

ECONOMIC HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

Taunton was sited at the centre of an area of rich agricultural land and for most of its history agricultural produce and cloth were directly or indirectly the sources of the town's prosperity. They created a need for markets and fairs and both national and overseas trade, which brought wealth and demand for a variety of goods and services. During the 13th century the borough, then the urban area of St Mary's parish, was farmed out for up to £51 15s. 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. in 1266, falling later to £34 16s. 6d. but far higher than the 32s. paid in 1086.¹ It was assessed for £10 3s. 4d. in the 1334 subsidy.² The 1327 returns are incomplete but most tax was paid by residents of the borough.³ In 1340 the ninth of movables in Taunton was £20 the second highest in the county, Wells was £21, but it is not clear how accurate such an assessment was given that in 1339 one Taunton man was owed over £65 for a consignment of wool, and had incidentally been taxed only 3s. in 1327.⁴ In 1377 539 taxpayers were recorded in the borough, the fourth largest number in the county.⁵ Town property values reflected the general prosperity. In 1330 a leasehold house in Shuttern well away from town centre cost 5s. a year.⁶ In the later 14th century repairing leases for lives of shops with solars cost 6s. 8d. a year each.⁷ By the late 15th century butchers' shambles cost 8s. a year.⁸ In 1524 the subsidy on goods and wages collected for East Street was nearly £20 including £5 from one man, compared with the rich agricultural tithing of Holway, which only paid £2 6s. 4d. Suburban wealth is shown in two men in Grasscroft tithing in North Town assessed at £25 and £50 and

¹ *Domesday*, 234; T.J. Hunt, *The Medieval Customs of Taunton Manor* (SRS 66), xi.

² R. E. Glasscock, *Subsidy of 1334*, 263.

³ F. Dickinson, *Kirbys Quest etc* (Som. Rec. Soc. 3), 147, 149, 151, 154, 274.

⁴ TNA, E 179/169/14; *SDNQ*, XXIX, p. 11; *Cal. Pat.* 1336—40, p. 294; Dickinson, *Kirbys Quest*, 274.

⁵ C. Fenwick, *Poll taxes 1377, 1379, 1381* (Oxford, 2001), 423—4.

⁶ TNA, E 326/4980.

⁷ TNA, E 326/5010, 5022, 5032.

⁸ TNA, E 326/5081.

a man in Extra Portam in St Mary's, south East Reach, at £30.⁹ The 1628 subsidy recorded only 98 taxpayers of whom 44 were taxed on goods but apart from Robert Hill all assessed at £7 or less. Of those taxed on land only two men were assessed at over £2 including Taunton's first mayor Andrew Henley but by that date assessments bore little relation to true wealth.¹⁰ However, there was no one dominant wealthy family in the town but probably a group of wealthy traders and clothiers.

The economy may have been depressed in the early 17th century when 31 burgages were in hand but as the statement was repeated for many years it may have referred to the demolition and redevelopment of property.¹¹ Fewer than 400 people were rated for the 1641 subsidy.¹² The town and its economy suffered badly during the Civil War but recovered well in the later 17th century with an increasing population fuelled by immigration employed in cloth production. That benefitted producers of food, goods and services. From the mid 17th century many men, even small farmers and craftsmen had large amounts of cash out on loan.¹³ Many older people probably invested their life savings in this way enabling other people to set up in business but a man with £260 out on loans may have been a professional moneylender similar to later bankers and a widow lent out money on pawn.¹⁴ In 1701 a visitor described Taunton as 'a large town and of great trade'.¹⁵ The decline in the serge industry in the 18th century caused a slump in the economy and loss of population. In 1739 39 houses were down and several traders refused to pay their rates.¹⁶ Taunton recovered due

⁹ TNA, E 179/169/180. The rest of the borough and most of St James's parish is missing or illegible.

¹⁰ SHC, DD/SF/1/5/11. One small tithing appears to be missing from the assesment.

¹¹ SHC, DD/MT/3/1, 11/36; Hants. R.O., 11M59/C1/19/10.

¹² A. J. Howard and T. L. Stoate, *Somerset Protestation Returns and Subsidy Rolls*, 258—61, 263—4, 267..

¹³ SHC, DD/SP/1645/51, 1664/75.

¹⁴ SHC, DD/SP/1669/92; 1672/54.

¹⁵ *HMC, MSS of the Earl of Egmont II*, p. 196.

¹⁶ SHC, DD/PM/7/11/62; below, industry.

partly to the silk industry but also to its favoured position as a market town with road and river access and many shops including high-class traders serving a wide area.¹⁷

Taunton had an exceptionally high land tax assessment especially of its urban area. In 1767 agricultural land accounted for £338 of the land tax assessment for the Taunton parishes compared with £656 for town houses, markets and stock in trade.¹⁸ In 1791 it was complained that Bath, larger and wealthier, paid only £443 in land tax whereas Taunton borough alone paid £726.¹⁹ The wealthy farms around Taunton had provided the bishops of Winchester with a large income in the Middle Ages but the fixed rents and charges reduced that income down the centuries. Taunton Deane manor produced a gross income of £715 in 1816, probably half of which came from Taunton. However, the 1832 land tax assessment totalled £1,434 18s. 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ d., of which stock in trade was £210 6s. raised from a flat payment regardless of the value of each trade, and £694 6s. 8d. from urban property.²⁰ By contrast at that period the bishops of Winchester only received £132 from Holway hundred with its wealthy farms.²¹ In 1824 Taunton's urban economy was assessed at c. £750,000 a year.²²

In 1821 of 1,706 families, 1,287 were engaged in trade, manufacture or craft.²³ In St Mary's parish in 1831 of 1,583 families 924 were engaged in trade, manufacture or craft, which employed 1,070 men. There were 174 merchants and professional men, 152 non-agricultural labourers, and 69 male and 478 female servants.²⁴ By 1849 there were five silk mills, a tannery and other factories using a total of nine steam engines.²⁵ There were periods of prosperity and decline and changes in employment. Most trades and industries reached a

¹⁷ Below, this section, industry, retail services.

¹⁸ SHC, Q/REI/35/24—6 (1767).

¹⁹ SHC, A/CPT/15/5, pp. 390—1.

²⁰ SHC, Q/REI/35/24—6 (1832).

²¹ Shillibeer, *Ancient Customs of Taunton Deane*, xxvii.

²² SHC, DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7 (1824).

²³ Census cited in C. and J. Greenwood, *Som. Delineated* (1822), 185.

²⁴ SHC, D/P/tau.m/23/16

²⁵ SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, p. 15.

peak of employment in 1861 probably before the full impact of mass production had been felt in the town. Later employment increased in the retail and service sectors.²⁶

Women worked in many trades and crafts and managed smithies and goldsmith's workshops as well as dressmaking and millinery businesses, public houses and shops but they appear to have been pushed out of several areas of work in the later 19th century. By the end of the century women were no longer occupied in crafts like shoemaking and basketmaking which they had practiced in the 1840s when Taunton recorded its last female hairdresser until the mid 20th century. Even traditional female occupations like upholstery employed more males and apart from drapery stores and neighbourhood shops, most shops had only male assistants, often young boys, until the First World War when women were in demand again. Female employment remained high in the factories and jobs like dressmaking but increasingly most women were occupied in domestic service, paid before the First World War and unpaid in the mid 20th century. In some households women earned more shirt and collar making than their husbands and fathers from casual labouring and skilled women could earn up to 16s. a week in 1909.²⁷ However, women's wages were usually much lower than men's and in 1919 the borough health visitor was paid less than the park keeper and little more than a labourer. In 1939 the compulsory retirement age for female council employees was reduced to 60 although restored to 65 in 1946 but from 1938, except during the war years, women lost public sector jobs if they married.²⁸

In 1910 the most valuable properties in Taunton, apart from the convent and the workhouse, were industrial premises and the railway station each valued at £4,000 to £8,500.

²⁶ TNA, RG 9/1617—18; RG 10/2370—2, 2374—5; RG 11/2366—8; RG 12/1875—7.

²⁷ *Taunton Courier* 20 Aug. 1909; BNA accessed 12 May 2022.

²⁸ SHC, D/B/ta/4/5/1 (Dec. 1939, Feb. 1946).

By comparison many factories and businesses were valued at under £200 and town centre dwellings at £5—6.²⁹

The First World War had inflated wages temporarily and large war bonuses were paid to council staff with labourers' wages increased from 6d. an hour in 1917 to 1s. 2d. in 1919 when they worked 48 ½ hours a week.³⁰ The post-war depression resulted in reduced demand for labour. In 1932 alone 1,000 additional men registered as unemployed but Taunton suffered less than other areas with 9 per cent unemployed compared with over 20 per cent nationally. Work schemes were proposed to relieve male unemployment but there was a reluctance to encourage more industry.³¹ In 1934 only 19 manufacturing companies in Taunton employed more than 50 people and were mostly engaged in shirt and collar making, brewing, engineering and printing.³² Even in 1933 only 175 women were registered unemployed and it was said they could get work more easily than men.³³ Although the council was more receptive to the benefits of industry by 1939 in 1948 a planner proposed Taunton should be a service and not an industrial town, partly to avoid the evils of sudden changes in the economy. Only three employers had more than 300 workers but employment in national and local government services rose from under 500 in 1929 to almost 5,000 by 1943.³⁴

In 1953 only 50 a. was in industrial use and the council was frustrated at being unable to get rid of the gas works and brickyards.³⁵ The county council was also opposed to more industrial development in the town.³⁶ In 1964 it was believed that the collar and shirt, cabinet-making, engineering and publishing sectors would increase to produce some of the

²⁹ SHC, DD/IR/T/26/1—4.

³⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/4/5/1 (Jan. 1917, Jan. 1919).

³¹ SHC, A/DVY/1; D/DC/tau.d T. Sharp, *A Plan for Taunton*, 16—7.

³² W.H. Thompson, *Somerset Regional Report* (SCC, 1934), 35, 47.

³³ SHC, A/DVY/1.

³⁴ SHC, PAM, 2563; D/DC/tau.d: Sharp, *Plan for Taunton*, 16, 23—4.

³⁵ SHC, C/PL/2/25, pp.4, 28—9.

³⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/4/3/6.

5,600 jobs needed but such optimism was short-lived.³⁷ By 1961 manufacturing accounted for less than a quarter of employment and by 1976 less than 19 per cent. Printing and publishing and electrical engineering each employed over 1,000 people followed by textiles and clothing 947, two thirds women, and food and drink with 876 employees. That compared with over 24,000 employees in the service sector, nearly half women.³⁸ By the 1990s most of Taunton's traditional manufacturing industries were closing in the face of overseas competition. Pearsall's was one of the few to survive into the early 21st century. Small enterprises including trading warehouses, garages, and service industries opened on trading estates such those on Priorswood and Bindon Roads in the late 20th century although in the early 21st century some employment areas have been redeveloped for apartments.

Commuting probably started with the better-off professional and business families who gradually ceased to live over their businesses from the mid 19th century. By the late 19th century workers were coming in from the surrounding parishes, especially as bus services improved. In 1951 over 4,600 people commuted to work in Taunton compared with c. 1,600 who commuted out.³⁹ In the 1960s the council believed that the economy depended on attracting people in for work, entertainment and shopping, which led to more demolition of town centre buildings to create large car parks.⁴⁰ Although the market declined in the 20th century and the livestock and produce markets moved to Canal Road and after 2008 out of Taunton altogether, the town remained the major shopping, service and administrative centre for the county and also a rail and coach hub as well as the destination of many local bus services.

AGRICULTURE

³⁷ SHC, A/BWX/5, pp.31—2.

³⁸ SHC, D/PC/stapg/7/3.

³⁹ SHC, A/BWX/5.

⁴⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/4/3/7 (July 1964).

Michael Drayton in the early 17th century referred to ‘Taunton’s fruitful Deane’ as unmatched and the land in the vale of Taunton is indeed rich and fertile, still graded one and two.⁴¹ There is evidence of farming activity in Taunton from prehistory. Although Taunton’s economy is now urban and had an urban component by the 11th century, agriculture was an important feature until the later 20th century not only directly in the formerly rural areas around the town but indirectly in providing some of the produce for its general and livestock markets and raw materials for its industries especially woollen cloth and leather. There were farms in St James’s parish north of the river in the hamlets of Obridge, Lyngford and Pyrland and farmsteads scattered along the lanes. Wet land may have been improved before the end of the Middle Ages and Riverland and probably Bowermarsh in Pyrland tithing were arable by the late 15th century.⁴² In St Mary’s parish there were farming hamlets at Shoreditch, Holway and Haydon, the last still agricultural being separated from the rest of Taunton by the M5 motorway and transferred to Stoke St Mary parish. Until the closure of the livestock market in 2008 agriculture employed auctioneers, corn, hay, feed and manure merchants, implement and vehicle manufacturers and dealers and supported services such as branch banking, legal, catering and retail services many of which were lost with the market.⁴³

Early farming

Evidence of possible Iron-Age or Roman cultivation has been found in the Fore Street area.⁴⁴ Romano-British material shows that there were several farmsteads particularly at Holway where a corn drier was found indicating extensive cereal production. Other possible Romano-

⁴¹ Quoted in W. G. Maton, *Observations on the Western Counties of England* (1797), 37; SHC, D/PC/stapg/7/3, p. 54.

⁴² SHC, DD/MT/1/19; 3/21, 25.

⁴³ Below, this section, markets.

⁴⁴ *PSANHS CXXIV* (1980), 30—1; *CXXXII* (1988), 97.

