

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Minehead has been a manor, a parish, a tithing, a borough and an urban district but the boundaries of each were different. The manor and borough did not include Bratton but the parliamentary borough included Alcombe and Staunton tithings in Dunster, whose tithingmen attended Minehead manor courts although they were not in the manor.¹ Minehead tithing covered the parish except Bratton manor, which was in Yearnor tithing, near Porlock.² After 1895 Minehead was divided between its urban and rural areas creating a new civil parish of Minehead Without. In 1916 Alcombe and Staunton were absorbed into Minehead civil parish and urban district.³

MANORIAL ADMINISTRATION

By the late 14th century there were twice yearly courts leet and monthly or three-weekly manor courts for Minehead manor dealing with the usual offences, nuisances and tenancies and were attended by the tithingmen of Minehead, Alcombe and Staunton. Court rolls survive for many years between 1379 and 1660⁴ and papers from the late 18th to late 19th century.⁵ The autumn court leet was known as Fulfilling day in the 15th century in 1469 appointed a tithingman and two each of constables, ale-tasters, victual tasters, pig wardens, breadweighers and shambles wardens.⁶ A leet dinner was held by the 1570s.⁷

From 1604 courts were held in the old town hall⁸ but a manor courthouse was recorded in 1647, when tenants were required to clean the millpond, maintain various

¹ SHC, DD/L P 26/6; Maxwell Lyte, Hist. Dunster, II, 453.

² SHC, Q/REI 8/8b.

³ SHC, DD/L 1/17/63, 2/17/97; D/PC/du 1/2/4; *ibid.* Q/REI 8/7; J. Savage, Hist. Hund. Carhampton, 391.

⁴ SHC, DD/L P3/10, 17—18, P26/4, 6, P27/10, P 28/13—16, P29/25, 29, 31—2, 40, P30/47—8, 113.

⁵ SHC, DD/L 1/43/2.

⁶ SHC, DD/L P27/11, P28/13/1—2.

⁷ SHC, DD/L P29/40.

⁸ SHC, DD/L P30/52, 59.

watercourses, view the bounds and perform an annual stock round up on the commons.⁹ By the 1680s the courts were poorly attended and in the 18th century the courts leet appear to have only elected the customary officers and drank large quantities of liquor at a feast in the Plume of Feathers. ‘Garsham’ and ‘wiggin’ were claimed but it was unknown by whom they were paid and for what.¹⁰ Attempts were apparently made to revive the court from c.1780 when 311 men were supposed to attend the leet but only 201 in the 1790s when the main business was nuisance. A crier of bellman was appointed from 1796¹¹ but in the 19th century the court held at the Plume of Feathers elected only one of each type of officer and there was little other business.¹²

The pound was still in use for pigs found wandering in the late 18th century.¹³ It was at the south-western end of Bampton Street, now the corner of Poundfield Road.¹⁴

No records survive for Bratton manor but tenants owed suit to its court in the 18th century.¹⁵

PAROCHIAL ADMINISTRATION

In addition to the usual parish officers there was a vestry by 1637 when seven men agreed on fees for bellringing and burial.¹⁶ The vestry approved the overseers’ accounts two or three times a year but a select vestry was not appointed until 1824 when it comprised the vicar, wardens, overseers and 14 other men who agreed to pay

⁹ SHC, DD/L P29/48; Maxwell Lyte, Hist. Dunster, II, 453.

¹⁰ SHC, DD/L 1/10/33, 1/43/2, 1/52/31/3.

¹¹ SHC, DD/L 1/43/2.

¹² SHC, DD/L 1/43/2.

¹³ SHC, DD/L 1/43/2

¹⁴ SHC, DD/L P3/12.

¹⁵ TNA, C107/88.

¹⁶ SHC, D/P/m.st.m 4/1/1.

Is for non-attendance at meetings.¹⁷ The annual vestry remained responsible for parish roads and, concerned at the increasing rate arrears, extended statutory labour to ten hours a day in summer and eight in winter but in 1861 farmed out maintenance for £210.¹⁸ By the later 19th century vestry business was confined to electing officers and discussing church repair.¹⁹

After 1895 Minehead was split into Within and Without parishes with separate vestries and rates. The Within vestry appointed a salaried assistant overseer paid by both parishes. From 1896 he was appointed by the urban district council, which took over most parish business and vestries seldom met thereafter. In the 1980s Minehead Without merged with Selworthy as a combined civil parish.²⁰

BOROUGH

A portreeve and burgesses were said to have existed in the 15th century but no records survive and no claim was made to previous borough government in 1559 or in later attempts to regain the charter so it may have been a temporary creation of the Herberts.²¹ In 1559 Minehead gained a charter of incorporation as a borough covering same territory as the manor, with a common council comprising a portreeve, elected annually and serving as clerk of the market, and 12 principal burgesses, chosen for life. They could regulate crafts and victualling and have a market and fairs, a lawyer as steward, a sergeant at mace, a court of record for pleas not exceeding £40 and a prison.²² The corporation held the town tolls and some land where cellars were built

¹⁷ SHC, D/P/m.st.m 9/1/1, 12/2/2.

¹⁸ SHC, D/P/m.st.m 9/1/1.

¹⁹ SHC, D/P/m.st.m 9/1/2.

²⁰ SHC, D/U/m 10/1/1; http://www.lgbce.org.uk/__documents/records-and-resources/bulletins-published-by-dclg/bulletin85-86.pdf: accessed 30 July 2012.

²¹ VCH Office, Taunton, draft history; above, landownership.

