

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Taunton's administrative history was complicated with manorial and municipal boroughs, two manors and two parishes. Until 1921 Taunton was divided between the parishes of St Mary, which included the medieval borough, and St James. Both included urban and rural areas and outside the borough were divided between tithings in the infaring hundreds of Holway and Staplegrove in Taunton Deane manor and the tithings of Taunton Priory manor, which formed part of the outfaring hundred. By the 18th century for tax and rating purposes the parishes were divided between townside and landside or within and without. The borough, originally the gated town, gradually expanded for municipal and Parliamentary purposes until by 1974 it included large areas of surrounding parishes although never the whole urban area. In 1947 a wider Tone Vale council was considered but no change was made until 1974.¹ The borough remained an unparished area within the 1974 borough district of Taunton Deane, from 2019 Somerset West and Taunton District. The district was abolished in 2023 and Taunton again has a Town Council.

MANORIAL ADMINISTRATION AND TITHINGS

The bishops of Winchester had considerable financial, legal and administrative powers within their manor. In 1086 their tenants did military service with the bishop's men and could be tried for theft or breach of the peace by the bishop's court, the bishop's pleas were held three times a year and the lords within the bishop's barony had to come to Taunton to make oath, undergo ordeal or be buried.² It was confirmed in 1276 that the bishops held the borough like the hundred by barony with rights including return of writ, gallows and the assize of bread and ale.³ The bishop's rights in matters of arrest and imprisonment in Taunton Deane were

¹ SHC, A/EOB/1.

² *Domesday*, 234.

³ *Rot. Hund.* II, 125, 134—5.

upheld against the sheriff at least twice in the later 17th century.⁴ The sheriff had originally attended the bishop's hundred court at the castle. The bishop was entitled to the goods of tenants convicted of felony in the king's courts and their tenants were exempt from attending any other lord's hundred courts.⁵ When, after the Civil War, the bishop's estates were confiscated the manor tenants insisted on maintaining their customs unchanged and in 1647 they were published, and regularly reprinted. That probably ensured that the customs were upheld until the manor estate was enfranchised in the 19th century and the courts, except for the borough, came to an end.⁶

Hundreds

These subdivisions of the hundred of Taunton Deane do not follow parish or topographical boundaries. Possibly they were based on early land management although that would not explain why Chipley in Nynehead six miles west of Taunton, Otterford seven miles south, and Rimpton 24 miles east were in Holway hundred.⁷ The outfaring hundreds were held of the bishop by other lords and only the infaring hundreds were held by the bishop directly. However, the outfaring tenants in the 11th century also owed burgh right, peter's pence and other dues to the bishop, some of which were lost during the Middle Ages, and suit of court, which was maintained until the mid 19th century. The infaring hundreds were Holway, comprising parts of Taunton St Mary, Wilton, Bishops Hull, Nynehead, Otterford, Rimpton, Ruishton, Stoke St Mary and Trull parishes and property in Lyng; Hull comprising most of Bishops Hull, parts of Pitminster and Trull; Nailsbourne covering Kingston St Mary; Poundisford comprising Corfe and part of Pitminster; and Staplegrove comprising Combe Florey, Lydeard St Lawrence, Staplegrove and part of Taunton St James. Holway hundred

⁴ *SDNQ*, XII, 195.

⁵ *Pipe R 1208—9*, xxix-xxxii; T. J. Hunt, *The Medieval Customs of Taunton Manor* (SRS 66), xxiv; DD/SP/1—303.

⁶ Bishops Hull, landownership; local govt.

⁷ Separate records were usually kept for Otterford and Rimpton: SHC, DD/SP/1—70; *VCH Som.* VII, 238.

included the area of St Mary's parish outside the borough but sometimes dealt with borough tenancies. St James parish was mainly in Staplegrove hundred although the early urban area was in the priory manor. Of the five infaring hundreds Holway was the wealthiest and in the early 19th century accounted for nearly a third of the manor's income and more than a third of the recognition money owed by bondland tenants to a new bishop.⁸ The hundreds were administered by reeves and Holway hundred had a bedel by 1566, the office served in turn by customary tenants, and eastern and western bedels or beadles by the 1590s.⁹ Holway tithing with Ruishton and Stoke St Mary parishes formed the eastern division.¹⁰ Reeves served by a rota of c. 130 holdings, were quit of rent during office and given a 3-a. meadow but could be fined for negligence and some possibly covered their losses by dubious means. By the early 18th century the changes in holdings made it difficult to draw up an accurate rota and there were failures to appoint. Reeves sometimes failed to collect and deliver rents, partly because they were required to go to Winchester. A servant carrying money was slain in Wiltshire c. 1301 and as long as cash had to be delivered it was a dangerous job.¹¹ The rota system meant that women sometimes served as reeves.¹² From the late 18th century local lawyers were responsible for overall administration.¹³

Tithings

Tithings were not always geographically defined and the two manors each had tithings called Obridge and Extra Portam, which led to disputes as to which manor small areas of land belonged.¹⁴ The priory manor's tithing outside the town gate was recorded from 1225,¹⁵ its

⁸ H.B. Shillibeer, *The Ancient Customs of the Manor of Taunton Deane...1817* (Taunton, 1821), 27—30, 60—1, xxvii—xxix.

⁹ SHC, DD/SP/71 [ff. 8—24], 325/143; DD/MT/15/1 (1682).

¹⁰ SHC, DD/SP/343.

¹¹ SHC, DD/SP/71 [f. 24v.], 343; M. Page, *The Medieval Bishops of Winchester; Estate, Archives and Administration* (Hampshire Papers 24, Hants.C.C.), 8—9.

¹² e.g. SHC, DD/SP/408 (Obridge).

¹³ SHC, DD/S/WT/20.1—2; DD/DP/43/4.

¹⁴ AHC, DD/SP/359.

Lyngford, probably later Obridge, tithing in 1298, and Canon Street by 1312.¹⁶ The last appeared as a separate entity only in the account rolls until the Dissolution. In 1334, apart from the borough, the Taunton tithings were Holway, Extra Portam, Obridge, Pyrland, Millane, Grasscroft, Extra Portam Prioris and Obridge or Tobridge Prioris.¹⁷ The two last included land in West Monkton and Kingston St Mary parishes respectively.¹⁸ Before the Dissolution the priory also had lands at Grasscroft.¹⁹ Canon Street and Extra Portam Jacobi or Without the Gate tithings were in regular use as divisions of the priory estate after the Dissolution.²⁰

Mill Lane tithing was located north of the river and west of Bridge Street and Staplegrove Road and included part of Fairwater in Staplegrove. Obridge tithing extended to include the area between Station and Staplegrove roads.²¹ Grasscroft tithing lay mainly north of the river east of Bridge Street and Station Road but included property north-west and south-east of the bridge, on the bridge and in Coal Orchard. The centre line of East Reach formed the parish and tithing boundary between Extra Portam Jacobi in St James to the north and Extra Portam in St Mary to the south.²²

In St James' Extra Portam tithing a poor day labourer held the office of tithingman for two years in the 1650s as the man chosen to succeed refused and a tithingman chosen in the 1670s offered to pay another to take his place and when he refused got a servant to do it.²³ A primary duty of tithingmen was to present the deaths of tenants and discover the extent of their holdings and the heir.²⁴ From the Middle Ages the borough was divided into six, later

¹⁵ Chadwyck-Healey, *Som. Pleas c. 1200—1256*, pp. 33, 95.

¹⁶ SHC, A/BFA/1, 3; DD/DP/63/4.

¹⁷ R.E. Glasscock, *Subsidy of 1334* (1975), 263—5; SHC, DD/HC/161/1.

¹⁸ SHC, A/BFA/7.

¹⁹ TNA, SC6/HenVIII/3137.

²⁰ SHC, DD/AY/69.

²¹ SHC, DD/CH/21; DD/SP/319/299.

²² SHC, DD/SP/1—35, 83, p. 284, 257 (1831).

²³ E.H. Bates-Harbin, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1646—60* (Som. Rec. Soc. 28), 200—1.

SHC, D/P/tau.ja/23/3.

²⁴ Shillibeer, *Ancient Customs of Taunton Deane*, 41.

seven, tithings based on the main streets: East, Fore, High, North, Paul and Silver Streets and Shuttern each with an alderman who acted as tithingman. By the late 19th century the office was purely ceremonial.²⁵ Taunton Castle was a liberty outside the hundred and tithing system although part of the manor of Taunton Deane and comprised all the manor's mills and some land in Bishops Hull.²⁶

Courts

The clerk of the castle, the steward usually being an aristocrat, held courts for the whole manor conducting manorial business and hearing pleas between tenants under 40s. Like rents, fees were fixed and even in the 19th century the highest was 5s. to have an order drawn, entered and copied.²⁷ Taunton outside the borough in the manorial hundreds of Holway and Staplegrave, had its own juries, accounts and records. By the early 14th century there were two leets and up to 14 manor or three-weeken courts each year.²⁸ The twice yearly leets, also known as lawdays or tourns, were held in tandem with pannage, choice and fulfilling courts, when officers were sworn. The court was held for the whole manor except the borough, divided between the infaring and outfaring with each hundred dealt with in turn, including the tithingmen's presentments. All tenants except cottagers, overland and 5 a. holders were required to attend every court but could usually be excused from intermediate courts if they attended the lawdays. Courts were not kept regularly under the Crown in the mid 16th century but thereafter records are complete except for gaps in the 1640s, 1680s and 1690s.²⁹ Even during the Civil War some courts were held and tenants pleas settled but presumably not in the castle. Several tithingmen were fined for not attending in 1643, no

²⁵ SHC, DD/SP/60; A/EDJ1/2, 2/1, 5/1.

²⁶ SHC, DD/DP/81/1.

²⁷ SHC, DD/X/WHI/2; Shillibeer, *Ancient Customs of Taunton Deane*, 68—7.

²⁸ SHC, T/PH/win 1316—19.

²⁹ Bishops Hull, local govt.; Hants RO, M11/59/C1/19/1—3; SHC, DD/DP/SP/1—63; DD/X/WHI/2; Shillibeer, *Ancient Customs of Taunton Deane*, 59; *Borough Customs II* (Selden Soc. 21, 1906), 52—3.

courts were held in 1644 but in 1645 returned to their normal schedule and business.³⁰ Tenants were not to sue their fellow tenants in other courts and could in theory forfeit their copyholds but were usually fined.³¹ Later courts were held every Saturday in the Castle exchequer until enfranchisement.³² Matters that had not been settled were taken by petition before the twice-yearly grand jury, which investigated and made a decision although sometimes there was insufficient evidence for a verdict or cases were referred to the magistrates. Jurors were paid 3*d.* each for these inquiries, raised to 4*d.* in 1591.³³ By the late 17th century the court was powerless against men like Henry Gale and his successors who were prepared to defy it.³⁴

Priory manor

The urban area of St James including parts of North Town and East Reach and the hamlet of Obridge lay in the priory manor. Its court dealt with tenancies, breaches of the assizes of bread and ale, pleas between tenants, various offences and distraint for debt. A few records survive from the 1290s showing that the courts were held only three or four times a year and not at regular intervals.³⁵ Tenants in Extra Portam tithing were negligent in attendance and some were fined for being late. Defaulters in 1322—3 included two clerks.³⁶ Chevage was taken from young men when they were enrolled in their tithings, usually two or three at each court for each tithing in the 1320s but only one a year in the 1430s. In 1425—6 a bond tenant paid 1*s.* to live outside the manor.³⁷ Illegal subletting in Extra Portam possibly reflected early 14th-century population pressure.³⁸ In 1320 a man was fined for refusing to serve as hayward

³⁰ SHC, DD/SP/39, 53—7; DD/X/HPS/4.

³¹ W. A. Jones, 'Customs of the Manor of Taunton Deane', *PSANHS* XVIII (1872), 93—4.

³² *The Universal British Directory* (c. 1798), IV, 583.

³³ SHC, DD/SP/2, 22—3, 36, 49 (Apr. 1588, Apr. 1591).

³⁴ SHC, DD/MT/15/1 *passim*; DD/SP/22/13; Q/SR/39/92; Bishops Hull, intro.

³⁵ SHC, A/BFA/1—9; A/AHT 3.

³⁶ SHC, A/AHT/3.

³⁷ BL, Add. Ch. 16332—3, 25873; SHC, A/BFA/5; A/AHT/4.

³⁸ SHC, A/BFA/4—6.

in Obridge.³⁹ A reeve and a tithingman were elected for each tithing but Extra Portam tithing had two reeves in 1330.⁴⁰ By the 1420s five courts were held annually including two leets but in the 1430s and 1440s 12 to 13 Friday courts were held, the reason for the increase is unknown.⁴¹ By the later 16th century there were petty constables in each tithing but the office was unpopular; one asked to be discharged in 1626 because he was illiterate and another in 1661 because his business often took him to London.⁴²

Before the Dissolution the priory held courts for Obridge, Extra Portam and Canon Street tithings separately, which is probably why later owners treated the tithings as manors with separate courts.⁴³ Their tithingmen attended and were appointed in the taunton Deane outfaring courts until the 19th century.⁴⁴ Taunton late Priory manor, comprising Canon Street and Extra Portam, continued to have its own courts, tithingmen, reeves and aletasters in the 17th century when courts were held at 8 a.m. in the manor house on the priory site. Later courts were held in public houses, twice yearly for courts leet and the three week court when required for tenancy matters, which followed the customs of Taunton Deane manor.⁴⁵ The Court of Chancery in 1773 ordered a court of survey, held at the White Hart.⁴⁶ Printed forms sent to tenants in 1819 advertised a combined court leet and baron to be held at the Oxford inn, Canon Street and were marked up with arrears of rent.⁴⁷

Pounds

³⁹ BL, Add. Ch. 16332.

⁴⁰ SHC, A/BFA/6.

⁴¹ BL, Add. Ch. 16333; SHC, A/BFA/7—9; A/AHT/4; DD/SP/373.

⁴² SHC, DD/SP/18/2, 12; 25; 43/8.

⁴³ e.g. Canon Street: TNA, REQ/2/8/126; *Valor. Eccl.* I, 169—70; Canon Street and Extra Portam, Obridge: SHC, DD/SP/350 (1673—8); above, landownership.

⁴⁴ SHC, DD/SP/36—47.

⁴⁵ SHC, DD/SP/356, 374—83; DD/HC/151/1.

⁴⁶ SHC, DD/HC/134/1/12.

⁴⁷ SHC, DD/DP/9/14.

In 1317 two men from Obridge were fined for a pound breach on the priory manor.⁴⁸ The borough pound for stray pigs was at Paul Street in the late 16th century but had gone by 1692 when the manor pound was used. Tenants paid 1*d.* at the latter and feared being charged more by the borough but in 1708 petitioned unsuccessfully for a new Paul Street pound.⁴⁹ The Taunton Deane manor pound at Castle Green in Bishops Hull was let out by 1869.⁵⁰

PAROCHIAL ADMINISTRATION

St Mary

No early parish records survive but in 1493 there were 'in' and 'out' clerks.⁵¹ Only one was recorded during the Civil War when he struggled to cope.⁵² They were appointed by the vicar.⁵³ The parish kept accounts on rolls until the late 17th century, which may explain why few survive.⁵⁴ Before the late 16th century poor relief and road repair were objects of charity. One couple left £20 between them in 1538 and 1541 for highway maintenance.⁵⁵ Thereafter road repair was a parish responsibility although in 1621 the borough was rated to repair East and Upper High streets whose disrepair interfered with the water supply. The two parishes disputed the repair of East Reach as the parish boundary ran down the centre.⁵⁶ Householders traditionally maintained their street frontages but in 1670 the highway surveyors were granted a rate to raise £50. Owners of ploughlands had to pay 10*s.* for a day's work, horse owners 3*s.* and cottagers 2*s.*⁵⁷

⁴⁸ SHC, A/BFA/4.

⁴⁹ SHC, DD/MT/15/1 (1692); H. Byard Sheppard, *Courts Leet and the Court Leet of the Borough of Taunton* (Taunton, 1909), 23, 37—9.

⁵⁰ Bishops Hull, local govt.; SHC, DD/AY/75.

⁵¹ TNA, PROB 11/10/31.

⁵² SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/1/1.

⁵³ SHC, DD/SP/424.

⁵⁴ SHC, DD/SAS/C909a/1.

⁵⁵ F. W. Weaver, *Somerset Wills 1501—30* (Som. Rec. Soc. 19), 26—7, 124—5, 137—8, 178, 187; *Somerset Wills 1531—58* (Som. Rec. Soc. 21), 25—6, 67..

⁵⁶ E.H. Bates, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1607—25* (Som. Rec. Soc. 23, 1907), 117, 183, 294; E. H. Bates-Harbin, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1625—39* (SRS 24), 159—60.

⁵⁷ M.C.B. Dawes, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1666—76* (Som. Rec. Soc. 34), 88, 187.

In the 18th century a vestry elected three wardens, four overseers and four highway surveyors, chose a sexton and appointed an organist, a workhouse governor and an apothecary and surgeon to attend the poor. By 1771 an assistant overseer was employed for £5 a year increasing to £30 by 1787.⁵⁸ In 1773 the parish agreed to pay a man 1s. for every beggar he brought to justice.⁵⁹ The poor rates were a growing burden and parishioners complained that houses were over rated and lands under rated. It was agreed not to remove people between St Mary and St James. In 1782 an overseer was insolvent and several parish officers had to be compelled to surrender their rate and account books. In 1783 a committee of 14 drawn from seven parish districts was required to attend the church house on Fridays when the poor were paid.⁶⁰ The vestry was well-attended, 134 including women came in 1789.⁶¹ In 1797 a parish examiner of weights and measures was appointed probably upsetting the borough constables, responsible for the market weights, as there is no later record of the office.⁶² The churchwardens maintained the stocks and paid £4 4s. to replace them when they were stolen in 1811.⁶³

In 1770 the parish was advised that land holders must repair roads even if they were not resident and a rate was levied.⁶⁴ The four highway surveyors kept separate accounts in the early 19th century for two divisions. The outfaring or without division included many roads, some turnpike, but farmers could provide labour and carts. The infaring or within division, itself divided in two by 1827, relied on paid labour and was responsible for pavements and their protective posts and gutters.⁶⁵ The surveyors used large quantities of stone and gravel,

⁵⁸ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (vestry min. 1732—67); D/P/tau.m/4/3/6 (1769—71, 1787); above, soc. hist., welfare.