British farms have been found in St James parish north of the river.⁴⁵ Those farmsteads appear to have been abandoned and it is not clear how the area was farmed until the Middle Ages but the density of settlements in the area with Anglo-Saxon names shows it was well populated. Royal and ecclesiastical interest in the area from the 8th century would have been due in part at least to agricultural wealth.⁴⁶

The Middle Ages

In the late 11th century the bishops of Winchester had demesne in many parishes in Taunton Deane totalling 20 ploughlands, 13 ploughteams, 70 slaves, 16 freedmen and 17 swineherds. It is not known how much demesne land lay in Taunton itself or how many of the 80 villeins and 82 bordars with their 60 ploughteams lived there but there were 64 burgesses, presumably all resident, some of whom would have held land. The whole Taunton manor estate had increased in value from £50 in 1066 to £154 in 1086 and some of that income derived from the borough mills, mint and market.⁴⁷

The vale of Taunton has always been high grade agricultural land for crops and also dairying. In the middle ages it was the most productive and heavily populated of the bishop of Winchester's estates.⁴⁸ Grain production dominated medieval agriculture but there was meadow south-east of the town towards Holway and pasture around the fishpond now in Vivary Park divided between the bishop, one of his freeholders and the priory. Further pasture was on unsown fields and meadows like Haydmead after mowing and in Haydwood.⁴⁹ A vineyard was recorded in Extra Portam tithing in the mid 13th century, the name Winnard surviving there in 1660, and land in Holway was called la Wynard from the

⁴⁵ *PSANHS* CXXXII (1988), 97; CXLII (1999), 202; above, intro.

⁴⁶ Above, landownership.

⁴⁷ *Domesday*, 234.

⁴⁸ M. Page, *The Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester 1301—2* (Winchester, 1996), pp. xxi.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 7, 29; T.J. Hunt, *The Medieval Customs of Taunton Manor* (SRS 66), 31, 45—6; SHC, T/PH/win 1328—9.

mid 14th century said to be near the Hurdleditch in 1468 and covering 4 ½ a. in 1579.⁵⁰ Land either side of the road to Orchard Portman was known as Winnard in 1687—8.⁵¹ Houses appear to have been built on it by 1637.⁵² A garden east of St Mary's churchyard was called the Hopyard in 1612 and 1706 and the Quaker meeting was built on a former hopyard.⁵³ Hops were tithed in 1691—2.⁵⁴

As most agricultural land was held of, or demesne of, the bishops of Winchester, the produce was taken to granges in the castle bailey.⁵⁵ In 1241—2 sales of grain from the castle granges, part of which would have been grown in Taunton, amounted to up to £160 a year.⁵⁶ The bishop's were not the only granges; *c.* 1250 Avice de la Barre, sister of Adam Rys of Taunton, released her claim to Adam's property in North Coker in exchange for his grange outside the east gate.⁵⁷ Presumably the priory also had a grange and a tenant at Obridge was to build a new one in 1322.⁵⁸ Tollcorn at the mills indicates that wheat was the dominant crop in the 13th century followed by rye and oats.⁵⁹ All barley appears to have been malted but as the town and Obridge mills were the only ones on the manor to grind malt in any quantity the barley could have been grown anywhere in Taunton Deane. By the 1290s rye appears to have only been grown with wheat as a mixed crop and few oats were ground, none in the 14th century, but that may be because they were used mainly for animal feed rather than that less was grown.⁶⁰

⁵⁰ Hunt, *Med. Customs Taunton*, 39 [The names in the custumal appear in pipe rolls of the 1250s but the MS is a 16th-century copy and gives no date]; SHC, T/PH/win 1358—9, 1361—2; DD/SP/73, f. 67; 100 (1660); 325/35; 331, p. 38.

⁵¹ SHC, DD/SP/325/231.

⁵² TNA, PROB 11/179/424.

⁵³ SHC, DD/X/LI/1; DD/PR/py/120; DD/SFR.w/28; DD/SAS/C795/TN/10, 37.

⁵⁴ SHC, DD/PM/8/2/18.

⁵⁵ Bishops Hull, *econ. hist.*

⁵⁶ *Receipt and Issue Rolls* (PRS NS 49), 18—19, 32, 76.

⁵⁷ SHC, T/PH/hbs/1/7. An Obridge cottage had a grange attached but no land *c.* 1600: DD/SP/334, f. 21d.

⁵⁸ SHC, A/AHT/3.

⁵⁹ Assuming gruel is oatmeal.

⁶⁰ SHC, T/PH/win 1208—1354.

The tithing of Holway comprised the agricultural land of Taunton St Mary but also included holdings in neighbouring parishes. In the mid 13th century the tithing of Holway had 11 tenants holding four and a quarter virgates, 11 a. and several meadows and plots. Holdings varied from a plot to one and a half virgates. Three cottars each held 5 a. and one only a house and curtilage but owed the same works as the others. At Holway 13 estate labourers, including one woman, held 5 a. each and two shared 6 ½ a. although one of the latter lived at Stoke St Mary. Haydon had 14 workers each holding 5 a. including a smith. Already the suburb of Extra Portam had only gardens and small plots of which the largest was 4 a. and 37 tenants held only 42 a. between them and owed cash payments although a few owed an autumn boon work.⁶¹ In addition the moors around Holway (51 ½ a.) were held by 24 tenants in amounts of between ½ a. and 8 a. with 1 a. allowed for the waggon and cart presumably providing hay for the estate horses. It is possible meadow and pasture were in short supply, perhaps due to converting pasture to grain production in the later 13th century.⁶² After the Black Death there was probably some reduction in arable. The site of the demesne Holway barton is not known but it was a demesne dairy in the 13th century and the cattleshed was demolished, probably after a storm, and was completely rebuilt in 1362—3.⁶³ The barton was farmed for pasture by the 15th century and provided with a new gate in 1410.⁶⁴ By 1419 the cattleshed was a house and a cottage of the lord's barton was recorded later.⁶⁵ The greens of Holway and Haydon presumably originate in the Leazes or Lesses recorded in the Middle Ages and during the 15th century the pasture of several roads was sold.⁶⁶ The Holway grange was in the castle between 1324 and 1473 or later.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Hunt, *Med. Customs Taunton*, 31—3, 39—40, 43—4.

⁶² Hunt, *Med. Customs Taunton*, 45—6.

⁶³ SHC, T/PH/win 1254—5, 1361—3.

⁶⁴ SHC, T/PH/win 1409—10.

⁶⁵ SHC, DD/SP/325/1; DD/DP/183/1.

⁶⁶ SHC, T/PH/win 1409—10; DD/SP/325/1—61; tithe award St Mary.

⁶⁷ SHC, T/PH/win 1324—5, 1377—8, 1455—6, 1472—3.

The tithings of Grasscroft, Millane, Obridge and Pyrland contained the agricultural land of Taunton St James.⁶⁸ In the mid 13th century in Pyrland tithing 12 tenants held nearly six and a half virgates in holdings varying in size from one and a half ferling to a virgate.⁶⁹ One also rented 6 a. of demesne and another 1 a. of meadow. The inhabitants also held the pasture beside the chapel. At Obridge 16 tenants held three and three quarter virgates and 35 a. in holdings varying in size from 7 a. to a half virgate. One also rented 2 a. of demesne with a plot of meadow. Rents on all holdings were usually 3*d.* an acre but demesne cost 6*d.* or more. The total recorded acreage in each parish was only *c.* 430 a. and even allowing for demesne in hand or priory and other estates there must have been unrecorded grassland. There is no reference to town lands for horses or butchers' stock, but possibly Grasscroft and other riverside land was used.⁷⁰ The name Pyrland probably means pear land and pears were grown in Obridge in the early 14th century.⁷¹ Later sources indicate that there was pasture in Millane called Moors and a possible large field called Cleyhull as well as several valuable farms.⁷²

Labour services varied between tenants and some related to the size of the holding and could be very onerous. Those in Holway owed ploughing in winter and Lent, threshing, sowing and care for the crop. If they possessed a full plough team they had to do twice as much work but were paid 1*d.* a day. Tenants also had to harrow, mow, reap and carry, again for payment including a share in two ricks of the hay and three quarters and two bushels of rye. Tenants were entitled to a share in the crops they threshed but had to pay above the market price for grain although at least once the bishop allowed them free grain. The straw might be taken for the lord's beasts although it was usually paid for being regarded as the

⁶⁸ The parish of St James was divided between Taunton Deane and Taunton Priory manor. The custumal relates only to the former and the tithings of Grasscroft and Millane are missing.

⁶⁹ A virgate or yardland was a quarter of a hide and in Taunton Deane was said to be 60 a.: SHC, ACPX/1

⁷⁰ Hunt, *Med. Customs Taunton*, xxii, 69—71.

⁷¹ SHC, A/AHT/3; A/BFA/5.

⁷² SHC, T/PH/win 1348—9; DD/MT/1/1.

tenants' right.⁷³ Carrying services included taking corn to Topsham, Devon and loading it in ships if required or to Bridgwater, Langport and Ilchester, carrying wine back from the same ports for payment, delivering a waggon load of firewood to the castle or, if he had no oxen, a horseload, and taking the bishop's belongings to Rimpton. Cash payments in addition to rent included hundred penny, pannage for pigs and payment for tenants and their wives to attend the lord's scotale. Tenants needed permission to marry their daughters or sell young stock, horses and oxen.⁷⁴ In the 13th century large numbers of livestock especially oxen and pigs were bought at Taunton for meat by the bishop, much of it driven to Wolvesey, Hants., presumably because it was of better quality than could be obtained on his Hampshire estates.⁷⁵ Estate labourers at Haydon worked by the day up to three times a week and were freed from rent, pannage and hundred penny when working for the lord and received a sheaf each day of reaping and the use of the lord's plough. The smith owed no agricultural work but instead was required to maintain the ironwork of four ploughs. Cottars owed only two days and received food. The Holway labourers owed similar work for one to three days a week according to the size of their holding. The workers received money for food at Christmas and Easter. the four ploughmen, smith and the bedel received 1s. and the carpenter who repaired the ploughs had 8d.⁷⁶ Tenants in St James parish owed similar services but some by custom owed only 1 a. or less of ploughing and a tenant of pasture had to find an ox for carrying. Tenants of smallholding were only required to do the 'small works'. Any tenant serving as reeve had the second best ½ a. of wheat and a rick of hay, the 2a. called Reveland and was quit of other works and pannage.⁷⁷ Twelve workers in Millane tithing paid 32s. 8d. a year to be released in the early 15th century but in 1427 seven of them worked a day at

⁷³ Hunt, *Med. Customs Taunton*, xxx—xxxii, 31—2.

⁷⁴ Hunt, *Med. Customs Taunton*, 31—2.

⁷⁵ SHC, T/PH/win 1244—9.

⁷⁶ Hunt, *Med. Customs Taunton*, 43—4.

⁷⁷ Hunt, *Med. Customs Taunton*, 69—71.

Lammas and in the autumn to be free of rent indicating the continuing importance of the harvest. During the rest of the century the demesne was increasingly leased out to tenants as overland⁷⁸ Cottage tenants by the 15th century owed no work but held land measured in daynes. Daynes, sometimes interpreted as for day work, were a measure of land by the 14th century and from the 15th to 19th centuries were used instead of perches as subdivisions of roods in the Taunton area.⁷⁹

In 1298 a poor priory tenant was presented for subletting his land for a crop, possibly he could not afford the seed and labour to cultivate it. The following year others had been illegally feeding cattle on the prior's pasture.⁸⁰ The new tenant of a tenement at Obridge in 1320 was allowed to pay his £4 fine in quarterly instalments.⁸¹ In the early 14th century several tenants rented small acreages of arable and meadow on short leases at 1s. an acre or more and others were presented with subletting or subdividing. There were several complaints of poor enclosure leading to animals straying onto demesne land with plough beasts and sheep getting into the meadow in the 1330s.⁸² In Canon Street tithing there was only garden land.⁸³ By c. 1420 works were sold and comprised mowing and reaping in Extra Portam, which included land in West Monkton, and mowing, reaping, manual works and grain carrying in Obridge.⁸⁴

There was a demesne sheepcote at Holway in 1302 which provided dung for the fields where 181 a. in the hundred were sown with wheat at c. 2 bu. per acre, 5 ½ a. with rye and 4 a. with peas but it is not known in which parish those acreages lay.⁸⁵ Wheat was sown at

⁷⁸ SHC, DD/MT/1/1—2, 4.

⁷⁹ e.g. SHC, DD/SP/325/12, 29; DD/CH/76/4; DD/SP/257.

⁸⁰ SHC, A/BFA/1.

⁸¹ BL, Add. Ch. 16332.

⁸² SHC, A/BFA/4—6; A/AHT/3.

⁸³ SHC, A/BFA/7.

⁸⁴ SHC, DD/SP/408.

⁸⁵ SHC, T/PH/win 1301—2.

Okehill and oats in Cleyhill and East Langforth in St James parish in the 1410 and later.⁸⁶ By the early 14th century lack of pasture led to the grazing of ditches and highways. Few meadows were recorded apart from Haydmead, which produced enough hay for 14 ricks and the smaller Rodmore both in Holway.⁸⁷ There were waterleats at Pyrland recorded until the 18th century and the streams diverted in the Obridge and Priorswood area for watering meadows may have early origins and were licensed later by the manor.⁸⁸ Mowing duties were carried out in Bishops Hull. Overland, not attached to a homestead and derived from clearing new land or former demesne, was let to tenants. Fines for copyholds were up to 40 *s.* for a ferling holding at Pyrland and several people shared one parcel of 7 a. at Obridge.⁸⁹ By the 1340s many copyhold tenements were a mix of bondland and overland. Although some rents were lost to plague there was plenty of demand for tenements, which were held for the same rents and for fines of over £6 for a half-virgate holding. Only in Holway tithing was there still a loss of rent in the 1360s and then only for one parcel of land. It is possible that tenants took the opportunity to add extra holdings to their farms or to provide for adult children.⁹⁰ There are few references to field names but in 1349 8 a. of arable in Pauls Field was let for 6*s.* 8*d.*⁹¹ Tauntonesfeld let out in 1282—3 may be the West Taunton field was recorded in Holway in 1410 and the Tauntfield of 1457 and later when it was overland close to the town on the south-east, divided into daynes between many tenants. Small plots were named after the occupier.⁹² By 1500 overland, possibly demesne pasture, was recorded at Rapshill in Pyrland and Culverhay recorded there in the 16th and 17th century may refer to a demesne dovecot.⁹³

⁸⁶ SHC, T/PH/win 1409—10; DD/SP/325/2.

