

## Vestry

**See Webbs, *Local Government*, particularly fns for sources**

During its first hundred years, the vestry of St George Hanover Square was considered by Sidney and Beatrice Webb to be 'by far the best-governed parish in the Metropolitan area.'<sup>1</sup>

The vestry of St George Hanover Square was established by the Commissioners for Building Fifty New Churches, who were empowered to set up select vestries for the parishes coming into existence.<sup>2</sup> A list of 'proper persons' to become the vestrymen and parish officers of St George was compiled by two commissioners: the Dean of the Arches, John Bettsworth, and John Ellis, previously an MP and comptroller of the Royal Mint.<sup>3</sup> They were assisted by the treasurer, solicitor and agent of the commission.<sup>4</sup> In future, all parish officers would be nominated annually 'according to the Laws now in Force'.<sup>5</sup>

Lord Carpenter and General William Stewart, who had led previous complaints about delays in finishing the church, were made the first churchwardens.<sup>6</sup> The former was then MP for Westminster and the latter gave the site for the church.<sup>7</sup> The parish officers amounted to

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<sup>1</sup> B. and S. Webb, *English Local Government: the parish and the county* (London, 1906), 241.

<sup>2</sup> 'Introduction', in *The Commissions for Building Fifty New Churches: The Minute Books, 1711-27, A Calendar*, ed. M H Port (London, 1986), pp. ix-xxxiii. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol23/ix-xxxiii> [accessed 7 April 2018].

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/ellis-john-1646-1738>.

<sup>4</sup> 'Minutes of the Commissioners: 1725', in *The Commissions for Building Fifty New Churches: The Minute Books, 1711-27, A Calendar*, ed. M H Port (London, 1986), pp. 119-131. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol23/pp119-131> [accessed 9 April 2018]. 402, 27 Mar. 1725.

<sup>5</sup> *CJ* 24, 250.

<sup>6</sup> 'Minutes of the Commissioners: 1725', in *The Commissions for Building Fifty New Churches: The Minute Books, 1711-27, A Calendar*, ed. M H Port (London, 1986), pp. 119-131. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol23/pp119-131> [accessed 9 April 2018]. 389, 18 Jan. 1724/25; 403, 31 Mar. 1725.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1715-1754/member/carpenter-george-1657-1732>; *VCH Middx. XIII*, 167.

two sidesmen, four overseers of the poor, two constables, four scavengers, one headbrough and three surveyors of highways. Not all the men chosen had their profession listed, but those who did were tradesmen, including a carpenter, distiller, saddler, baker, butcher, farrier, grocer, smith and breeches maker. They did not live in the expensive and fashionable new squares but in places like Swallow Street, Portugal Street, Maddox Street, Oxford Street, Piccadilly and Hyde Park Corner.<sup>8</sup>

Bettesworth and Ellis also presented an initial list of 70 potential vestrymen and each Commissioner present was given the list and asked to choose 50 names to constitute the vestry.<sup>9</sup> At their next meeting the Commissioners present were free to add any further names that were not on the list.<sup>10</sup> Following a postponement of the decision, the Commissioners decided that all members of both houses of Parliament living in the parish would be appointed to the vestry. As they were so numerous and left London during the summer, other residents were needed to continue vestry business while they were absent. These considerations prompted the Commissioners to expand the number of vestrymen to 100, besides the minister and churchwardens.<sup>11</sup> The eventual list of vestrymen included 7 dukes, 14 earls, 2 viscounts, 15 lords, 42 esquires, 7 JPs, 2 generals, 4 colonels, 1 major and

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<sup>8</sup> 'Minutes of the Commissioners: 1725', in *The Commissions for Building Fifty New Churches: The Minute Books, 1711-27, A Calendar*, ed. M H Port (London, 1986), pp. 119-131. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol23/pp119-131> [accessed 9 April 2018]. 403, 31 Mar. 1725.

