

## The Parish and Parish Council of St Peter the Great, Worcester

### *A Brief History*

Ancient parish is defined as one which existed at first for ecclesiastical purposes, as an area under the jurisdiction of a clergyman with cure of souls, but which gained secular functions in later periods. The first secular function was the relief of the poor, under successive statutory authorities beginning with the Elizabethan poor law of 1597. Therefore 'ancient parish' is used for a parish which existed before 1597 and which thereafter served both secular and ecclesiastical roles. [1]

Ecclesiastical Parishes came into existence after 1597 to serve only ecclesiastical roles. The number of these was much greater than for civil parishes, particularly as efforts were made to build new churches in increasingly populated urban areas. [1]

Civil Parishes served only civil roles. It was common to define parishes in this sense as areas 'for which a separate poor rate is or can be assessed', a definition of no use after 1930. The existence, alteration or abolition of these units made no effect on the ecclesiastical arrangements of the identical geographic area. [1]

### Modern Civil Parish (in England) [2]

Civil parishes in their modern sense were established by the **Local Government Act 1894**. The Act abolished vestries, set up urban districts and rural districts, and established elected civil parish councils in all rural parishes with more than 300 electors. Civil parishes were grouped into rural districts. Boundaries were altered to avoid parishes being split between counties. Urban civil parishes continued to exist; however they were generally coterminous (geographically identical) with the urban district or municipal borough in which they lay, which took over almost all of their functions. Large towns which had previously been split between civil parishes were, for the most part, eventually consolidated into one parish. No parish councils were formed for urban parishes, and their only function was electing guardians to the poor law unions. Many of these would include areas in more than one district. With the abolition of the Poor Law system in 1930, such urban parishes had virtually no function.

In 1974 the **Local Government Act 1972** retained civil parishes in rural areas and low-population urban districts, but abolished them in larger urban districts, especially boroughs.

Nowadays the creation of town and parish councils is encouraged in unparished areas. The **Local Government and Rating Act 1997** created a procedure which gave residents in unparished areas the right to demand that a new parish and parish council be created. The City of London is at present the only part of England where civil parishes cannot be created.

Every civil parish has a parish meeting, which all the electors of the parish are entitled to attend. Generally a meeting is held once a year. A civil parish may have a parish council which exercises various local responsibilities prescribed by statute. A civil parish may exist without a parish council.

### St Peter the Great Parish Timeline [3, 4]

Worcester St Peter the Great was an ancient parish, including in Oswaldslow Hundred the chapel at Whittington, which was originally in Worcester St Helen Ancient Parish, but was transferred early to this parish.

**1894** Worcester St Peter the Great was abolished civilly to create Worcester St Peter the Great City Parish and Worcester St Peter the Great County Parish. Worcester St Peter the Great County Parish is on the southern outskirts of the City bounded by the City on the north, Battenhall on the east, the southern link road on the south & the River Severn on the west. This essentially forms the basis of the current Parish of St Peter the Great, Worcester.

**1898** Worcester St Peter the Great City Parish was abolished civilly to help create Worcester Civil Parish. Worcester Civil Parish formed by the union of 16 parishes in Worcester County Borough (including Worcester St Peter the Great City Parish).

**1988** Worcester City Council Parish Review: "The Council had concluded that there was no need for parishes in an urban area like Worcester, because the City Council itself provided the facilities required by residents." [4]

**1991** Status of St Peters Parish in 1991: "It appears that no parish council nor parish meeting has ever been established for the area, although a statutory Parish of St Peter the Great is illustrated on Ordnance Survey maps. However, the population of the area is increasing rapidly as new residential development is completed. The Written Statement to the St Peter the Great District Plan issued by Worcester City Council envisaged that there would be

some 1,400 new dwellings in the Plan area by 1986 and that around 1,200 more would be built by 1992. A Progress Report issued in April 1991 noted that around half of these new dwellings had already been completed." [4]

**1992** Boundary Commission: "We have therefore decided to confirm as" final our proposals that a parish council should be established to represent the residents of the present non-functioning parish of St Peter the Great, and that it should have nine members, and also our interim decision that the parish should not be warded." [4]

The boundary commission on parish councils:

- "We believe that they are in the interests of effective and convenient local government." [4]
- "means of giving local residents a sense of identity, and a forum whereby they could be represented and consulted on local issues" [4]

Representations to the Boundary Commission review regarding the formation of a Parish Council in St Peters  
"Worcester City Council reaffirmed its view that no changes were needed to existing parish arrangements and that local residents were not interested in parishes. Worcester Labour Party suggested that the City Council largely carried out the functions of parishes within the City and that parish councils no longer served any useful purpose in urban areas. This view was shared by a member of the public, who also believed that residents were adequately represented by district councillors."

A significant factor was the result of a poll conducted by the then St Peters Residents Association.

"The St Peters' Residents Association stated that it had been formed in connection with the design and building of a community hall for the area, but that it had-- subsequently been asked to become involved in other aspects of local life. It had/written to the 1,235 households in the St Peters area to discover whether local residents wanted a parish council. Of the 440 votes received (from 227 households), 315 had been in favour of a parish council while 125 had voted against this."

"We were satisfied that the Association's letter to local residents set out fairly the case for and against the establishment of a parish council. We concluded that the Residents' Association was already performing many of the functions of a parish council, and that there appeared to be much local support for the formal establishment of such a council."

**1994** St Peters Parish Council Created (6th May?)

#### Sources

[1] *Definitions based on: "Guides to the Local Administrative Units of England, Vol I, Southern England 1979 and Vol II, Northern England 1991", Frederic A. Youngs, published by the Royal Historical Society.]*

[2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil\\_parishes\\_in\\_England](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_parishes_in_England)

[3] *Based on information published by the Worcester Branch of the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry (<http://www.worcesterbmsggh.co.uk>).*

[4] *"Local Government Boundary Commission for England Report No. 677. Parish Review: City of Worcester", 2nd July 1992*