

## SOCIAL HISTORY

### SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Until the 20th century Taunton was divided between urban and rural areas. Most medieval residents were tenants of the bishops of Winchester or the priors of Taunton. Copyholders were later regarded as customary freeholders but occasional attempts were made to enforce bond status.<sup>1</sup>

Most tax came from the borough and in 1327 the six highest taxpayers paid two thirds of its tax. In 1581 there were fewer high taxpayers, possibly due to evasion rather than a greater spread of wealth.<sup>2</sup> The wealth of Taunton's medieval merchants is reflected in their generosity to the church and community. Their monuments were lost in the destruction of the priory church or in later alterations to St Mary's.<sup>3</sup> Many used their distinctive marks as armigerous families used their coat of arms, even embroidered on gifts of vestments.<sup>4</sup> Few early houses survive but 15 Fore Street preserves an impressive great hall of 1323—4 and 18 was a large medieval remodelled with elaborate plasterwork in the early 17th century. A carved 15th-century overmantel stone was found in North Street. Early 16th-century wills indicate comfort and wealth.<sup>5</sup>

The dominant merchant families were closely interrelated and intermarried with others in Exeter, Bristol and Lyme. Wealthy widows continued their husband's business and multiple remarriages were common, probably accounting for the accumulated plate and jewellery distributed among children, stepchildren and grandchildren.<sup>6</sup> In 1570 William Chaplin had garden houses, needlework cushions, a Portuguese chair and a 'counting chest'.

<sup>1</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C795/PR/142; D/D/Cd/12 (Knowles, 1568).

<sup>2</sup> Dickinson, *Kirby's Quest*, 274; TNA, E 179/169/6, 180 [both incomplete]; A. J. Webb, *Two Tudor Subsidy Assessments*, 120.

<sup>3</sup> Below, charities, rel. hist.; SHC, DD/X/MDT/393, pp. 14—16.

<sup>4</sup> SHC, A/DAS/2 (12308); Weaver, *Som. Wills 1501—30*, 25.

<sup>5</sup> Above, intro.; TNA, PROB 11/13/242, 11/14/282.

<sup>6</sup> Ashford, 'Woollen Trade', *PSAS CLI*, 177; Wilts and Swindon HC, 2667/1/20/43a; SHC, DD/MK/14; TNA, PROB 11/11/332, 11/18/45, 11/29/31, 11/31/607, 11/39/450, 11/62/392; 11/77/366, 11/185/438.

In 1575 Alice Quick had a new second parlour, hangings and plate.<sup>7</sup> Most members of the 1627 corporation were merchants or clothiers.<sup>8</sup>

Merchants invested in land in Ireland and the West Indies in the 17th century.<sup>9</sup> Some married into local gentry families, several of whom had a town house.<sup>10</sup> Robert Henley (d. 1614), father of Andrew the first mayor, purchased two manors and lands in Somerset, Berkshire and Dorset. The largest purchases alone totalled over £15,300 and his personal estate excluding leaseholds was over £6,600. His young son-in-law James Reynolds left personal wealth of over £4,000. Andrew's son Robert bought manors in Dorset and Hampshire and in 1656 left £10,000 each to his two younger sons. Andrew, the eldest, was raised to the Baronetage.<sup>11</sup>

Seventeenth-century clothiers and shopkeepers had watches, clocks, books, cabinets, pictures, looking glasses, wainscot, carpets and cushions and a mercer in 1679 had a 'banketting house'.<sup>12</sup> Wealthy residents had family portraits, musical instruments and carriages.<sup>13</sup> By the mid 18th century even modest homes had furniture for hanging clothes and storing books.<sup>14</sup> Servants' halls and family parlours show changing attitudes to privacy. Family pride probably explains the multiple hatchments in one house. Wallpaper, chocolate mills, salad boxes, pier glasses, birdcages, game boards and china ornaments hint at individual taste.<sup>15</sup> Saving and investing shifted to public funds and undertakings although precious objects remained important given the economic uncertainty and business failures of the period.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>7</sup> TNA, PROB 11/52/319, 11/57/391.

<sup>8</sup> SHC, DD/X/HUNT/6/1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. A/CYV/1; TNA, PROB 11/62/392, 11/90/515, 11/142/707, 11/257/67, 11/303/357, 11/426/409.

<sup>10</sup> SHC, DD/WO/5/2/1—2, 35/8/5; DD/SP/300 (1768—95).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. DD/TOR/23, 73, 154, 422; TNA, PROB 11/254/317.

<sup>12</sup> SHC, DD/SP/1632/5, 1641/90, 1642/14, 1666/14, 1666/14, 1676/12, 1693/31, 1695/37; TNA, PROB 4/4111.

<sup>13</sup> TNA, PROB 11/555/325; SHC, DD/SP/1714/9, 1716/3, 47; Siraut, *Som. Wills*, 189.

<sup>14</sup> SHC, DD/SP/1742/15, 1744/24.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. DD/DP/76/2, 83/2, 43/2 (1801).

<sup>16</sup> TNA, PROB 11/1113/211, 11/1169/135, 11/1346/130, 11/1525/23, 11/1864/77.

Despite the mid 18th-century creation of the Parade, the prevalence of assembly and card rooms, reading societies and Hammet Street built for ‘genteel families out of trade’, the wealthy moved out into neighbouring parishes.<sup>17</sup> One of the last great town houses was Flook House where William Metford lived in fine style in the early 19th century, with his own boat and carriages, able to pay £100 for a horse and £50 for a piano.<sup>18</sup> By the mid 19th century Hammet Street’s houses were offices and shops. Few borough magistrates lived in town although most members of the Local Board of Health, mainly professional men, were resident.<sup>19</sup> The Crescent houses were occupied by retired tradesmen and professional families but in the 20th century like other town houses were converted to commercial use or flats.<sup>20</sup>

Households included servants, journeymen and apprentices. One former apprentice confessed in his 1677 will that he defrauded his late master but others were ill-treated especially girls.<sup>21</sup> In St Mary’s parish in 1831 there were 69 male and 478 female servants.<sup>22</sup> Commercial households remained large in the 19th century with resident assistants and servants. Even working families had a young nursemaid for the children or employed daily maids, housekeepers, charwomen and laundresses. As the wealthy moved out the number of menservants declined from 106 in 1841 to 25 by 1861 but the number of female servants increased to between 850 and 890 by the end of the century only declining to under 800 in 1911.<sup>23</sup> There were still *c.* 600 female servants and charwomen, mostly dailies, in 1939. Over 7,100 women were classed as unpaid domestics, some describing themselves as unpaid servants, including those running family businesses. There were 48 chauffeurs, including women, and many private gardeners.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>17</sup> SHC, DD/DP/97/1; Bishops Hull, Wilton, forthcoming.

<sup>18</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/17.

<sup>19</sup> *Goodman’s Dir. Taunton* (1864), 9, 13.

<sup>20</sup> *Kelly’s Dir. Taunton* (1929, 1957, 1972—3).

<sup>21</sup> TNA, PROB 11/356/385; SHC, DD/SP/1664/30; Q/SR/78/5, 86/82, 87/62, 114a/7, 138/41.

<sup>22</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.m/23/16.

<sup>23</sup> TNA, HO 107/972, 1922—3; RG 9/1617—18; RG 11/2366—8; RG 12/1875—7; RG 14/14234—45, 14249.

<sup>24</sup> SHC, D/X/WBB/837; TNA, RG 101/305/1/WOOA—WOPG.

## HOUSING

By 1595 houses were in multiple occupation by poor families and tenants in subdivided tenements were urged to be ‘neighbourlike’ in 1611.<sup>25</sup> Even a wealthy man let half his dwelling before 1712.<sup>26</sup> In 1664—5 an innkeeper paid for 23 hearths. The returns are incomplete but householders in East, Fore, High and North Streets had an average of 4 ½ hearths, elsewhere only 2.<sup>27</sup> In the mid 17th century £25 was considered too much for rebuilding a house yet in 1694 an estimate for a thatched, six-bay house with four heated rooms was £252 and for a large tiled house and outhouses with a total of 59 windows, presumably lights, £545.<sup>28</sup> In 1702 a Fore Street house sold for £730.<sup>29</sup> By the early 18th century chambers opened off a stairhead passage, a second parlour for dining replaced the hall and inns provided private dining rooms.<sup>30</sup> Some older houses survived unaltered including one in 1763 with leaded casements and a great hall chamber.<sup>31</sup>

House subdivision continued even in back courts. Some men shared a bed with up to two others in unheated garrets eating at a tripe shop. Families, especially migrants, lived in one room.<sup>32</sup> Former house entries became passages to back courts on medieval burgage plots as at 18 Fore Street or the Crown and Sceptre and Spread Eagle demolished c. 1910. By the late 19th century there were over 1,000 dwellings in back courts. Even the inspector of nuisances bought a court in 1858.<sup>33</sup> A wealthy landowner (d. 1902) concealed his ownership of court cottages from his agents.<sup>34</sup> In 1928 a local draper left his children two back courts

<sup>25</sup> SHC, DD/SP/36 (loose paper 1595), 50 (Oct. 1611, Oct. 1618).

<sup>26</sup> TNA, PROB 11/527/341.

<sup>27</sup> R. Holworthy and E. Dwelly, *I. Hearth Tax for Somerset 1664—5* (1916), 1—13; *II. Dir. Som. XVIIth century* [Hearth Tax Exemptions] 157—9, 163—5, 310—14.

<sup>28</sup> TNA, C 3/467/17 SHC, DD/DP/23/8.

<sup>29</sup> SHC, DD/DP/58/2.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. DD/SP/1716—44.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. DD/DP/75/3.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. DD/SP/423 (Morse v. Morse), 426 (Pether v. Pether); DD/SAS/C795/TN/22.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/13/1/1; DD/AY/150; D/DC/tau.d/25/14 (1692).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. DD/AY/145.

but his son-in-law paid £30 in 1937 to demolish them.<sup>35</sup> Slum owners in the 1930s included factories, charities, the Taunton and Somerset Hospital and private individuals both rich and poor.<sup>36</sup>

The Local Board of Health, and in 1879 the Borough Council, imposed housing by-laws. Some houses were demolished or converted into washhouses and toilets, but cesspit emptying and limewashing to prevent infestation proved largely unenforceable. Repair costs outstripped rents by the early 20th century and poor landlords could not afford them.<sup>37</sup> In 1900 the medical officer of health wrote ‘Now that the suburbs of the town are amply supplied with excellent artisans’ houses with gardens attached, there is no excuse for living in the close, ill-ventilated and unhealthy courts and alleys of former days’.<sup>38</sup> However, new houses were for better-off working families and were insufficient to replace the back courts, which housed skilled workers and multiple-income families besides the poor.<sup>39</sup>

In 1917 774 houses in 119 courts had neither foundations nor damp proofing and only a third of condemned houses had been vacated.<sup>40</sup> From the late 19th century most new houses had water and an outside flush toilet but few had bathrooms even in 1929 when heated public baths were provided in St James Street. Some courts had one water closet for 30 people or more.<sup>41</sup> The council built better houses but rents were higher. It could take 40 years to recover the cost of a three-bedroomed house excluding land in 1921 and demand far outstripped council capacity to build.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. DD/X/UP/1—3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/3/8/12, 4/2/3; D/DC/tau.d/36/15—21.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/3; D/B/ta/4/2/3.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/2 (1900, p. 9).

<sup>39</sup> TNA, RG 11/2366—8; RG 12/1875—7; RG 14/14234—45, 14249.

<sup>40</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/4/2/2 (1917).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/24/1/22—32, 36, 52; A/DIF/95/32.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/3/22/1, pp. 3—4, 26, 100, 105, 126; 3/22/2 (Dec 1926, Jan. 1927).

In 1891 over 1,100 dwellings had four rooms or fewer, rising to over 1,300 in 1911, many with three people per room. Two elderly people lived in back court outhouses.<sup>43</sup> Overcrowding was exacerbated as the poor took lodgers leaving one bedroom for their entire family including adult children.<sup>44</sup> In 1920 some families could only pay rent by taking lodgers or sharing with another family living in one room without water, food or rubbish storage.<sup>45</sup> In 1931 average occupancy was *c.* 5.3 per dwelling and over 1,100 people lived more than two to a room but by 1938 as slum clearance accelerated only 282 people lived in officially overcrowded dwellings.<sup>46</sup>

Surveys found up to 17 people in one house, eight houses in Duke Street sharing a toilet near the public pavement and three toilets and two taps for 16 houses in Paradise Square. Many did their washing in a pan dried it in the living room, some had a gas cooker in the cupboard under the stairs and wastewater was thrown into the communal yard or a stream. Tuberculosis and bed bugs were common. Rows of houses had often only a few feet between them, many rooms had no window and broken ones were boarded over. The council could compulsorily purchase land to rehouse people displaced by slum clearance and road schemes. Displaced elderly people had to share accommodation with strangers or live with relatives.<sup>47</sup> Rural cottagers shared wells and privies, a few had access to neither, and some workers were housed in old railway coaches or caravans until the 1940s.<sup>48</sup>

The outbreak of war halted clearance and under the Defence (General) Regulations of 1939 condemned houses could be occupied under licence and some were requisitioned until 1954. It became the usual practice to allow tenants to die or vacate slum properties before

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<sup>43</sup> TNA, RG 12/1875—7; RG 14/14234—45, 14249; Bd of Trade Report 1908, p. 465 cited in J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People* (1998), 34.

<sup>44</sup> TNA, RG 13/2276—8; RG 14/14234—45.

<sup>45</sup> SHC, A/EPF/250/4/4 (1920—5).

<sup>46</sup> *Census*, 1931; SHC, A/EPF/250/4/5 (1938, p. 22).

<sup>47</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/3/22/4, pp. 171, 203, 247—8, 267—8, 284—6; 4/2/3 (1921); D/DC/tau.d/36/15—21; A/EPF/250/4/5.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* DD/VL/2/6; D/R/ta/24/1/611; D/B/ta/3/8/12, p. 12; 3/8/13, p. 201; A/EPF/250/4/6 (1948, pp. 10—11, 1949, p. 7).

demolishing them. In 1952 179 condemned houses were still occupied, a third belonging to the council, a further 1,400 were ‘unsatisfactory’ and 259 were overcrowded.<sup>49</sup> There were complaints that people in new two-bedroom homes took in lodgers.<sup>50</sup> However, housing shortages led to squatting on former military property and single people in council housing were required to take in tenants.<sup>51</sup> Improvement grants were offered as an alternative to condemning houses and temporary homes were built, some still occupied in 2024.<sup>52</sup>

Squatting was a problem in the 1970s when unpopular pre-war houses were converted into one-bedroom flats, mainly for the elderly but by 1997 fewer than five per cent of houses were unfit, mostly rented.<sup>53</sup> In 2011 of 18,341 houses in the ancient Taunton parishes c.7,400 were rented, just over half were social housing. Most private rentals were in the town centre, the Priory area and on new estates. Average household size ranged from 1.7 in the town centre to 2.7 in Halcon.<sup>54</sup> In 2017 the Somerset Co-operative Community Land Trust based in East Reach created small affordable flats.<sup>55</sup>

## MIGRATION

Guy de Taunton, steward to Eleanor of Provence, John de Taunton, abbot of Glastonbury in the 1270s, Roger de Taunton, Bristol bell-founder c. 1280 and many others indicate emigration but at the same period Fraunc, de Bristol, le Ireys and Cornewalys surnames indicate inward migration.<sup>56</sup> By the early 14th century the Polruel family were well-established and most immigrants came from the west.<sup>57</sup> In 1579 a Taunton merchant left

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/3/8/12; 3/22/5, 8; 4/2/3; D/DC/tau.d/36/15—21.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. A/DVY/1.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/6; D/B/ta/3/22/5, 8; 4/22/1.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/7 (1957, pp. 8—9).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. A/ABN/2/18; D/DC/tau.d/2/2/7 (16 Jan., 10 Apr. 1978); D/DC/tau.d/2/2/25 (June).

<sup>54</sup> *Census*, 2011.

<sup>55</sup> SHC, A/DQO/404/11/23—4.

<sup>56</sup> TNA, SC 1/8/105; SC 8/343/16162; E 101/99/40, Dorset HC, DC/BTB/L1; Bristol Archives, P/AS/D/PH A 2; Landon, *Som. Pleas*, 1272—9, 146; *Som. Pleas*, 1280, 84; SHC, T/PH/win 1285—6, 1288—9, 1325—6.

<sup>57</sup> Dickinson, *Kirby's Quest*, 274; TNA, E 179/169/6; SHC, T/PH/win 1348—9.

money for a school and the poor in Colyton, Devon, presumably his birthplace.<sup>58</sup> Cardigan, Welsh, Pryst, Rice and Apmerike surnames indicate Welsh origins, an early 16th-century goldsmith could read Welsh and the alias Welshman occurred in the 1640s.<sup>59</sup>

Flemish weavers reputedly settled in the town in the 1330s, Breton residents included a 14th-century weaver and possibly the mercantile Leonard family.<sup>60</sup> John Lombard was resident in 1332 and John ‘Portyngale’ was killed in Taunton in 1394.<sup>61</sup> Men from Brabant and Holland resided in 1436 and in 1444 11 Normans were among 26 alien servants and craftsmen, the rest were French, ‘Dutch’,<sup>62</sup> Bretons and Chanel Islanders. A similar mix of nationalities was recorded in the 1520s.<sup>63</sup> Alien goldsmiths probably included Theodoric Tybus in 1475, John Garret c. 1505 and Peter Garret in 1581.<sup>64</sup> French protestants including the Fontaine family were in Taunton from the 1690s and a Swiss householder was barred from voting c. 1714.<sup>65</sup>

Over 1,000 settlement certificates brought by migrants between the 1650s and 1770s survive, mostly from Somerset, Devon, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Wales, London, Kent and northern England. In the early 1740s there were vagrants from Ireland and Scotland.<sup>66</sup> A native American became a bandsman with the Somerset militia c. 1800 and two men born in Gibraltar were presumably sons of sailors or soldiers.<sup>67</sup> In the later 19th century professional men attracted apprentices from the surrounding counties and south Wales.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Siraut, *Som. Wills*, 260.

<sup>59</sup> TNA, CP 40/570, image 1233d; 692, image 1423 at [waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40](http://waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40) accessed May 2021; E 326/3264; C 8/118/68; *L&P Hen. VIII*, IV (3), p. 1830; SHC, DD/SP/71 passim.

<sup>60</sup> *VCH Som.* II, 407, 420; TNA, C 1/108/42; C 1/1507/9; C 142/132/6.

<sup>61</sup> TNA, E 179/169/6; *Cal. Pat.* 1391—6, 687.

<sup>62</sup> Probably German.

<sup>63</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1429—36, 565; TNA, E 179/169, cited in [englandsimmigrants.com](http://englandsimmigrants.com): accessed 19 March 2015; E 179/169/154 [1], 180.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, CP 40/853, image 58: [www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40](http://www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40) accessed May 2021; SHC, D/D/Cd/4; DD/MK/9; Webb, *Tudor Subsidies*, 120; TNA C 78/42/4.

<sup>65</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C416/29; DD/SAS/C795/TN/159/4.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* D/P/tau.m/13/3/1—9; D/P/tau.ja/13/3/1; DD/SAS/C795/TN/57; DD/SAS/C238/1—2; Q/SR 311/38, 45; 314/245—6.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* D/P/tau.m/13/3/5.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* DD/DP/52/2, 69/1.



People left in the 18th century for Bristol, Exeter, Coventry and London and two men settled at Kimbolton, Hunts.<sup>69</sup> Migrants to London included Sir Benjamin Hammet MP and Sir Frederick Rowland an errand boy who became Lord Mayor in 1949.<sup>70</sup> The railway increased migration and in 1881 2,346 Londoners and 817 residents in south Wales were Taunton-born. Small numbers migrated to most areas including the Channel Islands. The number of Taunton-born people living elsewhere in the United Kingdom, excluding Ireland, doubled between 1851 and 1911 when only 13 per cent of Taunton-born British residents lived in the town, many of whom were young children.<sup>71</sup>

Foreign settlers in the 19th century were mainly Italians and Germans.<sup>72</sup> In 1851 nearly half of Taunton's population had been born there but that fell to under 20 per cent by 1911.<sup>73</sup> Polish, Welsh, Caledonian, Northern Counties and Anglo-Danish societies *c.* 1950 reflect inward migration.<sup>74</sup> Between 1915 and 1949 at least 33 people were formally naturalised from Eastern Europe and the Americas and later Poles, Italians and people from Latvia, Finland, Egypt and China.<sup>75</sup> In 1972 the council offered to house six Ugandan refugee families.<sup>76</sup> In the late 20th century many migrants came from Kerala in India, the Philippines and Eastern Europe and later from Nigeria. By 2011 almost 10 per cent of the population in the ancient parishes was foreign born. Refugees from Syria and Ukraine arrived in the late 2010s and early 2020s.<sup>77</sup>

### Overseas migration

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/13/3/3; DD/SAS/C112/20/21; Hunts. Archives, HP52/13/2/3, 23.

<sup>70</sup> Below, parl. rep.; SHC, A/CDE cat.

<sup>71</sup> TNA, census schedules 1851—1911; RG 12/1877.

<sup>72</sup> SHC, DD/X/WEA/5; TNA, PROB 11/1660/188; HO 107/972, 1923; RG 10/2370—2; RG 11/2366—8.

<sup>73</sup> TNA, census schedules 1851, 1911.

<sup>74</sup> SHC, A/EOB/1 (May 1948); A/CQJ; DD/TBL/73.

<sup>75</sup> TNA, HO 144, 334, 409/23—31, *passim*.

<sup>76</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/3/22/11, p. 260.

<sup>77</sup> *Census*, 2011.

In the early 17th century Taunton adventurers in Ireland, apparently sponsored by the corporation and shareholders, received 1,398 a. in county Westmeath. The Irish rebelled against them, many returned in the early 1640s and the allotment had been sold by 1664.<sup>78</sup> Before 1698 40 clothworkers and two soap boilers reputedly migrated to Ireland, at least eight with their families.<sup>79</sup>

Thomas Trowbridge the younger took his family to New England c. 1636 and three sons stayed there. Seven men settled in Boston, Dorchester and Salem, Massachusetts.<sup>80</sup> Taunton, Mass. was founded in 1637—8 by six Taunton men and others. After 1856 a close relationship developed between the two towns.<sup>81</sup> Male and female servants and journeymen bound themselves to serve in Virginia and Barbados in the 1650s and 22 rebels were transported to Barbados in 1685 although one died at sea.<sup>82</sup> Emigration to America including Florida continued although some emigrants returned.<sup>83</sup> Merchant Nathaniel Webb had slave plantations in Monserrat and St Kitts in 1739, John Bowdidge Webb lived in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1767 and in 1771 Francis Treble of Kingston had a plantation and 59 slaves, some hired out, and probably several children by women on his estate.<sup>84</sup> In 1842 Alfred Bult Mullett emigrated to Ohio where he designed public buildings and John Goodland became a Wisconsin state judge in 1891.<sup>85</sup>

Men were transported to Australia in the early 19th century leaving their families behind but one woman eventually followed her husband to Botany Bay, settling there with

<sup>78</sup> *HMC 9th Report* App. p. 149b; TNA, PROB 11/213/3, 11/253/491, 11/303/357; SHC, DD/SP/367; A. J. Webb and S. Berry, *Som. Loyalties on the Eve of the Civil War* (Taunton, 2022), 123—6.

<sup>79</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C416/29.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* DD/TRANS/1/74a; D/P/wilt/9/1/1; C. E. Banks, *Topographical Dict. of Emigrants to New England 1620—50* (Baltimore, USA, 1976), 145; C. W. Trowbridge, *Trowbridge Family Hist.* (Wantage, 1991), 50—1.

<sup>81</sup> H. J. Wickenden, *Emigration from Taunton and District to New England* (Taunton, 1931), 8, 30, 32—3, 36; SHC, D/N/tau.pm/6/10[2]; D/B/ta/3/13/13, p. 19.

<sup>82</sup> P. W. Coldham, *The Complete Book of Emigrants 1661—99* (Baltimore, USA, 1990), 273, 275, 279, 285, 301, 316, 318, 331, 339, 351, 555—6.

<sup>83</sup> *Dict. American Biog.* Harry Toulmin: accessed 5 Oct. 2022; C. Johnson, *British West Florida 1763—83* (New Haven, USA, 1943), 28; SHC, DD/X/WOH/1; D/P/tau.m/13/10/2; TNA, RG 12/1877.

<sup>84</sup> SHC, D/N/tau.mst/1/1/2—3; DD/X/FRC/8; TNA, PROB 11/708/50.

<sup>85</sup> VCH Office, TS. 'Alfred Bult Mullett 1834—90'; SHC, D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 17, 1943—5 (March 1944).

her sons.<sup>86</sup> Voluntary emigrants followed including Wesleyan missionaries like W. A. Quick in 1850, later governor of Melbourne Wesleyan College.<sup>87</sup> However, only six people and two infants used the assisted passage scheme between 1839 and 1854.<sup>88</sup>

A Taunton surgeon worked at Madras hospital before 1811.<sup>89</sup> Louisa Parsons and Isabella White went to India in 1855 but were massacred in the Bibighar at Cawnpore in 1857.<sup>90</sup> In 1881 16 Taunton families had a member born in India.<sup>91</sup> Many tradesmen and professionals emigrated to America, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, especially Assiniboia, and South Africa providing work for three emigration agents in 1864.<sup>92</sup> Silver Street Baptist church paid for two chapels in Canada in 1906 because members had emigrated there. They sent women missionaries to China c. 1900 two of whom settled.<sup>93</sup> In 1914 Chapmans had an overseas removal service to Canada, Ceylon, China, Jamaica, New Zealand and South Africa.<sup>94</sup> There are Tauntons in USA, Canada, Australia and Sri Lanka.

## EDUCATION

In the Middle Ages the priory taught local boys, later the grammar school educated those from better-off families but there was little provision for the poor or girls. In 1286 Walter de Tolre was master of the schools at Taunton, probably those which educated the clerk of Launceston castle and were in existence c. 1293. Between 1393 and 1530 150 Taunton boys were educated at Winchester School probably due to the Winchester see's ownership of the

<sup>86</sup> TNA, HO 17/72/103; SHC, D/P/tau.m 9/1/5, 9; 13/2/256.

<sup>87</sup> SHC, A/DVZ/1; DD/TBL/42/9/4 (*Taunton Mail* 12 May 1897, p. 6); DD/X/BNE/1; DD/DP/60/1; DD/CWC/ta/unlisted box 5; D/N/tau.n/3/2/1.

<sup>88</sup> F. Chuk, *The Somerset Years* (Ballarat, Victoria, Australia, 1987), 76, 95, 116, 265.

<sup>89</sup> TNA, PROB 11/1525/23.

<sup>90</sup> A. Blunt, 'Embodying war: British women and domestic defilement in the Indian 'Mutiny'; 1857—8', *Jnl Hist. Geog.* 26.3 (2000), 411—12; TNA, MSS EUR B344; SHC, DD/DP/69/2.

<sup>91</sup> TNA, RG 11/2366—8.

<sup>92</sup> SHC, D/N/tau.n/3/2/1; Q/AGW/1/1; A/EDJ/2/3; monumental inscriptions, St James' church; Devon HC, 4310 M/F/1; Lillford, 'Biog. Dict. Som. Architects and Surveyors', 460; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 85; SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/2 (*Taunton Mail* 23 Jan. 1895, p. 4).

<sup>93</sup> SHC, DD/X/WBB/585.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. DD/X/SOM/53.

manor.<sup>95</sup> The large number of Taunton ordinands in the later 15th century indicates access to education.<sup>96</sup> By the early 16th century the priory had a choir school and in 1538 paid a cantor £5 with house, fuel and gown to teach boys to sing.<sup>97</sup> The same year John Bytford was to instruct novices and others in grammar and literature.<sup>98</sup> After 1522 boys could attend the grammar school in Bishops Hull parish but for long periods that school was closed.<sup>99</sup> In 1539 it was said more than 200 boys under 14 in St James' parish alone needed teaching.<sup>100</sup>

In 1606 there were many unlicensed teachers but by the 1660s four men were licensed to teach English, reading, writing, cyphering and arithmetic.<sup>101</sup> John Morse kept a writing school c.1660—90, Mistress Musgrave and Sarah Langham taught at least 40 girls in 1685 and there was a schoolroom in Paul Street in 1695.<sup>102</sup> In 1635 Robert Gray provided a schoolroom at his almshouse for ten poor children. In the late 17th century the hospital children, five boys and five girls, had male and female teachers who also took paying pupils. In the early 19th century ten children were educated free of charge but provided their own books. The school apparently ceased in the mid 19th century.<sup>103</sup> In 1768 the Market House Act provided for market profits to be spent on a master to teach poor children but no profits accrued.<sup>104</sup>

In 1818 several small schools, often run by poor widows, educated children at their parents' expense.<sup>105</sup> In 1838 church schools were said to educate c. 700 children and dissenting schools c. 485.<sup>106</sup> William Chorley, a former militia lieutenant, had a National

<sup>95</sup> *Cat. Ancient Deeds*, I, B172; N. Orme, *Education in the West of England* (Exeter, 1976), 4, 105.

<sup>96</sup> R.W. Dunning, *Bath and Wells Ordination, 1465—1526*, passim; TNA, E 134/15Eliz/Hil5.

<sup>97</sup> Orme, *Educ. W. of Eng.*, 212.

<sup>98</sup> T. Hugo, 'Taunton Priory' *PSAS* IX (1859), 56.

<sup>99</sup> For the grammar, castle and Tangier schools see Bishops Hull, forthcoming.

<sup>100</sup> TNA, E 134/15Eliz/Hil5.

<sup>101</sup> SHC, D/D/Ca/151; D/D/Bs/39, 41—2; D/D/Vc/41.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* Q/SR/10/16; DD/SP/423 (Morse v. Morse); DD/SP/418 (1695).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* A/BIS/1/1; DD/SP/418 (1692), 419 (back of DD volume); *5th Rep Com. Char.* 522—8; TNA, HO 107/1922.

<sup>104</sup> SHC, D/B/ch/7/2/2.

<sup>105</sup> *Educ. of Poor Digest* (1819), 796; SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/5.

<sup>106</sup> SHC, DD/S/AM/13, p. 20

School in East Reach, which moved to a new building in Holway Lane in 1819. Called the Madras school from its system of education, in 1833 it taught 86 children, had a Sunday school and a lending library. It was given up in 1835 and the premises were used by the new St Mary's school. In 1833 a school in St Mary's parish taught 17 boys, another in St James' parish 40 boys and 27 girls and one begun in 1831 taught 11 boys, all at their parents' expense.<sup>107</sup> In 1833 Sir Robert Seppings gave nearly £100 to support a Taunton School of Industry, presumably for boys, which closed in 1856.<sup>108</sup>

The Revd Frederick Smith built schools in 1846 and others enlarged their schools to avert a school board.<sup>109</sup> In 1871 dame schools had fewer than 200 pupils whereas eight church schools taught 668 boys and 461 girls. In 1873 an estimated 1,350 children were not at school. Even after education became compulsory in 1881 and free in 1891 many children especially girls attended part-time and left prematurely. In 1909 part-time schooling was common and such children were often described as dirty, backward and unpunctual.<sup>110</sup>

Taunton church schools established a joint council in 1894.<sup>111</sup> A government official noted in 1898 that 'Taunton is determined to keep out a school board' and therefore had an 'unusual number of obsolete and defective schools crowded into a small area'. However, by 1901 some churches were reluctant to support voluntary schools.<sup>112</sup> The introduction of a church school rate under the 1902 Act created resentment and probably led to the acceptance of council schools from 1907. Taunton Borough Council was the local education authority for elementary education from 1903 until 1945 when its schools were transferred to Somerset

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<sup>107</sup> *Educ. of Poor Digest* (1819), 796; *Royal Com. on employment of children in factories* (1833), 76; SHC, DD/TBL/49; Toulmin, *His. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 594; *Educ. Enq. Abstract* (1835), 824; J. B. B. Clarke, *Church educ. among the poor* (1846), 69.

<sup>108</sup> SHC, D/H/ta/1/1/2 (26 Oct. 1857).

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* A/AUS, school rep. 1871.

<sup>110</sup> *Returns of Civil Parishes ...under the Education Act* (1871), 342—3; Revd F. J. Smith, *A paper on rate-supported schools* (Taunton, 1873), 6—7; TNA, RG 14/14234—6; ED 2/391/2; ED 21/15537; SHC, D/P/tau.m/18/2/6.

<sup>111</sup> SHC, A/ARQ/1/1.

<sup>112</sup> TNA, ED 21/15538; Revd L. Palmer, *The Taunton Day School Crisis* (1901), 10—14.

County Council, already responsible for secondary education.<sup>113</sup> Under the 1944 Act the county planned to replace town centre schools and provide education from the age of two but in 1952 the county planned to close all nursery schools.<sup>114</sup>

Parliamentary figures for ten grant-aided elementary schools show that average attendance increased from 1,947 in 1889 to 3,089 by 1907.<sup>115</sup> In 1905 pupil numbers varied from 68 at Original Infants to 689 at St Andrew's and the cost per pupil from £1 15s. at St James' school to over £3 3s. at St George's. All schools made a loss. Elementary schools taught geography, history, needlework, drawing, elementary and natural science. Some children had swimming lessons and from 1904 it was thought desirable that both boys and girls should learn to knit and sew and study art.<sup>116</sup> By 1920 only 322 children under 5 were in borough schools.<sup>117</sup> In 1911 there were 218 resident teachers, over three quarters of whom were women, rising to 244 by 1939.<sup>118</sup>

During the First World War Belgian refugee children were educated at Huish's and Bishop Fox's and evacuees at North Town.<sup>119</sup> In the Second World War most schools received evacuees and evacuated Coborn, Clapham Boys and Blue Coat schools used Bishop Fox's premises in Staplegrove Road.<sup>120</sup> Wellington Way School from Bow with up to 120 children used Weir Lodge, St Andrews Hall, Albemarle and North Town schools until July 1944. Some classes were held outside and holidays were reduced.<sup>121</sup>

In 1917 the borough education committee proposed a school kitchen but the North Town canteen closed before 1924.<sup>122</sup> Renewed interest in domestic and manual subjects,

<sup>113</sup> SHC, A/DSG/1; D/B/ta/4/9/1 (1945).

<sup>114</sup> Som. County Council, *New Schools for Old* (c. 1945), 35—6; SHC, C/E/4/311/7 (29 Jan 1949, 25 Mar. 1950, 12 and 19 June 1952).

<sup>115</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.m/18/2/6, 18/7/1; D/N/tau.mst/5/2/26.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. A/DSG/1; C/E/1/162; C/E/4/367/2, loose report.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/3/18/18, p. 72.

<sup>118</sup> TNA, RG 14/14234—45, 14249; RG 101/305/1/WOOA—WOPG.

<sup>119</sup> SHC, A/AHO 1; A/AYO 1/1.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. A/APN 2/6, p. 37; A/BFW 1/5 (Sep. 1939); A/AYO 3/1 (1939).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/223/1.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/3/18/17; C/E/4/311/13, p. 197; A/AUS, p. 11; A/EPF/250/4/8/2—4, 6.

before 1917 only taught at Bishop Fox's and North Town, led to the establishment in the 1920s of a centre at 92 Staplegrove Road, which by the 1940s held adult classes. Used as a Homecraft school in 1972 it closed shortly afterwards and was demolished.<sup>123</sup> In 1941 the borough feeding committee estimated that 10,610 children needed meals and in 1942 new central kitchens at Priory school provided hot meals for schoolchildren whose parents could pay the 4d. cost, although a few received them free. By 1944 1,650 meals were supplied daily, including to independent schools, and new central kitchens were built near Flook House and on South Street.<sup>124</sup> Later schools built their own kitchens so the central kitchens were demolished in the later 1960s.<sup>125</sup> Schools in poorer areas provided breakfast in the early 21st century.<sup>126</sup>

Most secondary schools had c. 12—15 a. but in 1964 Wellsprings was the only primary school with playing fields. Other schools used public recreation grounds.<sup>127</sup> Charities for all schools included the Wyndham Trusts from the 1920s to 2009, which provided lectures, books and outings.<sup>128</sup> The later 20th century saw the development of nursery schools, special schools, comprehensive secondary education, broader tertiary education and international departments at public schools. In the early 21st century academies reduced local authority control. New schools were built as the town expanded further into neighbouring parishes.

### Sunday schools

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/13/3/1, p. 395; C/E/4/311/13, pp. 117, 186; Goodman's *Dir. Taunton* (1928, 1939); SHC, A/EPF/211/1; 250/4/8/6, p. 6; *Kelly's Trade Dir. of Taunton* (1972—3).

<sup>124</sup> SHC, C/CD/1/1/29; D/B/ta/3/18/20; 4/9/1 (1942); C/E/4/367/3, p. 216; C/WS/1/4, p. 724; A/CBG/26.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/327/1, p. 73; D/P/tau.ja/18/7/3 (1964—5); C/CPHH/169 (1967), p. 16.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/409/171, 175.

<sup>127</sup> *Som. Co. Devt Plan; Taunton* (1964), 26—7.

<sup>128</sup> SHC, DD/X/WLT.t/1—5.

Joseph Alleine reputedly started a Sunday school at St Mary's church in the mid 17th century.<sup>129</sup> A Methodist founded a Sunday school for the poor in North Town in the later 18th century. The Society for the Institution of Sunday Schools started a school in March 1788 for 200 children.<sup>130</sup> A Taunton Sunday School Union was founded by Thomas Thomson in the early 19th century. By 1833 church and chapel Sunday schools taught 1,145 children compared with 454 in their day schools, partly because Sunday schools were free. They were supported by subscriptions and collections, were well attended across morning and afternoon sessions and most had lending libraries.<sup>131</sup> In 1880 2,012 children and 84 teachers from the Anglican Sunday schools took part in an anniversary procession.<sup>132</sup> Nine Sunday schools alone had 3,279 pupils c.1903.<sup>133</sup>

By 1818 St Mary's taught 60 poor children and in 1838 after the day school opened c. 80 of 240 children only came on Sundays.<sup>134</sup> In 1846 Anglican Sunday schools at Holy Trinity, St James and Rowbarton taught 443 children.<sup>135</sup> St Andrew's Sunday school was one of the largest and in 1901 had 60 teachers and 50 classes.<sup>136</sup> St Mary's mission in St George's Place had at least 93 children in its Sunday school in 1912.<sup>137</sup>

In 1802 the Wesleyans began a Sunday school, by 1839 the older children had a writing class on Tuesday evenings and access to a circulating library and there were 410 children on the books with 33 teachers in 1880—1.<sup>138</sup> In 1833 a second Sunday school in East Reach had c. 80 children and moved to Victoria Methodist chapel in 1840. By 1931 it had 233 children and 32 teachers.<sup>139</sup> In 1815 a Baptist Sunday school was started at Silver

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. A/DIF/95/35.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. A/CPT/15/5, pp. 380—1; D/N/tmc/7a/23, p. 14; Jeboult, *Popular Hist. W. Som*, 188.

<sup>131</sup> *Educ. Enq. Abstract* (1835), 824; *Taunton of Today* (1896), 34—44; SHC, A/DIF/79/2, p. 3.

<sup>132</sup> SHC, D/N/tmc/5/3/5.

<sup>133</sup> *Taunton and West Som. Annual* 1904, 105—13.

<sup>134</sup> *Educ. of Poor Digest* (1819), 796; SHC, D/P/tau.m/18/2/1; DD/S/AM/13, p. 20.

<sup>135</sup> *Nat. Soc., Schs Inquiry*, 1846—7 (1849), 16—17.

<sup>136</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.a 18/7/1.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/2/1/33 (1912).

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. A/DIF/95/35; D/N/tmc/5/3/5—6, 7/3/4, 7a/23, p.16.

<sup>139</sup> TNA, HO 129/315/3/4/13; SHC, D/N/tmc/5/3/1, p. 6, 7a/23, p. 15.



Street and by 1880 20 rooms accommodated 430.<sup>140</sup> In 1905 both Silver Street and Albemarle Baptist schools trained teachers.<sup>141</sup> In 1840 a school was added to Paul Street Congregational chapel, which in 1920 taught over 200 children.<sup>142</sup> In 1843—5 a Sunday school was built behind North Street Congregational church for 440 children and adults and in 1884 had 540 pupils including elderly people learning to read and write. By 1893 over 10,000 had reputedly been through the school, which had a first-floor library.<sup>143</sup>

Ebenezer Bible Christian Sunday school, probably started in 1844, had 120 children by 1851.<sup>144</sup> Rebuilt in 1897, it hosted a women's bible class between 1905 and 1914 but closed in 1935.<sup>145</sup> Mary Street Sunday school was revived in the 1880s, taught up to 170 children and adults and had a large library.<sup>146</sup> The Plymouth Brethren Sunday school taught 40 in 1851 but claimed 1,000 pupils in 50 classes in the 1890s. It was rebuilt after a fire in 1905 with 10 classrooms but closed in the 1960s and was demolished in the 1990s.<sup>147</sup> Schoolrooms were added to Rowbarton Congregational chapel in 1898 and Rowbarton Methodist church in 1909.<sup>148</sup>

### Charity schools

General Walter Cliffe (d. 1816) and his wife Harriet (d. 1838) endowed a girls' charity school in 1809 in Middle Street. Another was started in the castle for 80 boys recommended by subscribers who could take them as apprentices. They were taught reading only, other lessons were considered inappropriate for their social status, and received clothes to attend two Sunday services. In 1810 both schools were in Middle Street but the boys' school took three

<sup>140</sup> SHC, D/N/tau.b/4/2/6, p. 102; TNA, IR 58/82651 (2015).

