

SOCIAL HISTORY

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Until the 20th century Taunton was divided between the town, gradually extended, and a rural area, gradually reduced. Most medieval residents were tenants of either the bishops of Winchester or the priors of Taunton. Copyhold tenants came to regard themselves as customary freeholders because of the generous customs they enjoyed but occasional attempts were made to enforce bond status. In 1339 a priory bondman was manumitted in the chapter house.¹ In 1568 a woman tried to evade a marriage contract because the man had bond status but witnesses found that she was also unfree.²

Although there were wealthy farmers most tax came from the borough. In 1327 clothworkers and merchants dominated with two men paying more than a pound in tax, seven people paying between 3s. and 10s. and 38 between 6d. and 2s. Some returns are missing or incomplete but the wealthiest rural tithing was Holway with seven taxpayers assessed at 2s. to 4s., only three other suburban or rural taxpayers paid 1s. or more. Tax was not a true reflection of wealth as one suburban taxpayer assessed at 2s. was paying nearly 30s. rent for seven shops in Fore Street and many wealthy townsmen do not appear in the tax lists.³ Of the 54 taxpayers in the borough in 1332 the wealthiest was merchant and MP Richard Polruel assessed at £2 and other higher taxpayers included a dyer, a goldsmith and clothworkers. Outside the borough taxpayers usually owed between 1s. and 3s., a few farmers paid more, but in the two suburban Extra Portam tithings and the priory's Obridge most were assessed at 1s. or less.⁴ Although always considered the poorer parish, in 1524 the urban area of St James

¹ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/PR/142.

² SHC, D/D/Cd/12 (Knowles, 1568).

³ Dickinson, *Kirby's Quest etc* (Som. Rec. Soc. 3), 149, 151—2, 154, 274; SHC, T/PH/win 1334—5.

⁴ TNA, E179/169/6. The urban area of St James is missing.

had nine taxpayers assessed on goods between £10 and £24 and 59 between £1 and £6. Six servants were taxed on their wages.⁵

The great wealth of Taunton's merchants and cloth traders is reflected in their generosity to the church from the late 14th to early 16th centuries. Medieval monuments were lost in the destruction of the priory church or in later alterations to St Mary's where memorials to the Pope, Saunders and Toose families have been lost since the 1840s.⁶ Few early houses survive except south of Fore Street where 15 preserves a great hall of 1323—4. Early 16th-century wills indicate the comfort in which some families lived and their investment in plate. Margaret Eston in 1504 left her children 10 nuts, salt cellars, masers and other pieces of silver and gilt, silver spoons, girdles and beads and left her shop stuff and clothing to her daughter.⁷ The wealthy merchant Toose family, possibly from Ireland, were generous to the church and community.⁸ Merchants used a distinctive mark on their goods and many used it in the way armigerous families used their coat of arms on windows or embroidered on gifts of vestments.⁹

The dominant merchant families were all closely interrelated and intermarried with families in Exeter, Bristol and Lyme. Wealthy widows continued their husband's business as most men left the bulk of their wealth to their wives at least for life. Draper Philip Love in the late 15th century married a woman who had already had three husbands and was still collecting the debts due to them when Philip died.¹⁰ Merchant William Nethway married four times gaining at least £100 and possibly plate and jewellery with his last wife but distributed his wealth widely leaving cloth and woad to a tenant and a servant and gifts to the church and

⁵ TNA, E 179/169/180.

⁶ Below, rel. hist.; SHC, DD/X/MDT/393, pp. 14—16.

⁷ TNA, PROB 11/14/282.

⁸ TNA, PROB 11/13/242.

⁹ SHC, A/DAS/2 (12308); F. W. Weaver, *Somerset Wills 1501—30* (Som. Rec. Soc. 19), 25.

¹⁰ Ashford, 'Woollen Trade', *PSANHS CLI*, 177; Wilts and Swindon HC, 2667/1/20/43a; SHC, DD/MK/14; TNA, PROB 11/11/332.

the poor.¹¹ Multiple marriages may account for the large accumulations of gold and silver plate, spoons, goblets and jewellery distributed among children, stepchildren and grandchildren in many wills.¹² In 1570 wealthy merchant and property owner William Chaplin had a mansion house in Canon Street with garden houses and his furnishings included needlework cushions, a Portuguese chair and a ‘counting chest’.¹³ Alice Quick, who had a farm at Holway, lived in St James’ parish in 1575. Her windows were glazed and her rooms furnished with hangings. She had two parlours, one new, many fine clothes, napery, beds and bedding, plate, and other furnishings that she distributed amongst relatives and friends.¹⁴ In 1615 it was said the wealthiest merchants trading overseas had not contributed to the voluntary gift to the king making the excuse they paid customs dues.¹⁵ However, Taunton benefitted from several charities created by wealthy traders at that period.¹⁶

Successful merchants invested heavily in land.¹⁷ A Taunton yeoman in 1603 owned 120 a. in Brent and was buying 31 a. in West Buckland enabling him to provide his wife with a £40 annuity and £400 to his sons. He may have borrowed money from Lady Stowell and Sir Hugh Portman enabling him to make Sir Hugh an executor.¹⁸ Merchant Lewis Pope had land in West Bagborough and before 1623 married as his second wife the widowed mother of Thomas More, heir to the priory estate.¹⁹ His first wife, the only child of a wealthy clothier, had died two years after their marriage but Lewis sued his father-in-law for the £10 a year agreed in lieu of their board.²⁰ Some 17th-century townsmen had land in Ireland or the West

¹¹ TNA, PROB 11/18/451.

¹² e.g. TNA, PROB 11/29/31, PROB 11/31/607, PROB 11/39/450, PROB 11/62/392; 11/77/366, PROB 11/185/438.

¹³ TNA, PROB 11/52/319.

¹⁴ TNA, PROB 11/57/391.

¹⁵ *Acts of P.C.* 1615—16, .49—50.

¹⁶ Below, this section, charities.

¹⁷ TNA, PROB 11/62/392; PROB 11/90/515.

¹⁸ SHC, A/CYV/1.

¹⁹ TNA, PROB 11/142/707.

