

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Until 1921 Taunton was split between the parishes of St Mary and St James. Both had urban and rural areas and outside the medieval borough were divided between tithings in the infaring hundreds of Holway and Staplegrove in Taunton Deane manor and the tithings of Taunton Priory manor in the outfaring hundred. By the 18th century for financial purposes the parishes were divided between townside and landside. The borough gradually expanded for municipal and Parliamentary purposes and remained an unparished area within the 1974 borough district of Taunton Deane, from 2019 Somerset West and Taunton District. The district was abolished in 2023 and Taunton had a Town Council and became a greatly enlarged civil parish.

MANORIAL ADMINISTRATION

The bishops of Winchester had considerable financial, legal and administrative powers. In 1086 their tenants did military service with the bishop's men and could be tried for theft or breach of the peace by his court. Lords within the bishop's barony must come to Taunton to make oath, undergo ordeal or be buried.¹ In 1276 the bishop's rights were confirmed including return of writ, gallows, felons' goods and the assize of bread and ale in the borough as in the hundred.² The bishop's rights of arrest and imprisonment were upheld against the sheriff the later 17th century.³ The sheriff had originally attended the bishop's hundred court at the castle. Episcopal tenants were exempt from attending other hundred courts.⁴ After the Civil War tenants insisted on maintaining their customs, which were regularly reprinted, until 19th-century enfranchisement.⁵

¹ *Domesday*, 234.

² *Rot. Hund.* II, 125, 134—5.

³ *SDNQ*, XII, 195.

⁴ *Pipe R 1208*—9, xxix-xxxii; Hunt, *Medieval Customs*, xxiv.

⁵ SHC, DD/CM/177; DD/S/HY/172; A/EDJ/3/1.

Manorial Hundreds

Those subdivisions did not follow parish, topographical or even permanent boundaries.

Chipley in Nyncehead six miles west of Taunton, Otterford seven miles south, and Rimpleton 24 miles east were in Holway hundred.⁶ Tenants of the outfaring hundreds, held of the bishop by other lords, owed burgh right, peter's pence and other dues in the 11th century, mostly lost during the Middle Ages, and suit of court, maintained until the mid 19th century. By the 16th century the infaring hundreds, held by the bishop directly, were Holway, comprising parts of Taunton St Mary, Wilton, Bishops Hull, Nyncehead, Otterford, Rimpleton, Ruish-ton, Stoke St Mary and Trull parishes and property in Lyng; Hull comprising most of Bishops Hull, parts of Pitminster and Trull; Nailsbourn covering Kingston St Mary; Poundisford comprising Corfe and part of Pitminster; and Staplegrove comprising Combe Florey, Lydeard St Lawrence, Staplegrove and part of Taunton St James. Holway, the wealthiest, accounted for nearly a third of the manor's income in the early 19th century.⁷ Hundreds were administered by reeves and bedels appointed from a rota of customary tenants, c. 130 in Holway, which meant women served.⁸ Reeves were quit of rent but could be fined for negligence and some covered their losses by dubious means or failed to deliver rents, partly because they had to take cash to Winchester. A servant carrying money was slain in Wiltshire c. 1301.⁹ By the later 18th century and local lawyers became responsible for overall administration.¹⁰

Tithings

⁶ Separate records were usually kept for Otterford and Rimpleton: SHC, DD/SP/1—70; *VCH Som.* VII, 238.

⁷ H.B. Shillibeer, *The Ancient Customs of the Manor of Taunton Deane...1817* (Taunton, 1821), 27—30, 60—1.

⁸ SHC, DD/SP/71 [ff. 8—24]; 325/143; 408 (Obridge); DD/MT/15/1 (1682).

⁹ *Ibid.* DD/SP/71 [f. 24v.], 343; M. Page, *The Medieval Bishops of Winchester; Estate, Archives and Administration* (Hampshire Papers 24, Hants.CC.), 8—9.

¹⁰ SHC, DD/S/WT/20.1—2; DD/DP/43/4.

Nor were tithings geographically defined and both manors shared Grasscroft and had Obridge and Extra Portam tithings although the priory's Obridge may have been Lyngford in 1298.¹¹ Canon Street tithing, recorded by 1312 and after the Dissolution, was only recognised within the priory manor.¹² In 1334, apart from the borough, the tithings were Holway, Extra Portam, Obridge, Pyrland, Millane, Grasscroft, Extra Portam Prioris and Obridge or Tobridge Prioris.¹³ The two last included land in West Monkton and Kingston St Mary respectively. The far south-east of St Mary's parish was in Stoke and Galmington tithings.¹⁴ Millane, west of Bridge Street and Staplegrove Road, included part of Fairwater in Staplegrove. Obridge included the area between Station and Staplegrove roads.¹⁵ Grasscroft comprised the area east of Bridge Street and Station Road, the bridge and adjoining property including Coal Orchard. East Reach formed the parish and tithing boundary between Extra Portam in St James and Extra Portam in St Mary.¹⁶

Tithingmen served by rota but a poor day labourer was tithingman for two years in the 1650s as his successor refused to serve.¹⁷ They presented deaths of tenants, the extent of their holdings and the heir.¹⁸ The borough was divided into six, later seven, tithings based on the principal streets each with an alderman but the office was ceremonial by the 19th century.¹⁹ Taunton Castle was a liberty including the manor's mills and some land in Bishops Hull.²⁰

Courts

¹¹ Chadwyck-Healey, *Som. Pleas c. 1200—1256*, pp. 33, 95; SHC, DD/SP/359; A/BFA/1, 3.

¹² SHC, DD/DP/63/4; DD/AY/69; TNA, SC 6/HenVIII/3137.

¹³ Glasscock, *Subsidy 1334*, 263—5; SHC, DD/HC/161/1.

¹⁴ SHC, A/BFA/7; DD/SP/77.

¹⁵ Ibid. DD/CH/21; DD/SP/319/299.

¹⁶ Ibid. DD/SP/1—35, 83, p. 284, 257 (1831).

¹⁷ Bates-Harbin, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1646—60*, 200—1.

¹⁸ Shillibeer, *Ancient Customs*, 41.

¹⁹ SHC, DD/SP/60; A/EDJ1/2, 2/1, 5/1.

²⁰ Ibid. DD/DP/81/1.

The clerk of the castle held courts for Taunton Deane manor and heard pleas between tenants under 40s. Fees were fixed.²¹ Holway and Staplegrove hundreds had separate juries, accounts and records. By the early 14th century there were two leets and up to 14 manor or three-weeken courts each year.²² The leets, lawdays or tourns were held in tandem with pannage, choice and fulfilling courts, when officers were sworn. All tenants except cottagers, overland and 5-a. holders were required to attend every court but were usually excused if they attended leets. From the mid 16th century records are complete except for the 1640s, 1680s and 1690s.²³ Several tithingmen were fined for not attending in 1643 but few courts were held between October 1644 and July 1645.²⁴ Later courts were held every Saturday in the Castle exchequer until enfranchisement.²⁵ A twice-yearly grand jury received payments for investigating petitions and some cases were referred to the magistrates.²⁶ By the late 17th century the court was powerless against wealthy men prepared to defy it.²⁷

Priory manor

The urban area of St James lay in the priory manor whose courts were held three or four times a year at irregular intervals from the 1290s. Business included tenancies, breaches of the assizes and other offences, pleas between tenants and distraint for debt. Late or non-attendance incurred fines as did refusing office as hayward or reeve. Chevage, for enrolling youths in tithings, declined from three at each court in the 1320s to one a year by the 1430s when up to 13 Friday courts were held annually.²⁸ Separate courts were held for Obridge,

²¹ Ibid. DD/X/WHI/2; Shillibeer, *Ancient Customs*, 68—7.

²² SHC, T/PH/win 1316—19.

²³ Hants RO, 11M59/C1/19/1—3; SHC, DD/DP/SP/1—63; DD/X/WHI/2; *Borough Customs II* (Selden Soc. 21, 1906), 52—3.

²⁴ SHC, DD/SP/4, 12, 39, 53—7; DD/X/HPS/4.

²⁵ *The Universal British Directory* (c. 1798), IV, 583; SHC, DD/DP/43/4.

²⁶ SHC, DD/SP/2, 22—3, 36, 49 (Apr. 1588, Apr. 1591).

²⁷ Ibid. DD/MT/15/1 passim; DD/SP/22/13; Q/SR/39/92.

²⁸ BL, Add. Ch. 16332—3, 25873; SHC, A/BFA/1—9; A/AHT/3—4; DD/SP/373.

Extra Portam and Canon Street tithings, which after the Dissolution were treated as manors and had petty constables, an unpopular office.²⁹

In the 17th century courts for Taunton late Priory manor, comprising Canon Street and Extra Portam, were held at 8 a.m. in the house on the priory site and appointed tithingmen, reeves and aletasters. Later twice yearly courts leet and a three week court for tenancy when required were held in public houses and followed the customs of Taunton Deane manor.³⁰ Their tithingmen attended and were appointed outfaring courts until the 19th century.³¹

Pounds

In 1317 the priory manor had a pound.³² The borough pound for stray pigs was at Paul Street in the late 16th century but had gone by 1692 when a manor pound on Castle Green, Bishops Hull was used.³³

PAROCHIAL ADMINISTRATION

St Mary

In 1493 there were 'in' and 'out' clerks, but only one during the Civil War who struggled to cope.³⁴ Clerks were appointed by the vicar.³⁵ The parish used account rolls until the late 17th century and few survive. Charity trustees were accused in 1630 of taking the church rates and accounts.³⁶ Roads were a parish responsibility by 1621 but the borough was rated to repair East and Upper High streets and the parishes disputed the repair of East Reach. In 1670

²⁹ TNA, REQ 2/8/126; *Valor. Eccl.* I, 169—70; SHC, DD/SP/18/2, 12; 25; 43/350 (1673—8).

³⁰ SHC, DD/SP/356, 374—83; DD/HC/151/1; DD/DP/9/14.

³¹ Ibid. DD/SP/36—47.

³² Ibid. A/BFA/4.

³³ Sheppard, *Courts Leet...Taunton*, 23, 37—9; SHC, DD/MT/15/1 (1692); DD/AY/75.

³⁴ SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/1/1.

³⁵ Ibid. DD/SP/424.

³⁶ Ibid. DD/SAS/C909a/1; TNA, C 8/36/337.

highway surveyors were granted a rate and in 1770 non-resident land holders were rated for road maintenance.³⁷ In the early 19th century four highway surveyors kept separate accounts for two divisions; the without where farmers could provide labour and carts and the within, which relied on paid labour.³⁸ The surveyors paid wharfage on five stone boats c. 1825.³⁹ In 1849 parish highway responsibilities were transferred to the Local Board of Health.⁴⁰

In the 18th century a vestry elected three wardens, four overseers and four highway surveyors, chose a sexton and appointed an organist, a workhouse governor, an apothecary and surgeon to attend the poor and an assistant overseer.⁴¹ In 1782 an overseer was insolvent, several parish officers had to be compelled to surrender their books, it was agreed not to remove people between St Mary and St James and a committee of 14 attended Friday payments to the poor.⁴² The churchwardens still maintained the stocks in 1811.⁴³

From 1819 a select vestry employed a vestry clerk, assistant overseer and workhouse governor, later mistress.⁴⁴ Abolished before 1832 it was revived in 1835.⁴⁵ In 1827 both parishes were compensated for loss of the poor's land to the canal and by 1833 the St Mary's overseers' income was over £5,000, mainly from rates, and their expenditure slightly less.⁴⁶ A room in Church Square was hired for keeping parish documents and receiving rate payments until 1894.⁴⁷ The vicar chaired vestry meetings, which from 1837 elected five men to the Board of Guardians by a parish poll. By 1851 the vestry met at the castle or market house until a vestry room was established in Paul Street in 1863. Meetings, attended by up to

³⁷ Bates, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1607—25*, 117, 183, 294; Bates-Harbin, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1625—39*, 159—60; Dawes, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1666—77*, 88, 187; SHC, D/P/tau.m/23/11.

³⁸ Ibid. Q/REI/35/24, 26a; D/P/tau.m/14/2/1—2.

³⁹ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/14/5/1.

⁴⁰ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/3 (1849).

⁴¹ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (vestry min. 1732—67); D/P/tau.m/4/3/6 (1769—71, 1787).

⁴² Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1774—89); 9/1/2 (1814).

⁴³ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/4/3/8 (1811).

⁴⁴ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/5.

⁴⁵ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/3 (1835); 13/9/1.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Q/RUi/5; D/P/tau.m/13/10/4.

⁴⁷ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/4.

400 often voted against rates but later allowed them on a poll. Women could vote and elect officers.⁴⁸

In 1885 the parish was divided into Within and Without.⁴⁹ From 1894 the Without parish met annually at the Harp inn to elect the chairman, waywarden, district councillor, two overseers and two burial board representatives. In 1921 the new housing estates were lost to the borough but the parish still had a larger rateable value than adjoining rural parishes.⁵⁰ In 1933 the parish was incorporated in the borough except Haydon, which was transferred to Stoke St Mary parish. St Mary Magdalene Within was abolished in 1921 and absorbed in Taunton Borough.⁵¹

St James

The accounts and other records were kept under the communion table in 1629 but have been lost. The church ales, then discontinued, had paid the parish clerk and maintained the armour.⁵² In 1654 the parishioners complained that their constable was an alehouse keeper, unsuitable for the office.⁵³ There were two by 1772.⁵⁴ The ducking stool on the river was disused long before 1710 but the stocks were maintained in 1738—9.⁵⁵ The parish had two churchwardens, three by 1870, elected by the vestry, up to ten overseers, including women until the mid 18th century, and five to seven waywardens.⁵⁶ Between 1783 and 1791 the vestry paid overseers 30s. each, later reduced to a fee for collecting rates, and appointed a doctor to attend the poor. By 1842 the parish had 11 constables drawn from Hitchcock's

⁴⁸ Ibid. D/D/Va/1/12, 2/12, 12/12; D/P/tau.m/4/4/6, 9/1/1, 3—4, 13/9/6.

⁴⁹ Ibid. D/R/ta/34/12/1.

⁵⁰ Ibid. D/B/ta/3/16/4, p. 19; D/PC/sto.s.ma/1/1/2, pp. 1, 5, 61—3, 73—5.

⁵¹ Ibid. D/PC/sto.s.ma/1/1/2, p. 82; 2/2; Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 439.

⁵² SHC, D/D/Cd/65.

⁵³ Ibid. Q/SR/89/32.

⁵⁴ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/22/6—7, 23/3.

