

Thomas Ward Blagg and the Abbey parish Charities Scandal c.1827-1860.

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Abstract

St Albans in the early to mid-nineteenth century suffered from endemic levels of corruption. The borough was well known for the bribery that took place at its borough elections and was the subject of three parliamentary enquiries before it was eventually disfranchised in 1852. However, historians have largely focused on the forms that the bribery took without looking below the surface to identify the underlying causes of the corruption, the networks that allowed it to function or the wider repercussions. By concentrating on the activities of the town clerk Thomas Ward Blagg, I will examine the political and other motivations for corruption and look at how Blagg's embezzlement of several of the Abbey parish endowment charities helped fund his attempts at controlling the borough. Through this study, it will become clear that key pieces of legislation from the Age of Reform such as the Great Reform Act 1832 and The Municipal Corporations Act 1835 increased levels of corruption in the borough rather than reducing them. What followed was a 'golden age' of corruption, which saw competing factions trying to fill the vacuum of power that had been created by the ending of aristocratic patronage. In effect Blagg and his contemporaries were participating in a 'New Corruption' that would take the best part of two decades to overcome. It took the combined efforts of leading figures within the Abbey parish and the emergence of legislation from Westminster that gave the authorities unprecedented powers of intervention to bring men like Blagg under control.

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Lastly, it would not have been possible to devote the time to this undertaking without the support of my partner Elaine. Many weekends and evenings have been spent alone while I have had my head in the books or in the archives. Your quiet patience while I followed my latest idea is appreciated more than I can say.

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Abbreviations

ACACSA Archives of the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban

BLN *British Library Newspapers*

HALS Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies

HCPPO House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online

TDA *Times Digital Archive*

TNA The National Archives

Timeline 1827-1860

- 28/12/1827 Thomas Ward Blagg elected Common (Town) Clerk, Coroner, Chamberlain and honorary freeman.
- 1834 George Muskett opens Muskett's Bank of St Albans.
- 17/12/1835 Publication of handbill *Charities Questions Not Answered*.
- 30/11/1836 Robert Skelton's Charity in Chancery.
- 1837 George Muskett elected MP for St Albans.
- 13/03/1837 Francis Searancke sent letter to Blagg expressing surprise that the gift of Gawen's Charity has not been distributed.
- 10/11/1837 Abbey parish vestry committee report on accounts of parish charities. Concerns raised over Cross Keys Charity.
- 23/08/1839 Blagg officially becomes treasurer of Cross Keys Charity. He had been keeper of accounts since at least 1828.
- 1840 Affairs of Thomas Gawen Charity in Chancery.
- 1841 St Albans Election Committee investigate bribery in the borough at by-election on 9 February 1841.

- 1841 George Muskett failed to gain re-election as MP, his bank is found to be effectively insolvent.
- 01/1843 George Muskett dies of heart failure; Muskett's Bank collapses.
- 19/03/1846 Abbey parish vestry form committee to look into the state of the parish charities.
- 23/03/1846 Edward Gibson sent letter asking when Cross Keys Charity made its last disbursement.
- 30/03/1846 Blagg published handbill cancelling planned disbursement of Cross Keys Charity.
- 21/05//1846 Abbey parish committee reported findings and raised serious concerns over Cross Keys, Gawen and Skelton Charities.
- 1846 Blagg sues George Sturt for libel.
- 12/1846 Affairs of Cross Keys Charity in Chancery.
- 15/01/1847 Blagg resigns as treasurer of Cross Keys Charity.
- 14/07/1847 Meeting at Town Hall about the state of the charities.
- 23/12/1847 Abbey parish vestry meets and calls for immediate distribution of Cross Keys Charity gift.

- 03/02/1848 Abbey parish vestry hears further report on state of parish charities.
- 24/12/1850 Jacob Bell returned as MP.
- 04/01/1851 Abbey parish meeting, calls for attendance of all rate payers to discuss state of parish charities.
- 09/01/1851 Abbey parish vestry forms another committee to investigate the state of the parish charities.
- 29/01/1851 Abbey parish vestry resolves to hold charity trustees legally responsible for the charities' balances and unearned interest.
- 05/03/1851 Chancery issues decree on Cross Keys Charity, matter settled of eligibility.
- 27/03/1851 Abbey parish vestry committee publishes its report on state of parish charities.
- 31/03/1851 First parliamentary enquiry into bribery at the 1850 election opens.
- 13/05/1851 Trustees of Gawen's and Skelton's Charities resolve that Blagg is no longer the treasurer of the charities and is to pay money owed by him or legal action will be taken against him.
- 24/05/1851 Blagg informs Richard Grove Lowe that he is trying to obtain money but he will only pay money to the Accountant General.

- 29/10/1851 Second parliamentary enquiry into bribery at the 1850 election opens.
- 18/02/1852 First distribution to poor by Cross Keys Charity since 1843, now coals instead of cash.
- 03/05/1852 Borough of St Albans is disfranchised.
- 08/02/1853 Blagg pays money owed to Gawen's and Skelton's Charities.
- 12/01/1855 Gawen's Charity proceedings terminated in Chancery.
- 18/01/1860 Skelton's Charity proceedings terminated in Chancery.

Key Personalities

Thomas Ward Blagg Town Clerk 1827-1874.

Associates of Thomas Ward Blagg

George Alfred Muskett Owner of Muskett's Bank of St Albans 1834-1843 and
borough MP 1837-1841.

Henry Edwards Liberal Party Agent, chief clerk of the St Albans Bank,
then manager of Muskett's Bank of St Albans.

John Samuel Story Attorney, owner of the St Albans Bank, trustee of several
charities.

Opponents of Thomas Ward Blagg

Edward Langridge Justice and councillor, wine merchant and treasurer of
Lathbury's and Rayneshaw's Charities.

Rev Henry Nicholson Rector of Abbey Church 1835-1864.

Richard Grove Lowe Attorney, Alderman and trustee of several charities.

Edward Gibson Attorney, owner of the St Albans & Herts Bank.

George Sturt Chief Clerk of Musketts Bank, manager of the St Albans & Herts Bank.

Thomas and John Kinder Farmers and brewers, Blagg handled funds embezzled from them, Liberal party supporters.

Other Key People

Richard Webster Surgeon and leader of the 'Third' or 'Contest' party.

Thelonious Webster Surgeon and son of Richard. He took over leadership of the 'Third' or 'Contest' party on the death of his father.

William B. Simpson Former clerk to Blagg, Liberal party agent for the 'Third' or 'Contest party and town councillor.

Chapter 1

Introduction

'It is clearly a mistake to consider St Albans as a stagnant or declining borough. No town in England furnishes more steady employment to brewers, bankers, publicans, agents, politicians (being also capitalists), attorneys, barristers and even members of Parliament.'¹

On 28th December 1827, the twenty-four-year-old Thomas Ward Blagg was elected Common (Town) Clerk, Coroner and Chamberlain of the corporation of St Albans. He would remain in office until the day he died, on New Year's Eve 1874. From the start, he was a divisive figure and it took the casting vote of the mayor Samuel Jones to decide the matter.² Blagg was to play a key role in the political and charitable institutions of St Albans and the Abbey parish, causing great harm in both areas. The endemic levels of bribery and corruption of the borough's elections attracted much attention at the time and have been studied by historians.³ However, the underlying networks that facilitated the corruption have been overlooked as has the relevance of Blagg's embezzlement of several of the Abbey parish endowment charities. What has been written has not taken into account the extent of the connection between the

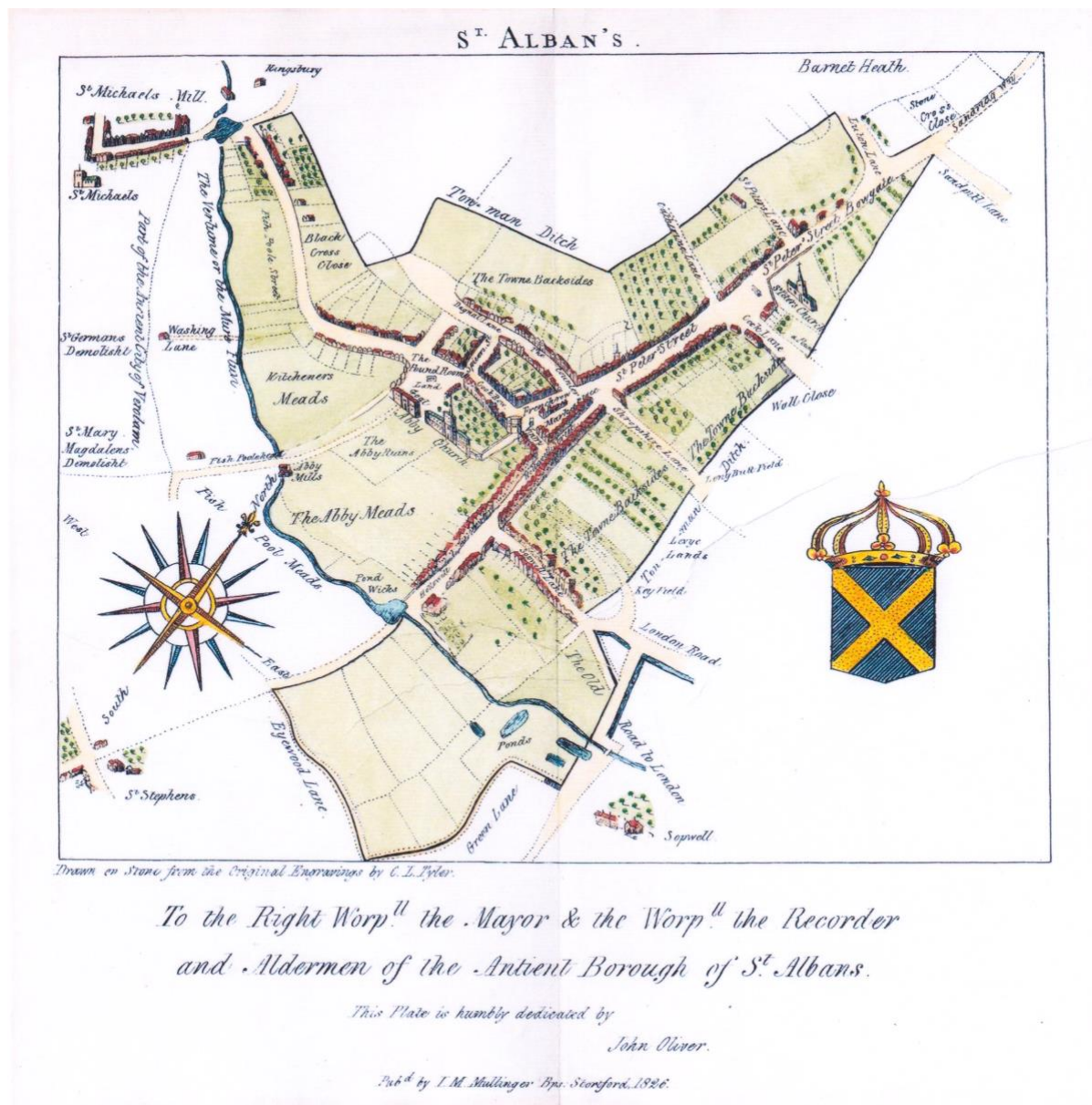
¹ "It is clearly a mistake to consider St Albans as". *Times*. (London, England) 12 Apr. 1851: 5. TDA. Web. Consulted on 27 Nov 2016.

² Gibbs, A. E., *The Corporation Records of St Albans* (St Albans, 1890), pp. 176-177 and "Summer Assizes", *The Times*, (London, England), Monday, Jul 13, 1846:7. TDA. Web. 20 Nov. 2017.

³ *The Times* and regional press regularly reported on the progress of the two enquiries of 1851 and 1852. They became such a part of everyday life that *The Times* claimed on 10 Nov 1851: 'The close of the St. Albans inquiry will be as bad as the close of the Great Exhibition. It will leave a blank in the public mind – a dreary void in the daily recreation of Englishmen.' Historians' coverage of the borough's bribery includes: Lanberry, H. C. F., *Politics and Government in St Albans 1685-1835*, unpublished PhD Thesis, (University of London, 1964), Hoppen, Theodore, K., 'Roads to Democracy: Electioneering and Corruption in Nineteenth-Century England and Ireland', *History*. Oct 96, Vol. 81 Issue 264, pp. 559-560, Thomas, Alison., *A Study of Hertfordshire Political Life 1830-1852, Concentrating on Elections and the Effects of Parliamentary Politics on this Aspect of the Local Political Scene*, unpublished Thesis, 1979 and Freeman, Mark., *St Albans: a history* (Lancaster, 2008), pp.219-223.

embezzlements and the funding of political corruption. Nor has the wider national context been considered in helping to explain why the events unfolded as they did.⁴

Figure 1: Map of St Albans 1826



This dissertation will not seek to explain the poor's experience of interacting with the Abbey parish endowment charities. Instead it will focus on the

⁴ See Kilvington, F. I., "'A Likeable Rogue': The Life of a St Albans Character", *Hertfordshire Countryside Magazine*, January 1996, p. 26 and Archives of the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban, hereafter ACASA, Kilvington, F. I., Report on the Charities, 1990.

environment these charities operated in and the systems and structures that administered the charities and how these were abused by those who should have been protecting them for the benefit of the poor. My approach will take the form of a local study that seeks to bring a new understanding to the wider national picture. In this sense, this dissertation challenges H. P. R. Finberg's argument that to include the national in the local devalues local studies.⁵

The period 1827-1860 has been chosen for several reasons. F. I. Kilvington is responsible for naming Blagg's embezzlement 'The Charities Scandal'. He dated the scandal to the years 1846-1852, which represented the period when the scandal first came to the public's attention and ends when it seemed that matters had been settled.⁶ I have chosen the start date of 1827 to reflect Blagg's appointment as town clerk. From the time of his appointment he would have become the clerk to the Abbey parish corporation charities. However, there is evidence that points to Blagg running one of the parish's charities without any apparent authorisation. This suggests a potentially early start date for his corrupt behaviour.⁷ 1860 has been chosen as the end date for our period for two reasons. Firstly, 1860 marked the year that the last of the charities affected by the scandal, the Skelton Charity, was discharged from the Court of Chancery, which finally drew a line under the Charities Scandal.⁸ Secondly, 1860 was the year that the Charitable Trusts Act came onto the statute books. This extended the powers of the 1853 act of the same name, which for the first time had established a permanent Charities Commission. The 1853 act allowed commissioners to question trustees under oath, gave them the right

⁵ Finberg, H. P. R., 'The Local Historian and His Theme', in Richardson, R. C., ed, *The Changing Face of English Local History* (Aldershot, 2000), p. 116.

⁶ ACASA, Charities 1 (1) General, Kilvington, F. I., *The Charities Scandal*.

⁷ Blagg was the clerk and treasurer to The Skelton charity. The Abbey parish vestry inquiry into the parish charities in 1851 found that not only was there no evidence of Blagg ever being appointed clerk and treasurer but that Blagg had also prepared the deed under which the trustees had been appointed in 1834. See ACASA, transcription of Abbey parish Vestry minute books 1828-1849, 9 Jan 1851.

⁸ I have taken the name 'The Charities Scandal' from F. I. Kilvington's 1990 Report on the Charities, which is a summary of the primary sources on the scandal housed in the Archives of the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban. However, he dated the scandal from 1846-1852.

to see any documents held by trustees and it compelled trustees to submit formal annual accounts. Under the 1860 act, commissioners were for the first time awarded legal powers that allowed them to enforce changes on smaller charities. Had this legislation been enacted earlier, as it could have been, Blagg's embezzlement, which amounted to a minimum of £749.0s 0d., may never have happened.⁹ The 1860 act was the last attempt at regulating charities for a century and as such it marks a fitting point to end our period.

Blagg's tenure coincided with the 'Age of Reform' which saw the end of 'Old Corruption' at Westminster and the introduction of momentous pieces of legislation such as the Great Reform Act 1832, the First to Fourth Charity Commissions 1819-1837, the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 and the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835.¹⁰ Yet these seminal landmarks of nineteenth century reform not only failed to stop Blagg but in some cases facilitated his corrupt behaviour. Blagg could easily hide his embezzlement of the charities from the charity commissioners because they had no legal powers other than to make enquiries and suggest solutions.

Despite the Great Reform Act increasing the number of voters at the national level, it reduced the electorate in the borough of St Albans, leaving fewer voters to bribe.¹¹ Similarly, the Municipal Corporations Act should have increased local democracy by introducing yearly elections of councillors. However, for a man of Blagg's energy, it represented an opportunity to fix the elections. He was able to maintain his control until the early 1850s when, perhaps, his reputation was

⁹ From 1844-1846, the Lord Chancellor tried three times to get a permanent Charities Commission established. See Owen, David., *English Philanthropy 1660-1960* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), pp. 199-207. The actual figure given by the Abbey parish committee investigating the charities was £749. 9s. 2d. This included lost interest but did not include the legal fees Blagg had charged. See ACASA, Abbey parish Vestry Minute Book 14 April 1853.

¹⁰ 2 & 3 Will. IV c.45. 58 Geo. III c. 91; 59 Geo. III c. 81; (5 Geo. IV c. 58); (10 Geo. III c. 57); 1 & 2 Will. IV c. 34; 5 & 6 Will. IV c. 71; (7 Will. IV c. 4).

¹¹ Absent Freemen of the Borough had their right to vote removed which even when the new £10 voters are allowed for reduced the electorate by over one hundred voters. See House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online, hereafter HCPPPO, *Report of The Commissioners to Inquire into the Existence of Bribery in the Borough of Saint Alban's; Together with The Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index*, PP. 1431, 1852, p. x.

damaged by the disenfranchisement of St Albans in 1852. Blagg along with his friend Harry Edwards, the Liberal Party election agent, were largely responsible for the level of bribery in the Borough elections¹². But as we shall see in chapter 3, the borough lost its MP for 33 years between 1852 and 1885.¹³ The Poor Law Amendment Act only made Blagg's embezzlement of the Charities worse than it would have been. Never designed to cope with large numbers of unemployed paupers, the system was severely tested at time of crisis in 1838-1842 and 1847. It is the argument of this dissertation that while the reforming pieces of legislation did solve many of the problems of corruption at central government level, reform at the local level in places like the Abbey parish of St Albans was a far slower process.

Our period coincided with some of the harshest economic conditions of the nineteenth century. Yet it was precisely at these critical moments, when the poor needed assistance the most, that Blagg's embezzlements caused the safety net offered by the endowment charities to falter. J. F. C. Harrison has said of the period 1836-1842 that 'These six years were the grimmest period in the nineteenth century.'¹⁴ More specifically, Peter Mathias has described the years 1842-43 as 'possibly the worst two years in the nineteenth century'.¹⁵ Furthermore, the European potato famine began in 1845, harvests were poor in 1845-46 leading to the Repeal of the Corn Laws and the financial crisis of 1847-48. I argue that the wider international and national events of the 1840s need to be considered as these greatly exacerbated the effect of Blagg's actions on the poor of the Abbey parish. Furthermore, I will argue that the failures of reform allowed men like Blagg to participate in a 'New Corruption', one which was not run by the old landed elite but

¹² Even though the Liberal party was not formed until 1859, the Whigs were often referred to as Liberals and both labels were widely used. Similarly, the Conservative party was formed in 1834 from the Tory party, but again both terms were widely used after this date. Throughout this dissertation I will use the names Whig, Liberal, Tory and Conservative within the context that they appear in the relevant primary source being discussed.

¹³ Lanberry, H. C. F., *Politics and Government*, p. 272 and Freeman, Mark., *St Albans: a history*, p. 223.

¹⁴ Harrison, J. F. C., *The Early Victorians 1832-51*, (London, 1971), p. 12.

¹⁵ Mathias, Peter., *The First Industrial Nation An Economic History of Britain 1700-1914*, 2nd edn. (London and New York), 1988, p. 214.

was instead facilitated by a newly enfranchised, interconnected middle class that could identify and exploit the opportunities afforded by the failures of reform. This 'New Corruption', while having its roots in politics, spread further than 'Old Corruption'. Lacking the personal resources of the landed elite, the acolytes of this 'New Corruption' were highly exposed to the vagaries of financial markets. This in turn made targets of wealthy individuals, or vulnerable institutions such as endowment charities when times were bad.

In order to better understand the context in which the corruption took place, this chapter will next consider the importance of St Albans both locally and nationally and its economic position in the early nineteenth century. The history of endowment charities and a description of the trusts in the Abbey parish will follow this. The chapter will end with an outline of the sources used in this dissertation.

St Albans

During our period of 1827-1860, St Albans like the rest of England, experienced great change both in legislative and administrative terms but with an increasing population, the urban environment was altered also. The exact date when more people lived in towns and cities than in the countryside is disputed but by around 1845-1850 a significant shift in where people lived and worked had taken place.¹⁶ That said, Hertfordshire was still an agricultural county. In 1851 only 24 per cent of its population lived in towns.¹⁷ The rapid increase in the size of the English population which had begun in the second half of the eighteenth century continued into the nineteenth century and into our period. In the fifty years from 1801 to 1851

¹⁶ Bedarida, Francios., *A Social History of England 1851-1990*, (Oxford, 2013), p.16-17 and Goose, Nigel., *Population, economy and family*, p. 51.

¹⁷ Freeman, Mark., *St Albans*, p. 210.

the population of England rose from 8,671,356 to 17,030,153, a 96.4 per cent increase.¹⁸

During the same period, the population of Hertfordshire rose from 97,393 to 167,298,¹⁹ a 41.78 per cent increase, which was still substantial but was well below half of the national growth rate. This slower growth rate meant that over the nineteenth century, Hertfordshire's population as a proportion of England's fell from 1.1 per cent to 0.77 per cent.²⁰ The population of St Albans had also been growing steadily since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1801, the population of the borough which comprised the Abbey parish and parts of St Michaels and St Peters parishes stood at 3,038. By 1851 it had increased to 7,000, a growth rate of 56.6 per cent, higher than Hertfordshire's total but still below the national figure. Population increases led to administrative change and in 1835, just eight years into our period, the Municipal Corporations Act was passed which for the first time pushed the town beyond its mediaeval boundaries. The land covered by the town increased from 320 acres to 434 acres.²¹

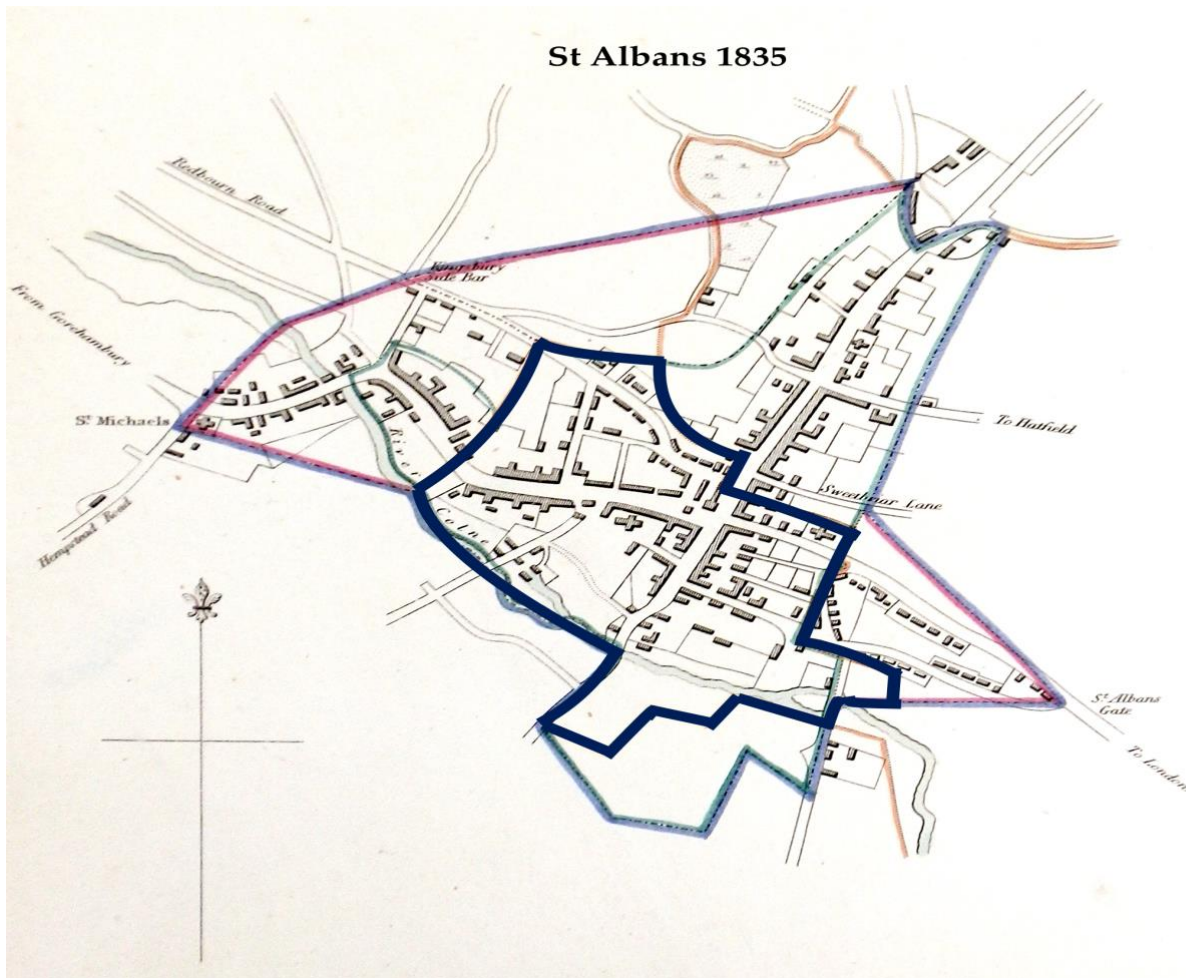
¹⁸ Shaw-Taylor, Leigh., and Wrigley, E. A., 'Occupational structure and population change', in Floud, Frederick., Humphries, Jane., and Johnson., Paul., eds, *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain Volume 1 1700-1870*, p. 73.

¹⁹ Goose, N., 'Poverty, old age and gender in nineteenth-century England: the case of Hertfordshire', *Continuity and Change*, 20, 2005, p. 351.

²⁰ Goose, N., 'Poverty, old age and gender', p. 351.

²¹ Freeman, Mark., *St Albans*, p. 210.

Figure 2: Municipal Borough of St Albans with Old and New Boundaries 1835



Legend: Abbey Parish Boundary – black, Borough Boundary up to 1835 – green, Borough Boundary 1835-79 – purple.²²

Source: TNA, T72/26 Final Correction to Warded and Unwarded Towns 1835-36, Map of borough of St Albans.

By 1851, St Albans was the largest town in the county and over one tenth of the population of Hertfordshire lived either in the borough or in the immediate area around St Albans. This was at a time when only 10 per cent of the population of England and Wales lived in towns of between 2,500-10,000 people.²³ Seen in these terms the borough was an important centre. However, when compared with towns in the industrial northern areas of England, St Albans was tiny. At the same period,

²² See Appendices A-C for larger scales maps showing the various boundaries.

²³ Goose, Nigel., *Population, economy and family*, p. 34.

Sheffield's population stood at 135,000, Manchester's at 340,000 and Liverpool 400,000.²⁴ By mid-century then, St Albans was becoming an increasingly urbanised environment situated within a rural county.

Table 1: Population of the Borough of St Albans 1801-61

Year	Population of borough of St Albans	Growth (%)
1801	3,038	
1811	3,653	20.2
1821	4,472	22.4
1831	4,772	6.7
1841	6,497	36.1*
1851	7,000	7.7
1861	7,675	9.6

Source: Freeman, Mark., *St Albans: a history*, (Lancaster, 2008), Table 7.1, p. 210.

*Municipal borough boundary changed in 1835.

The Abbey parish also experienced a significant rise in population across our period. From 1801 to 1851 the population increased from 1,911 to 3,371,²⁵ a growth rate of 43.31 per cent. This was in line with Hertfordshire's performance but below that of the borough's. Exceptionally in our period, between 1831-1841 there was a decrease in the parish's population and at this point the parish of St Peter overtook the Abbey parish as the most populous parish in the borough.²⁶

²⁴ Goose, Nigel., *Population, economy and family*, pp. 50-51.

²⁵ Thurston, H., *St Albans Urban Geography*, unpublished thesis, Appendix 3, Growth of Population.

²⁶ The decrease in population in the Abbey parish was caused by the demolishing of houses to build Verulam Rd in 1833. See Thurston, H., *St Albans Urban Geography*, p. 55.

Table 2: Population of the Abbey Parish 1801-51

Year	Population of Abbey Parish	Growth (%)
1801	1,911	
1811	2,151	11.2
1821	2,819	23.7
1831	3,092	8.8
1841	2,904	-6.5
1851	3,371	13.9

Source: Thurston, H., 'St Albans Urban Geography', Appendix 3, Growth of Population.

Despite St Albans rural surroundings, it is important to remember that its position on Watling Street, some 20 miles to the North West of London ensured that the two settlements have been closely connected since Roman times. However, St Albans may not have always been the subordinate partner that we assume it has always been. H. Thurston has argued that Roman Londinium was founded to supply Verulamium through its port on the Thames.²⁷ Being so close to London could be a mixed blessing. Leigh Shaw-Taylor and E. A. Wrigley have convincingly made a case for the 'London effect', in which the capital's size and power could have a significant economic and social effect on its surrounding counties. The expanding population of the capital needed feeding and this encouraged the introduction of new agricultural techniques to increase output.

London was so economically powerful, they argue, that its influence could even be felt in the north of England. For example, during the seventeenth century Northumberland and Durham experienced an explosion in population growth, coming behind only Middlesex in the rate of their expansion; this was fueled by the ever-increasing demand for coal from London.²⁸ As well as acting as a stimulus to

²⁷ See Thurston, H., *St Albans Urban Geography*, pp. 1-2.

²⁸ Shaw-Taylor, Leigh., and Wrigley, E. A., 'Occupational structure and population change', in Floud, et al, p. 77.

growth, London's wealth could also enable it to dictate market conditions which could have a detrimental effect on its surrounding regions. London received its coal from the north by sea, a relatively cost effective means of transport, that gave it an economic advantage over land locked Hertfordshire. The cost of transporting coal overland from London could increase the price paid by consumers in the county by over fifty per cent. Even the arrival of the Grand Junction Canal in west Hertfordshire in the early eighteenth century did not fully resolve the problem as strict conditions restricting the movement of coal by canal were imposed.²⁹ As late as 1851, a tax on coal exported out of London that was imposed to pay for the development of the capital's infrastructure added 13d. per ton to the cost brought into St Albans.³⁰

The health of St Albans' economy during the period 1827-1860 has sharply divided historians. Anne Jordan has argued that the town saw greater growth in the period 1790-1830 than it had at any time since the fifteenth century.³¹ H. Thurston has also identified our period in which the first growth took place for centuries. He has argued that up to the late 1850s the growth of the town was due to the stagecoach which by the mid 1820s could bring up to 1,000 passengers a day through the town, stimulating the hostelry and associated trades. However, he also argues that when compared against Watford and Luton the town's economic growth was slow. For Thurston, the town's prosperity really began in the 1870s and was brought by the arrival of the railways. Between 1858-1867 three lines were built, though it took until 1867 for the first direct line to London to open. Thurston concludes that until the railways came economic development was restricted in the town as there were no realistic opportunities to be able to move large volumes of goods across

²⁹ See Hiscock, Fabian., "Passing Through": The Socio-Economic Effects of the Grand Junction Canal on West Hertfordshire 1791-1841, unpublished thesis (University of Hertfordshire, 2016), p. 42.

³⁰ "The Late 'Great Exhibition' - We doubt." *Times* (London, England) 29 Dec 1851: 3. TDA. Web. Consulted on 5 Dec 2016.

