

**The twentieth-century poor law in the Midlands
and Wales, c.1900-1930**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the New Poor Law between c.1900 and 1930, the last three decades of its operation before boards of guardians were abolished by the 1929 Local Government Act. The poor law during this period has been widely neglected by historians in terms of focused regional studies, and although some scholars have acknowledged the system's continued activity, the nature of this activity at a local level has been little explored. Discussions of the poor law in existing literature on early twentieth century welfare are more often framed in terms of the alternative provisions being constructed around it, and the unsuccessful attempts by government at reform during these decades. This thesis refocuses attention on the realities of poor law administration on the ground, exploring the post-1900 poor law through four case studies chosen from across the Midlands of England and central Wales. The everyday operations of the poor law unions in each case study are reconstructed, and distinct regional welfare cultures are revealed, with relief policies and practices informed by specific local socio-economic conditions. Interactions between the poor law and a range of key welfare reforms are explored, and the relationship between 'old' and 'new' welfare systems is shown to have been complex in ways rarely captured in current historiography, whereby the poor law acted as a key safety net for families who fell through the gaps in between the newer welfare provisions, and in some cases as a stepping-stone to access them. Although often strained by conditions for which it was not designed, the poor law continued to play a significant role in the welfare landscape of England and Wales even in these last years of its operation. In this way, this thesis bridges the historiographical gap between the ending of the New Poor Law and the coming of the early welfare state.

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Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Contents	iv
Abbreviations	vii
Conventions	viii
Figures	ix
Tables	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Welfare policy and practice in England and Wales, c.1834-1930	3
1.2 Poor law and welfare state: exploring the historiography	17
1.3 Research questions	34
1.4 Case-study selection, sources and methods	35
1.5 Chapter structures	46
Chapter 2: Blaby poor law union, Leicestershire	50
2.1 Introduction	50
2.2 Regional context	53
2.3 The Blaby union guardians	57
2.4 Outdoor relief in Blaby poor law union	70
2.5 The twentieth-century pauper in Blaby	78
2.6 The nature and extent of relief in Blaby	84
2.7 Blaby poor law union and social housing	91
2.8 Conclusions	101
Chapter 3: Stafford and Newcastle-under-Lyme poor law unions, Staffordshire	104
3.1 Introduction	104
3.2 Regional context	107

3.3	The Stafford and Newcastle guardians	111
3.4	Indoor and outdoor relief in north Staffordshire.....	121
3.5	Unemployment: the early 1920s.....	134
3.6	1926: Newcastle union and locked-out miners.....	151
3.7	Conclusions	161
Chapter 4:	Spalding poor law union, Lincolnshire	164
4.1	Introduction	164
4.2	Regional context.....	168
4.3	The Spalding guardians	173
4.4	Indoor and outdoor relief in Spalding union.....	189
4.5	Central-local relations	212
4.6	Conclusions	224
Chapter 5:	Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown & Llanidloes poor law unions, Montgomeryshire.....	227
5.1	Introduction	227
5.2	Welfare reform in its Welsh context.....	230
5.3	Welsh sources and methods.....	233
5.4	Regional context.....	236
5.5	The mid-Wales guardians.....	243
5.6	Indoor and outdoor relief in central Wales	252
5.7	Vagrancy in central Wales.....	281
5.8	Conclusions	296
Chapter 6:	Conclusion	300
6.1	The changing context of the New Poor Law, c.1900-1930	300
6.2	Key gaps in the historical literature	301
6.3	Key research questions: a reflection	303
6.4	Main findings	305
6.5	Implications for current historiography	314
6.6	Future research opportunities: looking ahead.....	318

Bibliography 321

Abbreviations

BAF	Board of Agriculture and Fisheries
BOT	Board of Trade
GMB	Guardians' minute book
LA	Lincolnshire Archives
LGB	Local Government Board
MoH	Ministry of Health
MUDC	Machynlleth Urban District Council
NLW	National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth
NWJVC	North Wales Joint Vagrancy Committee
PA	Powys Archives
PAC	Public Assistance Committees
PLB	Poor Law Board
PLU	Poor law union
RCA	Royal Commission on Agriculture
RCL	Royal Commission on Labour
ROLLR	Record Office of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland
SRO	Staffordshire Record Office
TNA	The National Archives, Kew

Conventions

Expenditure data presented in Figures 2.3, 3.5-7, 4.2, 5.5, 5.7 and 5.9 have been calculated to the nearest pound.

