

RELIGIOUS HISTORY

There was reputedly a minster from the 7th century. Taunton priory and the churches of St Mary and St James were established before the 12th century. St Leonard's chapel, Pyrland recorded by the 13th century, possibly disused by 1400 and demolished by 1545 was remembered in 1800 and field names marked the site in 1839.¹ Moor Farm in St Mary's parish had a chapel chamber in 1584. Houses had oratories or portable altars but owners attended Sunday mass in church.² Until the 19th century there were only two parish churches, a surprisingly small number, which struggled to find space for their congregations. Two new churches were built in the 19th century and two in the 20th.³

In 1441 century a Taunton brewer accused of having a 'perilous book of heresy' and carrying vernacular books, had to publicly condemn English translations of the scriptures.⁴ However, chantries and fraternities indicate considerable devotion. Unrest in 1536 was partly caused by the threat to the priory.⁵ Eventually most parishioners accepted the Reformation but in 1570 William Chaplin had kept two heirloom rosaries.⁶ The Reformation probably led to questioning of faith and practice as centuries old institutions, liturgies, devotions and beliefs were destroyed. The Church of England was associated with the state especially at times of economic and political volatility. Both churches were neglected and many people stopped attending. A Taunton man was among the religious exiles in Amsterdam c. 1600.⁷

From the 1630s radical preachers helped create religious divisions, a major driver in local politics throughout the 17th century, reflected in the rowdy anniversaries of 11 May

¹ SHC, T/PH/win 1244—5; Hunt, *Med. Customs Taunton*, 71; *Cal. Papal Letters*, V, p. 362; Hants. R.O., 11M59/C1/19/10; SHC, DD/DR/28; tithe award, St James.

² TNA, PROB 11/67/13; *Regs of Apostolic Penitentiary* (Canterbury and York Soc.) II, p. 434; T. S. Holmes, *Bishop Bubwith's Reg.* I, p. 36.

³ St John was a chapel of ease in Bishops Hull and St Michael, Galmington in Wilton.

⁴ T. S. Holmes, *Reg. of Bp Stafford*, I, pp. 267—8; TNA, C 1/44/224.

⁵ *L. & P. Hen. VIII*, VIII, pp. 15, 296—7; Add (1) [1509-37], pp. 367, 369, 372.

⁶ TNA, PROB 11/52/319.

⁷ T. G. Crippen, *The story of nonconformity in Somerset* (1913—1914), 2.

1645, and the violent attacks on meeting houses in the early 1680s.⁸ The 1648 attestation of Somerset ministers was signed by George Newton of St Mary's and Robert Tyrling of St James's and in 1649 Taunton was described as the 'Western Bastion of Puritanism'.⁹ In February 1655 a covenant drawn up for St Mary's parish to 'endeavour universall reformation of ourselves and others' is unsigned.¹⁰ The grand jury that found Thomas Dare guilty of seditious words in 1680 asked for proceedings against both recusants and nonconformists, including George Newton.¹¹ In 1682 Taunton would reputedly see 'bloody noses ere they'll desert conventicles', but the churches were full and 3,000 men took the oath of allegiance. Most early 'dissenters' were not separatists but went to meeting houses for preaching and their parish church for worship and the sacraments. So there were objections to preaching at service times.¹² Even as congregations developed into distinct denominations people moved between them.¹³

Between 1689 and 1726 68 houses were licensed for worship of which 17 were issued in 1700 although probably short-lived.¹⁴ A French Protestant church, described as a 'little French meeting', was recorded between the 1690s and 1720s.¹⁵ St Mary's parish kept a register of children born to dissenters from 1691 although entries had declined by the later 18th century as chapels kept their own registers.¹⁶ The rapid rise of Arianism by 1730 split dissenting congregations but increasing tolerance of dissent and the greater respectability of nonconformity reduced the tendency to religious violence that had marred the 17th century.

⁸ *Cal. SP Dom*, 1671, 309—10; July—Sep. 1683, 278—9.

⁹ Crippen, *Nonconf. in Som.*, 11—12; John Bond cited in W. Gibson, *Religion and Enlightenment 1600—1800* (Bern, 2007), 13.

¹⁰ C. Surman, 'Taunton Church Covenant, 1654', *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, XX, 139—43.

¹¹ *Cal. SP Dom*, 1679—80, 425, 427—8; 1680—1, 585.

¹² *Cal. SP Dom*, 1680—1, 688; 1682, 97—8, 113, 145; July—Sep. 1683, 278—9, 358.

¹³ SHC, D/N/tau.pm/6/10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Q/RRw/1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* DD/SF/7/1/56; E. P. Alexander, *The Journal of John Fontaine* (Williamsburg, USA, 1972), 6; *SDNQ*, XXII. 63.

¹⁶ SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/1/3.

In c. 1776 half of St James's parish was reputedly nonconformist.¹⁷ Many supported denominations other than their own like Quaker Joseph Gifford who in 1787 left money to the poor in many Anglican and nonconformist congregations.¹⁸

The 1851 ecclesiastical census although incomplete recorded over 13,000 attendances at 13 places of worship although many people went twice.¹⁹ Edward Jeboult complained of several sects meeting in Taunton in the later 19th century including the Princeites from Spaxton and revivalist marching groups.²⁰ In 1893 the Revd Levi Palmer estimated that 25 places of worship accommodated 12,000 served by up to 80 clergy and lay preachers, 300 district visitors and 400 Sunday school teachers.²¹ During the later 20th century some long-established congregations experienced a decline while others flourished and new groups were formed. In 1964 Taunton established a Council of Churches, later Taunton Churches Together, and churches co-operated in dealing with debt, homelessness, refugees and hospital chaplaincy.²² Musgrove Park hospital has a multi-denominational chapel within the main building. Services and communions were celebrated and a baptism register was kept, mostly Anglican. In the early 21st century clerical and lay chaplains served staff and patients.²³ The role of the laity increased including church readers, town missionaries, street pastors and the lay chaplains of the Taunton Town Chaplaincy who minister to the business community.

BISHOPS

¹⁷ Ibid. D/D/Vc/88.

¹⁸ TNA, PROB 11/1363/36.

¹⁹ Ibid. HO 129/315/3/4/4, 8—16, 129/315/4/1/2—5.

²⁰ *Taunton Courier*, 13 July 1864: BNA accessed 24 July 2019; Jeboult, *Popular Hist. West Som.* 189; *VCH Som.* VI, 124.

²¹ *Taunton Courier*, 6 Dec. 1893: BNA accessed 11 Nov. 2019.

²² SHC, DD/X/DNG/8.

²³ Ibid. A/DRT/1; D/P/tau.hos/2/1/1, 2/5/2.

The Bath and Wells diocese was permitted to appoint a suffragan bishop of Taunton in 1538. William Finch (d. 1559) had no successor until Charles de Salis in 1911.²⁴ Later suffragans included Peter Nott, bishop of Norwich from 1985 and Nigel McCulloch, bishop of Wakefield from 1992.²⁵ In 2015 Ruth Worsley became the first woman to hold the office. Bishop de Salis resided at Bishop Mead, formerly Hope Corner House, but the bishop's residence later moved to Sherford in Wilton and then to West Monkton.²⁶

ARCHDEACONRY

Archdeacons of Taunton were recorded from 1106 and had deputies. The archdeaconry, first named 'beyond the Parrett', covered west Somerset and was divided into four deaneries.²⁷ An archdeacon's court was held in St Mary's church in 1244 and the first recorded visitation in 1249.²⁸ It was a wealthy office valued at over £83 in 1549 and held with a prebend of Milverton where the archdeacon's medieval residence with wall paintings survives as a private house. Stephen Gardiner and Thomas Cranmer held the office in the early 16th century until granted the sees of Winchester and Canterbury respectively.²⁹ An early 16th-century seal shows the archdeacon kneeling beneath God with the crucifix.³⁰ Two vicars of St Mary's became archdeacons: George Denison (d. 1896) and William Askwith in 1903.³¹

PREBEND

²⁴ BL, Lansdowne MS 979, f. 161; *Cal. SP Dom.* 1547—53, 169; Maxwell Lyte, *Bishop's Regs 1518—59*, p. 150; SHC, D/D/Ca/310.

²⁵ TNA, DO 35/1132/15; PREM 5/446; Lambeth Pal. Libr, MS 3440, no. 104; W. Temple 44, ff. 265—78; *Dioc. Dir.*

²⁶ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), 52; *Dioc. Dir.*

²⁷ D. Greenway, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1066—1300: Bath and Wells*, (2001), 25, 35, 37.

²⁸ *Plac. Abbrev.* (Rec. Com.), 121; *VCH Som.*, II, 142; below, local govt.

²⁹ *Cal. Papal Letters*, VI, p. 504; *Cal. SP Dom.* 1547—53, 160; *Cal. Pat.* 1591—2, p. 16; B. Jones, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1300—1541: Bath and Wells* (1964), 17.

³⁰ TNA, PRO 23/876.

³¹ J. M. Horn and D. S. Bailey, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541—1857: Bath and Wells* (1979), 18; SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/1/33.

The prebend of Taunton, recorded from 1291, was one of the poorest assessed at £4 or less.³²

Prebendaries usually had no connection with Taunton but in 1673 the bishop gave the prebend to Emmanuel Sharpe, vicar of St Mary's.³³

DEANERY

The rural deanery was established before 1291 and in 1357 the west ends of two aisled churches on the dean's seal possibly represented St Mary's and St James'.³⁴ Taunton deanery was revived in the 19th century but from 1872 was reduced to create Ilminster, Wellington and Wiveliscombe deaneries and in 1963 was split into two.³⁵

THE MINSTER

A 7th-century minster probably stood near the later castle where burials have been found. It was possibly destroyed when Queen Aethelburg re-took Taunton in 722. It may have been re-founded by Queen Frithogyth, possibly at the instigation of Forthere, bishop of Sherborne in whose diocese Somerset then lay to serve as an ecclesiastical centre, perhaps the seat of a Somerset bishop. She reputedly gave it to the bishops of Winchester.³⁶ In 904 bishop Denewulf obtained the minster's freedom from most secular dues and services.³⁷ An endowed community of clergy presumably served the minster, where all lords in the bishop's barony had to be buried in the 11th century. It received tithes from as far afield as Nynheath and presumably served the bishop's Taunton estate before local churches were established, which may have happened early given the size of the estate.³⁸ In 1084 the Taunton priests

³² Greenway, *Fasti 1066—1300*, 69; *Cal. Papal Letters*, VI, p. 206; *Feud. Aids*, IV, 417.

³³ SHC, D/D/Breg/33, f. 126; Jones, *Fasti 1300—1541*, 66; *Cal. SP Dom.* 1672—3, 399.

³⁴ *Tax. Eccl.* 198—9; TNA, E 326/5003.

³⁵ SHC, DD/SF/17/6/13 (1859); D/D/Ord/104/4; Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 775.

³⁶ S. Pearce, *The Kingdom of Dumnonia* (Padstow, 1978), 113, 115; S. Pearce, *South Western Britain in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 2004), 267.

³⁷ H.P.R. Finberg, *Early Charters of Wessex* (Leicester, 1964), 80, 128.

³⁸ *Domesday*, 234. Wilton church has late Anglo-Saxon stonework.

held over two hides of land, possibly the gift of Queen Frithogyth.³⁹ Church scot was payable from the free hearths at Taunton and all the estates within the manor in 1086.⁴⁰

THE PRIORY

In 1115 William Giffard, bishop of Winchester founded a house of Augustinian canons by appropriating the minster. In 1158 Henry of Blois gave the land outside the town ditch bordering the river, site of Taunton priory for nearly 400 years.⁴¹ The site was bounded with a ditch, which had been filled in by the 1430s when at least five gardens and a house had been built on it.⁴² The discovery of earlier burials suggests important people were removed to the new site. A 12th-century bowl found there was possibly a gift to the prior.⁴³

The first prior was probably Italian scholar Guido or Guy of Merton, one of five men from Merton priory reputedly moved to Taunton.⁴⁴ Two canons from Buckland at Durston transferred c. 1180. There are few records of the priory. In 1161 it held all Taunton's churches and chapels, presumably under the 1115 endowment. A few were exempt from episcopal jurisdiction but when a cleric committed suicide in the priory in the 1280s the diocesan bishop was entitled to his chattels.⁴⁵ The seal apparently changed from the 13th-century pair of saints to one showing a combined figure of Peter and Paul in 1302. It reverted to the older design by the 16th century.⁴⁶

The priory church of St Peter and Paul was recorded before 1161 and an early 13th-century grave slab predated the rebuilding planned in 1277—8.⁴⁷ The canons were fundraising in 1327 presumably to enlarge the church, bloodshed polluted it in 1332 and the

³⁹ *VCH Som.* I, 527.

⁴⁰ *Domesday*, 234; Pearce, *Kingdom of Dumnonia*, 101.

⁴¹ *VCH Som.* II, 141—2; *PSAS*, LXXXVIII, 118.

⁴² BL, Add. Ch. 16333.

⁴³ H. St George Gray, 'Early Medieval Bowl from Taunton Priory', *PSAS*, LXXXIV, 100—3.

⁴⁴ BL, Royal MS 8 E IX, no. 2; C. A. Raleigh Radford, 'The Church in Somerset down to 1100', *PSAS*, CVI, 45.

⁴⁵ *VCH Som.* II, 141—2; *Cal. Close*, 1279—88, p. 353.

⁴⁶ *VCH Som.* II, 144; SHC, A/DAS/2 (12270); TNA, PRO 23/146.

⁴⁷ *VCH Som.* II, 142; S. Membrey, *Taunton Priory Excavations* (Taunton, 2013), 30.

new work was incomplete in 1337.⁴⁸ The surname Bellringer was recorded on the priory estate in 1312—13 and a 14th-century bell-founding pit presumably cast a priory bell.⁴⁹ Bells rang for the prior's election in 1514.⁵⁰ In 1349 a tribunal sat in the cemetery, which was extensive and the only approved burial site until the 15th century. The infirmary chapel was recorded in 1359, St Mary's or the Lady chapel in 1440, a new St Anthony's chapel in 1493 and the Trinity door in 1499.⁵¹ William Netheway in 1511 requested burial and obits in 'his' chapel of Our Lady and St Theoderic in the priory churchyard. His St Etheldreda's chantry in St Mary's was regarded later as owning the priory cemetery chapel.⁵²

Despite substantial gifts of land in west Somerset in the 13th and 14th centuries including Dulverton and Nynheath manors, the priory was not wealthy and dispensed considerable alms to the poor.⁵³ A legacy in 1417 provided £2 10s. towards the meals in the refectory but in the 1450s the canons complained their food was inadequate possibly because of the many doles to the poor, clergy and servants.⁵⁴ The priory provided clergy to serve its churches and had 26 canons in 1339, although at least three were illiterate.⁵⁵ After 1377 there were 15 or fewer but there were lay brethren, servants and guests.⁵⁶ In the late 15th century many canons were ordained, at least five became priests between 1515 and 1524.⁵⁷ Those serving churches were allowed to live out.⁵⁸ Priory officers included cellarer, sacrist,

⁴⁸ T. Hugo, *Hist. Taunton priory* (1860), 11; Holmes, *Reg Ralph of Shrewsbury*, I, pp. 263, 302; *VCH Som.* II, 142—3.

⁴⁹ SHC, A/BFA/3; Somerset HER 44436.

⁵⁰ H.C. Maxwell Lyte, *Regs Bishops King and Hadrian*, p. 190.

⁵¹ Holmes, *Reg. Ralph of Shrewsbury*, I, pp. 350—3, II, p. 599; S.F. Hockey, *The Reg. of Wm Edington Bp of Winchester*, I (Winchester, 1986), p. 13; SHC, A/BFA/8; Maxwell-Lyte, *Reg. of Bp Bekynton*, II, p. 526; TNA, PROB 11/10/31, 11/14/120.

⁵² *Valor. Eccl.* I. 171; TNA, E 318/26/1694.

⁵³ *VCH Som.* II, 14—3; *Cal. Pat.* 1281—92, 373; 1334—8, 422; 1338—40, 479; W. Hunt, *Cartulary of Bath Priory* (Som. Rec. Soc. 1893), p. 24.

⁵⁴ Weaver, *Som. Wills 1383—1500*, 97; *VCH Som.* II, 143; Hugo, *Taunton priory*, 55.

⁵⁵ Holmes, *Reg. Ralph of Shrewsbury*, I, pp. 350—3.

⁵⁶ *VCH Som.* II, 143.

⁵⁷ R. Dunning, *Bath and Wells Ordination, 1465—1526*, passim.

⁵⁸ *Cal. Papal Letters*, V, p. 346; Maxwell-Lyte, *Reg. Bp Bekynton*, II, p. 526; Maxwell Lyte, *Regs Bishops King and Hadrian*, p. 189—90.

infirmarer, chamberlain, pittancer and keeper of St Mary's chapel in 1438.⁵⁹ In the 16th century the infirmarer received most Canon Street rents, the pittancer cottage rents and the sacrist had a garden.⁶⁰

It is not clear what services were open to the public but pilgrims were welcomed in 1391 with spiritual rewards for those who gave alms for the fabric on the feast of St Botolph, Taunton's fair day and the dedication of an aisle or chapel.⁶¹ Local people attended installations of priors and the 1514 election was announced to them 'in the vulgar tongue'.⁶² The priory church hosted several ordinations, 112 on 22 September 1487 including 20 priests.⁶³ In 1499 the prior, while visiting Rome, was given the privilege of using pontifical ornaments except the mitre, pronouncing solemn benediction and admitting priory canons and choristers to minor orders.⁶⁴ While he was away plate and deeds were taken.⁶⁵ The 1526 visitation found all well, 13 canons, the vicar of St Mary's, two newly professed canons and two novices resident.⁶⁶ In 1533 the prior became responsible for Stavordale priory in Wincanton. In 1534 15 members of the community accepted the Royal Supremacy.⁶⁷

From the late 15th century men left money and woad to be enrolled as priory brethren or for prayers. Some families had large tombs in the church.⁶⁸ A corrody granted in 1535 included the tower chamber 'in the chapel', with inner chamber and west stable.⁶⁹ Wealthy parishioners paid the prior and canons to attend their burials at St Mary's in the early 16th century. In 1533 a man gave the prior a crossbow that he wished to have. In 1537 Robert Horsey requested burial in the priory church before the image of Our Lady of Pity and left

⁵⁹ BL, Add. Ch. 16333.

⁶⁰ SHC, A/BFA/7; DD/SP/375, p. 110 [Sextregardyn].

⁶¹ *Cal. Papal Letters*, IV, p. 357; TNA, PROB 11/13/253; SHC, D/D/ca/1a, f.103.

⁶² Holmes, *Reg. Ralph of Shrewsbury*, I, p. 351; Maxwell Lyte, *Regs Bishops King and Hadrian*, p. 190.

⁶³ Dunning, *Bath and Wells Ordination*, 3, 8, 34, 86—9, 179.

⁶⁴ *VCH Som.* II, 143.

⁶⁵ TNA, C 1/168/6.

⁶⁶ T. F. Palmer, *Collectanea I* (Som. Rec. Soc. 1924), p. 220.

⁶⁷ *VCH Som.* II, 143—4; *L. & P. Hen. VIII*, VI, p. 189; VII, p. 329, 473.

⁶⁸ TNA, PROB 11/10/31; 11/12/13; 11/13/253; Weaver, *Som. Wills 1383—1500*, 313—14; 1501—30, 25, 177, 187; 1531—58, 31.

⁶⁹ Hugo, *Taunton priory*, 55.

money to be made a brother and to the canons and novices.⁷⁰ In 1538 provision was made for a teacher of novices and an organist to teach the chapel boys.⁷¹ However, on 12 February 1539 the priory was surrendered in return for pensions from £5 to £60 for the prior.⁷² The buildings were reserved to the king in 1540 but later the More family acquired and demolished them including the church, chapels and tombs to build a mansion. The Crown gave some alms to the poor in the 1600s but far less than the priory was accustomed to dispense.⁷³

Part of a possible 13th-century entrance to an inner court, rebuilt in the late 15th or early 16th century, survives as a cricket museum.⁷⁴ The rest of the priory site has been built over although masonry fragments in Canon Street may be from the priory. Large foundations were found in 1899 when building St Augustine Street.⁷⁵ Excavations in the 2000s uncovered the north-west of the church with fragments of 13th-century glass and encaustic tiles, part of the cloister and many burials. Priory Avenue lies over the central priory area, Gyffard Street over the east end of the church and the cemetery extended north-east to St Augustine Street and south-west to Canon Street where over 100 burials were found in the 1970s. Graves were re-used over a long period including family plots.⁷⁶

ST MARY MAGDALENE

The church of St Mary Magdalene, so dedicated by 1249 but often simply called St Mary and since 2022 Taunton Minster, formed part of the foundation estate of Taunton priory c. 1115

⁷⁰ SHC, T/PH/win 1521—2 (Holway); Weaver, *Som. Wills 1501—30*, 31, 37; *1531—58*, 17, 35—6.

⁷¹ Hugo, *Taunton priory*, 56—7.

⁷² *L. & P. Hen. VIII*, XIV, p. 107.

⁷³ SHC, DD/PM/8/2/1; Brett, *Crown Revenues*, pp. 77, 248—9; above, landownership.

⁷⁴ PSAS, 122 (1978), 131; Somerset HER 44205.

⁷⁵ *Taunton Courier* 15 Feb. 1899: BNA accessed 4 May 2022.

⁷⁶ Membury, *Taunton Priory Excavations*, 36—41; Somerset HER 44438; ‘Somerset Archaeology’, PSAS CXXII (1978), 130.

and may have been founded much earlier.⁷⁷ A vicarage was ordained in 1308, confirmed in 1314, and remained a sole benefice until it was united with St John in 2014.⁷⁸

Origins and Endowment

In 1291 and later the church and its chapels were valued at £60 but the vicar had only £6.⁷⁹ That was raised to £10 in 1308 when the vicar was entitled to 21 convent loaves and 42 flagons of convent ale weekly, 35 better quality loaves and 7 flagons of ‘brisk’ ale yearly, 2 quarters of bread corn, oats, hay and shoeing for his horse, and any legacies bequeathed to him.⁸⁰ He rented the pasture of the town ditch between east and north gates in 1320—1, presumably making the vicar’s gate there. After 1314 he had to make over any offerings to the prior.⁸¹ By 1536 tithes and offerings were valued at £31 12s. 11d. of which £20 was paid to the vicar. After the Dissolution only £18 was paid and c. 1550 the townspeople paid the additional costs of the vicar and a curate.⁸² In 1562 the rectory was let in trust for the inhabitants but reversionary leases to Royal office holders freed them from paying the vicar.⁸³ In 1607 the townspeople offered £140 to buy the rectory but in 1608 the Crown granted it to Richard More and Thomas Mountfield on condition they pay £20 to the vicar, increased to £30 by a Chancery decree in 1612.⁸⁴ They immediately sold to Sir John Portman (d. 1612), John Symes and Alexander Hill and in 1624 Symes sold his third to Alexander’s son Robert. The Hill family would not pay the stipend claiming tithes were insufficient to pay it and the fee farm rent.⁸⁵ In 1639 the vicar received dues for marriage and churching women, claimed herbage of the churchyard and the soil of the chancel and was in dispute over them and the

⁷⁷ *VCH Som.* II, 141—2; *Tax. Eccl.*, 198.

⁷⁸ SHC, DD/MK/10; Bp Hobhouse, *Bp Drogheda's Reg.* 69; Bishop’s Hull, forthcoming.

⁷⁹ *Tax. Eccl.*, 198.

⁸⁰ SHC, A/CPT/15/5, p. 47.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* T/PH/win 1320—1.

⁸² *Valor Eccl.* I, 169; BL, Add. M 30277, f. 3.

⁸³ *Cal. Pat.* 1560—3, p. 361; 1566—9, p. 229; 1584—5, pp. 175—6.

⁸⁴ TNA, C 2/JasI/B3/82; C 142/406/67; C 142/461/91; SHC, DD/AS/58; DD/SAS/C795/TN/10.

⁸⁵ Hawkins, *Sales of Wards* 1603—41, p. 137, 140; TNA, E 134/10Chas1/East33; C 10/64/38; *Cal. Cttee for Compounding*, II, 1366; SHC, DD/PM/7/10/27, 37, 48, 58—62; 8/2/19.

tithes with Alexander, son of Robert Hill in 1661—2 claiming he was given the Hill share of the rectory to pay his stipend and costs.⁸⁶ The vicar appears to have retained the tithes, although the Portmans claimed them. Edward Berkeley Portman reclaimed them in 1811 but farmers refused to pay tithe to any but the vicar and litigation resulted.⁸⁷

In 1649 the vicar's stipend was set at £50, the reputed value of the vicarage c. 1663, despite a petition for an additional £50 in 1655.⁸⁸ In 1707 the stipend was only £30 with tithes and offerings of £2 9s. 8 ½d.⁸⁹ The living was augmented from Queen Anne's Bounty with £800 between 1805 and 1810 and the vicar's income was £74 in 1815.⁹⁰ Henry Bower (1819—40) had 4 ½ a. in Wilton and Parsonage Plot, Holway, not recorded again, and his average net income in the 1830s was £254.⁹¹ In 1848 James Cottle offered to vacate the living for £6,000 claiming an income of nearly £400 but in 1851 the vicar's fees and offerings were c. £170.⁹² Lord Ashburton paid stipends of c. £50 a year for the rest of the century.⁹³ In the early 20th century a building in High Street was held in trust for the benefit of the living.⁹⁴

By 1725 the Crown's fee farm rent had been acquired by the Revd William Wickham of Garsington, Oxon., to whose descendants the Drake family the lay rectors paid £9 12s.

