

**Llandilofawr Poor Law Union 1836–1886:**

**‘The most difficult union in Wales’**

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**Abstract**

This thesis explores Llandilofawr Poor Law union’s first half-century. A small union with 17,000 inhabitants scattered across 12 parishes in the remote Carmarthenshire countryside, its economy was predominantly agricultural. The board’s 27 elected guardians, who repeatedly sought re-election, were thus drawn almost exclusively from the farming community. Poor Law Commissioners sensed that implementing the New Poor Law in this environment would be difficult, and frequently referred to the ‘peculiarity’ of Wales and the Welsh. Against this background, this is a detailed study of the union’s elected guardians and officials, and shows how a vibrant local culture determined their approach to the task. Because their sense of belonging remained at parish level the union never became an entity with which local people identified. It did, however, function as an effective administrative unit despite intense inter-parish rivalry. A particular ‘peculiarity’ emerges in that local gentry and magistrates remained almost wholly outside the process, playing almost no role in union affairs. Their absence, and the Commissioners’ clumsy handling of an early key event allowed elected guardians to take control of the union by 1839, one dominant individual, a board member for 47 years, leading an élite group which ran union affairs ‘their’ way. Key to this was to exploit local ‘connections’ and pay particular attention to appointing the ‘right’ officials, especially the union clerk. The outcome was that pauper care was generally benign, and considerable intra-parish differences flourished. Over 95% of relief was provided outside the workhouse, and doles in Llandilofawr were relatively generous compared to other areas of both Wales and England. The historiography of the Welsh poor law is shown to be thin, and this study’s findings have general implications for interpreting the practical operation of poor law unions in both England and Wales, lending support to the idea of considerable regional variation in the application of the New Poor Law.

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## Abbreviations

AC	Assistant Commissioner
BOH	Board of Health
CA	Carmarthenshire Archives
Carms	Carmarthenshire
CJ	<i>Carmarthen Journal</i>
LGB	Local Government Board
LDF	Llandilofawr
MO	Medical Officer
MOH	Medical Officer of Health
NLW	National Library of Wales
NPL	New Poor Law
OPL	Old Poor Law
PLB	Poor Law Board
PLC	Poor Law Commission
PP	Parliamentary Papers
TNA	The National Archives

## Poor Law Unions in Wales



Source: [www.workhouses.org.uk](http://www.workhouses.org.uk)



## Chapter 1

### Introduction and Historiography

Llandilofawr Poor Law union was formed by Assistant Poor Law Commissioner George Clive on 16 December 1836. Its twelve parishes were home to just over 17,000 people spread across some 97,000 acres of rural Carmarthenshire, thus comprising 17% of the county's population and 23% of its land area. The task for the new union was to implement the New Poor Law in a Welsh-speaking remote rural area. Its economy was mainly agricultural, and its highly conservative population was inward-looking with a strong sense of traditional rights. Guardians were to realise the central authorities' vision to 'improve' pauper care: 'abuses' of the old system were to be ended; relief was to be concentrated on the deserving poor. Ratepayers' bills would thus be contained, or hopefully reduced. This required a new management structure consisting of newly-recruited officials who would carry out their duties impartially, objectively and professionally. Further, this was to be done in a manner consistent with a national norm – all paupers should receive the same treatment wherever they were. But, by early 1839 the new Assistant Commissioner Edward Senior had come to a clear conclusion – Llandilofawr was heading in the wrong direction. It was, he pronounced, 'the most difficult Union in Wales'.<sup>1</sup>

The focus of this study, which covers the first half-century of the union's existence, is the people who ran it. It explores how they carried out their duties, investigates why

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<sup>1</sup> TNA: MH12/15922, Senior to the PLC 14 February 1839.

they acted as they did, and provides a picture of the result for those entrusted to their care. Accordingly, the approach adopted has been to conduct an in-depth study of the union and its cultural environment, using the richness of local archival material to take a deep, incisive look. Detailed attention is paid to specific events in union affairs such as the appointment of medical officers and intra-parish wranglings. They are used as a prism through which to interpret guardians' actions and the stance adopted by central authorities given their sensitivity to the 'peculiarity' of Wales and the Welsh. This approach is 'an attempt to assess and typify the ingrained sentiment of the poor relief system...and the related experience of being poor', by 'drilling down to core experiences, structures and official mentalities'.<sup>2</sup> This thesis seeks to carry forward the existing historiographical debate on the nature of the New Poor Law in Wales. It also starts a discussion about new aspects such as the role of élites in union management and the importance of personality. It has been suggested that the Poor Law Commissioners' systematic quantification of pauperism and expenditure resulted in 'a new and more impersonal rhetoric of poverty'.<sup>3</sup> However, it will be shown that in Llandilofawr there was an enduring and vibrant personal theme to most board activities. Findings from this study also challenge the notion that local gentry and magistrates played a positive role as *ex officio* guardians: in this case they were almost entirely uninvolved in union business.

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<sup>2</sup> S. King, 'Welfare regimes and welfare regions in Britain and Europe, c. 1750's to 1860's', *Journal of Modern European History*, 9 (2011), pp. 59-60.

<sup>3</sup> D. Green, *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790-1870* (Farnham, 2010), p. 16, quoting S. Sherman, *Imagining Poverty: Quantification and the Decline of Paternalism* (Colombus, 2001).

Senior and his colleagues regarded the Welsh as backward and reluctant to embrace new ideas, and felt that Llandilofawr's elected guardians (very predominantly farmers) and the union officials they appointed were not up to the job. This study, however, proposes a different and highly positive interpretation. In this reading the English gentlemen sent to administer the law were unable to comprehend the 'Welsh way of doing things', and made some early tactical blunders. The result was that by early 1839 the Llandilofawr board of guardians and its carefully selected clerk/s rather than the PLC were in firm control of union affairs, hence Senior's comment. For the next fifty years they proceeded to provide relief in a manner as close to Old Poor Law ways as possible, their actions being entirely in tune with Carmarthenshire culture. Llandilofawr guardians were masters at abiding by the letter of the New Poor Law while avoiding the spirit. The union remained little more than an administrative unit – one which, as will be shown, was well run – but never became an entity with which local people identified.

A significant finding of this study is that this situation developed because of the nature of nineteenth-century Carmarthenshire society, a subject explored at length in Chapter 2. Llandilofawr was a close-knit community – everybody knew 'who was who', an arrangement which facilitated the use of local connections to 'get things done'. The union itself was controlled from the beginning by a small élite group of 'squires', 'small landowners with considerable influence...a ruling caste'.<sup>4</sup> In the case of Llandilofawr membership comprised more than mere farmers, and included an eminent medical practitioner, the Captain of the local militia, and two clerics – the Llandilo

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<sup>4</sup> H.M. Vaughan, *The South Wales Squires: a Welsh Picture of Social Life* (London, 1926), p. 2. This social group was therefore quite different from English squires.

establishment. They led local society through the strength of their personalities and their close association with the area rather than through class status: they were looked up to, and trusted. Two further factors help to explain the relationship between the élite group, the elected guardians, union officials and paupers. First, local society did not adhere to the rigid class distinctions familiar in England – social boundaries were blurred.<sup>5</sup> Second, ‘squires clung to the traditional belief in the dignity of landownership and its descent’, their influence deriving from this rather than their economic status.<sup>6</sup> One such person, John Lewis, emerges as an extraordinary force in the union, effectively controlling its affairs for most of the fifty-year period studied. He did this ‘from within’, not aspiring to move from his position as vice-chairman: even when Lord Cawdor took on the chairmanship, it was Lewis who called the tune.

The thesis will show that traditional beliefs and practices remained a vibrant part of local life, and played a key part in guardians’ behaviour, especially when it came to making appointments. Elected guardians’ horizons stayed firmly at parish level, and their sense of belonging was often at sub-parish (hamlet) level.<sup>7</sup> This conditioned their behaviour at the board: fiercely independent, they behaved as individuals rather than as a team unless faced with what they saw as unwarranted interference in local matters, at which point they closed ranks against outsiders whatever their own internal differences. It is, perhaps, not surprising therefore that the study identifies occasional inconsistencies in guardians’ thoughts and actions, a result which confirms the notion that,

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<sup>5</sup> See D. Williams, *A History of Modern Wales*, London (1950), p. 212. He notes the ‘social equality’ between squires, tenant farmers, and their labourers.

<sup>6</sup> D.W. Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth-Century Wales* (London, 1977), p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge, 2006).

notwithstanding the intentions of the Commissioners, the law was not uniformly applied in all places and in all circumstances. The interpretation of events in Llandilofawr which follows strongly supports the assertion that ‘there are several different histories of distinctive and regional practices’ in implementing the New Poor Law which need to be located in their geographical context.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it will be shown that in the same way as there were big variations across a large metropolitan area such as London, so there were marked and lasting differences between the outcome in each of Llandilofawr’s twelve parishes, which can be seen as ‘a confederation of localities’, embracing remnants of the Old Poor Law approach throughout the period of this study.<sup>9</sup> This disparity has been seen as central to studies such as the present one which attempt ‘to understand the repercussions of the reform of social welfare in 1834’.<sup>10</sup> The central authorities recognised early on that allowing a considerable degree of latitude was the only viable approach to administering poor law matters in Llandilofawr: they settled for what could be done rather than what should be done, but without abandoning (in their minds at least) points of principle. Sadly, however, and as the historiographical section which follows will show, rigorous studies of how the New Poor Law was applied elsewhere in Wales are too thin on the ground to allow the outcome in Llandilofawr to be robustly compared to what happened in other parts of the Principality.

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<sup>8</sup> D. Green, *From Artisans to Paupers: Economic Change and Poverty in London, 1790–1870* (Aldershot, 1995), p. 210. See also S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700–1850: a Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> J. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor relief 1795–1834* (London, 1969), p. xx.

<sup>10</sup> A. Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in nineteenth-century England* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 30.

Pursuing the study's objective of 'getting inside' the organisation responsible for implementing the New Poor Law in Llandilofawr has revealed several characteristics which have not emerged from previous work of this kind on Wales or England. First and foremost is the paramount importance of personality – in an organisation which was supposed to depersonalise and objectify the management of poverty. This was closely linked with the fundamental influence of local culture on the behaviour of all concerned, notably the local élite. These factors in turn influenced the outcome of elections to the board of guardians. It will be shown that, far from the role of guardian being seen as undesirable and burdensome as has been proposed in some union studies, there was a body of men in Llandilofawr who sought re-election over long periods of time – they seem to have relished their role as poor law guardian. This was often the case because it allowed them, as they saw it, to protect their home parish from 'interference' from outside. In this situation, local gentry (other than immediate members of the élite group) and aristocrats chose to remain almost wholly outside union affairs until the late 1870's. The resonance of these findings for a more general understanding of how the New Poor Law was administered on the ground is developed in later chapters.

The next chapter describes the cultural and social background to the Llandilofawr area, identifying characteristics which had profound influence on the way guardians and union officials carried out their duties. Chapter 3 sets out to quantify pauperism in Llandilofawr: doles pre and post the union's formation are put in the context of Carmarthenshire generally and Wales as a whole, together with the area's demography. It examines how much money was needed to run the union, how the board went about

raising that money, and reveals some of the difficulties they faced in so doing. Chapters 4 and 5 respectively turn to the people, providing detailed analyses of the social background of both elected and *ex officio* guardians, together with a review of the élite group and the clerks they installed to run the union's daily affairs. The very active approach of the elected guardians and the non-appearance of *ex officio*'s is demonstrated and highlighted, and the emergence of John Lewis, Llwynfedwen, is explored. Chapters 6 and 7 then turn to specific aspects of union business to show how the combination of the local culture and particular personalities described in previous chapters played out in the provision of in-relief and medical relief. Historiographical themes such as the question of cruelty or kindness under the New Poor Law, continuity versus change and the 'revolution in government' are considered, and where Llandilofawr stands in relation to them is examined. All these matters are then brought together in the concluding chapter, which revisits some of the wider themes introduced in this section and suggests that there are broader implications for our understanding of how poor law unions operated from the experience in Llandilofawr, and whether what happened there should be classed as 'success' or 'failure'. The present chapter now closes with an historiographical review.

## Historiography

Historians of the New Poor Law have tackled the subject from many different angles and the resulting body of work is vast in scope and rich in composition. The purpose of this section is to set the context for the present study of a single poor law union in Wales, a relatively limited objective in the overall context. It is in two parts: the first outlines the principal strands of general historical debate about the New Poor Law insofar as they condition or complement thinking about its implementation in Wales; the second discusses the extant body of work specifically dealing with Welsh New Poor Law matters, which, as will become apparent, is extremely limited.

A considerable part of poor law historiography is English-centric, although it has broadened out considerably in recent years. As far as Wales is concerned – perhaps because the Poor Law Amendment Act applied to both England and Wales – it has often been assumed that what went for one country also went for the other, so no separate comment was necessary. This has led to a clear divide between the extent of coverage between the two. For England, differences in the circumstances of rural southern counties, industrial areas of the north, and metropolitan London have now become an accepted part of historians’ understanding of how the New Poor Law was effected. The approach to this present (Welsh) study has been to carry out a detailed examination of the key personnel in individual parishes in Llandilofawr union, how they went about implementing the law, and what they achieved. This has revealed that the way Llandilofawr operated and was managed was heavily influenced by a vibrant local culture. While this outcome, based on a single part of rural Carmarthenshire, does not *ipso facto* indicate that the New Poor Law operated in the same way elsewhere in



Wales, and in an identifiably common Welsh way, the present study does provide grounds for proposing that treating England and Wales as a single unit from the point of view of New Poor Law administration, and thus historiography, is inappropriate. For these reasons, the discussion of historiographical strands has been located in individual chapters throughout the thesis rather than grouping it into a single, and perhaps therefore rather too general, summary. For example, the key subject of change versus continuity is brought together in chapter 8 towards the end of the thesis, and issues of cruelty and harshness treated in chapter 6 when discussing in-relief. Chapter 2 deals with aspects of Carmarthenshire culture which go to the heart of how the law was applied in Llandilofawr, and the corresponding historiography of Wales, hardly any of which even touches on the New Poor Law, is placed at the start of that chapter. Finally, the concluding chapter will attempt to locate the contribution of this study to the historiographical debate.

Turning to the general body of work on the New Poor Law it is possible to point to four major groups of historiography. First are works which deal with administrative, government and legal matters, and the law's underlying philosophy, usually in a top-down way. These have been complemented by a second group which deal with practical aspects of the law's administration. This detailed approach has in turn opened up a third area revealing considerable local and regional diversity which adds an important dimension to the debate by starting to consider matters from paupers' point of view – from the bottom up. Fourth, this has blossomed into a new understanding by welfare historians: many, possibly most, paupers' predicaments were rooted in ill-health or infirmity caused by old-age, so the experiences of the sick poor, and the ways poor

law authorities dealt with them, are central to any interpretation of the New Poor Law. This has been coupled with a significant focus of attention on pauper narratives which are used to provide direct evidence of the pauper experience, which have been further enhanced by the addition of an international dimension to include much of mainland Europe. In this context, discussion of the Welsh as opposed to the English approach to the treatment of paupers, becomes part of a much broader debate. Before proceeding further, it should be acknowledged that individual historians' interests do not lie exclusively in any one of these four categories, and it is not therefore productive to try to assign every contribution exclusively to one or the other – there are overlaps. That said each of the four groups is now briefly reviewed.

The New Poor Law has been seen as a seminal factor in the social 'modernisation' of England and Wales. Thus, elements of the first strand of historiography have dealt with issues such as the 'revolution in government'; the formation of the welfare state; a move towards a centralised governmental approach; the decline of the parish as an administrative and social unit; legal aspects of specific matters such as the laws of settlement; and commentary on the political economists who framed the law. Many historians have contributed to these debates.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> W. Apfel and P. Dunkley, P., 'English rural society and the New Poor Law: Bedfordshire, 1834–47, *Social History* 10 (1985); M. Blaug, 'The myth of the Old Poor Law and the making of the New', *The Journal of Economic History* 2 (1963); A. Brundage, 'The landed interest and the NPL: a reappraisal of the revolution in government', *English Historical Review*, 87 (1972); A. Brundage, *The Making of the New Poor Law: the Politics of Inquiry, Enactment and Implementation, 1832–39* (New Brunswick, 1978); A. Brundage, 'Debate. The making of the New Poor Law *Redivivus*', *Past and Present*, 127 (1990); A. Brundage, *England's "Prussian Minister": Edwin Chadwick and the Politics of Government Growth. 1832–1854* (Pennsylvania, 1998); A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700–1930* (Basingstoke, 2002); A. Digby, 'The rural poor law', in D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1976); A. Digby, *The Poor Law in Nineteenth Century England and Wales* (London, 1982); P. Dunkley, 'The "Hungry Forties" and the New Poor Law: a case study', *The Historical Journal*, 2 (1974); P. Dunkley, 'Whigs and Paupers: the reform of the English Poor Laws, 1830–1834', *Journal of British Studies*, 20 (1981); D. Eastwood, 'Rethinking the debates on the Poor Law

A second strand of New Poor Law historiography has concerned itself with issues relating to the way the law was applied in practice. It has therefore addressed questions such as whether pauper care was more or less cruel than it had been under the Old Poor Law; the extent to which it was uniformly applied in all social circumstances in all geographical areas; differences between the outcome in rural and urban areas; and practical modifications in the approach to relief over time as the authorities gained more experience. One of the most enduring parts of this debate has concerned the issue of continuity and change, some historians seeing the New Poor Law as marking a negative step change in the treatment of paupers, while others have sought to interpret large parts

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in Early nineteenth-century England', *Utilitas*, 6 (1994); D. Eastwood, *Governing Rural England: Tradition and Transformation in Local Government 1780–1840* (Oxford, 1994); D. Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in Britain: from Chadwick to Booth, 1834–1914* (London, 1998); S. Finer, *The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick* (London, 1952); D. Fraser, 'The English Poor Law and the Origins of the British Welfare State', in Mommsen, W.J., (ed) *The Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany, 1850–1950* (London, 1981); R. Gutchen, 'Local improvements and centralisation in nineteenth-century England', *Historical Journal* 4 (1961); P. Harling, 'The power of persuasion: central authority, local bureaucracy and the New Poor Law', *English Historical Review* (Jan. 1992); B. Harris, *The Origins of the British Welfare State: Society, State and Social Welfare in England and Wales 1800–1945* (Basingstoke, 2004); G. Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (London, 1984); J. Innes, 'The distinctiveness of the English poor laws, 1750–1850', in D. Winch, P. O'Brien (eds), *The Political Economy of British Historical Experience, 1688–1914* (Oxford, 2002); A. Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in nineteenth-century England* (Basingstoke, 1999); S. King and J. Stewart, J., 'The history of the poor law in Wales: under-researched, full of potential', *Archives*, 26 (2001); N. Landau, 'The laws of settlement and the surveillance of immigration in eighteenth-century Kent', *Continuity and Change*, 3 (1988); R. Lewis, 'Edwin Chadwick and the administrative reform movement, 1854–56', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, II (1950); W. Lubenow, *The Politics of Government Growth: Early Victorian Attitudes toward State Intervention 1835–1848* (Newton Abbot, 1971); O. MacDonagh, 'The nineteenth-century revolution in Government: a reappraisal', *Historical Journal* 1 (1958); P. Mandler, 'The making of the New Poor Law redivivus', *Past and Present*, 117 (1987); P. Mandler, 'Tories and paupers, christian political economy and the making of the New Poor Law', *The Historical Journal* 33 (1990); G. Oxley, *Poor Relief in England and Wales 1601–1834* (Newton Abbot, 1974); H. Parris, 'The nineteenth-century revolution in Government: a reappraisal reappraised', *Historical Journal* 3 (1960); J. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor relief 1795–1834* (London, 1969); D. Roberts, *Victorian Origins of the British Welfare State* (New Haven, 1960); M. Rose, 'The allowance system under the new poor law', *Economic History Review*, 19 (1966); M. Rose, (ed) *The English Poor Law, 1780–1930* (Newton Abbot, 1971); P. Slack, *The English Poor Law 1531–1782* (Cambridge, 1990); K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660–1900* (Cambridge, 1985); K.D.M. Snell, 'Pauper settlement and poor relief', *Continuity and Change* 6 (1991); K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge, 2006); J. Taylor, 'The mythology of the Old Poor Law', *The Journal of Economic History* 29 (1969); J. Taylor, 'The impact of pauper settlement 1691–1834', *Pat and present*, 73 (1976); P. Thane, *The Origins of British Social Policy* (London, 1978); P. Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State* (London, 1982); S. and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History: Part II The Last Hundred Years* (London, 1929) reprinted (1963); K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London, 1981).

of the post-1834 régime as ‘more of the same’. As some writers have examined the way traditional concepts of the right to relief may have been interpreted differently under Old and New Poor Laws, examination of the conditions under which the poor lived has been broadened to include consideration of sources of relief such as charities and help from family and friends – the ‘mixed economy of welfare’. And, under the general banner of addressing what is perhaps the most fundamental question of all – did it work? – issues of whether power shifted from vestries to the centre, and from parishes to unions have been considered, and opposition to the new arrangements, often said to be particularly vigorous in Wales, has been identified. This is a complex and rich literature which will be discussed in the chapters to which they best pertain.<sup>12</sup>

Once the notion that there was considerable variety in the way paupers were treated depending on where they were relieved became generally accepted, the need for detailed, local studies was recognised. A considerable third strand of literature of this

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<sup>12</sup> A. Crowther, ‘Health Care and Poor Relief in Provincial England’, in O. Grell, A. Cunningham and R. Jütte (eds.), *Health Care and Poor Relief in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Northern Europe*, (Aldershot, 2002); F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: the Workhouse System, 1834–1844* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 122; N. Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement* (Manchester, 1971). For Welsh opposition: D. Williams, *The Rebecca Riots: a Study in Agrarian Discontent* (Cardiff, 1971); D. Williams, *A History of Modern Wales* (London, 1950); P. Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales, 1536–1990*, (Harlow, 1992). U. Henriques, ‘How cruel was the Victorian Poor Law?’, *The Historical Journal*, 11 (1968); D. Hirst and P. Michael, ‘Family, Community and the Lunatic in mid nineteenth-century North Wales’, in P. Michael and D. Wright (eds.), *Outside the Walls of the Asylum: the History of Care in the Community 1750–2000* (London, 1999); L. Hollen-Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers, 1700–1948* (Cambridge, 1998); E.T. Hurren, ‘Agricultural trade unionism and the crusade against outdoor relief: poor law politics in the Brixworth union, Northamptonshire, 1870–75’, *Agricultural History Review* 48 (2000); S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700–1850: a Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000); S. King, ‘Welfare regimes and welfare regions in Britain and Europe, c. 1750’s to 1860’s’, *Journal of Modern European History*, 9 (2011); S. King and A. Tomkins (eds), *The Poor in England 1700–1850: An economy of makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003); M. MacKinnon, ‘English poor law policy and the crusade against out-relief’, *Journal of Economic History*, 47 (1987); E. Midwinter, ‘Victorian Social provision: Central and Local Administration’, in E. Martin (ed), *Comparative Development in Social Welfare* (London, 1972); B. Song, ‘Continuity and change in English rural society: the formation of poor law unions in Oxfordshire’, *English Historical Review* 114 (1999); P. Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford, 2000); D. Thomson, ‘The decline of social welfare: falling state support for the elderly since early Victorian times’, *Ageing and Society*, 4 (1984).

type has developed. Some (such as the present study) concentrate on a particular poor law union or region. Not all areas have received equal treatment, and, until recently, there was a particular gap in the literature with regard to London. In some cases (notably Wales) academic historians have been joined by those writing for a popular audience, which has led to historiography of a less robust quality. It commonly seizes upon the great symbol of the New Poor Law, the workhouse, and, drawing on limited primary sources, seeks to paint a picture of unrelenting cruelty and oppression, implying that this was the typical treatment meted out to most paupers most of the time. Others are much more balanced, and have been joined by consideration of important specific-interest groups such as women. There has also been discussion of particular issues such as illegitimacy and the way it was handled under the New Poor Law. This enormous body of work illustrates the experience of poverty from the bottom up, and has led to an understanding that paupers could play an active role in influencing the quantity and type of relief they received – pauper agency was very real. This attention to the lives and experiences of individual paupers is evident in the fourth strand of historiography. Here, historians have opened up a series of issues to do with the relationship between sickness and poverty, emphasising its complexity and variation from region to region, while pauper narratives collected from places as far apart as Sweden, Germany and Spain now allow their hitherto unrevealed experiences to be compared and contrasted across much of Europe. An ever more detailed appreciation of poor law institutions is emerging from these two strands, using an increasing range of primary sources.<sup>13</sup> It bears repeating, however, that the same degree of attention has not

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<sup>13</sup> P. Carter (ed), *The Bradford Poor Law Union: Papers and Correspondence with the Poor Law Commission 1834–1839* (Yorkshire, 2004); S. Cherry, *Mental Health Care in Modern England: The Norfolk Lunatic Asylum c. 1810–1998* (Woodbridge, 2003); M. Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834–1929: the History of an English Social Institution* (Athens GA, 1981); V. Crossman, ‘The New Ross workhouse riot of 1887: nationalism, class and the Irish poor laws’, *Past and Present*, 179 (2003); A. Crowther, ‘Health Care and Poor Relief in Provincial England’, in O. Grell, A. Cunningham and R. Jutte

(eds), *Health Care and Poor Relief in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Northern Europe*, (Aldershot, 2002); R. Davies, 'Inside the house of the mad: the social context of mental illness, suicide and the pressure of life in South West Wales 1860–1920', *Llafur* 4 (1985); A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (London, 1978); A. Digby, *Making a Medical Living: Doctors and Patients in the English Market for Medicine, 1720–1911* (Cambridge, 1994); F. Driver, 'The historical geography of the workhouse system in England and Wales, 1834–1883', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 15 (1989); W. Fishman, *East End 1888: A year in a London Borough among the Labouring Poor* (London 1988); M. Flinn, 'Medical services under the New Poor Law', in D. Fraser ed. *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1976); W. Forsyth, J. Melling, and R. Adair, 'The New Poor Law and the County Pauper Lunatic Asylum: the Devon experience 1834–1884', *Social History of Medicine*, 9 (1996); A. Gestrich, E. Hurren, and S. King, (eds), *Poverty and Sickness in Modern Europe: Narratives of the Sick Poor, 1780–1938* (London, 2012); N. Goose, 'Workhouse populations in the mid-nineteenth century: the case of Hertfordshire', *Local Population Studies*, 62 (1999); D. Green, *From Artisans to Paupers: Economic Change and Poverty in London, 1790–1870* (Aldershot, 1995); D. Green, 'Medical relief and the New Poor Law in London', in Grell, Cunningham and Jutte, *Health Care and Poor Relief, in eighteenth and nineteenth century Northern Europe* (Aldershot, 2002); D. Green, 'Pauper protests: power and resistance in early nineteenth-century London workhouses', *Social History* 31 (2006); D. Green, *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790–1870* (Farnham, 2010); E. Hennock, *The origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany 1850–1914: Social Policies Compared* (Cambridge, 2007); U. Henriques, 'Bastardy and the New Poor Law', *Past and Present*, 37 (1967); A. Hinde, and F. Turnbull, 'The populations of two Hampshire workhouses, 1851–61', *Local Population Studies*, 61 (1998); D. Hirst, and P. Michael, 'Family, Community and the Lunatic in mid nineteenth-century North Wales', in P. Michael and D. Wright (eds.), *Outside the Walls of the Asylum: the History of Care in the Community 1750–2000* (London, 1999); D. Jackson, 'The Medway Union Workhouse 1876–1881: A study based on the admission discharge registers', *Local Population Studies*, 75 (2005); T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: the Voices and Strategies of the English Poor* (London, 1997); P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865–1914* (Oxford, 1987); E. Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late Victorian England, 1870–1900* (Suffolk, 2007); S. King, *Women, Welfare and Local Politics 1880–1920: 'We Might be Trusted'*, (Brighton, 2005); S. King, 'Regional patterns in the experiences and treatment of the sick poor, 1800–40: rights, obligations and duties in the rhetoric of paupers', *Family & Community History*, 10/1 (2007); S. King, 'Poverty, medicine and the workhouse in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', in J. Reinartz and L. Schwarz (eds), *Workhouse Medicine* (University of Rochester Press, 2013); S. King and J. Stewart (eds), *Welfare Peripheries: The Development of Welfare States in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe* (Bern, 2007); S. King and A. Stringer, 'I have once more taken the Liberty to say as you well know': The development of rhetoric in the letters of the English, Welsh and Scottish sick and poor 1780's–1830's, in Gestrich, A., Hurren, E., and King, S., (eds), *Poverty and Sickness in Modern Europe: Narratives of the Sick Poor, 1780–1938* (London, 2012); J. Lane, *A Social History of Medicine: Health, healing and disease in England, 1750–1950* (London, 2001); M. Levine-Clark, 'Engendering relief: women, able-bodiedness, and the NPL in early Victorian England', *Journal of Women's History*, 11.4 (2000); N. Longmate, *The Workhouse* (London, 1974); T. May, *The Victorian Workhouse* (Princes Risborough, 1997); E. Midwinter, *Social Administration in Lancashire, 1830–1860: Poor Law, Public Health and Police* (Manchester, 1969); K. Morrison, 'The New Poor Law Workhouses of George Gilbert Scott and William Bonython Moffatt', *Architectural History*, 40 (1997); A. Negrine, 'The Treatment of Sick Children in the Workhouse by the Leicester Poor Law Union, 1867–1914', *Family and Community History*, 13 (2010); S. Page, 'Pauperism and the Leicester workhouse in 1881', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 63 (1989); J. Pratt, 'Paternalistic, parsimonious pragmatists: the Wigan Board of Guardians and the administration of the Poor Laws 1880–1900', (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Central Lancashire, 2011); J. Reinartz, 'Mechanising medicine: Medical innovations and the Birmingham voluntary hospitals in the nineteenth century', in J. Anderson and C. Timmerman (eds), *Devices and Designs: Medical Technologies in Historical Perspective* (Basingstoke, 2006); J. Robin, *Elmdon: Continuity and Change in a North West Essex Village* (Cambridge, 1980); J. Robin, 'The relief of poverty in mid-nineteenth century Colyton', *Rural History*, 1 (1990); C. Seal, 'Poor relief and welfare: a comparative study of the Belper and Cheltenham Poor Law Unions, 1780 to 1914', (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Leicester, 2010); C. Smith, 'Family, community and the Victorian asylum: a case study of the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum and its pauper lunatics', *Family and Community History*, 9 (2006); K.D.M. Snell, 'The culture of local xenophobia', *Social History*, 28 (2003); K.D.M. Snell, and P. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: the Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge, 2000); T. Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters 1731–1837* (Oxford, 2001); A. Tomkins, 'The excellent example

yet been lavished on the Welsh poor law: what does exist is described in the next section.

### Historiography of the New Poor Law in Wales

The need for regional studies which place the New Poor Law in a local or regional context has long been recognised: seventy years ago Marshall argued that the Webbs' work could 'only be completed by a series of local studies', while McCord concluded that 'local studies are especially needed'.<sup>14</sup> Approaching the twenty-first century, Tanner applauded the (by then) 'growing band of historians' looking at the law 'from the point of view of local experiences', while Englander commented on 'the spectacular growth in studies which seek to place poor law history in its economic, social and political context'.<sup>15</sup> Such studies have been forthcoming for England, but few historians have produced work on Wales, and no-one has looked specifically at Carmarthenshire or Llandilofawr Poor Law Union. The paucity of Welsh Poor Law historiography has been pointed out by several historians. For Eastwood it was 'behind England in terms of depth, sophistication, and modernity of approach', while King and Stewart

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of the working class: Medical welfare, contributory funding and the North Staffordshire Infirmary from 1815', *Social History of Medicine*, 21 (2008); K. Waddington, *Charity and the London Hospitals 1850–1898* (Woodbridge, 2000); K. Waddington, 'Paying for the sick poor: Financing medicine under the Victorian poor law - the case of Whitechapel Union', in M. Gorsky and S. Sheard (eds), *Financing Medicine: The British Experience since 1750* (Aldershot, 2006); S. Williams, 'Poor relief, labourers' households and living standards in rural England c. 1834: a Bedfordshire case study', *Economic History Review* 58 (2005); P. Wood, *Poverty and the Workhouse in Victorian Britain* (Wolfeboro Falls NH, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> D. Marshall 'Revisions in economic history: the old poor law', *Economic History Review*, VIII (1937/8) quoted in A. Kidd, 'Historians or polemicists? How the Webbs wrote their history of the English poor laws', *Economic History Review*, XL (1987). S. and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History: Part II The Last hundred years*, (London, 1929) reprinted (1963). N. McCord, 'The implementation of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act on Tyneside', *International Review of Social History*, 14 (1969), p.90.

<sup>15</sup> A. Tanner, 'The casual poor and the City of London Poor Law Union, 1837-1869', *The Historical Journal*, 42 (1999) p.183; Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform* (London, 1998).

referred to it as ‘weak’.<sup>16</sup> Such work remains remarkably thin: there is still no significant body of good quality New Poor Law work with a Welsh emphasis. What does exist is shown in Table 1.1: there are twenty-five items, of which forty per cent appeared before 1999, and none since 2005. Work dealing with the Old Poor Law in Wales is similarly limited.<sup>17</sup> Three studies cover other aspects of the history of nineteenth-century south west Wales: while valuable as background to the present study, they do not touch on the New Poor Law.<sup>18</sup> This has led to a suggestion that there is not a sufficiently rigorous account allowing us to establish whether a distinctive Welsh poor law system was in operation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> D. Eastwood, review of L. Hollen-Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers, 1700–1948* (Cambridge, 1998): *Welsh History Review*, 2000, p. 382; S. King and J. Stewart, ‘The history of the poor law in Wales: under-researched, full of potential’, *Archives*, Vol. XXVI (2001) p.137.

<sup>17</sup> A.C. Davies, ‘The old poor law in an industrialising area’, *Welsh History Review*, 8 (1976); A.E. Davies, ‘Some aspects of the operation of the old poor law in Cardiganshire, 1750–1834’ *Ceredigion*, VI (1968); C. Davies, ‘Aspects of poor law provision in Carmarthenshire prior to 1834 in C. Jones-Davies, K. Gramich, A. Hiscock, eds., *Dangerous Diversity: the Changing Face of Wales* (Cardiff, 1998); S. Hancock, ‘Aspects of the old poor law in Pembrokeshire’, *Journal of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society* (2008); A. Dodd, ‘The Old Poor Law in North Wales’, *Archaeologia Cambrensis* LXXXI (1926); F. Hankins, ‘The old poor law in Breconshire’, *Bryncheiniog*, XXIX (1996); G. Owen, ‘The poor law system in Carmarthenshire in the 18C and early 19C’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1941); S. Williams, ‘Care in the community: women and the old poor law in Anglesey in the early 19C’ *Llafur* 6 (1995).

<sup>18</sup> K. Cooper, *Exodus from Cardiganshire: Rural-urban Migration in Victorian Britain* (Cardiff, 2011); J.E. Davies, ‘The role of the Cawdor estate and family in Carmarthenshire during the 19<sup>th</sup> century’ (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Swansea, 2009); L. Rees, ‘Middleton Hall and Aberglasney: two Carmarthenshire landed estates and their families 1780–1875’ (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Aberystwyth, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> W. Griffith, *Poor Law in Wales: some random notes*, <https://wiki.brookes.ac.uk>, accessed 1 December 2012; K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London, 1981), p. 60.



Table 1.1: Summary of work devoted to the New Poor Law in Wales

Year Produced	Number of studies
1944–1970	4
1971–1979	3
1980–1989	3
1990–1999	7
2000–2005	8
Total	25

Only seven items in Table 1.1 can be categorised as rigorous academic studies.<sup>20</sup>

Dewar’s article deals with high-level administrative arrangements in south Glamorganshire, and the other authors are mainly concerned with workhouse facilities and conditions, spanning Cardiganshire, Breconshire, Radnorshire and Caersws in Montgomeryshire: their work concentrates on the early 1840’s. There is valuable coverage here of several matters of concern to historians of the New Poor Law in Wales: the variable quality of union staff; slow progress in building workhouses; the prominent role played by Anglican clergymen; and the limited contribution made by *ex officio*’s who left most decision-making to elected guardians. Hankins interestingly argues that the principle of less eligibility was irrelevant in Breconshire because large parts of the population were always so poor that they lived in permanent conditions of

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<sup>20</sup> Scholarly works: A.E. Davies, ‘The New Poor Law in a rural area 1834–1850’, *Ceredigion*, 8 (1978); I. Dewar, ‘George Clive and the establishment of the New Poor Law in South Glamorgan, 1836–1838’, *Morgannwg*, 11 (1967); F. Hankins, ‘From parish pauper to Union workhouse inmate’ (Part 2), *Bryncheiniog*, 31 (1998); E.J.R. Morgan, ‘Administration of the Poor Laws in Pembrokeshire 1780–1870’ (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Swansea, 2004); B. Owen, ‘The Newtown and Llanidloes Poor Law Union workhouse, Caersws, 1837–1847’, *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 78 (1990); K. Parker, ‘Radnorshire and the New Poor Law to circa 1850’, *Transactions of the Radnorshire Society*, 74 (2004); J. Stewart and S. King, ‘Death in Llantrisant: Henry Williams and the New poor Law in Wales’, *Rural History*, 15 (2004).

‘less eligibility’, a situation similar to that in Montgomery. Only two authors offer a wider perspective: Davies sets the Cardiganshire experience in the context of nineteenth-century centralised ‘professional’ government, while Hankins largely agrees with E.P. Thompson, for whom the New Poor Law was a ‘sustained attempt to impose an ideological dogma, in defiance of human need’.<sup>21</sup> This slim literature is revisited in the substantive chapters which follow.

Academic historians’ enthusiasm for detailed local poor law studies has been tempered by its inherent dangers. For Apfel and Dunkley ‘elements of antiquarianism sometimes bedevil work of this sort’, a view echoed by Crowther in the context of alleged workhouse cruelty, noting that ‘at this point the academic and the popular historian part company...scandals still occupy the largest space’.<sup>22</sup> Even some of the better work on Wales runs dangerously close to such problems, as when Hankins refers to Brecon workhouse as ‘displaying all the legendary features of this infamous regime’. Generally, authors in the field of the Welsh poor law have tended towards description rather than analysis.

The remaining eighteen works in Table 1.1 must therefore be characterised as predominantly ‘descriptive’.<sup>23</sup> None of them makes a sustained attempt to probe the

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<sup>21</sup> D. Roberts, *Victorian Origins of the British Welfare State*, (New Haven, 1960); E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (Cambridge, 1981), p.295.

<sup>22</sup> W. Apfel and P. Dunkley, ‘English rural society and the New Poor Law: Bedfordshire, 1834–47’, *Social History* 10 (1985), p. 39; M. Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834–1929: the History of an English Social Institution* (Athens, GA, 1981), p. 33.

<sup>23</sup> E.A. Benjamin, ‘Of paupers and workhouses’, *Ceredigion* 10 (1985); R. Brown, *Parish and Pauper: A History of the Administration of the Poor Law in the Parish of Castle Caereinion, Montgomery* (Welshpool, 1999); D.J. Davies, ‘Guardians of the needy found wanting: a study in social division during

inner workings of Welsh poor law unions, and there is little about interaction between local officials and those in London. In these accounts authors' interests lie mainly, exclusively in several cases, with the workhouse. The work is characterised by selective reference to events in the author's chosen location, relying largely on contemporary press reports with an occasional nod to union minute books. Sometimes, extreme and unsubstantiated comments result from this approach, as when Davies asserts that 'even a superficial examination of the facts establishes beyond all doubt that the behaviour of the rural Boards was unequivocally disreputable': the Llandeilo Board in particular, a 'surviving remnant of the aristocracy', was 'ruthless'. Some works dealing with North Wales offer more objective and balanced accounts since they draw on broader sources including guardians' minutes and union correspondence.<sup>24</sup> But even here local findings are not set in a broader Welsh context, and there is no account of how the New Poor Law was implemented more generally.

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the industrial crisis of 1926', *Carmarthenshire Historian*, 19 (1982); R. Davies, 'Poor Law correspondence 1834-1909', *Dyfed Family History Journal*, 4 : 2 (1991); C. Draper, *Paupers, Bastards and Lunatics: the Story of the Conwy Workhouse* (Llanwrst, 2005); C. Flynn-Hughes, 'The Bangor workhouse', *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society*, 5 (1944); C. Flynn-Hughes, 'The Workhouses of Caernarvonshire 1760-1914', *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society* 7 (1946); C. Flynn-Hughes, 'Aspects of poor law administration and policy in Anglesey, 1834-1848', *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society*, 10 (1950); M. Garrett, 'Recalcitrance and acceptance: aspects of centralisation under the Poor Law in Cardiganshire', *Ceredigion* XV (2005); J. Hainsworth, *The Llanfyllin Union Workhouse: a Short History* (Llanfyllin, 2004); D. Jones, 'Pauperism in the Aberystwyth Poor Law Union 1870-1914', *Ceredigion* 9 (1980); B. Lewis, *Swansea and the Workhouse: the Poor Law in nineteenth century Swansea* (Llandybie, 2003); J. Lindsay, 'The Problems of the Caernarvon Union workhouse from 1846 to 1930', *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society* (1991); D. Llewellyn-Jones, 'The fate of paupers: life in the Bangor and Beaumaris Union workhouse, 1845 - 1871', *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society* 66 (2005); J.H. Thomas and W.E. Wilkins, *The Bridgend-Cowbridge Union workhouse and guardians*, (Cowbridge, 1995); J.E. Thomas, 'The Poor Law in West Glamorgan 1834 to 1930', *Glamorgan History*, 18 (1974); T. Thomas, *Poor Relief in Merthyr Tydfil Union in Victorian Times*, (Bridgend, 1992) based on an earlier article T.D Jones, 'Poor Law administration in Merthyr Tydfil Union 1834-1894', *Morgannwg* 8 (1964); S.R. Williams, 'The Bedwellty Board of Guardians and the Default Act of 1927', *Llafur*, 2 (1979).

<sup>24</sup> Hainsworth, *Llanfyllin*; Jones, *Aberystwyth*; Lindsay, *Caernarvon*; Llewellyn-Jones, *Bangor*.

It is clear from this historiographical review that much remains to be done. Since there are no studies covering Llandilofawr union or Carmarthenshire, there has been little existing work to draw on while conducting this study. As they struggled to implement the New Poor Law in Welsh unions the Commissioners often referred to ‘the peculiar circumstances of Wales’ – perhaps it is this which has deterred historians from entering such potentially perilous ground. This study, however, is an attempt to unravel some of the ‘peculiar circumstances’ as far as Llandilofawr union is concerned, and will draw some conclusions about what they meant for the treatment of the poor.

## Chapter 2

### Carmarthenshire and its society in the mid-nineteenth century

The purpose of this chapter is to set the local scene for what follows in the rest of this thesis. Llandilofawr poor law union was situated in a remote rural area of Carmarthenshire, so one of the key questions which needs to be addressed is its ‘Welshness’: what was there about Carmarthenshire which may have determined how the New Poor Law was implemented there by those actually involved with the day-to-day management of the union? As will be shown, they were people with deep roots in the immediate area. In order to offer a sensitive reading of the union’s affairs, it is therefore pertinent to begin by probing the background of the area in which the principal players in this account lived. It is desirable to have an understanding of their physical surroundings, and the social and cultural environment in which they operated. Such matters are also important in trying to grasp the task faced by the central poor law authorities in administering the New Poor Law in Carmarthenshire. Those responsible were English gentlemen who found themselves working in and with a society quite unlike that to which they were accustomed, and for them the experience was difficult.<sup>1</sup>

The chapter thus discusses social and cultural aspects of mid-nineteenth century Carmarthenshire life in order to facilitate later discussion of issues such as why the elected guardians acted as they did, why there was no effective input to union affairs

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<sup>1</sup> The first two senior Poor Law Commissioners, Sir Thomas Frankland Lewis and his son Sir George Cornwall Lewis, were Welsh and their family seat was in Radnorshire. There is no substantial study of their poor law activities from a Welsh point of view although there are clues in Rev. Sir Gilbert Frankland Lewis (ed.), *Letters of Sir George Cornwall Lewis*, London (1870). This is also true for Sir Hugh Owen, whose biography, B.L. Davies, *Hugh Owen 1804-1881* (Cardiff, 1977), and A.E. Davies ‘Sir Hugh Owen and the New Poor Law’, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* (1965) need to be supplemented.

from *ex officios*, and what paupers' expectations of relief under the New Poor Law may have been. It will offer indications as to how a small élite group of elected guardians, eventually dominated by one individual, assumed control of union policy and mitigated fears of a major and negative change from Old Poor Law to New. Although this appreciation of the 'Welshness' of those involved is fundamental to interpreting events in Llandilofawr, it is not possible on the basis of this study alone to determine whether it depicts a common Welsh approach to the New Poor Law. It is quite probable that the picture in mid or north Wales would be materially different, as it certainly would in the industrialising area of south-east Wales. As shown earlier, there has not yet been sufficient work on other Welsh unions to show the broader picture. The chapter sets out to describe 'what it was like' to live in the Llandilofawr area in the fifty years after 1836 by trying to evoke 'the spirit of the place'. It deals with issues such as local people's sense of belonging; social interactions between and within the different social classes; the powerful influence of popular culture on people's lives; and it interprets Llandilofawr gentry as three disparate groups rather than a single cohesive body. A commentary on unrest in the area leads to a discussion of the difficulties, as they saw them, which Poor Law authorities experienced in administering unions in Carmarthenshire, and examines some of the external influences which helped to shape their opinions of the Welsh.

What follows is based on three types of source material. First, a range of contemporary visitors and local residents wrote accounts and left journals about Carmarthenshire and its people. By their nature many were produced by persons relatively high up the social scale (several clergymen for example) and since they were written in English were directed principally at non-Welsh audiences. A powerful reason for using them is that

such accounts were probably known to Poor Law Commissioners and were thus a potent influence on their opinions, conditioning the way they administered the New Poor Law in Llandilofawr. The second source is the work of recent historians of nineteenth-century Welsh society.<sup>2</sup> Many of these writers approached the subject by looking at matters ‘from below’. They thus offer a different perspective from contemporaries, seeing links between aspects of society such as religion, social values and language from a different angle to contemporary writers. Thirdly, a range of personal and official correspondence adds further background and colour. In bringing these sources together, it is perhaps not surprising that inconsistencies and contradictions emerge, an outcome which lends weight to one of the principal findings of this study: its subjects were fiercely individualistic, sometimes adapting their actions

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<sup>2</sup> Histories of the area include J. Davies, *A History of Wales* (London, 1990); P. Jenkins, *History of Modern Wales 1536–1999* (Cardiff, 1992); I.G. Jones, *Mid Victorian Wales* (Cardiff, 1992); K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: a History of Modern Wales* (Oxford, 1981); and D. Williams, *A History of Modern Wales* (Cardiff, 1977). David Howell covers many aspects of nineteenth-century Carmarthenshire society: ‘The agricultural labourer in nineteenth-century Wales’, *Welsh History Review*, 6. (1973); *Land and People in Nineteenth Century Wales* (London, 1977); ‘Rural society in nineteenth-century Carmarthenshire’, *Carmarthenshire Antiquary* Vol. XIII (1997); *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth–Century Wales* (Cardiff, 2000); with C. Baber, ‘Wales’, in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950: Volume 1*, ed. F.M.L. Thompson (Cambridge, 1990); ‘A ‘less obtrusive and exacting’ nationality”: Welsh ethnic mobilisation in rural communities’, in D. Howell (ed), *Roots of Rural Ethnic Migration: Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe 1850–1940* (New York, 1993). There is a considerable literature on the social, religious and political history of the area and the link with Welsh identity including: T. Brennan, E.W. Cooney, H. Pollins (eds), *Social Change in South West Wales* (Bungay, 1954); M. Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales, 1832–1886* (Oxford, 2004); M. Cragoe, C. Williams (eds), *Wales and War: Society, Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cardiff, 2007); R. Davies, *Hope and Heartbreak: a Social History of Wales and the Welsh 1776–1871* (Cardiff, 2005); N. Evans, ‘Gogs, Cardis and Hwntws: regions, nation and state in Wales 1840–1940’, in N. Evans (ed), *National Identity in the British Isles* (Harlech, 1989); R.J.W. Evans, ‘Nonconformity and nation: the Welsh case’, *Welsh History Review*, vol. 25 (2010); I. Hume, W. Pryce (eds), *The Welsh and their Country* (Llandysul, 1986); D. Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community in South-West Wales at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 1971); G.H. Jenkins and J.B. Smith (eds), *Politics and Society in Wales 1849–1922* (Cardiff, 1988); B. Jones (ed), *The Anatomy of Wales* (Cardiff, 1972); D.J.V. Jones, *Before Rebecca: Popular Protests in Wales 1793–1835* (London, 1973); D.J.V. Jones, *Rebecca’s Children: a Study of Rural Society, Crime, and Protest* (Oxford, 1989); I.G. Jones, *Explorations and Explanations: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales* (Llandysul, 1981); D. Parry Jones, *My Own Folk* (Llandysul, 1972); A.D. Rees, *Life in a Welsh Countryside: A Social Study of Llanfihangel yng Ngwynfa* (Cardiff, 1950); D. Williams, *The Rebecca Riots: A Study in Agrarian Discontent* (Cardiff, 1971); G. Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality in Wales* (Cardiff, 1979). See also W. Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales* (Cardiff, 1983); M. Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy: the Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire, 1832–1895* (Oxford, 1996).

to suit a particular situation rather than adhering to ‘fixed principles’. It should be noted that secondary literature about nineteenth-century Wales has very little to say directly about New Poor Law matters.

Poor Law Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners were generally negative about Wales, partly because as upper-class Englishmen they felt unable properly to understand Wales or the Welsh; and since Welsh guardians exhibited what the PLC considered to be a complete misunderstanding of the principles of the New Poor Law they were often incredulous about their activities.<sup>3</sup> They detected ‘abuses’ which had crept into the administration of the Old Poor Law in Wales to a degree which they considered significant. Moreover, newly-elected guardians seemed to them not only to regard the *status quo* in a highly positive light, but were determined to continue it, and for reasons they found obscure. The Commissioners’ favoured phrase was ‘the peculiar circumstances of Wales’, one which occurs frequently in PLC correspondence. Such repeated references suggest that there was a widespread and commonly shared belief in the ‘peculiarity’ which required no further elucidation – Commissioners did not feel the need to specify what they thought it was, so we are left to infer what they had in mind from letters and reports.<sup>4</sup> The objective here is to probe something described as ‘a distinctive Welsh self-image, an identity rooted in a specific combination of social and economic conditions’,<sup>5</sup> or a ‘sense of collective distinctiveness’,<sup>6</sup> and to examine what

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<sup>3</sup> Despite the Welsh connections mentioned in footnote 1.

<sup>4</sup> A contemporary definition of ‘peculiar’ is ‘unlike others, singular, strange, odd, queer’: Alexander Reid, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1852). This is presumably the sense in which Commissioners employed the word.

<sup>5</sup> R. Merfyn Jones, ‘Beyond identity? The reconstruction of the Welsh’, *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992).



it might have meant in terms of implementing the New Poor Law in Carmarthenshire.

The discussion begins with an appreciation of the physical environment in which paupers and guardians lived.

### Carmarthenshire geography, landscape and agriculture

Llandilofawr's twelve landlocked parishes lay in central Carmarthenshire, an area whose considerable natural beauty was attested to by a series of visitors. 'Two conditions are essential to a perfect landscape – eminences and rivers', wrote Nicolas, 'and in these two Carmarthenshire abounds'.<sup>7</sup> The River Towy, he added, 'a splendid stream', passed through 'some of the most picturesque defiles in Wales', and he admired the 'overhanging shady woods and gravelly pellucid margins' of a river 'famed for its salmon and sewin'. Press reports spoke of 'the unrivalled excellence of its fly fishing': the Towy valley was 'the most classic spot in Wales.'<sup>8</sup> A century earlier Arthur Young was similarly appreciative of 'the hills and slopes which melt into each other so happily that all the outlines are beautiful' and the 'noble oaks spread over the declivities of the hills, their shade [contrasting with] the livelier verdure of the undulating lawn'.<sup>9</sup> The Rev. Emilius Nicholson beheld 'a galaxy of picturesque beauty...considerably heightened by gay meadows and embowering plantations',<sup>10</sup> while Samuel Lewis was struck by

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<sup>6</sup> C. Trosset, *Welshness Performed: Welsh Concepts of Person and Society* (Tucson, 1993), p.7. D. Howell and C. Baber, 'Wales', in F.M.L.Thompson (ed.), *Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 1990), p.329.

<sup>7</sup> T. Nicholas, *Annals and Antiquities of the Counties of Wales* (London, 1872), p. 212.

<sup>8</sup> *North Wales Chronicle* 30 August 1836. Llandilo town lies on the River Towy.

<sup>9</sup> A. Young, *A Tour of South Wales and the South Midlands* (London, 1776).

<sup>10</sup> Rev. E. Nicholson, *The Cambrian Traveller's Guide and Pocket Companion* (London, 1840).

‘lofty precipices of rugged character, forming scenery of great beauty and grandeur’.<sup>11</sup> Delegates at the AGM of the British Medical Association held in Llandilo in 1852 were encouraged to take an excursion ‘which would permit them not only to derive an invigorating and bracing air, but also see some of the finest scenery South Wales can boast of’.<sup>12</sup> Man-made additions to the landscape such as those to Lord Dynevor’s grounds were also fêted: ‘the undulating surface of the whole park is not to be equalled by anything in the kingdom’ wrote Fenton.<sup>13</sup> During his walk through Wales, the Rev. Warner extolled the beauty of the ‘swelling hills, extensive valleys and the rich assemblage of mountains and rivers’ around Llandilo.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century it appears that English and Welsh literary visitors alike, gentry and clergymen in the main, were unanimous in their appreciation of the area’s beauty – its ‘celebrated charms and rolling placid waters’ providing a ‘serene and placid’ environment.<sup>15</sup>

They also appreciated the local people they encountered, George Lipscomb admiring the ‘neatness of dress and decency of behaviour’ of communicants at Llandilo parish church,<sup>16</sup> while Donovan, observing the crowds travelling to market as he went from Llandilo to Llandovery, commented ‘there is a certain pride about the peasantry’.<sup>17</sup> Lipscomb further enthused, albeit rather patronisingly, that ‘throughout the British empire there is no spot where the peasantry exhibit more happiness’, and admired the

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<sup>11</sup> S. Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Wales* (Llandysul, 1849).

<sup>12</sup> *British Medical Journal*, 15 August 1857, President’s Address to the Annual meeting. The President was Dr. David Prothero, vice-chairman of Llandilofawr Union.

<sup>13</sup> R. Fenton, *Tours in Wales 1804–1810* (Cardiff, 1917).

<sup>14</sup> Rev. Richard Warner, *Second Walk through Wales* (London, 1800).

<sup>15</sup> Rev. J. Evans, *Letters Written During a Tour Through South Wales* (London, 1804).

<sup>16</sup> G. Lipscomb, *Journey into South Wales in 1799* (London, 1802).

<sup>17</sup> E. Donovan, *Descriptive Excursions through South Wales* (London, 1805).

fact that whole families co-operated on the same farm. This, he thought, encouraged them 'to perceive that they have a stake in society', and was 'a powerful motive to decency and integrity, cheerfulness and contentment'.

### Sense of belonging and place

Llandilofawr's natural beauty encouraged people to identify closely with their land, a matter extensively discussed by Howell.<sup>18</sup> Even in times of agricultural depression there was considerable 'land hunger', tenants clinging fiercely to the parcel of land farmed by their family for generations.<sup>19</sup> This suggests that the agricultural community's outlook was intensely local: they equated their interests with, and found their family identity in the farm they worked.<sup>20</sup> With the exception of Llandilo town, no parish in the union had anything approaching a centre: the population was scattered across the countryside and neighbours were a farm away, not immediately adjacent.<sup>21</sup> 'Farms remained isolated in spirit as well as in space', wrote Elwyn Davies, recalling his life on the Black Mountain: neighbours seldom gathered together except during harvest, or at chapel or market.<sup>22</sup> Aristocrats could also feel the want of company during sojourns in Carmarthenshire, Lord Emlyn appealing to Alan Gulston: 'I wish you would come and live somewhere

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<sup>18</sup> Especially in *Land and People*.

<sup>19</sup> The hunger concept, often mentioned by Howell, was later expressed more forcibly as 'gnawing hunger', Gwyn A. Williams, *When was Wales? A History of the Welsh* (London, 1985), p. 184.

<sup>20</sup> According to *The Times*, 27 July 1843, 'strong attachment to localities [was] a characteristic of the Celtic races'.

<sup>21</sup> See K.D.M. Snell and P. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: the Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge, 2000); J.G. Jenkins, *Life and Tradition in Rural Wales* (Stroud, 1973, repub 2009), p. 181.

<sup>22</sup> E. Davies, 'The Black Mountain: a study in rural life and economy', *Transactions of the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society*, XXVII (1937).

about here [Llandilo]. We want neighbours very badly'.<sup>23</sup> There was a shared sense of remoteness.<sup>24</sup>

The union comprised 70 hamlets, and it was with this unit rather than the parish at large that local people identified.<sup>25</sup> This is exemplified by the way census data was presented: enumerators recorded the boundary of each hamlet (the term used by them) very precisely, typically using small brooks and individual houses as identification markers.<sup>26</sup> An 1861 enumerator describes his district thus: 'encompassed by the Myddfai river...to the road by Austin's old house, passing Llwynpartridge through Cwmcynfin leading to Garnfawr'.<sup>27</sup> For most parishes in the union the census leaves the user to add the figures to obtain a parish total, which thus seems incidental. Hamlets were small, with populations typically under 200: this was the familiar 'unit size' for the subjects of this study, and in such localities, everyone was known to everyone else.

Llandilo town was not exempt from the emphasis on hamlets, 14 in this case. Even in town, the sense of belonging was more at hamlet than parish level.<sup>28</sup> One resident demanded a Poor Law guardian for each hamlet on the basis that a person from one

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<sup>23</sup> CA: Derwydd muniments, Emlyn to Gulston, 30 January 1860. Like Emlyn, Gulston was a part-time resident in Llandilofawr - he also had an estate in Devon.

<sup>24</sup> A.D. Rees, *Life in a Welsh Countryside: a Social Study of Llanfihangel yng Ngwynfa* (Cardiff, 1950), p. 91.

<sup>25</sup> Most inhabitants were non-conformist, and for them 'parish boundaries were of no significance', D. Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community in South-West Wales at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 1971), p. 181; Rees, *Welsh Countryside*, p. 104; K.D.M. Snell, 'The culture of local xenophobia', *Social History*, 28 (2003), p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> Details from the 1841 census. Subsequent censuses used the same logic.

<sup>27</sup> RG9/4130/59. Each place is an individual holding. 'Austin's old house' still appears as a descriptor in the 1881 census RG11/5390/68 although he died 30 years previously.

<sup>28</sup> See K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006).

could not be sufficiently familiar with paupers in another to offer adequate representation.<sup>29</sup> When the Llandilo Board of Health was established in 1849, its proposed remit was for Llandilo Villa only, ‘one of the fourteen hamlets of the parish’.<sup>30</sup> Once operational, eighteen of the hamlet’s residents, led by ex-union Chairman Rev. Griffies Williams, applied for separate registration because the proposed expenditure would be ‘extremely injurious’ to them as there would be no benefit ‘to our part of the town’.<sup>31</sup> Part of the Carmarthenshire outlook involved intense identification with the area immediately around a person’s place of residence.<sup>32</sup>

Language was also very localised: its form and the speaker’s accent could be used to pinpoint someone’s origins very precisely. This became evident, for example, during the Rebecca riots when investigators trying to identify perpetrators of ‘outrages’ took depositions from witnesses such as Henry Thomas of Carmarthen.<sup>33</sup> Thomas distinguished between those whose ‘Welsh is like mine, of this neighbourhood’, and others because ‘the Welsh spoken six or eight miles off is different’. He was thus able to suggest that the previous night’s rioters were not from Carmarthen. For him the fifteen-mile journey to Llandilo took him well into ‘foreign’ territory – he would have passed through several language zones on the way.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> In April 1867 William Samuel wrote to the PLB complaining that Trecastle hamlet was not properly represented on the union board because all the elected guardians for the parish came from other hamlets. Trecastle was a scattered community of some 70 houses. TNA: MH12/15928.

<sup>30</sup> TNA: MH 13/14, Board Clerk to PLB, 6 September 1849.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, Griffies Williams to PLB 14 June 1861.

<sup>32</sup> D.J.V. Jones, *Rebecca’s Children: a Study of Rural Society, Crime and Protest* (Oxford, 1989), p.58.

<sup>33</sup> TNA: HO 45/347a, Deposition of Henry Thomas, Water Street, Carmarthen, 27 May 1843.

<sup>34</sup> G. Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality in Wales* (Cardiff, 1979), p. 24/5; P. Jenkins, *History of Modern Wales 1536–1999* (Cardiff, 1992), ch. 15; J.W. Aitchison and H. Carter, ‘Rural Wales and the Welsh language’, *Rural History*, 2 (1991); W.T.R Pryce, ‘The Welsh language, 1751–1961’, in H. Carter and H. Griffiths (eds.), *The National Atlas of Wales* (Cardiff, 1981).

## Llandilo town

A look at the union's only urban centre allows us to delve further into local attitudes. As a 'progressing' town, its inhabitants felt themselves at the forefront of social 'improvement' in the area, and there are various reports on its state. For some it was 'beautifully situated' with a 'striking and picturesque appearance'.<sup>35</sup> Samuel's evocation of 'scenes histrionic, civil and political...with drinking to excess amongst partisans and dependents of seekers for parliamentary honours', contrasts with Cragoe's modern description 'genteel', or Davies' description of a town which sometimes 'retreated into a rural peace of almost Arcadian simplicity'.<sup>36</sup> The new bridge (1848) over the River Towy, whose cost had controversially rocketed from £6,000 to over £20,000 during construction, offered a view which 'may safely be pronounced as simply gorgeous'.<sup>37</sup> The town was considerably redeveloped in the period: in the mid 1830's, the main street 'consisted of straw-thatched houses of the poorest description', although there were some finer structures such as the Shire Hall (1801) and the Georgian vicarage,<sup>38</sup> and the workhouse was erected on the edge of town in 1837. Nevertheless there was still inferior housing stock, one report suggesting that 90% of Llandilo's inhabitants lived in 'cottages deficient in decent accommodations'.<sup>39</sup> By

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<sup>35</sup> Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary* p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> W. Samuel, *Llandilo Past and Present* (Carmarthen, 1868), p.67. M. Cragoe, 'The Golden Grove interest in Carmarthenshire politics, 1804–1821, *Welsh History Review*, 16 (1992) p. 470; R. Davies, *Secret Sins: Sex, Violence and Society in Carmarthenshire, 1870–1920* (Cardiff, 1996) , p.22.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid* p.7. His emphasis. The bridge project was a *cause célèbre* but the end product, 363 feet long and rising 47 feet above the river, was widely admired. Its complexity had proved too much for the original contractor Morgan Morgan who was sacked. Help was imported from a Shrewsbury architect.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid* p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> George Clark, *Report to the General Board of Health on the Town and Villa of Llandilo-fawr* (London, 1850).

the 1870's amenities including a new market, Civic Hall, Literary Institute, and National school had been added. The church was remodelled in 1851, a new reservoir was built and six gas lamps installed in 1860.<sup>40</sup> Llandilo was lively: a general market every Saturday; cattle and pig markets on two Tuesdays every month; sheep sales every fortnight (weekly in April and May); and ten fairs per year, each followed by 'capital dances...sanctimoniously denounced by some as sinful'.<sup>41</sup> Pigot's 1844 *Directory* lists an extensive array of tradesmen and artisans complemented by no less than 42 taverns.<sup>42</sup> Like many Welsh rural communities at this time, Llandilo was 'largely self-sufficient'.<sup>43</sup> Civic pride ran high, symbolised by 'those fine defensive forces, our local militia'. With 70 year-old Captain John Lewis (union chairman to 1850) at their head, and Trumpeter Davies, Pentrecwn, 'hale in health at eighty' by his side, 'the appearance of the big men in light blue with large and heavy Grecian helmets was an event as regularly looked for as our monthly market',<sup>44</sup> while their band was celebrated for 'a degree of proficiency surprising to those acquainted with music. [They were] a delight to their numerous hearers'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> CA: DB 79, Minutes of Llandilo Board of Health, 17 July 1860.

<sup>41</sup> Fairs for horses and horned cattle took place on 5 May, 14 May, 21 June, 23 August and 28 September. Pig fairs were held the following day and on 20 February, Easter, 22 November and Christmas. The most crucial for labourers was the hiring fair on 12 November. See Jones, *Rebecca's Children*, p.7; Rees, *Welsh Countryside*, p. 133/5.

<sup>42</sup> These include 8 bakers, 4 blacksmiths, 16 boot makers, 9 butchers, 8 carpenters, 14 grocers and drapers, 8 milliners, 5 ironmongers and 10 tailors. Numbers in each category were double those included in Pigot's 1833 *Directory*. For several other towns see Jenkins, *Life and Tradition*, p. 25/6.

<sup>43</sup> Howell and Baber, 'Wales', p.297; Jenkins, *Life and Tradition*, pp. 19, 22, 101.

<sup>44</sup> Samuel, *Llandilo* p.72. Trumpeter David Davies must indeed have been in rude health – his duties required him to sound his trumpet 'morning, noon and eventide'. He farmed 160 acres and was the most successful competitor at the 1867 agricultural show.

<sup>45</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, 1 June 1855.

Samuel's book offers fascinating insights into how local people saw life. Cambridge graduate and polymath, he followed careers as a medical doctor, teacher of mathematics and farmer, and was father to seven children by three wives. The mere existence of his book is rather curious: running to almost 200 pages, it must have taken a great deal of time to write, but since it only appeared in English cannot have attracted a large local readership, and, dealing with a very specific place is unlikely to have appealed to a wide audience outside the area. It is also written in an intriguing style – he is determined 'to have his say', giving voice to local concerns, and doing so in a manner which borrows from his fellow citizens' verbal style.<sup>46</sup> His very surname sets the scene for what he has to say. The use of Old Testament appellations was common: ten percent of Llandilofawr guardians had one as either surname or given name, and a broader look reveals 169 males in Llandilofawr parish thus named, while for Carmarthenshire as a whole, there were more than 5300, also ten percent of the population.<sup>47</sup>

For him the writing was on the wall: in a passage evocative of nonconformist warnings that 'the end is nigh', he abruptly breaks off from his eulogy of the town and changes tack: 'Llandilo has been scarcely more than a market place for the surrounding district, and since the opening of the railway, that district has been considerably lessened...[the railway] has tapped the reservoir of our trade'.<sup>48</sup> He senses a negative outcome:

'Llandilo market now has to compete with the attractions of Llandovery, Carmarthen and Swansea'. This was not really new as these towns were in easy reach before the

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<sup>46</sup> Trosset's insightful comment that 'what people say is less important than the language in which it is said' echoes this, *Welshness*, p.21.

<sup>47</sup> Daniel, Benjamin, Isaac and Jonah were common. Moses, Joshua and Ezekiel made regular appearances: [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com). The 1871 census lists 5314 Carmarthenshire residents thus named.

