THE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT OF BRISTOL 1851–1901
VOL. 50

THE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT OF BRISTOL

1851–1901
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BY

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Published by
BRISTOL RECORD SOCIETY
c/o Department of Historical Studies
University of Bristol
13-15 Woodland Road
Bristol BS8 1TB
1999
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Produced for the Society by
J. W. Arrowsmith Ltd.
Winterstoke Road
Bristol BS3 2NT
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Bristol Record Society is grateful to Bristol Water plc for a grant in support of this volume.
PREFACE

This is the first of two volumes which seek to present the history of Bristol's municipal government between 1851–1901, an epoch when the activities of the City Council expanded substantially and thus generated a mass of records in the form of its own minutes and those of its numerous committees. As with Dr. Bush's volume *Bristol and its municipal government 1820–1851* Vol. XXIX of the Record Society Publications, which it is designed to follow, it does not take the form of edited records but of a narrative closely based on the original sources complemented by reference to the local press and the considerable information about Bristol to be found in the invaluable parliamentary papers.

As was observed by Dr. Bush, the Record Society wisely made provision for the occasional publication of monographs of this kind in addition to the traditional publication of edited documents, a procedure which appears unsuitable for the mass of records generated by nineteenth and twentieth century local authorities. The very nature of this enterprise naturally precludes discussion of matters that have preoccupied some historians of modern Bristol, in particular the city's economic fortunes. The focus is on local government as seen through its own records.

A second volume is designed to contain a study of the Council's administration of the docks it acquired in 1848 and the major additions purchased in 1884, the manner in which it managed the urban environment and its increasing involvement in education and leisure provision.

I wish to thank most warmly Dr. J. Bettey, the Hon. General Editor, who has most patiently corrected and supported me, the staff at the Bristol Record Office and Bristol Central Library who have endured most obligingly my innumerable requests and queries, and above all my wife who over the years has not always been quite sure to which century my thoughts and remarks have related.
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<td>Artizan Dwellings Committee Minutes.</td>
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<td>B.C.L.</td>
<td>Bristol Central Library.</td>
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<td>Annals (<em>of Bristol in the nineteenth century</em>).</td>
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<td>Latimer</td>
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<td>L.C.M.</td>
<td>Library Committee Minutes.</td>
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<td>LGB</td>
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<td>WDP</td>
<td><em>Western Daily Press</em>.</td>
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CHAPTER ONE

THE STRUCTURE AND POLITICS OF
THE COUNCIL 1851–1901

The civic year in Bristol may be said to have begun with the annual elections of councillors decreed by the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 (5 & 6 William IV c 76 cl. xxx) to be held on 1 November between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. when one third of the Council’s seats were competed for. By mid-century there had emerged a settled pattern of municipal politics largely fashioned on the model of parliamentary contests. The contemporary parties contested control of the Council using methods familiar in battles to return M.P.s. As the following description indicates, the scene on polling day at a municipal election in 1853 might just as well have been applied to a parliamentary election: “for a solitary day the din of civic contest rages ... the largest room of the largest inn becomes redolent of gas and perspiration, headquarters are fixed, oratory becomes a drug, canvassing files steam through the mud and slush and electors are politely pressed for the favour of their vote ... committee rooms are hives of jostling crowds ... flies rattle along the streets with a kind of electoral enthusiasm in their very wheels, eager messengers hurry to and fro with scraps of pencilled bulletins ... until the magic hour of four arrives which makes or mars a councillor”.

The Municipal Electorate

Bristol’s municipal electorate of 7,174 in 1851 was by no means negligible in number. At this time only those of Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield were more numerous. Also it continued to grow, increasing to 12,233 in 1866 when it was just two thousand fewer than the then parliamentary electorate. Nevertheless in the

1 BM 29 Oct. 1853.
2 PP 1852 vol. xlv p 362 Municipal electors on the burgess list in the boroughs of England and Wales; PP 1874 vol. liii p 43 Return for all boroughs of England and Wales of the number of burgesses on the roll in 1866, 1869 and 1873.
eighteen fifties and sixties many of Bristol's working class men and all her adult women could not or did not seek to vote at municipal elections. The reasons were various. Some occupied dwellings that were not rated on the grounds that their occupants were too poor to pay rates which was a statutory condition for becoming a voter. Others did not do so by failing to occupy rated property for the two and a half years required by the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act. This Act also denied women the right to vote. Also, electors were responsible for their own electoral registration, and some did not bother to register. The Liberal press believed that many Liberal supporters did not do so because they were under the impression that they had to be ten pound householders in order to exercise the municipal franchise. It would seem too that those who compounded for paying their rates were often excluded from the franchise, although a parliamentary return in 1859 showed that four parishes, either wholly or in part within Bristol’s municipal boundaries, had adopted the Small Tenements Rating Act of 1850 (Vict. 13 & 14 c 99) which allowed parishes to extend the municipal vote to compound householders of £6 and under.3

By 1869 the municipal electorate had shot up to 19,878, evidently because the Assessed Rates Act of that year (Vict. 32 & 33 c 41) had made composition of rate paying compatible with the municipal franchise.4 Also in the same year the Municipal Franchise Act (Vict. 32 & 33 c 55), by reducing the period of residence in a rated property to one year instead of two and half years as a condition of becoming an elector, had probably enabled more to register as electors. The Act of 1869 also extended the municipal franchise to women for the first time, although the courts, relying on the notion that on marriage a woman was, legally speaking, merged with her husband, had ruled that only single women were allowed to vote.5 Women voted at a municipal election in Bristol for the first time in 1869 in the only contest of that year, in Clifton ward. The Western Daily Press patronisingly reported, “the ladies were brought up in good numbers and the fair creatures, nothing daunted ... came womanfully to the polling place and recorded their votes as if they were the lords of creation”. The Times and Mirror estimated that more than a hundred did so constituting a fifth of the females on the municipal register.6 In 1872 secret voting was introduced for municipal elections by the Ballot Act

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3 PP 1859 session 1 Vol. xxiv p 591. Return ... of the Parishes which put in force 13 & 14 Vict. C.99 lists Bedminster, Clifton, St Philip and St Jacob and Westbury on Trym.
6 WDP 2 Nov. 1869; TM 6 Nov. 1869.
but thereafter there was no legislative impetus to enlarge the municipal electorate until 1918. By the time of the third parliamentary Reform Act in 1884 Bristol’s municipal electorate had swelled to 27,723 of whom 3,544 were women and by 1901, after the substantial boundary extension in 1897, it totalled 54,372.\(^7\)

Compilation and revision of the register of municipal voters, as prescribed by the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act, was carried out between the 1st and 15th October each year by a court in the Guildhall presided over by the Mayor and two assessors, with the burgess list to be completed by 22nd October in time for the election on 1 November. The process was similar to that for revising the parliamentary register. Liberal and Conservative election agents attended to raise or refute objections to particular individuals being on the municipal register. Often the agents had met beforehand and negotiated an agreed list so that the court’s proceedings became purely formal. But now and then, it would seem, the registration process did affect election results. For instance, in 1852, the Liberals ascribed their failure to win in St Michael’s ward to energetic registration of their supporters by the Conservatives.\(^8\)

**Allocation of councillors to Wards**

But the numbers were by no means decisive in city politics: ownership of property counted more. The allocation of councillors to wards in 1836 which was not revised until 1880 was determined more by the rateable value of its property than by the number of its electors. The greater the rateable value of property in a ward the more councillors it was allocated which undoubtedly favoured the Conservatives. An official return detailing the situation in 1869 showed, for instance, that Clifton ward had a rateable value of £133,435 and 2,548 electors while St. Philip and St. Jacob had 4,818 electors, but being a poor district its rateable value was only £86,890. Clifton returned 9 councillors and between 1851 and 1869 in any given year either six or seven of these were Conservatives. St Philip and Jacob returned only 3 councillors almost always Liberals. Likewise Bristol ward returned 9 councillors two thirds of whom in the eighteen fifties and sixties were Conservatives while Bedminster had only 3 councillors, almost always Liberals, yet its electors outnumbered Bristol’s but its rateable value was less than half. In 1869 St Augustine’s ward had the smallest electorate in the city but returned 6 councillors, all of whom were Conservatives from 1836 to 1877, as against 3 councillors each allocated to six of the

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\(^7\)PP 1884–5 vol. lxvi p 23 *Return of Municipal Boroughs showing population, inhabited houses, number of burgesses etc.*

\(^8\)e.g. BM 2, 9, 16 Oct. 1852, 8 Oct. 1853, 11 Oct. 1856 etc.
ten wards into which the city was divided before ward revision in 1879. Finally Redcliffe ward was allocated 6 councillors although its electorate was virtually the same as District ward which only had 3. The rateable value of District ward was only two thirds of that of Redcliffe.\(^9\)

The allocation of councillors to wards enabled the Conservatives to establish themselves as the majority party in the Council as had been demonstrated for a decade before 1851, their dominance being inflated by their ability as the majority to determine membership of the aldermanic bench.\(^10\) As the table shows the Conservatives enjoyed comfortable majorities down to the major boundary revision in 1897 and thereafter they remained the largest single party.

The political complexion of the Council, 1851–1900: selected years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Conservatives</th>
<th>Liberals</th>
<th>Conservative Majority</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clrs. Aldn. Total</td>
<td>Clrs. Aldn. Total</td>
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<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>25 15 40</td>
<td>23 1 24</td>
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<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>25 16 41</td>
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<td>1861</td>
<td>26 15 41</td>
<td>22 1 23</td>
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<td>1866</td>
<td>24 15 39</td>
<td>24 1 25</td>
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<td>1871</td>
<td>27 15 42</td>
<td>22 0 22</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>28 16 44</td>
<td>20 0 20</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>27 15 42</td>
<td>21 1 22</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>23 15 38</td>
<td>19 0 19</td>
<td>Liberal Unionists 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>25 13 38</td>
<td>23 0 23</td>
<td>Liberal Unionists 3 Labour 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>23 13 36</td>
<td>28 5 33</td>
<td>Independents 11 Labour 4</td>
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Revision of Ward Representation

Clearly a revision of ward representation reflecting the size of electorates would help the Liberals to challenge Conservative dominance. Their campaign for ward revision was opened in 1866 by Councillor Christopher Thomas who carried a resolution to establish a committee to consider “an equitable redistribution of some Wards and of the number of such councillors thereof” in the light of “the great changes which have taken place in the relative population and wealth of several of the Municipal Wards”. But nothing came of\(^11\) this. Consequently he tried again by moving that the Council should take advantage of an Act passed ten years previously (Vic. 22 c 35) by which a Council, by a vote of two thirds of its members, was entitled to petition the

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\(^9\) PP 1871 vol. Ivi Return of Boroughs petitioning for ward alterations, showing rateable value of each ward, number of burgesses and councillors etc.


\(^11\) P.C. 25 Sept. 1866; WDF 26 Sept. 1866. Christopher Thomas highlighted the growth of St Philips: since 1836 its electors had grown seven fold and its rateable value had multiplied five fold yet it still had only three representatives.
Queen to direct changes be made to municipal wards to correct anomalies. Councillor Elisha Robinson, seconding Christopher Thomas's motion in a typically vigorous and witty speech, produced detailed figures for the electorates and rateable values for each ward as they were in 1836 and 1869 which showed that the greatest increases had occurred in Bedminster and St Philips. Totting up the voters and the rateable values for the whole city indicated that each councillor should represent four hundred electors and £13,000 of rateable value. By this standard, the Liberals argued, St Philips should have 9 Councillors not 3, St Augustine's 3 not 6, Redcliffe 4 not 6 and Bristol ward 6 not 9. Robinson went as far as claiming that if representation had been fairly allocated both the Gas and Water Companies would now be in the Council’s hands. But as Christopher Thomas anticipated, his motion was rejected—by 31:22—the Conservatives urging the Council not to commit municipal suicide (alderman Abbot), to let well alone (alderman Green) and not to encourage the growth of democracy (councillor R.P. King).

In 1874 Councillor Henry Mills, a former journalist, a Liberal, and a notably pungent speaker, raised the matter again when the Council was about to elect aldermen, complaining that “the majority which elected the aldermen ... was a majority not fairly elected as a majority” since “four favoured wards with 7,529 voters returned 30 councillors whereas six other wards with an aggregate of burgesses of 15,884 had to put up with only 18 representatives”. It was not right, he maintained, that “the whole election of aldermen rested in the hands of the four favoured wards” of Clifton, Bristol, St Augustine’s and Redcliffe. But although alderman Ford, the Conservative leader, admitted that he was forced to agree with much that Mills had said, the Conservatives voted down his resolution favouring ward revision by 32:14. Six months later Mills tried again, only to be denounced by the veteran councillor William Poole King for producing “a revolutionary motion’, to have a special meeting of Council to consider ward revision. This was voted down on procedural grounds.

The Liberals did not give up. A month later they secured a special meeting by a requisition to the Mayor signed by their leading figures and Mills once more rehearsed the case for ward revision and moved for presenting a petition to the Queen. Elisha Robinson, in seconding, made a detailed comparison of Bedminster and St Augustine’s wards designed to show that justice demanded that the former deserved the six representatives currently enjoyed by the latter while councillor Mark Whitwill made a similar comparison of St Philip’s and Bristol

12 P.C. 7 Dec. 1869; WDP 8 Dec. 1869.
13 ibid 9 Nov. 1874; WDP 10 Nov. 1874.
14 ibid 11 May 1875; WDP 12 May 1875.
wards. For the Conservatives alderman Proctor Baker responded with rumbustious vigour claiming that changing the representation of wards would not bring better men into the Council, indeed it would bring worse, and the whole agitation was got up for the advantage of the Liberals whom he complained monopolised all bodies in the city, including its parliamentary representation, the School Board, the magistracy and the Corporation of the Poor, and were now trying to dominate the Council. He rejected petitioning the Queen as this would lead to outsiders imposing a solution for what the Mayor described as “a burning question in Bristol for many years”. Instead, a tacit admission that inequalities existed, he proposed a committee of seven Conservatives and five Liberals be set up to examine the question in depth, justifying its composition by claiming that it accurately reflected the party strength of 20 Liberals and 28 Conservatives in the Council as a whole. In face of the Conservative majority the Liberals had no choice but to accept what some of them, with justification, would later see as a delaying tactic by their opponents since it was not until four years later that the committee reported to Council.\(^\text{15}\)

Evidently the party leaders had arrived at a compromise since the committee’s report was accepted in Council by 40:6 although Christopher Thomas, in committing the Liberals to vote for it, thought that the Conservatives should have conceded more and the justice done was “scant”. The scheme involved both revision of ward boundaries and re-allocation of representation. Three wards, St Augustine’s, Bristol and Clifton were to lose 3 Councillors each while Bedminster ward was to be divided into East and West Bedminster wards each represented by 3 councillors. St Philip’s was to be divided into North and South of St Philip’s wards also to have 3 councillors each, and a new ward, called Westbury, was to be created by detaching the northern end of St. Michael’s ward and uniting it with a part of Clifton ward. The other re-arrangement of boundaries was to take the Marsh district of St Philips and add it to Redcliffe ward to help justify its retention of 6 councillors.\(^\text{16}\)

The acceptance by the Council of the committee’s report was the beginning of the process of ward revision. The half a dozen Conservatives who had refused to accept it continued their opposition making the case that what Bristol needed before ward revision was boundary extension to take account of its considerable expansion outside the municipal boundaries into Horfield, St George, Cotham and Redland. Nevertheless the Council by an overwhelming majority voted in April

\(^\text{15}\) P.C. 29 June 1875; WDP 30 June 1875 and 8 Mar 1879 for a fracas in Council when Councillor George Wills accused the Conservative leader of still delaying the proceedings of the Committee.

\(^\text{16}\) P.C. 21 Mar. 1879 for the report; WDP 22 Mar. 1879.
1879 to promote a bill to carry out the committee’s scheme\textsuperscript{17} and the public meeting required by statute held in May to approve this was so supportive that no poll was required. But the Conservative opponents, led by Councillor W.K. Wait, one of Bristol’s most prominent grain merchants, who was also M.P. for Gloucester, presented a memorial to Mr Sclater-Booth, the Conservative President of the Local Government Board, claiming that the bill should not pass without further extension of the city’s boundaries and on its second reading in the Commons on 2nd March 1880 Wait moved its rejection in a lengthy speech. Unusually in a debate on a private bill he was supported by two cabinet ministers, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, Colonial Secretary and a member for Gloucestershire, and Mr Sclater-Booth. As one participant remarked, the debate took on the character of a contest between Gloucester and Bristol since the chief defender of the bill was Councillor Lewis Fry who was also one of Bristol’s M.P’s. His evidence of the support for the bill in Bristol and the admission on all sides that ward revision was necessary carried the day, the second reading being accepted by 163:98\textsuperscript{18}

Ward revision did not destroy the Conservative majority, as their leader, alderman Ford, confidently predicted. He believed his party would “stand higher in their fellow citizen’s esteem by righting an injustice.” Certainly the Liberals profited to some extent from revision. The two new Bedminster wards were represented from 1880 to 1897 by twenty councillors of whom sixteen were Liberals and the two new St Philip’s wards in the same years were also represented by twenty councillors of whom seventeen were Liberals. But the new Westbury ward returned equal numbers of Liberals and Conservatives.\textsuperscript{19} Conservative dominance was truly challenged by the major boundary extension of 1897 which led to the creation of five new wards, Horfield, St George’s, Stapleton, Somerset and Easton which only returned two Conservatives out of the fifteen new councillors elected in 1897.\textsuperscript{20}

\textit{Municipal Elections}

As for the municipal elections themselves, the inability of the Liberals to dislodge the Conservative majority on the Council, even though they often triumphed over them in parliamentary elections, doubtless encouraged infrequent electoral contests. Between 1852 and 1865 there were only 2.7 contests per year in the ten wards and only once in those years did more than three thousand electors actually cast votes. The average per year of votes cast amounted to a mere 1,402, scarcely

\textsuperscript{17} P.C. 29 April 1879; WDP 30 April 1879.
\textsuperscript{18} Parl. Debs. 3rd ser. vol. ccli 2 Mar. 1880.
\textsuperscript{19} A.B. Beaven, \textit{Bristol Lists} (Bristol 1899) pp 21–28, 39.
\textsuperscript{20} ibid p 40.
evidence of urban democracy. From 1866 until 1879, being the last election before ward revision, contests did increase, but not dramatically, to an average of three per year and from 1880–1896 when there were thirteen instead of ten wards, contests again increased, to an average of five per year, but, somewhat paradoxically, when there were eighteen wards, following boundary revision, contests dropped back to three or four a year at the end of the century. All told, of the 583 possible contests in the half century 1851 to 1900 68% resulted in unopposed returns and only 32%, i.e. 189 involved candidates going to the polls. The majority of these contests—105 out of 189—were straightforward battles between Liberals and Conservatives in wards where neither party had overwhelming support.

But for years on end in wards where either party was exceptionally strong the peace was not disturbed by the din of an election. Conservatives very rarely thought it worthwhile putting up a candidate in St Paul's. Only twice between 1851 and 1900 did they do so. Likewise between 1851 and 1900 of the thirty one councillors who represented St Augustine's thirty were Conservatives. During that half century the Liberals fought the seat only eight times winning just once in 1877. Also, understandings existed between the parties to avoid going to the polls and thus saving expense. In Bristol ward for years on end, the three seats to be filled each year were shared on a basis of two for Conservatives and one for the Liberals and there were times when a similar practice was observed in Clifton ward.

So, what did provoke contests? Tension within parties played a part, leading to Conservative challenging Conservative and Liberal standing against Liberal. On occasion such conflicts arose from personal animus but dissatisfaction with a councillor’s record also precipitated a contest. As the Times and Mirror noted in 1872, when a municipal election was imminent, it was the practice “to call a meeting of the ward’s electors at some well known hostelry or convenient schoolroom and to invite their representative to meet them . . . and undergo official vivisection”. More often than not a would-be councillor would survive the ordeal, as was reported of Mr Mills in District ward who “came close to having to face a contest, but, in the end, the burgesses were generally too proud of having the most pungent speaker in the Council for their representative, to turn him out”. But it was not always so. In St Pauls in 1862 Charles Tovey, its Liberal councillor since 1847, an active freeport campaigner, prominent in pressing for the city to have free library facilities, and enjoying the public support of the prominent tobacco manufacturer H.O. Wills, was rejected by the ward.

21 PP 1867 vol. lvi Number of registered voters . . . and numbers who voted in 1852 and subsequent years.
22 TM 26 Oct. 1872.
meeting, and subsequently in a contest at the polls, in favour of fellow Liberal, Thomas Wedmore, a Quaker wholesale grocer. Tovey’s crimes were that he had supported an unpopular increase in the Treasurer’s salary and the watering of some of the city’s streets to damp down dust but this did not include those of St Pauls.\(^\text{23}\)

In both parties tensions arose as each sought to maintain and organize their working class voters. The incentive to do so was especially strong in Bristol. In the eighteen sixties it had the largest number of working class voters in its parliamentary electorate of any city outside London and Manchester.\(^\text{24}\) In that decade both parties established associations of working class supporters. Although these generally followed the lead given by the party notables this was not always the case. For example, in 1869, the Clifton and Hotwells branch of The Working Mens Conservative Association staged a revolt against what the *Western Daily Press* called “the distribution of seats in the Council to friends and partisans in lawyers offices and at smug social gatherings”. At this time the parties in Clifton ward sought to avoid contests by agreeing to return two Conservatives and Lewis Fry, a Liberal, unopposed. But Mr Lane, Chairman of the local branch of the Conservative Working Mens Association, and his male and female supporters refused to be dictated to by their own party leaders, instead they secured the nomination of their own candidate, Mr Fooks, a barrister, precipitated a contest and saw their man head the poll and deprive the Liberal of his expected seat.\(^\text{25}\) In Redcliffe ward, for three successive elections in the later seventies, Roger Moore, a soap boiler and friend of Samuel Plimsoll, whom the Conservatives regarded as a joke candidate, and who enjoyed no countenance from the Liberal leadership, rallied the working class Liberal vote and proceeded to give their complacent opponents a considerable fright by the numbers they polled.\(^\text{26}\)

Roger Moore’s chance to become a councillor came in 1881 when he contested and won a seat in the new and more hospitable ward of Bedminster East. By this time the Liberal leadership, containing as it did some of Bristol’s leading industrialists, was beginning to find it increasingly difficult to retain the allegiance of some at least of its working class supporters. The notion that they should have

\(^{23}\)TM 8 Nov. 1862; BM 25 Oct. 1862; WDP 31 Oct. 3 Nov. 1862. As a wine merchant, it seems, Tovey was in part a victim of the teetallers.

\(^{24}\)PP 1866 vol. lvii p 747 Returns of the total number of voters in every borough at the last election and of the number of voters of the Working Class in such boroughs. Of Bristol’s 11,303 voters, 4,051 were classified as working class.

\(^{25}\)WDP 15 July, 1, 2, Nov. 1869; TM 6 Nov. 1869; BM 30 Oct. 1869.

\(^{26}\)Roger Moore, *To the independent electors of the ward of Redcliff and his To the burgesses of Redcliff ward* (BCL Bristol n.d. but internal evidence dates these as 1878. For a typical Moore campaign see TM 25,30,31 Oct. 1, 2 Nov. 1877; WDP 30,31 Oct. 1,2 Nov. 1877.
independent representation on public bodies had surfaced most notably in St Philips ward in 1877 where a challenge was mounted to Christopher Thomas, a leading Liberal, former Mayor, head of a major soap manufacturing business, who had represented the ward for the past twenty-nine years. He was not rejected by the ward meeting of Liberal voters "merely for the social sin of being respectable", as the Conservative press approvingly noted. But Thomas was sharply attacked by T.M. Kelly as an unsuitable candidate since he was a Director of Bristol Water Company and hence had a vested interest at a time when the Council was seriously contemplating purchasing the Company. Kelly, an Irishman and one-time building labourer, had been the driving force behind the establishment of a labourers' trade union The Bristol, West of England, Trade and Provident Society, which was part of the intense trade union activity which characterised the eighteen seventies in Bristol. After being ejected from the meeting which readopted Christopher Thomas, Kelly and his union allies who had formed a Working Man's Reform Association, nominated William Count, a working man, as a candidate "to revolutionise the grand old Tory city of Bristol" as a representative of labour. The Association worked hard for Count who polled a respectable 520 votes. Christopher Thomas polled three times as many but the working men believed they had gained a moral victory and Kelly declared that he would sever all ties with the Liberals "because of their attitude to working men". He felt that the events in St Philips in the following year justified him: the supporters of Lewis Fry, the Liberal candidate, attacked Count for standing again, impugned his character, and accused him of being surrounded by spongers.

Kelly, Count and their supporters by provoking electoral contests in the seventies to secure "direct labour representation" as Kelly called it, set a precedent for others to challenge the existing parties at the polls. In the eighties and nineties fifteen candidates calling themselves representatives of Labour stood for election in Redcliff, St James, District, St Pauls, St Philips, both north and south, Easton and St. George. Labour triumphed for the first time in 1887 in St Pauls when R.G. Tovey, who doubled as secretary of the Trades Council and the Labour League, defeated a long serving Liberal. By 1901 Labour had three sitting councillors. Further contests were precipitated by the Bristol Socialist Society founded in 1884 which fielded five candidates in three wards, Bedminster west, St Philips south and Somerset. In 1889 in St Philips south their candidate, H.H. Gore, a solicitor, capitalising

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27 TM 31 Oct. 1877.
29 William Count was a boot and shoemaker who had been adopted at a noisy torchlight meeting of three or four hundred on Broad Plain (WDP 23, 24 Oct. 1877).
30 See note 26 for press references for the St. Philips contest.
on the great labour revolt in the autumn of that year, won a spectacular victory, polling three times as many votes as his Liberal Unionist opponent.\textsuperscript{31} Now and then maverick Radicals entered the fray, the most persistent being Thomas Royall, a Hotwells Rd, tobacconist, who stood in Clifton at every election from 1878 to 1884 and was apt to cause a commotion by heckling the Conservative candidates and leading his own followers in singing at their adoption meetings.\textsuperscript{32}

The Independents

The emergence of the Labour and Socialist challenge to the established parties, although still very limited in its impact, was complemented by a growing tendency in the eighties and nineties for candidates to present themselves to the electorate as Independents. Some fifteen had campaigned under this flag in the nineties and by 1898 some seven sitting councillors were described as Independents.\textsuperscript{33} As often as not, especially among the Liberals, “independent” candidates would emerge to challenge the official nominee of the local party committee. For example in 1883 Gilmore Barnett, a solicitor and brother of Canon Barnett of Toynbee Hall renown, stood in St Philips North on “independent Liberal principles” as he put it and in opposition to Charles Garton, a brewer, who was the candidate of the Liberal Association. Gilmore Barnett lost in 1883, repeated his stand in 1884 only failing by 57 votes, but triumphed in 1886 and thereafter held his seat virtually unchallenged until the end of the century.\textsuperscript{34} Contests within the Liberal party often consisted of contention between very moderate Liberals of the kind acceptable to the dominant Conservatives in Clifton, Bristol and Redcliff wards, and hence allowed one of the three seats for these wards, and often less well to do and more radically inclined members of the party. Moderate Liberals from time to time found themselves not favoured in the less prosperous wards, particularly when, following the split in the national party in 1886, they became Liberal Unionists. In 1895, for instance, John William Lane, a Liberal Unionist, was challenged and soundly beaten in St Paul’s by William Cowlin, a twenty seven year old builder. Cowlin called himself a “Progressive Radical”, argued for municipalising the gas and water concerns, and claimed to be the first native of St Paul’s to stand for the Council.\textsuperscript{35}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[32] e.g. B.T. 30 Oct. 1876.
\item[33] WDP 2 Nov. 1898 for a breakdown of the political composition of the new 84 strong Council.
\item[34] \textit{ibid} 2 Nov. 1883. Gilmore Barnett took a keen interest in labour questions, the housing of the poor and poor relief. He was apt to upset leading Liberals by his outspoken advocacy.
\item[35] WDP 30, 31 Oct. 1,2 Nov. 1895.
\end{footnotes}
The councillors

So once the election results had been declared it might be asked who were the newly elected councillors? Down to Robert Tovey’s election for St Paul’s in 1887 all were drawn from the middle classes and, thereafter, working class councillors were still very much the exception. In the enlarged Council of 1897 there were just two carpenters (W.H. Elkins and J. Curle), an engine fitter (J. Sharland), a chair maker (J. O’Grady) and a carrier (W. Baster). At mid-century in 1851 of the 46 out of 48 newly elected councillors whose occupations are known eleven were manufacturers, another eleven were merchants of diverse kinds, a dozen were professional men, chiefly lawyers and doctors, three were ship owners or brokers, five were occupied in various commercial activities, while four described themselves simply as gentlemen. By this time the activities for which Bristol had been noted in the eighteenth century were scarcely represented on the Council: there was no West India merchant, although the two Poole King councillors Richard and William traded with Africa, and there was no sugar refiner or brewer. As the table below shows there was no radical change in the next half century in the occupations of the elected councillors.

Occupations of councillors 1851–1897

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1851</th>
<th>1861</th>
<th>1871</th>
<th>1881</th>
<th>1891</th>
<th>1897</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of councillors</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchants</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous Commercial</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentlemen</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipping owners or brokers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Until the coming of the enlarged Council in 1897, following boundary revision, steadily around a quarter of the councillors returned were or had been concerned with manufacturing often on a scale considerable in the Bristol context. For instance councillor James Derham who represented Bristol ward from 1878–1880 and St Philip’s North from 1880–1887 was senior partner in a footwear manufacturing firm which at this time had 1,500 employees.\(^36\) Councillor W.A.F. Powell, who sat for Redcliffe from 1861–1885, was a partner in the glass bottle

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manufacturing business of Powell and Ricketts which was notably successful in fighting competition from the dominant firms in the north and Midlands. 37 Christopher Thomas, councillor for St Phillips from 1845–1883, like many manufacturers, a Liberal, 38 was a member of a soap-making firm which in the 1870s was one of the largest producers in the country. The nationally known families of the chocolate manufacturer, J. S. Fry and Sons and the tobacco manufacturers, W.D. & H.O. Wills provided councillors from time to time as did firms of more local repute such as the Hare family firm of floor-cloth manufacturers, Finzels, the sugar refiner, and the substantial printing, and packaging manufacturers, Mardon, Son & Hall and E.S. & A. Robinson. 39

At mid-century Bristol was better known for its merchants than its industrialists. No doubt the Council's takeover of the management of the port in 1848 encouraged merchants with businesses dependent on port facilities to seek election to the Council and in particular membership of the powerful Docks Committee. Charles Nash, for instance, junior partner in the timber merchants Jones and Nash, was elected councillor for St Augustine's in November 1851 for which he sat until 1886. In 1853 he became a member of the Docks Committee, its deputy Chairman in 1859 and its Chairman in 1873 until he resigned in 1877. Likewise W.K. Wait of the firm of Wait and James, which by the end of the century was the largest corn merchant in the city, was councillor for Bristol ward from 1867 until 1885 and a member of Docks Committee from 1870 until 1885. His son H.W.K. Wait sat for Bristol ward from 1893 to 1906 and joined the Docks Committee in 1895.

Merchants trading to America, Africa or the West Indies, major activities of Bristol businessmen in earlier times, were much less prominent among councillors than they had been. The two brothers Richard and William Poole King, Africa merchants, were each councillors for thirty nine years until Richard, who was Chairman of the Docks Committee from 1848 to 1859, died in 1874 and William retired in 1880 after twenty years service on the Docks Committee. Apart from them, T.P. Jose who represented St Augustine's from 1858 to 1873, and his

37 ibid p 8, Powell lived at Norland House, Clifton, was a notable Mason, being Provincial Grand Master of Bristol for sixteen years, and when he died in 1906 at the age of 92 was the oldest magistrate in the city.
39 H.O. Wills sat for St Pauls 1845–1860, W.D. Wills for the same ward 1846–1861, Sir Wm. H. Wills for Bristol ward 1862–1880 and Sir F. Wills for Bedminster (w) 1885–1888; R. Fry sat for St James 1856–1868. Lewis Fry who sat for various wards 1866–9 and 1872–1884 can be more properly regarded as a professional as he was a partner in a firm of solicitors. C. Finzel was Councillor for Redcliffe 1871–1874, C.B. Hare sat for the same ward 1839–1854, followed by J. Hare 1854–1871 and C.F. Hare also sat for Redcliffe 1880–1885. H. Mardon represented St Pauls 1891–3 and E.S. Robinson represented Bedminster 1858–1885.
son William who sat for Clifton from 1874 to 1878 were partners in a firm of American merchants, John Bridges who sat for St Augustine’s 1880–1886 was that rarity a West Indies merchant, while John Lucas, councillor for Redcliffe 1859–1863, was member of a firm trading to Africa. One longstanding merchanting activity which continued to be represented among councillors was the importing of wine. Among such councillors was Edward Harvey, who sat for St Augustine’s 1873–1891, George Wills, a councillor from 1866–1882 and Chairman of the Docks Committee 1877–1880, and John Wetherman, a councillor from 1849–1877 and for twenty years a member of the Docks Committee.

But in truth, in the latter half of the nineteenth century Bristol’s businessmen were now more likely to be trading in coal, iron, chemicals, hides, provisions or timber and corn, which had become the two major staples of the port’s traffic, than in the products of warmer climes such as sugar. This change was reflected in the membership of the Council as was also the growth of diverse commercial activities. By 1897 the Council contained four councillors who were or had been builders, one who was a grocer owning seven or eight shops, two who were drapers, two who were tailors, one of whom, John Walls, was sufficiently well known to become President of the Master Tailors Association of Great Britain in 1898, two auctioneers and one estate agent. Professional men were always to be found among councillors although as the century wore on medical men were less in evidence, the five of 1851 dwindling to two in 1871 and 1881 and one in 1891 and 1897, while councillors qualified in the law increased in number reaching ten in 1891 and tended to play a very active part as was the case with G. Pearson and J. Inskip, to mention but two.

Councillor’s residences

In a city in which particular districts, such as Clifton or St Philips and Bedminster, were largely inhabited by either members of the middle or working class, the addresses of councillors provided an indication of their social standing. From 1852–1882 of the 48 elected councillors a percentage ranging from 46% to 52% at the beginning of each decade dwelt in Clifton and a further percentage ranging from 18% to 27% lived in Redland, Cotham, Tyndalls Park or the Park St. – Berkeley Sq. area. All of these localities were indisputably the haunts of Bristol’s well-to-do middle class. In the eighteen nineties the percentage with Clifton addresses fell to 31% in 1892 and 24% in 1897 in the enlarged Council. In part this reflected a tendency among the richest councillors to migrate to Stoke Bishop or Leigh Woods and in part it also reflected the advent of a more socially varied set of Councillors whose residences were widely scattered throughout the city.
Councillors’ religion

Insofar as it has been possible to trace the religious allegiances of Councillors it would appear the great majority belonged to that conspicuous minority of Bristolians to whom religion counted. Indeed some were very active in the life of chapels or churches. To mention but a few, Edward Parsons, councillor for Bedminster West 1889–1904, was the virtual founder of East St. Bedminster Baptist chapel; Thomas Pethick, councillor for St James 1863–1872, was a particularly prominent member of the Victoria Weslyan Methodist chapel in Whiteclad Road; James Inskip, councillor for Clifton 1872–1880, and Westbury from 1880–1892, was active in the evangelical Emmanuel church in upper Clifton and Charles Bowles Hare, councillor for Redcliff 1871–1896, was Church warden of St Mary Redcliff. Sir Joseph Weston and Sir George Edwards were active in the administration of the Bristol Church Extension Fund. As a general rule Conservative councillors were Anglicans while the Liberals contained within their ranks Nonconformists from a range of denominations.

Councillors’ service

The average length of service of the 139 councillors who represented wards between 1851 and 1901 was just over eight years. As might be expected there were some very long serving members and others whose term in the Council was brief. Some twenty eight were councillors for twenty years or more, the record being held by William Poole King with thirty nine years, closely followed by Christopher Thomas with a year less service. Long serving councillors such as Elisha Robinson, Thomas Canning, Frederick Terrell, Sir Joseph Weston, Charles Nash, James Inskip and Charles Townsend usually played a prominent part in Council proceedings. At the other extreme were those who served for three years or less such as W.H. Cowlin who represented St Pauls for a year before his death at 28. Thomas Gibson, councillor for Clifton for two years before death claimed him at 32. As in the past, bankruptcy cut short a councillor’s career as happened to Edward Rogers. A new hazard was death by railway accident, a fate which befell John Ayre after sitting for Bedminster for nine years, and more unusual was the misfortune of John Bates who represented Bristol ward for fifteen years, before he accidentally shot himself. In general, the typical councillor represented only a single ward in his career and the majority did not experience a setback at the hustings.

41 TM 5 July 1869.
As local notables many councillors and aldermen were involved in public bodies or duties outside the Council. In 1851 half the city's twenty J.P.s were councillors or aldermen and the same was true for the 25 J.P.s of 1861, the 34 of 1871 and the 47 of 1881. Naturally as the magistracy grew in numbers in the late nineteenth century, along with the population, this proportion fell. 22 of the 47 individuals who served as Masters of the Society of Merchant Venturers between 1851 and 1897 were either councillors or aldermen. Some eighteen councillors held office in the Chamber of Commerce during this half century and of the 58 governors and deputy governors of the Incorporation of the Poor between 1851 and 1897 13 were councillors while a further 7 served as Poor Law Guardians in the Unions of either Bedminster or Barton Regis. Bristol councillors were also to be found having served in the various new local institutions created in the late nineteenth century. Nine were members of School Boards, another nine served in various local Boards for districts adjacent to Bristol and three had experience as county councillors. Nevertheless the most usual activity of councillors outside the Council was that of company director: at the very minimum thirty were so occupied. In short it was the world of business which contributed most to forming the outlook of councillors.

The Mayoralty

Following the annual elections on 1 November at the first quarterly meeting of the Council on 9th November it was required by statute to elect a Mayor to be chairman of its proceedings and ex officio of all its committees. The Mayor was also ex officio chairman of the magistrates and by custom was supposed to make himself available on a regular basis to listen to the complaints and requests of his fellow citizens. As the city's first citizen he took the lead not only at civic ceremonies but also in providing festivities. Indeed in 1852 the Mayor, W.H.G. Langton and Mrs Langton, "gave a grand civic entertainment to four hundred of the principal residents of the city and neighbourhood, at the Victoria Rooms". The Bristol Mercury declared that "a more brilliant festival had seldom ever been witnessed". Forty years later, at the end of his six years in the office, Sir Charles Wathen was described as having "dispensed hospitality at the Mansion House with a liberal hand" and "on three occasions entertained a member of the Royal Family". The Mayor was the chief spokesman for the city in

42 A.B. Beaven, Bristol Lists pp 130–1.
43 B.M. 21 Feb. 1852; WDP 9 Nov. 1891. Langton was the son of Col. William Gore-Langton of Newton Park, M.P. for Somerset 1795–1847. His Bristol residence was Clifton Court, Clifton. For further details see M. Stenton ed. Who's Who of British Members of Parliament vol. 1 1832–1885 p 227.
its relations with outside authorities, Mayor Sir Joseph Weston playing a particularly valuable role in the complex negotiations with the private dock companies when the Council sought to acquire their Severnside facilities in the early eighties.

In the fifty years 1851–1901 19 councillors and 10 aldermen were elected Mayor and Charles Highett and Robert Symes, who were not at the time of their election members of the Council, also served as Mayor. Of these 31, 22 were Conservatives, 8 were Liberals and Sir Charles Wathen, who served no less than six terms, began as a Liberal but became a Liberal Unionist in 1886. With the exception of W.H.G. Langton, a wealthy Liberal who was Mayor 1851–2, the office was held from 1836 until 1864 by Conservatives.

By 1851 it had become usual for a small cabal of self-appointed councillors to find out who was willing to serve. There was no rush to do so. The Mayor’s allowance was by no means generous. It had been fixed at £700 a year in 1847 and remained at that figure in 1892 when a Council committee investigated the financing of the mayoralty. The Mayor was expected to pay for the upkeep and running of the state coach the expense of which by this time was absorbing almost all the Mayor’s allowance. It was not until alderman Proctor’s munificent gift to the city in 1874 of the Mansion House on Clifton Down that the Mayor had an official residence whose upkeep and furnishing was a Council responsibility and at which entertainment might be offered.\(^{44}\) Until then the Mayor had to use his private residence or resort to hiring premises. Furthermore the many calls on the time of the Mayor were such that well-to-do active businessmen might be excused from not wishing to serve, nevertheless the expectation that the Mayor should dispense much hospitality meant that only such men were really capable of playing the part. The mayor-making cabal, often known as the Warwick Committee in reference to its king-making powers, clearly succeeded for many years in bridging party divisions in choosing candidates. It became customary for the Conservatives to propose and the Liberals to second the election of their choice and from 1864 onwards Conservatives were willing to support the candidature of such leading Liberals as William Naisht, in 1864, E.S. Robinson, in 1866, and Christopher Thomas in 1874 even though, as the Conservative Alderman Hare remarked of the last “he disagreed with

\(^{44}\)P.C. 4 Aug. 1874 and 11 May 1875 for the report of the Finance Committee noting that the object in fitting up the Mansion House has been “to combine the advantages of an Official with those of a Private Residence and which may be occupied by the Mayor in both characters”. The Committee proposed a permanent staff of a housekeeper, a butler and two housemaids to be paid for by the Council. Latimer, *Annals of Bristol: nineteenth century* pp 478–9 for further detail. For the 1892 inquiry see P.C. 9 Aug. 1892 and WDP 10 Aug. 1892 for the informative debate.
him on most of the great political questions of the day.”45 It would appear that it was in this period of party co-operation that the understanding grew up that during his period in office the Mayor should put aside all party considerations. Also in the sixties the Council demonstrated, by electing William Naish, a Quaker, in 1864 and Joseph Alexander, a Jew, in 1865, that “the religious opinions of an English gentleman were no bar to his occupying an official position”, as councillor W.H. Wills put it.46

Harmony broke down in 1891, when, as the Western Daily Press observed “for the first time for many years there was not a unanimity of feeling in regard to the election of Mayor”. The election of Dr Highett was proposed and also seconded from the Conservative benches and Charles Townsend, the Liberal leader and his followers, voted unavailingly against the resolution. Dr Highett had been councillor for District ward from 1881 to 1884 but in 1891 he was the first non-member of the Council to be proposed as Mayor, a practice which had been made lawful by the Municipal Corporations Act, 1882 (Vic. 45 & 46 c 50 sect. 15). Townsend argued that choosing a non-member could only be justified if special circumstances existed which was not the case. He complained that he and his party had not been consulted over Dr Highett’s candidature. They regarded him as wholly unsuitable for the office: he was over seventy, in “very feeble health” and lacking “the capacity, physical strength and energy and intimate knowledge of the affairs of the Council which the office demanded.”47 The Conservatives sought to defend their choice by referring to his previous service as a councillor and electing him as an alderman after he had taken office as Mayor.48

It would appear that the Conservatives were having difficulty in finding Conservatives willing to stand. Highett’s successor in 1892, councillor W.R. Barker, was a Liberal, active in Council business and suitable for the post. But in 1893 the Conservative, Sir George Edwards, proposed Robert Syme, who was not a member of the Council, and had been rejected five times by the electorate when he had tried to become a councillor. Howell Davies, the new Liberal leader, echoed Townsend’s objections to electing a non-member but also castigated the Conservatives for failing to serve as Mayor. In the past thirteen years, he observed, only two had done so. In particular he attacked the Warwick committee, whom he named as three Conservative aldermen, Dix, Fox and Smith, as an “irresponsible cabal”. No other city, he claimed, had such a body choosing its Mayor. He

45 WDP 10 Nov. 1874.
46 ibid 10 Nov. 1866.
47 WDP 10 Nov. 1891.
48 P.C. 29 Jan. 1892.
rammed home his onslaught by nominating alderman Smith to be the new Mayor. Smith declined the nomination and declared himself ready to pay the fine for refusing to serve. Nonetheless the Conservatives voted through Syme’s election and he proceeded to serve five terms plainly having demonstrated his suitability for the office. No doubt Liberals were mollified by the election of Howell Davies who served 1895–6 and Sir Herbert Ashman who was elected as Bristol’s first Lord Mayor in 1899 after the Council had successfully petitioned the Queen for the conferring of this honour on its first citizen.

The Aldermen

Following the election of a Mayor the next business of the Council on the 9th November, as prescribed by the Municipal Corporations Act (5 & 6 William IV c lxvi sect. xxv) was to fill any vacancy among the sixteen aldermen. The Council itself elected the city’s sixteen aldermen. There was no statutory requirement that they should have faced the municipal electorate. Thanks to the House of Lords, their progenitor, this meant that they constituted an element of co-option in the reformed elected city governments created by the 1835 Act. Of the 74 individuals elected as aldermen between 1851 and 1901 38 had no experience as elected councillors while 36 had such experience before becoming aldermen. Aldermen were almost entirely Conservatives, as might be expected, given that the party commanded a majority in the Council. Those who had not faced the ratepayer electorate, with the exception of four solicitors, were drawn from Bristol’s business community of manufacturers and merchants. They included men prominent in that community such as William Proctor Baker, a leading corn merchant, William George of the brewing family, William and John Wyld, wine merchants, John Jones, timber merchant and Sholto Hare of the floor cloth manufacturing business. Some aldermen, such as Proctor Baker and Francis Fox, served as aldermen for over thirty years and were leading figures in the Council, Fox becoming leader of the Conservatives and Proctor Baker taking a very active part in the Docks Committee from 1875–1901, including two spells as chairman. Their careers came near to justifying Councillor Baster’s observation in 1901 that “an alderman was a holder of office practically for life”. Others remained in obscurity; George Morgan became notorious for never having spoken in Council, Edward Slaughter, after serving for a mere three months in 1865, failed to be re-elected for reasons that remain a mystery, and Conrad Finzel, a leading sugar refiner, when elected in 1858, refused to take office pleading too many business commitments.