11d. Payment was reduced to in 1847 and stopped before 1892.⁹⁵

In 1825 Edward Berkeley Portman sold the rectory and advowson to Alexander Baring, later Baron Ashburton, and in 1839 the tithes were commuted for £380.⁹⁶ In 1907 the

⁸⁶ SHC, DD/MK/10; TNA, C 10/64/38.

⁸⁷ SHC, DD/PM/7/10/27, 37, 41, 48; 8/2/19, 60; D/D/Rv/1; DD/AS/58; DD/MK/10.

⁸⁸ Crippen, *Nonconf. in Som.*, p. 13; *Cal. SP Dom.* 1655—6, p. 33; SHC, D/D/Vc/24.

⁸⁹ SHC, D/D/Rv/1.

⁹⁰ C. Hodgson, *An account of the augmentation of small livings...of the Bounty of Queen Anne*, pp. 202, 205, 231; SHC, D/D/Rb/1815.

⁹¹ SHC, DD/AS/6, 58; tithe awards, St Mary, Wilton; *Rep. Com. Eccl. Revenues* (1835), pp. 154—5. A house at Wilton carries shields inscribed 'St Mary's' 'Glebe'.

⁹² SHC, DD/MK/10; TNA, HO 129/315/3/4/4.

⁹³ SHC, DD/AS/58.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* DD/KIT/7/14; DD/IR/T/26/3, p. 36.

⁹⁵ TNA, CP 25/2/1089/12GEOIMICH; Oxfords. HC, Amb/III/6, 8; SHC, DD/AS/58.

⁹⁶ SHC, DD/PM/7/10—12, 8/5; tithe award, St Mary.

Revd William Askwith bought them from the executors of Mr Helyar who acquired them from Lord Ashburton. They were vested in the trustees of Queen Anne's Bounty to augment the benefice and provide for a curate.⁹⁷ The living was worth £914 by 1959, the wealthiest in Taunton.⁹⁸

The 1314 confirmation of the 1308 ordination of the vicarage mentions a house and in 1555 the burgesses paid for a house 'in the churchyard' for the priest, probably rented from the lay rectors.⁹⁹ A 1750s painting shows the 16th or 17th-century vicarage with a triple-gabled main range extended south-eastwards.¹⁰⁰ The north garden front was remodelled with sash windows by Richard Carver and the gables removed in favour of a plain three-bay south front with central porch in the 1840s.¹⁰¹ By 1872 it was considered inadequate and extended west providing three reception rooms and six bedrooms.¹⁰² Part was used as a girls' school in the 1920s.¹⁰³ The house was given up after 2008, sold in 2019 and renamed Whirligig House.¹⁰⁴ Glebe House, built in the vicarage garden after 1949 for the curate, was let out in 1981.¹⁰⁵ In the early 21st century it was replaced by a new vicarage house.

Advowson

Taunton priory held the advowson. Its lessee John Portman presented in 1542 but thereafter patronage was held by the Crown although the bishop presented in 1556.¹⁰⁶ Sir John Portman Bt (d. 1612) acquired the advowson, which descended with the rectory until 1825 when Edward Berkeley Portman sold it to Alexander Baring who in 1840 conveyed it with the

⁹⁷ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/2/1/33; D/B/ta/13/1/1 (1895); D/B/ta/13/3/1, p. 407.

⁹⁸ *Crockford*, 1959—60, 1664.

⁹⁹ Hobhouse, *Bp Droghda's Reg.* 69; SHC, T/PH/hps/1.

¹⁰⁰ SHC, art collection, painting of St Mary Magdalene, Taunton.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. A/DAS/1/390/26; T/PH/rea/3/101; DD/MK/10.

¹⁰² Ibid. D/D/Bbm/194; DD/TBL/60 (Aug., Sep. 1874); TNA, IR 58/82633 (240).

¹⁰³ *Taunton Courier*, 6 Aug. 1924; 25 January 1928; BNA accessed 2 Sep. 2021; Chipchase, *Taunton Revisited*, 21.

¹⁰⁴ *Dioc. Dir.*; SHC, A/DQO/404/9/73.

¹⁰⁵ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/110/3803; D/P/tau.m/ 9/3/2, 9/3/4 (1971); *Dioc. Dir.*

¹⁰⁶ *VCH Som.* II, 142; Holmes, *Reg. Ralph of Shrewsbury*, I, p. 93, II, p. 529; Maxwell Lyte, *Bishop's Regs 1518—59*, pp. 95, 142; SHC, D/D/Bp/27; *Cal. Pat.* 1555—7, p. 18; 1578—80, p. 225.

vicarage and chancel to the vicar, James Cottle.¹⁰⁷ To raise money to restore the church Cottle sold it and after passing through several hands it was acquired c.1860 by the Church Patronage Society, later Trust, which retains it.¹⁰⁸

Parish life: Middle Ages

In 1242—3 a man died falling from a beam, presumably during building work and two men sought sanctuary.¹⁰⁹ Roger the cleric c. 1218 and Robert of Timberscombe fl. 1286 probably served St Mary's.¹¹⁰ Parishioners reputedly died without the last rites before 1308 for lack of a priest.¹¹¹ Simon of Lyme, vicar in 1308 had to provide for Trull, Wilton and the castle chapel and his allowance of food and drink indicated a large household, possibly including parish chaplains and priests serving neighbouring churches.¹¹² In 1323 he was allowed to go abroad on pilgrimage and visit Rome.¹¹³ Before 1334 rents and wax were given for St Mary's lamp.¹¹⁴ In 1341 the bishop permitted the parishioners to have daily mass for a year if they paid the cost, presumably the priory only provided Sunday services.¹¹⁵ Walter Foxcote, ordained in 1310 and sponsored by the town, was parish chaplain until his death in 1348 and had a house and land, possibly provided by the parishioners to fund daily mass.¹¹⁶ In 1351 the vicar was attracting parishioners from West Monkton and the bishop ordered him to cast out non-parishioners before mass.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁷ Hawkins, *Sales of Wards 1603—41*, p. 137; SHC, DD/SAS/C795/PR/165; D/D/Bp/27; D/D/Vc/88; D/D/Breg/33, ff. 6, 149; DD/AS/58.

¹⁰⁸ SHC, DD/MK/10; A/DUI/7, D/P/tau.m/2/1/33 (clergy notes); TNA, MH 13/268/342, ff. 1006—8.

¹⁰⁹ Chadwyck-Healey, *Som. Pleas c. 1200—1256*, p. 293, 296.

¹¹⁰ SHC, T/PH/win 1218—19; *Cat. Ancient Deeds*, I, B172.

¹¹¹ SHC, DD/X/COLL/4, p. 16.

¹¹² Ibid. A/CPT/15/5, p. 47.

¹¹³ Hobhouse, *Bp Droghda's Reg.* 69, 219.

¹¹⁴ *Cal. Chart. R.* 1327—41, p. 316.

¹¹⁵ Holmes, *Reg. Ralph of Shrewsbury* II, p. 444.

¹¹⁶ SHC, T/PH/win 1309—10, 1347—8; DD/X/HUN/6/1, citing Winchester bp. reg.

¹¹⁷ *VCH Som.* II, 143; Holmes, *Reg. Ralph of Shrewsbury* II, p. 673.

Between 1425 and 1485 priestly ordinations in St Mary's included local men, 21 in 1485.¹¹⁸ By 1444 the church had a vicar and eight other priests, rising to 12 in 1450, but allegedly they did not vest properly or come together to sing the masses.¹¹⁹ Between 1435 and 1459 one anniversary chaplain lived next to the almshouses in Church Lane and chantry priests had houses in 'the churchyard'.¹²⁰ The Warres had built a mortuary chapel, which was consecrated in 1437 and in 1446 the parishioners successfully petitioned the pope for their own burial ground although reference to the borough cemetery in 1340—1 implies burials had already taken place there.¹²¹ In c. 1447 parishioners were in dispute with the priory over maintenance of church books, vestments and ornaments.¹²²

In 1486 Walter Eston gave money or rings to the clergy, fraternities and high altar and £5 for an anniversary priest for a year. Anniversary priests were usually employed for one to seven years. Walter Doling, merchant, left money for the new tower in 1492 but asked for a priest to sing for him in the Jesus chapel for a year and for a daily mass at the priory 'while the world stand', repeated by his son in 1502. Many legacies of money, cloth and dyes over 20 years from the 1480s helped pay for the new tower.¹²³ Merchant John Toose (d. 1502) gave £26 13s. 4d. towards the building of an ambulatory before the Sepulchre altar, to which his father had previously left money and two houses for obits and alms. John Netheway wanted a new cross made in the church near the 'procession way'. Among many generous donors of textiles and dyes to the church and the poor was Dame Agnes Burton who in 1502 provided for the completion of the tower window and donated the red damask mantle in

¹¹⁸ Holmes, *Reg. Bp Stafford*, I, pp. 3—4; Maxwell-Lyte, *Reg. of Bp Bekynton*, II, pp. 469, 476—7, 484, 520; Dunning, *Bath and Wells Ordinations*, 1—75.

¹¹⁹ Maxwell-Lyte, *Reg. of Bp Bekynton*, I, pp. 16—17, 140—1, 229.

¹²⁰ TNA, E 326/5058, 11773; Woodward, *Chantry Grants*, 18, 28.

¹²¹ Holmes, *Reg. of Bp Stafford*, I, p. 210; *Cal. Papal Letters*, IX, p. 557; SHC, T/PH/win 1440—1.

¹²² TNA, E 135/23/71.

¹²³ Weaver, *Som. Wills 1383—1500*, 264—6, 279—82, 298—300, 313—14, 321—4, 378—80; 1501—30, 31; TNA, PROB 11/14/794.

which she was professed to the Sepulchre service for the Mary Magdalene play.¹²⁴ In 1511 William Netheway left money for two tower windows. Merchant John Togwell gave a pipe of wine to building work in 1508, probably the south porch, and his widow wanted a chapel of St George built.¹²⁵

In the early 16th century there was a choir of clerks and children and c. 1530 a teacher for the boys.¹²⁶ In 1537 Joan Tedbury left £2 to pay for building a church house but by 1672 it was unused and rented out.¹²⁷ In 1734 it was converted into a parish workhouse and a room there, called the Church House or Room, was used for vestry meetings until demolished to extend the school.¹²⁸ Gifts to the church, fraternities and anniversary priests continued until the mid 16th century but thereafter money was not channelled through church almsgiving and valuable items were kept in the family.¹²⁹ In 1548 3,000 communicants were reported, presumably including St James.¹³⁰

Parish life: The Chantries and Fraternities

The earliest recorded chantry was St Andrew's in 1388.¹³¹ Dame Agnes Burton in 1503 endowed a priest and provided all necessary furnishings for her chantry, apparently St Andrew's, but only old vestments were recorded in 1548.¹³² Most chantries held burgages but St Andrew's had land in Durston.¹³³ In 1437 John Warre had a mortuary chapel, possibly the

¹²⁴ TNA, PROB 11/13/242; Weaver, *Som. Wills 1501—30*, 30—4, 42, 52—7. RBAS on the window commemorates Agnes and her last husband Richard Burton.

¹²⁵ Weaver, *Som. Wills 1501—30*, 89—91, 124—5, 137—8, 177; TNA, PROB 11/12/253.

¹²⁶ SHC, DD/AH/30/41; D/D/Vc/20.

¹²⁷ Weaver, *Som. Wills 1531—58*, 35; G. Turner, *Original Records of Early Nonconformity*, III, 651, 653.; SHC, DD/SAS/C909a/1.

¹²⁸ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (1731, vestry min. 1732—67, and loose papers); D/P/tau.m/9/1/2; above, soc. hist.

¹²⁹ N. Orme, *Cornish Wills, 1342—1540* (Devon and Cornwall Rec. Soc. 50, 2007), 208—9; Weaver, *Som. Wills 1531—58*, 66, 82, 100—1, 202; TNA, PROB 11/29/121, 11/31/607.

¹³⁰ Green, *Som. Chantries*, 25.

¹³¹ SHC, T/PH/win 1388—9.

¹³² Weaver, *Som. Wills 1501—30*, 52—7; TNA, C 1/314/77—80; E 117/8, no. 9.

¹³³ TNA, C 1/473/22; Woodward, *Chantry Grants*, 18, 28, 35, 37, 55; *VCH Som.* VI, 262.

origin of St Mary's chantry.¹³⁴ By 1444 the church had chantries of the High Cross, later a fraternity, St Andrew and St Mary. The St Mary's priest was to sing weekday mass in the Lady chapel after a bell had been rung over a quarter of a mile around and the burgesses had an interest in the chantry.¹³⁵ The chantrist had a stone house probably built in the 1540s.¹³⁶ Chantry land in Paul's Field was still known as Our Lady Acre in 1586.¹³⁷ St Anne's chantry, recorded in 1450, may have been Swynge's chantry, probably founded by William Swynge, mercer (fl. 1427—41).¹³⁸ In the 1470s John Bishop provided for a chantry of Jesus, Saints Mary, Peter, Paul, James, Andrew, Thomas, Giles, Botolph, Mary Magdalene, Katherine and Margaret at the St Nicholas altar, usually known as the St Nicholas Chantry, endowed with property to care for his almshouses. The chantry came into being on his death in 1499.¹³⁹ Holy Trinity chantry was founded by John Bough (d. by 1476) and St Etheldreda by William Netheway (d. c. 1517) with a chapel in the priory churchyard and property in Stogursey.¹⁴⁰ By 1536 there was a Jesus chantry.¹⁴¹ In 1548 vestments and other items were sold and the clergy, many quite elderly and one wounded in royal service, were pensioned.¹⁴² The trustees of Bishop's chantry remained in being until Elizabeth's reign appealing unsuccessfully for the property to support the clergy, almshouses and grammar school. The Crown disposed of chantry property for its own profit.¹⁴³

¹³⁴ Holmes, *Reg. Bp Stafford*, I, p. 210.

¹³⁵ Maxwell-Lyte, *Reg. of Bp Bekynton*, I, pp. 16—17; SHC, DD/SAS/C112/16.

¹³⁶ TNA, C 1/1360/65.

¹³⁷ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/34; *Cal. Pat.* 1548—9, 200.

¹³⁸ SHC, DD/SP/325/13; T/PH/win 1440—1; Maxwell-Lyte, *Reg. of Bp Bekynton*, I, pp. 140, 398; Green, *Feet of Fines, 1399—1485*, p. 67; *Cal. Close*, 1447—54, p. 157.

¹³⁹ TNA, E 326/5082, 5858; E 328/180; PROB 11/12/13.

¹⁴⁰ *Valor. Eccl.* I. 171; TNA, E 318/26/1694; E 328/180; Weaver, *Som. Wills 1501—30*, 177—8; SHC, DD/AH/30/4/1.

¹⁴¹ Weaver, *Som. Wills 1501—30*, 177—8.

¹⁴² TNA, E 117/8, nos. 8—9, 13, 32—3; E 135/1/22/47; Green, *Som. Chantries*, xxi, 19—23, 199.

¹⁴³ BL, Add. M 30277, f.3; Woodward, *Chantry Grants*, 3, 18, 25, 28—9, 35, 37, 44, 46, 55, 57, 122—3.

In 1397 Robert Bathe and his wife Tiffany gave rents to be paid after their deaths to the Holy Cross fraternity to provide a priest.¹⁴⁴ The fraternities of High Cross and Holy Sepulchre had almsgiving obligations, disowned by owners of fraternity property in 1607.¹⁴⁵

Parish life: 1550—1700

The first graduate vicar was pluralist Hugh Thomas in 1503.¹⁴⁶ William Dovell, an unmarried resident graduate, survived the change from Mary to Elizabeth.¹⁴⁷ The church declined under his successors and 258 people were presented in 1591 and 1594 for not taking Easter communion. In 1606 although the vicar preached twice on Sunday many failed to go to church.¹⁴⁸ By 1617 the vicar had left the church to his curate who also served St James and the churchwardens used ‘strange preachers’. Ownership of the chancel, in need of repair since at least 1602, was disputed between the farmers of the rectory and the vicar until the 1670s when the Portmans took responsibility for repairs.¹⁴⁹ In 1620 three graves in the church were uncovered, people drank and brawled in church or refused to pay church rates and by 1623 there were damaged and unused seats.¹⁵⁰ In 1630 30 people apparently met at Huish’s almshouse on Sundays to hear one of the almsmen expound scripture and the same year John Trowbridge the younger left £10 to procure a good preacher after the present vicar’s death, indicating dissatisfaction with Edward Clark, 1628—31, who was accused of not wearing surplice or hood, although he was a graduate.¹⁵¹

George Newton, 1631—62, was an outstanding preacher although better known later as a nonconformist. The town gave him a Wednesday lectureship, suppressed in 1637 but

¹⁴⁴ *Cal. Inq. pm.* XXII, p. 725—6.

¹⁴⁵ Green, *Som. Chantries*, 23—4; TNA, C 2/Jas1/W4/40.

¹⁴⁶ Maxwell-Lyte, *Regs of Bishops King and Hadrian*, pp. 102, 131.

¹⁴⁷ SHC, D/D/Bp/27; Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 97.

¹⁴⁸ SHC, D/D/Ca/57, 98, 104, 151.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* D/D/Ca/206; D/P/tau.m/3/1/1; DD/PM/7/10/32, 35; 8/2/18.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* D/D/Ca/220, 235.

¹⁵¹ TNA, PROB 11/159/65; SHC, D/D/Ca/274, pp. 210—11, 218.

revived by Parliament in 1643.¹⁵² He altered the communion table to give more room for communicants. In 1639 the lay rectors Robert Hill and Grace Portman gave two chalices, two patens and a flagon and William Smith, Warden of Wadham College, Oxford, born and educated in Taunton, gave two flagons.¹⁵³ In 1642 Bishop Piers was accused of forcing parishioners to pay for organs but the claim they never had organs was untrue; they were recorded a decade earlier.¹⁵⁴ Newton spent much of the Civil War in St Albans, and was replaced by Mr Banton (d. 1644) and Richard Reekes but they may not have served and Newton returned in 1645. He preached a sermon when the siege of Taunton ended, which he repeated every 11 May.¹⁵⁵ The church was probably damaged but the parish was able to have one of its six bells recast in 1647.¹⁵⁶ In 1655 Joseph Alleine came to assist Newton and left with him when he was ejected in 1662.¹⁵⁷

Newton's successor Emmanuel Sharpe was chaplain to the duke of Ormond from 1668 and was probably absent at times.¹⁵⁸ Communion was only celebrated at Christmas and Easter in 1672.¹⁵⁹ The bishop granted him a prebend in 1673 'the inhabitants there being of old leaven, and not likely to be overkind to an able, orthodox, conforming clerk'. In 1671 the bishop had been advised not to stay in Taunton as 'that town hates the Church and Churchmen' and a parishioner spoke against him in 1676.¹⁶⁰ Communion was celebrated monthly by the 1680s and there were magistrates' seats. The bells were rung for royal

¹⁵² W. Gibson, *Religion and Enlightenment 1600—1800* (Bern, 2007), 37; Crippen, *Nonconf. in Som.*, 10; M. Siraut, *The Trevelyan Letters to 1840* (Taunton, 1990), viii.

¹⁵³ M. Stieg, *Laud's Laboratory* (USA, 1982), p. 287, 297; SHC, D/D/Ri/4; VCH office, *Look* (1969) [St Mary's exhibition guide].

¹⁵⁴ Webb, *Som. Wills II*, p. 176; SHC, D/D/Cd/72; Webb and Berry, *Som. Loyalties*, 343—4.

¹⁵⁵ ODNB, s.v. George Newton: accessed 12 Apr. 2018; SHC, D/D/Bp/27; D/P/tau.m 2/1/1; *Cal. Cttee for Compounding*, II, 1366.

¹⁵⁶ Bates, *Gerard's Survey of Somerset, 1633*, 57; SHC, D/D/Ri/4.

¹⁵⁷ Crippen, *Nonconf. in Som.*, p. 21.

¹⁵⁸ SHC, D/D/Ca/324a; Bod. Lib., MS Carte 160, f. 2.

¹⁵⁹ SHC, DD/SAS/C909a/1.

¹⁶⁰ *Cal. SP Dom*, 1671, 309; 1672—3, 399; Dawes, *Som. Quarter Sessions 1666—77*, p. 191.

occasions, episcopal visitations, the assizes, perambulations, and in 1685 for Colonel Kirke's arrival and the issuing of the royal pardon. There were separate chimes for the clock.¹⁶¹

The church plate was buried in 1689, William Hart apparently lost the living in 1690 for refusing to swear allegiance to King William III and his successor Richard Doble was suspended in 1695 for adhering to King James. Biblical writer Nathaniel Markwick of St John's, Oxford succeeded and drew back many dissenters, registered the births of their children, repaired the church and baptised large numbers of adults and older children in 1700.¹⁶² In 1694 Hugh Prockter or Parker, gave £5 annually from 32 Paternoster Row, London for a sermon and bread for the poor at St Mary's on 1 May but the charity lapsed before the 19th century.¹⁶³ A silver almsdish was given at Easter 1699.¹⁶⁴

Parish life: 18th century

Unusually, there were only three incumbents between 1703 and 1803.¹⁶⁵ Parishioners gave generously to collections on briefs, 19 in 1732. Candles and greenery were bought to decorate the church for Christmas and silk curtains were purchased in 1745. In 1732 burials were damaging church paving and the sexton, who had a house north of the church, was not keeping the church clean. Bellringing was reduced in 1739 to a few national occasions like the 29 May and 5 November and significantly not the 11 May. In 1745 ringing for victory at Culloden cost two guineas, three times the usual rate. The bells were rehung and one was recast, probably by Thomas Bilbie, in 1746—9. In 1766 the vestry ordered a chest with three new locks for parish records.¹⁶⁶ The parish was still perambulated and large sums were spent

¹⁶¹ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (1685—6).

¹⁶² Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 136n; SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/1/2—3, 33; 4/4.2; ODNB, s.v. Nathaniel Markwick: accessed 12 Apr. 2018; A.E. Robinson, *Life of Richard Kidder*, 94—8; Fiennes, *Through England on a side saddle*, p. 63; SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/1/2—3, 2/4/4.

¹⁶³ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/10; *5th Rep. Com. Char.*, 530—1.

¹⁶⁴ VCH office, *Look*.

¹⁶⁵ SHC, D/P/tau.m/23/42 (3).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (1732, 1739—40, 1743, 1745—6, 1749, vestry min. 1732, 1766).

on dinner.¹⁶⁷ Two new salvers were given in 1774 but there were only 110 communicants in 1776 and the vicar complained that all charities were in the hands of dissenters.¹⁶⁸ In 1783 the 33rd regiment of foot laid their old colours in the church, a custom continued by the Somerset Light Infantry.¹⁶⁹

A large west gallery in the north aisle was authorised in 1708, a new organ was installed in 1709 and a chiming clock in 1711.¹⁷⁰ The organ was regularly maintained and upgraded notably in 1782 by Paul Mischau of Exeter. The tower pinnacles were in bad condition and despite repairs, clamps and rebuilding they were supported by ironwork in the early 19th century.¹⁷¹ In 1756 lead was stolen off the roof and in 1762 a plumber was employed to keep the roofs in repair.¹⁷² New gallery stairs and some reseating cost over £66 in 1751—2. The merchants' aisle, masters' row, christening pew and judges seat, had expensive cushions and a corporation pew stood at the front of the nave until 1792. All other seats could be bought by parishioners to a maximum of six per person, sub-letting was forbidden and although held for life they were to be surveyed every seven years.¹⁷³ In 1794 the organ gallery was extended to accommodate more singers but the Crown, Hammet's and Long galleries were inadequate.¹⁷⁴

Parish life: 19th century

In 1815 the resident incumbent preached twice on Sundays, celebrated communion monthly and on feastdays and held prayer services at least three days a week without the help of a curate. Claims the church could accommodate 4,000 were exaggerated as there were seats for

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/4/3/6 (1768).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. D/D/Vc/88; VCH office, *Look*.

¹⁶⁹ Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 135n.

¹⁷⁰ SHC, DD/KIT/7/14; A/ECY/2 (St Mary Magdalene, 5); Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 135n.

¹⁷¹ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (1732, 1735—51, 1754, vestry min. 1744, 1746, 1755—6); D/P/tau.m/4/3/6 (1769); D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1777, 1782); 13/5/3; A/DAS/1/390/18; art collection, St Mary's tower.

¹⁷² Ibid. Q/SR/324/3/49; D/P/tau.m/8/1/1.

