THE STREETS
OF
BRISTOL

ELIZABETH RALPH
The Streets of Bristol is the forty-ninth pamphlet in the local history series published by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association. It was first published in 1981.

The author was Archivist of the City of Bristol for many years. She dedicated the original publication of this pamphlet to her friend Miss Dora Livock who first aroused her interest in this particular theme when she was engaged in the 1960s in a study of the expenditure of the Corporation of Bristol on public services between 1530 and 1960, but who died before the completion of her work.

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Cover illustration: Bellman of Bristol from a 17th century woodcut
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Intervals until 1462, when quayage and murage were granted to as pavage. As early as 1317, 67 lbs of silver was spent on repairing the quay and adjacent pavement, and £93 in 1320. As no accounts of the Mayor and Commonality have survived before the sixteenth century, there is no means of knowing how the Council met its financial obligations and responsibilities for the maintenance of London and Southampton.

The Council found it difficult to deal with incompetent or obstinate householders, and in 1487/8 the Mayor, Sheriff, Bailiffs and Commonalty secured an Act which allowed distraint for non-repair of roads to be placed on the owner, and if the occupier was distrained, he was to be allowed to withhold his rent until the value of his distrained goods was recovered.

There were certain parts of the town that needed paving for which no householder could be held responsible. Special arrangements, therefore, had to be made for the paving of some of the main streets, the market place, and the space outside the Tolzey. To meet this expenditure, the King granted to the town the right to levy dues on foreigners' goods coming in by land, that is, on all goods entering the town through the gates. This toll was known as pavage. As early as 1317 such a grant was made for a term of three years, after which it was renewed at four or five-yearly intervals until 1462, when quayage and murage were granted to the town in perpetuity.

In 1317, 67 lbs of silver was spent on repairing the quay and adjacent pavement, and £93 in 1320. As no accounts of the Mayor and Commonality have survived before the sixteenth century, there is no means of knowing how the Council met its financial obligations and responsibilities for the maintenance of the main thoroughfares. Neither is there any evidence to suggest that the town employed an official paviour as happened in London and Southampton.

There must, however, have been such skilled men in the town. The churchwardens of St. Ewen's church in 1489/90 paid "paviours for paving the street in front of William Goldsmyth's house, 5s. 8d." At the same time the Corporation paid money to pave certain principal streets in the town. Robert Ricart, town clerk, records in 1491 that "dyvers streetes in Bristowe were new paved, that is to say. Horstrete, Knitesmyth strete, Brode strete, Highe strete, Redclif strete, Seynt Thomas strete, Temple strete, TOWER crete, the Bak, Baste strete, Seynt Mary strete, Lewensmede."

The care and consequently the use of the streets was of public concern. The Council tried to exercise some measure of control over the conditions of the streets by making ordinances and imposing fines on the offenders. The traffic of the Middle Ages may have been slow moving but the narrowness of the streets and the overhanging storeys to the buildings must have further reduced its speed and caused many problems. The Council tried hard to take all possible measures to guard against encroachments and obstructions. As early as 1391, there was an official called a "veyour" whose duty it was to inspect buildings for encroachments. He was probably not a single official, for in 1470, two masons and two carpenters were sworn "veyours" when they surveyed property in Cook's Row, High Street and reported that one cook had a wall projecting a half foot beyond the appointed line.

As a discouragement to those building new houses they had to be paid if the upper storey overhung the street. A licence to build a new house which would overhang All Saints churchyard contained a clause giving authority to jut out 3 feet 3½ inches from the second storey upward, paying a yearly rent of 4d.

In an attempt to prevent traffic congestion, no butcher or any other man was to buy any beast within the gates of the town, but only in Broadway or in front of the house of the Preaching Friars. At the same time the Common Council insisted that all

7. ibid.
12. ibid., pp. 132–33.
people coming to market should stable their horses and not leave them in the common streets.\textsuperscript{15} Markets were held in the streets. They obstructed traffic, and the pitching of the stalls frequently damaged the surface of the streets. According to a fourteenth century ordinance and proclamation, “benches, stalls and pens were to be moved from the High Cross and gate of St. Nicholas under pain of 40d.”\textsuperscript{16}

Each trade was governed by ordinances which sometimes included regulations as to the use of the streets. Some trades were by their nature liable to create more noxious waste matter than others. Butchers were notorious for fouling the streets and were forbidden to slay animals in the highways, but they were not alone in their careless disposal of animal refuse. Sporadic attempts to control butchers, tanners and other offenders often met with little success.