49 WDP 10 Nov. 1893.
50 ibid 9 Oct. 1901.
51 P.C. 6,22 Sept. 1853.
Not surprisingly Liberals from time to time attacked the practice of electing non-councillors as aldermen. The young Handel Cossham protested in 1865 that “one fourth of the voting power of the Council was not elected by the citizens” and that this was “an intentional violation of the principle of the 1835 Act”.52 This one fourth, of course, substantially increased the Conservative majority on the Council. Alderman Abbot for the Conservatives, replied by observing that the 1835 Act did allow non-councillors to be elected Aldermen and that in any case they would be elected by councillors who were the nominees of the ratepayers. While Conservatives retained an overall majority in the Council these considerations prevailed. But following the extension of the city’s boundaries in 1897 and the election of more Liberal, Labour and Independent councillors, councillor Baster, elected for the new Somerset ward in November 1897 as a Socialists, carried a motion in Council in October 1898 which amounted to calling for the abolition of aldermen. When alderman Fox, the Conservative leader, sought to have this rescinded he failed by 36 votes to 38.53 Nonetheless aldermen survived. Baster returned to the matter in 1901 contending that “those who voted money should be subject to public vote” and hence aldermen should be chosen only from among councillors, a proposition which he carried in Council by one vote, but the Town Clerk, when appealed to, said that he thought a resolution to this effect would be inoperative without a change in the Municipal Corporations Act. Seizing upon this alderman Fox subsequently moved that the resolution be expunged as ultra vires. Howell Davies, the liberal leader, agreed to second this, explaining that he had realised that the Town Clerk was correct but he had voted for Baster’s resolution to show his party’s support for the principle and commitment to campaigning for a change in the law.54

Committees

E lecting a Mayor and aldermen was followed by setting up the committees in which the bulk of the Council’s work was done. In 1851 there were seven standing committees. These were the Watch Committee which all Municipal Corporations were required to establish by the 1835 Act whose authors were so greatly concerned to improve urban policing; the Finance Committee which managed the Council’s estate and the Borough Fund, also created by the 1835 Act; the Docks Committee established in 1848 as a consequence of the transfer of the Docks to the Corporation; the Parliamentary Bills Committee,

52 WDP 14 Feb. 1866.
54 P.C. 8,30 Oct. 1901; WDP 31 Oct. 1901.
annually appointed to scrutinise all private bills which might affect the Council’s interests; the Improvement Committee charged with carrying out the Improvement Acts obtained by the Council in 1840 and 1847; the Baths and Washhouses Committee overseeing the facilities resulting from the Council’s adoption of the relevant Act; and, finally, the committee, usually known as the Sanitary Committee, which the Council in its capacity as the Local Board of Health established in 1851 following its adoption of the 1848 Public Health Act.

By 1901 such was their utility for dealing with business that the number of standing committees had swollen to nineteen. Six of the seven of 1851 still existed while the Improvement Committee had been merged with the Sanitary Committee. New committees such as the Museum, Libraries, Technical Education, Downs and Electrical Committees reflected the widening sphere of municipal action, while others such as the Pilotage, Loans, New Streets and Health Committees resulted from a hiving off of duties from overburdened committees. Now and then, too, parliament created legislation requiring local implementation for which the most appropriate body appeared to be a Council committee. This was the case with the legislation concerning the Diseases of Animals which was a matter of concern to Bristol as a considerable importer of cattle from Ireland. On occasion, too, it seemed appropriate for the Council to take over responsibility form other bodies and to exercise this by means of a committee as was the case in 1854 when a Council Committee of Visitors of the asylum for the mentally sick poor superseded the Justices as Visitors.

Attending committee meetings took up more of the average Council members time than full Council meetings particularly if they were members of committees such as Docks which met frequently. The Town Clerk from time to time totalled the number of committee meetings there had been in a year. In 1859 there were 244 and in 1863 382 and this did not include meetings of sub-committees. Most standing committees spawned these, usually consisting of three or four members and often dealing with routine matters of finance. By 1900 the member’s diary listed no less than thirty seven sub-committees. Some of these involved members in acting as inspectors, such as the sub-committees charged with oversight of the five districts into which the city was divided for sanitary purposes, while others were concerned with major aspects of the parent committee’s responsibilities. The works and traffic sub-committees of the Docks committee fell into that category.

The Council only rarely considered its burgeoning committee structure. But in 1883 councillor William Pethick carried a motion setting up a committee to inquire as to the best manner of selecting members

55 WDP 3 Jan. 1860; BM 2 Jan. 1864.
to serve on committees, as to whether there should be limits to the numbers on each committee and “to report on the subject of committees generally”. Practice in Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham was examined where it was found that Standing Orders fixed numbers on each committee and prescribed a limit to the number of committees on which a member could serve. The Bristol committee’s report proposed that no more than fifteen members should be appointed to the more important committees of Finance. Docks, Streets Improvement, Watch, Parliamentary Bills and Sanitary affairs; the lesser committees should not exceed eleven members and ad hoc committees should not exceed seven. As the figures provided by councillor Townsend showed, existing membership was significantly greater. All this was acceptable to the Council. The only contentious issue was the manner of selecting members.

The inquiry committee ducked the matter by making no recommendation. This amounted to endorsing the existing practice of the two party leaders co-operating to choose members. To the blunt-speaking councillor Moss Levy, a Liberal of radical leanings, this was an unfair and unconstitutional procedure which led to far too many aldermen sitting on major committees and no less than sixteen Conservatives on the Docks committee. He narrowly failed with a motion to have each ward represented on the major committees, a proposal regarded by those who disagreed as being impracticable. In 1890 the Independent councillor Hugh Gore, supported by the leading reformer among the Conservatives, councillor George Pearson, registered a further protest at selection by the party leaders which, in Gore’s words, “said that unless they had certain views on the Irish question they were disqualified from serving on the Electric Light or Watch committees” Independents, he complained, were forced to declare themselves to be party men if they were to be selected to serve on committees. The advent of Labour councillors also led to protests that they were unfairly treated by the dominant party leaders in regard to committee membership. These complaints, coupled with the enlargement of the Council in 1897, (resulting from boundary extension) invited a review of Standing Orders on committees. This led in turn to the Council appointing a Committee on Committees charged with considering “the appointment of and instructions to committees of the Council, the number of members on the various committees and the subject of committees generally”.

The Committee on Committees began by favouring a special selection committee to assist the party leaders in choosing committee

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56 WDP 15 Oct. 1890.
57 ibid 10 Nov. 1897.
58 ibid 24 Nov. 1897.
members, but whose role would be confined to advising on replacing non-attending members and meeting the demands of independent members of the Council. But this limited proposal did not satisfy the Labour councillor Sharland whose motion to scrap the limited purposes of the proposed selection committee and reinforce its membership with four members of Council in addition to the proposed membership of chairmen and deputy chairmen of the five principle standing committees, aroused prolonged discussion before carrying the day. When the Council debated the report of the Committee on Committees it decided that six rather than four councillors should be added to the proposed selection committee and named them as the leaders of the two major parties, councillor E.T. Lewis, as the senior Independent councillor, councillor Sharland, representing the Labour party, the Conservative councillor C.R. Hancock and alderman C.B. Hare, also a Conservative, who had chaired the committee on committees. Hare defended the Conservative majority on the selection committee by maintaining that it had long been recognised that the majority party should have a majority on committees and this should also apply to the new selection committee, a view accepted by the Liberal leader. The Council rejected by 42:11 a motion proposing that instead of this new committee the Council itself should hold an unofficial meeting before 9 November each year to settle committee membership, and by 1901 the selection committee was in full swing.

Another vexed question arose when the Totterdown Liberal, councillor Chandler, moved in 1899 that the press should be admitted to standing committees. He observed that for the past ten years reporters had been present at Sanitary Committee meetings and members had found their reports “impartial and correct”. Bath and Cardiff allowed reporters at committee meetings, he noted, and their presence would rid the Council of the present garbled stories that appeared in the newspapers as to what went on at committee meetings. Alderman Proctor Baker would have none of it. The Docks Committee, he declared “was essentially a commercial committee at which matters were discussed which were of a private character. Boards of directors of Banks, Railway Companies etc. would not dream of carrying on business with the press present”. Nevertheless Chandler carried his motion 26:19. It was a Pyrrhic victory. The deputy Mayor gave notice of a resolution to rescind which was duly carried 40:27 at the next meeting of the Council.

59 MMC 24 Mar., 23 June 1898.
60 WDP 19 Oct. 1898.
61 Sel. C. M. 5 Nov. 1901.
62 WDP 15 Mar. 1899; P.C. 14,28 Mar. 1899; historians seeking to penetrate what went on at committee meetings are left with the dry record of the minutes, the guesswork of contemporary reporters, and leaks by members.
Committee structure

Councillor Gilmore Barnett was the only member of Council who displayed any serious interest in the structure of the Council’s committees. He was the successful campaigner for establishing the Health Committee separate from the Sanitary Committee which lightened the latter’s manifold responsibilities and provided the MOH and his growing functions with a higher profile.\(^63\) The Committee on Committees in 1899 did recommend that it made sense for a committee, containing representatives of all existing committees, to be charged with raising all capital required by the Council, and what revenue needed raising by the Borough and General District rates, so that competition between committees in this respect might be avoided, and something approaching a budget for most but not all the activities of the Council became feasible.\(^64\) But it was Barnett who secured the renaming of this new committee as the Finance Committee while the old Finance Committee, he urged, was best denominated the Estates and General Purposes Committee as this accurately described the work it did.\(^65\) But he had no success in 1890 in seeking to have attendance at committees recorded and reported quarterly to the Council. Alderman Fox, the Conservative leader thought it “monstrous to have our names placarded for non-attendance”, “they were not boys to be controlled by a modern Dr Squeers” councillor Howell Davies complained that some of them on the more active committees did more in two months than Gilmore Barnett did in a year, while councillor Dix noted that “the absence of some gentlemen from committees would be a relief”.\(^66\) As might be inferred, Gilmore Barnett was not a popular figure in the Council.

Council Meetings

After appointing a Mayor, electing aldermen to fill vacancies and appointing committees on 9 November, the Council was obliged by the 1835 Act to meet at noon on three further quarterly meetings at which general business was to be transacted.\(^67\) No prior notice had to be given of such business. Special meetings of the Council could be called by the Mayor, or at the behest of at least five members, but business at such meetings had to be confined to matters specified in a prior notice. In the eighteen fifties almost always the Council met four times a year in special meetings as well as in the required quarterly

\(^{63}\) WDP 13 Oct. 1897; P.C. 12 Oct. 1897.
\(^{64}\) P.C. 31 Oct. 1899.
\(^{65}\) P.C. 14 Feb. 1899; WDP 15 Feb., 10 Nov. 1899.
\(^{66}\) P.C. 9 Dec. 1890; WDP 10 Dec. 1890.
\(^{67}\) 5 & 6 Will. IV c 76 sect. lxxix.
meetings. In addition, in its capacity as a Local Board of Health, the Council met two or three times annually. By the end of the decade some discontent with this pattern was voiced. In 1859 councillor J.G. Shaw, who had served as Mayor 1853–5, observed that at the quarterly meetings when items could be brought forward without notice members were kept sitting late, matters were not always fully discussed and individual members went away disappointed. He favoured rationalising Council procedure by having monthly meetings, claiming that as a business man he would rather attend for an hour or two per month rather than three or four hours once a quarter. But in the end Shaw modified his position by moving that in addition to the quarterly meetings the Council would meet on the fourth Tuesday in March, June and September. This the Council accepted *nem. con.* The trend was clearly towards having more meetings. In the sixties meetings averaged eleven per year, in the seventies twelve, in the eighties sixteen and in the nineties the average rose to twenty per year. Very occasionally debate was so protracted that the Mayor would adjourn the Council to the following day for completion of proceedings, while at the other extreme occasionally meetings were brief and formal as was the case when the Council met to agree the conferment of the freedom of the city on an eminent individual.

As late as the very end of the nineteenth century no Standing Orders existed to provide a code controlling Council proceedings. Councillor Gilmore Barnett was not challenged when he remarked in March 1900 that “they were the only city which attempted to conduct business without “standing orders” and successfully moved for the Committee on Committees to be instructed to remedy the deficiency." The Town Clerk duly produced draft S.O.s in 1901 which were then subjected to detailed amendment by the Committee. By 1902, having been accepted by the full Council, each councillor would find them printed in his member’s diary which itself was first produced in 1900. Prior to this, it would seem that the Council relied on the Mayor, aided by the Town Clerk, to ensure orderly meetings. Statute law required that minutes be kept of proceedings but there was no requirement for a verbatim record of speeches as in parliamentary proceedings. The public- and members themselves- had to rely on the reports in the local press for such a record. These were evidently regarded by councillors as a satisfactory record, since a resolution in 1898 to have copies of such reports provided for them along with the minutes was moved and seconded without demur, although nothing came of the suggestion.

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69 WDP 28 Mar. 1900.
70 M.C.C. 7 Mar. 1901.
71 WDP 29 Nov. 1898.
The Council House

A matter of much greater contention was the meeting place of the Council. In 1827 a new Council House in Broad St. was completed at a cost of over £23,000\(^2\) and for a half century no serious case was made for its replacement. Eventually, in the early eighties a combination of dissatisfaction with the poor ventilation, closely packed seats, lack of provision for writing in the Council chamber, and awareness of the ever-growing need of offices for the expanding number of employees of the Corporation, led to the Council establishing a committee to consider creating “a pile of buildings as other cities had”, to quote alderman Ford’s hope.\(^3\) Contention ensued over a site for a Town Hall and as to whether the city could afford one. Alderman Warren thought it might be possible to expand the existing Council House by buying the splendid West of England Bank adjacent to it. Alderman Edwards was all for one of the sites created by driving the new Baldwin St. through the old city: councillor Williams thought these were too costly for the city treasury. The Council House Re-arrangement Committee, as it called itself, in 1883, ruled out the site on the northern side of Baldwin St. but wanted more time to consider the site on the southern side. Councillor Elisha Robinson argued for a grand scheme of a new city centre made by roofing over the Frome from the Drawbridge to the Stonebridge and building on it an imposing block of offices to include the Council’s employees, the Post Office, the Inland Revenue and sundry other smaller public offices.\(^4\)

But all the Re-arrangement Committee came up with in 1883 was suggestions for very minor improvements to the Council Chamber such as removing a large table, arranging all seats so they all faced the chair and locating reporters at the side rather than the back of the room. The Finance Committee added suggestions for further minor improvements made possible by the removal of the police court, which had functioned in the Council House, to new courts in Bridewell St. Members W.C.s could now be on the same floor as the chamber, a much better room and ante-room could be provided for the Mayor and there could be a new large committee room. The Council evidently thought both proposals quite unsatisfactory: it rejected them and accepted a resolution from Alderman George Edwards for a committee to examine whether it would be desirable to acquire more land adjoining the Council House, or any other site, for municipal offices and an estimate of the cost. The eleven dissentents were spoken for by councillor C.F. Hare who regarded the proposal as “the ghost of

\(^2\) Bush, p 44.

\(^3\) WDP 3 Jan. 1881. Alderman Proctor Baker was the prime mover.

\(^4\) WDP 19 April, 29 June 1883.
a very serious expenditure”, but the press supported Edwards on the
grounds that the existing municipal buildings were quite unworthy of
the city and the failure of the Council to produce a grand town hall
in the manner of many a northern or midland town was comparable
with its failure to produce a single berth for a large ocean liner or its
shortcomings in not running the trams or having the city docks linked
to the rail system.75

Progress was very slow. The Finance Committee did acquire property
in Broad St76 but in 1888 councillor Barnett was urging it to report on
whether the site of the existing Council House together with these
properties would make a suitable site for a municipal building. Henry
Williams, the only member of the Council who was an architect, was
certain it would not and was backed up by councillor Charles Wills who
noted that Leeds had just equipped itself with a town hall which occu-
pied twice the area of the site suggested for Bristol. Williams proposed
that John Wood the Elder’s superb Exchange “would make the finest
Council Chamber in England” and that the corn merchants presently
using it might be accommodated on one of the Baldwin St. sites, a
suggestion unanimously adopted by the Council.77 But nothing came of
this. By 1889 the Finance Committee was toying with a site between
Broad and Small Streets although both Williams and Gilmore Barnett
warned that it was too small to accommodate all the officers of the
Mayor, whose mansion House up the hill in Clifton, was increasingly
being regarded as an expensive white elephant. Dissatisfaction with the
Council Chamber remained. Williams described it as “a shabby place”
and declared that he always put on his oldest clothes when he attended,
while the press commented on the insignificance of the 1827 building.78

But the Finance Committee’s suggested site adjacent to it was dis-
missed out of hand in 1890, with alderman Proctor Baker describing
the committee’s report “as bad as it could possibly be” and councillor
Dix describing it as “a pig with one ear”.79 Baker produced another
suggestion: sweep away all the miserable property opposite the Draw-
bridge back to Orchard St and produce a town hall worthy of the city
there. Plainly the Committee had failed to do its homework, as Proctor
Baker pointed out, it had not really decided what was to be housed in
the new building: elementary issues had not been addressed such as
were the sixteen committees of the Council to be accommodated or
were the offices of the Sanitary authority in Prince St. to be incorpo-
rated in it. No wonder the report was referred back. But again no
progress was made.

75 ibid 10 Nov. 1883, 14 May 1884.
76 ibid 1 April, 13 May 1885.
77 ibid 24 Oct. 1888.
78 WDP 18 Sept. 1889.
79 ibid 9 July 1890.
In 1897 the Council Chamber was re-arranged to accommodate the Council enlarged by boundary extension with chairs being substituted for benches, although it was obvious that a larger chamber was needed.\(^{80}\) Eventually a new committee chaired by councillor George Pearson, one of the ablest members of the time, was set up to take yet another look at the problem. It reported in November 1898. This time a calculation had been made of the size of site required to bring all the offices of the Corporation together in one building and provide the space needed by the Council, its committees, and the Mayor whose Mansion House was described by Pearson as an “incubus” on the city. Many sites had been considered including the Exchange, the Council House and Council-acquired property in Broad St., and buying and demolishing either the Royal Hotel or the Grand Hotel. In the end only two survived scrutiny: Colston Avenue and St. Augustine’s Parade. The City Engineer recommended the latter and argued that “in order to carry out a complete scheme the whole area bounded by St Augustine’s Parade, Denmark St., Pipe Lane and Orchard St. should be acquired”. This would give a frontage of 462 ft. The Colston Avenue site was undoubtedly the cheaper option, as the City Estate Surveyor demonstrated, but the Committee regarded it as having two serious drawbacks: it had been laid out as a pleasure ground which the public would resent losing and, secondly, it involved erecting a large building over the river Frome which was “imprudent”. Its recommendation was that the St. Augustine’s site was “by far the more preferable site of the two”.\(^{81}\)

In Council the critics gathered, led by councillor Lewis, an auctioneer and valuer, who claimed that the recommended site would cost £200,000 and the whole project £350,000. Councillor Lloyd thought port development and sewage disposal must take preference over “fine buildings” and three further members spoke in the same sense. Others canvassed for other sites: more than one favoured Queen Square while councillor Pembery put in a plea for Old Market. Eventually, in spite of a fighting speech by Pearson, Lewis carried an amendment by 34:31 rejecting the committee’s report and instructing it to come back with a cheaper option. Pearson resigned as chairman declaring that “he was sick and tired of the whole subject”.\(^{82}\) It would be a further half century before the city was equipped with a worthy municipal building. When the City Librarian was putting together a short pamphlet for members of the Library Association holding their annual national meeting in Bristol in 1900 he was forced to comment that the seventy year old Council House “cannot be said to present a striking appearance and its grimy appearance did not befit its classic pretensions”.\(^{83}\)

\(^{80}\) ibid 10 Nov. 1897.

\(^{81}\) ibid 28 Nov. 1898.

\(^{82}\) WDP 28 Nov. 1898.

\(^{83}\) N. Matthews & L.A. Taylor. The Library Association, Bristol Meeting, 1900.
Boundary Extension

Quite the most significant change in the structure of the municipality in the latter half of the nineteenth century was the substantial extension of its boundaries in 1897. The new elected Council brought into being by the 1835 Act ruled over an area six times as great as its predecessor, 4,461 acres as opposed to 755.\(^{84}\) This massive increase in the city's territory combined with the relatively slow growth of its population,\(^{85}\) virtually guaranteed that there would be no agitation within Bristol for boundary extension for many years. But eventually population did spill over the municipal boundaries especially in St George which had a population of 16,209 by 1871 and 26,443 by 1881. It was not surprising that the first time a proposal to extend the boundaries was aired in the Council came in 1879. The occasion was a debate over the agreement between the parties over revision of ward representation. A minority of Liberals dissatisfied with their leaders for failing to squeeze a greater concession from the Conservatives argued that the Council should apply to parliament for boundary extension which would then permit "a really good, bold and honest ward revision". Councillor Wait, who was also an M.P., produced an argument that was to be repeated ad nauseam in years to come: Bristol's overspill population enjoy "all the advantages of contiguity to a great city without the city's burdens". In 1879 the advocates of boundary extension could only muster half a dozen votes but this was the beginning of a debate that became the leading political issue in late nineteenth century Bristol.\(^{86}\)

In the eighteen eighties pressure for boundary extension arose more from outside than within the city, particularly when parliament legislated for the redistribution of parliamentary seats in 1885 following the third Reform Act of the previous year. Alderman Proctor Baker was probably right when he commented that the Commissioners appointed to redraw the electoral map of the whole country had decided that Bristol should have four M.P.s instead of its historic two. But to justify this more population had to be found for the parliamentary borough whose boundaries were coincident with those of the municipality. This was done by the Commissioners decreeing that St George, Horfield and Stapleton should be included in the parliamentary borough. This would increase its population from 206,874 to 253,906 and permit the creation of four constituencies simply labelled

\(^{84}\) Bush, p 115.
\(^{86}\) WDP 22 Mar. 1879. Councillor Wait was MP for Gloucester at this time. For him see M. Stenton, Who's Who of British members of Parliament, 1832–1885 p 394.
North, East, South and West, each having a little over 60,000 population, a figure that could be justified as deserving an M.P. It all seemed very neat but there was an unintended effect. The scheme uncoupled the municipal and parliamentary boundaries and stimulated proposals to enlarge the municipality. The Council’s Conservative majority proposed bringing Stoke Bishop within both boundaries. The Liberal stalwart Elisha Robinson countered by arguing that now the Council in 1884 had bought the docks at Avonmouth and Portishead these should come within the city’s boundaries while alderman George made a claim that was often to be repeated that most of Stoke Bishop’s inhabitants were not connected with Bristol and therefore this very select district should not be brought within Bristol. Not surprisingly the divided Council did not act.87

But it could not ignore the question of boundary revision. Central government pressed for unifying the three poor law unions which had been established in the city with the advent of the New Poor Law88 and making the boundary of a single union co-terminous with the built-up area. Then in 1887 a modest little Act of Parliament89 set up a commission to adjust local government boundaries so that no poor law union, borough, parish or sanitary district should be situated in more than one county. As a county it might be thought that Bristol would not be affected but section 7 of the Act declared that counties of cities such as Bristol were not to be counted as counties for the purpose of the Act. The upshot was the urban sanitary authority of Bristol (i.e. the Council) had to be considered as lying partly in Somerset as did Bedminster and partly in Gloucestershire as was the case with Clifton. Hence the Commission set up by the 1887 Act was bound to pay attention to Bristol’s boundaries as the Council eventually recognised in 1888. A short debate showed that it was divided on party lines. Liberals believed the case for boundary extension could not be seriously questioned and the only issue was by how much. Conservatives resisted extension since as one put it “the inevitable effect of taking in poor parts like Stapleton, St George and Bishopston would be to increase the rates “But everyone recognised that the Council would have to make some proposal to the Commission.

Ultimately the Council’s parliamentary bills committee, chaired by the Conservative chieftain Proctor Baker, after considering various proposals for extension, recommended the smallest possible addition, that of Totterdown. In a powerful speech he made the Council’s flesh creep by emphasising and exaggerating the financial burden that would fall on Bristol ratepayers if the municipal boundaries were

87 P.C. 1 Jan. 1885; WDP 2 Jan. 1885.
88 For these see D. Large, *Bristol and the New Poor Law* (Bristol 1995).
extended to the parliamentary limits by including St George, Horfield and Stapleton. Aldermen Proctor Baker and Fox also emphasised that the decline of sugar refining, tanning, and engineering in the city coupled with sharp competition from the Welsh ports meant that it was highly inopportune for ratepayers to take on additional burdens. When the Council accepted their arguments and defeated a Liberal amendment in favour of much greater extension by 37:18 the aldermen clearly thought they had killed extension stone dead.90

They were entirely mistaken. Just over a year later the Council would agree unanimously that extension was to be welcomed in principle and a committee was appointed to consider its extent. Two external developments and one internal brought about this volte face. First the Local Government Act of 1888 which established the new county councils, together with a body to decide their boundaries, had the effect of encouraging campaigners for extension to claim that central government favoured this as long as it was sponsored by the Council. Secondly in November 1888 Councillors received a strongly argued statement from William Butler, a leading industrialist and Chairman of the Local Board of St. George, urging that this large parish with now around 30,000 inhabitants should be amalgamated with Bristol. As Butler pointed out, most of those eligible to vote in the new Bristol East constituency actually lived in St George while many of Bristol's largest manufacturers had their works there, and, in his estimation, it was essential for the disposal of sewage and control of infectious diseases for the parish to come under the Bristol Urban Sanitary Authority (i.e. the Council).91

Then in 1888 a new member joined the Council who, now too little remembered, was destined to play a central part in the boundary question. This was George Pearson (1844–1922), a Staffordshire man who started practice in Bristol as a solicitor in 1870. He served for seventeen years on the Corporation of the Poor becoming a staunch advocate of creating a single Poor Law Union for Bristol. He was elected councillor for Clifton as a Conservative but he sat very loosely to his party, and frequently gathered more support from Liberals, Independents and Labour than from the more old fashioned among Conservatives. He was clearly a man of great capacity and energy. He led the Council in the successful campaign for it to become a supplier of electricity, he took the lead in agitating, unsuccessfully, for municipalising the trams, he chaired the management committee of the city's T.B. Sanatorium, but above all he was the driving force behind the

90 P.C. 8 May; WDP 9 May 1888.
91 P.C. 30 Nov. 1888; WDP 30 Nov. 1888. Proctor Baker and Fox tried to persuade Council to ignore all this on the grounds that the boundary question had already been settled. Nevertheless Council agreed to receive the statement and to take serious notice by having copies circulated to all members.
achievement of boundary extension. He chaired the committee appointed by the Council to negotiate with the districts to be incorporated in Bristol. Then he chaired the committee appointed to draw up the Bill to achieve this and, finally, he bore the chief burden of defending the measure before the House of Lords Committee examining it as an opposed bill in 1895.

Pearson judged correctly that there was substantial support for boundary extension in Bristol itself. Indeed the poll of ratepayers that had to be held before the Council could submit a private bill for the purpose to parliament produced a vote of 17,955 for it and 2,476 against. He also calculated that he would be able to produce a majority in the Council sufficient to impress the districts to be incorporated that Bristol meant business, if he proceeded by private Act, rather than by Local Government Board local inquiry and Provisional Order. Procedure by private Act enabled the existing ward arrangements, with their bias in favour of Pearson’s own Conservative party to be retained, whereas the alternative procedure demanded that ward representation should be based entirely on population without reference to property, a consideration likely to favour the Liberals. Thus he was able to sell extension to the bulk of his own party and isolate opposition to it so that it dwindled to a smallish number of senior aldermen, as was shown in 1891 when the Council accepted by an overwhelming majority the very ambitious proposals for extension put forward by the committee chaired by Pearson. These involved taking into Bristol St George, Horfield, and Stapleton parishes, and in addition Shirehampton which included Avonmouth, that part of Westbury-on-Trym outside the current municipal boundary, a small part of Henbury, the Leigh Woods part of Long Ashton parish and parts of the parishes of Brislington, Bedminster, Hanham, Mangotsfield and Oldland. Pearson’s strategy was to avoid incorporating only poor districts but to go for a balance of well-to-do and poor districts in order to produce no heavy burden on existing Bristol ratepayers.92

Once Pearson had Council approval to negotiate with representatives of the districts to be annexed, he met with almost universal opposition from them. Also when he met with Gloucestershire County Council it became clear, to quote his own words, “that unless the areas now under the jurisdiction of the County Council themselves expressed a desire to come in, or terms were made with them, the County Council would oppose any extension of Bristol beyond the parliamentary area”. Pearson then made a tactical error. Without permission from the Council he proposed what amounted to a bribe to persuade the districts to be annexed to support annexation. Copying a scheme that had been operated in Manchester the proposed

92 P.C. 20 Feb. 1891; WDP 21 Feb. 1891.
newcomers were to be offered reduced rates for a number of years in order to cushion them against the steep rise in their rates that would result from joining Bristol, while at the same time the incoming newcomers would pay 1/- in the pound over and above their existing rates to provide the city Council with an income to finance the improved services it would be providing the newcomers. The Council clearly thought Pearson had exceeded his powers and by a majority of one vote referred back his Committee’s report. The intended newcomers remained antagonistic.

Nevertheless Pearson pressed ahead with drafting the extension bill including in it his rating scheme and a formula for increasing the Council’s numbers in such a way as to prevent poor but populous districts such as St George having no more than three councillors, while less populous but well to do wards such as Bristol ward retained their six. In this way he kept the support of many of his own Conservative party and forced the Liberals to choose between extension, which they had all supported enthusiastically, or standing out for representation based solely on population. In 1894 he triumphed when his bill was accepted in principle by the Council by 33 votes to 13, in spite of alderman Fox’s prophecy that it would be contested and lost at great cost to Bristol’s ratepayers. The alderman likened Bristol to “an ardent lover who had made advances to a young lady but had been repulsed, backed up by her parents or guardians … the county councils.”

Alderman Fox was right: the county councils went into action, Sir John Dodington M.P., chairman of Gloucestershire C.C., indulged in an ominous outburst in October 1894 declaring that Bristol’s Bill was a matter of immense importance because “it proposed to take away a large portion of Gloucestershire’s rateable value and would completely upset the financial arrangements of the county”. By December 1894 the county council’s committee, set up to watch Bristol’s bill, estimated that the loss would amount to £265,927 or one seventh of the county’s current rateable value of almost £2 million. Its recommendation that strenuous opposition be made to Bristol’s bill was accepted by the county council and by January 1895 it resolved by a large majority to support all the local bodies hostile to the bill. In less bellicose fashion Somerset followed suit, although in effect it wrote

93 P.C. 7 Oct. 1892; WDP 8 Oct. 1892.
94 P.C. 20 Oct. 1893; WDP 21 Oct. 1893. It was noteworthy that Alderman Proctor Baker and Councillors Todd, Marshall, Hare and Eberle who had voted for referring back the report in 1892 now voted with the majority.
95 WDP 23 Oct. 1894 reporting the county’s quarterly meeting. For Sir John Dodington, Member for the Tewkesbury division of Gloucestershire, and Chairman of its Quarter Sessions since 1878 and of its County Council since its inception see M. Stenton ed. Who’s who of British members of parliament (Hassocks, 1978) ii 101.
96 WDP 3 Dec. 1894, 8 Jan. 1895.
off Bedminster as beyond saving from Bristol and committed itself only to supporting Long Ashton. This meant fighting to prevent exclusive Leigh Woods becoming part of the city. Its spokesman, alderman Francis James Fry, argued that its 700 acres, 71 houses and population of 213, rateable value of £7,740 and rates of 2s 2d in the pound meant that it was a rural and not an urban district and should not be included in the city, especially since when the reduced rates ended in ten years time rates would be three times their present level.

Battle was joined, 17 petitions were lodged against Bristol’s Bill. Q.C.s and solicitors galore were hired. The court was a House of Lords select committee on private bills chaired by the Earl of Belmore, assisted by Lords Lansdowne, Powerscourt, Falkland and Wantage. The star witnesses for the bill were Bristol’s Town Clerk and, naturally, George Pearson.

The 1895 bill

The key arguments deployed for the bill were first that all available building land within the current city boundaries had been used up and Bristolians had spilled over into adjoining districts, the bulk of whose inhabitants earned their living in Bristol, and made use of its resources such as free libraries, swimming baths and schools, without contributing to their costs. Secondly, it was scarcely just that Bristol ratepayers, busy creating major dock facilities at Avonmouth outside the municipal boundary, should see its burgeoning rate revenue benefit Gloucestershire C.C. rather than the city Council. Thirdly, more economical, uniform and efficient government demanded that instead of no less than 52 separate authorities collecting or spending rates and administering public affairs in the area covered by the bill, there should be one School Board, and one Poor Law authority and the City Council should be the sole authority for assessing and collecting rates with the other two bodies precepting upon it for their funds. Fourthly, the efficient disposal of stormwater and sewage and the effective control of infectious disease throughout the Avon and Frome Valleys made it highly desirable that Bristol’s experience as an urban sanitary authority with a well respected MOH should be extended.

In defence of Bristol it was maintained that it was not contemplating heavy spending on its docks or drainage system, which some had alleged was the reason it was seeking to draw in many more ratepayers, who would then find themselves heavily burdened. It was true that the City Council’s debt amounted to almost £3 million, while that of the districts proposed to be incorporated amounted to only about £100,000, but Bristol had valuable capital assets and ample income to

97 ibid 2 Jan. 1895.
service and pay off its debts. Meeting the needs of the incomers and servicing their modest debt would only push up Bristol rates slightly and only for a few years. Finally, extension it was claimed would help Bristol to expand as an industrial city and, while the scale of the proposed expansion might seem great, provision was needed for future city growth. There was every hope that parliament would accept the bill: it had already agreed that Liverpool and Manchester should be allowed to extend their boundaries substantially.

Opponents of Bristol’s bill claimed that there was much opposition to it in the districts to be annexed, except where, it was claimed, the Council had bought this off by extravagant promises of reduced rating and aldermanic representation. Also in many places along the proposed new city boundary there was no contiguity of houses and streets between Bristol and the areas it proposed to annex. The bill sought to create much too expensive a city of ten miles long from Avonmouth to Brislington and seven miles wide from Long Ashton to Mangotsfield. This would embrace much land that was agricultural, thinly populated, and well looked after by the county council and existing lesser local authorities. This it was maintained was particularly the case as far as Shirehampton, Westbury and Stoke Bishop was concerned. Stoke Bishop, it was vigorously contended, was an agricultural district, the majority of whose householders—197 out of 254—had no connection with Bristol. One of its champions insisted that it was largely populated by widows rather than Bristol based well-to-do businessmen. Dwellers in Stoke Bishop, it was asserted, were not dependent on the city for supplies of food and clothing, one witness before the Lords committee proudly citing the fact that his tailor was in London. Quite correctly it was pointed out that Stoke Bishop was not reliant on the city Council for gas and water as these utilities were privately owned. It was argued that Stoke Bishop was a self contained locality, separated from Bristol by the greenery of Durdham Down, well run and enjoying low rates and should not be brought within the city.

But the heavy guns of the opposition were fired by the witnesses from Gloucestershire, especially by Sir John Dodington. The Bristol bill, he protested would strip the county of 81,000 people, amounting to a quarter of its population and one seventh of its rateable value. The districts it would lose were the county’s plums since their rateable value was increasing more rapidly than almost any other part of the county. What particularly upset the County Council was the impact of the bill upon its policing arrangements. Admiral Christian, who had served it as Chief Constable for thirty years, complained that it would “disarrange our whole system”. He had made special provision for policing the districts to be annexed by Bristol in an effort to prevent Bristol based criminals venturing into peaceful Gloucestershire and
for providing the city with an easily mobilised additional police force when it indulged in one of its periodic bouts of restiveness. The Admiral’s cordon sanitaire would, he said, have to be replaced by a second line of defence at great expense.

So what was the upshot of the prolonged hearings before the Earl of Belmore’s committee and further examination by a House of Commons Select Committee? First it was ruled, much to Pearson’s disgust, that the case for making Bristol a single Poor Law Union had not been made out. As far as municipal boundaries were concerned the verdict was in part a victory and in part a defeat for Pearson. The victory came in the committees’ acceptance that there was very good reason for a substantial expansion of Bristol’s boundaries. All that the city was asking for in St. George, Stapleton, Brislington and Kingswood and also its docks at Avonmouth was acceptable as was the incorporation of some parts of Bedminster and Horfield, although not all that the city wished for. The repulse lay in the committee striking out of the bill the better off districts such as those parts of Westbury, Shirehampton, Long Ashton, Henbury and Mangotsfield which Bristol was claiming. As the city Council’s Q.C., Balfour Browne, commented, the committees’ findings destroyed the Council’s strategy because “it leaves us with all the burdens, which we are willing to take, but also leaves us without the rateable value which was one of the considerations for taking in those poorer districts”.

Advised by Pearson the Council decided to drop the bill save for the provisions for annexing Avonmouth and Dunball island. These became part of Clifton ward by the provisions of the catch-all Bristol Corporation Act of 1895. This was a small return for the well over £4,000 that Bristol ratepayers had had to find for promoting the failed bill. But all was not lost.

The 1897 bill

By March 1896 Pearson and the Boundary Committee brought a fresh proposal before the Council. It remained ambitious, but less so than the 1895 scheme. In 1895 Bristol had asked for 20,988 additional acres and Belmore had allowed 13,500. Now they were asking for

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98 For the extensive proceedings of the Belmore Committee and the House of Commons Select Committee see H.L. Evidence on Opposed Bills Vols. 3, 4 and 5 of the 1895 in H.L. Record Office. Vol. 3 contains a list of the inhabitants of Stoke Bishop with manuscript ascriptions of occupations and offices.
99 WDP 26 June 1895.
100 Pearson argued that the Council had proved four fifths of their case and parliament had given them a considerable extension if they had chosen to accept it. His critics thought the Council should have done so and taunted the Boundary Committee with ‘grudging that little principality of Stoke Bishop having a separate existence’ see WDP 8 Oct. 1895.
13,594. In 1895 they had wished to increase the city’s population to 312,217 and had been allowed 295,405. Now they asked for 291,000. Pearson explained in detail what had been given up. As he put it they had given way before “the long purse” of Somerset County Council and “another long purse” (clearly that of the Smyths of Ashton Court) and given up trying to incorporate Leigh Woods and Ashton Court Park within Bristol but they still wished to take a very small part of Ashton parish on the western fringe of the Avon. The new bill did not involve taking in any part of Kingswood or Staple Hill, then in the RDC of Mangotsfield. In northern Bristol the proposed new boundary would bring in to the city Stoke Bishop and all on the city side of a line from the junction of Parrys Lane and Stoke Lane to where the parish boundary crossed the road that ran from Horfield Common to Westbury village. Westbury village and many acres in its vicinity, which had been claimed in the 1895 bill, were given up as was the village of Shirehampton. There was some truth, though the Council did not accept it, in alderman Fox’s contention that the new bill did not balance rich and poor acquisitions since so much of the richer areas had been jettisoned.\(^{101}\)

Declaring that he believed sweet reasonableness was now prevalent Pearson secured Council’s permission to negotiate terms with those to be annexed. During the debate there had been ominous signs that sweet reason was not in abundant supply. Councillor Godwin, a resident of Stoke Bishop, protested vehemently about “laying hands on that pastoral hamlet” and declared that its inhabitants, who included a significant number of Bristol’s most successful businessmen, had nothing to do with the poor and “declined to pay the bill of the poorer districts”. By July 1896 Pearson had to admit that some districts were as persistent in their opposition as ever. Indeed only St George, Brislington and Bedminster had agreed terms with Bristol. The rest had not.\(^{102}\) So when the Council agreed to promote another bill it knew it would be facing another battle before a Lords committee, this time chaired by Lord Hawkesbury. Once again Gloucestershire County Council was in the forefront of opposition, but, on this occasion, the Duke of Beaufort gave the county assistance. His petition against Bristol’s bill complained that “his mansion house, Stoke House, and park, and some beautifully hilly grass downs, totally unsuited for building purposes”, will be intersected and be partly within and partly outside the city. Another new objector was the General Cemetery Company, owners of Arnos Vale, whose property would become liable to Bristol rates which were 57% higher than their current payments. The Company’s chairman pointed out that the Company would get no benefit

102 ibid 17 July 1896; P.C. 17 July 1896.
from the city's amenities while paying rates to assist their council-owned rival, Greenbank cemetery, to which Pearson retorted that it was “a commercial undertaking deriving its profit from the dead of Bristol and it should bear the burdens of Bristol”.

But, as was to be expected, although there was much repetition in 1897 of arguments heard two years previously, one major difference emerged. The Local Government Board's Commissioner investigating Bristol had reported strongly in favour of unifying the Poor Law Unions. They no longer offered objections to the bill. Furthermore as the bill’s “guiding principle ... is to only include areas which are distinctly built upon or likely to be very shortly”, as the Town Clerk said, it was possible to reduce the acreage demanded and in particular to ask for much less of Westbury. Its champions, the Parish Council, did complain that Bristol had cherry picked the richest parts for inclusion in Bristol and left outside the poorest parts such as “the hamlet of South Mead which is composed of a number of very small cottages of the smallest class and several laundries”. Eventually on 25 May 1897 the bill passed the Lords without alteration. Pearson had triumphed or so it seemed. But there was still the hurdle of the House of Commons. Seven hostile petitions were lodged before the Commons committee, chaired by Sir William Houldsworth, charged with examining the Bristol bill. Gloucestershire County Council, Westbury Parish Council and the residents of Stoke Bishop provided the bulk of the criticism with Pearson bearing the brunt of hostile cross examination spending many hours in the witness chair on four out of the eight days of the hearings. Stoke Bishop witnesses fought hard to present their community as a healthy, crime free, rural retreat quite unconnected with Bristol. Dr Steward, owner of a private home for inebriate gentlefolk, testified that he had chosen Stoke Bishop for this purpose because it was so rural and healthy, while Police Superintendent Matthews claimed it was crime free because “the roughs of Bristol do not go there because it had no pubs”.103

The Commons committee swallowed the Stoke Bishop arguments, ruling that the bill should be amended to leave it outside the city. Also, as The Clifton and Redland Free Press put it the Committee “cut the Horfield worm clean in two” by leaving the upper and richer part of the urban district outside Bristol. Both decisions were a blow for Pearson: as The Western Daily Press observed the decisions were unsatisfactory in that “the richer areas will be exempt from

103 BRO has a most useful volume entitled Bristol Extension 1897 which contains the notice, dated 16 Nov. 1896, of the Council’s intention to apply to Parliament in the next session for leave to bring in an extension bill; the text of the proposed bill; the report of the LGB on it; the text of the petitions against it; the proceedings of the five day hearing by the Hawkesbury Committee and the hearing by the House of Commons Select Committee.
contributing to the administrative expenses of the city to which these suburbs owe their existence”. Nevertheless the Boundaries Committee chaired by Pearson recommended the Council to accept the bill as amended which it duly did, according Pearson a well deserved ovation.\textsuperscript{104} He did not have to wait long to see Horfield, Westbury and Shirehampton added to the city in 1904, but dying in 1922 meant that he failed by four years to see Stoke Bishop also become part of Bristol.

The Bristol Corporation Act of 1897 was most certainly a defining moment in the history of the city’s government. It proclaimed what constituted Bristol. For the Council it meant adding 5 new wards, Horfield, St George, Stapleton, Somerset and Easton returning 15 additional councillors. The first elections in the new wards in November 1897 showed clearly that the long one party dominance in the Council was about to end. Of the 15 new councillors only two were Conservatives.\textsuperscript{105} By sweeping away the many minor authorities and vesting their duties in the City Council as well as giving it full control over the levying and collection of rates throughout its extended territory it was increasing its power to take on the major new responsibility that would be placed upon it by the 1902 Education Act. And, finally, the administration of the Poor Law was made more economical, more uniform and less liable to squabbles between Unions by the creation of a single Poor Law Union for the whole city, this eventually being a by-product of boundary revision.

\textsuperscript{104} Clifton and Redland FreePress and N. Bristol Advertiser 30 July 1897; WDP 30 July 1897; P.C. 30 July 1897.

\textsuperscript{105} This rises to three if an Independent Conservative is included.
CHAPTER TWO

FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

The financial history of the City Council in the latter half of the nineteenth century is complex. There was no single body drawing up a comprehensive annual budget, raising revenue by a single rate of tax, and supervising expenditure on the increasingly multifarious activities of the Council. In effect the Council’s accounts were divided into three: the Borough Fund, the Sanitary Authority’s Fund, sustained by the general District rate, and the income and expenditure of the Dock estate. Each had been brought to birth by particular Acts of Parliament. The Borough Fund was established and regulated by the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 (5 & 6 Will. IV c 76 sect xcii for the detail) and succeeding legislation of a similar kind such as the 1882 Act of the same title. The Sanitary Authority’s power to levy the general District rate and apply it to environmental and public health services stemmed from the adoption by the Council in 1851 of the Public Health Act of 1848. The Borough Fund and the District rate fund it may be noted, were not amalgamated until 1929. The Dock estate’s financial system originated from the Dock Transfer Act of 1848.

In essence these three financial systems were very largely but not completely separate from one another. Three different committees of the Council and three different chief officers managed them. The Finance committee of the Council and the City Treasurer looked after the Borough Fund. The Sanitary committee, which was a committee of the Council sitting as a Local Board of Health from 1851 to 1872 and thereafter as an Urban Sanitary Authority, took care of the District Fund, aided by their chief officers, the Clerk and the Accountant. The Dock estate’s finances were the business of the Docks committee assisted by the Secretary. In theory the full Council could oversee and co-ordinate the raising and spending of money by the three committees. In practice this did not happen. There was no group of Councillors and officers appointed to perform such a task by reporting regularly to the council. It was only as late as 1893 that Councillor Barnett carried a motion for a committee to report “on the different
systems of raising money adopted by the Council”, and “whether it would be desirable for one committee to be alone responsible for the raising of money”. The committee’s report in the following year rejected the notion and did not favour consolidating existing loans by issuing stock in place thereof, as had been practised by the Docks committee.¹

The Borough Fund

For each coming financial year the City Treasurer had to make an estimate of those items of the city’s expenditure which would be financed from the Borough Fund so that he would be in a position to advise the Finance Committee of how much would have to be raised by levying a borough rate. This being so it is logical to set out that expenditure which the table below seeks to do.

