

THE HISTORY OF OXFORD'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Oxford Road Board

Before the formation of road boards in 1864, applications for the construction of roads, the excavation of drains and other such works were made to the Canterbury Provincial Government. They sent an engineer to report, survey and estimate the cost, and after agreement, applicants were offered the contract. When rating powers were instituted in 1864, road boards were set up throughout New Zealand to undertake the administration of their districts.

Oxford ratepayers met in Fisher's accommodation house on Main Street on 30 January 1864 to elect their first board. Major T W White of the Warren was voted Chairman of the meeting and returning officer. Those elected were George A White, Henderson Gordon, Harry Kenrick, Salathiel Redfern and Wilson Fisher, a reasonable representation of sawmilling, land, and publican interests. As was the custom at that time, the Board held its first meeting that same day, electing Kenrick its chairman and deciding who should retire at the end of the year. The eligibility to vote was based on a graded property qualification.

The Board's initial focus was on constructing roads through the bush, and accommodation roads round the sawmilling areas. Drainage was also a pressing issue, although not as bad as for those road boards nearer the coast.

Among its functions were the recording of land sales, planting trees, repairing flood damage and generally contributing to the well-being of the district. Major schemes still needed assistance from the Provincial Government. The Board also helped immigrants who came to the

town during the timber boom of the 1870s, erecting cottages to house them.

The Counties Act of 1876 divided New Zealand into 63 counties, six of which were in the Canterbury Province. One of these new creations was the Ashley County, an extensive area bounded by the Waimakariri to the south and the Hurunui in the North, and subdivided into eight ridings. However, a loophole meant that the counties could refuse to adopt certain sections of the new Act, such as the raising of finance, and its work continued to be carried out by the Road Boards.

Oxford County Council

This system continued until the 1900s, when a series of Acts was passed to overhaul local government. 'The Ashley Subdivision, and the Waimakariri-Ashley Water-supply Board Act, 1911' abolished the seven Road Boards and created five Counties, these being Ashley, Eyre, Kowai, Oxford and Rangiora.

The members of the Oxford County Council were elected on 20 April 1912, and they held their first meeting four days later. The composition of the first Council was Andrew Baxter, Hugh Campbell, Harry Cooper, James McCormack (North Riding), Charles Bassett, John Cross, and John Wells (South Riding).

The County was responsible for such regulatory matters as roads, drains, dog registration, town planning, building permits, the cemetery, and some parks and reserves. Domain Boards and sports clubs also maintained reserves. The library was managed by a committee, with the books largely supplied by the Country Library Service of the National Library, and it was staffed by volunteers.

The County remained until local government amalgamation in 1989, when the Waimakariri District Council was formed, taking over the responsibilities of the local County and Borough councils.

If you know when any of the following without dates were chairman or clerk, please let us know:

Oxford County Chairmen

| | |
|----------------|-------------------|
| H. Campbell | 1912-3 |
| D. Hawke | 1913-4, 1917-18 |
| J. Wells | 1915-1916 |
| A. Baxter | 1916-1917 |
| R.F Henderson | 1919-1924, 1926-9 |
| E.W. Meyers | 1924-5 |
| A. Meyers | 1929-30 |
| L. Watson | 1931-3, 1941-4 |
| P. Fisher | 1933-41 |
| F.J. Gorton | 1944-7 |
| W.M Dalley | 1947-50 |
| W.H. Gillespie | 1950-3 |
| W.M. Dalley | 1953- |
| A.M. Henderson | |
| B. Erickson | |
| A. Gillespie | |
| P. McMorran | |

Oxford County Clerks

| | |
|-----------------|---------|
| R.H. Gainsford | 1912-19 |
| J. Sharpe | 1919-49 |
| L. T. Laurenson | 1949- |
| Mrs A. E. Fox | |
| J. Gardner | |
| L. Kennedy | |
| K. Felstead | |

For more information

Gillispie, Oliver A. Oxford : the first hundred years

Hawkins, D. N. Beyond the Waimakariri : a regional history

Oxford Historical Society