

THE EPSOM VESTRY

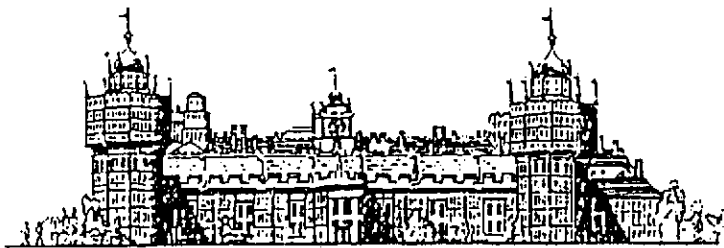
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THE EPSOM VESTRY

Charles Abdy



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The Epsom Vestry

1. Introduction

In medieval times local affairs were dealt with by the manorial court, presided over by a representative of the lord of the manor. However, people would meet in the vestry of the parish church to discuss problems and eventually by the 17th century Parliament made these vestry meetings responsible for matters such as the upkeep of local roads and bridges and the care of the poor and orphans as required by the Poor Laws. The vestries eventually took over most of the functions that had been exercised by the manorial courts.

Vestries were required to keep records of their meetings in minute books, and the Surrey Record Office at Kingston has the books for the Epsom Vestry covering the period 1770-1883. Such records are tantalising: they draw attention to many matters of interest, but seldom tell a complete story. Although one could wish that fuller information had been given and topics followed through to their conclusions, nevertheless, there is a great deal of material that throws light on life in Epsom during the period covered by the books. Barbara and I have made a study of them and abstracted details that seem to us to have a particular interest for local historians.

The minutes were for the most part clearly written in a copperplate hand by the vestry clerk: in 1771 he was being paid four guineas a year. He presumably wrote up the minutes during the meetings, since they are followed by the signatures of those present, an admirable custom that could with advantage be followed by present day committee secretaries.

2. The meeting place

Most of the meetings started in the church on a Sunday and were adjourned and continued some days later elsewhere, usually at 6 o'clock in the evening. The early minutes refer to 'Mr Morris's Coffeeshouse, and soon after, just, 'the Coffeeshouse.'

On 8 June 1776 the Spread Eagle was the venue, and thereafter several similar meeting places are mentioned, including the Magpie, the One Tun, the Eclipse, The Marquis of Granby, the Kingshead and the Dukes-head.

On 20 December 1799 consideration was being given to fitting up a room in the Poor House for the use of future Vestries, and the meeting on 5 February 1800 and many subsequent meetings were held there, with only an occasional visit to the Coffee House or a public house. However, by 1815 this trend had been reversed and meetings at the Poor House became rare.

3. Membership of the Vestry

The Epsom Vestry appears to have operated as a 'Select Vestry', i.e. consisting largely of self-appointed men of substance. Their signatures suggest that by the standard of the day they were well educated. Of the 23 members present at the meeting on 16 November 1773, seven had Esq., after their names, one of whom was William Northey, who was lord of the manor of Ewell, Cheam and Cuddington. There was also Joseph Shaw Esq., who was a J.P., the Rev. Dr. Madan and Sir Mark Parsons.

Occasionally a public meeting would be called, as the one on 2 October 1797 at the Kings Head Inn to consider the accounts of the Surveyors of the Highway.

At most meetings the two church wardens were present. They would have been appointed annually for a one year term of office. The church wardens had considerable responsibility for maintaining the church and running the parish: they also looked after the accounts. It has been said that churchwardens were the very foundation of democratic local government in England. They were unpaid, and understandably the job was not a popular one: however, suitable parishioners were expected to take their turn at it. There is an interesting entry for 2 December 1773: 'Mr Batchelor, one of the churchwardens in 1770, had ignored several notices to attend the Vestry. Accordingly, it was ordered that William Northey and Benjamin Furniss, the present church wardens, do attain Thomas Batchelor as late churchwarden and

do remove and examine his accounts and report at the next meeting.' On reading this, one feared that Thomas Batchelor would be found to owe money to the parish, but no, when the accounts for 1770-1771 were checked, it was found that he was owed £25.5s.2d by the parish !