<sup>141</sup> SHC, A/DSG/1.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/2/3/1, 5/3/1, p. 42; TNA, IR 58/823635 (441).

<sup>143</sup> SHC, D/N/tau.n/3/2/1; DD/TBL/49; A/DIF/79/2: chapel centenary; TNA, IR 58/82632 (153).

<sup>144</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 14 Feb. 1844; BNA accessed 29 July 2019; TNA, HO 129/315/4/1/3.

<sup>145</sup> SHC, DD/X/HYA/5 (1881); D/N/mca/4/3/1; D/N/tmc/3/4/1 (1917, 1934—5), 5/3/3.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. D/N/tau.mst/3/3/3, 4/1/1—5, 4/2/4, 5/2/29.

<sup>147</sup> TNA, HO 129/315/4/1/4; IR 58/82627 (3480); SHC, D/N/tsmc/7/2/2; A/BVO/2.

<sup>148</sup> SHC, D/N/tau.rc 7/2/1; D/N/tmc/7/2/1a, pp. 2—3, 15.

quarters of the funds raised. Parents of well-behaved boys received 7s. when their sons left school.<sup>149</sup> In 1818 140 children received a ‘plain education’ and annual clothing from public subscriptions. The boys school closed in the 1830s but 43 girls learnt reading, needlework and housewifery in 1833. The school moved to Upper High Street and closed c. 1852.<sup>150</sup> St Mary’s schools were regarded as successors and inherited the Cliffe gift.<sup>151</sup> A charity school south of East Street in 1834 was possibly Gray’s. Ragged schools recorded between 1847 and 1849 closed for lack of funds.<sup>152</sup>

### St George’s Roman Catholic school

From January 1812 the South Road convent taught poor Catholic girls reading, writing, accounts and religion in the ‘poor room’ below the chapel.<sup>153</sup> In 1833 the church supported 30 girls and after a period of closure the school reopened c. 1842. By 1858 a poor school with c. 40 boys occupied a two-roomed building in St George’s Place.<sup>154</sup> In 1870 schools for 100 boys and 100 girls was built at The Mount.<sup>155</sup> An infant school was formed c. 1900 in a cloakroom but the junior schools were combined in 1908 and the infants used two rooms downstairs. There were 162 pupils by 1928 and in 1955 the parish hall was used as a classroom and dining room.<sup>156</sup> Despite the removal of senior pupils in 1958 the school remained overcrowded with 161 children in 1964.<sup>157</sup> In 1967 the church bought adjoining Nunsfield and a new school designed by Shirley-Smith and Gibson opened in 1968 with a gymnasium and indoor swimming pool, replaced in the early 21st century. The old two-storey

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. DD/TBL/49; D/P/wilt/2/1/6 (1816, 1838); D/P/tau.m/17/1.

<sup>150</sup> *Educ. of Poor Digest* (1819), 796; SHC, D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1, 5; DD/TBL/49; *Educ. Enq. Abstract* (1835), 824; Revd J. Cottle, *The First Pastoral Letter addressed to the parishioners of St Mary Magdalene, Taunton* (Taunton, 1841), 19; *Pigot & Co. Dir.* (1842).

<sup>151</sup> Kelly’s *Dir. Som.* (1883).

<sup>152</sup> SHC, DD/CH/102/1 (1834); *Taunton Courier*, 17 Jul. 1847; 30 May 1849; BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

<sup>153</sup> R. Trappes-Lomax, *The English Franciscan Nuns, 1619—1821* (1922), 108—9.

<sup>154</sup> *Educ. Enq. Abstract* (1835), 824; Bristol RO 35721/addnl 12, visitation returns 1858—9; Morris & Co. *Dir. Som.* (1872).

<sup>155</sup> SHC, A/DBL/135/1; D/RC/ta.g/2/5/1, loose tender 1870.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. A/BMG/5/1; C/E/4/64; TNA, ED 21/15537; ED 161/11460.

<sup>157</sup> SHC, C/E/6/20 (8 Jan. 1959); *Som. Co. Devt Plan; Taunton* (1964), 26.

school was eventually converted into dwellings in 2016—17.<sup>158</sup> The school had 273 children by 1975 and 220, many from ethnic minorities, in 2017.<sup>159</sup> From 2014 the grounds housed a pre-school with 35 children.<sup>160</sup>

### Original Infants school

William Davis started the Congregational or British Infant school, called Original Infants, in the 1820s and in 1828 built a three-room school for 200 children south of Mary Street and renovated a cottage for a teacher. It opened with 99 pupils.<sup>161</sup> In the 1860s older children attended and in 1869 instruction was poor, not helped by frequent changes of teacher but numbers rose to 207 by 1873.<sup>162</sup> Staff retention remained a problem although inspectors' reports improved. From 1908 the school was run by the borough council.<sup>163</sup> Although numbers fell the arrival of Memorial infants resulted in 156 children in 1908.<sup>164</sup>

Poverty meant that teachers notified the authorities of malnourished children, obtained gifts of food, clothing and toys for their pupils and made clothes for them in winter. The school took pupils from families at the Barracks and during the war the children grew vegetables and raised money for soldiers.<sup>165</sup> The children, aged 3 to 7, suffered from influenza in 1918 and measles in 1919. Slum clearance reduced numbers to 46 by 1933 when children were allowed to stay until they were 9.<sup>166</sup> In 1967 nearly half the children transferred to Parkfield School but military children continued to attend although some left for Germany and a few children emigrated to Australia.<sup>167</sup> In 1973 there were 87 infants with 29 waiting

<sup>158</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/193/11016; DD/FIV/1/107; A/DBL/135/1 (1980); Orbach, S. & W. Som., 814.

<sup>159</sup> SHC, C/E/4/64; reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/123851: accessed 27 Aug. 2019.

<sup>160</sup> reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/16/EY474983: accessed 27 Aug. 2019.

<sup>161</sup> SHC, DD/HC/9/32; A/AUS, TS history by A. Trott; A/DBC 1/1; 5; DD/CH/84/1; TNA, ED 2/391/2.

<sup>162</sup> TNA, ED 2/391/2; SHC, C/E/4/367/1, pp. 74, 93, 153.

<sup>163</sup> SHC, A/AUS [p. 6]; C/E/4/367/2, p. 66; 4/293/1.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. A/DBC 4/1; C/E/4/367/1, pp. 253—4, 460; D/P/tau.m 18/2/6; D/N/tau.mst/5/2/26.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/367/2, pp. 209, 223, 237, 242, 256, 260—1, 270; C/E/4/367/3, pp. 21.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. A/AUS; A/DBC 1/1.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/367/4, pp. 24, 30, 4/367/5.

but the school closed in 1981.<sup>168</sup> Somerset County Council used it as a centre for disabled adults but in 2000 it was sold.<sup>169</sup> The stone entrance gate with the name and date survives but was moved away from the street in the late 1950s.<sup>170</sup>

### St James' school

This school designed by Richard Carver was built in 1828 north-west of the church and opened in 1829 as the Taunton Church of England Infant School. It taught 110 children for six hours a day in 1833 supported by subscriptions and school pence and paid the master £110 p.a.<sup>171</sup> In the 1840s local clergy raised funds, the headmaster collected subscriptions on commission, and the site of the former church house was given for a playground. By 1859 older children attended and in 1861 it was renamed the Taunton Church of England School. By 1868 an evening school was held and the building was extended despite financial difficulties.<sup>172</sup> In 1889 average attendance was 120 children and 107 infants and the building was extended again in 1898—9. On three evenings a week senior boys used a room in St James Street to learn arithmetic, drill, wood carving and drawing.<sup>173</sup>

In 1915 there were 184 children and 123 infants rising to 220 juniors and 144 infants c. 1928.<sup>174</sup> Numbers gradually fell to 26 infants and 66 juniors in 1964 with the loss of population but rose again to 164 in 1975. The juniors transferred to Priory school, renamed Archbishop Cranmer voluntary controlled church school in 1977. Priory infants transferred to St James but in 1978 it closed completely. In 1981 the original building became a church hall but the rest was demolished for a surgery.<sup>175</sup>

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/367/6 (reports 1973—1981).

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. A/DBC 1/2, 2/1, 3/2, 4/3, 8.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/367/6 (1956—8).

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/18/7/1; *Educ. Enq. Abstract* (1835), 824.

<sup>172</sup> Clarke, *Church educ.*, 70; SHC, D/P/tau.ja/18/7/1; DD/EDS/1/130.

<sup>173</sup> TNA, ED 2/391/1; ED 21/15538; SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/6 (*Taunton Mail*, 22 March 1899, p. 5); D/P/tau.ja/2/8/1.

<sup>174</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.ja/18/7/2, 18/3/1; A/BEZ 1/1; A/BMG/5/1.

<sup>175</sup> *Som. Co. Devt Plan; Taunton* (1964), 26; SHC, C/E/4/64; D/P/tau.ja/18/7/3—4, 18/13/1.

### St Mary's or Central school

St Mary's school opened in January 1836 in the closed National school, Holway Lane for 140 children over 7 on weekdays and Sundays for up to 2d. a week but later that year moved to Upper High Street.<sup>176</sup> The parish acquired land in Church Square abutting its workhouse and Richard Carver designed National schools for 400 poor boys and girls from Taunton and Wilton.<sup>177</sup> The boys' schoolroom had a 12-light window flanked by entrance doors and the gable was surmounted by a bell turret, the girls' room lay behind and the master's house on the west, the whole in square-headed Tudor style.<sup>178</sup> In January 1837 the children moved in but there were financial difficulties.<sup>179</sup>

In the 1850s the large room at the former workhouse became an infant classroom.<sup>180</sup> The school was managed by the clergy and nine lay subscribers and a ladies committee visited the girls and infants. The trustees acquired the workhouse with vestry room and cottages behind in 1862 and demolished it despite objections for a new school.<sup>181</sup> In 1866 Henry Davis remodelled the old building as a three-roomed boys' school with a playground replacing the former girls' school and built an extension housing girls' and infants' schools over two floors to the designs of Benjamin Ferrey.<sup>182</sup> The new four-gabled front had a high-arched window comprising three roundels over three lights in the large classroom, an asymmetrical entrance and a small spire with open belfry on the roof. The west range was retained and later converted for classrooms and a caretaker.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>176</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.m/18/2/1—2.

<sup>177</sup> TNA, CRES 2/1156; SHC, D/P/tau.m/18/1/1—2, 18/2/1—2, 18/4/1.

<sup>178</sup> SHC, A/DIF/116; DD/EDS/1/128.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/18/2/1—7, 18/4/7.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. DD/EDS/1/128; D/P/tau.m/18/2/4.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/54; 18/1/2; 18/2/3, 5; 18/4/1, 4.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/18/4/4; DD/EDS/1/128; C/E/4/359/1, p. 84.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. A/DIF/116; D/P/tau.m/18/4/4; TNA, IR 58/82633 (242).

Taunton Central National School, as it was then named, re-opened in the summer of 1867 with three teachers assisted by seven pupil teachers for over 440 pupils mostly boys and infants as girls worked in the silk factories or at home.<sup>184</sup> In 1871 Walter Cliffe's charity paid the school pence for poor scholars. Evening schools were attended by 340 young people in 1876 and by 1877 662 children attended the day school but girls' attendance was still poor.<sup>185</sup> In the 1890s a savings bank was established, girls could learn French and algebra and from 1908 the violin.<sup>186</sup> Despite subdividing rooms to provide more classrooms, in 1912 it was decided to transfer the boys to the new Askwith school.<sup>187</sup> The school taught 165 girls and 148 infants c. 1928 but was a mixed county primary school by 1938.<sup>188</sup> In 1958 children were bussed in from Bishop's Hull but numbers fell and the school closed in July 1975.<sup>189</sup> It became an auction room and later a restaurant. The sale proceeds and the Cliffe charity funds endowed the Sunday school but by 1995 the charity had ceased to exist.<sup>190</sup>

### British school

The school opened on 11 April 1836 with 80 boys in temporary premises, presumably the old National school in Holway Lane vacated by St Mary's. On 21 November a girls' school was begun and both were full by January 1837.<sup>191</sup> In 1838 land on Holway Lane was acquired for a school for the labouring and manufacturing classes on the principles of the British and Foreign Schools Society.<sup>192</sup> The teacher's house fronted two schoolrooms, for girls on the ground floor and boys above.<sup>193</sup> In 1862 a master and three pupil teachers taught 179 boys aged 4—14 history, grammar, music, geography and drawing from 9 a.m. to 4.15 p.m. but

<sup>184</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.m/18/2/5; C/E/4/359/1, p. 218.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. A/AUS, school rep. 1871; D/P/tau.m/18/2/6; C/E/4/359/1, pp. 424, 429, 461, 494—5.

<sup>186</sup> TNA, ED 21/15531; SHC, C/E/4/359/2, p. 147, 162.

<sup>187</sup> TNA, IR 58/82633 (242); SHC, A/DBL/133/18; D/P/tau.m/18/8/1; C/E/4/359/4, p. 239.

<sup>188</sup> SHC, A/BMG/5/1.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/64; C/E/4/359/6, pp. 283, 288, 448, 458, 468—9; C/E/4/359/10.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/18/4/11; C/E/4/78; Char. Com. reg.

<sup>191</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 18 Jan. 1837, 12 Sep. 1838; BNA accessed 30 July 2019.

<sup>192</sup> SHC, DD/TAC/5/5/46.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. DD/EDS/1/127; *Robsons Dir.* (1839); *Morris & Co. Dir. Som.* (1872).

there were very few books. Some factories sent boys to school part-time and paid the fees. Of 115 boys registered in 1883 half were part-time. Boys left early for full-time factory work and played truant for every event.<sup>194</sup>

In 1862 the 240 girls and infants had a teacher and four pupil teachers. Few did arithmetic and attendance was poor. Infant teaching was left to a 14 year-old monitress in 1867. Infants acquired their own teacher in 1893 but a girl looked after the babies.<sup>195</sup> There were 384 pupils in 1904 but numbers slowly declined, children left at 13 and boys worked milk or paper rounds coming to school late, unwashed and hungry.<sup>196</sup> Teaching was good but accommodation was dark and insanitary and the school was condemned and closed in 1913.<sup>197</sup> However, between 1917 and 1919 it reopened while Priory Junior School to which they had gone was requisitioned as a hospital.<sup>198</sup> The old building was sold in 1919, for storage and later a hostel, and the proceeds used for educational grants.<sup>199</sup>

### Workhouse school

St Mary's parish workhouse had a schoolroom before 1820 as it usually housed at least 25 children.<sup>200</sup> The union workhouse had a schoolroom under the chapel and employed a couple to teach. By 1840 the room was overcrowded, the infants were taught elsewhere by an older girl and new schools for 200 children were unfinished in November 1848.<sup>201</sup> The infant school was described as fit only for a coal cellar. The 1849 cholera epidemic killed 25 girls, the schoolmaster and nine boys.<sup>202</sup> Corporal punishment was regularly administered to

<sup>194</sup> SHC, C/E/4/220/1, pp. 1, 9—10, 21, 60, 65, 71, 73, 103, 117, 134, 377, 410, 416, 430, 438, 479.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid. DD/EDS/1/127; C/E/4/221/1, pp. 1, 7—12, 32, 148, 243.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. DD/TAC/5/5/68; D/N/tau.mst/5/2/26; C/E/4/220/2, pp. 221—2, 336, 349; 4/221/2, p. 166; TNA, ED 21/15540.

<sup>197</sup> TNA, ED 21/15540; IR 58/82648 (1762); SHC, A/BEZ/1/1/1; C/E/4/220/2, pp. 337, 367—8.

<sup>198</sup> SHC, A/BAV/14; D/H/ta/3/3 (1915, 1916, 1920); Taunton St James, school project.

<sup>199</sup> *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), 78; (1957), 124; SHC, C/E/4/401/79; DD/DH/2/1; DD/TAC/8.

<sup>200</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/10.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/2—3, 8, *passim*.

<sup>202</sup> *Rep. Gen. Bd of health on Cholera Epidemic 1848—9*, 37—8, App. II, 11—13.

violent children but more able children included a boy appointed as pupil teacher in 1856.<sup>203</sup> By 1871 most children were boarded out and only 31 boys and eight girls and infants were in the workhouse school under a single schoolmistress. It closed before 1900.<sup>204</sup>

### Holy Trinity school

Described as ‘large and noble’ in Tudor style by C. E. Giles, the school opened in 1846 south of the church at the expense of the Revd Frederick Smith who owned and managed them.<sup>205</sup> There were four rooms and an integral teachers’ house.<sup>206</sup> The school taught 110 boys and 86 girls supported by the National Society, subscriptions and parents.<sup>207</sup> By 1873 there were 324 children but no infants.<sup>208</sup> In 1893 an evening continuation school started with 80 pupils, mostly female.<sup>209</sup> In 1896 Smith’s son sold the school to the parish, which conveyed it the diocese in 1897 and built an adjoining three-room infant school.<sup>210</sup> An iron schoolroom was built across the road in 1902 to alleviate overcrowding although many children were ‘half-timers’. By 1910 there were 254 children and 164 infants.<sup>211</sup>

From 1926 children had swimming lessons and reports were good. In 1931 older children transferred to the ‘senior department’, as the Askwith school was known at Holy Trinity, but in 1937 there were 278 children and in 1939 44 evacuees arrived. In 1953, with 320 children, the school was full. In 1969 they moved to the former Askwith school off South Street and the old school was sold in 1972 to the borough council and demolished.<sup>212</sup> By 1985 Holy Trinity had a special unit for hearing impaired children and two units by 1995 for special needs. Behaviour and teaching were good and children came from some distance for

<sup>203</sup> SHC, D/G/ta/8a/10 (Nov. 1850, 17 Dec.1851), 13 (Oct. 1855, 1856).

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/21 (May, Oct. 1871); A/BVA/6.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. D/DC/tau.d/25/4, deed packet 85; A/DIF/101/6/130; Clarke, *Church educ.*, 69—70.

<sup>206</sup> BL, Add. MS 30293; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/74/1507.

<sup>207</sup> Nat. Soc., *Schs Inquiry*, 1846—7 (1849), 16—17.

<sup>208</sup> TNA, ED 2/391/2.

<sup>209</sup> SHC, DD/X/SOM/14 (1893).

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. A/BFW 1/1; D/DC/tau.d/25/4, deed packet 85; DD/X/PTB/2 [sch. mag.]; TNA, IR 58/82648 (1707).

<sup>211</sup> SHC, DD/X/SOM/14 (1898—9, 1910); D/B/ta/24/1/30/51.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. A/BMG/5/1; A/BFW 1/1, 5; 2/3.



an Anglican education.<sup>213</sup> In 2015 a new block was added containing four classrooms and a nursery creating a 14-class school. In 2016 the school had 375 pupils when it became an academy, rising to 442 in 2023.<sup>214</sup>

### St Andrew's school

Rowbarton infant school, affiliated to the National Society, occupied Kingston Road chapel in 1846 with 63 day pupils, 150 infants who attended on Sunday only and six paid teachers, supported by subscribers and parents.<sup>215</sup>

Rowbarton school, St Andrew's from 1889, moved in 1875 to new premises in Grove Terrace for 175 children. Behaviour and attendance were poor in the noisy, overcrowded schoolroom. One teacher was assisted by two pupils who were taught in the evening and older girls.<sup>216</sup> In 1888 an adjoining three-room school was added for 210 infants, arranged in five classes by 1898 including some older children until 1900. In 1901 when there were 310 infants two classrooms were added.<sup>217</sup> Numbers declined to 170 in 1955 after the opening of Wedlands infant school but there was a waiting list by 1962. In 1974 the infant and junior schools merged.<sup>218</sup>

A bequest financed new junior accommodation designed by C. H. Samson for 239 boys and 144 girls but it was soon outgrown.<sup>219</sup> In 1905 the inspector complained the 227 girls were overcrowded but only the boys' school was enlarged. In 1907 St Andrew's had 736 children and none-Anglicans were encouraged to move to the new North Town school.<sup>220</sup> In 1914 the girls' school was extended over the boys' school.<sup>221</sup> In 1929, with some funding

<sup>213</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/64; DD/TBL/97/26; C/E/4/409/180.2.

<sup>214</sup> reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/123848: accessed 27 Aug. 2019; 21/144985: accessed 12 March 2024.

<sup>215</sup> Nat. Soc., *Schs Inquiry*, 1846—7 (1849), 16—17; Morris and Co. *Dir. Som.* (1872); TNA, ED 2/391/2.

<sup>216</sup> SHC, A/ARQ 4/1; D/B/ta/24/1/16/637.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. A/ARQ 4/6; D/P/tau.a/23/2; D/B/ta/24/1/22/914, 24/1/29/2.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid. A/ARQ/1/2 (1962); C/E/4/64.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid. A/ARQ 4/1; D/P/tau.a/18/1/1, 18/2/1, 18/7/1.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. A/DSG/1; D/P/tau.a 18/7/1—2, 23/2.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/24/1/46/704; C/E/4/401/126; D/P/tau.a 23/2.

from the Great Western Railway, the schools were reorganised into eight classrooms for 320 seniors and four for 200 juniors over two floors. By 1932 the senior school took children from rural schools.<sup>222</sup> A science room was provided before 1933 and electric lighting in 1935.<sup>223</sup> In 1956 the senior children and their teachers transferred to Priorswood Secondary Modern school leaving 262 children.<sup>224</sup> St Andrew's was a popular school, nearly 60 children were refused admission in 1998, with close links to the church, good teaching and behaviour but as a Victorian urban school had to take children to distant playing fields.<sup>225</sup> In 2013 St Andrews became part of the Bath and Wells Diocesan Academies Trust and had 232 pupils in 2018.<sup>226</sup>

### Mary Street Memorial school

The Unitarians built a mixed school with three coloured glass windows adjoining their chapel in 1847. By 1853 it took girls only, infant girls by 1861, using the upper schoolroom accessed by an outside stair.<sup>227</sup> It closed in 1874 but reopened in 1875 under parental pressure as a mixed school with 40 children who paid for their schooling and books.<sup>228</sup> In 1881 the school day started with examinations, scripture, reading and music lessons. The registers were taken at 10 a.m. when children divided into five classes for reading, writing, grammar and geography but learnt arithmetic together before a two-hour dinner break. The school ended at 4.10 p.m. but the children were expected to do 'home lessons'.<sup>229</sup>

In 1885 Manchester Unitarian minister John Odgers bought eight houses west and south of the school as the site for a new building in memory of his wife, daughter of the

<sup>222</sup> Ibid. A/ARQ 4/2—3, 5; 6/1.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.a/18/7/2.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid. A/ARQ 4/5; C/E/4/64.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid. C/OP/3/151, p. 55; C/E/4/409/177; DD/TBL/97/28; D/P/tau.a/18/7/3.

<sup>226</sup> reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/1140062: accessed 27 Aug. 2019.

<sup>227</sup> SHC, T/PH/rea/3/72; D/N/tau.mst/4/2/4; 5/2/24, 28; *PO Dir. Som.* (1861).

<sup>228</sup> SHC, D/N/tau.mst/2/1/6, 4/2/1, 5/2/26; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883).

<sup>229</sup> SHC, D/N/tau.mst/5/2/30.

former minister Arthur Jones. Mary Street Memorial Schools for 300 children were completed in 1886 and vested in the chapel trustees. The building comprised classrooms over two floors, chapel vestry, cookery school and teachers' room and accommodated day, evening and Sunday schools and male teacher training. In 1893 there were 241 children on the books.<sup>230</sup> In 1907 infants transferred to Original Infants and other children were part-timers.<sup>231</sup> There were only 70 pupils in 1930, many described as backward, in 1932 senior children left and in 1933 the school closed.<sup>232</sup> The building was used for air raid shelters in 1939, an evacuee hostel by 1941, a dancing school from 1947 to c. 1972 and later a homeless centre.<sup>233</sup>

The two and three-storeyed, red brick building by Ernest Odgers of Plymouth has an irregular entrance front of four bays and a cross wing. There are three elaborately carved pediments and the name of the school on a frieze. The end bay is topped by a bell turret and the west front has a large stained glass window on the top floor.<sup>234</sup>

### Wesleyan school

There was a short-lived day school at the Victoria Methodist church in 1866. In 1868 a three-storey building for 350 children was added to the Temple Methodist Church, taking day pupils from 1874 and infants from 1876—9.<sup>235</sup> Average attendance in 1889 was 189 but very few were Wesleyan.<sup>236</sup> In 1897 children had to pay because it was a 'superior school'

<sup>230</sup> Ibid. A/AAZ/1; D/N/tau.mst/2/1/7, 3/3/2, 5/2/26, 5/2/29; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1889); TNA, ED 21/15532.

<sup>231</sup> SHC, A/DIF/95/32; D/N/tau.mst/5/2/26; TNA, ED 21/15532.

<sup>232</sup> SHC, A/DVY/1; C/E/4/219/1, pp. 226, 235, 239.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. D/N/tau.mst/4/2/4 (1939), 5/2/32 (1934—5, 1940—1, 1947—63); *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1972—3); Char. Com. reg.: accessed 22 Oct 2018.

<sup>234</sup> SHC, D/N/tau.mst/5/2/26.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid. D/N/tmc/4/2/27, p. 114; C/E/4/218/1, pp. 14, 16, 23—4, 32, 92, 98; C/E/4/222/1, pp. 117, 120.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/218/1, p. 223.

whereas other church schools were free after 1891.<sup>237</sup> Problems with poor light closed the girls' school and numbers fell to 147 boys in 1907 when it closed.<sup>238</sup>

### St John's second school

That school was established south of Mary Street behind Heidelberg House by the Revd John Smith after 1875 but closed in 1885 when several children transferred to St John's in Tangier. The building became a warehouse.<sup>239</sup>

### Albemarle British school

The school was built in 1879 for 250 children and was extended behind adjoining houses in 1883 to provide classrooms on two floors.<sup>240</sup> There were 312 children including 92 infants on the register in 1901 when the school closed.<sup>241</sup> The building continued as a Sunday school and taught evacuee children in 1943—4.<sup>242</sup>

### North Town council school

Taunton's first council school was built by Pollards of Taunton in Staplegrove Road probably to the designs of Frederick Roberts. It opened in 1907 with boys, girls and infant schools, caretaker's house, laundry, playshed and latrines.<sup>243</sup> Cookery and laundry classes were provided for girls from other schools and adults in the evenings.<sup>244</sup> By 1910 the infant school

<sup>237</sup> Ibid. D/N/tau.mst/5/2/26.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid. D/N/tmc/1/5/1, 4/2/27, p. 181—3, 228—9, 237; C/E/4/218/1, p. 465.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. D/DC/tau.d/25/16, deed packet 1276; A/EZI/2/1, pp. 86—8; TNA, IR 58/82634 (387).

<sup>240</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/13/459; D/B/ta/24/1/17/698.

<sup>241</sup> *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883, 1894); SHC, D/N/tmc/2/3/3; Palmer, *Taunton Day School Crisis*, 5—10.

<sup>242</sup> SHC, D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 19 (1939—40, 117); A/CDQ 1.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid. ADR, box 4.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/3/18/17, pp. 10, 12, 17; C/E/4/311/13, pp. 6, 117, 186.

had 256 children and numbers remained at over 200 until it merged with the junior school in 1989.<sup>245</sup>

The boys' school had 275 children with six assistant staff in 1909. Later boys learnt the violin and swimming and some won scholarships to grammar school. By 1932 the school was turning children away and in 1933 all boys over 11 were transferred to the Priory Central school with two teachers. The boys' and girls' schools were amalgamated.<sup>246</sup> In 1945 the junior school had 280 pupils with eight teachers and shared the site with the infant and girls' secondary modern schools. From 1989 infants and juniors merged and numbers rose to 410 in 1995.<sup>247</sup> It was a popular school, drawing children from a wide area and socially diverse but all children had preschool experience and very low levels of special need.<sup>248</sup> Since 2012 North Town has been an academy and was rated outstanding in 2017 with 508 children aged 2—11. Little Owls pre-school, established in the 1970s moved to Bishops Hull c. 2016.<sup>249</sup>

### Priory council school

The school in Cranmer Road, designed by Henry Stone and partners, opened in August 1913 with 225 children and seven teachers. The symmetrical building segregated boys and girls around a common assembly hall.<sup>250</sup> From 1916—19 the building was a Red Cross Hospital and children moved to Trinity then the old British school.<sup>251</sup> Senior pupils were removed in 1933 but infants were admitted. Although oversubscribed the school lost three teachers, given notice under a directive removing married women from public sector employment.<sup>252</sup> Numbers fell from 451 with 14 teachers in 1955 to 340 by 1975. In 1977 it amalgamated with

<sup>245</sup> Ibid. A/BEZ 1/1; C/E/4/64.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid. A/BEZ 1/1, 4 passim; A/DVY/1. Girls' school records went for salvage in the Second World War.

<sup>247</sup> SHC, C/E/4/64.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid. DD/TBL/97/24.

<sup>249</sup> reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/16/EY311840; 21/137126: accessed 27 Aug. 2019.

<sup>250</sup> SHC, DD/X/STONE (1911 plans); *Som. Co. Devt Plan*; *Taunton* (1964), 26.

<sup>251</sup> SHC, A/BAV/14; C/E/4/311/14, pp. 40, 44, 51—8, 66.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid. A/BFZ/1/1/1; A/BMG/5/1; C/E/4/311/14, pp. 67.

St James' school as Archbishop Cranmer Church of England voluntary controlled primary school adding the adjoining former secondary school to accommodate 450 children aged 5—11 and 16 teachers. By 1995 there was a nursery class of 40 and provision for 12 language impaired children.<sup>253</sup> In 2013 it became a diocesan academy renamed St James' Church School. It had many disadvantaged pupils and by 2018 was oversubscribed with 466 children aged 3—11 but was doing well.<sup>254</sup> The nursery school in the grounds was designed for 30 children but held 62 in 2014.<sup>255</sup>

#### Priorswood county school

The mixed Priorswood Infant school opened at Wedlands in 1949 and had 247 children in 1965. A few years later it became a full primary school. In 1995 a third of children had special needs and free school meals.<sup>256</sup> In 2000 252 children were taught and there was a playgroup, later pre-school. Both primary and pre-school re-opened in 2018 under the Redstart Learning Partnership with 178 children between 2 and 11.<sup>257</sup>

#### Wellsprings county primary school

The mixed junior school opened in September 1950 to relieve St Andrew's but was oversubscribed by 1953.<sup>258</sup> Numbers fell from 427 in 1965 to 237 in 1985. By 1995 the school took infants and had a nursery class of 40.<sup>259</sup> It was a good school with 339 children in 2019.<sup>260</sup>

<sup>253</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/64; C/E/4/89 (349).

<sup>254</sup> reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/139324: accessed 27 Aug. 2019.

<sup>255</sup> stjamesch.co.uk/nursery; reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/16/EY464321.

<sup>256</sup> SHC, C/E/4/64; DD/TBL/97/27.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/409/175.1; reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/16/EY46440, 21/139388, 21/146747: accessed 27 Aug. 2019.

<sup>258</sup> SHC, A/ARQ 4/5; C/E/4/64, 4/311/7 (18 July 1953).

<sup>259</sup> Ibid. C/OP/3/151, p. 30; C/E/4/64.

<sup>260</sup> reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/123710: accessed 27 Aug. 2019.

### Holway Park county primary school

Opened in 1951 in Byron Road as a nursery school, it was used for 60 infants. In 1955 it became a full primary school with 106 children rising to 312 in 1977.<sup>261</sup> In 1981 the school retained 169 infants and a new junior school was built in Broughton Close. Both were replaced in 1995 by a new building on the latter site named Holway Park Community School with 338 children.<sup>262</sup> In 2000 there were 22 teachers and 51 other staff for 349 children, a quarter of whom had special needs. The school suffered from vandalism and lack of punctuality but there were free before and after school clubs, a nurture group for infants, a library and a music room.<sup>263</sup> It had improved by 2019 and had resources for autistic children. The pre-school, established in 1992, had 26 children in 2019.<sup>264</sup>

### Halcon school

Opened as Lambrook county infant school in a prefabricated building in 1953 for 120 children aged 5—7, it was full by 1955. In 1981 it became a full primary called Halcon school with 184 children in 1995.<sup>265</sup> In 1999 half the children had special needs, attainment levels were low and equipment and outings depended on a friends' group.<sup>266</sup> The site, off Outer Circle, had limited play space. It re-opened in 2016 as Minerva School, an academy with 180 children but was still inadequate in 2019 with above average numbers of excluded, disadvantaged and special needs pupils. Circles nursery, opened in 2008, with 42 children was absorbed into Minerva school in 2016.<sup>267</sup>

### Parkfield county primary school

<sup>261</sup> SHC, A/BMG/5/13; D/PC/stapg/7/3, p. 81. Byron Road was used for excluded pupils.

<sup>262</sup> SHC, C/E/4/64; DD/TBL/97/23.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/409/171.

<sup>264</sup> reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/16/143077, 21/123739.

<sup>265</sup> SHC, C/E/4/64; C/E/4/131/7 (5 Sep. 1953); D/PC/stapg/7/3, p. 81.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid. C/E/409/171

<sup>267</sup> reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/123707, 21/143143, 16/EY371197: accessed 28 Aug. 2019.

Parkfield school, locally in Wilton, opened in 1968 and had 292 children by 1975. Numbers rose to 418 in 2000 in 14 classes. Older children learnt French and played several sports.

There was an early morning and evening creche.<sup>268</sup> In 2017 there were many children for whom English was a second language but it was a good school with 420 pupils in 2020.<sup>269</sup>

#### Bishop Henderson Church of England primary school

This Galmington school, locally in Wilton, opened in 1974 and was an overcrowded but successful school with 433 pupils in 2017.<sup>270</sup>

#### Lyngford Park primary school

The school in Bircham Road opened in 1971 and partly rebuilt in 1982 to provide 14 classrooms and six practical areas. It was a successful school in 2017 with 11 teachers and nine assistants for 274 children who had a swimming pool, music groups and a school council. There was a nursery class.<sup>271</sup>

#### Blackbrook primary school

The school opened in Ashbourne Crescent off Lisieux Way in 1989. It had 222 children by 1995, well over its 160 capacity.<sup>272</sup> A successful school, it reopened in 2019 as an academy with 241 pupils.<sup>273</sup>

#### Secondary schools

<sup>268</sup> SHC, C/E/4/64; C/E/4/409/174.

<sup>269</sup> reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/123714; accessed 28 Aug. 2019, 17 Jan. 2024.

<sup>270</sup> SHC, C/E/4/64; reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/123852; accessed 28 Aug. 2019.

<sup>271</sup> SHC, C/E/4/409/175; www.lyngfordparkprimary.co.uk; accessed 28 Aug. 2019.

<sup>272</sup> SHC, C/OP/3/151, p. 44; C/E/4/64.

<sup>273</sup> reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/123737; www.blackbrookschool.com; accessed 28 Aug. 2019.



The need for secondary education, at least for middle-class children, was recognised in the development of large private schools from the mid 19th century. Huish schools for boys and girls opened in the 1870s under the provisions of the 1869 Endowed Schools Act ushered in a new era in secondary education. Most schools were willing to take county council funded scholarship pupils, who were often brighter than the paying pupils, except Weirfield whose parents objected to their daughters mixing with poor pupils. In 1920 there were only 288 children in secondary schools in the borough.<sup>274</sup> Council secondary schools provided almost exclusively for boys and county scholarship girls were sent to a Frome boarding school, partly at parents' expense, which many could not afford.<sup>275</sup> From the 1950s mixed council secondary schools were established, reorganised from 1978 on the comprehensive system with sixth formers being removed into colleges.<sup>276</sup>

#### Huish's boys' school

In 1615 Richard Huish left £100 to maintain five divinity scholars at university. By the 1860s the trustees wanted to spend surplus money on secondary education.<sup>277</sup> The managing committee of Taunton Middle School in Bishops Hull and the Governors of Huish's charity agreed that the former's 103 boys registered on 1 December 1874 and their headmaster would form a new Huish boys' school. They remained in their old premises until they acquired the former Green's private school in East Street in 1881. Numbers increased after 1892 when new buildings opened in Mount Lane on former gardens of Grey's almshouses. Designed by J. Houghton Spencer of brick with Ham stone windows they had tiled catslide roofs broken by dormer windows and decorative brick chimneys. The interior featured coloured brick in patterns. There were laboratories, a workshop and flush toilets in the playground. Boys learnt

<sup>274</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/3/18/18, p. 72.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid. A/DVY/1; DD/X/HUN/6/28.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid. D/PC/stapg/7/3, pp.79—80.

<sup>277</sup> *5th Rep Com. Char.* 499; *Gen Digest of Endowed Chars. Som* (1869—71), 60—1.

drill, art, shorthand, typing and singing, fees varied from £3 a term for young day boys to £10 for boarders and there were ten free places.<sup>278</sup>

During the First World War women teachers were appointed and in 1917 a separate junior school was created with a headmistress.<sup>279</sup> As costs rose numbers fell from 248 in 1921 to 208 in 1922 when the county council agreed to pay off the £3,000 deficit.<sup>280</sup> During the Second World War there were c. 600 pupils. The junior school closed in 1945 and Huish's became a voluntary controlled secondary school.<sup>281</sup> In 1947 there were 450 boys in three streams with 22 teachers but half the boys left without qualifications.<sup>282</sup> From 1956 the charity provided bursaries and scholarships until it ceased in 2018.<sup>283</sup> In 1958 the county council bought Normans Field, South Road for new premises opened in 1964 with 521 boys, swimming baths and 10 a. of playing fields.<sup>284</sup>

By 1975 there were 838 boys. In 1978 the school became Richard Huish sixth form college but existing pupils were allowed to remain. There were 56 teachers and 30 non-teaching staff, 28 extra-curricular groups and a monthly communion service. In 1980 the boys were joined by the sixth formers from Bishop Fox's. In 1993 it became independent of the local authority under the Further Education Funding Council.<sup>285</sup> Additional facilities built in the early 21st century include the Aspen Music Centre and Oak House. In 2019 the highly-rated college taught over 2,000 pupils a year including international students.<sup>286</sup> In 2022 the college housed the Guildhall School of Music and Drama's regional centre for 105 young artists aged 5 to 18.<sup>287</sup>

<sup>278</sup> SHC, A/AHO/7, 27; DD/X/HUN/6/28; *Taunton of Today* (1896), 48; G. Baker, *The History of Huish's, Taunton* (Taunton, 1980), 8, 30.

<sup>279</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/42/558; A/AHO/1; A/AJA/1.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid. A/AHO/1; D/B/ta/24/1/49/773; Baker, *Huish's*, 63.

<sup>281</sup> SHC, A/AJA/1.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, C/E/4/64; TNA, ED 109/9065/2.

<sup>283</sup> SHC, C/E/4/401/78, 125; Char. Com. reg.: accessed 22 Oct 2018.

<sup>284</sup> SHC, A/AHO/6; C/SEC/44.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/64; A/AHO/6, 25.

<sup>286</sup> [reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/40/130808](https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/40/130808); [www.huish.ac.uk](http://www.huish.ac.uk): accessed 3 Sep. 2019.

<sup>287</sup> [www.gsmd.ac.uk](http://www.gsmd.ac.uk): accessed 22 Aug. 2022.

### Bishop Fox's school

Huish's school for girls began in 1875 in the former Roman Catholic chapel and expanded into 20 The Crescent. Only *c.* 60 girls were enrolled in the first five years, studying algebra, geometry, French, drawing, music, needlework and health and preparing for University and teacher training college examinations. Although fees were only £3—6 a year and there were four free places, parents were often unwilling to send girls for more than a few years and rarely allowed them further education.<sup>288</sup>

In 1890 the school was endowed with the former grammar school estate and renamed Bishop Fox's School for Girls.<sup>289</sup> The county council helped acquire the Laurels nursery in Staplegrove Road.<sup>290</sup> where Basil Cottam designed a central range, opened in 1905, with wings, never completed. Classes were held in corridors and the hall was the gymnasium and dining room.<sup>291</sup> The Laurels house was given in 1914 to house the headmistress and in 1918 Weir Lodge across Staplegrove Road was bought for the youngest pupils.<sup>292</sup> Numbers rose from 101 girls in 1907, a quarter of whom had never been to school, to 261 in 1921. There were 16 foundation scholarships in 1907 and a quarter of pupils had their fees were paid by the county council. Working-class girls were eligible for the Whitaker Scholarship between 1914 and 2010. The school ran up a large deficit, met by the county council, which took over the school in 1922.<sup>293</sup>

In 1938 new premises with playing fields were provided on Kingston Road and by 1940 Bishop Fox's had completed its move. Evacuee schools took over the old building,

<sup>288</sup> SHC, A/AYO/2/1; A/ADR, box 4, ins. bk.; C/E/4/401/78; *Som. Co. Gaz.* 13 Jan. 1883; *Taunton of Today* (1896), 48

<sup>289</sup> SHC, C/E/4/401/81; Bishops Hull, forthcoming.

