

Local Government

Francis Boorman

Borough Administration

From 1540 administration in the town was dominated by Robert Strange, the bailiff appointed by the outgoing abbot in 1539.¹ Strange remained as bailiff through the ownership of Thomas Seymour, Anthony Kingston and Sir John Danvers, all courtiers and largely aloof from the affairs of the town. He used an aggressive, bullying style to maintain his supremacy.² In 1571 Strange reported to the privy council that watch had been kept in Cirencester and the seven Hundreds with nothing to report, capturing the role of the manor in keeping the peace on behalf of the national government.³

Numerous public appointments relating to the old abbey manor reflect Strange's influence. In 1544, Richard Pate was made under-steward of the old abbey estate and steward of the associated courts, with Anthony Straunge as his deputy.⁴ Governance of the town instituted by the abbey remained largely unaffected as a small group of interconnected families took up the majority of manorial positions and leased many of its old estates.⁵ Thomas Webbe, a carpenter who leased some of the abbey lands, was made serjeant of Cirencester at the request of Sir Anthony Kingston in 1544.⁶ In 1547 there were two swains or sub-bailiffs for the town who received 12s. each a year and five sub-bailiffs for the seven hundreds who received 6s. 8d. each a year. Their total expenses came to 23s. 4d.⁷

Depositions relating to a power struggle between manor and town described the office of bailiff and other functionaries of the borough in some detail: 'The bailiff appointed by the lord of the manor is the head officer under the steward of the town, with two serjeants attending upon him bearing maces before him upon great occasions and all festival days, and the bailiff and those who have served the office of bailiff, with their wives, are wont to wear scarlet gowns on Sundays and festival days. There are also two constables, two 'cardeners', two ale-tasters, two searchers of hides and tallow, two sealers of leather, and two water-bailiffs, besides two wardsmen in each of the streets, or wards. The bailiff and constable associated with some of the best part of the town, have sometimes called a hall and heard and determined causes there, and did govern and rule the town in good sort and civil manner'.⁸

The functions of these various offices are partly detailed in the Cirencester court rolls, accounts of the views of frankpledge held in the vill of Cirencester, which was now in the purview of the manor in place of the abbey. Views of frankpledge were held every six months, although few of the 16th

¹ See Social: Influential Townspeople.

² D. Rollison, *Commune, Country and Commonwealth: the People of Cirencester, 1117-1643* (Woodbridge, 2011), 95, 99-100.

³ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1547-80, 419.

⁴ *L&P Hen.* VIII, XIX (1), p.643.

⁵ Rollison, *Commune, Country and Commonwealth*, 100-102.

⁶ The source in fact refers to Sir William Kingston, presumably in error, as he died in 1540. *L&P Hen.* VIII, XIX (1), 646.

⁷ Hockaday Abs. CLV.

⁸ TNA, E 178/959; Quoted in Rev. E.A. Fuller, 'Cirencester: the manor and the town', *Trans. BGAS* 9 (1884-5), 342.

century court rolls still survive. The seven wards of the town of Cirencester were (with spelling variations from the 1550-1 court rolls in brackets) St Lawrence (Saint Laurence Strete), Castle Street (Castellstrete), Cheping Street (Chepyngstrete), Instropp Street (Inkstropstrete), Cricklade Street (Crykeladestret), Gosdich Street (Gosdichstrete) and Dolers Street (Dolerstrete). Courts were also held for the seven Hundreds of Cirencester.⁹

At a view of frankpledge for the town in 1550 a tithingman presented the cases from each ward, mostly relating to the vending of products including meat, fish, beer and candles, or providing services such as inns or stabling, without the permission of the manor. Fines were 4d. or 6d. The wards with the greatest total fines were Cheping Street with 7s. 6d. and Gosdich Street with 6s. 10d. Transgressors presented by the searchers of leather and conservators of the water, included six glovers fined 2d. Each for putting hides in the river. The level of fines was set by two affeerers, and the total of fines taken was 29s. 8d. Finally, two constables were elected.¹⁰ In 1559 offences included taking undertenants, which was against the ordinances of the town, while the rector of Stratton was fined 6d. for throwing manure from his cart into the street.¹¹ In 1572 the searchers of hides and skins Thomas Man and William Vinor presented that John Smith of Cricklade was a common butcher who sold meat at market day, but did not bring the hides and skins as ordered. Smith was fined 6d. Robert Rowly of St Lawrence ward was fined 2s for selling ale without a licence. John Chapperleyn of Chepinge Street was fined 6d for keeping an inn without a sign.¹²

Low levels of public disorder were addressed at the view of frankpledge, such as obstructing the highway with anything from pigs to a wooden beam. In 1572 Elizabeth Webb, widow of Chepinge Street, was fined 6d. for suffering her family to throw dirt in the highway, 'to the injury of her neighbours'.¹³ The conservators of water fined several men 3-4d. for putting hides in the river and Edward Clerk 12d. for throwing dung in the water. In 1573, the tasters were in attendance and eight common transters (carriers) were fined 4d. each for not giving notification that they were selling ale that needed to be tasted.¹⁴ The level of total fines was £4 1s. 8d. in 1572, a substantial increase from the 1550s.

Cirencester manor also held a court of halimote every three weeks. The keeper of the court was the bailiff of the manor. In the early 1570s Sir Giles Poole was bailiff, but in practice the court was held by his deputy, then Richard Bird.¹⁵ Most of the business related to pleas of debt and freemen paying suit of court, or paying to be excused attendance. In 1550 the fines totalled 21s. 6d. More occasional business related to letting or transfer of property, which was held by copy of the court roll. In 1551 Robert Straunge and his wife Joan paid 20d. to let their property called 'le Antelope' to John Chappleyn for 21 years.¹⁶ Change of copyhold involved surrender into the hands of the steward who presided at the court, and payment of a fine.¹⁷ In May 1551, a messuage changed

⁹ See GA, D1375/208, translation in D1375/504 and D1375/496–502.

¹⁰ GA, D1375/495.

¹¹ GA, D1375/496.

¹² GA, D1375/208 m.1, translation in D1375/504.

¹³ GA, D1375/208 m.1.

¹⁴ GA, D1375/208 m.2.

¹⁵ GA, P86/1/MI/1.

¹⁶ GA, D1375/495.

¹⁷ Rudder, *Cirencester*, 111.

hands for a fine of 5s.¹⁸ Business in the halimote court was very similar in the early 1570s, although occasional disputes concerning land were heard. A disagreement over a hedge next to the Fosseway between Christopher George and Giles Selwyn was first heard in May 1572. A reminder in 1573 that surrenders made out of court had to be brought to the next court for enrolment suggests customary court procedure was not always being followed.¹⁹ Property transactions in the court of halimote continued through the 17th and 18th centuries.²⁰

Cirencester changed hands several times during the civil war. In 1643 the town was taken by Royalist forces. After Prince Rupert had extracted £3,000 from the county for raising and garrisoning troops and a further £4,000 a month for their maintenance, Cirencester was left in the governance of Prince Maurice.²¹ Essex briefly retook the town for Parliament, raiding horses and provisions, but did not attempt to hold it. The King subsequently left Cirencester in the hands of Sir Jacob Astley.²² When the Parliamentary generals including Thomas Fairfax passed through the town in 1646, they were received with rejoicing.²³

There was little change to the operation of the manorial courts during the 18th century, excepting occasional interventions when they were not seen to be functioning smoothly. Lord Bathurst himself was apparently presented at the court leet in 1745 for not maintaining the pillory and ducking stool and amerced £120.²⁴ In 1736 the customs and fines for transfers of copyhold at the halimote court were set out in full, presumably because they were not being adhered to. At the same time it was found that the three weeks court for small debts (the view of frankpledge for the seven Hundreds) had not been meeting at the prescribed interval and a plea was made for it to be convened with greater regularity.²⁵

In 1792 the inhabitants petitioned Parliament requesting legislation to promote the expeditious recovery of small debts and the town's MPs, Lord Apsley and Richard Master, were tasked with preparing a bill.²⁶ This resultant Act²⁷ established a court of requests with jurisdiction over debts of under 40s. with the steward, bailiff and serjeant of the court appointed by lord of the manor and seven Hundreds, Earl Bathurst.²⁸ A list of commissioners was appointed with any three making a quorum that could hold the court.²⁹ In 1800 the court was held every second Thursday at the town hall. Samuel Rudder considered it a great success, calling for its jurisdiction to be extended to debts of up to £5.³⁰

¹⁸ GA, D1375/495.

