

**THE LONDON BRIDGE IMPROVEMENT ACT OF
1756: A STUDY OF EARLY MODERN URBAN
FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION**

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ABSTRACT

In 1756 the Corporation of London began the removal of the houses that had lined the passage over London Bridge since the twelfth century, houses which had turned the Bridge into a 'living' structure and ensured its status as one of London's great medieval icons. The 'death' of the inhabited London Bridge, a key element in the construction of the Capital's medieval identity, was a highly symbolic moment in the progressive demise of the pre modern metropolis more generally.

The aim of this thesis is to elucidate the factors that led to the London Bridge Improvement Act of 1756, the parliamentary legislation obtained by the Corporation to facilitate the removal of the houses. Previous analyses of the Act have placed it within the narrative of the 'spirit of improvement'. Yet the role of urban governance and finance in the process of improvement has received virtually no detailed analysis. This despite the fact that the historiography of Improvement Acts suggests that the structural characteristics of early modern urban administration, and in particular urban finance, were crucially important factors in terms of the motivation for, and execution of, improvement schemes.

This thesis provides a greater understanding of the way in which the Corporation of London managed the Bridge and financed its upkeep. It does so in order to demonstrate how aspects of urban governance - the transition from aldermanic oligarchy to a commoner democracy, the bureaucratic structure for financial management, and the financial necessities of governance - played a crucial role in the advent of the London Bridge Improvement Act. To achieve this, the thesis utilises the records associated with the London Bridge House Estates, the most extant and complete financial and administrative series within the Corporation's archives. It undertakes for the first time a schematic collection and detailed analysis of financial data, property records and administrative accounts relating to an urban governmental body in the early modern period.

In pursuing this argument, and engaging in such an analysis, this research suggests that we should look beyond simply social and cultural factors, and in particular pay closer attention to the often mundane concerns that decisively influenced decision making within urban organisations, when seeking to explain the process of early modern urban development more generally.

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Abbreviations and Terminology

AC	Archives.
AD	Administration.
BHC	Bridge House Committee.
BHJ	Bridge House Journals.
BHLC	Bridge House Lands Committee.
CA	Court of Aldermen.
CC	Common Council.
CCS	Comptroller and City Solicitor.
CLA	Corporation of London Archives.
CLC	City Lands Committee.
CLRO	Corporation of London Record Office.
CO	Comptroller.
COL	Corporation of London.
EM	Estate Management.
FN	Finance.
LBI	London Bridge Improvement Committee.
OF	Officers.
SVD	Surveyor Department.

The term 'City' is taken to mean the City of London, the geographical area under the governance of the Corporation of London. Similarly when capitalised the term 'Corporation' refers to the Corporation of London.

References to 'London' the 'capital' or the 'metropolis' are used to describe the built up area covered by the cities of London, Westminster and the borough of Southwark.

When referring to the Bridge Masters, the shortened term 'Masters' is occasionally used.

When capitalised the term 'Court' refers to the Court of Aldermen. Similarly 'Council' refers to the Common Council.

When capitalised, the term Bridge refers specifically to London Bridge.

Chapter I

Introduction

“London Bridge is fallen down
Falling down, Falling down
London Bridge is fallen down
My fair lady”

Bridges have often occupied a unique place in the pre modern history of towns and cities. To begin with they often dictated where settlements emerged and they facilitated trade, and therefore economic and urban growth.¹ Because they were, and to a large extent still are, incredible feats of engineering, the construction of these structures has helped push back technological boundaries and encouraged innovation. Not only that, but because of the resources and technical expertise required to construct them bridges, perhaps more than any other pre modern piece of infrastructure, were often symbols of power and prestige and took on the type of iconic status afforded to modern day skyscrapers.² Such factors alone make bridges a fascinating topic for any research project. Yet the other hugely important aspect of bridges, and the one that, from a historian's viewpoint, is perhaps the most enticing, is that the construction of these structures is really only the beginning of the story. Once the bridge had been completed another edifice had to be assembled: an administrative, legal, and financial framework to facilitate the constant maintenance of the structure. These organisations took on a myriad of forms, and varied from county to county, city to city. But regardless of their type or

¹ For an example of the role bridges played in economic growth in the pre modern period see: Harrison, D., ‘Bridges and economic development, 1300-1800’, *Economic History Review*, vol. 45, no.2 (May 1992), pp.240-261.

² Harrison, D., ‘Medieval Bridges’, *History Today* (Nov 2004), pp.22-29. For the same themes within a French context see: Boyer, M., *Medieval French bridges: a history* (Cambridge MA, 1976). Calabi, D., *The market and the city* (Aldershot, 2004), p.29. For the celebration of bridges in art see: Sweetman, J., *The artist and the bridge, 1700-1920* (Aldershot, 1999). For a discussion as to what makes an iconic urban structure see: Ethington, P., and Schwartz, V., ‘Introduction: an atlas of the urban icons project’, *Urban History*, vol.33, no.2 (2006), pp.5-19.

location these bodies had two things in common.³ Firstly, because ensuring that a constant supply of money, materials and labour was available to undertake bridge maintenance was such an onerous and yet essential task, these bodies spread their tentacles far and wide into the local, and sometimes national, society and economy.⁴ Secondly, because of the nature of their activities, such as the collection of tolls, purchasing materials, establishing title over lands, and so on, these bodies were required to keep extensive records, particularly when it came to the issue of funding the maintenance of the bridge.

Therefore, as Cooper argues, the really significant aspect of bridges is not just how or why they were constructed or the meanings society vested in them, but also how the maintenance of them was conceived, administered, financed and conducted, and the broader understandings regarding society, the economy and the law that we can draw from the analysis of these issues. As he notes this issue of the ‘obligation for repair’ ensures that ‘the history of bridge building is thus necessarily also a story of finance, of law and ultimately government.’⁵ Cooper’s work, along with that of Harrison and Yates and Gibson, demonstrates the truth of this assertion and the value of approaching the analysis of bridges in this way to brilliant effect.⁶ Surprisingly, perhaps the single most important bridge in pre-modern Britain, London Bridge, has received relatively limited attention from scholars. It is the purpose of this thesis to demonstrate that the study of the administrative apparatus behind the maintenance of this iconic structure offers historians the chance to gain valuable insights into broader questions regarding the political, economic and physical development of the nation’s capital and its transition to modernity.

³ For examples of the different systems that supported bridges see: Harrison, D., *The bridges of medieval England* (Oxford, 2004), chapter 11.

⁴ The commitment needed in terms of expenditure is illustrated in Harrison, *Bridges of medieval England*, chapter 10; Chalklin, C., *English counties and public building: 1650-1830* (London, 1998), pp.103-112.

⁵ Cooper, A., *Bridges, law and power in medieval England: 700-1400* (Woodbridge, 2006), p.4.

⁶ Yates, N., and Gibson, J., (eds.), *Traffic and politics: the construction and management of Rochester Bridge, AD 43-1993* (Rochester, 1994).

Medieval London Bridge

The first stone bridge over the Thames, the first real “London Bridge”, was constructed in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. In terms of its social and economic importance, symbolism and sheer fame, few bridges in pre-modern Britain could rival London Bridge. Indeed even today the structure still lives on in the popular imagination, and of course it has been immortalised in the form of the nursery rhyme “London Bridge is fallen down”.⁷ It is no exaggeration to say that today’s sprawling metropolis to a large extent owes its very existence to this bridge over the Thames and it is hard to overstate the structure’s importance socially, culturally and economically to the pre-modern capital.⁸ As the only crossing over the river the Bridge was a vital conduit for the trade and traffic that was the economic lifeblood of the capital, and by linking both banks of the Thames it also allowed for the expansion of the city south of the river. The Bridge was also considered an engineering marvel and consequently a symbol of London’s power and primacy within the urban hierarchy.⁹ This valorisation of the structure due to its technical sophistication was based on two factors. Firstly it spanned over 900ft of fast flowing tidal river and therefore ranked as one of the longest such structures in the known world. Secondly, the Bridge was lined with an eclectic collection of buildings running the length of both sides of the structure, which turned the Bridge into a vibrant street, and led several foreign visitors to claim that these ‘extremely fine buildings’ made the Bridge ‘easily one of the finest bridges in the whole of Europe, both for size and beauty’¹⁰ and ‘a remarkable sight even among the beauties of London.’¹¹

The maintenance of the Bridge was neither funded, nor directly undertaken by the Corporation of London, within whose geographical and administrative boundaries the structure lay. Instead both of these tasks were undertaken by an organisation that operated

⁷ For an interesting discussion of the genesis of this rhyme see: Clark, J., ‘London Bridge and the archaeology of a nursery rhyme’ *London Archaeologist*, 9:12 (2002), pp.338-340.

⁸ Watson, B., Brigham T., and Dyson T., *London Bridge:2000 years of a river crossing*, Museum of London archaeology service monograph 8 (London, 2001).

⁹ Keene, D., ‘London Bridge and the identity of the medieval city’, *Transactions of the London and Middlesex archaeological society*, no.51 (2000), pp.143-56.

¹⁰ The diary of Baron Waldstein: a traveller in Elizabethan England, edited and translated by Groos, W., (London, 1981), p.175.

¹¹ Barron, C., Coleman, C., and Gobbi, C., ‘The London journal of Alessandro Magno 1562’, *London Journal*, no.8 (1983), p.142.

supposedly as a trust entirely distinct from the Corporation, which was known as the Bridge House. This body was headed by two men known as the Bridge Masters or Wardens who managed a small army of workmen responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of the structure. This work was funded by the rental income derived from the 130 or so houses and shops on the Bridge and a large landed estate located mostly within the City of London. The estate consisted of approximately 300 plots or leases, including those located on the Bridge, and collectively these lands were known as the Bridge House Estates. However, as we shall see, in practice the Bridge House's independence from the Corporation had been subject to gradual erosion ever since its inception, and by the beginning of the seventeenth century this autonomy was highly compromised.

The objective of the thesis

As one would expect over the course of its medieval and early modern history the Bridge was the stage for many memorable events which have been ably and thoroughly chronicled by Gordon Home's work of antiquarianism.¹² Yet arguably the most profound occurrence in the Bridge's history since its original construction was the removal in 1756 of the houses that had, up until that point, lined the Bridge for the entirety of its lifespan. These buildings and their occupants had for centuries ensured that the Bridge was not just an inanimate piece of urban infrastructure but rather a vivid lived space, a destination in itself, a bustling, jostling shopping street, and the home to a community. The various structures on the Bridge were integral to the rich tapestry of London's medieval history. Whether it be the display of the heads of traitors and revolutionaries such as Wat Tyler and Guy Fawkes at the Gate House or the elaborate decorations that adorned the houses for pageants, these structures were woven into the narrative of the medieval metropolis and gave London Bridge its unique and indelible character.¹³ The first houses were taken down in 1756 and by the time the Bridge finally reopened seven years later in 1763 it had been transformed.

¹² Home, G., *Old London Bridge* (London, 1931).

¹³ Barron, C., 'Pageantry on London Bridge in the early fifteenth century', in Klausner, D., and Marsalek, K., (eds.), *"Bring furth the pagants": essays in early English drama presented to Alexandra F. Johnson* (Toronto, 2007), pp.91-104. Keene, 'London Bridge'.

In place of the ramshackle houses and shops and a narrow, gloomy claustrophobic passageway was a broad uncluttered roadway and a clearly demarcated pavement, equipped with balustrades and lamps. Londoners had been handed a bridge of much greater functionality and utility but immeasurably less character. As Home notes, it had been ‘deprived of its individuality’ and reduced ‘to the commonplace level of a hundred other bridges of its period.’¹⁴ Clearly this was an event of historical interest bringing, as it did, to a close the story of the longest inhabited bridge in Europe, and forever altering the landscape of London. But why is it any more significant than the sweeping away of countless other archaic streets and buildings in the period? The answer to this question is threefold. Firstly as we have noted the Bridge and the houses on them were strongly resonant of medieval London. Secondly, London Bridge was, and always had been, a uniquely symbolic structure for London and Londoners. It was the first bridge across the Thames and, until Westminster Bridge opened in 1749, it was the only bridge across the river within the capital. Furthermore as we shall see in chapter 2 its symbolism was also embellished by the role the Bridge and its houses played in the birth of the City of London in the late twelfth century. Finally, there was the sheer visibility of the houses’ removal. London Bridge was literally at the heart of the capital, it was the only route into the metropolis from Southwark for land-born traffic and the structure was visible along large stretches of the river and its banks.¹⁵

Therefore, because of these factors it seems that in the eyes of many historians the removal of the houses, these symbols of “old” London, to make way for this rather starkly functional and prosaic structure represents in a very visceral way the progress from the traditional to the modern.¹⁶ Clearly therefore, the removal of the houses from London Bridge is rightly considered a significant event in the history of the capital. Yet, despite this, there is an absence of even the most cursory analysis as to exactly why these

¹⁴ Home, *Old London Bridge*, p.269.

¹⁵ This symbolism and historical baggage continued to play an important role in the perception, and ultimately the form of London Bridge throughout its history. See: Arnold, D., ‘London Bridge and its symbolic identity in the Regency metropolis’, *Art History*, vol.22, no.4 (November 1999), pp.545-566.

¹⁶ Ackroyd, P., *London the biography* (London, 2000), p.309; Guillery, P., *The small house in eighteenth century London* (London, 2004), p.280; Keene, D., ‘Growth, modernisation and control: the transformation of London’s landscape: 1500-1760’ in Clark, P., Gillespie, R., (eds.), *Two capitals: London and Dublin 1500-1840* (Oxford, 2001), p.37; Summerson, J., *Georgian London* (repr. London, 1970), p.123.

structures were ultimately demolished. As Miles Ogborn has demonstrated, understanding the process by which these changes to the built environment occurred, and the factors that shaped this process, can radically alter our understanding of the meanings which we attribute to such events.¹⁷

The first stated aim of this thesis therefore is simply to provide such an analysis, and to elucidate the factors behind the removal of the houses on London Bridge. Of course it is imperative that there be some kind of tangible structure to this research, and this will be provided by framing the thesis as an investigation into the factors behind the Parliamentary Act that facilitated the removal of the houses, the *Act to improve, widen and enlarge the Passage over and through London Bridge* of 1756, more commonly known as The London Bridge Improvement Act. Such Improvement Acts were frequently the instruments through which large scale infrastructure projects were implemented, and the historiography pertaining to their emergence and usage provides a suitable framework to allow this research to engage with broader debates surrounding urban administration, urban finance, and the shaping of the built environment during the early modern period.

Improvement Acts

When we examine the factors behind the emergence of Improvement Acts it is clear that we can distinguish between two different sets of issues: firstly, the motivation behind the changes these Acts sought to accomplish, and secondly why these particular pieces of legislation were used as the mechanisms through which to achieve these changes.

With respect to the first category the historiography highlights the fact that by the first half of the eighteenth century a number of pressures were being felt by urban authorities regarding the standard and capacity of the infrastructure and amenities within their ambit. To begin with there was a growing demand from urban inhabitants, fuelled largely by the growth of the middle classes and the emergent social paradigm of politeness, for higher standards of comfort, convenience and aesthetic beauty within the

¹⁷ Ogborn, M., *Spaces of modernity: London's geographies 1680-1780* (Guildford, 1998).

built environment. In particular these classes desired the creation of increasingly ordered and regularised public spaces, typically pavements, in which they could conduct their polite sociability, retailing and business activities. There were also mounting pressures engendered by population growth and proto-industrialisation. The increasing volume of trade and traffic brought about by economic expansion required improved infrastructure in terms of roads, canals, bridges, port facilities and the like, and the gradually growing populations of urban centres meant that providing services such as street lighting and waste collection and sanitation became a priority for urban governments. All these changes reflected contemporary desires and in turn contributed to the development of the burgeoning “modernity” of the eighteenth-century urban landscape.¹⁸

So traditionally the historiography of the Improvement Acts has suggested that the improvements this Parliamentary legislation sought to achieve stemmed from the dual desire for increased ‘beauty and utility’¹⁹ in the urban landscape. Indeed the majority of the literature analysing the development of the built environment in general, and that of London in particular, during this period has focused on various aspects of these twin concerns.²⁰ In terms of utility historians have identified the role economic pressures played in creating a more functional urban infrastructure and, for example, how demographic pressures intensified concerns over issues such as dirt and disease, social control and criminality, concerns that were at the root of many developments in the built environment.²¹ Similarly, in terms of increased beauty a substantial body of work has analysed the way in which the emergence of a consuming and socially aspirational middle class prompted changes in tastes and styles, and in the way the built environment

¹⁸ Jones, E., and Falkus, M., ‘Urban improvement and the English economy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’ in Borsay, P., (ed.), *The eighteenth century town 1688-1820* (Oxford, 1989), pp.116-158; Innes, J., and Rogers, N., ‘Politics and government 1700-1840’ in Clark, P. (ed.) *The Cambridge urban history of Britain: 1540-1840* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.529-74; Corfield, P., *The impact of English towns 1700-1800* (Oxford, 1982), chapter 9; Sweet, R., *The English town 1680-1840* (Harlow, 1999), chapter 3; Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity*, chapter 3; Corfield, P., ‘Walking the city streets: the urban odyssey in eighteenth-century England’ *Journal of Urban History*, vol.16, no.2 (1990), pp.146-155; Girouard, M., *The English town* (London, 1990), pp.75-89.

¹⁹ Ellis, J., *The Georgian town* (Basingstoke, 2001), p.103.

²⁰ For a schematic overview of the various factors that sculpted the urban landscape in this period see: Borsay, P., ‘Early modern urban landscapes, 1540-1800’ in Waller, P., (ed.), *The English urban landscape* (Oxford, 2000), pp.99-124.

²¹ Ellis, *Georgian town*, pp.87-105; George, D., *London life in the eighteenth century* (repr. London, 1951), chapter 2; Beattie, J., *Policing and punishment in London: 1660-1750* (Oxford, 2001), pp.207-225.

was conceived, used and therefore shaped, particularly in terms of architecture.²² Moving beyond the historiography dealing directly with these notions of elegance and utility, more prosaic issues, such as advances in building techniques, patterns of land ownership, the role of building legislation, and the impact of speculative building practices, and their roles in shaping the urban landscape, has also attracted a substantial degree of scholarly attention.²³ This short survey of the literature is very far from exhaustive but it is here to serve simply as an illustration of the vast number of factors that historians have identified as manifesting themselves in the way the eighteenth-century urban landscape, and in particular that of London, evolved.²⁴

Yet it is noticeable that despite this substantial corpus of work only a handful of texts directly address the possible role finance - in terms of profit/loss, income/expenditure, credit/debt and so forth - may have played in this process of determining the physical form of the urban built environment, and of “modernising” the capital.²⁵ However this issue of finance was central to how the urban landscape developed. At a most basic level money had to be acquired in order to pay for all building work. Similarly there were often financial considerations, and the desire for profit, motivating the changes in the initial instance.²⁶ The impact of these capitalist impulses on the built environment, and the power of market forces to reshape space and in the process create modern urban landscapes has been explored by theorists such as Henri Lefebvre

²² For example see: Summerson, *Georgian London*; Cruickshank, D., and Wyld, P., *London: the art of Georgian building* (London, 1975); Borsay, P., *The English urban renaissance* (Oxford, 1989); Stobart, J., ‘Shopping streets as social space’, *Urban History*, vol. 25 (1998), pp.3-21.

²³ In particular: Mckellar, E., *The birth of modern London* (Manchester, 2000) encapsulates all the above themes. Ayers, J., *Building the Georgian town* (New Haven, 1998); Chalklin, C.W., *The provincial towns of Georgian England: a study of the building process* (London, 1974), chapters 3, 4 and 5; Spence, C., *London in the 1690s: a social atlas* (London, 2000), chapter 3; Olsen, D., *Town planning in London* (London, 1982), in particular chapters 1 and 3.

²⁴ For the best synopsis of these factors in relation to the capital see: Guillery, *The small house*.

²⁵ Dawson, E.J. ‘Finance and the unreformed borough: A critical appraisal of corporate finance, 1660-1835, with special reference to the boroughs of Nottingham, York and Boston’ (University of Hull Ph.D. thesis, 1978) in particular chapters 7-10; Mckellar, *Modern London*, chapter 3.

²⁶ This was certainly the case in terms of speculative building with the increasing numbers of nobility and gentry who saw the profits to be made from such ventures: Booth, P., ‘Speculative housing and the land market in London, 1660-1730: four case studies’, *Town Planning Review*, 51 (1980), pp.379-97; Mckellar *Modern London*, chapter 2; Grassby, R., *The business community of seventeenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1995), p.375.

and David Harvey in relation to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁷ Similarly on a less abstract theoretical level Chalklin's work on public and private building in the eighteenth century has suggested that the cost of potential works, allied with the financial resources available to urban authorities and speculative builders, could do much to influence what types of buildings were renovated and constructed, and the form they actually took.²⁸ Therefore one of the principal objectives of this thesis is to look beyond the issues of 'beauty and utility' when identifying the motivations behind the removal of the houses on London Bridge, and to utilise instead the comprehensive financial records of the Bridge House to make explicit the role that financial issues played in this act of "modernisation". In order to identify the second main objective of this thesis we now turn to the historiography which outlines why Improvements Acts were used as the mechanisms through which to achieve these changes to the urban landscape. We begin with a brief description of eighteenth-century corporations before moving on to a description of Improvement Acts.

After the Revolution of 1688 there was a slow but inexorable trend towards oligarchy within national politics which culminated in the accession of George I in 1714 and the beginning of the Hanoverian regime. This created a static and ossified Whig oligarchy at the top of national governance which endured for the majority of the remainder of the eighteenth century.²⁹ It has been argued that this situation at the pinnacle of British politics was mirrored lower down the scale in relation to the governance of urban corporations which on the whole failed to evolve politically and administratively.³⁰ This lack of evolution became an issue due to the growing expectations for communal services and amenities on the part of the expanding and increasingly demanding urban populations. The monolithic and apparently inflexible corporations were simply not able

²⁷ Lefebvre, H., *The production of space* (Oxford, 1991); Harvey, D., *Paris, capital of modernity* (London, 2006) particularly chapters 5 and 6. For a fine example of research which demonstrates how economic forces such as credit availability, landownership and labour patterns combined to shape the built environment see: Rodger, R., 'The invisible hand: market forces, housing and the urban form in Victorian cities' in Fraser, D., and Sutcliffe, A., (eds.), *The pursuit of urban history* (London, 1983), pp.190-211.

²⁸ Chalklin, *English counties*; Chalklin, *Provincial towns*, in particular chapters 6, 8 and 9.

²⁹ Plumb, J., *The growth of political stability in England: 1675-1725* (London, 1967); Williams, B., *The Whig supremacy, 1714-1760* (Oxford, 1939).

³⁰ Porter, R., *English society in the eighteenth century* (London, 1991), chapter 3.

to operate outside the constraints of their charters and exert the powers required to meet this pressure for change. Yet many historians have noted that this characterisation is far from universally applicable, and acknowledge that much ‘quiet innovation’³¹ in administrative practices was occurring within many eighteenth century corporations and urban organisations.³² In particular the use of Improvement Acts to provide the flexibility to meet the challenges of improvement has been highlighted as an example of such innovation.

Improvement Acts were Acts of Parliament petitioned for by either urban authorities or groups of individuals, which created bodies called Improvement Commissions. These ‘Statutory Authorities for Special Purposes’ as the Webbs describe them, differed from existing urban governmental bodies in two fundamental ways.³³ Firstly, they derived their power from statute as opposed to other urban authorities such as the parish or corporation which were often created by prescription and derived many of their powers from Common Law or royal authority. Improvement Acts and the commissions they created were the products of Private Bill Legislation, which meant that any individual, grouping, company or corporation could petition Parliament for such an Act if they had the inclination and the resources to do so. Because these pieces of legislation were products of this Private Bill procedure this also meant that ‘no alteration was made to the general law’³⁴ and therefore the Act gave these powers to very small groups of individuals in the form of the Improvement Commissions. Secondly, whereas bodies such as parishes or corporations were charged with undertaking multiple tasks the Improvement Commissions were asked only to undertake one specific task, one ‘special purpose’, and therefore the powers they were vested with were highly specific. The Webbs describe a Statutory Authority as:

³¹ Corfield, *English towns*, p.157.

³² Davison, L., Hitchcock, T., Keirn, T. and Shoemaker, R., ‘The reactive state: English governance and society, 1689-1750’ in Davison, L., Hitchcock, T., Keirn, T. and Shoemaker, R., (eds.), *Stilling the grumbling hive: the response to social and economic problems in England 1689-1750* (London, 1992), pp.xi-liv.

³³ Webb, B., and Webb, S., *English local government: statutory authorities for special purposes* (London, 1908).

³⁴ Spencer, F., *Municipal origins* (London, 1911), p.5.

taking its origin from some special legislative act, establishing, not a class of local governing bodies, but one particular Local Governing Authority to discharge one designated function, for one prescribed locality. Each of them enjoyed its powers and incurred its obligations, not by Common Law, but exclusively by virtue of that particular legislative act.³⁵

So these Acts created completely new bodies which stood apart from existing urban power structures of corporations, and their flexibility and malleability meant that they could be deployed for a number of uses, financially, administratively and politically.

Traditionally the crucial power vested in these Improvement Commissions was the ability to raise funding for improvement projects through avenues such as taxes or tolls.³⁶ As any student of eighteenth-century urban governance will know, the corporations, boroughs and parishes of the towns and cities of Britain were rarely awash with funds, and because most corporations lacked the administrative and financial flexibility to increase revenues they simply had no way of meeting the funding demands made by improvement schemes.³⁷ The Improvement Acts offered urban administrative bodies such as corporations the ability to throw off these financial shackles and literally create new revenue streams which were sanctioned by parliamentary authority. But because of the flexibility of the Acts and the fact that they lay outside existing corporate power structures they could have several other uses. For example, the Acts also imbued the Improvement Commissions with the legal authority to supersede existing governmental structures in order to provide a communal service or broad transformation of the urban landscape which extended beyond the area of the town which fell under the jurisdiction of the corporation. Nor were they bound by the same legal constraints as the corporations. Similarly as Improvement Commissions acquired substantial powers relating to the governance of a town or city they were often employed by groups who had been traditionally excluded from corporate structures as a means to gain access to the levers of power.³⁸

³⁵ Webb, *Statutory authorities*, p.3.

³⁶ Jones and Falkus, 'Urban improvement', pp.137-141.

³⁷ Innes and Rogers, 'Politics and government', pp.548-551.

³⁸ Langford, P., *Public life and the propertied Englishman; 1689-1789* (Oxford, 1991), pp.211-287; Sweet, *English town*, pp.42-56; Spencer, *Municipal origins*, pp.7-45.

So from the perspective of this thesis the removal of the structures on the Bridge offers the chance to explore broader themes relating to our understanding of the ways in which the landscape of the capital was shaped during the long eighteenth century and the way in which urban administration was structured and conducted in the same period. In order to explore these themes fully the thesis will cover the period between the Great Fire of 1666 and 1756. The Fire not only provides a useful departure point in terms of the fact that it was a defining moment in the history of the capital but more importantly, as later chapters will demonstrate, the fire destroyed around one third of the houses on the Bridge itself and a great deal of the Bridge House Estates' housing stock within the City. Such a rupture fundamentally shaped the leasing of the Estate and its finances for the next century and played a direct role in the events of the 1750s.

The documentary sources associated with London Bridge

With such a large estate to administer and the essential, relentless maintenance obligations towards the Bridge itself, the record keeping associated with the Bridge House had to be equally extensive. Indeed, as Jones points out, when one begins to immerse oneself in this archive the sheer abundance and detail of the sources associated with the daily running of Bridge House (alongside the sister records relating to the Corporation itself) is startling. Most of the series associated with the Bridge's administration stretch back almost unbroken to the fourteenth century, therefore their completeness and comprehensiveness is unparalleled in terms of the Corporation of London's annals.³⁹ In addition, even a cursory glance at the more general records of the City's administration reveals numerous references to London Bridge and it is clear that the business relating to the Bridge and its estates occupied a large part of the Corporation's time. Therefore in terms of primary source material, London Bridge is extraordinarily well served, with a deep well of core material produced directly by the Bridge House organisation, and an additional rich seam of material that runs through the

³⁹ Jones, P.E., 'The estates of the Corporation of London', *Guildhall miscellany*, vol. I (1952), pp.3-16; Jones, P.E., 'Some Bridge House properties', *Journal of the British archaeological association*, 3rd series, vol. XVI (1953), pp.59-73; Harding, V., and Wright, L., (eds.), *London Bridge: selected accounts and rentals, 1381-1538*, London record society, vol. 31 (1995), p.vii.

related records of the Corporation. Yet only a handful of scholars have utilised this treasure trove of material, and their works have only just begun to scratch the surface of these extensive archives.⁴⁰ Therefore mining this source, and illustrating its potential value to historians constitutes a further central justification for this thesis.

There are six main sets of records that have been analysed for this thesis. Four sets of records - the Bridge House Journals, Bridge House Account Books, Bridge House Papers and the Bridge House Cash Books - are associated directly with the Bridge House, the body that administered many aspects of the Bridge and the Estate associated with it. The Journals recorded the proceedings of the meetings of Bridge House Lands Committee, the body responsible for leasing the landed estate. The Journals become much more organised and detailed over the course of the eighteenth century but even in the seventeenth century these tomes contained information such as the reports delivered to the committee, orders issued by them, the leases issued and lists of attendance of committee members. The Bridge House Papers are the various pieces of paper work associated with the committee meetings, and most of the information contained in these folios has been entered into the Journals in a more accessible form, yet the papers do throw up the occasional gem of information that the Journals fail to record.

The Bridge House's annual accounts are an exceptionally meticulous record of the revenues and expenditure of the Bridge House estate. These physically imposing volumes record in detail everything from the income received and owed from each individual lease, to the figures spent on particular materials for the maintenance of the Bridge. This level of detail makes them a potentially rich source but they are far from simple to use and, as with most early modern account books, they are a mass of figures and calculations. They were not simply concerned with recording actual cash flows, but rather their main object was to account for all the financial assets of the Bridge House and in particular the recording of the arrears owed to the estate. The accounts are therefore largely dealing with sums that exist purely on paper.

⁴⁰ Harding and Wright, *London Bridge*; Harding, V., 'Supplying London Bridge, 1380-1540', *Franco British studies*, vol. 20 (1995), pp.111-124; Shipley, N.R., 'The City Lands Committee, 1592-1642', *Guildhall studies in London history*, vol. 2, no.4 (London, 1977), pp.161-178; Swann, B.A.S., 'A study of some London estates in the eighteenth century' (unpublished London University Ph.D. thesis, 1964).

The Bridge House method of accounting is based on what was known as the ‘Charge and Discharge’ system - a system that has been charitably described by Mingay as ‘idiosyncratic’.⁴¹

As a result of this accounting method it is often difficult to identify the figures that are genuinely relevant, as opposed to those figures which are simply part of the accounting exercise. Consequently there is a strong element of sorting the wheat from the chaff when it comes to dealing with these sources. There is also the additional related problem of creative accounting, which is very much in evidence in these books, where simple manipulation of the data by the Bridge House accountants dramatically altered the financial situation of the Estate. Indeed, as the reader will note, this research has been selective about the use of data from the Account books in the period prior to 1684. The reason for this is that such an instance of creative accounting, which was only resolved in the mid 1680s, managed to distort the Bridge House balance sheet in the preceding decades, and makes a number of the Account book entries after the Fire highly dubious. Therefore the majority of the statistics employed in this thesis are derived from figures of the *actual revenues* or what could be termed cash revenues. These cash revenues were tangible sums of money that actually passed into and out of the Bridge’s treasury, and as we shall see, a worthwhile analysis of the finances of the Bridge can only realistically be based upon these figures. In this respect another set of records, the Cash Books has been invaluable as a corroboratory source, as they contain only figures for the actual cash coming in and out of the Bridge House on an annual basis.

The other two main sets of records, the Court of Aldermen Repertories and the Common Council Journals are related to the two main administrative bodies of the City, and they record the proceedings of the meetings of these two bodies, and contain reports and orders relating to London Bridge. Other sets of records consulted include those

⁴¹ Mingay, G.E., *English landed society in the eighteenth century* (London, 1963), pp.174-5; For descriptions of the undoubted deficiencies of this system of accounting see: Yates and Gibson, *Traffic and politics*, pp.311-312; Harding, V., ‘The crown, the City, and the orphans: the City of London and its finances, 1400-1700’ in Boone, M., Davids, K., and Janssens, P. (eds.), *Urban public debts* (Brepols, 2003), pp.57-58.

associated with the London Bridge Improvement Commission, the Comptroller and Solicitor papers, and various Bridge House collection books, alongside an array of miscellaneous documents, plans, and lease abstracts. The examination of documents beyond those related to the Corporation has been limited, but this has been the unfortunate consequence having to focus time and resources during the process of research on fully exploiting and utilising the extensive Bridge House related records.

Similarly a finite timeframe has meant that it has not been possible to transcribe data from every piece of documentary evidence relating to the Bridge House and therefore in certain areas sampling has been employed. In the case of the account books and cash books complete statistics for both income and expenditure streams for every year from 1684-1756 were obtained. The data prior to 1684 has to be treated with care as the Bridge House accounting practices were particularly dubious up until their overhaul that year. However, it has been possible to obtain accurate data for many areas of the Bridge House finances stretching back as far as 1666, and these figures have been recorded and utilised. This has allowed a comprehensive picture of the financial situation of the Bridge House to be charted. However, in terms of evidence relating to BHLC attendance and committee lists for example, a sample of every other year has been sufficient to illustrate the various trends and arguments discussed in the thesis. Where sampling has been employed it is noted.

Organisation of the thesis

The organisation of the thesis has been largely dictated by the historiography relating to Improvement Acts, and although this leads to a far from linear narrative it has allowed for a structure that facilitates engagement with specific historical debates. The thesis is broken down into three parts comprising of two chapters each.

In order to furnish the reader with a solid understanding of the mechanics of the Bridge House system of administration, Part I begins with a chapter which maps out the historical development of the Bridge House, elucidates the intricacies of its operation, and details the various bodies and offices involved in running it. Chapter three then assesses this administration in the period after the Fire in 1666 and prior to the Revolution in 1688, a period during which the City of London was under the control of

an aldermanic oligarchy. The opportunity is taken in this chapter to engage with debates regarding the functioning and character of early modern oligarchic rule.

Part II moves on to deal directly with the Improvement Act: specifically what factors motivated the desire to remove the houses from London Bridge. Chapter four analyses the received opinion that this renovation of the Bridge in 1756 was driven by the ‘spirit of improvement’, and suggests that there is little evidence for this assertion. Chapter five instead posits the alternative thesis that it was a series of crises and events in the finances of the Bridge House and the Corporation which prompted the demolition of the houses. In the process this section seeks to illustrate how the issue of finance can help shed light on why the built environment of early modern London took the form it did.

Chapters six and seven constitute Part III which seeks to establish the reasons behind the adoption of the Improvement Act as the mechanism through which to achieve this change. Chapter six will look at the finance raising powers contained in the Act and question why, given that the Bridge House derived its income from a large and stable landed estate, such powers were required. In doing so this chapter will address broader concerns regarding the manner in which urban authorities managed and exploited their financial resources. Chapter seven, covering the administration of the Bridge in the period after the Glorious Revolution, explores the political motivations behind the Act and more specifically why an Improvement Commission was entrusted with the duties of undertaking the project at the expense of the existing Bridge House administrative structure.

PART I

The Bridge House Administration

Chapter II

The Administration of London Bridge

The origin of the Bridge's system of administration lies in the period during and after the construction of the first stone Bridge in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The Bridge management had evolved considerably by the time of the mid seventeenth century but, as this chapter will go on to illustrate, this early modern administrative structure was still fundamentally shaped by the legacy of the system established upon the completion of the Bridge. Therefore in order to understand the system of administration in place by the 1660s we have to elucidate its early medieval origins and chart its evolution over the subsequent four and a half centuries.¹

The Bridge House and its historical origins

There are three main historical factors that had a fundamental bearing on the development of the Bridge's rather idiosyncratic and utterly indeterminate system of administration. Firstly, as Barron notes the Bridge 'antedated the formation of a permanent civic bureaucracy'². In other words the City of London as a corporation and administrative body simply did not exist in any meaningful form at the outset of Bridge's construction in 1172. However, by the time of the Bridge's completion in 1209 the institutions of civic governance, the Mayoralty and the Corporation, were in their infancy, and the City of London was doggedly fighting to assert its independence from the crown.³ The City of London has no charter of incorporation 'being a Corporation by prescriptive right',⁴ and developed its status and powers via a series of charters from the eleventh century onwards. Therefore the Bridge administration grew within the context of incremental developments in the structure of the Corporation itself. Secondly, and linked to this first point, the entire system of Bridge administration was predicated on the notion

¹ It is important to note at this point that the literature on the origins of the administration of London Bridge is far from satisfactory. Many of the sources, including several used in this study, contradict each other on numerous points, and none really provides a lucid and comprehensive account of the development of this system. What follows therefore is a narrative based on a careful reading of as many secondary sources as possible.

² Barron, C., *London in the later middle ages: government and people, 1200-1500* (Oxford, 2004), p.50.

³ *Ibid.*, pp.1-30.

⁴ Jones, P.E., *The Corporation of London: Its origin, constitution, powers and duties* (Oxford, 1950), p.6.

of the structure being financially self-sufficient as, at the time of its inception, there was no permanent and established corporate body to fund construction and maintenance of the structure. Thirdly, as we shall see, the twelfth-century administration of the Bridge in many ways resembled an organisation that we would now define as a trust; a body of individuals known as trustees, ‘in whom the legal ownership of property is vested to hold or use for the benefit of another’⁵ and indeed most historians have referred to the system of administration that developed as just that. However, as Jones has noted this was a period ‘before the doctrine of trusts was fully developed’⁶ and therefore the entity that was created to administer the Bridge was not, initially at least, subject to the essential legal protection and rules of operation that define a true trust.

This section will piece together a narrative that illuminates how these three factors combined to produce a system of Bridge management that was initially distinct from the City, but one that from the early thirteenth century onwards was increasingly integrated into the administrative mechanisms of the Corporation. It will conclude that this was an organic and rather piecemeal process, and crucially it was a process that left the Bridge administration with a rather truncated system of financial accountability.

There is some evidence that there existed a bridge at the site of London Bridge since Roman times but the first authenticated structure was a wooden Bridge that was probably in existence from the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.⁷ It has been suggested that even at this early date Londoners donated both cash and land to fund the maintenance of the wooden structure.⁸ Smith suggests that these assets comprised an estate that was most likely to have been administered by the monks of Bermondsey Abbey.⁹ Home is far more specific and argues that there existed a priest who was responsible for receiving and spending the revenues of this estate in order to maintain the structure.¹⁰ Keene however makes no reference to an estate during this period or the involvement of religious bodies and instead argues that Bridge maintenance was firmly in the hands of the monarchy. He claims that the running of the Bridge relied on a number of

⁵ Oxford University Press 2006, *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, viewed 6 January 2007, <http://www.dictionary.oed.com>

⁶ Jones, *The Corporation*, p.130.

⁷ Watson, B., Brigham T., and Dyson T., *London Bridge: 2000 years of a river crossing*, Museum of London archaeology service monograph 8 (London, 2001), chapters 1 and 2.

⁸ Harding, V., and Wright, L. (eds.), *London Bridge: selected accounts and rentals, 1381-1538*, London Record Society, vol. 31 (1995), p.ix.

⁹ Smith, V., *The origins and history of the Bridge House Estates*, vols. I (London, 1932-38), p.31.

¹⁰ Home, *Old London Bridge* (London), p.20.

officials, such as the sheriffs, who answered directly to the crown and who oversaw a system of 'direct provision of labour and materials as conditions of land tenure'.¹¹ In other words, this was a similar system of administration to that which has been identified for Rochester Bridge: landlords in the surrounding counties were obligated to provide these crown officials with men and materials in order to repair the Bridge. Whatever the case, it is clear that there was some form of system in place that oversaw the maintenance of the Bridge in the absence of a corporate institution, but it does seem to have been fairly informal compared with the much more organised system operating at the time for the bridge at Rochester.¹²

When building commenced on the stone Bridge in 1176 the project was sanctioned by Henry II and greatly assisted by the taxes he imposed. The commonalty made many contributions to the funding of the Bridge via donations and benefactions, such as land or cash sums. Additionally by the latter part of the 1180s at least five separate Bridge guilds run by the aldermen had sprung up. These were essentially guilds whose proceeds were channelled into Bridge construction.¹³ The estate of the Bridge was placed not directly in the hands of a body of London citizens but rather in the hands of the priest builder Peter de Colechurch, in order to provide him with the required finances to fund the project.¹⁴ He was appointed by the king and his duties as proctor of London Bridge appear to have been to manage the funds collected towards rebuilding the Bridge. Keene argues that 'Peter emerges from the sources as a man of affairs and head of a fraternity which held these assets for the benefit of the bridge and on behalf of the community of citizens.'¹⁵ So this was a project that was undertaken with the needs of the citizens and communities of London very much in mind, but it was also a project that was totally dependant on royal patronage.

Despite the initial lack of direct City control this construction of the Bridge was an undertaking fuelled by and analogous with the ambitions of the citizens of London, hence the many benefactions and donations. This involvement on the part of the citizens

¹¹ Keene, D., 'London Bridge and the identity of the medieval city', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex archaeological society*, no.51 (2001), pp.145-6.

¹² Yates, N., and Gibson, J. (eds.), *Traffic and politics: The construction and Management of Rochester Bridge, AD 43-1993* (Rochester, 1994), pp.12-40. This system relied on a fairly sophisticated 'bridgework list' whereby the surrounding parishes, the king, the bishop and the archbishop were listed as responsible for financing the maintenance of individual piers. This 'bridgework list' was held by the cathedral priory and the cathedral was responsible for receiving and spending the money.

¹³ Barron, *London*, p.50.

¹⁴ Home and others contend that de Colechurch was the architect and builder of London Bridge, Keene however suggests that there is no reason to believe this.

¹⁵ Keene, 'London Bridge', p.146.

stemmed from the fact that the construction of the Bridge was undertaken during a period of London's history 'characterised by the desire of the City to emerge from crown control and to establish itself as an autonomous self-governing body';¹⁶ a time 'when the citizens of London were struggling for recognition as a collective entity'.¹⁷ These citizens saw that the construction of London Bridge was part of this struggle for autonomy both in terms of the contribution it would make to the City's economic independence from the crown and also the civic prestige it would generate. So despite the fact that construction was not in the hands of London's citizenry it was still very much a project tied up with London's burgeoning civic identity, and was viewed as 'the city's bridge'.¹⁸ As we shall see, as the City of London emerged as corporate body and contested the power of the crown, so it incrementally gained more control over the Bridge affairs. It is crucial to note, however, that during these formative years the Bridge's administration was not in the hands of the citizens of the City. The administration of the new stone Bridge began life as a body headed by de Colechurch, distinct from the City, and a body that was ultimately at the whim of the absolute power held by the monarch. This state of affairs of course raised the issue of ensuring the proper funding of the Bridge, and it seems that upon the completion of the structure there was a desire on the part of King John to encourage financial self-sufficiency, no doubt to avoid a possible drain on the royal purse.

The first significant step taken to ensure the Bridge's financial self-sufficiency was made in 1201. John ordered that "the rents and profits of the several houses which the said Master of the Schools shall cause to be erected upon the Bridge aforesaid be for ever appropriated to repair, maintain and uphold the same" and several "void places" within the City were also allocated to the Bridge by the King in order that the revenues from rental might be utilised to fund the Bridge's continued construction and maintenance.¹⁹ These assets were added to the existing estate under the control of Peter de Colechurch.²⁰ There seems to have been some sort of decentralisation of control after Peter's death in 1205. It appears that Isenbert of Saintes was given the task of overseeing the building of

¹⁶ Barron, *London*, pp.1-55.

¹⁷ Harding and Wright, *London Bridge*, p.ix.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.ix.

¹⁹ Letter from king John to the architects of the Bridge, quoted in Home. *Old London Bridge*, p.42.

²⁰ Cooper argues that the estate used to fund the previous wooden bridge was not simply transferred into the hands of De Colechurch, but rather piece by piece, through benefactions and endowments, a wholly new estate was developed. Cooper also robustly contests the role of the 'antiquarians' hero' De Colechurch in the process of the construction of the Bridge and the development of the Bridge House estate. Cooper, A., *Bridges, law and power in medieval England: 700-1400* (Woodbridge, 2006), pp.109-119.

the structure.²¹ Furthermore King John issued a writ appointing an attorney for the custody of the Bridge, an individual by the name of Brother Wasce, and ordered that the Chief Justice of England and the mayor of London choose a suitable individual to work alongside the Brother.²² This seems to be the first instance of the City as a body actually gaining some official influence over the Bridge's administration. These men were known as the Bridge Protectors or Wardens. Their appointment as Bridge Wardens appears to have set a precedent as over the next four decades appointments to the post were made jointly by the City and crown via some opaque process, apparently when the incumbent died or resigned.²³ The number of these men in possession of the office at any one time varied but they were clearly substantial citizens, including aldermen and lord mayors.²⁴ It is important to note that it was clearly indicated that the responsibility of these men in their capacity as Bridge Wardens was solely towards the Bridge; they were charged with administering the estate purely for the benefit of the Bridge. As Welch notes 'they possessed large if not absolute powers of dealing with the Bridge properties by sale or otherwise *for the profit of the trust*.'²⁵

So despite the involvement of the City in the running of the Bridge via the appointment of Bridge Wardens there was no sense that the Bridge administration was indeed part of the Corporation, and this was illustrated in 1249 when Henry I reclaimed sole crown control of the estate in order to use the substantial revenues generated by the Bridge and its lands to help fund his wars in France. During the period between 1249 and 1281 all Wardens were appointed by the monarch (King Henry and thereafter Queen Eleanor) and the Bridge was simply a revenue generating mechanism for the royal purse. By the time of Edward I's accession to the throne the Bridge had become dilapidated due to this starvation of funds, and the king wisely revived the system of independent management. Under Edward further measures were introduced to improve the Bridge's financial self-sufficiency.²⁶ More importantly, by this time the City had begun to develop the machinery of bureaucracy and was given control over these measures. It was therefore beginning to fulfil a role as an administrative body for the Bridge. In 1282 the king 'gave

²¹ Keene, D, 'Colechurch, Peter of (d.1205)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press (2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5868>, accessed 10 December 2006.

²² Home, *Old London Bridge*, p.332.

²³ Welch, C., *The history of Tower Bridge, and of other bridges over the Thames built by the Corporation of London* (London, 1894), p.32.

²⁴ Home, *Old London Bridge*, appendix A.

²⁵ Welch, *Tower Bridge*, p.33, (my italics).

²⁶ Keene, 'London Bridge', p.148.

authority to the commonalty of London to exact tolls on traffic across and under the Bridge'²⁷ and in an order to the mayor he instructed him to appoint wardens in order to collect these tolls.²⁸ Edward also granted another tranche of land to the mayor and commonalty, who were instructed to lease this real estate to raise further funds to support the Bridge.²⁹ It is interesting that despite these measures the perception of the Bridge as a body distinct from the City was clearly still strong, so much so in fact that the whole system of Bridge administration, 'the wardens, workforce, properties and rights of London Bridge', had, by this period, developed its own 'institutional identity', to which the name 'the Bridge House' was applied'.³⁰ It seems that during this initial period of the Bridge's history, policy regarding the structure was made by the king and implemented and administered by the City. However, it is clear that, despite wielding ultimate power over the Bridge, the monarchy, by attempting to make the structure financially self-sufficient, was determinedly trying to eschew ultimate accountability for its financial health.

The Bridge management evolved further with Edward II's charter of 1319, which, as Barron notes, was pivotal in the City's struggle for self-government and comprised 'a number of detailed regulations about the way in which the city was to be governed'³¹, including the administration of the Bridge. The document stated that:

the keeping the bridge of the said city and the rents and profits belonging to that bridge, be committed to be kept to two honest and sufficient men of the city, other than Aldermen, to be chosen to this by the commonalty, at the will of the said commonalty, and not to others; and who may answer thereupon to the said commonalty.³²

This document was the last charter that related to the Bridge's administration, and officially enshrined the position of Bridge Warden, along with the City's right to select and appoint these men. More importantly it made these men accountable to the City and therefore, without explicitly stating it, devolved responsibility over the Bridge from crown to City. Conversely what this document also did was to reiterate that the assets of the

²⁷ Christianson, C.P., *Memorials of the book trade in medieval London: the archives of old London Bridge* (Cambridge, 1987), p.4; Smith, *Bridge House Estates*, p.59.

²⁸ Home, *Old London Bridge*, p.64.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.65.

³⁰ Harding and Wright, *London Bridge*, p.x.

³¹ Barron, *London*, p.34.

³² De Gray, W., *The historical charters and constitutional documents of the City of London* (London, 1887), p.49.

Bridge belonged to the *Bridge* and not the *City*, and that despite being men of the City the position of Bridge Warden was responsible solely for ‘keeping’ the estate and assets for the benefit of the Bridge. This document effectively established the Bridge House as a crude form of trust and charged the City both with selecting suitable men Bridge Wardens to act as trustees, and ensuring that these men fulfilled their obligations in respect of this trust. Additionally, superficially at least, it loosened the aldermen’s grip in another respect by barring them personally from holding the office of Bridge Warden. This charter was a pivotal chapter in the Bridge’s administrative history for two further reasons.

Firstly, the charter was almost totally devoid of detail or specifics regarding the limits of power of the Bridge Masters and the commonalty in the administration of the Bridge, and yet made the Bridge Masters accountable to the commonalty. It will be argued that these features of the charter allowed the latter group from this point on to act as the *de facto* governors of the Bridge House. Secondly, by defining them as mere “keepers” it seems that this charter established the position of Bridge Master as rather passive and reactive, and this characteristic shaped the financial responsibilities of the role for the next five centuries. The prime duty of the Bridge Masters was to ensure the maintenance and structural integrity of the Bridge itself but the rubric of this keeping role meant that the Bridge Masters were, according to Welch, ‘personally responsible for the financial prosperity of their trust’³³. This is true in one sense; however, it gives only half the story. The masters were responsible for receiving, spending and accounting for whatever income was paid into and out of the Bridge House coffers. The medieval masters ‘were not expected to balance income and expenditure year to year, only to set down what had come in and what had been spent.’³⁴ The Bridge House account could and often did run at a deficit during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³⁵ However what the masters were expected to do was ensure that the accounts balanced at the end of their term of office. As Welch notes, if the account was in deficit at the end of a Bridge Master’s term, then he himself owed the Bridge House the deficit and his accounts would not be signed off until the money was paid.³⁶ In this sense then the Bridge Masters certainly were ‘personally responsible’ for the financial health of the Bridge House. However in terms of the Bridge House’s ‘financial prosperity’, a phrase that suggests financial progression and growth, the Bridge Masters had very little if any personal responsibility to ensure this.

³³ Welch, *Tower Bridge*, p.45.

³⁴ Harding and Wright, *London Bridge*. p.xii.

³⁵ Welch, *Tower Bridge*, p.33, 47; Harding and Wright, *London Bridge*, p.xiii.

³⁶ Welch, *Tower Bridge*, p.33, 45.

The masters had no mandate to increase income by investing any surplus monies, indeed there was no provision for the Bridge Masters to hold a surplus, or make what could be termed a profit.³⁷ The fifteenth-century oath of the masters tries rather half heartedly to encourage them to financially maximise the Bridge's assets by directing them to "reasonably encrece . . . alle the profites and avauntages"³⁸ of the Bridge, but this seems rather a vague afterthought and it is difficult to envisage how this sort of injunction would have been enforceable. Fundamentally, as long as at the end of the Bridge Master's term of office the account books balanced and the Bridge was in a functional state of repair, then the duty of keeping the Bridge had been fulfilled. There was very little incentive, to borrow a phrase from modern management speak, for the Bridge Wardens to grow the business. Similarly, as the charter had cemented the difference between the 'City' and the 'Bridge' the City had no obligations or responsibilities in regards of expanding the assets and/or the profitability of the Bridge House.

Over the succeeding centuries after the charter of 1319 the monarch became less involved in City affairs.³⁹ The Bridge House and the Bridge Masters (as the Bridge Wardens were now more commonly known) fell firmly under the control of the City. Despite the Bridge Masters supposed autonomy regarding the Bridge matters Harding notes that by the late fourteenth century, 'important decisions about the estate and regulations about the bridge's use were authorised by the mayor, aldermen, and citizens, who kept a close eye on its administration and finances, and defended its interests.'⁴⁰ Furthermore the business of the Bridge was issued under the seal of the City, and the fourteenth-century wardens took their oaths in the county court of the City; the Court of Husting.⁴¹ So the Corporation, despite never explicitly being given the power to do so, was now dictating Bridge House policy and undertaking the strategic decisions for the Bridge. Yet the Bridge Masters still had trappings of authority between the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in that they continued to have significant control over expenditure on the Bridge and apparently still had control over the issuing of leases.⁴² These powers, however, were being eroded during the sixteenth century as the City began to augment the bureaucratic structure of the Bridge.

³⁷ Harding and Wright, *London Bridge*, p.xii.

³⁸ Quote taken from, *The oath of the wardens of the Bridge*, published in Welch, *Tower Bridge*, p.256.

³⁹ Barron, *London*, p.34.

⁴⁰ Harding and Wright, *London Bridge*, pp.ix-x.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.x.

⁴² Harding, V., 'Supplying London Bridge, 1380-1540', *Franco British studies*, vol. 20 (1995), pp.112-121; Jones, *The Corporation*, p.131.

As early as the fifteenth century the City installed a Clerk of the Works of London Bridge, a post subordinate to the Bridge Masters. The origins of this office seem uncertain, but it grew in importance throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁴³ The clerks were performing many important day-to-day duties during the fifteenth century including overseeing the weekly accounting, paying workmen and even on some occasions supervising building and maintenance work.⁴⁴ Then in September 1499 it seems that this office was elevated to the status of Comptroller. The Comptroller was to 'control the Bridge Masters like as there is appointed for the Chamberlain' and was to be 'named yearly by the Mayor and Aldermen'.⁴⁵ Yet whereas the Comptroller of the Chamber was clearly a subordinate role to the Chamberlain and the previous post of Clerk of London Bridge was more of an administrative role, the Clerk Comptroller of the Works of London Bridge (as he was newly entitled) was now informing the Bridge Masters of the orders of the Court of Aldermen and had effectively become the aldermen's representative to the Bridge House.⁴⁶ By conveying and implementing the committees' dictates the comptroller acted as the link between the committee, aldermen and Common Council and the Bridge Masters. The Bridge Masters were therefore reduced to acting upon the orders conveyed by the comptroller.

This situation changed again in 1559. Previous to this date the leasing of Bridge lands was in the hands of the Bridge Masters, who, it seems, were responsible for negotiating the leases and then seeking endorsement of the leases by the Court of Aldermen.⁴⁷ In 1559 the Court of Aldermen voted to place the leasing of Bridge lands under their own jurisdiction and 'Thereafter . . . the City lands, were controlled by a committee of Aldermen known as the Surveyors, in conjunction with the City Chamberlain.'⁴⁸ The creation of the City Lands Committee, in the spring of 1592, again altered the system of leasing of the Bridge lands. This committee was a product of a power struggle between the Common Council and the aldermen, and the desire of the former to have 'a greater role in the administration of the City lands, over which it had

⁴³ Christian, *Memorials*, p.6; Harding and Wright, *London Bridge*, p.xiii.

⁴⁴ Christian, *Memorials*, p.9; Harding and Wright, *London Bridge*. p.xiii.

⁴⁵ Smith, *Bridge House Estates*, p.12; CLRO, COL/AC/13/006 fol.17., Research papers: Bridge House Comptroller, historical notes on the office, 1499–1841.

⁴⁶ See: Masters, B., *The chamber accounts of the sixteenth century* (London, 1984), pp.xxxii, for a description of the duties of the comptroller of the chamber.

⁴⁷ Jones, *The Corporation*, p.131. Welch suggests that the power to grant leases was originally taken out of the hands of the Bridge Masters by the common council in 1528, Welch, *Tower Bridge*, p.50.

⁴⁸ Shipley, N.R., 'The City Lands Committee, 1592-1642', *Guildhall studies in London history*, vol. II, no.4 (London, 1977), pp.161-2.

always maintained its ultimate authority.⁴⁹ Alongside the City committee was created a separated body known as the Bridge House Estates Committee which comprised of both aldermen and common councillors. This body ensured that for the first time common councillors were officially part of the organisation that issued these leases.

What these two episodes demonstrate is the extent to which the *Bridge's* lands were now considered by the commonalty as the *City's* lands. Furthermore, it seems that the ultimate authority over the Bridge Masters vested in the commonalty by the 1319 charter justified the removal of the Bridge Masters' powers to grant leases, and justified the violation of the trustee system that this constituted. Although in theory the City and the Bridge House committees were distinct, with the Bridge still being technically a separate entity, in practice this was not the case. The four aldermen and six commoners that constituted the City committee were the very same ten individuals that sat on the BHLC. The differences between the two committees were slight in that they sat on different days, recorded their minutes separately, and each had their own clerk.⁵⁰ The Clerk Comptroller of the Bridge (by this time a position occupied by trained solicitors) 'was appointed the Clerk to the committee to advise it upon legal matters, and to act as the conveyancing officer of the trust in the sale and purchase of lands and the granting of leases.'⁵¹ In later years this office became more commonly known as the Bridge House Comptroller.⁵² As well as removing the power of granting leases from the Bridge Masters, this committee further emasculated the masters by ensuring that the comptroller effectively became the Bridge Houses' representative on the committee. The Bridge Masters could attend the committee's meeting if it was convenient, and be present at the granting of leases, but this seems to have been nothing more than a courtesy concession. They had no input into the decision and the Bridge Masters were left with the symbolic duty of holding the leases at the Bridge House.⁵³

Ultimately then the administrative body of the Bridge, the Bridge House, began its life as an independent body, but as the power of its sponsor, the monarchy, receded so the power of the Corporation rushed in to fill the vacuum. The 'informality'⁵⁴, and lack of legal clarity in the arrangements for administering the Bridge, epitomised by the charter

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.165.