⁸⁷ SHC, T/PH/win 1328—9, 1334—5, 1346—7, 1409—10.

⁸⁸ SHC, DD/MT/1/6, 5/15; DD/SP/245 (1720).

⁸⁹ SHC, T/PH/win 1328—9, 1334—5, 1346—7.

⁹⁰ SHC, T/PH/win 1348—50, 1361—2.

⁹¹ TNA, E 326/4985.

⁹² SHC, T/PH/win 1282—3, 1409—10, 1500—1; DD/SP/325/26; DD/MT/11/2; TNA, E210/1119.

⁹³ SHC, T/PH/win 1500—1; DD/SP/73, f. 364; DD/MT/5/15

In Holway Tauntfield, Redhill, Medeland, Waterslade, le Flores, later the Flowers, and les Mores were overland.⁹⁴

The priory's manor of Obridge in Taunton and Kingston may have produced barley, rye and cider but by the 1420s its mowing, reaping, carrying and manual works had been sold. The urban estate produced a much higher income, over £30 a year in the 1420s—40s compared with £20 or less from the rest of its Taunton estates combined. In Grasscroft the priory had only pasture let to several tenants. By the Dissolution the priory's Taunton estate was worth c. £50 Taunton from rents and court profits. The income from farming the tithes of the two parishes with the fixed tithe of mills was £44.⁹⁵

16th – 18th centuries

A saffron garden was recorded in 1505 and a farm at Pyrland produced apples and pears in the 1520s.⁹⁶ Apple pots were the subject of two disputes in the 1560s.⁹⁷ There was sufficient food produced for the local market and for export although in 1536 rioters attacked traders taking grain out of Taunton.⁹⁸

By 1566 holdings were being accumulated and although only one holding in Taunton St James comprised one virgate the amalgamation of holdings, sometimes with the loss of one farmstead, resulted in 24 farms of a half virgate or more in the parish and of which four had a virgate or more most with overland. Robert Hill at Yard had created a farm of eight holdings, four of which he had added to those he had inherited, and four cottages and overland. There were additional small freeholds caused by the purchase of chantry lands.

There may have been some common fields but they had probably been inclosed well before

⁹⁴ SHC, T/PH/win 1500—1, 1521—2; DD/SP/331, pp. 2—32. Flores was probably former demesne arable the name indicating a cornfield: Ekwall, *Oxf. Dict. Eng. Pl-Names*, 182.

⁹⁵ SHC, A/BFA/7—9; BL, Add. MS. 30291.

⁹⁶ TNA, PROB 11/14/794.; SHC, T/PH/win 1524—5.

⁹⁷ SHC, DD/SP/2 (Holway 100 1569).

⁹⁸ P. Clark and P. Slack, *English Towns in Transition: 1500—1700* (Oxford, 1976), 90; below, local politics.

the 16th century. In the south of St Mary's parish small fields belonged to Stoke St Mary parish possibly because it was the location of Stoke field recorded in the 16th century and possibly shared with tenants from that parish.⁹⁹ In St James's parish Pyrland Common Field was recorded in 1807 and the name Stony Furlong was found on the eastern boundary with Cheddon in 1829.¹⁰⁰

In 1566 the tenants of Holway and Staplegrove hundreds still owed a communal payment of 4s. 2d. to the bailiff of Hull hundred presumably in lieu of mowing work on demesne meadow. Some farm tenants in Obridge and Pyrland tithings still owed a day's work and all owed service as reeve, bedel and tithingman but not those in Millane instead two had to carry timber to the mills when needed, one limited to ten oaks. Other tenants may have escaped the obligation to carry timber following a dispute in 1276—7.¹⁰¹ Some tenants of smaller holdings were obliged to drive stock to Winchester if required but were freed from payment for release of other works.¹⁰² Wealthy farmers were renting overland at up to 3s. 4d. an acre for meadow although more usually 1s. and 9d. to over 1s. an acre for arable. Richard Morse of More farm paid 11s. 4d. for his three-ferling holdings but £2 8s. 11d. for 46 a. of overland and a new mansion.¹⁰³ In 1584 he gave his wife for her sole use the hall and a parlour, two chambers over them, a buttery, three other chambers one called the chapel chamber and a loft above them, the use of the kitchen, bakehouse, wring and bunting houses with her son who had the rest of the house, the orchard, the north part of the barn, two gardens and £20 a year. He had spent £40 buying the reversion of two town houses for a son.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Mayberry, *The Vale of Taunton Past*, 54; SHC, tithe award, St Mary; DD/SP/71 (Holway, Staplegrove).

¹⁰⁰ SHC, DD/SP/255 (1807); tithe award, St James.

¹⁰¹ SHC, DD/SP 71 (Holway, Staplegrove); T/PH/win 1276—7; DD/X/HUN/6/5.

¹⁰² SHC, DD/DP/331, 334.

¹⁰³ SHC, DD/SP 71 (Holway, Staplegrove).

¹⁰⁴ TNA, PROB 11/67/13.

Thomas More of the Priory in 1574 cattle, pigs, wains, ploughs, corn and hay and some of his 11 male and female servants may have worked his farm.¹⁰⁵ In 1575 Alice Quick of Taunton St James had a farm in Holway with cattle, sheep, corn and fruit.¹⁰⁶ In 1581 Robert Hill was able to charge his farm at Haydon, left to his wife, with annuities totalling £30.¹⁰⁷ Townspeople kept fowls and pigs and a shared pigsty was recorded in Fore Street in 1404.¹⁰⁸ Pigs were a regular nuisance especially in St Mary's churchyard in the late 16th century and attempts to impound the animals and remove pigsties in the town in the early 17th century largely failed.¹⁰⁹

The favourable customs of Taunton Deane manor, followed by the Priory manor after the Dissolution, allowed farmers to enlarge and improve farms having security of tenure and the right to raise money on their copyholds by a system of mortgage surrenders registered by the manor as well as the right to choose an heir in a similar manner. The rights of widows to continue in their estates even if they remarried allowed for continuity and enabled daughters to inherit and maintain family farms. Taunton copyholds, were usually referred to in the post medieval period as customary freeholds. If a tenant made no provision the default was a form of borough english under which the youngest son or daughter or other relative inherited.¹¹⁰ Although the terms of copyholding were extremely generous compared with other manors tenants could lose their land for committing waste or destruction.¹¹¹ Assarts were recorded in the 16th and 17th centuries although probably much earlier and appear to be woodland clearance.¹¹² By 1566 two large farms at Lyngford had been thrown together and one

¹⁰⁵ TNA, PROB 11/58/109.

¹⁰⁶ TNA, PROB 11/57/391.

¹⁰⁷ TNA, PROB 11/63/360.

¹⁰⁸ SHC, DD/PM/7/2/9.

¹⁰⁹ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/27, p. 12; DD/SP/49 (1593—5, 1600); 50 (1611).

¹¹⁰ G.B Shillibeer, *The Ancient Customs of the Manor of Taunton Deane...1817* (Taunton, 1821), passim; J. Toulmin, *History of Taunton*, rev. J. Savage (Taunton, 1822), 373; D. Defoe, *Tour through Great Britain* (London, 1927), I, 50—9.

¹¹¹ SHC, DD/SP/86, loose paper.

¹¹² SHC, DD/SP/86, f. 333; 162 (1676).

farmhouse demolished.¹¹³ In Holway tithing in 1579 there were 31 bondland holdings and at least 23 cottage holdings, one cottager had recently accumulated 18 a. of overland. There were also eight holdings with barns only, possibly held by people with houses in the town. In Extra Portam a grange and some overland were recorded but otherwise the tithing consisted of c. 84 cottage properties some already divided into several dwellings, which shared the original cottager's duties such as serving as tithingman.¹¹⁴ High fines continued to be paid for desirable property often higher for a cottage in the town than meadow land.¹¹⁵ In the early 17th century some Obridge tenants till owed a day's work on the river banks for 1d. if required.¹¹⁶

Apple, cherry and plum trees marked a boundary in Canon Street tithing in the 1620s.¹¹⁷ In the early 1630s Gerard referred to the orchards, gardens, and cherry gardens and the rich red earth that produced early crops such as peas.¹¹⁸ A cherry orchard had been developed for houses by 1684.¹¹⁹ The name cherry orchard survived at Priory Gate in 1797 and on Kingston Road in 1839.¹²⁰ Several 17th-century farmers continued to produce fruit¹²¹ and an apple monger was recorded in 1642.¹²² An innkeeper who died in 1626 had a mixed farm with land at West Buckland producing wheat and hay but seems to have concentrated on dairying producing cheese and butter presumably for his customers.¹²³ The cloth industry accounted for the production of teasels in 1635 but wheat accounted for half the arable tithed in kind in St Mary's parish and barley, beans and peas for most of the remainder but some oats and

¹¹³ SHC, DD/SP/86, f. 135.

¹¹⁴ SHC, DD/SP/331,

¹¹⁵ Hants. R.O., 11M59/C1/19/10.

¹¹⁶ SHC, DD/SP/334, f. 15.

¹¹⁷ SHC, DD/SP/376.

¹¹⁸ E. H. Bates, *Gerard's Survey of Somerset, 1633*, 55.

¹¹⁹ SHC, DD/MT/15/1 (1684).

¹²⁰ SHC, DD/BR/cg/5; tithe award, St James.

¹²¹ SHC, DD/SP/1642/14, 1645/51.

¹²² TNA, CP40/2496, image 904d: www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021

¹²³ SHC, DD/SF/11/1/34.

vetches were grown.¹²⁴ There were periods of dearth of grain in the early 1630s with wheat, rye, barley, oats and peas selling in the market for high prices.¹²⁵ A Haydon man was a licensed trader in butter and cheese in the 1630s travelling with two horses around Somerset and Dorset.¹²⁶ In 1635 one farmer in St James's parish had a dairy and a woman at Obridge had stored cheese worth £5 in 1642.¹²⁷ Cows were common heriots in the 17th century.¹²⁸ A farmer in 1682 with 11 cows had cheese worth £25 in store.¹²⁹ Cows, sheep and pigs were tithed in the 1690s but as many farmers paid cash tithes based on their acreage the total kept cannot be ascertained. In 1692—3 the wool of 320 sheep in St Mary's was tithed and the milk of 40 cows. Town pigs were tithed separately.¹³⁰

In 1634 a farmer at Pyrland raised horses, cattle, sheep and pigs and produced hay, wheat and barley, the wheat being the most valuable.¹³¹ Wheat usually sold for almost twice the price of barley and rye and four times that of oats.¹³² Another in 1635 had corn worth £85 and malt and implements in his brewhouse worth £100, he had new brick, stone, alabaster and timber worth £106, probably for a new farmstead but he may have been trading as well as farming.¹³³ An unmarried woman farming at Obridge had a well-furnished home in 1642 including an apple chamber containing apples and cheese, milk and cider houses, wheat, barley and beans worth nearly £20, cattle, sheep and pigs with hay valued at £41.¹³⁴

¹²⁴ SHC, DD/M/7/10/2.

¹²⁵ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1631—2, pp. 159, 282; 1633—4, DDpp. 85, 127, 171, 391, 539.

¹²⁶ E. H. Bates-Harbin, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1625—39* (Som. Rec. Soc. 24), 134, 214, 235, 256, 262, 278, 300.

¹²⁷ SHC, DD/SP/1635/128, 1642/14.

¹²⁸ SHC, DD/SP/325/203, 206, 231.

¹²⁹ SHC, DD/SP/1682/15.

¹³⁰ SHC, DD/PM/8/2/18—19.

¹³¹ SHC, DD/SP/1634/20.

¹³² SHC, DD/SP/43/8, 44; 53 (Oct. 1631).

¹³³ SHC, DD/SP/1635/132.

¹³⁴ SHC, DD/SP/1642/14.

However, a yeoman at Haydon had a smallholding with only 2a. of wheat in 1645 and most of his wealth was £50 out on loan.¹³⁵

The bondland holdings on the bishop's manor in 1647 had hardly changed since the 13th century but most farmers had either amalgamated several or had added quantities of overland for which they paid higher rents than for their tenements. Payment for release of works amounted for nearly a quarter of the income of Holway tithing. Urban expansion meant there was little if any land in Extra Portam and Grasscroft tithings but in Holway tithing farmers shared land in the Flowers and Moors, Stoke field, Pool mead and former woodland like Hayd Wood.¹³⁶ Only c. 11 farmers are recorded as having had more than 40 a. but not all overland was quantified so the figure may have been higher. Acreages are not given for Obridge or Pyrland but their bond holdings were much larger than at Holway perhaps reflecting differing fertility of the soil north and south of the town. All tithings except Pyrland had a number of landless cottages and all houses in Extra Portam, the south side of East Reach, were landless. The largest estate was Yard where Elizabeth Brereton held six half virgate tenements and others unspecified.¹³⁷ There seem to have been problems collecting rents and dues in the 1650s but heriot sheep and cows were recorded and one merchant was admitted to a large number of small overland holdings totalling four barns, over 51 a. and the pasture of the town ditch possibly he intended to sublet in parcels or to created a farm.¹³⁸ A rental of 1700 treated farms as integrated holdings making no mention of bond tenements or overland but manorial court records continued to note bondland until enfranchisement.¹³⁹ Quit or lord's rents on the two Taunton manors were fixed and often went unpaid, their low

¹³⁵ SHC, DD/SP/1645/51.

