

To most people, even local historians, the development of local government appears complex and boring. Yet it has a profound effect on the way villagers lived within their community. This summary is written from the viewpoint of a rural community; the history of local government in towns and cities is different.

There are four distinct phases: Danelaw with its wapentakes and tithings, the feudal manorial system of the Normans, the vestry meeting initially based on the parish church, and finally the modern system of civil parishes and districts. Before the nineteenth-century there was very little semblance of the sort of local government we are familiar with today. What local government there was evolved from piecemeal reactions to national crises and made up of people appointed rather than elected. However, it did meet the needs of the times, with most aspects of administration carried out at the parish level through local land-owners. It took most of the nineteenth-century to establish an effective system of local government, based on counties and districts. Although there has been an increasing involvement of central authority since feudal times, accompanied by erosion of local power, this process greatly accelerated during the twentieth century. By then the parishes had surrendered most of the control of their local communities to higher authorities.

[Brief History of Local Government, with reference to Great Ayton](#)

[Stokesley RDC Minutes](#)

[Parish Council Minutes](#)

It was not until the nineteenth century that local government bodies, as we would recognise them today and with elected rather than appointed members, first appeared. This section of the website is really devoted to these bodies and, consequently, older records relevant to village administration appear under "Sources" and "Parish Records".

[Churchwarden Accounts](#)

[Constables' Accounts](#)

[Overseers of the Poor](#)

[Select Vestry](#)

[Vestry Minutes 1827-1844](#)

### **Surveyor of Highways**

The Poor Law Unions, which from 1834 amalgamated groups of parish-level poor law guardians into larger units, paved the way for modern local government. At other times in the nineteenth century, national government responded to current crises by setting up local boards, such as the Highways Boards in 1862 and the School Boards in 1870. Great Ayton did not have a School Board, because of the existence of the National School (see Schools)

Successive Public Health Acts over the nineteenth century set up Rural Sanitary Authorities and Parochial Sanitary Committees, see Public Health

County Councils appeared from 1888, and in 1894 the Rural Sanitary Authorities became Rural District Councils, at first with responsibilities for sanitation and highways. Selections from Stokesley RDC minutes are included here.

Civil Parish Councils appeared from 1894, and there are Great Ayton Parish Council minutes from this date.

In 1974 smaller RDCs were joined up into larger District Councils, Stokesley and Great Ayton became part of Hambleton District.