

The Parochial Church Council through the years



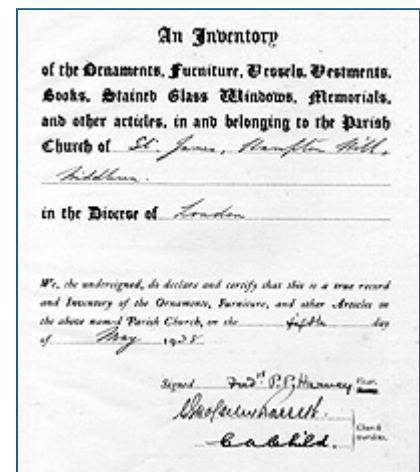
The administrative committee of an Anglican parish church was called a Vestry from the 16th until the 20th century, when it became the Parochial Church Council. Because the parishioners originally met in the church vestry to transact the business of the parish, the word Vestry came to be applied both to the body of parishioners and to their meetings. Both the secular and spiritual affairs of New Hampton, as the new parish was then known, were originally overseen by the Hampton Vestry.

However, a new Vestry, separate from that at Hampton, was established in New Hampton in 1863. An Annual Vestry Meeting, which was the equivalent of today's Annual Parochial Church Meeting, took place every Easter. It was convened for the reading of reports, passing of the year's accounts, and the election of two churchwardens (the vicar's and the people's) and other church officers.

After the 1st World War, an Enabling Bill, passed by a 300 majority in the House of Commons, gave the Church powers of self-government. Consequently in 1920 a meeting of the Church Electors (those on the electoral roll) took place to elect members to form a Parochial Church Council and also three members of the Ruridecanal Conference (a meeting of clergy and lay people under the chairmanship of their rural dean to consider a wide range of church matters). The first meeting was held on Tuesday, June 22nd, and during this and the following meeting the PCC formed a finance committee and also provided the sidesmen.

It was proposed that an inventory of church property should be made (shown left) and periodic inspections of it held. Financial statements were made about the church offertories for church expenses, and the Curate, Free-will Offerings and Parish Magazine funds. The vicar called the attention of the council to the approaching jumble sale and sale of work for missions, and asked the members for their full support. A sub-committee was chosen to make enquiries respecting the possibility of erecting a much needed parish room. The vicar was asked to make enquiries about a 'Bier' for use at funerals.

At a PCC meeting in 1924 three committees were elected for special pieces of parochial work. A Structural Committee was chosen to look after the fabric of the church, taking the church room under its wing as well; a Missionary Committee was appointed to create and further interest in the Mission Work of the church at home and abroad; and a Churchyard Committee was formed for the purpose of stirring up practical interest in the work of getting the churchyard into order and removing any cause for complaint about its untidy state.



The inventory

The Council has occupied itself extensively in the work of the three Commissions previously referred to and whose activities during the year are summarised as follows:—

Commission on Worship:

Introduction of a Parish Communion in place of the Sung Eucharist.

Congregational practices with the object of improving the congregational singing and giving people the opportunity to learn the Merbecke settings, and new chants and tunes.

Encouragement of Baptisms at Morning or Evening Prayer.

Abolition of pew rents (this was put into effect from 31.12.54).

Provision of new hassocks.

Suggestion that congregation sit near front of church.

Congregation to stand at same time as the choir.

Provision of the shorter form of the Prayer Book.

Clearance of old and useless books, etc., from the church and a special cleaning.

The omission of the hymn before the General Confession during Lent.

Altar Servers to be obtained from the Youth Fellowship.

Throughout Revd Brunt's incumbency the committees of the Church Council underwent much change. The year following his appointment in 1951 a Special Purposes Committee was appointed by the PCC, the main work of which was to deal with the important matter of the repairs and renovation of the church fabric, and the raising of the large sums of money that would be required.

During 1953 much thought was put into ways and means of improving the effectiveness of the church council and its committees, of having a church representative in every street in the parish, of seeing that all sick and lonely people who desired it were visited regularly, and so on. In 1955 there was a report on the "*commissions of enquiry into various aspects of parochial life*". The Commission on Worship is shown on the left, the Commission on Education was largely exploratory and the Commission on the Wider Church concerned itself with the formation of a Parish Voluntary Service and a Church Badminton Club.