<sup>290</sup> SHC, A/APN/2/6; A/DSG/1; A/AYO/1/2, TS notes on sch.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.* A/AYO/4/1; S. Mason, *Memories of Bishop Fox's School* (Taunton, 1990), photo. 1910.

<sup>292</sup> SHC, APN 2/6.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.* A/AYO/1/1, 3/1; C/E/4/401/81—2; Char. Com. reg.: accessed 22 Oct. 2018.

which after the war became a teachers' centre then a Somerset college annexe before being sold for offices and housing.<sup>294</sup> Until the 1960s the junior school remained at Weir Lodge.<sup>295</sup>

The Kingston Road site expanded rapidly but despite building over the playing fields was overcrowded with over 1,000 girls by 1978. when it became a comprehensive school. Boys were not admitted until 1980 when some of the 60 staff and the sixth formers moved to Richard Huish sixth form college.<sup>296</sup> The school had 29 classrooms, a music studio, nine science laboratories and many other specialist teaching rooms. In September 1994 it moved to new premises in Calway Road south of Richard Huish College and the Kingston Road school was demolished. The gate piers with the arms of Bishop Fox now mark the entrance to a housing estate, named Peile Drive after a former headmistress.<sup>297</sup> The new Bishop Fox's Community School became an academy in 2012 and was a successful school with 853 pupils aged 11—16 in 2017, including many with special needs.<sup>298</sup> Bishop Fox's Educational Foundation promoted the broader education of young people with an income of up to £165,000.<sup>299</sup>

### Convent schools

The Lodge, South Road, built as a hospital, became a Franciscan convent in 1807 and the nuns brought their pupils from Winchester. Poet Edwin Atherstone was employed to teach 12 girls music that year. From 1865 until the 1930s they provided a day 'middle school' for girls in a new north wing with indoor sanitation and called St Joseph's to distinguish it from the St

<sup>294</sup> Baker, *Huish's*, 76; SHC, A/APN/2/6; C/OP/3/151, p. 78.

<sup>295</sup> SHC, A/AYO/3/1; C/E/4/401/81.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid. C/OP/3/151, p. 62; A/BIR/1; A/APN/2/6; C/E/4/64.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid. A/BIR 1; A/BMG/5/2.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid. DD/TBL/97/29; reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/23/136851: accessed 4 Sep. 2019.

<sup>299</sup> Char. Co. Reg: accessed 22 Oct. 2018.

Francis boarding school.<sup>300</sup> From c. 1900 to 1911 they ran a fee-paying residential housekeeping school teaching women accounts, cookery, first aid, music and dairying.<sup>301</sup>

By the early 20th century the girls at St Francis's had 13 weeks holiday a year but still had to bring their own bedlinen and cutlery. From 1881 to 1911 c. 80 girls aged 7—20 were in the care of a matron and both lay and religious teachers. By the 1930s a single school accepted non-Catholic and day pupils. By 1945 a preparatory school took girls aged 7—13 and young boys and by 1950 older girls were no longer accepted.<sup>302</sup>

In 1954 the sisters of St Joseph of Annecy took over and ran a single school, known as St Joseph's with a few boarders, kindergarten and preparatory department but predominantly a girls' grammar school. A gymnasium was built in 1960 and by the late 1960s there were c. 380 pupils.<sup>303</sup> Boarding was phased out in the early 1970s and the sixth form was discontinued but the 400 pupils were insufficient for a comprehensive school and in 1978 it closed. After use as a King's College boarding house, in the early 21st century it was converted into flats and the grounds were developed for housing.<sup>304</sup>

### Askwith Memorial school

Named after Archdeacon Askwith (d. 1911), the school opened in 1912 on South Street in a single-storey brick building with six classrooms ranged around a hall.<sup>305</sup> The 150 St Mary's boys were the first pupils and the vicar was chairman of the managers.<sup>306</sup> In 1931 it became a mixed school. As Holy Trinity school provided most pupils by 1941 management was

<sup>300</sup> Ibid. A/APN/2/6; DD/SAS/G3016/4/6; D/DC/tau.d/24/4/2, p. 6; D/B/ta/24/1/5/145; Trappes-Lomax, *English Franciscan Nuns*, 102; *Pigot & Co. Dir.* (1842); Harding, *Diocese of Clifton*, 193.

<sup>301</sup> SHC, D/DC/tau.d/24/4/2, p. 6.

<sup>302</sup> TNA, RG 11/2366; RG 14/14250 (convent schedule); R. Berry, *The History of the Convent at Taunton* (Williton, 1987), 69, 71, 76, 79—82; SHC, PAM 2959, *Taunton Guide*, 1950, 44.

<sup>303</sup> TNA, ED 172/250/19; SHC D/DC/tau.d/24/4/2, pp. 6—8; A/APN/2/6; Berry, *Convent at Taunton*, 87, 89, 91.

<sup>304</sup> Berry, *Convent at Taunton*, 99, 101; SHC, D/PC/stapg/7/3, p. 84; D. Bromwich, *King's College, the first 100 years* (Taunton, c. 1980), 45—7; SHC, D/PC/stapg/7/3, p. 84; DD/X/WBB/1050.

<sup>305</sup> SHC, A/ARQ/1/1; D/P/tau.m/18/11/2.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid. A/DBL/133/20—1; D/P/tau.m/2/1/33.

transferred to that parish as a voluntary controlled secondary modern.<sup>307</sup> By 1955 there were 437 children in three streams, falling to 362 by 1964. Many failed general certificate exams, absenteeism was high and the site was too small. It closed in 1966 and Holy Trinity primary school moved onto the site.<sup>308</sup>

#### Priory council senior school

In 1933 a nine-classroom opened in Cranmer Road for senior boys from St James', North Town, Memorial and Bishops Hull schools.<sup>309</sup> By 1945, as Priory Boys Secondary Modern School, it had 198 boys and eight teachers.<sup>310</sup> Numbers increased to 432 in 15 forms in 1959 with 20 teachers. Facilities were inadequate, public recreation grounds were used for games and few boys stayed over the age of 14.<sup>311</sup> Numbers rose steadily to 686 by 1975 and it merged with West Monkton secondary school to form Heathfield comprehensive school. The Priory buildings remained in use for a few years before being taken over by Priory primary school.<sup>312</sup>

#### North Town girls' secondary modern school

The school opened in North Town elementary school in 1945 with 239 girls.<sup>313</sup> By 1955 with 401 girls and 17 teachers, classrooms were inadequate, the hall and playground were shared with the primary school and girls left at 15, mostly for retail or factory work. The school closed in 1966 and girls transferred mainly to Castle school.<sup>314</sup>

<sup>307</sup> Ibid. A/BFW 1/1; D/P/tau.m/18/11/2.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/64, 4/327/1, loose reports; *Som. Co. Devt Plan; Taunton* (1964), 26.

<sup>309</sup> SHC, A/DVY/1.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/64.

<sup>311</sup> TNA, ED 109/9065/5; 109/9343/18.

<sup>312</sup> SHC, C/E/4/64; D/PC/stapg/7/3, p 78.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/311/7 (14 July 1947).

<sup>314</sup> TNA, ED 109/9065/4; *Som. Co. Devt Plan; Taunton* (1964), 26; SHC, C/E/4/64.

### Priorswood secondary school

Opened in 1956 on Lyngford Road as a mixed secondary modern school, it had 631 pupils by 1975. In 1982 it became St Augustine's Anglican-Roman Catholic school with 759 children by 1985. The school declined in popularity but in 1999 had 582 pupils from a wide area, 32 teachers, three chaplains and 39 other staff.<sup>315</sup> In 2010 it merged with Ladymead and in 2017 its buildings were replaced by a new campus for Selworthy school.<sup>316</sup>

### Ladymead county school

Built in Cheddon Road c. 1960 as a mixed secondary modern, Ladymead had 786 children in 1985.<sup>317</sup> The school specialised in technology, had a large sports centre, shared with the public, and hosted adult classes. In 1998 60 per cent of leavers went on the higher education. In 2010 it combined with St Augustine's to form Taunton Academy, a Church of England school under the Richard Huish Trust. It was rebuilt for 1,150 pupils although there were only 881 in 2022 with a higher than average proportion with special needs or eligible for the pupil premium. It was renamed Pyrland in 2023.<sup>318</sup>

### Castle comprehensive school

Musgrove secondary modern school, Wellington Road opened in 1966 and had 781 children by 1976. It became Castle comprehensive school in 1978 and pupil numbers rose to 994 in 1995. Teaching and behavioural standards were high, most pupils got top exam grades and there were few exclusions or children with special needs.<sup>319</sup> It comprised four and two-storey blocks and in 1998 a large sports centre opened to pupils and the public. By 1999 the school

<sup>315</sup> SHC, A/DIF/70; C/E/4/64; C/E/4/409/178.1.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid. DD/X/DNG/36.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/64.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/409/172; A/EPF/211/1; reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/23/136193: accessed 4 Sep. 2019, 13 March 2024.

<sup>319</sup> SHC, C/OP/3/151, p. 67; C/E/4/64; D/PC/stapg/7/3, p 78; DD/TBL/97/31.

had two orchestras, two choirs, a school bank and a parents group raising over £10,000 a year for the school, whose budget was nearly £2 ½ million.<sup>320</sup> In 2011 it became an academy under the Castle Partnership Trust and as a popular, outstanding school had 1,199 pupils aged 11—16 in 2023.<sup>321</sup>

### Special schools

Until the 20th century disabled children often failed to get an education. From 1895 to the 1930s the Home Teaching Society for the Blind supported children and adults. Blind basketmaker George Hicks visited private homes, the hospital and the workhouse teaching handicrafts, braille or other embossed type and lending books.<sup>322</sup> In 1921 the Taunton Branch of the Somerset Association for Mental Welfare established a centre for c. 10 disabled children in the YWCA but regularly had to move premises. They received some county council support but depended on fundraising and only had one teacher.<sup>323</sup> A new centre opened in 1957 on Obridge Road, designed for 32 children. In 1961 it was taken over by the county council and had 57 pupils who later moved to special schools. The centre was used for adults until the early 21st century.<sup>324</sup>

In 1963 Monkton Priors special school opened in Pickeridge Close for 84 boys and girls aged 4—16 with boarding provision for boys.<sup>325</sup> In 2002 it was rebuilt as Priory School for c. 50 boys aged 10—18 with behavioural problems. In 2010 it became Sky College and in 2019 had 65 boys of whom five boarded.<sup>326</sup>

<sup>320</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/409/179.1—2.

<sup>321</sup> reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/23/123886, 136916; v1/file/50233741: accessed 4 Sep. 2019, 13 March 2024.

<sup>322</sup> SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/3 (*Taunton Mail* 2 Dec. 1896, p. 4); DD/TBL/64.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/8/2, 6; C/MD/54; C/E/4/311/7 (24 Apr. 1948).

<sup>324</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/24/1/127/6292; C/MD/54.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid. A/APN/2/6; C/PL/2/13, p. 28.

<sup>326</sup> reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/10/SC038758; 25/123939: accessed 4 Sep. 2019; www.skycollge.co.uk: accessed 30 Jan. 2020.



Selworthy mixed special school was built in 1963—4 in Selworthy Road for children aged 2—19, later reduced to 4—11, with learning difficulties.<sup>327</sup> By 2000 it took older children again and 58 pupils were divided between nine classes of which three were for children with extreme difficulties. A mobile building catered for those with profound communication problems.<sup>328</sup> In 2019, as a successful, oversubscribed school with 98 pupils and c. 85 staff, it became an Oak Partnership academy. It opened the Hazelbrook Campus for secondary pupils on the former St Augustine's site.<sup>329</sup>

Park House school opened in Cheddon Road in 2018 as a fee-paying therapeutic school for children aged 8—19 with mental and emotional problems, which prevented them attending mainstream schools. Its fees were extremely high but it only had 19 pupils in 2023.<sup>330</sup> In 2020 Silver Bridge School opened in Silver Street House for 34 children aged 6—19 with emotional and mental health problems.<sup>331</sup>

In 2014 the Taunton Deane Partnership College was established and opened the former Holway primary school, Byron Road for permanently excluded children. It ran other specialist units, education for children in hospital and virtual classrooms.<sup>332</sup>

### Nursery schools

A day nursery opened in Victoria Park before 1920 for 16 children who were bathed and dressed, received three meals and medical visits but it closed for lack of funds in 1921.<sup>333</sup> In 1941—2 another opened in the same park for 40 infants and staff included a certificated teacher. By 1946 it took 45 children, reduced to 30 from 1953, from birth to 5 for 2s. Only

<sup>327</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/155/9456; C/E/4/64.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/409/176.

<sup>329</sup> reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/25/123943, 146698; <http://www.selworthy.somerset.sch.uk>: accessed 4 Sep. 2019; [bbc.co.uk/news/live](http://bbc.co.uk/news/live): accessed 6 Sep. 2019.

<sup>330</sup> reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/27/145308; v1/file/50215599: accessed 4 Sep. 2019, 13 March 2024.

<sup>331</sup> reports.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50169388: accessed 13 March 2024.

<sup>332</sup> [www.tauntondeanepartnershipcollege.org](http://www.tauntondeanepartnershipcollege.org); reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/134699, 23/236916: both accessed 28 Aug. 2019, 13 March 2024.

<sup>333</sup> SHC, A/EPF/250/4/4 (1920, p. 31, 1921, p. 15).

poor, vulnerable children were eligible.<sup>334</sup> A county nursery on the site of the former Holway central kitchen opened in 1966 and as the Hollies remained open in 2024.<sup>335</sup> Many school, commercial and workplace nurseries and playgroups opened from the later 20th century.<sup>336</sup> By the 2010s nurseries were oversubscribed some with up to 80 children. Special units included a residential centre for families with young children referred by the courts.<sup>337</sup>

### Private schools

Early schools were in private houses and often short-lived. Boarding schools taught children from a wide area. Dissenting minister Joseph Alleine's wife Theodosia ran a day and boarding school in the mid 17th century with up to 50 scholars.<sup>338</sup> A dissenting schoolmaster Thomas Chadwick died in 1724.<sup>339</sup>

Multi-lingual poet and historian Henry Norris kept a boys' school in Canon Street from the later 18th century. He encouraged natural curiosity, would not use corporal punishment and insisted on a thorough knowledge of English grammar before teaching Latin. Pupils included members of the Badcock and Kinglake banking families. The school closed after Henry's death in 1823 although his nephew, linguist and Assyriologist Edwin Norris (1795—1872) gave private lessons.<sup>340</sup> David Sutton (d. 1818), probably at Grove House, Canon Street, was more concerned with turning out young gentlemen and took parlour boarders.<sup>341</sup> The school was continued by James Sutton and probably William Henry Sutton in 1839 who issued graded reports. The school, since demolished, had a large playground and

<sup>334</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/4/2/3 (1942, 1953); A/EPF/250/4/4/6 (1946, p. 4).C/PHH/169 (1952).

<sup>335</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/24/1/155/9432; C/OP/3/151, p. 98.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.a/9/4/11.

<sup>337</sup> e.g. reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/16/EY142844, 316345, 330522, 371197, 456118, 457194, 467521, 474983, 501678: accessed 4 Sep. 2019; faass.co.uk: accessed 2 March 2020.

<sup>338</sup> SHC, DD/TBL/94; Revd B. Kirk, *The Taunton Dissenting Academy* (Taunton, 2005), 7; *ODNB*, s.v. Joseph Alleine: accessed 12 Apr. 2018.

<sup>339</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/1/3; Q/AC/4.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid. A/DIF/9; DD/DP/47/6; DD/SAS/C795/SX/106; DD/SAS/C1042/1; *ODNB*, Edwin Norris: accessed 17 Mar. 2022. Henry helped Toulmin write his Taunton history and Edwin's bust stands in Shire Hall.

<sup>341</sup> SHC, A/DIF/9; TNA, IR 26/293/88.

rear schoolroom. A schoolhouse in Canon Street was sold in 1820 and two boarding schools were recorded in 1822.<sup>342</sup>

Middle Street academy, begun in 1826, gave boys a commercial education until the 1850s.<sup>343</sup> St James Classical Mathematical and Commercial Academy, presumably at Priory Farm, which had a large schoolroom, had 39 boarders aged 9—15 in 1841.<sup>344</sup> It moved to Middle Street before 1851 and continued under a succession of masters until the 1870s.<sup>345</sup> Charles Green and Charles Cecil kept a classical, mathematical and commercial boarding school at East Street House between 1851 and 1881, when it was taken over by Huish's boys' school. In a large schoolroom along Mount Lane they taught languages including Hebrew and prepared boys for university examinations.<sup>346</sup>

A girls' boarding school in Mary Street from 1822 until the 1900s had a large lecture room, several classrooms, boarders' dining room and a dormitory with cubicles. Two neighbouring houses were short-lived girls' schools like others in Hammet, High, Mount, North and Paul streets, Church Square and South Road.<sup>347</sup> By 1861 Ann Hancock and her daughters kept Hope Corner House boarding school, Kingston Road with 43 girls.<sup>348</sup> In 1865 Wesleyan Thomas Sibley, his wife and daughters took over the school moving it in 1878—9 to Flook House as the Ladies Collegiate School until it closed in 1913. It taught girls Latin, modern languages, music, science and physical education for which a large gymnasium was

<sup>342</sup> SHC, DD/X/BRO/2/97; DD/SAS/C2548/10; DD/SAS/C112/19/2; DD/TBL/49; DD/X/LG/1; *Pigot, London and Prov. Dir.* (1822—3); *Robsons Dir.* (1839).

<sup>343</sup> SHC, DD/MA/14; DD/X/LEE/1.

<sup>344</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 23 June 1841; TNA, HO 107/972; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/18/721.

<sup>345</sup> TNA, HO 107/1923; RG 9/1618; RG 10/2374; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 56.

<sup>346</sup> *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 28; *PO Dir. Som.* (1866); *Morris & Co. Dir. Som.* (1872); TNA RG 9/1617; RG 11/2366; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/8/230.

<sup>347</sup> *Pigot, London and Prov. Dir.* (1822—3); *Pigot & Co. Dir.* (1830, 1842); *Robsons Dir.* (1839); TNA, HO 107/972, 1922; IR 58/82634 (399); IR 58/82635 (404); SHC, DD/X/BOU/24; D/B/ta/24/1/uncat/15292; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1887, 1900, 1902—3); *Taunton of To-day* (1896), 50.

<sup>348</sup> TNA, RG 9/1618; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 103.

built. Many overseas students boarded, most pupils took University exams and several won scholarships.<sup>349</sup>

Many parents, regarding church schools as only for the poor, sent their children to private elementary schools such as that kept in 1830 by John Crockford, father of the founder of the clerical directory.<sup>350</sup> Seventeen private schools were recorded in 1842, 20 in 1852 and by 1864 there were 10 for boys, 12 for girls and nine mixed schools. Numbers attending are unknown but in 1861, excluding the public schools, 248 children boarded and there were 140 teachers in the town.<sup>351</sup> In 1872 most of the 27 recorded private schools were day schools.<sup>352</sup>

Emily Josland was unusual in having a purpose-built girls' schoolroom in Canal Terrace between 1879 and 1899.<sup>353</sup> Teachers were often unqualified and a girl who attended a private school later recalled sitting with c. 30 children around a table with slates and no formal lessons.<sup>354</sup>

In the 1900s there were three girls' schools in the Crescent including The Crescent School, 1896—1939, and schools for boys and girls in Belvedere Road. Later schools in the Crescent included St Dunstan's boys school and the Gilbert mixed school.<sup>355</sup> Maud McDermott (d. 1916), former head of Bishop Fox's, kept a boarding school at 22—3 Park Street for girls aged 7—15 and built a large assembly hall at the rear in 1912.<sup>356</sup> Open-air work was a feature of Eastcombe House, Holway Avenue, a mixed elementary day school

<sup>349</sup> TNA, RG 10/2374; RG 12/1877; IR 58/82614 (2182); *Taunton of To-day* (1896), 50; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1902—3), 159; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/11/394; DD/X/ENG/1; A/DSG/1; DD/X/MDA/5.

<sup>350</sup> Pigot, *London and Prov. Dir.* (1822—3); *Pigot & Co. Dir.* (1830); Goldsworthy, *Recollection*, 21; TNA, HO 107/972, 1922; RG 9/1618; Crockford's was demolished to build St Mary's school: SHC, DD/TBL/49.

<sup>351</sup> *Pigot & Co. Dir.* (1842); *Slater's Dir. Som.* (1852); TNA, RG 9/1617—18; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 103.

<sup>352</sup> *Morris & Co. Dir. Som.* (1872).

<sup>353</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/13/568; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883—99).

<sup>354</sup> SHC, A/BID/1.

<sup>355</sup> *Taunton Courier* 10 Feb. 1909, 24 Dec. 1924, 16 Oct. 1935: BNA accessed 19 Aug. 2019; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1894—1939), 154; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1900—3); TNA, RG 14/12286; IR 58/82639 831; SHC, D/R/ta/34/9/3, p.73; A/BID/1; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), 23; *Educ. Facilities in Som. (post 1935)*, 5; *Educ. in Dors., Som. and Wilts. (c. 1938)*, 7.

<sup>356</sup> TNA, RG 14/14242/317; SHC, DD/X/MDT/393, p. 11; D/B/ta/4/3/3 (1912); A/AYO/1/1.

between 1938 and 1950.<sup>357</sup> The greater variety of state education brought most small private schools to an end by the 1950s but Mountlands School, opened at 103 South Road in 1930 for boys and girls up to 12, had 74 children in 1977 shortly before it closed. Thone Preparatory School for boys in Staplegrove Road was open between 1937 and the early 1970s.<sup>358</sup>

Dancing masters were recorded from 1709, some working in schools, and in 1842 there were seven teachers of music, piano, singing and dancing, 14 by 1887.<sup>359</sup> James Davey taught dancing from 1851 until his saloon off Station Road was burnt down in 1898.<sup>360</sup> By the mid 20th century there were three dancing schools, two still open in 2024.<sup>361</sup>

### Taunton School

The West of England Dissenters' Proprietary School started on Wellington Road, Bishops Hull in 1847 but in 1868 moved to Fairwater House, Staplegrove. There were 137 boys over 8 and seven resident masters taught modern and classical languages, natural science, mathematics, grammar, history and geography. The school was reconstituted in 1899 as Taunton School for boys aged 7—19, non-denominational but run on free church principles. In 1914 there were 29 staff and 417 boys most of whom boarded but only 21 were in the sixth form. Three female teachers ran the junior school and taught history and French to the older boys. By 1937 overcrowding caused boys to be withdrawn but there remained 356 boarders and 193 day boys of whom 78 were on free places. The sixth form had increased to 94.<sup>362</sup> There were sports facilities, a rifle range, parade ground and aircraft hangar by 1939.<sup>363</sup> In 1964 768 boys aged 8—18 included 534 boarders.<sup>364</sup> Since 1976 Taunton School has been

<sup>357</sup> SHC, A/BMG/5/2; PAM 2959, *Taunton Guide*, 1950, 44.

<sup>358</sup> SHC, A/APN/2/6; A/BMG/5/2; D/PC/stapg/7/3, p. 84; A/CBG/19, 21.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid. Q/SR/270/7; *Som. Co. Gaz.*, 12 Sep 1840; *Pigot & Co. Dir.* (1842); *Goodman's Taunton Dir* (1887).

<sup>360</sup> TNA, HO 107/1922, p. 103; SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/5 (*Taunton Mail*, 9 Mar. 1898, p. 4).

<sup>361</sup> *The Schools of Som.* (1964); *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1972—3).

<sup>362</sup> *Royal Com. to Inquire into Education* (1868), XIV, 489; SHC, A/CBG/19—20; A/DIF/106/1.

<sup>363</sup> SHC, A/BMG/5/2, plan. The school biplane was burnt apparently by boys smoking: J. Brown, *Independent Witness* (Taunton, 1997), 23—4.

<sup>364</sup> *Som. Co. Devt Plan; Taunton* (1964), 27.

fully co-educational, although girls remain in the minority. In 2017 524 pupils aged 13—18 were evenly divided between day and boarding, the latter from 35 nationalities. The international branch in linked houses on Greenway Road had 83 pupils. The preparatory school catered for children from birth and had 495 pupils and from 2012 for an international middle school.<sup>365</sup>

### Queen's College

The school, in Trull parish, originated as Castle School in Bishops Hull but opened in 1847 on Trull Road as the Wesleyan Collegiate Institution, later Queen's College incorporated in 1888. On Sundays the boys walked to the Temple church where a college gallery was provided but by the 1880s they supported their own minister.<sup>366</sup>

The school was wound up in 1930 and placed in a trust. Few subjects were taught and only two thirds of the 116 boys obtained any certificates. In 1947 numbers had risen to 190 but boys as old as 18 were in the lower forms. However, by 1961 a third of sixth formers went to University. There were more day boys than at Taunton's other public schools.<sup>367</sup> From 1972 girls were admitted and by 2019 made up nearly half the pupils. The school continued to be run by the Methodist Independent Schools Trust with four departments: nursery, pre-preparatory, junior and senior with pupils transferring to senior school at 11 rather than 13. In 2017 there were 700 pupils, mostly day and a nursery for babies from birth opened in 2016.<sup>368</sup>

### King's College

<sup>365</sup> Brown, *Independent Witness*, 39, 79—80; [www.isi.net/school/taunton-school](http://www.isi.net/school/taunton-school); [taunton-preparatory-school](http://www.isi.net/school/taunton-preparatory-school): accessed 13 Sep. 2019.

<sup>366</sup> Bishops Hull, Trull forthcoming; H.J.C. Cannon, *History of Queen's College, Taunton* (Taunton c. 1956), 16—17, 27, 114; SHC, A/BMG/5/2, D/N/tmc/4/2/27, p. 63, 184—5, 3/2/1; TNA, BT 31/14950/27601.

<sup>367</sup> Cannon, *Queen's College*, f.p. 156; .SHC, A/CBG/22—3; D/N/tmc/3/4/5, 3/4/7.

<sup>368</sup> [www.isi.net/school/queen-s-college](http://www.isi.net/school/queen-s-college): accessed 13 Sep. 2019.

In 1867 C. E. Giles designed a school for the Taunton College School Company Ltd, incorporated in 1866, on 14 a. in South Road. The boys learnt French, German, Sanskrit, music and drawing.<sup>369</sup> In 1871 there were only 20 boarders, in 1879 the company was wound up and the school was offered for sale with cricket pavilion, swimming bath and iron chapel.<sup>370</sup> It was bought in 1880 by Canon Woodard who despite initial difficulties established King Alfred's College for boys, now King's College. In 1904 a permanent chapel, now the Lady Chapel was built. The present chapel dating from 1908 and was extended in 1936 but it was never completed or built as high as intended.<sup>371</sup>

In 1931 there were only 118 boys, teaching was inadequate and the school was heavily in debt. The headmaster reduced salaries to keep the school open and by 1936 there were 220 boys. The Holway Avenue frontage was sold financing the purchase of 50 a. for playing fields and a gymnasium completed in 1938. The boys had a succession of aeroplanes. The school bought adjoining houses in South Road, Fullands in Wilton in 1946 and Pyrland Hall in 1951—2 for boys under 13. In 1955 there were 432 boys in the senior school and 120 at Pyrland, many from overseas. The sixth form had 62 boys, a quarter of whom went to university. Science and other buildings were added from 1957 and in 1968 girls were admitted to the sixth form.<sup>372</sup>

In 1978 the former convent school was bought for a pre-preparatory school, which in 1987 combined with Pyrland to become King's Hall, later King's College Preparatory School for boys and girls aged 4—13. In 1990 110 of its 365 pupils boarded but by 2018 most were day pupils and King's College had 400 boarders and 60 day boys over 13 and a sixth form of 200 of whom 50 were girls boarding. Further buildings in the late 20th and early 21st century

<sup>369</sup> VCH Som. II, 445—6; TNA, BT 31/1299/3314; SHC, DD/TBL/47; Wilts and Swindon HC, 740/46; *Taunton Courier* 9 Jan 1867, 12 Oct 1870, 10 Sep 1879; BNA accessed 25 May 2018.

<sup>370</sup> TNA, RG 10/2370; *Taunton Courier* 23 Jan 1879, 10 Sep 1879; BNA accessed 25 May 2018; SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/1/T1/13.

<sup>371</sup> SHC, A/BMG/5/2; D. Bromwich, *King's College the 1st 100 years* (Taunton c. 1980), 12—16, 19—22.

<sup>372</sup> SHC, A/CBG/16—17; L. and E. Cowie, *That One Idea: Nathaniel Woodard and his schools* (Ellesmere, 1991), 100; Bromwich, *King's College*, 29—32, 40—2, 47; SHC, A/CBG/18.

included a theatre and study bedrooms. The new library of 2010—11 by Mitchell Taylor Workshop of Bath stands out for its careful brickwork and triple gabled roofline, each gable tipped forward in answer to long roof lights behind.<sup>373</sup> In 1991 the college became fully co-educational although there were still more boys than girls more boarders than day pupils. In 2017 the school of c. 480 pupils employed 284 people assisted by 30 volunteers, had subsidiaries in India and Qatar and a turnover of nearly £13 ½ million.<sup>374</sup>

### Weirfield

In the 1870s Weirfield House was a boys' boarding school under Robert Bailey but there were only five boarders in 1881 and Bailey moved to the Avenue, where he was succeeded by his son John until the 1900s.<sup>375</sup>

In 1879 Jane Loveday, wife of a Taunton School master, established a girls' boarding school at 5—6 Middle Street, which by 1883 she had moved to Weirfield. The school had a gymnasium, croquet and tennis lawns, a good reputation for music and taught dancing, calisthenics, political economy, chemistry and natural philosophy. Some girls went to London University but others were illiterate. Lessons occupied three hours in the morning and two and half hours in the afternoon.<sup>376</sup> The school competed for bright girls with Bishop Fox's, which offered scholarships.<sup>377</sup> There were 165 girls in 1922 falling to 88 by 1931 when boys were admitted to the kindergarten. There were seven full-time and three visiting teachers. By 1952 the school, run by two head teachers, had 263 girls aged 4—18 of whom 52 boarded but only five went to University.<sup>378</sup> In 1971, beginning with the sixth form, girls transferred to

<sup>373</sup> *Building Design*, 14 Oct. 2011.

<sup>374</sup> Cowie, *That One Idea*, 101—2; Char. Com. reg. accessed 22 Oct 2018; [www.isi.net/school/king-s-college](http://www.isi.net/school/king-s-college), king-s-hall-school: accessed 13 Sep. 2019.

<sup>375</sup> Morris & Co. *Dir. Som.* (1872); TNA, RG 10/2374; RG 12/1877; *Taunton and West Som. Annual 1897*, 135; Goodman, *Dir. Som.* (1902—3), 123.

<sup>376</sup> SHC, A/DIF/79/2: *Where to Buy: Taunton* (c. 1890), 14; M.M. Stych, *A History of Weirfield School, Taunton* (Taunton, c. 1973), [1—4].

<sup>377</sup> SHC, A/BMG/5/2.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.* D/B/ta/24/1/80/1676; A/CBG/26—6; Stych, *Weirfield*, [7, 9].



Taunton School, which bought Weirfield. After a few years as the girls' preparatory school Weirfield closed in 1995 and was demolished for housing.<sup>379</sup>

### Evening continuation and adult schools

In 1825 Abel Salter Trood opened an evening school to teach working men reading, writing and arithmetic for 6d. a week and for an extra fee shorthand, book-keeping, mensuration and navigation.<sup>380</sup> In the 1860s the Revd Joseph Jackson, curate of St James', taught men the classics for ½ d. a week at Rowbarton where one of his pupils was the amateur astronomer, Roger Langdon.<sup>381</sup> Evening continuation schools were aimed at younger workers and some were provided in factories.<sup>382</sup> St Mary's evening school taught over 300 young people in the later 19th century but St James' only took boys.<sup>383</sup> By the 20th century evening classes were available in several schools and the Technical Institute. Employers were reputedly apathetic but the gas company paid for its apprentices to attend. In 1913—14 four schools provided over 11,000 hours of classes for 118 males and 72 females but none in 1923—5 although 383 children a year left school prematurely. A revival in 1925—6 led Askwith and Priory schools to provide technical and general courses in arithmetic, English and geography twice a week.<sup>384</sup>

In the late 19th century the adult school movement was aimed at men and the Quaker meeting in Bath Place hosted Sunday morning classes. Working men's clubs and the YMCA provided men's classes. However, a mixed adult school, founded in 1895, was held in the Advent and Gloucester Halls off Gloucester Street with over 100 members and an orchestra

<sup>379</sup> SHC, D/PC/stapg/7/3, p. 84; Brown, *Independent Witness*, 34, 39—40, 79—80, 175—6.

<sup>380</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C2402/23.

<sup>381</sup> [www.archive.org/stream/thelifeofrogerlangdon](http://www.archive.org/stream/thelifeofrogerlangdon): accessed 30 Sep. 2019.

<sup>382</sup> SHC, C/E/4/220/1.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.* D/P/tau.m/18/2/6.; D/P/tau.ja/2/8/1.

<sup>384</sup> TNA, ED 41/391; ED 114/805, pp. 1—4, 11.

by 1900.<sup>385</sup> A women's adult school was built in Harcourt Street, Rowbarton before 1908 and continued until c. 1961 except during the war when it was requisitioned but women's classes continued at the Congregational Sunday school.<sup>386</sup> The Gilchrist Educational Trust and the Cordwent Lecture for adult education ceased to exist in the early 21st century but the Workers Educational Association, in Taunton since 1918, and the University of the Third Age had active branches.<sup>387</sup>

### Taunton dissenting academy

Matthew Warren trained ministers at Otterford but moved to Paul's Meeting in Taunton probably in the 1680s. He taught six students in his home for up to six years supported by the Exeter Assembly of Congregational and Presbyterian ministers. Other ministers assisted teaching divinity, ethics, classics, physics and mathematics and some students became lawyers or doctors. Teaching was in Latin and students had to submit a Latin thesis. The academy closed between 1714 and 1717 and permanently c. 1752 having taught at least 150 men. Another academy, established in 1752 at Ottery St Mary, Devon, moved to Taunton in 1779 but closed after 1794.<sup>388</sup> In 1842 the Revd John Jackson trained men for the dissenting ministry in Mount Street.<sup>389</sup>

### Commercial schools

The Shorthand and Typewriting Institute and School of Commerce, later Hallett's

Commercial school, was founded in 1887 by Henry Hallett at Bridge House, Bridge Street.<sup>390</sup>

<sup>385</sup> SHC, A/DSG/1; DD/X/SOM/39; DD/FIV/1/59; *Taunton and West Som. Annual 1898*, 111, 1901, 109.

<sup>386</sup> *Taunton Courier* 23 Sep. 1903: BNA accessed 19 Aug. 2019; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929, 1939), A35; SHC, D/N/tau.rc/4/2/2 (1942); A/APN/2/6.

<sup>387</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 20 Feb. 1918: BNA accessed 11 Feb. 2020; SHC, DD/X/BRO/2/4; DD/YMt/17.

<sup>388</sup> Kirk, *Taunton Dissenting Academy*, 12, 16—35, 38—72, 76—7. Warren has a memorial in St Mary's church.

<sup>389</sup> *Pigot & Co. Dir.* (1842).

<sup>390</sup> SHC, A/BMG/5/2; A/BRL/6/1; A/DIF/49.

Men and women learnt French, German, bookkeeping, land surveying, journalism and elocution, some by post.<sup>391</sup> Its final base between 1935 and 1950 was Mansfield House, Silver Street.<sup>392</sup> Phillips, later Priory, Commercial School, established in 1901, taught bookkeeping and occupied 11—13 Priory Avenue from 1919 until it closed c. 1959.<sup>393</sup>

### College of Art

A Taunton School of Science and Art established in 1830 was short-lived.<sup>394</sup> Taunton School of Art, later Somerset College of Art, was founded in 1856 and took over the former Mechanics Institute in Bath Place.<sup>395</sup> In 1881 and 1885 the school held two-week art, science and industrial exhibitions in the castle including objects loaned by the South Kensington museums.<sup>396</sup> In 1890 the school moved to the Victoria Rooms on Fore Street and taught drawing and painting, architecture, anatomy, modelling, building and machine construction and geometry with evening classes for ‘artizans’.<sup>397</sup>

An art school built in 1900 in Corporation Street had facilities for drawing, modelling, wood and metal working and weaving over four floors.<sup>398</sup> In 1912 there were 161 students and some classes were open to schoolchildren.<sup>399</sup> Teacher, Annie Stook, designed lace exhibited in Vienna in 1899. By 1916 it had a reputation for Honiton style lace making in modern designs taught to girls with disabilities.<sup>400</sup> In 1917 the school provided day, evening and Saturday afternoon classes in enamelling, leatherwork, fashion-plate design, cabinet making and teaching. Two scholarships were offered to children at local secondary schools.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid. PAM 469.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid. A/DVF/7/1; A/DIF/49, 114/12; A/BRL/6/1/3; PAM 2959, *Taunton Guide*, 1950, 44.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid. A/BMG/5/2; *Taunton Courier*, 8 Aug. 1959; BNA accessed 11 Feb. 2020.

<sup>394</sup> SHC, Q/RSI/1; A/DIF/114/12.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid. DD/TAC/6/1/4; T/PH/rea/3/14; A/BMG/5/23.

<sup>396</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 5 Oct. 1881, 14 Oct. 1885; BNA accessed 21 Sep. 2021.

<sup>397</sup> SHC, DD/PRY/1/33—4; D/B/ch/9/3/10.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid. A/CMY/456; DD/X/RGL/1.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid. A/BRL/3/1; TNA, ED 14/803.

<sup>400</sup> MAK: www.europeana.eu accessed 13 June 2024; SHC, PAM 2443, *Arts and Crafts, a review of the work executed by students in the leading art schools* (1916), 120—2.

Distinguished students included botanical illustrator Mary Eaton, architect Charles Biddulph-Pinchard and artist Rachel Reckitt.<sup>401</sup> Some employers encouraged their workers to attend and 26 schoolteachers took classes.<sup>402</sup> When the technical college moved to Staplegrove Road the art college took over its premises.<sup>403</sup>

By 1953 Somerset College of Art had 59 full-time, 166 part-time, 62 day-release and 242 evening students.<sup>404</sup> Annexes by 1962 when there were 470 day and 575 evening students included the old Huish's school in Mount Lane. In 1972 the college moved to Wellington Road and in 1974 merged with the technical college to become the Somerset College of Art and Technology.<sup>405</sup>

### Technical college

The Taunton Technical Institute on Corporation Street opened in 1900 with mechanical, electrical and physical laboratories, a photometric room and a drawing office. In 1911 it offered courses in mathematics, drawing, English, French, magnetism and electricity, engineering and bookkeeping with ten teachers. Chemistry lessons were held at Huish's school and typing and shorthand typing classes at Hallet's commercial school.<sup>406</sup>

In 1926 only half the 134 students had had a secondary education. Most studied commercial subjects, engineering, building and pharmacy.<sup>407</sup> In 1947 day-release courses were offered in bakery, butchery, hairdressing and building. Pre-nursing and agricultural classes were available to students from 15 but all c. 270 students were part-time. There was a growth in recreational courses for the public. In 1955 the college's 16 full-time and 22 part-

<sup>401</sup> SHC, A/BRL/6/2/1; VCH Office, Taunton, R. Lillford, 'A Biographical Dictionary of Somerset Architects and Surveyors' (2022), 51, 443.

<sup>402</sup> TNA, ED 114/804.

<sup>403</sup> SHC, A/BMG/5/23; A/APN/2/6.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid. A/BRL/1/1; PAM 268 (Prospectus 1956—7), 8, 11—12.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid. A/BRL/6/3/4, 6/4/1; *Som. Co. Devt Plan; Taunton* (1964), 27.

<sup>406</sup> SHC, A/BRL/6/1/3, 6/3/4.