⁵⁹ SHC, D/P/tau.m/4/3/6 (1773).

⁶⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1774—87); 9/1/2 (1814); above, soc. hist., welfare.

⁶¹ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1789).

⁶² SHC, Q/SR/364/1/53; D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1797).

⁶³ SHC, D/P/tau.m/4/3/8 (1811).

⁶⁴ SHC, D/P/tau.m/23/11.

⁶⁵ SHC, Q/REI/35/24, 26a; D/P/tau.m/14/2/1—2.

imported lias and kerb stone upriver and paid wharfage on five boats *c.* 1825.⁶⁶ In 1849 highway responsibilities were transferred to the Local Board of Health.⁶⁷

The four overseers of the poor divided the parish between them. In 1819 a select vestry, which met weekly, fortnightly from 1824, investigated complaints and employed a vestry clerk, assistant overseer and workhouse governor, later mistress.⁶⁸ It was said in 1832 to have been abolished for being over generous to the poor but in 1835 20 substantial householders formed a new select vestry.⁶⁹ In 1827 the parish was awarded £300 compensation for loss of the poor's land to the canal and by 1833 the overseers' income was over £5,000, mainly from rates, and their expenditure slightly less.⁷⁰ Under the new poor law St Mary's continued to pay an assistant overseer £20 but also found money to support the union by selling parish property.⁷¹ A room in Church Square was hired for keeping parish documents and enabling people to pay their rates until 1894 when the market house was used.⁷² The vicar chaired vestry meetings although a warden would take his place if required.⁷³ From 1837 the vestry elected five men to sit on the Board of Guardians by a parish poll. By 1851 the vestry met at the castle or market house, as it was not allowed to meet in church, until a new vestry room was established in Paul Street in 1863. Meetings often voted against rates but later allowed them on a poll. Up to 400 parishioners attended and women could vote and elect officers.⁷⁴

In 1885 the parish was divided into Within and Without, the former including part of West Monkton and the latter an area of Wilton east of the Sherford stream and from 1886

⁶⁶ SHC, D/P/tau.m/14/5/1.

⁶⁷ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/3 (1849).

⁶⁸ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/5; above, soc. hist., welfare.

⁶⁹ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/3 (1835); 13/9/1.

⁷⁰ SHC, Q/RUi/5; D/P/tau.m/13/10/4.

⁷¹ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/3, 9/1/4 (1860); above, soc. hist., welfare.

⁷² SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/4.

⁷³ SHC, D/D/Va/1/12, 2/12, 12/12.

⁷⁴ SHC, D/P/tau.m/4/4/6, 9/1/1, 3—4, 13/9/6.

three detached plots of Corfe parish.⁷⁵ From 1894 the Without parish met annually at the Harp inn to elect the chairman, waywarden, district councillor, two overseers and two burial board representatives.⁷⁶ By 1921 the parish had lost the new housing estates at Holway and along South Road to the extended borough but still had a larger rateable value than the rural parishes adjoining.⁷⁷ In 1926 allotment wardens were appointed.⁷⁸ In 1933 the parish was abolished and incorporated in the borough except for the remaining rural area around Haydon, which was transferred to Stoke St Mary parish.⁷⁹ St Mary's Within was abolished in 1921 and united with St James Within, Bishops Hull Within and Wilton in Taunton Borough.⁸⁰

St James

The early parish records have been lost although in 1629 when they were kept under the communion table they included accounts going back 60 years. The parish regretted the loss of church ales, which had paid the parish clerk and maintained its armour.⁸¹ The stocks were still maintained in 1738—9 although the ducking stool on the river was disused long before 1710 when the site was converted into a wharf.⁸² In 1654 the parishioners complained that their constable was a baker and kept an alehouse, which made him unsuitable for the office.⁸³

St James' was poor and neighbouring parishes were required to relieve its sick and poor in the mid 17th century although the wardens gave alms to strangers, over 100 in 1673—4.⁸⁴ The parish had two churchwardens, elected by the vestry, and up to five

⁷⁵ TNA, RG12/1876; SHC, D/R/ta/34/12/1; D/P/tau.m/13/9/7.

⁷⁶ SHC, D/PC/sto.s.ma/1/1/2, pp. 1, 5.

⁷⁷ SHC, D/B/ta/3/16/4, p. 19; D/PC/sto.s.ma/1/1/2, pp. 61—3, 73—5.

⁷⁸ SHC, D/PC/sto.s.ma/1/1/2, pp. 68.

⁷⁹ SHC, D/PC/sto.s.ma/1/1/2, p. 82; 2/2; Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 439.

⁸⁰ Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 439.

⁸¹ SHC, D/D/Cd/65; above, soc. hist., military.

⁸² SHC, DD/SP/18/17; D/P/tau.ja/4/1/3 (1738—9); Q/RUi/1.

⁸³ SHC, Q/SR/89/32.

⁸⁴ M.C.B. Dawes, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1666—76* (Som. Rec. Soc. 34), 222—4; SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/105; above, soc. hist., welfare, health.

overseers, including women until the mid 18th century.⁸⁵ The vestry elected wardens and between 1783 and 1791 the vestry paid overseers 30s. each to serve and appointed a doctor to attend the poor and later a man was paid to collect militia money.⁸⁶ The parish was divided into townside and landside each with constables in 1772.⁸⁷ In 1838 the vestry decided against a watch but by 1842 had 11 constables drawn from Hitchcock's force.⁸⁸ In 1791 the vestry discontinued giving poor relief in the vestry room and paying the overseers although in 1804 it agreed to pay them 5s. for every rate levied. In 1808 four men were appointed in each division, townside and landside, to assist with money collection.⁸⁹

Vestry meetings usually adjourned to a public house, the church porch and even to the Octagon Chapel in the 1820s and 1830s.⁹⁰ In 1820 the vestry appointed a select vestry of 20, including a doctor and from 1827 an assistant overseer and vestry clerk for £30 a year, and a matron of the workhouse but in 1832 the assistant overseer complained of over generosity to the poor.⁹¹ The parish received £300 compensation for loss of parish land to the canal in 1827.⁹² After the establishment of the poor-law union the vestry continued to elect ten overseers, half for each division, three guardians, five waywardens for the town side and two for the land side, and two tax collectors.⁹³ The annual vestry, chaired by the vicar from 1840 or earlier, met annually to consider church matters and by 1870 three churchwardens were appointed.⁹⁴

In 1885 separate Within and Without parishes were established the latter losing land to Staplegrove.⁹⁵ From 1894 St James Within had a parish meeting chaired by the vicar to

⁸⁵ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/4/4/1, 13/6/1; DD/SAS/TN/C795/105.

⁸⁶ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1783—97).

⁸⁷ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/22/6—7, 23/3.

⁸⁸ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1838); Q/APc/1/84; below, this section, police.

⁸⁹ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1783—91, 1803—32).

⁹⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1803—32); D/D/Va/1/12, 12/12.

⁹¹ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1820, 1827, 1833); D/P/tau.m/13/9/1.

⁹² SHC, Q/RUi/5.

⁹³ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1838).

⁹⁴ SHC, D/D/Va/1/12, 12/12; D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1.

⁹⁵ SHC, D/R/ta/34/12/1.

elect parish officers and representatives on the Board of Guardians until abolished in 1921.⁹⁶

The Without council served *c.* 300 people but after losing half its population to the extended borough in 1921 reverted to being a parish meeting serving *c.* 35 households.⁹⁷ It was

abolished in 1933 and divided between the borough and Cheddon Fitzpaine parish.⁹⁸

During the 19th century the Guardians, Local Board of Health and Town Council successively took over parish civil functions. The Taunton poor-law union comprising 37 parishes was governed by a Board of Guardians, which first met on 13 May 1836 and included at least eight members from the Taunton parishes.⁹⁹ In 1894 five polling stations in the within parishes opened from noon to 8 p.m. to elect guardians.¹⁰⁰ The board was based in Somerset House, Middle Street, with the Register Office but in 1926 the Guardians sold it and moved into Mary Street House with the Rural District Council.¹⁰¹ In 1930 the board was abolished and its duties passed to the Public Assistance Committee of Somerset County Council.¹⁰²

In 1849 the Local Board of Health board took over highway responsibility but in 1863 a Taunton District Highway Board was set up comprising local landowners described as waywardens responsible for 220 miles of road in 37 parishes. It met in the Union boardroom and appointed a district surveyor until it was abolished in 1895 when councils took over highway responsibilities.¹⁰³ In 1875 the Taunton Rural Sanitary Authority, later District Council, governed the two Taunton Without parishes and other rural parishes in the poor-law union. From 1925 it was based in Mary Street House and comprised one or two councillors from each parish.¹⁰⁴ It was abolished in 1974 and became part of Taunton Deane District.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁶ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/9/2/1; Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 439.

⁹⁷ SHC, D/B/ta/3/16/4, p. 19; D/R/ta/34/10/11.

⁹⁸ Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 439.

⁹⁹ SHC, D/G/ta/8a/1; D/P/ta.m/D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1838); Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 673.

¹⁰⁰ SHC, DD/SAS/C1540/3—8.

¹⁰¹ SHC, D/R/ta/34/11/4; D/G/ta/8a/47.

¹⁰² Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 673.

¹⁰³ SHC, D/R/ta/32/1/1; Q/AB/85.

¹⁰⁴ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 14; SHC, D/G/ta/8a/47..

BURIAL BOARDS

By 1847 church and chapel yards were overcrowded and Tangier people had to be buried two miles away at Bishops Hull.¹⁰⁶ The Local Board of Health ordered the closure of St Mary's churchyard in 1852 and in 1853 the parish established a burial board consisting of five Anglican and four others who agreed fees and kept the accounts.¹⁰⁷ In 1854 they agreed to join Bishops Hull in whose parish a new cemetery was laid out and looked after the closed churchyard from 1866. The board suspected the parish of getting improvements like paving at their expense and there was a lot of vandalism. In 1884 the churchyard was transferred back to the parish.¹⁰⁸

St James churchyard was to close after 31 December 1875 and the parish wanted a burial ground close enough for the poor to have a 'walking funeral'. Five acres near Fairwater on Staplegrove road was acquired, laid out with intersecting circular paths converging on a sinuous drive and extensive tree planting. Two mortuary chapels, Anglican on the east and nonconformist on the west, were combined in a single building, since demolished. It had banded brickwork in many colours, a patterned tiled roof, two south transepts of different design but with circular upper windows and a turret with spire on the north east.¹⁰⁹ There were 2,184 spaces in consecrated ground and 1,461 in the rest. A keeper's lodge at the entrance, of uncoursed dark stone with prominent light stone quoins and surrounds to deep-set windows, has decorative ridge tiles with a finial cross.¹¹⁰

A crematorium and cemetery were provided on Wellington New Road in Bishops Hull in 1966. In 1974 the district council replaced burial boards, took over all three

¹⁰⁵ Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 672, 676.

¹⁰⁶ *A Brief History of the late Taunton Improvement and Market Bill* (1847), 5; SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, p. 14.

¹⁰⁷ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/3—4; Bishops Hull, local govt.

¹⁰⁸ SHC, D/P/tau.m/3/5/1 (1884); D/B/ta/32/1/1 (1853, 1854, 1866—7, 1881—2).

¹⁰⁹ SHC. A/BKP/2; A/DIF/106/1.

¹¹⁰ SHC. A/BKP/2.

cemeteries and maintained the closed churchyards but no provision was made for closed nonconformist burial grounds.¹¹¹

BOROUGH ADMINISTRATION

Taunton has had two boroughs; a manorial borough owned by the bishops of Winchester by the 10th century and nominally still in existence, and a municipal borough with no continuous history. In addition the parliamentary borough although originating in the manorial borough diverged from it in 1832 when its boundary was extended to include most built-up areas of St Mary, St James, Wilton and Bishops Hull.¹¹² The town has also been administered by market house trustees, a local board of health and a district council.

Manorial borough

In 1086 the borough with its 64 burgesses, mint and market formed part of the bishop of Winchester's estate.¹¹³ King Stephen gave the burgesses the liberties of London and Westminster and later other episcopal boroughs were given the same freedoms as Taunton.¹¹⁴ Taunton was not given a communal government or mayor but was farmed out for up to £51 in the 13th century, presumably to a community of burgesses, but thereafter remained in the bishop's hands.¹¹⁵ A common seal was made based on that of Exeter showing a stylised castle flanked by towers and croziers, one with mitre, and two peacocks beneath. The legend 'SIGILLUM COMMUNE BURGII TANTONIE' indicated some independence under episcopal lordship.¹¹⁶ It was used to seal private deeds in the 15th century.¹¹⁷ By 1225 the borough jury heard felony cases in the king's courts. The township was held responsible in

¹¹¹ SHC, D/PC/b.hl/1/2/4, 2/23.

¹¹² SHC, DD/SAS/C1540/1/3.

¹¹³ *Domesday Book*, 234.

¹¹⁴ *Cal. Chart. R.* 1257—1300, 274, 324; 1300—26, 354.

¹¹⁵ Hunt, *Medieval Customs Taunton*, xi.

¹¹⁶ SHC, A/ABTH/1.

¹¹⁷ TNA, E326/5053.

the 13th century for not preventing a prisoner escaping and for harbouring a murderer.¹¹⁸ All residents of the borough were entitled to be heard before the Constable of the castle according to substance of their complaint or defence without challenge. They do not seem to have organised themselves into guilds.¹¹⁹

Few borough court records survive before the late 16th century and few entry fines are recorded.¹²⁰ The Taunton reeves, later portreeves, witnessed a deed in 1244 and received 2s. each from the 1280s.¹²¹ The steward and bailiff of the manor, who held office for life, were also steward and bailiff of the borough and the office often ran in families. The bailiff was responsible for sealing measures in 1574.¹²² Bailiffs were entitled to a pair of gloves and used under bailiffs for a halfpenny or farthing a week. Bailiff Walter atte Flodgate was fined in 1300—1 for carrying out his office in a contemptible manner.¹²³ The clerk to the manor also kept the borough records, in duplicate one copy going to Winchester, and was paid 4d. for each of the borough's 26 courts.¹²⁴ By the 15th century the borough had constables, some of whom were diocesan clerks, portreeves, bailiffs and aldermen. The portreeves managed the borough and its markets and acted as magistrates, assisted by the bailiffs who made arrests and collected fines.¹²⁵ Ale-tasters were appointed but in the late 16th century wanted 4s. a year claiming that previous tasters had been paid.¹²⁶

The borough courts were held fortnightly at the Guildhall built in the market place as a hall of judicature c. 1466 at the expense of the vicar of St Mary's on land given by Bishop

¹¹⁸ Chadwyck-Healey, *Som. Pleas c. 1200—1256*, 28, 296, 304.

¹¹⁹ B.L. Harl. MS 408, f. 213; *Borough Customs II* (Selden Soc. 21, 1906), 3.

¹²⁰ Hants. R.O., 11M59/C1/19/4.

¹²¹ *Cat. Ancient Deeds*, III, D296; .SHC, T/PH/win 1286—7.

¹²² SHC, DD/X/VNL/1; T/PH/win 1500—1; DD/DP/8/22; *Cal. Pat.* 1569—72, p. 364, 1572—5, p. 282; Bishops Hull, local govt.

¹²³ SHC, T/PH/win 1300—1; B.L. Harl. MS 408, ff. 212—13.

¹²⁴ Hants. R.O., 11M59/C1/19/10; HC, A/EDJ/3/1; Bishops Hull, local govt.

¹²⁵ R. W. Dunning, 'The Households of the Bishops of Bath and Wells', *PSANHS*, CX, 32—3; TNA, PROB 11/10/31.

¹²⁶ SHC, DD/SP/22/58.

Waynfleete whose clerk had a key to hold courts.¹²⁷ In 1528 the vicar and others acquired a decayed house in East Street to ‘augment’ the Guildhall and the burgesses also held a house in North Town. It is not known how they were used.¹²⁸ The Guildhall, furnished for cooking in 1672 when the equipment belonged to an innkeeper, was demolished c. 1769 but the new market house included a court room known as the Guildhall.¹²⁹

Tenants were required to attend the two leets, representative burgesses assessed fines and helped the portreeves draw up jury panels.¹³⁰ Courts dealt with tenancies and nuisances like straying animals, especially mastiffs for which a penalty of 6s. 8d. was imposed.¹³¹ Special courts tried leather quality in the 17th century at which the newly-appointed mayor of the chartered borough presided.¹³² The borough courts were by custom regulated by the steward but two freemen acted as judges and heard differences between tenants including monetary cases worth less than 40s.¹³³ Most people did not even attend the leets, 226 male defaulters were presented in 1613 rising to nearly 400 a century later, and jurors were paid to try cases, presumably for loss of earnings.¹³⁴ In 1716—17 558 male tenants of the manorial borough were known as ‘trying men’ eligible to serve on the jury.¹³⁵ The court leet continued to choose two portreeves, two bailiffs, two constables and six tithingmen or petty constables annually in the late 18th century. The portreeves were compensated with £18 a year from 1769 for loss of market revenues but still paid the castle Constable’s £20 fee.¹³⁶ By the 18th century local gentleman with legal training were appointed deputy stewards to hold courts

¹²⁷ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/10, 16, 149; DD/MK/9.

