

Local Government

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Manorial and Borough Government

Only fragmentary court records survive before the late 17th century.¹ However, deeds of the 13th and 14th centuries witnessed by the bailiff and burgesses are a good indication that borough courts existed at these dates.² The courts were kept in the upper chamber of the former guild hall, known by the 17th century as the town hall. The borough's evidences were kept in a chest in the chamber. The public beam was also kept in the chamber, and all cheese and bacon sold in the markets were weighed first in the town hall.³ Part of the town hall was set aside for the accommodation of poor people in the 17th century.⁴

The chief officer was the bailiff of the borough, who was chosen each year at the Michaelmas court leet. A deed of the early 13th century apparently referred to a mayor (*majore villae*),⁵ but subsequent deeds of the late 13th and early 14th century refer to a bailiff.⁶ From at least the late 16th century no-one was to serve as bailiff more than one year at a time.⁷ The lack of extant early records means that there is no evidence about the ancient custom for the selection of the bailiff each year.

The bailiff was responsible for overseeing the courts of the borough. The office was distinct from that of bailiff of the manor, who was appointed by the lord to serve in both Chipping Sodbury and Old Sodbury. Together, the two bailiffs collected the chief rents of the lord within Chipping Sodbury, amounting to £13 6s. 2d in 1625,⁸ and the rents for the standings at the markets and fairs, known as the pitching pence, which the bailiffs divided equally between themselves.⁹ The bailiff of the borough oversaw the distribution of the acres in the Mead Riding, where he held two acres called the Bailiff's Piece for the duration of his term, and he was responsible for the pasturing of the Stub Riding.¹⁰ The bailiff received 6d. for each acre held in the Mead Riding, 12d. per head of cattle pastured in the Stub Riding during the summer, and 2d. for each cow, sheep or horse pastured during the winter.¹¹ From this money the bailiff paid £5 a year to the lord for the rent of the two

¹ GA, D2071/B3–4, D2071/M1.

² TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, 14.

³ GA, D2071/L10; TNA, C 6/228/58.

⁴ GA, D2071/L10.

⁵ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, 14, Appendix A, 14–5.

⁶ GA, D2071/T2/12, 17.

⁷ GA, D2071/B4.

⁸ GA, D2071/L10.

⁹ GA, D2071/M2.

¹⁰ GA, D2071/B3–4.

¹¹ GA, D2071/L10.

ridings, keeping any remainder for himself to defray the cost of entertaining the steward during the local court days, and to pay for an annual breakfast given by the bailiff to leading residents.¹² The annual feasts continued to be celebrated until 1837.¹³ The bailiff was also entitled to receive the lop and shred of one tree from the ridings.¹⁴ In the middle of the 17th century the bailiff was allowed half of the profits of the markets and fairs for himself.¹⁵ The bailiff was required to keep and present his accounts at the end of his term,¹⁶ although an illiterate serge weaver served as bailiff in the year 1672–3.¹⁷ Following the completion of his term, it was usual for the outgoing bailiff to be elected one of the town masters for the ensuing year.¹⁸

The bailiff was expected to provide an annual breakfast for the burgesses and inhabitants of the town, 'for the continuance of neighbourly love, continual amity and friendship.'¹⁹ In 1589 it was complained that 'many disorderd and uncivil persons of all sorts' were disrupting the event, and it was ordered that in future the breakfasts would only be for the burgesses and head tenants.²⁰ The breakfasts, which were kept on St Stephen's Day (26 December), continued to be held in the 1670s.²¹ On the same day the bailiff attended the church preceded by the under-bailiff carrying the mace of the borough.²² During the 18th century the bailiff was allowed two guineas a year towards expenses, increased in 1798 to £10 a year.²³ In the year 1826–7 c.£36 was spent towards the costs of the bailiff's feast, and another £14 10s. was contributed towards a dinner held at Michaelmas each year after the meeting of the court leet from the revenues of the ridings.²⁴ The feasts were discontinued by an order of the bailiff and burgesses in 1837.²⁵ In the late 19th century the bailiff provided entertainment in the form of a meal on the Sunday following his election each year. This also was discontinued by the corporation in 1885, when it ruled that the corporation should meet in the town hall and attend church in the afternoon.²⁶ The contribution by the bailiff and burgesses towards the annual manorial court

¹² GA, D2071/L6.

¹³ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, 31.

¹⁴ GA, D2071/L3.

¹⁵ GA, D2071/M1.

¹⁶ GA, D2071/A3.

¹⁷ GA, D2071/L10.

¹⁸ GA, D2071/L10.

¹⁹ GA, D2071/L3.

²⁰ GA, D2071/B4.

²¹ GA, D2071/L10.

²² GA, D2071/L10.

²³ GA, D2071/B6, 5 Jan. 1798.

²⁴ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, Appendix F, 461.

²⁵ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, Appendix D, 31.

²⁶ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, Appendix D, 40.

dinner was discontinued in the following year, when the corporation ceased to exist.²⁷

Besides the bailiff there were also an indefinite number of burgesses, referred to in a deed of 1308.²⁸ Drawn from amongst the most substantial men of the town and appointed for life by the jury of the court leet, it was from this group that the bailiffs were usually selected.²⁹ Burgesses were also to have priority in the allocation of acres in the Mead Riding and were to have a cow's lease in the Stub Riding.³⁰ By an order of 1764 any burgess who refused to serve as bailiff, not having previously held the office, was to forfeit his privileges as a burgess and pay a fine of £5.³¹ In 1867 a burgess who refused to serve as bailiff was requested to resign as a burgess, but he was not fined. Similarly any burgess who refused to comply with any orders made by a majority of the bailiff and burgesses was to be disqualified as a burgess. By the late 19th century the burgesses were appointed by the lord of the manor, upon the advice of the bailiff and burgesses, up to a total of 12.³² In 1864 there were ten burgesses.