¹⁷³ Ibid. DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (1751—2, 1753, 1757, 1767, vestry min. 1751—2, 1763); D/P/tau.m/7/1/1—2.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/4/3/7(1793), 9/1/1 (1794—5, 1803); DD/SAS/C795/TN/148.

c. 1,500.¹⁷⁵ In 1827 the church was served by a curate in the absence of the pluralist vicar but services were maintained and the church remained popular for marriages.¹⁷⁶ The clerk received £20 a year and fees for additional duties and the sexton had £10 a year and his house. Both offices were sometimes held by women.¹⁷⁷

In 1811 the sexton's house was demolished but a replacement was found and used until c. 1860.¹⁷⁸ In 1820 the churchwardens refused to pay for a bell cast in 1816 by the Whitechapel bell foundry.¹⁷⁹ Before the changes of the 1820s the nave, full of box pews, was dominated by the pulpit and large galleries. The chancel was barely visible behind a gallery with the royal arms and commandment boards.¹⁸⁰ In the 1820s the tower and pinnacles were repaired with ironwork from the Tangier foundry, the Crown and Hammet galleries were dismantled, the former's front was re-used on the new organ gallery over the west door, and various school seats and the south porch vestry were removed.¹⁸¹ On 11 September 1836 996 people attended one Sunday service.¹⁸² The nave roof was repaired in 1839 and the chancel roof was provided with parapets and pinnacles to match the nave.¹⁸³ Three new bells and nave windows had been installed by 1840 but the chancel was in a poor state and there was no heating.¹⁸⁴ New open pews, half free, provided 1,112 seats and in 1842 a further 450 free sittings were added.¹⁸⁵

James Cottle, vicar 1840—9, deplored the 'owning' of seats, wanted to increase charitable and spiritual work in the parish and survived a scandal. He favoured the Gothic style but was against the Oxford movement. An admirer of George Newton he wanted to

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. D/D/Rb/1815; D/P/tau.m/4/3/8, 7/1/2.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. D/D/Rb/1827; D/P/tau.m/2/1/16, 20.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/4/1/1 (1824—5), 9/1/5 (1819).

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. A/ATH/46/48; D/P/tau.m/4/3/8 (1811); 9/1/2 (1811); 9/1/3 (1851—3); 9/1/4.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/17/2.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. A/DAS/1/390/21.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. DD/X/COLL/4 (note); D/P/tau.m/4/1/1 (1819, 1825), 4/1/3 (1828), 8/2/1 (1826—8).

¹⁸² Ibid. DD/SAS/C795/TN/28, survey inside front cover.

¹⁸³ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/3 (1837, 1839, 1841); SANHS Pigott colln, J. Buckler drawing 1827; A/ATH 46/48.3; VCH office, *Look*.

¹⁸⁴ SHC, D/D/Va/1/12; D/D/Ri/4.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. A/DAS/1/320/19.

revive lectures. including cottage lectures in the back courts.¹⁸⁶ The drawn-out restoration began in 1842 under diocesan architect, Benjamin Ferrey, executed by Richard Carver and his partner C.E. Giles. Ferrey introduced stained glass, only fragments of ancient glass remained, and removed the ‘irregular pewing and incongruous west gallery’ replacing them with his own designs and designed new pulpit, screen and font. The richly carved mid 18th-century pulpit and medieval font were removed in 1843, the font being given to Bishops Hull church and the pulpit to Bradford on Tone.¹⁸⁷ Although criticised later, an 1851 marble tablet commemorated the restoration and Cottle produced a lavishly illustrated book.¹⁸⁸ In 1851 there were 848 proprietary seats and 623 free ones. Attendance in the morning was 1,000 and 205 Sunday schoolchildren, in the afternoon 500 and 217 schoolchildren and in the evening 1,450.¹⁸⁹ The Easter communion was attended by the assize judges.¹⁹⁰ By 1852 the church had 12 surplices indicating a choir.¹⁹¹ Vicar Henry Parr bought seats to free them but the church received a substantial income from selling sittings including over £23 from boarding schools until 1894 or later.¹⁹² The dangerous state of the great tower was reported in 1850 and in 1852 C.E. Giles who had restored the medieval spandrels, which survive, was appointed to restore it supervised by Benjamin Ferrey but it was beyond saving. Architects Gilbert Scott, Benjamin Ferrey, Charles Giles, and Richard Carver were consulted and it was decided to rebuild in facsimile although Edmund Beckett Denison thought a 13th-century style would be finer.¹⁹³ The facsimile was entrusted to George Gilbert Scott, with Ferrey again overseeing, carried out in 1858-62 Architects Gilbert Scott, Benjamin Ferrey, Charles

¹⁸⁶ Cottle, *First Pastoral Letter*, 10, 12, 17, 20—3, 26; SHC, D/P/tau.m/8/4/1; D/D/Bd/11.

¹⁸⁷ SHC, D/P/tau.m/8/4/2; DD/MK/10; Orbach, *S. and W. Som.*, 126.

¹⁸⁸ SHC, D/P/tau.m/4/1/3; J. Cottle, *Some account of the church of St Mary Magdalene, Taunton, and the restoration thereof* (1845).

¹⁸⁹ TNA, HO 129/315/3/4/4.

¹⁹⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/5/1.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* D/P/tau.m/4/1/9 (1852).

¹⁹² *Ibid.* D/P/tau.m/4/1/38, 9/1/4 (1894).

¹⁹³ *Taunton Courier*, 14 Apr. 1852: accessed 11 Nov. 2019; *The Builder* 1855, 437,

Giles, and Richard Carver were consulted over the tower.¹⁹⁴ In 1858 it was demolished and rebuilt in 1858—62 Henry Davis under the direction of Ferrey and Scott. A temporary belfry was erected over the south porch. . Just two spandrel carvings on the west doorway, repaired by Giles in 1849, remain of medieval stonework.¹⁹⁵ A comic newspaper *The Will o the Wisp* was published to raise funds, at least two bells had to be recast and work was completed with an inauguration ceremony in September 1862.¹⁹⁶

From 1859 the parish received a grant for a second curate.¹⁹⁷ In 1862 the parish established its Paul Street vestry hall creating a new façade with double doors and central window all under a triangular pediment.¹⁹⁸ The church was lit by gas the same year and in 1867 a new pulpit, replaced that of 1843 now at the Temple Methodist church.¹⁹⁹ The clergy were resident in 1870, there were three elected churchwardens, two for the people and one for the vicar, a practice continued to the 21st century, and no rate.²⁰⁰ An 1872 parochial church council was apparently unsuccessful. Four Sunday services included two communion celebrations some choral, there were 390 Easter communicants and two jewelled chalices and patens and a flagon were given by John Marshall of Belmont, Wilton. Offertory income was c. £600 of which £125 was spent on curates, c. £80 on organist, blower and choir, and c. £57 on the clerk and two sextons.²⁰¹ Funds were found to pay for six choirboys to attend Huish's school in 1889 and it was agreed that up to 12 choirboys would be educated annually.²⁰² Expenditure exceeded income in the 1890s and the churchwardens took money from special

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/6/3/2, 9/1/3 (1853—5).

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/4/1/9, 6/1/2, 6/2/1, 8/2/2—5, 8/3/1—2; D/D/Cf//1858/1; A/DQO/404/38/4a.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. DD/SAS/C2548/1; T/PH/rea/3/42; D/P/tau.m/23/42 (4); D/D/Ri/4.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/4/4/6 (1872).

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/2/1/3, p. 355; D/B/ta/24/1/3/91.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/4/1/38 (1862); D/D/Cf/1867/1, 3.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. D/D/Va/12/12.

²⁰¹ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/4/1/8 (1872), 4/1/38; A/DBL/133/1 (1872); D/D/Ri/4; DD/WBF/20/479.

²⁰² Ibid. D/P/tau.m/4/4/5, 23/41; A/AHO/7; A/DBL/133/17.

collections to meet debts despite the vicar's objections.²⁰³ The parish maintained almsgiving, cottage lectures and its district visiting society begun by women in 1813.²⁰⁴

From 1869—71 the chancel was virtually rebuilt with a new altar, a reredos by Thomas Earp, a screen with gates, windows designed by G. E. Street and a north chancel vestry, rebuilt c. 1909. Clayton and Bell redecorated the chancel in 1877—8.²⁰⁵ In 1882 a new Henry Willis organ with 1800 pipes was installed at a cost of £1,290.²⁰⁶ Further work in the 1880s included an oak west screen. The old tower screen was moved to the National school.²⁰⁷ In 1875 six bells made by Taylor's increased the peal from eight to 14, raised to 15 in 1922 by a bell in memory of ringers killed in the First World War. Only 12 can be swung the others are fixed for chiming, by 1999 with a computer controlled carillon.²⁰⁸ In 1891 the borough agreed to pay £10 a year towards maintaining the clock and chimes, then recently replaced.²⁰⁹

Parish life: 20th century

In the 1900s there were five Sunday services, a monthly children's service and two weekday services.²¹⁰ Claud Corfield, vicar 1911—26, lived at Wilton as did one of his three curates, other vicars had two. A vergers replaced the last sexton (d. 1900). The three warden's staves and prayerbooks were unused and given to the archaeological society in 1911. An electric organ blower was installed in 1912.²¹¹ The church was active with Sunday schools, bible classes, band of hope, scouts, mothers' union and girls' club. There were 688 Easter

²⁰³ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/2/6/10, 4/1/38, 4/4/4; D/D/Va/21/12; A/DBL/133/17.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. DD/TBL/60 (1873); A/AUS (1881); D/P/tau.m/4/1/38, 9/3/1.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. D/D/Ca/462; D/D/Cf/1869/3, 1870/1, 5, 1871/1; D/D/Va/12/12; DD/TBL/60.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. D/B/ta/2/8/2 (1882).

²⁰⁷ Ibid. A/DBL/133/17; D/P/tau.m/18/2/8.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. DD/TBL/60 (Nov. 1875); D/D/Ri/4; DD/WBF/20/479; D/P/tau.m/8/4/4, 9/3/3 (1999).

²⁰⁹ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/4/1/38, 6/3/1.

²¹⁰ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1902—3), 107; *The Taunton and West Som. Annual 1904*, 103.

²¹¹ SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/1/33, 5/4/1; DD/X/COLL/7; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1939), A32

communicants in 1912 rising to 860 in 1914.²¹² In 1913 the parochial church council was revived and St Andrew's chapel was restored by F.W. Roberts in memory of Archdeacon Askwith.²¹³

At the outbreak of war 270 parishioners joined the services and c. 400 of the soldiers arriving in the town attended St Mary's. Daily services increased to three, besides five on Sundays, and a lay reader assisted the clergy.²¹⁴ After the war memorials were installed including the churchyard war memorial designed by Bligh Bond and dedicated 12 September 1920.²¹⁵ Regular communion became important, altar rails were donated in 1936 and total annual communions rose to nearly 5,000 by the 1950s.²¹⁶ In 1931 the vestry hall was sold and a new hall named after the Revd Corfield was built by the churchyard in 1934—5 to the designs of H.W.S. Stonor, with stage, dressing rooms and balcony.²¹⁷ In 1940 it became a social centre for the forces and later a concert and theatre venue but was sold c. 1986.²¹⁸

Military and open-air services were held during the Second World War and at Easter 1945 there were six communion services. In May thanksgiving services were held and the tower was floodlit.²¹⁹ In 1954 following a dispute funds had to be accounted for to the parochial church council, which met five times a year by the 1960s with 40 members.²²⁰ For the rest of the century there were three or four Sunday services, two with communion, and either communion or evensong every weekday but evensong was only held fortnightly from the 1980s. Services were provided at Higher Holway Community Centre. The mixed, gowned choir gave Good Friday sacred concerts in the late 20th century.²²¹ The fund to educate

²¹² SHC, A/DBL/133/18; D/P/tau.ma/2/1/33 (1912, 1914); *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), 15.

²¹³ SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/9/1, 9/3/1; A/DBL/133/18.

²¹⁴ Ibid. A/DBL/133/21; D/P/tau.m/2/1/33, 2/8/2.

²¹⁵ Ibid. D/D/Cf/1919/139—40; DD/X/MDT/393, pp. 2, 4—11; D/P/tau.m/2/1/33, 2/9/1, 23/41.

²¹⁶ Ibid. DD/X/MDT/393, p. 2; D/P/tau.m/2/5/3—4.

²¹⁷ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/2/1/33, 9/3/2 (1934).

²¹⁸ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/1/10 (1940, 1975, 1990); 9/3/4 (1985—6). It was due to be demolished in 2024.

²¹⁹ SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/5/4, 9/1/10 (1940).

²²⁰ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/3/2; D/D/Cf/1956/8/20; D/D/Va/37/2/6; DD/X/HUN/6/14.

²²¹ Ibid. A/DBL/133/22 (1954, 1975), 24 (1989), 32 (2001); D/P/tau.m/2/5/7; 9/3/4 (1980).

choirboys was replaced by a general charity in 1996 to support the choir of adults and 24 choristers of both sexes.²²²

Controversial changes in the late 1980s and early 1990s included providing a nave altar, a servery, a shop, toilets, glass entrance doors engraved with trumpeting angels and the Magdalene Centre. The bells were lowered to avoid damage to the tower.²²³ In 2008 the vicar was assisted by a curate and a reader.²²⁴ The bells and carillon were recast in 2016 as part of a major church restoration.²²⁵ In 2024 the church accommodated 800 and provided three Sunday and two weekday services, monthly communion at Calway House residential home, and hosted concerts, social groups and weekday events. It remained the civic church on occasions such as Remembrance Sunday and since 2022 has been designated Taunton Minster.²²⁶

Parish life: Victoria Mission

Cottage lectures were held in deprived areas by 1870 and in 1871 the former Crescent Catholic chapel was bought as a chapel of ease but the plan was abandoned. In 1886 the iron Victoria Mission Room was erected in St Georges Place off the Crescent and licensed for divine service.²²⁷ Sunday evening services were held, preceded in 1888 by brief open-air services in the High Street back courts. By 1895 morning prayers had been added. Sick visiting and open-air meetings were assisted by the Working Men's Brigade in 1900. Services, held by the clergy or lay readers, were well-attended, as was the Sunday school.²²⁸ In 1912 87 children and teachers from the Sunday school went to the seaside and the hall was

²²² Char. Com. reg. 310241.

²²³ SHC, DD/WBF/20/479; D/P/tau.m/9/1/10 (1982—94), 9/3/4 (1980—6); uncat. plans 1989—93; D/D/Cf/1988/5/21, 1991/10/31, 1992/1/11.

²²⁴ *Dioc. Dir.*

²²⁵ VCH office, *The Magdalene Campaign* appeal brochure.

²²⁶ Tauntonminster.org: accessed 10 Apr. 2024.

²²⁷ *Taunton Courier*, 21 Dec. 1870: accessed 11 Nov. 2019; SHC, DD/KIT/7/14; DD/IR/T/26/3, p. 43.

²²⁸ SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/2 (*Taunton Mail* 10 Apr. 1895, p. 4), 42/9/8 (*Taunton Mail* 16 May 1900, p. 4).

full for services including harvest festival.²²⁹ A curate, assisted by lay people, served the hall in 1928 but the mission was in debt and last recorded in 1931.²³⁰ In the 1920s the church operated missions in the High Street temperance hall.²³¹

St Mary's church and churchyard

The church of St Mary Magdalene, reputedly one of only five double-aisled churches in Britain and indicative of medieval prosperity, comprises a four-bay chancel with side chapels and north offices, a nave with double aisles, north door and south porch, and a 163-ft (50m.) west tower, rebuilt in 1858—62. Although the double aisles each have six-bay arcades, five-light end windows and five three-light side windows they are of different dates. The church is built of missed rubble stones. The oldest visible fabric is the late 13th-century inner north arcade, in an otherwise Perpendicular church, either original or Victorian. A c. 1750s painting shows the church with two-light clerestory windows in the chancel, later replaced by the present three-light windows, and without chancel parapets, added in the 19th century.²³² The two-storey south porch is dated 1508 and is made of dressed Ham stone although its figures are Victorian like St Mary Magdalene (1871) in a medieval nave niche. In 1869—70 the chancel was altered by G. E. Street and given new windows by Clayton and Bell in 1887 to mark the Queen's jubilee. The north-east chapel, occupied by the organ, was extended north in 1912 and the 1992 Magdalene Centre replaced the Victorian vestries and 1957 cloister north of the chancel. Most of the church was roofed in copper in the late 1950s. Decay in the exterior led to most ornamentation being removed from 1949 until the 1970s and not restored

²²⁹ SHC, A/DBL/133/18.

²³⁰ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/9/3/1—2.

²³¹ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), A55.

²³² SHC, art colln, St Mary Magdalene's church c. 1750s.

until the late 20th century.²³³ The church was heavily restored at least seven times between the 1840s and 2010s as the Ham and Douling stone suffers from environmental damage.²³⁴

The tower is an exact replica of the late-medieval original of red sandstone with Ham stone dressings. Over the west entrance is a large five-light window above which are three tiers of paired three-light windows on each face separated by friezes and with crocketed gables and pinnacles. The top level, the original belfry, is the tallest and above it are high battlements, which like the double corner buttresses have tall pinnacles. The statue niches and damaged carvings of Mary Magdalene and St Gregory's mass in the west door spandrels were preserved at rebuilding.²³⁵ The tower closes the view from the Parade down Hammet Street.

Most early fixtures and monuments have been lost but there are fragments of medieval glass, the remains of Thomas More's tomb (d. 1576), a 1637 Royal Arms, a memorial to Richard Huish (d. 1615), the figure of Robert Gray (d. 1638) and a memorial to Lieut John Bliss (d. 1828) with his sinking ship. The nave is embellished with canopied stone statue niches between the clerestory windows and bigger niche on one north arcade pier. The nave roof, of the ornate late-medieval type, is adorned with wooden angels on the wall-plates and tie-beams, while the narrow inner aisles have panelled roofs. Some roof timbering, especially in the south aisle, is original but most of the exuberant tie-beam nave roof has been restored. The font, with its elaborate cover, the tower screen and the pulpit are Victorian as is most stained glass including windows by Wailes (1840s), Gibbs (1860s) and Clayton and Bell (1880s).²³⁶

The original church enclosure may have formed a triangle bounded by the town ditch and the back boundaries of the North Street, Fore Street and East Street burgages including

²³³ Orbach, *S. and W. Som.*, 609—10; SHC, DD/WBF/20/479.

²³⁴ SHC, A/AUS (1956); D/D/Va/37/2/6; D/P/tau.m/8/4/3—4 (2001—4); VCH office, *The Magdalene Campaign* appeal brochure.

²³⁵ Orbach, *S. and W. Som.*, 609—10; PSAS, LXXXIII (1937), 9.

²³⁶ Orbach, *S. and W. Som.* 610—11; SHC, DD/X/MDT/393, pp. 14—19.

the priests house and garden and was probably regarded as glebe.²³⁷ The vicarage and many other houses were described as ‘in the churchyard’ as lanes developed around the church.²³⁸ The churchyard was enclosed with a brick wall and gates before 1698, a new gate was provided in 1738 and in 1748 paths were pitched and gravelled.²³⁹ An 18th-century painting depicts many chest tombs.²⁴⁰ Between 1804 and 1811 the forecourt in Church Square was enlarged.²⁴¹ From the 1820s to 1840s old burials were removed, human remains were crushed beneath or scattered over later coffins and some 500 cartloads of earth and bones were sold to farmers to lower the churchyard, which contained 12 accessible vaults and 50 brick-lined graves.²⁴² After the Wellington Road cemetery opened in 1854 the churchyard closed. In 1863 part of the southern churchyard was lost to create Magdalene Street, later most tombs and headstones were cleared and in the 1960s railings were removed and further land taken for road widening.²⁴³

ST JAMES

The church, outside the borough and known as St James by Taunton or ‘by the canons gate’, was first named in 1174 and 12th-century fabric has been found.²⁴⁴ In 1879 the north of the parish formed St Andrew’s parish, which acquired remaining land north of the railway in the 1930s reducing St James’ income. In 1952 St James gained part of Staplegrove.²⁴⁵ The perpetual curacy became a vicarage in 1868 and remains a sole benefice.²⁴⁶

²³⁷ PSAS CXXXVII (1993), 146; SHC, T/PH/hps/1.

²³⁸ Green, *Som. Chantries*, 189—203; SHC, T/PH/hps/1; TNA, E 317/SOM/41.

²³⁹ Fiennes, *Through England on a side saddle*, 63; SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (1738, 1748).

²⁴⁰ SHC, art colln, St Mary Magdalene’s church c. 1750s.

²⁴¹ Ibid. D/P/tau.m/4/3/8 (1811); 9/1/2.

²⁴² TNA, MH 13/180/118, 245—55. Earth and coffin fragments reputedly levelled grounds of the Grove, now Shire Hall: Som. HER 44492.

²⁴³ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/4 (1863); T/PH/rea/3/56; D/B/ta/2/23/6 (14 Apr. 1964); D/D/Va/37/2/6.

²⁴⁴ *Cal. Papal Letters*, V, p. 362; *VCH Som. II*, 142; SHC, D/P/tau.ja/5/4/6.

²⁴⁵ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/108; D/P/tau.ja/22/3/1—2.

²⁴⁶ *Taunton Courier*, 12 Aug. 1868: accessed 22 Nov. 2023.

Origins and endowment

The church was presumably given to Taunton priory before 1161 and exemption from episcopal jurisdiction was confirmed in 1174.²⁴⁷ In 1536 its tithes were worth almost £9 13s.²⁴⁸ After the Dissolution lay farmers paid the curate but provided no house.²⁴⁹ The rectory, grain and wool tithes and offerings only, was let by the Crown and the last lessee in possession, Robert Hill, left it to his wife Eleanor in 1581 for the remainder of his term.²⁵⁰ In 1600 the church, except the advowson, was sold to Peter Page and Henry Best, to be held of East Greenwich manor, reserving the leaseholds and paying £2 13s. 4d. to the minister. The purchasers apparently sold to the tenants.²⁵¹

Jane, daughter of Robert Hill married Thomas Brereton (d. 1602) and then Sir William Courtney. Her childless son Thomas Brereton, MP. (d. 1632) settled the rectory on his wife Elizabeth Anketil for life. She outlived their nephew and heir Sir Francis Anketil (d. 1635) whose son Brereton (d. 1661) left the rectory to his kinsman Francis Anketil charged with legacies and debts.²⁵² By 1767 the rectory belonged to John Periam (d. 1775) and passed to his great-nephew John Lethbridge (d. 1815) and his son Sir Thomas Lethbridge.²⁵³ The tithes were commuted in 1839 for £420 and in 1917 Sir Wroth Periam Lethbridge sold the rent charge, reduced to £368, to the Revd William Buttle of Cambridge from whom they passed to the trustees of Queen Anne's Bounty.²⁵⁴

²⁴⁷ *VCH Som. II*, 142.

²⁴⁸ TNA, E 315/400, f. 22.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.* E 134/15Eliz/Hil5; SHC, D/D/Ca/86.

²⁵⁰ SHC, DD/PM/8/2/1; *Cal. Pat.* 1554—5, p. 76; 1566—9, p. 284; 1580—2, p. 38; 1583—4, pp. 120—1; 1584—5, pp. 175—6; 1599—1600, I, p. 167; TNA, PROB 11/63/360.

²⁵¹ *Cal. Pat.*, 1599—1600, p. 169; Hawkins, *Sale of Wards, 1603—41*, pp. 4—5.

²⁵² historyofparlamentonline.org/volume/1604-129 (Thomas Brereton); SHC, D/D/Cd/40, 160; TNA, C 142/720/18; PROB 11/304/206; Hawkins, *Sale of Wards, 1603—41*, pp. 4—5; *Alumni Oxon.* (Brereton Anketil).

²⁵³ SHC, D/D/Vc/88; Q/REI/35/25a; D/D/Breg/33, f. 182; DD/DP/85/5; *VCH Som. V*, 35.

²⁵⁴ SHC, tithe award, St James; *Taunton and West Som. Annual 1897*, 140; SHC, DD/BR/but/1; D/B/ta/13/3/1, p. 407.

Interregnum allowances to the minister were not always paid.²⁵⁵ The perpetual curacy was eventually endowed with £400 from Queen Anne's Bounty and Lady Moger in 1721, £800 was provided through Queen Anne's Bounty in the early 19th century and Parliamentary grants between 1812 and 1825 totalled £1,700.²⁵⁶ Money was invested in smallholdings at Nyngham, Curry Rivel and Stoke St Mary totalling 71½ a. but they were sold in the early 20th century.²⁵⁷ Average net income was £220 by the 1830s and £775 by 1959.²⁵⁸

For much of the 18th century the church house was occupied by clergy but by 1791 it was let out to benefit the minister, who found his own house.²⁵⁹ Before 1827 Sir Thomas Lethbridge gave the incumbent a house opposite the church and the church house was demolished.²⁶⁰ After 1881 St James' House a tall four-bay, two-storey house with seven bedrooms and an exit on Middle Street, was used as a vicarage.²⁶¹ A new nine-bedroomed vicarage designed by Charles Samson in a large garden on the corner of Elm Grove and Staplegrove Road was completed in 1893.²⁶² It was too large by 1936 when the Governors of Queen Anne's Bounty bought Priory Villa but in 1982 the vicar moved to 2 Richmond Road.²⁶³

Advowson

The priory appointed chaplains until the Dissolution when the advowson passed to the Crown.²⁶⁴ In the 18th century it was acquired by the lay rectors.²⁶⁵ In 1840 Sir Thomas Lethbridge sold it in trust for the Revd James Cottle who sold one presentation that year for

²⁵⁵ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1655—6, p. 33.