The disposal of rubbish must have been a serious problem and one that was almost insoluble. Householders threw their rubbish into the streets despite the fines which were imposed upon them. Many ordinances were passed dealing with the cleanliness of the streets. For example, “everyman had to make clean the strete afore his dwelling upon peyne of xijd.”, “no coke, stynkynge water was to be caste in the High strete in peyne of xld. at every tyme thei don the contrary.”\textsuperscript{17} A similar penalty was imposed for throwing urine and stinking water out of windows.\textsuperscript{18} It is impossible to say how many houses had privies. There were a number of latrines, both private and public, but not much about them appears in the city’s records. In 1373, John Kyngton was ordered to pay to the Commonalty for the maintenance of a latrine in Lewensmead.\textsuperscript{19} No rubble, dung or timber was to be left in the streets, at the Quay or on the Back but all to be put in the Marsh and at other places appointed.

Nevertheless, the streets were littered with waste matter which provided happy hunting grounds for pigs, fowls and dogs which everyone seems to have kept. In the fourteenth century the owners of pigs which were wandering within the gates of the town were fined 6d. and the pig’s tail cut off so that it would be known again. And if the same pig was found straying its head was cut off by the gaoler or his servant.\textsuperscript{20} The penalty on straying ducks was 6d. for the first offence, one shilling for the second and forfeiture for the third, when the prisoners at Monkenbridge feasted on the bird.\textsuperscript{21} Dogs were not allowed to roam unchained,\textsuperscript{22} and horses coming into the town had to be stabled in hostellries; an offending owner could lose bridle and halter.

The streets were not lit and persons walking abroad after the ringing of the curfew were to carry lights.\textsuperscript{23} In 1347, the town sought permission of the King to punish by imprisonment “any person found wandering by night”.\textsuperscript{24} One thing the town did enjoy during the Middle Ages was a good water supply, probably one of the best in the country. Provided by wells and conduits, it was more than adequate for the population at that time.

By the close of the Middle Ages, Bristol was a prosperous trading centre with a population that had risen to over 12,000. As trade increased, greater efforts had to be made to ensure that the roads were able to stand the stress of more traffic. Nevertheless, the fundamental weaknesses of medieval road construction were largely beyond the powers of any town authority to eradicate. It could be argued that it was no fault of the Corporation that the streets of Bristol were always in a bad state of repair, for the maintenance of the roads was a costly business, as indeed it is today, but unlike the present time when the cost is borne by the community at large through the payment of rates and taxes then, no rates and taxes were levied for this purpose.

During the first half of the sixteenth century, a number of statutes dealing with road improvements in particular localities were passed,\textsuperscript{25} but the earliest mention of any kind of rate for the repair of Bristol highways was in 1554.\textsuperscript{26} and was concerned with the road from Gloucester. This was one of the major roads in the country, coming from the north through Gloucester to Bristol. The preamble of the Act tells us that the road had fallen into decay and that many passengers had lost their lives on it and that in the past it had been “well repaired by the devotion of divers

\textsuperscript{15} The Little Red Book of Bristol, vol. II p. 230.
\textsuperscript{16} ibid., p. 229.
\textsuperscript{17} Veale, E.W.W., The Great Red Book of Bristol, Bristol Record Society, vol. IV, 1933, pp. 142-43.
\textsuperscript{18} The Little Red Book of Bristol, vol. II p. 228.
\textsuperscript{19} ibid., vol. I, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{20} The Little Red Book of Bristol, vol. II, pp. 31-32.
\textsuperscript{21} The Great Red Book of Bristol, vol. IV, p. 143.
\textsuperscript{22} ibid., p. 31.
\textsuperscript{23} ibid., p. 32.
\textsuperscript{26} Statutes of the Realm, I Mary, Sess. 3, c.6.
good people." Now, the road was to be repaired and the expenditure was to be charged on the inhabitants of the cities of Bristol and Gloucester with the hundreds which lie between them. The justices of the peace were authorised to rate and assess the inhabitants, but the Act does not specify on what basis.