The first six items of expenditure concerned the Council’s major function of maintaining law and order. In aggregate, down to the 1880s, spending on this amounted to between a little under half to a little under a third of total spending from the Borough Fund. In the last two decades of the century this proportion dwindled as new demands on the Fund emerged most notably the precept from the School Board whose needs for cash to sustain its school building soared. But all told, as the table shows, the Borough Fund sustained a fairly wide variety of Council activities few of which required heavy spending. As time passed expenditure grew as the city’s population expanded, the Council’s staff increased, and it launched new services such as the provision of libraries. The result was a need for a buoyant income. The table below sets out where that came from.

Income was derived from property owned by the Corporation both in the city and country and from rents in the markets. As the table shows it was only the rents from city property which made a significant contribution, almost trebling in yield over the half century. Indeed Bristol derived more income than any other county borough from corporate property.² The Finance Committee was accustomed to making a frequent stream of recommendations to the Council for granting new leases for its city property. Whether or not this property was efficiently managed or not is difficult to say without prolonged detailed research although there is some evidence in the eighties and nineties of slackness. Certainly the Finance Committee tried, but with only limited success, to generate more income from the Corporation’s estate at nearby Portishead which had some potential for residential development. Market rents made only a very modest contribution.

¹ P.C. 11 May 1893, 1 Jan. 1894.
² As Joseph Redlich pointed out in his Local Government in England (1903) I 376.
### The Municipal Government of Bristol 1851–1901

**Borough Fund Expenditure (in £s to the nearest £)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1851–2</th>
<th>1860–1</th>
<th>1870–1</th>
<th>1880–1</th>
<th>1890–1</th>
<th>1900–1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>13,298</td>
<td>18,153</td>
<td>20,633</td>
<td>31,237</td>
<td>37,237</td>
<td>49,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaol</td>
<td>3,760</td>
<td>4,188</td>
<td>5,096</td>
<td>3,149</td>
<td>1,212</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridewell and Police Courts</td>
<td>1,131</td>
<td>1,214</td>
<td>1,328</td>
<td>5,483</td>
<td>3,220</td>
<td>3,622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horfield Gaol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,149</td>
<td>1,212</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Assize Courts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,824</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosecutions</td>
<td>1,029</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>1,975</td>
<td>1,259</td>
<td>1,743</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mayoralty</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>1,975</td>
<td>1,259</td>
<td>1,743</td>
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<tr>
<td>Council House</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>1,507</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guildhall</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>432</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>389</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cemeteries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baths</td>
<td>2,677</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>4,087</td>
<td>1,073</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Tramways</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Brigade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,474</td>
<td>750</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Officers salaries</td>
<td>5,940</td>
<td>5,162</td>
<td>5,417</td>
<td>8,847</td>
<td>6,249</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Expenditure on Dept. (a)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest on City Bonds</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>1,083</td>
<td>1,673</td>
<td>76</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loan Interest</td>
<td>1,726</td>
<td>4,165</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchequer taxes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13,682</td>
<td>5,719</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Portishead Dock interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>3,164</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improvement Act expenses</td>
<td>7,005</td>
<td>3,199</td>
<td>754</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cranage and Wharfage</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>1,940</td>
<td>2,244</td>
<td>6,592</td>
<td>1,639</td>
<td>4,144</td>
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<td>School Board</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,261</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>82,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Libraries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,406</td>
<td>4,682</td>
<td>5,929</td>
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<tr>
<td>Durdham Downs reserve</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>997</td>
<td>1,673</td>
<td>953</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River Frome and Floods Acts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15,522</td>
<td>649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunatic Asylum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7,367</td>
<td>2,753</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>31,083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous (b)</td>
<td>3,065</td>
<td>2,706</td>
<td>6,063</td>
<td>3,301</td>
<td>2,847</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer’s Balances</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>19,039</td>
<td>4,823</td>
<td>11,415</td>
<td>14,401</td>
<td>20,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52,483</td>
<td>62,446</td>
<td>74,707</td>
<td>114,179</td>
<td>187,431</td>
<td>327,789</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total less balances</td>
<td>52,420</td>
<td>43,407</td>
<td>69,884</td>
<td>102,764</td>
<td>173,630</td>
<td>307,301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) This includes spending on the Town Clerks, Treasurers, Surveyors, Overseers, Rate Collectors, Weights and Measures, and City Analyst’s depts and on the Haven Master and Water Bailiff.

(b) This includes spending under the headings charitable donations, general expenditure, extraordinaries and miscellaneous.

More important was the revenue derived from the port. Dues levied both by the Council and the Mayor on incoming shipping multiplied five times over during the half century, reflecting, of course, the increased activity of the port. Also wharfage dues, once the Merchant Venturer’s lease of the wharfs had been resumed by the Council in the
### The Borough Fund Income 1851–1901

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>1851–2</th>
<th>1860–1</th>
<th>1870–1</th>
<th>1880–1</th>
<th>1890–1</th>
<th>1900–1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Rural estates</td>
<td>2,481</td>
<td>2,499</td>
<td>3,042</td>
<td>2,652</td>
<td>3,525</td>
<td>3,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City rents</td>
<td>7,838</td>
<td>9,739</td>
<td>12,031</td>
<td>15,441</td>
<td>18,296</td>
<td>20,755</td>
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<tr>
<td>Market rents</td>
<td>2,962</td>
<td>2,827</td>
<td>2,423</td>
<td>2,670</td>
<td>2,998</td>
<td>3,859</td>
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<td>Town dues</td>
<td>2,020</td>
<td>4,949</td>
<td>8,799</td>
<td>6,337</td>
<td>7,905</td>
<td>9,479</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mayor’s dues</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>1,302</td>
<td>1,606</td>
<td>1,175</td>
<td>1,191</td>
<td>1,161</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cranage</td>
<td>697</td>
<td>2,076</td>
<td>2,262</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>204</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wharfage dues</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>7,042</td>
<td>5,960</td>
<td>8,254</td>
<td>10,859</td>
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<td>Prosecutions</td>
<td>972</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>1,737</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gaol income</td>
<td>1,036</td>
<td>1,312</td>
<td>1,021</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>Police court fees</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>3,578</td>
<td>4,399</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baths income</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>767</td>
<td>1,784</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2,735</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exchequer grants</td>
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<td>4,216</td>
<td>4,466</td>
<td>13,759</td>
<td>38,278</td>
<td>71,417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borough rates</td>
<td>27,132</td>
<td>23,200</td>
<td>7,483</td>
<td>37,932</td>
<td>34,000</td>
<td>157,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee income</td>
<td>3,236</td>
<td>3,373</td>
<td>4,188</td>
<td>6,651</td>
<td>2,256</td>
<td>3,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>2,848</td>
<td>9,689</td>
<td>10,301</td>
<td>9,406</td>
<td>20,880</td>
<td>38,577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash borrowed</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>14,500</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>7,575</td>
<td>46,270</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52,546</td>
<td>81,515</td>
<td>74,706</td>
<td>114,179</td>
<td>187,431</td>
<td>327,789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total less cash bor-</td>
<td>52,546</td>
<td>67,015</td>
<td>66,206</td>
<td>106,604</td>
<td>141,161</td>
<td>327,789</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

early sixties, proved to be almost as productive as the Town and Mayor’s dues put together. In reality, though, it was not the City Treasurer and the Finance Committee which reaped the bulk of the harvest from expanding port activity but, as will be seen, the Docks Committee. Valuable as was the income from property, the port and a range of miscellaneous sources, it was firmly established by mid-century that levying a borough rate was a necessity if income was to match expenditure. Indeed in 1851–2 just over half of the Borough Fund’s income came from that source although in the sixties and seventies reliance on borough rates declined quite sharply: indeed, the Finance Committee reported on 1 January 1861 that it was requiring the “smallest Borough rate for the past twenty years”.³ In 1870–1 Borough rates only formed a ninth of the Borough Fund’s income, a circumstance pleasing, no doubt, to Councillors and ratepayers alike. But thanks to the Council’s expanding spending commitments this did not last. By the end of the century almost half of the Borough Fund’s income was derived from the borough rate. It dwarfed all other sources of revenue.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century central government began to have a significant if far from decisive influence on municipal finances. Either it took over costs previously borne by corporations, strikingly manifested in the Prisons Act of 1877 which transferred the cost and administration of local prisons to the Home Office, or it made

³ P.C. 1 Jan. 1861.
a direct grant to assist the finances of a local authority. The Police Act of 1856, for instance, provided for an Exchequer grant of a quarter of the cost of the pay and clothing of a county or borough police force, provided Home Office inspection certified that it was efficient in numbers and discipline. Likewise the 1872 Public Health Act provided for half the salaries of Medical Officers of Health and Inspectors of Nuisances to be paid by central government. Also from 1888 onwards central government assigned certain specific revenues of its own to aid the finances of local authorities which *inter alia* led to them developing facilities for technical education.

**The District Fund**

The Sanitary Committee annually presented the proposed expenditure from the District Fund to a meeting of the Council in its capacity as a Local Board of Health and later an Urban Sanitary Authority. Basically its proposals fell under two broad headings: expenditure on caring for the physical environment of the city and measures to maintain its public health as the table below shows.

As can be seen expenditure from the District Fund increased twelve fold over the half century 1851–1901, compared with a six fold increase in spending from the Borough Fund. This may be attributed, in part at least, to the capital spending by the Council as Sanitary authority which created a drain on the District Fund in the form of interest payments and repayment of capital. By 1901 almost a quarter of expenditure can be put down to this. But far and away the largest items involved the maintenance, cleansing and lighting of the city’s ever increasing streets. This far outweighed spending on public health. So where did the Sanitary Committee obtain revenue? The table below sets this out for the years when the Council was a Local Board of Health.

**District Fund Receipts 1872–1901**

Information about the District Funds receipts from 1872 onwards when the Council became an Urban District Sanitary Authority is somewhat scarce. No copy of the printed audited accounts prepared by the Accountant for 1880–1 appears to have survived. Press reports

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4 The proportion of these police expenses paid for by the Exchequer was increased to a half in 1888.


6 This was known as the Exchequer contribution.

7 For expenditure figures for 1851–1871 see Abstract of the audited accounts of the Local Board of Health of the city and county of Bristol (2 vols. The only copy appears to be in BCL). Figures for 1880–1 can be found in WDP 13 April 1881. BCL has a copy of the Accountant’s printed booklet of his audited accounts for 1890–1.
## District Fund Expenditure (in £s to the nearest £)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Streets</th>
<th>Street Improvements</th>
<th>Lighting</th>
<th>Sewers</th>
<th>Cleansing</th>
<th>Bridges</th>
<th>Refuse Destructor</th>
<th>Public Drinking Fountains</th>
<th>M.O.H.'s Department</th>
<th>Hospitals</th>
<th>Baths</th>
<th>Parks</th>
<th>Electricity</th>
<th>Allotments</th>
<th>Museum</th>
<th>Administration</th>
<th>Repayment of Capital</th>
<th>Interest payments</th>
<th>Sinking Fund</th>
<th>Miscellaneous</th>
<th>Balances carried forward</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total less balances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1851–2</td>
<td>6,179</td>
<td>10,986</td>
<td>18,189</td>
<td>20,733</td>
<td>27,631</td>
<td>59,118</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14,376</td>
<td>41,298</td>
<td>27,938</td>
<td>141,865</td>
<td>310,584</td>
<td></td>
<td>141,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860–1</td>
<td>10,986</td>
<td>18,189</td>
<td>20,733</td>
<td>27,631</td>
<td>59,118</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870–1</td>
<td>18,189</td>
<td>20,733</td>
<td>27,631</td>
<td>59,118</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880–1</td>
<td>20,733</td>
<td>27,631</td>
<td>59,118</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890–1</td>
<td>27,631</td>
<td>59,118</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900–1</td>
<td>59,118</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Streets includes spending on paving, pitching, steining, watering, wood paving, macadamizing and miscellaneous expenditure under the heading highways.

(b) Lighting includes spending on equipment and for implementing the Gas Measures Act.

(c) Sewers includes spending on the High and Low Level sewers in Hotwells and Clifton, the Bedminster and St Philip's sewers, the Frome and Avon valley interceptors and expenditure simply classified as sewers.

(d) Bridges includes St Philip's and Prince St bridges and payment to the Docks Committee for the upkeep of the latter.

(e) M.O.H.'s department also includes the disinfecting station, the ambulance, the costs of the Port Sanitary Authority and of the inspection of food shops.

(f) Administration includes salaries, offices, rents, office expenses, payments to Surveyors, rate collector's poundage and payments to Council departments.

(g) This involves repayments of and interest payments on moneys borrowed for the purchase of open spaces.

sometimes provide details of expenditure but not of receipts. But a rare copy of the District Funds printed audited accounts for 1890–1 is in Bristol Central library and Bristol Record Office has a fine run of the audited accounts of the city Treasurer which by 1900–1 contain full details of the Borough, District and Docks accounts.

The 1890–1 receipts account shows that the yield of the general district rate at £141, 125 had virtually doubled since 1870–1. The special sewer rates were only being levied in the Avon interceptor area.
The District Fund Receipts 1851–1871

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1851–2</th>
<th>1860–1</th>
<th>1870–1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General District Rate</td>
<td>24,269</td>
<td>31,983</td>
<td>72,344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Level sewer rate</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4,755</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedminster sewer rate</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1,564</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Philip's sewer rate</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>7,688</td>
<td>1,831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low level sewer rate</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3,333</td>
<td>1,108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frome Intercepting sewer rate</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>13,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avon Intercepting sewer rate</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>special District rates(^{(a)})</td>
<td>2,665</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioners for lighting Clifton</td>
<td>1,999</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 per cent Consols Sinking Fund(^{(b)})</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3,934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In hands of Treasurer</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>5,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale of surplus lands etc.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital borrowed</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary receipts</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous(^{(c)})</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Improvement</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>29,462</strong></td>
<td><strong>66,566</strong></td>
<td><strong>88,440</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{(a)}\) These were rates levied for lighting parts of Bedminster, District ward and the out parish of St Philip and St Jacob which lay outside the jurisdiction of the Corporation.

\(^{(b)}\) This was income from Sinking Fund money invested in Consols.

\(^{(c)}\) This includes sums in the hands of the Surveyor and Clerk, interest on the Treasurer's account, miniscule income from drinking fountains, and items labelled District Fund account, interest on mortgages, payments from the Treasurer for cleansing, Clerk's charges for preparing grants etc.

...and bringing in a paltry £2,628. Street improvement income was only £3,364; swimming baths, a new income source, produced £2,064; and miscellaneous sources netted £1,577. The only substantial receipt other than the general district rate was the £42,539 in the hands of the Treasurer. It was this which swelled the total on the receipts side of the account to £194,435.

By 1900–1, as might be expected from the substantial expansion of the city arising from boundary extension, the yield of the general district rate had almost doubled again to £261,764. In these accounts the Treasurer, after listing in painful detail in forty two pages every conceivable receipt even down to the £416s received from sale of the manure from the horse which drew the Council's ambulance, categorised receipts under six headings. In ascending magnitude these were £45 from parks; £1,354 from public lighting and general purposes which included the pennies paid by the public to use the public lavatories, rent from allotments and sales of fruit and plants from the Ham Green estate; £1,755 from the Public Health department which included rents from the Municipal Lodging House; £12,175 of street improvement income; £56,704 from highways, sewers and cleansing which would appear to be earnings from providing highway services
such as paving or macadamising for builders and private individuals; and, lastly, £264,845 under the rubric of finance. This consisted of the £261,764 produced by the general district rate together with sundry small sums paid to the Sanitary Committee by other Council departments. In all receipts for the District Fund for the financial year 1900–1901 totalled £342,413. It would appear that income generation was not neglected by the Council. But without doubt the District Fund was sustained by the general district rate. Consequently the level at which it was set at six monthly intervals and the degree to which it was collected was crucial for those services to which it was devoted. The accounts suggest that arrears of payment of the district rate were small.

The Dock Accounts

Down to 1884 when the Dock estate was substantially increased by the acquisition of the docks at Avonmouth and Portishead the Docks Committee categorised its expenditure under three heads. First there was ordinary spending on maintenance, salaries, dredging, payment of interest on loans and general office expenses. Secondly there was extraordinary expenditure which consisted of spending out of ordinary revenue on new projects which naturally varied from year to year. For example in 1860 £856 was spent on the purchase of Dumball Island at the mouth of the Avon, £376 on the junction lock bridges, £314 on a cattle slip, £708 on a landing slip and £6500 on the discharge of Corporation Bonds. Thirdly there was a category called expenditure out of capital raised by borrowing. After 1884 the Dock accounts become even more complex with the formation of the Traffic and Warehouse departments each of which engaged in considerable spending. The table below seeks to record the total sums spent under these different heads.

As the table shows, ordinary expenditure by the Docks Committee remained steady for many years down to the seventies. Then it increased fairly sharply mainly because interest payments on capital borrowed for carrying out considerable port improvement were included in the ordinary expenditure account and after 1883 the Committee was, of course, maintaining a much increased estate resulting from the acquisition of the Severnside docks. All told, spending on new works out of ordinary revenues between the transfer of the dock estate in 1848 to the Corporation and its acquisition in 1883 of these docks totalled £348,015 while in the same period almost the same amount, £345,311, was borrowed either on mortgage or by the sale of stock for spending on capital works such as river improvement and the creation of new wharves.
### Dock Expenditure 1851-1901

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1851</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Ordinary Expenditure</td>
<td>31,092</td>
<td>31,691</td>
<td>30,986</td>
<td>57,410</td>
<td>50,392</td>
<td>30,989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Extraordinary Expenditure</td>
<td>7,067</td>
<td>8,753</td>
<td>9,821</td>
<td>10,136</td>
<td>8,158</td>
<td>10,548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic department</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>52,473</td>
<td>83,856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warehouse department</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>9,997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38,159</td>
<td>39,344</td>
<td>40,807</td>
<td>67,546</td>
<td>58,550</td>
<td>41,637</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) BRSP vol. xxxvi The Port of Bristol 1848–1884. Appendix: the finances of the port 1848–1883 pp xxxi–xxxix for figures down to 1883 and BRP Port of Bristol collection stack O shelf 32 Box 2 and the statement supporting the Council's 1895 extension Bill for the 1890 figures and the audited accounts of the Treasurer 1900–1 for the 1901 figures. Traffic and Warehouse departmental spending has been omitted from the totals.

As for the income generated in operating the docks the table below sets this out.

### The Dock Account: Receipts 1851–1901

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1851</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dock dues on</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonnage and goods</td>
<td>22,655</td>
<td>31,402</td>
<td>37,432</td>
<td>37,498</td>
<td>68,158</td>
<td>94,562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cranage rates</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>2,422</td>
<td>2,273</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor's dues</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>1,075</td>
<td>1,772</td>
<td>1,370</td>
<td>1,188</td>
<td>1,106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Bailiff rates</td>
<td>974</td>
<td>991</td>
<td>1,244</td>
<td>1,222</td>
<td>1,142</td>
<td>1,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town dues on goods</td>
<td>2,702</td>
<td>3,860</td>
<td>9,046</td>
<td>7,010</td>
<td>8,475</td>
<td>9,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor rate</td>
<td>2,355</td>
<td>2,355</td>
<td>2,355</td>
<td>2,360</td>
<td>2,360</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage dues</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moorage dues</td>
<td>1,196</td>
<td>1,343</td>
<td>1,465</td>
<td>1,538</td>
<td>1,663</td>
<td>2,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4d rate</td>
<td>5,650</td>
<td>6,460</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>12,500</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>28,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wharfage rate</td>
<td>1,776</td>
<td>2,515</td>
<td>5,139</td>
<td>5,470</td>
<td>6,202</td>
<td>8,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38,281</td>
<td>49,755</td>
<td>66,605</td>
<td>69,737</td>
<td>107,054</td>
<td>144,629</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As may readily be seen between a half and two thirds of the Docks Committee's receipts came from dues on tonnage and goods hence the level at which these were levied, coupled with tonnage using the port and the type of goods involved, were crucial for the Committee. Once it had taken over managing the Severnside docks in 1884 it inaugurated, in effect, two new accounts, those of the Traffic and Warehouse departments. Basically, the Committee spent money on providing services to shippers, such as warehousing, loading and unloading goods and shunting railway wagons, and recouped the spending by charging its customers sufficient to make a modest profit. For example in 1890 spending by the two departments totalled £52,473 and receipts £63,131.8

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8 See the statement supporting the Council's 1895 Extension Bill.
For a complete picture of the Council's finances it is necessary to combine the income and expenditure in the Borough Fund, the District Fund and the Docks Committee's accounts, a procedure which, it would seem, was rarely undertaken although it was essayed in the evidence the Council produced supporting its 1895 Extension bill when figures were produced covering the five years 1890–1894. The table below provides an estimate, which no doubt has its imperfections, of the total income and expenditure of the Council at decadal intervals.

The city's accounts 1851–1901 combined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>1851</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Borough Fund</td>
<td>52,546</td>
<td>67,015</td>
<td>66,206</td>
<td>106,604</td>
<td>141,161</td>
<td>327,789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Fund</td>
<td>79,462</td>
<td>66,566</td>
<td>88,440</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>151,896</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Docks Account</td>
<td>38,281</td>
<td>48,755</td>
<td>66,605</td>
<td>69,737</td>
<td>107,054</td>
<td>144,629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120,289</td>
<td>183,336</td>
<td>221,251</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>300,111</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>1851</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Borough Fund</td>
<td>52,420</td>
<td>43,407</td>
<td>69,884</td>
<td>102,764</td>
<td>173,030</td>
<td>307,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Fund</td>
<td>26,477</td>
<td>54,559</td>
<td>126,107</td>
<td>113,442</td>
<td>141,863</td>
<td>310,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Docks Account</td>
<td>38,159</td>
<td>39,344</td>
<td>40,807</td>
<td>67,546</td>
<td>58,550</td>
<td>41,637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>117,056</td>
<td>137,310</td>
<td>236,798</td>
<td>283,752</td>
<td>373,443</td>
<td>659,522</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Municipal Debt

Accounts simply showing income and expenditure still do not give a complete picture of the Council's financial operations. It also borrowed on an increasing scale for capital projects. Borrowing and having a debt was a familiar experience for the Council by mid-century. As early as 1574 it had borrowed in order to entertain Elizabeth I. By 1680 the debt had risen to £12,428, £77,000 by 1785 and £89,000 by 1835. By 1901 the debt had multiplied more than twenty times the 1835 figure. At the end of the financial year in 1901 the principal owing in the Borough Fund was £419,529, in the District Fund £1,028,528 and on the Dock account £2,697,604.

The latter half of the nineteenth century, it has been observed, witnessed “a vast increase in activity by the new (elected) boroughs”. Indeed “practically all public investment in Britain in the latter part of the nineteenth century in Britain was accounted for by local authority investment ... in roads, waterworks, schools, town halls, tram lines, electricity stations, gasworks and workhouses”. Central government invested minimally in such infrastructure and provided minimal financial help for local authorities in this field: ratepayers had to shoulder

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the burden.\textsuperscript{10} It made good sense to borrow for capital spending of this kind even though the ratepayer would have to find the necessary interest payments which virtually guaranteed that the long run trend would be for rates to rise.

The pattern of Bristol’s borrowing differed considerably from that of other cities in that gas, water and trams remained in private hands contrary to practice in Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham or Nottingham, for instance.\textsuperscript{11} The Council did not have to raise capital to expand such amenities. But the port was in municipal hands, and in the eyes of the Council required much capital expenditure and hence much borrowing if it was to remain efficient and competitive.

On the security of the borough rates, out of the principal owing in 1901 of £419,529, the largest borrowing of £163,549 was for the many additions to the Lunatic Asylum; £143,500 was borrowed under two Flood Prevention Acts of 1887 and 1890; and £100,000 was borrowed as the Council's contribution to the creation of Portishead Dock. The building of all public libraries was financed by borrowing as was spending on cemetery expansion and a host of smaller items, such as police courts and stations. On the security of the District rates far and away the greatest borrowing was for street improvements, usually involving purchasing property, but significant sums were borrowed for wood and granite paving, for purchasing equipment and depots for carrying out highway maintenance, for hospitals for the MOH's department and for acquisition of parks. An ever increasing amount was also borrowed for expanding the Council's electricity undertaking. But all this borrowing was dwarfed by the capital required to meet the needs of the Docks Committee. As will be seen later, much was spent on three main concerns: improving the river Avon and thus access to the Floating Harbour; creating new facilities in that Harbour; and from 1884 in providing additional equipment for the docks at Avonmouth and Portishead. All told the indebtedness of Bristol by the beginning of the new century would not appear to have been unusually high. In 1904 outstanding loans and overdrafts totalled £5,233,728. Cities of comparable size such as Bradford with a population of 280,000 compared with Bristol's 337,000 had a debt of £5,158,895 or Sheffield with 381,000, was in debt to the tune of £8,165,824. The

\textsuperscript{11}PP 1899 vol. lxxxiii Return of Municipal Corporations (Reproductive Undertakings) displays this difference very clearly. At this time Bristol's electricity business was making an annual profit of £5,150, its markets £1,442, its cemeteries £630 and its docks £62,056.
estimated value of all Corporation property at this time was £7,435,467.\(^\text{12}\)

So how was this capital raised? Basically either the Corporation issued stock or it resorted to loans on mortgage. For instance of the £1,028,528 debt outstanding in 1901 on the account of the Council as Sanitary Authority, £564,461 was in the form of mortgages and £464,067 in stock debt. In 1898 councillor George Pearson, in his capacity as President of a lately formed Economic Society, gave a very substantial Address in which he sought to enlighten Bristolians about municipal finance. It was rare for members of the Council to undertake such a task, hence his thoughts deserve attention. He argued that prudent capital raising meant steering between borrowing on short terms of optional repayment, which tended to deter lenders as exposing them to the risk of having their investment back in their own hands at inconveniently short intervals, and borrowing on long terms, or on irredeemable conditions, which meant that the local authority could not take advantage of interest rate changes. Pearson believed Bristol had suffered from issuing much stock in accord with Parliament’s insistence until recently that all stock issued by local authorities should be irredeemable. He was better satisfied with the Council’s abandonment of the older method of repaying loans on mortgages by which repayment was made by equal half-yearly instalments of principal and interest over periods varying from twenty to fifty years. Instead Bristol had repaid an equal instalment of the principal each half year with half a years interest on the balance of the loan, a method which although it involved a heavy first repayment led to less and less cash having to be found as the amount of the principal was reduced.\(^\text{13}\)

The Council by no means had complete freedom to accumulate a debt. Its borrowing was normally undertaken by the authority of a local Act, as was the case with much of that undertaken by the Docks Committee, and as a Sanitary Authority it required the approval of central government’s Local Government Board for raising capital. Generally it was able to borrow at interest rates varying between four and a half per cent, and two and three quarter per cent. Lenders varied from the Public Works Loan Commissioners and the Bank of England to private individuals.

\(^{12}\) PP 1904 vol. lxxxii Return showing the Total indebtedness of the Councils of Boroughs in England and Wales on 31 Mar. 1903 for these figures. The value of the Corporation’s property was arrived at in various ways e.g. the figure for the Docks was made up of the total capital expenditure since 1848 and an estimate of the value of the property then taken over; the electricity concern was valued at actual cost; town and country property was valued on net income capitalised etc.

\(^{13}\) WDP 9 Nov. 1898 for Pearson’s Address.
Rates and the Ratepayer

Every ten years the Council and the city magistrates ordered a survey of property throughout the municipality which was recorded in two large volumes recording parish by parish and street by street the owners and occupiers of properties and their gross and rateable value. The purpose was "for fixing the Poor, Borough and other rates". These surveys established the city's rateable value as far as the Borough Fund was concerned. At mid-century at £433,648 it was easily the greatest in the west country, slightly greater than Leeds and considerably greater than Sheffield, Bradford, Wolverhampton and Newcastle-on-Tyne. The growing expenditure of the Council was made possible by the increase over the next half century in the city's tax base in the form of its rateable value as the table shows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rateable value</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1851 1861</td>
<td>433,648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871 Oct. 1881</td>
<td>457,636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881 Oct. 1891</td>
<td>655,896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891 Oct. 1901</td>
<td>878,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901 Oct.</td>
<td>994,456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,561,891</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the ratepayers point of view rates appeared to have an inexorable tendency to increase in spite of the growth in the numbers and wealth of the ratepayers. For example the general district rate averaged 1s 1d from 1862-1871, 1s 3d from 1872-1881, 1s 5d from 1882-1891 and 1s 10d from 1892-1901. These being the rates for half years. The general district rate was only one, although often the heaviest of the charges on the ratepayer. At one time in the nineteenth century, it has been calculated that no fewer than eighteen different rates were levied. In the latter half of the century in addition to the general district rate the poor rate levied by the Poor Law Guardians was the major constituent of the ratepayer's bill. Lesser charges included the harbour rate, the borough dock rate and sewer rates all of which applied to some but not all parishes. There was no uniformity throughout the city about rate bills: all depended on the parish in which you lived as to whether it attracted these lesser charges and was either in Clifton Poor Law Union, or Bedminster Union, or the

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14 See e.g. BRO 04250 for 1851; 04251 for 1861; 04252 for 1871 etc.
15 PP 1852 vol. xlv Return of the amount of property assessed to the relief of the poor. The Council's own survey for 1851 put the rateable value slightly higher at £444,182.
16 The figures from 1861-1891 are the tax base on which the general district rate was levied rather than the base on which the borough rate was raised. The 1851 and 1901 figures relate to the latter. There was a slight difference between the two bases. Latimer, Conclusion, p 100 estimated that over the whole century Bristol's population had multiplied fivefold and its rateable value twelvefold.
17 BRO Information Box xxvi/29 Memo of City Archivist to City Treasurer 7 Nov. 1978.
Incorporation of the Poor. The authorities in each arrived at their own rate. For example in 1880 those living in a parish of the old city such as St Augustine or All Saints were required to pay rates of 6s 1d in the £ while dwellers in Clifton parish faced 5s 4d. Cliftonians paid the same general district rate as dwellers in the old city parishes but did not have to pay the lesser charges. But the Clifton poor rate at 2s 7d compared with 1s 11d for a city parish in the Incorporation of the Poor and 2s 3d for that part of Bedminster within the municipality, but for poor law purposes, in the Union of that name.\textsuperscript{18} No wonder the Town Clerk commented in 1886 that he was unable to meet government's request for a neat table of rates in the pound for Bristol over the past thirty years.\textsuperscript{19} What was clear, as was referred to in discussion of the allocation of numbers of councillors to wards, some wards such as Redcliffe, Bristol and Clifton from their rateable value were bound to contribute more to the city's finances than others.

So did the ratepayer rebel? If this was to happen there were two years in the latter half of the century when this might have been expected as rate demands were then unusually high. In 1856 7s 6d in the pound (including poor rate) was demanded of some and in 1898 when 7s 1d (also including poor rate) faced many ratepayers. In 1856 there was little or no evidence of widespread dissatisfaction. The Liberal opposition, launched no attack and the municipal elections, according to the Liberal \textit{Bristol Mercury} "passed off without excitement and almost without contest".\textsuperscript{20} Occasionally the paper carried a critical letter castigating the Council for paying above market value for the docks, embarking on loss making Baths and being likely to be dragged into building a luxurious palace for the city's pauper lunatics.\textsuperscript{21} But there were no signs in 1856 of ratepaying associations being formed. Insofar as there was dissatisfaction it was the Corporation of the Poor rather than the Council which was the focus of attention from aggrieved ratepayers thanks to the publication of a government return which appeared to show that the Corporation of the Poor was over generous with its relief.

It was a different story in 1898. A jump of 5d in the pound on the previous year was demanded. This was in part the result of the substantial boundary extension which involved the Council in considerable additional expenditure for policing the added districts and

\textsuperscript{18} PP vol. lxxii \textit{Return showing the Rate in the pound of all rates other than Water and Gas Rates or Rates for Private Improvement Works levied in certain Municipal Boroughs} for these figures.

\textsuperscript{19} PP 1886 vol. lvi \textit{Return of the amount of rates }...\textit{ levied by the Town Council of each Municipal Borough }...\textit{ the Rateable value of the Property in each Borough and the Rate in the pound.}

\textsuperscript{20} BM 8 Nov. 1856.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ibid} 12 Jan. 26 July 1856.
bringing up the standard of services there to the level supplied in the
rest of the city. Although boundary extension had been well supported
by Bristolians, paying for it was far from popular, perhaps because in
their rhetoric advocates of extension had been apt to play down its
cost. The Council itself, faced with requests for an additional 2d in the
pound on the general district rate from the Sanitary Committee, 3d
on the borough rate from the Finance Committee, £22,000 from the
Docks Committee and £35,500 from the School Board for the first six
months, was clearly taken aback. In spite of a letter in the Western
Daily Press from alderman Charles Low, a veteran with experience as
Chairman of the Docks Committee and the Sanitary Committee,
warning against accepting a resolution to slash by £5,500 (i.e. about
28%) the sum required for the borough rate as seriously disorganising
the city's finances, after a three hour debate, the Council accepted the
resolution. Voting was 36:27 with the minority containing 12 alder-
men and the majority none.22

But all the Council had achieved by its vote was to take a penny off
the rates. Letters to the press suggest that ratepayers were not
assuaged. It was suggested that "every district must have its rate-
payers' protection association".23 In fact such associations had existed
in some wards as far back as the early eighties.24 Indeed in Clifton
ward in 1898 such an association fielded a candidate at the municipal
elections in C.H. Tucker, a businessman, who claimed that he paid
over £600 annually in rates. He complained about the poor state of
the Clifton Wood district and the extravagance of the Sanitary Com-
mittee and duly unseated the sitting Conservative councillor George
Cawley. But there was no general revolt by ratepayers. Only four of
the city's eighteen wards were contested. All candidates professed to
favour economy but, as the Western Daily Press observed, the Council
had only partial control over the rates: the School Board and Boards
of Guardians needed to embrace economy if rates were to be brought
down. No satisfactory answer, it commented, had been given to the
question of "how it is that in Bristol there is a greater percentage of
pauperism than in most cities". Also it noted that the Council was still
suffering from having to find interest on high priced loans contracted
twenty to thirty years ago.25

Did the Council exercise financial discipline? The 1835 Municipal
Corporations Act (sect. xxxvii) sought to provide municipal electors
with some control over the Council's financial administration by

22 WDP 23 Mar. 1898 letter from C.H. Low
23 ibid 24, 25 Mar. 1898.
24 P.C. 13 Dec. 1881, 3 April 1883 for evidence of their existence. P.C. 10 May 1887 and
1 Jan. 1890 has references to an Independent Ratepayers League.
25 WDP 1, 2, Nov. 1898.
decreeing that on each 1 March they were entitled to elect two auditors. Members of the Council and the Town Clerk and Treasurer were barred from election. The Act also provided that accounts were to be kept of receipts and payments which were to be submitted to the elected auditors and one member of the Council nominated by the Mayor in March and September of each year. The Treasurer was required to print and publish a full abstract of his accounts for the year.\footnote{B.R.O. has such annual printed abstracts for 1835–1847 and from 1869 onwards.} No evidence has been found of the election of auditors save for bare notice of their appointment in the proceedings of the Council and occasionally in the press.\footnote{e.g. BT 5 Mar. 1865 reporting the appointment of J.T. Pike and G. Thomas.} Witnesses before a select committee on borough auditors in 1874 testified that municipal electors were little interested in the election of auditors and that it was not uncommon for professional accountants to be used and means found to pay them even if this was of doubtful legality. This appears likely to have been the practice in Bristol.\footnote{Pike was described in Matthews Directory as 'a public accountant and general agent' and Thomas as 'agent to the General Fire and Life Assurance Office.} As the evidence of the LGB’s “Inspector of Auditors” made clear, central government had no control over or knowledge of borough financial administration in contrast to its power via audit over poor law administration. All that the LGB did, he testified, was what the Home Office used to do i.e. receive the borough accounts and tabulate them statistically as a return to parliament without making any inquiry into the accuracy of these accounts.\footnote{PP 1874 vol. vii Report of the Select Committee on Borough Auditors and Assessors especially the evidence of Danby Palmer of the LGB and the Town Clerk of Hull.} The local auditors were supposed to ensure this, but, unlike poor law auditors, they were not concerned as to whether the Council was obeying statute law or ministerial orders, and in no way did they attempt to assess whether the Council was securing value for the money it spent.

There was only one occasion when it was plain beyond dispute that the city’s financial administration had broken down. In 1856 Thomas Garrard, who had served the Corporation for 54 years, 34 as Chamberlain and then as Treasurer, tendered his resignation admitting that his books were in disorder and his account with the borough fund would show “a considerable deficiency”. A professional accountant had to be called in to sort matters out. Almost certainly it was the failings of old age rather than peculation that accounted for this situation. In the event a mechanism on which the city long relied, and continued to do so, saved the day. On appointment those officers handling money had to find sureties graded according to their seniority. In 1856 Garrard’s sureties had the cash to cover his deficiency so
that the city suffered no loss. A further means of seeking to ensure against financial corruption was the Council's practice of encouraging its committees to appoint finance sub-committees, usually consisting of three or four Councillors or Aldermen, whose job it was to scrutinise bills, tenders, agreements and other items of a financial nature. The work was no doubt tedious and time consuming, nonetheless of value in keeping dishonesty at bay.

**Administration**

In 1851 the paid officers and employees of the Council numbered 291. Far and away the most numerous were the 198 police constables and their nine superior offices whose allegiance was primarily to the Watch Committee which enjoyed a semi independence from the Council. The rest were a small and diverse body. Some, such as the Mayor's personal attendants, who included the swordbearer, performed purely ceremonial duties. Others, including officers at the Mayor's Chapel, the Chaplain, Surgeon and Matron at Bridewell and the housekeeper of the Council House could scarcely be regarded as part of even a fledgling bureaucracy. Others, including the Recorder and the two clerks to the Justices, were not appointed by the Council but paid by it, while the half a dozen staff of Newgate prison were appointed by the Council but were under the control of the Justices of the Peace. Still others such as the Collectors at the Markets had relatively light duties.

All told there were five discernible departments if that is not too grand a name for offices often with but a handful of staff. These were the offices of the Town Clerk with three members, the Treasurer also with three, and the staff involved in carrying out the Improvement Acts of 1840 and 1847, the Docks Transfer Act of 1848 and the adoption by the city of the 1848 Public Health Act. The city architect, two clerks and three surveyors sought to carry out the Improvement Acts. The Council in its capacity as a Local Board of Health employed a Clerk, James Harris, a Surveyor, John Armstrong, an accountant, an Inspector of Lamps and Scavengers and an unknown number of weekly wage earners employed on maintaining the city's streets, sewers and lighting all of whom it had inherited from the Paving Commissioners whom the Council as Local Board of Health had superseded. Next to the police the Docks contained the largest number

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30 P.C. 15 Mar. 1856.
31 See Bush Appendix I for a list. This excludes the weekly paid staff of the Dock Co. and Paving Commissioners taken over when the Council assumed their functions, the turnkeys at Bridewell and Newgate Prison and the constables of Exchange and St. James Markets all of whose numbers are not know.
of Council employees. In 1851 these included twenty eight pilots, the Collectors of the Mayor's and Town Dues, the Water Bailiff, the Quay Warden, the Haven Master, the Cranemaster and his clerk. In addition there were staff taken over from the Dock Company when the docks were transferred to the Council. These included Joseph Dand Green, the Superintendent of Works, a Secretary to the Docks Committee, a Dock Master and a Collector of Rates and Dues on goods and shipping.

In the half century following the Council's employees grew substantially. A parliamentary return of 1906 showed that they numbered almost six thousand making the Council a major employer in the city. Indeed it was widely believed that it was the largest employer in Bristol. The prestige of its leading officers had so increased as to entitle them to biographical notice alongside prominent figures in the religious, political and business life of Bristol. Growth was essentially peacemeal driven partly by duties imposed on the Council by new statutes initiated either by government or by the Council itself and partly by the additional business created by the expansion of the city's population and economic activity. By examining the various departments of the city's administration examples of both processes will be revealed as well as the manner in which the Council handled issues of pay and conditions of work.

The Town Clerk was the most important of the Council's servants. When for the first time since 1849, on the death of Daniel Burges Jr. in 1874, a new Town Clerk was needed, the formidable alderman Proctor Baker listed the attributes which the Council required of its chief officer. First he must have solid attainment in his profession of the law including a minute acquaintance with all Acts of Parliament pertaining to municipal and sanitary law. Secondly he must have a general knowledge of affairs that would enable him to transact the very varied business of a Council which had estates outside the city, large house property within it, land let on various leases and an enormous dock property. Thirdly he needed to have a knowledge of the rates, how they were levied and the loans the Council had raised. Above

32 Green resigned in October 1851 and was succeeded in January 1852 by Thomas Blackwell who was given the new title of Docks Engineer, see D.C.M. 20 Oct. 1851 and 12 Jan. 1852.
33 PP 1907 lxxii p333 Return showing the number of persons in the employ of the Councils of Boroughs in 1906. This figure was swelled by the inclusion of teachers brought into municipal employ by the Education Act 1902.
34 Work in Bristol, a series of sketches of the chief manufactories (Bristol, 1883) estimates Frys as employing about a thousand hands, the Great Western Cotton Works, 1,600, Derhams, boot and shoe manufacturers, about 2000 and Robinsons, the wholesale stationers 668.
35 See e.g. The civic life of Bristol (Bristol, 1910).
all the alderman insisted he must have experience. To obtain these attributes the Council relied almost entirely on one family. From 1836 to 1900, with but a six years gap from 1874 to 1880, a Burges was the Council’s principal officer. In those six years William Brice, a lifelong friend and professional partner of Daniel Burges Jr., occupied the post. When obituaries of Daniel Travers Burges, the city’s Town Clerk who died in office in September 1900 came to be written, it was remarked of him “he may be said to have had an hereditary position, his father and grandfather in turn having been Town Clerks of Bristol”. All three were solicitors who had had connections with the unreformed Corporation going back to the late eighteenth century when a Daniel Burges was City Solicitor and Clerk of the Arraigns. He was father of the first of the family to become Town Clerk.

It is far from easy to assess the calibre of Daniel Burges Jr. Town Clerk from 1849 until 1874 and Daniel Travers Burges who held the post from 1880 until 1900. Both died in office hence tributes to them were almost bound not to contain measured judgements. Indeed Proctor Baker in 1874 described Daniel Burges Jr. as “the perfect Town Clerk”. Plainly neither Burges became national figures like Sir Joseph Heron of Manchester or Sir Samuel Johnson of Nottingham. Both these were regarded as convincing spokesmen for city government and were called on to testify in that capacity before major commissions of inquiry. There is little evidence to suggest that the Town Clerk in Bristol ever approached such a position. It is instructive that William Brice when he retired from the office in 1880 in his valedictory speech to the Council thought the Council had been wrong not to have built a Severnside dock in 1864 and should have bought the Water Company when it was for sale. Speaking in 1880 he also urged it to acquire either Avonmouth or Portishead docks or both. These were hardly the words of a commanding and directing figure. Indeed Brice, no doubt following the Burges pattern saw his job in civil service terms saying that he had been very careful to avoid political activity outside the Council believing this to be inconsistent with the office.

Without doubt the work and responsibilities of the Town Clerk increased substantially in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As has been seen council meetings increased in frequency and its committees in number. The Town Clerk in his capacity as secretary was called on to do much more minute taking. He also had to familiarise himself with the increasing stream of public legislation. To cite but one example: from the first Public Health Act of 1848 until the great

36 WDP 21 Nov. 1874.
37 See the family tree in the possession of Major-General Rodney Burgess grandson of Daniel Travers Burges mentioned above and WDP 17 Sept. 1900.
consolidating statute of 1875 there were twenty nine pieces of legislation which would be subsumed in the latter statute.\textsuperscript{38} Just as important from the Town Clerk’s point of view was the increasing number of private bills promoted by railway companies, gas and water companies and neighbouring local authorities. He had to advise the Council on their contents and whether or not the city’s interests were likely to be affected. He would also play a major role in assisting the Council to promote bills to further its own purposes. On occasion this was a most demanding and time consuming task, most notably in promoting legislation to achieve extension of the city’s boundaries. Boundary extension, coupled with growth in the existing city, meant that, between the appointment of a Town Clerk in 1880 and the need to appoint a successor in 1900, Bristol had increased its area two and a half times, its population by half as much again, more than doubled its spending as a Sanitary Authority and the capital invested in its municipal docks had risen from £858,000 to two and a half million pounds.\textsuperscript{39} Furthermore when J.G. Heaven, Clerk to the Council in its capacity as a Sanitary Authority, retired in 1887 his post was amalgamated with that of the Town Clerk which added to his work.\textsuperscript{40}

Certainly his assistants increased: for instance W.H. Wise was appointed to help with the Sanitary authority work in October 1887 and at the same time E.J. Taylor was recruited to help with the legal work and probably to be groomed to succeed Daniel Travers Burges which indeed came about in 1900. By then the Town Clerk’s department also included a conveyancing clerk, nine other clerks, one of whom, Charles Sampson, had been appointed as long ago as 1852, one junior clerk and an assistant solicitor. In addition, once the Town Clerk had taken over the duties of the Clerk to the Council in its guise as an Urban Sanitary Authority, he had under his wing the Accountant’s department consisting of Crompton, the Accountant, who was assisted by a chief Clerk, two book-keepers, one stock clerk, five clerks, one junior clerk and a rent collector.\textsuperscript{41} Indeed with managerial responsibility for 25 staff the Town Clerk in 1900 headed a department as numerous as central government’s Home Office at mid-century.

