

Herefordshire Water Board

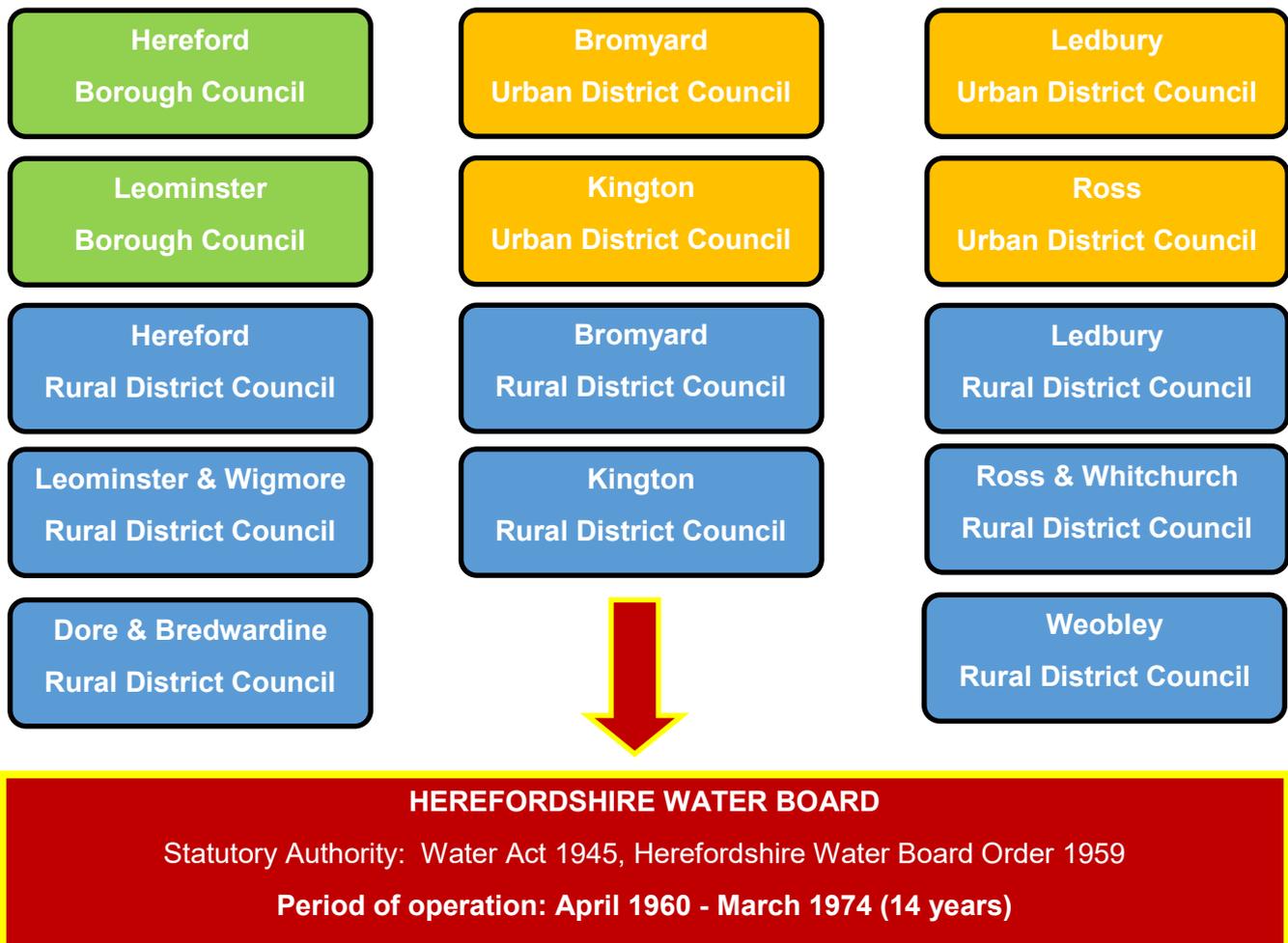
The Herefordshire Water Board was the statutory water undertaker for Herefordshire for 14 years between 1960 and 1974.