⁵⁵ Ibid. DD/SP/18/17; D/P/tau.ja/4/1/3 (1738—9); Q/RUi/1.

⁵⁶ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/4/4/1, 9/1/1, 13/6/1; DD/SAS/TN/C795/105; D/D/Va/1/12, 12/12.

force.⁵⁷ In 1820 the vestry appointed a select vestry of 20 and from 1827 an assistant overseer who acted as vestry clerk and a workhouse matron. Vestry meetings, usually adjourned to a public house or elsewhere and chaired by the vicar, appointed parish officers and were held annually in the later 19th century.⁵⁸

In 1885 separate Within and Without parishes were established and the vestry was replaced by a parish meeting chaired by the vicar in the former and a parish council for the latter. In 1921 the former was abolished and with most of the latter, absorbed into the borough. The Without council became a parish meeting serving *c.* 35 households until 1933 when it was divided between the borough and Cheddon Fitzpaine parish.⁵⁹

Burial Boards and other bodies

The Local Board of Health ordered the closure of St Mary's churchyard in 1852. In 1853 a burial board consisting of five Anglicans and four others was appointed, joined in 1854 by Bishops Hull parishioners to manage a cemetery and the closed churchyard, which from 1884 was returned to the parish.⁶⁰ St James churchyard, closed 1876, was replaced by a 5-a. cemetery on Staplegrove Road. Anglican and nonconformist mortuary chapels, since demolished, were combined in one building of banded coloured brickwork, a patterned tiled roof, two south transepts and a turret with spire. There were 2,184 consecrated and 1,461 unconsecrated spaces. A keeper's lodge stands at the entrance, of uncoursed dark stone with prominent light quoins and window surrounds and a decorative tiled roof.⁶¹ A crematorium and cemetery on Wellington New Road, Bishops Hull opened in 1966. In 1974 the district

⁵⁷ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1783—97, 1803—32, 1838); Q/APc/1/84; below, this section, police.

⁵⁸ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (*passim*); D/D/Va/1/12, 12/12.

⁵⁹ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/9/2/1; D/B/ta/3/16/4, p. 19; D/R/ta/34/10/11; Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 439.

⁶⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/32/1/1 (1853, 1854); D/P/tau.m/9/1/3—4, 3/5/1 (1884); Bishops Hull, forthcoming.

⁶¹ SHC, A/BKP/2; A/DIF/106/1.

council replaced burial boards and maintained all three cemeteries and the closed churchyards but no provision was made for closed nonconformist burial grounds.⁶²

Taunton poor-law union comprising 37 parishes was governed by a Board of Guardians. It first met on 13 May 1836 and included at least eight elected Taunton members.⁶³ In 1926 the Guardians sold Somerset House, Middle Street, shared with the Register Office, and moved into Mary Street House with the Rural District Council. In 1930 the board was replaced by the Public Assistance Committee of Somerset County Council.⁶⁴ The Taunton Turnpike Trust met at the Market House from 1752 to 1876 and from 1863 a Taunton District Highway Board of waywardens met in the Union boardroom and appointed a district surveyor. In 1895 councils took over highway responsibilities.⁶⁵ In 1875 the Taunton Rural Sanitary Authority, later Rural District, was formed. From 1925 it was based in Mary Street House until 1974 when it was absorbed into Taunton Deane District.⁶⁶

BOROUGH ADMINISTRATION

Taunton had a manorial borough by the 10th century, nominally still in existence, and a municipal borough with no continuous history. The parliamentary borough originally the manorial borough was extended in 1832 to include most built-up areas of St Mary, St James, Wilton and Bishops Hull.⁶⁷

Manorial borough

⁶² Ibid. D/PC/b.hl/1/2/4, 2/23.

⁶³ Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/1; DD/SAS/C1540/3—8; Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 673

⁶⁴ SHC, D/R/ta/34/11/4; D/G/ta/8a/47.

⁶⁵ Ibid. D/T/ta/5—12; D/R/ta/32/1/1; Q/AB/85.

⁶⁶ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 14; SHC, D/G/ta/8a/47; Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 672, 676.

⁶⁷ SHC, DD/SAS/C1540/1/3.

In 1086 the borough with its 64 burgesses, mint and market was held by the bishop by barony.⁶⁸ King Stephen gave the burgesses the liberties of London and Westminster but not communal government. By 1225 the borough jury heard felony cases in the king's courts. The borough was farmed out in the 13th century, presumably to a community of burgesses and sergeants were recorded, but thereafter it remained in the bishop's hands.⁶⁹ A common seal had a stylised castle flanked by towers and croziers, one with mitre, and two peacocks beneath. The legend 'SIGILLUM COMMUNE BURGI TANTONIE' indicated some independence under episcopal lordship. There is no record of guilds.⁷⁰ Residents were entitled to be heard before the Constable of the castle.⁷¹

The borough reeves, later portreeves, were recorded by 1244.⁷² They managed the borough and its markets and acted as magistrates and the bailiffs made arrests and collected fines.⁷³ The manor steward and bailiff acted for the borough. A bailiff was fined in 1300—1 for carrying out his office in a contemptible manner. They received gloves, had under bailiffs and sealed measures.⁷⁴ The clerk kept the records, one copy going to Winchester, and the borough's 26 courts.⁷⁵ The 15th-century also had constables and aldermen and later aleasters.

Fortnightly borough courts were held at the Guildhall built as a hall of judicature c. 1466. In 1528 a decayed house in East Street was acquired to 'augment' it. The burgesses held a house in North Town, use unknown.⁷⁶ Tenants were required to attend the two leets. Representative burgesses assessed fines and helped draw up jury panels and two freemen

⁶⁸ *Domesday Book*, 234.

⁶⁹ *Cal. Chart. R.* 1257—1300, 274, 324; TNA, WARD 2/57a/204/39; Hunt, *Medieval Customs*, xi; Chadwyck-Healey, *Som. Pleas c. 1200—1256*, 28, 296, 304.

⁷⁰ SHC, A/BTH/1; TNA, E 326/5053.

⁷¹ B.L. Harl. MS 408, f. 213; *Borough Customs II* (Selden Soc. 21, 1906), 3.

⁷² *Cat. Ancient Deeds*, III, D296.

⁷³ R. W. Dunning, 'The Households of the Bishops of Bath and Wells', *PSAS*, CX, 32—3; TNA, PROB 11/10/31; SHC, DD/SP/22/58.

⁷⁴ SHC, T/PH/win 1300—1, 1500—1; DD/X/VNL/1; DD/DP/8/22; B.L. Harl. MS 408, ff. 212—13; *Cal. Pat.* 1572—5, p. 282.

⁷⁵ Hants. R.O., 11M59/C1/19/10; HC, A/EDJ/3/1; Bishops Hull, local govt.

⁷⁶ SHC, DD/MK/9; DD/SAS/C795/TN/46, 135.

acted as judges.⁷⁷ Most men did not even attend the leets and ‘trying men’, eligible for jury service, were paid to try cases.⁷⁸ The court leet chose portreeves, bailiffs, constables and six petty constables annually. From the late 18th century lawyers as deputy steward, clerk and receiver, maintained contact with the bishop, held courts and remitted revenues.⁷⁹ Special courts tried leather quality in the 17th century at which the newly-appointed mayor of the chartered borough presided.⁸⁰

By the early 19th century bailiffs acted as returning officers and peace officers for St Mary’s parish, held public meetings and attended courts. The constables remaining duties were responsible for weights and measures, billeting soldiers and charity distribution for which in 1667 they issued farthings.⁸¹ Bailiffs and constables had staves including those given by former mayor Francis Hobart in 1701.⁸² Fortnightly borough courts continued for debt cases. A leet elected bailiffs, constables, portreeves, aletasters, shambles keepers, Cornhill keepers, searchers and sealers of leather, searchers of green skins, seven aldermen and eight rhyne ridders then had a dinner. The bailiffs’ nominees were re-elected so that four men held the office for many years serving alternately.⁸³ An estimated 260 burgage holders owed suit of court because they still paid lord’s rent.⁸⁴ At the November Constables Feast profits from market weighing were spent on borough officers. It ceased in 1887 but was revived in 1897 when over £8 was spent on decorations, loan of palms and invitations.⁸⁵ One annual leet continued, record-keeping was poor and juries were ‘packed’ to ‘elect’ officers

⁷⁷ B.L. Harl. MS 408, ff. 212—13; SHC, A/CTP/6/6.

⁷⁸ SHC, DD/SP/49 (Feb. 1588), 50 (Apr. 1613), 61/6—7.

⁷⁹ Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 277—8; SHC, DD/MT/1/33, 39; 11/36; DD/SP/197, 345; DD/DP/43/4.

⁸⁰ SHC, DD/SP/51(1628/9), 52 (1631, 1637).

⁸¹ Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 278; SHC, DD/CH/74/6; DD/SP/453; finds.org: SOMDOR-CFDA16.

⁸² Sheppard, *Courts Leet*, 3, 7; SHC, A/EDJ/2/2; PSAS, LXIII (1917), xxxix.

⁸³ *Returns Relating to County, Hundred and Borough Courts* HC 338 I-IV (1839) xliii, 32; Shillibeer, *Ancient Customs*, 131; SHC, DD/SP/49; DD/CH/74/6.

⁸⁴ SHC, DD/SP/65; A/CTP/6/6; DD/SAS/C909a/7—8.

⁸⁵ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 12; SHC, A/EDJ/2/2; DD/SP/463.

chosen in advance ‘for party purposes’.⁸⁶ Lowly offices, now sinecures, were desirable and the November Fulfilling Court, held in the Municipal Buildings, redistributed them. In the 1930s the constables, the previous year’s portreeves, hosted a summer outing and feast.⁸⁷ Only 24 men were summoned to elect officers who remained in post for years.⁸⁸ A local solicitor was steward and clerk of the castle, borough and manor and held the courts into the early 21st century.⁸⁹

Municipal borough

The bishop of Winchester feared incorporation and only in 1627 was a charter granted vesting civil power in a mayor, 14 capital and 10 inferior burgesses appointed for life who chose the mayor, filled vacancies and appointed a recorder, a town clerk and his deputy and one or two sergeants-at-mace. The corporation was entitled to own land but never did. In 1640 cloth merchant Richard Potts gave £50 to support the borough officers. The recorder and retiring mayor were justices of the peace.⁹⁰ The borough adopted the medieval seal with a corona over the central gateway and dome-capped flanking round towers with poles.⁹¹

The charter was cancelled in 1660. The 1677 restored charter, renewed in 1686, extended the municipal borough but the king had to approve the choice of recorder, usually a local aristocrat, and six county magistrates were to join the borough commission of the peace. All charters preserved episcopal rights.⁹² A mayoral seal of 1685 has a crown between a cherub’s head and wings with the motto ‘Defendamus’, which became the borough arms in

⁸⁶ SHC, DD/DP/116/2/1/3; ‘Proposed Incorporation of Taunton’, 32—3, 52—4.

⁸⁷ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 12; SHC, A/DVY/1; A/DWX/8/11; A/EDJ/2/1—2, 5/1.

⁸⁸ SHC, DD/SP/454—5, 457.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* DD/DP/203/1—3, 5—7; A/EDJ/5/1.

⁹⁰ *HMC 12th Report* App. I, p. 171; SHC, D/B/ta/1/2/4; *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1627—8, p. 101; TNA, PROB 11/185/438.

⁹¹ SHC, DD/PM/7/4/8.

⁹² *Cal. SP Dom.* 1675—6, pp. 39; 1677—8, 260—1; 1687—9, pp. 168, 240, 261, 266; Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 278—81; SHC, D/B/ta/1/2/6.

1934.⁹³ The mayor, who contrary to a 1733 drama could only be elected by members of the corporation, appointed a town crier and with the council granted freedom of the town.⁹⁴

The corporation fell under the dominance of men trying to control the parliamentary seats like Lord Egremont in the 1750s and later Sir Thomas Lethbridge and banker John Morland.⁹⁵ Vacancies were unfilled because they belonged various ‘interests’ and a dispute in 1782 revealed that there were only 11 members instead of the required 24 and the corporation was dissolved.⁹⁶ Public attempts by the public to get the charter restored failed until 1875 and except for copies of charters all the borough records were lost and the two maces.⁹⁷

Market Trustees

The 60 trustees including 40 borough residents attempted to fill the gap in town government after 1792. Self-elected, their powers including lighting, paving and watering derived from Acts of Parliament of 1768, 1817, 1833 and 1840.⁹⁸ They employed a beadle, liveried in blue with gold lace, a clerk and treasurer.⁹⁹ After the establishment of the Board of Health they continued to run the market and appoint a clerk and a town crier.¹⁰⁰ In 1926 the trust ceased and all its duties and powers passed to the town council, confirmed by an Act of 1931.¹⁰¹

Local Board of Health

⁹³ W.H. Bailey, ‘The Charters, Seals, Maces and Armorial bearings of Taunton’, *PSAS*, LXXXVIII, 53—5.

⁹⁴ SHC, DD/TB/15/33, no. 11, 18/7; DD/X/BUSH/12.

⁹⁵ *Hist. Parl.: Commons 1754—1790*; accessed 17 Oct. 2019; J. H. Thomas, ‘Economy and Society in 18th-century Somerset’, *PSAS* CXLI (1998), 63; above, landownership.

⁹⁶ SHC, DD/DP/8/20; Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 283—8; T.H.B. Oldfield, *History of the Boroughs of Great Britain* (1792), 449.

⁹⁷ Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 288; SHC, DD/SAS/C2558/10; TNA, PROB 11/565/325.

⁹⁸ Taunton Market Act 57 Geo. III c. lxxv; *Royal Com. On Market Rights and Tolls* (1888), II, p. 195; above, econ. hist., markets.

⁹⁹ SHC, DD/DP/8/21; Goldsworthy, *Recollections*, 28.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Proposed Incorporation of Taunton’, 35—6.

¹⁰¹ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/7, p. 408; 31/1/8, p. 322; 31/1/11, p. 384; A/DIF/95/37; PAM 2563, p. 18; Kite and Palmer, *Taunton...market trust*, 75.