<sup>407</sup> TNA, ED 114/805, pp. 2—6.

time staff taught vocational and commercial subjects, modern languages and courses leading to exams set by professional bodies like the Institute of Bankers.<sup>408</sup>

Despite the acquisition of the former Bishop Fox's school accommodation was inadequate. The college began moving to new buildings in Wellington Road from 1958—9. Student numbers rose to *c.* 600 full-time, 3,000 part-time and 2,500 evening students in 1969 when the college had departments of engineering, business studies, building and surveying, liberal studies, and catering, housecraft and nursing. The technical and art colleges merged to create the Somerset College of Art and Technology in 1974 and by 1976—7 there were 1,495 full-time and 6,664 part-time students.<sup>409</sup> The Collinson Centre, since demolished, was built in 1982 on New, now Castle Street. After 1990 the former Bishop Fox's was given up and all activities were housed at Wellington Road. The college was rebuilt apart from the distinctive art building including three-storey flat-roofed buildings with blue, silver and grey metal cladding by LHC Architects of Exeter in 2005.<sup>410</sup>

It became independent in 1993 as Somerset College and had its first graduates, with degrees from Plymouth University.<sup>411</sup> It merged with Bridgwater and Cannington Colleges in 2016 and the Taunton campus hosted University Centre Somerset in partnership with four universities. The large residential campus at the former Canonsgrove police college, Trull was replaced by Cannington *c.* 2020. A unit enables special school pupils to receive tertiary education.<sup>412</sup>

### Teacher training

<sup>408</sup> SHC, A/BRL/6/3/1, 4; A/EPF/211/1; A/AGL/2.

<sup>409</sup> *Som. Co. Devt Plan; Taunton* (1964), 27; SHC, A/BRL/1/1, 6/3/4; D/PC/stapg/7/3, p. 84.

<sup>410</sup> SHC, C/OP/3/151.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.* A/BRL/7/2.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.* C/E/4/409/176; [www.somerset.ac.uk](http://www.somerset.ac.uk); [reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/31/130803](https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/31/130803): accessed 13 Sep. 2019.

Schools often had more trainees than teachers in the later 19th century. Young girls started as class monitors, helping with an infant class or taking charge of the babies. Training as a pupil teacher began at age 12 and included home study. In 1883 a girl of 17 was considered too old. St Andrew's school had a long tradition of training and in the 1920s was used by Exeter University College for teacher training.<sup>413</sup> The Wesleyan schoolmaster taught pupil teachers in the evenings in 1874. In the 1890s male pupil teachers were taught at Mary Street Memorial School. A Taunton and West Somerset Teachers Association started in 1883.<sup>414</sup> In 1909 the old system of monitors and pupil teachers was given up. In the later 20th century there was a teachers' centre at 92—4 Staplegrove Road but in the early 21st century teacher training was based at Heathfield School, West Monkton.<sup>415</sup>

## ALMSHOUSES

Lost medieval almshouses include those of Richard Marchaunt in Church, or Great Magdalene, Lane recorded in 1480 and an East Reach almshouse, replaced by a private house before 1566.<sup>416</sup> The dissolution of the Priory and the abolition of the chantries and religious fraternities, which had maintained many almshouses, left them with no income as post-Reformation purchasers refused to honour charitable obligations.<sup>417</sup> An undated 16th-century petition claimed 44 almshouses were supported out of chantry lands. Only *c.* 30 can be accounted for.<sup>418</sup>

Post-medieval almshouses, often called hospitals, consisted of a building divided into rooms rather than a row of houses. Most had a chapel and a reader. The survivors except

<sup>413</sup> SHC, A/ARQ 4/1, 6; D/P/tau.a/18/7/2, 23/2; D/P/tau.m/18/2/5—6; C/E/4/220/1, p. 75; C/E/4/367/2, p. 167.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/218/1, p. 34; D/N/tau.mst/3/3/2.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/3/8/17, p. 1; C/E/1/162; C/E/4/64; <http://www.heathfieldcommunityschool.com/Taunton-Teaching-Alliance>: accessed 13 Sep. 2019.

<sup>416</sup> SHC, DD/WO/11/5/11; DD/SP/71 [f. 60].

<sup>417</sup> Weaver, *Som. Wills, 1531—58*, 78—9; TNA, C 2/JAS1/W4/40; below, *rel. hist.*

<sup>418</sup> BL, Add. MS 30277, f. 3.

Gray's have been rebuilt away from their original sites. Their use for parish paupers was largely stopped after 1820.<sup>419</sup> In 1888 the borough wanted a single management and a standard payment for inmates. Almshouses were gradually taken over by the Taunton Town Lands charity, which administered Harriet Badcock's £900 almshouse gift in 1864.<sup>420</sup> In 1963 the almshouse charities combined to create the Taunton Town Charity, now Taunton Heritage Trust, which managed them as sheltered accommodation for those over 60. In 2017 it had seven employees, an income of nearly £700,000 and assets of nearly £7,300,000.<sup>421</sup>

### St Mary Magdalene's almshouses

Before 1423 the Osbern family built seven almshouses and adjoining chaplain's house in Easter Church, now Magdalene, Lane. Their heir John Bishop (d. c. 1499) presumably added a row of six as he left 13 almshouses to his chantry in St Mary's.<sup>422</sup> Until 1548 the chantry supported them and during Elizabeth's reign the feoffees unsuccessfully petitioned the court of Augmentations on behalf of the almspeople.<sup>423</sup> The houses were used for parish paupers but in 1671 the Town Lands charity was responsible for repairing the 17 houses in Little Magdalene Lane and two in Paul Street, the latter rebuilt c. 1810 and demolished c. 1940.<sup>424</sup> The borough constables decided who should occupy them but by the 1860s trustees made some admissions.<sup>425</sup> The Magdalene Lane almshouses were rebuilt after 1851 by William Shewbrooks probably to Richard Carver's design for £1,419.<sup>426</sup> Five houses each comprised

<sup>419</sup> *5th Rep. Com. Char.*, 490—542.

<sup>420</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/2/2/2 (1888); R.W McDowall, and I. I. Jeffries, 'The Old Almshouses, St James Street', *PSAS CVI*, 82; *Gen Digest of Endowed Chars. Som* (1869—71), 60—1.

<sup>421</sup> SHC, DD/TAC; *Char. Com. Reg.*: accessed 22 Oct .2018.

<sup>422</sup> TNA, E 326/5020, 5058; E 328/180; E 329/476; PROB 11/14/794.

<sup>423</sup> E. Green, *Somerset Chantries*, 20, G. Woodward, *Chantry Grants*, pp. 2—3; *SDNQ*, XII, 198—9; XIX, 13.

<sup>424</sup> Bates, *Gerard's Survey of Som.*, 1633, 59; SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/10, 15 (1671); A/DIF/101/11/218 [33—34 Paul St].

<sup>425</sup> *5th Rep Com. Char.* 514—5; SHC, DD/SP/453.

<sup>426</sup> SHC, DD/TAC/5/5/51; A/CAE [photo.].

four dwellings with access to a backyard. Condemned in 1932, they were sold to help fund Leycroft Close almshouse. The southernmost houses survive as commercial premises.<sup>427</sup>

Six houses ‘in the churchyard’ supported by the St Sepulchre fraternity had become four by the 1780s when pulled down by Sir Benjamin Hammet. In 1806 John Hammet gave four two-room houses adjoining the relocated Henley’s Almshouse in Holway Lane in recompense.<sup>428</sup> As three ‘tolerable cottages’ they were occupied until 1871 but demolished in 1882.<sup>429</sup>

### St James’ almshouses

The almshouses were apparently entrusted to the priory, which supported the seven inmates until the Dissolution.<sup>430</sup> Thereafter the income was mostly spent on the church and the almshouses were used as a poorhouse. After investigation arrears were paid in 1822 to be spent on the buildings, which were returned to the ‘second poor’, those not on relief, appointed by the vicar. By 1869 the corner house was divided so that seven women and a married couple were accommodated. The building was filthy by 1883 with a choked privy.<sup>431</sup> Gifts to the almspeople from William Harry Stone in 1866, Louisa Crossman Coleman in 1890 and Hugo Bonn in 1949 were amalgamated in 1979 but ceased to exist before 1994.<sup>432</sup>

The late 15th-century, 12-bay, timber-framed row had deep bracketed eaves, back and front, and four chimneys, probably a later insertion although the corner house had a large stack. Six almshouses were built c. 1896 along the eastern boundary of St James’ churchyard of Bridgwater red brick with courses of Bath stone along the eastern boundary of St James’ churchyard. In 1902 two more were added on land reserved for a vestry hall. The two

<sup>427</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/24/1/79/1648, 24/1/85/1820, 24/1/86/1852; D/DC/tau.d/36/15 and uncat. plan; DD/X/STONE (plans).

<sup>428</sup> Green, *Somerset Chantries*, 24; SHC, T/PH/hps/1; *5th Rep Com. Char.* 514—5.

<sup>429</sup> TNA, RG 10/2371; SHC, DD/TAC/6/1/1; D/B/ta/3/9/1 (1882).

<sup>430</sup> *Valor Eccl.* I. 170.

<sup>431</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.ja/4/1/4, 9/1/3; D/B/ta/3/8/1; McDowall and Jeffries, ‘The Old Almshouses’, 82.

<sup>432</sup> SHC, DD/HS/2/13; A/ARG/8—9; D/P/tau.ja 3/1/2; DD/C/324; Char. Com. reg.: accessed 22 Oct. 2018.



northern houses remodelled as flats in 1969 to provide 10 dwellings named St James Close. The old site was sold to Canon Street Brewery, which donated the timber frames to Taunton Corporation in 1897. Two were given to the Archaeological Society including restored 33 St James Street, which stands in the Museum of Somerset courtyard.<sup>433</sup>

### Pope's almshouses

In 1590 Thomas Pope the elder surrendered in trust 3 a. and two cottages, rebuilt as six dwellings outside the East Gate. In 1602 he left 8s. a year from the land to a poor man to say daily prayers in the sixth or 'bell house' for the inhabitants.<sup>434</sup> In 1637 the cottages were replaced by one large corner house.<sup>435</sup> From the later 17th century the charity held Stringland's, (c. 15 a.), later Poor Ground, the only land it had in 1839. Saunders charity claimed 3 a. at Ash Meadows, possibly Pope's original endowment forfeited on a mortgage by 1651.<sup>436</sup>

In 1816 the almshouse had 14 rooms c. 14 ft square each occupied by a poor woman who provided her own furniture and received no allowance from the charity. The £50 rent for the land, after upkeep of the almshouse, was distributed to the poor of St Mary's.

Almswomen worked if they could and if in need were removed to the workhouse or asylum.<sup>437</sup> In 1870 Pope's, Stringland's and Saunders' charities were amalgamated, the almshouse dwellings were reduced to nine and occupants finally received a small pension.<sup>438</sup> In 1905 the land was sold and by 1917 the total income of £65 barely covered repairs. The assets were given to the Taunton Town Charity.<sup>439</sup>

<sup>433</sup> SHC, A/DAS/2 (12451—4); A/DIF/116/223; DD/SAS/2016/25; DD/CWC.ta/unlisted box 2; McDowall and Jeffries 'The Old Almshouses, St James' St', 83—4.

<sup>434</sup> TNA, PROB 11/101/226; SHC, DD/SP/90 (1601).

<sup>435</sup> *5th Rep Com. Char.* 493—5.

<sup>436</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/10, 3; tithe award, St Mary; DD/DP/116/21/1/1; TNA, C 10/10/18.

<sup>437</sup> *5th Rep Com. Char.* 495—7; SHC, Q/RSc/3/7; D/P/tau.m/9/1/5; *Gen Digest of Endowed Chars. Som* (1869—71), 60—1.

<sup>438</sup> SHC, DD/DP/116/21/1/3.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.* DD/C/325; *Char. Com. In the Matter of Taunton Town Charity* (Taunton, 1941), 5.

The almshouse were reputedly damaged by Parliamentary soldiers in the Civil War.<sup>440</sup> It was demolished in 1932 for road widening with the adjoining 1638 houses. The almshouse was of two storeys with two massive chimney stacks on the north and east fronts and heavy horizontal string courses. Apart from a door and a pair of two light windows on each floor at the west end, the front wall was blank rendered brick. On the east were five uneven bays of two-light windows.<sup>441</sup>

The charity money, with the proceeds of selling other almshouses, paid for Leycroft Close on the site of Leycroft House, south-east of East Reach in 1932. Thirty dwellings had a living room, kitchen, larder, fuel store, bedroom and water closet. The building was altered between 1997 and 2001 to provide 28 flats.<sup>442</sup>

### Huish's almshouses

Before 1615 Richard Huish began building a hospital for 13 poor aged men in Great Magdalene Lane. A literate native of Taunton was to be president, a rent of £103 out of his property in Blackfriars, London, was to support the hospital and 22 governors were to examine and choose inmates who were not to gamble or visit alehouses. The men would receive 2s. 8d. a week and a tawny gown every two years. There was a chapel for compulsory prayers but no provision for the sick.<sup>443</sup>

In 1616 the president and other inmates appealed successively against people claiming to be Richard Huish's heirs and detaining the London rents.<sup>444</sup> The property was destroyed in the Great Fire and was still waste in 1671. The number of almshouse inmates and their pay was reduced after 1725 although the Court of Chancery intervened to secure the income. In 1788 the charity sold an adjoining house to Sir Benjamin Hammet who was

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<sup>440</sup> TNA, C 10/10/18.

<sup>441</sup> *Taunton of Today* (1896), 71; SHC, A/DAS/2 (124550); A/DIF/44; DD/SAS/S2721/6/14.

<sup>442</sup> SHC, DD/DP/C1358/24 (1931 plans); A/DIF/79/2; info. from Taunton Town Charity in 2005.

<sup>443</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/10, 10A; *5th Rep Com. Char.* 499—503.

<sup>444</sup> TNA, C 2/JAS1/G3/72.

required to provide a carriageway from his new street, now a passage through the side of 6 Hammet Street.<sup>445</sup> Following a Chancery petition in 1817 the almshouse inmates received from 5s. a week and clothing.<sup>446</sup> By the 1850s the income, from the London property, some later sold to the London, Chatham and Dover Railway, and surpluses invested in consols covered the almsmen's pay and expenses, officers' stipends and payments to Huish scholars at University leaving enough to found two schools.<sup>447</sup>

The stone and tile almshouse had 13 rooms over two floors, a chapel, and a lumber room, originally for the records. A single door gave access to the covered passage along the south of the building. Each room was lit by a pair of two-light windows and had a fireplace. The upstairs passage was lit on the north by six 3-light windows and there was a bell turret on the ridge.<sup>448</sup> A new almshouse designed by C.E. Giles was built in 1867—8 on the site of Burton Square, Magdalene Street at a cost of nearly £3,000. The old almshouse was demolished in 1868 for a house numbered 5a Hammet Street.<sup>449</sup> From 1874 the almshouse was in the care of the Taunton Town charity.<sup>450</sup> The remaining London property was sold in the 1930s and after the war.<sup>451</sup> In 1951 the inmates' allowances and steward's salary had not increased since 1901.<sup>452</sup> The prayer room was adapted as the trustees meeting room and in 2004 the building was altered to provide four flats and the charity offices. The Bernard Taylor Homes, comprising 19 flats named after a charity chairman, were completed c. 1984 on the adjoining fire station site.<sup>453</sup>

### Henley's almshouses

<sup>445</sup> *Cal. Money*, II, pp. 607—10; SHC, DD/DP/60/1, 75/4, Q/RDd/32; DD/DP/C3161/1; DD/DP/43/5 (1798).

<sup>446</sup> *5th Rep Com. Char.* 499—508.

<sup>447</sup> SHC, Q/RSc/3/7.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.* A/DAS/2 (12460); A/DIF/44; DD/DP/C3161/6.

<sup>449</sup> *Gen Digest of Endowed Chars. Som* (1869—71), 60—1; SHC, A/DAS/2 (12460); D/B/ta/2/1/3, p. 733; DD/DP/C3161/4.

<sup>450</sup> *Char. Com. Taunton Town Charity*, 5.

<sup>451</sup> SHC, DD/DH/1/3 (1925—61).

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.* DD/C/325 (char. accts 1901, 1951).

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.* D/B/ta/24/1/5350; DD/TAC/13/1; inf. from Taunton Town Charity, 2005.

Robert Henley (d. 1614) father of Andrew, Taunton's first mayor, built 11 two-storey houses and both men left money to the inmates.<sup>454</sup> Andrew's widow Dorothy (d. 1651), is credited with building 18 one-roomed almshouses opposite the west end of St Mary's in 1637, presumably altering the earlier building. By the 18th century it was a parish poorhouse for 36 paupers with eight more in four nearby houses, probably the former Holy Sepulchre houses. Sir Benjamin Hammet, requiring the site for his new street, agreed to build a house in Holway Lane, which became a parish poorhouse. It was badly damaged by fire in 1793 and comprised eight houses in poor condition by the 1820s. Inmates were evicted for misconduct and adult and illegitimate children could be removed.<sup>455</sup> The row of two-storey, one-room deep houses with attics was at right angles to the road. The larger house on the street had Tudor-style 4-light windows.<sup>456</sup> With the adjacent houses of 1806 they were sold in 1860 and were demolished in 1882 for carriage workshops.<sup>457</sup>

#### Gray's almshouses.

In March 1635 Robert Gray (d. 1638) bought an East Street house to build an almshouse, to be endowed with £2,000. In 1638 he left £1,500 to the Merchant Taylor's Company to pay the ten almswomen and the future six almsmen 8s. a month and the prayer reader £6 13s. 4d. a quarter.<sup>458</sup> The company declined the trust and in 1641 the Lord Chancellor directed the feoffees to invest £2,000 in property, which they did not do until later.<sup>459</sup> By the end of 1640 the house was complete and six almsmen joined the 10 women.<sup>460</sup> Two feoffees were

<sup>454</sup> SHC, DD/TOR/23; TNA, PROB 11/159/31.

<sup>455</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/1, 5; 23/37; DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (1760 and loose papers); DD/SP/453; *5th Rep. Com. Char.* 519—20.

<sup>456</sup> SHC, A/DAS/2 (123210); A/DIF/101/11/230; A/DIF/116/669.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/15 (4 Feb. 1860); D/B/ta/3/9/1 (1882).

<sup>458</sup> Ibid. DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (1671).

<sup>459</sup> Ibid. DD/SAS/C795/TN/10; DD/DP/205/1; *5th Rep Com. Char.* 522—8; *Gen Digest of Endowed Chars. Som* (1869—71), 60—1.

<sup>460</sup> SHC, DD/SP/418, 422.

overseers and four were ‘keys’ keeping the chests in the chapel where the trustees met.<sup>461</sup> The almspeople wore a gilded badge with Gray’s rebus and had gowns every three years later replaced by coats for men and waistcoats and petticoats for women.<sup>462</sup> In c. 1680 the trustees were accused of mismanaging funds and attending conventicles and by the 1730s Presbyterian prayers were held in the chapel. A 1735 decree that future trustees and inmates must be members of the Church of England was apparently never enforced.<sup>463</sup>

By 1661 the charity owned a tenement east of the almshouse, repeatedly subdivided, and by the early 19th century Pugsley’s Mead (5 a.) off East Reach, Poors Croft (3 a.) at Haydon and nearly £700 invested in mortgages. Mortgaged property was often seized and let to benefit the charity until the debt was paid.<sup>464</sup> Each inmate received 3s. a week and the reader 6s. in the 1820s, clothing was no longer given and they had to furnish their rooms, of which the reader had three with a separate garden. Other inmates had to be unmarried, over 60, free of disease, resident in Taunton at least seven years and take in no lodgers or children. By mid century those rules were broken.<sup>465</sup> Under an 1870 scheme Pugsley’s Mead was developed for housing raising nearly £2,000. In 1896 John Hamilton Kinglake and his wife replaced the capital used for the development and in 1900 the combined assets became Gray’s Almshouse Charity.<sup>466</sup> The inmates were then all women and in 1906 the house was rearranged to provide eight apartments comprising bedroom, living room and pantry and shared bathrooms and water closet on each floor. The land and houses were sold in 1917 and 1931, half the £300 income went on upkeep and six almswomen received 15—20s. a week with extra payments for the reader and cleaner by 1949.<sup>467</sup> In the 1950s the trustees refused to

<sup>461</sup> Ibid. A/BIS/1/1; DD/SP/418 (1676—9).

<sup>462</sup> Ibid. DD/SP/418 (1676, 1680, 1682, 1695—6, 1708), 421.

<sup>463</sup> TNA, C 8/379/5; SHC, DD/TB/16/14.

<sup>464</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/48; Q/RSc/3/7; DD/X/BWR/1; DD/SP/418, 421; DD/TAC/2/1/1 (1820).

<sup>465</sup> Ibid. DD/SP/421; DD/SAS/C795/TN/48; *5th Rep Com. Char.* 522—8.

<sup>466</sup> SHC, A/AUS [uncat.]; DD/TAC/6/1/6; DD/DP/97/10; *Char. Com. Taunton Town Charity*, 22.

<sup>467</sup> SHC, DD/C/325; DD/TAC/2/1/1 (1935); DD/DP/205/1; D/B/ta/24/1/35/362.

allow demolition and in 1959 the almshouse became the responsibility of Taunton Town Charity with which Gray's charity merged in 1966.<sup>468</sup>

In 1989 the building was converted into nine self-contained flats retaining the chapel and the walled garden, recorded in 1693. The main street range including the chapel dates in part from 1635, the rest was completed slightly later. The wooden bell cupola may have been added in 1693, the date on the weathervane. The original building was probably timber-framed and the entire brick façade with stone string course and window surrounds was built in the 1670s. The eight two-light ground-floor windows were paid for in 1677. The small chapel retains its 17th-century oak-panelled interior, the low ceiling painted with stars, clouds and angels and the pews panelled with shaped bench ends. It contains a chest ordered in 1684, Gray's portrait bought in 1677 and his coat of arms.<sup>469</sup> The north front has three four-centred-arched stone doorways with plaques above, two-light casements except for the slightly more elaborate three-light windows of the chapel and former schoolroom and six massive stacks carrying pairs of smaller chimney stacks set diagonally. The three doorways open to cross-passages through to a long rear passage serving the ground-floor almshouses and to open-well stairs projecting beyond the back wall up to a similar first-floor access passage. Roof details show that the eastern end is indeed added.

### Middle Street almshouses

These may originate in Thomas Gale's surrender of a cottage in Canon Street tithing in 1689 to benefit poor children in St James' parish, later known as William Dunn's charity.<sup>470</sup> In 1791 the parish officers held and let the premises but rent was paid erratically and few

<sup>468</sup> Ibid. DD/TAC/2/1/1 (1957—66).

<sup>469</sup> Ibid. A/BIS/1/1; DD/SP/418 (1676—7); TNA, C 8/379/5; *PSAS CXXXII* (1988), 279—89. J. Orbach dates the ceiling to the 1630s like St John's chapel, Lydiard Tregoze, Wilts.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid. DD/CH/32; DD/SP/350 (1697), (1727); D/P/tau.ja/17/1/1.

distributions were made.<sup>471</sup> After 1839 the house was rebuilt and two large, terraced houses were built on the Middle Street frontage, let for £10 to clothe poor children.<sup>472</sup> By 1901 the site was part of the brewery, which paid £10 ground rent used to distribute calico. By 1941 it was part of the Taunton Town Charity.<sup>473</sup>

### Harmony Cottages

Charles Harman, cabinet maker and organist of St Mary's built Harmony Cottages south-east of Tancred Street as almshouses before 1845. In 1848 he left the ten one-up one-down houses with privies to the two parishes. Tenants were not to hang washing or damage the communal front garden. However, in 1910 the cottages were privately owned and were occupied until 1962.<sup>474</sup>

### CHARITIES FOR THE POOR

Taunton priory gave a tenth of its income in alms to the poor, £27 a year in the 1530s and children brought up in the priory may have included poor orphans.<sup>475</sup> Alms were given at funerals and by chantries and religious fraternities but later purchasers of their assets refused to accept charitable obligations.<sup>476</sup> Studies of child skeletons across the country have shown a greater rise in disease and trauma in the mid 16th century than during civil wars.<sup>477</sup> In the early 17th century the churchwardens of St James retained charity money for their own lawsuits, dinners, 'some exploit of the officers' and general parish business.<sup>478</sup> Sixteen charities in existence in 1647 worth nearly £1,000 had been lost before 1791 besides bread

<sup>471</sup> Ibid. A/ARG/9; DD/CH/32; *Rep Com. Char.* 536—7.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid. tithe award, St James; DD/CH/32.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid. DD/C/324; *Char. Com. Taunton Town Charity*, 28, 36, 40.

<sup>474</sup> SHC, T/PH/bb/4; DD/CH/22; DD/DP/184/2; DD/SAS/C212/map148; D/P/tau.m/4/1/1—2; DD/IR/T/26/1, p. 11; D/B/ta/2/1/6, p. 125, 4/2/4 (1962).

<sup>475</sup> *Valor Eccl.* I. 170; TNA, E 134/15Eliz/Hil5; Orme, *Educ. W. of Eng.*, 212.

<sup>476</sup> TNA, C 2/JAS1/W4/40.

<sup>477</sup> B. Penny-Mason, 'Children of the Reformation', *Current Archaeology*, April 2015, 27.

<sup>478</sup> Weaver, *Som. Wills 1531—58*, pp. 183—4; Webb, *Som. Wills II*, p. 176; SHC, DD/SP/18/3; Q/SR/16/25—6; D/D/Ca/235; TNA, C 2/JAS1/H19/24.

and apprenticeship charities.<sup>479</sup> Successful clothing charities included that of clothier Simon Saunders in 1591, invested in shambles and providing stockings, flannel and woollens until 1871 or later.<sup>480</sup> Gifts of bread by Sir George Farewell in 1622, Hugh Prockter in 1694 and an unknown donor were distributed until the mid 19th century.<sup>481</sup>

In 1614 Thomas Trowbridge gave rent from West Monkton for 1s. to each poor householder attending church in Taunton, paid until the land was sold in 1927.<sup>482</sup> In 1638 Florence Stone left £20 to provide 1s. each to poor women, which was distributed until 1871 or later.<sup>483</sup> In 1645 Robert Moggridge left money out of Frethey, Bishops Hull, for between 5s. and 10s. to the needy persons of both parishes and 10s. to each set of churchwardens.<sup>484</sup> In 1690 Samuel Reynolds, clothier, gave half the profits of 3 a. at Holway to the poor, preferably his former workfolk, distributed until the land was sold in 1927.<sup>485</sup> The daughter of Philip Gadd, mercer (d. 1679) was to pay £3 10s. out of his Holway lands to 70 people. It was paid until the later 18th century.<sup>486</sup> In 1954 the Farwell, Moggridge, Parker, Reynolds and Trowbridge charities for St Mary's parish were used for general charity and later ceased to exist.<sup>487</sup>

St James' poor benefitted from charities charged on land in Pyrland from the early 17th century by George Hooper, Joan King and Mr Risdon but later occupiers refused to pay and only Joan King's rent charge, redeemed for £60 in 1901, survived and was added to Taunton Town Charity. After 1820 Hyde Curtis's gift of 1809 for the poor was transferred to

<sup>479</sup> SHC, A/CTP/3/1, 15/5; DD/FJ/30; DD/SAS/C795/TN/10, 15 (1671), 30; DD/SP/367; DD/DP/90/4; TNA, PROB 11/253/491, 11/584/201; C 2/JAS1/G3/72; *5th Rep. Com. Char.*, 533—4; *Gen Digest of Endowed Chars. Som* (1869—71), 60—1.

<sup>480</sup> TNA, PROB 11/77/388; SHC, DD/DP/116/21/2/3—4; *5th Rep Com. Char.* 490—3; *Gen Digest of Endowed Chars. Som* (1869—71), 60—1.

<sup>481</sup> SHC, A/CTP/15/5; *Gen Digest of Endowed Chars. Som* (1869—71), 60—1.

<sup>482</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/10; A/CTP/15/5; DD/C/325.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.* D/P/tau.ja 2/1/95; *5th Rep Com. Char.* 520; *Gen Digest of Endowed Chars. Som* (1869—71), 60—1.

<sup>484</sup> TNA, PROB 11/195/290; SHC, A/CTP/3/5/17; D/P/tau.m/4/4/1; *Gen Digest of Endowed Chars. Som* (1869—71), 60—1.

<sup>485</sup> *5th Rep. Com. Char.*, 539—40; SHC, D/P/tau.ja/17/1/1; D/P/tau.m/4/4/1; DD/C/325.

<sup>486</sup> TNA, PROB 4/4111; SHC, DD/SP/367; DD/FJ/30.

<sup>487</sup> SHC, DD/C/325; *Char. Com. reg.*: accessed 22 Oct. 2018.



the school.<sup>488</sup> In 1839 Peter Martin Carey gave shares in the Bank of the United States of America to provide coal for St James' poor. Recipients declined from 240 in the 1880s to 15 in 1975.<sup>489</sup> Rent charges were redeemed in 1942 and in 1979 the Carey, Curtis, Farewell, Moggridge, Reynolds, Stone and Trowbridge charities were amalgamated as Taunton St James Relief in Need Charity with an annual income of nearly £50.<sup>490</sup> It was wound up in 1994 and the capital distributed to other Taunton charities and the occupants of St James' almshouses.<sup>491</sup>

Nonconformist charities included Elizabeth Moore's gift of £500 in 1805 for distressed dissenting ministers and the poor of Mary Street chapel. In 1902, with Elizabeth Noble's £200 given in 1841, it provided coal and a minister's purse for poor members of the congregation, last recorded in 1925.<sup>492</sup> Paul's Meeting charities included John Clitsome's gift of £448 for bread in 1821 and the Ackland, Davey and Heudebourck charities for cash distribution. By the 1930s only part of the income was distributed and the charities ceased to exist before 1996. The Powell and Stephenson charities provided warm clothing and bedding to poor Baptists until the 1920s.<sup>493</sup>

In the 1820s the Charity Commission deplored combining charity monies for a single distribution, procuring goods from tradesmen trustees, failing to choose recipients carefully and not keeping proper accounts.<sup>494</sup> Its work may have encouraged charitable giving and by mid century Taunton's charities produced over £1,850 a year.<sup>495</sup> Later charities fell victim to

<sup>488</sup> *5th Rep. Com. Char.*, 508—9, 535—9; SHC, D/P/tau.ja 2/1/9, 17/1/1, 17/2/1; DD/X/PLSS/4; *Char. Com. Taunton Town Charity*, 36—7.

<sup>489</sup> SHC, A/ARG/1—10.

<sup>490</sup> *5th Rep. Com. Char.* 537; SHC, D/P/tau.ja 3/1/2, 4/1/4, 17/1/1; A/ARG/9, 18.

<sup>491</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.ja/17/2/1; *Char. Com. reg.*: accessed 22 Oct. 2018.

<sup>492</sup> SHC, D/N/tau.mst/1/3/19, 5/2/26; DD/C/325; *Gen Digest of Endowed Chars. Som.* (1869—71), 60—1.

<sup>493</sup> SHC, D/N/tau.pm/4/3/1; DD/C/325; *Char. Com. reg.*: accessed 11 Oct. 2019.

<sup>494</sup> *5th Rep. Com. Char.*, 490—542.

<sup>495</sup> *Gen Digest of Endowed Chars. Som* (1869—71), 60—1.

inflation and were wound up in 1994 including those of Mary Pettit Davis (d. 1905) and Caroline Mary Tite (d. 1932) for dowries and higher education for girls.<sup>496</sup>

### Taunton Town Lands

The Town Lands, later Town Charity and now Taunton Heritage Trust, had feoffees and a common seal by 1512. Some of its later property was probably former parish land as purchasers of such property claimed some of its estate.<sup>497</sup> No evidence has been found for the claim lands belonged to plague victims. Early decrees refer to gifts of ‘charitable and well disposed persons’.<sup>498</sup> Before 1612 the feoffees held 39 burgages and other houses, the Hop Yard east of St Mary’s churchyard and 192 a. in Ottery St Mary and Upottery, Devon.<sup>499</sup> There were claims of abuse by trustees in 1630.<sup>500</sup> They held three closes at Grasscroft on the north bank of the river, administered £400 given by John Meredith in 1677 to clothe the poor of the borough and had three houses and a coalyard bought with £100 left by Margery Ackland, possibly including North Town wharf, which they rented out for £120 in the 1870s.<sup>501</sup>

Distribution was by the borough constables who in the mid 17th century issued farthing tokens.<sup>502</sup> From 1715 the feoffees dinner was restricted to £5 and money was given to the poor in place of bread but despite a 1724 Chancery decree the charity was mismanaged.<sup>503</sup> The Charity Commissioners objected to money being given away in public houses and trustees issuing tickets in the early 19th century. Meredith’s money was given as

<sup>496</sup> Char. Com. reg.: accessed 22 Oct. 2018.

<sup>497</sup> TNA, C 2/Jas1/W4/40; SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (1671).

<sup>498</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7. The claim arises from a letter of Alfred Monday: SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/3 (*Taunton Mail* 2 Dec. 1896, p. 5).

<sup>499</sup> SHC, DD/X/LI/1; DD/SAS/C795/TN/10; DD/DP/97/5; DD/TAC/5/5/2—3.

<sup>500</sup> TNA, C 8/36/337.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid. PROB 11/356/385; SHC, DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7; DD/MT/3/25; DD/TAC/2/3/1, pp. 13, 28, 80, 5/5/18, 9/1.

<sup>502</sup> PSAS, LXI (1915), 124; Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 114—5.

<sup>503</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7, TN/10, 47; D/B/ta/31/1/1, p. 19; DD/TAC/2/3/1, 9/1.

cloaks and coats with buttons bearing the Meredith crest and Ackland's was given to poor widows of St Mary's parish.<sup>504</sup>

In 1853 the steward, legal advice and other bills accounted for a third of the revenue, the constables used the rest with Meredith's and Ackland's charity income to buy 142 cloaks and 75 coats and distribute money to 45 widows and 479 other poor people. Most trustees were self-elected.<sup>505</sup> In 1872 Town Lands, Meredith, Ackland and Badcock charities became the Taunton Town Charity, which contributed towards the hospital, Bishop Fox's school and maintained the almshouses out of the 1612 property and Grasscroft.<sup>506</sup> In 1900 the income had risen to £2,586 and grants were given to the hospitals, nursing association and for a recreation ground. The almspeople received £566 in weekly allowances, and coal, medical care and nursing. Most property was sold between 1902 and 1924 and by 1941 cash investments totalled c. £105,000<sup>507</sup> The charity retains commercial property, maintains almshouses and makes grants to other charities; £104,000 in 2016.<sup>508</sup>

#### Non-endowed welfare charities

The St James District Visitors Society using church and subscription money supplied the parish poor with tracts, meat, bread, coal and cash through 28 women visitors in 1894.<sup>509</sup> St Mary's District Visiting Society had 24 visitors in 1881 and its mission behind the Crescent distributed bread in 1895.<sup>510</sup> The Taunton Association for the Benefit of the Poor established in 1800 provided food, probably soup. The Taunton Benevolent Society was founded c. 1804 and visitors relieved the sick and prayed with them regardless of denomination. In 1832 it

<sup>504</sup> Ibid. DD/TAC/9/1, 2/3/3, p. 37.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid. Q/RSc 3/7; J. Cook, *Several Cases*, 37.

<sup>506</sup> SHC, DD/DP/97/5; Char. Com. *Taunton Town Charity*, 5, 17, 19, 22—3; inf. from Taunton Town Charity, 2005.

<sup>507</sup> SHC, DD/C/322; D/DC/tau.d/25/12, uncat. deeds; Char. Com. *Taunton Town Charity*, 28—37.

<sup>508</sup> Inf. from Taunton Town Charity, 2005; R.W. Dunning, 'A Careful Trust', TS in VCH office, 9.

<sup>509</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.ja/2/8/1, 17/1/1.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid. A/AUS, uncat.; D/P/tau.m/9/3/1; DD/TBL/42/9/2 (*Taunton Mail* 20 Feb. 1895, p. 4).

relieved 225 people but was wound up after 1896.<sup>511</sup> The Taunton Union Society, founded in 1811, provided people with clothing until 1830 or later. The Taunton Relief Fund, started in the 1840s and revived in 1861, ran a winter soup kitchen in Magdalene Street with distribution points throughout the town. It issued bread and coal tickets and tokens until 1914.<sup>512</sup> In the 1900s it opened on two days supplying 2,200 quarts of  $\frac{1}{2}$  d. soup a week but ceased to function after the war and was formally wound up in 1938.<sup>513</sup> In 1912—13 the Taunton Fresh Air Fund provided holidays for needy and disabled children.<sup>514</sup> The Open Door, established in the later 20th century, had an income of over £108,000 in 2017 to provide care, meals, clean clothing and washing facilities for up to 300 rough sleepers a year.<sup>515</sup> The Trussell Trust's Taunton foodbank began in 2012 and by 2023—4 supplied over 7,000 parcels. In 2021 food charity Fareshare started a budget pantry at Rowbarton Methodist Church.<sup>516</sup>

## FRIENDLY SOCIETIES AND TRADE UNIONS

There was a weavers' club in 1707, a Friendly Society of Fullers established in 1751, which as their industry declined became more of a benevolent society, and a widows' annuitant society established in 1765, which continued until 1824, possibly succeeded by the Somerset and Dorset Annuity Society recorded in 1831.<sup>517</sup>

Besides national societies like Oddfellows, Foresters and Ancient Shepherdesses, Taunton had at least 35 friendly societies between 1794 and 1837, four of them for women and others for tradesmen, labourers, craftsmen, carpenters, weavers and woolcombers and

<sup>511</sup> Ibid. DD/SAS/C2402/20/1; C2548/13 (1800, 1833); *Taunton and West Som. Annual* 1897, 130.

<sup>512</sup> *Taunton Courier* 15 Dec. 1814, 29 Dec 1830, 3 Feb. 1847, 15 Jan. 1868; BNA accessed 2 March 2020; *Taunton of Today* (1896), 45; SHC, DD/X/BRO/2/11; A/DIF/95/33 (Jan. 1914); Minnitt and Young, *Tickets, Checks and Passes*, 21.

<sup>513</sup> SHC, DD/BLM/27/2/9 (undated cutting); *Taunton Courier* 29 Oct. 1938; BNA accessed 2 March 2020.

<sup>514</sup> SHC, A/DIF/95/33.

<sup>515</sup> Char. Com. reg.: accessed 22 Oct. 2018.

<sup>516</sup> taunton.foodbank.org.uk; Somerset.gov.uk: accessed 5 Aug. 2024.

<sup>517</sup> M. Fuller, *West Country Friendly Societies*, 4, 98; SHC, Q/RSf/1, 10; Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 587—9.

members of Paul's Meeting.<sup>518</sup> In 1815 only 90 people were in friendly societies in St James' parish but 1,028 in St Mary's.<sup>519</sup> St James had a junior society and there was a Taunton Young Club.<sup>520</sup> By the later 19th century co-operative and building societies were more popular and by 1896 all active friendly societies were branches of national societies except for the St Mary's girls' friendly society. In 1904 c. 3,200 members of national society branches were recorded, mostly men.<sup>521</sup>

St Martins tanners' guild was probably open to employers and employees and by the 18th century there were trade groups.<sup>522</sup> During the later 19th century carpenters and bricklayers struck for higher pay and reduced hours. Through collective bargaining master builders were expected to comply with agreed rates and hours. The men rebuilding St Mary's tower in 1859 belonged to a 'Society Union' as did striking bricklayers in 1868, probably the Taunton Operatives and Bricklayers Society. In 1893 the Taunton and District Master Builders Association was formed. Wages were negotiated locally and during a long strike in 1900 many men left for better-paid work elsewhere.<sup>523</sup> By the early 20th century all employers belonged to the Master Builders Federation and the Building Trade Operatives' Union required all employees to belong to it.<sup>524</sup>

By the 1890s there was a local Society of Engineers and Firemen for railwaymen. The Taunton Journeyman Bakers and Confectioners Association had secured the right to an annual day's holiday.<sup>525</sup> In 1905 a Taunton Trades Council was formed, by 1907 the Taunton Trades and Labour Council, to arbitrate when required and co-ordinate strike action as in

<sup>518</sup> SHC, C/E/4/220/1, 38; Q/RSf/1.

<sup>519</sup> *Abridgement of the Abstract of the Answers and Returns...so far as relates to the poor* (HC 1818), 394—5; *Taunton and West Som. Annual 1897*, 130.

<sup>520</sup> Museum of English Rural Life, Reading. Somerset poleheads: europeana.eu accessed 13 June 2024.

<sup>521</sup> TNA, FS 6/195/2, 7—8 SOMERSET; FS 8/12/351, 1181; 8/25/1181; FS 13/219; FS 15/1049, 1309, 1614, 1621; *Taunton and West Som. Annual 1897*, 118—19, 1904, 133, 135.

<sup>522</sup> Above, econ. hist., industry.

<sup>523</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 30 Mar. 1859, 24 June 1868, 27 Apr., 4 May 1892: BNA, accessed 3 Aug. 2022; SHC, A/EOD/1; DD/TBL/42/9/8 (*Taunton Mail*, 28 Feb., 25 Apr., 23 May 1900).

<sup>524</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 19 May 1920, 30 Sep. 1944: BNA, accessed 3 Aug. 2022.

<sup>525</sup> SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/1 (*Taunton Mail*, 4 July 1894, p. 4); SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/2 (*Taunton Mail*, 17 Apr. 1895, p. 4).

