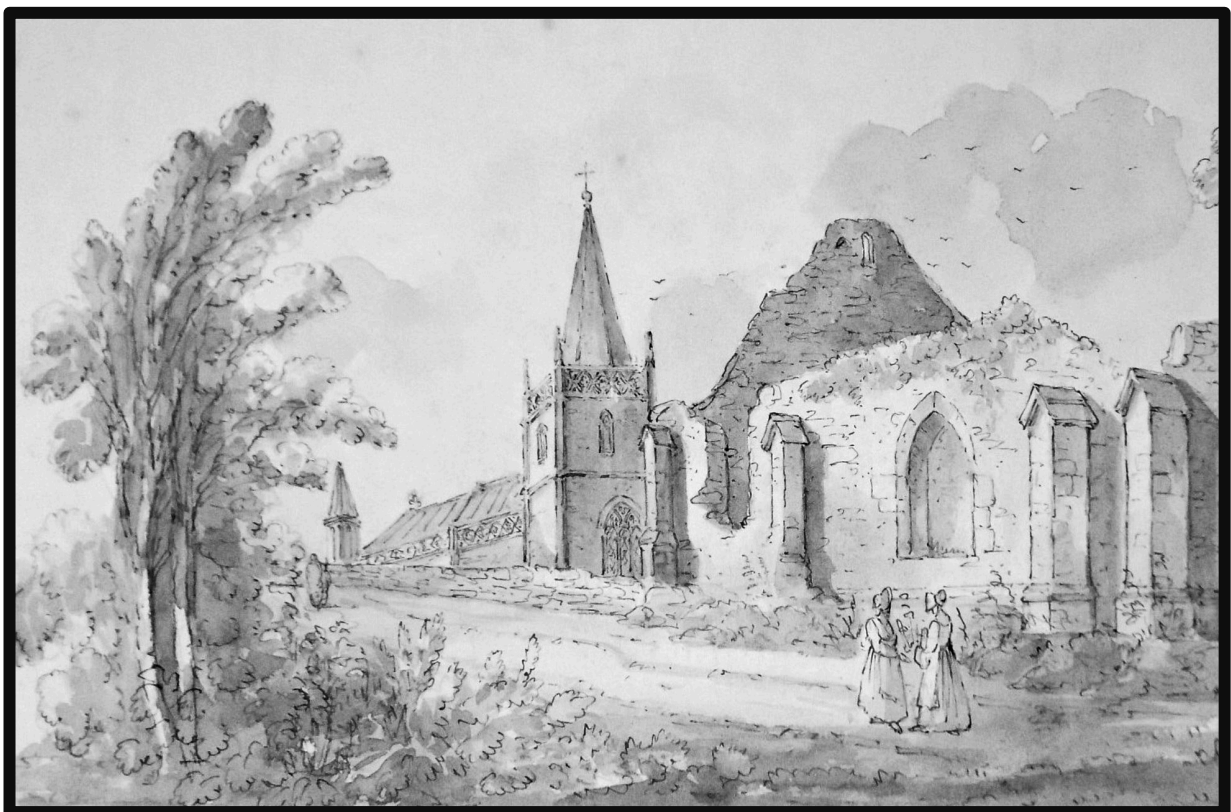


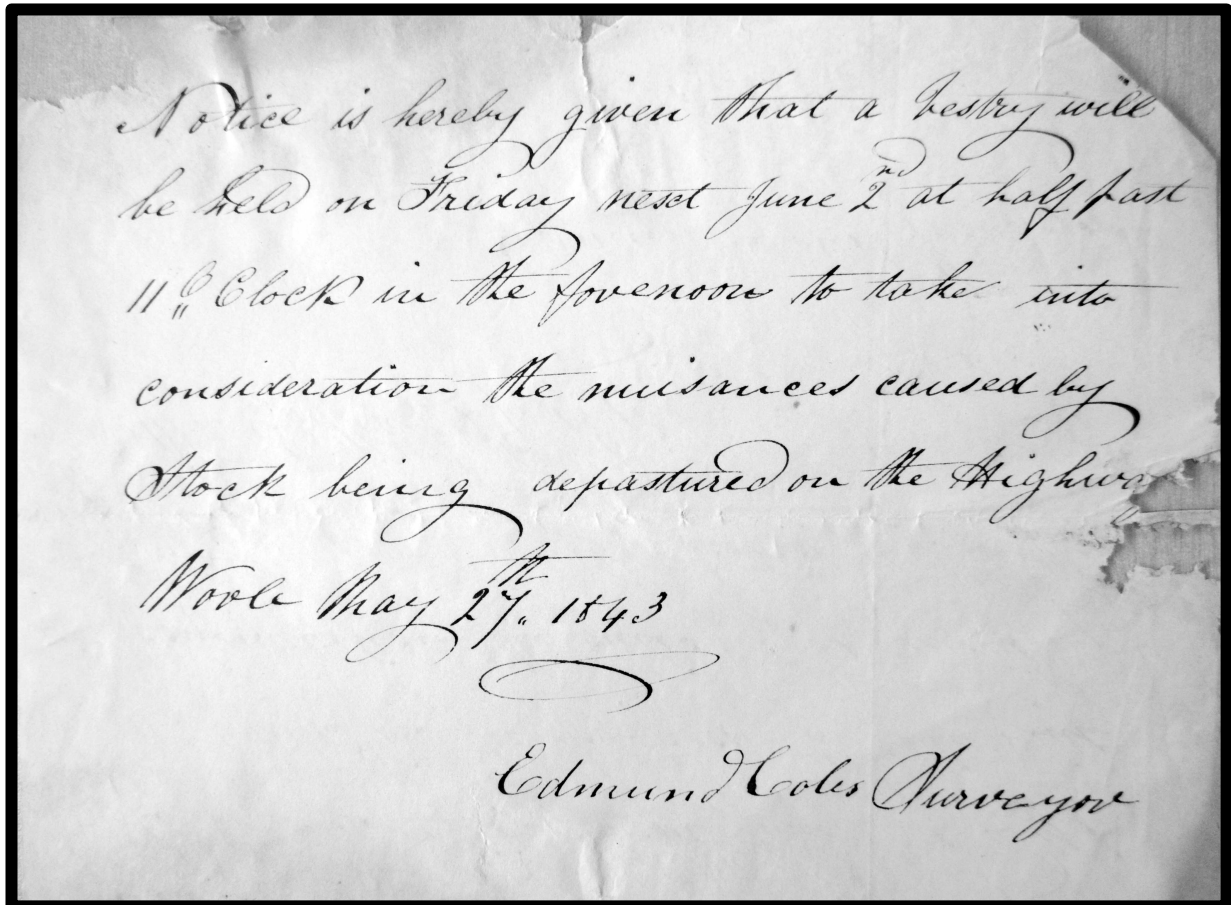
# **Worle Vestry Minutes 1815-1891**

**Local government and decision-  
making in the nineteenth century**



**Peter Johnson**

## Worle Vestry Minutes 1815-1891



Notice of Meeting Friday June 2 1843 at 11.30. Such notices were usually pinned to the church door for all to see.

### Cover Illustration.

Meeting places for the Vestry at various times. St Martin's Church and the old Barn, later to be rebuilt and opened as the new National School. Contemporary drawing by W. W. Wheatley from the Braikenridge collection held at the Somerset Heritage Centre.

# **Worle Vestry Minutes 1815-1891**

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# **1 Worle Vestry Minutes – the Background**

Before the formation of Parish Councils under the Local Government Act of 1894, local government used to be the responsibility of local residents meeting together as the Vestry. Their decisions were subject to the Justices of the Peace meeting in Quarter Sessions and the increasing number of Unions and Area Boards, which locally were centred on Axbridge. We are very fortunate in Worle that the Minutes of the Vestry meetings have survived and are archived at the SWHT in Taunton. I have been able to transcribe them and study them at length. Whilst they leave a certain amount to be desired in terms of detail they nonetheless give a real insight into the issues, and even dramas, of village life.

The vestry is that part of the church where vestments and other necessities for church services are stored. As it commonly served as a meeting place for church business the word also came to be applied to the group of parishioners who regularly met there, usually under the Chairmanship of the Vicar, to discuss and take decisions about secular issues relating to Parish life. Making arrangements for the poor and infirm was a high priority but other issues included the maintenance of roads and bridges, dealing with sundry nuisances, the appointment of constables and even on occasion recruiting soldiers. As ever, these services need to be paid for and so this was all underpinned by the collection of rates and taxes.