²⁰ TNA, C 78/118, no. 16 www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/C78 accessed May 2021.

Indies.²¹ Some married into local gentry families, which may explain why families like the Trevelyans, Wyndhams Aclands later held a house in the borough.²²

Most members of the new corporation in 1627 were merchants and clothiers.²³ The first mayor Andrew Henley belonged to possibly the wealthiest family in the town. His father, merchant Robert Henley (d. 1614) purchased two manors and lands in Somerset, Berkshire and Dorset with the largest purchases alone costing him over £15,300 and when he died his personal estate excluding leaseholds was over £6,600.²⁴ One son settled on his father's estate at Leigh in Winsham but other family members continued to trade including Andrew and his brother-in-law James Reynolds who despite dying young left personal wealth of over £4,000. Andrew's son Robert bought manors in Dorset and Hampshire but moved to London and in 1656 was able to leave £10,000 each to his two younger sons. Andrew, the eldest, was raised to the Baronetage.²⁵

By the 17th century clothiers and shopkeepers could afford watches, clocks, books, cabinets, pictures and looking glasses.²⁶ Even modest homes had wainscot, carpets and cushions and an unmarried woman farmer at Obridge in 1642 had a well-furnished home with chambers for her maids and menservants.²⁷ A mercer in 1679 had a 'banketting house'.²⁸ Wealthy residents in the late 17th and 18th centuries could afford to have their children's portraits painted to add to those they had inherited.²⁹ One woman in 1716 had two parlours furnished with blue chairs, glass sconces and pictures.³⁰ In 1725 a saddler had a tea-stand in the main bedchamber indicating that tea-drinking was well established.³¹ Frances Procter of

²¹ TNA, PROB 11/257/67; PROB 11/303/357; PROB 11/426/409.

²² SHC, DD/WO/5/2/1—2, 35/8/5; DD/SP/300 (1768—95).

²³ SHC, DD/X/HUNT/6/1.

²⁴ SHC, DD/TOR/154.

²⁵ SHC, DD/TOR/23, 73, 422; TNA, PROB11/254/317.

²⁶ SHC, DD/SP/1632/5, 1666/14, 1666/14, 1676/12, 1693/31, 1695/37.

²⁷ SHC, DD/SP/1641/90, 1642/14.

²⁸ TNA, PROB 4/4111.

²⁹ TNA, PROB 11/555/325.

³⁰ SHC, DD/SP/1714/9, 1716/3, 47.

³¹ SHC, DD/SP/1725/22.

Haydon in 1730 possessed fine clothes, jewellery, china, walnut furniture, a spinet and a carriage.³² The better inns emulated the finer private houses in decoration and furnishing of chambers.³³

Households included servants and apprentices. One former apprentice confessed in his will in 1677 to having defrauded his late master but others were beaten, starved and not properly clothed. One was described as 'eaten out with lice' and another was forced to walk up to six miles through the snow in only his shirt and drawers.³⁴ Girls were vulnerable and it was common for them to be forced to name a fellow servant or bribed not to name their master when they had a child.³⁵ Tradespeople often housed their workpeople. A weaver in 1660 had a large house with two halls but only his kitchen and workshop were not used as bedchambers and the beds were worth little compared with the valuable beds in most houses.³⁶ A 'little house' in North Town in 1698 comprised a hall and two shops, presumably at least one was a workshop, with chambers over.³⁷

The early 18th century saw the introduction into even modest homes of furniture for hanging clothes and storing books.³⁸ Later in the century writing desks, stocks of liquor and snuff boxes were cherished possessions. There was also a major shift in saving and investing from the personal loans used in the 17th century to public funds and undertakings like turnpike trusts by the mid 18th century and banks by the end of the century.³⁹ A servants hall recorded in 1775 reflected an increasing separation between the family and others within households and the prevalence of a best parlour and a family parlour reflects new attitudes to guests and privacy. Strong family pride may be reflected in the 33 hatchments hanging on the

³² Siraut, *Som. Wills*, 189.

³³ SHC, DD/SP/1723/50.

³⁴ TNA, PROB 11/356/385SHC, Q/SR/78/5, 86/82, 87/62, 114a/7.

³⁵ SHC, QSR/138/41.

³⁶ SHC, DD/SP/1664/30.

³⁷ SHC, DD/SP/83, p. 269.

³⁸ SHC, DD/SP/1742/15, 1744/24.

³⁹ TNA, PROB 11/1113/211, 1169/135; PROB 11/1346/130; PROB 11/1525/23; PROB 11/1864/77.

stairs of one house but furnishings such as wallpaper, chocolate mills, salad boxes, pier glasses, birdcages, game boards and china ornaments often supplied by local shops hint at greater comfort and individual taste.⁴⁰

Despite the mid 18th-century reshaping of the market area for a fashionable parade or promenade, the creation of assembly and card rooms, a freemasons lodge, reading societies and Hammet Street for 'genteel families out of trade', the gentry continued to desert the town for houses in neighbouring parishes. An absentee owner of a farm at Holway in 1760 reserved the best bedroom and parlour with access to the kitchen and stables for himself and a servant should he wish to visit Taunton.⁴¹ Although gentlemen's residences were built in the rural parts of the parish notably Pyrland, Lyngford, Holway and Haydon one of the last great houses in the town was Flook House where William Metford lived in fine style in the early 19th century, with his own boat and carriages able to pay £100 for a horse and £50 for a piano.⁴² By the mid 19th century Hammet Street's houses were offices and shops and of the 18 borough magistrates only a couple lived in the borough. By contrast almost all the members of the Local Board of Health, mainly professional men, were resident.⁴³ The Crescent and houses in the Priory and Staplegrave Road areas continued to be occupied by retired tradesmen and professional families but by the 20th century they were also moving out to Wilton and elsewhere and more town houses were converted to commercial use or flats.⁴⁴

Subdivision of houses continued on the main streets as well as among the small houses in courts. It was common for occupiers to let off rooms in their houses permanently or to strangers for short periods. In 1717 three subtenants produced an income of £30 a year.⁴⁵

Although many workers continued to live with their employers until the later 19th century

⁴⁰ SHC, DD/DP/76/2, 83/2, 43/2 (1801).