1926.<sup>526</sup> The Taunton branch of the Amalgamated Society of Tailors demanded a 48-hour week in 1895 and provided sick and strike pay. In 1908 a branch of the breakaway Society of Tailors and Tailoresses was formed, later the Garment Workers union.<sup>527</sup> The striking women collar makers of South Street in 1920 belonged to the Dockers' rather than the approved Garment Workers union. In 1921 local branches of the Railwaymen's and Dockers' unions with their banners joined a May Day parade. By 1937 employers accepted membership of any union but not union meetings on or outside their premises or any compulsion to join. The Taunton Typographical Association for printworkers was established before 1939 and by 1948 a branch of the Clerical and Administrative Workers' Union.<sup>528</sup> Public sector union Unison took over the former County Club in the Crescent, renamed Unison House, before moving c. 2018 to Flook House, Belvedere Road.

## WELFARE

### Poor Relief

In 1652 St James' parish, overburdened with, required extra rates from those lodging strangers and removal of those not lawfully settled.<sup>529</sup> In 1664 393 households were exempt from hearth tax for poverty.<sup>530</sup> In 1667 24 rural parishes contributed to the relief of the St James' poor, £173 was distributed and children were fostered out. In 1678 c. 85 households received regular relief and in 1697 relief cost over £600 before falling temporarily by 1699. The economic downturn in the 18th century led to at least 437 removals mostly in the 1730s and 1740s, and 43 people being returned often for begging. Irish and Scottish vagrants were

<sup>526</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 23 Jan. 1902, 5 Apr. 1905, 19 Jun. 1907, 25 Feb. 1920: BNA, accessed 3 Aug. 2022; Trade Union Congress Library, letter 7 May 1926I europeana.eu accessed 13 June 2024.

<sup>527</sup> SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/2 (*Taunton Mail*, 17 Apr. 1895, p. 4); *Taunton Courier*, 22 Jan. 1908, 4 Nov. 1908: BNA, accessed 3 Aug. 2022; TNA, LAB 2/654/TBI4226/1923.

<sup>528</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 11 Feb. 1920, 4 May 1921, 7 Aug. 1937, 20 May 1939, 24 Jan. 1948: BNA, accessed 3 Aug. 2022.

<sup>529</sup> SHC, Q/SPet/1/130; Bates-Harbin, *Quarter Sessions, 1646—60*, p. 201.

<sup>530</sup> W. Gibson, *Religion and Enlightenment 1600—1800* (Bern, 2007), 114.

found in Taunton. Children with different fathers might be split up and one woman claimed her child was illegitimate to avoid removal.<sup>531</sup> In St James regular pay rose to £572 in 1722 but total relief cost £805.<sup>532</sup> In the early 1730s St Mary's parish supported 197 parishioners including 20 blind and bedridden and 32 very young children.<sup>533</sup> In 1757 Lord Egremont gave £100 to the mayor to relieve the poor.<sup>534</sup>

In the late 17th century at least 280 children from St Mary's were apprenticed and until the 1740s many were bound to learn a trade. Between 1747 and 1766 only *c.* 20 were put to a trade compared with 265 to housewifery and husbandry. Apprentices were assigned between masters; fewer children were bound and before 1832 the system was abandoned.<sup>535</sup>

As the economy contracted spending on the poor increased yet ability to pay rates reduced. St James' parish spent £818 on the poor in 1740 and £999 in 1741 reducing later as poor families were removed.<sup>536</sup> In 1782 over 70 people were clothed by the parish. In 1800 only *c.* 30 were on regular pay of 4*s.* 6*d.* a week but in 1800 and 1817 the parish raised subscriptions to supply the poor with food.<sup>537</sup> In 1813—14 the parishes spent £4,432 maintaining 377 people on regular relief, 83 in workhouses and 46 occasionally but in 1819—20 St Mary's registered 1,220 paupers.<sup>538</sup> In the 1820s, a bad period for manufacturing, previously well-paid men were forced to claim relief, some returning to their native parishes.<sup>539</sup> In 1821 over half of adults on relief were working or able to work but female silk weavers only earned *c.* 5*s.* of which childcare cost up to 3*s.* a week compared with 9*d.* for lodgings. Children were employed for a few pence a week to save that cost.<sup>540</sup>

<sup>531</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/2/1, 13/3/1; DD/SAS/C795/TN/57; D/P/tau.m/13/3/1—9; DD/SAS/C238/1—2; Q/SR 302—26, 332—9, 341—3, 349—53, 356—7, 362—8.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/13/2/2.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid. DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (loose papers).

<sup>534</sup> Ibid. DD/WY/6/2/23.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/13/2/252, 13/6/1, 13/9/1; DD/SAS/C238/5/3/2.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/13/2/3; D/P/tau.m/13/2/9, 62—5.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/1.

<sup>538</sup> *Answers and Returns* (HC 1818), 394—5; SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/2/254—5.

<sup>539</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/7/1—2, 4; D/P/tau.m/13/9/1; 13/10/4.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/5; 13/2/254.

Poverty made the population vulnerable to ill-health and in 1829 a third of men of military age were unfit to serve.<sup>541</sup> Rural poverty and low wages increased prostitution as country girls migrated to towns. The Black Boy east of St Mary's church and the Crown and Mitre in Batt's Court were magnets for prostitution until the 1840s or later. A brothel was discovered in Elms Parade in 1889 and some in tiny slum dwellings.<sup>542</sup>

By 1830 exchange of money was preferred to removal of paupers and in 1832 seven per cent of St Mary's paupers were reputedly non-parishioners.<sup>543</sup> Removal orders between workhouses were used until the 1930s.<sup>544</sup> By 1833 St Mary's spent £5,144 on the poor, had c. 30 inmates in the poorhouse but 875 other paupers in varying states of health. The assistant overseer of St James thought magistrates too ready to believe a 'worthless pauper' and wanted the surplus population to emigrate. However, many paupers were orphans, elderly, disabled or widowed mothers on low earnings.<sup>545</sup> Paupers queued for hours to get relief and in St James' parish might wait all day and not be paid. Under the new poor law four relieving officers for Taunton were appointed.<sup>546</sup> In 1838 both parishes spent £3,480 on the poor, but only £591 in 1893 when less than two per cent of the population was on relief compared with nine per cent in some rural parishes.<sup>547</sup> In 1909 many paupers did not claim, existing by hawking, cleaning and charity.<sup>548</sup>

### Poor houses

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<sup>541</sup> Ibid. DD/CN/5/7.

<sup>542</sup> Goldsworthy, *Recollections*, 22; TNA, HO 73/8; SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, pp. 36, 47; DD/BDL/11; DD/TBL/42/9/1; *Taunton Courier*, 4 Feb. 1889; BNA accessed 1 Dec. 2020.

<sup>543</sup> SHC, D/P/m.st.m/9/1/1 (1830—3); D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1; 13/7/1—2, 4; D/P/tau.m/13/9/1; 13/10/4; DD/SAS/C795/TN/157.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid. C/WS/1/2, 82.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/12/1; 13/2/256; 13/9/1.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/1—2; 57/1

<sup>547</sup> *4th Report Poor Law Com.*, App. D (1838), 173; SHC, D/G/ta/57/21.

<sup>548</sup> *Taunton Courier* 20 Aug. 1909; BNA accessed 12 May 2022.



A charity-funded workhouse at the west end of St James Street in 1626 was probably let to benefit the poor by 1663.<sup>549</sup> It was probably replaced after 1702 by the parish workhouses and became a coalyard.<sup>550</sup>

St Mary's refurbished the church house with back building for a poorhouse by 1737. It closed c. 1744 but was reinstated in 1753, financed by inmates' work.<sup>551</sup> Inmates slept two to a bed in separate rooms for men and women. Anyone capable of work helped in the house, produced nets or worked outside keeping a fifth of earnings. The governor took another fifth and was compensated when the number of inmates fell below 35.<sup>552</sup>

In December 1819 regulations forbade farming out the poor, allowed infants and sick whatever they needed and required weekly accounts but were not implemented.<sup>553</sup> Three visitors reported to the select vestry. The death of a child in 1821 caused the select vestry to investigate the house, revealing serious shortcomings. The vestry demanded weekly accounting with the overseers and enforcement of the 1819 orders. A matron replaced the governor, sharing management of the 73 inmates with the assistant overseer. Inmates were to hear evening prayer in the vestry room every Sunday and have seats in church. The diet became more varied and included vegetables, cake, biscuits and Christmas puddings. The number of inmates rose to 104 in the severe winter of 1835 and remained around 100 until the house closed in 1836.<sup>554</sup> It was used briefly for women and young children until the new workhouse opened.<sup>555</sup> The parish retained the building, which included their vestry room, and from c. 1838—58 it was a police station. In 1858 the parish agreed to its demolition to extend the National school.<sup>556</sup> The two-storey building, a late 15th or early 16th-century church

<sup>549</sup> SHC, Q/SR/58/19; A/CPT/15/5, p. 88; DD/SP/100 (1663), 367.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid. DD/TAC/2/3/1; DD/FJ/30.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid. DD/TB/18/7; DD/SAS/C/795/TN/15 (loose papers, vestry min. 1737, 1742, 1744, 1753).

<sup>552</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/1—2, 13/2/252.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/3/10/4.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/5, 9; 13/2/2, 246, 286—7; 13/3/1.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/1.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/3, 54; D/G/ta/57/42, 48.

house, had three-light, stone-mullioned windows and two ogee-headed doors. The large first-floor room was open to a massive timber roof supported on corbels.<sup>557</sup>

St James' workhouse, East Reach, allegedly built in 1653 but rebuilt later, may have replaced a church house.<sup>558</sup> Pauper earnings covered less than a quarter of the costs and of the nets made in 1736 332 were unsold. In the 1790s the governor had a house and any profits from inmates' work but no salary. In 1801 he supplied beans, potatoes, herrings, pilchards and rice to the poor. The parish paid for shaving, coal, snuff, tobacco, wine and clothing for 32 inmates, delivery of babies and laying out the dead. By 1818 despite sickness the workhouse produced enough money to pay the vestry clerk. In 1827 the governor was removed for not allowing food and fuel as agreed and was replaced by a matron.<sup>559</sup> The able-bodied were employed stone-breaking but people were encouraged to leave the house, often to their disadvantage.<sup>560</sup> Two houses in North Town used by the parish poor were sold c. 1836 to defray the parish share of the cost of the union workhouse. The Board of Guardians leased the three-storey workhouse for the aged and infirm, males only from 1837, until the union workhouse opened.<sup>561</sup> The house was sold and by 1865 was a warehouse.<sup>562</sup>

### Union Workhouse

The Board of Guardians for the Taunton poor-law union first met on 13 May 1836. A workhouse for 400 designed by Sampson Kempthorne and built by Pollards of Taunton for c. £7,200 was completed in 1838 with an eight-foot boundary wall and an access road from Holway Lane. The hexagonal building had three internal cross ranges creating yards, each subdivided, and included schoolroom, chapel and boardroom. The 11-bay frontage, the three

<sup>557</sup> Ibid. A/DIF/44, 116; T/PH/rea/3/104.

<sup>558</sup> Jeboult, *Hist. West Som.*, 191; SHC, A/DAS/2 (12822); D/P/tau.ja/4/1/3; DD/SP/376 [1630].

<sup>559</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1; 13/2/3, 43—4; 13/7/1.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid. DD/SAS/C795/TN/157.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1; Q/Rup/82; D/G/ta/8a/1.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/2, 57/42; A/DAS/2 (12822).

central ones breaking forward, survives converted to dwellings under the inscription ‘Taunton Workhouse’.<sup>563</sup> In 1849 Dr Sutherland claimed it was not built on sanitary principles and accommodation was inadequate.<sup>564</sup> It was altered to accommodate tramps of both sexes, unmarried mothers and their babies, married couples with children, children and infants without parents and the sick.<sup>565</sup> In 1853—4 the Board of Guardians bought the Hill Place inn, cottage and land, sold in 1889 to build Holy Trinity vicarage, and received rent from the Holman Clavel inn, Otterford in the 1890s.<sup>566</sup>

In 1838 a master and mistress, schoolmaster and schoolmistress, chaplain, porter and nurse were appointed. In 1839 boys were trained in shoemaking and carpentry and women did the domestic work.<sup>567</sup> The Poor Law Board often forbade the noxious activities of bone crushing and oakum picking but the guardians found them profitable.<sup>568</sup> In 1892 the eye infirmary asked that eye protection be worn during stone breaking.<sup>569</sup> By January 1849 the house was full and only by discharging paupers and appropriating the vagrants’ wards and bakehouse could sufficient accommodation be found.<sup>570</sup> That November cholera killed several inmates, drains were leaking and filthy, water was impure and overcrowded wards lacked ventilation and washing facilities.<sup>571</sup> After a cesspool overflowed in 1851 the house was connected to the public sewer.<sup>572</sup> From the 1860s people of ‘unsound mind’ were housed.<sup>573</sup> In 1899 the master was accused of cruelty, misappropriation and poor food over two years.<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/1—2. Research in the guardians’ records was carried out by Judith Blaker.

<sup>564</sup> TNA, MH 13/180, pp. 271—6.

<sup>565</sup> SHC, D/G/ta/8a/8—10, 12.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid. D/H/ta/4/1/3; D/G/ta/8a/12 (1—15 Mar. 1854), 8a/32 (5 Jul. 1888—26 Jun. 1889), 8a/35 (22 May 1895).

<sup>567</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/2; 57/1; 57/42 (May 1839).

<sup>568</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/6 (19 Nov, 10 Dec. 1845); 57/45 (18 Jan. 1849).

<sup>569</sup> Ibid., D/G/ta/8a/33 (28 Oct. 1890, 3 Aug. and 14 Sep. 1892).

<sup>570</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/8; 57/45.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/57/8; TNA, MH 13/280, ff. 274—9.

<sup>572</sup> SHC, D/G/ta/8a/10 (9 Apr. 1852); 57/47.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/18 (1867); 8a/26 (Feb., Mar. 1880); 8a/31 (13 Jul. 1887).

<sup>574</sup> Ibid. DD/TBL/42/9/6 (*Taunton Mail*, 23 Aug.—13 Sep. 1899).

Problems with food supply and quality were common so pigs were bought in 1846 and bread was baked in the house by 1847.<sup>575</sup> In 1849 the guardians considered the diet too good and restricted full cooked dinners to twice a week, contrary to medical advice.<sup>576</sup> The diet improved later, peaches were distributed to boys working in the garden in 1852 and inmates received gifts of cake, oranges and nuts in 1879. Toys, magazines and pillows were given in 1890.<sup>577</sup> Inmates went on outings, the diamond jubilee was celebrated with a fried breakfast and other treats and Edward VII's coronation with sports, dancing and a box of chocolates for every inmate.<sup>578</sup>

In July 1848, the workhouse chapel having been converted to other uses, inmates attended Holy Trinity church.<sup>579</sup> All paupers were expected to attend church or chapel on Sunday and could go out to their place of worship.<sup>580</sup> In 1871 the boys' dormitory was converted into a chapel. A communion set given in 1880 replaced plate borrowed from St Mary's.<sup>581</sup> In 1894 there were morning and evening services on Sundays and a Thursday afternoon service.<sup>582</sup> In 1922 Samuel White gave an organ and stained glass in memory of his wife and the chapel remained in use in the 1930s.<sup>583</sup>

In 1852 three young women emigrated to Australia, boys went for military training in 1878 and 1880 or transferred to St Saviour's Home in Bishops Hull and girls went to the training home for servants until c. 1914.<sup>584</sup> Children were supplied to employers as far as Devon and in 1905 one deserted child wanted to go to Canada.<sup>585</sup> Parents could visit once in

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<sup>575</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/6 (Nov. 1845), 8a/7—8, 57/45.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/8 (Jun. 1849); TNA, MH 13/180, ff. 237, 281.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/11 (Sep. 1852), 8a/26 (1 Jan 1879), 8a/33 (24 Dec. 1890).

<sup>578</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/27 (30 Jun., 8 Sep. 1880), 8a/33 (11 May and 8 Jun. 1892), 8a/36 (19 May 1897), 8a/38 (20 Aug. 1902).

<sup>579</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/8 (July 1848).

<sup>580</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/11 (25 May 1853), 8a/13 (22 Oct. 1856).

<sup>581</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/21 (Nov. 1871), 8a/26 (10 Mar. 1880).

<sup>582</sup> Ibid. DD/TBL/42/9/1 (*Taunton Mail* 18 Apr. 1894, p. 5).

<sup>583</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/47 (31 May, 22 Sep. 1922); C/WS/1/1, p. 399.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/11 (23 June, 14 July 1852), 8a/25 (July 1878), 8a/26 (Jan. 1880), 8a/27 (10 Nov. 1880); D/G/ta/8a/29 (28 Feb, 5 Sep. 1883).

<sup>585</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/29 (17 Jan, 21 Feb. 1883); D/G/ta/8a/40 (26 Apr. 1905).

two months but children were usually boarded out ‘to remove workhouse associations’. In the 1900s children had holidays and a playground.<sup>586</sup> Following a Local Government Board decree in 1911 the guardians purchased three houses in Portman Grove, now 73—7 Cheddon Road, as Petersfield Children’s Home.<sup>587</sup> Up to 20 children were in the care of a matron and went to school until they left at 16. By 1927 the home took children from Axminster, Chard and Wellington unions. Parents visited at Christmas and Easter but by 1933 most children were boarded out. In 1934 the remaining children were rehoused elsewhere in the county. After a temporary re-opening the home was sold in 1937.<sup>588</sup>

During the First World War the workhouse, then the Poor Law Institution, accommodated 15 German prisoners of war with their guards and an unspecified number of Austrian aliens.<sup>589</sup> The local authority took over the building in 1929 as Holmoor House Public Assistance Institution, removed the mentally disabled and cared for 61 people in 1935. In 1946 the elderly feared going to Holmoor Hospital in case they were moved into the workhouse, which then formed part of the hospital.<sup>590</sup>

### Vagrants

Parish officers gave alms to strangers, over 100 in 1673—4 in St James’ parish. By 1773 St Mary’s agreed to pay 1s. for every beggar brought to justice.<sup>591</sup> Vagrants including an ‘East Indian’ and an ‘American’ received temporary accommodation in the 1800s and others died in the St James’ workhouse.<sup>592</sup> The Nook housed vagrants by 1820 but the scheme was abandoned in 1822. In 1825—6 more than 750 travellers received alms all but c. 10 on their

<sup>586</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/37 (21 Feb. 1900), 8a/38 (28 Mar. 1901, 20 Aug. 1902), 8a/39 (20 Jan. 1904).

<sup>587</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/43 (23 Aug., 4 Oct 1911, 21 Aug. 1912); D/R/ta/34/11/4; C/WS/1/3, p.2.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid. C/PA/T/18; D/G/ta/8a/49 (Aug. 1927); C/WS/1/1, pp. 287, 472, 481; 1/2, pp. 98, 376—7, 406; 1/3, pp. 2, 57, 888.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/44—6 (passim).

<sup>590</sup> Ibid. C/WS/1/1, pp. 458, 472; 1/2, p. 599, 719; 1/4, p. 723; below, hospitals.

<sup>591</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/105; D/P/tau.m/4/3/6 (1773).

<sup>592</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/1; DD/SAS/C795/TN/157; D/P/tau.ja 9/1/1, 13/2/43—4.

way to Devon and Cornwall, some under removal orders including pregnant women.<sup>593</sup> In 1832 2,935 vagrants obtained relief and a society for suppressing mendicity was formed. By 1836 numbers had fallen to *c.* 1,200 but many lodging houses south of East Reach were used by tramps, travelling entertainers and hawkers during the 19th century.<sup>594</sup>

Vagrants were admitted to the workhouse on a ticket system.<sup>595</sup> In 1868 when vagrants numbered 2,507 in 1868 a police superintendent was appointed their relieving officer and reduced the number to 579 by 1872. However, numbers rose again reaching 2,208 in the winter of 1879—80.<sup>596</sup> In the 1890s casuals were washed, fed and given clothing. If no beds were available places in a lodging house were bought.<sup>597</sup> Casual wards were added in 1900 and tramps were paid to work or given a week's hard labour.<sup>598</sup> The Bird in Hand, Mary Street housed tramps and another lodging house for vagrants was registered in 1925.<sup>599</sup>

From 1929 the county public assistance committee was responsible for the casual wards and closed them in 1932 although up to 133 vagrants were in Taunton on census night 1931.<sup>600</sup> In the later 20th century men stayed in Taunton before and after spending the summer in Devon and Cornwall. Charities provided overnight accommodation and food vouchers as resident rough sleepers increased and hostel accommodation, including Lindley House, East Reach, was insufficient.<sup>601</sup>

### The Servants Training Home

The home was founded in the early 1870s for poor, orphan or friendless girls who were boarded, clothed and trained for domestic service. In 1875 it moved from St James Street to

<sup>593</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/5, 13/10/2.

<sup>594</sup> TNA, HO 73/8, 107/1922; RG 9/1617.

<sup>595</sup> SHC, D/G/ta/57/2.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/22 (Jan. 1873); 8a/25 (8 Nov. 1877), 57/21.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/34 (31 Jan. 1894), 8a/35 (18 Nov. 1896), 8a/36 (30 Dec. 1896, 9 Feb. and 16 Nov. 1898).

<sup>598</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/24/1/26/1722; D/G/ta/8a/37 (4 Apr. 1900); 8a/39 (10 June, 11 Nov., 9 Dec. 1903, 8 Jun., 6 July 1904).

<sup>599</sup> TNA, RG 13/2278; SHC, A/EPF/250/4/4 (1921, p. 5, 1922, p. 8, 1925, p. 8).

<sup>600</sup> SHC, C/WS/1/1, pp. 1, 143, 145, 439; *Census*, 1931.

<sup>601</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.a/9/4/4.

the former King's Head, East Reach. Girls gained experience with women who paid a small sum to the home. By 1888 212 girls had been through the home and that year 28 were in the care of a matron.<sup>602</sup> The home was expensive to run and closed c. 1898.<sup>603</sup>

### The Soldiers Home

Established in 1902 by Mary Davison in the former Rose and Crown inn, High Street, the home provided emergency accommodation, meals, religious services a bowling alley, bar and reading room for recruits. In 1919 it housed over 2,000 men and served over 120,000 meals. In 1921—3 it was partially rebuilt and extended to provide dormitories and a billiard room.<sup>604</sup> In 1923 recruiting ceased and the home took in church army workers. It closed before 1934 when it was used as a club room for the unemployed.<sup>605</sup>

### Modern welfare

In the 1890s there was a girls' refuge in Viney Street and in 1914 two homes in Canon Street.<sup>606</sup> In the 1940s a house in Alma street was used as a refuge for women and girls.<sup>607</sup> In 1978 there was a home for children in Staplegrove Road and for disabled young people at Halcon. Day centres at Halcon and Obridge Road provided for up to 100 mentally and physically disabled people. Local authorities and homeless charities provided hostels for vulnerable groups. In 2012 the county council become responsible for women's refuges, run by a local charity since the 1970s.<sup>608</sup> Modular homes were built for homeless families at

<sup>602</sup> *Taunton Courier* 5 May 1875, 1 March 1876: BNA accessed 2 March 2020; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883, 1889); *Taunton of Today* (1896), 45.

<sup>603</sup> SHC, DD/CH/87/1; *Taunton Courier* 7 Sep. 1898: BNA accessed 2 March 2020.

<sup>604</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/29/226; C/EW/8/49; DD/TBL/69; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1914, 1923).

<sup>605</sup> SHC, DD/TBL/69; D/DC/tau.d/25/15 (1678); D/B/ta/13/3/1, p. 41.

<sup>606</sup> *Taunton and West Som. Annual* 1897, 130; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1914).

<sup>607</sup> SHC, A/EOB/1 (May 1948).

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid.* D/PC/stapg/7/3, p.86; D/DC/tau.d/2/2/11 (26 Apr.), 16 (20 Dec.); C/OP/3/151; A/EXY/1/1; tauntonwomensaid.org.uk; accessed 1 Dec.2021.

Lambrook *c.* 1992.<sup>609</sup> During the 2020 pandemic at least 100 homeless people were provided with emergency accommodation.<sup>610</sup>

Private nursing homes were established before 1939.<sup>611</sup> Calway House, named after a county council chairman, opened in 1962 and others followed in the 1970s.<sup>612</sup> By 1978 there were 173 places in council-run homes. By 1997 there were 227 places in eight care homes and 251 in eight nursing homes run by the local authority and many privately-run homes.<sup>613</sup> In 1964 Margaret Thatcher opened the Chestnut Tree charity day centre for the elderly in Canon Street carpark. It closed in 2010 and was demolished.<sup>614</sup>

From 1963 the borough built grouped dwellings for the elderly with resident wardens. In 1967 seven wardens looked after the elderly occupants of 238 dwellings but 130 people were on the waiting list.<sup>615</sup> By 1996 there were over 650 houses in council-run schemes with resident wardens.<sup>616</sup> The British Legion provided flats for the elderly from 1971.<sup>617</sup> By the 1950s a borough home help service for new mothers was extended to the elderly, the main users by 1970 when 108 vulnerable people received meals twice a week through the Women's Royal Voluntary Service.<sup>618</sup>

## HEALTH

### Disease

Children formed the largest group in the priory's lay cemetery and women had poorer dental health, iron deficiency, evidence of violence and no trace of the diabetes and obesity found amongst the men. One burial was marked by a charred plank, traditionally used for plague

<sup>609</sup> SHC, D/DC/tau.d/2/2/20 (28 Apr.).

<sup>610</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-54692919](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-54692919): accessed 7 Oct. 2020.

<sup>611</sup> TNA, RG 101/305/1/WOOA—WOPG.

<sup>612</sup> SHC, PAM 3063; A/DIF/116/221.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.* D/PC/stapg/7/3, p. 86; C/OP/4/12.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.* D/B/ta/24/1/149/9046; DD/X/BHS/4 (map); A/DDH/1.

<sup>615</sup> *Ibid.* A/DQO/404/10/13; D/B/ta/24/1/157/9648, 24/1/197/11120; A/DIF/114/23.

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid.* D/DC/tau.d/2/2/24 (19 March 1996).

<sup>617</sup> *Ibid.* D/B/ta/24/1/218/10897.

<sup>618</sup> *Ibid.* A/EPF/250/4/6 (1951, p. 11, 1955, p. 12), 7 (1970, pp. 14—15).



victims.<sup>619</sup> Some rents were temporarily lost to pestilence in 1348 but tenancies were soon filled.<sup>620</sup> In 1592 the plague killed c. 240 people in St Mary's parish and another epidemic killed 59 people in 1600.<sup>621</sup> In 1625 tents were erected at Bathpool, West Monkton to quarantine people from London and other infected places and trade was restricted. A 'pest house' received infected people but there was no great increase in registered deaths.<sup>622</sup> The worst plague hit in summer 1640 killing over 525 people and preventing the holding of fairs, Quarter Sessions and troop-raising as disease would do more harm than 'the enemy's sword'.<sup>623</sup> In 1646 plague struck again, 40 people camped in fields at the charge of the constables or in Hestercombe House in Cheddon for fear of spreading infection. St James' parish could not afford to relieve its sick.<sup>624</sup>

Smallpox in 1658 may have claimed up to 100 lives in St James' parish. It reputedly came in seven-year cycles including severe outbreaks in 1684 and 1740.<sup>625</sup> A surgeon spent three years in Obridge from 1767 giving smallpox inoculations.<sup>626</sup> In 1809 only boys who had been inoculated were admitted to the charity school.<sup>627</sup> Epidemics in the 1850s were blamed on poor management of vaccination.<sup>628</sup> In 1871—2 there were 74 cases, nine fatal, all unvaccinated.<sup>629</sup> In 1884—5 there were 37 deaths out of 230 cases.<sup>630</sup> There were concerns

<sup>619</sup> S. Membery, *Taunton Priory excavations* (Taunton, 2013), 36—40, 42—3.

<sup>620</sup> SHC, T/PH/win 1348—50.

<sup>621</sup> A. Nott and J. Hasler, *Wells Convocation Acts*, 79; SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/1/1.

<sup>622</sup> SHC, Q/SR/55/6, 57/102; D/P/tau.m/2/1/1.

<sup>623</sup> B.L., Eg. MS 2711; *Cal. SP Dom.* 1640, p. 437; Nott and Hasler, *Wells Convocation Acts*, 39; T.G. Holmes, *Som. Assize Orders 1640—59*, 3—4; SHC, D/P/tau.ja/2/1/3; D/P/tau.m/2/1/1.

<sup>624</sup> Holmes, *Som. Assize Orders 1640—59*, 12; Mayberry, *The Vale of Taunton Past*, 61; Bates Harbin, *Quarter Sessions 1646—6*, pp 117—18, 21. Registers were badly kept in the 1640s.

<sup>625</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.ja/2/1/2, 9; G. M. Howe, *Man, Environment and Disease in Britain* (1976 edn), 145; O.L. Dick, ed., *Aubrey's Brief Lives* (1972), 25; SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/1/32—3; DD/X/ALX/1.

<sup>626</sup> SHC, DD/HC/55/1.

<sup>627</sup> *Ibid.* D/P/tau.m/17/1.

<sup>628</sup> *Ibid.* A/BIV/3; D/G/ta/8a/4; D/G/ta/8a/14 (Apr. 1858).

<sup>629</sup> *Ibid.* D/G/ta/8a/22 (Feb., Mar., Dec. 1872).

<sup>630</sup> *Ibid.* D/P/tau.m/18/2/6; DD/X/SOM/14 (1884); A/AYO/2/1 (1885).

in 1914 that soldiers would spread smallpox but meningitis proved more dangerous.<sup>631</sup> By the 1920s smallpox vaccination had declined and only a quarter of infants were immunised.<sup>632</sup>

In 1730 gaol fever or typhus, spread by lice, was brought by prisoners from Ilchester gaol to the Lent assizes in Taunton and killed the judge Sir Thomas Pengelly. It apparently spread through the town causing high mortality from late April to June.<sup>633</sup> Spotted fever, possibly typhus, accompanied smallpox in 1746.<sup>634</sup> Mortality was high in the 1830s from cholera in 1832, influenza in 1833 and 1837, typhus in 1836—9 and dysentery in 1837—8.<sup>635</sup> ‘Bilious diarrhoea’ caused high mortality in 1848 and on 3 November cholera reached the Union workhouse girls’ school. Within 48 hours there were 42 cases of which 19 were immediately fatal.<sup>636</sup> On Dr Sutherland’s advice sick children were removed into the town, where all but two recovered, c. 30 healthy inmates moved to Orchard Portman and the disease was confined to the workhouse.<sup>637</sup> A total of 60 people, 35 under 16, died within one week and St James’ agreed to bury 21 corpses as St Mary’s ran out of space.<sup>638</sup> Dr Sutherland’s report on the workhouse, continuing cases of dysentery, blamed on poor sanitation and lack of clean water, and fear of cholera probably hastened the provision of sewerage.<sup>639</sup> The 1859 waterworks and 1877 sewage plant were credited with a great decline in enteric fever.<sup>640</sup>

<sup>631</sup> Ibid. A/CXE/2 (1914), 3 (1917).

<sup>632</sup> Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/4 (1922, p. 15).

<sup>633</sup> ODNB, Sir Thomas Pengelly: accessed 12 Apr. 2018; SHC, D/P/tau.ma/2/1/32; D/P/tau.ja/2/1/9.

<sup>634</sup> SHC, DD/S/WH/322.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/2/1/15, 9/1/1, D/P/tau.m/2/1/34, 9/1/5, 13/9/1; DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, pp. 24—5; D/G/ta/8a/1 (15 Nov. 1837), 57/2 (17/11/1837); Howe, *Man, Environment and Disease*, 157.

<sup>636</sup> SHC, A/BVA/6; D/H/ta/1/1/2 (2 Nov. 1848); D/P/tau.m/4/1/47.

<sup>637</sup> *Rep. Gen. Bd of Health on Cholera Epidemic 1848—9*, 37—8, App. II, 11—13; *Taunton Courier*, 28 Nov., 5 & 12 Dec. 1849; BNA accessed 4 Aug 2022; SHC, D/G/ta/8a/8 (Nov. 1849), 8a/9 (Nov. 1849); TNA, MH 13/180 ff. 233, 238.

<sup>638</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.m/4/1/47; 9/1/3.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/9 (12 Dec. 1849, 30 Jan., 10 Apr., 15 May, 10 Jul. 1850); TNA, MH 13/180, ff. 237—8.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/2/16, p. 250; A/DIF/95/32.

Infant mortality accounted for up to half of burials. Even in 1900 there were 535 births in the town but 157 infant deaths.<sup>641</sup> Scarlet fever outbreaks in 1842, 1850—1, 1871 and 1876—7 killed many children but those in the 20th century were rarely fatal.<sup>642</sup> From the 1880s diphtheria passed between schools and in 1890 a five-week school holiday reputedly stopped an outbreak.<sup>643</sup> There were epidemics in 1903, 1912 and 1915.<sup>644</sup> Infant schools lost pupils to diphtheria, measles and croup.<sup>645</sup> By 1908 schoolchildren had regular medical examinations and those from the newer houses were cleaner.<sup>646</sup> In 1914 there was a school clinic at the Technical Institute and by the 1940s at least two nurses visited schools.<sup>647</sup> The Taunton Infant Health Society started before 1913 and by 1920 the first infant welfare clinic had opened and health visitors saw new mothers at home.<sup>648</sup> The clinic had specialist rooms for the visiting oculist and dental surgeon. In 1931 it was replaced by the Tower Lane clinic.<sup>649</sup> Infant clinics were held at church halls and provided immunisation and free baby milk and cod liver oil.<sup>650</sup> Free milk was supplied to schoolchildren, c. 326,000 bottles of pasteurised milk by 1936, but poor nutrition remained a concern.<sup>651</sup>

Tuberculosis accounted for one in six adult deaths by the 1840s.<sup>652</sup> The Taunton Consumptives Aid Association, started in 1907, provided beds for the poor in Winsley Sanatorium, Wiltshire. It was wound up in 1914 and funds given to the newly-formed Taunton and District Tuberculosis Care Committee, which provided milk and food to patients until 1963 or later. Its visitors attended 58 patients in 1914 and 110 in 1923 including some in

<sup>641</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/2/1/34—5; DD/TBL/42/9/7 (*Taunton Mail*, 13 Mar. 1901, p. 5).

<sup>642</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/4; D/B/ta/2/1/5 (1871); A/CXE/1; L. Toller, 'Death and Disease in Somerset', TS in VCH office, 6—8, 14—16; TNA, ED 2/391/2.

<sup>643</sup> *Dr Blaxall's Report on Epidemics of Diphtheria in the Taunton Rural Sanitary District* (1883); SHC, A/EPF/250/4/1 (1882, p. 7); C/E/4/220/2, pp. 35—6, 4/359/3, p. 57; A/EPF/250/4/5; Toller, 'Death and Disease', 21—2.

<sup>644</sup> SHC, A/CXE/1—2; C/E/4/367/2, p. 213, 4/220/2, p. 336; A/EPF/250/4/4/ (1925, p. 16).

<sup>645</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/222/1, pp. 3, 6, 4/359/3, pp. 55, 63.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/2 (1908, pp. 34—46).

<sup>647</sup> Ibid. A/DIF/95/32; A/EPF/250/4/8/1—6; D/B/ta/4/9/1 (1944).

<sup>648</sup> Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/3 (1913, p. 6), 4 (1920, pp. 25—8).

<sup>649</sup> Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/8/6—10.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid. C/PHH/169 (1952, 1965).

<sup>651</sup> Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/8/12, 16—17, 20.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid. DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, p. 7.

surrounding rural parishes.<sup>653</sup> From the 1920s there was a county tuberculosis dispensary at 18 Priory Avenue. There were nearly 500 cases in the borough and c. 100 new ones annually, increasing into the 1940s.<sup>654</sup>

Influenza broke out in 1890 and December 1916 when 16 died.<sup>655</sup> The 1918—20 Spanish influenza outbreak affected boarding schools but Taunton suffered only 34 deaths mainly younger adults.<sup>656</sup> Far worse for infants were severe outbreaks of mumps, whooping cough, pneumonia and measles in 1919, following bad years for measles in 1896, 1900 and 1910, and most schools closed for several weeks in the autumn.<sup>657</sup> Despite 831 measles cases in 1924 school closure was no longer considered advisable. Measles recurred every three years but with fewer deaths.<sup>658</sup> Ex-servicemen brought dysentery and malaria in 1919—20, gonorrhoea and syphilis cases increased and encephalitis lethargica peaked in 1924.<sup>659</sup> Military personnel may have started the paratyphoid epidemic in 1941.<sup>660</sup>

Diphtheria was a concern in the 1930s, although treatment was available, as only 13 per cent of children were immunised.<sup>661</sup> The war changed attitudes and by 1952 the borough had been diphtheria-free for five years following immunisation rates of 70 per cent, higher among babies. A thousand children received tuberculosis radiography screening, later extended to workplaces, all infants received milk and orange juice and schoolchildren had regular dental checks. There were three welfare clinics, a health centre in Tower Lane and four health visitors. Poliomyelitis struck the Halcon and Lambrook estates in 1953 and two

<sup>653</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 25 Nov. 1908, 1 Apr. 1914; BNA accessed 4 Aug 2022; SHC, A/DIF/95/32; DD/TBL/63; D/B/ta/4/2/2 (1912, 1914).

<sup>654</sup> *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), SHC, A/EPF/250/4/3—4, 8/3—4; A/DIF/114/12; DD/TBL/63.

<sup>655</sup> Howe, *Man, Environment and Disease*, 196; SHC, C/E/4/359/2; D/B/ta/4/2/2 (1916).

<sup>656</sup> SHC, A/EPF/250/4/3 (1918, pp. 9—10; D/B/ta/4/2/2 (1918—19), 4/2/3 (1920)); C/E/4/367/3, pp. 1, 4; Bromwich, *Kings College*, 23.

<sup>657</sup> SHC, A/ARQ/4/6 (1887), 4/3 (1919); A/AUS, pp. 9—10; A/BEZ/1/1 (1910, 1918—19); C/E/4/367/3, pp. 12—20.

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.* A/EPF/250/4/4—5, 4/8/1 (1920, p. 12); A/BFW/1/7 (1925); A/BEZ/1/1 (1928); C/PHH/169 (1939).

<sup>659</sup> *Ibid.* A/EPF/250/4/3 (1919, pp. 16—17, 22), 4 (1920—4).

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.* A/CXE 8. The commonest form of paratyphoid in Europe is the Taunton phage.

<sup>661</sup> SHC, A/EPF.250/4/5; A/CXE/8.

children died. In 1956 a system of voluntary quarantine with guaranteed wages was successful and in 1959 there were over 6,600 vaccinations.<sup>662</sup>

By the late 1950s heart disease was the major adult killer followed by lung cancer. In the 1960s tuberculosis vaccines were added to those for polio, smallpox, diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus. Influenza remained a problem before the advent of vaccines and the 1969—70 epidemic was reputedly the worst in living memory. When 55 hospital nurses fell ill local nuns helped. Venereal disease increased and gonorrhoea infections were surpassed only by colds and measles in 1970.<sup>663</sup> The Covid 19 pandemic of 2020—1 severely affected the town and cost several hundred lives.

Despite concerns about storing corpses the only mortuary was at East Reach hospital until c. 1907 when a council facility was built at Coal Orchard depot. It was inadequate by 1958 and Musgrove Park Hospital mortuary became a public facility.<sup>664</sup>

### Doctors

Doctors were recorded from 1400.<sup>665</sup> Many barber surgeons, physicians and apothecaries were named from the 16th to 18th centuries.<sup>666</sup> In 1617 one medical man was reputed an expert surgeon and an apothecary was licenced to practice physic and surgery in 1631.<sup>667</sup> Tokens with unicorns issued in 1655 and 1662 may have been for apothecaries.<sup>668</sup> Between 1662 and 1706 at least seven surgeons were licensed.<sup>669</sup> In 1712 Dr Arthur Parsons left

<sup>662</sup> Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/6—7; D/B/ta 4/22/1; C/E/4/311/7 (23 July, 22 Aug. 1953).

<sup>663</sup> Ibid. A/EPF/250/4/6—7; C/PHH/169 (1952, 1953, 1965); C/E/4/367/6 (report 1958); D/H/ta/22/1 (26 Dec. 1969, 2 Jan. 1970).

<sup>664</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/2/1/2, p. 226, 4/2/2 (1907), 4/2/4 (1958).

<sup>665</sup> TNA, C 67/32, m. 20.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid. CP 40/1317b, image 226; 1318, image 71d; 1420, image 502, 1026:

[www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40](http://www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40) accessed May 2021; [www.practitioners.exeter.ac.uk](http://www.practitioners.exeter.ac.uk): accessed 16 Jan. 2024; SHC, DD/SP/1683/41.

<sup>667</sup> Broadway, Cust and Roberts, *Docquets of Lord Keeper Coventry*, p. 166; SHC, D/D/Ca/206.

<sup>668</sup> T.D. Whittet, 'Somerset Apothecaries' Tokens and their Issuers', *PSAS CXXX*. 130—2.

<sup>669</sup> SHC, D/D/BS/39; D/D/Ol/44.