²² SHC, DD/L P29/47.

in 1560s²³ but in the 1580s the manor prosecuted sellers of bad meat, elected clerks of the market, controlled ale selling, imprisoned offenders and put people in the stocks as it had before the charter and presumably prevented the council exercising its powers.²⁴ There are no borough records although courts were held, debtors were kept in the ‘cockmoyle’ prison and the portreeve examined offenders on behalf of the magistrates in 1607.²⁵

The charter was conditional upon the corporation maintaining the harbour and George Luttrell petitioned for its withdrawal claiming failure to maintain the harbour by ‘simple rude handicraft men fitter to be governed than to govern’.²⁶ In 1602 he secured a commission of inquiry. He started work on a new quay in 1604 and generally behaved as if the charter had already been rescinded. Inquisitions were held at Dunster and Taunton in 1604 and in 1605 the borough officers were arrested by the Dunster constables at the instigation of George Luttrell and taken before Star Chamber for alleged misuse of their prison.²⁷ After consideration by the Exchequer court in 1606 and another Inquisition at Taunton in 1607 the charter was declared forfeit and the freedoms extinguished.²⁸ Thereafter the Luttrells controlled Minehead through the manor court although it retained its Parliamentary seats with the title borough.²⁹

The Luttrells defeated attempts to obtain a new charter of incorporation in 1620 and 1667 claiming only they could maintain the port and that seafarers and traders were unfit for office, although the town was governed by two constables

²³ SHC, DD/L P29/35.

²⁴ SHC, DD/L P 3/18; P29/40/5.

²⁵ SHC, DD/WO 34/3/3; *ibid.* Q/SR 2/41—4.

²⁶ SHC, DD/L P30/50.

²⁷ SHC, DD/WO 34/3/3, 57/2/1; M. Siraut, *Trevelyan Letters* (Som. Rec. Soc. 80), 66.

²⁸ TNA, E 159/425/25.

²⁹ Below, Parl. Representation.

appointed by the manor from amongst such men.³⁰ In 1716 after a century of growth and prosperity the inhabitants tried again but the Luttrells claimed that it was only parliamentary candidates who wanted incorporation, which would put power in the hands of ‘poor beggarly people’. Minehead’s fortunes failed and self-government only came in 1896.³¹

TOWN HALL

The right to weigh trade goods was secured by the Luttrells probably by c.1500 and they probably built the Town Hall.³² In 1604 George Luttrell leased it, retrospectively from 1598, to George Quirke, merchant, and Simon Hatsell, clothier for 20s reserving the right to hold courts. George Quirke was to be the last portreeve.³³ There was a hall with space beneath and the prison with a chamber above. By 1620 it was the Old Town hall and the best room was reserved for courts for six years. The New Hall, east of Friday Street, was let in 1632 with the customs and duties for keeping and weighing merchandise.³⁴ The lessee added to the site and by 1668 it comprised a hall, buttery and cellar with accommodation above, a further ten rooms, two courtyards and two store houses.³⁵

Weighing at the town hall was often a condition of 17th-century leases³⁶ but after the hall burnt down c.1701 merchants weighed in their stores even after the hall was rebuilt c.1713 when a hall keeper was employed to weigh goods and collect charges.³⁷ An 81-signature petition against compulsory weighing claiming it was

³⁰ SHC, DD/L P30/112; 1/52/28.

³¹ TNA, SP 35/7/47; SHC, DD/L P30/11.

³² TNA, STAC 8/204/21.

³³ SHC, DD/L P30/52; *ibid.* Q/SR 2/41—4.

³⁴ SHC, DD/L P30/52, 59, 74; 1/10/35A.

³⁵ SHC, DD/L P3/12, P30/74.

³⁶ M. Siraut, *Trevelyan Letters* (Som. Rec. Soc. 80), 109; SHC, DD/L 1/44/5.

³⁷ SHC, DD/L 1/4/11, 1/51/27, 1/54/42/2.

intended for wool only³⁸ was countered by a list of charges c.1740 for all Welsh goods from 1s for 20 stone of wool to 6d for each bullock hide and up to 1s a week for cellarage.³⁹ The last account was for 1767 and despite a claim in 1770 that the beam was more accurate and older than the king's it had gone out of use by 1777. The hall possibly became an alehouse⁴⁰ and was destroyed in the 1791 fire but official notices were pasted on the remains until 1821 or later.⁴¹

URBAN DISTRICT

In 1890 Minehead ratepayers petitioned for a sanitary district to enforce health regulations as the unsanitary nature of parts of the town was damaging the tourist trade. They argued that most of the rate revenue came from the urban area and that the town's population of 2,000 increased to 3,000 in the summer.⁴² On 3 June 1891 the Minehead Local Board of Health held its first meeting in the Public Hall under the chairmanship of solicitor and property developer Thomas Ponsford. They agreed to meet fortnightly, appoint four salaried staff including an inspector of nuisances, lodging houses and dairies and provide street watering, gas lighting and a fire brigade but not a lock-up. In 1894 they discussed buying the gas works and preventing 'excursionists' coming on Sundays.⁴³

The Local Board was replaced by a nine-man Urban District Council, elected in December 1894, which first met on 2 January 1895, also chaired by Thomas Ponsford. Both bodies used a seal with a three-masted ship above a woolsack and the chairman was given a jewel and chain in 1936. The council dealt with nuisances,

³⁸ SHC, DD/L 1/52/28.

³⁹ SHC, DD/L 1/52/31/3.

⁴⁰ SHC, DD/L 1/55/3, 1/56/7/1, 1/58/17/2.

⁴¹ SHC, DD/L 1/51/24/2, 1/56/7/1, 1/59/10/3.

⁴² SHC, C/GP/D 60.

⁴³ SHC, D/U/m 2/1/1; *ibid.* A/CVZ 1/1 (4).

provided urinals, cabstands, street watering, refuse collection and a new fire engine house. From 1896 it appointed overseers and managed parish charities.⁴⁴ Of the nine members, three retired each year. After the 1897 election, which produced some scurrilous handbills, there were many proposals for improvements and committees were set up for housing, stables and water and later for the isolation hospital, civil defence and the seafront to set up shelters, seats and bandstands.⁴⁵ In 1907 the council opened a 3-a. burial ground on the Porlock Road held jointly with Minehead Without parish.⁴⁶

In 1901—2 the council built an Edwardian Baroque market house designed by W. J. Tamlyn with a diagonally placed clock turret on the roof like its predecessor, a council room and surveyor's office.⁴⁷ The Esplanade and Blenheim Gardens were created by the council,⁴⁸ which also replaced its tip at Sea Lane in Dunster these were usually let out in the 1920s,⁴⁹ and built its first dwellings in 1913—14. In 1916 the urban district was extended to include the rest of parish, except Bratton and rural North Hill, with Alcombe, Staunton and the warren area from Dunster and four houses at Hopcott in Wootton Courtney.⁵⁰

By 1928 the council had additional offices in Quirke Street as well as a fire station and two reservoirs and by mid century employed c.20 staff besides 53 outdoor workers including seafront supervisors, deckchair, parking and tennis court attendants and staff at the Gaiety theatre in the 1960s.⁵¹ On 31 March 1974 the Urban District was abolished and Minehead became part of West Somerset District with its main

⁴⁴ SHC, D/U/m 2/1/1, 2/2/1, 10, 3/4/1, box 11; *ibid.* A/AGC 35/6; J. Astell, Around Minehead (1995), 27.