The Vicar was sometimes present at the meetings, and would have been expected to take the chair, but more often he was not present, and a chairman would have been elected by the members.

4. The rates

One of the important functions of the Vestry was to agree the rates needed to raise the money required for the relief of the poor, the maintenance of the church and to cover the various other expenses that could be incurred by the Parish. The poor rate could vary considerably from year to year, depending on economic conditions and the number of people unable to make ends meet.

On 18 June 1772 the poor rate was fixed at two shillings in the pound. It rose to 2s 6d in 1773 and by 1797 was 3 shillings, rising still further to 4s in 1801, presumably as a result of economic problems arising from the Napoleonic Wars. The harshness of the times is illustrated by a reference on 27 December 1799 to 'erecting coppers and preparing the place for the soup Establishment to be paid out of the poor rate.' Although by 1807 the poor rate had been brought down to 2s, complaints that that was too high led to the appointment of a 'Rates Officer' to collect the rates and organise relief. This appears to have had an effect, as later in 1807 the figure came down to 1s 6d, at which it remained until 1809 when it rose again to 2s.

People were no more anxious to pay their rates in the days we have been considering than in more recent times. Defaulters were a recurring problem and were frequently listed as such in the Vestry minutes. On 16 May 1800 a meeting had to be adjourned because there were so many defaulters that the Overseers' accounts could not be completed. At a meeting on 14

December 1814 it was reported that circular letters sent to defaulters threatening summonses had had no effect in most cases. On 4 May 1815 it was stated that magistrates had ordered distress warrants to be issued against those not paying before 15 May.

The church maintenance rate was made as necessary to keep the church in repair and could vary from a few pence to as much as 1s 6d. At times rates had to be set for special purposes, an instance being the rate of one shilling in the pound agreed on 18 December 1796, 'to defray the expense incurred in raising Volunteers for His Majesty's Army Levied by a Late Act of Parliament.'

5. The administration of the Poor Laws

The duties of the Vestry in respect of the care of the poor and orphans were sometimes carried out by overseers of the poor appointed by the Vestry, while at other times the work was farmed out to contractors after competitive tendering. At a meeting on 12 August 1771 the proposals of a Mr Townsend and a Mr John Bulley 'to maintain and take care of the poor of this Parish' were considered. John Bulley had proposed to take on the job for a term of three years in return for a payment of £440 a year and this tender was accepted. John Bulley was still master of the workhouse in 1776, when he had to pay half a guinea compensation to Mary L.....for ill treating her by locking her out.

(In 1781 John Bulley was appointed to superintend the Ewell Workhouse, and in 1784 he was given a contract to maintain the poor in the Workhouse, which he did until his death in 1789).

In 1777 the job of caring for the poor was being advertised in public newspapers, and on 12 September John Evans was appointed for six years. He undertook to erect a workshop and a stable for a horse. It would appear to have been an ill-advised appointment: when a Vestry committee reported on the workhouse in 1779 they found children nearly in a state of nakedness, dirty, lousy and in a very wretched condition, and the older people were in much the same way. 'We tasted the beer

and the old people declared that instead of it being bittered with hops, it was bittered with feverfew and we think the same. We found a lunatic partly naked and chained. The children said they were not taught to read. We found the house so very offensive above stairs that we could not go to inspect the rooms and bedding.'

It was agreed that John Evans should forfeit £200 of his payment for breach of contract and that action should be taken to remove him. He was not prepared to go quietly, and his counterclaim was still in dispute two years later.

In 1793 a Mr Harris was the 'contractor for the maintenance of the poor', and he proposed that some boys in the workhouse should be sold to the Marine Society in order to be sent into the Sea Service and that several girls should be apprenticed to a cotton manufactory at Carshalton. These proposals were rejected.

'Selling' children was under consideration again in 1805 when an item of the agenda for a Vestry meeting was to consider the propriety of placing some of the children out to a manufactory. The factory in question was a cotton mill at Iver near Uxbridge that had been advertising for children aged from 10 to 14. Some members of the Vestry queried whether they could be accepted a year under 10 or more than 14, 'there being now about 10 of each in the workhouse which they wish to put out.' The matter progressed to the extent that members of the Vestry went to inspect the factory. At a subsequent meeting it was reported that, 'further enquiries have shown that there are reasons for supposing that the Employment in a Cotton Manufactory may be prejudicial to the Children's Health' and consideration was postponed.