¹²⁸ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/46, 135.

¹²⁹ SHC, DD/SP/1672/66; above, econ. hist., market.

¹³⁰ B.L. Harl. MS 408, ff. 212—13.

¹³¹ e.g. SHC, DD/SP/49 (Oct. 1601), 53 (Apr. 1642).

¹³² e.g. SHC, DD/SP/51(1628/9), 52 (1631, 1637); above, econ. hist.

¹³³ SHC, A/CTP/6/6.

¹³⁴ SHC, DD/SP/49 (Feb. 1588), 50 (Apr. 1613), 61/6.

¹³⁵ SHC, DD/SP/61/7.

¹³⁶ J. Toulmin, *History of Taunton*, rev. J. Savage (Taunton, 1822), 277—8; SHC, DD/MT/1/33, 39; 11/36.

and later lawyers like Robert Beadon, as deputy for the steward, clerk and receiver, maintained contact between borough and bishop, held courts and remitted revenues.¹³⁷

By the early 19th century the town was managed by the county magistrates, the market house trustees, the parish officers and the bailiffs of the manorial borough who acted as returning officers and peace officers for St Mary's parish. held public meetings and attended the courts. The constables had few duties left but distributed charity money. In 1667 they had issued farthings with the Taunton rebus on one side and castle on the other.¹³⁸ Bailiffs and constables had staves, the latter dating from 1701 and the gift of former mayor Francis Hobart and others such as that of Thomas Granger constable 1819 and 1825.¹³⁹ Four staves were restored in 1931.¹⁴⁰ Fortnightly borough courts continued to be held for cases of debt and a leet elected two bailiffs, constables, portreeves, aletasters, shambles keepers, Cornhill keepers, searchers and sealers of leather, searchers of green skins, seven aldermen, to present nuisances and breaches of the peace, and eight rhyne ridders, responsible for the street rhynes.¹⁴¹ The bailiffs ensured that their nominees were re-elected so that four men held the office for many years serving alternately.¹⁴² A regular expense was the court leet dinner.¹⁴³

By 1849 despite a reaffirmation of the borough constitution the courts were said to have fallen into disuse although two were advertised that winter. An estimated c. 260 burgage holders still owed suit of court because they paid lord's rent.¹⁴⁴ The constables, still responsible for weights and measures, billeting soldiers and charity distribution, kept the

¹³⁷ SHC, DD/SP/197, 345; DD/DP/43/4.

¹³⁸ Toulmin, *Hist. of Taunton*, rev. Savage, 278; Shillibeer, *Ancient Customs of Taunton Deane*, 131; SHC, DD/CH/74/6; C. & J. Greenwood, *Som. Delineated* (1822), 186; finds.org: SOMDOR-CFDA16.

¹³⁹ H. Byard Sheppard, *Courts Leet and the Court Leet of the Borough of Taunton* (Taunton, 1909), 3, 7; SHC, A/EDJ/2/2; *PSANHS*, LXIII (1917), xxxix.

¹⁴⁰ SHC, DD/SP/453 (1931).

¹⁴¹ *Returns Relating to County, Hundred and Borough Courts* HC 338 I-IV (1839) xliii, 32; SHC, DD/SP/49; Shillibeer, *Ancient Customs of Taunton Deane*, 131.

¹⁴² Shillibeer, *Ancient Customs of Taunton Deane*, 131; SHC, DD/CH/74/6; C. & J. Greenwood, *Som. Delineated* (1822), 186.

¹⁴³ SHC, DD/SP/456.

¹⁴⁴ SHC, DD/SP/65; A/CTP/6/6; DD/SAS/C909a/7—8.

Constables Feast in November, spending the profits of farming out weighing in the market to entertain fellow borough officers. It ceased in 1887 but was revived in 1897 when over £8 was spent on decorations, loan of palms and invitations.¹⁴⁵ It was said c. 1870 that the bailiffs were ‘elected by so called court leet purely for party purposes’.¹⁴⁶ One annual leet continued although the record keeping was poor and juries were ‘packed’ to ‘elect’ officers chosen in advance by their predecessors. The steward and bailiffs refused to consider other candidates and the only presentment was a vote of thanks to the bailiffs.¹⁴⁷ By the 1890s offices of lowly status were held by the leading men of the town as an honour and the annual court leet, held each November in the Municipal Buildings, the former grammar school, and called the Fulfilling Court, redistributed offices. By the 1930s the constables, the previous year’s portreeves, hosted a summer outing and feast known as the Constable’s Day.¹⁴⁸ By the mid 20th century just 24 men of the borough were summoned to form the jury and elect officers who often remained in post for years.¹⁴⁹ A local solicitor was appointed steward and clerk of the castle, borough and manor of Taunton Deane and the court was still held in the early 21st century.¹⁵⁰

Municipal borough

A slump in the cloth industry in the 1620s possibly encouraged application for a corporation with more control over the town. In 1624 ‘one of the greatest clothing towns in the county’ was said to be falling into decay for want of government. The bishop of Winchester feared incorporation would damage his interests and it was another three years before the charter

¹⁴⁵ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 12; SHC, A/EDJ/2/2; DD/SP/463.

¹⁴⁶ SHC, DD/DP/116/2/1/3.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Proposed Incorporation of Taunton’ in *Report of Several Cases conducted by James Cook* (Taunton, 1895), 32—3, 52—4.

¹⁴⁸ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 12; SHC, A/DVY/1; A/DWX/8/11; A/EDJ/2/1—2, 5/1.

¹⁴⁹ SHC, DD/SP/454—5, 457.

¹⁵⁰ SHC, DD/DP/203/1—3, 5—7; A/EDJ/5/1.

was granted.¹⁵¹ Under the 1627 charter civil power was vested in a mayor, 14 capital and 10 inferior burgesses appointed for life who formed a common council with power to make laws for the town and charge penalties and fines. Burgesses chose the mayor and filled vacancies and appointed a recorder, a town clerk and his deputy and one or two sergeants at mace. The corporation was entitled to own land worth up to £100 a year but never did so although in 1640 cloth merchant Richard Potts gave £50 to support the borough officers in the execution of their office. The recorder and retiring mayor were to be justices of the peace and might commit felons to the county gaol to await trial.¹⁵² They probably met in the Guildhall as in the 18th century.¹⁵³ During the Interregnum the corporation mace, there should have been two, reputedly had Cromwell's arms engraved on it, later covered with a silver plate bearing the Royal Arms. Its existence was implied in the 1790s but it was lost before 1877.¹⁵⁴ In 1716 a wealthy burgess requested the mayor and other senior officers to be his pallbearers and left them each a gold ring, gloves, hatbands and black silk to cover the maces, implying two then existed.¹⁵⁵ The seal was a version of the medieval seal with a corona over the central gateway and dome-capped flanking round towers with poles.¹⁵⁶

The charter was taken away in 1660 and not restored until 1677 when the borough was extended to include both parishes. The common council was to comprise a mayor, two aldermen, 12 other capital burgesses and ten inferior burgesses who elected a clerk but the recorder had to be approved by the king. Perhaps suspecting the council's loyalty provision was made for six county magistrates to be on the borough commission of the peace. The charter was renewed again in 1686. All charters preserved the rights of the bishops of

¹⁵¹ *HMC 12th Report* App. I, p. 171.

¹⁵² SHC, D/B/ta/1/2/4; *Cal. S.P. Dom.* 1627—8, p. 101; TNA, PROB 11/185/438.

¹⁵³ SHC, DD/TB/18/7.

¹⁵⁴ R. Locke, *Supplement to Collinson's History of Somerset*, ed. F. M. Ward (Taunton, 1939), 144; SHC, D/B/ta/3/12/1 (1877).

¹⁵⁵ TNA, PROB 11/565/325.

¹⁵⁶ SHC, DD/PM/7/4/8.

Winchester.¹⁵⁷ A small seal with the name of Bernard Smith mayor 1685 has a crown between a cherub's head and wings with the Taunton motto 'DEFENDAMUS', probably derived from the Civil War, which became the borough arms in 1934.¹⁵⁸ The mayor appointed a town crier or bellman to cry lost goods and proclaim sales.¹⁵⁹ Despite a popular opera based on a mayoral election in 1733 only the members of the corporation could elect the mayor.¹⁶⁰ They also granted the freedom of the town, in 1745 to two innkeepers.¹⁶¹

With no property or capital the corporation fell under the dominance of county families wishing to gain control of the parliamentary seats like Lord Egremont in the 1750s or later Sir Thomas Lethbridge.¹⁶² The recordership was held by local members of the aristocracy. The weakness of the corporation partly explains its failure to replace members as vacancies were said to belong to various 'interests' such as banker John Morland by the later 18th century. In 1792 a dispute revealed that the corporation was not quorate having only 11 members instead of 24 and it was dissolved.¹⁶³ Despite several attempts by the public to get the charter restored they had to wait until 1875 when 598 people signed a petition demanding a public meeting to apply for incorporation.¹⁶⁴ Unfortunately except for copies of charters all the borough records of 1627—1792 have been lost.

Market Trustees

Originally set up to redevelop the market place, the trustees attempted to fill the gap in town government after 1792. There were 60 trustees of whom 40 had to be borough residents and

¹⁵⁷ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1675—6, pp. 39; 1677—8, 260—1; 1687—9, pp. 168, 240, 261, 266; Toulmin, *Hist. of Taunton*, rev. Savage, 278—81; SHC, D/B/ta/1/2/6.

¹⁵⁸ W.H. Bailey, 'The Charters, Seals, Maces and Armorial bearings of Taunton', *PSANHS*, LXXXVIII, 53—5.

¹⁵⁹ SHC, DD/TB/15/33, no. 11.

¹⁶⁰ SHC, DD/X/BUSH/12.

¹⁶¹ SHC, DD/TB/18/7.

¹⁶² *Hist. Parl: Commons 1754—1790*: accessed 17 Oct. 2019; J. H. Thomas, 'Economy and Society in 18th-century Somerset', *PSANHS* CXLI (1998), 63; above, landownership.

¹⁶³ SHC, DD/DP/8/20; Toulmin, *Hist. of Taunton*, rev. Savage, 283—8; T.H.B. Oldfield, *History of the Boroughs of Great Britain* (1792), 449.

¹⁶⁴ Toulmin, *Hist. of Taunton*, rev. Savage, 288; SHC, DD/SAS/C2558/10.

20 country ones. Their powers derived from their 1768 Act of Parliament and additional Acts of 1817, 1833 and 1840. They were self-elected and their main concern was the repayment of bond debt and interest.¹⁶⁵ They employed a beadle, liveried in blue with gold lace, a clerk and treasurer.¹⁶⁶ The trustees were responsible for lighting, paving and watering until the establishment of the Board of Health when they were limited to running the market but continued to appoint a clerk of the market and a town crier.¹⁶⁷ In 1926 the trust ceased and all its duties and powers passed to the town council, confirmed by an Act of 1931 repealing the Taunton Market Acts.¹⁶⁸

Local Board of Health

Following reports and enquiries concerning the poor health, water, sewerage and lighting in Taunton, its inefficient and fragmented government and a failed attempt to get improvement commissioners in 1847, a Local Board of Health was established.¹⁶⁹ It first met on 14 September 1849 and elected members including the Revd. Frederick Jeremiah Smith, architect Richard Carver and builder William Shewbrooks. It was chaired by banker Henry Badcock, employed a surveyor, an inspector of nuisances and a clerk, had offices in East Reach and a yard in Magdalene Street on the site of tenements and a small brewhouse.¹⁷⁰ A second yard in Coal Orchard near Denmark Place was acquired for water carts and extended in 1901 when the fire brigade took most of the Magdalene Street site. Wives of board members met district visitors concerning poor relief.¹⁷¹ After the 1849 cholera outbreak at the

¹⁶⁵ Taunton Market Act 57 Geo. III c. lxx; *Royal Com. On Market Rights and Tolls* (1888), II, p. 195.

‘Proposed Incorporation of Taunton’ in *Report of Several Cases conducted by James Cook* (Taunton, 1895), 35; above, econ. hist., markets.

¹⁶⁶ SHC, DD/DP/8/21; Goldsworthy, *Recollections of Old Taunton*, 28.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Proposed Incorporation of Taunton’ in *Report of Several Cases conducted by James Cook* (Taunton, 1895), 35—6; SHC, Q/RUo/35; *PO Dir. Som.* (1866); above, econ. hist., markets.

¹⁶⁸ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/7, p. 408; 31/1/8, p. 322; 31/1/11, p. 384; A/DIF/95/37; PAM 2563, p. 18; Kite and Palmer, *Taunton: its history and market trust*, 75.

¹⁶⁹ SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/12—13.

¹⁷⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/1, 1—2, 8, 15, 38; DD/SAS/C212/13/1, p. 81; DD/SAS/C212/Map151.

¹⁷¹ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/1, p. 39, 2/1/3, p. 42, 3/9/6 (1901).

workhouse the Board concerned itself with burial grounds, street nuisances, sewage removal, pumps, limewashing, paving and housing. Although board members were elected rating qualifications reduced its electorate to *c.* 1,200.¹⁷² The Board moved *c.* 1860 to 21 East Street. The upper floors of the stuccoed three-storey, three-bay building of the mid 19th century survive intact with flat pilasters and alternate semi-circular and triangular pediments over the first-floor windows.¹⁷³ In 1875 the board became an Urban Sanitary District but was abolished in 1876 and its responsibilities passed to the Town Council.¹⁷⁴

Town Council

The new borough, incorporated in 1876, was usually known as the Town Council or Taunton Corporation to avoid confusion with the manorial borough. Its council consisting of a mayor, six aldermen, half elected every three years and not necessarily from existing councillors, and 18 councillors elected across three wards. The electorate then numbered 2,010. The council met monthly taking over the work of the Board of Health and served as the Urban Sanitary District. In 1877 the mayor, Myer Jacobs who had been instrumental in securing the new charter, was provided with a scarlet gown trimmed with sable and it was agreed he should have a chain, a sword and a mace. The seal was to be that of the town lands charity, identical to the medieval seal, simplified but with the same legend. The silver mace, gift of the town's MPs in 1877, is surmounted by a crown and bears the seal.¹⁷⁵ A new seal and arms were formally granted by the College of Arms in 1934 based on the later 17th-century borough arms with the addition of a mural crown, supposed to represent king Ine, and a peacock

¹⁷² SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/1, passim; 'Proposed Incorporation of Taunton' in *Report of Several Cases conducted by James Cook* (Taunton, 1895), 36—7.

¹⁷³ *P.O. Dir. Som.* (1861).

¹⁷⁴ Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 672; below, this section.

¹⁷⁵ SHC, DD/CH/102/2; D/B/ta/3/12/1 (1876—7); W.H. Bailey, 'The Charters, Seals, Maces and Armorial bearings of Taunton', *PSANHS*, LXXXVIII, 53—4. A Jew, he was elected Mayor unanimously despite opposition from the Revd Fred. J. Smith: *Taunton Courier* 18 July 1877: BNA accessed 18 Feb. 2020.

crest.¹⁷⁶ A house built by organist Charles Harman in 1823 on part of the White Lion site was acquired.¹⁷⁷ Still known as the Old Council House, 39 East Street formed the municipal offices until the old grammar school was converted into the Municipal Buildings in 1887.¹⁷⁸ It is a stuccoed three-storey, three-bay building whose upper two floors survive with flat pilasters and sash windows with coloured glass borders and decorative surrounds. The very tall 1st-floor windows probably lit the council chamber.

From 1878 the takeover of the markets and waterworks was planned, salaried offices were appointed and committees formed, mainly continuing the responsibilities of the Board of Health.¹⁷⁹ The original officers were the town clerk, treasurer, medical officer of health, borough accountant, borough surveyor, inspector of nuisances, rate collector and school attendance officers. Later a water inspector, electrical engineer, mace bearer, and inspector of animal diseases were added.¹⁸⁰ Acts of 1889 and 1900 extended powers to raise money, take over water supplies, and regulate streets and traffic.¹⁸¹ The civil parishes of Bishops Hull Within and Wilton were included with the Within parishes of St Mary and St James although each remained a separate civil parish.¹⁸²

In the early 20th century men were reluctant to serve as mayor and in 1913 the mayor remained in office for a second year with a salary of £150. Two aldermen were appointed to act as overseers. In 1921 the built-up areas of the Without parishes were added to the borough whose four civil parishes were abolished and Taunton remained unparished, divided into wards. Further extensions were approved in 1932, 1958 and 1966.¹⁸³ The 1921 council had

¹⁷⁶ W.H. Bailey, 'The Charters, Seals, Maces and Armorial bearings of Taunton', *PSANHS*, LXXXVIII, 53—5; SHC, D/B/ta/1/3/1; above, this section.

¹⁷⁷ SHC, DD/DP/184/2.

¹⁷⁸ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883, 1889); Bishops Hull, soc. hist., educ.

¹⁷⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/3/12/1, passim.

¹⁸⁰ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883, 1889); *Taunton of Today* (1896), 9—10.

¹⁸¹ Taunton Corporation Act 52—3 Vic. c. cxxxvi; Taunton Corporation Act 63—4 Vic. c. cclxxxiii.

¹⁸² SHC, Q/Rup/464, 467; D/P/b.hl/2/21.

¹⁸³ Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 439; SHC, C/CP/D/163; A/DIF/95/33 (1913), 37 (1926); D/B/ta/42/13.