<sup>9</sup> 'Minutes of the Commissioners: 1725', in *The Commissions for Building Fifty New Churches: The Minute Books, 1711-27, A Calendar*, ed. M H Port (London, 1986), pp. 119-131. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol23/pp119-131> [accessed 9 April 2018]. 403, 31 Mar. 1725.

<sup>10</sup> 'Minutes of the Commissioners: 1725', in *The Commissions for Building Fifty New Churches: The Minute Books, 1711-27, A Calendar*, ed. M H Port (London, 1986), pp. 119-131. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol23/pp119-131> [accessed 9 April 2018]. 404, 3 Apr. 1725.

<sup>11</sup> 'Minutes of the Commissioners: 1725', in *The Commissions for Building Fifty New Churches: The Minute Books, 1711-27, A Calendar*, ed. M H Port (London, 1986), pp. 119-131. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol23/pp119-131> [accessed 9 April 2018]. 408, 17 Apr. 1725.

4 messrs. Of the four men styled Mr, two were parish officers, sidesman Benjamin Timbrell and surveyor of the highway John Heylin.<sup>12</sup> The vestry would be governed by the customs of St Martin in the Fields, the jurisdiction from which it had been carved, a point later raised in a controversy in 1742.<sup>13</sup>

The vestry soon began exploring the legality and limits of its powers, asking counsel for advice on whether the vestry could meet or make decisions without the rector present, the number of vestrymen needed to make a quorum and whether the instrument constituting St Martin's select vestry was in fact valid.<sup>14</sup> The vestry clerk was paid 5 guineas to make a book of reference to the parish book of St Martin's for use as a source of precedent.<sup>15</sup>

The vestry continued to organise practical matters, asking the overseers, sidesmen and Westminster burgesses to divide the parish into three wards, although they recommended the creation of a fourth, Grosvenor Street Ward.<sup>16</sup> This was precipitated by difficulties the overseers reported in collecting the rates, with householders failing to pay either because they were out of town or claimed to be over rated.<sup>17</sup> A pew was given to Samuel Molyneux in exchange for land on which to build a vestry room.<sup>18</sup> Interpersonal and familial relationships were important to the close vestry. When Lord Carpenter suddenly had to go abroad in 1726, his son Col. George Carpenter deputised as churchwarden.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> 'Minutes of the Commissioners: 1725', in *The Commissions for Building Fifty New Churches: The Minute Books, 1711-27, A Calendar*, ed. M H Port (London, 1986), pp. 119-131. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol23/pp119-131> [accessed 9 April 2018]. 414, 31 May 1725.

<sup>13</sup> *CJ* 24, 251.

<sup>14</sup> WCA, St George's Vestry Minutes, C766a, 14 July 1725.

<sup>15</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 25 Feb. 1725/6.

<sup>16</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 15 Jan. 1725/6 and 9 Mar. 1725/6.

<sup>17</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 14 Feb. 1726 audit report, p.314.

<sup>18</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 15 Jan. 1725/6 and 19 Jan. 1725/6.

<sup>19</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 25 Feb. 1725/6.

The appointment of parish officers continued as Thomas Howson was made parish messenger and given a livery coat and £20 a year.<sup>20</sup> Howson was discharged for negligence within a year of his appointment but later restored.<sup>21</sup> April 1726 saw the first annual appointment of churchwardens overseers and sidesmen.<sup>22</sup> Yet another committee was appointed to audit the churchwardens' and overseers' accounts and to scrutinise all of the vestry's public appointments.<sup>23</sup>

St George Hanover Square was a part of the City of Westminster, which entailed financial contributions. In 1727 the Westminster constable demanded over £37 from the vestry, over £30 of it to spend on bridge maintenance and the rest for repair to the Bridewell, hospitals and to support maimed mariners and soldiers.<sup>24</sup> Another responsibility was the land tax, payment of which was negotiated with the seven commissioners for the parish over several years.<sup>25</sup> The ratio of payments had to be negotiated with St Martin's, who paid 11 in proportion with 7 from St George's.<sup>26</sup>

The vestry took a step towards professionalisation in 1728, when the vestry clerk who had previously been paid only expenses, was given an annual salary of £150. His responsibilities were set out and on top of attending the vestry and giving administrative support to its officers, he was expected to attend the county court and court of burgesses, reporting any pertinent developments to the vestry.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 19 Jan. 1725/6.