In April 1806 a request by a Mr Merryweather for some poor children for his factory at Otley in Yorkshire was rejected unanimously.

Although the proposals for 'selling' children to factories seem not to have been accepted, apprenticeships were another matter,

and at a meeting on 16 July 1806 it was, 'Resolved that it would promote industry and public morals that children of fit ages should be placed as apprentices to such manufacturers or traders carrying on such trades and occupations that do not tend to endanger the health of the children placed under them and that the parish are therefore determined not to afford relief to such parents as refuse to attend to this considerate attention of the parish. Resolved that advertisements to this effect be inserted in The Morning Chronicle, The Times and The Star for next three weeks.'

As happens today, the thing to do when things went wrong was to set up a committee, and this was done in 1796 when one was formed, 'to inspect the conduct of the Governor of the Poor House.' Seventeen rules covering the running of the poor house were laid down, which included:

4) Two members of the committee must attend the Workhouse every Sunday morning to inspect the conditions of the house and inmates and also examine the weekly records.

8) Inmates must be kept clean, decent and sober and idleness and wastefulness should be avoided.

14) Bread for use in the house shall be baked in the house and where possible corn shall be ground in the house.

15) The Governor shall not have any outside perquisites. Salary £40 p.a plus £10 p.a for keeping books.

17) The Governor shall have prayers said in the house at least once a day and inmates shall attend Church every Sunday.

Clearly, in 1796 the maintenance of the poor was not being contracted out and at a meeting in September 1800 it was, 'Resolved by a very great majority that the poor in the Poor House shall continue to be under the management of two persons to be appointed by the Parish under the inspection of the officers for the time being and a committee and not let to Farm.' In December 1800 it was, 'Resolved that Benjamin Barth

and his wife is now elected to superintend the Poor in the Poor House at a salary of £35 per annum and that he be allowed tea and sugar also that the rooms allowed to him be furnished by the Parish.'

The master of the poor-house in 1812 must have been a particularly worthy man, because it was 'Resolved that the Overseers do make Edw. Coxon the master of the poor-house a present of £5.5s.0d at Christmas next for his good management and conduct as master of the same.'

6. The Workhouse

The Workhouse was originally known as the Poor House, but as legislation came in that increasingly made it necessary to set the poor to work, the term 'Workhouse' became more appropriate, although throughout the period covered by the Vestry minutes, both terms were used at different times to describe the building that had been built on the Dorking road on a site that was later used for the Union Workhouse and where Epsom Hospital now is.

There are frequent references to the Poor House. In March 1776 a committee reported that the walls, roof, tiling and windows needed repair and that the outside gates and fence were in a ruinous condition.

On 18 November 1778 it was agreed that 'a Mrs R..... was to be transferred from a mad house at Hoxton where she has been for several years, to Epsom Workhouse. She was in a quiet state of mind, not outrageous at any time but was in a melancholy state.'

On 4 March 1801 it was stated: 'In consequence of the crowded state of the Poor House and many of the Poor being afflicted with the Itch and which continues to spread among them, the Churchwardens and Overseers be desired to look out for some proper place for the purpose of separating those who are in good health from those who are infected with the above or any other disorder that may require their being removed.'

The Vestry had the employment of the poor in mind in November 1800 when they were seeking to elect, 'a man and his wife to superintend the internal management of the Poor House and to instruct the Poor therein in some useful Manufactory.' Employment came to the fore again on 3 June 1801 when it was resolved that, 'two rooms with necessary apparatus be immediately purchased to employ the Poor in the Poor House, and on 15 June it was agreed that material and an instructor were to be obtained to put the poor to straw work.' Sack making was another form of employment, and in February 1805 an estimate was being requested for a brick building 100 feet long and 18 feet wide in which to carry it out.