18 members including one woman but only in three wards were there sufficient candidates for an election to be held.¹⁸⁴

In the 1930s the council was responsible for electricity and water supply, sewerage, elementary education, slum clearance, house building, road improvements, allotments, implementing war regulations and precautions and under an Act of 1931 the power to create an aerodrome.¹⁸⁵ In 1938 it employed 102 officers and 180 servants.¹⁸⁶ The outbreak of war resulted in Charles Goodland serving as mayor for seven years for which he was made an honorary freeman. His successor was only the second Labour mayor.¹⁸⁷ After the war a new corporation depot with garages and workshops was created at Lambrook south of the sewage works. In 1962 the Coal Orchard depots were demolished for car parking and the Lambrook site was extended in 1965. The depot was destroyed in the late 20th century to build a new flyover and roads and relocated to the new adjoining Priory Way industrial park before moving to Wellington *c.* 2016.¹⁸⁸ By 1972 the borough had seven wards with 20 councillors and offices on at least five sites. One of its last decisions was to buy Higher Holway for £1,500,000 for housing.¹⁸⁹

In 1974 the borough became part of the new Taunton Deane district, later borough, with Taunton Rural District and Wellington's Urban and Rural districts.¹⁹⁰ The council inherited the Municipal Buildings, St Paul's House, converted to council offices in 1930, offices at Castle Bow, Mary Street House, headquarters of the former Taunton Rural District Council, and in Wellington but was still short of space and temporary offices were taken in Bath Place and elsewhere. In 1985 Taunton Deane Borough Council planned a new building for 272 employees and Deane House was completed in 1987 in Belvedere Road behind

¹⁸⁴ SHC, A/DIF/49.

¹⁸⁵ SHC, D/DC/tau.d, unlisted boxes 16—17, 19; Taunton Corporation Act 21—2 Geo. V c. cii.

¹⁸⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/4/5/1 (Sep. 1938).

¹⁸⁷ SHC, D/DC/tau.d, unlisted boxes 16—17, 19.

¹⁸⁸ SHC, D/B/ta/4/3/6 (Dec. 1959, Dec. 1962); D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box 1 (1965).

¹⁸⁹ SHC, D/DC.tau/2/2/1.

¹⁹⁰ Youngs, *Local Admin. Units*, I, 676.

Flook House.¹⁹¹ Councillors representing the unparished area of Taunton, known as the charter trustees, continued to elect a mayor and a deputy for the town and a sergeant at mace remained in office.¹⁹² On 1 April 2019 West Somerset district council merged with the borough to form Somerset West and Taunton District Council, abolished in April 2023 when Somerset came under a unitary council.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT OFFICERS AND DEPARTMENTS

Mint

Taunton had a mint from the late 10th century until the reign of Stephen (d. 1254), possibly to meet the manor's need for cash for rents, salaries and trade. A moneyer called Brihtric was at work under Edward the Confessor and Harold and possibly another named Boia.¹⁹³ In 1086 the mint made £2 10s. a year profit for the bishop of Winchester, the same as the market.¹⁹⁴ Surviving coins show moneyers called Elfric (*t. Hen. I*) and Alfred (*t. Stephen*) but production was apparently small.¹⁹⁵ The mid 17th-century tokens and the charity farthings issued in 1667 may have been produced locally. They circulated widely and have been found in Dorset, Gloucestershire, Hampshire and Wiltshire.¹⁹⁶ Illegal coining included an unknown 15th-century counterfeiter of foreign coins and a brewer hanged in 1473 for coining nobles at the instigation of a Devon goldsmith.¹⁹⁷ There were arrests in 1726 for coining shillings and in 1845 James and Mary Adey made 'silver' coins out of base metal spoons in East Reach.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹¹ SHC, D/B/ta/4/6/3 (Sep. 1930); D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 1 (report, 1985); D/DC/tau.d/2/2/14 (21 Jan. 1986); date on building.

¹⁹² SHC, D/DC/tau.d/2/2/4 (8 Jan. 1976).

¹⁹³ *PSANHS CXXVIII* (1984), 17; *CXXXI* (1987), 158.

¹⁹⁴ *Domesday*, 234.

¹⁹⁵ Toulmin, *History of Taunton*, rev. Savage, 108; *PSANHS CXXIII* (1979), 93; *CXXXI* (1987), 220.

¹⁹⁶ e.g. finds.org.uk: SOM-74E522, 82C2ES; GLO-4668EF; HAMP-255993; WLT-EABFO3.

¹⁹⁷ SWHT, HER 44409; H. Kleineke, 'The Prosecution of Counterfeiting in Lancastrian England', *Medieval Markets and Money* (2016), 215—6.

¹⁹⁸ DD/SAS/C2548/2 [*Norris's Taunton Jnl*, 23 Sep.1726]; S. Minnitt, Counterfeit Coins in Somerset, 1810—1855', *PSANHS CLXIII* (2020), 182—3.

Coroner

Under the bishops of Winchester Taunton Deane manor and borough had its own coroner and the royal coroners were excluded from Taunton Deane hundred.¹⁹⁹ In 1297—8 the burgesses were presented for not raising a hue and cry when the coroner arrived.²⁰⁰ In the 16th century the office was served by Taunton men, probably in combination with the office of bailiff.²⁰¹ In 1755 an inquest held at the Antelope in the market place led to the murder of a female witness who was trampled to death for refusing to testify against a murder suspect, having already been threatened with imprisonment by the Mayor and others if she refused.²⁰² Coroners were elected but in 1845 borough coroners were abolished and new county coroners' districts created.²⁰³ Taunton came under the west Somerset coroner, based in the town, who had a deputy by 1893 when they held 99 inquests.²⁰⁴ In 2015 the county was placed under a single coroner based in the former Municipal Buildings in Corporation Street.²⁰⁵

Registrar

The Register Office in Lower Middle Street, later known as Registry Place, was designed by Richard Carver in rendered Tudor Gothic style and built by George and Robert Herniman in the early 1840s. It housed the superintendent registrar but there were also a registrar of marriages and a registrar of births and deaths for each parish.²⁰⁶ By 1895 the superintendent was responsible for four urban and three rural registrars.²⁰⁷ The Register Office, shared with the Board of Guardians and known as Somerset House, was sold in 1926 and the service

¹⁹⁹ Chadwyck-Healey, *Som. Pleas c. 1200—1256*, p. 293.

²⁰⁰ SHC, T/PH/win 1297—8.

²⁰¹ *Cal. Pat.* 1585—6, p. 195; 1586—7, I, p. 194; TNA, KB9/458/50, KB9/599a/108.

²⁰² SHC, DD/DP/59/11.

²⁰³ SHC, Q/C/8/2; Q/SR/573/119; DD/SAS/C909/123.

²⁰⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/4/6/1 (Jan. 1893); C/CR/Misc/1; *Taunton Official Handbook and Guide* (1931), 71.

²⁰⁵ SHC, C/CR/w. cat. Most records before 1971 were destroyed.

²⁰⁶ *Slater's Dir. Som.* (1852).

²⁰⁷ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 15.

moved to Mary Street House and c. 1945 to Flook House.²⁰⁸ In the early 21st century it was based in the former Municipal Buildings.

Inland Revenue and Customs

Excise officers were said to have provoked a riot in 1647.²⁰⁹ They were provided with their own seat in St Mary's church in the 18th century.²¹⁰ The Inland Revenue offices were in East Street in 1859 and by 1864 also housed the tax commissioners.²¹¹ In 1878 the Revenue leased the former bank at 4 Fore Street but c. 1892 had moved again to share offices with the Excise over a bank at 54 North Street. The two services employed a surveyor and eight assessors and a supervisor and four officers respectively.²¹² By the 1920s there were two Taunton tax districts; the first with offices in Hammet Street and later in Tone Bridge Chambers, Bridge Street and the second district based at Westminster Bank Buildings on the corner of Corporation Street then after 1935 at Revenue House, Billet Street.²¹³ Revenue House, a white three-storey block, was demolished in 1983. Replacement brick offices in Corporation Street closed in the 2010s and were converted to flats in 2022—3.²¹⁴ The Customs and excise were based in The Crescent in the later 20th century before moving to Brendon House off High Street.²¹⁵

Other Government Offices

²⁰⁸ SHC, D/G/ta/8a/47; D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 17, 1943—5 (Sep. 1945).

²⁰⁹ Below, local politics.

²¹⁰ SHC, DD/SAS(C/795)/15 (1746).

²¹¹ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/3, p. 5; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 19.

²¹² SHC, DD/X/CMG/1; *Taunton of Today* (1896), 16—17.

²¹³ SHC, D/B/ta/13/3/1, p. 413; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929) 35; *Taunton Official Handbook and Guide* (1931), 95; SHC, D/B/ta/95/2122; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957) 10, 12, 16.

²¹⁴ SHC, DD/X/SML/9, p. 28.

²¹⁵ SHC, DD.X/ROW/1.

The District Probate Registry was in Hammet St in the 19th century,²¹⁶ in Westminster Bank Buildings in the early 20th century and later in Bridge Street.²¹⁷ In 1931 the Labour Exchange, formerly Town Villa possibly by Richard Carver with a later wrap-around shopfront on the corner of Bridge and Wood Streets, opened six days a week including a late evening. It was demolished in the 1970s for road widening and the exchange, now Job Centre, moved to Brendon House.²¹⁸

Most ministries used existing buildings often in Hammet Street but in the 1920s the Ministries of Health and Pensions and the Inland Revenue Valuation department occupied a block of offices designed to look like houses in Priory Avenue, now Freemantle House.²¹⁹ The Ministry of Pensions later moved into Silver Street House. In the later 20th century Brendon House was built on the site of Pool Wall mill off High Street for the Ministry of Labour and remained in use in the early 21st century for government offices. A scheme to move 120 Foreign Office staff to Taunton in 1955 was not carried out. In 1961—4 Quantock House was built in two blocks at the south end of Paul Street for the Ministry of Agriculture to replace offices throughout the town but was closed and demolished in 2017.²²⁰ In 1991 high quality brick offices were built at Tangier on the river bank for the Treasury Solicitor and Charity Commission but both had moved back to London by 2016. The Admiralty Hydrographic Supplies Establishment was set up at Halcon before 1937 to produce maritime charts for both military and civilian customers. It remained on Admiralty Way in the 2020s although Cyril Jowsey's original chart factory has been demolished.²²¹

²¹⁶ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 17; *Taunton of Today* (1896), 17.

²¹⁷ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 17; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929) 35; *Taunton Official Handbook and Guide* (1931), 71.

²¹⁸ *Taunton Official Handbook and Guide* (1931), 101; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957) 16; SHC, DD/X/BUSH/13.

²¹⁹ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), 68.

²²⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/3/22/7, pp. 404, 456; D/B/ta/24/1/143/8432; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), A17—18.

²²¹ Inf. from Hydrographic Office; VCH Office, Taunton, R. Lillford, 'A Biographical Dictionary of Somerset Architects and Surveyors' (2022), 309.

COURTS

Apart from the manor courts the oldest were probably those of the church. The archdeacon of Taunton held a court in St Mary's church in 1244.²²² His court for church and probate matters was kept regularly until the 19th century and an area in St Mary's church was known as the Consistory Court in the 18th century.²²³ Courts were badly attended after the Interregnum. Archdeaconry business was conducted by a local notary in 1696 and later by the solicitors who managed the manors.²²⁴ A piepowder court at the fairs produced 3s. 4d. for the manor in 1388—9 but from the mid 15th century paid a fixed fee of 1s. 8d.²²⁵ In 1849 sales of horses and cattle were required to be recorded in the court and nine beadles were appointed to account for receipts.²²⁶

Taunton Deane manor tenants were not required to serve on assize or sessions juries unless they held land outside the manor.²²⁷ Quarter Sessions, Assizes with Gaol Delivery and the County Court were held in the Castle in Bishops Hull until the Shire Hall opened on 22 March 1858.²²⁸ Two Quarter Sessions, one of the Assizes and the County Court continued to be held at the Shire Hall until abolished in 1971. The Taunton court district covered west Somerset, Bridgwater, Chard and east and north Devon with offices in Hammet Street and by the 1950s in North Street.²²⁹ The last Somerset Assize and General Gaol Delivery opened at Taunton on 18 October 1971.²³⁰

²²² *Plac. Abbrev.* (Rec. Com.), 121.

²²³ Above, rel. hist., archdeaconry; SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (vestry min. 1761); SHC, DD/X/MDT/393, p. 14.

²²⁴ A. Thomson, *Church Courts and People in Seventeenth Century England* (2022), pp. 86—7, 90—4; SHC, DD/SAS/C112/20/7; DD/SP/423—43.

²²⁵ SHC, T/PH/win, 1388—9; 1454—5, 1496—7, 1544—5; DD/SP/325/127.

²²⁶ SHC, A/CTP/6/6.

²²⁷ SHC, DD/MT/15/1 (1687).

²²⁸ Bishops Hull, local govt.

²²⁹ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 13; *Taunton Official Handbook and Guide* (1931), 71; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957) A 17.

²³⁰ SHC, DD/X/ASZ.

Shire Hall was built on the site of The Grove, a large late Georgian mansion in Shuttern with grounds extending downhill to modern Park Street.²³¹ Richard Carver's 1854 classical designs were rejected. A public competition in 1855 was won by W. B. Moffatt, a former partner of George Gilbert Scott, although the building work by George Pollard of Taunton remained under Carver's supervision.²³² The foundation stone was laid 14 August 1855 and the building in an irregular and flamboyant Tudor style took two and a half years to complete.²³³ Set back from Shuttern to take advantage of the slope, the two main courtrooms with large traceried rear gable windows extend the main depth and full height of the building on either side of the grand entrance hall with its balconied porch and since 1860 housing busts of Somerset worthies including Robert Blake, John Locke, Henry Fielding and John Hanning Speke. The hall, used for events such as a ball in honour of John Hanning Speke in 1863 and recruiting in 1916, was ceiled to provide a first-floor civil court, converted in 1928 into a chamber for the county council.²³⁴ Government tribunals and commissions also used the building, there were offices for the Clerk of the Peace and the High Sheriff and in a west wing with their own grand entrance was the judge's lodging. A passage under the road to the gaol, since disused, allowed prisoners to be brought directly into the dock. Crowds watched public executions on the gaol roof opposite until 1867. The lower ground floor housed the county records and offices and there was accommodation for the Keeper, a post held by members of the Wollen family from the mid 19th to mid 20th centuries.²³⁵ By the 1930s there were complaints from judges about the layout of courtrooms and lodgings.²³⁶ Alterations included removal of the roof lanterns and the railings and gates in 1943.²³⁷ A large area of housing to the west was demolished and despite provision of car parking much open parkland

²³¹ SHC, tithe award; Q/SR/606/94.

²³² SHC, Q/AC/6—10; DD/L/1/10/35A.

²³³ SHC, DD/SAS/C909/169.

²³⁴ SHC, C/CA/G187/1; DD/SF/17/5/15.

²³⁵ SHC, A/DGU/1, 4—5; Q/AC/21; ; SWHT, Som. HER 36786.

²³⁶ SHC, Q/AC/25.

²³⁷ SHC, D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 17, 1942—3, 29.

remained. Criminal and other courts continued to be held at Shire Hall except during alterations and renovations in 1988—90 when they were held at Wells. Offices were provided for the chief clerk to the courts and the county court registrar.²³⁸ However, the courtrooms were not considered secure enough for the most serious criminal trials and after 1971 Taunton was a third tier Crown Court.²³⁹ The Nisi Prius courtroom retains its grand jury box and has been used occasionally for theatrical performances.

Local justices of the peace for the county, and the borough when there was one, met in regular petty sessions but special sessions were held in the early 19th century, monthly for highway matters and annually for alehouse licensing, appointing overseers and surveyors and examining highway accounts. Examinations of paupers and unmarried mothers were carried out at the Magistrates Office in East Street before the sessions.²⁴⁰ The Taunton justices had their own clerk in the mid 19th century.²⁴¹ Petty sessions were held in the Guildhall on the ground floor of the Market House every Wednesday for the town and every Saturday for the rural areas.²⁴² The room became inadequate and in the 1870s justices used the Shire Hall.²⁴³ County sessions were held monthly but from 1899 the borough had its own commission of the peace and held weekly Wednesday petty sessions but in reality held daily to deal with the volume of offences from assaults to not paying rates. Unlike the county justices the borough justices had to pay to use Shire Hall.²⁴⁴ In 1906 there were 16 magistrates on the borough commission of the peace and 22 in the Taunton division of the county commission responsible for the rural parishes.²⁴⁵ Increased business for all courts and separation from their administrative offices made a separate magistrates court desirable. In 1980—2 the lower

²³⁸ SHC, PAM 1106 *Taunton Crown and County Court* (1990).

²³⁹ SHC, A/ASC/11/4/6.

²⁴⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.m/14/5/1.

²⁴¹ Robson, *Dir.Som.* (1839); *PO Dir. Som.* (1866).

²⁴² Harrison, Harrad & Co. *Dir. Som.* (1859); *P.O. Dir. Som.* (1861, 1866).

²⁴³ SHC, Q/AC/23, 28; Q/SR/671/4.

²⁴⁴ SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/6 (*Taunton Mail*, 21 June, 15 Nov. 1899); D/B/ta/3/16/1; DD/AY/132/1—13; Q/AC/23; DD/SAS/C2402/48.