⁴⁵ SHC, A/AGC 35/5—6; *ibid.* D/U/m 3/2/1, 3/11/1; *ibid.* Q/RUo 27; VCH office, Taunton, handbills.

⁴⁶ SHC, D/D/Ri 3; D/U/m 2/2/2, 5; *ibid.* A/AGC 35/6.

⁴⁷ TNA, IR 58/82388; SHC, D/U/m 2/2/1, 4—5.

⁴⁸ SHC, D/U/m 3/11/1; above, intro.

⁴⁹ SHC, D/U/m, box 11; T. Sharp, Minehead (1950).

⁵⁰ SHC, A/AGC 35/6, 38/2.

⁵¹ SHC, C/V 15; *ibid.* D/U/m 3/3/1—2, 4; 3/15/1; *ibid.* A/AGC 38/6.

headquarters at Williton.⁵² However, in 2000 Minehead had a town council of 16 members elected from four wards and ten district councillors.⁵³

PORT ADMINISTRATION

Harbour

Until the 1950s the harbour belonged to the Luttrells. The keeper of the Were, as the harbour was then known, was recorded in 1483⁵⁴ and the Were House was rented out in 1597 with the duties.⁵⁵ The office was held in the early 17th century by the church organist, son-in-law of Lewis Lashbrooke.⁵⁶ From the early 18th century the Luttrells imposed additional duties to maintain their new quay and a water bailiff was appointed in the manor court until 1823 or later to collect duties and manage the harbour.⁵⁷ The water bailiff's house was possibly that of 1597 and in the 1770s was replaced by another on the seaward side of Quay Street,⁵⁸ where it was located in 1822 and 1868.⁵⁹ The officer was paid £15 a year in 1769.⁶⁰ There were two water bailiffs c.1810⁶¹ but although still elected as such they were known as harbourmasters. John Frank Dugdale, schoolmaster's son and former clerk to the Customs Collector who became harbourmaster c.1815, died in 1874 and founded a charity for the poor.⁶² The harbourmaster's office on the quay is now run by the district council.⁶³

From 1769 until c.1818 a body of Minehead Harbour Trustees, originally including the vicar and the manor steward, met annually at the George or the Plume of

⁵² SHC, D/U/m 2/2/41.

⁵³ SHC, A/DCK 1.

⁵⁴ SHC, DD/L P28/14/2,

⁵⁵ SHC, DD/L P30/49.

⁵⁶ SHC, T/PH/ste 9.

⁵⁷ SHC, DD/L 1/43/2, 1/54/42/2, 1/55/2/5—6; *ibid.* Q/RUa 24.

⁵⁸ SHC, DD/L 1/10/33, 1/10/35C; 1/33/49.35.

⁵⁹ SHC, DD/L 291/8, 297/1—2.

⁶⁰ SHC, DD/L 1/51/24/1.

⁶¹ SHC, DD/L 1/4/12/4.

⁶² SHC, DD/L 1/24/8; DD/CCHg 25; *ibid.* Q/RUa 16; TNA, BT 212/34.

⁶³ SHC, DD/CCHg 25.

Feathers to inspect the accounts and in 1781 to obtain a loan for quay repair. From the 1790s they seldom met unless new trustees were needed and then simply recorded the ever increasing debt on the quay extension mortgage, which had reached over £25,000 by 1818.⁶⁴

Customs

Minehead was a creek of Bridgwater but had its own customs officials who were responsible also for Porlock and Watchet and the coast between Coscombe kiln on the Devon border and Shurton Barrs near Stogursey in the east. Watchet had its own coal meter.⁶⁵ Officers included the Customer and Collector, usually the two offices were combined, a clerk, and two assistants called waiters by the 1640s and landwaiters by the 1690s.⁶⁶ William Cuff, Collector, fought with Lord Hopton in the Civil War.⁶⁷ Collusion with smugglers was rife in the later 17th century; in 1679 a Minehead Collector claimed to have discovered abuses at the port but was dismissed and in 1682 two officers confessed to smuggling. One, who also kept an alehouse, withdrew his confession when Francis Luttrell promised to keep him in post. Luttrell was reputed to have acquired great wealth by smuggling and could bribe or intimidate officers.⁶⁸

By 1695 the staff comprised Customer and Collector, Comptroller, deputy searcher, two landwaiters, two tidesmen and two tidesmen for Porlock.⁶⁹ Offices were often bought from the previous holder. Thomas Wolstenholme, Collector and Customer, sold his office for £700 c.1705 before absconding owing £1,600 on his customs accounts but got his brother to petition on his behalf for the office of

⁶⁴ SHC, DD/L 1/4/12; 1/51/24/1; DD/CH 13.

⁶⁵ SHC, DD/HCK 9/1/17; DD/L 1/58/14/58—9; TNA, BT 212/34.

⁶⁶ Cal. Treas. Bks., 1679—80, 193, 754; TNA, E 351/3622.; SHC, Q/SO 8, ff. 290—1.

⁶⁷ Cal. Money, II, p. 1090.

⁶⁸ Cal. Treas. Bks., 1679—80, 193, 555; VCH Som. II, 261, 325.

⁶⁹ SHC, Q/SO 8, ff. 290—1.