The Worle Vestry Minutes cover the greater part of the nineteenth century. They begin in 1815, the year of Waterloo, when King George III was on the throne, and come to an end in 1891, when Queen Victoria had already reigned for 54 years. There are no comparable records for the period before 1815, and the termination in 1891 precedes by a couple of years the establishment of Worle Parish Council following the Local Government Act of 1894. Unfortunately the Parish Council Records have not survived and for an account of them we are reliant on the reports written up in the Weston Mercury and Weston Gazette, which were often gratifyingly detailed.

The Minutes are contained in two hard bound foolscap notebooks. The first (D/P/wor/9/1/1) runs from 1815 to 1843 and, in addition to the meeting notes, contains lists of previous office holders in some cases extending as far forward in time as 1866. The second (D/P/wor/9/1/3) runs from 1826 to 1891. Curiously this creates an overlap of some 17 years. The entries in the earlier book seem to refer entirely to decisions about the placement of apprentices until 1835. It also contains the minutes for 1842 and 1843 which are missing from the later book. Perhaps the Chairman picked up the wrong book on his way to the meeting! Indeed it strikes me as almost miraculous that this one book saw continuous service for 65 years without becoming lost, being dropped in a puddle or generally falling apart from constant use.

## **Members of the Vestry**

It is not clear who qualified to belong to the Vestry or indeed to vote. There is no evidence of selection by voting so it is probable that members were co-opted. Although there is little evidence in the minutes it is generally understood that the

members were householders and consequently ratepayers. Participation probably involved a mixture of a desire to play their part in the running of village affairs and a wish to keep an eye on expenditure to which they were contributing through their rates. The Minutes of all meetings carry a list of attendees, sometimes recorded by the Chairman (usually the Vicar) and sometimes (judging by the different hands) signed by the participants. The Vicar and the two churchwardens are ex officio members.

The Vestry also makes appointments, appointing officers from their own number, some of whom are paid for their services.

The members throughout are all men with one exception. Elizabeth Walker was appointed as an overseer from 1879 to 1886, though her name does not appear on the attendance list for any of the Vestry meetings.

### **Parish Constables**

The Vestry also appointed constables, who basically constituted the delivery arm of the Vestry and had a number of “hands-on” roles. The literature tells us that they had responsibility for maintaining public order: e.g. the stocks and lockup, and securing prisoners for transporting to quarter sessions and assizes. They also collected rates and national taxes, monitored weights and measures, supervised the alehouses and raised the local militia.

Unfortunately the Vestry Minutes give us no references to instances of these various roles being carried out, but they do record the names of those appointed to the role. In February of each year between three and ten constables were named. The records cover the period between 1814 and 1872 when recording ended.

In 1856 the Somerset Constabulary was founded and Worle’s first policeman Constable George Foster is recorded. The newly founded Police force took over the public order role of the traditional constables, but for a further 17 years the parish constables were still carrying out their other traditional functions.

### **Meeting Place and Procedure**

Meetings took place at the Church until March and November 1862 when it was “*resolved that the Vestry should be adjourned from the Church to the National School to transact the necessary business*”. This would have referred to the “Old School” which was in a building near the top of the Scaurs. The new National School built in the converted ancient barn next to the church was not opened until 1865. This school was first mentioned in the Minutes as the Vestry’s regular meeting place in March 1873 and thereafter the church seems to have no longer been used.

The Minutes are pretty rudimentary in comparison with what we might expect today and generally do little more than note the basic facts of decisions, although in the later years there is more of a tendency to record the to and fro of discussions.

Very occasionally differences of opinion and the way people vote are recorded, or a matter is deferred while more information is sought. In the absence of agendas it is

not easy to reconstruct the discussions. The decisions seem often to be quite formulaic and give the impression of having gone through on the nod.

## **Worle Vestry in the nineteenth century**

My aim in presenting these extracts from the Minutes is to allow the preoccupations of village life in the nineteenth century to emerge from the matters discussed.

The Vestry took responsibility for a range of issues and I have grouped the entries accordingly. They are concerned with providing services for residents of the Parish, whether comfortable or needy. Please consult the list of Contents for an overview of the themes.

Family historians might well find references to names they are working on. A simple search on the PDF document will get you there quickly.

In each section I have tried to present the extracts in chronological order so that it is possible to gain a sense of the changing approach to issues resulting from legislative and social innovations.

Direct quotations from the minutes are in italics.

## 2 Poor people in Worle

Since the introduction of the first Poor Laws under Queen Elizabeth in 1597 and 1601 it had become a legal requirement for the Parish to take on responsibility for “The Poor”. The individual responsible was known as the overseer and was appointed annually. It was originally an unpaid position and bore the weighty responsibilities of assessing the claimants and allocating funds derived from the Rates paid by householders. Further legislation in the following centuries defined the issues more clearly and in 1834 a major change to the system was brought about by the introduction of the Poor Law Amendment Act which grouped neighbouring parishes into Unions run by Boards of Guardians. Worle became one of the 38 constituent parishes of the Axbridge Union. Workhouses were a major feature of the 1834 Act and one was built at Axbridge soon after it was passed. The first reference to the Guardians in the Worle Vestry Minutes appears in 1837 and they continue throughout. The office of overseer also continues throughout and indeed in each year there are several holders of the position. It appears that in 1849 the post of assistant overseer became salaried at £9.00 per annum

### 2.1 Apprentices

The children of poor people were often cared for under the system of apprenticeship.

The Minutes record the placing of apprentices with local individuals. They generally record the name of apprentice and master and the estate or part of estate to which they are attached. Occasionally the master receives a sum of money from the Vestry to cover certain costs.

#### 2.1.1 James Wallis 1817

*At Vestry held this day for the purpose of apprenticing the Poor Children by us whose names are hereunto subscribed do agree to give Saml. Lancaster the sum of ten pounds to take James Wallis as apprentice untill he attain the age of 21 years*

#### 2.1.2 Job West 1826

*At a Vestry held this day for the purpose of placing of Job West to John Lovell farmer of this Parish for the term of six years from the date hereof the said John Lovell to be at the charge and expence of Clothing Maintainance etc. of the said Job West John Lovell to receive Four Pounds of the Overseer for the same*

As with John Lovell above the Masters were probably in the main farmers. Both boys and girls were recorded as apprentices but their duties and conditions are never specified. In all probability the boys undertook farm work and the girls had domestic duties. As David Hey puts it in *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* (1996): “Apprenticeship served the purpose not only of teaching a trade but of helping to ensure a supply of labour and keeping adolescents under control”.

### 2.1.3 Mary Barratt 1832

In September 1832 the Vestry agree to “*place Mary Barratt to George Lee from this date to the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1838 with consent of the Mother Jane Barratt.*” Although not specified this sounds very much like an apprenticeship arrangement. The mother Jane Barratt figures later in the minutes in her own right.

The records of apprentices cease in 1835, probably a reflection of the newly introduced Poor Law Reform Act when the function was presumably taken over by the Axbridge Board.

### 2.1.4 Henry Weakly 1865

There is one later exception, probably recorded because of the implied disability of the apprentice and because a separate institution was involved.

*It was resolved that if a proper situation as apprentice can be obtained for Henry Weakly, to the satisfaction of the Board of Guardians and the deaf and dumb asylum, that the Parish are willing to pay five pounds towards the apprenticeship*

## 2.2 Poor House

The Poor House (also known as the Almshouses) at Worle was built around 1799. Standing on the Scaurs they remained in use until around 1937?? when the occupants were rehoused in the newly built Council Houses in the Rows, off Coronation Road. The Almshouses were subsequently demolished. The Vestry appears to have maintained ownership through the 1834 changes, for in 1848 the Minutes record a discussion about its disposal:

### 2.2.1 Possible disposal of the Alms House 1848

*At a vestry held at Worle Dec 8<sup>th</sup> 1848 called for the purpose of taking into consideration the matter of disposing of the Poor House: it was resolved that the question of sale be deferred and notice given by the Churchwardens and Overseers to the present inhabitants of the Poor House quit same at Lady-Day next:*

What prompted the discussion? Were the letters of Notice ever given out? The matter is not mentioned again and from later events it appears that the Vestry retained its interest in the Poor House, for thirty-one years later they were discussing the criteria for admission to the Poor House:

### 2.2.2 Rules for admission to Alms Houses 1879

*It was decided that a set of rules with regard to the admission of in-mates of the Alms Houses should be framed by the Parish officers that inequalities wh. have crept in should for the future be avoided*

From the wording in the Minutes it seems that an issue had emerged about who was entitled to a place in the Poor House. Tongues had been wagging!