¹⁹ GA, P86/1/MI/1.

²⁰ GA, D10820/C6-1-a

²¹ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1641–3, 442; Baddeley, *Cirencester*, 249.

²² Baddeley, *Cirencester*, 254.

²³ J. Washbourn, *Bibliotheca Gloucestrensis* (1825), cxc.

²⁴ *Cirencester Parish Magazine*, 21 (Sept. 1890).

²⁵ GA, D2050/M3, f. 197–8.

²⁶ *CJ* 47, 640.

²⁷ *CJ* 47, 804.

²⁸ Courts of request. Abstract of returns to an address of the Honourable the House of Commons, dated 15 August 1838; for, returns of the number of causes, officers, jurisdiction and committals of the Courts of Requests (Parl. Papers 1839 (338-I) xliii), p. 172–3.

²⁹ Rudder, *Cirencester*, 182–204.

³⁰ Rudder, *Cirencester*, 204–5.

Guild and Trade Companies

Guild merchant

In 1582 an attempt was made by the townsmen to re-establish the guild merchant granted by Henry IV, but subsequently annulled after the intervention of the abbot.³¹ The lord of the manor Sir John Danvers resisted the move in the Court of Exchequer, complaining that the petitioners were causing unrest in the Seven Hundreds.³² Danvers claimed that the bailiff and other manorial officers were not only prevented from carrying out their duties, but were even put in physical danger by the insurrectionary populace. The townsmen attempting to establish the validity Henry IV's charter were led by Giles Selwyn.³³

An inquisition held at Cirencester to gather evidence about the custom of the manor and governance of the town, upheld Danvers' manorial rights.³⁴ Selwyn and the townspeople were forced to give up the guild-charter and publicly submit to Danvers, as well as paying him a fine of 20 marks.³⁵ A further attempt by the townsmen to re-establish the guild merchant in 1595,³⁶ was overturned by the Court of Exchequer which upheld the decree of 1583.³⁷

Weavers' Company

The Weavers' Company of Cirencester, which had regulated the trade since around 1400, was granted a charter during the reign of Philip and Mary. This was confirmed by Elizabeth in an *inspeximus* of 1558.³⁸ The charter provided for an annual meeting of the weavers on St. Katherine's Day, to elect two masters or wardens for the period of one year and to inspect the previous year's accounts. Any weaver present in the town who did not attend the meeting had to pay a fine of 3s. 4d., while a warden who failed to pass on the records and accounts of the company was fined 20s. No weaver could take an apprentice without a licence from the wardens, who also enforced the indentures of apprenticeship. No-one could set up a loom in the town unless they observed the customs of the company, had the approval of the wardens, and were worth £5 or owned property worth 20s. annually. The same regulations applied to 'foreigners' who wished to weave in the town. Journeymen weavers who had not been apprenticed in Cirencester also had to be licensed by the wardens. If any members of the company failed to pay a fine as set out in the charter, the wardens could seize possessions from their house to force payment. The wardens could also deny work to apprentices or journeymen if they repeatedly misbehaved.³⁹ A similar set of regulations was set out for journeymen weavers in 1559.⁴⁰

In 1605 the Weavers' Company leased the upper room or loft of St Thomas' Hospital from the almsmen. The lease was renewed in 1638 for 2s. per year and again in 1688, 1708 and 1717. In

³¹ See Medieval Cirencester: Economic, Trade.

³² TNA, E 178/884.

³³ Baddeley, *Cirencester*, 236; Rollison, *Commune, Country and Commonwealth*, 134.

³⁴ E.A. Fuller, 'Cirencester: the manor and the town', *Trans. BGAS* 9 (1884-5), 341.

³⁵ TNA, E 123/10, Hilary 23 Eliz.

³⁶ Fuller, 'Cirencester: the manor and the town', 343.

³⁷ TNA, E 123/23, Michaelmas 38 Eliz.

³⁸ Rudder, *Cirencester*, 163-4.

³⁹ GA, D4590/1/1.

⁴⁰ GA, D4590/1/3.

1792 it was stated that 'there is no lease now nor is it worthwhile to have one'.⁴¹

The regulations of the Weavers' Company were renewed in 1640, confirming practices which had been developed since at least the early 16th century.⁴² By this time common stock accumulated by the Company was distributed to members. Anyone setting up a loom in the town without the wardens' permission had to pay £10 and for a 'breakfast' for the company. The weavers were active in parish life and the wardens and Company were obliged to take up the weavers' seats in the church. Members had to serve as beadle of the company. Further rules were set out to protect the trade and fines for various misdemeanours were increased.⁴³ From 1672 the Weavers' Hall was used as a Presbyterian meeting place.⁴⁴

The Weavers' Company felt that its authority was being challenged in 1737, during the deliberations over the future of the Blue School.⁴⁵ The weavers believed a decree of the Lord Chancellor ran contrary to their charter, which they emphasised they had exercised regularly⁴⁶ and took legal advice about whether the charter covered weaving 'stockings, silks, stuffs or bags' and even considered applying for a new charter.⁴⁷ Eventually the wardens petitioned Benjamin Bathurst, MP for Cirencester, but the petition failed and the Company had to rely on their charter as it stood to maintain their monopoly.⁴⁸

In 1800, the Company continued to meet, but with the collapse of the weaving trade their purpose was increasingly convivial and members were not required to have a connection to weaving.⁴⁹ Their only continuing responsibilities were charitable, providing four tenements in St Thomas' Hospital and distributing the rent of an estate in the parish of Berkeley to poor members, bequeathed by Sir William Nottingham in 1483.⁵⁰ Meetings were rarely held more than once a year and functionaries such as the beadle and keykeeper were elected more sporadically in the late 18th century.⁵¹ The Weavers' Company continued to meet annually throughout the 19th and 20th centuries and administer its rather slender revenue, with legacies helping to maintain its almshouses.⁵² The members of the Company donated an inscribed Credence Table for use in the Chapel of the Holy Trinity in the parish church in 1975.⁵³

Parochial Administration

The first 'accompte' in the vestry book is dated July 1613. From 1612 two churchwardens were listed and a complete list of them has been compiled from the earliest named until 1912.⁵⁴ From

⁴¹ GA, D4590/3/3.

⁴² GA, D4590/2/1.

⁴³ GA, D4590/1/4.

⁴⁴ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1671–2, 341 and 343; *Cal. SP Dom.* 1672, 43.

⁴⁵ See Social: Education, Charity Schools.

⁴⁶ GA, D4590/6/1.

⁴⁷ GA, D4590/6/2.

⁴⁸ GA, D4590/6/3 and /4.

⁴⁹ Rudder, *Cirencester*, 170–1.

⁵⁰ GA, D4590/3/5; See Medieval: Religion, Nottingham's Service.

⁵¹ GA, D4590/2/1.

⁵² GA, D4590/8/1, *Wilts & Glos Standard*, 10 May 1884; H.J. Legg, *Cirencester Weavers' Company, 1918–1976* (1976).

⁵³ Legg, *Cirencester Weavers' Company*, 3.

⁵⁴ *Wilts and Glos Standard*, 30 Dec. 1911; reprint at GA, RV79.1GS.

1618 the appointment of four waymen or surveyors of the highways was recorded. The appointment of four sidesmen, who were assistants to the churchwardens and constables for the tithings, were detailed in the vestry book, and from 1624 four overseers of the poor.⁵⁵ Most appointments were initially made on Easter Monday, which was the only meeting recorded in the vestry book for long periods and was generally used to conduct the most important vestry business. Activities of the vestry were funded by taxes on householders, or rates. There was a rate for mending the church, relieving the poor, policing the parish (the constables' rate) and for fixing the roads (the surveyors' rate).⁵⁶

From 1647 a general meeting of the inhabitants was ordered to be held on the first Thursday of every month.⁵⁷ A venue for the meeting was secured in 1671, when a grant was made by the bishop of Gloucester, William Nicholson, to the minister and churchwardens to make public use of the church house or 'vise', which became the town hall.⁵⁸ In October 1736, the vestry decided to meet quarterly, with the first meeting at Easter and the other three on the quarter days, unless there was exceptionally urgent business.⁵⁹

A committee was appointed to conduct vestry affairs in September 1741, including Earl Bathurst, Thomas Master, the curate Joseph Harrison, appointees such as the constables and churchwardens and other leading figures, creating a closed vestry. Seven men had to be present to make a quorum. They would report their decisions back to the parish in 'full vestry' and Timbrell the town clerk was also clerk to the committee.⁶⁰ In 1742 the quorum was reduced to five.⁶¹ By 1750 the vestry was meeting on a monthly basis.⁶² Following bitter disagreements between the minister and vestry in the mid-1750s, all inhabitant householders were involved in electing one of the churchwardens and far fewer vestry meetings were recorded, often only one a year.