Customs Commissioner in Scotland in 1707!⁷⁰ By 1715 the staff also included two boatmen and two coal meters and the salary bill was £492, almost half going to the Collector.⁷¹ Excise officers and searchers for salt duties were added later and a cleaner was employed to light fires.⁷² The customs house had a seal with additional seals for Irish and French cloth and seized goods.⁷³ Although customs officers were crown appointees the Luttrells regularly recommended men for vacant posts for which there was great demand and in the 1760s Henry Fownes Luttrell obtained the right to appoint all officers in Minehead.⁷⁴ In 1759 smuggling, especially from Ireland, amounted to possibly £1,000 lost revenue and damage to local manufacturing. The customs officer who tried to stop it got no support from the Luttrells and was forced out of office.⁷⁵

By the early 19th century declining trade meant fewer staff. Richard Searle (d. 1831) was Customs Collector for 27 years and his tidewaiters had 2s 6d a day to act as coal meters but sometimes only one was employed.⁷⁶ In the later 19th century Minehead officials were checking vessels at Combwich and Burnham.⁷⁷

The Customs House was west of quay c.1668,⁷⁸ probably that set back from the street opposite the entrance to the quay in 1701⁷⁹ and rented for £15 a year from 1746.⁸⁰ Destroyed in the 1792 fire⁸¹ it was replaced by the Collector's house on the quay, a small three-storeyed, thatched building that in 1813 had no private meeting room and an insecure warehouse. It was probably demolished to make an entrance to

⁷⁰ Cal. Treas. Bks 1706—7, II, 278—9.

⁷¹ SHC, DD/L 1/52/28.

⁷² SHC, Q/SR 356/3—4; TNA, CUST 70/198.

⁷³ SHC, DD/X/WBB 62

⁷⁴ SHC, DD/L 1/52/28; DD/TB 16/8; Hist. Parl. Commons 1754—90, I, 370.

⁷⁵ SHC, DD/TB 16/11.

⁷⁶ SHC, Q/RRz 2; *ibid.* D/D/Cf (S/237); TNA, BT 212/34; *ibid.* CUST 70/198..

⁷⁷ TNA, CUST 70/200.

⁷⁸ SHC, DD/L P3/12.

⁷⁹ SHC, DD/L 1/58/15.

⁸⁰ SHC, DD/L 1/4/12/4; 1/10/35B.

⁸¹ Above, intro.

the new pier.⁸² An additional house rented in 1822 at Puddle Bridge was given up before 1840,⁸³ possibly for the house and warehouse opposite the quay rented in 1868.⁸⁴ Between 1888 and 1902 the customs officers moved to the two-bay, three-storey, 18th-century house west of Quay Street, now called the Old Custom House, which remained in use until the 1930s.⁸⁵

Coastguard

The Minehead preventive boat, probably acquired when the system was established in 1809, was declared unfit in 1813 and the four boatmen complained that they were badly paid. There was no watch house until the 1820s. Following the creation of the Revenue Coastguard Service in 1822 Minehead had a watch house with a team of up to six men until the mid 20th century.⁸⁶ The coastguard station comprised the chief officer's house and a terrace of five cottages at the south end of Quay Street, probably built c.1874.⁸⁷ The Tudor Gothic houses are now private dwellings and the coastguard is based at Alcombe.

Lifeboat

Following the heroic overland haul of the Lynmouth lifeboat to Porlock in 1899 it was decided that Minehead needed a lifeboat. In 1901 a station was built north of the quay and furnished with a rowing boat.⁸⁸ In 1939 a motor boat was acquired.⁸⁹ Currently a lifeboat and an inshore rescue boat are stationed at Minehead.

⁸² SHC, A/BAZ 4/9; above, intro.

⁸³ SHC, DD/L 297/1—2; *ibid.* tithe award.

⁸⁴ SHC, DD/L 291/8.

⁸⁵ OS Map 1:10560, XXXV.NW&NE (1888 edn); XXXV.NW (1904 edn, surveyed 1902).

⁸⁶ SHC, DD/L 1/58/14/58—9; D/D/Cf (S/237); TNA, HO 107/1920; TNA, RG 9/1601.

⁸⁷ OS Map 1:10560, XXV.NW (1930 edn); OS Map, 1: 2500 SS 9746 (1963 edn); SHC, DD/L, 288/5; *ibid.* C/V 15.

⁸⁸ SHC, A/CVZ 1/1 (4); *ibid.* D/U/m 22/1/112; OS Map 1:2500, XXXV.1 (1904 edn).

⁸⁹ H. Binding, Old Minehead, 38.

PUBLIC SERVICES

Fire

Minehead suffered terribly from fires and had a large fire engine in 1742⁹⁰ and 1868, stored opposite the almshouses.⁹¹ In 1891 the Local Board established a brigade of five men with a fire engine, ladder and hose and later the Urban District Council provided fire hydrants. The engine was damaged attending a fire at Watchet papermill in 1898.⁹² In 1902 a new fire engine house was built off Market House Lane⁹³ which in 1950 had showers, kitchen, mess, lecture and control rooms but storage was on a site opposite. In 1954 a new fire station was built in Hopcott Road, Alcombe, and remains in use.⁹⁴

Police and courts

Minehead had a resident police constable in 1861 and thereafter a sergeant, apparently working from home⁹⁵ but in 1889 a police station was recorded with two officers.⁹⁶ In 1897 George Fownes Luttrell gave the council a site on Blenheim Road behind the Public Hall and William Wilcox of Bath designed a three-bedroom house with an office, two cells and an exercise yard.⁹⁷ It was used until 1937 when a new police station with magistrates' court was built at Alcombe, replacing both the Minehead and Dunster stations. Police houses were built in Hillview Road in 1952.⁹⁸

⁹⁰ Above, intro.; SHC, D/P/m.st.m 13/2/2.

⁹¹ SHC, tithe award; *ibid.* D/P/m.st.m 9/1/1; DD/L 291/8.

⁹² SHC, D/U/m 2/1/1, 2/2/1, 3/4/2.

⁹³ TNA, IR 58/82386; OS Map 1:2500, XXXV.5 (1929 edn).

⁹⁴ OS Map 1:2500, SS 9745 (1964 edn); SHC, C/FB 39; *ibid.* D/U/m 22/1/856.

⁹⁵ TNA, RG 9/1601; RG 10/2348; RG 11/2353.

⁹⁶ Kelly's Dir. Som. (1889); TNA, RG 12/1863; SHC, D/U/m 2/1/1.

⁹⁷ SHC, Q/AP 43, 71.

⁹⁸ SHC, D/U/m 22/1/769.