Epsom had almshouses as well as the Workhouse and on 29 October 1772 the relationship between them was spelt out: 'All people under 50 living in the Almshouses must remove from them in a fortnight's time. If they do remove they will be sent to the Workhouse. In future no one under 50 shall be allowed in the Almshouses unless the Vestry gives specific consent.'

(The almshouses had been built in 1703 by John Livingston for twelve poor widows on a piece of land in East Street granted by the parish. Livingston was the entrepreneur who in 1707 opened a new spa centre in Epsom behind what is now The Albion public house, taking water from a well at one time owned by John Symonds, hence the name Symonds Well for the recently re-opened pub and restaurant.)

There is a glimpse of the diet of the poor in the minute of 30 March 1803 which states: 'Mr Radford, Mr Charman and Mr Hope to serve the poor house with Clods and Stickings of good beef at 3s 2d per stone,' and on 9 May 1811 it was, 'Resolved that the complaint of the poor respecting the quantity of meat is frivolous.'

At some periods the discipline imposed on the poor seemed particularly harsh, as in 1812, when it was, 'Resolved that no pauper in the poor house shall leave the House without leave of the Master and then not without a ticket and if anyone be found

about the Town without a ticket such person shall be allowed bread and water only for two days after such an offence.'

A minute of 18 December 1818 reveals that the Rev. Douglas was a thoughtful man: he not only made a handsome present of 12 testaments for the use of the poor in the Poor House: he also provided 12 pairs of spectacles !

7. Outside relief

Although the major relief provided for the poor was by way of the workhouse, some help was given to needy parishioners who were not in the workhouse, as can be seen from the following examples:

20 January 1797 '...ordered that the Overseers do pay to Mrs S.....for the keep of a child belonging to William D..... the sum of 2s 6d the week from the 3rd day of December last past so long as the Parish may think proper, also that the Overseers do give Robert P.....'s wife 10s 6d.'

3 May 1799 '.....ordered that the Overseers do pay John G.....during his wife's disease. Also ordered that the Overseers do pay Henry H.....four shillings a week during his wife's illness and that they do pay the Arrears he owes to his Benefit Club.'

5 July 1799 'William B.....is agreeable to marry Maria T....., widow and that she have the following children, Maria now six years of age, George eight years, Mary six and Edmund two and a half years. Resolved that the officers for the time being do pay the said William if he do marry the said Maria tomorrow morning five shillings weekly for the support of the said four children so long as they shall be unprovided for or unfit for service or until they shall each of them arrive at the age of fourteen years.'

20 October 1806 'Resolved that as Mr Stephen Brown proposes taking Charles F..... Apprentice that the Officers do give him necessary Cloathes.'

There is evidence of the efforts made to help the unemployed.

13 April 1816 The employment of stone grubbers (ie those who removed stones from fields) was discussed. Gentlemen and farmers were asked to take one or more men as a deliberate future plan. 22 stone grubbers were listed with ages ranging from 9 to 73.

14 March 1817 It was reported that out of 33 unemployed poor, 16 had been employed by Gentlemen, Farmers and inhabitants. 17 people occupying land in the Parish had not signified any interest in employing the labouring poor.

18 May 1817 'Parishioners are recommended only to employ labourers from the Parish, provided they can obtain good characters from their last service.'

14 January 1820 'Consideration was to be given to enclosing part of the Waste to be cultivated by the unemployed poor. There would be no objection by Mrs Mawby (the Lady of the Manor) for the enclosure of 20 acres of Waste.'

8. The militia and the army

Each county had to provide a certain number of militia men and each parish had to make its contribution. The men were chosen by ballot: they could avoid service by paying £10 for a substitute. On 11 October 1798 the Vestry were considering, 'a mode to alleviate the expenses incurred by the wives and families of Militia men and to empower the Church-wardens and Overseers to provide substitutes for such persons as may be chosen by ballot to serve for this Parish.' It was agreed that any person resident in the Parish liable to serve in the militia who paid annually the sum of seven shillings and sixpence should have a substitute provided for him if he was chosen by ballot. The cost of providing the substitutes would be paid by the parish.