<sup>48</sup> Samuel, *Llandilo* p.137.



railway, so his conclusion illustrates that for him the ‘outside world’ started just beyond Llandilo parish and was not of a friendly disposition.<sup>49</sup> His gaze was inwards:<sup>50</sup> danger was caused by anything new, was omnipresent, and was especially likely if the English, who were depriving local people of their livelihood, were involved. He summed the situation up thus: ‘The Celt is not a seller, the Cymro is not commercial. The Saxon invasion continues, modified from direct slaughter to money-making, in a less revolting though equally effectual way’. In the context of such an unfortunate economic situation ‘a talent for talking rather than doing’ has been noted as a possible cultural explanation.<sup>51</sup> And Leyson Orton Lewis who had ‘devoted his fine talents and valuable time to the material improvement of Llandilo’ had ‘died in the land of the stranger’.<sup>52</sup> Samuel’s testimony is especially telling in the present context because he became an elected guardian in 1856, bringing his protective feelings about Llandilo directly to the board table.

#### Social interactions in the Llandilofawr area

Numerous social activities were available for Llandilo people, often associated with notable events in the life of royalty or local aristocrats. The marriage of the Prince of Wales in March 1863 was one such occasion: fireworks costing £15. 6s. were lit on Castle Green, schoolchildren treated to tea, and dinner laid on for the poor. In December 1858 a public subscription paid to celebrate the Dynevor family’s arrival in Llandilo.

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<sup>49</sup> For market towns in south west Wales see E. Davis and A. Rees (eds.), *Welsh Rural Communities* (Cardiff, 1960), pp. 81-84; Howell and Baber, ‘Wales’, p. 299.

<sup>50</sup> Jones, *Rebecca’s Children*, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Howell and Baber, ‘Wales’, p. 315.

<sup>52</sup> Samuel, *Llandilo*, pp. 146 and 73. When Lewis’ wife died all shops in the town closed as a mark of respect, *CJ*, 7 April 1843.

This too included a pyrotechnic display consisting of £6. 12s. worth of fireballs, an archway to the park entrance, and a performance by the famed militia band. The town was specially illuminated by 15s. 9d. worth of torches, and money was left over to provide five tons of coal for 56 poor people: all social classes gained something. Similar festivities took place on the occasion of Dynevor's golden wedding anniversary in October 1844 and when Viscount Emlyn reached his majority in February 1868; and when the railway opened in January 1857 there was a public breakfast for 156 persons at the Shire Hall.

We are aware of these events from Thomas Jenkins' diary which (intermittently) covers the period 1826 to 1871 offering glimpses of the lifestyle enjoyed by the artisan class in Llandilofawr.<sup>53</sup> Jenkins spent his entire life in Llandilo, earning his living as a cabinet maker, but also turning his hand to the manufacture of items such as sundials, wax replicas of local people, a chocolate grinding machine and a three-wheeled 'homomotive carriage' eventually used to pay an urgent visit to his dying girlfriend 15 miles away. He and his peers had sufficient time and money to travel: he spent a week in Bristol in July 1841, journeying by steamer ('got very sick') from Swansea, and visited London in 1851, this time by train, to see the parks and the Great Exhibition. Such trips required considerable stamina – a 20-mile walk to Neath followed by a nine and a half hour train journey. Several holidays were taken on foot, including a 52 mile walk to Tenby in 1844. We also learn of the agricultural show in 1861, a lecture on phrenomesmerism in 1850, and a presentation of his own hydraulic servo pump to the Mechanics Institute in 1843. It seems, then, that although Llandilo residents such as Jenkins exhibited a close attachment to their hamlet of residence, this did not mean that they were ignorant of or

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<sup>53</sup> D.C. Jenkins (ed.), *The Diary of Thomas Jenkins of Llandeilo, 1813–1871* (Bala, 1976). Interestingly, he kept the diary in English rather than Welsh.

unwilling to investigate ‘foreign’ places, enjoying both for different reasons, while, when at home in Llandilo there was a lively set of ‘improving’ activities. His diary also reveals some of the personal tribulations suffered by people in his sphere. In 1845 his four-year old son died of scarlet fever, followed, in 1848, ‘after a night of intense suffering’, by his wife – and Sarah Davies, his about-to-be fiancé, ‘breathed her last’ only three years later, having spent several days on her deathbed in a state of extreme religious ecstasy described in vivid detail.<sup>54</sup> On several occasions he was required to make multiple coffins for children from the same family who had succumbed to an epidemic. Such sad experiences were interspersed with happier ones: regular ‘scientific’ group visits to explore local caves; outings to the Mumbles; suppers at the ‘Cawdor Arms’; acting as census enumerator in 1851, 1861 and 1871; fathering an illegitimate daughter in 1850; and eventual marriage to already-pregnant Ann Thomas in 1854. There were dramas such a train crash, an earthquake, a series of arson attacks, and the destruction of toll gates during the Rebecca riots, although there is scant mention of the latter. It is telling that, in a town where his extra-marital activities would have been well known, he could still socialise with local clergy: indeed, after one of his regular visits to Sarah Davies’ grave, the Rev. D. Williams, former union chairman, gave him a lift home in his phaeton. Clearly he was not *persona non grata*: this was an inclusive society.<sup>55</sup>

From time to time the gentry organised public celebrations triggered by events they considered significant. After a failed assassination attempt on Queen Victoria for example, J.W. Philips and William Peel organised a ‘County congratulatory meeting’ at which Capt. Lewis proposed the toast to Prince Albert. The left-leaning *Welshman*

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<sup>54</sup> Sarah may have been in the vanguard of the 1849 ‘Great Revival’ in South Wales. 1000 people joined churches around Llandilo: T. Rees, *The Great Revival in South Wales in 1849* (London, 1867), p. 93.

<sup>55</sup> Howell and Baber, ‘Wales’.

reported gleefully that the event was ‘thinly attended’, perhaps because the principal organisers were among the least popular local gentry.<sup>56</sup> Despite temperatures of 110 degrees, a performance of ‘She stoops to conquer’ proved more popular, the sponsor, Richard Hughes, Tregib, being much respected: it was held up as ‘rational and instructive recreation.’<sup>57</sup> In other contexts elected farmer guardians took a social lead, David Harries, for example, giving the keynote speech at the Llanegwad ploughing competition in 1869.<sup>58</sup>

Friendly Societies were an important feature of community life. The Oddfellows enjoyed a substantial following: membership of the six Llandilo district lodges reached 226 by 1850, while neighbouring Carmarthen’s 13 boasted 635 members.<sup>59</sup> There was a conscious social element to the Society’s proceedings in addition to its provision of financial benefits. Monthly meetings were held in public houses whose proprietor was the lodge secretary: in some cases such as Llandebie and Talley he was also an elected guardian.<sup>60</sup> The ‘Philanthropic Order of True Ivorites’ was similar, but enhanced by a specifically Welsh slant – in addition to providing sickness benefits ‘they promoted the speaking and writing the Welsh language’.<sup>61</sup> Annual processions allowed them to engage with townsfolk, and elected guardians were actively involved, for example as chairman and vice-chairman at the evening dinner.<sup>62</sup> Diners sang patriotic songs among

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<sup>56</sup> *Welshman*, 17 June 1842.

<sup>57</sup> *Welshman*, 19 August 1842.

<sup>58</sup> Guardian for Llanfynydd for 27 years, and Union vice-chairman..

<sup>59</sup> Figures from Oddfellows *Annual Handbook*, 1851.

<sup>60</sup> Rawlins Evans, Red Lion Inn and Thomas Evans, Shears in Hand Inn respectively.

<sup>61</sup> The Ivorites were the only indigenous Welsh Friendly Society, D. Williams, *A History of Modern Wales* (London, 1950), p. 239. See also [www.wales-usa.org/honoraryorderofivorites](http://www.wales-usa.org/honoraryorderofivorites), 10 October 2010.

<sup>62</sup> D. Davies, Froodvale and Morgan Jones, Maesllan respectively.

scenes of ‘wild grandeur so truly pleasing that they defy description’.<sup>63</sup> Societies like these were important in a broad sense because members had to adhere to a strict rules regarding morals and behaviour specified in the handbook.<sup>64</sup> Their motto ‘Friendship, Love and Truth’ expressed a wider purpose and was in tune with local people’s principles linking non-conformist values, language and popular culture.<sup>65</sup> The ‘bright rays’ of the Oddfellows and Ivorites may have ‘spread over the valleys like the firmament of light’, but they did not (for actuarial reasons, presumably) extend to the over 40’s, and concern that this group might have ‘to dwell between the lofty and hopeless walls of the gloomy prison of poverty and misfortune’ led to the formation of an ‘Elders Institution’ in 1841.<sup>66</sup> Anyone who was ‘moral and virtuous’ (and over 40) could join on payment of an annual subscription ranging from 5s. 0d. to 10s. 6d. depending on age, plus 1s. per month. A particular feature of this society was the importance attached to secrecy and ritual – entry to meetings, called ‘the Court’, at which the only permitted form of music was the harp, was restricted to bearers of an oak staff who gave a correct display of signs and uttered the password. It is not clear why secrecy was so vital to a benefit club, but a clue may come from the fact that there was one, and only one, exclusion to membership – ‘bailiffs or bailiffs’ followers’: there was a fear that if landlords knew what was going on, trouble would ensue. This might come in the form of a rent increase, for example: anyone who could afford the dues could pay more rent.<sup>67</sup> A schedule of fines included 3d. for ‘refusing to give signs’, eating or sleeping in Court

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<sup>63</sup> *CJ*, 1 July 1842.

<sup>64</sup> *CA: Ivorites* 18 (1840).

<sup>65</sup> See Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 361.

<sup>66</sup> From the *Introduction to the General Laws of the Elders Institution* (Carmarthen, 1842).

<sup>67</sup> See discussion later in this chapter.

or wearing a hat; 2s. 6d. for ‘drink’; and a massive 10s. 0d. for ‘admitting strangers or challenging another member’. It sounds akin to a secret society with a potentially subversive purpose, a suspicion bolstered by the thought that meetings offered an opportunity for elderly farmers to gather in complete privacy during the Rebecca riots.<sup>68</sup>

Examples of social interaction discussed above show that there were frequent opportunities for people from most social classes to mix, and that many functions were well-attended. Large numbers would have met regularly in other circles such as nonconformist chapels, and moral expectations of chapel goers’ behaviour carried over into the membership rules of benefit societies. Despite such rules, transgressions like Jenkins’ adulterous affairs did not cause him to be cast out of polite company: foibles could be overlooked. ‘Collective individualism’ seems to have been the name of the game.

An important characteristic of festivities and club events such as those described above is that they were for people of the immediate area. ‘Outsiders’ did not attend, and Llandilo people would not have expected to go to similar events in Carmarthen, for example. This is a further important factor in understanding the distinction between most local people and the gentry – fundamental to the latter’s social life was engagement with those of the right class rather than those of the same area, and in thinly populated Carmarthenshire this required a social network spread over considerable distances, crossing county borders to include Pembrokeshire and Cardiganshire, as the journal kept by Agnes Hermione Jennings of Gellideg between 1865 and 1872 makes clear.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> There was also a ‘Society of Gentlemen Tradesmen of Carmarthen’ as early as 1819. CA: RB 23A 22231.

<sup>69</sup> Summarised in two parts by Francis Jones, *Carmarthenshire Historian*, XI (1974) and XII (1975).

Hermione Jennings' family originated in northern England. Her mother had family ties to an estate in Breconshire, and wealth on her father's side derived from trading activities with Russia financed the 1849 purchase of Gellideg, 15 miles south-west of Llandilo. Her journal begins when she was 17 and details the social whirl in which the Jennings engaged, a circle which included Llandilofawr gentry, thus providing a direct view of social interactions at the upper end of the scale. Hermione possessed the attributes of well-educated young ladies: she was an accomplished pianist, sang well, and spoke French. Regular activities included horsemanship and archery, for which she won several prizes. For her circle the essence of social engagement involved four-day house parties involving around twenty resident guests, while others joined for lunch or evening balls. Evening entertainments were the crux of such gatherings, involving 100 people or more. The Aberglasney ball of January 1867 was typical: it continued until half past five in the morning, at which point a 'second supper' was consumed. Hermione carefully records who took her in to dinner, and notes the names of her dancing partners: in her world such matters were of key importance. Dining with the right people, however, did not always guarantee enjoyment: fellow guests such as Capt. Bragg, a 'pompous conceited piece of humanity', were found wanting, while Lady Hamilton 'went on like a clock, talking for half an hour without interruption'. At the other extreme when Mr Vaughne, 'a very meek individual', spoke, he did so in 'a low tone of voice'. Inviting large numbers of guests risked including some with deficient manners: Owen Wilson was 'a very vulgar man', while his wife was dismissed as 'somewhat resembling an actress with yellow hair'. In this world shades of gentility were keenly perceived and economic success did not guarantee social esteem – Rose Crawshay, the wife of 'Iron

King' Robert, was a 'stiff, proud mother' with 'two awkward ill-mannered daughters',<sup>70</sup> while the Archdeacon's offspring were sniffed at as 'wonderful specimens of rusticity dressed in the most rural manner'. Even dinner with Lord Dynevor could be 'slow' with 'no music and little conversation': he had taken holy orders, and the evening was topped off with an extempore sermon, an experience repeated after breakfast the next morning. Hermione's *Journal* offers a fascinating insight into her frequently unfavourable opinions about members of her own class.

The lasting impression is one of frantic activity resulting in little satisfaction – being seen to be in the 'right' place was everything and it was the quantity of entertainment which mattered. At the end of 1866 Hermione proudly, but somewhat wearily, sums up her year:

Amount of Gaiety in 1866

- Stays in country houses - 7 visits.
- Balls & Dances - 11 in Wales, 13 in London.
- Dinners - 19 in Wales, 13 in London.
- Drums<sup>71</sup> - 2 morning, 11 evening.

Since she offers no further comment we are left with the impression that, despite the amount of 'distraction' available to Hermione, her life remains unfulfilled – excitement has become routine.

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<sup>70</sup> Robert Crawshay (1817-1879) employed 5000 workers at his Cyfarthfa ironworks in Merthyr Tydfil, and left an estate worth £1.2m., but, personally engaged in manufacturing, he was not perceived by Carmarthenshire gentry as a social equal.

<sup>71</sup> Less formal gatherings in private houses.



## Popular beliefs and culture

A rich seam of traditional popular cultural activities underpinned life for Carmarthenshire residents, and this together with widely held popular beliefs formed an integral part of their life. Indeed, it has been suggested that ‘one cannot fully appreciate the treatment of poverty [in Wales] without understanding the significance of the revel and the maypole’.<sup>72</sup> It seems, then, desirable to consider such matters in the Llandilofawr area.

Accounts of Welsh folk customs such as that by Trefor Owen describe a range of traditional activities: Christmas wassailing ceremonies; the ‘summer birch’ (involving young couples dancing to harp music around intricately decorated birch trees); and a tradition in Llansawel, still prevalent in 1849, according to which brides en-route to their wedding were taken away on horseback at high speed by a ‘guardian’, the bridegroom having to retrieve her for the ceremony to take place, a practice which demonstrates such traditions’ ‘triple ingredients of licence, danger, and rebellion’.<sup>73</sup>

Another account provides rich detail of the immediate Llandilofawr area. In an early example of oral history, Jonathan Ceredig Davies talked to inhabitants of south-west Wales: since the interviews were carried out before 1911, the individuals had personal memories from the mid-nineteenth century. Seven of Llandilofawr’s twelve parishes are specifically mentioned: two incidents relate to farms whose tenants were elected

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<sup>72</sup> R. Suggett, ‘Festivals and social structure in early modern Wales’, *Past and Present*, 152 (1996), p. 79.

<sup>73</sup> T.M. Owen, *Welsh Folk Customs* (Cardiff, 1987); Jenkins, *Life and Tradition*, p. 176; Jones, *Rebecca’s Children*, p. 79.

guardians.<sup>74</sup> A few examples of his discoveries reveal a world where traditional beliefs and ceremonies remained a vivid part of life for ordinary people.

There are several accounts of spirits, and the need to have them ‘laid’ by professionals. In Llanfynydd, where farmers took care to sow their wheat during the waxing of the moon, a spirit regularly appeared in forms such as a pig, mouse or hare, so, in 1850, the ‘celebrated wizard Harries of Cwrtcadno’ was called in to deal with it. His solution was to turn it into an insect, seal it in a bottle, and throw it into the water under a nearby bridge. In Llandilo a family squabble caused an engaged couple to split up after which the man encountered a run of bad luck. He came to believe that this was caused by his ex-fiancé who turned out to be a witch: friends recommended consulting a wizard who wrote a charm, instructing him to bury it at the entrance to his farmyard: after so doing, the troubles ceased. More generally, bad luck or evil spirits could be kept at bay by drawing a chalk line around one’s doorstep. Llandebie residents called help from a ‘sin eater’ who removed the sins of a dead loved one by spreading salt on the corpse’s breast, and placing a piece of bread placed on top. Upon payment of 2s. 6d. the sin eater uttered an incantation, ate the bread and departed taking the sins away with him.<sup>75</sup> Aristocrats were also known to require help with ghosts, although, according to Davies, they sought intervention in the more conventional form of a parson. At the Cawdors’ Stackpole estate in Pembrokeshire it became necessary to remove a ghost – the divine’s innovative cure was to condemn it to empty a large lake with a cockle shell, a task which it was anticipated would last for eternity.

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<sup>74</sup> J.C. Davies, *Folklore of West and Mid Wales* (Aberystwyth, 1911).

<sup>75</sup> Owen also recounts this, tracing the custom to Hereford. He was always a ‘poor person’ which may explain why the fee in this case was only 6d.

More joyful events included ‘biddings’, widely reported in Carmarthenshire in the mid 1800’s, and specifically upon the marriage of William Howells and Sarah Lewis of Llangathen. Friends and relations were welcomed at Mr Shenkins’ house where they presented gifts to the couple on the understanding that the favour would be returned. Their bidding letter reads ‘whatever your propensities feel to grant will meet with acknowledgement...and will be retaliated with promptitude and alacrity on the occurrence of a future hymeneal occasion.’

Even poor law guardians needed conjurors from time to time. Davies narrates an incident at Ffosyhwyaid in Talley parish: the farmer’s ox went missing so he consulted a conjuror who was able to give him precise information as to its whereabouts. He also commented that the farmer looked sad, correctly stating that his mother had just died. Moreover, he warned, there would be an even more melancholy event in a year’s time: exactly one year later the farmer himself died. This account is particularly resonant in the present context because the inhabitant of Ffosyhwyaid between 1838 and 1870 (likely to have included the period described by Davies’ interviewee) was Thomas Griffiths, for 21 years one of the elected poor law guardians for Talley. Even more interestingly, Griffiths appears in the 1851 religious census as Secretary of the Talley Baptist chapel, and it thus seems that a committed Christian felt at ease with the idea of soliciting help from ‘magical’ sources. For him, there was no unbridgeable gulf between his non- conformity and traditional practice – perhaps he perceived a spectrum of remedies to his problem, and he may well have prayed for the safe return of his ox while simultaneously soliciting an alternative supernatural solution.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> For non-conformity ‘undermining’ the ‘customs of the peasantry’, D.W. Howell and C. Baber, ‘Wales’, p. 330.

The farm inhabited by another guardian is also mentioned by Davies, this time in the context of traditional ceremonies. This account is very specific, relating to events at Cilwennan Isaf in Llansawel in 1845, where after harvest it was customary for neighbours to gather round the corn-drying kiln. Stories were told, quantities of the local brew, cwrw, were consumed, and games were played: one of Llansawel's elected guardians, David Davies, was the farmer of Cilwennan Isaf. There was a general Carmarthenshire tradition of cwrw parties: neighbours gathered and paid to consume the home brew and sing songs, the profits being given to the poor.

Llanegwad, and neighbouring places between Llandilo and Carmarthen were the scene for *Mari Lwyd Llawen* (merry grey Mary), a traditional Christmas ceremony in which a man wearing a straw replica of a horse's head bedecked with ribbons and rosettes and covered in a large white sheet proceeded from house to house singing songs and playing pranks before presenting his collecting box.<sup>77</sup> In this account the prankster could cover prodigious distances, sometimes straying almost to Aberystwyth.

Life in the Llandilofawr area, then, included the regular enjoyment of traditional pastimes, which helped to bond local people together and, for many, offered a respite from the grind of daily life, 'magical' beliefs co-existing alongside the more conventional non-conformity of most participants: as Russell Davies put it 'the person who attended chapel also subscribed to a number of beliefs and practices which dated back to pagan times'.<sup>78</sup> Elected poor law guardians were active participants in these activities and ceremonies.

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<sup>77</sup> Jenkins, *Life and Tradition*, p. 180.

<sup>78</sup> R. Davies, *Secret Sins*, p.11. Even during the 1905 Revival 'angels and devils walked the county's highways and byways'.

## Gentry in Llandilofawr

Turning again to the upper echelons of society, a deeper look into Hermione Jennings' social *milieu* shows that it would be misconceived to regard Llandilofawr gentry as a cohesive body bent on improving the lot of the poor.<sup>79</sup> A more nuanced look at gentry society suggests that it consisted of three separate groups: the first two can be described as families who were 'in the area', while the third, with deep local roots, were 'of the area'.<sup>80</sup> The generic term 'gentry' obscures an underlying situation in which each group played a distinct role in local affairs in general, and poor law matters in particular.<sup>81</sup>

The first group comprises three families, Cawdor, Dynevor and Hamlyn Williams. They had substantial estates in multiple locations – for them Carmarthenshire was not the centre of their world, and only a proportion of their time was spent there. Their public contribution to the wellbeing of the area, as they saw it, was made in politics at the national or county level, while undertaking roles such as Lord Lieutenant or High Sheriff of Carmarthenshire facilitated patronage opportunities to lesser gentry and political allies. They sat on the bench and were involved as investors in Turnpike Trusts and railways. Up to the mid 1870's poor law affairs were not of sufficient importance to them to warrant significant time investment, a stance which encouraged elected guardians vigorously to oppose them whenever it suited. Such interaction as they had with Llandilofawr residents of any class was limited: they sometimes presided at formal

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<sup>79</sup> A view shared by Rees, who notes that Carmarthenshire gentry 'were far from a unified group'. L. A. Rees, 'Middleton Hall and Aberglasney: two Carmarthenshire landed estates and their families 1780–1875' (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Aberystwyth, 2009).

<sup>80</sup> D.W. Howell and C. Baber, 'Wales', p. 287; Jones, *Rebecca's Children*, p. 69.

<sup>81</sup> Biographical details of some gentry members and *ex officio* guardians are in Chapter 5. The discussion here relates to Llandilofawr gentry society in general.

occasions; they saw it as their duty to make financial contributions to good causes such as schools; they provided prizes at agricultural shows and so on, but regarded themselves in a different sphere.

Although at a social level below aristocracy, Hamlyn Williams, with estates in Edwinstford and Clovelly, is also part of this group. As MP he was involved in national politics, but the difference between him and the aristocrats is that he seems to have used his political position principally for his own benefit rather than for the general good. Like them he moved between his different estates but, at the Welsh end where he effectively owned a closed parish, he did his best to 'job' political supporters into paid poor law employment.<sup>82</sup> He was loved by those he helped, and distrusted in other circles, notably the PLC.<sup>83</sup>

The second and most numerous group is amorphous, including wealthy families active in the house-party set discussed above, and others who were less well off, thus spending more time in Carmarthenshire than elsewhere. For some, such as the Gulstons, property interests around Llandilofawr had come through marriage settlements, while those like the Peels were first generation arrivals having purchased an estate in the area. Yet others like Walters Philips arrived from elsewhere in Wales and tried to fight their way up the local social ladder. For them local ties were economic rather than emotional, hence the suggestion that they were in the area rather than of it. Their attitudes to engagement in public affairs varied. Many were magistrates, albeit fairly inactive; Peel tried and failed to become union chairman. A.J. Gulston, the largest property owner in Llandilo, had a

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<sup>82</sup> For the creation of such jobs for friends on a massive scale see S.R. Williams, 'The Bedwellty Board of Guardians and the Default Act of 1927', *Llafur*, 2 (1979).

<sup>83</sup> See discussion p. 186.

different approach: there is no record of him being involved in poor law affairs, and he hardly attended the bench, but he was a significant benefactor, donating land and paying for the construction of a new market hall, for example. The result was that he and his family seem to have been generally well regarded, partly because none of their interactions had negative consequences such as fining or imprisoning offenders, or refusing poor relief. The family was sufficiently popular that when their daughter Lizzie married Molesworth Ellis in 1870 the wedding party was cheered and local people erected arches across the streets bearing goodwill messages to the happy couple. Correspondence between Peel and Gulston suggests that the public duties they did perform were undertaken reluctantly: both felt obliged to take a turn as High Sheriff, and, in 1860, Peel confided 'I am sorry you are Sheriff, but it can't be helped'.<sup>84</sup> However unenviable the task may have been, they set about enjoying its ceremonial aspect with aplomb: if it was necessary to do one's duty, it was worthwhile doing it 'properly'.<sup>85</sup> The High Sheriff received and entertained judges when Assizes were held, part of the tradition involving a procession: he arrived at court in a sumptuous carriage attended by 12 'Javelin Men' whose attire, for which he paid, cost over £100. Peel turned this to advantage by appointing his own tenants as javelin men: he provided blue frock coats, trousers with scarlet strips, boots and hats, which they were allowed to keep to wear 'on high days and holidays'.<sup>86</sup> Their approach was to manage their estates in an orderly fashion and treat tenants well, thus achieving a degree of acceptance while living life away from unnecessary contact with local people, to whom they were not close.

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<sup>84</sup> CA: Derwydd muniments, Peel to Gulston, 24 January 1860.

<sup>85</sup> M. Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy: the Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire, 1832–189* (Oxford, 1996), p. 75/6.

<sup>86</sup> CA: Derwydd muniments, Peel to Gulston, 10 February 1860.

By contrast, men such as Walters Philips seem to have been unpopular with the lower orders. This was for a variety of reasons: some were relatively new to the area; others took pains to look after their own affairs to the exclusion of others; and the public service they did offer as magistrates was poorly regarded because the bench sat too infrequently, and was often held to act in a partial manner. In poor law matters they were frequently obstructive, creating unnecessary difficulties for the board of guardians. There is little evidence of this group's social circles extending beyond the immediate area – they were continuously resident. Ironically, it may be the fact that they were normally to be found in Llandilofawr where they thus actively 'interfered' with local peoples' lives that led to their unpopularity – they seem to have achieved an unsatisfactory half-way house where attempts to engage with local people backfired, often because it was their own self-interest which won the day, and this is what the lower orders principally remembered.

In terms of participation in union matters, the stance adopted by this group changed over time. There was a brief flurry of activity in the late 1850's when a couple of non-resident gentlemen appeared at board meetings together with William du Buisson whose approach was similar to Gulston's, and there is evidence that for politicians such as the local MP David Pugh it was useful to be seen to be taking an interest.<sup>87</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that when it eventually suited Cawdor to become union chairman in 1876 a few gentlemen came to meetings to show support, but by this time running the union was largely a matter of routine. There is a strong suggestion that for this group the stimulus to spend time on poor law matters was to do with what was regarded as useful to their own kind rather than for the good of the poor, a situation very unlike that of the last group, Welsh-speaking families resident in the area for many generations, who were

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<sup>87</sup> The du Buissons paid for the parish church and school at Llandebie. They were Huguenots.



more likely to be involved in Ivorites' gatherings or at the Mechanics' Institute than Hermione Jennings' whirl of balls, dinners and parties.

These families exerted power and influence over many people's daily lives through extensive local connections – they knew 'how to get things done', and their opinion about what should be done was often different from that of the other gentry. They were crucial to the operation of the New Poor Law: the only gentry group, it seems, which did anything about it. What distinguished them from the other groups was their Welsh heritage: their families had a long-standing relationship with and involvement in Llandilofawr; they lived there, their children were born in the area and went on to marry into the same stratum; and they died and were buried there. Everyone knew who they were. They did not need to tell people to do things: they knew who could be effective in achieving their goals and were comfortable to work with them in a non-hierarchical way, using persuasion and 'obligation' rather than muscle to achieve desired results. Families such as the Protheros, Lewises and Thomases of Caeglas gave unstinting public service in several roles. Their successes were frequently achieved despite the other gentry groups rather than because of them – they were expert at not allowing them to get in the way. It seems clear that they regarded themselves as an integral part of local society, while the Peels and Gulstons stood apart. Their social activities were more to do with the immediate local area than with class – they were the effective local leaders, but, crucially, they led from within.

Able members of this group were upwardly mobile, John Prothero Lewis the first clerk being a good example. He resigned the clerkship to concentrate on developing his own legal practice, later adding the post of Superintendent Registrar to his portfolio. His

name frequently cropped up in local social gatherings and by 1861, as a ‘man of substance’, he was honoured with the appointment of Under-sheriff of Carmarthenshire. In a decision which bears the hallmark of this close-knit local group he nominated his cousin Dr. Prothero (former union medical officer and vice-chairman) and his brother-in-law David Davies, Froodvale (elected guardian for Llansawel parish at the time) as his sureties: others would probably have used a non-family member.<sup>88</sup>

It is clear from this discussion that these deeply rooted Welsh families felt secure and at ease in the Llandilo social world: one which had been developed by their direct forbears. They were comfortable with each other and with poorer people whose interests they took to heart. Although many were Anglican, there were no apparent social barriers between them and the non-conformist majority: both religious persuasions felt that they belonged together. It is also very striking that they felt sufficiently secure, socially and economically, to oppose vigorously any actions taken by gentry which they considered offensive or intrusive – they protected their own interests from aristocrats who may have been socially superior, but were nevertheless outsiders as far as they were concerned. People such as Cawdor or Walters Phillips did not belong to Llandilo as intensely as the Protheros and Lewises. One specific instance encapsulates this.

In March 1845 Dr. Prothero, sitting at the Llandilo Petty Sessions, heard a ‘very unpleasant case’ between the Rev. Griffies Williams of Llwynhelig and Griffith Bowen Jones of Gurrey.<sup>89</sup> The latter belonged firmly to the long-established local category,

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<sup>88</sup> CA: Derwydd muniments, Lewis letter to George Brace, 26 January 1861.

<sup>89</sup> Griffies Williams was union chairman until 12 months before this event.

while Williams descended from a minor baronet; they were well-known to each other, their properties adjoined, and both were magistrates. Some details of the case are unclear as Petty Sessions records have not survived; there is, however, correspondence between Dr. Prothero and Lord Cawdor. The latter publicly complained about magistrates' conduct of the case, an action which Prothero took as an unwarranted and unacceptable assault on his integrity. The case concerned trespass in pursuit of game, Jones having strayed onto Griffies Williams' land, an offence for which he was now being prosecuted. Jones attempted to shrug the matter off by offering an alibi, but was found guilty and fined 2s. 0d. Cawdor was outraged, finding 'the penalty utterly inadequate to the offence'. For him trespass warranted far more than a small fine: he testily reminded Prothero that a less serious case of poaching on Robert Peel's estate had recently resulted in a sentence of two years' hard labour for one offender, and five years' transportation for the other. But he was even more infuriated by 'the aggravation of an unsuccessful attempt at an alibi by a gentleman and a magistrate'. In his view, magistrates had not given sufficient weight to this aspect of the case and had closed ranks with a friend. Prothero's response was short and to the point: he proclaimed that he would 'allow no-one to doubt the purity of the motives by which I have been guided', and expressing distaste that Cawdor had not 'had the courtesy to enquire privately of the merits of the case before publicly (sic) condemning those whose character for integrity would bear the strictest scrutiny'.<sup>90</sup> Cawdor's reply avoids reassurance on the issue of integrity, and affirms his belief that, on reflection, the magistrates would have acted otherwise. While the principal issue here is the spirited stand taken by Prothero against an aristocrat, the fact that Williams brought a case against a neighbour and fellow member of the bench underlines the sometimes uneasy

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<sup>90</sup> CA: Cawdor box 137. Prothero to Cawdor 18 March 1845, and Cawdor's reply 22 March 1845. See Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, p. 89.

relationship in gentry ranks; and since the sitting magistrates did not apparently see great harm in one of their own number attempting to deny an offence for which they subsequently fined him, it is reasonable to conclude that they saw him as, at worst, a rogue rather than a criminal, and it is impossible to imagine that the idea of sentencing Jones to hard labour or transportation ever crossed their minds.<sup>91</sup> One could, however, well imagine that had Cawdor been faced with a similar situation concerning a fellow aristocrat, the nominal fine solution would be far more likely than transportation.<sup>92</sup> In other words, each group within the overall gentry category looked after its own.

The conclusion of this discussion is that there were three distinct groups of Llandilofawr gentry who, apart from formal occasions, had little appetite for interaction with each other: they existed side by side rather than as a group. The business of the union was carried out by well-established local gentry, a group trusted by local people. Although they can be distinguished from the lower orders by their economic wellbeing, they acted in a manner which suggests that they identified closely with ordinary people, having much more in common with them than with other gentry. They took care to further each others' interests and enjoyed being large fish in a small pond – and they were prepared to go into print if they felt that they were under attack by intrusive aristocrats.

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<sup>91</sup> For Prothero notions of 'right' were more important than social class: he treats Cawdor as an 'outsider' who is not playing by local rules of politeness.

<sup>92</sup> In similar vein a circuit judge infuriated by the failure of magistrates to attend Carmarthen bench regularly nevertheless refrained from fining members of his own social class: *CJ*, 20 July 1855.

## Riots and politics

Not surprisingly elements of the traditional culture described above spilled over into other aspects of Carmarthenshire life. One of the most celebrated expressions was the *ceffyl pren*, a ceremony used to shame those who broke the accepted moral code: it involved noisy processions, rough music, firing guns, and burning an effigy representing the offender. It has been the subject of considerable commentary, partly because it is a physically spectacular example of popular culture, but also because elaborate and noisy processions with wooden horses were reported at toll gates during the Rebecca riots.<sup>93</sup> The way in which these demonstrations were conducted reveals much about the Carmarthenshire way of thinking: rioters often chose to employ ceremonial behaviour rather than pure and simple vandalism. Since processions and unruly behaviour were also commonly associated with elections it is possible to suggest that unruly behaviour was never far from the surface, and could break out at any time.

Although violence and destruction were certainly part of the Rebecca experience, there is a sense that locals were also having fun during the processions and rituals. They were certainly angry about tolls, poverty and so on, but one way of rising above the grind of daily life was to enjoy themselves: Williams has gone so far as to use the word ‘pantomime’.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, when English troops were sent to quell the riots, local people were presented with an opportunity to use their intricate local network to outwit authority. *The Times* captured the flavour of events: ‘It may show...the character of the

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<sup>93</sup> Rosemary Jones provides an extensive account in ‘Women, community and collective action: the ‘Ceffyl Pren’ tradition’, in A. John (ed.) *Our Mother’s Land: Chapters in Welsh Women’s History 1830–1939* (Cardiff, 1991). The link between Rebecca rioters’ activities and the *ceffyl pren* is discussed in Jones, *Rebecca’s Children*, and D. Williams, *The Rebecca Riots: a Study in Agrarian Discontent* (Cardiff, 1971).

<sup>94</sup> Williams, *Rebecca Riots*, p.19.

people [when 200] seated in a circle on the grass calmly deliberated on their projects and silently dispersed with the dragoons not 200 yards from them, without being observed.’<sup>95</sup> They could plan to be disorderly in an orderly way, partly because they were so well informed about the whereabouts of troops – ‘It is truly wonderful how they procure their information’ asserted one gentleman.<sup>96</sup> Many residents were understandably fearful for their safety, especially if they were English land agents: with the riots at their peak, Thomas Cooke, agent at Middleton Hall, told his mother ‘the inhabitants were thoroughly intimidated by [the rioters’] shouts and firing of guns. Not a soul ventured out to see what they were about – even the police though numerous refused to risk their lives without a military force’.<sup>97</sup> One of those sent from London brilliantly captured the spirit of the place, observing ‘they know everybody and see everything’.<sup>98</sup>

A similar penchant for processions and ceremony existed in Llandilo politics, part of the wider tradition described by O’Gorman: ‘participants were usually in a state of some excitement...decked in colourful livery’, candidates sometimes having to indulge in providing ‘treats of epic proportions’.<sup>99</sup> Such festivity was certainly true of the 1842 Carmarthenshire election held in Llandilo’s Shire Hall, the *Carmarthenshire Journal* excitedly reporting the sole candidate’s ‘splendid procession, consisting of several hundred horsemen and carriages...escorted by a fine band of music’ – Capt. Lewis’

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<sup>95</sup> *The Times*, 18 August 1843.

<sup>96</sup> TNA: HO 45/454, Walter Jones to Home Secretary 19 September 1843.

<sup>97</sup> Cooke to his mother 28 May, 1843. His letters are in C. Davies, ‘The Rebecca Riots – letters from the front’, *Carmarthenshire Antiquary*, XL (2004).

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Jones, *Rebecca’s Children*, p. 41.

<sup>99</sup> F. O’Gorman, ‘Campaign rituals and ceremonies: the social meaning of elections in England 1780–1860’, *Past and Present*, 135 (1992), p. 82.

famed militia, perhaps.<sup>100</sup> Triumphal arches lined the processional route, the windows of houses were ‘filled with well dressed ladies’, and when electoral formalities were concluded the processional party regrouped, making its way to dinner at the Cawdor Arms, ‘not separating until a late hour’. It is clear that large numbers took to the streets despite the small size of the electorate, which tells us something about local enthusiasm for a revel and candidates’ desire to ‘aim their theatre, and the substance of their political messages, at the non-voters as much as at the voters.’<sup>101</sup> These points were also emphasised by Cragoe: ‘the culture of an election campaign was irresistibly popular...the inclusion of the crowd became a public negotiation of the rights of the people, a demonstration that those who ruled were answerable to those they governed’.<sup>102</sup>

Such accounts reinforce earlier descriptions of Llandilofawr residents as ‘complex and vigorous people, neither class heroes nor passive, forelock-tugging peasants’.<sup>103</sup> They joined together in large numbers for celebrations or protests, but remained strongly individualistic. Faced with outside interference from troops and London policemen they closed ranks in collective defence of the perpetrators of ‘outrages’, deploying traditional ceremonials to further their aims: the gentry exploited such ceremonies too, those involving javelin men for example, to further their own ends, and to be seen doing their duty. The use of ceremony was common to all parts of society.

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<sup>100</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, 30 December 1842.

<sup>101</sup> O’Gorman, *Rituals*, p. 81.

<sup>102</sup> M. Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales, 1832–1886* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 224 and 228.

<sup>103</sup> S. Howard, ‘Riotous community: crowds, politics and society in Wales, 1700–1840’, *Welsh History Review*, 20 (2000).

## The riots and the New Poor Law

As the riots developed the range of targets broadened, encompassing matters of general social concern – Williams notes ‘a dozen’ instances of disorderly conduct directed, for example, at wife beaters or fathers of illegitimate children who failed to support them.<sup>104</sup> By 1843 the New Poor Law was believed by many to be at the root of the problem.<sup>105</sup> John Lloyd Davies, Alltyrodin, was one of several magistrates to write colourful letters employing considerable hyperbole to the Home Secretary: ‘There will be eight to ten thousand in Carmarthen – they will not rest until the Poor Law Amendment Act is repealed. Poor houses will be pulled down in every direction and Carmarthenshire will be at the mercy of a lawless tyrant mob’, he warned.<sup>106</sup> He was somewhat wide of the mark: the Carmarthen workhouse was stormed a fortnight later, but Rice Trevor informed Graham that when the rioters burst in to liberate the occupants ‘all the adult paupers refused to quit it’ – for them, conditions inside were no worse than the alternative outside.<sup>107</sup> There was nevertheless ‘a bitter spirit of hostility to the Poor Law’, a view stressed in several further letters. There were similar feelings in nearby Newcastle Emlyn where ‘most meetings are just a long harangue against the Poor Law, Church and tithes’; and here even the gentry were not on-side, Edward Lloyd Hall complaining that fellow magistrates’ actions ‘excite considerable enmity against the [Poor] law’.<sup>108</sup> At least some of the gentry were as turbulent as the masses. If the

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<sup>104</sup> Williams, *Rebecca Riots*, p. 241.

<sup>105</sup> Williams, *Rebecca Riots*, pp. 137-147; A. Brundage, *The Making of the New Poor Law: the Politics of Inquiry, Enactment and implementation, 1832–39* (New Brunswick, 1978), p. 148.

<sup>106</sup> TNA: HO 45/454, to Sir James Graham, 17 June 1843.

<sup>107</sup> TNA: HO 45/454, George Rice Trevor to Sir James Graham 4 July 1843.

<sup>108</sup> TNA: HO 45/454, Lloyd Hall to Sir James Graham 23 July 1843.



New Poor Law was seen as a means to oppress the working classes, writers such as Gwyn Williams would also highlight the attitude of the gentry – ‘middle-men and rack-renters, tithe-grabbing parsons and magistrates’.<sup>109</sup>

Seen ‘from below’, it can be suggested that people were simply reacting to the wretched conditions experienced by many of them: demonstrations could take them outside ordinary life, and had communal consensus. As Seal put it, ‘Traditional ritual provided a form for action that went against the structures of the new political economy yet remained within the morally acceptable limits [of those adhering to] the customary social order’.<sup>110</sup>

#### The Poor Law Authorities and Carmarthenshire people

The chapter began by referring to the PLC’s view that administering Welsh unions was inherently difficult: as they saw it, ‘peculiar circumstances’ pertained in Wales.<sup>111</sup> The foregoing account has explored some factors which may have contributed to this conclusion. The PLC feared that the closely-knit nature of Carmarthenshire society coloured paupers’ expectations of what was rightfully theirs, and how much relief they should receive. Even more worrying was the thought that elected guardians probably shared the same view, being insufficiently distant from the poorer element in society. Guardians and paupers alike exhibited the potential to find ways to avoid strict application of the PLC’s rules, and would be prepared to argue the point forcibly. There

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<sup>109</sup> G.A. Williams, *When was Wales?* p. 192.

<sup>110</sup> G. Seal, ‘Tradition and agrarian protest in nineteenth-century England and Wales’, *Folklore*, 99, (1998), p. 154.

<sup>111</sup> For example, TNA: MH32/44 Assistant Commissioner Edmund Head, 27 March 1837.

was a fine line between this and outright insubordination, and they wondered how this came about: one contributing factor, they thought, was the prevailing religious sentiment in the area.<sup>112</sup>

The non-conformist ethos encouraged open expression of intense emotions and emphasised the need for individuals to explore their own spirituality and ‘carve their own salvation’.<sup>113</sup> The emphasis on the individual, and the fact that most families had no immediate neighbours, were two background factors influencing personal behaviour. In 1815, the Rev. Roberts had pointed out that the Welsh spoke their mind: ‘The people of this nation have been endowed by nature with a boldness and frank, open manner of addressing or answering on every occasion...such as we see in the Romans, but not the English’. He went on to comment on their musical style: ‘In their concerts, they do not sing in unison *like the inhabitants of other countries*, but in many different parts; so that in a company of singers, which one very frequently meets with in Wales, you will hear as many different parts and voices as there are performers’.<sup>114</sup> Whatever one may think about the musical accuracy of his analysis, the resulting picture provides a powerful metaphor for appreciating the approach of many Carmarthenshire people in general, and the Llandilofawr board of guardians in particular. To them it was harmony, but to the PLC it was unruliness and discord.

Given the above, it is no wonder that Assistant Poor Law Commissioners (all English) tasked with administrating Welsh unions found their assignment difficult. Strongly

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<sup>112</sup> Rees, *Welsh Countryside*, pp. 109-112; E. Davies, *Religion and Society in nineteenth-century Wales* (Llandeby, 1965); Jenkins, *History*, pp. 195/6.

<sup>113</sup> Jenkins, *Life and Tradition*, p. 183.

<sup>114</sup> Rev. P. Roberts, *An Account of Some Traditions, Customs and Superstitions of Wales* (London, 1815). His emphasis.

influenced by their own religious beliefs, usually Anglican in their case, they favoured polite understatement based on an English-derived culture in which labouring classes did what they were told and accepted their lot in life, often involving poverty and suffering, as God-given. Anglican clergy sometimes emphasised the propriety, indeed necessity, of the working classes staying deferential and placid. Carmarthenshire inhabitants, however, were given to frequent emotional outbursts and paupers did not meekly accept their condition. The absence of clear social boundaries between guardians, farmers and gentry would also have seemed ‘peculiar’ to the PLC: there should have been no doubt that the gentry and *ex officios* actively controlled union affairs with elected guardians toeing the line, but, as will be shown, this was simply not the case in Llandilofawr. Commissioners reluctantly accepted opposition to the New Poor Law if it came from gentlemen – those politically opposed to it for example – but were riled and incredulous if mere Welsh farmers spoke up. An exasperated George Clive explained the problem he faced: ‘Deliberation and discussion is almost impossible...the uncertainty as to which way they [farmers] will vote causes frequent divisions. It is to the incredulity and ignorance of this class that I trace everywhere the difficulties and delays that arise constantly’.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, his view of Llandilofawr gentry, who indulged in ‘nothing but jobbing and dishonesty’ was equally negative.<sup>116</sup>

In short, one of the reasons for Wales’ ‘peculiarity’ was the impossibility of determining who was in charge. The Commissioners, even those with Welsh connections, believed that as Welsh speakers, guardians and paupers alike were trapped – handicapped by a supposedly outmoded language which prevented them from comprehending

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<sup>115</sup> TNA: MH32/12, Assistant Commissioner Clive’s report to Chadwick, 22 January 1837.

<sup>116</sup> TNA: MH 32/12, 24 November 1837.

‘improvement’.<sup>117</sup> Ironically, their inability to relate to the way local people felt about their vernacular was shared by some elements of the Welsh press: an editorial in the *Carmarthen Journal* claimed that Welsh was only spoken by one-thirtieth of the population, so its speakers were ‘on the same footing as foreigners’.<sup>118</sup> According to them, texts concerning recent developments in science, engineering or geography could be of no benefit to Welsh monoglots, so there was a ‘barrier’ between them and the ‘fountains of knowledge’.<sup>119</sup> A further aspect was that because the Welsh were ‘prevented from assimilating the tastes, habits and modes of thinking of the upper classes’ there were more ‘sects, divisions and schisms than anywhere else on the globe’. And, in an alarming extension of this logic, the *CJ* held that more sects meant worse morals, which explained why ‘bastardy is worse in Wales than anywhere else’.

Inflammatory and inaccurate though this might be, it is relevant here as one of the influences at work on the opinions of New Poor Law administrators.<sup>120</sup> There had been a steady flow of literature critical of matters such as Welsh farming practices and social mores, often written by English gentlemen or Anglican priests with livings in Wales who sought to distance themselves from their surroundings, added to which Government Inquiries had been critical of housing conditions. The Education Commissioners were struck by the ‘utter separation’ of the mass of common folk from the gentry, and this

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<sup>117</sup> This was especially true of George Cornwall Lewis, ‘an inveterate opponent of the Welsh language’, R. Shannon, ‘The virtues of unheroic government: the counterfactual case for Sir George Cornwall Lewis’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 17 (2010), p.16.

<sup>118</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, 25 February 1842. The *CJ* was reactionary on many social and political issues, and the one-thirtieth was certainly under-estimated, probably deliberately.

<sup>119</sup> Some Welshmen understandably felt that the problem was more accurately expressed the other way round: despite ‘the multiplication of works in the English language on Wales and its inhabitants’ wrote the Rev. T. Rees ‘educated Englishmen [suffer from] glaring ignorance’ on the subject: *Preface* to T. Rees, *Miscellaneous Papers on Subjects Relating to Wales* (London, 1867).

<sup>120</sup> Ongoing Ph.D. research by Anna Brueton demonstrates that the widely held view that bastardy was more common here than in England in the mid-nineteenth century is unfounded. See also Jones, *Rebecca’s Children*, pp. 37-38.

infamously led them to make serious allegations about the Welsh in their *Report*.<sup>121</sup> The evidence they selectively chose to present found them to be ‘lost in irrelevant theological wranglings, ignorant, dirty and unchaste [and] in danger of being led into sedition or even revolution’.<sup>122</sup>

It may be that some of the comments – about the state of farms, for example – could have been justifiable if those making them had delved below the surface to look for likely causes of the effects they described. Reluctance to adopt new agricultural techniques was a common criticism. One likely explanation for this had been advanced by Hassall before 1800: ‘people are not forward in receiving improvement... they are afraid of adopting English practices lest their neighbours should laugh at them’.<sup>123</sup> In other words there was a fear of being seen as different and thus socially shunned: seen in this light, it is more to do with a cultural desire not to show off than with indifference to better farming. There are other explanations: Howell points firmly to the fact that many farmers were ‘victims of long-standing poverty and lack of education’, their resulting ‘peasant mentality’ (as he puts it) making them averse to spending money, especially if it meant borrowing to do so.<sup>124</sup> They feared that conspicuous expenditure would lead

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<sup>121</sup> PP. 1847 [870] [871] [872] *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*. Local housing was described in PP. 1865 (3484) *Seventh Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council*, App. 9, Dr. Hunter’s report on South Wales, p. 500.

<sup>122</sup> P. Morgan, ‘From Long Knives to Blue Books’, in R. Davies, R. Griffiths, I.G. Jones and K.O. Morgan (eds), *Essays presented to Glanmor Williams* (Cardiff, 1984), pp. 207-8. Contemporary examples of adverse comment include A. Young, *A Tour of South Wales and the South Midlands* (London, 1776); C. Hassall, *A General View of the Agriculture of Carmarthen* (London, 1794); A. Pratt, *Gleanings through Wales, Holland and Westphalia*, Vol 1, Letter IX (London, 1802); Rev. J. Evans, *Letters Written During a Tour Through South Wales* (London, 1804); B.H. Malkin, *The Scenery, Antiquities and Biography of South Wales* (London, 1804); W. Youatt, *Sheep, their Breeds, Management and Diseases* (London, 1837); Rev. W. Jones, *Essay on the Character of the Welsh* (London, 1841); J. Gibson, *Agriculture in Wales* (London, 1879).

<sup>123</sup> Hassall, *op. cit.* (1794).

<sup>124</sup> Howell, ‘Agricultural labourer’.

landlords to conclude that it was possible for them to pay more rent, an outcome regarded as a ‘major calamity’. They believed that their well-being ‘depended upon rents remaining stationary and at a level charged in the past’, or as Gibson, a contemporary, put it, ‘the remote possibility of a rise in his rent is sufficient to paralyse [the farmer’s] effort and to prevent him manifesting signs of prosperity’.<sup>125</sup> In practice, many landlords fully accepted that it was not desirable or sensible to raise rents and acted accordingly, often advised to do so by people like T.T. Mousley, Cawdor’s much respected agent.<sup>126</sup> He is an important observer because, given the size of Cawdor’s estates, he had more experience than most of the state of Carmarthenshire farms. In 1882, he identified the problem as ‘the want of capital and of agricultural education and enterprise’ which were ‘formidable hindrances to an improved state of agriculture’.<sup>127</sup> In this reading, years of hardship had prevented farmers from accumulating the necessary resources to invest in new farming practices. Evidence that aspirations for a rent freeze were met right up to the end of the century was provided by one of Llandilofawr’s elected guardians, John Morgan Davies, land agent for the Tregib estate near Llandilo when he addressed the Royal Commission on Land in Wales in 1895.<sup>128</sup> He informed them that ‘with very rare exceptions’ the same tenants had been on the same farms for 70 years, and ‘a vast number of rents’ had been unchanged for 50 years.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Gibson, *Agriculture*, quoted by Howell.

<sup>126</sup> For agents see R. Moore-Colyer, ‘The land agent in nineteenth-century Wales’, *Welsh History Review* 8 (1976/7).

<sup>127</sup> PP 1882 (C.3375-III), A. Doyle’s *Report on Agricultural Depression in Wales*, p. 369, quoting evidence from Mousley.

<sup>128</sup> PP. 1895 (C. 7761), *Minutes of Evidence*, Vol III, para. 37,558. Morgan was also agent for five other estates, and served as guardian from 1865 to 1880.

<sup>129</sup> R. Moore-Colyer, ‘Some aspects of land occupation in nineteenth century Cardiganshire’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1981), p. 83; Rees, *Welsh Countryside* p. 148.

## Conclusions

The discussion has revealed a close-knit society located in a beautiful but remote area. Llandilofawr farmers ‘thought small’, identifying with hamlets of only 200 persons, each of which, to them, was unique.<sup>130</sup> They remained intensely attached to their own specific holding, Their gaze was inwards, they felt ‘isolated in spirit’, and were strongly individualistic, but, on the other hand engaged widely in public events and participated avidly in societies such as the Ivorites and Oddfellows, whose strict rules echoed their non-conformist values. Nevertheless, traditional ceremonies remained alive, and magic was not far from the surface. It was from this population that the elected guardians were drawn, and it was in these societies, chapels and processions that they actively participated. Those elements of the gentry without strong local roots remained separate from most local people, and their actions sometimes backfired: they were not of the area. By contrast, a group of families with longstanding local ties were the local social leaders, and used their connections to take effective control of union affairs, a strategy which had the additional benefit of keeping outsiders (generally regarded with much suspicion) at bay, the central Poor Law authorities being a case in point.<sup>131</sup> In this culture local people closed ranks against ‘foreigners’ and the board of guardians, as will be shown, is a good example of such an attitude at work.

Conflicting characteristics are sometimes apparent, examples of which will emerge in this thesis – chapter 7, for example, will show that despite generally strict adherence to non-conformist morality, guardians and others were prepared to employ seriously vicious

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<sup>130</sup> ‘Variety was the keynote to life at parish level and no one parish should be described as typical’, Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, p. 26.

<sup>131</sup> For the prevalence of such groups in South Wales public affairs see I.G. Jones, *Health, Wealth and Politics in Victorian Wales* (Swansea, 1979), p. 22.

and libellous attacks against opponents in pursuit of their ends. It was with such apparently contradictory behaviour that the PLC frequently had to grapple, so from their perspective local persons available to implement the New Poor Law in Llandilofawr were not ideally suited for the task, while the poor had a keen appreciation of the relief they had traditionally received.

With this background in mind, the outcome is now explored in more detail. The next chapter provides a quantitative appreciation of the union, detailing the size of the pauper host and the amount of money spent (very predominantly in the form of out relief), also considering the size and structure of the ratepayer population which provided the financial resources, and the area's demographics.



## Chapter 3

### Llandilofawr Union in numbers: how funds were raised and spent

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to quantify and discuss the task faced by the Llandilofawr Board: it had to raise £7,000 p.a. to run the union and relieve some 1,200 paupers. It discusses the people who paid the money and analyses how it was spent, matters which have received remarkably little attention in studies of other unions. To start, the union's basic parameters are established – its size in both population and land area terms – and then, following a section about the pattern of land ownership, the question of who paid to run the union is investigated by looking at the number of ratepayers and where they lived. The size of the pauper host is quantified, and the bulk of the chapter then devoted to an analysis of union expenditure, culminating in a description of changes between Old Poor Law and New, the Llandilofawr experience being set in the overall Welsh and English context. Some surprising results are revealed. The analysis breaks new ground in Welsh poor law studies by including extended reference to per capita payments in every Llandilofawr parish. Finally, the text picks up themes from chapter 2 about relations between social classes in Llandilofawr, showing that conflicts of interest among the gentry surfaced in the 1860's, and that the resulting battle over rate assessments decisively confirmed the dominant position of elected guardians. In particular the influence of one individual, John Lewis, Llwynfedwen, stands out very

clearly:<sup>1</sup> the extent of his personal dominance is one of the major (and unexpected) findings of this study.<sup>2</sup>

### Llandilofawr union size and demographics

The union was formed in December 1836 and consisted of 12 parishes with an overall population of some 17,000.<sup>3</sup> Compared to the PLC's 'ideal' size of 20 to 40 parishes for rural unions, it was thus rather small – there was a general preference for large unions because it was felt that they would be administratively easier to run and to staff – but it reflected the fact that Carmarthenshire housed a very scattered population.<sup>4</sup>

Three neighbouring Unions (Llandovery, Llanelly and Newcastle Emlyn) were of similar size, the fourth, Carmarthen, being twice the size. Table 3.1 shows that between

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<sup>1</sup> The naming system used throughout this thesis follows the contemporary convention whereby a person's name is followed by that of his place of tenancy or residence. 'Lewis' was a surname shared by a large number of people so this system facilitated identification of individuals. Importantly it also holds great significance for their sense of belonging, discussed at length in chapter 2. The inseparable nature of name and place is discussed in D. Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community in South-West Wales at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 1971), p. 214. Chapel pews were often denoted by the occupants' dwelling-place.

<sup>2</sup> This is highlighted in chapters 4 and 5, and explored in detail through specific aspects of union business in chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>3</sup> The twelve parishes were Bettws, Brechfa, Llandebie, Llandefeisant, Llandilofawr, Llanegwad, Llanfihangel Aberbythych, Llanfihangel Cilfargen, Llanfynydd, Llangathen, Llansawel, Talley.

<sup>4</sup> For union size in South Wales see I. Dewar, 'George Clive and the establishment of the New Poor Law in South Glamorgan, 1836–1838', *Morgannwg*, 11 (1967), p. 48. See also A. Digby, 'The rural poor law', in D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1976), p. 150; A. Brundage, *The Making of the New Poor Law: the Politics of Inquiry, Enactment and implementation, 1832–39* (New Brunswick, 1978), p. 101. Size was not always the main factor: Radnor parishes were assigned to unions on the basis of avoiding anti-poor law boards, K. Parker, 'Radnorshire and the New Poor Law to circa 1850', *Transactions of the Radnorshire Society*, 74 (2004), p. 172. Other studies have shown that in England landowners' interests could be paramount, see E. Hurren, 'The 'Bury-al Board': Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in the Brixworth Union, Northamptonshire, c. 1870–1900' (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Leicester, 2000); B.K. Song, 'Continuity and change in English rural society: the formation of poor law unions in Oxfordshire', *English Historical Review*, 114 (1999).

1801 and 1881 the union's population grew by 45.1%, but that this increase was only half the rate for Carmarthenshire as a whole, and substantially less than national figures.

Table 3.1: % change in population 1801–1881

Area	% change 1801–1881
Llandilofawr union	+ 45.1
Carmarthenshire	+ 86
All Wales	+ 262.2
England and Wales	+ 292.2

Source: [www.histpop.org](http://www.histpop.org). (April 2011).

Detailed population figures are presented Table 3.2. The 1841 census showed 17,129 inhabitants in Llandilofawr, a figure some 43% higher than at the turn of the century. After 1841 the rise slowed, the population only growing by 1% over the next forty years having declined slightly in the interim – Llandilofawr was in relative population decline, accounting for only 13.9% of Carmarthenshire's population in 1881 compared to the peak of 16.2% in 1851. The same relative decline is more marked for the County of Carmarthenshire compared to Wales, falling from 11% of the national total in 1831 to 7.9% in 1881.

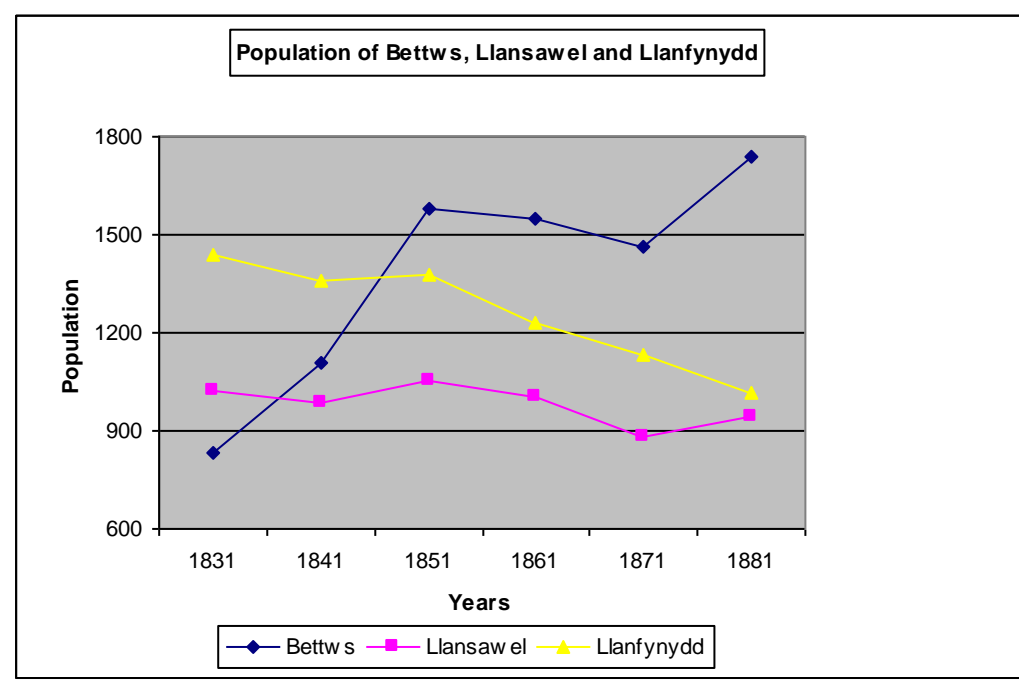
Table 3.2: Population of Llandilofawr union, Carmarthenshire, Wales and England and Wales

Area	Prior to study			Period of study					
	1801	1811	1821	1831	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881
Llandilofawr	11,940	13,287	15,695	<b>16,444</b>	<b>17,129</b>	<b>17,968</b>	<b>17,227</b>	<b>16,976</b>	<b>17,324</b>
Carmarthenshire	67,137	77,217	90,239	<b>100,740</b>	<b>106,326</b>	<b>110,632</b>	<b>111,796</b>	<b>115,710</b>	<b>124,864</b>
Wales	601,767	688,774	811,381	<b>924,329</b>	<b>1,068,547</b>	<b>1,188,821</b>	<b>1,296,001</b>	<b>1,421,670</b>	<b>1,577,559</b>
England and Wales	8,892,536	10,134,068	11,999,322	<b>13,896,767</b>	<b>15,914,148</b>	<b>17,922,768</b>	<b>20,066,224</b>	<b>22,712,266</b>	<b>25,974,439</b>
Llandilofawr as % of Carmarthenshire	17.8	17.2	17.4	<b>16.3</b>	<b>16.1</b>	<b>16.2</b>	<b>15.4</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>13.9</b>

Source: [www.histpop.org](http://www.histpop.org) (April 2011).

From the point of view of the local experience, and in terms of union management, relative parish population movements are more pertinent than the union total. There were substantial differences from one parish to another - four experienced population growth and the other eight declined. The biggest changes are summarised in Figure 3.1. While the population of the union as a whole increased by 5.4%, that of Bettws parish more than doubled, while Llansawel and Llanfynydd fell by 7.8% and 29% respectively.

Figure 3.1: Changes in population in three parishes



Source: [www.histpop.org](http://www.histpop.org) (April 2011).

Bettws and Llandebie, the most southerly parishes in the union, were increasingly industrial in nature - up to 1851 there was a significant rise in anthracite mining and quarrying with an associated upwards population movement, while Llansawel and

Table 3.3: Population of each parish in Llandilofawr union 1801–1891

Parish	1801	1811	1821	Period of study						1891	% change 1831 to 1881
				1831	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881		
Bettws	538	608	1026	830	1109	1579	1547	1465	1738	2448	209
Llandebie	1513	1787	2077	2248	2534	2885	2821	3171	3560	4388	58
Brechfa	85	82	110	93	109	107	122	104	104	85	12
Llandilofawr	3712	4030	4668	5149	5471	5758	5440	5507	5484	6065	6.5
Llanf.	654	718	867	911	948	860	824	863	888	886	
Aberbythych											-3.6
Llansawel	773	849	919	1024	983	1051	1003	883	944	898	-7.8
Llandefeisant	181	268	226	230	267	247	258	225	196	125	-14.8
Talley	822	880	1084	1058	1068	1005	1022	935	839	754	-20.7
Llanegwad	1557	1803	2070	2214	2113	2008	1920	1707	1638	1508	-26
Llangathen	908	1017	1171	1182	1108	1035	977	931	868	750	-27
Llanfynydd	1145	1191	1412	1436	1358	1376	1230	1132	1019	949	-29
Llanf. Cilfargen	52	54	65	69	61	57	58	53	46	41	-33
Total	11940	13287	15695	16444	17129	17968	17222	16976	17324	18897	4.8

Source: [www.histpop.org](http://www.histpop.org) (April 2011).

Llanfynydd in the north were mainly agricultural. Figures for each parish are contained in Table 3.3. This shows that the character of the union changed very significantly over fifty years: population in the north fell but rose in the south, and the proportion engaged in industry rather than agriculture increased dramatically. Taking the two industrial parishes together, they comprised 18.7% of the population in 1841 but 30.6% in 1881.<sup>5</sup> Llandilofawr's increase is relatively small, and the most agricultural and remote parishes, often containing seats of minor gentry, fell by more than a fifth, thus contributing to their progressively declining influence.<sup>6</sup>

Table 3.4 below shows that the union's population was young: 47% were under the age of 20 in 1851: in the industrial parishes the figure was 50%, while urban Llandilofawr's population was relatively old, with 56% over 20. The overall male/female ratio was 48/52.

Principal points emerging from this discussion of Llandilofawr union's demography are that the paupers and guardians inhabited a world in which the total population remained virtually static over a 40 year period while that elsewhere in Wales rose considerably; that their area thus became ever more remote from mainstream south Wales; there were significant intra-union changes as agriculture declined and industry grew; and the age and gender structure of the population differed from parish to parish. This emphasises that the union is best conceived as a collection of distinct parishes rather than a unified

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<sup>5</sup> This trend continued. By 1891 they accounted for over 36%.

<sup>6</sup> D.J.V. Jones, *Rebecca's Children: a Study of Rural Society, Crime and Protest* (Oxford, 1989), p. 23.

Table 3.4: Age and gender distribution of population for the main parishes: 1851

Parish	Gender	Population 1851		Total	%
		Over 20	Under 20		
Bettws	Male	421	403	824	52
	Female	370	385	755	48
	Total	791	788	1579	100
	%	50	50	100	
Llandebie	Male	668	738	1406	49
	Female	775	704	1479	51
	Total	1443	1442	2885	100
	%	50	50	100	
Llandilofawr	Male	1437	1273	2710	47
	Female	1783	1265	3048	53
	Total	3220	2538	5758	100
	%	56	44	100	
Llanegwad	Male	488	457	945	47
	Female	593	470	1063	53
	Total	1081	927	2008	100
	%	54	46	100	
Llanfynydd	Male	349	310	659	48
	Female	381	336	717	52
	Total	730	646	1376	100
	%	53	47	100	
Llangathen	Male	253	236	489	47
	Female	304	242	546	53
	Total	557	478	1035	100
	%	54	46	100	
Llansawel	Male	262	273	535	51
	Female	274	242	516	49
	Total	536	515	1051	100
	%	51	49	100	
Talley	Male	221	263	484	48
	Female	288	233	521	52
	Total	509	496	1005	100
	%	51	49	100	
TOTAL	Male	4099	3953	8052	48
	Female	4768	3877	8645	52
	Total	8867	7830	16697	100
	%	53	47	100	

Source: [www.histpop.org.uk](http://www.histpop.org.uk)



whole – and, as noted in chapter 2, it was the hamlet with which people identified.<sup>7</sup>

With that thought in mind, the discussion now moves aside to develop matters raised in chapter 2. The issue of land hunger was outlined and it was shown that farmers experienced an extreme attachment to their land.<sup>8</sup> These points are now developed using material for Llandilofawr parish about land ownership and tenement size, thus focussing attention on the immediate vicinity in which guardians and paupers lived closely together.