The bailiff appointed an under-bailiff, who was also the constable of the town. A deed of 1315 was witnessed by the bailiff's sergeant (*serviente*), presumably a precursor of the under-bailiff.³³ The under-bailiff carried a mace before the bailiff at all of the courts of the borough, and also in the procession to church on St Stephen's Day.³⁴ The borough possessed two maces c.1895,³⁵ which were in the possession of the Town Trust in 2019.³⁶ One, known as the greater mace, made of silver and measuring 2 feet 5 inches in length, was given to the borough by the inhabitants of the town in 1705 to replace an older mace described as 'lost or conveyed of' c.1685.³⁷ The second mace is of silver parcel-gilt, measures 11½ inches long, and is topped by a conical head bearing the arms of the Beauchamp family. Although this clearly alludes to the family's connection with the lordship of Sodbury in the 15th century,³⁸ it is not thought that the mace dates from this period.³⁹ This was presumably the

²⁷ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, Appendix D, 40.

²⁸ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, Appendix A, 14–5.

²⁹ GA, D2071/L10.

³⁰ GA, D2071/L10.

³¹ GA, D2071/B5, 6.

³² TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, 5.

³³ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, Appendix A, 16.

³⁴ GA, D2071/L10.

³⁵ Llewellyn Jewitt and W.H. St John Hope, *The Corporation Plate and Insignia of Office of the Cities and Towns of England and Wales I* (1895), 250–1.

³⁶ Inf. from Mr. J. Elsworth.

³⁷ GA, D2071/B6, 5 Jan. 1705/6; Jewitt and St John Hope, *Corporation Plate*, 250.

³⁸ See Old Sodbury, Land Ownership.

³⁹ Jewitt and St John Hope, *Corporation Plate*, 251.

'ancient mace' that was returned to the borough's possession in 1723.⁴⁰ A tipstaff was also in the possession of the borough in the early 18th century.⁴¹

The constable was presented in 1664 for not having carried out an order to duck common scolds, when the women were again ordered to be ducked.⁴² A man was presented in 1665 for abusing the bailiff and steward and for questioning the authority of the court, while another man was presented for making a violent rescue from the pound in 1666.⁴³ The constable was presented in 1667 for having failed to prevent a tumult in court in the previous year, and two men were presented in 1668 for drunken violence in the court.⁴⁴ The paucity of records before the 18th century make it impossible to discern whether these incidents represent a crisis of authority, or a level of disorder that was typical in the pre-modern town. Besides regulating misbehaviour, the court leet also took measures against public nuisances. Orders were made to prohibit washing in wells, throwing blood or other filth into the streets, and throwing carcasses and hides into the brook.⁴⁵ There were stocks, a pillory and a cucking stool all in good repair in 1681.⁴⁶ The court leet also appointed two searchers and sealers of leather, two scavengers, two aletasters, and two inspectors of meat in the 17th century,⁴⁷ and into the 18th century.⁴⁸

Deeds of the 15th century refer to tenements and burgages belonging to the community of the borough (*communitatis burgi*), and feoffees are referred to in 1440, when the town also possessed a common seal.⁴⁹ Two men, one of whom was usually the outgoing bailiff of the previous year, were appointed to collect the rents and profits of the lands belonging to the town.⁵⁰ Called town masters, these were apparently well established by 1585.⁵¹ In 1694 it was ordered that the bailiff would convene a public meeting at the election of the new town masters on 5 January each year, who were to enter their accounts into a ledger to be kept in the chest in the town hall.⁵² Two of the four keys of the town's chest were to be held by the two towns masters for that year, a third by one of the previous year's town masters, and the fourth by the bailiff for the time being.

⁴⁰ GA, D2071/B6, 8 Feb. 1722/3.

⁴¹ GA, D2071/B6, 22 Oct. 1706.

⁴² GA, D2071/M1.

⁴³ GA, D2071/M1.

⁴⁴ GA, D2071/M1.

⁴⁵ GA, D2071/M1.

⁴⁶ GA, D2071/M2.

⁴⁷ GA, D2071/M1; D871/M1.

⁴⁸ GA, D247/74, 4.

⁴⁹ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, 14, Appendix A, 17.

⁵⁰ GA, D2071/L10.

⁵¹ GA, D2071/L3.

⁵² GA, D2071/L11.

A controversy arose in the 1670s concerning the election of the bailiff. The lord of the manor, Thomas Stephens, insisted that the custom was for the steward to choose the new bailiff from three men nominated by the jury,⁵³ a custom apparently confirmed by a fragment of court roll purporting to be from 1653.⁵⁴ However, Stephens' claim was denounced as a recent innovation by some of the townsmen, who claimed that the custom had been for the bailiff to be chosen by the jurors without the involvement of the lord or his steward.⁵⁵ They also claimed at this time that the lord of the manor had sought to alter the traditional oath of the bailiff, by having him swear to serve the lord of the manor as well as the king.⁵⁶ The townsmen complained that Stephens sought to encroach upon the privileges of the borough, and to render the bailiffs 'more and more a servant to them.'⁵⁷ In return Stephens derided the town as a 'pretended upstart corporation' that was merely a township governed by a constable, and that there was never any bailiff other than the bailiff of the manor.⁵⁸ In 1679 the bailiff was continued in his office by Stephens for the third year in a row, while other men refused to take up offices or to present their accounts as required by the court.⁵⁹ There were similar refusals in 1680 and 1681, and men were fined for contemptuous behaviour in court.⁶⁰ There were further ugly scenes in 1682, and the bailiff, who had been constrained to serve for over six years, was fined £15 for not appearing at the court.⁶¹ He was not released from the office by Stephens for another 18 months.

In the meantime, as a consequence of this conflict, the borough successfully petitioned for its incorporation in 1681, apparently through the intervention of the Marquess of Worcester.⁶² In petitioning for a charter, the townsmen claimed that the town had been anciently incorporated but that their former charters had all been destroyed or stolen during the civil wars, a patent fiction.⁶³ The new corporation was to comprise a mayor, six aldermen and 12 burgesses.⁶⁴ Samuel Burcombe was named the first mayor by the charter, and the new corporation included other men who had been prominent in resisting the Stephens's claims in the previous decade.⁶⁵ The mayor was to serve for one year at a time, and to be elected from among the

⁵³ GA, D2071/L10; TNA, C 6/228/58; C 6/82/50.