¹³⁶ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/16; DD/DP/183/1.

¹³⁷ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/16.

¹³⁸ SHC. DD/SP/325/201, 203.

¹³⁹ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/12.

value making it little worth pursuing them. However, lords took care to assert their rights to ownership to secure the valuable entry fines on change of tenancy.¹⁴⁰

Despite the amount of wheat produced very few oxen are recorded until the 1680s and horses appear to have been used for ploughing. Presumably the need of Taunton residents to hire horses for trading and travelling meant that it was more profitable for local farmers to keep horses. However, one prosperous farmer with plate and books in his house and with livestock and corn valued at over £100 in 1668 had neither oxen nor horses so possibly he hired them.¹⁴¹ A woman farming in St James parish in 1679 had 12 a. of wheat, barley and peas, sheep, cattle and pigs but also a woad mill, wool and cloth so was presumably also making cloth.¹⁴² A comfortable small farm may have been the desired retirement of tradespeople and professional men. A maltster had cattle, sheep and pigs worth over £45 in 1664.¹⁴³ In 1679 innkeeper John Barton who kept the small Rose and Crown in the market place also had a comfortably furnished house, produced beans and hay and kept cattle, sheep horses and pigs.¹⁴⁴ A doctor, John Walsh, died in 1682 worth over £1,000 of which £100 was in books and £363 in money but he had produce and hay worth £79 and cattle, oxen, horses, and sheep valued at £113. He made cider and cheese and lived in a well-furnished six-bedroom house of which one chamber was new.¹⁴⁵ Several copyhold farms in Taunton were held by major west Somerset landowners in the 17th and 18th centuries including Poole farm by the Wyndhams, Haydon farm by the Aclands and Pyrland by the Yeas.¹⁴⁶

Two prosperous farmers who died in 1682 each had four oxen, worth £5 each, two horses and ploughgear although one had no recorded arable land or produce and the other

¹⁴⁰ SHC, DD/HC/16/7/6, 16/8/1—3,

¹⁴¹ SHC, DD/SP/1668/34.

¹⁴² SHC, DD/SP/1679/2.

¹⁴³ SHC, DD/SP/1664/64.

¹⁴⁴ SHC, DD/SP/1679/20.

¹⁴⁵ TNA, PROB 4/8674.

¹⁴⁶ SHC, DD/SP/162 (1667); DD/AH/53/2, 57/1/7, 66/11; DD/SP/257 (1836); above, landownership.

only 28 a. Another had eight plough steers and a modest amount of grain in 1684. It is possible that the owners hired them out to small farmers like the man at Holway whose 15 a. of wheat was worth as much as his livestock and house contents together or a dairy farmer who only had a few acres of arable.¹⁴⁷ One farmer with hay worth £50 and grain worth £38 as well as £400 out on loan in 1684 had no horses and only one ox, but another may have gone for a heriot as happened to a poor farmer at Shoreditch the same year.¹⁴⁸ In 1699 ploughing and sowing 14 a. with hired labour cost £18 13s.¹⁴⁹ Many farms were very small with fewer than 5 a. of arable and small herds of cattle and sheep.¹⁵⁰

In 1683 a Christmas turkey rent was demanded for property in Taunton so presumably they were reared locally although poultry appears rarely in farming inventories.¹⁵¹ Clover was also being grown and dairy cows and sheep are recorded on most farms.¹⁵² Bere corn was still grown around Taunton in the late 17th century.¹⁵³ Apples for cider and culinary use continued to be grown and in 1663 a widow in St James parish had a small farm of which her cider house with press were among the most highly priced items.¹⁵⁴ In 1684 apples were the most valuable crop on a small farm at Shoreditch, which still had a cider press and mill in 1773.¹⁵⁵ In 1691—2 151 ½ hogshead were tithed in St Mary's and tithe fruit was worth nearly £2.¹⁵⁶ Tithes were increasingly replaced by compositions on acreage so the tithe accounts recorded diminishing details of crops and stock.¹⁵⁷ In 1760 a lease of a farm at Holway included the use of a building containing an apple mill, 2 cider presses, bottle rack

¹⁴⁷ SHC, DD/SP/1682/60, 1684/121, 1685/18, 1690/18.

¹⁴⁸ SHC, DD/SP/1684/28, 94.

¹⁴⁹ SHC, DD/MT/15/1 (1699).

¹⁵⁰ SHC, DD/SP/1684/94, 1700/28.

¹⁵¹ SHC, D/B/ta/31/5/3.

¹⁵² SHC, DD/SP/1684/28, 94, 1685/18, 1690/18.

¹⁵³ SHC, DD/SP/1682/60, 1700/28.

¹⁵⁴ SHC, DD/SF/11/1/51.

¹⁵⁵ SHC, DD/SP/1690/18; SHC, DD/SF/2/52/9.

¹⁵⁶ SHC, DD/PM/8/2/17.

¹⁵⁷ SHC, DD/PM/8/2/18—19.

and vessels.¹⁵⁸ The Tone Conservators planted an apple orchard at Obridge mill after 1768 and built an apple mill, letting the orchard for £4.¹⁵⁹ Horticulture was important to supply the town. A gardener Thomas Odell left his son his gardens, stock, tools and hives in 1715.¹⁶⁰ An ancient perennial kale is known as Taunton Deane.¹⁶¹

The Taunton Deane area was said in the 18th century to grow the heaviest wheat in the country.¹⁶² A lease, probably of the early 18th century, allowed the tenant to take eight crops in ten years although one was to be of peas and beans, provided he applied lime, dung or soap ashes twice in his 1st year of ploughing and once thereafter.¹⁶³ Although some farmers grew barley and fodder, wheat was the main crop and even smallholdings were largely given over to it. The other main feature of early 18th century farms was a dairy herd and cows were sometimes worth more than horses. Most farmers still had a mix of livestock except for oxen, as horses were once again the main draught animal recorded. Waggon became more common on larger farms.¹⁶⁴ The Aclands' Haydon Green Farm in 1767 (c. 73 a.) was almost entirely arable and a large orchard was used for pasture.¹⁶⁵ In 1767 Sir Benjamin Hammet bought Holway farm for £2,500 as it could be let for £123 5s. and a hogshead of cider but he let it for £130. In 1774 he reduced the rent to £100 to cover the farmer's costs in draining, guttering and adding 1,000 hogsheads of lime to improve the land.¹⁶⁶ It was probably one of the two c. 100-a farms, amalgamated from several holdings and overland, that his son John sold in the early 19th century for £9,000 and £9,900, values not seen again until the 20th century.¹⁶⁷ Sir Benjamin was not the only wealthy man to invest

¹⁵⁸ SHC, DD/DP/97/1.

¹⁵⁹ SHC, DD/MK/34, 53 (1784—5).

¹⁶⁰ M. Siraut, *Somerset Wills* (Som. Rec. Soc. 89), 172g.

¹⁶¹ H. Dove, *The Kew Gardener's Guide to Growing Vegetables* (2020), 52.

¹⁶² SHC, A/CPX/1.

¹⁶³ SHC, DD/SP/358.

¹⁶⁴ eg SHC, DD/SP/1721/31, 1731/35.

¹⁶⁵ SHC, DD/AH/66/11.

¹⁶⁶ SHC, DD/DP/97/1.

¹⁶⁷ SHC, DD/AY/28; DD/DP/183/1; DD/SP/198.

in farming in the mid 18th century. John Doman a Taunton tobacconist bought farms in Holway and Shoreditch and had an estate in Brompton Regis when he died in 1763. He required his tenant at Holway to restrict arable cropping and before breaking fallow to add 160 horseloads of manure to each acre.¹⁶⁸

Flax had been grown from the late 17th century and was a valuable cash crop although labour intensive to produce.¹⁶⁹ Mary Halliday's farmer at Lyngford in the 1750s sold flax for £5 the pack at Bridgwater and the seed for 5s 6d the bushel and the tailings for 3s 6d. Pitting, spreading and working the flax to produce just under seven packs cost over £8 and threshing and winnowing seed cost 6d to 1s a day depending on whether women or men were employed, the same price as for wheat.¹⁷⁰ Flax was grown at Rowbarton but tenants were allowed only one crop in five years in 1761.¹⁷¹ In 1787 three farms produced 449 stone of flax.¹⁷² In 1794 Pyrland farm (133 a.) was let as a ring-fenced mixed farm with orchard for £260 a year.¹⁷³ In 1799 a Holway tenant was required to remake his hedges and ditches at least one in seven years and dress and manure his grass.¹⁷⁴ Despite the value of agricultural land in the later 18th century agricultural and suburban property accounted for only £338 of the land tax assessment for the Taunton parishes compared with £656 for town houses, markets and stock in trade.¹⁷⁵

19th century

A farmer engaged in a tithe dispute provided details of his farm in 1810. At Haydon he produced 30 a. of crops mainly wheat and 12a. of hay said to be barely enough to support the

¹⁶⁸ SHC, DD/SF/2/52/3—4, 8—9; 11/1/151.

¹⁶⁹ SHC, DD/PM/7/10/12, 48.

¹⁷⁰ SHC, DD/MY/8

¹⁷¹ SHC, DD/MY/7.

¹⁷² SHC, Q/RLh/63.

¹⁷³ TNA, DD/HC/76/10; 121/41.

¹⁷⁴ SHC, DD/BR/rh/3.

¹⁷⁵ SHC, Q/REI/35/24—6.

plough as he kept three horses and 12 oxen for the farm and a riding horse. He had a dairy herd and bred his own oxen, renting pasture in Ruishton, Stoke St Mary and Hillfarrance where he fattened his old stock. He kept a sow, chickens, geese and duck, although a fox got the last, and an unspecified number of sheep, possibly 250—300 produced 480 lb. of wool and his orchards produced c. 240 bags of apples.¹⁷⁶ By 1813 several farms were being amalgamated with some loss of farmsteads but land was still divided between bondland and overland because heriots, works and other manorial dues levied on the former could be worth nearly half the manor income. Land exchanged between tenants and absorbed into their holdings, rather than held separately, took its status from the holding it became part of so that former bondland became overland and vice versa. Waste that had been inclosed was held for an entry fine and rent only. Although the Taunton tenants of Taunton Deane manor had the same generous common rights as those elsewhere it is not clear that there were many places where they could exercise them, certainly by the 19th century.¹⁷⁷ In 1688 the manor jury forbade grants of common as they must be open to all tenants.¹⁷⁸ Some inclosure had taken place of small areas like Haydon Green by 1767¹⁷⁹ but still providing access to the houses around it. At Holway Green a man was allowed to have land with elms from 1672 and another a man attempted to close the road into the green in 1739. In 1878 when Taunton Deane lands were formally enclosed the only uninclosed land in St Mary's parish were Holway and Haydon Greens, both small rectangular areas, the latter subject to a land charge. The 2 a. allotted to the poor was unsuitable being a distance from the town but there were no other allotment grounds available.¹⁸⁰ By 1890 there were 27 small allotments.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ SHC, DD/MK/10.

¹⁷⁷ Devon HC, 74B/MT/1918; H.B. Shillibeer, *The Ancient Customs of the Manor of Taunton Deane...1817* (Taunton, 1821), 27—30, 60—1, xxvii.

¹⁷⁸ SHC, DD/MT/15/1 (1688).

¹⁷⁹ SHC, DD/AH/66/11; Devon HC, 74B/MT/1918.

¹⁸⁰ SHC, DD/SP/331, p. 8; DD/MT/15/1 (1739); D/P/tau.m/5/4/3.

¹⁸¹ SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/14, p. 372.

Arable land still dominated but former overland marsh had been converted to meadow at Haydon. In 1811 99a out of the 170-a Haydon House estate was arable, 32 a. was meadow and 17 a. was orchard including Golden Pippin.¹⁸² In 1819 farms were rack rented for £3 an acre although in 1840 a landowner was trying to secure closer to £5 for three farms he was trying to consolidate into one.¹⁸³ Most farms in Holway hundred were enfranchised in the 1820s including two Holway Farms, the first (101 a.) based on two medieval farms and the second (130 a.) on four smallholdings and both with large amounts of added overland. Similarly two farms at Shoreditch with land in both Taunton and Stoke St Mary parishes had increased in size to c. 60 a. each, probably in the later 18th century, with the addition of overland. Dowsland farm covered 41 a. of which over 26 a. was former overland and 22 a. of overland had increased the size of Moor farm to 73 a.¹⁸⁴ By contrast Lucky Tree farm was divided and sold in the early 1820s with part used to build Mount Terrace and extend the Barracks and the Convent grounds and the rest later becoming the site of King's College.¹⁸⁵

Priory farm in 1816 produced wheat and barley with two draught horses and maintained a small flock of sheep and a dairy herd.¹⁸⁶ It was subsequently farmed with Lambrook and in 1849 had winnowing and threshing machines, an apple mill, a dairy with cheese press, 12 wheeled vehicles, seven horses, 210 Devon sheep, 40 cattle and 21 pigs, eight wheat and three barley mows and 75 tons of hay. Nether farm used oxen.¹⁸⁷ In 1821 of 1,706 families, 183 were still engaged in agriculture and 75 in St Mary's parish in 1831 although only 12 occupied land. Eight families regularly employed labour although 107 agricultural labourers were recorded.¹⁸⁸ Wages were low in 1837 and labourers were given

¹⁸² SHC, DD/DP/85/6, 90/11.

¹⁸³ SHC, DD/DP/23/8, 45/12.

¹⁸⁴ SHC, DD/PYR/8; DD/CH/138/1, pp. 37—43, 47—52, 86—8.