<sup>21</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 2 Nov. 1726 and 3 Apr. 1727.

<sup>22</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 7 Apr. 1726 and 11 Apr. 1726.

<sup>23</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 18 Jan. 1726/7 and 25 Jan. 1726/7.

<sup>24</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 10 Mar. 1726/7.

<sup>25</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 7 Apr. 1726, 18 Jan. 1726/7, 15 Jan. 1727/8, 10 Mar. 1727/8 and 27 Mar. 1728.

<sup>26</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 9 May 1728.

<sup>27</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 29 Nov. 1728.

The vestry was very conscious of its increasing expenditure and a committee was appointed to consider methods to increase revenues and to cut costs, the latter by reducing the number of parish officers.<sup>28</sup> The committee recommended reducing the number of overseers from eight to four, the surveyors of the highway from four to two, and the scavengers reduced to three. Exclusions upon the rates payable by officers were to be reduced.<sup>29</sup> The vestry asked for the reduced number of overseers to be confirmed by the petty sessions.<sup>30</sup> From 1730 householders refusing to serve as churchwarden or overseer were fined £20, although the fines were abolished in 1733 so that they might be set through the courts.<sup>31</sup>

The vestry was responsible for firefighting and at the same time as collecting donations following fires in Tiverton and Blandford, plans were made for a shed to be built by the watch house, to store the great engine. Thomas Howson, previously messenger for the vestry, claimed he had been taking care of the parish engines for five years without pay and asked for recompense.<sup>32</sup> One element of fire prevention the vestry felt householders should take responsibility for was fire plugs; the audit committee suggested asking householders to repair the plugs on their houses if they had to be moved or damaged when repaving the streets.<sup>33</sup>

A reorganisation of the parish ward structure was necessary by 1733 when Grosvenor Ward incorporated so many new buildings that the rate collectors found it impossible to complete their rounds. Changes included moving the west side of New Bond Street to Conduit Street

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<sup>28</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 3 Jan. 1728/9.

<sup>29</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 14 Jan. 1728/9.

<sup>30</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 7 Apr. 1729.

<sup>31</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 30 Mar. 1730, 14 Apr. 1730 and 27 Apr. 1733.

<sup>32</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 1 Feb. 1732/3.

<sup>33</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 20 Apr. 1734.

Ward and part of Tyburn Lane, May Fair and Hay Hill from Conduit Street Ward to Dover Street Ward.<sup>34</sup> A perambulation of the parish was also organised for the following Ascension Day, to be led by then churchwarden viscount Tyrconnel.<sup>35</sup> The candidates for election as MP for Westminster, Charles Wager and William Clayton, approached the vestry asking for their votes and interest, which were duly granted.<sup>36</sup> As well as finding its feet politically, the vestry continued to introduce cost-cutting measures, such as removing the grave digger's supply of coals and instructing the beadles not to call the coroner for accidental deaths unless given express permission.<sup>37</sup>

Following the joint passing of a watch act with St James's Piccadilly, the neighbouring parishes synchronised their church clocks which no doubt aided the accurate timekeeping of the watch but also seems a symbolic gesture of cooperation.<sup>38</sup>

By 1739 Grosvenor Street ward had grown so populous that it was too unwieldy as an administrative unit and it was divided in two, firstly for collection of the land and window taxes, with the parochial rates soon following. A new ward was created, named after Brook Street, although a single beadle was still appointed for the two wards.<sup>39</sup>

## Poor relief

The vestry minutes of St George Hanover Square show immediate attention to providing for the poor of the parish. In July 1725 Dr John Maubray was made physician to the poor,

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<sup>34</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 26 Mar. 1733.