²⁵⁶ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/2/1/9 (note on curacy); Hodgson, *Queen Anne's Bounty*, 205, 207, 218, 230.

²⁵⁷ SHC, tithe award, Nyngham; DD/SF/6/6/315; DD/WBF/2/124.

²⁵⁸ *Rep. Com. Eccl. Revenues*, pp. 154—5; *Crockford*, 1959—60, 1664.

²⁵⁹ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/4/1/3 (1719—20); DD/HC/161/1; DD/CH/32; D/R/Rb 1815; *5th Rep. Com. Char*, 536.

²⁶⁰ SHC, D/D/Rb 1827; tithe award, St James.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.* D/B/ta/24/1/15/576; DD/VN/6; DD/SAS/C212/Map138; T/PH/rea/3/105.

²⁶² *Ibid.* A/CMY/488; D/D/Bbm/275; D/P/tau.ja/5/1/2, 2/8/1 (1893).

²⁶³ *Ibid.* DD/CWC.ta/7/4; A/DBL/130/1 (1952); A/BKP/4/1; DD/WBF/2/124.

²⁶⁴ *Cal. Papal Letters*, VI, 1404—15, p. 486; *Cal. Pat.*, 1599—1600, p. 169.

²⁶⁵ Above, this section.

£2,000 to restore St Mary's church.²⁶⁶ By 1883 the advowson had been acquired by Simeon's Trustees who retain it.²⁶⁷

Parish life: The Middle Ages and 16th century

The priory presumably built and rebuilt the church and tower. In 1308 the prior was required to find a secular priest to serve St James and Staplegrove and a canon to assist if needed.²⁶⁸ Chaplain William atte Halle complained in 1353 that he did not get his customary provisions from the priory.²⁶⁹ Chaplains were entitled to eight loaves a week, seven gallons of convent ale and meals in the priory whenever they wished, which apparently led early 16th-century clergy to sell their bread and beer.²⁷⁰ Following the parishioners' complaints of neglect, in 1415 the priory canons were required to serve the church if a secular chaplain could not be found.²⁷¹ The priory presumably gave the octagonal font carved with St Augustine, two Augustinian canons and several saints, reputedly found buried in the west wall in 1838 and restored or ruined by an unnamed Italian artist. A new cover was installed in 1978.²⁷²

By 1363 St Mary's fraternity had its own chaplain and by the 1450s property in North Town and later in Bathpool, West Monkton.²⁷³ In 1447 and 1450 there were three anniversary chaplains.²⁷⁴ From the 1470s to 1500s further gifts were made for anniversaries and to the fraternity.²⁷⁵ In 1505 a man provided for five tapers before St Katherine.²⁷⁶ In 1530 one of two anniversary priests was better paid than the curate.²⁷⁷ Gifts for masses, lights and the St Mary and St Katherine services continued into the 1540s when St Mary's service had its own

²⁶⁶ SHC, D/D/Bmisc/8; TNA, MH 3/268/342, ff. 1006—8.

²⁶⁷ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883); *Dioc. Dir.*

²⁶⁸ *VCH Som. II*, 142.

²⁶⁹ Holmes, *Reg. Ralph of Shrewsbury*, II, p. 718.

²⁷⁰ TNA, E 134/15Eliz/Hil5.

²⁷¹ *Cal. Papal Letters*, VI, 1404—15, p. 486.

²⁷² BL, Add. MS 30289, 167; SHC, A/DAS/1/390/32; D/P/tau.ja/5/4/3, 22/3.

²⁷³ Maxwell-Lyte, *Reg. of Bp Bekynton*, I, p. 398; SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/91, 97, 100, 111.

²⁷⁴ F.W. Weaver, *Som. Incumbents* (Bristol, 1889), 454; Maxwell-Lyte, *Reg. of Bp Bekynton*, I, p. 141.

²⁷⁵ BL, Add. MS 30289; SHC, D/P/tau.ja/5/1/1; DD/SAS/C795/TN/111; Weaver, *Som. Wills 1383—1500*, 356—7, 392—3; 1501—30, 37, 42.

²⁷⁶ TNA, PROB 11/14/794.

²⁷⁷ SHC, D/D/Vc/20.

wardens.²⁷⁸ In 1547 the church had a procession at Candlemas [2 Feb.].²⁷⁹ At the suppression St Katherine's had a tenement in High Street and St Mary's service owned 18 burgages, the clerk's house and at least 17 a. at Grasscroft and Staplegrove, mostly let by the Crown.²⁸⁰ A reversionary Crown lease from 1783 required £200 to be spent on repairs within two years.²⁸¹ Two houses in North Town used for parish paupers c. 1836 and Grasscroft land acquired for charity was possibly fraternity land.²⁸²

After the Dissolution canon Thomas Dale became curate but his successors as curate received only the ancient stipend of £2 13s. 4d. although in the 1530s it had been £6 13s. 4d. One curate refused to serve. In 1573, when there were over 700 communicants, the parishioners thought the stipend should be at least £12. In 1588 lay rector Eleanor Hill failed to provide a preacher. In 1591 the unlicensed curate refused to baptise a child and lent money at interest and the churchwardens failed to fine those who did not attend church.²⁸³

In 1539 the churchwardens rented a tenement, probably the church house and recorded as priest's and clerk's chambers in the early 17th century when it was used to house the poor. Church ales ceased under justice's orders in the 1590s. The parish pots were lent to the poor to prepare dyestuffs before being sold or added to the bellmetal for casting two bells in 1626 by Thomas Purdue.²⁸⁴ The building was used as a clergy house in the 18th century but was demolished before the 1840s to provide a playground for St James' school.²⁸⁵

Parish Life: 17th and 18th centuries

²⁷⁸ Ibid. DD/SAS/C795/TN/133; Siraut, *Som. Wills*, 243—4; Webb, *Som. Wills II*, 174—6, 187, 332; Crisp, *Abstracts of Som. Wills* (1887—90), IV, 115; TNA, PROB 11/30/46, 11/31/105.

²⁷⁹ SHC, D/D/Ca/12A, f. 64.

²⁸⁰ Green, *Som. Chantries*, 202—3; *Cal. Pat. 1572—5*, p. 489; Woodward, *Chantry Grants*, 44, 108, 122, 177.

²⁸¹ SHC, DD/AY/331

²⁸² Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/4/1/3, passim; 9/1/1 (1836).

²⁸³ *Valor Eccl.* I, 169; *VCH Som. II*, 143 [where he is called William]; BL Add. Ms 30291, no. 164; SHC, D/D/Ca 75, 86, 98; Shorrocks, *Bp Still's Visitation*, 99—100.

²⁸⁴ Mayberry, *Vale of Taunton Past*, 50; SHC, D/D/Cd/65; D/P/tau.ja/5/2/2; DD/SP/376., 409.

²⁸⁵ TNA, SC 6/Hen.VIII/3137; SHC, D/P/tau.ja/4/1/3 (1745—6), 18/7/1; DD/HC/161/1; 410.

The parish clerks, from 1579 the Mico family, were better off than the curate having £1 6s. 8d. and 3d. from each household but were not always paid.²⁸⁶ From 1606 to 1620 an unlicensed curate served both churches. Many parishioners failed to attend church and 31 stood excommunicated in 1630.²⁸⁷ The bell ‘Come when I call’ was cast in 1610 and two in 1626.²⁸⁸ Parish records had been kept in a triple-locked chest but in 1629 were in a locked cupboard under the communion table. The wardens had taken documents home and sold parish property at a loss. The registers are missing before 1610, for most of the 17th century were badly kept and a replacement chest was only bought in 1697.²⁸⁹ In 1630 the church was without a minister but the pulpit is dated 1633 and there is a 1639 chalice in addition to a 1574 cup.²⁹⁰

During the Interregnum John Glanville, described by one as a ‘deluding person’ of ‘unrighteous deeds’, petitioned for arrears of stipend.²⁹¹ He was ejected in 1662.²⁹² In 1672—3 money was spent ringing for the king’s birthday and coronation day, 5 November and Queen Elizabeth’s day and in the 1700s for military victories and 29 May. Alms were given to over 100 travellers, the salaried clerk and sexton received £5 6s. 8d. and £1 a year and in 1745 the clerk’s widow became clerk for £4 8s. The church had 98 rented seats, a screen, side screens and a vestry in 1714 and in 1718—19 £4 was spent on salvers. Tower repairs cost c. £50 and bells were recast by Edward Wroth in 1721—2 and Thomas Bilbie at Cullompton in 1749. Charity boards were painted in 1728 and there was a pillared Mayoral seat in 1730.²⁹³

²⁸⁶ *Cal. Pat., 1599—1600*, p. 169; SHC, D/D/Cd/65.

²⁸⁷ SHC, D/D/Ca/151, 160, 175, 195, 206, 220, 274, p. 237.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.* D/P/tau.ja/5/2/2; D/D/Cd/65. The 1610 bell was recast in 1891 preserving the inscription.

²⁸⁹ SHC, D/P/hal/2/9/1; D/P/tau.ja/2/1/1—3; date on chest: *PSAS*, LXXXIII (1937), 72—3.

²⁹⁰ SHC, D/D/Ca/274, p. 237; D/P/tu.ja/22/23; D/D/Rd/2.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, Q/SR/101/15; Crippen, *Nonconf. in Som.* 13; *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1654, p. 335; *SDNQ*, XIII, p. 157.

²⁹² Crippen, *Nonconf. in Som.* 21; Siraut, *Som. Wills*, 110.

²⁹³ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/104—5; D/P/tau.ja/4/1/3 (1714—20, 1721—2, 1730—1, 1745—6, 1748—9), 5/2/2.

George Attwood (1714—d. 1752), a graduate, was resident, held a prebend from 1721 and from 1726 was archdeacon of Taunton.²⁹⁴ The church almsdishes were given in 1721 and 1737 by members of the Odell family.²⁹⁵ Attwood's successors John Hurley the elder and Lawrence Heard Luxton were pluralists but had assistant curates. Hurley was master of the grammar school and gaol chaplain.²⁹⁶ New brick and Bath stone gates were built in 1759, pews were repaired and replaced in 1772 and 1795 and a singing gallery was built c. 1779. The vestry elected sextons, including a sexton's widow in 1799, whose duties included tolling for funerals.²⁹⁷

19th century

By 1807 extra seats were added to accommodate the growing congregation, limits were placed on the number of seats a family might hold and non-parishioners lost their seats but were repaid the fees. In 1812 the south door was enclosed, the chancel screen removed and an iron bar tied the north and south walls together. Frederick Corfield gave a Broadwood organ, replacing the cello, and paid for church repairs.²⁹⁸ Lack of funds prevented church enlargement in 1826 but an organ loft was added, extended in 1850.²⁹⁹ Early 19th-century ministers were usually non-resident pluralists and four served less than five years. The curate found his own house and was paid £30, fees and offerings. Frederick Corfield gave £800 to provide a second Sunday service from 1812, probably easing the seating problem. In 1827 there was a Wednesday evening service.³⁰⁰ On 11 September 1836 643 people attended one

²⁹⁴ Weaver, *Som. Incumbents*, 454; Horn and Bailey, *Fasti 1541—1857*, 17, 96.

²⁹⁵ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/5/2/2.

²⁹⁶ theclergydatabase.org.uk (John Hurly, Lawrence Heard Luxton); accessed 6 Feb. 2020; SHC, D/P/tau.ja/22/23.

²⁹⁷ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/4/1/3 (1758—9, 1771—2); 9/1/1 (1779, 1781, 1795, 1799, 1805).

²⁹⁸ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1807, 1811—14); DD/SAS/S1042/2 (15 Nov. 1812). Oak tracery from the screen is in the Museum of Som.

²⁹⁹ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/4/1/5 (1826—7, 1850), 9/1/1 (1826).

³⁰⁰ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/22/23; D/D/Rb/1815, 1827; Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, ed. Savage, 161—2.

service.³⁰¹ In 1837 a £400 grant increased sittings to 800, most to be free, by adding a larger south aisle and north and south galleries. The vestry sold land to meet costs and in 1842 Quaker parishioners agreed to help provided no precedent was set as they refused to pay church rates.³⁰²

By 1840 the vestry was chaired by a resident minister, communion was celebrated monthly, there were three Sunday services and in 1843 there were two assistant curates and two parish clerks.³⁰³ On Census Sunday 1851 morning service was attended by 503 people and 83 Sunday school children, the afternoon service by 325 adults and 85 children and the evening service by 756.³⁰⁴ In 1862 the present organ was installed, rebuilt in 1903 and 1965. In 1869 after two years delay for objections a faculty was granted to rebuild the tower, from which three tons of stone had fallen.³⁰⁵ Apprentice saddler William Weston made a leather model of the old tower.³⁰⁶ It was rebuilt from 1870 by John Spiller overseen by J Houghton Spencer, mainly of sandstone with a taller stair turret and the statues were not replaced back. When completed in 1875 a sixth bell by Llewellyn and James of Liverpool was added.³⁰⁷

By 1876 there were 15 communions a year and both incumbent and curate were resident but the plain evangelical services allegedly drove parishioners. There were only 57 Easter communicants in 1882.³⁰⁸ About that time historian Revd Thomas Hugo gave the church a 1617 chalice, possibly by Fleming Jan Romantowski.³⁰⁹ Church land rents including Grasscroft and Ladymead had been used to pay the parish clerk and maintain the church or poor but by the later 19th century were given to 28 women visitors to provide necessities for

³⁰¹ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1835—6).

³⁰² *Inc. Church Building Soc. Ann. Rep.* 1927, p. 92; BL, Add. MS 30293; Glynne, *Church Notes for Som.*, 340—1; SHC, D/P/tau.ja/4/1/5 (1845); DD/SAS/C795/TN/28, 42.

³⁰³ SHC, D/D/Va/1/12, 2/12.

³⁰⁴ TNA, HO 129/315/4/1/2.

³⁰⁵ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/9/1/2 (1862, 1865—60); 5/4/5; A/BKP/2; D/D/Cf/1867/10, 1869/2.

³⁰⁶ BL, Add. MS 30289, 168—84. Model in the county museum collections.

³⁰⁷ SHC, A/BKP/2; D/P/tau.ja/5/2/2, 22/23; DD/SAS/C112/20/22.

³⁰⁸ *Taunton Courier*, 1 May 1878: BNA accessed 24 Aug. 2022; SHC, D/P/tau.ja/29/3.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.* D/P/tau.ja/5/2/2; DD/WBF/20/477.

the poor.³¹⁰ The charity was wound up in 2000 and the last land sold in 2009.³¹¹ In 1884 the galleries and the external access stairs were removed and the chancel and vestry were replaced by a larger chancel with sanctuary, north and south aisle extensions and north vestry.³¹² In 1886 five electric arc lights replaced gas and candles. The parish paid the assistant curate, choir and organist and pews were still rented. In 1897 two bells by Mears and Steinbank were added to the peal for the Royal Jubilee.³¹³

Mission rooms

St James' Mission Room in Registry Place, later Lower Middle Street, was used for meetings, services and infant Sunday school from the 1880s to 1902 when the East Reach Mission or St James Hall hosted meetings and Sunday evening services until c. 1957. It was later demolished for road widening. St James Reading Room, recorded in 1894, was sold for warehousing before 1914.³¹⁴ The French Weir mission room, Northfield, given by Mrs Loveday of Weirfield school was run by the Church Army in 1914. In 1917 it was given up but the iron and slate building with roof lantern survives.³¹⁵

Parish life: The 20th and early 21st centuries

In 1900 a new vicar celebrated communion weekly but most people only took communion monthly for most of the 20th century and the plain evangelical tradition was maintained. A watchnight service was held at New Year 1901 and there were 230 Easter communicants.³¹⁶ In 1908 the parish paid for watching the church in the cricket season, as the ground adjoined

³¹⁰ SHC, D/D/Cd/65; DD/TBL/60 (1873); D/P/tau.ja/2/8/1 (1894), 3/1/1.

³¹¹ Ibid. DD/C/324; D/P/tau.ja/3/1/1, 9/3/2 (1927), 17/2/2 (1994, 2000), 9/2/5 (2009).

³¹² SHC, A/DIF/72; D/D/Cf/1884/6.

³¹³ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/4/1/5 (1870, 1885—7, 1893—4); 2/8/1 (1894, 1897); 5/52; 7/1/1.

³¹⁴ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/2/8/1 (1893—4); DD/X/SOM/53; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1902—3), 113; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957).

³¹⁵ *Taunton Courier*, 15 Apr. 1914, 12 Dec. 1917; BNA accessed 24 Aug. 2022.

³¹⁶ SHC, D/D/Va/22/2/6; D/P/tau.ja/2/8/1 (1900—2, 1904), 2/5/1—3.

the churchyard.³¹⁷ In 1911 a self-elected parochial church council of clergy, officers and others met quarterly in Church House, Canon Street. Women were elected in 1919.³¹⁸ In 1914 a 12-year restoration was completed.³¹⁹ In 1924 a north chapel designed by W.D. Caröe was a memorial to the 100 parishioners who suffered in the First World War.³²⁰ Remaining land was sold in 1927 to repair the tower. In 1933 18 St James St was bought and demolished in the 1960s to improve access.³²¹ There were 352 Easter communicants in 1931, in 1939 a communion rail was made and in 1948 a second war memorial was . A window commemorated the safe return of 11 soldiers.³²²

In 1950 Gyffarde House, Priory Avenue was given to house the curate but was sold in 1977.³²³ In 1963 a wooden reredos with built-in table by E. C. Francis of West Monkton and a children's altar were installed and a tower screen in 1969. The altar was removed in 1977, 'the idea being entirely foreign to our tradition'.³²⁴ In 1978 a monthly family service was held, lay people led house groups and the vicar served two other churches assisted by a non-stipendiary minister, members of the Church Army and lay readers.³²⁵

In 1980 the west door replaced the south as the main entrance and in 1982 a link corridor was made to the former school.³²⁶ In 1983 c. 170 people attended morning service and half that number in the evening.³²⁷ In 1996 there were usually c. 100 Sunday communicants. In 2001 the church closed for building work, services were held in the school or church hall, pews were replaced by chairs and archaeological excavations were carried

³¹⁷ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/4/1/7 (1908).

³¹⁸ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/9/3/1 (1911, 1919).

³¹⁹ Brass in church.

³²⁰ SHC, D/D/cf/1924/75; D/P/tau.ja/9/3/1 (1919, 1923), 8/4/1.

³²¹ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/9/3/2 (1927, 1932—3), 5/1/3; DD/FIV/1/61.

³²² Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/9/2/1 (1930—1, 1948); brasses in ch.

³²³ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/9/2/1 (1950), 5/4/7.

³²⁴ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/8/3/2, 5/4/3; D/D/cf/1963/6/10, 1969/10/16.

³²⁵ Ibid. D/D/Va/40/20; A/DBL/130/1 (1978).

³²⁶ Ibid. D/D/cf/1980/12/8, 1982/8/22.

³²⁷ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/22/3/1 (1983).

out.³²⁸ Two Sunday services were maintained in 2016 with an additional monthly communion, messy church for young children, services for teenagers and in homes for the elderly. The church was also used for concerts, vaccinations and blood-donation. In the early 2020s over 100 people attended Sunday morning service.³²⁹

Church and churchyard

Archaeological investigations in 2001 revealed the walls of a narrow 12th-century church. A larger church built between the mid 15th and early 16th century had a west tower and north aisle whose arcade replaced the 12th-century north wall.³³⁰ The larger four-centred eastern arch may indicate a side transept or chapel; both the St Nicholas aisle and Lady chapel were recorded in the 1540s.³³¹ A narrow south aisle was added possibly in the 16th century and enlarged in 1837—8 by Richard Carver who converted the two eastern arches into one to match the north side and installed a rose window over the south porch. The church, then stuccoed, comprised chancel with south door, nave with aisles, south porch and west tower. Covered stairs gave access to the galleries apparently lit by square windows above the arcades. In 1884—5 Edmund Ferrey added a new chancel, preserving the 1860 east window by Clayton and Bell. Apart from late Georgian heraldic fragments in the south aisle, the stained glass windows are Victorian. There are many military memorials but several have been lost since the early 19th century.³³² The stonework formerly suffered from the proximity of the power station.³³³

Pieces of a reputedly 12th-century churchyard cross carved with crucifixion and presentation scenes, a bishop and a possible saint were unearthed in the churchyard and

³²⁸ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/2/5/5 (1996, 2001); D/D/cf/2001/6/11.

³²⁹ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/9/3/1.

³³⁰ Ibid. D/P/tau.ja/5/4/6.

³³¹ Weaver, *Som. Wills 1531—1558*, 78; Webb, *Som. Wills II*, 176.

³³² Glynn, *Church Notes for Som.*, 340—1; Orbach, *S. and W. Som.* 612; SHC, D/D/Cf/1884/6; D/B/ta/24/1/18/732.

³³³ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/6/3/3.

sketched in the 1860s but since lost.³³⁴ By the 1530s burials took place at St James.³³⁵ Before 1816 when new gates and railings were built the churchyard had an open boundary and included houses and shops.³³⁶ In 1846 the churchyard was extended but by 1876 was overcrowded and closed. Most gravestones have been removed and the survivors are in poor condition but since 1974 the churchyard has been maintained by the local council.³³⁷

HOLY TRINITY

The increased population of St Mary's parish led to the building of a district church in 1839—42. Sited near the union workhouse Holy Trinity as named after one of the medieval chantries in St Mary's church. It was a perpetual curacy with the bishop as patron and its first incumbent was Frederick Jeremiah Smith (1842—58). Half the 900 seats were free. The district comprised the south-eastern area of the town and the rural part of St Mary's parish with a population of 2,000 in 1844 when the curate received £150 a year. In 1863 it was confirmed as a separate parish and from 1869 was a vicarage.³³⁸ In 1933 West Monkton within the borough was transferred to Holy Trinity but in 1962 the area between the railway and Hamilton Road was taken into the new parish of All Saints.³³⁹ The living was worth £746 by 1959 and remained a sole vicarage.³⁴⁰

The vicar was usually resident but only in 1889 was a vicarage built on the site of the Hill Place inn on the corner of Holway Lane, now South Street, and Union Street now Trinity Road.³⁴¹ The light brick, seven-bedroom house with two staircases and four attics was

³³⁴ Ibid. T/PH/rea/3/63; *SDNQ*, XIX, 153.

³³⁵ Weaver, *Som. Wills 1531—58*, 78; TNA, PROB 11/30/46, 11/31/105; Webb, *Som. Wills II*, 174, 176.

³³⁶ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/4/1/4 (1800, 1809), 9/1/1 (1806, 1816); Orbach, *S. and W. Som.* 112.

³³⁷ TNA, MH 13/180, ff. 256—8, SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/16, p. 251; D/P/tau.ja/3/5/1.

³³⁸ TNA, HO 129/315/3/4/15; SHC, D/D/Ord/6/1; D/P/tau.ht/2/1/1, 2/3/1.

³³⁹ SHC, D/D/Ord/103/2; D/P/west.m/22/2/1, 4; Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 439.

³⁴⁰ *Crockford*, 1959—60, 1664; *Dioc. Dir.*

³⁴¹ SHC, D/G/ta/8a/16 (7 Nov 1863), 8a/32 (9 Jan. 1889).

designed by George Strawbridge.³⁴² In 1941 it became an evacuated children's home and later a care home. The vicar moved to Holway Avenue.³⁴³

The registers date from 1842, burials took place in vaults under the church between 1846 and 1930 and the interment of ashes thereafter.³⁴⁴ A font was made by Robert Long of Taunton in 1842.³⁴⁵ In 1846 Revd Smith gave a William Hill organ, given a painted case in the late 1950s.³⁴⁶ No figures were supplied for the 1851 ecclesiastical census but there was an assistant curate.³⁴⁷ For the rest of the century there were two Sunday services, monthly and festal communion, a vestry chaired by the incumbent and a parish clerk.³⁴⁸ William du Sautoy, 1858—87, was accused of poaching children from the British school with offers of choir places.³⁴⁹ His successor was Altham Surtees Altham, 1887—90, nephew of Elizabeth Barrett Browning.³⁵⁰

In 1881 a new pulpit, replaced in 1926, font and screen were installed when the chancel area was raised, the church was paved with encaustic tiles and closed pews were replaced with open benches.³⁵¹ In 1885 a mission room was built south of the chancel connected by a covered way and in 1901 an eastern extension, since demolished, was a reading room.³⁵² By 1898 there were three Sunday services, two with communion and communion was celebrated on Tuesdays and Thursdays.³⁵³ The workhouse children attended the Sunday school and church services.³⁵⁴ In 1902 there were four Sunday services including

³⁴² TNA, IR 58/82647 (1674); SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/23/996.