The Board first met on 14 September 1849. Elected members included the Revd. Frederick Jeremiah Smith, architect Richard Carver and builder William Shewbrooks under chairman Henry Badcock, banker. They employed a surveyor, an inspector of nuisances and a clerk, had offices in East Reach and a yard in Magdalene Street.¹⁰² A second yard in Coal Orchard was acquired and extended in 1901 when the fire brigade took most of the Magdalene Street site. Wives of board members met district visitors concerning poor relief.¹⁰³ The Board concerned itself with burial grounds, street nuisances, sewage removal, pumps, limewashing, paving and housing. Contact was maintained with the General Board of Health whose medical inspector, Dr John Sutherland visited in 1849.¹⁰⁴ The Board moved c. 1860 to rebuilt 21 East Street. The upper floors of the stuccoed three-storey, three-bay building of the mid 19th century survive intact with flat pilasters and alternate semi-circular and triangular pediments over the first-floor windows.¹⁰⁵ In 1875 the board become an Urban Sanitary District but in 1876 its responsibilities passed to the Town Council.¹⁰⁶

Town Council

The new borough council, incorporated in 1876 and known as the Town Council or Taunton Corporation to avoid confusion with the manorial borough, met monthly. It consisted of a mayor, six aldermen, half elected every three years, and 18 councillors elected across three wards by 2,010 voters. In first mayor was Myer Jacobs, instrumental in securing the new charter. The town lands charity seal, identical to the medieval seal, was used and a silver mace, gift of the town's MPs in 1877.¹⁰⁷ A new seal and arms were granted by the College of

¹⁰² SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/1, 1—2, 8, 15, 38; DD/SAS/C212/13/1, p. 81; DD/SAS/C212/Map151.

¹⁰³ Ibid. D/B/ta/2/1/1, p. 39, 2/1/3, p. 42, 3/9/6 (1901).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. D/B/ta/2/1/1, passim; TNA, MH 13/180 passim; 'Proposed Incorporation of Taunton', 36—7.

¹⁰⁵ *PO Dir. Som.* (1861).

¹⁰⁶ Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 672; below, this section.

¹⁰⁷ SHC, DD/CH/102/2; D/B/ta/3/12/1 (1876—7); W.H. Bailey, 'The Charters, Seals, Maces and Armorial bearings of Taunton', *PSAS*, LXXXVIII, 53—4. Jacobs, a Jew, was elected unanimously despite opposition from the Revd Smith: *Taunton Courier* 18 July 1877: BNA accessed 18 Feb. 2020.

Arms in 1934 based on the later 17th-century borough arms with the addition of a mural crown, to represent king Ine, and a peacock crest. The motto ‘defendamus’ was retained.¹⁰⁸

The council acquired 39 East Street, rebuilt in 1823 and still known as the Old Council House, used until the old grammar school was converted into the Municipal Buildings in 1887.¹⁰⁹ The upper floors of the stuccoed three-storey, three-bay building have flat pilasters and sash windows with coloured glass borders and decorative surrounds. The tall 1st-floor windows probably lit the council chamber.

The original officers were the town clerk, treasurer, medical officer of health, borough accountant, borough surveyor, inspector of nuisances, rate collector and school attendance officers. Later a water inspector, electrical engineer, mace bearer, and inspector of animal diseases were added.¹¹⁰ Acts of 1889 and 1900 extended powers to raise money, take over water supplies, and regulate streets and traffic over the Within parishes of St James, St Mary and Bishops Hull and Wilton although each remained a separate civil parish until 1921.¹¹¹ The 1921 council had 18 members including one woman but only in three wards were there sufficient candidates for an election. Further borough extensions were approved in 1932, 1958 and 1966.¹¹²

In the 1930s the council was responsible for electricity, water, sewerage, elementary education, housing, roads and allotments. By 1938 it employed 282 people. Charles Goodland served as mayor for seven years during the war and his successor was only the second Labour mayor.¹¹³ After the war a new corporation depot was created at Lambrook, extended in 1965 but demolished in the late 20th century. It was relocated to Priory Way

¹⁰⁸ Bailey, ‘Charters...of Taunton’, 53—5; SHC, D/B/ta/1/3/1.

¹⁰⁹ SHC, DD/DP/184/2; *Kelly’s Dir. Som.* (1883, 1889); Bishops Hull, forthcoming

¹¹⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/3/12/1, passim; *Kelly’s Dir. Som.* (1883, 1889); *Taunton of Today* (1896), 9—10.

¹¹¹ Taunton Corporation Acts 52—3 Vic. c. cxxxvi; 63—4 Vic. c. cclxxxiii. SHC, Q/Rup/464, 467; D/P/b.hl/2/21.

¹¹² Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 439; SHC, C/CP/D/163; A/DIF/49, 95/33 (1913), 37 (1926); D/B/ta/42/13.

¹¹³ SHC, D/B/ta/4/5/1 (Sep. 1938); D/DC/tau.d, unlisted boxes 16—17, 19.

before moving to Wellington c. 2016.¹¹⁴ By 1972 the borough had seven wards with 20 councillors and offices on at least five sites. In 1974 it became part of Taunton Deane district, later borough, with Taunton Rural and Wellington's Urban and Rural districts.¹¹⁵ The council inherited the Municipal Buildings, St Paul's House, Castle Bow, Mary Street House and other offices, replaced by Deane, completed in 1987 in Belvedere Road.¹¹⁶ Charter trustees, councillors representing the unparished area of Taunton, continued to elect a mayor and deputy and the sergeant-at-mace remained in office.¹¹⁷ On 1 April 2019 West Somerset district council merged with the borough to form Somerset West and Taunton District Council, abolished in April 2023 when Taunton had a town council again.

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

The county council formed in 1889, included three councillors for the borough and met in Shire Hall.¹¹⁸ Dispersed county offices included premises in Weston super Mare and the former prison. The council decided in the 1920s to concentrate county administration in Taunton. County Hall, designed by Vincent Harris, was built in 1932—5 on the Crescent field. The other planned blocks were not built and the architect's and education departments had temporary buildings in Park Street and Trull Road, planning and civil defence offices were in Upper High Street and the highways department in South Street, rebuilt for weights and measures and since demolished.¹¹⁹ Rodwell, later Bedford, House was also until office blocks were built south of County Hall in 1962—4 and 1968—9.¹²⁰ In April 2021 the county council was replaced by Somerset Council.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. D/B/ta/4/3/6 (Dec. 1959, Dec. 1962); D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box 1 (1965).

¹¹⁵ Ibid. D/DC/tau/2/2; Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 676.

¹¹⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/4/6/3 (Sep. 1930); D/DC/tau.d/2/2/14 (21 Jan. 1986); date on building.

¹¹⁷ SHC, D/DC/tau.d/2/2/4 (8 Jan. 1976).

¹¹⁸ Ibid. DD/SK/6/9.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. C/CA/27/1/1, 12, 15A, 18; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), A12; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/142/8404; above, intro, built character.

¹²⁰ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), 76; J. Orbach, *South and West Somerset*, 620.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT OFFICERS AND DEPARTMENTS

Mint

Elfsig produced coins of Cnut (d. 1035), Brihtric the moneyer, and possibly another called Boia, worked under Edward the Confessor and Harold.¹²¹ In 1086 the mint made £2 10s. a year profit for the bishop of Winchester.¹²² Later moneyers were Elfric (*t.* Hen. I) and Alfred (*t.* Stephen) after which production ceased.¹²³ The 17th-century tokens and 1667 charity farthings may have been produced locally.¹²⁴ Illegal coining was recorded from the 15th-century until the 1840s.¹²⁵

Coroner

Taunton Deane manor and borough had its own coroner and royal coroners were excluded.¹²⁶ In the 16th century the office was held by Taunton men, probably manor bailiffs.¹²⁷ In 1755 an inquest held at the Antelope in the market place led to the murder of a female witness.¹²⁸ The coroner lived in East Street in Crown property in 1769.¹²⁹ Borough coroners were elected until 1845 when the office was abolished.¹³⁰ Taunton came under the west Somerset coroner, based in the town. He had a deputy by 1893 when they held 99 inquests.¹³¹ In 2015 the

¹²¹ Finnish Heritage Agency: www.europeana.eu/item/2021009 accessed 13 June 2024; CXXVIII (1984), 17; CXXXI (1987), 158.

¹²² *Domesday*, 234.

¹²³ Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 108; PSANHS CXXIII (1979), 93; CXXXI (1987), 220.

¹²⁴ [Finds.org.uk](https://finds.org.uk): SOM-74E522, 82C2ES; GLO-4668EF; HAMP-255993; WLT-EABFO3.

¹²⁵ SWHT, HER 44409; H. Kleineke, 'The Prosecution of Counterfeiting in Lancastrian England', *Medieval Markets and Money* (2016), 215—6; S. Minnitt, 'Counterfeit Coins in Somerset, 1810—1855', PSANHS CLXIII (2020), 182—3.

¹²⁶ Chadwyck-Healey, *Som. Pleas c. 1200—1256*, p. 293.

¹²⁷ *Cal. Pat.* 1585—6, p. 195; 1586—7, I, p. 194; TNA, KB 9/458/50, 9/599a/108.

¹²⁸ SHC, DD/DP/59/11.

¹²⁹ TNA, CRES 12/1156.

¹³⁰ SHC, Q/C/8/2; Q/SR/573/119; DD/SAS/C909/123.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* D/B/ta/4/6/1 (Jan. 1893); C/CR/Misc/1; *Taunton Official Handbook and Guide* (1931), 71.

county was placed under a single coroner based in the former Municipal Buildings in Corporation Street.¹³²

Registrar

The Register Office in Lower Middle Street, later Registry Place, was designed by Richard Carver in rendered Tudor Gothic style in the early 1840s. for the superintendent registrar.

There were registrars of marriages and of births and deaths for each parish.¹³³ The service moved to Mary Street House in 1926 and c. 1945 to Flook House.¹³⁴ In the early 21st century it was based in the former Municipal Buildings.

Inland Revenue and Customs

Excise officers were said to have provoked a riot in 1647.¹³⁵ They had a seat in St Mary's church in the 18th century.¹³⁶ The Customs and Excise were based in The Crescent in the later 20th century before moving to Brendon House.¹³⁷ The Inland Revenue offices were in East Street by 1859 and in 1864 housed the tax commissioners.¹³⁸ In 1878 the Revenue leased 4 Fore Street but by 1892 shared offices with the Excise at 54 North Street. The two services employed a surveyor and eight assessors and a supervisor and four officers respectively.¹³⁹

The Customs and Excise were in The Crescent in the later 20th century before moving to Brendon House.¹⁴⁰ By the 1920s Taunton had two tax districts; the first in Hammet Street and later Bridge Street and the second on the corner of Corporation Street but from c. 1935 to

¹³² SHC, C/CR/w. cat. Most records before 1971 were destroyed.

¹³³ *Slater's Dir. Som.* (1852); *Taunton of Today* (1896), 15.

¹³⁴ SHC, D/G/ta/8a/47; D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 17, 1943—5 (Sep. 1945).

¹³⁵ Cockburn, *Som. Assize Orders, 1640—59*, 18.

¹³⁶ SHC, DD/SAS(C/795)/15 (1746).

¹³⁷ SHC, DD.X/ROW/1.

¹³⁸ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/3, p. 5; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 19.

¹³⁹ SHC, DD/X/CMG/1; *Taunton of Today* (1896), 16—17.

¹⁴⁰ SHC, DD.X/ROW/1.

1983 at Revenue House, Billet Street.¹⁴¹ Both were united in new brick offices in Corporation Street until the 2010s.¹⁴²

Other Government Offices

The District Probate Registry was in Hammet St during the 19th century and in Corporation Street and Bridge Street in the 20th.¹⁴³ In the 1920s the Ministries of Health and Pensions and the Inland Revenue Valuation department occupied a block of offices designed to look like houses in Priory Avenue, now Freemantle House.¹⁴⁴ In 1931 the Labour Exchange on the corner of Bridge and Wood Streets opened six days a week including a late evening. It was demolished and the exchange, now Job Centre, moved to Brendon House.¹⁴⁵ In 1961—4 Quantock House was built in two blocks at the south end of Paul Street for the Ministry of Agriculture but was closed and demolished in 2017. In the 1970s Brendon House was built off High Street on the site of Pool Wall mill and remained government offices in the early 21st century.¹⁴⁶ In 1991 offices were built at Tangier for the Treasury Solicitor and Charity Commission but both had returned to London by 2016. The Admiralty Hydrographic Supplies Establishment was set up at Halcon by 1937, chart-making began in 1941 in drawing offices, Admiralty Way, built by R. G. Booth of the Ministry of Works and from 1967 maritime chart production was concentrated on Admiralty Way.¹⁴⁷

COURTS

¹⁴¹ SHC, D/B/ta/13/3/1, p. 413; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929) 35; *Taunton Official Handbook and Guide* (1931), 95; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957) 10, 12, 16.

¹⁴² SHC, DD/X/SML/9, p. 28.

¹⁴³ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 17; *Taunton of Today* (1896), 17; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929) 35; *Taunton Official Handbook and Guide* (1931), 71.

¹⁴⁴ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), 68.

¹⁴⁵ *Taunton Official Handbook and Guide* (1931), 101; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957) 16; SHC, DD/X/BUSH/13.

¹⁴⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/3/22/7, pp. 404, 456; D/B/ta/24/1/143/8432.

¹⁴⁷ Inf. from Hydrographic Office; Som. HER 15632.

The archdeacon of Taunton's court for church and probate matters was held from the 13th to 19th centuries in St Mary's church, different parts of which was known as the Consistory in 1761 and later. The surrogate's house was probably used for regular business in the 1630s and in the 1660s they met in the Lamb inn. By the 1690s local lawyers conducted business.¹⁴⁸ The fairs had a piepowder court by the 14th century and in 1849 was required to record horse and cattle sales.¹⁴⁹ Quarter Sessions, Assizes with Gaol Delivery and the County Court were held in the Castle until 1858 when they moved to Shire Hall. Taunton Deane manor tenants only served on juries if they held land outside the manor.¹⁵⁰ Two Quarter Sessions, one of the Assizes and the County Court were held at the Shire Hall until abolished in 1971.¹⁵¹

The removal of the county gaol from Ilchester to the Wilton house of correction increased the need for a modern court building. Shire Hall, on the site of The Grove, Shuttern with grounds extending downhill, was designed by W. B. Moffatt, former partner of George Gilbert Scott, in an irregular and flamboyant late Gothic style and opened in 1858 at a cost of £28,000.¹⁵² Two courtrooms with large traceried north windows extend the main depth and full height of the building either side of the entrance hall with its balconied porch. Since 1860 the hall has housed busts of Somerset worthies and was used for events. The double-height hall was ceiled to provide a first-floor civil court, converted in 1928 into the county council chamber.¹⁵³ Government tribunals and commissions used the building, there were offices for the Clerk of the Peace and the High Sheriff, now for the chief clerk to the courts and the county court registrar, accommodation for judges, county records and the Keeper, a post held by the Wollen family until the mid 20th century. A disused underground passage

¹⁴⁸ *Plac. Abbrev.* (Rec. Com.), 121; *Collectanea II*, passim; SHC, D/D/Ca/138, 310; DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (vestry min. 1761); DD/SAS/C112/20/7; DD/SP/423—43; Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 137.