### 2.2.3 Insurance of Alms Houses 1887

In 1887 it was agreed to increase the insurance from £200 to £400, and Almshouse Accounts continued to be submitted to the Vestry until the very last meeting in 1891, at which point the balance in the accounts was £3..15..2 1/2

### 2.2.4 Isaac and Edward Shepston 1831

The death of Isaac Shepston around 1827 resulted in the Vestry seeking legal advice from Weston Solicitor Joseph Eagar. The details are sketchy but it appears that Isaac shared the house with a relative Edward Shepstone, who refused to move out. The Minutes of July 1831 record a resolution whereby arrears of rent were paid and new terms agreed upon. This issue probably relates to one of the Poor Houses though it is never specified as such.

Also in 1831 some building work at the Poor House was carried out which might be related to the Shepstone business. John Bennett and John Bishop were contracted to carry out £39.00 worth of Masons Work and Thomas Watts to do the Carpenter's work for £30.00.

## 2.3 Settlement and Removal

Poor Relief was the responsibility of the Parish where the person was legally settled. Disputes between Parishes often arose when there was disagreement about who was responsible. Frequently these disputes went to the Assize Courts for resolution, which sometimes resulted in an Order for Removal from one Parish to another. Professional legal assistance was often sought. There are several cases involving the Worle Vestry though it is not always clear how they were resolved.

### 2.3.1 Jacob Williams 1830

In 1830 the Vestry resolved to appeal against an Order of Removal against Jacob Williams. A Mr Bradford was engaged to pursue this matter.

### 2.3.2 Mary Lawrence 1831

In 1831 Mary Lawrence became the subject of an Order of Removal and a Mr John James was employed to deal with it.

### 2.3.3 Restatement of Rules of Removal 1837

In March 1837 the Vestry felt it necessary to reiterate the position regarding the removal of persons becoming a charge on the Parish:

*"Resolved that the Overseers do not allow any persons to return again and reside in the Parish of Worle who having become chargeable to the said Parish, have been legally passed under Orders of removal to their respective parishes: And when their failing to comply with this Resolution, the Guardian is requested to report their conduct to the Board of Guardians; together with any other wilful neglect of duty"*

No offenders are mentioned by name but it is clearly a burning issue, perhaps in the light of changes following the recent Poor Law Amendment Act.

### 2.3.4 Ann Midler and her family 1841

In 1841 there was concern about the situation of Ann Midler and her family and the Vestry determined to “*Take the oppinions of the Board of Guardians*” about their removal.

#### 2.3.5 Jane Barratt 1846

In 1846 the Vestry was in discussion with their counterparts in Kenn Parish about a Jane Barratt. As usual the story is difficult to piece together. Kenn had approached Worle as Jane was now chargeable to Kenn. Worle replied to Kenn indicating their “*consent to acknowledge her as belonging to the Parish of Worle, without giving her any further trouble*” There are just glimpses of a human story behind these bald words. Jane Barrett could be the same Jane whose daughter Mary was recorded in the Minutes as being “*placed to George Lee*” in 1832. (see 2.1.3 above). The Parish Records also give us a couple of likely leads. The 1841 Census shows Jane Barratt a pauper, aged 50, living in Worle. There is no reference in the 1851 Census but in the 1861 Census we glimpse her again living in Watsons Lane, Worle. Watsons Lane was an earlier name for The Scaurs, where the Poor House was located, and from the layout of the Census entry it seems certain that that is where she was. Jane was a former washerwoman, a Pauper aged 70 and had been born in Stogursey. In 1865 she died and was buried at St Martin’s.

#### 2.3.6 Mary Davis 1848

In 1848 the Vestry agreed to accept Mary Davis as a parishioner of Worle “*respecting the order made upon the Overseers in the settlement of Mary Davis*”

#### 2.3.7 Thomas Bradford 1850

In 1850 The Vestry met five times to discuss the case of Thomas Bradford. Described in the Minutes as a Lunatic, Thomas was in all probability suffering from severe mental illness. The Minutes do not provide enough detail to be clear what was going on but it appears that his father, also named Thomas Bradford, was involved, that several Parishes in Gloucester (not all legible) were involved as was the Fairford Asylum. A deposition before Magistrates is mentioned and various people were employed to establish facts and negotiate with distant parishes. There was also the matter of Thomas Bradford’s marriage in Bath. Altogether quite a tangle! Whether Worle eventually accepted the removal of Thomas Bradford from the Parish of Cirencester is not known.

#### 2.3.8 Richard Field and his wife 1854

In 1854 the Vestry employed solicitor John James to act for them in the removal of Richard Field and his wife.

### 2.4 Invalidity

Ill health often accompanied poverty and there are two instances recorded in the minutes.

We have seen in the case of Thomas Bradford (2.3.7 above) the complications arising from his “lunacy”. Edward Hillman was another who suffered from the condition.

#### 2.4.1. Edward Hilman 1. 1842

The case of Edward Hilman occupied the Vestry for four meetings from 1842 to 1846. In March 1842 there is a statement in the Minute book, signed by George Hillman

*“I George Hilman do agree to pay £1 15 s per quarter from the date here off. towards the Maintenance of my Father Edward Hilman (lunatic) now chargeable to the said Parish”*

#### 2.4.2 Edward Hilman 2. May 1843

In May 1843 Edward Hilman was still a concern

*“The Parish Officers were directed to take all further steps to ascertain the property of Edward Hilman”*

#### 2.4.3 Edward Hilman 3. June 1843

In June 1843 there had clearly been developments in the case and the Vestry decided to suspend their enquiries for the time being and *“ordered that all Proceedings, respecting the property of Edward Hilman, be relinquished at present”*.

#### 2.4.4 Edward Hilman 4. 1846

In 1846 the Vestry instructed the Overseers *“to let the property belonging to Edward Hilman (lunatic), now chargeable to this Parish, to the best advantage”*

As is so often the case there is insufficient detail for a full understanding, but the matter is probably one of negotiation between parishes.

## 2.5 Delinquency

Occasionally the system would be abused. A certain Henry Day was a major offender.

#### 2.5.1 Henry Day 1. 1843

Henry Day occupied the Vestry's time for several years. The first intimation comes in June 1843 when the Vestry ordered *“that the Parish Officers of Worle be instructed to take the examination of Henry Day whenever he again becomes chargeable to the Parish”*

#### 2.5.2 Henry Day 2. 1846

In September 1846 the Vestry considered the case of Henry Day who had left his family, thus leaving them chargeable to the Parish. They decided to *“authorise the Parish Officers to take whatever steps they may deem expedient for his immediate apprehension.”* The 1851 Census shows Henry, a blacksmith, living with his family (wife Amelia and eight children, the last of whom was born in Newport, Monmouthshire) in Aberdare in 1851.

#### 2.5.3 Henry Day 3. 1851

By December of 1851 the Vestry decided that *“application be made to the Board of Guardians to direct the examinations of Amelia Day to be taken”*, so presumably Amelia had returned from Wales and was again alone and seeking the assistance of the Parish.

#### 2.5.4 Henry Day 4. Feb 1852

By 1852 things had become so serious that *“it was proposed the reward of £3/3 be offered for the apprehension of Henry Day”*.

## 2.6 Sources of Funding

Poor relief was largely paid for by the contribution through rates collected from the parishioners.

### 2.6.1 Reference Book of the Whole Parish. 1833

In May 1833 the Vestry came to an agreement with the Surveyor John Cox that he would “*furnish the Parishioners with a Reference Book to equalize the Land Tax Rates of the said Parish for the sum of £20*”. In May 1833 the fee for the Reference Book job was increased to £30 and its scope was extended to include the Land Tax assessment. In 1834 and 1835 the Rate allowed to the Overseer was set at sixpence in the Pound with specific reference to the new Reference Book. This seemingly important innovation just preceded the introduction of the Poor Law Reform Act and is probably a further indicator of the far-reaching administrative changes affecting Parish life at that time. Another example was the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836.