⁵⁴ GA, D2071/M1.

⁵⁵ GA, D2071/L1.

⁵⁶ GA, D2071/L10.

⁵⁷ GA, D2071/L10.

⁵⁸ TNA, C 6/228/58; C 6/82/50.

⁵⁹ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, Appendix C, 26.

⁶⁰ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, Appendix C, 26.

⁶¹ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, Appendix C, 26.

⁶² *Parson's Notes*, 278.

⁶³ CSPD 1680-1, 145.

⁶⁴ GA, D2071/B1.

⁶⁵ GA, D2071/L10.

aldermen each Michaelmas. The aldermen were to hold office for life, and replacements were to be chosen from among the burgesses. The burgesses were also appointed for life, and new burgesses were to be nominated by the mayor and aldermen. The Marquess of Worcester, soon to be created Duke of Beaufort, was appointed high steward, and an under-steward and town clerk were also appointed. Chipping Sodbury's new charter was the first to be issued on which the town's legal officers would serve at the King's pleasure.⁶⁶ Under the terms of the charter, the mayor and senior alderman were to preside over a three-weekly court, assisted by the under-steward, where they were to hear all suits of transgressions within the borough. A common seal bearing the date 1680 was produced for the new corporation, exhibited to the heralds at the visitation of 1682–3.⁶⁷ The new corporation was short-lived, the charter being cancelled by James II's proclamation of 17 October 1688.⁶⁸

The court leet had continued to meet and to appoint officers during the brief life of the new corporation, including bailiffs, and the ancient officers resumed the government of the town in 1688.⁶⁹ Seven new burgesses were appointed in the twelve months following the king's proclamation, and four more were added in 1690.⁷⁰ Also in 1689, the jury petitioned Stephens, presumably at his instigation, complaining that the charter had been granted without the knowledge of the majority of the townspeople and that the new corporation had been too liberal in their impositions upon their neighbours.⁷¹ They called upon Stephens to have the charter cancelled if it was not already 'vacated' by the former king's proclamation. The return to the ancient form of government was not wholly smooth, however, and in 1690 the jury demanded that the keys of the town chest and the mace which had formerly been carried before the bailiffs should be returned.⁷² A replacement mace was procured in 1706, when the original had still not been returned.⁷³

The bailiff and burgesses were accused of embezzling the funds of the town lands in 1800.⁷⁴ When the commissioners to enquire into charities visited the town in 1826, they made it clear that it was highly improper for the bailiff or burgesses to rent any of the charity lands which they administered. However, in 1834 it was alleged that letting the lands by closed tender rather than by public auction enabled the corporation to practice partiality in the renting of the lands, to the detriment of

⁶⁶ Paul D. Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic: Partisan Politics in England's Towns 1650–1730* (Cambridge, 1998), 185.

⁶⁷ *Visit. Glos. 1682–3*, 214–5.

⁶⁸ TNA, PC 2/72/161v–3; Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic*, 257.

⁶⁹ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, Appendix C, 27–8.

⁷⁰ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, Appendix C, 28–9.

⁷¹ GA, D2071/B2.

⁷² TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, Appendix C, 2.

⁷³ GA, D2071/B6, 5 Jan. 1705/6.

⁷⁴ GA, D2071/B6, 11 Mar. 1800.

the charity's revenues. One of those who was said to have benefited was the bailiff himself, who was said to be the real tenant of land let to another at a favourably low rent.⁷⁵ During the mid 19th century the burgesses continued to manage the affairs of the town and administer the municipal property. The court leet presented encroachments upon the waste and nuisances, such as blocked ditches, broken water pumps, and obstructions in the street.⁷⁶ In 1876 the then bailiff reported to the Commissioners for Municipal Corporations that the corporation of the borough at that time comprised himself and just one other.⁷⁷ The corporation had no power in the administering of justice nor a licensing jurisdiction, powers which were exercised by local magistrates at the divisional petty sessions. The corporation appointed no town clerk nor other officers except an under-bailiff. The corporation constructed a weighbridge opposite the town hall in 1883, the profits from which were paid into the Bailiff's Fund.⁷⁸

The borough was dissolved in 1886 under the terms of the Municipal Corporations Act of 1883,⁷⁹ but the former corporation continued to manage the municipal property, in particular the ridings, until the 1890s. Questions were raised concerning the administration of this property in 1887, and considerable dissatisfaction were expressed by inhabitants of the town. In 1895 the newly elected parish council urged the charity commissioners to adopt a new scheme for the management of the ridings which would ensure that the benefits would be distributed equitably throughout the town, and an inquiry was convened by the charity commissioners in 1896.⁸⁰ This found that the corporation administered the ridings, the town hall, the weighing-machine, and the fire engine on behalf of the town, the income from which was accounted as the Bailiff's Fund, acted as trustees for the town lands and church lands charities, the latter in combination with the vicar of the parish. New schemes were adopted for the municipal property and charity estates of the town in 1899, and the seven surviving members of the former corporation were appointed trustees of the new Town Trust, Town Lands and Grammar School, and Church Lands charities.⁸¹

⁷⁵ GA, D2071/L14.

⁷⁶ GA, D2700/MD1/1.

⁷⁷ Royal Commission on Municipal Corporations, *Report* (1880), 142.

⁷⁸ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, Appendix D, 40.

⁷⁹ 46 & 47 Vic. c.18.

⁸⁰ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, 6–7.

⁸¹ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1; see Social History.

Parochial Government

There were two procurators of the chapel by the 15th century,⁸² described as chapel wardens by the late 17th century.⁸³ They became churchwardens when the chapel became a parish church in its own right.