A year later in 1555, the first general Highway Act was passed which remained the foundation of the highway law for nearly three centuries. It laid down that constables and churchwardens of every parish were to call together the parishioners and elect two honest persons "to be surveyors for one year of the works for amending the highways." In Bristol the justices of the peace were also the aldermen of the city and therefore it was their responsibility to see that the parishes carried out this function. How it worked out in Bristol, if in fact it ever did, is not easy to surmise as so few parishes in Bristol have records for this period and where they have survived, there are no references to the implementation of this Act. The fact that the aldermen assembled in Council in 1561 passed an ordinance laying down that "every burgess or inhabitant within the city shall pay the pitcher for pitching the street before the limits of his house and ground, three half-pence for every yard as need shall require, whatsoever the pitcher shall be set on work by the alderman of the ward or his deputy, to supervise that the work be done," suggests that the Council through the aldermen made the occupiers responsible for the repair of the streets. The householder was committed to prison if he failed to pay.

The main thoroughfares in and out of the city were the concern of the Council, and in 1569 the City Chamberlain took it upon himself to repair them and "set men on work and caused all causeways to be made 7 miles every way about this city most at his own charge." The city accounts from 1532 contain many references to the paving of certain streets, such as, around Newgate, and the Quay and near the gates.

The first reference to the paviour or pitcher as a paid official of the Corporation was in 1579 when the City Chamberlain paid "John Raynsbery the paviour of the streets the summe of xxs. which was promised to hym at his first commyng to make his abode here untill he pitched all the stretes in the town which was agreyd upon by Mr. Mayor and the Aldermen to be gevyn as a rewarde so that he shall take not above 1½d. per yard for pitching and that he shall do his worke well. I pay hym xxs." At the beginning of the seventeenth century, when it was reported that the highways leading into the city were in a ruinous state, the Common Council ordered that every inhabitant whose name was in the subsidy book should pay a rate of 4d. in the pound to repair the Queen's highways. John Hopkins one of the aldermen, was to be treasurer and collect the rates and to disburse the money. Every householder free of this rate had to work eight hours yearly on the roads without pay, providing his own pickaxes and shovels.

The problem of paying for the repair of the highways in and out of Bristol must have been eased by the gift of the Reverend Dr. Thomas White who settled an annuity of £100 on Bristol for the maintenance of roads around the city, "within a compass of five miles thereof, every travelling and market way; and also the highways that were most used from Bristol." The first payment was made in 1624 and was used to pitch the causeways which were six feet or more in breadth. Two years later, £60 was spent setting up posts along the highway to Kingswood for the guidance of travellers. After 1647, surveyors were appointed and the road money was paid to the aldermen of the wards concerned who kept accounts which were signed by the surveyors in charge of the work. In 1653, £10 was given towards the mending of St. Michael's Hill towards the Downs which sum included the cost of digging and hauling the stones. With the passing of the Turnpike Acts, the application of the road money for the maintenance of what became turnpike roads was unnecessary, but from time to time the Corporation laid out various sums of money for the repair of such roads around Bristol that were not turnpike roads.

As has been seen, the task of supervising the maintenance of streets within the city was the duty of the aldermen of the wards.

27. Statutes of the Realm, 2 & 3 Philip and Mary, c.8.
28. Bristol Record Office, 04273(2), fo. 11.
31. ibid., 04264(1), p. 34.
32. Dr. Thomas White was a native of Bristol and is best known as the founder of Sion College, London. The 'road money', as it was called, was only one of his many benefactions to Bristol.
34. Bristol Record Office, 04026(18), pp. 293, 297.
35. ibid., 04026(19), p. 320.
36. ibid., 33041
37. ibid., 33041
At this time there were twelve wards in the city and each alderman was responsible, among other duties, for the care of the streets, the keeping of the peace. The Court of Aldermen met once a week and was in fact the “cabinet”. In 1641, the Council gave the surveyors of highways the authority to order the Chamberlain to pitch the streets in places where they ought to be repaired at the city’s charge. No reason is given for this action, but ten years later, this ordinance was repealed leaving the care of the streets again with the aldermen of the wards.