#### Land ownership and rate payments in Llandilofawr parish<sup>9</sup>

The 1841 Llandilofawr parish tithe apportionment book identifies each land owner, together with the name, occupier and area of each of the parish's 599 tenements: it has been used to derive the information in Tables 3.5 and 3.6 below. 159 individuals each owned less than 100 acres. They were the largest single group (81%) but only had title to 28% of the land: 49 of them, mostly residents of Llandilo town, had one acre or less. At the other end, Lord Cawdor was the largest single owner with just under 12% of the parish – no other individual exceeded 10%. Although the 14 largest owners together accounted for 57% of the total, they are unlikely to have found it possible to act together as a dominant group given the fractious nature of Llandilofawr gentry – it is

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<sup>7</sup> Alwyn Rees, *Life in a Welsh Countryside* (Cardiff, 1975) discusses the history and social significance of hamlets. Much of what he found in Llanfihangel yng Ngwynfa is applicable to Llandilofawr.

<sup>8</sup> The Welsh Land Commission concluded that Welsh farmers thought they 'had a moral right to obtain their livelihood throughout life' from the family holding: PP [15] 1897, p. 332.

<sup>9</sup> Although part of Llandilofawr, Taliaris is excluded here being entirely owned by William Peel and let to 44 tenants. With its own church and clergyman, it was a 'closed' parish. For Welsh closed parishes see K.D.M. Snell and P. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: the Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 91; Also B. Holderness, 'Open and Close parishes in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', *Agricultural History Review* 20 (1972); S. Banks, 'Nineteenth-century scandal or twentieth-century model? A new look at open and close parishes', *Economic History Review* XLI (1988).

therefore probable that the large number of small owners were the most influential group in the parish when it came to voicing opinions on matters of common interest such as the level of rates.

Table 3.5: Distribution of land ownership in Llandilofawr parish 1841

Acres owned	No. of owners	% owners	Total acres owned	% acres
< 100	159	81	6068	28
100 to 300	23	12	3384	15
300 to 999	9	5	4043	18
>1000	5	2	8755	39
Total	196	100	22250	100

Source: Llandilofawr Tithe Book (1841).<sup>10</sup>

The size distribution of the 599 tenements in the parish is shown in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6: Size of tenements 1841

Size of tenement, acres	Number	% of tenements
< 5	172	29
5 to 49	271	45
50 to 99	108	18
100 to 200	43	7
> 200	5	1
Total	599	100

Source: Llandilofawr Tithe Book

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<sup>10</sup> CA: *Apportionment of the Rent Charge in lieu of Tithes in the parish of Llandilofawr in the County of Carmarthen* (1841).

These figures broadly accord with Howell's analysis of farm size,<sup>11</sup> reinforcing the finding discussed in chapter 4 that elected guardians came from the upper ranks: most farmed more than 100 acres.<sup>12</sup>

A close look at the names of the 196 land owners (Table 3.5) reveals a fundamental point about power and influence in Llandilofawr: property owners did not seek to use their position as a means to control the union.<sup>13</sup> Thus, they did not seek to pack the board with 'puppet' tenants: the largest estates in the area were owned by Lords Cawdor and Dynevor, but only one and two of their tenants respectively became elected guardians. No other large landlord was active in union affairs, and none had more than one tenant on the board, although two of them were substantial property owners.<sup>14</sup> This situation is dissimilar from that in Talley parish discussed in chapter 5, again reinforcing the diverse nature of parishes in this union.<sup>15</sup> More generally, thirteen of those listed in the tithe book became elected guardians: six served only one term, two (freeholders) served for 10 and 18 years, and the others (apart from the special case of John Lewis, Llwynfedwen) for around five.

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<sup>11</sup> D. Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth Century Wales* (London, 1977). This pattern was typical throughout south west Wales, see R. Colyer, 'The size of farms in early nineteenth-century Cardiganshire', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* XXVII (1976); C. Hassall, *A General View of the Agriculture of Pembrokeshire* (London, 1794), p.10.

<sup>12</sup> For this 'distinctive' landownership pattern see Jones, *Rebecca's Children*, pp. 43-50.

<sup>13</sup> This approach is in contrast to that of the dominant landowners in Northamptonshire: A. Brundage, 'The landed interest and the NPL: a reappraisal of the revolution in government', *English Historical Review*, 87 (1972).

<sup>14</sup> A.J. Gulston, a significant benefactor to the town, and E.J. Wood who was non-resident.

<sup>15</sup> Here Sir James Hamlyn Williams was the dominant landowner: a big proportion of guardians were his tenants, and the relationship was clearly much 'closer'.

The tithe book also shows how much money was paid, and to who. From this it is to be noted that the annual amount payable by the 599 tenants, £1,224 10s. 5d., was large in relation to the Poor Rate which averaged £1,650 p.a. during the 1840's. The vicar was the largest beneficiary, receiving almost 42% of the tithes, his resulting annual income of £513 4s. 0d. putting him in a comfortable financial position.<sup>16</sup> The second largest recipient, receiving £424 16s. 4d., was another clergyman, Dean John Parker, the remainder being paid to tithe impropiators, most locally resident.<sup>17</sup> Although the level of tithe payments was one of several objects of complaint by farmers during the Rebecca riots, there is no evidence of active refusal to pay in Llandilofawr, despite the difficulty faced by many farmers in paying in cash.<sup>18</sup> Given the strongly nonconformist persuasion of most local residents, there were also religious objections to tithes.<sup>19</sup> The discussion now moves to the question of who paid the poor rate in Llandilofawr parish.

Several sources such as rate books, rental lists, electoral registers and poll books make it possible to explore where the funds required to finance the union's operations – between £6000 and £7000 p.a in the 1840's – came from.<sup>20</sup> In 1847 there were 1123 property schedules with a combined rateable value of £16,794 9s. 1d. spread across the parish's 15 hamlets. Ratepayers were located across the entire parish, not concentrated in a small

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<sup>16</sup> The *Clergy List* (1841) confirms this.

<sup>17</sup> For social unrest and non-resident tithe impropiators see R.J. Moore-Colyer, 'Thomas Johnes of Hafod (1748-1826)', *Welsh History Review* 1990/91. See also Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 205.

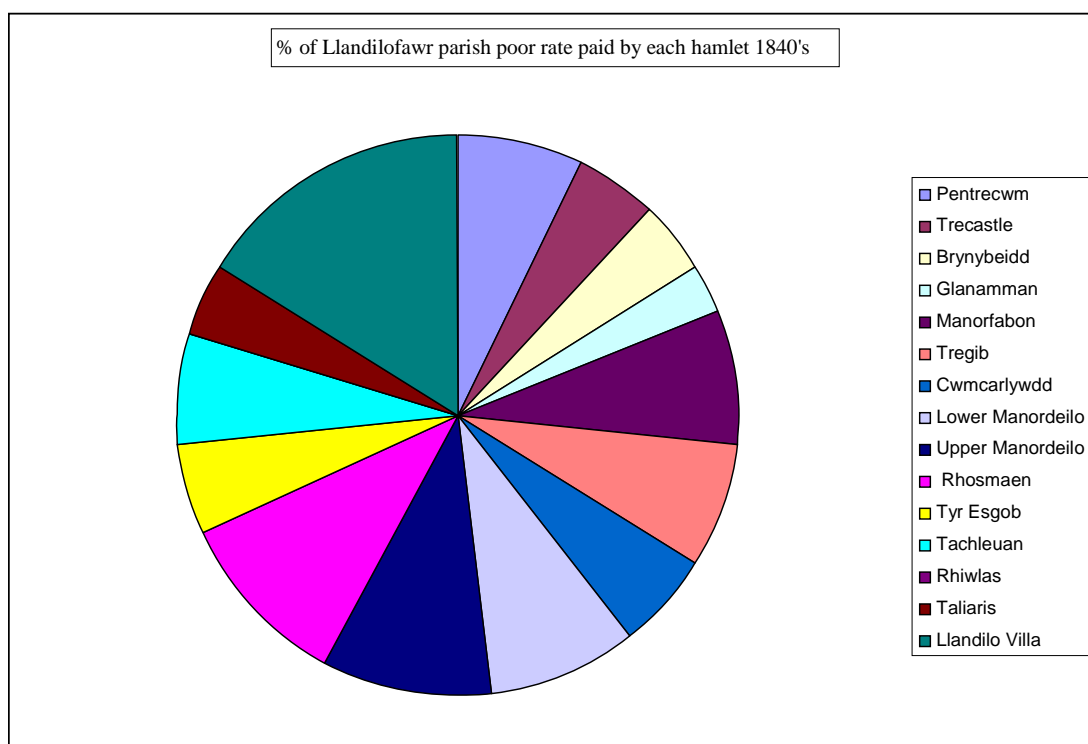
<sup>18</sup> D. Howell, 'Rural society in nineteenth-century Carmarthenshire', *Carmarthenshire Antiquary* XIII (1977), p. 76; J.G. Jenkins, *Life and Tradition in Rural Wales* (Stroud, 1973), p. 102; D. Williams, *A History of Modern Wales* (London, 1950), p. 205.

<sup>19</sup> Paying tithes to Anglican clergy was 'a chagrin' for nonconformist farmers: K.O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868-1922* (Cardiff, 1970), p. 84.

<sup>20</sup> CA: MUS 110, 1833; MUS 126, 1839; MUS 142, 1848.

number of wealthy areas. The rate for 1847 was set at 6d. in the £, thus yielding £1258 16s. 8d.<sup>21</sup> The percentage contributed by each hamlet is shown in Figure 3.2.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 3.2: Percentage of poor rate paid by each hamlet in Llandilofawr parish<sup>23</sup>



Source: Llandilofawr parish rate books.

Each hamlet made a significant contribution to the total, more affluent rural areas such as Rhosmaen subsidising poorer urban Llandilo Villa which housed over one-third of the

<sup>21</sup> The 6d rate amounting to £419.17s.2d. was levied three times.

<sup>22</sup> Tithe payments were almost as large as the £1,600 p.a. poor rate. In a 'peasant economy [which] involved only a limited use of money', Howell, *Land and People*, p. 83, finding cash was difficult. See also J.G. Jenkins, 'Technological improvement and social change in south Cardiganshire', *Agricultural History Review* XIII (1965), pp. 96-100.

<sup>23</sup> The term 'poor rate' denotes the sum of money collected from ratepayers. It was derived from the rateable value assessed for each property and the annual rate set by the guardians at a number of pence in the £.

population but contributed only 16% of the money, partly because sums due from a large number of properties were deemed ‘unrecoverable’ – in the poorer part of town, half of the properties were so listed in 1848.<sup>24</sup> It is tempting to speculate that parish authorities consciously allowed poor families to escape payment and thus receive relief which would have been banned under the official rules, a tactic possibly supplemented by deliberately understating rateable values in the poor part of town.<sup>25</sup> The advantage of such an approach would be that relief offered in this way would be very difficult for outsiders, such as PLC representatives, to detect.

Comparing the names of persons rated in 1833 and 1848 also provides some idea of how frequently faces changed. Examples from two hamlets demonstrate this: in Trecastle, three-quarters of those listed in 1848 appear to be from different families to those in 1833, and even in William Peel’s closed hamlet of Taliaris, the turnover rate was 40%, figures which are high in relation to some previous studies.<sup>26</sup> Llandilofawr, with its considerable turnover, was a fluid society.

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<sup>24</sup> This was also the case in 1839 when rates for 140 out of 331 (42%) of properties were in this category.

<sup>25</sup> Rateable values of poor quality housing were by definition low but, at only 2.7% of the total, they account for a surprisingly small proportion.

<sup>26</sup> J. Robin, *Elmdon: Continuity and Change in a North West Essex Village* (Cambridge, 1980) calculated that 35% of the population left the parish between 1851 and 1861. P. Laslett ‘The study of social structure from listings of inhabitants’ in E. Wrigley (ed), *Introduction to English Historical Demography from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (London, 1966) pointed out that most migration was over short distances, often five miles, and that in a small parish (Taliaris is such an example) the effect was magnified because such a distance inevitably involved a parish change. He had identified migration rates of 54% and 66% respectively for Coggenhoe and Clayworth in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. See also D. Eastwood, *Governing Rural England: Tradition and Transformation in Local Government 1780–1840* (Oxford, 1994), p. 27.

## Elections

Returning to union level, a brief look at elections in the Llandilofawr area contributes to an appreciation of how much ratepayers engaged with the electoral process, adds to our understanding of whether the union was politicised, and casts light on social relationships inside the parish.

In Parliamentary elections Carmarthenshire returned two members, but contests for these seats were a comparative rarity.<sup>27</sup> In 1837 three candidates stood, but electors, each of whom had two votes, had to wait for 31 years for the next contest when three Conservatives and one Liberal came forward.<sup>28</sup> Table 3.7 shows that the Llandilofawr electorate consisted of 1563 persons – 35% of the 4400 males over 20 years of age in the union.<sup>29</sup> Thus, 6.9% of parliamentary voters became poor law guardians.

A look at how guardians voted provides a political context to the board of guardians. Although with such a small sample it would not be wise to over-emphasise their significance, several points emerge. The Liberal candidate Edward Sartoris, who topped the poll with one-third of the votes, was the guardians' least favoured candidate: it would thus seem that guardians' political sympathies were somewhat different from

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<sup>27</sup> The fullest treatment of elections in Carmarthenshire is M. Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy: the Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire, 1832–189* (Oxford, 1996), chapters 4 to 6. See also A.J. James and J.E. Thomas (eds.) *Wales at Westminster: a History of the Parliamentary Representation of Wales 1800–1979* (Llandysul, 1981).

<sup>28</sup> Six Carmarthen Borough elections were held in the interim - 1841, 1847, 1852, 1857, 1859 and 1865 - but only two candidates appeared at each one and were thus elected unopposed.

<sup>29</sup> Figures from the 1861 census.

Table 3.7: Number entitled to vote in 1868 Carmarthenshire Parliamentary election

Parish	No. voters incl. occupiers £50+	No. voters incl. occupiers £12-£49	Total voters	No. elected guardians included *	Guardians as % of voters
Bettws	121	39	160	12	7.5
Brechfa	8	6	14	5	3.6
Llandebie	143	63	206	5	2.4
Llandefeisant	11	8	19	3	15.8
Llandilofawr	302	160	462	26	5.6
Llanegwad	186	21	207	15	7.2
Llan. Aberbythych	33	40	73	7	9.6
Llan. Cilfargen	4	5	9	3	33
Llanfynnydd	105	40	145	5	3.4
Llangathen	42	27	69	8	11.6
Llansawel	51	37	88	11	12.5
Talley	73	38	111	11	9.9
TOTAL	1079	484	1563	109	6.9

\* Approximate number

Sources: Carmarthenshire election Poll Book 1868 and guardians' election returns

those of the electorate as a whole. In ten parishes guardians distributed their votes broadly across all four candidates, indicating that they were expressing their own individual preferences, choosing on the basis of candidates' perceived qualities.

However, Llansawel and Talley, parishes where most guardians were tenants of Hamlyn Williams, were noticeably different. Apart from a couple of independently minded 'rogue' freeholders, all the guardians here chose the same two candidates.

Given Williams' bellicose approach to politics, and his policy of close engagement with his tenants, it is unlikely that this was a coincidence.<sup>30</sup> However, since he seems to

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<sup>30</sup> See chapter 5.



have been well-regarded by his tenants, it is not clear whether they simply voted for candidates he approved of out of genuine loyalty, or whether they feared repercussions from voting against his wishes.<sup>31</sup> The key conclusion here is that, for the most part, local or national party politics played little part in union affairs, although chapter 7 reveals that personal political enmities could flare up when union appointments were being made. As shown in other aspects of union affairs throughout this thesis guardians were fiercely individualistic, not mere representatives (enforced or voluntary) of party political or property-owning interests.

Similarly, poor law elections seem to have had only a limited impact on parish life. As with parliamentary elections, contests for a seat on the board of guardians occurred only sporadically. Most of those who gained a seat on the board obtained their place without a formal contest: four small parishes never had one, and there was no single year in which the remaining eight all went to the polls together.<sup>32</sup> A compilation of the number of votes typically cast in the mid-1850's and 1860's is shown in Table 3.8.

Since a plural voting system was in use it is not possible to use this data to calculate what proportion of the population actively participated because there is no surviving equivalent of the parliamentary Poll Book to show who voted and how many votes each

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<sup>31</sup> The relationship between politics and the implementation of the New Poor Law is a vast subject explored in works such as F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: the Workhouse System, 1834–1844* (Cambridge, 1993), pp 18–31; S. Finer, *The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick* (London, 1952); Brundage, *Making*; E. Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late Victorian England, 1870–1900* (Suffolk, 2007); P. Jenkins, *History of Modern Wales 1536–1999* (Cardiff, 1992) ch. 13.

<sup>32</sup> The procedure for union elections is described in P.F. Aschrott, *The English Poor Law System Past and Present* (London, 1888; reprinted 2006), pp. 180–183.

Table 3.8: Typical number of votes cast in poor law elections

Parish	Typical no. votes cast 1850's	Typical no. votes cast 1860's
Bettws	159	159
Llandebie	1083	880
Llandilofawr	2500	2750
Llanegwad	670	640
Llanfynnydd	319	272
Llangathen	200	250
Llansawel	221	221*
Talley	250	250
TOTAL	5402	5201

\* There were no elections in Llansawel in the 1860's so the 1850 number is repeated.

Source: clerk's annual election returns.

person cast; and since the qualification to vote was property-based, non-resident ratepayers formed part of the electorate.<sup>33</sup> The figures are none-the-less of interest because they suggest similar levels of participation in both decades. These elections were by definition parish affairs, fought out among a small number of people in a concentrated area, and involved close neighbours choosing between rival candidates who were fellow worshippers at chapel, and possibly relatives. They therefore had the potential to cause local excitement, but this is unlikely to have been on the same scale as for Parliamentary elections: being a poor law guardian was not a high-status activity

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<sup>33</sup> Section VI of the 1844 'Little Poor Law' (7 and 8 Vic., c. 101) laid down a single voting scale for property owners and payers of poor rates. Those paying £50 p.a. received one vote, £50 to £100 two votes, up to six votes for those over £250. Female property owners paid rates in the same way as males: twelve were identified in the Llandilofawr rate book.

which helps to explain why elections were not extensively commented on in the local press.

Having used snapshots of individual aspects of the area's demography and provided local personal colour through a look at land ownership, tenement size and elections, the chapter now turns to the major issues of how much relief was provided by the Llandilofawr board and to who. The following sections present a quantitative review of this in the context of Wales as a whole, offer an insight into what the transition from Old Poor Law to New meant for paupers, and open out into a final section showing how gentry reaction to revised rate assessments generated considerable acrimony and cemented the elected guardians' power base. It starts by looking at the size of the Llandilofawr pauper host.

#### Number of individuals relieved

Table 3.9 shows the number of people relieved in Llandilofawr up to 1843. One of the key findings of this study is immediately apparent: the overwhelmingly dominant way to relieve the poor in Llandilofawr union was to do so outside the workhouse. Apart from a brief period during the Rebecca riots out-relief consistently ran above 93% through to the 1870's (see also Table 3.11).<sup>34</sup> From the PLC's point of view matters in Llandilofawr had started in a more promising light – the board had moved unexpectedly

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<sup>34</sup> For the predominance of out-relief see D. Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in Britain: from Chadwick to Booth, 1834–1914* (London, 1998); Digby, *The Poor Law in Nineteenth Century England and Wales* (London, 1982); M. Rose (ed.) *The English Poor Law, 1780–1930* (Newton Abbot, 1971); and a different view from K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London, 1981). Wales is extensively discussed in K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge, 2006).

Table 3.9: Number of persons given poor relief in Llandilofawr union 1839–1843

Year	Number of paupers relieved indoors		Number of paupers relieved outdoors		Total all paupers		% able bodied paupers	% given out relief
	Total	Able bodied	Total	Able bodied	Total	Able bodied		
1839	35	3	1096	244	1131	247	21.8	96.9
1840	61	23	1009	164	1070	187	17.5	94.2
1841	85	18	1122	151	1207	169	14	93
1842	104	28	1082	143	1186	171	14.4	91.2
1843	185	69	1245	192	1430	261	18.25	87.0

Source: Poor Law Commission annual reports PP 1840 [245] to PP 1844 [589].

speedily to build a workhouse which was ready for occupation early in 1839, and in preparation for this momentous event the PLC told the board to take preparatory action.<sup>35</sup> First, they were to abolish out-relief to single women with bastards, a policy widely detested in Wales.<sup>36</sup> Second, they were ordered to cease giving outdoor relief to able-bodied males<sup>37</sup> – except in cases of ‘sudden and urgent necessity’.<sup>38</sup> An indication

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<sup>35</sup> CA: BG 43, guardians’ minutes 28 August 1838. See chapter 6.

<sup>36</sup> Bastardy clauses faced two major objections: unfairness because the whole burden of supporting the child was placed on the woman; and parishes could not recover the cost of relief. Welsh guardians saw this as an incentive to male immorality, while the woman was left to fend for herself. ‘A delicate machinery of social balance’ was upset: U. Henriques, ‘Bastardy and the New Poor Law’, *Past and Present*, 37 (1967), p.127.

<sup>37</sup> CA: BG 43. Board of guardians’ minutes 22 September 1838.

that the guardians anticipated frequent use of this provision is suggested by the small order placed for coconut bed mattresses in the workhouse: only 45 were purchased although the house could accommodate 200.<sup>39</sup>

As shown in Table 3.9 the number of workhouse inmates remained low, only exceeding 100 after 1842, between one-fifth and one-third of them being able-bodied. The numbers for 1842-43 are unusually high due to disruption caused by the Rebecca riots: up to the mid 1880's there were rarely more than 100 inmates. The total number of paupers relieved in the union represented 6.6% of the population in 1839 rising to 8.3% in 1843.

The same analysis is not possible after 1843 because in that year the PLC ceased to publish the number of paupers relieved by union, changing the reporting format to counties. No such records have survived locally, although the clerk was expected to send frequent, detailed returns to London. While guardians had no choice but to ensure that expenditure returns were properly prepared (as ratepayers, it was also in their own interests to do so) there was more reluctance to offer information on who was relieved and why – they preferred to be left as far as possible to their own devices in order to stretch the rules.<sup>40</sup> It thus seems likely that the guardians would not have gone out of

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<sup>38</sup> Snell, *Parish and Belonging* p. 244 concludes that this 'rendered the workhouse potentially irrelevant for a majority of paupers'. The official version is in PP 1838 [147] *Fourth Annual Report* of the Poor Law Commissioners. See also A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700–1930* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 85.

<sup>39</sup> Part of a more general pattern in which 'early rules and regulations were riddled with exceptions to accommodate local conditions and placate hostile élites', D Green, *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790–1870* (Farnham, 2010), p. 3; G. Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (London, 1984), p. 153; A. Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in nineteenth-century England* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 30.

<sup>40</sup> Popular tactics included encouraging medical officers to issue dubious relief orders on grounds of sickness, A. Digby, 'The rural poor law', in D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century*

their way to keep copies of returns they wish they had never been forced to make. The result is that, after 1844, the only figures available for pauper numbers relate to Carmarthenshire as a whole, while a further change in 1854 grouped all counties in South Wales together. These overall figures for South Wales are of little help in the present context: population in the industrial area of Glamorganshire rose rapidly after the mid-1850's and the area experienced specific poverty problems due to economic fluctuations not relevant to a mainly rural area such as Llandilofawr. The authorities' decision to present aggregated numbers is presumably indicative of the way they thought about Wales – they were either unable or unwilling to comprehend intra-Wales cultural and social differences. It also suited their purpose not to give ammunition to critics by revealing statistics which might have highlighted the slow 'progress' of the New Poor Law in Wales.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the best available indicator is for Wales in total, and that has been employed here.<sup>42</sup> Table 3.10 shows the result: at the beginning of the period Llandilofawr's 7% pauperism rate was similar to that for Wales as a whole, lower than the county total but higher than that for England and Wales.<sup>43</sup> By 1881 the overall national rate had fallen from 6.1% to 3.1%.

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(Basingstoke, 1976), p. 159; W. Apfel and P. Dunkley, 'English rural society and the New Poor Law: Bedfordshire, 1837–47', *Social History*, 10 (1985), p. 44. For an especially enthusiastic Welsh example see S.R. Williams, 'The Bedwellty Board of Guardians and the Default Act of 1927', *Llafur*, 2 (1979), p. 72.

<sup>41</sup> There was the additional practical difficulty of actually getting Welsh unions to provide accurate and timely returns.

<sup>42</sup> Extracting these numbers from PLC reports requires care. Practice as to whether lunatics and vagrants should be classified as 'mainstream' paupers varied from time to time. The figures used here exclude both categories.

<sup>43</sup> This figure compares with Jones' general assertion that 'about one-tenth' of the population received poor relief: *Rebecca's Children*, p. 38; For Cardiff union Dewar pointed out that if paupers' dependents are also considered, the pauperism rate could rise to 15%, 'George Clive', p. 55.

Table 3.10: Numbers and percentages of paupers 1841–1881

	1841			1851			1861			1871			1881		
	No. of paupers	Population	% paupers	No. of paupers	Population	% paupers	No. of paupers	Population	% paupers	No. of paupers	Population	% paupers	No. of paupers	Population	% paupers
Llandilofawr union	1207	17129	7.0	na	17968	na	na	17227	na	na	16976	na	na	17324	na
Carmarthenshire	8276	106326	7.8	7311	110632	6.6	na	111796	na	na	115710	na	na	124864	na
Wales	73405	1068547	6.9	68220	1188821	5.7	79786	1296001	6.2	84448	1421670	5.9	67820	1577559	4.3
England and Wales	968573	15914148	6.1	941315	17922768	5.3	883921	20066224	4.4	103280	22712266	4.5	809341	25974439	3.1

Carmarthenshire % of all Wales	11.3	10.7
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Wales as % England and Wales	7.6	7.2	9.0	8.2	8.4
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na: not available

Source: *Annual Reports*. PLC: PP 1840 [245]; PLB: PP 1852/53 [1625]; PLB: PP 1861/62 [3037]; LGB: PP 1872 [C.516]; LGB: PP 1881/82 [C.3337].

Further detail can be obtained by extracting data on sub-divisions of paupers and, as in the case of Llandilofawr, the figures for Wales as a whole reveal that the proportion of able-bodied adult paupers remained stubbornly high at just over one-fifth of the total for most of the period. Table 3.11 shows this together with other key categories.

Table 3.11: Categories of paupers for all Wales

	1851	1861	1871	1881
% of paupers who were able-bodied	na	22	20.3	20
% of persons given out-relief	93.9	95.2	93.8	90.3
Children as % of all persons relieved	na	35.4	35.2	35.1

Source: *Annual Reports*

As with total pauper numbers, it is clear that out-relief for the able-bodied continued to be a mainstay of Welsh unions' relief strategy as they declined to impose the new policy strictly, believing that out-relief was cheaper.<sup>44</sup> The central authorities were unwilling or unable to force the issue, and there is no evidence of anything approaching a 'crusade' against out-relief in Llandilofawr.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> P. Wood, *Poverty and the Workhouse in Victorian Britain* (Wolfeboro Falls NH, 1991), pp. 142-3. In northern England it was calculated that indoor relief cost 50% more than out-relief: M.E. Rose, 'The allowance system under the new poor law', *Economic History Review*, 19 (1966), p. 613; C. Flynn-Hughes, 'The Bangor workhouse', *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society*, 5 (1944).

<sup>45</sup> E.T. Hurren, 'Agricultural trade unionism and the crusade against outdoor relief: poor law politics in the Brixworth union, Northamptonshire, 1870-75', *Agricultural History Review* 48 (2000), p. 203; M. MacKinnon, 'English poor law policy and the crusade against out-relief', *Journal of Economic History*, 47 (1987), pp. 603-625; Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p. 262/79; P. Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 171/3; D. Thomson, 'The decline of social welfare: falling state support for the elderly since early Victorian times', *Ageing and Society*, 4 (1984), pp. 451-482; K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (1981). There was an unsuccessful attempt at a 'crusade' in Aberystwyth: D. Jones, 'Pauperism in the Aberystwyth Poor Law Union 1870-1914', *Ceredigion*, 9 (1980), p. 94.



Data available on the financial cost of poor relief under the New Poor Law is relatively abundant: the following account provides the Welsh context for Llandilofawr by relating it to Carmarthenshire and Wales as a whole, and then moves to a level of detail only covered briefly in previous studies of Welsh unions by analysing and comparing expenditure in each parish, and, importantly, doing so on a per capita basis.<sup>46</sup>

#### Expenditure on poor relief: Carmarthenshire and Wales

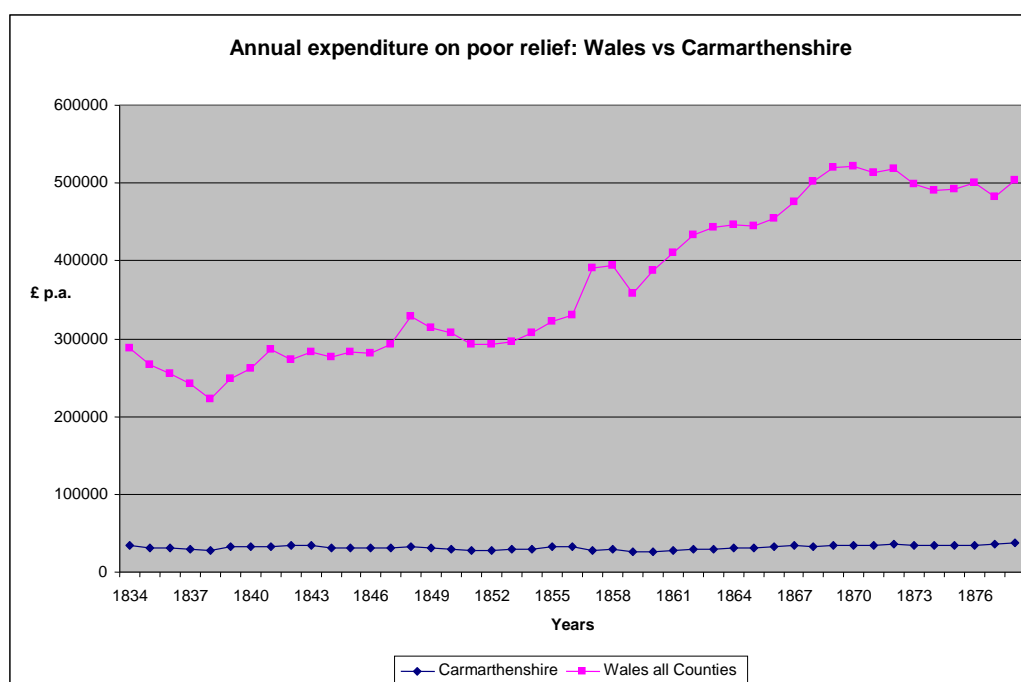
Expenditure figures provide the best measure of how much relief the poor actually received: national data for this covering Wales as a whole is available from *Annual Reports* published by the PLC and its successors. However, for Carmarthenshire and Llandilofawr union the expenditure series only runs to 1878 – thereafter all South Wales Unions were aggregated into a single number. Thus, in order to source material about Llandilofawr union beyond 1878 or obtain data at parish level, it is necessary to exploit other sources. This has been done by assembling information produced within the union and buried in board of guardians’ minutes and various returns. The data relates to the amount of poor rate levied, and is thus a measure of union income rather than expenditure, but since the sole purpose of raising it was to provide relief to paupers the two measures come to the same thing over a sufficiently long period of time.<sup>47</sup> As the discussion

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<sup>46</sup> There is a short passage in F. Hankins, ‘From parish pauper to Union workhouse inmate’, (Part 2), *Bryncheiniog*, 31 (1998), p. 106, showing Breconshire figures to be very similar to the Welsh average from 1835 to 1845.

<sup>47</sup> A check performed by summing each source for the period 1839-1878 showed a cumulative difference of 3% - considered acceptable for present purposes.

Figure 3.3: Annual expenditure on poor relief: Wales vs Carmarthenshire



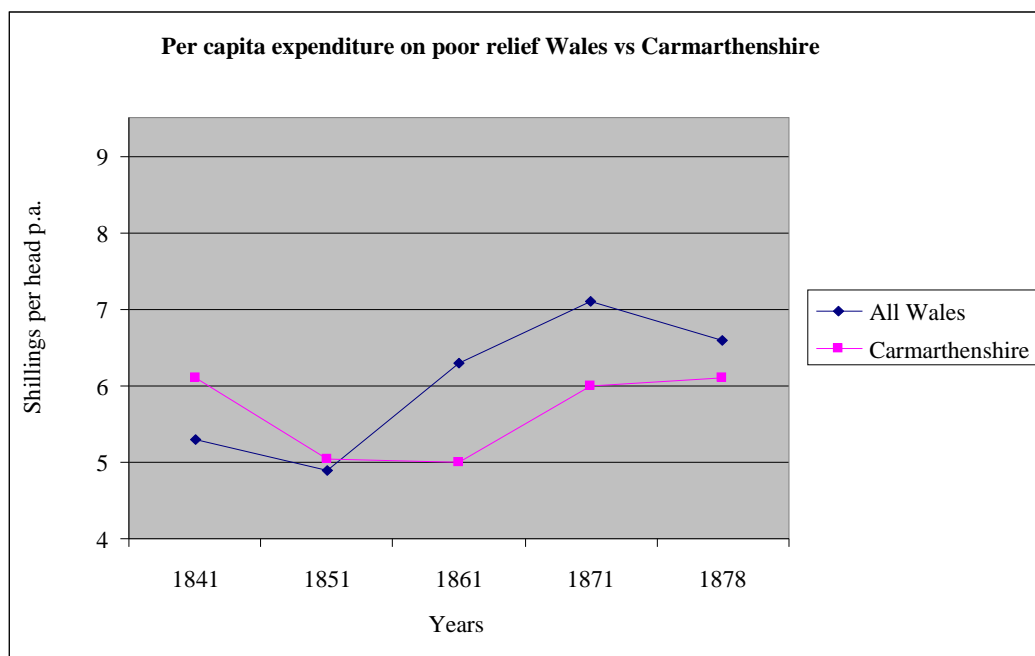
Source: *Annual Reports* of PLC and successors.

develops, it will be made clear which source is being used.<sup>48</sup> Figure 3.3 shows annual expenditure on poor relief for Wales and Carmarthenshire from 1839 to 1878. This shows a very clear difference between the experience in Carmarthenshire and that for Wales as a whole. For Wales, expenditure rose from £287,884 in 1839 to £503,346 in 1878, an increase of 75%, while the change in Carmarthenshire was much more modest, moving

<sup>48</sup> The definition of poor relief requires comment. PLC data was presented in a 'Poor Rate Return' table in each *Report*. Figures used here are from the column 'Amount expended for the relief of the poor' which included three sub-headings, In-Maintenance, Out-Relief and 'Other expenditure immediately connected with relief'. There are eleven other columns including one each for Vaccination Fees and Medical Relief which could be regarded as 'benefits in kind'. The biggest items are the County, Police, and Road Rate which together typically amounted to between 25% and 33% of Llandilofawr's expenditure. Remaining columns categorise administrative expenditure including parochial assessments, legal costs, registration, and 'nuisances'. Data used here excludes Relief for Vagrants and Lunatics. The PLC sometimes 'corrected' figures emanating from Llandilofawr to ensure consistency, or in the belief that the Clerk had made arithmetical or definitional errors. Central charges were a further potential source of confusion.

from £33,755 to £37,584, up 11%. However, since Carmarthenshire's population increased at a much slower rate than Wales as a whole per capita figures are more meaningful.<sup>49</sup> While Figure 3.3 suggests that Carmarthenshire unions were more parsimonious than Welsh guardians as a whole, Figure 3.4, showing expenditure per head of the whole population, makes the extent of the difference even more apparent.

Figure 3.4: Per capita expenditure on poor relief, Wales vs Carmarthenshire



Sources: *Annual Reports* of PLC and successors; censuses.

This suggests that in the first decade of the New Poor Law's introduction in Wales, and despite widespread resistance to many of its provisions, there was success from the

<sup>49</sup> Per capita numbers derived by using population data from Table 3.2 above. 1878 population estimated by linear extrapolation between 1871 and 1881 numbers.

PLC's point of view.<sup>50</sup> Overall per capita expenditure on poor relief in Wales fell from 5s. 4d to 4s. 11d. (8%), and from 6s. 2d. to 5s. 1d. (17%) in Carmarthenshire. Thereafter Carmarthenshire spending reduced slightly to 1861 and then rose 24% to 1878, while Wales rose earlier and further. At the end of the period the Welsh total of 6s. 7d. per head p.a. was almost 7% higher than Carmarthenshire's 6s. 2d.

### Poor relief in Llandilofawr union

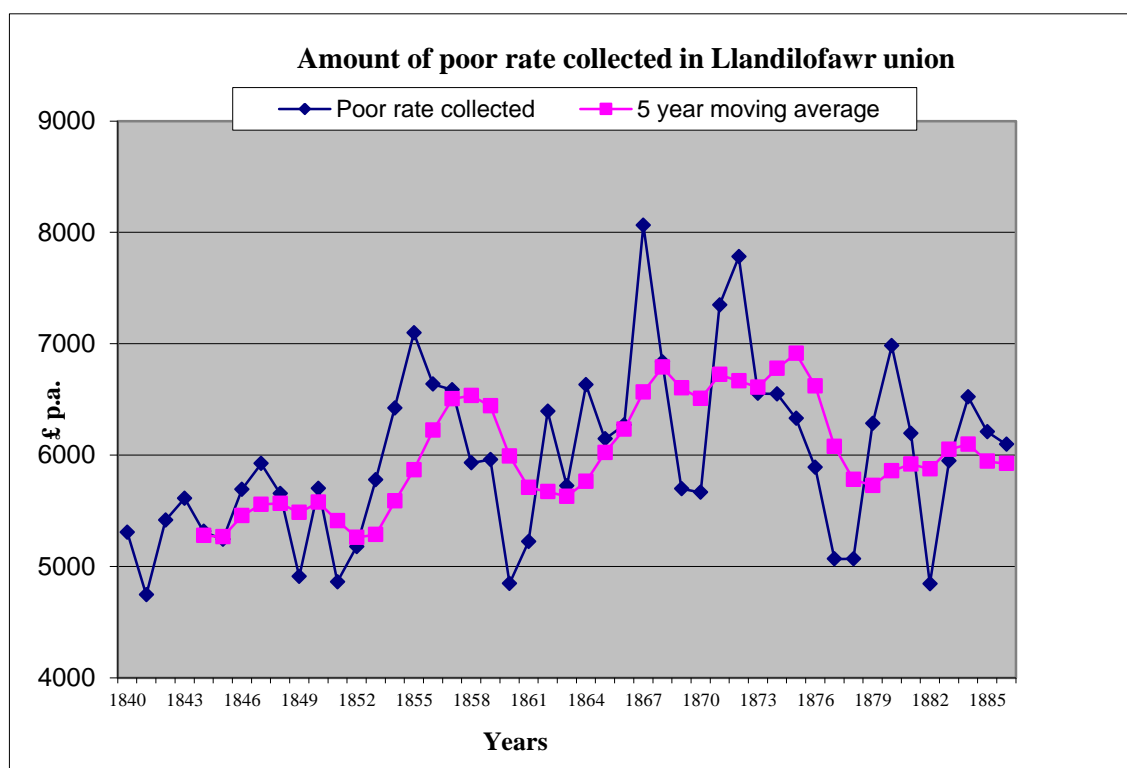
The union called for parish payments (made in monthly instalments) twice a year.<sup>51</sup> Each demand was based on actual expenditure in previous years modified for any anticipated future changes: at the end of a period any surplus or deficit was carried forward to the next, and a correction made. For the present study the big advantage of this data source (which relates to income from the poor rate) is that it is available by parish for the whole period. Figure 3.5 shows the annual amount levied from 1839 to 1886.

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<sup>50</sup> For opposition generally see N.C. Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement* (Manchester, 1971); A. Brundage, *English Poor Laws*, p. 74; Digby, 'Rural poor law', in Fraser, p. 151; F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: the Workhouse System, 1834–1844* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 122; D. Roberts, *Victorian Origins of the British Welfare State* (New Haven, 1960), pp. 265–275. For Wales, D. Howell, 'The Rebecca Riots', in T. Herbert and G. E. Jones (des), *People and Protest: Wales 1815–1880* (Cardiff, 1988) p. 117; D. Williams, *The Rebecca Riots: a Study in Agrarian Discontent* (Cardiff, 1971) pp.138–147; Williams, *Modern Wales*, p. 208; P. Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales, 1536–1990*, (Harlow, 1992), p. 266; A. Brundage, *Making*, p. 146–149; D. Eastwood, *Governing Rural England*, p. 185; A. Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in nineteenth-century England* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 30; D. Llewellyn-Jones, 'The fate of paupers: life in the Bangor and Beaumaris Union workhouse, 1845–1871, *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society*, 66 (2005), p. 95; Parker, 'Radnorshire', p. 173.

<sup>51</sup> For example, in 1855/56 £3,358 was raised for the period April to September, payable in 4 equal instalments on 5 May, 28 May, 23 June and 4 August. For October to March £3,278 was demanded, payable on 13 October, 27 October, 1 December, 18 January and 23 February. The requirement was for the union Treasurer always to have sufficient cash to keep Relieving Officers in funds.

Figure 3.5: Amount of poor rate collected in Llandilofawr union



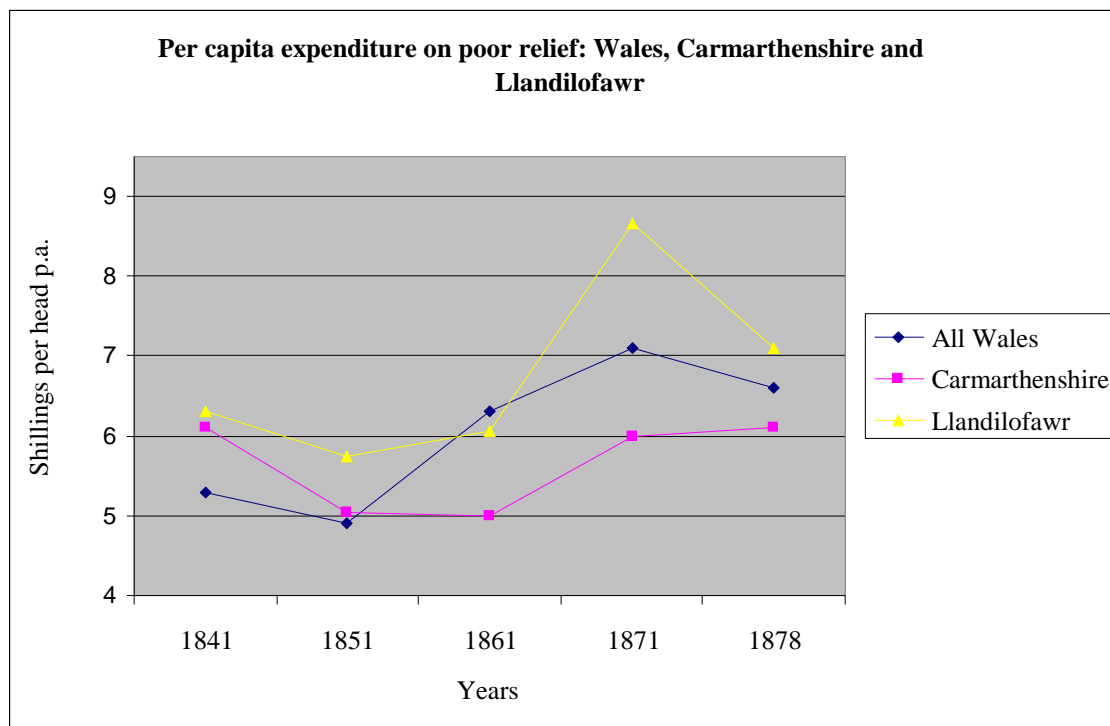
Source: Board of guardians' minutes.

It can be seen that there were significant fluctuations from year to year. For example, the sum raised rose by 46% from 1850 to 1854 only to fall again up to 1859. Thereafter the pattern was even more erratic. The five-year moving average reveals several periods: figures were relatively stable up to 1851 following which there was a steep rise during the rest of the decade; a return to mid-1850's levels with a subsequent increase to the end of the 1860's; stability up to 1875; and a steep decline to 1879 followed by a level period to the end of the study. Figures for surrounding unions show much less annual variation – in the same period the total for the other three Carmarthenshire unions rose and fell by just over 15%, so the Llandilofawr figures look odd. It seems unlikely that such large swings were caused by pauper numbers or the size of doles and

are thus likely to be apparent rather than real, caused by the methodology used to determine rate calls. For example, forecasts of future expenditure may simply have been wrong, necessitating large corrections: or guardians, always reluctant to part with cash, may have deliberately restricted rate calls to suit short-term financial constraints. The most reasonable interpretation is that from 1839 to the late 1860's the amount of poor rate collected rose on average by a shade over 1% p.a., following which it fell gently by less than 1% p.a. For present purposes these trends are more important than the figure for any particular year.

As with pauper numbers, however, it is more meaningful to consider per capita figures, for which purpose we return to the expenditure data shown in Figure 3.6. This is the same as Figure 3.4 with Llandilofawr added, and shows that per capita poor relief payments made in Llandilofawr were not only consistently higher than those for Carmarthenshire generally but were, with one minor exception in 1861, above those for Wales as a whole.

Figure 3.6: Per capita expenditure on poor relief: Wales, Carmarthenshire and Llandilofawr



Source: Board of guardians' minutes and censuses.

Furthermore, Welsh per capita expenditure was higher than that for England from 1861 to 1878 as shown in Table 3.12.<sup>52</sup> The differences are significant and striking, the 1871 Llandilofawr figure of 8s. 8d. per head being 44% higher than Carmarthenshire's

<sup>52</sup> Reasons for variations include factors such as cultural differences within Wales, I.G. Jones, *Explorations and Explanations: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales* (Llandysul, 1981), and kinship links, D. Parry-Jones, *My Own Folk* (Llandysul, 1972); Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 91. Intra-Wales variations were identified in S. King and J. Stewart, 'The history of the poor law in Wales: under-researched, full of potential', *Archives*, 26 (2001) and Kidd, *State, Society* p. 29. For regional variations in England see S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700–1850: a Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000); W. Apfel and P. Dunkley, 'English rural society and the New Poor Law: Bedfordshire, 1837–47', *Social History*, 10 (1985); D. Fraser, 'The English Poor Law and the Origins of the British Welfare State', in W.J. Mommsen (ed.) *The Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany, 1850–1950* (London, 1981). According to Thane, differences were so great by the 1860's that the situation was 'anarchic', *Foundations of the Welfare State* (London, 1982), p. 34, while generalisations about the operation of the PLAA are 'invalid': P. Dunkley, 'The 'Hungry Forties' and the New Poor Law: a case study', *The Historical Journal*, 2 (1974), p. 329.

6s. 0d. By this measure, and even given a difference of ‘only’ 16% in 1878, Llandilofawr guardians were always relatively generous.<sup>53</sup>

Table 3.12: Per capita poor relief

Year	England	Wales	Carms	LDF
1841	6s. 0d.	5s. 4d.	6s. 1d.	6s. 4d.
1851	5s. 8d.	4s. 8d.	5s. 1d.	5s. 8d.
1861	5s. 9d.	6s. 4d.	5s. 0d.	6s.1d.
1871	6s.11d.	7s.1d.	6s. 0d.	8s. 8d.
1878	6s. 2d.	6s. 8d.	6s.2d.	7s. 2d.

Sources: *Annual Reports* of PLC and successors; censuses.

To delve into these union averages further, it is necessary to return to income data to investigate what happened on a per capita basis in each parish. An even more interesting picture emerges, shown in Table 3.13.

The first points to note are that in every single parish the 1881 figure is higher than that for 1841 and that the union’s average figure rose by 47%. There were, however, considerable differences between parishes: in 1841 Llanfihangel Cilfargen’s 11s. 1d. was twice the union average and almost six times higher than Brechfa, the lowest at 2s. 0d. There were also some very large increases: Llandefeisant’s poor rate rose 450% from 1841 to 1881. The biggest changes were in small parishes, but the figures for larger ones also exhibit considerable differences. Figure 3.7 illustrates the variations.

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<sup>53</sup> PP 1847/48 [735] provided examples of comparative per capita expenditure by county. The top three (Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire) spent over 10s. 0d. and Monmouth was bottom with 3s. 5d. Llandilofawr would have ranked around number 35.

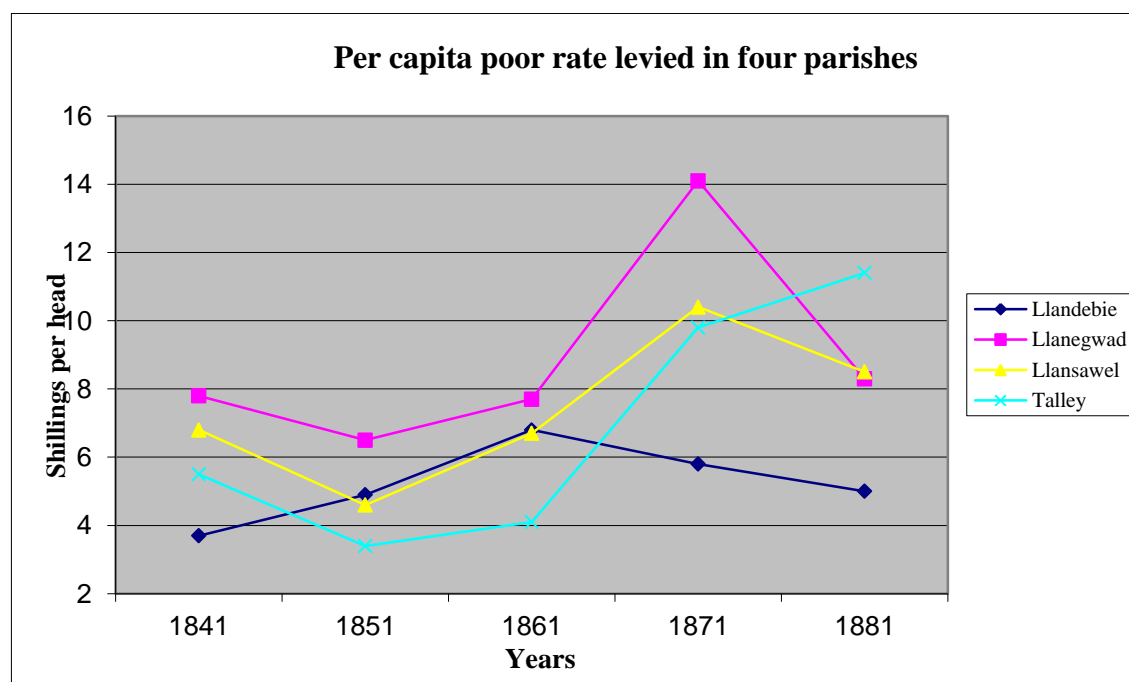


Table 3.13: Income generated from the poor rate: shillings per capita p.a.

Parish	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881
Bettws	2s. 5d.	3s. 5d.	4s. 1d.	5s. 6d.	5s. 6d.
Brechfa	2s. 0d.	1s. 4d.	3s. 4d.	4s. 5d.	4s. 7d.
Llandebie	3s. 8d.	4s. 11d.	6s. 9d.	6s. 9d.	5s. 0d.
Llandefeisant	5s. 1d.	9s. 8d.	6s. 2d.	15s. 9d.	22s. 11d.
Llandilofawr	5s. 1d.	5s. 0d.	8s. 9d.	9s. 5d.	8s. 9d.
Llanegwad	7s. 9d.	6s. 6d.	7s. 8d.	12s. 1d.	8s. 4d.
Llanfihangel Aberbythych	4s. 6d.	4s. 8d.	5s. 4d.	8s. 4d.	7s. 8d.
Llanfihangel Cilfargen	11s. 1d.	1s. 5d.	1s. 5d.	11s. 1d.	16s. 6d.
Llanfynnydd	7s. 8d.	7s. 10d.	8s. 6d.	9s. 7d.	9s. 8d.
Llangathen	8s. 1d.	10s. 0d.	11s. 11d.	10s. 2d.	12s. 0d.
Llansawel	6s. 9d.	4s. 7d.	6s. 8d.	9s. 5d.	8s. 6d.
Talley	5s. 6d.	3s. 5d.	4s. 1d.	9s. 9d.	11s. 5d.
Total Llandilofawr union	5s. 6d.	5s. 5d.	7s. 5d.	9s. 2d.	8s. 1d.

Source: Board of guardians' minutes and censuses.

Figure 3.7: Per capita poor rate levied in four parishes



Source: Board of guardians' minutes and censuses.

Llandebie, the most industrialised parish in the union, began and finished with lower per capita figures than the three rural parishes, each of which increased poor relief after 1851. In 1881, the Llanegwad and Llansawel figures were 70% higher than in Llandebie, where the figure of 5s. was similar to Bettws, the only other industrial parish. It seems, then, that ratepayers in Llandilofawr's rural parishes where population was contracting paid relatively more than others, an outcome explained below.

### Level of payments

It is now possible to start seeing things from the paupers' point of view by looking at weekly doles and the difference between Old Poor Law arrangements and New. The Llandilofawr parish vestry book records the formation of a select vestry on 14 March 1821: it had one representative from each hamlet, and six 'assistants', a system again emphasising that hamlets were the unit with which paupers and officials identified.<sup>54</sup> A clue to the continuity of Llandilofawr's poor law arrangements is given by the identity of those involved: the vestry Chairman, Rev. David Prothero, and another leading light Capt. John Lewis, became the first and second Chairmen of the union respectively. John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen, first appeared on 25 September 1833.<sup>55</sup> Interest in vestry affairs was keen: when two candidates stood for the post of 'Surgeon and Apothecary to the poor' 352 votes were cast, and it was necessary to pay Thomas Lewis 6d. to 'take charge

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<sup>54</sup> CA: CPR/36/42, Llandilofawr parish's comprehensive vestry book covers 60 years, 1821 to 1886. There are also vestry books for Llanfihangel Cilfargen (CPR/33/ 6) and Llandefeisant (CPR/31/7), but these have much less detail. For select vestries see Brundage, *English Poor Laws*, p. 50.

<sup>55</sup> A year later he was in a group appointed 'to prepare answers to the questions propounded by the PLC' as they gathered information prior to forming unions: Appendix to the first *Annual Report* PP. 1835 (500). Llandilofawr's response has not survived.

of the door', only allowing entry to those who 'actually have business'.<sup>56</sup> Cash payments were made to two-thirds of paupers, the others receiving relief in kind, usually in the form of clothing, shoes or bedding. Relief decisions were made by an overseer: there was one for every hamlet, which emphasises the highly localised nature of the Old Poor Law system.<sup>57</sup> It was also very personalised, as when the vestry paid David Watkins £1.4s. 'for maintaining Henry Owen during the time he was with him in order to learn him to play upon the violin'.<sup>58</sup> Relief could also be used as a means to discourage behaviour regarded as undesirable: Talley parish had a policy of refusing relief to dog owners, for example.<sup>59</sup>

A comprehensive picture of 1834 was contained in a memorandum sent by the vestry clerk to a local gentleman.<sup>60</sup> This shows that 256 persons, 5% of the population, received regular amounts of between 1s. 6d. and 4s. 0d. per week, and 39 others had their rent wholly or partly paid: winter payments were 'sometimes' given to the able bodied. The total cost was £2052. 0s. 4d., an average of 3s. 0d. p.w. for each recipient. Only 7 of the 256 lived in Llandilo town, the vast majority being relieved in outlying locations. There was no provision for in-relief although the matter had been actively

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<sup>56</sup> The appointee Griffith Bowen Jones later became one of the few active *ex officio* union guardians, and the loser Nathaniel Rees a medical officer.

<sup>57</sup> There was thus one overseer for a dozen or so paupers. The term 'hamlet' is used in this context because it was the word employed by local people when describing their area. For the local nature of the Old Poor Law see G.W. Oxley, *Poor Relief in England and Wales 1601–1834* (Newton Abbot, 1974).

<sup>58</sup> CA: CPR/36/42, December 1823. The same policy was employed in neighbouring Llangadock where a blind boy was sent to William the Harper for two years, and two others learned the organ and the fiddle: [www.genuki.org.uk](http://www.genuki.org.uk). I am grateful to Anna Brueton for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in G.D. Owen, 'The poor law system in Carmarthenshire during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1943).

<sup>60</sup> CA: Derwydd additional muniments 16. Memorandum from William Evans 3 January 1835.

discussed: in 1830 a committee, exclusively manned by gentry, was set up to ‘decide upon the most convenient location for a parish poor house’. Nothing happened immediately and a second group composed of smaller landowners was still looking for a site two years later.<sup>61</sup> This may be an early example of the large ratepayers failing to get their way on matters relating to poor relief.

Similar care was offered in Bettws.<sup>62</sup> Vestry meetings here took place in houses, typical cash payments ranging from 1s. 8d. to 3s. 3d. p.w.<sup>63</sup> Several paupers had their rent paid – normally, it seems, after they had built up twelve months’ arrears. Vestry members here organised matters differently from Llandilofawr. After 1826, the minutes of every March meeting contain a schedule naming those individuals (typically around 25) to receive relief in the year ahead, together with details of their allowance, a procedure which suggests that the pauper population was very predictable.<sup>64</sup> It was also stable – one-third of the names on the 1831 list were the same as in 1826. Each year the vestry book notes: ‘We do agree and allow to Relieved the Poor as under named if they liewed or other unnecessary things happen unto They’(sic).<sup>65</sup> Additions during the year are infrequent although in July 1829 it was ‘agreed to apparrell Rees Evan of Shurt and a

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<sup>61</sup> CA: CPR/36/42, 8 July 1830 and 15 May 1832.

<sup>62</sup> The amounts offered in both parishes were, interestingly, almost identical to those in parts of North Wales, where payments in Bangor and Dolgellau unions ranged between 1s. and 4s. in 1837: William Day recorded 136 such examples. TNA: MH32/15, May 1838.

<sup>63</sup> CA: Bettws PC/CC, Box 1/1: vestry book for 1825–1888.

<sup>64</sup> Agreeing pensions for the old, widows and disabled at Eastertime was common practice: P. Slack, *The English Poor Law 1531–1782* (Cambridge, 1990) p. 19.

<sup>65</sup> Note the underlying Welsh grammar.

Pare of Shoose’.<sup>66</sup> It is clear that in this small, remote community, inhabitants found it difficult (and probably unpleasant) to produce minutes in English. A form of the roundsman system seems to have been adopted: in 1834 every ratepayer was required to keep Mary Phillip for ‘one natural day for every five shillings [of rateable value]’, for which they were paid fourpence, after which ‘the keeper of the above named must send her to the next name unto he on the streat’,<sup>67</sup> the employment of a woman in this context casting an interesting light on Carmarthenshire social values. The cost was closely monitored, resulting in great variations in the poor rate levy: from 22s. in the pound in 1826, it fell to 10s. in 1831, returning to 22s. the following year, and then falling progressively up to 1837 by which time it was down to 5s. In November 1836, fearful of New Poor Law arrangements, the vestry preferred to pay a 6s. fine to stay out of Llanelli union, but Bettws was eventually incorporated into Llandilofawr union six months after its formation.

It seems that paupers were accustomed to care which was very personalised, consisting principally of out-relief tailored to their needs, which would lead them to expect something similar from the union after 1836.<sup>68</sup> Three sources offer a glimpse into what happened. First, guardians’ minutes sporadically mention individual doles ranging from 1s. 6d. p.w. to 3s. between 1840 and 1843, many on account of ‘sickness in the family’.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Shoes formed a large part of the relief budget: Llanegwad’s policy was to reuse those belonging to deceased paupers. Owen, *op. cit.*(1943).

<sup>67</sup> Similar treatment was given to Jonathan John in 1829. For the roundsman system see Rose, *English Poor Law* p. 56. It was ‘not common’ in Wales, Williams, *Modern Wales*, p. 204.

<sup>68</sup> Oxley, *Poor Relief*.

<sup>69</sup> Usually the wife is named as the sick party, illnesses including rheumatism with ulcers, debility, diseased heart, and fever. One payment was to provide a bed for a child.

The average is around 2s., a reduction of one-third from the pre-New Poor Law level.<sup>70</sup>

The second source is rather more substantial, providing details of weekly doles paid to 156 separate individuals in 11 parishes between July and September 1847.<sup>71</sup> A short explanation of why it was produced sets the background for the subsequent discussion.

The table allowed guardians to assess the effect of 1846–7 Parliamentary Acts which changed the way the cost of relief was charged to parishes. From 1846 the parish where a pauper had resided for five years paid for his relief even if he had a settlement elsewhere. A new statute in 1847 called for all such non-resident cases to be totalled (150 in Llandilofawr) and paid from a central ‘Common Fund’ contributed to by every parish according to its proportion of the union poor rate. This caused a significant redistribution of the relief burden between parishes – those with a large number of non-resident paupers gained, the cost now being spread across all 12 union parishes, the others lost. Llandilofawr parish was much better off: under the new arrangements it only provided 27% of union funds compared to 32% previously, its poor rate thus falling from £1900 to £1500, while most of the rural parishes were worse off, a situation causing great controversy. The table, entitled ‘Relief afforded to Paupers exempted to be removed to their places of legal settlement’, detailed every case in the union, and showed the relief paid to each individual. Interestingly, the issue in Llandilofawr was principally internal as only one-third were paupers settled in another union. The principal point of interest here, however, is the size of the payments, shown

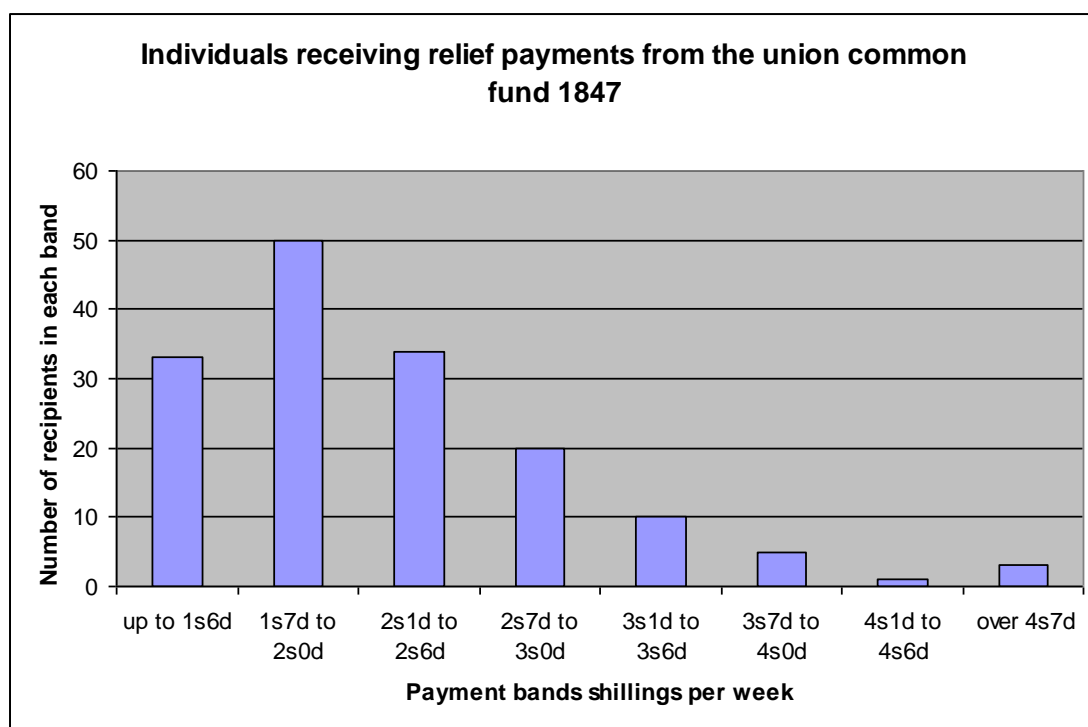
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<sup>70</sup> Thus Llandilofawr parish’s poor rates declined from £2052 to £1400 p.a.

<sup>71</sup> CA: BG 42, 10 September 1847, table presented to the guardians.

in Figure 3.8. This reveals a similar picture to that described above: 83 paupers, 53% of the total, were awarded less than 2s. per week, and another 54 (35%) between 2s. 0d. and 3s. 0d. A small number were paid 4s. or more.

Figure 3.8: Individuals receiving relief payments from the union common fund 1847.



Source: Guardians' minutes 10 September 1847.

The third source is much later. John Lewis, Llwynfedwen, convened special meetings to review all out-relief cases: at one such in Llandilo Shire Hall in 1873 thirty doles were considered, and every single payment was between 1s. 6d. and 2s. 0d.<sup>72</sup>

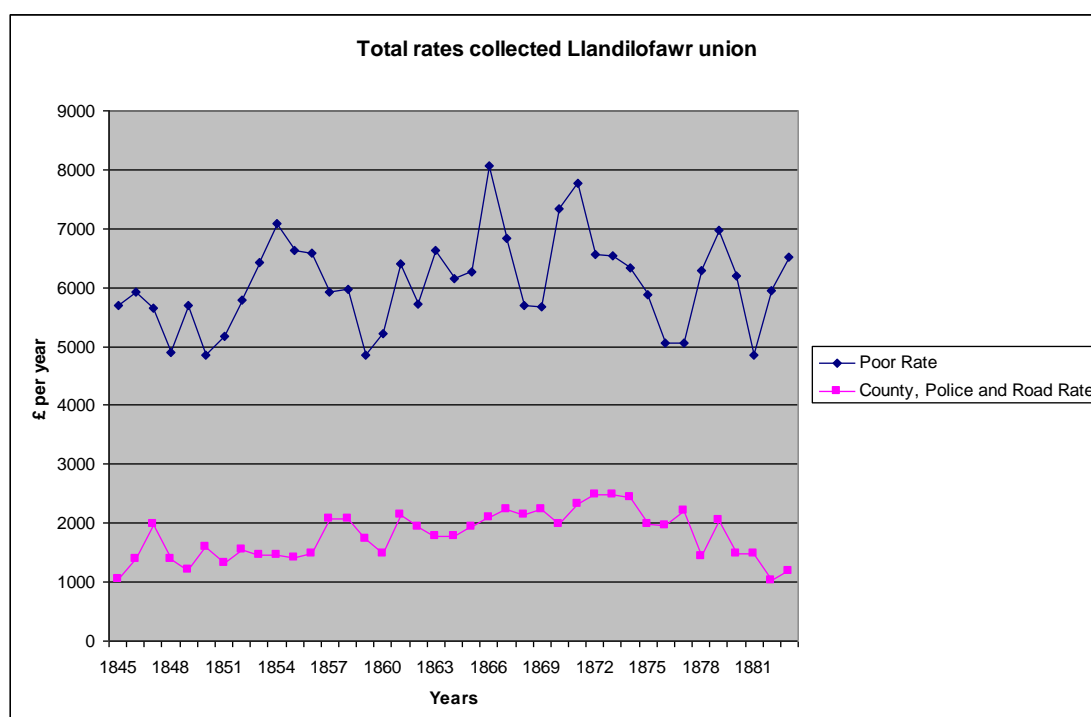
<sup>72</sup> CA: BG 28, 9 August 1873. The fact that these meetings were held in the Shire Hall rather than the workhouse board room suggests that they had 'semi-official' status.