¹⁴⁹ SHC, T/PH/win, 1388—9; 1454—5, 1544—5; A/CTP/6/6.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* DD/MT/15/1 (1687).

¹⁵¹ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 13; *Taunton Official Handbook and Guide* (1931), 71; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957) A 17.

¹⁵² SHC, tithe award, St Mary; Q/SR/606/94; Q/AC/6—10; DD/L/1/10/35A; DD/SAS/C909/169.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* C/CA/G187/1; DD/SF/17/5/15.

brought prisoners from gaol.¹⁵⁴ In 1971 security was inadequate and Taunton was downgraded to a third tier Crown Court.¹⁵⁵ The Nisi Prius courtroom with grand jury box has been used occasionally for theatrical performances.

Petty sessions in the early 19th century included special sessions for highway matters, alehouse licensing, appointing overseers and surveyors and examining highway accounts.¹⁵⁶ They were held in the Guildhall in the Market House every Wednesday for the town and every Saturday for rural areas.¹⁵⁷ From 1899 the borough had its own commission of the peace with weekly but in reality daily sessions.¹⁵⁸ In 1906 there were 16 borough magistrates and 22 in the Taunton division of the county commission for rural parishes.¹⁵⁹ In 1980—2 the lower ground floor of Shire Hall and portable buildings were fitted out as temporary premises until a courthouse opened in St John's Road in 1992 with four courtrooms opening off a first-floor concourse, offices and cells.¹⁶⁰

PRISONS

A town prison was recorded in 1242—3.¹⁶¹ The borough bailiff was responsible for writs, distress, arrest and ward except any royal summons under green wax, shared with the hundred bailiff.¹⁶² The Bridewell, a county house of correction, was built in 1582 on the bridge with a master appointed by Quarter Sessions.¹⁶³ It was poorly maintained, some prisoners died including the Revd Edmund Peacham in 1616 and there were many escapes.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. A/DGU/1, 4—5; Q/AC/21; SWHT, Som. HER 36786.

¹⁵⁵ SHC, A/ASC/11/4/6.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/14/5/1.

¹⁵⁷ Harrison, Harrad & Co. *Dir. Som.* (1859); *PO Dir. Som.* (1861, 1866).

¹⁵⁸ SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/6 (*Taunton Mail*, 21 June, 15 Nov. 1899); D/B/ta/3/16/1; DD/AY/132/1—13; Q/AC/23; DD/SAS/C2402/48.

¹⁵⁹ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1906).

¹⁶⁰ SHC, A/DLZ, reports 1980—2; A/DQO/404/4/1.

¹⁶¹ Chadwyck-Healey, *Som. Pleas c. 1200—1256*, 296.

¹⁶² B.L. Harl. MS 408, f. 212; *Borough Customs II* (Selden Soc. 21, 1906), 165—6; TNA, REQ 2/3/252.

¹⁶³ SDNQ, XXXII, pp. 629; SHC, Q/SR/49/16, 49; 58/19, 86

¹⁶⁴ Bates, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1607—25*, 20; *Cal. S.P. Dom.* 1611—18, p. 357; SHC, Q/SR/70/85—6, 75/53—4, 160/25; Q/SO/7 f. 456v.

Women were kept there for bastardy or mental illness.¹⁶⁵ The office of keeper often passed within the family and widows held the post in 1698 and 1741.¹⁶⁶ The ‘deep hall’ was used for the worst criminals and there were tools for those committed to hard labour.¹⁶⁷ In 1747 prisoners, one of whom killed a guard, accused keeper Nathaniel Gardner of cruelty and extortion.¹⁶⁸ In 1755 a site in Wilton was acquired for a prison, the Bridewell was sold and thereafter criminals were sent to Wilton and debtors to Ilchester.¹⁶⁹

A pillory was recorded in the market in 1587 and 1676 and the parishes kept stocks and lockups called Cowhouses.¹⁷⁰ In 1629 a new parish prison was, probably on Staplegrove Road, and apparently destroyed during the Civil War.¹⁷¹ Until the 1760s St Mary’s had the Cow House and Little Ease at the Guildhall, for miscreants, vagrants, deserters, and ‘lewd women’.¹⁷² The ‘town gaol’ comprised two ‘insecure and offensive’ rented rooms in 1782 with no access to water.¹⁷³ In 1787 the two parishes agreed to share the cost of a joint lockup built near St Mary’s church but Sir Benjamin Hammet objected and provided a building in a court off Magdalene Lane.¹⁷⁴ It was c. 16ft by 14ft with accommodation above for the keeper who shared a pump and privy with two one-roomed cottages. In 1787 the corporation bought the whole court as a borough prison called the Nook. Disused by 1820 except for vagrants, it was sold c. 1836 to the Board of Guardians and later demolished.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁵ Bates-Harbin, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1646—60*, 314; Dawes, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1666—77*, 74; SHC, DD/X/WHI/6 (1686).

¹⁶⁶ SHC, Q/SO/7 ff. 246v, 374, 387v, 402; 8 ff. 313, 319, 357v, 376 v; 9, ff. 84v, 334, 392; Q/SR/309/118—19.

¹⁶⁷ SDNQ, IV, 309; SHC, Q/SR/300/151; 305/22; 307/12, 14.

¹⁶⁸ SHC, Q/SR/315/47, 50—1.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. Q/SR/322/1/9, 322/2/33, 323/3/38, 323/4/19; D/B/ta/31/5/6; Wilton, forthcoming; C. & J. Greenwood, *Som. Delineated* (1822), 186.

¹⁷⁰ SHC, DD/SP/49 (Apr. 1587); Dawes, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1666—77*, 217; D. Shorrocks, *Bp Still’s Visitation and ‘Smale Bk’*, 168.

¹⁷¹ Cockburn, *Som. Assize Orders*, 2—3; SHC, DD/X/HPS/4 (Apr. 1646); DD/SP/98 (1652).

¹⁷² SHC, D/B/ta/31/5/3 (1714, 1763); TNA, SP 36/81/1/143; Siraut, *Som. Wills*, 216.

¹⁷³ J. Howard, *The State of Prisons in England and Wales* (1792), 402.

¹⁷⁴ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1787); D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1787); A/CTP/13/5.

¹⁷⁵ McDermott, *Sir Benjamin Hammet*, 29; SHC, DD/KLY/C/2898; D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1788), 23/6; D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1834); D/G/ta/8a/16 (29 Mar. 1862, 3 Jan. 1863).

POLICE

Medieval borough constables and tithingmen kept the peace until parishes appointed constables; St James' had two but St Mary's had nine with nine assistants in 1834. Disorderly men were bound over but women were imprisoned for several days being unable to provide surety.¹⁷⁶ In 1836 the guardians wanted night patrols and inspections of beer and lodging houses.¹⁷⁷ By 1842 24 constables kept watch day and night, recorded crimes and reported fires, faulty streetlamps and illegal drinking.¹⁷⁸ In 1853 at least 60 men were nominated for the office.¹⁷⁹

In October 1838 William Hitchcock organised a borough force comprising a sergeant and ten constables based in Church Square who wore blue uniform with white embroidery and buttons. In the first quarter of 1844 they dealt with one murder, two highway robberies and 56 other crimes, recovered stolen property and saved six lives.¹⁸⁰ They depended on public subscriptions, which meant no policing for poor neighbourhoods. North Town residents paid watchmen.¹⁸¹ By 1851 a force of railway police comprised a sergeant and four constables.¹⁸²

In 1853 a Parliamentary committee was told Taunton constabulary was not properly supervised.¹⁸³ In 1856 a Somerset constabulary controlled by Quarter Sessions was established under the new Police Act and run by a standing committee of Somerset County Council from 1888.¹⁸⁴ The borough force, a superintendent, three sergeants and 14

¹⁷⁶ Chadwyck-Healey, *Som. Pleas c. 1200—1256*, p. 85; SHC, D/P/tau.ja/22/6—7; D/P/tau.m/12/2.

¹⁷⁷ TNA, HO 73/8.

¹⁷⁸ SHC, Q/APc/1/84.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/3.

¹⁸⁰ *The Police and Constabulary List* (1844), 61, 99 [facsimile SHC, PAM 1206]; TNA, HO 107/972.

¹⁸¹ SHC, DD/DP/116/2/1/2 (1846); DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, pp. 50—3.

¹⁸² TNA, HO 107/1923.

¹⁸³ I. P. Collis, 'The Struggle for Constabulary Reform in Somerset', *PSAS XIX—C*, 75, 89, 92—3, 98, 102.

¹⁸⁴ SHC, DD/ASC, cat.

constables, formed part of the county constabulary but was paid for by the borough council.¹⁸⁵

In 1857 the justices purchased land and houses east of Shire Hall for a police station.¹⁸⁶ It was built in Tudor style of light coursed rubble with dark stone dressings.¹⁸⁷ In 1873—4 it was extended northwards and in 1891 a superintendent and a sergeant with their families and seven constables were resident.¹⁸⁸ The county police moved into the entrance block of the former prison, rebuilt in the 1940s as headquarters for the combined county and borough constabularies. The old building, used as police flats, was demolished c. 1959.¹⁸⁹

The borough force declined from 21 in 1915 to 15 by 1917 of whom four were re-employed pensioners and eight were liable for military service. The first woman was appointed in February 1918 but none were appointed after the war.¹⁹⁰ In 1932 there were again only 15 officers but an investigation department was created in 1933 and a traffic department in 1939 when 68 police officers were resident, all male.¹⁹¹ There was only one constable per 1,400 people in 1941, a Women's Auxiliary Police Corps was formed and there were c. 175 special and reserve constables during the war when crime rose sharply and the detection rate was under 50 per cent.¹⁹² Police houses were built between 1948 and 1954.¹⁹³

In the 1950s the number of officers rose from 30 to 97 including five women. Traffic wardens were employed from 1964 but there were only ten detectives in the borough in 1967.¹⁹⁴ In 1974 the Somerset and Avon constabulary was established. In the early 21st century the police station closed and an office opened in Deane House.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁵ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 13; SHC, DD/ASC/2/3/14—16.

¹⁸⁶ SHC, DD/X/BWR/3; Q/APb/3/52.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. T/PH/rea/3/112.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. Q/AP/53; TNA, RG 12/1875.

¹⁸⁹ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), 121.

¹⁹⁰ SHC, DD/ASC/4/6/1, 10/1/4.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. DD/ASC/2/3/15; Q/APb/3/65; C/PO/2/2/9; TNA, RG 101/305/1/WOOA—WOPG.

¹⁹² SHC, DD/ASC/2/3/15, 10/1/4.

¹⁹³ Ibid. C/CA/18/61,259, 263, 265, 268, 276, 655, 666—8.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. A/DIG/1, 45; DD/ASC/2/3/17.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. DD/ASC, cat.

SERVICES AND UTILITIES

Water

Streams by ancient custom were used for ‘communal conduits’.¹⁹⁶ William Giffard in the early 12th century granted the priory a mile long watercourse from the Sherford stream, replaced after 1332 by a new course from the Blackbrook or Stockwell stream.¹⁹⁷ Water diverted before 1209 along the west boundary of High Street burgages was still called potwater in the early 20th century.¹⁹⁸ In 1562 merchant William Leonard left £10 to bring a covered watercourse through High Street into open gutters both sides of North Street. The manor’s rhyne ridders were to sweep rhynes three times a week but they were primarily used as sewers and had no water by the 1840s.¹⁹⁹ A conduit stood in the marketplace in 1305 and 1427 but the water was possibly diverted before 1466 into the great gutter, which ran round the market until 1769.²⁰⁰ Taunton Deane manor restricted water supply from streams. In 1389 a man was allowed have water through an opening ‘the size of one little finger’ and another was allowed water in the 1580s through two ‘barrel holes’.²⁰¹ The Commission of Sewers, which tried to enforce communal stream cleaning in 1568, was later asked to fine people 40s. for diverting water from the former priory watercourse. In the early 17th century it was used as potwater despite pollution with privies. Communal scouring was still expected in 1677—8.²⁰²

In St James parish many relied on the watercourse between the whirligig²⁰³ and the river Tone, which was obstructed by rubbish in 1595 and was a sewer probably long before

¹⁹⁶ B.L. Harl. MS 408, f. 213.

¹⁹⁷ SHC, DD/SP/64, 459; above. intro.

¹⁹⁸ SHC, DD/SP/191/56; *PSAS* LXXXVI, 55.

¹⁹⁹ TNA, PROB 11/45/206; SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, p. 47.

²⁰⁰ SHC, T/PH/win 1305; *Bridgwater Borough Archives* pp. 42, 88; SHC, DD/SAS/C795/ BA/9/7. TN/10; DD/DP/93/4.

²⁰¹ SHC, T/PH/win 1388—9; DD/SP/4 (8 Oct. 1585).

²⁰² *Ibid.* DD/SP/18/49—50, DD/SP/36 (1590 and loose papers), 64, 376—7; DD/SAS/C795/TN/107.

²⁰³ A rotating horizontal timberwork to keep animals out.

the 19th century.²⁰⁴ By 1647 the parish bought water diverted from the Stockwell stream through an arch, which it agreed to repair in 1784 if water could run down St James and Middle streets for two hours a week. Priory farm's owners claimed the water, which being full of sewage was valuable manure.²⁰⁵ St Mary's parish bought water from the same stream and in 1749—50 paid for a sluice at Pool Farm, Wilton, presumably to improve the flow, and a man to maintain it.²⁰⁶ That arrangement continued until c. 1835 but only supplied East, North and part of Fore Street for two hours three days a week.²⁰⁷

Wells of varying date were found near Castle Bow in the 1930s. The sites of Martinswell recorded from the 1340s and St Mariewell are unknown but Busshupeswell was probably south of East Reach in 1440. Eastgate and East Street wells were in use in the 1590s and there were shared private wells.²⁰⁸ Town wells were often condemned and replaced by pumps from the late 16th century and a pumpmaker was recorded in 1571. Wells at St John's Cross in High Street and in Fore and North Streets were to be repaired or stopped up. In 1603 a second pump in North Street was needed to replace the well. In 1615 a well in St Mary's churchyard with a gutter and sink used for washing wool and bucking linen was condemned and would be stopped unless only used for potwater.²⁰⁹ Flook well on Staplegrove Road, recorded in 1574, was fed from the stream at Frieze Hill. Rebuilt in 1663 and roofed in 1722, it was demolished c. 1878 to control the spread of typhoid.²¹⁰ A well at Rowbarton was condemned in 1720.²¹¹

By the late 16th and early 17th century there were communal pumps in East, North, Paul, Canon and Middle and probably High streets, later vulnerable to traffic damage and

²⁰⁴ D. Shorrocks, *Bp Still's Visitation and 'Smale Bk'*, 168; SHC, DD/CH/93/1; DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, p. 8; Board of Health report in *Som. Co. Herald* 25 Jan. 1851.

