Tuesday	60	4	7	56	93
1904	8 March	Tuesday	59	14	24	45	76
1907	5 March	Tuesday	59	9	15	50	85
1910	8 March	Tuesday	59	11	19	48	81
1913	4 March	Tuesday	59	7	12	52	88
<i>First World War</i>							
1919	1 March	Saturday	63	11	17	52	83
1922	4 March	Saturday	61	11	18	50	82
1925	7 March	Saturday	61	12	20	49	80
1928	3 March	Saturday	61	8	13	53	87
1931	7 March	Saturday	61	10	16	51	84
1934	3 March	Saturday	68	7	10	61	90
1937	6 March	Saturday	68	8	12	60	88
<i>Second World War</i>							
1946	2 March	Saturday	68	37	54	31	46
1949	9 April	Saturday	68	32	47	36	53
1952	5 April	Saturday	70	23	33	47	67
1955	2 April	Saturday	70	21	30	49	70
1958	10 April	Thursday	71	25	35	46	65
1961	13 April	Thursday	71	33	46	38	54
1964	9 April	Thursday	71	48	68	23	32
1967	13 April	Thursday	71	32	45	39	55
1970	9 April	Thursday	71	30	42	41	58

Sources: *Hampshire Chronicle*, H/CX7/1 and Ottewill (forthcoming)

Table 7 Contested elections for Hampshire, Cheshire, Lancashire and Surrey County Councils

<i>Year</i>	<i>Hampshire</i> %	<i>Cheshire</i> %	<i>Lancashire</i> %	<i>Surrey</i> %
1889	45	61	38	47
1892	16	24	13	28
1895	22	14	11	25
1898	5	8	11	14
1901	7	2	10	16
1904	23	24	9	20
1907	15	23	2	27
1910	18	20	9	12
1913	12	7	12	21
<i>First World War</i>				
1919	17	21	8	21
1922	18	13	18	16
1925	20	21	18	16
1928	13	18	22	7
1931	16	39	25	14
1934	10	18	31	26
1937	12	38	34	26
<i>Second World War</i>				
1946	54	74	67	81
1949	47	51	71	83
1952	33	38	55	71
1955	30	38	60	71
1958	35	38	59	70
1961	46	45	57	69
1964 ^a	68	58	63	82
1967	45	57	73	88
1970	42	52	74	68

Notes

^a 1965 in the case of Surrey.

Source: Lee, 1963; Marshall, 1977; and Ottewill, 2005

Table 8 Hampshire County Council by-elections 1889–1974

Period	No	Cause				Contested ⁴		Uncontested ⁴	
		Alder- man	Resigna- tion	Death	Other ³	No	%	No	%
1889–92	3	2	0	0	1	2	67	1	33
1892–95	5	0	0	5	0	1	20	4	80
1895–98	5	1	2	2	0	3	60	2	40
1898–01	9	1	3	2	3	1	11	8	89
1901–04	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	100
1904–07	3	2	0	1	0	0	0	3	100
1907–10	4	1	0	2	1	0	0	4	100
1910–13	8	5	1	2	0	3	37	5	63
1913–15	8	0	0	5	3	5	63	3	37
1915–19 ¹	10	4	2	4	0	–	–	–	–
1919–22	9	1	2	4	2	4	44	5	56
1922–25	13	6	0	7	0	4	31	9	69
1925–28	10	2	3	5	0	1	10	9	90
1928–31 ²	7	6	0	1	0	2	29	5	71
1931–32 ²	4	2	1	1	0	1	25	3	75
1932–34	13	2	0	4	7	7	54	6	46
1934–37	7	4	2	1	0	2	29	5	71
1937–39	8	4	4	1	0	1	13	7	87
1939–46 ¹	48	9	18	16	5	–	–	–	–
1946–49	7	3	3	1	0	2	29	5	71
1949–52	8	2	5	0	1	4	50	4	50
1952–55	9	4	4	1	0	3	33	6	67
1955–58	16	8	5	3	0	9	56	7	44
1958–61	8	2	2	4	0	3	37	5	63
1961–64	5	2	1	2	0	3	60	2	40
1964–67	9	4	3	2	0	3	33	6	66
1967–70	12	6	3	3	0	8	67	4	33
1970–74	8	3	4	1	0	3	37	5	63