\textsuperscript{39} WDP 24 Oct. 1900; P.C. 23 Oct. 1900.
\textsuperscript{40} P.C. 29 July 1887; WDP 10 Aug. 1887 when a critical Councillor Gilmore Barnett observed that until this happened ‘Bristol was the only large city in the empire where there were two distinct officers with the positions of Town Clerk and Clerk to the Sanitary Authority’.
\textsuperscript{41} A.A.C.C.B. vol. for 1901 contains details of staff paid out of the various city funds.
The Treasurer

Second to the Town Clerk in lists of Council officers in 1851 came the Treasurer, Thomas Garrard, whose resignation in 1856 has previously been mentioned. His default led to a sub-committee of investigation recommending that the Treasurer’s department should consist of the new Treasurer, who was to find £4,000 surety and have a salary of £700; a first clerk, to find £1,000 surety and be paid £250 a year; and a 2nd Clerk to find £500 surety and be paid £100 p.a. both Clerks to be appointed by the Finance Committee and not by the Treasurer. The Council itself, in appointing the new Treasurer, John Harford, who was in his fifties and had been Deputy Treasurer to Garrard, a post now abolished, settled on £600 rather than £700 for his salary and £210 rather than £250 for the first clerk. The Finance Committee clearly did not think such reductions were fair. In 1860 it recommended that Mr Sharp, the first Clerk, who had served the Council for nearly thirty years, should receive £250 and in 1861 that Harford who had served for forty five years should have £700. The Council’s acceptance of this last provoked something of a storm. The Bristol Mercury attacked the Council for the amount it spent on “salaries to the vast staff of officers”, criticised Councillor T.P. Jose for behaving like an unreformed Councillor when he declared that citizens had no right to concern themselves with officers’ salaries, and maintained that no case at all had been made for increasing that of the Treasurer. The matter became an issue in the municipal elections in 1862. Liberal candidates in particular found themselves having to defend themselves for voting for the salary increase, or preening themselves, as Elisha Robinson did, for not having done so.

Increasing the salary of John Lane, the 2nd Clerk, after he had served eight years, in 1864, from £100 to £150 p.a. aroused no such controversy. His career illustrates a common feature among the Council’s employees: long service, occasional increases in salary and a slow climb up a promotion ladder. In 1868 Lane’s salary was increased to £180 p.a. Ten years later after twenty two years service it was increased to £300 p.a. A year later, in 1879, on the death of George Sharp, the 1st Clerk, who had served the Corporation for fifty years, John Lane was promoted to his post but with no increase in salary. In 1881 his opportunity arrived. John Harford, after 65 years service, died at the age of 79. He was evidently a much loved officer: the Council, all standing, carried by acclamation a motion of regret at his

42 P.C. 15 Mar. 1856.
44 B.T. 8 Nov. 1862; B.M. 15 Oct. 1862.
45 P.C. 9 Feb. 1864.
death. It agreed to appoint Lane as his successor but to save £500 a year by paying him a salary of £500 rather than the £700 enjoyed by Harford, and leaving his £300 a year post as 1st Clerk unfilled. Also a set of rules governing and, in effect limiting the Treasurer’s powers was drawn up, including the provision that all orders on the Corporation’s bankers to pay out moneys should be signed by three members of the Council and countersigned by the Town Clerk.46

Lane soldiered on. No doubt he gave satisfaction. In 1888 the Council recognising his 21 years service, and that in Harford’s last years he had done most of the Treasurer’s work, increased his salary to £600 and restored the post of 1st Clerk as “vitaly necessary”. It would be another ten years before Mr Lane in 1898 sought another increase to bring his salary up to the £700 enjoyed by Harford. As he pointed out the duties of his office had increased considerably. In 1890 on the death of W. Gale Coles he had taken over as Treasurer of the Council in its role as Sanitary Authority and recent extensions of the Council’s activities such as its responsibilities for technical instruction and newly acquired burial grounds as well as for additional libraries, parks, police stations and baths had added to his labours. Councillor Lloyd, a builder and an “advanced Liberal” who believed in economical local government sought but failed with an amendment to keep Lane’s salary at £600. He was still in post when the century ended.47

Two further developments in the Treasurer’s department may be noted. First, the Treasurer’s department grew a little in that it acquired a junior clerk in the seventies and the competition for this post demonstrated that becoming a Council employee, even at a lowly level, was much valued. Mr G.L. Bush was chosen for the post in 1879 from 70 candidates.48 Secondly, after growing concern among councillors over the management of the Corporation’s property, part of the Treasurer’s task, it was decided in 1897 that a new senior specialist officer was needed if the large collection of old and often dilapidated houses and pubs which constituted this property was to be put in order, the growing number of public buildings were to be properly maintained and rateable values were to be accurately ascertained. The result was the appointment of Peter Addie, of the improvement department of Birmingham City Council, to the new post of Estate Surveyor and Valuer at a salary of £700 rising by £100 p.a. to £1000. In effect a new Council department was in train.49

46 ibid 30 June, 4 Aug. 1868, 9 Nov. 1878, 15 Mar. 1881; WDP 16 Mar. 1881.
48 ibid 1 Jan. 1881; WDP 3 Jan. 1881.
49 ibid 9 Nov. 1897, 28 Jan. 1898.
The Treasurer’s department was staffed in a manner not unlike central government’s civil service by officers who were expected to carry out administrative and clerical work but did not have professional or technical qualifications. Increasingly in the latter half of the nineteenth century the city Council found itself having to appoint officers with such qualifications partly because the job could only be done by those with qualifications and partly because the post involved the supervision of technically qualified assistants. Examples of such appointments were Thomas Howard’s appointment in 1855 as “Resident Engineer and Superintendent of the Dock Works”, that of Bristol’s first MOH in 1865, the appointments of Dr Stephens and of his successors Dr G. Thompson and Dr H. Benham as Medical Superintendent of the Lunatic Asylum, the previously mentioned Peter Addie, the Estate Surveyor, who was an F.I.S. and H. Faraday Proctor, Engineer to the electricity department.

In addition to the Council was obliged by law to make appointments of individuals with sufficient expertise to satisfy central government. Such was the case with the appointment in 1873 of William Stoddart as the first City Analyst and of the successive Inspectors of Nuisances. Furthermore the Council found itself obliged to recruit officers for posts for which there were no formal qualifications but clearly required candidates with expertise and experience. This applied to posts as various as that of Chief Constable, the Superintendent of the Firebrigade, the city librarian, the museum curator and the vet who was appointed in 1892 to care for the by now numerous horses belonging to the Council.

These technically or professionally qualified officers, and those similar to them, were often to be found managing departments or subdepartments answering to particular committees and consequently having to develop administrative and secretarial skills in addition to their technical expertise. For example H. Faraday Proctor, the electrical engineer, by 1900 headed a department of fifteen, a third of whom were clerks, another third engineers and the rest were draughtsmen. The other half of the electricity undertaking, headed by the Secretary and Accountant, was more akin to a department such as the Treasury in that it consisted of a dozen clerks and a bookkeeper and was much concerned with the billing of increasing numbers of customers and

50 R. A. Buchanan, Nineteenth century Engineers in the Port of Bristol, p 13 describes him as ‘the embodiment of the New Model Docks Engineer’.
51 P.C. 30 Sep. 1873.
52 The Council usually recruited such officers from other police forces especially the Metropolitan.
53 P.C. 13 Dec. 1892.
attending to their needs and complaints. Likewise by 1900 T.H. Yab-bicom, the City Engineer, headed a department of forty five which included sixteen clerks and sixteen draughtsmen as well as five surveyors, five building inspectors and an assistant Engineer.54

A landmark in the evolution of this department was the appointment in 1872 of Josiah Thomas to a new office of City Surveyor who was to supersede the district surveyors and the city architect and have responsibility for the whole city with powers defined by the 1840 and 1847 Improvement Acts, the 1848 Public Health Act and the Streets Improvement Committee for whom he was to prepare plans and estimates for all contemplated street improvements. His fellow district surveyors, R.S. Pope and S.C. Fripp, appear to have been semi-pensioned off as city architects with salaries of £150 p.a. each. The debates and negotiations about Thomas's appointment illustrated several issues concerning the terms of employment of officers, particularly those of local origin who had built up successful private businesses.

Terms of employment of officers

The committee recommending the new appointment thought that its holder should devote all his time to it and not engage in private practice. The popular and respected alderman Proctor, believed that this would probably deter Josiah Thomas from accepting the post, and that Thomas was indispensable, both because of his knowledge and experience, and because he proposed to carry out the surveying functions more cheaply than hitherto. Proctor persuaded the Council to abandon this provision. Not everyone was happy. At a subsequent meeting alderman Green, arguing that private interests and public duties were bound to clash, tried to reverse this. Although he failed to do so an elaborate agreement was arrived at by which Thomas was to give up his practice as an architect and builder and restrict his private business to valuations. He was to work from the Prince St. office of the Council, (its headquarters in its role as Urban Sanitary authority) and be paid £750 p.a. Also he was to receive all the fees payable to the superseded district surveyors and pay to the Treasurer £900 a year while keeping anything over this sum, an agreement which councillor Follwell believed to be unduly generous to Thomas. Finally it was agreed that the Council, acting through the Streets Improvement Committee, not the new City Surveyor, should pay, hire or dismiss such clerks, draughtsmen, surveyors, inspectors and assistants as were needed, leaving the Surveyor simply with a suspending power over them.55

54 A.A.C.C.B. 1900–1.
Generally speaking the trend in the latter half of the nineteenth century was for officer posts to be full time, precluding private practice, for payment to be by salary rather than by collecting fees, and for officers ceasing to be paid a salary out of which they were expected to pay for clerical or other assistance. In the absence of nationally agreed pay scales and before NALGO was born in 1905 the Council had total freedom to set pay. Pay increases—at infrequent intervals—were recommended to Council by the committee to whom the officer was responsible and then debated in full Council where there was usually a disposition to grudge increases in the knowledge that municipal electors were apt to believe that officers were overpaid. In the absence of a superannuation scheme—except for the police and pilots—officers were dependent on the goodwill and generosity of the Council. When age crept up either you soldiered on and on or you managed to persuade your committee to grant you an annuity. The result was that officers grew older than was compatible with efficiency by serving the Council for many years. In 1876 a unique return revealed that the Corporation employed eight officers aged 65 or over led by Henry Gascodine, Collector of Town Dues, who was 88. Some officers certainly recorded remarkably long service. J.B. Grindon resigned as Coroner from infirmity in 1868 after fifty years service and G.H. Sharp, senior Clerk in the Treasurer’s office, died in post in 1879 after the same years service, while J.A. Gardner’s stint of thirty seven years as Governor of the gaol earned him the description of senior governor of a gaol in England. On the other hand the Council not infrequently did reward service by its humbler employees. For instance in 1870 George Perrin, male warder in the gaol for twenty years, was granted an annuity on retirement, as was one of the very few female employees, the matron of the lunatic asylum, who had served for the same years.

With the emergence in the later eighties of a small number of councillors with an interest in labour questions, which came to the fore in the shape of widespread strikes in the city in 1889, the Council for the first time was urged to pay attention to the needs of its wage earning employees. For instance in 1889 councillor Barnett moved that all Corporation employees should have four days holiday with pay in addition to Christmas Day and Good Friday. He pointed out that employees of the Baths committee had a weeks holiday per year, the Library committees staff had a fortnight and employees of the Finance Committee had the four Bank holidays as well as Christmas and Good Friday. Barnett declared that “the man who earned 2s 6d a day was

56 PP 1876 vol. lxii Return of Municipal Officers … who might be entitled to Superannuation Allowances under the provisions of the Municipal Officers Superannuation bill.
57 P.C. 8 Feb. 2nd Aug. 1870.
as entitled to a holiday as one who earned £3 or £5 and that his resolution covered all permanent employees except those on piece work. It would increase Council expenditure by £400–500 and affect 700 men in the employ of the Docks and Sanitary Committees. Councillor Tovey, the first Labour Councillor to be elected, claimed that wage earners employed by the Docks Committee were unfairly treated in that they had to work more hours than men in comparable private employment, were paid 2/- to 3/- less per week and were barred from trade union membership. Barnett’s resolution was defeated in a thin house: the chairs of the two committees most affected argued that the cost of granting four days holiday was insupportable and strongly objected to full Council instructing Committees on the matter. It would, they argued, undermine their authority over their employees.58

Barnett renewed his efforts, moving a milder resolution simply asking the two committees to explore granting the four days holiday. This was acceptable to the Docks chairman but alderman Naish, the veteran chairman of the Sanitary Committee refused to accept it as amounting to a Council instruction although assuring Barnett that the matter was on the Committee’s agenda. He gave a rare glimpse of the wage earning work force employed by the Council as Sanitary authority. It consisted of 214 employees of whom 106 were paid wages of 14s–17s a week. Barnett’s resolution was accepted by the Council but there is no sign that it was followed up by action.59 He was not deterred. In 1891 he took up the question of superannuation.

Two groups of Council employees by this time had superannuation schemes, the police and the pilots operating under the direction of the Docks Committee. No doubt because it was as well that both should not go on serving into decrepitude they had been singled out for pensions. Barnett claimed that the Council had in its employ, especially in the Docks, men who were too old to work and were being kept on just to keep them out of the workhouse. When the Finance Committee confirmed his supposition that the Corporation would need statutory powers to set up a pension scheme, he moved that Council should seek these next time it promoted private legislation only to be defeated 29:16.60

It was not until 1899 that the superannuation question came to the fore again when the officers and servants of the Corporation presented a memorial to the Council requesting it to support the Local Authorities Superannuation Bill just about to be presented into parliament. Alderman Fox argued in favour of the Bill’s principle on the grounds

58 P.C. 1 Jan. 1889; WDP 2 Jan. 1889.
60 P.C. 12 May, 11 Aug. 1891; WDP 13 May, 12 Aug. 1891.
that officers should not be kept on when of an age to retire and local authorities had no power to set up pension schemes while the salaries they paid were too small for employees to provide their own pensions. But Council accepted an amendment which led to appointing a committee to study the bill while not accepting its principle. This the committee did but reached deadlock and was unable to report. Alderman Fox, its chairman, explained that it had employed an actuary to report on the financial burden likely to fall on the rates. His report led to the committee splitting evenly on whether the bill should be supported or not. Noting that Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham had schemes Fox maintained that a scheme was long overdue and imperative in Bristol. The Council could either agree with him that the current bill should be supported or draw up one of its own. In the event it decided to promote its own bill “to provide superannuation to embrace all persons in the employ of the Corporation” and this was duly enacted.61

In the nineties the pay and hours of work of Corporation employees was brought to the Council’s attention to an unprecedented degree. Councillor Gore in 1894 made sure that every councillor was provided with a return of the number of men on weekly pay, their hours of work, wages and number of holidays.62 Two years later the Labour councillor John Sharland moved that the Council adopt the eight hour day and ban all overtime for weekly paid workers. His contention was that at a time of severe unemployment in the city this would create more badly needed jobs. The proposal was referred to committees for consideration but to no effect.63

In 1897 councillor John Curle, secretary of the Trades Council, inaugurated controversy when he sought to persuade the Council to instruct committees to employ waged employees on conditions which did not exclude trade unionists. In his speech he described the Council’s employment practices. It employed two sets of men, permanent and temporary. The permanent employees were paid a little less than the temporary but enjoyed 16s a week or half pay if absent ill and were paid during holidays. The temporaries were employed on conditions similar to employees in trades generally in the city but in some Corporation departments temporaries who were trade union members were precluded from being taken on as permanent employees. To this Curle objected. Eventually in 1898 the Sanitary Committee took the unusual step of organising a ballot of its permanent employees as to whether or not they wished to retain their existing conditions of

63 P.C. 10, 21 Mar. 1896; B.T. 1 April 1896.
employment or to adopt the hours of work, rates of pay and conditions of labour recognised by the unions.

The voting went 1,045 in favour of the existing conditions and 33 for the union recognised conditions. In the face of this overwhelming defeat for the unions Curle complained that the temporaries had not been consulted and Labour councillor Sharland accused the committee of paying engineers and building tradesmen below union negotiated rates. To which the chairman, alderman Cope-Proctor, replied that only 125 of the voters were of this description and the rest were “ordinary labourers, sweepers, carters, stablemen and destructor men” Curle’s amendment calling for balloting all employees was resoundingly defeated 50:13.64

In spite of this defeat spokesmen for unions in the Council did not cease to campaign. In 1900 Labour councillor G.F. Jones, a printer’s reader, sought to remedy the imperfections of a resolution which the Council had adopted in 1891, on the urging of socialist Councillor H.H. Gore, that contracts for work done on its behalf should contain clauses requiring contractors to pay union rates of pay. As Jones observed, the 1891 resolution was silent as to hours of work and it did not apply to sub contractors. It was a measure by this time of how involved the Council had become in labour relations that it did not seek to settle a matter of this kind in an ordinary Council meeting, as it had so often done in the past in regard to salary and wage questions, but was ready to accept alderman Proctor Baker’s suggestion that the chairmen of committees and representatives of workmen should get together in conference to establish a legal and proper rule.65

Indeed the Council, as a major employer, was entering the twentieth century with an increasing need to establish machinery by which it might negotiate terms of employment with a wage earning work force which was becoming increasingly organised and vocal. By 1901 this was also true of the salaried work force. Local government engineers had formed their Institution in 1873, Sanitary Inspectors their Association in 1883 and Municipal Treasurers and Accountants their corporate body in 1885. Also in the nineties in London and Liverpool guilds of salaried officers existed which would be the germs from which NALGO would emerge in 1905.66 The Council would eventually respond by appointing a Salaries Committee in 1909 which would be the forerunner of the later Establishments Committee.

Clearly the influence of qualified officers grew in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Certainly Bristol’s Council contained sufficient members with enough business or legal experience to more than hold

64 P.C. 11 May 1897, 1 Jan. 1898; WDP 12 May 1897, 3 Jan. 1898.
65 P.C. 8 June 1900; WDP 9 June 1900.
66 A. Spoor, White-Collar Union (1967) chap 2.
their own with officers in these fields, but the Council was ill equipped to challenge the expertise of engineers or the medically qualified. Consequently such officers were bound to carry weight, and the Council was having to turn increasingly to such expertise if it was to face up to the problems of the city and to promote necessary legislation which so often involved the Council in producing experts to make its case. Even if it was too inclined to go on employing some officers long after they should have been retired, on the whole, as will be seen, it both sought to appoint competent senior officers and when necessary to turn for additional help to the best expertise of the day, particularly in dock and public health matters.67

There is little evidence of corruption, or serious misbehaviour, among officers. Apart from the Treasurer’s default in 1856, already referred to, the only question mark that was raised over the conduct of senior officers concerned the Town Clerk in 1866–7. In November 1866 a letter signed Ex-Councillor appeared in the Daily Press alleging that leaks of information from the Improvement Committee allowed a property speculator to buy property about to be purchased by the committee which the speculator then sold to it at a handsome profit. In a subsequent article headed “Rumours of civic jobbery” it was observed that the Clerk to the Committee (who was the Town Clerk as well) had suddenly resigned that office as soon as Ex-Councillor’s letter had appeared. The Town Clerk defended himself vigorously and the Improvement Committee, after reviewing the very detailed investigation carried out by its sub-committee, concluded that the Town Clerk should be “wholly and completely exonerated”.68 As for lesser officers, serious misbehaviour was promptly punished as in 1884 when a Sergeant of the Tolzey Court was summarily dismissed when he had been convicted and sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment.69

No doubt there was much humdrum routine clerical work which had a mind-deadening effect on Council employees. The telephone did arrive in the last two decades of the century but not the typewriter it would seem, although reports and Council minutes were usually printed by then rather than delivered in long hand or read out at length. There may well have been some officers who were jobbed into a post although it is far from easy to prove that this was so and from time to time councillors suggested that this or that post was a sinecure only to have a reasonably convincing case made that this was not so as with Captain Parson’s tenure as Haven master whom the Chairman of the Docks Committee praised for having reduced accidents in the

67 e.g. The eminent civil engineer Bazalgette was consulted over the city’s main drainage and particularly in the eighties and nineties a string of nationally eminent civil engineers were employed to advise on dock questions.
68 P.C. 1 Jan 1867.
69 P.C. 21 Oct, 1884.
river and having responsibility not only for deciding whether ships should come up it or not but also for managing the pilots. It was rarely possible to make convincing comparisons between the costs of administration as managed by the Council and private enterprise but alderman Hare, a manufacturer, testified that when the Docks Committee took over the privately run Avonmouth Dock in 1884 it had been astounded at the size of its salary bill and was quite convinced that Bristol’s general manager had managed its docks much more economically. There were always councillors and electors who believed that the Council rewarded its employees extravagantly. In reality time and time again when comparisons were made with comparable authorities this proved a myth. Where the Council was generous was in its pension arrangements for its police and pilots.

70 WDP 14 Aug. 1889.
71 ibid 8 Oct. 1884.
By the mid-century the Council was well accustomed to managing the reformed police force which the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 had obliged it to establish. Each year it appointed, as the Act required, a Watch Committee led by the Mayor which met weekly to hear and endorse reports from the Superintendent, the officer who headed the force. The Watch Committee, the Council’s oldest committee, ranked alongside the Finance, Parliamentary Bills, and recently established Docks and Sanitary Committees, as one of the most important committees of the Council and on it in the eighteen fifties sat senior figures such as Sir John Haberfield, W.H. Gore Langton, George Thomas and William Herapath. This continued to be the case until the end of the century. For instance in the eighties and nineties leading business men such as H. Ashman, W. Pethick, J.S. Fry, J. Bartlett and E.B. James sat on it. No doubt the presence on the Watch Committee of powerful and influential figures guaranteed that their recommendations were rarely challenged in Council.

The Watch Committee expected the Superintendent to report all cases of dismissal of policemen and the reasons for such action. Policemen wishing to resign had to seek the approval of the Committee. It sanctioned all fines for their misconduct or rewards for exceptional devotion to duty as well as recommendations for pensions or gratuities for retiring members of the force or their widows which had to be forwarded to Council for approval. Furthermore it had to be told of and to approve the acceptance of gratuities offered to policemen by members of the public pleased by services rendered, such as attending concerts at the Victoria Rooms and marshalling carriages there, or being present at religious observances, finding lost dogs or young lady’s brooches or apprehending thieves, to mention but a few. The Superintendent also had to supply the Committee each week with the

1Renamed the chief Constable in 1876.
statistics of arrests, charges and convictions and informations laid by
the police for breaches of the law committed by pub and beer house
owners.\textsuperscript{2} Naturally, too, the Watch Committee was responsible for
advising the Council on matters such as pay, superannuation, organisa-
tion and size of the force and everything to do with its premises.

In addition to the weekly meetings Watch Committee members in
1852 decided that they ought to inspect the four police stations from
time to time. To do so they divided into groups of two, three or four.
The first report on the Central Station in Bridewell St., signed by two
of the Council’s most illustrious members, George Thomas and Sir
John Haberfield, while stating that it was “generally in excellent
order”, did reveal the need for improvements. There was “a very bad
stench in the Prisoner’s cells” arising from the failure to flush the con-
veniences. It was recommended that these, and those in the yard used
by the constables should be “converted into self acting water closets”.
The pillows in the dormitory were described as “very filthy” because
“the men daub their hair with grease under the notion that they look
better with glossy hair”. The Clifton station on Brandon Hill, it was
reported, needed external painting, had a wholly unfit boot room,
washing facilities in the yard only and the atmosphere in the dormitor-
ies was “close and decidedly unhealthy”. The chief criticism of the
Bedminster station on Bedminster Parade centred on the housekeeper:
she had three young children and the apartment allotted to the family
was too small and her family commitments meant that she had not
the time to pay enough attention to the comfort and cleanliness of the
dormitories. This, it was thought, “may account for the extra quantity
of vermin stated to be in the beds during the last summer”. At St
Philips station in Clarence Road internal decoration and sixteen new
linen pillow cases were called for. It was to the credit of the Watch
Committee that all its suggestions for improvements were promptly
put in hand. But it would seem that the visiting exercise had convinced
members that more supervision of the stations was desirable. In the
following year 1853 the Committee ordered that the Superintendent
should visit each station at night at least once in every week.\textsuperscript{3}

These four stations had been established in 1836 as part of the
organisation of the police force recommended by Joseph Bishop, an
experienced officer of the Metropolitan force, who became Bristol’s
first Superintendent in that year. And, before the major expansion of
the city’s boundaries in 1897 compelled substantial changes in policing
arrangements, the only addition to them was Redland station\textsuperscript{4}
designed to cope with the policing of the new suburbs of Cotham and

\textsuperscript{2} W.C.M. vol. vi 1851–4 for all this.
\textsuperscript{4} W.D.P. 16 Nov. 1891.
Redland. Indeed the basic organisation of the force did not really change radically from the days of Joseph Bishop until the major boundary extension of 1897.

Certainly the force almost doubled in size from the 228 of 1836 to 402 in 1897 in parallel with a similar increase in the city’s population so that the proportion of police to population remained reasonably stable varying only from 1:485 in 1857 to 1:560 in 1897. Increases in the force in the latter half of the century occurred on two occasions, the first in 1857 when the Council sanctioned the recruitment of 5 additional sergeants and 44 constables following a report from their Superintendent, J.S. Handcock, which argued that “when the Beats were first defined no provision was made for casualties arising from sickness, leave of absence or vacancies in the Force”. This, together with the many new streets formed in the past twenty years, and additional duties devolving on the police, meant that beats could not be properly manned. But what probably convinced the Council was the Superintendent’s demonstration that thanks to the 1856 Police Act (19 & 20 Vict. c 69) the Bristol police could be increased without cost to the Council or even at a saving to it, depending on the size of the increase. The Act made provision for the Exchequer to make a grant of a quarter of the cost of the wage and clothing bill to all those forces found efficient by an Inspector of Constabulary reporting his findings to the Home Secretary. Clearly a favourable report was unlikely to be earned by a force which was having a struggle to carry out a basic task through lack of manpower. The second major increase in the force of 4 extra sergeants and 50 constables in 1872 was triggered by the census of 1871 which showed that the population of the city had risen by 28,431 in the past decade, by the comment in the Inspector’s report in 1871 that “some of the beats were now too extensive” and by a demand by the Docks Committee that marine police should be formed to police the Floating Harbour. Thereafter a dozen additional constables were recruited in 1876 to permit an improvement in leave entitlements and in 1892 the force was increased from 374 to 393, the addition involving creating 21 sergeants.

The four stations were manned by numbers appropriate to the divisions of the city each was supposed to serve and in 1876 Bristol adopted the Metropolitan model by naming them A–D. Divisions A comprised the centre of the city and its station in Bridewell St. served as headquarters for the whole force and to it was attached the largest number of officers and men. Division B was responsible for

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5 W.C.M. 10 June 1857; P.C. 4 Aug. 1857.
6 P.C. 14 May 1872; W.C.M. 17 April, 24 April and 1 May 1872.
7 P.C. 26 Sept. 1876; Reps. of the Inspector of Constabulary to the Sec. of State in PP 1892 xli p 224.
Bedminster and in 1882 the old station was replaced by what the Inspector of Constabulary described as "a large and commodious station" containing a charge room, a parade room, superintendent's office, seven cells, accommodation for eight single constables, a nine hundred square and yard drill ground, a mortuary and sheds for fire appliances. This new and formidable looking station replaced one that had become too small for the expanded force. St Phillip's station in Trinity Road, named D Division and responsible for eastern Bristol, was likewise rebuilt in 1869 for the same reason after the Watch Committee had acquired a copy of the government approved plans for stations, no doubt to ensure that it would pass muster with the Inspector. The Clifton station of Division C covering the north west of the city for a number of years in the early seventies attracted critical comment from him for being too limited in accommodation leading to several prisoners occupying a cell which was judged "unsafe for health". Eventually in the late seventies extensive improvements were undertaken and no more adverse comments on the stations were heard from the Inspector for many years to come. Divisions B, C, and D, were each manned by very similar numbers of the force each having attached to them about half the number in A Division. From its inception, as was often not the case in other boroughs, the force sought to patrol the whole of the municipality.

Each division was commanded by a Superintendent responsible for discipline, good order at the station, arrangement and manning of beats and reporting weekly on the state of his division to the Chief Constable. Inspectors supervised several sergeants, patrolled on horseback to ensure that beats were being properly patrolled and the duty inspector assumed control of the Division in the absence of the Superintendent. Sergeants commanded sections of between six and eight constables and were held responsible for their conduct besides marching at their head, conducting drill, and inspecting dress and equipment. Only minor changes were made to this structure in the latter half of the nineteenth century. For example in 1888 the post of Deputy Chief Constable was created by promoting Superintendent Wedmore to it and paying him an additional £20 p.a. Also the increased clerical work generated by the expansion of the force and of its duties led to the status of the Chief Constable's clerk being

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8 Reps. Of Inspectors of Constabulary to Sec. of State in PP 1883 xxxi p 245.
9 ibid. PP 1868-9 xxi, 1872 xxx, 1873 xxxi, 1874 xxvi, 1875 xxxvi, 1876 xxxiv, 1877 xlii.
11 Reps of Inspectors of Constabulary to Sec. of State in PP 1889 xl p 256.
upgraded in 1877 when the constable in the post was promoted to 1st class Sergeant and by the nineties he was denominated Chief Clerk and regarded as one of the salaried officers.\footnote{ibid. in PP 1878 xl p 255 and P.C. 11 Oct. 1892.}

As for recruiting officers there were two sources: for the chief Constable the Watch Committee quite deliberately looked outside Bristol but for the rest of the officers promotion from within was the general rule. The first two heads of the city’s force, Joseph Bishop (1836–1838) and Henry Fisher (1838–1856) were recruited directly from the Metropolitan police. When Fisher resigned in 1856 the sub committee of the Watch Committee set up to find a successor was charged with finding someone with no local connections with Bristol. It used a former member of the Watch Committee, W.H. Gore Langton, now one of the city’s M.P.s, to approach Metropolitan Commissioner Sir Richard Mayne to recommend a suitable officer to head the Bristol force. J.S. Handcock who was to serve as Chief Constable for twenty years was Sir Richard’s choice endorsed by the Watch Committee.\footnote{P.C. 12 Feb. 1856 where Fisher was described as ‘worn out’; W.C. M. 30 Jan. 20 Feb. 1856.} When he retired in 1876 the Council appointed E.W. Coathupe as his successor. Coathupe had begun his career in the Metropolitan police eventually serving for some years in its detective department before securing appointment in 1868 as Deputy Chief Constable of the considerable Manchester force.\footnote{P.C. 28 Mar. 1876. Handcock’s resignation was occasioned by ill health as was his successor’s.} He was succeeded in 1894 by Henry Allbutt, Assistant Chief Constable of Liverpool, who was still in office in 1901. Allbutt’s appointment marked a change. He had no experience in the Metropolitan police. He had been educated at a public school and New College Oxford and, before his service in Liverpool where he had distinguished himself by his conduct in the absence of the Chief Constable during a strike of seamen and firemen, he had served in the Royal Irish Constabulary.\footnote{P.C. 17 July 9 Oct. 1894. W.D.P. 12 Sept. 1894 reports that Allbutt and the chief Constables of Portsmouth, Dewsbury, Oldham and Plymouth were the short listed candidates who appeared before a two hour sitting of the whole Watch Committee. The paper listed his ‘excellent credentials’ nevertheless in 1906 he fled Bristol in disgrace for reasons it has not been possible to discover.}

The most striking examples of recruitment of officers from within the force were the cases of Alexander Bruce, James Cann and Francis Wedmore. Bruce, a farm labourer, joined the force in 1887 when he was aged 21, was promoted to Sergeant in 1895, Inspector in 1896 and Superintendent in 1900 eventually becoming Chief Superintendent in 1916. Wedmore served for 35 years as PC, sergeant, inspector, chief inspector, superintendent and retired in 1900 as deputy chief constable. James Cann, a Somerset porter, joined the force in 1872 at
the age of 21 and by 1901 had risen to Deputy Chief Constable and in 1906 he became Chief Constable, the first member of the force to have achieved this.\footnote{B.S. Howell \textit{op. cit.} p 10.} The careers of most policemen were much less spectacular, promotion being slow and earned by length of service with the result that many officers were middle aged, or, by the standards of the time, elderly. For instance, in 1871, three inspectors retiring, each with over thirty years service, were over sixty years old.\footnote{W.C.M. 27 Dec. 1871.}

Naturally officers were recruited from those whose conduct satisfied their superiors and indeed constables were examined by their Superintendents in reading and writing, their knowledge of the bye-laws and of the general duties of constables as laid down in the \textit{Police Instruction Book} before reaching the grade of Constable first class from which promotion to Sergeant was the next step.

Those who sought to join the force as probationer constables had to be under forty years of age, literate, with a minimum height of 5 foot 7 inches, of good character and able to pass a medical examination. Previous occupations of applicants were very various but both when the force was first set up and in the last three decades of the nineteenth century the most numerous appointees described themselves as "labourers". This was the case with 225 out of 526 new recruits appointed between 1872 and 1906 and 53 of the 204 appointed in 1836. Ex-soldiers and sailors, colliers and railwaymen together with some with experience in other police forces produced significant numbers of recruits. The majority were aged between 20 and 25 and in the later decades of the century not far off half came from Somerset whereas in 1836 only just over ten per cent gave addresses outside Bristol.\footnote{R. Walters. \textit{The establishment of the Bristol Police Force} (Bristol 1975) p 10 and B.S. Howell \textit{op. cit.} p 16 for a valuable statistical return.}

A major concern of the officers was the maintenance of discipline among the constables. The object was to create a body of respectable, temperate working men who would enforce the law, maintain public order and win the confidence of the public by their behaviour.\footnote{For this see C. Steedman, \textit{Policing the Victorian Community} (1984) chap. 6.}

Developing such a force was no easy task. Some elements of military discipline were employed. Drilling was a feature of police life and as late as 1877 cutlass training was still in evidence.\footnote{There is an excellent photograph of this in P. Hallett, 150 years \textit{Policing of Bristol} (Bristol 1986) p 13.} In the eighties on the occasion of the annual inspection by Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary all available officers and men paraded at the Volunteer drill ground and "were drilled as a battalion by the head constable".\footnote{Reps. of Inspectors of Constabulary to Sec. of State in PP 1887 xl p553.}
Smartness of dress was insisted upon. Reprimands, docking of pay and dismissal were the common sanctions used to combat a catalogue of misbehaviour by constables. By mid century this was declining compared with the very numerous instances in the first few years of the new police. But the decline was slow and irregular. In the eighteen fifties policemen were not infrequently found drunk on duty, failing to carry out all their beat, taking naps while on night duty, idling their time away chatting to ladies of dubious reputation, arriving for duty in a filthy condition, being absent from drill or turning up late for duty, being insubordinate, failing to notice that doors or windows had been left open providing thieves with opportunities and, among the single men living at the stations, misbehaving at meal times or in the dormitories. Persistent drinking, insubordination, idling and neglect of duty such as the case of the constable found in the gallery of a theatre when he should have been on his beat usually led to instant dismissal. As late as 1860 24 were dismissed from a force now numbering just over 300.22 Gradually dismissals became fewer. Between 1880 and 1900 there were only 38.23

But the turnover in the force long remained considerable. For instance in 1860 37 resigned and in the following year 5424 although by the last two decades of the century resignations were a good deal less common. Only 72 were recorded between 1880 and 1900. Now and then outsiders came to Bristol to poach from its force. In 1882 a chief inspector of the Singapore police visited the city and induced a number of Bristol police to join the Hong Kong and Straits Settlements Police by offering them inducements.25 It would seem that the rigours of the job involving as it did up to twenty miles of walking per day in all weathers, much at unsocial hours, some risk of personal injury, a severe discipline and until 1872, when it was reduced to eight hours, a ten hour tour of duty, helped to explain this exodus.

But pay also probably played a part. That of a newly enrolled policeman at mid-century was 12/- a week, increased to 14/- in 1853.26 Clothing was provided—two pairs of trousers and boots each year as well as capes, greatcoats and tunics—and no doubt there were windfalls now and then from gratuities. Also the pay came in regularly which was by no means always the case with many unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. And it was these with which that of a policeman was to be compared as may be seen from the mention now and then in the Watch Committee minutes of the destination of resigning members of

22 ibid in PP 1860 lvii.
23 B.S. Howell op. cit. p10. Dismissals had been 69 in 1837 and 28 in 1848 for which see R. Walters op. cit. p 12.
24 See note 22 and Reps. of Inspectors of Constabulary to Sec. of State in PP lii.
25 ibid in PP 1883 xxxi p 245. The Inspector thought this “wholly unjustifiable”.
26 P.C. 4 Aug. 1853.
the force. For instance in 1852 one found a job as a porter at Dr Fox’s well known private madhouse and another as a turnkey at Bristol’s gaol.27

Throughout the latter half of the century the Watch Committee sought to structure the pay scale to encourage constables to stay in the force. The longer a constable or sergeant did so and gave satisfaction the more he was paid. In 1865 the Committee responded to a memorial from the force pressing for a pay increase by remodelling the pay scale for constables. Instead of the existing five grades there would now be three. All constables with two years or more service would receive 20/- a week, those with over one month but less than two years would get 18/- and new recruits 16/-. For all constables this represented either a 1/- or 2/- a week increase and increased the incentive to remain in the force. Likewise the pay of sergeants was re-arranged to make it correspond better with their responsibilities with the four of them who acted as deputy inspectors receiving 30/- a week while class four sergeants—the bulk of them—being paid 24/-. Clearly this did not satisfy the force. Less than a year later the sergeants and “certain of the Constables” sought a further pay rise and the Watch Committee conceded a further shilling a week for all sergeants and constables with upwards of two years service thus increasing the incentive to stay in the force.28 In 1870, again after a memorial from the force, a further increase of a shilling was awarded.29

In regard to pay the Committee was subject, not only to pressure from the force itself, but regard for ratepayers, labour market conditions, and “a desire to recruit a good class of candidates and to retain efficient officers”. In 1872 it successfully persuaded council to grant an increase of two shillings for constables, three shillings for sergeants and five shillings for inspectors on the grounds that there had been “a general advance of remuneration for labour throughout the country” and a pay increase was needed to safeguard recruitment standards.30 A further small rise for all ranks was granted in 1877–8 but in the 1880s pay remained static at below Metropolitan police rates but slightly above the national average for constables’ pay. By 1889, at a time of acute labour agitation in the city, sergeants and constables were also dissatisfied. A meeting was held by them at the Colston Hall where their grievances over pay and promotions were aired and there was talk of their having “a right to confer” by being able to form a trade union. The Watch Committee was having none

27 W.C.M. 16 June 1852.
28 P.C. 28 Mar. 1865, 1 Jan. 1866; Reps of Inspectors of Constabulary to Sec. of State in PP xxxiv which provides the number in each class.
29 P.C. 28 June 1870.
of this and responded in October 1889 by reminding the men of the Promise Oaths Act of 1868 (31 & 32 Vict. c lxii) although it did grant sergeants and constables a small pay rise.\textsuperscript{31} Eventually in 1892 it granted another pay rise,\textsuperscript{32} again targeted to benefit long serving men, but also based upon a comparison of police pay rates in "places similar circumstanced to Bristol". By 1901 it could reasonably be said that a constable who had served fifteen years or more and had thus qualified to join the long service class created in 1898 and was earning 30 shillings and ninepence per week, enjoyed a financial status a good deal nearer to that of a skilled working man than had been the case at mid-century.\textsuperscript{33}

Increases in pay recommended by the Watch Committee required the approval of the Council as did pensions or gratuities to retiring policemen, hence the attention devoted to them by the Committee. Already by mid-century a primitive system of superannuation existed. A fund was created by "a moiety of fines received by the Superintendent for informations laid by police constables being paid to the city Treasurer to the credit of the police superannuation fund", to quote one of the periodical records of this in the Watch Committee's minutes. By 1853 the fund totalled £1,700.\textsuperscript{34} It appears to have been used for paying lump sums when deserving constables became unfit for duty and from time to time for pensions as in 1864 when two inspectors, three sergeants and three constables, all of whom had served for between 25 and 27 years, were awarded pensions of half their annual pay.\textsuperscript{35} By this time, and since 1859 when the appropriate legislation was enacted (22 & 23 Vict. c 32), the fund was augmented by a deduction of two and a half per cent of the annual pay of officers and men and the payment into it of fines levied on misbehaving policemen, drunken persons, those who assaulted the police and the proceeds of the sale of "worn or cast police clothing". By 1872 the superannuation fund totalled £16,221 which generated, when invested, an income for distribution of £1,771 to meet the pensions of 31 officers and constables.\textsuperscript{36} As time went on the fund and its annual revenue increased but so did the number of pensionable policemen until in the eighties there was almost always insufficient revenue to meet all the pensions particularly since the Watch Committee normally recommended half pay pensions. The Borough fund was called on to

\textsuperscript{31} P.C. 22 Oct. 1889.
\textsuperscript{32} P.C. 11 Oct. 1892.
\textsuperscript{33} P.C. 12 Feb. 1901.
\textsuperscript{34} W.C.M. 21 April 1852, 23 Mar. 1853.
\textsuperscript{35} e.g. W.C.M. 5 Oct. 1853; P.C. 28 June 1864.
\textsuperscript{36} Reps. of the Inspectors of Constabulary to the Sec. of State in PP 1861 lii and PP 1873 xxxi.
meet the deficiencies as in 1888 when £1,796 was paid into the police superannuation fund to make up deficits incurred since 1884.37

Up to this time no policeman had a right to a pension: that was a matter for the discretion of the Watch Committee. The Police Act of 1890 (53 & 54 Vict, c 45) entitled policemen to a pension for life after 25 years service, or after 15 years if he was medically certified to be unfit for duty, or if injury in execution of his duty rendered him incapable. Rules of the utmost complexity provided for an Exchequer contribution to superannuation funds. The Act contained a disciplinary element: the 25 years service had to be “diligent and faithful” with deductions of time served “in respect of sickness, misconduct or neglect of duty”, a provision which still left the Chief Constable and Watch Committee with significant influence in the pensions field. All told, though, the Watch Committee appears to have been both efficient and generous in granting pensions compared with other authorities and was certainly early in the field in this respect. No doubt the prospect of a pension was an important element in creating the notion that becoming a policeman was a worthwhile job, made a useful contribution to reducing the rates of turnover in the force and helped to keep the force reasonably vigorous by encouraging the retirement of those of advancing years.

The prestige of being a policeman was enhanced by several improvements in the status and conditions of work. In 1887 policemen secured the right to vote in parliamentary elections followed in 1893 by the same right for municipal elections. In 1896 their leave was increased. Before this leave in the Bristol force was meagre, simply ten days annually. Now it was increased to a day a month and seven days annually.38 Any more than this needed backing from the Chief Constable and an application to the Watch Committee. Not surprisingly to obtain the Committee’s approval led to constables resorting to subterfuges such as the constable who forged a letter purporting to inform him that his father was on his deathbed and begging his son to see him when in fact the constable wanted a day off to get married.39 Also in 1896 came the end of lodging single men in the stations where they slept in dormitories, messed together and were subject to rules of a quasi-military flavour.

While pounding the beat remained the central experience of most policemen, the latter half of the nineteenth century was noteworthy for the emergence of specialist branches of the service which included the detective department, the Fire Brigade, the River Police and the mounted section. Furthermore, as parliament legislated on a wide

37 Reps. Of the Inspectors of Constabulary to Sec. of State in PP 1889 xl.
range of topics from the regulation of explosives in 1875 to the shop hours worked by young persons by the Shop Hours Act of 1892, the Council looked to the police to enforce such measures. Also as the force became more disciplined and enjoyed growing public acceptability its role expanded to include acting as a rescue service both for individuals in distress but also, as in times of flood, for districts in trouble. Indeed the police pioneered the use of ambulances and by 1901, when policemen were expected to become proficient in first aid, 171 were reported to have the St John’s Ambulance certificate.\textsuperscript{40}

The Watch Committee first considered establishing a permanent detective force in 1855 but decided that each Division should employ “some intelligent PC in plain clothes” when needed to trace offenders, “care being taken that the same PC is not always employed in this special service” so that all constables might have the “opportunity for the display of activity and intelligence”.\textsuperscript{41} Watch Committee members probably shared the common suspicion in Britain of the undercover work of French detectives and no doubt were aware that even if the Metropolitan Commissioners had created a detective force in 1842 it still only numbered 15 in 1868 when one of its number, E.W. Coathupe, went off to Manchester to be the Deputy Chief Constable. As mentioned earlier he became Bristol’s Chief Constable in 1876. Four years later he recommended that the Watch Committee should establish a permanent detective force. No doubt the Committee’s acceptance of the advice arose partly because Coathupe was a whole hearted believer in the value of such a force and partly because the Home Office and the Metropolitan police now shared this view and were demonstrating the increasing success of detective methods. The new section of the force consisted of an Inspector and seven constables whose pay of 35 shillings a week was more than that of a sergeant.\textsuperscript{42}

It was not long before the local press was reporting their activities as these were revealed in cases before the courts. Their most spectacular success was foiling an assassination plot against the Prince of Wales when he was about to visit Bristol in January 1884 when they arrested William Donne in whose possession were found firearms and threatening letters. By the nineties the detective section was busy developing methods of classifying and identifying criminals and a Register of Criminals was compiled from 1895 onwards recording numerous histories of lawbreakers. Detectives were required to study the Register, the Book of Suspected Persons and the Police Gazette

\textsuperscript{40} Reps. of the Inspectors of Constabulary to the Sec. of State in PP 1901 xli.
\textsuperscript{41} W.C.M. 5 Dec. 1855.
\textsuperscript{42} Reps. of the Inspectors of Constabulary to the Sec. of State in PP 1882 xxxiii; W.C.M. 3 Nov. 1880.
which provided information nationwide on wanted persons. No doubt, too, the detective section received encouragement from H. Albutt, the new Chief Constable appointed in 1894, who, among other qualifications, had been head of Liverpool’s 67 strong detective force.

At mid-century fighting fires was not regarded as a responsibility of the Council. The various fire insurance companies active in the city maintained fire fighting equipment of a simple kind and the only involvement of Council employees was the beat constable’s responsibility to keep an eye open for fires, to give assistance to those seeking to extinguish them, and giving warning of a fire to the public by “springing their rattles”, a practice which the Watch Committee defended in 1858 against the protests of the popular Dr Symonds of Clifton who complained that this disturbed his patients. By this time the police had a fire engine since the Watch Committee sanctioned buying an additional 200 ft of hose for it. In 1860 there was further evidence of the police becoming more involved: all the fire insurance offices, except the Norwich Union, agreed to “place their Establishments under the Superintendent of police during the time they are employed at fires”. Nevertheless a minor revolution occurred in 1877 when a municipal fire brigade manned by the police was formed. The impetus was provided by several serious fires early in the year during which a life was lost. Then, five out of six of the fires offices informed the Watch Committee that they were “strongly impressed with the futility and anomaly of Insurance Companies undertaking the task of extinguishing fires” and had decided to give this up from 1 July and finally it seems likely that the recently appointed and newly-titled Chief Constable, fresh from service in Manchester where an efficient brigade existed, advised that Bristol needed one.

