

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Wilton parish has had divided administration for much of its history. It was part of both Taunton Deane and Taunton priory manors and after 1832 it was divided between the Taunton parliamentary borough and the Western electoral division. The civil parish was included in the Taunton Poor-Law Union from 1832, in 1874 it was divided between the Taunton Urban and Rural sanitary districts and in 1885 Wilton built-up area was absorbed into Taunton borough and the south-eastern farms were transferred to the new parish of Taunton St Mary Magdalene Without. In 1864 the corner of Wilton under St John's church was transferred to that parish. In 1921 Wilton, including Galmington and Sherford, became part of Taunton Borough, from 1974 the borough district of Taunton Deane and from 2019 Somerset West and Taunton District, abolished in 2023. In 1983 the civil parish of Comeytrove was created out of Trull and Wilton but in 2023 was absorbed into Taunton.¹

MANORIAL ADMINISTRATION and TITHINGS

The bishops of Winchester as lords of Taunton Deane manor administered most of the parish including Galmington and Sherford. They had considerable financial, legal and administrative powers within their jurisdiction and held regular courts.² The tithing was known as Galmington and formed part of the manorial hundred of Holway but the tithingman usually presented all well. From the mid 16th century records are complete until enfranchisement except for the 1640s, 1680s and 1690s.³ By the mid 17th-century most major tenants failed to attend court.⁴

¹ Youngs, *Local Admin Units*, 442; SHC, D/D/ord/24/3.

² Above, Introduction; Bishops Hull, local govt.

³ Hants. RO, M11/59/C1/19/1—3; SHC, DD/DP/SP/1—63.

⁴ SHC, DD/SP/18/33. 43/4.

Taunton priory owned the village area of the parish as Fons George tithing, after the Dissolution a separate manor.⁵ The tithingman presented nuisances, a reeve was elected and the priory court regulated agricultural work and heard cases from the tithing in the 14th and 15th centuries.⁶ Tenants were allowed to move in or out of the tithing with licence but new residents must pay *1d. chevage*.⁷ After the Dissolution the tithing came under the outfaring or foreign hundred jurisdiction of Taunton Deane manor and there are few surviving court records.⁸ The lord of the manor man was threatened with prosecution at the assizes for refusing to find a tithingman in 1634.⁹

PAROCHIAL ADMINISTRATION

Stocks remained in the churchyard in the 1780s.¹⁰ A vestry was meeting by 1784 administering the poor's property and pauper apprenticeship, maintaining the church and authorising rates. In 1819 the vestry wished to replace statutory highway labour with a composition.¹¹ In the 1840s both wardens were both appointed by the parishioners, there was a salaried clerk and a vestry chaired by the minister when he attended, which was seldom.¹² In 1986 Galmington became a separate civil parish called Comeytrove bounded by the Galmington and Trull roads and comprising the then built up area extending into Trull parish.¹³

SERVICES AND UTILITIES

⁵ Above landownership.

⁶ BL, Add. Ch. 16332—3; SHC, A/AHT/3; A/BFA/5—6; DD/SP/373.

⁷ SHC, A/BFA/5.

⁸ SHC, DD/SP/2; DD/SF/12/14/47.

⁹ SHC, Q/SR/71/75, 116.

¹⁰ McDermott and Berry, *Rack's Survey of Som.* p. 287.

¹¹ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/CH/8.

¹² SHC, D/D/Va/1/12, 2/12.

¹³ SHC, PAM 2637.

In 1842 there were three parish constables in Wilton.¹⁴ The county police moved into the entrance block of the former prison, rebuilt in 1940 as the headquarters of the combined county and borough constabularies.¹⁵

In 1849 the northern stretch of the Galmington stream and the Gaol stream were open sewers.¹⁶ Only the gaol had sewerage in 1854 and the school was said to have an open privy pit. In 1858 a new sewer was laid under the Gaol Stream and in 1859 the magistrates called for Wilton Street to be connected to it but its sewer discharged into the stream at Hammets Walk.¹⁷ In 1873 Galmington was drained by a brick sewer leading to a cesspit, probably the sewage tank which in 1895 also took road drainage and was let, the occupier using the material for the fields.¹⁸ By 1858 water mains were being laid in Wilton Street.¹⁹ A borehole was sunk to supply Musgrave Park hospital in the 1940s and in 1949 the council was given permission to take a supply from it as the area was short of water but it had to be softened from 1952.²⁰ After the closure of the brick pit at Galmington c. 1910 it was used as a council rubbish dump and by 1924 there were complaints of the stench.²¹ It was later used as a private tip by local firms and caught fire several times in 1950 before it was sealed.²²