³¹ Jordan, Ann, The Public Weal and the Borough Corporation of St Albans 1835-1888, unpublished thesis, (City of Portsmouth College of Education, April 1973), p. 17.

country.³²

Mark Freeman has taken issue with Asa Briggs's pessimistic view of the town's economic performance. Briggs dismissed the economy of St Albans as being of no significance nationally because what industry there was such as printing and silk mills all declined, while straw plaiting and brewing could not be classed as industry at all. He saw no periods of fast growth or sudden large migrations in to the town and as a result has characterised a slow underperforming economy.³³ Freeman has found that Briggs was working from inaccurate data and in contrast to both Briggs and Hurston, he paints a picture of St Albans as a thriving town, which increasingly toward the later decades of our period was experiencing an unprecedented period of growth.³⁴

Despite its close links with the metropolis, it is important to remember that for all our period, St Albans was the urban centre for the surrounding villages, enjoying a mutually beneficial relationship between the urban and rural areas. This was most conspicuously seen by the dominance of the straw plait industry.³⁵ The importance of the straw plait industry to St Albans was neatly demonstrated when in 1868 the first train to arrive at the newly opened City Station drew in festooned with straw plait.³⁶

Whereas, Asa Briggs was unimpressed about the role of the straw plait trade in the borough's economic life, both Nigel Goose and Mark Freeman have acknowledged the importance of the straw plait and the associated hat making and silk trades in providing employment.³⁷ They were also largely responsible for the very high numbers of women living within the borough. Textiles and straw plaiting were trades dominated by women and within St Albans district in 1851 only 10.2 per

³² Thurston, H., 'St Albans Urban Geography', pp. 55-61.

³³ Freeman, Mark., *St Albans*, p. 209.

³⁴ See above, pp. 209-210.

³⁵ Goose, Nigel., *Population, economy and family*, p. 51.

³⁶ Freeman, Mark., *St Albans*, p. 215.

³⁷ Freeman, Mark., *St Albans*, and Goose, Nigel., *Population, economy and family*, p. 54.

cent of plaiters were male. In the Abbey parish of the 491 people employed in textiles 310 were female.³⁸ In the same year, the employment rate for married women in the district stood at 43 per cent which was higher than the northern pottery and cotton towns where figures ranged from 26 to 30 per cent.³⁹ The employment opportunities afforded to women was reflected in the numbers of women living within the parish. In 1851 of the 3,371 inhabitants of the Abbey parish, 46.6 per cent were male while 53.4 per cent were female.⁴⁰ This meant that the sex ratio of the parish was 87, compared with 99 for Hertfordshire and 96 for England and Wales.⁴¹ Another factor in the high rates of women living within the Abbey parish was that most of the town's wealthiest inhabitants lived within the parish and they would have therefore provided employment in the form of domestic service. Of the three parishes within the borough, the Abbey parish had the highest number of domestic servants, retailers and professional occupations such as doctors and attorneys. It also had the second highest number of people of independent means, all indicators of wealth.⁴² But wealth and poverty lived side by side and there were many poor inhabitants in the Abbey parish. As can be seen from table 3, by 1841 the Abbey parish was the second most populous parish. Figures 3 and 4 show the numbers of poor in receipt of out and in-relief in the three parishes during the depression years of 1838-1842. Despite this, figure 3 shows that the Abbey parish had the most paupers in the union workhouse. By 1843 the Abbey parish had 15 endowment charities, St Peters had 17 while St Michaels had two. St Peters parish also had the Duchess of Marlborough Charity, which provided almshouses and was the wealthiest of all the St Albans endowment charities. In 1843, it had an annual

³⁸ Thurston, H., 'St Albans Urban Geography, p. 40.

³⁹ If all women aged 15 and over are included, the figure rises from 63 to 66 per cent. See Goose, Nigel., *Population, economy and family*, pp. 89-91.

⁴⁰ See above p. 72

⁴¹ Sex ratio: Males per 100 females. See above p. 37.

⁴² Goose, Nigel., *Population, economy and family*, p. 40.

income of £757. 3s. 4d.⁴³ But compared with the other two parishes the Abbey parish's poor received the most in disbursements. In 1843, the parish's poor received disbursements worth £124. 4s. 18d. while the poor of St Peters received £39. 14s. 10d. followed by just £4. 0s. 0d. going to the poor of St Michaels parish.⁴⁴

Table 3: Population of the Abbey, St Peters and St Michaels Parishes 1841

Parish	Population 1841
Abbey	2,904
St Peters	3,701
St Michaels	1,999
Total	8,604

Source: Thurston, H., *St Albans Urban Geography*, Appendix 3 Growth of population.

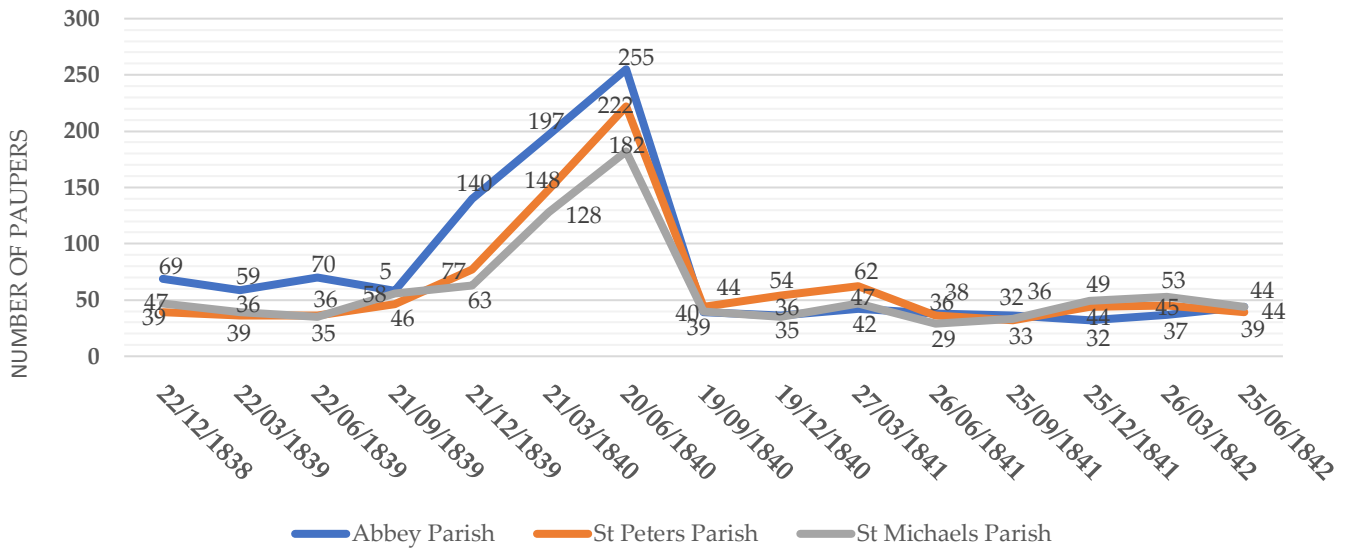
The relative generosity of the endowment charities could cause complaints from wealthier residents. For example, Thomas Blagg complained that the poor were attracted to the town because of the charities and that they were responsible for the high poor rates.⁴⁵

⁴³ HCPPO, *Commission of Inquiry into Charities in England and Wales 1843: Analytical Digest of Report of Commissioners*. PP. 435, pp. 418-419.

⁴⁴HCPPO, *Commission of Inquiry into Charities in England and Wales: Return of Charities Distributed to Poor 1843*. PP. 436, pp. 90-91. This total excludes charities providing education and almshouses and the totals relate to the main parish that the gift applies to. This means that the actual totals were lower for the Abbey parish and higher for the other two, though the Abbey parish poor still received the most.

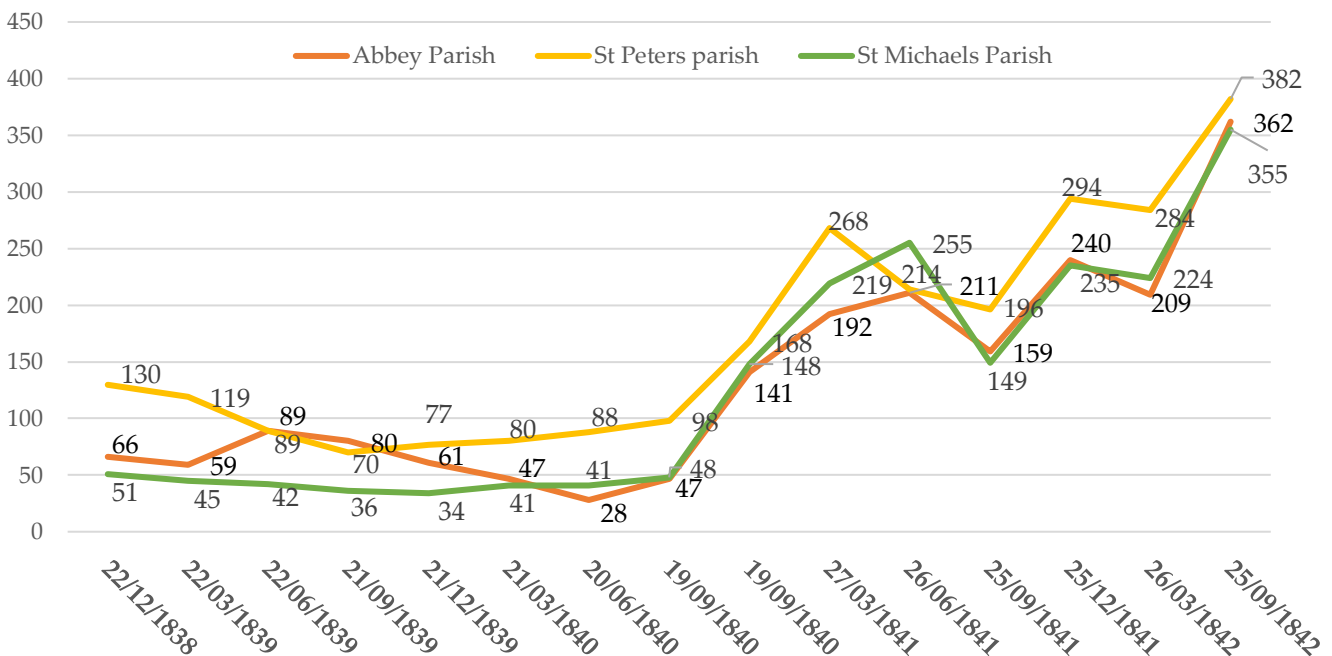
⁴⁵ Lanberry, H. C. F., *Politics and Government*, p. 268.

Figure 3: Paupers in Union Workhouse from the Abbey, St Peters & St Michaels Parishes Dec 1838-Jun 1842



Source: HALS, B/STA45, General Ledgers of Board of Guardians (St Albans Union) Sep 1838-Mar 1842, folios 2-16.

Figure 4: Numbers of Paupers Receiving Out-relief in the Abbey, St Peters & St Michaels Parishes Dec 1838-Jun 1842



Source: HALS, B/STA45, General Ledgers of Board of Guardians (St Albans Union) Sep 1838-Mar 1842, folios 2-162.

The History of Endowment Charities

Endowment charities had been the most common type of charitable organization since the reign of Elizabeth I. This was due to two pieces of legislation; An Acte to reform Deceits and Breaches of Trust touching lands given to Charitable Uses of 1597 and The Charitable Uses Act of 1601. The later act made significant improvements to the 1597 act and for the first time there existed a framework which defined the legal status of endowment trusts.⁴⁶ Martin Gorsky has defined endowments as ‘a trust where money or land was given by deed or will and the annual income used to fund a scheme designated by the donor.’⁴⁷ Most benefactors had a close connection to the parish they gifted to. If they had not been born there, then they would have almost certainly lived there or had close business connections with it. Of the Abbey parishes’ sixteen endowed charities, at least eight of the charities benefactors were living in the parish on their death.⁴⁸

Typically, endowment charities would be run by a board of trustees who were drawn from members of the local governing class, a body that Krausman Ben-Amos has named the ‘gift circuit’, which included all those who were involved in administering the charities including corporations and parish vestries.⁴⁹ In the incorporated boroughs, trustees of ‘corporation’ charities were Aldermen or Burgesses because the original benefactor entrusted the running of the charity to the corporation to ensure that the funds were distributed in line with his or her intentions.⁵⁰ As we shall see in chapter 3, this was not always a wise move. For

⁴⁶ Jones, Gareth., *History of the Law of Charity 1532-1827*, (London, 1969), pp. 22-25.

⁴⁷ Gorsky, Martin, *Patterns of Philanthropy: Charity and Society in Nineteenth Century Bristol* (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 3.

⁴⁸ See ACASA, Charities II (2) The Charities Scandal 1846-1852, *An Account of the severall Pious and Charitable DONATIONS and LEGACIES of divers well-disposed CHRISTIANS, BENEFACTORS to this Parish of St. Alban, in the Borough of St. Alban's, in the County of HERTFORD, viz, (St Albans, 1723).*

⁴⁹ Krausman, Ben-Amos, Ilana., *The Culture of Giving Informed Support and Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 181.

⁵⁰ However, in St Albans due to a Chancery ruling in 1787 over an embezzlement carried out by the corporation of the Abbey parish charities, the corporation was only allowed to appoint half of the trustees to each charity. See Lanberry, H. C. F., *Politics and Government*, p. 74.

example, in 1835, the corporation of Exeter had ‘misappropriated’ £17,000 from the charities under its control.⁵¹ A further layer of administration came in the form of the parish vestry. As the parish overseers had intimate knowledge about the poor in their locality, disbursements were often made in collaboration with the vestry. The overseers drew up lists of the those eligible for charity and sometimes also disbursed the charity itself. In the Abbey parish, disbursements by the endowment charities took the form of bread, clothing, coal and cash. There were also almshouses and the ‘Free’ Grammar School, though by our period there were only twelve scholars and all paid fees for their education, when there should have 120 poor scholars being educated for free.⁵²

The Abbey Parish Endowment Charities

Of the sixteen endowment charities that applied to the Abbey parish, four are of particular interest to this dissertation; the Bray Norrice, the Cross Keys, the Gawen and the Skelton Charities. All four charities had Thomas Blagg as their clerk and treasurer and they all suffered from a loss of funds as a result. Except for the Bray Norrice Charity, the other charities had their funds embezzled by Blagg. However, I have included the Bray Norrice Charity because for several years it was unable to disburse funds because of a delay caused by Blagg in investing money from the sale of the charity’s land. The embezzlement and loss of funds of these charities will be covered in detail in chapter 4.

The Bray Norrice Charity was founded by the will of Bray Norrice on 9 December 1641. Norrice left one acre of land at West Ham, the rent from which was to provide forty-five poor widows with 12d. each on St Thomas’s Day at 1pm in the

⁵¹ See Lanberry, H. C. F., *Politics and Government*, p. 81 and HCPPO, *Royal Com. of Inquiry into Municipal Corporations of England and Wales. First Report*, PP. 116, 1835, p. 47.

⁵² See Lanberry, H. C. F., *Politics and Government*, pp. 68-77 for an account of the troubled history of the school. This story of the Free Grammar School is a scandal in itself, though is separate from the controversy caused by Blagg.

Abbey Church, where they were to attend church afterwards.⁵³ In 1849, the charity disbursed £10 between 56 widows and in 1851 the charity had invested £300 in 3 ¼ per cent Consols (government bonds), which it had received from the sale of its land to the Eastern Counties Railway.⁵⁴ However, this should have been invested in 1848 but due to Blagg's negligence this was delayed causing the charity to cease distributions for several years.⁵⁵

The Cross Keys Charity was the wealthiest of the Abbey parish charities. It was founded by indenture on 9 April 1619 by Edward Smith, Humphrey Bowden and Elizabeth Pemberton.⁵⁶ By 1843, the charity owned eighteen houses including the Cross Keys Inn, in Fishpool Street within the Abbey parish, from which the charity took its name.⁵⁷ In 1794, the charity sold some of its property so that a new road could be built and by 1833 the investment from this sale amounted to £968. 19s. 8d. in 3 ½ per cent Consols, that paid annual interest on the amount invested.⁵⁸ The charity's income was derived from the rents on its properties, the interest on the Consols and until the early eighteenth century from the profits of the Prae Fair.⁵⁹ The terms of the indenture gave half of the charity's income for the repair of the Abbey church with the other half being equally shared between the poor of the Abbey and St Peters parishes. In 1843, the gift of the charity amounted to £54. 5s. 1d. to the Abbey Church, with a further £27. 2s. 6 1/2d. going to the poor of the two parishes.⁶⁰

The Gawen Charity was founded by indenture by Thomas Gawen on 6 August 1636. The charity gave £40 a year in two equal amounts twice yearly to the twenty poorest people of the Abbey parish. By 1833 it owned over 71 acres of land

⁵³ ACASA, *An Account of the several Pious and Charitable DONATIONS.*

⁵⁴ ACASA, Charities II (2) The Charities Scandal 1846-1852, *Report of the Abbey Parish Vestry Committee to Investigate the State of The Cross Key's, Gawen's, Skelton's and Bray Norrice Charities*, 27 March 1851 (St Albans, 1851), p. 30.

⁵⁵ See above, p. 30.

⁵⁶ See footnote 51.

⁵⁷ HCPPO, *Commission of Inquiry into Charities in England and Wales 1843: Analytical Digest of Report of Commissioners.* PP. 433, pp. 418-419.

⁵⁸ HCPPO, *Twenty-Seventh Report of the Charity Commissioners*, 1834, PP. 225, p. 191.

⁵⁹ See footnote 51.

⁶⁰ ACASA, *The Account Book of the Cross Keys Charity 1793-1919*, folios 73-74.

split between Harrold's Wood farm at Romford and land at Hornchurch, Essex and had £300 invested in 3 per cent Consols⁶¹. In 1842, the Court of Chancery ordered that £203. 13s. 3d. of surplus funds that had accumulated due to increased rental values should be invested in Consols. However, due to Blagg embezzling the money this was not carried out until 1851.⁶² The Skelton Charity was founded by several benefactors including Robert Skelton by indenture on 5 May 1628. The terms of the indenture gave 26 loaves of bread to 26 poor people and 30 groats to 30 poor widows of the Abbey parish.⁶³ In 1833, these gifts amounted to £6. 2s.8d. which was generated by the rents from two houses in St Albans, another house having been sold in 1826 for £500. The charity's investments totaled £634. 18s. 5d. in 3 per cent Consols but it also had a surplus of £137. 6s. 10d. which the commissioners suggested being invested, but again Blagg embezzled this money and it had still not been invested by 1851.⁶⁴

Blagg was also clerk to The William King George and The Thomas and Margaret Hall Charities, though there is no indication that he embezzled the funds of these charities. That said, the corporation and the Earl Verulam were involved in a protracted dispute over the control of The Thomas and Margaret Hall Charity. In 1833, the charity commissioners reported that for many years land that the charity owned had been claimed by the Earl as the original tenants had all died. He had continued to pay 40s. a year to the poor of St Albans but not the money to the poor of Hertford, nor the wages of the under-master of the Free Grammar School, which the trust deed stipulated. However, the Earl was willing to make good the arrears.⁶⁵ By 1837, the situation had still not been resolved. The Earl had stopped paying the disbursement and the corporation had appointed new trustees through the Court of

⁶¹ HCPPO, *Twenty-Seventh Report*, p. 185.

⁶² See footnote 52, p. 22.

⁶³ See footnote 51.

⁶⁴ HCPPO, *Twenty-Seventh Report*, p. 190 and *Report of the Abbey Parish Vestry Committee*, 1851, p. 24.

⁶⁵ HCPPO, *Twenty-Seventh Report of the Charity Commissioners*, 1834, PP. 225, p. 187.

Chancery in an effort to regain control of the charity⁶⁶. The Earl eventually resumed the disbursements in 1847 and agreed to hand the land back to the corporation in 1851. As we shall see in chapter 4, there were also problems with several other of the Abbey charities which meant that they were an unreliable source of relief for the poor until the early 1850s. Table 4 gives the details of the other Abbey parish endowment charities.⁶⁷

Table 4: Abbey Parish Endowment Charities

Charity Name	Charity Type*	Date Founded	Benefactors' Name(s)	Original Terms of Endowment
The Free Grammar School	Education	12 May 1563	By Charter of Incorporation	120 poor boys from borough to be educated without charge.
The Thomas & Margaret Hall Charity	General	By surrender at Court Baron 29 Oct 1592	Thomas and Margaret Hall	6d. per year to 80 of poorest in St Albans on Good Friday and 60 in Hertford on Palm Sunday. £2 per year to the under-master of St Albans Free-School paid half yearly at Michelmas and Lady-Day. (The amount disbursed had doubled by 1723).
The Anna Goldsmith Charity	General	By Indenture, 18th June 1641.	Anna Goldsmith, Richard Rut, Ralph Pollard, John Symson.	The Profits from the original gift of £20. to be applied to the use of the poor of the parish of St Albans for ever more.
The Rayneshaw Charity	Corporation	By Will, 9 Dec 1569	Richard Rayneshaw	Almshouses provided rent free for the poor for evermore.

⁶⁶ HALS, DE/BS/Q6, Correspondence concerning the treasurer and Abbey Parish Committee 1846-1851, *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Abbey Parish Charities* (St Albans, 1846), p. 22.

⁶⁷ The table is based on *An Account of the several Pious and Charitable DONATIONS...* which was itself compiled in the aftermath of the corporation of St Albans embezzlement of £1,000 from the Abbey charities in 1714. The intention was that by publicly displaying a list of the charities and their gifts, further embezzlements would be avoided, see Lanberry, H. C. F., *Politics and Government*, pp. 54-55. In the aftermath of Blagg's embezzlement, the Abbey parish vestry suggested that another list be printed and displayed, but it is not known if this was ever fulfilled see, ACASA, transcription of Abbey parish vestry minute books 1850-1883, 14 April 1853.

The Lathbury Charity	Corporation	By Will, 1 June 1579	Thomas Lathbury	Profits from the tenements and land to be used for the relief of the poor of St Albans yearly.
The Richard Hale Charity	Bread	23 Nov 1716	Richard Hale	'The yearly sum of £10.8.0. to paid quarterly to the ministers and churchwardens of the Abbey and St Peters parishes so that bread can be provided for the poor on every Sunday for evermore.'
The William King George Charity	Bread	By Will, 25 August 1781.	William King George	5s worth of bread to be distributed on twelve sacrament Sundays but only to the Abbey parish's 'industrious poor'.
The Francis Combe Charity	Preaching	By Will, 12 Dec 1640	Francis Combe	£10. p.a. to be paid to the Abbey Church as long as a sermon preached on a Saturday.
The Joshua Lomax Charity	Preaching	By Will, 26 Dec 1685	Joshua Lomax	20s each per annum to the rectors of the Abbey Church, St Peters, St Michaels and St Stephens to preach sermon, morning and afternoon on a specified date.
The Jane Nicholas Charity	Preaching	By Will, 14 Oct 1708	Jane Nicholas	'£5. a piece to be paid yearly to 6 poor widows or other of the poorest persons in the Abbey parish, also £5. a piece to be paid yearly to two poor people from the parish of St Peters and £5. a piece to two poor people of St Michaels parish in the borough of St Albans.'
The William Ruth Charity	Church Repairs	By Will, 30 August 1732.	William Ruth	Income of charity to go to repairing the Abbey church, 20s. a year to the minister collecting rents.
The William Smith Charity	Tradesmen Charity	By will, 11 July 1637	William Smith	£20. to be lent to the poor tradesmen of the Abbey parish by the minister and churchwardens. Recipients to provide security and no one an to have more than £5. for longer than three years. This money was last lent in 1719 but not known who to. In 1786, parliamentary records state this charity as being lost.

Source: *An Account of the several Pious and Charitable DONATIONS and LEGACIES of divers well-disposed CHRISTIANS, BENEFACTORS to this Parish of St. Alban, in the Borough of St. Alban's, in the County of HERTFORD, viz, (St Albans, 1723).*⁶⁸

*I have used the classifications adopted by F. I. Kilvington in his 'Report on Charities' 1990, see footnote 5. Kilvington classified The Bray Norrice, Cross Keys, Gawen and Skelton Charities as 'General', 'Corporation' and 'Bread' charities respectively.

Sources

In researching this dissertation, I have used two main archives, The Archives of the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban (ACASA) and Hertfordshire Archives & Local Studies (HALS). ACASA contains items such as the Abbey vestry Minute Books 1818-1883 and transcripts of these, charity accounts, reports of the Abbey vestry committees that investigated the Abbey charities. It also holds the Abbey parish vestry copy of the Cross Keys Charity account book 1793-1919. This is the only charity for which the full accounts exist for our period and is therefore an important source of information. ACASA also holds various hand bills relating to the charities which give an insight into the public nature of charity at this period and show how it was a contested area. HALS holds the surviving correspondence of the Cross Keys, Bray Norrice, Skelton and Gawen Charities. The correspondence between Thomas Blagg and Richard Grove Lowe has been especially useful in piecing together the struggle that took place to get Blagg to pay back the money he had embezzled from the Skelton and Gawen Charities. HALS also holds the General Ledger Books for the Board of Guardians St Albans Union, though the ledger from September 1842 to December 1846 has not survived. However, the ledgers either side of these dates have been used to compile figures for the Abbey, St Peters and St Michaels parishes that are not available from central sources.

⁶⁸ See Appendices D and E for disbursements of endowment charities in 1843 for the Abbey, St Peters, St Michaels and St Stephens parishes.

Dissertation Structure

Chapter 2 will cover the historiography with an overview of three main fields: corruption, the Age of Reform and charities. Blagg's activities were complicated and diverse. By looking at how historians have viewed our period the overall context will be set and the main themes of their arguments explored and related to the themes and arguments of this dissertation.

Chapter 3 will outline the political and social structures within the town and parish of St Albans. By looking at these a better understanding of what may have motivated Blagg to participate in bribery and corruption will be achieved. It will then look at a case study of a poll that Blagg won in the Abbey parish vestry to give an example of the extent of his influence within the parish. It will also examine contemporary attitudes to criminality and how middle class crime was viewed and punished. It will also consider the aspects of Blagg's behaviour that bordered on criminality and when the moments to prosecute him occurred and were missed.

Chapter 4 compares how much provision the Abbey trusts provided for the poor compared with New Poor Law and the subscription charities. It will then go on to look in detail at the Charities Scandal to trace its beginnings, outline the main events and to define its end. The chapter will then seek to explain how Blagg was held to account and will conclude by examining the consequences of the scandal.

Chapter 5 will look at a court case in which Blagg sued for libel which reveals details of an embezzlement he was involved with which was used fund bribery in the borough elections. It will also examine how Blagg's contemporaries viewed embezzlement by the middle classes. It will conclude with a detailed account of the 1850 borough election and the resulting parliamentary enquiries into the bribery during the election; which ended with the borough being disfranchised.

Chapter 6 will form the conclusion and will reiterate how the Abbey parish's charities should have functioned and what happened. It will remind the reader how the key pieces of legislation in the Age of Reform failed to prevent Blagg's corrupt

behaviour. It will end by looking at how representative St Albans is of the bigger picture.

Chapter 2

Historiography

‘I know what England is. Old England is a fine place for the rich, but Lord help the poor.’¹

This dissertation touches on some of the major themes of the historiography of late Georgian and early Victorian England, ‘Old Corruption’, the Age of Reform and the role of charity. The years 1827-60 saw major shifts in the way government functioned and how it viewed its purpose. It also experienced unprecedented population, industrial and economic growth and saw the rise of an urban society. These changes had already, before our period, introduced enormous tensions. This dissertation is a contribution in helping to understand how these tensions were managed at the local level and where the points of contention lay.

This chapter will review the national versus the local debate historians have had over the best way to understand the period. While acknowledging the importance of understanding the wider context and the need for centrally compiled sources, I will stress the value of local studies. Local documents often contain information not covered by other sources which can be used to gain deeper insights into wider national trends and developments.²

This chapter will also highlight the relevant aspects of the historiography of ‘Old Corruption’, the Age of Reform and charity. An important area for this dissertation is the area of ‘Old Corruption’. There has been debate over when ‘Old

¹ The words of an English migrant to Australia in 1846, Kiddle, Margaret., *Caroline Chisholm* (Melbourne, 1950, p. 243, quoted in, Harrison, J. F. C., *The Early Victorians 1832-51* (London, 1971), p. 177.

² For example, see Lees, L., *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 177-193.

Corruption’ was tackled but a wider agreement has emerged which points to the continuation of it in some form until the end of the nineteenth century. However, both Philip Harling and W. D. Rubenstein have argued against the emergence of ‘New Corruption’ after the Great Reform Act of 1832. The consensus is that though there was an increase in bribery in corrupt boroughs after 1832, the forms that bribery took remained the same. I will argue that the historiography has overlooked how that bribery was funded in boroughs that no longer enjoyed the direct patronage of a wealthy aristocrat. While much more research needs to be conducted into this area, there is a gap in our knowledge which this dissertation both acknowledges and begins to redress.

Old Corruption

The term ‘Old Corruption’ was coined by the radical political campaigner William Cobbett and is used by historians to describe the system of government during the period c. 1780-1850.³ Cobbett and other radicals were attacking the long-established form of government in which the crown’s ministers bought loyalty by making government appointments from within the ranks of the ruling elite. Rubenstein has described ‘Old Corruption’ as ‘the widespread use of pensions, sinecures, and gratuitous emoluments granted to persons whom the British government wished to bribe, reward or buy.’⁴ Sinecures were positions held that required no work from the office holder and often attracted a large salary, reversions included the holding of more than one office which may or may not have required work from the holder.

³ For example, see, Harling, Philip., *The Waning of ‘Old Corruption’: The Politics of Economical Reform in Britain, 1779-1846* (Oxford, 1996), Burns, Arthur., and Innes, Joanna., (eds). *Rethinking the Age of Reform Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge, 2003), Hilton, Boyd., *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People? England 1783- 1846* (Oxford, 2006). For a wider discussion on corruption see Knight, Mark., *Old Corruption; What British history can tell us about corruption today* (University of Warwick, 2016).

⁴ Rubenstein, W. D. ‘The End of “Old Corruption” in Britain 1780-1860’, *Past and Present*, No.101 (Nov. 1985), p. 55.

Emoluments, applied to positions such as Bishops and government legal work, which again came with very high levels of remuneration.⁵

With the advent of rapid population growth, the industrial revolution and the pressures these brought to the country, this patronage system looked increasingly expensive, inefficient and corrupt. The only way to tackle this, radicals argued, was by parliamentary reform. From the 1780s onwards however, the government, faced with the loss of the American colonies, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, needed support, which it bought in ever increasing amounts. By 1809, £365,555 a year was being spent on sinecures alone.⁶ Philip Harling has defined of 'Old Corruption' as:

a parasitical system – ostensibly built up to enormous proportions during the Napoleonic Wars – through which the elite fed its insatiable appetite for power and money at the people's expense.⁷

Norman Gash has highlighted the role that radicals such as Cobbett played in shaping public opinion. Gash has argued that the radical narrative was so successful and persuasive that reform could not be avoided.⁸ Radicals sought Parliamentary reform and attacked the corruption of parliamentary elections as they argued they were designed by the ruling elite to enable them to ensure that their own men would be elected who could then be relied to vote on legislation as directed.⁹

Historians have differed over the period in which 'Old Corruption' was tackled. Rubenstein has argued that 'Old Corruption' remained largely unreformed until after the Great Reform Act 1832 and that it was effectively ended by Whig government legislation. Gareth Stedman Jones has identified the 1840s as the end

⁵ Rubenstein, W. D. 'The End of "Old Corruption"', pp. 57-58.

⁶ Rubenstein, W. D. 'The End of "Old Corruption"', p. 61.

⁷ Harling, Philip., 'Rethinking "Old Corruption"', *Past and Present*, No. 147 (May, 1995), p. 127.

⁸ Gash, Norman, 'After Waterloo: British Society and the Napoleonic Wars', *Transcriptions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., xxviii (1978), pp. 152-153.

⁹ Lees, L., *The Solidarities of Strangers*, pp. 177-193.

date which saw reforms implemented by Robert Peel's administration. A later end date still is given by Eugenio Biagini and Alistair Reid who argue that 'Old Corruption' continued until being finally stopped by William Gladstone from the late 1860s.¹⁰ In contrast to these historians, Harling has identified a much earlier start date of reform beginning from 1805 under William Pitt the Younger.¹¹

Importantly for this dissertation, there is agreement between historians that 'Old Corruption' continued to exert a long-term significance. Gash argues that the memory of 'Old Corruption' retained its influence on public opinion well into the nineteenth century.¹² Similarly, despite arguing that it had been effectively tackled by the 1830s, Rubenstein has stated that 'as late as the mid-nineteenth century or even after in some cases, Britain contained wide areas of custom and authority surviving from an earlier period.'¹³ In the case of St Albans, the bribery and corruption of the borough elections and from 1835 the council elections provides evidence for the continuation of 'Old Corruption' into the early 1850s. It also means that it is likely that Thomas Blagg's opponents would have recognised Blagg's behaviour as being corrupt in the 'Old' sense. It may also explain the early signs of concern from the early 1830s about the state of the Abbey parish charities.