The Council unanimously resolved that a municipal Fire Brigade should be created and asked the Watch Committee to recommend a scheme. Three of its members, the Chief Constable and the Town Clerk visited Liverpool and Manchester both of which had large and efficient brigades but manned differently. Manchester’s force was staffed by full time firemen while Liverpool’s was a branch of the police force. It was the latter model that the Watch Committee recommended, observing in its report that if policemen were employed a part of their pay and clothing costs would be met by the Exchequer. Such staff would have to be available for police duties as well as those of a fireman. The Committee recommended that the new force should

44 W.C.M. 27 Oct. 1858.
45 ibid 23 May 1860.
The Municipal Government of Bristol 1851–1901

consist of one sergeant and eleven constables who were to be appropriately trained for fire fighting and be headed by a superintendent, on a par with others of this rank, and subordinate to the Chief Constable. Plainly, on their visit to Manchester, the Bristol team believed they had found just the right man for the post in Mr. Alfred Tozer, son of the head of the Manchester force, who had both worked for Merryweather & Sons, well known makers of fire engines, and had experienced fire fighting with his father. Not everyone agreed. Alderman Brittan moved in Council that the post should be advertised but Council preferred to accept the Watch Committee’s choice. To meet the deadline of 1 July set by the insurance companies withdrawal involved much haste in securing a steam fire engine capable of delivering 350 gallons per minute to a height of 150 ft as recommended by Tozer, a hose cart, 3000 yards of hose, a temporary shed to house all this in the yard of the Central police station and arrangements to accommodate engines at the rest of the stations. A particular problem was the “horsing of the engines, that is having horses in constant readiness to take engines to fires.”

The Docks Committee also took a hand by deciding to provide “a powerful Steam Fire Engine, on wheels, to be fitted into an iron lighter to be stationed close to a crane so it could be landed if more useful on land than water”. This was to be in the charge of the fire brigade. The brigade itself soon lost its first superintendent when in 1879 Tozer was chosen to head the Birmingham force and Basil Wyld, superintendent of Crumpshall’s brigade was chosen to take his place. Neither choice was satisfactory. The Watch Committee failed to appreciate that commanders of the brigade with no experience of police discipline would find it irksome to be subordinate to a Chief Constable with no expertise in fire fighting. Also, the Committee seems to have failed to realise how primitive Bristol’s arrangements were in the eyes of the experts. The equipment which the Committee bought from the insurance companies proved inadequate, water pressure in the upper parts of the city was insufficient and there was a mismatch between the brigade’s standpipes and some of the water mains. In short much needed doing as the Committee realised when appointing Wyld. The new instructions it gave him clearly indicated that Tozer had not given satisfaction: Wyld was to reside at the Central Station, “must attend to no other instructions than the Chief Constable’s and not leave the city without express directions from the Chief Constable”. The committee’s hope that Wyld would “quickly bring

46 The establishment of the fire brigade can be followed in P.C. 1 Jan., 17 Mar., 8 May, 26 June 1877. The police continued to operate the fire brigade until 1941 when it was absorbed by the National Fire Service.
47 D.C.M. 11 June 1877.
48 P.C. 13 May 1879. Crumpshall was a suburb of Manchester.
the brigade into an efficient state” was soon frustrated. Six months after his appointment the Committee was faced with the Chief Constable charging the fire chief with insubordination and Wyld complaining that the Chief Constable continually interfered in brigade affairs about which he had no expertise. The Committee upheld the Chief Constable’s authority and required Wyld to resign. His successor, Thomas Wingfield, was an experienced member of the Metropolitan fire brigade which was a police run force. Matters now went more smoothly.

On Wingfield’s recommendation in 1880 independent fire brigade premises were built adjacent to the Central police station in Bridewell St. and four horses were kept in stables there to provide twenty four hour service as well as pulling the city’s prison van. In the same year all stations were linked by telephone and in 1884 at the chief’s request all policemen were given rudimentary instruction on how to deal with fires. In the same year the Watch Committee purchased a self-propelling, floating steam fire engine to protect the city docks. From 1881 onwards the superintendent made a report, which was to become an annual practice, giving statistics of call outs. In 1880 they amounted to 213 of which 92 were for chimneys on fire, 2 for false alarms and of the 119 fires ten were classified as serious. Seven lives were lost in fires. Given that much lighting was by candles or oil lamps and virtually all heating by coal or wood fires and processes prone to fires, such as sugar refining, were carried on in the city, it might be thought that call outs would be more numerous. Clearly in Wingfield’s time progress was made in improving the fire brigade.

Unhappily disaster struck in 1886 when Wingfield fell off a ladder and fractured both his legs which led to his retirement. The Watch Committee then made a serious error when they demoted the head of the brigade to the rank of Inspector and within less than a year their choice for the post was required by them to resign as he was too free with the bottle. When Allbutt took over in 1894 as the new Chief Constable it was his opinion that the Bristol fire brigade was in poor shape, ill equipped, indifferently trained and inefficient. He did not conceal his views from the Watch Committee, presenting it with a plan of reform. This involved substantial additions to equipment including a new, larger fire engine, six new reserve fire stations to be linked by telephone, and improvements in the water supply, especially abolition of the old fashioned, cumbersome fire lug in the mains. The Committee immediately accepted their energetic new Chief Constable’s recommendations.

49 B.S. Howell op. cit. pp 24-5.
50 P.C. 8 Feb. 1881.
51 P.C. 1 June 1881; B.S. Howell op.cit. pp 25-6.
An important feature of Allbutt’s reform plan for the fire brigade had been his insistence that its members were employed solely as fire fighters. Up to then they seem to have served for a month as firemen and then for another month as river police. To the new Chief Constable this meant “both branches suffer”. A river police section had been established as early as 1842 and in 1879 a hulk, moored at Prince’s St. bridge, had been fitted out as its station. The river police besides their normal duty of combating criminal activity were expected to help Custom and Excise officers inspecting vessels for smuggled goods, to rescue individuals from drowning in the Floating Harbour and, from 1875, to see to it that Plimsol line regulations were not breached.

The emergence of the mounted section of the force was a direct result of the major changes made necessary by the boundary extensions of 1897. The Watch Committee had not copied the Metropolitan police which by 1876 had a mounted force 54 strong. From time to time it had authorised the Chief Constable to use mounted constables for duties such as crowd control at elections and police officers rode horses when inspecting constables on the beat. Mounted police were also used on ceremonial occasions. But there was no separate mounted section or schooling of police horses in obedience and calmness under pressure. The formation of a small full-time mounted section was recommended by Allbutt in 1897 after forthright critical comment by him of the equipment and expertise of the existing arrangements and his observation that such a body would be most useful in policing those parts of the extended city which were still semi-rural. The Watch Committee agreed. A force of one officer and eight men was established with the British Army Cavalry Manual being used as its instruction book.

The boundary extension of 1897 added 8,793 acres to the city and 88,914 to its population. Plainly a substantial increase in the police force and its premises would be needed if the added districts were to be policed on similar lines to the existing city. Allbutt argued for an increase of 130 which was not an extravagant claim since it would lead to a reduction of police per head of population from a pre-extension 1:560 to 1:650. The Watch Committee on 15 September 1897 “resolved, an increase of 98 men to be made to the police force making a total of 500 men”. Their rejection of Allbutt’s recommendation was based on cost. There was no great difficulty in recruiting the 98 since the 1897 extension Act provided for the transfer of Gloucestershire

53 For the river police and the mounted section see B.S. Howell. op. cit. pp 28–31.
54 The increased commercial activity at Avonmouth was recognised by the Watch Committee as justifying an increase of 1 Inspector and 4 constables to the existing establishment of a sergeant and three constables (see P.C. 14 May 1897).
55 W.C.M. 15 Sept. 1897.
and Somerset policemen and 55 of the former and 6 of the latter were accepted, after careful examination, by the Bristol force.\(^{56}\) No doubt they were pleased: Bristol paid its police more than its neighbouring counties and their duties remained much the same since they had served in the districts formerly in the counties but now incorporated in the city. Bristol also secured a good bargain. None of the new recruits misbehaved and had to be dismissed while almost half, twenty four, were found to deserve promotion.\(^{57}\)

Allbut did not seek to change the Divisional structure following boundary extension. Instead the newly included districts were simply added to the existing Divisions so that D Division now supervised St George, Stapleton and Eastville as well as inner city St Philips, C Division took over Horfield and Avonmouth in addition to Clifton, and B Division took charge of more of Bedminster and growing districts such as Knowle, while A Division remained responsible for the central area.\(^{58}\) As for stations the Watch Committee took over Gloucestershire stations at Fishponds, Horfield, Two Mile Hill, Stapleton and Eastville and the Somerset station in Totterdown but rejected private-house stations at Lawrence Hill and Church Road, Horfield as unsuitable. Allbutt, ever critical, was scathing in his assessment of the county stations and the century closed with him demanding many improvements and a string of new stations.\(^{59}\) No doubt a strong case could be and was made for boundary extension but the price was high, as critics had warned, and the Watch Committee was not prepared to pay it in full. Improvements to existing stations were made but only one new one in Horfield was sanctioned.\(^{60}\)

Boundary extension naturally posed additional duties for the fire brigade. The districts newly incorporated in the city had been served by five separate volunteer brigades manned by 65 volunteers which now all disbanded. As Allbutt pointed out to the Watch Committee the fourteen strong police brigade was scarcely adequate for the pre-extension city and was clearly totally unequal to the needs of the much enlarged municipality. The Committee accepted the Chief Constable’s radical proposals which involved organising the brigade into four divisions, purchasing much new equipment, setting up new fire stations and doubling the number of firemen.\(^{61}\) Likewise Allbutt

\(^{56}\) P.C. 23 Nov. 1897.
\(^{57}\) B.S. Howell \textit{op. cit.} p 46.
\(^{58}\) P.C. 28 Jan. 1898.
\(^{59}\) e.g. the Watch Committee on his advice sought Council’s approval for new stations at Bedminster Down and Ashton Gate (see P.C. 9 Aug. 1898).
\(^{60}\) For the impact of boundary extension see B.S. Howell \textit{op. cit.} pp 44–9; and \textit{Reps. Of the Inspectors of Constabulary} in PP 1899 xlii.
\(^{61}\) B.S. Howell \textit{op. cit.} pp 27–8.
persuaded the Watch Committee to improve the medical service to the police. A police surgeon had long been employed for examining recruits, granting certificates for pensions and attending to the health of serving men free of charge. When a police surgery was set up in 1884 he was made responsible for its upkeep. The Chief Constable proposed replacing the single doctor attending 402 men before extension with six looking after 500 with each Division having its own surgeon. The cost was more than double but the Watch Committee accepted the assurance of Allbutt that an improved medical service would increase the efficiency of the force.

The Police Instruction Book declared that “the duty of a Constable is to preserve the peace by day and by night and prevent robberies and other felonies”. As far as maintaining public order was concerned the Watch Committee and its police force was not faced with a major challenge comparable with the riots of 1831 or the Chartist meetings in 1839 and 1848 during the fifties, sixties and seventies. Certainly there were lesser disorders. Complaint by the Vicar and church wardens of St Nicholas “of the disorderly state of Welsh Back” in 1853 or that of a correspondent of the Western Daily Press in 1865 concerning “the nightly disturbances on the Broad Quay caused by prostitutes, sailors and other disorderly characters who flock to the dancing houses on the quay” were commonplace examples of these minor disorders. Also from time to time the force would be asked to help quell disturbances outside Bristol such as election riots in Somerset, a disturbance in Nailsea or labour troubles in Bridgwater or Radstock. But it was only in the eighties with the growth of organised labour that the Watch Committee and the police force were confronted with serious problems particularly during the widespread strikes of 1889 and the employers offensive in 1892.

The police found themselves the butt of all sides particularly at picket lines which since peaceful picketing had become lawful from 1875 onwards had become a usual feature of strikes. In 1889 the Cotton Works management complained that the police had failed to help workers who wished to cross the picket lines while striking gasworkers were angered by police giving protection and transport to those who wished to work. Likewise strikebreaking free labourers had been given police protection when working at Welsh Back during the dock strike. Feelings ran very high in the city in 1889. Many groups

62 The job was usually done by a Surgeon of the Infirmary. In 1871 when the incumbent died his successor was chosen from several nominees by the votes of the Council. Alderman Green refused to support appointing an Infirmary surgeon on the grounds that one man could not do both jobs but the post nevertheless went to Mr Tibbetts of the Infirmary (W.D.P. 27 Sept. 1871).
64 W.C.M. 30 Nov. 1853; W.D.P. 26 Jan. 1865.
of workers were on strike, large scale picketing took place and police resources were stretched to the limit in trying to keep order. The Chief Constable testified to the Watch Committee that it had been “very difficult to maintain discipline during the present crisis “but if he feared that working class constables would follow the lead of fellow workers and openly rebel this proved groundless. There was also little evidence of lasting bitterness among either or employees employers about the role of the police in 1889.65

Matters were different in 1892. Employers had been caught off balance in 1889 and been forced to concede wage increases. They counter-attacked vigorously and evidence accumulated that the Bristol force was being used on their behalf. In February 1891 fifty Bristol policemen were sent to Cardiff by the Watch Committee to assist in stopping the docks and tramways strikes. In the following year during strikes by dock workers in Bristol itself 120 constables were used to protect non-union strike breakers recruited by employers and on 23 November an ugly clash took place between a crowd of some 7-8000 dockers and the police who charged them with their staves and batons. Injuries were suffered by both sides. Tension rose, the Bristol Strike Committee complained to the Watch Committee about the police action, individual policemen were assaulted and eventually Ben Tillett, himself a Bristolian and a national figure as General Secretary of the Dockers union, came to the city with the purpose of organising a mass demonstration advertised as seeking to raise money for the starving families of the strikers. The date fixed was Friday 23 December 1892.

The Mayor, William Barker, a Liberal was so alarmed by this that he wrote to the Home Secretary requesting military assistance in the belief that the police would be unable to maintain public order. There was some warrant for this. The Bristol force was well below its normal strength thanks to sickness and some 80 would not be available to police the demonstration as they were needed to protect the “blacklegs” working in the docks. Also the Watch Committee’s efforts to recruit reinforcements from Birmingham, Manchester, Somerset and Gloucestershire only produced 50 men from Gloucester. The Chief Constable sought to get the Strike Committee to agree that their march should follow a route prescribed by him and that no torches or lanterns should be carried but while the ruling on lanterns was accepted, as a fire risk was involved, the Strike Committee declared they would only change their route if confronted with superior force.

On Thursday 22nd December 200 Dragoons and Hussar lancers from Aldershot entered the city. When the march began in the evening of Friday the 24th, crowds, variously estimated at between 28,000 and

35,000, gathered to watch the five thousand or so marchers. It was not long before there were scenes of disorder. The magistrates, led by councillor Charles Wills, a Liberal clothing manufacturer, decided that the police were unable to control the crowds and called on the military to intervene after the Riot Act had been read. Their intervention eventually cleared the streets by midnight after using their lances to disperse the crowds. The decision to use the troops was defended on the grounds that the Mayor had been put on trial for failing to call out the military during the famous riots of 1831. Nonetheless it was not entirely clear that the police had lost control of the situation: the Bristol Mercury commented “there was nothing more than the police would have been able to deal with ... It was a panic-stricken and needless appeal to military force”.

The upshot of Black Friday, as it was termed by many Bristolians, was many broken heads among civilians and police alike and much bitterness. The Strike Committee complained to the Watch Committee that “the actions of the police and soldiers were most unwarrantable and brutal”. The Trades Council furiously condemned “the criminal stupidity” of the magistrates.\(^{66}\) Councillor Hugh Gore, the Christian Socialist who had been prominent in the strikes of 1889, tabled a series of questions to the Mayor critical of the use of the military and moved a motion in Council to have the Home Secretary set up an inquiry into Black Friday. The motion was lost but twelve councillors were prepared to support it.\(^{67}\) It was also evident that working folk were apt to regard the police as the lackeys of employers with whom they were in dispute. In 1893, when dockers were on strike, police escorting so called “free labour”—blacklegs in dockers’ parlance—were commonly abused and stoned. A further upshot of Bristol’s greatest disturbance since 1831 was a setback for the Liberals who had been so prominent in calling in the troops: in the 1893 elections for the Council protagonists of Labour representation captured two seats in wards hitherto regarded as Liberal strongholds.

The police did not have to face any further major challenge to their capacity to maintain public order in the closing years of the century which was perhaps as well since Black Friday had shown, at the least, that they were ill trained to cope with large crowds. Their reaction was to blame the riotous events on one man. Ben Tillett, who was arrested and charged with incitement to riot. The jury at his Old Bailey trial found him not guilty.

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66 There is extensive reporting of the events of 1892 in the local press. See also D. Large and R. Whitfield, op. cit. pp 10–12. The Watch Committee minutes are remarkably uninformative on this episode and the Council itself after meeting on 13 Dec. 1892 did not meet again until 2 Jan. 1893. The reports of the Inspectors of Constabulary entirely ignored the matter.

It is not at all easy to assess the record of the police in tackling crime. Without much doubt the incidence of crime both in Bristol and the country as a whole had fallen by the end of the century. The table below, drawn from the criminal statistics first collected annually from 1858 onwards, and related to population growth, shows that the crime rate in 1891 was less than in 1861. For example, the rate of reported indictable offences—the most serious crimes—in 1861 was .00198 but had fallen to .00079 by 1891.

The incidence of crime, 1861–1891.68

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1861</th>
<th>1871</th>
<th>1881</th>
<th>1891</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>154,093</td>
<td>182,686</td>
<td>206,874</td>
<td>221,578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported indictable offences</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprehended persons</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed for trial</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proceeded against summarily</td>
<td>3,896</td>
<td>6,026</td>
<td>6,831</td>
<td>5,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convicted</td>
<td>1,853</td>
<td>2,790</td>
<td>5,444</td>
<td>4,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discharged</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>3,234</td>
<td>1,287</td>
<td>777</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To ascribe these falling crime rates solely to the work of the police would be misleading, but it is highly likely that their efforts did make an important contribution to creating a more peaceful society. Their contribution ultimately depended on their acceptability by the majority of the public which certainly did not exist when the new police were first launched in the eighteen thirties. By mid-century the evidence points to the well-to-do in Bristol valuing the police rather than seeing them as some new fangled body smacking of continental authoritarian Bourbon or Metternichian regimes. The stream of gratuities to policemen recorded week by week in the Watch Committee minutes in the eighteen fifties shows the faith that respectable society now had in their services. The Vicar of St Judes, one of the city’s poorest districts, regularly employed a policeman to oversee divine services.69 It was not uncommon for Clifton ladies to arrange for a policeman to watch their premises while they were on holiday or to settle a dispute with their servants.70 Few distributions of charitable soup or bread seem to have occurred without police attendance.71 Constables can be found receiving rewards for chasing after apprentices who had fled their masters.72 Many public events at

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68 For the criminal statistics see PP 1862 vol. lvi; PP 1872 vol. lxv; PP 1882 vol. lxxv and PP 1892 vol. lxxxix. The radical change in the definition of Bristol in 1897 renders the figures for 1901 not comparable with earlier statistics.
69 See e.g. W.C.M. 20 Dec. 1854.
70 ibid 6 Dec. 1854.
71 ibid 18 Mar. 1857 when it was recorded that the committee of the River Street Soup house gave gratuities to 28 Constables during the distribution of soup.
72 ibid 13 Dec. 1854.
venues such as the zoo, Victoria Rooms, the theatre, or on the Downs were incomplete without a police presence.

This acceptance of the new police by middle class Bristolians was, no doubt, aided by the strategies adopted by the creators of the Metropolitan police on whom the Bristol force was modelled to a greater degree than most provincial forces. Its first three Chief Constables were recruited directly from that force. They brought with them such a basic notion that a force should be full time, professional, hierarchically organised, following rules about dress, deportment and discipline inculcated by semi-military practices such as drilling. To win public support in the hostile environment of the eighteen thirties and forties the Metropolitan Commissioners had emphasised the need for policemen to adhere strictly to the rule of law, to use minimum force, and to see their role as seeking to prevent crime by regular tramping of the beat in full and public view rather than by covert detective work. Above all the architects of the new police sought to create the impression that their new force was effective in controlling crime and maintaining public order.

But there was a price to be paid for winning the approval of well-off Bristol. It was such folk who in large measure controlled the police: working class magistrates and councillors only began to appear in the eighteen nineties and then in tiny numbers. The consequence was that the police ran the risk of being regarded as fostering the interests and values of middle class Bristol and this might well bring them into conflict with elements of the working class. Apart from the clashes between police and organised labour, already referred to, during which the police did not escape accusations of being employers' agents, their role in coping with drunkenness, disorderly public houses, gambling, prostitution, begging, child labour, street trading and the misdeeds of youngsters, did from time to time expose them to the charge of simply being bullies on hire to the well-off or to religious zealots.73 Pub and beer house keepers and their customers had an ambivalent relationship with the police. The police relied on publicans for information about the criminal world and were apt to be lax about enforcing licensing laws or arresting the drunk and disorderly particularly in localities where the police had little or no backing for so doing from the populace. Indeed in 1870 P.C. Hill was stabbed to death in the street outside the Three Horse Shoes Tavern where in notorious Gloucester Lane in St Philip's, which was full of pubs and low lodging houses, assaults on the police by drunks were commonplace. Nonetheless senior police officers and the Watch Committee frowned severely on policemen drinking, especially to excess in pubs, and pubkeepers

73 For an exploration of relations between the police and street gangs of youngsters in working class districts see S. Humphries, Hooligans of Rebels (1981) pp 203–8.
treatment of policemen to free drinks. Also the 1874 Licensing Act required the police to act as inspectors rather than customers of drink-selling premises. Furthermore in Bristol, with its redoubtable Nonconformist congregations, there was a strong Temperance lobby which in the early eighties was reinforced by the new force of the Salvation Army which conducted its campaigns against the demon drink in and around pubs. In 1882, as the Clerk to the city’s magistrates was to testify to the Royal Commission on Licensing in 1896, the Watch Committee and the Chief Constable, no doubt influenced by the lobby, launched a crusade against the drunk and disorderly and pub and beer-house keepers who tolerated them and their disorderly female companions. For years following the police arrested around a thousand drunks a year of whom an average 90% were convicted and usually given a choice of a fine of 5/- plus 3s costs or seven days hard labour. At the same time the police were active in prosecuting licensees for offences and filing objections to renewal of licenses especially for those premises often frequented by prostitutes. As with drink there was a lobby which campaigned for the suppression of brothels and urged the Watch Committee to instruct the police to be active in the cause. This it did but without much effect it would seem.

No doubt sections of the working class supported police action against drink and prostitution while others objected. Less popular was police action to enforce bye laws against “nuisances” such as begging, hawking, gaming and trading in the streets, school attendance, and dog licensing. Punishments at Petty Sessions could be harsh. In 1882, for instance, William Coleman was given a choice of 14 days in prison or a fine of 10/- for keeping a dog without a licence; William Lewton was given a month in prison for begging in the street, a poor homeless Irishman, Terence O’Brien was remanded to the workhouse and Richard Dye, aged 15 was fined 2s 6d or three days in gaol for playing pitch and toss in the street. William Cox found guilty of “furious driving” got off relatively lightly with a 10/- fine. The police were certainly highly unpopular with many a child found absent from

74 The evidence of Thomas Holmes Gore for 22 years Clerk to the Bristol Licensing Magistrates to The Royal Commission on the Liquor Licensing Laws in PP 1897 xxxiv pp 360–375 is a valuable survey of pubs and clubs in late nineteenth century Bristol.
75 The Reps. of the Inspectors of Constabulary to the Sec. of State in the eighties and nineties generally record the number of drunks arrested and convicted while the Register of the Court of Summary Jurisdiction sitting at Petty Session Court House provides evidence on penalties.
76 P. C. 9 Nov. 1874 and 11 May 1875 for petitions to Council complaining of brothels in St. James. P. C. 9 Nov. 1875 for a resolution from the magistrates seeking the establishment of a special force of police to deal with disorderly houses which the Chief Superintendent advised against and P. C. 1879 for representations about brothels from clergy of the inner city parishes.
school whom they hauled before the magistrates, as Stephen Humphries has demonstrated.\(^{77}\)

Two developments in the latter half of the nineteenth century qualified to a limited extent the control which the city Council had over its police force: central government took a hand in overseeing local forces and Chief Constables became more powerful figures. The County and Borough Police Act, 1856 (19 & 20 Vict. c 69) introduced annual inspections of the force by H.M. Inspectors of Constabulary and on a variety of policing matters local authorities were supposed to make returns or seek approval from the Home Office. When the 1856 Act was being debated there were those who thought it would end local administration of the police. It certainly did not. The visit by H.M.'s Inspector seems to have been brief, usually lasting one day, and akin to a commanding officer inspecting a parade of troops. Only occasionally in the 45 annual reports from 1857 to 1901 is any critical comment made of the Bristol police, chiefly on the inadequacy of a police station, and not once is any doubt cast upon the efficiency of Bristol's force even though there were clearly times when doubts might reasonably have been expressed, particularly about the police fire brigade. Only very rarely was comment passed on the size of the force and pay and pensions matters were simply noted as was also the case with appointments of Chief Constables. Of course the very existence of inspection and the need for Home Office approval meant that central government was exerting a greater influence than in times past but as yet it was limited.

The Chief Constable's power was on the increase mainly because, as the duties of the police expanded and the city grew in size and complexity, the Watch Committee had to rely on his advice and expertise to a greater extent than in the past. Its members were bound to have to largely defer to him over matters such as fire fighting, detective work, the implementation of legislation, dealing with explosives, petroleum and food and drugs where expertise and experience were required which the police had acquired by being put in charge of their enforcement. Also by the century's end the regulation of traffic was becoming an increasing concern of the police. Such was the proliferation of public carriages that in 1877 the Council drew up bye-laws for their regulation. The police were given the task of inspecting the vehicles and refusing licences if they were considered unroadworthy. By 1884, in a single year 390 vehicles ranging from carriages to trams and cabs to wheelchairs had been examined by the police and approved.\(^{78}\) The last two decades of the century were

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\(^{77}\) These examples are from the *Register of the Court of Summary Jurisdiction for 1882*. For S. Humphries see note 73.

\(^{78}\) P.C. 31 Mar. 1885.
also noteworthy for the growth of cycling and the tramway system. Both posed problems. The police received many complaints of bicycles being ridden or raced at speeds in the streets while in the early eighties there was a veritable war between the police and the Tramway Company during which the police frequently prosecuted the Company’s employees for offences against the bye-laws. The Chief Constable's day to day observation of traffic regulation and its problems, as with many other matters of concern to his force, was bound to put him increasingly in the position of the expert coming before a Watch Committee of amateurs. No doubt the accretion of power by the Chief Constable had not gone far by 1901 but the trend was already apparent as the vigorous Allbutt was demonstrating by his handling of the major issues raised by the extension of the city's boundaries in 1897.

The city council’s involvement with the courts and with prisons was less than with the police. The Municipal Corporations Act, 1835 and the County Courts Act, 1846 much reduced borough authority over both, although the council remained liable for most of the costs. As ever, the Council was particularly concerned about staffing and salaries. In 1854 it complained to the Home Secretary that the proposed salary of £700 for the Recorder was excessive and proposed that he should be paid £300 for his role of presiding over Quarter Sessions and £200 as Judge in the Tolzey Court. Also it continued to be concerned as to whether Bristolians were properly served both by the civil and criminal courts and regarded itself as the spokesman of the city in dealings with government on these matters.

It secured greater powers for the Tolzey court to enhance its useful role as a civil court dealing with disputes involving small amounts. It also took in hand the inconvenient anomaly created by the Home Secretary's refusal in 1835 to continue the Court of Gaol Delivery which had condemned Bristolians charged with serious crimes to be heard at Assizes to have to be sent to Gloucester. To put an end to this involved the Council in creating two new courts, much debate as to their location, a Council sponsored architectural competition and calling in two eminent contemporary architects. Alfred Waterhouse and G.E. Street to adjudicate. The expenses of assizes were borne by the Council and on occasion aroused controversy: in 1892–3 the Finance Committee rejected the idea that the judges should be provided with a permanent lodging on the grounds both of economy and that the judges were satisfied with the Bristol arrangement “of

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79 P.C. 9 May 1854.
80 P.C. 14 Feb. 1871, 13 May 1873.
81 P.C. 14 Feb., 28 Mar., 9 May, 26 Sept. 1865, 1 Jan., 27 Feb., 27 July 1866. This last has a valuable precis of the history of this much debated matter. P.C. 27 July 1867.
entertaining them in a hotel”. The Committee listed the requirements of a judge’s lodgings as two best and two second best sitting rooms and bedrooms, eight other bedrooms for clerks and servants, a bathroom and suitable kitchens and a servants’ hall. A property large enough to supply all this would cost £300 a year to rent and be difficult to find close to the Assize courts.82

In regard both to the gaols and administration of criminal justice by summary procedure it was the city magistrates who played the main part. In 1851 an observer might be forgiven for believing that the city justices were simply a cut-down version of the Council itself since of the 21 of them who singly or in pairs manned the police court which sat daily in the Council House to consider a wide range of alleged breaches of the law and to hand out judgements, 13 were city councillors or aldermen and one was the Town Clerk. Of the remaining seven, four had been Council members. Their chief officer, the Clerk to the Justices was paid and appointed by the Council. Also when their court business grew apace and complaints multiplied about their more unsavoury clients hanging around outside the Council House in the heart of the city’s business district so that new premises became a necessity it was the Council that had to provide them. Furthermore when pressure of court business compelled the appointment of additional justices in 1871 the Lord Chancellor consulted the Council as to its opinion of the worthiness of seven individuals to be put on the Commission of the Peace. Not surprisingly the Council unanimously endorsed them: they were all members of the Council.83 Even as late as 1901 when the magistrates had swelled to 70 to cater for the much enlarged city 24 were Council members and 13 former Council members.

Bristol had no Stipendiary Magistrates. In 1875 a Council committee considering an approaching vacancy in the office of Clerk to the Justices, did raise the question of whether “the judicial bench of Bristol should continue to be honorary”. But it noted that the Justices themselves had said that if a qualified solicitor giving all his time to the job was appointed they would be prepared to carry on. The majority of the committee favoured this rather than a Stipendiary but called on the Council itself to resolve the issue which they did by accepting a further report recommending the appointment of a full time solicitor as Clerk on a salary of £700 to be assisted by three clerks as well as copying staff. All were to hold office at the pleasure of the Justices.84 Thomas Holmes Gore, the solicitor appointed to the post, clearly gave satisfaction and was sufficiently respected to be called to

82 P.C. 9 Aug. 1892 and 14 Feb. 1893.
83 P.C. 1 Aug. 1871.
84 P.C. 5 Feb. and 2 Mar. 1875.
give evidence to the Royal Commission on Licensing in 1896 when he showed himself to be very well informed about Bristol’s drinking establishments. Most likely his service to the Justices helped to defeat two further attempts, the first in 1885 by the drink trade, and the second in 1889 by the prominent councillor, George Pearson, to persuade the Council to apply for a Stipendiary.85

The police court handled an enormous amount of business. For instance in 1881, by no means an exceptional year, its register recorded no less than 17,633 individuals being summoned before it. Not all came. Some were truants from school. Many hundreds were discharged for lack of evidence and failure of the prosecutor to turn up, but it seems plain that just over a third (6,026) appeared as a result of police action while the rest were brought before the magistrates by a summons taken out by a fellow citizen most of whom were members of the working class.86 The prevalence of this has been interpreted as evidence that the working class by and large accepted and respected the law. Qualification is needed. As one London stipendiary magistrate commented “there are two unfortunate impressions as to the police court which exist widely in the minds of the working classes. One is that the policemen is both witness and prosecutor, and the other is that the magistrate is the creature of the police.”87 In other words probably there co-existed both belief that justice would be obtainable in the police court if the police were not involved, and its contrary, that this was unlikely if they were, because the police would always win in any case they brought. Indeed very often, if it was a case of a policeman’s word against a defendants in a matter of assault, Bristol magistrates would find in favour of the police.

Over the city’s two gaols, the Bristol Common Gaol and House of Correction and the Bristol City House of Correction, to use the official description, the Council, by mid century, had only limited power. It had to find the money for running them which in 1864 amounted to £4,265 for the Common Gaol which had 188 cells, and £1,380 for Bridewell, as the House of Correction was commonly called, which had 83 cells.88 The Exchequer made a contribution, amounting to about a third of these costs, for maintaining convicted prisoners and removing transportees. The Council had to pay for any improvements that might be required, particularly as a result of visitations by H.M.’s Inspectors of Prisons. Furthermore central government was much

85 P.C. 12 May 1885 and 22 Mar. 1889.
86 Register of the Court of Summary Jurisdiction for 1881.
88 There is a detailed description of both prisons in The 30th Rep. of the Inspectors of Prisons. Southern District in PP 1865 xxiii pp 100-103.
concerned about prison administration so that its Prison’s Act, 1865 (28 & 29 Vict, c. 126) was so demanding in its requirements that Bristol’s Common Gaol, although considered by the Justices a “comparatively new, healthy and in many respects, commodious Prison” was unable to meet these. The cells were too small and ill ventilated to be certified as suitable for solitary confinement and hence the Council was forced to contemplate the great expense of building a wholly new prison.

The Council fought hard to avoid this. In 1867 it had set up a special committee to consider the important duties imposed on the Council by the 1865 Prison’s Act which made it the Prison authority for the city and the “stringent power” granted to the Home Secretary to close any prison which failed to meet provisions of the Act within five years from Feb. 1st 1866. Thanks to the Prison Inspectorate the Justices and the Council were well aware that the city’s prisons did not measure up to the detailed regulations of the new Act. A letter from the Home Office in January 1868 saying that none of the cells could be certified as meeting these rules, and if this continued. Exchequer contributions to the upkeep of prisoners would be forfeited, reinforced the point. The Council’s committee had plans prepared for altering the gaol to make it conform to the Act only to have them summarily rejected when John Perry, the Inspector, advised the Home Secretary that they were “makeshift” and their cost of £33,700 was extravagant because “an unexceptionable Prison might be built from the ground fully sufficient for the City for a much smaller sum, probably little more than half the amount”. The Council’s committee very reasonably, in view of the near £100,000 cost of the new Horfield prison, commented that Mr Perry had “greatly underestimated the cost of a new building” but began considering a site for one. Their first notion was to rebuild on the site of the existing Common Gaol on Cumberland Road with the addition of an adjoining field. Certainly they dragged their feet: so that by 1872 the patience of the Home Office was wearing thin: the Town Clerk received a curt letter requesting that “immediate steps be taken to build a new prison”. The Council itself responded by the Mayor, accompanied by fellow councillors and one of the City’s M.P.s, waiting on the Home Secretary to urge him to allow Bristol to delay action in order to ease the “present heavy burden on the ratepayers in

89 The Common Gaol had been erected in 1819–20, severely damaged in the 1831 riots, but repaired at a cost of £56,000 and adapted in 1840–1 for establishing the separate system. The details are usefully assembled in Appendix D p 489 of M.H. Tomlinson, Victorian Prisons: Administration and Architecture, 1835–1877(PhD London 1975). The Bridewell was rebuilt in 1836 after being destroyed in the 1831 riots.
90 P.C. 9 Nov. 1867.
91 P.C. 12 May 1868.
respect of various public works” or at least to accept the site of the existing prison as suitable for a new one. Early in 1873 the Home Secretary insisted there should be no more delay: a new Prison capable of accommodating 210 male and 89 female prisoners must be built immediately to replace Bristol’s two “inefficient” gaols. The Surveyor General of Prisons estimated the cost to be “from £30,000 to £35,000”.92

The Council’s Gaol and Bridewell Committee at last gave up their delaying tactics and recommended to Council that, as the Prison Authority, it should comply with the Home Secretary’s demand. Even then when the Council met, alderman Green tried to deter a decision until a Citizen’s Public Meeting had expressed an opinion and alderman Ford moved an amendment in favour of adapting the old prison. Both failed and the Council resolved a difference of opinion within its committee over where to site the new prison by ruling out using the present site as it would attract a good price if it were sold, as would the Bridewell site, and the proceeds could be used to help with the cost of the new prison.93 Indeed what was left of the site of the Common Gaol was sold to the GWR in 1895 for £22,500.94 The committee was left to find a suitable and economical site which it duly did by recommending buying a piece of land of eight acres known as “Horfield Gardens” for £3,875. It also was charged with employing an architect “with experience in building Gaols on the modern principle” whose plans would have to meet with the Home Secretary’s approval.95 By June 1874 this approval had been obtained for the plans of Mr Josiah Thomas, the city Surveyor, chosen as the architect, and their estimated cost of £65,000. The Council resolved to borrow this from the Bank of England.96 Unhappily when tenders were invited in 1875 the lowest exceeded the estimated £65,000 by £32,000 and only minor reductions were achieved by revising specifications. Some of the excess arose from a recent steep increase in the price of building materials and from works in the ground floor store rooms to render their conversion to additional cells should they be needed. But all told when the cost of engineering works and the boundary wall was added the total cost, excluding professional fees, at £98,373 so appalled some members of the committee that they tried, but without success, to carry an amendment in favour of altering the existing gaol.97

Before the new prison was built a wholly new situation was created by a new Prison Act, 1877 (40 & 41 Vict. c 21) by which Disraeli’s

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92 Latimer, p 468.
93 P.C. 10 June 1873.
94 Latimer, Conclusion p 45.
95 P.C. 30 Sept. 1873.
96 P.C. 30 June 1874.
97 P.C. 4 Jan. 1876.
ministry nationalised all local prisons. This relieved the Council of finding the running costs of its two gaols now in the hands of the Prison Commissioners who promptly closed Bridewell as a prison. But the Council, in effect, was fined by the Commissioners for its failure under the 1865 Act to provide certified cells in both prisons to the tune of £21,481 which it paid out of the money it had borrowed from the Bank of England for the contemplated new prison. The rest of the money it repaid to the Bank so that Bristol ratepayers were spared finding interest and capital repayments. Also it negotiated the transfer of Bridewell, now no longer a prison, to Council ownership in return for giving up the Horfield site to the Prison Commissioners by whom the new prison was built in 1883. The Bridewell site, when leased, proved a valuable income generating asset for the Council. Also the 1877 Act provided for the award of pensions by the Council to those who had served if long and faithfully, particularly Governor Gardiner and his wife Eliza, matron of the Gaol, who had been appointed forty years before.98

During the years 1851 to 1877 when the Council was responsible for the city’s gaols it, formally speaking, had no control over how they were actually administered. This was a matter for the Justices. Their power was much circumscribed by the elaborate rules for the government of prisons introduced by the Prisons Act of 1865 and entirely abolished by the Prisons Act, 1877. Nonetheless, as earlier observed, Justices were often also members of Council and three quarters of the members of the two committees of Visitors to the two gaols were councillors or aldermen (29 out of the 37 who served between 1851 and 1877). Their reports were frequently brought before Council as their recommendations often involved financial considerations and this opened the way to discussion of wider and controversial matters such as how should prisons best be run.

The eighteen fifties and sixties was an age in which the notion that prisons should aim to reform their inmates was almost totally eclipsed in favour of prison as a wholly punitive institution and the favoured regime was the separate system by which it was hoped the virus of criminality would be prevented from being passed from prisoner to prisoner. In the Common Gaol the Governor, James Anthony Gardiner and the Justices were enthusiastic practitioners of the separate system. In extensive evidence to the Carnarvon committee in 1863 Gardiner said that he practised it with “complete strictness”. The rule of silence and preventing prisoners from seeing each other was carried out “in the cells, in the wards, in the school, on the treadwheel, in the chapel, in the exercising yards and throughout the prison”. Prisoners wore bags over their heads down to their shoulders to

98 P.C. 9 Nov. 1878, 24 June 1879.
prevent recognition of their features and were moved about the prison with a warder in front and behind them. It took half an hour to fill or empty the chapel. Gardiner was a stern disciplinarian. He boasted that prisoners "very much dislike our gaol" and that "the discipline is more severe in our gaol, perhaps, than in any other prison". He claimed that he did not punish prisoners often with bread and water diets or flogging but thought that the official dietary was "considerably too high" and should be reduced in quantity and quality and that most prisons should use flogging rather more often. He believed he was the first to photograph prisoners to help the courts identify a previously convicted defendant and advocated branding prisoners with the words "Bristol Gaol" for the same purpose.

But it was in regard to labour in prison that Governor and the Justices went against the national trend which favoured penal labour such as stone-breaking or the treadmill or crank rather than productive labour such as tailoring, needlework or shoemaking. Their cardinal principle was that prisoners should "assist to support themselves while in prison" the unspoken object being to make running the prison or improving it as cheap as possible for the Council and the ratepayers. The Gaol was not connected to the Water Company's supply and avoided paying its rates by having the prisoners using the treadmill daily to raise the water supply from wells. Prisoners made shoes and clothing and did all the work of the gaol and if a prisoner had a trade his skill was put to use. The noble lords of the Carnarvon Committee were none too happy about this as it appeared to be setting aside a court's sentence of "hard labour".99

But the main labouring activity from 1850 to 1859 was building work to extend and improve the prison. The Governor set himself up as an architect and, employed the prisoners to construct "a cooking department", 30 new cells out of quarters hitherto used for storage, to convert the existing chapel into a store, and to build a new chapel. Materials were purchased using the proceeds of the sale of oakum picked by the prisoners. The Visiting Justices, backed by the Mayor, claimed that this use of prison labour was beneficial to the Bristol ratepayer, even though it entailed, as critics complained, a reduction in the profits accruing from prison labour paid into the Borough Fund, because the resulting buildings were built for a fraction of normal costs and much more cheaply than the scheme of "extending

the present wings” suggested by the Prison Commissioners. Indeed they boasted that in no other gaol in the kingdom had works on this scale been undertaken in this way. Additional accommodation at the gaol, it was argued, was necessary both to cater for increased numbers of criminals generated by a growing city and to meet the regulations for prisons issued by the Home Secretary which if not complied with would jeopardise the good reports which Inspectors made of Bristol’s gaol. The Inspector certainly approved of the works: in his 1858 report he referred to “the completion of one of the best Chapels found in any similar building”. He estimated that it would have cost at least £3,500 if constructed by free labour and two thirds of this had been saved by using prisoners’ labour. The Dean of Bristol was so pleased that he organised a subscription fund which raised £200 to make “a handsome present of plate” to the Governor which was a clear sign of the improved status of such officers in the mid-Victorian age.  

The Council was urged to take a particular interest in juvenile crime. In 1854 it was persuaded by councillor William Naish, a Quaker manufacturer and a Liberal to petition the House of Commons for an Act to end imprisonment of young children and to establish Reformatory Schools. By 1857 such an Act was in place and two years later the Justices wrote to the Council outlining their concerns about the treatment “of the large and increasing numbers of Juvenile Criminals who infest the streets of this city”, most of whom they thought, “were driven into crime, frequently from loss of parents, but more frequently from an absolute want of the commonest necessities of life”. The Justices thought prison inappropriate but had wholly inadequate cash put at their disposal by the Council for buying places in reformatory facilities which in any case were only available outside Bristol at Kingswood and Hardwick, both in Gloucestershire. They asked the Council to consider providing reformatory facilities in Bristol and adequate funds but all it did was to find £150 a year for paying 2/- a week per child placed in the above named institutions. Reformatory Schools for the Children of the Perishing and Dangerous Classes, and for Juvenile Offenders, to quote the title of a tract published by Mary Carpenter in 1851, were eventually provided in Bristol in considerable measure by her own efforts. In 1867 the Council was asked by the Bristol Certified Industrial School and Mary Carpenter’s pet project, the Park Row Certified Industrial School, to contribute to their upkeep. It found £100 to help with enlarging the

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100 Details of this building work can be found in the 19th, 21st, 23rd and 25th Reps. Of the Inspectors of Prisons in PP 1854 xxxiv, 1856 xxxiii, 1857–8 xxix and 1860 xxxv.
101 P.C. 14 Feb. 1854.
102 P.C. 8 Feb., 28 June 1859.
103 For her efforts see Jo Manton, Mary Carpenter and the children of the streets (1976) part two.
former of the two schools but that was all until 1890 when it agreed to provide Kingswood with £2000 a year provided the Council had a representative on its board of management. Indeed, apart from being ready to pay fees for delinquent Catholic girls to be cared for in homes in Finchley and Cannington (Somerset), the Council appears to have regarded rescuing the children of the streets as a matter for charitable effort, of which there was a considerable amount as the very large orphanage created by William Muller suggests, rather than collective effort financed by ratepayers.

So, how should the Council’s record in maintaining law and order be assessed? Certainly by 1901 Bristol had become a thoroughly policed city. An ever increasing network of regulatory laws and bye laws existed to be enforced by the police aimed at producing a more orderly and safer society. In terms of crime the city of 1901 was more orderly than that of 1851 but whether it was safer may be doubted since there were certainly practices such as the increasing use of petroleum, the making and use of cigarettes and the growing complexity of manufacturing processes, to name but a few, which increased rather than decreased the hazards to life. On the other hand some risks had been reduced such as that of being poisoned by adulterated food. There can be little doubt that the norms of conduct that were enforced were essentially those acceptable in middle class and employing circles and rather less so among the working class as became apparent at times of industrial conflict or when the Council sought to regulate street selling by child hawkers. Nonetheless, as the evidence of the police court suggests, the law did command respect among working folk. Bristol was not a lawless city.