The streets were lit by 1862 and in 1869 a lamp was requested for Turkey Court.²³ Galmington was lit by four oil lamps, which were replaced c. 1928 by eight electric ones.²⁴ Sodium lighting was provided for the north end of Galmington Road c. 1961.²⁵ Probably in connection with the extension of electric street lighting a transformer was built in 1928 near

¹⁴ SHC, Q/APc/1/84.

¹⁵ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), 121.

¹⁶ *Taunton Courier* 5 Dec. 1849: BNA accessed 5 Dec. 2023.

¹⁷ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/2, pp. 69, 96, 696, 710; 2/1/3, p. 32.

¹⁸ SHC, A/EPF/250/4/1 (1873, p. 16); *Taunton Courier* 13 Nov. 1895: BNA accessed 6 Dec. 2023.

¹⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/2/1/2, p. 690.

²⁰ *Taunton Courier* 17 Sep. 1949: BNA accessed 5 Dec. 2023; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/118/4953.

²¹ Bishops Hull, econ. hist.; *Taunton Courier* 19 Mar. 1924: BNA accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

²² *Taunton Courier* 29 Jul. 1950: BNA accessed 6 Dec. 2023.

²³ *Taunton Courier* 9 Apr. 1862, 24 Nov. 1869: BNA accessed 24 Nov. 2023.

²⁴ *Taunton Courier* 10 Oct. 1928: BNA accessed 5 Dec. 2023.

²⁵ *Taunton Courier* 11 Nov. 1961: BNA accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Osborne House.²⁶ As development increased another substation was built on Fons George Road in 1962 and many more have been added since.²⁷

GAOL

In 1754 a house and meadow near Shuttern was surrendered to trustees to erect a prison or house of correction, which opened in 1755 replacing the old Taunton Bridewell.²⁸ It was designed by Henry Tucker and the old house was repaired presumably for the governor.²⁹ Unfortunately it proved as easy to escape from as the old Bridewell and gaol fever was prevalent.³⁰ There was neither division of the sexes during the day nor provision for solitary confinement or employment. Men and women were kept in irons in the 1770s and cells were only available to prisoners who could pay. There was a condemned cell, a chaplain and a chapel by 1779. The gaol was still small and often had fewer than ten prisoners. By 1811 debtors and felons were sent to Ilchester gaol but in 1843 Wilton became the county gaol when Ilchester closed.³¹

There were concerns that people could access the prison walls, that houses adjoined and that the ground floor cells were unfit. The prisoners had no work or instruction and there was no separation between the convicted and those awaiting trial.³² In 1814 the houses adjoining the gaol on the west were acquired, a keeper's lodge of brick and stone replaced the old entrance, the old house and adjoining cells were partly converted to council and county record rooms and a new rear boundary wall was built c. 1816. The new east wing had cells with paved floors and cast iron doors off a gallery overlooking the yards and the loft over was

²⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/68/1319.

²⁷ SHC, DD/X.DNG/7 (1962).

²⁸ SHC, DD/ASC/13/1; *VCH Som.* XIII, local govt.

²⁹ SHC, Q/SR/323/3/38; DD/TB/56/51/3.

³⁰ J. Howard, *The State of Prisons in England and Wales* (1792), 37; SHC, DD/X/SF/1; TNA, ASSI 23/7, f. 117.

³¹ Howard, *State of Prisons*, 37; SHC, Q/SR/358/5; Q/AGZ/12/24/23; Q/AGW/3/8.