### 2.6.2 Outdoor Relief 1843

Outdoor relief was the name given to support provided to people in their own home rather than in a Poor House. This was a practice that the Act of 1834 sought to reduce through the provision of Workhouses. However It continued to be a practical solution to many of the situations encountered. There are a couple of mentions of it in the Minutes the first being in December 1843 when it is reported that “*The last quarterly account of the Axbridge Union was examined: and the out relief list approved*”

### Outdoor Relief 1873

It is also referred to in 1873, by which time the Board of Guardians were clearly controlling these matters. There is a proposal to request the Guardians to consider an increase:

*It was suggested .... that application be made to the Guardians for an increased allowance to those persons at present receiving outdoor relief and after some discussion it was agreed that the matter be postponed to a more advanced period of the year, in the hope that in the meantime action may be taken by the Guardians of their own accord.”*

The rates were not the only source of income for supporting poor people. Some, usually individual acts of charity, are described below

### 2.6.3 The Second Poor

Sometimes money for the support of the Poor came from individual charitable donations rather than from the Rates. In 1844 the Minutes refer to a bequest of bread by Mr Day to “*the second poor of Worle*”. This was to be “*given to those parishioners alone who have received no parochial relief of any description during the past year.*” A memorial on the interior of the north wall of the church refers to a similar bequest by Henry long in 1809.

### 2.6.4 Subscriptions 1847

In January 1847 the Vestry appeared to be suffering something of a crisis in their arrangements for supporting the poor people of Worle. They resolved “*that the Chairman do write to the several landowners and request their assistance, and that the following Committee be authorised to collect subscriptions of the inhabitants of*

*the Parish.*” Seven members formed the sub-committee. Perhaps that did the trick, for the subject did not come up in subsequent minutes. But we have seen above (2.2.1) how the Vestry were obliged to consider disposing of the Poor House in the following year 1848

#### 2.6.5 Charitable bequest of Thomas Castle. 1872

In April 1782 it was proposed that “*the bequest of £40 made to the Parish by the late Mr Thomas Castle and recently paid to the Churchwardens to be invested in the Government Fund and that the proposal be submitted to the Vicar*”. Interestingly the Vicar did not chair this meeting and in March 1875, when the next meeting with the Vicar in the Chair occurred, the bequest was treated rather differently. It was “*resolved that the sum of £40.00 be placed in the hands of the Charity Commissioners in the names of the Vicar and Churchwardens for the time being.*”

#### 2.6.6 Charitable donation 1884

In April 1884 it was proposed by Captain Battiscombe “*that in future the sum of £10 (instead of £7-0-0) be given to the Vicar as Alms for the poor. This sum to be paid at Easter for the year then ending.*”

### 3 The Roads and Lanes of Worle

The parish appointed an officer to be responsible for the roads, lanes and bridges. This person was known as the Surveyor or Waywarden. Both terms have long histories but as far as Worle Vestry is concerned Surveyor seems to be the older one. Waywarden came in after 1863 following the setting up of the new Highway Board, and was regularly used thereafter.

#### 3.0 Background

##### 3.0.1 Team Work

In April 1843 a somewhat mystifying entry proposed *“that the rate payers be enabled to decide the team work for the ensuing year.”* The proposal was not carried. But what is team work? See 3.0.2 below!

##### 3.0.2 Rate rebate for Team work.

In the minute of 1844 we learn that the teams in question are teams of horses. The parishioners themselves provided the manpower and equipment for road maintenance and received a rebate on their rates as a result. *“It was recommended to the Surveyor under the Inspection of the Committee appointed to survey The Highways in the Parish, to allow every rate Payer residing in the Parish, keeping a team of horses, to work out one third of their respective rates”*

##### 3.0.3 Need to engage solicitor

In 1846 over the course of two meetings we learn that the Vestry is to be indicted for some reason. They engage a solicitor Mr Jonathan Edgar and resolve to *“plead not guilty to the present indictment”*. We do not learn how they are supposed to have failed in their duties but it is stated that the Surveyor of the Highways should also attend the Assizes if necessary.

##### 3.0.4 Highways Act

In 1862 a new Highways Act was passed which allowed for the creation of Highway Districts consisting of a number of Parishes. The Vestry obviously didn't think much of this idea and at their meeting in September 1862 *“It was resolved by the majority to petition the Chairman and magistrates at the quarter sessions to be holden at Wells on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of October 1862 to exclude the Parish of Worle from any district that may be formed under the said act”*.

##### 3.0.5 Highways Act again

It seems that this mini rebellion was not acceptable to the Magistrates, as the Minutes of March 1863 record the nomination of Mr George Lee not only as assistant Overseer at £25 p.a but *“also nominated serve the office of Surveyor of the Highways at a salary of five pounds on the contingency of any work being required to be done in the Parish within three months from the date hereof, before the new Highway board comes in to operation.”*

##### 3.0.6 Repairs to wall

In March 1875 it was resolved to send a *“notice”* to Mr John Lovell *“requiring repairs or removal of his wall in Hollow Lane. It being in a dangerous condition.”*

*The work to be completed within one month from this date, or legal proceedings to be instituted.*” One wonders just where the offending wall stood. It was obviously something of a hazard!

### **3.1 Footpaths**

#### **3.1.1 Repair of footpath to The Row**

In March 1875 the newly re-elected Waywarden Mr Hewlett *“enquired whether the Vestry would sanction the repair of the Church Path leading from the Church to the Row by the Highway Board”*. At this point an objection was raised by Mr Stabbins seconded by Mr Scotford which led to a resolution *“that the Vestry should not interpose in the matter.”* The objection seemed to be based on the lack of progress in stoning the droves (see 3.2.3. below).

The area known as The Rows was redeveloped in the 1930s??. The footpath still runs from near the bottom of Coronation Road to the Church via Hill Road

#### **3.1.2 Stopping up of a footpath**

In 1877 a question had arisen about *“the stopping up of a path leading from the East End and over a portion of the South side of Worle Hill to Worle Church”*. Several opinions were voiced, Mr Day and Mr Printer proposing that *“the Highway Board be asked to maintain the right of way belonging to the Parish”*, Mr Stabbins and Mr J. Curle advising that *“The Highway Board be not appealed to on this subject”*. Mr Scotford thought the right of way could not be maintained and Mr Hewlett *“thought the question of right was an intricate one, and could not be settled without an appeal to law, and although he had no doubt that on a memorial from the parish that the Highway Board wd. entertain the question he should be sorry to involve the parish in litigation”*. The final decision was to not put the matter before the Highway Board.

It is not clear why the Vestry were so nervous about pursuing the matter, nor is it obvious where this path actually ran, nor where it actually was stopped up. The course was supposedly from the East End to the Church. Taking East End to refer to the east end of The Hill rather than the village, it could refer to the path setting off from Lower Kewstoke Road via the present St Martin’s Court emerging to the north of the Church on the Kewstoke Path (see below). This course is very apparent in the earlier maps. Odd lengths of disjointed and distorted footpath can still be traced through the modern development. This includes a short cul-de-sac running east off the “Captain’s Path” which ends in a stone wall that marks what was once the north eastern boundary of Sunnyside. Could this be the site of the “stopping up”?

#### **3.1.3 Captain Battiscombe’s path**

At the same meeting in December 1877 another footpath came up for discussion. It ran across a field belonging to Captain Battiscombe, the owner of Hillside, a fine property that stood opposite the church. Battiscombe was seeking to divert the footpath and the proposal was that the diversion *“...be accepted by the Parish on the understanding that the foot way be made and maintained in proper repair at the owner’s expense.”* Despite some opposition the *“proposition was carried by a large majority”* and the Vestry tasked the Chairman *“to write to Captain Battiscombe on*

*this subject and that in the event of his refusal to agree to the proposition of the parish that the Highway Board be appealed to in the matter."*

#### 3.1.4 Captain Battiscombe's path Part 2

In July 1879 there was further and detailed discussion of the Battiscombe diversion of *"the footpath leading from Worle over Worle Hill towards Kewstoke"*. In the one and a half years that had passed since the matter was first raised Battiscombe had been busy and seemingly secured the support of the Highways Board. The Surveyor Thomas Smith presented a plan of the proposed diversion and a letter from the Board. The Vestry accepted the proposal.

#### 3.1.5 Footpaths on Worle Hill

In March 1882 the Vestry resolved to write to the Chairman of the Highway Board *"complaining of the obstruction of footpaths on Worle Hill"*. Unfortunately there is no more detail of the issue or its outcome.