Treasurers

There were two treasurers of the church, who were chosen from among the leading men of the town, including Richard Danvers, John Coxwell and Robert George in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, who either did not serve for a specific term or the same men were consistently re-elected.⁶³ From 1614 one treasurer was elected each year to join the incumbent.⁶⁴ It seems likely that that they were a lay continuation of the system of treasurers established for the abbey in 1378, but were certainly appointed from at least the early 16th century.⁶⁵ In all matters relating to church property and the appointment of the schoolmaster, the minister was joined in his decisions by the churchwardens and the treasurers. The treasurers also agreed the orders for the churchwardens issued in 1615, checked their accounts before the parishioners to avoid contention

⁵⁵ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.46.

⁵⁶ GA, P86/1/IN/6/3, f.140–2.

⁵⁷ GA, P86a/CW/2/1, f.11; GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.64.

⁵⁸ GA, P86a/CW/2/1, f.1; P86/1/VE/2/1, f.223.

⁵⁹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.120.

⁶⁰ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.126.

⁶¹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.128.

⁶² GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.143.

⁶³ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, ff.25–6, 44–6.

⁶⁴ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.44; P86/1/IN/6/3, f.142.

⁶⁵ See Cirencester Abbey: Internal Structure and Management; E.A. Fuller, *The Parish Church of St. John Baptist, Cirencester* (Cirencester, 1882), 16.

and gave consent to leases issued by the churchwardens.⁶⁶ At some point after 1624, when the treasurers stop being mentioned in the church accounts, only one treasurer served at a time.⁶⁷ A treasurer was still included in an agreement of 1719.⁶⁸

Churchwardens

Churchwardens often served for two, sometimes three years consecutively. Their responsibilities, which included the numerous charitable trusts of the town and the property associated with them and such contentious duties as the assignment of seats in the church were set out in an agreement of 1615. Charitable donations were received by the churchwardens and had to be registered with the treasurers and six principal men of the town. Their accounts had to be checked by the church treasurers, with money spent on the church and taken for renting seats recorded in detail. A list of money and leases given for the maintenance of the church poor was to be drawn up and read at every accompte to stir the generosity of others.⁶⁹ A memorandum listed additional duties. All tenants of church land and tenements were to bring their leases and have them enrolled in the parish register. Forthwith, no lease was to be granted for longer than 21 years or three lives and a clause would be inserted whereby any payments that were more than 21 days late would result in the lease being terminated. One of the treasurers and a churchwarden were to survey the state of all premises annually and present any problems of poor conditions or abuse of properties at the accompte. Finally the church was to be repaired and storage arranged for leases and accounts.⁷⁰ All these duties are reflected in the churchwardens' accounts.⁷¹ The churchwardens' business occasionally took them to London: Edward King was reimbursed for his journey in 1647 and offered expenses if parish business kept him in London longer than he needed in 1651.⁷²

Following a gap in the accounts beginning in 1668, from 1700 the two churchwardens' accounts were listed separately, with one taking rents and making payments relating to the church and the other receiving and disbursing monies related to the parish charities.⁷³ Receipt of briefs was accounted for by both men. In 1717 new rules for auditing the churchwardens' accounts were introduced. Henceforth they would have to provide receipts for all money paid out of the church rents, they were banned from giving church money to the poor, they were told to keep a closer check on paid seating in the church and limits were placed on what they could claim for various fees and expenses.⁷⁴

The divisions in the town over the parliamentary election in 1754 led to the appointment by mandamus of James Croome as the warden for the poor and Benjamin Bathurst and John Timbrell as joint wardens for the church⁷⁵ and prevented a satisfactory audit of the churchwardens' accounts for 1754 and 1755, when John Cripps was the warden for the poor and Thomas Parsons

⁶⁶ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.43 and 57.

⁶⁷ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.46; P86/1/IN/6/4, f.129.

⁶⁸ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.35.

⁶⁹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.43; GA, D10820/L3-1-b, S.E. Harrison, *The Cirencester Vestry Book During the 17th Century* (1914), 10–11.

⁷⁰ Harrison, *The Cirencester Vestry Book During the 17th Century*, 11.

⁷¹ GA, P86a/CW/2/1.

⁷² GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.63 and 67.

⁷³ GA, P86a/CW/2/1, ff.109–17.

⁷⁴ GA, P86a/CW/2/1, f.201.

⁷⁵ GA, P86/1/IN/6/3, II, f.6; See Parliamentary Representation.

and John Timbrell were joint wardens for the church.⁷⁶ A case was heard at Gloucester assizes with Charles Coxe as plaintiff and the recently appointed minister Samuel Johnson as defendant, over the established procedure of the outgoing postholders nominating four eligible men, from whom the minister chose one and the parishioners elected the other.⁷⁷

In March 1755 the great chest in the vestry room was broken open and £467 0s. 1d. was stolen in cash and bonds, an incident possibly related to the recent troubles.⁷⁸ In the same month John Cripps was elected churchwarden with his majority of 86 recorded for the first time.⁷⁹ A compromise was reached in 1756 when one churchwarden was chosen by the minister and the other elected by the parishioners, although this process was not to affect their customary rights.⁸⁰ This method continued in the following years.⁸¹ The minister used his appointment of a churchwarden for 1776, 1777 and 1778 to aid him in his struggle with the vestry, who then stopped attending the vestry and failed to hand in his accounts in 1778, meaning a rate could not be set for the year.⁸² In many years the election of the churchwarden was not contested but in 1793 Edward Cripps was elected churchwarden ahead of Daniel Masters, by a majority of 141.⁸³

Overseers of the poor

The vestry chose their overseers of the poor but occasional interventions in their decisions were necessary, as in 1703 when the justices of the peace replaced two of the elected overseers, John Cleaveland and Phillipp Painter, with their own choice of candidates.⁸⁴ The rejected men were then appointed overseers by the magistrates in 1704. Their intervention became more pronounced, perhaps because they had repeatedly rejected one candidate for overseer, Thomas Browne, and in 1707 also John Browne. In 1708 they rejected all four elected overseers and made the appointments themselves.⁸⁵ From 1708 onwards, all overseers of the poor were appointed by the magistrates.⁸⁶ In October 1742 the vestry agreed to use the poor rates to appeal a decision at the quarter sessions regarding the inequality of poor rates paid by Lord Bathurst, his tenants and the inhabitants of the town.⁸⁷

Surveyors of the highways

There is little early evidence relating to the role of the waymen or supervisors of the highways, but it would appear that their major responsibility was to inspect the roads, bridges and walls around the town and to ensure that residents were maintaining those adjacent to their own land.⁸⁸ From 1704 the surveyors of the highways were elected and then confirmed by the magistrates, at

⁷⁶ GA, P86a/CW/2/1.

⁷⁷ GA, P86/1/IN/6/3, II, f.3.

⁷⁸ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.152.

⁷⁹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.152.

⁸⁰ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.154.

⁸¹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.155.

⁸² GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.169–70, f.176; P86a/VE/5/4; P86/1/VE/2/1, f.175–8.

⁸³ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.193.

⁸⁴ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.105.

⁸⁵ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.107.

⁸⁶ for other appointments relating to poor relief, below: ???

⁸⁷ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.128.

⁸⁸ Harrison, *The Cirencester Vestry Book During the 17th Century*, 16–7; GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.97.