During the Commonwealth, an ordinance was passed which stated that all streets and pavements in cities, corporate towns and their suburbs were expressly declared to be common highways and “scavengers” to be surveyors, and all streets and pavements were to be paved and kept in repair,” and cleansed for the convenience and health of the inhabitants.” In 1656 when the parish of St. Philip & Jacob was allowed to use rubble from the Castle which was being demolished, to repair the roadway from Lawford’s Gate to the Old Market, the cost was great and the parish officer had to ask for £200 to finish it. To meet this, the justices agreed that a rate of one shilling in the pound should be levied on the whole city, so that the expense of maintenance of the roads should be shared equally. With the Restoration in 1660, the levying of a compulsory rate was abolished.

The justices of the peace were kept busy hearing cases brought before them for failure of citizens and others to pitch or keep clean the streets. It was open to anyone to indict at Quarter Sessions householders or others responsible whenever a highway became “ruinous, miry, broken and in great decay”. In 1665 Sir John Knight and Edward Colston were presented for defective pitching in front of their properties. The churchwardens of St. John’s were indicted in 1676 for not pitching the highway but ten years later, this ordinance was repealed leaving the care of the streets again with the aldermen of the wards.

By the eighteenth century the problems of noise and heavy traffic were appearing. The streets of the ancient city had been laid out at a time when the traffic was carried on by means of pack-horses and when travellers moved on horseback. From the Middle Ages no wheeled traffic had been allowed in the town. That there were no carts to be seen in the city attracted the notice of Daniel Defoe when he visited Bristol: “They draw their heavy goods on sleds or sledges which they call ‘Gee-hoes’ without wheels. This kills a multitude of horses; and the pavements are worn so smooth by them that in wet weather the streets are very slippery and in frosty weather ‘tis dangerous walking.” The streets were narrow and the busiest thoroughfares were under twenty feet in width. Wine Street, one of the main streets, was wider than most, but here in 1625 the Corporation had built the Market House which with the pump, the pillory and the whipping post must have made the street very congested. The houses built of timber overhung the streets. Celia Fiennes says “the buildings of the town are pretty high, most of timber work, the streets are narrow and somewhat darkish because the rooms on the upper storys are more jutting out, soe contracts the street and light.” The housing problem by this time must have been acute, for the population had risen to about 20,000. Open spaces and gardens within the city had almost disappeared and many lived in dark alleys and courts. The excellent water supply which fed the townsmen in the Middle Ages was now inadequate.

To stop the use of wheeled traffic the Council in 1705 ordered that trucks must be made of wood and no carts with wheels were to be allowed as the ground was still honeycombed by the cellars which had been constructed for the storage of merchants’ wares. In 1722, an agreement was made by the Council that when a house was rebuilt it should be set back to widen the streets and at the same time an attempt was made to discourage the medieval practice of building houses which overhung the street. The Council itself was reluctant to spend money on widening streets but readily accepted offers from other sources. In 1780, All Saints parish agreed to widen Corn Street by 5½ feet by rebuilding the coffee house and removing the merchants’ tolzey. The Corporation did pay £400 towards the cost. Two years later the

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Council agreed to surrender the Fish Market if the parish of St. Stephen would widen the thoroughfare on the Quay from 24 feet to 44 feet which was achieved four years later.\(^49\)

The widened streets created yet another problem in that when a street was over 20 feet wide, to pave to the middle of it was a heavy burden on the owners of small houses. In these cases the justices were given power to make orders as to who should pave and to confirm any necessary rate which would be administered by the surveyors of highways. In 1751 a rate of £63 7s. 4d. was assessed on the parish of St. Mary Redcliffe for the repairing and pitching of Redcliffe Hill. The following year a rate of £76 6s. 6d. was imposed on the parish of St. Philip & Jacob for mending and pitching the way in Old Market; and in 1777, £252 10s. 9d. was raised to pave and pitch different streets in the parish of St. Augustine which exceeded the width of 30 feet.\(^50\)