A vestry was in existence by the 18th century,⁸⁴ although extant minutes begin in 1830. The vestry managed those areas of public life not under the administration of the bailiff and burgesses.⁸⁵ The vestry nominated candidates for the office of overseer and guardian of the poor and from 1867 nominated a waywarden for the parish.⁸⁶ It decided to install drains in the town in 1853 to improve the health of the parishioners,⁸⁷ and in 1864 ordered that land be purchased north of the town for a new burial ground, establishing a burial board to manage it.⁸⁸ In 1866 the vestry resolved that all public pumps, wells and springs should be put under the management of the parish or the board of guardians, and to be repaired at their expense.⁸⁹ Similarly, the vestry ordered in 1868 that the fire engine should be kept in a fit state of repair at the expense of the parish.⁹⁰ After the creation of the parish council in 1894 it confined its activities to matters concerning the parish church.

There were two overseers of the poor, whose accounts are extant for the years from 1786 to 1863.⁹¹ An assistant overseer was appointed in 1842 with a salary of £15 a year, although this was reduced to £10 a year in 1847 and increased to £12 in 1852.⁹² The assistant overseer's salary was increased to £15 a year in 1871, and by a further £5 in the following year when the collection of gas rates was added to his duties.⁹³ From 1894 the overseers were appointed by the parish council. From 1902 two assistant overseers were appointed, one to act as clerk and the other as overseer,⁹⁴ and from 1917 a third overseer was also appointed.⁹⁵

The parish established a workhouse in 1745,⁹⁶ which in 1777 was said to be able to accommodate up to 40 inmates.⁹⁷ Despite this, there were only 12 inmates in

⁸² TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, Appendix A, 17.

⁸³ GA, P302 CW 2/1.

⁸⁴ GA, P300 OV 2/2–3.

⁸⁵ GA, P300 VE 2/2–3.

⁸⁶ GA, P300 VE 2/3.

⁸⁷ GA, P300 VE 2/2.

⁸⁸ GA, P300 VE 2/3.

⁸⁹ GA, P300 VE 2/3.

⁹⁰ GA, P300 VE 2/3.

⁹¹ GA, P300 OV 2/2–7. See below, Social History.

⁹² GA, P300 VE 2/2.

⁹³ GA, P300 VE 2/3.

⁹⁴ GA, P300a PC 1/3, 79–80, 84.

⁹⁵ GA, P300a PC 1/4, 208.

⁹⁶ GA, D2071/B6, 20 June 1745.

⁹⁷ *Report from the Committee appointed to inspect and consider the Returns made by the Overseers of the Poor, 1877* (Parliamentary Papers, 1776–7, Commons Committee Repts. IX), 355.

1802–3,⁹⁸ four inmates in 1812–3,⁹⁹ and five inmates in 1814–5.¹⁰⁰ The vestry appointed a superintendent of the poor in 1830, who was to have £400 a year from the parish and the profits of the work of the inmates of the workhouse, from which he was to pay for all of the expenses of the poor, the county bridge money, the medical officer of the poor, and the annual subscriptions to the local hospitals.¹⁰¹ Chipping Sodbury was one of 23 parishes included within the poor law union of the same name when it was created in 1835.¹⁰² A new workhouse was established for the union in Yate.¹⁰³

Parish Council

The first meeting of the parish council was held on 4 Dec. 1894, when 21 men were nominated to serve as councillors.¹⁰⁴ The nine councillors were elected by a show of hands, but one of the defeated candidates, the Baptist minister Aquilla Lemon, demanded a poll. This was conducted the following week.¹⁰⁵ Meetings were held at first in the National schoolroom, moving to the Petty Sessions Room in 1897, before settling at the town hall in 1906.¹⁰⁶ The new council took on the responsibilities of the former burial board, and appointed the overseers of the poor and a waywarden.¹⁰⁷

The early meetings were dominated by friction between the parish council and the defunct corporation, representing the wider sentiment within the town concerning the management of the ridings and the town's charitable estates.¹⁰⁸ Although the corporation had been dissolved in 1886, the continued entitlement of the former burgesses to claim pasture in the ridings, and the perception that they used their patronage to disproportionately reward their customers and Anglicans, caused simmering resentment, which was displayed by parishioners at the annual parish meetings.¹⁰⁹ In 1895 the council attempted to take control of the parish fire engine from the former corporation, appointing a committee to oversee it, but were resisted by the burgesses, who had kept the engine in repair from their funds.¹¹⁰ In March 1895 parishioners demanded that the parish council should nominate the trustees of the town lands and grammar school charities, and 12 months later it was

⁹⁸ *Poor Law Abstract, 1804*, 176–7.

⁹⁹ *Poor Law Abstract, 1818*, 150–1.

¹⁰⁰ *Poor Law Abstract, 1818*, 150–1.

¹⁰¹ GA, P300 VE 2/2, Mar. 1830.

¹⁰² *Poor Law Com. 2nd Rep.* 522.

¹⁰³ See Yate, *Social History*.

¹⁰⁴ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 1; *Glouc. J.* 8 Dec. 1894,.

¹⁰⁵ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 3; *Bristol Mercury*, 18 Dec. 1894,.

¹⁰⁶ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 1, 48, 122; P300a PC 1/2, 103–8.

¹⁰⁷ GA, P300a PC 1/2, 14, 60–1.

¹⁰⁸ See *Manorial Government*.

¹⁰⁹ GA, P300a PC 1/2, 3–5.