Rubenstein has also argued that more research needs to be completed so that the limits to which 'Old Corruption' extended in to other areas of national life can be fully understood. For example, radicals also associated the term with the unreformed municipal boroughs and the financial sector of the City of London.¹⁴ Harling has also highlighted the difficulties that students of the subject face when trying to unpick the strands that made up 'Old Corruption'. He has argued that 'historians should no longer assume the accuracy of 'Old Corruption' as a description of the measures and motives of the Pittite governing elite from 1793 to

¹⁰ As above, p. 130.

¹¹ As above, pp. 131-133.

¹² Gash, Norman, 'After Waterloo', pp. 152-153.

¹³ Rubenstein, W. D. 'The End of "Old Corruption"', p. 70.

¹⁴ See above, pp. 57 and 80.

1830.¹⁵ Harling's and Rubenstein's arguments mean that we must pay greater attention to the peripheries of political funding to have a better understanding of corruption particularly in the period after 1832.

The Great Reform Act 1832

The Great Reform Act of 1832 is of interest for this study not so much for its position as a landmark reform in British history but because of the opportunities it afforded men like Thomas Blagg to bribe the electorate. In England and Wales the act increased the electorate from 439,200 to 656,000. As a proportion of the population this represented an increase from 3.1 per cent in 1831 to 4.6 percent in 1832.¹⁶ However, as we have already seen, in St Albans the electorate shrunk by around 100 voters. K. Theodore Hoppen has argued that there was nothing inherently new after 1832 in the forms of corruption in borough elections, just that there was more of it. Hoppen has also found that with the removal of patrons, voters now had to be dealt with on a one-to-one basis.¹⁷ Potentially, this gave greater leverage to voters who had more influence on the level of the bribe. In St Albans, the newly enfranchised were keen to profit from their hard-won rights demanding a higher amount than the established voters. Blagg observed that the new £10 voters 'introduced by the Reform Act, have been more venal than the old.'¹⁸ But there were other changes in the way corruption functioned in the borough after 1832. Bribery was moved from the streets to behind closed doors and voters were expected to vote for the candidate they were being bribed by whereas before there was not the same expectation. With the ending of aristocratic patronage a vacuum was created which was filled by the election agents, Thomas Blagg, Henry Edwards and Richard Webster for the 'Third'

¹⁵ Harling, Philip., 'Rethinking "Old Corruption"', p. 144.

¹⁶ Hoppen, Theodore, K., 'Roads to Democracy: Electioneering and Corruption in Nineteenth-Century England and Ireland', *History*. Oct 96, Vol. 81 Issue 264, p. 554

¹⁷ See above, pp. 560 and 557-558. See also Steinbach, L., Susie., *Politics, Culture and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London and New York, 2012), p. 41.

¹⁸ HCPPO, *Report of The Commissioners to Inquire into the Existence of Bribery in the Borough of Saint Alban's; Together with The Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index*, PP. 1431, 1852, p. x.

or 'Contest' party, which was determined to challenge the domination of the former two agents in the borough. This led to greater proportions of bribery compared with the amounts expended on elections overall, which eventually created a reaction against bribery from within the borough.

But in what other ways was the corruption different after 1832? While dismissing their argument, Harling has found evidence that before 1832 Tory politicians claimed that a reformed parliament would create a form of 'New Corruption' because MPs would now be controlled by their constituents instead of a patron.¹⁹ In effect one form of corruption would just be replaced by another. But this was not where 'New Corruption' is to be found. To find what really changed we need to look deeper into the ways in which election campaigns were funded in the remaining corrupt boroughs.

The Reform Act had gone some way to deal with the 'rotten boroughs'. These were boroughs in the control of patrons, usually the local wealthiest landowner. Before 1832 it has been estimated that of the 215 parliamentary boroughs in England and Wales 84 were rotten; after 1832, 42 boroughs were still controlled.²⁰ With fewer aristocratic families as patrons, prospective MPs and their agents had to find additional sources of funding. During the second 1851 parliamentary inquiry into bribery at St Albans, Blagg in his role as Conservative party agent complained that he had incurred liabilities of £2,160 due to bills left unpaid by his candidate in the 1832 election.²¹ In St Albans, between 1832 and 1850 it was estimated that £37,000 was spent on elections, £24,600 of this on bribes. Even though this was less than was spent on elections before 1832 it represented an increase in the proportion spent on bribery, which rose from one-third to two-thirds.²² When George Muskett, MP for St

¹⁹ Harling, Philip., 'Parliament, the state, and 'Old Corruption': conceptualizing reform, c. 1790-1832', in Burns, Arthur., and Innes., Joanna., (eds). *Rethinking the Age of Reform Britain*, p. 100.

²⁰ Hoppen, Theodore, K., 'Roads to Democracy', pp. 556-557.

²¹ ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Thursday, November 6, 1851; Issue 26489. *British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 3 Feb 2018.

²² HCPPO, *Report of The Commissioners to Inquire into the Existence of Bribery in the Borough of Saint Alban's*, p. x.

Albans from 1837-1841, ran into financial difficulties in the economic crisis of the late 1830s and early 1840s, Blagg as his professional advisor, turned to alternative sources of funding. The available evidence points towards the Abbey parish charities being one source of that funding along with embezzled money from the wealthy St Albans brewing family the Kinders.²³

The 'reformed' political landscape after 1832 did not abolish all the corrupt boroughs nor did it sufficiently increase the size of the electorate which would have made wholesale bribery too expensive and difficult to manage. Effectively, the Act encouraged men like Blagg to embark upon acts of embezzlement from new sources so that he could retain his influence. In this respect, the Great Reform Act failed to stop corruption.

Age of Reform

The Age of Reform and 'Old Corruption' are closely related as the roots of both historical themes can be traced to the upheaval caused by the loss of the American colonies, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. However, whereas the fight against 'Old Corruption' was centered around political reform, the reforms that came after 1832 were largely aimed at social reform. By 1860, successive governments had enacted legislation which covered the banking system, charities, factories, public health, and the poor law and saw the establishment of a police force and the post office.²⁴ Susie Steinbach has highlighted the internal and external pressures that led to reform. These, she argues, came from the religious beliefs of a section of the governing class and from radical activists criticizing a bloated wasteful system of government. For Steinbach, the Age of Reform represented a calculated

²³ See, "Court of Queen's Bench, Westminster, June 11." *The Times*, (London, England), Friday, Jun 12, 1846:7. TDA. Consulted on Web. 20 Nov. 2017.

²⁴ Wood, Anthony., *Nineteenth Century Britain 1815-1914* 2nd edn. (Harlow, 1982), p. 125.

compromise by the aristocracy which enabled them to maintain their hold on power by controlling the rate and extent of change.²⁵

Joanna Innes has recently argued that the word 'reform' came into popular use in the early 1780s and was initially identified with parliamentary reform, but by the 1820s had become associated with the wider reform of society.²⁶ Steinbach has identified a date range from the 1820s to the 1870s for the reform era, arguing like Biagini and Reid that reforms were carried out by Whig, Conservative and Liberal governments alike.²⁷ Anthony Wood also agrees that reform was undertaken by all of these administrations. However, he has underlined the competing approaches that existed throughout the nineteenth century of state intervention as opposed to *laissez faire* politics that sought to reduce the amount of regulations imposed by government.²⁸ It is the existence of these two opposing philosophies that caused the failures of key reforms such as the Great Reform Act, The Poor Law Amendment Act, and The Municipal Corporations Act. While evangelicals and the forces of state intervention sought to bring about rapid, radical change, the proponents of *laissez faire* sought to reign in the rate and extent of change.

The Municipal Corporations Act 1835, was passed as a direct consequence of the Great Reform Act 1832. Just as the 1832 Act sought to reform politics at the national level, the 1835 Act was designed to make the incorporated boroughs more accountable to rate-payers. It is an important piece of legislation for this dissertation because of the impact it had on local politics in St Albans. Anne Jordan has argued that it reformed local government within the borough.²⁹ In one sense it did in that councillors were now elected by rate-payers. However, instead of creating greater democracy as was intended, Thomas Blagg and the corporation were able to control

²⁵ Steinbach, L., Susie., *Politics, Culture and Society*, pp. 33-34.

²⁶ Innes, Joanna., 'Reform' in English public life: the fortunes of a word, in Burns, Arthur., and Innes., Joanna., (eds). *Rethinking the Age of Reform Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 71.

²⁷ Steinbach, L., Susie., *Politics, Culture and Society*, p. 34.

²⁸ Wood, Anthony., *Nineteenth Century Britain*, p. 125.

²⁹ Jordan, Ann, *The Public Weal and the Borough Corporation of St Albans 1835-1888*, unpublished Thesis (City of Portsmouth College of Education, April 1973), p. 22.

who was elected to the council until at least 1855.³⁰ Rosemary Sweet has argued that because of the regular elections brought in by the Act, a greater level of debate was encouraged between political parties.³¹ This may have had an impact on the way in which the public debate over the Charities Scandal was conducted within St Albans. For example, leading critics of Blagg including Edward Gibson, Edward Langridge and Thomas Kinder were all elected as councillors in the mid-1840s.³² Another reform of the Act was to take the appointment of trustees of charitable trusts administered by corporations out of their hands.³³ But this would be a reform that would take time to take effect. In 1846 seven of the Abbey parish charities still had five aldermen or councillors as trustees and Thomas Blagg was clerk and treasurer to four of these and as well as being a trustee of another.³⁴ The Municipal Corporations Act was another piece of legislation that failed to prevent the abuses carried out by Thomas Blagg. That said, it was an attempt to make local administrative structures more efficient for the benefit of local rate-payers, an intention that also lay behind the reform of the poor laws.

The Poor Law Amendment Act 1834

The Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 has been regarded as one of the seminal moments of British political, administrative and social reform of the nineteenth century. It was designed to reduce the financial burden upon rate payers for the provision of relief for the poor which had been steadily increasing since the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1803, £5,348,205 was collected in poor rates in England and Wales; by 1834 this had increased to £8,338,079.³⁵ In the four years

³⁰ Gibbs, A. E., *The Corporation Records of St Albans* (St Albans, 1890), pp. 221-222.

³¹ Sweet, Rosemary., *The English Town 1680-1840 Government, Society and Culture* (Harlow, 1999), p. 160.

³² Gibbs, A. E., *The Corporation Records*, p. 300.

³³ Gorsky, Martin., *Patterns of Philanthropy*, p. 68.

³⁴ ACASA, Charities II (2) *The Charities Scandal 1846-1852 Report of Vestry Committee to investigate the accounts of charities*, 21 May 1846 (St Albans, 1846).

³⁵ HCPPO, *Poor Law Board Second Annual Report*, Appendix, 1849. PP. 142, 1850, Table 19, pp. 146-147.

after the introduction of the New Poor Law the average amount paid in poor rates fell to £4,567,988.³⁶ Under the Old Poor Law which had existed since 1601, each parish was responsible for setting and collecting its own poor rate, appointing overseers and providing work for the able-bodied poor.³⁷

Acting on the recommendations of the 1832 Royal Commission into the poor law, The Poor Law Amendment Act 1834, replaced these earlier pieces of legislation while retaining some of their features. Parishes were grouped into unions, each union having a workhouse. Out-relief was to be ended and a board of elected guardians was to be established in each union who would now administer the system rather than the parishes. However, poor rates were still set and collected by parishes who now passed these onto their union. The objective of the new poor law was to make the system as unattractive as possible to the poor; it was not an attempt to solve the causes of poverty. Instead it sought to dissuade applications for relief by providing the most basic standards of relief.³⁸ Inside the workhouse families were separated along gender lines and paupers were expected to work in return for the relief they received.

The large volume of literature produced on the subject over the last five decades is an indicator of the importance that historians have attached to the New Poor Law.³⁹ This section of the historiography will concentrate the themes in the historiography of the New Poor Law that are relevant to this dissertation. These

³⁶ Wood, Anthony., *Nineteenth Century Britain*, p. 90.

³⁷ The 1601 Poor Law Act was officially known as 43 Eliz I Cap.2. See, Bloy, Marjie., "The Poor Law: introduction." *Victorian Web*. <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/poorlaw/elizpl.html>. Web. Consulted on 22 Oct 2015.

³⁸ Harrison, J. F. C., *The Early Victorians*, p. 82.

³⁹ For example see Brundage, A., *The English poor laws 1700-1930* (Basingstoke, 2001), Digby, A., *The Poor Law in Nineteenth Century England and Wales* (London, 1982), Englander, D., *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19th Century Britain, 1834-1914* (London and New York, 1998), Hurren, Elizabeth., *Protesting about Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late-Victorian England 1870-1900* (Martlesham, 2015), King, Steven., and Gear, Gillian., eds., *Social Welfare in Hertfordshire from 1600: A Caring County?* (Hatfield, 2013), Lees, L., *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge, 1998), Rose, M. E., *The Relief of Poverty, 1834-1914*, 2nd edn. (London, 1984), Treble, J. H., *Urban Poverty in Britain, 1830-1914* (Trowbridge and Esher, 1979), Williams, Samantha., *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law, 1790-1834* (Martlesham, 2013).

include the debate over national versus local studies, the role played by the parish authorities in providing relief and the various forms this could take, the New Poor Law as a political institution, and the New Poor Law in its urban context.

In the Abbey parish, the setting of poor rates and the New Poor Law were political matters. Issues around the setting of the poor rate could prove especially contentious and this is where we see the clearest evidence of political tension within the Abbey parish. As we shall see in chapter 3, there was a division along party lines in the Abbey vestry when the trustworthiness of the vestry clerk in keeping correct records of rate-payers was called into question. Further evidence for the political nature of the new poor law in the Abbey parish comes from the first election of guardians in which Thomas Blagg and George Muskett were elected as the first guardians for the Abbey parish in 1835. As the Town Clerk, a magistrate and future MP, they would have been expected to keep a close eye on expenditure so that the poor rate could be kept as low as possible. The election of Blagg is also an indication that rate-payers trusted the corporation to be able to keep rates as low as possible. This was an important matter for Blagg and those of his class. He had stated his belief that poor rates were so high in the borough because of the generosity of the town's endowment charities attracted poor migrants to the town. It may have been beliefs like these that allowed Blagg to justify his embezzlements of charity funds.⁴⁰

Derek Fraser has made the case for the New Poor Law as a political construct. Fraser highlights three examples to back up his claim. Guardians were elected officials, the New Poor Law was politically divisive and the right to vote was linked to being able to pay the poor rate.⁴¹ For Fraser, the political nature of the New Poor Law is so important that he warns to neglect it '...is to misunderstand the role of the Poor Law in Victorian Society'.⁴² Fraser also argues that elections of guardians and

⁴⁰ Lanberry, H. C. F., *Politics and Government*, p. 268.

⁴¹ Fraser, Derek., ed. 'Introduction' in *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London and Basingstoke, 1995), p. 12

⁴² Fraser, Derek., 'The Poor Law as a Political Institution', in Fraser, Derek., *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 115

vestries could be vehicles in which Whigs and Tories fought to dominate the wider political scene, particularly in urban areas. Due to their intimate involvement with the poor rate, overseers were privy to highly sensitive information that could be of great value to political parties.⁴³

The shift towards local studies of poverty began with Mark Blaug's 1963 article 'The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New'. Blaug challenged the accepted negative view of the impact of the Old Poor Law on the poor and rate-payers. He also highlighted the lack of knowledge about how many of the poor received relief and he questioned the reliability of the assumptions of the Commissioners that the principles of the New Poor Law were built upon.⁴⁴ This paper prompted scholars to begin investigating local records because many of the issues raised by Blaug could only be investigated by looking at what was happening at the parish level. Lynn Hollen Lees has summed up this change in direction as moving '...from what was said to what was done'.⁴⁵ Yet, despite this method of research now being commonplace for over five decades, it has recently caused debate between historians over what can be learnt from focusing on the local experience.

Lynn Hollen Lees points out that the effect of historians concentrating their efforts to a locality for a narrow period has prevented researchers from '...getting a broader picture of how welfare systems changed over time...'⁴⁶ Looking at the specific example of London, David Green has argued for the capital to be looked at as a whole rather than looking at individual parishes in isolation. However, he acknowledges that 'The dilemma in studying the poor law at this scale is how to convey a sense of complexity without losing sight of the human dimension'.⁴⁷ David

⁴³ Fraser, Derek., 'The Poor Law as a Political Institution', pp. 117-123

⁴⁴ Blaug, Mark., 'The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New', *The Journal of Economic History*, 23, 2, 1963, pp. 151 and 157

⁴⁵ Lees, L., *The Solidarities of Strangers*, p. 9

⁴⁶ Lees, L., *The Solidarities of Strangers*, p. 9

⁴⁷ Green, David, R., *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790-1870* (Farnham, 2010), p. xiv

Englander has questioned whether historians will ever be able to truly understand the system due to the all-encompassing effect of the act. He has also raised concerns over the amount of material generated by local research warning that it has '...become an obstacle to the advancement of knowledge'.⁴⁸

In contrast, Elizabeth Hurren has argued that 'Researchers must challenge the misconception that studying the minutiae of pauperism records means losing the bigger poor law picture.'⁴⁹ Steven King has argued for more research conducted at the local level particularly within the same county so that the bigger picture can be understood.⁵⁰ David Thompson has shown the benefits of this method. His findings on the scale of reductions in out-relief across the country to the old after 1870 could only have been gained by undertaking detailed local analysis.⁵¹ Hurren's argument is important for this dissertation because I will use records from St Albans Union for the Abbey Parish that back up national trends in the economic crises of 1838-42 and 1847-48. Karen Rothery has recently demonstrated the value of a local study. Her work on Hertfordshire unions has thrown important new light on how the system of poor relief implemented by Lord Salisbury in Hatfield influenced the Poor Law Commissioners in shaping the Poor Law Amendment Act.⁵²

The historiography of the New Poor Law has moved away from a concentration on the rules laid down by the central authorities to a more locally centered approach that seeks to understand the various ways in which the Poor Laws operated at the parish or union level. This in turn has come under attack for blurring the picture due to the volume of information, which has been produced. A reaction against this can be detected by an attempt to use the best of both national

⁴⁸ Englander, David., *Poverty and Poor Law Reform*, pp.1 and 85

⁴⁹ Hurren, Elizabeth., *Protesting about Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late-Victorian England 1870-1900* (Martlesham, 2015), p. 250

⁵⁰ King, Steven., and Gear, Gillian., eds., *Social Welfare in Hertfordshire*, p. 2

⁵¹ See Thompson, William, David., *Provision for the Elderly in England, 1830-1908*, unpublished PhD. Thesis (Cambridge University, 1980), pp. 204-241, quoted in Lees, L., *The Solidarities of Strangers*, pp. 264-265

⁵² Rothery, Karen., *The Implementation and Administration of the New Poor Law in Hertfordshire c. 1830-1847*, unpublished PhD Thesis (University of Hertfordshire, 2016), pp. 29-56.

and local records to gain a clearer understanding of the complicated nature of poor relief. Despite the problems noted above in using local records I argue that local studies need to be at the centre of research into the poor law. It is only by looking at what happened at the level of the parish or union that the historian can detect the often-subtle ways in which both the poor and administrators alike navigated the system. In my view, small-scale studies are also invaluable for looking at the way charity operated alongside the New Poor Law. The Abbey parish is likely to be an exceptional case in that as well as subscription charities that many urban parishes would have had, the poor also had access to the many charities associated with the Abbey. This fact alone probably means that the experience of the poor in that parish was different, perhaps significantly so from other parishes in Hertfordshire. It is only by looking at the 'local' that we will discover just how much regional variation there may have been.

Charities

Both endowment and subscription charities were important elements in providing for the poor in the Abbey parish. The Abbey parish not only had more endowment charities than the rest of the borough, they were also wealthier.⁵³ This made them an ideal source of revenue for Blagg but it also explains the level of interest generated publicly when his embezzlements came to light. As we will see in chapter 4, the charitable trusts of the Abbey parish, made a far bigger contribution to providing for the poor than the national figures would suggest and so assumed a greater level of importance than they may have achieved in other localities.

While this dissertation concentrates on endowment charities it is important to be aware that there was a huge surge of philanthropic effort in Victorian Britain. Charity, both public and private forms played a significant role in providing for the

⁵³ The exception was The Duchess of Marlborough Charity, which provided alms-houses in St Peters parish and had an income of £757. 3s. 4d in 1843.

poor in the nineteenth century. This is reflected in the historiography of charity and has led Colin Jones to identify the roles of public and private charity as one of its main themes.⁵⁴ Norman McCord sees the roles of private charities as being a means of gaining deeper insights into public forms of relief. He has classed Victorian charity in to three groups; charitable organisations, emergency short term charity and personal acts of philanthropy. McCord sees this last category of charitable activity as being deserving of more attention from historians. For example, in London alone in the early 1860s he has shown that between £5.5 million and £7 million was raised by private donations, amounts that dwarfed the relief given out by guardians and relief officers.⁵⁵ Lees has made a similar claim that far more money was raised by private charities than by the poor rate in the rest of England and Wales.⁵⁶ Giving through private philanthropy also dwarfed endowment charities. In London in 1837, the total income of endowment charities amounted to £120,846, while nationally the total came to £1,199,223. However, these figures can mask local variations.

Despite the enormous sums of money donated to charities, Robert Humphries has observed that the poor could not count on charities as a reliable source of relief.⁵⁷ This a key point for this dissertation. Endowment charities were vulnerable to mismanagement or corruption by their trustees, clerks and treasurers. As we shall see in chapter 4, the experience of the Abbey parish endowment charities, not just in our period of 1827-60, but stretching back into the eighteenth century, will clearly demonstrate that the poor could not rely upon charity as a consistently available source of assistance. That said, in their study of endowment charities in the West Riding of Yorkshire, Mae Barker and Michael Collins found that trusts were rarely

⁵⁴ Jones, Colin., 'Some recent trends in the history of charity', in Dauntton, Martin., ed. *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past*, (London, 1996), pp. 51-64. p. 51.

⁵⁵ McCord, Norman., 'The Poor Law and philanthropy', in Fraser, Derek., ed., *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 89-110

⁵⁶ Lees, L., *The Solidarities of Strangers*, p. 259

⁵⁷ Humphreys, Robert., *Sin, Organized Charity*, p. 48

the targets of deliberate acts of fraud by their administrators but more commonly suffered because of disinterested and neglectful trustees.⁵⁸ Similarly, David Owen has pointed out that the Charity Commissioners found few serious cases of abuse of charitable trusts.⁵⁹ That said, Owen has found that when abuses did take place the trusts were vulnerable to two types of abuse; through the way that a charity's capital was used and how its income was spent.⁶⁰ The Abbey parish charities were subjected to both types of abuse by Thomas Blagg. He was guilty of not investing large accumulations of cash in the case the Gawen, Skelton and Bray Norrice charities, so losing valuable amounts of interest, and through his unnecessary referrals of the charities to the Court of Chancery, which led to expensive legal bills to the charities.

Colin Jones has also identified the giving/receiving relationship between benefactor and recipient as another area that historians have concentrated on.⁶¹ Fraser has argued that by donating to certain charities, the rich tried to impose their moral or religious views on to the poor.⁶² Hugh Cunningham has also argued that 'Any form of donation involved donor and recipient in a relationship of power and reciprocity...'⁶³ This dissertation will not investigate the giver/receiver relationship however it should be noted that the evidence in the Abbey parish backs up these arguments. Nine of the sixteen Abbey parish endowment charities stipulated some form of religious observance or linked their gift to the church in some form to qualify for the gift of their charity. Some of the charities were also based on the principles of 'deserving' and 'undeserving'. For example, the William King George Charity had a provision that the recipients of the bread given by the charity had to be 'industrious poor'. Widows were seen as 'deserving' and the Bray Norrice

⁵⁸ Baker, Mae., and Collins, Michael., 'The Governance of Charitable Trusts in the Nineteenth Century. The West Riding of Yorkshire', *Social History*, vol.27, No. 2 (May 2002), p. 183.

⁵⁹ Owen, David., *English Philanthropy 1660-1960*, p. 194.

⁶⁰ See above, p. 195.

⁶¹ Jones, Colin., 'Some recent trends', p. 51.

⁶² Fraser, Derek., ed. *The New Poor Law*, p. 11

⁶³ Cunningham, Hugh., 'Introduction', in Cunningham, Hugh., and Innes, Joanna., eds. *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform From the 1690s to 1850* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp.1-14, p. 4.

Charity left 1 shilling each to 45 poor widows a year, while the Jane Nicholas Charity left £5 each a year to six poor widows of the Abbey parish, and a further two widows each from the parishes of St Michael and St Peter. The same principles also applied to the town's subscription charities. For example, St Albans Lying-in Charity was established 'for the benefit of respectable Poor Married Women during their confinement.'⁶⁴

However, the effect of charities on the way that the middle and upper classes perceived the poor had unfortunate consequences. Those classed as 'deserving' poor were deemed worthy of help from charities while those classed as 'undeserving' had to resort to the local Poor Law Union. According to Fraser, the effect of this charity in urban centres '...was to designate pauperism to the Poor Law and poverty to philanthropy.'⁶⁵ The Court of Chancery may have inadvertently assisted this shift by ruling that only poor persons not receiving parochial relief should receive assistance from a benefactor's gift as this would be seen as a benefit to the rich by helping to reduce the poor rate.⁶⁶ It is not known how strictly this was enforced in the Abbey parish. However, Thomas Blagg made this one of the qualifying criteria when giving guidance to the Abbey vestry on how they should make up the list of poor who would receive the gift of the Cross Keys Charity.⁶⁷ This would suggest that the vestry was not in the habit of observing the distinction closely.

Historians have also looked at the administration of charities, the history of charity law and the role of the Court of Chancery in administering charitable trusts.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ ACASA, Charities 1 (1) General, *An Account of charities Supported by the inhabitants of St. Albans* (St Albans, 1841), p. 5.

⁶⁵ Fraser, Derek., ed. *The New Poor Law*, p. 14

⁶⁶ ACASA, Charities II (2) The Charities Scandal 1846-1852, *Report of the Abbey Parish Vestry Committee to Investigate the State of The Cross Key's, Gawen's, Skelton's and Bray Norrice Charities*, 27 March 1851 (St Albans, 1851), p. 7.

⁶⁷ ACASA, Charities IV (3), The Cross Keys Charity, Thomas Blagg, Instructions to Parish Officers as to Making out Lists, 3 April 1846.

⁶⁸ For example, see Owen, David., *English Philanthropy*, Jones, Gareth., *History of the Law of Charity 1532-1827* (London, 1969), Fisherman, J, James., *Charity Accountability and Reform in Nineteenth-Century England: The Case of the Charity Commission*, *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, vol. 80. Issue 2, 2005, pp. 723-776, Jones, Gareth., *History of*

Gareth Jones has studied how the law functioned in protecting endowment charities. He has argued that the Charitable Uses Act 1601, gave benefactors a firm legal basis in which their trusts could be founded. For Jones, the legislation was effective in protecting trusts until parochial authority was eroded by the English Civil War and it was at this point that the Court of Chancery began to hear cases involving breaches of charitable trusts.⁶⁹ However, by the eighteenth century the Court of Chancery had become a graveyard to charitable trusts, which could be ruined by the cost of proceedings that sometimes took years to settle.⁷⁰ Both David Owen and Richard Thompson have compiled thorough accounts of the temporary Brougham Commissions that were enacted between 1819 and 1837 and the permanent Charity Commission established in 1853, which was given improved powers in 1860.⁷¹ Owen's account recognises the monumental scale of the undertaking of the Brougham Commissioners in recording 30,000 trusts in nearly twenty years.⁷² Thompson's extensive survey emphasizes the reforming nature of the Commission but argues that its method of inquiring rather than compelling to bring about change means that it cannot be viewed in the same light as other reforms of the era. Thompson credits the work of the Commissions as being of great importance, citing the fact that by 1837 despite costing over £291,000 the Commissions had secured £800,000 for charities that would have been lost.⁷³ Thompson's findings contrast sharply with those of James J. Fisherman. For Fisherman, the Commission failed in its aims. This was because it was founded on the conviction that endowment trusts had sufficient funds to solve the problem of poverty, which they did not. Ultimately, Fisherman argues that 'The failure of the Charity Commission in some sense reflected the failure of nineteenth-century liberalism and its replacement by the

the Law of Charity 1532-1827 (London, 1969).

⁶⁹ Jones, Gareth., *History of the Law of Charity*, pp.22-26.

⁷⁰ See above, pp. 160-168.

⁷¹ See Owen, David., *English Philanthropy*, especially chapter 7 and Thompson, Richard., *The Charity Commission and the Age of Reform* (Trowbridge and Esher, 1979).

⁷² Owen, David., *English Philanthropy*, p. 191.

⁷³ Thompson, Richard., *The Charity Commission*, p. 38.

modern welfare state.⁷⁴ The evidence from the Abbey parish Charities Scandal supports Fisherman's conclusion that the Commission failed. It would be fairer to argue that it was a wider failure of government. When Thomas Blagg's embezzlement came to light in 1846, the Commission had ended in 1837 and it was not until 1853 that the permanent Commission was established. This was despite the efforts of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Lyndhurst, who tried three times between 1844 and 1846 to get the necessary legislation enacted.⁷⁵

Another important trend in the historiography of philanthropy has been the role of women.⁷⁶ Martin Gorsky has argued that the eventual demise of endowment charities in Bristol may be partially attributable to rise of subscription charities which were more inclusive and in which women played a prominent role.⁷⁷ However, endowment charities during our period were the preserve of men both in terms of the trustees that administered them and in the members of the parish vestries that oversaw distributions. As such, this dissertation will by necessity only feature the role of men in the Abbey parish charitable trusts. That said, it should be noted that as in Bristol, women played a crucial role in running subscription charities in St Albans. Of the twelve subscription charities recorded in St Albans in 1841 nine were run by committees of female only members.⁷⁸ But, the town's wealthiest subscription charity St Albans General Dispensary, was run entirely by men and had the Earl of Verulam as its president.⁷⁹ Further research is needed in to the area of subscription charities and the role that women played in them so that a

⁷⁴ Fisherman, J, James., *Charity Accountability and Reform*, p. 776.

⁷⁵ Owen, David., *English Philanthropy*, p. 199.

⁷⁶ See Prochaska, F. K., *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1980), Mandler, Peter., 'Introduction', in Mandler, Peter., *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth Century Metropolis* (Philadelphia, 1990), Martin, Clare, Mary., 'Women and philanthropy in Walthamstow and Leyton, 1740-1870', *London Journal* xix (1994), pp. 119-50, Gorsky, Martin., *Patterns of Philanthropy*, Chapter 7, pp, 162-177.

⁷⁷ Gorsky, Martin., *Patterns of Philanthropy*, p. 113.

⁷⁸ ACASA, Charities 1 (1) General, *An Account of charities*.

⁷⁹ ACASA, Charities 1 (1) General, *Sixth Annual Report of the St Alban's General Dispensary* (St Albans, 23 January 1850).

fuller understanding of the charitable institutions of St Albans and the role they played in providing relief to the poor can be achieved.

The historiography has shown that the major pieces of legislation that have been covered here had consequences for the endowment charities of the Abbey parish. In every area, not only was Blagg not prevented from carrying out his corrupt practices before the damage was done, he was sometimes empowered and was able to increase his influence. With the introduction of the New Poor Law, provision for the poor became an even more politically contested area. For a time, his dual roles as a guardian and clerk, treasurer and trustee would have given him great leverage in both St Albans Union and the Abbey parish charities.

Chapter 3

Creating Political and Social Power

'A man's politics in St Alban's is in his breeches pocket.'¹

Sir Richard Carden

This chapter will outline the political structures in Hertfordshire, the borough of St Albans and the Abbey parish during the first half of the nineteenth century. By looking at the wider political landscape that Thomas Blagg operated within it will become clear that he was part of a well-established system of aristocratic patronage which was dominated by the Marquis of Salisbury and the Earl of Verulam. As the Tory party election agent within the borough Blagg could not have operated without the support of the Earl of Verulam. Ultimately, Blagg's power base came from these connections, which along with late Georgian and Victorian attitudes towards middle-class criminality protected him and explains his long-term survival.