³⁴³ SHC, C/WS/1/3, pp. 328, 347; DD/WBF/20/475; *Dioc. Dir.*

³⁴⁴ SHC, D/P/tau.ht/2/1/1, 13.

³⁴⁵ R. Gunnis, *Dict. of British Sculptors* (1968), 242.

³⁴⁶ Orbach, *S. and W. Som.* 611; SHC, D/D/cf/1958/9/15.

³⁴⁷ TNA, HO 107/1922; HO 129/315/3/4/15.

³⁴⁸ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 53; SHC, D/D/Va/12/12; A/DBL/133/1.

³⁴⁹ SHC, C/E/4/220/1, p. 384.

³⁵⁰ browningscorrespondence.com/William Surtees Altham: accessed 13 Dec. 2019.

³⁵¹ Orbach, *S. and W. Som.* 611; tablet in church; SHC, DD/WBF/20/475.

³⁵² SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/20/824, 24/1/29/27.

³⁵³ *Ibid.* D/D/Va/21/12.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.* D/G/ta/8a/16 (13 Dec. 1899).

choral communion, an afternoon children's service and two or three services every weekday. From 1904 to 1939 there were two curates.³⁵⁵

By 1901 electricity had replaced gas lighting.³⁵⁶ Early 20th-century photographs show a richly stencilled chancel, probably carried out in 1892 for the church's 50th anniversary but obliterated presumably in the 1957 redecoration. A dwarf stone screen and chancel gates given by Dr Edward Liddon have been lost.³⁵⁷ In 1927 a spare chalice and paten were donated to a community in South Africa but another paten was given by the girls' friendly society in 1944, a baptism set by the young people in 1945, a bread box in the 1960s, a sick communion set c. 1970 and two chalices in 1978.³⁵⁸ In 1962 a brick church hall was built north of the chancel.³⁵⁹

A parochial church council met four times a year by 1965.³⁶⁰ In the 1980s the vicar was assisted by a lay reader and maintained three or four Sunday services including evensong, two weekday communion services and monthly services at two homes for the elderly.³⁶¹ By 1993 Sunday services had been reduced to two communion services and evensong for 120 regular worshippers. Matins and evensong were said most weekdays with communion services on three weekday. Monthly care home services continued.³⁶² In 2019 there were two morning communion services and evening prayer with benediction and communion most weekdays. The vicar had a curate, two lay readers and three pastoral assistants.³⁶³

Church building

³⁵⁵ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1902—3), 107; *Taunton and West Som. Annual 1904*, 104; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1939), A32.

³⁵⁶ SHC, D/D/Va/22/2/6.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.* A/DPA/3; A/BEN/55 (Holy Trinity); DD/FIV/5/94; D/D/Cf/1957/4/10.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.* D/D/Ri/4; D/P/tau.ja/5/2/3.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.* D/D/Cf/1962/2/6.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.* D/D/Va/37/2/6.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.* A/DBL/134/1, 3.

³⁶² *Ibid.* A/DBL/6/26.

³⁶³ holytrinitytaunton.org; accessed 14 Nov. 2019.

Holy Trinity church, designed by Richard Carver and completed in 1842, was built of white lias, which is unfortunately soft. The buttressed west tower's pinnacles have had to be removed. The church interior is now open with no division between the narrow chancel and the broad eight-bay nave. It retains galleries on iron columns and an open trussed roof with decorative tracery, repaired in 1976. A vaulted burial crypt extends under the whole building. In 1959—60 the original bell was increased to a lightweight peal of six including two of c. 1450 transferred from Swell church.³⁶⁴ Although high church in worship the building is very plainly furnished. There is some stained glass of 1858. The stone reredos was carved by Bligh Bond in 1916.³⁶⁵ In the 1920s a memorial chapel was created at the end of the north aisle and memorial windows were inserted in 1930 and 1946.³⁶⁶ In 1957—8 the church was restored and a south chapel was created for weekday use.³⁶⁷ Ten leaded ground floor windows were replaced in 1965, a new high altar was installed in 1969 and a carved cover provided for the font in 1985.³⁶⁸ The porch holy water stoup is the font from the demolished Holy Trinity church at Bridgwater. Stations of the cross were installed in 1992 and a baptistery area was created in 2001.³⁶⁹ Originally church and school were enclosed in decorative iron railings, which with those of the vicarage went for salvage in the 1940s, and the low walls have been removed.³⁷⁰

ST ANDREW

A cottage with land was let to the vicar of St James in 1844 to build a Rowbarton chapel of ease.³⁷¹ Completed in 1846 the chapel opened from Kingston Road and had two gothic-headed east windows. It seated 200 in free seats and on Census Sunday 1851 80 people

³⁶⁴ SHC, DD/WBF/20/475.

³⁶⁵ Ibid. A/CLM/60; Orbach, *S. and W. Som.* 611.

³⁶⁶ SHC, D/D/Cf/1920/138, 1925/68, 1930/94, 1946/32.

³⁶⁷ Ibid. D/D/Cf/1957/4/10, 1958/9/15.

³⁶⁸ Ibid. D/D/Va/37/2/6; D/D/Cf/1969/9/7, 1985/2/17.

³⁶⁹ Ibid. D/D/Cf/1991/11/5; 1992/4/24, 2001/12/3.

³⁷⁰ Ibid. A/DAS/2 (12273); DD/WBF/4/173.

³⁷¹ Ibid. DD/CH/83/1.

attended morning service and 160 in the afternoon including 50 Sunday schoolchildren.³⁷² It was usually served by the curate of St James who in 1866 accused the boys Sunday school of lapsing into dissent although the teachers complained of high churchmanship and in 1877 the vicar tried to use a layman to take a service.³⁷³

In 1878 at a thanksgiving service for the Berlin treaty the Revd Frederick Jeremiah Smith promised £3,000 for a new church to accommodate 700 without galleries. It was that church and school builder's last great act of generosity. When he died in 1884, he went to his grave accompanied by children from almost every school in Taunton.³⁷⁴ In 1879 a separate Rowbarton ecclesiastical district was formed including North Town between the railway and Staplegrove Road but in 1931 the whole of St James' parish north of the railway was absorbed into St Andrew's in exchange for the latter's North Town area.³⁷⁵

The Ecclesiastical Commissioners bought Rowbarton House orchard on Kingston Road for a church in 1880, a vicar was appointed and the registers opened. Patronage belonged to the Master of Baliol until 1922 when it was transferred to the bishop of Bath and Wells. The living remains a sole vicarage.³⁷⁶ It was augmented by gifts totalling £1,100 in 1894—5 and was worth £879 by 1959, second only to St Mary's.³⁷⁷ An 1861 semi-detached house south of the church was rented in 1882 and bought c. 1898 with the adjoining house, usually occupied by the curate, through an anonymous gift.³⁷⁸ In 1988 the vicarage was replaced by a modern house further north in Kingston Road and the clergy houses were sold.³⁷⁹

³⁷² TNA, HO 129/315/4/1/4; SHC, T/PH/rea/3/66.

³⁷³ SHC, A/BKP 2.

³⁷⁴ Ibid. D/P/tau.a/2/9/7 (1878); C/E/4/218/1, p. 193; PAM227: A. Harrison, *Threescore years and ten: a history of Prebendary Gresley's incumbency* (1952), 1—2, 4, 13.

³⁷⁵ SHC, D/P/tau.a/2/92; D/P/tau.ja/22/3/1. The parish was officially Rowbarton St Andrew until 1972 when it changed to Taunton St Andrew: *ibid.* D/P/tau.a 9/4/4.

³⁷⁶ Ibid. PAM227, p. 6; DD/X/BUSH/1; D/P/tau.a/2/1/1; 2/9/2; D/D/Ord/67/1; DD/X/BUSH/1; *Dioc. Dir.*

³⁷⁷ SHC, D/P/tau.a/2/9/2; *Crockford*, 1959—60, 1664.

³⁷⁸ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/3/76; DD/CH/106/3, 119/4; PAM227, pp. 6, 20—1; D/P/tau.a/9/1/1 (1892), 18/2/1 (1898), 23/8; *Dioc. Dir.*

³⁷⁹ *Dioc. Dir.*; SHC, D/P/tau.a/9/4/11; C/OP/3/151, p. 55.

St Andrew's church opened in 1881 but despite 500 free seats was overcrowded and people had to be turned away. The vicar was assisted by a curate by 1884. On 14 July 1893, an extension was consecrated increasing seats to *c.* 700. From 1899 the church had electric light.³⁸⁰ Sometimes called the railway church St Andrew's and its school had a close connection with the Great Western Railway.³⁸¹ A 2002 stained glass window of GWR locomotive 2913 by Clare M. Green in the north aisle commemorates those links.³⁸² The church had a choir with *c.* 26 members in 1890, increasing to *c.* 50 in 1939, several social groups and a parish library.³⁸³ The church had a working men's club by the 1880s, a branch of the Church of England Men's Society until 1986, a Mothers Union, a young wives' group, scouts, guides, cubs, brownies and a branch of the St Michael's guild.³⁸⁴ In 1913 the curate set up a wireless telegraph station in Rowbarton drill hall in Railway Street to enable the Church Lads Brigade to communicate with people in Europe.³⁸⁵ In 1898 the vicar chaired the vestry but in 1918 a church council was formed of 10 members, increasing to 20 including women by 1921.³⁸⁶ The men's club buildings were burnt down in 1978 and a new club and church hall opened in 1981 and remained in use in the early 21st century with the adjoining scout and guide club.³⁸⁷

Easter communicants increased from 166 in 1883 to 543 in 1900.³⁸⁸ Services were in the high church tradition.³⁸⁹ There were five Sunday services and daily communion by 1904 when there were two curates.³⁹⁰ By 1911 the church was furnished with a gold pyx, four silver or silver gilt chalices, one of *c.* 1840, increased to five by 1948, processional and altar

³⁸⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.a/9/1/1 (1884); PAM227, pp. 21—4, 35.

³⁸¹ Ibid/ D/P/tau.a/4/1/1; A/ARQ 6/1.

³⁸² Orbach, *S. and W. Som.* 612.

³⁸³ SHC, D/P/tau.a/23/7; DD/C/323.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., D/P/tau.a/3/4/1, 9/3/10, 18/1/1; D/B/ta/24/1/20/823; D/P/tau.ja/23/1; A/DBL/128/1 (1981).

³⁸⁵ Ibid. D/P/tau.a/2/9/7.

³⁸⁶ Ibid. D/D/Va/21/12; D/P/tau.a/9/2/1 (1921), 9/3/2; D/P/tau.a 23/2 (1918).

³⁸⁷ Ibid. D/P/tau.a/2/9/7, 8/3/4, 9/3/10 (1978—82); DD/C/323.

³⁸⁸ Ibid. PAM227, p. 39.

³⁸⁹ SHC, D/P/tau.a/8/3/2, 9/1/1 (cutting, 1891).

³⁹⁰ Ibid. D/D/Va/21/12; *Taunton and West Som. Annual 1904*, 104.

crosses, 16 candlesticks, eight altar frontals, a bier, six sets of vestments and 45 cassocks and surplices. A silver bread box was given to mark the 1897 jubilee. By 1915 there were 607 Easter communicants. In 1919 a silver gilt ciborium was given and an oak chancel screen with rood was installed commemorating 53 men killed in the First World War.³⁹¹ Before 1935 the church acquired seven sanctuary lamps, which still hang in the church, six black and gold funeral candlesticks, several sets of vestments and altar frontals and four copes.³⁹² In 1930 the bishop permitted use of the reserved sacrament. By 1936 a confraternity of the blessed sacrament was established, there were baptismal services twice a week and confessions.³⁹³ A second ciborium was given in 1950 and communicants averaged 100 over four Sunday communion services³⁹⁴ It was then the largest parish in Taunton but financial constraints reduced the clergy to two.³⁹⁵

In 1965 the parochial church council met 14 times a year.³⁹⁶ In 1966 and 1984 seats were removed to accommodate the font and a nave altar reducing accommodation to c. 450.³⁹⁷ In the 1980s family services attracted over 300.³⁹⁸ In 1997 there were two Sunday communion services with evensong and three or four midweek services. In the early 21st century evensong was discontinued, few people received daily communion but c. 80 attended on Sundays. Despite losing his curate the vicar continued to give home communions in 2001 and hold a communion service in at least one old people's home, a practice since the 1980s.³⁹⁹ In 2008 the vicar was assisted by 3 readers and the church retained a surpliced

³⁹¹ SHC, D/P/tau.a/2/5/3, 5/2/1 (inv. 1948), 2/2 (1919).

³⁹² Ibid. D/D/Ri/4; D/P/tau.a/5/2/1 (inv. 1939).

³⁹³ Ibid. D/P/tau.a/2/9/6, 8/3/2, 9/1/1 (letter, 1930).

³⁹⁴ Ibid. D/P/tau.a/2/5/11, 5/2/1 (inv. 1957); A/DBL/128/1.

³⁹⁵ *Crockford, 1959—60*, 1664; SHC, D/P/tau.a/9/2/1 (1957—8).

³⁹⁶ SHC, D/D/Va/37/2/6.

³⁹⁷ Ibid. D/P/tau.a/6/1/1 (1966), 9/3/10 (1985—6); D/D/Cf/1984/1/35.

³⁹⁸ Ibid. D/P/tau.a/2/9/8.

³⁹⁹ Ibid. D/P/tau.a/2/5/26, 2/9/7 (1994—5); A/DBL/128/1 (1987, 2001).

choir.⁴⁰⁰ In the 2020s services were reduced to one Sunday and one weekday communion but weekly talks and children's events were held.⁴⁰¹

Church building

St Andrew's church, of Westleigh stone lined inside with polychromatic brickwork, comprises chancel with sacristy to the north and Lady chapel to the south, separated by stairs to the basement, a choir located in the 1881 chancel with south tower, a nave flanked by north and south aisles and a west narthex the full width of the church. The tower has a short broach spire and is now enclosed within the church fabric, which has a rectangular footprint with no churchyard. The 1881 bell was sold and replaced by a peal of six in 1995—7. The 1936 clock has two gilded skeleton dials on the tower, connected to dials in the church and vestry.⁴⁰² The Home Guard were blamed for the holes in the weathercock, restored in 1983.⁴⁰³

The 1881 church, designed by John Houghton Spencer, had a stencilled ceiling and an altar table by Taunton cabinet maker Arthur Steevens. In 1883 the organ was installed, rebuilt in the later 1920s by Osmond of Taunton, and in 1885 windows were installed in memory of the Revd Frederick Jeremiah Smith.⁴⁰⁴ Edmund Buckle designed the 1892 extension comprising additional south aisle, replacing the original south wall with a third arcade, narthex, sacristy and choir vestry, enlarged chancel and a semi-basement vestry under the chancel, taking advantage of the sloping ground.⁴⁰⁵

The stained glass included an east window by Lavers and Westlake representing the *Te Deum*, clerestory quatrefoils, the Hardman south-west, former east, window of 1881 and

⁴⁰⁰ *Dioc. Dir.*

⁴⁰¹ Inf. from ch.

⁴⁰² SHC, D/D/Rrd/2; D/P/tau.a/5/2/1, 6/1/1 (1936); A/EQS/25; D/D/Cf/1995/9/31.

⁴⁰³ Ibid. D/P/tau.a/2/9/8.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid. PAM227, pp. 6—11; D/P/tau.a/6/1/1 (1885), 8/3/2, 8/3/5, 9/1/1 (cutting, 1891).

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. D/D/cf/1892/5, 10.

south windows with a nativity by Mayer.⁴⁰⁶ The 1901 memorial window in the Lady chapel commemorates two Taunton nurses; one died working in South Africa and the other founded the Taunton Nursing Association.⁴⁰⁷ Among the furnishings are a Derbyshire alabaster font on an Irish green marble column with a brightly coloured, carved cover. Nearby is a large angel lectern, given in 1904.⁴⁰⁸

ALL SAINTS

This church was built for local authority housing estates at Halcon, served from 1937 by a mission room near Lambrook farm and from 1948 by a converted nissen hut on the junction of Roman and Moorland Roads, the site of the present church.⁴⁰⁹ An ecclesiastical district was established and services were held from 12 April 1953. Initially the church followed high church traditions, attendances were small and even fewer took communion, only 48 at Easter 1954.⁴¹⁰ A church hall was built c. 1955 and a plain brick vicarage house in 1959, refurbished in 2019.⁴¹¹ In 1962 All Saints became a separate parish, initially called Halcon, comprising the northern half of Holy Trinity and part of West Monkton.⁴¹² The living remained a sole vicarage with the bishop as patron. It was worth £483 in 1959, the poorest of Taunton's churches.⁴¹³

In 1965 a church council met eight times a year.⁴¹⁴ In the 1970s and 1980s there were two Sunday services including a sung Eucharist, held in the evening on the 3rd Sunday, two weekday communion services and a monthly baptism service.⁴¹⁵ In 2019 there was a morning communion service every Sunday with an average congregation of 18, weekday prayers and

⁴⁰⁶ Orbach, *S. and W. Som.* 611—12; SHC, D/P/tau.a/2/9/5.

⁴⁰⁷ SHC, D/P/tau.a/9/1/1 (cutting, 1901).

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid. PAM227, pp. 21—4; D/P/tau.a/6/1/1 (1892), 9/1/1 (1891—2), 23/2.

⁴⁰⁹ *Taunton Courier*, 16 Jan. 1937, 15 Jan. 1938, 25 Oct. 1941, 13 Nov. 1948; BNA accessed 24 Aug. 2022; DD/X/STONE (plans, 1948).

⁴¹⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.a.s/2/5/1, 3.

⁴¹¹ Ibid. D/B/ta/24/1/126/6169; bathandwells.org.uk/2019/05 (parish profile, Halcon 2019).

⁴¹² SHC, D/P/tau.ja/22/3/3; D/D/Ord/103/2.

⁴¹³ *Dioc. Dir.*; *Crockford*, 1959—60, 1664.

⁴¹⁴ SHC, D/D/Va/37/2/6.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid. A/DBL/129/1.

on Thursdays a shared service with Halcon Baptist church. Communion services were held at local nursing homes and community halls for the elderly. The church, in a deprived area, was involved in setting up a community centre in 1998 and providing school holiday activities.⁴¹⁶

All Saints, of red brick, was built to be extended, which was never done. In the 1970s the front was remodelled, a porch with abstract stained glass by Henry Haig was added to serve as a baptistery and a choir gallery was built over the vestries.⁴¹⁷ In 1986 and 1996 statues and a tapestry of Christ were removed.⁴¹⁸ Church, hall and vicarage occupy a slightly raised site with a large green area in front of the church.

ST PETER

In 1898 the diocese acquired a site in Chip Lane for a church of St Peter. It was not built and the land was sold in 1903.⁴¹⁹ Housing development in the north-east of St Andrew's parish led to morning and evening Sunday services being provided in the housebuilders' canteen by 1955. Harvest festival drew 50 for evensong and 80 children for the morning procession. Sunday school classes were held in private houses and a choir was formed. In March 1956, the foundation stone of the church was laid. By August the vicarage was used for services and in September the church was consecrated. There were three Christmas services and 140 communicants. In 1957 the curate of St Andrew's became the first vicar of St Peter's, Lyngford, created out of St Andrew's and Cheddon Fitzpaine parishes.⁴²⁰ The living remained a sole vicarage with the bishop as patron and was worth £683 by 1959.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁶ bathandwells.org.uk/2019/05 (parish profile, Halcon 2019).

⁴¹⁷ SHC, D/D/Va/37/2/6; D/D/Cf/1972/7/9; D/B/ta/24/1/227/13904; DD/X/STONE (plans); Orbach, *S. and W. Som.* 611.

⁴¹⁸ SHC, D/D/Cf/1986/10/4, 1996/10/17; DD/WBF/20/217.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid. PAM227, p. 18; D/P/tau.a/18/1/1.

⁴²⁰ Ibid. D/P/tau.p/2/5/1 (1955); D/D/Ord/98/10.

⁴²¹ *Dioc. Dir ; Crockford, 1959—60, 1664.*

In 1958 a hall for 150 was built and by 1965 a parochial church council met seven times a year.⁴²² In the early 1970s a curate assisted with four Sunday communion services and four Sunday school classes for children up to 11.⁴²³ In the 1970s and 1980s stained glass was installed including a Girl Guide window and new pews and a lectern were installed.⁴²⁴ In 1978 there were three morning communion services, Sunday school, an evening service and youth fellowship on Sundays, four weekdays communions, a monthly healing service and a lay reader to assist the vicar. In the early 21st century there were two morning services, traditional and modern, an evening service had been given up by 2008 but weekday prayers and one midweek communion were still held.⁴²⁵

The church of St Peter, Eastwick Road, comprised a nave and chancel seating 228, with north and south aisles added in 1965 and a later vestry. There is a small west turret with fleche spire. The bell came from St Andrew's school and a pinnacle from Wells Cathedral supported the credence table.⁴²⁶

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Two recusants were fined £240 each in the 1590s and the Hill heiress, Joan wife of Thomas Brereton, and her descendants were Catholics.⁴²⁷ Many 17th-century recusants probably had non-religious motives for failing to attend their parish church or were protestant nonconformists. In the early 18th century only one Catholic was recorded, a female convert, but c. 10 in St Mary's parish by 1776. The Revd George Baldwin of West Monkton (d. 1818) took a house in East Reach, Taunton in 1782 where he celebrated mass. After 1791 when Catholic chapels were permitted, the Shattock family provided an upper room as a chapel,

⁴²² SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/131/7107.1; D/D/Va/37/2/6; D/B/ta/24/1/213/12784.

⁴²³ Ibid. DD/X/DH/9 (1973).

⁴²⁴ Ibid. D/D/Cf/1973/4/22, 1981/4/24, 1981/6/8, 1985/2/8, 1986/7/21, 1987/3/10.

⁴²⁵ Ibid. A/DBL/131/1 (1978); 131/18 (2005, 2008); *Dioc. Dir.*

⁴²⁶ SHC, D/P/tau.p/2/5/1 (1956); D/D/Va/37/2/6; D/B/ta/24/1/213/12784.

⁴²⁷ *Recusant Roll 2, 1593—4* (Cath. Rec. Soc.), 141; above, landownership.

possibly that in Canon Street licensed for worship in 1818. The baptism register dates from 1806 but burials were entered in the Anglican registers until c. 1841.⁴²⁸ Bishop Collingridge lived at the Franciscan convent from 1812 to 1818 and between 1811 and 1821 there were 83 confirmations.⁴²⁹ Two men were disqualified from voting in 1820 because they were Catholics and anti-Catholic sentiment caused problems for the community during the move for catholic emancipation.⁴³⁰

St George

The foundation stone of St George's church in The Crescent was laid 13 April 1821 by Thomas Clifton of Hatch Court. The church opened on 3 July 1822 and was licensed for worship.⁴³¹ George Manley bought the site and conveyed it to Bishop Collingridge in 1826.⁴³² Built by in a classical style with large Ionic pilasters on the west front and between the south wall windows, the interior has a curved ceiling and pilasters linked by swags. Originally a painting of Christ as Saviour of the world served as a reredos.⁴³³

The Revd Richard Towers, a Benedictine monk, was parish priest 1822—30 and 1834—41 and opposed the anti-Catholic faction led by Sir Thomas Buckler Lethbridge.⁴³⁴ He established good relations with several nonconformists and prominent local men and the Unitarians supported Catholic emancipation. Towers defended his faith and congregation in the face of violence with moderation and in 1830 St Mary's parish agreed to end bell-ringing on November 5th, seen as a focus of anti-Catholic sentiment.⁴³⁵ The parish had a circulating library, from 1838 marriages were celebrated and by the 1840s confirmations had increased

⁴²⁸ G. Oliver, *Collections illustrating the history of the Catholic Religion in the counties of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Som., Wiltshire* (1857), 62; SHC, D/D/Vc/88; D/RC/ta.g/2/2/1, 2/1/5; Q/RRw/1 (1818).

⁴²⁹ SHC, D/RC/ta.g/2/2/1; J. A. Harding, *The Diocese of Clifton 1850—2000* (Clifton, 1999), 281; Birmingham Archdiocesan Archive, Z5/1/4/2/7.

⁴³⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.m/23/29.

⁴³¹ Ibid. D/RC/ta.g/2/5/1; Q/RRw/1 (1822); DD/X/BRO/2/19.

⁴³² Ibid. DD/CH/77/2; DD/BR/me/15.

⁴³³ *Taunton Courier*, 26 June 1822: BNA accessed 11 Nov. 2019.

⁴³⁴ Dom. A. Bellenger, 'Monastic Revival in Som.', *Writing the History of Som.* (2018), 184.