The three sources produce a similar picture, showing that post 1836 payments of around 2s. per week were significantly less than the 3s. typically offered previously.<sup>73</sup>

#### A further look at Llandilofawr's rates and expenditure

A more detailed look is rewarding because it gives insights into guardians' priorities, and if County rates are added into the picture, we can start to appreciate ratepayers' feelings. This is important here because although guardians could not control the amount of County rates, they were responsible for collecting them, and were thus 'blamed' for the additional cost. Figure 3.9 shows how significant this was.

Figure 3.9: Total rates collected in Llandilofawr union



Source: Guardians' minutes

<sup>73</sup> See P. Thane, *Old Age*, pp. 165-171.



County rates were collected with additional sums for the cost of police and roads.<sup>74</sup> In the 1840's they amounted to one-fifth of the poor rate, rose to around one-third, and remained at that level with odd peaks such as 44% in 1877. The minutes make it clear that paying County rates was very contentious – guardians considered a police force unnecessary and intensely disliked being charged for services over which they had no control:<sup>75</sup> they saw it as 'taxation without representation'.<sup>76</sup> Worse, the County rate was set by magistrates at the Quarter Sessions: the same gentlemen were the *ex officio* guardians, and this arrangement is an example of something setting them and elected guardians at loggerheads with each other.

A number of observations may be made about guardians' priorities, notably their propensity to spend large sums (£100 to £250 per annum) on legal proceedings: between 1848 and 1852 the £882 legal bill was greater than the £794 spent on medical services. This expenditure was for several reasons. In the early years the board actively pursued fathers of illegitimate children chargeable to the parish. Many cases were resolved by the father agreeing to make voluntary contributions, but if this did not happen, legal proceedings were instituted, a policy enthusiastically supported by the poor law authorities. In the early 1840's such proceedings typically cost £5 so a 2s. maintenance award could be recovered over one year. A further large cost was for

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<sup>74</sup> The first levy reported in the minutes was £316 2s. 11d. made on 7 June 1845: CA: BG 42.

<sup>75</sup> In June 1846 the board, advised that they were 'unenforceable', rescinded its decision to collect County rates. In April 1850 John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen, persuaded guardians unanimously to sign a petition to disband the police.

<sup>76</sup> CA: BG 39, 7 July 1859. The guardians, again led by Lewis, petitioned for an elected board to run County affairs and set the rate.

removals, an activity in which the Llandilofawr board was unusually active.<sup>77</sup> Between 1845 and 1849 they were granted 53 orders, the second highest number of all Carmarthenshire unions: much bigger Carmarthen only managed 30.<sup>78</sup> In cases where it was difficult to determine the parish of an individual's settlement it was extremely costly to arrive at an answer – a removal appeal typically cost over £15, and there are several cases in the early 1840's where sums of up to £40 were expended.<sup>79</sup>

Other legal proceedings were taken against husbands who deserted their families; children (or even grandchildren) who left aged relatives on the parish;<sup>80</sup> or against relief recipients who were subsequently found to have sufficient assets to support themselves. While some of these cases were not economic when considered in isolation, the authorities presumably believed that there was a deterrent effect on potential defaulters which rendered the process worthwhile. It is interesting that the most-often cited recipient of legal fees was none other than the union's first Clerk, John Prothero Lewis.

Looking at the overall picture, and taking the 1850's as an example, Figure 3.10 shows the four main categories into which expenditure from the rates can be divided.

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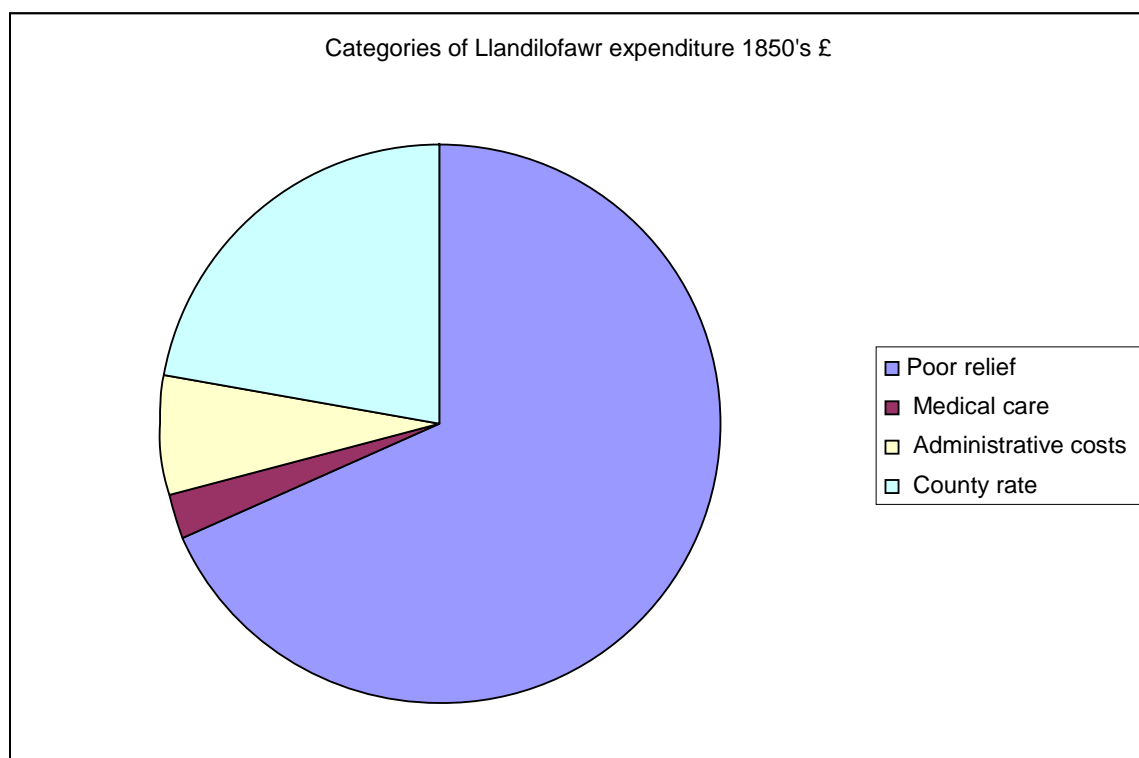
<sup>77</sup> For removals see Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p. 348.

<sup>78</sup> PP 1850 [666] *Abstract of return of the number of orders of removal granted*. Guardians maintained their stance over a long period, opposing two removals in July 1866. They kept a list of widows who were removable.

<sup>79</sup> Between 1841 and 1845 minutes sometimes detail the cost of a removal case. In 1844 £40 4s. 1d. was spent to prevent Merthyr Tydfil removing David Rees to Llandilofawr, while it cost £47 17s. 0d. to ensure that Mary Davies was kept away from Llanfynydd. Removal appeals were not always successful, Llanegwad losing £29 17s. 8d. on a failed appeal regarding John Davies.

<sup>80</sup> Thane, *Old Age*, p. 167.

Figure 3.10: Categories of Llandilofawr expenditure 1850's



Source: *Annual Reports*

At 68% of the total, poor relief was the largest category, followed by the County rate at 22%. 'Administrative Costs', comprising legal fees, registration,<sup>81</sup> surveys and maintenance of voting lists accounted for 7% of the total, and the remainder was for medical care. This shows that the vast majority of the money raised was spent directly on caring for the poor rather than administration, and comparison with other similar unions shows Llandilofawr in a favourable light.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Censuses were costly – such as £110 10s 9d in 1841: CA: BG 43, 13 November 1841.

<sup>82</sup> In 1843 Llandilofawr spent £714 on 'Establishment Charges', *Tenth Report of the Poor Law Commission*, App. B II (1844), compared to £745 in Llanelly and £681 in Llandovery. This was not echoed elsewhere. In Durham the cost of 'relief machinery' made it necessary to curtail payments to paupers: Dunkley, 'Hungry Forties', p. 334.

### Rate assessments: a source of dispute

Poor rate bills were calculated from two variables, the rateable value (in £) of each property and a levy per £ of that value. Values were established by surveys and the board of guardians decided on the levy. This system caused conflicts of interest which came to a head in Llandilofawr in 1866: to examine this illuminating event it is necessary to step back a little.

Overseers were responsible for keeping an up-to-date record of the value of every property in their parish and to this end organised regular surveys funded from the poor rate. Large property owners had a vested interest in ensuring that their property's rateable value was as low as possible, and it was widely believed that they used their influence to achieve this. Surveyors employed in Llandilofawr were all locally based, often agents for, or tenants of, large landowners: they would therefore be likely to listen attentively to 'men of influence', and there was unease that some valuations were 'fixed'. The PLB offered a polite, and typically understated, observation: 'some dissatisfaction has been expressed at the mode in which surveyors and valuers have given their valuations. It is urged that they do so hastily and without proper attention, or without due care and discrimination'.<sup>83</sup>

A landowner who disputed a valuation could appeal, a process giving rise to a further conflict of interest since magistrates who heard the case were often immediate neighbours and themselves large landowners: even worse, as *ex officio* guardians they

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<sup>83</sup> William Golden Lumley, *The Law of Parochial Assessments* (London, 1862).

sat on the other side of the fence as board members responsible for raising union funds. They could thus try to influence both parts of the equation by keeping valuations down while urging reductions in relief payouts. Steps to mitigate such problems were taken: special sessions consisting only of county magistrates were established, and a rule that no-one could hear an appeal concerning his own property was established. However, this led to a further problem – in areas like Carmarthenshire where justices were thin on the ground, the result was that ‘it is oftentimes impossible to assemble a sufficient number of justices uninterested in the matter to constitute a competent tribunal’.<sup>84</sup> Further measures to improve matters were therefore progressively introduced.

The 1862 Parochial Assessment Bill, aimed at ‘stopping the wealthy interfering with rating procedures’,<sup>85</sup> established property size as the determining factor in fixing rateable values, thus introducing a greater degree of objectivity. A further measure required unions to establish an assessment committee to manage the valuation process. It had to consist of six to twelve members including at least one-third *ex officio*: the union clerk was to attend to its administrative requirements. Control of valuations was thus moved from parochial officers to the union. The 1865 Union Chargeability Act reduced opportunities for ‘interference’ at parish level by further emphasising the accounting significance of the union common fund. As Lumley explained: ‘the object of the new law is principally to obtain a correct basis for the contributions of the several parishes to the common fund of the union’.<sup>86</sup> Crucially, the Act improved elected

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> E. Hurren, *Protesting*, p. 18.

<sup>86</sup> From a *Circular Letter* written by Lumley explaining the Act to boards of guardians in 1865.

guardians' ability to set 'proper' values by empowering the board 'to become co-respondents in appeals against the valuation list, and thus defend their judgements'.<sup>87</sup>

Against this background a series of events which vividly illustrate relationships between the gentry and the elected board unfolded in Llandilofawr.

On 6 September 1862 Llandilofawr's assessment committee was established with four *ex officios* and eight elected guardians, inevitably including John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen. By June 1863 the process was well underway: the committee seems to have felt that previous valuations in the northernmost parishes of Llansawel and Talley parishes suffered from Lumley's lack of 'proper attention' detailed above, and moved to 'survey such property as does not belong to Sir James Drummond' in these two parishes.<sup>88</sup> In October the board moved up another gear, sanctioning a broader and more vigorous approach by commissioning a new survey of 'the different mansions comprised in the union' together with 'collieries, lime kilns, railways, manufactories, machineries, water works and saleable underwood'.<sup>89</sup> This tightening of the valuation process coincided with a steep rise in payouts to paupers, and hence the poor rate: it rose by 27% between 1860 and 1863, and, after a slight temporary decline, subsequently rose by 31% up to 1866.<sup>90</sup> Thus, in 1865, the largest ratepayers (all *ex officio* guardians) clubbed together to appeal the new valuations, a lengthy process which, fiercely resisted by elected guardians, was very costly.

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> CA: BG 37, guardians' minutes 27 June 1863.

<sup>89</sup> CA: BG 37: guardians' minutes 31 October 1863.

<sup>90</sup> See Figure 3.9. This was part of a national trend: the Carmarthenshire poor rate rose 24% over the same period.

Lords Cawdor and Dynevor headed a group including local MP David Jones, J.W.G. Hughes and Robert Smith (the only non-resident), which employed Charles Bishop, a prominent local attorney, to organise their appeals. His legal bills amounted to £211 16s. 9d. A second group was led by another attorney, D. Long Price, a role in which he had multiple and partly conflicting interests. He represented the Peel family and Sir James Drummond, for whom he also acted as agent; he appealed the valuation of his own property; and he was at the same time elected guardian for Talley, a role he fulfilled continuously from 1858 to 1870, and again from 1875 to 1879: he eventually received £202 17s. 11d. for his services. To obtain payment Bishop and Price had submitted their bills to the Clerk of the Peace who reduced them substantially from their original submissions of £494 3s. 8d. and £310 19s. 2d. respectively.<sup>91</sup> The costs did not stop there, however – serving the committee proved a windfall for the union clerk George Williams who was paid £150 in 1865, £60 in 1866 and a further £100 in 1867 ‘for his heavy and laborious duties’. Matters came to a head at an extraordinary meeting called on 16 February 1867: held in the Shire Hall rather than the workhouse board room, indications are that discussions were out of the ordinary. Significantly, former union chairman Rev. Griffies Williams returned to the table after an absence of several years: it is likely that he performed the much-needed role of peacemaker as an out-of-court deal was struck between gentry and elected guardians. The PLB had been uneasy about the situation for some time, and asked for an explanation, resulting in an eight-page letter which provides a fascinating insight into what was involved in fighting the case.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> CA: BG 37: guardians’ minutes 9 June 1866.

<sup>92</sup> TNA: MH12/15928, Williams to PLB 11 May 1867.

One of the underlying principles of the new legislation was to make the valuation process transparent: it required, for example, valuation lists to be published. In an attempt to string the process out the two gentry groups proceeded to make life as difficult as possible for the union. They claimed that their own valuations were much lower than those arrived at by union surveyors, but refused to reveal the basis on which they had arrived at this conclusion. An investigation was undertaken by the clerk who, in the absence of information from the appellants, was forced to embark on a lengthy process to obtain it elsewhere. Using his network of local contacts, he visited parish officers to extract relevant information and spent three days discussing the assessment committee's valuation with surveyors to verify the methodology. Much time was required to brief legal specialists to draw up the Committee's response, so there were visits to Carmarthen, Swansea and Llandovery to consult lawyers; the gentry's valuations were checked against property tax schedules and inhabited house duty returns; minutes of every meeting had to be produced. Eventually, following the meeting in the Shire Hall, 'the cases were settled by consent'.<sup>93</sup> From the ratepayers' point of view the result of this battle was effective, at least in the short term: the poor rate fell by 30% over the next two years before returning to the pre-dispute level in the early 1870's.

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*



A number of points emerge from these events. The most obvious is that there was clearly a fundamental and protracted disagreement between elected and *ex officio* guardians on one of the most essential matters in running the union. All indications are that the battle, in which gentry board members put their own interests above those of the union, was fiercely fought on both sides. Elected guardians stuck determinedly to their guns, and the only obvious beneficiary was the clerk, whose income soared. Before the assessment committee was formed there were few gentry appearances at board meetings, but as matters reached a crescendo during legal proceedings *ex officio* attendance was suddenly higher than at any time in the last ten years. Then, as soon as the matter was settled, the gentry disappeared again. None turned up for the next five years and matters were again left to John Lewis, Llywnyfedwen and his colleagues.

### A new phase

This unprecedented gentry/guardian stand-off was a watershed in the life of the union - matters were never the same again, and it took its toll on the individuals involved. The first change took place when Dr. Prothero, the long-standing vice-chairman died: 'an incomparable loss to the guardians and public generally'.<sup>94</sup> The clerk, George Williams, was also affected: as the time he spent on assessment committee matters increased, he had less to devote to mainstream union activities: board minutes became more and more untidy, often appear incomplete, and are written in numerous hands, sometimes several for a single meeting, suggesting that more than one person was acting as clerk to the board. Finally, Williams died in August 1872, to be replaced by

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<sup>94</sup> CA: BG 45, guardians' minutes 30 January 1869.

Richard Shipley Lewis, great-nephew of Dr. Prothero. The two were very different: Williams, ex-publican, was relatively low down the social scale, from where he was able to operate as John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen's 'fixer', while Shipley Lewis' family was, by this time, established in local society: his father, first union clerk, had been appointed Under-Sherriff of Carmarthenshire in 1861 – the post of clerk had been 'gentrified'.

At the height of the confrontation union Chairman John Lewes Thomas tried to resign, only to be dissuaded by an anxious delegation of elected guardians. Throughout his chairmanship he performed his role in an exemplary fashion, acting as a bridge between awkward gentry and elected guardians, a role which could only have been played by someone from a respected local family with strong bonds to his tenants: he knew 'how to get things done', and worked closely with John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen to this effect. He was by this time, however, suffering from tuberculosis, and gradually faded from the scene until he died in 1875.<sup>95</sup> Lord Cawdor replaced him, and *ex officio* attendance at board meetings soared to levels which had never been seen before, but it had taken forty years for the gentry to play an active and prominent role in the union. John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen carried on undaunted, and in Cawdor's frequent absences continued to take the chair – in both 1879 and 1880, for example, he chaired half the meetings. For him, this was a major triumph – and, as we shall see, an opportunity to continue to impose his will on union affairs.

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<sup>95</sup> Lewes Thomas and Dr. Prothero are commemorated in adjacent stained glass windows in Llandilo parish church.

## Conclusions

This chapter has examined poor relief payments in a way and at a level of detail not employed in previous studies of Welsh poor law unions. A society in which local people engaged intensely with their immediate area has been revealed, and it has emerged that for paupers and guardians alike extra-parish administrative units such as the union held little significance. Doles fell from Old Poor Law levels, and big differences from parish to parish remained, suggesting that the union had little effect in ironing out long-standing local variations.<sup>96</sup> A surprise finding is that Llandilofawr was relatively generous compared to other Carmarthenshire unions, and that by the 1870's could be said to be lavish in comparison to England, being some 25% higher. The overall impression is of competent, caring management in Llandilofawr, an outcome which was achieved by elected guardians and union officials despite the obstructive and self-centred approach of *ex officio*'s. These events confirmed the pre-eminent position of elected guardians, and John Lewis, Llwynfedwen, emerged as the dominant force in union affairs well into the 1880's.

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<sup>96</sup> For continuity in Wales see A. Digby, 'The rural poor law', in D. Fraser, pp. 158-9. A significant literature on regional differences in welfare has developed, covering international and intra-regional variations. This is extensively reviewed in S. King, 'Welfare regimes and welfare regions in Britain and Europe, c. 1750's to 1860's', *Journal of Modern European History*, 9 (2011), which includes a commentary on Wales versus England, pp. 56-9.

## Chapter 4

### Llandilofawr union's elected guardians

This chapter is about Llandilofawr's elected guardians, the people who, together with the *ex officio*'s and officials, provided the union's day-to-day management. They were also the 'front line' for the Assistant Commissioner and the central authorities: it was the board of guardians which had to be won over when it came to implementing the New Poor Law in Llandilofawr's twelve parishes.<sup>1</sup> Chapter 2 offered a general description of local culture and society – that is now complemented with an examination of the social background of the guardians themselves, a subject area hardly tackled in previous Welsh poor law studies.<sup>2</sup> The purposes here are to see how they fitted into the local community; thus start to appreciate the relationship between Llandilofawr guardians and paupers; and understand the board dynamics. Issues such as their age and local roots are explored to gain an insight into these matters. Following that, a detailed review of guardians' length of service and their re-election rate will highlight the powerful position of the élite group headed by John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen. Finally an account of a particular event which exemplifies how he and

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<sup>1</sup> F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> B. Owen, 'The Newtown and Llanidloes Poor Law Union workhouse, Caersws, 1837–1847', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 78 (1990) devotes two pages to the subject. Hankins simply records that in Crickhowell guardians were 'reasonably representative', F. Hankins, 'From parish pauper to Union workhouse inmate', (Part 2), *Bryncheiniog*, 31 (1998). For the Welsh borders, see D. Williams, 'The Ludlow guardians 1836–1900, *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society* (2002), and (briefly) R. Brown, *Parish and Pauper: A History of the Administration of the Poor Law in the Parish of Castle Caereinion, Montgomery* (Welshpool, 1999).

his group dealt with opposition from within and fended off outside pressure precedes a profile of Lewis' board career.

The first matters considered are the number of Llandilofawr guardians and their local social standing. When the union was formed on 16 December 1836 there were 21 board seats allocated on the basis of parish population: the biggest (Llandilofawr) had four, and the smallest parishes one. During the 1850's, modifications were made to take account of intra-union demographic shifts (see chapter 3) so after 1856 guardian numbers rose to 27. Had each parish elected a different person to every seat each year, more than 1,200 individuals would have become guardians between 1837 and 1885. In practice there were only 282, all male, and, with a handful of exceptions, farmers.<sup>3</sup> Numbers are shown in Table 4.1. A casual look at this fifty-year period would show their average length of service to be 5.6 years. However, the more detailed analysis which follows reveals that a single number provides an incomplete understanding of the situation.

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<sup>3</sup> No female guardian was elected in Llandilofawr in the period of this study. For women guardians see P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865–1914* (Oxford, 1987). See also S. King, 'We might be trusted: female poor law guardians and the development of the New Poor Law: the case of Bolton, 1880–1906', *International Review of Social History* 49 (2004) p. 29; A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700–1930* (Basingstoke, 2002) p. 128. For farmers, A. Digby, 'The rural poor law', in D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1976), p. 153–159.

Table 4.1: Number of elected guardians in Llandilofawr poor law union 1836–1886

Parish	Total Number of Individuals elected
Bettws	22
Brechfa	14
Llandebie	29
Llandefeisant	8
Llandilofawr	56
Llanegwad	38
Llanfihangel Aberbythych	21
Llanfihangel Cilfargen	6
Llanfynydd	20
Llangathen	19
Llansawel	23
Talley	26
Total	282

Source: Board of guardians minutes.

To fulfil their role as champions of parish poor law affairs guardians needed to be men of some local standing in their community. One way of judging that is to look at the size of farm they worked on the basis that, in a society where status was closely associated with the family farm, that would be an appropriate measure:<sup>4</sup> this has been done using a range of sources. First, 217 of the 282 guardians (77%) have been traced in censuses allowing us to see their family background. Second, it has been possible to establish the precise size of 166 guardians' farms by using data from rate books,

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<sup>4</sup> D. Parry Jones, *My Own Folk* (Llandysul, 1972), p. 501; A. Rees, *Life in a Welsh Countryside* (Cardiff, 1975), p. 142.

electoral rolls and tithe apportionments, while election returns show the number of votes cast for each candidate, and provide some direct measure of their popularity. This level of detail, shown in Table 4.2, provides a unique look at the board's composition – a way of glimpsing the board 'from within'.

Guardians comprised two roughly equal categories measured by farm size: taking 100 acres as the break point, 52% were 'large', and 48% 'small'. The overall average was 120 acres, but this differed considerably from one parish to another: 194 acres in Llansawel and only 61 in Brechfa. However, farm size and income do not necessarily follow each other, and in this case many of the large farms were in the mountainous north of the union containing significant areas of unproductive heathland, so even 'large' farmers had only modest incomes.<sup>5</sup> Looking more broadly, comparison of this sample with Howell's data reveals that the proportion (52%) of 'large' farmers in Llandilofawr was considerably greater than in south west Wales as a whole, where the figure was only 22%.<sup>6</sup> Thus, many Llandilofawr guardians would have been seen as substantial farmers in local terms, although small in relation to many of their English counterparts.<sup>7</sup> That said, to understand board dynamics fully it is also important to note the numerical significance of the small farmers who account for almost half (48%) of the 166: indeed, a third were very small with under 75 acres – a 'unique pattern of land

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<sup>5</sup> For farm incomes in south-west Wales see A. E. Davies, 'Wages, prices, and social improvements in Cardiganshire, 1750–1850', *Ceredigion* (1984); D.W. Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth-Century Wales* (Cardiff, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> D. Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth-Century Wales* (London, 1977), p. 68. Figures are for 1851; M. Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy: the Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire, 1832–189* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 20–25.

<sup>7</sup> E. Collins (ed.) *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. 7 (Cambridge, 2011); G. Mingay, *Rural Life in Victorian England* (Stroud, 1976) ch. 3; J. Thirsk, *The Rural Economy of England* (London, 1984).

Table 4.2: Summary of Llandilofawr guardians' farm size

	Parish												
Farm Size Acres	Bettws	Brechfa	Llandebie	Llandefeisant	Llandilofawr	Llanegwad	Llanfihangel Aberbythych	Llanfihangel Cilfargen	Llanfynydd	Llangathen	Llansawel	Talley	Total all Parishes
	% of Elected guardians' farms in each category												
0 to 99	73	100	43	50	48	38	53	4	47	25	15	42	48
100 to 200	27	0	29	50	45	44	27	0	47	58	50	42	38
> 200	0	0	29	0	7	18	20	0	6	17	35	16	14
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Average farm size in acres	84	61	124	81	105	119	114	73	109	127	194	114	120
Number of Farms	11	10	14	4	29	17	15	4	17	12	14	19	166

Source: Censuses 1841 to 1891



ownership' in both Wales and England. This group, including those such as Ezekiel Jones, Cwmlerach, and Thomas Evans, Hafodneithi, with 46 and 27 acres respectively, had a significant presence at the board table, often outnumbering the larger farm group: they 'enjoyed a status and freedom denied to others' and 'played an important part in organising and directing public opinion'.<sup>8</sup> Such small farmers were relatively small ratepayers, and the PLC considered that they took a rather 'narrow' view of poor law matters: they thought that 'better' guardians would have emerged from the ranks of those owning or occupying bigger properties because they had a bigger vested interest in ensuring that poor rates were well spent.<sup>9</sup> In South Wales this was not to be – recognising the local situation the qualification to stand for election as guardian was set by Assistant Commissioner George Clive at £25 p.a.<sup>10</sup>

A fuller picture of guardians' personal profiles emerges when their family background and age are considered. Their local roots were strong. Over 90% were born in Carmarthenshire and 44% represented their birth parish, but this average understates the degree of continued physical closeness to their place of birth. For example half the guardians for Llandefeisant parish (population 200) had been born in Llandilo town, but since it is only three miles distant, they were still very close to

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<sup>8</sup> Jones, *Rebecca's Children*, p. 50. Since Evans was a baptised Mormon they also demonstrate Llandilofawr's religious diversity. There was a large cluster of Mormons in Carmarthenshire in the 1850's: K.D.M. Snell and P. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: the Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 165.

<sup>9</sup> Driver, *Power*, p. 135.

<sup>10</sup> Clive to the PLC, TNA: MH32/12, 24 April 1836. D. Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in Britain: from Chadwick to Booth, 1834–1914* (London, 1998), p. 23. Further west the figure was £15, A.E. Davies, 'The New Poor Law in a rural area 1834–1850', *Ceredigion*, 8 (1978), p. 248.

where they started life.<sup>11</sup> In most cases guardians who had moved away from their birth parish had not strayed beyond one immediately bordering it.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, relatives often occupied contiguous farms.<sup>13</sup> Their wives had similarly local roots, and their children were almost universally born where the couple still lived, a pattern unchanged during the period of the study.<sup>14</sup> Chapter 2 showed the intense feel of Carmarthenshire society, where ‘the family is the most sacred and important unit in the community’,<sup>15</sup> but the other side of the coin was that outsiders such as those sent to implement the New Poor Law in this environment, and who saw a need for ‘new’ thinking to achieve their goals, perceived remoteness rather than cultural richness. Assistant Commissioner Edward Senior, for example, considered that his Welsh unions, ‘isolated by their position’, had not ‘progressed’, and were still so backward and inward-looking that ‘feudal ties can hardly be seen to be extinct’.<sup>16</sup>

Elected guardians were unpaid, so the age profile of those able to spare the necessary time was partly determined by economic circumstances.<sup>17</sup> Generally, they could only

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<sup>11</sup> D.J.V. Jones, *Rebecca’s Children: a Study of Rural Society, Crime and Protest* (Oxford, 1989), p. 41.

<sup>12</sup> Those unable to find local accommodation often moved to industrial areas of south Wales, D. Howell, ‘The agricultural labourer in nineteenth-century Wales’, *Welsh History Review* (1972), p.266. For emigration more generally see K. Cooper, *Exodus from Cardiganshire: Rural-urban Migration in Victorian Britain* (Cardiff, 2011); Digby ‘Rural poor law’, in Fraser (ed.), p. 154.

<sup>13</sup> E. Davies, ‘The Black Mountain: a study in rural life and economy’, *Transactions of the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society and Field Club* 27 (1937), p. 61.

<sup>14</sup> For marital endogamy see K.D.M. Snell, ‘English rural societies and geographical marital endogamy, 1700–1837’ *Economic History Review* 55 (2002).

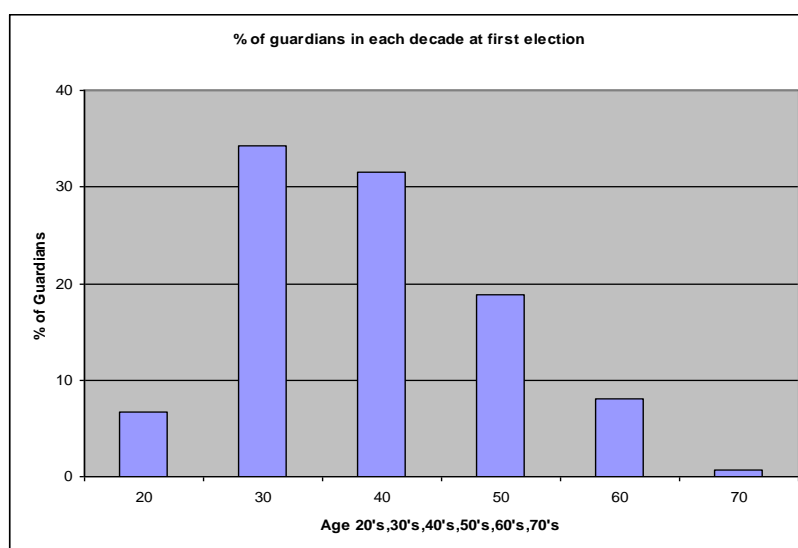
<sup>15</sup> E. Davis and A. Rees (eds), *Welsh Rural Communities* (Cardiff, 1990), Introduction p. 92.

<sup>16</sup> TNA: MH32/66, Edward Senior to PLC, 3 December 1838. See J.G. Jenkins, *Life and Tradition in Rural Wales* (Stroud, 1973, repub 2009), p. 182.

<sup>17</sup> Assistant Commissioners were suspicious that Welsh guardians received illegal ‘compensation’, described by Senior as ‘convenient peculations’: TNA: MH32/66, 3 December 1838. The Vicar of

afford to spend time on union business after marriage and the arrival of children, by when they were likely to be around 40 and well-established financially, the presence of live-in servants allowing the farm to continue to run in their absence.<sup>18</sup> Figure 4.1 shows that over 60% of guardians were in their thirties or forties at first election – the predominant range being from 37 to 42. The average age was 43, with Llanegwad guardians at 47 the oldest, while the youngest at 38.8, came from Llansawel. The oldest to seek election was Rees Thomas, Talley, who was 71 when he first took office. At the other end, Herbert Williams, Llanegwad, was only 22. Eleven of the twelve parishes had at least one guardian in his twenties at some point.

Figure 4.1: Age of Llandilofawr guardians at first election



Source: census data and election returns

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Meidrim told the PLC 'No man will undertake the duties of Guardian without a salary', TNA: MH12/15872, 6 June 1836. In 1843 the chairman of Aberystwyth union uncovered payments of £5 p.a. to 'almost all Guardians' from the highway rate PP 1844 (531) p. 285.

<sup>18</sup> D. Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community in South-West Wales at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 1971); D.W. Howell, 'Agricultural labourer' p. 269; Jones, *Rebecca's Children*, pp. 66-68; K.D.M. Snell, 'Deferential bitterness: the social outlook of the rural proletariat in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England and Wales', in ed. M.L. Bush, *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification* (London, 1992), p. 160.

Attention now turns to guardians' performance of their duties. Although active participation by those elected to the board was necessary for the New Poor Law to work well, this important matter is only touched on briefly in previous studies of Welsh unions. Thomas claimed that in Merthyr Tydfil Union only 'a handful of town guardians' carried out most of the work, while J.H. Thomas and W.E. Wilkins make passing reference to poorly attended meetings in Bridgend and Cowbridge union: neither study quotes specific numbers.<sup>19</sup> Brian Owen offers a fuller picture in his account of the Newtown and Llanidloes union. He considered a total of 353 meetings held between 1837 and 1847, finding that exactly half the guardians were typically present at meetings between 1837 and 1842, following which the count progressively rose to 60% by 1847. Although an apparent advance on Merthyr Tydfil, Owen feels that this was 'not particularly encouraging'.<sup>20</sup>

The present study uses three measures to assess Llandilofawr guardians' attendance performance. The first broad measure (the annual % turnout measure, as used by Owen) calculates the percentage present at all board meetings in a given year.<sup>21</sup> This has been calculated for the forty year period between 1837/38 and 1877/78, during which time there were 1050 meetings.<sup>22</sup> The resulting picture, shown in Figure 4.2,

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<sup>19</sup> T. Thomas, *Poor Relief in Merthyr Tydfil Union in Victorian Times* (Bridgend, 1992), p. 22. She comments that 'the office of Guardian was regarded as burdensome and unpopular', but presents no supporting evidence. J.H. Thomas and W.E. Wilkins, *The Bridgend-Cowbridge Union workhouse and Guardians* (Cowbridge, 1995).

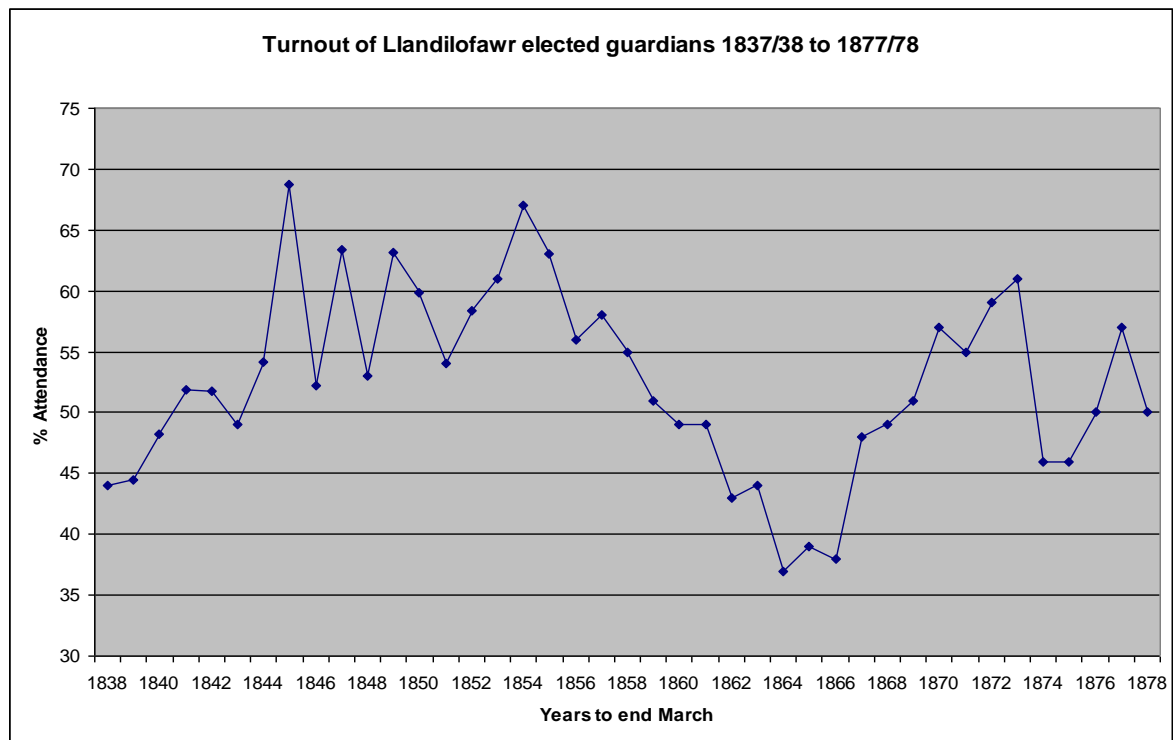
<sup>20</sup> B. Owen, 'Newtown and Llanidloes'; D. Jones, 'Pauperism in the Aberystwyth Poor Law Union 1870-1914', *Ceredigion*, 9 (1980), p. 88.

<sup>21</sup> For example, if there were 25 meetings per year, and 27 guardians, maximum attendance was  $25 \times 27 = 675$ . If 20 guardians attended every meeting, they made  $20 \times 25 = 500$  appearances, and the annual rate would be 74%.

<sup>22</sup> Meetings were weekly to the end of 1840, and then fortnightly.

reveals three distinct periods, with an overall average of 52.5%, similar to Owen's findings. The first period runs from the formation of the union to 1853. Initially, guardians were reluctant to turn out, the first two years' attendances averaging 43% and 42%, but after the Rebecca riots in 1842 and 1843 levels rose sharply, peaking at 68.7% in 1845, remaining well over 50%, and ending the first period at 67%. By the start of the second period in 1854 the union had settled into a working routine, the difficult decisions such as how to draw up medical and relief areas having been made. In this stable situation, attendance levels fell between 1854 and 1866, bottoming at 37% – lower than when the union began. They then reversed: in the third period from 1867 to 1877 levels were mostly between 50% and 60%.

Figure.4.2: Guardians' attendance rate at board meetings 1837 to 1878



Source: Board of guardians minutes.

The interpretation can be refined by using a more detailed measure, the percentage turnout for each board meeting.<sup>23</sup> Resulting examples from three decades are shown in Figure 4.3 where blue columns represent the percentage turnout rate at each meeting, and the black line a two-month moving average. Inevitably there is much variation at this level of detail: attendance levels vary significantly from meeting to meeting, and there is no such thing as a ‘typical’ year. For example, in 1840/41, attendances rise in the spring, drop off in the summer and then stabilise around 40%, while in 1851/52 there is much less variation, although overall average attendance is much higher. The pattern in 1873/74 shows a sharp decline in August and September, before rising in the autumn and falling away in the winter. Over the whole forty year period, there was only one meeting when every elected guardian was present.<sup>24</sup> High attendance rates at individual meetings were more common before 1851: a total of eleven saw a rate of over 90%, or about one per year, most of which were on occasions when union officers were being elected.<sup>25</sup> After 1851, the 90% level was never reached again. The official view of such an outcome was unfavourable: writing about Llanfyllin union William Day commented: ‘attendance of guardians is very bad...the Chairman has been very assiduous..but the business of the union is very much behind hand’.<sup>26</sup> Given the figures in Llandilofawr (which became part of his district in 1841) his view was presumably the same.

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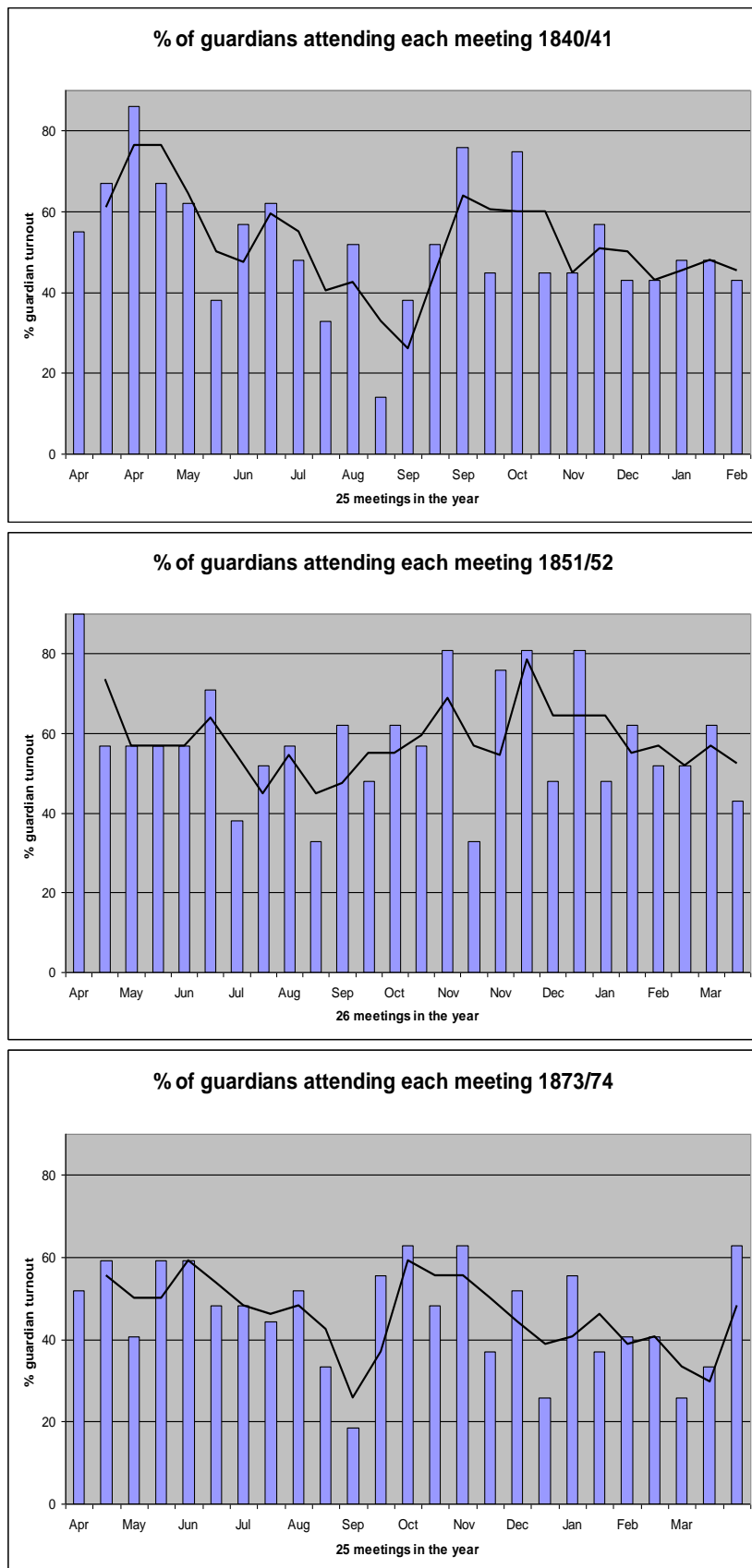
<sup>23</sup> Calculated for the period 1837 to 1852 and the mid-1870’s.

<sup>24</sup> This discussed in detail in Chapter 7, and concerns an especially acrimonious dispute in May 1844 about the appointment of a medical officer.

<sup>25</sup> A.E. Davies, ‘The New Poor Law’; T. Thomas, *Merthyr Tydfil*, p. 22; Jones, ‘Pauperism in Aberystwyth’ p. 88.

<sup>26</sup> TNA: HO73/52/19, Day to PLC 22 April 1837. Attendance figures for Llandovery union in the 1840’s are similar.

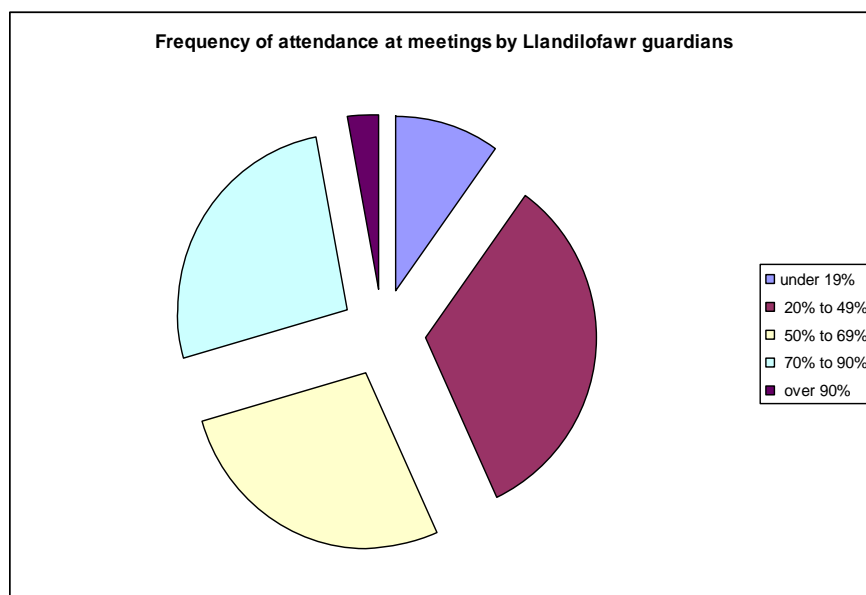
Figure 4.3: Comparison of guardians' attendance levels at each board meeting



It is possible to look at board attendance from a personal perspective by measuring how frequently each individual guardian went to meetings.<sup>27</sup> From Figure 4.4 which covers the period from 1837 to 1851 five groups emerge: the results start to allow us to determine who contributed most to the board.

The small segment at the top of the diagram identifies a group of guardians who consistently went to over 90% of board meetings – the union ‘élite’. This represents a very significant time commitment for any farmer, especially when maintained over a fifteen year period. Working anti-clockwise, not far behind them was a further large

Figure 4.4: Frequency of attendance at board meetings



Source: Board of guardians minutes 1837 to 1851.

<sup>27</sup> For example a guardian who went to 20 out of 25 meetings achieved an 80% attendance rate.



group who attended on more than 70% of occasions. Taken together these two groups account for about a third of elected guardians, and demonstrate a degree of commitment radically different from the picture presented in other Welsh studies.<sup>28</sup> At the other extreme poor attenders represent a relatively small proportion. No guardian attended every meeting in a given year.

It is revealing to point to some individual cases at each end of the scale. First, John Lewis, Llwynfedwen, emerges as a unique case – his high attendance rate of over 90% took place not just between 1837 and 1851, but for a continuous period of 47 years. At the other extreme were some, mainly from small parishes, who failed to attend at all. Brechfa for example, elected no guardian for three years in the 1840's, and its subsequent representative, Rev. David Jones, was only present once during his four year term of office.<sup>29</sup> This analysis has revealed considerable differences over time and between individuals: various factors likely to cast light on what issues they took into consideration when deciding to attend – or perhaps whether to stand for election in the first place – are now discussed.

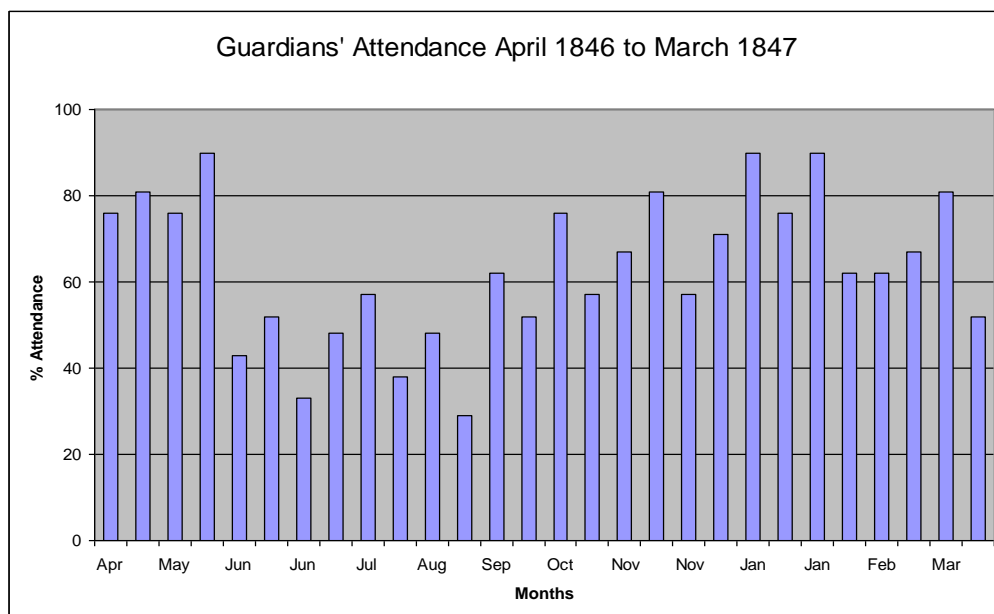
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<sup>28</sup> Similar observations appear about English unions such as those in Durham: P. Dunkley, "The 'Hungry Forties' and the New Poor Law: a case study", *The Historical Journal*, 2 (1974), p. 341.

<sup>29</sup> Brechfa parish was very small with 92 inhabitants. The poor rate was around £10 suggesting that there was only one pauper, so the Rev. Jones probably saw little purpose travelling sixteen miles to meetings to discuss a single case. But perhaps he was 'forced' into office: if only one person was nominated as guardian for a parish, he was declared elected even if he wrote refusing to serve. Such an individual would not be an avid board attendee.

First harvest: it might be thought that rural guardians' attendance was particularly low at periods of high agricultural activity such as harvest and haymaking.<sup>30</sup> However, in the case of Llandilofawr highly volatile attendance figures make it difficult to determine a definitive relationship between the two, as Figure 4.5 shows. 1846-47 is taken as an example, in which year guardians turned out less frequently between June and August than in the winter, data for other years revealing a similar but rather less pronounced pattern. So, seasonal factors were not a major factor in Llandilofawr guardians' decision about whether to attend.

Figure 4.5: Seasonal variation in guardians' board attendance



Source: Board of guardians minutes. The number of meetings held differed from month to month e.g. two in April and three in June.

<sup>30</sup> Rees, *Welsh Countryside*, p. 25; there were celebrations at harvest time as well as a large workload, D. Parry Jones, *My Own Folk* (Llandysul, 1972), pp. 93-98;

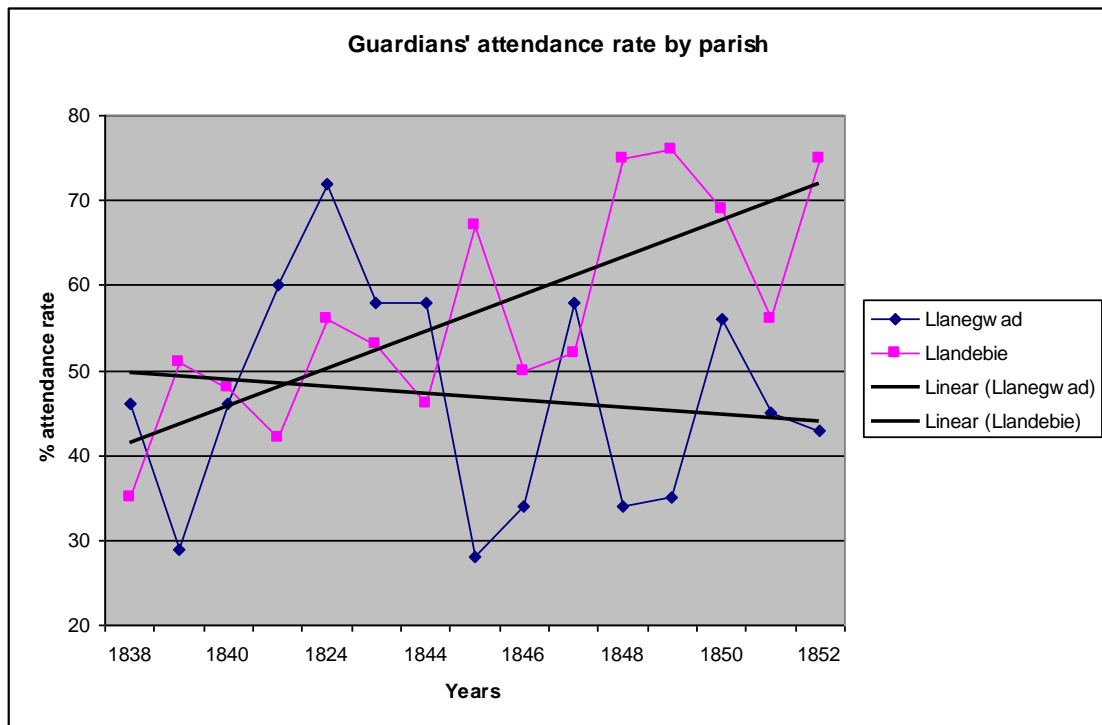
A second factor could be reluctance to undertake long journeys, especially for guardians with the greatest distance to travel: Table 4.3 compares the length of round trips to board meetings from the largest parishes with their guardians' attendance rates.

Table 4.3: Attendance rates and distance to travel 1837–1851

Parish	Round journey distance: miles	Guardians' average attendance rate %
Llansawel	21	53
Talley	16	64
Llanegwad	15.5	47
Llandebie	11	57
Llanfynydd	10	60
Llangathen	7.5	65
Llandilofawr	1	64

This demonstrates no robust relationship between the two factors. Talley and Llangathen Guardians with round trips of 16 miles and 7.5 miles respectively attended as regularly as those from Llandilofawr for whom meetings were on the doorstep, all managing an overall rate of 64% or 65%. However, examining the trend in attendance rates by parish does reveal striking differences, and Figure 4.6 shows what happened in two cases between 1837 and 1852: Llandebie attendance rises sharply while that for Llanegwad falls, an outcome for which, however, there is no obvious explanation.

Figure 4.6: Guardians' attendance rate by parish



Source: Board of guardians minutes

Another hypothesis is that where parishes had two guardians they could arrange to alternate attendance, thus mitigating each one's time commitment:<sup>31</sup> there are limited periods when this was the case, but the pattern was not sustained, so this was not the way most such guardians behaved.

Could age explain matters? One might imagine that older guardians would limit journeys because of their physical state, but the record of those who were in their sixties when they began duty is distinctly otherwise. An impressive example is Capt.

<sup>31</sup> For example guardians from the 'outer' parishes of Llanegwad, Llansawel and Llanfynydd in 1843.

John Lewis of Llandilofawr parish who consistently went to eight out of ten meetings when he was between 70 and 75, during which time he bore the additional responsibility of acting as union Chairman. John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen, was equally assiduous into his seventies. Many guardians in their late sixties attended over 70% of meetings, their number including James Richards, Llangathen; John Jones, Brechfa; and David Stephen, Llandebie. The star performer was Thomas Jones, Llanfynydd who, at the age of 65, went to 93% of the meetings in his first term of office.

So far, the review of some factors which on the surface would seem likely to clarify how enthusiastic guardians were to undertake union work, and why, has not produced a clear result, although it helps to build their personal profile. A consideration of the election process in Llandilofawr takes us further forward because it shows that, although elections were to the *union* board, it was parish matters which played the key role in who stood for election, and subsequently determined how important it was to attend board meetings. There was, in fact, little apparent relationship between individuals' attendance rates and their fight to be elected. If someone decided to force a contest, one might expect him to be keen to participate actively in union matters. However, some examples suggest that this was not the case. William Williams, Newfoundland, guardian for Llandefeisant parish from 1844 to 1848 was elected unopposed on four occasions, and in those years went to about half of the board meetings, the average level. However, in the year he faced a contest his attendance rate fell to 30%. John Jones, Bryncoch acted similarly, going to less meetings in the year he was opposed than his normal rate of 80%, while Rees Rees,

Glanbryn Uchaf, attended less than two-thirds of the time, although it had been necessary for him to see off several challengers to obtain his place.

### Union elections in Llandilofawr

The term ‘election’ was used by the PLC in two different sets of circumstances. If a guardian took office as the result of a contest between several candidates, he was declared ‘elected’. However, if there was only one candidate, he would be returned unopposed, but in PLC parlance he was also declared ‘elected’. Understanding elections in Llandilofawr thus requires some exploration of both contested and unopposed events. Guardians took office for a year, elections being held on the first Thursday after the twenty-fifth of March. The process adopted was specified in a PLC General Order, the electorate including both owners and occupiers of property.<sup>32</sup> A system of plural voting designed to ensure that large landowners were unlikely to be outvoted by small ones was put in place.<sup>33</sup> An individual could vote in both categories if he occupied a rented property and owned another which he rented out to someone else. In the case of Llandilofawr where most people occupied relatively small farms, the majority would have thus had one vote. As noted earlier those rated at £25 p.a. or more were eligible to stand for election.

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<sup>32</sup> PP 1845 [660] Appendix 5, *Eleventh Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners*. Its 29 Articles detailed eligibility to stand and to vote, how and when voting should take place, and contained templates for Nomination Papers and Voting Forms. The process was to be open to scrutiny and thus free from improper influence.

<sup>33</sup> Before 1844 owners had one vote for a property rated at £50 or less, ranging up to 6 votes at £175. Occupiers had one vote if they paid up to £200 p.a. rent, two for £200 to £400, and three thereafter. Post 1844 owners and ratepayers had the same number of votes (to a maximum of 6) for properties in a given band. Brundage, *English Poor Laws*, p. 41.

Ensuring that elections were held professionally and openly was a cornerstone of PLC policy, and one of the principal means of achieving this was to put the union clerk rather than parish officers in charge of the process. As a paid professional, it was expected that he would enforce propriety – he received payments in addition to his normal salary, and elections could thus be a fruitful source of extra income.<sup>34</sup> In 1849 Assistant Commissioner Edward Hurst informed the PLB that ‘elections are rare in my district’.<sup>35</sup> He was speaking of South Wales generally but this was certainly the case in Llandilofawr where only 56 contested elections were called between 1836 and 1886, a tiny proportion of the theoretical maximum.<sup>36</sup>

For Llandilofawr parish the first election was held in 1842, the second in 1844 when ten candidates took to the hustings, but the number rose to seventeen in 1847. The extreme volatility of sitting guardians’ popularity is demonstrated by the fact that, after this major challenge (which resulted in only one of the four incumbents being unseated), the next contest did not take place for seven years. Most of the 38 unsuccessful challengers only made one attempt to gain office, and thus seem to have been ‘protest’ candidates. In small parishes like Llandefeisant challenges were less common. Here, where there were only a dozen or so voters in a tightly knit community, one might imagine that it would not be necessary to go to the trouble and

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<sup>34</sup> Examples include payments of £10 and £9.13s. in 1842 and 1856 respectively.

<sup>35</sup> TNA: MH32/47, 8 May, 1849. Only 400 elections occurred annually between 1853 and 1856 in 16,000 parishes. A. Brundage, ‘The landed interest and the New Poor Law: a reappraisal of the revolution in government’, *English Historical Review* 87 (1972) p. 33. See also K. Parker, ‘Radnorshire and the New Poor Law to circa 1850’, *Transactions of the Radnorshire Society*, 74 (2004), pp. 174/5.

<sup>36</sup> If each of the 12 parishes had held an election every year, there would have been 600 between 1837 and 1886, so only 9.3% proceeded to a contest. Interestingly this is a higher incidence than that above, where only 2.5% of elections were contested.

expense of a formal public election, but in 1847, the same year as neighbouring Llandilofawr's election, Edward Mathias, Glanyrafon and John Davies, Ffosddu took on incumbent William Williams.<sup>37</sup> The result of the election was clear, Mathias only receiving one vote (presumably his own) and Davies two. Why two individuals would bring such electoral humiliation upon themselves is unclear, but they obviously felt a strong need to make a public show.<sup>38</sup> A similar event took place in Bettws parish in 1881 when Jonathan Morgan attracted only two votes, 0.47% of the total cast.

The commentary above refers to contested elections fought out and reported in public. It is less clear how the names of the candidate/s who took office unopposed emerged, but the most likely explanation is that informal discussion in the vestry, chapel or inn allowed the 'right' names to come forward: it might be better to think of them as vestry 'appointments'. Such a process is consistent with the society described in chapter 2 which placed a high value on neighbourly consensus and common values:<sup>39</sup> it is likely that contested elections only took place when the 'normal' procedure 'failed', and one or two particularly opinionated individuals insisted on promoting their own views at all costs.<sup>40</sup> Unforeseen and exceptional parish events could also trigger

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<sup>37</sup> Some have seen poor law elections as one of the most important opportunities in mid-Victorian Wales for men to learn about representative democracy, I.G. Jones, *Health Wealth and Politics in Victorian Wales* (Swansea, 1979), p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Mathias was never heard of again, but Davies had the ultimate satisfaction of being elected unopposed three years later. Both were small farmers, with 30 and 49 acres respectively.

<sup>39</sup> Rees, *Welsh Countryside*, p. 91-93.

<sup>40</sup> It should be stressed that this comment about consensus relates to intra-parish matters which could be resolved 'privately' in the vestry: open conflict, often very bitter and protracted, between different parishes was quite normal.



an election, for example a rate collector embezzling the money in his possession and causing a financial crisis.<sup>41</sup>

Generally speaking, union elections in Llandilofawr seem to have been fair and open, unlike Parliamentary elections which were often accompanied by violence and accusations of fraud, particularly in neighbouring Carmarthen.<sup>42</sup> There is evidence, however, that some ratepayers were always on the lookout for irregularities or impropriety. In February 1844, for example, board minutes note the requirement to send nomination forms to nine specified individuals: one is left to wonder whether they had failed to receive them on previous occasions or simply worried that they would, somehow, be left out this time round. In 1842 a disaffected loser alleged that he was refused permission to examine the ballot papers (as he was entitled to do) but the Clerk got away with an explanation that this had only happened because of ‘confusion’ about where and when the papers were supposed to be provided.<sup>43</sup>

Union elections in Llandilofawr, then, were relatively rare and most decisions on who would represent parishes were taken without recourse to a public contest. It emerges that personal factors are those most likely to explain who stood for election and why.

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<sup>41</sup> This occurred in Llandilofawr parish in 1854 and sitting guardians were accused of ineffective supervision. Ratepayers’ reaction was intense – the collector was the union clerk’s brother.

<sup>42</sup> Llandilofawr was also unlike unions such as Brixworth where one candidate’s supporters ensured that the chairman missed his re-election notice, the clerk falsified electoral registers, and ballot papers went to people not entitled to vote. E. Hurren, ‘The ‘Bury-al Board’: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in the Brixworth Union, Northamptonshire, c. 1870–1900’ (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Leicester, 2000), pp. 123-124.

<sup>43</sup> TNA: MH12/15922, 2 May 1842, Edward Cheney Hughes to PLC.

A close look at re-election rates and how long some individuals remained on the board confirms this view.

### Length of service

A guardian who sought office repeatedly was likely to be doing more than simply bowing to peer pressure to represent his parish – he must have found the role personally worthwhile. It is, then, instructive to look at guardians' re-election rate, when interesting findings emerge. Table 4.4 below is based on the length of service of all 282 guardians elected between 1836 and 1886. It is striking that only a minority (39%) of guardians, usually from large parishes such as Llandilofawr, limited their activities to a single term of office, while 27% served for over five years.<sup>44</sup> Every single parish in the union found at least one person willing to act for over a decade, so it is possible to argue that the norm was a *minimum* of two years.<sup>45</sup> Two exceptionally long-serving individuals emerge, John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen with 47 years, and David Harries, Llanfynydd with 43: four others managed twenty years or more.<sup>46</sup> It thus seems clear that there was a subset of ratepayers for who acting as poor law guardian became a way of life. Since there was no limit to the length of

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<sup>44</sup> This finding is in stark contrast to Thomas' contention that the role was 'burdensome and unpopular'.

<sup>45</sup> In very small parishes such as Llanfihangel Cilfargen, with only ten ratepayers long service was inevitable: two of its six guardians served for ten years, compensating by limiting attendance to 25%.

<sup>46</sup> David Harries, Abersanan (union vice-chairman after 1875) farmed 300 acres. His father had been vicar of Llanfynydd and his brother was also a cleric.

Table 4.4: Length of service of Llandilofawr elected poor law guardians

Length of service, years	One	Two to Four	Five to Nine	≥ Ten	Total
Number of guardians	110	94	38	40	282
% of total	39%	34%	12.5%	14.5%	100%

Source: Board of guardians minutes

time any individual could hold office (witness Lewis and Harries), some who had already experienced life at the board table relished the opportunity to seek office again after a break – one-fifth (56) of Llandilofawr’s elected guardians did so, and thus had broken service (perhaps more accurately called ‘repeat’ service). This is shown in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Llandilofawr guardians’ repeat service

Number of separate terms of office: years	Number of individuals	% in each category
2	27	48%
3	13	23%
4	4	7%
5	5	9%
6	6	11%
7	1	2%
Total	56	100%

Source: Board of guardians minutes.

Almost half (27) of this group served two separate terms, while at the other extreme John Phillips, Llanfynydd, took office on seven different occasions, with a break between each term. What emerges is a complex situation whereby individuals' service records differ greatly from parish to parish and from person to person. There is not, therefore, a 'typical career pattern': there was, rather, a variety of outcomes. Long service was not unique to Llandilofawr, as examination of a ten year period in neighbouring Llandovery union shows: half its 21 guardians in 1854 were the same people as in 1844.<sup>47</sup> This suggests that continuity of guardianship may have been common in Carmarthenshire, at least in rural parishes.

Repeat service is now analysed further: Llanegwad parish is used as an example because it was typical. Three elements are considered: the number of years served by an individual; the number of separate sessions into which this service was divided; and the time span from first election to cessation of service. Six Llanegwad guardians are considered in Table 4.6, ranked in terms of the number of years served: Henry Davies comes top with sixteen, and David Davies bottom with two. The column showing 'span of years served' consists of the period from first election to the last year of service inclusive, so someone elected for two years, out of office for five years and then re-elected for three years has a span of ten years.

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<sup>47</sup> Llandovery union was similar to Llandilofawr in many ways. It consisted of 12 rural parishes and 21 guardians. Between 1844 and 1854 only three individuals served a single term, a dozen 2 years, but one-third were re-elected 8 or 9 times.

Table 4.6: Llanegwad parish guardians' repeat service

Name	Number of years served	Number of separate sessions	Span of years served	Pattern of service: each column represents one year																						
Davies, Henry	16	2	25	C	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Davies, Evan	10	4	19	.	1		1	0	0	C	1	.	1	1	0	.	.	.	.	1	1	1	1	.	.	.
Dickens, Edward	8	2	19	1	1	C	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	1	1	C	.	.	.	.	.
Rees, James	7	5	21	1	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	C	.	.	1	1	1	.	.	.	1	.	.	.
Williams, Herbert	3	2	4	.	C	1		1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Davies, David	2	2	6	1	0	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.

Source : Board of guardians minutes

Key 1: Elected unopposed. C: Elected in a contest 0. Unsuccessful in a contest

Henry Davies first held office for one year in 1862, took a nine year break, and then resumed for fifteen years in 1872, thus having a service record spanning twenty-four years, and although his first term resulted from a contest he was returned unopposed for each year of his second run. At the other extreme, David Davies started life unopposed, failed to gain re-election the following year, took a break of three years and was then returned unopposed for a single year. The most complex case is Evan Davies whose service record consists of four terms during which he fought four elections, losing three of them, before reappearing unopposed after a break: a final figure shows how an individual's fortunes (or popularity) could change over even a short period, since between 1846 and 1848 he doubled his share of the vote, from 11.9% to 27.8%. In every parish the time span between first election and final year of service for at least one guardian was twenty years: thus, someone first elected around the age of forty was closely involved with poor law activities until his late fifties. Guardianship for many, it seems, was a mainstream activity, but the fact that these great variations in individuals' electoral fortunes all took place in a single parish emphasises that, ultimately, it was issues to do with personal popularity and motivation which determined who sat on the board. The example of Evan Davies above indicates that an individual's popularity, or others' perceptions of his suitability for office, changed significantly, even over a short time: in three successive years he lost an election, won one and was elected unopposed. This strongly suggests that in Llanegwad there was a continuous and vigorous debate among ratepayers about how the New Poor Law was being applied: actual and potential guardians' focus was strongly on intra-parish matters. Once elected, guardians were keen to perform their duties 'properly', although they did not always start with a clear picture of what they

were actually supposed to do. Rees Davies and David Lloyd wrote to the PLB soon after their election asking where they could obtain ‘instructions as to our duties’.<sup>48</sup>

There is a further intriguing aspect to the electoral pattern. A deeper look shows that *groups* of guardians were repeatedly elected and that this became more common in later years. Llanfynydd parish had two guardians and returned David Harries and John Phillips for seven years running from 1850 to 1856: three other parishes elected two pairs each for two years or more.<sup>49</sup> Llandilofawr returned the same group of four guardians for the three years 1849 to 1851. By the 1880’s five two-guardian parishes had the same pair for five or six years, while in Llanfynydd long-serving David Harries now teamed up with William Davies for nine years: even more remarkable are three-guardian parishes with runs of five and six years,<sup>50</sup> while in Llandilofawr six acted together from 1879 to 1881. Because many of these parish groups served simultaneously, overall board membership was very stable. In 1880, twenty-two out of twenty-seven guardians (81%) were unchanged from the previous year, and in 1881 nineteen were still there.