105 P.C. 10 May, 28 June 1870.
106 The bye laws of 1883 permitted the levying of fines up to 10/- on parents who allowed children under eight to sell on the streets or children under thirteen to do so after 8 p.m. (P.C. 16 Oct. 1883).
CHAPTER FOUR

THE COUNCIL AS LOCAL BOARD OF HEALTH AND URBAN SANITARY AUTHORITY: THE SANITARY BATTLE

When the Council decided in 1851 to adopt the Public Health Act, 1848 it was embarking on a major expansion of its responsibilities and committing itself to tackling the horrendously dirty and disease-ridden state of much of the city. Mid-century Bristol was in dire straits. It had a wholly inadequate water supply and sewage disposal system. The general mortality rate in the eighteen forties was the third highest among provincial towns, only surpassed by notoriously unhealthy Manchester and Liverpool. In 1849 it had experienced a severe cholera epidemic. A very well informed observer, whom it is plausible to believe may have been the Mayor, J. G. Shaw, using a pseudonym, in 1854 described the inhabitants of the old city as "crowded into miserable and often dilapidated buildings". He thought some 30-40,000 were lodged in an unsatisfactory condition often "in one small room to a family in an ill conditioned, badly drained house" and that about 15,000 lived "in a state which is absolutely inconsistent with health and decency". He went on to list five particularly black spots: Poyntz Pool, home of the city's criminals and the "beggar's opera" where "deserted boys are numerous, sleeping at a penny a night two or three in a bed", and in training as thieves. From Lewin's Mead along the Frome and harbour to Hotwells was the resort of the idle and dissolute without the ability to survive in Poyntz Pool. Pithay was full of prostitutes and old clothes shops kept by Jews. The Back and Marsh street was the resort of sailors, quay porters and the poor Irish while Pile Street and the Temple was where the worst paid operatives of the manufacturing district, who were unable to afford the lodging houses of the Dings, crowded in. The article ended with a selection of extracts from the official reports of the Medical Visitors of the Corporation of
the Poor giving vivid sketches of the appalling filth, overcrowding and insanitary conditions in the old city.¹

**Powers and duties of a Local Board**

According to the new law of 1848 the Council became the Local Board of Health and as such had vested in it, as a local barrister put it, “powers of the most extensive character involving an extraordinary interference with private rights but undoubtedly admirably calculated to enforce measures of sanitary reform”.² The duties and powers of the Local Board as prescribed by the Act related to two related fields. One set focussed on the activities of the now superseded Paving Commissioners and parish authorities and were concerned with urban movement and the built environment. Typical duties were the paving, cleansing and repair of all streets and fixing the level and width of every new street while the Local Board was empowered to require private streets to be properly maintained, to purchase premises for the improvement of streets, to contract for lighting streets and to provide public lavatories. Taking on all these new activities, which will be considered later, was no mean task for as The Builder, in calling for the Council to draw up a general plan of action, remarked in December 1850 “the approaches and thoroughfares of Bristol much require improvement”.³

A much more urgent task for the Local Board was to tackle the truly appalling sanitary condition of Bristol.⁴ To this end the 1848 Act laid upon it the duties of managing all sewers, requiring every house to have a drain connected to a sewer and a w.c. or privy kept in such a state as not to be a nuisance and all houses in a filthy condition to be “white-washed, cleansed, or purified.” The Board was provided with powers to build sewers, to take measures for the disposal of household waste in default of owners or occupiers doing so, for preventing the establishment of noxious trades, for regulating cellars and many other matters considered to have a bearing upon public health.

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¹ B.T. 18 Feb. 1854 Letter amounting to an article signed Viator. The author clearly had privileged access to Corporation of the Poor records which have since perished in the war. He was keenly interested in promoting model lodging houses and expressly stated that he was relying on his own observations and not those of G.T. Clark’s 1850 report to the General Board of Health. J.G. Shaw was Governor of the Corporation of the Poor 1847–1850 and Mayor 1853–1855. At the May 1854 Quarterly meeting of the Council he delivered an enormously long speech arguing for the council to adopt a recent Act enabling Councils to establish model lodging houses. He was an Anglican, a Conservative and a soap manufacturer who would find the conservative Bristol Times the natural vehicle for urging his views.

² D. W. Nash Analysis of the Public Health Act (Bristol n.d.) p 6. This is a most useful summary of the Act.

³ The Builder vol. viii p 619.

⁴ For a concise description of this see D. Large and F. Round Public Health in mid-Victorian Bristol (Bristol 1974) pp 1–5.
So what did the Council as Local Board do to promote a cleaner and healthier Bristol? First it had to establish new machinery for action. This entailed appointing officers, particularly the key figures of Surveyor, Clerk, Accountant and Inspector of Nuisances, creating a budget, establishing the Sanitary Committee to mature proposals for the Board’s approval, and, above all, raising money through the power which the 1848 Act gave the Board to levy a general district rate. In short a whole new administrative apparatus parallel to that already in existence was brought into being, but in its early days the most important undertaking of the Board was the creation of an impressive system of main drainage for the whole city. This was certainly a costly enterprise but there can be little doubt that it was a major contribution to making Bristol a more sanitary city and, it will be contended, its citizens healthier.

Creating main drainage

As has been explained elsewhere, by mid-nineteenth century Bristol faced a crisis over the disposal of the rainwater falling on its increasing number of streets and waste from its houses and industrial concerns. The two basically separate systems of disposing of rainfall by streams such as the Malago and sewers and household waste by cesspools were increasingly not being kept separate thanks to the advance of the w.c. and the horse both of whose ordure found its way increasingly into the sewers and, if not blocking them, from thence into a stinking, highly polluted Floating Harbour. The Local Board tackled the problem by adopting the mid-Victorian remedy of the intercepting trunk sewer—intercepting because the aim was to intercept the sewage flowing into the harbour and the rivers by a major sewer running at right angles to the existing smaller sewers and streams and then depositing the sewage in the Avon well down stream from the city.

In the eighteen fifties and sixties with the guidance of the Surveyor, Frederick Ashmead, six major intercepting sewers were constructed catering for upper Clifton, Bedminster, lower Clifton, St Philips, the Frome valley and a whole cluster of inner city parishes which the Board denominated by the unromantic name of the Avon Intercepting District. Fortunately for the Council these trunk sewers did not require the elaborate and expensive pumping machinery of Bazalgette’s contemporary scheme in London to produce a flow sufficient to prevent deposits forming. Also while the cost of the first sewer—for upper Clifton—greatly exceeded the original estimate the succeeding schemes were completed either slightly under or slightly over budget.

indicating the growing expertise of the Surveyor. Of course there were problems. In St Pauls there were vociferous complaints that their wells were in danger of being polluted by seepage from the Board's sewer and Bazalgette himself had to be summoned from London to advise on how to prevent this. Also construction of the trunk sewers system meant that Bristol's sewage although more efficiently collected and no longer finding its way so easily into the Floating Harbour, nevertheless had been exported to the Avon down river from the city where it would foul its mud banks at low tide for decades to come.\(^6\)

**Further Sewage disposal problems**

Important and valuable as the Council's achievement was in establishing the trunk sewers this was by no means the end of its problems in disposing of waste and stormwater. As the city expanded, particularly outside its borders into St George, Horfield and up the southern slopes to Totterdown and Knowle, the disposal problem again threatened to become acute. In essence it took two forms, the tendency of the Frome to flood as a result of increased flows of stormwater from its tributary streams, a matter that will be treated elsewhere,\(^7\) and the growing pollution of the New Cut by the discharge of sewage into it. In the seventies Frederick Ashmead, the City's Surveyor and Engineer, in three reports to the Sanitary committee in 1871, 1873 and 1877, proposed dealing with this problem by intercepting each trunk sewer outlet into the New Cut, feeding the sewage into the Coronation Road sewer and concentrating the sewage in tanks to be constructed near Clift House on the south bank of the Cut close to the western end of Coronation Road. The sewage in the tanks would then be discharged at suitable states of the tide into the River Avon itself.\(^8\) In 1876 the Council bought Clift House and its grounds for £6000\(^9\) but Ashmead's scheme was not carried out. He had recognised in his second report that the sewage in the tanks would need deodorising as the prevailing wind would carry the smell straight into Clifton which prided itself on being something of a health resort and there were still many who, contrary to expert opinion, believed that bad smells actually caused disease. The very idea of sewage tanks close by was enough to set Clifton alight with protest so that the scheme was abandoned.

\(^6\) *Ibid* pp 129–130 and many references in the Proceedings of the Local Board.

\(^7\) See Chapter in vol ii.

\(^8\) The substance of these reports can be found in Ashmead's report to the Sanitary Committee of 9 Oct. 1884 presented to the Council as Sanitary Authority on 10 Feb. 1885 for which see P.S.A. of that date.

\(^9\) S.C. Minutes 22 P.S.A. of that date.

\(^10\) Latimer, p491.
But much as the M.O.H. might observe that there was no evidence that the smelly condition of the New Cut had injurious effects on the health of those dwelling alongside it, the Sanitary Committee believed that something must be done about the disposal of the city’s sewage. In 1879 Ashmead was asked to make further proposals. He came up with a massively expensive idea. All the sewage, including that generated by Horfield and St George, should be dumped in the Severn at Charlescombe Bay between Portishead and Clevedon. This would involve building a sewer some nine or ten miles long and would cost an estimated £279,823.\(^{11}\) Not surprisingly the Council was not prepared to endorse this and nothing was done.

*Bazalgette consulted*

By the early eighties Charles F. Hare, councillor for Redcliffe, was complaining that St George’s sewage was being discharged into the Cut near Totterdown Lock to such an extent that at low tide it was little more than a stream of sewage. He also thought that St George should be paying Bristol for dealing with its waste. Councillor Moore referred to fifteen dead salmon having been found in the river in the past week.\(^{12}\) Once again Ashmead was called on and, after rehearsing the substance of his past reports, he lectured councillors on the absence of any threat to health from the polluted New Cut by a lengthy disquisition on how those dwelling by the even more polluted waters of the Clyde suffered no ill effects. His conclusion was to repeat his 1879 prescription: the outfalls into the New Cut should not be closed until the ultimate destination of the city’s sewage had been decided, and, in his view, Charlescombe Bay was the best terminus. This was clearly an uncomfortable conclusion. so that, as had been found helpful in the past, Bazalgette was asked for his advice. His recommendations\(^ {13}\) were eminently tactful. He ruled out connecting up all outlets to the Coronation Road sewer and discharging the four fifths of Bristol’s sewage at the Clift House outlet on the grounds that while this would benefit the upper part of the river it would simply lead to sewage in more concentrated form being “conveyed up and down the river past Clifton”. To avoid upsetting Clifton he suggested extending the Coronation Road sewer for two and half miles down river to Sea Mills picking up in the process the one fifth of the city’s sewage which was discharged from the Clifton High and Low Level sewers into the Avon close to the Suspension Bridge. Once this was done the other sewer outlets should be connected with the Coronation

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\(^{11}\) See Ashmead’s 1884 report mentioned in note 8.  
\(^{12}\) W.D.P. 13 Aug. 1884.  
\(^{13}\) S.C. Minutes 9 Feb. 1885.
Road sewer. He thought all this would cost about £85,000 and if borrowed at four per cent and repaid over sixty years would only involve a penny on the rates, a notion pleasing to councillors. He agreed with Ashmead that the ultimate solution was to convey the sewage to the Bristol Channel near Charlescombe Bay and advised that design work to this end be put in hand. At a rough estimate this would increase the burden on the ratepayer to “threepence halfpenny in the pound”. Tactfully he did not urge immediate action.

All councillors were sent a copy of Bazalgette’s report. The Sanitary Committee sought to fend off criticism of his proposals by concluding agreements with the Horfield and St George authorities that they should contribute to the cost of the new sewer to Sea Mills. It was also intent on involving the whole Council in deciding whether to proceed or not but its resolution to have Ashmead design and cost the project was defeated in full Council by 24:22 in February 1886. Powerful voices were raised against action. Alderman Fox, a leading Conservative, thought that economic depression made it inopportune to embark on spending £85,000 while councillor Moss Levy, speaking for St Philips thought covering over the Frome merited a higher priority. Councillor Lane argued that there should be no spending on plans and estimates until the Council had accepted the general principles of Balzagette’s report. In a further debate in May 1886, he moved to have all spending on Bazalgette’s scheme rejected on the grounds that there were too many heavy calls on the city’s purse, such as the £70,000 needed for the extension of the Asylum, and that the M.O.H. was of the opinion that the existing system was no threat to health. He was for doing nothing. Alderman Naish, chairman of the Sanitary Committee, hit back by narrowly carrying by 24 votes to 21 an amendment which left the Council in its capacity as an Urban Sanitary Authority free to decide on plans for sewage disposal. But Lane persisted with a further motion favouring no action. Alderman Proctor Baker tried but failed by 19:24 to have it set aside and the upshot was victory for the advocates of inaction.14

Post Boundary extension schemes

But sewage disposal questions did not go away at the behest of councillors, particularly when the city’s boundaries were substantially enlarged in 1897. By this time considerable building had taken place in upper Knowle, Brislington and along the Bath road as well in districts bordering the Malago stream. Much of this development now became the responsibility of the Council and in 1899 its Chief Engineer and the Sanitary Committee secured approval to spend £45,075 on a variety of

14 S.C. Minutes 9 Feb. 18 May 1886; W.D.P. 10 Feb., 19 May 1886.
schemes to cope with stormwater and sewage. But this was relatively small beer compared with the second project which the Committee's energetic and capable chairman, George Pearson, presented to the Council a month later. This was a further attempt to produce a viable plan for dumping Bristol's waste in the Bristol Channel.

In January 1899 the Committee had persuaded the Council to prepare plans and estimates for constructing works to enable the city's sewage to be discharged into the Bristol Channel at Avonmouth, a solution which Balzagette had rejected by noting in his 1885 report, "that the Sewage discharged near the mouth of the river Avon would not be entirely got rid of, for a considerable portion would return up that River on the flood tide". Nonetheless the Committee had gone ahead. Consulting engineers were retained and together with the City Engineer a giant scheme was prepared. Its main feature was the construction of a large sewer along the Gloucestershire bank of the Avon to Avonmouth where a huge tank would store the sewage until the appropriate time for its dispersal into the Bristol Channel. This would be "at or about the time of high water". To persuade the sewage to flow down to Avonmouth a substantial pumping station was to be provided at Clift House and, so that the scheme would deal with sewage throughout the Avon valley from Bath onwards to Avonmouth, a number of linkage sewers were planned and the various local authorities using the works were to be contacted and their agreement secured for contributing to the cost and maintenance of those parts of the works which they would use. The whole project was estimated to cost £650,000 or if only Bristol took part it would cost the city £490,000.

To carry it out a parliamentary bill would have to be promoted and this proved to be the Committee's Achilles heel. Not surprisingly a poll was demanded and not surprisingly given the magnitude of the cost the vote went by 19,205 to 8,678 against proceeding in spite of virtual unanimity in the Council in support of the proposal. The bill had to be abandoned and it was left to the twentieth century Council to wrestle with the difficult problem of disposing of Bristol's sewage.

Water Supply

Among other powers conferred by the 1848 Act upon Local Boards was that of purchasing, leasing or erecting water-works and few towns in the country in the eighteen forties needed a more plenteous water supply than did Bristol as Sir Henry de la Beche had observed in his Report on the state of Bristol made in 1845 on behalf of The Royal
Commission on the state of Large Towns and Populous Districts. It was then estimated that a bare 5000 had access to piped water while 73,000 were dependent on meagre, filthy and expensive supplies from pumps and wells. To remedy this truly dire situation the privately owned Bristol Water Works Company was established in 1846. Councillors were involved but in their private capacity. Among the original dozen directors were councillor George Thomas, Sir John Haberfield, six times Mayor and Chairman of the Company from 1851–1857 councillor George Sanders who was Chairman from 1846–1851 and former councillor Charles Fripp. The Company embarked on an ambitious plan to bring Bristol an ample supply of pure water from springs well outside the city. This took much time and money. Four years after the founding of the Company only some 3,152 houses were connected with the new supply and it was estimated that a mere 7.8% of houses rented at or below £10 a year received the Company’s supply.\(^\text{18}\) Progress was made in the eighteen fifties in bringing the good quality water to more and more dwellings but there were serious setbacks notably in 1854 when a leak in the Company’s Barrow reservoir led to it having to be emptied which was then followed by a five month long drought. It was not long before John Burroughs, the councillor for Clifton, was complaining in Council that his constituents were without water and by the end of the year the Council acting as the Board of Health had appointed a special committee to meet the directors of the Company to investigate how to remedy “the late serious deficiency”\(^\text{19}\). Matters did not go smoothly. The directors failed to attend and when sent written questions refused to answer some of them, according to the report of the Board’s committee. Their conclusion was that the Company was not in a position to supply the city so long as they were dependent on their present springs and that therefore Richmond spring in upper Clifton should be re-opened or in other words the Council should play a part in providing a water supply. Alderman Abbot, later to become Chairman of the Company, criticised the report as unfair and discourteous to the Company but thanks to a conciliatory speech from the veteran alderman Vining who concluded that the deficiencies in supply had arisen from circumstances unlikely to recur and that the Company had adequate resources and hence it was best to let the matter drop and see what they could do in the future.\(^\text{20}\) This was just the first of a number of

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\(^{18}\) G. T. Clark Report to the General Board of Health on the sanitary condition ... of Bristol (1850).


\(^{20}\) B.M. 17 Feb. 31 Mar. 1855. The Mercury ticked off Abbott for speaking as if he had a “special retainer” from the Company and the Council for shelving the matter; the March issue has a useful report of the AGM of the Company.
occasions when some members of the Council became dissatisfied with the privately owned water Company.

Limited success of the Water Company in the fifties

In the fifties the contribution of an improved water supply to enhancing Bristolian’s health must have been limited. As late as 1857 the Company was only supplying 13,000 houses.\(^\text{21}\) It was indeed struggling. It paid no dividend to its shareholders from 1850–1854 and only very modest sums for the rest of the decade.\(^\text{22}\) Its £25 shares often traded at £8 or £9. To improve its prospects the Company in 1862 sought to set aside their obligation under their foundation Act of 1846 to provide a constant supply, to charge higher rates for customers living in houses standing more than 200ft above the level of Bristol bridge as their supply required costly pumping, to require all domestic customers to use and pay for a meter to reduce waste, and to increase their capacity to supply more customers by building an additional reservoir at Barrow. To achieve all this the Company had to promote a bill and this provided the Council with the opportunity to scrutinise its policy on the ground that it was the Council’s business to safeguard the interests of Bristolians by deciding whether or not to oppose the bill before a select committee of the House of Lords where such matters could be examined in detail. The cost of employing lawyers to defend or attack bills in this venue was such as to often induce parties at loggerheads to come to compromises over their terms. This was what happened in 1862.

The Council’s parliamentary bills committee in a report which spoke of the Company being “entitled to public sympathy” since “they had rendered services to the Public which would only be properly appreciated, if they were withdrawn”, concluded “that no sufficient grounds exist for opposing (the bill), provided the concessions which they consider essential are yielded by the Company”. It duly did so. But in the eyes of some, the concessions demanded by the Council were so limited as to amount to a betrayal by it of the interests of Bristolians. The limited hours of supply—from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.—was conceded by the Council with but minor change although it did insist on arrangements by the Company for providing supply in case of fire at night. The Council also ensured that water should be supplied at a cheaper rate for houses with rentals of £15 or less but conceded that properties in the hillier parts of the city should pay a surcharge. It also

\(^\text{21}\) B.M. 4 April 1857.
\(^\text{22}\) There is a list of dividends paid from 1850–1876 on p.2 of the report of the Committee appointed by the Council to negotiate with the Directors of the Company for which P.C. 7 Mar. 1877; for share prices Latimer p 283.
secured the removal of the draconian clause requiring customers to use and pay for a meter—at a cost of 8 shillings—in favour of allowing the Company to fit a meter if it could demonstrate that a customer was wasting water.\(^\text{23}\)

**The Council and the water supply crisis of 1864**

In 1864 there was another crisis arising out of a severe drought and inadequate reservoir storage. Water was available only for limited hours, and at times not at all, and the Board of Health took action to open wells that had ceased to be used and to supply pumps.\(^\text{24}\) Once again critical voices were raised: Elisha Robinson thought the Council had been very patient with the Company. Manchester, Leeds, Glasgow, Liverpool and Preston all had constant supply but Bristol did not, he complained.\(^\text{25}\) The Company reacted to the 1864 crisis by promoting another bill to enable it to increase its capacity to serve the city by tapping supplies at Chelvey, nine miles west of the city, and to raise its charges to generate an estimated £3,200 annual income in addition to the £15,000 it currently derived from domestic users. The Council's committee on parliamentary bills pointed out that the new store reservoir at Barrow, authorized by the Company's 1862 Act, which was designed to double holding capacity, would not be completed until two years hence, yet customers were already being charged the increased rates for the additional supply it was intended to bring about. The Company's 1865 bill proposed new rates which would fall particularly heavily on properties with rental values between £5 and £13. The suggested increase was 66% for a property of £6 rental. As the committee remarked this “will bear with peculiar severity upon the poorer householders”. Also such a policy was scarcely likely to encourage those householders who had yet to become customers of the Company to do so although this was certainly most desirable for health reasons. On the other hand the Committee recognised that the Council should support the Company in seeking new supplies from the Chelvey springs and when it consulted its Directors it became clear that the necessary works could only be carried out if the Company could generate more income to service the necessary capital expenditure and that meant increasing rates. In the end the Committee, while winning from the Directors promises of concessions over hours of supply and the implementation of the new rates, decided that when the new storage reservoir at Barrow was completed the city would have a supply of water “equal to any ordinary emergency” and therefore no

\(^{24}\) Proc. LBH 29 July 1864.
new works were needed, hence the Company’s bill should be opposed.26

When the full Council was urged to do so by E.S. Robinson, alderman Abbot, a Director of the Company, who would become its Chairman in 1869, rose to defend its bill, only to be most plausibly challenged as to the propriety of his doing so on grounds of conflict of interest. The Mayor was compelled to give a ruling. He argued that Abbot had information which Bristolians had a right to know, a view which by no means convinced all councillors, but which allowed Abbot to make an enormously long and involved defence of the Company.27 This failed to prevent the report being accepted, but probably paved the way for a further negotiation between the Council and the Company during which the Company agreed to make a number of changes in its bill to satisfy some at least of the Council's objections. Originally the bill had only obliged the Company to supply water for ten out of every twenty four hours but now it agreed to the same hours (fifteen) as in the 1862 Act. The Council persuaded the Company to strike out a clause enabiling it to charge an extra 10 per cent on bills not paid within three months and negotiated better terms for poorer customers as far as increased rates were concerned. These concessions were just sufficient to bring about a withdrawal of the proposal for the Council to oppose the bill but there clearly remained considerable support for the view that the Council was not doing enough to protect its citizen’s interests in its dealings with the Water Company.28

*The Council’s attempt in 1877 to acquire the Water Company*

Between 1865 and 1877 the city’s water supply did not attract the Council’s attention. The Company at last began to prosper. From 1872 onwards it was paying ten per cent dividends on its ordinary stock and thanks to the completion of the store reservoir at Barrow, the tapping of the Chelvey springs and other lesser works its supply problems appeared to be over. Also by the seventies the great majority of domestic properties in the city had become Company customers. Its revenue from water rates had risen from the £7,727 of 1851 to the £56,772 of 1876. In short it was a business worth acquiring—or battling to preserve as an independent concern.29 On 1st January 1877 alderman John Jones, Mayor the previous year, senior partner in a firm of timber merchants and a Conservative moved and carried by a large majority in Council a motion declaring that it would be “for the

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27 B.T. 4 Feb. 1865.
28 P.C. 8 Mar. 1865; B.T. 11 Mar. 1865; the agreement was carried by 19 to 16 votes.
29 For the Company’s annual revenues from domestic consumers see the report referred to in note 2.
interest of the City to acquire . . . the Bristol Water Company provided
the purchase can be effected on equitable terms.” A committee to nego-
tiate with the Directors of the Company was appointed immediately
and by 28th February it had produced a lengthy and detailed report
on what it described as “the most weighty and important subject that
has engaged public attention since the acquisition by the Corporation
of the Dock Estate in 1848”30.

It is not easy to establish precisely why the Council should have sought
to acquire the Company at this time. The Water Company, unlike the
privately owned Dock Company in the eighteen thirties and forties,
was not thought to be serving Bristol disastrously and hence simply
had to be taken over. The Committee’s report made reference, in justi-
fication, to parliament favouring “the Transfer of the undertakings of
Water Companies to Municipal and Sanitary Authorities”, that “most
of the large towns in the kingdom possess their own means of Water
service” and “purchases have generally proved remunerative”. But if
these were the prime considerations it becomes difficult to explain
quite why the Council abandoned its takeover effort in 1878 with so
little fight. Its negotiation Committee led by Mayor George Edwards,
a stockbroker and partner in a tobacco firm, brother in law of the
formidable alderman Proctor Baker, was chiefly concerned with trying
to arrive at financial terms satisfying to both parties. It was generally
accepted that the Company’s product was beyond criticism as far as
quality was concerned ever since this had been challenged in 1869, and
refuted by a chemical analysis which showed conclusively that the
purity of Company water was much greater than that in the city’s
wells, pumps and conduits.31 The success or failure of the negotiation
hinged on whether the Council was prepared to agree to the terms
demanded by the Company’s Directors whose main concern was to
secure a good deal for shareholders. By December 1877 the Council’s
negotiating committee reported on the differences still remaining
between the parties which evidently seemed to the Council too wide to
bridge so that the effort to do so was abandoned for the time being.32

The Council and the Company’s 1882 Bill

By 1882 population growth, both of the city and adjoining districts
such as St George, also served by the Company, forced it to promote
another bill to enable it to raise capital for further works to increase
its supply capacity. The terms proposed were so loaded in favour of

30 P.C. 1 Jan. 1877.
31 F.C. Jones op. cit. p 31; and another report by W. Stoddart, the city analyst, of a
similar kind W.D.P. 9 Feb. 1876.
32 See report referred to in note 22.
shareholders and so disadvantageous to customers that the Council unanimously agreed to oppose the Company's bill.\textsuperscript{33} Angry citizen's then memorialized the Mayor demanding he call a public meeting which adopted a resolution favouring a Council purchase of the Company. This was followed by the Council unanimously agreeing to pursue this.\textsuperscript{34} But the Company simply refused to negotiate so that all the Council could do was to seek to modify the Company's bill by representations to the Lords Committee. In this it was modestly successful in that shareholder profits from the capital raising operation were curbed to some extent.\textsuperscript{35} After two failures to acquire the Water Company the Council appears to have given up trying. After all the Company provided water of a quality and on a scale from the 1870s onwards which satisfied the professionals concerned with the health of Bristolians. Also the Council, when it came to borrowing for capital works, had plenty of demands to meet, especially arising from ownership of the Docks, without adding to them by acquiring a utility which experience showed required expensive new works from time to time.

\textit{Baths and Wash-houses}

The new water supply provided the means for the Council to make use of the 1846 Act (9 & 10 Vict. c 74) to encourage the establishment of public baths and wash-houses which were regarded by doctors concerned with public health as providing a valuable means of encouraging cleanliness and good health. In 1847 the Council opened a facility at Broadweir which was soon attracting much custom. The baths, as elsewhere, ran at a loss which upset businessmen like councillor Michael Castle who thought the council should sell them although the chairman of the Local Board argued that they were of immense benefit "to a class for whom it was their duty to care" and that the annual loss of £200 was a small price to pay for providing for 31,582 bathers and 22,783 using the wash-houses as was the case in 1859.\textsuperscript{36} It took the Council more than twenty years to decide that such manifest use justified building a second establishment on a piece of Council owned land known as the Mayor's Paddock close to the New Cut and between Bedminster and Bath bridges at a cost of £14,638. The specification showed clearly that, while two small swimming baths were to

\textsuperscript{33} P.C. 14 Feb. 1882.
\textsuperscript{34} P.C. 7 Mar. 1882.
\textsuperscript{35} Latimer p 286.
\textsuperscript{36} By 1851 Liverpool already had four establishments. It had also failed to make them pay their way since if charges were raised this simply drove away the custom see J. Calvert "The means of cleanliness"; the provision of baths and wash-houses in early Victorian Liverpool in \textit{Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire} vol 137 (1987) pp 117–136; B.M. 3 Jan 1857; P.C. 27 Mar. 1860.
be provided, the emphasis was on facilities for personal bathing and the washing of clothes or in other words on resources for encouraging cleanliness and good health among the largely working class inhabitants of Bedminster.\textsuperscript{37} Indeed the Council’s baths were looked upon largely as facilities for women and children while to the scandal of some, and to the hazarding of their health, young men bathed in the Floating Harbour or the River Avon. In 1857 a correspondent to the \textit{Bristol Mercury} reported that he had seen upwards of two hundred nude bathers in the Float on a wherry journey from one end to the other.\textsuperscript{38} Respectable Bristolians disapproved and the Council took some notice of the need to cater for swimmers. In 1875 a new bath, larger than anything hitherto, was added to the Broadweir establishment.\textsuperscript{39}

But at the same time the need to provide washing facilities for working class districts remained a main thrust of policy as indicated by a resolution adopted by the full Council in 1875 asking its Baths and Wash-Houses Committee to report on how to extend its premises to cater for St Philip’s, St Augustine’s and Hotwells. The Committee soon discovered that the Council owned no land in these districts and it was well aware, as it put it, “the cost of land and construction must be considered as unproductive capital, experience having proved that the ordinary receipts do not provide for the current expenses”. Yet the Committee recognised “that extended bathing and washing accommodation would be a great boon to many of the working classes”. Its solution was to opt for seeking a suitable site for an establishment to cater for the working class of lower Clifton on the grounds that the bulk of the people of St Philip’s lived no more than three quarters of a mile from the two existing baths. It recognised that the population of St Philip’s was growing and a case for providing for this would eventually exist so that the city’s Surveyor was instructed to keep a weather eye open for any suitable land.\textsuperscript{40}

The upshot of the Committee’s report of 1875 was the creation of the baths at the foot of Jacob’s Well Road but not before burning its fingers by proposing in 1881 to spend £20,000 on premises which ratepayers protested in public meetings was wildly extravagant. The Council withdrew. Eventually in 1885 a much more modest scheme, including using Cattybrook wire cut facing bricks instead of stone,

\textsuperscript{37} P.C. 27 June, 26 Sept. 1871 Report of the Baths and Wash-houses Committee.
\textsuperscript{38} B.M. 20 June 1857; A pamphlet published in 1871 entitled \textit{The Cry of the Poor}, being a letter from 16 \textit{Working Men of Bristol} to the 16 \textit{Aldermen of the City} complained “baths and wash-houses do well for the aged and infirm and are very useful in the colder seasons, but we want to swim in the open, and that free of cost. Nowhere can man or boy bathe in Bristol-rivers, canal and float are all closed.
\textsuperscript{39} P.C. 3 Aug. 1875.
\textsuperscript{40} P.C. 11 May 1875; Report of the Baths and Wash-houses Committee 2 July 1875.
costing half that originally proposed, was accepted by it and the Mayor opened the new bath in 1889.\(^{41}\) Central government still saw such facilities as providing for improved public health rather than a recreational amenity: the Local Government Board insisted in 1887 that the Council did not pledge the Borough Fund as security for borrowing the necessary £10,117 to build Jacob’s Wells but applied for permission to borrow in its capacity as an Urban Sanitary Authority citing as security the general district rate which it levied as such.\(^{42}\) Nevertheless it is plain that by this time the building of new baths, as proposed for Barton Hill in December 1898, or the purchase of privately owned baths as in Clifton in the previous year was prompted more by a desire to improve recreational facilities than by health promotion considerations.\(^{43}\)

*The war against “nuisances”*

The third prong of the Local Board’s strategy for combating Bristol’s ill health after creating new sewers and keeping a watchful eye on the Water Company’s efforts to improve the water supply was to wage war against the innumerable “nuisances” especially in Bristol’s poorer districts so graphically described in the reports of Sir Henry de la Beche and G.T. Clark. Inspector of Nuisances, Joseph Yeates was a key figure in this war serving the Council from 1851 until he died in office in 1887. The nuisances he was concerned to deal with consisted of filthy privies, blocked drains, overflowing cesspools, stinking dung heaps, pigs kept inappropriately, dirty courts and alleyways and pollution caused by smoke and chemical works. These matters were reported weekly to the Board’s Sanitary Committee where decisions were taken to serve notices demanding amendment on creators of nuisances, or if this was not forthcoming, prosecution was authorised. No doubt this activity helped to improve Bristol’s sanitary condition but as its scale, dictated by the limited assistance available to the Inspector, was still small in the eighteen fifties the impact could not have been great. In 1858 only upwards of 300 nuisances were dealt with and a further 36 prosecutions undertaken when individuals failed to respond to notices.\(^{44}\)

Gradually the drive against nuisances intensified, particularly when the Council appointed an energetic M.O.H. who instituted the practice of meeting daily the Inspector of Nuisances, and the inspectors

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41 P.C. 9 Aug. 27 Sept. 1881 and 13 Aug. 1885; Latimer p 310.
42 P.C. 18 Mar. 1887.
44 The Sanitary Committee had a practice of sending three of its members to view places requiring repairs and records of this viewing committee survive from 1855 onwards.
assigned to each of the four districts into which the city was divided, to receive their reports and give them directions. The district inspectors were generally recruited from the small detective force which formed part of the Council's police force. They were each assisted by two assistants whose job was to clean urinals and privies, fumigate houses, carry out lime washing and disinfecting, especially of clothing, as much of the war against nuisances involved the Council in carrying out work and recovering costs from occupiers and owners rather than trying to persuade or compel them to become responsible for doing it themselves. By 1887 when Joseph Yeates died and James Kirley took over as Chief Inspector the number of nuisances "abated" at 3,101 was ten times that in the eighteen fifties while the city had only doubled in population and by 1897, on the eve of boundary extension, the figure had risen to 8,800. Alongside this, the amount of disinfecting of bedding and clothing had risen prodigiously from an annual four to five thousand in the mid eighties to thirty or forty thousand in the early nineties. No doubt the increase was assisted by the purchase in 1888 of "one of Washington Lyon's steam disinfectors" which was greatly superior to the two gas-heated dry air machines hitherto in use.

The Bristol privy

The Council's vigorous campaign of disinfection and supervision of "excrement disposal in the poorer classes of houses" was, in part at least, a response to the urgings of William Budd, one of the most eminent physicians of the city whose evidence before the Royal Sanitary Commission in 1871 revealed him as strikingly far sighted in matters of public health. Budd was a great believer in "disinfection by anticipation" to stave off infectious diseases which he thought helped to explain the considerable fall in the mortality rate in the city in the fifties and sixties. Some, including the M.O.H., thought that the "Bristol privy" had also played a part. It was in fact a hand flushed w.c. which, it was claimed, was rarely put out of order by careless use and foreign bodies could be easily removed from it without damaging it. However a Local Government Board expert, after finding blocked and offensive Bristol type privies in neighbouring Westbury-on-Trym, observed that whereas Westbury had a scanty water supply and there was no supervision of privies, in Bristol the Council

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45 These procedures were often described by Dr Davies e.g. in his lecture to a Sanitary Conference in Birmingham in 1875 for which see B.T. 15 Jan. 1875.
46 The M.O.H.'s report for 1893 gives figures for 1884-1893; see also D. S. Davies, Notes on Disinfection in Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Journal June 1888.
"maintained a constant systematic supervision" and the water supply was abundant. The better condition of Bristol's privies he attributed not only to this but also to the small size of many Bristol houses. Compared with the tenements of Glasgow or the larger houses of Liverpool, Bristol's working classes in their smaller houses had more privies per head and hence keeping them in good condition was an easier task.48

Safeguarding food supply

In addition to the routine of the battle against nuisances the Council throughout the latter half of the century was obliged by a variety of statutes to appoint officers to carry out tasks which were regarded as protecting the public health—and, in some cases, also the public's pocket. Various facets of the country's food supply system attracted parliamentary attention in the second half of the nineteenth century, above all, the very widespread practice of adulterating food and drink which represented not only a loss to the pocket but often a serious threat to health. It was not until 1872, after a sustained campaign spearheaded by the *Lancet*, that legislation (35 & 36 Vict. c 74) allowed boroughs with separate police establishments such as Bristol to appoint public analysts and empowered Inspectors of Nuisances to procure samples for them to examine.49 Bristol appointed William Stoddart F.C.S. as its first public analyst with a salary of £100 a year and an allowance of £50 a year for "a laboratory and expenses", on 30 September 1873, and Joseph Yeates, the Inspector of Nuisances, was appointed to secure samples for him.50 Thereafter Stoddart reported annually to the Council in its capacity as an Urban Sanitary Authority on his findings while the Inspector of Nuisances instituted proceedings against offenders being rewarded in 1875 with an increase of his salary from £150 p.a. to £200 p.a. for the extra work.51 William Stoddart died in 1880 and was succeeded by his son Frederick while in the following year Yeates asked to be relieved of his duties because of failing health. By this time the threat to public health of food adulteration had receded and dealing with it was increasingly regarded as a matter of law enforcement and hence a matter for the Watch Committee and the police. Yeates was succeeded by two Inspectors of Police from each of the four police divisions and by 1883 no less than seventeen police Inspectors were collecting samples.52 By the end of the

50 P.S.A. 31 July 1873 and P.C. 30 Sept. 1873.
51 e.g. P.C. 11 May 1875 and P.S.A.27 April 1873.
52 P.C. 9 July 1880, 10 June 1881.
century there can be no doubt that the combined effect of legislation, decisions in the courts, and the work of the public analyst and his adjutants had greatly reduced the hazard to health from impure food and drink.

The struggle to achieve this had been long and arduous partly because methods of food production in slaughterhouses, dairies and bakeries were often primitive and insanitary. Although the Sanitary Committee had appointed in 1883 an Inspector of meat and fish supplies who recorded that in 1893 he paid over seven thousand visits to markets, shops and slaughter houses, as late as 1895 the M.O.H. reported that “more than half the 85 City Slaughter Houses” were unsatisfactory, their defects irremediable and their number and distribution “prohibits effectual supervision”. He urged the Council to establish a public slaughter house adjacent to the Council’s Destructor in St Philip’s Marsh, capable of dealing with 50,000 animals annually in order to ensure a safe meat supply for the city.53

The M.O.H. was particularly concerned about Bristol’s milk supplies. In his penultimate report in 1884 Dr Davies remarked that he had known “milk to be the medium in the spread of Typhoid Fever” and he believed “that many mysterious attacks of sickness are due to changes in milk improperly exposed”, especially the often fatal infantile diarrhoea.54 The Council, as Sanitary Authority, sought to control the production and sale of milk by regulatory bye laws which required “every dairyman, cow-keeper and purveyor of milk” to be registered, to allow the Authority’s officers free access to their premises, and to observe a set of rules for ensuring the prevention of contamination of milk.55 A similar technique was used to regulate bakeries although Dr Davies was much less concerned about them, commenting in his summing up of his years in office that most were in fair shape.56

Common Lodging Houses

This could scarcely be said of the many common lodging houses in the city. In the eighteen fifties the Council as the Local Board of Health had sought to enforce the legislation calling for registration and did secure the closing of dozens that failed to do so. But as the Mayor, J.G. Shaw, pointed out in 1854 “it had no power to provide

53 M.O.H. Reports 1883, 1893, 1895; Proc. LBH 1871 for an earlier suggestion that there should be public slaughter houses.
54 M.O.H. Report 1884.
55 P.S.A. 10 Dec. 1890.
56 The 1883 Factories and Workshops Act transferred the regulation of bakeries to Sanitary Authorities and hence the Council had to appoint an Inspector see M.O.H. Report 1883.
lodgings for those whom they dislodge”. But though he enthusiastically urged the Council to adopt a recent Act (14 & 15 Vict. c 34), sponsored by Lord Shaftesbury, which would have given it the power to establish municipal lodging houses, the Council finally decided to adopt what the Conservative Shaw called “the unsatisfactory suggestion of leaving the provision of lodging houses to private enterprise”.

Thirty years later in Dr D.S. Davies’s first report in 1886, as the newly appointed M.O.H., he noted that a further registration drive in 1884 had found almost all in an unsatisfactory condition. But after six hundred inspections of 61 of them 26 could now be classified as “good”, 27 as “fair” and only 6 as “bad” and there had been no case of infectious disease among the 1,055 persons who lived in them. Supervision of such houses was a matter of particular importance in Bristol as a port city and centre of land communications since seamen and travellers coming from localities suffering from epidemics so often made for such lodgings and might well bring with them the seeds of disease.

Burial grounds

Early Victorian sanitary reformers, Chadwick especially, had emphasised the adverse consequences to health of the overloading of urban burial grounds of which Bristol had many in the old city. In 1854 Palmerston’s Home Office obtained an elaborate Order in Council which closed or regulated the burial grounds of all sects in Bristol. This provoked a minor crisis: what was to be done with the dead? There did exist the privately owned Bristol General Cemetery at Arno’s Vale and on the Company’s Board there sat the most prestigious councillor of the fifties, Richard Poole King. The Arno’s Vale cemetery could and did cope with increased burials and it did possess ten acres of land adjoining it for expansion. But it did not suit north Bristol whose inhabitants did not want the deceased to have to be conveyed right across the city for burial. Extensions of time before closing had been granted to three inner city grave yards but this was purely a stop gap solution. The Mayor was told in no uncertain terms by Mr Waddington, the principal official at the Home Office, that he should get the parish authorities to establish new burial grounds. This was considered by a city-wide gathering of churchwardens in September 1854 who came to the conclusion that a recent Burial Act (16 & 17 Vict. c 134) did not enable them to do so and they would

58 M.O.H. Report 1886.
The Council as Local Sanitary Authority

have to rely on the power that could be vested in the City Council by an Order in Council under an amending Act of 1854 (17 & 18 Vict. c 87) to provide new burial grounds. The Council made no effort to obtain such an order.\(^6\) It appears to have relied on Arno’s Vale, the creators of new churches and chapels, and the suburban Burial Boards of St Philip and Jacob Without and St George, to provide such grounds. It would not be until 1885 that the Council took charge of the former’s Greenbank cemetery and 1898 when the latter’s Avonview burial ground became managed by the Council on the incorporation of St. George within the city boundaries.

All told, in the half century 1851–1901, the Council had done much to transform the sanitary condition of Bristol. In 1851 the rivers Frome and Avon, as they passed through the city, were little more than stinking, open sewers and the Floating Harbour was virtually a cesspool. By 1901, thanks to the Council’s efforts, sewage and stormwater were certainly collected far more efficiently, with much less of an assault on the senses and with less hazard to the public’s health. Nonetheless no truly satisfactory method of sewage disposal had been arrived at by 1901. Sewage was still being discharged into the river Avon, even if some way downstream from the city, and at low tide sewage left on the mudbanks of the river gave forth a truly pungent smell. It would not be until the nineteen sixties that a cure for this would be effected.

As for the water supply, no doubt, eventually the private Bristol Water Company made a substantial contribution to creating a cleaner and healthier Bristol. But, as has been seen, the Company was by no means always successful in providing a satisfactory supply and the Council was concerned enough to seriously consider taking on this function itself, as was commonplace in other cities. There were those who thought the Council should have persisted until it did so. For instance, in 1891 the Bristol Fabians published a tract entitled *Facts for Bristol* which maintained that the supply of this vital service should not have been left by the Council “in the hands of a monopolist company earning a dividend of eight and a half per cent”, particularly because the Council could borrow capital at three and a half per cent whereas private companies had to pay six per cent. Bristolians, it was alleged, thanks to the failure of the Council to buy out the Company, were paying more than was necessary for their water and failing to make profit from supplying it which elsewhere helped to keep down the rates.

\(^6\) B.T. 16 Sept 1854; The Bristol General Cemetary Company was established by Act of Parliament (I Vict. cap 131) in 1837. It was a Public Act whose preamble refers to the insufficiency of burial grounds in the old city and names all the shareholders of the Company.
Certainly the Council did embark on an increasingly vigorous effort to eliminate "nuisances". It applied disinfection on a large scale in its attempts to curb the ravages of disease. Likewise it was energetic in implementing the legislation designed to safeguard food supplies. In short it was by no means a lethargic sanitary authority.
CHAPTER FIVE
THE COUNCIL AND DISEASE

The Cholera epidemic of 1853–4

It was not at all clear who was responsible in Bristol for dealing with a serious, or potentially serious, outbreak of disease, as may be seen when cholera threatened in the autumn of 1853. The Council had adopted the Public Health Act 1848 in part because in 1849 the city had suffered a major cholera epidemic which had killed 445 Brístolians. No less than 44 inhabitants of three courts off Redcross street had perished. The report of the General Board of Health on the Epidemic Cholera of 1848 and 1849, summing up the national experience, commented that “preventive measures were very well carried out in Bristol” except for “the failure to provide a house of refuge in the early stages of the epidemic”. These measures, as the report observed, were instigated by the Corporation of the Poor with the co-operation of the parish authorities. The Council played no part and even after it had adopted the 1848 Act the initiative in combatting a threatened cholera epidemic was taken by the Corporation of the Poor. Indeed in 1852 the Local Board rejected a proposal to appoint an M.O.H. and simply directed its officers to continue with their sanitary work although when the threat was greater in the following year it was more active in that it appointed a sub-committee to co-operate with the Guardians of the Poor, and urged the Clifton and Bedminster Guardians to do the same, to co-ordinate precautionary measures. Nevertheless it was the Corporation of the Poor’s health committee or a sub

1 PP 1850 vol. xxi Report of the General Board of Health on the Epidemic of Cholera of 1848 and 1849 especially pp 125–6 of Appendix A. William Farr in The 17th Annual Report of the Registrar-General (1856) gives considerably higher figures of deaths from cholera in 1849 i.e. 591 in Bristol Union, 563 in Clifton Union and 281 in Bedminster Union. The last two figures would include deaths in rural districts outside Bristol’s boundaries.