¹⁸⁵ SHC, DD/DP/51/7, 54/4, 69/4.

¹⁸⁶ SHC, DD/HC/121/10/109.

¹⁸⁷ SHC, A/CGF/1.

¹⁸⁸ Census cited in C. and J. Greenwood, *Som. Delineated* (1822), 185; SHC, D/P/tau.m/23/16.

liquor, probably poor quality cider in lieu of about a quarter of their pay, up to half for women and boys. Males earned slightly more on piece rate, 1s. 6d. instead of 1s. 2d. a day but women had only 7d. to 8d. a day and boys 3d. to 8d. Women and girls were better off working in factories.¹⁸⁹ Between the 1820s and 1840s farm rents were reduced, sometimes by nearly half, as agricultural depressions made farms less profitable. Landowners found their income insufficient to meet interest payments on the mortgages they had taken out to buy the land.¹⁹⁰

Pigs and poultry had been kept in town for centuries and Trinity Hospital kept pigs in the 1950s.¹⁹¹ A man incubated hens eggs in the steam engine of the silk mill where he worked in the 1840s and later John Morse invented and built poultry incubators behind his house in Alma Street.¹⁹² A poultry show was held on the Parade between the 1850s and 1880s.¹⁹³

Four acres of potato ground was recorded probably at Greenway in 1831.¹⁹⁴ In 1839 St James's parish lay on valuable and fertile land, mainly loam over gravel, easily managed and well-cultivated with some irrigated meadow and pasture and orchard. Farms were small and hay was produced for Taunton market. Arable accounted for half the land and produced 27 bushels of wheat or 38 bushels of barley or turnips per acre. Livestock comprised 1,200 sheep, 130 beef and dairy cattle, and 40 plough and 60 other oxen.¹⁹⁵ Of 1,100 a. of titheable land arable covered 528 a., meadow and pasture 468 a., orchard 65 a., nurseries, gardens and homesteads 20 a. and canals the remaining 19 a. In St Mary's parish arable covered 439 a. of 1,212 a. of titheable land, meadow and pasture 630 a., orchard 93 a., and nurseries, gardens and plantations 52 a. Partly because of the high quality of the land and the proliferation of

¹⁸⁹ TNA, HO 73/53/9.

¹⁹⁰ SHC, DD/DP/183/1.

¹⁹¹ SHC, Q/SR/76/157; A/BVA/1 (1854—9); below, lcal govt.

¹⁹² *Barbados Agricultural Reporter*, 15 Jan. 1855: BNA accessed 12 May 2022; *Where to Buy: Taunton* (1890), 44.

¹⁹³ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/5, p. 377, 31/1/8, p. 66.

¹⁹⁴ SHC, DD/DP/49/4.

¹⁹⁵ TNA, IR 18/8802.

orchards and market gardens serving the town but also of the fragmented nature of copyholding, agricultural holdings were relatively small. Many large fields were held by charities including several from outside Taunton and other small areas formed part of farms in neighbouring parishes. The largest farms were at Holway farm (128 a.), Priorswood (126 a.), Greenway (122 a.) and Haydon House (110 a.). There were 15 holdings between 50 and 100 a., 15 between 20 and 50 a. and 24 under 20 a., mostly in St James' parish. The manor reeve continued to occupy Reeves Field near Holway.¹⁹⁶ Greenway farmhouse and buildings were described as modern in 1852.¹⁹⁷ Haydwood or Haydon Wood farm (73 a.) was created by woodland clearance in the post medieval period. It had been a small farm since 1794 or earlier. It had a farmyard but no house, although the old customary description refers to two cottages, and was let to neighbouring farmers. It was enfranchised in 1862.¹⁹⁸

Large nurseries were laid out in North Town in the early 19th century. The largest eventually occupied land on both sides of Staplegrove Road and was run by Quaker seedsman John Young. He expanded in 1824 and the nursery covered 9 a. by 1827 and over 17 a. by 1831. In 1848 and 1855 he bought other nurserymen's stock including greenhouses but let the management of the nursery to others by 1844.¹⁹⁹ He had an extensive seed shop north of the Tone Bridge iron foundry, which later absorbed his premises.²⁰⁰ The nursery was run by the Dyers in 1864 and a Mr Hockins in the 1870s before the whole area was sold for residential development.²⁰¹ One small nursery near Chip Lane and three market gardens at Grassgrove between Station Road and the river survived into the 20th century.²⁰² Chantry gardens nursery on Kingston Road was sold for housing development in 1947.²⁰³

¹⁹⁶ SHC, tithe award, St James and St Mary.

¹⁹⁷ SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/1/T1/2.

¹⁹⁸ SHC, tithe award, St Mary; DD/DP/69/8, box 103 (abstr. of title 1862).

¹⁹⁹ SHC, DD/CH/79/1, 4; DD/HC/15/4/11, 20.

²⁰⁰ SHC, DD/SAS/C/212/Map148.

²⁰¹ SHC, DD/CH/79/4.; DD/DP/49/4, 66/8; above intro.

²⁰² SHC, DD/IR/T/26/1, pp. 64, 68; 26/2, 4.

²⁰³ SHC, DD/KW/1947/21.

In 1841 34 farmers were recorded but 12 lived in town as did many of the 131 agricultural labourers although one farm at Pyrland had two resident labourers. At least two farms were dairies.²⁰⁴ Some small farms on the fringe of the built-up area were already losing land like Cockpit on the Kingston Road, which had been reduced from 66 a. in 1817 to 31 a. in 1831 to 18 a. by 1849 and could only have been viable by being rented with another holding.²⁰⁵ By 1851 farms had increased in size especially in St Mary's where there were six farms of 100 a. or more of which the largest was Holway farm (224 a.), an amalgamation of two large holdings since 1839, employing six labourers. In St James' parish there were three over 100 a. of which Old Pyrland covered 380 a. employing 26 labourers. Many of the large farms included land in neighbouring parishes but of 25 farmers recorded only four lived in town and they employed a total of 121 labourers although 177 were resident in Taunton including four women, also six ploughboys, a cowherd and a shepherd. One farmer was also a seed merchant and who had resident farm apprentices.²⁰⁶ The Royal Agricultural Show was held in Taunton in 1842, the council of the Bath and West of England Agricultural Society met at Taunton in the mid 19th century and the show was held in the Taunton area several times.²⁰⁷

A major change in the mid 19th century was the production and use of artificial fertilisers. The scavengers made money in the 18th and early 19th century from the manure they collected and farmers mixed sewage and animal dung especially those who had open sewers through their land such as Priory and Lambrook farms. As late as 1853 interest was expressed in selling all the town sewage for manure.²⁰⁸ The Trood family had a wharf north-east of the Tone Bridge where they had established a steam-driven bone crushing mill before

²⁰⁴ TNA, HO 107/972.

²⁰⁵ SHC, DD/DP?C1358/38; DD/DP/49/4, 69/8.

²⁰⁶ TNA, HO 107/1922—3.

²⁰⁷ SHC, PAM 2957; Bath RO 0038/1/15, 2/2, 6/56, 7/10, 16, 61.

²⁰⁸ SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, pp. 12, 22; D/B/ta/31/1/1, p. 11; 2/1/1, p. 679; below, local govt, sewerage.

1838 making glue and bonemeal. However, complaints led them to move in the mid 1850s to a new works at Obridge near Firepool on the canal.²⁰⁹ By 1866 they were superphosphate and bone manure manufacturers but by 1868 were only using their works for storage for distribution having ceased to make fertiliser themselves.²¹⁰ In 1854 four men had established the Taunton and West of England Patent Manure Company with a manufactory at Rowbarton built in 1853, which they extended in 1860.²¹¹ However, the business was short-lived and after 1866 the site became a brewery.²¹² Presumably it had become cheaper to import fertiliser by rail than manufacture it locally and by 1872 agents based in Taunton could supply all types of fertilizer including guano as well as implements and animal feeds.²¹³ Reaping and mowing machines were made in Taunton by the 1860s.²¹⁴ Agricultural steam engines were made at the Tone Bridge foundry from the 1880s²¹⁵ and in 1902 steam ploughs could be hired in Taunton.²¹⁶ Four ploughing engine men were recorded in 1901.²¹⁷

By 1861 only 16 farms were recorded at least three were dairy farms, and eight were over 100a, three of which were over 300a. They employed a total of 122 of the 193 male and 13 female agricultural labourers recorded. Of the agricultural specialists recorded there were four dairy workers and also a land drainer.²¹⁸ In 1866 there was more arable than permanent grass in St James' parish and barley was the main crop followed by fodder whereas wheat predominated in St Mary's.²¹⁹ In 1871 20 farmers were recorded and six farms over 100a. including Haydon (400 a.), which was three farms in the 1820s. They still employed 122

²⁰⁹ *Taunton Courier* 28 Nov 1838: BNA accessed 12 May 2022; SHC, Q/Rup/192; D/B/ta/2/1/2, p. 232, 236; OS Map, Som. LXX.12.3 (1888 edn.).

²¹⁰ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1866); SHC, Q/Rup/192; D/B/ta/2/1/4, p. 437; Som. HER 14501.

²¹¹ SHC, A/BLQ/26/5—6.

²¹² SHC, D/P/tau.a/2/9/7. Date on building, since demolished.

²¹³ Morris and Co. *Dir. Som.*(1872).

²¹⁴ *P.O. Dir. Som.* (1861, 1866).

²¹⁵ TNA, RG12/1875—7; *Where to Buy: Taunton* (1890).

²¹⁶ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1902—3), 175.

²¹⁷ TNA, RG13/2277—8.

²¹⁸ TNA, RG 9/1617—18.

²¹⁹ TNA, MAF 68/59.

male and female labourers but by then only 110 farm workers were resident in Taunton.²²⁰ Already farms were offered for sale in lots with land with frontage for building offered separately even in areas which were not developed until the mid 20th century.²²¹ Wheat was the dominant crop in both parishes in 1876 totalling over 414 a. but turnips, clover and artificial grasses covered nearly 300 a. and c. 150 a. was under orchard, nurseries and market gardens. Of 592 cattle 250 were dairy cows and there were 2,604 sheep, fewer than earlier, and 215 pigs.²²² During the later 19th century some hedgerows were removed enlarging field especially at Moor farm and around Lyngford but in 1890 there were still 82 holdings under 50 a. of which two thirds were under 5a. and half of those were owner-occupied.²²³ The 19 farmers recorded in 1891 gave no statistics but 72 agricultural labours were recorded with 11 specialists, over half dairy workers, and a farm pupil.²²⁴ In 1896 returns from 88 holdings show that arable had shrunk especially in St James' parish where c. 100a. was under barley and 89 a. under wheat, still the dominant crop in St Mary's. Although cattle numbers had changed little in 20 years pigs had increased but sheep numbers had halved. Orchard had declined to two thirds of its 1839 extent.²²⁵ Many nurseries and market gardens were sold for building development in the later 19th century.²²⁶ Farm prices were low and a farm at Holway, not yet seen as a development area, sold in 1893 for c. £4,700, half its cost in the first decade of the century.²²⁷

The size of the dairy herd remained constant at about 250 cows from the 1870s to the 1910s.²²⁸ There were several urban dairies in the mid 19th century, twelve in 1864, and in

²²⁰ TNA, RG 10/2370—2, 2374—5; DD/AS/6, 58.

²²¹ SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/1/T1/8.

²²² TNA, MAF 68/486.

²²³ SHC, tithe award, St James and St Mary; DD/SAS/C2273/3/14, p. 372; OS Map 1:2500, LXX.8, 12 (1887 edn.).

²²⁴ TNA, RG 12/1875—7.

²²⁵ TNA, MAF 68/1626.

²²⁶ SHC, DD/CH/21; above, intro.

²²⁷ SHC, DD/DP/183/1.

²²⁸ TNA, MAF 68/59, 486, 1626, 2196, 2766.

1872 there were nine cow keepers in town including one in industrial Tancred Street. By the end of the century they employed milkmen to deliver to customers twice a day.²²⁹ The White Hart public house in East Reach had a cowhouse and dairy in 1887.²³⁰ There were six licensed cowsheds in the borough c. 1915 and 39 dairies.²³¹ Howe's dairy in St James Street was one of the larger businesses until the 1950s or later having Priory farm, with land at Cheddon, and keeping cows in the Priory barn. During the Coronation celebrations in 1937 the firm bought Watcombe pottery cream bowls for customers.²³² By 1952 there were 15 dairies and 17 milk distributors but presumably none kept cows in town by that date. There were four pasteurising plants.²³³

20th century to present

Twelve farms were recorded in 1901 but some may have been smallholdings. There were 55 agricultural labourers and 33 other agricultural workers in Taunton.²³⁴ In 1905 Taunton still had 880 a. of arable and 1,594 a. of grass²³⁵ but St James' parish had lost a lot of land to building development with barley and fodder the principal crops in 1906. Wheat was still the main crop in St Mary's accounting for over a third of arable followed by barley, beans and roots. Potatoes, carrots, cabbage, onions and peas covered 59 a., mainly in St Mary's and there had been no further loss of orchard. Of 53 holdings 18, mainly in St James's, were under 5 a. and only 13, mainly in St Mary's, were over 50 a.²³⁶ In 1910 Holway farm (149 a.) was still the largest, a desirable farm with excellent meadows and good arable and pasture, a

²²⁹ *Goodmans Dir. Taunton* (1864), 83; Morris and Co., *Dir. Som.* (1872); TNA, RG11/2366—8; SHC, A/DIF/101/14/281.

²³⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/21/874.

²³¹ SHC, A/DIF/95/32.

²³² *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), ii; info. from the late Revd Ruth Howe.

²³³ SHC, D/B/ta/4/22/1 (1952).

²³⁴ TNA, RG13/2276—8.