#### 3.1.6

In May 1887 the Vestry met to consider *"the laying-down of a footpath through the village of Worle"*. A deputation of three including the Vicar Rev W.F. Rose were appointed to take the proposal to Axbridge Highway Board *"and ask their assistance in carrying out the scheme."* Once again, the Minutes fail to record the outcome of this initiative, but it is probable that the first pavements along the High Street date from this meeting.

### 3.2 Stoning the Droveways

Droveways were tracks primarily used for the movement of livestock. In Worle some have developed as main highways, some still exist as footpaths and others have disappeared altogether as public rights of way. They must have been very heavy going in wet weather and stoning would have made a lot of sense.

#### 3.2.1 Stoning Worle Moor Drove

In 1858 the Vestry met to consider a *"notice"* from Thomas Quick calling for the Worle Moor West Drove to be stoned. Quick farmed on the moor in the south of the Parish in the vicinity of Vale Mill, a property associated with the Quick name. The Drove in question is probably a section of the lane which runs past Vale Mill. Known at the time of the Worle Enclosure Map (1802) as Moor Drove, it is now known as Moor Lane and is a pedestrianised lane running through a recent housing development. The Vestry not only agreed to the request but resolved *"that the following drove ways be stoned proportionally at an expense of £25 per annum, until the whole is completed:*

*Moor Drove* see above

*Mead Lane* led off the present Moor Lane in the general line of the present Mead Vale.

*Madam* Presumably Madam Lane

*Ricketts* Ricketts Lane, as at present, but extending the length of Tavistock Road

*Dunkirk* not known

*Strode Field* Lane leading off Ebdon Road by Nut Tree Cottage.

#### 3.2.2 More stoning of the Droveways



In 1874 the Vestry returned to the stoning of the local lanes, now referred to as Bye Lanes. The proposal was that they *“be stoned and kept in repair at the expense of the Parish: viz Madam Lane, Dunkite Lane, Rickett’s Lane, Meads Lane, Hauliers Moor Drove, Southfield Lane and Strode Lane.”* A number of the names are familiar from the earlier efforts to improve the lanes (3.2.1). The mention of Dunkite Lane (the lane running from Ebdon Road past the north of Castle Batch) introduces the possibility that the earlier reference to Dunkirk was a result of confusion. Also new here are:

Hauliers Moor Drove : there is a Halliers Moor (Tithe 147-158) along Locking Head Drove which is probably the location referred to.

Southfield Lane : this ran west from Moor Lane where Downs Close now stands

In the event the motion was voted down by ten votes to five and it was decided to *“defer this question until some future opportunity”*

3.2.3. In 1875 Mr Stabbins complained that *“sufficient progress had not been made with the repairs of the several lanes in this parish in compliance with the order of the Highway Board. The Way-warden undertook that all reasonable despatch should be used in this matter”*.

### **3.3 Bristol and Exeter Railway**

In 1841 the main line of Brunel’s Bristol and Exeter railway was opened cutting through farmland and introducing bridges over long established roads.

#### **3.3.1 Rating of the Railway**

In Dec 1842 the Vestry considered the impact of the new Railway and how its rateable value should be calculated. The numbers seem quite large and one wonders whether they were in fact imposed. The resolution was passed *“that the Directors of the Bristol & Exeter Railway Company be rated at the sum of nine hundred pounds per mile for the Gross Estimated Rental, from which ten per cent is to be deducted for the Rateable Value”*

#### **3.3.2 Maintenance of Bridge approaches**

In 1855 the Vestry found themselves negotiating with the Bristol and Exeter Railway Company over the approach to the road bridges. Evidently they were in need of repair, so it was decided on December 7<sup>th</sup> to *“call on the proper authorities to make a proposal to them”*. The compromise put forward was this: *“That if they will make the Bridge Approach in good repair, the parish will hereafter take to it by their keeping the Fences in good repair”*

#### **3.3.3 New proposal**

By the following April a new position had been adopted. The Parish would agree to take on the future repairs of the road surface *“provided the Bristol and Exeter Railway Company will execute the repairs at present needed”*. The Parish also declined to undertake repair and maintenance of the fences and resolved to send a copy of the Minute to the Board of Directors.

### 3.3.4 Final agreement

This appears to have satisfied the Board of Directors and their reply is copied in full into the Minute of the May 1856 Meeting.

*Bristol and Exeter Railway  
Engineers Office: Bristol Terminus  
Temple Mead  
Bristol 15 May 1856*

Sir

*Your communication of the 26<sup>th</sup> April on the subject of the repairs of the road and of the bridge approaches in the Parish of Worle was read to the board on the 7<sup>th</sup> inst, and I am directed to inform you that the Company propose to proceed at once with the repairs of the road surface on the understanding that all future repairs will be undertaken by the Parish*

*Tenders for the supply of stone are now under consideration. I shall be obliged by your informing me who is the surveyor for the Parish that I may apply to him to examine and approve the roads after repair*

*I remain*

*Yours truly*

*F.Fox (Engineer)*

There was no further mention of the fences!

## 3.4 The Parish Quarry

The Parish Quarry (described in the Tithe Apportionment of 1840 as “Limekiln and Public Stone quarry”) is a major feature of the Parish. It was occupied by Mr Printer for many years and it seems that in 1876 he was ready to give it up.

### 3.4.1 Proposals for the Quarry

In 1876 consideration was given to “*the most expeditious use of the quarry Pits and Lime Kiln in the general interests of the Parish*”. Mr Smith from the Highway Board explained the issues (though these were not recorded in the Minutes.) Mr Printer agreed to give up possession of the lime-kiln on the Parish Quarry to the Parish on 21<sup>st</sup> of February next. “*The proposition was unanimously accepted by the Vestry, and it was agreed that any material belonging to Mr Printer necessary for the support of the fabric should be valued by the Surveyor to the Highway Board and Mr Printer indemnified for it.*” It was unanimously agreed to repair the lime kiln and also “*that the quarry lime-kiln and surface-ground for feed or cultivation be let by the Parish.*”

### 3.4.2 The Highway Board’s view

At the next meeting in March 1876 the Waywarden reported that “*any outlay on the Lime-kiln would be disallowed by the Highway Board.*” There appear to have been two outcomes to this bombshell. Firstly there was the proposal that “*the surface of the stone grounds be let to the poor or labouring men of the parish, the same to be allotted by the Vicar and Parish officers for the time being*” and secondly that the matter of repairing and letting the lime-kiln and quarry should be postponed.

### 3.4.3 Stone for the new loop line

In June of the same year it was agreed that they should “*subject to the sanction of the High Way Board allow stones to be raised from the Parish Quarry for making the new loop-line or for any other purpose on payment of a royalty to the Parish.*”

Later Minutes do not record the Highway Board’s decision on the matter.

## 3.5 The Manor Pound

The pound was a secure area set aside for the safe keeping of animals that had strayed on to the Highway. Early maps show us that it stood along Lower Kewstoke Road a little to the north of the present Esgar Rise.

### 3.5.1 Appointment of Haywarden

In 1817 Edward Watts is appointed “*Haywarden for the year Ensuing and that he shall be*

*empowered to impound all stock strayed on the Highways in the sd. Parish the prices to be*

*fixed by the last agreement of Vestry*”. This is the only mention of a Haywarden and I am assuming that his duties became part of the Surveyor’s responsibilities at some stage.

### 3.5.2 Grazing on the Highways

In June 1843 it was “*Ordered that the Surveyor of the Highways be instructed to indict any party grazing any description of stock upon the Highways in the Parish of Worle after the 1<sup>st</sup> day of July 1843: and that the Surveyor do give publick notice of the same by handbills circulated about the Parish*”

### 3.5.3 The Pound and the Lord of the Manor

At the meeting in 1876 when the quarry and lime-kiln were being discussed the matter of the Parish Pound also came up. Mr Printer (presumably the same Mr Printer who was trying to dispose of the lime-kiln) stated that “*the Pound was claimed by Mr Stephens as Lord of the Manor*” and undertook to “*communicate on the subject*” with Mr Stephens.

### 3.5.4

At the following meeting it was reported that Mr Printer had “*received a communication from Mr Stephens in which he stated that the Pound was Parish Property, and that he would as Lord of the Manor maintain it in proper repair for the Parishioners.*” Interestingly it was referred to in the Tithe Apportionment as the Manor Pound in the ownership of Edward Stephens with Isaac Printer being a substantial tenant of his.