The invasion threat from Napoleon in the heyday of his career from 1803 to 1805 led to the formation of an 'Army of Reserve' of 50,000 men selected by ballot. The danger was imminent: the

Grand Army was encamped at Boulogne equipped with flat-bottomed boats for the invasion. The Epsom Vestry called a meeting, 'for the purpose of appointing overseers and officers for removing of the livestock and other stock in this Parish in case of invasion.'

Surrey did not meet its target of 1,781 men for the Army of Reserve, and a fine of £20,200 was imposed, spread over all the parishes, and this explains the entry in the Vestry minutes for 21 April 1805, 'The fine laid on the Parish under the Defence Act, £28.5.0, is so small that a rate cannot conveniently be made to defray it.'

The invasion threat was brought to an end by Nelson's victory at Trafalgar in 1805.

9. Charities

Epsom was well provided with charities and on 15 November 1772 it was decided that, 'A summary of the various charities that have been left to the Parish of Epsom shall be drawn up and written on black boards in gold lettering and placed in various conspicuous places in the Parish Church.'

Charities referred to in the Vestry minutes include those provided by the following benefactors:

Mr Brayne
Mrs Cullerne
Mrs Mary Dundas
Mrs Elizabeth Evelyn
Mrs Elizabeth Northey
Mr David White
Mr Wright

An open Vestry was held annually on the first Sunday in September to, 'enquire into the distribution of the different Charities belonging to this Parish.'

The bequests took a variety of forms: Mrs Elizabeth Evelyn had provided for six poor women to be clothed at Easter. On 6 October 1800 it was reported that those benefitting had been given:

'One Grey Lindsey Gown and Coat, two shifts, one pair of Dark blue woollen stockings, one pair of strong shoes and one blue and white Checked Apron.' A note said, 'If none of the six women who are clothed Die before the third year, they are entitled at that time to receive the charity again.'

Mrs Elizabeth Northey had left £100, the interest to be applied to the purchase of books for the use of children in the Charity School.

Mrs Mary Dundas had left a house and piece of land that were let to the highest bidder to provide an income for charitable use, including the provision of bread and coals. Mr Brayne's charity provided education for ten boys.

David White's charity started in 1725. By 1802 the fund consisted of £3,384 in South Sea Annuities and produced an annual dividend of more than £101, a considerable sum at that time. However, in 1807 it was reported that, 'Mrs Cullerne's charity has been unproductive this year.'

10. The relations between Vestry and Vicar

Harmonious relations seemed to prevail between Vestry and Vicars for most of the period we have been studying: indeed, the Revd. Jonathan Boucher who was the incumbent from 1785 to 1804 was referred to in the Vestry Minutes after his death as, 'that learned and exemplary Divine.' Things were less harmonious in the 1840s when Bradway Bockett was Vicar.

18 August 1842 The Vestry had asked the Vicar for a table of fees legally payable to him, and were not pleased with what was being asked! '.....the fees now exacted far exceed the accustomed fees taken by our late Vicar the Revd. Fleetwood Parkhurst and his most excellent curate the Revd. Joseph Darby.' Neither were they pleased with the tone of a letter the Vicar had sent to the

Vestry concerning a tombstone that a Mr Langland wished to set up: 'I hereby give you notice that I will not allow a stone to be erected until I know what the inscription will be and also until the fee is paid which to Mr Langland shall be not less than 10 guineas. I need hardly say if after this Notice you or Mr Langland put up a Stone in my Churchyard without any written consent you will be liable to an action in the Ecclesiastical Court which my Solicitor will have immediate instructions to commence.'

This led to the following entries in the minutes:

'Resolved that to increase the fees in individual cases as attempted to be done in the case of our respected townsman Mr Langland is a practice highly injurious and that the Churchwardens be directed to mention all the facts to the Bishop of the Diocese and respectfully to request his Lordship to order a Table of Fees to be set up in the Parish Church in order that the inhabitants might not have their feelings outraged.'

'Resolved that if the Bishop should refuse to protect the Parishioners that a subscription be entered into to purchase a burial ground for Epsom and its vicinity by which all extortionate fees will be avoided and that it be distinctly understood that the highly respectable body of Dissenters of this Parish be allowed to bury therein according to their own rights.'