Christmas and in January instead of Easter.⁸⁹ In November 1739 a new rate of 6d. in the pound was collected by the vestry for repair of the highways, which they agreed would be paid for even in cases where those people who were customarily responsible refused to carry out repairs.⁹⁰ In 1746 four men were made supervisors of the hundred. Thomas Hughes was paid £3 3s. for collecting the rate for repairing the highways.⁹¹ In January 1766 a rate of 3d. was made for repairing the highways which was proportional to the poor rate.⁹² The supervisors of the highway were asked to make a rate of 6d. in the pound in 1776 and to make any repairs necessary within the hundred.⁹³ James Pincott, mason was contracted by the vestry to pitch, repair and amend the highways in the hundred for seven years from 1779, with a salary of £70.⁹⁴ With the arrival of a turnpike road in Castle Ward in 1783, Pincott's salary was reduced to £30.⁹⁵

Vestry Clerk and Sexton

The terms vestry, town and parish clerk were used interchangeably throughout the period. Reference was first made in 1551 to the late clerk Richard Blake, who was threatened with legal action if he failed to return the ledger books.⁹⁶ The role of clerk was twinned with that of the keepers of the church clock and chimes, and their long years of service were a rare source of stability amid the religious turbulence of the 16th century. The first recorded keeper of the clock and chimes was William Chapman, who lived in the porch house. Next was Thomas Farington, who held the position for 27 years and was also made church clerk. He died in the time of the plague in 1578.⁹⁷ He was succeeded by John Baker, who was clock-keeper and clerk and also rented the porch house to tenants.⁹⁸ By 1621 Baker was also the sexton, the first mention of the role.⁹⁹ Baker died in 1631, having been clerk for nearly 53 years.¹⁰⁰ Thomas Moore was clerk in 1639, when an order was made for him to be paid 20s. annually for attending vestry meetings and keeping the ledger book.¹⁰¹ He died in 1672, aged 92.¹⁰²

A general meeting was held in 1647, when the churchwardens and constables were asked to decide what was due to the sexton and what to the parish clerk, as William Webbe and Walter Portlock held the offices together.¹⁰³ At another general meeting in 1648 Webbe was designated as keeper of the bells and chimes, and was required to account for the graves dug and to keep the church, chapel and porch clean. Portlock was made the clerk and had to attend upon the

⁸⁹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.106.

⁹⁰ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.125.

⁹¹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.137.

⁹² GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.162.

⁹³ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.173.

⁹⁴ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.180.

⁹⁵ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.185.

⁹⁶ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.65

⁹⁷ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.27; 18thC transcriptions in GA, P86/1/IN/6/1.

⁹⁸ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.27 and f.39.

⁹⁹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.7; P86/1/IN/6/1 f.6.

¹⁰⁰ GA, P86/1/IN/6/1, f.1.

¹⁰¹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.57.

¹⁰² GA, D10820/L3-1-b, Harrison, *The Cirencester Vestry Book During the 17th Century*, 8.

¹⁰³ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.63–4; GA, P86/1/IN/6/1.

minister.¹⁰⁴ Webbe and Portlock were put in joint charge of the register for christenings, weddings and burials.¹⁰⁵ William Webbe died in 1664 and the office of sexton passed to his brother John and his widow Edith.¹⁰⁶ In 1672 at a public vestry meeting, John Webb's son, also John, was made town clerk in place of Thomas Moore, who died aged 92. Edith Webb died in the same year and John Webb the younger was elected sexton.¹⁰⁷

In 1684 an extensive agreement was made between the sexton Henry Belcher and the vestry. Belcher was given the job for life on condition of good behaviour and was granted the house in the church porch, which the vestry agreed to repair as it was in a ruinous state. Belcher was also made town clerk with a wage of 20s. for attending vestry and other public meetings, and could retain the profits he earned from any other writing commissions.¹⁰⁸ He was leased a house by the churchwardens with £2 rent in 1686.¹⁰⁹ Belcher died and was replaced by Henry Timbrell as sexton, town clerk and register in 1710.¹¹⁰ The next appointment was of Thomas Hughes in 1745.¹¹¹ From 1753 the sexton was entitled to charge a 1s. fee for searches in the parish register.¹¹² In 1775 the sexton's salary was £5 and the duties of an under sexton were listed, mainly involving bell ringing and cleaning.¹¹³

Thomas Hughes resigned in 1775, when the vestry chose Timothy Stevens, who had been assisting with his duties for ten years, to replace him.¹¹⁴ The minister chose an alternative candidate called John Fisher.¹¹⁵ In the ensuing struggle, the minister went so far as to order the gravedigger Barton to change the locks on the church. Fisher resigned, but the minister and churchwardens appointed Thomas Lediard in his place. This led to a protracted legal dispute.¹¹⁶ Following a poll, which Stevens won with 155 votes to 60 for Lediard,¹¹⁷ Stevens was appointed without the consent of the minister and churchwardens.¹¹⁸ Following several years of disputes and a change of minister, articles of agreement were finally drawn up for Stevens.¹¹⁹

Stevens kept detailed accounts from 1775 of money taken for burials and more intermittently for ringing of the church bells.¹²⁰ He paid a deputy Thomas Haines for jobs including dressing the church and cleaning the chancel.¹²¹ The Stevens family made the position of clerk almost

¹⁰⁴ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.65a.

¹⁰⁵ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.72b.

¹⁰⁶ GA, P86/1/IN/1/2; P86/1/VE/2/1, f.75 and f.77

¹⁰⁷ GA, P86/1/IN/6/1 f.2 and P86/1/VE/2/1, f.80.

¹⁰⁸ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.91–2 and P86/1/IN/6/1 f.3.

¹⁰⁹ GA, P86a/CW/2/1, f.9.

¹¹⁰ GA, P86/1/IN/6/1 f.4 and P86/1/VE/3/5.

¹¹¹ GA, P86/1/IN/6/1 f.4.

¹¹² GA, P86a/VE/5/3

¹¹³ GA, P86a/VE/4/1.

¹¹⁴ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.171.

¹¹⁵ GA, P86/1/IN/6/1 f.4.

¹¹⁶ GA, P86a/VE/5/4.

¹¹⁷ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.172.

¹¹⁸ GA, P86/1/IN/6/1 f.6.

¹¹⁹ GA, P86/1/VE/3/5.

¹²⁰ GA, P86a/VE/4/1 and P86a/VE/4/2.

¹²¹ GA, P86a/VE/4/2.

hereditary. Timothy was son of an earlier parish clerk for 40 years called Joseph, and was succeeded by his son.¹²² However, after Stevens died in 1816 the vestry, no doubt mindful of their earlier difficulties, separated the offices of clerk and sexton. Stevens's son, also Timothy Stevens, succeeded him as clerk, while John Smith became sexton.¹²³ Stevens had a rival for the office of clerk, Joseph Mountain. Both men began canvassing for votes and had handbills printed declaring their candidacies but Mountain conceded.¹²⁴ The younger Timothy Stevens and Smith were still in office in 1825.

Gravedigger or under sexton

Fees were set out in 1661 for 'he that digs the graves', but without mention of any particular appointee.¹²⁵ A gravedigger, William Jones, appointed in 1666, was asked to walk around the church during sermons and keep order among the boys.¹²⁶ The post of gravedigger became a point of contention after the incumbent of 18 years John Paul was removed by the minister Joseph Harrison and the churchwardens for not voting as they wished at an election. Thomas Gardiner was appointed in his place. Harrison died in 1753 and the new minister Samuel Johnson with the two churchwardens reappointed John Paul. This led to a legal dispute when a father with his dead child was faced with two graves dug by the two diggers and an ultimatum from the minister that no burial would take place in Gardiner's grave.¹²⁷

Organist

In 1684 the sexton had to pay the organist (at that time Charles Badham) £10 annually from his perquisites, continuing in 1710.¹²⁸ In January 1730 the vestry met to elect a new organist, following the death of the previous incumbent, George Glanvill. He was replaced by his son of the same name.¹²⁹ However, the younger Glanvill was suspended in March 1733 until he had carried out a penance imposed by an ecclesiastical court for begetting a bastard, having already been found guilty in a civil court of adultery with his wife's servant. In the meantime, the churchwardens sought out a temporary replacement who would receive Glanvill's salary.¹³⁰ Glanvill denied the charge and as the mother had fled without presenting the child at an archdeacon's visitation to Cirencester, the evidence available was thought to be insufficient to prove Glanvill's guilt. The curate Joseph Harrison agreed that it was not worth proceeding any further against Glanvill.¹³¹ Glanvill's avoidance of punishment was not well received by the members of the vestry to whom he had already admitted his guilt, and in October 1733 he was replaced as organist by Charles Smith.¹³²

In January 1750 George Saxon was appointed organist on the same terms following the death of

¹²² Jan Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2006), 23–4.