⁵⁰ Smith, *Bridge House Estates*, p.89.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.89.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁵³ Shipley, 'City Lands committee', p.166; Smith, *Bridge House Estates*, p.83, 86.

⁵⁴ Harding and Wright, *London Bridge*, p.ix.

of 1319, allowed the City through a number of measures progressively to gain power over the Bridge House. In the wake of this charter it seems that the City could act with impunity over the Bridge. Quite simply as the monarchy increasingly withdrew from involvement in the administration of the capital who or what was in a position to challenge the City's actions? However, this process only served to ensure that the Bridge House occupied an increasingly liminal position: it was never an 'integral element'⁵⁵ of the Corporation, yet nor, as we have seen, was it a truly distinct body. As Harding notes, its institutional status was hard to define: it 'was not in the hands of an independent charity or corporate body; essentially it was a municipal institution at one remove from the municipality'.⁵⁶ The most important consequences of this piecemeal acquisition of power was that the responsibility to maximise the assets of the Bridge was never vested in any individual or body involved in the administration of the Bridge House. Historians have conflated the Corporation's control over the Bridge Masters and their ability to act with impunity, as control over the Bridge House. Welch states that 'the supreme control over the bridge was, vested in the Corporation of London',⁵⁷ however, as we have seen, although the corporation may have had 'supreme control' over the Bridge, the issue of who or what had supreme accountability for the structure and its finances was never resolved.

Therefore the historical development bequeathed the Bridge House a legacy with two defining features. Firstly, this issue of financial accountability and the responsibility to maximise the resources of the Bridge House was simply never attributed to any office or body. Secondly, the Bridge House administration was particularly opaque and disjointed even by the standards of early modern organisations. In order to understand the roles this historical legacy played in shaping the administration of the Bridge in the period between the 1660s and 1750s we need to analyse the details of exactly how the system of Bridge House administration operated by looking at the activities of the various bodies and offices that were involved in the running of London Bridge and how the Bridge House related to the broader administrative structure of the City.

⁵⁵ Keene, 'London Bridge', p.148.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.ix.

⁵⁷ Welch, *Tower Bridge*, p.31.

The Corporation of London and its administrative structure⁵⁸

As we have seen the administration of the Bridge and its estates rested almost entirely with three bodies: the Court of the Aldermen, the Court of the Common Council and the Bridge House Lands Committee, and two offices: the Clerk Comptroller of the Bridge House and the Bridge Masters. In order to understand how these various components of the administration operated the following section will give a brief overview of the mechanics of the City government in the seventeenth century, from its lowest level: the precinct, to its highest: the Court of Aldermen, and in the process it will illustrate the oligarchic nature of the system. It will then describe how oligarchy has been studied in relation to other corporations and suggest ways in which an analysis of the Bridge House administration can help improve our understanding of oligarchy in the context of the Corporation of London.

It must be noted here that what follows is an explanation of both the Corporation's and Bridge House's administrative structures in the period between 1666 and roughly 1683. The reason for this is that the events of the period between the Exclusion crisis in the early 1680s and the Revolution of 1688 greatly altered the administrative landscape of the Corporation. The fall out from broader national party political battles saw the Corporation's charter suspended in 1684, and, as the Common Council did not sit for the following four years, the administration of the City, and indeed the Bridge House was undertaken solely by crown appointed aldermen.⁵⁹ These events created a disjuncture in the history of City governance for two inter-related reasons. Firstly the balance of administrative power began to shift from the Court of Aldermen towards the Common Council, and secondly historians have argued that the whole issue of City administration became highly politicised as the Corporation split along party political lines.⁶⁰ The final chapter of this thesis will discuss these developments and their potential implications for the administration of the Bridge House in much greater detail, but suffice to say at this

⁵⁸ The following explanation of City government is based on the accounts contained in the following works: Webb, B., and Webb, S., *English local government: The manor and the borough* (London, 1908); Pearl, V., *London and the outbreak of the puritan revolution: City government and national politics, 1625-43* (Oxford, 1961); Jones, *The Corporation of London*; De Krey, G., *A fractured society: The politics of London in the first age of party, 1688-1715* (Oxford, 1985); Rudé, G., *Hanoverian London: 1714-1808* (London, 1971); Doolittle, I.G., 'The government of the City of London, 1694-1767' (unpublished University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1980).

⁵⁹ For the suspension of the charter see: Levin, J., *The charter controversy in the City of London, 1660-88 and its consequences* (London, 1969).

⁶⁰ De Krey, G., *London and the restoration, 1659-1683* (Cambridge, 2005); Horwitz, H., 'Party in a civic context: London from the exclusion crisis to the fall of Walpole' in Jones, C., (ed.), *Britain in the first age of party, 1689-1750: essays presented to Geoffrey Holmes* (London, 1987), pp.173-94.

juncture that the period between the Great Fire and the early 1680s allows us to construct a basic understanding of the way in which the Bridge House administration system operated without having to factor in the additional complexity of post Revolution administrative and political developments, which require their own chapter.

As many historians have noted the Corporation of London was a complex and multifaceted body with a plethora of officers, assemblies and courts, each imbued with varying degrees of power and breadth of operation, and all fuelled by an idiosyncratic elective process. The Corporation's administration essentially revolved around five main bodies: the precinct, the wardmote, the Court of the Common Hall, the Court of the Common Council, and finally the Court of the Aldermen. Although technically these various bodies 'formed no hierarchy'⁶¹ in practice the Court of Aldermen dominated the administration of the City.

The most basic unit of organisation within the Corporation was the precinct. There were around 250 precincts in the City of London, each representing a small geographical area within the City and encompassing no more than about a 100 houses.⁶² Once a year the householders of the precinct, defined as those paying scot and bearing lot⁶³, were called to attend the precinct meeting. The business of this meeting was to nominate individuals from amongst its number to fill various local offices within the precinct. In addition the precinct also nominated men for places on the ward inquest jury. However, the most important function of this meeting was for the attendant freemen to nominate one of their number for the office of Common Councilman of the Ward.

A precinct was in turn part of a larger administrative body known as a ward. The City of London was divided into 26 of these wards, each one encompassing several precincts. Once a year on St Thomas's day all the ratepayers of the ward were obliged to attend an assembly called the Wardmote. This was presided over by the highest officer of the ward known as the alderman, with his deputy and the sitting common councillor of the ward also in attendance (a grouping also known as the Common Council of the Ward). At the beginning of our period the Common Council of the Ward was responsible for the everyday business of the ward: directing the night watch, recommending publicans for

⁶¹ Webb, *Manor and the borough*, p.575.

⁶² Webb, *Manor and the borough*, p.587.

⁶³ This is essentially the obligation of performing duties such as hanging a light out in front ones property, or acting as an officer such as Constable within the precinct "bearing lot", or paying a fee in lieu of such service "paying scot". Jones, *The Corporation*, p.125.

licences, settling assessments, hearing ratepayer's appeals and directing the collection of rates.⁶⁴ During the actual Wardmotes the men nominated by the precincts for the various ward offices would be elected, the freeman members of the ward voted on the nominations for common councillors,⁶⁵ and selections were made for the ward inquest jury. This jury was ordered by the alderman of the ward to investigate and report on 'houses of ill-fame, false weights and measures, foreign traders, unlicensed brokers, encroachments and nuisances', within the ward.⁶⁶ The jury then presented its findings every year to the Court of Aldermen, whereupon action to remedy these issues was decided upon.⁶⁷ As the Webbs note it was this system of inquest jury that ensured that the householders of the ward performed their social obligations in terms of the paving, cleansing and lighting of the streets.⁶⁸ The Wardmote also performed another important function. In the event of the death of the alderman of the ward the Lord Mayor would preside over the Wardmote and the freemen members would nominate or elect their new alderman.⁶⁹

These smaller bodies may have been the basis upon which the City's government was built but they certainly played little direct part in the administration of the Bridge. Their importance however lies in the fact that they elected the members of the two bodies that did have direct influence over the Bridge: the Court of Common Council and the Court of Aldermen. They also supposedly provided a mechanism through which the non-elite of the City, the tradesmen and small shopkeepers of London, could express their collective opinions regarding their city to the upper Courts.

The first body we encounter in the Corporation that had real influence in Bridge affairs was the Court of the Common Hall. This Court, convened by the Lord Mayor as required, was attended by the aldermen, common councillors and was open to the several thousand liverymen of the City. As Pearl notes, this body was not a 'deliberative council'⁷⁰, but rather its sole function was to elect (nominate) candidates for various City offices. The Court, after a period of deliberation, would elect two men for each post and

⁶⁴ Webb, *Manor and the borough*, p.579.

⁶⁵ As the Webbs note, the nominations for the various offices were determined by the 'governing clique' of the ward and were basically automatically elected unless a vote was specifically called for, and this rarely occurred as these cliques that ran the precincts had an unwritten rule of not opposing each others nominations. Webb, *Manor and the borough*, p.585, 592-3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.579.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.594-606.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.603.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.579.

⁷⁰ Pearl, *London*, p. 49.

would then 'send up' these nominations to the Court of Aldermen who would choose one of the candidates.⁷¹ The most important election held by this Court was for the Lord Mayor, but it also elected other important City officials such as the chamberlain, sheriffs and auditors. However in terms of London Bridge the most influential function of this court was to elect the two Bridge Masters.⁷²

The next level up the Corporation's hierarchy was the fully elected Court of the Common Council. As previously noted the men that comprised this 234 strong body had been elected as representatives of their various wards. The common councillors were joined in this Court by the 26 aldermen (including the Lord Mayor) and, as we shall see, it was the aldermen that were very much in control of this assembly.⁷³ The Court of the Common Council was considered the legislature of the Corporation, and its function was 'to afford counsel to the Lord Major and aldermen in their government of the City'.⁷⁴ This Court was convened and dissolved by the Lord Mayor as and when the aldermen required this counsel.⁷⁵ During the seventeenth century the advice of the Court of Common Council was rarely sought and it met infrequently, only around five to six times annually.⁷⁶ The Court discussed 'only those measures proposed to the assembly on the initiative of the Court of Aldermen'.⁷⁷ In other words the aldermen strictly controlled the issues this assembly could debate. The issues that were introduced to this Court were presented in the form of a petition, with the petitioners 'whether the officers of companies, Wardmotes or parishes, or merely individual citizens'⁷⁸ appearing before the Court to state their grievances or requests. The aldermen also placed before the Court numerous bills for their deliberation that had often been discussed and prepared by the Court of Aldermen before their submission to the Court of Common Council.⁷⁹ The petitions and bills presented to the Court were then discussed and voted upon and if a majority decision was arrived at an act or law was passed. It was usual when dealing with matters of importance for the Court to refer the issue under deliberation to either a standing or select committee, made up of a number of aldermen and common councillors

⁷¹ Pearl, *London*, p.51.

⁷² Webb, *Manor and the borough*, p.578.

⁷³ Jones, *The Corporation*, p.40.

⁷⁴ Webb, *Manor and the borough*, p.577.

⁷⁵ Pearl, *London*, p.58; Webb, *Manor and the borough*, p.659.

⁷⁶ Pearl, *London*, p.58.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.57.

⁷⁸ Webb, *Manor and the borough*, p.629.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.639, 631.

and any experts deemed appropriate. These committees went away and investigated the issues, returning, often by the next Court, to present a report. The Court's decisions would then be made on the basis of these reports.⁸⁰ Once the act was passed it was then largely the responsibility of the Lord Mayor and aldermen, either collectively as a Court or individually as heads of their wards, to implement and enforce these Acts of Common Council as they saw fit.⁸¹ The voting process was also effectively under the control of the aldermen as they claimed the right to be able to reject any legislative proposal, or nomination for office made by the Common Council. This aldermanic negative or veto as it was sometimes known was given legal sanction in 1725. In some cases after the negative had been used the decision was returned to the Court of the Common Council and the election was re-run, in other cases the aldermen simply applied their own decision or instated their own candidate in the office.⁸² The men that comprised the Common Council were, by and large, from what the Webbs have rather disparagingly called the 'lower middle classes'⁸³; they were the artisans and tradesmen of the City.

The body at the pinnacle of the Corporation's administrative hierarchy, and the most powerful assembly within the government of the City was the Court of Aldermen. This gathering of the 26 aldermen was the magistracy and executive of the City and to a large extent, the legislature. Although at first glance the method for selecting aldermen appears to have been truly inclusive, affording the chance for a "common man" to be nominated by the Wardmote and rise to the upper echelons of City government, in reality this was definitely not the case. The requirement that aldermen be worth in excess of £10,000 saw to it that only a select group of men were eligible for the office.⁸⁴ Additionally, although the wards nominated individuals to become their aldermen, the Court of Aldermen could reject these nominations if they considered them unsuitable, and appoint their own choice.⁸⁵ Therefore in reality the Wardmote's nomination was simply a gesture of protocol rather than an independent, democratic selection. These factors, combined with the fact that aldermen were elected for life, ensured that the Court of Aldermen was an 'almost self-perpetuating' body.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.629.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.639.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.659.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.628.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.657.

⁸⁵ Pearl, *London*, p.59.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.60.

This assembly exerted a remarkable degree of control over all aspects of City governance. Besides the powers we have already identified regarding the rather mundane business of ward administration, the Court of Aldermen and aldermen themselves had further executive powers. The Court directly appointed numerous important City officers such as the recorder, and the aldermen conducted the City Courts of Law and acted as judges and justices of the peace. It was this Court alone who could order payments from the Chamber (the Corporation's treasury), and aldermen alone who could present petitions to the throne, and it was the aldermen that monopolised the City representation in Parliament. In addition this Court managed the civic infrastructure of the City, with 'the hospitals, Gresham College, the prisons, the bridges and stairs, Guildhall and other public buildings' under their control.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the decisions of this Court were not open to scrutiny, it conducted its deliberations in private and the aldermen were not obliged to give reasons for their decisions.⁸⁸ The most contentious power of this Court and in many ways the source of their dominance over the Corporation was the previously mentioned Aldermanic veto or negative. As De Krey notes this ability to veto the decisions of the lower courts effectively ensured the 'subordination of the Corporation's legislative agency to its executive'⁸⁹ With this veto and the other powers listed it is no wonder that the aldermen considered themselves 'as the supreme authority in all parts of the City government.'⁹⁰

This basic outline of the structure of the Corporation highlights why one historian has claimed that the Corporation was a 'complex mix of oligarchical and participatory elements'⁹¹. Participatory in that it essentially allowed all inhabitants from ratepayers onwards some involvement in the governance of their city, and oligarchical in that, certainly in the pre-Revolution period, the real power within the Corporation was held by the 26 man Court of Aldermen, a body elitist in its composition and holding the right to select its own members. Such a scenario of oligarchic governance – the situation where power is concentrated in the hands of the few - was repeated in corporations throughout early modern Britain. But what do we actually understand in a historical context by the term oligarchy? When one begins to delve into the scholarship on urban governance it is clear that oligarchy is not simply the rule of the many by the few, it is in fact a multi-

⁸⁷ Webb, *Manor and the borough*, p.664.

⁸⁸ Pearl, *London*, p.61.

⁸⁹ De Krey, *Fractured society*, p.10.

⁹⁰ Webb, *Manor and the borough*, p.658-9.

⁹¹ Horwitz, 'Party in a civic context', p.175.

faceted phenomenon with a set of much broader meanings. It is also clear that our understanding of the nature and character of the government of the City of London would benefit greatly by applying a more sophisticated reading of oligarchy to the analysis of the activities and composition of elements of the Corporation.

Understanding oligarchy

Oligarchy may be defined as the possession and exercise of power by a few individuals either directly, as a consequence of holding the important political offices, or indirectly, as a consequence of controlling recruitment of officeholders and influencing their decisions.⁹²

This definition suggested by Evans is one that illustrates the two aspects of oligarchy, the first being the possession of power by small clique's, and the second being the exercising of that power usually for the cliques benefit. In regards the first element, historians researching oligarchy within early modern provincial corporations have produced a great deal of scholarship on the extent to which these oligarchies were closed shops in terms of their composition. Such studies involve identifying the grouping that held the most power within a town or city, usually the aldermanic bench, and through a process of prosopographical research assessing to what extent this body self-selected both its members and men for offices under the control of the corporation from within small familial, political and socio-economic cliques or networks.⁹³

This body of historiography indicates that the extent to which corporate oligarchies in the period prior to the Revolution were indeed restrictive in terms of their recruitment varied from one town or city to another. Some supposedly closed corporations were far more inclusive than the rigid definition of oligarchy would suggest, and indeed Evans himself has argued that the Norwich corporation actually became increasingly open over the period. There is therefore no standard model with regard to the level of exclusivity exhibited by the corporate oligarchies of the period. One of the problems with this prosopographical research however is that, although perfectly valid and vitally important, it does tend to focus on the self-replicating element of oligarchy: oligarchy as merely an exercise in the *possession* of power. From this approach the analysis of

⁹² Evans, J.T., 'The decline of oligarchy in seventeenth-century Norwich', *Journal of British Studies*, 14:1 (1974), p.47.

⁹³ Evans, 'Norwich'; Clark, P., 'The civic leaders of Gloucester 1580-1800' in Clark, P., (ed.), *The transformation of English provincial towns; 1600-1800* (London, 1984), pp.311-345; Ellis, J., 'A dynamic society: social relations in Newcastle-upon-Tyne 1660-1760' in Clark, P., (ed.), *The transformation of English provincial towns; 1600-1800* (London, 1984), pp.190-227.

oligarchy is reduced more or less to the discussion of the composition of corporate bodies, who was included and who was excluded.⁹⁴ In adopting such a focus the attention is paid to elucidating who held power, little attention is paid to the analysis of what they actually did with it, particularly in the context of the everyday administration of their towns and cities.⁹⁵ Yet when one turns to the research that does focus on elucidating the character of governance and administration under oligarchy, essentially the *exercise* of power, there also exists a lack of historiographical consensus.

The research of the Webbs, Greaves and Keith-Lucas casts this governance of the many by the few in an unfavourable light, and largely characterises the character of corporate administration under oligarchy as venal, self-serving and corrupt. Such bodies, so the narrative goes, were inefficient and generally unresponsive to the needs of their populations and such patent deficiencies made them worthy targets of the reform movement of the 1830s.⁹⁶ However subsequent scholarship has identified a number of problems with this literature. Firstly it indulges in sweeping generalisations and therefore fails properly to acknowledge that the diversity of corporations makes the construction of a standardised model of corporate behaviour impossible. Secondly, it largely voices the opinions and attitudes expressed by the 1830s reform movement, with all the prejudices, subjectivities, and again generalisations that this entails.⁹⁷ A revisionist approach begun by historians such as Corfield, Clark and Jackson and adopted by other scholars such as Gauci and Sweet since then, challenges this image of eighteenth-century corporations. They contend that when one strips away the rhetoric of the Victorian reformers and begins to assess the corporations objectively a much more nuanced picture of early modern oligarchies emerges, a picture that suggests a great deal of variation in their

⁹⁴ In defence of Clark he does make reference to the impact of Gloucester's aldermanic oligarchy on the magistrates bench of the town. Clark, 'Gloucester', pp.320-322.

⁹⁵ A prime example of this approach is that of Joan Kirby in her analysis of the aldermen of late seventeenth-century Leeds: Kirby, J., 'Restoration Leeds and the aldermen of the corporation, 1661-1700', *Northern History*, no.22 (1986), pp.123-174.

⁹⁶ Webbs, *Manor and borough*, chapters 8 and 9 compare the closed corporations of a number of towns, including Bristol and Liverpool, with the 'municipal democracies' of towns such as Norwich and Ipswich to 'discover the efficiency and honesty of the government' of the various corporations. p.405; Greaves, R., *The Corporation of Leicester, 1689-1836* (Leicester, 1970), in particular chapters 3 and 5; Greaves sets out his objectives in his Introduction; Keith-Lucas, B., *The unreformed local government system* (London, 1980).

⁹⁷ In particular see: Sweet, R., 'Oligarchy and urban government in eighteenth-century England' in Saupin, G., (ed.), *Le pouvoir urbain dans l'Europe Atlantique du xvie au xviiiè siècle* (Nantes, 2002), pp.183-194, for an articulation of this criticism.

competence and conduct and, at least partially, rehabilitates the image of these institutions.⁹⁸

Early modern oligarchies therefore defy standardisation both in terms of our understanding of their composition and their behaviour. It is clearly far more productive as Gauci has argued, to treat each oligarchy as unique and focus on the production of broad based case studies of individual corporate bodies. Gauci's research itself focuses on one corporation, Great Yarmouth, and includes a prosopographic study to assess whether Yarmouth's Corporation managed to perpetuate its possession of power by operating as a closed body. But he also seeks to analyse how the Corporation exercised its power in terms of the mundane, everyday political life of the town, in order to gain some understanding as to the character of oligarchic corporate administration.⁹⁹ Essentially this is a study of who they were and what they did. Because his concern is with the politics of the town Gauci pays only limited attention to the everyday administrative life of Great Yarmouth, but his more inclusive approach of analysing the composition of the corporation alongside an analysis of their activities in one particular sphere of Yarmouth's daily life offers a much more productive methodology with which to conduct an analysis of oligarchic bodies.

Conclusion

As we can see from this précis, historians of provincial towns and cities have managed to produce a substantial body of work relating to the experience of urban areas under oligarchy, and a vibrant historiographical debate has ensued. Yet inexplicably the largest, richest and most powerful corporation in the country, the City of London, has been woefully neglected. As we shall see in chapter seven, research has been produced on the development of a party political oligarchy within the Corporation in the period after the Revolution but there is a real dearth of material on the character, composition and depth of this oligarchy in any areas of the Corporation's administrative life in the period both prior to and after the Revolution. By adopting the spirit of Gauci's holistic methodology and applying this to an analysis of the Bridge House we have a chance to see how a particular facet of the Corporation of London operated under the Aldermanic

⁹⁸ Corfield, P., *The impact of English towns 1700-1800* (Oxford, 1982), chapter 9; Sweet, R., *The English town 1680-1840* (Harlow, 1999); Gauci, P., *Politics and society in Great Yarmouth: 1660-1722* (Oxford, 1996); Jackson, G., *Hull in the eighteenth century: a study in economic and social history* (Oxford, 1972), pp.307-330; Sweet, 'Oligarchy and urban government'; Clark, 'Gloucester'.

⁹⁹ Gauci, *Great Yarmouth*.

oligarchy, and gain some understanding of the impact this style of governance had on the day-to-day administration of the City.

The following chapter will therefore seek to achieve three things. Firstly it simply has the prosaic purpose of describing the structure of the Bridge House by focusing more specifically on how the various elements of City government operated in relation to the administration of the Bridge, and explaining the roles of the BHLC, the Bridge House Comptroller and the Bridge Masters. Secondly, it will identify the men who actually undertook the administration of the Bridge House to assess whether it was essentially a closed body. Thirdly it will elucidate the character and working culture of this administration under the aldermanic oligarchy that dominated the Corporation in the late seventeenth century to see whether it operated in the unaccountable, venal and corrupt manner so often associated with such modes of governance. Chapter three will conclude by recounting an event that occurred in the administration of the Bridge during 1678 to illustrate the various themes outlined in this section.

Chapter III

The Bridge House in the seventeenth century: 1666-1684

Given that the Bridge administration, like most facets of the administration of the City of London, had developed organically and did not exhibit well defined lines of accountability or areas of jurisdiction, there is no single source, either primary or secondary, that elucidates how the Bridge administration operated, or that fully clarifies who was responsible for the various aspects of the Bridge management. What follows is a piecing together, through both primary and secondary sources, of the roles of particular bodies and officers relating to the operation of London Bridge in the post Fire period. As will be argued in chapters six and seven, the roles and responsibilities of these offices and bodies did, in many cases, change dramatically between the mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries as the Corporation of London itself evolved.

The Court of Aldermen and the Bridge House

As we have seen, in the period between the Fire and the Revolution, the Corporation was under the control of an aldermanic oligarchy. The Court of Aldermen had a firm grip on the levers of power for the administration of the City, and selected its members and the offices under its control as it saw fit. This aldermanic control over the operation of the Corporation certainly extended to the administration of the Bridge House both directly through the Court of Aldermen and also indirectly through their control over the office of the Bridge House Comptroller, and the BHLC. In the period prior to the Revolution the Court of Aldermen was the main decision making body with regard to the Bridge House administration. The Court itself directly dealt with issues such as payments to and from the Bridge House and the Chamber (the City's treasury), it ordered the repairs to be undertaken on the Bridge when required. It heard and resolved differences between lessees when they arose, it levelled dictats regarding public order issues on the Bridge, and it saw to the defence of the legal rights of Bridge House and the resolution of any legal issues the Bridge House faced. Unsurprisingly, given that the posts were sold by the lord mayor, the Court of Aldermen also rubber stamped the appointment of the various Bridge House workmen. In order to arrive at an informed decision the Court of Aldermen

often ordered the constitution of small bodies known as sub-committees, which were hugely important tools in the administration of the Bridge House (and indeed the Corporation more generally) as they were effectively the eyes and ears of these bodies. If there were any issues that the Court of Aldermen felt needed further investigation before they passed an order, they would convene a sub-committee usually consisting of a handful of members along with any required specialists such as the surveyor, carpenter, or mason, to undertake this further investigation. The sub-committees were required to report their findings to the Court at a given date. The report would usually contain a suggested course of action which the Court would, without fail, agree with and order to be put into action. These sub-committees were required to report on a variety of issues from the state of the Bridge, to legal disputes between tenants, to the finances of the Bridge House, to the efficiency of certain Bridge House offices. If the often highly detailed and thorough reports of these sub-committees are anything to go by these were onerous duties.¹ Although sub-committees could consist of anyone, they were exclusively manned by either aldermen or BHLC members, alongside the occasional Bridge House workman or the clerk. No one outside this restricted group made it onto one of these powerful bodies during our period.

It is important to note that issues regarding the Bridge and Bridge House were brought to the attention of the Court by various individuals such as the comptroller, Bridge Masters or lessees, who informed the Court of a particular problem, or petitioned it for resolution of a perceived wrong. It is also likely that the individual aldermen introduced issues to the Court that had been brought to their attention during their ward business or as members of the BHLC. The Court therefore operated as a decision making body rather than an administrative body in a narrow sense. This meant that in some years, such as 1673-4 Bridge House business only fleetingly appears on the repertories.² Yet the year 1676-77 was a busy one for the Court with regard to Bridge House business, and gives a flavour of the issues this aldermanic forum dealt with. During this year, amongst other things, a draft agreement between the City and a Mr Daintrey for the laying of water

¹ Shipley, N.R., 'The City Lands Committee, 1592-1642', *Guildhall studies in London history*, vol. II, no.4 (London, 1977), pp.168-169. Woodhead, J. R. 'The rulers of London: the composition of the courts of aldermen and common council of the City of London, 1660-89' (unpublished University of London M.A. thesis, 1961), p.15. Both highlight the heavy workload and time commitments these committees required. For an example of Bridge House sub-committees see reports contained in: CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/03 fol.02., Bridge House Committee papers, 1679-80.

² In this case to order a workman's gratuity and appoint the audit committee. CLRO, COL/CA/01/01, fol.79/195, 79/354., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1673-4.

pipes across the Bridge was read to the Court for their approval. They received a complaint from a Thomas Chambers regarding the conduct of the Bridge Masters in relation to a contract to build a bridge in Essex, and they set about putting in place the legal documentation to ensure that it was the Bridge Master rather than the Bridge House that was liable for breaking this contract. They also confirmed the appointment of several Bridge workmen and, on the advice of the comptroller, they ordered that the books and accounts of the Bridge House should be kept under lock and key. The Court was also informed by the audit committee of the ‘desperate’ arrears of rent owed to the Bridge House and it ordered that a sub-committee of their number examine these arrears.³

The appointment of this audit committee was one of the further duties of the Court. This committee, comprising between four and six men, undertook a yearly audit of the Bridge House accounts. The audit committees comprised mainly aldermen with a smattering of aldermen’s deputies and City grandees.⁴ The comptroller would attend the audit committee with the various Bridge House account books, in order that the committee could ensure to its own satisfaction that the income and expenditure balanced. They would then usually make some recommendations to the Court regarding fairly perfunctory elements of the administration of the Bridge House. Such recommendations often included measures such as lowering the purchase price of materials or keeping better records of wage payments. The audit was an important body in that it was the only one responsible for surveying and assessing the financial health of the Bridge House and it was the only body involved in the administration of the Bridge House that offered with any regularity any pro-active policy plans. However as we shall see in chapter six its effectiveness was strictly limited in that its concern was primarily with ensuring that the books balanced. Once the account books were signed off the attempts at implementing most of the measures suggested by the audit committees seemed to fizzle out, primarily because the lack of clear chains of accountability within the Bridge House system meant that there was no body or office to take on the responsibility of ensuring these reforms were being carried through.

³ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01, fol.82/86, 82/199, 82/61, 82/227, 82/61., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1676-77.

⁴ Four committees had their members listed between 1666 and 1684- May 1676, May 1678, June 1682 & June 1683. Of a total of 18 men, 11 were aldermen, 4 were deputies and a further 2, John Dubois and Michael Godfrey were an MP and prominent leader of the City Whigs respectively. CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/05/001 Order book, containing orders of the common council and Bridge House Committee on divers matters relating to the Bridge & Bridge property, 1611-1741.

Indeed once the audit had been signed off the attention of the Court seemed to be directed towards the lavish audit dinner (a feast held to celebrate the completion of the audit) rather than the implementation of administrative reform.⁵

The Court, therefore, was the main decision making body in relation to the Bridge House. There were however two areas where the Court had little direct involvement. The first of these was the day-to-day management of the Bridge House workforce and the Bridge Yard and the supervision of works on the Bridge, which was largely in the hands of the Bridge Masters (although as we shall see later in this chapter after a series of events in 1678, for a period the Court became extremely familiar with the day-to-day operations of the Bridge House.) The second was the leasing of Bridge House property which was technically exclusively the preserve of the BHLC. But it is important to note that, by virtue of its status as the most powerful body within the Corporation, and the opacity of the Bridge House administration, the Court of Aldermen could act with impunity, and involve itself in any aspects of Bridge House business as it saw fit. There was little to circumscribe or temper its powers.

The Bridge House Lands Committee

As we have seen the Bridge House Lands Committee (a body also known by various other names) was a permanent standing committee of the Common Council, and, as the body charged with leasing the landed estates of both the Bridge House and the City, it was one of the most important organisations within the entire Corporation.⁶ By the beginning of our period the numbers on the committee had risen to six aldermen and twelve commoners.⁷ In order for a committee meeting to occur a quorum of at least three aldermen and six common councillors had to be in attendance. The members of this committee were elected by the Common Council, with the newly elected members taking up their places at the first committee meeting of the calendar year.⁸ The 1592 Act stipulated that the common councillors served two year terms with elections every year for half of the commoners' places on the committee. The situation with the aldermen was

⁵ See: CLRO, COL/CCS/CO/06 fols.004, 016., Comptroller and City Solicitor Bridge House Papers, 1603-1837, for an audit dinner menu and the hierarchical dining arrangements.

⁶ As previously noted in chapter I the Bridge House Lands Committee and the City Lands Committee differed in name only, and indeed there are instances in the Bridge House journals of the committee being referred to as the 'committee for letting City lands' BHJ 02, 29 March 1667.

⁷ Welch, C., *History of Tower Bridge, and of other bridges over the Thames built by the Corporation of London* (London, 1894), p.50. This occurred in 1609.

⁸ This seems to change around the late 1690s when the committee year seemed to begin in March, no doubt to comply with the financial year. BHJ 03.

slightly different. There was an election every year for two of aldermanic positions on the committee but whereas the common councillors were restricted to two year terms there seemed to be have been no similar restriction on the length of the tenure of the aldermen.⁹ As with all elections for offices of the Corporation places on the BHLC were subject to the aldermanic veto and therefore the Court of the Aldermen could technically, if it so chose, control the composition of this hugely important body.

Social composition of Committee

Our first challenge is to establish what type of men sat on this committee. As we have noted the Court of Aldermen could control the composition of this body, and according to Shipley and Pearl during the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries it was only the Corporation's elite that occupied positions on the BHLC.¹⁰ The Act of 1592 stipulated that half the committee's aldermen must have previously served as mayor and the other half should be aldermen 'that by course are next to succeed in the place of Lord Mayor'¹¹. The commoner members of the committee were 'normally the senior and wealthiest members of the Court who had either fined for the positions of Alderman and Sheriff, or were soon to occupy these places.'¹² No wonder then that Shipley has argued that this committee was the 'premier committee of the City both in constitutional importance and in social and political distinction.'¹³ This social profile is certainly in evidence in the post Fire period. The first full meeting of the committee after the Fire was on 30 November 1666 and there were nineteen meetings of the committee over the following twelve month period. Of the eight aldermen who attended the committee over this period four had been lord mayor previously and four would become lord mayor within the next six years. All eight had been knighted and had been sheriff, and four of them had been or would become MPs.¹⁴

To a certain extent this survey of the aldermen is of limited use in suggesting that the committee was staffed by the elite of the Corporation as essentially *all* the aldermen

⁹ Shipley, 'City Lands Committee', p.166-7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 166-7; Pearl, V., *London and the outbreak of the puritan revolution: City government and national politics, 1625-43* (Oxford, 1961), pp.56-7.

¹¹ From the Act of 1592, quoted in Smith, V., *The origins and history of the Bridge House Estates*, 2 vols (London, 1932-38), p.84.

¹² Pearl, *London*, pp.61, 56-7.

¹³ Shipley, 'City Lands Committee', p.178.

¹⁴ BHJ 02, 30 November 1666 – 20 November 1667. Biographical data taken from: Woodhead, J.R., *The rulers of London 1660-1689* (London, 1965). The eight aldermen were: Thomas Adams, Thomas Allen, Anthony Batemen, Richard Ford, William Hooker, John Lawrence, Samuel Starling and William Turner.

could be considered elite. For example, every alderman would be expected to serve as lord mayor and those that did not were the exception rather than the rule. Similarly numerous aldermen served as MPs and so it is no surprise to find a number of MPs sitting on this committee. But Horwitz has suggested for the late seventeenth century there did exist something of a wealth hierarchy within the aldermanic Court, with those aldermen who invested in the joint stock companies or became MPs tending to be the wealthiest of their number.¹⁵ Of our eight aldermen, not only had four been MPs but six were investors in the East India Company, and five had an income in excess of £2000pa in 1660. This suggests that the aldermen that sat on the BHLC were certainly not located towards the poorer end of the aldermanic spectrum. Similarly in the period between 1660 and 1689 Woodhead has identified a grouping of seventy eight men whom he terms as ‘long service’ aldermen who served for more than four years and were effectively the elite aldermen.¹⁶ He argues that these seventy-eight men ‘look very alike, when their families, social and economic status and public service are examined’. They had familial connections with City government, they were ‘rich even by aldermanic standards’ and they had strong Parliamentary connections.¹⁷ Woodhead does not provide tabulations of his data or a list of these seventy eight men but it is notable that nearly all the men that he cites as examples of these ‘long service’ aldermen served on the BHLC at some point in the period prior to the Revolution.¹⁸ We can, therefore, with reasonable authority posit the thesis that those aldermen who sat on the BHLC were the *crème de la crème*. However, what is more instructive in deciding the social status of the committee is the profile of the common councillors who populated it.

Despite being rather more exclusive in its composition in the mid-seventeenth century than it would become as the eighteenth century progressed, the Court of the Common Council was still a far more heterogeneous body in terms of the social status of its members than the Court of Aldermen. Knights of the realm, and prospective lord mayors and MPs, sat in this Court alongside simple freemen artisans. Shipley argues that for the early seventeenth century there was ‘a pool of about two dozen commoners’¹⁹ that

¹⁵ Horwitz, H., “The mess of the middle class” revisited: the case of the “big bourgeoisie” of Augustan London’, *Continuity and Change*, 2:2 (1987), p.271.

¹⁶ Woodhead, ‘Rulers of London’, p. 10.

¹⁷ Woodhead, ‘Rulers of London’ thesis., p.22, 23.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.20,21, 23. He cites the following men as examples of these ‘long service’ aldermen and all served on the BHLC: Thomas Alleyn, John Lawrence, Robert Clayton, Richard Ford, Peter Daniel and Thomas Rawlinson.

¹⁹ Shipley, ‘City Lands Committee’, p.168.

could be considered the ‘most prominent men in London’s political life below the level of the aldermanic bench.’²⁰ These men ‘effectively represented the Common Council in its dealings with aldermen, court and business community.’²¹ Stevenson has suggested that a similar clique of thirty or so elite commoners existed in the mid-eighteenth century.²² Therefore the presence of a disproportionate number of higher level common councillors on the Bridge House committee would be illustrative of exclusivity and elitism.

Of the fifteen commoners who sat on the committee in the year of 1667 over the course of our twelve month sample period from 30 November 1666, nine had, did, or soon would occupy the position of deputy of the ward. The office of deputy is a good indicator of social status. The position could often be a stepping stone on the way towards becoming an alderman as the deputy was chosen by the alderman of the ward from the common councillors of the ward. He was usually the most senior commoner of their number, and in addition deputies answered more or less directly to the Court of Aldermen as it was the aldermen who ‘held control over their conduct’.²³ Furthermore five of the committee commoners had been or were soon to become alderman, indicating they possessed the £10,000 qualifying wealth for the position. Out of fifteen²⁴ commoners that sat on this committee eleven had held or would soon hold what could be termed senior offices within the Corporation such as sheriff or chamberlain and some including Robert Geffrey and Thomas Pilkington would eventually rise to the office of lord mayor, be given knighthoods, and in the case of Pilkington serve as an MP as well.²⁵ These eleven men were therefore certainly in the upper echelons of the Common Council, and could be considered part of the subset of commoners that effectively acted as a feeder pool to the Court of Aldermen. This subset of commoners were, as Woodhead notes, joined ‘with the fifty or ‘long service’ aldermen in a secondary, but important role at the centre of City government.’²⁶ Thus this survey of the aldermen and common councillors that sat on the

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.166

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.168

²² Stevenson, J., ‘Introduction’ in Stevenson, J., (ed.), *London in the age of reform* (Oxford, 1977), p.xiv; Rudé, G., *Hanoverian London: 1714-1808* (London, 1971), p.123.

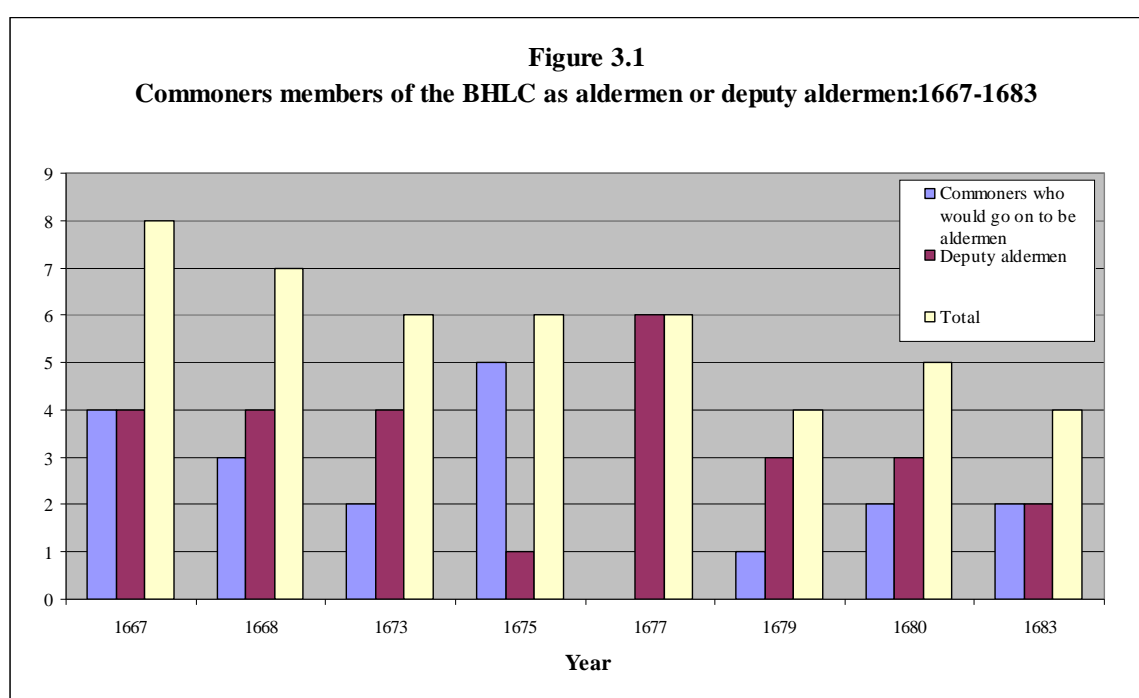
²³ Webb, B., and Webb, S., *English local government: the manor and the borough* (London, 1908), p.582; Jones, P.E., *The Corporation of London: Its origin, constitution powers and duties* (Oxford, 1950), p.38; Baddeley, J.J., *The Aldermen of Cripplegate ward from A.D 1276 to A.D. 1900: the office of alderman, alderman’s deputy and common councilman of the City of London* (London, 1900), p.109-119. Quote from p.116.

²⁴ Three new commoners were elected in June. BHJ 02, 11 June 1667.

²⁵ For further information on Pilkington’s colourful career see his entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22280?docPos=30>

²⁶ Woodhead, ‘Rulers of London’, thesis, p.42.

committee in the year after the Fire indicates that they did fit the social profile identified by Shipley and Pearl for earlier periods. The same pattern of recruitment continues in the period till 1684. Figure 3.1 is taken from a sample used to indicate the numbers of commoner members of the BHLC who at some point in their careers held or would attain the rank of aldermen. It also notes the number of deputies and those deputies who would also sit on the aldermanic bench. As we can see at any one time at least a third of the commoner members of the BHLC can be positively identified as part of the aldermanic clique.



Source: BHJ 02. Sample taken for alternate years starting in 1667. The journal does not include attendance lists for years 1669, 1671 and 1681. Years 1668 and 1680 have been included instead.

Another important point in relation to this committee is the issue of multiple re-elections. The charter of 1592 stated that common councillors could serve only two year terms and the lists of committee members contained in the Bridge House Journals indicate that this order was obeyed. However the Journals also indicate that it was commonplace for Common Council committee members to serve multiple, although not continuous, terms of two years in this post Fire period. For example, Pilkington was still attending committee meetings as late as 1679 even though he was a committee member in 1667. Similarly Francis Griffiths, Thomas Heatly, Robert Geffrey, William Flewellen, William

Farr, William Savage and John Short all appear as committee members multiple times.²⁷ Given the attritional nature of the Common Council elections, with most councillors serving a handful of years at best,²⁸ managing such a constant presence on the council and the BHLC was no small feat, and illustrates the stability, consistency and closed nature of the recruitment to the BHLC.

The overall impression one gets of the committee between the Fire and the early 1680s is that it was a closed shop, manned by aldermen and a small select group of elite commoners who were part of the aldermanic clique. Such a conclusion certainly concurs with the conclusion reached by Woodhead, who suggests that only a ‘select few’ of the men of the Corporation ‘sat on the most important of the City committees’.²⁹ He calculates that a total of just fifty-six common councillors sat on the City Lands Committee/BHLC in the period 1660-1688. He also notes the men that sat on the BHLC were invariably the same men that sat on the Irish Society, the Gresham Committee and the ‘various irregular and ad hoc committees’ of the Corporation.³⁰ This type of exclusive membership was a central characteristic of oligarchic governance.

Duties of the committee

The only operational duty that this committee was charged with was the leasing of the Bridge House lands. The committee had no other officially prescribed responsibilities in relation to the Bridge. The 1592 Act that created the committee states that it was to “make and bargain to full conclusion with any person or persons for any lease or leases . . . in THE CHARGE and account of the wardens or keepers of LONDON Bridge” and to do so “according to their best directions for the benefit and advantage of the city”³¹. An abridged version of this Act confirming the powers of the 1667 committee indicates that this rubric was still the same by the beginning of our period.³²

As a permanent standing committee of the Common Council the BHLC could be convened to meet whenever it was required. But because it was largely restricted to the issue of leases rather than the more routine aspects of Bridge House administration there

²⁷ BHJ 02.

²⁸ Woodhead, ‘Rulers of London’ thesis., p.38.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.40.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.40, 41. He notes that in a 30 year period just 180 different men served on the committees and that in the same period over a 1000 men served on the common council.

³¹ Quote taken from Shipley, ‘City Lands Committee’, pp.82-89.

³² CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/05/001 Order book, containing orders of the common council and Bridge House Committee on divers matters relating to the Bridge & Bridge property, 1611-1741, (undated) January 1667.

was a great variation in the committee's workload. For example, the committee met sixty times between 1667 and 1669, as it dealt with the mountain of leasing business created by the Fire, but by the 1670s this mountain had subsided and the committee was averaging just two meetings per year.³³

What is clear, however, is that not only was the committee basically populated by men from the aldermanic clique it was also taking its orders and deriving its powers directly from the Court of Aldermen during this period. For example, the order after the Fire in 1666 for the BHLC to conduct discussions regarding rebuilding with tenants was an order from the Court of Aldermen. Likewise the copy of the Act that created the BHLC notes that the powers of the committee derived from orders of the Court.³⁴ Again in 1677 the Court ordered the BHLC to 'inform themselves what powers' the committee had, and report their findings to the Court. Upon receiving the report the Court agreed with it and confirmed the powers of the committee.³⁵ There is no indication either in the Bridge House Journals or the Common Council Journals that the committee took orders from the Common Council prior to the Revolution. Orders and directives to the BHLC were channeled exclusively through the Court of Aldermen.

In order to "bargain and conclude" the leases the committee operated in a fairly simple manner. Once the committee meeting was in session it would hear the petitions from the individuals who were hoping to obtain leases on properties that were either close to the end of their lease or properties that had no current lessee. Once the petition or petitions had been heard it was then the job of the committee to debate each one, set the level of the fine and rent, offer the lease if it saw fit, and instruct the Clerk Comptroller of the Bridge House to draw up the lease. The petitioner then had six months in which to sign the lease, whereupon it would then be entered into the Court of Aldermen repertories.³⁶ It appears that, as with petitions presented to the Courts of the Corporation, the petitioners and relevant parties appeared in person before the committee.³⁷ The petitioner would make an opening offer for the lease and the two parties could then engage in a spot of haggling.³⁸ As Swann notes, if the committee did not consider the

³³ BHJ 02.

³⁴ BHJ 02, 30 November 1666, 12 April 1673.

³⁵ BHJ 02, 21 March 1677; CLRO, COL/CA/01/01, fol.83/208., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1677; Smith, *Bridge House Estates*, p. 89.

³⁶ BHJ 03, 8 May 1667. Shipley, 'City Lands Committee', p.165. Smith, *Bridge House Estates*, p.87.

³⁷ Webbs, *Manor and borough*, p.629. They note that petitioners appeared in person before courts.

³⁸ See for example Thomas Cotton who in 1678 was offered by the committee the lease of a Wharf with a rent of £36p.a. to which he responded by offering £30p.a. (BHJ 03, 3 June 1678) Cotton eventually agreed

opening offer suitable then the petitioner was asked to add to the bid; if this again proved unsuitable then the decision on whether to accept the offer was adjourned, to be debated again at the next committee meeting.³⁹ Ultimately the committee could simply refuse to lease the property if it found the terms offered unacceptable. Similarly the petitioner could find the terms offered by the committee unpalatable and walk away from any agreement.⁴⁰ Instances where it was not possible to reach agreement appear very rarely in the early Journals and the market conditions created by the Fire of 1666 played a large part in this.⁴¹

Contributing to the BHLC's willingness to agree, and indeed as we shall see in chapter six what fundamentally shaped the leasing policy of the committee, was the issue that we will return to repeatedly: the fact that the BHLC was not responsible for the financial health of the Bridge House - the bottom line - it was simply charged with leasing the various properties in the Bridge House Estate at the best price it could achieve.⁴² This willingness to agree also highlights the perversity of the BHLC's position in that this committee, a body with no accountability in terms of the finances of the Bridge, was responsible for leasing the estate upon which the whole of the Bridge House was financed.

Despite its rather partial responsibilities towards the Bridge House it is clear, as we shall see, that the committee undertook its officially prescribed duty of 'bargining and concluding' the Bridge House leases with a great degree of diligence. But in addition, as Shipley notes, this almost paternalistic attitude towards the operations of the Bridge House led the committee to 'exceed[ed] this modest commission from the outset'⁴³ and the committee was involved in many aspects of the administration of the leases.

The committee did not simply sit, hear petitions and issue the leases on the basis of oral and documentary testimony. Prior to any committee meeting the Clerk

to the lease at the rate of £32 p.a. CLRO, CLA/007/EM/05/02/004, An Abstract of Bridge House leases granted before and since March 1707. Also with regard to the early seventeenth century Shipley talks of 'projects' being 'discussed' by potential lessees and committee: Shipley, 'City Lands Committee', p.173.

³⁹ Swann, B.A.S. 'A study of some London estates in the eighteenth century' (unpublished London University Ph.D. thesis, 1964), p.16.

⁴⁰ As was the case with Thomas Flood in 1667. Flood rejected the committee's offer of leases of eighty-one years at £4p.a. rent in return for his rebuilding of the two tenements on land in Gracechurch Street. BHJ 02, 20 November 1667.

⁴¹ Porter, S., *The great fire of London* (Godalming, 1998), chapter 5; Reddaway, T.F., *The rebuilding of London after the great fire* (London, 1951), chapter 4.

⁴² Chapter 6 will look in greater detail at how this factor shaped leasing policy and the implications for the financial health of the Bridge House.

⁴³ Shipley, 'City Lands Committee', p.169.

Comptroller would devise a ‘list of business’ for the forthcoming meeting. The list would note the petitioners who were to appear but also noted what were effectively little sub-committees consisting of a few committee members, occasionally aided by artisans or surveyors, whose purpose was to physically view the properties that were soon to be made available.⁴⁴ These viewings ensured that the committee would have information and reports on the relevant properties when the petitioner appeared before them. Shipley claims that these viewings also gave the committee an idea of the potential impact of a lease on the neighbourhood, and that they were conducted out of some paternalist desire to regulate the built environment of the city.⁴⁵ However, by our period at least, the importance of these viewings, and the motivation behind them, lay in the fact that they would give the committee an indication of how much rebuilding and/or maintenance a lessee would need to undertake and would also establish an up-to-date value of the property: both crucial pieces of information when it came to establishing the level of the fine. As we shall see later the fine became the most important revenue source for the Bridge House in the eighteenth century. It is interesting to note that the chapter of St Paul’s only rarely used personal viewings to establish the value of the properties in its estate, preferring instead the documentary evidence provided by subleases or assignments.⁴⁶ The fact that the Bridge House committee relied on personal viewings by its members to establish property values does seem to demonstrate the gravity the committee attached to its duties. The committee members were regularly ordered to conduct inspections of the properties of the Bridge House and the reports they produced were often incredibly thorough, making what were clearly well considered recommendations for repairs or remedies to be undertaken.⁴⁷ Again Shipley attributes this concern to a kind of altruistic desire on the part of the committee to ensure the general good upkeep of the City, however it seems more likely that this monitoring of the building stock was to ensure that the lessees undertook their duties with regards to maintenance in order that the Bridge House should not be encumbered with the cost of

⁴⁴ See: CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/03 fols.02, 03., Bridge House Committee papers, 1666-1759, for examples in 1678 & 1684.

⁴⁵ Shipley, ‘City Lands Committee’, p.169.

⁴⁶ Johnson, D., ‘Estates and income, 1540-1714’ in Keene, D., and Burns, A. (eds.), *St Pauls: the cathedral church of London, 604-2004* (London, 2004), p.309.

⁴⁷ CLRO, COL/CCS/CO/06 fol.003., General views of the Bridge House properties in London and the suburbs with notes of necessary repairs (1 volume) 1647 – 1667; CLRO, CLA/007/EM/06 fol.004., Views made by the Bridge Warden’s clerk and workmen on the condition of the Bridge House properties, 1675-83; CLRO, CLA/007/EM/06 fol.004., Views made by the Bridge Warden’s clerk and workmen on the condition of the Bridge House properties, 1675-83.

repairs.⁴⁸ The committee even viewed the temporary sheds erected on the Bridge after the Fire in order to establish their structural integrity and rental terms.⁴⁹ But it is crucial to note that by the late seventeenth century at least, these viewings were always reactive measures. Sub-committees were sent out to review the state of a property after a specific complaint had been made against it, such as by anxious neighbours in adjoining properties or when the lease was close to expiry. The committee did not review its estate on a regular basis but rather acted in response to specific stimuli.

So in effect the committee acted as quasi administrators of the Bridge's landed estate, and to that end their involvement strayed into areas beyond simply dealing with leases and property. On several occasions the committee became involved in issues regarding the maintenance of Bridge structure itself and the financial situation of the Bridge House. For example in 1669 the committee ordered that a Mr Osbaston be paid £140 as compensation by the Chamber for his interest in the recently destroyed Stocks Market which the Bridge House owned, and a payment of £720 was made to the Bridge House itself for the same reason. The committee also represented the Bridge House in a thorny dispute with the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's over a wall on Bridge House land, which the Chapter argued was unlawfully impinging into church land.⁵⁰ In 1674 the Chamberlain was ordered to pay the Bridge Masters £200 'for supplies in repair of London Bridge' in response to a report by the committee which found the Bridge 'very much out of repair'.⁵¹

That said, these instances where BHLC involvement strayed beyond leasing business were relatively uncommon in the pre Revolution period but the fact that they did occur again gives an indication of the fluid, opaque nature of the Bridge House administration and also illustrates the willingness of the BHLC members to take on duties beyond their remit. Having assessed the bodies involved in the administration of the Bridge House, we now turn our attention to the two main offices concerned with the operation of this organisation, the Comptroller and the Bridge Masters.

⁴⁸ Shipley 'City Lands Committee', p.168.

⁴⁹ CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/03 fol.02., Bridge House Committee papers, 1667.

⁵⁰ BHJ 02, 15 March 1669, 15 May 1669, 6 June 1669.

⁵¹ BHJ 02, 23 September 1674, 1 February 1674.

The Comptroller

As we have seen in chapter two the post of the comptroller was highly influential by the seventeenth century. Essentially he was the head clerk of the Bridge House, but he also operated as the link between the Court of Aldermen and the Bridge Masters. The post itself was sold by the lord mayor for the sum of £60, and therefore if not an office totally under the auspices of the aldermen, it was clearly very closely associated with them, as they had the ability to control who took up the post. The remuneration that came with the job was attractive, with an annual salary of nearly £50 and more importantly, as with most offices that were sold, the comptroller had ample opportunity to increase his earnings.⁵² For example, he would receive an extra £7 for completing the grand accounts at the end of the year, and would bill the Bridge House when extra work such as drawing up leases or legal documents was required.⁵³

Unsurprisingly given the professional abilities this post required, it was not filled by an existing common councillor; rather it is more likely that these men were qualified clerks. The comptroller maintained all the paperwork of the Bridge House and drafted all leases; he attended the BHLC meetings and provided them with the documentation or paperwork they required; he helped prepare reports and oversaw the completion of the Bridge House journals and most importantly the yearly Bridge House accounts.⁵⁴ Finally the comptroller, alongside the Bridge Masters, was the only individual who had access to the Bridge House cash box which was held at the Bridge House in Tooley street.⁵⁵ It was also the comptroller who was empowered to sue or take other legal action on behalf of the Bridge House, most notably against lessees in arrears of rent. Effectively the comptroller was the chief administrator for the Bridge House, but as with most aspects of the Bridge House administration the terms of his office were poorly defined.⁵⁶

It is also interesting to note that the level of involvement of these men in the administration of the Bridge did seem to a large extent to depend on the individuals themselves. For example the names of the first three comptrollers in our period rarely appear in any of the documentation regarding the Bridge House, yet Phillip Oddy who

⁵² CLRO, CLA/007/FN/10/009-010, Accounts of money received from sale and alienation of Bridge House places 1705-1710, 1713-1749; CLRO, CLA/007/FN/06/01 fol.008., Bridge House cash books, 1675-1677.

⁵³ CLRO, CLA/007/FN/06/01 fol.008., Bridge House Cash Book 1675-1677.

⁵⁴ CLRO, COL/OF/02 fol.008., Extracts from reports in relation to the office of Clerk-Comptroller of the Bridge House, 1755-1830.

⁵⁵ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.86/170., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1680-81.

⁵⁶ For one of the earliest explanations of duties of the post see: CLRO, COL/OF/02 fol.05., Names, duties and emoluments of several Bridge House officers, 1824-1877.

held the post between 1677 and 1690 was highly active in most areas of the Bridge House administration. Oddy was heavily involved in the collection of arrears and, through mechanisms such as Letters of Attorney, was given powers to prosecute those who owed the Bridge House money. He assisted in the resolution of a dispute between the Bridge House and the Bridge Masters' securities and another dispute over the title of some Bridge House land. Furthermore he was responsible for paying outstanding debts owed to various Bridge House workmen from a sum of £500 lent to the Bridge House by the chamber, and perhaps most interestingly he became a fixture in the small sub-committees that conducted viewings of the Bridge House properties.⁵⁷ The reason for Oddy's activity may well be related to his extra remuneration, as he received several lump sums over the period for his additional work, or as gratuities for his 'good service to this city in his office'.⁵⁸ But it is also just as feasible that Oddy was a man who took his duties seriously and had a particularly conscientious attitude towards his job. Whilst it is true that he was paid directly in relation to some of his additional work, for the other supplementary duties he undertook it is clear that he received no extra remuneration. His work on the sub-committees for instance is something that he was not obliged to do as part of the office of comptroller (as we shall see none of his successors attended sub-committees) yet he received no extra income for this time consuming and demanding work.