### 3.6 The Parish Bounds

#### 3.6.1 Encroachment of the Parish property

In May 1853 a Vestry was called “*to take into consideration some supposed encroachment of the Parish Property situated at Worle*”. They decided to adjourn to June 3<sup>rd</sup> “*for the purpose of marking out the bounds of the aforesaid property*”. It is a great shame that there is no further detail about this issue because the event has left its mark on the Worle landscape in the form of 4 (possibly 5) boundary stones, each of which bears the date 1853 and the initials W and K, and stands at a point where it marks a boundary dividing land belonging to Kewstoke Parish as described in the Tithe Map of 1840.

### 3.7 The New Road

#### 3.7.1 Mr Baker’s new road not adopted

In 1853 the Vestry met “*to consider the desirability of adopting the new road recently made by S.E. Baker Esq over Worle Hill as a Public Highway*.” This must refer to Milton Hill/Monks Hill and lies within the old Parish of Kewstoke. The Vestry rejected the proposal

#### 3.7.2 Not adopted for the second time

The Vestry again rejected the proposal at a meeting in May 1886. Again Mr Baker was there to put his case explaining “*that the road had been kept in repair for 3 years at his own expense*” and saying that “*he considered its adoption would be for the benefit of the Parish*”. Once again the Vestry considered that “*the road would be of no benefit to the parish*” and “*do not recommend its adoption by the Highway Board*”. Carried by 13 votes to 4. The Minutes offer no further information on the resolution of this issue.

### 3.8 Worle Turnpike

The Worle Turnpike Trust came into being in 1840 and was wound up in 1882. It built the road that ran along the course of the present Locking Road from approximately the junction with High Street, Worle to a point in the outskirts of Weston where it connected with Watersill Road. It ran for roughly a mile, though the precise location of the two toll points is not known.

#### 3.8.1 Trustees request financial support

In 1858 the Trustees of the Turnpike applied to the Vestry to carry out improvements to it. The Vestry weren’t inclined to help out and “*resolved that no outlay be made beyond what is necessary to keep the road in repair*.” All the same it is interesting that they were prepared to contribute to maintenance in spite of the fact that it was a private enterprise.

#### 3.8.2 Dipping-place in Madam Rhyne

In 1890 the Turnpike again came up in the Minutes. By this time the Trust was of course extinct, but it was claimed that it used to maintain a feature described as “*a certain dipping-place in Madam Rhyne*”. The Minutes also use the term “*watering-place*”. It is not clear what its purpose was: the possibilities include a place to allow carts to stand and take up water to expand their wheels, a sheep-dip, or a water

source for dipping buckets etc. Apparently “*On the extinction of the Trust the Highway Board refused to clean out this portion of the Rhyne as had previously been done by the Turnpike Trust considering that the work belonged to the Sanitary Authority.*” The Vestry resolved to approach the Sanitary Authority of the Axbridge Union “*to undertake the work of cleansing and keeping in repair the watering place in question as a public watering place.*”

## 4 Sanitation and Water Supply

In the previous section (see 3.8.2) we saw the difficulty of establishing responsibility for maintaining access to water supplies. This was a problem that would challenge the Parish Council that was to succeed the Vestry.

Although water is a basic human need there is little evidence of a communal approach to its provision in Worle until about the middle of the nineteenth century. It was only then that a growing scientific understanding of waterborne diseases began to have a bearing on national policy. Prompted by outbreaks of cholera that claimed thousands of lives, Parliament introduced the Public Health Act in 1848 which empowered local authorities to appoint an Officer of Health and to improve sanitation.

### 4.1 Acts and committees

#### 4.1.1. Medical Officer and Committee

In 1848 the Vestry resolved that *“That the Chairman do request the Medical Officer of the Parish to report to the Board of Guardians any nuisances he may consider to be injurious to health”*. Interestingly this item arose in the same meeting at which the possible closure of Worle’s Poor House was discussed (see 2.2.1. above). It may be that there was a connection between the two items.

#### 4.1.2 Nuisance Removal Committee

In 1855 the Nuisances Removal Act firmed up on some of the measures introduced earlier, requiring further action at a local level. Worle Vestry’s response came in 1858 and is recorded as follows: *“At a Vestry held at Worle Sep 18<sup>th</sup> 1858 convened for the express purpose of appointing a committee under the Nuisances Removal Act : it was determined that the said committee shall consist of twelve members, and the following persons were duly nominated”* Twelve names duly followed and arrangements were made to meet *“at the New Inn Worle on Monday next the 13<sup>th</sup> inst at 10 o’clock”*

#### 4.1.3 Nuisance Removal Committee re-appointed

In March 1859 twelve members were again elected to the Nuisance Removal Committee. Nothing further is heard of this Committee in the Vestry Minutes so perhaps it took on a life of its own.

#### 4.1.4 Dr Kemm and nuisances

In March 1890 the Vestry discussed the need for more land to accommodate burials. Dr Kemm took an active part in this discussion and also had something to say about Nuisances. He referred to the fact *“that there were many nuisances wh. may be injurious to public health existing in the Parish and understanding that a Local Sanitary Committee existed in the Parish proposed that such Committee should meet at least once in every three months”* Some 30 or more years after the formation of the original Nuisance Removal Committee there was apparently still a body in existence with a similar brief. Judging by Dr Kemm’s comments it may not have been as active as it might.

## 4.2 The Hatch-Pool and the Village pump.

In the 1880s a long-standing issue came out into the open which led in the end to the installation of Worle's Parish pump.

Opposite the New Inn (today's Woodspring Inn) lay a pond or pool the ownership of which was disputed. Unfortunately one of the claimants, a Mr Moses Stabbins, appears to have been a somewhat difficult individual and the local newspapers carry several accounts of rowdy confrontations around the pool and actions brought against various individuals by Stabbins. The full story remains to be researched. The issue was discussed in Vestry and seems to have had a happy outcome in that a regular supply of water for Worle's Parish Pump was installed in 1888.

### 4.2.1. The Hatch-pool Debate

In March 1880 a special meeting of the Vestry was held *"to take into consideration the question of the Parish Hatch-pool."* It was proposed by Captain Battiscombe and seconded by Mr Jones *"That Hatch-pool being the property of the Parish steps be taken to assert the right of the Parish to the property."* This was opposed as an amendment by Mr M. Stabbins (seconded by Mr S. Stabbins) who *"claimed the pool as his property."* The Stabbins faction was heavily defeated in the ensuing vote: *"On the original motion being put it was carried by the votes of all in the room 36 in number with the exception of the mover and seconder of the amendment"*.

Mr Stabbins continued to fight his corner and *"objected to the Vestry as illegal on account of the notice concerning the Meeting not having been signed by the Overseers and also because the Meeting did not begin punctually at 18 o'clock."*

A further proposal by Mr Day, seconded by Mr Jones, *"That the road-contractor having been summoned by Mr M. Stabbins for removing soil from the Hatch-pool legal assistance be procured by the parishioners to defend the road-contractor and establish the title of the Parish to the pool."* Again Stabbins was defeated by 34 votes to 2. And again Stabbins objected, this time *"to any sum being expended from the Rates for that purpose."*

Finally it was proposed *"That Mr Hewlett as Way-warden be requested to bring the matter before the Highway Board at their next meeting and that a document signed by the Rate payers present be taken by him to the Board requesting them to take action in the matter"*

This was accepted 34 to 2 and a Committee of seven was duly set up *"to take action in the matter and to obtain the necessary funds for the purpose."*

The names of 33 parishioners are appended to the minutes, excepting those of M. Stabbins and S. Stabbins.

### 4.2.2. Proposal for a village pump and trough.

In October 1886 the Vestry met to consider a proposition made by Mr Wm. Smith *"relative to the Hatch-Pool Worle adjoining his property"*. The offer was *"subject to the sanction of the parish to build a wall from the corner of his stable to Messrs Lee's Cottages and to bring the water by means of a pump to the Wall, with a trough for the use of the Parish outside the Wall", the pump and trough to be*

*erected to the satisfaction of the Vicar and Churchwardens.” The meeting were truly appreciative and “the proposition was unanimously accepted and a hearty vote of thanks passed to Mr Smith for his very handsome offer.’*

This generous offer of William Smith presumably led to the installation of the pump which stood opposite the New Inn until it was lost to development. It no longer exists and neither does the hatch-pool which was the source of so much debate in 1880.