Notes: ¹ For most of the First World War and the whole of Second World War county elections were suspended with vacancies being filled by a system of co-option. ² This three year period has been split to take account of the substantial restructuring of divisions which occurred in late 1932. ³ This includes the filling of vacancies in newly created divisions, two during the period between 1898 and 1901; four between 1913 and 1915; and seven between 1932 and 1934. ⁴ It has not always been possible to obtain full details of every by-election. Figures are shown in italics for those periods where this is the case.

Source: Ottewill (forthcoming)

Table 9 Competitiveness by division 1889 to 1932

<i>No triennial contests</i>		
Alton	Fawley	Highclere
Christchurch Borough	Froyle	Monk Sherborne
Dummer	Gosport Ward/Town	Odiham
<i>Most triennial contests</i>		
Aldershot West (5)	Droxford (5)	Ropley (5)
Basingstoke Borough (6)	Farnborough/North (6)	Whitchurch (7)
Christchurch Rural (5)	Millbrook (5)	Winchester No 1/St Bartholomew and St Michael (5)
Crondall (5)	Mottisfont (5)	

Source: Ottewill (forthcoming)

Table 10 Competitiveness by division 1946 to 1958

<i>No contests</i>		
Burley	Hartley Wintney	Medstead
East Meon	Hurstbourne Tarrant	Ringwood
Fleet and Crondall	Lyndhurst	Wickham
<i>Five contests</i>		
Basingstoke East	Eastleigh North	Fawley
Basingstoke West	Eling	Whitchurch
Botley	Fareham North/East	

Source: Ottewill (forthcoming)

The active interest awakened would seem to have been inconsiderable ... When of a council of 68 elected members 55 are re-elected unopposed, three out of four are re-elected after a contest, seven take without opposition the place of others who retired, two are elected to vacancies unopposed, and one who wished to retire is deemed re-elected because no candidate at all was nominated, and if (as was the case) only 6664 out of a possible 24002 troubled to record their votes, the logical conclusion is that the great bulk of the total electorate in the county of 223100 are satisfied that the administration of affairs cannot be improved upon, or else, the number of people who are prepared to voluntarily take on public work which involves them in the expenditure of time and money is very limited (10 Mar 1934).

This suggests that the lack of competitiveness was due, in part, to voter indifference and, in part, to a shortage of those with the requisite resources for being a county councillor. Regardless of whether this was an accurate assessment, it is hardly a ringing endorsement of the health of county democracy.

The increase in competitiveness from 1946 onwards was associated, in the main, with the party politicisation of county council elections which is discussed more fully below. However, while competitiveness increased, there were still parts of the county where electors were consistently denied the opportunity to cast a vote in county elections. Taking the five triennial elections held during the period 1946 to 1958,

Table 11 Hampshire County Council election turnouts 1889–1937

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Electors</i>	<i>Contested divisions</i>	<i>Electors in contested divisions</i>	<i>% of total electorate</i>	<i>Number voting</i>	<i>Turnout</i>
1889	60130	34	32031	53.3	24179	75.5
1892	57070	10	10509	18.4	7500	70.2
1895	59500	14	16800	28.2	9980	59.4
1898	63065	3	4212	6.7	2114	50.2
1901	60491	4	5373	8.9	2218	41.3
1904	61831	14	17667	28.6	11374	64.4
1907	65548	9	9956	15.2	6286	63.1
1910	69174	11	11820	17.1	6412	54.2
1913	73565	7	7420	10.1	4975	67.0
1919	158170	11	28097	17.8	8612	30.7
1922	159351	11	26577	16.7	10381	39.1
1925	175863	12	40949	23.3	14954	36.5
1928	186459	8	30901	16.6	11742	38.0
1931	214228	10	33534	15.7	10135	30.2
1934	223672	7	24000	10.7	6709	33.5
1937	239432	8	30638	12.8	9276	30.3

Source: H/CX8/ ... and Ottewill (forthcoming)

there were nine divisions, listed in Table 10, in which only one candidate was nominated.