Under the Water Act 1945 the UK government had a responsibility to promote the conservation and proper use of water resources and water supplies in England Wales. It had been given the power, where necessary, to impose arrangements requiring water undertakers to amalgamate to achieve this policy objective.

A statutory power had been considered necessary because, in 1944, there were more than 1,000 water undertakers, 26 of which supplied half the volume of water in England, and another 97 supplied a further quarter. The rest was split between some 900 small water undertakings.

It took 14 years before a 'mandatory' order was made under the 1945 Act when the Herefordshire Water Board Order, 1959 was approved. Prior to that, there had been a number of successful amalgamations, but these had been achieved without the Minister reverting to the power to impose them.

Responsibility for substantially all of Herefordshire's water supplies was compulsorily transferred to the Herefordshire Water Board on 1 April 1960. This brought together 14 operations previously run by council appointed 'water undertakers, albeit that the creation of a county wide water board had been supported by only Herefordshire County Council and just one of the water undertakers.



The Waterworks Museum is custodian of major exhibits relating to piped water supply to the communities of Hereford, Ross on Wye, Ledbury, Leominster and Kington, but it also tells the story of drinking water supply and of the associated improvements in public health in each of the county's market towns and rural districts up to the formation of the Herefordshire Water Board in 1960.

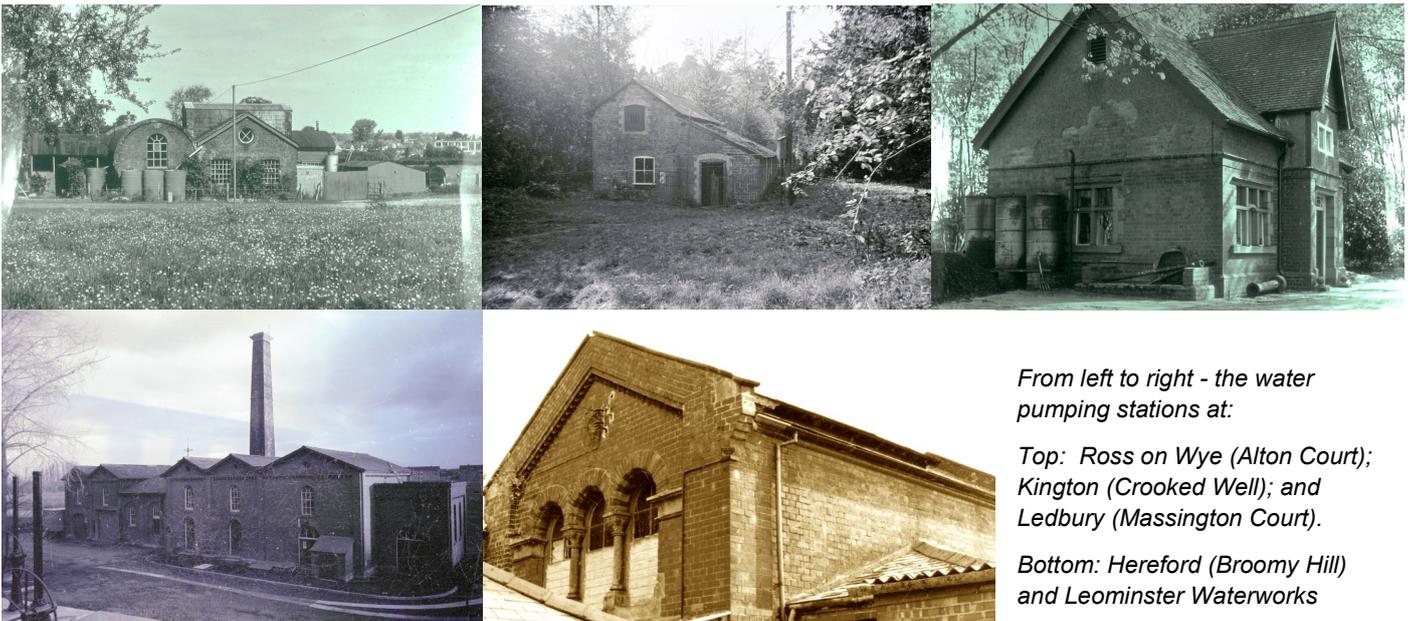
The concept of a county wide water board for Herefordshire arose from a Government initiated survey of all counties water supplies in the late 1940s early 1950s. In Herefordshire the report of the Government's inspector, Mr AA Cowie, was discussed at a local government conference in September 1953 at which the proposal received no support at all.