¹¹⁰ GA, P300a PC 1/2, 20, 24–5, 29.

urged that the trustees should hold no personal interest in the charities.¹¹¹ In return the bailiffs refused to allow the new council to hold its meetings in the town hall rent free, as had previously been the case for other public bodies, such as the burial board and the gas inspectors.¹¹² The hostility even extended to the town's cricket club, where in 1896 one of the former burgesses attempted to prevent the re-election of the club's captain, because he was a member of the new parish council.¹¹³ At the instigation of the council an enquiry was convened into the management of the town's charities by the charity commissioners late in 1896. The resulting report of 1897 described the town as being 'divided (nearly equally) into two very hostile sections'.¹¹⁴ These tensions were dissipated by the new schemes for the town's charities adopted in 1899, which appointed parish councillors as seven of the 17 trustees of the Town Trust and three of the 11 trustees of the Town Lands and Grammar School charity.¹¹⁵

One of the first acts of the new council was to adopt the Lighting and Watching Act of 1833,¹¹⁶ enabling them to levy a rate for lighting the town with gas.¹¹⁷ A total of £70 was levied by the council, to pay the cost of lighting 25 lamps in the town, and the salary of the town clerk.¹¹⁸ A gas committee was formed in 1895.¹¹⁹ Proposals to light Station Road were rejected in 1920 as being too costly.¹²⁰ The lights were converted from gas to electricity in 1930.¹²¹ The council oversaw the regular markets and fairs held within the town, and in 1899 they investigated appointing an official to collect the tolls and dues from the stands at the biannual Mop Fairs and other events.¹²² In 1899 the council proposed to arrange for new pitchings to be laid on both sides of the high street to provide a new site for the sale of pigs during the market.¹²³ A committee was set up which oversaw the work, handing the site to the council after the final payments were made in 1901.¹²⁴ In 1902 the Board of Agriculture required the market place to be adequately paved between the road way and the footpaths, but the council was constrained by the manorial rights of the

¹¹¹ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 7, 22–3; P300a PC 1/2, 11, 14–6.

¹¹² GA, P300a PC 1/1, 10; P300a PC 1/2, 4–5, 26, 37–8.

¹¹³ *Bristol Mercury*, 10 Feb. 1896.

¹¹⁴ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1, Report of the Assistant Charity Commissioner, 1897, 8.

¹¹⁵ TNA, CHAR 7/112/1.

¹¹⁶ 3 & 4 Wm. IV c. 90.

¹¹⁷ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 9; P300a PC 1/2, 204–5

¹¹⁸ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 11.

¹¹⁹ GA, P300a PC 1/2, 35.

¹²⁰ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 188.

¹²¹ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 238; P300a PC 1/5, 102, 107.

¹²² GA, P300a PC 1/1, 70.

¹²³ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 72–6; P300a PC 2/1, 6.

¹²⁴ GA, P300a PC 2/1, 33.

ladies of the manor.¹²⁵ In 1912 it was proposed that the markets should be monthly instead of fortnightly.¹²⁶

Although the rural district council was the local sanitary authority, the parish council was also concerned with the cleanliness and sanitation of the town. Complaints were made in 1895 about the state of the streets after the cattle market, and a water cart was purchased in 1897 for cleaning the streets.¹²⁷ The dilapidated parish pound was purchased from the ladies of the manor in 1897.¹²⁸ A new scheme for the sewerage of the town was proposed by the rural district council in 1898, but it was rejected by the parish council, who instead suggested a joint parochial committee be established to consider the question.¹²⁹ The parish council opposed the district council's scheme both on the grounds of cost and because the health of the parish was thought to be good, and a meeting of the parish unanimously rejected it.¹³⁰ The parochial committee recommended in 1899 that the Horse Street ditch should be converted into a sewer, and that the brook and mill pond should be scoured, but the district council took no action until the summer, by which time it was said that the water flowing into the millpond was little better than sewage.¹³¹ Tenders were invited by the district council for cleaning out the mill race, and for repairing sewers and drains in the streets of the town, but no new scheme was adopted.¹³² The district council employed a man to keep the sewers running freely in the early 20th century,¹³³ and regular collections of household refuse had been introduced by 1911.¹³⁴ The question of a new sewage system for the town was raised again in 1926.¹³⁵ Ultimately, the council decided that the scheme was too costly, but that a new system should be laid between Horse Street and Hatter's Lane.¹³⁶ The council also ordered that the mill race running behind the houses on the high street, which served as an open sewer, should be cleaned out.¹³⁷ In 1930 the council proposed to the rural district council that a new sewage system was necessary for the town.¹³⁸

The council played a leading role in the intellectual and cultural life of the town. The council, which appointed three governors of the grammar school, was strongly opposed to its proposed closure in 1906, presenting a petition signed by 200

¹²⁵ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 96–8; P300a PC 1/3, 77; P300a PC 2/1, 63.

¹²⁶ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 163.

¹²⁷ GA, P300a PC 1/2, 121–2.

¹²⁸ GA, P300a PC 1/2, 51, 95, 119, 137, 142.

¹²⁹ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 63–6; P300a PC 1/2, 170–2, 190–4; P300a PC 2/2. See Rural District Council.

¹³⁰ GA, DA33/100/3, 262, 275.

¹³¹ GA, DA33/100/3, 310–1, 319.

¹³² GA, DA33/100/4, 20, 29.

¹³³ GA, DA33/100/7, 13.

¹³⁴ Glos. County Council, *Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health* (1911), 140.

¹³⁵ GA, P300a PC 1/5, 29–32.

¹³⁶ GA, P300a PC 1/5, 45–7.

¹³⁷ GA, P300a PC 1/5, 59.

¹³⁸ GA, P300a PC 1/5, 85.

parishioners to the Board of Education.¹³⁹ The council again opposed the proposal of the county council in 1907 that the school should close for at least two years, in order that the funds of the Town Lands and Grammar School charity could build up.¹⁴⁰ The school reopened in 1912, in part through the pressure of the parish council,¹⁴¹ but changing demographics in south Gloucestershire encouraged the Board of Education to contemplate relocating the school outside the parish. These proposals were again resisted by the parish council, and a new site was found for the school within the parish.¹⁴² The council organised the decoration of the town during the passage of the Prince of Wales through it in 1901, and committees were appointed to organise celebrations of the jubilee in 1897, and the coronations in 1902 and 1911.¹⁴³ From 1916 the council appointed a trustee to the Baptist Chapel and Burial Ground charity, and it requested that it should be represented on the trust of the New Hall in any future reorganisation of the charity.¹⁴⁴ The council arranged for the transfer of the old market cross to its present site at the eastern end of Broad Street in 1919 to be used as a war memorial.¹⁴⁵