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<sup>48</sup> MH12/15925, 16 August 1854. The PLB was unhelpful even when the entire board sought help. A free copy of Glen, *The Poor Law Guardian* (London, 1855) was given to every guardian. They were told that the purchase was ‘not justified’ because the book was ‘between official and non-official’: TNA:MH12/15925, 11 June 1855.

<sup>49</sup> Llangathen, Llansawel and Talley.

<sup>50</sup> Llandeibie and Llanegwad.

The background of those who became guardians changed over time. This is shown in Table 4.7 which compares two cohorts of guardians born thirty years apart.<sup>51</sup>

Table 4.7: Comparison of two cohorts of guardians

Parish	1850 Cohort			1880 Cohort		
	Average age	Terms served	Acres farmed	Average age	Terms served	Acres farmed
Bettws	44	3	65	53	6	102
Llandebie	51	7	128	44	8	203
Llandilofawr	53	6	124	56	8	80
Llanfihangel Aberbythych	41	2	85	54	7	95
Llanegwad	45	5	124	44	10	135
Llanfynydd	38	4	129	59	12	213
Llangathen	40	7	120	56	12	142
Llansawel	44	7	132	52	10	146
Talley	43	4	125	39	9	181
Average 9 parishes	46	5	107	50	9	136

Source: Board of guardians' minutes and censuses.

On average, the 1880 group were four years older and had farms 27% larger than their 1850 predecessors. The most striking difference however is that the turnover rate decreased sharply over time, the 1880 cohort serving an average of nine terms of office, almost twice the five years of their forerunners, although their average age at first election remained unchanged. They therefore devoted more years to union affairs than the previous generation, and a considerable group of ratepayers more than happy to take on the role of guardian in Llandilofawr had emerged. Although meetings after

<sup>51</sup> Data for three parishes has been excluded being too sparse to be statistically significant.



the mid-1850's had become relatively routine affairs, this was not a disincentive to join the board and attend regularly; and when Earl Cawdor became chairman in 1876 the board's 'gentrification' may have been one factor in attracting those with social aspirations.

With the foregoing discussion in mind it is now possible to develop a feel for 'what the Llandilofawr board of guardians was like', and where real power and influence among elected guardians lay. The chapter which follows will deal with *ex officio*'s. Because there was such a significant number of long-service guardians the board consisted of people with considerable experience – they form an important and influential sub-group. It consisted of 40 individuals each with over 10 years' experience plus another 39 who were on the board for over 5 years (see Table 4.4). The composition of the board in each year included several of them representing a range of parishes: they were good attenders who had started their board careers at the age of 39 (the average for the whole board). It included a colliery owner and (in the 1880's) a timber merchant, but the rest were large farmers, working an average of 142 acres. Few of them had had to seek public election, but had joined the board unopposed, presumably by public acclaim in their parish. They all had intensely local roots. No organisation of this type had existed before, and guardians from independent parishes now found themselves in the same room, expected to co-operate in implementing the New Poor Law. They received no training for this task – indeed, when they did seek help they were rebuffed as shown earlier – while advice from the central authorities came very predominantly by written communication rather than personal visits from the Assistant Commissioner, who was normally only present two or three times per year unless there

was a major problem. The board being thus left largely to its own devices, meetings are likely to have been intense affairs.<sup>52</sup> Once the workhouse was built, meetings took place in the board room, and the fifteen or so elected guardians typically present, the union clerk, and the occasional *ex officio* squashed into a space measuring 23ft x 7ft.<sup>53</sup> Members of the experienced sub-group were joined by a sprinkling of very small farmers, whose ‘peasant mentality’ was the *bête noir* of the central authorities.<sup>54</sup> This social mix of large and small farmers echoes the situation lower down the scale where social distinctions between farmers and labourers were indistinct.<sup>55</sup> Crucially, the board was controlled by working people from the very beginning.<sup>56</sup> All these elected guardians saw their role as ensuring that affairs in Llandilofawr were protected from outside ‘interference’, and, as shown in chapter 6, intense intra-parish rivalries could come to light when sensitive official appointments were being made: they practised individual parish rather than ‘corporate’ union responsibility.<sup>57</sup> Given all this, it is perhaps not a surprise that the mode of relief offered continued to show significant

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<sup>52</sup> In Aberystwyth they were ‘stormy’, Jones, ‘Pauperism in Aberystwyth’ p. 87.

<sup>53</sup> When numbers increased guardians spent £1.3s.0d. to lengthen the board table by four feet. CA: BG 41, 29 April 1854.

<sup>54</sup> D. Howell, ‘The impact of railways on agricultural development in nineteenth-century Wales’, *Welsh History Review* 7 (1974), p. 40; Howell, *Land and People* p. xiv. Among many contemporary comments from Assistant Commissioners, William Day described them as neither accessible to reason nor open to persuasion: TNA: MH32/14, 29 October 1837 and 15 August 1839, and E. Head found Knighton guardians ‘exceedingly ignorant and obstinate’, TNA: MH32/44, 25 April 1838. See also A.E. Davies, ‘The New Poor Law in a rural area 1834–1850’, *Ceredigion*, 8 (1978), p. 259. Snell has (less judgementally) observed that this group was ‘one of the most illiterate, subdued, silent, maligned and shadowy classes in nineteenth-century society’, ‘Deferential bitterness’, p. 162. See also J.V. Beckett, ‘The peasant in England: a case of terminological confusion?’, *Agricultural History Review* 32 (1984).

<sup>55</sup> Williams, *Rebecca Riots*, p. 109.

<sup>56</sup> In Brixworth this took until 1894, E. Hurren, *Protesting About Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late-Victorian England, 1870–1900* (Woodbridge, 2007), p. 214.

<sup>57</sup> Rivalry in Swansea was intense: its guardians managed to ‘get rid’ of Gower parishes altogether, J.E. Thomas, ‘The Poor Law in West Glamorgan 1834 to 1930’, *Glamorgan History*, 18 (1974), p. 46, and they established a separate union. In Llandilofawr the situation does not seem to have developed into full-scale ‘xenophobia’, see K.D.M. Snell, ‘The culture of local xenophobia’, *Social History*, 28 (2003).

differences from one parish to another, as shown in chapter 3. These general assertions are now supported by taking one particular incident of electoral malpractice and its aftermath to illustrate the board's inner workings.

### John Davies, Penywaun

John Davies, Penywaun was elected unopposed as one of four guardians for Llandilofawr parish in 1866. In December that year relieving officer Thomas Phillips retired, and guardians for the northern area he had served asked the board to agree to pay him £36 p.a. superannuation.<sup>58</sup> This was vigorously opposed by Davies and his fellow guardians representing southern parishes, but the motion was carried by 19 votes to 7.<sup>59</sup> Infuriated, Davies wrote to the PLB claiming that his opposing motion was not properly put to the vote.<sup>60</sup> Such public airing of dissent was not popular within the union, and especially not with vice-chairman John Lewis, Llwynfedwen, who was used to getting his own way, and supported the plan to pay superannuation. Nevertheless, after protracted vacillation, the PLB declined to intervene.<sup>61</sup> The matter might have rested there, but when union elections came round the following April, Davies encountered opposition from eight other candidates, and in the ensuing poll he came bottom with only 3.5% of the vote. On investigation, he discovered that union clerk George Williams had marked the voting form: 'Nomination paper imperfect,

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<sup>58</sup> Phillips, 71 years old and infirm, had given faithful service for 37 years. This was the first instance of such a request in Llandilofawr.

<sup>59</sup> This is a clear case of guardians putting loyalty to their own parish above that to the union as a whole: they saw no good reason for parishes who had never benefited from Phillips' efforts to bear the cost of such a payment, and sought to treat him as a parish rather than a union employee.

<sup>60</sup> TNA: MH12/15928. Davies to PLB 20 February 1867.

<sup>61</sup> D. Roberts, *Victorian Origins of the British Welfare State* (New Haven, 1980), pp. 236/7.

the Nominator not having described therein his qualification'.<sup>62</sup> Not un-naturally Davies concluded that this had adversely affected his chances, and, unable to obtain redress within the union, again wrote to the PLB, sending them a copy of the offending document, and observing 'from my personal knowledge of him [the clerk], I am satisfied that his act was purposely mischievous'.<sup>63</sup> He believed that Williams was acting in concert with Lewis to ensure his removal from the board. Williams deftly avoided giving the PLB a direct explanation of his course of action, but eventually admitted that it would have been better to reject the nomination. Further recriminations followed when Davies uncovered a second irregularity – the ballot papers had not been kept in regulation 'Lock Bags' and had been delivered to Williams' home rather than to the union office, a fact not denied by the clerk who explained rather lamely that it had happened 'inadvertently'. Again the PLB avoided taking a hard line – they 'regretted' the incident but felt it 'not advisable' to insist on a re-run, settling for admonishing Williams that his action was 'not proper'. It was now halfway through the electoral year, and the PLB, by refusing to engage with the local situation in Llandilofawr, cleverly (as they saw it) avoided being drawn into a local squabble.

This incident casts light on the power structure inside the union, and also shows how an individual deemed troublesome could find himself excluded; how the board divided on parish lines; how a worthy officer's best interests could be swept aside

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<sup>62</sup> Clerks took advantage of 'tiny errors' in voting papers to disqualify unwelcome candidates: Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 208.

<sup>63</sup> TNA: MH12/15928. This began a flurry of correspondence between Davies, the PLB and the clerk between April and October 1867.

because of personal rivalries; how ineffectual the PLB was even when faced with gross impropriety; and how the clerk could ‘fix’ events to satisfy opinion leaders like Lewis but escape largely unscathed. Davies’ parting shot to the PLB provides rich evidence about how such situations were interpreted by those who understood the local politics inherent in union affairs.<sup>64</sup> He explained that Williams’ ‘local knowledge conveniently used in these matters’ had allowed him to guess accurately how, if his name was omitted, his votes would be redistributed to candidates ‘with views on parochial and union affairs like mine.’<sup>65</sup> His reference to ‘parochial’ matters in this context is telling, and his vignette of how Llandilo society worked is very pertinent to board affairs. The retribution wreaked on Davies was definitive – he stood for election again in each of the following four years, but was defeated every time, although in his final attempt, he was only one place short of success. It is apparent from this incident that John Lewis wielded great influence on the board. A detailed profile of him and his activities now follows revealing his grip on power.

#### John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen (1811–1886)

It is easy to portray Lewis’ role in the John Davies affair in a wholly negative light. This, however, only tells part of the story – he can also be seen as a ‘progressive’ force, a ‘moderniser’. He may have genuinely felt that Phillips’ devoted and unblemished record deserved reward, and wanted to see the new rules on

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<sup>64</sup> A second instance of ‘intentional and malicious’ malpractice involved a ballot paper being changed because he had filled it in ‘wrongly’, TNA:MH12/15928: David Lodwick to PLB, 15 May 1868.

<sup>65</sup> TNA: MH12/15928. Letter from John Davies to the PLB 11 September 1867.

superannuation for union officers implemented effectively. In 1840 it was he who had proposed the motion to appoint Phillips as relieving officer, and in a previously unheard-of move also demanded that candidates be examined in front of the board to prove their proficiency in arithmetic and writing. In this reading, he was closely following policies espoused by the PLC, and ensuring that the union carried out its affairs in a professional manner. His first appearance on parish business came at a Llandilofawr select vestry in September 1833 when he signed a petition stating that residents were ‘harassed with suits for tithes alleged to be due to the lay impropiator’, a matter causing ‘great hardship’.<sup>66</sup> By September 1834 (aged only 23) he was active in poor law matters: in preparation for the formation of unions the PLC asked vestries for information about their current practice, and Lewis was a member of the Committee formed to supply answers.<sup>67</sup>

The farm occupied by Lewis until around 1878 lay in the hamlet of Upper Manordeilo five miles from Llandilo town, and comprised 164 acres: he was a substantial farmer in a prosperous area.<sup>68</sup> His property was immediately adjacent to Danyrallt, seat of the Gulstons, a local gentry family. By 1878 he had taken a step up the social ladder, moving closer to Llandilo and occupying Gurrey Manor, previously home to Griffith Bowen Jones J.P.<sup>69</sup> Lewis’ wife had been born locally and his two

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<sup>66</sup> CA: CPR/36/42, Llandilofawr vestry book 25 September 1833.

<sup>67</sup> The so-called ‘Rural Queries’, *First report on the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, PP 1834 [44] App B. The reply from Llandilofawr has not survived.

<sup>68</sup> In the 1851 census, HO107/2471/370/4, he employed 4 labourers who lived in, as he also did in 1871, RG10/5486/44/5.

<sup>69</sup> He had been renting 7 acres at Gurrey since 29 September 1871, CA: Derwydd Muniments 1871 rentals.

sons went on to farm in their own right. He was an extremely active guardian. First elected in 1839 at the young age of 28, he remained on the board for 47 years until his death in 1886 at the age of 75, by which time he had attended well over 1000 meetings. After 10 years he was elected vice-chairman, a post which he retained until he died. He additionally served as a member of various sub-committees.<sup>70</sup> His attendance rate was exemplary throughout the whole period, and a significant proportion of his time must have been devoted to union affairs: he was the union's most devoted guardian. During his long term of office, he was elected unopposed on 31 occasions – on the other 16, he had to fight to retain his seat. An examination of his electoral history in Table 4.8 provides a fascinating insight into the world of Llandilo local politics – that inhabited by the guardians.

Contested elections for Llandilofawr parish occurred in groups: four each in the 1840's and 1850's; a break of nine years; five in the late '60's and early '70's; another break of seven years and then four in quick succession. Lewis was consistently the voters' most popular choice, coming top of the poll in 12 of his 16 contests, and, in 1844, coming second lagging behind the union chairman by only 12 votes. Thereafter he topped the poll for two years. Matters took a turn for the worse in 1856 because there had just been a major scandal: the Llandilofawr parish rate collector absconded with £538, resulting in a demand for extra guardians (presumably on the basis that this would provide additional scrutiny), and the entry of fifteen

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<sup>70</sup> He belonged to the visiting, assessment and sanitary committees, and one inspecting premises used to house lunatics.

Table 4.8: Votes cast in Llandilofawr parish poor law elections

Year	Total votes cast	Number of candidates	Votes cast for Lewis	Lewis' % share of votes cast	Lewis' poll position
1844	1378	10	265	19.2	2
1845	1302	7	295	22.7	1
1847	1992	17	257	12.9	1
1854	2164	6	478	22.1	1
Number of guardians increased from 4 to 6 in 1856					
1856	2000	15	180	9.0	4
1857	2677	9	327	12.2	3
1858	3489	9	491	14.1	3
1867	3054	9	455	14.9	1
1868	2508	7	423	16.9	1
1869	2607	8	441	16.9	1
1870	2915	10	456	15.6	1
1871	4122	9	640	15.5	1
1878	4000	9	698	17.5	1
1881	3703	7	735	19.9	1
1882	3790	7	768	20.1	1
1884	3965	8	675	17.0	1

Source: Form 'E' electoral returns. The 1842 return has not survived.

candidates.<sup>71</sup> Sitting guardians were held responsible for the problem so three new candidates led by John Popkin, standing on a 'clean-up Llandilo' platform, took the first three places, pushing Lewis into fourth position.<sup>72</sup> When contests restarted in 1867 there was a low turn-out, but Lewis trebled his score and regained first place,

<sup>71</sup> This was almost 50% of the total annual rates.

<sup>72</sup> Popkin was an attorney. In 1856 two *ex officio*'s proposed him as Union Vice-Chairman, a vote which he lost to John Lewis by 13 votes to 12. He topped the poll in 1857 but did not stand thereafter. He seems to have been popular: a board motion 'deeply regretting the retirement of Mr Popkin' was passed, an accolade unique in the life of the union: CA: guardians' minutes 10 April 1858. He had previously been popular in other circles, having fathered an illegitimate son by Elizabeth Lewis, interestingly baptised John Lewis, in 1823.



remaining on the board for 17 years with between 15% and 20% of the votes, a unique electoral success rate.<sup>73</sup>

The energy Lewis expended as guardian is evident from his board voting record. Between 1858 and 1878 he proposed or seconded 35 motions, 32 concerning the appointment of union officers: he won 27 and lost five. All other guardians taken together proposed or seconded 13 appointment motions in the same period, so it is clear that in this field he was a prime mover. Supporters of Lewis' motions were a varied group voting according to their view of the merits of a case, rather than as a parish team. Thus, between 1844 and 1858 there were 13 elections of union officers, and in eleven cases Llandilofawr parish guardians voted for competing candidates, managing to vote three ways in 1851, while the fourth abstained.

Measures proposed by Lewis covered a broad range of matters. He put forward policies to keep costs down, such as lowering salaries in line with the fall in agricultural prices (1843);<sup>74</sup> to reduce the number of policemen (1850);<sup>75</sup> and to visit paupers more often to ensure that relief was really necessary (1850). In this instance Lord Cawdor seconded his motion so his influence can be seen to have operated upwards as well as downwards. On other occasions he proposed more humane care

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<sup>73</sup> For low voter turnout see Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform*, p. 17.

<sup>74</sup> Owen, 'Newtown and Llanidloes', p. 146.

<sup>75</sup> J. Davies, *A History of Wales* (London, 1993), p.382; L.A. Rees, 'Paternalism and rural protest: the Rebecca riots and the landed interest of south-west Wales', *Agricultural History Review* 59 (2011); D.J.V. Jones, 'Rebecca, crime and policing: a turning-point in nineteenth-century attitudes', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1990); A. Brundage, *England's "Prussian Minister": Edwin Chadwick and the Politics of Government Growth. 1832–1854* (Pennsylvania, 1998), ch. 4

for paupers; stopping the requirement for workhouse children to perform tasks (1857);<sup>76</sup> making industrial training the primary objective of workhouse education (1860);<sup>77</sup> and funding a professionally-run County Lunatic Asylum instead of farming lunatics locally (1861).<sup>78</sup> He attempted to improve the standard of union management by suggesting that an elected County Finance Board should oversee all financial affairs (1859), and opposed a motion to cease education in the workhouse and send pauper children to the local Board school (1879). When the chairman resigned in 1866, a board deputation led by Lewis marched to his house to ‘express the earnest hope’ that he would stay on.<sup>79</sup>

Lewis’ antipathy to the police force noted above extended outside the board room – he publicly denounced the manner in which they dealt with vagrants, complaining that by delivering them to the door of the workhouse they ‘work against the board of Guardians’. This outburst brought a rebuke from Superintendent William Phillips who wrote to the newspapers stating that all tramps were ‘sent before the magistrates,’ so Lewis was wrong, before concluding: ‘Mr Lewis is a respectable man and a faithful Guardian. I am unwilling to charge him with misrepresentation of facts from purely malicious motives, and is, I assume, grossly misled by others’.<sup>80</sup> It is

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<sup>76</sup> A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (London, 1978), p.191.

<sup>77</sup> T. Thomas, *Merthyr Tydfil*, pp 101-103.

<sup>78</sup> R. Davies, ‘Inside the house of the mad: the social context of mental illness, suicide and the pressure of life in South West Wales 1860–1920’, *Llafur* 4 (1985).

<sup>79</sup> Lewis came out of this rather well. The *ex officio* chairman, John Lewes Thomas, withdrew his resignation, but took what amounted to a year’s sabbatical during which time Lewis was left in charge.

<sup>80</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, 9 February 1869.

tempting to take this passage as a piece of well-crafted sarcasm: Lewis was a controversial character in some quarters.

A crucial episode at the peak of the Rebecca Riots in 1843 further demonstrates his influential place in local society. Gatherings of farmers, especially at night, became common: grievances were aired and protests sent to the gentry. At the request of George Rice Trevor MP, Colonel Love, an experienced military man, was sent from London to supervise troops stationed to keep the peace.<sup>81</sup> Needing inside information about the rioters, he appointed intelligence-gathering specialists who, sometimes joining *The Times*' reporter Thomas Campbell Foster, attended gatherings of farmers. A series of *Reports from Persons employed to obtain secret information* were produced between 5 August and 15 September 1843,<sup>82</sup> the second detailing events at Cwmifor, a hamlet three miles east of Llandilo: "A farmer proposed that a Mr Lewis, Llwynfedwen should take the chair. Mr Lewis addressed them in Welsh as follows – 'My friends I feel great pleasure in meeting you here as our object is to get rid of all illegal gates and every other grievance that now falls so heavy on the farmers of this neighbourhood so they cannot endure it much longer'. He hoped the time was not far distant when the Gentlemen themselves would see they were acting wrong". This clearly sets Lewis as a central figure in local affairs, and provides a direct link between local poor law administrators and Rebeccaites.<sup>83</sup> Two Chartists

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<sup>81</sup> Rice Trevor was also Lord Lieutenant of Carmarthenshire, and a principal channel of communication to the Home Secretary. Their voluminous correspondence is in the 'Disturbance Books', TNA: HO 45/454.

<sup>82</sup> TNA: HO 45/347A.

<sup>83</sup> Jones, *Rebecca's Children* (Oxford, 1989) p. 92 mentions a John Lewis who is 'difficult to identify', and quotes the *Swansea Journal* 18 Oct 1843 which described him as 'a man of considerable influence

attended the meeting: their speeches, reported *in extenso* by the intelligence gatherers, claimed that the gentry extorted rents and tithes from land they had stolen from the people, and demanded universal suffrage.<sup>84</sup> It is difficult to know what Lewis would have made of their tirade against ‘one of the worst burdens’, the Poor Law, legislation ‘made by the gentry to suit themselves’ and used ‘with an iron rod of despotism.’ At the end of the meeting, Lewis made a closing address attempting to calm matters by suggesting that no more such gatherings should take place for a month in order to concentrate on the vital task of getting in the harvest: this was agreed. Further, he tried to deflect attention from the broader political issues which had been aired, returning to his opening theme of tolls and roads. He liked ‘the way of the people of Llanfynydd...sending a memorial to Lord Dynevor to put all the bridges on the County’. What Lewis offered was a means for the farmers to achieve their goals in a peaceful and lawful manner. Importantly, he came up with a concrete and practical plan of action.<sup>85</sup>

A more detailed look at the Llanfynydd parishioners’ memorial sheds further light on Lewis’ views. It was drawn up at a public meeting chaired by former elected guardian Harry Thomas, Bronglyn, on 5 October 1843, when ‘a great number of

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in these parts, and who is indebted for that influence not so much for his property...as to his rough-hewn talents, strong sense, and independent spirit’.

<sup>84</sup> Rural towns like Llandilo provided ‘a seedbed of political radicalism in the countryside’, I.G. Jones, *Explorations and Explanations: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales* (Llandysul, 1981), p. 280.

<sup>85</sup> A similar meeting at Cwmifor on 20 July 1843 is described in David Williams, *The Rebecca Riots* (Cardiff, 1971), p. 226.

farmers and others attended to express their opinions'.<sup>86</sup> In addition to their views about bridges, they deplored high salaries paid to county officials which took one-sixth of the rate, the cost of the judicial system and the tithes, but their bitter resentment of 'obnoxious clauses of the Poor Law Act' such as those on bastardy and the separation of man and wife in the workhouse is most pertinent to Lewis' position. The parishioners further believed that 'the unwarrantable and unnecessary control invested in the hands of the Poor Law Commissioners is extremely repugnant to the feelings, habits and opinions of the Country...and elected Guardians ought to have the whole management of the poor's rate'. It seems that Lewis was happy to associate himself with these views. On the Board, Lewis had to tread a careful path between such strong views and the pragmatic requirement to keep the PLC at bay by being seen to do enough to satisfy the legal minimum. This he achieved in a most dextrous manner – his repeated re-election suggests he was trusted locally as someone who would do his utmost to implement voters' wishes: he had the means to 'fix things'.

It is clear, then, that Lewis was highly influential, but preferred to operate from within the farming community rather than by being 'top dog' – it suited him to persuade the gentry chairman to stay on rather than seek appointment himself, but as vice-chairman he was able to influence every aspect of union affairs, and took every opportunity to do so. He was accepted by the gentry, and held sway over his fellow farmers. He ensured that the union was professionally run, that expenditure was carefully controlled, and that opportunities for officials to siphon off funds were

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<sup>86</sup> The full text was read to the Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots and Turnpike Roads when it met in Llandilo on 3 December 1843, see Question 3147, p. 133 of the Inquiry's *Report* PP 1844 [531].

avoided. In this context his apparent acceptance of the union clerk's dubious dealings is more problematic, but may be partly explained because he facilitated Lewis' plans through his network of contacts: he was useful.<sup>87</sup> Lewis combined principle and pragmatism – a typical product of the local society where a key skill was to 'know how things worked'. His surviving correspondence reveals stylish expression and a fluent hand: when the District Auditor surcharged him for 'illegal' expenses, he wrote to the PLB observing that previous identical claims had not been challenged. Recalling that he had been vice-chairman for many years he felt that 'in common courtesy the Auditor should long 'ere the last audit have intimated his views'.<sup>88</sup> He died in November 1886, aged 75, an event which went unremarked in the local press: despite his considerable public service, he was, perhaps, of insufficient social rank to warrant an obituary. The guardians decided to 'place on record the great loss' they had suffered and expressed 'sympathy with his family in the heavy trouble that has fallen on them'.<sup>89</sup>

This account of John Lewis has looked at how he worked with other elected guardians, and will be supplemented in chapter 5 which discusses his 'upwards' relationship with gentry. The development of an élite group on the board will be identified, and, at the end of chapter 7 the full extent of his eventual dominance of the

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<sup>87</sup> George Williams was clerk for 26 years during Lewis' guardianship. Before him, his father occupied the post for six years.

<sup>88</sup> TNA: MH12/15929, John Lewis to PLB 29 October 1869.

<sup>89</sup> CA: BG 46, Board of Guardians' minutes 15 November 1886. His death occurred shortly before his son's wedding which took place on 3 December at Esgarnant Methodist chapel.

board will be made apparent.<sup>90</sup> He fits comfortably into a social group labelled ‘squirearchy’ by H.M. Vaughan: ‘small landowners with considerable influence...a ruling caste’.<sup>91</sup> Vaughan cites the case of one such individual offered a seat on the bench who declined because he would rather be at the head of the farmers than at the tail of the gentry. Such was John Lewis.

## Conclusions

The analysis above has shown that Llandilofawr’s elected guardians all came from the immediate area which they represented, and were mainly drawn from the ranks of larger farmers – they were big fish in a small pond. No females were elected during the period of this study.<sup>92</sup> Many individuals sought re-election over long periods, so, contrary to suggestions made elsewhere, it seems that being an elected guardian was an attractive option for such farmers: repeat service was the norm. Indeed, for John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen, it seems to have been a way of life, a comment which applies also to the élite group which formed around him, and which he came to dominate.<sup>93</sup>

The group applied itself vigorously to union business and deployed whatever tactics it

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<sup>90</sup> Elsewhere opposition to such strong leadership was ‘drowned’: Jones, ‘Pauperism in Aberystwyth’ p. 94.

<sup>91</sup> H.M. Vaughan, *The South Wales Squires: a Welsh Picture of Social Life* (London, 1926), p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> There is no evidence suggesting that prejudice against women was as virulent in Llandilofawr as in London. Asked by Ludlow union whether there was any opposition to electing a female guardian for a small parish with few other qualified persons, London replied that objections ‘on grounds of public policy and convenience are so manifest that the Board cannot readily suppose that the question will become one of practical importance’. TNA: MH 12/9957, 1 May 1850.

<sup>93</sup> In Bridgend it was the chairman who dominated: J.H. Thomas and W.E. Wilkins, *The Bridgend-Cowbridge Union workhouse and guardians*, Cowbridge (1995).

felt necessary to maintain its influence on the board and quash opposition. Since contested elections were relatively rare, and the same people stayed in place for extended periods, it seems that their policies enjoyed the support of Llandilofawr's ratepayers. For the first time a direct connection between a leading Carmarthenshire poor law official and the Rebecca movement has been established, and this hints at some of the influences on guardians' views on poor law matters. In addition to the élite group, a number of very small farmers also joined the board. They are likely to have been men with very conservative views, unenthusiastic about 'progressing' in the way the central authorities wished, but keen to ensure that their own parishes maintained their individuality. The next chapter will show that one of the major reasons for the élite group's continued influence was that Llandilofawr gentry and *ex officio*'s made no serious attempt to involve themselves in union affairs.



## Chapter 5

### Llandilofawr's *ex officio* guardians and the development of a powerful élite group

An active role for gentry as members of boards of guardians was envisaged when plans for the formation of Poor Law unions were drawn up.<sup>1</sup> Guardians elected by each parish would be the fundamental building block, but because they were likely to be inexperienced in managing sizeable organisations and come from the lower classes (farmers in the case of Carmarthenshire) they would need help and advice. This would be provided by magistrates who were thus given an automatic right to sit as *ex officios* on their local union board: indeed, as gentlemen, JP's had a duty to do so.<sup>2</sup>

Such an arrangement was expected to offer several advantages. First, magistrates had experience of administering the Old Poor Law, so once they had been properly briefed on the changes, they would ensure an orderly transition to the new arrangements. Second, because local benches were generally made up of the largest ratepayers, they had an incentive to keep rates down by restricting relief to the minimum, notably by abolishing outdoor relief for the able-bodied. Third, as opinion formers in local society they would lead by example and encourage doubters among elected guardians to follow

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<sup>1</sup> A. Brundage, *The Making of the New Poor Law 1832–1839* (London, 1978), p. 101; Byung Khun Song, 'Continuity and change in English rural society: the formation of Poor Law unions in Oxfordshire', *English Historical Review* 114 (1999); D. Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in Britain: from Chadwick to Booth, 1834–1914* (London, 1998), p. 14; I. Dewar, 'George Clive and the establishment of the New Poor Law in South Glamorgan, 1836–1838', *Morgannwg*, 11 (1967).

<sup>2</sup> A. Digby, 'The rural Poor Law', in D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1976), p. 153; M. Cragoe, *An Anglican aristocracy: the moral economy of the landed estate in Carmarthenshire 1832–1895* (Oxford, 1996), p. 76; F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: the Workhouse System 1834–1884* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 127.

the ‘right’ path.<sup>3</sup> A further role for *ex officios* was to provide a conduit for communication with the local Assistant Poor Law Commissioner who would be much more comfortable dealing directly with fellow gentlemen than with the lower orders: ensuring that a senior gentry member was appointed as union chairman would also help. The gentlemen the PLC had in mind were expected to act dispassionately, seeking to end the jobbing and corruption thought to be endemic under previous arrangements.<sup>4</sup> It was also to be hoped that they would vigorously and enthusiastically pursue implementation of the new legislation. This chapter will discuss the gentry who acted as *ex officios* in Llandilofawr union, and review how well they matched up to this model.<sup>5</sup>

In Carmarthenshire there was a significant difficulty with the above plan – the pool of such high-minded magistrates was too small.<sup>6</sup> In 1837 Lord Dynevor complained to the Home Secretary of ‘the great difficulty of providing active magistrates’ in the area.<sup>7</sup> Matters did not improve, and he wrote again in 1843 lamenting that ‘few gentlemen reside in Carmarthenshire to act as magistrates’.<sup>8</sup> Even the current complement was

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<sup>3</sup> P.F. Aschrott, *The English Poor Law System* (London, 1888), p. 164; A. Brundage, *England’s ‘Prussian Minister’: Edwin Chadwick and the Politics of Government Growth, 1832–1854* (London, 1988), pp 32/3; A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700–1930* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 124/5; Driver, *Power and Pauperism*, p. 135.

<sup>4</sup> P. Dunkley, ‘Whigs and Paupers: the reform of the English Poor Laws, 1830–1834, *Journal of British Studies*, 20 (1981), p. 142.

<sup>5</sup> P. Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales, 1536–1990* (Harlow, 1992), pp 39–44.

<sup>6</sup> A problem not unique to Carmarthenshire, D. Eastwood, *Governing Rural England: Tradition and Transformation in Local Government, 1780–1840* (Basingstoke, 1994), p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> CA: Dynevor muniments. Incomplete letter Dynevor to Lord John Russell, 29 November 1837.

<sup>8</sup> TNA: HO 45/454, 9 January 1843, Dynevor to Sir James Graham.

overstated as it was ‘the custom to insert names of children...at a very early age’.<sup>9</sup>

*Parliamentary Returns* attest to a long-running shortage of JP’s in the County – in 1831 there had been 75 laymen and nine clergy.<sup>10</sup> By 1840 clerical participation had fallen to only three,<sup>11</sup> but the overall number had climbed to 88 by 1852.<sup>12</sup> In the immediate area of this study, 31 were said to be active around Llandilo in 1842 compared to 25 in 1837.<sup>13</sup>

Interpreting the Llandilofawr situation requires introductory comment. The above model implies the presence of a distinct social group able and willing to undertake the role, one clearly ‘superior’ to elected guardians.<sup>14</sup> This was not, however, the case here: apart from an Earl and a Lord, social boundaries between the rest of the potential *ex officios*, and between them and large farmers, were indistinct.<sup>15</sup> Magistrates *in situ* during the union’s formative years included large farmers, minor gentry, Anglican clergy and recent arrivals from Lancashire, but acceptance of authority or guidance from ‘superiors’ depended more on perceptions of how firmly they were rooted in the local area and how well they treated tenants than on notions of social supremacy. A ‘kind’ landlord whose family had lived and farmed in Carmarthenshire for generations

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<sup>9</sup> CA: Dynevor muniments, Dynevor to Graham 19 November 1843.

<sup>10</sup> PP 1831 [39]. Despite the shortage, ‘persons actually engaged in retail trade’ were ‘not considered to be proper’ for appointment

<sup>11</sup> PP 1840 [484].

<sup>12</sup> PP 1852 [558]. These 88 comprise 47% of all Carmarthenshire JP’s: the rest had not qualified.

<sup>13</sup> PP 1836 [583] and PP 1842 [524]; TNA: HO 45/454. See discussion in Cragoe, *Anglican aristocracy*, p. 77.

<sup>14</sup> D.J.V. Jones, *Rebecca’s Children: a Study of Rural Society, Crime and Protest* (Oxford, 1989), p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, pp 29-33.

was more highly regarded and thus more influential than a newly arrived ‘gentleman’, even if he was Welsh and wealthy. Assistant Commissioner William Day had encountered this situation during his struggles to establish unions in mid-Wales where he described ratepayers as ‘themselves little removed from the class of paupers, and in the majority of cases intimately connected with them’.<sup>16</sup> In his view, they were not suitable elected or *ex officio* guardian material: their decisions about how to deal with paupers were not based on knowledge of the new law’s principles, but on the customary method of consulting local, albeit deficient, sources – ‘they inform themselves with scrupulous fidelity to views of fellow parishioners, who are ignorant’.<sup>17</sup> Many Welsh *ex officios*, he pointed out, had no desire to facilitate the introduction of the PLAA, and when all other excuses failed, they launched their final, insurmountable, objection: ‘It may do very well for England but will not do for Wales’.<sup>18</sup> Day’s findings are echoed in Llandilofawr.<sup>19</sup> What follows will explore Llandilofawr gentry in the context of these observations, and show that its *ex officios* – ‘petty princes’ – were far from an influential and homogenous group, consisting of an eclectic mix of individuals, some driven principally by self-interest, but others by their sense of responsibility for their tenants.<sup>20</sup> They appear, however, to have shared a desire to ensure that Llandilofawr union affairs should remain firmly in local control and that it was necessary to manage

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<sup>16</sup> NLW: MSS 3142, William Day to PLC, 12 July 1838.

<sup>17</sup> Day, ‘a young and vigorous squire from Sussex’ was noted for colourful descriptions of people and events in his district: Brundage, *Making*, p. 30. For an account of Day see R.A. Lewis, ‘William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners’, *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, IX (1964).

<sup>18</sup> NLW: MSS 3142, 12 July 1838.

<sup>19</sup> See D. Roberts *Victorian Origins of the British Welfare State* (New Haven, 1960), p. 275 for a summary of officials’ views on Welsh guardians.

<sup>20</sup> Jones, *Rebecca’s Children*, p. 49.

matters accordingly.<sup>21</sup> This was helped because all the significant estates in Llandilofawr remained in the same ownership for the period of this study.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, it will emerge that a small number of large farmers – elected guardians who did not ‘progress’ to become magistrates, and who would certainly not have regarded themselves as ‘gentry’ – wielded more influence in the union than *ex officio*s. The composition of the Llandilofawr board was thus radically different from some English rural unions.<sup>23</sup>

There were two aristocratic families with local links, the Dynevors whose property was under a mile from Llandilo, and the Cawdors with an estate at Golden Grove (Gelli Aur) five miles away. Although both families had extensive land holdings in Carmarthenshire their favoured residences were elsewhere, the Dynevors at Barrington Park in Gloucestershire and the Cawdors at Stackpole Court in Pembrokeshire.<sup>24</sup> They were ‘semi-detached’ from Llandilofawr.

For the Dynevors, George Rice Trevor (1795–1869), the 4<sup>th</sup> Baron, was the principal family member for most of the period of this study: from 1820 to 1852 he was Lord

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<sup>21</sup> The New Poor Law ‘created an entirely new administrative grid [resting on] jealously guarded local autonomy’, D Green, *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790–1870* (Farnham, 2010), p. 2/3.

<sup>22</sup> J. Davies, ‘The end of the great estates and the rise of freehold farming in Wales’, *Welsh History Review* 7 (1974); J.V. Beckett, ‘The pattern of landownership in England and Wales, 1660–1880’, *Economic History Review* XXI (1984), p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> E. Hurren, *Protesting About Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late-Victorian England, 1870–1900* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 175/179.

<sup>24</sup> Dynevor owned 7,208 acres and Cawdor 33,782 acres in Carmarthenshire: *Return of Owners of Land, PP 1874 [C.1097]*; Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, p. 15; For gentry land ownership in North Wales see K.D.M. Snell and P. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: the Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 203.

Lieutenant of Carmarthenshire and Tory Member of Parliament for the County for most of that period, a capacity in which he played a prominent role during the Rebecca riots, keeping the Home Secretary informed of developments, and badgering fellow magistrates to act against perpetrators of ‘outrages’.<sup>25</sup> His parliamentary duties involved lengthy stays in London which limited his attachment to, and the amount of time spent in, Carmarthenshire. Whilst it would be inaccurate to describe him as wholly non-resident, his engagement with locals seems to have been dutiful rather than close.<sup>26</sup> He made gifts of food to the poor; provided suppers for workers who extinguished a fire at his mansion; and was patron of a fishing club and a horticultural society.<sup>27</sup> For the first forty years of Llandilofawr union’s existence there was no direct involvement by the Dynevors, although in Gloucestershire Rice Trevor’s father (1755–1852) had briefly intervened in 1835, complaining that the Assistant Commissioner’s planned allocation of parishes to unions was ‘inconvenient, unpleasant and unsatisfactory’.<sup>28</sup>

The Cawdors inherited Golden Grove unexpectedly from a family friend in 1804: a ‘strange action for which there is no explanation,’ so their connection with the Llandilo

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<sup>25</sup> The Dynevors’ Carmarthenshire connection dated from 1440: F. Jones, *Carmarthenshire homes and their families* (Carmarthen, 1988); G. Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality in Wales* (Cardiff, 1979), p.81.

<sup>26</sup> A point emphasised by D. Williams, *The Rebecca Riots* (Cardiff, 1971), p.4. For distant gentry see J.G. Jenkins, *Life and Tradition in Rural Wales* (Stroud, 1973), p. 18; and ‘widespread hostility to their life of slothful luxury’, G. Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality*, pp. 164/7.

<sup>27</sup> Cragoe, *Anglican aristocracy*, p. 100. He contributed (p. 104) to Welsh cultural activities through the ‘Society for the Preservation of the Remains of Ancient British Literature, Poetical, Historical, Antiquarian and Moral; and for the encouragement of the national music’.

<sup>28</sup> Song, ‘Continuity and change’, p. 320. Dynevor owned 297 acres in Fairford straddling Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire borders: PP 1874 [C.1097]. For pressure regarding union boundaries see E. Hurren, *Protesting*, pp. 82 and 91; Brundage, *New Poor Law*, pp 34/5.

area was relatively recent.<sup>29</sup> Extensive though this estate was, their main interests lay elsewhere: at Stackpole Court in Pembrokeshire, Cawdor Castle in Scotland and London. During the period of this study the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron, John Frederick Campbell (1790–1860) and his son Viscount Emlyn (1817–1898) were active in public life. After a major refurbishment completed in 1834, Emlyn and his family frequently resided at Golden Grove, and he assumed Rice Trevor's responsibilities as Lord Lieutenant and MP in 1852. As a Whig, Emlyn's politics were different from Dynevor's, and there was a history of intense political rivalry between the two families, their opposing factions being known as the 'Reds'(Tories) and 'Blues'(Whigs), sarcastically dismissed by Gwyn Williams as 'gentry-led mafias'.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the aristocrats available to participate in Llandilofawr Poor Law matters were politically disunited and somewhat distant from the rest of local Carmarthenshire society, and it is therefore no surprise that their personal involvement in union affairs was extremely limited. No Dynevors appeared at the board until the late 1870's and the first Earl Cawdor only made a short series of attendances in 1839 in a vain attempt to resolve a personal grievance.<sup>31</sup> Emlyn did rather better with two bursts of activity in 1851 and 1856, both associated with the ill-fated appointment of a rate collector: then, after a twenty-year absence, he took the chair in 1876. Interestingly, AC Edward Senior had identified another reason for this indifference: 'I on one occasion persuaded

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<sup>29</sup> Williams, *Rebecca Riots*, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> G. Williams, *When was Wales? A History of the Welsh* (London, 1985).

<sup>31</sup> Cawdor was briefly chairman of Pembroke union, resigning in March 1841 after a dispute with elected guardians about affiliation orders.

Lord Cawdor to attend. The board were not decently civil to him'.<sup>32</sup> There was, then, little direct aristocratic engagement with the administration of the New Poor Law in Llandilofawr.<sup>33</sup> While it is more difficult to gauge what influence aristocrats might have played indirectly or informally, they did not exploit the obvious route of using proxies: their agents did not appear at the board or stand for election as guardians.<sup>34</sup> Further, there is no evidence that Dynevor or Cawdor attempted to place tenants as guardians in order to have them support favoured policies – an examination of rate, tithe and rent books from which it is possible to link elected guardians with their landlord, suggests that their estates were, if anything, under-represented.<sup>35</sup> This was unlike neighbouring Carmarthen union where guardians who were magistrates' tenants were 'obliged to vote with them'.<sup>36</sup>

The evidence suggests that these aristocrats specifically chose to stay away from union affairs – their horizons were wider than the immediate area and they concentrated the time they devoted to public duties on bigger roles such as MP or Lord Lieutenant, with county or national dimensions.<sup>37</sup> Poor Law matters were, for them, a low-status

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<sup>32</sup> TNA: MH 32/66, September 1838. Edward Senior to PLC. His emphasis.

<sup>33</sup> This issue has not previously been raised in the historiography of the New Poor Law in Wales. Cragoe, the main writer on Carmarthenshire aristocracy, makes only passing reference to the Poor Law, *Anglican Aristocracy*, p. 94.

<sup>34</sup> Two agents became elected guardians in Llandilofawr: David Long Price ran the Edwinsford estate, see discussion in this chapter. John Morgan Davies, Ffroodvale, who served from 1866 to 1880 managed several estates in the area.

<sup>35</sup> CA: Cawdor Box 472, 1863 estate rentals. CA: Rate books for Llandilofawr, MUS 125 (1847) and MUS 126 (1839). CA: *Apportionment of the rent charge in lieu of tithes in the parish of Llandilofawr, 1841*.

<sup>36</sup> Evidence of Capt. Lewis Evans to the 1844 Inquiry. *Report* p. 76, Question 1761.

<sup>37</sup> There is one exception: in the early 1880's board minutes mention 'kindness to the workhouse children' by Lord Emlyn and Lady Dynevor.



activity. The need to indulge in local paternalism was met by providing agricultural prizes, or monetary contributions towards schools, chapels, churches and so on – or, very directly, by charging reasonable rents, offering rebates in hard times such as the 1840's.<sup>38</sup> Thus, such *ex officio* activity as there was in union affairs was left to non-aristocratic magistrates, a group which included wealthy but mainly elderly clergy, cadet sons of minor baronets, and men who had benefited from unexpected inheritances or advantageous marriages and had now 'progressed' – big fish in a small pond. Collectively they cover a broad spectrum, and it should be emphasised that they were permanent residents in the union, not absentee landlords who imposed high rents on their tenants only to spend their income in England.<sup>39</sup> The other side of this coin, however, is that they had a vital concern to promote their own local personal, social and economic interests, which, as a heterogeneous group, often pointed in different directions. They were more 'un-united' than disunited: like the elected guardians they were an array of very different individuals – and there were not many of them.<sup>40</sup>

What follows traces their relationship with the union, using personal details to provide a context against which to interpret their collective contribution: specific events are highlighted to illustrate how they sought to use 'connections' to best advantage, not always successfully. At the micro Llandilo level such behaviour mirrors the overt use

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<sup>38</sup> Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, p. 73. See discussion on Edwinsford rents later in this chapter. In the early 1840's farmers claimed that rents were 25% above an acceptable level: Jones, *Rebecca's Children*, p. 62, but *The Times*, 31 August 1843, commended the 'handsome manner' in which Cawdor had responded.

<sup>39</sup> G. Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality*; D. Williams, *Rebecca Riots*, p. 34.

<sup>40</sup> This is exactly opposite to the picture in Northamptonshire: Hurren, *Protesting*, p. 84. She also points to situations between the two extremes in Oxfordshire described by B.K. Song and Eastwood.

of ‘position’ and patronage in the central Poor Law authorities, although it is unlikely that they would have appreciated such a comparison.<sup>41</sup> The following discussion will outline the role played by those shown in Table 5.1 – Llandilofawr’s chairmen, vice-chairmen and clerks. Crucially, it also shows their family and professional connections. The first chairman the Rev. David Prothero died only a year after taking office. He had steered the union through its formative phase: medical and relieving officers were appointed, the workhouse building project commenced and, in line with the new policy, the board began to reduce rent payments to paupers and reduce out-relief to the able-bodied. His successor William Garnons Hughes, Glancothi (1801–1878), an *ex officio* and only 36 at the time of his appointment, was not a success: he attended one meeting, and resigned 6 months later.<sup>42</sup> It will be shown shortly that he was eased into office by Sir James Hamlyn Williams in return for a favour – his rapid exit may have partly resulted from retribution by elected guardians.

The next three chairmen were found by promoting the sitting vice-chairman. The Rev. David Herbert Thackery Griffies Williams, son of a minor baronet, served until 1844, to be followed by members of two local families.<sup>43</sup> Capt. John Lewis, leader of those

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<sup>41</sup> For PLC patronage PLC see J.M. Bourne, *Patronage and Society in nineteenth-century England* (London, 1986), p. 25. For Chadwick’s preferred objective approach, R.A. Lewis, ‘Edwin Chadwick and the administrative reform movement, 1854-56’, *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, II (1950), p. 184. See also C. Dewey, *The Passing of Barchester: a Real Life Version of Trollope* (London, 1991).

<sup>42</sup> He reappeared briefly in 1851 proposing the successful candidate for the registrarship of his home parish in opposition to every other *ex officio* including his own father. He was from an extensive family, many of them military, none of whom played any part in Poor Law matters.

<sup>43</sup> At only 27 he was even younger than Hughes.

Table 5.1: Chairmen, vice chairmen and clerks of Llandilofawr union 1836–1885

Year	Chairman						Vice Chairman						Clerk
	Rev. David Prothero	Wm. Garnons Hughes	Rev D.H.T.G. Williams	Capt. John Lewis	John Lewes Thomas	Earl Cawdor	Rev D.H.T.G. Williams	Capt. John Lewis	John Lewes Thomas	John Lewis Llwynfedwen	Dr. David Prothero	David Harris	
1836	X						●						John Prothero Lewis (1)
1837	died	6 months						■					”
1838								■					”
1839			●					■					Thomas Williams (2)
1840			●					■					”
1841			●					■					”
1842			●					■					”
1843			●					■					”
1844			●					■					”
1845				■					▲				”
1846				■					▲				George Williams (2)
1847				■					▲				”
1848				■					▲				”
1849				■					▲	◆			”
1850				■					▲	◆			”
1851 to 1875					▲ 25 years					◆	◇ to 1869	□	George Williams to 1872 Richard Shipley Lewis 1873. (3)
1879 to 1885						10 years				◆		□	”

(1) John Prothero Lewis was son of Capt. John Lewis and nephew of Rev. David Prothero. He was also cousin to Dr. Prothero.

(2) Thomas Williams had been employed in John Prothero Lewis' private law practice. George Williams was Thomas Williams' son.

(3) Richard Shipley Lewis was John Prothero Lewis' son.

‘fine defensive forces’, the Llandilo militia,<sup>44</sup> served until his death in 1850, and was replaced by John Lewes Thomas who remained in post until 1875. These two local families thus occupied key positions in the union for thirty years and it will be shown later that they were also the mainstays of most other local public institutions – they were the fabric of Llandilo society. Their number also included Dr. David Prothero, wealthy nephew of Capt. Lewis, and sometime union medical officer, magistrate and vice-chairman 1851–1869.<sup>45</sup> Together with two elected guardians – John Lewis, Llwynfedwen, and David Harries, Abersannan – they comprised an élite group which effectively controlled union affairs for the whole period of this study, wielding influence through a network of local personal connections, key to which was their control of the union clerk, the primary point of communication with the central authorities.<sup>46</sup> Lewis and Harries were joint vice-chairmen after 1851, the former steadily moving to a position of *de-facto* prime mover in all union affairs until his death in 1885. Serving different constituencies, this alliance of gentry and farmers was at times uneasy: they occasionally opposed each other, but at all times they closed ranks against outside officialdom from London. It suited each of them to retain their local position. Footnotes to table 5.1 vividly illustrate how they used the clerkship to this end, a closed arrangement showing a certain pleasing symmetry, and one which typifies society and union affairs in mid nineteenth-century Llandilofawr – connections worked, ‘establishing complex networks of power, paternalism and dependence’.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> W. Samuel, *Llandilo past and Present*, Llandilo (1868).

<sup>45</sup> He was well-suited for these tasks: ‘the Protheros were one of the most kind-hearted families in South Wales, always ready to help the poor and needy’: F. Jones, *Historic Carmarthenshire homes and their families*, Carmarthen (1987).

<sup>46</sup> For parish élite groups see Eastwood, *Governing Rural England*, pp. 30, 38.

<sup>47</sup> Eastwood, *Governing Rural England*, p. 166.

### The union's opening months

In the first four months there was a brief flurry of *ex officio* activity. One magistrate seemed likely match to the PLC's concept of a fit and proper person to run a union – William Peel, cousin of the recent Prime Minister. He, together with his son Robert came to the union's inaugural meeting on 16 December 1836 and was duly proposed as chairman by John Walters Philips, Aberglasney, but unexpectedly the 23 persons present, mainly farmers, elected the vicar of Llandilo the Rev. David Prothero, uncle of both Dr. Prothero and John Prothero Lewis, the clerk.<sup>48</sup> Peel's candidacy was hindered in the eyes of the farmers by the fact that he had acquired his 3,048 acre estate, Taliaris, only three years previously. To those with substantial local roots he was an *arriviste* whereas Prothero was part of the Llandilo establishment – and Welsh.<sup>49</sup> After this rebuff the Peels were not seen at the board for forty years, although their trusted Curate, whose living was in their gift, attended on a handful of occasions.<sup>50</sup> This early defeat of a wealthy 'outsider' at the hands of local gentry was to set the scene for control of the union thereafter.

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<sup>48</sup> Assistant Commissioner George Clive had consulted gentry about suitable union boundaries and to identify the 'right' chairmen. No relevant Llandilofawr correspondence survives, but his *modus operandi* is described in I. Dewar, 'George Clive and the Establishment of the New Poor Law in South Glamorgan, 1836–1838', *Morgannwg*, Vol. XI (1967).

<sup>49</sup> Ten years after Peel's arrival, Magistrates' Clerk John Davies told the Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales, 'Mr Peel has only latterly come to reside in the district': PP 1844 [531] 5 December 1843. He had paid £65,000 for Taliaris and the actions he took to maximise estate income resulted in local friction and complaints: Jones, *Rebecca's Children*, p. 51. For 'outsiders' obtaining legitimacy representing Welsh interests see Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, pp. 136/7.

<sup>50</sup> For Peel Rev. Williams was 'our respected minister [whose] ghostly counsel and advice was comforting and wholesome'. CA, Derwydd Muniments: Peel to A.F. Gulston, 22 January 1860.

Apart from the Peels and Philips, the magistrate complement during the first six months consisted only of two Anglican clerics.<sup>51</sup> Ostensibly neutral parties, they were perhaps persuaded to front opposition to an English outsider, a reading supported by the presence of a fourth (Welsh) divine, Rev. Griffies Williams. Not being a magistrate at the time, he was present in his capacity as the parish representative of Llandefeisant, although his eligibility had been challenged.<sup>52</sup> It was Williams who proposed the successful candidate, for which his reward was to be elected vice-chairman.<sup>53</sup> Although not in the aristocratic mould, he was suited for the job being well-connected and local. His union activities required him to work closely with those considerably lower down the social pecking order, notably John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen, an interesting and effective combination whereby Lewis' apparent command over elected farmer-guardians was complemented by the other's ability to exert upwards influence. It will be shown in chapter 7, however, that he was out of his depth when it came to handling internecine warfare among guardians.

### The period after 1837

After April 1837 the two clerics and the Peels vanished, and the already low level of *ex officio* involvement plummeted further. Counting each appearance of any *ex*

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<sup>51</sup> Both were elderly long-standing incumbents, Rev. David Nicholls, Llanegwad, since 1812, and Rev. John Williams, Llandebie since 1804: *Clergy List* (1841).

<sup>52</sup> A Llandilo attorney wrote several letters to the PLC raising 'points of order', one falsely claiming that Griffies Williams paid poor rates of less than the minimum qualification: TNA: MH12/15922, J. Thomas to PLC 9 December 1836.

<sup>53</sup> There was thus an all-Anglican line-up in the top jobs. Williams exercised the care of 230 souls from his 'sylvan and secluded' church. The family came from Llwynywormwood in Myddfai, where his father acquired a baronetcy. His brother Sir Erasmus was also a cleric. Family wealth made him better placed financially than many Anglican clergy in Wales: Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 86-91.

*officio* as a single event, there were 87 in fifteen years – less than six per annum.

Looked at another way, no *ex officio* was present at 326 (87%) of board meetings held between 1837 and 1850 – whole years passed with none at all, and the interval between attendances could be over eighteen months – elected guardians were left to their own devices. Only three individuals, John Walters Philips, Aberglasney, James Thomas, Caeglas, and Griffith Bowen Jones, Gurrey, made a noticeable effort – they accounted for two-thirds of the *ex officio* turnout. Three others attended in two-year ‘clusters’.<sup>54</sup> The problem of ‘invisible’ Welsh *ex officios* was widespread and long-lasting.<sup>55</sup> In 1868 AC Graves prepared a thoughtful report on the subject when a proposal to scrap magistrates’ automatic right to sit on union boards was being considered. In a passage specific to his Welsh unions he proffered a lengthy, pungent criticism:

‘The discontinuous and spasmodic apparitions and interferences of *ex officios* who thus shirk the work which is useful or dull, and pick out the subjects which are pleasingly exciting and are attended with the exercise of power are often unwelcome to elected guardians, especially when they, the regular toilers, are swamped by a set of aristocratic interlopers’.<sup>56</sup>

Although, as shown above, the Llandilofawr ‘interlopers’ were gentry, not aristocrats, and never appeared in numbers to swamp anybody, Graves’ comments provide a

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<sup>54</sup> Sir James Hamlyn Williams, William Garnons Hughes and George Morgan were each seen over different two-year periods and then never again.

<sup>55</sup> Digby, *Rural Poor Law*, p. 159.

<sup>56</sup> TNA: MH32/31, Graves to PLB June 1868.

valuable insight into the prevailing official view of Carmarthenshire *ex officios*' attitude to union matters.<sup>57</sup>

The nature of Llandilofawr *ex officio* activity is now explored further, using case studies of some principal characters selected to highlight two recurring themes: the gentry were highly individualistic, often at odds with each other, rather than a harmonious group; and social boundaries between the gentry and farmer board members were blurred - there was often no real distinction.<sup>58</sup> The two groups did, however, share certain attributes and desires, notably a wish to run union affairs in their own Carmarthenshire manner, an end which they vigorously pursued. Running Llandilofawr thus involved an uneasy coalition between persons whose motivations and objectives remained resolutely individual, driven by personal and parish loyalties rather than a shared vision of pauper welfare, and certainly not determined by class status. In Llandilofawr Poor Law administration there is thus little evidence of 'something akin to an orthodoxy of Welsh historical interpretation' – the existence of long-standing inherent class hostility.<sup>59</sup> From that it would follow that class *per se* was not a factor in the fractious relationship between Llandilofawr's *ex officio* and elected guardians, although for England it has been suggested that it was the New

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<sup>57</sup> The situation in some other unions was very different. In Cheltenham, for example, there was such a 'surfeit of *ex officios*' that it became necessary to dilute their presence by increasing the number of elected guardians: C.V. Seal, 'Poor relief and welfare: a comparative study of the Belper and Cheltenham Poor Law Unions 1780–1914' (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Leicester, 2010), p. 68.

<sup>58</sup> D. Williams, *A history of modern Wales*, London (1950) for 'social equality' between squires, tenant farmers, and their labourers p. 212.

<sup>59</sup> This is a recurring theme among historians of nineteenth-century Wales: Glanmor Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality in Wales* (Cardiff, 1979), pp. 161–165; D. Williams, *Rebecca Riots*, p. 34; Gwyn Williams, *When was Wales?*. In Northamptonshire tense social relations are ascribed to antagonistic labour relations, Hurren, *Protesting*, p. 101/2.



Poor Law which caused the problem, being a ‘major factor behind the growth of rural class hostility’.<sup>60</sup>

The first two portraits, John Walters Philips Esq., and Sir James Hamlyn Williams, dealing mainly with the period up to 1840, demonstrate that interventions by Llandilofawr *ex officios* were frequently negative, while the third, John Lewes Thomas, presents a complete contrast. His positive input lasts from 1845 to 1875, thus bridging the period between the union’s relatively tempestuous early years and its later state of maturity. After this the élite group whose input spans the whole period of this study is discussed.

#### John Walters Philips (1788–1865)

It is appropriate to start with Philips since he was the first person to propose a motion at the board. He started life as John Walters: his parents’ families were tanners turned farmers, holding a ‘peripheral position’ in gentry ranks.<sup>61</sup> In 1824 he inherited Aberglasney in Llangathen parish from his uncle (whose funds had come from ‘trade’ as an employee of the East India Company) following which he spent £225 on a Royal Licence to style himself Walters Philips and acquire a coat of arms which was incorporated into the staircase of his new home. Clearly, he wanted to seal his position as ‘gentry’ in a very visible way.<sup>62</sup> As Davies put it ‘to this group the

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<sup>60</sup> K.D.M. Snell, *Deferential bitterness: the social outlook of the rural proletariat in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England and Wales*, in ed. M.L. Bush, *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification* (London, 1992), p. 169.

<sup>61</sup> Details based on F. Jones, ‘Walters of Porthcereint’, *Ceredigion* VI (1968).

<sup>62</sup> His uncle’s surname was Phillips, but Walters added his own twist, spelling it with one ‘l’.

charisma of their name and ancestry was sacrosanct and frequently stressed so that ancient prestige added verisimilitude to contemporary pretensions'.<sup>63</sup>

His family relationships, notably with sisters Jane and Frances, were uneasy. The atmosphere was stirred up by Jane, a prodigious letter writer possessing a remarkable religious fervour: for her 'the rolling hills of Canaan were always before her eyes, solemn voices of Hebrew prophets resounded in her ears, and the revealed word of Jehovah sustained her fervent spirit'.<sup>64</sup> Well before their uncle's death it became clear to the sisters that they would have no share in the inheritance, so it was agreed that John would compensate them with an annual payment of £1,000 each. However, as soon as he inherited he refused to honour the payments, leading to a five-year lawsuit. Clearly, there was at best a strained relationship between siblings. Once paid out, the sisters moved to Cardiganshire where they had a curious encounter with Rebeccaites.<sup>65</sup> Philips, then, was not a man to be trusted in some of his personal and financial arrangements. Coming from an uneasy family background, recently arrived in the area, and still aspiring to gentry status, he was insecure and needed to assert his importance, a pursuit in which he conceived an occasional intervention as *ex officio* guardian to be useful.

He made 28 appearances at the board. The first resulted in disappointment: he proposed but lost two votes, first for his candidate for chairman (Peel), and second for

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<sup>63</sup> R. Davies, *Secret Sins: Sex, Violence and Society in Carmarthenshire 1870–1920* (Cardiff, 1996), p. 29. See also Jones, *Rebecca's Children*, pp 47–51.

<sup>64</sup> Jones, 'Porthcereint' p. 174. Jane's prolific correspondence was peppered with ardent religious imagery.

<sup>65</sup> L.A. Rees, 'The wail of Miss Jane: the Rebecca riots and Jane Walters of Glanmedeni, 1843–44', *Ceredigion*, 15 (2007).

Caleb Jones, his nominee as clerk. To add insult to injury, he also failed to obtain agreement to a salary reduction for the successful clerk, John Prothero Lewis. This was divisive: he put himself in flagrant opposition to a much-respected local family of much longer local standing than himself. A confrontation with the entire board and with the PLC followed. Union auditors were to approve unions' accounts, replacing the previous system under which magistrates had inspected overseers' books. Philips, however, sought still to exercise his now-defunct right, but the guardians refused to bow to his wishes, instructing the clerk to seek support from the PLC: he wrote a polite letter expressing the hope that, if they explained matters, Philips 'could in all probability be induced to abide by your advice'.<sup>66</sup> He was wrong: when the PLC confirmed that Philips' auditing services were no longer required he suffered a fit of righteous indignation, responding that he would henceforth refuse to act as a JP, a piece of *hauteur* sarcastically dismissed as 'surprising having been given on a point of law by a Commissioner'.<sup>67</sup> He stayed away for two years, reappearing to table an identical salary reduction demand and suffering a second defeat: his approach had the merit of consistency.

Most matters discussed at the board during his intermittent presences were routine. He successfully moved a motion to reduce medical officers' salaries in 1843, but stayed away on several occasions when new appointments were made. Elected guardians for his home parish, Llangathen, were not his tenants, and two votes were recorded in which they opposed his wishes. He failed to secure his nominee as registrar, on which occasion other *ex officios* also voted against him. He was notably

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<sup>66</sup> TNA: MH12/15922, Prothero Lewis to PLC 3 May 1838.

<sup>67</sup> TNA: MH12/15922, Clive to Walters Philips 16 June 1838.

absent from the board during one of the most momentous events in the union – the rate collector scandal in 1855 – and then for the next ten years. His final mention is more positive, the guardians expressing their thanks ‘for his interest in the welfare of Rees Evans now in his service’, and lately in the workhouse.<sup>68</sup> Philips died shortly afterwards.<sup>69</sup> His contribution to the union had been at best unremarkable: he neither provided the helpful advice which the PLC expected from *ex officios* nor teamed up with other gentry to give positive guidance. He seems, rather, to have remained a relatively isolated outsider: when he did propose a course of action, he was invariably defeated.

This unflattering profile is written from a Poor Law perspective: Rees comes to a less critical, albeit lukewarm conclusion.<sup>70</sup> In her account, which does not mention his Poor Law activities, Philips is credited with attending to matters of duty such as appearing at Quarter Sessions, although a later section of this chapter questions that reading. Rees also notes a ‘considerable degree of social snobbery’ in his approach to Carmarthenshire society, his 1858 donation of 5s. 5d. to the United Hunt Club being made because he needed to be seen to be supportive, although his ‘motives are not clear’. He is, she thinks, a typical example of landlords whose ‘over-riding concern was to stake out a position of superiority...in the local community’.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> CA: BG 37 guardians’ minutes 13 May 1865.

<sup>69</sup> The Philips family involvement with the union could have continued, but it ended with him: his magistrate son-in-law resident in Llangathen in the 1870’s did not participate in union affairs.

<sup>70</sup> L. A. Rees, ‘Middleton Hall and Aberglasney: two Carmarthenshire landed estates and their families 1780–1875’ (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Aberystwyth, 2009).

<sup>71</sup> Quoting D. Howell, *Patriarchs and Parasites: the Gentry of South West Wales in the Eighteenth Century* (Cardiff, 1986).

### The Williams family of Edwinsford

Sir James Hamlyn Williams (1790–1861), owner of Edwinsford six miles north of Llandilo, was an *ex officio* member of the Llandilofawr board – in practice, however, his direct contribution was very limited. The family had long connections with Carmarthenshire, Sir James’ maternal line having resided locally since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. They were the only active Llandilofawr *ex officios* to participate in national politics, putting them on a level somewhat above and different from the other gentry. Three forebears had been County MP - Sir James Hamlyn (1735–1811), ‘a plain downright country gentleman’<sup>72</sup>; Sir James Hamlyn Williams (1760–1829); and Sir Nicholas Williams (1680–1745).<sup>73</sup> Successions through the female line led to ever more complicated surname combinations as new husbands attached wives’ maiden names to their own.<sup>74</sup> These marriages progressively increased family property ownership: Clovelly had been added by Sir James’ father, and was supplemented by estate in Midlothian in the 1850’s – like the aristocrats discussed earlier, the Williams had substantial interests elsewhere.

Carmarthenshire politics in the early nineteenth century were characterised by frequent changes of allegiance and marked by violence and allegations of

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<sup>72</sup> R.G. Thorne, *The House of Commons 1790–1820*, London (1986), p. 580.

<sup>73</sup> Sir Nicholas Williams, Sir James’ great-uncle, was trumpeted by Jones as ‘a champion of truth and liberty’, *Carmarthenshire homes and families*.

<sup>74</sup> Sir James’ grandson became Sir James Hamlyn Williams Williams-Drummond.

corruption.<sup>75</sup> To survive and prosper in this world, Williams needed wealth and a combative personality. The scene was set by the local political grandees – Dynevors and Cawdors – who rivalled each other for influence, fighting their battle in two seats, Carmarthenshire County and Carmarthen borough. It was the former which had attracted the Williams who at different times had managed to upset both nobles: Sir James' great uncle fell out with Dynevor in 1796; his father regained his support in 1802, at which point he upset Cawdor. Between 1820 and 1832 the seat changed hands between the Williams and Rice Trevor (Dynevor) several times so that in 1836 Sir James had relatively recently suffered defeat at Rice Trevor's hands. The strategy he employed to survive in this rough and tumble world was to remain nominally independent, although in practice it was necessary for Williams to seek alliances with either Whigs or Tories to secure sufficient support.<sup>76</sup> That said, Sir James espoused radical policies in the Commons: he opposed church rates, supported the abolition of slavery and was pro-reform, while at local level he opposed the formation of a police force. Any one of these positions was certain to upset one or more of the other Llandilofawr gentry.