### **4.3 The Parish Well and the Axbridge Union Rural Sanitary Authority**

It is not clear whether the Parish well was the same thing as the Pool discussed above. I suspect not but there is no indication as to where it stood. Perhaps it was in the upper part of the village.

#### **4.3.1 Work on the Parish Well.**

In August 1887, one year after William Smith offered to construct a pump and trough opposite the New Inn, water supply was again an issue. The meeting was held to discuss *“the necessity of deepening the Parish Well and to receive estimates of the cost”*

Mr J. Day explained that there had been complaints about the *“short supply of water in the Parish Well”* and that he had *“brought the matter before the Rural Sanitary Authority”* who informed him that the consent of a Vestry Meeting would be needed before any work could be undertaken.

It was agreed that *“subject to the consent of the Rural Sanitary Authority’ a Committee should be formed to get the necessary work done at a cost not exceeding £25”*

#### **4.3.2 The rural sanitary authority**

In August 1873 The Vestry established a further committee *“in obedience to a requirement from the Axbridge Union Rural Sanitary Authority”*. This seems to be in response to the requirement to *“form a Parochial Committee under the Public Health Act 1872”* rather than addressing any particular issue.



## 5 Church Matters

In addition to the secular issues described above, decisions relating to the maintenance and running of the church also passed through the hands of the vestry. The small team responsible comprised the Vicar, the two Churchwardens, the sexton, the Parish Clerk and the organist/choirmaster. The Vicar and the Churchwardens were present at just about every meeting of the Vestry, the vicar as chairman and the Churchwardens as the lay representative of the Vicar and the parishioners respectively.

### 5.1 The Vicars

Our entire period of 76 years, from 1815 to 1891, was overseen by no more than four vicars. John Price came to the Parish in 1797 and signed his last Vestry Minute as chairman in 1827. He was succeeded by Nathaniel Wodehouse who chaired his first Vestry in 1831 and his last in 1870. Charles M Doherty chaired one meeting only, in April 1871, and four years of lay chairmen followed until the appointment of W.F. Rose in 1875. Rose was the last Chairman to sign the Vestry Minutes (in October 1891) and he left Worle in 1896.

### 5.2 The Churchwardens

The office of churchwarden is a longstanding one and dates back to the thirteenth century. Historically they were responsible for maintaining the fabric of the church and other expenditure determined by the parish. The accounts produced by Worle's churchwardens (unfortunately far from complete) are held by the South West Heritage Trust.

The churchwardens were effectively the executive of the parish church and it is clear from the Vestry Minutes that tasks were carried out in their name (and that of the vicar).

#### 5.2.1. The Shepstone issue 1831

This was discussed in 2.2.4. The reference is picked up here to show how the wording of the minute emphasises the important role of the Churchwardens: “ ... *proposed and agreed that the Churchwardens and Overseers shall allow tenancy to Edward Shepstone.... Shepstone having released the Churchwardens from all arrears of rent and given Security for the Payment of Twenty Pounds*” ....

#### 5.2.2 John Lovell's Wall 1875

When it came to serving notice on John Lovell to repair his wall in Hollow Lane the Churchwardens and Overseers were the ones to sign it. See 3.0.6 above.

#### 5.2.3 Vicar's and Parish's Churchwardens

The distinction between responsibility for Chancel and Nave was reflected in the existence of two churchwardens, one appointed by the Vicar and one by the Parish. This comes out clearly in the Minute of April 1878. The Churchwardens presented their accounts and “*a hearty vote of thanks*” was passed for their valuable services.

Then *“Mr G Hewlett was re-appointed Churchwarden by the Vicar. Mr Thomas Parsley was elected Churchwarden on behalf of the Parishioners”*.

#### 5.2.4 Mr Parsley declines

In the following meeting in May 1878 it is recorded that *“Mr Thomas Parsley having declined to serve the office of Churchwarden to wh. he had been elected by the parishioners Mr James Day was unanimously re-elected on the part of the Parish.”* Some confusion here! Perhaps no one had thought to ask Thomas Parsley if he would be happy to serve or maybe he had just changed his mind.

#### 5.2.5 George Hewlett’s long service recognised

In April 1885 it was recorded that *“The Vicar’s Churchwarden, Mr George Hewlett, having expressed a wish to retire, the Vicar, after having expressed his deep sense of obligation to Mr Hewlett for his most valuable services during his 16 years of office, nominated Captain W.E.S. Battiscombe as Churchwarden for the ensuing year.”*

### 5.3 The Sexton

The Sexton acted as caretaker with the additional role of digging graves in the churchyard.

#### 5.3.1. The cost of funerals

The earliest mention of the Sexton occurs in March 1817 when George Phillips was *“Elected to the office of sexton of this Parish for the year ensuing.”* In reality he was probably appointed rather than elected. It was also agreed that *“the general price for funerals shall be 9. 6d. to begin ringing the bell at 10 o’clock in the Forenoon and all persons requiring the bell to be tolled before 10 o’clock to give 10/6 ...”* One wonders how much the of the fee mentioned went to the sexton or whether it was just considered as part of his duties.

#### 5.3.2. The appointment of James Harris as Sexton

In March 1832 James Harris was appointed as Sexton. No rate of pay is recorded.

#### 5.3.3 The Sexton’s Fees

In April 1857 rather than setting a rate for the job, as was done with most appointments by the Vestry, *“the Sextons fees and charges for digging graves were left to the arrangement of the Churchwardens for the ensuing year”*

#### 5.3.4 John Lancaster, Sexton

In April 1872 Mr John Lancaster was appointed as Sexton. The question of his pay seems to have been clearly determined; *“... proposed by Mr Scotford and seconded by Mr Printer that Mr John Lancaster be retained in the Office of Sexton receiving £6.0.0.with the sexton’s Fees.* This suggests that as well as a retaining salary he received one-off fees such as the additional sums mentioned in 5.3.1. above.

#### 5.3.5 John Lancaster, misbehaviour?

In March 1875 a rather curious minute leaves something of a cloud hanging over the head of Mr Lancaster

*“On the proposal of Mr Hewlett seconded by Mr Scotford it was decided that John Lancaster be paid the sum of £8.0.0. for his duties as sexton – according to agreement.”*

At this point It is noted that the accounts were passed and then a further minute states that it was: *“Proposed by Mr James Hardwick seconded by Mr George Lee that John Lancaster be appointed sexton for the ensuing year at a salary of £4.00 subject to removal in case of any misconduct.”*

Why at the same meeting was he offered a salary of £8.0.0. and then almost immediately found the offer halved and a clause threatening dismissal for misconduct introduced? I suspect that significant further discussion intervened and was simply not recorded!

#### 5.3.6 John Lancaster. Could do better!

Two years later in April 1877 Lancaster's salary was again on the agenda and it seems that the Vestry were less than happy with his performance.

*“The Vestry refused to entertain the application of John Lancaster for an increase of salary as Sexton, and received from him an understanding that the Church should be better cleaned for the future”*

#### 5.3.7 John Lancaster. Still trying!

In April 1882 it was recorded that: *‘A letter asking for an increase of salary from John Lancaster was laid before the meeting, and on the proposition of Mr Day seconded by Capt. Battiscombe it was agreed that he be given a gratuity of ten shillings.’*

#### 5.3.8 John Lancaster. The end of the affair?

The last reference to the matter of Lancaster's salary occurs in March 1883, when *“An application for an increase of salary to John Lancaster was refused”*.

It does seem that the unfortunate Lancaster was not held in high esteem.

### 5.4 The Parish Clerk or Vestry Clerk

From 1827 there are occasional references to the office of Parish Clerk. His responsibilities are never defined but it is a paid role, generally associated with that of Overseer.

#### 5.4.1 Appointment of Vestry Clerk

For example in March 1831: *“Edward May to serve the Office of Overseer and Vestry Clerk and allow him Eleven Pounds per year To be paid out of the Poors Rate”*

#### 5.4.2 Increase in salary for Clerk

In April 1853 *“The Clerks fees were raised to five pounds per annum.”* In comparison with 1831 (see 5.4.1 above) it will be noted that the Clerk's fees had fallen. This may relate to the separation of the roles of Clerk and Overseer.