£3,000 to Corpus Christi College, Oxford.<sup>670</sup> Ten apothecaries, surgeons and physicians were in practice in 1784 and most took apprentices.<sup>671</sup> Michael Dickson (d. 1779) could leave £3,000 to each of three children and spend £2,000 establishing his eldest son ‘in the Indies’. Samuel Farr (d. 1795) wrote medical treatises and translated Hippocrates.<sup>672</sup>

In 1807 the Taunton Medical Society was formed to provide doctors with a library, transferred later to the hospital, and by 1840 the Taunton and Somerset Medical and Surgical Association, from 1860 a branch of the British Medical Association, was established. Dr James Dore Blake (d. 1874) practiced homeopathy in the 1840s.<sup>673</sup> In 1848 Dr Henry Alford, later medical officer of health, was credited with the first case of childbirth under chloroform although administered at the mother’s insistence.<sup>674</sup> In the early 19th century brothers Henry and John Liddon established a medical practice in Church Square, which remained in the family for a century and moved to the former St James’ school in 1982 where it remained in 2024.<sup>675</sup> By 1872 there were eight physicians and 17 surgeons resident and in 1887 14 town surgeries including a homeopathic practice.<sup>676</sup>

Doctors added consulting rooms and surgeries to their homes including Salisbury House, Billetfield and North Town House, Staplegrove Road.<sup>677</sup> Borough medical officers endeavoured to improve public health and issued a magazine in 1929.<sup>678</sup> By 1939 women were in general practice.<sup>679</sup> In 1957 a large group practice at Powlett House, High Street included a dentist, a physiotherapist and two consultant surgeons.<sup>680</sup> A purpose-built medical

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<sup>670</sup> TNA, PROB 11/574/387.

<sup>671</sup> *Bailey’s British Dir.* (1784), 454—5; TNA, IR 1/23, p. 186; 1/58, p. 164; 1/67, p. 114; 1/68, p. 200; 1/69, p. 227.

<sup>672</sup> *DNB*; Devon HC, 2780B/F/2.

<sup>673</sup> Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 381; SHC, A/EWA/1/1; *British Jnl of Homeopathy* 33 (1875), pp. 379—80.

<sup>674</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 5 Jan. 1848; BNA, accessed 17 Feb. 2020; SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/5, p. 606.

<sup>675</sup> *Pigot’s London and Provincial Directory* (1823); SHC, A/DSP; DD/HBD.

<sup>676</sup> Morris & Co. *Dir. Som.* (1872); *Goodman’s Taunton Dir* (1887); TNA, RG 12/1875—7.

<sup>677</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/18/717; 24/1/26/1733, 24/1/27/1767, 24/1/44/631, 24/1/45/648, 24/1/51/837.

<sup>678</sup> *Ibid.* A/EPF/250/9/1—9.

<sup>679</sup> TNA, RG 101/305/1/WOOA—WOPG.

<sup>680</sup> *Kelly’s Dir. Taunton* (1957), 68, 386—7.

centre opened at French Weir in the 1970s starting a move of medical practices to centres in residential areas. Of c. 12 surgeries in 2019 only two were in the central area.<sup>681</sup>

### Midwives and nurses

There were unlicensed midwives in the 1630s.<sup>682</sup> From c. 1710 to 1730 Taunton was served by skilled midwife Sarah Stone who was scathing about her fellow practitioners and noted high maternal and infant mortality among the weavers and their habit of giving birth standing.<sup>683</sup> From 1824 there was a lying-in room in St Mary's workhouse.<sup>684</sup> The Taunton Institution for Relieving Lying-In Women, founded in East Street in 1806, was used by c. 150 women a year in the 1840s.<sup>685</sup> By 1852 it was in the care of a former schoolmistress and later a surgeon.<sup>686</sup> In 1872 it shared premises with the eye infirmary but closed before 1883 for shortage of funds.<sup>687</sup>

The Taunton District Nursing Association, established in 1891—2 by Ethel Mary Fisher (d. 1900), provided nurses for the poor at home and maternity cases.<sup>688</sup> In 1901 George Saunders of Bishops Lydeard gave the association Canon Lodge, Canon Streete.<sup>689</sup> The Somerset Nursing Association was formed in Taunton in 1902 and supplied Queens's nurses to neighbouring towns and villages.<sup>690</sup> Rowbarton Nursing Association, established c. 1896, was supported by St Andrew's church, which paid the nurse until 1904.<sup>691</sup> There was a

<sup>681</sup> SHC, DD/X/WEA/1; D/B/ta/24/1/14269; D/P/tau.ja 22/27; D/DC/tau.d/2/2/15 (11 Aug.).

<sup>682</sup> Ibid. D/D/Ca/310.

<sup>683</sup> S. Stone, *A Complete Practice of Midwifery* (1737), 39—48, 54, 73, 80, 85: copies in SHC, T/PH/mcl/3.

<sup>684</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/9.

<sup>685</sup> Revd Jas Cottle, *The First Pastoral Letter addressed to the parishioners of St Mary Magdalene, Taunton* (Taunton, 1841), 18.

<sup>686</sup> *Slater's Dir. Som.* (1852); Harrison Harrad & Co *Dir. Som.* (1859).

<sup>687</sup> Morris & Co *Dir. Som.* (1872); *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883).

<sup>688</sup> SHC, A/DIF/95/32; PAM 469.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid. DD/TBL/42/9/7 (*Taunton Mail*, 2 Jan. 1901, p. 4).

<sup>690</sup> *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1914).

<sup>691</sup> SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/3 (*Taunton Mail*, 1 Apr. 1896, p. 4); DD/C/323.

district maternity nurse based in East Reach by 1902 and three district nurses in Elm Grove in 1911.<sup>692</sup> In 1907 a female health visitor was appointed.<sup>693</sup>

By 1914 the Taunton association made over 12,000 visits of which 1,524 were to maternity cases and held a weekly school for new mothers. Infant mortality fell from an average of 139 deaths per 1,000 births in the 1880s to 37 in 1939 despite increasing premature births. In 1911 many women had between 10 and 19 children but in some cases up to two thirds died. There was a high incidence of stillbirth in 1942—3 including many twins, although in 1920 two sets of triplets and seven pairs of twins were born and survived.<sup>694</sup> The number of visits per nurse rose from c. 2,800 in 1931 to c. 3,230 in 1941.<sup>695</sup>

In 1927 the Taunton association sold Canon Lodge to the borough, which built a 10-bed annexe, enlarged in 1933 to provide labour and lying-in wards.<sup>696</sup> Pauper cases continued to be confined in the workhouse until 1930.<sup>697</sup> Only 99 confinements took place in the maternity home in 1933 whereas 275 women gave birth at home with the help of a district nurse.<sup>698</sup> Four fifths of all births still took place at home in 1939 and fewer than half of expectant mothers received ante-natal care. When 34 pregnant women were evacuated to Taunton in four days in September 1940 a nursery was created at the home.<sup>699</sup> In 1942 there were 246 cases including evacuees and soldiers' wives and in 1946—7 218 patients stayed for an average of two weeks.<sup>700</sup> The unit became part of the National Health Service in the care of a midwife until 1972. The special care baby unit was at Musgrove Park Hospital to which all maternity cases were later removed.<sup>701</sup> The Nursing Association became the

<sup>692</sup> *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1902—3), 182; TNA, RG 14/14238.

<sup>693</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/4/2/2 (1907).

<sup>694</sup> TNA, RG 14/14234—45; SHC, A/DIF/95/32; A/EPF/250/4/1—4; C/PHH/169 (1939); A/DQR/2 (1942—3).

<sup>695</sup> SHC, DD/C/322 (reports 1931, 1942).

<sup>696</sup> *Ibid.* D/B/ta/1/61/1116, 24/1/64/1213, 24/1/81/1725; A/DIF/95/37; A/DVY/1; D/H/ta/4/1/3.

<sup>697</sup> *Ibid.* C/WS/1/1, p. 408; C/WS/1/2, p. 599.

<sup>698</sup> *Ibid.* DD/C/322 (report 1933).

<sup>699</sup> *Ibid.* C/PHH/169 (1939).

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid.* DD/C/322 (reports 1942, 1946—70); A/EPF/250/4/6, p. 3.

<sup>701</sup> *Ibid.* D/H/ta/1/2/13 (1963); A/BWX/5; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1972—3).



Taunton Aid in Sickness Fund in 1993 and had an income of over £30,000 a year in 2016—  
17.<sup>702</sup>

By 1931 there were 12 midwives and in 1944 a Taunton branch of the Royal College of Midwives, later amalgamated with Bridgwater and Minehead branches. Although the birth rate fell to 14 per 1,000 in 1952 and 1970, midwives in the west Somerset area increased from 75 in 1946 to 303 in 1994, although not all may have been practicing.<sup>703</sup>

### Dentists

By the 1830s there were three dentists, six in 1851 including Taunton's first woman dentist Julia Blackmore, and eight in 1891.<sup>704</sup> The English and American Dental Company, established in North Street c. 1894, offered painless extraction. By 1914 there were three artificial teeth makers.<sup>705</sup> A school dental service established by 1920 saw c. 2,000 children a year.<sup>706</sup> By 1939 12 resident dentists, including a woman, employed at least seven receptionists and five mechanics, presumably making dentures.<sup>707</sup> There were at least 11 surgeries in 2020 and two orthodontic clinics. Unlike doctors most dentists were based in or near the town centre.

### Other health practitioners

By 1839 there was a family of opticians and for most of the 19th and 20th centuries there were three practices, later joined by several national firms.<sup>708</sup> In 1871 two women practiced chiropody.<sup>709</sup> By 1957 there were seven chiropodists, four physiotherapists, three masseuses

<sup>702</sup> SHC, A/BXP/1/1/1; Char. Com. reg.: accessed 22 Oct. 2018.

<sup>703</sup> SHC, A/EPF/250/4/5 (1931, p. 7); A/BQM/4/4; D/B/ta/4/22/1.

<sup>704</sup> *Robson's Dir. Som.* (1839); TNA, HO 107/1922—3; RG 12/1875—7.

<sup>705</sup> *The Parish Church and Church Life in Taunton* [1910], advert; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1914).

<sup>706</sup> SHC, A/EPF/250/4/8/1, p. 1; 8/6, p. 5.

<sup>707</sup> TNA, RG 101/305/1/WOOA—WOPG.

<sup>708</sup> *Robson's Dir. Som.* (1839); *Morris & Co. Dir. Som.* (1872); *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1972—3).

<sup>709</sup> TNA, RG 10/2374—5.

and a chiropractor.<sup>710</sup> In 2020 there were at least five chiropody practices, three physiotherapy and seven osteopathy and chiropractic clinics. Alternative therapy was provided by herbalists in 1861 and in the 1930s.<sup>711</sup> In the 21st century there were homeopathy and hypnotherapy clinics.

Apothecaries acted as druggists in the 17th century but by the later 18th century the latter had become a separate profession. Chemists and druggists manufactured and patented their own drugs and veterinary medicines.<sup>712</sup> By the late 19th century at least one had an analytical laboratory and another practised homeopathy.<sup>713</sup> Two of the oldest pharmacies, 15 East Street by 1830 and 18 Fore Street by 1884, survived until the later 20th century.<sup>714</sup>

### Mental health

In 1820—41 patients were sent to Fullands, Wilton or until the 1860s to Fairwater House, Staplegrave.<sup>715</sup> The workhouse housed paupers of ‘unsound mind’ although dangerous cases were transferred to an asylum.<sup>716</sup> In 1956 the Taunton and District Society for Mentally Handicapped Children was formed and in 1983 took over the redundant Albemarle chapel.<sup>717</sup> During the later 20th century patients were treated at Tone Vale Hospital. Day and residential units included Ivor House. After 1986 Wellsprings Hospital, Cheddon Road had units for detained individuals, acute mental health and dementia patients and outpatients. There were

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<sup>710</sup> *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957).

<sup>711</sup> TNA, RG 9/1617; SHC, D/CC/ta/7/87.

<sup>712</sup> SHC, DD/HC/70/2/4; D/P/tau.m/13/3/16, 23/29; TNA, IR 1/38, p. 70; IR 1/69, pp. 149, 227; IR 1/70, p. 91; IR 26/292/73.

<sup>713</sup> TNA, RG 10/2372; *Where to Buy: Taunton* (1890), 22, 25, 41; *Industrial Great Britain* (c. 1890), 235.

<sup>714</sup> *Pigot Dir.* (1830); *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883); *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1972—3); SHC, DD/ADK/1—5.

<sup>715</sup> Jeboult, *Hist. West Som.*, 189; SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/5; D. Bromwich, *Kings College the 1st 100 years*, (Taunton c. 1980), 32.

<sup>716</sup> SHC, D/G/ta/8a/18 (June 1867).

<sup>717</sup> *Ibid.*, A/DBL/135/1 [1983].

private clinics for various disorders.<sup>718</sup> The Samaritans have been based in Wood Street since 1973.<sup>719</sup>

### Ambulance service

Since 1881 St John Ambulance have had a Taunton branch, based in Canon Street in 2024. In 1892 a railway ambulance corps was formed. It joined the St John association and had 70 members by 1909.<sup>720</sup> In 1906 a horse-drawn ambulance was donated by Sir Edward Boyle MP.<sup>721</sup> The Red Cross had a motor ambulance during and after the First World War at Coal Orchard.<sup>722</sup> In 1924 a motor ambulance, given and run by volunteers, took 400 people to hospital in 1926, nearly half from road accidents. In 1935 a subscription was raised for another vehicle.<sup>723</sup> The Isolation Hospital had its own ambulance in 1941 when the people of Honolulu donated a trailer ambulance, passed on to St John Ambulance, Bishops Lydeard. The Red Cross maintained two ambulances at Coal Orchard until 1948. By 1951 the health service had eight vehicles, radio-controlled from 1955 when they aimed to attend within five minutes, and carried over 25,000 patients annually.<sup>724</sup> The station, beside Musgrove Park Hospital had 15 ambulances by 1972.<sup>725</sup> In the 1980s an ambulance station was built in Lisieux Way, in 2024 run by the South West Ambulance service.<sup>726</sup>

## HOSPITALS

<sup>718</sup> [www.sompar.nhs.uk](http://www.sompar.nhs.uk): accessed 14 Nov. 2019.

<sup>719</sup> SHC, D/DC/tau.d.2.2.15 (30 June).

<sup>720</sup> Ibid. A/DVZ/1; DD/TBL/42/9/4 (*Taunton Mail* 3 Nov 1897, p. 4); *Taunton Courier*, 19 Oct. 1881, 16 Jan. 1909; BNA accessed 1 Sep. 2022.

<sup>721</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/10, pp. 225, 421; 31/1/11, p. 347.

<sup>722</sup> SHC, C/EW/8/49; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), 17.

<sup>723</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 13 Aug. 1924, 9 March 1927, 13 Feb., 27 March 1935; BNA, accessed 17 Aug. 2021.

<sup>724</sup> SHC, D/H/yeo/23/9/2 (Jan. 1941); D/B/ta/4/5/1 (June 1941); A/CXE/8; A/EPF/250/4/6 (1955, p. 13).

<sup>725</sup> Ibid. C/PHH/169; D/B/ta/4/22/1; D/B/ta/24/1/143/8428.

<sup>726</sup> Ibid. D/P/stapg/7/3, p. 91.

The Tone Conservators' profits were to provide a hospital but they made none.<sup>727</sup> A site at Shuttern earmarked for a hospital in 1767 was sold but a site was found in South Road. Building started in 1772 to the designs of the James Stowey and Thomas Jones partnership. The three-storey, nine-bayed square building had a 13-ft diameter courtyard and porticoed entrance with double stair. The ground floor was to house domestic areas and hot and cold baths, the principal floors staff quarters, surgery, operating room, committee room and nine wards of varying sizes, including two running the full width. The design was not ideal from a medical point of view with the operating room on the top floor and poorly lit.<sup>728</sup>

Subscriptions to raise the £6,300 cost dried up before 1777, the builders brought legal action for £600, and the unfinished hospital stood empty and vandalised until disposed of under an Act of 1793.<sup>729</sup>

In 1789 Dr Cox opened a dispensary at his own expense. It treated nearly 600 patients but closed for lack of funds in 1793.<sup>730</sup>

### Taunton and Somerset Hospital

In 1809 local doctors led by Malachi Blake planned a hospital to mark the 50th year of George III's reign. Banker George Sheppard of Bishops Hull gave a site in East Reach, the foundation stone was laid in 1810 and the hospital opened in 1812. Additional land was acquired later. The hospital was governed by physicians and surgeons and major donors including clergy who collected funds.<sup>731</sup> A monthly committee was replaced in 1948 by a Hospital Management Committee responsible for all Taunton hospitals.<sup>732</sup>

<sup>727</sup> 9th Rep. Com. Char, 531—2.

<sup>728</sup> SHC, DD/DR/28; A/DAS/1/390/8; D/H/yeo/23/8/7.

<sup>729</sup> SHC, A/CPT/15/5: pp. 89—93; D/H/yeo/23/8/7.

<sup>730</sup> Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 590n.; SHC, D/H/ta/23/8/12.

<sup>731</sup> Ibid. DD/C/325a; tithe award, St Mary; A/DIF/114/12.

<sup>732</sup> Ibid. D/H/ta/1/1/2—13, 1/2/1—23. The first minute book is missing. They were researched by Jenni Llewelyn.

The original four-storey, five-bay block was by John White.<sup>733</sup> In 1832 the navigation interests of the Tone Conservators were bought out enabling them to spend £2,000 on a wing in 1843. Their generosity was remembered later in Conservators ward at Musgrove Park Hospital. In 1828 and 1848 additions were designed by Richard Carver.<sup>734</sup> By 1870 two convalescent wards designed by J. Houghton Spencer were linked to the main building by glazed corridors and in 1873 another wing was added.<sup>735</sup>

In 1850 gaslight and hot water were installed and by 1853 there were 81 beds including air and water beds, three physicians, four surgeons, a matron and a chaplain.<sup>736</sup> From 1860 a house surgeon was accommodated who must not practise outside the hospital but might take up to four apprentices. Apprentice surgeons served for five years paying up to £200 a year to the hospital and £50 to the surgeon they assisted. By 1880 apprenticeships had ceased and surgeons usually trained in London. Matron, elected by the governors, had charge of the hospital and nurses, made twice daily ward rounds and ensured the hospital was locked at night.<sup>737</sup> In 1841 only matron, two nurses and a female servant had lived in but by 1881 the house surgeon, porter and 13 nurses resided.<sup>738</sup> As late as 1902 the physicians, surgeons and dental surgeons were honorary. The house surgeon and his assistant were the only paid medical staff.<sup>739</sup> In 1921 the first female house surgeon was appointed.<sup>740</sup>

Apart from accident cases patients had to be recommended, be over 7, and not pregnant or suffering mental disorder or infectious disease. Patients gave security to meet burial costs and until the 1870s wore a uniform jacket.<sup>741</sup> Food gifts were frequent as food accounted for 80 per cent of hospital expenditure. In 1897 meat accounted for £458 compared

<sup>733</sup> SHC, A/DIF/44; DD/SAS/TN/54.

<sup>734</sup> Ibid. DD/TC/36; D/H/ta/4/1/3; ; *Taunton Courier*, 5 Mar., 12 Nov. 1828; BNA, accessed 17 Aug. 2021; *Gen Digest of Endowed Chars. Som* (1869—71), 60—1.

<sup>735</sup> Morris & Co. *Dir. Som.* (1872); SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/15/573

<sup>736</sup> SHC, D/H/ta/1/1/2 (5 Dec. 1850, 25 Oct. 1853).

<sup>737</sup> Ibid. A/DIF/114/12; D/H/yeo/23/8/12.

<sup>738</sup> TNA, HO, 107/972; RG 11/2366.

<sup>739</sup> SHC, D/H/ta/3/2 (1902).

<sup>740</sup> J. Guy, *Malachi's Monument* (Taunton, 1986), 60.

<sup>741</sup> SHC, A/DIF/114/12; Guy, *Malachi's Monument*, 21.

with £438 spent on nurses. Alcohol expenditure fell from £271 in 1868 to £80 in 1886.<sup>742</sup> By 1889 a total of 33,726 in-patients and 140,292 out-patients drawn from west and south Somerset, east Devon and west Dorset had been treated since 1812.<sup>743</sup> In 1898 electric lighting was installed and in 1901 a lift.<sup>744</sup> In 1914 another operating theatre was built and there were 603 major operations under general anaesthetic.<sup>745</sup> By summer 1916 the hospital had to cope with sick and wounded soldiers and venereal disease.<sup>746</sup>

During the late 19th and early 20th century the hospital acquired by gift or purchase neighbouring houses and back courts, Penzoy farm, Westonzoyland, sold in 1915 and 1918, and land in New Zealand sold in 1920.<sup>747</sup> Some cottages housed staff, the site of two houses opposite the hospital provided gardens and tennis courts and other property was used to expand the hospital. The Jubilee Nursing Institute, designed by J. Houghton Spencer, was built west of the hospital.<sup>748</sup> An anonymous donor paid £5,000, half the cost, and it was to be self-funding through hiring out private nurses.<sup>749</sup>

Nurses, who had to be single, were trained on the Nightingale model from 1867. Pupils trained for three years, extended to four from 1896, under a lady superintendent after three months' probation. In the 1880s senior nurses could earn £36 with board, lodging, washing and indoor and outdoor uniform including a blue cloak and bonnet. They were accommodated in the upper floors of the Institute.<sup>750</sup> In the 1890s each ward was staffed by a ward nurse, an assistant and a pupil during the day and a night sister and an assistant nurse at night. Sisters were known by the name of their ward in the 19th century. Institute nurses

<sup>742</sup> *Gen Digest of Endowed Chars. Som* (1869—71), 60—1; SHC, A/BMG/5/2; D/H/ta/3/1—2 passim.

<sup>743</sup> SHC, D/H/ta/3/1 (1886—7); *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1889).

<sup>744</sup> Taunton and Somerset Hospital, *Centenary 1812—1912 Souvenir* (Taunton, 1912), 24, 26; SHC, D/H/ta/1/1/6 (17 June 1898).

<sup>745</sup> SHC, D/H/ta/3/3 (1914).

<sup>746</sup> *Ibid.* D/H/ta/1/1/10 (8 Aug. 1913—1 Dec. 1914, 4 Jul. 1916—2 Nov. 1917).

<sup>747</sup> *Ibid.* D/H/ta/1/1/10 (6 Jul., 5 Oct. 1915, 6 Feb., 4 Sep. 1917), 3/3 (1919, 1921), 4/1/3; DD/CH/16.

<sup>748</sup> *Ibid.* D/H/ta/1/1/13, p. 188; 2/1/1 (6 Nov. 1888); 4/1/3; DD/C/325a.

<sup>749</sup> *Ibid.* D/B/ta/24/1/21/900; D/H/ta/3/1 (1886—7); *Taunton of Today* (1896), 45. B over the entrance indicates the donor: James Broadmead of Langport (d. 1892) worth nearly £300,000.

<sup>750</sup> SHC, A/DRT/3; D/H/ta/2/1/1; London Metropolitan Archives, H01/St/NC/18/126/049 accessed June 2019; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1889).

could be hired for £1—2 a week for up to eight weeks. The hospital did not contribute to the Institute although its nurses lived there. From 1900 all nurses were paid by the hospital effectively merging the two groups and although the Institute was extended in 1901, by 1918 private nurses were reduced to four and the service declined.<sup>751</sup> Nursing was a popular profession; in 1903 34 women applied for eight training places and in 1907 36 applied for the post of matron.<sup>752</sup> In 1906 the hospital spent £782 annually on nurses to care for 1,109 inpatients and 5,419 outpatients.<sup>753</sup> Additional accommodation for sisters was built in 1933, for nurses in 1937 and in 1944 houses were acquired for nurses.<sup>754</sup> From 1947 Lyngford House was used for probationary training.<sup>755</sup> By the 1960s nurses were accommodated at Musgrove Park Hospital and offered specialist courses in obstetrics and psychiatry.<sup>756</sup>

Two large diagonal wings behind the hospital opened in 1938 when 48 nursing staff dealt with 1,710 inpatients and nearly 28,000 outpatients annually, 1,217 operations under general anaesthetic and kept a register of blood donors.<sup>757</sup> Average patient stay fell from 30 days in 1907 to 17 in 1937.<sup>758</sup> In 1947 costs were £14,000 a quarter and investments were sold to meet a deficit. It was probably with relief that the management committee handed over the hospital on 28 June 1948 to a regional hospital board, part of the National Health Service.<sup>759</sup> East Reach and Musgrove Park hospitals were united as one institution. In the late 1950s the emergency and pathology departments at East Reach were extended. An accident centre was built in 1967—8 to deal with over 23,000 cases annually including 888 road casualties.<sup>760</sup> The East Street site had 117 beds in 1980, mainly for accident and emergency,

<sup>751</sup> SHC, D/H/ta/1/1/18 (2 Sep. 1901), 2/1/1 (1893—1900), 3/3 (1910—13, 1918—21), 23/8/14; *Taunton and West Som. Annual 1897*, 130

<sup>752</sup> SHC, DD/C/322 (reports 1903, 1907).

<sup>753</sup> Ibid. D/H/ta/3/2 (1906).

<sup>754</sup> Ibid. D/H/ta/1/1/13, p. 308, 3/3 (1933); D/B/ta/24/1/101/2475.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid. D/H/ta/3/5 (1948).

<sup>756</sup> Ibid. A/DRT/1; D/H/ta/1/2/13 (July 1963), /3/5.

<sup>757</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/24/1/98/2207; A/EFZ/2. Undated human remains were found on the site: *ibid.* A/DQR/2.

<sup>758</sup> SHC, DD/C/322 (reports 1907, 1937).

<sup>759</sup> Ibid. D/H/ta/1/1/13, pp. 309, 313, 326, 393, 404, 410.

<sup>760</sup> Ibid. DD/X/ROW/1; D/H/ta/22/1 (July 1967, Oct. 1968, March 1970).

trauma and orthopaedic surgery, compared with 478 in 1967. It closed in 1987 although the Institute was used for a few years for out-patient clinics. The buildings were sold, additions were demolished but the main building and institute survive as offices named East Reach and Nightingale houses. A proposed Lyngford hospital was never built and Lyngford House was a health conference centre until sold in 2017.<sup>761</sup>

### Eye Infirmary

An eye hospital, supported by public subscription, opened in a house in Upper High Street in 1816. James Billett operated for cataracts treating people from a wide area. In 1844 36 in-patients were treated without charge but the hospital was short of funds and was demolished in 1847.<sup>762</sup> In 1853 Billet acquired the large Shuttern tollhouse, former headquarters of the Taunton Turnpike Trust, and converted it into an eye hospital. It opened in 1854 as a charity. James Billet was assisted by consulting surgeons and physicians, matron, nurses and servants treating eye and ear diseases. In 1855—6 493 of 653 patients were cured.<sup>763</sup> By 1864 20,860 patients had been treated since 1816.<sup>764</sup> In 1879 in-patients stayed a week or less for cataract operations and in 1883 there was a late morning clinic on Saturdays.<sup>765</sup> The Taunton and Somerset Hospital established ophthalmic wards in 1860, which eventually reduced demand at the eye hospital.<sup>766</sup> The last in-patient was treated in 1903 and the infirmary closed in 1905.<sup>767</sup> The 1815 H-shaped crenelated building by George Pollard on the corner of Westgate Street had two storeys and attics lit by quatrefoil windows. It was converted into dwellings and most decorative features were removed.<sup>768</sup>

<sup>761</sup> Ibid. A/DRT/1; D/PC/stapg/7/3, p. 89; A/DBL/135/1 [1980]; A/DPH/1/24.

<sup>762</sup> Ibid. DD/SAS/C795/TN/28; D/P/m.st.m/9/1/1 (1835); *Taunton Courier*, 29 Apr. 1846, 21 Apr. 1847; BNA accessed 12 Feb. 2020.

<sup>763</sup> SHC, DD/CH/124/1.

<sup>764</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 25 Jan. 1816, 10 Sep. 1864; BNA, accessed 22 Aug. 2018.

<sup>765</sup> SHC, DD/CH/124/1; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883).

<sup>766</sup> SHC, D/H/ta/1/1/3 (6 Dec. 1860, 7 Feb. 1861).

<sup>767</sup> Ibid. DD/CH/124/1; DD/SAS/C2273/3/15; *Taunton Courier*, 7 Aug. 1905; BNA, accessed 22 Aug. 2018.

<sup>768</sup> SHC, A/DIF/44; D/B/ta/24/1/34/324.



### Workhouse Hospital

By July 1849 there was a small fever hospital east of the workhouse with one nurse assisted by paupers.<sup>769</sup> In 1866—7 A two-storey cholera ward was added in 1866—7 and a two-storey wing in 1901 with a lying-in ward.<sup>770</sup> In August 1904 of 60 patients 34 were bed-ridden but there were only two nurses.<sup>771</sup> By 1930 there were seven nurses and the infirmary expanded into the workhouse.<sup>772</sup> The buildings suffered minor damage from enemy action in May 1941. In 1947 men were moved to Musgrove Park and in 1948 the infirmary and workhouse were transferred to the Taunton Hospital Board as a geriatric hospital.<sup>773</sup>

Renamed Trinity Hospital in 1954, there were 14 wards and had a nurses' training school.<sup>774</sup> Beds were reduced to 87 by 1980 and upstairs wards disused. Patients recovering from surgery were transferred to nursing homes c. 1989 leaving only acute geriatric patients who were transferred to Musgrove Park Hospital when the hospital closed in 1993. The infirmary and was demolished for housing.<sup>775</sup>

### Taunton Isolation Hospital.

There was a smallpox hospital in Rowbarton between 1871 and 1873. A fever hospital opened on Cheddon Road in 1879, mainly for scarlet fever and diphtheria cases. It was run by the borough and rural district, and from 1933 by the Taunton and District Joint Hospital Board. War delayed the construction of a tuberculosis sanatorium but brought infected soldiers, usually with enteric fever. By 1917 patients with tuberculosis, meningitis, often

<sup>769</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/8 (10 July 1849), 8a/10 (March 1851); 8a/11 (Feb 1853).

<sup>770</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/3/1/1 (1867), 24/1/6/170, 24/1/26/1722; D/G/ta/8a/38 (7 Aug.-18 Sep. 1901).

<sup>771</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/39 (Sep. 1904).

<sup>772</sup> Ibid. D/G/ta/8a/49 (19—22 Mar. 1930); C/WS/1/1, p. 389, 1/2, p. 599.

<sup>773</sup> Ibid. C/WS/1/3, p. 347; 1/4, pp. 157, 335, 477, 721, 723; 1/6 pp. 56, 99.

<sup>774</sup> Ibid. A/BVA/1—2; D/R/ta/34/11/2; D/H/ta/1/2/13.

<sup>775</sup> Ibid. A/DBL/135/1 [1980]; A/DPH/1/1.

fatal, and typhoid were admitted but smallpox and measles cases were turned away for lack of accommodation.<sup>776</sup>

In 1929 the hospital was provided with a concert hall and a porter's lodge. It was renamed the Taunton and District Isolation Hospital and Somerset County Council Sanatorium, the latter a separate building to the north. In 1932 virulent diphtheria forced the hospital to close to other patients who were moved out. In 1937 a puerperal fever block was built, cases being higher than average in Taunton, and from 1939 infants were admitted with their mothers.<sup>777</sup> An outbreak of cerebro-spinal meningitis in 1940 possibly brought by military personnel was fatal in a third of cases. There were many cases of measles, whooping cough and ophthalmia neonatorum caused by gonorrhoea. Admissions to the sanatorium increased and the death rate was high. In 1941 Cossington smallpox hospital was acquired for several months for scarlet fever patients.<sup>778</sup> In 1943 the staff comprised a matron, two ward sisters, two staff nurses, five assistant nurses and five probationers.<sup>779</sup>

In the 1950s the hospital dealt with the polio epidemic, pneumonia and tubercular meningitis. Death rates declined to seven out of 267 hospital cases in 1954 but remained over ten per cent in the sanatorium until improvements in tuberculosis treatment reduced patients to eight by 1960. In 1962 the Quantock sanatorium closed and patients transferred to Taunton.<sup>780</sup> By 1964 it was largely a geriatric hospital and closed in 1986. After use as a community hospital it was redeveloped as Wellsprings mental health hospital in the 1990s.<sup>781</sup>

### Military and Red Cross hospitals

<sup>776</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/2/1/5, pp. 447, 480, 505, 749; 2/1/6, p. 369; C/WS/2/1/6 (1933); A/CXE/1—3, 6; Toller, 'Death and Disease', 21—2.

<sup>777</sup> SHC, A/CXE/4—5; D/H/yeo/23/9/2 (Dec. 1934, Jan 1935, Feb., Dec. 1936, Apr. 1937).

<sup>778</sup> Ibid. D/H/yeo/23/9/2 (1939—41).

<sup>779</sup> Ibid. A/CXE/6.

<sup>780</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/311/7 (25 July 1953); D/H/yeo/23/9/3 (1954, 1958); 23/9/5 (1960—2).

<sup>781</sup> Ibid. A/BWX/5 (1964); A/DRT/3; D/PC/stapg/7/3, p. 89; D/DC/tau.d/2/2/24.

A large house on Mount Street was bought in 1876 and converted into a military hospital. It was replaced before 1885 but may have gone out of use by 1914.<sup>782</sup> The Red Cross, active in Taunton by 1909, in 1915 established a subscription-funded hospital in the Priory School with c. 130 beds and treated 1,121 patients. Its female commandant and matron lived in and other staff had a hostel in Priory Avenue. Patients had recreational facilities in Victoria Park and free admission to cinemas and shows. Serious cases were transferred to East Reach hospital, which received remaining funds after the war.<sup>783</sup> In the 1930s and 1940s the Red Cross was based at the drill hall in Burton Place.<sup>784</sup> In the 1940s the Americans built a large Red Cross hospital in the grounds of Flook House, which after 1945 was used for postal training, aeronautical inspection, tax offices, central school kitchens and the technical college nursing department.<sup>785</sup>

### Musgrove Park Hospital

The hospital, in Galmington, Wilton, started as a British and later American army hospital in 1942 and treated c. 24,000 patients. It passed to the Ministry of Pensions in 1945 and became a National Health Service hospital in 1951.<sup>786</sup> It was leased to Somerset County Council, which in 1961 licensed it to the Hospital Management Committee as part of the Taunton and Somerset Hospital, from 1990 Taunton and Somerset National Health Trust. There were 451 beds by 1980.<sup>787</sup> In 2020 the hospital had c. 600 beds in 30 wards, 15 operating theatres and c. 4,000 staff to deal with 56,000 emergency cases of which c. 41,000 were admitted, 43,000 surgical cases, 315,000 out-patients and 3,400 births annually.<sup>788</sup> New theatres were due to be completed in 2025. In 2022 an ophthalmic centre was established at Blackbrook business

<sup>782</sup> Ibid. A/ASW/1; D/B/ta/2/2/2 (1885) 4/2/1 (1885).

<sup>783</sup> Ibid. A/BAV/14; D/H/ta/3/3 (1915, 1916, 1920); C/EW/8/49.

<sup>784</sup> *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1939), A34; SHC, A/DIF/114/12.

<sup>785</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/3/13/14, pp. 194, 211, 286, 291; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), 10.

<sup>786</sup> SHC, A/DPH, cat.; A/DRT/3.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/23/1/120/5289; A/DRT/1; A/BHI/1/20/7; A/DBL/135/1 [1980].

<sup>788</sup> www.nhs.uk: accessed 4 March 2020.

park where the unused fire control building was a cancer diagnostic centre in the 2020s.<sup>789</sup>

Musgrove Park has a private hospital facility and the private Nuffield Hospital at Staplegrove opened in 1974.<sup>790</sup>

## COMMUNITY LIFE

### Theatre and Cinema

In 1680 a Trull goldsmith built a show called *The beginning of the world*, shown in Taunton in 1681.<sup>791</sup> An exhibition of moving figures and musicians in a Turkish landscape was shown in 1817.<sup>792</sup> Four ‘mountebank stages’ were condemned as obstructions in 1769.<sup>793</sup> A theatre with galleries at the Three Cups in 1773 was used by local performers and travelling companies.<sup>794</sup> The Taunton Comedians performed in Tiverton in 1775.<sup>795</sup> In 1786 a small theatre with boxes and a gallery opened south of East Reach behind a public house, renamed the Shakespeare.<sup>796</sup> Theatre manager Sidley Harper planned performances in 1796 and the Curtis family brought *The Tempest* in 1799.<sup>797</sup>

The theatre was rebuilt in Silver Street and opened in March 1800. It had a two-month season starting with assize week, when the programme changed nightly. Boxes, pit and gallery had separate street entrances.<sup>798</sup> Henry Lee was manager from 1801—18 and his Taunton Company toured Somerset, Devon, Dorset and Guernsey.<sup>799</sup> In April 1820 Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* and *Hamlet* were performed with actors from London and

<sup>789</sup> www.rutherfordhealth.com: accessed 8 June 2022.

<sup>790</sup> SHC, A/DQO/20/5.

<sup>791</sup> *Cal. SP. Dom.* Jul.—Sep. 1683, 192.

<sup>792</sup> SHC, DD/X/BRO/2/49

<sup>793</sup> *Ibid.* DD/HC/93/3/1; DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7 (mkt plan); D/B/ta/31/1/1, p. 53.

<sup>794</sup> *Ibid.* DD/SAS/C2402/52; PAM2160, p. 11; J. Barnard, *Retrospections of the Stage* (1830), pp. 58, 63—8, 73.

<sup>795</sup> J. Bourne, *Georgian Tiverton* (Devon and Cornwall Rec. Soc. 1986), 24—5.

<sup>796</sup> SHC, A/CTP/15/5; DD/X/HFD/3.

<sup>797</sup> *Ibid.* Q/SR 364/3/22; DD/SAS/C2402/20/1.

<sup>798</sup> Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 596; SHC, DD/SP/178 (1800); DD/CH/138/1;

DD/SAS/C795/FA/185, pp. 97—8, 157—8, 160; A/DIF/44, 97.

<sup>799</sup> *ODNB*, Henry Lee: accessed 17 Mar. 2022; SHC, DD/SAS/C2402/20/1—2, 52; DD/SAS/S241/1.

Bristol, *Hamlet* sponsored by local freemasons.<sup>800</sup> Edmund Kean played Shylock in 1816, Richard III and Othello in 1822 and performed there again in 1839 when the theatre was gaslit.<sup>801</sup> It was last recorded as a ‘neat theatre’ in 1842.<sup>802</sup> Thereafter the London Hotel hosted plays and operas in its assembly room.<sup>803</sup>

Theatrical groups included the Taunton Amateur Dramatic Club (fl. 1872—1911), Taunton Players (fl. 1909—27) and Taunton Liberty Players who used the Corfield Hall from the 1950s to the 1970s and visited Germany.<sup>804</sup> The Taunton Thespians, founded in 1928, and the Wayfarers Pantomime Society formed before 1964 were still active in the 2020s.<sup>805</sup> In 1977 the Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre opened at Coal Orchard incorporating the brewery manager’s house as restaurant and offices. It was later extended and remained open in the 2020s.<sup>806</sup> A second theatre, the Tacchi Morris, opened in West Monkton parish.

Diorama and myriorama were presented from the late 19th century at the London Hotel assembly room, which housed the Empire or County Cinema from c. 1912 until 1934.<sup>807</sup> The Victoria or Parade Assembly Rooms over the market acquired a cinematography licence and the Exchange Picture House was in the corn exchange until the 1930s.<sup>808</sup> In 1913 the Lyceum Theatre opened on the corner of Staplegrove and Station roads. By 1920 it was a cinema accommodating 750. In 1935 it was assigned to the Odeon company and in 1967 to Capital and Provincial Cinemas who renamed it the Classic but closed it c. 1990. It was demolished for Laverock Court.<sup>809</sup> The Gaiety, Kingston Rd, a government cinema moved in

<sup>800</sup> BBC Somerset images: accessed 22 March 2016.

<sup>801</sup> SHC, DD/CH/98, 138/1; DD/SAS/C416/8; DD/SAS/C2402/20/3; 23; Cambridge Univ. Lib., Add.MS 7633/68-123/100.

<sup>802</sup> *Pigot Dir.* (1842).

<sup>803</sup> SHC, DD/TBL/75.

<sup>804</sup> *Taunton Courier* 3 Apr. 1872, 6 Nov. 1901, 16 Dec. 1908, 22 Feb., Sep. 1956: BNA Accessed 16 Aug. 2022; SHC, A/BXQ; A/DIF/114/12; DD/TBL/73, 75.

<sup>805</sup> *Taunton Courier* 6 March 1929: BNA accessed 16 Aug. 2022; SHC, A/DLT; A/DMP/3; DD/X/BUSH/24.

<sup>806</sup> SHC, A/ACO 6/23.

<sup>807</sup> *Ibid.* A/DIF/95/32; D/G/ta/8a/41 (11 Mar. 1908), 8a/42 (24 Mar. 1909); A/ERO/1, p. 8; PAM2160, pp. 20—1.