The Political Structure of Hertfordshire

The main holders of power in Hertfordshire during the nineteenth century were concentrated in a small body of landowners, the county Yeomanry, the Church of England and the legal profession.² Hertfordshire, in common with most rural counties during the period, was politically dominated by aristocratic land owners. Between them, the Earl of Verulam at Gorhambury and the Marquis of Salisbury at Hatfield House dominated Hertfordshire's political life and between them they held some of the most important positions of authority within the county. The Earl of

¹ HCPPO, *Report of The Commissioners to Inquire into the Existence of Bribery*, p. ix.

² Hirst, M., *Hertfordshire Elections 1868-1906*, unpublished Thesis, (Hertfordshire College of Higher Education, 1977), p. 7.

Verulam was Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire, effectively the sovereign's representative in the county, and as Viscount Grimston he had been a county MP from 1832-1845. The Marquis of Salisbury was the Chairman of Quarter Sessions and Master of Foxhounds, a position which gave him great influence over the major landowners of the county.³

Before the Great Reform Act 1832, the county returned two MPs but with the passing of the act this was increased to three.⁴ The county town of Hertford was the location for county elections, meaning that the electorate had to travel to the town to vote. The two ancient boroughs of Hertford and St Albans were the main seats of political influence within the county and this is where the patronage of the aristocracy was concentrated. Both borough seats returned two MPs each, which encouraged patronage from both Tory and Whig families. In Hertford, before 1832, the borough was controlled by the Marquis of Salisbury, a supporter of the Tories. It is estimated that he could call on the support of over half of the electorate of the borough.⁵ After 1832, Earl Cowper of Panshanger, a Whig supporter, shared the borough with the Marquis of Salisbury. In St Albans, patronage by the aristocracy had all but ended by our period. In 1807, the Whig supporting Spencer family of Holywell House, in St Albans, had withdrawn from political activity within the town. This left the patronage of the borough in the hands of the Verulam branch of the Grimston family of Gorhambury, who supported the Tories.⁶ After 1832, aristocratic patronage was replaced by the election agents Thomas Blagg for the Tories and Henry Edwards for the Whigs. Even after 1832, the Verulams retained an interest in the borough politics. Despite being defeated in 1831 by reforming candidates, Lord Grimston, the eldest son of the Earl of Verulam, was an MP for the

³ As above, pp. 7-8

⁴ As above, p. 3.

⁵ Thomas, Alison., *A Study of Hertfordshire Political Life 1830-1852, Concentrating on Elections and the Effects of Parliamentary Politics on this Aspect of the local Political Scene*, unpublished Thesis, (1979), p. 16 and Hirst, M., *Hertfordshire Elections*, p. 5.

⁶ Lanberry, H. C. F., *Politics and Government*. p. 281

borough from 1835 to 1837⁷. Similarly, in Hertford, Earl Cowper's son was MP from 1838-1868. Patronage at the county level continued until the end of the century.⁸

The Borough of St Albans

The borough of St Albans lay within but was separate from the Liberty of St Albans which was formed of twenty-two parishes that had, until the Reformation, come under the jurisdiction of the Abbott of St Albans. Only the Abbey parish was entirely within the borough boundary, the other constituent parts of the borough being made of the urban areas of the parishes of St Peter, St Michael and St Stephen.⁹ St Albans was one of 246 incorporated boroughs that existed by 1833 and this gave the corporation certain privileges.¹⁰ It had the right to appoint its own Justices of the Peace, had its own court, it could make its own by-laws, it could sue and be sued, it could own land and within its boundaries its officials took precedent over even the monarch's officers.¹¹ As an incorporated borough, St Albans was governed by the town corporation. This body was responsible for setting the borough rates, running borough parliamentary elections, public sanitation and maintaining law and order. The unreformed corporation of St Albans was an inefficient badly run institution. It was almost permanently in debt for most of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and it had a reputation for indulgence. The mayor held an annual feast as well as meals at other times of the year such as during the Quarter Sessions, when local dignitaries would be entertained. By 1835, Thomas Blagg estimated that the mayor was exceeding his allowance of £79 a year by £100-£150.¹² The corporation was led by the mayor who was elected yearly from within and by twelve aldermen. Before the Municipal Corporations Act 1835, the aldermen elected themselves and

⁷Thomas, Alison., *A Study of Hertfordshire*, pp. 10-11.

⁸ Hirst, M., *Hertfordshire Elections*, p. 5 and 7.

⁹ HCPPO, *Report of Commissioners on Municipal Corporations*, p. 2918.

¹⁰ Sweet, Rosemary., *The English Town 1680-1840 Government, Society and Culture* (Harlow, 1999), pp. 33-34.

¹¹ Lanberry, H. C. F., *Politics and Government*, pp.6-7.

¹² As above, p.20.

retained the office for life.¹³ Table 5 shows that aldermen, were largely drawn from the professions and from tradesmen in the borough. They were predominantly in their 40s, lived in the Abbey parish and represented the Tory party.

Table 5: Aldermen of St Albans 1835-59

Date Elected	Surname	First Name	Occupation	Parish	Age	Political Party	Times Elected
1835	Kent	Thomas	Malster & Brewer	Abbey	25	Whig	
1835	Collisson	William					
1835	Langley	William	Stationer	Abbey	48	Tory	4
1835	Heath	Thomas					
1836	Mason	John	Ironmonger	Abbey	25		
1837	Nash	John B.	Stationer	Abbey	40	Tory	4
1837	Cherry	Luke	Tailor	Abbey	65	Tory	
1841	Story	John S.	Solicitor	Abbey	59	Tory	2
1841	Lipscombe	John T.	Surgeon	Abbey	48	Tory	8
1849	Lowe	Richard G.	Solicitor	St Peter	47	Tory	4
1852	Langridge	Edward	Wine Merchant	Abbey	62	Whig	
1856	Bennett	William	Builder & Brick maker	St Peter	48	Tory	
1859	Parsons	Henry	Brewer	St Peter	43	Whig	3

Sources: Gibbs, A. E., *The Corporation Records of St Albans*, 1841 & 1851 Census and Borough of St Albans Poll Book 1841.

From the early eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, alderman also came from the Spencer and Grimston families, who played an active role in the corporation.¹⁴ Some families had provided aldermen for generations. For example,

¹³ HCPPO, *Report of Commissioners on Municipal Corporations*, p. 2919. An exception to this was in the case of J. S. Story, who was removed as an alderman on 1st Feb 1849 when he was declared a bankrupt. See Gibbs, A. E., p. 213.

¹⁴ Gibbs, A. E., *The Corporation Records*, p. 294.

the Gape family almost continuously served as aldermen from 1688-1835.¹⁵ Other offices included the High Steward, though this position ended when the last holder, the Earl of Verulam, died in 1845.¹⁶ Other offices included the Recorder, two Sergeants-at-Mace, two beadles and twenty-four assistants from whom alderman were often elected.¹⁷ Before 1835, Thomas Blagg was the Common or Town Clerk, Coroner and Chamberlain. With the passing of the 1835 Act, Blagg lost his position as Coroner for which he received an annuity in compensation.¹⁸

The position of town clerk was an important position and one that could bring the office holder a great deal of local influence. As the main role of the town clerk was as a legal advisor to the corporation the position was usually filled by a solicitor and Blagg also had his own private practice in the town. He was also paid for his legal work as town clerk and this was the main attraction of the job. At Blagg's death in 1874 it had been suspected for years that Blagg had inflated his charges for this work and the council passed a motion that in future the town clerk would receive a fixed salary inclusive of all work carried out.¹⁹ One duty of the town clerk was to run the poll at borough elections and keep the poll-book; this would have presented Blagg with the opportunity to alter the book to help return the corporation's preferred candidate. He also received payment from each candidate for carrying out these duties, which was in addition to his salary. Blagg was also the clerk to the corporation charities but under the 1835 Act corporations were to eventually lose control of the charitable trusts that had been entrusted to them. The corporation complained to the House of Lords about the loss of the charities arguing that without their oversight they would cease with the existing generation.²⁰

The Municipal Corporations Act 1835 sought to bring reform to the incorporated boroughs in the same way that the Great Reform Act 1832 had been

¹⁵ Lanberry, H. C. F., *Politics and Government*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁶ Gibbs, A. E., *The Corporation Records*, p.298.

¹⁷ HCPPO, *Report of Commissioners on Municipal Corporations*, p. 2919.

¹⁸ Lanberry, H. C. F., *Politics and Government*, p. 202.

¹⁹ Gibbs, A. E., *The Corporation Records*, p. 248.

²⁰ As above, p. 82.

intended to reform national politics. The purpose of the Act was to make the corporations more accountable to ratepayers by introducing elections for town councillors. In the first town council election in 1835 twelve councillors were elected and every year one-third of the councillors stood for re-election and one-third of the council was elected by its own members as aldermen.²¹ Anne Jordan has argued that in St Albans the Act 'brought a new enthusiasm to the government, a new awareness of its importance in providing for public welfare and the start of a new era of reform in the town.'²² However, not only did the 1832 Act fail to stop corruption, the 1835 Act allowed the introduction of new forms of corruption.

Blagg and the corporation supplied a list of candidates for the council elections to each voter, counting on voter apathy to accept the corporation's nominations. These became known as 'Blagg's Lists'. For the next two decades, the corporation effectively controlled who could become a councillor. Their hold was broken during the 1855 council elections when William Balcombe Simpson a local Liberal supporting solicitor and former clerk to Blagg, put forward his own list of four candidates which defeated the corporation's list.²³

Despite the attempt at reform intended by the 1835 Act, there was hardly any change. In the first council elections after the 1835 Act, all but one of the existing aldermen was elected to the new council.²⁴ Effectively the Liberal party were excluded from the council for several years. The only time that Blagg was successfully challenged came in 1846 when Edward Gibson, a Whig candidate, gained office after proving that Blagg had fixed the poll.²⁵ As we shall see in the next chapter, it was Gibson who had sparked the investigation into the Abbey parish charities when he realised that the Cross Keys Charity had not disbursed its gift for several years. This is particularly significant as it indicates that there was strong local feeling about what Blagg was doing to the charities and that they were a politically

²¹ Gibbs, A. E., *The Corporation Records*, pp. 197-198.

²² Jordan, Anne, p. 22.

²³ Gibbs, A. E., *The Corporation Records*, pp. 221-222.

²⁴ Lanberry, H. C. F., *Politics and Government*, pp. 271-272.

²⁵ As above, p. 272.

contested area. Seen in these terms his election was a significant victory over Blagg and his supporters.

The Abbey Parish Vestry

While the town council was responsible for the overall administration of the borough, the parish vestry was the foundation of local administration throughout the country. Vestries were responsible for a variety of tasks, including maintaining the parish church, repairing the roads and setting and collecting the poor rate. Before the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834, they also disbursed parochial relief and if the parish had one, were responsible for the poor house. However, the structure and make up of vestries across the country differed and depended on local tradition. There were two types of vestry, 'open' and 'closed'. In closed vestries only the elected officials attended, but these were supplemented with occasional public meetings.²⁶ The Abbey parish operated an 'open' vestry and any ratepayer could attend. On occasion, such as when the vestry committee reported its findings about the state of the parish charities, even non-ratepayers were urged to attend.²⁷ As a rate payer in the Abbey parish, Thomas Blagg was a regular attender of the vestry meetings and took an active role in proceedings. The Abbey parish vestry usually consisted of a chairman (which for most of our period was the Rector of the Abbey church the Rev. H. Nicholson), two churchwardens, two overseers, and the vestry clerk who were appointed by the local magistrates. Table 6 gives a breakdown of the occupations and ages of Churchwardens and overseers from 1850-52, which shows that they were mostly drawn from local traders and were mostly in their 30s.

Table 6: Abbey Parish Vestry Churchwardens and Overseers 1850-52

²⁶ Sweet, Rosemary., *The English Town*, pp. 30-31.

²⁷ See appendix F.

Date	Surname	First name	Position	Occupation	Age
1850	Brooks	Robert	Churchwarden	Tallow Chandler	31
1850	Wingrave	Josiah	Overseer	Straw Plait Merchant	37
1850	Brooks	John	Overseer	Teacher of Music & Singing	29
1850	Harris	Joseph	Overseer	General Dealer	26
1850	Wells	Joseph	Overseer	Watchmaker & Jeweller	35
1850	Steabben	George	Overseer	Grocer	39
1851	Cocking	Joseph	Churchwarden	Inn Keeper	43
1851	Reeves	Harvey	Churchwarden	Draper	31
1851	Russell	Joseph	Churchwarden	Gentleman	47
1851	Norris	Joseph	Overseer	Baker	33
1851	Climance	George	Overseer	Baker	33
1852	Wells	Joseph	Churchwarden	Watchmaker & Jeweller	38
1852	Josling	Robert	Churchwarden	Seedsman	49
1852	Woods	William	Overseer	Linen Draper	27
1852	Pratt	John	Overseer	Poulterer & Carrier	59

Sources: ACASA, Transcripts of Abbey Parish Minute Book 1846-83 and 1851 Census

The vestry appointed stone wardens for the upkeep of the Abbey church and surveyors of the highways to maintain the roads. Vestry meetings usually took place once a month in the Abbey church, but at busy periods there may have been two or even three meetings in a month.²⁸

Politics within the Abbey parish was often played out through the vestry, and was symptomatic of the wider political divisions within the borough. Blagg, always an astute political operator, was quick to spot a situation that he could use to his advantage. One episode in 1835 neatly demonstrates this and gives us an insight into the political divisions within the parish that are also relevant to the Charities Scandal.

²⁸ See Appendices G and H.

Langridge v Blagg Poll 1835

An important element of the vestry's responsibilities was the setting of the parish poor rate every quarter; a duty that should have called for an impartial approach. Suspicions of favouritism to certain parishioners when assessing the rate could cause much local disquiet. At a vestry meeting on 22 January 1835, the vestry clerk, John Hilliard, was accused of not being in possession of the parish books, amending names and reducing the rates due from several parishioners without authority and not carrying out the wishes of the vestry.²⁹ These allegations touched on sensitive ground and occasioned the highest attendance of a vestry meeting up to that date. The parish was split along party lines on this issue. Hilliard assisted Blagg during borough elections and had voted for the Tory party at the last borough election which had taken place only sixteen days previously. In contrast, those who had called the meeting, Richard Webster, Edward Langridge and Samuel Crawley, were all supporters of the Liberal Party. However, Thomas Blagg and James Dorant, both Tory voters, attacked the motion's supporters 'as being actuated solely by malicious motives against the poor old man, in consequence of his having voted for the conservative candidate.'³⁰

It was proposed by Edward Langridge, a local grocer, that Hilliard should be removed from office. However, this was opposed by Thomas Blagg who moved that Hilliard should remain. A vote held at the meeting went in favour of Blagg's proposal but Langridge and Webster pushed for a poll to be held. This took place on 26 January with Blagg winning the day by 231 votes to 35, a majority of 196.³¹

²⁹ ACACSA, Transcription of Abbey Parish Vestry Minute Books 1828-49, 22 Jan 1835.

³⁰ HALS, MF5/D4/3, 'St Alban's Whig Liberality', *The County Press for Herts, Beds, Bucks, Huntingdon, Cambridge, Essex and Middlesex*, hereafter *The County Press*, No 187. Vol.V. Saturday, January 31, 1835.

³¹ ACACSA, Transcription of Abbey Parish Vestry Minute Books 1828-49, 22 Jan 1835.

Table 7: Votes for and against Langridge’s motion and Party voted for in 1835

Borough Election.

	No. of Voters in Vestry Poll	Party Voted for in 1835 Borough Election								
		C	3rd	L	C+3rd	C+L	3rd+L	No Vote Cast	Not found in Poll Book	Female Voters
For Langridge’s Motion	27*	0	0	18	0	2	0	0	6	1
For Blagg’s Amendment	193*	11	0	7	83	25	12	3	41	11
Total	220*	11	0	25	83	27	12	3	47	12

Sources: ACACSA, Transcription of Abbey Parish Vestry Minute Books 1828-49, 22 Jan 1835, HALS, ACC 3877 Box 2, Borough of St Albans Poll Books: 1835.

*Actual number of votes cast was higher as some voters had more than one vote.

C = Conservative 3rd = Third or Contest Party L= Liberal.

By comparing the list of voters in the vestry minutes with the 1835 poll book from the borough elections, it becomes clear that there was a split along party lines. Table 7 shows that of the 27 voters who sided with Langridge’s motion, eighteen were Liberal party voters. In contrast, Blagg’s supporters were heavily weighted towards the Conservative party with eleven voting for the Tories, eighty-three voting Conservative and the ‘Third’ or ‘Contest’ party and twelve splitting between the Conservative and Liberal parties. The highly politicised nature of parish politics was captured by the Tory leaning newspaper *The County Press* when it declared:

Thus has been defeated by the almost unanimous voice of the parish, one of the most paltry and contemptible of the Whig tricks. During the whole of Monday the town bore every appearance of a contested election; in the evening the event was celebrated by several convivial parties, and a band was in attendance for several hours to enliven the scene.³²

³² HALS, MF5/D4/3, ‘St Alban’s Whig Liberty’, *The County Press*, No 187. Vol.V. Saturday, January 31, 1835.

In contrast to *The County Press*, the Liberal supporting *The Reformer*, told a different story. It reported that Hilliard had taken the rate-book 'in defiance of all rules to Mr. Blagg's office, whence it has only emerged shorn of one or two names, at each visit, which it was not desirable for the Tories to retain.'³³ The truth it would seem was that Blagg was trying to extend his control of parish affairs to rate setting for political gain as only rate-payers could vote in vestry elections.

However, care should be taken when talking about divisions between political parties in St Albans as money blurred the lines. During the 1851 parliamentary enquiry in to bribery in the borough of St Albans election of 1850, one witness stated:

We talk about parties, but they are so amalgamated and shifted about by the money that has been spent according to circumstances, that I must confess I am lost in parties. The fact is, the party in St Alban's there is no doubt has been for years moved by money.³⁴

Blagg was perfectly prepared to work with the Liberal party when his control of the town was under threat. As we shall see in chapter 5, he supported and voted for the Liberal party candidate in the 1850 borough election when the Conservative candidate stood against corruption.

This small episode in the parish's history reveals that there existed a small group of parishioners who were engaged in a fight that sought to eradicate the corrupt practices of Thomas Blagg and his supporters. Over several decades these two opposing sides would engage in struggles that would result in breaking the Blagg's control of the corporation, the endowment charities, council elections and parliamentary elections. This fight against corruption was fought through the Abbey vestry in the administration of the parish's charitable trusts. As we shall see,

³³ ST. ALBAN'S. ELECTION OF VESTRY CLERK IN THE ABBEY PARISH. *The Reformer* (Hertford, England), Tuesday, 27 January, 1835.

³⁴ *Report of The Commissioners to Inquire into the Existence of Bribery in the Borough of Saint Alban's*, 1852, p. x.

Langridge was the treasurer of two charities that in stark contrast to Blagg's charities, were operating in line with the benefactor's intentions and were disbursing their gifts regularly.³⁵

In this chapter, we have seen that Blagg was operating within long established power structures at the county, borough and parish levels. He was a skilled political operator who knew how to navigate the system and get it to work in his favour. Through bribing the electorate, he enjoyed much popular support within St Albans even though he was supporting the corrupt behaviour of the vestry clerk. But he also made powerful enemies who would eventually find ways of reigning him in. Over the next two decades these opposing forces fought over the control of both small and large-scale power within the parish and borough of St Albans. The next chapter will concentrate on the small-scale struggle which was played out through the Abbey parish charitable trusts.

³⁵ See Appendix I.

Chapter 4

The Charities Scandal

'Public charities cannot be too public'³⁶

S. G. Shaw

The Abbey endowment trusts, like other areas of public life in St Albans were a contested area. Thomas Blagg used the charities as a source of revenue to fund corruption in the borough elections. The fight to stop him therefore had a political element but it was also moral and religious in nature. Disbursements from the charities often took place in the Abbey church, especially from the charities that distributed bread.³⁷ Because of their intimate knowledge about the local poor some of the Abbey charities relied on the vestry to compile lists of the poor who received their gift. As we have seen, several benefactors stipulated that to be able to qualify for the gift the poor had to attend a religious service. In seeking to embezzle the charities, Blagg not only took on his political opponents, he was also taking on the church. On his appointment in 1835 as Rector of the Abbey Church, the Rev. Henry Nicholson would prove to be one of the driving forces that eventually would hold Blagg to account. This chapter will examine that struggle and seeks to explain who suffered because of his embezzlements.

To gain an understanding of how the poor were affected by Blagg's embezzlements we need to look at the provision provided by both endowment and subscription charities and the New Poor Law. This will also help us to understand why for Blagg the Abbey endowment charities were such an attractive target. The role of the Court of Chancery in administering charitable trusts will then be considered as both Blagg and the Abbey vestry used it as means to achieve their

³⁶ Shaw, S. G., *History of Verulam and St Albans* (St Albans, 1815), pp. 206-207.

³⁷ For example, the Anne Goldsmith and the William King George Charities.

aims. There will then follow a detailed account of the scandal itself which will shed light on the continuous positioning for power between the Abbey vestry and Thomas Blagg and the trustees. The chapter will end by considering the consequences of the scandal.

Provision for the Poor of the Abbey Parish

Nationally, endowment charities played a significant role in providing charitable relief for the poor. In 1837, public expenditure under the New Poor Law and education amounted to £4,095,000, while endowment charities made disbursements worth £1,199,223 in the same year.³⁸ By 1840 there were 28,800 endowed charities in England and Wales holding assets worth £7,103,443.³⁹ The wealth of many endowment charities came from the value of the land they owned which was rented to tenants, these rents and other investments usually funded the charity's disbursements. Rising rental values of land meant that by the 1850s, some of the Abbey parish charities held large sums of money. For example, by 1851 Gawen's Charity had accumulated £644.3s.9d in cash, while Skelton's Charity had a total of £383. 12s. 9d. Similarly, The Cross Keys Charity had £228. 8s. 2d. while Bray Norrice's Charity had around £300 in cash, though this was held in a Bank of England Account in the name of the Accountant General.⁴⁰ This meant that these surpluses were not being distributed to the poor. This not only made them vulnerable to embezzlement, it also restricted the amount and numbers of poor persons they could disburse it to. Despite this, the Abbey parish charitable trusts could provide a relatively large amount of help to the poor. The surviving evidence for expenditure in the Abbey parish on provision for the poor by the poor law and

³⁸ See table 1b in, Gorsky, Martin, *Patterns of Philanthropy*, p. 17.

³⁹ Owen, David., *English Philanthropy*, pp. 192-193

⁴⁰ For the Gawen, Skelton and Bray Norrice Charities see *Report on the state of the Cross Key's, Skelton's, Gawen's and Bray Norrice's charities and all other parish charities* (St Albans, 27 Mar 1851), pp. 22 and 30 and The Account Book of the Cross Keys Charity 1793-1919, folio, 53.

charities is incomplete. This means that figures do not allow for comparisons in the same years, but near years can be compared and can be broken down as follows:

Table 8: Number of Paupers in Receipt of and Cost of In and Out-Relief in Abbey

Parish 1841

Cost of out-relief to Abbey parish	Abbey parish paupers in receipt of out-relief	Cost of in-Maintenance	Paupers in union workhouse
£161. 7s. 5d.	835*	£248. 6s. 0d.**	148*

* These figures are total number added from each quarter year so actual number of individual paupers relieved will be lower.

** This total does not include establishment and other costs which came to an additional £605. 4s. 9d.

Source: HALS, BG/STA 45, General Ledger Books of the Board of Guardians St Albans Union Sep 1838 – Jun 1842, folio 116.

Table 9: Value of Abbey Parish Endowment Gifts and Estimated Number of Poor receiving gift of charities 1843

Value of disbursements	Number of poor in receipt of gift of charities
£124. 5s. 6d.*	427**

*This figure would have been £199. 4s. 18d. but both The Gawen and Jane Nicholas Charities did not make disbursements in 1843. Also, this figure does not include the value of the rent saved by those poor persons in almshouses. Gifts included, bread, clothes and cash.

**This is an estimated figure as numbers of poor relieved changed over time and some sources consulted are from the 1850s. It is likely that some individuals received the gift of more than one charity.

Sources: HCPPO, *Commission of Inquiry into Charities in England and Wales: Return of Charities Distributed to Poor 1843*, PP 436, p.9, ACASA, *An Account of the several Pious and Charitable DONATIONS*, ACASA, Churchwardens Accounts 1852-60, HALS, D/EBs/Q5 Correspondence of Gawen's, Skelton's and Cross Keys Charities 1837-57, Cross Keys Charity Recipients of the Coals 1852.

Table 10: Amount Received by Subscription Charities in St Albans and the Abbey

Parish 1841

Subscriptions and donations paid to St Albans subscription charities	Subscriptions and donations to Abbey Parish Coal Fund
£172. 2s. 7d.*	£27. 17s. 6d.

*This total does not include charities that provided education and excludes the total for the Abbey parish. If the schools are included the total amount including donations is £250. 0s. 5d. Also, there were twelve subscription charities recorded in the town in 1841 but the amounts subscribed and donated are only recorded for eight of these.

Source: ACASA, Charities General 1 (1), *Account of Charities Supported by the Inhabitants of St Alban's And its Neighbourhood* (St Albans, 1841).

By comparing tables 8-10 we can see that the Abbey parish endowment charities held a significant position within the hierarchy of provision for the poor within the parish. If all these charities had distributed their gift in 1843 then the value of their disbursements would have been worth £38 more than was spent on out-relief by St Albans Union in the Abbey parish in 1841. The figures also show that it is likely that around 50 per cent fewer poor persons received help from the endowment charities compared with those who received out-door relief. This means the gifts of the endowment charities was worth considerably more than the relief given by the union. That said, 1841 was a particularly difficult year during the depression years of 1838-42. If we look at the year 1839 when there were only 289 instances of out-door relief in the parish but £152. 8s. 3d. was spent, the endowment charities do not look as generous.⁴¹ This suggests that the sums spent on relief by the union stayed relatively constant regardless of the numbers of poor in need of it. In years of high demand the amount received by the poor must have decreased sharply.

Under the Old Poor Law, endowment charities were protected by the Charitable Uses Act 1601, which formed part of the Elizabethan poor laws.⁴² Under

⁴¹ HALS, BG/STA 45, General Ledger Books, folio 9.

⁴² Jones, Gareth., *History of the Law of Charity 1532-1827* (London, 1969), p. 22.

the New Poor Law, endowment charities were still of interest to guardians because, as in St Albans, if they stopped being efficiently administered, more pressure could be put on the system by increased numbers of poor persons needing relief. At a meeting of the St Albans Union Board of Guardians in July 1850, one member raised concerns over the charities and asked if the board could intervene in the matter as it was possible that one of the charities could lose all its money in Chancery, but the guardians were not clear if their powers extended to the charitable trusts.⁴³ However, the guardians continued to take an interest in the state of the trusts. Philip Vincent Coleman was recorded as being a guardian and a member of the committee on the last page of the report on the Abbey vestry investigation of the charities in 1851.⁴⁴ As well as the endowment charities and parochial relief, the poor of the borough were also provided for by private charities.

By 1841, there were twelve subscription charities serving the needs of the poor of the town of St Albans. Figure 15 shows that subscription charities in the Abbey parish made a small contribution to the poor of the parish in comparison to the charitable trusts having just two charities, the Abbey coal fund and a Sunday school. Money for the coal fund was raised through a mixture of subscriptions from the wealthier inhabitants of the parish and deposits made by the poor themselves. In 1840, the Abbey coal fund raised £62. 9s. 3d. which allowed over 48 tons of coal to be distributed. It is likely that high levels of provision made by the trusts in the parish acted as a disincentive to the creation of more of this type of charity. This meant that the efforts of voluntary charities were concentrated in the rest of the borough. Of the other ten subscription charities in the town, five were schools, including two Sunday schools, one of which was in St Michaels parish; the other being in St Peters parish. St Peters also had a coal fund, a soup society and a visiting society, while the town had a lying-in-charity, a clothing society and a repository of industry. This charity offered the poor employment by making items such as baskets and straw plait work

⁴³ BOARD OF GUARDIANS. *The Hertford Mercury* (Hertford, England), Saturday, July 13, 1850.

⁴⁴ ACASA, *Report of the Abbey Parish Vestry Committee to Investigate the State of The Cross Key's, Gawen's, Skelton's and Bray Norrice Charities*, 27 March 1851 (St Albans, 1851), p. 31.

which were sold through the charity's shop, which also sold clothes wealthier shoppers could buy and donate to the poor.⁴⁵

The relatively high levels of disbursements offered by the Abbey parish charities reflected the level of income they were receiving. In 1843, the charities' income totalled £575. 6s. 12d. but they only disbursed £124. 5s. 6d.⁴⁶ It was this level of income that made the charities a target for Blagg's embezzlement. Thomas Blagg's abuse of charitable trusts in the Abbey parish was not a unique episode in the history of the parish's charities. The Jane Nicholas Charity was embezzled by one of its trustees in 1822. But a century before this, the corporation of St Albans had used money from the Abbey charities to repay an outstanding loan. The Court of Chancery ordered them to pay back £808. 12s. 9d., while four aldermen had to return a total of £875.⁴⁷ The Court of Chancery played a key role in recovering the charities' money in the eighteenth century but in the nineteenth century Blagg used the court as a cover for his embezzlements.

Court of Chancery

The Court of Chancery originated from the Anglo-Saxon royal scriptorium headed by the Chancellor and operated separately from the common-law. The main function of the court was to not to punish but to establish the facts. It then sought to gain the co-operation of the defendant so that a just solution could be found.⁴⁸ However, by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was a backlog of 10,000 to 20,000 cases which could sometimes take decades to be resolved. Even though the situation had improved by the nineteenth century, the court had a notorious reputation for the time and money it took to reach a decision. By the mid 1820s, £39 million was held up in Chancery with court rulings taking around five years to be made.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ ACASA, Charities General 1 (1), *Account of Charities Supported by the Inhabitants of St Alban's And its Neighbourhood* (St Albans, 1841).

⁴⁶ See Appendix D

⁴⁷ Lanberry, H. C. F., *Politics and Government*, pp. 62-72.

⁴⁸ Baker, J. H., *An Introduction to English Legal History*, 4th ed. (Oxford, 2007), pp. 97- 103.

⁴⁹ As above, pp. 111- 112.

Two legal processes were used in the court for hearing the cases involving the Abbey parish charities; petitions and a bill of information. Petitions were used to ask the Lord Chancellor to decide how a charity's funds should be applied.⁵⁰ Petitions were used in the cases of the Skelton and the Gawen Charities and were generally the quicker and less costly option. A bill of information was used in more complicated judgements. As a result, these were costlier and usually took longer to resolve.⁵¹ Despite the objections of the Abbey vestry, the trustees of the Cross Keys Charity used this process in 1846 when they put the affairs of the charity in Chancery to decide who should be eligible for the gift of the charity.⁵² Our three charities were in Chancery for a combined total of forty-five years from 1836-60 but many of the delays were caused by Blagg not carrying out the orders of the court. A major weakness of the court was that it did not follow up on its rulings to check that they had been carried out. Instead complainants would have to re-petition the Lord Chancellor. This explains why Blagg could evade its rulings for so many years.⁵³ As a solicitor, Blagg was well placed to use Chancery to his advantage. He could make money from charging for the legal fees involved with drafting petitions and other work. These were known as fees for 'professional business' and were additional payments to his small salary as clerk and treasurer.⁵⁴ For example, between 1828 and 1840 Blagg charged The Gawen Charity £185. 12s. 4d., for the Cross Keys Charity from 1828-60 his fees came to £180. 6s. 10 1/2d.⁵⁵ Blagg would also use Chancery to help cover his embezzlements. In 1836, a petition was raised for Skelton's charity to decide how the surplus funds of the charity should be used. Not only was this unnecessary as the donor's intentions were clear on this, Blagg had asked two

⁵⁰ Harding, Grant., *The practice of High Court of Chancery under the new orders* (London, 1829), p. 147.