By contrast electors in eight divisions, shown in Table 10, had the chance to cast a vote on every occasion. After 1958, the distinction between competitive and non-competitive divisions became less clear-cut, with only East Meon and Lyndhurst from the list in Table 10 not having at least one contest.

TURNOUT

Curiously perhaps, as the percentage of contests increased, so turnouts tended to decline. Thus, the highest turnouts were recorded in the very

early years when, as mentioned earlier, the franchise was restricted to between 15 and 20 per cent of the population. This is confirmed by the data in Table 11.

Pre-1919 turnouts averaged about 60 per cent, while for the interwar period the equivalent figure was 34 per cent. In this respect, it is probable that Hampshire was not dissimilar to most other counties, although it is difficult to make precise comparisons since the necessary information is not readily available.

After 1945, however, summary data on county and other local election turnouts were collected and published thereby enabling broader comparisons to be made. Table 12 summarises these data for the nine Hampshire County

Table 12 Hampshire County Council election data 1945-1970

Year	Electors	Contested divisions	Electors in contested divisions	% of total electorate	Number Voting	Turnout	Turnout English counties	Turnout Hants districts
1946	393818	37	225967	57.4	43847	19.5	29.0	39.6
1949	401266	32	217939	54.3	80440	36.9	42.1	41.1
1952	419219	23	141959	33.9	56514	39.8	42.8	45.7
1955	424599	21	162004	38.2	49024	30.3	36.1	41.0
1958	451732	25	186727	41.3	50624	27.1	32.8	39.0
1961	486810	33	259650	53.3	75725	28.0	35.3	34.9
1964	528773	48	386092	73.0	121572	31.5	40.7	37.3
1967	543282	32	296305	54.5	93357	31.5	38.4	35.3
1970	659518	30	280916	42.6	91429	32.5	33.4	35.6

Qualifying dates:

1945-1947 : 30th June Register in force from 15/10 to 14/10

1951-1954 : 20th Nov Register in force from 15/03 to 14/03

1955-1972 : 10th Oct Register in force from 16/02 to 15/02

Source: Registrar General's Statistical Reviews 1945-1972 Part 2 Civil Table E Population Tables V and VI Analysis of Local Elections and H/CX7/2

Council elections held between 1945 and 1974. For comparative purposes, turnout figures for county elections across the country and for county district council elections in Hampshire are also included.

These data show that turnouts for Hampshire County Council elections were consistently lower than those for counties in general. Why this should have been the case is not entirely clear. Possible explanations include the predominantly rural character of many divisions, where the spirit of deference towards the established order was well entrenched; the distance of Hampshire from counties with relatively high turnouts; and satisfaction with the existing state of affairs. The fact that county elections attracted less interest than district elections is perhaps easier to explain, since it is a comparatively common phenomenon and can be accounted for by reference to the perceived remoteness of the county council relative to municipal borough, urban district, rural district and parish councils.

TURNOVER

Although an important function of elections is to provide for the democratic renewal of bodies such as county councils, for Hampshire County Council other processes were of greater consequence. This is illustrated by the data in Table 13. For most sitting councillors electoral challenges to their incumbency were a rarity in the years prior to the Second World War. The vast majority of councillors ended their membership through retirement, resignation or death. Moreover, even when sitting councillors faced a contest it was relatively unusual for them to be defeated at the polls, especially during this period. Of the 95 sitting councillors who faced a contest between 1889 and 1937, only 36 (i.e. 38 per cent) were defeated.

Even in the nine triennial elections held after 1945, sitting councillors were more likely to be unopposed than face a contest. The only exception was in 1964 when 60 per cent of the sitting councillors, who sought re-election, were opposed. Between 1945 and 1974, 150 sitting

councillors were challenged at the polls and of these 62 (i.e. 41 per cent) were defeated, a very similar percentage to the earlier period. Thus, recruitment processes such as personal contacts, standing in the local community and organisational affiliations, played a more significant role than the ballot box in determining the membership of Hampshire County Council. From 1945 onwards, the political parties gradually came to occupy centre stage as far as candidate selection was concerned.