General opposition to the Cowie proposal was based on water undertakers belief that their existing arrangements adequately met the foreseeable needs of their respective ratepayers. Some also argued that the quality of existing spring water supply was superior to that of any proposed treated river water supply. Hereford BC, in particular, also did not want to hand over the benefit of 100 years of ratepayers' investment in the waterworks at Broomy Hill.

These debates went on for four and a half years, alongside strong discussion of the administrative cost of forming a county wide water board and how this would be apportioned, and the capital cost of Mr Cowie's proposals for a county wide piped water supply, which, at £2.25 million, was argued to be some £2 million below the true cost of such water supply improvements.

The Government finally approved the Herefordshire Water Board Order on 3 March 1958, explaining in its announcement that this was the first compulsory order of its kind under the Water Act 1945 to regroup statutory water undertakers into larger and more efficient units.

But even then the opposition continued with an unsuccessful application by Ross UDC to be excluded from the Herefordshire Water Board Order and a joint counter proposal with Ross UDC and Ross & Whitchurch RDC for the establishment of a South Herefordshire Water Board. This argument had not been accepted before and it was again rejected.



From left to right - the water pumping stations at:

Top: Ross on Wye (Alton Court); Kington (Crooked Well); and Ledbury (Massington Court).

Bottom: Hereford (Broomy Hill) and Leominster Waterworks

The Herefordshire Water Board comprised 20 members and met for the first time at the Shire Hall in Hereford on 9 October 1959. Six members had been nominated by Hereford BC. The other councils had each nominated 1 member, with the final seat nominated by Herefordshire County Council. The person appointed to lead the transition was Cllr. AE Farr, a past Chairman of the Hereford BC Roads and Waterworks Committee.

The Board had been appointed to serve a population of 126,599 (1951 census) in a supply area of just over 534,000 acres. It had been given the primary objective of extending the provision of a piped water supply to the rural areas of Herefordshire

The first decision of the Board was to give final approval and allocate funding for water supply schemes previously approved (subject to funding) by its predecessor water undertakers. Some of these schemes are detailed over page.

The table below illustrates the course of the Herefordshire Water Board Order, and the intensity of the arguments against it, from the first proposal in 1953 to its approval by the Minister for Housing and Local Government in 1958,

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| September 1953 | Conference of local authorities to discuss the report of AA Cowie's Government initiated survey of Herefordshire's Water Supplies. |
| September 1953 | Kington UDC approved an application for funding for phase 1 of a comprehensive scheme to provide piped water supply. |
| November 1953 | Herefordshire CC supported Cowie's recommendation for a county wide water board to provide piped water supply for the whole county as soon as possible. |
| June 1954 | Herefordshire County Council and Hereford County District Councils issued a joint letter proposing the formation of a joint water board for Herefordshire. |
| June 1954 | Conference of County District Councils oppose formation of a joint water board. |
| July 1954 | Kington UDC is first undertaker to reject the Cowie recommendation, especially in absence of information on costs and the apportionment of costs. |
| August 1954 | Hereford CC was warned the estimated cost of a comprehensive water supply scheme (£2.25million) was likely £2 million below the true cost of the scheme. |
| October 1954 | Meeting at Hereford Shire Hall where the water undertakers had a presentation from the Chairman of North Devon Water Board (founded in 1946). A government grant of £1 million was confirmed towards the cost of the £2.25 million improvements recommended by Cowie. |
| February 1955 | Leominster BC voted against the Cowie recommendation as existing supplies were sufficient and adequate for consumers (but only by use of the Mayor's casting vote). |
| March 1955 | Herefordshire CC only supported the Cowie recommendation by a majority of 3 votes - despite the fact that none of district councils supported it. |
| December 1956 | Water undertakers opposing the Cowie recommendation met and agreed to appoint parliamentary agents to advise them (subject to agreement on costs). |
| January 1957 | Kington UDC vote against as the existing spring supply was considered sufficient and of superior quality to a supply of filtered river water. |
| March 1957 | Government inquiry held in Hereford. At this, only Herefordshire CC and Ledbury RDC expressed support for the Cowie recommendation. |
| March 1958 | Minister approved the formation of the Herefordshire Water Board. |
| April 1959 | Ross UDC applied to be excluded from the Herefordshire Water Board Order. With Ross & Whitchurch RDC it proposed a South Herefordshire Water Board. |
| October 1959 | 1 st meeting of Herefordshire Water Board |
| April 1960 | The assets and operations of 14 Herefordshire water undertakings transfer to the Herefordshire Water Board. |