Although the gates to the city caused some of the worse traffic congestion, the Corporation were not willing to remove these ancient defences. In 1721 Lawford's Gate at the end of the Old Market, one of the busiest streets, was “repaired and beautified”, despite the fact that it was so narrow that carts often were wedged in the gateway. A petition of the inhabitants of Temple parish in 1730 complaining that the Temple Gate was so low and narrow as to be highly incommodious and dangerous met with no response. A similar request was made by the parishioners of Redcliffe, but rather than remove it, a new gate was built! Having rebuilt Redcliffe Gate, the Corporation rebuilt Temple Gate with a narrow roadway for carriages but providing two passages for pedestrians. The Council did, however, allow Back Gate to be demolished in 1738 to allow easier access to Queen Square; and by the end of the eighteenth century all the gates had been removed with the exception of St. John’s Gate.

The Council fully realised that the time had come when householders were unable to keep the streets in a satisfactory condition and that money would have to be raised by the levying of rates. Several times during the eighteenth century the Corporation sought Parliamentary powers to carry out the public services to pave, cleanse and light the streets, but at a cost of an unlimited rate. The citizens violently opposed the proposals because they wanted these powers vested in another body rather than the Corporation which they did not trust.

By this time the Bristol Turnpike Trust had been established

\(^{49}\) Bristol Record Office, 04264(15), p. 329.
\(^{50}\) ibid., Rate Books.
and was responsible for designated stretches of highway, that is, the main roads in and out of the city; but no part of them was within the area administered by the Corporation. The trustees included the knights of the shire for Gloucester and Somerset, the Members of Parliament for Bristol, the Justices of the peace for Gloucestershire and Somerset, the Mayor, Aldermen and Common council of Bristol and others listed by name. The Act provided that tolls should be collected from June 1727 and to continue for twenty-one years. The Bristol Trust was the first statutory authority to rely on tolls to meet its expenditure. In 1733, the corporate accounts show that £350 was spent on building toll-houses and an assignment of the tolls to the Council was made as a security for payment.

There was, however, violent opposition to the payment of tolls, particularly from hauliers and colliers. Riots broke out in Bristol, and turnpike gates were destroyed. According to a contemporary account the rioters were "armed with rusty swords, pitchforks, axes, guns, pistols, clubs, etc. They ranged themselves in the main street before the George Inn, by beat of drum, huzzas and a hunting horn, three drums attending them. Here they drank freely with much noise and then broke the windows of one Mr. Durban, tithingman of the Hundred, who had by order of the Turnpike Commissioners carried persons in, destroying the turnpikes before the justices by whom they were committed to Newgate."

An amending Act dealt with the problems of administration, and the trustees were given power to divide the responsibility so that ten of them should care for each of the ten roads. As the Act states, "divers of the said roads do at certain places near Bristol terminate and unite in certain common roads leading into the said city," and to prevent any disputes, the Act provided that tolls arising from such roads should be chargeable in equal proportion for the repair of the common roads. There were four such roads leading from the city: to Don John's Cross (at the junction of the Kingswood and Hanham roads), to Totterdown, to Lower Easton and to Bedminster Down. It is interesting to note that by 1799 the Bristol Turnpike Trust had become the largest single authority in the country. The roads leading from Bristol were now in a better state than those inside the boundaries. When John McAdam took up his residence in

51. George I c.12. An Act for amending the several roads leading from the City of Bristol.
Bristol in 1802, he invented a new system of road construction, using clean dry stones and the road bed was raised above the level of the ground on either side and good drainage was regarded essential. McAdam was made Surveyor to the Bristol Turnpike Trust in 1815, and soon his roads were a pattern for the world. In the local newspapers the condition of the city streets was described “as ruinous and dangerous”, there being no foot pavements. Yet in 1794, a new guide to Bristol stated “that the streets were well paved with flat stones for foot passengers and smooth crossways from street to street executed very neatly.”