²⁴⁵ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1906).

ground floor of Shire Hall and portable buildings were fitted out as temporary premises.²⁴⁶ A new courthouse opened in St John's Road in 1992 with four courtrooms opening off a first-floor concourse, offices and cells and won a Civic Trust Award in 1995.²⁴⁷

PRISONS

A town prison was recorded in 1242—3 when a prisoner escaped.²⁴⁸ Several escapes were recorded but it is not clear whether from the castle or town prison, which during vacancies in the see of Winchester belonged to the Crown.²⁴⁹ The borough bailiff was responsible for writs, distress, arrest and ward but for a royal summons under the green wax he shared responsibility with the hundred bailiff.²⁵⁰ In 1352 Sir Thomas Fichet was pardoned for illegally imprisoning a man in Taunton, as well as for murder and forgery.²⁵¹ In 1531 a mercer claimed he had been wrongly imprisoned by the constables and a bailiff.²⁵²

The Bridewell, on the Tone Bridge north-west of North Street, was built in 1582 as a county house of correction. It was often in poor repair and some prisoners died there including the Revd Edmund Peacham awaiting execution for treason in 1616.²⁵³ It was one of three houses of correction maintained by the county and its master was appointed by Quarter Sessions.²⁵⁴ In 1632 the master complained that poor maintenance of the leads enabled prisoners to escape.²⁵⁵ In 1650, while it housed a Royalist committed by the County Committee, its decayed gates were a nuisance.²⁵⁶ Despite repairs it was again decayed in 1656 when it housed a runaway apprentice and nine diseased women committed for bastardy.

²⁴⁶ SHC, A/DLZ, reports 1980—2.

²⁴⁷ SHC, A/DQO/404/4/1.

²⁴⁸ Chadwyck-Healey, *Som. Pleas c. 1200—1256*, 296.

²⁴⁹ *Cal. Close*, 1268—72, p. 68; *Cal. Pat.* 1301—7, p. 39; *SDNQ*, XVI, 52; Bishop's Hull, local govt.

²⁵⁰ B.L. Harl. MS 408, f. 212; *Borough Customs II* (Selden Soc. 21, 1906), 165—6..

²⁵¹ *Cal. Pat.* 1345—50, p. 98; 1350—4, p. 377.

²⁵² TNA, REQ 2/3/252.

²⁵³ *SDNQ*, XXXII, pp. 629; E.H. Bates, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1607—25* (Som. Rec. Soc. 23, 1907), 20; *Cal. S.P. Dom.* 1611—18, p. 357.

²⁵⁴ SHC, Q/SR/49/16, 49; 58/19, 86.

²⁵⁵ SHC, Q/SR/70/85—6, 75/53—4.

²⁵⁶ Sheppard, *Court Leet of the Borough of Taunton*, 35; *Cttee for Compounding*, II, 1812.

In 1669 a 'distracted' woman was housed there..²⁵⁷ The keepers lived in the house and the office often passed within the family.²⁵⁸ Even locked shackles did not prevent a prisoner escaping but in 1685 it was used to house some of the Monmouth rebels.²⁵⁹ In 1686 the gaoler, as keeper of the sergeant's ward for the corporation, was ordered to receive a female debtor.²⁶⁰ Despite escapes and fires in the early 18th century the deep hall was used for the worst criminals and there were tools for those committed to hard labour.²⁶¹ The corporation appointed keepers of Taunton Gaol and in 1698 a widow briefly governed the prison and another in 1741.²⁶² In 1747 a prisoner awaiting execution killed a guard blaming his cruel treatment by the keeper Nathaniel Gardner who was accused by another prisoner of cruelty and extortion.²⁶³ In 1753 the justices of the peace were authorised to rebuild the prison and in 1755 a site in Wilton was acquired. The old Bridewell was sold and became a private house.²⁶⁴ Criminals thereafter were sent to Wilton gaol and debtors to Ilchester.²⁶⁵

A pillory was recorded in the market in 1587 and 1676.²⁶⁶ Stocks in East Reach had decayed by 1595 but others were kept by the parishes.²⁶⁷ Parishes lockups were known locally as Cowhouses. In 1629 the inhabitants of St James parish had to contribute to building a new prison, probably at North Town on the north side of Staplegrove Road. Apparently destroyed during the Civil War it was replaced by a private house before 1652.²⁶⁸

St Mary's had the Cow House and Little Ease at the Guildhall, presumably intended for miscreants during market days but also used for vagrants and deserters. Both were

²⁵⁷ E. H. Bates-Harbin, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1646—60* (Som. Rec. Soc. 28), 124, 154, 283, 313—14; SHC, Q/SR/94/84, 105; B. Dawes, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1666—76* (Som. Rec. Soc. 34), 74, 83.

²⁵⁸ SHC, Q/SO/7 ff. 246v, 374, 387v, 402; Q/SO/9, ff. 84v, 334, 392.

²⁵⁹ SHC, Q/SR/160/25; Q/SO/7 ff. 456v.

²⁶⁰ SHC, DD/X/WHI/6 (1686).

²⁶¹ *SDNQ*, IV, 309; SHC, Q/SR/300/151; 305/22; 307/12, 14.

²⁶² SHC, Q/SO/8 ff. 313, 319, 357v, 376 v; Q/SR/309/118—19.

²⁶³ SHC, Q/SR/315/47, 50—1.

²⁶⁴ SHC, Q/SR/322/1/9, 322/2/33, 323/3/38, 323/4/19; D/B/ta/31/5/6; Wilton, local govt.

²⁶⁵ C. & J. Greenwood, *Som. Delineated* (1822), 186.

²⁶⁶ SHC, DD/SP/49 (Apr. 1587); Dawes, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1666—76*, 217.

²⁶⁷ D. Shorrocks, *Bp Still's Visitation and 'Smale Bk'*, 168; above, this section.

²⁶⁸ J. S. Cockburn, *Somerset Assize Orders 1640—59* (Som. Rec. Soc. 1971), 2—3; SHC, DD/X/HPS/4 (Apr. 1646); DD/SAS/C795/TN/44 (1646); DD/SP/98 (1652).

demolished in the 1760s.²⁶⁹ Another prison in St Mary's parish was repaired in 1782 and boards laid for the prisoners to sleep on but in 1785 St James vestry was consulted about a new prison. Eventually in 1787 they agreed to pay a third of the cost of a lock up and keeper's house being built near St Mary's church. However, Sir Benjamin Hammet objected to its spoiling his new street, repaid the expense and provided a new Bridewell in a court off Magdalene Lane.²⁷⁰ It was only c. 16ft by 14ft with accommodation above for the keeper who shared a pump and privy with two one-roomed cottages and in 1787 the whole court was conveyed to the corporation for use as a borough prison, known as the Nook. St Mary's parish paid the keeper to apprehend vagrants and see them out of town. By 1794 the workhouse governor kept the prison to house vagrants but it was sold in the 1860s and demolished.²⁷¹

POLICE

The borough constables and tithingmen kept the peace in the Middle Ages and the bishop's constable was accused of harbouring a man who failed to take thieves in 1225.²⁷² Later the parishes appointed constables; St James' had two in 1772 and St Mary's had nine with nine assistants in 1834. Disorderly men were bound over but women were imprisoned for several days being unable to provide surety.²⁷³ In 1836 the guardians were divided over paying for policing but most wanted night patrols and the inspection of beer and lodging houses.²⁷⁴ By 1842 there were 24 constables, seven described as unqualified, to keep watch day and night, record crimes and report fires, street lamps not working and illegal drinking. Most took their work seriously although some got drunk and one took his wife to a concert when he should

²⁶⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/31/5/3 (1714, 1763); Siraut, *Som. Wills*, 216; above, econ. hist., market.

²⁷⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1782, 1785, 1787); D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1785, 1787); A/CPT/13/5.

²⁷¹ McDermott, *Sir Benjamin Hammet*, 29; SHC, DD/KLY/C/2898; D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1788); D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1838); Goldsworthy, *Recollections of Old Taunton*, 28; above, soc. hist, welfare.

²⁷² C. E. Chadwyck-Healey, *Som. Pleas c. 1200—1256* (Som. Rec. Soc. 11), p. 85.

²⁷³ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/22/6—7; D/P/tau.m/12/2.

²⁷⁴ TNA, HO73/8.

have been on duty.²⁷⁵ In 1853 60 men were nominated for the office and an additional list included seven borough policemen.²⁷⁶

In October 1838 after a spate of crimes William Hitchcock organised a borough force and became its honorary Chief Superintendent. A sergeant and ten constables were based at a police station in Church Square where some resided. They wore a blue uniform with white embroidery and buttons. On census night 1841 a woman and her baby were in the cells.²⁷⁷ In the first quarter of 1844 the force dealt with one murder, two highway robberies and 56 other felonies and misdemeanours, recovered stolen property and saved six lives.²⁷⁸ The force depended on public subscriptions, in 1846 an almshouse paid 6*d.* a week for police protection, which meant there was no policing for poor neighbourhoods. North Town residents had their own system of paid watchmen. Constables were sworn in by the parishes and an inspector was in post by 1847.²⁷⁹ By 1851 there was a force of railway police in the town consisting of a sergeant and four constables.²⁸⁰

In 1853 the governor of Wilton gaol told a Parliamentary committee the Taunton constabulary was not properly supervised.²⁸¹ In 1856 a Somerset constabulary was established under the new Police Act controlled by Quarter Sessions until 1888 and then by a standing committee of Somerset County Council.²⁸² The borough force formed part of the county constabulary with a superintendent, three sergeants and 14 constables in the 1890s.²⁸³ They were governed by agreements of 1915, 1936 and 1944 with the borough council paying the county for the cost of policing the town.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁵ SHC, Q/APc/1/84; D/P/tau.m/12/1.

²⁷⁶ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/3.

²⁷⁷ *The Police and Constabulary List* (1844), 61 [facsimile SHC, PAM 1206]; TNA, HO107/972.

²⁷⁸ *Police and Constabulary List* (1844), 99.

²⁷⁹ SHC, DD/DP/116/2/1/2 (1846); DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, pp. 50—3.

²⁸⁰ TNA, HO107/1923.

²⁸¹ I. P. Collis, 'The Struggle for Constabulary Reform in Somerset', *PSANHS XIX—C*, 75, 89,92—3, 98, 102.

²⁸² SHC, DD/ASC, cat.

²⁸³ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 13.

²⁸⁴ SHC, DD/ASC/2/3/14—16.

In 1857 the justices of the peace purchased land and houses east of the new Shire Hall for a police station.²⁸⁵ It was built of light coursed rubble with dark stone dressings in a similar style to Shire Hall.²⁸⁶ In 1873—4 it was extended northwards to provide additional living accommodation and in 1891 a superintendent and a sergeant with their families and seven constables were resident.²⁸⁷ The force grew reaching 23 in 1924.²⁸⁸ The county police moved into the entrance block of the former prison on the south side of the street, locally in Wilton, which was rebuilt in 1940 to become the headquarters of the combined county and borough constabularies with the old building used as police flats until demolished c. 1959.²⁸⁹

Concern over the consequences of having more soldiers in the town during the First World War led to requests for women police officers. The chief constable was against the scheme but the borough force had declined from 21 in 1915 to 15 by 1917 of whom four were re-employed pensioners and eight were liable to be called up for military service. The first woman was appointed in February 1918 but as women earned more in the factories they were difficult to retain and none were appointed after the war.²⁹⁰ In 1932 there were again only 15 officers instead of the 26 needed but in 1933 the county constabulary created an investigation department and in 1939 a traffic department by which date 68 police officers were resident in the borough but all were male.²⁹¹ There was one constable per 1,400 people in 1941, far fewer than other towns in the county, a Women's Auxiliary Police Corps was formed and there were c. 175 special and reserve constables during the war. However, the crime rate rose sharply especially among non-residents and the detection rate was under 50 per cent.²⁹²

²⁸⁵ SHC, DD/X/BWR/3; Q/APb/3/52.

²⁸⁶ SHC, T/PH/rea/3/112.

²⁸⁷ SHC, Q/AP/53; TNA, RG 12/1875.

²⁸⁸ SHC, Q/APb/3/65; C/PO/2/2/9 (1924).

²⁸⁹ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), 121; above, intro.

²⁹⁰ SHC, DD/ASC/4/6/1, 10/1/4.

²⁹¹ SHC, DD/ASC/2/3/15; Q/APb/3/65; C/PO/2/2/9; TNA, RG101/305/1/WOOA—WOPG.

²⁹² SHC, DD/ASC/2/3/15, 10/1/4.

Police houses were built throughout the town between 1948 and 1954.²⁹³ In the 1950s the number of Taunton officers rose from 30 to 97 including five female officers. Traffic wardens were employed from 1964 but there were only ten detectives in the borough in 1967 and some were probationers.²⁹⁴ In 1974 the Somerset and Avon constabulary was established. In the early 21st century the police station closed and an enquiry office opened in the district council offices.²⁹⁵

Somerset County Council

The county council was formed in 1889, including three councillors for the borough, and met in the Shire Hall. In 1906 a planned three-storey building was not implemented and existing buildings were converted.²⁹⁶ County offices were dispersed through the county including the former gaol partly adapted as County Buildings until County Hall was built in 1932—5 on the Crescent field. With the culverting of the Gaol Stream the field formed a single site within the grounds of Shire Hall. Designed by Vincent Harris and built by Nichols of Gloucester, County Hall consisted of a curved three-storey nine-bay range with two gabled wings of buff brick facing with Portland stone dressings on a concrete frame. The original plan of 1929 was to add two similar blocks at either side and demolish Shire Hall but only the south block was built. The former galleried entrance hall with marble skirtings and vaulted plaster ceiling lies between two stone staircases with heraldic stained glass windows by George Kruger Gray and carries the names of Somerset worthies on the walls. The first floor formerly housed panelled offices, applewood for the clerk and light oak for the chairman,

²⁹³ SHC, C/CA/18/61,259, 263, 265, 268, 276, 655, 666—8.

²⁹⁴ SHC, A/DIG/1, 45; DD/ASC/2/3/17.

²⁹⁵ SHC, DD/ASC, cat.

²⁹⁶ SHC, DD/SK/6/9.

with quality 1930s furnishings including glazed bookcases and delft tiles but much of the interior was gutted and the furnishings removed in the 1990s.²⁹⁷

In the 1950s, the planning and civil defence offices were sited in houses in Upper High Street, since demolished. In 1961 the highways department had offices in South Street, rebuilt for weights and measures, later trading standards and scientific services, but demolished for housing in the late 20th century.²⁹⁸ New office blocks on Park Street known as Rodwell, later Bedford, House were occupied in the 1960s. Additional blocks were built to the north of County Hall in 1962—4, partly over a large formal courtyard with fishpond, and in 1968—9.²⁹⁹ In April 2021 the county council was replaced by Somerset Council on the same site.

SERVICES AND UTILITIES

Water

Taunton's medieval water supply and drainage depended on streams, which were diverted, such the Sherford stream by ancient custom used for 'communal conduits'.³⁰⁰ It was diverted before 1209 mainly through the mill stream or town rhyne from Pool Wall mills along the west boundary of High Street burgages, probably the Town Shutt recorded in 1719, to feed the castle moat and was still called potwater in the early 20th century.³⁰¹ Wells of varying date were found in and beside a section of moat near Castle Bow in the 1930s.³⁰² In 1562 merchant William Leonard left £10 to bring a watercourse through High Street where water flowed through open gutters to either side of North Street. They were the responsibility of the manor's rhyne ridders, swept clean three times a week but functioned primarily as

²⁹⁷ SHC, DD/X/BNL/10; A/DNM/1; DD/SK/6/9.

²⁹⁸ SHC, C/CA/27/1/1, 12, 15A, 18; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), A12; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/142/8404.

²⁹⁹ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), 76; J. Orbach, *South and West Somerset*, 620.

³⁰⁰ B.L. Harl. MS 408, f. 213.

³⁰¹ SHC, DD/SP/191/56; *PSANHS LXXXVI*, 55.

³⁰² A.W. Vivian-Neal, 'Materials for the history of Taunton Castle', *PSANHS LXXXVI*, 56—7.

sewers. Lack of water, only available on Sundays by the 1840s, rendered the rhynes useless.³⁰³ A watercourse in the centre of the market place, presumably to feed the conduit that stood there in 1305 and 1427, was diverted before 1466 possibly into the great gutter which ran round sides of the market until 1769.³⁰⁴ In 1615 and 1621 Sherford stream, diverted through a hole and sluice at Pool Wall, was needed in case of fire.³⁰⁵

William Giffard in the early 12th century granted the priory a mile long watercourse from the Sherford stream to their site controlled by a 'great weir'. That was replaced after 1332 by a new course from the Blackbrook or Stockwell stream.³⁰⁶ Taunton Deane manor was concerned more with water for the mills and domestic water was restricted. In 1389 a man was allowed have water from Pool Wall mill through an opening 'the size of one little finger and no more' and a farm was allowed water from the Stockwell stream in the 1580s through two 'barrel holes'.³⁰⁷ Wells included Martinswell recorded from the 1340s and St Mariewell.³⁰⁸ In 1440 Busshopeswell was probably south of East Reach.³⁰⁹ Some people had the right to shared private wells such as that in East Street in 1555.³¹⁰ Town wells were often condemned and were replaced by pumps. A pumpmaker was at work in 1571. Users of Eastgate and East Street wells had to maintain the rope and bucket in the 1590s but the wells at St John's Cross in High Street and in Fore and North Streets were to be repaired or stopped up.³¹¹ In 1615 a well in St Mary's churchyard with a gutter and sink used for washing wool and bucking linen was condemned and would be stopped up if used for more than

³⁰³ TNA, PROB11/45/206; SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, p. 47; above, intro.

³⁰⁴ SHC, T/PH/win 1305; *Bridgwater Borough Archives* (Som. Rec. Soc. 58), pp. 42, 88; SHC, DD/SAS/C795/ BA/9/7. TN/10; DD/DP/93/4.

³⁰⁵ SHC, DD/SP/22/3—4, 13; Q/SR/39/92.

³⁰⁶ SHC, DD/SP/64, 459; above, intro.