²⁰⁵ SHC, DD/HC/151/2; D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1784); DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, pp. 10—12.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. DD/SP/22/40; DD/SAS/TN/C795/15 (1749—50).

²⁰⁷ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/4/3/8 (1811), 8/2/1 (1826); DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, p. 57, report p. viii.

²⁰⁸ A.W. Vivian-Neal, 'Materials for the history of Taunton Castle', *PSAS LXXXVI*, 56—7; SHC, T/PH/win 1345—8, 1409—10; DD/SP/49 (1592, 1597), 325/15; T/PH/hps/1.

²⁰⁹ SHC, DD/SP/49 (May 1593, Apr. 1597, May 1602, May 1603); 50 (Apr. 1615).

²¹⁰ Ibid. DD/SP/18/111; DD/MT/15/1 (1686); DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7 (inscr. 1722); T/PH/rea/1/146.

²¹¹ Ibid. DD/SP/18/113.

poorly maintained.²¹² Originally maintained by tithings, parishes became responsible for them in the 18th century but by the 19th century some were claimed by private landlords and fell into disrepair or were removed.²¹³ By 1618 private pumps took water from the town rhyne but wealthier households had their own well with pumphouse, shared if houses were divided. Well water was hard so houses and businesses collected rainwater in large cisterns.²¹⁴ In 1796 a lead pump east of the market house was mainly fishmongers' use.²¹⁵

In the 19th century streams were losing water and access was disputed.²¹⁶ In 1847 only High Street, Magdalene Lane and Market House pumps were usable. A public pump on the town bridge drew up sewage-filled river water for watering the streets. By the 1850s there was insufficient water for firefighting and sewer flushing. Diarrhoea and other deaths were blamed on dirty water.²¹⁷ The poor bought water and some well owners charged ½ *d.* a pail.²¹⁸ An Act of Parliament in 1858 established a Taunton Waterworks Company, which raised £15,000 to build a reservoir in the Blackdowns but the water was hard.²¹⁹ Leigh Hill reservoir was completed in 1859 and land was bought at Fulwood in 1864 for a second. By 1874 an estimated third of people in Taunton had access to mains water.²²⁰ However, over 75 per cent of urban well water was polluted with sewage; some supplies were described as liquid sewage. That year enteric fever affected every house in Denmark Place, Coal Orchard so free water was provided from a fire hydrant. The council closed pumps and wells and

²¹² Ibid. DD/SP/43/3; 49 (Apr. 1591, May 1603, Oct. 1606), 50 (Oct. 1611, June 1614, Oct. 1615), 60 (1616), 38 (Apr., Oct. 1628), 60 (1749); D/T/ta/8, p. 70.

²¹³ Sheppard, *Courts Leet*, 41; SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (1758); DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, p. 43; D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1788), 9/1/3 (1835); D/B/ta/31/1/5, p. 57.

²¹⁴ SHC, DD/SP/23/8; 50 (Oct. 1618); 423; 1684/64; DD/DP/75/3; DD/MY 35; DD/X/UP/3.

²¹⁵ Ibid. D/B/ta/31/1/1, p.440.

²¹⁶ Ibid. DD/X/OLD/1 (plan); Q/AC/13; D/B/ta/31/1/5, p. 416.

²¹⁷ Ibid. DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, pp. 43, 47, 951; L. Toller, *Death and Disease* (TS in VCH office), 17—18.

²¹⁸ SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, p. 88; DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, p. 12.

²¹⁹ Ibid. Q/Rup/258a; Q/Ruo/27; Q/RUa/53; Q/AB/85.

²²⁰ Ibid. PAM 2444 unpaginated.

extended mains water throughout the borough and landlords were ordered to provide it.²²¹

The waterworks was taken over by the borough council in 1877.²²²

In 1886 Taunton was short of 26 million gallons a year and another reservoir at Leigh Hill, completed in 1894, could not fill the need.²²³ Luxhay reservoir, opened in 1905, and supplies from Fulwood and elsewhere on the Blackdowns bought in 1910 could not prevent restrictions in drought years.²²⁴ The planned Quants reservoir was abandoned after litigation in the early 1940s and the existing reservoirs only held 80 days' supply increasing to 172 days after the opening of Clatworthy reservoir in 1959.²²⁵ In 1962 the new West Somerset Water Board, Wessex Water from 1963, took over the borough waterworks and supplied c. two million gallons a day by 1964.²²⁶ From the late 1970s Wimbleball reservoir, also in the Brendons, secured Taunton's supply into the 21st century.²²⁷

In 1859 Mr Rawlinson gave a granite drinking fountain surmounted by an obelisk at the Eastgate junction. A drinking fountain was incorporated into the 1867 Kinglake memorial. Horse troughs were donated of which one survives as a planter on Staplegrove Road.²²⁸

Sewerage

Borough residents had to scour rhynes and clean their street frontages but by the late 16th and early 17th centuries people no longer disposed of filth in cesspits but left dung and rubbish in the streets or swept it into watercourses.²²⁹ In 1798, when the market trustees offered the

²²¹ Wilts and Swindon HC, 1075/001/396; SHC, D/B/ta/3/8/1 (1877—1883); A/EPF/250/4/1—4.

²²² SHC, D/B/ta/3/12/1 (1879); Q/RUo/27.

²²³ Ibid. D/B/ta/4/4/1 (1884, 1886, 1889, 1892, 1894, 1898).

²²⁴ Ibid. DD/KIT/12/15; A/DSG/1; D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box 19 (1938—9), 9.

²²⁵ T. James, *Along the Wild Edge*, (2011), 109—10; SHC, D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box 19 (1939—40), 47; D/B/ta/4/22/1; A/EPF/250/4/6.

²²⁶ SHC, Q/RUo/28; D/B/ta/24/1/122/5486; A/BWX/5, p. 24.

²²⁷ SHC, D/P/stapg/7/3.

²²⁸ SHC, D/T/ta/11, pp. 774, 782; D/B/ta/2/1/3, p. 204, 4/3/2 (1898), 4/2/2 (1905), 4/3/3 (1908, 1918).

²²⁹ SHC, DD/SP/48 (1570), 49 (1586—94), 50 (Dec. 1613), 37 (Oct. 1612, Apr. 1615, May 1617), 38 (Apr. 1628); Sheppard, *Courts Leet*, 36.

town dung for sale, the rhynes stank.²³⁰ The turnpike trustees tried to restore water to the High and North street rhynes in 1866 but all street rhynes were later closed by the Local Board of Health.²³¹ The manor court failed to stop privies being built over the town rhyne, many a few yards from the Hunts Court pump and after 1810 the Crescent houses used it as a sewer leading to fatal disease outbreaks.²³² Occupiers of houses east of North Street had access to the rhyne by Whirligig Lane for water although it was a sewer long before 1843.²³³

Sewers were planned but not built until 1822 when brick and tile maker James Lackington Rice got permission from the market house trustees to build sewers 3 ft wide and 7 ft below the surface of the main streets to discharge into the river. Subscribers connected drains to the sewers but Rice lost money. By the 1840s basements were being installed below sewer level causing sewage flooding. Waste from c. 1,000 people discharged into the Gaol stream and the town rhyne making life unbearable in summer, waste from the south of the town discharged into an open drain north of East Reach, which overflowed when hot water was discharged from the South Street factory, and sewage from the east including hospital and workhouse waste went south into the Black brook or north across Priory fields to the river. The effluent of c. 50 houses in Silver Street flowed along the street. Houses in courts used gutters to the street, or privy vaults and cesspits, whose material was dug out and deposited with animal dung in streets for removal. It was used by farmers or mixed with coal ash and spread on the turnpike roads.²³⁴ Over 150 privies, pigsties and manure pits were ordered to be removed in 1847.²³⁵ The owner of Britannia Court off East Reach was

²³⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/1, p. 499; DD/SP/49; DD/X/MAY/11.

²³¹ Kite and Palmer, *Taunton...market trust*, 64; SHC, D/T/ta/12, p. 263, 270; D/B/ta, 31/1/6, p. 316.

²³² SHC, DD/SP/49 (Apr. 1586), 36 (1589), 18/16; DD/PRY/1/10; *Minutes of evidence on the Taunton Improvement and Market Bill* (Taunton, 1847), 2.

²³³ SHC, DD/CH/83/5, 93/1.

²³⁴ Ibid. Q/Rup/45; DD/SAS/C2283/3/12, passim; DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, p. 9—10, plan 1; D/B/ta/2/1/1, p. 349, 31/5/14 (1852); Alford, *Olden Taunton*, 9.

²³⁵ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/5, p. 68.

commended in 1849 for providing piped water and sewerage to the public house and seven tenements.²³⁶

In 1848 North Town sewer replaced an older drain but discharged in the river blocking Firepool weir.²³⁷ In 1852 the Local Board of Health bought the sewers from the shareholders but there was insufficient water to flush them.²³⁸ Sewer pipes in stream beds were permeable and in 1859 the Board was forced to remove a new sewer at Tangier by the miller at the Town Mills who claimed it reduced his flow of water.²³⁹ Sewage in the river impeded navigation and blocked Pollard's canal, preventing barges berthing.²⁴⁰ New houses were required to have mains water and sewerage by the 1870s resulting in greater strain on the sewers but many courts and poor streets had neither.²⁴¹ Rural areas relied on privies or flushed their water closets into streams and the medical officer of health inspected nearly 4,000 privies in 1882.²⁴² By 1920 there were 5,824 water closets for over 24,000 residents but in the back courts only one for every ten.²⁴³

Lambrook sewage works opened in 1877 with machinery from Stothert and Pitt of Bath powered by a water turbine but raw sewage still entered the river and in 1878 lightening caused a sewer gas explosion.²⁴⁴ In the 1880s new sewers were built with ventilators and flushing siphons, from 1892 the sewage work had a new engine using mains water and in 1897 land was bought for filter beds.²⁴⁵ In 1899 North Town sewer was replaced by a pipe from Rowbarton to Obridge carried on piers over the river to the sewage works.²⁴⁶ The works

²³⁶ Ibid. DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, p. 9.

²³⁷ Ibid. DD/TC/15 (plan c. 1830); Q/Rup/218; D/DC/tau.d/21/1[3].

²³⁸ Ibid. D/B/ta/31/5/14 (1852); L. Toller, *Death and Disease* (TS in VCH office), 17—18.

²³⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/3, pp. 50—1, 168; 42/28.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. D/B/ta/3/2/1 (1875).

²⁴¹ Ibid. D/B/ta/3/1/1; D/WB/t/10/1.

²⁴² Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/1 (1873), pp. 16—17; D/B/ta/3/8/1 (1882).

²⁴³ SHC, A/EPF/250/4/4 (1920, p. 8).

²⁴⁴ Ibid. D/WB/t/10/1; D/B/ta/3/8/1 (1877); PAM 2444 unpaginated.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. D/B/ta/3/12/1 (1882—3), 4/2/1 (1892, 1897, 1898).

²⁴⁶ Ibid. D/TBL/42/9/8 (*Taunton Mail*, 14 March 1900, p. 5).

were converted to steam power, generated from 1902 by burning rubbish.²⁴⁷ In 1957 a new sewage works opened at Ham, North Curry and the Lambrook works was demolished.²⁴⁸ In the 1970s new sewers were laid with additional relief sewers and stormwater treatment.²⁴⁹

Public conveniences

Early 19th-century public privies at St George's Place and Half Moon Court were very offensive and the men preferred not to use them or the urinals in the eastern arcade of the Market House.²⁵⁰ By 1874 there was a urinal behind the police station, others were built at the Station Road and Staplegrove Road junction and temporary ones were provided for the Bath and West Show.²⁵¹ Before 1891 more were built in Canal Road and c. 1905 underground at the junction of Silver Street and East Reach.²⁵² The latter were later replaced by conveniences in Tancred Street, demolished in the late 20th century.²⁵³ Latrines for soldiers were provided during the First World War.²⁵⁴ Despite complaints there were no female facilities except at special events but by 1890 enterprising shops advertised female toilets.²⁵⁵ By 1913 a ladies lavatory was provided in Castle Walk, replaced with the male urinal in the 1930s by toilets for both sexes behind the municipal buildings still in use in the 2020s. Most other 20th-century conveniences have closed.²⁵⁶

Scavenging and rubbish disposal

²⁴⁷ Ibid. D/B/ta/4/3/2 (1900), 3/16/1 (1902).

²⁴⁸ Ibid. A/BWX/5, p. 24; D/B/ta/4/2/4 (1960).

²⁴⁹ Ibid. D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box (1 July 1972); 2/2/3 (Aug. 1975).

²⁵⁰ Goldsworthy, *Recollections*, 48; SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/4, pp. 10, 342, 378; 31/1/5, pp. 394, 398; 2/1/3, p. 42, 2/1/4, p. 395.

²⁵¹ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/6, p. 231, 3/3/1 (1875).

²⁵² Ibid. D/B/ta/4/6/2 (Dec. 1897); A/DSG/1.

²⁵³ Ibid. D/B/ta/4/6/3 (July 1931).

²⁵⁴ Ibid. A/DIF/95/32.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. D/B/ta/3/5/1 (1875); *Where to Buy: Taunton* (1890), 20; *Industrial Great Britain* (c. 1890), 235.

²⁵⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/4/2/3 (1921, 1931); 24/1/82/1747.