One of the predecessor water undertakers concerns had been the a county wide board would set aside their view on priorities for water supply improvements in their rural area or that there would be a lack of continuity in the improvements they had already initiated. Herefordshire CC had previously encouraged the county's water undertakers to implement the results of a survey conducted on its behalf by Major HS Waters in 1946. Subject to its approval of individual schemes, the county council had given an assurance that it would provide a financial contribution at least matching that which would have been contributed from central government in the past (then via the Ministry of Health).

Schemes that received final approval at the first meeting of the Herefordshire Water Board included a Kington RDC scheme, first discussed in September 1953, to bring piped water supply to its area. This included the parishes of Eardisley, Willersley, Winforton, Whitney Court, Pembridge and Staunton from the Shobdon Airfield supply. A latter phase would also bring a piped water supply to Huntingdon, Lower Hergest, Kinsham and Combe. Other schemes were also approved as previously advanced by the rural district councils covering Bromyard, Dore & Bredwardine and Weobley.

Some of the predecessor water undertakers had been keen to see improvement schemes adopted before Herefordshire Water Board took over. In April 1959 we see a tender notice advertised in the Leominster News for the construction of a pumping station, booster house and circular reinforced concrete reservoir of 300,000 gallons. It also covered the laying of 2,000 yards of 12" cast iron rising mains in roads and fields and associated pipework.

In the same month the Kington Times reported that funding for a new borehole scheme at Crooked Well had been approved by government. This was claimed as necessary to meet an immediate need for an extra 40,000-50,000 gallons per day to supply the Kington area in extended periods of dry weather. This was vital, the article said, to cover demand over the next few years until the new county wide water board took over.

Like all major reorganisations, the creation of the Herefordshire Water Board created a hitch or two. For example, in November 1966, Bromyard UDC entered into a contract to sell land at Three Mills (the site of the former waterworks) which it had been using as a rubbish tip for development. This was land it didn't own, as it had previously transferred to the water board in 1960.

Volunteers at the Waterworks Museum are continuing research into the work of the Herefordshire Water Board, which achieved much in fourteen short years. This included most of the planning for the 'modern' water treatment works which opened by the Welsh National Water Development Authority at Broomy Hill in 1978. Eight years earlier, in November 1970, all the local and regional newspapers carried a short article that read:

"NEW HEREFORD WATERWORKS. Herefordshire Water Board is to build a new £800,000 waterworks at Hereford to replace the one that has served the City for 110 years. The fully automated works will be run by one man. The City's water supply comes from the Wye, and in winter water from taps is dirty because the old treatment works are unable to cope."

WHO HAS BEEN THE STATUTORY WATER UNDERTAKER FOR HEREFORDSHIRE SINCE THE DEMISE OF THE HEREFORDSHIRE WATER BOARD

HEREFORDSHIRE WATER BOARD

Statutory Authority: Water Act 1945, Herefordshire Water Board Order 1959

Period of operation: April 1960 - March 1974 (14 years)



WELSH NATIONAL WATER DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Statutory Authority: Water Act 1973, The WNWDA (Establishment & Constitution) Order 1973

Period of operation: April 1974 - September 1989 (15 years)

Change of name (April 1984): WELSH WATER AUTHORITY



DWR CYMRU WELSH WATER

Statutory Authority: Water Act 1989 (Privatisation of the Water Industry)

Period of operation: since October 1989 (over 30 years)

Initially owned by Welsh Water PLC (change of name to Hyder plc in 1996)

Hyder was acquired by Western Power Distribution (September 2000)

Dwr Cymru Welsh Water was sold to Glas Cymru Cyfyngedig (February 2001)