²³⁵ Bd. of Agric. Returns 1905. Figures are higher than for the 1906 returns.

²³⁶ TNA, MAF 68/2196.

modern house, built on the former Holway Green, and good buildings, reduced to 91 a. by the 1920s.²³⁷ Lower Holway (30 a.) was still copyhold.²³⁸ Haydon farm (116 a.) had lost land since 1871 and had some poor buildings including two cottages, a cider house, a barton for pigs and cattle, stabling, stalls for 18 bullocks and a large barn.²³⁹ Haydon House farm (59 a.) was a small dairy farm with first-class meadow and pasture, two dairies, a cider house, several stables and three hay houses. The former had halved in size again by the 1920s presumably land had been transferred to the latter, which had increased in size.²⁴⁰ Moor Farm adjoining the town, like similar holdings, was attractive for its building frontages. It was an old farm with good land, stabling for six carthorses and stalls for 40 cows, a hack stable and cottages.²⁴¹ Further south Dowsland (78 a.), mainly arable had doubled in acreage since the 1820s, was in good heart with a cob farmhouse and a few stone buildings including a two-bay barn.²⁴² The principal farm at Shoreditch (111 a.) had a dairy house and two cottages besides a good farmhouse. In the 1820s there had been four farms at Shoreditch, one of which was given a new house in 1867, but by the 20th century it was a private house and later the farm buildings were converted to dwellings.²⁴³

North of Taunton Pyrland Hall had a 119-a. farm in 1910 farmed with Pyrland Hall farm.²⁴⁴ During the First World War there was further amalgamation as one farm was over 300 a. in 1916, possibly the Pyrland farms combined following the sale of the hall and then the rest of the Yea lands in 1911, but 20 holdings were still under 5 a. More wheat was grown and there had been an increase in pigs and sheep.²⁴⁵ Slape's farm (84 a.), a ring fenced farm

²³⁷ TNA, IR 58/82654 (2327); SHC, D/R/ta/14/16/5; D/DC/tau.d/25/17.

²³⁸ TNA, IR 58/82654 (2332).

²³⁹ TNA, IR 58/82654 (2374); SHC, D/R/ta/14/16/5.

²⁴⁰ TNA, IR 58/82654 (2369).

²⁴¹ TNA, IR 58/82654 (2357).

²⁴² SHC, DD/AS/6, 58; DD/CH/138/1, pp. 47—50; TNA, IR 58/82654 (2305).

²⁴³ TNA, IR 58/82654 (2316); SHC, DD/AS/6, 58; DD/CH/103/5.

²⁴⁴ TNA, IR 58/82658 (3512—13).

²⁴⁵ SHC, DD/SCL/40; TNA, MAF 68/2766.

in 1911, had two houses used as four cottages and its land was divided between neighbouring farms by the 1920s.²⁴⁶ Priorswood farm (120 a.) suffered by being cut by the railway and by trespassing on the riverside fields. It had a dairy of 40 cows but no cottages.²⁴⁷ By the 1920s Lyngford farm was the largest surviving in St James' with over 140 a. but it was built over soon afterwards although the house survives.²⁴⁸ Wellsprings farm's 50 a., mostly described as highly productive arable, was sold off for development in 1918.²⁴⁹ By 1911 although many were run with only family labour, 80 agricultural labourers and 54 specialist farm workers were recorded. Most of the latter were cow and horsemen including one American cowboy. The only non-domestic staff living with employers were dairy workers. Rural housing was probably inadequate as some farmers and many workers lived in the town some as lodgers or with their parents. There were 26 specialist dealers in corn, seeds, potatoes, hay, cattle, feathers and implements.²⁵⁰

Orchards and market gardens supplied the town in the early 20th century together with poultry farms.²⁵¹ Of 62 holdings in 1926 only two were over 100 a. and eight under 5 a. Arable had shrunk to not much more than 550 a. but a third was under wheat. Of the permanent and clover grass only a third was cut for hay instead of half, which had been the pattern since the mid 19th century, possibly because of a decrease in urban horses although 114 were still kept on farms and in 1922 a partnership was established to deal in horses from stables at Lambrook.²⁵² Pig and cattle numbers including dairy cows remained stable but sheep numbers fell.. More than 3,000 poultry were kept and there was a new poultry farm on St George's Avenue, replaced by housing in the 1960s.²⁵³ In 1936 on 64 agricultural

²⁴⁶ SHC, DD/SCL/40; D/R/ta/14/16/4.

²⁴⁷ TNA, IR 58/82658 (3567).

²⁴⁸ SHC, D/R/ta/14/16/4.

²⁴⁹ SHC, DD/MKG/28

²⁵⁰ TNA, RG14/14234-40

²⁵¹ e.g. SHC, D/DC/tau.d/25/17.

²⁵² TNA, MAF 68/3312; SHC, DD/AY/239.

²⁵³ TNA, MAF 68/3312; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/162/9790.

holdings, the majority under 20 a., there were 134 horses, half of them heavy, 983 cattle, mostly dairy, 699 sheep, 800 pigs and c. 3,850 poultry., and 550 a. of orchards, wheat, barley, vegetables and other crops employing 104 people.²⁵⁴

By 1941—2 tractors were appearing on farms, although at least two were converted cars, together with electric and petrol engines to drive farmyard machinery but most farms still had horses. Only six holdings lacked electricity and eight lacked mains water. A surprising number of farmhouses still used well water when mains water was available in the yard and fields. Several farms had poor buildings, Lyngford suffered from vermin, Pyrland from rooks and pigeons and Priorswood from bindweed. Fifteen farmers worked full-time, presumably most small holdings were horticultural, at least some farms were dairies, one was a hunting and polo stable and Poole farm (68 a.) was a pedigree pig farm. Among part-time farmers were a solicitor, a garage proprietor and a timber merchant who also ran Priorswood (113 a.) and Hovelands (78 a.) and an unspecified acreage in Staplegrove and Wilton parishes. King's College (33 a) grazed its 17-a playing fields during school holidays, grew vegetables and kept poultry and goats. Of 39 farm cottages many were not occupied by farm workers but 20 holdings employed a total of 54 workers of whom only five were women. Some very small scattered holdings were held by butchers one of whom also rented 10 a. in fields around the towns. Caution must be exercised with the returns as surveys were sent in error to people who merely kept a horse or whose land had been sold for building. Several farms who had lost land compensated by renting grazing elsewhere. Lyngford (117 a.) had grazing rights on a 34-a. farm at Trull many miles away, at Haydon farm the farmer held 55 a. of glebe land in neighbouring parishes, and one farmer with a neglected 61-a. farm with no house or buildings had land in Kingston St Mary and 12 a. at Milverton and was about to take another 19 a. in Taunton overgrown with bracken, trees and weeds.

²⁵⁴ TNA, MAF 68/3809.

The only holding classed as C was the army's 14-a. holding half of which was derelict and the whole weed infested, the Somerset Light Infantry having 'few agricultural interests', although they grew a few acres of potatoes. Even farms with bad buildings, fences and ditches, no water or electricity got an A for management, probably because almost all land was good or fair. A B-rated holding was said to have good stock but the scattered 22 a. was very held of four different landlords, with poor buildings and a further 8 a. in a parish many miles from Taunton. Another farmer was rated B for his lack of knowledge and attention and an 8-a butcher's holding was B graded as it had three owners, was scattered and in poor condition infested with thistles although it was only used as temporary grazing by animals awaiting slaughter. Recorded livestock comprised 587 cattle, 848 sheep, 650 pigs, 4 goats and 2,460 poultry supported by 537 a. of grass, 358 a. of meadow and 67 a. of forage crops. However, at least 45 a. of grazing had been broken up for cereals and a considerable acreage, other than allotments, was producing crops for human consumption. Recorded crops were 277 a. of cereals, 53 a. of potatoes and 48 a. of vegetables. Vegetables were crop mainly roots and brassicas but one farm had 8 a. of peas. There were still 78 a. of orchard.²⁵⁵

In 1943 there were 76 a. of allotments in the borough and the council cultivated 15 a. at Lyngford and Wilton producing c. 850 cwt most of which was consumed locally especially in the British restaurants. The council also took over 61 a. in the area to produce wheat, oats and potatoes.²⁵⁶ A Taunton butcher had land at Holway, which was cultivated by 1943.²⁵⁷ Wheat and oat production had almost tripled, there were 92 a. of potatoes and vegetables, 6 a. of sugar beet and 50 a. of flax and farming employing 164 people.²⁵⁸ Livestock numbers continued to fall during the war and arable production increased to 482 a. of grain, 147 a. of fruit and 141 a. of vegetables and potatoes. However, rough grazing had increased to 55 a.

²⁵⁵ TNA, MAF 32/155/281.

²⁵⁶ SHC, D/DC/tau.d unlisted, box 17, 1942—3, 52.

²⁵⁷ SHC, D/P/sto.s.ma/5/1/1.

²⁵⁸ TNA, MAF 68/4066.

possibly due to a fall in livestock grazing. Only two members of the land army were recorded.²⁵⁹ In 1944 New Barn farm at Haydon, 58 a., of accommodation land with a largely stone and thatch double farm yard for cattle, was sold. The new owner built a house and the yards have been largely rebuilt.²⁶⁰

In 1946 Lower Holway farm in 1946 was a 73-a dairy farm with a further 14 ½ a. of meadow usually let out and 7 ½ a. of orchard. It had a modern house and separate yard with stalls for 32 cows, a bull house, stabling for five horses and four piggeries. No dairy was recorded so presumably the farm sold liquid milk. In 1949 the Holway farms were sold and split up for building development the remainder was sold in 1966 with the former Lower Holway farm to the borough for local authority housing.²⁶¹ The same fate befell Moor farm, reduced from 149 a., partly in West Monkton, to a 74 a. dairy farm by 1944 when it was bought from the Eaton family.²⁶² Pyrland remained agricultural and when Pyrland hall farm was sold in 1951 its traditional mixed farm buildings included cowstalls, piggeries, stables and a white tiled milk house but also a modern Dutch barn and Danish piggeries. There had even been a new orchard planted with 102 trees adding to the existing 4 ½ a. However, some of its roadside fields were offered for sale for development and several had already been built on.²⁶³ A further 500 a. of Taunton's agricultural land was lost to building development by 1956. Pig and poultry production had increased to 1,275 and 6,701 respectively but there were only 197 sheep. Employment had fallen to 76 and only one holding had over 150 a.²⁶⁴ Although the huge acreage under allotments during the war had fallen there were still 99 a. in 1964.²⁶⁵ By 1966 barley had become the dominant crop (359 a.)²⁶⁶ Orchards were destroyed

²⁵⁹ TNA, MAF 68/4177.

²⁶⁰ DD/SAS/C2273/1/T1/23

²⁶¹ SHC, DD/KW/1946/46; D/DC/tau.d/25/17.

²⁶² SHC, D/DC/tau.d/25/17.

²⁶³ SHC, DD/MKG/28.

²⁶⁴ TNA, MAF 68/4547.

²⁶⁵ SHC, A/BWX/5, p. 17.

²⁶⁶ TNA, MAF 68/4988.

on a large scale in the later 20th century leaving only *c.* 10 a. (4 ha.) of top fruit and 19 a. (8 ha.) of soft fruit by 1986. Sixteen holdings shared 1,136 a. (541 ha.) but seven were part-time, there were three dairy farms, a poultry farm with over 17,000 birds and two horticultural holdings. There were only 324 sheep and 109 pigs but over 700 cattle.²⁶⁷ Although most land around Taunton was grade 1 agricultural land it was taken for urban development and the few remaining farmers increasingly suffered from theft and vandalism.²⁶⁸ The only farms to survive into the 21st century were a large poultry farm at Haydon, now in Stoke St Mary parish, and Pyrland farm, a dairy farm with holiday accommodation and a farm shop.

Wood

One square league of woodland recorded in 1086²⁶⁹ may have included Haydwood at Haydon, recorded in the mid 13th century when it was ditched. It was probably the source of firewood for the castle provided by Holway tenants.²⁷⁰ It had its own woodward.²⁷¹ By the early 14th century hedge trimmings were a valuable crop presumably because of a shortage of firewood.²⁷² Land called Okehills and Okeplace in St James parish may indicate early woodland but had been cleared by the 15th century.²⁷³ Sales of mast indicate that the woodland was primarily beech but in 1328—9 the lops of 38 oaks in Haydwood were sold.²⁷⁴ The wood supplied timber to rebuild Obridge mill in 1421—2.²⁷⁵ Wood sales and the woodward were recorded in 1531 when the gate was repaired but it appears to have been largely cleared by 1572.²⁷⁶ A 1556 survey refers to a grove of 40-year old oaks on the manor

²⁶⁷ TNA, MAF 68/6025.

²⁶⁸ SHC, D/PC/stapg/7/3.

²⁶⁹ *Domesday*, 234.

²⁷⁰ Hunt, *Med. Customs Taunton*, 32—3, 43; SHC, T/PH/win 1224—5, 1328—9.

²⁷¹ SHC, T/PH/win 1334—5.

²⁷² SHC, T/PH/win 1328—9.

²⁷³ SHC, T/PH/win 1409—10; DD/SP/325/31.

²⁷⁴ SHC, T/PH/win 1301—2, 1328—9.

²⁷⁵ SHC, T/PH/win 1421—2.