The Bridge Masters

Finally we come to the longest standing office within the Bridge House administration, and indeed one of the most ancient offices of Corporation, that of the Bridge Master. As noted in chapter two the office of Bridge Master had lost much of its importance and authority by the seventeenth century. The desire of the commonalty, in the form of the Courts of Common Council and Aldermen, to have greater control over City affairs led to the erosion of the Bridge Masters' powers during the sixteenth century,

⁵⁷ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.88/149, fol.89/177, fol.93/196, fol.91/126, 91/143, fol.92/194., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1682-87; CLRO, CLA/007/EM/05/02/003, Orders and receipts regarding: fines for Bridge House leases of houses, a wharf, "wheledge", 1678-1683; CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/05/001 Order book, containing orders of the common council and Bridge House Committee on divers matters relating to the Bridge & Bridge property, June 1678; CLRO, CLA/007/EM/06 fol.004., Views made by the Bridge Warden's clerk and workmen on the condition of the Bridge House properties, 1675-83.

⁵⁸ For example in January 1684 he was paid a £30 'gift': CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/05/001 Order book, containing orders of the common council and Bridge House Committee on divers matters relating to the Bridge & Bridge property 1611-1741. In 1688 he was paid an additional £50 'bill for law charges and expenses': BHJ 03, 2 April 1688; CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.95/36., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1690, shows him receiving a £77 bill and £25 for a gratuity, and fol.95/145, a £15 'gift' upon his resignation.

most notably the loss of the power to grant leases. However, the position was still important in the context of the day-to-day operation of the Bridge House, and it was the only office or body that had any financial accountability with regards to the Bridge House. Besides its lineage and relationship to the Bridge House the other feature that distinguished the post of Bridge Master was that it was one of the very few posts within the corporation which was democratically elected by the Common Hall.

The historiography suggests that the position of Bridge Master in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was, like other offices such as chamberlain or solicitor, effectively a lucrative, undemanding office for elderly common councillors who had served in some of the more onerous offices of the Corporation.⁵⁹ Effectively the position is portrayed as a cosy sinecure for previously hard working councilmen.⁶⁰ The office suffered a further diminution of powers in the post Fire period, in particular due to a series of events that occurred in 1678, that seemed to bring the office further under the control of the Court of Aldermen.

Election

The Masters were chosen by the lord mayor and aldermen from four nominations sent up by the Common Hall, and although technically they needed to be elected yearly it seems that in practice they held their post until they died or surrendered their office.⁶¹ The position was relatively unusual in the context of the Corporation in that, rather than being purchased from the lord mayor, the holder was installed after an election.

Once chosen for the position the newly appointed Bridge Masters would appear before the Court of the Aldermen and be 'sworn for the due execucon of the said place and alsoe tooke the oath and subscribed the declaration contained in the last Act of Parliament for regulating of corporacons.'⁶² Crucially, although the Corporation was responsible for the selection of these men, there is no documentary indication that they had the power to dismiss them, in fact, as we shall see throughout this thesis, the evidence suggests that once they had been appointed, if they did indeed fail to fulfil their duties, there was little the Corporation could do to dislodge the Bridge Masters. Again such a

⁵⁹ Doolittle, I.G. 'The government of the City of London, 1694-1767' (unpublished University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1980), pp.15-17.

⁶⁰ Webbs, *Manor and borough*, p.617; Doolittle, 'City of London', p.26; Harding, V., and Wright, L. (eds.), *London Bridge: selected accounts and rentals, 1381-1538*, London Record Society, vol. 31 (1995), p.xi. Swann, 'London estates', p.4.

⁶¹ Maitland, W. *The history of London from its foundation to the present time*, 2 vols. (London, 1769) V,I, p.682 gives an account of an election.

⁶² CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.75/333., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1669.

conclusion would be logical given the status of the Bridge House, as it is hard to see how the Masters could be held accountable for their actions by the Corporation when the Bridge House was technically an independent entity.

The Bridge Masters also had to provide their securities. Although not responsible for maximising the financial resources of the estate, the Bridge Masters were responsible for ensuring that the books balanced. To that end the Corporation demanded that any potential Master provide securities; men who would enter into bonds whereby they would pay the Bridge House if there was any shortfall between the income and expenditure in the accounts at the cessation of the Bridge Masters' tenure. The Masters required five securities, whose names would be placed before the Aldermen who would decide whether the men should be allowed as securities. If they were accepted the men would each enter into a bond for £300.⁶³

The securities were largely drawn from the ranks of the tradesmen freemen of the City.⁶⁴ There is also evidence in the eighteenth century of groupings along livery or family lines, and there is no reason to suggest that such a profile did not exist in the seventeenth century also.⁶⁵ Several of the securities were also common councillors. In the period 1677-88 out of a total of twenty-nine securities nine can be positively identified as common councilmen at the time that their Bridge Master was elected, two others would become councilmen at a later date and one of the securities, Richard Booth was actually an alderman. A number of these men were worth substantial sums, with one, Samuel Ongley, estimated to be worth up to £10,000p.a.⁶⁶ Acting as a security was a serious business and could result in potentially substantial losses. In 1678 the aldermen, in response to an event discussed in greater depth in the conclusion to this chapter, embarked on a program of sustained investigation into the financial state of the Bridge House,

⁶³ CLRO, COL/CA/05/01 fol.0001., Papers of the Court of Aldermen, 1663-1680.

⁶⁴ Of the 72 securities that have their occupation/guild affiliation noted in the repertories in the period between 1666 and 1756, 7 were drapers, 5 mercers, 4 merchant tailors 3 grocers, 3 ironmongers, and just about every occupation can be found in this list from blacksmiths to vintners, to higher class occupations such as an attorney, a Dr of civil laws, Sirs and Esquires.

⁶⁵ As with the case of Bridge Master and tailor Robert Swan in 1708 who had a fellow tailor and a William Swan as securities, CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.113/307., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1708; Henry Owen in 1717 who had a fellow vintner as a security, CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.122/349., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen 1717; and finally Matthew Suablin in 1725 who was a member of the guild of drapers as were four of his securities, CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.129/295., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1724.

⁶⁶ Ongley acted as a security for Issac Puller in 1687, CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.93/198., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1687; Biographical data for Ongley taken from his entry in Woodhead, *Rulers of London*. Others with notable assets include William Parker, Valentino Adams and Issac Lambert, CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.83/231, 83/231, 88/177., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1677-83. See their entries in Woodhead, *Rulers of London*.

resulting in the discovery of numerous financial irregularities and an apparent deficit in the accounts. The aldermen duly ordered that the securities of the dead Masters be ‘sued upon their bonds’ for the recovery of the sum of £500.⁶⁷ The securities, upon the examination of the Bridge House accounts disputed the deficit⁶⁸ and a long legal wrangle ensued, during which the City in the form of the aldermen demonstrated remarkable tenacity.⁶⁹ But the question does arise: if being a security did entail such financial risks then why did these men offer to act as one? The episode of the securities disputing the charge offers one suggestion in that the petition notes that one of the securities for a previous Bridge Master, a Mr Hussey, was actually *paid* £40 by the Bridge House upon the death of the Master as the accounts were in the black.⁷⁰ However, this payment was clearly an anomaly. As previously noted the Master had no remit to actively seek to create a surplus and there is no evidence in such sources as the cash books to suggest that any payments such as these were made, it is clear therefore that no type of official profit sharing system existed. The further thought occurs that these men may have acted as securities in return for concessions, such as favourable contracts for materials for the Bridge House once the Master took up his post. But the occupations of the securities are in general not conducive to this, they are often drapers rather than carpenters for example, and in a survey of the three earliest cash books none of the securities’ names appears as recipients of Bridge House contracts.⁷¹ It would appear, as was common in the period, that most of these men simply acted as securities out of personal obligation towards the Master.⁷² However, what is clear is that the securities would have been very eager for the Bridge Masters to take all possible care to ensure that the Bridge House account books balanced, particularly as there is no evidence to suggest that they accrued any profit making opportunities in return for the risk they took.

The issue of securities illustrates the relative independence of the post of Bridge Master, and as we shall see judging by the aldermen’s relationship with the Bridge

⁶⁷ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.84/5, 84/40., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1679.

⁶⁸ BHJ 02, 9 February 1678, 16 February 1678; CLRO, COL/CA/05/01 fol.0001., Papers of the Court of Aldermen, 1678.

⁶⁹ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.84/40, 84/157, fol.85/18, 85/24, 84/34, 84/57, 84/72, fol.91/126., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1679-86. The City was still attempting to extract monies from a few of the securities as late as 1686: CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.92/132, Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1687.

⁷⁰ It is also interesting to note that the securities were arguing that the true state of the Bridge House finances had to be taken from the cash books and not the account books. This again indicates that even contemporaries realised how opaque the figures contained in the account books were.

⁷¹ CLRO, CLA/007/FN/06/01/008, 009, 010 Bridge House cash books, 1675–1683.

⁷² For a discussion of the importance of this notion of personal obligation and credit in the eighteenth-century see: Muldrew, C., *The economy of obligations* (London, 1998), particularly chapter 6.

Masters it is clear that, unlike the office of comptroller, this was a post that at times they struggled to exert much control over. The reason for this is hard to pinpoint, but it seems to be found at least partially in the historical antecedents of the post. As chapter two points out, because of its antiquity, the post of Bridge Master was the only aspect of Bridge House administration that had a definite role with established parameters and duties, and consequently it did not lend itself to being naturally subsumed by the aldermanic oligarchy, unlike the BHLC or comptroller. In addition, the evidence suggests that the aldermen seemed either unwilling or unable to contest the Common Hall's selection of Bridge Masters, and therefore the Hall by and large had their democratically elected men installed in the post.

Duties

The duties of the Masters had essentially three facets. Firstly they were responsible for receiving the 'rents and profits' of the Bridge House Estate and ensuring that these amounts were correctly recorded. They were not required to actively pursue tenants, or go round door-to-door as a rent collector but rather a clerk would be at the Bridge House every Saturday to receive the rents. The Bridge Masters then had to ensure that these figures for income were entered, along with those for expenditure, into the accounts and would be ready for the yearly audit. Their second main duty was to purchase materials for the repair of the Bridge. They were required to buy these materials at the lowest price, although in later periods there were constant accusations of the Bridge Masters overpaying for materials. Thirdly they were responsible for overseeing the workmen and paying their salaries (and again this duty seemed to attract accusations of corruption in later periods) and they were often responsible for large sums of cash when payments were made from the chamber for extraordinary expenses incurred in the repair of the Bridge. Effectively the Masters oversaw the day-to-day operations of the Bridge House, although in practice they seemed to delegate many of the tasks to the various Bridge House clerks, and master artisans that the Bridge House employed.⁷³ However it was still a post of some considerable gravitas given that these men were responsible for the maintenance of one of the most important pieces of infrastructure in the metropolis.

⁷³ For a early nineteenth century description of the Masters duties see: Thomson, R., *Chronicles of old London Bridge, by an antiquary* (London, 1827), p.632.

In terms of whether it was lucrative or not, the remuneration for the place was actually fairly generous. They received an annual salary of £66 12s, paid quarterly⁷⁴, a salary which remained constant throughout the seventeenth century.⁷⁵ Although, like all Bridge House employers, when being sworn in the Masters were informed that they were entitled to ‘enjoy the same with all fees and profits and commodities thereunto due’⁷⁶, there seems to have been little in the way of additional legitimate income for the Masters. The cash books only note some minor expense payments to the Masters,⁷⁷ but in general the aldermen seem to have been quite keen to keep such payments to a minimum.⁷⁸ The office also came with a dwelling at the Bridge House,⁷⁹ although it seems that most Masters still kept and occupied private residences in the City.

Despite there being no accusations made regarding the illicit perks of the office in this period (although accusations of fraud and related crimes were prevalent by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries) the distinct absence of supervision over the Bridge Masters, and the culture of office holding at the time, meant that abuses were very likely to have occurred.⁸⁰ In 1677 the two Bridge Masters appeared before the Court claiming that it was the Bridge House’s responsibility to rebuild a Bridge that had been taken down by a tenant in Essex. The Court agreed to undertake this rebuilding upon the Masters’ advice but further information received by the Court discovered that it was ‘not the immediate concern of this city but of their said tenant’ to rebuild and that the Court had been ‘mislead by the said Bridge Masters.’ The Court were so disgusted by their behaviour that they threatened to ‘make a representation thereof to the London Hall (*sic*) and press the election of other persons in their said places who may act more advisedly for the service and benifitt of this city.’⁸¹ So at best the Bridge Masters had been highly negligent in this affair but the inference was that they had wilfully misled the Court in

⁷⁴ CLRO, CLA/007/FN/06/01/008 Bridge House cash books, 1675-77.

⁷⁵ CLRO, CLA/007/FN/06/01/012 Bridge House cash books, 1693-97. The salary was raised to £76 for the senior Bridge Master and £72 for the junior in 1724; Jones, P., *Historical notes on the office of Bridge Master and the duties of the same* (1942), p.1.

⁷⁶ CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/05/001 Order book, containing orders of the common council and Bridge House Committee on divers matters relating to the Bridge & Bridge property, 1611-1741, July 1677.

⁷⁷ The Bridge Masters livery charges of £6, 13s were paid in 1675 alongside £4 to one of the Masters for the use of his stables. CLRO, CLA/007/FN/06/01/008 Bridge House cash books, 1675-77.

⁷⁸ In May 1677 the Court of Aldermen forbade the Masters to continue charging expenses of their attendance at the Court of Aldermen, CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/05/001 Order book, containing orders of the common council and Bridge House Committee on divers matters relating to the Bridge & Bridge property, 1611-1741, May 1677.

⁷⁹ Jones, *Office of Bridge Master*, p.1.

⁸⁰ These opportunities for exploitation also existed in the sixteenth century, Harding and Wright, *London Bridge*, p.xii.

⁸¹ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.82/199., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1676.

order to somehow profit from the work on the Essex bridge. But the tone and wording of the aldermen's threat regarding the Masters suggests that the Common Hall did largely conduct the selection of the Bridge Masters free from the involvement of the aldermen, and that there was limited influence that the aldermen could bring to bear on this process.

It is clear then that the post of Bridge Master held a significant level of responsibility but it is also apparent that the application and dedication of these men was probably highly variable given that there was little in the nature of direct supervision. This survey also highlights the fact that the relationship between the Court and the Bridge Masters could be fractious.

Social Composition

The patchy biographical details available for these men only allow a sketchy picture to be developed regarding profile of the Bridge Masters, and it has proved impossible to ascertain whether the occupants of the post were indeed the elderly long serving commoners as has been claimed. Of the ten men who held the post between 1666 and 1688 six had been common councilmen, many for a number of years. It has only been possible to establish the age of one: William Allot was 59 when he took the post. However six can be positively identified to have died in office. The periods in office ranged from eleven years for Richard Brackley to just a year for Francis Parson and Matt Sheppard. This would suggest that these were men coming to the end of their careers in the Corporation. But little more can be deduced from the information available. However from 1678 onwards two interesting names start to appear as Bridge Masters: John Sexton and Thomas Nicholas, and the information available on these men becomes more detailed.⁸² Sexton served as Master for three terms, with Nicholas following on from him from 1684-1696. But what is intriguing is that both these men had been members of the BHLC before they took the post of Bridge Masters. By virtue of their time on the BHLC (and therefore of course the City Lands Committee) we can assume that these were men of considerable standing within the Corporation, indeed Nicholas was a man of substantial wealth, worth approximately £5000. Why would such men take on the post of Bridge Master? Their appointments seem more than just happenstance, if we take into account a series of events that occurred in 1678 when, due to the sickness of the Bridge Masters, the aldermen actually took direct control of the Bridge House for several weeks. The events of this period had implications for the administration of the Bridge for the next few

⁸² See their entries in, Woodhead, *Rulers of London*.

decades, and the responses, strategies and approach of the aldermen during this period are particularly pertinent as they demonstrate well the themes outlined in this chapter regarding the character of the Bridge House administration and therefore a description of this episode provides an apposite conclusion to Part I of this thesis.

Conclusion

For a few weeks in February 1678 when both Bridge Masters were ‘sick and weake’ the court appointed aldermen Sir John Shorter and Sir Thomas Gould ‘to supervise and take care of the Bridge House concerns’⁸³. When it later transpired that one of the Bridge Masters, Mr Allot had died and the other, Mr Rutland, was so weak as to be unable ‘to execute any part of the duty of his place’, the court empowered eight men, four aldermen: Shorter, Gould, Sir James Smyth (Smith), and Sir Robert Geffery and four common councilmen: John Nicholls, Thomas Papillion, Mr Dubois and Mr Short ‘to inspect dispose and manage the whole affairs of the Bridge House in such a way and manner as they shall find most convenient for the interest and benefit of the city’ until new Bridge Masters were elected.⁸⁴ Surprisingly none of the aldermen had been BHLC members but unsurprisingly all of the commoners had either sat on the BHLC or been aldermen and therefore can be positively identified as part of the aldermanic subset of commoners outlined in chapter two.⁸⁵

During the period when the temporary committee of aldermen and commoners had to operate the Bridge House on a day-to-day basis their orders and directives were entered into the Bridge House journals and they make interesting reading. Over the course of their eleven meetings between 26 January 1678 and the 23 February 1678 the committee uncovered a number of issues relating to the manner in which the Bridge House had been administered by the Bridge Masters in previous years. They began to rectify these problems by issuing a number of orders regarding the daily operation of the Bridge House - an area of Bridge administration that the BHLC and Court of Aldermen had previously largely steered clear of. Firstly there are dictats regarding the purchase and use of materials: that all workmen had to receive permission from the clerk comptroller before purchasing materials; that all workmen’s bills were to note the place where the work was

⁸³ BHJ 02, 10 January 1678.

⁸⁴ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.83/68., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1678; BHJ 02, 10 January 1678.

⁸⁵ Nichols and previously fined for the position of alderman, Papillion had previously been an alderman, Dubois was apparently worth over £35,000 and was soon to be an MP; see their entries in Woodhead, *Rulers of London*. All four men had previously been members of the BHLC.

carried out; and that all materials used had to be logged and accounted for in the accounts. There was an order to document the cost incurred in repairing the houses belonging to the Bridge House.⁸⁶ The committee also issued a few directives regarding the state of the actual Bridge House and yard in Tooley Street, including orders to clear up the building materials scattered about the yard, and to stop using a shed as a stable rather than a warehouse.⁸⁷

The orders issued by the committee suggest that they had uncovered some very serious issues relating to the ground level administration of the Bridge House that neither they nor the Court of Aldermen had hitherto had any previous knowledge of due to their distance from this administrative shop floor and the relative autonomy of the Masters. These were not orders aimed at achieving root and branch reform of the Bridge House; rather they were composed mostly of efforts to improve record keeping rather than actual accountability, and the extent to which these measures were actually enforced and their effectiveness both in the short and long term is debatable.⁸⁸ However their intention was clearly to improve elements of the Bridge House administration and organization that the committee had found lacking.

Such were the concerns of the aldermen over the issues uncovered by the temporary committee during their period in place of the Bridge Masters, that the Court of Aldermen were moved to order the committee to compile a report containing 'proposalls for better regulating the Bridge concerns' so that the Bridge House 'may for the future be better managed and ordered and the accompts better made and stated'.⁸⁹ This was a rare proactive measure. Sadly the report does not survive but it was clearly limited in its scope. From the report stemmed a new set of new rules for the conduct of the Bridge House officers. Those concerning the Bridge Masters in particular were devised 'for better managment and reguylation of the Bridge House affairs'.⁹⁰ These rules were then 'placed in a table and hung up at the Bridge House'.⁹¹ Several years later the report was used as a justification for the Court's decision to abolish the position of Bridge House plumber, a post, like those of the 'Land Carpenter Bricklayer or plaisterer', that had been deemed

⁸⁶ BHJ 02, 2 February 1678, 9 February 1678, 16 February 1678.

⁸⁷ BHJ 02, 20 February 1678.

⁸⁸ The inaccurate or deliberately erroneous recording of materials appears as an issue throughout our period.

⁸⁹ CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/05/001 Order book, containing orders of the common council and Bridge House Committee on divers matters relating to the Bridge & Bridge property, 1611-1741, April 1676; CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.83/190., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1678.

⁹⁰ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.83/208,227; fol.84/219,101., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1679-80.

⁹¹ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.85/157., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1681.

‘useless to the Bridge House’ by the committee on the basis that the Bridge House simply did not need to permanently employ such workmen.⁹² Despite the reforms being far from being substantive or structural the apparent impetus behind these measures was a genuine desire to improve the administration of the Bridge House. However, the Court did undertake a programme of removing various powers from the Bridge Masters and transferring them to the Court, the BHLC and the Court appointed Clerk Comptroller of the Bridge House. In April 1678 the power to discharge debts was removed from the Bridge Masters and handed to the BHLC.⁹³ In the same year the autonomy of the Bridge Masters to spend income was curtailed by orders that basically gave the Court the power to instruct the Bridge Master on how income from fines should be spent.⁹⁴ Similarly, it is clear that the Bridge Masters had their power to pay workmen’s bills for non routine work withdrawn. For example in 1678 the comptroller was given the duty of paying the Bridge House artificers their outstanding wages out of £500 received from the chamber for that purpose.⁹⁵ The bills for these types of one off jobs were now brought before the BHLC and it was they who authorised payment.⁹⁶ Finally it is very possible that the appearance of the two ex-BHLC members Sexton and Nicholas as Bridge Masters from 1678 onwards was related to this desire to bring some order, accountability and control to the office of Bridge Master.

On the one hand the response of the aldermen to the events of 1678 can be seen as highly oligarchic. To begin with by taking over the post of Bridge Master in February 1678 the aldermen acted in contradiction to the charter of 1319 which expressly forbade aldermen from taking the position of Bridge Master in order to preserve the independence of the position from the City. Although not Bridge Masters in name, during this supervisory period the committee installed by the aldermen fulfilled the duties of the Bridge Masters, and therefore it could be argued that this may not have been a direct violation of the charter in practice but it certainly was in spirit. Additionally the Court took this action unilaterally without any consultation with, or reference to any other Corporation body. Once aware of the mismanagement prevalent in the administration of the Bridge they set about centralising power over the Bridge House by further

⁹² CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.89/182., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1683.

⁹³ BHJ 02, 17 April 1678. A system permanently adopted in 1680. BHJ 02, 1 September 1680.

⁹⁴ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.84/21, fol.83/233., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1678-79.

⁹⁵ CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/05/001 Order book, containing orders of the common council and Bridge House Committee on divers matters relating to the Bridge & Bridge property 1611-1741, June 1678.

⁹⁶ See for example: BHJ 03, 11 February 1683, 6 June 1683, 2 December 1685, 11 July 1683.

emasculating the power of the supposedly independent and democratically elected Bridge Masters and placing more powers in the hands of the oligarchic clique. In addition the remedies the aldermen implemented were rather piecemeal ad-hoc changes, they were measures that nibbled round the edges rather than aiming at achieving root and branch reform by improving the accountability or supervision of the office of Bridge Master or indeed the Bridge House as a whole. As a result they were not structural changes to the system of administration, but rather limited modifications directed at a specific office – reactive short term expedients.

However, these measures differ from the stereotypical notions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century urban oligarchy in that they were undertaken as part of a genuine attempt to improve the administration of the Bridge House. There is little evidence that this acquisition of power personally benefited the aldermen in any way, in fact many of the orders increased the aldermen's workload and would have made greater demands on their time. Additionally abolishing posts such as the Bridge House land carpenter or plumber was actually detrimental to the lord mayor personally, given that these were posts that he was allowed to sell as part of his office. The measures implemented by the aldermen also have to be understood in the context of the system of Bridge House administration itself. As we have seen this system was rather fluid, opaque and disjointed, with few clear lines of accountability or indeed prescribed duties. Given such a system, the aldermen's reaction to the issues that they faced and this increasing centralisation of power, seem much less the actions of a power hungry oligarchic clique but rather practical pragmatic solutions to the problems they faced. There is also one further issue that this episode of 1678 highlights and that is the comparative behaviour of the two main offices relating to the Bridge House administration: the Bridge Masters and the comptroller.

As we have seen the comptroller was an office that was sold by the lord mayor. Such offices were bywords for corruption and self serving behaviour and have been closely associated with the negative image of oligarchy. Such a picture is based upon the premise that if someone had paid for an office their sole justification to undertake it would be to extort as much financial gain from it as possible. There is of course no doubt that such behaviour existed throughout corporations in the early modern period. But Goldie has argued that such sweeping generalisations are unjustified and that in many cases people undertook office holding not simply for self serving ends but also out of a desire to

serve the public.⁹⁷ The point here is that simply because the office of comptroller was sold did not necessarily mean the men who occupied it automatically acted in a venal, corrupt manner. It seems it depended on the individual who occupied the post. Men like Philip Oddy did seem to be active in the affairs of the Bridge House above and beyond the call of duty, and although perhaps it would be far too presumptuous to suggest he acted out of altruism (he was after all decently rewarded for much of his additional work) it is clear that he took on a workload that he was not obliged to, and for other activities such as his additional work on the hard working sub-committees there is no evidence that he received any further payments.

Conversely the post of Bridge Master was in effect democratically elected by the thousands of freemen who comprised the Common Hall. The aldermen had much less direct control over this office and it was clearly one outside the gift of the aldermanic oligarchy. Again the behaviour of the Bridge Masters, it seems, could vary enormously, but it is also clear from the events of 1678 and incidents prior to this that the Masters were far from paragons of industrious virtue. They were no strangers to accusations of venality and possible corruption and the evidence suggests that their general competence at times left much to be desired. Therefore the simple assumption that the democratic process would ensure a better calibre of individual took office as opposed to the oligarchic method of either gifting or selling offices, is clearly highly suspect.

To conclude, we began chapter three with the twin objectives of establishing whether the Bridge House operated as a closed shop in terms of the composition of the bodies and offices involved in its administration, and secondly to elucidate the character and working culture of this administration to see whether it operated in the unaccountable, venal and corrupt manner so often associated with early modern oligarchic institutions.

In response to the first question it is clear that the Court of Aldermen dominated the administration of the Bridge House in the post Fire period, but it is also apparent that the aldermanic clique also controlled entry onto the BHLC and largely constituted its membership. Similarly the important office of comptroller was merely an extension of aldermanic power. In other words the administration of the Bridge House in this period was definitely a closed shop.

⁹⁷ Goldie, M., 'The unacknowledged republic: office holding in early modern England' in Harris, T. (ed.), *The politics of the excluded: 1500-1850* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp.153-94.

However the second issue of the character of this administration merits a less stringent verdict and this is primarily due to the fact that the behaviour of the aldermanic clique was in many ways shaped directly by the organisational structure, or more correctly the lack of organisational structure, of the Bridge House. For example, as the Bridge House was fundamentally a headless organisation, in reality it depended on the Court of Aldermen to act in an executive capacity, and as such the oligarchic Court was the clamp that held the Bridge House together. In practical terms there were no other bodies within the Corporation that could perform such a function other than the Court. Similarly on the face of it many of the actions of the aldermen could be construed as self-serving or venal, particularly the issue of the emasculation of the powers of the democratically elected Bridge Master. But when one appreciates the context in which these actions were taken - a disjointed administrative structure largely bereft of accountability or clearly delineated duties - and begins to realise the true objectives and implications of their actions - to remedy problems or issues regarding the running of the Bridge House despite often increasingly the workload of individual aldermen or the BHLC - it seems increasingly inappropriate to condemn these actions.

Again this is not to paint a universally sympathetic picture: for example, despite being aware of the need for changes to the Bridge House, the occasional flurries of reforming activity seemingly petered out due to a distinct lack of conviction and determination on the part of either the Court or the BHLC to drive improvements through. But it is apparent that the aldermanic oligarchy which dominated the administration of the Corporation in the period prior to the Revolution did not, in relation to the Bridge House, display any proclivity to act in a wilfully corrupt or venal manner and that their actions take on a different meaning when placed within the context of a detailed knowledge of the structure and organisation of the Bridge House.

PART II

The Motivations

Introduction to Part II

The previous chapters have undertaken the crucial tasks of elucidating the structure and character of the Bridge House system of administration. With this completed we can now move on to specifically addressing the question of what factors accounted for the London Bridge Improvement Act. The introduction to this thesis noted that the impetus behind Improvement Acts can basically be grouped into two categories – the motivations behind the “improvements” the acts sought to achieve, and why the acts themselves were chosen as the mechanism through which to achieve this change. The following chapter deals with the first of these categories and seeks to explain the motivations behind the desire to remove the houses from London Bridge. To begin with it interrogates the existing assertion that the removal of the houses from the Bridge was as a result of a desire to “improve” the built environment of the capital, and argues that in fact there is little evidence for such a conclusion. The second chapter then posits the alternative thesis that it was a series of crisis and events in the finances of the Bridge House and the Corporation which prompted the removal of the houses.

Chapter IV

The ‘Spirit of Improvement’?

The main objective of the following two chapters is to deconstruct one argument and construct another in its place. It is therefore apposite to begin our analysis by describing the documents at the centre of this thesis: the Bill, and subsequent ‘*Act to improve, widen and enlarge the Passage over and through London Bridge*’ as the information they contain offers various pointers as to the path we shall be charting. The chapter will then map out the historiographical terrain on which we are working in order to establish why the notion of “Improvement” has been elevated to the status of an actual historical phenomenon, and why the removal of the houses has been understood within this context.

The Bill and the Act

The first seeds of what we now know as the London Bridge Improvement Act were sown at a meeting of the Common Council on 22 February 1754. During this meeting the Council instigated a sub-committee to investigate the desirability and feasibility of constructing a new bridge across the Thames between Westminster and London Bridge. This was the beginning of a process that would eventually result in the building of Blackfriars Bridge. After electing the committee (and it seems very much as an afterthought) the journal notes that this same sub-committee was also asked ‘to enquire into the present state of London Bridge and report their opinions and methods as the most proper to make it more safe, commodious and ornamental’¹. The report, delivered to the Common Council later that year on 25 September is unambiguous in its assessment that the current state of the Bridge was unacceptable, primarily because the houses on the Bridge were ‘a publick nuisance, long felt, and universally censured and complained of, whereby the passage for carriages and foot passengers is rendered dangerous as well as inconvenient to the Citizens of London.’ They therefore concluded that in order to ‘render the said Bridge . . . more safe and

¹ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fols.60/189-90., Court of Common Council journals, 1754.

commodious, all the Houses . . . ought to be taken down.'² From this point it was clear that the houses on the Bridge were destined for demolition, and soon after the requisite constitutional wheels were put in motion. The initial bill to remove the houses was drafted in 1755, and despite some fairly strong objections to it from within the ranks of the commonalty and aldermen, the Corporation finally agreed to present the bill to Parliament.³ The City petition was delivered to the House of Commons on 13 January 1756, stating that:

the Passage over *London Bridge*, by means of the present Buildings standing thereon, is very narrow, inconvenient, and dangerous . . . and that by the Removal of the Houses and other Obstructions thereon, the Passage of the said Bridge would be rendered as safe and commodious as that over *Westminster Bridge*.⁴

After fairly rapid progress through the Houses the Act was finally passed on the 25 June 1756. The opening paragraph of the Act states that:

Whereas the passage over and through London Bridge is very dangerous and incommodious and it is absolutely necessary to widen and enlarge the same, and the widening and enlarging of the said Bridge . . . will be of Publick Utility, of great Benefit to Trade and Commerce, make the Navigation upon the River Thames more safe and secure, and greatly tend to the Preservation of the Lives of his Majesty's Subjects passing over and through the said Bridge: And whereas in order to the same, it is necessary that the Houses, Edifices and Buildings on the said Bridge . . . should be taken down and removed.⁵

The 'Spirit of Improvement'

As this material demonstrates, the changes that the Improvement Acts sought to achieve in terms of urban infrastructure and buildings were often motivated by a desire on the part of urban dwellers for increased 'beauty and utility' in the urban environment.⁶ On the one hand, the long eighteenth century brought with it new expectations regarding prosaic practical issues relating to the way urban populations used the built environment: utility. But also, there was the more quixotic desire for buildings to embody the contemporary ideals of beauty, civility and rationality:

² CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.60/220., Court of Common Council journals, 1754.

³ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fols.60/263, 61/58., Court of Common Council journals, 1754.

⁴ 29 George II, 13 January 1756. *A petition of divers merchants, tradesmen, citizens.*

⁵ 31 George II cap 40 (1756). *An act to improve, widen and enlarge the passage over and through London Bridge.*

⁶ Ellis, J., *The Georgian town: 1680-1840* (Basingstoke, 2001), p.103.

elegance. Alongside this, the quality and style of urban buildings and infrastructure was increasingly important in terms of other considerations, such as the creation of the image of a city. The aspiration to close the widening gap between what was expected from the urban environment and what was actually being delivered, spawned what John Summerson has described as the ‘age of improvement’.⁷ Summerson suggests that in regards of the capital ‘Improvement talk had been dormant in the City since the Great Rebuilding, but started again in the Common Council about 1753’.⁸ Summerson, along with other historians, asserts that the improvement of London Bridge was merely one of a broader range of measures, such as filling in Fleet Ditch, the construction of Blackfriars Bridge, the removal of Southwark fair and the demolition of the City gates that were products of this, as Summerson calls it, ‘spirit of improvement’.⁹ In other words, the current historiography asserts that London Bridge was one of several segments of the Capital’s infrastructure that had become deficient, and therefore deemed to be in need of renovation, by the mid eighteenth century as these new expectations regarding the built environment had developed.

However, there are a number of problems which arise from such a thesis. Because historians have tended to view ‘urban improvement’ as the practical manifestation of the broader enlightenment ideals of progress and perfectibility there is a tendency to assume that all changes to the urban infrastructure can be subsumed under this rubric, which in turn lends credence to the type of totalisation encapsulated by Summerson’s term ‘age of improvement’.¹⁰ Consequently, the theme of improvement is one that underpins the vast majority of the literature dealing with eighteenth-century urban development, and, as improvement is such a broad church, much of the current historiography, particularly that dealing with the built environment, seems eager to identify any apparently progressive developments in eighteenth-century urban areas and understand them as products of this seductively

⁷ Summerson, J., *Georgian London* (repr. London, 1970), p.122.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.123.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.121-132; Porter, R., *London: a social history* (London, 1998), p.126; Guillery, P., *The small house in eighteenth century London* (London, 2004), p.280; Keene, D., ‘Growth, modernisation and control: the transformation of London’s landscape: 1500-1760’ in Clark, P., Gillespie, R., (eds.), *Two capitals: London and Dublin 1500-1840* (Oxford, 2001), p37; Ackroyd, P., *London the biography* (London, 2000), p.309.

¹⁰ For a succinct description of the intellectual and socio-economic basis of “improvement” see: Guillery, *The small house*, chapters 1 and 9. For the connection between enlightenment ideas and the notion of improvement see: Girouard, M., *The English town* (London, 1990), pp.75-99; Spadafora, D., *The idea of progress in eighteenth-century Britain* (New Haven, 1990), pp.408-411.

convenient story or pattern of improvement.¹¹ The removal of the houses from London Bridge is no exception to this rule, the conclusion that London Bridge was perceived as deficient due to this mid-century movement to improve, seems to be based entirely on three factors.

Firstly the language employed in the Act itself and the documentation relating to it would appear to express the ideology of improvement and therefore at first glance it seems plausible to link the Act to this developing creed. For example, we could if we so desired, take the references in the documents relating to making the Bridge more 'commodious' and more 'convenient' and link them to the emerging expectations surrounding the regulation of the streetscape, which produced such changes as the adoption of pavements, street lighting and street cleaning, to ensure greater safety for passengers and greater comfort.¹² The issue of making the Bridge more beneficial to 'Trade and commerce' by widening the passageway could be taken as evidence of a developing appreciation of the importance of free flowing traffic and circulation to the urban economy.¹³ Similarly, the assertion that the removal of the houses would be of 'publick utility' could be portrayed as evidence of the Habermasian theory regarding the emerging notion of publics.¹⁴ All these concepts were in circulation during the long eighteenth century and therefore we could, if we viewed them from a certain angle, understand the issues highlighted in the Act as expressions of the enlightenment ideals of improvement. But it is important to display caution when handling these types of documentation as the language employed in petitions, bills, and acts, was shaped by the necessities of actually getting the measures enacted by parliament.

¹¹ For example see: Girouard, *The English town*, pp.86-89; Keene, 'Growth, modernisation and control', p.37; George, D., *London life in the eighteenth century* (repr. London, 1951), chapter 3.

¹² Corfield, P., 'Walking the city streets: the urban odyssey in eighteenth-century England', *Journal of Urban History*, vol.16, no.2, (1990), pp.146-155; Spence, C., 'Accidentally killed by a cart: workplace, hazard, and risk in late seventeenth century London', *European Review of History*, 3:1 (1996), pp.9-26. Borsay, P., *The English urban renaissance* (Oxford, 1989), pp.60-74.

¹³ Ogborn, M., *Spaces of modernity: London's geographies 1680-1780* (Guildford, 1998), pp.211-223; Jenner, M., 'Circulation and disorder: London streets and Hackney coaches c.1640 - c.1740' in Hitchcock, T., and Shore, H. (eds.), *The streets of London: from the great fire to the great stink* (London, 2003), pp.40-53; Byrd, M., *London transformed: images of the City in the eighteenth century* (London, 1978), pp.8-43.

¹⁴ Habermas, J., *The structural transformation of the public sphere* (Cambridge, 1989).

To this end these documents were framed in certain ways by employing a kind of standardised language; a rhetoric of improvement.¹⁵ For example, one oft employed tactic was to highlight the supposed benefits that the proposed improvements would engender for the broader community and ultimately the nation. This involved using terms such as ‘publick utility’ and focusing on the economic benefits to be had via these schemes, not just for the city, but the nation as a whole. In particular, measures to construct or renovate trade and communications infrastructure, such as Bridges, were framed in this way.¹⁶ So, there are limits as to what we can deduce by analyzing the language employed in these documents, and indeed much of the discourse of improvement they espouse could simply be empty rhetoric adopted solely for the purposes of ensuring the bill was enacted.

The second factor that seems to have induced historians to suggest the removal of the houses was a product of this spirit of improvement is simply that, occurring as it did alongside a series of other infrastructure projects in the 1750s, it slips neatly into a linear narrative. Again seen from the comfortable perspective of our rather orderly historiographical conception of improvement such an assertion seems perfectly defensible - the Corporation saw the deficiencies in the infrastructure of the City and embarked on a coherent program of reforms. However, the problem is that no tangible evidence is produced to illustrate that there existed any coherent, unifying motivations behind these projects; and secondly, such an assumption posits the removal of the houses as simply part of an inevitable and deliberate movement, thus adopting a rather teleological approach.

Finally, and most obviously, for those wishing to see this Act as a product of the spirit of improvement, the term ‘to improve’ is employed within the title of both the Bill and Act (although it is absent from the actual texts of these documents). Yet, as the preceding sections have argued it is current historical assumptions that have infused this term “improvement” with meanings and connotations beyond its simple dictionary definition. To argue that the Act was born from the complex motivations encapsulated in the supposed ‘spirit of improvement’ simply because it has the term ‘improve’ in its title is tenuous at best and has little explanatory power.

¹⁵ Sweet, R., ‘Local identities and a national parliament: 1688-1835’ in Hoppit, J., (ed.), *Parliaments, nations and identities in Britain and Ireland, 1660-1850* (Manchester, 2003), pp.48-63. It is important to note that the Common Council report of 25 September 1754 that labeled the houses ‘a publick nuisance’ was made widely available for public consumption in several newspapers.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.51.

Therefore, the objective of this chapter is to develop a convincing argument that repositions the demolition of the houses on London Bridge from its current situation as simply the manifestation of a spirit of improvement. The analytical framework to be used here is provided by two particular pieces of scholarship that problematise the validity of this concept. Paul Slack, in a thought provoking work focused on early modern public welfare, has subtly questioned the whole basis of improvement as a phenomenon particular to the eighteenth-century. Slack suggests that in many ways improvement was simply a repackaging of a number of ideas that had been in evidence for several centuries previously. These ideas were intended to solve the same problems that had exercised society and its rulers for most of the late medieval and early modern period. In other words many aspects of public welfare were considered deficient and worthy of remedial measures well before improvement came along; indeed, the main difference was simply implementation, in that the earlier concept of reformation entailed rather revolutionary solutions whereas improvement entailed more evolutionary, piecemeal methods.¹⁷ In a different vein, Miles Ogborn has successfully critiqued the propensity of some historiography to unquestioningly view changes in the built environment as simply interrelated *products* of overarching narratives (in his case modernity) and has argued that a more appropriate methodology is to analyse such changes as fully historicised autonomous occurrences that combine to *produce* what historians then form into broader narratives.¹⁸

Armed with these historiographical tools the rest of this chapter will analyse the various issues related to ‘utility and convenience’ which were stated in the Act and the documentation related to it, as motivating factors for the removal of the houses. It will argue that there is little evidence to suggest that the problems highlighted in these documents were issues peculiar to the mid-eighteenth century and that indeed many had been the object of attempted improvements in previous eras. It will then look at two further potential causes of the Act which were specific to the

¹⁷ Slack, P., *From reformation to improvement: public welfare in early modern England* (Oxford, 1999). Martin Ingram posits a similar argument regarding another of the “progressive” movements strongly associated with the long eighteenth century, the reformation of manners. Ingram argues that this movement was ‘far from being an innovation of post-Reformation England’, and had existed in one guise or another for centuries previously. Ingram, M., ‘Reformation of manners in early modern England’ in Griffiths, P., Fox, A., Hindle, S. (eds.), *The experience of authority in early modern England* (London, 1996), pp.47-88. Quote from p.81.

¹⁸ Ogborn, *Spaces of modernity*.

mid-eighteenth century and could possibly help to explain the timing of the Act: the accentuation of the existing problems with the Bridge due to growth of London, and secondly, a factor which comes closest to the traditional notions of urban improvement, the construction of Westminster Bridge and the possible desire of the Corporation to make London Bridge more elegant and aesthetically pleasing through the demolition of the houses.

Issues of Utility and Convenience

Safety on the Bridge

One of the most prominently stated motivating factors behind the removal of the houses was clearly the issue of the safety of individuals. It is constantly referred to in the documents, and there is good reason for this. Due to the narrowness of the passageway the foot passenger would have to step into doorways or gaps between the houses in order to avoid carts and carriages. Right from the Bridge's earliest years it was not uncommon for foot passengers in particular to suffer serious injury or even death either by falling from the Bridge or from being crushed by horse or cart.¹⁹ For example, Strype noted an incident in 1396 when nine people met a grim end when they were killed in a crush whilst traversing the Bridge, and in 1722 Richard Mount died after sustaining a leg injury from a carthorse in similar circumstances.²⁰ Home also notes that the churchwardens' accounts of St Magnus the Martyr in 1735-6 list many payments to those injured on the Bridge, and that in 1752 a man suffered a gruesome fate by being crushed to death between two carts.²¹ Of course such deaths were not uncommon on the streets of London itself or any eighteenth-century urban area, and the refashioning of the streetscapes of urban Britain during this time, in particular the addition of pavements, was designed to reduce the dangers of walking the streets. However the problems on London Bridge did seem particularly acute, not least because of the unique dangers the Bridge presented. Several times the Bridge Masters were ordered to ensure the railings between the houses on the Bridge were strengthened 'to secure the same against the mischiefs which has lately happened to

¹⁹ Welch, C., *History of Tower Bridge, and of other bridges over the Thames built by the Corporation of London* (London, 1894), p.117.

²⁰ Strype, J., *A survey of the cities of London and Westminster* (London, 1720), vol.1, p.5; Fisher, S. 'Mount, Richard (bap. 1654, d.1722)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, OUP, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50892>, accessed 7 March 2008.

²¹ Home, G., *Old London Bridge* (London, 1931), pp.264, 280; Welch, *Tower Bridge*, p.117.

passengers by the losse of same and hazards of other mens lives.’²² Samuel Pepys described his fears of literally being blown off the Bridge during high winds because the rails were absent, having been destroyed in a previous storm.²³ Similarly in 1697 the BHLC took firm action against a rogue tenant whose house stood ‘five foot further into the street than any other tenant’ and was causing such a blockage that ‘many stops are made and the lives of many persons endangered.’²⁴ The houses on the Bridge clearly made traversing it something of a risky business, and it is no exaggeration to say that Londoners often risked life and limb doing so.²⁵

The populace of the capital also had to contend with the ever present issue of criminal behavior on the Bridge. The main threat was from the ubiquitous pickpockets, and although this was by no means a problem that was particular to the Bridge, it was clear that the narrowness of the passage and the consequent scrum it often created produced an environment that was particularly suited to cutpurses. It was a common tactic was for women ‘under shew and pretence of selling Ginger bread Apples Oranges Ballads and other Knacks’²⁶ to block up the passageway and hinder travellers so that ‘many pickpockets and ill persons take the opportunity from the straitening of the passage and turning people out of their way to pick their pockets.’²⁷ Such nefarious activities, alongside the equally commonplace begging, seemed to thrive on the Bridge largely because of the spatial intimacy created by the houses.²⁸

Traffic on the Bridge

The clumsy but clearly effective diversionary tactics employed by the pickpockets not only allowed them to perpetrate their crimes but they also contributed to another factor declared as a reason for the removal of the houses: traffic blockages. This issue of traffic being impeded on the Bridge was also longstanding, as James Robertson notes, concerns regarding the inhibition of traffic were being articulated in

²² CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.74/80, fol.91/27., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1668 & 1685; BHI 08, 6 July 1743.

²³ Pepys, S., (24 January 1666) *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/4200> Home, *Old London Bridge*, p.218.

²⁴ BHI 04, 17 March 1697.

²⁵ CLRO, COL/CC/06/01 fol.0134., Court of Common Council papers, 1754.

²⁶ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.98/213., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1693.

²⁷ CLRO, COL/AD/04 fol.019., Ward presentments: Bridge Ward Within, 1712.

²⁸ Hitchcock, T., *Down and out in eighteenth-century London* (London, 2004), p.11; Davies, Mary (1722) *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey*, 4 July 1722. <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?ref=t17220704-39>.

the early seventeenth century, and in 1617 a one-way system for carts exiting the Bridge by the northern end was instigated by the Common Council in order to improve entry and exit from the Bridge.²⁹ By the 1660s traffic could be so bad on the Bridge that it was said to be quicker to take to the water and employ the services of one of the many watermen and their boats to cross the Thames.³⁰ With such a historical precedent it is no surprise to find that the obstruction of traffic on the Bridge appears as an issue with regularity throughout the period. In 1669 the Court of Aldermen ordered that:

upon complaint made unto this court of the frequent stoppage of the common passage upon LB by the disorderly leading and driving of carrs and cartes to the annoyance and dainger of the inhabitants and passengers It was considered and ordered by this court that for – remedy and prevention of the said dainger and annoyance for the future two Beadles or two persons fit . . . shall be appointed . . . to attend dailey for directing all cartes going to keep on the one side and all cartes coming to keep on the other side of the said Bridge and by all other means to avoid the said dainger and inconveniency and to apprehend and bring offenders before some Justice of the Peace to be dealt with all according to laws.³¹

This order, in all probability the origin of the British system of driving on the left side of the road, was re-issued, with amendments, throughout our period. A re-issue of the order in 1674 made official this specific directive concerning road use as the two beadles were ordered to keep all traffic going northward into the City to the east, or left side of the Bridge and all those going south to the west (right) side.³² The 1681 version of the order was issued with the addendum that the Collector of Tolls should ensure that he collected the tolls prior to carts crossing the Bridge so as to avoid them stopping in the roadway.³³ Several decades later in 1722 the BHLIC, upon the direction of the Court of Aldermen, appointed a street keeper to see to it that these rules of the road were being observed by those crossing the Bridge. This lucky soul was to be present at the Bridge from 5.00am-9.00pm in the summer and 8.00am-7.00pm in the winter, and was sworn to the office of constable to ensure he had some

²⁹ Robertson, J., 'Persuading the citizens? Charles I and London Bridge', *Historical Research*, 79:206 (2006), p.522; Spence, C., *London in the 1690s: a social atlas* (London, 2000), p.32. In 1658 a complaint was made to the Common Council by the inhabitants of the Bridge regarding people selling goods on the Bridge and obstructing the passageway, CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.41/193., Court of Common Council journals, 1658.

³⁰ Picard, L., *Restoration London: everyday life in the 1660s* (London, 1997), p.23.

³¹ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.75/ 313., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1669.

³² CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.80/256., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1674.

³³ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.87/7., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1681.

legal powers to carry out his duties. Furthermore it was decreed that copies of the order were to be posted up on the Bridge and in other public places to promote public awareness of this regulation.³⁴

Not only were there human obstacles to one's progress across the Bridge but also the houses themselves occasionally encroached into the road space. A report in 1683 noted that many of the habitations on the Bridge hindered traffic by 'jutting over into the common highway or erected across the same' thereby acting as 'nusesances and greatly obstructing the common passage'. The problem was so severe that legal action was taken by the Bridge House against the tenants in order to force them to remove the offending constructions.³⁵

Safety under the Bridge

Another area where the Bridge was uniquely dangerous for travellers was in terms of waterborne travel. Crossing the Bridge on foot, dangerous as it may have been, was nothing compared to the danger of sailing though the arches of the structure, a practice known as "shooting the Bridge". The number and thickness of the piers of the Bridge had a damming effect on the flow of water creating what was a frequently a lethal mini-waterfall on one side of the Bridge. A work of 1742 claims that a twelfth of the volume of the water in the Thames was 'deny'd passage' further up the river 'by the Piers and starling of London Bridge'.³⁶ Pepys makes several references to the dangers of the practice of shooting the Bridge, which caused many deaths amongst the boatmen and their passengers, and led to the proverb that 'London Bridge was made for wise men to go over and fools to go under'.³⁷ The Corporation was clearly well aware of this health and safety issue. A report by the Bridge House mason in 1672 notes that the damming effect that the starlings and piers created ensured that 'Many Boats and peoples lives lately had and may hereafter be cast away by the great falls of the water'³⁸, and a Common Council motion of 1746 similarly

³⁴ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.127/216., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1722; BHJ 06, 1 May 1723. CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.127/216., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1722; CLRO, CLA/022/02/007 fol.P.D.10.203., Order of Bridge House Lands Committee for the better regulating the passage over London Bridge, 16 May 1753.

³⁵ CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/03 fol.02., Bridge House Committee papers, 1683; CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.89/34., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1683.

³⁶ Anon, *A new and compleat survey of London. by a citizen, and native of London* (London, 1742) vol.1, p.668.

³⁷ Home, *London Bridge*, pp.216-8; Pepys, *Diary*, entries for 8 August 1662 and 18 May 1661 www.gutenberg.org/etext/4200, accessed 8 October 2007.

³⁸ BHJ 02, undated 1672.

notes that efforts should be undertaken to make the ‘navigation of the river’ through the Bridge ‘more commodious’.³⁹ By removing the houses, and thereby reducing the weight that the piers would be required to hold, the Corporation hoped to remove ‘one or more of the Arches’ and therefore alleviate to some extent the damming effect they were causing.⁴⁰

Damage to the Bridge

Finally, and rather understandably given the age of the Bridge itself, there was great concern over both the structural integrity of the houses and the detrimental effect they were having on the actual structure of the Bridge. Countless reports and viewings of the houses note that they were out of repair, or ‘greatly decayed’, but that they also put a tremendous strain on the rest of the Bridge.⁴¹ A report by a BHLC sub-committee in 1740 noted the importance of ensuring the ‘immediate repair upon any sudden decay’ of the hammer beams and timbers that supported the houses on the Bridge, ‘which for want of immediate assistance may be attended with very bad consequences.’⁴² In other words the physical deterioration and possible collapse of a house could lead to substantial damage to the actual Bridge. Similarly the piers had to be constantly strengthened and repaired in order to take the weight of the houses. In 1679 a BHLC sub-committee reported that money would have to be found in order to repair several piers, or they would be damaged by building new habitations upon them.⁴³ This type of work on the substructure of the Bridge was costly. In order to allow the construction of new houses on the Bridge, work to repair the piers was undertaken in 1683 at a cost in excess of £1000.⁴⁴ Yet even such a substantial outlay did not prevent the houses from listing so badly due to the decay of the piers that by 1687 the house owners were unable to lease them and were demanding compensation from the Bridge House.⁴⁵ Eager no doubt to avoid liability, the BHLC pointed out that the lessees of the houses were hardly blameless having damaged the structure of the

³⁹ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.59/29., Court of Common Council journals, 1746.

⁴⁰ *A bill with the amendments to improve, widen, and enlarge, the passage over and through London Bridge* (London, 1756), p.4.

⁴¹ Although one contemporary text suggested that it was in fact the weight of the houses that had kept the arches intact for so long. Gadsdon, I., *Geometrical rules made easy for the use of mechanicks concern'd in buildings* (London, 1739), p.54.

⁴² CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.58/207., Court of Common Council journals, 1740.

⁴³ BHJ 02, 2 April 1679.

⁴⁴ BHJ 03, February 1683.

⁴⁵ CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/03 fol.03., Bridge House Committee papers 1687; CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.93/79., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1687.

Bridge by cutting ‘doorewayes in their cellars through the Spandrells of the Arches’ of the Bridge which only served to ‘weaken the said Peeres and Arches.’⁴⁶ But not only was the fabric of the Bridge being threatened from above, but it was also being attacked from below as the Thames itself was taking its toll on the ancient structure. The same damming effect that caused the mini waterfall also constantly and inexorably eroded the piers, and the removal of the houses, thereby allowing for the widening of the arches, would ease this problem.⁴⁷

So clearly there were many genuine problems engendered by the houses on the Bridge and many benefits were to be had by removing them. The issues highlighted in the various documents pertaining to the Act cannot simply be dismissed as empty rhetoric. But the obvious point here is that none of these issues highlighted in these documents were unique to the mid-eighteenth century; they were problems that, as the report of 25 September 1754 noted, had been ‘long felt’, and had clearly existed for centuries previously.⁴⁸ How these longstanding issues helped ensure that the Bridge was in previous eras perceived as deficient is the subject of the next section, with the following section showing how this perception of the Bridge as unfit for purpose drove the Corporation’s intermittent responses to remedy these problems.

A ‘Popular Nuisance’ :Critiquing the Bridge

We begin our analysis of the criticism of the Bridge by stepping back from our eighteenth-century vantage point to focus on a particularly prescient episode in the history of the structure when Charles I launched an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to renovate the Bridge as part of a broader refashioning of the City in the 1630s.⁴⁹ The research conducted by James Robertson on this affair highlights the fact that the motivations behind the desire to remove the houses in the 1630s were very similar to those mentioned in the 1750s. As Robertson notes, by the 1630s the houses on the Bridge ‘appeared increasingly archaic’⁵⁰ to contemporaries and the entire existence of

⁴⁶ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.89/130., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1683.

⁴⁷ Harding and Wright, *London Bridge*, p.xxii.

⁴⁸ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.60/220., Court of Common Council journals, 1754.

⁴⁹ For more on Charles efforts in the 1630s see: Griffiths, P., ‘Politics made visible: order, residence and uniformity in Cheapside, 1600-1645’ in Griffiths, P., and Jenner, M. (eds.), *Londinopolis: essays in the cultural and social history of early modern London* (Manchester, 2000), pp.176-196.

⁵⁰ Robertson, ‘Persuading the citizens’, p.516.

the houses was being questioned. There was widespread criticism, including from the King himself, of the “nucances . . . to persons of all conditions” concerning the “streightness of the ways” and the encroachments into the street of “stayres and stoops” which impeded all the traffic over the Bridge.⁵¹ A commission, including Inigo Jones and members of the Corporation who had been ‘carefully selected’ by the King, was charged with looking into this matter and they concluded that ‘for the convenience of passengers . . . that all the rest of the Buildings upon the same (bridge) were likewise to be removed and taken away’.⁵² Unsurprisingly given the composition of the commission this was a judgement very much in line with Charles’ thinking. This course of action would allow for the structure, the piers and arches, to be strengthened and raised pavements with guttering were to be added to the roadway to distinguish the walking area from the roadway, and provide increased levels of convenience.⁵³ It was also claimed that removing the houses would improve the safe navigation of the river, and would help to ensure the Bridge was no longer a potential site for public disorder.⁵⁴ The reason these plans failed to come to fruition is particularly interesting and will be discussed latter in the chapter.

The inadequacy of the Bridge in this period is reflected in the persistent agitation during the seventeenth century for a new bridge across the Thames to be constructed.⁵⁵ Indeed the Bill for the construction of a bridge at Putney was only narrowly defeated in Parliament in 1671, but the demands for such a structure continued to rumble on throughout our period, and eventually Putney Bridge was opened in 1730.⁵⁶ Criticism of London Bridge continued to resonate across the decades, and a century on from Charles’ efforts the same types of issues were informing a scathing attack on the state of the Bridge by figures of no less magnitude than Nicholas Hawksmoor and James Ralph.

Ralph in his 1734 work ‘*A Critical Review of the Publick Buildings of London*’ opined that ‘nothing can be more ridiculous than this invention’ a Bridge

⁵¹ Privy council order, 21 January 1634/5 (copy), quoted in Robertson, ‘Persuading the citizens’, p.522.

⁵² Bridge House Committee Papers 1630-5 (unnumbered bundle), quoted in Robertson, ‘Persuading the citizens’, p.522.

⁵³ Robertson, ‘Persuading the citizens’, p.524.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.526-7, 525.

⁵⁵ Brett-James claims the first agitation began as early as 1664. Brett-James, N., *The growth of Stuart London* (London, 1935), p.437.

⁵⁶ Spence, *London*, pp.38-9; Brett-James, *Stuart London*, pp.437-9. The defeat of the Bill was orchestrated by the Corporation, primarily at the urging of the watermen who plied to the river as they felt that the construction of this bridge would greatly reduce their business.