¹²³ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.225.

¹²⁴ GA, P86a/VE/5/5.

¹²⁵ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.73.

¹²⁶ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.76.

¹²⁷ GA, P86/1/IN/6/3, II, f.5.

¹²⁸ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.95; P86/1/IN/6/1 f.4; *Cirencester Parish Magazine*, 89 (May 1896).

¹²⁹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.114.

¹³⁰ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.115.

¹³¹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.116.

¹³² GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.116.

Smith.¹³³ Saxon became delirious in March 1753 and showed no signs of recovery by May, so the vestry replaced him with George Whatley, who was made a member of the King's band of music in 1774.¹³⁴ He was allowed a salary of £25, with £10 from the sexton, £2 from the churchwardens and £13 from a parishioners' subscription.¹³⁵ Following his death he was replaced by his son, also George in 1799.¹³⁶ The appointment of a new organist in 1817 was postponed for six months at the request of David Whatley, a relative of the previous incumbent, so that he could train Caroline Whatley to take up the role. He also undertook to make a temporary appointment within a year. When George Whatley died that year, he was replaced by Arnold Merrick.¹³⁷

Public Services

Fire Brigade

Fighting fires was a haphazard affair relying on voluntary efforts, but the parish did take the lead in supplying equipment. The earliest church inventory of 1614 listed a ladder with 29 rungs and a town crook 'for adventure of fire'.¹³⁸ The church continued accumulating firefighting equipment through the 17th century. An inventory of 1633 listed two crooks, two ladders and 18 leather buckets.¹³⁹ In 1662 it was stipulated that anyone renting land or houses from the church had to supply a bucket as well as the money they owed.¹⁴⁰ Some leases demanded two or even three buckets.¹⁴¹ Mr Master donated 12 buckets in 1665 and a further 20 buckets were purchased by the churchwardens in 1672.¹⁴² The church also continued to keep ladders which it rented out.¹⁴³

From the 18th century private donations of equipment and advances in technology improved the town's ability to fight fires. A large fire engine was given to the town by Sir Benjamin Bathurst around the beginning of the 18th century and a Newsham engine was purchased by the town's MPs, Henry Bathurst and Thomas Master, during the 1730s or 1740s.¹⁴⁴ In September 1760 the parish paid for the repair of the engines.¹⁴⁵ A vestry meeting was held in 1780 to agree the purchase of a new fire engine and the maintenance of the old ones twice a year, which would be the responsibility of the overseers.¹⁴⁶

Policing

The manorial administration continued to provide the town with a system of policing from 1540. Two constables were elected at the view of frankpledge. There was also a tithingman for each of

¹³³ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.144.

¹³⁴ GA, D3439/1/157, Hockaday Abs. CLVII.

¹³⁵ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.149.

¹³⁶ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.201.

¹³⁷ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.227.

¹³⁸ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.42.

¹³⁹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.51.

¹⁴⁰ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.74.

¹⁴¹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.76 and 80.

¹⁴² GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.80.

¹⁴³ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.76.

¹⁴⁴ GA, P86/1/IN/6/3, f.5.

¹⁴⁵ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.158.

¹⁴⁶ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.182.

the town's seven wards. Either the constables or tithingmen brought offences such as insults, affray or harbouring vagrants before the 12 jurors who sat at the view of frankpledge. At a view of frankpledge for the town on 8 October 1550, a tithingman presented several low-level public order offences including an insult, a fight and an insult and affray committed by Robert Major, 'to the effusion of blood, upon Agnes Deetlezey', which commanded fines of 6d. and 9d. Roger Saunders and John Bromhyll were elected to the office of constable.¹⁴⁷

The same court roll described a busier view of frankpledge on 23 April 1553, which detailed further offences, including the failure of Thomas Syndlehurst to clean the pavement opposite his house, which carried a fine of 12d., and several men who allowed their pigs to roam free in public places. John Roberts and Richard Saundye of 'Instropp Street' were fined for harbouring 'wandering women' with no occupation and 'vagrant and vagabond men'. This view received 41s. 4d. of amerancements.¹⁴⁸

A view of frankpledge held in May 1559 fined three people 12d. for harbouring 'upright men', a notorious criminal caste in Elizabethan England. In October 1559, two officers of the tithing were sworn for each ward, with some also said to be elected, and thereafter this appears to have become standard practice.¹⁴⁹ At the view of frankpledge in May 1572, the constables, John Staunton and John Webley, presented more serious crimes, including several assaults with daggers, and in one case a 'candelabre'. There were more cases of violent behaviour in 1572 than were recorded in the 1550s.¹⁵⁰

The bailiff for the manor, Robert Strange, reported to the Privy Council in 1571 that 'watch and ward had been made for rogues and vagabonds in Cirencester and the seven adjacent hundreds, but no suspected persons found.'¹⁵¹ There are mentions of a gaol in 1545 and a 'gaile' in Cirencester in 1574.¹⁵² A gaol or bridewell was in Dyer Street next to the Bear Inn from at least the end of the 17th century until it fell out of use around 1840.¹⁵³ The County Quarter Sessions were occasionally held in Cirencester.¹⁵⁴

During the 17th century the parish also made efforts to tackle vagrancy in the town. A 'biddle (beadle) of beggars' was appointed in 1618 with 12 orders for describing his work and conduct. These included keeping strange beggars out of the town; reporting any idleness, drunkenness or theft committed by those in receipt of alms (or if they were able to work) to the officers of the town; preventing the poor from begging; inquiring if anyone was poor due to sickness; keeping noisy babies away from church; warning alehouse keepers not to suffer the poor drinking too much; ensuring the poor behaved and begged in an orderly manner; keeping children over seven from loitering, setting them to work as appropriate; informing the justices if anyone said they lacked work; and ensuring nobody fouled the streets, that residents kept the streets in front of

¹⁴⁷ GA, D1375/495.

¹⁴⁸ GA, D1375/495.

¹⁴⁹ GA, D1375/496.

¹⁵⁰ GA, D1375/208, m.2.

¹⁵¹ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1547–80, 424.

¹⁵² *L&P Hen. VIII*, XX (1), p.300; F.D. Price (ed.), *The Commission for Ecclesiastical Causes Within the Dioceses of Bristol and Gloucester, 1574* (1972), 74.

¹⁵³ GA, P86/1/CH/12/2.

¹⁵⁴ GA, D8887/3

their house clean; and keeping the streets clear of pigs.¹⁵⁵

The post of beadle seems to have lapsed repeatedly and was recommenced in 1641, 1666 and 1705.¹⁵⁶ Richard Harris was reappointed in 1641 with £8 a year wages and provided with a coat and staff.¹⁵⁷ In 1666 a resolution was made to appoint another beadle under the same terms as earlier in the century.¹⁵⁸ James Viner was beadle in 1667 and was to be paid monthly by the overseers.¹⁵⁹ A new rate was introduced in 1705 for a 'Belman Beedle', to perform a variety of customary duties at the usual salary.¹⁶⁰

From the 18th century the two high constables for Cirencester were appointed by the justices at the quarter sessions and their responsibilities were set out in full.¹⁶¹ The town very occasionally cooperated with the surrounding area. In 1749 the vestry set a rate of half a penny for repaying the constables of the hundred for carrying prisoners to gaol.¹⁶² An association for the prosecution of felons was established in Cirencester in 1774.¹⁶³ It seems that a lock-up was present in the town well before 1804, when a new one was constructed on Gloucester Street.¹⁶⁴

Health and hospitals [with Louise Ryland-Epton]

Medical provision for the poor in the parish developed alongside the workhouse. In 1740 Thomas Coleman was employed as apothecary to the workhouse at a salary of £40.¹⁶⁵ Similar medical appointments were made until 1784.¹⁶⁶ William Lawrence the apothecary was also hired as town doctor in 1776 with a salary of £15 a year, and instructions to treat anyone in the workhouse or in receipt of poor relief.¹⁶⁷ Joseph Cullurme was hired as apothecary and surgeon to the town in 1784 with a salary of £20.¹⁶⁸ Subsequently the post of surgeon and apothecary was selected annually.¹⁶⁹ Between 1818 and 1830 the post was annually rotated between three surgeons, John Bedwell, Daniel Sparkes and Charles Warner in every year except one. In 1819 the vestry agreed that the apothecary need not treat anyone further than three miles from the town.¹⁷⁰ From 1823 apothecaries could not be elected unless they had been living and practising in the town for at least a year.¹⁷¹

¹⁵⁵ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, ff.45–6.