Minehead had its own county court from 1923 until 1975 but the judge only sat one day a month and the registrar had one or two visitors a week.⁹⁹ The magistrates' court sat only once a week by the later 20th century and closed in 2009.¹⁰⁰

Water

Minehead originally depended on the Bratton stream for water with the higher town using St Michael's well, now destroyed but apparently north of the church,¹⁰¹ and Pemswell whose overflow supplied Church and Middle Streets and Holloway. Sydernewell at Periton was recorded in 1420. Minehead had a pump maker in the later 17th century, two Friday Street houses had pumps by 1668 and later private and shared pumps were recorded.¹⁰² By the 1780s there was a conduit at the quay and by 1833 a public water supply at Holloway.¹⁰³ The Minehead Waterworks Company was formed in 1874, issued 600 shares and completed a reservoir in 1875. Water was supplied under a rate, except to the railway which was metered, with extra charges for each water closet, bath or stable; even cottagers using water to flush out their privies were charged extra. Additional supplies from the hills south of the town were piped down Periton Combe and in the 1880s the company imported over 300 tons of iron pipes from Newport. It was too expensive to get water from Dunster and unreliable in dry weather. Supplies remained inadequate and water was turned off at 7 pm. By 1903 the company supplied Minehead, Alcombe and parts of Wootton Courtney and

⁹⁹ SHC, D/CC/m 11/1; DD/SLS 29.

¹⁰⁰ news.bbc.co.uk; accessed 14 Oct 2009.

¹⁰¹ In 1741 the street beside the church contained a house 'near St Michael's well': SHC, DD/L 1/51/23/3.

¹⁰² SHC, DD/L P3/12, P8/2/153, 1/44/4/15, 1/44/5/46, 1/50/12/8.

¹⁰³ SHC, A/AOW 19; *ibid.* DD/L 1/43/2; SCC. HER.

Selworthy. In 1904 the council purchased the water undertakings for over £13,000 and the company was wound up in 1905 when water was still turned off at night.¹⁰⁴

The 1875 Turnhill Lea reservoir near Lower Moor Farm held c.85,000 gallons and the total supply in 1913 was estimated at 210,000 gallons. A larger reservoir opened near Lower Moor in 1925¹⁰⁵ but increasing demand led the council to buy Alcombe waterworks in 1928 from the Luttrell estate and build a reservoir at Staunton c.1930¹⁰⁶ and at Nutscale on Exmoor between 1939 and 1941 with a capacity of 39 million gallons. Water from most sources was piped to the Turnhill Lea reservoir and then distributed but in 1949 concerns were raised about pollution and inadequate filtration.¹⁰⁷ In the 1960s responsibility was transferred to the West Somerset Water Board, from 1974 part of Wessex Water.¹⁰⁸

Sewerage

Privies were often built over streams or the harbour.¹⁰⁹ Private sewers served the better houses on the Luttrell and Acland estates by the 1890s with an outfall north of the quay,¹¹⁰ but in 1913 raw sewage was discharged onto land, watercourses and the beach. Cast iron outfalls were extended in the 1930s but in the 1980s a new sewage treatment works was built at Dunster with a pumping station in Mart Road and an outfall at the Warren.¹¹¹

Gas

¹⁰⁴ SHC, D/U/m 3/11/1, 38/1/1—2; *ibid.* A/AGC 35/6; *ibid.* Q/RUo 27; TNA, BT 31/2020/8742; *ibid.* IR 58/82385.

¹⁰⁵ OS Map 1:2500, XXXV.5 (1905 edn); SHC, D/U/m 3/11/1; *ibid.* A/AGC 35/6, 38/5; OS Map 1:10560, XXV.NW (1930 edn).

¹⁰⁶ SHC, D/U/m, box 10; TNA, HLG 50/580.

¹⁰⁷ SHC, D/U/m, box 11; *ibid.* A/AGC 38/6.

¹⁰⁸ SHC, Q/RUo 43; *ibid.* D/RA 11.

¹⁰⁹ SHC, DD/L P3/10, 1/47/8/27, 1/47/9/40—1.

¹¹⁰ SHC, D/U/m, box 9.

¹¹¹ TNA, BT 356/2091, 6457, 6536, 11064; SHC, A/AGC 35/6; *ibid.* D/DC/w.som 22/5/12.

Minehead Gas Light and Coke Company formed in 1868 had 38 local shareholders and built a gas works with one gasometer north of the quay beside former limekilns used for coal storage. The works remained there because of the convenience of shipping Welsh coal to the quay. By 1902 there was a second gasometer.¹¹² Street lighting was installed by 1870 and reached the harbour and most streets by 1900.¹¹³ The company employed a manager, who lived on the site, and two stokers and by 1911 produced a profit of c.£1,500 a year from selling gas locally and coal tar to the council or for export to Cardiff.¹¹⁴ In 1919 the works was extended across the road with a gasometer next to the lifeboat station.¹¹⁵ By the 1930s gas was supplied to Dunster and appliance were sold. In 1936 4,268 tons of coal produced over 60.7 million cubic ft of gas, 52,499 gallons of tar and 2,850 tons of coke and in 1946 over 88 million cubic ft of gas and 3,899 tons of coke were produced.¹¹⁶ In 1948 the plant was upgraded with two new gasometers with a total capacity of 224,000 cubic ft, four retorts and an underground tar tank.¹¹⁷ In the later 20th century the plant closed and was replaced by flats, car parking and boat storage.

Electricity

The Minehead Electric Supply Company, formed in 1902,¹¹⁸ built a generating station in 1903 in Quay Lane and extended it in 1905.¹¹⁹ In 1907 street lighting was converted to electricity. The works moved to Marshfield Road, Alcombe c.1922 and

¹¹² TNA, BT 31/34098/4210; SHC, DD/GA 9/1; DD/SAS C212/MAP/101; OS Map, 1:10560 XXXV.NW (1904 edn, survey 1902).

¹¹³ SHC, SANHS Topog Colln, Wellington Sq, 1870, Parade c.1870; DD/X/BYE 4; DD/L 294/14.

¹¹⁴ SHC, DD/GA 9/1; above, econ. hist.