However, it must be said that the efforts of the Corporation and the parishes to pave the streets of Bristol adequately had met with little success. In 1806 an Act set up the Paving Commissioners as a statutory body responsible for the paving, cleansing and lighting of the streets of Bristol, and so came to an end the responsibility for the care of the streets laid upon the parishes in the sixteenth century and that laid upon the individual householder from the Middle Ages.

Paving was but one aspect of the care of the streets in Bristol. Cleansing and lighting provided two other problems. It was not only the bad state of the roads but the rubbish and filth which were thrown into the streets and left to accumulate that made daily life in the streets so unpleasant. The Council made ordinances concerning the cleaning of streets and the courts, imposed fines on offenders, but the citizens seemed rarely conscious of the dangers of dirt, and the frequent visitations of the plague did little to convince them.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, the Common Council had appointed an official called a raker to clean the streets, his wages being re-couped by levying a rate on all the parishes. His duty was to gather the filth and rubbish from the streets and alleys and to cart it to certain places outside the town assigned by the Council, but not to relieve the householders of their responsibility to keep their frontages clean. Unlike his counterpart in London, the raker was not allowed to put the rubbish on the banks of the river. In 1543 Roger the raker received from the

City Chamberlain £4 a year which in 1558 was increased to £12 per annum. It was not easy to collect the money from the parishes and in 1602 the Council ordered all non-payers to be imprisoned. The system does not seem to have been effective, and so in 1617 the Council took over the responsibility of paying the raker’s wages. In 1626 it was agreed that the raker should receive £30 to be raised by general taxation upon sufficient inhabitants throughout the city, and that “one more raker shall be added to the other so that by two, the streets may be kept cleaner and the business better performed.” Three years later the standard of cleansing was still unsatisfactory and when the Council questioned the raker about the foulness of the streets, he said that he could not keep them cleaner at the rates he was paid and asked to be freed of his employment. As usual the Council made the parishes liable for the extra money the rakers were to receive. They agreed to give £30 a year, but ordered the thirteen ancient parishes to contribute an extra £40 a year. The raker was to provide more carts, cattle and servants and to clean more streets. In fact, a specially appointed committee laid down what streets the raker should clean. He was “to begin at the Bridge End at the corner of Alderman Rogers’ shop in St. Thomas’ parish, and then to come over the bridge and all St. Nicholas, St. Maryport, St. Peter’s parishes to Newgate, all St. Ewes’. All Saints’ and Christchurch parishes with the Pithay and along St. James’ Back to the end of Broadmead as far as Mr. Chester’s house where Alderman Parker dwells and so along St. James’ Back to Lewins Mead and St. James’ Court, after it shall be once cleaned of the soil in it, through Lewins Mead to Hors street and so back again through From Gate, Christmas Street, Broad Street, Bell Lane and from St. John’s Gate down to the Key and all St. Werburgh, St. Leonard and St. Stephen’s parishes.”

Although as time went on the raker’s wages increased, the Council did not increase its contribution of £30 and the difference had always to be met by the parishes. By 1643 the raker was receiving £84 a year, but a year later the financial position of the city was so bad because of the Civil War that his appointment was cancelled. For four years the cleansing of the streets was left

55. Ibid., 04264(1), p. 59.
56. Ibid., 04273(2), fo. 33.
57. Ibid., fos. 56–57.
to the elements so that they were "full of dirt, soil and filth, and very dangerous in this time of infection". If the main thoroughfares were in this appalling state, the numerous narrow lanes inhabited by the poor must have been rank with household refuse. It is, therefore, not surprising that every summer brought with it the dread of the plague, visitations of which were frequent. It was not unusual for several thousands to die, and during the Civil War period the plague ravaged the city for more than twelve months. When in 1648 a raker was again appointed, he was given £100, of which the parishes paid £60.

From 1630 the references in the city accounts are to scavengers rather than rakers. There seems little difference between the duties of the raker and the scavenger. London used the title of raker which may well have been why Bristol did so, as many of the ordinances made by the Council were based on those of London. An inventory of the goods and chattels of Thomas Henley, a scavenger, who died in the parish of St. James in 1623 suggests that he was a humble person. He left other than his furniture and wearing apparel:

"in another house certain old implements 2s. 6d.
five small coal horses £5 10s.
three old cart horses £4 10s.
three dung carts with their harness £2 13s. 4d.
three old pack saddles £3. 4d."