In 1897 the council proposed extending the boundaries of the parish to take in the new cemetery and the ridings to the north of the town and the vicarage to the west, but they were opposed by the parish councils of Old Sodbury and Yate.¹⁴⁶ Another attempt was made in 1902 to extend the boundaries of the parish south to the railway line and east to the river Frome, and north to include the cemetery and ridings.¹⁴⁷ The extension would facilitate any sewage scheme which was to be put in place for houses that were to be built near the railway station. Proposals to extend the boundaries of the parish were made again in 1922, to take in much of the western part of the parish of Old Sodbury, from Chipping Sodbury railway station to the boundary with Yate.¹⁴⁸ The question of extending the boundaries was raised again in 1938, this time with the annexation of parts of Dodington, Old Sodbury, and Yate parishes.¹⁴⁹ Following an inquiry it was decided instead to amalgamate Chipping Sodbury and Old Sodbury into one parish, to be divided into two wards of the same

¹³⁹ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 113, 117.

¹⁴⁰ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 126.

¹⁴¹ See Social History.

¹⁴² GA, P300a PC 1/1, 243–5, 257–8.

¹⁴³ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 43–4, 88, 93, 150; P300a PC 2/1, 38.

¹⁴⁴ GA, P300a PC 1/4, 214.

¹⁴⁵ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 183.

¹⁴⁶ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 53–4; P300a PC 1/2, 129, 132–3, 149; P300a PC 2/1, 1–3.

¹⁴⁷ GA, P300a PC 2/1, 45.

¹⁴⁸ GA, P300a PC 1/1, 201–2; P300a PC 1/4, 258.

¹⁴⁹ GA, P300a PC 1/6, 116.

names.¹⁵⁰ An order amalgamating the two parishes to form the new parish of Sodbury was finalised in 1939, but its enactment was delayed until after the war.¹⁵¹

The new council of Sodbury met for the first time in March 1946 at the Literary Institute in Chipping Sodbury, and subsequent meetings alternated between there and Old Sodbury parish school.¹⁵² It was principally concerned with considering planning applications and overseeing the market, and continued to appoint trustees and governors to the parish charities and schools as its predecessors had done.¹⁵³ The council was restructured in 1998 to comprise 15 councillors, divided equally between the three wards of North East, South West, and Old Sodbury, who are elected for four years at a time.¹⁵⁴ The council opted to be known as a town council at the same time, and a town mayor was appointed for the first time in 1999.¹⁵⁵ In 2019 subcommittees meet monthly to oversee environment and leisure, finances, the markets, and planning applications.¹⁵⁶

Rural Sanitary Authority and District Council

A rural sanitary authority bearing the name of Chipping Sodbury was established in 1873, although it was actually based in Yate.¹⁵⁷ The authority comprised 23 parishes, including all three of the Sodburys.¹⁵⁸ An inspector of nuisances was appointed with a salary of £150 a year, and it was agreed to appoint a single medical officer of health for south and west Gloucestershire, with the authority's share of his annual salary of £800 amounting to £119.¹⁵⁹ The sanitary authority's principal concerns were disease, overcrowding, sewerage, and unfit habitations. There were repeated outbreaks of scarlet fever until the early 20th century and occasional outbreaks of typhoid fever. Another common problem was the contamination of water supplies by cess pools and open sewers, in particular in the cramped conditions of Chipping Sodbury. In 1883 slop matter percolated into the well of the town pump in the high street of Chipping Sodbury, and the authority ordered that the drains of all of the town's pumps be cleaned and adequately repaired.¹⁶⁰ In 1890 it was proposed that a weir be constructed to flush sewage from the river Frome where it flowed behind tenements on the high street, and in 1891 a culverted drain was built to carry sewage and

¹⁵⁰ GA, P300a PC 1/6, 120.

¹⁵¹ GA, P300a PC 1/6, 123.

¹⁵² GA, P300a PC 1/6, 177; P300a PC 1/10, 1.

¹⁵³ GA, P300a PC 1/10–6, 18–26; P300a PC 2/3–16.

¹⁵⁴ GA, P300a PC 1/17, 173.

¹⁵⁵ GA, P300a PC 1/17, 176.

¹⁵⁶ *Chipping Sodbury Town Council*, <<https://www.sodburytowncouncil.gov.uk/town-council>> [accessed 2 Feb. 2019].

¹⁵⁷ GA, DA33/100/1, 1.

¹⁵⁸ GA, DA33/100/1, 15.

¹⁵⁹ GA, DA33/100/1, 2–3, 16.

¹⁶⁰ GA, DA33/100/1, 22 Aug. 1883; DA33/100/2, 3.

surface water from Horse Street to the allotments behind the street.¹⁶¹ The central town pump in the high street was found to be contaminated again in 1893, and a new pump was erected at the top of Bowling Hill by the county council later in the year.¹⁶² The West Gloucestershire Water Company extended its mains to Chipping Sodbury in 1894.¹⁶³ Cowsheds and dairies were registered in 1887.¹⁶⁴

The sanitary authority became a district council in 1894, comprising the same 23 parishes.¹⁶⁵ Chipping Sodbury returned two of the 33 councillors.¹⁶⁶ Like its predecessor, meetings were held at the Union workhouse in Yate, usually immediately following the conclusion of meetings of the Board of Governors. Following the reorganisation of the Chipping Sodbury charities in 1899, the rural district council was to appoint one trustee for the new Town Lands and Grammar School charity.¹⁶⁷

The district council inherited the sanitary responsibilities of the previous authority, and one of its first acts was to consider the erection of a new isolation hospital in the district. After consultation with the county council, it was decided to establish a single hospital for the southern half of Gloucestershire, and two cottages on Sodbury Common were acquired for that purpose in 1896.¹⁶⁸ The medical officer complained in 1899 that the hospital was too small, and in 1903 temporary hutting belonging to railway contractors in Old Sodbury was purchased to provide an annexe to the hospital.¹⁶⁹ Upon the formation of the council it had continued the previous arrangement of a appointing a medical officer shared with other districts,¹⁷⁰ but in 1905 the district council attempted to appoint its own medical officer instead.¹⁷¹ The Local government Board objected to the breaking up of the medical union, but the council continued to propose that it should appoint its own medical officer.¹⁷² Instead the board ordered the council to appoint a medical officer in combination with several other rural and urban districts in south and west Gloucestershire, although fewer in number than the original arrangement.¹⁷³ The new officer's district combined five districts in the Forest of Dean, the large rural district of Gloucester, the urban and rural districts of Cirencester and Tetbury, and

¹⁶¹ GA, DA33/100/2, 238, 274.