³² SHC, Q/AGW/9/1.

to be a chapel.³³ In 1819 seven prisoners on remand escaped using carpentry tools and a new wall along the gaol stream was advised.³⁴ In 1820 Taunton carriage builder James Jacobs designed a secure coach for carrying prisoners.³⁵ Prisoners continued to escape but were usually recaptured. They did most of the internal building and maintenance work, which gave them access to tools. Female prisoners kept their infants and two children died in 1824.³⁶

In 1823 a new treadmill was designed by Stothert and Pitt, new infirmaries were built and in 1825 workshops were added.³⁷ Men walked the treadmill, clove wood, broke stone or followed their own trade while women mended clothes and did the laundry. There were ten wards and ten day rooms each with a yard. However, most prisoners, 280 out of 402, were awaiting trial. There were 33 child convicts. Deaths were rare but there were usually 10 sick prisoners and over 50 in solitary confinement or facing other punishment such as irons and whipping but only on a magistrate's order. Inmates had a pound each of bread and potatoes daily with beef, soup and gruel and extra rations if they worked the treadmill. They attended two Sunday services and had bibles and other books. There were only two officers and a guard when the justices visited.³⁸ Elizabeth Fry visited the prison in 1825 and found it clean but that the prisoners needed education.³⁹ The visiting magistrates regularly ordered provisions and clothing, repairs, alterations and journal-keeping by the chaplain and surgeon.⁴⁰

By the 1830s the gaol comprised a block on the street with two rear wings opening onto exercise yards.⁴¹ In 1838 the roof was dangerous and the west side of the gaol was raised and re-roofed. By 1841 plans to close Ilchester gaol and make Wilton the county gaol,

³³ SHC, Q/AGW/1/1, 2/1—6, 3/2 (1814).

³⁴ SHC, Q/AGW/9/2.

³⁵ SHC, Q/AGW/4/1.

³⁶ SHC, Q/AGW/7/1.

³⁷ SHC, Q/AGW/2/1, 7, 9—13.

³⁸ SHC, A/AGZ/9/1.

³⁹ SHC, QSR/439/145.

⁴⁰ SHC, DD/SAS/H281/1.

⁴¹ SHC, tithe award.

required a larger building with accommodation for debtors. The staff had increased to a 27 year-old governor, seven turnkeys and a matron to look after 109 prisoners and two infants.⁴²

In 1842 Richard Carver drew plans for new cells with Monkton stone walls and a new frontage with governor's house increasing capacity from 80 to 275. Taunton builder George Herniman died, probably of a heart attack, while working on the new prison.⁴³

In 1848 following a complaint heating and ventilation were installed, and drainage in 1851.⁴⁴ In 1849 the prison escaped cholera and had only two deaths out of 1,199 prisoners that year, Cells had ventilation, water closets and hand basins. A good diet and cleanliness were reputedly enforced throughout the building.⁴⁵ By 1849 there was a schoolmaster and in 1853 the matron was also the schoolmistress.⁴⁶ In 1852 there were 172 prisoners and the matron wanted female assistants for women prisoners. One was appointed in 1853.⁴⁷ That year eight houses south of the prison were bought to enlarge the site, enfranchised after 1855, but a suggestion to buy Turkey Court for guard's cottages was taken up. The land was in Fons George manor and was enfranchised after 1855.⁴⁸ Despite paying lower wages the county was concerned at the over £1,600 a year running costs.⁴⁹ By 1855 the stream had been built over and the Somerset inn yard abutted the gaol brewhouse causing concern.⁵⁰ In 1855 the prison name was officially changed to Taunton Gaol but the old name remained in use.⁵¹

By 1857 there were cells for nearly 300 prisoner each with water closets and washing facilities but a planned prison gas works was never built.⁵² The treadmill was disused from 1860, there were fewer debtors and prisoners awaiting trial fell from 740 in 1849 to 300 by

⁴² SHC, Q/AGW/2/14—15; DD/SAS/H281/1; TNA, HO 107/959/26.

⁴³ SHC, Q/AGW/7/1; *Taunton Courier* 4 July 1838, 30 June, 11 July 1841, 16 Feb. 1842: BNA accessed 22 Nov. 2023.

⁴⁴ SHC, Q/SR/566/119; Q/AGW/2/15, 2/16—18, 3/9, 9/9.

⁴⁵ *Rep. Gen. Bd of Health on Cholera Epidemic 1848—9*, 37—8, App. II, 13,

⁴⁶ SHC, Q/SR/571/118; Q/AGZ/9/3.