¹⁵⁶ Harrison, *The Cirencester Vestry Book During the 17th Century*, 14.

¹⁵⁷ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.61.

¹⁵⁸ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.76.

¹⁵⁹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.77.

¹⁶⁰ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.106.

¹⁶¹ GA Q/SN/1; B. Jerrard, 'Early policing methods in Gloucestershire', *Trans. BGAS*, 100 (1982), 223–4.

¹⁶² GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.142.

¹⁶³ Jerrard, 'Early policing methods in Gloucestershire', 228; K.J. Beecham, *History of Cirencester and the Roman City of Corinium* (Dursley, 1978), 161–2.

¹⁶⁴ GA, D2525/R10; D. Viner, 'Lock-ups at Cirencester and Bibury', *Trans. BGAS*, 109 (1991), 208–9.

¹⁶⁵ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, 14 Oct. 1740, 28 Aug. 1741.

¹⁶⁶ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, 1 Mar. 1744, 4 Oct. 1751, 10 Feb. 1758, 19 Nov. 1773.

¹⁶⁷ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.170.

¹⁶⁸ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.186.

¹⁶⁹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, 16 Apr. 1784, 14 Apr. 1785, 28 Apr. 1786.

¹⁷⁰ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.229.

¹⁷¹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.233.

Between 1732 and 1762 various attempts were also made to provide a pest house for the use of the poor when infected with smallpox or any other infectious disease.¹⁷² These were generally short term, possibly because the accommodation was not continuously required. In January 1732 the churchwardens rented a building adjacent to the Querns from Lord Bathurst for £5 a year to be used during outbreaks of smallpox or other illness.¹⁷³ A search began in 1746 for a location for a pest house, and £5 of the poor rate was allocated for securing a building.¹⁷⁴ Money was assigned in 1747 for nursing children with the smallpox at the old Chesterton house.¹⁷⁵ Payment of £8 to Benjamin Bathurst was authorised for a house for those with smallpox or other infectious diseases, with the option to rent an interim property while it was made ready.¹⁷⁶ The old Chesterton house was again rented from Daniel Gibbs for housing people with the smallpox and other infectious diseases for £4 4s.¹⁷⁷ Payments for nursing care or hospital treatment were occasionally made, and from 1793 subscriptions were paid to Bath hospital and Gloucester infirmary.¹⁷⁸

In the late 18th century inoculation was also used to fight smallpox. In 1774 the vestry threatened to prosecute a parishioner if he did not have his children inoculated.¹⁷⁹ In January 1796, regulations were agreed with the town's apothecaries regarding the prevention of the spread of smallpox. Inoculations were to be administered and clothing and bedding left in the house of infection. Visiting was not allowed.¹⁸⁰ However, showing an ambivalent attitude to its efficacy, by February the vestry decided that the only way to prevent the spread of infection was to stop all inoculation for six months.¹⁸¹

Parliamentary Representation

After acquiring the abbey's lands in 1547, Sir Thomas Seymour had two MPs returned to Parliament for the borough, constituting a restoration rather than an enfranchisement, as members had previously been returned in the 14th century. There is no evidence of another election in Cirencester until 1571, possibly instigated by the Earl of Leicester.¹⁸² The lack of representation in previous parliaments was questioned by the House of Commons and the issue referred to the returns committee.¹⁸³ However, two burgesses were again returned in 1572: Thomas Poole and Thomas Strange, son of the bailiff Robert Strange.¹⁸⁴ Influence in the borough changed hands along with the largest estates; the Masters returned many MPs from George Master onwards, elected in 1586 and 1588, and the Poole family took over the Danvers interest in 1597, following the flight and eventual execution of Charles Danvers, who took the senior seat in

¹⁷² GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, 9 Jan. 1732, 11 July 1746, 9 Aug. 1751, 12 Feb. 1762; P86/1/IN/6/3.

¹⁷³ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.115.

¹⁷⁴ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.135-6.

¹⁷⁵ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.138.

¹⁷⁶ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.146.

¹⁷⁷ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.147.

¹⁷⁸ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, 31 May 1754, 23 Feb. 1753, 20 Apr. 1793.

¹⁷⁹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.167.

¹⁸⁰ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.198.

¹⁸¹ GA, P86/1/VE/2/1, f.199.

¹⁸² *Hist. Parl. Commons 1509-1558*, Cirencester.

¹⁸³ CJ 1, 83.

¹⁸⁴ Beecham, *History of Cirencester and the Roman City of Corinium*, 174.

1586 and 1588.¹⁸⁵ Both families had strong connections with Wiltshire and rather than using their interest to return Gloucestershire gentry, Cirencester tended to be represented by local men.¹⁸⁶ The elections of 1604 were the exception, when London lawyers were twice returned to Parliament.¹⁸⁷ In 1614 Robert Strange became an MP for the borough, following in his father Thomas' footsteps.¹⁸⁸

Unusually for Cirencester thus far, the 1624 election was contested. Henry Poole took the first seat by right, but the second was competed over by Sir William Master, Sir Maurice Berkeley and John George.¹⁸⁹ As there was no law or custom to designate who the electors should be, the opinion of a local serjeant at law was sought, who thought the electorate was restricted to borough freeholders. The competitors agreed, and after some confusion, the under-sheriff managed to organise a count of freeholders, with the bailiff acting as returning officer. Sir William Master was declared to have won by five votes. Sir Maurice Berkeley and his supporters petitioned Parliament to have the result overturned as unlawful, due to the 'sinister practice and procurement of William Bird, the under-sheriff'.¹⁹⁰ The Commons Committee of Privileges found that Bird had not acted improperly, that agreement of competitors could not alter the course of an election and that in an unincorporated borough without law or precedent, the electorate should extend to all householders. Nevertheless, Sir William Master was duly elected.¹⁹¹ Connections to the Master or Poole interests decided most of the representatives throughout the rest of the 1620s.¹⁹²

The turmoil of the civil war put the representation of Cirencester into a state of flux. The Puritan and Parliamentarian John George was twice elected in 1640, but was captured at the sack of Cirencester.¹⁹³ George was disqualified with his fellow MP Sir Thomas Gorges for following the king to Oxford in 1644.¹⁹⁴ A writ was issued in 1646 for two new burgesses to be elected.¹⁹⁵ A by-election ensued in 1647, which was contested by two lists, comprising Thomas Fairfax and Nathaniel Rich on one side, with John Gifford and Isaac Bromwich on the other. Fairfax and Rich apparently had a clear majority, but Gifford and Bromwich were returned amidst accusations that the town was packed with ex-Cavalier soldiers and that Lady Poole had bribed the bailiff.¹⁹⁶ The result was referred to the Committee of Privileges and was not resolved until 1649, when Rich and Fairfax were eventually returned.¹⁹⁷ As a borough, Cirencester sent no member to the Parliament

¹⁸⁵ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1558-1603*, Cirencester; Baddeley, *Cirencester*, 240.

¹⁸⁶ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1604-1629*, Cirencester.

¹⁸⁷ D. Rollison, *Commune, Country and Commonwealth: the People of Cirencester, 1117-1643* (Woodbridge, 2011), 217.

¹⁸⁸ Williams, *Parl. Hist. of Glos.* 154.

¹⁸⁹ 'Diary of Sir Walter Earle', ff.152-3 from '20th April 1624', in P. Baker (ed.), *Proceedings in Parliament 1624: The House of Commons* (2015).

¹⁹⁰ J. Glanville, *Reports of Certain Cases Determined and Adjudged by the Commons in Parliament* (1775), 104.

¹⁹¹ *CJ*, 1, 708.

¹⁹² *Hist. Parl. Commons 1604-1629*, Cirencester.

¹⁹³ A.R. Warmington, *Civil War, Interregnum and Restoration in Gloucestershire 1640-1672* (1997), 27.