¹¹⁵ SHC, D/U/m 22/1/596.

¹¹⁶ SHC, Q/RUo 40; Q/RUp 665; *ibid.* C/F 29/157.

¹¹⁷ SHC, A/ATS 15/4/3.

¹¹⁸ TNA, BT 31/34698/74382.

¹¹⁹ SHC, D/U/m 22/1/223.

in 1936 the company agreed to supply Porlock. After 1947 Minehead was served by the South Western Electricity Board and the works became a depot.¹²⁰

PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION

The 1559 borough charter appears to have been used as authority for Minehead sending two members to Parliament in 1563.¹²¹ Candidates were put forward by the principal burgesses. Male residents of the borough were entitled to vote although paupers and recipients of charity were denied and only one vote per house was allowed.¹²² The constituency was controlled by the Luttrells including Thomas who took one borough seat in 1563. At first the Luttrells only sat occasionally like George Luttrell in 1581 replacing Andrew Hymerford who died before taking his seat and his brother John in 1589. However, most of those elected were related to or approved by the Luttrells and were local landowners. Exceptions included sea captain Robert Crosse, son of William of Charlinch, elected in 1586 although he was at sea with Drake in 1585 and 1587, ‘poor’ merchant James Quirke in 1593, Nether Stowey lawyer and lessee of the rectory Conand Prowse in 1597 and Minehead lawyer Lewis Lashbrooke in 1601. The reason why some men were chosen is unclear: men like Bristol merchant Dominic Chester elected 1572 and rogue iron trader Richard Hanbury in 1593 possibly had trading links with Minehead but others may have been put forward by the Luttrells on request.¹²³

Both Prowse and Lashbrooke were quarrelsome and litigious so when the latter obtained the second seat in 1601 Prowse took proceedings in Star Chamber claiming that George Luttrell and James Quirke had been elected but that Francis

¹²⁰ SHC, Q/RUa 38; Q/RUp 671; *ibid.* D/U/m, box 11, 22/1/655; *Kelly’s Dir. Som.* (1923—31).

¹²¹ *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1558—1603, I, 236.

¹²² SHC, DD/L 1/59/5/10.

¹²³ TNA, C 219/283, 3—4, 37; *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1558—1603, I, 236.

James was to sit in place of Luttrell and that the Portreeve had replaced Quirke's name with that of Lashbrooke. Whatever happened at the election, which Prowse claimed was only attended by 40 to 50 voters, the replacement of elected members by others on request was obviously considered acceptable. Lashbrooke was accused of blackmailing people over non-existent lawsuits, interfering with customs officers and faced proceedings in Queen's Bench in 1601 the year in which he sat on a parliamentary committee ironically considering the avoidance of frivolous lawsuits. In 1649 aged c.83 he was suspended from practicing law for misconduct.¹²⁴

Following the forfeiture of the borough charter in 1607¹²⁵ elections were held in the manor court, returned by the constables, which sheriffs resented, and controlled by the Luttrells. They were reluctant to sit themselves before 1660, only Thomas did so in 1625 and George had wanted the franchise abolished. Somerset landowners like Sir Maurice Berkeley (1603), Arthur Duck (1623), Thomas Horner (1627), Edmund Wyndham (1627) and Francis Wyndham (1640) held Minehead. Alexander Popham, elected in 1640 for Bath and Minehead, chose Bath but Sir Francis Popham sat in 1641 with his son-in-law Alexander Luttrell, a Parliamentarian who also sat in the late 1650s. Royalist Thomas Hanham, elected 1642, was replaced in 1645 by Walter Strickland, a Yorkshireman. After the Restoration the Luttrells ensured that, except when too young, they held the seat with a colleague of their choice. In 1660 Francis Luttrell (d. 1666) chose his wife's uncle Charles Pym but in 1661 found it expedient to replace him with Royalist Sir Hugh Wyndham. Unfortunately the Wyndhams then considered the seat as theirs and in 1673 ousted John Malet who had successfully opposed Lucy Luttrell's choice of Sir Thomas Bridges in 1666. Although Malet opposed the Luttrells in trying to regain Minehead's charter the younger Francis

¹²⁴ TNA, STAC 5/P1/5; 8/204/21; J. S. Cockburn, Som. Assize Orders (Som. Rec. Soc. 71), xix, 33; ; Acts PC, 1628—9, pp. 46, 267, 355, 411; SHC, DD/HCK 9/1/17.

¹²⁵ TNA, E 159/425/25.

Luttrell chose him as his colleague in 1679 and they destroyed the Wyndham interest in Minehead.¹²⁶

There were few years when a Luttrell was not MP between 1660 and 1832. The second seat was held by Thomas Palmer from 1679 and his brother Nathaniel from 1685 to 1690. Despite being Tories and supporting James II Luttrell and Palmer were returned in 1689 and 1690 when both died. Alexander Luttrell replaced his brother and wealthy landowner John Sanford replaced Palmer.¹²⁷ At the 1698 election Alexander chose Jacob Bancks, a Swede who had married his widowed sister-in-law Mary, to replace Sanford, who accused Bancks of bribery but the case was not heard.¹²⁸ The 1701 Harbour Act and the presentation to Minehead of a statue of Queen Anne and meat and drink for a feast in honour of the Queen by Sir Jacob helped to ensure that both men kept their seats until Alexander Luttrell retired in 1708 in favour of his neighbour Sir John Trevelyan. In 1711 Alexander's death with no Luttrell old enough to take his seat provided an opportunity for a rebellion against the family's control of the constituency. William Benson a wealthy iron merchant from Wiltshire attacked Bancks for supporting passive obedience and in 1713 entered a debate on the peace settlement and the benefits to trade. That endeared him to tradesmen and Whig supporters and he stood with John Milner, a London merchant and expert on Anglo-Portuguese trade. They arrived in Minehead apparently accompanied by woollen manufacturers from Bristol, Taunton and Tiverton. The result was a contested election with about 300 voters. It was said that customs officials who had not voted before were given the vote while others were turned down, that the tithingman as returning officer had declared he would prevent the election of the sitting members as enemies of trade and that the vicar and Quaker John

¹²⁶ Cal. SP. Dom. 1640, 42; DNB; Hist. Parl. Commons 1660—1690, I, 377.