‘incumber’d with houses from end to end’, and argued that this ‘popular nuisance’ (the houses) should be removed.⁵⁷ But such censure was mild compared to the full blooded castigation launched by Nicholas Hawksmoor two years later.

In his pamphlet entitled ‘*A Short Historical Account of London-Bridge; with a proposition for a new stone-bridge at Westminster*’ which detailed the need for a new stone bridge at Westminster, Hawksmoor comprehensively highlighted every deficiency of London Bridge. He began with a critique of the narrowness and irregularity of the piers which made the Bridge ‘very ill-contrived’ and ‘much obstructes and indangers the Naviagation thro’ the Bridge’. These characteristics led to ‘the Loss of Lives and Goods, and the Vessels, which are either thrown upon the Sterlings or sunk within the Arches.’⁵⁸ He then directed his fire toward the houses on the Bridge, wondering how the Bridge had come to be ‘embarrassed’ by the ‘Nusance of Building upon it’.⁵⁹ He went on to point out, not unreasonably, that to build a Bridge ‘for a safe and open Passage’ yet put houses on it ‘so as to make it difficult for two Carriages to pass by one another, without endangering the Lives of Foot-passengers, or driving them into those very Houses for their Security, must be very absurd, in that it perverts and destroys the principle Benefits that can accrue from a Bridge’.⁶⁰ The structural damage that the houses were potentially causing did not escape his attention either as he noted that by their being ‘one half on the Bridge, and the other half hanging over the Air’ they ‘must certainly make the Backs of the Piers suffer much by that unequal Pressure’.⁶¹ For good measure Hawksmoor concluded his pamphlet with a two pronged *coup de grace* by stating that Rochester Bridge, although built in the same style as London Bridge, ‘may be esteemed better’ due to the fact that ‘no Houses are placed upon it, to make it useless’ and that ‘the Arches are wider than at London Bridge’, and illustrating this fact by including a plan for a new London Bridge, *sans* houses, and complete with widened arches.⁶²

Separated as they are by a century, both these sets of perspectives differ in terms of the framework within which they conceptualised London Bridge. For Charles I, the Bridge was to be refurbished as part of a broader refashioning of the capital to

⁵⁷ Ralph, J., *A critical review of the publick buildings of London* (London, 1734), p.9.

⁵⁸ Hawksmoor, N., *A short historical account of London-Bridge; with a proposition for a new stone-bridge at Westminster* (London, 1736), p.8, 10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.10 and 11.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.49.

reflect monarchical power; Ralph and Hawksmoor were criticising the Bridge within the context of their desire to create an architectural landscape that would be fitting for a metropolis of such cultural and commercial importance. But the point is that both viewpoints claimed the Bridge to be deficient on the basis of safety, convenience and general utility, therefore the same issues were being used to construct different narratives separated by over a century, and to portray the Bridge as inadequate. These same issues were also what moved the Corporation itself to undertake several major refurbishments of the Bridge in our period, again on the basis of the deficiency of utility and general visual appearance of the Bridge. But whereas for Charles I, Hawksmoor, and Ralph, alleviating the problems associated with the Bridge meant removing the houses, for the Corporation it entailed a resolutely different approach.

Post Fire measures to improve the Bridge

The Corporation was clearly not immune to the disapproval that its Bridge incited and the City was moved to undertake several major refurbishments of the structure in our period. In 1693 and again 1725 subcommittees of the BHLC were asked to report on the viability and cost of widening the southern entrance to the Bridge, for the ‘convenience of foot passengers’, but nothing seems to have come from these reports.⁶³ However two major renovation projects were undertaken to improve the Bridge in this aspect, the first in 1683, the second in 1728. Of the two the renovations of 1683 were the more substantial and give a real indication of the issues that were exercising the Corporation in relation to the Bridge.

It seems that by the early 1680s the problem of the houses on the middle part of the Bridge ‘jutting over into the common highway or erected across the same’⁶⁴ and causing ‘nusances and greatly obstructing the common passage’ was so severe that the Court of Aldermen ordered the clerk of the Bridge House to take legal action to prosecute the tenants of the offending houses. It was at first suggested that the tenants should take down these jutties and ‘reduce the fronts of their houses or in any other manor as shall be thought fit convenient.’⁶⁵ However after a report of the BHLC noted the ‘charges of removing the nusances’ as well as ‘the great inconvenience of

⁶³ BHJ 03, 13 October 1693; CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.57/137., Court of Common Council journals, 1725.

⁶⁴ CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/03 fol.02., Bridge House Committee papers. 1683.

⁶⁵ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.89/34., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1683.

continuing the old buildings’ and suggested that instead the Bridge House ‘pull down old buildings in the roome thereof to build faire substantial uniforme houses’ in their place’, which they believed would be ‘of great consequence and advantage to the city’.⁶⁶ A body of aldermen called the ‘London Bridge improvement committee’ was convened to oversee this work and they acted decisively. The old tenants were effectively subject to a compulsory purchase order and the Bridge House undertook the removal of the houses and remedial work on the piers of the Bridge. New tenants were then sought but they had to abide by the strict building regulations enshrined in the post Fire building acts which stipulated the size, shape and materials of the new houses.⁶⁷ The sub-committees policed these regulations well, with anyone accused of ‘irregular building’ being subjected to a full survey by masters of the Company of Bricklayers, and, if the workmanship was found wanting, the offenders were ordered to correct these irregularities or suffer the draconian punishment of having their properties demolished.⁶⁸ This program of renovations of the houses on the Bridge continued for several years with all building work being carried out under the watchful eyes of the committee who oversaw strict adherence to the building regulations in order to ensure that the houses did not ‘obstruct or prejudice the common passage over the said Bridge’.⁶⁹

The renovations of 1728 were more limited in their scope but significant nonetheless. The ancient and restrictive Bridge gate was completely rebuilt and several houses surrounding it were removed in order that the passageway through the gate could be widened from its current width of thirteen feet so that ‘two carts or coaches may pass through.’⁷⁰ This undertaking cost over £1000, although it appears that the majority of the money was provided by the Corporation rather than coming directly from Bridge House coffers. Such spending was justified on the basis that it was, according to both the BHLC and the Common Council, ‘very much for the publick good.’⁷¹

⁶⁶ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.89/48., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1683.

⁶⁷ Swann notes that the estate s usually helped share the costs of repairs if they were great to ensure the proper repairs were carried out: Swann, ‘London Estates’, p.37. For the Acts see: Reddaway, T.F., *The rebuilding of London after the great fire* (London, 1951), pp.137-170; Porter, S., *The great fire of London* (Godalming, 1998), pp.92-115.

⁶⁸ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.89/67., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1683.

⁶⁹ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.89/67., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1683.

⁷⁰ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.57/176., Court of Common Council journals, 1728.

⁷¹ BHJ 06, 31 May 1728; CLRO, CLA/007/FN/06/01/022 Bridge House cash book, 1728; CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.57/176., Court of Common Council journals, 1728.

Therefore, from at least the early seventeenth-century onwards there had clearly been a perception of the Bridge as deficient on a utilitarian level, due to the houses on the structure. The various efforts by the Corporation to renovate the structure and alleviate some of these problems, along with the derogatory comments by high profile commentators such as Ralph and Hawksmoor and the agitation for the bridge at Putney, serve to illustrate the fact there existed a general consensus on the part of both those inside and outside the Corporation that in many ways the Bridge was inadequate.

However the opinions of those outside the Corporation diverged markedly from the City itself on the issue of how to remedy this myriad of ills. For Charles I, Hawksmoor and Ralph the palpably obvious solution to the Bridge's woes was simply to remove the houses. Yet despite such a soundly logical plan the Corporation itself pursued a different approach, sticking doggedly to a rather unsatisfactory policy of trying to implement improvements on the Bridge whilst maintaining the habitable structures on it. This then leaves us searching for an explanation as to why, after a rigid strategy of improving the Bridge via refurbishing the houses, the Corporation in the 1750s abruptly abandoned this policy and opted to remove the houses altogether? One possible explanation is that improvement was often motivated by the fact that by the eighteenth-century social and economic changes such as population growth and the expansion of trade were making pre-existing problems more acute, ensuring that elements of urban infrastructure were simply not capable of fulfilling their functions.⁷² Because of London's sheer size this concern over the ability of infrastructure to cope was particularly heightened in relation to the capital.⁷³ Such contextual factors could have accentuated the existing problems with the Bridge in the post Fire period until they built to a crisis point by the mid-eighteenth century and triggered the desire to remove the houses. There is also the issue of the aesthetic qualities of the Bridge - the

⁷² Ellis, J., *The Georgian town: 1680-1840* (Basingstoke, 2001), chapter 5.

⁷³ These concerns were most obviously felt in relation to the capital's infrastructure, such as it was, regarding the criminal justice system, and provision for the poor. The literature relating to these topics is voluminous, but some select examples: Beattie, J., 'London crime and the making of the 'Bloody Code' 1689-1718' in Davison, L., Hitchcock, T., Keirn, T. and Shoemaker, R.(eds.) *Stilling the grumbling hive: the response to social and economic problems in England 1689-1750* (Stroud 1992), pp.49-76; Shoemaker, R., 'Reforming the city: The reformation of manners campaign in London, 1690-1738' in Davison, L., Hitchcock, T., Keirn, T., and Shoemaker, R. (eds.), *Stilling the grumbling hive: the response to social and economic problems in England 1689-1750* (Stroud, 1992), pp.99-120; Macfarlane, S., 'Social policy and the poor in the later seventeenth century' in Beier, A., and Finlay, R. (eds.), *London 1500-1700: the making of the metropolis* (London, 1986), pp.252-273; Innes, J., 'Managing the metropolis: London's social problems and their control, c.1660-1830' in Clark, P., and Gillespie, R. (eds.), *Two capitals: London and Dublin 1500-1840* (London, 2001), pp.53-79.

elegance of the structure. Improvement was often related to such concerns, and the completion of Westminster Bridge in 1749, which was far better suited to eighteenth-century expectations of architectural elegance, has not gone unnoticed by historians when seeking to identify the cause behind the Act to Improve London Bridge. Consequently, it is imperative we explore both these theses.

Contextual factors

The growth of London

Unfortunately no quantitative data is available, such as records of the volume of traffic or incidences of accidents, which could be taken as evidence to indicate whether problems such as traffic or safety were becoming more acute as the eighteenth century progressed. However contextual factors tend to suggest that a dramatic intensification of Bridge usage across our period was unlikely. To begin with London's population growth in the period between the Fire and 1750s had been limited; indeed Dorothy George has argued that the population actually declined between 1700 and 1750.⁷⁴ Swann and Spate argue that the evidence from bills of mortality suggest that despite an initial upswing in the first quarter of the century 'London's population had ceased to grow by the mid-thirties', and declined over the next 20 years.⁷⁵ There were also short term economic fluctuations affecting the capital. The decline in population coincided with several nationwide economic depressions during the late 40s and 50s, and London suffered the effects of these, particularly in terms of a decline in building activity.⁷⁶ Similarly, according to Spate, although the value of the trade passing through London's port increased over the period, London's actual share of imports and exports declined in the mid century, and a slew of trade data, including figures for the number of ships entering the Port of London, shows that the volume of London's trade was declining relative to the nation

⁷⁴ Rude suggests population levels of 575,000 in 1700 and 675,000 by 1750; Rudé, G., *Hanoverian London: 1714-1808* (London, 1971), p.4. George argues for 674,000 and 676,000 over same period, George, *London life*, p.329.

⁷⁵ Swann, 'London Estates', p.44, 42. Spate notes that the capital's birth rate declined in the "Gin" decade of the 1740s, and similarly there was a high death rate between 1730s and 1750s and a decline in christenings until the 1760s: Spate, O.H.K., 'The growth of London, A.D. 1660-1800' in Darby, H.C., (ed.), *An historical geography of England before A.D. 1800* (Cambridge, 1948), pp.538-9.

⁷⁶ For these economic depressions see: Aston, T., *Economic fluctuations in England, 1700-1800* (Oxford, 1959), pp.147-8; Shepherd, F., Belcher, V., and Cottrell, P., 'The Middlesex and Yorkshire deeds registries and the study of building fluctuations', *London Journal*, 5 (1979), pp.185-6.

by the 1740s.⁷⁷ In addition to these cyclical economic fluctuations there were also longer term trends affecting London. In particular the capital was being transformed from a centre of production to a mercantile and financial centre, and therefore, as opposed to cities such as Liverpool or Bristol, had a relatively limited involvement in the trade and traffic generated by the booming industries of cotton and iron.⁷⁸ As a result, the economic climate of London in the first half of the century was one of limited growth, with stagnation and even decline in some sectors setting in by the mid century. In sum, there is little evidence for an explosive growth in trade or population that would suggest a sharp ratcheting up of the pressures on the infrastructure of the capital around the mid eighteenth-century.

Having said this, it is true that internal traffic of the metropolis most likely increased due to the growing use of carriages, the emergent phenomenon of commuting due to the increasing separation of workplace from living place, and the de-localisation of social networks. Put simply, eighteenth-century Londoners' social and working patterns dictated greater mobility.⁷⁹ However, whether such changes translated into greater usage of the Bridge is highly doubtful. To begin with, the extent to which such journeys for work or pleasure would involve crossing the Bridge is debatable: as Keene notes, it was amongst the 'professional and mercantile classes' that a 'new relationship between residence and workplace, involving daily travel between one and the other, slowly emerged.'⁸⁰ These classes were not residing south of the river in Southwark, an area that had a less than salubrious reputation, but rather they inhabited the new suburbs of West London that were developing to the west of the City. Certainly, the polite attractions of Vauxhall Gardens and possibly the less polite gambling halls, cockpits, and bawdy houses located south of the river would have attracted these middling classes to some extent, but their social facilities were

⁷⁷ Spate, 'Growth of London', p.543; Swann, 'London Estates', pp.43-44.

⁷⁸ Swann, 'London Estates', p.41; Jones, E., and Falkus, M., 'Urban improvement and the English economy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' in Borsay, P. (ed.), *The eighteenth century town 1688-1820* (London, 1990), p.149; Spate, 'Growth of London', p.547.

⁷⁹ Jenner, 'Circulation and disorder'; Shoemaker, R., 'Gendered spaces: patterns of mobility and perceptions of London's geography, 1660-1750' in Merritt, J., (ed.), *Imagining early modern London: perceptions and portrayals of the city from Stow to Strype, 1598-1720* (Cambridge, 2001), pp.144-65.

⁸⁰ Keene, 'Growth, modernisation and control', p.23.

confined mainly to the north of the river, and residence in Southwark was still by-and-large confined to those of a lower social status.⁸¹

As images 4.1 and 4.2 illustrate, it was Westminster and the suburbs of the City that were expanding during the period between the Fire and mid century, whilst the growth of Southwark was limited. In fact George argues that the population of Southwark declined slightly between 1700 and 1750.⁸² One would assume that the limited expansion of the docking facilities eastwards along the southern side of the river into Rotherhithe would have had an impact on the Bridge usage to some extent but again without hard data this is mere speculation.⁸³ Additionally, the opening of Putney Bridge in 1730 offered a route across the Thames for through traffic that wished to avoid entering the metropolis or paying the wheelage to cross London Bridge. In fact, this issue of the wheelage provides hard evidence to suggest that the amount of traffic over the Bridge may have reached a peak in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, and actually been in decline by the second quarter of the century.

Map 4.1



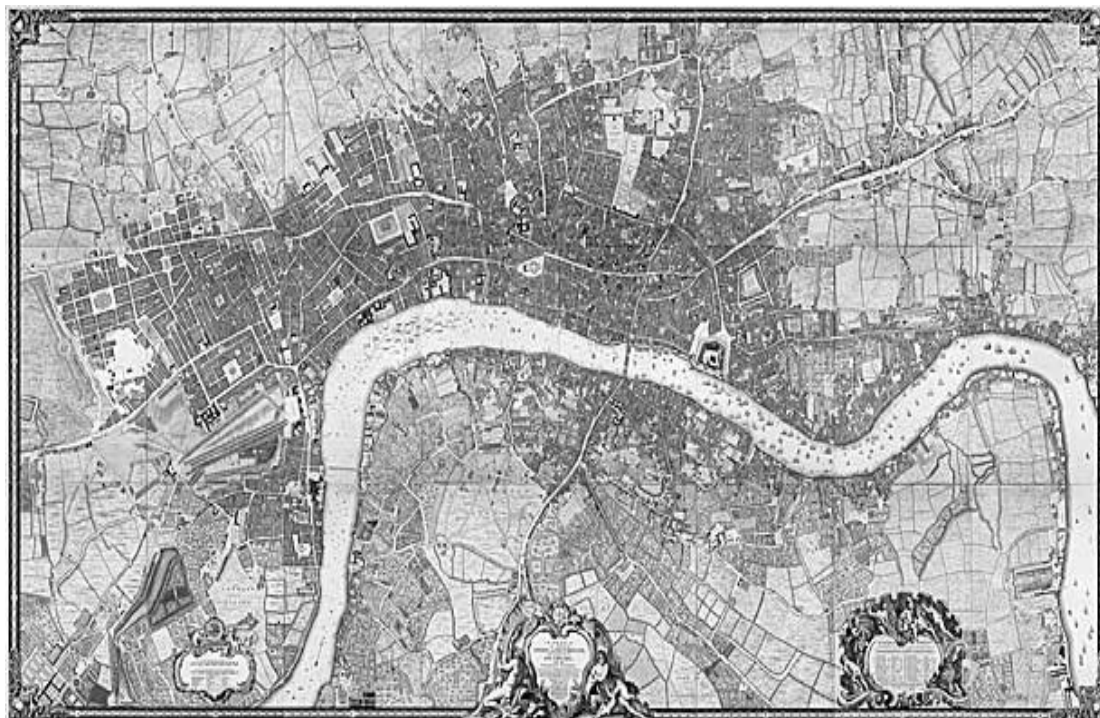
Wenceslaus Hollar, *An Exact Survey of London 1665* (Guildhall Library City of London)

⁸¹ Stone, L., 'The residential development of the west end of London in the seventeenth century' in Malament, B.C., (ed.), *After the reformation: essays in honour of J.H. Hexter* (Manchester, 1980), p.190.

⁸² George, *London life*, p.329.

⁸³ For development of Southwark prior to 1700 see: Brett-James, *Stuart London*, pp.405-10.

Map 4.2



John Rocque, *A New and Accurate Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster* 1746 www.motco.com/Map/81002. Accessed on 19 April 2007.

The right to collect wheelage was the right to collect tolls from the vehicles passing over, and supposedly under, the Bridge. This right was farmed out and purchased by individuals every twenty-one years. The sums paid were substantial, and constituted an enormous financial boost to the Bridge House coffers. In 1699 the wheelage was leased to James Pond for a £500 fine and £400 p.a rent, and by the time the BHLIC put the lease (beginning in 1720) up for renewal in 1717 Pond had to increase his outlay to a £1100 fine and £450p.a. rent in order to win the bidding war. The committee remarked at the time that the profits from the wheelage had increased markedly in the previous twenty-one years, and this was indeed reflected in the price increase.⁸⁴ By the time of the next renewal in 1738 Thomas Winterbottom paid a fine of £1010 but with an annual rent of just £300. Winterbottom was by far and away the highest bidder for the lease, with other bidders offering the same rental amounts and fines of just £500 or less.⁸⁵ Of course this cannot be taken as definitive evidence of a decline in the amount of traffic over the Bridge, but given the fact that the tollage

⁸⁴ BHJ 05, 6 November 1717.

⁸⁵ BHJ 07, 1 November 1738.

charge to cross the Bridge remained the same over our period any increase in traffic would surely have been reflected in the cost individuals were willing to pay for the wheelage. Put simply, more traffic would have made the rights to wheelage more valuable.

Finally, there is perhaps one more important indication that the Bridge did not suffer an intensification of usage by the mid-century, and it is perhaps the most obvious, in that none of the documents relating to the Act itself actually claim that the Bridge was suffering under an increased workload or weight of traffic that was making issues of safety or traffic flow any more acute. Had the structure indeed been labouring under an increased workload it seems unlikely that the Corporation would have neglected to mention such an important justification.

We must conclude that there is little direct evidence for increased usage of the Bridge during the mid-eighteenth century and little in the way of compelling contextual factors that could have accounted for the same. But perhaps the most likely trigger for the removal of the houses, and indeed the one most cited by historians, was not increased usage but rather the possibility of decreased usage of the structure due to the opening in 1749 of a rival bridge across the Thames at Westminster.

The Comparison with Westminster Bridge

Several historians, such as Welch, Keene, and Ackroyd, have identified the opening of Westminster Bridge as the key motivating factor in the removal of the houses from London Bridge. Indeed Home has claimed that it was the ‘shower of criticism’ that was levelled against London Bridge after the opening of its western brother that spurred the Corporation into taking action towards removing the houses.⁸⁶ The order for the subcommittee in 1753 notes that there was a desire to make the Bridge more ornamental and less of an eyesore, and similarly the petition notes that the City wanted to make London Bridge as commodious as Westminster Bridge. This suggests that some element of the motivation for the houses’ removal came from the desire to improve both the look of the Bridge and its standing in comparison to Westminster Bridge.

As Borsay notes, it was common for improvement projects to be motivated by a desire to improve the image of a city or urban area, particularly when that city was

⁸⁶ Welch, *Tower Bridge*, p.125; Home, *Old London Bridge*, p.264.

competing with another. These concerns over image were particularly acute in relation to that of the metropolis, which represented Britain on an international level and was judged against the great European capitals past and present, in particular Paris and Rome.⁸⁷ This type of corporate one-upmanship led to many urban areas undertaking improvement projects, particularly in relation to large symbolic civic buildings.⁸⁸ The image of the City was indeed somewhat diminished at this time. The Court end of the metropolis, Westminster, was seen as the “town”, the area where the polite, sociable, and socially aspirational gentry and middling sorts were increasingly resident.⁸⁹

The City, on the other hand, was perceived as rather less sophisticated, and as the residential area of tradesmen and commercial mercantile interest, an area where pursuit of civility was sacrificed in the rather grubby pursuit of money.⁹⁰ Certainly, with the emergence of the new aesthetic paradigm of classical architecture, the rivalry between the City and Westminster, and the symbolic nature of London Bridge, it is not hard to imagine that the decision to remove the houses drew its motivation from the desire to create a more functional, aesthetically pleasing structure, so as to improve the image of the Bridge, and therefore its reflection on the image of the City, and indeed the nation.

Yet, despite his claim of a crescendo of criticism, Home fails to reference any examples of such comparative criticism, and an extensive survey of literature printed between 1749 and 1754 for this thesis has failed to identify many examples of such. Indeed, there exists very little documentary or contemporary textual comparisons between the two structures, and no suggestion of a ‘shower of criticism’. Those textual comparisons between the two bridges that do exist confine themselves largely to the discussion of the increased volume of water Westminster Bridge would allow to flow between its arches in comparison to that flowing through London Bridge, rather than making any comparisons of the aesthetic or utilitarian merits of both structures. For example, in 1746 the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, waxing lyrical about the dimensions of Westminster Bridge, noted that it had ‘four times the space for the watercourse between the starlings at London Bridge so that here is no fall of water to endanger the

⁸⁷ See for example: Gwynn, J., *London and Westminster improved* (London, 1766).

⁸⁸ Borsay, *Urban renaissance*, pp.101-113.

⁸⁹ Klein, L., ‘The polite town: shifting possibilities of urbanness, 1660-1715’ in Hitchcock, T., and Shore, H. (eds.), *The streets of London: from the great fire to the great stink* (London, 2003), pp.27-39.

⁹⁰ For the best analysis of this phenomenon see: Stone, ‘Residential development’, particularly pp.186-190; Rudé, *Hanoverian London*, p.209; Earle, P. *A city full of people* (London, 1994), pp.12-14.

smallest boat'.⁹¹ The text goes on to compare the dimensions of London Bridge unfavourably with those of its neighbour, but there is no comparison in aesthetic terms. Moreover, there is no suggestion that the refurbished London Bridge was designed to combat Westminster Bridge in terms of practical issues such as trade, and traffic, or indeed in aesthetic terms as a counter symbol. Both the Common Council meeting of 22 February 1754 and contemporary texts such as Maitland's *History of London*, clearly state that the opening of Westminster Bridge was a concern to the Corporation, but it is also abundantly clear that efforts to counter it both aesthetically, and in terms of functionality would revolve around the construction of a new structure – Blackfriars Bridge.

Maitland notes that this new stone bridge across the Thames would be a:

Point of Grandeur and Ornament . . . whereby Uniformity would be joined to Beauty and Magnificence. And without detracting from Westminster Bridge this may undoubtably be made to exceed it, as much in Beauty and Ornament.⁹²

He then lists other advantages of such a bridge including, 'Conveniency and Accomodation' for travel across the river, and the fact that such a structure would help 'recover and preserve what Westminster is gradually taking' by counteracting the ascendancy that Westminster was gaining over the City through its improvement schemes. There is absolutely no sense in this text, or the documents of the Corporation, that London Bridge was being pitched against Westminster Bridge, and no comparisons between the two are made. In fact Maitland records that one of the supporters for the new Bridge, Samuel Decker, suggested that upon the completion of this new Bridge the City 'will have an Opportunity of pulling down London Bridge' entirely.

Ultimately then, there is little evidence that the removal of the houses from London Bridge in the 1750s is tied up with either the practical challenge from Westminster Bridge or a refashioning of the image of the structure in relation to the same. Again, there is evidence that London Bridge had been seen as aesthetically unattractive due to its houses for well over a century. Robertson and Keene both note that despite favourable impressions in the sixteenth century, by the early seventeenth

⁹¹ *The Gentleman's Magazine* (London), 16 December 1746, p.684.

⁹² Maitland, W., *The history of London from its foundation to the present time*, vol. 1 (London, 1769), p.709.

century the Bridge was starting to be cast in a less favourable light. The recently completed Pont Neuf provided the architectural standard by which all bridges were now to be judged, and in comparison London Bridge looked decidedly archaic.⁹³ Indeed, one of the motivations for Charles's plans in the 1630s was to increase the 'uniformity and beauty' of the structure. Hawksmoor chastised 'the Appearance of those Houses' as 'so disagreeable' that it 'sinks their Taste down to the lowest Barbarity', and he proceeded to eulogise about the bridges of Europe; the Rezone at Vicenza, the Rialto in Venice, and the Pont Royal in Paris, noting their adherence to classical architectural styles, their beauty and their convenience.⁹⁴ Likewise, his compatriot Ralph suggested that 'nothing can possibly offend the eye more' than the houses on the Bridge, and he lamented that they obscured the scenic view up and down the Thames.⁹⁵

The Corporation clearly felt the same on some level as the refurbishment of the houses in the 1680s was partially justified on the basis that such work would make the Bridge 'ornamentall and uniform'⁹⁶, and another set of renovations in the 1740s were designed to augment the aesthetic qualities of the Bridge. These renovations are particularly intriguing and make the removal of the houses a decade later even more mystifying, yet as we shall see, they provide us with the key to understanding the motivations behind the events of 1756.

George Dance and his plans for the Bridge

In the early 1740s as a large number of leases of the houses, particularly on the northern end of the Bridge began to expire it seems that the BHLC was being particularly strict about the design and dimensions of new houses built on the Bridge. A handful of house plans submitted with lease petitions in 1742-3 show that houses on the north western end of the Bridge were being built to identical designs and sizes.⁹⁷ This desire for uniformity crystallised in a decision taken later that year by the

⁹³ Robertson, 'Persuading the citizens', p.525, 515-6.

⁹⁴ Hawksmoor, *London-Bridge*, p.11.

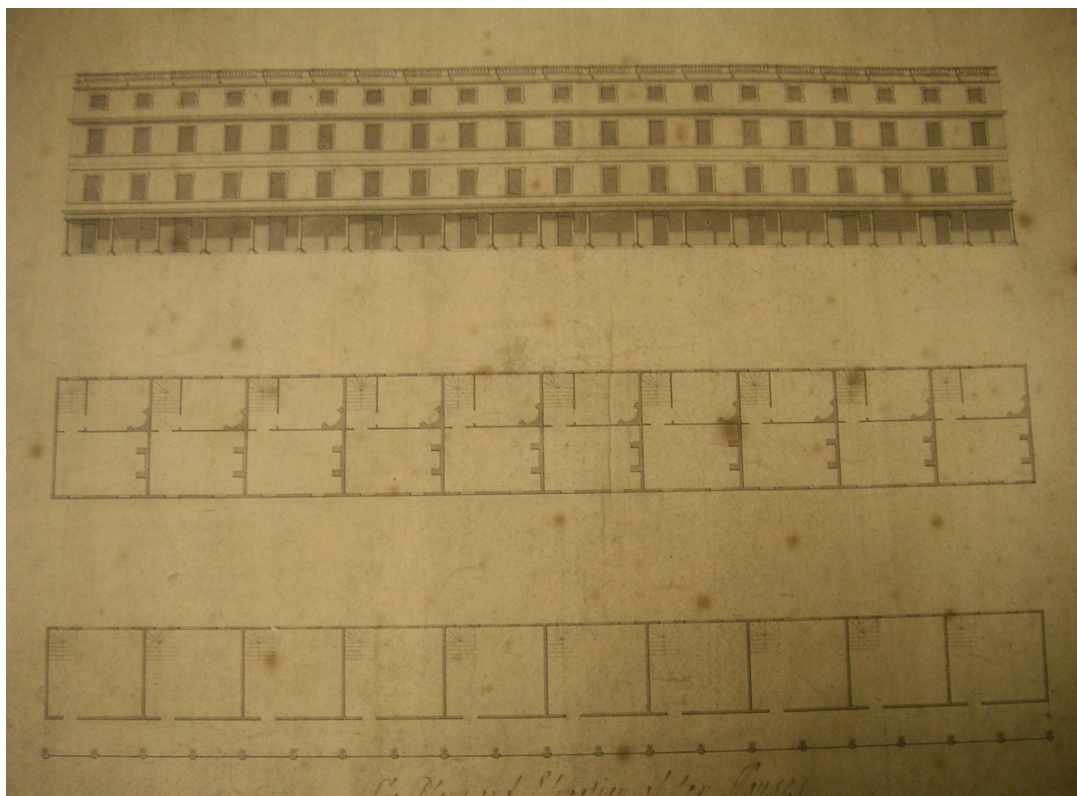
⁹⁵ Ralph, A critical review, p.9.

⁹⁶ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.93/183., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1687.

⁹⁷ CLRO, COL/CCS/PL/01/202 fol.04., Plan of Mr Childe's houses on London Bridge, 1742; CLRO, COL/CCS/PL/01/203 fol.29C., Plan of Mr Kamp's houses on north west part of London Bridge, 1743; CLRO, COL/CCS/PL/01/202 fol.04., Plan of Mr Brown's houses on north west part of London Bridge, 1743.

BHLC to adopt a plan for ‘the new building of the houses of the Bridge’.⁹⁸ This plan had been devised previously by George Dance, the City’s Clerk of the Works, and the committee noted it would be ‘greatly for the advantage of the Bridge House estate the beauty of the Bridge and above all the safety of the publick that the houses on the Bridge hereafter to be lett on building leases should be built according to the design’. A copy of this plan shows the uniform facades, all set back the same distance from the street and all incorporating a walkway known as ‘piazzas’. These houses were designed along fashionable neo-palladian lines. The idea was to get the individual tenants to build houses according to these strict guidelines which would be incorporated in the leases. Dance’s plans were to provide the master plan for the Bridge as these houses would be replicated along the length of the Bridge, and in the process create a more beautiful, safe, and practical structure.

Illustration 4.1



⁹⁸ BHJ 08, 14 September 1743.



COL/SVD/PL/03/0002 (1745) *Plan and Elevation of Ten New Houses on London Bridge*

The BHLC at first tried to undertake this plan in relation to the houses on the north eastern end of the Bridge but despite several attempts to offload these leases, at first individually and then in bulk, there were no bidders. With the houses in danger of falling down the BHLC decided to go it alone and undertake the construction of these houses itself. This was an exceptionally unusual step for the BHLC (indeed unique for our period) given that its policy, like most large institutional landlords, had hitherto been to avoid at all cost the construction of its own properties, and it is highly suggestive of the determination of the BHLC to ensure the erection of these houses.⁹⁹

Quite why Dance had drawn up this plan in the first place is unclear. There is no record of him being commissioned to do so by either by the BHLC, the Common Council or the Court of Aldermen. Given that Dance made his money though fees it is entirely possible that he drew this plan speculatively, then saw his opportunity in the 1740s to sell his vision to the BHLC.¹⁰⁰ It is also clear from the Bridge House Journals that Dance was becoming an increasingly influential figure within the BHLC and the Bridge House in general, (his rise coinciding with the diminution of the

⁹⁹ Swann notes that Bridge House very rarely undertook repairs on houses on its estate by the eighteenth century: Swann, 'London Estates', p.28.

¹⁰⁰ Dance paid £150 for the post: Jeffery, S (2004) 'George Dance the elder (c.1694–1768)'. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7095>.

comptroller's powers) and there is every possibility that he subtly lobbied the committee and Corporation into adopting these proposals. Dance had taken up the post of Clerk of the City Works in 1735 and he is best remembered for his design of Mansion House in the late 1730s. He was, by the 1740s, firmly established as one of the pre-eminent architect-planners of his day, and in taking his inspiration from architects such as Wren and Hawksmoor he was fully versed in the rules and language of the dominant classical architectural form of the day: Palladianism.¹⁰¹ Dance was very much one of the emerging breed of what Lefebvre would call the 'specialists of space' and was, alongside Wren, Hawksmoor, Ralph, Gwynn and others, one of those responsible for reconceptualising and ultimately rebuilding London according to the new tastes and aesthetic expectations of the period. Dance was one of the group of men that Summerson and others would suggest were so responsible for improvement and modernising London during the eighteenth century.¹⁰²

The objective of Dance's plans was clear: to improve the aesthetic appearance and practical usage of the Bridge. As Maitland notes 'the City, ever mindful of the Safety of their Fellow-Subjects' and aware of the 'many Misfortunes' caused by the many carriages on the Bridge and the lack of a 'Foot-Way' adopted the plan 'so that Foot-Passengers might be secured both from the Horses and Carriages, and sheltered from the Weather.'¹⁰³ It is also important to note that these houses had to meet with some kind of approval from contemporary commentators. Maitland claimed that the 'Advantages' of Dance's plan 'are so obvious, that it is the Desire of every Well-wisher to the City to see it completed.'¹⁰⁴ An anonymous publication in 1751 entitled: *Gephyralogia. An Historical Account of Bridges, Antient and Modern*, notes that the City had 'resolved to remedy' the narrowness of the passage on the Bridge via the implementation of these plans, which would 'much enlarge the thorough-fare, when the whole street comes to be rebuilt in the same manner.'¹⁰⁵ As this last sentence indicates it is also clear that with this refurbishment the Corporation and commentators such as Maitland, and begrudgingly the author of *Gephyralogia*, were

¹⁰¹ See: Jeffery, S., *The Mansion House* (Chichester, 1993), chapters 3 and 4.

¹⁰² For a discussion of the creation of this profession of the architect planner see: Ogborn, M., 'Designs on the City: John Gwynn's plans for Georgian London', *Journal of British Studies*, 43:1 (2004), pp.15-39.

¹⁰³ Maitland, *History of London*, p.52.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.52.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.66.

viewing the houses as long term permanent structures. In many respects these houses were perceived as the solution to the Bridge's deficiencies.

It would seem therefore that it would be appropriate, if we were so inclined, to recognise *these* houses as products of the spirit of improvement. They were devised by an architect-planner, Dance, a man who was familiar with the work of Hawksmoor and must surely have been aware of his criticism of the Bridge in the mid 1730s. They adopted the dominant fashionable architectural style of the day: Palladianism, and the incorporation of 'piazzas' was a common device to encourage walking and strolling. Finally there is every possibility that they were devised as a response to Westminster Bridge, as reading through the documentation one cannot help but feel that this plan had been hatched some years earlier, with Dance's appointment in 1735, the Parliamentary approval to build Westminster Bridge occurring in 1736, and Hawksmoor and Ralph's stinging criticism of the mid 1730s. It is entirely possible that Dance and the BHLC had just been waiting for the leases to fall due in the early 1740s in order to put their plan into action.

Conclusion

To conclude, we began this chapter by arguing that in order to elucidate the factors motivating the removal of the houses from London Bridge we have to deconstruct the vague assumption that this course of action was the product of an intangible and rather abstract 'spirit of improvement'. There is little evidence to back the assertion that the desire to remove the houses derived from changing expectations for the built environment which left the structure looking increasingly deficient in terms of utility, as it is clear that the Bridge had for several generations been perceived as inadequate on many utilitarian levels. Seeking to explain the origins of the Act to Improve London Bridge in terms of an intensification of existing problems due to broader socio-economic changes such as population increase or growth in trade, or the practical and aesthetic challenge offered by Westminster Bridge, is similarly without much empirical foundation.

Yet despite the Bridge's entrenched and persistent failure to meet the expectations of London's populace and its governors, the Corporation clearly did not wish to countenance the possibility of demolishing the houses, and the construction of the new houses in 1745 serves to illustrate this point emphatically, whilst further

complicating the picture. Not only do Dance's structures seem to be appropriate products of a 'spirit of improvement', but in addition the Corporation had lived with at least a century or so of criticism of an inhabited Bridge, so why should they have taken the decision to remove all the houses just a few years after undertaking the construction of these habitations? Clearly something dramatic occurred between 1746 and 1753 to trigger this *volte face* and it is implausible to ascribe this to a sudden and rather volcanic eruption of improving zeal. It is apposite at this juncture to return to a point raised earlier in this chapter regarding the question why the previous talk of removing the houses in the 1630s had come to nothing. Robertson suggests that the prime reason the 1630 plans were abandoned was because the City and the Bridge Masters were deeply concerned as to how much rental revenue the Bridge House would lose as a result of the removal the houses.¹⁰⁶ Similarly the author of text entitled *Gephyralogia* writing in 1751 regarding Dance's houses notes that:

It had been a more noble and publick-spirited, though less frugal resolution, to have quite disencumbered this antient and stately edifice of all its unnatural load, and devoted the whole plane of it to the wheel and foot passages, as it done in that of Westminster: but the houses on London bridge bring in so great a revenue to the city, which takes care of its repairs, that it is hardly to be expected such a fund will ever be given up.¹⁰⁷

In other words the Corporation did not want to remove the houses due to the revenue they provided. The next chapter will argue that it was in fact this issue of finance and revenue generated by the houses on the Bridge that was ultimately responsible for motivating their removal.

¹⁰⁶ Robertson, 'Persuading the citizens', p.523.

¹⁰⁷ Anon, *Gephyralogia: an historical account of bridges, antient and modern* (London, 1751), p.66.

Chapter V

Financial crisis, property crash and the removal of the houses

The previous chapter assessed the commonly held assumption that pervades the literature on eighteenth-century London: that the removal of the houses on London Bridge in the mid 1750s was prompted by what John Summerson has termed the ‘spirit of improvement’¹. The chapter argued that there is little evidence to suggest that this rather abstract notion of ‘improvement’ was responsible for motivating the Corporation of London to remove a series of structures that had been considered deficient, and therefore in need of improvement, throughout their centuries of existence. The chapter concluded by suggesting that the decision to remove the houses was linked to the financial predicament of the Bridge House.

This chapter will develop this hypothesis and argue that the motivations for removing the houses stemmed from a series of events that occurred from the mid 1740s onwards, beginning with the decision to undertake the construction of a set of new houses on the Bridge designed by the Clerk of the City Works George Dance. The chapter will argue that these events both weakened the financial situation of the Bridge House and demonstrated to the Corporation that their long held belief that the houses were indispensable to the financial health of the Bridge House was anachronistic. It was this realisation that the houses were no longer a financially viable asset that ultimately prompted their removal from London Bridge.

The Dance designed houses on the Bridge

The financing of the construction of the new houses on London Bridge by the Bridge House itself was without precedent in the period after 1666. Since the Great Fire

¹ Summerson, J., *Georgian London* (repr. London, 1970), p.123.

the Bridge House had studiously avoided involving itself in building any properties. Its policy, like virtually all large landlords, was to issue building leases, even if this entailed settling for less than the full economic value of the rent.² The Bridge House simply did not have the money, resources or administrative structure to routinely undertake building works, so the construction of these houses in 1746 marks a striking departure from the norm in terms of the Bridge House's approach to its estate. This *volte face* is significant in its own right but the importance of this decision lies in the fact that it marks the beginning of a train of financial events that ultimately led to the decision to remove the houses from London Bridge.

The documents surrounding Dance's plans indicate the BHLC hoped that they would be able to get tenants on building leases to construct the properties according to Dance's designs. What made Dance's plan feasible was that a large number of leases of the houses on the Bridge expired in the mid to late 1740s. A particularly large tranche of leases, thirty-four in total, were due to expire in 1744 and a BHLC sub-committee was sent to view the properties in June 1742. They reported that those houses on the northwest and west side of the Bridge were in good condition and should be let at 'improved rents'³. These properties were subsequently let by October the following year on short twenty-one year repair leases with relatively high fines and rents.⁴ The houses on the north eastern and eastern sides of the Bridge however were in a decrepit state, two were deemed to be in 'good condition' and therefore could be offered at 'improved rent', but the other fifteen, leased to a pen maker named Mr Porter, were categorised as being in 'bad condition', indicating that the sub committee felt they needed substantial work. The

² Swann, B.A.S. 'A study of some London estates in the eighteenth century' (unpublished London University Ph.D. thesis, 1964), p.28; Johnson, D., 'Estates and income, 1540-1714' in Keene, D., and Burns, A. (eds.), *St Pauls: the cathedral church of London, 604-2004* (London, 2004), pp.309-310; Dawson, E.J. 'Finance and the unreformed borough: A critical appraisal of corporate finance, 1660-1835, with special reference to the boroughs of Nottingham, York and Boston' (unpublished University of Hull Ph.D. thesis, 1978), pp.144-146; Stone, L., 'The residential development of the west end of London in the seventeenth century' in Malament, B.C., (ed.), *After the reformation: essays in honour of J.H. Hexter* (Manchester, 1980), pp.198-205; Mckellar, E., *The birth of modern London* (Manchester, 2000), chapter 3. As Mckellar notes the objective of landlords was to 'increase income without committing capital.' Mckellar, *Modern London*, p.58.

³ BHJ 08, 2 June 1742

⁴ CLRO, CLA/007/EM/05/01/002 Grant Book 1734-1752.

report suggested that these be offered on long sixty-one year building leases which would have entailed major renovation work, if not complete reconstruction, by the lessee.⁵

By September of 1743 it was decided that Dance's plans should be adopted and that the un-let houses on the northeast end of London Bridge should be let on building leases in four lots, with the lessees being required to rebuild according to Dance's plans. Similarly, a batch of houses on the middle part of the western side of the Bridge were available for lease, and it was decreed that these too should be offered on rebuilding leases according to Dance's plans.⁶ However this plan proved to be an absolute non starter. The lots on the mid-west part of the Bridge were offered for lease several times but attracted no bidders. A sub-committee report of 18 July 1744 reluctantly concluded that although Dance's plans 'would have proved very useful had anybody undertaken the execution of it' the absence of any bidders meant that they would have to be let on short repair leases which omitted the proviso of having to build according to Dance's plans.⁷ These properties were in good repair according to the report, so having to offer them as repair rather than rebuilding leases was not a grave issue. However the lots on the north east and east sections of the Bridge also failed to attract even a single bid, despite repeated advertisements, and attempts to offer the plot in bulk as nine houses rather than fifteen.⁸

We can only speculate as to why these leases were proving to be so unattractive, although by the mid-century the Bridge had become something of a downmarket area and therefore bidders were likely to have been dissuaded by such a reputation.⁹ But it is evident that the BHLC was hoping to attract speculative developers to build these houses in bulk and this is probably where the problem lay. The strict stipulations on the form the houses should take must have made developers think twice about bidding, as stricter stipulations could easily have translated into increased building costs, as they did after the various building acts for example.¹⁰ It was also the case that the political uncertainty consequent upon the Jacobite rebellion ensured that credit was scarce in this period;

⁵ BHJ 08, 2 June 1742.

⁶ BHJ 08, 14 September 1743.

⁷ BHJ 08, 18 July 1744.

⁸ BHJ 09, 10 March 1745.

⁹ Home, *Old London Bridge* (London, 1931), p.254.

¹⁰ Swann, 'London Estates', pp.50-53.

given, therefore, that the whole development process relied heavily on credit, it is likely that many potential lessees simply could or would not raise the sums required to undertake this project.¹¹

Whatever the case, the inability of the BHLC to find lessees for these properties was clearly a problem, and in particular this had grave implications for the properties in 'bad condition' on the north east section of the Bridge. A sub-committee report read to the BHLC in 1745 notes that the now empty houses were 'so ruinous that they are in great danger of falling which may be of bad consequence to passengers'¹², added to which the Bridge House was losing £105 per year in ground rent by the houses being unlet.¹³ It was clear to the committee that they could waste no more time in attempting to let these properties on building leases and that they had to act swiftly to guard against a potentially very serious collapse of these structures on the Bridge. Instead they ordered that no time be lost pulling the houses down 'and rebuilding in the room as many (houses) as shall be thought necessary at the expense of the Bridge House by such person as shall be willing to contract' according to Dance's plan.¹⁴ In other words the BHLC was taking the unprecedented step of directly employing a contractor to construct these houses. They would be constructed according to Dance's design, and all this work would be financed purely from Bridge House funds.

The report was read to the Common Council that same day and their assent was given to commence this course of action. A report of a sub-committee was then read to the BHLC which detailed the state of the Bridge House's available cash and the arrears of rent due. They concluded that there was £600 of Bridge House money in the chamberlain's hands along with an unspecified amount of rental arrears, and that these two sources of finance would allow the Bridge House to build ten houses on the plot.

¹¹ For the credit crisis in this period see: Aston, T., *Economic fluctuations in England, 1700-1800* (Oxford, 1959), p.123; Dickson, P.G., *The financial revolution in England* (London, 1967), pp.216-224; Joslin, D., 'London bankers in wartime 1739-84' in Pressnell, L., (ed.), *Studies in the industrial revolution* (London, 1960), pp.160-164. For an illustration of how the whole system of speculative building relied on credit see: McKellar, *Modern London*, chapters 2 and 3; Booth, P., 'Speculative housing and the land market in London, 1660-1730: four case studies', *Town Planning Review*, no.51 (1980), pp.384-386. For the increase in interest rates in the period see: Weiller, K., and Mirowski, P., 'Rates of interest in eighteenth-century England', *Explorations in Economic History*, no.27 (1990), pp.8, 26.

¹² BHJ 09, 27 March 1745.

¹³ BHJ 09, 10 March 1745.

¹⁴ BHJ 09, 10 March 1745.

Events were moving quickly given that at that same meeting the first proposal from a contractor to build the houses was delivered, with a George Hoare quoting a fee of £4080 to carry out the work, a proposal that was rejected by the committee. The reason for this rapidity is illustrated by the final piece of business that day which was an order to Dance to instruct some workmen to shore up the properties to stop them from collapsing.¹⁵ Within days an advert was placed in the *London Gazette* inviting bids for the work and by the next meeting of 24 April four bidders appeared before the committee. Their quotes ranged from £3780 to £4252, and as was usual in this type of bidding process, the bidders each presented their opening offers and were then ‘called back in’ to see if they would offer improved terms, which none of the contractors did in this case. The lowest bid of £3780 by Thomas Reynolds was chosen and he was told to provide two securities at £500 each to ensure that the work was completed by midsummer 1746.¹⁶ The speed with which this whole process was conducted goes to show not only how bad a state the existing houses were in but also the desperate need for the Bridge House to get the new houses erected and generating income. By midsummer of 1746 the BHLC was reporting to the Common Council that the houses were close to completion and ready to be advertised, and it was decided by the Common Council and BHLC that the leases should be of no more than forty-two years and no less than twenty-one years.¹⁷

Fascinatingly, in 1746 the Corporation was presented with a design, clearly penned some decades previously, by Sir Christopher Wren for the Bridge minus all the habitations. This situation arose from the fact that the Common Council, no doubt motivated by the broader financial malaise that the City found itself in by the latter 1740s,¹⁸ was eager to ascertain

whether such alterations can be formed as may make the passage through the Bridge more safe, render the navigation of the river more commodious and

¹⁵ BHJ 09, 27 March 1745.

¹⁶ BHJ 09, 24 April 1745.

¹⁷ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.59/35., Court of Common Council journals, 1746; BHJ 09, 4 June 1746.

¹⁸ The motivations for the plan and the financial problems that beset the City in this period are discussed below, pp.121-124.

and renovate each of the piers ‘two or three . . . every year until the whole is done.’²¹ Wren’s plan was to demolish the houses, which would allow for the removal of several of the piers. Yet when Labeleye proffered Wren’s plan to the committee he did so with the suggestion that

Instead of *Gothick* Recesses, and a Cast-iron Balustrade, on a Dwarf Parapet-Wall, as in this Sketch, new Houses might be replaced on the Top in the same Taste as those now building²²

In other words he proposed that the design could be adapted to accommodate Dance’s houses.

The extensive debates on these schemes indicates they were being seriously considered by the BHLC, as one would be expected given the claimed £2000p.a. savings on maintenance that would be generated by the renovation of the Bridge substructure.²³ Labeleye’s own plan had an immense advantage in that its piecemeal implementation would have been less disruptive than Wren’s extensive overhaul. Yet what scuppered the Wren proposal was not related to its implementation. After further investigation it was decided that the Wren plan would require that, ‘several of the houses must be taken down’.²⁴ As a consequence the committee rejected this design and would only countenance Labeleye’s scheme that would ‘leave the Piers and Houses standing’.²⁵

The BHLC continued to discuss Labeleye’s proposal at the 24 October meeting of the committee but after this the historical record goes silent, although it is clear that the plan was never undertaken. Yet what this episode does illustrate is that neither the BHLC nor the Corporation was prepared to contemplate the Bridge without the houses. The assumption once again springs to mind that, like the efforts in the 1630s, the Corporation was reluctant to demolish the buildings on the Bridge as they perceived them to be a central stanchion of the Bridge House’s financial vigour.

²¹ Maitland, W., *The history of London from its foundation to the present time*, vol.1 (London, 1796), p.827.

²² *Ibid.*, pp.828.

²³ BHJ 09, 10 September 1746; 17 September 1746; 25 September 1746; 24 October 1746.

²⁴ BHJ 09, 17 September 1746.

²⁵ BHJ 09, 25 September 1746.

Regardless of the deliberations over the merits of these designs the BHLC was in the meantime still determinedly pressing on with the construction and marketing of Dance's houses. The remainder of this chapter will argue that their construction was important to the eventual clearance of the Bridge in 1756 in two ways. Firstly, the manner in which this 1745 project was financed had a detrimental impact on the Bridge House's financial resources. Secondly, and most importantly, the subsequent problems of actually leasing the houses in the late 1740s early 1750s seem to have illustrated to the BHLC and Corporation in general that the houses on the Bridge were no longer an economically viable asset to the Bridge House.

Funding Construction

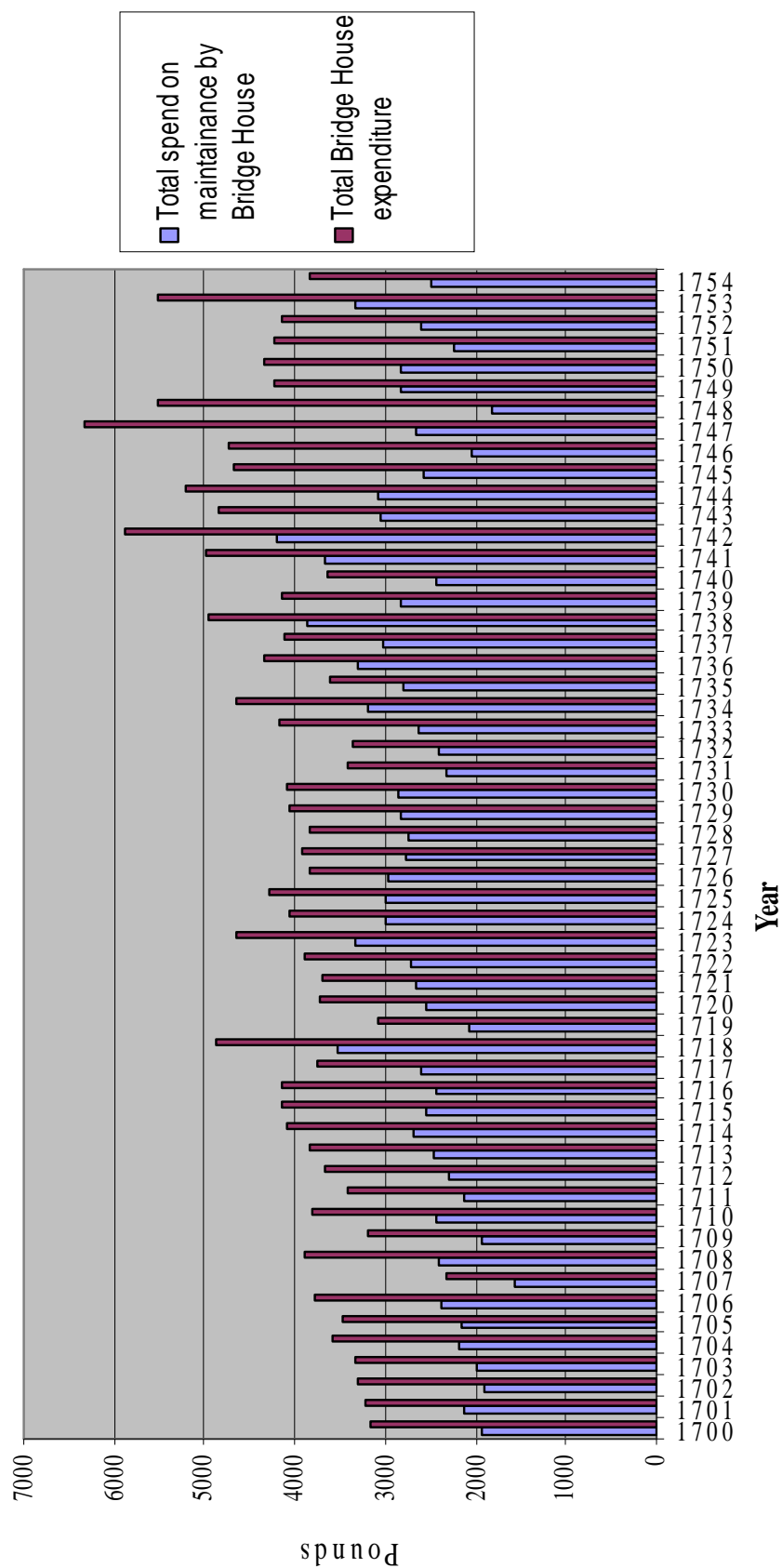
The Bridge House proved to be quite resourceful when it came to the question of how the construction of these houses was to be financed, and it needed to be. The small surplus of £600 that the chamberlain held was the entirety of the Bridge House's cash assets and the entire Bridge House income for 1745-6 was £4135, so clearly a one off payment when Reynolds had completed the work was impossible: it would have to be staggered payments. The first of these payments was made in October 1745 for £500, with another £300 following later that year; a total of £1800 was paid in several instalments in 1746; and the final £1000 was paid between May and October 1747.²⁶ There were also subsidiary costs, notably Dance's £222 bill for surveying the new buildings.²⁷ As if this was not enough of a financial burden on the Bridge House it also had to find an additional £1218 in 1746 that was due to the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's for the rental of several parcels of land in Paternoster Row.²⁸ These two obligations meant an additional drain of over £5000 on the Bridge House finances between 1745 and 1747, and although the BHLC would have had long term prior knowledge of the rental due to the Dean of St Paul's, the rebuilding of the houses was clearly sprung upon them, and as such was not an eventuality they had actively planned for. The result of these pressures

²⁶ CLRO, CLA/007/FN/06/01/030 Bridge House cash book 1745-1747; BHJ 11, 8 May 1754.

²⁷ CLRO, CLA/007/FN/06/01/030 Bridge House cash book 1748.