⁴¹ SHC, DD/DP/97/1.

⁴² Above, landownership; SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/17.

⁴³ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 9, 13.

⁴⁴ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929, 1957, 1972—3).

⁴⁵ e.g. DD/SP/423 (*Morse v. Morse*), 426 (*Pether v. Pether*); above, intro., sett..

others depended on lodgings. Conditions and rents varied but some men shared a bed with up to two others in unheated garrets having to get their meals at a tripe shop, a cheap eating house. A room could cost 1s. 3d. to 3s. 6d. a week in the 1770s, depending on whether or not food was included. Families, especially migrants to the town, might also find themselves in one room.⁴⁶

By the 19th century as the number of poor houses grew and the better-off moved out of the town centre poverty and crime became more evident. Poverty led to absconding fathers and prostitution. Beerhouses like those in the market place before it was cleared in 1769, the Black Boy east of St Mary's church with adjacent derelict property and the Crown and Mitre in Batt's Court became magnets for prostitution until the 1840s or later. Prostitutes appear to have been country girls using public houses or in back courts although one brothel was discovered in Elms Parade in 1889.⁴⁷ Newspapers alerted people to the sufferings of the poor to obtain help as in 1840 when a labourer's wife had triplets. The family of ten had two rooms and nether beds nor fuel and although local women brought clothes, food and fuel the babies died.⁴⁸

Households remained large in the 19th century, tradesmen had resident assistants and domestics. Most middle class families had at least one servant although some used poor female relatives. Well-paid working families had a young nursemaid to look after the children or employed daily maids, housekeepers, charwomen and laundresses who lived with their own families and worked for several households. As the wealthy moved out of town the number of male servants declined from 106 in 1841 to 25 by 1861 but the number of female servants increased to between 850 and 890 by the end of the century only declining to under

⁴⁶ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/22.

⁴⁷ Goldsworthy, *Recollections of Old Taunton*, 22; SHC, DD/SAS/C2273/3/12, pp. 36, 47; DD/BDL/11; *Taunton Courier*, 4 Feb. 1889: BNA accessed 1 Dec. 2020.

⁴⁸ *Taunton Courier*, 16 Dec. 1840: BNA accessed 1 Dec. 2020.

800 in 1911.⁴⁹ Despite new labour saving devices there were still c. 600 female servants and charwomen, mostly dailies, in 1939. Over 7,100 women were classed as unpaid domestics, some even describing themselves as unpaid servants, including women running family businesses. There were 48 chauffeurs, including women, and many private gardeners.⁵⁰

HOUSING CONDITIONS

In 1595 there were complaints of people in St James parish making new rooms with fireplaces for tenants, possibly to circumvent rules against taking lodgers.⁵¹ Tenants of subdivided tenements near St Mary's church were urged to be 'neighbourlike' in 1611 in facilitating repairs. A house in High Street was said in 1618 to have been let to many poor people on short rents.⁵² Window glass was still valuable enough to be mentioned in a yeoman family's wills together with wainscot and cupboards and in the inventory of a wealthy merchant's house where the warehouse was only fitted with wire lattice and shutters.⁵³

Houses in the 17th century varied from the two up two down to those with six or more bedchambers, two halls or two parlours, although some of the largest were inns. The Black Spread Eagle, presumably that on North Street, had five bedchambers, one described as new in 1609, and two loft bedrooms.⁵⁴ In 1664—5 some men paid tax on more than 10 hearths and innkeeper Henry Pullen paid for 23. The returns are incomplete but it is striking that householders in East, Fore, High and North Streets had an average of 4 ½ hearths each while those other parts of the town including North Town averaged c.2.⁵⁵ Rural houses had brewing

⁴⁹ TNA, HO TNA, HO107/972, 1922—3; RG9/1617—18; RG10/2370—5; TNA, RG11/2366—8; RG12/1875—7; RG14/14234—45, 14249.

⁵⁰ SHC, D/X/WBB/837; TNA, RG101/305/1/WOOA—WOPG.

⁵¹ SHC, DD/SP/36 (loose paper 1595).

⁵² SHC, DD/SP/50 (Oct. 1611, Oct. 1618).

⁵³ Siraut, *Som. Wills*, 145—7; SHC, DD/TOR/422 (1614).

⁵⁴ SHC, DD/SP/1609/1.

⁵⁵ H. Symonds, 'Taunton Tokens of the Seventeenth Century', *PSANHS*, LII (1911), 65; SHC, DD/SP/1672/66; R. Holworthy and E. Dwelly, *I. Hearth Tax for Somerset 1664—5* (1916), 1—13; *II. Dir. Som. XVIIIth century* [Hearth Tax Exemptions] 157—9, 163—5, 310—14.

and cider houses, dairies, cow stalls and stables, some with chambers over to house farmworkers.⁵⁶

In the mid 17th century £25 was considered too much for rebuilding a house yet in 1694 an estimate for a thatched, six bay house with four heated rooms was £252 and for a large tiled house and outhouses with a total of 59 windows, presumably lights, £545.⁵⁷ In 1702 a house in Fore Street was sold for £730.⁵⁸ Merchant Joseph Markes (d. 1717) invested in building houses.⁵⁹

Older cross passage houses were often divided like that of William Cole (d. 1712), a wealthy tucker in East Street, who let half his dwelling with garden and summerhouse to a nonconformist minister while he occupied the rest and had his workshops and racks in his half of the garden.⁶⁰ The most notable feature is the disappearance of the hall with a second parlour furnished for dining and the pantry replaced the buttery. Inns provided private dining rooms by the early 18th century. Greater privacy was provided by a stairhead passage off which chambers opened.⁶¹ Some older houses survived unaltered including one in 1763 with leaded casements and a great hall chamber.⁶²

By the late 18th century several house entries had become passages to back courts. A rare survivor is 18 Fore Street, the northern half of a 16th-century mansion, whose entry is now a public entry to Bath Place. The near contemporary Crown and Sceptre in North Street was similarly divided but was demolished c. 1910. Built on central burgage plots courts provided cheap housing from the later 18th century. In the 19th century attempts were made to create decent homes, including the Trinity area developed in the 1830s and 1840s and the priority area in the 1890s. Smaller estates included Edward Jeboult's Sunny Bank, which had a

⁵⁶ SHC, DD/SP/1609—95.