#### 5.4.3 Parish Clerk dispensed with

In April 1872 this rather shadowy role came to an end when it was decided: *“that the Office of Parish Clerk be dispensed with”*

### 5.5 Music: the organist and the Choir

Music would have played an important part in Church ritual but sadly there are few references to it in the Minutes. According to J. and S. Thompson in “900 years of Power and Glory”, their history of St Martin’s Church, Worle, a gallery was installed in the late eighteenth century which would have served for instrumentalists to play the music of the services. The organ, originally built in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, was installed in the early 1860s and rebuilt in its present position in 1876.

#### 5.5.1 Choir Outing

In April 1885 *“it was agreed that the Churchwardens be at liberty to contribute from the Offertory Fund the sum of Five pounds (or more if necessary) per annum towards the Choir outing”* Evidence perhaps of a healthy musical scene in Worle but unfortunately there are no further details of the excursion.

#### 5.5.2 Consideration of a church organ.

As early as May 1854 thought was being given to the installation of an organ: a special meeting was *“called to take into consideration the repairs of the Church, it was resolved that the gallery as it stands at present with elevations is large enough to take an organ for the church”*. According to the Thompsons this is where the organ, which now stands on the north side of the choir, was originally installed.

#### 5.5.3

In April 1881 *“it was resolved that the addition of salary asked for by Mr Medhurst as Organist be granted – namely £5.0.0. additional, and use of the School-Room for two concerts”* It is interesting to note that the 1881 Census records a William Medhurst “Music teacher and Organist” living in Walliscote Road, Weston-super-Mare. It must have been quite a pull up to St Martin’s for services, concerts and choir practices.

### 5.6 Repairs to the Church

We know that in 1870 the Church reopened following a major restoration of the Church under the supervision of the noted architect John Norton. Five years previously the neighbouring monastic barn, having been restored from its ruined state to a school by the same architect, had also reopened and was later to serve as the meeting place of the Vestry, who forsook their traditional venue in the Church. Strangely neither event has left any record in the Vestry Minutes. Nonetheless we have a few records of work carried out at the Church.

#### 5.6.1. Repairs to Church Roof

Three entries in the Minutes record the process of contracting for some work on the Church roof:

On May 13<sup>th</sup> 1835 the following agreement was written into the minutes: *“I hereby agree to repair the Roof of the Church according to the specification given for the sum of Thirty Six Pounds, I also agree to make good any Injury that may happen*

*to the ceiling in making the above repairs”* The entry is in a neat, steady hand and signed by the builder “*Thomas Watts*”

On 15th May a Vestry was held and “*... we whose names are Hereunto subscribed do agree to the above contract, and Do allow the Churchwardens to pay the above sum into*

*The hands of Thomas Watts, one half when The work is completed and the remainder the beginning Of September next”* The agreement is witnessed by seven members of Vestry, including the two Churchwardens.

Finally on 14<sup>th</sup> August the money for payment is released when the Vicar and the Overseer “*Do allow the Churchwardens a rate at four pence in the Pound for the repairs of the Church*”

#### 5.6.2 Staining Inside Walls

In April 1854 the minutes record that “*it was unanimously resolved that Mr George Lee do stain the inside walls of the Church and Chancel for the sum of twenty five pounds*”

### 5.7 The Churchyard

St Martin’s Churchyard today is a split-level affair with the church occupying the upper plot amid an assortment of early graves and the lower section reached by steep steps and a winding path.

#### 5.7.1 Repairs to the Churchyard Wall

In May 1875 a Vestry was held “*for the purpose of discussing the estimate given for the repairs to the Church-yard wall and other business*”. Unfortunately the Minutes do not give the figure contained in the estimate, but it must have been a tidy sum as “*It was resolved that appeal be made to the parishioners and others possessing burial ground in the Churchyard for the necessary funds.*”

A committee was formed to carry out the work.

#### 5.7.2 Partial closing of churchyard

Some 9 years later in April 1884 the churchyard wall was again an issue. It seems that the churchyard was threatened with partial closure. Although not specified it could well be that the south wall was the source of the problem. There is a pronounced geological feature which runs through the upper village at this contour and calls for the construction of massive retaining walls. This vulnerable wall was again in danger of collapse in 2015??

So we find that it was “*proposed by Captain Battiscombe and seconded by Mr G. Hewlett that the question of the partial closing of the present Church-yard, and providing additional burial ground, be brought before the Parish.*” It was to be another six years before the nettle was grasped!

#### 5.7.3. Extension to the Churchyard 1

The final set of entries in the minutes is almost exclusively concerned with negotiations for an extension to the churchyard. Between 9 April 1890 and 28 October 1891 the Vestry met on 7 separate occasions. Not only was the matter

discussed at length but it was also recorded in much greater detail than was usual. A major player in the discussion was Captain Battiscombe who had served on the Vestry since 1877 and had been the Vicar's Churchwarden since 1885, having served a spell as the Parishioner's Churchwarden for the previous five years. Battiscombe lived in the fine old house known as "Hillside" which stood to the north of the church.

We saw in 5.7.2 above that this had been a longstanding problem but the proposal for an extension received its first airing on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1890 when *"Captain Battiscombe brought before the Vestry the crowded state of the Churchyard on the South and East sides and pointed out the necessity of securing suitable additional burial space for the Parish"*

It was agreed *"that a small Committee be appointed for the purpose of ascertaining what land would be available for this purpose and to report to a future Vestry."* Five members were duly appointed, including the Vicar and Captain Battiscombe.

#### 5.7.3 Extension to the Churchyard 2

In June 30 the sub-committee announced their detailed proposal for the extension. In order to avoid the more expensive option of making a cemetery to be managed by a Burial Board as required by the Churchyard Enlargement Act 1867 they would need to acquire land immediately adjoining the existing Churchyard. This could be achieved by Captain Battiscombe selling to the Parish a plot that he owned (Tithe Map 502 ) and the Vicar giving up some of his land and taking some of Battiscombe's plot as compensation. The deal was described in some detail and Battiscombe insisted on 5 conditions.

The price of £138 and the conditions were agreed to by the meeting and there followed much discussion about how the money was to be raised. The committee proposed that a voluntary rate should be made with subscriptions asked from others. It was finally agreed that *"an effort be made to raise the amount by public subscription and that a Committee consisting of the Vicar and Churchwardens, with power to add to their number, be requested to take the necessary measures."*

#### 5.7.4 Extension to the Churchyard 3

Battiscombe had obviously been reconsidering the problem of raising the funds and by the next meeting on 4 July he had written to the Vestry saying that since his proposed terms *"were not acceptable to the meeting, he felt that the only course open to him was to withdraw his offer"*.

After a long discussion the vestry eventually proposed *"that Captain Battiscombe be asked to extend the time for the acceptance or refusal of his offer until Monday July 21."*

#### 5.7.5 Extension to the Churchyard 4

The meeting of July 21 duly arrived and with it a letter from Battiscombe which was read to the meeting by the Chairman: *"The letter stated that Captain Battiscombe regretted that he was unable to accede to the proposal and referred the Parishioners to his letter of June 2 as being final on his part."*

All told Battiscombe's bombshell seemed to be final and "*after some discussion the members separated - no resolution being come to*".

#### 5.7.6 Extension to the Churchyard 5

Eight months passed and then at the Vestry meeting of March 28 1891 the issue was re-opened. With no preliminaries or discussion recorded "*...it was proposed that a Committee be appointed ... to enquire as to sites available for a new Burial Ground, and to report to a future meeting*

With the Vicar, Captain Battiscombe and four others on the committee we were back to square one!

#### 5.7.7 Extension to the Churchyard 6

The April meeting passed with no mention of the Churchyard and then on 16 October 1891 the committee produced their report into the sites available for a new burial ground.

The original offer was back on the table with some minor qualifications: Battiscombe would sell his field for the higher price of £150, a deal would be done with Rev. Rose that would allow the whole lower part of the cemetery to be created and a roadway would be formed from the upper churchyard to the lower.

#### 5.7.8 Extension to the Churchyard 7

The final meeting on this issue was recorded on 28 October 1891 when the Vestry met to consider the proposal for the re-arrangement of the land. The previous meeting's proposals were rehearsed and agreed, the Committee was reappointed to collect subscriptions and tenders were to be obtained for building a suitable wall and laying out the ground.

The matter seemed to have been organised to everybody's satisfaction, "*carried unanimously*" being the phrase of the day and the final chapter in 76 years of minutes had now been written.