Borough residents were required to remove rubbish weekly. From the 1770s the market house trustees ordered residents to sweep the footways outside their premises every morning, enforced by an Act of 1833.²⁵⁷ Scavengers paid £5 to scavenge and employed paupers in 1821 to sweep the streets twice a week, but not to use iron scrapers on turnpike roads, and clean the Parade within the chains every Sunday morning.²⁵⁸ After 1873 the Local Board of Health employed scavengers and owned the material.²⁵⁹ People objected to ashpit emptying because they used to sell the contents.²⁶⁰ In 1878 scavengers cleaned public urinals daily, emptied 796 ashpits and cleaned 14 courts weekly.²⁶¹ Containers were provided for horse manure from 1879 but it remained a problem in the 1920s.²⁶² Refuse was spread on fields until 1902 when a destructor was built to burn 20 tons of rubbish a day providing steam for the sewage works and clinker for the filter beds.²⁶³

In 1912 six vans and two carts collected house refuse and by 1920 there were two electric dustcarts.²⁶⁴ By 1914 dustbins were emptied twice a week reduced to weekly during the war, by 2000 they were fortnightly and later three-weekly, as more recyclables were collected.²⁶⁵ From 1941 weekly food waste collections produced up to 1,286 tons a year but were discontinued in 1959 and re-introduced in the early 21st century.²⁶⁶ The destructor closed in 1957 because it was cheaper to tip waste.²⁶⁷ Priorswood tip, begun in 1972, was full in 1977 and refuse was sent out of town. The site was retained as a depot and recycling facility. Refuse collection was privatised from the 1980s, when bins and later recycling

²⁵⁷ Sheppard, *Courts Leet*, 19—20; SHC, DD/AY/31 (1833); Q/RUo/35.

²⁵⁸ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1787); D/B/ta/31/1/1, pp. 3, 9, 11; 31/1/3, p. 60.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/1 (1873, p. 16); D/B/ta/3/3/1 (1875), 3/9/1 (1879)

²⁶⁰ Ibid. D/WB/t/10/1; A/EPF/250/4/2 (1898, p. 10).

²⁶¹ Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/1 (1878, pp. 8—9, 1880, p. 6); *Royal Com. On Market Rights and Tolls* (1888), III, p. 252.

²⁶² SHC, A/EPF/250/4/4 (1922, p. 8).

²⁶³ Ibid. A/DIF/95/35 (1901); D/B/ta/3/16/1 (1902); 4/3/3 (1904).

²⁶⁴ Ibid. D/B/ta/4/2/2 (1912); A/EPF/250/4/4 (1920, p. 8).

²⁶⁵ Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/3 (1914, 1919); D/B/ta/3/8/12, p. 200; D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box 19 (1939—40), 24.

²⁶⁶ Ibid. D/B/ta/4/2/4 (1950, 1959).

²⁶⁷ Ibid. D/B/ta/3/25/4, p. 319.

containers were provided to all households.²⁶⁸ In 1958 150 litter bins were installed paid for by advertising.²⁶⁹

Fire

Both parishes had fire engines and buckets in the 18th century. St Mary's bought two replacements in 1753—4 and had an engine house from c. 1797. In 1792—4 St James' parish spent over £40 on an engine operated by seven men.²⁷⁰ St Mary's bought another larger engine and employed an engineer in the early 19th century but by 1847 the engines were in poor condition.²⁷¹ All parish engines were transferred to the Local Board of Health c. 1860.²⁷² The barracks had its own fire engine in the 1830s and from 1839 the West of England Insurance Company fire engine was kept near the castle.²⁷³ In 1889 the company gave the engine to the borough council.²⁷⁴

In 1860 the Local Board of Health appointed a brigade of eight men. Fire hydrants were installed, escape ladders provided and in 1870 a new more powerful engine with three suction pipes obtained.²⁷⁵ In 1877 the brigade and station in Magdalene Street, came under borough control. Alarm points, escape ladders, appliance boxes and hydrants were gradually installed throughout the town.²⁷⁶ In 1889 the Priory Manufacturing fire exposed failings but in 1905 the engines were 'antiquated', many firemen were old and summoned by boys, and commercial premises had inadequate fire escapes.²⁷⁷ By 1912 firemen inspected places of amusement and had alarms in their homes and a town had a siren but boys were still

²⁶⁸ Ibid. A/EPF/2450/4/7 (1970, p. 18); D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box 1 (June 1972); D/DC/tau/d2/2/11 (11 Jan. 1983).

²⁶⁹ Ibid. D/B/ta/4/3/7 (Apr. 1958).

²⁷⁰ Ibid. DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (1734—5, 1753—5); D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1797), 9/1/2 (1811); D/P/tau.ja/4/1/3 (1724—5, 1792—4), 9/1/1 (1791, 1807); A/DIF/44.

²⁷¹ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/4/1/3 (1828—9), 4/1/6 (1834), 9/1/3 (1834—5); DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, p. 44.

²⁷² Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/2 (1860).

²⁷³ Ibid. D/N/tmc/7/4/1; DD/CH/23/5; DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, p. 44.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. D/B/ta/4/4/1 (1889).

²⁷⁵ Ibid. D/B/ta/3/3/1 (1860, 1863, 1867, 1870, 1873); D/B/ta/2/1/3, p. 174.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. T/PH/rea/3/111; A/AMS/1; *Taunton of Today* (1896), 10.

²⁷⁷ *Taunton Courier*, 6 March 1889; BNA, accessed 7 July 2021; SHC, D/B/ta/4/16/1.

employed. There was no provision for firefighting outside the borough.²⁷⁸ Although Taunton Rural District acquired a steam fire engine c. 1910 by 1915 its horses had been sold to the War Department.²⁷⁹ The tragic circus fire of 1920 led to demands for a motorised engine but it was 1924 before one was registered.²⁸⁰

In 1935 the council bought Ebenezer chapel to extend the fire station. After the formation of a county brigade a new station was built in Lisieux Way between 1966 and 1974.²⁸¹ Brigade headquarters was at Hestercombe House, Cheddon Fitzpaine from 1954 to 2006 when it merged with Devon.²⁸² A fire control headquarters built at Blackbrook business park in 2007 was never used.²⁸³

Paving

From 1477—8 until the later 18th century residents paved the main streets. Iron-shod cartwheels were forbidden on town streets but had broken them up by 1700.²⁸⁴ Paving was usually ‘flints’ or cobble as stone was very expensive.²⁸⁵ A flint road surface was uncovered two feet below Silver Street in the late 19th century.²⁸⁶ The market trustees took over responsibility and in 1790 broke up suburban streets to improve drainage.²⁸⁷ By the 1840s main streets were macadamised with blue lias pavements but the courts and North Town streets were unpaved and had to be watered until the early 20th century when most were tarred. From the 1840s paved crossings were provided for pedestrians on principal streets.²⁸⁸

²⁷⁸ SHC, D/B/ta/4/9/1 (1912, 1918, 1920—1).

²⁷⁹ Ibid. D/N/tmc/7/4/1; A/DIF/95/32.

²⁸⁰ *Taunton Courier*, 21 July 1920: BNA accessed 18 Feb. 2020; SHC, C/MT/21 (Apr. 1924).

²⁸¹ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/133/7349, 24/1/176/10572; 24/1/214/10572; C/CA/12/19/2, 500.

²⁸² Ibid. SHC, C/CA/12/6; C/FB passim; A/DQO/369/8/1.

²⁸³ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-55163364:accessed 8 Dec. 2020.

²⁸⁴ *Parl. Rolls Med. Eng.* XIV, pp. 373—5; Hants. R.O., 11M59/C1/19/4; SHC, DD/SP/49 (Apr. 1604, Oct. 1606), 50 (Jan. 1614, Nov. 1615); Sheppard, *Courts Leet*, 37, 40.

²⁸⁵ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/1, p. 462.

²⁸⁶ J. H. Pring, *The Briton and the Roman on the site of Taunton* (Taunton, 1880), 97. There is no evidence that it was Roman as the author suggests.

²⁸⁷ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7.

²⁸⁸ Ibid. DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, p. 12; T/PH/rea/3/19, 28, 33; D/T/ta/11, p. 217; D/B/ta/3/9/1 (1879).

Early streets on the Priory estate had wood setts and cobbled areas were only replaced by stone slabs, later concrete, and tarmac in the 1920s partly to create work for the unemployed. In the late 20th century decorative setts and brickwork were introduced in the town centre.²⁸⁹

Street Lighting

The market trustees erected oil lamps in the main streets in 1791, on the bridge in 1793 and had 121 by 1818.²⁹⁰ Lamps were converted to oil gas, 45 by 1823, but by the 1840s they were dirty and feeble, North Town needed 100 lamps and there were none in suburban areas.²⁹¹ The trustees owed £300 for gas in 1849 and offered the lamps to the new Local Board of Health.²⁹² After lamps were unlit for several days the board accepted responsibility, which later passed to the borough council. The board installed triple gas lamps from Glasgow on the Parade, lit side streets and back courts and by 1855 had 240 lamps.²⁹³ In 1887 lamplighters were paid 15s. a week, 12s. in summer when only 60 lamps were lit.²⁹⁴

Taunton was reputedly the first town with electric street lighting, from December 1885.²⁹⁵ In 1886 29 electric lamps replaced 86 gas ones leaving 264 gas and oil lamps until the 1890s.²⁹⁶ In 1893 electric mains for street lighting were laid and in 1909—10 filament lamps replaced expensive arc lights.²⁹⁷ Many back courts remained unlit until 1930 and poorer streets had only one lamp in 1948.²⁹⁸ In the 1930s Hardy and Padmore of Worcester supplied new lamps for the Parade, which were restored in 1996 and sited behind the Market

²⁸⁹ Ibid. D/B/ta/3/9/6 (1903), 3/9/11, p. 2, 4/3/3 (1912, 1921), 31/1/4, pp. 307—8.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. D/B/ta/31/1/1, pp. 358, 374; 31/1/2, pp. 20, 472.

²⁹¹ Ibid. T/PH/gdl/1; DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, pp. 20—1; D/B/ta/31/1/4, p. 331.

²⁹² Ibid. D/B/ta/31/1/5, p. 155.

²⁹³ Ibid. D/B/ta/2/1/2, p. 348, 3/3/1 (1856).

²⁹⁴ Ibid. D/B/ta/4/6/1 (May 1887).

²⁹⁵ Godalming was the first to try but Eastbourne claims electric street lighting from 1882.

²⁹⁶ SHC, A/DQO/404/29/97; D/B/ta/4/6/1 (Sep. 1886), 4/6/2 (1897).

²⁹⁷ Ibid. Q/RUo/28; A/ATZ/1 (1896); Gledhill and P. Lamb, *Electricity in Taunton 1809—1948* (Taunton, 1986), 30.

²⁹⁸ SHC, D/B/ta/4/6/1 (Dec. 1892), 4/6/3 (Sep. 1930); D/DC/tau.d/38/28.

House.²⁹⁹ In 1956 mercury vapour lamps and automatic switches were installed gradually replaced in the early 21st century by dimmable or LED lights.³⁰⁰

Electricity

Electricity was first used for the telegraph and two companies wired the town in the early 1860s.³⁰¹ In 1879 electric lamps were provided for rugby matches, in 1880 bootmaker Henry Massingham demonstrated electric lamps with a generator and in 1881 an exhibition was lit by electricity. Massingham created an electric works behind his Fore Street shop and in 1887 formed the Taunton Electric Lighting Company, which in 1889 acquired the former St James Street Collar Works for a generating station. An 1891 electrical exhibition included an electric bus and an electric launch. After a public enquiry the Board of Trade permitted the council to acquire the business in 1891 and electricity became a paid-for public service.³⁰²

The council built the first substation under the Municipal Buildings in 1893 and four more by 1898. In 1894—5 underground cables replaced overhead wiring. Seven generating sets were installed between 1896 and 1901. Coin slot meters were introduced in the late 1890s. The 1902 coronation required 1,000 decorative lights and the load rose from 243 KW in 1899 to 495 KW at Christmas 1905 as customers used electricity for cooking and heating. The council borrowed £220,000 for new equipment that consumed less coal and expanded the site several times between 1913 and 1932.³⁰³

The First World War reduced electricity consumption but increased coal prices. In 1915 the works made a loss and a munitions experiment produced only 333 shells. In 1916 1 St James Street was acquired for a showroom and in 1920 a 500 KW steam turbine by

²⁹⁹ Ibid. D/DC/tau.d/21/2.

³⁰⁰ Ibid. D/B/ta/4/3/6, p. 25; DD/X/WBB/1011.

³⁰¹ *Taunton Courier*, 11 Oct. 1865: BNA accessed 21 Sep. 2021; above. econ. hist.

³⁰² Gledhill and Lamb, *Electricity in Taunton*, 6—7, 9—10, 13; *Taunton Courier*, 5 Oct. 1881: BNA accessed 21 Sep. 2021; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/21/861.

³⁰³ SHC, A/ATZ/1 passim; D/B/ta/4/7/1 passim; 4/7/2 (Jan. 1919).

Parsons of Newcastle cost over £11,000 but a second was needed by 1923. The council reputedly had some of the lowest generating costs in the country and made over £11,000 a year from the works. A new generator was installed in 1930 when small houses prepared to give up gas lighting were fitted with a prepayment meter, lights and an iron. Local authority houses were only provided with one electric light until c. 1933. In 1932 the council switched from alternating to direct current.³⁰⁴ A new showroom on the Corn Exchange site costing £20,000 opened in 1939 when c. 14 million units of electricity were sold, compared with only one million in 1922.³⁰⁵

From 1936 Taunton was supplied from the national grid, electricity generation ceased on 31 December 1937 but the site was kept on standby.³⁰⁶ The corporation still hired out and fitted domestic equipment. The works generated electricity five days a week during the winter of 1947—8 using the 1930 3,125 KW alternator. In 1948 it was taken over by the South Western Electricity Board, closed c. 1960 and demolished c. 1980.³⁰⁷

Housing

The Local Board of Health and later the borough council were concerned about housing.³⁰⁸ In 1913 three-bedroomed workmen's cottages with bath, water and light were built in String Lane, later Leycroft Road, at a cost of £148 each to be let for 4s. a week. Under the 1919 Act a housing committee with three co-opted women members designated five Unhealthy Areas and built 111 replacement houses.³⁰⁹ In the 1920s the medical officer of health found 700 unfit houses beyond repair but there were over 660 applicants for council housing.

³⁰⁴ Ibid. D/B/ta/4/7/2 passim, 21/2; Q/RUo/39; DD/X/WBB/1011; A/DVY/1.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box 19 (1938—9), 86—7; DD/X/BUSH/19.

³⁰⁶ Ibid. D/B/ta/4/7/2 passim; 4/5/1 (Dec. 1941).

³⁰⁷ Ibid. D/B/ta/4/7/2 (1937—9, 1947—8).

³⁰⁸ Ibid. D/B/ta/4/2/1—2, 4/3/2.

³⁰⁹ Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/3 (1913, f.p.1); A/DIF/95/32; A/DVY/1.