<sup>35</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 27 Apr. 1733.

<sup>36</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 8 Nov. 1733.

<sup>37</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 20 Apr. 1734.

<sup>38</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 4 Nov. 1735.

<sup>39</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 13 Apr. 1739 and 7 May 1739.

offering his services for free. Arrangements were also made to regulate poor relief. Books detailing any relief provided by the overseers were begun and a committee established to oversee poor relief. The overseers were instructed not to relieve the poor unless they carried a badge proving their status, or were in an emergency situation such as disablement by sickness.<sup>40</sup>

The sidesmen Benjamin Timbrell and Thomas Phillips were asked to make plans and costings to build a workhouse for the parish.<sup>41</sup> Another committee was formed to make enquiries about the workhouses of St. Martin's and St Giles'.<sup>42</sup> Timbrell and Phillips' plans were soon approved and they, as well as other tradesmen, engaged to construct it on a site in Mount Street acquired from bricklayer Henry Elkins.<sup>43</sup> The first poor rate, in part to pay for the workhouse, was set at 12 pence in the pound in January 1726, falling to 8 pence in the pound by the next year.<sup>44</sup> The vestry's first audit report was already concerned with reducing spending on relief. It recommended that inspectors check on the poor and reduce out relief. They would also be paid 2s. 6d. for apprehending vagrants or 'strolling beggars'.<sup>45</sup> The churchwardens were asked to borrow not more than £1000 to complete the workhouse and issue a bond for security.<sup>46</sup> The churchwardens, sidesmen and other members of the vestry formed a committee to put the nearly completed workhouse in habitable order and a room was provided there for the clerk in orders and gravedigger.<sup>47</sup> Another standing committee to regulate the affairs of the workhouse was later established, which set aside

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<sup>40</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 1 July 1725.

<sup>41</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 1 July 1725.

<sup>42</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 8 July 1725.

<sup>43</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 21 July 1725, 23 July 1725, 18 Aug. 1725, 8 Sept. 1725.

<sup>44</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 8 Jan. 1725/6 and 4 May 1727.

<sup>45</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 14 Feb. 1726 audit report, p.314.

<sup>46</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 2 Feb. 1725/6.

<sup>47</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 5 May 1726 and 12 May 1726.

money for Rev Thomas Clark to say prayers and teach the catechism to inmates.<sup>48</sup> It met every Wednesday at the workhouse.<sup>49</sup>

Tenders were invited for a parish apothecary and Dr Maubray thanked for his services and for reducing apothecary bills.<sup>50</sup> He and other local doctors were asked about the character of the apothecaries who applied and one Despaigal was chosen, with a salary of £40 per annum.<sup>51</sup> Maubray had a complaint made against him by apothecary Anthony Kent in 1726, but the vestry considered it 'scandalous and malicious' and vowed to defend the doctor.<sup>52</sup> He eventually joined the vestry and became a member of the workhouse committee; new members of the vestry were often more civically active.<sup>53</sup>

A report from the audit committee set out a regime for the operation of poor relief in the parish in 1727. The churchwardens and overseers were asked to apply to the JPs to summons any defaulters on the poor rate. The Out Ward was to be divided in the ensuing year and two further overseers appointed. Two people were also employed to apprehend beggars, inspect houses which received poor or suspicious persons and investigate any poor person taking up residence in the parish without a settlement certificate.<sup>54</sup>

Conversely, rich residents were expected to contribute to the system. The vestry wrote to 'persons of distinction' in the parish who had not paid the poor rate and if they still didn't comply, the JPs would be contacted.<sup>55</sup> The duchess of Buckingham applied for exemption from the rates for the infant duke, but the vestry demanded the duke pay with goods and

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<sup>48</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 19 Oct. 1726, 2 Nov. 1726 and 10 Nov. 1726.