The bitterly fought 1802 *Lecsiwn Fawr*, when Sir James' father confronted Sir William Paxton, Cawdor's chosen candidate, demonstrates the poisonous political atmosphere inhabited by the Williams. The election was 'characterised by scurrility and riotous scenes at Llandilo',<sup>77</sup> and after allegations of gross fraud by Williams, his opponent Sir William Paxton petitioned Parliament for a re-run, but withdrew when it

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<sup>75</sup> Corruption was 'the most notable and persistent trait in Carmarthenshire municipal history' right up to WW1: Davies, *Secret Sins*, p. 24; Bribery was 'widespread...getting a man into Parliament was more important than getting him there honestly', Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, p. 164.

<sup>76</sup> Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, p. 119.

<sup>77</sup> Thorne, *House of Commons*, p. 490.

became apparent that his own election ‘expenses’ amounting to £15,690 4s. 2d. would also be investigated.<sup>78</sup> Such competition had required Williams to spend on a similar scale, paying ‘a crippling price for Commons membership’, and causing him to unleash a torrent of invective against ‘the rapacity’ of his fellow gentry – ‘Carmarthenshire Hell Devils’ who ‘delighted in the ruin of those that never did them harm’.<sup>79</sup> Such feelings of intense animosity and associated fluid political affiliations provide clues to relationships between gentry members, and help to explain the lack of cohesion among *ex officios* when it came to Poor Law matters.<sup>80</sup> Side-effects of this hostility were felt among local tradesmen whose bills for the 1802 entertainments were disputed and remained unpaid for a considerable period, and Williams had to remain away from Edwinstord for some time after the election.<sup>81</sup> Elections for Carmarthen borough, which had an outstanding reputation for universal political corruption, were even more tempestuous: a second election had to be held in 1831 because rioting was too severe for a result to be obtained first time round, the protagonists in this battle including the two peers, their gentry supporters and Paxton.<sup>82</sup> It was, then, normal practice for Carmarthenshire gentlemen to indulge in fierce political battles, changing sides whenever it suited them to do so – like the

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<sup>78</sup> Voters were treated to 36,901 dinners, 25,275 gallons of ale and 11,068 bottles of spirits. Each vote received by Paxton cost him over £10: W. Samuel, *Llandilo*; A.J. James and J.E. Thomas (eds), *Wales at Westminster: a History of the Parliamentary Representation of Wales, 1800–1979* (Llandysul, 1981).

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in R. Moore-Colyer, ‘The Edwinstord estate in the early nineteenth century’, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, XXVI (1975), p. 200.

<sup>80</sup> There were many undercurrents to political rivalry among the gentry: J.W. Hughes, Tregib, another *ex officio*, tried and failed to persuade a different ‘true Independent’ to stand.

<sup>81</sup> NLW: Edwinstord MSS 2987, 2 January 1804, letter from Williams to his agent Daniel Price.

<sup>82</sup> The 1835 *Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Municipal Corporation* noted: ‘Government [of Carmarthen] is mainly carried on for political purposes. This object is carried out throughout, in the election of mayor, sheriffs, councilmen, gaoler, constable, bellman, and in the choice of magistrates and juries’. Carmarthen was a ‘beargarden’ with ‘weekly allegations of jobbery and financial incompetence’, Jones, *Rebecca’s Children*, p. 26.

farmers described in chapter 4 they were strongly individualistic. *Ex officios* brought this tempestuous and adversarial relationship with each other to their involvement in union business.

Edwinsford differed from other estates in Llandilofawr in one important respect – most sprawled across many parishes, but Williams’ holdings were concentrated in two: he owned one-third and one-fifth of the properties in Talley and Llansawel respectively.<sup>83</sup> As well as paying rent tenants made payments in kind described as ‘Duties’, consisting of lime, coal, fowls and two varieties of sheep – reapers and shearers.<sup>84</sup> These varied from year to year: John Griffiths, Bank, paid 33 teals of lime and coal, 12 fowls and 10 shearers in 1854, but only 8 teals of minerals, 4 fowls and 4 shearers in 1861. The Agent clearly kept a watchful eye on tenants’ ability to pay: close attention to tenants’ wellbeing was a key element of many Carmarthenshire landlords’ policy, Edwinsford being a prime example. Immensely detailed rent books contain several columns for each tenant: five record annual rental, arrears from previous years, allowances for property tax, stamps and bad debts, and the sixth headed ‘Allowance made on account of the badness of the times’ shows a special reduction made during the early 1840’s. The allowance varies from tenant to tenant, those on newly-granted leases receiving nothing while the average was 9%.<sup>85</sup> Judged by this, Williams was a caring landlord, although the turnover rate of tenants could be

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<sup>83</sup> NLW: Edwinsford MSS 4666, rent books 1843, 1844 and 1845.

<sup>84</sup> NLW: Edwinsford MSS 13 itemises ‘Duties’ from 1854 to 1861. Payment in kind can be seen as anachronistic, or a paternalistic response to tenants’ desires given farmers’ difficulty in raising cash.

<sup>85</sup> By 1830 most Edwinsford farms had annual tenancies: traditional three-life leases were discontinued before 1820: R. Moore-Colyer, ‘Edwinsford’ (1975). For leases see D. Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth-Century Wales* (London, 1977), pp. 58-61; Jones, *Rebecca’s Children*, pp. 58/9; Williams, *Rebecca Riots*, pp. 63-68; G.E. Mingay, *Rural Life in Victorian England* (Stroud, 1976), pp. 47-8.



high.<sup>86</sup> Further examination shows an interesting link between Williams and elected guardians. Between 1854 and 1861 twelve out of thirty-two tenants owing ‘Duties’ were elected guardians at some point, and a thirteenth was relieving officer for the area. An even more fascinating relationship emerges when rent arrears are considered: at 46% of the annual total in 1843, they were un-typically high in Talley, the overall estate average being only 15%. In Talley, incidentally, tenancies changed hands much less regularly than in Llansawel. The largest individual sums by far comprising 55% of the total were owed by only two individuals, John Jones, Talley Demesne, and Thomas Thomas, Glanyraffondu Genol, both active elected guardians. Similarly, two Llansawel tenants were on the board, while the father of a third, James Davies, Ffosgotta, was solely responsible for two-thirds of total parish rent arrears.<sup>87</sup> A suspicious Assistant Commissioner might have seen permitting arrears as a means of paying elected guardians, although Williams could not always dictate what happened – there were contested elections in 1845, 1848 and 1855. A simpler explanation was offered by fellow gentleman Capt. Lewis Evans, who asserted that ‘there are several of Sir James Williams’ farmers that are all ruined’.<sup>88</sup>

As noted earlier, Sir James was an unenthusiastic participant in union affairs – he played no personal part at the board during the first year. Thereafter he attended seven times between October 1837 and March 1838; paused for eighteen months; made eleven appearances between November 1839 and April 1840, and then stayed

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<sup>86</sup> Between 1814 and 1826, 75% of tenancies in Llansawel changed hands. For turnover rates see Jones, *Rebecca’s Children*, p. 59; A. Rees, *Life in a Welsh Countryside* (Cardiff, 1950), p. 146.

<sup>87</sup> Ffosgotta had been troubled for some time, having been untenanted between 1818 and 1820: Moore-Colyer, *Edwinsford*, p. 208.

<sup>88</sup> PP 1844 [531] p. 76. Evans attributed this to soaring rates caused by excessive expenditure on bridges and police.

away until he died 21 years later. The purpose of his first intervention in October 1837 was to secure the appointment of Dr. Nathaniel Rees as medical officer – on very special terms. He was to superintend and receive full salary for three districts, attend one of them personally but provide assistants to cover the others, presumably on lower rates of pay. The motion was successfully put by David Thomas, Tyn y Cwm, elected guardian for Talley and one of Sir James’ tenants, and, like Hamlyn Williams, noted for his belligerent approach. It was seconded by his friend William Garnons Hughes, who became chairman briefly a few weeks later – proposed by none other than Sir James.<sup>89</sup> Such an arrangement was clearly not in accordance with PLC rules: two guardians formally complained, and the appointment was rescinded. Details of what was clearly a ‘job’ were revealed by AC George Clive in his report to the PLC.<sup>90</sup> His account of these proceedings provides the most explicit available evidence for Llandilofawr *ex officios*’ self-serving activities, and is thus worthy of further exploration.<sup>91</sup>

When Clive recommended the guardians not to accept the arrangement, Sir James moved that it should be ‘persisted in’, revealingly calling on the board ‘not to submit to the dictates of the PLC’.<sup>92</sup> Vigorous and protracted opposition from six elected guardians caused excruciating embarrassment to Rees, who ‘ashamed of the grossness

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<sup>89</sup> Intricate connections were in play here. Thomas was Talley guardian for fourteen of the seventeen years 1836 to 1853, and instigated one of the most dramatic confrontations in Llandilofawr in 1843. This concerned the appointment of a medical officer for his own parish and is one of the major subjects treated in chapter 7. The guardians for the other 3 years were father and son James Thomas and Thomas Thomas, Maesllan, tenants of Garnons Hughes.

<sup>90</sup> TNA: MH 32/12, 10 November 1837. Clive had apprehended the gentry machinations but does not seem to have been aware of the lower level connections.

<sup>91</sup> Driver, *Power and Pauperism*, p. 135.

<sup>92</sup> TNA: MH 32/12, 10 November 1837.

[of Williams' plan] gradually retired' and the motion failed: for Clive it was 'the most scandalous job I have yet seen'. Worse, he was subsequently 'called in' by Sir James and so infuriated by what transpired that he vented his spleen more generally.<sup>93</sup> 'He said he was very sorry, but that the surgeon was his most particular friend, i.e. his most zealous partizan. But thus it is in the County of Carmarthen, nothing but jobbing and dishonesty among the gentry, and ignorance among the farmers'.<sup>94</sup> This event was one of several concurrent South Walian transgressions: a Pembrokeshire medical officer had 'run away, cheating everybody'; Tregaron union was 'hopeless' and Lampeter no better; the Carmarthen union chairman and vice-chairman, being 'in a minority of two' had resigned, 'disgusted with the constant thwartings by Town guardians and the stupidity of the farmers'. Clive's rage finally extended even further: 'If all the magistrates of Carmarthen were transported, I should do very well'.<sup>95</sup> It is clear from this that, in Clive's experience, Llandilofawr *ex officio*s did not conform to the hoped-for model of perfection described at the start of this discussion. Far from supporting the PLC's attempts to introduce the new law, Williams used his best endeavours to frustrate it.<sup>96</sup>

Williams' later interventions were often on issues specific to his parish: he demanded a revaluation of the rates, and asked the union to repossess and sell a recently-deceased pauper's effects. He sent a representative to check on non-resident paupers' means, charging the cost of the trip to the rates, and when that was declared illegal,

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<sup>93</sup> TNA: MH 32/12, 24 November 1837.

<sup>94</sup> There was a similar problem in Cardiganshire, A.E. Davies, 'The New Poor Law in a rural area 1834–1850', *Ceredigion*, 8 (1978), p. 245.

<sup>95</sup> See Roberts *Origins*, p. 275.

<sup>96</sup> Clive was only 32 – a young upstart to seasoned politicians like Williams. He became Liberal MP for Hereford between 1857 and 1880.

called an EGM to petition the House of Commons. He took a disciplinarian approach, proposing a motion requiring able-bodied workhouse inmates to work, or be reduced to half rations if they refused. His final contribution was to secure the appointment of Edward Waters as workhouse master: he was offered the post, accepted, but failed to appear for duty. Sir James Williams was, then, a contradictory mixture of benign landlord and bellicose political activist, intensely hostile to rivals and ‘officialdom’. Most of his recorded activities in the union were in pursuance of his own parish affairs, where he held an unusually strong position as principal ratepayer and landlord. He greatly disliked ‘interference’ from outsiders such as the PLC: Talley was to him akin to his own kingdom, where he considered it to be his right to pursue his own interests, and promote those of friends and supporters, and his duty to ensure that tenants were well-treated, in return for which they tried to help him achieve his objectives.<sup>97</sup> After Sir James’ death the family played no personal role in union affairs, but the tradition of indirect influence continued through the election of the Edwinsford agent David Long Price as guardian for Talley, a post he held for 20 years.<sup>98</sup> This is the only example in Llandilofawr of such a connection.

### The Thomas family of Caeglas

The contributions made by James Thomas Caeglas and his son John Lewes Thomas are radically different from those of Philips or Williams. Thomas senior (1775 – after

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<sup>97</sup> He made Christmas donations to the poor in ‘his’ parishes, such as ‘rugs, blankets and shoes for 200 families’ in addition to a cow: *Welshman*, 1 January 1842. For a discussion of opposition to London from persons such as Williams, see Roberts, *Origins*, p. 265.

<sup>98</sup> Successive generations continued the family’s penchant for conflict – his son-in-law spent much of the 1850’s fighting a legal battle with his estranged mother and siblings over his inheritance: NLW: Edwinsford MSS 23, 24, 25. The correspondence suggests that he believed Long Price acted against him and in concert with his mother.

1851) came from a family which had been in the area for several generations. He was in his sixties when the union was formed and attended the board about four times a year until 1841, during which time there is no record of him having acted contentiously. On 12 April 1845 his son John Lewes Thomas (1818–1875) attended his first meeting and was unanimously elected vice-chairman, an appointment which was part of a top-level reshuffle.<sup>99</sup> Thomas' new position marked the start of a union career which was to span thirty years, including 25 as chairman. During his first five years on the board he was virtually the only active *ex officio* – while he was present at over half of the meetings, all others taken together only managed 15 out of 150. At 27, he was the third successive chairman to take office at a very young age, which marks Llandilofawr out from the area norm.<sup>100</sup>

The Thomases were minor gentry, and James had been a magistrate for many years. His younger son pursued a career in the Royal Navy while John employed himself running the 1,800 acre estate, acting as JP, and engaging in union affairs. Estate income was sufficient to permit the employment of a governess, two nurses, a cook, a groom and a couple of maids, all of whom lived in. Conveniently, their residence Caeglas was only half-a-mile from the union workhouse and within easy walking distance of Llandilo town, situated in the scattered hamlet of Trecastle – not a 'posh' area. According to the 1851 census many of the seventy households were farmers of under fifty acres; there were equal numbers of artisans and widows; finally came twenty agricultural labourers and two paupers.<sup>101</sup> Thomas thus lived very much

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<sup>99</sup> Capt. John Lewis became Chairman.

<sup>100</sup> Chairmen of neighbouring unions such as Llandovery, Llanelly and Carmarthen were in their fifties.

<sup>101</sup> HO 107/2471/342 ff. 10 to 20.

among members of the local community rather than in a secluded mansion, and he would have had a close engagement with the real-life experience of ordinary people. This explains the benign nature of his chairmanship, throughout which John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen was his deputy: they were a team, drawn from different parts of the social spectrum, but with a common quality of long-standing in the community.

In 1856 his wife Frances died, aged 34, leaving ‘an infant two days old bereft of a parent exemplary in every Christian virtue’.<sup>102</sup> The infant did not survive. He remarried a year later, his new wife producing four daughters and three sons.

However, tragedy struck in 1875: Lewes Thomas died of tuberculosis aged 57, two days after the birth of a child who died a few hours later. His ‘grateful tenants’ paid him a fond tribute – a tablet in Llandilo parish church describes him as ‘an upright Christian gentleman, a fearless and honest magistrate, and a most kind and considerate landlord’.<sup>103</sup> He was a model of paternalism in a positive sense: and unlike some parts of England, his active involvement in union affairs did not detract from the esteem in which he was held.<sup>104</sup>

His arrival on the board in April 1845 followed a divisive dispute over appointing medical officers (see chapter 7) which had been handled ineptly by Griffies Williams,

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<sup>102</sup> Laugharne parish church memorial. It also commemorates her brother William ‘whose life rich in promise from his many excellent qualities of mind and disposition was suddenly cut off in the 24<sup>th</sup> year of his age’.

<sup>103</sup> There is a large stained glass memorial window to him in the church, while a neighbouring window pays similarly affectionate tribute to Dr. David Prothero.

<sup>104</sup> R. Wells, ‘Social protest, class, conflict and consciousness in the English countryside, 1770–1880’, in M. Reed and R. Wells (eds.), *Class, conflict and protest on the English Countryside, 1700–1880* (London, 1990), p.194 suggests that gentry support for the New Poor Law was a major factor in ending rural paternalism; see also Brundage, *Prussian Minister*, p. 45. See Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, pp. 93/103 for Carmarthenshire gentry paternalism.

causing him to stand down abruptly.<sup>105</sup> One of Thomas' objectives, therefore, was to restore harmony: to that end he acted non-contentiously, for example remaining 'neuter' when voting took place to appoint the clerk, George Williams, and a registrar. He tried but failed to block the selection of George Tracey as Llandilo rate collector, a person later found to be unreliable, failing to pay his balances to his successor for 3 years. Fellow *ex officios* proved unhelpful by abstaining when the board split on the appointment of a relieving officer, forcing him to deploy his casting vote, his only real show of strength. Together with John Lewis he succeeded in defusing a major dispute over a change to rules on non-resident relief by proposing a compromise. For 10 years the minutes record no motion proposed by him, a policy quite unlike that of his predecessors: he acted as an administrator rather than someone who led from the front, decisive actions being led by John Lewis with the new clerk acting as background 'fixer'. This shrewd approach restored a degree of stability to the board.

However, in 1855 there was a seminal event in the union's life. Tracey's replacement as Llandilofawr parish rate collector resigned and was discovered to have absconded with £538, almost 50% of the year's rates: to make matters worse, the offender, Thomas Williams, was the clerk's brother. There was a sudden upsurge of activity as eager *ex officio* and elected guardians came forward to propose remedies, take the credit for the resultant improvement, and pin the blame on someone else. Lewes Thomas, however, remained unscathed and continued his strategy of keeping his head below the parapet.<sup>106</sup> His ability to restore calm and establish a smooth routine is

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<sup>105</sup> He had caused disarray by misunderstanding his voting rights. He had also just been appointed to the bench.

<sup>106</sup> Notably he abstained from voting when a replacement for the errant Williams was selected two years later.

demonstrated by the fact that after the drama of 1855, elected guardians' attendance progressively declined to under 40% over the next ten years – they had little to argue about. Previous dramas concerning appointments did not resurface, a series of medical officers and other officials were selected peacefully – unlike other *ex officios*, he displays a lightness of touch. In 1866, following a serious confrontation with other *ex officios* about rateable values (see chapter 3) he expressed a desire to stand down, but John Lewis persuaded him to remain, which he did until his death ten years later, a period more notable for what did not happen than what did, and one in which external 'interference' in union affairs was relatively modest. For a quarter of a century a 'kind' member of a minor gentry family with very strong local connections held the union fort.<sup>107</sup>

#### *Ex officios* generally post the 1855 rate scandal

The upsurge of *ex officio* activity came in the form of three new faces at the board – David Pugh, Sir John Mansel and William du Buisson Esq. – and the reappearance of Rev. Griffies Williams ten years after standing down as chairman. The newcomers brought fresh, 'professional' talent to the board, Mansel and du Buisson as businessmen, and Pugh as barrister turned politician: their activity tailed off after 1861 once propriety had been re-established.

Pugh was part of the Carmarthenshire tradition of changing political loyalties, 'the personality of the candidate being at least, if not more, more important than his

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<sup>107</sup> Other sympathetic Welsh union chairmen included Llanfyllin: J. Hainsworth, *The Llanfyllin Union Workhouse: a Short History* (Llanfyllin, 2004), p.7



politics'.<sup>108</sup> He was Tory MP for Carmarthenshire from 1857 to 1868, then turned Liberal, in which guise he served a second term from 1885 to 1890. Throughout, he felt unconstrained by established party positions, declaring 'I wish to preserve my independence'.<sup>109</sup> His opposition to church rates put him at odds with Cawdor, and as soon as the latter became union chairman, Pugh stayed away. With an estate of over 6,000 acres in Carmarthenshire, he was a substantial landowner and ratepayer: his younger brother was vicar of Llandilo.

The du Buisson family were of Huguenot origin settling in Llandebie parish in 1770.<sup>110</sup> They formed a cutlery manufacturing business, became partners in the Black Ox bank of Llandovery, and, in the 1860's, were significant local benefactors, setting up a school in their home parish and paying for restoration of the church. The family was clearly 'foreign', but by the time of William du Buisson's appearance as *ex officio*, had managed to gain acceptance into Carmarthenshire society: two generations, for example, served as Carmarthenshire High Sheriff.

Pugh and du Buisson reappeared briefly in 1872 when the clerkship became vacant but were not seen again after fending off a LGB attempt to redraw union boundaries in 1874/5. Finally, once Cawdor took the chair in 1876 – at 59 rather older than his predecessors – Mansel and Griffies Williams were regular participants, the period of this study thus seeing a transition from an almost complete lack of *ex officio* activity

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<sup>108</sup> Jones, *Rebecca's Children*, p. 88.

<sup>109</sup> D. Pugh to Lord Cawdor, 31 October 1866. Quoted by Cragoe p. 139.

<sup>110</sup> T.H. Lewis, 'A Carmarthenshire Huguenot family', *Carmarthen Antiquary*, II (1945).

at the beginning to active aristocratic presence at the end: only Griffies Williams, now in his late sixties, had survived the whole period.

### The élite group and control of the board

Discussion so far has described the model *ex officio* and concluded that those in Llandilofawr fell short of that ideal: effective leadership here did not come from the upper echelons of society.<sup>111</sup> In a possibly pre-emptive strike against magistrates such as Walters Philips and Peel, the Llandilo establishment had moved – quietly, and without the need for open conflict – to take the top union posts on its first day of existence. Such establishment groups, memorably dubbed ‘distinctive and independent rural élites’, were to be found in many parts of Carmarthenshire, and one thrived in Llandilofawr in the form of the extended Lewis/Prothero clan.<sup>112</sup> From the very beginning *ex officios* were on the back foot, and the élite could ‘fix it’. An added twist in this case was the progressive rise of John Lewis, Llwynfedwen, within the élite group. This discovery of the extent of one man’s personal dominance for so long is hitherto uncharted territory in Welsh Poor Law studies: neither has a local élite been shown to act as a ruling caste in a Welsh union.<sup>113</sup> Lewis’ rise was possible because, as

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<sup>111</sup> This perceived lack of positive engagement with the Poor Law by Carmarthenshire magistrates existed well before 1836, so the assertion that ‘magistrates, in effect, made and remade the [old] Poor Laws’ could well have been valid, although not in the same favourable sense as in England. S. King, ‘Welfare regimes and welfare regions in Britain and Europe, c. 1750’s to 1860’s, *Journal of Modern European History*, 9 (2011), p. 56.

<sup>112</sup> I.G. Jones, *Explorations and Explanations: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales* (Llandysul, 1981), p.287. (In current parlance such controlling groups are popularly known as ‘Taffia’).

<sup>113</sup> By contrast the powerful position of aristocrats in some English unions is well known: Brundage, *Making of the New Poor Law*; Song, ‘Poor Law unions in Oxfordshire’; D. Eastwood, *Governing Rural England*; Hurren, *Protesting*.

noted earlier, class boundaries in Carmarthenshire were indistinct.<sup>114</sup> Although not of the gentry, Lewis could co-exist on equal terms with the establishment as long as his network of personal connections was properly utilised.

Three phases in the evolution of the élite group's reign can be ascertained, broadly coinciding with those described in chapter 4 when discussing guardians' attendance record. In each of them Lewis' personal position became stronger. In phase one establishment members Capt. John Lewis (no relation) and Dr. David Prothero were the formal leaders of the union. They may have had reservations about some of Lewis' activities such as addressing Rebecca protestors, but he was effective. A decisive moment came with his ruthless treatment of opponents during the appointment of a medical officer in 1843 (see chapter 7), one from which he never looked back. His board colleagues recognised his value by appointing him vice-chairman in 1849, his proposers interestingly including those with whom he had had the most venomous exchanges in 1843 – a demonstration that the ability to 'fix' things was one of the most valued qualities in the farming community.

A second phase started after 1850. Capt. Lewis died and the young and inexperienced Lewes Thomas became chairman while Dr. Prothero remained in the background. Lewis thus now had only one gentleman to contend with, and for 25 years they co-existed happily – as an 'administrator' Thomas did not seek dominance. Lewis survived a difficult period after the 1855 rate scandal, following which his personal popularity soared to new heights, and he was helped by a new élite member, David Harries, Abersannan, somewhat of an *éminence grise*. Harries, farmer of 300 acres and similar

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<sup>114</sup> Jones, *Rebecca's Children*; Williams, *History of Wales*.

in age to Lewis, was guardian for Llanfynydd for 43 years, unopposed for most of that time, and an ardent attendee at the board. He became joint vice-chairman, taking on Dr. Prothero's mantle after his death. The two complemented each other perfectly, Lewis a nonconformist, and Harries an Anglican, both successful farmers. Harries had years of experience and had weathered the storms of contentious appointments – he was, perhaps, a moderating influence on Lewis.

Phase 3, a period marked by the first involvement of an aristocrat as union chairman, commenced with Lewes Thomas' death in 1875. Lewis utilised Cawdor's frequent absences to full advantage, turning the normal chairman/vice-chairman, aristocrat/working farmer power balance upside-down and assuming effective control 'from below'. The full extent of his dominance became clear in the early 1880's during a second squabble over a medical officer appointment discussed at the end of chapter 7. Thus, the composition of the élite group had evolved over time with Lewis as the only constant, but increasingly dominant force, the other members being drawn from progressively higher echelons of the social scale as time wore on. Another way to visualise the evolution of the élite group is to consider the three phases as: the Llandilo establishment plus John Lewis; minor gentleman Lewes Thomas and John Lewis on equal terms; and John Lewis operationally superior to the aristocratic Cawdor.

To assure its position the élite group needed to keep the central authorities at bay and exert a tight rein on the union's day-to-day administration. The key to both of these requirements was the union clerk, so ensuring that a 'suitable' person was in post was crucial. This had been readily achieved in 1837 by easing a member of the establishment clan into the job: John Prothero Lewis was the son of Capt. Lewis,

nephew of the first chairman and cousin to Dr. Prothero – a man to be trusted. He was also an able, up-and-coming attorney with a flourishing private practice, and, in January 1839 he decided to resign the clerkship to pursue his other interests.<sup>115</sup> This led to a pivotal moment in establishing the élite group's position vis-à-vis London – the Assistant Commissioner, Edward Senior, made a serious tactical blunder during the appointment process for the replacement clerk. A short account of proceedings explains how, only two years into Llandilofawr's existence, the PLC lost local credibility – it was clearly seen to be unable to impose its will, a position from which it never recovered.

On 26 January 1839 the process of electing a new clerk got off to a disastrous start from the *ex officios*' point of view when Messrs. Philips and Peel unsuccessfully moved for the clerk's salary to be reduced from £80 p.a. to £60: they had apparently not learnt from their previous experience. Elected farmer guardians then went on to appoint Thomas Williams by a majority of 12 votes to 7. Senior believed that Williams' opponent Nathaniel Davies was a better choice and decided to go to war on the matter, attacking on two fronts: the way the run-up to the election was conducted and Williams' suitability for the job. Senior was convinced that Prothero Lewis had 'fixed' it for Thomas Williams, an employee in his private practice, to succeed him in a typical piece of Llandilofawr chicanery: 'every appointment is the result of a trick', he told his superiors.<sup>116</sup> However, he then proceeded to launch a vitriolic personal attack on Williams and his supporters which backfired – faced with such blatant

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<sup>115</sup> He was 'a man of sterling worth, ability and independence in his profession', *Red Dragon: the National Magazine of Wales*, 5 (1884), p. 198.

<sup>116</sup> TNA: MH12/15922. Correspondence ran between 9 January 1839 and early March. Senior believed that Lewis had 'some pecuniary interest in the matter' and had forewarned Williams of his resignation (not even telling his own father, the chairman), to allow him to canvas guardians in advance of the election.

interference from an (English) outsider, the board closed ranks.<sup>117</sup> Guardians who had previously supported Davies abruptly changed sides voting unanimously for Williams, thus presenting a united front to London: despite Senior's earnest exhortations, his PLC colleagues could find no excuse to intervene, and Williams was appointed.<sup>118</sup> With their power base established, the élite group was now in a position to secure its own chosen clerk whenever the need arose in the future, and their solution was simple – install the next generation. Thus, Thomas Williams was succeeded by his son George, and he was followed by Richard Shipley Lewis, son of Prothero Lewis. By this means the élite group effectively established the clerkship as an extension of itself into the mid-1880's, making it possible to resist outside influence for the whole period of this study. For a quarter of a century (1846 to 1872) George Williams was clerk while John Lewis was vice-chairman – a partnership which provided effective control of union policy under Lewes Thomas' benign gaze. In this reading, the management of Llandilofawr was quite unlike the PLC model, but it did offer one big advantage – stability.

The case for proposing this group as the seat of power and influence is supported by considering their extra-union status.<sup>119</sup> The Government Inquiry into the causes of the Rebecca riots, chaired by former Poor Law Commissioner Sir Thomas Frankland

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<sup>117</sup> Williams, Senior said, had 'little education, no knowledge of the law', and was 'not of very sober habits'. He would be ' beholden' to those who voted for him – farmers 'so small as to be in fact labourers, ignorant of English, sent there by their respective parishes to oppose the working of the law': TNA: MH12/15922.

<sup>118</sup> There was a sub-plot. Those changing sides were provoked by Senior's recent decision to sack their auditor on the grounds that he was 'inefficient, and the nephew of the leading Guardian of the Board': revenge was sought by deliberately appointing the 'wrong' clerk. Minutes after doing so they determined not to comply with the PLC's order to appoint a District Auditor to replace their sacked friend.

<sup>119</sup> They were an 'active élite', Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, p. 93. Their combined service to the union amounted to 200 man-years.

Lewis, assembled in Llandilo to examine expert witnesses On 3 December 1843.<sup>120</sup>

Those called included Capt. John Lewis, Dr. Prothero and John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen.<sup>121</sup> Such a Commission only took evidence from reputable sources, which suggests that the élite group fulfilled that criterion – they were also privy to ‘the mood of the people’ and their grievances. Their evidence contains specific and serious allegations about magistrates’ repeated failures to take the necessary actions to ensure proper administration of the New Poor Law, thus shedding light on how Llandilofawr *ex officios* were regarded.

John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen, began his testimony with one of the guardians’ persistent grudges, magistrates’ refusal to exact maintenance payments from fathers of bastards: ‘they never make an order for more than 1s 6d a week [from] persons who could have paid much more’.<sup>122</sup> The group made a series of proposals designed to appeal to fellow farmers: reductions in union officers’ salaries; exemption of lime from turnpike tolls; reductions in tithes and fees charged by magistrates’ clerks. They also explained that upkeep of a private local weir was charged to ratepayers. When pressed as to why the owner had not been asked to pay, their answer was simple: ‘because the magistrates won’t get it in’. There was another contributory factor – the owner was himself a leading magistrate.<sup>123</sup> Lewis’s evidence is noteworthy for two reasons: his complaints are very precise, and he had specific remedies to propose,

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<sup>120</sup> Its *Report* was published in 1844: PP 1844 [531].

<sup>121</sup> Magistrates’ clerks John Davies and Nathaniel Davies, plus John Walters Philips were also called.

<sup>122</sup> *Report*, p. 350. Keeping a child in the workhouse cost 2s 0d. per week, but an examination of Carmarthenshire Quarter Sessions minutes 1837–1843 shows that every maintenance order was for 1s. 3d., and ended when the child was 7.

<sup>123</sup> They also alleged that as turnpike trustee he had ‘all the money’ spent improving the roads around his own house. *Report* p. 351.

particularly with regard to the current magistrates. He wanted them replaced by two stipendiaries each paid £500-£600 p.a. This is particularly illuminating as it shows willingness to pay for a better service, one provided by dispassionate professionals rather than those incumbent amateurs, Lewis' current *ex officio* 'colleagues' on the Llandilofawr board.

There were other criticisms of magistrates. There were inappropriate links between their private interests and court sessions: John Walters Philips, for instance, insisted on holding his monthly petty sessions in one of his own properties, the Salutation Inn, although a more convenient location was available. Further, magistrates' attendance at court was, like that at union board meetings, infrequent. In the last three years thirty sessions had been cancelled because magistrates did not attend.<sup>124</sup> This lack of attention to duty extended to County Sessions: 11 Llandilofawr *ex officios* were County JP's but, on average, only three attended Carmarthenshire Quarter Sessions between October 1837 and January 1843. Carmarthenshire magistrates were, then, deficient both in quantity and quality, while their imperious attitude was widely detested: 'they look upon the people as if they were beasts, not human beings',<sup>125</sup> a view echoed in one of Anne Beale's novels, where they were labelled 'blustering braggadocios'.<sup>126</sup>

The evidence given by Capt. John Lewis (1775-1850) is remarkable. He was a magistrate who chose not to act, at least partly because of his aversion to the

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<sup>124</sup> Evidence from Nathaniel Lewis, *Report* p. 351.

<sup>125</sup> *The Times*, 19 August 1843. See also L.A. Rees, 'Paternalism and rural protest: the Rebecca riots and the landed interest of south-west Wales', *Agricultural History Review* 59 (2011), pp. 45 and 52.

<sup>126</sup> Anne Beale, *Rose Mervyn of Whitelake* (London, 1879). She had inside knowledge: she was Governess to the Rev. Griffies Williams' children.



pecuniary self-interest of those who did. ‘Special sessions for the highways’, he explained, took place monthly: evidence of poor road quality was taken from parish surveyors, and repairs ordered. Magistrates summoned surveyors to attend in person, charging them 1s 6d for appearing: Mr Philips, Lewis added darkly, had shown a particular interest in the state of the roads.<sup>127</sup> Asked whether *ex officio* board members attended board meetings he offered telling evidence: ‘No, they never come near us now: it used to be a great benefit the *ex officio* guardians coming and sitting amongst the elected guardians: but they were out-voted, and therefore they ceased to attend’.<sup>128</sup> His reference to fellow *ex officios* in the third person is particularly significant, since it emphasises the gulf between them and elected guardians. His obituary makes clear the regard and affection in which he was held – and thus indicates the impact which his damning indictment must have had on local opinion. Recalling his chairmanship of the union, ‘duties which he discharged regularly and efficiently’, it concludes with a flourish: “the loss of this benevolent gentleman will be felt by his relatives and numerous friends to all of whom he was devotedly attached. In all the relations of life he was a perfect specimen of the ‘fine old English gent’.”<sup>129</sup> From the final comment we may infer that he also possessed a wry sense of humour.

The élite group also played a leading role in other local organisations. The Llandilo Savings Bank was formed in the early 1830’s with a mission to encourage financial

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<sup>127</sup> Philips’ penchant for collecting money was widely resented. Twelve parishioners from Llangathen and Llanegwad explained that there was a surveyor for each of their thirteen hamlets and one for the parish, so Philips charged fourteen times. *Report* p.133, Question 3130. He was nevertheless indicted with fellow magistrates for failing to keep the bridge at Llandilo in good repair. Capt. John Lewis was a member of the jury issuing the indictment.

<sup>128</sup> *Report* p. 349.

<sup>129</sup> *CJ*, 27 December 1850.

providence by offering working people an opportunity to set money aside for hard times. Signatories to the Banks' *Rules* included Dr. Prothero and Capt. Lewis, as well as William du Buisson and Rev. John Williams.<sup>130</sup> Early depositors included future clerk John Prothero Lewis and his sister, together with one of Capt. Lewis' servants. Success in attracting money from ordinary working people is evident: many depositors were unable to write their name in the ledger, leaving only their mark. By the time the union was formed the bank's balance sheet shows funds of over £17,000, a figure which had grown to £26,154 in 1850. The bank's 'Managers' were listed in 1837 and resemble a roll-call of union activists – Rev. Griffies Williams, William Garnons Hughes, Dr. Prothero, Capt. Lewis, John Prothero Lewis. John Lewes Thomas was Chairman by 1865.

Responsibility for public health matters was vested in the Llandilo Local Board of Health (BoH) in July 1859: its chairman was Dr. Prothero, union clerk George Williams was Secretary, and other members of the élite group appeared regularly at monthly meetings.<sup>131</sup> The BoH dealt with matters such as the public supply of water to the town, for which purpose it raised £3,400.<sup>132</sup> It also dealt with gutters, pavement obstructions and street lights: six gas lamps were erected in Llandilo in 1860.<sup>133</sup> By 1870, the Board levied a district rate of £408, and a scale of water charges was introduced. In 1872, it became the Rural Sanitary Authority, the chairman being the same person as for the union. Thus, with Cawdor frequently absent, John Lewis,

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<sup>130</sup> CA: DB 69, Minute books of the Llandilo Savings Bank.

<sup>131</sup> CA: DB 79, Minutes of the Llandilo Board of Health. It became a sister organisation to the union board. Meetings were held back-to-back, the relevant members staying on.

<sup>132</sup> This was contentious and leading gentry refused to pay, although Dynevor demanded double pipes to his property to provide a fire protection system: CA: DB 79, March 1863.

<sup>133</sup> Thomas Peter was paid 2s. p.w. as town lamplighter.

Llwynyfedwen, took the chair, and attended nearly every meeting. His influence had formally extended beyond union affairs, and the élite group generally played a broad role in the Llandilofawr's public affairs.

## Conclusions

It has been shown that the gentry population in Llandilofawr – those available to serve the union in an *ex officio* capacity – consisted of three parts. The first group, aristocrats, displayed no real interest in Poor Law affairs for almost half a century, preferring to devote their time to other gentlemanly activities. A second group, to which the majority of local gentry and magistrates such as Walters Philips belonged, inhabited a rather murky world of political intrigue and self-serving involvement in ostensibly paternalistic public activities. Such Poor Law activities as they did indulge in served only to demonstrate, and possibly even deepen, the divisions between them. Their attitude also seems to have exacerbated social disunity more broadly: they were widely disliked by working guardians, not in tune with the spirit of the New Poor Law as exercised by them, and their failure to support its administration was resented.<sup>134</sup> Since this situation became apparent at the very first union board meeting, the authorities' hopes that a 'model' force of *ex officio* guardians would come forward to steer the New Poor Law into action in Llandilofawr had little hope of success from the start. Indeed, some of the most trenchant criticism came from Assistant Commissioners – the very men the *ex officios* were supposed to support. In this respect, Llandilofawr gentry were not unique, since similar comments were made

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<sup>134</sup> This is a very far cry from parts of rural England: 'Throughout Northamptonshire the Poor Law redrew and reinforced social cohesion', Hurren, *Protesting*, p. 83; Brundage also sees the NPL system 'restoring social cohesion', *Making*, p. 183.

about their peers in Carmarthenshire generally, and in neighbouring Cardiganshire.<sup>135</sup>

Magistrates here had become a largely discredited group, and were in no position to exert positive leadership: previous Welsh Poor Law studies have not, however, uncovered the extent of their negative impact on union activities. It was a third group, well-established local gentry families, those who represented the fabric of Llandilo society, who stepped into the gap, effectively carrying on doing what they had done for generations. From day one, they were the driving force in Llandilofawr union, evolving into a enduring élite group which was expanded to embrace younger, determined farmers who took care of day-to-day matters. A crucial element of their approach was to ensure that the union clerk was one of their own, and they did this by establishing a virtual dynasty of clerks. In these respects, the manner in which implementation of the New Poor Law was managed in Llandilofawr had wider implications for the development of local government, since, as has been shown, the same group was involved in other public bodies in the area.<sup>136</sup> Since current historiography of mid-nineteenth century local government in south west Wales does not include assessments of the role of such élites (if any) on boards of health, turnpike trusts, or whether their activities reached County council level, it is not yet possible to

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<sup>135</sup> *Ex officio*s from both counties were lambasted by those within their own ranks. They were ‘so bad that they should never go on: the greatest benefit in the world would be if it was left entirely to the elected guardians’, Capt. Lewis Evans’ evidence to 1844 Inquiry, *Report*, p. 76. Edward Lloyd Hall described bench colleagues in Cardiganshire as ‘ignorant and timid of character, accustomed to servile obedience from their own dependents’ and ‘not inclined to be civil’: TNA: HO 45/454, 20 June and 23 June 1843.

<sup>136</sup> Brundage reminds us that the New Poor Law is part of the nineteenth-century “revolution in government”, *Making*, p. 181. See W. Apfel and P. Dunkley, ‘English rural society and the New Poor Law: Bedfordshire, 1834–47’, *Social History* 10 (1985); D. Eastwood, ‘Rethinking the debates on the Poor Law in Early nineteenth-century England’, *Utilitas*, 6 (1994); S.E. Finer, *The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick* (London, 1952); O. MacDonagh, ‘The nineteenth-century revolution in Government: a reappraisal’, *Historical Journal* 1 (1958), pp. 52-67; H. Parris, ‘The nineteenth-century revolution in Government: a reappraisal reappraised’, *Historical Journal* 3 (1960); R. Gutchin, ‘Local improvements and centralisation in nineteenth-century England’, *Historical Journal* 4 (1961) pp. 85-96; W. Lubenow, *The Politics of Government Growth: Early Victorian Attitudes toward State Intervention 1835-1848* (Newton Abbot, 1971); D. Roberts, *Origins*.

look beyond Llandilofawr. It would also be interesting to know whether the same élites were closely involved with charities or orders such as the Ivorites and Oddfellows as they were in Llandilofawr. Extensive biographical detail together with specific events in union affairs have been used to illustrate how both positive and negative attributes of these three groups played out: these will be amplified in chapters 6 and 7 with detailed accounts of the workhouse and medical care. Importantly, the élite group consisted of people who were generally well liked, people with many friends and extensive local connections: it is largely for these reasons that there is little evidence of significant active opposition to the New Poor Law in Llandilofawr. Above all, the story is of the dominance of one individual – John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen. This too will be further demonstrated in following chapters.

## Chapter 6

### In-relief in Llandilofawr union

The first meeting of the Llandilofawr board was held on 16 December 1836. Having elected a chairman, vice-chairman and clerk, and decided to recruit two relieving officers (to be ‘men in the full vigour of life’) the next item on the agenda was the workhouse. It seems clear that there had been preparatory discussions on the subject between the Assistant Commissioner, local gentry and vestry members because there was no need for extensive debate on the matter: the minutes simply record ‘agreed that it is expedient to build a workhouse forthwith’.<sup>1</sup> In the context of historians’ assertions of strong Welsh resistance to the idea of workhouses<sup>2</sup>, such ready agreement is surprising, but the board’s second decision, albeit made on a majority of just one vote, was very unusual indeed – they planned to build a joint workhouse with neighbouring Llandovery union. AC George Clive, assisted by a committee of seven Llandilofawr guardians led by *ex officio* William Peel agreed to ‘treat with the Llandovery Board’ to that effect. The cost would be borne by the parishes of both unions, each paying a proportion equivalent to its share of the overall rateable value.<sup>3</sup> Matters were proceeding more smoothly than in nearby unions, where ‘considerable skirmishes’ on the subject occurred in Neath; there was ‘nothing but personal quarrels among the

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<sup>1</sup> CA: BG 43, 16 December 1836.

<sup>2</sup> A. Digby, ‘The rural poor law’, in D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1976) ; F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: the Workhouse System, 1834–1844* (Cambridge, 1993); D. Williams, *The Rebecca Riots: a Study in Agrarian Discontent* (Cardiff, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> There were 12 parishes in Llandilofawr union, and 11 in Llandovery.

guardians' in Carmarthen; and Merthyr Tydfil guardians left the room if the subject was even mentioned.<sup>4</sup>

By January 1837 agreement on a suitable location near Abermarlaes Turnpike gate had been reached, and negotiations with E.P. Lloyd, the owner of the land, commenced: his asking price was £200, but it would also be necessary to pay the current tenant £7 compensation. Llandilofawr guardians wanted the cheapest option: sample plans for a 150-person workhouse had been obtained, and they envisaged that a small modification could increase the capacity to their target level of 180, thus avoiding the need to hire an architect. Over the next few weeks this plan gradually stalled: agreement on price could not be reached; Lloyd was unable to prove title to the land; and Llandovery guardians insisted that an architect should be involved. Thus, at the end of March 1837 Llandilofawr guardians decided to go it alone, negotiating a 99 year lease on land south of Llandilo town: a weekly rent of 5/- was agreed with Lord Cawdor's agent. This site had the further advantage of fulfilling the normal criteria for workhouse locations, being in a central part of the union – it is difficult to see how the original choice was considered satisfactory by Clive.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> TNA: MH32/12, Clive to PLC 27 August 1836 and 2 June 1837.

<sup>5</sup> It was 6 miles from both Llandilo and Llandovery and would have involved extensive journeys for paupers and guardians to attend meetings. Clive had a strong preference for large unions and might have subsequently proposed a merger of the two, using the savings of a single building as a benefit. I. Dewar, 'George Clive and the establishment of the New Poor Law in South Glamorgan, 1836–1838', *Morgannwg*, 11 (1967), p. 48; Digby, 'Rural poor law', p. 150; A. Brundage, *The Making of the New Poor Law: the Politics of Inquiry, Enactment and implementation, 1832–39* (New Brunswick, 1978), p. 101.

The PLC wanted to ensure that the workhouse was designed ‘properly’, and pressurised Llandilofawr to employ architect George Wilkinson.<sup>6</sup> The guardians engaged him on 4 April 1837, starting a relationship which rapidly became unsatisfactory for both parties, largely because guardians constantly intervened during both design and construction, causing confusion and delay. Wilkinson had developed new ideas about workhouse design which he wanted to use in Llandilofawr, but the board thought otherwise, demanding a plan ‘to resemble Pembroke workhouse, or as nearly as can be’.<sup>7</sup> The eventual outcome, a layout identical to that at Pembroke, is shown in Figure 6.1. One contemporary described it as ‘a neat building in the Elizabethan style, with a handsome front of cut stone’,<sup>8</sup> an extravagance which led a correspondent to *The Welshman* to protest that the board had ‘allowed [the] architect to indulge his peculiar fancy in ornament at a cost of one-sixth of the whole building’.<sup>9</sup> Presumably because they did not trust Wilkinson to meet their ever-changing requirements, guardians bombarded

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<sup>6</sup> Wilkinson designed Witney workhouse in 1835, followed by Cardiff and seven further Welsh unions: N. Cooper and K. Morrison, ‘The English and Welsh Workhouses of George Wilkinson’, *Georgian Group Journal*, XIV (2004). He moved to Ireland and built 163 workhouses, becoming more prolific than his more celebrated competitors: K. Morrison, ‘The New Poor Law Workhouses of George Gilbert Scott and William Bonython Moffatt’, *Architectural History*, 40 (1997).

<sup>7</sup> Other guardians used personal influence to adjust workhouse design to their own taste. Llanfyllin’s appearance reflected the style of the chairman’s Jamaican plantation buildings, J. Hainsworth, *The Llanfyllin Union Workhouse: a Short History*, (Llanfyllin, 2004), p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> S. Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Wales* (Llandysul, 1849) p. 524. It was demolished in the mid 1960’s.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous letter to *The Welshman* 4 January 1839. The author was outraged at the ‘absurdity’ of choosing ‘Oxford Gent’ Wilkinson over local architects. Llandilofawr’s tailoring was not unique: ‘each Board could indulge its own tastes’, N. Longmate, *The Workhouse: a Social History* (London, 1974), p. 89; F. Driver, ‘The historical geography of the workhouse system in England and Wales, 1834–1883’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 15 (1989), p. 284.



Figure 6.1: Llandilofawr workhouse in the 1960's



Source: Terry Norman, Ammanford.

him with letters specifying the precise location of the kitchen boiler, and requiring floating valves to be fitted to cisterns. Just before construction started they decided to convert the dining room to a chapel, and Wilkinson's chapel to a bakehouse, which, the above correspondent acidly noted, 'has neither flue nor oven', and was centrally situated in the men's yard. By the end of June, only three months after the decision to proceed, three tenders had been received.<sup>10</sup> The guardians were not impressed, finding them all too expensive, but after obtaining quotations from three other builders which

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<sup>10</sup> Local builder W. Samuel tendered £2243, with bids of £2913 and £3293/18/3 from Messrs Pilditch and Ayres.

all turned out to be even higher, appointed Samuel. A £2,500 loan at 5% for 20 years was arranged, a clerk of works who would work jointly on the Llandovery project (where Wilkinson was also commissioned) was appointed, and building commenced in August 1837.

An unusually well-attended board meeting on 10 October learned that Samuel was substituting grey stone for the front wall for blue and he was instructed to abide by the original plan. Worse was to come: in February 1838 they discovered that Wilkinson had directed Samuel to add a tower, an idea they rapidly quashed, but their own modifications had already increased the cost by over 25%. By the end of August construction was nearly finished, and Wilkinson wrote to advise guardians that they could take possession immediately, making deductions for work which was ‘improperly completed’, or wait and pay more: they chose the first option. Fitting out commenced, the recruitment process for a Master was started, and a board resolution passed declaring that out-relief for able-bodied men, single women with bastards, and deserted wives would be discontinued as soon as the workhouse was ready. The first board meeting took place there on 11 December 1838.

Towards the end of 1838 the relationship between guardians and Wilkinson soured further when he sent them an invoice for £160 3s. 6d. They were outraged – AC Clive,

they said, had told them to expect a bill of £50.<sup>11</sup> In protracted correspondence, they accused Wilkinson of providing defective plans and specifications causing ‘much trouble and dispute’ with the builder. In return the architect complained of ‘a Party in the position of the Board having a veto’ over his plans, and allowing the builder to make ‘any alteration he considered advantageous’.<sup>12</sup> The guardians sought help from Assistant Commissioner Clive, but this failed to materialise because he was reassigned to East Anglia. Desperate attempts to persuade the central authorities to come to their rescue were fobbed off with a reply stating that ‘the Commissioners do not know that they can interfere in the decision of the matter’. No record of the eventual outcome survives.

As they argued about Wilkinson’s bill, it became apparent that some building work was indeed defective: the roof leaked, the windows were ill-fitting, and there was trouble with a culvert.<sup>13</sup> Over the next few years there was a continuous need for running repairs, but there were no significant alterations until 1845, when £163 was spent to enlarge the sick ward. Thereafter it took another 22 years for guardians to respond to London’s requests: a vagrant ward was added in 1867 and new day rooms in 1883.<sup>14</sup> The board was extremely reluctant to spend money even on structural items such as a

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<sup>11</sup> There is no surviving written record of this. It is unlikely that any guardian had experience of a project of this financial magnitude: the cost was one hundred times larger than the rental qualification for elected guardians.

<sup>12</sup> TNA: MH12/15922 letters to PLC 14 September, 16 October, 10 December 1838.

<sup>13</sup> Poor quality workhouse construction was common in S. Wales. Similar problems were encountered at Neath, Swansea, Llanelly and Llanidloes.

<sup>14</sup> Driver, *Power*, p. 89.

leaking roof: in 1886 AC Bircham wearily recorded that ‘guardians are gradually repairing the roof which has been defective for years’.<sup>15</sup> The idea of connecting the workhouse to mains water was rejected in 1862, and inmates had to wait until 1880 for oil lights to replace candles. A slightly more enthusiastic approach was taken to providing work facilities for the able-bodied and vagrants: a mill was purchased in 1843, and a stone breaking shed in 1863 (replaced in 1886), but regular prompting was necessary to ensure that inmates were actually forced to do any work.<sup>16</sup> Expenditure on the board room was by comparison relatively lavish, although it measured only 23 x 16 feet, and is thus unlikely to have emulated the ‘typical’ version, ‘a mixture of an Old Bailey Court, a small chapel, and a third-class railway waiting room’.<sup>17</sup> In 1884 it was extended by 9 feet, and, at John Lewis’ behest, equipped with two windows and ventilators at a cost of £50: a urinal for the sole use of guardians was also installed.<sup>18</sup> Notwithstanding these new comforts, it was decided that winter meetings would be held in the Shire Hall to shorten most guardians’ journey by one mile. After 45 years of union operation this marks a watershed, a move by the board to distance itself from the workhouse both physically and philosophically. The discussion now steps back to review how the concept of in-relief envisaged by the authors of the 1834 *Report* compares to the way Llandilofawr guardians applied it in practice, thus establishing a context for considering the extent to which this key element of the NPL ‘succeeded’.

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<sup>15</sup> TNA: MH12/15936. Bircham’s report 15 April 1886.

<sup>16</sup> Guardians took much trouble to acquire a ‘No. 14 Lever Motion mill’ which could be operated by four men, shipping it from Bristol to Llanelly at considerable expense. CA: BG42, 4 March 1843.

<sup>17</sup> *Social Science Review*, 1865, quoted in T. May, *The Victorian Workhouse* (Princes Risborough, 1997) p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> A decision taken during stringent economy measures: CA: BG42, 2 February 1883. The LGB unenthusiastically commented ‘the expenditure does not seem open to serious objection’: MH12/15933, 4 June 1884.

Given the close connection between medical care and in-relief, this chapter is constructed as part of a pair together with that which follows.

### NPL philosophy and Llandilofawr

Establishing workhouses was a core part of NPL thinking, the ‘centrepiece’ of the plan to deal with pauperism.<sup>19</sup> Popularly seen as ‘incarceration’, the threat would act as a deterrent to the ‘base moral habits’ of the labouring poor.<sup>20</sup> On the positive side paupers would be inspired to embrace Christian virtues such as providence, and encouraged to exercise greater self-discipline, pausing before embarking on a marriage and family commitments they could ill afford.<sup>21</sup> At the other end of society the upper classes would be protected against insurrection which might result from unrelieved indigence.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, it would be fair to ratepayers, especially those whose finances meant that they struggled to care for their own families: as one put it, ‘poor is the diet of the workhouse, poorer is the diet of the small ratepayer, poorest is the diet of the

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<sup>19</sup> F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: the Workhouse System, 1834–1844* (Cambridge, 1993) p. 147; P. Thane, *The Origins of British Social Policy* (London, 1978), p. 11; S. King, ‘We might be trusted: female poor law guardians and the development of the New Poor Law: the case of Bolton, 1880–1906’, *International review of Social History* 49 (2004) p. 27; D. Green, *From Artisans to Paupers: Economic Change and Poverty in London, 1790–1870* (Aldershot, 1995), p. 211.

<sup>20</sup> Driver, *Power*, p. 61.

<sup>21</sup> P. Mandler, ‘Tories and paupers, christian political economy and the making of the New Poor Law’, *The Historical Journal* 33 (1990); D. Williams, *The Rebecca Riots: a Study in Agrarian Discontent* (Cardiff, 1971), p. 140.

<sup>22</sup> J. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor relief 1795–1834* (London, 1969).

independent ratepayer'.<sup>23</sup> To work effectively the workhouse needed to be 'repulsive', 'an uninviting place of wholesome restraint': this would be achieved by applying the principle of 'less eligibility'.<sup>24</sup>

For some, there were holes and inconsistencies in these arguments. William Lutley Sclater, chairman of Basingstoke union, warned that although the workhouse would provide a refuge for the destitute, the able-bodied would 'submit to long and severe privations or commit crime rather than enter the house', while from the perspective of a farmer whose pool of cheap labour would be removed if the parish stopped organising work, the prospect of in-relief was 'not merely objectionable but execrable'.<sup>25</sup> In any case there was, he added, no clear understanding of what the term 'independence' meant: he feared that it was 'a cant expression without definition'. The Hon. Rev. Godolphin Osborne considered some of the basic ideas about the poor to be 'erroneous': the poor were not alone in pursuing 'vicious habits' – all the crimes of which they stood accused 'exist equally in the classes above them'.<sup>26</sup> In an excoriating account of gentlemen busy 'gambling in the gorgeous clubs of St. James' he censured

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<sup>23</sup> Sir Francis Hendy, *English Charity* (London, 1835).

<sup>24</sup> A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700–1930*, (Basingstoke, 2002); A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces*, (London, 1978); N. Longmate, *The Workhouse* (London, 1974) p. 82; PP [28] 1834 *Report from Commissioners for inquiring into the administration and practical reform of the poor laws*, App. A, p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> W.L. Sclater, *Letter to the Poor Law Commissioners on the Working of the New System* (Basingstoke, 1836).

<sup>26</sup> See G. Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (London, 1984); Poynter, *Society and Pauperism*.

them for displaying the same ‘extravagance, immorality, drunkenness and reckless disregard for the future’ as the ‘poor and ignorant labourer’.<sup>27</sup>

In Wales too, some of those associated with the administration of the NPL saw it as their duty to help paupers lift themselves from their current ‘degraded’ state, and some influential members of this group believed that the workhouse was an essential element of the plan to achieve this. Henry Leach, chairman of Haverfordwest union, wrote a series of letters to his elected guardians, mostly small ‘ignorant’ farmers like those in Llandilofawr, in an attempt to enlighten them with ‘correct principles’.<sup>28</sup> He explained that Old Poor Law administrators in Pembrokeshire had erred like their foreign counterparts in Denmark, Norway and Prussia: the ‘right’ to relief was enshrined. Although it sounded compassionate, it made paupers’ situation ‘less agreeable than the independent labourer’, and removed their ‘right to property’. By contrast Haverfordwest’s deployment of the workhouse was kinder: ‘if we do not place the pauper in a situation which none but the absolutely destitute will accept, we inflict evil upon society and degradation and misery upon the poor that cannot be imagined’.<sup>29</sup> The Rev. Archer Clive, brother of Llandilofawr’s first Assistant Commissioner, enthused about the benefits of the workhouse for the ‘sick, old and helpless’: they would be ‘allowed tea and butter, be comfortably lodged’ and children would be

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<sup>27</sup> Hon. Rev. Godolphin Osborne, *A View of the Moral and Physical Condition of the Agricultural Labourer* (London, 1844).

<sup>28</sup> Leach was a Welsh gentleman with ‘an exceptional influence’, D.J.V. Jones, *Rebecca’s Children: a Study of Rural Society, Crime and Protest* (Oxford, 1989), p. 47.

<sup>29</sup> H. Leach, *Fifth Letter to the Haverfordwest Board of Guardians* (Haverfordwest, 1839). This letter runs to sixteen pages.

schooled. The able-bodied who were poor because of their own misconduct, however, would get ‘what they deserve’ in the form of ‘hard fare and hard work’.<sup>30</sup> And William Day, AC for Llandilofawr from 1841 to 1844, benefitted from personal experience in improving the lot of labourers and ratepayers alike; in 1826 he had persuaded his local vestry to take a more robust approach to dealing with poverty. The practice of the parish organising work for able-bodied men needing support had depressed wages, but when this was abolished and the workhouse became the sole means of relief, wages and employment rose, the number of paupers fell by 60% and the rates bill by 40%. A firm approach to in-relief was of the essence: ‘without the stigma, [the workhouse] should embrace the discipline of a prison’.<sup>31</sup> Anticipating things to come he envisaged that such workhouses could cater for a whole district rather than a single parish, and commented at length on the ‘evils’ of paying rents. In similar vein to Leach and Archer he maintained that too much relief was ‘a bonus upon chicanery, a premium on improvidence...the more [the pauper] receives, the greater is his cunning [to find ways to obtain more].’ The workhouse test solved that problem.<sup>32</sup> If conditions inside were optimal, ‘only the utterly degraded and destitute would enter’.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Rev. Archer Clive, *A Few Words to the Poor and Overseers on the New Poor Law* (Birmingham, 1836).

<sup>31</sup> W. Day, *An Inquiry into the Poor Laws and Surplus Labour and their Mutual Reaction with a Postscript with Observations on Tithes and the Corn Laws* (London, 1833). Day’s view belongs to the ‘traditional’ view of why the OPL needed replacement: G.R. Boyer, *An Economic History of the English Poor Law, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, 1990). He also identified a ‘neo-traditional’ view espoused by the Webbs and Hobsbawm, and the ‘revisionist’ stance taken by Blaug.

<sup>32</sup> On the workhouse test see A. Brundage, *England’s ‘Prussian Minister’: Edwin Chadwick and the Politics of Government Growth, 1832–1854* (London, 1988), p. 46; Brundage, *English Poor Laws*, pp. 75–81; Digby, *Pauper Palaces*, pp. 128/9, 136/7; B. Harris, *The Origins of the British Welfare State: Society, State and Social Welfare in England and Wales 1800–1945* (Basingstoke, 2004), p. 47; D. Roberts, *Victorian Origins of the British Welfare State* (New Haven, 1960), p. 238–241; T. Thomas, *Poor Relief in Merthyr Tydfil Union in Victorian Times* (Glamorgan, 1992), pp. 83, 118.

<sup>33</sup> P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865–1914* (Oxford, 1987), p. 196.



This positive view of the benefits of the workhouse was by no means universal in Wales, and historians have emphasised Welsh resistance to ‘incarceration’, citing specific local objections: repugnance to the separation of husband and wife; high workhouse staff salaries; and resentment that workhouse inmates were, if anything, housed in better conditions and more generously fed than hard-working independent farmers who paid for their keep.<sup>34</sup> Evidence of resistance was demonstrated in that, even by 1841, some Welsh unions such as Lampeter (immediately adjacent to Llandilofawr) and Tregaron had not built workhouses.<sup>35</sup> Crowther paints a more general picture of Welsh reluctance, guardians believing that the best way to keep rates down was to offer ‘parsimonious outdoor relief’.<sup>36</sup> Elsewhere Dewar observed that the Bridgend union chairman, anticipating resistance from his guardians, warned AC Clive that it would probably be necessary to obtain an order to build,<sup>37</sup> while for Gwyn Williams ‘bastilles were [seen as] a central enemy’.<sup>38</sup> David Williams saw the Welsh attitude even more vividly, claiming that some boards ‘had to be coerced before they would comply’, if only because guardians were ‘frequently elected under a pledge to refuse to build a workhouse’.<sup>39</sup> Such a picture of widespread opposition was supported

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<sup>34</sup> NPL bastardy rules were also bitterly resented. Workhouse inmates were widely believed to eat better than those outside: ‘in the greater number of cases...the whole body of inmates subsists on food far exceeding both in kind and amount...that of the majority of the persons who contribute to their support’: PP 1834 [44], *Report into the Practical Administration of the Poor Laws*, p. 31.

<sup>35</sup> Digby, ‘Rural poor law’, p. 159; A.E. Davies, ‘The New Poor Law in a rural area 1834–1850’, *Ceredigion*, 8 (1978), p. 263.

<sup>36</sup> M.A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834–1929: the History of an English Social Institution* (Athens GA, 1981), p. 50.

<sup>37</sup> I. Dewar, ‘George Clive and the establishment of the New Poor Law in South Glamorgan, 1836–1838’, *Morgannwg*, 11 (1967) footnote 54.

<sup>38</sup> G. Williams, *When was Wales? A History of the Welsh* (London, 1985) p. 194.

<sup>39</sup> D. Williams, *The Rebecca Riots: a Study in Agrarian Discontent* (Cardiff, 1971) p. 139.

by citing instances of physical resistance: incendiary attacks on both Llandovery and Narberth workhouses in July 1838 and January 1839 respectively, and the storming of Carmarthen during the Rebecca Riots. Seen from this perspective, Welsh objections to workhouses were part of general hostility to the NPL, which ‘initiated a decade of agitation and unrest’ in rural South Wales.<sup>40</sup> Put more forcibly, the Welsh thought the NPL was there ‘to be subverted not administered’.<sup>41</sup>

The workhouse was specifically intended to be a highly visible symbol to deter all but the desperate from accepting in-relief, a purpose in which it is widely acknowledged to have succeeded: it ‘loomed large in working-class consciousness’ becoming a ‘feared and shameful institution’.<sup>42</sup> This strong and enduring antipathy seems to lie behind Welsh historians’ view of the NPL in Wales generally as cruel and oppressive – the relationship between Welsh poor law administrators and the central authorities has been largely portrayed in terms of epic struggles between the weak and the powerful, and the treatment handed out to paupers seen in terms of conflicting forces of good and evil.<sup>43</sup> For Welsh workhouses specifically, this is certainly the picture painted in the published work reviewed in the historiography section of this thesis – the NPL story often starts

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<sup>40</sup> D. Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in Britain: from Chadwick to Booth, 1834–1914* (London, 1998) p. 43.

<sup>41</sup> Digby, ‘Rural poor law’ p. 159.

<sup>42</sup> K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 211; Brundage, *English Poor Laws*, pp. 75–81.

<sup>43</sup> For cruelty see U. Henriques, ‘How cruel was the Victorian Poor Law?’, *The Historical Journal*, 11 (1968).

and stops with ‘bastilles’.<sup>44</sup> Readers are encouraged to believe that guardians were generally of a malevolent disposition, given to employing tyrannical workhouse staff who imposed cruel regimes on the poor and helpless. In the same way that the authorities promoted the workhouse as a symbol in the 1840’s, historians writing well over a century later have maintained it as the dominating theme of the practical implementation of the NPL in Wales.

It is, however, difficult to reconcile the picture of reluctance to build, general antagonism to the concept, coercion from the authorities, specific revulsion to separation, or a cruel regime with the Llandilofawr situation.<sup>45</sup> It was shown earlier that the Board’s decision to build was taken within hours of the union’s formation, and there is no surviving record of any significant local opposition to the idea. This is not to say that the workhouse was greeted with great enthusiasm as guardians’ reluctance to spend money on the fabric shows, but even in Carmarthenshire generally, where strident and vocal opposition to ‘high’ salaries and the separation of husband and wife certainly occurred, it is difficult to identify obvious reasons for supposing that such issues were

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<sup>44</sup> This approach is epitomised in D.J.V. Jones, *Before Rebecca: Popular Protests in Wales 1793–1835* (London, 1973); *Rebecca’s Children: a Study of Rural Society, Crime and Protest* (Oxford, 1989); D. Williams, *The Rebecca Riots: a Study in Agrarian Discontent* (Cardiff, 1971); and G. Williams, *When was Wales? A History of the Welsh* (London, 1985). These historians wrote when industrial conflict in South Wales was common: a 1970 dock strike, a 1980 steel strike, and, the most celebrated in local culture, miners’ strikes in 1972, 1974 and 1983. Popular belief that such action represented a glorious victory for working-class people influenced the way these historians interpreted the intention and the effects of the NPL in south Wales. The final chapter title in *The Rebecca Riots* – ‘Rebecca Triumphans’ – expresses the feelings clearly. Protesting was more important than winning.

<sup>45</sup> A. Davies takes a similar view of the Cardiganshire reaction, ‘The New Poor Law in a rural area 1834–1850’, *Ceredigion*, 8 (1978), p. 265, but Crickhowell’s guardians set out ‘to punish poverty’, F. Hankins, ‘From parish pauper to Union workhouse inmate’, (Part 2), *Bryncheiniog*, 31 (1998).

more odious to the Welsh than anybody else.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the argument about ‘coercion’ does not sit comfortably with the PLC’s remit: its powers to command were limited.<sup>47</sup> To help resolve this apparent problem in squaring Llandilofawr’s provision of in-relief with the accepted view of outright opposition, the following section considers aspects of the workhouse and its governance in more detail in an attempt to probe more deeply.