⁵⁷ TNA, C3/467/17 SHC, DD/DP/23/8.

⁵⁸ SHC, DD/DP/58/2.

⁵⁹ TNA, PROB 11/562/388.

⁶⁰ TNA, PROB 11/527/341.

⁶¹ SHC, DD/SP/1716—44.

⁶² SHC, DD/DP/75/3.

communal garden and a closet for each pair of houses. In 1857 the Conservative Land Society planned Alma Street.⁶³ However, those schemes and the later Rowbarton developments were for lower middle and upper working-class families and were insufficient to replace the huge number of back courts. The courts housed a wide variety of people including many skilled workers and multiple-income families who would probably not have been in such accommodation if better housing had been available.⁶⁴

In 1900 the medical officer of health wrote in his report 'Now that the suburbs of the town are amply supplied with excellent artisans' houses with gardens attached, there is no excuse for living in the close, ill-ventilated and unhealthy courts and alleys of former days.' However, he was over optimistic as 700 back to backs remained to be cleared in 1925 and new housing fell far short of need.⁶⁵ By the late 19th century Taunton had probably over 1,000 dwellings in back courts, many on former medieval burgage plots and owned in blocks. They were regarded as a good investment by rich and poor, a schoolmaster owned a large back court east of St James' churchyard in 1843 and even the local inspector of nuisances bought a court in 1858.⁶⁶ Several back courts were built or bought by factory owners, some to enable future expansion but others to house employees.⁶⁷ Many poor houses built in the later 19th century were condemned and demolished from the 1930s, some not 50 years old.⁶⁸ In 1910 many houses in side streets and back courts were valued at £5, whereas Silver Street House was valued at £2,320.⁶⁹ One wealthy landowner (d. 1902) concealed his ownership of back court cottages from his estate agents but as late as 1920 a man was prepared to buy an entire back court in Paul Street with 13 houses.⁷⁰ In 1928 a local draper left his children c. 20

⁶³ SHC, DD/X/AUS/17; A/CHM/12.

⁶⁴ TNA, HO TNA, HO107/972, 1922—3; RG9/1617—18; RG10/2370—5; TNA, RG11/2366—8; RG12/1875—7; RG14/14234—45, 14249.

⁶⁵ SHC, A/EPF/250/4/2 (1900, p. 9); 4/4 (1925, p. 23)

⁶⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/13/1/1; DD/AY/150; D/DC/tau.d/25/14 (1692).

⁶⁷ TNA, IR58/82645—8; SHC, DD/IR/26/1, pp. 10, 52, 76—7; 26/3, pp. 57, 79—80, 89.

⁶⁸ SHC, D/DC/tau.d/36/19.

⁶⁹ SHC, DD/IR/T/26/1—4.

⁷⁰ SHC, DD/AY/145.

including Woodfords Buildings and 5 Court, East Street but his son-in-law paid £30 in 1937 to demolish the latter, which like many courts looked out on a blank wall only a few feet away.⁷¹ Slum owners in the 1930s included Pearsall's silk factory, charities and even the Taunton and Somerset Hospital but most were private individuals, some like the owner of Denmark Place in Coal Orchard as far away as Alnwick in Northumberland but others were court dwellers whose tenants were their neighbours.⁷²

Lodging houses provided decent accommodation for visitors and young single workers but some notably 79—81 East Reach were appallingly overcrowded with travelling entertainers, itinerant workers and tramps.⁷³ In 1862 a house in East Reach had dangerous bedrooms propped up on poles with broken windows and the front was in danger of falling out.⁷⁴ In 1891 there were over 1100 dwellings of four rooms or fewer. The 180 two-room and 42 one-room dwellings were mainly almshouses and small houses in multiple occupation but the 335 three-room dwellings were mainly thin three-storey houses in back courts.⁷⁵ By 1901 the number of tiny dwellings had only fallen to 981 and four-room houses were still being built.⁷⁶ Population pressure led to more subdivision and in 1911 there were over 1,300 dwellings of four rooms or fewer with over 200 with only one or two rooms. Several three and four-roomed houses had more than ten occupants and two elderly people were found living in back court outhouses.⁷⁷

The Local Board of Health, and in 1879 the Borough Council, imposed bye-laws to improve housing. Some court houses were demolished and others were converted into washhouses and toilets as landlords were required to provide mains water and drainage. The

⁷¹ SHC, DD/X/UP/1—3.

⁷² SHC, D/B/ta/3/8/12, 4/2/3; D/DC/tau.d/36/15—21.

⁷³ TNA, RG 12/1875—7; RG14/14234—45.

⁷⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/3, 366.

⁷⁵ TNA, RG 12/1875—7.

⁷⁶ TNA, RG 13/2276—8; Bd of Trade Report 1908, p. 465 cited in J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People* (1998), 34.

⁷⁷ TNA, RG14/14234—45, 14249.

reports of the Medical Officer of Health brought wider attention to conditions in the courts and combined with Acts of Parliament to improve housing led to pressure to improve or demolish court dwellings. Cesspit emptying and limewashing proved largely unenforceable even by magistrates. Limewashing, for centuries the best way of dealing with insect and bacterial infestation, was only done after an epidemic was traced to courts, and the council often had to step in to disinfect privies and gutter drains. Repair costs increased out of line with rents in the early 20th century and many poor landlords could not afford them.⁷⁸

The late 19th and early 20th century saw an great increase in the provision of three up three down terraced housing especially in the east and north-west of the town but although most had a parlour, scullery with water and an outside flush toilet very few had bathrooms even in the large four and five bed houses with dressing rooms and attics. Many existing houses had to share a tap and water closet with some courts having only one for the whole court of 30 people or more.⁷⁹ Overcrowding was common, made worse by the practice of taking lodgers leaving one bedroom for the whole family. In 1901 one such house was occupied by a couple and 10 children aged up to 25 and in 1911 many three-roomed houses had 8—10 occupants often including adult children and boarders.⁸⁰ In 1920 it was said poor families could not pay rent for single occupation of the smallest house and overcrowding was widespread and serious. Back court houses lacked damp proofing, water, food or rubbish storage, and shared toilets but it was impossible to rebuild and recover the outlay from rent. Housing was considered the biggest health problem in the 1920s with 700 back to backs still occupied in 1925 and many families in one room.⁸¹ In 1931 the average occupancy was *c.*

⁷⁸ SHC, A/EPF/250/4/3; D/B/ta/4/2/3; above, intro; below, local govt.