Unemployed unskilled labour was used *c.* 1926 to construct 100 concrete houses at Lambrook, still in use in the 2020s.³¹⁰

The 1930 Housing Act obliged the council to provide satisfactory accommodation for those displaced but it had only built 677 houses. By 1933 700 more families lived in unfit dwellings and rooms outside the slum clearance areas. Although costs had been reduced to *c.* £300 a house only 573 houses were planned over five years. In 1936 with 1,076 unfit houses awaiting demolition the council planned 892 houses and 100 flats for the elderly. The earliest large estates were Priorswood and Halcon where hundreds of painters, floor layers and other workers were completing houses in 1939.³¹¹

Although *c.* 1,400 houses were built between 1945 and 1953 over 2,000 applicants waited for a home, the council placed homeless families in converted Nissen huts and continued condemning houses. Prefabricated steel-framed and concrete houses and aluminium bungalows were constructed amid a national shortage of building materials. Of 4,084 council-owned houses in 1962 nearly half were ‘temporary’ or awaiting demolition but only *c.* 100 new houses were built annually compared with 150 in the 1950s. The one-storey steel and aluminium dwellings were soon demolished but at least 1,000 prefabricated houses were still occupied in the 2020s when demolition of the Woolaway types began.³¹² From *c.* 1954 the council sold houses to tenants and by 1991 council tenants were in the minority on the Lyngford and Pyrland estates.³¹³ In the 1970s the council extended the Lambrook estate and bought 67 a. at Holway for housing. Thereafter social housing became the responsibility of housing associations but supply continued to fall short of need.³¹⁴

³¹⁰ Ibid. DD/X/PTB/1, p. 71; A/DIF/95/37; D/DC/tau.d/2/2/19 (29 Oct.), 21 (23 Feb.).

³¹¹ Ibid. D/DC/tau.d/36/15—21; unlisted box 19 (1938—9), 9; D/B/ta4/2/3; TNA, RG 101/305/1/WOOA—WOPG.

³¹² SHC, D/B/ta/3/22/10, pp. 60—1, 4/22/1 (1952, 1963); D/DC/tau.d/2/214 (22 Oct.), 19 (30 Apr.), 20 (10 Nov.).

³¹³ Ibid. D/B/ta/3/22/8, p. 112; 3/22/10, pp. 21, 626; 3/22/11, p. 28; D/DC/tau.d/2/2/19 (19 Sep.).

³¹⁴ Ibid. A/APN/2/6; D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box 1 (Sep., Nov. 1973, Mar. 1974).

LOCAL POLITICS

Taunton's reputation for rebelliousness may predate the 17th century. Although most trouble occurred when faction leaders seized the castle and it was Cornishmen who reputedly murdered the provost of Penryn in the marketplace in 1497, there was a conspiracy of former MPs to attack the bishop's officers in 1409—10. In 1497 *c.* 130 people were fined up to £100 for supporting Perkin Warbeck, possibly to pacify Henry VII who came to Taunton to confront Warbeck. Townspeople possibly were penalised because Warbeck and his followers stayed there for two nights. The royal coffers benefited by over £680.³¹⁵

Unrest in 1528 prevented the assizes being held and in 1536 some rioters were hanged. There was anger at attacks on religious institutions and high grain prices.³¹⁶ Within a century many ceased attending church or followed radical preachers. Religious divisions were a major driver in local politics.³¹⁷ The 1627 municipal charter gave political power to local men like lawyer Roger Hill, accused in 1629 of scandalising justices and being an evil example yet mayor in 1633.³¹⁸ Mayors often came from trading families and several served more than once.³¹⁹ Economic problems led to festering resentment at Crown demands for money.³²⁰ The ship money assessment of £100 in 1635 was the highest in the county. The authorities admitted it was easier to get money from Taunton than country areas 'who pay their money slowly'.³²¹

In the 1640s councillors and leading men supported the parliamentary cause, tradesmen and workers took up arms and by 1645 many were dead or injured, hungry, homeless, and workless. Royalists were blamed for the war and support for Parliament was

³¹⁵ *Cal. SP Milan* 1385—1618, p. 328; *VCH Som.* II, 193; E. Chisholm Batten, 'Henry VII in Som.', *PSAS* XXV (1879), 63—71; A.J. Howard, *Fines Imposed....in 1497* (Pinner, 1980), 1—2, 4, 7.

³¹⁶ *L&P Hen. VIII*, IV (2), p. 1830, VIII, pp. 15, 296—7, XII (1), p. 549; SHC, T/PH/win 1535—6.

³¹⁷ Above, rel. hist; SHC, DD/SP/367; Webb and Berry, *Som. Loyalties*, 8, 12, 55—6, 93, 102, 123—6.

³¹⁸ SHC, DD/X/HUNT/6/1; T.G. Barnes, *Som. Assize Orders 1629—40*, p. 7.

³¹⁹ SHC, DD/TRANS/1/92.

³²⁰ *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1619—23, 156; *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1604—1629; historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1604-1629, s.v. Taunton: accessed 10 Nov. 2020.

³²¹ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1635, pp. 495, 515; 1636—7, pp. 535—6.

strengthened by aid.³²² However, many disliked the new government, complaining about billeting in 1644 and 1659, the excise in 1647 and fatal encounters with troops in 1648. The mayor was removed for disloyalty to the Commonwealth in 1650, Taunton was charged £21 to maintain the army in 1654 and 35 men imprisoned in 1655 may have supported Penruddock's rising.³²³ Men were prosecuted for Royalist sympathies and for extreme anti-clericalism. Some complained about their compensation and demanded a free parliament in 1659.³²⁴

From 1660 militias were ordered to disband amid fears of violence and 'Rebellious Spirits' especially at violent commemorations of 11 May 1645, the end of the siege.³²⁵ The king ordered the demolition of the castle but fortunately it was being used to imprison rebels.³²⁶ The municipal charter lost in 1660 was not returned until 1677 and the king had to approve the recorder.³²⁷ From 1680 support for the duke of Monmouth was stoked by John Trenchard MP, who reputedly led 'clubs' of disaffected people at the Red Lion inn and William's coffee house but left the county before 1685. Thomas Dare was tried for sedition, fled to Amsterdam and was removed from the borough council.³²⁸ Mayor Stephen Timewell closed meeting houses and conventicles, organised an oath of allegiance, a loyal address in July 1683 and a seemingly successful loyal celebration in September but it damaged his business.³²⁹

³²² Above, soc. hist.; *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1644—5, pp. 83, 107, 113—15, 124, 196, 433, 459, 476, 479, 483, 491—3, 508, 526, 595, 602, 617, 621.

³²³ Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion*, 230, 234n.; Cockburn, *Som. Assize Orders*, 18, 22, 69; *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1655, pp. 98—9; SHC, D/P/tru/23/20.

³²⁴ SHC, Q/SR/82/191—2; *Cal. SP Dom.* 1657—8, p. 21; 1658—9, p. 58; Underdown, *Som. in the Civil War*, 191—2; *HMC, Leyburne-Popham* C 9471 (1899), 157—8.

³²⁵ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1659—60, pp. 379, 381; 1660—1, p. 424; 1661—2, pp. 434, 443, 448—9; 1663—4, pp. 116, 296, 624, 666—7; 1664—5, pp. 35, 544; 1682, pp. 208—9; SHC, Q/SR/103/14, 105/5, 106/59, 111/94.

³²⁶ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1661—2, pp. 424—5, 511.

³²⁷ *Ibid.* 1675—6, 39; 1677—8, 260—1; 1690—1, 186.

³²⁸ *Ibid.* 1680—1, 211, 352, 514—15; 1682, 159; Jan.—June 1683, 250, 257, 266, 272, 278; Jul.—Sep. 1683, passim; SHC, A/EGL/1; DD/WY/14/53; *VCH Som.* II, 221—2; *Lond. Gaz.* (23 Jul. 1683), 1—2; Dunning, *Monmouth Rebellion*, 14—20.

³²⁹ *Lond. Gaz.* (23 Jul. 1683), 1—2; *Cal. SP. Dom.* Jan.—June 1683, 212, Jul.—Sep. 1683, 278—9, 358, 398; above, rel. hist., nonconf.

Despite anti-government sentiment, a legacy of the Civil War, the 1685 Monmouth rebellion was effectively not a republican movement but an attempt to replace one absolute monarch with another of a different religious persuasion. In June 1685 the ‘Maids of Taunton’, mostly daughters of wealthy Monmouth supporters, presented a ‘JR’ banner to the duke of Monmouth who was proclaimed king.³³⁰ At least 393 Taunton residents were implicated, many presented at the manor courts, mostly cloth workers and small craftsmen. The Bloody Assize held by Judge Jeffreys resulted in barbarous executions. At least 14 Taunton men were hanged, 30 were shipped to Barbados or Jamaica but some escaped to Holland to be pardoned subsequently. The ‘maids’ were later allowed to compound for c. £2,000.³³¹ Sir William Portman MP apparently visited William of Orange in 1688 but townspeople were wary of open support and William avoided Taunton on his march to London.³³²

Most 18th-century violence erupted at the elections, fuelled by free or cheap alcohol and underlying problems in the serge industry. There were risings over corn prices in 1710, 1772 and as late as 1847. A Jacobite riot was feared on Coronation day 1714 and in 1744—5 the mayor and others were accused of Jacobite sympathies.³³³ The council, predominantly Anglican and conservative, was controlled by powerful men like bankers John Morland and Benjamin Hammet who repaired the castle to prevent Taunton losing the assizes.³³⁴ Few townsmen joined the Revolution Society in 1789, but people remembered the 11 May, now

³³⁰ SHC, DD/BLM/25/1/14; D/P/tau.ja/2/1/8; D/P/tau.m/2/1/32; *VCH Som.* II, 221—2; Dunning, *Monmouth Rebellion*, 51—60; above soc. hist., military hist.

³³¹ W. Wigfield, *The Monmouth Rebels*, xvii, 216—220; *Cal. SP Dom.* 1686, pp. 155, 202, 261, 279, 440; 1686—7, 35, 63—4, 202, 226; 1687—9, p. 234; SHC, DD/BLM/25/1/14; DD/SP/18/61.

³³² *Correspondence of the family of Hatton*, II, 106; *VCH Som.* II, 221—2; Dunning, *Monmouth Rebellion*, 51—60.

³³³ SHC, Q/SR/261/9; D/PS/ilm/7/25; DD/SAS/C909a/6; *SDNQ*, XXI, 148; *Taunton Courier*, 19 May 1847; BNA accessed 12 Sep. 2017; *Cal. SP Dom.* 1714—9, pp. 10, 197; TNA, SP 36/64/429, 36/65/115, 36/69/17, 36/70/184, 36/73/2/62, 36/73/2/100.

³³⁴ *Hist. Parl: Commons 1754—1790*: accessed 17 Oct. 2019; Oldfield, *Hist. Boroughs of Gt Britain* (1792), 449—50.

Somerset Day, and in 1898 Edward Jeboult wrote an operetta ‘In the Days of the Siege’.³³⁵

Petitions for and against Catholic emancipation, against slavery with over 7,000 signatures, for the protection of the silk trade and against the land tax assessment showed some confidence in democratic government.³³⁶ The town welcomed the passing of the 1832 Reform Act with a procession of tradesmen and a dinner.³³⁷

Anglicans were expected to vote Conservative and nonconformists Liberal.³³⁸ A local Liberal paper was established in 1868 and in 1872 there was a Taunton Working Men’s Liberal Association.³³⁹ In 1873 Rhoda Garelt came to campaign for women’s suffrage.³⁴⁰ In 1913 the women’s suffrage pilgrimage passed through Taunton supported by most who came to hear them.³⁴¹ Attitudes to the monarchy had mellowed, royal events were celebrated and in 1897 Taunton was said to be one of the most loyal towns, probably an exaggeration.³⁴² The 1928 pageant, claimed as bolstering support for the established order and yet to boost Taunton’s position as the county town, has scenes that might favour rebelliousness.³⁴³

Uncontested municipal elections were common in the early 20th century, sitting councillors were rarely defeated and most were Independent. Female councillors were rare and half the electorate failed to vote.³⁴⁴ The three main parties had active local branches by the 1920s. An attempt to start a branch of the British Union of Fascists in 1934 was unsuccessful. After the war the borough council was two thirds Independent and one third Labour. In 1961 Labour became the largest group but many seats were uncontested and fewer

³³⁵ Toulmin, *Hist. of Taunton*, rev. Savage, 423.SHC, A/CTP/15/9; DD/SAS/M1401/1/2.

³³⁶ SHC, DD/SAS/C2402/52; SHC, A/CXD/1; *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1820—1832; historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832, s.v. Taunton: accessed 10 Nov. 2020; *Taunton Courier*, 27 July 1825, 28 Apr. 1832: BNA accessed, 24 Jan. 2022.

³³⁷ SHC, DD/SAS/C2402/51; D/X/BRO/2/97.

³³⁸ SHC, PAM 426, pp. 37.

³³⁹ *Taunton Courier*, 1 Nov. 1871; BNA accessed 10 Nov. 2020.

³⁴⁰ SHC, PAM 427, p. 14.

³⁴¹ *Taunton Courier*, 16 July 1913: BNA accessed 12 Sep. 2017.

³⁴² SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/4 (*Taunton Mail*, 23 Sep. 1897).

³⁴³ SHC, A/BCJ/2; A/BDK/1; A/CLC/1; A/DIF/98; M. Woods, ‘Performing power: local politics and the Taunton pageant of 1928’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 25 (1), (1999); 57—74.

³⁴⁴ *Taunton Courier*, 4 Nov. 1908, 5 Nov. 1913, 4 Nov. 1925: BNA accessed 24 Aug. 2022; SHC, A/DQO/404/12/1.

people voted.³⁴⁵ Property-owners dominated the planning committee and decisions usually favoured developers with the loss of many historic buildings. Only in the 1970s did public pressure secure the protection of some streets.³⁴⁶ The decline in manufacturing probably reduced support for Labour and the rise of party politics in local government resulted in fewer Independents. The Peace Fellowship, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, United Nations Association and Communist Party had Taunton branches in the later 20th century.³⁴⁷ There were Anti Poll Tax Unions in 1989 and Extinction Rebellion were active in the early 21st century.³⁴⁸

PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION

John Russell and William Leffatt represented Taunton at the Council at Northampton in 1273.³⁴⁹ Taunton may not have sent representatives to the 1295 parliament but did in 1307.³⁵⁰ In 1361 a regional south-west parliament met at Taunton to discuss defence.³⁵¹

Local gentry were preferred representatives and merchant members like Richard Polruel in 1337 were uncommon.³⁵² William Portman and William Marchaunt owned town property and chosen several times in the late 14th and early 15th. centuries. Some early 15th-century MPs were the bishop of Winchester's servants like Thomas Bacot or tenants without local connections. That may have provoked former MPs and their sons to attack the bishop's toll collectors in 1409. Returns from 1407 onwards were signed by several burgesses stating

³⁴⁵ *Taunton Courier*, 31 Jan. 1934, 3 Nov. 1945, 8 Nov 1947, 24 Jan. 1959, 25 Nov. 1960: BNA accessed 24 Aug. 2022; SHC, A/DQO/404/12/1.