<sup>49</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 24 Feb. 1726/7.

<sup>50</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 2 Feb. 1725/6.

<sup>51</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 9 Feb. 1725/6 and 16 Feb. 1725/6.

<sup>52</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 23 Jun. 1726.

<sup>53</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 30 Aug. 1727 and 2 Oct. 1727.

<sup>54</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 24 Feb. 1726/7.

<sup>55</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 27 Apr. 1727.

chattels, which they duly distrained.<sup>56</sup> The duchess had a JP sign a warrant of distress to gain exemption from the rates and the vestry agreed to defend the JP against any suits that might be brought.<sup>57</sup> The duchess eventually offered to pay the rates on Buckingham House and other messuages, although she would not pay arrears and the duke would retain the right to dispute the rating when he came of age.<sup>58</sup>

The auditing committee set out stringent rules for the overseers of the poor. They could not borrow money without the approval of the vestry. They were told to diligently inquire about the settlement of poor people and if in doubt to ask a JP. Before executing a removal order they were required to give a copy to the vestry clerk to avoid unwanted returns and register the names of people coming into the parish. They were not to defend or bring law suits without notifying the vestry or go to the quarter sessions without telling a churchwarden and consulting a JP, or send a lunatic to the madhouse or doctor without consulting the vestry and obtaining an order from two JPs. No relief could be supplied outside the workhouse except in emergencies such as sickness and no inmates put out of the workhouse without the consent of the committee. Women pregnant with a bastard were to be taken to a JP and bastard bonds registered with the clerk. No doctor should be consulted unless appointed by the parish.<sup>59</sup>

Recruitment of a schoolmaster and mistress for the workhouse began in the winter of 1727.<sup>60</sup> Peter Francis was appointed the workhouse governor.<sup>61</sup> The vestry reported on the workhouse at the beginning of 1729; for the preceding year, the average monthly running

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<sup>56</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 27 Apr. 1727, 4 May 1727 and 5 Oct. 1727.

<sup>57</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 4 Jan. 1727/8.

<sup>58</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 7 Apr. 1729.

<sup>59</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 1 Feb. 1727/8.

<sup>60</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 4 Dec. 1727.

<sup>61</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 9 Feb. 1727/8.

costs were £60 15s. 5d. and the number of inmates was 160.<sup>62</sup> The workhouse committee reported later in the year that the number of poor was increasing rapidly due to the rising population and ‘unwholesome season’. There were 40 sick people in the workhouse, but the only deaths had been amongst infants and the aged. They put this down to the good work of the apothecary Despaigal, whose salary was increased to £60.<sup>63</sup> Reflecting the rise in numbers of poor residents, the poor rate was increased to 10d. in the pound in 1730.<sup>64</sup> By 1735 the master of the workhouse William Nicholson had, through his diligent work, obtained pay rises to £40 a year.<sup>65</sup>

## Policing

The first mention of a watch was provision of coals for the watch house, presumably inherited from St Martin’s, in 1725.<sup>66</sup> The watch house keeper was paid £12 a year from Christmas 1725, as was the engine keeper.<sup>67</sup> A committee was appointed in 1726 to investigate the laws related to the watch and John Pye asked to petition the House of Commons for a new law regulating the watch.<sup>68</sup> The first mention was made of beadles and a warder in the same year, when they were provided with coats.<sup>69</sup> Two Westminster burgesses and the high constable attended the vestry following a complaint about a negligent beadle, whom they promised to summon to court.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C766a, 14 Jan. 1728/9.

<sup>63</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C766a, 15 May 1729.

<sup>64</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C766a, 12 May 1730.

<sup>65</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C766a, 3 Apr. 1735.

<sup>66</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C766a, 11 Nov. 1725.

<sup>67</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C766a, 29 Dec. 1725.

<sup>68</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C766a, 26 Jan. 1725/6 and 9 Feb. 1725/6.

<sup>69</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C766a, 5 May 1726.