⁵¹ Thompson, Richard., *The Charity Commission*, p. 65

⁵² ACASA, *Report of the Abbey Parish Vestry Committee to Investigate the State of The Cross Key's, Gawen's, Skelton's and Bray Norrice Charities*, 27 March 1851 (St Albans, 1851), pp. 8-9. The vestry suspected that the lawyers had used a bill of information so that they could make more money and they disputed the need of going to Chancery at all.

⁵³ See the Charities Scandal timeline for the start and end dates for the Chancery actions.

⁵⁴ See Appendix 10.

⁵⁵ HALS, D/EBs/Q2 1-3 and ACASA, *The Account Book of The Cross Keys Charity 1793-1919*.

churchwardens to sign the petition so that the trustees would be unaware of his actions.⁵⁶ However, just as legislation in other areas came too late to stop or punish Blagg, the same was true of the Court of Chancery. The Common-Law Procedure Act of 1854 gave Chancery the right to try cases along the same lines as other courts allowing the court to use juries, reach decisions on law and crucially to award damages.⁵⁷

The price of the failure of legislation in preventing Blagg's embezzlements was paid by the poor of the borough. The six years that the Cross Keys Charity was in Chancery cost £395 in legal costs, the equivalent of around ten years' disbursements. Chancery costs for Gawen's Charity came to £64. 17s. 8d. and £135. 10s. 1d. for Skelton's charity.⁵⁸ The losses to Skelton's Charity were particularly severe and represented a loss equal to around twenty years' disbursements.⁵⁹ All this was eventually paid back by Blagg but the money was lost to the poor during the late 1830s and 1840s, years which saw some of the most difficult economic conditions of the nineteenth century.

The Abbey Parish Charities Scandal

At the centre of the Abbey Parish Charities Scandal was the relationship between Blagg and George Muskett, the Liberal Party MP for the borough and owner of Muskett's Bank of St Albans. Blagg acted as 'professional adviser' for the bank, a connection that almost certainly came about through Blagg's friendship with Henry Edwards, the Liberal Party election agent and chief clerk of the bank.⁶⁰ The surviving evidence strongly suggests that even at the point that Muskett established his Bank of St Albans in 1834 that he was already in financial difficulties. Muskett's business

⁵⁶ ACASA, *Report of the Abbey Parish Vestry Committee to Investigate the State of The Cross Key's, Gawen's, Skelton's and Bray Norrice Charities*, 27 March 1851 (St Albans, 1851), p. 28.

⁵⁷ Baker, J. H., *An Introduction to English Legal History*, pp. 112-114.

⁵⁸ ACASA, Transcription of the Abbey parish vestry minute books 1849-1883, 14 Feb 1853.

⁵⁹ HALS, D/EBs/Q5, Correspondence of Gawen's, Skelton's and Cross Keys Charities 1837-1857, Petition of Robert Brooks and John Mason 1836-1851.

⁶⁰ Parker, Jack., *'Nothing for Nothing for Nobody' A History of Hertfordshire Banks and Banking*, (Hertfordshire Publications, 1986), p. 33.

interests were built around the chemical and mining industries and finance.⁶¹ It is likely that the economic crisis of 1839-1842 pushed Muskett to the point of bankruptcy. Certainly by 1841, when Muskett failed to gain re-election as MP for St Albans, his bank was effectively insolvent.⁶² To keep the bank afloat, it seems that Blagg not only used the charities' money, he also funnelled thousands of pounds embezzled from Thomas Kinder, a local wealthy brewer, by two of his clerks.⁶³

The first indication of public disquiet with the Abbey parish endowment charities came with the printing of a poster in December 1835 that raised questions over the way that several of the charities were discharging their responsibilities. As well as other parish trusts, the poster raised concerns about the Gawen, Skelton and Cross Keys Charities. They were accused of noncompliance with the recommendations of the 1833 report of the Charity Commissioners, non-distribution of funds, excessive legal expenses, and questionable work charged to several of the charities' accounts.⁶⁴

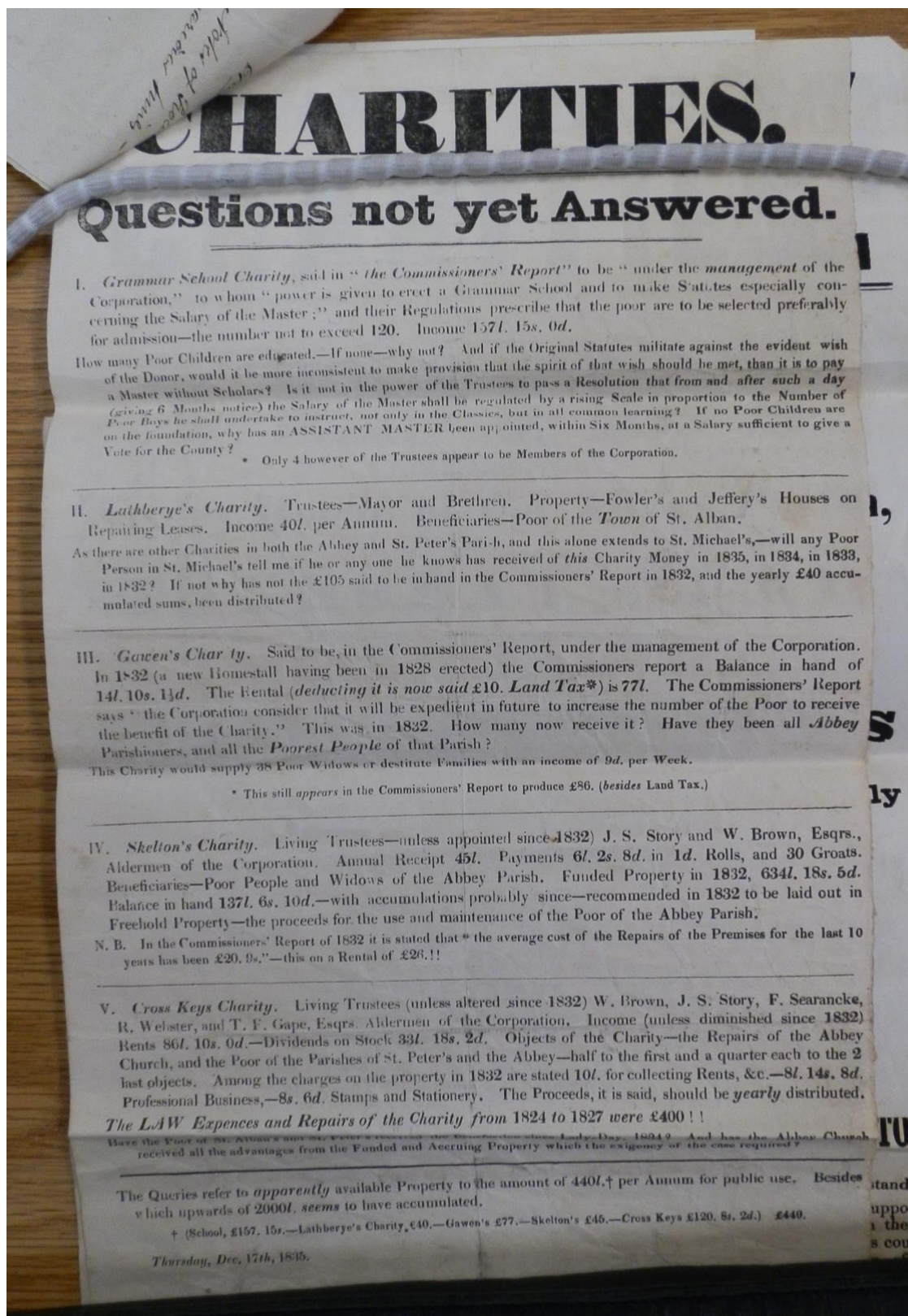
⁶¹ Habgood-Everett, Judith., 'George Alfred Muskett, 1788-1843: A case of 19th century political sleaze?' *Hertfordshire's Past*, Issue 41, Autumn/Winter 1996, p. 27

⁶² Parker, Jack., 'Nothing for Nothing', p. 34.

⁶³ See "Summer Assizes", *The Times*, (London, England), Monday, Jul 13, 1846:7. TDA. Web. Consulted on 20 Nov. 2017 and "Home Circuit Hertford", *The Times* (London, England), Saturday, Jul 13, 1846:7. TDA. Web. Consulted on 20 Nov. 2017.

⁶⁴ HALS, DE/BS/Q5, *Charities, Questions Not Yet Answered!* 17 Dec 1835.

Figure 5: *Charities Questions Not Answered*



HALS, DE/BS/Q5, Charities, Questions Not Yet Answered! 17 Dec 1835.

These questions were to be the recurring themes relating to the parishes' endowment charities for the next twenty years. The depth of knowledge displayed by the questions, points to the author being a member of the parish vestry who would have had a degree of access to some of the charities' accounts. In 1837, further issues were raised in a report by a committee of the Abbey vestry into the accounts of the parish's charities. It highlighted a large accumulation of funds by both the Skelton and Gawen's charities that was not benefitting the poor of the parish.

Concerns must have surfaced again as the Abbey parish formed a committee to investigate the parish charities on 19 March 1846. The next day a letter was sent to the trustees of the charities informing them of the formation of the committee and requesting that they make themselves available for an interview at a future meeting of the Abbey vestry.⁶⁵ Concerns were then raised over The Cross Keys Charity. On 23 March Edward Gibson, a churchwarden in St Peters parish wrote to John Thomas Lipscomb a trustee, asking when the charity had last made any disbursements. He received a swift response from him admitting that there had been no disbursements by the charity since February 1843. The activities of both the Abbey vestry and Gibson evidently caused alarm as the trustees of the charity met for the first time in over three years on the same day that Lipscomb had replied to Gibson. Gibson then applied to see the charity's accounts but was not successful, and a pattern of repeatedly unsuccessful attempts to scrutinise the charity's accounts ensued over the coming months.⁶⁶ Gibson became so frustrated with the lack of cooperation from the trustees that he published a poster detailing his actions in trying to resolve the matter.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ ACACSA, Charities II (2) The Charities Scandal 1846-1852, 'Copy of circular addressed to the trustees of charities on Friday 20 March' 1846.

⁶⁶ Gibson's intervention may have been motivated by concern for the poor but there is also a political dimension to this. Blagg and Gibson had a history of clashing over local issues. In 1845, the *Hertford Reformer* published letters from both Blagg and Gibson attacking each other over the issue of rural policing. See LATE MEETING AT ST. ALBAN'S. *The Hertford Mercury and Reformer*, (Hertford, England), Saturday 4 January 1845 and MR BLAGG AND THE POLICE. *The Hertford Mercury and Reformer*, (Hertford, England), Saturday 11 January 1845.

⁶⁷ See Appendix L.

Clearly unsettled by the questions being asked of them, on 30 March the Cross Keys trustees met again, this time to agree to the disbursement of £181.9s.1d to be equally split between the Abbey and St Peter's parish. This was made public the same day when a handbill, published in Blagg's name was printed advertising the disbursement, which was to be made on 17 April.⁶⁸ Large as this disbursement may seem, at this time the charity was actually holding £412.8s.2d. in cash with £50 reserved for repairs to the charity's cottages.⁶⁹ A letter sent by Blagg on 3 April as treasurer of the Cross Keys Charity to the Abbey parish officers, is the only surviving example in the Abbey archives of a set of instructions from the trustees of a charity to the parish officers on how they should decide who was to receive the charity's money. Blagg was careful to stipulate that the recipients:

must reside in the Old Borough and must be those persons who are really poor and objects of charity. The Trustees look to the Parish Officers with confidence that they will be very careful in the recommendations of proper objects, and not put down each applicant's name on the list without due investigation and consideration which has been too much the case here to fore.⁷⁰

However, the planned disbursement never took place. On 15 April, the trustees received another letter from Gibson in which he questioned whether the poor living outside the boundaries of the old borough but still within the parish of St Peter were also eligible. The very next day a second handbill was published by Blagg announcing that because of the matter raised by Gibson the planned disbursement had been postponed until legal advice had been sought and the money had been deposited in the St Albans Bank.⁷¹ The decision to seek legal advice was highly questionable. In September 1838, the same question that Gibson had asked was

⁶⁸ See Appendix M.

⁶⁹ ACACSA, *The Account Book of the Cross Keys Charity 1793-1919*, folio 60.

⁷⁰ ACACSA, *Charities IV (3) The Cross Keys Charity*, Thomas Blagg, 'Instructions to Parish Officers as to Making out Lists', 3 April 1846.

⁷¹ See Appendix K.

directly addressed by the trustees and their decision was recorded in the charity's minute book:

It was unanimously resolved that such poor persons are not entitled to participate therein, but that the Gift must be confined to the Poor of the ancient Borough, in accordance with the instructions of the original Trust Deed.⁷²

Most benefactors of the Abbey trusts had stipulated that those eligible for charity had to be residents within the boundaries of the old borough which existed until 1835, and this was the usual definition of the 'town' of St Albans up until that date. However, another common tactic of Blagg's was to put the affairs of charities that he was responsible for into the Court of Chancery on the slightest of pretexts. This allowed him to be able to charge fees for the legal work this would entail and would also buy him time as it helped to cover up any surplus funds he had embezzled. But going to Chancery sometimes meant that the charity would not be able to disburse its gift. This was indeed what happened here and the affairs of the Cross Keys Charity were in Chancery for five years between 1846 and 1851.⁷³ In fact, the charity did not distribute any money again, because when the charity next disbursed its gift in 1852, the Court of Chancery had amended the trust deed so that only coal could be given to the poor rather than cash.⁷⁴ This was a common occurrence and represented the widespread hostility of the middling and upper classes to dole charities.⁷⁵

By 21 May 1846, the committee formed by the Abbey parish vestry to consider the state of the parish charities was ready to submit its report. It found that since the 1837 report the Abbey church was owed £165.14s.2d. for repairs dating back to 1840.

⁷² ACACSA, Charities II (2) The Charities Scandal 1846-1852, *Report of the Committee to Investigate and Enquire into the State of Charities*, (St Albans, 27 March 1851), p.19.

⁷³ ACACSA, Transcription of the Abbey Parish Vestry Minute Books 1829-1883, 14 Apr 1853.

⁷⁴ ACACSA, Account Book of The Cross Keys Charity, folio 84.

⁷⁵ Owen, David., *English Philanthropy*, p. 196.

It also questioned the amount of money Blagg was charging for 'professional business'. A full audit of the charities' accounts was recommended.⁷⁶

The investigation also found problems with several of the other charities of which Blagg was the clerk and treasurer. The affairs of Thomas Gawen's Charity were in Chancery, as they had been since 1840, though Blagg expected the proceedings to be completed by the summer of 1846 with the costs of the action expected to be around £250. The affairs of the Skelton Charity were also in Chancery, awaiting a ruling by the Master on a new scheme for the charity in which after the normal distribution of bread and money, additional distributions of coal and clothing should be allowed. This ruling was expected in November 1846. However, the chancery action was entirely unnecessary. Robert Skelton the original benefactor, had foreseen a situation arising where surplus funds might accumulate. His indenture stipulated that these funds were 'to be laid out in buying some Land, or Thing, for the further use and Maintenance of the Poor...'⁷⁷

The resulting scandal continued to be a very public affair. The Abbey vestry had the 1846 committee's report printed so that a wider audience could see the findings; a measure they again resorted to in 1851 when a further enquiry was required.⁷⁸ As the scandal intensified, a public meeting was held at St Albans town hall on 14 July 1847. Questions over the accountability and transparency of the management of the charities were very much on the agenda, as were the rights of the public and the duties of trustees. The meeting went on to find that there was no need for the Gawen's, Skelton's and the Cross Keys Charities to be caught up in the costly and lengthy process of the Court of Chancery as the trustees should have just increased the numbers of poor eligible for gifts in proportion to the increase in

⁷⁶ HALS, DE/BS/Q6, Correspondence concerning the treasurer and Abbey Parish Committee 1846-1851, *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Abbey Parish Charities, St Albans*, (St Albans), 1846. pp. 8-11.

⁷⁷ ACACSA, *An Account of the several Pious and Charitable DONATIONS*.

⁷⁸ See HALS, DE/BS/Q6, Correspondence concerning the treasurer and Abbey Parish Committee 1846-1851, *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Abbey Parish Charities, St Albans*, (St Albans, 1846).

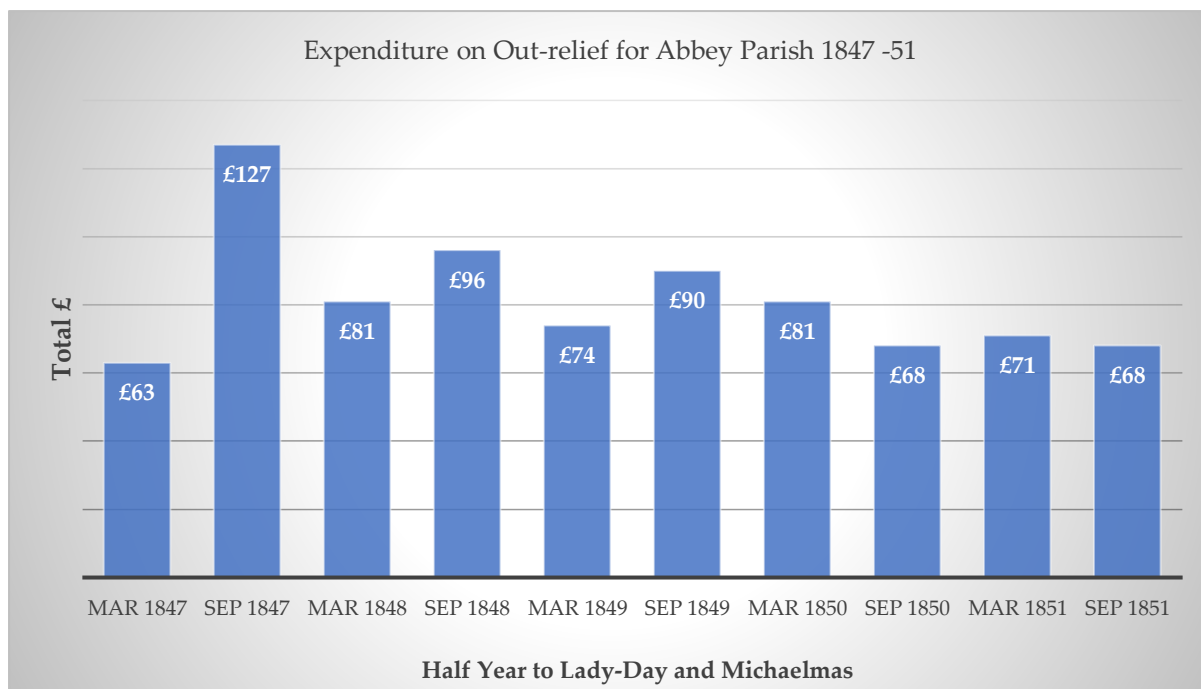
charity income. Further questions were specifically directed at the absent trustees of the Cross Keys Charity when the meeting asked them to explain why no disbursements had been made by the charity between 1843 and 1846 and why there had been a delay in starting the proceedings in Chancery until 26 December 1846.⁷⁹

This meeting appeared to have achieved little and the scandal quietly continued as an undercurrent of parish and town life. For the poor however, the scandal was having serious consequences. Because of poor harvests in 1846, the years 1847-48 experienced a severe economic depression which for a time was even worse than the depression of 1838-42. This was represented in the increase in the amounts spent on out-relief and in-maintenance by the parish. Figures 6 and 7 show the amounts spent on out-relief and in-maintenance in the Abbey parish from 1847 to 1851. The high points for expenditure on out-relief came in the half-years to September 1847 and for in-maintenance in March 1849. These far exceeded expenditure during the previous crisis in 1838-42 when at the worse periods just £45 was spent on out-relief in March 1841 and £77 was spent on in-maintenance in March 1839.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ ACACSA, Charities II (2) The Charities Scandal 1846-1852, hand-bill, 'St Albans Charities' (St Albans, July 1847).

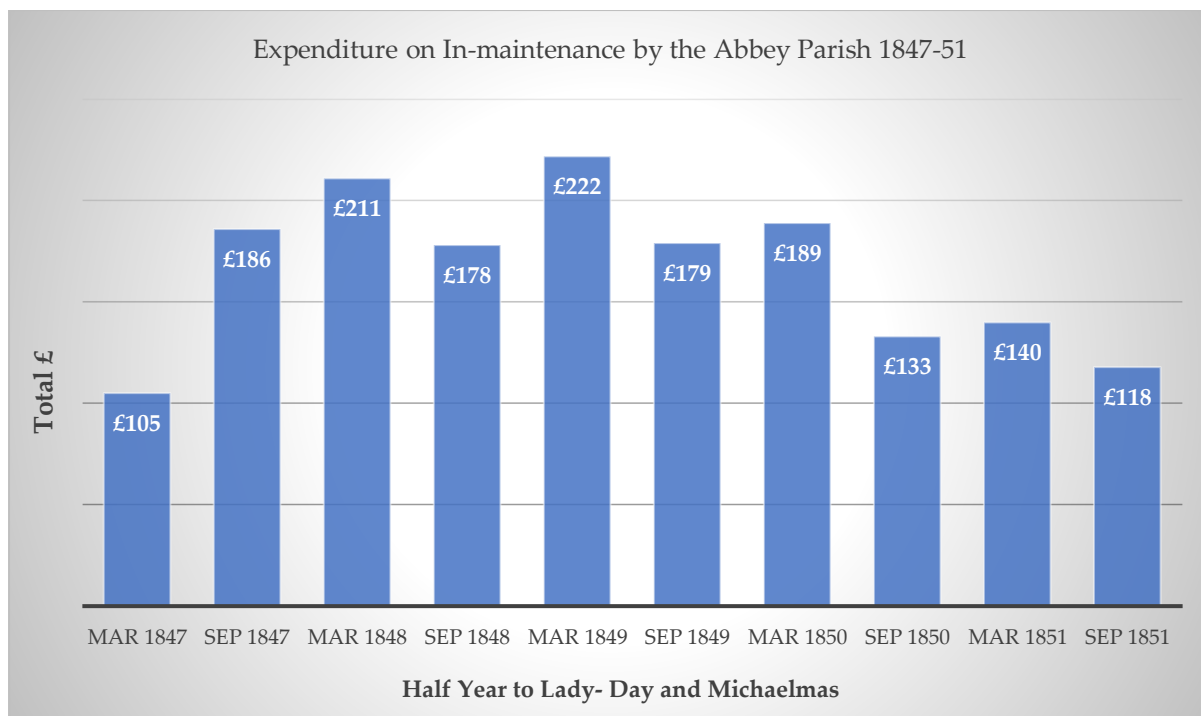
⁸⁰ HALS, BG/STA 45 General Ledgers of Board of Guardians St Albans Union, Sep 1838 – June 1842, folios 9, 70, 116 and 162. Amounts quoted are to the nearest £.

Figure 6: Expenditure on Out-relief by Abbey Parish 1847-51



Source: HALS, BG/STA 46 General Ledgers of Board of Guardians St Albans Union, Dec 1846-Mar 1853, folios, 1, 56 and 102.

Figure 7: Expenditure on In-maintenance by the Abbey Parish 1847-51



Source: HALS, BG/STA 46 General Ledgers of Board of Guardians St Albans Union, Dec 1846-Mar 1853, folios, 1, 56 and 102.

The situation became so desperate in the parish that the Abbey vestry urged that:

owing to the present unprecedented distress amongst the poor this vestry earnestly and respectfully recommend to the trustees of the Cross Keys Charity the immediate distribution of the £181. 9s. 1d. announced in March 1846 to be due to the persons entitled to be recipients...⁸¹

But the money was never paid out.

The scandal was re-ignited in January 1851 when the Abbey vestry heard a detailed account of the state of the parish charities. It revealed there were still problems. The vestry heard that a letter sent by the Rev. Nicholson to the trustees of Gawen's, Skelton's and Cross Keys Charities in April 1850 asking that the Chancery Court proceedings be completed quickly went unanswered. The Skelton Charity was still in Chancery as was the Cross Keys Charity. In 1846, the Bray Norrice Charity had been found to be running correctly but by 1848 the charity was also in Chancery. Blagg had failed to invest £300 from the sale of some of the charity's land in 1848 claiming that the consols could not be bought as the leases for the land had been lost. The money was at least safely in the hands of the Accountant General at Chancery but the money wasn't earning any interest.⁸²

Thomas Blagg, as clerk to the trustees, supplied information to the Abbey vestry committees on several occasions and usually appeared to be co-operative with them but at a vestry meeting on 9 Jan 1851 he pointedly refused to answer questions about the Gawen's, Skelton's and Cross Keys Charities stating:

if a proper application from the Vestry were addressed to him as Clerk to the trustees, it should receive an official answer. He being there simply as a Parishioner could not give any answer to questions respecting the management of the affairs of the Charity without the authority of the Trustees.⁸³

⁸¹ ACACSA, Transcription of the Abbey Parish Vestry Minute Books 1829-1883, 23 Dec 1847.

⁸² ACACSA, Transcription of the Abbey Parish Vestry Minute Books 1829-1883, 9 Jan 1851.

⁸³ ACACSA, Transcription of the Abbey Parish Vestry Minute Books 1829-1883, 9 Jan 1851.

Blagg was treading a careful line here and appears to have been playing for time but his refusal to answer questions did nothing to put off the vestry and it resolved to appoint another committee to look into the state of the parish charities. Its work was quickly completed and when it reported its findings on 27 March 1851 a much fuller picture of Blagg's and the trustees' activities was revealed. It was found that the Cross Keys Charity was being deprived of rents because an order of Chancery made in 1844 that Thomas Kinder a lease holder of some of the charity's land, had failed to build three properties on the land at his own expense. The charity had lost ownership of some of its land, and there had still been no disbursements since 1843. The charity had stopped giving notice of disbursements in the local press in 1839. On top of this, the committee found that Blagg had had the vestries of both St Peters and the Abbey parishes named as suitors for the Chancery action begun in 1846, something that neither vestry had any knowledge of. Two former churchwardens of the Abbey parish had remembered being asked to sign a document by Blagg which revealed that he had concealed the true nature of the forms as 'the impression they had was that they were simply signing some document to facilitate the settlement of the question and prevent the matter going into Chancery.'⁸⁴

For Gawen's Charity the committee found that the charity's balance sheets had been published in the local press up to 1841 but this had since ceased to happen. The committee found that in 1843 only £20 was distributed instead of the required £40 and that no distribution was made at all in 1847 despite the accounts showing that more than sufficient funds were available. Most damning of all were the outstanding Chancery proceedings. An order had been made by the court in 1842 instructing that the balance being held by Blagg be paid into the Bank of England and that in future all the charity's annual income be distributed to the poor instead

⁸⁴ ACACSA, Charities II (2) The Charities Scandal 1846-1851, *Report of the Abbey Parish Vestry Committee to Investigate the State of The Cross Key's, Gawen's, Skelton's and Bray Norrice Charities*, (St Albans, 27 March 1851), p. 18.

of the usual £40. This order had been entirely ignored by Blagg and he still held £644.3s.9d.⁸⁵

Perhaps the most serious shortcomings were uncovered in the administration of the Skelton's Charity. There was no record of Blagg ever being appointed as the clerk and treasurer and it appeared that Blagg had appointed the present trustees himself. No meeting of the trustees had taken place between March 1826 and January 1851. As a result, Blagg had failed to consult the trustees on the need to go to chancery in August 1839 to decide on how to use the surplus funds that were accumulating. This was no doubt a deliberate decision on Blagg's part as the original donor had stipulated that additional funds should be used to buy more land or property so that the income could be given to the poor. Yet the trustees had signed the Chancery petition, indicating that they had either been misled by Blagg about the purpose of the proceedings or that they had failed to properly scrutinise the need for the proceedings. This account of Blagg's conduct was put into a petition submitted to Chancery on 2 May 1851 with the addition that as the original benefactor's intentions were clear, the original petition applied for by Blagg was 'wholly unnecessary and uncalled for'.⁸⁶The committee found that one of the charity's properties which was being rented as one house should have been rented as two separate houses. As a result, the charity was losing £4 per year in rent. There were also discrepancies in the accounts as the receipts did not match the income and no application for the re-imburement of property tax had ever been made. At the time of the report Blagg was holding £383. 12s. 9d., none of which was earning any interest. In summarising the three charity's accounts, the committee reached the shocking conclusion that since 1841 'less than one third of the gross income has been distributed amongst the poor.'⁸⁷Yet all was not entirely bad news. In the case of Bray

⁸⁵ ACACSA, Charities II (2) The Charities Scandal 1846-1851, *Report of the Abbey Parish Vestry Committee to Investigate the State of The Cross Key's, Gawen's, Skelton's and Bray Norrice Charities*, (St Albans, 27 March 1851), pp. 22-23.

⁸⁶ HALS, DE/BS/Q5, Petition to Attorney General regarding Skelton's Charity, 2 May 1851.

⁸⁷ ACACSA, Charities II (2) The Charities Scandal 1846-1851, *Report of the Abbey Parish Vestry Committee* (St Albans, 27 March 1851), p. 29.

Norrice's Charity the committee could report that after a delay of two years, £300 from the sale of charity land at Stratford had at last been invested in 3 ¼ per cent consols. Distributions had now begun again with £10 being shared between fifty-six widows in December 1849.⁸⁸

Because of this report there seems to have been intense pressure on Blagg and the trustees of the Skelton and Gawen Charities. The wider public could now see these resolutions which stated that the vestry held the trustees legally responsible for the loss of interest on accumulated funds being held by Blagg. But Blagg had refused to call meetings of the trustees to discuss the resolutions but he could not evade the consequences of his actions for much longer.⁸⁹

How was Blagg held to Account?

The first trust to act against Blagg was The Cross Keys Charity. By January 1847, Blagg had been replaced as the treasurer having apparently handed over all the money he held to the new treasurer but he continued as the clerk.⁹⁰ The very public nature of the events in the spring of 1846 in which the disbursement was first promised then cancelled and the intense interest of the Abbey vestry probably meant that Blagg's position was untenable.

In the case of The Gawen and Skelton Charities it was the prolonged efforts of the Abbey parish committees that eventually made the trustees take action against Blagg. In particular, the Rev. Nicholson, Rector of the Abbey church and chairman of the vestry committees, played a key role in recovering the money that Blagg owed. He ensured that a thorough investigation took place and his committee continued to put pressure on Blagg and the trustees over a period of around eight years. In January 1851 after a particularly intense line of questioning from Nicholson and his

⁸⁸ ACACSA, Charities II (2) The Charities Scandal 1846-1851, *Report of the Abbey Parish Vestry Committee* (St Albans, 27 March 1851), p. 30.

⁸⁹ ACACSA, Charities II (2) The Charities Scandal 1846-1851, *Report of the Abbey Parish Vestry Committee* (St Albans, 27 March 1851), pp. 23 and 25.

⁹⁰ ACASA, Account Book of the Cross Keys Charity 1793-1919, folio 76.

committee, Blagg stated his intention to resign as treasurer of the charities.⁹¹ Despite all the trustees of Gawen's and Skelton's Charities also being trustees of The Cross Keys Charities they were much slower to act. It was not until 13 May 1851, that the trustees met and drafted resolutions that declared that Blagg was no longer the treasurer and that he should immediately pay to them the money he owed. They also informed Blagg that a lawyer had been 'instructed to take proceedings necessary to compel such payment and to defend the Trustees from such claims existing against them.'⁹² The 'claims' that the trustees referred to came from the Abbey vestry who had made it clear that they would hold the trustees legally responsible for the money owed if Blagg did not repay it. It was this that finally forced the trustees into action and in July 1851 they filed a petition with Chancery which sought to protect themselves from any claims and to make Blagg solely answerable.⁹³

However, this by itself was not enough and it would be almost another two years before Blagg would pay. Richard Grove Lowe, a local attorney and former alderman who had opposed Blagg's appointment as town clerk, was involved in a protracted correspondence with Blagg as the trustees' legal representative. Through their letters Blagg consistently used delaying tactics to buy himself time, usually arguing that he needed to obtain legal advice. But by the end of May 1851 even he was admitting to Lowe that he would pay the money and that 'My time and attention are now devoted to finding the money to pay the balances in question'.⁹⁴ Having received Blagg's agreement to pay the money back, Lowe then turned his attention to getting Blagg to also pay the interest on the money, something the vestry had been calling for several months. By 10 June Blagg had also agreed to do this.⁹⁵ The affair carried on into 1852 with the Abbey vestry giving three further updates on

⁹¹ HALS, DE/BS/Q5, Report of Abbey Parish Vestry Resolution, 27 March 1851.