¹⁶² GA, DA33/100/2, 324, 337, 348.

¹⁶³ GA, DA33/100/2, 348; *Western Daily Press*, 1 Oct. 1894.

¹⁶⁴ GA, DA33/100/2, 125.

¹⁶⁵ GA, DA33/100/3, 1.

¹⁶⁶ *Bristol Mercury*, 7 Dec. 1894.

¹⁶⁷ TNA, CHAR 7/112.

¹⁶⁸ GA, DA33/100/3, 32, 40, 60–1, 63, 65, 70, 149.

¹⁶⁹ GA, DA33/100/4, 73–4; DA33/100/5, 455.

¹⁷⁰ GA, DA33/100/3, 5.

¹⁷¹ GA, DA33/100/6, 682, 688–9.

¹⁷² GA, DA33/100/6, 699, 727.

¹⁷³ GA, DA33/100/7, 11, 52.

the rural district of Chipping Sodbury. Following the sudden death of the medical officer, it was decided in 1912 to appoint a replacement for the combined districts of Chipping Sodbury and Thornbury.¹⁷⁴

Like its predecessor, the district council was responsible for the disposal of sewage within the district, and was particularly concerned by the condition of Chipping Sodbury. The surveyor was asked to produce a report on the drainage and sewerage of the town in 1898, following which a parochial committee was established with the parish council to consider improvements.¹⁷⁵ The district council decided in 1899 not to join with Bristol Corporation in a proposed scheme to dispose of sewage directly into the river Severn.¹⁷⁶ During the First World War the War Department, who had an office at Yate, laid new sewers in the parish from the aerodrome to the railway station, although a planned extension as far as Nibley was not completed until 1919.¹⁷⁷ A proposal for the council to purchase the sewage works near Nibley in 1921 resulted in a public inquiry where opposition was expressed.¹⁷⁸ Local ratepayers objected to the cost, while Chipping Sodbury parish did not want to be part of the Yate sewage scheme, nor to have their own scheme. In 1922 the Ministry of Health sanctioned the sewage scheme for Yate but deferred a scheme for Chipping Sodbury pending a decision on proposed extensions of the parish boundaries.¹⁷⁹ The water company's mains were extended as far as Brook Street in Chipping Sodbury in 1922.¹⁸⁰ The county council were highly critical of the sewerage of Chipping Sodbury, determining that the pollution of the river Frome was due to the discharge of sewage from the town, but agreed in 1926 that a scheme would be too costly to proceed with.¹⁸¹ A new sewer was laid in Horse Street in 1928.¹⁸² In 1930 Chipping Sodbury parish council put forward proposals for a new sewage system in the town, subject to most of the costs being met by other authorities.¹⁸³ The sewage system was extended from Chipping Sodbury as far as Colt's Green in Old Sodbury in 1935, despite the objections of the council of the latter parish.¹⁸⁴

A Sodbury highway district was formed in 1864, comprising 22 parishes and 210 miles of highway.¹⁸⁵ The powers of highway boards of Lawford's Gate, Sodbury and Thornbury within the district were transferred to the council in 1899, when the

¹⁷⁴ GA, DA33/100/9, 66–7, 80, 100–1.

¹⁷⁵ GA, DA33/100/3, 227, 233, 239, 248, 256.

¹⁷⁶ GA, DA33/100/4, 41.

¹⁷⁷ GA, DA33/100/11, 154–7, 166, 192–3, 207; DA33/100/12, 20–1.

¹⁷⁸ GA, DA33/100/15, 200; DA33/100/16, 4, 32, 38.

¹⁷⁹ GA, DA33/100/16, 49.

¹⁸⁰ GA, DA33/100/16, 43, 48, 110.

¹⁸¹ GA, DA33/100/19, 100–1, 132, 160, 172.

¹⁸² GA, DA33/100/21, 168–9; DA33/100/22, 17.

¹⁸³ GA, DA33/100/23, 219–20.

¹⁸⁴ GA, DA33/100/28, 68, 111.

¹⁸⁵ GA, HB15; *Bristol Mercury*, 9 Apr. 1864.

boards were abolished, although the county council remained the overall highway authority.¹⁸⁶ The former surveyor of the board was reappointed by the council, with a salary of £150.¹⁸⁷ In 1914 the council purchased 4 a. of land at Bury Hill in Yate in order to develop the quarries there.¹⁸⁸ In 1923 the district council upgraded lanes on the outskirts of Chipping Sodbury to relieve unemployment caused by the closure of the strontium quarries at Yate.¹⁸⁹

The district council was the housing authority, although initially it limited itself to closing unfit homes and assessing planning applications. In 1913 the Local Government Board recommended that the district council should proceed with small schemes to the erection of new houses in several parishes.¹⁹⁰ The outbreak of the war in the following year delayed these plans, but the influx of people drawn to the district by the presence of the aircraft works and chemical works caused the council to begin preparing housing and town planning schemes for Iron Acton, Chipping Sodbury, and Old Sodbury in 1917.¹⁹¹ Gaunt's Field near Chipping Sodbury was identified in 1918 as a potential site for new housing, but the council decided not to purchase the land as they felt the government or its contractors should provide housing for workers at its sites.¹⁹² In 1919 the medical officer recommended that the council provide a total of 90 houses in the parishes of Acton Turville, Chipping Sodbury, Old Sodbury, and Yate.¹⁹³ Estates were laid out in the fields to the south of Chipping Sodbury and near the railway station.¹⁹⁴