PARTY POLITICS

In Hampshire, like many other counties, party affiliation was of either no, or only minor, significance for electoral purposes until after the Second World War, even though most councillors were active in local branches of one of the major political parties. This reflected the prevailing antipathy towards party politics as far as county affairs were concerned. Such a stance is clearly evident in the following extract from a report which appeared in the *Hampshire Chronicle*. 'The contest in Ropley [1907] was fought on *strictly proper* lines, without any political or personal element' [emphasis added] (9 Mar 1907).

The initial challenge to the anti party-political ethos came from the Labour Party. From 1919, some left-wing candidates adopted the designation Labour, but they were few in number and enjoyed only limited success at the ballot box. This changed in 1946 when there was a substantial increase in the number of Labour candidates. From the press reports it is difficult to know precisely how many, but the best estimate would be around twenty. This development was triggered by the Labour Party's desire to maximise its representation at all levels of government following its landslide victory in the general election of 1945.

In the 1946 Hampshire County Council elections Labour gained Botley, Eastleigh Central, Eastleigh North, Eling, Fawley and Stockbridge, but lost Basingstoke West. In addition, three uncontested divisions—Eastleigh South, Gosport Newtown and Gosport North—had Labour councillors. Given that Hampshire

Table 13 Turnover of councillors 1889–1974

Year	Sitting Councillors			New Councillors			
	<i>unopposed</i>	<i>contest</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>defeated</i>	<i>unopposed</i>	<i>contest</i>	<i>Total</i>
1892	44	3	47	2	9	7	16
1895	43	7	50	3	6	7	13
1898	52	1	53	2	7	2	9
1901	52	2	54	1	3	2	5
1904	42	8	50	3	3	6	9
1907	44	3	47	3	6	6	12
1910	45	8	53	1	3	3	6
1913	50	2	52	3	2	5	7
1919	41	5	46	3	11	6	17
1922	40	4	45	5	10	7	17
1925	41	3	44	5	8	9	17
1928	49	2	51	2	4	6	10
1931	46	4	50	1	5	6	11
1934	55	3	58	1	6	3	10
1937	47	4	51	1	13	4	17
1946	25	20	45	9	6	17	23
1949	28	15	43	9	8	17	25
1952	41	9	50	6	6	14	20
1955	39	10	49	6	11	10	21
1958	44	16	60	6	2	9	11
1961	33	19	52	6	5	14	19
1964	20	30	50	9	4	17	21
1967	34	14	48	8	5	18	23
1970	30	17	47	3	11	13	24

Source: *Hampshire Chronicle* and Ottewill (forthcoming)

was an extremely right-wing county apart from parts of Southampton and Portsmouth, this was creditable performance.

Thereafter, Labour's success and failure at county elections was dictated more by the position of the Party nationally than anything else. Thus in 1949 the unpopularity of the

Labour Government resulted in Labour losing all its county council seats bar one, Eastleigh South. The seats won by Labour at the three triennial elections held during the 1950s are shown in Table 14.

During this period, Labour's opponents used either the designation 'Independent' or 'Con-

Table 14 Divisions won by Labour candidates 1952–1958

1952	1955	1958
Basingstoke East	Aldershot East	Aldershot East
Basingstoke West	Basingstoke West	Botley
Botley	Botley	Eastleigh Central
Eastleigh Central	Eastleigh Central ¹	Eastleigh North
Eastleigh North	Eastleigh South	Eastleigh South
Eastleigh South ¹	Millbrook	Eling
Eling ³		Gosport Town
Gosport Elson ²		Havant (Barncroft <i>et al.</i>) ^{1,2}
Millbrook		
Whitchurch		

Notes

¹ Uncontested.² New division.³ Lost at a by-election held in February 1954.