⁷⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/22—32.

⁸⁰ TNA, RG13/2276—8; RG14/14234—45.

⁸¹ SHC, A/EPF/250/4/4 (1920—5).

5.3 per dwelling and over 1,100 people lived more than two to a room but by 1938 only 282 people lived in officially overcrowded dwellings.⁸²

Some builders were installing bathrooms by the 1900s, occasionally off the kitchen, but others continued to build houses without indoor sanitation in the late 1920s. Often identical houses in the same street were built by different builders and some put in bathrooms and others did not, partly as it reduced the size of the bedrooms and large families were still common.⁸³ Houses built for the council were often of a higher standard but rents were also higher. Even at 10s. a week it would take the council 40 years to recover the cost of a three-bedroomed house excluding the land in 1921 and demand far outstripped capacity to build.⁸⁴

The condition of men joining the services in the First World War highlighted the links between housing and health. In 1917 a survey of 774 houses in 119 courts found that none had foundations or a damp proof course, almost all had no front or back yard and they shared access to water taps and toilets. Only a third of condemned houses needing urgent closure had been vacated.⁸⁵ Little had changed by 1931 when 40 families shared a house with one other and 81 people including a family lived in a single room. The 1930 and 1936 Housing and Public Health Acts led to the creation of many slum clearance areas and surveys of housing condition. Eight houses in Duke Street shared one toilet by the public pavement. In Paradise Square the three toilets and two taps for the 16 houses were located in a tiny, dark alley although in the 1850s it had been planned to provide eight toilets.⁸⁶ Washhouses were scarce in that area and many people heated up their washing in a pan on the stove or fire and dried it in the living room. Some houses had a gas cooker installed in the cupboard under the stairs, which formerly stored food and fuel. Waste water was thrown into the communal yard where

⁸² *Census*, 1931; SHC, A/EPF/250/4/5 (1938, p. 22).

⁸³ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/26/1707, 1713, 1728; 24/1/29/41; 24/1/36/375—6, 380, 382, 385; 24/1/52/872; TNA, RG13/2278.

⁸⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/3/22/1, pp. 3—4, 26, 100, 105, 126; 3/22/2 (Dec 1926, Jan. 1927); below, local govt.

⁸⁵ SHC, D/B/ta/4/2/2 (1917).

⁸⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/4/2/3 (1921); D/B/ta/24/1/1/15; D/DC/tau.d/36/15—21.

the rainwater gully theoretically carried it out to the street but often back into the houses. Some courts to the west of High Street discharged their waste into the stream, which still lay open behind the former burgage plots. Up to 17 people were found in one house and in High Street court 17 six houses were divided and housed 49 people sharing three toilets, a washhouse and drying ground. The medical officer found twice as many tuberculosis cases per 1,000 in the slum clearance areas and many unfit houses were infested with bed bugs. If houses were not joined back to back there was often only a few feet between them. Large numbers of rooms had no openable windows, bedrooms were divided in two by a wooden partition even when there was only one window. Broken windows were simply boarded over depriving the room of light and air. Most houses in the narrow High Street courts were three storeys high shading their neighbours. Slum clearance was delayed by the shortage of alternative accommodation, which led to elderly single people being required to share accommodation with strangers or being made to live with relatives.⁸⁷ New powers allowed the council to compulsorily purchase most of the Lambrook area in 1933—4 to rehouse people displaced by slum clearance and road schemes.⁸⁸

Rural areas also had housing problems. In 1926 a row of three farm cottages at Holway shared a well, two earth closets and a new washhouse but another cottage had neither well nor privy.⁸⁹ One employer housed workers in old railway coaches near Holway in the 1930s and 1940s.⁹⁰ Another man had a caravan park from 1937 on land off East Reach, which was transferred to Tangier in 1948 and in 1949 three sites were licensed for moveable homes.⁹¹

Although many slums had been cleared by 1939, the outbreak of war halted clearance and some like Paradise Square were not demolished until the 1950s because the council had

⁸⁷ *Census*, 1931; SHC, D/B/ta/4/2/3 (1921); D/DC/tau.d/36/15—21; A/EPF/250/4/5.

⁸⁸ SHC, D/B/ta/3/22/4, pp. 171, 203, 247—8, 267—8, 284—6.

⁸⁹ SHC, DD/VL/2/6.

⁹⁰ SHC, D/R/ta/24/1/611.

⁹¹ SHC, D/B/ta/3/8/12, p. 12; 3/8/13, p. 201; A/EPF/250/4/6 (1948, pp. 10—11, 1949, p. 7).

nowhere to rehouse the occupants.⁹² There were complaints that people in new two-bedroom homes took in lodgers and that local authority houses were overcrowded.⁹³ Under the Defence (General) Regulations of 1939 condemned houses could be occupied under licence and some slum houses were requisitioned for war purposes and not surrendered until 1954. In 1951 a man desperate for accommodation for his family who shared rooms with no access to sanitation asked if he could have a condemned house. It became the usual practice to allow tenants to die or otherwise vacate slum properties before demolishing them thus saving a replacement house. In 1952 179 condemned houses were still occupied, a third belonging to the council, a further 1,400 were 'unsatisfactory' and 259 were overcrowded.⁹⁴

Such was the need with additional houses waiting to be condemned that building 200 houses annually in the 1950s was very inadequate.⁹⁵ Squatting on former military property continued into the 1950s and single people in council housing were required to take in tenants.⁹⁶ Improvement grants were offered from the late 1950s as an alternative to condemning houses and even temporary post-war homes were still occupied in the 2020s.⁹⁷ Housing shortages in the 1970s led to squatting, it was difficult to house the elderly near amenities and some unpopular pre-war houses were converted into one-bedroom flats.⁹⁸

A survey in 1997 found fewer than five per cent of Taunton houses were unfit and many of those were rented.⁹⁹ In 2011 of 18,341 houses in the ancient Taunton parish area c.7,400 were rented, just over half of which were social housing. Distribution was uneven with most social housing in the north and east where in Halcon and Lambrook two thirds of households were in local authority housing. Most private rentals were in the centre of the

⁹² SHC, D/B/ta/3/8/12, 4/2/3; D/DC/tau.d/36/15—21.