⁹² HALS, DE/BS/Q5, Resolution of a meeting of the Trustees of the Robert Skelton Charity, 13 May 1851 and Resolution of a meeting of the Trustees of the Thomas Gawen Charity, 13 May 1851.

⁹³ HALS, DE/BS/Q5, Petition to the Court of Chancery in the case of Skelton's Charity, 25 July 1851.

⁹⁴ HALS, DE/BS/Q5, Letter from T. W. Blagg to R. G. Lowe, 24 May 1851.

⁹⁵ HALS, DE/BS/Q5, Letter from T. W. Blagg to R. G. Lowe, 10 June 1851.

the situation.⁹⁶ Then on 8 February 1853, Blagg wrote to Lowe to inform him that that day he had paid £962. 18s. 8d into the Bank of England which included £227. 6s. 7d. in interest.⁹⁷ Gawen's and Skelton's charities would not finally be out of Chancery until 1855 and 1860 respectively.

The Consequences of the Charities Scandal

For the Abbey vestry, the most important outcome of the scandal was that it had established its position to question and oversee charity administration in the parish. At the end of its report in 1851 it stated:

It has been strongly contended that the **Vestry** has no legal or inherent right to interfere with or touch upon the Charities of the Town. That opinion may now be set at rest, for, irrespective of legal authority, the Committee have been shewn to possess a moral power superior and paramount to such assumed disabilities, and which in the present instance has proved and as it ever must and should do, not influential only but irresistible.⁹⁸

The scandal also represented a serious defeat to Blagg and his supporters. Just as the vestry was asserting its influence, Blagg was losing his. He was removed as the treasurer from all the charities which ended his ability to take any more money from them. He remained as clerk to the Cross Keys Charity but there is no record of Blagg having any role in the Gawen's and Skelton's charities after his resignation as treasurer in 1851. The scandal also resulted in regular meetings of the trustees of the Skelton Charity who had failed to meet for twenty-six years before 1851. It is likely that the whole affair concentrated the minds of all trustees and made them take their responsibilities far more seriously than they had done previously.⁹⁹ Because of the scandal, the poor of the parish were able to rely on the charities as a regular and

⁹⁶ ACACSA, Transcription of the Abbey Parish Vestry Minute Books 1829-1883, 5 Feb, 14 April and 5 Aug 1852.

⁹⁷ HALS, DE/BS/Q5, Letter from T. W. Blagg to R. G. Lowe, 8 Feb 1853.

⁹⁸ ACACSA, Transcription of the Abbey Parish Vestry Minute Books 1829-1883, 27 March 1851.

⁹⁹ See Appendices N and O for the names of the trustees of the Cross Keys, Gawen's and Skelton's Charities in 1846.

constant source of help. Probably for the first time in centuries the charities were run efficiently and there was to be no repetition of the embezzlements that had plagued them over several generations. Crucially, the funds of the charitable trusts would no longer be lost through entirely unnecessary and costly court action in Chancery. In the next chapter, we will see the scandal also had important implications for the larger scale power struggle over the fight to end corruption in the borough elections. The breach of trust that Blagg had committed acted as an incentive to his opponents that would end in the borough becoming disenfranchised.

Chapter 5

The Political Scandal

'I do believe that if his Satanic Majesty were to come forward as a candidate, and Mr. Edwards and Mr. Blagg were to advocate his cause, as I have no doubt they would, that he would be sure to be returned...'¹

Sir Richard Carden

For men of ambition, nineteenth century St Albans was good place to do business. The Abbey parish had a particularly high concentration of wealthy inhabitants of both independent means and those practising professions and trades.² The town's closeness to London would have made it an attractive seat for wealthy men seeking to gain election to parliament and this would have fueled the bribery and corruption of the borough elections. As a solicitor Blagg would have been aware of how far he could push the boundaries so that he could avoid prosecution. This chapter will begin by examining why Blagg and other election agents were involved in bribery and corruption and how he avoided prosecution. Large amounts of money were needed to bribe the electorate and Blagg became involved in the embezzlement of a wealthy brewer in the town. The libel case in which the details came to light will be explored as an example of how the corruption in elections affected other areas of life in the town. Despite Blagg's best efforts his bid for political influence came to an end with the 1851 parliamentary enquiries into bribery in the borough and the subsequent disfranchisement of the borough in 1852. Using the findings of the enquiry, the chapter will conclude with an account of how Blagg and his associates managed the corruption of the electorate.

¹ ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Thursday, November 6, 1851; Issue 26489. *British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 2 Feb 2018.

² Goose, Nigel., *Population, economy and family*, p. 54.

What Motivated Blagg?

Being town clerk came with an expectation by the Earl of Verulam and the corporation that he would return their choice of candidate at the borough elections. After the end of direct aristocratic patronage in the borough he was the natural choice to be the Conservative party election agent. The drive for political power and influence were the driving factors behind Blagg's actions. Not only did he play a key role in manipulating the borough's elections he also tried to intervene in other constituencies. In 1840 Blagg tried and failed to get himself registered as a voter in Brighton.³ The next year he was trying to register in Middlesex prompting a newspaper to report 'Thomas Ward Blagg, the Tory Town Clerk of St Albans, who has year after year been defeated in his attempts to create fictitious votes in more counties than one, was struck off.'⁴ Within the borough Blagg demonstrated traits of behaviour that verged on the dictatorial. Blagg led a group of supporters known as the 'Rough Committee' who would be used to intimidate his opponents. At a meeting of the town council in 1845 he physically removed the mayor from his chair by picking him up by his collar. He was described as '(on this, as on most other occasions in this Borough, as acting as Mayor, Corporation, and Town Clerk,)...'.⁵ Simply put, Blagg wanted to be in control of the town so that he could behave how he wished. However, this desire for political influence was restricted by a lack of money so he sought wealthy men who could afford to bribe the electorate. In return he could navigate the power structures within the borough to enable them to get elected. According to Blagg he does not appear to have made much money by orchestrating the bribing of the electorate. During the second parliamentary enquiry into bribery in the borough he claimed that he had been paid at only three elections

³ COURTS OF REGISTRATION. *The Standard* (London, England), Friday, October 2, 1840; Issue 5082. *British Library Newspapers, Part II: 1800-1900*. Consulted 12 Jan 2017.

⁴ "Domestic". *The Bury and Norwich Post and East Anglian* (Bury St Edmunds, England), Wednesday Oct. 13, 1841. Issue 3094. *British Library Newspapers, Part II: 1800-1900*. consulted 11 Jan 2017.

⁵ LATE MEETING AT ST. ALBAN'S. *The Hertford Mercury and Reformer*, (Hertford, England), Saturday 4 January 1845.

amounting to £850, though it is unlikely this was an accurate figure.⁶ As we shall see later there were other rewards available to election agents.

While Blagg held an influential and powerful position he was not a wealthy man. Table 11 gives some idea of what Blagg could earn but this does not include his earnings as a solicitor. In 1849, it was stated that the solicitor J. S. Story had an annual income of £1,000, but he was also running a bank.⁷ Based on this an estimated annual income of £500 for Blagg's work as a solicitor would seem to be reasonable. Based on this assumption Blagg may have had an income of around £1,000 per year. St Albans had many solicitors so Blagg would have had much competition to contend with. In 1838, there were at least fifteen attorneys practicing, all in need of clients.⁸ Blagg was also protective of his business interests. In March 1851, just as Blagg was being made to accept responsibility for the money he had embezzled from the charities he took his former clerk William Balcombe Simpson to the Court of Chancery. Simpson had set up business from his home in St Peters Street and was practising as an attorney. He had been given his articles by Blagg on the promise that he would not practice as a solicitor within fifteen miles of St Albans and had signed a bond with a £2,000 fine if he broke these terms.⁹ It is not known if Blagg's petition was successful but Simpson is recorded as practising as a solicitor in St Peters Street in 1855.¹⁰ Blagg may have been motivated to raise the petition in revenge for Simpson sitting on the Abbey vestry committee that investigated Blagg's embezzlement of the charities which reported its findings in January 1851. Blagg's petition might also have been raised on political grounds. Simpson was a Liberal agent for the 'Third' party and a rival of Blagg's. Simpson had his revenge when he

⁶ ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Thursday, November 6, 1851; Issue 26489. *BLN, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 3 Feb 2018.

⁷ "COURT OF BANKRUPTCY", Basinghall-street, Dec.10." *Times* (London, England) 11 Dec. 1849: 8. *TDA*. Web. Consulted 23 Sept 2017.

⁸ *Hertfordshire Directory*, 1838, p. 53.

⁹ TNA, C14/1215/B205 Blagg v Simpson 1851.

¹⁰ *Kelly's Post Office Directory of Hertfordshire*, 1855, p. 231.

beat the corporation candidates in the 1855 council elections, breaking Blagg's hold on local politics.

Table 11: Indication of Thomas Blagg's Income Excluding Earnings from Private Solicitors Practice

Year	Source of income	Amount Earned
1840	Town clerk's salary	£50. 0s. 0d.
1840	Professional business Gawen's Charity	£16. 3s. 8d.
1847	Salary from Cross Keys, Gawen & Skelton Charities	£14. 2s. 10d.
1851	Charges for legal work as town clerk	£437. 45s. 9d.
	Total	£519. 11s. 6d.

Sources: ACASA, 1839-42 Sundry bills and lists and administration, Charities II (2) The Charities Scandal 1846-1852, Report of Committee on Abbey Parish Charities 27/03/1851, Account Book of the Cross Keys Charity 1793-1919, HALS, SBR/1708 Town Clerk's Diary 1851.

When Blagg died in 1874, he was not in a strong financial position. His estate is recorded as being worth less than £2,000.¹¹ On top of this, just twelve days after he died his wife's family took Blagg's estate to the Court of Chancery to recover money owed to them. Blagg had borrowed £574. 11s. 0d. from them to fund the remortgaging of his property on the High Street but he had defaulted on the repayment in August 1874. The petition states that Blagg 'was also indebted to divers other persons in various sums of money'.¹² His wife had to sell her house on the High Street to pay them back.¹³

It was estimated that it cost around £6,000 to fund an election campaign in the borough in 1841, £4,000 of which would have been given in bribes.¹⁴ Given the costs involved with bribing the electorate compared with Blagg's income, it is clear that becoming an MP would have been beyond Blagg's means. Blagg also claimed that

¹¹ Will of Thomas Ward Blagg 16 Jan 1875.

¹² TNA, C16/1022/M7 Merriman v Blagg 12 Jan 1875.

¹³ See Appendix P.

¹⁴ HCPPPO, Report of The Commissioners to Inquire into the Existence of Bribery in the Borough of Saint Alban's; Together with The Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index, PP. 1431, p. x, 1852.

the reason he could control the Conservative party within the borough was because he covered the losses of his prospective MPs.¹⁵ But the level of his income would seem to bring that claim in to doubt. If it is true then it may also help to explain his motivation in carrying out embezzlements. As a solicitor Blagg was also on the lower rungs of the professions and his occupation would not have allowed him many opportunities for social advancement. However, as the town clerk and Conservative party agent he would have had access to a far greater social circle which brought him into contact with the aristocracy. His position also allowed him to create a personal power base among the people of St Albans. But his professional and personal ambitions meant he had to take risks to obtain the money he required. His position within society and his popularity, and contemporary attitudes all help to explain how he managed to avoid prosecution.

Thomas Blagg, Keeping on the Right Side of the Law.

George Robb has used the term 'white-collar' crime to describe offences committed by the middle-classes but he has extended its meaning to include 'breaches of trust' and 'behaviour widely held to be unethical and immoral as well as that which violates the letter of the law.'¹⁶ Clive Emsley has observed, the Victorian obsession with the threat from the 'criminal classes' led to a blinkered approach and a skewed perspective of who should be classed a criminal. There was an awareness that acts of 'immoral profiteering' were committed by members of the middle class but the perpetrators were the exception rather than the rule.¹⁷ This explanation probably goes a long way in explaining how Blagg was viewed by his peers in St Albans. In Blagg's case there is also the political motivation to take into account which may have further blurred the lines of how his behaviour was perceived. Both Rob Sindall

¹⁵ ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Thursday, November 6, 1851; Issue 26489. *British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 3 Feb 2018.

¹⁶ Robb, George., *White-Collar Crime in Modern England Financial Fraud and Business Morality, 1845-1929* (Cambridge, 2002), p.4.

¹⁷ Emsley, Clive., *Crime and Society in England 1750-1900*, (Harlow, 1987), p. 49 and 124.

and George Robb have agreed that a criminal class did not exist and that there was more middle-class crime than working-class offences. However, Sindall came to his conclusion by analysing recorded crime whereas Robb has argued that the true extent of middle-class crime can only be found by looking beyond the official records.¹⁸ In Blagg's case we know of much of his behaviour through either indirectly related court cases or in situations where he was guaranteed immunity from prosecution if he cooperated with the authorities. However, in the case of the charities much of what we know comes from the Abbey vestry investigations which had no legal sanctions to offer. In contrast, middle-class crime was carried out behind closed doors or in plain sight by a clerk at his desk.¹⁹ For Sindall, embezzlement was one of the defining features of middle-class crime.²⁰ As Blagg used embezzlement to fund bribery it is important to understand its extent in Victorian society.

Embezzlement

Because of the development of the financial and business sector, embezzlement was an increasingly common crime in nineteenth-century England. Embezzlement can be defined as 'Thefts committed by clerks, servants, or other employees of goods belonging to, or in the security of their employers'.²¹ However, as a crime it only began to be prosecuted by the courts in the decade after Blagg's embezzlements which took place in the 1840s.²² Nationally, embezzlement was a huge problem. In 1840, the directors of the Commercial Bank of England embezzled the bank's assets causing losses of £2 million. Two years later the Bank of Manchester's manager took £1 million. During the 1850s, the Northern Railway lost £240,000 because of the

¹⁸ Robb, George., *White-Collar Crime*, p.8 and Sindall, Robb., 'Middle-Class Crime in Nineteenth-Century England', *Criminal Justice History*, Vol IV. 1983, pp. 23-40, p. 25.

¹⁹ Robb, George., *White-Collar Crime*, p.8

²⁰ Sindall, Robb., 'Middle-Class Crime', p. 30.

²¹ <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/static/crimes.jsp>. Consulted on 13 Nov 2016.

²² Sindall, Robb., 'Middle-Class Crime', p. 31.

embezzlements by the company registrar.²³ Depositors in St Albans suffered losses from embezzlements which led to several bank failures during the 1830s and 1840s. In 1835, the Rector of the Abbey church, the Reverend Henry Small, embezzled £24,000 from the Hertfordshire Savings Bank he was manager of and almost a further £9,260 from private individuals, many of them from the poor working class.²⁴ George Sturt and his partner the attorney Edward Gibson embezzled £7,500 and £2,568 respectively from the depositors of the St Albans and Herts Bank, which failed on 2 December 1847.²⁵ As we shall see, £1,275 of Sturt's total was used to cover his legal costs defending himself against a libel case brought against him by Thomas Blagg.²⁶

In December 1848, The St Albans Bank, owned by the solicitor John Samuel Story, also failed. Story had been spending twice his yearly income and owed his creditors £11,137, of which they eventually received only 8s. in the pound.²⁷ Sturt's, Gibson's and Story's cases are recorded not because of their embezzlements but because of the bankruptcy that came with the failure of their banks after they committed the embezzlements. That said, the judge summoning up Story's case expressed the standards of behaviour that were expected from someone in his position and could have equally applied to Blagg:

the man who receives the money of his customers as a sacred trust to be repaid at call, and the man who in course of business and in the fullness of that confidence which subsists between attorney and client [...] contract a greater degree of responsibility and obligation than the ordinary trader. They obtain such funds in confidence; they violate that confidence; they receive moneys as trustees; they break their trust; they are unfaithful stewards; they withheld that which it was their duty to pay over: offences of such a nature

²³ Robb, George., *White-Collar Crime*, pp. 60 and 51.

²⁴ Parker, Jack., *Nothing for Nothing*, p. 55.

²⁵ Parker, Jack., *Nothing for Nothing*, pp. 37-38.

²⁶ "COURT OF BANKRUPTCY, Basinghall-Street, April 17." *Times* (London, England) Apr 18, 1850:7. TDA. Web. Consulted 27 Nov 2016.

²⁷ "COURT OF BANKRUPTCY", Basinghall-street, Dec.10." *Times* (London, England) 11 Dec. 1849:8. TDA. Web. Consulted 23 Sept 2017.

must, with a consideration for the interest of the public, be punished with severity.²⁸

Endowment charities also suffered from embezzlements by their upper and middle-class trustees. At Berkhamstead Grammar School, even though the school was educating no boys, the master still paid himself and his young son while the school building fell into disrepair and the charity's money was wasted on legal bills and other costs. Additionally, the trustees kept large sums of the charity's money for themselves.²⁹ Similarly, in 1849 the Earl of Guildford was found to have been keeping £1,200 per year from the hospital of St Cross in Winchester.³⁰ The funds of the Abbey parish's The Jane Nicholas Charity were embezzled during 1822. Moses Wilson, a trustee of the charity, absconded to France with all the charity's money amounting to £937.8.1d.³¹ This theft prevented the charity from disbursing any payments for eighteen years until 1840, leading to a loss to the poor of three parishes of £270. 0s. 0d.³² Wilson's wife Maria was eventually able to repay the charity £950 in 1843 from money inherited from her mother's will.³³ These examples show how common embezzlement was in the country and in St Albans during the 1830s and 1840s. Whether you were rich or poor in nineteenth century St Albans, there was much to fear from the actions of middle-class men. Blagg's embezzlements also had serious implications. Not only did they threatened to undermine local institutions and power structures, they caused significant financial harm to individuals that sought to expose him or were targeted by him for their wealth. The case of Blagg v Sturt is a prime example.

²⁸ "COURT OF BANKRUPTCY", Basinghall-street, Dec.10." *Times* (London, England) 11 Dec. 1849:8. TDA. Web. Consulted 23 Sept 2017.

²⁹ See Fisherman, J, James., Charity Accountability and Reform in Nineteenth-Century England: The Case of the Charity Commission, *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, vol 80. Issue 2, 2005, pp. 723-776, p. 740

³⁰ Owen, p. 196.

³¹ <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid>, consulted on 16 Nov. 2016.

³² ACASA, Charities II (2) The Charities Scandal 1846-1852, Report of Committee on Abbey Parish Charities, 21 May 1846.

³³ See Kilvington, F. I. Report on the Charities, Archives of the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban, Charities Box I (1), 1990 and HCPPO, *Twenty-Seventh Report of the Commissioners for enquiring concerning Charities*, 1834, PP. 225, pp.196-198.

Blagg v Sturt 1846

In January 1843, George Musket's Bank of St Albans failed when he died from heart failure. The bank had largely been kept going by Thomas Blagg who was Musket's professional advisor and had passed thousands of pounds in embezzled money through the bank's books. Despite Blagg's efforts, by 1841 the bank had liabilities of £19,500 and his London bank refused to lend Musket any more money.³⁴ Musket had been one of the borough's MPs since 1837 and he had used the bank to help finance his election campaigns and to keep his businesses afloat which had suffered from the economic crisis of 1838-42.³⁵ However, once he began to run out of money and could no longer afford the bribes his support collapsed and he received the lowest number of votes cast in the 1841 election. His unfortunate creditors only received 2s. 1/4d. in the pound and then not until 1851.³⁶

During the spring and summer of 1846 allegations were made by George Sturt, the former clerk of Musket's bank, about where Blagg had obtained the money from to keep Musket's bank afloat. The resulting court cases were probably the closest that Blagg came to being prosecuted. Blagg faced accusations that he had embezzled from the Abbey charities and from a local brewer Thomas Kinder. Two friends of Blagg's, a nephew and uncle team named Richard Gutteridge and David Hutson, who helped Blagg during elections had for several years been clerks to Kinder. Kinder had raised queries with Gutteridge over discrepancies in his accounts and he promptly went missing. After Hutson left Kinder's employment he had also come under suspicion. Both men were separately brought to trial in April 1846. Blagg defended the nephew Gutteridge, before the Liberty magistrates and the uncle, Hutson, was put on trial before the borough magistrates and was defended by

³⁴ Parker, Jack., *'Nothing for Nothing'*, p. 34.

³⁵ Habgood-Everett, Judith., *'George Alfred Musket, 1788-1843'*, p. 29.

³⁶ See Parker, Jack., *'Nothing for Nothing'*, p. 33-35.

a friend of Blagg's. Blagg himself acted in his role as the clerk to the borough magistrates, in effect their legal advisor. Hutson was committed for trial but then given bail.³⁷

There was a real danger that Blagg's multiple legal roles on all sides and his involvement in the embezzlement could result in a miscarriage of justice. This caused Sturt to write several letters to the Home Secretary Sir John Graham to make him aware of the situation. Sturt revealed that Blagg had received thousands of pounds of Kinder's embezzled money from Gutteridge and Hutson, and that he had also embezzled the money of several of the Abbey parish charities which he had used to keep the bank afloat. In addition, the magistrates involved in prosecuting the cases, J. S. Story and R. G. Lowe were also trustees of the affected charities and Story was also a Conservative alderman and Lowe was a Conservative councillor. Sturt was a credible witness would have had first-hand knowledge about the amount of money that Blagg was putting into the bank, and where it was coming from.

On receiving the letters from Sturt, Graham promptly notified the borough magistrates, who in turn informed the mayor of St Albans. Unfortunately, the Mayor Robert Kentish, was related by marriage to both Gutteridge and Hutson and Blagg enjoyed the strong support of both the magistrates and the corporation.³⁸ The disclosure of Sturt's letters resulted in the corporation suing Sturt for libel. However, at the Court of Queen's bench Lord Denham dismissed the case because the original copies of the letters had not been presented before the court. Instead he called for:

the corporation to institute upon their own account an inquiry into the allegations of corruption in the administration of justice, and of the charitable institutions of St Albans, and to prosecute it as fully as they were able to do.³⁹

³⁷ "Summer Assizes", *The Times*, (London, England), Monday, Jul 13, 1846:7. TDA. Web. 20 Nov. 2017.

³⁸ "Home Circuit Hertford", *The Times*, (London, England), Saturday, Jul 13, 1846:7. TDA. Web. 20 Nov. 2017.

³⁹ 'Court of Queen's Bench, Westminster, June 11, *The Times*, (London, England), Friday, Jun 12, 1846:7. TDA. Web. 20 Nov. 2017.

Instead of prosecuting Blagg the corporation offered 'the Mayor and Justices their full support and assistance in vindicating them in discharge of their public duties'.⁴⁰ It is clear from this statement that the attack on Blagg's impartiality in his legal roles was the most important issue for the corporation and that the matter of the embezzlements was not the main issue. In the light of this support, Blagg then took Sturt to court at the Hertford Assizes that July and sued him for libel. Blagg was represented by The Earl of Verulam's eldest son: the old network was supporting one of its own. It is clear from the reports in the *Hertford Mercury and Reformer* that the magistrates seriously discussed if they could remove Blagg from his position as town clerk, but they decided they did not have that power. The trial centered around the alleged conflict of interests brought about by the various legal positions Blagg held, the embezzlement of the Abbey charities does not seem to have been examined. Both Story and Lowe gave evidence that Blagg had conducted himself honorably and their evidence along with the production of Sturt's original letters seem to have swayed the case as Blagg was cleared and was awarded £100 in damages but as we have seen Sturt eventually incurred legal bills of over £1,000, which he paid by embezzling the bank he managed in St Albans.⁴¹ The outcome of the libel case proved to be a popular decision among some of the people of St Albans. reported that:

on Mr. Blagg's arrival near St Alban's, he was met by a large number of inhabitants estimated at 1,500, and escorted into Town, the horses were taken from the carriage, which conveyed him-self and friends, and he was drawn round the Town in triumph.⁴²

These celebrations are reminiscent of the festivities that accompanied Blagg's win over Edward Langridge in the vestry poll of 1835 and is further evidence of Blagg's popularity. It is likely this gathering was a deliberately orchestrated political show of

⁴⁰ Gibbs, A. E., Corporation Records, pp. 208-209.

⁴¹ HALS, MF6/16 *The Hertfordshire Mercury*, Saturday 3 July 1847.

⁴² HALS, MF6/16 *The Hertfordshire Mercury*, Saturday 18 July 1847.

strength from Blagg's supporters. It would have sent a clear message to his opponents that there was a price to pay for taking him on. It also shows that a significant part of the population of the town did not view Blagg's behaviour as being either immoral, corrupt or illegal. But the evidence against Blagg was damning. During the trial, it emerged that Gutteridge and Hutson had been in possession of two boxes containing many bills of payment and legal documents, found to be traceable to Blagg. These represented thousands of pounds' worth of transactions from Kinder's embezzled money and very probably the charity's money also. However, the contents of these boxes were never examined in court. Giving evidence, Henry Edwards, formerly a clerk at Muskett's Bank and Blagg's old friend and collaborator in the bribery of the borough elections, admitted that Blagg had on at least two occasions given him cash totaling £300 in exchange for bills at the bank. Blagg then paid these bills into a bank in Luton and claimed the money, so falsely inflating the bank's assets.⁴³ It is these practices which provide the evidence for Blagg's 'New Corruption'.

However, one outcome of the reporting of the libel trials would have been that prominent figures within the town would have gained knowledge of Blagg's involvement in the embezzlement of the Abbey charities. The Rev. Nicholson, one of the magistrates in the Liberty court which tried Hutson, was also chairman of the Abbey vestry. Similarly, Richard Grove Lowe was the prosecuting council against Gutteridge. Both men would play a leading role in making Blagg repay the money he embezzled from the charities. Blagg's embezzlements were motivated by the need to buy the electorate of St Albans so we will now turn our attention to Blagg's involvement in electoral bribery and corruption.

⁴³ Parker, Jack., *'Nothing for Nothing'*, p. 33-35.

Bribery and Corruption

Defining terms such as 'bribery' and 'corruption' can be difficult. Not only do meanings change over time, they also meant different things to different people during the same historical period and in the same geographical location. Giving evidence at the parliamentary inquiry into bribery during the St Albans borough election of 1850, Thomas Blagg stated that 'Many respectable tradesmen have been known to take these guineas who would have been shocked at the imputation of having been bribed.'⁴⁴ But the corrupting nature of bribing voters was clearly described by one witness who stated that 'it was difficult to trace political parties at St. Albans, they were so merged in money matters'.⁴⁵ Yet despite the widespread practice of bribing voters in St Albans, there were a significant number who did not accept any money and a further unknown number who were opposed to the wholesale bribery associated with the elections. Thomas Blagg estimated that out of the 483 registered voters in the 1850 Borough elections 308 voters had taken bribes while 175 did not.⁴⁶

Mark Knights has recently argued that 'Today we tend to think of corruption as bribery or the abuse of public office for private gain', a serious criminal offence. During the nineteenth century, however, bribery came under common law and was most commonly prosecuted for during parliamentary elections.⁴⁷ As we have seen earlier, the Great Reform Act 1832 failed to end corruption in parliamentary elections. Between 1832 and 1852 there were 130 petitions to Westminster which contested election results in England and Wales.⁴⁸ Examples of election corruption can be found across the country. In 1832, the Earl of Warwick spent £8,000 bribing

⁴⁴ HCPPO, Report of The Commissioners to Inquire into the Existence of Bribery in the Borough of Saint Alban's; Together with The Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index, PP. 1431, p. x, 1852.

⁴⁵ "The close of the St Albans Inquiry will be as." *Times* (London, England) 10 Nov. 1851: 4. TDA. Web. 5 Dec 2016.

⁴⁶ HCPPO, *Report of The Commissioners to Inquire into the Existence of Bribery in the Borough of Saint Alban's*, PP. 1431, p. ix, 1852.

⁴⁷ Knight, Mark. *Old Corruption; What British history can tell us*, p. 3.

⁴⁸ See Hoppen, Theodore, K., 'Roads to Democracy', p. 561, but Hawkins puts the figure at 85 petitions between 1832-52, see Hawkins, Angus., *Victorian Political Culture: 'habits of Heart and Mind.'* (Oxford, 2015), p. 166.

voters. At Hull in 1837, voters were treated to a day trip and plied with meals and large amounts of drink, while in the 1852 election in Barnstaple over a third of votes were bought.⁴⁹ These examples provide evidence that the Westminster legislators were ahead of much of the electorates' views regarding bribery and corruption. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s parliaments began to assemble the legislative framework for investigating cases of corruption in elections. This drive to fight corruption came to St Albans in 1841 when for the first time the result of a borough election became the subject of a parliamentary enquiry.

The 1841 St Albans Parliamentary Election Committee

During 1841, there were two borough elections in St Albans. The first, held on 9 February, was a by-election caused by the Conservative MP Lord Edward Grimston (son of the Earl of Verulam) standing down to take holy orders. The second, held on 29 June, was a general election in which George Muskett lost his seat. The result of the first election became the subject of a parliamentary committee investigation when the defeated Conservative candidate Benjamin Bond Cabbell standing on a 'Purity' or anti-corruption ticket was defeated by the Liberal candidate, Lord Listowel, whose agent had bribed the electorate.⁵⁰ The petitioners were Cabbell's proposers the Conservatives alderman John Samuel Story and councillor Thomas Foreman Gape.⁵¹ This was an important moment locally and nationally as at the same time other parliamentary committees were investigating allegations of bribery in elections at Canterbury and Walsall. This enquiry and the election that caused it represented the first serious attempt at taking on bribery in the borough elections and it provides evidence that the corporation and other elements within the borough were beginning to react against the domination of the town's election agents.

⁴⁹ Hoppen, Theodore, K., 'Roads to Democracy', p. 560.

⁵⁰ Cabbell had also contested the seat in 1837 and would eventually win it 1846.

⁵¹ HCPPO, *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence Taken Before the St Alban's, Canterbury and Walsall Election Committees*, 5 April 1841. PP 219.

However, the investigation was seriously flawed in its ability to get to the truth. Lacking the powers that the Commissioners were to enjoy in the second enquiry of 1851, the 1841 committee was prevented by lawyers acting for the witnesses from asking them direct questions that would have incriminated them. This was in stark contrast to the later enquiry in which lawyers were denied any active role in the proceedings. Due to these restrictions, it was never definitively established if Henry Edwards or Richard Webster, a doctor in the town, were the Liberal election agents. Testimony from several witnesses stated that they had seen both Edwards and Webster going to London, suggesting that they both been trying to secure Listowel for themselves.

No evidence of wholesale bribery was uncovered with most of the evidence centering around an extraordinary incident which occurred during the election as a man named Robert Adams went to vote. Just before he took the bribery oath, he handed a small package to the town's mayor and declared that he had been given £12 by Webster to vote for Lord Listowel. Adams confession may have been prompted by a letter signed by eight prominent Conservative voters which they gave to the mayor on polling day. This was read publicly by him at the poll and it requested that every voter be made to take the bribery oath.⁵² Other evidence emerged that Webster had given another voter money not to vote for Cabell.⁵³

Due to the restrictions placed on the Committee and the attention being paid to Webster, Thomas Blagg faced no serious questioning about any role he had in bribing the electorate. His case was also helped because he had been supporting and canvassing for Cabbell, the 'Purity' candidate, which may have deflected suspicion from him. The worst that could be attributed to Blagg was that he was instructed to alter the way he kept the poll-book for future elections as it was strongly suspected that he had altered them before they went to the printer.⁵⁴ It would take until the

⁵²"Borough of St. Alban's Election." *Times* (London, England), Wednesday, Feb 10, 1841: 5. TDA. Web. Consulted on 2 Feb. 2018.

⁵³ HCPPO, *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence Taken Before the St Alban's, Canterbury and Walsall Election Committees*, 5 April 1841. PP 219, p. 74.

⁵⁴ See above, pp. 3-5.