<sup>70</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C766a, 10 Mar. 1726/7.

A committee was formed in 1727 to establish the numbers of beadle and watchmen employed, their hours, pay and to propose future arrangements.<sup>71</sup> Reporting back, the Westminster court of burgesses agreed that the vestry could appoint its own beadle and watchmen and set the watch rate. Collectors were appointed and the money paid to the burgesses' assistant and treasurer, David Audsley. The burgesses' collecting books were to be examined to find out the current level of expenditure.<sup>72</sup> The vestry removed the parish stocks from the workhouse to the watch house in 1727.<sup>73</sup>

The watch committee completed their report which was shown to counsel in preparation to ask Parliament for a local Act.<sup>74</sup> They planned to hire four beadle, one for each ward, to be paid £30 each a year. 32 watchmen were to be hired, with the maximum of 10 in Dover Street ward, falling to 6 in the Out Ward. They would be paid £13 10s. for working nine months of the year and men previously as private watchmen would be employed if their employers recommended them. Watch boxes would be erected and a watch rate set at four pence in the pound.<sup>75</sup> The burgesses' assistant Audsley asked for lists of people in each ward with a house, shop or warehouse who were fit and able to keep watch and ward. The lists were divided between those who would keep watch themselves, those who would find a replacement supplied with a lamp, candle and suitable arms, or pay a fine.<sup>76</sup>

Early in 1729, plans were made to build a new watch house on the site of the old one.<sup>77</sup>

Having supplied an estimate, Benjamin Timbrell was contracted to rebuild the watch house

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<sup>71</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 23 Mar. 1726/7.

<sup>72</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 28 Mar. 1727.

<sup>73</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 4 May 1727.

<sup>74</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 16 Nov. 1727.

<sup>75</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 28 Dec. 1727.

<sup>76</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 15 Jan. 1727/8.

<sup>77</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 25 Feb. 1728/9.

and erect a 'handsome' pair of stocks and whipping post for £130.<sup>78</sup> The watch house was completed in December 1731.<sup>79</sup>

When the Westminster Burgesses attempted to pass a bill through Parliament enabling them to levy a watch rate, the vestry of St George's vehemently opposed a move regarded as 'grievous to the inhabitants'.<sup>80</sup> The bill was soon defeated in collaboration with the vestry of St James's, Piccadilly.<sup>81</sup> However, the vestrymen acknowledged in 1735 that many robberies were being committed in St George and neighbouring parishes and blamed the lack of a proper night watch. Thus a bill was considered by the vestry to establish its own watch and a committee established to liaise once again with St James's, Piccadilly.<sup>82</sup> The idea of the watch bill was communicated to the other Westminster parishes, but only St James's and St John the Evangelist expressed an interest, enough encouragement to prepare a petition for Parliament.<sup>83</sup> St John's balked at the lack of support and consequent expense, but the other two parishes pressed ahead.<sup>84</sup> Using the vestry's extensive connections in Parliament, Lord Tyrconnel presented the bill and the Westminster MPs were asked to attend its hearing and promote it.<sup>85</sup>

The watch act was passed despite opposition from the Westminster Burgesses and other Westminster parishes followed suit the next year.<sup>86</sup> The act was soon put into practice, with severe punishment promised to vagrants and beggars.<sup>87</sup> It had cost £200 to obtain, with St

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<sup>78</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 20 Nov. 1729 and 26 Mar. 1730.

<sup>79</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 25 Mar. 1732.

<sup>80</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 11 Mar. 1733/4; E. Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies: The Night Watch and Police Reform in Metropolitan London, 1720–1830* (Stanford, 1998), 16–17.

<sup>81</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 11 Apr. 1734

<sup>82</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 6 Feb. 1734/5.

<sup>83</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 25 Feb. 1734/5.

<sup>84</sup> E. Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies*, 17.

<sup>85</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 3 Apr. 1735, 7 Apr. 1735 and 29 May 1735.