⁹³ SHC, A/DVY/1.

⁹⁴ SHC, D/DC/tau.d/36/15—21; D/B/ta/3/22/5, 8.

⁹⁵ SHC, A/EPF/2650/4/6.

⁹⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/3/22/5, 8; 4/22/1.

⁹⁷ SHC, A/EPF/250/4/7 (1957, pp. 8—9).

⁹⁸ SHC, A/ABN/2/18; D/DC/tau.d/2/2/7 (16 Jan., 10 Apr. 1978).

⁹⁹ SHC, D/DC/tau.d/2/2/25 (June).

town especially the Priory area and new private housing estates. Average household size ranged from 1.7 in the town centre to 2.7 in Halcon.¹⁰⁰ In 2017 the Somerset Co-operative Community Land Trust based in East Reach created small affordable flats.¹⁰¹

MIGRATION

By the 13th century surnames like Fraunc, de Bristol, 'le Ireys' and 'Cornewalys' indicate early migration into Taunton.¹⁰² The surname Taunton occurred widely including Guy de Taunton, steward to Eleanor of Provence, John de Taunton, abbot of Glastonbury in the 1270s, and Roger de Taunton, Bristol bell-founder c. 1280. By the early 14th century the Polruel family, who were to supply one of Taunton's earliest MPs, were well-established and people from Wiveliscombe, Exeter, Crediton and Tiverton indicated that most immigrants came from the west.¹⁰³ In 1579 a Taunton merchant left money for a school and the poor in Colyton, Devon, presumably his birthplace.¹⁰⁴ Medieval names like Cardigan, Welsh, Pryst, Rice and Apmerike indicate Welsh origins and an early 16th-century goldsmith could read Welsh.¹⁰⁵ A Welsh blacksmith with a large family set up a forge in the market place in 1616. He was ordered to pull it down and give surety to the parish for his children or return to Cardiff.¹⁰⁶

Overseas trade linked with the Taunton cloth industry probably encouraged migration. Flemish weavers were said to have settled in the town in the 1330s and Breton residents in the 14th century included a weaver from whom local men sought instruction in the Breton

¹⁰⁰ *Census*, 2011.

¹⁰¹ SHC, A/DQO/404/11/23—4.

¹⁰² L. Landon, L. (ed.), *Som. Pleas, 1272—9*, 146; *Som. Pleas, 1280*, 84; SHC, T/PH/win 1285—6, 1288—9, 1325—6.

¹⁰³ F.H. Dickinson, *Kirby's Quest etc.*, 274; TNA, E179/169/6; SHC, T/PH/win 1348—9.

¹⁰⁴ Siraut, *Som. Wills*, 260.

¹⁰⁵ TNA, CP40/570, image 1233d; 692, image 1423 at waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021; TNA, E 326/3264; *L&P Hen. VIII*, IV (3), p. 1830; SHC, DD/SP/71 passim.

¹⁰⁶ E.H. Bates, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1607—25*, p. 239.

language.¹⁰⁷ John Lombard was taxed in Extra Portam in 1332 and John ‘Portyngale’ was killed in Taunton in 1394.¹⁰⁸ Men from Brabant and Holland were resident in 1436 and in 1444 11 Normans were among 26 alien taxpayers, the rest were French, ‘Dutch’,¹⁰⁹ Bretons and Chanel Islanders and were servants or craftsmen in the cloth, leather and gold trades.¹¹⁰ A similar mix of nationalities was recorded in the 1520s.¹¹¹ Theodoric Tybus, goldsmith in 1475, was probably an alien.¹¹² John Garret, goldsmith who settled in Taunton c. 1505, may also have been an alien as was Peter Garret in 1581 when only six aliens were taxed.¹¹³ Men were accused of housing aliens in 1629 but they may have been merely strangers.¹¹⁴ French protestants including the Fontaine family were in Taunton from the 1690s one of whom, a clothworker migrated to Ireland.¹¹⁵ A Swiss householder was barred from voting c. 1714 for not being naturalised.¹¹⁶

Migrants from Hampshire may have been moving between bishopric estates.¹¹⁷ Large numbers of people flocked into the town in the 17th century mainly from Somerset, Devon, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire but also from Wales, London, Kent and northern England. Over 1,000 settlement certificates brought by migrants between the 1650s and 1770s survive, mostly for clothworkers and before 1730. The downturn in the industry in the 18th century led to increasing numbers of poor people and their families being removed from the town. At least 437 people, excluding vagabonds and people moved within the town, were ordered out by the magistrates between 1732 and 1799 including several three-generational families probably in Taunton for many decades. Apprentices were removed with their masters. Forty-

¹⁰⁷ VCH Som. II, 407, 420; TNA, C1/108/42.

¹⁰⁸ TNA, E179/169/6; *Cal. Pat.* 1391—6, 687.

¹⁰⁹ Possibly German.

¹¹⁰ *Cal. Pat.* 1429—36, 565; TNA, E 179/169, cited in englandsimmigrants.com: accessed 19 March 2015.

¹¹¹ TNA, E 179/169/154 [part1], E 179/169/180 TNA, E 179/169, cited in englandsimmigrants.com accessed 19 March 2015.

¹¹² TNA, CP40/853, image 58: www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021.

¹¹³ SHC, D/D/Cd/4; DD/MK/9; A. J. Webb, *Two Tudor Subsidy Assessments*, 120; TNA C 78/42/4.