3 Letterbook of the B.H. vol. i f 324–5 Clerk of the Board of Guardians of Clifton 16 Sept. 1853.
committee of the same which in the autumn of 1853 was meeting daily to watch for the spread of cholera and to organise house to house visiting which revealed, as its Governor reported, "a vast amount of filth and a vast amount of want of drainage". Once again, on the eve of what was to be Bristol's third visitation of cholera, an attempt was made to persuade the Local Board to appoint an M.O.H. as it could opt to do by the terms of the 1848 Act. William Green, a surgeon, impressed by Liverpool's Duncan and the city of London's Simon's activities as pioneering M.O.H.'s and having recently been elected an alderman led the attempt but was overwhelmingly defeated. The Local Board agreed with Councillor Naish's view that you did not need a medical man to tell you what were the causes of disease or the state of the city: the cure was to be found in sanitary engineering rather than medical science. The truth was that the Corporation of the Poor and the Poor Law Guardians of Clifton and Bedminster Unions had long co-operated with doctors as decisions about relief for individuals often depended on medical opinion while the Local Board of Health was apt to think that doctors were always looking for paid jobs to supplement their private practices. In the last resort the Corporation of the Poor could not embark on sanitary reform: it simply did not have the legal and financial powers to do so. That had to be the province of the Local Board. Ultimately its members would recognise that the assistance of a medical officer skilled in preventive medicine would be of value but not yet.

So it was with responsibility divided between the Poor Law authorities and the Council as Local Board that the cholera epidemic of 1854 was tackled, insofar as it was, for there is little evidence of the vigour which John Simon demonstrated in the City of London being applied in Bristol. Indeed there was almost a conspiracy of silence on the matter. On the very eve of the advent of the disease in August 1854 the Local Board's meeting lasted only fifteen minutes just time to set a rate; there was no reference to cholera in the many speeches at the annual dinner of the Corporation of the Poor and likewise at a major public meeting called to raise funds for the Infirmary or in the Directors' annual report on the work of the General Hospital. Also in the scanty reports in the press the emphasis was on the paucity of evidence of deaths from cholera and the good health of the city although there was some change of tone when the headmaster of the Grammar School was struck down by the disease. Also as reports of the ravages which cholera was making especially in south London reached Bristol the Local Board did employ gangs of men to cleanse

4 B.M. 3, 10 Dec. 1853.
foul drains and privies. In reality, if William Farr's figures are to be trusted, cholera in 1854 claimed 76 victims in the Bristol Union (i.e. the old city), 92 in Clifton Union and 4 in Bedminster Union. Clearly the city had got off lightly compared with the 1849 outbreak but it would not be convincing to ascribe this to the efforts of the Local Board of Health and Poor Law authorities and some improvement in the water supply. John Simon whose far more thorough and energetic measures had won him a reputation as the nation's foremost guardian of the public's health was careful to conclude that his success in the City of London was just as likely to be due to good fortune as to his own efforts. The cholera vibrio was most lethal when it entered the water supply, as appears to have happened in Bristol in 1849, but not to any extent in 1854 for reasons that probably will always remain obscure.

The Typhus epidemic of 1864–5

By the early sixties the Local Board was faced with a different crisis: a major outbreak of typhus which swept the poorer districts in the autumn and winter of 1864–5. It was estimated that there were about 1500 cases and about 150 fatalities although accurate statistics were not available. This was preceded by visitations of measles in 1861, scarlatina in 1863 and smallpox in Clifton in 1864 sufficiently serious to attract attention in the Annual Reports of the Registrar-General who in the late fifties had called attention to the falling number of deaths in Bristol during the winters and described the city along with Cheltenham and Birmingham as "comparatively healthy". Typhus is above all an environmental fever whose causative organism appears to be invariably louse-borne although the role of the louse in spreading the disease was not established until 1909. Insistence on personal and household cleanliness, disinfection by common antiseptics, if carried out thoroughly, and isolation of patients was usually sufficient to put an end to an epidemic as was recognised by the medical profession by the sixties. Also by this time the profession distinguished typhus from typhoid. There were, though, two problems in the city. In the poorest districts such as St Judes where the epidemic chiefly raged families were often crowded into single rooms, water supplies were exiguous

6 Proc. L.B.H. 8 Dec. 1854
9 D. Davies, The late epidemic of typhus in Bristol in Medical Times and Gazette Oct. 1867 p 427.
10 24th, 26th and 27th Annual Reports of the Registrar-General p xxi; p xl–xli; p xiii.
and cleanliness absent. In such conditions typhus was endemic and might easily become epidemic. If this happened isolating patients in their dwellings was near impossible and Bristol had no fever hospital to which they might be removed. As was usual among voluntary hospitals the Bristol Infirmary and the General Hospital did not admit fever cases. The poor law authorities were expected by central government to provide hospital accommodation and what would now be called G.P. services, while the Council as Local Board busied itself with sanitary matters and disinfection.

The typhus epidemic of 1864–5 exposed the deficiencies of the poor law authorities as guardians of Bristol's health and in so doing impelled the Council into significantly extending its role in this respect. The shortcomings of the poor law authorities were twofold. First there were three rather than one poor law authority covering the city with the result that no agreement was reached as to how to provide temporary isolation facilities for typhus victims. Many of these lived in St Judes which was in Clifton Union while the only hospital facility controlled by a poor law authority was St Peter's which was managed by the Corporation of the Poor of Bristol. The only vacant beds there were those vacated by the pauper 'lunatics' who had recently moved to the new asylum at Stapleton. But the Corporation did not see why it should accommodate fever victims from outside its jurisdiction while the Clifton Guardians pleaded that they had no facilities for caring for them. Secondly as the Local Board became aware, typhus was no respecter of administrative boundaries. The poor law authorities were supposed to relieve the destitute not those who were simply poor. Typhus certainly affected the destitute but it was also to be found among the poor whom the poor law authorities were not obliged to help. So what was to be done about isolating patients of this description? These deficiencies of the poor law authorities led first to philanthropic efforts led by Dr Edward Lane Fox junior to provide isolation

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12 Dr Hunter's study of the housing of the poorer population in towns published as an appendix to the 8th Report on the state of the public health by the Medical Officer of the Privy Council in PP 1866 xxxiii refers to Bristol "where the blankest poverty and domestic misery abound in the wealthiest town in Europe" and cites many examples of gross overcrowding, including a citation from the M.O.H.'s journal referring to as many as eleven inhabiting a single room. Hunter estimated that about half the labouring population lived in a room or rooms in large houses while the rest had small houses or cottages to themselves.


14 Letter book of B.H. vol. vii Clerk of the Board to Clerk to Clifton Guardians 22 Dec. 1864 “the Committee of the Local Board of Health understand that the Fever is very bad and is increasing amongst that class of Poor who do not receive Parish Relief and respecting whom your Board may perhaps not have any report from your Medical Officers".
accommodation and eventually to central government intervention in the form of a visitation by Dr Buchanan. He was the chief trouble shooter, as far as outbreaks of epidemic disease was concerned, for John Simon, Medical Officer of the Privy Council and principal adviser to the government on the nation’s public health.

Dr Buchanan’s visitation

As far as the Local Board was concerned Buchanan’s most important recommendation was that it should appoint “a competent medical practitioner” to inspect and advise them on the needs of the districts affected by typhus and to carry out all the other functions vested in a Medical Officer of Health by the Public Health Act of 1848. He also advised that the Board should employ inspectors to carry out house to house visitations of the fever districts “giving special attention to the ventilation, cleansing and disinfection of houses and to preventing their being overcrowded”. Also the Board should authorise its officers to take immediate action against every case of ‘nuisance’ and be ready to disinfect premises whenever landlords or occupants were slow to do so. Finally the Board should use its M.O.H. to publicise among the poor the need for good sanitation and the importance of isolating fever victims. In short Buchanan prescribed a plan of action which entailed appointing a new officer controlling an enhanced organization and taking on expanded responsibilities for fostering the health of Bristol.

Buchanan’s advice was no easy pill for the Local Board to swallow. Its Sanitary Committee had voted against appointing an M.O.H. in 1852 and in 1860 it had resolved that appointing one was “inimical to the working and interests of Local Boards of Health”. Certainly employing an M.O.H. was not widespread. Of 196 towns and districts which by 1855 had adopted the 1848 Act permitting such an appointment only 35 had done so and as late as 1866 many large towns such as Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield and Newcastle had yet to do so. Nonetheless driven by the pressure created by the typhus epidemic which it had evidently been slow to respond to, and the firm prodding by Dr Buchanan the Sanitary Committee reversed its previous policy and on 3 February 1865 decided to appoint Dr David Davies as Bristol’s first M.O.H. Clearly the Committee was only half convinced: he was designated a Medical Inspector, appointed on a six monthly renewable basis and only paid £75 for six months work.
Dr David Davies, the First M.O.H.

The Committee chose well. David Davies set to work at once and with great energy so much so that he and his office soon became a permanent part of the Local Board’s efforts to improve Bristol’s health. He was clearly trusted by the Sanitary Committee, allowed to work in his own way, and the city’s magistrates were usually disposed to take notice of prosecutions backed by his professional opinion. Indeed Davies’s appointment in 1865 marked as important a landmark in that endeavour as the founding of the Water Company in 1846 or the establishment of the Local Board itself in 1851 and its adoption of an ambitious sewerage scheme. In a paper delivered to a Sanitary Conference in Birmingham in 1875 Dr Davies set out his basic beliefs about promoting the health of a large town. There were, he contended, six requirements for success: “the complete, constant and speedy removal of human sewage and all excretions of the human body” by “water tight flushable sewers; an ample supply of good water; adequate isolation hospital accommodation; an M.O.H. and a staff of sanitary inspectors; a sufficiency of appliances for disinfection purposes and “what may well be most important of all, sufficient and proper housing for the working classes”. While Dr Davies was certainly proud of what he and the Sanitary Committee had achieved there was a strain of pessimism in his assessments. He despaired of ever seeing an improvement in the death rate among the children of the poor from infectious diseases. He deplored the “enormous birth rate of 50 per thousand among the poor in Bedminster and St Philip’s” and accused working people of caring more for their pets than their children. He had little hope of better health among the poor until “the lower order of the population is intellectually and morally raised”. And, finally, in his farewell to the Sanitary Committee on resignation due to advancing years, he summed up his career as that of

An infant crying in the night
An infant crying for the light
And with no language but a cry.20

The appointment of Dr D. S. Davies as M.O.H. in 1886

Councillor Henry Naish, Chairman of the Sanitary Committee, sought to fill the vacancy by proposing Dr Davies’s son should be appointed as his successor without more ado. He was overruled in the Council, sitting as the Urban Sanitary Authority, and the post was advertised in the local press. Dr Davies’s son was nonetheless appointed and

20 B.T. 15 Jan. 1875 for an extensive report of his paper; M.O.H. reports 1883 and 1885.
quite properly, it would seem, as his testimonials were impressive. He held the certificates of the Society of Apothecaries, and of the College of Surgeons; he was a Licentiate of the College of Physicians, a Bachelor of Medicine from London University and, what was becoming particularly relevant, he held the certificate of the examiners of the University of Cambridge in Sanitary Science of fitness for the office of M.O.H. The only question was should the Committee appoint without the sanction of the Local Government Board. If it did it could fix the salary as it chose but would have to bear the whole cost. Or if it sought LGB approval then central government would pay half an agreed salary and the authority would not be able to dismiss without LGB consent and the LGB would have the right to remove the officer if it so pleased. Not surprisingly the Committee opted to seek central government approval and cash help with the new M.O.H’s £750 salary. Dr D. S. Davies was still serving the city when the new century began and all the signs are that he was a most worthy successor of his father.

Within three days of his appointment in 1865 the first Dr Davies was reporting finding in houses in St Judes “the Corpses of 3 persons who had been dead a week still unburied” because, so he was told, “the regulations of your Board (i.e. Clifton Board of Guardians) limit the issue of Coffins to the Poor to one day in the week”. The Clerk to the Board of Health on his urging wrote immediately to the Clifton Guardians begging them to make coffins readily available for paupers and asking them to stretch a point and make them available “for those not absolutely in receipt of parish relief.” Davies tackled the typhus epidemic by insisting on the removal of every patient to the temporary fever hospital erected by voluntary effort, the fumigation of all infected rooms, the destruction of infested clothing, the application of chloride of lime to privies and sanitary measures such as the repair of defective drains. Taking Buchanan’s recommendations to heart he created an organization not only to deal with the typhus epidemic but any future outbreak of infectious or contagious disease wherever it might occur in the city. It was divided into four districts each with its own inspector and two assistants. Davies met all the inspectors daily to receive their reports, himself kept a daily journal which was then read every week at meetings of the Local Board’s Sanitary Committee. Only a year after Davies’s appointment Dr Buchanan,

21 P.S.A. 23 Mar. 1886 for his resignation letter; 18 May 1886 for Naish’s proposal and defeat 22:6; 29 June 1886 for D.S. Davies’s qualifications and appointment subject to LGB approval and 28 Sept. 1886 for that approval.
23 For descriptions of the activities of Davies and his inspectors see A.P. Stewart and E. Jenkins, The Medical and Legal Aspects of Sanitary Reform (1867) pp 42–3 and W. Budd, The Asiatic Cholera in Bristol in 1866 in B.M.J. 13 April 1867.
paying a return visit to Bristol in 1866, noted many improvements in the city's sanitary administration: a new vigour was apparent in proceedings to pave and drain the courts of the city and in proceeding against landlords who failed to provide properly constructed privies connected with the main sewers. But the most important evidence that Davies's efforts brought success came in 1866 when Bristol was again faced with cholera and typhus.

The Cholera epidemic of 1866

The first case of cholera, on April 23 1866, was that of a sailor just returned to the city. Davies relying on William Budd's preventative methods which involved liberal use of disinfectants acted at once and no further case occurred until late July and then in a different part of the city. All told Bristol suffered only 49 cases of which 29 were fatal. Much of Europe and many British cities suffered far more than Bristol. For instance over 400 died in Swansea from cholera in 1866. There can be little doubt that improved water supplies, better sanitation and the vigilance both of the Poor Law authorities and the Sanitary Committee helped to account for Bristol's spectacular success in greatly reducing the scourge of cholera in 1866 compared with its ravages in the city in 1849. The Sanitary Committee from the beginning of May onwards saw to it that the main sewers in all the lower levels of the city and in threatened districts were constantly disinfected while the Poor Law authorities set up depots of disinfectants to be distributed free. In addition Davies was assisted by 'The Sanitary Mission' begun in 1865 by Canon Norris's wife and aided by public subscription. Its object was to help poor folk with cleaning and health care under the instructions of 'the medical inspector'. At the height of the cholera epidemic some fourteen women sanitary missioners were at work forming the early beginnings of today's health visitors. Following the containment of cholera in the summer of 1866 for the rest of the century cases of the disease were few and far between and deaths from it rare. Thanks to the sanitary improvement brought about by the efforts of its City Council, the vigilance of its M.O.H., the better water supply provided by its Water Company and quite probably a measure of luck, Bristol was spared the truly horrific cholera epidemic experienced by Hamburg in the nineties.

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25 In addition to the sources referred to in notes 13 and 14 the cholera crisis of 1866 can be studied in Proc. L.B.H. 24, 26 Aug. 1866; The 29th Annual Report of the Registrar-General (1866) which records 24 deaths from cholera in Bedminster Union, 17 in Bristol Union and 10 in Clifton Union; Letter book of B.H. vol. ix and the local press.
26 For which see R.J. Evans, Death in Hamburg: society and politics in the cholera years, 1830–1910 (1987)
Typhus in 1866 and thereafter

A considerable degree of containment was repeated when typhus once more threatened to become epidemic in the early autumn of 1866. Indeed Davies was congratulated by The Times for "hunting down the disease with the keenness and perserverance of a bloodhound". Stamping out typhus proved a rather more long drawn out process than Dr Davies anticipated. Early removal or complete isolation of the patient together with thorough disinfection he believed was invariably effective. What he could not prevent was an individual introducing it into the city while he or his assistants remained unaware of this. From 1870 to 1872 the city was free of the disease but "it was then introduced by an Irish family in Pope's Parade in the Friars and about thirty cases and four or five deaths occurred." Then in 1873 the fever was again introduced "by an educated woman given to tramp and frequent low houses" About a dozen cases occurred in Bedminster but the only death was that of the woman's husband who sailed to New York where he died of it. In 1877, though, Davies confessed that he was surprised at the scale of a further epidemic when he recorded 174 cases and 36 fatalities in the quarter ending 29 September. Nonetheless deaths in 1877 were significantly fewer than in the epidemic of 1865–6 and thereafter until the end of the century the death rate from typhus and typhoid combined was always less than 25 per 100,000 of all ages both male and female. No doubt Davies's recipe for stamping out typhus played its part in rendering this disease a much less cause of concern by 1901 although improved piped water supplies in poor districts, some improvement in living standards, and greater personal cleanliness were not without effect.

Isolation facilities

Success in regard to cholera and typhus in 1866 still left a multitude of problems facing the Sanitary Committee and its 'medical inspector.' For example there was the vexed question of isolation hospital facilities. In 1865–6 temporary provision had been made by philanthropic effort. This consisted of a large wooden hut 88 ft x 40 ft and 25 ft to the roof and containing 35 beds. Dr Buchanan on his visit in 1865 had tried to settle the matter by declaring that in his opinion the most suitable accommodation for typhus cases were the vacant 'lunatic' wards in St Peter's hospital but if the Corporation of the Poor

27 The Times 18 Oct. 1869.
28 Davies's quarterly report for the third quarter of 1877 provides a very useful account of typhus outbreaks in the seventies. The only copy that has been located is in B.C.L. (B 5935)
remained adamantly in turning this down then alternatives would have to be found such as using the Poor Law school buildings of the Clifton Union. Neither of these suggestions was accepted and by 1867 the Local Board backed by Davies was writing to central Government’s Poor Law Board complaining that infectious diseases were “kept alive and propagated in certain of the poorer parts of the District of the Local Board which lie within the Clifton Union by reason of there being no proper place provided by the Guardians . . . to which paupers suffering from such diseases may be removed”. Three times the Local Board pressed the central authority to use its powers to make the Clifton Guardians act but without result and it appears to have received no reply when it took up the matter directly with Clifton. 29

Eventually in 1871 both the Clifton and Bedminster Guardians maintained that they had sufficient accommodation to cater for all infectious diseases among their paupers but as the Sanitary Committee well realised this did not mean that there was any provision for cases, particularly of smallpox, “amongst those persons who are not paupers but who might desire to be removed to a hospital or the inconvenience of whose homes might render their removal necessary to prevent the spread of the disease”, to quote their minutes. The Committee was particularly concerned about smallpox which was raging throughout the kingdom in the worst epidemic of the century at this time though not as yet in Bristol.

Smallpox

These considerations led to the Board of Health to establish in 1871 a wooden hospital for smallpox patients in one of its yards in St Philips and arranging medical attention for them. This was its first venture into providing institutional care for the sick but it was soon followed in 1872 by the erection of a second wooden building to house twenty patients and designed to cater for sufferers from fever and other infectious diseases. 30 The smallpox hospital was certainly busy in 1872 when the numbers admitted were 162 most of whom were children and young adults. The admissions book shows that 27 of these died, most not having been vaccinated. 1872 was truly a bad year for smallpox. Right down to 1888 from its opening in the autumn of 1871 564 patients were admitted so that a third of these came in in the single year 1872. 31 In the three registration districts of Bristol, Clifton and

31 B.R.O. 38224/1 Admissions Register 1871–1888. The bulk of the patients were children, adolescents and young adults.
Bedminister which, admittedly, included about one third more population than the city itself, the years of serious mortality from smallpox between 1856 and 1889 were 1858 with 214 deaths and 1864 with 335 while in 1872 there were 209 just in the municipal borough. Otherwise in only one year in these three decades did deaths from smallpox number over 50. But in regard to smallpox the Local Board had played no part before 1871, The Poor Law Guardians were responsible for organizing vaccination. Their record was mixed according to Dr Sanders who reported on the matter to the Medical Officer for the Privy Council in 1864. “Vaccination, he said, was better performed in Bristol than in any large town that I have had occasion to visit”. This he attributed to vaccinators being well trained. But he was sharply critical of the Corporation of the Poor for adding in 1859 its medical officers to the existing staff of vaccinators, increasing the number of stations from five to nine and introducing domiciliary vaccination. This had “seriously injured the public vaccination of Bristol” because, contrary to expectation, it had led to fewer rather than more vaccinations while domiciliary vaccination was “indefensible” as it always led to poor practice. By 1864 the Poor Law authorities were taking steps to correct these errors but it seems clear that with the coming of Dr Davies and his industrious pursuit of disease the war against smallpox, the only epidemic disease for which there was an effective antidote at this time, was increasingly waged by the Local Board of Health and its successor in 1872, the Urban Sanitary Authority which was simply the City Council in another guise. That war seemed to be virtually won in the late seventies and early eighties when from 1877 to 1884 there was but one death from smallpox in the city. The key to stamping out the disease lay in vaccination—and revaccination—isolation of patients and, crucially, the M.O.H. getting to know of or being notified of all cases so action could be taken. Notification was developed by Davies and his son, who was his successor as M.O.H., of any case of smallpox and given statutory authority by the 1889 Notification Act which imposed on heads of families, nearest relative, occupier of a house or attending doctor, the duty of notifying the M.O.H., of any case of smallpox (and other diseases) on pain of a fine.

Nonetheless outbreaks of smallpox continued to occur though on a much smaller scale than those of 1856, 1864 and 1872. In 1887–8 and again in 1893–4 there were about 360 cases and 30 deaths. No doubt it was this which persuaded the Sanitary Committee in 1895 to establish a new Smallpox Hospital on a 13 acre site at Novers Hill outside the city. It was designed to provide 78 beds in addition to the twenty

32 M.O.H. Report 1897 provides an overall picture
33 PP 1864 vol. xxviii 6th Report of the Medical officer of the Privy Council Appendix pp 189, 201–3, 208, 212.
or so in the original wooden building in St Philip's.\textsuperscript{34} As Dr Davies observed if smallpox had raged as it had done in earlier times more than a thousand beds would have been needed to cater for isolating sufferers whereas about a hundred was adequate for catering for the minor epidemics of the nineties. Nonetheless it was difficult to stamp out the disease altogether. Tramps and sailors were apt to bring it into the city and they were not always easy to track down. Then, in 1896, Gloucester was clearly identified as a focus of infection and 26 out of 36 cases of smallpox in Bristol were traceable to this source either through tramps, servants or workmen who had come from Gloucester or worked there. In Gloucester vaccination had been badly neglected: at least a quarter of the population was unvaccinated and at least 1580 suffered from the disease. Thanks to extreme vigilance by the M.O.H. and his assistants there was no epidemic in Bristol: for example, over three thousand visits were paid to the city's common lodging houses to enforce precautions until the Gloucester outbreak was brought under control by a mass vaccination of upwards of 36,000 persons.\textsuperscript{35}

\textit{Typhoid}

Considerable headway, too, had been made in eradicating typhoid. Its incidence cannot be gauged before 1876 as in Bristol its victims were lumped together with those from typhus but Dr Davies declared that the epidemic he faced in 1878 produced more sufferers from typhoid than he had experienced since his appointment in 1865. He, along with William Budd, his friend, and Bristol's best known physician of the time, believed that typhoid had a specific cause, a view which was vindicated by the discovery of the bacillus in 1880. The only source of the elusive bacillus is an infected person and the three means of transmission are infected water or food, often milk, or by carrier. Dr Davies's investigation and attack upon the outbreak of typhoid in Bristol in 1878 illustrated these characteristics. On 2 August he reported to the Sanitary Committee that there was an extensive outbreak in two widely separated places, Napier Street off Clyde Rd. in Redland and in Grafton and Duffet Streets in St Philips. Davies had visited all patients and had the Inspector of Nuisances examine all the houses involved. It was clear that the outbreak was not due to defective drains nor was there any decaying animal or vegetable material in the vicinity to give credence to believers in the miasmatic or pyrogenic theory of the origin of disease. Also all the houses relied on

\textsuperscript{34}S.C.M. 13 Oct. 1891 where it is reported that the site owned by Sir Greville Smyth would cost £2,650. A loan of £16,100 had to be obtained before construction could begin so that it was not until 1895 that the work was completed (see M.O.H. \textit{Report}, 1895)

\textsuperscript{35}M.O.H. \textit{Report} 1896.
piped Company’s water “which is above suspicion” to quote the M.O.H. Also in Redland there was no social intercourse between the families with sufferers. So what had caused the outbreak? There had to be a common cause. Davies was well aware that his colleagues in other parts of the country had found infected milk to be the culprit. Indeed he thought milk supplies to large towns were much more in need of governmental and legislative supervision than their bread supply which was regulated. Eventually the Redland outbreak, which resulted in 131 cases and 12 deaths, was traced to infected milk supplied to retailers by a Henleaze farmer, the infection having come from a young woman convalescing from typhoid at the farm and using a privy next to a well pump at which the farmer and his son washed their hands when milking their cows, the infection having seeped from the privy into the well. The Sanitary Committee was so impressed by their officer’s elegant demonstration of cause and effect and his vigour in putting drains on “full disinfection with sulphate of iron and carbolic acid” that they ordered his report to be printed and circulated widely.  

The typhoid cases in St Philips attracted much less publicity partly, no doubt, because they were less numerous than those in Redland but also because the cause was more difficult to demonstrate. Patients had derived their milk supplies from several small sources To one of these Davies personally put a stop when he found “a house in St Philips . . . with two patients ill of fever and a cow in the yard from which milk was supplied to the neighbours”. In Bristol’s poorer districts faulty or primitive domestic plumbing and sanitary facilities, inadequate water supplies, the ease with which food, especially milk could become contaminated and poor personal hygiene ensured that typhoid would continue to take its toll of lives although to a diminishing extent. Throughout the eighties mortality from this cause varied between a third and a half of what had been the case in the late seventies.

Nevertheless cases continued to occur in the nineties. When typhoid became a notifiable disease by the 1889 Act, first applied in Bristol in 1890, 122 cases were reported 18 of whom were traceable to visitors to the city both from abroad and various parts of the U.K. This remained more or less the annual level until 1897 when notifiable cases shot up to 350. Up until then, in the ten years 1887–1896, the death-rate per 100,000 living from fever in the Bristol and Clifton registration districts was always considerably below the rates for both England and the thirty three largest towns in the country. The sudden

36 David Davies, Report on a Localised Outbreak of Typhoid Fever in Bristol (Bristol 1879).
37 B.T. 2 Aug 1878 report by Davies to the Sanitary Committee.
38 For a valuable survey of the history of typhoid outbreaks see A. Hardy The Epidemic Streets chap. 6.
escalation of cases in 1897 was entirely due to a milk-borne outbreak which affected Clifton alone. Once more the infected milk came from one farm outside the city boundaries—in Long Ashton parish—but it found its way on to three milkman’s rounds. Dr Davies’s son, the current M.O.H., by an elaborate analysis, convincingly demonstrated that virtually all the cases were traceable to drinking unboiled infected milk. Special attention was paid to cases at Clifton College and other schools. The remedy was simple: the milk supply was stopped, the city bought it and destroyed it and the public was urged to boil all milk and cream before use. A dramatic fall in cases occurred. Discovering the source of the pollution at the farm brought into play the City Analyst and considerable detective work while for the medical world the M.O.H. emphasised that for the first time he had used the Widal reaction on a large scale to establish an early diagnosis of typhoid. This was important because so indeterminate were the early stages of the disease that nearly all cases were not notified till the second week or later. If the cause of an outbreak was to be tackled speedily accurate early diagnoses was essential otherwise, the M.O.H. maintained, "irreparable damage to the business of Clifton and the City might have ensued". Comparing father and son’s dealings with the typhoid outbreaks of 1878 and 1897 shows that each displayed a similar determination to root out their causes and to act swiftly and vigorously to contain them. Not surprisingly the son was able to deploy a more sophisticated science although both showed themselves to be well up with the best current practice of their colleagues in other parts of the country.

By 1901 it could reasonably be claimed that cholera, typhus, typhoid and smallpox, while not eradicated, had been very largely tackled with success thanks in good measure to the efforts of the City Council and its officers, particularly the M.O.H., aided possibly by good fortune. After all as Dr Davies found when attending a conference in Germany in 1867 on what to do about controlling cholera, the authorities in Leipzig had applied exactly the same remedies as in Bristol in 1866 but cholera had taken a heavy toll of life nonetheless. Also, no doubt, benevolent developments in the latter half of the nineteenth century, such as gradually rising living standards and improved diets, helped to reduce mortality from these diseases.

Mortality Rates

As far as general mortality rates from all diseases were concerned the Local Board of Health and its successor was able to record a substantial fall between 1850 and 1901 although no such fall occurred in the

39 M.O.H. Report 1897 for D.S. Davies’s detailed account.
infant mortality rate. This meant that the health of many Bristolians, babies excepted, was gradually improving in the latter half of the nineteenth century. For ascertaining general and infant mortality rates the Registrar-General’s annual reports down to 1875 and those of the M.O.H. from 1876 to 1897, when major extension of boundaries redefined Bristol, provide the data. The Registrar-General’s reports give total deaths from all causes and deaths of those of one and under in any given year as well as total births and population counts for each year in the ten registration sub-districts making up the municipality of Bristol. From this data general and infant mortality rates can be calculated. The M.O.H.’s reports use the same data and provide the calculated rates. The table below sets these out.

To put precise figures on mortality rates for particular diseases such as T.B., scarlet fever, measles, whooping cough or diphtheria which were of substantial importance in determining the general or infant mortality rates recorded above is far from easy. It was not until 1856 that the Registrar-General published figures of “deaths from several causes” and then these related to whole Poor Law Unions and were not broken down into figures for registration sub-districts within those Unions. The first record of these appeared in the Report of the Medical Officer of Health on the Sanitary Condition of the City and County of Bristol with a Tabular Return of Mortality during the Quarter ending October 2nd, 1875. The trigger which precipitated this was the Registration of Births and Deaths Act of 1874 (37 & 38 Vict. c 88) whose 28th clause required registrars when requested by Sanitary Authorities to return “particulars registered by him concerning any death as may be specified in the requisition of the Sanitary Authority”. On 9 February 1875 the City Council in its capacity as an Urban Sanitary Authority invoked the statute declaring that the M.O.H. should have returns of all deaths from smallpox, diphtheria, cholera, fever, scarlet fever, measles, whooping cough and phthisis (pulmonary tuberculosis) and that it would supply registrars with suitable forms as suggested in the statute. So from 1875 onwards details of mortality from a range of diseases became available for the ten sub-registration districts which made up the municipality. Indeed the M.O.H. was supplied with figures for a wider spread of diseases than those first specified.

But before 1875 the only way of capturing mortality statistics for a variety of diseases for the whole population of the municipality was to consult the returns of the Registrar-General for all three Poor Law

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41 The sub-districts were St Mary Redcliff, Castle Precincts, St Paul, St James, St Augustine, Bedminster, Clifton, Ashley, St Philip and Westbury. The Registrar-General credited Bristol with the deaths in the extra-municipal institutions of the Bristol workhouse at Stapleton, the Clifton Union workhouse at Eastville and the Bristol Lunatic Asylum at Stapleton.

42 P.S.A. 9 Feb. 1875.
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Unions of Clifton, Bedminster and Bristol. By the Civil Registration Act of 1836 Unions were made the districts for registering births, marriages and deaths and, by a useful provision of the Act, recording the cause of death. Unhappily when the new Unions were established, as a result of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, the City of Bristol, whose boundaries had been extended in 1835 by adding its suburbs to
the old city, was not made a single Union. That would only come about in 1898. Until then the Poor Law Unions and hence the registration machinery were not co-terminous with the city boundaries. The old city as it was before the the addition of the suburbs in 1835 was catered for by the Corporation of the Poor for administering poor relief and for registration purposes was treated just as any other Poor Law Union. Clifton Union included the insalubrious and heavily populated suburb of St Philip and Jacob Without as well as healthier Clifton as well as a string of rural Gloucestershire parishes. Bedminster included that part of Bedminster parish within the city which was heavily populated as well as a cluster of rural Somerset parishes. At mid-century about half the population of Clifton and Bedminster Unions lived within Bristol's municipal boundaries so that any consideration of the city's mortality from particular diseases needed to take into account their records. But totalling the mortality returns of all three Unions meant that statistics for about a quarter more population than the city contained were captured and the excess population was entirely rural and hence might well have a different experience of disease from that of city dwellers. In fact when it is possible for the years after 1875 to graph the figures for deaths from a number of destructive diseases for the city on its own and compare these with those for the three Unions the discrepancy turns out to be small. In short, figures for the three Unions available from 1856 to 1875 concerning mortality from a range of diseases do provide a fair guide to such mortality within the smaller population of the city itself.

So what do the mortality statistics tell us about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the efforts of the City Council's Sanitary Committee to improve the health of Bristol? Those such as Thomas McKeown who claimed that the decline in general mortality rates was basically the result of a gradual rise in standards of living leading especially to improved diet and increased capacity to withstand disease have regarded the work of sanitarians and doctors as having had a minor impact. In recent years this view has been vigorously challenged and the importance of locally administered preventive health measures emphasised. Some light can be thrown upon this controversy by examining the mortality records of diseases with a major impact upon the general mortality rate. Of these pulmonary tuberculosis ranked very high.

43 For a concise description of the coming of the new Poor Law in Bristol see D. Large, Bristol and the new Poor Law (Bristol 1996)
Tuberculosis

Sir John Simon believed that this "vastly fatal disease" probably caused "at least an eighth part of the entire mortality of England and a modern commentator has estimated that in the nineteenth century as a whole some four million perished from its ravages. As this suggests there was no effective treatment for T. B. Its causative bacillus was not identified until 1882 and it would not be until the mid-twentieth century that streptomycin would rout it. This being so it is not surprising that the Sanitary Committee and the M.O.H. rarely considered a disease about which they long felt helpless and which was widely held to be hereditary.\(^45\) Nevertheless by the 1890s, as the M.O.H. put it, "the conviction is steadily growing that phthisis may be to a large extent controlled by well considered precautionary measures"\(^46\). One reason for this optimism was the belief that the death rate from pulmonary T.B. was declining.

This belief rested on the figures collected through the registration system and tabulated below

While the registration figures show an unmistakeable decline in the death rate from the late seventies onwards some caution is in order. There is reason to believe that deaths from pulmonary tuberculosis were on occasion reported as arising from other respiratory diseases and there were those, including the Registrar-General himself in 1881, who would only accept that the death rate from phthisis was declining when the sum of this rate and that for other respiratory diseases showed a progressive decline. It may be noted that the M.O.H. produced figures for 1887–1891 for deaths in Bristol from phthisis and bronchitis, the most lethal respiratory disease, whose sum did not show a progressive decline.\(^47\) This must cast some doubt as to the timing and extent of the decline in mortality from pulmonary tuberculosis.

As to the causes of such decline, accepting that it did occur in line with national experience and that of London, it seems probable that the efforts of the Sanitary Committee and its officers did have some effect. Given the inability of medical intervention to reduce the impact of T.B. the primary role in so doing must lie broadly with environmental factors. Some of these, such as the migration overseas of high risk young adults, or improved nutrition stemming from a gradual increase in living standards, which helped patients to resist the disease more

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\(^{46}\) M.O.H. Report 1891 p 79.

### Mortality from pulmonary tuberculosis 1856–1897

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Annual Mortality per 10,000 for the city and county of Bristol</th>
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effectively, were beyond the power of the City Council to influence. But it is probable that the ever increasing pressure of its officers to promote the cleaning, maintenance, ventilation and sanitation of dwelling houses when combined with the Water Company's making
constant water supplies more readily available to working-class areas
did have some impact on tuberculosis mortality. Furthermore the
heavy emphasis on isolating patients suffering from epidemic diseases
such as typhus, smallpox, cholera and typhoid coupled with the con-
siderable success in reducing their impact, already referred to, may
well have helped reduce the death rate from T.B. Those saved from
an attack of typhus, for instance, were more likely to put up resistance
to the T.B. bacillus than those who had suffered such an attack yet
survived it. Likewise if the M.O.H. was preaching isolation for “fever”
patients may be this was good for T.B. sufferers since it was a common
observation that those who cared for them so often contracted the
disease.

Scarlet Fever

In the fifties, sixties and seventies on occasion deaths from scarlet fever
outstripped even those from pulmonary tuberculosis. Every five to
seven years an epidemic would carry off eight or nine hundred Bristoli-
ans as was the case in 1858–9, 1863, 1870 and 1875–6. Commenting
on the 1870 epidemic the Registrar-General suggested that the heavy
mortality which ensued “implied some essential defects in the dwell-
ings, sewage, water supply or other hygienic conditions” which he was
sure that Bristol’s “able health officer” would discover and remedy.48
This was not the case as the 1875–6 severe outbreak showed. In 1877
Dr Davies was reduced to reporting to the Sanitary Committee that
scarlet fever was “the most intractable of the zymotics” and two years
later he called it the “bete noir of Medical Officers of Health”.49 There
was no known antidote, patients were highly infectious and most com-
monly were young children whom parents were highly reluctant to
have admitted to a hospital bed, if such existed. Furthermore the
causative bacterium was potent and was not amenable to the sanitary
measures pursued by the Sanitary Committee.

Nonetheless relief was at hand. The death rate from the 1880 and
1887 scarlet fever epidemics was a quarter of those of the sixties and
seventies and in the nineties mortality from the disease dropped away
sharply. For the ten years 1888 to 1897 inclusive the yearly number of
deaths averaged 34.50 The major cause, it is generally agreed, was a
decline in the potency of the bacterium due to the introduction of a
new strain from France. But again the very welcome decline in deaths

50 Figures for scarlet fever deaths from 1856 up to and including 1875 are from the
Registrar-General’s reports on the mortality in the three Poor Law Unions and there-
after from the M.O.H. ’s annual reports.
from scarlet fever was probably assisted to some degree by the Sanitary Committee and the M.O.H. although it was not until Dr Davies was succeeded by his son in 1886 that a vigorous attempt was made to reduce the death toll from scarlet fever. The principal aim was to limit the spread of the disease by isolating those who contracted it and thoroughly disinfecting their clothing and living quarters. Given the limited house room for the majority of the population isolating a patient was impossible without removal to a hospital bed but as the M.O.H. forcibly pointed out in 1888 the provision of beds for sufferers from infectious diseases was wholly inadequate. He calculated that there were 290 available beds but 246 of them were in the hands of the Poor Law Guardians and reserved for paupers. The Sanitary Authority controlled a mere 44 most of which were needed for smallpox patients. For non paupers, the Artizan and the Dispensary classes, to quote the M.O.H., all that was available for scarlet fever patients was some beds in the tiny Avonmouth Port Hospital. Dr D. S. Davies continually harped on the theme that if there was to be compulsory notification of infectious diseases there would have to be a substantial increase in hospital beds. By November 1889 the Authority’s Hospitals Sub-Committee had agreed that 100 additional beds would be needed and the buildings to house them should be capable of further extension. The 1889 Notification Act which made the disease notifiable made patients better known to the M.O.H.’s department and indicated more precisely how many beds would be needed if isolation was to become a reality rather than an aspiration.

Throughout the nineties increasing success was recorded both in creating hospital facilities and persuading patients and their families to take advantage of them. When an epidemic of scarlet fever occurred in 1896 1,352 cases were notified and the M.O.H. reported that 515 or 37% had been isolated. He justified hospital admission by observing that the case mortality in hospital was 3.6% while for patients at home it was 5%. Providing more beds was a rather slow and sometimes makeshift process for most of the decade. The initial idea in 1892 was to provide the whole of the isolation accommodation for the city on the Novers Hill site but this proved impossible as central government adopted a new policy of refusing sanction for loans for hospitals treating both smallpox and other infectious diseases. Consequently a second hospital on another site would be needed. For this purpose a twenty acre site was acquired at Ham Green outside the city boundary on the western bank of the Avon close to Pill. In the meantime isolation for scarlet fever and other fever cases was provided in temporary accommodation which included the Port Hospital and the Ship

51 M.O.H. Report 1888.
52 ibid 1889 p 6.
Hospital at Avonmouth but was chiefly provided by the decision of the Authority in 1893 to make use of Clift House for this purpose. This had been bought by the Council in 1876 together with seven acres of land as a site for a projected works for deodorising sewage. The proposal aroused such opposition that it had to be abandoned leaving this large property without profitable use until the Sanitary Authority turned it into an isolation facility.

The building of the Novers Hill Smallpox Hospital and the Ham Green Hospital was something of a rushed job as beds were urgently required to cope with the smallpox epidemic of 1893-4 so instead of going through normal tendering procedure the Sanitary Committee directed the City Engineer to carry out the works as quickly as possible with labour directly employed by the Committee. As might be expected the cost of the buildings overran the estimates of £50,503 made in 1892 by £10,514 partly because extra allowances over and above ordinary wages had to be made to workmen to compensate them for having to work at a considerable distance from the city. Ham Green, it was decided, was to be the principal hospital and Novers Hill was scaled down in size from the original proposal. Ham Green was eventually opened on 12 July 1899 so that at last Bristol was provided with more ample facilities for coping with patients with infectious diseases requiring isolation. Designed by Mr. Yabbicom, the City Engineer and Dr. D. S. Davies, an article in the BMJ described it as being “fully up to the most modern ideas of what hospitals should be, besides being well built and not unhandsome in appearance”.

By the end of the century the City Council in its capacity as Sanitary Authority had reason to be pleased with the progress made in combating scarlet fever but not with its record as far as infant mortality was concerned. Indeed the mortality rate for babies up to the age of one was only slightly lower in the 1890s than it had been in the 1860s. The M.O.H. was well aware of the part played by the deaths of young children in inflating the general mortality rate: in 1877 he observed that no less than 46.1% of the total mortality in that year was of children under the age of five with the chief causes of death being whooping cough, measles and diarrhoea. No doubt he was right in believing that most adults regarded these afflictions as unavoidable evils of early life about which little could be done. But as Dr Hugh

54 P.C. 11 April 1893 shows the Council approving a Sanitary Committee proposal to buy a Hulk and fit her up as a Hospital Ship at a cost not to exceed £1000. Eventually a tender of £550 was accepted to fit out the “Margarida”.

55 Even after Ham Green was opened Clift House went on being used as a fever hospital until 1906 and was reopened as a temporary hospital in 1914 for T.B. patients. , see E. T. Morgan, Clift House and its history in Bristol Observer 16 May 1914.

56 From 1860-1869 the infantile mortality rate ranged from 135 to 161 per thousand births and from 1890- to 1897 from 139 to 149 per thousand births.

Jones observed in an authoritative study of infant mortality “the danger of measles has been very greatly underrated” and whooping cough was “the most fatal of all zymotic diseases except diarrhoea and little had yet been done to grapple seriously with the disease”. Dr Davies believed that the reason for this was because “it selects its victims for a fatal termination chiefly from the neglected children of the poor” He passed the same comment on measles adding that like whooping cough “sanitary officers had no practical control over its spread or its fatality” there being no hospital for it and no practical compulsory powers for the isolation of children. Immunization was, of course, a long way in the future and unlike scarlet fever there was no beneficial change in the causative organisms. Hence it is not surprising to find that the death rates from both diseases remained more or less stable over the half century with peaks and troughs every other year for measles and every two years for whooping cough. In short the Sanitary Committee and its officers had not been able to make an impact on these two important causes of infant deaths.

Almost at the end of his twenty one years in office Dr Davies believed that this was equally the case with infantile diarrhoea. In his report in 1884 with its fine warm summer he commented sadly “to know that a higher temperature . . . during the summer months, means death to hundreds of the most feeble and helpless among us, namely infants under one year old, is not a pleasing reflection for those who have made Sanitary Science their chief study. That the onset of warm summer weather is a sure harbinger of infantile diarrhoea and a greatly increased mortality, shows that we have yet much to learn as to the prevention of disease”. Nonetheless Dr Davies had opinions as to what factors in addition to the weather, which his department monitored in detail throughout the year, encouraged diarrhoea. He made critical comment on the high birth rates in working class districts. He deplored the growth of female employment in factories which he believed led to their infants being reliant on artificial feeding rather than breast nourishment, a practice which analysis showed was associated with infant fatalities. In short he was inclined to attribute these to the shortcomings of working class mothers. He was far from being alone in so doing.

60 ibid 1884.
61 ibid Quarterly Reports Sept. 1884 and 1885 and p 36 of the 1886 Report provide details of infant deaths. In the 1886 survey only one of the 58 deaths was of a breast fed baby.
Infantile Mortality rates in the districts.

In reality it seems clear that infantile mortality rates were related to environmental and social conditions. Dr Davies's son and successor published a revealing table in his first full report for the year in 1887 setting out the rates per thousand births for the registration sub-districts: three of these, St James, St Philip's and Bedminster had rates above the city average of 150 in that year. Indeed St James had a rate of 280 which was exactly four times that of Westbury, the lowest in the city. St James was a small densely populated central city district with, in 1886, 7,773 people crammed on its 68 acres, containing some notoriously ill conditioned streets and a largely working class population whereas Westbury was described by Dr Davies in 1884 as "inhabited by well-to-do residents, with but few poor people or of the working classes as permanent residents" and the lowest population density of any district in the city. Differences in infant mortality rates persisted with the more prosperous and less densely populated parts of the city such as Clifton having substantially lower rates than inner city and working class districts. For instance in 1897 Clifton’s rate was 112 per thousand births while Castle Precincts was 174 and St Philips 166. The limited evidence that exists as to the circumstances of the parents of babies succumbing to diarrhoea in the third quarter of the year, notably the M.O.H.’s enquiry in 1884, shows that one in five out of 69 cases were labourers and the follow up in 1885 showed one in six parents in 47 cases were of this description. This together with a fair scattering of single parents of illegitimate infants, parents with precarious occupations such as street hawker or babies whose father was away at sea or in the services, suggests that the offspring of the poorest and most disadvantaged were most at risk. Ill nourished mothers, probably having low weight babies, living in very cramped conditions in poorly maintained housing, and having little knowledge of child care, were sure to find combatting infectious disease or diarhoea a real struggle. Also however much the Sanitary Authority might seek to spread the sanitary gospel and see that it was observed no doubt Dr Hugh Jones, the acknowledged expert in the 1890s, was right in saying that "most fatal cases (but not all) of infants suffering

from diarrhoea are traceable to contamination of the food supply". The organisms which caused the condition were so often carried by flies flourishing in summer warmth buzzing around ill conditioned lavatories and settling on food, especially milk, kept in conditions in no way excluding the flies. As the way the infant mortality rate nationally shot up in the exceptionally hot summer of 1911 after its considerable fall in the Edwardian period shows, this was a danger to babies which had yet to be conquered.