²⁷⁶ SHC, DD/DP, box 193 (copies of court rolls 1470—1840).

but possibly outside Taunton.²⁷⁷ By the early 17th century firewood was coming from the Trull area.²⁷⁸ Taunton Deane manor tenants were allowed to fell timber on their lands and even to sell it, because it was said in 1707 that the old rule of needing licence of the lord to fell trees had long been abandoned and that it was unreasonable for a man's land to be overrun with trees breeding rooks and crows. That may account for the loss of the woodland by the 19th century.²⁷⁹ Tenants had rights in Knoll and Smocombe woods in Holway hundred, mainly in Stoke tithing, but assarts had been made by the 1560s. Despite opposition from the manor court a man was allowed to lease them in 1572 and they had been cleared, divided and enclosed by 1577.²⁸⁰ By 1647 Haywood and East Wood in Holway tithing were agricultural land let to several farmers, the land was a small farm by the late 18th century but the names and the description of 60-a of wood persisted in copyhold documents until the 19th century.²⁸¹ A large circular enclosure divided into fields was still clearly visible in 1767 and can still be traced on later maps.²⁸²

Wood may have been scarce on the priory's Taunton estates although there was wood on the demesne. A tenant presented for not repairing his buildings in 1317 was presented at the next court for felling an ash.²⁸³ In 1319—20 an Obridge tenant was fined for taking spars in the Moor, two alders were taken from the same land and two oaks were felled illegally for which the whole tithing was fined.²⁸⁴ In 1322 tenants were presented for cutting thorns and branches from a hedge, taking withies, felling an oak for repairs and cutting branches from pear trees.²⁸⁵ In 1330—1 men felled two oaks and lopped 29 more and felled three poplars

²⁷⁷ TNA, SC 12/38/26.

²⁷⁸ AHC, DD/SP/63 (1620).

²⁷⁹ SHC, DD/BR/hl/1; DD/SP/90 (1608); Shillibeer, *Ancient Customs of Taunton Deane*, 57.

²⁸⁰ SHC, DD/SP/86, f. 333; 3 (15 Sep. 1572); 8 (8 May 1577), 4 (2 Oct. 1589).

²⁸¹ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/16 (Holway tithing); DD/SP/319/302; tithe award, St Mary DD/DP, box 193 (abstr. of title 1862).

²⁸² SHC, DD/AH/66/11; tithe award, St Mary.

²⁸³ SHC, A/BFA/4.

²⁸⁴ BL, Add. Ch. 16332.

²⁸⁵ SHC, A/AHT/3; A/BFA/5.

damaging hedges at Obridge.²⁸⁶ By 1535 the priory had firewood from its demesne pasture called the Moor and Priorswood may have been cleared long before although a 14-a. wood used for pasture was let in 1540 but any trees were reserved to the Crown.²⁸⁷ A yeoman with timber worth £16 and firewood worth nearly £7 in 1635 but it may have bought it in.²⁸⁸ there is no record of commercial withy growing in Taunton but by 1460 willows were growing in the south part of the vivary and the tenant was allowed the profit of them.²⁸⁹ Withybere and Withymead were recorded in 1684 and 1701 at Lyngford.²⁹⁰

Several timberyards were recorded throughout the 19th century including at Shuttern and Silver Street, redeveloped for housing in the early 19th century, but they were presumably storing and cutting imported timber.²⁹¹ In 1839 St James's parish had some oak and elm timber but no woodland is recorded in the tithe award and only a few plantations in St Mary's although there had been 258 timber trees at Haydon c.1802.²⁹² However, seedsman John Young was able to supply nearly 23,000 ash, oak, spruce, scotch fir, holly, Turkey oak and elm trees to the Nynehead Court estate in the 1820s and 1830s from his tree nursery part of his extensive nurseries and gardens in Staplegrove Road.²⁹³ However, there was 1a of woodland in St Mary's parish by 1905 and 16 a. in St James's.²⁹⁴

Fishing

The fishery of the river Tone and of Obridge weir as far as Lambrook belonged to the bishops of Winchester. A fisherman was paid for nine days netting fish for the bishops visit with the

²⁸⁶ SHC, A/BFA/6.

²⁸⁷ T. Hugo, 'Taunton Priory' *PSANHS IX* (1859), 55; SHC, DD/PM/8/2/1.

²⁸⁸ SHC, DD/SP/1635/128.

²⁸⁹ SHC, DD/SP/325/29.

²⁹⁰ SHC, DD/SP/358.

²⁹¹ SHC, DD/DNL39; DD/CH/138/1, pp. 69—70.

²⁹² TNA, IR 18/8802; SHC, DD/DP/90/4; tithe awards St James and St Mary.

²⁹³ Pigot, *London and Provincial Dir.* (1822—3); inf. from the late David Rabson, Nynehead; above, this section.

²⁹⁴ Bd. of Agric. Returns 1905.

legate in 1218 and others were similarly employed in the early 13th century.²⁹⁵ Local fishermen paid a fee to fish, 16s. 7d. in 1289—90 when the fees were last recorded.²⁹⁶ The fishery was farmed out in the 14th century, sometimes to the priory, and eels and salmon could be taken. The rent fell from 26s. 8d. in 1370—1 to 5s. in 1376 to 3s. 4d. in 1417, 1s. 8d. in 1566 and 4d. in 1666 possibly reflecting a decline in fish perhaps caused by pollution from dyeing and washing oiled wool, and by sewage from the increased population.²⁹⁷ Two fish traps in Millane tithing had ceased to be rented by the 1430s.²⁹⁸ The lessee of Obridge mills continued to pay 4d. rent for fishing rights until they were sold to the Tone Conservators in 1768.²⁹⁹ The owners of Yarde claimed the right to licence fishing and used nets to take fish in the 1680s but the manor court declared that every tenant had the right to fish in the river.³⁰⁰ The Hallidays of Yarde continued to hold the fishery until 1854 when John Halliday, having recently bought it from the manor, sold it to George Beadon.³⁰¹

The bishops also had the large fishpond or vivarium south of the town, recorded from the 13th century, after which Vivary Park was named.³⁰² It may have given rise to the name Pool Wall, Pole or Paul Street, and Pool Farm in Wilton as well as many fields in the area.³⁰³ In 1238 the bailiffs were required to have two fishing nets made in Bridport, the larger 40 fathoms long, and in 1239 the king sent fishermen to catch 100 bream and 40 pike and pack the former in cloth and the latter in salt, some also as a galantine.³⁰⁴ In 1241 the king demanded another 100 pike and 200 bream and later a further 100 pike later implying the ponds were large and heavily stocked. A further 40 bream were taken for the king in 1244,

²⁹⁵ SHC, T/PH/win 1217—18, 1224—7; Bishops Hull, soc. hist.

²⁹⁶ SHC, T/PH/win 1289—90.

²⁹⁷ SHC, T/PH/win 1362—3, 1370—1, 1376—7, 1416—17, 1521—2; DD/SP/71; DD/SP/325/209.

²⁹⁸ SHC, DD/SP/325/11

²⁹⁹ SHC, DD/SAS/C/795/TN/16, 138; DD/SP/301.

³⁰⁰ SHC, DD/SP/22/60.

³⁰¹ SHC, DD/MY/40; DD/DP/58/8.

³⁰² SHC, T/PH/win 1248—9.

³⁰³ SHC, DD/SP/71—4.

³⁰⁴ *Cal. Lib. R.* 1226—40, 352, 435.

‘as may pike and bream as they can’ in 1261 and unspecified fish in 1263.³⁰⁵ A boat was kept on the pond and a new one was bought in 1282—3.³⁰⁶ In the 14th century the small fishpond in the castle garden and the moat were used to keep fish. The large vivary pond was silting up despite a major earth-removing operation in 1347—8 and was partly filled with reed, 5 a. were cut to thatch the cattleshed at Holway in 1361—2, and may have had no fish by the early 15th century.³⁰⁷ It provided at least 7 ½ a. meadow including Pool Mead and the 1-a. Swanpool, drained by 1579.³⁰⁸ Swans on the pond had been caught for marking in 1284.³⁰⁹ Fishermen were recorded in 1425 and 1442 and seem to have also been fishmongers.³¹⁰ Merchant Simon Fisher, probably from a fishing family, left a ‘motte with the fysshes’ to his son in 1505.³¹¹

Although there was a significant fish market in Taunton it may have been mainly sea fish although a fisherman was recorded in 1861.³¹² An eel fishery at Obridge was said to have caused flooding in 1877 and the apparatus was ordered to be removed in 1878.³¹³ There was, and still is, recreational fishing on the river probably for trout and Taunton had several rod and tackle makers in the mid 19th century.³¹⁴

MILLS

The most important mill in the Taunton area until the 1950s was the castle or town mill in Bishops Hull, which would have served the urban area and market and was the customary

³⁰⁵ *Cal. Lib. R.* 1240—5, 31, 87, 270; 1260—7, 126; *Cal. Doc. Scotland*, 1108—1272, 441—2..

³⁰⁶ SHC, T/PH/win 1253—4, 1282—3.

³⁰⁷ SHC, T/PH/win 1346—8, 1354—5, 1361—2, 1409—10, 1533—4; DD/SP/325/4.

³⁰⁸ SHC, DD/SP/73, f. 52; 86, f. 118; 100 (1659—60).

³⁰⁹ SHC, T/PH/win 1283—4.

³¹⁰ TNA, CP40/641, image 1351; 656, image 1080; 724, image 1023: at waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021.

³¹¹ TNA, PROB 11/14/794.

³¹² Below, market; TNA, RG 9/1618.

³¹³ SHC, D/B/ta/3/8/1 (Nov. 1877, Oct. 1878).

³¹⁴ Pigot and Co., *Dir. Som.* (1830); Robson, *Dir. Som.* (1839); TNA, HO 107/1922—3; RG 9/1617; RG 10/2372—5.

mill for Holway, Haydon and Stoke St Mary.³¹⁵ It was presumably one of the three mills on Taunton manor in 1086.³¹⁶ However, Taunton had its own mills on the river Tone at Obridge, possibly serving the area north of the river, and on the Sherford stream at Pool Wall south of the town, both in existence by 1208 when they produced in toll 17 quarters of wheat, 14 quarters of oat gruel or meal, and 23 ½ quarters of malt in two grades for the bishop of Winchester. The millers had an allowance of seven baskets of wheat and six of meal.³¹⁷ Mill maintenance was a major expense but in the late 13th century a store of millstones was apparently kept at Wareham, Hants., to supply the bishop's mills.³¹⁸ That coincided with a short-lived farming out of the mills but they were back in hand by 1297 presumably because they were so profitable.³¹⁹ Burgesses were free to grind at any mill for reasonable toll only.³²⁰

The Black Death affected milling but only Obridge seems to have suffered badly. Pilcorn and maslin replaced rye and meal but malt continued to be graded into capital and coarse. Falling profits may have led to short periods of farming out the mills again in the 1360s. In 1360—1 five mills were let for £46 and in 1367—8 eight were let for £70, the manor paying for repairs.³²¹ The town had a millwright in 1434 and they continued to be recorded until the 19th century including the early 18th-century Maggs family.³²² From the early 16th century mills were permanently let out.³²³ Although they were customary mills and tenants from different parts of the manor were supposed to grind at an appointed mill, whose pond they also had to scour in Whit week, it is not clear that those obligations were enforced and certainly by the late 16th century customary tenants and townspeople used other mills

³¹⁵ Bishops Hull, econ. hist.

³¹⁶ *Domesday*, 234.

³¹⁷ SHC, T/PH/win 1208—9.

³¹⁸ SHC, T/PH/win 1286—7.

³¹⁹ SHC, T/PH/win 1286—7, 1289—90, 1292—3, 1297—8.

³²⁰ SHC, DD/X/HUN/6/2, photos of BL, Harl MS 408, ff. 212—13.

³²¹ SHC, T/PH/win 1348—9, 1349—50, 1353—4, 1360—1, 1363—4, 1367—8.

³²² TNA, CP40/692, image 1098: at waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021; IR1/42, pp. 80, 86; HO107/1923.

³²³ SHC, T/PH/win 1521—2, 1538—9, 1544—5.

like Bathpool in West Monkton. By 1607 manor tenants were not compelled to use their customary mill although most townspeople used Town, Obridge or Pool Wall mills.³²⁴ Millers' loaders were threatened with detention if they carried grain out of town on Sundays in 1592.³²⁵ In 1580 the manor court upheld the claims of millers at Pool Wall and Obridge that the lord should provide materials for repairs and the water bailiff was allocated money for the purpose.³²⁶ By 1630 the fines and rents were said to be insufficient to cover repair costs and tenants were required to pay.

William, bishop of Winchester, presumably William Giffard (1100—29), gave the Sherford stream to the priory to grind corn but it is not clear where their mill was but other religious houses had a small mill on site.³²⁷ At that date the Sherford stream may have flowed entirely east of the town but by 1209 a long straight diversion had been made to power Pool Wall mill and possibly also to keep the fishponds full. A weir at the head of this diversion allowed water to flow to the priory site along what is now called the Stockwell stream.³²⁸ The tithes of 12 mills in Taunton Deane manor belonged to the prior of Taunton but from 1301 the whole, in kind, was levied on the town mills in Bishops Hull.³²⁹ By the 16th century they had been commuted for a fixed charge of £2, which became the rent the Crown charged for renting out the tithes.³³⁰ In 1675 the farmer of the tithes tried to claim that all the 12 mills should contribute and that the value of the customary tithes in kind was £16.³³¹ However, the £16 including £2 to the Crown continued to be borne solely by the town mills.³³²

³²⁴ TNA, E134/4JasI/Mich26—7.

³²⁵ SHC, DD/SP/49 (Apr. 1592).

³²⁶ SHC, DD/SP/18/1, 15.

³²⁷ *Cal. Chart* 1327—41, p. 318.

³²⁸ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/107; above, intro.

³²⁹ SHC, T/PH/win 11301—2, 1348—9.

³³⁰ BL, Add. MS. 30291; L&P Hen. VIII, XX (1), p. 783; TNA, SC 6/EdwVI/402; Brett, *Crown Revenues from Som and Dorset*, 77.

³³¹ TNA, E134/27ChasI/East15; E126/12.