1851 enquiry before Blagg admitted to spending £1,000 and Edwards confirmed that he had spent £3,000 on bribes during the election. Just as the Committee were beginning to probe deeper into the allegations and were going to call Lord Grimston to give evidence, the proceedings were abruptly ended. The report of the Committee's findings stated that the petitioners had 'declined to proceed further with the case while the Committee were in the course of investigating grave charges of bribery alleged to have been practiced at the late election...'⁵⁵ There is the strong suspicion here that as soon as Lord Grimston had been implicated in the proceedings that pressure had been applied to Story and Gape by the Conservative party hierarchy within the borough to withdraw their petition. It would take another ten years before parliament would give its enquiries sufficient legal powers to be able to effectively investigate allegations of electoral corruption. When they did eventually receive these, events in St Albans would prove to be a catalyst for change that would have national implications.

The 1850 St Albans By-Election

On Christmas Eve 1850, the borough went to the polls in a by-election caused by the death of one of the borough's two MPs, the Liberal Alexander Raphael. After gaining the consent of the local Tory leadership, Thomas Blagg and Henry Edwards formed a 'compact' in which Blagg promised not to put up a Conservative candidate in return for Edwards having agreed in the 1847 election not to oppose the Conservative candidate George Repton. Blagg had paid Edwards £250 for his cooperation in 1847 and there were rumours that this time Blagg had received a payment, something which Blagg publicly denied at the poll.⁵⁶ After hearing about Raphael's death, Edwards had quickly found a Liberal candidate, a wealthy Quaker chemist from London named Jacob Bell. Having received payments totalling £2,500 from Bell, Edwards set about securing the electorate through bribery. There was now

⁵⁵ See above, p. x.

⁵⁶ ST. ALBAN'S ELECTION. *The Standard* (London, England), Tuesday, December 24, 1850; Issue 8227. *BLN, Part II: 1800-1900*. Consulted 2 Feb 2018.

the danger of an uncontested election. But within the borough there existed an established system to prevent this eventuality in the form of the 'Third Party'. This party had been established by a surgeon in the town named Richard Webster after the 1832 Reform Act but by 1850 he had died and his role had been taken over by his son Theophilus Webster. Webster was a Liberal supporter but he would bring in Whig or Tory candidates as the situation demanded. Bribes were always paid by Webster as his intention was to prevent the borough elections being controlled by other election agents.

At this point, the interests of the 'Third Party' and of both anti-bribery Liberal and Conservative voters within the borough coincided and an Alderman from London, Sir Richard Carden, was approached. A delegation from the town, told him that because of bribery 'they were the laughing- stock of all other counties and boroughs and indeed the whole of England.'⁵⁷ They said they wanted a candidate who would not accept bribes and showed a document to Carden signed by forty-five leading inhabitants of the borough promising to use their influence to ensure that no money would be paid for his votes. On this basis Carden eventually agreed to stand as a Conservative on a 'Purity' or anti-corruption ticket, making it very clear that he would not pay any bribe money to obtain the votes of the electorate.⁵⁸ The scene was now set for a struggle between two sides who both drew support from across party lines. The divide was marked between those that supported bribery and those who opposed it.

Leading religious figures within the town seem to have played an important role in Carden's campaign. He was proposed as a candidate by Francis Searancke, described in reports as a Conservative Church man and seconded by councillor

⁵⁷ ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Thursday, November 6, 1851; Issue 26489. *BLN, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 3 Feb 2018.

⁵⁸ As above.

William Bennett, a Dissenting Liberal.⁵⁹ All the town's clergymen voted for Carden.⁶⁰ A significant change had also occurred in the attitude of the town council. In a very public sign of support, ten of the borough's sixteen councillors walked arm in arm in front of Carden's carriage on his arrival in St Albans. While there was a definite move among the middle classes against corruption, out canvassing Carden quickly found that many of the poorer voters he approached expected to be paid for their vote. After explaining his belief of 'Purity' in elections to one poor voter, Carden was told:

It is all very well, sir and I approve of your principle. I have always been a Conservative; but look around this room, I have got these little children, and I am seeking to get them bread, I should like to support you, but how can I resist a £5 note when I can benefit my family?⁶¹

This example goes a long way to help to explain why Blagg enjoyed the support of the poor in the town. It was also reported that the town's pawn broker was experiencing an upturn in business from the poor buying back their possessions and that landlords were surprised by the level of rents arrears that were being settled.⁶² Carden was quickly finding out that he could not win an election in the borough without bribing, but he kept to his principles despite being aware that Edwards and to a lesser extent Blagg were securing votes for Jacob Bell with bribes. The extent to which bribery had become the dominant feature in this election was demonstrated on polling day. A placard issued by the mayor and a councillor was paraded around the town warning that:

⁵⁹ ST. ALBAN'S ELECTION. *The Standard* (London, England), Tuesday, December 24, 1850; Issue 8227. *BLN, Part II: 1800-1900*. Consulted 2 Feb 2018.

⁶⁰ ST. ALBAN'S ELECTION COMMITTEE. *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Saturday, April 5, 1851; Issue 26316. *BLN, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 2 Feb 2018.

⁶¹ ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Thursday, November 6, 1851; Issue 26489. *BLN, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 3 Feb 2018.

⁶² PROVINCIAL INTELLIGENCE. *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser* (Exeter, England), Thursday, January 2, 1851; Issue 4439. *BLN, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 2 Feb 2018.

We the undersigned, being electors for the borough of St. Alban's, hereby give notice that Jacob Bell Esq., has by himself and his agents been guilty of bribery and treating, both before and during this election for the borough of St. Alban's, and is thereby incapacitated from sitting in this present Parliament; and that votes given for the said Jacob Bell will be thrown away.

John Horner Rumball

William Bennett⁶³

At the poll itself there was much talk of the bribery. Blagg publicly denied he had been paid for his services by Bell, but admitted influencing the vote of the local police. He also claimed that he had intended to remain neutral in the election but had voted for Bell to register his disdain for Carden's principles. Bell was accused of putting down £2,500 to pay for bribes, while Carden declared that in contrast he had turned down the chance to buy the seat for £2,000.⁶⁴

The result of the election was predictable and Bell was elected with 226 votes to Carden's 119. However, as he went to place his vote for Carden, Rumball, the mayor, said to Bell:

if you come into town and work with dirty tools, you must take the consequences. I am not in the habit of barking at elections, therefore when I do move I bite, and I tell you that you shall not be suffered to retain your seat as member for St. Alban's.⁶⁵

Similarly, after the result was announced Carden warned Bell that he would be using all legal means available to him to ensure the decision was reversed.⁶⁶

True to their word a petition requesting an enquiry into the bribery of the 1850 election was sent to the House of Commons by Carden's proposers Rumball and

⁶³ ST. ALBAN'S ELECTION. *The Ipswich Journal* (London, England), Saturday, December 28, 1850; Issue 5825. *BLN, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 2 Feb 2018.

⁶⁴ ST. ALBAN'S ELECTION. *The Standard* (London, England), Tuesday, December 24, 1850; Issue 8227. *BLN, Part II: 1800-1900*. Consulted 2 Feb 2018.

⁶⁵ ST. ALBAN'S ELECTION. *The Ipswich Journal* (London, England), Saturday, December 28, 1850; Issue 5825. *BLN, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 2 Feb 2018.

⁶⁶ PROVINCIAL INTELLIGENCE. *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser* (Exeter, England), Thursday, January 2, 1851; Issue 4439. *BLN, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 2 Feb 2018.

Bennet. Because of the enquiries that came from this petition, the 1850 election was to be the last parliamentary election in the borough for thirty-five years.

The First 1851 Parliamentary Enquiry into Bribery in St Albans

The first parliamentary enquiry into bribery in St Albans opened at the House of Commons on 31 March 1851. But from the outset there were attempts to obstruct the Commissioners by preventing witnesses from appearing. Warrants were issued in the name of the Speaker of the House of Commons to arrest the witnesses that had failed to attend but Edwards and Blagg were determined to obstruct the enquiry in any way they could. Edwards either removed witnesses to his farm near Watford or arranged for them to go to Boulogne. Blagg meanwhile prevented two witnesses from attending parliament by rushing to Watford station to bring them back to St Albans. Blagg was lucky not to be arrested as he was accused by the committee of holding the House of Commons in contempt and they called for him to be punished.⁶⁷ Edwards was not so fortunate. He was jailed for lying to the committee and for refusing to co-operate with them.⁶⁸ Incomplete as it was, it was clear from the evidence that was heard that bribery had been carried out so Edwards was held at Newgate while arrangements were made to continue with the enquiries. The whole tone of this first enquiry was marked by the reluctance of witnesses to tell the truth. Blagg accompanied Sarah Atkyns, the wife of one of the missing witnesses, to the hearing and had clearly told her not to cooperate with the committee. On being questioned, she denied all knowledge of her husband's actions in the election. When one of the missing witnesses did appear, he lied about receiving bribes but others had seen him in the Cross Keys Inn with 'a hand-full of gold' which he used to 'treat all round'.⁶⁹ However, by 15 April the committee had decided that as several key

⁶⁷ "Vice-Chancellors' Courts, Wednesday, March 5", *Times* (London, England), 6 Mar 1851: 6. TDA. Web. Consulted 27 Nov. 2016.

⁶⁸ "Considering the belief notoriously existing on the." *Times* (London, England) 6 Nov. 1851: 4. TDA. Web. Consulted on 3 Dec: 2016.

⁶⁹ ST. ALBAN'S ELECTION COMMITTEE. *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Tuesday, April 8, 1851; Issue 26318. *British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 2 Feb 2018.

witnesses could not be found then the enquiry must end and they had no choice but to declare Jacob Bell as elected.⁷⁰ But with Edwards still in Newgate prison and the authorities trying to track down the witnesses that had absconded, this would not be the end of the matter.

The Second 1851 Parliamentary Enquiry into Bribery in St Albans

The second enquiry opened on 27 October 1851 in St Albans Court-house. From the start, the Commissioners were keen to impress on the town that they had been given unprecedented powers which they would not fail to use to get to the truth.⁷¹

Witnesses were given immunity from prosecution if they cooperated with the Commissioners by giving full disclosures. There could have been no doubt now about the seriousness of the situation and in sharp contrast to the first enquiry this commission was characterised by the willingness of witnesses to provide testimonies. Having been held in custody since April, Edwards was willing to give a full account and admitted to being involved in the bribing of the borough's electorate for twenty-five years. Similarly, Blagg gave an account of his actions, admitting having been involved in bribery since the 1832 election. Both men gave a full list of the names of everyone who had accepted a bribe. The evidence from this enquiry is important for three reasons. A full account of how bribery was carried out was given, the local election agents and their associates identified and the role of parliamentary agents with access to central party sources was revealed.

For the first time the extent of the bribery in the borough elections was revealed. Since 1832, Edwards admitted to distributing £19,200 while Blagg's total came to £12,380.⁷² These figures do not include the amounts spent by the Third Party by Richard Webster and his son Thelonious. It emerged that in the 1847 election a

⁷⁰ "Charles J. F. Russell. St Albans Election". *Times*. (London, England) 13 June 1851: 4. TDA. Web. Consulted on 27 Nov 2016.

⁷¹ ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *Daily News* (London, England), Tuesday, October 28, 1851; Issue 1694. *British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 3 Feb 2018.

⁷² HCPPO, *Report of The Commissioners to Inquire into the Existence of Bribery*, pp x-xi.

bribe could range in price from £7 to £25 and in the eight elections between 1832 and 1850 it was estimated that £37,000 was spent on election costs, including bribes.⁷³ Thelonious Webster claimed that part of the Third Party's aims for the borough elections was to go back to the pre-1832 system of bribery in which every voter was given a guinea regardless of who they voted for, with their wives receiving half a guinea during any future confinement. Webster also bought some voters' wives new hats to help secure their husbands' votes.⁷⁴ The way bribes were given after 1832 also changed. Formerly they were given out openly from door to door, but after 1832 they were given behind closed doors. During the 1850 election, Edwards rented a house in the centre of St Albans where he passed over sovereigns known as 'Bell-metal', in a back room in return for the promise of the recipient's vote. Voters then left through a side entrance which opened on to the appropriately named Sovereign Alley.⁷⁵ Blagg played a more minor role in this election, bribing fifteen Conservative voters to give their support to Bell.⁷⁶ Blagg was never questioned on the way that he distributed bribe money and he was fortunate that in this election Edwards had taken the leading role as it meant that most of the focus was on Edwards' actions rather than Blagg's.

The testimony of several witnesses at the enquiry is particularly interesting as it reveals the party networks that existed to supply candidates for elections during this period and how elections were funded. For most elections, Edwards was put in contact with Liberal candidates by James Coppock. Coppock was a London based solicitor and had been a parliamentary agent for the Liberal party since 1835. He had also been the secretary of the Reform Association, which was formed of leading Liberals who sought to ensure that Liberal candidates would be found to fight

⁷³ HCPPO, *Report of The Commissioners to Inquire into the Existence of Bribery in the Borough of Saint Alban's; Together with The Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index*, PP. 1431, pp. x-xiii, 1852.

⁷⁴ ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *Daily News* (London, England), Friday, November 7, 1851; Issue 1703. *British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 3 Feb 2018.

⁷⁵ "St Albans Election Committee". *Times*. (London, England) 5 Apr. 1851: 8. TDA. Web. Consulted 27 Nov. 2016. This alley still exists and is known as Sovereign Way.

⁷⁶ ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Monday, February 9, 1852; Issue 26559. *British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 3 Feb 2018.

elections. The association had been funded by the Reform Club but by 1850 it had ceased to function for several years. However, Coppock was still a member of the club and would have had contact with the highest levels of the Liberal party, ensuring access to government funding as the Liberal party were in government for the majority of the period 1827-60. At the enquiry Coppock claimed to have contact with 'every borough, and every city, and every county in the kingdom...' which meant he knew when every vacancy appeared. Coppock had been approached by Jacob Bell in 1849 about gaining a seat and Edwards had promised to bear him in mind. The day after Raphael's death, Coppock had sent a letter to Edwards asking to meet him in London where he told him about Bell and put him in touch with Bell's London solicitor. Through negotiations held at Watford station with Bell's solicitor, Edwards then met Bell and he agreed to use Edwards as his agent at a cost of £2,500. Blagg had also been involved in the negotiations and had promised Bell that the Conservatives would not put up a candidate.

William Balcombe Simpson, Blagg's former clerk, was also an election agent for the Liberals acting for the 'Third party' in the borough and tried to secure Bell promising it would cost him £2,000. Simpson had even tried to pay off Edwards by promising him £300 if he would stand down.⁷⁷ This split in the local support for the Liberals was explained by Webster's hostility to Coppock who gave evidence declaring that his aim was 'to do away with the interference of Mr. Coppock...'⁷⁸ Blagg, in his testimony gave further details about how the Third Party functioned. Its party allegiance changed from election to election as it was designed to ensure that elections were contested. The party was run by Webster, Simpson and a Mr Banks, an inn keeper in the town who had formerly been an election agent in Essex. In a further sign that Blagg was actively supporting Bell's campaign he had also used his 'Rough Committee' to help the party in the election. This 'Committee' had

⁷⁷ ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *Daily News* (London, England), Wednesday, October 29, 1851; Issue 1695. *British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 3 Feb 2018.

⁷⁸ ST. ALBAN'S ELECTION COMMITTEE. *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Tuesday, April 8, 1851; Issue 26318. *British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 2 Feb 2018.

local knowledge of voters and consisted of six members whom Blagg used to perform tasks such as intelligence gathering and to get election papers signed.⁷⁹

Blagg told the Commissioners that he had been in control of the Conservative party in the borough since 1830 and they were generally the strongest party and that voters were giving their loyalty to the families associated with the party rather to any political principles. Blagg stated that Conservative candidates came through The Carlton Club and that he had turned down six applicants for the 1850 election due to his promised 'compact' with Edwards. Blagg denied working for the Bell campaign but admitted to using 'quiet influence' to help him. He blamed the corruption of the election on the Conservatives who had supported Carden and attacked Carden's 'Purity' as 'a hypocritical pretense'.⁸⁰

Several witnesses also gave evidence which provides details of what agents could gain from their involvement in elections. Edwards claimed that Coppock had promised that in return for getting Bell elected he would secure his eldest son a government position. During the 1847 election, Raphael had offered Edwards a position as clerk to the County Court but he had to turn it down as he was not qualified for the role. Edwards offered it to Simpson instead who was a solicitor on condition that he paid him £86, which was half the amount he had paid Simpson not to challenge Raphael's candidacy. This provoked a furious reaction from Blagg who claimed he had been promised the position, which was denied by Raphael.⁸¹ Blagg claimed that rather than making money, being an election agent cost him money. He always personally covered the losses of Conservative candidates, citing the 1832

⁷⁹ ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Thursday, November 6, 1851; Issue 26489. *British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 3 Feb 2018 and ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Thursday, November 16, 1851; Issue 1709. *British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 3 Feb 2018.

⁸⁰ ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Thursday, November 6, 1851; Issue 26489. *British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 3 Feb 2018.

⁸¹ ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *Daily News* (London, England), Wednesday, November 5, 1851; Issue 1701. *British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 3 Feb 2018.

election in which he was left with a bill of £2,160, though he admitted to being paid during three elections which amounted to £850.⁸²

The other aspect that came out of the enquiry was the role of Carden's supporters in the 'Third' party which revealed the depth to which bribery was an unescapable aspect of the borough's elections. Despite their candidate running on a 'Purity' ticket, the 'Third' party always bribed the electorate. Their role as Carden's election agents was entirely concerned with overcoming Coppock's candidate Bell. After Simpson's unsuccessful attempt to become Bell's agent Webster, Simpson and Banks gave their support to Carden. Despite Carden's very publicly stated intention that he would under no circumstances pay for votes, the 'Third' party had other ideas. In the lead up to election day Simpson told Carden that he had influence with some voters which he could use if he was paid a 'retaining fee' of £250.⁸³ Similarly, Webster had told Carden's London agent that if he gave him £500 he could guarantee Carden's election. Banks tried a different tactic, saying to Carden that he bet him £500 that he would win the election.⁸⁴ These attempts at securing bribe money were all rebuffed by Carden. However, the Commissioners found that Carden's election costs came to £530: much of this had without Carden's knowledge been used to buy votes, with the remaining amount being used to pay some of the 'Third' party for their services by his London solicitor, again against Carden's wishes. So, despite his intention to run a clean election, the corrupt nature of St Albans elections still held its grip.

As a result of the findings of the enquiry, St Albans was disfranchised on 3 May 1852. In one move, much of the corruption that was such a prevalent feature of the town was ended and Blagg and the other agents would never have the same level of influence again. The corruption of borough elections at St Albans also had

⁸² "St Albans Election Committee". *Times*. (London, England) 5 Apr. 1851: 8. TDA. Web. Consulted 27 Nov. 2016.

⁸³ ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Monday, February 9, 1852; Issue 26559. *British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900*. Consulted 3 Feb 2018.

⁸⁴ ST ALBANS BRIBERY COMMISSION. *Daily News* (London, England), Friday Nov. 7, 1851; Issue 1703. *British Library Newspapers, Part II: 1800-1900*. Consulted 11 Jan 2017.

wider implications for election law. On 9 July 1852, The Corrupt Practices Act was passed which incorporated into law several of the new powers that had been given to the Commissioners in St Albans. It would now be established practice to appoint Commissioners with wide ranging powers to investigate cases of suspected election bribery and they would have the power to grant immunity from prosecution to witnesses.⁸⁵ But it was The Corrupt Practices Act 1854, which finally gave a legal definition to election bribery. Bribery could now be punished and for the first-time election accounts had to be published.⁸⁶ Just as with embezzlement however, the changes came just too late to act as a deterrent for Blagg.

⁸⁵ DOMESTIC. *The Royal Cornwall Gazette, Falmouth Packet, and General Advertiser* (Truro, England), Friday, July 9, 1852; pg. 2; Issue 2559. *British Library Newspapers, Part II: 1800-1900*. Consulted 3 Feb 2018.

⁸⁶ Hawkins, Angus., *Victorian Political Culture*, p. 166.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

'To enquire whether bribery was practised at St. Albans was like enquiring whether dancing was practised at Greenwich Fair...'¹

Times

By 1860, the public life of St Albans had changed dramatically. Through a combination of local persistence and central intervention and legislation the opportunities for Blagg to continue his corruption had been largely closed. Blagg had been forced to pay back the money he had embezzled from the Abbey charities. They were being run efficiently and were regularly disbursing their gifts and all the costly Chancery cases had been ended. Thanks to the actions of Blagg and the other election agents, St Albans had lost both its MPs; the 1850 election was the last in the borough until 1885. The second parliamentary enquiry into bribery at St Albans of 1851 was a landmark in the fight against corruption in borough elections. It had a significant influence on the way that future enquiries were conducted.

This dissertation contributes to the historiography of the Age of Reform by supporting previous findings of an increase in the level of corruption in borough elections after 1832. However, in contrast to the findings of Harling and Hoppen, it has also found evidence for the existence of 'New Corruption' after 1832, which operated in subtly different ways to 'Old Corruption'. In contrast to the open public bribery seen at elections before 1832, after that date, bribery in St Albans was conducted behind closed doors and was therefore harder to detect. After 1832, interference from the Liberal party's Westminster agent James Coppock in the town's elections created resentment locally and helped to fuel 'New Corruption' in

¹ "Considering the belief notoriously existing on the." *Times* (London, England) 6 Nov. 1851: 4. TDA. Web. Consulted on 3 Dec: 2016.

the borough. Thelionius Webster's Third party, existed to ensure that the borough's elections would always be contested and they also sought to prevent Coppock's candidates from being elected. Voters for Webster's party were always bribed, which helped to increase the overall proportion of campaign funds spent on bribery as there were more contested elections. A further feature of 'New Corruption' was the way that elections were funded.

Campaigns had traditionally been paid for by wealthy candidates. This continued after 1832, but Blagg was willing to cover the expenses of his candidates. But Blagg was not wealthy enough cover all the costs. It is highly likely that his embezzlement of the Abbey parish endowment charities and his manipulation of the banking system provided funds for the MP George Muskett; as, it would appear did his involvement in the embezzlement of John Kinder. So while politics after 1832, offered new opportunities for the middle-classes, the old underlying structures which supported it, were still those set up by the aristocracy which could not be afforded by men like Blagg. This in turn, made institutions and private individuals in the town vulnerable, as Blagg used all the methods available to him to maintain his local power and influence. 'New Corruption' as exercised in the borough elections, would only come to an end with the disenfranchisement of St Albans in 1851. The measures taken by Westminster to uncover the corruption at St Albans would prove to have implications of national importance.

In 1852, parliament passed the Corrupt Practices Act which gave all future enquiries into corruption at elections the power to imprison witnesses who failed to cooperate with commissioners. It appears highly likely that this was a direct result of the success of these same measures employed for the first time during the second parliamentary enquiry into corruption at St Albans, just the year before. Legislation was strengthened further in 1854, when a further Corrupt Practices Act stipulated the punishments for those found guilty of bribing voters for the first time. The 'New Corruption' as practised in St Albans and possibly in other borough's, caused the authorities to develop new legislation to deal with it.

In the case of municipal elections after 1835, 'New Corruption' was created in a form which had not existed before. Blagg, was again able to use the new legislation in the form of the Municipal Corporations Act to his advantage by excluding candidates in the new council elections from the voting list issued by the corporation. After the loss of the borough's MPs, the municipal elections took on a new importance, providing the main arena for party political differences to be fought out. This time, the problem was tackled locally when Blagg's former clerk and Liberal election agent, William Balcombe Simpson, defeated the corporation's list of candidates in the 1855 election.

This study of St Albans has also revealed wider implications of the failure of the 1832 Act to end corruption. The surviving evidence strongly suggests that Blagg's embezzlement of the Abbey charities and of Thomas Kinder's money was carried out both to support Muskett's failing bank but also to fund the bribery of the electorate. The losses suffered by the Abbey charities and the poor were made possible by an inadequate system of governance both from the trustees and the Charity Commissions. The trustees come in for particular criticism here. Due to their unwillingness to perform their duties, Blagg was able to hold both the clerk and treasurer posts leading to a lack of scrutiny of his actions. In the case of the Gawen and Skelton charities, it was only when the trustees were faced with having to pay back the money from their own pockets that they took any meaningful action against Blagg.

The court of Chancery and the Charity Commissioners do not come out of this well. Chancery was used by Blagg as another source of raising funds as he could charge the charities for his legal work. The lengthy delays in cases and the lack of checks to ensure the court's rulings had been carried out gave Blagg the perfect opportunity to prolong the embezzlements. Chancery also altered the Cross Keys Charities deed of trust so that coals instead of cash were disbursed, which would

have limited the options of the poor people receiving the gift of the charity. The Charity Commissioners failed to spot Blagg's embezzlement but as they were not a permanent body with limited powers until after Blagg had been made to pay back the money, this is not surprising. When the Charity Commission became fully established in 1853, it could begin to be more effective and when its powers were further increased in 1860, the possibility of ruining small trusts in Chancery was closed.

The Abbey vestry must be given recognition for the crucial role they played in recovering the embezzled money from Blagg. It was their determined action over several years that forced Blagg to recognise that he had to repay the money he had embezzled. Perhaps more importantly, their actions seem to have finally driven home to the trustees of the trusts that they had to take their responsibilities more seriously. The vestry also established their right to intervene in the charities, which until then had been secretive and largely unregulated. Blagg's defeat by the vestry was also a political defeat for him and contributed to his wider loss of power in the borough.

The 'Charities Scandal' was a reminder of how important the charities remained as an element of provision for the poor even after the introduction of the New Poor Law after 1834. Blagg's embezzlement coincided with some of the harshest economic conditions of the nineteenth-century. The limited provision St Albans Union could make for the large number of paupers during the crises of 1838-42 and 1847-48 combined with the reduced amounts available from the Abbey charities must have caused a great deal of suffering among the poor of the borough. The interest taken by the guardians of the union in the Abbey Parish charities, is a further indication of the importance of these ancient trusts. The 'Charities Scandal' shows that despite the many new reforms that were implemented, ancient institutions such as the parish vestry and charitable trusts still had a significant role to play in helping to deal with contemporary problems.

But was St Albans a typical borough? More research needs to be conducted into the activities of town clerks and election agents in other boroughs after 1832 to see if the new forms of corruption found in St Albans were replicated elsewhere. Certainly, corruption in parliamentary elections continued in other boroughs throughout the century. In 1868, a parliamentary committee found that corruption had increased since 1832 and as late as 1880, fifteen MPs lost their seats due to bribery.² The fight against corruption in its various forms at St Albans reflects a wider struggle that was taking place across the country, so in this sense St Albans has much in common with other urban centres of the period. That said, the town's proximity to London must be considered as the capital provided a ready source of wealthy men who wanted to buy power and influence. It also allowed for easier communication between the town's election agents and the parliamentary agents at Westminster. This means that St Albans may have been experienced a more contested form of corruption than other boroughs. The existence of the 'Third' party in the borough was certainly a reaction against interference from London in the borough and shows that it was resented by some sections of the population.

It is not known how wide a practice the embezzlement of charitable trusts was to fund corruption in elections. Martin Gorsky found tentative evidence that trusts in Bristol may have had some of their funds used to bribe voters.³ The Charity Commissioners found few cases of serious abuses of trusts but they failed to detect Blagg's embezzlement so more cases may come to light in other boroughs. However, this dissertation has shown that a study of a locality using charitable trusts as the starting point can provide a different understanding of the administrative structures of a town or borough that may not be gained from other approaches. In particular, this type of approach can help to reveal the complex relationships and power struggles that existed. It seems highly likely that other Thomas Blagg's await

² Hoppen, Theodore, K., 'Roads to Democracy', pp. 559 and 561.

³ Gorsky, Martin., *Patterns of Philanthropy*, p. 101.

discovery and with them will be found further evidence of corruption and how it was tackled.