¹¹⁴ SHC, DD/SP/51 (Apr. 1629).

¹¹⁵ SHC, DD/SAS/C416/29; below, rel. hist., nonconf.

¹¹⁶ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/159/4.

¹¹⁷ SHC, DD/SP/423; D/P/tau.m/133/5, 8; DD/MK/50.

three people were returned to Taunton from elsewhere at the same period. Taunton people were begging in Bedminster near Bristol in the early 1740s and vagrants from Ireland and Scotland were found in Taunton. The peak period for removals was the 1740s and 1750s when over 250 were removed. Some were the wives of soldiers based in Taunton who had been posted overseas leaving their families behind, often destitute. Children with different fathers might be split up and one woman claimed her child was illegitimate to avoid removal.¹¹⁸ A native American became a bandsman with the Somerset militia c. 1800 and married a local woman before deserting his family. Two men born in Gibraltar were presumably sons of sailors or soldiers.¹¹⁹ In the later 19th century professional men like bankers, surveyors, architects and printers attracted apprentices from the surrounding counties and south Wales.¹²⁰

Taunton people left in the 18th century for Bristol, Exeter, Coventry and London and two men settled at Kimbolton, Hunts.¹²¹ Going to London to make one's fortune was probably very common and included Sir Benjamin Hammet MP and Sir Frederick Rowland an errand boy who became Lord Mayor in 1949.¹²² The railway probably increased migration to London from the mid 19th century and in 1881 2,346 Londoners had been born in Taunton. Men went to work in the south Wales coalfields, which had 165 Taunton born residents in 1851 but 817 by 1881 although at least one miner had left his family in Taunton and returned on visits.¹²³ Migration to London had peaked by 1881 but increased to south Wales and Bristol peaking at 1,660 and 1,441 respectively in 1901. Migration to the industrial northern and midland counties was much lower but small numbers migrated to most areas including the Channel Islands. The number of Taunton-born people living

¹¹⁸ SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/3/1—9; D/P/tau.ja/13/3/1; DD/SAS/C795/TN/57; DD/SAS/C238/1—2; Q/SR 302—26, 332—9, 341—3, 349—53, 356—7, 362—8.

¹¹⁹ SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/3/5.

¹²⁰ SHC, DD/P/52/2, 69/1.

¹²¹ SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/3/3; DD/SAS/C112/20/21; Hunts. Arch., HP52/13/2/3, 23.

¹²² Below, parl. rep.; SHC, A/CDE cat.

¹²³ TNA, census schedules 1851, 1881; RG 12/1877.

elsewhere in the United Kingdom, excluding Ireland, doubled between 1851 and 1911 when only 13 per cent of Taunton-born United Kingdom residents lived in the town, many of whom were young children.¹²⁴

Taunton continued to attract foreigners to settle including Italian barometer makers from 1805, an Italian trader in 1822, a German clockmaker in 1841—51, several Italian plaster modellers in the 1850s and 1860s and an Italian bird fancier, a Canadian shopkeeper and a musician born in Tasmania.¹²⁵ German and Italian musicians in 1871 and 1881 were probably travelling entertainers but Italian ice cream makers settled in the early 20th century.¹²⁶ In 1851 nearly half of Taunton's population had been born there but that fell to under 20 per cent by 1911.¹²⁷ By the 1950s Welsh, Caledonian, Northern Counties and Anglo-Danish societies in the town reflects inward migration.¹²⁸ Most foreign immigrants probably never became naturalised but between 1915 and 1949 at least 33 people mostly from Eastern Europe and the Americas were naturalised. In the three decades after the Second World War at least 62 Taunton residents became British citizens including 31 Poles, 11 Italians and people from Latvia, Finland, Egypt and China. A Polish club was established off Wellington Road by 1946.¹²⁹ In 1972 the council offered to house six Ugandan refugee families.¹³⁰ In the late 20th century migrants came from Kerala in India and the Philippines, primarily to work in healthcare, and from Eastern Europe especially Poland. By 2011 almost 10 per cent of the population in the area of the ancient parishes was foreign born and more than five per cent were from the black and ethnic minority population. Refugees from Syria and Ukraine arrived in the late 2010s and early 2020s.¹³¹

¹²⁴ TNA, census schedules 1851—1911.

¹²⁵ SHC, DD/X/WEA/5; TNA, PROB 11/1660/188; HO 107/972, 1923: *PO Dir. Som.* (1861, 1866).

¹²⁶ TNA, RG 10/2370—2; RG 11/2366—8; RG14/14239, no. 414; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1906).

¹²⁷ TNA, census schedules 1851, 1911.

¹²⁸ SHC, A/CQJ; DD/TBL/73.

¹²⁹ TNA, HO 144, 334, 409/23—31, *passim*; SHC, A/EOB/1 (May 1948).

¹³⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/3/22/11, p. 260.

¹³¹ *Census*, 2011.

Overseas migration

In the early 17th century a group of Taunton adventurers in Ireland appear to have been sponsored by the corporation, which received allotments in county Westmeath totalling 1,398 a. Roger Hill of Taunton paid £200 for a share, left to his nephew William Hill in 1661, the Revd George Newton invested in shares and some land was said to have been given to charity. The Irish rebelled against the settlers, many of whom returned in the early 1640s, and the allotment had been sold by 1664.¹³² In 1698 40 clothworkers and two soap boilers had reputedly migrated to Ireland, at least eight having taken their families.¹³³

In c. 1636 Thomas Trowbridge the younger took his family to New England and returned a few years later leaving his younger sons settled there and John Whetcomb, probably a relative of clothier Samuel Whetcomb, left for Dorchester, Massachusetts.¹³⁴ Taunton, Massachusetts was founded in 1637—8 by Somerset people of whom six were from Taunton including brothers William and John Parker.¹³⁵ Other people followed later and some went further south.¹³⁶ In 1856 a clergyman from Taunton Mass. visited Taunton and encouraged others to do so starting a close relationship between the two towns leading to a Mayoral visit to Massachusetts in 1939.¹³⁷ Migration to the West Indies was usually temporary but emigration to America continued down the centuries and included the Revd Harry Toulmin son of Joshua Toulmin in 1793 and William Knott who went ‘without leave’ c. 1821 although a few others returned.¹³⁸ In 1842 the family of architect Alfred Bult Millett emigrated to Ohio where he later became Supervising Architect responsible for public

¹³² *HMC 9th Report* App. p. 149b; TNA, PROB 11/213/3, 11/253/491, 11/303/357; SHC, DD/SP/367; A. J. Webb and S. Berry, *Som. Loyalties on the Eve of the Civil War* (Taunton, 2022), 123—6.