<sup>86</sup> E. Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies*, 18.

<sup>87</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 29 May 1735.

James' paying half and the rector lending the parish the remainder. The first full meeting in pursuance of the watch act decided that 38 watchmen would be spread across the four wards, each with a watchbox and a beat to patrol every half hour. They were armed with six-foot quarter staves and a clapper to call for assistance. The watchmen were paid £15 a year and as well as their policing duties were told to prevent accidents in any area where the pavement was broken or street unlit and to report fires to the engine keeper. Two supernumerary watchmen were appointed to attend the constables (still appointed by the court of burgesses) and four beadles were also hired. The beadles were to count the watchmen in to the watch house morning and night, apprehend vagrants, investigate the settlement of poor in the parish and collect the watch rate. This meeting was held annually and all arrangements adjusted or reconfirmed.<sup>88</sup> The first rate was set at 4*d.* in the pound.<sup>89</sup>

There were some difficulties with the watch in its first year. The position of the watchboxes was repeatedly changed, often at the instigation of residents.<sup>90</sup> Complaints were made about the watchmen's neglect and the beadles were asked to keep an eye on them overnight. The beadles were also found to be neglectful and rate collectors were to be employed to allow them better focus on their main duties.<sup>91</sup> A committee was then formed to enquire into the behaviour of the beadles and watchmen, liaising with St James's.<sup>92</sup>

Reporting back, the committee found four watchmen to be in dereliction of duty and they were duly replaced, which became a frequent occurrence for reasons such as neglect, drunkenness or sleeping on the job.<sup>93</sup> Inhabitants were asked to report future infractions by

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<sup>88</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 2 Jun. 1735.

<sup>89</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 10 Jun. 1735.

<sup>90</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 4 Nov. 1735.

<sup>91</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 13 Jan. 1735/6.

<sup>92</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 26 Jan. 1735/6.

<sup>93</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, e.g. 24 Dec. 1736.

watchmen or beadles to the churchwardens. The speaker of the House of Commons asked that the beadles keep the streets around Parliament free from obstruction and became a repeat correspondent, complaining that MPs were being bothered by disorderly beggars in 1740.<sup>94</sup> Conditions were not easy for the watchmen; the parish paid to indict the perpetrator of an assault on a watchman, who was convicted.<sup>95</sup>

It was not only the watchmen and criminals who destabilised the system of policing. Several householders were not paying the watch rate, including such eminent locals as the duchess of Rutland and the lords Clinton and Baltimore.<sup>96</sup> The vestry vowed that defaulters on the watch rate would be summoned by the JPs.<sup>97</sup> The duke of Bolton went further and hired a private watch for his house, claiming this exempted him from paying the watch rate, but the vestry disagreed.<sup>98</sup> Collectors of the watch rate were finally hired in 1738 and allowed 8 pence in the pound on the rate collected, whilst the beadles lost £5 of their annual salary as their responsibilities were reduced.<sup>99</sup> Non-payment of the watch rate persisted into the 1740s.<sup>100</sup>

### **Highways and street cleaning**

The vestry and surveyors of the highway initially avoided doing statutorily required work on the roads by paying £400 to the turnpike trustees of Kensington, Chelsea and Fulham.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 2 Feb. 1735/6 and 20 Feb. 1739/40.

<sup>95</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 4 Nov. 1735 and 2 Feb. 1735/6.

<sup>96</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 9 Feb. 1735/6 and 18 Feb. 1735/6.

<sup>97</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 6 Mar. 1735/6.

<sup>98</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 15 Mar. 1736/7.

<sup>99</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 18 May 1738 and 2 Jun. 1738.

<sup>100</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 20 Feb. 1739/40.

<sup>101</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 6 July 1727.