¹⁹⁴ J. Rushworth, 'Historical Collections: The Lords and Commons at Oxford, 1644', in *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State* 5, 1642-45 (London, 1721), 559-603; 'Cases before the Committee: December 1645', in M.A.E. Green (ed.), *Calendar, Committee For Compounding* 2, (London, 1890), 1040-1069; Baddeley, *Cirencester*, 246.

¹⁹⁵ *CJ*, 4, 712-4.

¹⁹⁶ Warmington, *Civil War*, 84.

¹⁹⁷ *CJ*, 6, 135-6; 17 Feb. 1649, 144-5.

of 1653, and was represented by John Stone, a Londoner without local connections, throughout the 1650s. Stone was joined by a second MP and another Londoner, Robert Southby, in 1659.¹⁹⁸ Interests in Cirencester borough changed hands once again following the Restoration, although the Abbey estate remained in the hands of the Masters. The first Earl of Newburgh married the daughter of Sir Henry Poole in 1660, bringing him the manor of Cirencester. Poole sold most of the rest of his estates in Cirencester to Robert Atkyns (d. 1710) during the 1660s.¹⁹⁹ In the 1660 election, Thomas Master I (d. 1680) and Henry Powle – both from Cavalier families – were returned, despite a petition by the defeated candidate, John George.²⁰⁰ George was subsequently returned in 1661, along with the first Earl of Newburgh. Newburgh died in 1670 and the ensuing by-election was contested by Henry Powle and Atkyns's son, Sir Robert Atkyns of Sapperton (d. 1711).²⁰¹ Powle was returned but Atkyns petitioned against the result, due to a disturbance between Master and John Grobham Howe I, a new interest in the borough.²⁰² The petition was referred to the Committee of Elections, but the disturbance was not thought sufficient to make the election void.²⁰³ Following the death of John George, Sir Robert Atkyns and Henry Powle were returned at the three exclusion elections of 1679-81.²⁰⁴ Atkyns became a representative of the county in 1685. Thomas Master II (d. 1710) was returned for one seat, presumably unopposed. The other seat was won from the Whig Powle by Charles Livingston, 2nd Earl of Newburgh. Powle petitioned against the result on the grounds that some of Newburgh's supporters were in receipt of alms, but examination of the petition was delayed by an adjournment and appears to have been later withdrawn.²⁰⁵ Thomas Master II and the aggressively whiggish John 'Jack' Grobham Howe II were returned in 1689, probably without a contest, as it is unlikely that the Jacobite Earl of Newburgh stood.²⁰⁶ Powle was elected for New Windsor and became Speaker of the House of Commons.²⁰⁷

The relatively large electorate, including a considerable dissenting community and the high church Tory leanings of Cirencester's major families and their supporters, made for a highly charged political culture. In 1690, the seats were contested by Henry Powle, Jack Howe and his cousin, Richard Grobham Howe. The latter announced his decision to withdraw from the contest thinking his position to be hopeless, but in doing so inadvertently lulled his opponents into a false sense of security. Richard Howe enjoyed a late resurgence thanks in part to Lord Newburgh's arrival in Cirencester.²⁰⁸ Amidst angry disputes about the legitimacy of many of the voters who were in receipt of charitable 'by-money' but not alms, the Tory steward Charles Coxe decided the count in favour of Richard Howe and Henry Powle.²⁰⁹ Jack Howe held that he had won the vote on any

¹⁹⁸ Williams, *Parl. Hist. of Glos.* 161.

¹⁹⁹ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1660-1690*, Cirencester.

²⁰⁰ Warmington, *Civil War*, 167; *CJ*, 8, 92-3.

²⁰¹ *CJ*, 9, 176-8; *Hist. Parl. Commons 1660-1690*, Cirencester.

²⁰² *CJ*, 9, 188-9; *Hist. Parl. Commons 1660-1690*, Cirencester.

²⁰³ *CJ*, 9, 205-7.

²⁰⁴ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1660-1690*, Cirencester.

²⁰⁵ *CJ*, 9, 715-8; 11 June 1685 732-3; *Hist. Parl. Commons 1660-1690*, Cirencester.; *CJ*, 10, 426-9.

²⁰⁶ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1660-1690*, Cirencester.

²⁰⁷ *ODNB*, 'Powle, Henry (bap. 1630, d. 1692)'..

²⁰⁸ Longleat House, Thynne papers 18, ff. 191-94, 197, 200; 26, f. 496.

²⁰⁹ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1690-1715*, Cirencester.

reckoning.²¹⁰ He petitioned against the result in March and again in October, when the Committee of Privileges decided that those in receipt of by-money and inmates were not allowed to vote, and upheld the returns of Powle and Richard Howe.²¹¹ The House narrowly overturned the decision excluding voters in receipt of by-money and referred the matter back to committee. The committee resolved to hear further evidence and then referred the dispute to the Bar of the House, which finally decided that Jack Howe should replace Henry Powle as representative for Cirencester.²¹²

Powle died in 1692 and his son in law, Henry Ireton, contested the 1695 election in partnership with Sir John Guise.²¹³ They were against Richard Grobham Howe and Jack Howe, the latter now a 'country' spokesman associated with Tory leaders, having lost his Court offices in 1692.²¹⁴ The Howe cousins had the support of the town's Tory interest of the Master family and Sir Benjamin Bathurst, who had recently acquired Cirencester manor (along with the right to appoint the returning officer) from Lord Newburgh's widow.²¹⁵ The Howes were duly returned, following an unsuccessful petition by Ireton.²¹⁶ Ireton was successful in winning a seat in 1698, when Richard Grobham Howe contested a Wiltshire seat. Jack was defeated by Charles Coxe, steward to Cirencester manor and kinsman of Thomas Master, but was returned for a county seat.²¹⁷ Coxe was returned unopposed along with James Thynne in January 1701 and retained his seat again in December, when William Master was also successful in defeating a challenge from Henry Ireton. Coxe and Master continued unchallenged in 1702.²¹⁸ The 1705 election was fiercely contested and was the first in which the dissenting community of Cirencester voted *en masse* for the Whig candidates.²¹⁹ Allen Bathurst put forward his candidature following the death of his father the year before, and was partnered by Coxe. They were opposed by the Whigs Ireton and Thomas Onslow. Bathurst topped the poll, but Ireton and Coxe gained an equal number of votes and upon the bailiff's refusal to return Ireton, violence erupted. As a compromise, a double return was made of Ireton and Coxe. Both petitioned Parliament accusing the other of bribery, but Coxe withdrew his petition, leaving Ireton to be selected with Bathurst.²²⁰

Bathurst and Coxe stood again in 1708, defeating the Whig Thomas Onslow. Onslow's supporters petitioned against the result alleging bribery.²²¹ The petition was heard at the Bar of the House and, following a decision that inhabitants of the old abbey land and the Emery and Spiringate Lane should not be allowed to vote in future, the election was declared void.²²² Bathurst and Coxe went on to win the by-election against Henry O'Brien, the Earl of Thomond, and Major Long. Thomas

²¹⁰ *The case of J. Howe, touching the election of Cirencester* (London, 1690).

²¹¹ *CJ*, 10, 350-4, 426-9.

²¹² *CJ*, 10, 426-9, 465-8, 482-3.

²¹³ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1690-1715*, Cirencester.

²¹⁴ ODNB, 'Howe, John Grobham (1657-1722)'.

²¹⁵ Williams, *Parl. Hist. of Glos.*, 163.

²¹⁶ *CJ*, 11, 353-5.

²¹⁷ *Cal. SP Dom.* William III, 1698, 369-84.

²¹⁸ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1690-1715*, Cirencester.

²¹⁹ Beecham, *History of Cirencester*, 177.

²²⁰ *CJ*, 15, , 12-3, 15, 26-7.

²²¹ *CJ* 15, 21, 213.

²²² *CJ* 16j, 235, 237.