Source: Ottewill (forthcoming)

servative'. Most, but not all, Independents had Conservative support, and could therefore be dubbed 'concealed Conservative'. Nonetheless, for various reasons they were keen to sustain the notion of 'independence' in county council elections at least in symbolic terms. This was due partly to the vestigial principle of non-partisanship and partly to electoral considerations, it being felt that when faced with a contest the designation 'Independent' would attract more support. Gradually, however, use of the designation 'Conservative' became more widespread. Even so, at each of the triennial elections during the 1950s, there were a number of contests which involved two or more Independent candidates – five in 1952, six in 1955 and one in 1958. In addition, there were a few contests involving a Conservative and an Independent candidate, such as that in Christchurch North in 1952 and in Farnborough North and Farnborough South in 1958. Thus, the flame of genuine 'independence' continued to flicker, although the Conservative candidate invariably won.

At the same time, another political force

gradually emerged from hibernation, namely the Liberal Party, with an openly Liberal candidate winning Aldershot West in 1958. This contrasted with a 'concealed Liberal' who, standing as an 'Independent', held Havant and Waterlooville (Purbrook and Waterloo) from 1945 to 1974.

During the 1960s, party politics continued to make inroads into the conduct of county council elections. How the parties fared is illustrated by Table 15.

Although party labels had become a common feature of county election contests by the 1960s, it was not until 1969 that the law permitted candidates to identify these on the ballot paper. Thus, in charting the fortunes of candidates by party, it is necessary to rely on press reports. While these are reasonably comprehensive, there are a few gaps and inconsistencies, where some degree of judgement needs to be applied. With these caveats in mind, from Table 15 it is possible to identify a number of trends. One was the continuing replacement of Independents by Conservatives. Another was the failure

Table 15 Number of councillors by party label/affiliation 1961 to 1974

<i>Label</i>	<i>1961</i>	<i>1964</i>	<i>1967</i>
Independent	38	32	26
Conservative	22	25	37
Independent + Conservative	60	57	63
Labour	8	12	6
Liberal	3	2	2
Total	71	71	71

Source: Ottewill (forthcoming)

Table 16 Divisions represented by Independent councillors 1970

Candover ¹	H&W HP and C ³	Lyndhurst ¹
Clatford ²	Highclere ¹	Odiham ¹
Gosport Alverstoke ⁴	Hurstbourne Tarrant ¹	Petersfield ¹
Gosport Elson ⁴	Kingsclere ¹	Stockbridge ²
Gosport Town ⁴	Loddon ¹	Twyford ¹
Hartley Wintney ¹	Lymington East ¹	Yateley and Hawley ¹

Notes

¹ Uncontested.² Opposed by another Independent candidate.³ Opposed by a Conservative Candidate. The full name of the division was Havant and Waterlooville Hart Plain and Cowplain.⁴ Opposed by a Labour Candidate.

Source: Ottewill (forthcoming)

of Labour and Liberal candidates to break the hegemony of Independents and Conservatives. A final trend was the waxing and waning of the small Labour contingent in line with the standing of the party nationally.

With respect to first trend Conservatives overtook Independents in 1967, and by 1970 they were the dominant force in quantitative terms. That said, in certain parts of the county the Independent label still retained its salience as far as county elections were concerned. Table 16 lists those divisions which still had Independent councillors in the early 1970s.

Together the Conservatives and Independ-

ents always had a substantial majority *vis-à-vis* the relatively small number of Labour and Liberal councillors.

How the Labour party performed during the 1960s is recorded in Table 17. As can be seen, Labour's best year was 1964 when the party won 12 divisions. This was a record high. It is surprising that Labour retained six of these divisions in 1967, given the unpopularity of the Wilson Government at that time. This was primarily due to the fact that Labour candidates did not face any opposition in four divisions. In the circumstances one would have thought that the Conservatives (and Independents) would have

Table 17 Divisions won by Labour candidates 1961–1967

1961	1964	1967
Botley	Andover	Eastleigh East ¹
Eastleigh East	Basingstoke East	Eastleigh South ¹
Eastleigh South	Basingstoke West	Gosport Elson ¹
Eling	Botley	Havant and Waterloo (B) ³
Fareham East ¹	Eastleigh East	Hound
Gosport Elson	Eastleigh South	Winchester (St B & St James) ¹
Havant and Waterloo (B) ³	Eling	
Winchester (St B & St J) ⁴	Gosport Elson	
	Gosport Hardway ²	
	Havant and Waterloo (B) ³	
	Hound	
	Winchester (St B & St J) ⁴	

Notes

¹ Uncontested.² Won at a by-election held in January 1963.³ The full name of the division is Havant and Waterlooville (Barncroft, Leigh Park and Stockheath).⁴ The full name of the division is Winchester (St Bartholomew and St James).