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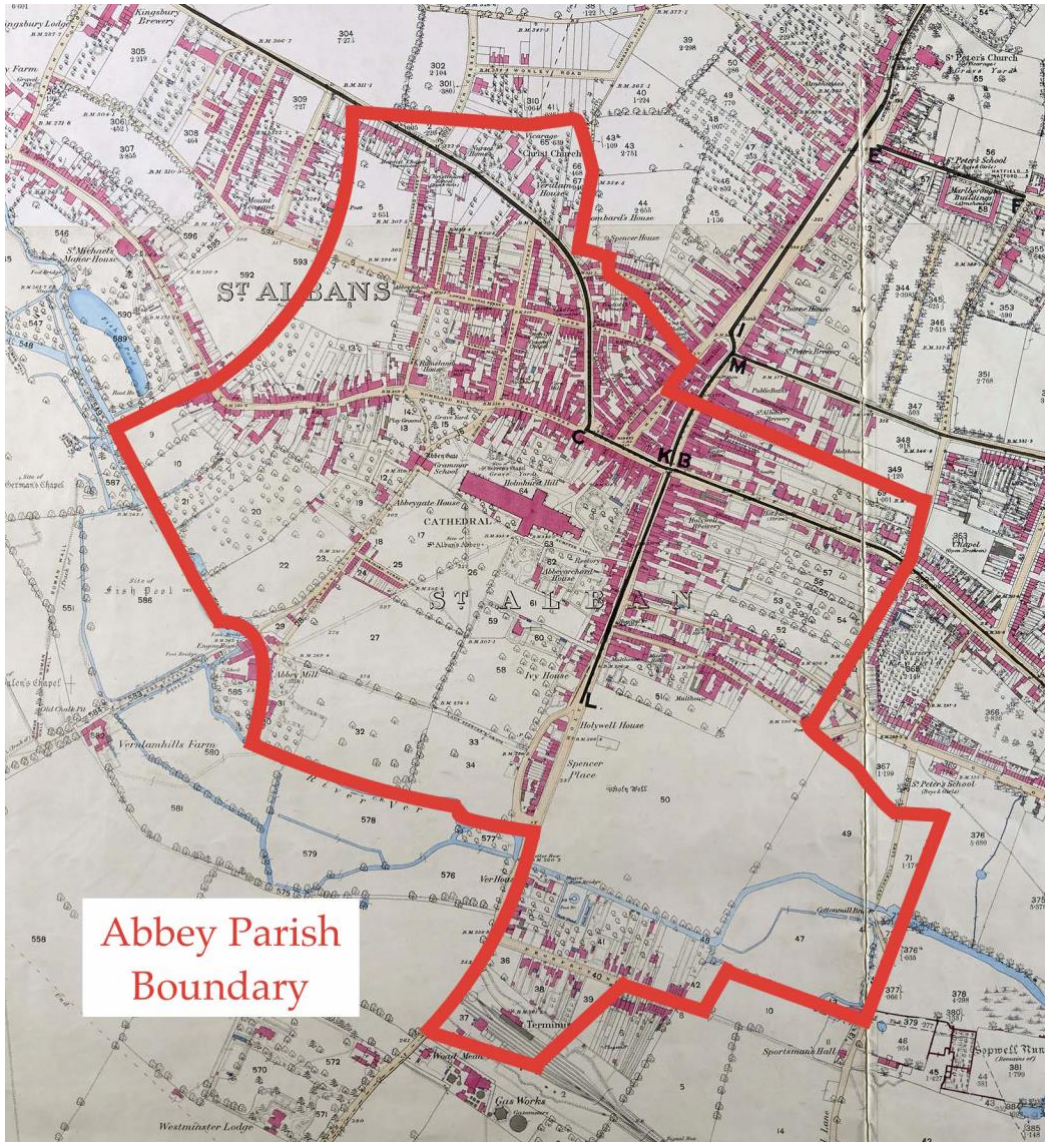
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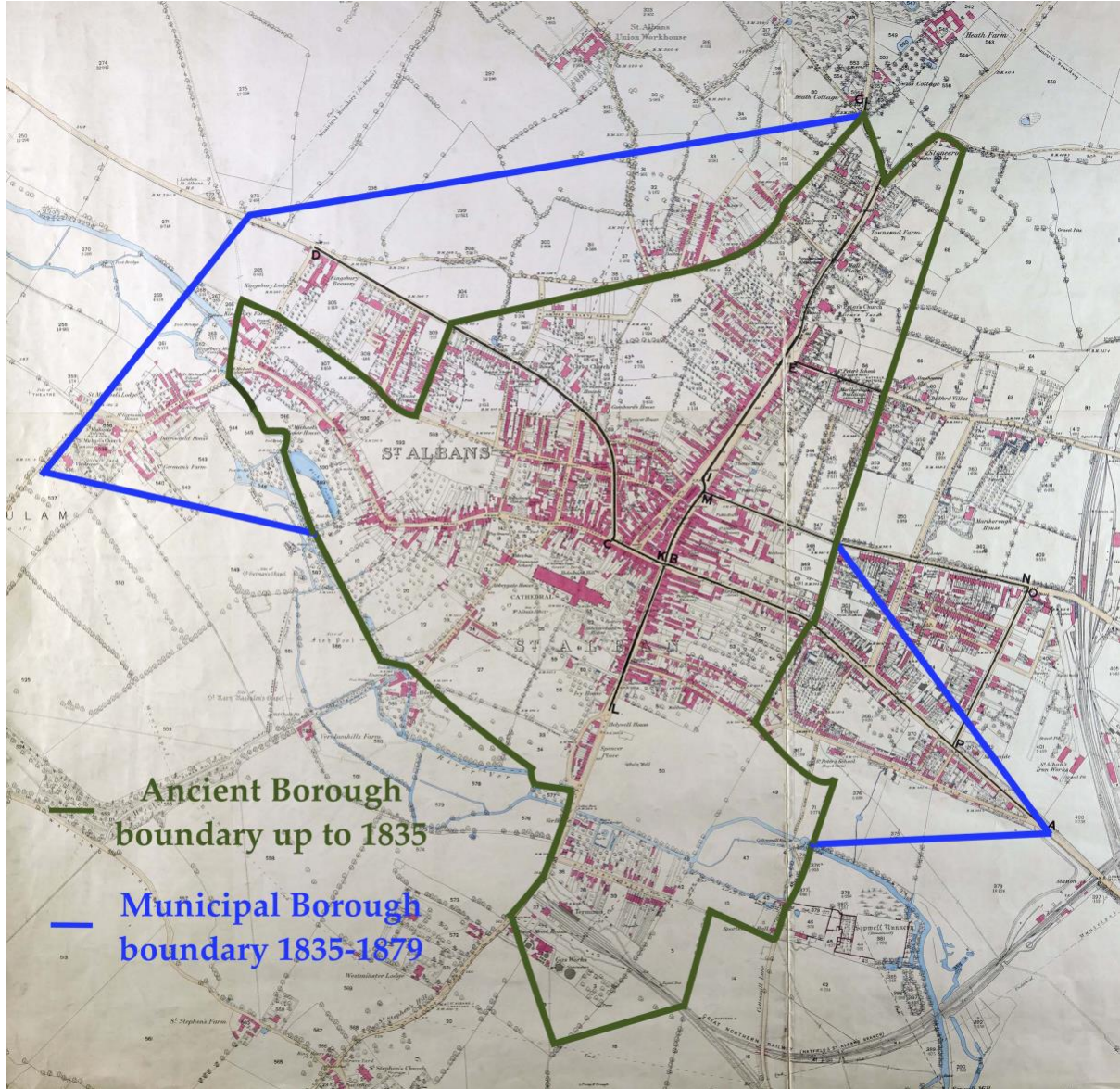
Appendix A

Abbey Parish Boundary



Appendix B

Pre-1835 Borough Boundary and Municipal Borough Boundary 1835-1879



Appendix C

Municipal Borough Boundary 1879



Appendix D

Income and Disbursements of Abbey Parish Endowment Charities 1843

Charity Name	Income	Value of Gift of Charity
Rayneshaw	Not known	Almshouses
Lathbury	£45. 0s. 0d	£45. 0s. 0d
Thomas & Margaret Hall	Not known	No disbursement
Bray Norrice	£9. 9s. 9d	£9. 9s. 0d
Goldsmith	£1. 0s. 0d	£1. 0s. 0d
Skelton	£45. 1s. 0d	£45. 0. 4d
Cross Keys	£120. 8s. 2d	£23. 4s. 0d
Gawen	£97. 0s. 0d	No disbursement
Lomax	£8. 0s. 0d	£1. 0s. 0d
Hale	£9. 3s. 0d	£4. 11s. 6d
George	£3. 0s. 0d	£3. 0s. 0d
Nicholas	£27. 0s. 0d	No disbursement
Total	£575. 6s. 12d	£124. 5s. 6d

Sources: HCPPO, *Commission of Inquiry into Charities in England and Wales 1843*: Analytical Digest of Report of Commissioners. PP. 435, p. 91 and *Commission of Inquiry into Charities in England and Wales: Return of Charities Distributed to Poor*. PP. 436. 1843, pp. 418-419.

Income and Disbursements of St Michaels Parish Endowment Charities 1843

Charity Name	Income	Value of Gift of Charity
Ewer	£3. 0s. 0d	£3. 0s. 0d
Nicholas	See Abbey parish	No disbursement
Total	£3. 0s. 0d	£3. 0s. 0d

Sources: HCPPO, *Commission of Inquiry into Charities in England and Wales 1843*: Analytical Digest of Report of Commissioners. PP. 435, p. 91 and *Commission of Inquiry into Charities in England and Wales: Return of Charities Distributed to Poor*. PP. 436. 1843, pp. 418-419.

Appendix E

Income and Disbursements of St Peters Parish Endowment Charities 1843

Charity Name	Income	Value of Gift of Charity
Sir R Cox	£7. 10s. 10d	No disbursement
Cross Keys	£120. 8s. 2d	£25. 5s. 0d
Knowlton	£3. 9s. 4d	£3. 9s. 4d
Robotham	£25. 5s. 0d	£4. 0s. 0d
Lomax & Nicholas	£8. 0s. 0d	£1. 0s. 0d
Hale	£9. 3s. 0d	£4. 11s. 6d
Bishop of Ely	£1. 0s. 0d	£1. 0s. 0d
Ball	£1. 0s. 0d	£0. 10s. 0d
Church & Poor's Land	£8. 0s. 0d	No disbursement
Poor's Houses	No income	Almshouses
Duchess of Marlborough	£757. 3s. 4d	Almshouses
Lathbury, Hall & others	See Abbey parish	See Abbey parish
Total	£912. 7s. 8d	£39. 14s. 10d

Sources: HCPPO, *Commission of Inquiry into Charities in England and Wales 1843*: Analytical Digest of Report of Commissioners. PP. 435, p. 91 and *Commission of Inquiry into Charities in England and Wales: Return of Charities Distributed to Poor*. PP. 436. 1843, pp. 418-419.

Income and Disbursements of St Stephens Parish Endowment Charities 1843

Charity Name	Income	Value of Gift of Charity
Kentish	£0. 10s. 0d	£0. 10s. 0d
Unknown	£1. 0s. 0d	£1. 0s. 0d
Unknown	£6. 0s. 0d	£6. 0s. 0d
Paddy	£5. 7s. 8d	£5. 3s. 8d
Lomax	£8. 0s. 0d	£1. 0s. 0d
Total	£12. 17s. 8d	£13. 17s. 5d

Sources: HCPPO, *Commission of Inquiry into Charities in England and Wales 1843*: Analytical Digest of Report of Commissioners. PP. 435, p. 91 and *Commission of Inquiry into Charities in England and Wales: Return of Charities Distributed to Poor*. PP. 436. 1843, pp. 418-419.

Appendix F

Awful State of Abbey Parish Charities

**AWFUL STATE
Of the Abbey Parish
CHARITIES!**

The Rector and Parish Officers have called a Vestry for to-morrow (THURSDAY,) at the Abbey Vestry-Room, to consider the present state of The Cross Keys, Skelton's, Gowen's and Bray Norrice's Charities.

It is believed that--notwithstanding all that has been said and published respecting the above--the Parishioners generally are not aware of the **TRULY DEPLORABLE** state in which these Charities are; and the **VERY LARGE AMOUNT OF MONEY**, by some means or other, withheld from the Poor to whom it justly belongs.

Let the Meeting on Thursday be the most numerous Parish Gathering ever known :--the importance of the subject, as well as common justice and humanity demand it !!

MINISTERS OF RELIGION IN THE PARISH, COME--
As doubtless you will—to help on the cause of righteousness and truth.

GENTRY OF THE PARISH, COME--
The Poor will not look to you in vain for protection and redress of their WRONGS.

TRADESMEN, COME--
You mix much with the Poor in your callings—they tell you their woes, and ask your sympathy.

**WIDOWS AND ORPHANS !!
COME :**

You have a right to come. It's a Meeting of *The Abbey Parish*, to which you belong.—You are the Parties grievously injured—at any rate COME, and hear about what belongs to you.

LET EVERY MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD BELONGING TO THE PARISH COME--
Fathers—Mothers—Sons and Daughters—should **KNOW** how the whole matter stands.

When assembled let us give a generous—unanimous—enthusiastic—**DETERMINED** support to the Rector and Parish Officers in their laudable endeavours to extricate the Charity Funds from the fangs of the Law : and let no man be hindered by any party, personal, or unworthy feeling from giving his countenance to any practical measure that may be proposed with a view to ensure the speedy distribution of the said Funds amongst the deeply-injured Poor.

When we see the faithful Trustees of LATHBURY'S CHARITY—as this day—distributing the full yearly amount of that Fund up to Christmas now just passed, in the shape of £27 worth of Bread, the question naturally arises—“ Why not THE CROSS KEYS, SKELTON'S, GOWEN'S and BRAY NORRICE'S ?”

COME TO THE VESTRY, AND KNOW WHY !!!

A PARISHIONER.
(NOT IN OFFICE.)

St. Alban's, Jan. 8th, 1851.

GIBBS, PRINTER, ST. ALBAN'S.

ACASA, Charities II (2) The Charities Scandal 1846-1852: *Awful State of Abbey Parish Charities*, (St Albans, 8 Jan 1851).

Appendix G

The Lady Chapel, St Albans Cathedral



Location of the Free Grammar School until 1871 and used for well attended Abbey parish vestry meetings.

Appendix H

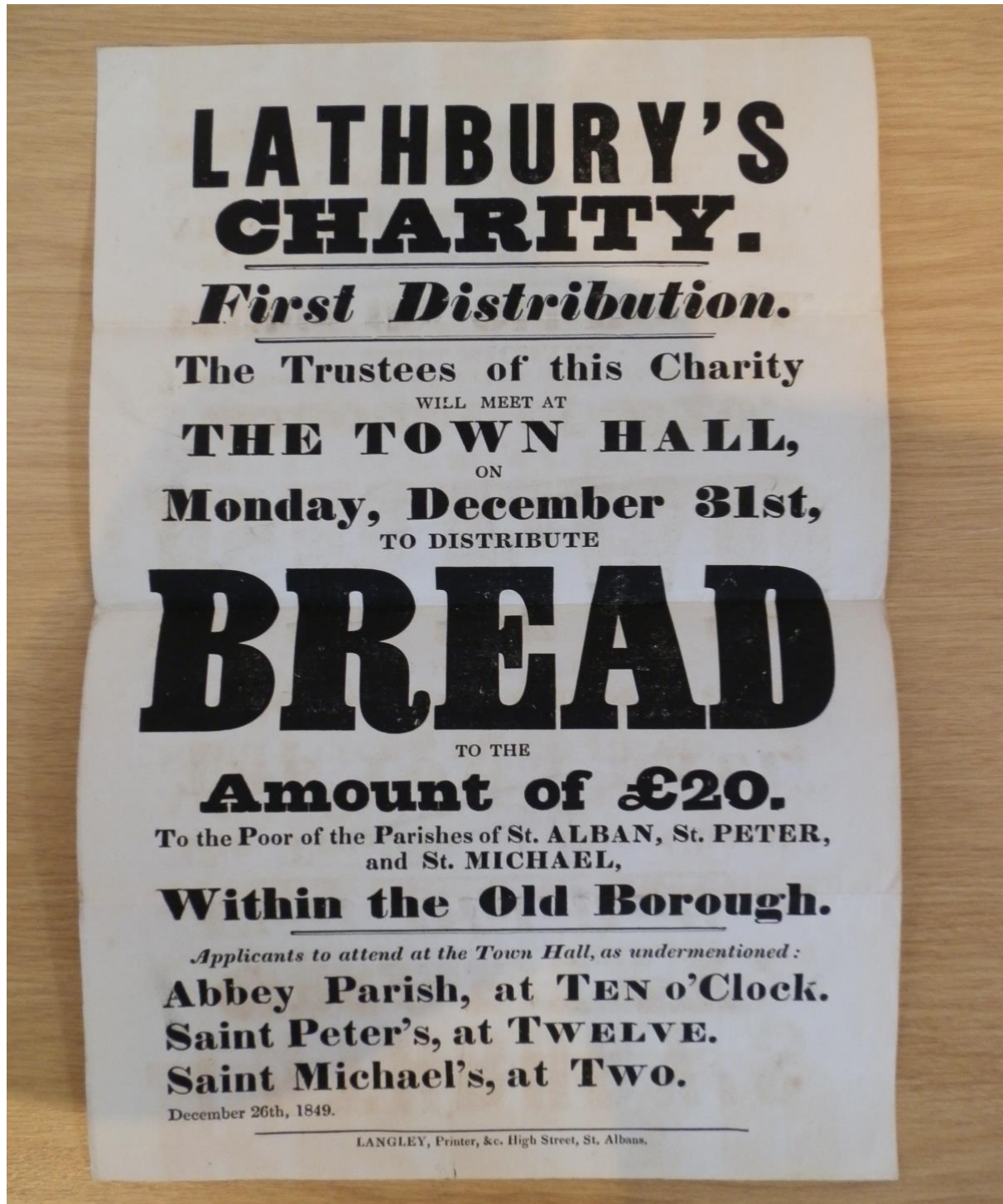
The South Transept, St Albans Cathedral



Location of most Abbey parish vestry meetings.

Appendix I

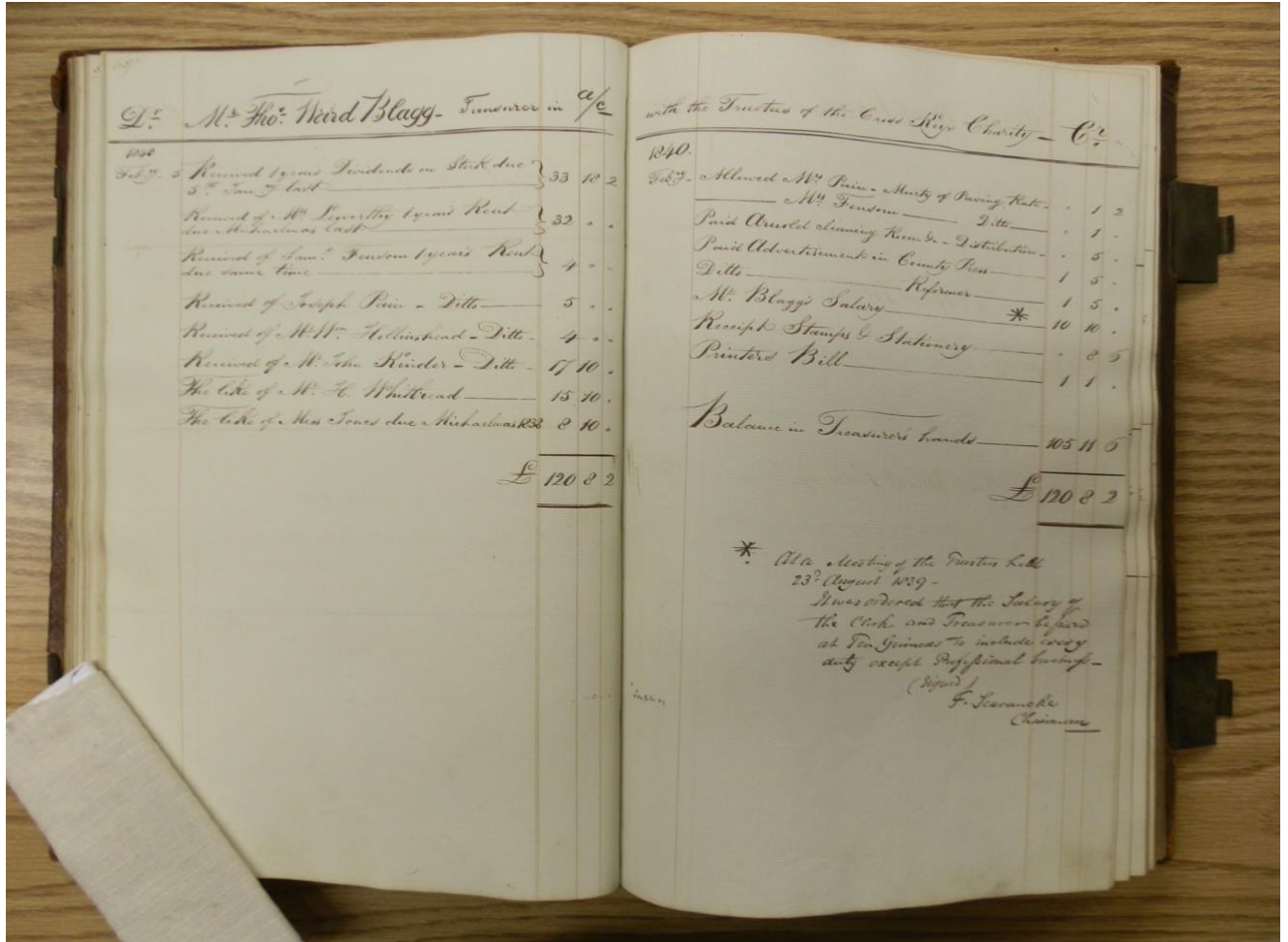
Lathbury's Charity First Distribution



ACASA, Charities IV (4) The Thomas Lathbury and Richard Rayneshaw Charities, *Lathbury's Charity First Distribution*, (St Albans, 31Dec 1849).

Appendix J

The Account Book of the Cross Keys Charity 1793-1919



ACASA, The Account Book of the Cross Keys Charity 1793-1919. This opening, Thomas Ward Blagg is appointed clerk and he is to keep the accounts for the treasurer at a salary of £10.0s.0d. a year excluding 'professional business', folio 70, 16 Sept 1828.

Appendix K

The Cross Keys Charity

Cross Keys Charity, S T. A L B A N ' S.

The attention of the Inhabitants of ST. ALBAN'S is particularly called to the following facts.

On the 23rd of March last I applied to Mr. Lipscomb, one of the Trustees, not knowing who the other Trustees were, requesting as one of the Churchwardens of St. Peter's, to be informed when the Poor of that Parish last received the Charity, and to what amount,—to which application I received a very proper Letter giving me the required information, also informing me that the authorities of the Abbey Parish would have an interview with the Trustees on the following Monday, and inviting me with the other Parish Officers of St. Peter's to attend with them; accordingly I made arrangements with my Co-Churchwardens, one of whom put off an engagement which he had in London on that day; but no interview took place on the day above named, nor has any taken place since. Finding that the Poor of St. Peter's had not received the Charity since February, 1843, although by the Trust Deed a *yearly* distribution ought to take place, I, on the 1st April, addressed a letter to the Trustees requesting them to give me some explanation as to the state of the Accounts, to which letter, on the 17th April, I received a reply from their Clerk, in which he writes “that a full copy of all the Accounts will be furnished to the Churchwardens of St. Peter's on payment of my reasonable charge for such copy, but inasmuch as the Churchwardens of the Abbey have already a Book in which the Treasurer's Accounts are fairly entered, your object may be obtained by a loan of their Book, &c. I must request that you will communicate this letter to the Vestry to-morrow.”

I read this letter to the Vestry, and a Resolution was unanimously passed appointing a Committee, to consist of the Vicar and Parish Officers, to investigate the Accounts of the Charity; a copy of which resolution was, by order of the Vestry, forwarded to the Trustees.

On the same Afternoon I waited upon the Churchwardens of the Abbey and was surprized to find that they had not even seen the Book referred to, and that the whole of the Accounts of the Charity were in the hands of Dr. Nicholson: and upon my applying to the latter gentleman he of course stated that he had no authority to allow their inspection. Finding every attempt to see the Accounts frustrated, I, on the 6th May, applied to the Clerk to furnish me with a copy of the Accounts since 1832, he having previously offered to furnish such a copy *at a day's notice*.

On the 11th instant their Clerk sent up the copy of the Account, but I being absent his Clerk did not leave it. On the 16th I again applied and was informed that I should receive it on the 18th. Not having received it, I, this morning, made another application, and am now for the first time informed, that the Churchwardens of the Abbey have expressed a wish that they and the Churchwardens of St. Peter's should see the Accounts simultaneously, and that I cannot have them till 10 o'clock on Thursday next. Will it be believed that notwithstanding a Committee was *some weeks* since appointed both by the Abbey and St. Peter's Vestry, the Churchwardens of either Parish have not as yet been allowed to inspect the Accounts.—The reason is obvious,—viz. that we may not be prepared to ask any questions at the Abbey Vestry called for *Thursday next*, for the express purpose of having a full explanation of the Accounts given to us—by whom? why by a Committee only *one* of whom has seen them.

EDW^D. GIBSON.

St. Alban's, 19th May, 1846.

Gibbs, Printer, Market Place, St. Alban's.

ACASA, Charities IV (3) The Cross Keys Charity, *The Cross Keys Charity St Albans*, (St Albans, 19 May 1846).

Appendix L

the Trustees of this Charity will distribute...

CROSS KEY'S Charity.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN,

That the TRUSTEES of this Charity will distribute amongst
Poor Persons

BELONGING TO THE PARISHES OF
Saint Alban & Saint Peter

RESIDING WITHIN THE

OLD BOROUGH,

THE SUM OF

£181. 9s. 1d.

AT THE TOWN HALL,

On Friday the 17th of April next

At TEN o'Clock in the Forenoon.

ALL such POOR PERSONS are requested to apply
before WEDNESDAY the 15th day of April next, to
the PARISH OFFICERS, to have their Names set
down in a List, for the consideration of the Trustees.

Thomas Ward Blagg,

Clerk to the Trustees.

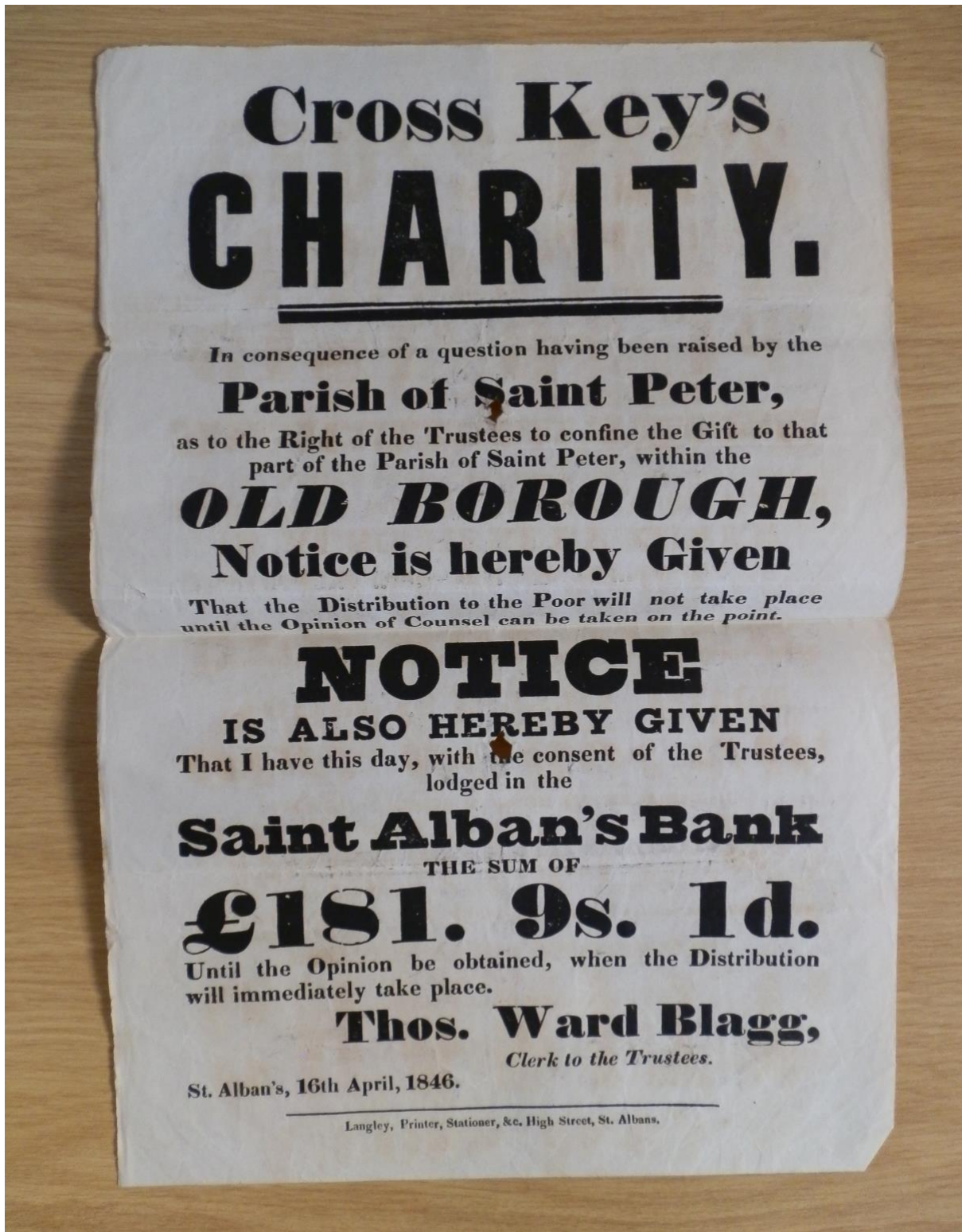
St. Albans, 30th March, 1846.

Langley, Printer, Stationer, &c. High Street, St. Albans.

ACASA, Charities IV (3) The Cross Keys Charity, *the Trustees of this Charity will distribute...*, (St Albans, 30 March 1846)

Appendix M

In consequence of a question...



ACASA, Charities IV (3) The Cross Keys Charity, *In consequence of a question...*, (St Alban's, 16 April 1846)

Appendix N

Trustees of the Cross Keys Charity 1846

Surname	First name	Occupation	Corporation Position	Political Party	Age
Story	John S.	Solicitor	Alderman	Conservative	64
Searancke	Francis	Brewer		Conservative	36
Webster	Richard	Surgeon		Liberal	65
Gape	Thomas G.	Gentleman		Conservative	57
Brabant	Richard B.	Solicitor		Conservative	66
Lipscombe	John T.	Surgeon	Alderman	Conservative	53
Bowen	William M.	Clergyman		Conservative	78
Jones	Samuel	Farmer			75
Lowe	Richard G.	Solicitor	Councillor	Conservative	44
Story	Anthony B.	Solicitor		Conservative	35

Trustees of Thomas Gawen's Charity 1846

Surname	First name	Occupation	Corporation Position	Political Party	Age
Story	John S.	Solicitor	Alderman	Conservative	64
Searancke	Francis	Brewer		Conservative	36
Webster	Richard	Surgeon		Liberal	65
Gape	Thomas G.	Gentleman		Conservative	57
Brabant	Richard B.	Solicitor		Conservative	66
Lipscombe	John T.	Surgeon	Alderman	Conservative	53
Bowen	William M.	Clergyman		Conservative	78
Lowe	Richard G.	Solicitor	Councillor	Conservative	44
Jones	Samuel	Farmer			75

Sources: *Report of Vestry Committee to investigate the accounts of charities*, 21 May 1846 (St Albans, 1846), Gibbs, A. E., *The Corporation Records of St Albans* (St Albans, 1890), 1851 Census of England and Wales.

Appendix O

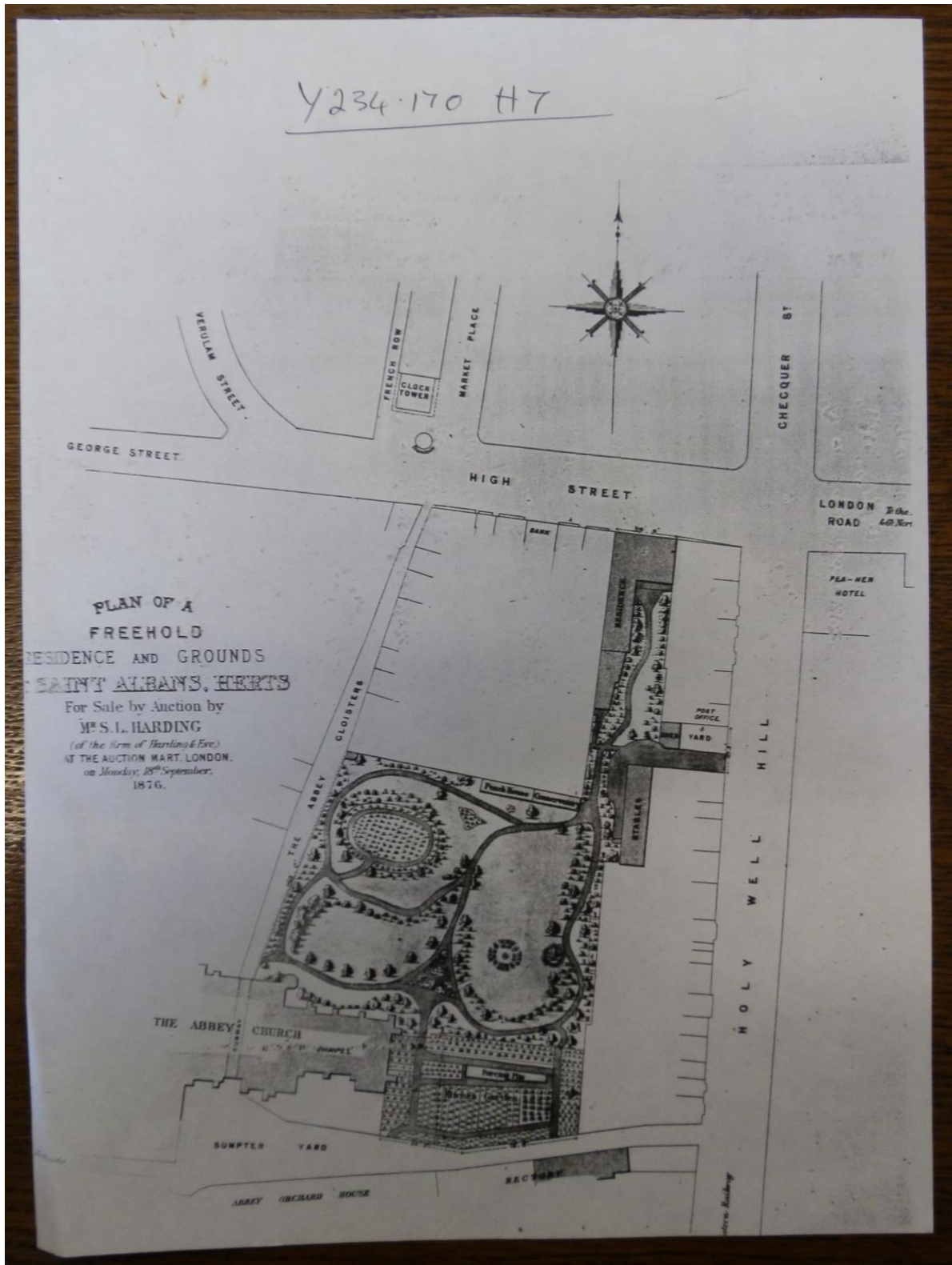
Trustees of Robert Skelton's Charity 1846

Surname	First name	Occupation	Corporation Position	Political Party	Age
Story	John S.	Solicitor	Alderman	Conservative	64
Searancke	Francis	Brewer		Conservative	36
Webster	Richard	Surgeon		Liberal	65
Gape	Thomas G.	Gentleman		Conservative	57
Brabant	Richard B.	Solicitor		Conservative	66
Lipscombe	John T.	Surgeon	Alderman	Conservative	53

Sources: *Report of Vestry Committee to investigate the accounts of charities*, 21 May 1846 (St Albans, 1846), Gibbs, A. E., *The Corporation Records of St Albans* (St Albans, 1890), 1851 Census of England and Wales.

Appendix P

Plan of Freehold Property and Grounds, St Albans 1876.



HALS, Y234/170/H7, Plan of Freehold Property and Grounds, St Albans 1876.