### Llandilofawr workhouse

The notion of considerable variation in the affairs of individual workhouses is well established: ‘each workhouse was a world to itself’, while those in rural unions needed a ‘particular approach’.<sup>48</sup> The PLC itself realised that its orders detailing correct workhouse procedures were subject to ‘active opposition’: each union was ‘a small municipality’ within which there were ‘discordant views’.<sup>49</sup> Against this background, it is perhaps not surprising that Llandilofawr, in a particularly remote rural location, was much more a world of its own than the authorities might have wished. The independence concept applies in two ways. First, it was relatively easy for individual boards to escape day-to-day management supervision – the central authorities’ only personal intervention was in the form of (usually annual) inspections. As long as the

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<sup>46</sup> In fact, PLC Rules provided for aged couples to be placed together ‘in a separate sleeping apartment’, and allowed outdoor relief for those ‘it may inexpedient to separate’: Article 10, *Workhouse Rules*, PP 1843 [389].

<sup>47</sup> Roberts, *Origins*, pp. 109-111; Harris, *Origins*, p. 48.

<sup>48</sup> Crowther, *System* p. 113; Englander, *Poverty*, p. 35; Digby, *Rural Poor Law*, p. 149.

<sup>49</sup> *The English Poor Laws and the Poor Law Commission in 1847* (London, 1847) p. 52.

union clerk also sent them a decent proportion of the required paperwork they were in practice satisfied. Second, the workhouse was physically separated from its immediate area by high walls, so staff had little more freedom than inmates – they were literally cut off from normal daily life – and many of them lived there for much more extended periods than the paupers.

The number of paupers who actually entered Llandilofawr workhouse and their demographic composition were far removed from the authorities' original vision. As shown in chapter 4, the vast majority of relief was given outside the workhouse – typically 95% or more. The workhouse could accommodate 180 paupers, but the average number never approached this level: only in 1860 and 1861 when the whole of South Wales suffered from exceptionally poor weather were there more than 90 inmates: between 1837 and 1885 the average number was only 47. From the beginning guardians had not expected a full house, as demonstrated by their early decision to restrict the number of bedsteads to 45.<sup>50</sup> This picture is similar to that in other Welsh unions, where workhouses were normally half-empty.<sup>51</sup> Compared to some, the Llandilofawr figures actually look high – William Day encountered only two inmates in Pwhelli in 1840, and three in Aberaeron in 1844, while Aberystwyth (capacity 200) housed less than 30 into the mid-1840's. The latter was particularly disappointing

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<sup>50</sup> Llandilo ironmonger C. Marlton supplied 30 double and 15 single bedsteads, and 45 pairs of blankets were also locally acquired: CA: BG43, 22 September 1838.

<sup>51</sup> E.A. Benjamin, 'Of paupers and workhouses', *Ceredigion* 10 (1985); J.H. Thomas and W.E. Wilkins, *The Bridgend-Cowbridge Union workhouse and guardians*, Cowbridge (1995).

given that it commanded ‘panoramic views of the town and surrounding scenery’, had the ‘finest water’, and was ‘picturesque, domestic, and somewhat collegiate’.<sup>52</sup>

Assistant Commissioners’ explanations of low occupancy rates consistently stressed two points – guardians preferred out-relief because it was cheaper, and justified it on health grounds having encouraged medical officers to issue appropriate, if misleading, paperwork.<sup>53</sup> This was said to be the case in Carmarthenshire by AC Neave, but nowhere in his 49-page *Report* does he refer to Welsh aversion to workhouses on philosophical or emotional grounds. He emphasises instead his view that failure to use the workhouse was unkind because ‘such paupers as require [workhouse] protection’ were left to find their own salvation elsewhere.<sup>54</sup>

Llandilofawr’s reluctance to use the workhouse did not diminish as time wore on. A prime example of how the board used obfuscation to keep authorities at bay on the subject came in 1885, 46 years after it had opened. The LGB asked why there were (still) so few inmates.<sup>55</sup> Presumably sensing an implied criticism that the workhouse

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<sup>52</sup> *Welshman* 23 April 1841, quoted in A.E. Davies, ‘The New Poor Law in a rural area 1834–1850’, *Ceredigion*, 8 (1978) App. 5. The article ran to 500 words in this tone. There were also favourable comments about Bangor from the *Carnarvon & Denbigh Herald*, cited in D. Llewellyn-Jones, ‘The fate of paupers: life in the Bangor and Beaumaris Union workhouse, 1845–1871’, *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society*, 66 (2005), p. 96; According to *The Cambrian* Swansea paupers had ‘a palace on Poppet Hill’, quoted in J.E. Thomas, ‘The Poor Law in West Glamorgan 1834 to 1930’, *Glamorgan History*, 18 (1974), p. 50.

<sup>53</sup> See S. King, *Women, Welfare and Local Politics 1880–1920: ‘We Might be Trusted’*, (Brighton, 2005), pp. 29–55.

<sup>54</sup> TNA: MH12/59, 9 November 1839. Neave’s *Report on Further Amendments to the Poor Law Amendment Act*.

<sup>55</sup> Some information on Welsh workhouse populations is in J. Hainsworth, *The Llanfyllin Union Workhouse: a Short History*, (Llanfyllin, 2004); D. Jones, ‘Pauperism in the Aberystwyth Poor Law Union 1870–1914’, *Ceredigion*, 9 (1980); J. Lindsay, ‘The Problems of the Caernarvon Union workhouse from 1846 to 1930’, *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society* (1991). See also

test was not being applied with due rigour, the clerk composed a delicate and elegant reply, informing them that ‘residence in the workhouse is not altogether voluntary’.<sup>56</sup> Although he volunteered further clarification – of the 29 inmates, 8 were insane, 4 were mothers with illegitimate children, and the total included 5 vagrants – the explanation is a deliberately indirect answer to the question.<sup>57</sup> The LGB did not pursue the matter.

Such demographics were usual in Llandilofawr workhouse, as 1851 and 1881 census returns reveal. In 1851, two-thirds of the 73 inmates were children (most without a parent), a fifth were single women, and the rest comprised the aged and vagrants. In 1881 half the 43 inmates were children, a quarter were old people, and a fifth were lunatics or idiots, the balance being young mothers, some of them unmarried.<sup>58</sup> The group most obviously absent in both cases is able-bodied males of working age – it is evident that Llandilofawr guardians made no serious attempt to force them into the workhouse if they needed relief and other means must have been deployed when

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N. Goose, ‘Workhouse populations in the mid-nineteenth century: the case of Hertfordshire’, *Local Population Studies*, 62 (1999); A. Hinde and F. Turnbull, ‘The populations of two Hampshire workhouses, 1851-61’, *Local Population Studies*, 61 (1998); E.C. Midwinter, *Social Administration in Lancashire, 1830-1860: Poor Law, Public Health and Police* (Manchester, 1969); S. Page, ‘Pauperism and the Leicester workhouse in 1881’, *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 63 (1989); J. Robin, ‘The relief of poverty in mid-nineteenth century Colyton’, *Rural History*, 1 (1990), pp. 193-218.

<sup>56</sup> TNA: MH12/15934, 23 October 1885. For a discussion of how clerks and guardians set out to frustrate ‘interference’ from London see Roberts, *Origins*, pp. 276-280.

<sup>57</sup> According to Brundage, the workhouse test was never applied comprehensively, so Llandilofawr was in good company, *Making*, p. 183.

<sup>58</sup> There has not been a Welsh equivalent of the growing work on the mentally ill in English institutions, see C. Smith, ‘Family, community and the Victorian asylum: a case study of the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum and its pauper lunatics’, *Family and Community History*, 9 (2006); W. Forsyth, J. Melling and R. Adair, ‘The New Poor Law and the County Pauper Lunatic Asylum: the Devon experience 1834-1884’, *Social History of Medicine*, 9 (1996); S. Cherry, *Mental Health Care in Modern England: The Norfolk Lunatic Asylum c. 1810-1998* (Woodbridge, 2003).

required. Apart from the separate identification of lunatics, no data has survived on the proportion of workhouse inmates who were there because of ill-health.<sup>59</sup> It also seems that in these years there were no married couples in the workhouse, in which case the question of separation was not a frequent practical concern.<sup>60</sup> Taken together, these points help to explain why the threat of the workhouse was not a hot topic of conversation in Llandilofawr. A further powerful reason to believe that there was a considerable degree of public acceptance (or apathy) is that the workhouse evoked little local publicity – its affairs were generally not criticised in the public domain. Complaints of ill-treatment were rare and not usually proven, and, as will be shown, schooling became a considerable success in the early 1860's. While spartan conditions and an unvarying diet were imposed, it is probable that the standard of living for many farmers and labourers in Carmarthenshire was at least as poor.<sup>61</sup> Llandilofawr workhouse seems to have been more akin to a 'small Welsh almshouse' than the harsh popular model put forward.<sup>62</sup> In Llandilofawr, the spirit of the law with regard to 'less eligibility' was not rigorously applied – and, from the point of view of inmates, it was much superior to its neighbour in Carmarthen.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See discussion in chapter 7.

<sup>60</sup> There are only two definite instances of married couples being in the workhouse, both discussed later.

<sup>61</sup> An account of apparently atrocious living conditions around Llandilo was given by Dr. Hunter: PP. 1865 [3484] *Seventh Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council*, App. 9, p. 500. Thomas Campbell-Foster provides a graphic account of ordinary farmers' inadequate diet, *The Times*, 2 December 1843; For workhouse diet compared to the norm outside, K. Parker, 'Radnorshire and the New Poor Law to circa 1850', *Transactions of the Radnorshire Society* 74 (2004), p. 187.

<sup>62</sup> Crowther, *System*, p. 47.

<sup>63</sup> There were regular criticisms of Carmarthen conditions and staff. The *Cambria Daily Leader*, 14 December 1867, revealed that although conditions were 'insanitary...the closets had not been flushed for two and a half years', the master said he did not know about it. AC Graves had written to guardians on numerous occasions but complained that 'they do little about it', TNA: MH32/33, 16 December 1867. A clue to Carmarthen officials' attitude was given when the master explained: 'separate rooms are not



### Life in Llandilofawr workhouse

Although surviving workhouse records for the period of this study are thin, it is possible to use events recorded in board minutes to provide an illustrative picture of workhouse life. This lack of locally held official records is in itself interesting – although union archives are ‘usually’ rich in workhouse material,<sup>64</sup> extant items for Llandilofawr comprise only the 1842 Master’s Journal; the Porter’s Book for 1854 to 1861; one Indoor Relief list; a few General Ledgers; and the Punishment book for 1878 to 1907 (and thus mainly beyond the end point of this study). Items such as Admission and Discharge registers<sup>65</sup>, Creed Registers and Accounts are wholly absent, and there is no trace of any of the prolific correspondence, which has (happily) been preserved at the National Archives along with Dietaries. It seems that those in charge of official records in Carmarthenshire did not deem them sufficiently valuable to warrant preservation. Moreover, there is not one single letter written by (or on behalf of) workhouse inmates in the local archives, although a small batch, all written in a twelve-week period in 1845, have been preserved at Kew.<sup>66</sup> One might conclude that several

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provided...for females of good and bad character’ because the cost would outweigh the benefits for a group ‘all of the same class viz. the lowest or uneducated’: TNA: MH32/32, 17 June 1859.

<sup>64</sup> Snell, *Parish and Belonging* p. 209.

<sup>65</sup> These would have cast valuable light on sickness as a cause of workhouse admission. For English examples see D. Jackson, ‘The Medway Union Workhouse 1876–1881: A study based on the admission and discharge registers’, *Local Population Studies*, 75 (2005); A. Negrine, *The Treatment of Sick Children in the Workhouse by the Leicester Poor Law Union, 1867–1914*, *Family and Community History*, 13 (2010).

<sup>66</sup> It is therefore not possible to add much from Llandilofawr to the burgeoning literature using pauper narratives to examine questions of paupers’ agency and strategies to improve their lot. See A. Gestrich, E. Hurren and S. King (eds.), *Poverty and Sickness in Modern Europe: Narratives of the Sick Poor, 1780–1938* (London, 2012); T. Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters 1731–1837* (Oxford, 2001).

generations of local officials specifically chose to keep workhouse matters firmly out of the public arena.

A surprising finding of this study is that, using the number of visitors to the workhouse as the measure, inmates and officials were rarely short of outside company – sometimes, led by the publican of the White Lion Inn, William Price, they came in groups of five to ‘visit the paupers’.<sup>67</sup> Dignitaries such as Lord Emlyn arrived from time to time, and there was a regular succession of clerics, some there to perform divine service. Family visits were not uncommon: in August 1855 John Jones came to visit his daughter, and in January 1856 John Bowen came to see his wife and children: Mary Howells received a dozen visitors over a ten-month period in 1857. Sometimes, it was also possible for inmates to go out: John and Isaac Jones went to visit their grandfather in May 1858, Mary Lewis ‘went for a walk’, and in November the schoolmistress ‘went to a Bidding’ which lasted all day.<sup>68</sup> The vast majority of recorded visits were to inmates rather than staff, but it is highly likely that the master regularly received local tradesmen on business matters, and guardians appeared in the board room once a fortnight, although, as the AC regularly complained, they hardly ever carried out official tours of inspection as a visiting committee.

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<sup>67</sup> Article 25 of the *Workhouse Rules* allowed visits if the master gave permission. They had to take place in a room separate from other inmates. Edwin Chadwick reminded guardians of this rule in a Circular Letter dated 31 October 1844. It seems that this rule was interpreted liberally in Llandilofawr.

<sup>68</sup> A Bidding was a traditional Welsh wedding custom. Friends and relatives of the bride and groom were expected to attend with presents.

In November 1857 there was a surprising addition to the inmate population when they were joined by the Rev. David Evans, his wife and five children. Evans had been vicar of Llangathen parish and wrote to the PLB to inform them that he was now unable to support his family without relief having been suspended from his post which had paid him £130 in tithes.<sup>69</sup> His presence in the workhouse caused raised eyebrows in London, and the PLB discovered that his removal from office was due to drunkenness. AC Graves considered it his duty to become involved, paying two one-hour visits to Evans in November 1857: he received at least nine further visits including several from the curate of Llandilo parish, the last in mid-March 1858. It is not clear what happened to the family immediately, but they were living in Llandilo in 1871, Evans still describing himself as vicar of Llangathen although another incumbent was in place. There is no other record of an Assistant Commissioner becoming personally involved with a Llandilofawr inmate, so Evans seems to have received special treatment: and, if official rules were applied, this would be a rare instance in which separation of husband and wife was a live issue.<sup>70</sup>

It is clear that the guardians kept a close eye on the workhouse dietary which was regularly modified.<sup>71</sup> Sometimes this was for economic reasons as when barley bread was substituted for wheat bread in October 1840, but the London authorities also recommended occasional variations, declaring in February 1849 for example, that a

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<sup>69</sup> TNA: MH12/15926, 13 November 1857. His suspension occurred on 18 October.

<sup>70</sup> No other Welsh poor law study has revealed anything similar.

<sup>71</sup> For dietaries in other Welsh unions see Hainsworth, *Llanfyllin*; Jones, *Aberystwyth*; Lindsay, *Caernarvon*; Llewellyn-Jones, *Bangor*; and J.E. Thomas, *West Glamorgan*.

drier and more solid diet was necessary ‘during the present morbid state of the atmosphere’.<sup>72</sup> Llandilofawr’s medical officers were also involved: in June 1852 they announced that it was ‘essential for the health of the paupers’ to receive 1 lb. of boiled potatoes on Saturdays instead of boiled peas. Meat featured as a regular part of the diet, but the authorities kept a careful watch for excessive generosity. In 1851 this gave rise to a bout of tetchy correspondence when the PLB discovered that the able-bodied had tea for supper, and wrote to ask why. This measure had been adopted, the guardians informed them, on the specific recommendation of the medical officer ‘in consequence of [paupers’] constant grumblings that the barley bread did not agree with them, and most of them being female’.<sup>73</sup> This explanation was not acceptable: an immediate rejoinder observed that ‘the giving of tea is altogether unusual’, and, as for the barley bread, ‘it is the common food of the peasantry of this union’. This exchange is a vivid example of the level of detail to which the authorities went in pursuance of what they regarded as effective supervision of union affairs.<sup>74</sup> They discovered that in Llandilofawr they were often unable to exert their authority on big issues and seem to have felt it necessary to indulge in micro-management elsewhere to assert at least some degree of power where they could, a practice interpreted as a strategy to exert control through ‘petty rules and regulations, boredom and monotony’.<sup>75</sup> Others may have seen it more simply – as meanness – but such ‘niggling attention to detail’ continued

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<sup>72</sup> CA: BG44, 24 February 1849.

<sup>73</sup> CA: BG44, 16 June, 1851.

<sup>74</sup> The master was to apply ‘minute personal attention’ to remedy any defects in applying the Rules: *Workhouse Rules*, PP 1843 [389] p. 74. For Inspectors see Roberts, *Origins*, pp. 152-167.

<sup>75</sup> Crowther, *System*, p. 39; E. Midwinter, ‘Victorian Social provision: Central and Local Administration’, in E. Martin (ed), *Comparative Development in Social Welfare* (London, 1972), p. 199.

throughout the period of this study. Yet another review of the dietary in 1883 produced apparently separate tables for each pauper classification, but a close look reveals minimal differences – compared to other groups the aged, infirm and imbeciles received an extra half-ounce of butter for breakfast, another half-ounce to go with their bread for supper, and one and a half pints of tea instead of cheese.<sup>76</sup> Tea, it seems, was no longer contentious – as one gentleman had long ago complained, compared to the workhouse diet, ‘poorer is the diet of the small ratepayer, poorest is the diet of the independent ratepayer’.<sup>77</sup>

‘Better’ discipline was seen by many as a necessary measure to reduce pauperism. For many, the poor had become ‘associated with dirt, bad health and immorality’, and it was feared that they might spread ‘evil habits’ to others: pauperism was seen as a disease: ‘a more disciplinary approach to welfare’ could be part of the cure.<sup>78</sup> This was a natural role for the workhouse, where discipline could be applied psychologically as well as physically. Thus, maintaining order and ensuring that inmates adhered to the rules were thought to be important elements of workhouse management. Setting the Rules down comprehensively was a matter of utmost importance for the PLC: they ran to twelve pages containing eighty Articles, and, in order to ensure that there was no

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<sup>76</sup> TNA: MH12/15933, 14 July 1883. This was a slow response to criticism from a MO: MH12/15933, 22 August, 1882. Despite his repeated complaints the diet was ‘very poor’, dayrooms were crowded, cheerless and ill-ventilated, and bedrooms close and stuffy. A lunatic had been allowed out, and was now lost. Poor ventilation may be because William Day had ordered the dayroom windows to be boarded up ‘to prevent communication’ between paupers: CA: BG 427, 3 May 1842.

<sup>77</sup> Sir Francis Hendy, *English Charity* (London, 1835).

<sup>78</sup> L. Hollen-Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers, 1700–1948* (Cambridge, 1998) pp. 126-134.

room for doubt, were distributed with an accompanying letter of the same length.<sup>79</sup>

Rules covered every aspect of workhouse life: classification; times to rise and go to bed; the taking of meals; a list of offences and punishments; and the banning of cards or smoking. The master's job description listed twenty-six duties, and, along with similar lists for the matron, medical officer and porter, blank copies of the multitude of forms to be regularly filled in were provided.

Although such a regime opened up the possibility of physical unrest, this does not seem to have been a major issue in Llandilofawr.<sup>80</sup> Some inmates responded by absconding, taking union property with them: the board pursued such offenders, for example spending 6/- in August 1841 to pay a constable to apprehend Mary Evans. The biggest single group of escapees was young mothers, who left their illegitimate children behind while they went to seek employment outside.<sup>81</sup> Inmate Elinor Lewis wrote to the PLC to explain the predicament: 'Your Petitioner is anxious to regain her Liberty being a Mantua Maker by Trade and able by her Needle to gain a comfortable living for herself, but the Parish authority will not allow her to go without taking the Child with her'.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> They were contained in PP 1842 [389] as *Appendix A to the Eighth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners* pp. 47 to 75.

<sup>80</sup> For workhouse unrest in England see D. Green, 'Pauper protests: power and resistance in early nineteenth-century London workhouses', *Social History* 31 (2006); for Ireland, V. Crossman, 'The New Ross workhouse riot of 1887: nationalism, class and the Irish poor laws', *Past and Present*, 179 (2003).

<sup>81</sup> Some felt that such mothers had little choice, their right to claim financial support from the father having been removed. Others such as Ellen Bowen were more desperate: she ran away to earn money as a prostitute having accused Lord Cawdor's best friend Capt. John Markham of fathering her daughter. This led to a stand-off between elected guardians, who wanted to pursue him for support, and Cawdor who unsuccessfully demanded that the board motion to do so be rescinded: CA: BG 43, 24 December, 1839. Ellen was spared prison, eventually dying of syphilis in the workhouse aged 23.

<sup>82</sup> TNA: MH12/15923, 31 May 1845. She received little sympathy and was told that she could only leave the house if she took the child with her.

Absconding had become such a problem by 1843 that the walls to the women's yard were raised by three feet to deter such attempts.

Evidence of occasional indiscipline is available from the workhouse punishment book, from which a clear picture emerges: there was a small number of repeat offenders.<sup>83</sup>

Some descriptions of what occurred are rather colourful, such as Mary Williams' threat 'to crumble an inmate's head': over a two-year period she variously 'refused to cleanse her person', 'behaved herself in a beastly manner' and 'tore two panes of glass', offences for which she was jailed for 21 days.<sup>84</sup> Between 1878 and 1882, 70 percent of

recorded offences were committed by only two persons. William Jones, who was deaf and dumb, threatened the master and matron with violence on several occasions, including one when he had somehow become drunk, and regularly refused to work, offences for which his diet was reduced and he was confined to a punishment cell.

Sadly for him he was in the workhouse for a considerable time as his offences ranged over a nine-year period. David Jones, only 13 years old, clearly suffered from severe behavioural issues, and received thirteen mentions in the punishment book in three months. He is reported to have caused deliberate damage to property, particularly by vandalising other children's clothes, and was generally disruptive. In one bout of violence he attacked his brother who had also been found guilty of 'annoying the other inmates'. This is one of the two definite cases where the whole family was in the house: his father took charge of him for a night after he had thrown clothing out of the window, and two days later 'his parents gave him a good thrashing', the master

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<sup>83</sup> See Green, 'Pauper protests', p. 155. In the West London workhouse six paupers committed one-third of the recorded offences between 1842 and 1846.

<sup>84</sup> CA: Abercennen 526, 17 January 1878 to 16 December 1879.

observing that ‘he is incorrigible in a workhouse’. Even putting him in a straightjacket did not help, and guardians eventually sent him to Neath Reformatory. In general, however, indiscipline was not the ‘endemic problem’ encountered in London, where the chief offenders were vagrants, girls, old women and adolescent males.<sup>85</sup> Up to 1842 only one Llandilofawr workhouse offender had been committed to prison, along with three from neighbouring Carmarthenshire unions.<sup>86</sup>

There was a prevailing view that workhouse visits from upper class ladies were highly beneficial, their ‘mere presence and appearance in the workhouse’ setting an example to inmates, breaking down ‘formidable barriers of vice, recklessness and improvidence’.<sup>87</sup> This idea was strongly promoted.<sup>88</sup> Accordingly, such visits were paid by leading ladies in Llandilofawr. Although offering food was inconsistent with maintaining a strict dietary, Mrs Gwynne Hughes, Tregib, provided a ‘liberal supply of beef, pudding and *cwru da* (beer)’ when her son attained his majority in December 1841, and the chairman followed suit on New Year’s Day. More beef was offered when the Prince of Wales was born, and Mrs Thomas, Caeglas, regularly gave Christmas presents of fruit between 1860 and 1880. A different approach was taken by socialite Hermione Jennings who donated clothes in 1881, and there are several mentions of ‘kindness to

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<sup>85</sup> Green, ‘Pauper protests’, pp. 14, 154.

<sup>86</sup> PP 1843 [63] [63 II].

<sup>87</sup> Rev. J.S. Brewer, *Lectures to Ladies on Practical Studies* (Cambridge, 1855). Driver, *Power*, p. 68.

<sup>88</sup> Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, pp. 198-201. The *Journal of the Workhouse Visiting Society* (January 1859) explains that its members were concerned with the ‘moral and spiritual improvement’ of inmates. See also Crowther, *System*.



the children' from Lady Dynevor and Lord Emlyn.<sup>89</sup> In a rather more curious move in 1884, John Lewis (now 73) and his niece were thanked 'for their kindness in entertaining the inmates'. Sadly the form of entertainment is not specified.

### Llandilofawr Workhouse Staff

The key member of staff was the master whose wife normally acted as matron. In the early years, Llandilofawr guardians and officials almost always used the term 'Governor' in written communications on the subject. It is not clear whether the use of this term also employed in the context of prisons was deliberately sarcastic, but it chimes with the popular view that the master 'was little more than a jailer'.<sup>90</sup> It was with rigorous discipline and organisation in mind that former military personnel were frequently chosen for the job, but Llandilofawr trod a different path adopting the compassionate approach espoused by Assistant Commissioners such as Day: for him requirements were 'diligence, firmness and mildness', someone with 'a knowledge of the habits of the indigent classes'.<sup>91</sup> Formal training for the job which was not seen as a profession, however, was neglected.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> This suggests that uniforms were not in use at this time. There is no surviving record of the use of uniforms in Llandilofawr workhouse. But for Bangor see Llewellyn-Jones, 'Fate of paupers', p. 117.

<sup>90</sup> May, *Workhouse*, p. 15.

<sup>91</sup> NLW: 3144F, Day to Lefevre, 8 November 1838. He warned that 'the poor are far more sensitive to the behaviour of persons in authority than is generally imagined'.

<sup>92</sup> A. Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in nineteenth-century England* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 36.

On the basis of empathy with ordinary people, the guardians' unanimous decision to appoint local tradesman John Roberts to fill the job in August 1838 looked promising, but an early warning about his fitness came when AC Clive warned 'there is every reason to suppose that this is a very bad choice'. Research presumably carried out after the appointment was made revealed that Roberts was 'old, infirm [and previously] insolvent'.<sup>93</sup> Nine months later Clive's successor described him as 'incompetent', noting that 'the house is neglected' and little used.<sup>94</sup> He was called before the board for an unminuted 'special session' in the Salutation Inn on 5 March 1840, was found to be 'almost an imbecile' and asked to resign.<sup>95</sup>

Disarray followed. When interviews for a successor were held on 28 April 1840 'none but unfit candidates attended'. Although unable to attend personally, Edward Waters of Merthyr Tydfil was put forward to fill the job, and a worried Neave privately consulted the union chairman who warned him that 'rural guardians will go to all lengths to bring about a local appointment'.<sup>96</sup> (His emphasis). They had their way: although Waters appears to have accepted the job, he and his wife never arrived in Llandilo, and the board considered 'their election vacated'.<sup>97</sup> Local interests were served by retaining

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<sup>93</sup> TNA: MH12/ 15922, August 1838 (no day shown). The union clerk later explained that Roberts' 'affairs got embarrassed in consequence of speculation in building' but he was generally considered 'honest and upright'. MH12/15922, 24 September 1838. He was 47.

<sup>94</sup> TNA: MH32/59, June 1839.

<sup>95</sup> TNA: MH12/15922, 27 May 1840.

<sup>96</sup> TNA: MH12/15922, 20 May 1840. Narberth union had behaved in a similar manner in July 1837, rejecting William Lewis because 'he is a stranger to the guardians generally': PA: SPU/NA/1/1.

<sup>97</sup> See chapter 5, p. 188.

Mrs Roberts ‘to see to the discipline and good conduct of the whole establishment in consideration of appointing her son to the situation [of Master]’, wording which strongly suggests that a deal to ensure ‘fairness’ had been done.<sup>98</sup> This arrangement continued until March 1855, during which fifteen-year period little is heard of Roberts junior, apart from a reprimand for appearing before the board drunk in April 1850: he had consumed three glasses of ale, but the medical officer’s explanation was that ‘Roberts was afflicted with brain fever, in consequence of which the least excitement will affect the head’.<sup>99</sup> When forced to accept a one-third salary cut as part of economy measures in March 1855, the Roberts resigned.

The next master stayed in post for 23 years. Morgan Pendry, a 48 year old Unitarian plasterer, and his Calvinistic Methodist baker wife Sarah were elected by ‘a large majority’ in preference to two rival couples because they had ‘no encumbrances’. The board had, following remonstrance from the PLB, rescinded the salary reduction, and the Pendrys were further awarded double rations. Despite an unblemished record for the next ten years, Morgan Pendry’s career as master almost came to an untimely end in October 1865 when his wife died, and the PLB reminded guardians that Rules required widowed masters to leave at the end of the quarter.<sup>100</sup> The board’s response was rapid: two weeks after Sarah Pendry’s death, they promoted workhouse nurse Margaret

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<sup>98</sup> CA: BG43, 26 May 1840. This resembles the actions of guardians from remote parishes in the dramatic process of appointing a Medical Officer in 1842/3, where the local concept of ‘fairness’ was much to the fore.

<sup>99</sup> TNA: MH12/15924, 1 June 1850.

<sup>100</sup> Consolidated General Order, Article 189.

Edwards to the post of matron, a move to which there is (unexpectedly) no record of opposition from London. Matters were, however, regularised two years later when the master and new matron married. In September 1877, Morgan Pendry, aged 70, died suddenly at Llandilo railway station and guardians issued a lengthy eulogy loudly praising his abilities, something not done for any other union official. Following the same logic as hitherto, they immediately decided to leave the matron in post and appoint a new master, but this proved too much for the LGB to stomach, and permission was withheld. A stiffly worded letter said that ‘the good management of the workhouse and the welfare of inmates would be seriously interfered with by the inability of a Master and Matron not being married to communicate freely with each other on matters affecting the health and condition of both male and female inhabitants’.<sup>101</sup>

The final appointment in the period of this study was made one month after Pendry’s death. Schoolmaster David Morgans and his wife Mary, were, at 26, much younger than their predecessors, and despite early negative comment for their inexperience, became highly thought of. The board sought to satisfy their demand for higher remuneration by offering them the additional appointment of rate collector, only to be fiercely resisted by the LGB which later bowed to pressure from its own Inspector. Despite this the Morgans left to take up more highly paid posts.

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<sup>101</sup> TNA: MH12/15931, 29 September 1877.

This section on workhouse staff closes with a brief look at one of the other extraordinary characters in Llandilofawr, workhouse porter William Escott. In his own way his 33-year contribution to the union was every bit as impressive as that of John Lewis. His official job description contained only nine duties, including keeping the entrance secure, searching those entering and exiting the building, and helping the master ‘enforce obedience and due subordination’.<sup>102</sup> But Escott did not stop there – he was also layer-out of the dead and hairdresser to children with ringworm. Further, he exercised considerable initiative, demonstrating real concern for the welfare of children and a willingness to take on duties substantially beyond those for which he was contracted. Board minutes in July 1839 record the following: ‘William Escott, Porter, having taken upon himself the tuition of the workhouse children, is considered entitled to some remuneration in addition to his salary’: his pay was increased from £10 p.a. to £15.<sup>103</sup> He remained in this position for the next eight years, guardians repeatedly refusing to appoint a full-time schoolmistress, until in May 1847, AC Aneurin Owen reported that with 28 children in the school and the porter as schoolmaster there was ‘a very poor result’.<sup>104</sup> Despite the arrival of Jane Harries as schoolmistress, Escott maintained his annual £5 supplement for another six years. By May 1872, aged 80 and in failing health, he was no longer able to carry out his duties, but having lived there since 1839 was unable to bring himself to face the outside world. Guardians wrote to the LGB explaining that it was Escott’s ‘earnest wish’ to remain as a voluntary resident: they were happy for him to stay and provide him with double rations, and he was

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<sup>102</sup> These duties were set out in PP1842 [389] Article 79 of the *Eighth Report*.

<sup>103</sup> CA: BG43, 23 July 1839.

<sup>104</sup> TNA: MH12/15924, 29 May 1847.

offered, but refused, superannuation as an alternative.<sup>105</sup> Having apparently become institutionalised, he lived on in the workhouse for a further six years. He died in June 1878 and was buried in a prominent position near the main door of Llandilo parish church. There is in this account no trace of Englander's contention that porters and schoolmistresses 'came to constitute a fraught community': this is an example of Llandilofawr doing it differently.<sup>106</sup>

Once guardians had overcome their reluctance to open a workhouse school they found difficulty in finding anyone to fill the job of schoolmistress – there were no applications to the first advertisement.<sup>107</sup> A key reason was poor pay and conditions – a salary of £15 p.a. was offered, the successful candidate would live in the workhouse, leaving only when the master gave permission, receive the same diet as paupers, and sleep behind a partition in the girls' dormitory: apart from money, conditions were no better than those for inmates. Eventually, Jane Harries, aged 21 and with no previous experience, was appointed in November 1847. Things began badly: the result of the first school inspection the following August castigated her for 'incompetence' and for instruction which was 'extremely defective'.<sup>108</sup> However, she learned from this

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<sup>105</sup> TNA: MH12/15930, 6 May 1872.

<sup>106</sup> Englander, *Poverty* p. 37.

<sup>107</sup> Bangor guardians were similarly 'ambiguous' about opening a workhouse school, Llewellyn-Jones, 'Fate of paupers', p. 102.

<sup>108</sup> TNA: MH12/15924, 16 August 1848, Education Inspector's *Report*. Jelinger G. Symons was one of the Commissioners whose *Report into the State of Education in Wales* PP1847[871], the 'Blue Books', caused outrage being taken to suggest that the Welsh language and Nonconformity led to ignorance and immorality. Symons' did offer some hope: 'if the Welsh people were well educated...they would in all probability assume a high rank among civilised communities', *Report* p. 68.

experience: her performance improved steadily, and in February 1854 she made a significant career step, resigning to attend training school.

Between March 1854 and September 1857 three disastrous appointees came and went. Mary Dyer was dismissed after six months for ‘inflicting serious injuries on John Jones’ in an over-enthusiastic attempt to correct his ‘shameful conduct’,<sup>109</sup> and her successor Mary Anne Reece followed suit after only eighteen months of poor performance, curiously complaining that she had been paid ‘not one farthing’, and was now ‘no better than an orphan’.<sup>110</sup> And Jane Owens, who seems to have been appointed for no better reason than another instance of rural guardians insisting on a local person, lasted only twelve months during which time the children had not ‘been taught anything for they know nothing’.<sup>111</sup>

It was at this point that the benefit of Jane Harries’ decision to undertake professional training paid off – she was unanimously elected as workhouse schoolmistress for a second time in October 1857 with a higher salary (£25 p.a.) and ‘free washing’. By 1862 she was given ‘high credit’ for her teaching skills, and in 1864 guardians informed the PLB that children trained by her in the workhouse ‘turned out in after life as the equals of other children’.<sup>112</sup> There could be no higher compliment, but Jane was sadly

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<sup>109</sup> TNA: MH12/15925, 3 November 1854.

<sup>110</sup> TNA: MH12/15926, 27 November 1856.

<sup>111</sup> TNA: MH12/15926, 9 October 1857, Symons’ *Report*.

<sup>112</sup> TNA: MH32/31, June 1864 (no day). See also Hainsworth, *Llanfyllin Workhouse*, p. 21.

forced to leave in 1869 (after 12 years) to care for her aged parents. This marked the start of a slow decline for the school. Numbers were falling with only 13 pupils by 1870, and Jane's successors were little better than her predecessors. In May 1872 pupils were 'not advanced', and guardians began to think about sending the children to the Board school only 100 yards distant. It took more than ten years to implement that plan – there was still fierce resistance to any form of change – but the final closure decision came in 1885 when the incumbent schoolmistress (with four pupils) resigned.

### Conclusions

The foregoing discussion has shown that Llandilofawr workhouse did not achieve the principal goals desired by those who formulated the New Poor Law. They had envisaged a situation in which the house would provide a vivid symbol to the labouring classes, warning them to live their lives prudently and put money aside for times of adversity. In the worst case, they would be offered a place in the workhouse, basic nutritional needs would be met, but no more. Thus, a mixture of fear and deterrence would keep the level of pauperism down. It has been shown that, in Llandilofawr, there is little evidence of fear or deterrence on a significant scale. It is clear that the guardians, who somewhat curiously agreed to build a workhouse without demur, were unenthusiastic about using the facility once it was in place. For most of the time it ran at 25% of its capacity, and, with such consistently low figures, the deterrent effect was



minimal. Everyone knew the score – out-relief was given to 95% of paupers.<sup>113</sup> This explains why there was little apparent local opposition: there was hardly anything to oppose, and the workhouse test was not applied. Guardians paid lip service to the PLC's rules and regulations while never entering the spirit of the law. Thus, the workhouse offered only spartan accommodation and a basic diet, and guardians were loath to spend money on running repairs until matters were urgent. Physical cruelty to inmates does not seem to have occurred – even Wythen Baxter in citing Welsh examples was unable to offer any instances in Carmarthenshire<sup>114</sup> – although the psychological effect of detention, surveillance and discipline would have been the same for Llandilofawr inmates as for those anywhere else.<sup>115</sup> Once some issues with the first master were resolved, the workhouse staff managed matters competently and humanely – indeed, the frequency of visits indicates a degree of relaxation about applying the principle of less eligibility. Given all these circumstances it is not apparent that Llandilofawr workhouse was a 'deeply contested site of resistance' in which staff and inmates negotiated a *modus vivendi*.<sup>116</sup> Further the grim picture of Welsh workhouses (which draw mainly on press reports) painted in other studies

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<sup>113</sup> Parker, 'Radnorshire', p. 195.

<sup>114</sup> G. Wythen Baxter, *The Book of the Bastilles* (London, 1841).

<sup>115</sup> Driver, *Power and Pauperism*, pp.10-15.

<sup>116</sup> Green, *Pauper Protests*, p. 159. See also W. Fishman, *East End 1888: A year in a London Borough among the Labouring Poor* (London 1988) where the image of the workhouse as the 'ultimate horror' for the poor who were 'consigned to...grim, massive battlements' contrasts with a small rural establishment such as Llandilofawr.

simply does not apply here, although, as noted, the situation in neighbouring Carmarthen was poor.<sup>117</sup>

It has been shown that, in common with England, the vast majority of inmates were children or elderly people. This mix presented the authorities with a dilemma: the basic principle of less eligibility was incompatible with providing a reasonable level of care for those who genuinely had nowhere else to go.<sup>118</sup> With a large proportion of such inmates, it was perhaps inevitable that Llandilofawr guardians would lean towards a caring rather than harsh approach to running the workhouse.<sup>119</sup> Such a policy was supported by guardians' careful selection of local people as staff members: they were close to the Carmarthenshire culture which embraced a strong duty of care to the aged. It was also good for local economic reasons. Thus, the demographic profile of workhouse inmates in Llandilofawr did not require it to develop into a care institution – it had always been one.<sup>120</sup> The inseparability of sickness and poverty has become a mainstream element in recent historiography,<sup>121</sup> and while there is no specific mention in archival material for Llandilofawr about the state of health of elderly workhouse

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<sup>117</sup> In Conwy paupers were 'intimidated', C. Draper, *Paupers, Bastards and Lunatics: the story of Conwy Workhouse* (Conwy, 2005); In Caernarvon they were told to 'enter or starve', J. Lindsay, 'The Problems of the Caernarvon Union workhouse from 1846 to 1930', *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society* (1991); but in Swansea they found starving preferable to enduring workhouse discipline, J.E. Thomas, 'The Poor Law in West Glamorgan 1834 to 1930', *Glamorgan History*, 18 (1974).

<sup>118</sup> Himmelfarb, *Idea of Poverty*, p. 164; Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor*, p. 36; Crowther, 'Health Care', p. 212.

<sup>119</sup> In similar circumstances, Bangor workhouse was 'a useful last resort for the old and sick': Llewellyn-Jones, 'Fate of paupers', p. 96.

<sup>120</sup> L. Hollen-Lees, *Solidarities*, (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 231-232; K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London, 1981).

<sup>121</sup> Gestrich, Hurren and King, *Poverty and Sickness*.

inmates or paupers more generally, there is no reason to suppose that its situation was different from elsewhere. Basic medical care was offered to such inmates – but the principal medical issue in Llandilofawr was how (or whether) to provide such care to the 95% of paupers receiving out-relief. Looking more broadly, archival material about charities in the Llandilofawr area, or the extent to which strong kinship links led families to provide care for the sick and elderly, is sparse: it is therefore not possible to be clear about how a ‘mixed economy of welfare’ may have operated.<sup>122</sup> Given the nature of local society and the scattered population, however, there was an emphasis on community support. With help from friends and relatives people ‘made do’.<sup>123</sup>

Surprisingly perhaps, the central authorities in London would not disagree with many of the findings in this chapter, although, of course, they would not have approved. The final word may therefore be left to them. In 1872, when Llandilofawr workhouse had been in operation for 35 years, Inspector Longe sent his annual review to London. ‘This is one of those small economically constructed workhouses so constantly met with in Wales’ he wrote. ‘It is not bad enough to condemn and not good enough to be satisfied with. All that can be done in such cases is to bring defects under the notice of

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<sup>122</sup> For the mixed economy see A. Crowther, ‘Health Care and Poor Relief in Provincial England’, in O. Grell, A. Cunningham and R. Jütte (eds.), *Health Care and Poor Relief in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Northern Europe*, (Aldershot, 2002), p. 206. Kinship links were particularly important in caring for the mentally ill in Wales: D. Hirst and P. Michael, ‘Family, Community and the Lunatic in mid nineteenth-century North Wales’, in P. Michael and D. Wright (eds.), *Outside the Walls of the Asylum: the History of Care in the Community 1750–2000* (London, 1999), p. 84.

<sup>123</sup> S. King and A. Tomkins (eds), *The Poor in England 1700–1850: An economy of makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003).

guardians'.<sup>124</sup> This is likely to be precisely what the guardians intended, and if so must be regarded as a great success from their point of view.

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<sup>124</sup> TNA: MH12/15930, 10 May 1872. The 'bulk of inmates' were sick and kept 'in the body of the house'; the children were 'not advanced'; and vagrants were not forced to work.

## Chapter 7

### Llandilofawr Union's approach to public health and the provision of medical care

As literature on the medical care available to paupers has expanded, and evidence of their involvement in influencing the relief they received has been revealed, the subject area has become ever more complex. It has been enriched with an international dimension by accounts of medical matters in Prussia, Denmark, provincial France and many other places,<sup>1</sup> and there has been a focus on reclaiming paupers' experiences from the bottom up by delving into their narratives. This too has developed across regions, with information *inter alia* from Germany, Ireland and Sweden, in addition to earlier work on Britain.<sup>2</sup> There is also a growing body of studies of specific institutions by place and by type.<sup>3</sup> This vast array of material has very recently been charted, making it possible to see the paths being taken in the field of welfare history, and to understand the gaps which remain.<sup>4</sup> From this it becomes clear that, as with other aspects of the New Poor Law, medical matters in Wales remain relatively un-trodden territory.<sup>5</sup> Given the significance of sickness in many paupers' lives, and the attention

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<sup>1</sup> O. Grell, A. Cunningham and R. Jutte (eds), *Health Care and Poor Relief in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Northern Europe*, (Aldershot, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> A. Gestrich, E. Hurren and S. King (eds), *Poverty and Sickness in Modern Europe: Narratives of the Sick Poor, 1780–1938* (London, 2012); T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor 1640–1840* (Basingstoke, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> K. Waddington, *Charity and the London Hospitals 1850–1898* (Woodbridge, 2000); J. Reinartz, 'Mechanising medicine: Medical innovations and the Birmingham voluntary hospitals in the nineteenth century', in J. Anderson and C. Timmerman (eds), *Devices and Designs: Medical Technologies in Historical Perspective* (Basingstoke, 2006); S. Cherry, *Mental Health Care in Modern England: The Norfolk Lunatic Asylum/St. Andrews Hospital c. 1810–1998* (Woodbridge, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> S. King, 'Poverty, medicine and the workhouse in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', in J. Reinartz and L. Schwarz (eds), *Workhouse Medicine* (University of Rochester Press, 2013) pp. 251–79.

<sup>5</sup> But see S. King and A. Stringer, 'I have once more taken the Liberty to say as you well know': The development of rhetoric in the letters of the English, Welsh and Scottish sick and poor 1780's–1830's, in

paid to medical services by the poor law authorities, however, this is an important element of the present study.<sup>6</sup> In Llandilofawr, such care included basic medical provision for workhouse inmates and paupers receiving out-relief, but, important though medical care is to welfare historians, it is doubtful whether it assumed such a central role in the minds of Llandilofawr's guardians, or paupers – expectations were low.<sup>7</sup> Thus, this chapter, while discussing the provision of medical care, principally uses the subject as a lens to explore aspects of union management: the sometimes byzantine process for appointing medical officers, for example, illustrates themes about relationships between groups of guardians and the role of the élite group, the core concerns of this study, thus developing strands emerging from earlier parts of the thesis. It explores how characteristics identified there influenced the way guardians and officials set out to provide pauper medical care, concentrating on their approach to the task rather than presenting a detailed analysis of the quality of care offered, particularly since archival material on these latter points is sparse.

Chapter 6 noted the unresolved dilemma between the principle of 'less eligibility' and an adequate standard of care for the genuinely impotent in the workhouse. This is

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Gestrich, Hurren and King, *Poverty and Sickness*. E. Morgan, 'The administration of poor laws in Pembrokeshire 1780–1850' (unpub. Ph.D thesis University of Swansea, 2004) covers medical matters from an administrative point of view.

<sup>6</sup> It has been estimated that 75% of mid-nineteenth century pauperism was caused by sickness, D. Green, 'Medical relief and the New Poor Law in London', in Grell, Cunningham and Jutte, *Health Care and Poor Relief, in eighteenth and nineteenth century Northern Europe* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 221.

<sup>7</sup> The Poor Law Amendment Act contained no explicit requirement for the provision of union medical care, but by its very nature it became a high-profile activity once put in place.

particularly relevant in the case of sick paupers.<sup>8</sup> Just as Llandilofawr workhouse was not the focus of intense hatred, there is no evidence that union medical care was regarded as ‘at best undesirable and at worst repellent’ – it is more likely that it was seen as a genuine benefit, with no stigma attached to its recipients.<sup>9</sup> In a small union like Llandilofawr medical care did not flourish and develop as it did in large metropolitan areas, largely because the numbers involved were so limited:<sup>10</sup> even if half of all workhouse inmates were sufficiently sick to require medical attention, the average number would be less than 15 at any one time.<sup>11</sup> Other facilities in the area for those with physical ailments were few: Carmarthen Infirmary opened in 1846, and the union paid an annual subscription to send paupers there after that date, and there was a similar arrangement with Swansea.<sup>12</sup> The majority of such care, however, was provided to paupers in their place of residence. The same is true for the mentally ill: there was always a small number of lunatics in the workhouse, but most were farmed out because it was cheaper, although a small number – usually those considered to be ‘dangerous’ – were sent to asylums paid for by the union. Until 1865 when a joint Counties facility

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<sup>8</sup> A. Crowther, ‘Health Care and Poor Relief in Provincial England’, in Grell, Cunningham and Jutte (eds.), *Health Care*, p. 212; D. Green, ‘Medical relief in London’, in *ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>9</sup> A. Tomkins, ‘The excellent example of the working class: Medical welfare, contributory funding and the North Staffordshire Infirmary from 1815’, *Social History of Medicine*, 21 (2008), p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Complex sets of institutions’ developed in London: K. Waddington, ‘Paying for the sick poor: Financing medicine under the Victorian poor law - the case of Whitechapel Union’, in M. Gorsky and S. Sheard (eds), *Financing Medicine: The British Experience since 1750* (Aldershot, 2006), p. 102.

<sup>11</sup> There are no reliable figures for the number of pauper patients treated by Llandilofawr’s medical officers: the only surviving records are financial.

<sup>12</sup> J. Bolwell and A. Evans, *A History of the County Infirmary, Carmarthen* (Carmarthen, 2005).

was built in Carmarthen, this involved sending lunatics considerable distances as there was no other local provision.

The chapter begins by outlining how medical care in the union was organised, and how it developed over the period. This is followed by an account of events surrounding the filling of a medical officer post in the early 1840's, which is used as a prism to analyse the local culture and to show how the members of the élite group determined the outcome: internal politics were more to the fore than pauper care. Conflict in filling such posts was endemic, and this is revealed by examining a recurrence of such events forty years later which set the seal on John Lewis' union career. Finally, some interesting differences of approach and emphasis emerge when Llandilofawr is compared to certain events in Cardiff union.

#### Medical care in Llandilofawr

The new board moved rapidly to organise medical care. A fortnight after the union's declaration two medical districts were formed, and the clerk was instructed to offer posts to Dr. David Prothero (his uncle) and Dr. Nathaniel Rees: they would be paid 7s.6d per case. Advertisements for permanent posts to run from April 1838 were placed in the *Carmarthen Journal*. Although it had by then been decided to have three districts, only Prothero and Rees sought positions, so the latter was awarded two. Llandilofawr was one of the early unions to adopt the idea of making annual (later



permanent) salaried appointments rather than inviting tenders on a cost-per-case basis,<sup>13</sup> so the MO's were paid £40 and £55 p.a. respectively.<sup>14</sup> Some historians, such as Tomkins quoted earlier, have questioned the status of poor law medicine and its practitioners, but this was not the case here:<sup>15</sup> Dr. Prothero, a prominent Llandilo resident and part of the élite group, was probably the leading medical practitioner in the area, and Dr. Rees, as a close political ally of *ex officio* guardian Sir James Hamlyn Williams, was a senior member of the local establishment.

This arrangement highlights an early dilemma, one which continued for the whole period of this study – the PLC wanted union medical officers to reside in the district they covered, but in remote rural communities such as Carmarthenshire there were not enough doctors to go round, a difficulty made greater when the authorities started to insist that applicants possess a double qualification.<sup>16</sup> This was part of a ‘campaign for improvement of medical provision’ which ‘played a central role in policy debates’.<sup>17</sup> Be this as it may, ‘the consensus...is that working conditions for poor law medical officers were incompatible’ with a proper medical service.<sup>18</sup> Some consider this outcome inevitable because the Poor Law Amendment Act, which enshrined ‘a

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<sup>13</sup> The PLC advocated salaried appointments: *Seventh Annual Report of the PLC*, PP 1841 [327] p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> They were also paid 10s 6d for each midwifery case.

<sup>15</sup> A. Crowther, *Health Care*, p. 206; A. Digby, *Making a Medical Living: Doctors and Patients in the English Market for Medicine, 1720–1911* (Cambridge, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> *Seventh Annual Report of the PLC*, PP 1841 [327] p. 10; 1842 *General Medical Order*; specified in detail in PP 1847 [816] p. 75.

<sup>17</sup> F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: The Workhouse System, 1834–1884* (Cambridge, 1993) p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> A. Negrine, ‘Medicine and poverty: a study of the poor law medical services of the Leicester area, 1867–1914’ (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Leicester, 2009), p. 12.

deterrent social philosophy and cost cutting...loaded the dice against the development of an adequate system of medical care',<sup>19</sup> comments which chime with the situation in Wales where the inferior quality of medical care for the poor was frequently noted: according to the PLC, 'no system of medical relief could be considered as organized throughout the Principality' prior to the NPL.<sup>20</sup> However, although AC William Day jibbed at Welsh parishes' parsimony, offering paupers a 'small pecuniary sum' to take to a neighbourhood healer 'who is not infrequently a woman',<sup>21</sup> the PLC demurred at the idea of asking ratepayers for more money for doctors. Chadwick considered that their work 'was no more important than the supply of any other commodity' and should be seen in the same category as bakers and tradesmen,<sup>22</sup> a view surprisingly similar to Carmarthenshire guardians' and paupers' attitudes about the efficacy of 'proper' medical care.<sup>23</sup> Financing medical care for the poor was, of course, a significant issue.<sup>24</sup> Welsh loyalty to traditional healers ran deep: in 1844, five years after the arrival of professional MO's, Commissioner Frankland Lewis asked Aberystwyth union clerk Hugh Hughes what sort of men Welsh guardians would appoint: 'I am afraid they would not select the most skilful; they would go to the cheapest persons, for that is what

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<sup>19</sup> A. Digby, *Medical Living*; A. Crowther, 'Health Care', p. 212.

<sup>20</sup> *Appendices to Tenth Annual Report of PLC*, PP 1844 [589] p. 23; D. Williams, *The Rebecca Riots: a Study in Agrarian Discontent* (Cardiff, 1971), pp. 90-93.

<sup>21</sup> NLW: MS 3141F. 12 July 1837, Day to Lefevre.

<sup>22</sup> S. Finer, *The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick* (London, 1952) pp. 157-160. For Chadwick curative medicine was a 'sham', 'nothing but *consolatio animi*', and he 'distrusted doctors' judgement in relation to pauperism', D. Green, 'Medical relief in London', p. 226. See also A. Crowther, 'Health Care' p. 203.

<sup>23</sup> M.W. Flinn, 'Medical services under the New Poor Law', in D. Fraser ed. *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1976) p.48.

<sup>24</sup> Waddington, 'Paying for the sick poor'.

they want', he replied.<sup>25</sup> The same was true for paupers who, according to union chairman Capt. Phillips, were 'glad to get any quack to attend them rather than the regular medical men'.<sup>26</sup> This was easy to organise because they were ubiquitous: 'each village had its own quack doctor and bone-setter'.<sup>27</sup> However, while these gentry comments clearly imply that traditional healers were, in their view, deficient and probably best avoided, in the popular mind they were not seen negatively, and had a valuable role in the community.<sup>28</sup>

In Llandilofawr there were two additional factors. First, many peoples' horizons stopped at the hamlet, so, as will be shown, treatment from someone born and bred in the parish was preferable to that from a well-trained 'stranger'. Second, local or family 'connections' greatly influenced guardians' concept of who should be chosen for the job, so the selection process was not always impartial: 'I am sorry to say that there are a number of people who practice in this country who are related to many of the guardians'.<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly therefore debates about MO's remuneration were agitated and intense. Supporters of the 'cheap and cheerful' local approach sought to keep salaries down, arguing for a link between the price ratepayers, nearly all farmers,

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<sup>25</sup> For professionalisation see S. King, 'Poverty, medicine and the workhouse in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', in J. Reinartz and L. Schwarz (eds) *Workhouse Medicine* (Rochester, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> *Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry for South Wales*, PP 1844 [531] paragraphs 6472 and 6672. However, AC Senior noted that paupers viewed union doctors favourably when they indulged in 'the practice to order mutton, wine &c.', *Report of the Poor Law Commissioners on the Continuance of the Poor Law Commission*, PP 1840 [227] p. 275.

<sup>27</sup> D.J.V. Jones, *Rebecca's Children: a Study of Rural Society, Crime and Protest* (Oxford, 1989), p. 38.

<sup>28</sup> R. Porter, *Quacks: Fakers and Charlatans in English Medicine* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 325-328.

<sup>29</sup> *Inquiry*, PP 1844 [531] para. 6672.

could obtain for their agricultural produce, and medical salaries.<sup>30</sup> Others such as Henry Leach believed that under the Old Poor Law ‘the really impotent were never taken half the care of that given to them’ since the formation of unions, and declared that MO salaries were ‘perfectly reasonable and moderate’.<sup>31</sup> Leach, the very active chairman of Haverfordwest union, and much appreciated in London for his ardent adherence to ‘correct principles’, also highlighted guardians’ strong desire to get back ‘the management to their own hands as it was [under the OPL]’, a wish much cherished in Llandilofawr parishes. The latter, however, may not have admitted, as Leach claimed, that this could be because it would allow them to pay their own labourers’ wages and rents and ‘put so much to their own pockets and so much to dinners’.<sup>32</sup> Good salaries were, however, not necessarily a guarantee of good performance, because even in Haverfordwest some MO’s were later found to be negligent. A balance had to be struck: in Basingstoke, advertising MO posts at low salaries resulted in applications from persons whose ‘emaciated appearance and wearing apparel’ made it difficult to distinguish them from the paupers they were hoping to treat.<sup>33</sup>

Despite such misgivings expenditure on medical care in Wales rose steadily, as shown in Table 7.1. The cumulative increase over 20 years amounted to 83%.

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<sup>30</sup> This was a widespread view in Wales. In Kington, Sir Thomas Frankland Lewis’ home union, there was an exceptionally rancorous argument, the board accusing the PLB of ‘unworthy and undignified conduct’. TNA: MH12/4351 May 1850 onwards.

<sup>31</sup> *Inquiry*, PP 1844 [531] paras. 3862 and 3867. Capt. Phillips shared this opinion.

<sup>32</sup> Leach claimed that officers in his home parish had spent 40s. out of the poor’s rate for a dinner.

<sup>33</sup> W.L. Sclater, *Letter to the Poor Law Commissioners on the Working of the New System* (Basingstoke, 1836).

Table 7.1: Medical relief expenditure in Wales 1840 to 1860

Year	Expenditure £	% change
1840	6725	
1845	8038	+ 19.5
1850	8995	+ 12
1855	10532	+ 15.1
1860	12312	+ 16.9

Source: *Annual reports of the Poor Law Commission and Poor Law Board*

Around 16% of the total was spent on vaccination, marking a move towards prevention as opposed to cure of disease, especially after 1853 when it became compulsory. In Llandilofawr the annual bill for medical care accounted for between 3% and 4% of the union's budget, as shown in Chapter 3.<sup>34</sup>

In some urban areas there was keen competition for union medical posts, partly because the change from parish to union medical provision for paupers meant that fewer job-holders were required, and partly because doctors were keen to 'consolidate their territory': it was worth their while to take relatively poorly paid union work to keep others away.<sup>35</sup> In rural areas, however, there was less competition simply because there were fewer doctors, and this was certainly the case in South Wales, as will be shown shortly. In Llandilofawr the number of medical districts was changed from time

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<sup>34</sup> See Figure 3.10. A detailed breakdown is not available since the only identifiable numbers are for MO salaries. How much workhouse expenditure was on medical facilities is unknown.

<sup>35</sup> A. Digby, *Medical Living*, p. 119. Negrine makes a similar point: 'Medicine and Poverty', *Abstract*.

to time: the original boundaries were modified on several occasions, the number of districts growing from three to five by 1844. In 1864 they reverted to four, recognising changing district demographics. When MO posts became vacant the behaviour of local doctors exhibited some of the competitive spirit described above, but in Llandilofawr economic competition for jobs was only part of the story – there were underlying personal, political and social issues which, as will be seen, rose to the surface, and potential MO's had teams of supporters who engaged in battle with even more vigour than the doctors themselves. Indeed, the extent and nature of the ensuing clashes became a hallmark of the way contests of this kind were conducted.<sup>36</sup>

Between 1837 and 1884 twenty-four individuals were employed as MO's in Llandilofawr, as detailed in Table 7.2. Excluding those still in service beyond 1884, their average length of service was 8.6 years, but this obscures two distinct populations: 8 served for over 10 years, the other 11 only lasting an average of 3. The length of service of those appointed in later years was generally longer than those who took office before the early 1840's. Five resigned from their posts, two were dismissed, but the largest number continued to work until they died. Doctors Edwards and Thomas, whose appointments are discussed in detail later, are especially interesting cases.

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<sup>36</sup> There were also skirmishes when relieving officers, registrars and rate collectors were appointed.

Table 7.2: Llandilofawr union medical officers 1837 – 1884

Name	Dates of Service	Years Served	Reason for Leaving
MO's in post > 10 years			
Davies, Lewis	1838 – 1849	11	Died
Edwards, Richard Price	1845 – 1867	22	Died
Jones, William Lewis	1876 - 1884	12	Died
Lewis, Frederick	1843 – 1860	17	Died
Lloyd, Evan	1866 – 1884	18	?
Rees, Nathaniel	1837 – 1856	19	Resigned
Thomas, John	1843 – 1860	17	Died
Williams, Evan Evans	1861 – 1873	12	Died
MO's in post < 10 years			
Davies, Henry	1861 – 1866	5	Resigned
Davies, James Harris	1878 - 1882	4	Dismissed
Davies, Thomas	1860 – 1861	1	Term expired
Jenkins, Evan	1868 – 1877	9	Dismissed
Jones, John	1860 - 1861	1	Term expired
Lewis, Thomas	1861 – 1868	7	Died
Lloyd, Thomas.	1873 – 1876	3	Died
Prothero, David	1837 – 1837	1	Resigned
Pythero, David	1841 – 1843	2	Died
Samuel, William	1839 – 1841	2	Resigned
Williams, Morgan	1838 – 1839	1	Resigned
MO's in post at end of study			
Davies, William	1866 onwards		
Jones, Evan	1884 onwards		
Lloyd, William Howell	1880 onwards		
Evans, Thomas Jones	1882 onwards		
Rees, W. Howell	1882 onwards		

Source: Board minutes and MH 12 series

Guardians and union authorities sometimes acted in surprising but revealing ways on medical matters. For example, during the 1849 cholera epidemic MO's were called upon to work harder than usual and take greater personal risks, so they were paid an

extra 10s.6d. per case for their trouble.<sup>37</sup> The Board of Health (BOH) monitored the national situation closely, to ensure that all requiring care were properly treated while ratepayers were not over-charged for attending the less seriously ill. Llandilofawr guardians considered this too complicated and resolved to leave it to 'the gentlemanlike liberality of the profession not to charge for cases which, fairly speaking, are so slight as not to be of a character' to put on the payment list.<sup>38</sup> Since two current MO's had previously faced accusations of over-charging or extortion, this was a brave move, but seems to have been successful as the epidemic was soon brought under control.<sup>39</sup> To contain expenditure, however, persons receiving relief from Clubs or Works were not treated at union expense.<sup>40</sup> Further evidence of the board's generous spirit was shown by instructions issued in 1865: MO's were given leave to order quinine, wine and cod liver oil for workhouse inmates, the latter proving so popular that two gallons had to be purchased a year later.<sup>41</sup>

The residency issue surfaced in 1860 when the PLB refused to sanction the appointment of John Jones, deeming him non-resident. Even when sent a map showing his house

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<sup>37</sup> The epidemic was described by one Congregational Minister as a 'terrible visitation' giving rise to intense religious feelings manifested by 'the audible groans and floods of tears...of hundreds', Thomas Rees, *The Great Revival in South Wales in 1849* (London, 1867) p. 97.

<sup>38</sup> CA: BG 44, Board minutes, 11 August 1849.

<sup>39</sup> This was unlike the general situation: according to Flinn guardians were 'uniformly supine and ineffective' during the epidemic, *Medical Services*, p.52.

<sup>40</sup> According to T. Davies, 'David Jones goes to town: some events in the history of medicine in Carmarthenshire', *Carmarthenshire Antiquary*, XL (2004), there were 80 clubs in the area in 1879. Such provision in metropolitan and urban areas was more extensive and varied, Green, 'Medical Relief in London', p. 222.

<sup>41</sup> CA: BG 44: 13 May 1865 and 7 July 1866.



less than 100 yards from the boundary, and his surgery actually in the district, they refused to relent, sniffily explaining that ‘a surgery does not constitute residence’. It is not clear why they eventually conceded, but since Jones was also deficient in qualifications, having only one, this was an instance in which the PLB lost on both counts. When another post became vacant in May 1873, there was only one applicant, appointed on the basis of ‘good testimonials’.

After the formation of the Llandilo Local Board of Health in July 1859 public health matters were tackled more broadly.<sup>42</sup> MO’s were designated Medical Officers of Health (MOH), and their duties broadened to include monitoring the quality of Llandilo’s water supply, which was ‘often turbid and offensive to taste and smell’.<sup>43</sup> Improvement was slow: in 1874 an outbreak of typhoid caused 5 deaths, and Llansawel parish was ‘in a filthy state’ with blocked gutters and cesspools. By 1875, however, board members could congratulate themselves that typhoid had gone, although the water was still ‘poor’ and there had been 50 deaths from scarlatina.<sup>44</sup>

After 1876 there was a marked change in the union’s focus. From then on correspondence with the LGB is almost exclusively concerned with public health matters rather than poverty, but despite this emphasis there was considerable official

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<sup>42</sup> D. Roberts, *Victorian origins of the British Welfare State* (New Haven, 1960), p.111.

<sup>43</sup> TNA: MH12/15930, 4 November 1874.

<sup>44</sup> Only in 1881 was Llandilo’s water improved by linking springs to the reservoir.

confusion.<sup>45</sup> In a revealing episode, the BOH complained about Dr. Lloyd's failure to provide reports. He wrote a lengthy letter explaining why – he was unaware that he had been appointed to the job, his first knowledge of the matter being when he received a salary cheque. He added that he considered he was doing a good job as MO, and did not want to be MOH as well, the tasks being 'unpleasant' and the pay 'insufficient'.<sup>46</sup> The response from London, demanding his dismissal, seems disproportionate, especially given Inspector Bircham's recommendation of a 'lenient line', but confrontation was avoided when Lloyd conveniently died. A second MOH, as we will see, was often too drunk to write reports, and was sacked.

The foregoing suggests several observations: authorities were aloof from local affairs; officials in London regarded themselves as greatly superior to hard-working Welsh MOH's; and communications between all concerned were at best poor. Tensions peaked when such reports as London did receive from Llandilofawr were deemed too cursory: one was particularly upsetting, referring to public health matters in the parish of Llanfihangel Aberbythych, the pronunciation of whose name was presumably an extreme challenge to monoglot Englishmen. An outraged official fumed about the 'defaulters' to his colleagues: 'Pray note the contumely with which the Board's directions are set at nought and its remonstrances are unheeded by two of these Medical Officers of Health. Even worse, officials could not see how to effect improvements,

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<sup>45</sup> When the LGB replaced the PLB in 1871, with a broader remit, relieving poverty had become relatively routine, and it concentrated on public health and drainage. The change in priorities is not apparent in Llandilofawr until 1876 .

<sup>46</sup> TNA: MH12/15930, 15 October 1877.

since ‘We have no means of knowing where the above place is.’<sup>47</sup> Inspector Bircham knew who to blame: ‘The slackness is attributable to the apathy of the Sanitary Authority, who like other Welsh rural authorities are scarcely alive to their responsibilities’. The MOH’s carried on undaunted: in 1878 the water was still yellow, Llansawel’s drainage ‘could not be worse’, and there was an outbreak of measles in 1879. In an interesting twist, this exchange ended with the two other MOH’s formally complaining that the BOH was itself slack, having neglected to pay them for the last two years. Blame could be attributed to all concerned.

Having given a broad introduction to medical care in the union, the next section takes an in-depth look at one event in Llandilofawr in order to probe more deeply into the inner workings of the union and its attitude to NPL medical arrangements.

#### Appointing a Medical Officer in 1843

What happened when it became necessary to appoint a new medical officer in 1843 had fundamental consequences for the future management of the union. It also reveals much about what went on behind the scenes in Llandilofawr. At first sight what took place seems straightforward. In October 1843 Dr. Pythero, the incumbent doctor for district 2 (in the extreme north of the union) died. There were two candidates to

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

succeed him, Doctors Morgan and Thomas: the election result was close, Thomas winning by eight votes to seven. The PLC sanctioned his appointment, and he remained in post until 1860, becoming one of the union's longest-serving officers.