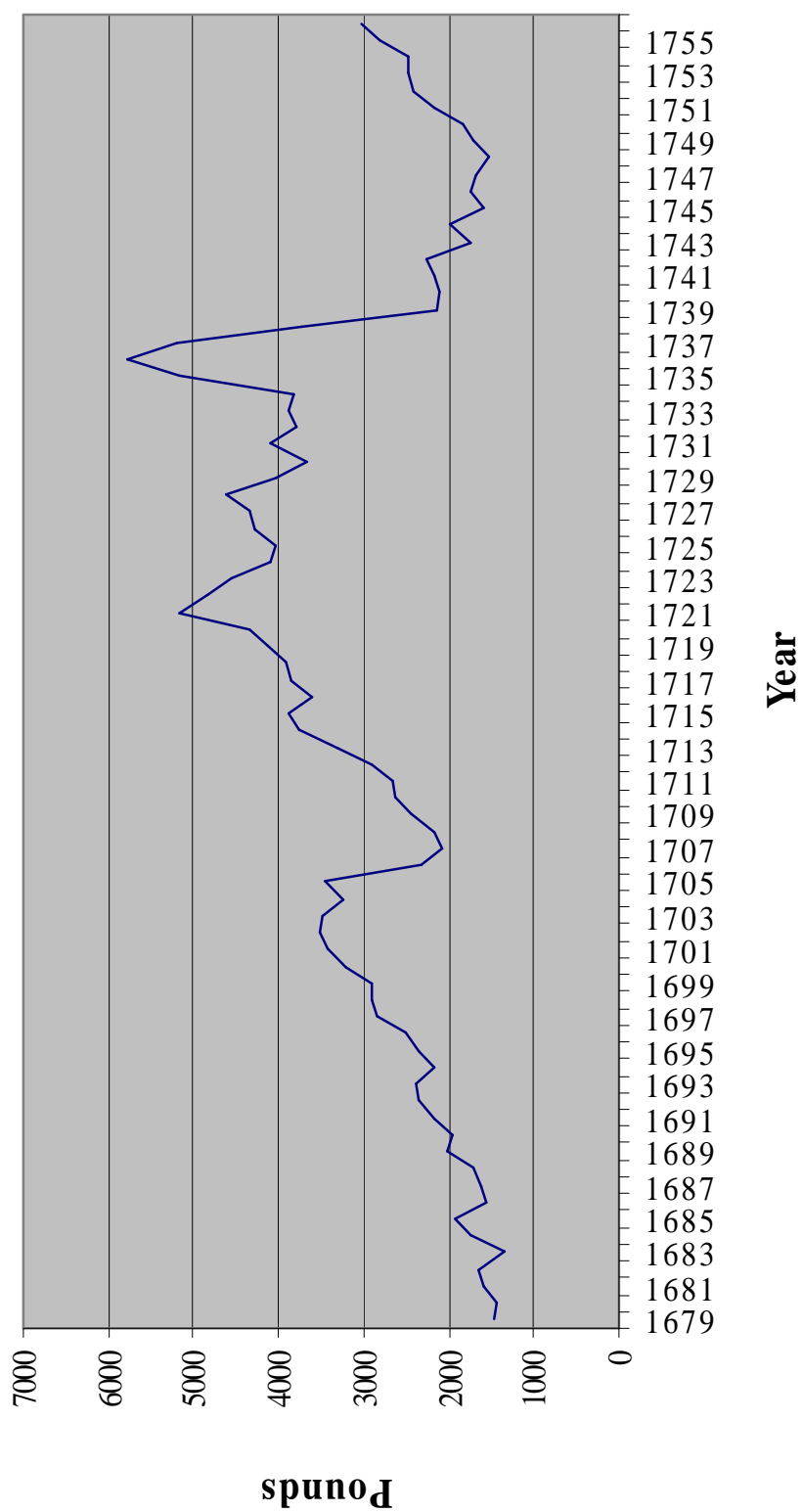
²⁸ CLRO, CLA/007/FN/06/01/030 Bridge House cash book 1747.

Figure 5.1
Total Bridge House expenditure and expenditure on maintenance: 1700-1754



Source – CLA/007/FN/10/024 *Summary accounts of the produce of the Estates and application thereof 1700-1761*

Figure 5.2
Bridge House rent arrears: 1679-1756



Source – CLA/007/FN/02/027-043 *Bridge House accounts 1678-1755*

was that expenditure soared to a previously unmatched figure of £6329 in 1746 and amounted to the third highest figure in our period of £5516 in 1747 (Figure 5.1).

The rental charged by the Bridge House remained flat over this three year period, so clearly no great extra sums of cash were to be gained from increasing the amounts demanded from lessees. Therefore other avenues were utilised in order to raise this additional money.²⁹ As the sub-committee of 1745 noted, the £600 in the Chamberlains' hands was one way the bill for the houses would be met, but the other suggestion of relying on arrears collection was woefully misguided, and the problem lay in the definition of arrears.

Tenants were allowed to be one year in hand with their rents, so there would often be a deficit on a lessee's account. It was those tenants in *excess* of a year in hand that were considered to be 'officially' in arrears, and the journals suggest that the committee did have some success in reducing these arrears of arrears between 1746 and 1748. A sub-committee report of June 1746 notes that official arrears stood at just over £940, exactly a year later this was down to £630, and by 1748 it stood at £570.³⁰ As Figure 5.2 illustrates the problem was that large scale write offs in the late 1730s meant that the actual sums of 'proper' arrears were fairly low, and the Bridge House had been effective in controlling the number of tenants who fell into the red in the subsequent period. Between 1739 and 1745 the total rental actually collected exceeded by some £400 the rental charged, and this excess was created by the payment of outstanding arrears.³¹ Therefore what was left in terms of arrears was measured in £100s rather than £1000s, and these were arrears that had proved, for one reason or another, to be particularly stubborn. Many were for leases that had long since expired, or for the foreign properties in Kent or Essex.

²⁹ From 1745-1747 the charge was: £3473, £3457 and £3414: CLRO, CLA/007/FN/02/043 Bridge Master's annual accounts and rentals 1741-1755.

³⁰ BHJ 09, 4 June 1746; BHJ 09, 3 June 1747; BHJ 10, 8 June 1748. See also: CLRO, COL/CCS/CO/06/003 Comptroller and City Solicitor Bridge House Papers, fols.001-005, fol.016., 1603-1837, for lists of these arrears.

³¹ Between 1739 and 1745 had actually collected £401 more than they had charged in rental: £25,314 collected - £24,913 charged: CLRO, CLA/007/FN/02/042-043 Bridge Master's annual accounts and rentals 1737-1755.

These were sums that were to all intents and purposes uncollectible; the Bridge House simply did not have the bureaucratic apparatus to track down such rogue lessees. So this source was never remotely likely to provide the large scale cash injection to fund the construction of the new houses that the sub-committee of 1745 somehow believed it would. The few hundred pounds the post 1746 drive to collect arrears added to the Bridge House coffers was certainly welcome but clearly these were small scale sums in the grander scheme of things.

It seems that one way the cost of the houses was met was by reducing the money spent on Bridge and Bridge estate maintenance. Figure 5.1 indicates the amount spent on maintenance of the Bridge and the estates between 1700 and 1754 and it shows that in 1745 only £2034 was spent, the lowest sum since 1709; 1747 was even lower at just £1815, the lowest figure in 40 years. The expenditure for 1746 looks fairly rosy but the figure is skewed due to the money spent having to make structural alterations to the northern end of the Bridge to accommodate the building of the new houses, in particular additional money was spent on carpentry and timber.³²

The Bridge House journal of 1754 indicates that the actual figures spent on Bridge maintenance were £1704, £2279 and £1643 respectively. So clearly this tightening of the Bridge House belt provided additional funds that could be channelled into paying for the houses.³³

However the bulk of the money to fund construction came from what on the face of it seems a timely and fortuitous windfall in the form of fines from the many leases that fell due in the mid 1740s. As we shall later see, this glut of leases spilling onto the market was ultimately a disastrous event for the finances of the Bridge House, but in the short term it provided much needed income. The Bridge House managed to generate £1960 and £1580 from fines in 1746 and 1747 respectively, including £220 in fines from the first leasing of four of the new houses on the Bridge.³⁴ This was the highest income from fines over a two year span in our 90 year period.

³² CLRO, CLA/007/FN/02/043 Bridge Master's annual accounts and rentals 1741-1755.

³³ BHJ 11, 8 May 1754.

³⁴ CLRO, CLA/007/FN/02/043 Bridge Master's annual accounts and rentals 1741-1755; CLRO, CLA/007/EM/05/01/002 Grant Book 1734-1752.

So although, as the sub-committee of 1745 suggested, some of the costs of the houses were to be met by a combination of a small surplus and arrears collection, this was overly optimistic. The bulk of the money actually came from two sources: a reduction in expenditure on Bridge and Bridge estate maintenance, and a windfall from fines.

But crucially this whole undertaking had exposed the Bridge House's limitations when it came to raising the types of sums needed to undertake large scale renovation projects. It was also clear that the Bridge House was now financially exhausted; there were simply no financial resources now left upon which the Bridge House could call in the event of further unforeseen circumstances. The small cash surplus had been used up, and the arrears had been thoroughly mined. Finally the sum collected from fines was to be the last big payday from this source because, as we shall see, the property market into which the houses were released was facing a slump.

Leasing the new houses

The eighty-one year leases issued for many of the houses on the Bridge after the Fire in 1666 began to expire from 1747 onwards and it seems that many of these properties were in poor repair. As Swann notes, many of these houses built after the Fire were of dubious quality given the haste with which London was rebuilt.³⁵ In addition many of the houses that had been rebuilt on the Bridge in the major renovation work carried out on the structure in the mid 1680s had been issued with sixty-one year building leases. Grant books and lease abstracts from the 1710s and 1730s indicate the extent of this problem. Of the 288 leases listed in the 1730 grant book 118 (41%) of them expired between 1745 and 1750.³⁶ The vast majority of these leases were located within the City, actually on the Bridge itself, Gracechurch Street, Old Change, Paternoster Row, Christchurch and St Dyonis. In previous years when relatively large tranches of Bridge House leases came onto the market, particularly in the boom years of the first quarter of

³⁵ Swann, 'London Estates', p.68. Reddaway makes the point that ensuring house construction was carried out to the required standards in the post Fire period was a 'formidable problem' for the authorities, Reddaway, T.F., *The rebuilding of London after the great fire* (London, 1951), pp.152-153.

³⁶ CLRO, COL/CHD/BH/01/61 An abstract of Bridge House leases, 1730.

the century, the Bridge House could expect substantial income from fines, as was the case in 1713-16.³⁷ But the late 1740s glut differed from others in three respects: firstly this was on a larger scale, with over one third of the Bridge House properties up for lease, and this was a level of availability not seen since the Fire. Secondly, as we have noted in chapter 4 the general economic climate of the late 1740s and early 1750s was highly unfavourable. Thirdly whereas with previous gluts it was just the Bridge House whose leases were expiring, in the 1740s other institutional landlords, including the City, St Thomas' and St Bart's Hospitals, and the Livery Companies, were suffering the same fate due to the widespread use amongst London's landowners of the eighty-one year building lease after the Fire.³⁸ This glut created a 'distortion in the property market'³⁹ with supply far outstripping demand, inevitably meaning that beneficial lease terms for the landlord were hard to come by.

The results of this distortion are etched into the pages of Bridge House Journals which from late 1745 onwards start to record, occasionally at first but with increasing regularity, meetings of the committee at which there were 'no bidders' for the various leases on offer that day. In previous periods it had been a very rare phenomenon for no bidders to appear for leases. Additionally it is also clear that for those leases that did actually attract bids, there was much less competition. Whereas in earlier periods there were often several individuals bidding for a lease, by the late 1740s there could often only be a single bidder, and those that did bid rarely increased their offer when 'called in for a second time.' Bidders continued to be sparse well into the 1750s.

The decreasing desirability of the City as a residential area must also have made leases within the boundaries of the Corporation a much less attractive proposition. By the mid-eighteenth century the City was no longer the residence of choice for the fashionable, socially aspirational middle classes who were moving west to the streets and

³⁷ In the period 1713-16 a total of 75 leases expired, CLRO, COL/CHD/BH/01/60 An abstract of Bridge House leases granted before and since March 1707. The business of the BHLC in the years 1713-14 was almost entirely comprised of leasing. Competition for the leases was healthy with nearly every one attracting multiple bidders and increased offers during the bidding process. BHJ 04.

³⁸ Swann, 'London Estates', pp.68-9; Doolittle, I., 'The City's west end estate', *London Journal*, vol.7 (1981), p.16; Shepherd, F., Belcher, V., and Cottrell, P., 'The Middlesex and Yorkshire deeds registries and the study of building fluctuations', *London Journal*, 5 (1979), pp.185; Porter, S., *The great fire of London* (Godalming, 1998), p.169; Reddaway, *Rebuilding of London*, p.159.

³⁹ Porter, *Great Fire*, p.169.

squares of the West End.⁴⁰ But just as importantly many tradesmen increasingly preferred the unregulated suburbs over the City, as taking up residence in the City required them to become freemen in order to practise their trade, and becoming a freeman could entail many onerous unremunerated duties in the service of the Corporation.⁴¹ These factors combined to ensure that the property market was in a highly unfavourable state when the new houses on the Bridge were put up for lease, and it comes as little surprise that the Bridge House struggled mightily to find lessees.

As noted previously the first four houses were let in May 1747 for twenty-one years at £23, £21, £15 and £15 p.a. This was a reasonable start, an annual rent of £15p.a. being a decent rental sum, but the sums received for fines gave much less cause for optimism.⁴² John Grant paid £100 fine for his lease, but the other lessees, Isaac Putham and Christopher Herd (Herd leased two houses) could only be persuaded to part with the lesser figures of £20 and £100 (£50 per lease) in fines respectively. But there was no flood of bidders for these properties. They failed to attract bids in the next meetings, and by July that year the BHLC was clearly getting anxious. A sub-committee report lamented that six of the houses remained un-let and suggested that notices be fixed to the houses themselves advertising their availability.⁴³ But this was to no avail and the properties continued to languish on the market, indeed one of the existing tenants, Putham, died and his widow claimed that her husband had ‘very inadvertently over bid himself’ when bidding for the lease and she was now no longer able to pay the rent of £23 p.a. A measure of the desperation of the BHLC is evidenced by the fact that they released her from the lease, wrote off her arrears of rent, and allowed her to continue living in the house as a tenant-at-will for £20 p.a.⁴⁴ As Swann notes it was ‘only in the most unusual circumstances’ that a lessee was allowed to surrender a lease, even bankruptcy or imprisonment were not usually considered sufficient reasons.⁴⁵

One of the problems was that the houses attracted what the committee clearly felt were unsuitable bids. Richard Huntmill offered to take on a lease at £20 p.a. for just three

⁴⁰ Stone, ‘Residential development’, pp.186-189; Earle, P., *A city full of people* (London, 1994), pp.12-14

⁴¹ Doolittle, ‘City of London’, pp.28-49.

⁴² For comparative rental figures see: Mckellar, *Modern London*, p.59; Swann, ‘London Estates’, pp.93-100.

⁴³ BHJ 09, 1 August 1747.

⁴⁴ BHJ 10, 30 March 1748, 5 October 1748.

⁴⁵ Swann, ‘London Estates’, p.20.

years and he refused to offer a fine. The committee suggested the compromise solution that he give a security or always pay a year in advance but again Huntmill refused. William Elliott offered to take a lease at £18 p.a. with no fine and for 'seven, eleven, fourteen of twenty one years'. Similarly William Deakin offered £21 p.a. no fine and a term of either seven, eleven of twenty one years 'at his option'⁴⁶. These were not the types of terms that the BHLC envisaged as fitting for these properties. Interestingly these final two proposals were eventually rejected not solely on the basis of the terms they were offering but also on the activities that the lessees would conduct in them, and this illustrates another problem with the houses in that the types of *bidders* that they were attracting were simply not of the type of shop keeper that the BHLC desired.

The intention of Dance's plan was clearly to create a rather fashionable shopping street, the houses were designed with large windows next to the doors so the contents of the shops would be visible from the street, and the piazza would allow shoppers to peruse the window displays at their leisure. But the bidders certainly did not fit this profile, for example Elliott was a pastry cook and wanted to have an oven in the property; clearly a fire hazard, and Deakin wanted to 'sell strong beer' from his property. Deakin was informed after some deliberation by the committee that 'the house would not be lett to a publican.'⁴⁷ This evidence, along with the knowledge that one of the existing tenants, Putham, had his lower floor as a coffee house and the upper as a tailors workshop,⁴⁸ indicates the social profile of those bidding for these leases, and they were clearly not the type of polite shopkeeper that the committee was hoping for, but rather those from the less refined end of the shopkeeper spectrum.⁴⁹

The BHLC did manage to lease five more of the houses between April 1749 and April 1750, all at between £18 and £20.p.a and on twenty-one year terms but crucially none of them with fines.⁵⁰ So four years on from when they first went on the market the houses had still not been fully leased, they had generated just £220 in fines and it was not until 1751 when the rents collected reached £173 that they generated the kinds of rental

⁴⁶ BHJ 10, 4 May 1748, 27 August 1748.

⁴⁷ BHJ 10, 27 August 1748.

⁴⁸ BHJ 10, 5 October 1748.

⁴⁹ As Swann notes most of the houses on the three estates she surveyed were let to 'tradesmen' who had a shop on the lower floor and living space above. Swann, 'London Estates', p.78.

⁵⁰ CLRO, CLA/007/EM/05/01/002 Grant Book: 1734-1752.

income that the BHLC was clearly anticipating when they undertook the project to build them. The result of these tribulations was that the houses were turning into an expensive white elephant that had simply drained the Bridge House financial reserves. But this inability to find lessees was not just afflicting the new houses but also all the other properties in the Bridge House portfolio and in particular the remaining houses on the Bridge, many of which were now utterly decrepit.

Leasing the rest of the Estate

Not only was the BHLC attempting to leases the new houses but it also had the problem of having to find tenants for thirty-nine other houses on the Bridge whose leases expired between 1745 and 1750.

The general master plan of having the whole of the Bridge lined with houses based on Dance's designs is evidenced by a sub-committee report of June 1746 which notes that the many old houses on the Bridge with leases close to expiry should be let on building leases and modelled on Dance's plans.⁵¹ However the report also notes that these properties were in 'bad condition' and given the difficulty the BHLC was clearly having leasing the brand new houses on the Bridge it is no surprise to find that the committee began to find leasing any properties difficult. A sub-committee in 1747 met with the present tenants of the many houses on the middle sections of the Bridge and reported to the BHLC that most of the tenants wanted reductions in the rents and to continue as tenants-at-will rather than to renew their leases.⁵² The committee rejected the proposal of abating the rents but the committee must by now have been aware of the general depressed state of the property market and, faced with the prospect of seeing many of its Bridge properties unoccupied, it had little alternative but to allow these tenants to go 'at-will'. Tenancy-at-will meant that no lease was involved and tenants could vacate the property with just a month's notice. The BHLC and landlords in general only allowed tenancy-at-will as a last resort,⁵³ and the Bridge House accounts books show that it was

⁵¹ BHJ 09, 4 June 1746.

⁵² BHJ 10, 1 August 1747.

⁵³ Swann, 'London Estates', p.10.

only used in a handful of cases prior to this period. The report also suggests that the comptroller should take steps to force the aforementioned tenants to undertake some repairs of the houses, but the committee must have known that this was a token gesture. The futility of this suggestion and the severity of the situation is exemplified by the fact that by 1748 some of these tenants had already defaulted on their rental payments and the committee was ordering the comptroller to ‘make distress’ (basically repossess) on goods belonging to them.⁵⁴ Tenants unable to even meet their rental payments were clearly not going to spend money repairing their properties. All the while it is clear that the houses continued to deteriorate in condition. In 1750 a sub-committee viewed the houses and found that they were ‘very defective and hazardous’ and that immediate repairs should be undertaken under the guidance of Dance ‘for the security of the houses’⁵⁵. The committee also backed down on its 1747 decision and agreed to abate the rents of the tenants-at-will of the houses on the Bridge in a desperate effort to keep the properties occupied.⁵⁶

The predicament of the Bridge House during this period can be seen in the journal entries of 1754. Four out of the hundred houses listed on the Bridge were empty, but thirty-three were being let at-will.⁵⁷ This meant that the Bridge House had little security of income for over a third of its leases on the Bridge; it meant that the Bridge House received no income from fines for these leases; but most crucially of all it meant that no repairs or refurbishments were being undertaken on these properties. The tenants were not willing, or quite frankly able (as we have seen being a tenant-at-will was a good indication of penury), to pay for repairs to houses that they might only live in for a few months.

Interestingly the BHLC was able to find lessees for other properties in its portfolio, albeit at much less advantageous terms, and managed to avoid a precipitous drop in income. For example this period did not witness a great decline in the rental income received by the Bridge House, in fact in terms of rental income the period between 1747 and 1754 is by far the most stable in our ninety year period of study. As Figure 5.3 demonstrates the greatest yearly variation in rental income over this seven year period is

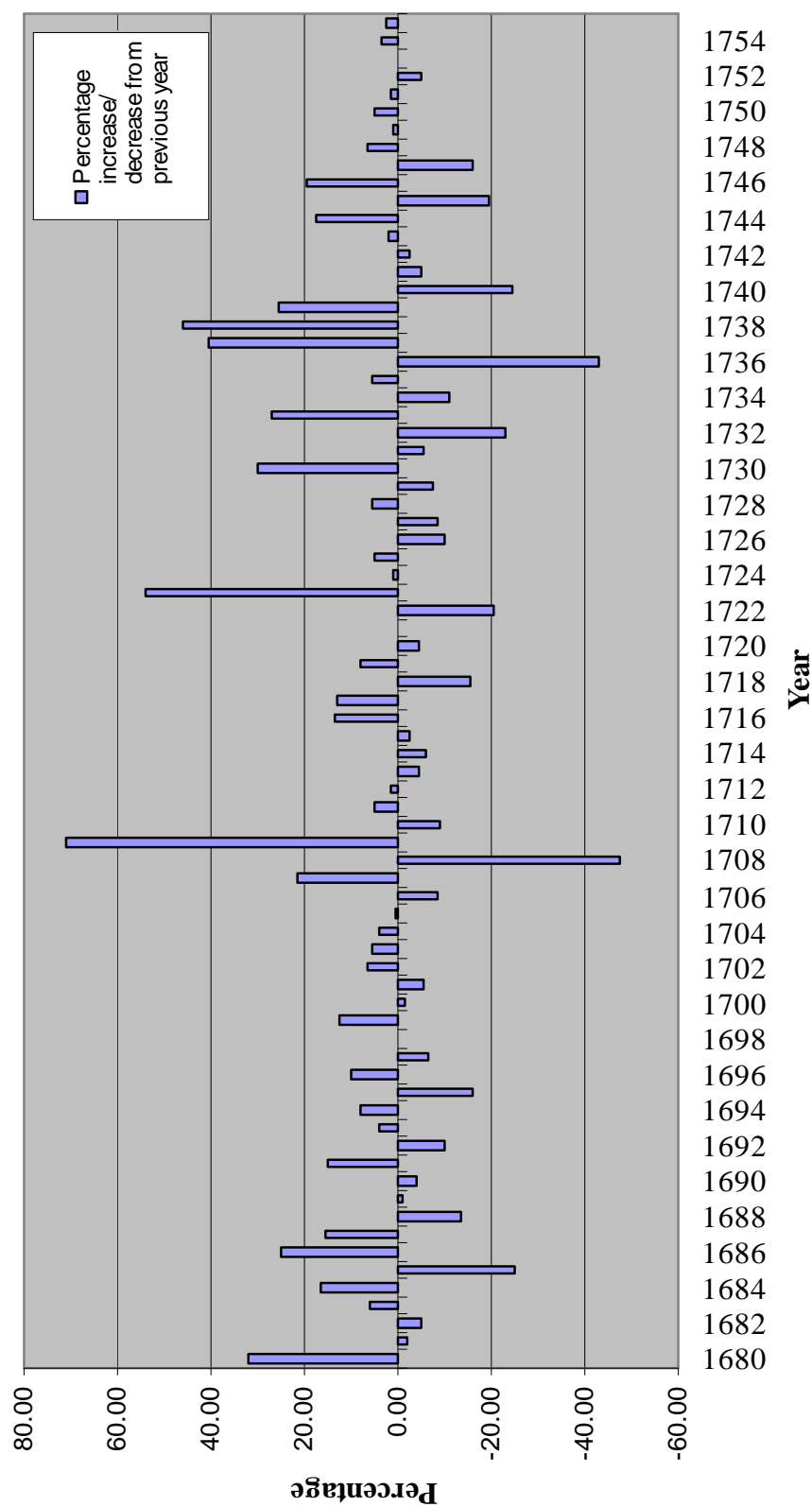
⁵⁴ BHJ 10, 7 December 1748.

⁵⁵ BHJ 10, 4 July 1750.

⁵⁶ BHJ 10, 12 December 1750.

⁵⁷ BHJ 11, 8 May 1754.

Figure 5.3
Yearly variation in Bridge House rental income:1680-1754



Source - CLA/007/FN/02/027-043 *Bridge House accounts 1678-1755*

just 5.5%. Additionally the Bridge House was generating some sums from fines for other properties in its portfolio, in particular those in the City and Southwark.

As Swann notes although there was a generally depressed market some properties in 'favourable positions', such as those close to particular transport links or redevelopment areas such as around the Bank of England,⁵⁸ managed to buck this trend, and attract lessees, with a handful of sites actually increasing in value.⁵⁹ So some leases were still attractive to lessees, but the fines and rental terms the Bridge House received for these leases were much reduced and it seems that the lessees were taking advantage of the situation to grab some prime City real estate at reduced prices.

The grant books also show that the Bridge House managed to insert clauses into these leases that required the lessee to spend a stipulated sum on repairs. For example in December 1749 James Duke agreed to a lease for some tenements in Hood Lane on a twenty-one year lease, £3p.a., £40 fine and an agreement to spend £80 on repairs to the properties, similarly Christopher Richards in 1750 agreed a lease with a fine of £20 and an undertaking to spend £100 in repairs of the property in Paternoster Row.

Some of the sums pledged for repairs were very substantial, Lancelot Dowbiggin agreed to spend £500 when he obtained his lease for the Three Tun Tavern in Newgate street, and in 1753 William Sallis agreed to a staggering £1000 expenditure on his block of messuages in the same street, although in both cases no fine was paid and the rental was a modest £16 and £10 respectively.⁶⁰

But these sums spent on repairs are indicative of the poor physical state of the properties and illustrate the Bridge House's predicament: it was in a weak negotiating position as it desperately needed to find lessees willing to spend substantial sums on repairs, and therefore had to settle for much reduced rents and fines. The BHLC was fortunate to find lessees that were willing and able to spend the types of monies needed to repair and refurbish the Bridge House property stock in these select areas of the city. But this willingness to lease other Bridge House properties throws into sharp relief the

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.102.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.96.

⁶⁰ Swann notes that all three of the estates in her study managed to find lessees willing to take on building leases for properties in the areas of Newgate Street, Paternoster Row, Old Bailey and Old Change, although many of them were let on much reduced terms compared to the previous leases. Swann, 'London Estates', p.69, 94.

undesirability of the houses on the Bridge; there was simply no market for such properties.

The final years

The lack of repairs to the houses meant they continued to physically deteriorate and by late 1753 it seemed that the BHLC was finding the situation intolerable. Dance was ordered by the committee to undertake a full survey of the houses on the Bridge and to estimate the cost of their repair. The committee also ordered the comptroller to attend them with the accounts of the rents and lease terms of the houses on the Bridge.⁶¹ Dance's survey is highly detailed, and he divides the houses into eight sections such as the cellar, the ground floor, the attic and so forth, and makes remarks on each section. Most of the houses he classified as 'exceedingly bad almost Ruin'd', and most of them had severe structural problems.⁶² However what is interesting is that it was not just structural improvements that Dance was evaluating, but he was also factoring in aesthetic improvements. It is clear too that Dance was estimating the costs according to a template of what all the houses should consist of: standard dimensions, layout, interior and exterior décor, similar to the vision set forth in his plans of 1746. This indicates that even at this late stage the BHLC was still actively trying to keep the houses on the Bridge.

But whereas in 1745 it was the BHLC that acted autonomously and made the decisions regarding the building of the new houses, this time around the Common Council became involved, and, as we shall see, the reason for this seems to have been the financial predicament of the Corporation as a whole.

Dance was ordered to inspect by the BHLC on 12 September 1753 and later that year on 20 December the Common Council ordered the sub-committee for Blackfriars Bridge to be constituted. By 22 February 1754 that same sub-committee was ordered to 'enquire into the present state of London Bridge' and to assess the possibility of making London Bridge more 'safe, commodious and ornamental' and to establish how much this

⁶¹ BHJ 11, 12 September 1753.

⁶² CLRO, COL/CCS/CO/06 fol.003., Comptroller and City Solicitor Bridge House Papers, 1603-1837.

would cost.⁶³ There is no indication of how the Common Council envisaged that the Bridge would be made more ‘safe, commodious and ornamental’, but there is no reason to suggest at this juncture that the solution in the eyes of the Council involved the removal of the houses. However Dance’s report must have caused a sharp intake of breath amongst the Council members when it was delivered a few weeks later on 6 March 1754. He estimated that in order to bring the houses that were leased up to standard the lessees would have to find a combined sum of £4025. Encouraging, cajoling or even forcing the lessees to do such work would undoubtedly have been a difficult, messy task, and, assuming the lessees even had the cash to undertake such work, the only real tool the Bridge House had to affect these changes was expensive and time consuming legal action. Worse still was the total of £7238 the Bridge House itself would have to find in order to undertake work on the Bridge structure and rebuild the houses currently let to tenants-at-will.

From this point on the Blackfriars Bridge sub-committee took control of proceedings and ordered the BHLC to conduct what can best be described as a feasibility study in the form of a report to assess whether such an outlay from the Bridge House revenue would have been both possible and indeed desirable in the long term financial interest of the Bridge House. In order to complete this report a BHLC sub-committee was ordered to look into the state of the Bridge House rents, and by early April the sub-committee was asking the Bridge House clerk and the Bridge House officers to provide details of the leases of the houses on the Bridge, the costs of repair of the Bridge in the past 10 years, and the rental income of the houses.⁶⁴ It seems that up till this point the Corporation was still entertaining the notion of refurbishing the houses on the Bridge according to Dance’s vision, but the final report delivered on 8 May 1754 must have made grim reading. To begin with the generally parlous state of the Bridge House’s financial predicament was laid out in black and white. The cost of materials for repairs on the Bridge was running at an average of just over £2100, whilst the overall rental due from the estates for 1753 was £3843 of which £3685 was collected. Therefore the

⁶³ BHJ 11, 12 September 1753; CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.60/179-180., Court of Common Council journals, 1753-54.

⁶⁴ BHJ 11, 13 March 1754, 3 April 1754.

materials for the maintenance of the Bridge alone were gobbling up around 55% of the Bridge House income. After taxes and wages had been paid and costs associated with the rest of the estate had been met the Bridge House often slipped into the red. But even more importantly the declining importance of the houses on the Bridge to the Bridge House finances was highlighted.

In 1744 the Bridge House was charging £625 p.a. from lessees on the Bridge, this had nearly halved to £348 by 1749 and only slightly recovered to £440 by 1753, yet in the mean time income from tenants-at-will was accounting for £382 by 1753.⁶⁵

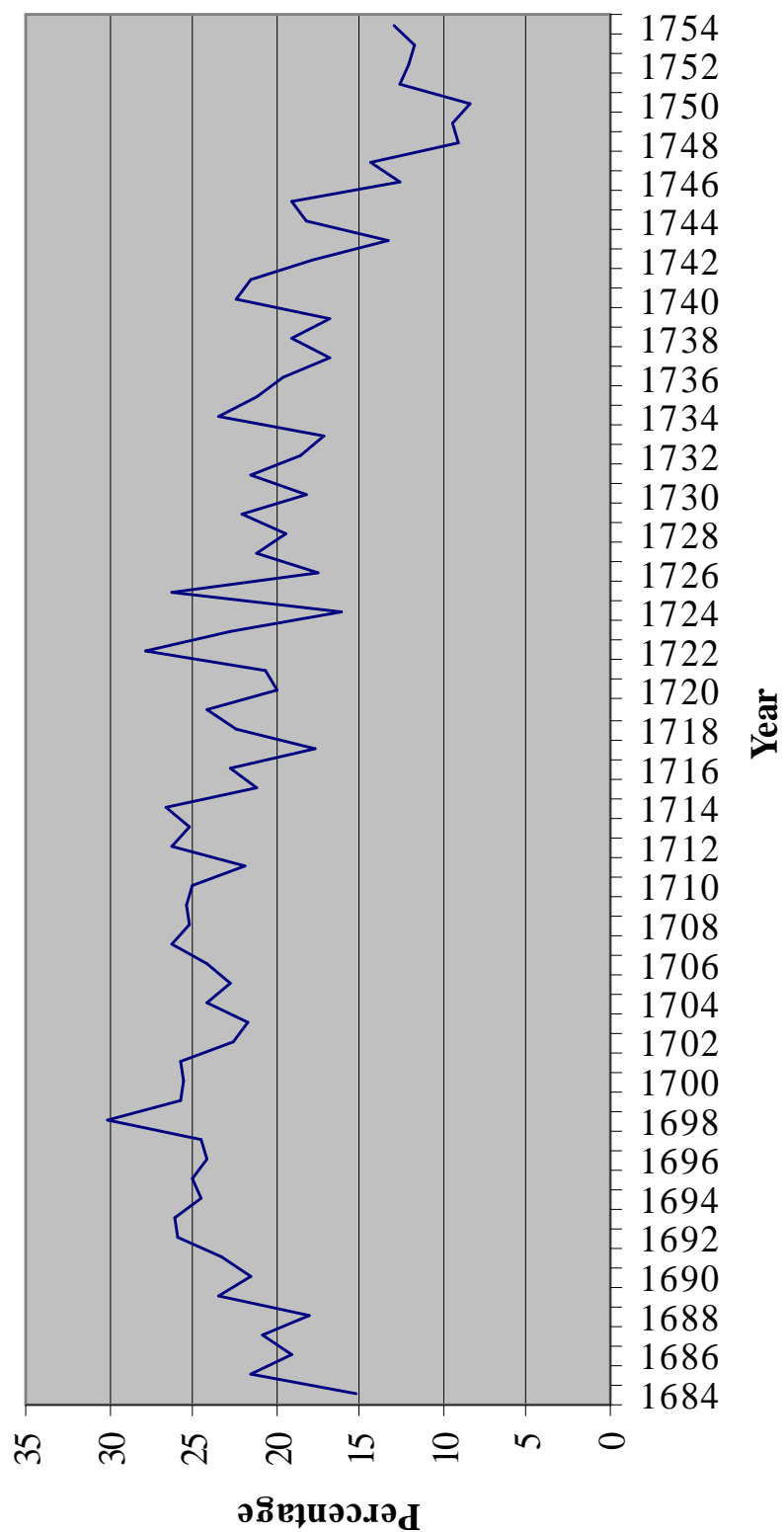
This significant deterioration in income from leases from the mid 1740s onwards can be seen in Figure 5.4. The houses on the Bridge in their current state were therefore a diminishing asset as they were not attracting the lessees that the Bridge House desperately needed but rather the much less desirable tenants-at-will. The report also vividly illustrated the failure of the new houses constructed in 1746 to reverse this trend. By 1753 these houses were contributing a rather underwhelming £173 p.a, and they had generated a paltry £220 in fines for the Bridge House coffers. These were disappointing sums and at such a rate the Bridge House would not have made a profit until the leases came up for renewal in the late 1760s.⁶⁶

So this report of the 8 May 1754 conveyed to the members of the Corporation that not only could the Bridge House simply not afford the £7000 to replace the houses out of its existing revenues, but it also made clear the fact that it made no sense to attempt to replace them as the houses on the Bridge were simply no longer a financial asset. One contextual factor that was influencing these developments and driving the Common Council itself to become involved much more closely in this episode was the financial position of the Corporation in general in the mid-eighteenth century. The Corporation since the late seventeenth century had been engaged in a prolonged struggle to remain

⁶⁵ BHJ 11, 8 May 1754.

⁶⁶ This calculation is based on the fact that the houses cost a total of over £4000 whereas payments of £173 pa. for twenty-one years plus the £220 in fines would have netted the Bridge House a total of just £3853.

Figure 5.4
Income from houses as percentage of total Bridge House income:
1684-1754



Source - CLA/007/FN/02/029-043 *Bridge House accounts 1684-1755*

solvent and indeed in the 1690s the orphans crisis ensured that for some time afterwards the Corporation teetered on the brink of bankruptcy.⁶⁷

The orphans fund was a trust fund administered by the City into which the City freemen paid one third of their estate upon their death in order that their orphans would receive a lump sum plus interest when they came of age or married.⁶⁸ These were effectively bonds, which by the 1690s had often been sold on to professional investors and no longer belonged to the orphans. However, the City in its wisdom was basically spending the money in trust and by the 1680s it was unable to find the cash even to meet the interest payments. By 1694 the trust was over £700,000 in debt and the City, unable to obtain further credit to pay the bonds, faced bankruptcy.⁶⁹ In order to assuage this crisis in 1694 Parliament imposed a settlement on the City and the orphans and ordered that a fund be established by the City out of which the orphans would be paid an interest of 4% p.a. The agreement called for the City to pay £30,000 p.a. into this fund and Parliament granted the Corporation various revenue generating powers to achieve this, the most important being the right to collect dues for coal entering the City. The City also had to find £8000 p.a. from its existing revenue streams, mainly its estates, to contribute to the fund, but because of the nature of the City estates the Corporation often struggled to raise this figure.⁷⁰

Doolittle notes that the Parliament-imposed settlement worked well for the City and was incredibly effective in raising the required £30,000 p.a. But the spectre of bankruptcy was never far from the Corporation throughout the first half of the century, and was again visible in the 1740s. Firstly the Act of 1694 stated that the right to levy coal duties would expire in 1750, but more importantly for this study the Act also states that from 1750 onwards the figure that the City had to contribute from existing revenues

⁶⁷ For the orphans crisis see: Kellett, J.R., 'The financial crisis of the Corporation of London and the orphans act, 1694', *Guildhall miscellany*, 2:5 (1964), pp.220-7. For City finances in general during this period see: Doolittle, 'City of London', chapters 4 and 5. For evidence of the fact that many other Corporations struggled to keep their heads above water financially in the eighteenth century see: Dawson, 'Unreformed borough'.

⁶⁸ For an explanation of how this system operated see: Kellett, 'Financial crisis', p.221.

⁶⁹ For details on some of the solutions the City was contemplating for its financial crisis see: Kellett, J.R., 'Some late seventeenth-century schemes for the improvement of the Corporation of London's revenues'. *Guildhall Miscellany*, 1:9 (1958), pp.27-34.

⁷⁰ Doolittle, 'City of London', p.100 and chapter 5 in general.

would rise from £8000 to £14,000, with the City's estates expected to contribute £2000 of this additional £6000. Given that the City's estates were already unable to contribute their share of the £8000 finding an additional £2000 was clearly going to be challenging at the best of times but in the context of the general depression in the property market it must have seemed an impossible task.⁷¹ Indeed as Doolittle's data shows the City accounts were in deficit for every year of the 1740s.⁷² The act for coal duties was eventually renewed in 1748 but it was not until 1754-55, after several years of piecemeal solutions, that the fines, and latterly rents, generated from the leasing of the Conduit Mead estate eventually solved the City's problem of how to pay the £14,000.⁷³

So the investigation into repairing the houses on the Bridge was conducted against a backdrop of increasingly urgent efforts by the Corporation to find ways of extracting more cash from existing revenue streams. As the Labelye plans of 1746 indicate, it seems that the Common Council was keen throughout this period to ensure that the Bridge did not become a financial burden in any way to the Corporation. Indeed there is every possibility that the motivations of the commonalty went further than this. It is entirely conceivable that the Labelye plans represent a desire on the part of the Council to reduce the maintenance costs of the Bridge in order that the surplus monies thereby generated by the Bridge House estate could then be channelled into the City Chamber. Such a thesis carries weight given the evidence that the Corporation contemplated the desperate measure of raiding the Bridge House revenues to help meet the extra £6000 cost due to the orphans fund. In 1750 the Common Council sub-committee charged with investigating ways of increasing revenues to the orphans fund was also instructed to see if the revenues from the Bridge House estates could be increased.⁷⁴ Such a raid on the Bridge House, although not unheard of in the Corporation's history⁷⁵, had certainly not

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.126.

⁷² *Ibid.*, appendix 5.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, chapter 7.

⁷⁴ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.59/325., Court of Common Council journals, 1750.

⁷⁵ Bridge house revenues were used to pay for the construction of the guildhall in the fifteenth century and the purchase of the City's charter over Southwark in 1550 amongst other expenses, Harding, V., and Wright, L. (eds.), *London Bridge: selected accounts and rentals, 1381-1538*, London Record Society, vol. 31 (1995), p.xxi; Johnson, D., *Southwark and the City* (Oxford, 1969), pp.124, 128.

occurred since the Fire and the fact the Corporation was even entertaining such an idea illustrates the gravity of the City's situation in the early 1750s.

Conclusion

The Corporation was therefore left with little choice but to remove the houses. To begin with these structures were clearly in such a state that if urgent, substantial and ultimately hugely expensive remedial work was not carried out they would simply collapse, yet it was also just as clear that neither the Bridge House nor the Corporation itself had the financial resources to fund such a project. The Bridge House had spent what little surplus it could generate on the construction of Dance's houses in the 1740s and was often struggling to break even year-on-year, and the City itself was grappling with the problems of finding additional monies to channel into the orphans fund. Finding over £7000 to rebuild the houses on the Bridge from existing Bridge House revenues was clearly way beyond the realms of possibility. Perhaps most importantly the difficulties the BHLC had in finding lessees for any of the houses on the Bridge, in particular Dance's houses, must also have demonstrated to the committee a fact that had been evident for some while: that there was no appetite in the property market for leases on the Bridge.

The report of 8 May 1754 demonstrates in an unequivocal manner this market rejection of leases on the Bridge. The large blocks of 'at will' scribbled into the columns indicating tenants-at-will, the heavy repair costs required for most of the properties and the empty entries under the 'Fines given' heading, all leap off the page of this document and must have done so for the beleaguered members of the BHLC and Common Council. To further darken the mood of these men the construction of Dance's houses in the 1740s was revealed as an unmitigated failure by the report. The paltry returns on the Bridge House's £4000 investment in terms of both the rent and in particular the fines these houses generated are evident. There could be no clearer illustration to the Corporation that Londoners were simply no longer interested in leasing houses on London Bridge.

The members of the Corporation plainly absorbed this message as by September later that year the report compiled by the Blackfriars Bridge subcommittee, which called for the removal of the houses and precipitated the London Bridge Improvement Act, was being delivered and the end of the houses was nigh. But the important point here is that well into the mid 1750s the BHLC and the Corporation in general were intent on keeping houses on London Bridge; it was only when it became apparent that it simply made no financial sense to keep them that the Corporation began to think differently. This was no noble 'spirit of improvement' that was motivating these men of the Corporation but rather the more prosaic sentiments of cold hard financial logic.

As we noted in chapter 4 historians need be attentive to the fact that changes in the built environment were often the results of quite individualised historical processes, rather than simply products of some grand overarching contemporary theme. These two chapters have demonstrated that the removal of the houses from London Bridge was the result of a series of factors and events in the finances of the Bridge House and the Corporation, as opposed to another manifestation of a single and generalised ideology of improvement.

PART III

The Mechanism

Introduction to Part III

Once the recommendation had been made by the sub-committee in September 1754 to remove the houses, attention invariably turned to how such a project would be undertaken, how much it would cost, and how it would be funded. In the period after the report of September 1754 the Corporation busied itself in the drafting of a bill produced in 1755, which outlined the proposed measures for undertaking the works on the Bridge. A petition to Parliament was made a few months later, and on 25 June 1756 the Act was passed.

The Act itself, which was little changed from the bill, essentially had two facets, the first related to the creation of a new body distinct from the existing Bridge House structure, known as the London Bridge Improvement Commission. The commission was charged with the task of actually executing the project and was endowed with the relevant powers in order to discharge its duties. The second facet was related to the funding of the project and in particular granting this commission the tools to facilitate borrowing on a significant scale.

The following two chapters will address the question of why the Corporation resorted to the creation of this new body to implement the project, particularly given that the existing corporate structures, the Court of Aldermen, and the BHLC had previously managed to carry out and finance substantive renovation projects on the Bridge in the 1680s and 1740s.

Chapter 6 will argue that as with many improvement acts the main reason for the creation of the London Bridge Improvement Commission was in order to facilitate borrowing to fund the project, and the chapter will elucidate the reasons why such Parliamentary legislation was required for this purpose and more explicitly why the Bridge House could not fund borrowing from its resources. Chapter 7 is concerned with addressing the potential practical and political reasons behind the creation of the commission and specifically why, rather than the project being entrusted to existing elements of the Bridge House administration, in particular the BHLC, the Corporation felt that the implementation of the project required the formation of this new body.

Chapter VI

Income, Expenditure, Corruption, and the Act: The Finances of the Bridge House 1666-1765.

In the report of 1754 George Dance estimated that the cost of the renovation of the Bridge would be around £30,000 with an additional £9000 required to purchase the leases of the various tenants. The £484 p.a that the houses contributed to the parishes of St Magnus and St Olave in terms of land taxes, poor rates, church warden's rates and tithes would be met by the Bridge House itself.¹ A total of nearly £40,000 was clearly a huge capital sum, and the report made no suggestions as to how this money was to be raised. The Bridge House finances had been put under enormous strain when finding the £4000 for the construction of Dance's houses in the 1740s and the Bridge House was unable to extract from its revenues the £7000 plus that would have been required to rebuild the houses in the mid 1750s. Therefore, finding £40,000 to remove the houses out of the existing Bridge House revenues was clearly beyond the realms of possibility. Nor was the Corporation itself in a position to stump up such sums, burdened as it was with its own series of crippling financial problems, and memories of the divisive and contentious funding of the Mansion House construction were still fresh.² The only possibility therefore was to borrow the money from private lenders, yet the Corporation had the additional dilemma of how such borrowing was to be facilitated. A number of corporations with landed estates could, and did, borrow directly in order to fund maintenance or renovation projects.³ But the corporations had relatively clear lines of

¹ CLRO, COL/CC/06/01 fol.0134., Court of Common Council papers, 1754.

² The construction of the Mansion House was funded by fines paid by individuals to avoid taking on the office of sheriff and beset by accusations that nonconformists were targeted for nomination to the office in the knowledge that they would have to decline and therefore pay the fine: Doolittle, I., 'The Mansion House "racket"', *History Today*, vol.33 (1983), pp.37-41.

³ Dawson, E.J. 'Finance and the unreformed borough: A critical appraisal of corporate finance, 1660-1835, with special reference to the boroughs of Nottingham, York and Boston' (unpublished University of Hull Ph.D. thesis, 1978), pp.300-346; Innes, J., and Rogers, N., 'Politics and government 1700-1840' in Clark, P. (ed.) *The Cambridge urban history of Britain: 1540-1840* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.548-551; Jackson, G., *Hull in the eighteenth century: a study in economic and social history* (Oxford, 1972), p.328.

accountability, with bodies or individuals in whom ultimate financial accountability for the organisation rested, usually the commonalty. The Bridge House with its opaque rather disjointed system of administration, complete absence of financial accountability, and lack of a genuine executive body, simply did not possess an entity with which the responsibility for a debt could have rested. Borrowing directly was therefore an impossible proposition. As early as December 1754, it was clear to the Corporation that they would require Parliamentary legislation in order to assist in the funding of this project, and by creating the improvement commission, the Act brought into existence a body with which the legal responsibility for the debt could rest, and consequently a body with the capability to borrow.⁴

Secondly, and the centrepiece of the Act, was the fact that that it created a new, supposedly stable, revenue stream, independent from the Bridge House Estates, which the commission could use as security against credit. The commission was to be vested with the power to collect additional tolls from vehicles passing both over and under the Bridge. For every horse crossing the Bridge the toll was one half penny and for every ‘Coach, Chariot, Hearse, Berlin, Landau, Calash, Chaise or Chair’ it was one and half pennies.⁵ For those craft passing under the structure the toll ranged between 3d and 1s, dependant on the tonnage of the craft. The Act empowered the Commission to set up the infrastructure to gather these tolls by instructing it to appoint an actual individual responsible for their collection, and to establish toll gates at either end of the Bridge. The Act also allowed the commission to take legal action against those who refused to pay the charge.⁶

Once these powers had been established in the text, the Act then noted that ‘the borrowing of Money upon the Credit of this Act will be the most effectual Method to accomplish the Ends designed thereby’ and to this end it allowed the commission ‘from Time to Time [to] borrow under the Common Seal of the said City, upon the Credit of the said Tolls and Duties created by this Act, any Sum of Sums of Money at a Rate or Rates of Interest not exceeding four Pounds *per Centum per Annum*.’⁷ Therefore it was the

⁴ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.60/263., Court of Common Council journals, 1754.

⁵ 31 George II c.40. cl.24.

⁶ 31 George II c.40, cl.17.

⁷ 31 George II c.40, cl.31.

ability to obtain credit that formed the real purpose of the *Act to improve London Bridge*. It was abundantly clear that borrowing money was going to be the only method through which funding would be obtained in order to carry out the renovation of the Bridge, hence the creation of the improvement commission was essentially a credit vehicle. However the interesting question arises as to why this new revenue stream was deemed necessary given that the Bridge House had a large and stable landed estate.

The Historiography of Urban Finance

It was a common procedure for improvement acts to create these new revenue streams to fund the improvements and according to the historiography of early modern urban government these new sources of revenues were deemed necessary owing to the generally parlous and unstable state of most corporations' finances. The reason eighteenth-century corporate finances were in such a poor state of health was due to consistently rising expenditure alongside volatile income streams. These characteristics meant that corporations increasingly struggled to meet their ordinary expenditure commitments. Indeed it has been emphasised that the consistent problems they had in matching income and expenditure saw them slowly sink collectively into the financial mire, culminating in the reforms of the 1830s.⁸ With many corporations struggling to find stable incomes to match even ordinary expenditure it was clear that there was little chance of them creating the reliable surplus that would have been required to repay loans or indeed to act as security for credit. The creation of new steady revenue streams, through mechanisms such as improvement acts, was imperative in order to obtain the credit required to fund infrastructure projects.⁹

⁸ Webb, B., and Webb, S., *English local government: the manor and the borough* (London, 1908); Sweet, R., *The English town 1680-1840* (Harlow, 1999), chapter 5; Dawson, 'Unreformed borough', chapter 5 and the conclusion.

⁹ Jones, E., and Falkus, M., 'Urban improvement and the English economy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' in Borsay, P. (ed.), *The eighteenth century town 1688-1820* (London, 1990), p.137. It is interesting to note how the City of London's extensive program of infrastructure projects from the late 1760s onwards (the rebuilding of Newgate jail, the construction of the Embankment, the repair of the Royal Exchange, and in the 1820s the construction of an entirely new London Bridge) was funded by massive borrowing secured against just such a reliable surplus of cash flowing into the orphans fund: Doolittle, I.G. 'The government of the City of London, 1694-1767' (unpublished University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1980), pp.94-95.

The role of individual corporations in creating this financial situation - whereby they struggled to match even everyday expenditure, could exert little control over income, and therefore had to create additional revenue streams to fund improvement - has been open to differing interpretations. Historians such as the Webbs and Greaves argued that the unhealthy financial predicament of a number of corporations was largely self inflicted. According to this scholarship, on the basis of which all corporations were tarred with the same brush, the corporations were burdened with an outdated paternalistic culture of administration that simply engendered a rather negligent, short sighted, occasionally corrupt, and routinely inefficient approach to financial matters.¹⁰ The orphans crisis is a good example of how such an administrative culture was instrumental in shaping the finances of the City of London.¹¹ Within the context of such a culture, financial mismanagement not only caused the increasing divergence between income and expenditure but also ensured that it was impossible to create the types of constant and secure sums required to fund borrowing for improvement projects.

A second historiographical strand has somewhat challenged this generalisation and painted a more sympathetic picture of the role a number of corporations played in shaping their financial predicament. Both Dawson and Doolittle suggest that rather than a negligent culture of administration it was contextual and structural factors over which corporations had little influence, such as economic fluctuations, increased demands on civic infrastructure, or an inflexible unresponsive leasing system, that did most to shape their finances in the eighteenth century. According to this narrative ordinary corporate expenditure was essentially inflexible and inexorably increasing. Doolittle stresses the fact that commitments such as the increase in salaries and payments to the orphans fund were 'unavoidable', whilst Dawson similarly suggests that expenditure for provincial corporations was driven ever higher by costs associated with the increased professionalization of services and facilities. However, whilst expenditure was inexorably

¹⁰ Webbs, *Manor and borough*. For example they argue that 'in the administration of Corporate funds' the corporation of Coventry 'scarcely ever thought of the public needs of the City, but dissipated the money in their own feastings and perquisites' (p.441). Similarly the corporation at Bristol is accused of gross 'financial incompetence' (p.479), and the financial mismanagement by the commonalty of Ipswich ensured that 'much public revenue was lost by neglect. Debts were recklessly contracted.' (p.568); Greaves, R., *The corporation of Leicester, 1689-1836* (Leicester, 1970).

¹¹ For the orphans crisis see chapter 4.

rising the other half of the equation, income, failed to respond and this was due to the manner in which the corporations derived their incomes.¹²

The corporations such as, London, Canterbury, York and Nottingham, were typical of many urban administrations, and indeed the Bridge House, in that they derived the majority of their income from landed estates.¹³ Income from this source came in two forms: rental payments and fines, but the problem with these sources was twofold. Firstly, rental income was largely inflexible: even the shortest leases of twenty-one years issued by the likes of the City of London meant that rental income from that source was fixed for a generation.¹⁴ Secondly, the problem with income from fines was that it was so sporadic and corporations had little control over them. As the accounts for Nottingham and London illustrate fines were highly erratic; in the case of London a year of double figure income from this source could often be followed by a glut of several thousand pounds.¹⁵ There were other sources of revenues for the corporations, for example, the sale of offices, the sale of freedoms, fines for offices and a multiplicity of tolls that changed from town to town and could be levied for the use of markets, river passage, bridge crossings, harbour usage and many other things besides.¹⁶ But again according to Dawson and Doolittle these sources could prove highly erratic and susceptible to external economic pressures, such as a decline in trade or urban depopulation. The corporations struggled to do what they could to ensure that income kept pace with ordinary expenditure but they were increasingly fighting a losing battle and could do little to impose stability on their revenue streams. In effect what Dawson and Doolittle are suggesting is that it took rather valiant efforts on the part of the corporations just to ensure that they could extract enough from their revenue streams to match their increasingly onerous and intractable “ordinary” financial commitments. Therefore when ‘contingencies arose’¹⁷ or extraordinary expenditure was required, such as the increase in

¹² Doolittle, ‘City of London’, in particular chapters 4, 5 and 6; Dawson, ‘Unreformed borough’; Panton, F., ‘Finances and government of Canterbury 1700-1850’, *Archaeologia Cantiana*, no.120 (2000), pp.347-358.

¹³ Dawson, ‘Unreformed borough’, p.51; Doolittle, ‘City of London’, p.121; Panton, ‘Canterbury’, p.356.

¹⁴ Doolittle, ‘City of London’, p.120.

¹⁵ For London see: Doolittle, ‘City of London’, pp.301-309; For Nottingham see: Dawson, ‘Unreformed borough’, pp.800-1. (Unfortunately Dawson does not include figures for the other two corporations in her study); Panton, ‘Canterbury’, p.354.

¹⁶ Dawson, ‘Unreformed borough’, chapter 2 and in particular pp.54-63; Doolittle, ‘City Government’, chapter 5.

¹⁷ Dawson, ‘Unreformed borough’, p.62.

contributions to the orphans fund in 1750s, or to fund borrowing for improvement projects, the corporations' finances were clearly incapable of providing such sums.

In many respects these two historiographical approaches are debating the agency of corporations in creating a situation in which their finances were unable to fund borrowing for improvement projects and therefore explaining why they ultimately needed to resort to Parliamentary legislation to create these new stable revenue streams. The Webbs painted the corporations as architects of their own downfall, whereas the more sympathetic viewpoint adopted by Dawson and Doolittle suggests they were at least partially the victims of circumstance. Yet in her analysis of the factors that contributed to the City's financial meltdown in the 1680s, Harding has indicated that there is a further aspect of urban governance that needs to be more fully considered in any analysis of early modern urban finances. Whilst acknowledging the responsibility that cultural and contextual factors played in this tale of woe, Harding has argued that the Corporation's bureaucratic structure and administrative procedures, seen for example in opaque accounting practices and undeveloped income raising machinery, also played a pivotal, if not decisive role, in contributing to the Corporation's financial difficulties.¹⁸

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to analyse the various income streams and expenditure of the Bridge House. It will make explicit the link between the Bridge House's system of administration and the Bridge House's financial health, and in doing so argue that, as Harding has suggested, in order to understand the factors that determined urban finances in this period, historians need to consider not only issues such as the administrative culture and broader socio-economic factors, but also display an appreciation and awareness of the role that individual systems of administration and their workings played in shaping the financial predicament of urban authorities and organisations. This chapter will argue that the Bridge House's idiosyncratic system of administration - and primarily its lack of financial accountability - played a central role

¹⁸ Harding, V., 'The crown, the City, and the orphans: the City of London and its finances, 1400-1700' in Boone, M., Davids, K., and Janssens, P. (eds.), *Urban public debts* (Brepols, 2003), pp.51-60. See also: Kellett, J.R., 'The financial crisis of the Corporation of London and the orphans act, 1694', *Guildhall miscellany*, 2:5 (1964), p.222; Masters, B., *Chamber accounts of the sixteenth-century* (London, 1984), p.xxxviii.

in moulding its balance sheet, and it was due to this system of administration that the Bridge House was unable to create the funds necessary to fund borrowing and ultimately why the improvement act was required.

We begin with a brief précis of the various sources of revenue for the Bridge House, and then move on to examining in detail the most important of these sources: rental income, both in terms of the rental charged and the rental collected. The subsequent section explores the role of fines, noting the high volatility of income from this source. This is followed by an analysis of expenditure. The chapter concludes by seeking to understand the close link exhibited by the income and expenditure of the Bridge House.

Income of the Bridge House

The Bridge House had three main sources of income: rental charges, fines, and finally casual receipts. This section will briefly explain each of these sources before moving onto an analysis of how the two main sources, rent and fines, contributed to the income of the Bridge House.

Rental income

The leasing of the lands was divided into four sections within the account books. The first was known as ‘proper rents’, these were the rents from properties within the city of London and included the properties on the Bridge. These sites were located on lands that were among the most ancient bequests to the estate and the majority of them were in prime City locations. The largest single tranche was indeed the Bridge itself (138 plots) followed by the land in St Olave’s Southwark (35 plots), Christ Church (32), Paternoster Row (22), Billingsgate (16), the Old Change (14), and the parish of St Dionis Backchurch (12). Several other smaller parcels of land such as Gracechurch Street and in St Magnus parish were also part of the Bridge’s property portfolio. The sums received for the wheelage were also included as part of the proper rents, and these constituted the biggest single yearly payment to the Bridge House.