Source: Ottewill (forthcoming)

been 'in for the kill'. For the 1970 elections, the calculation of gains and losses is somewhat problematic given the substantial redrawing of divisional boundaries. That said, Labour lost half of its seats, only winning Eastleigh South, Havant and Waterloo (Bancroft, Bondfields, Leigh Park and Stockheath) and Winchester (St Bartholomew and St James).

For the Liberals, the high point was 1961 when three divisions – Aldershot Central, Aldershot West and Headley – returned Liberal councillors. Three years later Aldershot West and Headley were lost, but Wickham was won albeit with a majority of just 3 votes. In 1967 it was all change, with the loss of Aldershot Central and Wickham being offset by gains at Headley and Fordingbridge, for the first time. Three years later, however, both these divisions were lost and there were no compensating gains elsewhere. Thus, by the early 1970s, with just

three Labour councillors, the council was, in party political terms, almost completely blue.

While county council membership reflected the rightwing orientation of Hampshire, in strictly numerical terms there were undoubtedly some distortions. For example, in 1970 there were 14 contests between a Conservative/Independent and a Labour candidate. Of these the Conservative/Independent won 13 and the Labour Party just one, yet overall Labour candidates secured 38.5 per cent of the votes cast. Moreover, although Liberal candidates contested seven divisions and won 6362 votes in aggregate, this did not yield any seats. Clearly, use of proportional representation would have helped to secure a more representative council and one in which, although still in a minority, Labour and Liberal councillors combined would have been large enough to mount a credible opposition to the Conservative/Independent majority.

CONCLUSION

As Dunbabin observes, 'the establishment of elective County Councils was ... a major change ... [which] provided a democratically acceptable machinery to which the central government ... could entrust the supervision of the new services it considered desirable' (1965, 376). While there is no denying that there was a desire to embed democratic principles at the county level of local government, the reality was somewhat different. Is it fair, however, to describe county democracy in Hampshire, and indeed other counties, as impaired? In some ways, the answer must be yes. Indeed, it is hard not to agree wholeheartedly with Robson's assessment, dating from the 1930s, that 'It is obvious that the spirit of democracy has not penetrated county government, no matter how broad based the legal franchise may be.' (1954, 156).

Taking the 85 years from 1889 to 1974 as a whole, more seats were uncontested than contested. In addition, after 1919 the turnout for most contests was less than 50% and often below 30%. Moreover, election coverage in the local press was substantially reduced from 1919 onwards, perhaps reflecting declining public interest. Against these features, however, must be set the fact that from 1945 the franchise was universal and the number of contests increased, so that by the early 1970s a far larger percentage of elections were being contested than had been the case before the Second World War, and consequently more electors at least had the opportunity to vote even if they did not take advantage of it.

Another post-War development was the decline in the number of Independent councillors. While in certain parts of the county some remained, by the early 1970s their days were numbered as the national political parties increasingly saw Hampshire County Council elections as opportunities for flexing their electoral muscles. With respect to the health of county democracy, this can be viewed in

two ways. On the one hand, it could be seen as a retrograde step undermining the principle of localism and contributing to what has been dubbed 'the nationalisation of local politics' (Gyford 1985). Indeed, the latter can be regarded as the very antithesis of county democracy. On the other hand, national party involvement did contribute to a substantial widening of the competitive base of county council elections. Thus, viewed in this light it can be seen as energising county democracy rather than weakening it.

Whatever position one adopts, arguably the biggest constraint on county democracy was, in fact, central government. Through its failure to entrust Hampshire and other counties with the power to control their own destiny as far as the form and conduct of their elections was concerned it, unwittingly perhaps, deprived them of a real stake in the democratic process.

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