The inventory of the goods of John Barwick of Bristol, a scavenger, taken in 1687 shows him to be a man of substance.

"Wearing apparel £2; money in house £4; 50 ozs old plate £12-19-4; 2 houses, valued at £70; kitchen table, stools & chairs 18/-; dogwheel & spindle 3/-; ironware 13/2; brass 8/-; earthenware 4/6; Bible, looking glass & brasses 11/-; 96 lbs of pewter £2-12-0; beds & bedding £5-1-0; rug, curtains, close stool & bedstead £1-11-0; andirons & creepers 8/-; rent due from William Ayton £2-15-0.

At the house at the Down called the Lamb:- furniture 12/6; boards, poles & rafters 13/-; hay cart & dung putt 13/-; 4 dung carts with wheels and drafts, axletrees & iron £4-10-0; 2 horses, 2 mares & a colt £9; grindstone, iron, an old wheel & other lumber 12/-."

60. Bristol Record Office. Inventories, bundle 1687, no. 4. I am indebted to Mrs E. George for this reference.
61. 11 & 12 William III c. 23.
The sixteenth century saw the beginning of the awareness of the necessity of street lighting in Bristol, when the Corporation provided a few lanterns with candles to be hung at such places as the High Cross, Frome Gate and the Quay. Who was responsible for lighting and attending the lanterns is not known as there is no reference in the city accounts until 1606 when a man was paid half a crown a quarter “for looking to the lanterns”. In 1610, the bellman was paid 2s. 6d. for giving warning when it was time to hang out the night candles. This suggests that householders also hung out lights of some kind. As there was no penalty for default, the bellman’s summons is not likely to have been widely complied with.

Despite many complaints by the citizens of the dangers and inconvenience of the dark streets, it was not until 1660 that the Court of Aldermen issued a warrant that 530 of the principal householders must hang out at their doors a lantern and lighted candle from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. during the winter months. Of the persons listed, 61 were in the parish of St. Nicholas, 52 in St. Thomas, 47 in St. Peter’s, 43 in St. Stephen’s and 31 in the parish of Christchurch. Having empowered others to provide the lighting, the Corporation did little more about it except to hang “a great lanthorn” outside the Tolzey and two others at the Blind Gate and Small Street Gate. The lantern outside the Tolzey could not have been very effective, for the parishioners of Christchurch at their own expense set up a large fair double glass lamp at the corner of their church for enlightening the streets, and then applied to the Council for some contribution towards the same, which request the Council thought reasonable. Although defaulters were threatened with a fine of 3s. 4d., some parishes had no lights at all.

Presumably after the ringing of the curfew, most people would stay in doors, for after 9 p.m. the streets would remain in utter darkness. This continued until 1700 when a local Act making regulations for the cleansing and paving of the streets dealt also with lighting. Every householder who was charged 2d. a week must hang out candles or lights in lanterns between Michaelmas and Lady Day. If, however, the householders of any parish chose to carry out this by means of a rate, they were empowered to do so, but the Council disclaimed all responsibility in the matter. A waywarden was appointed in each parish who collected and disbursed the rates. There must have been an uneven distribution of lights, for the three central parishes had only four each and Temple parish only six; in all there were 128 lamps. In some of the poorer parishes the number of inhabitants paying the poor rate was so small that the rate was not sufficient to maintain the necessary lamps or a nightly watch. Therefore, the Council petitioned Parliament for further powers to raise a lighting and watching rate, but so great was the opposition that the Bill was dropped. Another attempt was made in 1740 without success, and it was not until 1748 that an Act combining river navigation with street powers was passed.

The Act stated that because of insufficient number of lamps, the citizens were exposed to the danger of fires, burglaries, robberies and many outrages, and it empowered the justices to levy a rate on all houses, warehouses and tenements except dwelling houses under the value of £7 a year rack rent. The Court of Aldermen took immediate action and directed the parishes to provide the necessary lamps. The eighteen lamps in the parish of Christchurch were to be “of the sort or fashion commonly called Globular Glass lamps containing sufficient fountain or pan within two sufficient pipes or spouts in each lamp.”