The second category was ‘foreign rents’ which consisted of those properties outside the City. These were relatively small, scattered, rural holdings which were mostly located to the south and east of the City, such as Lewisham, Deptford, Stratford and Peckham. These lands were put to a number of uses: some were let with tenements on them, others were simply let as land for farming or grazing, and some, as in the case of Lewisham and Stratford, for commercial activities such as milling.¹⁹ Those rents that fell under the label ‘land purchased’ were derived from properties on two parcels of land, one in Southwark, and the other part the land that once belonged to Bermondsey Monastery. These lands had been purchased by the Bridge House Estate during the reign of Edward VI and added to its portfolio (the rest of the estate had of course been donated over the centuries). The fourth type of rent was quit rents. These were small fixed annual rents whose payment released a tenant from manorial services. Such payments had had real relevance in the medieval period but by the late seventeenth century the duties which these payments supposedly exonerated the tenant from performing were long since forgotten and these charges effectively acted as surcharges on a lease.

Of these four categories proper rents were by far the most important source of rental income, accounting for 80-85% of the rental income throughout our period. It is important to note that no land was added to or removed from the Bridge’s property portfolio over the course of our period, and likewise the total number of plots on the various parcels of land remained static. The revenue of the Bridge House was therefore derived from a stable and settled estate.

Fines

The second revenue source: fines, are particularly interesting. They were lump sums paid upon the signing of the lease and they often far exceeded the sum the Bridge House would receive over the course of the lease. In order to attract tenants large institutional landlords often set their rents at lower than the actual market value of the lease. Fines were therefore a way in which a landlord such as the Bridge House could

¹⁹ Jones, P.E., ‘Some Bridge House properties’, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 3rd series, vol. XVI (1953), pp.59-73., discusses the uses of these foreign lands in greater detail.

factor in the increase in the value of a plot of land without having to raise the actual rental charge from one lease to the next.²⁰ Johnson describes them thus in relation to St Paul's:

Rents charged by the church were traditionally below the market rates . . . The difference between the beneficial rent paid by the lessee to the church and the full commercial rack rent was aggravated by prolonged inflation. To make up for this difference – the 'improvement' – churchmen, like many institutional landlords, charged a premium or entry fine every time they granted or renewed a lease.²¹

In other words fines were a mechanism through which the institution could benefit from the increased rental value of a property without any alteration to the actual lease or rental charged. Before 1712 these fines were collected sporadically by the Bridge House and subsumed under the heading of casual receipts. After 1712 they became a category in their own right and an increasingly important source of income.

Casual

The final source of income, that of 'casual receipts', was much less important and only very occasionally contributed significant sums. This income derived from a number of miscellaneous sources and could consist of the exploitation of permanent resources that were at the Bridge House's disposal, including the short term rental of the granaries in Southwark (which held all the City's reserves of grain²²) to the charge for using the various wharves the Bridge House controlled. Other sources included the realisation of assets, such as materials, timber, lead, stone and the like, held at the Bridge House, and the rental of various pieces of machinery.

Over the period between 1712 and 1756 rents comprised 76% of the Bridge House income, fines 19% and casual receipts 5%, so clearly the most important of these three sources of income was rental charged on the various properties within the Bridge House Estate, followed by the fines.²³ The income from casual receipts was largely

²⁰ Dawson, 'Unreformed borough', p.236.

²¹ Johnson, D., 'Estates and income, 1540-1714' in Keene, D., and Burns, A. (eds.), *St Pauls: the cathedral church of London, 604-2004* (London, 2004), p.309.

²² Home, G., *Old London Bridge* (London, 1931), pp.168-9.

²³ Figures derived from; CLRO, CLA/007/FN/02/036-042, Bridge Master's annual accounts and rentals, 1709-1765.

incidental. The following analysis, therefore, will concentrate specifically on these two sources beginning with rental income.

Rental charged

We begin this section by highlighting an important distinction (a distinction that neither Doolittle nor Dawson acknowledge)²⁴ between the two elements of rental income –what was charged and what was actually collected. In the discussion regarding the remit of the BHLC we noted that it was responsible for leasing the properties of the Bridge House and seeking to increase that charge wherever possible.²⁵ The proceeding sections will argue that in this respect the BHLC did an excellent job. However, such proficiency was clearly lacking when it came to the collection of rents. The key differences here being that rental collection was an aspect of the Bridge House administration for which no official was held responsible, and whereas setting the level of rents required very little in the way of bureaucratic machinery, the collection of rents was an entirely different matter.

The Bridge House Leasing policy

The single most important factor shaping the rental charged was the need above all else for the Bridge House to get tenants to take up leases. Like most other landlords of the period, institutional or otherwise, the Bridge House simply did not have the remit, the resources or the administrative structure required to construct or maintain properties on its estate. Therefore landowners of the period simply derived income from leasing the land on their estates; it was the lessees that built and maintained the properties on this land.²⁶ Such a system was in many ways the only one possible, given the small size of the organisations that administered even the largest estates. Full occupancy of leases therefore became the overriding priority for the landowner, as a plot with no lessee meant

²⁴ Doolittle takes his figures for rental income from the rental charged: Doolittle, 'City Government', p.301. Whereas Dawson admits that the account books for her corporations often fail to differentiate between the charge and the actual collection of rents: Dawson 'Unreformed borough', p.840.

²⁵ See chapter 3.

²⁶ Olsen, D., *Town planning in London* (London, 1982), p.8; McKellar, E., *The birth of modern London* (Manchester, 2000), p.38.

a property with no one undertaking maintenance, and this would in turn lead to the physical deterioration of the property and a decline in the value of the lease.²⁷ It was also the case that once a property was vacant the Bridge House became liable for the land tax levied on the plot.²⁸ Consequently maximising the amount of rental charged was a secondary priority, and as Booth has argued the focus of most large urban landlords was to increase the capital value (the underlying value of the land) of their estates rather than to extract as much as possible from these assets in terms of rents.²⁹ Such fundamental considerations led to urban landlords, including the Bridge House, adopting what we could term conservative leasing policies.³⁰

The Bridge House like most other urban landlords issued two standard leases throughout our period. The first was the rebuilding lease which usually comprised a sixty-one year term. This lease was issued either for a plot of land, where no structure existed, or for a plot where the current structure was so decrepit that total reconstruction was necessary. The relatively long term of years reflected the fact that the lessee would have a substantial initial outlay on the construction of the house, particularly as, after the Fire, buildings had to conform to set standards outlined in the various Building Acts of the period, and this served to push the cost of construction ever higher.³¹ The sixty-one year term allowed the lessee to recoup that expenditure, either by ensuring he/she would suffer no rental increase over the period whether they chose to reside in the property or, as was more common, by allowing them to sub-let it.

The second lease was the repair lease which consisted of twenty one years and required that the lessee ensure that the property was kept in good repair over the course of the lease. Effectively the idea was that the lessee would hand back the property to the Bridge House at the cessation of the lease in a good state of repair so it could simply be re-issued on another twenty-one year repair lease. As Doolittle has noted, even the shorter

²⁷ Swann, B.A.S. 'A study of some London estates in the eighteenth century' (unpublished London University Ph.D. thesis, 1964), p.90.

²⁸ Ward, W., *The English land tax in the eighteenth century* (Oxford, 1953), pp.6-10; Swann, 'London Estates', p.34.

²⁹ Booth, P., 'Speculative housing and the land market in London, 1660-1730: four case studies', *Town Planning Review*, no.51 (1980), p.396.

³⁰ See: Archer, I., *The history of the Haberdashers' company* (Chichester, 1991), chapter 8; Booth, 'Speculative housing', pp.386-390.

³¹ Porter, S., *The great fire of London* (Godalming, 1998), pp.92-115.

repair lease fixed rental income for at least a generation and therefore prevented landowners from taking advantage of any short term increase in land values, but it is clear that leases of this duration were necessary to entice lessees, particularly when they would be required to rebuild.³²

In terms of who took up the lease the Bridge House, like other large urban landlords, was keen to encourage existing lessees to renew their leases, rather than seek new lessees.³³ This may have partially have stemmed from the prevailing contemporary notion of existing tenants having the 'right to renewal of the lease'³⁴, but there were also practical factors. Keeping existing tenants *in situ* alleviated the need to embark on the potentially lengthy process of finding new tenants; it also meant that the property was continually occupied and therefore that there was continual income. But perhaps most importantly the opportunity for existing lessees to repeatedly renew their leases was a great incentive for them to invest in the property and keep it in good repair.³⁵ In order to encourage renewal by existing tenants it was BHLC policy that wherever possible the leases should be issued with 'old rent being reserved'³⁶ (in other words with the rent kept at the same level as the previous lease). As we shall see this did not translate literally into no rental increases over our period but what it seemed to mean in practice was that rental increases between one lease and another were small and rental increase often only occurred every two to three leases.³⁷ This also meant that the BHLC did not have to give much thought to the level of the rent: it simply issued the lease with the same rental level as previously or with a small increase. The Corporation itself followed the same policy in

³² Doolittle, City of London, p.123. This was particularly true of the post fire period: Doolittle, I., *The City of London and its companies* (Dorchester, 1982), p.10.

³³ Swann, 'London Estates', p.18; Wordie, J., 'Introduction' in Chalklin, C., and Wordie, J., (eds.), *Town and countryside: The English landowner in the national economy, 1660-1860* (London, 1989), p.17; Johnson, 'Estates and Income', pp.309-310; Trueman, B., 'The purchase and management of Guy's hospital estates, 1726-1806' in Chalklin, C., and Wordie, J. (eds.), *Town and countryside: the English landowner in the national economy, 1660-1860* (London, 1989), pp.69-72.

³⁴ Swann, 'London estates', p.17.

³⁵ Swann, 'London estates', p.18. Johnson explains the benefits of this policy in relation to St Paul's: Johnson, 'Estates and income', p.310.

³⁶ BHJ 02, undated) 1672.

³⁷ Many seventeenth-century leases were issued along these terms, see for example lease of Samuel Castle BHJ 02, 8 December 1669; the lease of Mr Drickins BHJ 02, 9 June 1670; the lease of Lady Pasley BHJ 02, 10 July 1672.

relation to its own estates.³⁸ One of the duties of the clerk comptroller of the Bridge House was to prepare a list of leases that were within three years of expiry, and to ‘give notice to the several tenants of the time when they may apply for new leases’.³⁹ The documents from across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are littered with lists noting the expiry dates of leases.⁴⁰ Until the turn of the century these leases were not widely advertised. Prior to 1678 when the committee ordered that published notices of leases within three years of expiry were to be pinned up at the Exchange and the Guildhall,⁴¹ it seems that the availability of the leases was not advertised to the general public.

All these factors clearly favoured the existing tenants as they effectively had first refusal on their leases. Clearly for those lessees on longer terms, such as the sixty-one year rebuilding lease, renewal was unlikely to have been a consideration. However, this policy of favouring existing lessees does give an indication of the BHLC’s conservative approach to leasing the estate.

Finally because of the dilapidated state of some of the properties when they came up for lease the BHLC had to prioritise the amount that potential lessees were willing to spend on repairs above any potential increases in rental charged. One of the problems the Bridge House and other landlords such as the Corporation, the Haberdashers’ livery company, St Bart’s and St Thomas’ hospitals all had in common was their inability to keep a close eye on their housing stock in order to ensure that lessees undertook their obligations in relation to maintenance of the property.⁴² Consequently, as we have seen in chapter 4, when leases expired, particularly the long rebuilding leases, many of the properties were in poor repair and needed substantial investment from the new lessees. For example, in 1738 John Chandler saw off competition from an unusually high number of bidders (thirteen) for the leases to four tenements in Southwark. He offered a rent of

³⁸ Doolittle, I., ‘The London property market before and after the great fire’, *London Topographical Society newsletter*, vol.56 (2003), p.6.

³⁹ C CLRO, COL/OF/02 fol.008, Extracts from reports in relation to the office of Clerk-Comptroller of the Bridge House, 1755-1839. For example in 1678 a lessee was asked to give notice if he wanted to keep a lease on a warehouse or it would be put out to tender. BHJ 03, 16 March 1678.

⁴⁰ For example see: CLRO, COL/CCS/CO/06 fol.004 Comptroller and City Solicitor Bridge House Papers, 1603-1837; CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/03 fols.02–11, Bridge House Committee papers, 1666-1683.

⁴¹ BHJ 03, 5 June 1678.

⁴² Doolittle, ‘City of London’, p.107; Archer, *Haberdashers*, pp.110-115; Swann, ‘London estates’, p.23-4.

£31 p.a. and fine of £315: these were much lower offers than those of all but three of the bidders. However, he offered by far the highest amount for rebuilding the properties - £1650. It was this fact that made him successful in his bid.⁴³ Similarly in 1741 Jasper House was given a sixty-one year lease to several messuages and tenements in Bermondsey Street. He paid a £100 fine but was charged a peppercorn rent of a few shillings per house in return for spending £400 on rebuilding.⁴⁴ In 1751 Thomas Ham took a lease for a tenement in Newgate Street which was in such poor repair that he had to agree to pay £300 to rebuild the property. In return the BHLC gave him a sixty-one year lease with no fine and a peppercorn rent of just 40s p.a. Finally that same year John Suiter was given sixty-one year leases with no fines and just a £2 p.a. rental charge for two tenements in Tooley Street in return for spending £600 on their rebuilding.⁴⁵

So it is clear that the amount spent on rebuilding often influenced to whom the BHLC actually leased the properties. The importance of the Bridge House's inability to successfully monitor its housing stock cannot be underestimated, as it also meant that the Bridge House was unable to break the chain of long leases with low rents. If a lessee did not undertake maintenance the property would quickly deteriorate so that by the time the lease expired the BHLC had little option but to offer sixty-one year rebuilding leases, again with small rents and often with small fines. A report in 1738 indicates the problems that the BHLC had in this respect. In 1734 the BHLC leased some properties in Borough to tenants at reduced rents and twenty-one year leases on the agreement that the lessees would 'keep the premises in good repair . . . and clean and removing all filth and soil that might be noisome to the neighbourhood'.⁴⁶ Unfortunately for the Bridge House not only did the tenants neglect to pay their rents properly, and therefore had to be evicted, they also failed to keep their part of the bargain regarding the maintenance of the house and the neighbourhood. The report concluded that the houses were now 'in a ruinous condition and so much out of repair that they require to be new built and are of the opinion that they should be lett on a building lease for sixty one years'.⁴⁷ In other words

⁴³ BHJ 07, July 1738.

⁴⁴ COL/CHD/BH/01/61, Abstract of Bridgehouse leases granted before and since March 1730, 1730.

⁴⁵ COL/CHD/BH/01/61, Abstract of Bridgehouse leases granted before and since March 1730, 1730.

⁴⁶ BHJ 07, 3 May 1738.

⁴⁷ BHJ 07, 3 May 1738.

the houses had deteriorated so much that a sixty-one year rebuilding leases would now have to be offered.

So in terms of rental charged this was a conservative leasing policy engendered by two factors: firstly the need to have full occupancy of the Bridge House estate because the Bridge House simply did not have the resources or administrative structure to carry out construction or maintenance on its estate. This led to the granting of medium to long term leases and less emphasis on increasing rental charged. Secondly, it was difficult for the BHLC to break this pattern of long leases and low rental charged when they were unable to get existing lessees to undertake their duties in respect of maintaining the properties. This led to a cycle of long leases and suppressed rents. However this was not to say that it was a static leasing policy: the Bridge House did take steps to improve its leasing process. For example in 1696 the Court of Aldermen ordered that all leases were to be advertised in the *London Gazette* a month before the BHLC meeting in which they were available.⁴⁸ This marketed the leases to a much greater audience than had previously been the case.

The BHLC also became much more efficient in its reviewing of the properties before they came up for lease. The Bridge House archives are full of orders for views and valuations of properties and their reports. The comptroller was responsible for making the committee aware of any leases that were within several months of expiry and the committee would then order a sub-committee of its members (usually three to four men) to view each of the properties on the list. Some of these views could be incredibly detailed but at the minimum they contained details of the previous lease, such as terms, rental and fines, and the current occupier, but they also contained detailed information on the physical state of the property. Before each session of the BHLC when leases were to be offered these reports were read to the committee. This information then allowed the committee to establish some sort of up-to-date valuation of the lease and drive a harder bargain with the bidders. Indeed in many cases the BHLC simply rejected all bids if they felt that the offers were below a suitable price as they did in large volumes in the mid 1710s.

⁴⁸ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.101/429 Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1696.

It is also clear that the BHLC and the Corporation understood the link between maintenance and leases and the problems that the longer leases caused in this regard. A 1694 audit notes such long leases should be ‘prevented in future’ because of the ‘great prejudice’ they caused to the City.⁴⁹ The BHLC members were regularly exhorted not to issue leases over twenty-one years unless strictly necessary, in particular this seems to have been intended to discourage the issuing of individually tailored leases of between twenty-one and sixty-one years.⁵⁰ Preambles to revised leases emphasised the fact that part of the requirements of being a lessee was to keep the property in a fit state of repair, and the BHLC was keen to point out the lessees’ obligations at every opportunity.⁵¹ However the fundamental problem still remained that the administrative structure of the Bridge House was unable to undertake the constant and regular reviews of its estate that would have been required to ensure that repairs were being undertaken by lessees and that they kept the properties in a good condition. Even if this sort of review could have been undertaken, the extent to which the Bridge House could actually have forced lessees into carrying out such repairs is debatable, given the expensive and time consuming legal process that would probably have been required. It is also clear that the improvements in leasing policy were not designed to increase the rental charged; rather their primary purpose was to increase the amount the BHLC charged for fines. So it was a series of factors relating to the administrative structure of the Bridge House that forced the BHLC to adopt this conservative leasing policy. Yet despite this the BHLC did a commendable job of increasing the rental charged on the estate year upon year. Figure 6.1 shows that London Bridge compares favourably with the corporations of Nottingham and Boston and with Rochester Bridge in terms of growth in rental charged from the late seventeenth century to the mid eighteenth, as growth of roughly 100% was achieved by all four organisations.

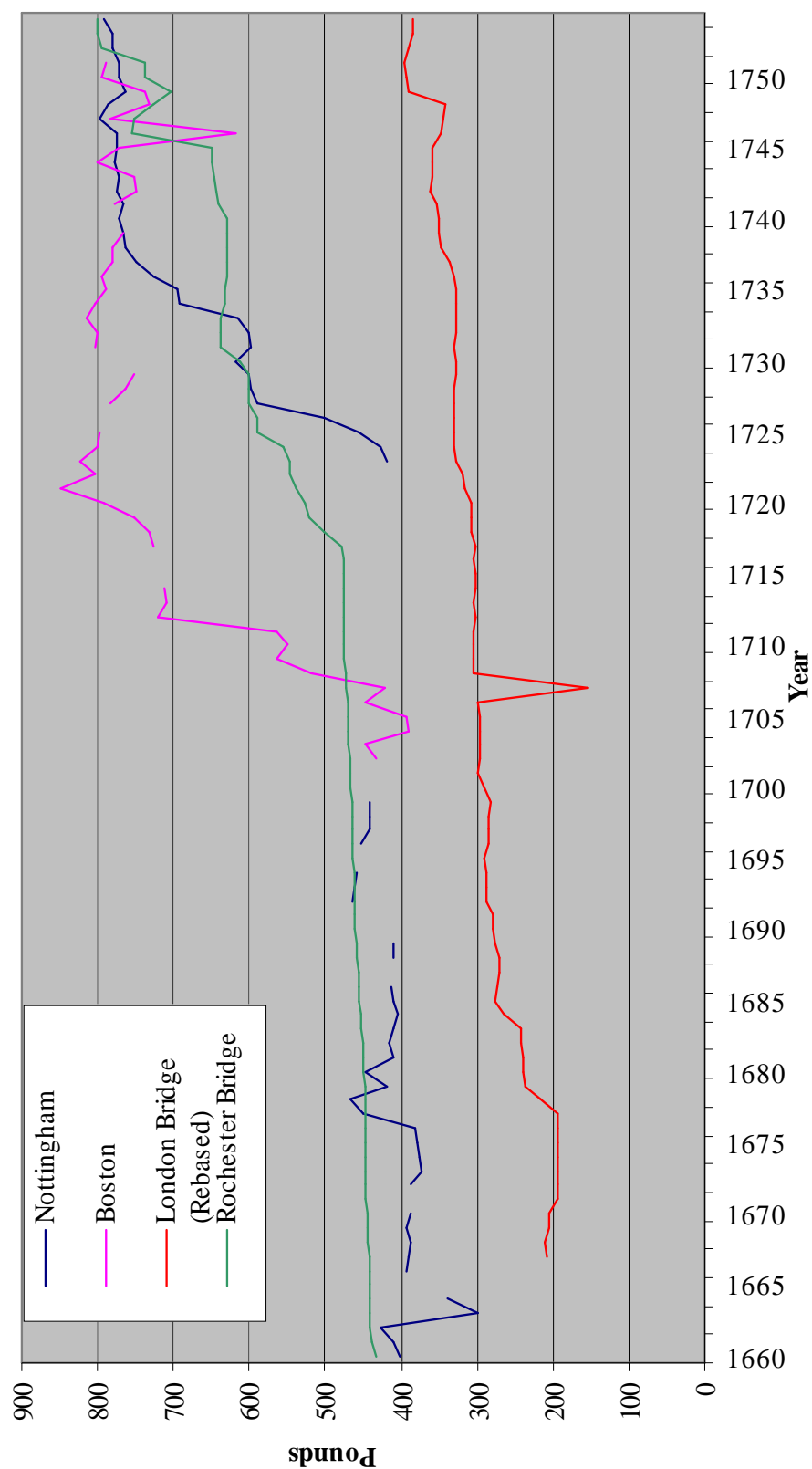
It is undeniable that the Bridge House was simply benefiting from the rising London property market. Fuelled by increasing demand for quality housing and the

⁴⁹ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.99/470-80., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1694.

⁵⁰ BHJ 04, 20 April 1698. BHJ 09, 4 June 1746.

⁵¹ BHJ 03, 11 March 1685, lease preamble. And for examples of the constant references to lessees obligations regarding the properties see: BHJ 07, 1 October 1740, 19 November 1740; CLA/007/EM/06/004, View Book of Bridge House properties, 1675-83; COL/CCS/CO/06/005, sub-committee reports on warehouses and other properties, 1736-40.

Figure 6.1
Comparison of rental charged: 1660-1754



Sources – CLA/007/FN/02/021-043 *Bridge House accounts 1661-1755*. Figures for Nottingham and Boston taken from: Dawson, 'Unreformed borough', pp.800-803 & pp.786-788. Figures for Rochester Bridge from: Yates and Gibson, *Traffic and Politics*, pp. 324-328.

appetite for urban land for investment purposes on the part of the professional and landed classes, the value of land in the capital rose appreciably over the first half of the century.⁵² But this increase in land values was highly variable across the metropolis with land in the developing west end, and to a lesser extent some areas in the City, seeing the greatest increases.⁵³ The Bridge House owned no land in the west end and none of the land it owned in the City was located in particularly desirable areas. Therefore the BHLC must take some credit in creating this increase in rental charge.

However the main difference this chart highlights is in how this growth occurred. Nottingham, Boston and Rochester Bridge all saw rapid and explosive growth in the first three decades of the eighteenth century, which accounted for most of their doubling of rental charged, whereas the Bridge House's increase is distinctive for its incremental and even path upwards. It was almost certainly the conservative leasing policy alongside the diligence and application of the BHLC that helped to insulate the Bridge House from the vagaries of the London property market and ensured this smooth and progressive increase in the rental charged across our period.⁵⁴ What is most interesting about this rental charge is that it exhibits the type of stability and predictability that would have made it suitable for use as security for credit.

Yet this graph presents only half the story. The emphasis by the BHLC on fines as the mechanism through which to factor in increases in the value of a lease is of profound importance to the Bridge House finances, and will be the focus of analysis later in the chapter, but the reliance on fines also hints at one of the main problems that dogged the Bridge House throughout our period in relation to its revenues, and that had nothing to do with rental *charged* but rather the rental *collected*. Fines were preferred by landlords not only because they effectively front loaded the increase in the value of a lease rather than spreading it out over the length of the contract but they were also easy to collect. The fine was paid upon the sealing of the lease, in other words, the lessee actually had to turn up and pay the fine in full before the lease was sealed. If he or she did not do so the Bridge

⁵² Mckellar, *Modern London*, chapter 2; Grassby, R., *The business community of seventeenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1995), p.383-4.

⁵³ Stone, L., 'The residential development of the west end of London in the seventeenth century' in Malament, B.C., (ed.), *After the reformation: essays in honour of J.H. Hexter* (Manchester, 1980), p.186-7.

⁵⁴ For the fluctuations in the property market see: Shepherd, F., Belcher, V., and Cottrell, P., 'The Middlesex and Yorkshire deeds registries and the study of building fluctuations', *London Journal*, 5 (1979), pp.179-187.

House simply put the lease back on the market. Collecting rents on the other hand was a completely different matter.

Rental collected and arrears

Whereas the BHLC was responsible for leasing the Bridge House estate the historical development of the Bridge House failed to establish a defined mechanism through which these rents were to be actually collected or indeed to allocate responsibility to anyone to do so. It seems that in the seventeenth century the Bridge House experimented with having an officer, that was to all intents and purposes, a rent farmer, but this had disastrous results.

The place of renter was sold by the Court and he acted effectively as a sub contractor responsible for collecting rents.⁵⁵ Under the inherently obscure charge and discharge system of accounting that the Bridge House employed, the renter was charged with the money that he was owed in rent both for that year and for the arrears of rent, and this total was entered into the account book. The amount that was charged to the renter was understandably increasing from 1667 onwards (from £2085 in 1667 to £3370 just 4 years later in 1670⁵⁶) as he was clearly struggling to collect income in this post Fire period and the rental arrears were running out of control. Yet under the charge and discharge system this was not an obvious issue because these arrears were being charged to someone, and as long as someone had responsibility for the outstanding sums it was therefore accounted for and not considered a debt. To put it in the terminology of the system this was not a sum at ‘the foot of the account’. The renter’s charge of £3370 in 1670 is a phenomenal amount considering that the whole year’s rental charge was £2051. Clearly, as the Court of Aldermen noted, the ‘Renter of the Bridge House is much in arrears’⁵⁷. He was ordered to pay £250 to the Bridge Masters immediately and the BHLC was ordered to investigate the full extent of the problem so that, in the words of the Court

⁵⁵ Dawson provides a detailed description of the post of renter in relation to York: Dawson, ‘Unreformed borough’, pp.827-840.

⁵⁶ In 1667 his arrears stood at £2085 ; for 1668, £2092 ; 1669, £3015 ; 1670, £3370 and 1671, £3063. CLA/007/FN/02/022-023, Bridge House Account Books, 1666-1674.

⁵⁷ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.76/156, Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1670.

‘the truth of all may appeare’.⁵⁸ In fact it emerged that so inefficient had the previous renters been in fulfilling their duty that when the incumbent died a few months later in early 1671 it was decided that the position should be abolished, as the aldermen felt that ‘considering the great debt made to the Bridge House by the late dec’ed and the like damage sustayned by severall of his predecessors . . . this Court doth adjudge and declare the said place to bee useless burthousome and prejudiciall to the Citty.’⁵⁹

However, it is interesting to note that despite the fact that there was obviously something systematically wrong with the Bridge House administration for such arrears to accumulate, there was little that the BHLC or Court of Aldermen could or would do to address this problem. Their solution to both recovering the outstanding arrears and preventing them from accumulating again was rather crude and makeshift. The Masters and clerk were ordered to ‘give all the Bridge House tenants particular notice to pay their several rents unto Bridge Masters’ according to their leases, and if the tenants failed to do this the Masters and clerk were to ‘proceede against them accordingly as law shall direct’.⁶⁰ Despite these apparently proactive measures, it seems that this was not enforced as there is no evidence that legal action was undertaken during this period. Arrears continued to accumulate seemingly unabated, and the issue of arrears crops up regularly in the sources from this period onwards. Various efforts were made, however, to ‘examine’ or ‘find out’ the leases where monies were due in order to get some sense of the state of these arrears: the 1674 and 1676 audits both suggested that they be closely examined to ascertain which ‘if any of them can be recovered’ and that ‘some effective action be taken to get them in’. But inertia reigned and no measures were actually taken to reclaim these monies.⁶¹ Indeed when the 1676 audit committee was ordered by the Court to follow up on their recommendations and investigate the possibility of recovering some of the arrears, their report concluded that the vast majority of them were ‘desperate

⁵⁸ BHJ 02, 14 December 1670. Quote from: CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.76/156, Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1670.

⁵⁹ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.76/272, Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1670. The place of renter was never replaced, and instead an equally inefficient system of lessees bringing their rent four times a year to the Bridge House for payment was instigated.

⁶⁰ BHJ 02, 8 November 1671.

⁶¹ Quote from BHJ 02, 21 May 1674. For the 1676 audit see: COL/CC/BHC/05/001, Order Book, containing orders of the Common Council and Bridge House Committee on divers matters relating to the Bridge & Bridge Property 1611-1746. For other examples of arrears being mentioned see: CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/03 fol.02., Bridge House Committee papers, 1666-1683.

debts . . . most of which are irrecoverable and wholly lost'.⁶² So in the next year's accounts 1677-8 a sum of £2309 was entered as 'desperate debts' and continued to be included in the year's charge until 1684, by which time it had grown to over £3300. The logical step was then taken and they were finally expunged from the account books.⁶³

What is interesting is that the renters' inefficiency only came to light due to the Corporation's close interrogation of the Bridge House account books in 1670, and this close scrutiny was undertaken in response to the Corporation's desire to ensure that the several thousand pounds it had lent the Bridge House in the post Fire period was paid back.⁶⁴ As we shall see this approach to rental collection and arrears continued, it was only at moments of financial stress that the BHLC, the Court of Aldermen, or latterly the Common Council, actually made concerted efforts to increase rental collection. Yet at no point was the ultimate remedy of vesting someone with the responsibility for the systematic collection of rents ever considered.

After the abolition of the post of renter in 1670 the Bridge House fell back on relying on personal obligation on the part of the lessee to pay rents. As a report to the Court of Aldermen in 1670 noted, tenants were 'bound by lease' to pay their rents 'duly to the Bridge Masters', and lessees were expected to pay their rent quarterly at the Bridge House which was open every Saturday for that purpose.⁶⁵ The payments were then meticulously recorded in various rough books and eventually logged in the yearly account books.⁶⁶ Effectively the whole system of rental collection was based on a personal obligation on the part of the lessee to literally turn up and pay the monies due, and it should come as no surprise that, as Figure 6.2 illustrates, many lessees clearly did not pay their rents promptly or fully. As we can see, the amount of money that the Bridge House actually *collected* was regularly 10% or more below the actual yearly rental charge.

The record keeping of the Bridge House was impeccable, the account books contain in clear accessible form the income received from the year's rent and the yearly

⁶² CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.84/133., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1678.

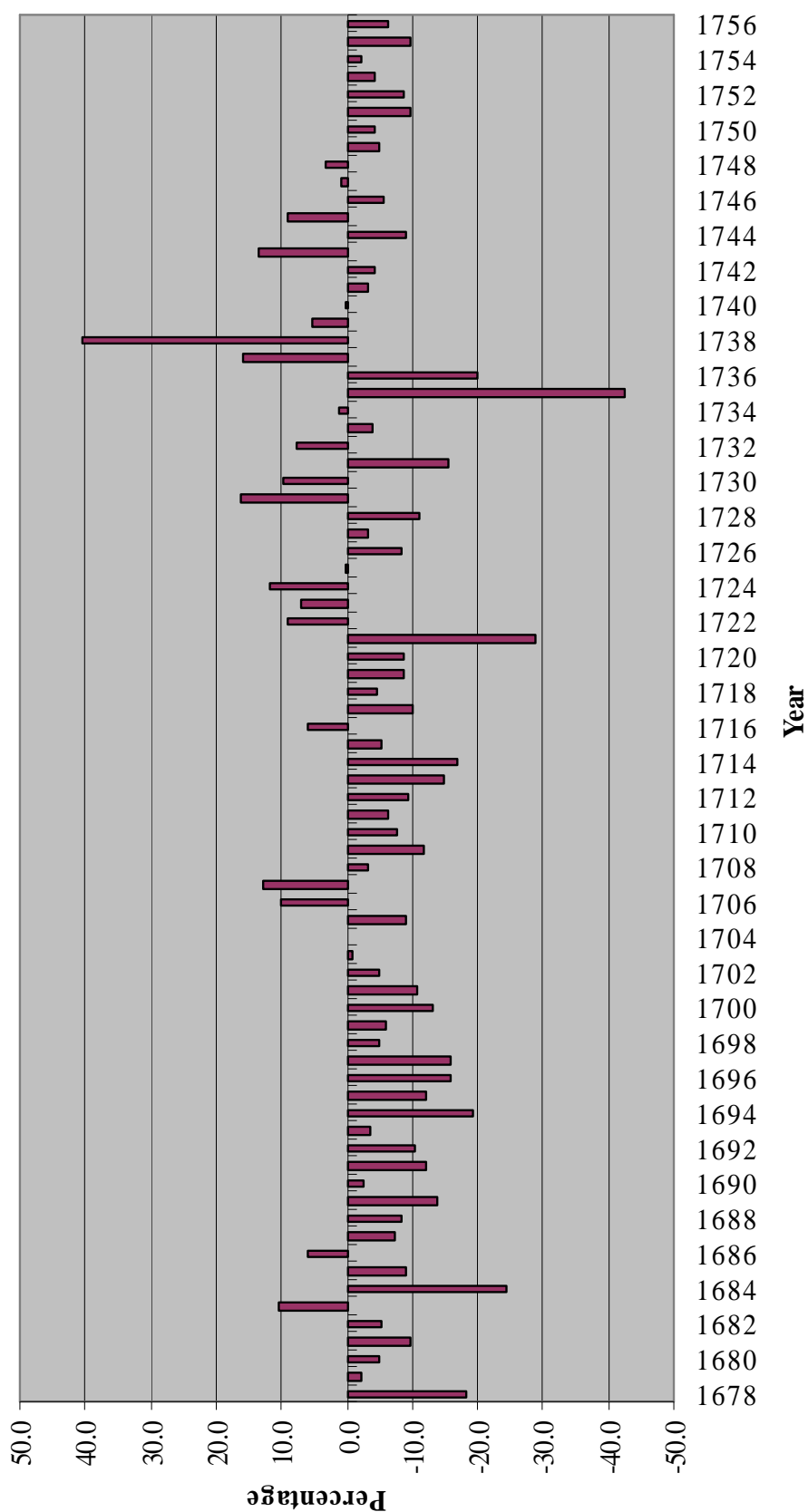
⁶³ CLA/007/FN/02/029, Bridge House Account Book. 1682-1686.

⁶⁴ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.71/172; fol.72/9,98,118: fol. 73/89., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1666-68. A total of approximately £1700 was lent to the Bridge House.

⁶⁵ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.76/272., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1670.

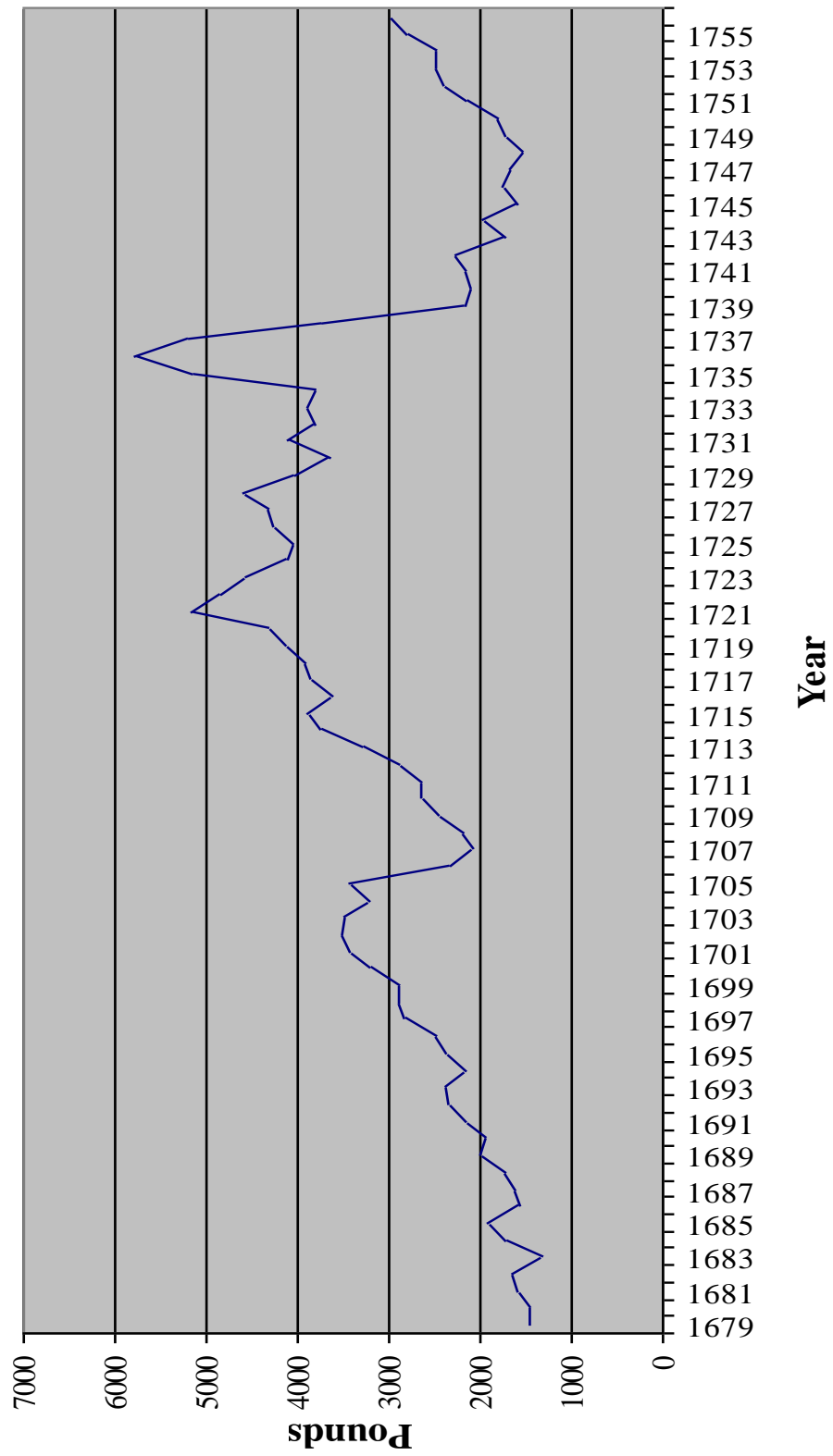
⁶⁶ CLRO, CLA/007/FN/09/001-002, Collectors' rough books, 1710-1715.

Figure 6.2
Percentage of Bridge House rental uncollected: 1678-1756



Source – CLA/007/FN/02/027-043 *Bridge House accounts 1678-1755*

Figure 6.3
Bridge House rent arrears: 1679-1756



Source – CLA/007/FN/02/027-043 *Bridge House accounts 1678-1755*

charge. They fully illustrate the differential between the rental charge and rental collection and this would have been abundantly clear to the audit committees that signed off the accounts on a yearly basis. Yet very little was done over the period to try and improve yearly rental collection, and those measures that were undertaken were largely cosmetic. For example, every so often the Court of Aldermen or BHLC would remind tenants of their obligation to pay their rents quarterly according to their leases.⁶⁷

In 1691 The Court of Aldermen ordered that a list of the ‘exact schedule of the Bridge House rents’ should be given to the aldermen of each ward, presumably so that they would remind the lessees in their ward of their obligation to pay, and a report in 1730 suggested adopting a yearly payment for rents in place of a system of quarterly payments.⁶⁸ But the basic system of rental payment relying on the obligation of the lessee was never questioned. Of course this persistent under-collection of rental led again to spiralling arrears.

But as both Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3 illustrate there were occasional abrupt declines in arrears, caused by years when rental collection far exceeded the rental charge. As with the events of 1670 these declines in arrears were in response to specific financial shocks and were instigated either by the Court of Aldermen or the BHLC. They also resulted in forlorn efforts to devise slightly more permanent remedies to solve this problem of constantly spiralling arrears. These efforts were makeshift, ultimately unsustainable and doomed to failure because the Bridge House system of administration had been constructed from the outset without any consideration as to who or what within the organisation was responsible for the collection of rents. No amount of tinkering at the edges could remedy this fundamental problem.

As we can see from Figures 6.2 and 6.3 there were major declines in arrears in 1705-7 and 1736-9, with smaller declines in the period after 1721 and 1728, and corresponding increases in rental collection. Each of these incidences can be related to specific crises in the Bridge House finances. In 1705 the Bridge Masters appeared before the Court of Aldermen claiming that ‘the Bridge was extreamly out of repair And that they were out of cash and could not make such repairs good without supply of

⁶⁷ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.88/149., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1682.

⁶⁸ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.96/334., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1691; BHJ 06, 15 April 1730.

considerable sum of money out of the Citys cash'.⁶⁹ In response to this request the Court of Aldermen ordered that the Masters 'do lay a fair and distinct account before this court upon this day next what cash they have by them what arrears of rent are and will be due to them at Michaelmas next.'⁷⁰ The Bridge was in such a state of repairs that the chamberlain was ordered to advance the Bridge Masters £200 immediately out of the chamber.⁷¹ Several more payments were made over the next few years to ensure the Bridge Masters had sufficient funds to continue these repairs, but the Court of Aldermen, clearly perturbed by the fact that the Bridge House was having to resort to such expedients, ordered that measures be taken to collect the Bridge House arrears.⁷² This was clearly successful as for 1706 and 1707 rental collected far exceeded the yearly rental charged, yet a significant sum of over £800 worth of arrears was also written off.

What is also key here is that the Court of Aldermen, clearly keen to ensure such a situation where the Bridge House had to approach the chamber for cash did not arise again, and 'being apprehensive that there are great arrears of rent standing out and in the tenants hands' ordered the BHLC to 'inspect the rental and examine what sums are so in arrears and by whom' and to report their findings to the Court.⁷³ The report notes that most of the remaining arrears were fairly old and the Court ordered that the Bridge Masters and comptroller produce a report suggesting how these arrears could be recovered.⁷⁴ The court also ordered the Masters themselves to 'to give his attendance at certain times for the receipt of those arrears and to cause publick notice thereof to be given to the said tenants, so that the said arrears may be speedily gotten in or the tenets prosecuted at law'.⁷⁵ In other words the Court wanted pro-active measures to be taken regarding arrears to prevent the Bridge House from resorting to chamber funds in the future. However despite these orders no action was actually taken. No report was made by the Bridge Masters and comptroller, there are no records of tenants being given orders

⁶⁹ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.110/193., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1705.

⁷⁰ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.110/193., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1705.

⁷¹ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.110/208., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1705.

⁷² CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.111/96, 185., fol.113/26., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1705-1708; CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/03 fol.04., Bridge House Committee papers, 1708.

⁷³ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.113/27., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1708.

⁷⁴ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.113/229., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1708.

⁷⁵ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.113/27., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1708.

to pay arrears or being prosecuted, and from 1708 onwards arrears began to increase relentlessly.

The steep decline in arrears between 1728 and 1730 similarly was related to the urgent rebuilding of the Bridge House gate in 1728 at the cost of £1000.⁷⁶ The chamber had to lend the Bridge House the cash and in order to repay this money the BHLC undertook an aggressive campaign of arrears collection, including legal action and threats of ejection.⁷⁷ Again, the Court of Aldermen ordered that a report be made to offer some suggestions as to how the Bridge House revenues could be improved and such a situation could be prevented in the future.⁷⁸ A rather tame report was delivered in 1730, but the suggestions were mainly cosmetic, and as Figure 6.3 illustrates by the mid decade arrears were on the rise again.⁷⁹ In particular there was an explosive growth in 1735, from £3810 in 1734 to £5160 in 1735, and this was caused by a collapse in the rental collected for that year which dropped from £3320 in 1734 to £1890 in 1735.⁸⁰

The audit committee who audited the 1735 account books in April of 1736 was clearly shocked by this collapse in rental payments and consequent explosion of arrears. It ordered a series of immediate measures, including adverts placed in newspapers threatening those behind on their payments with legal action, to increase income and curb the spiralling arrears.⁸¹ The BHLC was stung into action and launched a protracted campaign against these debts which finally began to see significant results in 1737-8. This campaign involved a comprehensive analysis of the Bridge House account books and financial records to identify those in arrears, threats of legal action and ejection and orders for tenants to attend the BHLC to explain why they had fallen behind in their payments.⁸²

The analysis of the accounts really illustrated the fundamental problems caused by the Bridge House system of rental collection. A sub-committee report into these debts discovered that many of the lessees in arrears were in fact 'dead long ago'. In many other

⁷⁶ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.57/176., Court of Common Council journals, 1728.

⁷⁷ BHJ 06, 8 May 1728, 4 September 1728; CLRO, COL/CCS/CO/06 fol.003., Comptroller and City Solicitor Bridge House Papers contains lists of tenants in arrears for 1729 and 1733.

⁷⁸ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.133/368., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1728.

⁷⁹ BHJ 06, 15 April 1730.

⁸⁰ The reason for this almost halving in the rental collected has remained a mystery throughout this research

⁸¹ BHJ 07, 6 October 1736, 1 December 1736.

⁸² BHJ 07, 5 October 1737; 2 November 1737; 1 March 1738; 3 December 1738.

cases lessees had simply absconded, or were ‘very poor and a beggar’. Some of these sums had begun to accumulate as long ago as 1714, with the largest amount owed £425 for arrears for a plot in Stratford dating back to 1724. The report concluded that the only option was that these ‘desperate arrears should be reported to the Court of Common Council to the end the same may be remitted and struck out of the Bridge House accounts.’⁸³ In other words they were to be written off, and that is indeed what happened, to the tune of over £1700 in 1739.⁸⁴ Yet despite this heavy loss the measures implemented to prevent such a crisis occurring again consisted of a change from a weekly to a yearly system of renting the Bridge House granaries, and an order that all receipts issued to lessees were to have a reminder to pay on time printed at the bottom of them.⁸⁵

In fact writing off arrears was a fairly common occurrence for the Bridge House and a course of action that other large institutional landlords such as Rochester Bridge and the corporations of Nottingham, Boston and York were familiar with.⁸⁶ Large sums were written off in 1694, 1706 and again in 1724. In total over our period the Bridge House wrote off a total of £9171 in arrears. What is interesting about these debts is that the Bridge House documents are littered with orders to collect arrears, threats to pursue legal proceedings against those who owe quit rents, lists of unpaid rents, and Letters of Attorney empowering the Bridge Masters or clerk to sue those in arrears. Virtually every year from 1666-1756 has some form of initiative to increase the collection of these outstanding amounts. This fixation with arrears was mirrored in the Corporation itself and other landed organisations around the country, yet it is clear that it was only at moments of financial stress as identified above that the arrears actually begin to decline when the Court of Aldermen or BHLC became actively engaged in supervising their collection.⁸⁷

⁸³ CLRO, COL/CCS/CO/06 fol.005., Comptroller and City Solicitor Bridge House Papers, 1603-1837, February 1738.

⁸⁴ CLRO, CLA/007/FN/02/042, Bridge Master’s annual accounts and rentals, 1739.

⁸⁵ BHJ 07, 6 October 1736; CLRO, COL/CCS/CO/06 fol.005, Comptroller and City Solicitor Bridge House Papers, 1736; BHJ 07, 5 October 1737.

⁸⁶ Dawson, ‘Unreformed borough’, pp.204-205; Yates, N., and Gibson, J., (eds.), *Traffic and politics: The construction and management of Rochester Bridge, AD 43-1993* (Rochester, 1994), p.179.

⁸⁷ Both Trueman and Dawson have noted a similar obsession with arrears on part of the governors of Guy’s hospital, and other Corporations, and a similar reaction to them in moments of financial stress. Trueman, B.E.S., ‘The management of the estates of Guy’s Hospital, 1726-1900’ (unpublished University of Nottingham Ph.D thesis, 1975), p.319; Dawson, ‘Unreformed Borough’, pp.190-207. The Corporation also tried to reduce arrears to solve another of its financial crises in the 1710s: Doolittle, ‘City of London’, p.108.

The majority of orders to reduce arrears were simply issued as a matter of course, and because of the lack of financial accountability there was no one within the Bridge House responsible for actually driving these measures through. The lists of arrears are a case in point. They are simply an exercise in futility, mapping, as they do, the arrears without doing anything to actually ensure their collection.

The Bridge House's inability to collect rents led to chronic underperformance in yearly rental collection, which in turn led to spiralling arrears. Every so often in response to specific stimuli the BHLC, Common Council or Court of Aldermen would instigate a drive to recoup these arrears and dramatic improvements could be achieved. However, efforts to tighten up rental collection in the long term were simply not forthcoming and the result was a cyclical development of arrears, which contributed significantly to the erratic nature of rental income. However the inability of the Bridge House to consistently collect rents compounded this problem in another way – it made the Bridge House reliant to an ever greater degree on fines.

Fines

This chapter has already highlighted the centrality of these payments to the financial health of the Bridge House, and as with many other landlords these payments comprised a significant percentage of the estate's income. Over the course of the forty-four years between 1712 and 1756, fines provided a total of £37,322 or 19% of the Bridge House total income of £196,512 in the same period.⁸⁸

The Bridge House preferred to use fines to account for rises in the value of leases caused by increases in land values, for two reasons. Firstly they got the majority of the money for leases up front. Secondly and most importantly, given the problems that the Bridge House had in collecting rent, fines were much easier for small organisations such as the Bridge House to gather as they were one-off payments as opposed to yearly payments made over the course of a twenty-one or sixty-one year lease. Due to these benefits in terms of the collection of fines there are numerous examples in the Bridge

⁸⁸ Figures calculated from data contained within CLRO, CLA/007/FN/02/036–043, Bridge Master's annual accounts and rentals, 1709-1755.

House journals of the committee favouring a bidder offering the highest fine as opposed to the highest rent.⁸⁹ In 1678 such a fixation with fines nearly caused the Bridge House to commit a truly spectacular blunder with the Bridge House's single most important financial assets: the wheelage

The leasing of the right to collect wheelage was one of the most important sources of income for the Bridge House. The lease was renewable every twenty-one years and to give some indication of its importance to the Bridge House it was put out to tender many years before the old agreement elapsed to ensure that the wheelage was continuously leased. Income from this source came in two forms: a yearly rental and a fine. In 1678 it generated a £500 fine and £300pa. rent, in 1699 it was 500/400 in 1720, 1100/450 and in 1741 1010/300.⁹⁰ This was therefore a cash cow, producing high rental income plus hugely important fines, and, as Figure 6.4 illustrates, it was these fines that were responsible for spikes in the income of the Bridge House in the years 1678, 1699, 1718, and 1742.⁹¹

However as with all leases the job for both the lease holder and the bidder was to find the right balance between the rental charge, the fine and the length of the agreement, but the Bridge House often placed too much emphasis on the fine. In the negotiations over the wheelage in 1678 William Osbolston offered the BHLC a £500 fine and rental of £50 in return for an eye watering 120 year lease. The committee countered by offering terms of £1000 fine and £100 rent but still accepted the 120 year lease.

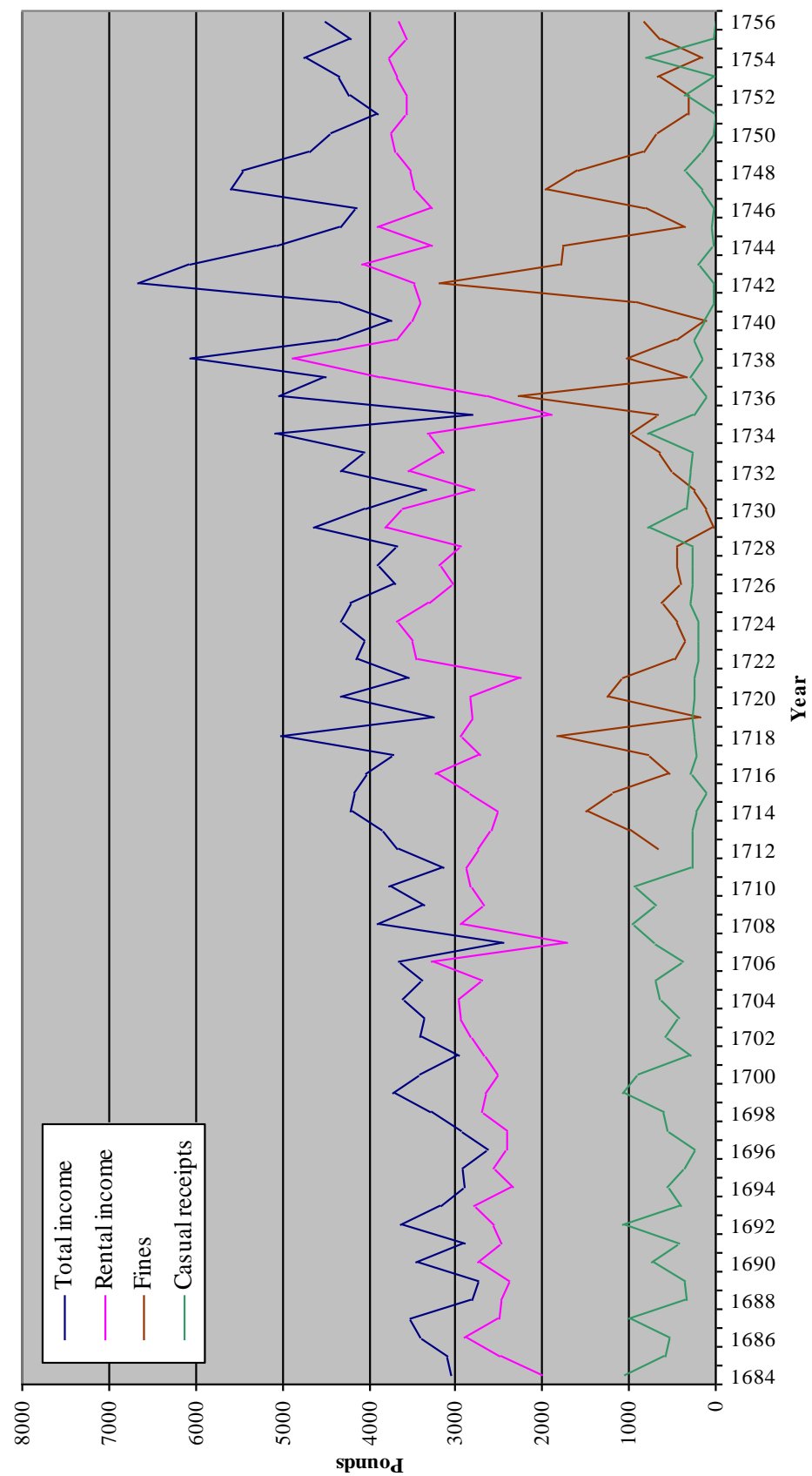
Luckily for the committee, and the future financial health of the Bridge, Osbolston either declined or the committee withdrew its offer and the lease was not signed. Had Osbolston taken the lease the Bridge House would have lost out on tens of thousands of pounds in rental and fines over the succeeding years. After several other offers from various suitors, the committee finally decided to advertise the wheelage by posting notices at the Exchange, the Guildhall, along London Bridge and at the Bridge

⁸⁹ For examples see: BHJ 07, 1 December 1736; BHJ 07, 2 July 1740.

⁹⁰ They were worth over their lifetime – 1678:£6800, 1699:£8900, 1720:£10,550, 1741:£7310. For 1678 and 1699 agreements see: CLRO, CLA/007/FN/02/033, Bridge Master's annual accounts and rentals. For 1718 and 1741 see BHJ 05, 6 November 1717; BHJ 07, 1 November 1738.

⁹¹ In 1678 and 1699 the fine for the wheelage was paid upon the commencement of the wheelage collection, in regards of the contract that began in 1720 the fine was actually paid upon the signing of the lease in 1718, whereas by the time of the 1741 agreement the lessee was paying the fine the year after the commencement of the contract.

Figure 6.4
Bridge House income: 1684-1756



Source - CLA/007/FN/02/029-043 *Bridge House accounts 1684-1755*

House yard, for a lease of twenty-one years, a £500 fine and a £300.p.a. rent, the terms that it was indeed eventually leased for.⁹² But this whole episode goes to show how the BHLC often prioritised the fine above the rent.

However as our period progressed the BHLC became more adept at exploiting the wheelage, and the by the time it was available for leasing again in 1717 a sub-committee was convened to investigate the wheelage collector's books, and aided with this knowledge, to place an accurate value on the lease.

Armed with such information the BHLC was able to drive a much harder bargain with the bidders.⁹³ This more precise knowledge of the value of elements of its estate becomes ever more evident in the BHLC's dealings over the course of our period. As previously mentioned the BHLC did a comprehensive job when it came to reviewing leases close to expiry in order to establish a suitable level of the fine on a lease, and these viewings became increasingly sophisticated. By the early part of the eighteenth century these 'views and valuations' as they were known, noted the level of the rent, the fine and term of the existing lease. They also noted the general state of the house and any particular repairs that would be necessary. This report would then be read before the sitting of the BHLC during which the lease was due to be bid for, and the result was often intense haggling over the level of the fine with any prospective lessee.⁹⁴ In other words it is clear that the BHLC was increasingly proficient in terms of placing itself in the best position to extract as much as was possible from the fines it charged on the leases for the estate.

However this reliance and focus on fines to account for the increases in the value of a lease had a detrimental side-effect, in that it compounded the problem of erratic and volatile income. The issue, as evidenced by the events discussed in chapters 3 and 4, was that leases tended to expire in bunches, this of course meant that they were re-leased in bunches, and the result of this was that fines also came in gluts. The graph below illustrates the feast and famine effect that this had on the income from fines, and how this was then reflected in the general income figures for the Bridge House by creating often huge variations from year-to-year. According to Doolittle, in the late seventeenth century

⁹² BHJ 02, 5 June 1678, 12 June 1678.

⁹³ BHJ 05, 6 November 1717.