¹²⁷ Hist. Parl. Commons 1660—1690, I, 377; 1690—1715, II, 524.

¹²⁸ SHC, DD/SF 5/6/12; C.J. 12, 365: accessed 7 March 2011.

Alloway had prevented Whig voters from proving they were parishioners. The constable's poll showed a great majority for the sitting members and the tithingman's a small majority for their opponents but the sitting members were declared elected.¹²⁹

The 1713 election clearly alarmed the Luttrells who spent over £500 treating voters in public houses. In 1715 Sir William Wyndham and Sir John Trevelyan were opposed by James Milner and Samuel Edwin, although the latter was a Tory. Milner and Edwin won by a small number of votes but the constables returned Wyndham and Trevelyan and on petition the election was declared void. In 1717 Dorothy Luttrell proposed John Milner with Sir John Trevelyan at the by-election in a tactical move to counter another petition to restore the charter. Samuel Edwin and Thomas Gage were returned by the sheriff before the poll closed and the constables returned more votes for Trevelyan and Milner. The resulting petition was supported by Robert Walpole and the seats were awarded to Trevelyan and Milner although only one witness was asked about bribery.¹³⁰ Milner shot himself in 1721 and in the by-election Whig Sir Richard Lane procured a return, which the sheriff accepted without the constables' signatures. The poll book showed 177 votes for Mansel and 138 for Lane although someone marked 84 and 40 respectively as invalid. Mrs Luttrell secured Lane's replacement by Robert Mansel who successfully fought the 1722 election with her other choice, Sir Thomas Hales. However, their opponents Samuel Edwin and Francis Whitworth secured 45 per cent of the votes.¹³¹

By the 1720s the Presbyterians claimed 75 voters and said there were another 30 dissenting votes out of an electorate of c.300 to challenge the Luttrell interest.¹³²

When Mansel died in 1723 Francis Whitworth took the seat but over £450 was spent

¹²⁹ TNA, SP 9/249/105; *DNB*; *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1690—1715, II. 524—5.

¹³⁰ *DNB*; *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1715—54, I. 316; SHC, DD/WY, box 174; DD/L P28/15/2—3, P30/109—10; 1/59/4/1—4; DD/TB 17/4.

¹³¹ SHC, DD/L 1/59/4/5; *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1715—54, I. 316.

¹³² T. G. Crippen, *The story of Nonconformity in Somerset* (1913—14), 41; SHC, DD/X/WBB 49.

on meals, paying mariners to defer voyages and ‘secret services’ to manage the vote.¹³³ In 1727 Alexander Luttrell took the seat with Whitworth in a strangely conducted election. It was proclaimed for 17 August by one of the constables Henry Blake who took the votes for Luttrell and Whitworth by voice and returned them whereas the other constable John Jones proclaimed and held the election two days later when Sir William Codrington and George Grove were elected. The Luttrell supporters claimed the second constable was a young tailor who had told the poor they would get six guineas to vote for Sir William and that he could get a better living if he was sent to the West Indies.¹³⁴ In 1733 Alexander Luttrell paid 2s 6d to each of 272 voters¹³⁵ and in 1737 he and Francis Whitworth were returned unopposed. but Luttrell died. Sir William Codrington beat Thomas Carew in the by-election but died himself in 1739 when Thomas Carew was returned having provided 2 ½ quarts of beer and wheat to each voter at their request. Whitworth gave coal to the poor and 5s as a ‘Christmas Box’ to voters. It was said that other men wanted to stand but there was violence at the election. Carew spent over £340 on messengers, horses, music, cockades, ringers, dinners, colour bearers, guns and gunpowder. When Francis Whitworth died in 1742 he was replaced unopposed by John Periam as his son Charles was under age.¹³⁶

In 1747 Henry Fownes Luttrell failed to stand or nominate a candidate because he wanted to sell Minehead to a prospective parliamentary candidate and refused to support anyone unless he purchased the constituency. The seats went to Whigs Charles Whitworth and Percy Wyndham O’Brien, brother of the earl of Egremont who spent £900 on drink and cash bribes of up to three guineas. In 1754 Henry

¹³³ SHC, DD/L 1/59/4/6—7.

¹³⁴ SHC, DD/X/LTR 2.

¹³⁵ SHC, DD/L 1/59/4/5.

¹³⁶ SHC, DD/L 1/59/4/5; DD/TB 16/11, 17/3; DD/CH 12; Hist. Parl. Commons 1715—54, I. 316.

Shiffner lost the election despite securing the last-minute approbation of Luttrell, provided a purchaser did not come forward. Whitworth and Daniel Boone, on the earl of Egremont's interest, won but Egremont spent over £2,100 including five guinea 'loans' to voters and had been ready to spend £10,000. Whitworth secured £1,000 'secret service' money to finance the election.¹³⁷ Shiffner brought charges of vote rigging and bribery and questioned Boone's qualifications and the earl's interference but was persuaded to drop the charges and Luttrell nursed the seat with bribes of wheat and public house dinners in many public houses. In 1761 he gave three guineas to each voter, few refused, and post election dinners at Dunster Castle. Shiffner won alongside Egremont's brother Lord Thomond defeating Lord Clanbrassill.¹³⁸

Shiffner lost the support of Henry Fownes Luttrell who decided to stand himself encouraged by the vicar Leonard Herring. When Charles Townshend, Chancellor of the Exchequer and favoured candidate, died Luttrell blocked a move by the duke of Grafton to supply a candidate and secured the right to appoint all officers in Minehead.¹³⁹ In 1767 Luttrell refused an offer of £40,000 including a refundable £3,000 if the candidate failed to secure the seat.¹⁴⁰ He won the 1768 election with Charles Whitworth, who had promised education for the poor and Shiffner was defeated. The election cost Luttrell over £1,800 in food and drink, over £980 in bribes to most of the 362 voters canvassed and an unspecified sum on ribbons, musicians, colourmen and ringers. One man promised to vote for whoever gave most money and only five refused a bribe and that because they had received other favours. Having gained the seat Luttrell was determined to retain it and in 1774 secured the election of himself and his son John unopposed with the help of four and five guinea bribes.