³⁰⁷ SHC, T/PH/win 1388—9; DD/SP/4 (8 Oct. 1585).

³⁰⁸ SHC, T/PH/win 1345—8, 1409—10. Sites are unknown but a family called Atte Welle had a house adjoining Martineshurne in 1348: SHC, DD/VN/2/2.3.

³⁰⁹ SHC, DD/SP/325/15.

³¹⁰ SHC, DD/SP/49 (May 1592); T/PH/hps/1.

³¹¹ SHC, DD/SP/49 (May 1593, Apr. 1597, May 1602).

potwater.³¹² In 1636 an ancient watercourse, possibly the same gutter, ran through St Mary's churchyard near the church house.³¹³

The Stockwell Stream was corrupted and the Commission of Sewers tried to enforce communal cleaning in 1568 and later was asked to fine people 40s. for diverting the water from the former priory supply leaving those tasked with its maintenance without any.³¹⁴ Owners of adjoining houses were still expected to scour the watercourse in 1677—8.³¹⁵ In St James parish many relied on the watercourse between the whirligig³¹⁶ and the river Tone, which was obstructed by rubbish in 1595.³¹⁷ Although regarded as a water supply in the 17th and 18th centuries, by 1849 it was used as a sewer with many privies discharging into it and in 1851 a sewer pipe was proposed to replace it.³¹⁸ In the early 17th century the owners and tenants of the former priory estate complained that Robert Hill had diverted the Stockwell stream at Silver Street, still used as potwater despite blockage and pollution with privies.³¹⁹ A man spent over £2 in 1633 on scouring the water from Fullands, where the weir had decayed, to the priory and found privies blocking the flow of water, which ran back into his house.³²⁰

By the late 16th and early 17th century there were communal pumps in East, North, Paul, Canon and Middle Streets and later others were recorded including in Great Magdalene Lane. In 1603 the constables agreed to pay towards the repair of the North Street pump and set up another in place of the well there. Maintenance by users was difficult to enforce and they were vulnerable to traffic damage.³²¹ Private pumps west of High Street took water from

³¹² SHC, DD/SP/50 (Apr. 1615).

³¹³ SHC, D/D/Ca/310.

³¹⁴ SHC, DD/SP/36 (1590 and loose papers); DD/SAS/C795/TN/107.

³¹⁵ SHC, DD/SP/18/49—50.

³¹⁶ A rotating horizontal timberwork to keep animals out.

³¹⁷ D. Shorrocks, *Bp Still's Visitation and 'Smale Bk'*, 168.

³¹⁸ SHC, PAM 2444 unpaginated; DD/SP/49 (Apr. 1586); DD/CH/93/1; DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, p. 8; Board of Health report in *Som. Co. Herald* 25 Jan. 1851.

³¹⁹ SHC, DD/SP/64, 376.

³²⁰ SHC, DD/SP/377.

³²¹ SHC, DD/SP/49 (Apr. 1591, May 1603, Oct. 1606), 50 (Oct. 1611, June 1614, Oct. 1615), 60 (1616), 38 (Apr., Oct. 1628), 60 (1749).

the town rhyne by 1618.³²² Wealthier households had their own well often with a pumphouse and houses and businesses collected rainwater in cisterns holding up to 100 gallons because well water was hard.³²³ When burgage plots were divided for new houses residents were expected to share the original pump and well.³²⁴ Each tithing appears to have been responsible for public pumps but from the mid 18th century they were provided and maintained by the parishes. A new one cost £3 8s in 1740.³²⁵ The market needed water for washing down, and in 1796 the trustees provided a lead pump east of the market house primarily for the use of fishmongers.³²⁶ By the 19th century St Mary's parish wanted to replace the tithing pumps. Ownership of that in East Reach destroyed by vandalism in 1815 was claimed by a private landlord who refused to repair it.³²⁷ In 1847 the market trustees did not know who owned pumps and one in Noah's Ark Court off Hunts Court had been removed without authority.³²⁸

Taunton Deane manor supplied water to copyholders and to St James' parish for between 2d. and 10d. a year in 1647.³²⁹ Water from the Stockwell stream was diverted into the streets under an arch at the priory gate and in 1784 the parish agreed to repair it provided that the water should run down St James and Middle Street for an hour in the late afternoon on Wednesdays and Saturdays. By then the owners and tenants of Priory farm, on the priory site, claimed ownership of all the water in the stream, which being full of sewage was valuable manure.³³⁰

Parishes paid for domestic water supplies. In 1749 St Mary's parish rented water diverted through East Street from the Stockwell Stream at Silver Street for £2 a year but

³²² SHC, DD/SP/50 (Oct. 1618).

³²³ e.g. SHC, DD/SP/23/8; 423; 1684/64; DD/DP/75/3; DD/MY 35.

³²⁴ SHC, DD/X/UP/3.

³²⁵ Sheppard, *Court Leet of the Borough of Taunton*, 41; SHC, DD/PM/7/11/58; DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (1758); D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1788).

³²⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/1, p.440.

³²⁷ SHC, D/P.tau.m/9/1/3 (1835); DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, p. 43.

³²⁸ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/5, p. 57; Goldsworthy, *Recollections of Old Taunton*, 10, 17.

³²⁹ SHC, DD/HC/151/2.

³³⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/9/1/1 (1784); DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, pp. 30, 42; DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, pp. 10—12.

many people diverted the water to their own premises, so the parish paid for a wall and sluice at Pool Farm in Wilton, presumably to improve the flow and employed a man to maintain the supply. In 1766 the vestry wanted to run water through the streets.³³¹ By the early 19th century St Mary's was paying £5 5s. a year for water, less the cost of repairing the vault, and 5s. to the person who 'turned it' presumably using the sluice at the top of East Street repaired in 1816 and provided with a new handle in 1826.³³² The water only supplied East, North and part of Fore Street for two hours three days a week and the parish ceased renting it c. 1835 although water was still taken on sufferance near Gray's almshouses. That was probably the unused branch that collapsed in East Street in 1880.³³³

Access to ditches for water or sanitation formed part of several copyholds.³³⁴ Obridge tenants as a group paid 6s. 8d. annual water rent to water their fields from the stream at Lyngford, which ran from Kingston mill.³³⁵ There were disputes over the water in 1590 and 1700.³³⁶ Flook well on Staplegrove Road, recorded in 1574, was fed from the stream at Frieze Hill and was possibly the potwater well at North Town recorded in 1719.³³⁷ The structure, dated 1663, was roofed in 1722 by Richard Churly. Removal of its pump was recommended in 1878 to control the spread of typhoid and it was destroyed.³³⁸ A well at Rowbarton was open and dangerous in 1720.³³⁹

Shortage of water had become severe by the mid 19th century. An objection to the 1847 Taunton improvement bill was that it made no provision for a domestic water supply.³⁴⁰ By that date only three of six tithing pumps were still working in High Street, Magdalene

³³¹ SHC, DD/SP/22/40; DD/SAS/TN/C795/15 (1750, vestry min. 1750, 1766).

³³² SHC, D/P/tau.m/4/3/8 (1811, 1814, 1816), 4/1/1—2 (1821, 1824), 8/2/1 (1826); A/DAS/1/396/42.

³³³ SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, p. 57, report p. viii; D/B/ta/3/9/1 (1880).

³³⁴ e.g. DD/MT/6/3.

³³⁵ SHC, DD/HC/15; DD/SP/71, f. 29, 334, f. 21d.

³³⁶ SHC, DD/SP/36 (loose paper 1590). 358 (1701).

³³⁷ SHC, DD/SP/18/111, 325/127.

³³⁸ Goldsworthy, *Recollections of Old Taunton*, 4—5; SHC, DD/MT/15/1 (1686); DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7 (inscr. 1722); T/PH/rea/1/146; D/B/ta/3/8/1.

³³⁹ SHC, DD/SP/18/113.

³⁴⁰ *A Brief History of the late Taunton Improvement and Market Bill* (1847), 5.

Lane and at the Market House. A public pump on the town bridge drew up sewage-filled river water used for watering the streets in dry weather. There was insufficient water for fire fighting.³⁴¹ The 1854 drought reduced water to flush the sewers. Diarrhoea and excess deaths were blamed on the lack of clean water.³⁴² The poor were obliged to buy water and some well owners charged their neighbours $\frac{1}{2} d.$ a pail.³⁴³ In 1810 cottages north of Shuttern Bridge had a flight of steps down to the Gaol Stream for water but its ownership was disputed in the 1850s.³⁴⁴ In 1856 water was being lost from the Stockwell stream and piping it was proposed but it would still be insufficient.³⁴⁵ An Act of Parliament in 1858 established a Taunton Waterworks Company.³⁴⁶ It raised £15,000 and constructed a reservoir in the Blackdown hills to supply those willing to pay a rent for water.³⁴⁷ The water was hard but constructing a reservoir and piping water was easier and cheaper than from elsewhere. Leigh Hill reservoir was completed in 1859 and land was bought at Fulwood in 1864 for a second. By 1874 an estimated third of people in Taunton had access to mains water.³⁴⁸ The waterworks was taken over by the borough council in 1877 and the 1858 act was repealed in 1900.³⁴⁹ The borough turncock had a cottage at the fire station.³⁵⁰

Many people still drew water from wells and pumps even when clearly contaminated with faeces and businesses, especially breweries, continued to use well water.³⁵¹ In 1862 building permission was refused for houses not provided with water and in the 1870s and 1880s the council ordered landlords to provide mains water.³⁵² In 1874 over 75 per cent of water from urban wells was polluted with sewage; supplies in Batts Court off Fore Street and

³⁴¹ SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, pp. 43, 47, 95.

³⁴² L. Toller, *Death and Disease* (TS in VCH office), 17—18.

³⁴³ SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, p. 88; DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, p. 12.

³⁴⁴ SHC, DD/X/OLD/1 (plan); Q/AC/13.

³⁴⁵ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/5, p. 416.

³⁴⁶ SHC, Q/Rup/258a; Q/Ruo/27; Q/AB/85.

³⁴⁷ SHC, Q/RUa/53.

³⁴⁸ SHC, PAM 2444 unpaginated.

³⁴⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/3/12/1 (1879); Q/RUo/27.

³⁵⁰ SHC, DD/TAC/5/5/66.

³⁵¹ SHC, D/B/ta/3/8/1 (1878); Wilts and Swindon HC, 1075/001/396.

³⁵² SHC, D/B/ta/3/1/1 (1862), 3/8/1 (1877—1883).

at a dairy in Bridge Street were described as liquid sewage. That year enteric fever affected every house in Denmark Place, Coal Orchard producing two deaths. Every well in the area was contaminated and free water was provided from a fire hydrant until a mains supply was provided. Mains water was credited with halving enteric fever deaths. The council had power to close pumps and wells and as the borough boundary was extended so was mains water especially after 1921.³⁵³ At an estimate of 30 gallons of water per head per day and less in the winter months Taunton was short of 26 million gallons a year in 1886. Another reservoir at Leigh Hill to store over 20 million gallons was finally completed in 1894, by which time demand again outstripped supply. The council was promised additional springs at Leigh Hill when the militia camp was given up in 1896.³⁵⁴ Luxhay reservoir nearby opened in 1905 and supplies from Fulwood and elsewhere on the Blackdowns were bought in 1910 but Taunton remained short of water with summer restrictions in drought years.³⁵⁵

The building of a 144 million-gallon Quants reservoir in the Blackdowns was abandoned after litigation in the early 1940s.³⁵⁶ In the 1950s reservoirs only held 80 days' supply and a reservoir was built at Clatworthy on the upper Tone to provide 172 days' supply from 1959.³⁵⁷ In 1962 the West Somerset Water Board, Wessex Water from 1963, was set up and took over the waterworks from the borough.³⁵⁸ By 1964 *c.* two million gallons a day were supplied to Taunton.³⁵⁹ In the late 1970s another reservoir was built at Wimbleball further west in the Brendons securing Taunton's supply into the 21st century.³⁶⁰

In the 1860s a drinking fountain was incorporated into the Kinglake memorial and Mr Rawlinson gave a granite drinking fountain surmounted by an obelisk at the junction of East

³⁵³ SHC, A/EPF/250/4/1—4.

³⁵⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/4/4/1 (1884, 1886, 1889, 1892, 1894, 1898); DD/TBL/42/9/3 (*Taunton Mail*, 6 May 1896, p. 4).

³⁵⁵ SHC, DD/KIT/12/15; A/DSG/1; D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box 19 (1938—9), 9.

³⁵⁶ SHC, D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box 19 (1939—40), 47; T. James, *Along the Wild Edge*, (2011), 109—10.

³⁵⁷ SHC, D/B/ta/4/22/1; A/EPF/250/4/6.

³⁵⁸ SHC, Q/RUo/28; D/B/ta/24/1/122/5486.

³⁵⁹ SHC, A/BWX/5, p. 24.

³⁶⁰ SHC, D/P/stapg/7/3.

Street, East Reach and Silver Street, moved to Vivary Park in 1905.³⁶¹ Concern for the welfare of horses led to gifts of troughs at the junction of Station and Staplegrove roads, now used as a planter, in East Reach, by the market and in Silver and Cann streets.³⁶² By the early 19th century many back courts had washhouses but it was not until 1915 that a scheme was drawn up for slipper baths and a laundry in St James Street heated with waste steam for the electricity works and they did not open until 1929.³⁶³

Sewerage

The inhabitants of the borough were responsible for scouring rhynes and cleaning their street frontages before Saturday afternoon in the 16th and 17th centuries or they were fined.³⁶⁴ In the early 17th century it was said that streets had been cleaner earlier when residents disposed of all filth in cesspits with the water from roofs but then dung and rubbish was left in the streets or swept into watercourses though gutters.³⁶⁵ One man was accused of emptying chamber pots on his neighbour's leads in 1613 and in 1615 a servant disgraced 'so worthy a town' by dumping filth and ashes on the Cornhill.³⁶⁶ A visitor in 1798, when the market trustees offered the town dung for sale, complained the street rhynes did not drain properly and stank in hot weather. The eight rhyme ridders were responsible for the rhynes until the 19th century and for the town rhyme.³⁶⁷ Street rhynes were closed by the Local Board of Health in the mid 19th century although at least one of the bridges that formerly crossed them survived until 1873.³⁶⁸

³⁶¹ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/3, p. 204, 4/2/2 (1905).

³⁶² SHC, D/B/ta/4/3/2 (1898), 4/2/2 (Apr. 1905), 4/3/3 (1908, 1918).

³⁶³ SHC, A/DIF/95/32; above, soc. hist.

³⁶⁴ SHC, DD/SP/48 (1570), 49 (1586—94), 50 (Dec. 1613), 37 (Apr. 1615, May 1617), 38 (Apr. 1628).

³⁶⁵ SHC, DD/SP/49 (May 1586), 37 (Oct. 1612, Apr. 1615, May 1617); Sheppard, *Court Leet of the Borough of Taunton*, 36..

³⁶⁶ SHC, DD/SP/50 (Apr. 1613, Nov. 1615).

³⁶⁷ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/1, p. 499; DD/SP/49; DD/X/MAY/11; Shillibeer, *Ancient Customs of Taunton Deane*, 131.

³⁶⁸ G.H. Kite and H.P. Palmer, *Taunton: its history and market trust* (Taunton 1926), 64; SHC, D/B/ta, 31/1/6, p. 316, 3/3/1 (1873).

The town rhyne from Pool Wall mills was cleaned in the late 16th century but was probably already a sewer. The manor court failed to stop privies being built over it although people still drew water from it.³⁶⁹ In 1786 several privies were built over the rhyne in Hunts Court only a few yards from the pump.³⁷⁰ When the Crescent was built after 1810 it was expected they would use the Gaol stream but instead used the town rhyne as a sewer making the inhabitants of Hunts Court even more vulnerable to disease, sometimes fatal.³⁷¹ In 1814 5-ft sewers were planned for St James', North, Fore, High and East Streets to empty into the river Tone at the town bridge but not built.³⁷²

In 1822 brick and tile maker James Lackington Rice with the permission of the market house trustees built sewers 3 ft wide and 7 ft below the surface of the main streets to discharge into the river. Subscribers connected drains to the sewers but Rice lost money. A sewer ran from East Gate under East, Fore and North Streets with branches from Mary Street through Paul Street and from High Street through west Fore Street. By the 1840s basements were being installed in old and new houses below sewer level causing sewage flooding. Waste from c. 1,000 people discharged into the Gaol stream and the town rhyne making life unbearable in summer. Drains from the south of the town discharged into an open drain north of East Reach and sometimes overflowed when hot water was discharged from the South Street factory. Sewage from the east including from the hospital and the workhouse was discharged into gutters leading south into the Blackbrook or north across Priory fields to the river. A stream received the effluent of c. 50 houses in Silver Street before flowing along the street. Houses in courts depended on gutters to the nearest street, privy vaults or cesspits, holes 6 ft deep and up to 10ft across. The last were dug out, the material often carried through houses, and deposited in streets like East Reach for removal to Priory fields or String Lane to

³⁶⁹ SHC, DD/SP/49 (Apr. 1586), 36 (1589), 18/16.

³⁷⁰ SHC, DD/PRY/1/10.

³⁷¹ SHC, D/DC/tau.d/25/9 (1235); Goldsworthy, *Recollections of Old Taunton*, 9; *Minutes of evidence on the Taunton Improvement and Market Bill* (Taunton, 1847), 2.