⁹⁴ For examples see: BHJ 05, 3 September 1718; BHJ 06, 4 December 1723.

the Corporation itself tried to curtail the volatility that its reliance on fines caused to the City's own finances by making attempts to issue leases on shorter terms than twenty-one years, with high rents and low or no fines.⁹⁵ This experiment proved unattractive to lessees and was soon abandoned but the City floated a similar idea again in the early 1750s, again to no avail.⁹⁶ The fact that the City should be toying with such ideas is no surprise given its own reliance on fines, which made the Bridge House's dependency on income from this source look tame by comparison. Doolittle's figures for the City illustrate that its yearly income from fines regularly exceeded the yearly income from rents and on several occasions was double.⁹⁷ Dawson has also demonstrated that there was a conscious effort on the part of the corporations at Boston and Nottingham to move away from a dependence on fines in the early part of the eighteenth century, as in doing so this allowed these corporations to exert greater control over their estates and incomes. As Dawson sees it this certainly constituted a marked improvement for the administration of these bodies. The result of this course of action was that both Nottingham and Boston witnessed a doubling of rental incomes in the space of a few decades.⁹⁸

So the Corporation, and by extension the BHLC, was clearly fully aware of the undesirability of having so much of the financial health of both the City and the Bridge House tied up in fines. However there was one fundamental difference between the Bridge House and the Corporation itself which meant that this reliance on fines and the general volatility in income had much more profound implications for the Bridge House: and that was the issue of carrying or investing a surplus. Whereas the Corporation could, if needed, either save or invest the additional income generated by these gluts of fines, and most other organisations with landed estates were similarly able to invest a surplus, the Bridge House of course was unable to do the same.⁹⁹ It is true that the Bridge Master could carry a small surplus or deficit, as long as the accounts balanced at the end of their period in office, but there was simply no incentive for them to carry any sort of excess monies for long. Neither the Masters nor their securities would see any personal benefit

⁹⁵ Doolittle, 'City of London', pp.79-80.

⁹⁶ Doolittle, 'City of London', p.123.

⁹⁷ Doolittle, 'City of London', p.301-309.

⁹⁸ Dawson, 'Unreformed borough', pp.232-247. See figure 6.1.

⁹⁹ These investments could take the form of more land, annuities or in many cases South Sea stock, for example see: Yates and Gibson, *Traffic and politics*, pp.178-181; Ridley, J., *The carpenter's company* (London, 1995), pp.83-92; Trueman, 'Guy's Hospital estates', pp.52-82.

and they were not obliged to do so as part of their official duties.¹⁰⁰ In other words, and this is the crucial point, what came into the Bridge House in terms of income had to go back out, virtually in its entirety, the same year in the form of expenditure, and therefore it was *income* that dictated expenditure rather than the maintenance needs of the Bridge. As we shall see in the following section this unique characteristic of the Bridge House administration, alongside its erratic income and dependence on fines, engendered a rather perverse situation whereby the Bridge House was starved of funds for renovation projects one year but then was awash with cash the next.

Expenditure

The Bridge House's unique linkage between income and expenditure is vividly illustrated by Figure 6.5 below. When income rose due to factors such as gluts from fines, so expenditure diligently followed, as it did when income declined precipitously. As we can see in Figure 6.6 in comparison to Rochester Bridge and the Corporation itself, the expenditure for London Bridge rarely deviates more than 10% above or below income whereas for the other two organizations, deviations well in excess of 20% are common, and there are some extreme swings of over 60%, with the Corporation managing to spend 100% more than it received in 1709. Such swings should be expected given the unpredictable nature of the demands placed on institutional finances in this period, with everything from natural disaster to exceptional royal tax requests disrupting their financial equilibrium on a short term basis.¹⁰¹

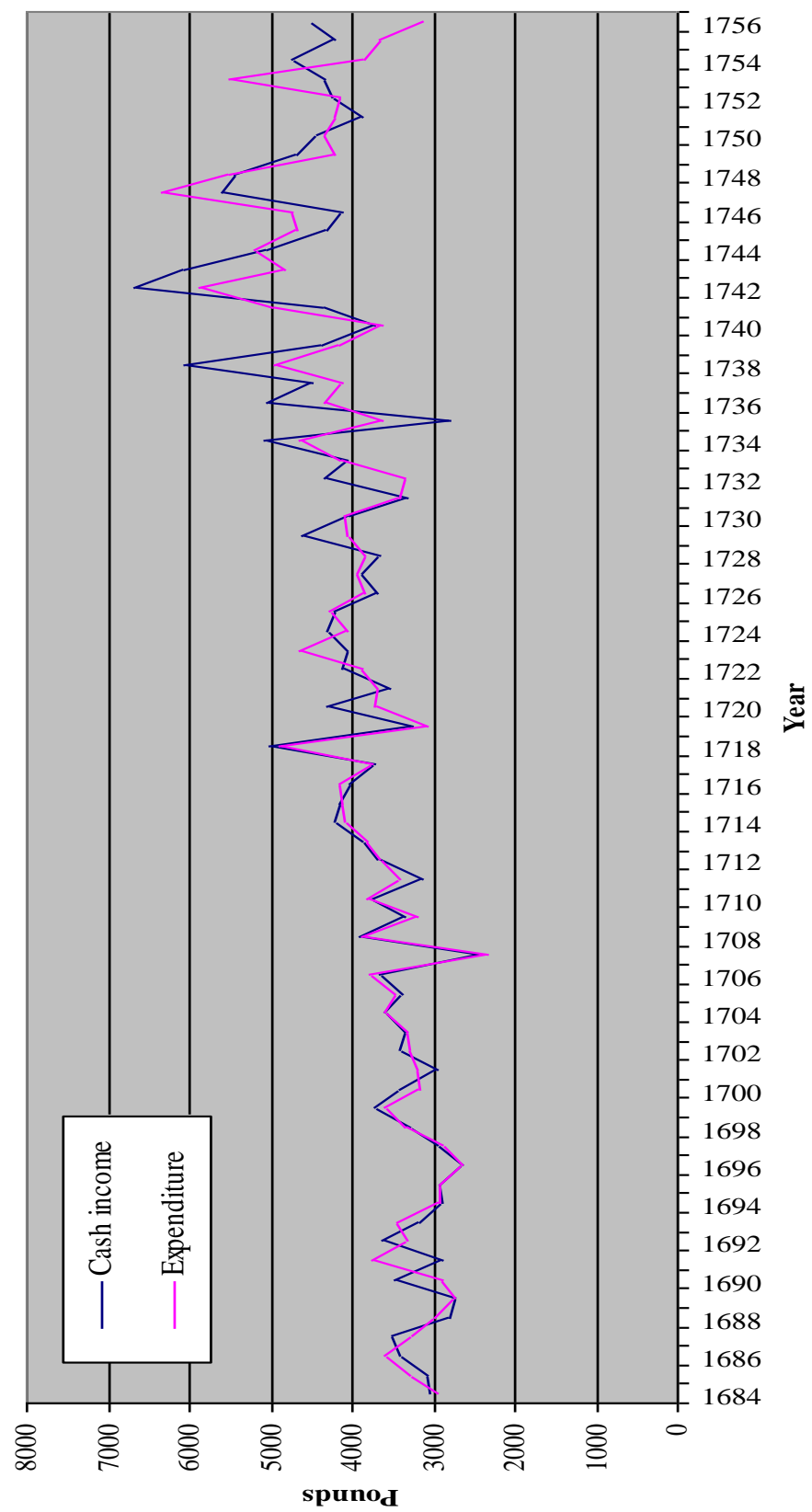
Indeed because of the nature of the structures they served, bridge trusts were particularly susceptible to extraordinary charges being made on their resources.¹⁰² Put simply urban authorities and landed institutions could and did find themselves in situations where income and expenditure, by necessity, would diverge markedly due to exceptional circumstances, yet for the most part the Bridge House figures remain within a few hundred pounds of each other. This close correlation begins to look even more

¹⁰⁰ In fact given that any such surplus would have had to have been kept in cash form at the Bridge House itself, and responsibility for this cash would have been solely the Bridge Masters this could in fact be considered a fairly powerful disincentive.

¹⁰¹ See various articles in Korner, M., *Destruction and reconstruction of towns*, vol.1 (Bern, 1999).

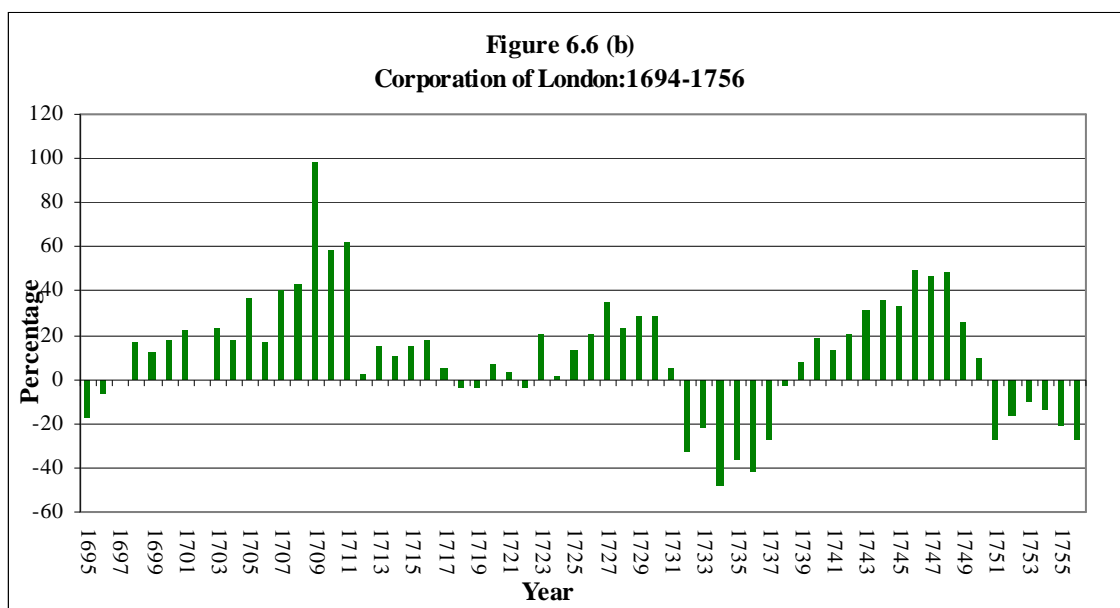
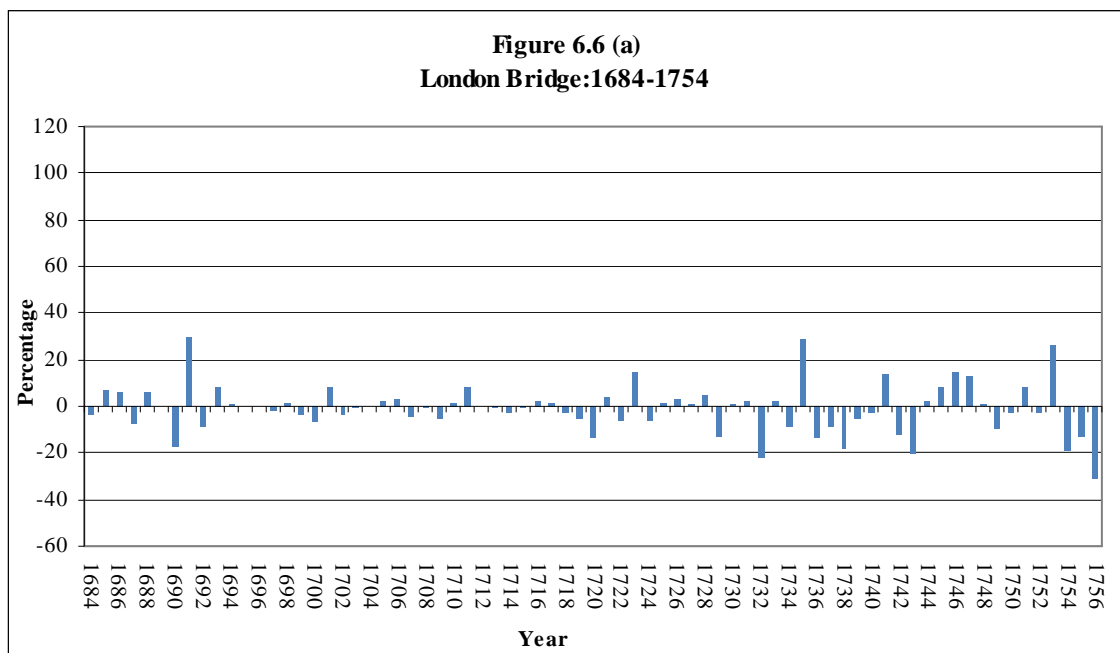
¹⁰² Harrison, D., *The bridges of medieval England* (Oxford, 2004), pp.180-182.

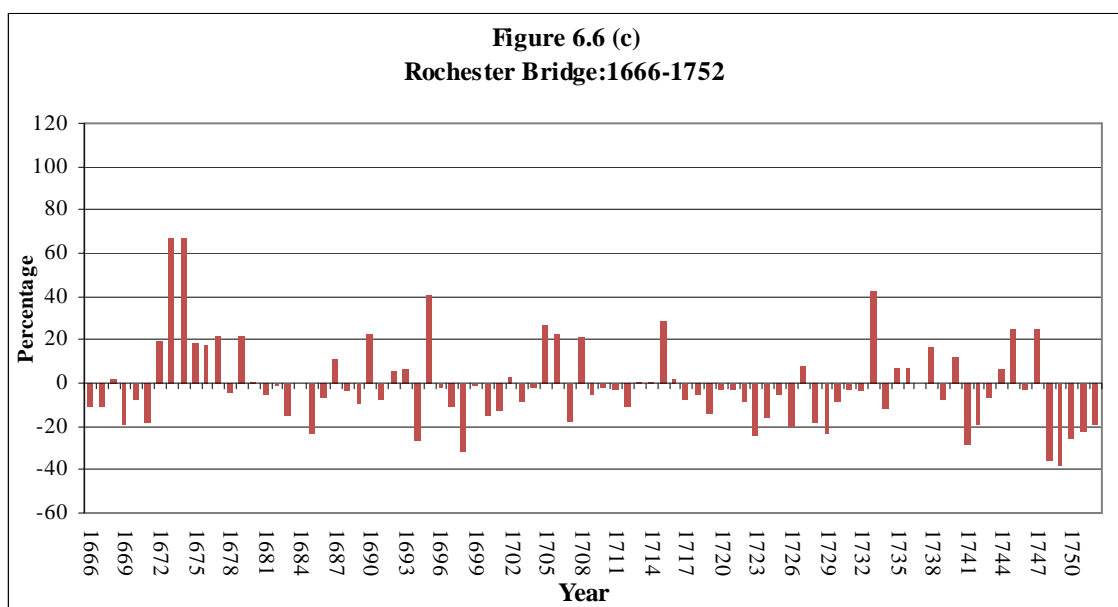
Figure 6.5
Bridge House Income and Expenditure: 1684-1756



Source - CLA/007/FN/02/029-043 *Bridge House accounts 1684-1755*

Figure 6.6:
Percentage of expenditure above or below income for the Bridge House, the Corporation of London, and Rochester Bridge.





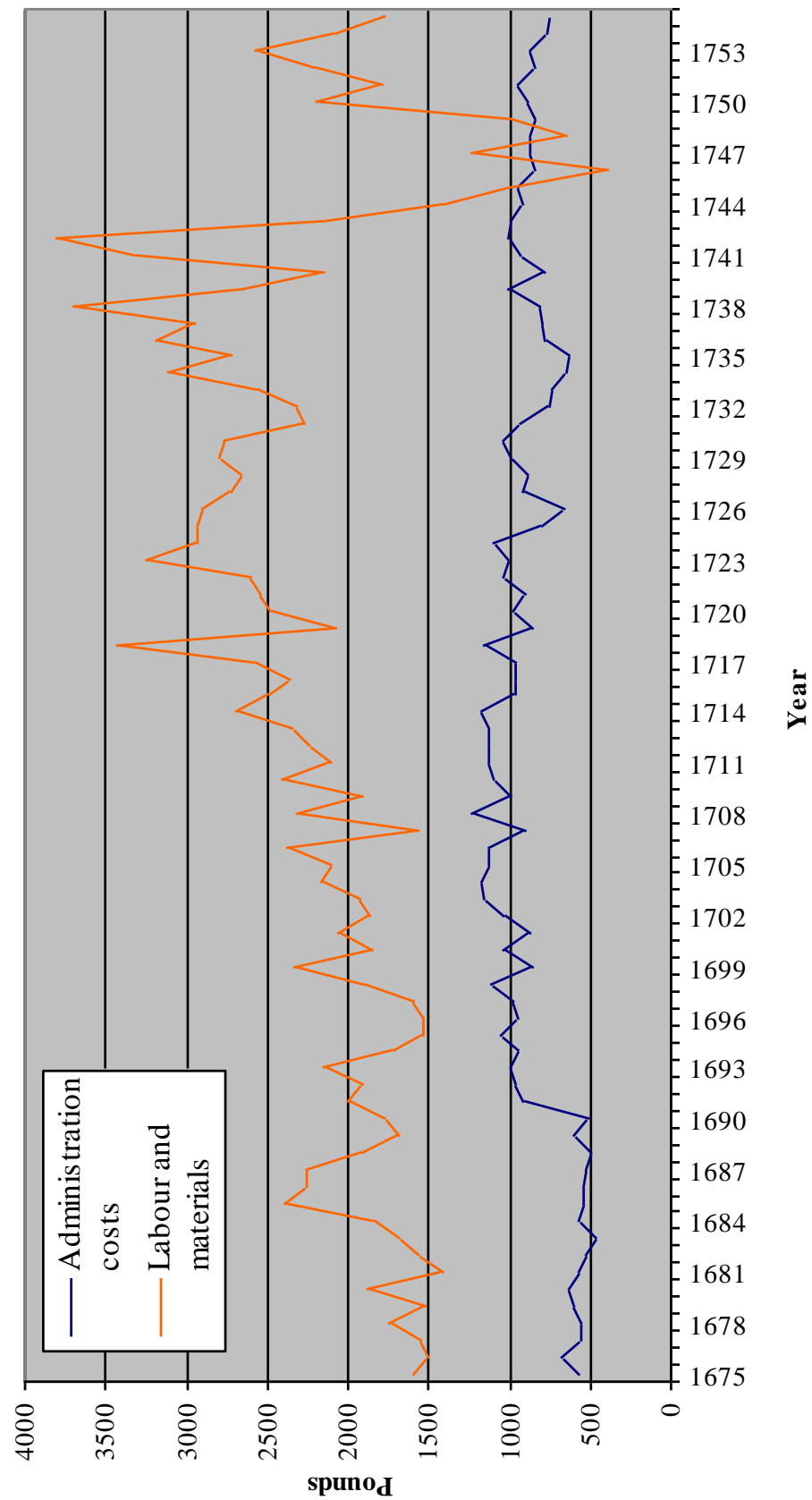
artificial and suspect when one begins to understand what was accounting for these swings in expenditure, what the money was being spent on, particularly in relation to the upsurges in expenditure that were linked to the rise in income due to fines.

As Figure 6.7 illustrates the Bridge House expenditure was basically split into two elements. The first of these was what we could term administrative costs which were comprised of taxes: mainly land tax, charity donations, ancient benefactions made to the various parishes in the vicinity of the Bridge, and finally the fees paid for professional services such as legal advice, clerks and the like. The main point to flag up about these costs was that they were fairly settled and a declining expense to the Bridge House. For example the Bridge House was liable for various guises of land tax from the early 1690s onwards, which were assessed on the rental value of the estate and equated to roughly a 20% charge on this valuation.¹⁰³ The intricacies of the land tax have been well documented elsewhere, but in relation to this research it is important to note a few points. The Land Tax Act of 1693 established a settled rate of 4s in the pound level of taxation on the rack rental value of the land.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Porter, R., *English society in the eighteenth century* (London, 1991), p.117.

¹⁰⁴ Ward, *English land tax*, pp.6-7; Spence, C., *London in the 1690s: a social atlas* (London, 2000), pp.10-14; Brooks, C., 'Public finance and political stability: the administration of the land tax, 1688-1720', *Historical Journal*, 17:2 (1974), pp.281-300.

Figure 6.7
Bridge House Expenditure:1675-1755



Source – CLA/007/FN/02/026-043 *Bridge House accounts 1675-1755*

The value of the land was established by a committee of localised assessors, which in the case of the City automatically included the mayor and the aldermen, and once this value had been established the landowner was expected to pay this from the rental received.¹⁰⁵ The taxation charged could and did fluctuate, particularly as the City struggled to match the onerous quota levelled on it by central government.¹⁰⁶

But right from the outset in the early 1690s the Bridge House began to insert a clause into its leases that stated that the *tenant* would be responsible for the payment of the tax.¹⁰⁷ As leases were renewed so the clause was inserted, and so progressively over the decades the responsibility for payment of the tax was transferred from the Bridge House to the tenants. In this way the tax burden on the Bridge House actually *declined* both literally and relatively over the period.

Wages covered salaried payments to the Masters, the comptroller, the clerks, and the staff at the Bridge House, including a porter, a chef, and various servants and labourers. There was also the workforce that saw to the maintenance of the Bridge, which included various “master” workmen of the Bridge House: the land carpenter and water carpenter, the bricklayer, a surveyor, the mason, the plasterer, a plumber, a painter, a glazier, and a smith. Actual salaries paid to these men comprised a nominal figure as this was not the manner in which most of the workforce, in particular the master workmen, made their money. As was the case with most other offices in the early modern period these posts of the master workmen were sold, in this case they were in the lord mayor’s gift. The prices paid for these offices were often substantial, for example in 1708 the post of Bridge House plasterer was bought for £107. Three years later the post of water carpenter sold for £450, and by 1725 the Bridge House mason was paying £546 for the privilege of office.¹⁰⁸ However, as with such ‘offices of profit’¹⁰⁹, the men who had purchased them ‘were likely to try to secure a worthwhile return on their investments.’¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Ward, *English land tax*, p.6.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.92-99.

¹⁰⁷ Swann, ‘London Estates’, p.34.

¹⁰⁸ CLRO, CLA/007/FN/10/009-010, Accounts of money received from sale and alienation of Bridge House places 1705-1710, 1713-1749. Thomson suggests prices ranging from £1250 for the clerk of the Bridge House, to £100 for the porters. However his erroneous valuation of £200 for the carpenter must place doubt on the accuracy of his figures. Thomson, R., *Chronicles of old London Bridge, by an antiquary* (London, 1827), p.350.

¹⁰⁹ George, D., *London life in the eighteenth century* (repr. London, 1951), p.9.

¹¹⁰ Doolittle, ‘City of London’, p.223.

In other words it was expected that the post holder would not be paid a salary but rather would make money through exploiting the post, as every oath for a Bridge House office noted the office holder was entitled to ‘enjoy the fees, profits and comoditys’ of the office.¹¹¹ The master workmen would therefore bill the Bridge House for the work they had undertaken, and of course the more work they had undertaken the higher their profits. The master workmen were also responsible for employing labourers on a day rate as and when they were required, and billing the Bridge House accordingly.¹¹²

The second category of expenses was the materials required for the maintenance of the Bridge, the wharfs, granaries, Bridge House and so on. Such works required substantial amounts of a wide variety of materials from timber and stone to lime and chalk. The Bridge House held a small store of materials but due to space constraints (the materials had to be stored at the Bridge House yard) in general material was ordered in when needed, so it was the responsibility of the master workmen to order in materials when they were required to conduct works on the Bridge or the estate. The bills for both wages and materials would then be submitted by the workmen to the Master, who would pay the costs from the cash stored at the Bridge House and the bills would be kept for the purposes of the yearly audit. Crucially the Masters, as two of only three individuals with keys for the Bridge House cash chests kept at the Bridge House in Tooley Street, would have had a fairly good idea at any one time of how much cash was available to spend on Bridge House maintenance. One further important point is that these materials and wages were covering maintenance only. The Bridge House often employed sub-contractors who supplied their own labour and materials to carry out renovation projects on the Bridge, such as in 1682-3, 1728 and 1733-4. The fees paid to these contractors were recorded separately in the account books and so the costs for wages and materials did not include the costs incurred by occasional major renovation projects. In any case major renovations such as these were often funded by loans from the Corporation’s chamber, not from

¹¹¹ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.85/242., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1679.

¹¹² CLRO, COL/CCS/CO/06 fol.004, Comptroller and City Solicitor Bridge House Papers. Included in this box are bundles of pocket sized books: ‘tide carpenters books’ 1754-64, ‘masons and carpenters day books’ 1750-65 ‘tide carpenters day books’ 1746-53, which log the numbers of men employed on a daily basis.

existing Bridge House revenues, and it is not at all clear from the documentation whether the majority of the loans were actually repaid.¹¹³

As Figure 6.7 illustrates what made up the bulk of the Bridge House outgoings, and what was accounting for the yearly surges in expenditure due to income from fines, was not the stable administration costs, but rather wages and materials. Of course to find substantial variations in expenditure on these items is not really a surprise given that by the very nature of Bridge maintenance expenditure on materials and labour would have fluctuated, and often to a considerable degree on a year-to-year basis.¹¹⁴ But the close correlation between income and expenditure displayed by the Bridge House, the inability of the organisation to carry or invest any surplus, and the fact that remuneration of the Bridge House workforce was derived from the system of billing suggests that another force was at work shaping the Bridge House balance sheet – corruption.

Corruption¹¹⁵

The documents relating to the Bridge House highlight the fact that its administration was blighted with corruption, and they strongly suggest that a great deal of the income received in years of plenty in fact ended up in the pockets of the various workmen of the Bridge House and suppliers of materials. Chapter 3 highlighted the abuses which had been uncovered in the late 1670s, and the issue of potentially

¹¹³ For 1682 see: CLRO, CLA/007/FN/02/029, Bridge Master's annual accounts and rentals; BHJ 03, (undated) February 1683; 6 June 1683. For 1728 see: CLRO, CLA/007/FN/02/040, Bridge Master's annual accounts and rentals; BHJ 06, 4 September 1728, 11 December 1728. For 1733-4 see: CLRO, CLA/007/FN/02/040-041, Bridge Master's annual accounts and rentals, 1661–1765.

¹¹⁴ For expenditure on London Bridge in the medieval period see: Harding, V., 'Supplying London Bridge, 1380-1540', *Franco British Studies*, vol. 20. (1995), pp.111-124. For figures illustrating these fluxuations in expenditure in relation to Rochester Bridge see: Yates and Gibson, *Traffic and politics*, pp.313-351.

¹¹⁵ It is acknowledged that the use of the term 'corruption' is highly problematic and we must be wary of judging our ancestors by the same standards we adhere too. Indeed many early modern practices that we would define as "corrupt" did not fall foul of the law and were considered perfectly acceptable perks of office. Yet this analysis sides with the argument articulated by Waquet that we cannot as historians 'pardon everything'. For the most part individuals had, and indeed have, a 'moral conscience enabling them to distinguish between good and bad, vice and virtue.' Many of the practices we shall be discussing were corrupt regardless of whatever standards they are judged against. Waquet, J-C., *Corruption: ethics and power in Florence, 1600-1770* (Oxford, 1991), p.16.

fraudulent practices raises its head intermittently over the next few decades.¹¹⁶ In 1708, one of the Bridge House labourers, Thomas Veasey, a man clearly unconcerned with such frivolities as popularity in the workplace, revealed the systematic abuses occurring at the Bridge House. It is likely that Veasey was motivated by revenge for an earlier altercation with his workmates,¹¹⁷ but nonetheless the detail of his testimony and the subsequent investigations by the Corporation attest to the veracity of his accusations.

The timing of Veasey's attack could not have been better, given that an increasingly alarmed Court of Aldermen had over the previous three years ordered the chamberlain to loosen the chamber's purse strings and lend the Bridge House a total of over £1000 on the basis of the Bridge Masters' repeated assertions 'that the Bridge was extremely out of repair, and that they were out of cash and could not make such repairs good without supply of considerable sum of money out of the City's cash'.¹¹⁸ It was against this backdrop of claims of penury by the Bridge Masters that Veasey launched his salvo in November of 1708. He lodged a complaint in writing to the BHLC regarding the behaviour of Jeremy Bower, the water carpenter, claiming that he attended the Bridge at 'tyde no more than nine times in eleven months', and that he 'spends more time in his own business' than the Bridge House business.¹¹⁹

But Veasey did not stop there, he proceeded to deliver an immensely comprehensive three page testimony to the Court of Aldermen which detailed numerous incidences of malpractice on the part of the Masters John Pitt, Bower and several other workmen. Both Pitt and Bower were accused of using Bridge House materials and workmen to renovate their personal abodes. Veasey claimed that Pitt had directed Fowler the bricklayer to 'set up a stove, and sett the chimney with gally tiles', Higgs the plasterer 'whitewashed and painted . . . the house from top to bottom', Russell the carpenter and three of his men installed new oak curbs, cellar doors and window shutters. A new sink

¹¹⁶ For example in 1690 the Bridge Masters were reprimanded for having work undertaken on their houses without prior permission from the Court of Aldermen, and employing excessive amounts of servants. CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.95/198., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1698.

¹¹⁷ BHJ 04, 1 December 1703, 12 December 1705.

¹¹⁸ Quote from CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.110/193., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1705. CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.110/208; fol.111/96,185; fol.113/26-27., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1705-08; BHJ 04, 20 October 1708.

¹¹⁹ BHJ 04, 3 November 1708. The water carpenter was supposed to visit the Bridge for at least one tide a day, in order to ensure work was being undertaken and inspect the Bridge structure itself.

and lea was installed by the Bridge House plumber, and all iron work was done by Bridge House smith. Of course all labour and material costs for these works had been charged to the Bridge House. Veasey reiterated the accusation that Bower had sold timber directly from the Bridge House yard, and claimed wages for workmen that did not exist. He also implicated other workmen, including William Wise the Shootsman who stole whole boats full of ropes, and Bart Sparock the Water carpenter, who stole various building materials from the Bridge House. Perhaps the most disturbing accusation was that Captain Wise the mason and his men had actually wilfully damaged the Bridge by pushing out a damaged stone on one of the arches which had caused ‘thirty to forty’ additional stones to fall. Wise and his men then spent the next two years repairing the damage at a cost of over £300 when the original damaged stone could have been repaired, according to Veasey, ‘both in very little time and at a small charge’.¹²⁰

A separate BHLC sub-committee investigated these claims relating to the activities of both the land and water carpenters and agreed that the water carpenter had been paying wages to non-existent labourers, that the land carpenter had, without authority from the BHLC, Court of Aldermen or comptroller,¹²¹ purchased excessive amounts of timber, most of which was extremely poor quality, and that ‘great imbezlements have been made of the Bridge House timber’.¹²² Of course each of these frauds individually were relatively small, a few tens of pounds here and there, maybe a few hundred pounds lost for the most flagrant abuses, but Veasey is just illuminating the tip of the iceberg, and his evidence suggests that such fraudulent activity was systemic, widespread and ingrained. Therefore if such practices were replicated across a fair percentage of the workforce on a regular basis it is not difficult to imagine the cost to the Bridge House running well into the hundreds of pounds if not thousands.

The spectre of corruption was again raised in the early 1730s with another financial scandal involving the Bridge Masters John Webb and John Lund. Between 1729 and 1732, when these two men occupied the posts of Masters, the accounts show a healthy surplus of nearly £1500. (Figure 6.5) Yet rather than benefit the Bridge House

¹²⁰ CLRO, CLA/007/AD/01/007, Information of Thomas Veasey, labourer, as to abuses at the Bridge House, 1709; CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.113/396., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1708.

¹²¹ One of the outcomes of the events of the late 1670s was that the workmen were obliged to obtain consent from one of these bodies before they purchased materials.

¹²² BHJ 04, 1 December 1708.

this surplus was employed by the Masters for personal gain. Webb, who took up the post in 1729, was clearly a dubious character from the start and struggled to find men to act as his securities, and it was after a routine inspection of the Bridge House account books in 1733 prior to the acceptance of one of Webb's securities, that the Court of Aldermen discovered that he was effectively personally carrying this surplus that had been built up over the previous few years. In the parlance of the account books this money had been 'discharged' personally to Webb. Of course the Bridge Masters were allowed to carry a small surplus or deficit one year to the next as long as the books balanced at the end of their term, but £1500 was clearly a sum that the Court felt was excessive. Webb was ordered to pay this money back immediately, but he responded by claiming that he was unable to as 'he and Mr Lund the other Bridge Master had employed about £600 part thereof in a stock in trade and had converted the remainder to his own private use'.¹²³ Lund of course protested his innocence, and neither man divulged exactly what they were doing with the cash but it is clear that they were making short term investments with the money and pocketing the profit.¹²⁴ Webb died 'insolvent' a year later, and given that he had still not repaid any of the missing cash the Corporation was forced to pursue his securities for payment. Ultimately the Bridge House had to accept a £300 loss when one of the securities could not be traced.¹²⁵

Finally the spotlight was again shone on the dubious practices of the Bridge House workmen in 1742-3. This is particularly interesting as 1742 witnessed the single biggest yearly income in our period, caused by an avalanche of fines. A BHLC sub-committee regarding the duties of the Bridge House water carpenter found many examples of what they felt was overcharging for materials and labour. They found evidence of double charging, and claiming wages for workmen he did not employ. These 'unreasonable' bills, totalling over £200 were paid without question by the Masters and so the committee broadened its remit to investigate the bills of the Bridge House more generally.¹²⁶ The committee uncovered a plethora of 'abuses and neglects' of the types

¹²³ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.137/367., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1732.

¹²⁴ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.137/256,323,367,386,394., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1732.

¹²⁵ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.137/414; fol.138/5,31,87,149,166,282,310,319., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1732-33.

¹²⁶ BHJ 08, 11 May 1743, 1 June 1743, 5 October 1743.

that had dogged the Bridge House for the decades previously.¹²⁷ The problem of ‘extravagant and fraudulent bills . . . for which there was neither any materials found nor any work done’¹²⁸ was clearly reaching endemic proportions. Bills for plastering work were massively inflated, as was a £44 bill for window cleaning at the Bridge Masters’ offices, not to mention a £174 plumber’s bill which had ‘several exorbitant and unjust charges’ in it. The committee also calculated that a smith’s bill for £278 was at least £55, nearly 25%, over and above the normal prices charged for such labour and materials.¹²⁹ The Bridge Masters Hyde and Piddington were accused of being ‘very negligent and remiss in their Duty as well as in the application and use of the materials, as in permitting the workmen to do as they like without any sort of check or inspections’.¹³⁰ In other words the Bridge Masters simply turned a blind eye to the activities occurring around them and were no doubt complicit in many of them.

How much of the extra cash the Bridge House received was lost to this sort of malpractice is impossible to quantify, but the point is that once the basic maintenance and running cost of the Bridge were met for that year, the surplus was literally superfluous, especially in years with gluts of income due to fines. It is very probable that some particularly diligent and far sighted Bridge Masters may have used this extra income to spend on additional remedial work on the Bridge, and the Masters could use any additional cash to stock up on small amounts of materials such as timber and stone. It is also true that some of the monies received in years of plenty must have been used to catch up on maintenance that the Bridge House had been unable to afford in years of dearth. Yet as the Bridge House had no facility to carry a surplus this seemed to lead to a perverse situation whereby the Bridge House often had to borrow cash from the Corporation to carry out emergency work on the Bridge, as was the case in 1706-1708, but also in 1674 and 1728.¹³¹ However in years of plenty the documents strongly suggest

¹²⁷ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.58/302., Court of Common Council journals, 1743.

¹²⁸ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.58/302., Court of Common Council journals, 1743.

¹²⁹ BHJ 08, 2 November 1743.

¹³⁰ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.58/302., Court of Common Council journals, 1743.

¹³¹ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.80/138., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1674; BHJ 06, 4 September 1728.

that a great deal of the overspill in income in fact ended up lining the pockets of the various workmen of the Bridge House and suppliers.

As we shall see in the following chapter by the second quarter of the century the Corporation was making efforts to try and curtail the worst of these excesses but the fundamental problem was to be found in the structure of the Bridge House administration. Its system of remuneration alongside the fact that the Bridge House could not invest or carry over a surplus was simply an open invitation for malpractice on the part of the Bridge House workforce and many seemed happy to oblige.

Conclusion

Over the course of this chapter we have sought to establish why the new revenue stream the improvement act created was required in order to facilitate borrowing and therefore fund the removal of the houses from the Bridge. The chapter has argued that the income of the Bridge House was highly erratic, and therefore not suitable to act as security for credit. In areas over which it could exert reasonably close control, such as leasing, and therefore the rents charged, the BHLC did a commendable job of engineering a stable and smoothly growing rental charge. However there was simply not the bureaucratic machinery to ensure the collection of these rents and so the rental income was both volatile and often went uncollected, which in turn led to spiralling arrears. This inability to collect rents also engendered a dependence on fines which in turn created even greater extremities in income. Finally the inability of any element of the Bridge House to carry a surplus meant that such extra monies rather than being saved for future eventualities or invested was simply spent and it seems often lost to corruption. In pursuing this argument this chapter has highlighted the fact that the way in which the Bridge House administration was structured and its systems for managing its financial affairs decisively shaped this volatility and the Bridge House's financial predicament.

Chapter VII

The Act in Context: The Corporation in transition

The ‘*Act to improve, widen and enlarge the Passage over and through London Bridge*’ spans ten pages and consists of forty five clauses, each detailing some aspect of how the project to remove the houses was to be undertaken. None of these powers were granted to any facet of the existing Bridge House administration, and instead they were vested directly in the Corporation or more correctly in ‘any Committee who shall be appointed from Time to Time by the said Mayor, Aldermen and Commoners of the City of London, in Common Council assembled for putting in Execution this Act’.¹ In other words these powers belonged solely to the London Bridge Improvement Commission, which was elected by the Common Council, and derived its authority not from prescription but directly from the Act. Only one short clause in the Act was devoted to stipulations regarding the creation of this body, and indeed it seems that the clause was deliberately vague so that the exact structure and composition of the commission could be thrashed out by the gathered members of the Common Council after the Act had been passed.² This was exactly what happened in the first council meeting following the passage of the Act, when ‘after some debates thereupon’ a motion was made that the commission be comprised of twelve aldermen and twenty-four common councillors. The motion was passed by a vote of thirteen aldermen and one hundred commoners for, and four aldermen and fifty seven commoners against.³ The first meeting of the commission occurred on 6 June 1756 and the twenty-nine men who attended were soon busy establishing the rules and regulations of the forum, where it was to meet (the Guildhall

¹ 31 George II cap 40 (1756). *An act to improve, widen and enlarge the passage over and through London Bridge*.

² 31 George II cap 40 (1756). *An act to improve, widen and enlarge the passage over and through London Bridge*.

³ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.61/72., Court of Common Council journals, 1755.

every Friday), and the appointment of its own clerks and administrative staff that were to serve it in its daily business. A new layer of City bureaucracy had been born.⁴

The previous chapter has established that it was financial motives, in particular the Bridge House's inability to borrow or ensure a suitably stable income with which to borrow against, that drove the Corporation to apply for the Act. Yet it is surprising to note that the BHLC had absolutely no involvement in any elements of the implementation of the project to demolish the houses, which was undertaken wholly by the commission. Indeed this distinction between the two bodies extended to the fact that none of the BHLC men were included in the membership of the commission. The trust set up to maintain London Bridge was utterly frozen out of the supervision and administration of the most profound alterations to the structure since its original construction. Given that it was the improvement commission that was creating the funding for the project it is no surprise to see that it took the lead in the renovations of the Bridge but the comprehensive ostracism of the Bridge House is both jarring and unexpected.

Possible practical reasons for the Act

Yet the superseding and circumnavigation of existing power structures in such a way was a common reason for many corporations or those in opposition to corporate bodies to resort to improvement commissions in that these bodies were given jurisdiction over several elements of a municipality's often disparate administrative components. The best example of this of course are the paving commissions which cut across a web of localised and parochial power structures in order to transform the streetscape of many Georgian towns. In other words improvement commissions were a way of investing a single body with a set of uniquely comprehensive supra-administrative powers in order to carry out a specific improvement project.⁵ However, as we shall discover it is clear that none of the powers the Act vested in the commission could be considered supra-

⁴ CLRO, COL/CC/LBI/02 fol.01., London Bridge Improvement Committee minute books, 1756.

⁵ For paving commissions see Ogborn, M., *Spaces of modernity: London's geographies 1680-1780* (Guildford, 1998), chapter 3. For a detailed look at how they operated see: Sheppard, F., *Local government in St Marylebone, 1688-1835* (London, 1958), pp.72-93; Stovold, J., *Minute book of the pavement commissioners for Southampton 1770-1789* (Southampton, 1990).

administrative. They did not need to be as they covered areas of governance already under the auspices of a single body - the Bridge House, more specifically the BHLC. Similarly nor were they in any way new powers, the Bridge House had previously carried out renovations of the Bridge utilising its existing authority and without the need to resort to parliamentary legislation.

The first step on the road to removing the houses was of course to purchase the interest in the various leases of the properties both on the Bridge and those near its two entrances. However, the sanction of parliamentary authority was not required to achieve this in the vast majority of cases. To begin with a large number of the houses on the Bridge were in fact either empty or in the hands of tenants-at-will who had only to be given a month's notice on their leases by the BHLC. The Act also made absolutely no provision for what was to occur in cases relating to actual lessees in properties belonging to the Corporation or Bridge House. In such instances the Corporation had access to the lease agreements, and therefore an accurate valuation could be ascertained and a consensual buyout could be agreed between the two parties.

The actual powers that the Corporation petitioned for and received in the Act in terms of the implementation of the project revolved exclusively around instilling the improvement commission with the legal muscle to conduct compulsory purchases on properties that would need to be demolished and which did 'not belong to the Mayor and Commonalty and Citizens of London' or the Bridge House.⁶ The improvement commission was ordered in the first instance to try to reach agreement with these lessees regarding the purchase of their properties but if no agreement could be reached a jury of twelve 'disinterested' men would be empowered to establish the value of the property and their judgment on this issue would be 'binding and conclusive'.⁷ The Act also eased the progress of this compulsory purchase programme by establishing a legal procedure for cases where properties were owned by trusts, or where mortgages were involved, and it also set a time limit of one year for tenants to vacate their properties or face eviction by the sheriffs.⁸ Although relatively impressive on paper, in practice such authority was almost utterly redundant because, of course, the Bridge House owned all the plots on the

⁶ 31 George II c.40.

⁷ 31 George II c.40.cl.9.

⁸ 31 George II c.40.cl.12.

Bridge, and between them the Bridge House and the Corporation owned most of the properties on either entrance to the Bridge. Therefore in reality these powers of compulsory purchase were directed against a handful of private property owners, and were only required in cases where consensual agreement could not be reached. In fact the first recorded meeting of one of these juries was not until 1759, and in the three year period until 1762 only 10 cases were heard.⁹ As previous chapters have demonstrated renovation projects had been undertaken on the Bridge under the auspices of the BHLC and via the existing Bridge House organisation, primarily through employing sub-contractors to carry out the work. The renovations of the 1680s (which involved the creation of a body known as the London Bridge Improvement sub-committee¹⁰) and Dance's houses in the 1740s were substantial undertakings, and they illustrate the wide-ranging and extensive powers available to the BHLC in these matters. Similarly these episodes demonstrate that the BHLC was capable of supervising sub-contractors in order to deliver a project on budget and on time.

In sum, it is evident from our short survey of the improvement commission's powers that, in terms of undertaking the scheme to demolish the houses, or in modern parlance, managing this project, there was nothing that could not have been undertaken by the BHLC, even via delegation from the commission. There were no practical reasons in relation to the implementation of the project that necessitated the complete ostracism of this body and the Bridge House more generally. However by giving the Common Council legal control over the implementation of this project and the various powers to do so completely autonomously, for the first time in its history the Corporation - the commonalty - acquired an unconditional, legally ratified foothold in the affairs of the independent trust that was the Bridge House. Therefore what was unique, and historically significant about these powers held by the improvement commission was not really *what* they were, but rather *who* they were vested in - a body wholly controlled by and directly answerable to the Common Council. This observation takes on increased saliency when contextualised with the historiography of the period.

⁹ CLRO, CLA/022/02/009, Orders of the Court of Aldermen to the sheriffs of London requiring them to empanel juries to attend the court and determine compensation for properties acquired under the terms of the act of parliament of 29 George II, 1759-1762.

¹⁰ CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/03 fol.02., Bridge House Committee papers, 1684.

Corporation politics – from oligarchy to a ‘rate payer’s democracy’.

The studies that engage directly with the subject of the City of London’s politics and administration during the period between the Revolution and the mid-century are framed within the context of the Corporation’s transition from aldermanic oligarchy to something equating to a commoner democracy. Historians have generally approached their topic from an exclusively party political angle that takes its cue from the broader national battle between Tories and Whigs. Research by historians such as Rogers and De Krey is implicitly concerned with elucidating how and why in the era after the Revolution the Whigs managed to control the body possessed of the most power within the Corporation, the Court of Aldermen.¹¹ According to Rogers, the Whigs achieved this ‘defence’ of their oligarchy by only admitting fellow Whigs to the Court and parrying efforts by the more inclusive and Tory-controlled Common Council to remove a number of the Court’s powers, in particular the aldermanic veto. The party politically motivated battles between the Court and Council reached a crescendo in the 1720s and 30s, over issues such as the City Elections Act of 1725 and the Excise Crisis, but by the 1740s the balance of power had shifted decisively towards the Council, the Whigs’ grip on the Court had been broken and the anti-ministerial Tory, and therefore “democratic” element within the Corporation had been crowned victors in this conflict. The abolition of the veto in 1746 has been cited as symbolic of the death of aldermanic oligarchy within the Corporation, largely because it ensured firstly that the Tory controlled Council was now the ultimate authority within the Corporation and secondly that party political considerations could no longer dictate the composition of the aldermanic bench.¹² Such an account, again reflecting literature pertaining to the broader national picture, is couched in terms such as ‘struggle’ against and ‘resistance’ to oligarchy, and posits a rather

¹¹ Rogers, N., *Whigs and cities: popular politics in the age of Walpole and Pitt* (Oxford, 1989), pp.13-86; Rogers, N., ‘Resistance to oligarchy: the City opposition to Walpole and his successors’ in Stevenson, J., (ed.), *London in the age of reform* (Oxford, 1977), pp.1-29; De Krey, G., *A fractured society: The politics of London in the first age of party, 1688-1715* (Oxford, 1985); Horwitz, H., ‘Party in a civic context: London from the exclusion crisis to the fall of Walpole’ in Jones, C. (ed.), *Britain in the first age of party, 1689-1750: essays presented to Geoffrey Holmes* (London, 1987), pp.173-94.

¹² Rogers, N., ‘The City Elections Act (1725) reconsidered’, *English Historical Review*, vol.100 (1985), pp.604-17; Rogers, *Whigs and cities*; Rudé, G., *Hanoverian London: 1714-1808* (London, 1971), pp.143-161.

revolutionary path from oligarchy to democracy within the Corporation.¹³ Yet although there is consensus on the fact by the 1750s rule by the Common Council rather than rule by the Court was the order of the day, when one takes a less myopic view of politics and comprehends it in terms of ‘how government *worked*’¹⁴ rather than simply party politics, a less confrontational and tumultuous path to a more representative form of governance is suggested. Research (including that by Rogers himself) indicates that as the Court became more exclusive in its social composition after the Restoration, and therefore oligarchic in this sense, its increasingly elite and elitist members gravitated of their own volition towards the more salubrious aspects of being an alderman, such as involvement in national politics, high finance and polite society.¹⁵ The pace and depth of this gentrification of the aldermen has been open to debate,¹⁶ but nevertheless it is clear that as the volume of administrative business undertaken by the Corporation expanded in the first half of the eighteenth century, so the aldermen were progressively shying away from the more mundane, and bureaucratic aspects of aldermanic duties.¹⁷ As a consequence the Court itself became incrementally less involved in the actual governance and administration of the City and its importance began to wane.¹⁸ Indeed as Doolittle points out, in practical administrative terms the Court’s most potent weapon, the veto, was largely redundant in the second quarter of the eighteenth century as the aldermen were reluctant to employ such a controversial power. Consequently it was only actually used a handful of times after its confirmation in 1725.¹⁹ Therefore as the Court was evolving into a ceremonial rather than functional body, so its powers and its members became ever more beholden to the Common Council. In a sense this is a story of rather peaceful and

¹³ See for example chapter 2 in Rogers ‘*Whigs and Cities*’, entitled ‘The struggle for control of the City’. Such language is similar to that used by Linda Colley for example, in her work on the Tory party during the period entitled *In defiance of oligarchy* (Cambridge, 1982).

¹⁴ Miller, J., *Cities divided: politics and religion in English provincial towns, 1660-1722* (Oxford, 2007), p.10.

¹⁵ Rogers, N., ‘Money, land and lineage: the big bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London’ in Borsay, P., (ed.), *The eighteenth-century town* (London, 1990), pp.268-291.

¹⁶ Andrew, D., ‘Aldermen and big bourgeoisie of London reconsidered’, *Social History*, vol.6 (1981), pp.359-364; Horwitz, H., ‘The mess of the middle class’ revisited: the case of the “big bourgeoisie” of Augustan London’, *Continuity and Change*, 2:2 (1987), pp.263-296.

¹⁷ Beattie, J., *Policing and punishment in London, 1660-1750: urban crime and the limits of terror* (Oxford, 2001), pp.101-2, 220-3.

¹⁸ Webb, B., and Webb, S., *English local government: the manor and the borough* (London, 1908), pp.656-670.

¹⁹ Doolittle, I., ‘Walpole’s City Elections Act (1725)’, *English Historical Review*, vol.97 (1982), p.528.

consensual devolution of powers, charting an evolutionary course from oligarchy to democracy.

The rather contradictory picture which emerges from the literature is best exemplified by the Webbs, who on the one hand suggest that the repeal of the aldermanic veto in 1746 was a fundamental turning point, a rupture, by stating that it was ‘between 1746 and 1835’ that the ‘transformation of the Court of Common Council . . . into a supreme organ of administration’²⁰ occurred. They argue the ‘administrative business of the Common Council itself was, for the first half of the eighteenth century, insignificant in amount.’²¹ Such statements would suggest a rather abrupt transition around the mid century. Yet in other parts of their work they seem to be suggesting a more protracted and linear transition as they argue that from the seventeenth century onward the alderman would find ‘his work as a member of the Court of the Common Council was steadily increasing in importance, as his functions as a member of the Court of Aldermen were becoming, slowly but surely, of less importance.’²² Rudé adheres to a similar rather confused narrative, whilst Jones likewise states that ‘the functions of the Court have never been accurately defined but may be said to have contracted as those of the Common Council developed, each being complementary to each other’.²³ Such inconsistent evidence and vague statements indicate that we have a limited understanding of how this transition from aldermanic oligarchy to commoner democracy actually occurred in the context of the daily governance of the City. So although historians agree that by the 1750s the City of London had thrown off its old oligarchic clothes and was taking its first tentative steps towards life as a ‘rate payers democracy’ the question of whether it had undergone evolutionary or revolutionary change to get to this point is more open to debate.

This chapter will argue that the use of the improvement commission to implement this project, at the expense of the existing Bridge House administrative

²⁰ Webbs, *Manor and borough*, p.637.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.639.

²² *Ibid.*, p.664.

²³ Rudé, G., *Hanoverian London: 1714-1808* (London, 1971), pp.120-1; Jones, P.E., *The Corporation of London: Its origin, constitution powers and duties* (Oxford, 1950), p.43.

structure, an organization that had in the pre-Revolution period been firmly under the control of the Court of Aldermen, can be seen as representative of this shift towards a Corporation administered by the Common Council. But it will also argue that the deployment of the improvement commission as the administrative mechanism through which to remove the houses is illustrative of an evolutionary process. As aldermanic power began to wane, so authority over the Bridge House was progressively, and in a rather piecemeal ad-hoc manner, devolved from the Court to the Council. It will highlight the fact that in the period before the 1740s, this devolution occurred without alterations to the fundamental structure of the Bridge House administration, yet from the mid 1740s onwards, the Council increasingly sought to instigate structural reforms of a greater permanency. These served to further compromise the Bridge House's independence as it was absorbed into the burgeoning central bureaucratic apparatus of the City.

It will pursue this thesis by first highlighting several ways in the period up to the mid 1740s in which the Common Council's influence over the Bridge House increased without any great structural alterations to the administrative system. The chapter will then show how the changes in the late 40s early 50s, although still piecemeal, were of a more profound nature. The final section will look at events after 1756 and demonstrate how the Act allowed the Common Council to engage more deeply and without restriction in the management of the Bridge House finances. It should be noted here that the chapter will not address or attempt to note every administrative development within the Bridge House in the post Revolution years, but rather it will highlight the most relevant developments, alongside several that serve to give a flavour of the pattern and pace of change during this period.

Transfer of power between Court of Aldermen and BHLC

After the Revolution in 1688 the variety and depth of the Court of Aldermen's involvement in the routine affairs of the Bridge House entered a period of steep and terminal decline, and by the 1720s was perfunctory. For example, in the twenty year period prior to the London Bridge Improvement Act the business of the Bridge made a total of sixty-six appearances in the Court of Aldermen repertories, of which forty-seven

were simply related to what could be termed formulaic, ceremonial duties that rubber stamped decisions taken by the BHLC or occasionally the Common Council. The simple confirmation of a gratuity paid to the journeymen workmen, ginmen and poor of St Olave's by the Bridge House accounted for a third (22) of the entries in the repertories between 1736 and 1756.²⁴ Likewise the resignation or swearing in of Bridge House officers such as Bridge Masters, clerks, porters or the confirmation of the securities of the Masters accounted for another twenty-five of the Bridge House entries in the repertories. The rest of the business brought before the court consisted of rather trivial affairs such as ordering the Bridge Masters to pay the lord mayor £40 'allowed from the Bridge House towards Posts and repairs for the Lord Mayors house' and £50 'allowed . . . toward the feast'.²⁵ The Court's withdrawal is further exemplified by the fact that from the late seventeenth century onwards it ceased to order its own sub-committees, a crucial mechanism in the administration of the Bridge House and the Corporation in general during this period. By the early eighteenth century its duties towards the Bridge House had become virtually token: there are no directives regarding the financial affairs or daily running of the organisation emanating from the aldermanic forum.

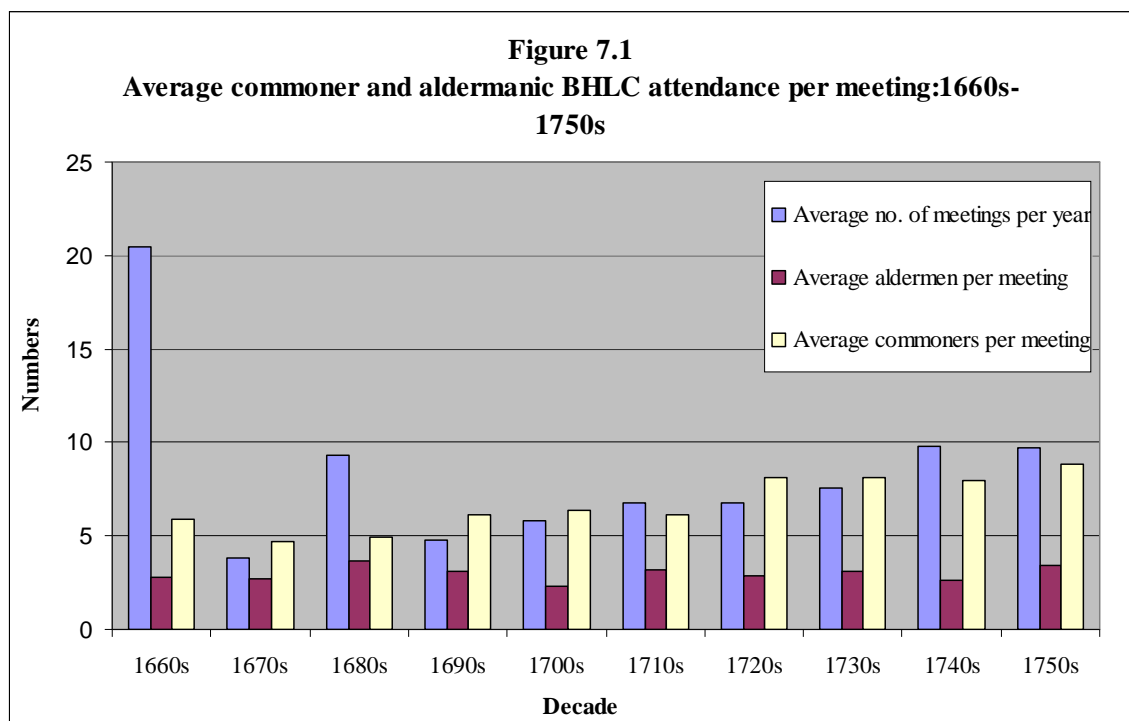
The Webbs note that as the power of the Court of Aldermen receded so it was the committees of the Common Council that increasingly undertook the routine administration of the City.²⁶ The case of the Bridge House was no different as it was the BHLC that progressively began to occupy the place of the Court of Aldermen in the everyday operation of the Bridge. The BHLC began to issue directives regarding the maintenance of the Bridge, it saw to the resolution of disputes between the Bridge House and its lessees, and ordered reports regarding various issues. Virtually every aspect of Bridge House administration that had previously been undertaken by the Court of Aldermen was now undertaken solely by the BHLC. Again the expansion of the committees' duties is best illustrated simply by the physical size of the Bridge House journals, which begin our period as small volumes with a handful of pages required for the entries for each year. By the later part of our period researchers find themselves

²⁴ See: CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.86/186., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1680, for explanation of this gratuity.

²⁵ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01, fol.156/452, fol.146/352, fol.154/408, fol.158/505-6., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1741-1753.

²⁶ Webbs, *Manor and borough*, pp.641-2, 664.

wrestling with weighty tomes, with the entries for a single meeting often running to a dozen or more pages. This increased workload is evidenced by the rising number of meetings from the 1690s onwards, Figure 7.1.²⁷



Source: BHJ 02-11. Sample taken for alternate years beginning in 1667 and ending in 1755.