At the same Vestry meeting there is evidence of a squabble with the Vicar over who should pay the organist:

'Resolved that the Vicar be informed that he may have the use of the organ in the Church if he will raise the necessary funds for the playing but if he should refuse to accept this reasonable offer the Churchwardens be directed to sell the same and to appropriate the proceeds towards discharging the building debt or in the diminution of the Church rates.'

This is followed by a minute that censures the Vicar and the curate for not devoting as much time to visiting the sick and afflicted 'as was the daily practice of that pious minister of the Gospel, the Rev. Joseph Darby.'

A further entry: 'Resolved that it is a matter of grief to this Vestry that this Parish for the last 2 or 3 years has been in a state of discord and turmoil and the kindly feeling that once existed in our Town is nearly extinguished and therefore this Vestry pledge themselves not to relax their objections until the parties who have been instrumental in bringing so much misery in among us are detected and exposed.'

Bradway Bockett was no stranger to controversy, judging by comments made about him by Andrews in his 'Reminiscences of Epsom'. He is reported as having said 'I am the three B's you know, and a stinging bee too, sometimes, they tell me.' (I do not profess to know what the Victorians regarded as the three B's.) When the bishop threatened to suspend him after numerous complaints, he replied: 'My dear Lord Bishop, if you suspend me, I'll be hanged.'

The following advertisement, characteristic of Bockett, appeared in The Guardian on 26 October 1881: 'Curate wanted for Epsom by decided Protestant free from Ritualistic follies. Gown used in pulpit. No intoning, no blasphemous hymns, no eastward position.'

(It would seem that the threat made in 1842 to purchase a burial ground that would be independent of the Vicar did not have to be carried out. In 1868 discussions were going on regarding acquiring land for enlarging the churchyard or providing a new burial ground. Various sites were considered for a new burial ground, but there was so much difficulty in getting agreement that in 1869 the problem was referred to the Epsom Board of Health that had been set up in 1850. The cemetery in Ashley Road was opened in 1871.)

11. The Vestry and the fabric of St. Martin's Church

The church that the Vestry was responsible for had been rebuilt around the middle of the 15th C when the tower had been erected. Repairs were frequently needed; in 1779 they involved work on the ceiling, guttering and tiling. Two hundred guineas were spent repairing the tower and spire in 1801. In 1806 new

paving was put down and the galleries were extended. The state of the roof in 1811 was such that an entirely new one had to be built.

In the early 1820s there are references to a bigger church being required. A surveyor reported in 1823 that a moderate annual expenditure would keep the existing building in repair, and the fabric would withstand an extension: however, he recommended that it would be better to build a new church at the cost of £10,000. This proposal was accepted and an entry for 21 August 1825 states that the rebuilding had been completed: the expenditure exceeded the estimate by nearly £2,000. (How familiar that is!).

The rebuilding was in 'commissioners' gothic' style: the 1450 tower was retained and restored. (There were further extensive enlargements to St. Martin's in 1907/8 when the present east end with crossing and transepts was built).

12. The races

Considering the importance of the races to Epsom, there are surprisingly few references to them in the Vestry Minutes. There was cause for concern however in 1818 when at the meeting on 22 May it was minuted:

'Intimation has been given by Mr Lindsay, steward of the lady of the Manor, of her intention to appropriate all monies collected from the standing of Booths on the Downs during the Races and thereby depriving the racing funds of that support which it has enjoyed from time immemorial which is a breach of the privileges belonging to the inhabitants of Epsom and to which they conceive themselves fully entitled to from long custom and also from the herbage of the Downs being indisputably their property.

Resolved that if the collection made upon the Booths is suffered to be diverted from its usual channel there will be an end of Epsom Races and consequently the prosperity of the Town which

must effectually depreciate the value of all kind of property within the Manor.

Resolved that Messrs Scott, Hayton, Brown and Dearle are hereby nominated to wait upon Mrs Mawby and her Trustees respectfully with a copy of these instructions to remonstrate against any violation of our alleged rights and more particularly against the personal appropriation of the racing funds arising from the Booths.