³³² SHC, DD/MK/50.

Vivary or Pool Wall Mill

This mill was recorded from the 1200s and was the customary mill for Holway tenants.³³³ It is not clear when the pool wall, first recorded in 1400, was built to increase the fall and power of the diverted Sherford stream but possibly very early as Upper High Street runs along it.³³⁴ No issues from the mill were recorded between 1210 and 1248 when it was known as the mill below the vivary³³⁵ and produced 63 quarters of tollcorn.³³⁶ It was described as new in 1250 but apparently was less productive than Obridge.³³⁷ By 1297 it was also called Pool mill and was rebuilt the following year, supplied with two Welsh stones in 1301—2 and new sluices and roof in 1315—16.³³⁸ In 1348—9 less grain was ground but by 1349—50 it was back to normal.³³⁹ The stone and timber water part, pier or bay, which presumably diverted water to the mill wheel, needed repair in 1367—8.³⁴⁰ Customary labour was regularly used for repairs and stopping up the millstream. The income from tollcorn doubled in the later 14th century and was only slightly less than that from Obridge, which had declined. A reference to the outer wheel suggests there were two.³⁴¹ In 1410-92 men were needed to scour the pond and in 1413 the mill was thatched with c. 400 sheaves of reed.³⁴² In 1430—1 Vivary mill was rebuilt again and until the 1460s or later ground oat malt.³⁴³ Rebuilt again for £17 in 1482—3, it was farmed out permanently as a copyhold from 1505 although the manor continued to provide millstones and maintain the banks.³⁴⁴ In 1566 there were two grain mills at Pool Wall, presumably under one roof, one of which was a newly converted fulling mill and in 1573

³³³ SHC, T/PH/win 1208—9; DD/MT/1/39.

³³⁴ BL, Add. Ch. 25902.

³³⁵ fishpond.

³³⁶ SHC, T/PH/win 1248—9.

³³⁷ SHC, T/PH/win 1251—2, 1264—5.

³³⁸ SHC, T/PH/win 1297—8, 1298—9; 1301—2, 1315—16.

³³⁹ SHC, T/PH/win 1348—9, 1349—50.

³⁴⁰ SHC, T/PH/win 1358—9, 1361—2, 1367—8, 1373—4.

³⁴¹ SHC, T/PH/win 1373—4, 1377—8, 1385—6, 1388—9, 1399—1400.

³⁴² SHC, T/PH/win 1409—10, 1412—13.

³⁴³ SHC, T/PH/win 1430—1, 1434—5, 1447—8, 1462—3.

³⁴⁴ SHC, T/PH/win 1482—3, 1505—6, 1535—6, 1544—5; DD/SP/71.

they were grain and malt mills.³⁴⁵ There were complaints in the 1570s that the weir diverting water to the Priory was sometimes broken for Pool mills.³⁴⁶ The Trott family held the mills in the late 16th and early 17th century earning at least £30 a year and paying £4 rent.³⁴⁷ By the late 16th and early 17th century the rhyne carrying water from the mill was frequently encroached on by owners of High Street burgages for privies and pigsties whose filth impeded the flow and backed up to the mill wheel.³⁴⁸

By the 18th century the mill had a bakery on the east side and in the early 19th century the street front was a shop. In 1780 the miller allowed the new silk mill to have a wheel on his premises in return for a £9 annuity. His widow gave up the grist mill in 1791 and the house was occupied by the silk mill's millwright. In 1804 the miller's son, a baker, surrendered the mill and the annuity to the silk mill owners who later demolished it to extend their factory.³⁴⁹ Late 20th century clearance of the factory buildings has revealed the height of the wall and the huge drop from the road to the ground below.

Obridge Mill

The mill at Obridge produced c. £7 from toll corn in the early 13th century when it ground, wheat, oatmeal, rye, and two grades of malt. In 1216 it supplied wheat flour to the castle.³⁵⁰ In the mid 1220s the toll corn increased in value to c. £24 a year.³⁵¹ In the later 13th century it appears to have ground at least half as much grain as the mill at the castle.³⁵² In 1267—8 it suffered from a great flood and was provided with a new sluice and a new malt mill and

³⁴⁵ SHC, DD/SP/71; 72, f. 488; TNA, E134/4JasI/Mich27.

³⁴⁶ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/107.

³⁴⁷ SHC, DD/MT/1/39; J. H. Treat, *The Treat Family* (Salem, Mass. 1893), 4, 16, 18.

³⁴⁸ SHC, DD/SP/23/45.

³⁴⁹ SHC, DD/MK/9; DD/DP/37/2, 45/12, 66/2; tithe award, St Mary; A/DAS/2 (13080); below, this section, silk.

³⁵⁰ SHC, T/PH/win 1208—9, 1211—12, 1215—16.

³⁵¹ SHC, T/PH/win 1224—5, 1226—7.

³⁵² SHC, T/PH/win 1251—2, 1264—5.

stones.³⁵³ However, rising grain prices led to the reduction in the miller's grain allowance and the substitution of rye for some of his wheat and gruel.³⁵⁴ In 1309—10 two French millstones were supplied at the enormous cost of £7 17s. 8d. and 12s. for five days carriage and in 1324—5 a pair imported through Lyme cost £8 16s. including carriage.³⁵⁵ Previously only the castle mill had received French stones, the others used Welsh stones at 18s. a pair.³⁵⁶ By the 15th century stones came through Bridgwater.³⁵⁷

Despite major repairs in 1341 by the late 1340s the mill ground much less than usual and work was done on its pond and sluices. It may have lost its miller and workers to the plague as other mills appear to have been less affected. Its malt mill, which had its own wheel, was not repaired until 1353—4 when two new tollcorn chests were bought.³⁵⁸ The weir at Firepool, first recorded as le Fourpool, as it was above the mill, was rebuilt using 248 works provided from Holway tithing in 1358—9 but a fore weir had to be made in 1363—4 and 1367—8 further work on the weir and a stone wall under the mill took 75 men a day.³⁵⁹

Obridge mill was said in the 1380s to be as far as boats could go up the Tone and then only at high water.³⁶⁰ That position on the river meant it needed more repairs than others. Major work in 1399—1400 involved rebuilding one mill, possibly the malt mill, from the ground of limestone and timber, which necessitated building a fore weir to keep the site dry.³⁶¹ Following that work the issues of the mill increased again, although the £28 of 1409—10 was exceptional. A mill, presumably the corn mill was rebuilt in 1421—2 at a cost of c. £23. Tollcorn from that date, as at Vivary mill, included beans and oat malt.³⁶² Its weir was

³⁵³ SHC, T/PH/win 1267—8, 1270—1.

³⁵⁴ SHC, T/PH/win 1271—1, 1274—5.

³⁵⁵ SHC, T/PH/win 1309—10., 1324—5.

³⁵⁶ SHC, T/PH/win 1301—2.

³⁵⁷ SHC, T/PH/win 1409—10, 1476—7.

³⁵⁸ SHC, T/PH/win 1340—1, 1348—9, 1349—50, 1353—4.

³⁵⁹ SHC, T/PH/win 1358—9, 1361—2, 1363—4, 1367—8.

³⁶⁰ T. Hugo, *Hist. Taunton Priory* (Taunton, 1860), 48—50.

³⁶¹ SHC, T/PH/win 1399—1400.

³⁶² SHC, T/PH/win 1409—10, 1421—2, 1430—1, 1434—5.

apparently timber and was rebuilt in 1445 and provided with new shuts in 1469.³⁶³ Severe flooding destroyed the Firepool weir and required the raising of the banks and the mill house in 1482—3. Further flooding broke the banks again in 1486—7 and the mill weir was rebuilt in 1504 requiring 89 waggon loads of stone, lime and timber.³⁶⁴ The shuts at Firepool weir were still the responsibility of the manor water bailiff in 1591 and in the early 17th century the reeve of Staplegrave hundred paid a man 13s. 4d. a year to draw them.³⁶⁵

In 1496—7 the mill was repaired using five waggon loads of timber, piles were driven for Obridge weir and the mill was farmed out permanently for £6 a year although the manor provided stones.³⁶⁶ By the 1500s there was concern that the mill should not be impeded by the fulling mills at Firepool.³⁶⁷ By 1520 Obridge mill was two mills, either two sets of stones under one roof or the second may have been the malt mill. It was profitable enough to be sublet in layers of tenancies with the occupier paying £11 rent in the 1560s.³⁶⁸ By the 1600s the miller paid £20 a year and two bushels of barley malt a week to his landlord who paid the manor £6 a year. Obridge was said in 1606 to be the customary mill for tenants from Henlade and Ruishton who were obliged to scour the pond on Whit Monday.³⁶⁹ It was described as two water grist mills in 1647.³⁷⁰ It was let with the fishery between the mill and Lambrook and a plot of waste, the later Obridge Island. A new mill house was built in the 1730s.³⁷¹

In 1744 the sluice gates or shuts were kept closed in time of drought or flood to protect the mills but that impeded milling at the town mills, which claimed priority for water over all other mills on the manor. The customary maintenance had long since been

³⁶³ SHC, DD/SP/325/18; DD/SF/1/2/19.

³⁶⁴ SHC, T/PH/win 1482—3, 1486—7; DD/SP/325/66.

³⁶⁵ SHC, DD/SP/4 (March 1591), 325/167—76.

³⁶⁶ SHC, T/PH/win 1496—7, 1505—6, 1509—10, 1528—9, 1538—9, 1544—5.

³⁶⁷ SHC, T/PH/win 1505—6.

³⁶⁸ SHC, DD/MT/15/4/21; TNA, C 3/139/98.

³⁶⁹ TNA, E 134/JasI/Mich27.

³⁷⁰ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/16, 138.

³⁷¹ SHC, DD/SP/301—2.

abandoned and tenants of the mills maintained them and riparian owners repaired the banks.³⁷² Firepool mill was converted to a grist mill probably in the 1750s but was short-lived.³⁷³ In 1768 the Conservators of the Tone bought the Obridge mill estate and fishery letting the house and orchard.³⁷⁴ They demolished the mill and its house and sold the materials including two mill shafts in 1779—81. Thomas Southwood as lord of the manor of Taunton Deane sued for unpaid rent and fines although the mill together with Firepool mill had been demolished to improve the Tone navigation and the only land left was the new river bank. The Conservators agreed to pay £470 for the freehold in 1827. They also appear to have removed the bridges that linked the mill with Mill, later String Lane at Lambrook.³⁷⁵

The Lambright family had three mills at Obridge in 1304 but their site or nature is unknown.³⁷⁶

Other mills

Two horsemills operated by brewers were grinding malt in Taunton by 1606 when they were accused of damaging trade at the watermills. One had been built in St Mary's parish at a brewhouse outside the borough c. 1550 and the second in St James's parish in 1604 on the site of one built in a former dyehouse c. 1592. Their owners argued that lack of water in summer or winter floods meant malt was not ground as other grains had priority and that brewers needed a horsemill to be able to grind their own malt. It was said the malt they used was bought in and was not grown on the manor also that many tenants used hand malt mills.³⁷⁷ A man left his son a horsemill with stones in 1638.³⁷⁸ However, a new horsemill in

³⁷² SHC, DD/MK/50.

³⁷³ SHC, DD/SP/301; below, econ. hist. cloth.

³⁷⁴ SHC, DD/SP/301; DD/MK/34.

³⁷⁵ SHC, DD/MK/50—3; PAM 226, T. Hugo, 'A ramble by the Tone', 5.

³⁷⁶ E. Green, *Feet of Fines 1196—1307* (SRS 6), 330.

³⁷⁷ TNA, E134/4JasI/Mich27.

³⁷⁸ SHC, DD/MT/26/5/3.

St James's parish was declared illegal in 1654.³⁷⁹ A malt mill in Paul Street was also presumably a horsemill but had been destroyed by 1747.³⁸⁰

The North Town electric grinding feed mills were set up by George Small and Son, coal and general merchants and millers, c. 1900 off Station Road. They were partly destroyed by fire in 1946 but rebuilt in 1957 and remained in use in the 1970s.³⁸¹

STONE, GRAVEL and LIME

There is no record of stone quarrying in Taunton although in 1267—8 Ralph le Quareur of Taunton provided stone for a chapel near Woodstock.³⁸² Gravel was widely available locally as it forms part of Taunton's sub soil.³⁸³ It was dug at Millane and Grassgrove in the Middle Ages and later but the sites had been given up probably by the late 16th century.³⁸⁴ A gravel pit was opened before 1872 in Staplegrove Road probably in connection with housing development with new roads in the area, probably that at the end of Richmond Road, which remained in use in 1910s.³⁸⁵ Another was opened before 1885 near Kingston Road in Rowbarton by the developer of the Greenway estate.³⁸⁶ Former gravel pits could make good arable land.³⁸⁷ Lime had to be imported upriver, and later by canal. Limekilns were built at the canal wharves and survive under a later railway water tank but were never used.³⁸⁸

³⁷⁹ SHC, DD/SP/18/25.

³⁸⁰ SHC, DD/DP/97/5.

³⁸¹ SHC, D/PC/b.hl/5/3/15 (1906); *Taunton Courier*, 18 May 1946, 9 Feb. 1957; BNA, accessed 7 July 2021; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1972—3).

³⁸² *Cal. Lib.* 1267—72, p. 39.

³⁸³ TNA, 18/8802.

³⁸⁴ SHC, DD/SP/18/129; 71, f. 54; 72, f. 362; 86, f. 217; DD/SAS/C795/TN/131.

³⁸⁵ SHC, DD/DP/204/1; D/B/ta/24/1/50/817.

³⁸⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/19/784.

³⁸⁷ SHC, DD/MKG/28 (Wellsprings).

³⁸⁸ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/SX/7; Q/Rup/192.

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