Two orders in the Sessions Dockets made on the 22nd January and the 17th February 1749 set out the number of lamps for each parish which were to be “of the like form of Christchurch”. The numbers were: All Saints 10 lamps, Christchurch 18, St. Augustine 56, St. Ewen 4, St. James 78, St. Maryport 10, St. Mary Redcliffe 36, St. Michael 20, St. Nicholas 60, St. Peter 23, St. Philip & Jacob 42, St. Stephen 50, St. Thomas 29, St. Werburgh 10, Temple 30 and Castle Precincts 27. Daniel Defoe when visiting Bristol remarked “the city has long been lighted with lamps, but of late they have increased and the lighting is exceeded only in London.”

However, the condition of the streets did not improve and serious complaints were made in the local newspapers about the inefficiency of the lighting, the filthiness of the thoroughfares and “the barbarous custom of using sledges in the main streets for the

64. The lighting and scavenging rate books for the parishes date from 1700 but are incomplete. Waywarden’s accounts from 1752–1806 have survived and are in the Bristol Record Office.
65. 22 George II c. 20.
carriage of goods which are endangering the limbs of both men and cattle."

At last in 1806, the problem of paving, cleansing and lighting the streets of Bristol was vested in one statutory authority, the Paving Commissioners. The Act gave powers which were largely under the jurisdiction of the mayor and aldermen who were also the justices of the peace. It was the duty of the churchwardens of each parish to assemble together the householders from whom they were to nominate ten, and the justices were to appoint two, to be commissioners who would serve for two years. Powers were given to set up lamps, appoint scavengers and other officers, to make sewers and to pave streets. Rates, certified by the justices in session, were to be paid by the tenant or the occupier, who could recover half from the owner, and collected by the churchwardens or the overseers of the poor. They were given authority to borrow up to £20,000 on the credit of the rates.

Immediately the Act came into force, the Commissioners were elected and visits were made to London and Bath to see how the streets in these two cities were cared for. As a result, and in spite of local opposition, a professional surveyor from London was appointed. Contracts were made for the repair of the pavements of the whole city and for new streets. The administration was rigorous and no more complaints were heard about the state of the streets, though there were many complaints about the payment of rates. The minutes of the Paving Commissioners give a full account of their work. Undoubtedly the efforts of the Commissioners effected an improvement in the surface of the streets for they realized that skilled and trained planning with supervision of the work was essential.

The estimated cost for providing an adequate public service for the first year was £12,000 but, as some of the backlog of work was completed, the estimated cost fell to £10,000 in 1810. It was made up as follows:

- Lighting £2,800
- Scavenging £2,800
- Jobbing pitchers and masons £800
- Stone £1,100
- Salaries, rents, etc. £700
- Law charges £230
- Interest £700
- Sewers £500
- Contingencies £300
- Iron work £70

The Paving Commissioners only dealt with the streets within the ancient city, and the streets of the out-parishes were mainly unlit and not cleansed. Even when the city boundaries were extended in 1835, there was no improvement, as the newly constituted Corporation had no paving powers. The Paving Commissioners continued to function until their work was transferred to the Local Board of Health in 1851.

The story of the care of the streets of Bristol began with the individual householder bearing the whole responsibility of repairing and cleansing the streets and providing lighting where it existed. When the task became too big in the sixteenth century, there not being enough money, legislation introduced parish rates and the appointment of voluntary parish officers. When at the beginning of the nineteenth century this failed to provide adequate street maintenance, a statutory authority was established by a local Act of Parliament, resulting in a further increase in rates to pay for trained and salaried staff. Finally in the middle of the nineteenth century the responsibility for paving, cleansing and lighting the streets of the whole city passed to the Corporation acting as the Local Board of Health. Today it still rests there with financial help from central taxation.

I wish to acknowledge the work of Miss D.M. Livock in her analysis of the city's accounts and those of the Paving Commissioners.
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