Resolved that in case our remonstrance should fail of that due effect which we sincerely desire it may produce, this meeting unanimously determines to procure every means to secure those rights which are so essential to the interest of every inhabitant within the Manor of Epsom.

Resolved that this meeting do nominate and appoint Mr Jos. Farrall as Clerk of the Course to collect the money for the standing of the booths as usual and that they will undertake to indemnify him for so doing in case of any opposition on the part of the Lady of the Manor.'

It would seem that the alarm of the Vestry was based on a misunderstanding, or perhaps the steward of the Lady of the Manor was being over-zealous, because, 'The deputation having waited on Mrs Mawby and her Trustees, Sir Jonathan Gibbons and Captain Dotton, report that they expressed much surprise, said they know nothing of the business and that they had given no such order and requested the collection might be made in the usual way and that it should be applied to the purpose it had been heretofore.'

13. Miscellaneous concerns of the Vestry

18 June 1772 '....ordered that the Watch House be put into such repair to make it capable safely to detain in custody the offenders who shall be sent there'.

28 December 1773 'John Martin of Wallington applies for two acres of land on the common for the purpose of erecting a

windmill to grind corn, a mill house and stables.' It was agreed the land should be let for 99 years at a yearly rent of 30s. (The mill was built close to the Old Well. It burnt down around 1880 with its sails revolving like a giant catherine wheel.)

6 June 1794 Some better method of securing the windows of the church was suggested, following a break-in by robbers who stole several articles.

2 December 1796 'Mrs Trotter of Horton Place having lately made a present to our Parish Church of two very handsome Suits of Rich Crimson Velvet for the Pulpit and the Altar, with Cushions and Carpets so as to render the whole very complete together with two very beautiful Common Prayer Books for the Altar, it was unanimously agreed that a Letter of Thanks should be written to Mrs Trotter.' An elegantly worded letter was drafted expressing, 'warmest thanks for the very handsome manner in which you have ornamented our Church. Our pleasure in seeing its former Nakedness and meanness rendered thus perfectly neat and elegant is much enhanced by the Reflection that we owe it to the unsolicited Munificence of one of our own Parishioners.'

27 December 1799 'Resolved that a proper book be provided by the Vestry Clerk and that the Rev. Mr Boucher do employ some proper person to Register all Papers and Documents belonging to this Parish and that the said book with the Papers shall afterwards be put into a place to be provided for the purpose which shall be lodged in the said room.' (The said room was the room in the Poor House that had been fitted up for Vestry meetings.)

18 March 1800 'Resolved that the Meadow belonging to the Poor-house be broke up and used as a garden for the use of the said House.'

4 May 1803 'Mr James B.....promises to pay the Overseers of this Parish the sum of fifteen pounds in six months from this day on account of Sam. R.....as a composition for a Bastard Child sworn to him by Mary A...'(The idea behind the CSA is nothing

new!)

26 July 1805 'To take into consideration the conduct of the Lord of the Manor who has inclosed a part of the Common near the Old Wells, in permitting persons to inclose some part of the waste and charging the same with a Rental and selling the Earth from the Common for the purpose of making Bricks. Wm. Northey and Geo. Smith be requested to present at the next general Court Baron to be held for the Manor of Epsom the several above enumerated encroachments in order that they may be removed.'

20 October 1806 'To take into consideration the nuisance in Church Street occasioned by the waste liquor from the Brew-house.' It was agreed that, 'Parish Officers be instructed to inform Mr Rutter that if he does not remove the nuisance complained of he will be indicted for the same.'

28 June 1806 It was agreed to offer a reward of £50 upon conviction of offenders stealing lead from the Church. 'Accomplices may be pardoned if they bring other offenders to conviction.'

8 July 1808 'Thomas J..... the pew opener, did attend and begged pardon for his misconduct and did promise that in future he will take care to keep the Church, Churchyard and everything thereto belonging clean and that he will be attentive to his duty particularly in conducting persons to seats in the Church.'