¹³⁷ Hist. Parl. Commons 1715—54, II. 316; 1754—90, I. 370; DNB; SHC, DD/L 1/59/5/3—12; DD/WY, box 36; DD/TB 17/4.

¹³⁸ Hist. Parl. Commons 1754—90, I. 370; SHC, DD/L 1/59/5/14, 18, 21—2, 24; 1/59/6/3—4.

¹³⁹ Hist. Parl. Commons 1754—90, I. 371; SHC, DD/L 1/59/6/14.

¹⁴⁰ SHC, DD/WSAS 22/3.

Voters were rewarded with a ball including lobster, salmon and over £50 in drink. Thereafter the Luttrells sat themselves or sold the second seat and were elected unopposed by 12 token voters.¹⁴¹ Richard Locke in the late 18th century deploring the decline of the port observed that a Liverpool merchant lived in own house and supported an independent character but a Minehead merchant ‘must vote for the man he hates or quit his mansion, connections and trade’.¹⁴²

Voter numbers fell to 240 in 1780 and c.180 by 1796, probably due to the fires of 1791—2. One later pamphleteer even claimed that the man who started the fire was rewarded with a farm. Bribes of several guineas were still paid with large quantities of ale¹⁴³ but there was resistance to the Luttrell monopoly probably due to failure to rebuild Minehead after the fire. In 1796 freehold building land was offered for sale by Quaker merchant William Davis and John Langston a London merchant banker built the terraced houses at Woodcombe to secure independent voters. In 1796 the first contested election was held for nearly 30 years and although John Fownes Luttrell won a seat his brother Thomas lost to Langston despite heavy bribery. The other losing candidate was Langston’s connection Charles Morice Pole, a naval man.¹⁴⁴ Luttrell advised by lawyer Francis Bastone that ‘a pound of honey is better than a pound of vinegar’ and that poverty and destruction were to blame but a day later he was urged to evict 82 tenants who voted against him and give preference in employment for those who voted for him by a group of supporters including Bastone.¹⁴⁵ In 1802 there were six candidates, scurrilous handbills and warnings of

¹⁴¹ Hist. Parl. Commons 1754—90, I. 371; SHC, DD/L 1/50/18; 1/59/6/12—14; 1/59/7/2—18; 1/59/8/1—4, 12—14, 23, 37—8; 1/59/10/1—3, 18; 1/59/11/12.

¹⁴² Richard Locke’s supp to Collinson’s History of Somerset (Taunton 1939) p 112—13.

¹⁴³ ‘The Blessings of Boroughmongering’ cited in VCH Office, Taunton, draft history; SHC, DD/L 1/14/13/1; 1/59/11/2, 4, 10, 12

¹⁴⁴ Hist. Parl. Commons 1790—1820, II. 352; DNB; SHC, DD/L 1/59/4/13; 1/59/12/3, 5, 7, 11—14,

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¹⁴⁵ SHC, DD/L 1/59/13/17—18.

slavery to ‘those who have ruined your town’ but the election was carried by John Fownes Luttrell and John Patteson who paid Luttrell over £4,000 for his seat. John Langston and James Woodbridge were not too far behind but Peter Cazalet, Langston’s brother-in-law and David Walters had only 13 votes each. Langston and Woodbridge complained of illegal treating but eventually the petition was shelved and Langston was persuaded to sell his houses to Luttrell, although it was said Langston had been good to the town, promoted its trade and tried to protect his voters from reprisals.¹⁴⁶

Increases in tithe brought about some violence and another handbill debate in 1803—4 with the opposition led by William Davis whom Luttrell forced to apologise in 1804. Even those who supported Luttrell were treated with ‘Ingratitude and Insolence’ and it was suggested that the vicar was afraid to collect his tithes for fear of upsetting his patron’s electoral success. A letter, probably by George Cumberland of Bristol, deplored the state of ‘this consumptive borough’ destroyed in retribution for opposition to the Luttrells with its declining trade and derelict houses where the Luttrells would not give leases and drove out trade and manufacture in order to hang onto their seats.¹⁴⁷ That was confirmed by William Davis in 1833 when he blamed ‘boroughmongering’ for Minehead’s decline.¹⁴⁸ Luttrell had given clothes and ale to voters in 1804 and was afraid of a bribery petition so substituted Sir John Lethbridge in the 1806 election and sold the other seat to George Parkyns, Baron Rancliffe for £5,000. The six colourmen were accused of abuse when they claimed for 81 quarts of porter and ale.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ SHC, DD/L 1/16/2—3, 1/59/14/17, 19—21, 1/59/15/1, 4; J. Savage, Hist. of Car. Hundred (1830), 582.

¹⁴⁷ SHC, DD/L 1/54/43/1; 1/59/16/6; 2/42/13; BL, Add. MS 36517, f. 55—7.

¹⁴⁸ SHC, DD/X/HRG 9.

¹⁴⁹ Hist. Parl. Commons 1790—1820, II. 353; SHC, DD/L 1/14/13/1, 1/59/15/7; TNA, IR 18/1876.

In 1807 Thomas Bowes built houses at Periton for voters¹⁵⁰ but failed to win a seat in the last attempt to dislodge the Luttrells. In 1812 John Fownes Luttrell and his son John were elected by acclamation and when the elder John died his two sons John and Henry had the seat. Later John sold the second seat to John Douglas (1824), James Blair of Scotland (1826), William Tomline of Lincolnshire (1830) and Viscount Villiers in 1831. Although open bribery had stopped a lot of drink was still provided at elections. The Luttrells did not attend Parliament very often until faced with Minehead's disenfranchisement in 1832¹⁵¹ when John Fownes Luttrell argued in vain that Minehead was larger than Petersfield, which was keeping its seat, even suggesting extending the borough over the whole of the neighbouring parishes. Minehead was too obviously a pocket borough. Its disenfranchisement cost the Luttrells political power and left only 19 men in Minehead eligible to vote.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ SHC, DD/SAS C795/PR484.

¹⁵¹ Hist. Parl. Commons 1790—1820, II. 352—3; SHC, DD/L 1/14/13/1; 1/59/3/2—6.

¹⁵² SHC, DD/L 1/60/17/3, 1/60/18/37—8; DD/DN 293.