Master died in 1710 and his son of the same name, still too young to stand himself, lent his support to the continuing Tory candidates of Bathurst and Coxe. Their only opponent, the Colonel Long (probably the same man as Major Long), suffered the ignominy of garnering a single vote. 1710 was a year of wider political disturbance in Cirencester. Supporters of Henry Sacheverell, spurred on by Thomas Master II, allowed their political festivities to take on a Jacobite tone, while enraged Whig supporters rioted following the election.²²³ Master took over Bathurst's seat unopposed when the latter was elevated to the peerage in 1712. Charles Coxe was forced to contest the Gloucester seat in 1713 as Allen Bathurst reserved his interest for his brother Benjamin. Bathurst and Master defeated two local Whigs, John Foyle and Edmund Bray.²²⁴

Benjamin Bathurst and Thomas Master III (d. 1770) were returned unopposed in 1715, and their families went on to enjoy a duopoly that lasted without a break until the mid-century. Personal animosity led to futile attempts to unseat the Bathursts in 1722 and 1727, when another brother Peter replaced Benjamin.²²⁵ Earl Bathurst's son-in-law William Wodehouse replaced Peter in 1734 but died a year later, when Henry, son of Allen Bathurst, took over the seat.²²⁶ Thomas Master III took over his father's seat in 1747 but died in 1749 and was succeeded by John Coxe, eldest son of Charles Coxe.²²⁷ The next election in 1754 was dubbed 'the Cirencester Contest', as the Bathurst family overextended their interest and triggered a deeply contentious election. Henry Bathurst was seeking re-election, but John Coxe had become deeply unpopular with the electorate. Rumours that Benjamin Bathurst planned to stand for a seat alongside his brother caused a deputation of electors to seek out Lord Bathurst and attempt to broker a compromise, by which he would choose one son to be returned unopposed and they would name the second candidate. The electors were dismissed and Benjamin Bathurst declared his candidacy.²²⁸ When Henry Bathurst attempted to enter the town with a group of dignitaries they were attacked by a mob and violence between the opposing factions resulted in a fatality.²²⁹ There was a religious element to the contest, with the opposition accused of courting the Dissenters of the town and the Bathursts suspected of having Presbyterian connections.²³⁰ Eventually Coxe and Henry Bathurst stepped aside making way for a new candidate, John Dawnay, 'the first Whig avowedly that ever represented this borough'.²³¹

Elections in Cirencester continued to be contested, with those of 1768, 1790 and 1802 each achieving high turnouts of between 82 and 92 per cent, continuing similar levels in the early 18th century.²³² Local interests and the tension between oligarchy and independence remained a more important consideration than party, which was still not irrelevant, particularly the link between Whigs and dissenters.²³³ In 1761 James Clutterbuck was defeated as Dawnay was returned again alongside James Whitshed, another son-in-law to Earl Bathurst who married Wodehouse's widow

²²³ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1690-1715*, Cirencester.

²²⁴ Williams, *Parl. Hist. of Glos.*, 166.

²²⁵ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1715-1754*, Cirencester.

²²⁶ Williams, *Parl. Hist. of Glos.* 167.

²²⁷ Williams, *Parl. Hist. of Glos.* 168.

²²⁸ S. Rudder, *The Cirencester Contest* (Cirencester, 1753), 3-5.

²²⁹ Friend to the old interest, *A View of the Cirencester Contest* (Cirencester, 1753), 13.

²³⁰ R.W. Jennings, 'The Cirencester Contest', *Trans. BGAS* 92 (1972), 161-2.

²³¹ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1715-1754*, Cirencester.

²³² F. O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England 1734-1832* (Oxford, 1989), 191; Rollison, *Commune, Country and Commonwealth*, 217.

²³³ O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*, 344, 362 and 366.

Frances. It was around this time that the Cripps family began to emerge as an electoral force, opposing the Bathurst interest.²³⁴ Dawnay's connection to the area was by marriage to Charlotte Pleydell of Ampney Crucis. He inherited the manor there and sold it in 1765 to Samuel Blackwell of Williamstrip in 1765. Blackwell attempted to gain a seat in 1768 but was defeated in a poll he described as 'vexatious and dilatory', by Whitshed and Estcourt Cresswell, lord of the manor of Bibury.²³⁵ Blackwell mounted a formidable challenge, bringing occasionally violent support to the town from London to act as temporary voting inhabitants and petitioning Parliament twice about the outcome.²³⁶ The same three men contested the 1774 election in a more sedate manner, when Blackwell triumphed at the expense of Cresswell. Earl Bathurst died in 1775 and was succeeded by his son Henry, who brought peace to the feuding factions.²³⁷ Whitshed and Blackwell were returned unopposed in 1780, but Whitshed vacated his seat in 1783 when Henry Bathurst II, Lord Apsley, came of age. Apsley was a successful politician, becoming a lord of the Admiralty, then the Treasury, a commissioner of the Board of Control and member of the privy council whilst representing Cirencester.²³⁸ Blackwell and Apsley retained their seats in 1784, but Blackwell died in 1785. His seat was taken by Richard Master, returning the Cirencester seats to the two oldest family interests in the borough.²³⁹ An Act of Parliament in 1786 stipulated that inhabitants had to be resident for six months before they could exercise the franchise.²⁴⁰

Apsley and Master received a late challenge in 1790 from London merchant Robert Preston, who lost to Master by only nine votes.²⁴¹ Preston petitioned Parliament claiming that the steward and bailiff had excluded legal votes for him, while allowing illegal votes for Master.²⁴² Preston's petition was eventually upheld in 1792 after extensive examination of witnesses in Parliament, and he replaced Master.²⁴³ At the same time, the definition of a householder was clarified as possession of 'the exclusive right to the outer door of the building'.²⁴⁴ The election committee also upheld the ruling of 1709, barring residents of the old abbey land, the Emery and Spiringate Lane from voting as they lay outside the hundred of the borough.²⁴⁵ Earl Bathurst died in 1794 and Apsley moved up to the House of Lords. He was replaced by Michael Hicks Beach, owner of Williamstrip Park. Hicks Beach and Preston were challenged by Thomas Bayly Howell in the 1796 and 1802 elections, in which time he attempted to grow his interest in the borough by building houses and tontines. Petitions were made against both results to no effect.²⁴⁶ The extremely high degree of accuracy of canvassing in this period suggests a low level of voter independence, as voters almost invariably cast their ballots as promised.²⁴⁷

²³⁴ Jennings, 'The Cirencester Contest', 164-5.

²³⁵ VCH Glos. 12, 21-44.; *Oxford Journal*, 16 Apr. 1768; Williams, *Parl. Hist. of Glos.* 169.

²³⁶ Jennings, 'The Cirencester Contest', 166-7.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

²³⁸ *ODNB*, 'Bathurst, Henry, third Earl Bathurst (1762–1834)'.

²³⁹ Williams, *Parl. Hist. of Glos.* 170.

²⁴⁰ 26 George III, c. 100.

²⁴¹ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1790-1820*, Cirencester.

²⁴² *CJ*, 17, 12; *Evening Mail*, 19-21 Mar. 1792.

²⁴³ *CJ*, 17, 782.

²⁴⁴ Beecham, *History of Cirencester*, 171.

²⁴⁵ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1790-1820*, Cirencester.

²⁴⁶ *CJ* 52, 43, 45; *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 6 Nov. 1796; *CJ* 58, 1 Dec. 1802, 41; *Glouc. Journal*, 16 May 1803.

In 1806, Preston believed that he would be returned unopposed, but upon arriving in Cirencester found gathering support for Joseph Cripps, a local banker and lieutenant colonel of the Cirencester Volunteers.²⁴⁸ Preston withdrew in the face of overwhelming support for Cripps, who was returned with Hicks Beach in 1806 and 1807. Henry George Bathurst, also Lord Apsley, came of age in 1811 and his father put him up for a seat in Cirencester in 1812, which he won with ease. Hicks Beach and Cripps contested the remaining seat fiercely, polling 324 and 318 respectively. Hicks Beach did not stand again in 1818. Apsley and Cripps won an overwhelming victory against Richard Estcourt Cresswell of Bibury, son of the earlier MP. Thus a new duopoly emerged in Cirencester; Apsley and Cripps were returned unopposed in the next five elections.²⁴⁹

DRAFT

²⁴⁷ O’Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*, 103.

²⁴⁸ *Glouc. Journal*, 1 Dec. 1806; *Hist. Parl. Commons 1790-1820, Cirencester*; Williams, *Parl. Hist. of Glos.* 171-2.

²⁴⁹ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1790-1820, Cirencester*.