8 November 1812 There was discussion of, 'The expediency of providing a school for the education of the children, male and female, of all the poor inhabitants willing to benefit by it, in the principles of the Established Church and that a voluntary annual subscription of the inhabitants be solicited for the maintenance of it.'

17 March 1813 Thomas J....., Senior, was appointed Parish Clerk. Thomas J....., Junior, was appointed pew opener. 'His duty will include also keeping the Church, the Churchyard, tombs and

paths clean and free from weeds and to endeavour to keep the children quiet during service.'

31 March 1814 'Resolved that a new fence be put round the town pond with brick foundation and a good ash plank coping, posts and rails.'

14 October 1814 It was reported that the Town Pump was in a bad state. The old one was to be removed and a new one erected at a cost of £15.

18 May 1818 A Beadle was appointed at a salary of 10 guineas a year, the parish to furnish him with, 'A greatcoat and a hat once in two years, a pair of shoes and a pair of stockings every year.'

24 August 1825 An organist was appointed at £25 per annum. 'No deputy except by permission. To teach children of the National School in Psalmody at least once in every week. He is required to play such Tunes as shall be approved by the Minister and Churchwardens and no other.'

9 December 1826 A Beadle was appointed on the same terms as in May 1818, implying no great inflation in the interval.

22 April 1847 'It appearing that the keeping of the Town Pond in repair is attended with a great expense to the parish and that its stagnant water is exceedingly prejudicial to the health of the inhabitants, resolved that the Surveyors be requested to adopt measures for filling up the pond and for making a sewer along the centre of it.'

19 June 1847 Mr Langlands moved that it was inexpedient to fill up the Town Pond and that it should be cleaned and repaired, but Mr Everest moved that it should be filled as it was 'a disgrace to the Town'. The motion to fill was carried.

17 July 1847 'Resolved that the old Watch House and Clock be pulled down and sold, with the old disused Engine by Private Tender or 'Public Auction.'

24 November 1865 'To determine on some course for discovering the offenders who have lately broken several tombstones in the yard of the Parish Church and for preventing the future desecration of the tombstones. A private subscription to be raised for the purpose and offering a reward for discovery of offenders. Police to be alerted to help in preventing a recurrence of this evil.'

14. The decline of the Vestry

In much the way that Vestries had taken over many of the functions of the manor courts, so in their turn Vestries lost their powers with the setting up in the 19th century of administrative bodies not connected with the Church. The Poor Law Act of 1834 aimed to make the relief of the poor more efficient by grouping parishes into large districts known as poor law unions. The large Union Workhouses replaced the multitudinous parish workhouses. Epsom parish came in the Epsom Union set up in 1836 which comprised more than a dozen parishes. A new large workhouse was built in Dorking Road, Epsom.

Responsibility for public health was taken over by a Board of Health and in 1853 it was insisting that a permanent supply of good water must be made available in Epsom. The Vestry were not too happy with some of the Board's demands and it led to a complaint that they were interfering improperly in the duty of the Board to enact the law! (A report of 1849 had strongly recommended the provision of a good water supply and the need for sanitation).

Towards the end of the period covered by the Vestry minutes the matters discussed are largely confined to those relating to the running of the Church. There was on several occasions unseemly squabbling over the allocation of pews.

The Local Government Act brought about the setting up of the Epsom Urban District Council in 1894 which brought to an end the Vestry as an organ of local government.

NONSUCH ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

This Occasional Paper is one of a series that has been published by the Society, which was founded in 1959 by a group of people who had taken part in the excavation of Nonsuch Palace, Ewell. Its aims are to encourage an interest in archaeology and local history; to investigate, record and publish information about such matters; and to use its influence to achieve the preservation of objects of archaeological and historical importance. The area of activity comprises Epsom and Ewell, and also Sutton, Cheam and Banstead if the aims are not already covered.

Meetings are held, normally on the first Wednesday of each month, at St. Mary's Church Hall, London Road, Ewell (opposite the Church) with speakers on some historical or archaeological subject.

Visitors are welcome to attend meetings on payment of a small entrance fee.

Further details of the Society may be obtained from the Library and the Museum at Bourne Hall, Spring Street, Ewell.