However, a deeper look uncovers a very different picture: a complex web of rancorous political intrigue and bitter inter-parish rivalry which lasted for nineteen months. The contestants for the job, a succession of guardians and parish officials, the Assistant Commissioner, the PLC, and numerous local residents engaged in extensive correspondence, some letters running to over 1000 words.<sup>48</sup> There were two official Inquiries and a neighbouring union intervened. A plethora of notes and jottings made in Somerset House show that the allegations (many thought to be mendacious), and the venomous, vicious manner in which they were propounded, confirmed Commissioners' worst fears about the near impossibility of administering the NPL in Wales, and they took shelter in a bureaucratic haze. The hapless union chairman resigned, and a relentless campaign conducted by guardian John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen, using a range of tactical devices to out-manoeuvre his opponents, cemented his power base for the next forty years. One guardian sadly remarked 'the comforts of the sick poor found no part of the motive which guided [the participants]'.

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<sup>48</sup> There are 40 letters in TNA: MH12/15923, between November 1843 and April 1845. They comprise letters from the vicar and the union chairman; 10 from parishioners; 9 from guardians; and 10 from the candidates (5 from Edwards, 4 from Morgan and 1 from Thomas). Many include extensive notes written by officials in London. There are two reports by Colonel Wade. In the text this material is identified only by date. Board minutes, CA: BG 42 record the bare essentials but give no indication of the extent or intensity of the argument.

This was arguably the most sensational event in the union's history, and a close reading reveals patterns of opinion and behaviour characteristic to Llandilofawr which were in play in other union affairs. The actions and *modus operandi* of all concerned go to the heart of the union's *mentalité*, so the following extensive account is used to reveal the nature of relationships between individuals, parishes and the Poor Law authorities, and the biblical style many of them adopted in promoting their cause.<sup>49</sup> The period of strife can be considered in several phases, which are detailed and analysed below.

Phase 1 began immediately the post became vacant in October 1843. Unusually, perhaps because they anticipated trouble, five *ex officios* and AC William Day attended the next board meeting. Their fears were justified – John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen, moved and won a motion to reduce the replacement MO's salary from £40 to £35 pa. His case was convincing: 'all agricultural produce is reduced by one third...and £35 is an equivalent for the discharge of the duties'.<sup>50</sup> However, it soon became apparent that no candidate fulfilled the PLC's residence and qualification criteria: the best the guardians could hope for was to find someone who 'would do'.

Two other factors made for further difficulties. The disturbed social situation significantly influenced the behaviour of all concerned as divisions and conflicts arising from the Rebecca riots were played out at the board. In the three months before the

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<sup>49</sup> In Carmarthenshire Old Testament style was 'a natural part of popular speech, and of threatening letters': Jones, *Rebecca's Children*, p. 82.

<sup>50</sup> The PLC emphatically disagreed, finding that 'the amount and the pressure of salaries...have been much exaggerated: *Appendices to Tenth Annual Report of the PLC*, PP 1844 [589].

election 134 of the total 197 recorded ‘outrages’ took place.<sup>51</sup> The ‘Walk’ tollgate, only 600 metres from the union chairman’s home, had just been destroyed, and Lewis himself was fresh from addressing a meeting of protestors. Further, the PLC’s ability to manage affairs in South Wales was gravely weakened: William Day suffered an accident in August 1843, and, unknown to him, the Commissioners were preparing to relieve him of his duties, eventually asking him to resign on 12 January 1844. Thus, from August onwards the only central resource steering matters in Llandilofawr was unavailable.<sup>52</sup>

Phase 2 started within hours of Thomas’ election on 25 November 1843. Resident guardians of Talley and Llansawel parishes (which comprised district 2) wrote to the PLC complaining that a ‘highly improper and unjust Appointment in the Surgeonship of our district’ had been made. They had all supported Thomas’ opponent, but were out-voted by guardians from southern parishes led by Lewis. For them what was at stake was their right to determine who looked after their ‘own’ sick poor: they did not accept what they saw as extra-parochial interference. Claiming that Thomas lived 18 miles away, they invoked the PLC’s residency rule, and warned that their poor could ‘be hurdled into eternity before the Surgeon comes’: Morgan on the other hand lived centrally. Seeing the imposition of someone else’s candidate as an affront, they developed a recurring theme - fairness. In their words, Morgan was ‘entitled’ to the post, but Thomas had ‘no equitable right’.

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<sup>51</sup> D. Jones, *Rebecca’s Children*, p. 261.

<sup>52</sup> The appointment of Col. Thomas Wade as Day’s successor was only announced in *The London Gazette* on 10 April 1844.

On 28 November a letter from Morgan himself added a further element – intense emotion, perhaps coupled with a degree of naïveté. Not grasping that he had been hopelessly out-manoeuvred, he clung to traditional values, finding that guardians who had originally promised him their vote had acted ‘most treacherously’ by changing sides at the last minute: he also thought that voting irregularities had contributed to his downfall. He finished with fairness, evoking the ‘impossibility to have any thing in the shape of justice done by the guardians’. The alleged irregularity was that the chairman (who Morgan counted as a supporter) did not cast his vote although present at the election. Morgan thought he should have done so, and should moreover have used his casting vote, in which case he would have won.<sup>53</sup> His further contention that some guardians on the winning side should not have been allowed to vote because of their poor attendance record was ignored by the PLC.<sup>54</sup>

Warm words of praise for Morgan, ‘a man of the most active, temperate, self-denying and philanthropic habits’, were sent to the PLC by parish clerk Josiah Rees on 19 December, and although Morgan was a ‘member of the Calvinistic Methodist connection’ the Vicar of Talley penned a lengthy and highly positive testimonial strongly emphasising the importance of a doctor’s close attachment to and physical presence in the immediate locality: Morgan was born and bred in the parish, but

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<sup>53</sup> This was incorrect but it is not clear whether it was a genuine misunderstanding. It was taken sufficiently seriously for Chadwick to write to him: MH12/15923, 3 December 1843.

<sup>54</sup> The clerk believed that such a rule existed. The PLC later told him that he must have ‘some mutilated copy of the official circular.’

Thomas had been brought up in a public house in Llanegwad, ‘out of the district’.<sup>55</sup> He shared previous correspondents’ desire for fairness, asserting that such a ‘trustworthy and upright’ man was ‘more likely to do justice to the sick poor’, and wondered whether the district could be split, Morgan and Thomas each taking half. His idea came too late – Thomas’ appointment was confirmed by the PLC on 15 December. Silence ensued for the next three months, but, following annual board elections on 16 March matters were thrown into a state of turmoil. Phase 3 had commenced.

For the first time since the start of the union there was a contest for seats on the board of guardians. Ten candidates competed for four vacancies in Llandilofawr parish and John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen and vice chairman Capt. John Lewis topped the poll.<sup>56</sup> Board dynamics had changed – Lewis, Llwynyfedwen, now had an electorate to satisfy, as did Capt. Lewis, who was sympathetic to northern parishes’ desire for self-determination. Moreover, three new guardians for Talley and Llanegwad, all vociferous supporters of Dr. Morgan, were elected: rivalry between board members had intensified. Further, the publication of the Commissioners’ *Report* into the Rebecca riots at precisely this moment stirred up feelings about the ‘state of things’, including the cost and efficacy of poor law medical care.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Also in Llandilofawr union, 10 miles to the west.

<sup>56</sup> They received 265 and 277 votes respectively, the nearest candidate reaching only 166.

<sup>57</sup> Guardian Thomas had a history of interested meddling in medical appointments. In 1837 he proposed Nathaniel Rees as MO during Sir James Williams’ blatant attempt at jobbery, see chapter 5. He was probably one of his tenants.



Despite the two doctors now agreeing to split the district, resident guardian David Thomas escalated matters: on 25 May, at the only meeting in the union's history attended by every elected guardian (but not a single *ex officio*), he brought a motion to dismiss MO Thomas, tabling serious allegations about his conduct: he failed to keep regular surgeries, and paupers had had to wait up to nine days for him to attend. The argument was moving from objective issues such as residence to personal attacks. Not to be outflanked, Lewis persuaded the board to postpone discussion of the allegations until the PLC could be consulted. Col. Wade was called in, and an Inquiry lasting several days started on 22 June 1844.

While waiting for Wade to arrive, letters from the Morgan camp further raised the temperature: Thomas could 'seldom be found when required' so Morgan was 'generally called in'. Crucially, the real cause of the dispute as perceived in northern parishes was now revealed: although the doctors were prepared to split the district, the idea had been stymied by a guardian, 'a close relative' of MO Thomas.<sup>58</sup> Determined to achieve their objective, resident guardians personally paid for ten paupers to travel to a board meeting and plead for Morgan to be appointed as their MO: they were thwarted by Lewis who moved another adjournment, thus preventing the paupers from appearing.

Significantly, the language and style used in the letters changes noticeably in June 1844: they are still signed by resident guardian David Thomas but the text becomes much more fluent, employing words unlikely to be used by a Welsh speaking farmer. For example, his letter of 15 June talks of guardians raising *quibbles* to defer

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<sup>58</sup> This presumably refers to guardian David Thomas.

discussion, and hopes that the PLC ‘will be pleased to direct the Board immediately to *effect* a division...and not *vindicate* [Lewis’] conduct’. This suggests that the process was being engineered by an Anglophone third party, who it has not been possible to identify.

It took a month for Wade to write his report and for the PLC to digest its contents but in the intervening period both sides remained active. On 25 June Lewis organised a ‘Memorial’ to be sent to London by southern guardians: the charges against Thomas were old-hat, and northern guardians had hatched a ‘clandestine’ plan to give the job to Morgan. In short, the accusations against Thomas were ‘frivolous, vexatious and malicious’. Dr. Thomas admitted failing to attend a pauper suffering from ‘acute inflammation of the lungs’, but explained that this was because his brother ‘was in a dying state’ and he had stayed by his bed until he passed away four days later. He was being ‘continually harassed and maligned’ by guardian Thomas who had stood for election on a platform that ‘he would get rid of me cost him what it would’. The Morgan camp’s riposte on 13 July was that if it was true that Dr. Thomas’ mother (sic) was so ill, it was odd that ‘he could find time to remain two days in a public house drinking from morning to night’ – he ‘had been tipsy for nine days’.<sup>59</sup>

Wade’s report issued on 25 July was written in measured tones, concluding that if the plan to divide the district had gone ahead, the charges would never have been preferred.

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<sup>59</sup> This mistake may have been deliberate: deserting a dying mother was even more odious than abandoning a brother.

Using technical points to set most of the charges against Thomas aside he nevertheless recommended his dismissal for not attending the pauper with inflamed lungs promptly. The PLC watered the recommendation down, and wrote to the board ordering them to ask Dr. Thomas to resign: he did so on 17 August 1844.

Faced with such fiery rhetoric and un-gentlemanly conduct, the Commissioners in London despaired. George Cornewall Lewis expressed extreme exasperation: ‘This is a very Welch case’, he wrote (his emphasis), a sarcastic remark which is an important reminder of the PLC’s deeply negative view of Wales and the Welsh, remarkably coming from someone with deeply Welsh roots: the Lewis family had been in continuous residence at Harpton Court in Radnorshire since the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>60</sup>

Matters had now dragged on for ten months, and, so far, all participants had lost. Neither Doctor had the job they wanted; the northern guardians had been comprehensively out-manoeuvred by Lewis, and were resorting to more and more extreme allegations; Lewis had not yet succeeded in imposing his will; the PLC had lost control of the matter and their Assistant Commissioner; and the sick poor were not able to access the type of medical care they wanted. Remarkably, instead of drawing stumps at this point, the proponents dramatically escalated matters. Phase 4 commenced with the PLC and the guardians in a corner. They had a duty to ensure that

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<sup>60</sup> NLW: GB 0210 Harpton. According to one recent historian Lewis was ‘an inveterate opponent of the Welsh language and cultural revival’, Richard Shannon, ‘The virtues of unheroic government: the counterfactual case for Sir George Cornewall Lewis’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 17 (2011), p. 16.

paupers received medical care, but no doctor – alarmed, they opted to invite recently-sacked Thomas to stand in until a fresh election could be held. It is perhaps unsurprising that this remarkable decision, made within hours of his sacking on 17 August, led to an immediate intensification of hostilities which involved substantially enhanced vitriol, personal slurs now eclipsing issues of professional competence.

A new election was called for 14 September 1844. With district boundaries modified, there were now three posts to fill. Guardians voted unanimously to assign another existing MO, Dr. Davies, to district 3, and the re-ascendant Dr. Thomas to district 5. Since the latter was centred on Llandilo town, Lewis Llwynyfedwen's home territory, Thomas was now safely out of the battle zone. The guardians now went to war again over Talley and Llansawel parishes, newly designated as district 4.

Previously defeated Dr. Morgan now considered himself well-positioned to assume his 'rightful' place in his home parishes. However, when a new Lewis-backed entrant, Dr. Edwards, appeared and defeated Morgan by nine votes to eight resident guardians were apoplectic with rage. An anonymous letter of 30 September informed the PLC that 'Electors divided into parties who by means of some private enmity owe each other a grudge and... Mr John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen... immediately got the whole district ransacked to ffind (sic) a medical man to oppose Morgan.' The 850 word tirade which followed was very specific. Edwards was 'Drunk and carousing from Public House to Public House for 2 or 3 months together, when at home he abuses his family and breaks all the furniture in the house, smashes the windows and commits a complete devastation

and is totally reckless of everything.’ In other words, he was even worse than Thomas, especially when a further charge of extortion was added. But he did have one advantage – he lived in the parish. The intense emotion and sheer rage of the writer (who, it later emerged, was one of the newly-elected guardians) is very apparent and centred on the same fundamental issue, resentment by northern guardians that their home affairs were being hijacked by outsiders in the south. ‘The non resident guardians overlook their duty to the Poor...and sacrifice their rights to gratify the unbridled spleen of private animosity.’ In this phase the attack on Morgan’s opponent was personal from the outset – Talley had dispensed with the niceties.

The board now contained two factions, Capt. John Lewis joining forces with resident guardians to oppose Lewis, Llwynfedwen.<sup>61</sup> During early October 1844 a series of petitions and letters arrived in London, some on a ‘hate Edwards’ platform, others voicing ‘universal support’ for Morgan, the latter including one signed by 54 parishioners, but with a new twist – it was written by the chairman of neighbouring Llandovery union, who expressed ‘regret that so much schism should have occurred’. Interestingly, northern parishioners were happy to seek outside intervention if it suited their case.<sup>62</sup> No such ‘interference’ in a neighbouring union has been uncovered in other Welsh unions’ affairs. The fairness theme reappeared, one of Morgan’s

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<sup>61</sup> A rare moment when the élite group was in disarray.

<sup>62</sup> The battleground parishes were immediately adjacent to Llandovery. They were linked by the drover route and Llandovery was the natural market town for Talley residents. It was thus less ‘foreign’ than Llandilo.

supporters pleading for him to be appointed ‘on grounds of justice alone to the helpless poor’.

While, using progressively more extreme language, Morgan’s supporters continued to challenge Edwards’ suitability for the job, he himself continued to concentrate on voting irregularities. For a second time chairman Griffies-Williams had interpreted the rules incorrectly, and when he wrote to the PLC on 30 September to explain his error, it became clear that it was his failure which had led directly to Morgan’s downfall. Rather sadly, he said that he believed himself ineligible to vote, but had he done so he would have supported Morgan.<sup>63</sup> He suggested that his vote should now nevertheless be counted, thus reversing the result. Not surprisingly, the PLC rejected this idea.

At the end of October 1844, and with no resolution in sight, Wade warned the Commissioners that he now had information leading him to suppose that Edwards was indeed unfit for the job – he would go to Llandilofawr to find out. However, at this critical point he suffered a serious illness and was unable ‘to proceed to Wales’ for three months. At the official level matters stood still, but the local campaign against Edwards continued unabated. In February 1845 new allegations flowed in, culminating in claims that Edwards had perpetrated a ‘base and diabolical libel upon the virtuous character’ of one Ann Davies by maliciously claiming that she suffered from venereal

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<sup>63</sup> The union clerk ‘mistakenly’ claimed that guardians could only vote on appointment matters if they had attended two-thirds of meetings. Griffies-Williams had not done so.

disease, and then ‘spread a report in the country’ to that effect, while charging £9.13s. for his trouble.

Such allegations would have to be tabled at the board for them to be formally registered and Lewis wished to avoid this happening at all costs: he did so by deploying the finest tactical manoeuvre of his campaign. It was local practice for tenant farmers to pay their annual rent by meeting their landlord in person on a nominated day. Adhering strictly to this custom, which also provided opportunities to socialise with other tenant farmers, was a central local event. Rent day for Llansawel and Talley fell at this time, so Lewis contrived for the board meeting to be held on that day thus ensuring that Edwards’ detractors were unable to attend: his appointment was duly confirmed in their absence. Meanwhile Edwards himself wrote several letters in September and October reminding the PLC that he was still awaiting confirmation of his appointment. Nothing moved until Wade recovered and held his second Inquiry at the end of February 1845, five months after the election.

He passed over many of the points raised by Edwards’ detractors, but the decisive factor in his judgement was integrity – he discovered that the perpetrator of the venereal disease story, sister to a convicted Rebecca rioter, had perjured herself in an attempt to prove his innocence. He concluded that although Edwards’ ‘former habits of life were not creditable...there is not any sufficient ground to refuse to confirm the appointment’: on 29 March 1845, 21 months from the start of the affair, the PLC gave its assent. Lewis Llwynfedwen had finally triumphed, continuing his union career for a further

40 years, most of them as vice chairman; The Rev. Griffies-Williams resigned days later, and Capt. Lewis took his place; and Dr. Edwards remained in post for 22 years, becoming the longest serving MO in the union's history, nothing being heard of him apart from a brief spell of drunkenness in 1849.

### The appointment process and Carmarthenshire culture

The behaviour of Talley and Llansawel guardians in resisting 'outsiders' vividly illustrates how characteristics described in Chapter 2 came to the fore when important parish decisions had to be made, and suggests that there was an almost inevitable intra-union conflict when the whole board voted on issues which only directly concerned subsets of parishes: the union was not an entity with which local people identified. These events should be seen against a background in which there was 'an enduring proclivity towards abuse or rivalry between people from different parishes', something that a new administrative convenience such as a poor law union could not remove.<sup>64</sup> The intense local sense of belonging to the immediate area, and the suspicion, or even dislike, of 'strangers' is clear: people closed ranks against other parishes in the same union just as they had when faced with troops and policemen from London sent to quell riots, as was shown earlier.<sup>65</sup> A desire to continue with the Old Poor Law *status quo* is evident from the wish to retain a known parish doctor rather than accept a (possibly

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<sup>64</sup> K.D.M. Snell, 'The culture of local xenophobia', *Social History*, 28 (2003), p. 8

<sup>65</sup> Carmarthenshire people coined sarcastic or abusive nicknames for neighbouring villagers, D. Parry Jones, *My Own Folk* (Llandysul, 1972), p. 66.



better qualified) outsider, and parishioners felt that they had a moral right to determine matters in their own immediate environment.

The most remarkable feature of what occurred, however, concerns the extraordinary lengths local people were prepared to go to in support of their case – the volume level was extreme, and they seem to have been quite at ease making accusations about personal behaviour and morality which were at best unfounded. Any evidence, even from a convicted perjurer, was apparently acceptable: notions of ‘fact’ were unlike those espoused by the PLC. Such notions are rather difficult to explain in a community where religious values were ardently experienced and expressed: but they were sometimes ‘broadened’ to embrace other ideas, as shown earlier when another Talley guardian, Secretary of the Baptist chapel, solicited help from ‘magical’ sources to find his ox. This society had its own way of comprehending moral and religious boundaries, one in which ‘fairness’ was judged to be the prime requirement. Rumour and gossip were deployed as a useful part of Carmarthenshire’s way of life: ‘in a society where even local communication was haphazard and problematical, rumour was a powerful enemy’.<sup>66</sup> If securing Morgan the job is used as the measure of success, the tactics employed by his supporters were wholly unproductive. Those involved seem to have relished ‘having a go’, and it is possible to interpret the whole event as a ritual – it was, in a sense, their parish version of a Rebecca riot. Seen in this way, the process was more important than the outcome, and symbols of oppression such as New Poor Law officials were symbolically debunked.

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<sup>66</sup> M. Cragoe, ‘The Golden Grove Interest in Carmarthenshire Politics’, *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 16 (June, 1992) p. 475.

While most of the charges against the two men were set aside in the Inquiries, at least some, such as Thomas' failure to attend, were based on real events: it should, however, be noted that allegations of medical incompetence formed no part of this story.

Importantly, none of the complainants were actual patients – they were people related to or complaining on behalf of paupers who, they said, had been or would be unable to obtain satisfactory care. It is also noteworthy that none of the active participants in the correspondence were women – unlike many Rebecca 'outrages', they seem to have played no direct part in this affair. As for Thomas and Edwards the former was given a new job immediately after dismissal, and they remained in post for 17 and 22 years respectively.<sup>67</sup> There was, however, an unexpectedly beneficial outcome for Morgan. His lack of success at home caused him to widen his horizons and in 1846 he became a Royal Navy surgeon, a substantially better career opportunity: ironically his supporters' failed tactics ended up doing him a great favour. But more was to come, and having served in Africa, the Crimea and China, he rose to even greater heights in 1882 by being appointed physician to Queen Victoria: his supporters had apparently been right about his professional qualities all along.<sup>68</sup> We cannot be sure whether they saw the outcome principally as a personal triumph for Morgan or a tragic loss for Llansawel.

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<sup>67</sup> See Table 7.2.

<sup>68</sup> *Welsh Biography Online*, [wbo.llgc.org.uk/en/s-MORG-LLO-1823.html](http://wbo.llgc.org.uk/en/s-MORG-LLO-1823.html) (15 April 2012).

### Later medical malpractice

Once these 1843/4 battles were over, medical matters in the union seem to have been conducted in a routine and efficient way for the next thirty years. There is no mention of impropriety or complaint: indeed there is hardly any mention of medical matters in surviving records. However, when further difficulties arose in 1877 and 1881, they were decisively resolved.

The first involved MO Evan Jenkins who had been in post for seven years. The LGB, informed that he was ‘an habitual drunkard’, wanted to sack him. Despite this, the board, now chaired by Lord Cawdor, voted to retain his services. When the LGB asked Inspector Bircham to clarify the situation, he informed them that although ‘the better portion of the guardians’ were aware of Jenkins’ frequently inebriated state, ‘his farmer friends see little harm in a man being constantly drunk’.<sup>69</sup> However, following more consultation he was dismissed two months later.

The second event concerned a case of genuine medical misconduct. A complaint was made that Dr. J. Harris Davies had refused to operate on an urgent and ultimately fatal case of strangulated hernia. Inspector Bircham called an immediate enquiry, his promptness perhaps hastened by extensive coverage in the *Carmarthen Journal*.<sup>70</sup> He

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<sup>69</sup> TNA: MH12/15931, 29 November 1877.

<sup>70</sup> *CJ*, 22 December 1881.

concluded that there had been ‘gross neglect’, caused partly by ‘jealousy’ when the relieving officer sought a second medical opinion: he also noted Davies’ ‘excited and strange manner’. However, since Davies would be ‘ruined’ if dismissed, Bircham recommended a reprimand, adding on a more practical note that the job would be difficult to fill for the same reasons as forty years previously – there was no fully-qualified resident alternative. Bircham was over-ruled by the LGB which decided that Davies’ employment must be terminated, and the affair concluded quickly with his resignation in February 1882, two months after his failure came to light. There was a tragic aftermath to this account: having seen Bircham’s comments about Davies’ manner, the union clerk informed him that ‘several of [Davies’] relatives are of unsound mind: by 1891 Davies himself had been admitted to the Carmarthen Lunatic Asylum as an inmate.

#### Further changes to medical districts

The size of Llandilofawr union was increased in June 1882 by the addition of Quarter Bach, an industrialising area to the south. John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen, chaired a special meeting to make transitional arrangements: what started as a routine response to the union’s changed circumstances developed into a major argument, in some ways a replay of events in the 1840’s, and, as before, it was what went on beneath the surface which is most revealing. On this occasion, Lewis’ swansong, the full extent of his power and influence became apparent.

In an untypically generous gesture, Lewis, now aged 71, suggested that three measures were necessary: existing relief districts should be enlarged to include Quarter Bach; the current relieving officers' salaries should be increased to reflect the extra work; but proper health care required an additional medical district. Accordingly, he proposed new boundaries, and recommended that W. Howell Rees should be appointed as the extra MO. There was, however, also a fourth point: because it logically followed that medical and registration districts should have the same boundaries, an extra registrar would also be needed, a post for which, it turned out, he had someone in mind. When the LGB intervened, believing that Quarter Bach should simply be added to existing medical and registry districts, a row broke out: Dr. Lloyd, one of the existing MO's, objected strongly to Lewis' plan on the grounds that he had not been consulted and that the change 'would be detrimental to me and of no benefit to paupers', a view shared by all existing MO's.<sup>71</sup> Earlier themes were revived: Lloyd protested that the change 'would deprive me of my home territory', and newly-imposed Rees did not even live in the district. When Inspector Bircham appeared to back Lewis' proposal Lloyd became even more indignant, writing to the LGB at length to tell them what was really at stake: his 3-page letter is a remarkably revealing document, casting unique light on how and why Lewis acted as he did, and helping to explain his actions throughout his 36 year tenure of the vice-chairmanship.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> TNA: MH12/ 15932, 27 June 1882, Lloyd to the LGB.

<sup>72</sup> TNA: MH12/ 15932, 20 July 1882.

Lloyd's thesis was that Lewis' enthusiasm to 'meddle with' districts was a side-effect of his desire to secure the extra registrar post for a friend, a task even 'the very determined' Lewis had not found easy: he 'had to have a break to get a seconder' who turned out to be the candidate for the job. He wistfully continued 'the rest of the guardians, as is their wont under similar circumstances, were dumb': this was an attempt 'not intended, perhaps, to injure me as to serve friends at any cost to me and to other people', an interpretation which sounds remarkably similar to Lewis' plot to unseat Dr. Morgan in Llansawel forty years previously.<sup>73</sup> Bircham seems to have been caught between a desire to ensure that things were 'properly' done, and an inability to see that Lewis was up to his old tricks, but admitted that the 'original method of announcing the change was injudicious'.<sup>74</sup> He was saved when the Registrar General decided not to create an extra job, but to add the district to Llandilo. The board now changed tack and offered Lloyd his old district back, a move he described as 'an example of steering due North by South with a vengeance'. Echoing old sentiments he was, he explained, 'only pleading for ordinary fair play'.

For a short while Lewis remained silent, but in September he sought vengeance, securing a motion to terminate all MO contracts in six months, at which time medical districts would be redrawn.<sup>75</sup> He bided his time until March 1883 at which point he tabled detailed proposals, feeling sufficiently self-assured to oppose Lord Dynevor in

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<sup>73</sup> This is in startling contrast to Driver's contention 'Individual guardians were simply unable to exercise the kind of influence at the disposal of landowning magistrates', *Power and Pauperism*, p. 33.

<sup>74</sup> Bircham's handwritten notes..

<sup>75</sup> CA: BG 46, 15 September 1882.

the process.<sup>76</sup> This time, however, Lewis was over-confident in his ability to have his way: the LGB reminded guardians that under their General Medical Order of 25 May 1857, MO's remained in post until they died, resigned, or went insane – the contracts could not be terminated. Despite such a setback Lewis may have taken comfort from the fact that at least 'he had had a go' – just like his Llansawel opponents in the 1840's.

Undaunted, and chairing the board in July 1883 in Lord Emlyn's absence, Lewis refused to sign cheques for the doctors' salaries on the grounds that their contracts had all been terminated in March: he had conveniently forgotten the LGB's ruling. His position was clearly unsustainable and the union clerk appealed to the LGB, which ordered payment to be made. In the face of such odds, Lewis was finally overwhelmed, but still unbowed – when elections were held in April 1884, he again topped the poll, remaining popular with voters despite fellow guardians' and poor law officials' probable misgivings as to his actions and motives. Even Lewis could not fend off the effects of age: he did not stand for election in 1885, and died in November that year. After due consideration the guardians recorded their 'great loss at the death of John Lewis [and expressed] sympathy with his family in the heavy trouble that has fallen on them'.<sup>77</sup> It is not inconceivable that, for some of them at least, this carefully worded tribute was expressed ironically.

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<sup>76</sup> He had opposed Lord Cawdor on other matters on several previous occasions.

<sup>77</sup> CA: BG 46, 15 November 1885.

### Cardiff union medical issues in the 1840's

Complaints about medical officers' behaviour were, of course, not unique to Llandilofawr. In 2004, Stewart and King drew attention to allegations of medical malpractice in Cardiff union, a situation which offers interesting similarities and contrasts to Llandilofawr.<sup>78</sup> Between February 1842 and March 1845 four medical complaints, including the Llantrisant incident in May 1844, were lodged in Cardiff, and it is likely that the PLC's extreme anxiety to investigate matters in Llantrisant was partly due to the fact that the murky appointment row in Llandilofawr occurred simultaneously. There are, however, key differences in the way events unfolded in the two unions. First, Cardiff investigations were resolved relatively rapidly: only one took more than 8 weeks from start to finish. Second, the style adopted by complainants in Cardiff was very low-key compared to the histrionics further west. Third, and perhaps most importantly, while the appointment of 'strangers' was not generally a major issue in Cardiff, guardian Richard Francis added an extra dimension. Writing to the PLC, he said that although 'modern' professional qualifications were important, a local man Dr. Williams, with 20 years' experience but not fully qualified, should be appointed anyway: he had a benefit 'indispensable for a medical man who has to do with the lower order of people in this district' – he was a Welshman.<sup>79</sup> The emphasis on Welsh

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<sup>78</sup> J. Stewart and S. King, 'Death in Llantrisant: Henry Williams and the New Poor Law in Wales', *Rural History*, 15 (2004). There was also alleged malpractice in Bridgend: J.H. Thomas and W.E. Wilkins, *The Bridgend-Cowbridge Union workhouse and guardians*, Cowbridge (1995), chapters 5 and 11.

<sup>79</sup> TNA: MH12/16247, Richard Francis 13 May 1843. Although the board elected Williams by 19 votes to 14, the PLC over-ruled them, appointing his better qualified opponent. Guardians seem to have accepted this outcome peacefully, an unthinkable outcome in Llandilofawr.



in general rather than a specific parish highlights interestingly different priorities in the two areas.

It was pointed out earlier that the PLC found difficulty adhering to its policies of double qualification and residence in Llandilofawr. This was also true for Cardiff: when the board confirmed six appointments in August 1842 none satisfied both requirements, and when two of those appointees resigned in October their replacements were similarly deficient. Curiously the PLC does not seem to have objected in the same dogged way they did in Llandilofawr in such circumstances, perhaps accepting the reality that ideal candidates did not exist in the area. However, in the case of Evan Davies, the Llantrisant MO, there is a further complication which would certainly have ruled him out had he been seeking a post in Llandilofawr. He was appointed when Cardiff union was formed in 1836, but in August 1838 the union clerk wrote to the PLC: ‘Mr Davies is, I find, also appointed to a district in the Merthyr Tydfil union at £40’.<sup>80</sup> It is astonishing that this was not immediately seized on in London, but his double appointment continued without apparent further comment until two guardians accused him of neglecting eight patients in April 1842.<sup>81</sup> Their motivation and the outcome provide interesting insights.

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<sup>80</sup> TNA: MH12/16247, clerk to PLC 21 August 1842.

<sup>81</sup> This seems to involve administrative bungling in London. The form used to approve MO appointments only contained questions about ‘officers’ other duties within a union. The idea of an MO holding posts in two unions simultaneously was never officially entertained, although in practice it also occurred elsewhere: P. Dunkley, ‘The ‘Hungry Forties’ and the New Poor Law: a case study’, *The Historical Journal*, 2 (1974), p. 341.

The issue originally raised was identical to one of the main contentions in Llandilofawr – the doctor lived too far away to attend patients and deal with them properly. Despite repeated attempts to get the two complainants to provide details, their allegations remained at best vague. In the one case which AC Day was able to investigate, Davies was accused of failing to provide care to Ann Miles who eventually died. There was conflicting evidence from family and friends about Davies' attendance, but union paperwork recorded 17 visits over a two-month period: there were also professional differences of view as to whether the patient's condition had been curable. Three doctors supported Davies' contention that there was no known cure for her 'paralytic affliction of the lower extremities', but Dr. Harrison thought otherwise. Harrison, it turned out, was one of the 'old school' doctors, in practice since 1812 with no formal qualifications, but well established in the local community.<sup>82</sup> On this basis, Day found his medical opinion unconvincing, and Davies was exonerated. The complainants eventually admitted that their real grievance (as in Llansawel) was that Davies was not resident, a situation exacerbated by his two jobs – 'a friendless pauper has to send 18 miles for help'.<sup>83</sup> Their (much exaggerated) statements about the acreage of Davies' two districts eventually caused the PLC to agree that there was a problem, but, partly because the clerk was unable to obtain maps to verify matters, and partly because of the dearth of doctors in the area, there was no practical alternative solution. Thus, as in the case of Henry Williams, the final report did not provoke any remedial action.

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<sup>82</sup> It was Harrison who later stirred up trouble for Davies in the Llantrisant case and on similar grounds: 'Death in Llantrisant' p. 79.

<sup>83</sup> TNA: MH12/16247, guardians Richards and Williams, 18 August 1842.

A previous complaint in February 1842 had raised issues not mentioned in Llandilofawr. This case concerned Cardiff MO James Lewis who, at the time of the complaint, was also Mayor. He had been appointed MO along with Evan Davies at the start of the union. His accuser was another doctor, George Reece, who, like Harrison, was of long local standing but unqualified. He accused Lewis of poor patient care, a charge eventually disposed of, and fraud. The fraud charge related to cases of childbirth for which Lewis claimed the standard rate of 10s. 6d. from the union, but employed a midwife to attend the birth, calling him only if there were complications: he paid her 4s. and retained the balance. Day discovered that this was a frequent occurrence, ‘most’ births in the workhouse happening this way: indeed it was common practice in Cardiff for MO’s to use deputies. He concluded that it could not really be classed as fraud but pleaded with the PLC to stamp out such practice, ‘otherwise the humanity of the law will not be applied’ – a revealing comment about how Day saw the intention of the NPL.<sup>84</sup> He was also concerned that continuation would ‘inflict unmerited odium on local officials’. The motivation for Reece’s intervention is extremely unclear, especially since one of Day’s discoveries was that Reece himself had done exactly the same thing, regularly employing deputies for the last 25 years – it was a typical ‘abuse’ carried over from pre-NPL times.

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<sup>84</sup> TNA: MH12/16247, Day’s report, 28 February 1842.

## Conclusion

The events described in two Welsh unions emphasise many historians' findings: the manner in which the New Poor Law was applied varied considerably. This has been found to be the case not only between regions – northern versus southern England, for example – but also between different parts of the same region.<sup>85</sup> England and Wales may have been subject to the same legislation, but it seems that, at a detailed level, many unions trod their own path. Llandilofawr is certainly such a case.

Stewart and King posed a question for other historians: 'were Llantrisant and Cardiff truly representative of anywhere else?'.<sup>86</sup> Their observations about communications, continuing OPL practices and administration are echoed in Llandilofawr, but, on the basis of the limited evidence available about individual cases, there is less reason to question its quality of medical care. There are further similarities: local peoples' strong desire for MO's to reside in their district; a preference for appointees to be of local origin; a strong sense of trust in the competence of older, less qualified doctors; the frequency of bitter intra-union disagreements on medical matters; the PLC's difficulty in imposing its will on Welsh guardians; the lack of doctors in South Wales with the relevant qualifications; and the PLC's reluctance to accept that its rules were

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<sup>85</sup> D. Green, *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790–1870* (Farnham, 2010), pp. 2-3; A. Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-century England* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 20; G. Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (London, 1984), p. 153; D. Fraser, 'The English Poor Law and the Origins of the British Welfare State', in W.J. Mommsen (ed.) *The Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany, 1850–1950* (London, 1981), p. 21; But Hennock argues for greater uniformity of policy between parishes: E. Hennock, *The origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany 1850–1914: Social Policies Compared* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 32.

<sup>86</sup> 'Death in Llantrisant' p. 83.

unenforceable in these circumstances. The Commissioners were philosophically unable even to contemplate that their rules might be ‘wrong’ in a Welsh setting. The bureaucracy they had established made it unacceptable to do anything other than ensure that they were used: ‘correct principles’ had to be universally applied. This echoes suggestions that the ‘first twenty years of NPL administrative history is one of conflict and compromise’.<sup>87</sup>

When it comes to style, however – the means local people adopted in an attempt to improve matters – differences between Cardiff and Llandilofawr are marked. First, extreme allegations of the type employed by Llansawel guardians to denigrate Doctors Thomas and Edwards were not used in Cardiff. They may, of course, have seemed unacceptable to many Carmarthenshire people, but if, in the light of on-going Rebecca activities their actions are interpreted as ceremonial, it could be argued that their behaviour was culturally determined and thus ‘normal’. Second, in the 1840’s at least, it is not obvious that Cardiff union had an equivalent of John Lewis. Although patronage was commonly brought to bear in making public appointments (Sir Thomas Frankland Lewis engineering the appointment of his son to succeed him as PLC Commissioner being a pertinent example in this context)<sup>88</sup>, John Lewis’ methods of imposing his will were at the boundaries of acceptability, involving bulldozer tactics rather than mere persuasion. Here again caution is necessary, because in Llandilofawr, as shown in earlier chapters, ‘connections’ were vital: access to the clerkship, for

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<sup>87</sup> Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor*, p. 30.

<sup>88</sup> J. Bourne, *Patronage and Society in nineteenth-century England* (London, 1986), pp. 166-8.

example, was effectively controlled by the élite group for fifty years: Carmarthenshire culture may have been more tolerant of what the PLC saw as ‘jobbing’ than was the case in Glamorganshire.

Cardiff consisted of 45 parishes as opposed to Llandilofawr’s 12, and the difficulties described above highlight some of the dilemmas faced when South Wales unions were formed. There was a general preference for large rather than small unions because it was felt that they would be administratively easier to run and to staff: Clive had refrained from declaring separate unions in Cowbridge and Caerphilly because of ‘the advantages of large unions so frequently adverted to’.<sup>89</sup> Once they were set up however, he encountered a handicap, ‘the great difficulty of obtaining intelligent guardians in this country’. Clive’s trenchant views need to be treated with some care, but in a large board such as Cardiff, small farmer guardians from rural parishes (a particular target of Clive’s venom) who he felt were unused to and perhaps uncomfortable dealing with complex issues could either be eclipsed and ‘leant on’ by more self-assured gentlemen and *ex officios*, or could stubbornly stick to ‘incorrect principles’ and obstruct progress. On the other hand, too small a union opened the way for dominance by someone such as Lewis, and made it even more likely that guardians could promote personal interests at the expense of objective decision-making. Cardiff and Llandilofawr are good examples of these contrasts.

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<sup>89</sup> TNA: MH12/16426, Clive to PLC 29 July 1836. I. Dewar, ‘George Clive and the establishment of the New Poor Law in South Glamorgan, 1836–1838’, *Morgannwg*, 11 (1967).

In examining relief offered to the sick poor in Llandilofawr in the general context of medical relief under the New Poor Law, this chapter has found that it was notable for what it was not, rather than for what it was. The picture which emerges bears little resemblance to Englander's characterisation of NPL medical provision as 'a Cinderella service staffed by second-rate doctors'.<sup>90</sup> Medical care was not a major issue in Llandilofawr: the relatively small scale provision was headed up by doctors of high social standing rather than low status, and there is no reason to doubt its quality. In an area where expectations were low, this is, perhaps, not surprising.<sup>91</sup> Leaving out doctors who died in service, half the incumbents served the union for more than 10 years, so although the posts were not well paid, once medical men were appointed, they were content to perform their duties for long periods. It should be noted, however, that, in common with other Welsh unions such as Cardiff, fully qualified candidates were not always easy to find. Michael Flinn believed that medical relief offered under the NPL was 'one of the more remarkable social developments of the Victorian period': this study indicates that while the Llandilofawr medical service was hardly 'remarkable' it was, given the resources made available to it, adequate.<sup>92</sup>

The process in which guardians engaged when appointing a new MO in the 1840's was shown to be a seminal event in the life of the union – not because it contributed anything to the welfare of the sick poor, but because John Lewis and his supporters

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<sup>90</sup> D. Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in Britain: from Chadwick to Booth, 1834–1914* (London, 1998) p. 37.

<sup>91</sup> A. Negrine, 'Medicine and poverty'.

<sup>92</sup> Flinn, 'Medical services', p.48.

were able to out-manoeuvre their opponents, leaving him to exert *de facto* control of the board for the next forty years.<sup>93</sup> The event is probably best seen as a form of ritual conflict played out between rival parishes – if the MO appointment had not been the event to light the touchpaper, it would have happened over some other issue. No previous studies of Welsh unions have uncovered anything similar.

Finally, a comparison with some events in Cardiff, strongly emphasises findings of intra-regional variation in aspects of New Poor Law administration. Indeed, it may be that Llandilofawr medical services were part of a welfare system which had more in common with Denmark or the Netherlands than other parts of Wales.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> As did the Rev. Christopher Dodson, chairman of Andover union, who ‘established a ruthless ascendancy over all his colleagues’, N. Longmate, *The Workhouse: a Social History* (Pimlico, 2003) p. 68.

<sup>94</sup> S. King and J. Stewart (eds), *Welfare Peripheries: The Development of Welfare States in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe* (Bern, 2007), pp. 24-27.



## Chapter 8

### Conclusions

The principal aims of this study have been to take a detailed look at Llandilofawr union's guardians (both elected and *ex officio*); to locate them firmly in the local culture and see what that meant for the way they ran the union; to use specific events as prisms to examine what went on below the surface; and to examine the outcome in the context of New Poor Law historiography. This methodology has opened up hitherto unexplored areas which lie at the heart of how the law was implemented in a rural Welsh union, and the principal finding is clear. The area remained remote for the whole of the period studied – even after the railway arrived in 1857 – and the population's deep aversion to change or 'progress' kept outside forces at bay. Thus, in the debate about continuity or change from Old Poor Law to New, evidence from Llandilofawr points firmly to the former.<sup>1</sup>

In drawing conclusions about Llandilofawr it needs to be recognised that matters were not black and white. It was in the nature of Carmarthenshire culture for there to be

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<sup>1</sup> This issue is discussed in S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700–1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000), ch. 3. He points out that the continuity argument may have been overplayed. See: W. Apfel and P. Dunkley, 'English rural society and the New Poor Law: Bedfordshire, 1837–47', *Social History*, 10 (1985); A. Brundage, *The Making of the New Poor Law 1832–1839* (London, 1978), p. 183; P. Harling, 'The power of persuasion: central authority, local bureaucracy and the New Poor Law', *English Historical Review* (Jan. 1992); E. Hurren, *Protesting About Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late-Victorian England, 1870–1900* (Woodbridge, 2007), p. 98; P. Mandler, 'The making of the New Poor Law redivivus', *Past and Present*, 117 (1987); P. Mandler, 'Tories and paupers: christian political economy and the making of the New Poor Law', *Historical Journal* 33 (1990); M. Rose, 'The allowance system under the New Poor Law', *Economic History Review*, 3 (1966).

inconsistencies and conflicts between what people said and did, and boundaries between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ could be flexible. That very complexity provided a richness to Llandilofawr society which conditioned the way people thought about the New Poor Law and, therefore, the way it was implemented. In such a world an appreciation of what went on behind the scenes is crucial to understanding how the union was managed – things were often not what they seemed. These are matters addressed by this study.

The starting point in 1836 was that most of Llandilofawr’s elected and *ex officio* guardians believed that what they had was good enough and they did not want to change it, albeit for different and partly opposing reasons.<sup>2</sup> Crucially, the authorities’ hope that a keen group of *ex officios* would take up the reform banner simply did not happen – it has been shown that magistrates consciously absented themselves from the process.<sup>3</sup> Further, at the very first meeting, the leading lights of Llandilofawr society moved decisively to prevent ‘outsiders’ such as William Peel (however eminent their English family connections might be) taking control. It was a trusted élite, consisting mainly of much respected families of long local standing (the same people who had run the vestries) who took on the task of running the union, and, between 1836 and 1886, only 282 other elected guardians joined them on the board. Their primary allegiance remained firmly at parish level with the ratepayers (their friends, neighbours and relations) who had elected them, and they had little enthusiasm for actively facilitating

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<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to see evidence of the English approach as described by Eastwood who saw magistrates as ‘actively involved in innovations in poor law administration’, and ‘virtually universal’ reformism in parishes taking place at a ‘bewildering’ rate: D. Eastwood, ‘Rethinking the debates on the Poor Law in Early nineteenth-century England’, *Utilitas*, 6 (1994), p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> There was a much more robust approach by the magistracy in Yorkshire, see F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: the Workhouse System 1834–1884* (Cambridge 1993) p.127. For Wales, Williams identifies a general problem with magistrates and the NPL, because they felt ‘forced to accept a seat on the Board of Guardians and to debate and vote among shopkeepers and farmers’: D. Williams, *The Rebecca Riots* (Cardiff, 1971) p. 138.

the development of a new union administrative infrastructure which would diminish parish control. They took a pragmatic view of the situation, however: the law was unlikely to be rescinded, so they made a good show of appearing to co-operate by attending board meetings in goodly numbers, recruiting the necessary officers (taking the opportunity to appoint friends and relations if possible), and building a workhouse. But lengthy debates on ‘better’ ways to administer the law rarely resulted in action: Carmarthenshire guardians preferred to engage in a process of discussion and argument rather than act in a way which did not suit them, a powerful diversionary tactic. A vivid expression of the sometimes conflicting nature of events in Llandilofawr is to be found in the union career of John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen who rose from the back row of the vestry to a position of dominance in the union hierarchy over a career spanning 47 years. He was at times a ‘moderniser’, but fiercely resisted new ideas if he felt they were being foisted on the union by outsiders. Thus, to see why Llandilofawr worked as it did it is necessary to understand who held the reins of power. This issue is now explored before further conclusions are drawn.

Within two years of Llandilofawr’s formation it is apparent that elected guardians and local union officials were in the ascendant. There are three reasons for this decisive outcome. First was the emergence and development of the élite group. At the beginning, it was led by influential members of Llandilo town society, ‘squires’ with connections in every part of the area: they were looked up to and respected by those lower down the social scale, but kept a careful distance from the gentry. Town members were joined by two large farmers, John Lewis and David Harries, both around 30 years of age when the union began, who remained active in poor law affairs for fifty years. As the ‘squires’ grew older, the farmers – John Lewis, Llwynyfedwen, in

particular – effectively assumed control of the union: influence moved away from the traditional leaders of local society towards a younger and very assertive out-of-town group. This change exacerbated traditional tensions and competition between parishes in the union which never became a cohesive entity with which local people identified: their sense of belonging remained firmly at parish level, or even at sub-parish hamlet level. In short, there was an influential local group keen to exert control of the union (or at least prevent it from usurping their own traditional position) composed of individuals with the determination, skill and local connections to do so. The group's composition evolved over time.

Second was the PLC's handling of Assistant Commissioner appointments, a matter on which we may assume they lavished some care given their views about the 'peculiarity' of Wales. Finding and managing the 'right' people was not an easy task: no such organisation had existed before, so there was no experience on which to draw.<sup>4</sup> The initial choice of George Clive, a man with a robust approach and trenchant views, suggests that they thought a firm approach was necessary. He saw matters in military terms, explaining that he had been 'forced to lecture clayheaded farmers a good deal and dragoon them all', so that after only two months all the now-unionised Carmarthen parishes had 'succumbed'.<sup>5</sup> His correspondence with Sir Thomas Frankland Lewis hints that they were on close personal terms, and he thus felt empowered to do things his way with the minimum interference (or help) from London. Despite Clive's

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<sup>4</sup> A. Brundage, *Making*, Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the so-called 'Tyrants of Somerset House'. Opinions differ – the Commission has also been described as an 'agency of restraint and enlightenment', P. Dunkley, "The 'Hungry Forties' and the New Poor Law: a case study", *The Historical Journal*, 2 (1974), p. 346.

<sup>5</sup> TNA: MH32/12: 2 August 1836 speaking of Newport and 14 October concerning Carmarthen.

apparent success, the Commissioners embarked on a series of rapid management reshuffles, and, after only 18 months in South Wales, he was replaced by Edward Senior.<sup>6</sup> Even more acerbic about the Welsh than his predecessor, he lasted only 11 months before being reassigned to eastern England, at which point Digby Neave was forced, very much against his will, to take over in South Wales. His response was to resign after only 10 months in charge of Llandilofawr, and the long-serving William Day found his district extended. He had looked after Mid and North Wales since 1835, and now took charge of the South as well.<sup>7</sup> These rapid changes led to a lack of continuity from the central authorities – each AC started with no local knowledge, and Llandilofawr guardians were quick to sense and exploit this situation. The PLC's *modus operandi* produced a situation in which the vested interests of the well-organised élite group were almost bound to prevail.

Third was Senior's botched intervention in the election of a new union clerk when the incumbent resigned in January 1839, a process described in chapter 5. This was a pivotal moment in establishing where real power lay because his inability to exert his authority led to a loss of credibility, and allowed the post of clerk to be retained by what amounted to a dynasty. In particular for a quarter of a century (1846 to 1872) George Williams was clerk while John Lewis was vice-chairman – a partnership which provided effective control of union policy. In passing it is interesting to note that elements of the election process for clerks are reminiscent of the 1843 medical officer election described in Chapter 7 when grossly defamatory allegations were made against

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<sup>6</sup> This does not seem to have a planned operation, rather a reaction to events.

<sup>7</sup> Day had found administering North Wales a difficult task, declaring it to be 'A devilish queer country to have to do business in'. NLW: MSS 3146F, 21 October 1837, Day to Chadwick.

‘unwanted’ candidates in what may be read as an example of ceremonial ‘debunking’ of figures of authority.<sup>8</sup> Having now established how the power structure of the union developed, this account now discusses whether the New Poor Law can be said to have ‘succeeded’ in Llandilofawr.

An appropriate starting point is to recall that despite the generally accepted story of fierce Welsh resistance to the workhouse and certain specific provisions of the New Poor Law, reaction in Llandilofawr was muted. Guardians and officials got on quietly with the job of running the union in a way which satisfied the letter of the law, remaining adept at retaining their own local influence. Their solution to the workhouse ‘problem’ was simple – use it as little as possible; the secondary solution was to ensure that the few inmates were treated reasonably, although firm steps were taken to deal with troublemakers.

Ultimately, the question of ‘success’ or ‘failure’ for all concerned (paupers, ratepayers, guardians, officials and the central authorities) is determined by financial measures.

The study has shown that, in common with many Welsh unions, the vast majority of relief – over 95% throughout the period – was given outside the workhouse. The overall pauperism rate in Llandilofawr has been estimated at around 7% when the union started, falling to 6% by the early 1880’s. It is clear that payments continued to be made to the able-bodied and the workhouse test was not rigidly applied. Chapter 4 suggested that guardians found inventive ways to help paupers by means which would

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<sup>8</sup> When George Williams was being eased into the clerk’s job in 1846 two letters from guardian William Williams informed the PLC that ‘everybody knows’ he had fathered five illegitimate children. He proceeded to name four of the mothers and advised Commissioners not to seek corroboration from the union chairman because he was ‘biased’. In fact William Williams had announced his intention to vote with the other 21 guardians until told that the proposed salary was £60 p.a. In the light of such ‘excess’ he suffered qualms about the candidate’s moral suitability for the job. TNA: MH12/15923, 5 May and 23 May 1846.

not be apparent in union accounts. Thus, seen from this macro level, Llandilofawr was a mixed success for the central authorities.<sup>9</sup> The concept of in-relief had not really worked as they wished, but they could take comfort from the fact that the level of rates required to fund the union in the 1880's was only slightly higher than it had been in the early 1840's. Yet, as suggested in several aspects of union affairs, a more detailed look reveals a varied story.

The level of rates collected varied significantly from year to year, rising and falling back three times between 1850 and 1880.<sup>10</sup> An examination of expenditure per head of the population on poor relief revealed that while for Carmarthenshire as a whole the level remained constant at around 6/- per head between 1841 and 1878, the figure for Llandilofawr rose sharply after 1861: by the 1880's it was some 15% higher than for the county and 5% higher than the average for Wales as a whole. Judged by this, Llandilofawr guardians appear relatively generous. The most telling finding, however, is that there continued to be substantial differences between parishes in the union. Several aspects of guardians' local horizons have been identified and discussed in the study, and, not surprisingly, this was reflected in the relief they offered. Typical payments in the northern parish of Talley stood at over 11/- in the early 1880's, well over twice the level in the southern industrialising parish of Llandebie – there is scant evidence of a union norm from these figures. Although such variations are unlikely to have been welcomed in London, a broader measure indicates that money doles paid to

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<sup>9</sup> The outcome in Cardiganshire was similar, A.E. Davies, 'The New Poor Law in a rural area 1834–1850', *Ceredigion*, 8 (1978), p. 274. This was also the case in parts of North Wales: C. Flynn–Hughes, 'Aspects of poor law administration and policy in Anglesey, 1834–1848', *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society*, 10 (1950).

<sup>10</sup> Precise reasons for such large swings from year to year remain unclear.

individuals fell from around 3/- per week under the Old Poor Law to 2/- at the end of the study, which would be more in line with their expectations – but paupers also received better medical care once union facilities were available to them. It is evident that there is not a simple answer to the success/failure question: broader measures suggest that central authorities could claim success, but seen from parish level the variation in payments indicates that a significant degree of local practice continued, echoing Snell's observation: 'Wales emerges almost as a different welfare country'.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the picture of Llandilofawr which emerges is one of a considerable diversity of geographical outcomes. Indeed, significant differences remained between parishes within the union, so, in a sense, there is no Llandilofawr norm which can be compared to any other union – Welsh or English. It is therefore pertinent to reflect how much of the philosophy behind the New Poor Law trickled down to Carmarthenshire, and to those actively involved in its administration in Llandilofawr in order to assess their intentions. Lord John Russell's objective was clear – to introduce 'improvement' into the system for handling pauperism. 'We are busy introducing system, method, science, economy, regularity [and] discipline' he boasted to Chadwick, previous arrangements having been 'lax, careless, wasteful and injudicious'.<sup>12</sup> Such an approach would be associated with words and ideas such as the following: objective/disinterested provision of relief; use of standard criteria to judge need; deserving versus non-deserving poor; systematic treatment of paupers; professional management; discipline; deterrence;

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<sup>11</sup> K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 230.

<sup>12</sup> Russell to Chadwick, 9 October 1836. Cited by Eastwood, 'Rethinking', *Utilitas*, 6 (1994), p. 99.



restraint/submission.<sup>13</sup> Since most of these concepts cannot readily be associated with the management of Llandilofawr union, it may be concluded that the guardians had other ideas. The discussion of medical care and the workhouse have shown that John Lewis and his team were largely successful in doing things their own way, and the central authorities, having lost local credibility at an early stage were not in a position to impose their approach. It has been shown that after an initial decade during which some aspects of union management in Llandilofawr were quarrelsome and difficult, matters settled down. After the 1850's business was largely dealt with routinely – it had become evident to the authorities that they were not going to effect a regime in which out-relief was the exception rather than the rule, so they settled for a policy of administering what existed in practice. Thus, Inspectors' annual *Reports* reflect a weary acceptance that what was there did not always conform to their ideal view – it never had, and that was not about to change.

In 1877 Inspector Thomas Bircham reflected on forty years' experience of efforts to impose the New Poor Law on Wales generally and Llandilofawr in particular. Attitudes had not 'improved' since 1837: outdoor relief was still widely offered to women with illegitimate children; medical relief was given by loans, guardians using their 'discretion' about repayment; and there was no point in giving orders to reduce relief to the able-bodied as they would be 'evaded'. In short 'no desirable result for Wales is likely to realised as yet'.<sup>14</sup> Like Clive forty years previously, he attributed this to 'ordinary Welsh guardians, whose discretionary powers, if limited in proportion to the

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<sup>13</sup> See D. Green, *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790–1870* (Farnham, 2010), pp. 14–16; P. Dunkley, 'Whigs and Paupers: the reform of the English Poor Laws, 1830–1834', *Journal of British Studies*, 20 (1981).

<sup>14</sup> TNA: MH32/96, 28 February 1877. The inclusion of 'as yet' suggests that he nevertheless lived in hope.

intelligence they exhibit in the administration of the poor laws, should be but small indeed': the Poor Law authorities' attitudes to the Welsh had not 'advanced' either. Bircham had not grasped the Carmarthenshire culture: a diligent, caring, thoughtful administrator, he produced printed booklets tailored to the circumstances of each of his unions containing advice on how to reduce pauperism. He launched them in person at board meetings, encountering 'the most willing verbal assistance', but then nothing actually happened: 'rules of a strict nature were drawn up and adopted unanimously, but proved to be little better than a farce, a printed irony in the proceedings that followed their presumed adoption'.<sup>15</sup> Guardians shied away from unpleasant personal confrontation and deliberately appeared to be friendly, before carrying on as if nothing had happened. For them, strongly influenced by their nonconformist values, this was a normal part of local culture, although for the authorities in London it may be what they had in mind as Welsh 'peculiarity'.<sup>16</sup>

Bircham's 1882 *Report* showed that Llandilofawr and its neighbours still held remarkably similar opinions about poor relief to those they had espoused in the 1830's – and, 50 years on, hopes of a change for the better were fading. 'The difficulty experienced in these Welsh hill districts of breaking through the traditional system, so long in vogue, is not one easily to be overcome' wrote Bircham, 'and the small dole upon which the poorer classes continue to exist is looked upon by them as a right as soon as they reach 60 years of age, and by widows the day after the head of the family has been removed'.<sup>17</sup> His *Reports* written in 1892 and 1896, a decade beyond the end

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> I.G. Jones, *People and Protest: Wales 1815–1880* (Cardiff, 1988), p. 122.

<sup>17</sup> TNA: MH32/96, June 1882.

of this study, make identical observations, and he gave warnings echoing those of Henry Leach in 1839: ‘indiscriminate doles lower the standard of independence and self help of all’: some paupers were still obliged to live in unfit accommodation because their rent was paid.<sup>18</sup> In short, the central authorities were vividly aware that hardly anything had changed. This view was shared by local people – according to Llangeler parishioner Daniel Jones writing in 1899 ‘Little change has taken place in a social sense, especially in the case of the ordinary people in the parish from the days of the feudal system’.<sup>19</sup> There is, then, scant evidence of a ‘revolution in government’ in Carmarthenshire during the period of this covered by this thesis.

Several findings from this study have wider implications for interpreting the implementation of the New Poor Law generally. First, the importance of personality in governing union affairs emerges as a key finding – one not yet been echoed in other studies, which have generally treated boards of guardians as collective wholes. In Llandilofawr the dominance of John Lewis, Llwynfedwen, has been made clear, but personality issues emerge in other ways such as the fractious nature of the gentry group, and interventions on matters such as medical appointments by a series of interested parties. More widely, the emergence of the élite group, membership of which evolved over the fifty years of this study, as the union’s controlling force may be traced back to the personalities of the key players – in the choice of chairman, for example. As a cohesive group, and driven by Lewis’ relentless involvement in every aspect of union

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<sup>18</sup> TNA: MH32/96, 8 July 1892.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in D. Parry-Jones, *My Own Folk* (Llandysul, 1972), p. 49.

business, they did not need an experienced, powerful person in this role – three were in their late twenties or early thirties when appointed.

A second area which has emerged is that a small body of elected guardians comprised the board throughout the period studied. The discovery that guardians sought re-election over long periods of time, and that poor law elections were sometimes vigorously contested on local or personal grounds rather than following mainstream political divisions also comes as a new finding, pointing to the existence of a ‘committed core’ of local (male) farmers in poor law matters. ‘Commitment’ included a strong desire to keep outside forces such as the authorities in London at bay, but also extended to maintaining parish independence as far as possible. Steeped in the local Carmarthenshire culture, they brought local values to the board table, and, in particular to the way the appointment process for officials such as medical officers was conducted. Suggestions of nepotism have been made in some other studies, but the active role of vociferous local residents in protecting parish interests, as they saw it, may have been widespread.

The virtually complete absence of magistrates from Llandilofawr’s affairs begs the question of whether this was so in other unions. In this case it was further complicated by the apparent separation of local gentry from aristocrats, but the extent of their disengagement opens questions about the universality of the widely accepted view that magistrates were key to the New Poor Law process in a positive way. The élite group in Llandilofawr skilfully assured their control of day to day matters throughout the

union by establishing a family dynasty of clerks, an outcome not yet revealed elsewhere.

The extent of the central authorities' powerlessness in handling affairs in Llandilofawr effectively from their point of view is evident from this study, suggesting that similar difficulties may have faced them in other unions, especially small ones in rural areas. The rapid turnover rate of Assistant Commissioners in the early years was followed by a period of stability once William Day's district was extended to include South Wales. He remained in post for three years, but his ultimate ejection leaves many unanswered questions.<sup>20</sup> This study has illustrated some aspects of the 'peculiarity' of Wales as the Poor Law Commissioners saw it, at least in terms of attitudes to the relief of poverty. This too is likely to have as yet unrevealed implications for the way they dealt with other Welsh unions, and possibly those in remote areas of England. Given that two of the early appointees, Thomas Frankland Lewis and his son George Cornwall Lewis, were themselves of Welsh stock, and that William Day (and his wife) were half-Welsh, their attitude is puzzling.<sup>21</sup>

Issues of Welsh 'peculiarity' and the lack of evidence for a 'revolution in government' in Carmarthenshire beg the question of why this was so. For English gentry such as Llandilofawr's Assistant Commissioners, Wales felt alien. Extremely poor roads made

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<sup>20</sup> The only work on Day is now almost fifty years old: R.A. Lewis, 'William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, IX (1964).

<sup>21</sup> Studies of George Cornwall Lewis, for example, have ignored his Poor Law activities: K. Bock, 'History and a science of man: an appreciation of George Cornwall Lewis', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 12 (1951); S.H. Palmer, 'Sir George Cornwall Lewis, a different kind of Englishman', *Éire-Ireland*, 16:3 (1981); R. Shannon, 'The virtues of unheroic government: the counterfactual case for Sir George Cornwall Lewis', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 17 (2011).

it physically impenetrable and they found the language unintelligible. A culture which made it acceptable, even 'normal', for guardians to indulge in grossly defamatory personal attacks on fellow board members was incomprehensible to Clive and Senior, quite at odds with their own moral and religious beliefs. Further, the nonconformist religion practised by most local people which encouraged personal salvation and did away with priestly authority challenged accepted notions of obedience to 'superiors'. This is somewhat akin to a situation recently considered by Scott, who examined the 'fraught dialectical relations' between ruling groups and 'zones of relative autonomy and their inhabitants'.<sup>22</sup> He concluded that at least part of the explanation involves questions of landscape, physical separation and 'internal colonialism'. The idea of an 'ungovernable landscape and its people' he found in south-east Asia could be to some degree applied to Carmarthenshire, although the word 'ungovernable' was not actually used by the Poor Law authorities. A broader understanding of whether this concept is applicable here would require access to more studies of Welsh unions, without which it is not possible to know whether this was pertinent to the whole of Wales, or unique to Llandilofawr. The idea does, however, sit comfortably with the notion of Wales as a welfare 'periphery' discussed at the end of chapter 7.

The findings above explain why, as noted at the beginning of this thesis, the PLC considered Llandilofawr to be 'the most difficult union in Wales'. Although this judgement was made early in the union's life there is every reason to believe that the Commissioners' view remained unchanged for a considerable period. But, as time wore on and it became clear that the central authorities' ability to force change was limited,

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<sup>22</sup> J. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: an Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (Yale, 2009), pp. 1-10.

resigned acceptance set in. In 1880 Talley guardians were still explaining that it was not possible for the rate collector to keep the books properly because he remained in blissful ignorance of the rules: as he put it himself, 'I know nothing about the 'General Order'.<sup>23</sup> Llandilofawr may not have been a 'model' union, but guardians skilfully managed not to be caught transgressing official policy to a sufficiently serious degree to warrant further intervention – and there were bigger battles to fight in other Welsh unions whose resistance to building workhouses, for example, continued for much of the period of this study.<sup>24</sup> It was better to leave it to plough its own furrow, and those in London must have been aware that John Lewis's iron grip on the board would be almost impossible to loosen because he was always one step ahead: after 45 years' experience of managing Llandilofawr, a note in the LGB file says 'the ways of this board of guardians are inscrutable'.<sup>25</sup> The Llandilofawr board would certainly have relished this reputation.

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<sup>23</sup> TNA: MH12/15932, 7 December 1880.

<sup>24</sup> Lampeter guardians refused to build a workhouse until 1874.

<sup>25</sup> TNA: MH12/ 15932, 1 August 1882.

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CPR/33/6	Llanfihangel Cilfargen vestry book 1827
CPR/36/42	Llandilofawr parish vestry book 1821 – 1867
MUS 110	1833 Rate book for Llandilofawr parish
MUS 125	1847 Rate book for Llandilofawr parish
MUS 126	1839 Rate book for Llandilofawr parish
MUS 133	Poor law rate book, Bettws parish, 1851
MUS 142	1839 Register of Persons entitled to vote for Llandilofawr parish



## **Estate papers**

Cawdor MSS	Papers of the Cawdor family and estate
Derwydd Muniments	Papers of the Derwydd Estate and Gulston family
Dynevor Muniments	Papers of the Dynevor family

## **Miscellaneous**

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HO 45/454	Correspondence concerning the Rebecca Riots 1843
HO 73/53/5	Sir Edmund Head's Report on the state of South West Wales
HO 73/54	Various letters received by the PLC and forwarded to the Home Office 1838

### **The National Library of Wales**

#### **William Day Papers**

NLW MS 3141 F	General Reports
NLW MS 3142 F	Union Reports
NLW MS 3143 F	Complaints and Investigations
NLW MS 3144 F	Abusive Practices and Suggestions
NLW MS 3145 F	Commissioners 1836 – 1869
NLW MS 3146 F	Commissioners 1840 – 1844

### **Estate Papers: Edwinsford, Carmarthenshire. Sir James Hamlyn Williams.**

Edwinsford 13	'Duties'. Payments in kind made by tenants to landlord
Edwinsford 17	Accounts 1820 – 1823
Edwinsford 18	Accounts 1829 – 1835
Edwinsford 19	Accounts 1836 – 1841
Edwinsford 21	Freeholdings in Carmarthenshire 1830
Edwinsford 22	Cash Book of Daniel Price, Agent
Edwinsford 23, 24, 25	Letter Books
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Harpton 3197	Notebook re Ireland Sir George Cornwall Lewis
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Harpton 3208	Prohibition of outdoor relief to the able bodied
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Harpton 3211	Rising population and tghe food supply
Harpton 3212	Correspondence with the PLC
Harpton 3236, 3240, 3241	Papers re Edwin Chadwick
Harpton 3290	PLC papers
Harpton 3291	Papers re Chadwick's report to the Andover Enquiry
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PP 1835 [116]	<i>First Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Municipal Corporations in England and Wales</i>
PP 1836 [583]	<i>Return of all persons appointed to act as justices of the peace in each and every county of England and Wales</i>
PP 1840 [227]	<i>Report of the Poor Law Commissioners on the Continuance of the Poor Law Commission</i>
PP 1842 [524]	<i>Return of all persons appointed to act as justices of the peace in each and every county of England and Wales since July 1836</i>
PP 1844 [484]	<i>Return of the names, addresses and residences of justices of the peace</i>
PP 1844 [531]	<i>Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry for South Wales</i>
PP 1847 [870] [871] [872]	<i>Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales.</i>
PP 1850 [666]	<i>Abstract of return of the number of orders of removal granted by justices of the peace in England and Wales for each of the last five years</i>

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