⁴³⁵ SHC, D. J. Abbott, 'Richard Towers and the Catholic Controversy in Taunton, 1822—30', 22—49.

to 103. In 1852 55 people were confirmed including 31 converts. There was no return of services in 1851 but a third of 230 seats were free⁴³⁶

Canon John Mitchell (1853—99) wanted a larger church. In 1858 the Franciscan nuns bought and gave a site for church, house and school near Billetfield south of Paul Street. Benjamin Bucknell designed a church and a tower with a spire. It was built by John Spiller but the tower, without the spire, was not completed until 1873.⁴³⁷ The church opened on 24 April 1860 although not consecrated until 1912.⁴³⁸ Clergy found their own accommodation until a house in the Crescent was donated in 1842,⁴³⁹ replaced by the present house at Billetfield in 1860. Designed by Bucknell in Tudor style it was linked to the church by a sacristy and vestry.⁴⁴⁰ By 1864 there were two Sunday masses and one each weekday.⁴⁴¹ The old chapel was used as a hall until sold in 1871. Since 1873 it has been a masonic hall.⁴⁴²

Architect Alexander Scoles was curate in 1881, and Daniel Iles (1899—1902) and his nephew Richard Iles (1927—67) were parish priests. The parish extended west to Wiveliscombe, south to Chard and Crewkerne and north and east to the Quantocks until the mid 20th century when five neighbouring towns established churches.⁴⁴³ In c. 1900 photographer and organist Montagu Cooper gave an organ and by 1902 there were two morning and one evening mass every Sunday and morning mass every weekday. In 1932—3 a parish hall was built, replaced by a parish centre containing two halls in 1991.⁴⁴⁴ In the later 20th century when there were four Sunday masses and one each weekday, the parish priest

⁴³⁶ Ibid. D/RC/ta.g/2/1/5, 2/2/1.

⁴³⁷ Bristol RO, 35721/addl, box 12, papers 1857—9; SHC, D/RC/ta.g/2/5/1; A/DAS/2, no 12269; A/DIF/116/223, no. 7825.

⁴³⁸ SHC, D/RC/ta.g/2/5/1; Harding, *Diocese of Clifton*, 193.

⁴³⁹ K. Slater, 'The Catholic Chapel, Taunton', *Studies in Som. History from Local Records* (Bristol, 1971), 56; TNA, HO 107/972, 1923; Bristol RO, 35721/addl, box 12, plans, visitation return 1858—9.

⁴⁴⁰ K. Slater, 'The Catholic Chapel, Taunton', *Studies in Som. History from Local Records* (Bristol, 1971), 56; TNA, HO 107/972, 1923; Bristol RO, 35721/addl, box 12, plans, visitation return 1858—9; SHC, D/RC/ta.g/2/5/1.

⁴⁴¹ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 53.

⁴⁴² *Taunton Courier*, 29 June 1859, 2 June 1861, 29 Nov. 1867, 15 Oct. 1873; BNA accessed 11 Nov. 2019; SHC, DD/CH/77/2.

⁴⁴³ TNA, RG 11/2366; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1902—3), 109; Harding, *Diocese of Clifton*, 194; SHC, D/RC/ta.g/2/5/2.

⁴⁴⁴ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1902—3), 109; SHC, D/RC/ta.g/2/5/1; D/B/ta/24/1/78/1639; A/DVY/1.

was assisted by two curates and a deacon. They served Tone Vale hospital and Norton Manor army camp in the 1980s and until the early 21st century Bishops Lydeard.⁴⁴⁵ In 2019 there was a mass on Saturday evening, given up in 2022, two on Sunday morning and one on most weekdays. Sunday mass attendance was 561.⁴⁴⁶ Since the later 20th century the church has also been used by a Polish congregation and from 2022 the Keralan Syro-Malabar community each with their own priest and Sunday mass. In 2022 St George's and St Teresa's parishes were united with Wellington and Wiveliscombe to create a new Tone Vale parish.⁴⁴⁷

The church of St George comprises chancel with side chapels, clerestoried nave with aisles and west tower with a small organ gallery and electric bells. The west door and tower close the view up Billet Street. The carved reredos and side altars were possibly by C. F. Hansom. The stained glass includes the east window of 1860, memorial side aisle windows from the 1890s to 1940s and the west window, Christ in Majesty by Patrick Reyntiens, installed in 2009. A traditional font with a carved wooden cover was given in 2014. The 1977 stations of the cross by Tom Preator of Taunton uniquely conclude with an image of the risen Christ.⁴⁴⁸

St Teresa of Lisieux

In 1955 Taunton twinned with Lisieux, Calvados, France and funds were raised to build a church dedicated to St Teresa of Lisieux in Eastwick Road. It opened on 8 October 1959 for Taunton north of the railway and surrounding villages. Since 1981 has been served from St George's. The presbytery, home to parish sisters from the 1980s until 2016, was later let. Masses were held on Saturday evening and Sunday morning and a new altar was installed in

⁴⁴⁵ SHC, A/DBL/135/1.

⁴⁴⁶ VCH office, newsletter 12 Jan. 2020.

⁴⁴⁷ tauntonparafia.co.uk/msze-swiete; accessed July 2022; inf. from church July 2022.

⁴⁴⁸ Orbach, S. & W. *Som.*, 814.

1984.⁴⁴⁹ There was one Sunday mass and one weekday mass in 2019 and Sunday mass attendance was 136.⁴⁵⁰

The steep-roofed red brick building in modern Georgian style was designed by Eric Francis and built by Stansells of Taunton. It comprises an open chancel and nave with large west window and narrow aisles lit by dormer clerestory windows. The south tower, beside the baptistery, has a fleche with octagonal base. Furnishings include a crucifix by Escourt Clack, an octagonal font with scrolled cover and fabric stations of the cross reputedly from Buckfast Abbey, Devon.⁴⁵¹

South Road Convent

In 1807 Franciscan nuns from Winchester bought the Lodge, South Road, which they altered to accommodate both convent and school adding a burial ground and a chapel, completed in 1811.⁴⁵² Burials continued until 1952, including Joseph Hendren (d. 1866), first Bishop of Clifton who was exhumed and re-interred in the garden of St George's church in 1997.⁴⁵³ The convent ran schools, two kitchen gardens and a small dairy farm and in 1839 bought the land of neighbouring Silver Street House probably with cottages in Gwynne Lane and a nursery, which they let.⁴⁵⁴ The community of c. 100 included boarders, resident lay teachers, chaplains and servants and up to 55 nuns, divided between enclosed choir nuns and lay sisters who were not enclosed.⁴⁵⁵

In 1954 the Franciscans left for Newbury and were replaced by the nuns of St Joseph of Annecy who had come to Taunton c. 1918 to teach and lived in 8 Mount Terrace by 1929.

⁴⁴⁹ Harding, *Diocese of Clifton*, 194—5; SHC, DB/ta/24/1/121/7109; A/DBL/135/1 (1980—5).

⁴⁵⁰ VCH office, newsletter 12 Jan. 2020.

⁴⁵¹ SHC, DD/X/STONE (plans); Harding, *Diocese of Clifton*, 195; Orbach, *South and West Som.*, 614.

⁴⁵² Trappes-Lomax, *English Franciscan Nuns, 1619—1821*, 101—107.

⁴⁵³ SHC, D/RC/ta.co/2/1/2, 2/5/1; TNA, HO 107/972; Harding, *Diocese of Clifton*, 194.

⁴⁵⁴ SHC, T/PH/kns/1

⁴⁵⁵ TNA, HO 107/972, 1922; RG 10/2370; RG 12/1876 (convent schedule); RG 13/2278 (convent schedule); RG 14/14250 (convent schedule).

They gave up the farm and converted the kitchen gardens to school playgrounds as they spent their time in teaching and parish work. Their chapel was served from St George's and when they left in 1978, the artwork and chapel furnishings were taken to Llantarman Abbey, the graveyard was cleared of monuments and the chapel was deconsecrated.⁴⁵⁶ Some nuns moved to Staplegrove until 2016.⁴⁵⁷

The convent, now Annecy Court apartments, includes fabric from the former Georgian hospital, a plain brick building with stone dressings and sash windows. Before 1865 the clock tower with weathervane was added, probably by Charles Hansom who designed the additions, except his Gothic chapel, to match the Georgian building. They included a two-storey extension with a bay on the east in 1853 to house the refectory and workroom, a south-east wing for the boarding school with its own oratory of St Francis and the north school wing of 1865. Many later additions have been demolished but Kings College added the large block to the south-east and a headmaster's house and left almost nothing of the original interior.⁴⁵⁸

Our Lady of Glastonbury

The South Street chapel, in a former commercial building, was established in the 1990s by the Society of Pius X. Mass was celebrated on Sunday mornings in 2019. It is simply furnished with wooden benches, communion rails and altar.⁴⁵⁹

ORTHODOX

⁴⁵⁶ Berry, *Convent at Taunton*, 79, 84—6, 101; SHC, D/DC/tau.d/24/4/2, pp. 6—7; above, soc, hist., educ.

⁴⁵⁷ VCH office, cutting from St George's newsletter, 6 Nov. 2016.

⁴⁵⁸ SHC, T/PH/rea/3/87; D/DC/tau.d/24/4/2, pp. 5—8; Orbach, *S. & W. Som.*, 632.

⁴⁵⁹ Notices on ch.

A few Members of the Russian Orthodox church met in 1994.⁴⁶⁰ In 2024 the Romanian Orthodox church met at Holy Trinity and the Indian Orthodox church at St Michael's, Galmington.⁴⁶¹

NONCONFORMITY

Paul's Meeting

Taunton formed part of a Presbyterian classis in 1647 and after being ejected from St Mary's in 1662 George Newton (d. 1681) with Joseph Alleine (d. 1668) established a Presbyterian congregation meeting in private houses. Alleine preached up to 14 times a week and was imprisoned twice. His *Sure Guide to Heaven* was still in print in 1998.⁴⁶² There were fears of Presbyterian risings and in 1665 a large conventicle with 11 ministers from the Taunton area was broken up.⁴⁶³ By 1669 there were reputedly 470 hearers at Taunton conventicles. John Glanville, ejected from St James, preached at his own house, licenced for worship in 1672 when 1,000 inhabitants petitioned unsuccessfully for various public buildings to be used for Presbyterian worship with George Newton as preacher.⁴⁶⁴

Rawlin Mallack gave land in Paul Street for a meeting house in 1672 and a communion cup dated 1668.⁴⁶⁵ The Presbyterian meeting house galleries were torn down and the contents burnt on the orders of mayor Stephen Timewell in 1683 amid fears that meetings fermented rebellion. The building, popularly known as Paul's Meeting, reopened in 1687 with two ministers and was licensed in 1689.⁴⁶⁶ It was a T-shaped building with a front

⁴⁶⁰ VCH Som. files, letter 1994.

⁴⁶¹ holyltrinitytaunton.org; indianorthodoxuk.org; accessed 10 Apr. 2024.

⁴⁶² A.G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 6; Crippen, *Nonconf. in Som.*, 11—12; SHC, DD/TBL/94; *ODNB*, s.v. Joseph Alleine: accessed 12 Apr. 2018. Both were buried in St Mary's chancel.

⁴⁶³ *Cal. SP Dom*, 1663—4, 116; 1664—5, 35.

⁴⁶⁴ Turner, *Orig. Recs. of Early Nonconf.* I, 5—7; II, 1097; III, 651, 653.

⁴⁶⁵ SHC, D/N/tau.pm/2/1/1, 4/3/1, 6/10 [6—9].

⁴⁶⁶ *Cal. SP Dom*, Jul.-Sep. 1683, 77, 278—9; J. Murch, *Presbyterians and General Baptists in the West of England* (1835), 193; SHC, Q/RRw/1.

courtyard planted with lime trees.⁴⁶⁷ Between 1743 and 1748 six houses were licensed for Presbyterian worship in St James' parish.⁴⁶⁸

In 1688 ministers were ordained in an assembly at Paul Street, noted for its Academy.⁴⁶⁹ Baptismal registers survive from 1699 and burial registers from 1780.⁴⁷⁰ By 1730 a reputed 1,300 hearers had difficulty getting seats. Minister Thomas Amory adopted Arian beliefs and left with many of the congregation.⁴⁷¹ Perhaps as a result in 1732 the church decided ministers could only be chosen by a vote of two thirds of members as the nominally Presbyterian congregation moved towards Congregationalism. Professional and gentry families were members but anyone could buy one of the 97 seats, comprising four to six sittings, in the chapel or its four galleries, without being a communicant member.⁴⁷² In 1744 monthly communion was instigated and six communion cups were given before 1821.⁴⁷³ The church singers were taught in 1763 and by 1810 the chapel had a bass viol, still in use in the 1850s although an organ was installed c. 1830.⁴⁷⁴

Twelve men were chosen in 1744 to manage the chapel by monthly meetings, six communicants for spiritual matters only and six non-communicants. By 1794 five unelected men transacted all church business, allocated seats and appointed officers and ministers despite the 1732 agreement. In 1796 the church formed part of the new Somerset Association of Independent Churches, later Somerset Congregational Union. In 1836 the committee refused to pay for a visiting minister because it was said he preached at the request of the church rather than the committee.⁴⁷⁵ Matters came to a head in 1842 when a minister resigned over the ill-treatment of a woman by the committee, which appointed a new minister without

⁴⁶⁷ SHC, D/N/tau.pm/6/10 [9]; A/CPT/15/5, p. 57.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid. Q/RRw/1

⁴⁶⁹ Alexander, *Journal of John Fontaine*, 6; above, soc. hist., educ.

⁴⁷⁰ SHC, DN/turc/3/3/2.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/6/10 [11—12]; below, this section.

⁴⁷² SHC, D/N/tau.pm/4/2/2 (list of church members), 4/3/1 (1732, 1787); 6/10 [12].

⁴⁷³ Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/4/3/1 (1744, inventory).

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. D/D/tau.pm/4/2/1 (1856), 4/2/2, 4/3/1 (1810).

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/4/3/1 (1744, 1794, 1821, 1836), 6/10 [15—16].

consultation. An open letter signed by c. 50 of the leading members of the congregation, mostly women, asked for the church to be run in line with Congregational principles and not by an unaccountable, self-appointed committee. The signatories and others left in 1843 to form a separate church.⁴⁷⁶

In 1851 the chapel had c. 1,000 seats, 400 free, and three services attended by 402, 170 and 450 people.⁴⁷⁷ In 1868 church members complained of interference in the choice of minister and in 1871 the minister resigned because the church was not ‘Independent’ and a few ‘self-elected men may overrule the majority’.⁴⁷⁸ In 1870 there were only 193 people on the church roll, there were financial difficulties and the minister’s stipend was reduced.⁴⁷⁹ From 1896 there were two Sunday services, communion was celebrated twice a month and the chapel had a literary and musical society.⁴⁸⁰ Minister Thomas Wilkinson conducted Stainer’s Crucifixion in the chapel in 1902.⁴⁸¹ In 1913 the minister was assisted by six lay preachers.⁴⁸²

By the 1960s there was pressure to unite the local Congregational churches because of the cost of stipends and declining membership. Attendance was 51 in the morning and 30 in the afternoon in 1967 when Paul’s Meeting agreed to unite with Rowbarton and Bishops Hull, later the Taunton United Reformed Church, with a single minister and 143 members.⁴⁸³ In 1972 it elected 11 male and female elders to replace the deacons.⁴⁸⁴ Under the Revd Brian Kirk a monthly magazine *The Taunton Congregationalist* was produced, communion was celebrated monthly and the morning service became the main act of worship with a monthly

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/4/2/2 (1842—3), 4/2/13.

⁴⁷⁷ TNA, HO 129/315/3/4/11.

⁴⁷⁸ *Taunton Courier*, 26 Feb 1868: BNA accessed 11 Nov. 2019; SHC, D/N/tau.pm/4/2/2 (1871).

⁴⁷⁹ SHC, T/PH/tau.pm/1; D/N/tau.pm/4/2/1 (1868), 4/2/3 (1879), 6/4.

⁴⁸⁰ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 39; *Kelly’s Dir. Som.* (1914).

⁴⁸¹ SHC, D/N/tau.pm/4/2/5 (1902).

⁴⁸² Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/6/4.

⁴⁸³ Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/4/2/12; 4/2/17, pp. 178, 191, 220, 240; 4/2/19, pp. 1, 8, 41.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid. D/N/turc/4/2/1.

evening service.⁴⁸⁵ In 1995 there was a gowned choir, 17 elected elders who met seven times a year and served as chapel stewards and four general church meetings. Attendance was usually *c.* 75 in the mornings and 10 in the evening. In the early 21st century evening service was given up but weekday events were held.⁴⁸⁶

In 1797 the meeting house was rebuilt in brick with a five-bay front, with parapets, urns and a central porch. The yard was walled and railed with three sets of gates the central set hung from tall pillars topped by urns. New vestries were added in 1835 and a schoolroom in 1840.⁴⁸⁷ The façade was altered in 1877 when two side entrance porches replaced the three doors. New pine pews accommodated 800, gas lighting and hot air heating were installed and the organ was restored.⁴⁸⁸ The interior was elaborately decorated in 1895—6.⁴⁸⁹ The church retains its galleries, with 19th century-graffiti, pulpit and several monuments from the later 18th and 19th centuries. There is an attached library, with portraits of the founders, and meeting rooms.⁴⁹⁰ In the early 21st century the two east windows were re-opened, chairs replaced ground-floor pews and a glass canopy was added to the façade.

In 1750 Paul Street manse, possibly that recorded in 1734, was given to the chapel trustees. It was rebuilt *c.* 1824.⁴⁹¹ It was replaced in 1968 by a house in Parkfield Drive and was demolished for road widening.⁴⁹² In 1862 a hall for 350 was built south of the chapel of brick with Bath stone dressings to mark 200 years since the founding of the congregation.⁴⁹³ By the late 20th century it was let out with the chapel keeper's house behind and in the 2020s was a creative art centre.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid. A/DBL/132/1.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid. D/N/turc/4/4/1, 7/1/12.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/2/3/1; D/N/tau.mst/6/8; D/N/turc/7/4/1.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid. D/N/turc/2/3/6; D/N/tau.pm/4/2/3 (1877).

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid. DD/TBL/42/9/3 (*Taunton Mail* 19 Feb. 1896, p. 4).

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid. T/PH/bal/3.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/1/1/1, 4/3/1 (1734, 1824); C/C/41/1.

⁴⁹² Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/4/2/16, pp. 299, 309; 4/2/17, p. 254.

⁴⁹³ Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/6/10 [17]; TNA, IR 58/823635 (443).

⁴⁹⁴ SHC, D/N/tau.pm/1/1/1; D/N/turc/4/2/18.

North Street Congregational church

Congregationalists who left Paul's Meeting in 1843 held their first public service at 20 The Crescent.⁴⁹⁵ A church was formally constituted on the 10 August 1843 and appointed a minister. They bought a house and former carrier's yard between North Street and Whirligig Lane, held three Sunday services and started a Sunday school. The new chapel was dedicated and opened on 11 June 1844. A Sunday school building with small burial ground was added in 1845 and extended later. The church attracted young people, tradesmen, professional men, servants and shop assistants.⁴⁹⁶ Galleries were added in 1850, seats were free, and in 1851 average attendance was 550 morning and evening and there were two weekday meetings.⁴⁹⁷ In 1870 an organ was installed and a keeper's house was erected on Whirligig Lane.⁴⁹⁸ In 1884 the North Street house was rebuilt revealing the chapel to the street.⁴⁹⁹

The Revd Edwin Tongue was minister 1899—1909 and his daughter Ruth collected Somerset folk songs, which she published in 1967. They lived in Park Street, Richmond Road and Castle House but before 1967 a manse was purchased in Eastwick Road.⁵⁰⁰ A roll of honour records that 56 men of the church died in the First World War including four from one family and a victory fund was established. Decline in attendance led to the abandoning of the monthly communion service in 1935 but a large organ was installed in 1943 as part of the centenary celebrations.⁵⁰¹ In November 1967 attendance was 51 in the morning and 31 in the evening and most of the Sunday school was let.⁵⁰² The congregation refused to join the United Reformed Church and remained an Independent Congregational church.⁵⁰³ In 1980—3 the minister was the Revd Elsie Chamberlain, former religious broadcaster and the first

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., D/N/tau.n/3/2/1 (1843).

⁴⁹⁶ *Rep. Som. Cong. Union* (1896), 42; SHC, DD/X/BRO/2/18; D/N/tau.pm/6/10 [24]; D/N/tau.n/3/2/1 (1843—5, members list); A/DIF/79/2, pp. 6, 8.

⁴⁹⁷ TNA, HO 109/315/3/4/8.

⁴⁹⁸ *Rep. Som. Cong. Union* (1896), 42; SHC, A/ADR, vol. 1 (1870).

⁴⁹⁹ SHC, A/DIF/79/2, p. 11.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/6/10 [24]; A/BRC, cat.; D/N/tau.rc/4/2/12.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid. D/N/tau.n/3/2/2 (roll of honour, 1935), 5/2/1; A/DIF/79/2.

⁵⁰² Ibid. D/N/tau.rc/4/2/12.

⁵⁰³ Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/4/2/17, p. 231.

woman to become an army chaplain and to head the Congregational church.⁵⁰⁴ The church was refurbished for the 150th anniversary in 1993 and in 2019 there was a Sunday morning service and a monthly Thursday afternoon service.⁵⁰⁵

The church was designed by Samuel Knight Pollard, a founder of the congregation, in Gothic style of red sandstone with Ham stone dressings.⁵⁰⁶ The west front has lancet windows, slim turrets and buttressed porches. The interior has arcades with galleries on three sides under a plastered, hammer-beam roof. The pews have been replaced by chairs.⁵⁰⁷ The council agreed to maintain the grounds in 1962 in exchange for public access.⁵⁰⁸

Rowbarton Congregational church

A house at Rowbarton was licensed for dissenting worship in 1699.⁵⁰⁹ A converted malthouse was used by Congregationalists in 1868. In 1869 they collaborated with Baptists to build a chapel on Kingston Road. The Baptists withdrew and it was served from other Congregational churches. By the 1890s they had their own minister, cleared the debt and installed an organ. The chapel exercised a particular ministry to railway workers.⁵¹⁰ Sunday morning and evening services were held with an additional midweek service in 1896. A schoolroom was added before 1898.⁵¹¹

In 1904 a marble font was donated, by 1908 there was a choir and paid organist and increasing numbers meant people were turned away but they still received financial support from other Congregational churches.⁵¹² A new chapel for 450 was built across the road on land bought in 1909. Built by Henry Spiller to designs by F. W. Roberts, it had low side

⁵⁰⁴ R. Pope, *TT Clark Companion to Nonconformity* (2013), 561—2.

⁵⁰⁵ Inf. from church.

⁵⁰⁶ SHC, D/N/tau.n/3/2/1.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid. A/DIF/79/2, painting 1843; *Rep. Som. Cong. Union* (1896), 42; TNA, IR 58/82632 (153).

⁵⁰⁸ SHC, D/B/ta/3/23/6 (14 Aug. 1962).

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid. Q/RRw/1 (1699).

⁵¹⁰ Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/4/2/4, 4/2/7, 6/10 [25]; *Rep. Som. Cong. Union* (1896), 43.

⁵¹¹ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 39; SHC, D/N/tau.rc/7/2/1 (1908).

⁵¹² SHC, D/N/tau.rc/4/2/1, 7/2/1 (1908); D/N/tau.pm/6/10 [25].

walls, a steep tiled roof and a short spire over the front gable with a triple Venetian window.⁵¹³ It was registered for worship in 1910 and for marriages in 1911.⁵¹⁴ The old chapel became a Sunday school and hall but was sold in 1979 to the Taunton Operatic Society for a rehearsal room.⁵¹⁵

The minister provided a monthly service at Lydeard St Lawrence in the 1920s and from 1925 had a manse in Leslie Avenue.⁵¹⁶ The Rowbarton Monday Society for Congregationalists met from 1954 to 1977.⁵¹⁷ Retired engineer Charles Inngs made furniture including a carved lectern in 1954.⁵¹⁸ In November 1967 attendance was only 34 in the morning and 27 in the . After 1968 the manse was sold and the chapel united with Paul's Meeting and Bishop's Hull. The furnishings were sold or given to other chapels and the last church meeting was held on 15 December 1971.⁵¹⁹ In 1972 the chapel was demolished for road widening although a small public garden marks the site.⁵²⁰

Mary Street Baptist, later Unitarian, church

In 1646 a Baptist minister wrote to 'the saints in the order and fellowship of the gospel in Taunton', formed by Thomas Collier, a former army preacher.⁵²¹ Despite the imprisonment of their pastor Baptists reputedly built a meeting house in 1670.⁵²² The galleries, seats and pulpit were ripped out in 1683 forcing them to meet in private until a new brick house and malthouse were converted to a Baptist meeting with burial ground c. 1690 south of Mary

⁵¹³ Ibid. D/N/scu/7/6/19; DD/AY/331; TNA, IR 58/82623 (3011).

⁵¹⁴ SHC, D/N/tau.rc/7/5/1.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/6/10 [25]; D/N/scu/7/6/19.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid. D/N/scu/4/2/4; D/N/tau.rc/4/2/2 (1935).

⁵¹⁷ Ibid. D/N/tau.rc/4/2/6.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid. A/CWH/1; *Taunton Courier*, 3 Aug. 1957; BNA accessed 25 Oct. 2019.