Adjustments to the boundaries of the district were made in 1935, when parts of Filton, Hawkesbury, Westerleigh, Wick and Abson, and Winterbourne parishes were transferred to neighbouring districts. The council chose to adopt the name Sodbury rural district council at the same time.¹⁹⁵ Following the conclusion of the Second World War, the council again turned its attention to housing in the district. A proposal to build a large estate to the south of Chipping Sodbury railway station was considered at a special meeting in 1947, but ultimately rejected.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, developments to the south of the town begun before the war were continued, as the town expanded beyond its ancient boundaries.¹⁹⁷ A formal plan for the expansion of

¹⁸⁶ GA, DA33/100/3, 121, 296, 306; DA33/100/4, 52; HB15.

¹⁸⁷ GA, DA33/100/3, 307.

¹⁸⁸ GA, DA33/100/11, 352.

¹⁸⁹ GA, DA33/100/16, 116, 122, 128, 144, 165; DA33/100/17, 131–2, 162, 172.

¹⁹⁰ GA, DA33/100/10, 237.

¹⁹¹ GA, DA33/100/11, 203.

¹⁹² GA, DA33/100/11, 259–60, 268.

¹⁹³ GA, DA33/100/12, 1.

¹⁹⁴ See *Landscape and Settlement*.

¹⁹⁵ GA, DA33/100/29, 8.

¹⁹⁶ GA, DA33/100/41, 1–4.

¹⁹⁷ See *Landscape and Settlement*.

Yate adopted in 1959 was superseded in 1966 by a plan for Yate and Sodbury.¹⁹⁸ As part of the reforms of local government in 1974, most of Sodbury rural district was absorbed into the new Northavon district council within the new county of Avon. Avon was abolished in 1996, and Northavon district combined with the borough of Kingswood to form the unitary authority of South Gloucestershire.

Public Services

Policing

There was a prison in the Tolzey,¹⁹⁹ which stood in the middle of the high street near the entrance to Hounds Lane.²⁰⁰ The walls of the prison were repaired in 1642.²⁰¹ A new prison was erected in part of the town hall in 1789.²⁰²

An association for the prosecution of felons was established in 1783, incorporating Chipping Sodbury with its neighbours in Old Sodbury, Yate, Horton, Codrington and Wapley.²⁰³ Those bringing prosecutions were to be paid sums ranging from 10s. for petty larceny to £5 for a capital crime, half to be paid upon commitment of the accused and the other half upon conviction.²⁰⁴ The Association was still active in the late 19th century.²⁰⁵

On the establishment of the county police force in 1839, a police station was established in Chipping Sodbury, initially staffed by seven policemen.²⁰⁶ By 1902 the station at Chipping Sodbury was the centre of a policing district, manned by a superintendent.²⁰⁷ In 1910 the constabulary was reorganised into 11 divisions, one of which was based in Chipping Sodbury.²⁰⁸

When the police station was built, land was also purchased adjacent to the station for the purpose of erecting a new court house for the town, although this had still not been done by 1890.²⁰⁹ As a consequence, the Sodbury petty sessions continued to be held at the Cross Hands inn in Old Sodbury until 1892, when they transferred to a new court house was erected in the High Street by the county

¹⁹⁸ Wallis, *Yate*, 20–1.

¹⁹⁹ GA, D2071/L10.

²⁰⁰ GA, D2071/L11. See Settlement.

²⁰¹ GA, D2071/A3.

²⁰² GA, D2071/B6, 15 Sep. 1789.

²⁰³ *Glouc. J.* 11 Dec. 1783; *Trans. BGAS*, 100 (1982), 228.

²⁰⁴ *Glouc. J.* 25 Nov. 1793.

²⁰⁵ *Kelly's Directory of Glos.* (1879), 740.

²⁰⁶ Thomas, *Glos. Constabulary*, 13.

²⁰⁷ Thomas, *Glos. Constabulary*, 35.

²⁰⁸ Thomas, *Glos. Constabulary*, 46.

²⁰⁹ *Glouc. J.* 18 Oct. 1890, 3.

council.²¹⁰ Sessions were held in this court house twice a month in 1923. The magistrates' court was relocated to Yate c.1967.²¹¹

A county court was established in Chipping Sodbury under the County Court Act of 1846.²¹² The sessions were held at the George inn once a month during the 1850s.²¹³ The county court continued to sit at Chipping Sodbury until 1918.²¹⁴

Fire

There was a fire engine in 1811.²¹⁵ There was a fire station at the north of Horse Street in the early 20th century.²¹⁶ A fire brigade was established in 1903, managed by a committee of the parish council appointed in the following year.²¹⁷ The Town Trust was requested to take on the management of the fire engine in 1908.²¹⁸ A fire station was built at Culverhill, near Lilliput court, in the 1920s. A fire engine was purchased by the council for use in the various parishes in 1936.²¹⁹

²¹⁰ *Western Daily Press*, 19 Nov. 1892.

²¹¹ GA, P300a PC 1/12, 25 July 1966; 14 Nov. 1966.

²¹² 9 & 10 Vic. c.95; *Bath Chron.* 14 Jan. 1847.

²¹³ *Bristol Times*, 5 June 1852; *Slater's Directory of Bristol, Glos. &c.* (1859), 222.

²¹⁴ BA, J Cty/18–20; Polden, *A History of the County Court, 1846–1971* (Cambridge, 1999), 327.

²¹⁵ GA, D2071/A10; D2071/A6, 11.

²¹⁶ OS Map 1:25000Glos. LXIX.10 (1881 edn.); GA, DA33/100/33, 43.

²¹⁷ GA, P300a PC 1/3, 97, 153.

²¹⁸ GA, P300a PC 1/4, 74.

²¹⁹ *Western Daily Press*, 6 Jan. 1936.