The composition of the BHLC

In terms of individual aldermanic participation in the daily business of the Corporation only John Beattie's work on the efforts to tackle crime in the metropolis has undertaken a reasonably detailed analysis of this issue. Beattie's research has identified two phenomena of particular interest to this study: the growing reticence on the part of the aldermen to participate in the activities of the Common Council committees, and their similar withdrawal from their duties as magistrates. With regards to the first issue Beattie has suggested that the committees dealing with the street lights and the watch in the mid 1730s were 'dominated' by the commoners to the extent that they 'consisted almost

²⁷ It is worth pointing out that the figures for the 1660s are skewed due to the number of meetings required to lease property after the fire. Similarly the meetings for the 1680s are rather unrepresentative given the situation caused by the suspension of the City's charter. Between 1684 and 1688 only aldermen sat on the BHLC and as a consequence with fewer men dealing with the Bridge House business the number of meetings inevitably rose.

entirely of common councillors, among whom several deputy aldermen were particularly active.’²⁸ Secondly and perhaps most astonishingly he has uncovered a ‘flight of magistrates from the day-to-day work of the office’²⁹, as the aldermen became increasingly reluctant to fulfil their duties with regard to the legal system. By the 1730s the entire burden of magistrates’ work was being borne by just two aldermen. But Beattie also notes that this trend is in evidence from the Revolution onwards, when ‘the magistrates seem to have become increasingly reluctant . . . to attend court sessions in sufficient numbers to guarantee a quorum’ resulting in frequent delays of the sessions.³⁰ In other words Beattie has uncovered a distinct pattern of disengagement by the aldermen in City business and a concomitant rising engagement by the commoners. Yet the first element of this equation does not hold true in relation to the BHLC. Figure 7.1 shows decadal averages of the number of meetings, aldermen’s attendance and common councillors’ attendance. It is clear that aldermanic attendance remained remarkably constant throughout our period. Between the 1690s and 1750s the average aldermanic attendance never dips below 2.5 per meeting. An average of over two aldermen per meeting is of course to be expected given the rule that two had to be in attendance in order to constitute a quorum, but as Beattie has shown in relation to the magistrates’ sessions, this rule could not be taken as a guarantee that the requisite number of aldermen would indeed be present. The Bridge House journals surveyed for this thesis record no similar instances of aldermanic absenteeism leading to the abandonment of a BHLC meeting, which suggests a genuine willingness on the part of the aldermen to sit on the committee. This postulation is reinforced by further analysis of the attendance lists.

The attendance lists show that for virtually every year of our sample the six aldermen elected to the committee attended at least one meeting. This is not to say that the duty to attend meetings was distributed evenly amongst the six men, for example in 1737 Daniel Lambert attended all nine meetings whereas John Barnard appeared at just one, the other four aldermen Francis Child (5) John Barber (3) Rob Godschall (4) Rob Willmot (4) all managed multiple attendances.³¹ Even in years when aldermanic

²⁸ Beattie, *Policing and punishment*, p.192.

²⁹ Beattie, *Policing and punishment*, p.99.

³⁰ Beattie, *Policing and punishment*, p.98.

³¹ BHJ 07 (1737).

attendance was relatively low, such as 1743 (average attendance 2.1 per meeting), each alderman managed to appear for at least one of the nine meetings that year, including a certain Daniel Lambert.³² Lambert's appearance in both 1737 and 1743 bring us onto a further point, that the phenomenon of multiple aldermanic re-elections to the BHLC, something we have noted as commonplace for the pre Revolution period, was still prevalent to the point of being almost *de rigueur*. For example Thomas Stampe appears in 1693, 1701 and 1707 in our sample, Francis Child appeared 5 times between 1723 and 1739 before his death in 1740, Robert Ladbroke 5 times between 1741 and 1751.³³ These are just a few examples and there are plenty more to indicate that a majority of the aldermen served for more than one term.

All this data seems to illustrate the willingness of these particular aldermen to undertake their duties as members of the BHLC in comparison to their reluctance to involve themselves with other committees of the Corporation and indeed with their duties as magistrates. Aldermanic attendance at the BHLC was relatively healthy, with individuals willing to accept their share of the burden of attending meetings, and their proclivity to serve multiple terms could almost be taken as evidence of aldermen actively seeking to sit on the committee. There could be many reasons for the aldermen's continued commitment and desire to serve on the BHLC in comparison to their reluctance to attend sessions. The BHLC met on average once a month, on the face of it its duties would have been far less taxing than magistrates' work as the meetings themselves were unlikely to have had the potential to be as rambunctious as magistrates hearings. Interestingly from the mid 1690s onwards meetings were never held in January and February and rarely in March a hiatus in activity that coincided almost certainly intentionally with the height of the London 'Season', the annual social gathering of genteel high society that was becoming increasingly important for Aldermen during the eighteenth century in order to 'facilitate their entry into polite society'.³⁴ Therefore, membership of the BHLC and of course the City Lands Committee would fit into the

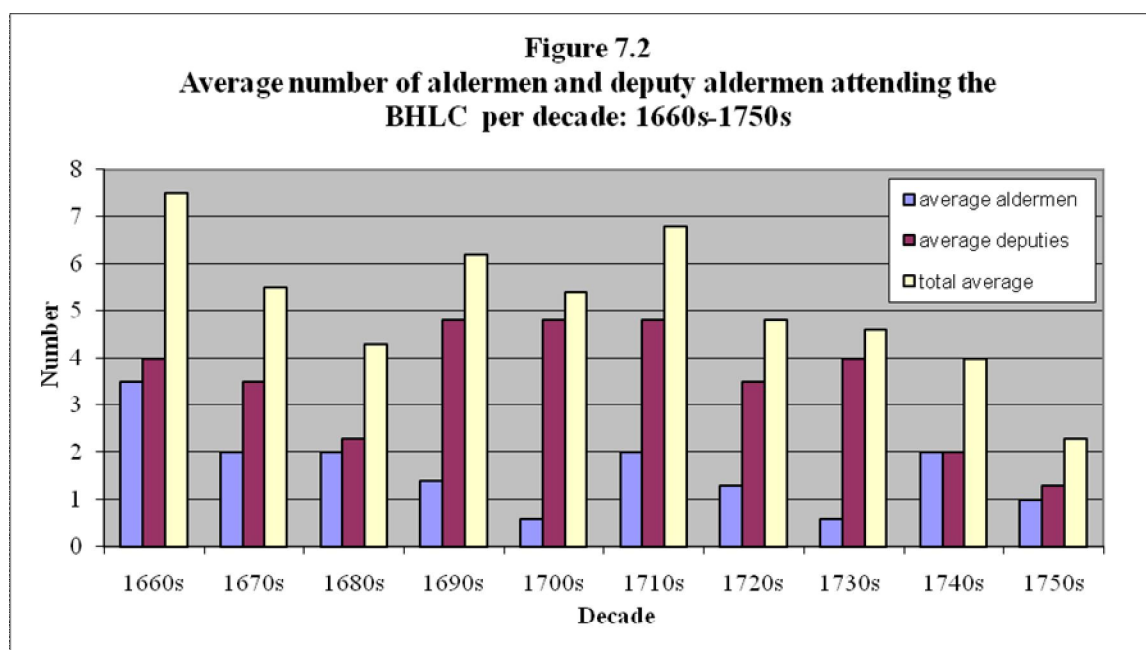
³² BHJ 08 (1743): Edwad Bellamy – 3, John Thompson – 2, Dan Lambert – 5, Will Calvert – 2, Walter Bernard – 6, Sam Pennant – 1.

³³ For Stampe see: BHJ 03&04. Child attended 1723,1731,1735,1737 and 1739, BHJ 06&07. Ladbroke attended 1741,1745,1748,1749 and 1751, BHJ 08-10.

³⁴ BHJ 04 onwards. Sweet, R., *The English town 1680-1840* (Harlow, 1999).p.172. Rogers, 'Money, land and lineage', pp.279-280.

aldermen's changing priorities regarding their involvement in the administration of the Corporation. Attending the Committee meetings and the responsibility for the leasing of the City's estates offered these men the power, prestige and influence they desired as opposed to their work as magistrates which offered little in the way of such benefits.

Whereas Figure 7.1 shows that the aldermanic attendance remained stable it also highlights that attendance by the common councillors showed a marked increase over our period from an average of just under 5 per meeting in the 1670s to over 8 per meeting by the 1750s. But even more revealing data can be gained from an analysis of the composition of this cohort. As previously noted the common councillors in the pre Revolution period were from an aldermanic subset of commoners, who had either been, or would go onto reach the aldermanic bench, in particular aldermanic deputies figure highly in the composition of the BHLC.³⁵ Figure 7.2 shows the data for the post Revolution period. Despite the fact that deputies and proto-aldermen were still in evidence amongst the commoner members of the committee throughout the period there was clearly a dilution of this profile from the 1720s onwards.



Source: BHJ 02-11. Sample taken for alternate years beginning in 1667 and ending in 1755.

³⁵ See chapter 3.

In part this is to be expected given that given the increasing rarity of vacancies for aldermanic posts and the fact that the office of alderman was becoming even *more* elite over this period, including an increased property qualification.³⁶ Yet even allowing for this the data clearly shows that the profile of the commoners sitting on the committee was changing. Although they were still likely to come from the elite end of the commoner spectrum, they were also less and less likely to have had any direct connection with the Court or the post of Alderman – they were career commoners.³⁷

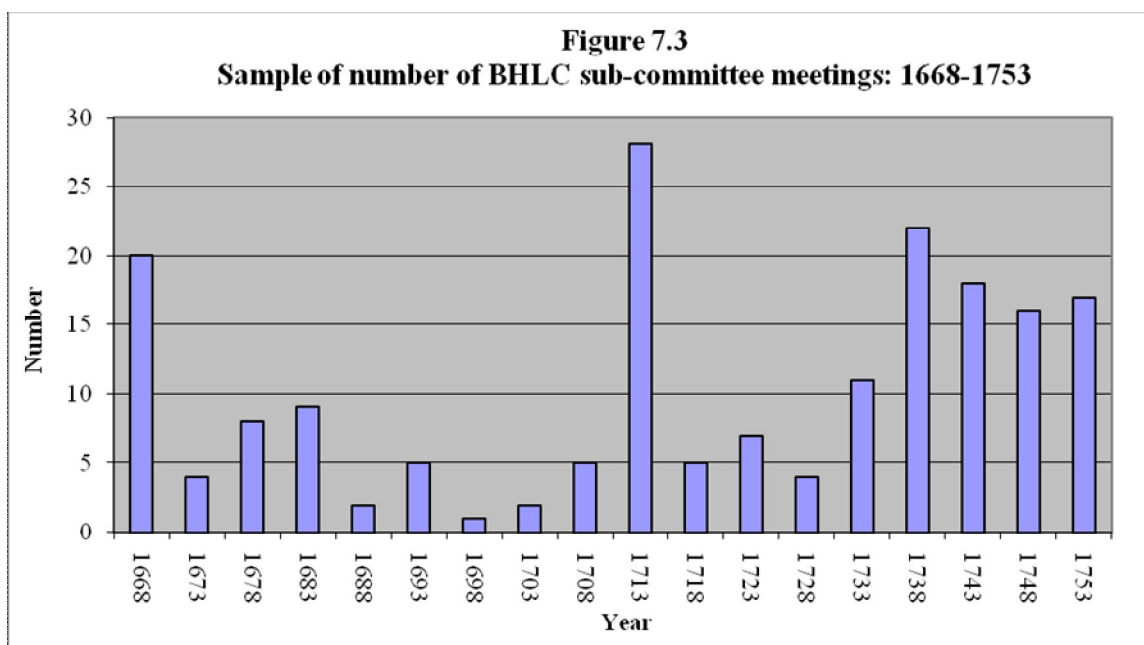
Overall this analysis demonstrates that despite the expanding workload of the BHLC the aldermen certainly did not demonstrate any reluctance to continue attending this body, a reluctance that they had shown in relation to other facets of City administration. Their willingness to attend, and therefore ensure a quorum, meant that the committee continued to function with little disruption. But it is also evident that the number of commoner members attending the BHLC meetings rose markedly over the period, and that the profile of these commoners was less and less aldermanic. This pattern of greater commoner activity can be seen in other aspects of the Bridge House administration, in particular the rise in the deployment of sub-committees.

The rise of the sub-committee

The importance of sub-committees to the work of the BHLC and indeed the Corporation in general has been identified earlier in this thesis. During the eighteenth-century as the workload of the BHLC expanded so delegation of duties was needed and as Figure 7.3 shows the number of sub-committees similarly increased.

³⁶ Webbs, *Manor and borough*, pp.656-7.

³⁷ Given the absence in this post Revolution period of a biographical record of common councilors similar to the one John Woodhead has researched for the earlier period it has been difficult to gather any systematic biographical data on these men. However Stevenson and Rudé have argued that there existed a small group of around 30 or so commoners in 1739 who could be considered the elite of their cohort on the basis of their occupations: Stevenson, J., 'Introduction' in Stevenson, J., (ed.), *London in the age of reform* (Oxford, 1977), p.xiv; Rudé, G., *Hanoverian London: 1714-1808* (London, 1971), p.123. Evidence from the PCC Wills suggests that several of the commoner members of the BHLC in the late 1740s and early 1750s were of occupations, such as jewellers or merchants that Stevenson identified as indicators of a higher social status.



Source: BHJ 02-11.

This table shows that prior to the 1730s the number of sub-committees was fairly limited. The peaks of activity in years like 1668 and 1713 were related to the views and valuations conducted due to the expiration of large numbers of leases. By the 1730s the number of sub-committees was consistently in double figures for the year and on the rise. This was courtesy of the fact that the breadth of business they dealt with began to expand in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. This development had the effect of greatly increasing the importance of sub-committees in relation to the Bridge House administration. Throughout our period the sub-committees continued to compile thorough and comprehensive reports on the properties whose leases were close to expiry, and therefore continued to wield great influence on the leasing process.³⁸ But the sub-committees seemed to grow in stature in other areas. For example as we have noted in the previous chapter by the 1740s they were auditing workmen's bills in order to keep 'fraudulant bills' to a minimum. They also investigated and made recommendations on the working practices of workmen, and occasionally oversaw the work carried out.³⁹ It was sub-committees who investigated arrears of rent and were therefore instrumental in

³⁸ See for example: BHJ 06, 2 October 1723; BHJ 07, 20 May 1738; BHJ 07, 3 November 1738; BHJ 08, 14 September 1743.

³⁹ BHJ 08, 5 October 1743; BHJ 06, 8 May 1728; BHJ 06, 5 September 1733.

attempts to boost the income of the Bridge.⁴⁰ Briefings on the physical state of the Bridge similarly fell to the sub-committees and in addition they also provided the research upon which the committee's decisions to undertake large scale alterations to the Bridge were made, such as in 1728 and in the early 1740s.⁴¹ Previously these assessments had been carried out exclusively by the sub-committees instigated and manned directly by the Court of Aldermen.

As they became ever more vital cogs in the functioning of the Bridge House so the nature of these bodies began to change. They remained for the most part small, with only three men having to appear to constitute a quorum (compared with the six men required for sub-committees relating directly to the Common Council)⁴². Yet in the early eighteenth century not even a quorum of three could be guaranteed. For example in 1713 when a glut of Bridge House leases was about to expire twenty-eight views and valuations took place for a range of properties within the City. These types of viewings, upon which the BHLC would base its valuation of a lease, were crucial given the reliance of the Bridge House on fines and the fact that the Bridge House would be tied into the leases for at least twenty-one years. Yet four of these viewings were conducted by sub-committees of just two men, and one of the viewings by just a single BHLC member, and examinations undertaken by undermanned quorums were fairly common.⁴³ By the 1740s such a lackadaisical approach was clearly no longer tolerated and the rule of at least three attendees was being strictly adhered to.⁴⁴ The aldermanic attendance on these bodies remained negligible, as it had always done; indeed in the period between 1747 and 1755 not a single alderman appeared as a member of a BHLC sub-committee.⁴⁵ Yet the rise in the number of these committees, allied with the strict adherence to a minimum number of attendees ensured that the contribution of common councillors to the administration of the Bridge House naturally increased. The profound influence of these little administrative mechanisms by the early eighteenth century, is further accentuated by the

⁴⁰ BHJ 07, 1 March 1738; BHJ 07, (undated) December 1738; BHJ 08, 6 July 1743.

⁴¹ BHJ 03, 13 October 1693; BHJ 05, 12 March 1718; BHJ 06, 31 May 1728; BHJ 07, (undated) October 1738; BHJ 08, 11 May 1743; BHJ 08, 6 July 1743.

⁴² Beattie, *Policing and punishment*, p.192.

⁴³ CLRO, COL/CC/BHC/03 fol.04., Bridge House Committee papers. See for example viewings on 5 April 1693; 20 October 1698; 10 November 1708.

⁴⁴ BHJ 08.

⁴⁵ BHJ 10.

fact that, not only did they gather the data upon which the committee itself made its decisions, but crucially, in the course of reviewing nearly three hundred reports made by sub-committees to the BHLC for this thesis, only in a handful of occasions was a recommended course of action or valuation made by a sub-committee contested or amended by the full committee. In other words the BHLC simply rubber stamped the decisions made by its sub-committees, committees that were exclusively composed of commoners.

Furthermore, alongside these gradual changes in the composition of these sub-committees, and the ones identified in chapter 5 relating to innovations in the leasing process, Swann notes that there were a number of subtle administrative reforms initiated after the Revolution.⁴⁶ Such efforts were symptomatic of the response of urban authorities to their expanding administrative workload, and they exemplify the shift occurring from an organizational culture built on a paternalistic ethos associated with oligarchy, to one with the clearer lines of accountability, efficiency and professionalization associated with more participatory forms of governance.⁴⁷ The broader remit of the committee and the rise in the number of meetings is also accompanied by a greater regularity of occurrence as by the 1720s the committee was sitting at roughly monthly intervals.⁴⁸ Such scheduling indicates a more organised approach on the part of the BHLC, as opposed to the rather reactive approach identified in chapter 3 in relation to the pre-Revolution period, whereby the committee seemed to meet as and when required. The meetings themselves became more systematic, with the business relating to the general administration or maintenance of the Bridge House being dealt with first and the process of issuing leases being dealt with in the second half of the session. The reason that these changes are evident is that there was a marked improvement in the record keeping of the committee. Whereas in the late seventeenth

⁴⁶ Swann, B.A.S. 'A study of some London estates in the eighteenth century' (unpublished London University Ph.D. thesis, 1964), pp.3-6.

⁴⁷ Sweet, *English towns*, chapter 5; Davison, L., Hitchcock, T., Keirn, T. and Shoemaker, R., 'The reactive state: English governance and society, 1689-1750' in Davison, L., Hitchcock, T., Keirn, T. and Shoemaker, R.(eds.) *Stilling the grumbling hive: the response to social and economic problems in England 1689-1750* (Stroud 1992), pp.xxviii-xli; Dawson, E.J. 'Finance and the unreformed borough: A critical appraisal of corporate finance, 1660-1835, with special reference to the boroughs of Nottingham, York and Boston' (unpublished University of Hull Ph.D. thesis, 1978), pp.372-377 and pp.731-774.

⁴⁸ BHJ 06.

century entries were literally scribbled in the journals with no standardization in the information they contained, by the early eighteenth century the journals had been transformed into accessible and detailed chronicles of each meeting of the committee, recording everything from the members of the committee present to every bid for a lease, whether accepted or rejected. Finally the committee instigated changes in the recording of information, for example efforts were made to set down on paper the exact details of the duties of the various Bridge House officers so that the committee had an established job specification for future reference.⁴⁹

As the BHLC progressively took over the duties once undertaken by the Court of Aldermen, and the workload of the committee grew, so the involvement of commoners in the administration of the Bridge House became more profound, and this was primarily the product of the sheer increase in commoner man hours spent on Bridge House business. But what is significant is that this expansion of commoner involvement did not entail any real alterations to the structure of Bridge House administration, it was simply an evolutionary development within the context of the existing bureaucratic framework. However, as the following section will show, by the second quarter of the eighteenth century there were more pronounced modifications being instigated that began to further compromise the existing semi-autonomy underpinning the administrative structure of the Bridge House, whilst providing the Common Council with tangible new avenues of influence over the Bridge House.

Direct involvement of the Common Council in the Bridge House administration

The increasingly direct intervention by the Common Council in the business of the Bridge House can be seen in a number of areas. For example in the first quarter of the eighteenth century the Council took over from the Court the role of arbiter of lease disputes, such as when a lessee wished to exit a lease early or the BHLC was keen to issue leases with terms other than the standard twenty-one or sixty-one years. Similarly

⁴⁹ BHJ 05, 4 March 1719; BHJ 05, 3 June 1719.

around the same period the Common Council started to authorise the BHLC to request cash from the chamber, a responsibility that had previously rested with the Court.⁵⁰ By far the best illustration of this intervention by the Common Council can be found in chapter 5 of this thesis, where the Council's role in the decision to remove the houses from the Bridge was highlighted.⁵¹ However, the most tangible and visible manifestation of the gradual and piecemeal process by which the Bridge House was subsumed by the Council is the abolition of various Bridge House offices, many of which were eliminated in response to the accusations of corruption outlined in the previous chapter. These reforms served to tighten the Council's control over the way the Bridge House operated on a daily basis. Doolittle has argued that the Corporation was slow to reform its own system of sold offices, only doing so with an Act of Common Council in 1749.⁵² He suggests that this inertia was primarily the result of the fact that these offices were viewed first and foremost as sources of income for the lord mayor rather than essential components of the City's administration, and as a consequence there was no 'compelling need' to reform the system in the early eighteenth century.⁵³ Yet in terms of the Bridge House the following section suggests that the abolition of sold offices began to occur earlier, and that these measures were probably the product of broader changes in the mentality towards office holding in the early modern period.

The Veasey allegations of 1708 discussed in the previous chapter, despite their severity, led to little in the way of lasting improvements. A committee instigated by the Court of Aldermen was ordered to investigate these 'frauds and abuses' but interestingly there is no evidence that it ever met.⁵⁴ The separate BHLC sub-committee concluded their report by stating that the 'place of Carpenter is useless' and that serious consideration should be given to abolishing the posts of land and water carpenter and subcontracting the work as and when necessary.⁵⁵ Yet despite being initially dismissed from their posts by the Council, the carpenters petitioned the Court and were re-instated, and one cannot

⁵⁰ BHJ 06, 4 September 1728; CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.57/176., Court of Common Council journals, 1728.

⁵¹ See chapter 5.

⁵² Doolittle, 'City of London', p.224.

⁵³ Doolittle, 'City of London', pp.224-227.

⁵⁴ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.113/433., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1708.

⁵⁵ BHJ 04, 1 December 1708.

ignore the possibility that the dismissal of the carpenters was simply a piece of political gamesmanship on the part of the Council designed to antagonise the Court.⁵⁶ Similarly beyond simply restating a 1708 order that the purchase of materials and labour had to be approved by two members of the BHLC⁵⁷ (an order that was clearly routinely ignored) nothing further was done, neither the Council-appointed Bridge Masters, nor any of the lord mayor-appointed officers implicated in Veasey's report were censured. This inertia may well have been the result of a lack of political will; after all it would have been in the best interests of all concerned to sweep such an incident under the carpet. Whatever the case, it is clear that the status quo prevailed: instances of fraudulent behaviour on the part of the Bridge House workforce continued to appear in the Bridge House journals, and it is clear that jobbery and outright corruption was endemic on the part of the Bridge House workforce.⁵⁸ The next bout of corruption to occupy the attention of the commonalty and aldermen, were the revelations made against Bridge Masters John Webb and John Lund in 1733. Again these may well have been politically motivated given that party political partisanship was coursing through the Corporation as the Excise crisis raged that year, and Doolittle has argued that many accusations of corruption levelled at the Corporation's workmen were indeed prompted by such concerns.⁵⁹ The Court of Aldermen had for decades previously barely cast a glance in the direction of the Bridge House administration, yet the aldermen seized upon these accusations and the Court roused itself from its slumber to delve into a thorough investigation of the Masters and their activities.⁶⁰ Whatever motivated this turn of events it is clear that again little in the way of tangible reform was instigated. Neither Master was dismissed and the only directive to come out of this affair was an alteration made to the Bridge Master's oath to include several further clauses which noted that they were prohibited from putting the 'Bridge House profit in anyways . . . to your own use.'⁶¹

However, as Doolittle notes by the early 1730s corruption and jobbery within the Corporation as a whole were attracting increased publicity, due to various printed

⁵⁶ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.113/102, 426., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1708.

⁵⁷ BHJ 04, 2 June 1708.

⁵⁸ For example: BHJ 04, 1 December 1708; BHJ 05, 3 September 1718; BHJ 06, 15 April 1730.

⁵⁹ Doolittle, 'City of London', p.211-235.

⁶⁰ See notes 120-121 chapter 6.

⁶¹ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.138/468., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1733.

exposés of corrupt practices.⁶² The intensification of such concerns was evidenced by a revision of the oaths of the various Bridge House workmen to include a passage stating that a workman ‘shall not at any time charge any higher prices for his goods or work than others of the same trade do to private customers’.⁶³ As with the alteration to the Bridge Master’s oath, this was evidently an attempt, albeit a rather lame one, to rein in potential abuses. Yet more fundamental changes were being countenanced as there was clearly a shift in thinking regarding the practice of selling offices which was being seen as the key factor engendering fraudulent practices.⁶⁴ A subcommittee report of 1730 into a rapid and inexplicable recent increase in the cost of workmen’s bills notes that ‘wee can no otherwise account for but because of having to purchase their places’, and they recommend that this ‘growing evil maybe effectually prevented’ by ceasing to sell the various offices of the Bridge House,⁶⁵ and in 1731 the Common Council ordered the abolition of several sold offices within the Corporation and the Bridge House.⁶⁶ But whereas in 1708 the tide of censure did not translate into concrete action by the 1730s several offices did disappear: the Bridge House mason in 1737, the Bridge House surveyor in 1739 and finally the land carpenter in 1740.⁶⁷ The posts were deemed simply wasteful by the BHLC and Council, who felt that sub-contraction would suffice, and that a system of employing contractors rather than workmen directly would ensure that ‘a proper check is kept upon artificers bills.’⁶⁸ Crucially these were all offices in the gift of the lord mayor, and sub-contraction would ensure that the workmen were directly accountable to the BHLC.

The events of 1742-3, when again virtually the entire permanent Bridge House workforce, from the Bridge Masters to the labourers, were accused of corruption also saw

⁶² In particular see: A Citizen., *City corruption and mal-administration display’d; occasion’d by the ill management of the publick money in general* (London, 1738). Although it must be pointed out that Doolittle argues that such exposés, and this pamphlet in particular were politically motivated; Doolittle, ‘City of London’, pp.223-233. The scandal involving the construction of the Mansion House in the later part of the decade contributed greatly to this concern over “jobbery”. See: Webbs, *Manor and borough*, pp.648-9.

⁶³ CLRO, COL/CA/01/01 fol.137/403, fol.138/443-453., Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, 1732-33.

⁶⁴ A Citizen., *City corruption*, pp.14-15; Webbs, *Manor and borough*, p.650.

⁶⁵ BHJ 06, 15 April 1730.

⁶⁶ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.57/212-213, 241, 243-5., Court of Common Council journals, 1731.

⁶⁷ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.58/50, 147, 207., Court of Common Council journals, 1738-40.

⁶⁸ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.58/207., Court of Common Council journals, 1740.

the initiation of administrative reforms. These reforms, alongside the fact that it was the BHLC and Common Council that were censuring the Bridge Masters, men that the council itself had appointed, serves to illustrate the changing perceptions of what was acceptable for men in public office. Given that the Council seemingly did not have the remit to dismiss the Bridge Masters, the best censure they could muster in relation to this episode was a severe verbal reprimand for one of the Masters, Piddington. After their deliberations the Council concluded that the other Master, Hyde, was not guilty, and in a noteworthy act of transparent governance they ordered that an explanation for the distinction between the two verdicts be published ‘in some of the publick daily papers.’⁶⁹ As a remedial measure the Common Council created a new post entitled ‘the Inspector for the Works’,⁷⁰ taken up by a Mr Becher, whose job it was to ‘act as a check and inspection on the Bridge House workmen and their bills.’⁷¹ In effect the inspector simply took on many of the duties of the Bridge Masters regarding the monitoring of the workforce and materials, but he was directly accountable to the Council, and as such, unlike the Masters could have his employment terminated by the Council. Becher was expected to sign in all materials received by the Bridge House so he could inspect their weight, quantity and quality, he would then keep and catalogue receipts and relevant paperwork for all these materials, in order that they could be produced for inspection at the Bridge House audit. He was also issued with the only key for the warehouse in which the materials were to be stored. Finally, in terms of monitoring the Bridge House workforce he was expected to provide reports regarding their activities to the audit committee and inform the Common Council of any abuses. For his services he was paid the princely sum of £80, £15 more than the Bridge Masters. What is so fascinating about this post is that this was a classic ad-hoc, piecemeal solution to the issue of an administrative defect within the Bridge House, but one that served to further advance the process by which the Bridge House was incrementally absorbed into the central bureaucratic apparatus of the Corporation.

The modifications described here may represent the consolidation and centralization of power over the Bridge House by the Common Council but they also

⁶⁹ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.58/320. , Court of Common Council journals, 1743.

⁷⁰ BHJ 08, 7 December 1743.

⁷¹ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.58/313., Court of Common Council journals, 1743.

suggest that the Corporation's members were, at least on some level, beginning to be influenced by the emerging expectations of probity, honesty, and professionalization in public office.⁷²

When, in the scandal of 1743, the water carpenter was faced with the accusations regarding excessive bills and fraudulent activities, he did not actually deny the fraudulent nature of his behaviour, rather his defence was simply to argue that many of the charges he was claiming for were in fact 'fees or prerequisites (*sic*) belonging to his place', fees he was entitled to by 'ancient custom'.⁷³ In other words, the carpenter tried to argue that such remuneration was somehow all part of the "legitimate" profits to be made from his post. In previous eras such activities may have been tacitly accepted, as it was expected that individuals who paid for a post, or were gifted a post such as Bridge Masters, would in turn make money from it. But clearly such a defence was deemed anachronistic by the Common Council, and as was their wont, the council effectively entrusted George Dance with the ordering of materials and deployment of the carpentry workforce. As a result the two avenues for profit making on the part of the carpenter had been severely curtailed. Consequently the Bridge House's 'offices of profit', in many ways the most visible symbol of the oligarchic, paternal governance exercised by the aldermen were, throughout the second quarter of the eighteenth century, picked off one-by-one, until the 1749 Act of Common Council swept away the few residual sold offices of the Bridge House, including that of the water carpenter, and the clerk comptroller.⁷⁴

Therefore, whereas in the first quarter of the eighteenth century the process of consolidation of the Common Council's control over the Bridge House was achieved through changes within the context of the existing Bridge House administrative framework, by the 1730s and 1740s an intensification of this pattern occurred due to limited, yet transformative, structural alterations to the relationship between the Bridge House and the Common Council. As we shall now see the improvement act represented

⁷² Sweet, R., 'Corrupt and corporate bodies: attitudes to corruption in eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century towns' in Moore, J., and Smith, J. (eds.), *Corruption in urban politics and society, Britain 1780-1950* (Aldershot, 2007), pp.41-56; Langford, P., *Public life and the propertied Englishman; 1689-1789* (Oxford, 1991), chapter 4; Aylmer, G., 'From office-holding to civil service: the genesis of modern bureaucracy', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, series 5, vol.30 (1980), pp.91-108.

⁷³ BHJ 08, 11 May 1743, 1 June 1743, 5 October 1743.

⁷⁴ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.59/193. , Court of Common Council journals, 1749.

a further escalation of this absorption of the Bridge House into the central bureaucratic apparatus of the Corporation, in particular because the Council seemed to believe that the Act empowered the Corporation to involve itself much more deeply and decisively in the overall financial management of the Bridge House.

After the Act

Although not included as clauses in the Act itself the bill details how the Corporation intended to raise credit to fund the renovation of the Bridge by the public sale of annuities: the 4% interest and the annuity would be paid for out of the toll income.⁷⁵ Interestingly the bill also suggested that the Bridge House estates could be used as security against the annuities but this suggestion did not make it into the Act.⁷⁶ The Act placed the responsibility for receiving, distributing and recording all the sums associated with the project in the hands of the chamberlain, the money was to pass through the City Chamber and never appeared in the Bridge House account books.⁷⁷ The legislation also called for the chamberlain to conduct a yearly audit, a copy of which was to be presented by him to both houses of Parliament within twenty-one days of their opening of session.⁷⁸

Things began auspiciously for the project. Once the removal of the houses was underway the Bridge House no longer received income from the houses, but this was balanced by the fact that by the mid 1750s the rental income from these structures was about a third of the yearly expenditure on the maintenance of the Bridge.⁷⁹ Therefore removing the houses actually left a net gain for the Bridge House and by mid 1757 the Bridge Masters had a surplus of £2400 on their hands. This surplus was growing by the week, and was further swollen by the cash income that was being generated by the tolls. The Common Council met to debate what to do with these sums and decided to combine the surplus with £600 of Bridge House cash which was in the chamberlain's hands, in order to purchase an annuity for £3500 paying 3% interest, and this 'interest thereof

⁷⁵ *A bill with the amendments to improve, widen, and enlarge, the passage over and through London Bridge* (London, 1756), p.13.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁷⁷ 31 George II c.40, cl.36 & 37.

⁷⁸ 31 George II c.40, cl.37.

⁷⁹ BHI 11, 8 May 1754.

applied for the benefit of the Bridge House Estate'.⁸⁰ Such was the level of cash flowing in from the rental income and tolls that the Council was able to order the purchase of another £3400 annuity several months later. These investments were purchased in the name of the 'Mayor and Commonalty of the City', and a letter of attorney was used to transfer them into the hands of Peter Robert, the junior comptroller of the Bridge House, and a man elected by the Council, in order that he could receive the dividends and deploy them for the future maintenance of the Bridge.⁸¹

The purchase of these annuities illustrates two crucial points regarding the reasons for the adoption of the London Bridge Improvement Act discussed earlier. Firstly the Common Council seemed to presume that the powers vested in it by the Act furnished it with the authority to assume direct control over the strategic financial management of the Bridge House, and this assumption resulted in the investment of surplus funds generated by the Bridge House. It is also evident that it was the Common Council itself rather than the actual improvement commission that was making these decisions, directing the project, and acting in an executive capacity. The commission on the other hand was allocated the role of administrative body. It is clear that in this respect the Common Council was stepping outside the boundaries of the Act as at no point did the legislation empower either the commission or Council to commandeer money directly from the Bridge House revenues to channel into investments. Yet in taking this course of action the council solved one the Bridge House's most intractable financial problems: its inability to productively utilise an income surplus.⁸²

⁸⁰ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.61/82, 186. , Court of Common Council journals, 1755. Quote from fol.61/73.

⁸¹ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.61/186-7, 210., Court of Common Council journals, 1755.

⁸² Indeed it was the investments held by the Bridge House, and purchased with the income surplus generated in later years, that the Corporation used to fund the building of the Giltspur Street Comptor to the tune of £30,000 in the late 1780s. Chalklin, C., 'The reconstruction of London's prisons, 1770-1799: an aspect of the growth of Georgian London', *London Journal*, no.9 (1983), p.31.

Conclusion

In sum it is clear that well before the mid-eighteenth century a process was underway whereby as the Court of Aldermen's power began to wilt and the individuals themselves became more interested in the ceremonial and prestigious aspects of their roles, so the Common Council became more active, both in terms of personnel and direct intervention, in the daily business and administration of the Bridge House. This commoner involvement served to ensure an incremental and rather evolutionary absorption of the Bridge House into the central apparatus of the corporate bureaucracy, an assimilation which became more profound and pronounced from the 1740s onwards. Yet it is also important to note that this was a piecemeal process, whereby small measures over several decades slowly yet unmistakably began to consolidate the Common Council's hold on the Bridge House. The use of the improvement commission to undertake the renovations of the Bridge, at the expense of the existing Bridge House structure can be seen as a further chapter in the ongoing absorption of the Bridge House by the centralised authority of the Corporation.

The experience of the Bridge House therefore suggests that the Corporation's path from the oligarchic governance of the aldermen, to the 'rate payer's democracy' of the Common Council was rather more evolutionary and consensual than revolutionary.

Postscript

The concern of this thesis has been to elucidate the reasons behind the advent of the '*Act to improve, widen and enlarge the Passage over and through London Bridge*', yet it would be remiss to bring a halt to this story punctually at the point of the Act's inception, particularly when the events post 1756 offer such an intriguing postscript to this tale. The financial progress made by the investment in the Bridge House surplus was matched by the building work on the project which progressed apace with most of the houses removed from the Bridge by early 1758.⁸³ But at the same time this rosy picture was beginning to darken and just a few months after the purchase of the annuities the

⁸³ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.61/212., Court of Common Council journals, 1758.

whole project to improve the Bridge had begun to implode financially. By 20 January the improvement commission was requesting that the lord mayor convene a meeting of the Common Council in order to make another application to Parliament ‘for making the Act more effectual’.⁸⁴ The reason for this is that in the space of a few short months the whole project had plunged into a financial mire; a mire caused by a number of factors for which the Corporation itself must take varying degrees of blame.

The first, and most worrying factor, was the inability of the commission to manage to raise credit against the tolls. Secondly, it seems that the initial estimate of £45,000 to undertake the whole project was a gross underestimate and was becoming more fanciful by the day as costs for materials and labour spiralled. Finally, as if the problems were not enough of a burden on 11 April 1758 the temporary wooden Bridge erected alongside London Bridge was burnt down and this served to further exacerbate the financial malaise the project found itself in. On this final point, the burning down of the bridge, the Corporation was an unfortunate victim. This event was surrounded by contemporary conspiracy theories, and left the commission with the headache of having to find over £5000 as a matter of utmost urgency for its repair.⁸⁵ By late April 1758 the Corporation, desperate for the cash to effect such works, and with little other choice, resolved to sell the recently acquired annuities, and managed to raise £6391 upon their sale eight months later.⁸⁶ However, the burning down of the temporary bridge was a minor issue compared to the commission’s inability to raise credit against the toll income. The commission’s report to the Common Council noted that the tolls had collected the ‘clear sum’ of £2470 since the toll duty had started to be collected in 1756 of which £1600 came from tolls over the Bridge and £870 for those craft passing under.⁸⁷ However these tolls for craft passing under the Bridge were understandably difficult to collect. The method of collection seemed to rely on a typically *laissez-faire* system whereby the details of vessels passing through the Bridge were recorded in a log book, the owner was then billed and expected to pay the collector of tolls at a later date. Unsurprisingly many

⁸⁴ CLRO, COL/CC/LBI/02 fol.001., London Bridge Improvement Committee minute books, 20 January 1758.

⁸⁵ For the various conspiracy theories regarding this disaster see Home, *Old London Bridge*, (London, 1931), pp.269-272.

⁸⁶ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.61/236, 317., Court of Common Council journals, 1758-59.

⁸⁷ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.61/212., Court of Common Council journals, 1758.

owners simply failed to pay. In fact that commission was informed that the value of the tolls charged was over £1600, almost double the actual sums gathered.⁸⁸ This inefficiency of collection was, according to the commission, making the obtaining of credit impossible, as ‘the persons who may be inclined to lend the said Money at a moderate interest, cannot under the present Act have the full benefit of the security intended thereby’.⁸⁹ In other words no one was willing to lend to the commission at a rate of 4% or less (as the Act stipulated) against the unpredictable income stream of the tolls, and this despite the fact that the interest rate of the period hovered around 3.8% between 1756 and 1758.⁹⁰ The situation was clearly desperate, and the response of the Common Council was to return to Parliament with a persuasive plea and a begging bowl. The improvement commission was instructed by the council to prepare a bill to be presented to Parliament that would convey the dire nature of the situation the Corporation found itself in, and beseech the House for its urgent ‘assistance’.⁹¹ If the situation was not grim enough it was being further exacerbated by the inexorably rising cost of the project. In April 1758 Dance and Taylor were instructed to prepare an up-to-date estimate of the overall cost of the Bridge renovations to be included in the petition to Parliament for its assistance, and the report they delivered concluded that it was now going to cost over £73,000 to complete the renovations of the Bridge.⁹² Even allowing for the unforeseen expense of £5000 on the temporary Bridge, this was a substantial increase on Dance’s original 1756 estimate. This estimate had allocated £45,000 for the Bridge repairs, a sum that had risen to £55,000 by 1758, and in 1756 Dance had tentatively suggested that buying the tenants out of their leases would cost around £9000, a sum that had in actuality topped nearly £14,000 by 1758. The rise in the purchase cost of the tenants’ leases may well have been due to the ability of the tenants to drive a hard bargain. The rise in the cost the

⁸⁸ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.61/212., Court of Common Council journals, 1758; CLRO, CLA/022/01/01/009-010, Accounts of craft passing through London Bridge, showing their number, owner and place of abode, tonnage and sums due, 1756-7; CLRO, CLA/022/01/01/012, Summary accounts for the year for each owner, showing quarterly tonnage and annual total of money, with additional account of money received each quarter, 1756-1757.

⁸⁹ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.61/212., Court of Common Council journals, 1758.

⁹⁰ Weiller, K., and Mirowski, P., ‘Rates of interest in eighteenth-century England’, *Explorations in Economic History*, no.27 (1990), pp.27.

⁹¹ CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.61/212., Court of Common Council journals, 1758.

⁹² The handwritten and printed copies of this estimate are contained in: CLRO, COL/CC/LBI/03 fol.001., London Bridge Improvement Committee minute papers, 1754-1765; CLRO, COL/CC/01/01 fol.61/237-9., Court of Common Council journals, 1758.

refurbishment itself may have been related to outbreak of the Seven Years War in 1756 as it is well documented that prolonged conflicts had the effect of pushing up the cost of both raw materials and labour.⁹³ Yet even allowing the Corporation the benefit of the doubt it is clear that Dance had grossly underestimated the cost of the project in his initial report.⁹⁴

The petition was delivered to the House in late 1758, and luckily for the Corporation Parliament agreed to act as the white knight, although in reality one could argue that it had little option but to play this role given the alternative was to effectively leave the City of London without any form of bridge across the Thames. The House felt that in view of the fact that the rebuilding was well advanced, the temporary Bridge had burnt down, and that 'it hath been found by experience that the said tolls, or sums of money, will not be sufficient' to fund the work on the Bridge, it would offer the Corporation assistance in the form of a £15,000 grant.⁹⁵ This money was to be paid from the Exchequer into the Corporation's chamber and applied to the rebuilding of the Bridge. The tolls, which had always been much resented by the City's residents, were to be abolished in June that year.⁹⁶ Therefore without any independent form of income with which to fund the renovation of London Bridge the Corporation was almost entirely dependent on regular handouts from Parliament. The House duly obliged and yearly payments of £15,000 were made to the Chamber by the Exchequer till 1762, alongside final payment of £7000 made in 1765.⁹⁷ Over the same period the Corporation managed

⁹³ Shepherd, F., Belcher, V., and Cottrell, P., 'The Middlesex and Yorkshire deeds registries and the study of building fluctuations', *London Journal*, 5 (1979), p.186; Chalklin, C.W., *The provincial towns of Georgian England: a study of the building process* (London, 1974), pp.221-227; Aston, T., *Economic fluctuations in England, 1700-1800* (Oxford, 1959), pp.84-105.

⁹⁴ This inability of the Corporation to correctly estimate the cost of repairs was also in evidence in the building of the Mansion House in the 1740s and the revocations of Newgate prison and construction of other jails in the 1770s and 80s. In the case of the Mansion House it ended up at least 50% over budget and the cost of constructing the new Newgate soared to twice the initial rough estimate. See: Jeffery, S., *The Mansion House* (Chichester, 1993), pp.98-99; Chalklin, 'London's prisons', p.24.

⁹⁵ Act for applying for a sum of money granted in this session of Parliament for rebuilding London Bridge, George 31.II Cap XX (1758) contained in: CLRO, CLA/022/02/005 fol.P.D.151.3, Volume entitled 'Statutes: London Bridge 1694-1901' and marked 'Town Clerk's Office, Guildhall, EC', 1694-1901.

⁹⁶ For the animosity towards the tolls see the large printed pamphlet entitled, *Reasons for abolishing the toll of London Bridge*, contained in: CLRO, COL/CCS/CO/06 fol.016., Comptroller and City Solicitor Bridge House Papers, *Act for applying for a sum of money granted in this session of Parliament for rebuilding London Bridge, George 31.II Cap XX (1758)* CLA/022/02/005 (p.d.151.3).

⁹⁷ CLRO, CLA/022/01/01/004, Account of monies received by the chamberlain to improve, widen and enlarge passage over and through London Bridge, 1756 – 1763; CLRO, CLA/022/01/01/005, Accounts of receipts and payments under Act of 29 Geo. 2., 1756-1767.

to contribute: £1722 in tolls, £6391 from the annuities sale, £2173 from the sale of the materials from the demolished houses, and finally in 1766 the Bridge House and City itself had to contribute £5397 from their own revenues to complete the project - a grand total of £15,683 and a figure dwarfed by the Exchequer's overall contribution of £82,000.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ CLRO, CLA/022/01/01/005, Accounts of receipts and payments under Act of 29 Geo. 2., 1756-1767.

Conclusion

The history of the Bridge was no less eventful in the centuries after the houses were removed. By the 1820s moves were afoot to completely rebuild the entire structure in order to ‘provide improved access’ both over and under the Bridge, and ‘a more favorable aesthetic for this enduring symbol of London.’¹ Again the notion of the Bridge as a symbol of the City was a powerful agent in the devising of several grandiose plans to build a monumental structure to project the City’s power and prestige. In an echo from the past the eventual design chosen (devised by John Rennie) was shaped not by inspirational vision but rather by a set of more complex, if parochial, concerns related to finance and the City’s desire to rearticulate its independence from the national government.² The result was a decidedly banal, ‘functional engineer-designed structure’ of little individuality and limited character.³ This Bridge lacked the longevity of its medieval predecessor and in the 1960s was dismantled to be replaced by the current structure. In a rather bizarre turn of events Rennie’s nineteenth-century Bridge was purchased by Robert McCulloch, an American oil baron, and shipped in pieces to the USA where it can now be found nestled in the unfamiliar surroundings of Lake Havasu City in the Arizona desert.

The plans of the 1820s in many respects represented the last chance to construct a London Bridge with the appearance and aesthetic impact to match its ubiquitous fame. After the houses had been removed the Bridge lost its distinctive physical identity and with that its status as an iconic structure in a visual sense. However as Ethington and Schwartz note it is the historical element that does most to infuse structures with their iconicity,⁴ and it seems that the demolition of the old London Bridge triggered a wave of antiquarian interest in the old structure, and in particular the inhabited Bridge. Several re-prints of various medieval depictions of the Bridge, most notably Visscher’s evocative rendering which makes the Bridge the focal point of the City, appear in this period.

¹ Arnold, D., ‘London Bridge and its symbolic identity in the Regency metropolis: the dialectic of civic and national pride’, *Art History*, vol.22, no.4 (1999), p.553.

² For the full story behind the construction of Rennie’s bridge see: Arnold, ‘London Bridge’.

³ *Ibid.*, p.564.

⁴ Ethington, P., and Schwartz, V., ‘Introduction: an atlas of the urban icons project’, *Urban History*, vol.33, no.2 (2006), p.12.

Illustration 8.1



C.J. Visscher, *Aerial view of London Bridge, the River Thames and surrounding area in 1616 from the southbank*, Reprinted 1830 (Guildhall Library City of London).

Similarly Richard Thomson produced his *Chronicles of old London Bridge, by an antiquary* in 1827 which, at 500 pages, is a lengthy, thorough, and somewhat eclectic collection of the events in the history of the Bridge, pieced together from prior texts such as Maitland and Stow, and one that again plays heavily on the centrality of the Bridge to life in the pre-modern metropolis. Thomson's work understandably catalogues the most distinguished and conventional events in the Bridge's history; the pageants that accompanied the symbolic entry of various monarchs (including Richard II, Henry VI and Charles II) into the City via the Bridge, alongside the more gruesome episodes such as the displays of traitors heads on stakes at the gatehouse.⁵

Yet he also recounts more trivial, occasionally bizarre, yet intimate details of how the Bridge featured in the everyday lives of Londoners, for example in 1391 when the Bridge provided the perfect platform from which to view a dolphin frolicking in the Thames,⁶ or in 1536 when an apprentice Edward Osborne valiantly leapt from one of the houses on the

⁵ For the entry of the monarchs see: Thomson, R., *Chronicles of old London Bridge, by an antiquary* (London, 1827), pp.148-9, 173, 318, and for the display of traitors' heads, p.218, 272, 308-9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.146-7.

Bridge to save his master's daughter who had been dropped by a maid from a window. The master Sir William Hewet rewarded Osborne by promising him his daughter's hand in marriage, complete with sizable dowry.⁷ And (a personal favorite) Thomson recounts a supposed plan by an engineer Captain John Bulmer for the 'Blowing up of a Boat and a man over London Bridge'.⁸ The plan (to be paid for by subscription, and, as Thomson notes, clearly simply a device to extort money from gullible individuals) was to construct a river borne gun capable of firing a boat 'with a man or a boy in and aboard her' so that the boat

with helpe of the said engine, be advanced and elevated so high, as that the same shall passe and be delivered over London Bridge, together with the said man or boy in and aboard her, and floate againe in the said River of Thames, on the other side of the said Bridge.⁹

Human cannon balls aside, the visual and textual representations of Visscher and Thomson paint a picture of an unregulated, physically chaotic and rather ramshackle structure, (Thomson never fails to recount stories of the fires on, or collapses of the Bridge), bursting with character, central to the lives of Londoners, and yet one resonant with the stereotypical images of the disordered and vernacular pre-modern city in which it was located. Thomson explicitly states in his introduction that his text is a lament for the medieval city that was being, as he saw it, flattened by the forces of modernity:

since, in a little time, there will not be a spot left, where any feature of age will carry back my remembrance to its ancient original. What with pullings-down, and build- ings-up; the turning of land into canals, and covering over old water-ways with new-paved streets; erecting pert plaster fronts to some venerable old edifices, and utterly abolishing others from off the face of the earth ; London but too truly resembles the celebrated keepsake- knife of the sailor, which, for its better preservation, had been twice re-bladed, and was once treated with a new handle.¹⁰

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.227-9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.312.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.312.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.1.

Such reminiscences served to ensure that the notion of old London Bridge - the “living bridge” - as being representative of London’s pre-modern past embedded itself more firmly in the historical narrative of London’s emergence as a modern metropolis. The inhabited Bridge serves as a metaphor for the anarchic medieval city, in contrast to the organised, rationalised City that was being both envisaged and, in some respects, actually created by the forces of modernity by the early nineteenth century. Old London Bridge had passed into the realms of a ghost ‘urban icon’, a structure that was serving to ‘condense and reduce’¹¹ the experience of pre modern London into one readily identifiable form.

As a result of the physical banality of the “new” London Bridge the baton of the iconic bridge over the Thames eventually passed to the aesthetically memorable and utterly unique Victorian Gothic masterpiece that we know as Tower Bridge, ironically paid for by the revenues from Bridge House Estates. Of all the bridges over the Thames it is Tower Bridge that, alongside Buckingham palace and Big Ben, adorns the postcards eagerly purchased by the millions of tourist who visit the capital annually. It is Tower Bridge that now visually represents London to the wider world.

However what is fascinating is that not only did (and still does) Tower Bridge derive its financial lifeblood from London Bridge but a sizable portion of those self same tourists who purchase the ubiquitous picture postcards of the metropolis will believe that this gothic edifice carries the moniker “London Bridge”. McCulloch himself had to rebuff claims that he believed he was purchasing the Tower Bridge when he agreed the transaction for Rennie’s London Bridge. It is as if the valuable historical baggage accumulated by London Bridge, the vibrant history that gave it such validity as an iconic medieval structure, has been assimilated by a building, Tower Bridge, that is far more in keeping with notions of what an urban icon like London Bridge *should* look like.

Old London Bridge’s status as an iconic structure is perhaps best exemplified by the recent revival of plans by the Mayor of London to construct a new “living bridge” over the Thames an idea that has been in circulation since 1995.¹² The Bridge (the most recent plans committed to paper being a rather unsightly glass and steel structure designed by the architect Antoine Grumbach in 1996¹³) were conceived as a showpiece project designed to act as a

¹¹ Ethington and Schwartz, ‘urban icons’, p.9.

¹² Gourlay, C., (May 2009), ‘Gadzooks – it’s a living bridge’, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article6211498.ece>; Glancey, J., (May 2009), ‘Turn again Boris – your bridge plan is all wrong’, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/may/05/shortcuts-architecture-boris-johnson-bridges>.

¹³ Grumbach, A., (Sept 1996), ‘The garden bridge’, http://www.antoinegrumbach.com/pdf/expo/1996/LivingBridges_RoyalAcademyArts.pdf.

tourist attraction and apparently revived in part as a response to French President Nicholas Sarkozy's efforts to impose a grand renovation plan on London's continental neighbour and rival Paris.¹⁴ Similarly the Royal Institute of British Architects has recently conducted a competition to design a new version of a living London Bridge, based on the existing structure, to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the opening of old London Bridge.¹⁵ It is as if the concept of a "living" London Bridge has come full circle, and that the deliberate evocation of the old medieval Bridge is now perceived as a marketable asset, a link to London's pre-modern past to be celebrated rather than derided.

Arnold has skillfully used the construction of the Rennie's London Bridge as 'a matrix through which fundamental aspects of urban identity can be explored'¹⁶. She has demonstrated the role that the Bridge played in the fashioning of the City's civic identity. Yet she has also established how the desire of the City to assert this identity as an independent entity, distinct from the nation state, fed into the selection process regarding the form the new Bridge was to take. In the same vein Richard Dennis has used the construction of Tower Bridge (as well as Brooklyn Bridge and the Bloor Street Viaduct in Toronto) as illustrative of the multiplicity of interconnecting social, cultural and economic factors that combined to shape and define the modernity of the Victorian city.¹⁷

Similarly this research has tried to illustrate how an iconic structure such as the early modern version of London Bridge can act as a lens through which to interpret and analyse a broad range of historical changes in the urban milieu. In particular this thesis has utilised the extensive, and richly documented, administrative organisation associated with the Bridge to add to our understanding of the complex interplay between financial, political and cultural factors that marked London's progress towards modernity.

In providing a fresh perspective on this transition, this thesis has been heavily influenced methodologically by Miles Ogborn's study of London in the eighteenth century, *Spaces of Modernity*. At its most fundamental level Ogborn's text is a reminder to scholars that historical developments are not abstract, they are the products of the everyday processes of human interaction, of the decisions that people make. This thesis represents an extrapolation of this approach by identifying and analysing some of the contextual social, economic and political factors that served to shape and influence the decision making process

¹⁴ Gourlay, 'Gadzooks'.

¹⁵ Royal Institute of British Architecture (July 2009) [http://www.architecture.com/NewsAndPress/News/CompetitionNews/Press/NewCompetitions/2009/London %20Bridge.aspx](http://www.architecture.com/NewsAndPress/News/CompetitionNews/Press/NewCompetitions/2009/London%20Bridge.aspx).

¹⁶ Arnold, 'London Bridge', p.546.

¹⁷ Dennis, R., *Cities in modernity: representations and productions of metropolitan space, 1840-1930* (Cambridge 2008), pp.1-28.

within a specific urban organisation – the Bridge House - and the implications of those decisions.

By grounding such an analysis in the routine, everyday operations of the institutions responsible for the administration and maintenance of London Bridge we have been able to shed new light on broader historical issues - the character of urban oligarchy, the transformation of the built environment, the transition from oligarchy to more representative forms of governance, and the competence and performance of urban authorities in their financial affairs.

We began this thesis by detailing the development and functioning of the Bridge House, and then progressed to a discussion of the character of this administration whilst under the auspices of an aldermanic oligarchy. The section concluded by arguing that a more rounded and accurate assessment of the character of urban oligarchy can be gained by grounding the actions of those individuals that comprised the ruling clique within the context of the day-to-day challenges they faced and the idiosyncrasies of the administrative structures in which they operated. Similarly chapter six has argued that the lack of accountability within the Bridge House ensured that there was a systematic and institutionalised inertia built into the system of management of its revenue streams. It was this complete absence of both a mandate for proactive decision making, and any procedures to implement lasting administrative improvements that did most to shape the financial health of the Bridge House, and ultimately necessitated the creation of the improvement act in order to fund the removal of the houses. Chapter seven has used the creation of the improvement act to explore the piecemeal and incremental way in which the routine aspects of City administration were devolved from the aldermen to the commoners as the Corporation began its transition from an aldermanic oligarchy to a commoner democracy in the period between the Great Fire and the mid eighteenth century. Finally, in seeking to elucidate the motivations behind the removal of the houses on London Bridge, chapters 4 and 5 have argued that it was primarily a set of complex and interwoven financial considerations that decisively influenced the BHLC's decision making process from the mid 1740s onwards. It was these financial considerations that ultimately resulted in the resolution to remove the houses in 1756, and the consequent modernisation of a small yet significant element of London's built environment.

Perhaps at first glance this is not the most appealing of methodological approaches. Defining the minutiae of how an administrative system worked, the duties of various officers, or the nuances of an accounting procedure, in order to fully appreciate and understand how

and why certain decisions were made is often complex and tedious work, and can lead the researcher merrily yet unwittingly down the path of outright antiquarianism (after weeks working with account books and ledgers one can pick up an unhealthy fixation with trying to deduce the reasons behind even the smallest of accounting irregularities, and suffer an even healthier sense of achievement when the puzzle is solved). But despite such pitfalls this research has hopefully shown that such a technique, when combined with a clear analytical purpose can open up new avenues of productive historical research.

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Eighteenth Century Official Parliamentary Publications Portal: 1688-1834
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