But all said and done although the City Council through the efforts of its Sanitary Committee and its officers was unable to reduce the infant mortality rate in the latter half of the nineteenth century in any significant degree that did not mean that their efforts had no effect. Indeed it must be recalled that among the 28 large towns of England whom the Registrar-General reported on as far as their infant mortality was concerned Bristol frequently ranked in the first three or four in having the lowest rates. No doubt Bristol had advantages over cities such as Glasgow and Liverpool where housing was often of more stories than in low rise Bristol: it meant that in terms of how many persons there were per lavatory the city had the edge and the task of keeping facilities hygienic was that much easier. Nonetheless to do so was an unending battle and was of importance in preventing infant mortality soaring as it had done at mid-century. Bringing about its lasting decline would be a twentieth century achievement.

As for the general mortality rate the Sanitary Committee and its officers had reason for satisfaction. By the end of the century it was significantly lower than at mid-century when it was so high as to render Bristol the third most unhealthy among provincial towns after notorious Liverpool and Manchester. By the late sixties it was being held up as an example to other towns for having attended to its sanitary problems and brought its death rate down and thereafter until the end of the century it frequently occupied either the first place as in 1883, or among the first half dozen in the Registrar-General's league table of death rates in the 28 large towns of England. It would be misleading to attribute this success entirely to the efforts of the City Council and its officers. There were four ways in which a decline in mortality of this kind could occur. Particular diseases could decline in virulence independently of human action as very probably happened

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63 Hugh R. Jones, op.cit.
64 The situation was not helped by the Water Company's practice of charging extra for connecting a lavatory to the water supply. The result was to encourage the perpetuation of flushing lavatories by carrying pails of water to them, a less hygienic method than the flushing w.c.
65 Dr Davies was a great believer in small houses rather than blocks of flats or multi-story houses as being healthier by avoiding what he called "community of privies". See his evidence to the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes in PP 1884-5 vol. xxx esp. Qs. 6916-6923.
with scarlet fever. Medical science could reduce morbidity and mortality although both McKeown and his critics agree that this played little or no part at this time. Living standards, diet and housing conditions could improve and almost certainly did so but not dramatically; and finally public health could be improved by governmental action, either central or local. Certainly general legislation and the prodding of central government bodies played some part. The City Council needed the powers made available to it by major Acts of parliament such as the great consolidating Public Health Act of 1875 and, for example, Sir John Simon, the nearest the age had to the present day Chief Medical Officer of the country, by sending his emissary Dr Buchanan to Bristol to investigate its typhus epidemic certainly stimulated local action. But it was local action which mattered a great deal as may be seen, in conclusion, by examining what happened when the city was confronted by the increasing anxiety in the nineties over the loss of life from diptheria and the relatively novel experience of a prolonged epidemic of "Russian flu".

Four waves of severe influenza known as Russian flu affected the United Kingdom from 1889–1894. In his report in 1890 the M.O.H. noted that while only 48 deaths had been directly attributed to the flu there had been a very marked increase in the deaths from lung, brain and heart disease during the weeks of the epidemic. The huge number of sufferers stimulated the Local Government Board in the spring of 1890 to investigate the behaviour of the disease by sending a questionnaire to local authorities. The response in Bristol to this demonstrated the evolving role of the M.O.H. He decided to reply by seeking answers to the Board’s questions from the city’s doctors and making himself responsible for collating them and returning a report to the Board thus making himself the spokesman of medical opinion in Bristol. 48 doctors responded who estimated that there had been 8,214 cases in the first three months of 1890 and provided extensive and not infrequently conflicting evidence as to the nature of the epidemic. Elaborate statistics were provided for its impact on Clifton College. As Dr D. S. Davies admitted to the Sanitary Committee the flu inquiry added nothing to knowledge: flu was highly infectious, spread by contagion from one human being to another and there was no known means of prevention. It was all very depressing and, it has been suggested, played no mean part in creating the fin de siecle syndrome of the nineties.66

The experience of combatting diptheria was more positive. Deaths from the disease from 1870 to 1884 were not more than twenty in any

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one year and were often in single figures but thereafter the annual death rate per thousand Bristolians was on a upward trend down to 1897, except for the years 1889–1891, although the city’s rate was considerably below the average of that of the Registrar-General’s thirty three great towns. Also morbidity was increasing as the figures for notifications showed. However advances were being made in understanding the disease. The causative bacillus was isolated in 1883–4, an antitoxin discovered in 1890 and a year later the first human received it and by 1892 an anti-diphtheria serum was on the market. Bristol’s M.O.H. was clearly apprized of all this and unlike some of his colleagues was prepared to enlist the support of bacteriology in the fight against a disease whose behaviour his father in 1883–4 had confessed himself to be unable to understand. As Dr D.S. Davies explained in an article in the journal Public Health he had been inspired by what he had heard at a meeting of the BMA in 1894 of methods being used in New York and “with the aid of Dr Walter Dowson, then acting as Assistant Medical Officer, and Dr Heaven, had succeeded in establishing a small laboratory, furnished by the Sanitary Committee, and early in 1895 commenced systematic work, as a tentative step, for diphtheria only”. Two years later the laboratory was also testing for typhoid by the Widal method and examinations for the two diseases had become “almost as much a matter of routine as notification”. Dr Davies believed that “Bristol was the first, or one of the first places in England, to start this most useful work” and he became something of a missionary in urging his fellow M.O.H.s and their employers to follow his example. But it has to be admitted that the decline in the death rate from diphtheria in the early twentieth century, or a few years earlier in London, was chiefly due to a decline in the virulence of the causative bacteria only partially assisted by the preventive mechanism of notification, hospitalization, disinfection and laboratory confirmation of diagnosis and fitness of recovering patients to resume ordinary social life which was the main purpose of its work. Stamping out the disease would have to wait on immunization which did not begin to be practised until the nineteen twenties.

In short by the end of the century the City Council’s Sanitary Committee was venturing into new responsibilities. It had acquired an up to date sizeable isolation hospital to manage, an able and vigorous M.O.H. had frequently prodded it into action and led it into new

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67 M.O.H. Report 1889 for figures up to 1889 and Report 1897 for figures for 1881–1897.
68 M.O.H. Report 1900 for notification figures.
69 ibid Reports of 1884 and 1885.
70 D.S. Davies, Bacteriology in Public Health Work, in Public Health (June 1899) pp602–611.
71 A. Hardy, The Epidemic Streets chap. 4 esp. the conclusion; Dr Dowson explained the work of the laboratory in M.O.H. Report 1895.
paths such as the union of medicine and science, legislation had made it undertake a widening range of inspectorial duties while the major expansion of the city's boundaries in 1897 meant that it had to cater for a substantially greater population. Fortunately the newly incorporated Stapleton and Horfield, as suggested by their general mortality rates of 10.1 and 10.3 and their infant mortality rates of 96.2 and 67.8, had reasonably healthy populations. But the most populous of the new districts, St George, was likely to present problems: its infant mortality rate, usually regarded as sensitive indicator of the state of public health, at 142.1, was virtually the same as that for the city as a whole. Also the M.O.H. noted that he was unable to obtain figures for the district added to the city from Long Ashton Rural District but he added that it did contain "the populous district of Totterdown" which he clearly believed was likely to require attention. 72 How the City Council coped with its added districts must, though, be left to another author.

CHAPTER SIX
THE COUNCIL AND THE MENTALLY SICK

While the City Council was becoming gradually more involved in attempting to combat the diseases threatening the physical well being of Bristolians it also became heavily committed to caring for those whom contemporaries called pauper lunatics. By 1851 it was becoming clear that it was likely to face an acute problem with regard to them stemming in part from the city's legal status as a county. A new statute in 1845\(^1\) required county justices to provide what had hitherto been optional, expensive lunatic asylums set in extensive grounds. At this time pauper lunatics were housed in two wards in St Peter's Hospital in the heart of the city leased from the Incorporation of the Poor who used the rest of the building to provide indoor relief for the destitute from the parishes of the ancient city. By a local Act of 1822\(^2\) the two wards had been designated the lunatic asylum for those parishes and subjected to the general laws relating to lunatics except as such laws authorized or required building a new asylum. The exception suggests that as early as this it was foreseen that the day might come when parliament and central government would insist that St Peter's Hospital was inadequate for the therapeutic treatment of the mentally ill. By 1851 that day appeared to have arrived.

_the Lunacy Commissioners and St Peter's Hospital_

In the late 1840s central government's Lunacy Commissioners, led by the celebrated 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, had frequently complained of the shortcomings of the asylum at St Peter's. Being in the centre of the city it lacked the many acres of open space around it which the Commissioners considered essential for the well being of patients. Also because the Justices, who were responsible for the management of the pauper lunatics, only controlled the limited space in St Peter's which

\(^1\) 8 & 9 Vict. c 126.
\(^2\) 3 Geo. IV c xxiv.
the Incorporation of the Poor was prepared to lease to them, overcrowding was a constant threat and proper classification of patients was impossible. This in turn meant that treatment tailored to the needs of the individual could not be given. The Lunacy Commissioners had made known to the Home Office the defects of St Peter's as an asylum and in 1849 Sir George Grey, the Home Secretary had issued an Order to the Visitors of the Asylum, who were a group of the Justices together with three nominated councillors, that they should provide a new building.

The Bristol Justices and St Peter’s Hospital

The great snag was that a new building, particularly if constructed to satisfy the specifications of the Lunacy Commissioners, was bound to involve very heavy capital expenditure which would eventually have to be met by the ratepayers of Bristol. Not surprisingly the Justices had sought to forestall such an Order by making some much needed improvements at St Peter’s. Also their Clerk, William Brice, in reply to the Order drew up what was believed to be a strong case for postponing providing a new asylum. He pointed out that the Justices had acted on suggestions from the inspecting Lunacy Commissioners for improvements and claimed that the cure rate at St Peters bore comparison with the very best asylums. The high mortality rate was to be explained as due to patients coming from the most crowded and poorest parts of the city and often suffering from T.B. when admitted. St Peter’s site was not as unhealthy as was often alleged: during the recent severe cholera epidemic there had not been a single fatality from the disease at the hospital while rural Stapleton had been badly affected. Finally, he urged, Bristol was never less able than at present to bear increased local taxation: retail trade was depressed, the effect of the Dock Transfer Act had not yet been felt and in the meantime ratepayers had to make up the port deficiency, heavy expenditure had been incurred for rebuilding the Guildhall, widening streets, providing baths and wash-houses and forming new sewers and to cap all the Council was contemplating “placing Bristol under the Health of Towns Act, the expense of which cannot be foreseen but it will be enormous”. Compliance with the Order was not insisted upon. It seemed as if the Home Office and the Lunacy Commissioners had been defeated.3

3P.C. 10 Jan. 1854 Report of the Justices in relation to the Secretary of State’s Order to erect a new Lunatic Asylum gives a detailed history including at Appendix B Brice’s letter. B.R.O.31038 Visitor’s reports on St Peter’s vols 1 & 2 1846–1860 are valuable for efforts to improve St Peter’s and for the views of visiting Lunacy Commissioners.
The Council and the Mentally sick

The County Justices and St Peter’s Hospital

In reality there was no escaping them. Between 1849 and 1851 the wards at St Peter’s could be and were further improved but the basic defects of lack of open space and inability to increase the size of the accommodation remained. The need to do so was sharply underlined by the Justices of Somerset and Gloucestershire. They decided that pauper lunatics from parishes such as Clifton or Bedminster, previously within their counties but since 1835 incorporated in the city and county of Bristol, should no longer be cared for in their counties’ lunacy asylums at Wells and Coney Hill, outside Gloucester. In law the county Justices had a good case since a local Act of 1837 had designated St Peter’s as the asylum for the city as enlarged in 1835. The immediate consequence of their decision was that, in addition to the existing seventy to eighty in the asylum, room would have to be found for at least forty more. This was plainly impossible. Consequently the Guardians of Clifton Union informed the Home Office that St Peter’s was quite unfit to be a county asylum for the mentally ill on the grounds of size, lack of open space and inability to classify patients.

Palmerston’s Order in 1853 for a new Asylum

By October 1853 Shaftesbury’s father-in-law, Lord Palmerston, in his unfamiliar role as Home Secretary, signed an Order requiring the Justices of the city and county of Bristol “to erect or provide a fit and proper asylum” declaring that the existing provision was inadequate and unfit. The Bristol Justices themselves certainly did not wish and were scarcely the most suitable body, as they acknowledged, to take on raising the large sum that would be needed for a new asylum. In their report of January 1854 to the City Council urging it to adopt section 29 of the Lunacy Act of 1853 which permitted the Council to take over the duties and powers hitherto exercised by the Justices, they regretfully accepted that St Peter’s was unsuitable as an asylum. But they did propose a cheaper solution than building a new asylum: why not house the pauper lunatics in spare accommodation in the workhouse which the Incorporation of the Poor had created at Stapleton, some three miles outside the city, to cater for the overflow of the indoor poor from St Peter’s? Various estimates of the cost of adapting this accommodation were made ranging from £7000 to £10,000 which was dramatically less than estimates for a wholly new building which varied from £25,000 to £60,000. The upper end of these estimates

4 1 Vict. c 86.
5 16 & 17 Vict. c 97.
would involve, it was claimed, an additional rate of 8d in the pound over a period of thirty years.  

_The Council takes responsibility_

In 1854 the City Council took over responsibility for the care of the mentally ill from the Justices and appointed a Committee of Visitors of the asylum to be chaired by William Herapath who more than any other councillor had shown, and was to continue to show, a close interest in this field. The Visiting Committee’s initial step was to seek to delay implementing Palmerston’s Order. When the Home Office wrote to the Mayor asking what was being done about it the Committee replied on his behalf that the current high rate of interest and the heavy burden of paying for the new sewers justified delay. Palmerston promptly dismissed these reasons as inadequate, refused to receive the Mayor and restated the Order. In spite of this the Visiting Committee still thought “exertions should yet be made to get the project postponed”. Nevertheless by mid 1855 it was forced to admit that St Peter’s was inadequate. The Corporation of the Poor made it clear that it would not provide any more room at St Peter’s and without it proper classification and comfort was impossible. Furthermore the Visiting Committee held out no hope for the Stapleton solution by which, it was suggested by the Corporation of the Poor, there should be a swop involving the pauper lunatics moving to a part of the Stapleton workhouse whose inmates should come back to St Peter’s. As it pointed out both, the Commissioners in Lunacy and the Poor Law Board would have to approve, but a visiting Lunacy Commissioner had already reported against the scheme and the Mayor had been informed that the Home Secretary was just about to issue a new Notice to the Council to build an adequate asylum.  

_Attempts to avoid building a new Asylum and their failure_

It might be thought that this would now be done. Indeed the _Bristol Mercury_ declared that it was “afraid not a loophole exists through which taxation to the tune of £40,000 can be evaded and the only consolation is that the worst is come to the worst”. But in the same issue the Governor of the Corporation of the Poor was still breathing defiance urging that “the citizens were already borne down with taxation and there really seemed to be a disposition to crush the city of Bristol. The Senior Physician at St Peter’s reckoned that only one in

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6 e.g. B.M. 29 Oct. 1853, 7 April, 3 Nov. 1855.
7 P.C. 27 Jan. 1854, 1 Jan. 1855 for the Committee’s annual report.
8 P.C. 8 May 1855.
ten lunatics would be cured so was it right to put the city to an enormous expense for such a chance?". Aware that building what one councillor called palaces for lunatics was very far from being popular the City Council and the Corporation of the Poor decided to have one more attempt to avoid doing so. A joint committee of seven councillors and seven members of the Incorporation of the Poor was established. What it was intended to do became a matter of dispute. Herapath believed its purpose was to procure a postponement of the Order to build a new asylum but the Corporation of the Poor's members, supported by Alderman Green and Councillor Rogers, both of whom were doctors, thought that the committee's function should be to further the Stapleton solution. They carried the day in that this was the main recommendation of the committee's report presented to the Council in November 1855. This meant brushing aside the objections of the visiting Lunacy Commissioner and, in Herapath's view, exceeding the powers of the committee. As he explained to the Council in the lengthy debate on the report he had walked out of the committee. But the Council while not accepting a motion moved by Green and Rogers that its report should be accepted voted by 25 to 13 to adopt an amendment to appoint yet another committee to consider whether or not the pauper lunatics should be transferred to Stapleton, and the Mayor wrote immediately to the Home Secretary telling him of this and assuring him that in a short time he would be informed of the views of the Council "in a matter which has ... deeply interested the public feeling in Bristol".

Indeed letters in the press, parish meetings and a public meeting of the citizens supported the conversion of part of Stapleton workhouse and certain adjoining premises to house the pauper lunatics. Councillor Cam Gyde Heaven moved and carried a resolution in the Council's committee aligning it with the views of the citizens' meeting but with the caveat that the Corporation of the Poor and the Poor Law Board would have to agree to sell to the City Council and the reservation that the committee was not pledging itself by adopting this resolution to accepting the Stapleton proposal if a more eligible site could be found. Eventually after a good deal of toing and froing a high powered delegation was assembled to go to London and seek the Poor Law Board's view on the Stapleton proposal. Representatives of the Corporation of the Poor, the Chamber of Commerce, Bristol's M.P.s, the City Council and four deputies chosen at the citizen's public meeting met the full Poor Law Board presided over by its chairman, the Hon. E.P. Bouverie, in 1856 to press the case. No immediate answer was

9 B.M. 7 April 1855.
10 P.C. 19 Nov. 1855; B.M. 24 Nov. 1855 for the debate.
11 B.R.O. 04991 New Lunatic Asylum Minute Book f.2 for this.
forthcoming, evidently because the Board wished to consult the Lunacy Commissioners, but when it did it so it was met with a blank rejection of the Stapleton proposal with no reasons given, much to the fury of the Corporation of the Poor. The young Elisha Robinson, one of its members and yet to embark on his long and distinguished career in the City Council, denounced the Board as exhibiting the "evils of centralization" and treating Bristol with "supercilious contempt". It was generally believed and probably correctly that the Lunacy Commissioners were the real authors of the veto on the Stapleton solution. The Council's committee recognised that the Poor Law Board's decision had finally killed off any scheme for adapting any part of the Stapleton workhouse for the pauper lunatics. A new asylum would have to be built.12

Finding a site for the new Asylum

By May 1856 the committee was advising the Mayor to ask the Lunacy Commissioners "what quantity of Ground, description, site and capacity of Building will be necessary for the accommodation of the Pauper Lunatics of Bristol" so that a realistic advertisement could be drawn up. John Foster,13 Secretary to the Commissioners replied that not less than 15 acres and not more than 50 would be needed and enclosing a paper of "Suggestions and Instructions" which the Commissioners had lately issued. These sought to counter criticism that asylums were pauper palaces by asserting "that a large proportion of the inmates of such establishments may be most properly treated in buildings of a simple and inexpensive character substantially but plainly constructed and containing only day rooms and dormitories of a domestic and ordinary character". John Foster also pointed out that the paper encouraged saving by allowing a main building of three stories provided the upper story was used exclusively for dormitories. By mid July 1856 eight tenders offering sites had been received, three in Horfield, three in Stapleton and one each in St George and Bedminster. The committee ruled out the three in Horfield as "open to the great objection to being near the Barracks as well as having stiff clay soil and water of an extremely doubtful character". The sites in Bedminster and St George were regarded as "too near the Manufactories of Bristol" while in Stapleton Mr Castle's land was judged too expensive and Dr Ogilvie's offer of his private madhouse was rejected as having too little land attached. That left only Mr Yalland's offer of twenty two and three quarter acres in the parish of Fishponds which he tempted the committee to recommend buying by saying that he

12 Ibid f.3-19; B.M. 19 Jan., 8 March 1856.
13 Better known as friend and biographer of Charles Dickens.
could also offer another four acres adjoining his own property and observing that his soil was suitable for garden cultivation, there was a supply of Pennant stone, access to a good water supply and a large sewer ran through the site and discharged into the river Frome. His price was £120 an acre. That was certainly attractive: as was explained to Mr Gaskell, the Lunacy Commissioner who had been to Bristol to view Yalland’s site, “the only other sites for building would be on the Clifton side of the city where building land readily sells for £1000 per acre” Also as Messrs Brice and Burgess, the City Council’s law officers pointed out to Gaskell, “if the Lunacy Commissioners refuse consent (to the Yalland site) there will inevitably be long delay. The measure is extremely unpopular in the City and it is only in the hope of obtaining a site at a reasonable price and erecting a building thereon at a very moderate cost that the Citizens will be induced to view the matter with complacency”.

The Lunacy Commissioners continued to create problems. They informed the Mayor that at least thirty acres should be purchased and an asylum to hold 200 built. The committee was upset, expostulating that if thirty acres was insisted upon the Yalland proposal would have to be abandoned and it would be extremely difficult to find an alternative site of 30 acres within a reasonable distance of the city. Furthermore there was no probability that accommodation for more than 150 would be needed for many years so that 23 acres would be enough especially as most patients would be “from the manufacturing classes” who would not take kindly to agricultural pursuits. The Commissioners ultimately accepted that 23 acres would do but insisted on provision for 200. The subsequent history of the asylum was to justify them. For the time being there was no more wrangling between the Council’s committee and the Commissioners.

Design and construction of the new Asylum

The site was bought and tenders were drawn up for the new asylum with premiums of £100 for the best plan £50 for the second best and £25 for the third best being offered. The Mayor was asked to see the Docks Committee’s consultant engineer, Mr Blackwell, for his advice on who should judge the 27 competing plans. His choice was “Mr Salvin, Architect of London”14 who chose Mr T.R. Lysaght of Imperial Chambers, Bristol as winner of the competition. His plans were forwarded to the Lunacy Commissioners for their approval and that of the Home Secretary. The Council was somewhat exasperated by their dilatoriness and quibbling over minor details but by the end

14 He had a large practice throughout the country but was chiefly known for his quasi-archaeological work at the Tower of London, Windsor Castle and Alnwick Castle.
of May 1857 this hurdle had been surmounted and by June the Public Works Loan Commission informed the Town Clerk that it would advance the Council £30,000 in three equal instalments the whole to be repaid in twenty equal instalments of capital and interest. The rate of interest was to be 5%. When tenders were opened in July the committee accepted Messrs Fosters at £19,977 together with three further tenders for iron joists and girders, wrought iron window sashes and a range of metal fittings for heating, laundry, kitchen and ventilating purposes.\(^{15}\)

When work began the committee kept a close watch on operations visiting the site regularly, approving all payments and negotiations with suppliers such as the Gas Company who pleased the committee by charging the city rate of 4/- per 1000 cubic feet rather than the 6/- it charged those outside the city boundary. Nonetheless construction took longer than expected and furnishing cost more than initial estimates so that the Council had to find additional funds. All told the building cost £34,189 which was just over £4,000 more than had been borrowed. It was not until December 1860 that the architect informed the committee that the asylum was ready for the admission of patients, a major cause of delay being four strikes by the masons demanding increased pay and shorter hours.\(^{16}\) The committee when reporting the cost overrun defended itself by claiming "that with reference to its size and accommodation the new Asylum even at such increased cost will still be one of the cheapest in the kingdom". It met with the approval of the Lunacy Commissioners whose inspection led them to report that "the works generally, external and internal, ... appear to have been executed and finished in the best manner" and such criticism as they made was confined to very minor matters even though their visit had been made while the asylum was in an incomplete state.\(^{17}\) Indeed patients had been moved in before completion because conditions at St Peter's were unsatisfactory.

**Early years**

Not surprisingly the first year of the new asylum proved a difficult one for Herapath, chairman of the Committee of Visitors. In the report he presented to the Council on 28 December 1861 he was forced to explain that calculations about running costs had gone astray and a debt of £500 had been incurred even though the charge to parishes for each patient had been increased from 10/- per week to 12/-. There

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\(^{15}\) The whole story can be followed in detail in *New Lunatic Asylum Minute Book* f. 20-77.

\(^{16}\) P.P. 1860 vol. xxxiv 14th Annual report of the Commissioners of Lunacy, p 11.

\(^{17}\) *New Lunatic Asylum Minute Book* f. 138–227.
were two parts to these calculations of expenditure, first the cost of maintaining inmates and their number had to be estimated and secondly the expenses of the new asylum such as staff salaries and wages had to be reckoned. Adding these together provided a figure for total expenditure and to meet this the parishes with patients had to be charged a sum per week per patient which would meet this expenditure and also a sum to set aside for contingencies. The variables which caused the embarrassing debt in 1861 were the number of patients and deficiencies in the design of the asylum. Patients were fewer than expected. This meant that the only way the committee's income could be kept up was by the unpopular move of raising the weekly charge to the parishes. But even this was insufficient to produce the funds to create the necessities of a bakery, piggery, smith's shop and strong rooms for refractory patients which had not been allowed for in the original planning. Hence the debt which the Council had to meet. The committee saw its future salvation in an increase in patient numbers.18

Work of the Council's Visiting Committee

For the next forty years the Visiting Committee, as its regular reports to Council showed, had four main concerns: the domestic economy of the asylum; the care and management of patients and staff; satisfying the visiting Lunacy Commissioners and what concerned the Council most of all, the challenge of housing ever increasing numbers of patients.

Broadly speaking the Visiting Committee aimed at making the asylum as self sufficient as possible as was shown by the establishment of a bakery and piggery already referred to. In part the objective was economy in running costs but the Visitors also believed that a therapeutic purpose would be served if patients were occupied in pursuits contributing to their own maintenance. For instance in 1862 it was reported that all clothing and shoes were made on the premises which was regarded as not only profitable employment for patients but conducive to their ultimate recovery. The Visitors were particularly exercised over both beer and water. As they remarked in 1861 "the cost of Beer still forms a very important item in the accounts of this Establishment". The erection of a brewery at the asylum was contemplated as a means of reducing spending on beer but as the Committee was not able to wipe out its debt until 1863 there was no cash available for the time being to create a brewery and in any case the necessary water supply was a problem. Indeed for many years there were reports of shortages. In 1864 during a severe drought water was brought to the asylum in carts at a cost of £1 a day. Even when a small reservoir

18 P.C. 1 Jan 1862.
was created from which 5,000 gallons a day could be pumped by a small steam engine there were still reports of water shortages. In 1868 the visiting Lunacy Commissioners complained that the same bath water was being used for three patients. Indeed it was not until 1877 that the asylum was supplied by the Bristol Waterworks Company after 28 cases of typhoid had occurred among patients between 1873 and 1875 and analysis of water supplies from wells had shown that water from two was polluted and unfit for drinking. As might be expected growing vegetables and doing all its own laundry were encouraged by the Visitors and patients were expected to do the work. It was often remarked that the men were not expert in agricultural pursuits and in 1866 the Superintendent valued the work of four patients as being equal to that of one labourer. He stressed the curative value of such employment.19

The Visitors, led by Herapath, had a long tradition of paying regular visits of inspection and involving themselves in matters of patient management and welfare. In the early fifties while St Peter’s was the asylum it was the Visitors rather than the medical staff who had insisted that patients be secluded or restrained at the first sign of any violence. It was they who directed that “Neal, an Irishman . . . of savage and uncontrollable temper” of whom the other patients were afraid, should be put in a room below stairs which had been fitted up for persons of this description.20 The Visitors were accustomed to conducting detailed inquiries into untoward events such as deaths of patients which appeared to involve suspicious circumstances.21 Their active Chairman had virtually taken charge personally of the asylum during the cholera outbreak in 1854 when a number of patients died from the disease.22

The Visitors and the visiting Commissioners in Lunacy whose recommendations the Visitors usually sought to implement, shared similar ideas about patient care. As previously referred to they believed as many as possible should work. Patients should be quiet, neat and orderly. In reality some certainly were not for instance the Visitors reported in 1861 that “there are several noisy and violent Patients and some have done considerable injury to the Building by breaking the windows and doors of the strong room”. The Visitors recommended Dr Stephens, the Superintendent, to classify and segregate the patients as much as possible to prevent the noisy and turbulent from annoying the peaceable and orderly. The Commissioners in Lunacy in the following year and frequently thereafter commented “most favourably
on Patients orderly demeanour” and were particularly pleased that their previous suggestion that Sunday suits and dresses should be provided for them had been carried out.23

Both Visitors and Commissioners were very keen on patients attending religious services regularly as a congregation although for the first twenty years of the new asylum there was no room large enough to accommodate them all. Indeed by 1880 when there were 430 patients the existing room used as a chapel would only accommodate 100. At the same time the adjacent dining room was also too small. For several years the visiting Commissioners had suggested extending the dining room by adding the chapel to it and building a new detached chapel in the grounds. In 1880 the Visitors reported to the Council that they had had plans prepared for this. It would cost £3,035 and accommodate 350 patients. £525 would be needed for extending the Dining hall. No doubt the Council was pleased to hear that there would be no charge on the rates because the Visitors had accumulated a balance of more than £6,000 by taking in some private patients whom they charged almost twice as much as they did parishes sending paupers. Also they had been making a profit out of such parishes since they said that in future they would not have to keep such a large balance and would be able to reduce their weekly charge for patients. Clearly they had been saving up for the chapel.24

Both Visitors and Commissioners believed that patients should have a modest ration of excursions, creature comforts and sober entertainment. On moving to the new asylum the Visitors reported that in the summer patients “had been treated with two entertainments in the grounds, a band of music was engaged on each occasion and the patients regaled with plain cake and ginger wine”. On the advice of the Superintendent the Visitors instructed their clerk, Mr Williams25, to provide further amusements and later in the year directed that “roasted beef and plum pudding be provided on Xmas day”. A New Years Ball became a regular feature of asylum life, often reported, somewhat condescendingly and at great length in the press. The councillors of the visiting committee normally attended in force. Commissioners Ludwide and Wilkes recommended introducing more furniture of a domestic kind, decorating the day rooms and galleries with prints, shrubs, flowers and rustic summerhouses for the grounds, more use of open fires, better cutlery and ensuring that beds were always three feet or more apart.26

24 P.C. 20 July 1880.
25 Daniel Burges, 1846–1849, William Brice, 1849–1864 were the previous clerks. Mr J.F. Williams served from 1864–1887. When the asylum moved to Stapleton a resident clerk had to be appointed.
The Medical Superintendent and staff

The main burden of patient care, of course, fell on the staff led by the Medical Superintendent, Dr H.O. Stephens, who served in this capacity at St Peter’s and the new asylum until 1870 when Dr Fox, the local expert in mental illness, informed the Visitors that “Dr Stephens was suffering from melancholia induced by great bodily and mental exertion”. In the spring of 1871 he resigned and the committee summoned no less than ten applicants for the job for interview. Evidently the post was attractive since candidates came from all over the country. The committee chose Dr G. Thompson of the West Riding Asylum at Wakefield who served until 1890 when his health broke down. He was succeeded by Dr H.A. Benham, the Assistant Medical Officer, who was still in office in 1901 when he was granted six months sick leave. There can be no doubt that the Superintendent’s job was an exacting one. He was faced with an ever increasing number of patients for many of whom he had no means of bringing about their recovery. By the second half of the century the extravagant claims by self styled medical experts that the asylum was the panacea for all mental ills was being exploded. In 1865, for instance, Dr Stephens classified the 209 inmates as 191 “hopeless of recovery” and only 18 as “estimated to be recoverable”. The visiting Commissioners in 1867 reported that upwards of 25% were epileptic. In 1870 Dr Stephens carried out a census of the number of epileptic fits experienced by day and night by patients over the year: the total was 9,741. It is also clear from the annual reports of the Superintendent that the bulk of new admissions were in poor physical health. In 1880, as a typical example, of the 122 admissions only 2 were “in fair bodily health and condition”. Among these same admissions were to be found 46 suffering from dementia and 26 from melancholia all of whom were regarded as “disposed to commit suicide”. In short the medical Superintendent faced a massive patient management task.

So what help did he have? Until 1871 he was the sole doctor when Dr S.H. Carter was appointed Assistant Medical Officer at a salary of £100 p.a. and keep, and this post became permanent in the following year when he resigned and was succeeded by Dr W.T. Benham. With the number of patients approaching five hundred Council agreed in 1889 to appointing Mr Frederick Lennox Harman Brown as

27 He died in 1881.
29 Superintendents Reports 1865 Table 7; 1870 Table 14; 1880 Tables X11 and X111.
2nd. Assistant Medical Officer. As for attendants the asylum had to manage with small numbers of ill paid young men and women aided by what help could be obtained from the patients themselves as was common practice in institutions run on Poor Law lines. When planning for the new Asylum the Visitors estimated that "27 servants and attendants would be needed ... and the average yearly cost of each servant would be £26, exclusive of clothing".

Attendants of each sex were led by a Head Attendant the male having £50 a year and the female £30 with board and lodging according to the annual report in 1875. Numbers of attendants plainly did not keep pace with increase in patients: in 1881 there were still only 27 excluding the two Heads and at night there were just two on the female side and one on the male, increased to three on the female side and two on the male by 1885 when patients topped the 400 mark. It is hard to believe the Commissioners’ statement in that year’s report that “all the actively suicidal were kept under constant supervision at night” but not surprising to find them commenting that the turnover of staff was ”somewhat numerous” in spite of the institution in 1875 of a bonus of £2 p.a. for all female attendants who stayed more than a year. In fact more than half of the attendants in 1885 had yet to complete a year’s service. In short the attendant’s job was arduous, unrewarding and ill paid. As if to demonstrate that this was so in 1890 the whole male staff went on strike, were promptly dismissed and had to be replaced urgently. There is little or no evidence that they received any training before 1894 when the M.O.H. provided a training course. Thereafter it is reported that in 1895 18 had passed the examination for proficiency in mental nursing instituted by the Medico-Psychological Association and each year there were passes in the first aid examinations run by St John’s Ambulance Association.

Doctors and attendants were complemented by a small staff consisting of the Chaplain whom the Visitors expected to be active in holding services and preaching; the Matron and Housekeeper, a Clerk and Steward, an engineer, a carpenter, gardener, stoker and baker and eventually a storekeeper. The emphasis was always on making the asylum a self sufficient and self helping institution exemplified by the creation of its own fire brigade albeit trained by the city’s force.

The enlargement of the Asylum

But the greatest challenge which faced the Visiting Commitee was having to provide for constantly increasing numbers of patients. Over and

30 P.C. 12 Feb. 1889.
over again the visiting Commissioners in Lunacy commented adversely on overcrowding and urged increased accommodation and the acquisition of more land. As early as 1863 the highest number of inmates (206) during the year exceeded the total (200) for which the asylum had been designed and consideration was turning to "the most economical mode of extending the accommodation". But in spite of the complaints of the Commissioners it was not until 1867 that plans for providing for an additional 35 patients were prepared while in the meantime beds were placed in the corridors. This modest extension was no great burden on the City Council as it only cost £3,000 but as the Commissioners warned in 1868 further expansion would soon be necessary.

Indeed this was the case. As the Visitors reported to the Council in 1875 the highest number of inmates in any year had risen to 252 in 1870, 272 in 1872, 289 in 1873 and 297 in 1874 whereas even by turning two day rooms into dormitories the available beds totalled only 267. Once more the corridors were resorted to. For the three years prior to the Visitor’s report the Commissioners had been pressing for enlargement and the purchase of more land. Councillor Frederick Terrell, a senior councillor who had taken over from Heraph as Chairman of the Visitors, a post he was to hold for twenty years, presented the Council with a major scheme, approved by the Commissioners in Lunacy and the Secretary of State, comprising two new and substantial wings providing for 126 patients at an estimated cost of £12,600 exclusive of furnishings and fittings. The pill of having to find new capital was sweetened by the observation that £25,000 of the £30,000 borrowed for the original building had been repaid.

Completion of the new wings was delayed by a long strike by building workers so that by the time they were ready in 1877 overcrowding was acute there being 307 patients in an asylum with only 267 beds. Equally unsatisfactory, as the Visitors recognised, they had to ask Council for permission to borrow another £8,000. Just over a quarter was for furnishing and fittings which the Visitors had earlier reported on to Council but the rest was yet another cost overrun. The only comfort was that now there was room for very nearly 400 patients and further extension was surely a distant prospect. In the meantime some

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32 The rapid increase from the 113 patients who moved to the new asylum from St Peter’s in 1861 was the result of transferring mentally ill inmates of the Union workhouse to the new asylum, a move which eventually improved the finances of the asylum considerably.

33 P.C. 11 Feb. 1868.

34 ibid 5 Feb. 1875. In the event the lowest tender came in at £13,294 which the Visiting Committee accepted without bringing it to Council, pleading that no useful purpose would be served by delay as the crowded state of the asylum demanded urgent action. Council kept the Visitors on a tight reign by only sanctioning borrowing £12,600 (P.C. 11 20 May 1875).
useful income could be earned by using any spare capacity to contract to take in patients from outside Bristol whom it was possible to charge rather more than the Bristol parishes would countenance.35

On the other hand, as earlier referred to, the 1877 enlargement meant that the pressure on dining facilities and the adjacent chapel was so great that in 1880 more capital had to be found for Mr Edwards, the Visitor’s architect, and Mr Wyatt, the Commissioner’s consultant, to build a new chapel separate from the main building. Also by 1885 the Visitors, now led by the Mayor, Charles Wathen, were forced by the relentless increase in patients and the urgings of the Commissioners, to plan for yet another extension as well as the purchase of nine acres of land at £5,150 and another three plots at almost £1,000 to provide the asylum estate with “the excellent boundary” of the Fishponds-Stapleton road. This time a further two large wings were to be added to house 172 patients with two smaller wings to accommodate 84 “refractory patients”.36 In addition provision was made for workshops, storerooms, laundry and a mortuary.

Once again the necessity of the whole scheme, it was argued, was shown by the simple fact that the Visitors had been forced to contract with the Gloucestershire Justices to take 40 women patients. All told this meant that 465 patients had to be accommodated which was 35 in excess of the beds available in the asylum. The estimated cost, including land purchase, was a massive £65,676 which the Visitors sought permission to borrow. In Council there was evidence that members were dissatisfied with what seemed to be never ending requests for borrowing to extend the asylum. The powerful alderman, Proctor Baker, carried a resolution asking the Visitors to submit an approximate estimate for acquiring a site for an asylum which would meet all needs for fifty years to come. In the meantime Council set aside the Visitor’s proposed extension.37

Nonetheless in the end it had to accept it, since the Visitors pointed out that it was virtually impossible to estimate how many patients there would be in fifty years time but it would seem likely that there would be at least a thousand and for this number the Commissioners would require a site of 200–250 acres. The Visitors declined to speculate as to where this might be found close to Bristol and at what cost. By 1889 the extensions had been completed, handed over and the forty ladies had returned from Gloucester.38

But increasing the bed capacity carried with it further building work and capital spending to enlarge supporting services. Indeed the Commissioners insisted that the existing administrative block was quite

35 P.C. 1 Jan. 1877.
36 P.C. 30 June 1885; as with previous additions equal weight was given to provision for males and females.
37 ibid 30 June 1885.
38 ibid 1 June 1886, 12 Feb. 1889.
inadequate. This forced the Visitors into the drastic step of proposing pulling it down and, in answer to those who wanted the asylum to meet the city's needs for many years to come, to plan a new administrative block, including enlarged kitchens, laundry and storerooms capable of supporting an asylum with a thousand patients. It was so designed that it could be enlarged to accommodate the necessary dormitories for such a number of patients “at no great cost and without interference with the architectural effect or efficient working of the establishment”. 39

In the 1890s the requirements of the Commissioners, ever ready to note deficiencies and obsessed with the asylum's landed estate, caused the Visitors to come to Council for permission for yet more borrowing. In 1892 acquiring another four acres and putting a wall round this, together with renewing the gas installation, sanitary ware and laundry equipment and creating a new engine house produced a bill for £10,800. 40 Also pressure to extend the asylum yet again was exerted by the new development of a rapid increase in female patients. In 1894 the Visitors commented that in the past ten years there had been a nearly 50% increase so that the female wards were now practically full and it would soon be necessary to provide more accommodation for females. By contrast there was enough space in the male wards to accommodate, under contract, 30 men from North Wales. The Commissioners had intimated that they would not sanction any further increase in patients unless more land was acquired and when asked how much, had replied thirty acres. The Visitors were fortunate enough to get a bargain when the City Surveyor obtained for them at auction 22 acres for £2,600: the remaining eight cost them £1,900 because it was “market garden land”. The Council had little choice but to approve further borrowing to meet these bills for, as the Visitors pointed out, the alternative was the far more expensive purchase of another large site and establishing a second asylum. 41

Now that the acres had been acquired, the female wards full to overflowing, and the city poised to expand its territory and population very substantially, the Visitors once again reported to Council that expansion was a necessity. In proposing building four new wards for 150 female patients they used once again the argument that the only alternative would be the expensive one of a second asylum. Not surprisingly the Council acquiesced and a tender for £36,926 was accepted

39 P.C. 11 Feb., 10 June 1890; the lowest tender for the building work, a two year job, was A.J. Beaven's at £36,000 to which a further £11,000 had to be added for fittings, fees and a relatively new requirement of the Commissioners, fireproof floors, as well as £2,970 for furnishing (P.C. 21 Oct. 1892).
40 P.C. 21 Oct. 1892.
41 ibid 13 Feb. 1894.
with an estimate for fireproofing, heating and ventilation bringing the cost to £45,000.\textsuperscript{42}

By the end of the century the City Council had created at Stapleton its largest building given that, unlike so many towns and cities, it had not built a monumental town hall. Its asylum, although always a little below the average of county asylums throughout the country,\textsuperscript{43} was comparable in size and appearance to its near neighbours, the Bristol Union’s workhouse on Blackberry Hill, Stapleton and the Clifton Union’s establishment at 100 Fishponds Road both of which housed over a thousand each by this time, while the city’s asylum had 825 as its highest number of patients in 1900 of whom 783 were chargeable to the now citywide Bristol Poor Law Union.\textsuperscript{44}

\textit{The increase in patient numbers: causes}

The increase in patient numbers which had led to the creation of the City Council’s massive asylum arose in part from extravagant claims by experts, often self appointed, concerning the curative properties of asylums, and in part simply from a growth in the municipality’s population from the 154,093 in 1861 when the asylum opened to the estimated 232,242 in 1897 on the eve of the major boundary revision which would send the population up to 329,086 at the census of 1901. The patients who moved to Stapleton from St Peter’s in 1861 numbered 113 according to the first Annual Report of the Medical Superintendent while his 37th Report recorded that on 31 December 1897 there were 751 patients although only 673 were chargeable to Bristol the rest being either private or out of Bristol patients. As is apparent, the increase in patients substantially outstripped population growth. Why was this so?

It appears clear that admissions generally outnumbered discharges and deaths. For example for the five years 1864–8 admissions totalled 410 whereas deaths were 136 and discharges and removals categorised as “recovered” were 189. In addition 67 were described as “not recovered”. If these, as seems to have been the case, nevertheless still left the asylum, totalling all three figures still left a small deposit of additional patients to gradually swell numbers in the eighteen sixties. A repetition of this process on a larger scale in succeeding decades would account for a rise in patient numbers. What the figures for

\textsuperscript{42}ibid 11 May, 12 Oct. 1897; architect’s fees appear to have been avoided since the Labour Councillor Curle carried an amendment to a motion to appoint an architect in favour of using a competent Clerk of Works (P.C. 23 Nov. 1897).

\textsuperscript{43}For figures on average size per decade see L.J. Ray, Models of madness in Victorian asylum practice in \textit{Archives Europeennes de Sociologie} tome xxii (1981) p 260.

\textsuperscript{44}P.C. 23 May 1901; the remaining patients were either chargeable to other authorities or were private payers.
discharges do show is that there were appreciable numbers of patients who stayed for a relatively short time, a year or less, while the number of deaths shows that there were appreciable numbers admitted whose health was poor or very poor so that the asylum was for them a last resting place.

This leads on to asking why were there so many admissions? The reports of the Medical Superintendent, amidst unhelpful statistics as to whether admitted patients were married or not, belonged to the Church of England or not, or could read and write, contained sections on causes of the disorder for which they were admitted and a broad characterization of that disorder. These cast a somewhat wavering light on the situation. For instance in 1870 there were 94 admissions of whom 60 were classified as suffering from "mania", 14 from "melancholia", 5 from "dementia" and 15 from "imbecility". 17 of the 94 also suffered from epilepsy and 6 from general paralysis. The probable causes of these disorders were divided into moral and physical. Leaving aside "moral" causes such as "disappointed affections" or "fright", or physical causes as vague as "ill health" it seems probable that the most numerous ascribed causes such as "intemperance" corresponded to the present day "alcoholic" and "puerperal mania" corresponded to an equally obvious recognisable condition. Once again the conspicuousness of epilepsy as the probable cause of mental disorder indicates what a problem it was to Victorian medical science, to its sufferers and to their relatives and neighbours. 45

Indeed it seems likely that many admissions were of individuals whose mental and physical problems rendered them an impossible burden on either their relatives, or failing them, their friends and neighbours. Probably their problems rendered them destitute of resources and hence eligible for poor relief. Indeed a considerable number were first consigned to the ordinary workhouses of the three Unions serving Bristol and came from them to the asylum if they proved too difficult to cope with in the workhouse. In short pace Professor Scull it seems more likely that admissions were the result of individuals by their behaviour making themselves impossible rather than their social superiors seeking to tidy up society by incarcerating its inconveniently deviant members. 46

The Asylum: an evaluation

In sum the City Council, spurred on by the law and central government's Commissioners in Lunacy, had created at very considerable

45 Annual Report of the Medical Superintendent 1870.
expense outside the city an enormous institution which was scarcely a palace for paupers although there was a trickle of evidence that, amidst the Victorian obsession with work, exercise and divine service, amusements were not wholly forgotten. It is probable that for some, perhaps many, of those whose stay was reasonably short the asylum brought some benefit. It allowed alcoholics to dry out, the really poverty stricken to rebuild their strength because at least it offered three meals a day, however monotonous these were, and a building that was dry and warm up to a point. Also insofar as a mental illness might be overcome in spite of the lack of curative treatment the asylum provided what its name implied. On the other hand for those who became long stay patients suffering from major psychiatric illness the asylum became an entirely self contained small world cut off from the wider community. Their number tended to grow as time went on. Decanting such patients without resources into a harsh and unfriendly world was hardly practicable, or at least was most likely to lead to readmission. It was this cumulation of chronic cases which created the image of the asylum rather than the comings and goings of those who stayed for short periods.
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