⁵¹⁹ SHC, D/N/tau.rc/4/2/4 (1967—9, 1971), 4/2/12; D/N/scu/7/6/19.

⁵²⁰ Ibid. D/P/tau.a/9/4/4.

⁵²¹ D. Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* (Oxford, 1987), 247; SHC, D/N/tau.pm/6/10 [3—4].

⁵²² Murch, *Presbyterians and General Baptists*, 192—3; D Jackman, *Baptists in the West Country* (Dorchester, 1953), 40—1.

Street, then called Paul Street.⁵²³ Thomas Whinnell, minister from 1688 to 1720, attended the Calvinistic Baptist Assembly in London in 1689.⁵²⁴

Generous legacies from 1690 were invested in property and in 1721 the chapel was rebuilt.⁵²⁵ By 1733 the congregation had become openly , sometimes described as Unitarian Baptist.⁵²⁶ Joshua Toulmin, minister 1764—1803, wrote a history of Taunton and was a founder member of the Western Unitarian Society in 1792. He persuaded 200 local people to sign a petition for legal rights for Unitarians and was partly responsible for Unitarianism's recognition as a distinct denomination. Samuel Taylor Coleridge preached several times at Mary Street in the late 1790s, walking from Nether Stowey, and the pulpit and bible he used remain at the chapel.⁵²⁷

In 1828 the Somerset and Dorset Unitarian Association met at Mary Street.⁵²⁸ In 1851 it was estimated that 150 adults attended each of two Sunday services.⁵²⁹ In 1859 there was a paid choir.⁵³⁰ By the 1890s there were financial difficulties and although the chapel interior was restored in 1894 the benefit society was disbanded.⁵³¹ A new organ was installed on the ground floor c. 1912 with help from Andrew Carnegie.⁵³² The church had 17 members and 98 subscribers in 1920 when most of the income went on paying the minister.⁵³³ Minister George Woods stood unsuccessfully as a Labour candidate for the Taunton constituency in 1918 and 1924.⁵³⁴ In 1934 the church decided to have a Christmas day service, something they had hitherto refused to do, and to decorate the church. In 1943 services were taken by a

⁵²³ *Cal. SP. Dom.* Jul.—Sep. 1683, 278—9, 358; SHC, D/N/tau.mst/2/1/1; D/P/tau.j/2/1/8 (1695); D/P/tau.m/2/1/32 (1695).

⁵²⁴ Murch, *Presbyterians and Gen. Baptists*, 201; Crippen, *Nonconf. in Som.*, 43.

⁵²⁵ SHC, D/N/tau.mst/1/1/2—3, 6—8, 1/3/1—2; Jackman, *Baptists*, 41; Murch, *Presbyterians and Gen. Baptists*, 201.

⁵²⁶ SHC, D/N/tau.pm/6/10. The baptism pool survives covered up: *ibid.* DD/X/NDS/33.

⁵²⁷ SHC, DD/X/MAY/13; *ODNB*, s.v. Joshua Toulmin: accessed 12 Apr. 2018; T. Mayberry, *Coleridge and Wordsworth: the crucible of friendship* (Stroud, 2000), 70, 162.

⁵²⁸ SHC, DD/X/LV/1 (1828).

⁵²⁹ TNA, HO 129/315/3/4/9.

⁵³⁰ SHC, D/N/tau.mst/4/2/4.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.* D/N/tau.mst/3/3/2, 4/2/2 (1900—2, 1907); DD/C/325.

⁵³² *Ibid.* D/N/tau.mst/4/2/23 (1911—12). The old organ had been in the gallery: *ibid.* DD/X/NDS/33.

⁵³³ *Ibid.* A/DUV/1; D/N/tau.mst/4/2/23 (1929).

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.* T/PH/rea/1 (1918, 1920).

woman minister.⁵³⁵ The first manse was built in 1954—6 on the former school playground.⁵³⁶ By then there was one Sunday service and the minister also served Bridgwater. A break-away group in the 1980s held services in a private house and from 1992 services were held on alternate Sundays at Mary Street and attendance was only 12.⁵³⁷ In the early 21st century services were held at 11 a.m. on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of the month with guest preachers including from other faiths continuing a tradition since the 1940s or earlier.⁵³⁸

The interior of the chapel with its raked galleries dates mainly from 1721 and the original plaster ceiling was restored in 2000. The central chandelier, inscribed ‘Nathaniel Webb 1728’, was given in 1745 by attorney Samuel Noble who paid for the 1746—7 communion plate.⁵³⁹ Two large Corinthian pillars of Flemish oak support the ceiling and smaller ones carry the gallery around three sides. The pulpit and some pews date from 1721 but most furnishings are later 18th or 19th century. In 1881 an iron column was inserted to support the front gallery.⁵⁴⁰ The façade had entrances at each end surmounted by elaborate broken pediments and two round headed windows in the centre and three oval bulls-eye windows lighting the galleries. A west cross-wing housed the school.⁵⁴¹ In 1880—1 John Houghton Spencer designed a Corinthian-style front with central door with pediment, removed in 1952 as unsafe, and pairs of tall round-headed windows. Three smaller windows light the galleries flanked by blank recesses. Memorials include that of Dr Malachi Blake, founder of the Taunton and Somerset Hospital. The school wing was replaced in the 1880s

⁵³⁵ Ibid. D/N/tau.mst/4/2/4 (1933—4,1943).

⁵³⁶ Ibid. D/N/tau.mst/6/2.

⁵³⁷ Ibid. DD/X/ROW/1; D/N/tau.mst/7/8, 18.

⁵³⁸ Ibid. D/N/tau.mst/4/2/4 (1942).

⁵³⁹ Possibly belonging to Nathaniel Webb (d. 1741) father of the Taunton MP. SHC, A/CPT/15/5, p. 62; D/N/tau.mst/6/8; DD/X/NDS/33. The Noble family monument survives and their vault is in the burial ground.

⁵⁴⁰ SHC, DD/X/NDS/33; D/N/tau.mst/4/2/1 (1881), 6/8.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid. D/N/tau.mst/6/8.

and later the forecourt was cut back for road widening. The burial ground behind the chapel has been disused since the mid 19th century.⁵⁴²

New Meeting, Tancred Street

The Revd Thomas Amory, a Taunton-educated Presbyterian minister seceded from Paul's Meeting in 1732 taking members of the congregation who accepted his Arian beliefs and built the New Meeting in Tancred Street. He ministered there until c. 1752 but in 1759 he returned to evangelical doctrine and moved to London.⁵⁴³ Joshua Toulmin described the meeting as 'not yet a harmonious and respectable society'.⁵⁴⁴ Despite generous legacies and the rents of three adjoining houses the meeting declined and the chapel deteriorated.⁵⁴⁵ In 1815 the congregation and its endowments transferred to Mary Street although their minister, the Revd John Ludd Fenner, later returned to the Congregational church.⁵⁴⁶

The meeting house west of Tancred Street stood behind an area planted with lime trees. It was demolished c. 1815 but the burial yard and vestry were retained until sold in 1854. The site was lost to road widening in the later 20th century.⁵⁴⁷

Silver Street Baptist church

Baptists who did not accept Unitarianism formed a church at Wellington and met in Taunton houses. In 1814 they rented a room in 54 East Street, held three Sunday services and were permitted to form their own church. They built a chapel on a former timberyard in Silver Street, which opened in September 1815 although not completed until 1820. A house and burial ground were provided. In 1817 the Western Baptist Association met in Taunton for the

⁵⁴² Ibid. D/N/tau.mst/4/2/1 (1880), 5/2/26; D/B/ta/24/1/15/568, 24/1/117/4887.

⁵⁴³ Ibid. D/N/tau.pm/6/10 [12]; *ODNB*, s.v. Thos Amory; accessed 12 Apr. 2018.

⁵⁴⁴ SHC, A/CPT/15/5, p. 60.

⁵⁴⁵ TNA, PROB 11/1080/280; SHC, D/N/tau.mst/1/3/5—7, 2/2/1; D/N/tau.pm/6/10 [23].

⁵⁴⁶ SHC, A/DIF/9; D/N/ta.pm/4/2/2; D/N/tau.mst/5/2/26.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid. A/DIF/9, 44; D/N/tau.pm/6/10 [23]; D/N/tau.mst/2/2/1—3; DD/CH/22.

first time since 1730.⁵⁴⁸ Before 1824 three galleries and a schoolroom were built.⁵⁴⁹ The square chapel had an entrance front built by William Lewarn with a tall round-headed window flanked by two doors topped by triangular pediments. A front court had walls and railings divided by stone pillars and a pair of double entrance gates.⁵⁵⁰

In 1847 the chapel became an open communion church but c. 40 strict Baptists left and started services in the c. 1840 Temperance Hall. On Census Sunday 1851 there were 45 at morning service and 55 in the evening. They occupied the Octagon between 1852 and 1859 but ceased to exist c. 1861, with several returning to Silver Street.⁵⁵¹

Membership at Silver Street in 1849 was over 150, three quarters female, and on Census Sunday 1851 there were 210 people and 120 Sunday schoolchildren in the morning and 280 and 30 children in the evening.⁵⁵² The minister lived in the adjoining house and later in Billetfield but a new manse was acquired in 1955 when the church had 239 members and 50 people attended midweek services.⁵⁵³ In 1984 morning communion was held on alternate Sundays and baptisms at the evening service.⁵⁵⁴ In 2012 the church was altered internally including removal of the raised pulpit and replacement of pews by chairs, except in the galleries, which were provided with a safety barrier.⁵⁵⁵ In the 2020s the church maintained a Sunday morning service, an afternoon service for Chinese members, monthly communion and messy church and regular prayer and social meetings.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁴⁸ Jackman, *Baptists*, 41—2; SHC, D/N/tau.b/4/2/1; DD/SP/186; *Western Baptist Association Letters*, 1815, 1817.

⁵⁴⁹ SHC, DD/X/WBB/585.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid. D/N/tau.mst/6/8; VCH Office, Taunton, Lillford, 'Biog. Dict. Som. Architects and Surveyors', 332.

⁵⁵¹ *Taunton Courier*, 15 Sep. 1847, 10 May 1854, 31 Mar. 1858: BNA accessed 24 July 2019; TNA, HO 129/315/4/1/5; Harrison, Harrad & Co *Dir. Som.* (1859); *PO Dir. Som.* (1861); SHC, DD/X/WBB/585.

⁵⁵² SHC, D/N/tau.b/4/2/1; TNA, HO 129/315/3/4/12.

⁵⁵³ TNA, IR 58/82651 (2016); SHC, D/N/tau.b/4/2/1, 4/2/6, pp. 618, 624.

⁵⁵⁴ SHC, A/DBL/6/27

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid. DD/FIV/5/172; D/N/tau.b/2/3/1.

⁵⁵⁶ tauntonbaptist.org: accessed 3 Apr. 2024.

The chapel dates from 1815 but the front was rebuilt in 1870 and altered in the late 1980s when an extension was added on the north partly on the site of the Davies Hall.⁵⁵⁷

Davies Public Hall

The large hall for 600 north of Silver Street Baptist Church was built c. 1860, named after Baptist minister Henry Davies. Licensed for worship it was used by the United Free Mission, the Plymouth Brethren, and the Gospel Union who held three Sunday services until c. 1894. Thereafter it housed a Sunday school before being demolished in the later 20th century.⁵⁵⁸

Albemarle Calvinistic Baptist church

Another secession at Silver Street in 1874 led a group of 13 Calvinistic Baptists to meet at the Parade Assembly Rooms. In 1875 in Albemarle Road off Station Road they built a chapel, which opened in April 1876.⁵⁵⁹ The Revd Levi Palmer, established day and Sunday schools. He acquired the former St James's chapel of ease in Rowbarton in 1884 as a mission room renamed Albemarle Hall. It was shared with the Taunton Free Mission who had three weekday services, the Albemarle Christian band and the Albemarle Temperance Society before being give up to the Methodists.⁵⁶⁰

The Albemarle chapel had two Sunday and one weekday service until 1914 or later.⁵⁶¹ It closed in 1979, the pipe organ, ornamental ironwork and furniture were removed. It reopened in 1983 as a community centre and later hosted evangelical services.⁵⁶² The three-bay street front is topped by a pediment enclosing the datestone. The rendered wall is broken

⁵⁵⁷ Orbach, *S. and W. Som.*, 61; SHC, DD/X/SML/7, p. 19.

⁵⁵⁸ SHC, A/BID/1; DD/SP/186 (1860); D/B/ta/24/1/28/1834; *Taunton Courier*, 26 Apr. 1882, 16 May 1883, 4 Nov. 1891; BNA accessed 24 July 2019; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1889—94).

⁵⁵⁹ Jackman, *Baptists*, 42; *Western Gazette*, 7 Apr. 1876; BNA accessed 22 March 2018.

⁵⁶⁰ SHC, D/N/tmc/2/1/1 (1—3); *Taunton Courier*, 3 Sep. 1884, 25 Nov. 1885, 12 Jan., 5 Oct. 1887; BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

⁵⁶¹ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 40; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1914).

⁵⁶² SHC, DD/BR/bp/3/3/18; DD/FIV/5/174; alllifefskills.org: accessed 11 March 2020.

by string courses and bordered by prominent quoin stones. The boundary wall and gates have been removed.

Halcon Baptist church

Silver Street and Albemarle congregations built a church on the Halcon estate in 1939 and supported it until 1949. It was used as a clinic and provisional first aid centre during the war.⁵⁶³ From 1951 the congregation raised funds for Sunday school accommodation and a minister, having only an unpaid lay pastor.⁵⁶⁴ The plain brick chapel in Valley Road had Sunday morning and evening services, Sunday school and weekday activities in the 2020s.⁵⁶⁵

Religious Society of Friends

Quaker missionaries were possibly active in the 1650s and were meeting in Taunton by 1662 when several men were arrested for refusing swear the oath of allegiance.⁵⁶⁶ Taunton Friends met at Ilchester but John Alloway built a meeting room in 1669. They acquired a burial ground at Halcon in West Monkton.⁵⁶⁷ After the 1685 rebellion meetings were not held and some members left for Pennsylvania.⁵⁶⁸

Robert Button built a meeting house on what is now Bath. He gave it to the Friends in 1693 and it was licensed for worship.⁵⁶⁹ In 1696 there were meetings for worship on alternate Sundays and during the week. In 1709 the Taunton quarterly meeting drew up behavioural guidance.⁵⁷⁰ Joseph Gifford (d. 1801) asked for a brick grave in the burying ground and gave money to maintain it and the meeting house, the men's and women's meetings and the poor

⁵⁶³ Jackman, *Baptists*, 42; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/104/2747; D/N/tau.b/4/2/6, pp.165—6, 190.

⁵⁶⁴ SHC, PAM 240.

⁵⁶⁵ halconbaptist.org.uk: accessed 4 Apr. 2024.

⁵⁶⁶ SHC, DD/SFR.w/68, p. 2; *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1657—8, 21; 1658—9, 146; J. Besse, *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People called Quakers* (1753, 2004 facsimile), 590—1.

⁵⁶⁷ SHC, DD/PM/7/10—11; S.C. Morland, *Somerset Quarterly Meetings*, 6—7, 137; Besse, *Sufferings of Quakers*, 606; D. M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (1999), II, 548.

⁵⁶⁸ Morland, *Som. Quarterly Meetings*, 14, 168.

⁵⁶⁹ TNA, PROB 11/416/278; SHC, DD/SFR.w/28, 38, 116; Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses*, II, 548.

⁵⁷⁰ Morland, *Som. Quarterly Meetings*, 71, 229; SHC, DD/SFR.m/51.

of many denominations. The burial ground was disused and sold in 1865. It was destroyed for road widening in the 1920s when a brick vault, probably Gifford's, was discovered. The bodies were reburied in a cemetery.⁵⁷¹

By 1796 the meeting house with galleries and a women's room was dilapidated. In 1815 Samuel Parsons rebuilt it in plain brick to seat 440. It had hipped roofs, a pillared veranda, three entrance doors and five semi-circular headed windows above. A garden was used for burials until the mid 19th century. The caretaker's cottage was rebuilt in 1831.⁵⁷² On Census Sunday 1851 20 children attended a scholars' meeting in the morning and ten in the afternoon. The building was provided free for lectures by anti-slavery and peace societies and was licensed for marriages in 1854 although they had been held since at least 1840.⁵⁷³ Sunday morning and Wednesday evening meetings were held until the 1900s but by 1914 were poorly attended.⁵⁷⁴ In 1947 the meeting room was let, worship meetings were held in the women's room under the gallery and demolition for car parking was narrowly averted.⁵⁷⁵ By 1967 Sunday meetings services were held alternately morning and afternoon and attendance increased. The building was altered in the 1970s including removal of the veranda. The Quaker tapestry was begun by members of the Taunton meeting.⁵⁷⁶ Controversially the north forecourt was removed and the building as extended and remodelled in 2014—15. There were morning and evening meetings on Sundays in 2019, a Thursday lunchtime meeting and a monthly children's meeting.⁵⁷⁷ Covid 19 reduced average attendance to 18 in 2021 but there was a resident warden and rooms could be hired.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷¹ TNA, PROB 11/1363/36; SHC, DD/SFR.w/79, 68, p. 10.

⁵⁷² Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses*, II, 548; SHC, DD/SFR.w/28, 32, 37, 79, 116; DD/S/AM/1, p. 337.

⁵⁷³ TNA, HO 129/315/3/4/14; SHC, DD/SFR.w/38, 91—2.

⁵⁷⁴ SHC, DD/SFR/44; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1902—3), 111; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1914).

⁵⁷⁵ SHC, DD/SFR.w/79, 116.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid. DD/X/ROW/1; DD/SFR.w/79, 116, 119.

⁵⁷⁷ www.quaker.org.uk/meetings/taunton: accessed 14 Aug. 2019.

⁵⁷⁸ inf. from meeting.

Wesleyan Methodists

John Wesley visited Taunton regularly but his preaching aroused mob violence and in September 1743 the Riot Act was read.⁵⁷⁹ In 1748 three houses were licenced for Methodists, two of which had formerly hosted Presbyterians, and more were licenced later.⁵⁸⁰ In 1775 Wesley was invited to preach in Mary Street chapel. There were sufficient supporters to build a preaching house and for Taunton to head the new Somerset Circuit in 1780.⁵⁸¹

Octagon

The Octagon, Middle Street was designed as a preaching house, not a place of worship, by James Perrett, a London builder who settled in Taunton, for John Wesley who opened it on 6 March 1776. It was licensed in July and he continued to visit and preach until 1789.⁵⁸² A local minister was appointed in 1777.⁵⁸³ By 1796 galleries were needed and people came from the county and beyond.⁵⁸⁴ A manse nearby was acquired before 1807. The society had 146 members by 1812 when they moved to the Temple.⁵⁸⁵ In 1827 the Wesleyans took back the Octagon for a Sunday school and evening service before selling it in 1832 to help clear the Temple debt.⁵⁸⁶ After use by other denominations the Octagon became an occupation centre c. 1964 and after 1967 a nightclub.⁵⁸⁷ It was restored in 1990 as a free standing building in a new residential development. The open interior has a gallery around five sides supported on wooden columns.

New Connexion

⁵⁷⁹ SHC, D/N/tmc/2/5/1, 7a/23, pp. 1—3.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid. Q/RRw/1; D/N/tmc/7a/23, p. 23; D/N/tmc/7a/23, p. 4—5; Q/SR/342/3/19.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid. D/N/tmc/4/3/15b (1771, 1780), 7a/23, p. 7.

⁵⁸² Ibid. D/N/tmc/2/5/1, D/N/tmc/7a/23, loose cutting; Q/SR/348/4/22.

⁵⁸³ Ibid. D/N/tmc/7/2/1.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid. D/N/tmc/7a/23, p. 10—12; T/PH/pro, 67g (80).

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid. D/N/tmc/4/3/15b.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid. D/N/tmc/3/2/1, 7a/23, pp. 16—17.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid. D/B/ta/24/1/120/5173, 24/1/201/10333; DD/HWN/11.

James Lackington built a chapel with free seats in Upper High Street c. 1806, named the Temple after his London bookshop. His first tenants in July 1809 were the Kilhamites or Methodist New Connexion, a Wesleyan secession more usually associated with the industrial cities of Yorkshire.⁵⁸⁸ Lackington exchanged land in 1809 to enlarge the burial ground.⁵⁸⁹ In 1811 he fell out with the preachers and reportedly locked them out. The New Connexion wished to buy the Temple but Lackington sold it to the Wesleyans and there was no further record of the former congregation.⁵⁹⁰

Temple Methodist church

The Wesleyans held three Sunday services and quarterly communion, later increased to two-monthly for most of the 19th century.⁵⁹¹ In 1851 only 100 of the 850 seats were free, 370 adults attended morning service, 85 in the afternoon and 450 in the evening.⁵⁹² The manse was at 15 The Crescent from 1849 to 1938.⁵⁹³ In the 1850s two ministers and c. 15 lay preachers served both Temple and Victoria congregations.⁵⁹⁴

In 1943 the church lost its railings, gate and pillars and pew rents were abolished in 1949.⁵⁹⁵ During alterations in 2003 all services were held in Queens College chapel.⁵⁹⁶ In 2003—4 an average of 150 attended morning service and 15—20 adults came in the evening. There was a Wednesday lunchtime service, monthly services at Calway House residential home and Easter services in Vivary Park.⁵⁹⁷ In 2004 the Taunton and Bridgwater circuits were amalgamated as Taunton Deane and South Sedgemoor which held its first ordination

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid. D/N/tsmc/7/2/2; 7a/23. Lackington's inscriptions including that concerning free seats were destroyed in the 1840s.

⁵⁸⁹ SHC, DD/X/KIT/1.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid. D/N/tsmc/7/2/2; 7a/23.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid. D/N/tsmc/3/2/1; D/N/tmc/3/2/1, 6.

⁵⁹² TNA, HO 129/315/3/4/10.

⁵⁹³ SHC, D/N/tmc/2/2/1, 4/2/9 (1850); A/AFU/14/11.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid. D/N/tsmc/3/2/1.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid. D/N/tmc/7/2/1.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid. D/N/tmc/2/3/31, 7a/11/11.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid. D/N/tmc/3/4/7, 7a/25.

service in the Temple in 2005.⁵⁹⁸ In the 2020s the Temple held one or two Sunday morning services, fortnightly communion, Wednesday services and many prayer and social meetings.

The Temple was five bays deep with three galleries, spacious vaults and burial ground, closed in 1854.⁵⁹⁹ The front was rebuilt in 1846 with crocketed gable and twin pinnacles, flanked by stair turrets with their own entrances. On the east set back from the road a four-bay Sunday school was erected. The site was enclosed by iron railings.⁶⁰⁰ In 1867—9 the Temple was rebuilt, apart from the frontage, by Samuel Shewbrooks to accommodate 1,100 people by extending over the burial ground, creating problems of light and access. A spire was added to the east turret, since demolished. The 1843 pulpit was purchased from St Mary's and a three-manual hydraulic organ was installed in 1878.⁶⁰¹ In 1877 the choir area was extended west to the boundary and in 1887 received a new floor incorporating the Royal arms.⁶⁰² The interior retains its galleries and iron columns with naturalistic foliage capitals.

Victoria Methodist church

In 1834 Wesleyans held services in String Lane, now Leycroft Road. The new congregation with 20 members moved to Victoria chapel, Victoria Street opened on 18 September 1840.⁶⁰³

A gallery was added in 1842 and the forecourt and burial ground, closed in 1858, were gravelled and planted in 1844.⁶⁰⁴ In 1851 there were 178 seats, 102 free, and the total attendance at two services was 123 adults and 110 Sunday schoolchildren.⁶⁰⁵ In 1859—63 the church was virtually rebuilt and a new two-storeyed Sunday school was added over the closed burial ground.⁶⁰⁶ In 1909 the west gallery was enlarged and north and south galleries

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid. D/N/tmc/7a/11/11.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid. T/PH/pro, 67g (80); D/N/tmc/2/3/5, 3/3/9.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid. A/DIF/44; D/N/tmc/2/5/1; Morris & Co. *Dir. Som.* (1872).

⁶⁰¹ SHC, D/N/tmc/2/3/2—3, 4/2/27, pp. 38—57, 107, 168; A/DIF/106/1; Morris & Co. *Dir. Som.* (1872).

⁶⁰² SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/11/373; *Taunton of Today* (1896), 42.

⁶⁰³ SHC, D/N/tmc/2/3/1, 4/3/18; A/DIF/79/1.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid. D/N/tmc/1/3/1, 3/3/9.

⁶⁰⁵ TNA, HO 129/315/3/4/13.