³⁴⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/3/37/1—3.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.* DD/TCM/1/18; 16/84; 17/2—3; D/B/bw/3/25/3, p. 235; *Taunton Courier*, 15 Nov. 1947, 10 Jan. 1958, 10 Jan. 1959, 20 Apr., 28 Oct. 1961, 24 Nov. 1962: BNA accessed 22 Aug 2022.

³⁴⁸ SHC, DD/X/DEH/10.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.* DD/PH/216/79.

³⁵⁰ Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 289; *VCH Som.* II, 184.

³⁵¹ *Cal. Close* 1360—4, 96—7.

³⁵² Dickinson, *Kirby's Quest*, 274; *Cal. Close*, 1337—9, p. 114.

that the whole community agreed but that does not preclude undue influence.³⁵³ Under an Act of c. 1445 the bailiffs and constables of the manorial borough were returning officers, confirmed by parliament in 1803 although between 1627 and 1792 the mayor took the role.³⁵⁴ Only male householders in the borough, within the town gates, were eligible to vote, the origin of the potwallopers.³⁵⁵

Thomas Cromwell was elected in 1529, John Norris MP 1554 was the bishop's clerk at Taunton castle and Valentine Dale in 1558 was probably the bishop's protégé. Later MPs included county landowners Edmund Hody in 1575, Alexander Pym in 1584, Matthew Horner in 1585 and Edward Hext in 1597 and 1604, Taunton merchants Robert Hill in 1571 and Thomas Fisher in 1589 and schoolmaster John Bond in 1601 and 1604. Episcopal influence was evident in the election of John Goldwell 1584—8, Francis Bacon in 1586 and George Browne castle keeper in 1626 and 1628 but declined thereafter when most MPs were county gentlemen.³⁵⁶ Royalist Sir William Portman lost his seat in 1644 and in 1661 his namesake was the last of that family to represent Taunton. During the interregnum Taunton continued to elect two members, other Somerset boroughs had only one, and in 1660 Thomas Gorges and William Wyndham retained their seats. Men like John Trenchard did little to benefit Taunton and election violence increased but Edward Clarke (1690—1710) was a hard-working MP.³⁵⁷

³⁵³ *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1386—1421; historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1386-1421, s.v. Taunton: accessed 10 Nov. 2020; *Hist. Parl. Commons*, 1439—1509, 12, 24—5, 257, 537.

³⁵⁴ SHC, DD/CH/74/6; PAM 428, [23]; Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 305—6, 327, 340—58; *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1790—1820; historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820, s.v. Taunton: accessed 10 Nov. 2020.

³⁵⁵ Below, this section.

³⁵⁶ *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1509—1558; historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558; *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1558—1603; historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1558-1603; *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1604—1629; historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1604-1629, s.v. Taunton: accessed 10 Nov. 2020; *ODNB*, s.v. Francis Bacon: accessed 12 Apr. 2018.

³⁵⁷ *VCH Som.* II, 232; Cockburn, *Som. Assize Orders*, 73—4; *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1660—1690; historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1660-1690, s.v. Taunton: accessed 10 Nov. 2020; SHC, DD/SF/13/2.

Throughout the 18th century attempts were made to reduce the number of called potwaller or potwalloper voters, men who could cook their own food.³⁵⁸ The first officially disputed election was in 1714 when 500 voters were disqualified as minors, temporary residents or recipients of poor relief or charity. The election was negated in favour of the losing candidates although the Commons ruled that former charity recipients might vote. In 1774—5 c. 200 voters were rejected for receiving alms, being Chelsea pensioners, too young, non-resident or having no hearth.³⁵⁹ Voters expected and wished to be bribed, despite an opera, *The Downfall of Bribery*, lauding the honest men of Taunton in 1733. Bribery cost thousands of pounds some from government secret service funds³⁶⁰ In 1754 and 1768 candidates gave china plates commemorating their victory at election dinners.³⁶¹

When John Halliday died weeks after being elected in 1754 government-funded bribes probably secured the seat for Robert Maxwell, later Viscount Fareham. A 13-day poll saw over 700 voters disqualified and two people reportedly killed in weeks of drink-fuelled rioting. Nathaniel Webb, MP, reputedly used bribe money unspent in the uncontested 1768 elections on the new Market House. He held Taunton until 1775 but never spoke in Parliament. Nor did John Halliday the younger, MP 1774—84, despite living mostly in London. His fellow MP, John Roberts, was too ill to attend debates and died in 1782.³⁶² To secure the peaceful election of Benjamin Hammet bribes of between 29s. for poor men and £500 for woollen manufacturers were proposed but not required. Sir Benjamin, MP 1782—96, was born in Taunton and was followed in the seat by his son John, who faced a bribery

³⁵⁸ Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 238, 259.

³⁵⁹ *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1715—1754; historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1754, s.v. Taunton: accessed 10 Nov. 2020; Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 317—23; *VCH Som.* II, 237; SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/22, 159/4.

³⁶⁰ SHC, DD/X/BUSH/12; *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1754—1790; historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790, s.v. Taunton: accessed 17 Oct. 2019.

³⁶¹ *PSAS*, LXXXIII (1937), 72—3. The Museum of Somerset has examples.

³⁶² Webb had estates in Montserrat, West Indies. Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 567, 571—8; *Hist. Parl: Commons* 1754—1790: accessed 17 Oct. 2019; SHC, DD/X/MDT/393, p. 13.

petition in 1806—7. The other seat was held by Alexander Popham, Quarter Sessions chairman.³⁶³

Benjamin Hammet and John Morland bought property to secure votes. Morland's agent denied inducing tenants to vote although admitted to what would today be called emotional blackmail.³⁶⁴ Sir Thomas Buckler Lethbridge and Alexander Baring, later Lord Ashburton and MP 1806—20, invested in back courts ironically called 'colleges'. Lethbridge evicted 13 tenants in the 1810s for not voting for his brother-in-law Henry Powell Collins.³⁶⁵ In 1818 a potential buyer for Lethbridge's property asked how many voters occupied it and in 1825 Lethbridge raised his price from £20,000 to £25,000 for 130 voters and land for 200 houses. He sold to Edward Bainbridge.³⁶⁶ Some men accepted poor housing to keep their vote, leading to more back courts, but the better-off increasingly lived outside the borough, losing their vote, which skewed the nature of the electorate. Despite their efforts it is doubtful if any individual amassed enough property to affect the result of an election. Early 19th-century candidates were backed by local business and professional men whose support may have been more important.³⁶⁷

By 1818, when Sir William Burroughs was unseated on petition, Taunton had three political factions: the blues were Tories, the buffs were Whigs and the greens were Radicals. The last two favoured electoral reform and in 1830 the buffs instigated a Taunton Loyal Political Union to further reform.³⁶⁸ The 1820 election lasted 14 days, only 631 of c. 962 voters were allowed to vote and it cost c. £25,000.³⁶⁹ Men were disqualified for being minors,

³⁶³ *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1754—1790, 1790—1820; historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820, s.v. Ben. Hammet; Taunton: accessed 10 Nov. 2020; M. McDermott, *Sir Benjamin Hammet 1736—1800* (Taunton, 2017), frontispiece, 4, 18—19, 56—66; SHC, DD/X/WLM/3.

³⁶⁴ SHC, DD/X/RON/1.

³⁶⁵ TNA, CRES/2/1156; SHC, PAM 426—7; A/AKV/1/1—8.

³⁶⁶ SHC, A/ARW/2/1; DD/SAS/C2402/22; A/AKV/1/1—8.

³⁶⁷ *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1790—1820; historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820, s.v. Taunton: accessed 10 Nov. 2020.

³⁶⁸ Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 362—3, 595; SHC, PAM 426, pp. 3, 50.

³⁶⁹ *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1820—1832; historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832, s.v. Taunton: accessed 10 Nov. 2020; Toulmin, *History of Taunton*, rev. Savage, 363—5.

Catholics or Jews, sharing rooms, having a child in the workhouse or convictions or because their houses were declared outside the borough³⁷⁰ In 1826, when drink and dinners on ‘tally tickets’ caused disturbances especially around the polling booths in the market arcades, James Savage published an election manual, kept up as late as 1841, including lists of innkeepers for beer bribery.³⁷¹

Henry Labouchere, nephew of Alexander Baring and later a local landowner, was elected in 1830 with Edward Bainbridge who defended an action for bribery by ‘treating’ the witnesses to dinners and theatre seats in London. Many townspeople supported electoral reform, demanding universal male suffrage, a secret ballot and extension of the parliamentary borough.³⁷² At a reform meeting in 1831 Sydney Smith compared the anti-reform lobby to a Mrs Partington trying to sweep back the sea.³⁷³ The Reform Act allowed registered potwallers to retain their votes for life. There were 574 in 1834, almost as many as £10 occupiers on the new franchise, declining to five by 1881. The last was Tom Lock (d. 1904) who was struck off the register after voting in 1900.³⁷⁴ Potwallers expected to be paid to vote with tea, tobacco and coal, objected to the 1842 Act against indirect bribery and in 1850 petitioned for their traditional ‘privileges’.³⁷⁵

Benjamin Disraeli failed to unseat Labouchere in 1835 having been portrayed as anti-nonconformist. Bainbridge gave up his seat for the Chiltern Hundreds in 1842 and Conservatives gained the second seat in the 1850s but Labouchere survived until entering the House of Lords as Lord Taunton in 1859. He served as President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for the Colonies and as Lord Taunton chaired the schools enquiry of the

³⁷⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.m/23/29; DD/HC/6/1/3.

³⁷¹ Ibid. T/PH/up/1; *Taunton Courier*, 2 June 1826: BNA accessed June 2021; Goldsworthy, *Recollections*, 38.

³⁷² *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1820—1832; historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832, s.v. Taunton: accessed 10 Nov. 2020; SHC, DD/SAS/C1540/1/3, 236.

³⁷³ P. Virgin, *Sydney Smith* (1994), 237—9.

³⁷⁴ *Taunton Courier* 16 May 1866, 30 Nov. 1881, 3 Feb 1904: BNA accessed 10 Nov. 2020.

³⁷⁵ SHC, PAM 426, pp. 31, 36, 41—2, 51.

1860s. He avoided the bribery scandals that engulfed his colleagues and once vowed never to set foot in Taunton again deploring its lack of electoral probity.³⁷⁶ Scurrilous literature still circulated, petitions were submitted for bribery and the elections of Arthur Mills in 1853 and Edward William Cox in 1868 were overturned.³⁷⁷ Support for a secret ballot increased and when finally introduced in 1872 Taunton was used to demonstrate its working.³⁷⁸

Conservative candidate Sir Alfred Slade opposed the secret ballot, which prevented him discovering who had not voted for him as promised, and bribed men to make false accusations against the winning candidate, the Liberal Sir Henry James.³⁷⁹ The Liberal vote waned and in 1880 Conservative Sir William Palliser, an Irish army engineer, obtained slightly more votes than Sir Henry. In 1885 the constituency was reduced to one member.³⁸⁰

A Labour society began in 1905 and in 1909 the first labour candidate stood, supported by Margaret Bondfield, Keir Hardie and Ramsey Macdonald, and secured about a third of the votes. The Taunton Labour Party was founded in 1918 and by the late 1940s had nearly 7,000 members and ward branches.³⁸¹

In 1918 Wellington MP Col. Fortescue Boles took the newly enlarged seat of Taunton with Wellington and part of Exmoor. In 1921 Liberal Arthur Boscawen won the by-election after Mrs Lloyd George visited the area but could not halt losses in the Liberal vote to Labour. From 1924 to 1934 the seat was held by Conservative Andrew Hamilton Gault.³⁸² His successor Edward Wickham in 1945 visited Buchenwald concentration camp.³⁸³ In 1945 Taunton elected its first Labour MP Victor Collins but in 1950 Winston Churchill visited and

³⁷⁶ ODNB, s.v. Henry Labouchere: accessed 12 Apr. 2018; R. E. Foster, 'Peel, Disraeli and the 1835 Taunton by-election', *PSAS*, CXXVI (1982), 111—18; SHC, PAM 426; A/EMQ/1/2/1, 3; *VCH Som.* II, 239.

³⁷⁷ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/1 (8), 160; DD/DP/19/1; PAM 427, p. 3; ODNB, s.v. Edw. Cox: accessed 12 Apr. 2018.

³⁷⁸ *Taunton Courier*, 10 Feb. 1858, 4 Mar. 1859, 6 Sep. 1865, 17 July 1872: BNA, accessed 10 Nov. 2020; SHC, A/DIF/44.

³⁷⁹ SHC, PAM 427, p. 14

³⁸⁰ *VCH Som.* II, 239; ODNB, s.v. Wm. Palliser: accessed 12 Apr. 2018.

³⁸¹ Labour History Archive, LP/LRC/20/251—2, 28/420; SHC, PAM 236; A/BMG cat.; DD/TLP cat.

³⁸² SHC, T/PH/rea (1918, 1921); PAM 236; DD/X/ADS; A/BRP/1/1—6.

³⁸³ F. Hebditch, *Som. in the Second World War* (Tiverton, 2006), p. 73.

Collins lost by a narrow margin. Despite strong Labour campaigns and a Liberal revival, the seat was held from 1956 to 1987 by Conservative Edward du Cann, Taunton's longest-serving MP since Henry Labouchere and chairman of the 1922 Committee from 1978 to 1984.³⁸⁴

The wider suffrage and enlarged constituency in 1918 increased the electorate from 3,921 in 1912 to 28,833, of whom a third were women. Turnout rose from 60 per cent in 1918 to c. 80 per cent in the 1970s before declining especially for European and local elections. Most polling in the early 21st century was carried out in school buildings or by post. The shift from Labour to Liberal among non-Conservative voters possibly reflected the change from blue to white collar employment. The seat, officially Taunton Deane from 2010, alternated between Conservatives and Liberal Democrats but was split in 2024 the urban area being renamed Taunton and Wellington. While Britain was in the European Union Taunton formed part of the South-West constituency for the European Parliament.³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ SHC, PAM 236, pp. 4, 7—9, 13—15; A/EMQ.

³⁸⁵ Ibid. T/PH/rea/1 (1918); PAM 236, pp. 4—5, 7—9, 11—15, 17; D/DC/tau.d/2/2/20 (10 Nov.); A/DQO/365/18/13.