John Wilkins was made parish paviour and asked to pave the area around the church.<sup>102</sup>

Agreement was reached with neighbouring St James' to maintain a passage running from Swallow Street to Kings Street and remove the turnpike there.<sup>103</sup> Another road had previously been fixed by St Paul Covent Garden but was now in St George's, although the vestry had not been repairing it. They were indicted for their neglect and sought legal advice.<sup>104</sup>

Street cleaning was organised in 1728 as rakers were asked to tender; James Whitaker was appointed for the Grosvenor Street and Conduit Street Wards for £250 and Mrs Harding for the Dover Street Ward for £50, contracting with the scavengers.<sup>105</sup>

It became clear in 1729 that the parish was responsible for repairing the highway to Tyburn and the churchwardens and surveyors of St George's agreed to compound with the Marybone turnpike commissioners or trustees.<sup>106</sup> The same trustees intended to petition Parliament to be allowed to increase their fees in 1735 and take over repairs of the half of Tyburn Lane under vestry jurisdiction.<sup>107</sup> Tyburn Lane continued to be a problem for the parish as resident Edward Shepherd built 14 feet of brick wall that encroached on the highway and had to be prosecuted.<sup>108</sup> Indicative of the interests that had to be considered in the area, Mr Gill, agent of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster attended the vestry several times to consult about this and another encroachment on Tyburn Lane.<sup>109</sup> The indictment was eventually found against Shepherd in the court of King's Bench and he had

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<sup>102</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 16 Nov. 1727.

<sup>103</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 1 Feb. 1727/8.

<sup>104</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 16 May 1728 and 27 Jun. 1728.

<sup>105</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 18 Apr. 1728, 22 Apr. 1728, 6 May 1728 and 9 May 1728.

<sup>106</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 15 May 1729.

<sup>107</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C766a, 6 Feb. 1734/5.

<sup>108</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 23 Dec. 1737 and 16 Jan. 1737/8.

<sup>109</sup> WCA, St George's VMs, C767, 30 Mar. 1738, 3 Apr. 1738 and 18 May 1738.

to restore the Lane to include 18 foot wide roadway with 3 foot ditches and footways along the length his wall had encroached on.<sup>110</sup> When the Kensington turnpike trustees submitted a bill to Parliament soon afterwards the vestry negotiated for a clause in the bill requiring the trustees to repair Tyburn Lane with the vestry contributing £100 to the cost.<sup>111</sup> A similar payment of £20 a year was arranged with the Marybone turnpike trustees to maintain Oxford Street.<sup>112</sup>

In 1738 the vestry prepared a bill for the better paving of the streets in the parish which was supported by the parish of St James, as with the recent watch act, and St Martin in the Fields, although other Westminster parishes declined to get involved.<sup>113</sup> Discussions with the other parishes continued and after amending the bill they applied to Parliament.<sup>114</sup> In giving evidence to the commons committee examining the bill, Matthew Pank of St George lamented the ‘most ruinous and dangerous Condition’ of the streets and the negligence of the scavengers which left the parish strewn with rubbish.<sup>115</sup> The draft bill was prepared but St James’s cooled on the idea and it was dropped.<sup>116</sup>

Meanwhile the parish had difficulty maintaining its existing arrangements as several eminent householders including the earls Coventry and Craven were refusing to pay the highway rate. A deputation of vestrymen was sent to explain why the rate was just and reasonable.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C767, 20 Feb. 1738/9, 26 Feb. 1738/9 and 21 Mar. 1738/9.

<sup>111</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C767, 19 Dec. 1739, 11 Jan. 1739/40 and 20 Feb. 1739/40.

<sup>112</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C767, 21 Jan. 1739/40.

<sup>113</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C767, 20 Feb. 1737/8, 3 Mar. 1737/8 and 3 Apr. 1738.

<sup>114</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C767, 26 Jan. 1738/9 and 26 Feb. 1738/9.

<sup>115</sup> *CJ* 23, 289.

<sup>116</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C767, 21 Nov. 1739 and 21 Jan. 1739/40.

<sup>117</sup> WCA, St George’s VMs, C767, 26 Jan. 1738/9.