During these years committees included the Standing Committee, the Finance Committee, the Properties Committee, the Renovation Committee, the Missionary and Evangelistic Committee, the Magazine Committee, the Social Committee (to include representatives from church organisations), the Catering Committee (all the ladies of the PCC). Building Committee, Stewardship Scheme Continuation Committee, Centenary Committee

and Commission on Worship. The Wayside Committee was incorporated into the Properties Committee, which then dealt with all bookings and meetings and general administration. May 1957 saw an experiment combining the committees into one Standing and General Purposes Committee to deal with all major concerns, and plan general policy and concrete proposals for submission to the whole Council. A Planning and Policy Committee was set up in 1958 to decide and define priorities and objectives in all the closely inter-related spheres of the Church's life and work, and then to fashion a purposive strategy. Parish Meetings were started in December 1957 and were open to all in the parish who wished to come to hear and talk about things that mattered.

The Properties Committee came into being following the Wells Stewardship campaign circa 1960/61. Although this had been primarily aimed at achieving an increased and predictable income, the giving of 'time and talents' was quickly recognised as an alternative and/or parallel form of [stewardship](#). Tackling a neglected churchyard and a backlog of repairs and dilapidations to the buildings was an obvious outlet for those with the necessary aptitudes and energy, and a group soon came together. An early guiding principle was to avoid, as far as possible, the use of any paid labour, keeping building maintenance costs to a minimum. This remains as an underlying philosophy.

Up until the 1960s committees reporting to the PCC had been drawn fully from PCC members. This had resulted in both a rather large PCC and too little 'spread' on the committees. In 1965 it was decided to reduce the number of PCC members from the following year. The June 1965 Spire reported: "*Every year, at the first meeting of the newly-elected Church Council, we consider carefully the lines on which we hope to work for the ensuing twelve months. We got down to all this at our meeting in May. We felt that a number of committees was again necessary, but we did not just slavishly follow last year's pattern: we enlarged some, abolished others, and set up two new ones. We agreed that this year the Council as a whole should be the decision-making body on all matters of importance. The committees would go into these matters beforehand whenever possible, and then make recommendations to the Council about them. In the past it has often been not so much a matter of making recommendation as reporting decisions already taken, and the Council has been in danger of becoming a body*

whose main function was to put the rubber-stamp of approval in retrospect on actions already carried out. Under the new system every member of the Council will feel much more fully involved and responsible." By 1966 the Annual Parochial Church Council meeting was followed by a Parochial Church Council meeting.

The Church of England introduced the House of Laymen which gave St James's the opportunity to elect four members to the Ruridecanal Conference (a meeting of clergy and lay people under the chairmanship of their rural dean to consider a wide range of church matters). From this time, lay members began taking on a more definite role in church affairs.

The Annual Church Meeting in 1970 was the first to be held under the new rules and regulations for Synodical Government in the Church of England. The February 1970 Spire reported: *"For the new system to succeed, everyone has to do their part - it is no longer a question of leaving all the important matters to the 'high-ups' at the centre, but of 'going along the way together' (the literal meaning of synod) so that we here at the local level will have a real share in the decision-making of the whole Church."* The Meeting of Parishioners for the Election of Churchwardens and the Annual Parochial Church Meeting still have to be held by April 30th each year and are generally reported on in the Magazine.

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Churchwardens through the years

The office of churchwarden is a very ancient office going back to the 13th Century. The primary function of the office at that time was taking care of the church building and its contents on behalf of the parishioners. As time went on other duties were added, and churchwardens became the local officers of the Bishop of the diocese, responsible to him for the proper carrying out of their responsibilities. Churchwardens must be elected and re-elected by the parish at the Annual Meeting of Parishioners and are formally admitted to the office by the Archdeacon at a special Diocesan service.



Historically we had two very long-standing churchwardens - Len Rockcliffe and Bill Robinson (shown right with Revd Brunt) - who retired in the early 1980s. It was then proposed that in future churchwardens should serve for a five-year term, giving the parish not only a range of skills, but also a body of parishioners who even after their term of office have a useful familiarity with the detail of parish administration.

The first churchwarden to serve in this way was Ron Bridges, taking over from Len Rockcliffe, and the following year Eila Severn took over from Bill Robinson. Since then most churchwardens have served for either five or three years, trying to ensure that both churchwardens don't retire at the same time. St James's Church established a tradition for the election of the two churchwardens.

The above information covers the period from when any records could be found until November 2016. This was when Revd Derek Winterburn became St James's tenth vicar and from this time onwards any new information can be found on the main site.