³⁷² SHC, Q/Rup/45; Taunton Market Act 57 Geo. III c. lxx.

be mixed with animal manure by neighbouring farmers for their fields or mixed with coal ash and spread on the turnpike roads. Some courts had pigsties and dung was heaped with the privy overflows in heaps awaiting removal.³⁷³

Most sewage found its way into the river and impeded navigation. Sewage from the Wilton and Galmington streams blocked Pollard's canal entrance and prevented barges berthing.³⁷⁴ It was said that 390 houses in the borough were empty in 1847 and many could not be let as they were unhealthy and the town had earned a bad reputation.³⁷⁵ Rhyne ridders were told to clean the drains and over 150 privies, pigsties and manure pits were ordered to be removed. There was not a sufficient outfall or water to move the sewage and the result was disease like typhus and dysentery.³⁷⁶ Night men or scavengers emptied closets and pits and in 1849, because of cholera, were only allowed to work between 9 p.m. and 9 a.m. using disinfectants.³⁷⁷ In 1851 some courts and at least one public house lacked even a privy and relied on open gutters and landlords were negligent in emptying cesspits.³⁷⁸ The owner of Britannia Court off East Reach was singled out in 1849 for providing piped water and sewerage to the public house and seven tenements.³⁷⁹ The pit of tannery waste at Tancred Street discharged into the Stockwell stream forcing local residents out of their homes. In 1860 the shared privy at Star Plat on Mount Lane where there had been a disease outbreak was so bad the board employed men to work through the night to empty the pit but they could not get it all out and peat was brought to soak up the overflowing liquid.³⁸⁰

³⁷³ SHC, DD/SAS/C2283/3/12, pp. 14—20, 27—30, 38—42, 48, 56, 62, report p. vi—viii; DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, p. 9—10, plan 1; D/B/ta/2/1/1, p. 349, 31/5/14 (1852); Dr H. Alford, *Olden Taunton, a Cycle of Change* (Taunton c. 1921), 9.

³⁷⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/3/2/1 (1875).

³⁷⁵ SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, pp. 62—3.

³⁷⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/5, pp. 15, 68, 75; A *Brief History of the late Taunton Improvement and Market Bill* (1847), 6; *Minutes of evidence on the Taunton Improvement and Market Bill* (Taunton, 1847), 17.

³⁷⁷ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/1, p. 31.

³⁷⁸ Board of Health report in *Som. Co. Herald* 25 Jan. 1851.

³⁷⁹ SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, p. 9.

³⁸⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/1, pp. 361, 620, 692, 724; 2/1/3, 173.

In 1848 sewers were proposed from Rowbarton, East Reach and Shuttern but only the North Town sewer was built, replacing a drain in existence by 1830, but it discharged in the river blocking Firepool weir.³⁸¹ In 1852 the Local Board of Health bought the sewers from the shareholders.³⁸² Shortage of water in the 1850s left only the waste water from pumps to flush the waste of over 12,000 people.³⁸³ Sewer pipes in stream beds were permeable and took in water leading the miller at the Town Mills in 1859 to demand their removal including the new sewer and pipes at Tangier because they were reducing the flow of water into the millstream. The Board removed the Tangier pipes in 1860 but most affluent areas had sewers and a network was planned to discharge further east.³⁸⁴ North Town sewer at 18 inches wide with a poor fall was frequently blocked in the 1860s and shoals of sewage accumulated at Obridge as the river flow was insufficient to clear it.³⁸⁵ New houses were required to have mains water and sewerage resulting in greater strain on the sewers but in the 1870s when water and sanitation were available many courts and poor streets like Pig Market Lane had none.³⁸⁶ Even in the Crescent in 1879 closets discharged into the rhyne, which surrounded the Quaker meeting site on three sides and was not filled in until the 1930s.³⁸⁷ Rural areas of the parish still relied on privies or flushed their water closets into streams and the medical officer of health inspected nearly 4,000 privies in 1882.³⁸⁸

Plans were drawn up for a sewage works at Obridge where the sewage could be turned into profitable manure, a reason why some people objected to having their pits emptied.³⁸⁹ A sewage works at the Target Field, Lambrook was completed in 1877 with machinery from Stothert and Pitt of Bath powered by a water turbine in a long flume south of

³⁸¹ SHC, DD/TC/15 (plan c. 1830); Q/Rup/218; D/DC/tau.d/21/1[3].

³⁸² SHC, D/B/ta/31/5/14 (1852).

³⁸³ L. Toller, *Death and Disease* (TS in VCH office), 17—18.

³⁸⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/3, pp. 50—1, 168; 42/28.

³⁸⁵ SHC, D/DC/tau.d/21/1 [3]; D/B/ta/3/1/1 (1870), PAM 2444 unpaginated.

³⁸⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/3/1/1; D/WB/t/10/1.

³⁸⁷ SHC, D/B/ta/3/8/1 (1879); DD/SFR/w/32.

³⁸⁸ SHC, A/EPF/250/4/1 (1873), pp. 16—17; D/B/ta/3/8/1 (1882).

³⁸⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/1, pp. 50, 60, 62, 77—113, 158—9, 349, 679.

the river but volume often exceeded capacity and raw sewage was discharged into the river. A lightning strike in 1878 caused accumulated sewer gas to explode.³⁹⁰ In the 1880s new sewers were built with ventilators and flushing siphons and most streets were connected.³⁹¹ The sewage works was extended with a new engine using mains water from 1892 and in 1897 land was bought for filter beds. The works was said to have substantially reduced the death rate by 1898.³⁹² The North Town sewer was replaced in 1899 by a new sewer from Rowbarton to Obridge carried on piers over the river to the sewage works.³⁹³ The works were converted to steam power generated from 1902 by burning rubbish in the adjoining destructor.³⁹⁴ By 1920 there were said to be no privies in the borough but only 5,824 water closets for over 24,000 residents and in the back courts only one for every ten.³⁹⁵ In 1957 a new sewage works opened at Ham in North Curry and the Lambrook works was demolished.³⁹⁶ In the 1970s new sewers were laid with additional relief sewers and stormwater treatment.³⁹⁷

Public conveniences

In the early 19th century there were public privies near St George's Place and in Half Moon Court, which were very offensive.³⁹⁸ Three urinals were provided in the eastern arcade of the Market House, although without doors until the 1830s and until c. 1867 without a cistern for flushing. Others were put in the old pound on Castle Green in the 1840s.³⁹⁹ In 1856 it was said men would not use public urinals but continued to use 'angles' and there were

³⁹⁰ SHC, D/WB/t/10/1; D/B/ta/3/3/1 (1875), 3/5/1 (1876), 3/8/1 (1877); PAM 2444 unpaginated.

³⁹¹ SHC, D/B/ta/3/12/1 (1882—3).

³⁹² SHC, D/B/ta/4/2/1 (1892, 1897, Apr. 1898).

³⁹³ SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/8 (*Taunton Mail*, 14 March 1900, p. 5).

³⁹⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/4/3/2 (1900), 3/16/1 (1902).

³⁹⁵ SHC, A/EPF/250/4/4 (1920, p. 8).

³⁹⁶ SHC, A/BWX/5, p. 24; D/B/ta/4/2/4 (1960).

³⁹⁷ SHC, D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box (1 July, 1972); 2/2/3 (Aug. 1975).

³⁹⁸ Goldsworthy, *Recollections of Old Taunton*, 48.

³⁹⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/4, p. 10, 342, 378; DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, p. 9; *Taunton Courier*, 18 Sep. 1867: BNA accessed 18 Feb. 2020.

complaints about the privy provided for the men rebuilding St Mary's church tower.⁴⁰⁰ By 1874 there was a urinal behind the police station, c.1875 others were built at the Station Road and Staplegrove Road junction with temporary ones at the bridge and in the Crescent when the Bath and West Show was at Taunton.⁴⁰¹ Before 1891 they were provided in Canal Road and c. 1905 underground at the junction of Silver Street and East Reach.⁴⁰² The underground facilities were later replaced by conveniences in Tancred Street, which were demolished in the late 20th century.⁴⁰³ Latrines for soldiers were provided during the First World War.⁴⁰⁴

Facilities were not provided for women except at special events such as the Bath and West Show, despite complaints from the 1870s.⁴⁰⁵ By 1890 enterprising shops advertised female toilets.⁴⁰⁶ A ladies lavatory was provided in Castle Walk before 1913 and it and the male urinal were replaced in 1931 and 1933 by toilets for both sexes behind the municipal buildings, which remained open in the early 21st century. Most others built in the mid and later 20th century such as in Goodland Gardens, Station Road and High Street have closed.⁴⁰⁷

Scavenging and rubbish disposal

Inhabitants of the borough were required to remove rubbish weekly and not to let their birds and animals wander the streets, probably from the early Middle Ages.⁴⁰⁸ From the mid 18th to mid 19th century the market house trustees were responsibly for cleaning although they ordered residents to sweep the footways before their premises between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. every morning, enforced by an Act of 1833, and to provide shuts into the drains.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/5, pp. 394, 398; D/B/ta/2/1/3, p. 42, 2/1/4, p. 395.

⁴⁰¹ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/6, p. 231, 3/3/1 (1875).

⁴⁰² SHC, D/B/ta/4/6/2 (Dec. 1897); A/DSG/1.

⁴⁰³ SHC, D/B/ta/4/6/3 (July 1931).

⁴⁰⁴ SHC, A/DIF/95/32.

⁴⁰⁵ SHC, D/B/ta/3/5/1 (1875).

⁴⁰⁶ *Where to Buy: Taunton* (1890), 20; *Industrial Great Britain* (c. 1890), 235.

⁴⁰⁷ SHC, D/B/ta/4/2/3 (1921, 1931); D/B/ta/24/1/82/1747.

⁴⁰⁸ Sheppard, *Court Leet of the Borough of Taunton*, 19.—20.

⁴⁰⁹ SHC, DD/AY/31 (1833); Q/RUo/35.

Scavengers, including clergymen, paid £5 in 1769 for the right to scavenge, but employed paupers to do the work.⁴¹⁰ In 1821 scavengers were to sweep the streets twice a week, clean the Parade within the chains every Sunday morning but not to use iron scrapers on turnpike roads.⁴¹¹ They piled the sweepings at their houses but after 1873 the Local Board of Health paid scavengers and the material became the board's property. All household rubbish was collected but no garden waste.⁴¹² People objected to the twice weekly emptying of ashpits because they were accustomed to selling the contents and they remained in use in the 1890s.⁴¹³ In 1878 the scavengers cleaned public urinals daily, emptied 796 ashpits and cleaned 14 courts weekly. Rubbish and ashes were put out for regular collections. The council spend £637 on scavenging in 1887.⁴¹⁴ Horse manure was valuable and should have been placed in containers from 1879 but remained a problem in the 1920s.⁴¹⁵ Refuse was spread on fields around the sewage works at Lambrook until in 1902 when a destructor was built on the site to burn rubbish, provide steam for the sewage works and clinker for the filter beds. By 1904 it burnt 20 tons a day.⁴¹⁶ In 1912 six vans and two carts were used for house refuse collections and the council bought a covered dust cart and by 1920 had two electric ones.⁴¹⁷ By 1914 dustbins were emptied twice a week and ashpits and cesspools had virtually disappeared.⁴¹⁸

Refuse collections were reduced to weekly during the war and continued until the end of the 20th century when they were reduced to fortnightly, and later three-weekly, as collection of recyclable materials was introduced.⁴¹⁹ From 1941 weekly food waste

⁴¹⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/1, pp. 3, 9, 11; D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1787).

⁴¹¹ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/3, p. 60.

⁴¹² SHC, A/EPF/250/4/1 (1873, p. 16); D/B/ta/3/3/1 (1875), 3/9/1 (1879)

⁴¹³ SHC, D/WB/t/10/1; A/EPF/250/4/2 (1898, p. 10).

⁴¹⁴ SHC, A/EPF/250/4/1 (1878, pp. 8—9, 1880, p. 6); *Royal Com. On Market Rights and Tolls* (1888), III, p. 252.

⁴¹⁵ SHC, A/EPF/250/4/4 (1922, p. 8).

⁴¹⁶ SHC, A/DIF/95/35 (1901); D/B/ta/3/16/1 (1902); 4/3/3 (1904).

⁴¹⁷ SHC, D/B/ta/4/2/2 (1912); A/EPF/250/4/4 (1920, p. 8).

⁴¹⁸ SHC, A/EPF/250/4/3 (1914, 1919).

⁴¹⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/3/8/12, p. 200; D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box 19 (1939—40), 24.

collections in pails for homes, hotels and cafes produced up to 1,286 tons a year. The scheme lost money and in 1959 was discontinued from private houses until re-introduced in the early 21st century.⁴²⁰ The destructor was given up in 1957 because it was cheaper to tip the waste on the Priory fields, closed river courses and eight former sewage filter beds.⁴²¹ Litter bins were installed from 1958 when 150 were provided paid for by advertising.⁴²² A new tip at Priorswood, begun in 1972, was full in 1977 and waste was dumped at a former brickfield in Wellington but the site was retained as a depot and recycling facility, expanded in the early 21st century. The refuse service was privatised from the 1980s and wheelie bins and recycling containers were provided to all households.⁴²³

Fire

St James' parish had a fire engine and buckets by the 1720s.⁴²⁴ In 1792—4 the parish spent over £40 buying and trying out a new engine from London. In 1807 seven men were assigned to the engine and were paid 10s. 6d. between them annually. If another parish needed it there was a charge of 10s. 6d. and the cost of any repairs.⁴²⁵ In the mid 19th-century custody of the engine was transferred to the Local Board of Health.⁴²⁶ St Mary's parish had large and small engines with hoses and 24 buckets in the 1730s. Replacement engines were bought in 1753—4 and the old ones were repaired and sold.⁴²⁷ Only one was mentioned in the 1790s, when it was kept in the belfry until 1797 when the vestry decided to build an engine shed in the churchyard, possibly replaced in 1811.⁴²⁸ A severe fire at Bathpool in West Monkton in 1812

⁴²⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/4/2/4 (1950, 1959).

⁴²¹ SHC, D/B/ta/3/25/4, p. 319; 3/37/4 (9 Apr. 1963); 4/2/4 (1960—1). Now a retail park.

⁴²² SHC, D/B/ta/4/3/7 (Apr. 1958).

⁴²³ SHC, A/EPF/2450/4/7 (1970, p. 18); D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box 1 (June 1972); D/DC/tau/d2/2/11 (11 Jan. 1983).

⁴²⁴ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/4/1/3 (1724—5, 1744—5).

⁴²⁵ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/4/1/3 (1792—4), 4/1/4 (1798, 1809), 9/1/1 (1791, 1807).

⁴²⁶ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/9/1/2 (1859).

⁴²⁷ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/15 (1734—5, 1739, 1750, 1754—5, vestry min. 1753); DD/SAS/S1042/1.

⁴²⁸ SHC, A/DIF/44; D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1797), 9/1/2 (1811).

revealed the poor state of local engines.⁴²⁹ By 1828 St Mary's had acquired a second larger engine which was rebuilt in 1834—5 but both were in poor condition by 1847 although engineer James Shattock was paid £4 a year to look after them.⁴³⁰ They were transferred to the Local Board of Health c. 1860.⁴³¹

The barracks had its own fire engine in the 1830s and from 1839 the West of England Insurance Company fire engine was kept in a station by the entrance to the castle but was only available to people who were insured or able to pay.⁴³² In 1889 the company gave the engine to the borough council.⁴³³

In 1860 the Local Board of Health appointed a brigade of eight men and in 1867 gave them tunics and rewards for prompt response. Fire hydrants were installed, escape ladders provided and in 1870 a new more powerful engine with three suction pipes.⁴³⁴ In 1877 the station, at the Board's yard south of Magdalene Street, and the brigade passed into the control of the borough, which provided five public alarm points, six fire escape ladders, ten fire appliance boxes and many hydrants throughout the town.⁴³⁵ In 1889 the Priors Manufacturing fire exposed the failings of an amateur brigade lacking water and modern equipment.⁴³⁶ In 1901 the brigade was run by the manager and inspector of the water works.⁴³⁷ In 1905 there were only two manual engines, condemned as 'antiquated', many firemen were old and were summoned by boys, having no alarm, and commercial premises had inadequate fire escapes.⁴³⁸ By 1912 firemen inspected places of amusement and had alarms in their homes with a siren usually based at the electricity works, but call boys were

⁴²⁹ SHC, DD/SAS/C2402/53 [extract from *Taunton Courier* 266 Mar. 1812].

⁴³⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.m/4/1/3 (1828—9), 4/1/6 (1834), 9/1/3 (1834—5); DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, p. 44.

⁴³¹ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/2 (1860).

⁴³² SHC, D/N/tmc/7/4/1; DD/CH/23/5; DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, p. 44.

⁴³³ SHC, D/B/ta/4/4/1 (1889).

⁴³⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/3/3/1 (1860, 1863, 1867, 1870, 1873); D/B/ta/2/1/3, p. 174.

⁴³⁵ SHC, T/PH/rea/3/111; *Taunton of Today* (1896), 10.

⁴³⁶ *Taunton Courier*, 6 March 1889; BNA, accessed 7 July 2021.

⁴³⁷ TNA, RG13/2278.

