

# Information Note

## Civil Parish

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2024  
National Records of Scotland (NRS)

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## Introduction

There are 871 civil parishes in Scotland.

Although they have had no administrative function since 1930, they still exist and are used for statistical purposes such as the census, as shown in the sample table below of usually resident population extracted from Scotland's Census reports, 1931 to 2022.

Civil Parish 1930	1931	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011	2022
Abbey St Bathans	169	149	125	109	87	96	112	106	119
Abdie	670	629	586	463	409	441	373	421	512
Abercorn	775	806	612	520	550	553	445	458	727
Aberdalgie	235	283	241	135	110	163	390	402	372

## History

Since early medieval times, Scotland has been divided into parishes. Initially parishes were areas of land, whose inhabitants were compelled to pay a proportion of their produce or income to support the Church.

The Church was responsible for education and poor relief however from 1845 to 1930 these functions were made the responsibility of local government bodies (parochial boards and school boards) in most parishes and parishes which had these bodies were known as civil parishes.

The parishes, which had their origins in the ecclesiastical parishes of the Church of Scotland, often overlapped the then existing county boundaries, largely because they reflected earlier territorial divisions.

County Councils were established following the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1889. The civil parish boundaries were re-aligned by the [Local Government \(Scotland\) Act 1889 \(c.50\)](#) to coincide with the County Councils.

The next [Local Government \(Scotland\) Act 1929 \(c.25\)](#) unified administrative and financial control into elected district councils, and parish councils were formally abolished (in 1930) as a result.

The district councils were abolished in 1975 via the [Local Government \(Scotland\) Act 1973](#) which removed any remaining civil functions of parishes. The Act introduced a two-tier system of local government comprising 9 regional authorities (divided into 53 district councils) and 3 unitary island councils. The new authorities established often cut across civil parish boundaries.

In 1996, there was a further re-organisation of Scottish local government, the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 replaced the two-tier system of Scottish local government with 29 unitary authorities, and 3 unitary island councils which are responsible for all civil administration.

As a result of this re-organisation, several civil parishes now lie in two or more council areas.

## Civil Parish Digital Boundaries

The civil parish boundary dataset is the responsibility of NRS Geography Branch.

The initial version of the boundaries was first created in the mid-1960s. The boundaries were plotted on to Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 maps using the written descriptions of the parishes.

In the late 1980s Geography Branch introduced a Geographic Information System (called 'GenaMap') to its working practices. At this point the manually plotted civil parish boundaries were digitised using the GenaMap system.

In 2006, GenaMap was replaced by ESRI's ArcGIS product, and the civil parish boundaries were migrated to the new system.

In March-April 2009 many of the coastal postcodes were edited to improve their alignment with MasterMap's coastal detail.

After improving the coastal postcode alignment there was a requirement to check that all the individual postcode Gridlink points fell within the extent of the civil parish boundaries. It was discovered that some of the points were outside the limits of some of the coastal parishes.

The current version of the civil parish boundaries was edited in May 2009 to ensure that all postcodes' Gridlink points would fall within the limits of the civil parish boundaries.

## Coding of Civil Parishes

In September 2015, NRS Geography updated the coding of Civil Parishes to align with the Government Statistical Service (GSS) coding structure.

GSS codes are not allocated to historical/frozen geographies that will not change and do not require maintenance (generally geographies created prior to the GSS coding system).

Civil Parish is an exception to the rule. While the geography has not changed since 1930, it is the only consistent geography that official statistics can be produced for across Censuses. Due to this it was agreed it should be converted to the GSS code structure.

More information on Standard Names and Codes is available in the [Geography Policy](#) section of the NRS website.

## Postcode lookup to Civil Parishes

NRS Geography Branch first began plotting postcode boundaries in 1973.

In addition to the creation of postcode boundaries, NRS Geography Branch also assigned each postcode to an array of Scottish boundary datasets including civil parish boundaries.

You can access a postcode lookup to civil parishes in the [Scottish Postcode Directory](#) available on the NRS website.