<sup>808</sup> *Ibid.* A/EHA/8.1; A/DIF/95/32; *Kelly’s Dir. Som.* (1923); *Kelly’s Dir. Taunton* (1929) 35.

<sup>809</sup> SHC, A/BMG 5/2; A/CUO 1; A/ANX/1; A/DAS/2 (12388).

1920 from Salisbury plain, was run by the Vickery family who rebuilt it for 500 in the 1930s but in the late 20th century it became successively a nightclub, bingo and billiard halls before being demolished.<sup>810</sup> The Gaumont Palace opened in Corporation Street in 1932 for films and live performances. In the late 20th century it became a bingo hall but a multi-screen cinema opened off Toneway in West Monkton.<sup>811</sup> Two film societies active in the 1950s, merged in 1963 and folded in 1972. Another started in 1977 remained active in the 2020s.<sup>812</sup>

### Assembly and public rooms

A first-floor Assembly Room was recorded in 1708 but like the 15th-century Guildhall was demolished in 1770. The replacement Market House included a first-floor assembly room 24 ft high with a music gallery. two chandeliers given by Colonel Coxe before 1791 and a large portrait of George III given by Benjamin Hammet in 1793. The room was used for concerts, masquerades and balls until the late 19th century.<sup>813</sup> A gaslit assembly room was built behind the London Hotel in 1841 but in 1861 was rebuilt as a theatre, concert hall, ballroom and banqueting room.<sup>814</sup> By 1896 it had a gallery and accommodated 650 and a stage was added in 1901.<sup>815</sup> In 1920 it became the 555-seat Empire Cinema and after 1934 the Empire Hall for live entertainment and dances.<sup>816</sup> In 1960 it was replaced by the County or Queen's ballroom demolished in the late 20th century.<sup>817</sup>

The Mechanics Institute in Hunts Court was built as a public hall in 1839. The Taunton Teetotal Society, formed c. 1838, probably built the 1841 Temperance Hall at 10 St

<sup>810</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/4/3/3 (1920); 24/1/50/794, 799; DD/AY/331; A/BMG 5/2; DD/TBL/73.

<sup>811</sup> Ibid. A/BMG 4/3, 6; 5/2; D/B/ta/24/1/75/1563.

<sup>812</sup> Ibid. DD/X/TFS/1; DD/TBL/73.

<sup>813</sup> Ibid. A/APT/15/5, p. 45; D/B/ta/31/1/1, pp. 5, 73, 129, 374, 407—9; 31/5/2 (g); DD/X/BRO/2/51. Portrait in SHC.

<sup>814</sup> Alford, *Olden Taunton*, 32; SHC, PAM2160, p. 20.

<sup>815</sup> *Taunton and West Som. Annual 1897*, 132; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/29/2.

<sup>816</sup> SHC, A/EFC/1; PAM2160, pp. 20—1; D/B/ta/24/1/50/819; DD/TBL/73.

<sup>817</sup> Ibid. A/ACO 6/6; A/CTP 12/4; A/DOL 1; A/DIF/95/32, 114/2.

James Street, since demolished.<sup>818</sup> In 1885 William Rawlinson built a large iron-roofed brick and timber Temperance Hall seating 350 approached by a broad flight of steps south-east of High Street.<sup>819</sup> It was used as a soup kitchen, concert hall and mission room but became a depository in the 1920s before being demolished.<sup>820</sup> A large lecture hall built by John Spiller in Haydon Road in 1885, possibly used by the Salvation Army, was replaced by houses *c.* 1900.<sup>821</sup> Several public houses had clubrooms by the early 20th century.<sup>822</sup> The 1980 Holway community hall was replaced by a medical centre in 1989 but a small hall was retained. Many churches provided halls for community use in 2024.<sup>823</sup>

## Music

Ballad singers performed on the Cornhill in 1693, probably the ballads were political.<sup>824</sup> In 1816 a man was convicted of hawking printed songs without licence.<sup>825</sup> Virginals and citterns were found in inns and homes in the 17th century.<sup>826</sup> Composer Richard Mico (*c.* 1590—1661) became resident musician to the Petres at Thornden Hall, Essex.<sup>827</sup> The Turle family included cellist James (1766—1844) and his sons James (1802—1882), organist at Westminster Abbey, and Robert, organist of Armagh Cathedral, both also composers, violinists Joseph (d. 1805) and Joseph (d. 1830), and William (1795—1833), composer and organist successively of St James' and St Mary's.<sup>828</sup> The musical Comer and Summerhayes

<sup>818</sup> *Pigot Dir. Som.* (1842); *Taunton Courier*, 13 Jan. 1841, 24 March 1877: BNA accessed 24 July 2019; SHC, DD/SAS/C212/13/1, p. 51.

<sup>819</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/19/796.

<sup>820</sup> *Som. Co. Gazette*, 14 Jan. 1888: BNA accessed 24 July 2019; *Taunton and West Som. Annual 1897*, 132; TNA, IR 58/823637 (606); SHC, DD/TBL/68; A/CRU/1/1; D/B/ta/13/3/1, p. 41.

<sup>821</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/20/825; below, *re. hist.*

<sup>822</sup> Wilts and Swindon HC, 1075/001/396; D/DC/tau.d/25/13 (1391); D/R/ta/34/9/3.

<sup>823</sup> SHC, D/DC/tau.d/2/2/16 (17 May).

<sup>824</sup> *Ibid.* DD/MT/15/1 (1693); DD/SP/18/75.

<sup>825</sup> *Ibid.* DD/SF/15/2/64.

<sup>826</sup> *Ibid.* DD/SP/166/4, 1676/10; 1684/64.

<sup>827</sup> Richard Mico, oxfordmusiconline/grove: accessed 19 Feb 2019.

<sup>828</sup> James Turle, oxfordmusiconline/grove: accessed 19 Feb 2019; A. Humphries, *Som Parishes*, 681; SHC, D/P/tau.ja 4/1/4, 9/1/1; D/P/tau.m 4/1/6; TNA, PROB 11/1835/412; *Taunton Courier*, 11 June 1834: BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

families were active in the 19th century.<sup>829</sup> Frederick Baker (1857—1933) composed dance music, had a band, music shop and piano warehouse.<sup>830</sup> St Mary's spent a great deal on its organ and organists and several churches hosted concerts.<sup>831</sup>

German and Italian musicians and singers were regular visitors in the 19th century. Distinguished performers included Franz Liszt, Jenny Lind, Ida Haendel, Moura Lympany, the Carl Rosa Opera, the Doyley Carte and the Royal Ballet.<sup>832</sup> In the early 21st century professional concerts were promoted by Taunton Festival of the Arts, Taunton Live and Music on the Quantocks. Concerts of popular music by the Beatles, Rolling Stones and others were held in the Gaumont and the County Hotel ballroom in the late 20th century but later were staged outdoors.<sup>833</sup> Some public houses had music societies and concert rooms and provided a venue for amateur groups.<sup>834</sup>

Glee and madrigal clubs were established in the early 19th century. A madrigal club established in 1891 and the Taunton Choral Society, founded in 1892 united in 1955.<sup>835</sup> The Taunton Male Voice Choir, active in the early 20th century and revived at the Avimo factory in the 1940s, Taunton Choral Society and Taunton Operatic Society founded in 1900 were all active in the 2020s. The latter rehearsed at Callebout Hall, Kingston Road, a former Congregational chapel named after their director Eve Callebout.<sup>836</sup> Somerset Opera, founded in 1974, is based in Taunton but tours the county.<sup>837</sup> The Somerset County Orchestra was based in Taunton from the 1950s to the 2020s.<sup>838</sup> A town band was formed in 1857, the

<sup>829</sup> SHC, A/ADD/1, 2/4—5; TNA, PROB 11/2259/51.

<sup>830</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 29 Nov. 1933; BNA accessed 22 Aug. 2022; SHC, A/CUH/6/1.

<sup>831</sup> *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 95; below, rel. hist.

<sup>832</sup> TNA, HO 107/972; RG 10/2370—2, 2374—5; RG 11/2366—8; SHC, Q/SR/163/14; A/BKN/5/1; A/BMG/4/2, 6.

<sup>833</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 27 July, 2 Nov. 1963; BNA, accessed 16 Aug. 2022.

<sup>834</sup> SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/1 (*Taunton Mail*, 5 Sep. 1894, p. 4); D/B/ta/24/1/29/2.

<sup>835</sup> *Taunton and West Som. Annual 1897*, 124; SHC, A/AEA 1.

<sup>836</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 2 July 1919, 9 Aug. 1922, 7 Aug. 1943, 28 Dec. 1946; BNA, accessed 16 Aug. 2022; SHC, A/BEM 2/2; A/ACO 8/5; A/DIF/114/12.

<sup>837</sup> SHC, A/CYY.

<sup>838</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 6 Apr. 1957; BNA, accessed 16 Aug. 2022.



Taunton Silver Band was re-formed in 1960 and revived in the 1980s.<sup>839</sup> Several later 20th-century classical, folk, jazz and popular music groups were short-lived but Amici Chamber Choir founded in 1994, Deane Big Band and Taunton Jazz and Swing Band remained in existence in 2024.<sup>840</sup>

### Reading rooms and libraries

Public houses provided newspapers, sometimes read aloud to customers.<sup>841</sup> In the later 18th century the Market House reading room provided London and local papers, Smyth's in Fore Street and Savage's in High Street had reading rooms, the latter kept Parliamentary proceedings, and of four book societies, the earliest founded in 1766, one was for ladies.<sup>842</sup> Circulating libraries in the 19th century included John Poole's, which charged 12s. a year and had 1,849 books including plays, Barnicott's in Fore Street, Sutton's in North Street and Goodman's in North Street.<sup>843</sup> Private circulating libraries in Kingston and Station roads were still open in 1957.<sup>844</sup>

The Taunton Mechanics Institute, established in 1830 in Paul Street, moved into Edward Bainbridge's 1839 public hall in Hunts Court with a lending library, newspaper room, classes, lectures and discussions for subscribers but closed in the late 1850s.<sup>845</sup> The Taunton Working Men's Association took over the Paul Street reading room before 1867 but closed c. 1876. The Taunton Literary Institution, later Taunton and Somerset Institution, was established in 1823 above the indoor market with a museum, lending library and reading

<sup>839</sup> SHC, DD/X/BRO/2/80; A/EHA/8/1.

<sup>840</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 23 Feb. 1921, 14 Nov. 1923, 19 Jul. 1958, 26 Jan. 1963; BNA, accessed 16 Aug. 2022.

<sup>841</sup> P Mansfield, 'John William Marriott and the *Taunton Courier*', *SDNQ*, XXXVI, 418; SHC, DD/X/WBB/27 (Map 1840); *Pigot & Co. Dir.* (1842).

<sup>842</sup> SHC, A/CTP/15/5; Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 592; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883).

<sup>843</sup> SHC, DD/SF/17/2/26; D/B/ta/31/7/2; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 86.

<sup>844</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/115/4434; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), 76, 129.

<sup>845</sup> SHC, Q/RSI/1; DD/SAS/C909a/4; A/BUN/1; DD/X/WBB/27 map 1840; *Pigot & Co. Dir.* (1842); *Taunton Courier*, 2 May 1855; BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

room for shareholders. It closed in 1883 when its library was sold.<sup>846</sup> The Taunton Conversazione and West Somerset Literary Association only lasted from 1832—4 but the Taunton Reading Society and Taunton Literary and Philosophical Society, in existence by 1893, survived to 1907 and 1931 respectively.<sup>847</sup> The Taunton Conversazione and Field Club met from 1899 and as the Taunton Field Club provided lectures and excursions until 1950.<sup>848</sup>

The Taunton and Somerset Institution unsuccessfully offered its books to the council for a free public library. Only in 1902 did the borough adopt the Public Libraries Act A library designed by Ingleson Charles Goodison and built by Thomas Moggridge opened in Corporation Street in January 1906, supported by the Andrew Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. It was extended to Bath Place in 1911 in matching Tudor style in red sandstone with mullioned windows. By 1913 it had juvenile reading rooms, c. 10,500 volumes, nearly 14,000 borrowers and lent books to schools. During the war French books and newspapers were provided for Belgian refugees.<sup>849</sup> In 1965 issues had risen to over 350,000, and the library added gramophone and reference libraries and a mobile service. Priorswood branch library opened in 1968. Children formed half the library's c. 3,000 members and had a homework room.<sup>850</sup> The central library issued 535,550 books to over 31,000 members by 1988 and in 1996 moved into a former supermarket in Paul Street with facilities for study and exhibitions and for several years the tourist information centre. The first-floor local studies and archaeological society libraries moved in 2010 to the Somerset Heritage Centre.<sup>851</sup>

The county records, formerly held in Wells, were kept at Wilton Gaol from 1817 until 1858 then moved to Shire Hall. A purpose-built record office opened in 1958 in Obridge

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<sup>846</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/153, 156; DD/SAS/2016/50; *PO Dir. Som.* (1861); *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 23; Jeboult, *Hist. West Som.*, app. 1882.

<sup>847</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/144, 146; DD/S/AM/10; *Taunton and West Som. Annual 1897*, 123; *Taunton Official Handbook* (1931), 105.

<sup>848</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/7; DD/SAS/2016, 43, 45.

<sup>849</sup> *Ibid.* A/DIF/95/32; C/SEC/29; PAM3130: *Taunton New Library* (1996).

<sup>850</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/3/19/6 (1964—5); DD/TBL/62 (1965—70).

<sup>851</sup> *Ibid.* A/AUS; C/OP/3/151; PAM3130.

Road but in 2010 the office moved with other county heritage services to the Somerset Heritage Centre, in Norton Fitzwarren, run in 2024 by the South West Heritage Trust.<sup>852</sup> The county museum has been located in the castle since 1958 and later ran an education and loan service.<sup>853</sup>

### Art

Local artists in the late 19th century included Harry Frier (1849—1921), noted for his topographical paintings and sketches of back courts and local characters, landscape artist Charles Haseler, portrait painter Frederick Lake, Mabel Trood and her brother William and architectural artist Alfred Alexander Clarke. Landscape artist Charles Daniel Ward married royal portrait artist Charlotte Blakeney who painted Taunton mayor Josiah Lewis.<sup>854</sup> An art club, established in 1957, was wound up in 1989.<sup>855</sup> The borough received paintings for display but lacking a gallery most remained in storage. A gallery in the former Van Heusen factory was active 1993—5 and regular art exhibitions were mounted in the Museum of Somerset in the early 21st century.<sup>856</sup>

### Popular Entertainment

By the 1820s balloon ascents usually with fireworks and circuses with equestrian events, clowning and tight rope walking were held on Castle Green and off Holway Lane.<sup>857</sup> In 1863 the Female Blondin, Sarah Young, performed on Castle Green. Edmonds, later Wombwell's wild animal show came in 1858 and 1863 and in 1867 was invited to bring animals to the

<sup>852</sup> *Somerset in Manuscript* (Taunton, 1959), vii—ix.

<sup>853</sup> SHC, DD/X/SOM/58/3.

<sup>854</sup> *Robson's Dir. Som.* (1839); *Pigot Dir.* (1842); M. H. Jones, *Harry Frier: Somerset's unknown painter* (Bridgwater, c. 1985); TNA, HO107/1922—3; SHC, A/DSG/1.

<sup>855</sup> SHC, DD/X/TAC/1.

<sup>856</sup> *Ibid.* D/B/ta/4/6/3 (Sep, Nov. 1938); *Western Daily Press*, 27 May 1993, 27 June 1995: BNA accessed 22 Aug. 1922.

<sup>857</sup> SHC, DD/X/BRO/2/50, 61, 64, 74, 76; DD/SAS/2402/23.

convent school, South Road. The Assize fair or Powell's show on Castle Green, North Town fair, military parades or circuses decimated school attendance until the early 20th century.<sup>858</sup> In 1894 up to 9,000 people reputedly attended an evening performance by Sanger's Circus at riverside Jarvis field but an escaped elephant raised concerns about animal welfare. Probably the biggest show ever staged in Taunton was Barnum and Bailey's circus, which arrived in four trains with over 840 people, horses, big cats and 22 elephants in 1899. They camped and performed on Poor Ground behind the hospital and processed around the main streets lined with thousands of onlookers.<sup>859</sup> In 1920 a fire at Sanger's Circus on Jarvis field resulted in five deaths and serious injuries to women and children.<sup>860</sup> Traditional circuses continued to visit although without animals by the end of the 20th century.<sup>861</sup> A flying circus was held at Holway in June 1931 and Sir Alan Cobham brought his flying display to Taunton in 1932.<sup>862</sup> In the 1930s travelling pantomime shows included young girl performers kept in poor conditions with little schooling.<sup>863</sup>

### Radio

A low-power radio transmitter was installed during the Second World War at the borough's Lambrook depot.<sup>864</sup> In 1981 the BBC acquired 14—15 Paul Street for local radio. It first broadcast on 19 November 1981 as an offshoot of Radio Bristol, with three staff and using the Lambrook transmitter.<sup>865</sup> In 1998 it became Somerset Sound, later Radio Somerset, in 2002 moved to Paul's Cottage, Park Street but in 2017 transferred to studios at Deane

<sup>858</sup> Ibid. C/E/4/220/1, pp. 37—8; C/E/4/367/1, p. 1, 377; C/E/4/420/1, pp. 29, 36, 177; D/P/tau.m/18/11/1 (1873, 1877); A/ARQ/4/1 (1875, 1877); A/BEZ/1/1 (1919).

<sup>859</sup> Ibid. DD/TBL/42/9/1 (*Taunton Mail* 4 July 1894, p. 4), 42/9/6 (*Taunton Mail* 5 July 1899, p. 4).

<sup>860</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 21 and 28 July 1920: BNA accessed 18 Feb. 1920.

<sup>861</sup> SHC, A/AOW/22, 25; A/DIF/101/2/32.

<sup>862</sup> Ibid. DD/X/CPN/1; *Taunton Courier*, 10 Aug. 1932: BNA accessed 22 Aug. 2022.

<sup>863</sup> SHC, A/EPF/250/4/8/10—12.

<sup>864</sup> D. Dawson, D. Hunt and C. Webster, *Somerset and the defence of the Bristol Channel in the Second World War* (Taunton, 2011), 73; SHC, D/B/ta/4/2/4 (1960).

<sup>865</sup> SHC, D/DC/tau.d (M/3252), box 1 (1981); D/D/tau.d/2/2/9 (25 Aug.); PAM664.

Gate.<sup>866</sup> A commercial popular music station known as Orchard FM broadcast from 1989 to 2010 near Shoreditch. Tone FM community radio station was started by volunteers in the Market House in 2013. An attempt to provide local television in the late 20th century failed.<sup>867</sup>

## Sport

Hunting and other animal sports Bear and bull baiting were common, although there were penalties for keeping mastiffs, and the Cornhill bullring was destroyed c. 1769.<sup>868</sup>

Thomas Pope owned a cockpit in 1597.<sup>869</sup> There was cock fighting at the White Hart in 1771 and beerhouses named Fighting Cocks from the 1760s to 1790s and Game Cock in 1833.<sup>870</sup>

The Sun, Canal Road reputedly had cock fighting in the early 19th century and an area between Station and Canal roads was called Cockpit until the 1930s.<sup>871</sup> Taunton Vale Harriers, in existence by 1842, were accused in 1846 of keeping a captive deer to hunt. They had moved to Huish Champflower by the early 21st century and Taunton Vale Foxhounds had kennels at Henlade, Ruishton.<sup>872</sup>

The 18th-century Horse and Jockey public house indicates early racing and by 1801 races were held on Broomhay, West Monkton. The South Road racecourse, later site of Kings College, opened before 1826 when up to 9,000 people reportedly attended. It had a grandstand, a mile long track and two days' racing in September 1838 but was given up before 1853. The present Taunton Racecourse opened in 1927 at Shoreditch in Orchard

<sup>866</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news/43592239](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/43592239): accessed 2018; *What's On Somerset*, summer 2018, 55—6.

<sup>867</sup> SHC, A/EIZ, 1—2, 5; *Bridgwater Journal*, 25 Nov. 1989: BNA accessed 22 Aug. 1922.

<sup>868</sup> SHC, DD/SP/49—51 passim, 53 (Apr. 1642), 54 (1662); DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7 (mkt plan).

<sup>869</sup> TNA, PROB 11/90/115.

<sup>870</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 29 May 1935, citing advert 1771; 23 Jan. 1833: BNA accessed 23 Nov. 2021; SHC, Q/REI/35/25a. Q/RLa/19/10.

<sup>871</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 27 Jan. 1926: BNA accessed 23 Nov. 2021.

<sup>872</sup> *VCH Som.* II, 590—1; *Taunton Courier*, 16 Oct. 1842, 15 Apr. 1846: BNA accessed 4 May 2022.

Portman.<sup>873</sup> In 1942 there was a polo and hunting stable on 10 a. at Lower Holway.<sup>874</sup> Water polo clubs used the river bathing place and the baths in the early 20th century.<sup>875</sup> A greyhound racing stadium in Priory Bridge Road, established c. 1946 but closed c. 1951 when racing moved to a short-lived track at the cricket ground which had kennels in the 1960s.<sup>876</sup> Taunton Flying Club, a pigeon homing society, was active in the 1930s.<sup>877</sup>

Recreation grounds and sports centres Public parks and gardens came late to Taunton, but the Elms nursery off Staplegrove Road had public gardens until the 1870s.<sup>878</sup> In 1929 the council published details of areas to be kept open and recreation areas and allotments were provided on most housing estates. In the 1930s pavilions were provided at recreation grounds.<sup>879</sup>

Victoria Park (6 a.) north of East Reach is a 1929 amalgamation of the first public park of 1892 with sports pitches and former school playing fields. It was enlarged to Priory Avenue by the gift of Lieut Col A. Hamilton Gault in 1931 but was requisitioned for the American army, the Hydrographic office and allotments. It was reinstated in 1948 but the children's playground was taken for car parking and housing, exchanged for cleared land north of Somerset Place. Of the Eastbourne and Victoria Gates only the former survives.<sup>880</sup> The east end was cut off by a road in 1972 but hexagonal pavilions were built and gardens created from the late 1980s, maintained by a community group and home to the toad sculpture created for the town centre in 1982.<sup>881</sup>

<sup>873</sup> Goldsworthy, *Recollections*, 45; SHC, DD/X/BRO/2/45, 48; /SAS/C2402/52; D/B/ta/32/1/1 (1853); J. Tyrell, *Chasing Around Britain* (1994), 201.

<sup>874</sup> TNA, MAF 32/155/281.

<sup>875</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 5 June 1929, 3 June 1936, 11 June 1938: BNA accessed 31 July 2019; local inf.

<sup>876</sup> SHC, D/PS/tau.b/3/8; D/B/ta/3/13/14, p. 269, 24/1/18/8323.

<sup>877</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 8, 22 July 1931, 19 June 1935: BNA accessed 22 Aug. 2022.

<sup>878</sup> SHC, DD/CHA/22; DD/CH/21; Alford, *Olden Taunton*, 9.

<sup>879</sup> *Ibid.* D/B/ta/4/3/4 (1929); 4/6/3 (Feb. 1932).

<sup>880</sup> SHC, D/DC/tau.d/25/19, no 581; D/B/ta/3/13/14, p. 293; A/EOB/1 (Feb. 1948); *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), A6.

<sup>881</sup> SHC, D/DC/tau.d (M/3252), box 1; D/DC/tau.d/2/2/16 (12 July); inf. panels in park.

Vivary Park south of High Street was 11 a. of private parkland created in the 1840s by the Kinglakes but used for public events. Mount Street houses still have access gates. It was offered as a public park but only in 1894 did the council purchase it with adjoining land and tennis courts for over £3,600, spending £2,000 on planting, fencing and buildings.<sup>882</sup> It opened in 1895 with a bandstand and decorative gates facing High Street designed by MacFarlanes of Glasgow.<sup>883</sup> The fountain was installed in 1907 and the war memorial in 1922, backed by a trial rose garden. The park was extended to over 40 a. in the later 20th century with a wildfowl lake, children's playground, tennis courts, putting green and golf course.<sup>884</sup> The nurseries created c. 1978 were destroyed for housing in the early 21st century and the parkkeepers cottages in Wilton were sold in the 1980s.<sup>885</sup>

French Weir playing field (6 a.) was bought by the corporation in 1893.<sup>886</sup> Greenway Road recreation ground, Leslie Avenue (3 ½ a.) was opened in 1899, the gift of Rowbarton developer Thomas Penny. Its large pavilion has been demolished.<sup>887</sup> In 1929 the corporation bought 6 a. on Cheddon Road, probably as the children's home playground.<sup>888</sup> Redeveloped by 1952 as Taunton Green it provided sports' courts and children's play areas.<sup>889</sup> Lieut Col A. Hamilton Gault gave the town the 11 ½-a. playing field named after him.<sup>890</sup> It provided three soccer and two cricket pitches, used for amateur sport in 2024, a playground and a skate park.<sup>891</sup> Lyngford Park (c. 8 a.), was laid out c. 1964 with recreation areas at nearby Cleeve

<sup>882</sup> SHC, tithe award, St Mary; DD/SAS/C/2550/12 (Map 1849); *Exeter Flying Post*, 29 July 1847; *Taunton Courier*, 11 Oct. 1854; 24 Mar. 1886, 30 Nov. 1892: BNA accessed 31 July 2019; SHC, D/B/ta/4/6/1 (Aug. 1893, June 1894); DD/AY/8.

<sup>883</sup> Orbach, S. & W. *Som.* 622. A temporary reprieve in 1943 lasted long enough to save them from scrap: SHC, D/B/ta/3/13/14, p. 11.

<sup>884</sup> SHC, A/BMG/5/2; DD/TBL/72; inf. panels in park.

<sup>885</sup> SHC, D/DC/tau.d/2/2/6 (20 June 1978), 2/2/10—11.

<sup>886</sup> TNA, IR 58/82630 (3711)

<sup>887</sup> SHC, SANHS Tite Colln, Taunton Scrap book.

<sup>888</sup> *Taunton Official Handbook* (1931), 116.

<sup>889</sup> SHC, C/E/4/311/7 (25 Oct. 1952).

<sup>890</sup> *Ibid.* D/B/ta/4/5/1 (Jan. 1932); D/DC/tau.d/25/17 (1947).

<sup>891</sup> *Ibid.* D/PC/stapg/7/3, p. 83.

Road and Grange Walk.<sup>892</sup> There are parks at Holway, Blackbrook and Wellsprings and play spaces on most housing estates.

A single-storey gymnasium with a Corinthian portico and an exercise yard behind, opened west of Bridge Street in 1861 but closed before 1871.<sup>893</sup> The YMCA gymnasium, Middle Street was built in 1895 with a stone and brick frontage having a large stained glass window. It forms part of a 1980s residential development.<sup>894</sup> In 1911 there was a small gymnasium behind the Bird in Hand, Mary Street.<sup>895</sup> From the late 20th century several gymnasia opened, a few with swimming pools, including the local authority centre at Blackbrook. Several schools open sports facilities to the public outside school hours. Since 2001 the Taunton Vale Club sports hall and ground off Greenway Road have provided facilities for schools and clubs. The Somerset Constabulary Athletics Club, from 1954 the Taunton Police Club, acquired a large sports ground at Mountfields and had 2,051 members by 1959. The ground later passed to the county council and remained open in 2024. The Civil Service and some private employers had up to 500 members in their sports clubs in the 1950s.<sup>896</sup>

Swimming Men and boys swimming in the river was regarded as a nuisance by 1849. In 1862 a free male bathing place opened where the canal formerly entered the river and a private one above the weir accessed by ticket. The latter had changing rooms and steps into the water, chained off to prevent swimmers being swept away although several drowned. A rowing boat and hook were kept for emergencies. Taunton Swimming Club, started in 1883,

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<sup>892</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/3/26/6 (1964).

<sup>893</sup> *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 87; SHC, D/B/ta/3/1/1 (1871); DD/DP/3/8; DD/SAS/C795/SX/7; above, econ. hist.

<sup>894</sup> SWHT, HER 16759; SHC, PAM3088: *The Red Triangle in Taunton*, 10—13.

<sup>895</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/43/610.

<sup>896</sup> Ibid. A/BMG/5/2; D/PS/tau.b/3/7—9.



held events until 2000.<sup>897</sup> The bathing station was rebuilt in 1894 with diving boards and cubicles and in 1896 the riverbed was concreted, the old canal bed filled and turfed. By the early 20th century men, women and schoolchildren used the station although it closed in 1914 while French Weir was rebuilt.<sup>898</sup>

In 1929 the long-planned public baths and swimming pool opened in St James Street. In 1931 a learner pool and spectators' gallery were added.<sup>899</sup> In 1933 between April and October there were 96,000 admissions but despite pollution the river bathing station was used until 1939 and people still swim in the river.<sup>900</sup> By 1968 at least ten Taunton schools had a pool.<sup>901</sup> A larger public swimming pool opened near Flook House in 1976 and had 300,000 attendances by 1983. Clubs and learners, c. 115,000 swimmers a year, used the St James Street pool, restored in 1986 but demolished in 2018—19.<sup>902</sup> The Blackbrook Leisure Centre pool opened c. 2010.

Cycling and athletics Taunton Bicycle Club, founded c. 1866, helped develop Taunton Carnival and there was a ladies' club by 1900.<sup>903</sup> Taunton Athletic Club, begun c. 1876, held events in Vivary Park.<sup>904</sup> In 1880 it merged with a cricket club, laid out tracks by the river accessed from Priory Walk and in 1882 built a combined pavilion and grandstand for the cricket, football and cycling clubs. To cover the debt it leased the ground to the county cricket club while continuing to use it.<sup>905</sup> The Taunton Harriers running club met from 1883, held cycle races and by 1899 had c. 60 members. It later merged with the athletic club, reformed

<sup>897</sup> Ibid. DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, p. 13; A/BXU/3/3—5, 7—8; A/BID 1; D/B/ta/3/4/1; Q/SR 749/103—5; A/DIF/114/12; A/DQR/1.

<sup>898</sup> Ibid. A/BXU/3/7; 4/1; D/B/ta/4/2/1 (1893—4, 1896), 4/5/1 (1907, 1912); TNA, IR 58/82630.

<sup>899</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/3/16/4, pp. 66—76, 89, 99, 114, 114; 24/1/81/1721; A/BXU/3/4, 7; A/DIF/95/32, 114/2.

<sup>900</sup> Ibid. A/DVY 1; A/DIF/114/12; A/EPF/250/4/5 (1930, p. 12).

<sup>901</sup> Ibid. C/PL/3/1/6.

<sup>902</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/24/1/226/12103; D/DC/tau.d/2/2/11 (22 Aug.); A/BXU/3/1, 8.

<sup>903</sup> PSAS, LXI (1915), lii; SHC, DD/SAS/C2645/22—3; DD/TBL/80; *Taunton Courier* 18 Apr. 1894: BNA accessed 11 Aug. 2022; SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/8 (*Taunton Mail* 28 Nov. 1900, p. 4).

<sup>904</sup> *Som. Co. Gaz.* 15 June 1878: BNA accessed 11 Aug. 2022.

<sup>905</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 6 Oct. 1880, 23 Feb., 17 Aug., 14 Sep. 1881, 15 March 1882, 28 Feb. 1883, 19 March 1884: BNA accessed 11 Aug. 2022.

in 1926 allowing girls to run, and in 1957 became the Taunton Athletics Club. It was active in the 2020s with several other running clubs.<sup>906</sup> The Taunton marathon, using a half marathon course twice, has run since 1982 except during 2020—1.<sup>907</sup>

Bowls In 1598 the owners of two bowling alleys were forbidden to profit by them.<sup>908</sup>

The Three Cups bowling green was disused by the 1750s but was revived briefly by subscribers.<sup>909</sup> Beerhouse and club skittle alleys were built from the 19th century.<sup>910</sup> Taunton Bowling Club, renamed Taunton Deane before 1931, started in 1909 at The Avenue before moving to Richmond Road where it remained until 2000. In 1996 they acquired six indoor rinks at Blackbrook and in 2000 added eight outdoor greens. Another Taunton Bowling Club had a green and pavilion in Vivary Park by 1931 and Taunton Athletic Bowls Club used a green at the Poor Grounds before 1935.<sup>911</sup>

Tennis A tennis court at the George in High Street was disused by 1615.<sup>912</sup> The White Hart had an enclosed tennis court in 1653.<sup>913</sup> In the early 20th century lawn tennis clubs had courts in The Avenue, Woodstock Road, Priory Bridge Road and Wellington Road, and there were public courts in Vivary Park.<sup>914</sup> By the early 21st century there were courts at the Blackbrook sports centre.<sup>915</sup> The YMCA badminton club was founded in 1922. By the 1960s there were Pyrland, Rowbarton Ladies and Taunton clubs and 21st-century badminton and squash clubs

<sup>906</sup> *VCH Som.* II, 591; *Taunton Courier*, 10 Jan., 5 Sep., 7 Nov. 1883, 15 Apr. 1891, 16 Aug. 1922, 8 Sep. 1926, 15 Aug. 1934, 4 May 1957; BNA accessed 4 May 2022; SHC, DD/X/WBB/284; *PSAS*, LXI, lii; [www.tauntonac.org](http://www.tauntonac.org).; accessed 11 Aug. 2022.

<sup>907</sup> SHC, A/BCZ 1.

<sup>908</sup> *Ibid.* DD/SP/49 (May 1598).

<sup>909</sup> *Ibid.* PAM2160, pp. 9, 11.

<sup>910</sup> Wilts and Swindon HC, 1075/001/396; SHC, Q/LIC/1/5; D/B/ta/24/1/84/1817, 24/1/108/2435; DD/SAS/C2401/69.

<sup>911</sup> SHC, A/DIF/116, no. 27385; D/PS/tau.b/3/9; D/B/ta/24/1/55/948; *Taunton Official Handbook* (1931), 63; [tauntondeanebowlsclub.com](http://tauntondeanebowlsclub.com); accessed 6 Sep 2019.

<sup>912</sup> SHC, DD/SP/50 (Apr. 1615).

<sup>913</sup> North Devon RO, 1142B/FP71.

<sup>914</sup> TNA, IR 58/82605 (1289); SHC, A/BMG/5/2; *Taunton Official Handbook* (1931), 122; OS Map 1:2500, LXX. 7, 12 (1914 edn), LXX.7 (1930 edn.).

<sup>915</sup> SHC, D/DC/tau.d/2/2/20 (1 Sep.).

were based at local schools.<sup>916</sup> A Taunton table tennis league started in 1932 and by 1957 there were at least 11 clubs.<sup>917</sup>

Billiards Some public houses and the Market House had billiard rooms in the 18th century.<sup>918</sup> The game fell out of favour until the later 19th and early 20th century when larger hotels and clubs installed billiard rooms. Holy Trinity men's club had three by 1920.<sup>919</sup> In 1891 six men were employed as billiard markers.<sup>920</sup> The former Gaiety Cinema became a billiard hall before being demolished in the early 21st century.

Cricket The first recorded cricket match was in 1845 and Taunton Cricket Club played at Taunton school by 1857.<sup>921</sup> In 1878 it amalgamated with the Bishops Hull club using their ground but by 1896 it shared the county ground and in 1931 had two teams.<sup>922</sup> Another Taunton Cricket Club merged with the athletic club in 1880.<sup>923</sup> The Vale, later Taunton Vale Cricket Club, was formed in 1870 with 45 members and a ground at Tangier. Despite a gap in the early 1870s it continued until 1925 or later.<sup>924</sup> A North Town Cricket Club was recorded in 1874.<sup>925</sup> Taunton Deane Cricket Club, formerly Wilton has a ground adjoining Vivary Park.<sup>926</sup>

The Gentlemen of Somerset played from 1860 and were probably succeeded in 1877 by Somerset County Cricket Club, which first played in the ground off St James Street in

<sup>916</sup> *Taunton Official Guide* (1961), 106—7; SHC, DD/YMt/20.

<sup>917</sup> SHC, DD/X/WBB/284.

<sup>918</sup> *Ibid.* DD/SP/1723/50, 1729/58; Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 596.

<sup>919</sup> SHC, PAM2160, p. 21; PAM3088: *Red Triangle*, 21; DD/SCY; D/B/ta/21/851; D/B/ta/24/1/9/252, 24/1/201/800, 24/1/21/851, 24/1/49/774, 24/1/51/836, 848; 24/1/91/2208, 24/1/45/172, 24/1/50/795.

<sup>920</sup> TNA, RG 9/1617—18; RG 12/1875, 1877.

<sup>921</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 13 May 1857: BNA accessed 25 Nov. 2020; SHC, DD/TBL/75 (1965), 47; D/DC/tau.d/2/2/14 (23 Sep.).

<sup>922</sup> Bishops Hull, forthcoming; *Taunton of Today* (1896), 48; *Taunton Official Handbook* (1931), 73.

<sup>923</sup> *Som. Co. Gaz.* 10 March 1883 (letters); above, this section.

<sup>924</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 5 Oct. 1870, 24 Feb. 1875, 10 May 1876, 30 March 1878, 16 Dec. 1925: BNA accessed June 2016; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/9/251; *Taunton Official Handbook* (1931), 73, 75.

<sup>925</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/7, p. 224.

<sup>926</sup> *Taunton Official Handbook* (1931), 75; SHC, A/AAU 1.

1886. They bought the freehold in 1896 having become a first-class county side in 1891.<sup>927</sup>

The ground had public and members' entrances and the 1882 athletics grandstand pavilion with changing rooms, dining room and toilets for both sexes until it was demolished during redevelopment from 2014, including apartments and controversial floodlighting standards.<sup>928</sup>

A large riverside grandstand, since demolished, was built in 1926. The properties between the pitch and St James Street were acquired for car parking.<sup>929</sup> Half the championship games were played at Taunton during the 20th century but the club depended on amateur players until the 1940s including Jack White who captained the team from 1927—31 but was a working farmer.<sup>930</sup> Gates were erected in 1963—4 in memory of Jack White (d. 1961) and a cricket museum opened in the Priory Barn c. 1985.<sup>931</sup>

Between 1891 and 1900 two Somerset professionals had their own team, the Taunton Moonlighters.<sup>932</sup> In the early 20th century the Somerset Stragglers Cricket Club provided for gentlemen cricketers. The Great Western Railway had a cricket club from 1894, Chapman's department store and the YMCA from the 1900s, the press in 1907 and the banks in 1931.<sup>933</sup>

Rugby Taunton Rugby Football Club first played in 1876 but was short-lived. It revived in 1884 when there were Press Club, Railway, Star, Swifts and Trinity teams and Rowbarton, later Taunton Albion, which played until the First World War.<sup>934</sup> Richard Msimang, founder member of the South African Native National Congress, played for the Taunton club 1907—12 while studying law.<sup>935</sup> Several clubs used Jarvis field where they established a permanent

<sup>927</sup> SHC, DD/TBL/75 (1965).

<sup>928</sup> *Taunton of Today* (1896), 77; TNA, IR 58/82603 (1042); www.bbc.co.uk: accessed 18 Sep. 2014.

<sup>929</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/63/1174, 24/1/123/5760; 31/3/1, p. 239.

<sup>930</sup> Ibid. A/BMG/5/2; D/B/ta/3/16/4, pp. 235—7; DD/TBL/75 (1961—2, 1965).

<sup>931</sup> Ibid. DD/TBL/75 (1965); DD/X/SML/7, p. 21.

<sup>932</sup> *Taunton Courier* 29 Apr. 1891, 17 Jan. 1900; BNA accessed 11 Aug. 2022.

<sup>933</sup> SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/1 (*Taunton Mail* 4 July 1894, p. 5); A/EDG 2/1; D/B/ta/24/1/26/1737; DD/FIV/5/415; *Taunton Official Handbook* (1931), 73, 75.

<sup>934</sup> SHC, DD/TBL 47; PAM262: *100 years of Taunton rugby*, 17, 21, 23; A/BMG/5/2; DD/TBL/42/9/3 (*Taunton Mail*, 29 Jan. 1896, p. 6).

<sup>935</sup> Ibid. A/DQO/404/42/1

ground with grandstand c. 1896, given up before 1928. Until 1935 Taunton Rugby Club used the Poor Ground with grandstand, rebuilt in 1906.<sup>936</sup> The club bought the Priory Park soccer ground in 1935. It was requisitioned in the Second World War. but returned in 1946. The club rebuilt the ground after a fire in 1959 and had 425 members in 1962.<sup>937</sup> In the 1990s they moved to Bathpool, West Monkton and Priory Park was redeveloped for housing. In the early 21st century the club fielded three teams and youth teams.<sup>938</sup>

Football Soccer was played under electric light in Vivary Park for the first time in 1879.<sup>939</sup> Taunton United football team, in existence by 1900, used Priory Park sports ground, Priory Bridge Road by 1924. They formed a company selling shares but were disbanded and c. 1927 the ground passed to a new Taunton Town club c. 1927, which also failed. The ground was sold to the rugby club.<sup>940</sup> Railway staff had a team by 1909 with a ground near Obridge and Avimo had a team in the 1930s.<sup>941</sup> Military personnel revived interest in the game and in 1947 the Taunton Amateur, later Town, Football Club was formed. By 1953 it used ground off Wordsworth Drive, purchased in the 1970s, and played in the Southern League Premier Division. Popularly known as the Peacocks, they won the FA Vase in 2001 but were in difficulties by 2024. Early 21st-century clubs included Hamilton Ladies.<sup>942</sup>

Other sports In 1859 an archery club had a ground in Bishops Hull.<sup>943</sup> A small bore-rifle club existed by 1900 with a range behind the Black Horse, Bridge Street and in 1940 started a

<sup>936</sup> Ibid. PAM262, p. 25; D/B/ta/4/3/2 (1896); 13/3/1, p. 396; 24/1/36/379; A/BMG/5/2; D/DC/tau.d/25/17 (abstr. of title); OS Map 1:2500, Som. LXX.12 (rev. 1929).