⁴⁷ SHC, Q/AGW/9/9; DD/SAS/H281/1.

⁴⁸ SHC, Q/AGW/1/5, 9/3.

⁴⁹ SHC, Q/AGW/9/3.

⁵⁰ SHC, A/AGW/3/15 (1855). The yard was later acquired by the county.

⁵¹ SHC, Q/SR/613/162, 652/27.

⁵² SHC, Q/AGW/5/3; DD/SAS/H281/1; DD/SF/15/2/83.

1869. In 1862 100 Middlesex prisoners were accepted but had been transferred to other London prisons by 1868.⁵³ There were few executions, only ten people were executed on the prison roof before 1867 when public executions ceased. They were carried out by the London hangman William Calcraft. Corpses were buried on site in quicklime; other deceased prisoners were buried in Wilton churchyard.⁵⁴ In 1868 some prisoners were brought from Bath but income from prison work was only *c.* £300 less than a quarter of outgoings. The diet was more varied especially for the sick. It was suggested that prisoners be locked up and lights put out at 8 p.m. to save gas, that earth closets be installed to save water and that part of the gaol be closed.⁵⁵

In 1872 100 military convicts were received and in 1881 there were 124.⁵⁶ The prison was physically divided into civil and military prisons. Under the 1878 Prison Act the gaol was transferred to the government, which wanted only one Somerset prison. As there were more prisoners at Shepton Mallet than at Wilton the former was chosen. In 1884 the civil prison closed but a few cells were reserved for use during the Assizes and Quarter Sessions.⁵⁷ The military prison occupied most of the site, which had been linked to the cells in Shire Hall by a tunnel under the road alongside the gaol stream. It was disused at an early date and in 1971 it was partly filled in.⁵⁸

The prison had reached its greatest extent by the 1870s when it comprised a northern three-storey brick building on Shuttern containing offices and the governor's residence, a separate entrance with lodge and reception cells on the west and the T-shaped, three-storey gaol with one female and two male wings to the south. The female wing designed by Richard Carver was built first and the rest completed before 1868. The gaol was separated from the

⁵³ SHC, DD/SAS/H281/1; Q/AGW/16/11.

⁵⁴ *Taunton Courier*, 4 Sep. 1867; BNA accessed 5 Dec. 2023; SHC, PAM 1106 *Taunton Crown and County Court*; D/P/wilt/2/1/6; *PSAS CXLVI*, 152.

⁵⁵ SHC, DD/SAS/H281/4; Q/SR/610/197; Q/AGW/9/4.

⁵⁶ SHC, Q/AGW/16/11; TNA, RG/11/2367.

⁵⁷ SHC, Q/AGZ/12/2; A/AGW/12/5—7.

⁵⁸ SHC, Q/AGW/1/4; C/A/S1185/1; SWHT, Som. HER 36786.

north block by a governor's garden. East of the garden was the chapel with the laundry behind. Between the main blocks and Burton Place were the 1820s treadmill, workshops, stores and 1850s stables. The prison wings met at a central hall with panopticon tower and the south wing was flanked by the prison hospital and exercise yards with another governor's garden dividing the prison estate (4 ½ a.) from the Turkey Court residential area.⁵⁹

The front block was occupied by the county police by 1891, including a few resident officers until the police houses were built in Burton Place on the governor's garden in 1915, and county council taxation and weights and measures offices. The rest of the site was used largely by the Territorial Army, who built houses on Burton Place and converted part of the prison into a drill hall.⁶⁰ In 1957 the Red Cross, St John Ambulance and army welfare associations occupied part of the site.⁶¹ The Shuttern block was remodelled c. 1943 as the headquarters of the combined Taunton and county constabularies.⁶² Later the police took over the entire site, demolished the south wing for parking and gutted most of the remainder c. 1973.⁶³

⁵⁹ SHC, Q/AGW/1/9 (c. 1875), 3/8, 10, 16.

⁶⁰ TNA, RG 12/1876; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1902—3), 200; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), 11, 95—6.

⁶¹ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), 121.

⁶² SHC, C/PSCS/5/1/4.

⁶³ SHC, PAM 2588, p. 10.