⁴³⁸ SHC, A/AMS/1; D/WB/t/3/8 (1905); D/B/ta/4/16/1.

still employed and there was no provision for firefighting outside the borough.⁴³⁹ Taunton Rural District Council acquired a steam fire engine c. 1910, but by 1915 it was disused as the horses had been sold to the War Department and the two councils disagreed over paying for a motor vehicle.⁴⁴⁰ The tragic Sanger's circus fire of 1920 led to demands for a motorised engine but it was 1924 before the one was registered.⁴⁴¹

In 1935 the council bought Ebenezer chapel to extend the adjoining fire station but by 1959 it was inadequate for the newly combined borough and county fire services.⁴⁴² Between 1966 and 1974 a new fire station was built in stages in Lisieux Way.⁴⁴³ The county fire brigade headquarters in the later 20th century was at Hestercombe House in Cheddon Fitzpaine but in 2007 a new fire control headquarters was built in the Blackbrook business park beside the motorway but it was never used.⁴⁴⁴

Paving

In 1477—8 a successful petition was submitted to have the main streets paved by residents.⁴⁴⁵ In 1518—19 Extra Portam tithing was required to raise and stone the King's highway.⁴⁴⁶ By 1600 the main streets were paved and householders were responsible for maintenance and had to share costs incurred by the poor. Iron-shod cartwheels were forbidden on the town streets as they broke the paving but in 1700 there were complaints they had broken up the streets and gullies.⁴⁴⁷ The master of Gray's almshouse and town residents were presented for failing to keep the paving in good repair c. 1710.⁴⁴⁸ Paving was of 'flints' or cobble as stone

⁴³⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/4/9/1 (1912, 1918, 1920—1).

⁴⁴⁰ SHC, D/N/tmc/7/4/1; A/DIF/95/32.

⁴⁴¹ *Taunton Courier*, 21 July 1920; BNA accessed 18 Feb. 2020; SHC, C/MT/21 (Apr. 1924).

⁴⁴² Above, rel. hist.; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/133/7349.

⁴⁴³ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/176/10572; 24/1/214/10572; C/CA/12/19/2, 500.

⁴⁴⁴ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-55163364; accessed 8 Dec. 2020.

⁴⁴⁵ *Parl. Rolls. Med. Eng.* XIV, pp. 373—5.

⁴⁴⁶ Hants. R.O., 11M59/C1/19/4.

⁴⁴⁷ SHC, DD/SP/49 (Apr. 1604, Oct. 1606), 50 (Jan. 1614, Nov. 1615); Sheppard, *Court Leet of the Borough of Taunton*, 37.

⁴⁴⁸ Sheppard, *Court Leet of the Borough of Taunton*, 37, 40.

was very expensive; in 1797 the market trustees spent over £97 paving the Parade.⁴⁴⁹ In 1819 Taunton streets were said to be too convex making them expensive to repair and dangerous and suburban ones needed breaking up to improve drainage as had been done *c.* 1790.⁴⁵⁰ By the 1840s main streets were macadamised with blue lias pavements but the courts and North Town streets were unpaved and had to be watered by successive authorities until the early 20th century when the widespread tarring of roads rendered watering redundant. From the mid 19th century paved crossings were provided for pedestrians especially to the Parade.⁴⁵¹ Early streets on the Priory estate had wood setts, replaced by tarmac in the 1920s.⁴⁵²

The council was concerned to keep roads and pavements free from obstruction including sun blinds and advertising hoardings, banned in 1913 from parks and areas with important views.⁴⁵³ Tarmac replaced cobbles in the 1920s, partly to create work for the unemployed but residential pavements were usually of stone, later concrete, slabs.⁴⁵⁴ In the late 20th century decorative setts and brickwork were introduced in the town centre not entirely successfully.

Street Lighting

Under the 1768 Act the market trustees erected oil lamps in 1791 in East, Fore, High and North Streets to be lit until 2 a.m. from 1 September until 30 April except at the period of full moon.⁴⁵⁵ Further lamps were added at Hammet Street and the bridge in 1793.⁴⁵⁶ A lamp room was rented by 1800 when lighting cost over £75 a year rising to *c.* £109 for 121 lamps by 1818.⁴⁵⁷ In 1821 the trustees agreed to convert the lamps to gas by public subscription and

⁴⁴⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/1, p. 462.

⁴⁵⁰ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7.

⁴⁵¹ SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, p. 12; T/PH/rea/3/19, 28, 33; D/B/ta/3/9/1 (1879).

⁴⁵² SHC, D/B/ta/3/9/6 (1903), 3/9/11, p. 2.

⁴⁵³ SHC, D/B/ta/3/3/1 (1873); 3/9/5 (1882); 4/6/2 (1913).

⁴⁵⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/4, pp. 307—8, 4/3/3 (1912, 1921).

⁴⁵⁵ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/1, p. 358.

⁴⁵⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/1, p. 374.

⁴⁵⁷ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/2, p. 20, 472.

from 1823 45 oil gas lamps were lit from 1 August to 31 May except at the full moon at a cost of £210.⁴⁵⁸

By the 1840s the lamps were dirty and the gas supply feeble.⁴⁵⁹ In 1844 the new gas company provided gas for 125 lamps at £3 each from August to April but in 1847 poorer and newer streets were unlit, North Town needed 100 lamps and there were none in suburban areas.⁴⁶⁰ The trustees owed £300 for gas in 1849 and offered the lamps to the new Local Board of Health.⁴⁶¹ After a disagreement left lamps unlit for several days the board accepted responsibility for lighting, which later passed to the borough council.⁴⁶²

The Board of Health installed triple gas lamps from Glasgow on the Parade, provided lamps for side streets and back courts but decided against lighting Obridge due to the expense of laying a gas main. By 1855 there were 240 public lamps, 262 by 1863, and brackets were replaced by standards. From 1876 they were extinguished at 1 a.m.⁴⁶³ In 1887 lamplighters were paid 15s. a week in 1887, reduced to 12s. in summer when only 60 gas lamps were lit. The switch to electricity led to the demise of that occupation.⁴⁶⁴

Taunton was reputedly the first town⁴⁶⁵ to install electric street lighting in December 1885 when Henry Massingham lit the Parade using his own electricity. By September 1886 the council had decided to replace 86 gas lamps in the town centre with 29 electric lamps leaving 264 gas and oil lamps outside the central area until the 1890s.⁴⁶⁶ Lighting cost over £1,000 a year in 1887.⁴⁶⁷ In 1892 31 courts were provided with lighting but not until 1930

⁴⁵⁸ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/3, p. 47, 91; T/PH/gdl/1; DD/DP/8/21 (1825).

⁴⁵⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/4, p. 331.

⁴⁶⁰ SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/13, pp. 13, 20—1, 28, 30; DD/DP/69/8; D/B/ta/31/7/1 (1849); above, econ. hist., gas.

⁴⁶¹ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/5, p. 155.

⁴⁶² SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/2, p. 348.

⁴⁶³ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/2, p. 348, 3/3/1 (1856, 1863, 1867, 1873, 1876).

⁴⁶⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/4/6/1 (May 1887).

⁴⁶⁵ Godalming was the first to try it but did not continue.

⁴⁶⁶ SHC, A/DQO/404/29/97; D/B/ta/4/6/1 (Sep. 1886), D/B/ta/4/6/2 (1897). In 1899 Massingham was contracted to bring electricity to Bath: info. Museum of Bath at Work.

⁴⁶⁷ *Royal Com. On Market Rights and Tolls* (1888), III, p. 252.

were the remaining 23 back courts in the town centre lit.⁴⁶⁸ In 1893 under a new Act electric mains for street lighting were laid throughout the town and many lights left lit till dawn.⁴⁶⁹ Expensive arc lamps were replaced by filament lamps in 1909—10.⁴⁷⁰

During the First World War street lighting was reduced until 1916 when lack of street lighting was seen as a greater danger to the population than enemy action.⁴⁷¹ In the 1930s new ornamental lamps were supplied for the Parade by Hardy and Padmore of Worcester. They were restored in 1996 and sited in the pedestrian area of Fore Street.⁴⁷² By 1948 almost all streets and footpaths were lit although some poorer streets had only one lamp.⁴⁷³ In 1956 mercury vapour lamps and automatic switches were installed gradually replaced in the early 21st century by dimmable or LED lights.⁴⁷⁴

Electricity

Electricity was first used for the telegraph and two companies wired the town in the early 1860s.⁴⁷⁵ In 1879 electric lamps were provided for events such as rugby matches, in 1880 bootmaker Henry Massingham demonstrated electric lamps with a generator and in 1881 the art, science and industrial exhibition was lit by electricity. Massingham was acquainted with local engineers especially Francis Murray Newton who founded an electrical factory and made arc lights. Massingham created an electric works behind his Fore Street shoe shop and in 1887 formed the Taunton Electric Lighting Company, extending his works to supply business and street lighting using two boilers. All supply was by overhead wiring on poles until replaced by underground cables in 1894—5. In 1889 the company acquired the site of the former St James Street Collar Works for a new generating station. In 1891 Massingham

⁴⁶⁸ SHC, D/B/ta/4/6/1 (Dec. 1892), D/B/ta/4/6/3 (Sep. 1930).

⁴⁶⁹ SHC, Q/RUo/28; A/ATZ/1 (1896).

⁴⁷⁰ Gledhill and Lamb, *Electricity in Taunton*, 30.

⁴⁷¹ SHC, D/B/ta/4/5/1 (1915—16).

⁴⁷² SHC, D/DC/tau.d/21/2..

⁴⁷³ SHC, D/DC/tau.d/38/28.

⁴⁷⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/4/3/6, p. 25; DD/X/WBB/1011.

⁴⁷⁵ *Taunton Courier*, 11 Oct. 1865: BNA accessed 21 Sep. 2021; above. econ. hist.

mounted an electrical exhibition in Taunton including an electric bus from the station and an electric launch on the river. However, the company had insufficient capital to meet the demand from potential new customers and agreed to sell to the corporation. After a public enquiry the Board of Trade permitted the council to acquire the business in 1891 and electricity became a paid-for public service unlike gas.⁴⁷⁶

The council appointed an engineer, three assistants and a collector and built the first substation under the Municipal Buildings in 1893 and four more by 1898 as more lights were converted to electricity and more customers wanted a supply. Large factories and offices might need over 100 lamps to be lit even lighting during the day so the council bought seven generating sets between 1896 and 1901, when they had also to supply the tramway. Coin slot meters were introduced for the poor in the late 1890s and wiring costs were recovered through electricity charges. Public celebrations required decorative lights especially the 1902 coronation when 1,000 were used. The maximum load on the works was 243 KW in 1899 but reached 495 KW at Christmas 1905. By 1910 the council had borrowed £220,000 for equipment but the newer boilers consumed less coal. Customers were encouraged to use electricity for cooking and heating but lighting was still the largest demand and envisaging the need to expand the council bought adjoining property from 1913.⁴⁷⁷

The First World War reduced electricity consumption but increased coal prices and in 1915 the works made a loss and an experiment with munitions produced only 333 shells.⁴⁷⁸ In 1916 1 St James Street was acquired for a showroom, in 1919 a travelling crane was bought and in 1920 a 500 KW steam turbine by Parsons of Newcastle costing over £11,000. Despite losing the trams in 1921, the biggest consumer, extension of supply to rural villages like Norton Fitzwarren and Bishops Lydeard led to orders for new boilers and a second steam

⁴⁷⁶ D. Gledhill and P. Lamb, *Electricity in Taunton 1809—1948* (Taunton, 1986), 6—7, 9—10, 13; *Taunton Courier*, 5 Oct. 1881: BNA accessed 21 Sep. 2021; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/21/861.

⁴⁷⁷ SHC, A/ATZ/1 passim; D/B/ta/4/7/1 passim; 4/7/2 (Jan. 1919).

⁴⁷⁸ SHC, D/B/ta/4/7/2.

turbine in 1923, a new cooling water intake at Coal Orchard and the purchase of more property between 1924 and 1932.⁴⁷⁹ Taunton reputedly had some of the lowest generating costs in the country and the corporation made over £11,000 a year from the works. A powerful new generator was installed in 1930 when it was decided to supply all small houses prepared to give up gas lighting with a prepayment meter, lights and an iron but local authority houses were only provided with a single electric light until *c.* 1933. In 1932 the council switched from alternating to direct current.⁴⁸⁰ A new showroom on the Corn Exchange site costing £20,000 opened in 1939 when *c.* 14 million units of electricity were sold, compared with only one million in 1922.⁴⁸¹

The Electricity Commissioners recommended Taunton be connected to the national grid and from 1936 Taunton was supplied by the Central Electricity Board and electricity generation ceased on 31 December 1937.⁴⁸² The site was kept on standby and further property bought and the corporation continued to hire out and fit domestic equipment, which was displayed and demonstrated at the new showroom.⁴⁸³ The Borough Electrical Engineer remained one of the highest paid council officers, earning £950 a year in 1941.⁴⁸⁴ The national electricity crisis resulted in the works generating electricity for five days a week during the winter of 1947—8 using the 1930 3,125 KW alternator. The plant was taken over by the South Western Electricity Board in 1948, which with its successors maintained the site as a large substation but the power station closed *c.* 1960 and was demolished *c.* 1980.⁴⁸⁵ All electricity thereafter came from the national grid via a large transmission station at Fideoak in Bishops Hull.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁷⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/4/7/2 passim; Q/RUo/39.

⁴⁸⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/4/7/2 passim, 21/2; DD/X/WBB/1011; A/DVY/1.

⁴⁸¹ SHC, D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box 19 (1938—9), 86—7; DD/X/BUSH/19.

⁴⁸² SHC, D/B/ta/4/7/2 passim; D/B/ta/4/5/1 (Dec. 1941).

⁴⁸³ SHC, D/B/ta/4/7/2 (1937—9).

⁴⁸⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/4/5/1 (Dec. 1941).

⁴⁸⁵ SHC, D/B/ta/4/7/2 (1947—8).

⁴⁸⁶ SHC, A/BWX/5, p. 24; Bishops Hull.

Housing

The Local Board of Health and later the borough council were very concerned with housing and access to water and sewerage was insufficient to prevent many houses being unfit for habitation.⁴⁸⁷ By 1901 many houses in back courts were left empty but more workers' housing became available, first privately rented and then from the council.⁴⁸⁸ In 1913 workmen's cottages were built in String Lane, later Leycroft Road, at a cost of £148 each with three bedrooms, kitchen, sitting room, bath, water and light to be let for 4s. a week. From 1914 extensive surveys of the back courts were made and closing orders made and under the 1919 Act a housing committee with three co-opted women members designated five Unhealthy Areas and built 111 replacement houses.⁴⁸⁹ In the 1920s John Allen, borough medical officer of health, found 700 unfit houses beyond repair that should be demolished, put closing orders on the worst homes and dealt with 116. There was pressure to clear the rest and provide for over 660 applicants for council housing. Rising unemployment led to the construction c. 1926 of 100 concrete houses at Lambrook, still in use in the 2020, using unemployed unskilled labour and costing £390 to £425 each compared to brick houses on Wellington Road at £444.⁴⁹⁰

The 1930 Housing Act obliged the council to provide satisfactory accommodation for those displaced, which caused problems given the scale of clearance and the borough had only built 677 houses. In 1933 700 families living in unfit dwellings and rooms outside the slum clearance areas needed a house as well as those in slums not yet demolished. The council feared the cost of managing another 1,500 dwellings and estimated that just to clear the remaining condemned houses and build 605 replacements would cost nearly £190,000 on

⁴⁸⁷ SHC, D/B/ta/4/2/1—2, 4/3/2.

⁴⁸⁸ TNA, RG 13/2276—8; SHC, D/B/ta/4/2/2—2.

⁴⁸⁹ SHC, A/EPF/250/4/3 (1913, f.p.1); A/DIF/95/32; A/DVY/1.

⁴⁹⁰ SHC, DD/X/PTB/1, p. 71; A/DIF/95/37; D/DC/tau.d/2/2/19 (29 Oct.), 21 (23 Feb.).

top of *c.* £450,000 already spent. The cost of a new house had been reduced to about £300 including land but for £400 the council bought three houses and an entire back court for improvement. Although 598 houses with 1,873 persons needed clearance the council only planned to build 393 2-bed, 80 3-bed and 30 4-bed houses over a 5-year period, clearly hoping that by 1938 many slum dwellings would be unoccupied. Most had gas cookers, installed in cupboards where there was only one ground floor room, and access to a shared washhouse but some had no provision for washing and many houses were infested with vermin. It was said *c.* 4,000 houses in Taunton had no bathing facilities. By 1936 1,076 unfit houses were awaiting demolition and the council increased its building target to 892 houses and 100 flats for the elderly. The earliest large estates were Priorswood and Halcon and hundreds of painters, floor layers and other workers were brought in to complete houses as war broke out.⁴⁹¹

Despite the *c.* 1,400 houses built between 1945 and 1953 over 2,000 applicants waited for a home. After 1945 the desperate housing and materials shortage led to the erection of steel-framed BISF and concrete Orlit, Easiform and Cornish houses and aluminium bungalows. The last with the one-storey steel prefabs were soon demolished but the Orbits survived into the early 1990s and a thousand or more of the others were still occupied in the 2020s. In 1952 the council had to place families in 48 converted Nissen huts and *c.* 175 in condemned houses.⁴⁹² Of 4,084 council-owned in 1962 nearly half were ‘temporary’ or awaiting demolition but only *c.* 100 new houses were built annually compared with 150 in the 1950s.⁴⁹³ In the 1970s aluminium and asbestos bungalows were demolished and older houses modernised but shortage of homes led the council to buy a few private houses, extend the

⁴⁹¹ SHC, D/DC/tau.d/36/15—21; unlisted box 19 (1938—9), 9; D/B/ta4/2/3; TNA, RG101/305/1/WOOA—WOPG.

⁴⁹² SHC, D/B/ta/4/22/1; D/DC/tau.d/2/214 (22 Oct.), 19 (30 Apr.), 20 (10 Nov.).

⁴⁹³ SHC, D/B/ta/3/22/10, pp. 60—1, 4/22/1 (1952, 1963).

Lambrook estate and buy Higher Holway Farm (67 a.) for housing.⁴⁹⁴ Thereafter social housing became the responsibility of charitable housing associations but supply continued to fall short of need.

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⁴⁹⁴ SHC, A/APN/2/6; D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box 1 (Sep., Nov. 1973, Mar. 1974).