⁶⁰⁶ SHC, D/N/tmc/4/2/27.

were added.⁶⁰⁷ By 1956 there were 95 members far fewer than the Temple or Rowbarton although two Sunday services were still held in 1972. The church closed c. 1979 and was demolished.⁶⁰⁸

The chapel façade, terminated by buttressed turrets, had a central west porch only a few feet from the pavement flanked by pairs of lancets and surmounted by a triple lancet window.⁶⁰⁹

Rowbarton Methodist church

In 1839 a house was licensed for Wesleyan worship at Rowbarton.⁶¹⁰ From 1885 services were held in the former Anglican chapel, Kingston Road.⁶¹¹ By 1892 there were congregations of up to 100 so a site was bought on the corner of Greenway Road. A chapel for 280 designed by Alexander Lauder opened on 26 May 1893.⁶¹² There were Sunday morning and evening services and one weekday service by 1896.⁶¹³ A railed communion area was installed in 1935, deaconesses were appointed from the 1930s to 1957 and in 1939 a manse was bought in Holway Road, replaced in 1963 by one in Whitmore Road.⁶¹⁴ American soldiers used the church during the war bringing their own minister.⁶¹⁵

In the 1960s the church had a choir of 24 and a young people's bible class.⁶¹⁶ The 1865 Sunday school with hall was partly rebuilt in 1985 due to road widening.⁶¹⁷ From c. 1967 to 1988 monthly evening services were held in the Anglican church of St Peter,

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid. D/B/ta/24/1/40/503.

⁶⁰⁸ SHC, D/N/tmc/3/2/7, 9, 3/4/5.

⁶⁰⁹ Devon and Somerset Stores, *Views of Taunton* (Taunton, c. 1903), unpag.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid. D/N/tmc/7/2/3.

⁶¹¹ Ibid. D/N/tmc/2/1/1—4; 7/2/1a p. 2.

⁶¹² Ibid. D/N/tmc/2/3/26, 7/2/1a, p. 2; D/B/ta/24/1/40/500.

⁶¹³ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 43; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1914).

⁶¹⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/93/2055; D/N/tmc/2/2/2, 4/2/36, 4/3/11.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid. D/N/tmc/7/2/1a, p. 9.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid. D/N/tmc/4/2/36, 5/5/1.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid. D/N/tmc/6/2/2, 7/2/3, 4/2/40, p. 38, 162—3.

Lyngford.⁶¹⁸ Girls and boys brigades, guides and brownies and a junior church were active in the 1990s. In 2003—4 only 50 adults and seven children attended morning service and eight adults the evening service.⁶¹⁹ In the 2020s the church had one Sunday morning service and its own minister.

The Gothic brick building with stone dressings is buttressed and has patterned stained glass windows and memorial stones of subscribers.⁶²⁰ Due to road widening a window replaced the door and an entrance was made at the side. Before 1990 a new pulpit, communion furniture and seats for 165 were provided.⁶²¹

Lisieux Way Methodist church

Outreach by nonconformists to the Holway and Blackbrook estates included a monthly Methodist service at Holway community centre in 1988—9. The Cross Fellowship, a secession from the Church of the Nazarene at Bathpool, West Monkton, met briefly in Blackbrook school and was succeeded by the Methodists whose congregation averaged 45 people c. 1991. In 1995 Lisieux Way Methodist church opened with a Sunday morning service. A manse was bought in 1996 and by 1997 an evening service had been added. In 2003—4 average attendance was 30 in the morning and six in the evening.⁶²² The church remained open in 2024 with a morning Sunday service and was served from Rowbarton.

Bible Christians

The Bible Christians reputedly arrived in 1823. The Kings Brompton and Taunton Mission circuit, established in 1834 possibly had 35 Taunton members, reputedly using the Octagon

⁶¹⁸ Ibid. DD/X/ROW/1; D/N/tmc/3/2/7, 3/4/5.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid. D/N/tmc/2/3/29, 4/2/40, p. 237, 7a/25.

⁶²⁰ Ibid. D/N/tmc/7a/2/3.

⁶²¹ Ibid. D/N/tmc/2/3/29, 34, 4/2/40, p. 233.

⁶²² Ibid. D/N/tmc/3/4/5, 7—8, 7a/25.

until c. 1840.⁶²³ In 1843 they bought a house south of Canon Street, which they converted and licensed. Named Ebenezer, it had 128 seats, a third of which were free, a manse, schoolroom and burying ground, used until 1853. On Census Sunday 1851 there were 130 adult attendances over three services and up to 70 Sunday schoolchildren.⁶²⁴ The largely illiterate congregation from the poorer areas needed the words of hymns read out to them in 1863.⁶²⁵

The chapel was formally licensed in 1855 and for marriages in 1880.⁶²⁶ In 1864 it was rebuilt in brick with Ham stone dressings by Thomas Penny behind the old chapel. It had two entrance doors and a central arched window under a pedimented gable.⁶²⁷ The old site was used as a yard to the manse and dwellings let to provide an income.⁶²⁸ Later the chapel façade was remodelled with one central door and small high windows presumably to light a gallery.⁶²⁹

In 1864 there were two Sunday and three weekday services and two ministers.⁶³⁰ A new manse was acquired in Staplegrove Road in 1896 and the following year a vestry and schoolroom for 250 were built on the site of the chapel's cottages. Financial difficulties meant reduced salaries for ministers and in the 1910s and 1920s furniture was sold to pay debts. The creation of the United Methodist Church in 1907 brought no change at Ebenezer whose congregation called themselves Bible Christians and celebrated the movement's centenary in 1915.⁶³¹ Union of all English Methodist churches in 1932 made Ebenezer's position insecure although they engaged in outreach at Holway. In 1934 the manse was sold,

⁶²³ Ibid. D/N/tmc/7/2/1; 7/4/1, p. 9.

⁶²⁴ Ibid. DD/X/HYA/6 (1845); TNA, HO 129/315/4/1/3.

⁶²⁵ SHC, D/N/tmc/7/4/1, p. 10.

⁶²⁶ Ibid. D/N/tmc/3/2/8.

⁶²⁷ *Taunton Courier*, 16 Apr. 1864; *Tiverton Gazette*, 27 Sep. 1864; BNA accessed 24 July 2019; SHC, D/N/mca/4/3/1; A/DIF/116, neg. 1738.

⁶²⁸ SHC, DD/X/HYA/5.

⁶²⁹ Devon and Somerset Stores, *Views of Taunton* (Taunton, c. 1903), unpag.

⁶³⁰ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 57; TNA, RG 10/2370, 2374.

⁶³¹ SHC, D/N/tmc/4/2/29; 7/4/1, pp. 10–12.

in 1935 the chapel closed and was sold to extend the adjoining fire station. Ebenezer finally cleared its debts.⁶³²

Primitive Methodists

They had a minister and met at an unknown location between 1861 and 1875.⁶³³

Trinitarian and Particular Baptists

The Revd George Baring like most of his siblings, children of the banker Sir Francis, their spouses and friends seceded from the Church of England after 1810 and founded a new sect described as the Trinitarian and Particular Baptists, popularly known as Baringites. George, formerly curate of Durston, with other dissident clergy established a meeting at 54 East Reach in Taunton before renting the Octagon in 1816. Among their beliefs were adult baptism by total immersion and extreme antinomianism, the assertion that the elect cannot sin. George persuaded James Mason, a former Baptist, to preach in Taunton while he founded another church in Exeter. When George was sent abroad, Mason moved to Exeter and from c. 1822 Taunton had no minister although baptisms continued until 1826 when the Octagon was returned to the Wesleyans.⁶³⁴

Plymouth Brethren

Open or Christian Brethren In 1840 a Plymouth Brethren congregation was established at the Octagon. In 1843 Colonel Wellesley, nephew of the duke of Wellington and a convert, preached. Following the 1848 split in the Brethren the Octagon remained Open.⁶³⁵ In 1851 30

⁶³² Ibid. D/N/tmc/3/4/1; 7/4/1, p. 13.

⁶³³ *PO Dir. Som.* (1861—6); TNA, RG 9/1617; *Kelly's Co. Topog. Som.* (c. 1875).

⁶³⁴ G. Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals* (Oxford, 2000), 107—49; TNA, RG 4/1566; *Taunton Courier*, 27 Nov. 1817; BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

⁶³⁵ *Western Times*, 9 Jan. 1841; *North Devon Journal* 21 Dec. 1843; BNA accessed 17 July 2019; *Prove all things* (1850); brethrenarchive.org; accessed 16 July 2019.

brethren attended evening service at the Octagon.⁶³⁶ The following year the annual Brethren conference was held in Taunton.⁶³⁷ In the 1850s they moved to Westgate Street where a group of houses was converted into a place of worship c. 1854.⁶³⁸ Before 1861 they returned to the Octagon holding two Sunday services and three weekday meetings.⁶³⁹ In 1892 draper Robert Hatcher took over the leadership and the Hatcher family remained prominent members of the Octagon into the early 20th century.⁶⁴⁰

In 1964 the new Octagon chapel opened behind 114—17 East Reach, which were demolished. It was designed by architects Steel, Coleman and Davis in yellow brick.⁶⁴¹ Two Sunday services were held until it closed in 2012 and became an auction room. In 2024 conversion to a mosque was proposed.⁶⁴²

Wellsprings The Open Brethren Evangelical Hall or Wellsprings Octagon in Quantock Road was built c. 1955.⁶⁴³ In the 1960s there were morning and evening Sunday services. In 1968 the hall was extended.⁶⁴⁴ It suffered a bad fire in 1983, was restored and extended again in 2019. Like many brethren halls it became an independent evangelical community church with services every Sunday, monthly communion, social events and a community café in 2019.⁶⁴⁵

⁶³⁶ SHC, D/N/mst/6/8; TNA, HO 129/315/4/1/4.

⁶³⁷ *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 24 July 1852; BNA accessed 17 July 2019.

⁶³⁸ Harrison, Harrad & Co *Dir. Som.* (1859); *Taunton Courier*, 13 July 1864; BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

⁶³⁹ *PO Dir. Som.* (1861); *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 57.

⁶⁴⁰ SHC, A/BVO/1—2.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.* D/B/ta/24/1/149/9096; Orbach, *S. and W. Som.*, 60.

⁶⁴² SHC, DD/X/ROW/1; A/BVO/2.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.* A/BVO/2; DB/ta/24/1/124/5910; *Taunton Courier*, 15 Oct. 1960; BNA accessed 24 July 2019; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1972—3).

⁶⁴⁴ SHC, DD/X/ROW/1; D/B/ta/3/22/10, p. 12.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.* D/P/tau.a/9/3/10; A/DQO/404/9/2—3, 69, 72; wellspringscommunitychurch.org.uk: accessed 16 July 2019.

Exclusive Brethren A Gospel Hall opened in 1871 in East Reach but by 1883 the brethren met twice on Sunday at Davies Hall, Silver Street.⁶⁴⁶ By 1885 they had moved to the Mountway Room, Mary Street, and in 1902 held two Sunday and two weekday meetings.⁶⁴⁷ Between the 1930s and 1960s they met in Mill Lane in Bishops Hull parish before moving to new premises in Corkscrew Lane run by the Taunton Vale Gospel Hall Trust. A proposed Gospel Hall on Killams Lane in 2017 was not built.⁶⁴⁸

An iron Gospel Hall at Shoreditch was run by two blacksmiths between 1909 and 1940 but closed and was removed to Minehead in 1949.⁶⁴⁹

Town Mission

The mission was a Christian charity begun in 1840 to help people with domestic and religious troubles and defendants in the magistrates' court.⁶⁵⁰ Up to three town missionaries, as they were known, were appointed and in 1896 there was a separate female mission.⁶⁵¹ In 1892 the British Workman coffee tavern, High Street, and the adjoining Temperance Hall were given to the mission but sold in 1927.⁶⁵² The best-known missionary was Charles Minett, a Baptist probation officer, who served from 1885 to 1933 helping the poor and defendants at court. He held services twice weekly in the factories attended by up to 300, on the Parade, in hospital wards and in lodging houses attended by c. 40 people, aiming to carry the gospel to people otherwise ignored. In 1931 he held 145 services and made 2,736 home visits. His Church Army successor continued hospital and lodging house services. By the 1960s there was no missionary but the charity supported services at Holway community centre in the 1980s. In

⁶⁴⁶ Jeboult, *Hist. W. Som.*, addenda unpag.; Morris & Co. *Dir. Som.* (1872); *Taunton Courier*, 29 May 1872: BNA accessed 24 July 2019; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883).

⁶⁴⁷ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/19/781; OS map 1:500, Som. LXX.12.22 (1888 edn); *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1902—3), 111.

⁶⁴⁸ Bishops Hull, forthcoming; Char. Com. reg. 1160168.

⁶⁴⁹ SHC, D/U/m/22/1/832; D/H/ta/3/1, 3; TNA, RG 13/2277; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1906—39).

⁶⁵⁰ SHC, A/CRU 2/1, 3/1.

⁶⁵¹ TNA, HO 107/972, 1923; RG 9/1617—18; RG 10/2370—2, 2374—5; *Taunton of Today* (1896), 44.

⁶⁵² TNA, IR 58/823637 (606); SHC, D/DC/tau,d/25/15 (1685); *Taunton Courier*, 25 July 1927: BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

2004 the mission merged with the Open Door charity for the homeless, which received the assets.⁶⁵³

Salvation Army

The Salvation Army apparently ran their Taunton mission from Wellington in 1880 and in the early years suffered violent abuse.⁶⁵⁴ They occupied Salvation Hall, Haydon Road in 1887 but moved into Foundry Hall, Duke Street before 1888.⁶⁵⁵ In 1902 there were four Sunday services beginning with prayers at 7 a.m. and an evening service every weekday.⁶⁵⁶ The officers lived in Albemarle Road.⁶⁵⁷ General Booth preached and conducted a service in the Temple Methodist church in 1904.⁶⁵⁸ Foundry Hall, threatened with demolition as part of the 1930s slum clearances, survived until a Salvation Army hall built in South Street opened in 1956. In the 1960s there were three Sunday services.⁶⁵⁹ After a decline in membership the cause revived from 1978, a second hall was added and in 2024 there were Sunday morning and Thursday evening services and social outreach activities throughout the week.⁶⁶⁰

United Free Mission

Open-air preaching missions with bands were active by the 1870s.⁶⁶¹ The United Free Mission came to Taunton in the 1880s, sometimes described as Salvationists although not connected to the Salvation Army. Their outdoor preaching, led chiefly by bandmaster Alfred King, attracted complaints and violence. They held weekday evening services at Albemarle

⁶⁵³ *Taunton Courier* 29 Apr. 1891: BNA accessed 12 May 2022; SHC, A/CRU/1/1, 2/1, 3/1; DD/C/322.

⁶⁵⁴ Jeboult, *Hist. West Som.*, addenda unpag.; *Taunton Courier*, 16 Nov. 1881: BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

⁶⁵⁵ SHC, D/B/ta/4/3/1 (1887); *Som. Co. Gaz.*, 18 May 1888; *Taunton Courier*, 8 Nov. 1933 (obit. C Minnett): BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

⁶⁵⁶ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1902—3), 113.

⁶⁵⁷ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), A55.

⁶⁵⁸ SHC, D/N/tmc/4/2/27.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.* A/BMG/5/3; D/B/ta/24/1/123/5682; DD/X/ROW/1; *Taunton Courier*, 30 June 1956: BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

⁶⁶⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.a/2/9/7; salvationarmy.org.uk/Taunton: accessed 10 Apr. 2024.

⁶⁶¹ *Taunton Courier*, 1 May 1878 (Review of TSJ): BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

Hall, Foundry Hall, the Davies Hall and the Victoria Rooms on the Parade. Their preachers were known by their Christian names prefaced by the title 'Happy'. In 1885 they united with the Gospel or Baxter's Mission to build Gloucester Street Mission Hall, north of East Reach, in 1890.⁶⁶² Early evangelists included Alfred Butcher and his wife Mary who held regular morning and evening services until 1894 despite financial difficulties. He eventually became a Wesleyan minister.⁶⁶³ The mission had a Sunday school, bible and sewing classes and a male voice choir. The Advent Hall to the north was built for the Sunday and adult schools.⁶⁶⁴ In 1897—9 there was a single Sunday evening service but three in 1906.⁶⁶⁵ The mission declined and in 1911 the site including undeveloped land was offered for sale. The halls remained unsold.⁶⁶⁶ The mission was last recorded in 1923 before the halls were converted into a laundry.⁶⁶⁷

Christadelphians

After conducting earlier missions the Christadelphians had a mission room in Winchester Street by 1922. In 1934 they began sharing the Oddfellows Hall before taking it over as the Christadelphian Hall.⁶⁶⁸ In 2024 the service of breaking of bread was held on Sunday afternoons.

Pentecostal church

⁶⁶² Guy, *Malachi's Monument*, 63; *Taunton Courier*, 16, 23 May, 17 Oct. 1883; 26 Mar., 15 May, 3 Sep., 31 Dec. 1884; 18 Apr. 1888; 26 Apr., 8 Nov. 1933 (obit. C Minnett); BNA accessed 24 July 2019; D/B/ta/4/3/1 (1890).

⁶⁶³ TNA, RG 12/2368; RG 13/1739; RG 14/730; SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/1 (*Taunton Mail* 18 Apr, 27 June 1894).

⁶⁶⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/54/930; *Taunton Courier*, 8 Nov. 1933 (obit. C Minnett), 21 Dec. 1957 (letters); BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

⁶⁶⁵ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1897—1906).

⁶⁶⁶ *Taunton Courier*, 12 July 1911, 15 Oct. 1813; BNA accessed 24 July 2019; SHC, D/P/tau.j/9/3/1 (1911).

⁶⁶⁷ SHC, D/DC/tau.d/25/18. no. 1598; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1923); *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1928), 138.

⁶⁶⁸ *Taunton Courier*, 21 March 1900, 23 Nov. 1932, 3 May 1941; BNA, accessed 18 Jul. 2019; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/53/900, 24/1/88/1920; *Kelly's Dir Taunton* (1957).

A Pentecostal congregation started in 1928—9 when it appointed its first pastor. By 1931 they used the Glad Tidings Hall, a converted workshop at Union Gate off East Reach.⁶⁶⁹ By the 1940s the Pentecostal church had to give up their hall and acquired workshops in Canon Street. They built a new church themselves, supervised by a Methodist builder, which opened in October 1950. Ernest Gigg, minister c. 1946—58, was town missionary and hospital chaplain. The Sunday school was added in 1963.⁶⁷⁰ In 1967 there were Sunday morning and evening services. In 2019 there was one Sunday service, communion once or twice a month and weekday prayer meetings. In 2023 the church united with the Taunton Family Church as the New Creation Church.⁶⁷¹

Spiritualists

The National Spiritualist Church opened in Spiritualist, later Theosophical, Hall, The Mount, in 1931 with morning and afternoon services, lectures and social events but moved out after 1945.⁶⁷² A Universal Church of Truth and Freedom meeting in the Saracen's Head Yard, north-west of High Street in 1957 was possibly the Spiritualist Church, which met there by 1959 until c. 1967 when they used Oddfellows Hall for Sunday evening services. In the early 21st century the Taunton New Spiritualist church met in Staplegrove village hall.⁶⁷³

Christian Scientists

A branch of the Christian Science Society was established before 1941 with a reading room in Bath Place, Sunday services and Sunday school.⁶⁷⁴ In 1964 they moved to 12 Middle

⁶⁶⁹ SHC, A/DQO/404/9/52; DD/X/WBB/837; *Taunton Courier*, 8 July, 4 Sep 1931; BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

⁶⁷⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/113/4117, 24/1/146/8699; A/BMG/5/3; *Taunton Courier*, 23 Nov. 1957, 31 May 1958, 27 Apr. 1963; BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

⁶⁷¹ SHC, DD/X/ROW/1; newcreationtaunton: accessed 10 Apr. 2024.

⁶⁷² *Taunton Courier*, 15 June, 21 Sep., 7 Dec. 1932; 2 Dec. 1944, 2 June 1945; BNA accessed 19 Aug. 2019; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1938), 100; SHC, A/DIF/114/12.

⁶⁷³ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957); SHC, A/BMG/5/3; A/APN/2/6, *Taunton Guide* (1961); SHC, DD/X/ROW/1.

⁶⁷⁴ *Taunton Courier*, 9 Aug 1941, 12 Sep. 1959; BNA, accessed 18 Jul. 2019; SHC, A/BMG/5/3.

Street and Bridge Street where they held a Sunday morning service. They disbanded c. 2004.⁶⁷⁵

Jehovah's Witnesses

A congregation met at Kingdom Hall 22 East Reach by the 1940s and the Annual Assembly of Witnesses was held at the Empire Hall in 1949. In 1959 they converted a large garage in Upper High Street, which they later rebuilt as Taunton Kingdom Hall.⁶⁷⁶ A Sunday morning service and weekday bible study meetings were held in 2024.

Seventh Day Adventists

The Advent Hall was created from former brewery stables in Mary Street in the early 1950s.⁶⁷⁷ In 2024 a Saturday morning service was preceded by a Sabbath school meeting.

Evangelical churches

In 1992 Fountainhead and Bishops Lydeard Christian fellowships created the Thomas Street Christian Fellowship, renamed Riverside church when in 1997 it moved to Marshalsea's off Wellington Road, since demolished. In 2001 the congregation bought the former Hamilton Road telephone exchange, which in 2010 they converted into a church meeting hall and a community facility called The Exchange. In 2024 the church had a Sunday morning service.⁶⁷⁸ Oakwood, part of the Apostolic Church of Great Britain, began in 1993 with Sunday morning services at the former Albemarle Baptist chapel. In 2013 the church moved into the former County Record Office, Obridge Road and in 2024 they held a Sunday

⁶⁷⁵ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/157/9633; A/APN/2/6, *Taunton Guide* (1961); DD/X/ROW/1; Char. Com. reg. 267418; accessed 22 Oct. 2018.

⁶⁷⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/131/6966; *Taunton Courier*, 7 Feb. 1959; BNA accessed 24 July 2019; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1972—3).

⁶⁷⁷ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/18/723; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1951—4), 100; *Taunton Courier*, 15 June 1963; BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

⁶⁷⁸ riversidechurch.co.uk: accessed 10 Apr. 2024.

morning service and home bible groups. The Taunton Vineyard Church was started in 2000 holding a Sunday morning service at Richard Huish College and later at Castle School where they met in 2024. The Taunton Family Church, in the Newfrontiers group, began Sunday morning services in February 2011, moved in 2013 to the former Albemarle chapel and in 2023 united with the Canon Street Pentecostal church.⁶⁷⁹ Living Light Christian Church was founded in Taunton in 2003 but c. 2012 moved into the former Bishops Hull Board School in Gipsy Lane.⁶⁸⁰ Kingdom Faith South West began in 2001 in former offices in The Mount. In 2024 a Sunday morning service was held and weekday prayer meetings.⁶⁸¹

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

The Mormons, active in Taunton from 1854, used a converted outhouse in Princes Street but suffered mob violence. In 1856 many migrated to Utah, USA.⁶⁸² Those who stayed took over the Brethren's Westgate chapel, where they were last recorded in 1864.⁶⁸³ In 1961 missionaries held meetings in Taunton and in 2010 the Taunton Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was built in Deane Gate Avenue by the Taunton Ward under its own Bishop. Regular Sunday communion services were followed by teaching classes in 2024.⁶⁸⁴

OTHER FAITH COMMUNITIES

The first Mayor of the new borough in 1877 was Jewish cabinet maker Myer Jacobs.⁶⁸⁵ The few local Jews were joined in 1939 by refugees who celebrated Passover at St Andrew's. In 1942 25 Jews heard a rabbi preach at Mary Street Unitarian chapel and several continued to

⁶⁷⁹ Char. Com. reg.; Oakwoodchurch.org.uk; Tauntonvineyard.org; Tauntonfamilychurch.org; accessed 10 Apr. 2024.

⁶⁸⁰ Taunton.livinglightchurch.com; accessed 23 Nov. 2015.

⁶⁸¹ kingdomfaithsw.com; accessed 19 Apr. 2017.

⁶⁸² *Taunton Courier*, 7 Feb. 1855; *Exeter Flying Post*, 15 Feb. 1855; BNA accessed 17 July 2019; *SDNQ*, XXVI, 150; New York passenger lists; *The Thornton* 1856: Ancestry, accessed 18 July 2019.

⁶⁸³ *Taunton Courier*, 13 July 1864; BNA accessed 24 July 2019.

⁶⁸⁴ www.haydnwelch.co.uk/lds/taunton-ward; accessed July 2019; local.churchofjesuschristoflatterdaysaints/en/gb/England/Taunton; accessed 10 Apr. 2024.

⁶⁸⁵ SHC, A/CAE/2/12; D/B/ta/2/2/1.

attend services into the later 20th century.⁶⁸⁶ In 2024 a Taunton Jewish social group met regularly.⁶⁸⁷

In addition to the mosque in Tower Lane, originally founded in Taunton in 1993, and planning to move to East Reach in 2024, the Somerset Turkish Community had a mosque and community centre in a 1907 corn warehouse in Yarde Place in the early 21st century.⁶⁸⁸

DRAFT

⁶⁸⁶ TNA, RG 101/305/1; Hebditch, *Som. in the Second World War*, p. 17; SHC, D/N/tau.mst/4/2/4.

⁶⁸⁷ www.jsc.org.uk: accessed 10 Apr. 2024.

⁶⁸⁸ Bishops Hull, forthcoming.