<sup>937</sup> E. Saffin, *Taunton AFC 1947—97* [1997], 1; SHC, PAM2626 pp., 37, 41, 43, 47; D/PS/tau.b/3/8.

<sup>938</sup> tauntontown.com; accessed 10 Jan. 2020.

<sup>939</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 1 May 1878; BNA accessed 24 July 2019; Jeboult, *Hist. West Som.*, app. 1879.

<sup>940</sup> OS Map 1:2500, Som. LXX.12 (rev. 1929); SHC, D/B/ta/4/3/4; 24/1/58/1042; DD/KIT/1/16; *Taunton Official Handbook* (1931), 75.

<sup>941</sup> SHC, DD/FIV/5/375.

<sup>942</sup> Saffin, *Taunton AFC*, 1—2; tauntontown.com; accessed 10 Jan. 2020; SHC, A/ECJ/1—15.

<sup>943</sup> *Slater Dir. Som.* (1859); *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 33.

ladies section.<sup>944</sup> In 1876 a short-lived roller skating rink was established at the London Inn assembly room, followed by an outdoor rink of Wellington Road and by 1930 a large rink off Upper Wood Street, possibly used by the Taunton Roller Skating Hockey Club. A rink opened in 1939 next to the cinema in Station Road was later demolished for car parking.<sup>945</sup> In 1879 nine hire boats seating three to 12 people were licensed, and there were canoes, but boating declined in the 20th century although canoeing remained. Taunton Canoe Club has had facilities on the river since 1986.<sup>946</sup> The Taunton and West Somerset Gliding Club founded in 1931 continued until c.1989.<sup>947</sup>

Taunton and Pickeridge golf club, formed in 1891, made a course in Corfe. A municipal golf course and putting green were established at Vivary Park in 1928 and Vivary Park golf club, formed in 1932, had 200 members by 1967. Both courses remained open in 2024.<sup>948</sup> Taunton Women's Hockey Club was founded before 1912 as the Priorswood Club, and there were men's and mixed hockey clubs by the 1930s using school grounds until Taunton Vale Hockey Club and Taunton Cricket Club, united since 1974, opened a sports ground off Greenway Road in 2001. Taunton had a basketball team by 1909, the YMCA formed a team in the 1960s and the Tigers Basketball team was established in the 1990s.<sup>949</sup> Taunton Deane Croquet Club, founded in 1985, was based in the 2020s at the Taunton Vale ground.<sup>950</sup> Since 2013 Taunton has had a baseball club at Taunton Green.<sup>951</sup>

### Societies and Clubs

<sup>944</sup> SHC, A/EXN/6; D/DC/tau.d 17, 1942—3, 18—19, 69.

<sup>945</sup> Bishops Hull, forthcoming; OS Map 1/2500 Som. LXX.12 (1930 edn.); *Taunton Courier*, 8 March 1876, 9 Jan. 1929, 31 Dec. 1938, 14 Jan. 1939; BNA accessed 22 Aug. 2022; SHC, D/B/ta/48/18 (c. 1945).

<sup>946</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/3/4/1 (1872, 1874); Saffin, *Taunton AFC*, 1.

<sup>947</sup> SHC, DD/X/BIC.

<sup>948</sup> Ibid. A/BMG/5/2; C/PL/3/1/5.

<sup>949</sup> Ibid. A/DKT 1/3, 4/4/16, 21; DD/FIV/5/387; A/ECJ/1—15; *Taunton Courier*, 19 Sep. 1959, 15 Oct. 1960, 22 Apr. 1961; BNA accessed 22 Aug. 2022.

<sup>950</sup> SHC, D/DC/tau.d/2/2/13 (1 May).

<sup>951</sup> tauntonbaseball.co.uk: accessed 21 June 2024.

A St George's freemasonry lodge met in East Street from 1764 until 1783. The Unanimity Lodge, constituted in 1788 in Ilminster, moved to Taunton before c. 1800 and in 1878 bought the former Crescent Catholic church, which remained the Freemason's Hall in 2024. It had a library begun in 1842 and an organ installed in 1932. By 1938 six other lodges met in Taunton and by 2010 there were nine, four connected with schools.<sup>952</sup>

A club raised money to pay the shrievalty javelin men in the later 18th century.<sup>953</sup> A Revolution Society lasted only from 1789 to 1790.<sup>954</sup> The Somerset and Taunton Pitt Club founded in 1815 with c. 100 members was last recorded in 1823.<sup>955</sup> The Somerset County Club, established in 1882, had handsome premises at 40—1 Fore Street but moved to Shrapnells in the Crescent c. 1930 and later to Middle Street. Membership fell to 72 in 1957 and it was wound up in 1986—7.<sup>956</sup> Liberal Clubs were recorded from the 1880s to 1920s, Conservative or Constitutional clubs from 1895 to 1942 and a Labour Club and Institute in Priory Bridge Road between 1928 and 1946.<sup>957</sup>

The Taunton branch of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) began in 1855 and had a library, reading room, lectures and classes. Frederick Roberts converted St James House for them after 1890 with a gymnasium, added in 1895, cricket pitch and billiard hall. By 1901 the 612 members fielded two football teams, cricket, swimming and tennis clubs.<sup>958</sup> They moved to Lisieux Way c. 1974, redeveloped their old site for housing and were active in 2024.<sup>959</sup> The Young Women's Christian Association branch, established in East

<sup>952</sup> Ibid. A/CTW; Q/SR/368/1/84; Q/RSm/2; D/P/tau.m/4/4/1; A/BMG/5/2; M. Yates, *Freemasonry in the Province of Somerset from 1733* (Wedmore, 2010), 115—18, 174, 282.

<sup>953</sup> SHC, DD/SK/4/5/23.

<sup>954</sup> Ibid. A/CTP/15/5, p 384.

<sup>955</sup> Toulmin, *His. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 595; *Taunton Courier* 21 May 1823: BNA accessed 16 Aug. 2022.

<sup>956</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/14/548, 24/1/44/617, /24/1/74/1520, 24/1/229/14770; DD/SCY; D/PS/tau.b/3/6; DD/ATK 3/6, 14.

<sup>957</sup> Ibid. DD/TBL/42/9/8 (*Taunton Mail* 11 July 1900, p. 4); D/B/ta/4/3/4 (1926); 24/1/68/11329, 24/1/69/1360, 24/1/91/2019; D/PS/tau.b/3/6; *Taunton Courier* 27 Mar. 1895: BNA accessed 16 Aug. 2022.

<sup>958</sup> Ibid. DD/TBL/68; DD/YMt/1—2.

<sup>959</sup> Ibid. A/DSG/1; DD/YMt/18; D/B/ta/24/1/230/14882.

Street in 1882, moved in 1898 to a large house in Mary Street, which they vacated in 1996.<sup>960</sup> Scout and guide troops were established at several schools and churches, some formed from 19th-century clubs.<sup>961</sup> From the mid 20th century there was a guide and brownie centre adjoining St Andrew's church hall and a scout and guide centre at Tangier wharf. Local authority youth centres opened off Belvedere Road in 1966 and at Tangier but most youth clubs had closed by the early 21st century.<sup>962</sup>

In the early 20th century c. 35 working men's clubs, military and sports associations, applied for alcohol licences. The Great Western Railway Staff Club and Institute, which in 1940 succeeded the Great Western Railway Social and Educational Union of the 1920s, had 750 members in 1946. Although popular during the Second World War clubs closed from the early 1950s but the St Andrews and Holy Trinity men's clubs survived into the 2020s.<sup>963</sup> By the mid 20th century Taunton had a civic society, Moose hall and branches of the Soroptimists, Rotary Club and British Legion, which occupied the Lawns, Mary Street and built Clifford Ashman Court later run by a housing association.<sup>964</sup>

The Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society, founded in 1849, and Taunton and District Gardener's Association, started in 1928, flourished in 2024. Losses included the Taunton Business and Professional Women's club started in 1947, the townswomen's guild founded in 1948, although their Bath Place shop was continued by Women's Institute branches, and Taunton Deane Archaeology and Excavation Committee 1973—2015.<sup>965</sup>

<sup>960</sup> Ibid. A/DSG/1; DD/CH/87/1; DD/FIV/1/45.

<sup>961</sup> Ibid. A/CVB 6/4/1, 7/3/1; D/P/tau.a/23/2; DD/X/BYE/19.

<sup>962</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.a/9/4/4; D/B/ta/24/1/156/9507, 24/1/179/10691, 24/1/224/14216, 24/1/229/14772.

<sup>963</sup> Ibid. D/PS/tau.b/3/6—9; D/B/ta/13/3/1, p. 357; 24/1/66/1269; 24/1/106, 3118 (map).

<sup>964</sup> *Taunton Courier* 3 June 1931, 9 March 1963; *Som. Standard*, 3 March 1972; BNA accessed 5 Oct. 2022; SHC, DD/X/WBB/281; A/CUD; A/ASF/1; PAM261: R. Dunning, *The Rotary Club of Taunton, 1922—72*; D/PS/tau.b/3/6.

<sup>965</sup> SHC, A/CUH/6/1; DD/TCM/18; DD/WI/136/10/2; C/ENAH/7.



### Events and Celebrations

The anniversary of George I's coronation was celebrated annually, in 1727 the leads of the high cross and the post office ran with wine.<sup>966</sup> The three-day Peace Festival opened 22 June 1814 with a huge pageant including tradesmen, workers, musicians, cavalry and charity schoolchildren followed by dinner for c. 3,000 people. Waterloo celebrations were more muted.<sup>967</sup> Taunton Carnival has its roots in the 1814 festival and hospital fundraising. Girls and nurses paraded with flowers and collecting boxes alongside decorated mill and factory wagons. Taunton Cyclists Carnival and Trades Procession was held in the summer with an evening concert from 1891 until 1914 but some autumn carnivals were held in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1966 a June carnival was inaugurated with elaborate floats and lighting but since the 1970s it has been held on a Saturday night in October as part of the Somerset carnival circuit.<sup>968</sup>

In 1863 for the marriage of the prince of Wales 6,000 Taunton families received food gifts.<sup>969</sup> Royal accessions were proclaimed from the Market House or municipal buildings.<sup>970</sup> Local composer Harold Jeboult wrote a *Te Deum* for the 1902 coronation, celebrated prematurely.<sup>971</sup> The 1953 coronation events included a live television broadcast of the ceremony in Vivary Park, repeated in 2023, a carnival, fair, military tattoo and 21-gun salute with three-pounders. Babies born on coronation day received a silver spoon. Members of the royal family visited in the 20th century including Queen Elizabeth II in 1987 and 2002 and Diana, Princess of Wales in 1993.<sup>972</sup>

In 1928 Major Maurice Cely-Trevillian wrote *Defendamus*, the borough motto, in the tradition of Louis Napoleon Parker's 1905 pageants with more emphasis on Taunton's

<sup>966</sup> Ibid. DD/SAS/C2548/2 [Norris's *Taunton Jnl*, 21 Oct. 1726, 13 Oct. 1727].

<sup>967</sup> Ibid. DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7 (printed insert, 1814); DD/SAS/C795/TN/150; AAPS/8/5.

<sup>968</sup> Chipchase, *Taunton Remembered*, 92; SHC, DD/TBL/80—2; DD/S/PCK/3; DD/FIV/5/3, 15, 17—18.

<sup>969</sup> SHC, C/E/4/220/1, pp. 26—7.

<sup>970</sup> Ibid. DD/ASC/9/3/1.

<sup>971</sup> Ibid. A/DIF/95/35.

<sup>972</sup> Ibid. A/BWM/1.DD/ASC/9/3/1, 5, 9, 24—5, 29—32, 34.

perceived character from King Arthur to the Monmouth Rebellion than historical accuracy.<sup>973</sup> Performances were held on five evenings in the Crescent field using c. 1,500 actors, c. 3,000 people came each night and 7,500 copies of the pageant book were sold.<sup>974</sup> The Taunton Deane Festival of 1981 proved over-ambitious but in May 2004 the 1100th anniversary of King Edward the elder's 904 charter to the bishop of Winchester was celebrated with a month of events.<sup>975</sup>

## THE MILITARY AND THE IMPACT OF WAR

In 1327 the borough had to provide three armed footmen and a Taunton man was in the Calais garrison before c. 1350.<sup>976</sup> A man 'going south in the kings wars' made his will in 1544.<sup>977</sup> In 1588 Taunton men were owed £82 for six weeks service in the royal fleet implying a large number.<sup>978</sup> In 1569 Taunton could muster a light horseman with a gelding, 90 other men and an inadequate store of armour and weapons although all males over seven were supposed to keep bows and arrows.<sup>979</sup> The borough or Pool butts, recorded in 1441—2, were long decayed by 1616.<sup>980</sup> Greenway Butts were recorded in 1566.<sup>981</sup> In 1608 St James parish was ordered to set up butts but delayed until 1628.<sup>982</sup> In 1625 150 men were to be pressed for the expedition to the Palatinate, Francis Kerton of St James' parish was responsible for 200 raised in Devon and a rate in 1628 paid for billeting.<sup>983</sup>

### Civil War and Monmouth rebellion

<sup>973</sup> Ibid. A/BDK/1.

<sup>974</sup> Ibid. A/BCJ/2.

<sup>975</sup> Ibid. D/DC/tau.d/2/2/10; DD/X/WBB/204; VCH Office, festival leaflets.

<sup>976</sup> *Cal. Pat.*, 1321—4, 130; TNA, SC 8/188/9379.

<sup>977</sup> *Siraut, Som. Wills*, 254.

<sup>978</sup> *Cal. SP Dom.* 1581—90, p. 548.

<sup>979</sup> SHC, A/EXN/5; E. Green, *Certificate .of Musters, 1569*, 285—8, 291—2. The figures, as at Bath, are suspiciously low.

<sup>980</sup> SHC, T/PH/win 1441—2; DD/SP/22/2, 34; 50 (15 Apr. 1616).

<sup>981</sup> Ibid. DD/SP/71, f. 19.

<sup>982</sup> Bates, *Quarter Sessions, 1607—25*, 23.

<sup>983</sup> H.L., PO/JO/10/1/27; *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1623—5, p. 436; SHC, D/P/tru/23/14.

In 1642 c. 400 townsmen fought at Marshalls Elm, Street. The castle was garrisoned by Parliamentary supporters who found arms for 100 men and two barrels of gunpowder. The town was defended by barricaded gates, trenches, earthen ramparts and forts. The parliamentary force moved to Bridgwater before the arrival of Royalist cavalry whose behaviour reinforced support for Parliament.<sup>984</sup> Local burgesses Philip Lissant and Thomas Trowbridge became captains under Robert Blake. Philip Cornew assisted with the defence of Dorchester but Trowbridge's brother-in-law was expelled from Taunton for refusing to fight for Parliament.<sup>985</sup> Trained bands and volunteers were mustered but the castle was surrendered on 5 June 1643.<sup>986</sup> The town agreed to raise £8,000 and the Marquis of Hertford forbade plundering but was unable to prevent disorderly behaviour by troops.<sup>987</sup>

On 8 July 1644 the castle was again taken for Parliament but royal forces overcame most of the town defences to besiege it. Divisions between royalist commanders Ralph Hopton and George Goring and the sympathies of most townspeople enabled Robert Blake to hold out until relieved on 11 May 1645 although relief had been asked for in November 1644. Properties had been burnt, thatch was reputedly taken to feed horses, people were reportedly starving and homeless without commerce or society.<sup>988</sup> A lawyer from Greylake lost £300 of property burnt during the last siege and the Bournes of Gothelney had a mansion worth £600 demolished.<sup>989</sup> Some 1,200 Royalists and c. 200 townspeople were reported killed. On 10 May 1645 Robert Moggridge left money to the garrison 'where I shall die' and wished to unite the king and parliament 'in love'.<sup>990</sup> People buried their money and never retrieved it

<sup>984</sup> D. Underdown, *Somerset in the Civil War and Interregnum* (Newton Abbot, 1973), 40; Chadwyck Healey, *Bellum Civile* (1902), 7, 17, 47—8, 85; BL, Add. MS 30277, no. 4; HL/PO/JO/10/1/137.

<sup>985</sup> SHC, Q/SPet/1/117, 125; Q/SR/84/4—5; C.H. Mayo and A.W. Gould, *The Municipal Records of the Borough of Dorchester* (Exeter, 1908), 684; Bush, 'The Tudor Tavern', 18—19.

<sup>986</sup> HL/PO/JO/10/1/145; Underdown, *Som. in the Civil War*, 41, 50—1.

<sup>987</sup> SHC, DD/WO/53/1/145; Chadwyck Healey, *Bellum Civile*, 47.

<sup>988</sup> *Cal. SP Dom.* 1644, pp. 335, 355, 530; Underdown, *Som. in the Civil War*, 80—2, 93—5; E. Green, 'The Siege and Defence of Taunton, 1644—5', *PSAS*, XXV, 33—48; SHC, PAM 1655; DD/AH/21/16/3; BL, Add. Ms. 30277/4.

<sup>989</sup> *Cal Cttee Compounding*, II. 1004, 1210.

<sup>990</sup> SHC, PAM 1655; TNA, PROB 11/195/290.

and some migrated elsewhere.<sup>991</sup> Collections were taken for ‘poor Taunton’ and in 1646 three former royalist estates were bought with part of £7,000 granted to the town.<sup>992</sup> The homeless were housed at Hestercombe and Orchard Portman until 1649, criminals took advantage and long-term sufferers included disabled men and widows. Royalists faced difficulty compounding for property, tenants were dispossessed and informers were active.<sup>993</sup> St Mary’s parish clerk kept a careful register but documents like wills were lost.<sup>994</sup> Parliamentary forces were in occupation for several years, accused of destroying property.<sup>995</sup> Sir Edward Rodney and Sir Edmund Berkeley were imprisoned in Taunton on suspicion of planning a Royalist rising.<sup>996</sup>

Monmouth landed at Lyme on 11 June 1685 and the next day a muster was ordered in Taunton but Monmouth’s stay 18—21 June passed without fighting.<sup>997</sup> After the rebellion Col. Kirke’s Tangier regiment took over the town, at least 39 soldiers and rebels were buried, some probably hanged and the Bloody Assize resulted in barbarous executions.<sup>998</sup> The Somerset Light Infantry dates its origins from the 13th regiment of 1685 but was not affiliated to the county until 1782.<sup>999</sup>

### Military service

<sup>991</sup> PSAS CXXV (1981), 121—3; *Cal. Money* II, p. 757.

<sup>992</sup> A. MacFarlane, *The Diary of Ralph Josselin 1616—83* (Oxford, 1991), 47; *Cal Cttee Compounding*, II. 1429; HL/PO/JO/10/1/187, 191; West Sussex R.O., PAR/21/11/3.

<sup>993</sup> SHC, Q/SR/84/4—5; 93/226; 94/100—1; Q/SPet/1/117, 125—9, 159; *Cal Cttee Compounding*, I. 54; II. 1573—4; III, 1746.

<sup>994</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/1/1; DD/SP/438, no. 4.

<sup>995</sup> *Cal. SP Dom.* 1650, 60, 193, 281, 504; 1651, 100, 211, 220, 306, 329, 467, 474; HL/PO/JO/10/1/231; *Cal Cttee Compounding*, II. 1313.

<sup>996</sup> Underdown, *Som. in the Civil War*, 191—2.

<sup>997</sup> SHC, DD/X/DEA/1; R. Dunning, *The Monmouth Rebellion* (Wimborne, 1984), 26—7; below, local govt., politics.

<sup>998</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.ja/2/1/8; D/P/tau.m/2/1/32.

<sup>999</sup> *VCH Som.* II, 239; E. Grant, *The Somerset Light Infantry, 1685—1959* (Tiverton, 2004), 15.

Men kept weapons and some belonged to the Taunton militia foot regiment in the later 17th and early 18th century.<sup>1000</sup> Soldiers quartered in the town were a burden in the 1690s but regularly visited. In 1757—8 nine soldiers were buried at St Mary's over several months.<sup>1001</sup> William and Christian Corfield lost three sons on military service including a son killed in America in 1776 and many local families had sons in the army or navy.<sup>1002</sup> In 1779 French prisoners of war were escorted to Taunton.<sup>1003</sup> In 1783 the 33rd regiment was in Taunton followed in 1784 by the 40th.<sup>1004</sup> Recruiting officers were active and by the late 1790s Taunton had raised yeomanry and infantry troops.<sup>1005</sup> There were volunteer Taunton Rifles, 203 members of a Taunton Loyal Volunteers corps from 1794 and in 1803 a Taunton Volunteer Cavalry unit was established to raise 62 men.<sup>1006</sup> The Taunton Rifle Company by 1807 comprised six officers, 2 buglers and 60 men.<sup>1007</sup> Local militia drills sometimes resulted in violence as in 1812.<sup>1008</sup> Clothworkers joined up during slumps and the parish paid their wives 2s. or more a week but families of non-parishioners posted overseas were removed.<sup>1009</sup>

In 1829 only 22 men were in the army but 960 men were liable to serve in the militia.<sup>1010</sup> A Taunton Corps of Yeomanry Cavalry enrolled 158 men in 1832.<sup>1011</sup> The 1st Somerset Regiment served in the Afghan wars and bore the name Jellalabad, later given to their barracks. A captured Crimean war gun, the Sebastopol trophy, was installed in the grounds of Shire Hall.<sup>1012</sup> The 3rd Somerset or Taunton Volunteer Rifle Corps, later the 2nd

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<sup>1000</sup> SHC, DD/SP/1725/22. 1742/15; DD/SAS/C795/FA/129, 136.

<sup>1001</sup> Ibid. DD/SF/1/21; 13/2/51; D/P/tau.m/2/1/32.

<sup>1002</sup> Monumental inscriptions, St James' church.

<sup>1003</sup> Bedfordshire R.O., L 30/14/62e.

<sup>1004</sup> Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 135n.; Bourne, *Georgian Tiverton*, 80.

<sup>1005</sup> SHC, DD/HC/2/17/2; Q/SR/364/3/24.

<sup>1006</sup> TNA, WO 12/134539; SHC, DD/SLI/10/1; DD/SAS/C795/SY/18.

<sup>1007</sup> SHC, DD/S/BS/5; DD/X/HRG/2.

<sup>1008</sup> Ibid. DD/SAS/C795/FA/185, p. 164; DD/SAS/C2548/12.

<sup>1009</sup> Ibid. D/P/tau.m/13/3/3, 21/2/1.

<sup>1010</sup> Ibid. DD/CN/5/7.

<sup>1011</sup> Ibid. DD/SLI/3/2/16.

<sup>1012</sup> Ibid. T/PH/rea/3/107.

Volunteer battalion, was raised in 1859 and by 1860 82 Taunton men had joined.<sup>1013</sup> A squadron of the West Somerset Yeomanry Cavalry was based in the town from 1864.<sup>1014</sup> The need to accommodate 1,129 men and 509 horses from the militia, Scots Greys, Dragoons, Hussars and Royal Engineers on their way to manoeuvres in 1872 probably led to the construction from 1873 of the Blackdowns campsite.<sup>1015</sup>

In 1881 the militia and Light Infantry units united as Prince Albert's Light Infantry (Somersetshire) Regiment based in Taunton and serving in Egypt in 1882 and Burma in 1885—7; the memorial cross bears 144 names.<sup>1016</sup> In 1896 the regiment comprised two line battalions, two former militia battalions and three volunteer battalions.<sup>1017</sup> In the late 1890s c. 2,000 men trained for the Boer War but of 450 men from the Somerset Light Infantry only c. 250 returned. Militia, reservists and several hundred livery horses from Taunton took part. In 1902 thousands watched the survivors march from the station.<sup>1018</sup> In 1911 three per cent of resident working males in the borough were in the army.<sup>1019</sup>

Several Taunton men served at Trafalgar, between 1853 and 1872 at least 293 men were in the sea services and later at least 150 in the merchant navy, many of whom served in the First World War.<sup>1020</sup>

### Mount Street Barracks

In 1796 a cavalry barracks with officers' apartments was erected, said to have cost over £5,000.<sup>1021</sup> His Majesty's Ordnance bought the 3-a site in 1826.<sup>1022</sup> In 1861 it accommodated

<sup>1013</sup> Ibid. DD/SAS/C795/SY/2, 9; DD/SF/14/4/15.

<sup>1014</sup> *Taunton of Today* (1896), 54—6.

<sup>1015</sup> SHC, DD/SP/453 (1872—3); T. James, *Along the Wild Edge*, (2011), 94—9.

<sup>1016</sup> VCH Som. II, 240—1; Grant, *Som. Light Infantry*, 44, 152—4; SHC, DD/SAS/C/1193/11; DD/SLI/3/4/2.

<sup>1017</sup> *Taunton of Today* (1896), 54—6.

<sup>1018</sup> SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/6 (*Taunton Mail*, 15 Nov., 27 Dec. 1899), 42/9/7 (*Taunton Mail*, 2 Jan. 1901); A/DIF/95/35, 101/6/113; DD/FIV/4/66,14/62.

<sup>1019</sup> *Census*, 1911.

<sup>1020</sup> TNA, ADM 27/5/423; 27/10/22; 27/13/112; 27/18/220; 27/19/132; 139; 188; BT 380—1.

<sup>1021</sup> B.L., *An Account of money...for the erection of barracks* (1790—5); Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 596.

four militia officers and 61 men with their horses. The three-storey barracks had a five-bay central range and cross wings.<sup>1023</sup> The militia converted the stables into a canteen and schoolroom in 1863 but left in 1874 before being united with the Light Infantry.<sup>1024</sup> As part of reforms reinforcing local affiliations, in 1877—8 the Ministry of War bought adjoining premises and redeveloped the site as Jellalabad Barracks from 1879—81 for the 13th, later Somerset Light Infantry. Built by Major Henry Crozier of the Royal Engineers and army surveyor Thomas Berry it consisted of distinctive red brick blocks and a large gatehouse, which towers over Mount Street. In 1881 officers of the 2nd Somerset Light Infantry moved there from Bath.<sup>1025</sup>

In 1914 six timber barrack and ancillary buildings were added but by August a site designed for 350 had 1,300 soldiers.<sup>1026</sup> Married quarters and other buildings were added from 1921 to 1945.<sup>1027</sup> The Somerset Light Infantry remained until 1959. The barracks became the regimental headquarters with a museum. In 1963 the county council bought the military hospital and between 1964 and 1987 the officers' mess housed the Royal Army Pay Corps, based in Taunton since 1944. The Admiralty Hydrographic office used the barracks from 1989—92 but in 1993 most was sold for redevelopment and some blocks became apartments. The Wessex reserve force and cadets occupy two blocks on Mount Street.<sup>1028</sup>

### First World War

In 1913 the War Department leased the old Target Field at Lambrook, which remained a rifle range until after the Second World War. Later a range and military training ground were

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<sup>1022</sup> TNA, WO 12/13068; SHC, DD/CH/138/1; A/ASW/1.

<sup>1023</sup> *PO Dir. Som.* (1861); SHC, Q/AM/4; A/DIF/44.

<sup>1024</sup> SHC, Q/AM/4.

<sup>1025</sup> TNA, WORK 43/1453—61, 1463—70; SHC, A/APN/2/6; D/B/ta/24/1/10/323, 24/1/11/379; DD/SLI/20/6/1.

<sup>1026</sup> SHC, A/ADR, box 4; A/DIF/95/32.

<sup>1027</sup> TNA, WORK 43/1450—2, 1462.

<sup>1028</sup> SHC, A/APN/2/6; A/ASW/1; DD/SLI/19/2/10, 20/6/1, 25/2—6.

created south of Vivary Park.<sup>1029</sup> At least 1,300 men were recruited in summer 1914 and a ‘pals’ battalion was planned. Reading rooms and the soldiers home were provided for their use and other soldiers were moved out of town. A Taunton Volunteer Training Corps was formed for those unable to enlist. By October 130 Belgian refugees were allotted to Taunton and a fund and home in Middle Street were set up. Early in 1915 400 soldiers with 135 motor waggons were camped near French Weir and an Australian military band played regularly at the Lyceum. In 1916 over 800 soldiers were given Christmas dinner.<sup>1030</sup> Objectors appeared before tribunals and one man was fined for trying to bribe the medical board.<sup>1031</sup>

Initially street lighting was reduced, petrol rationed, allotments established and a national kitchen set up.<sup>1032</sup> Prices rose, a food committee was established and ration cards, later books, were issued.<sup>1033</sup> Scouts went to Cornwall to assist the coastguard, a girls’ evening club was opened in Bath Place, the Red Cross set up a hospital and supply depot and women supplied garments to hospitals and men on active service.<sup>1034</sup> The 1919 absent voters list records 880 men from the two Taunton parishes still in service.<sup>1035</sup> A peace celebration was held in 1919 and in 1922 a granite cenotaph under a domed Portland stone canopy, was erected in Vivary Park commemorating 456 men. Most churches and many schools erected war memorials.<sup>1036</sup> Hugh Trenchard (1873—1956) became commander of the fledgling Royal Flying Corps, later Royal Air Force.<sup>1037</sup> A souvenir tank and howitzer were placed at French Weir but went for scrap in the Second World War.<sup>1038</sup>

<sup>1029</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/3/1/1 (1868); D/DC/tau.d box 19 (1939—40), 50.

<sup>1030</sup> Ibid. A/DIF/95/32—3; DD/X/SRY/14; C/EW/8/49; DD/TBL/59 (1915—16).

<sup>1031</sup> TNA, NATS 1/983.

<sup>1032</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/4/5/1 (1915—16); C/EW/8/49.

<sup>1033</sup> Ibid. A/DIF/95/33; D/N/tau.pm/5/3/1, p. 27; D/B/ta/3/16/2, pp. 115, 125, 129, 137, 141, 143, 263; 3/27/1 passim.

<sup>1034</sup> Ibid. A/DIF/95/32—3; A/DBL/133/21; DD/X/SRY/14.

<sup>1035</sup> Ibid. Q/REr/15/5.

<sup>1036</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/3/16/4, pp. 50—1; Som. HER 46217; Orbach, S. & W. *Som.* 622.

<sup>1037</sup> *ODNB*, Hugh M. Trenchard: accessed 12 Apr. 2018.

<sup>1038</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/4/6/3 (Dec. 1919, Jan. 1920); 3/13/13, pp. 79, 84; D/DC/tau.d box 19 (1939—40, 71).



## Second World War

The Taunton stop line with anti-tank positions was created across the county east of the town in 1940 and a decoy town using flares to simulate burning was built in Trull.<sup>1039</sup> There were air crashes and in 1940 a fatal derailment of a train from Paddington carrying naval personnel.<sup>1040</sup> An emergency mortuary was established at Union Gate and evacuation plans were drawn up in 1941. On 12 May 1941 six bombs fell on Eastleigh and Holway roads seriously damaging several houses but there were no fatalities. Incendiaries and machine gunning from aircraft in 1940 and 1942 saw damage to buildings but no casualties.<sup>1041</sup> In 2023 an unexploded bomb was found in the grounds of Richard Huish College.<sup>1042</sup>

The National Fire Service, air defence cadets, male and female Air Raid wardens and Home Guard were active by 1944, communal air raid shelters accommodated 5,800 and Anderson shelters were supplied to people near main roads.<sup>1043</sup> Shops and factories had shelters, some like the large block built by Pearsalls retained for storage.<sup>1044</sup> By the end of 1939 800 people were engaged in civil defence, increasing to 5,825, mostly women, by 1942 when a women's defence corps was established. The 2nd Somerset (Taunton) Battalion Home Guard included companies for south and north Taunton and several platoons recruited in workplaces such as the gasworks, Avimo who raised 153 men, or Van Heusen's. The railway and post office had their own local companies and staff from the Hydrographic Office formed the Admiralty Home Guard.<sup>1045</sup> The 4th battalion (Taunton) of the Somerset Light Infantry took part in Battle of Britain preparations and the D Day landings. They crossed the Rhine and were quartered in Celle in Hanover, where one man acquired a portrait of Adolf Hitler by

<sup>1039</sup> Dawson, Hunt and Webster, *Som. and the defence of the Bristol Channel*, 22, 74; SHC, DD/X/SOM/46/2.

<sup>1040</sup> TNA, AVIA 5/19/W 891; ADM 358/3775; SHC, A/EXN/10; D/DC/tau.d box 19 (1939—40, 139).

<sup>1041</sup> M. Hawkins, *Som. at War, 1939—45* (Bridgwater, 1996), pp. 24, 43—4, 52, 75; SHC, D/B/ta/3/22/4, p. 250, 3/22/5, p. 209, 3/29/1, pp. 191, 281—2, 288, 293—4, 298; 3/29/4, p. 269; DD/X/PLSS/4; C/WS/1/3; A/EXN/10.

<sup>1042</sup> [bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-66404933](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-66404933).

<sup>1043</sup> SHC, D/DC/tau.d, box 19 (1938—9), 94, 98—9; box 17, 1942—3, pp. 38, 52; DD/S/BS/6 (6); D/B/ta/3/22/5, p. 41; 3/29/1, pp. 1—37, 191; 3/29/3, p. 8; 4/5/1 (Dec. 1940, Jan. 1942).

<sup>1044</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/24/1/105/2888; 24/1/106/3179, 3189; 24/1/113/4183; 24/1/178/10657.

<sup>1045</sup> Ibid. A/CWH/1; C/CD/1/1/29, 2/20/3; D/DC/tau.d box 19 (1939—40), 1; A/EXN/9; D/B/ta/4/5/1 (Oct. 1942); D/R/ta/10/7; DD/S/BS/5, 8; J. Wilson, *The Somerset Home Guard*, 180—212.

W. Kruke as a souvenir. A 30th battalion, raised in Taunton for home defence, was posted to Tunisia and Italy before being disbanded.<sup>1046</sup>

A camp built at Nunsfield, The Mount remained until the 1950s. British military stationed around the town included the 8th Corps command at Hestercombe House, Cheddon Fitzpaine in 1940—3 and a Signals Regiment. American troops arrived in 1942, camped in Norton Fitzwarren, Musgrove Park hospital and Hestercombe and were billeted in civilian homes. Additional Americans arrived in 1944 including c. 2,000 soldiers, 570 technicians and 300 support workers who were fed at the old meat market and Victoria park.<sup>1047</sup>

Large areas of allotments were cultivated, a feeding committee was established and four schools had emergency feeding stations. On 26 August 1941 a British restaurant opened in the Victoria Rooms serving 560 fixed-price meals a day using vegetables supplied from Council nurseries. Two opened later at Leycroft at the bottom of East Reach and at a former evacuee centre in Priory Bridge Road, although the latter closed in 1943. The Victoria restaurant also provided a takeaway service in customer's basins, drinks and light meals during the afternoon and early evening and school meals. Ration coupons were not required. By March 1943 over 600,000 meals had been served and the two restaurants averaged 1,200 a day.<sup>1048</sup> Fixed-price, cooked midday meals were supplied to the public at the gasworks and Huish's school. In 1944 volunteers opened the Victoria in the evening to entertain service personnel until June 1945. Leycroft closed in September 1945 but the Victoria restaurant continued to serve up to 40,500 meals a month and in 1947 was taken over by the borough. Rising costs meant usage declined and it closed in June 1953.<sup>1049</sup> A canteen at Silver Street Baptist church served nearly a million meals to service personnel and another at the YMCA

<sup>1046</sup> SHC, DD/TBL/75; SWHT art colln.

<sup>1047</sup> Mayberry, *Vale of Taunton Past*, 114—16; Hawkins, *Som. at War*, 146; SHC, DD/S/BS/5; D/DC/tau.d box 17, 1942—3, loose notice 1944; D/B/ta/3/29/4, pp. 235, 250.

<sup>1048</sup> SHC, C/CD/2/20/3; D/DC/tau.d box 17, 1942—3, 18—19, 52.

<sup>1049</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/3/29/1, pp. 92, 110, 174; 3/29/2, pp. 12, 33, 35; 4/20/1 (1943—5, 1947—9, 1951—3); A/EOB/1 (Dec. 1947).

provided two and half million.<sup>1050</sup> Taunton, Massachusetts, donated two mobile canteens in 1941, used after raids in Exeter and Plymouth and for war workers before being sent to Holland. The Taunton (War-Time) Choral and Orchestral Society and Holiday At Home Week provided free entertainment.<sup>1051</sup> Fund raising included Wings for Victory Week with air displays, Warship Week with a two-mile procession, a visit from Sylvia Pankhurst in 1943 and the adoption of *HMS Dauntless*.<sup>1052</sup>

In late 1939 580 evacuee children arrived with Jewish refugees, relocated civil servants and civilian military workers. Between 1 and 4 September 1940 c. 1,200 evacuees arrived. Later bombed-out Londoners stayed overnight at Albemarle school.<sup>1053</sup> By August 1941 there were 5,564 evacuees excluding unaccompanied children.<sup>1054</sup> Most returned leaving only 800 by 1943 but by July 1944 c. 1,000 children and mothers came to escape flying bombs. By September 1944 fire-watching ceased although the council sent 700 shelters to areas regarded as still in danger. In December the Home Guard stood down but took part in 1945 victory celebrations and parades. In 1946 the Somerset Light Infantry was given the freedom of the borough.<sup>1055</sup> Prisoners of war were contracted to work on roads and sewers until 1947.<sup>1056</sup> Only in 1950 were the names of 156 war dead added to the Vivary Park war memorial.<sup>1057</sup> Military units remained in the Taunton area until c. 1978 providing civilian jobs and access to sports facilities.<sup>1058</sup> Children from Belgium, France and the Netherlands were invited to Taunton for a holiday in 1948 and 20 poor German children from the Königsutter

<sup>1050</sup> Ibid. DD/X/WBB/585; PAM3088, 5—13, 29.

<sup>1051</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/3/29/1, p. 95; 3/29/4, p. 8; A/EFC/1; D/DC/tau.d box 17, 1942—3 (Aug. 1943), 1943—5 (Aug. 1944, Aug., Oct. 1945).

<sup>1052</sup> F. Hebditch, *Som. in the Second World War* (Tiverton, 2006), p. 30; SHC, DD/SAS/C2548/12; A/EXN/7—8; D/DC/tau.d box 17, 1942—3, 66, 83.

<sup>1053</sup> TNA, RG 101/305/1/WOOA—WOPG; SHC, A/EPF/250/8/19; C/PHH/169; D/DC/tau.d box 19 (1939—40, 117).

<sup>1054</sup> SHC, D/CD/1/1/29.

<sup>1055</sup> Ibid. D/DC/tau.d box 17, 1942—5 (Sep., Dec. 1944, May 1945); DD/TBL/75; D/B/ta/3/29/4, p. 266, 3/13/14, pp. 263—4, 273—4. Successor units were given the freedom in 1961 and 1985: *ibid.* D/DC/tau.d/2/2/12 (7 Aug.), 13 (5 Mar.).

<sup>1056</sup> Ibid. D/B/ta/3/22/5, pp. 118, 283.

<sup>1057</sup> Ibid. A/DIF/114/12.

<sup>1058</sup> Ibid. D/R/ta/10/7; D/B/ta/3/13/14, p. 293; D/P/stapg/7/3, pp. 12, 21, 23, 94.

area and their teacher in 1949. Continuing contact resulted in a twinning arrangement in 1992.<sup>1059</sup>

### Territorial Army and Civil Defence

The local Territorial Army originated in volunteer associations including the Taunton Riflemen. In 1860 volunteer units united as the 1st Bath and Taunton Volunteers, from 1921 the 8th District of the Territorial Army Southern Command including the Somerset Light Infantry volunteer battalions.<sup>1060</sup> Their headquarters and drill hall were in the former Wilton site, but from 1951 in Bishops Hull in 1951 where they remained as the Rifles and Army Reserve.<sup>1061</sup> The borough established a Civil Defence headquarters and training centre at Canon House in 1955. The county council took over, transferring it to Jellalabad barracks c. 1962 and built a fall-out shelter at Lambrook in 1964.<sup>1062</sup>

<sup>1059</sup> Friends of Durham County Record Office, *No Longer the Enemy (The children never were)*, 76, 86—7; SHC, A/EOB/1 (Feb., July 1948, Mar. 1949); A/DQO/404/11/20.

<sup>1060</sup> *VCH Som.* II, 242—3.

<sup>1061</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/115/4502; Bishops Hull, forthcoming.

<sup>1062</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/3/16/5, p. 112; 4/5/1 (Aug. 1955); 24/1/146/8723; 24/1/156/9548.