¹³³ SHC, DD/SAS/C416/29.

¹³⁴ SHC, DD/TRANS/1/74a; R. Bush, ‘The Tudor Tavern, Fore Street, Taunton’, *PSANHS* CXIX, 1975, 19.

¹³⁵ H.J. Wickenden, *Emigration from Taunton and District to New England* (Taunton, 1931), 8, 32—3, 36.

¹³⁶ Devon HC, 1148M/add6/17; C. Johnson, *British West Florida 1763—83* (New Haven, USA, 1943), 28.

¹³⁷ Wickenden, *Emigration from Taunton to New England*, 30; SHC, D/B/ta/3/13/13, p. 19.

¹³⁸ *Dict. American Biog.* Harry Toulmin: accessed 5 Oct. 2022; SHC, DD/X/WOH/1; D/P/tau.m/13/10/2; TNA, RG 12/1877.

buildings. Coal merchant's son John Goodland became a Wisconsin stationmaster then studied law and in 1891 became a state judge.¹³⁹

Several men were transported to Australia in the early 19th century leaving their wives and children to fend for themselves but one woman eventually followed her husband to Botany Bay, with two sons and settled there.¹⁴⁰ Seven women transported from Taunton in 1833 were not necessarily townswomen.¹⁴¹ Voluntary emigrants included a hospital doctor who settled in Sydney in 1839 and Robert Meade who emigrated in 1841 and became a magistrate at Benalla, Victoria.¹⁴² Many young Wesleyans were said to have gone to Australia on missionary work including Sunday school teacher W. A. Quick in 1850, who became governor of Melbourne Wesleyan College.¹⁴³ Printer Thomas Trood died in Sydney in 1850, two members of the Badcock family settled in Tasmania before 1851, a nonconformist carrier went to Australia in the 1860s and a son of merchant John Kingsbury was a cooper in New South Wales in 1862.¹⁴⁴ However, only six people and two infants migrated to Australia under the assisted passage scheme between 1839 and 1854 and two were newcomers to Taunton.¹⁴⁵ A Frome man returned from Australia to settle in Taunton c. 1860.¹⁴⁶

In the 19th century several people spent time in India including a Taunton surgeon who worked in the Madras hospital before 1811.¹⁴⁷ Neighbours and friends Louisa Parsons and Isabella White, daughters of a tanner and brewer respectively, went to India ostensibly in search of husbands in 1855, Louisa successfully. Tragically both women were massacred in

¹³⁹ VCH Office, TS. 'Alfred Bult Mullett 1834—90', written to correct the plaque in Taunton stating that he was architect to President Lincoln who died before Mullett's appointment; SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/10/2; D/DC/tau.d/unlisted box 17, 1943—5 (March 1944).

¹⁴⁰ TNA, HO 17/72/103; SHC, D/P/tau.m 9/1/5, 9; 13/2/256.

¹⁴¹ TNA, ADM 101/74/6/3.

¹⁴² SHC, A/DVZ/1; DD/TBL/42/9/4 (*Taunton Mail* 12 May 1897, p. 6).

¹⁴³ SHC, DD/X/BNE/1.

¹⁴⁴ SHC, *Western Flying Post*, 14 May 1850; SHC, DD/DP/60/1; DD/CWC/ta/unlisted box 5; D/N/tau.n/3/2/1.

¹⁴⁵ F. Chuk, *The Somerset Years* (Ballarat, Victoria, Australia, 1987), 76, 95, 116, 265.

¹⁴⁶ TNA, RG 9/618.

¹⁴⁷ TNA, PROB 11/1525/23.

the Bibighar at Cawnpore in 1857.¹⁴⁸ In 1881 16 Taunton families had a member born in India.¹⁴⁹ By the mid 19th century a wide variety of tradesmen and professionals were emigrating to America, Australia and New Zealand and later Canada and South Africa.¹⁵⁰ There was sufficient work for three emigration agents in 1864.¹⁵¹ John Farrant son of Samuel Farrant, mayor of Taunton, was a Boer War veteran who settled in the Transvaal.¹⁵² By the late 19th century Canada was popular with emigrants and several Taunton people settled in the Redpath area of Assiniboia, Saskatchewan.¹⁵³ Families from Silver Street Baptist chapel emigrated to Canada and their sons fought in the First World War. Chapel members paid for two Baptist chapels in Canada in 1906 and sent women missionaries to China c. 1900 two of whom settled there.¹⁵⁴ In 1914 Chapmans had an overseas removal service shipping emigrant's goods to Canada, Ceylon, China, Jamaica, New Zealand and South Africa.¹⁵⁵ In addition to Taunton, Massachusetts, there are Tauntons in Canada, Australia and Sri Lanka.

¹⁴⁸ A. Blunt, 'Embodying war: British women and domestic defilement in the Indian 'Mutiny', 1857—8', *Jnl Hist. Geog.* 26.3 (2000), 411—12; TNA, MSS EUR B344; SHC, DD/DP/69/2.

¹⁴⁹ TNA, RG 11/2366—8.

¹⁵⁰ SHC, D/N/tau.n/3/2/1; monumental inscriptions, St James' church, Taunton; Devon HC, 4310 M/F/1; R. Lillford, 'A Biographical Dictionary of Somerset Architects and Surveyors' (2022), 460.

¹⁵¹ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 85.

¹⁵² SHC, A/EDJ/2/3.

¹⁵³ SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/2 (*Taunton Mail* 23 Jan. 1895, p. 4).

¹⁵⁴ SHC, DD/X/WBB/585.

¹⁵⁵ SHC, DD/X/SOM/53.