All central government reports, returns and minutes of evidence have been accessed through *UK Parliamentary Papers Online*.

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Figures

Figure 1.1 Map of England and Wales with the poor law unions included in this thesis highlighted.	36
Figure 2.1 Blaby poor law union within Leicestershire, and with parishes labelled.	54
Figure 2.2 Average weekly number of indoor and outdoor relief recipients in Blaby poor law union, 1900-1929.	71
Figure 2.3 Annual expenditure on outdoor relief in Blaby poor law union, 1900-1930.	85
Figure 2.4 Size of cash payments made to outdoor relief recipients in Blaby poor law union, 1916-1926.	89
Figure 3.1 Stafford and Newcastle unions within Staffordshire.	109
Figure 3.2 Stafford and Newcastle unions with parishes labelled.	110
Figure 3.3: No. of paupers relieved on 1st January in Stafford poor law union, 1900-1930.	123
Figure 3.4: No. of paupers relieved on 1st January in Newcastle-under-Lyme union, 1900-1930.	123
Figure 3.5 Annual indoor and outdoor relief expenditure in Stafford poor law union, 1900-1930.	125
Figure 3.6 Annual indoor and outdoor relief expenditure in Newcastle, 1900-1925. ...	126
Figure 3.7 Annual indoor and outdoor relief expenditure in Newcastle, 1900-1927. ...	126
Figure 3.8: Value of outdoor relief payments in Stafford and Newcastle-under-Lyme unions.	130
Figure 4.1 Spalding poor law union within Lincolnshire, and with parishes labelled.	169
Figure 4.2 Expenditure on indoor and outdoor relief in Spalding poor law union, 1900-1930.	190
Figure 4.3 Size of weekly outdoor relief payments in Spalding, 1914-1922.	200
Figure 4.4 Seasonal distribution of inmate numbers (male and female) in Spalding workhouse, 1913-1915.	204
Figure 4.5 Seasonal distribution of inmate numbers (male and female) in Spalding workhouse, 1925-1927.	204
Figure 4.6 Seasonal distribution of male inmate numbers in Spalding workhouse, 1913-1915.	205

Figure 4.7 Seasonal distribution of male inmate numbers in Spalding workhouse, 1925-1927.	205
Figure 4.8 Seasonal distribution of female inmate numbers in Spalding workhouse, 1913-1915.	206
Figure 4.9 Seasonal distribution of female inmate numbers in Spalding workhouse, 1925-1927.	206
Figure 4.10 Seasonal distribution of outdoor relief recipients in Spalding union, 1914-1915 and 1919.	207
Figure 4.11 Seasonal distribution of outdoor relief recipients in Spalding union, 1920-1922.	207
Figure 5.2 Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown poor law unions within Wales.	237
Figure 5.3 Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown poor law unions with parishes labelled.	238
Figure 5.4 No. of paupers relieved on 1st January in Llanfyllin poor law union, 1900-1930.	254
Figure 5.5 Annual expenditure on indoor and outdoor relief in Llanfyllin poor law union, 1900-1930.	254
Figure 5.6 No. of paupers relieved on 1st January in Machynlleth poor law union, 1900-1930.	255
Figure 5.7 Annual expenditure outdoor relief in Machynlleth poor law union, 1900-1930 [indoor relief expenditure missing due to 1916 workhouse closure].....	255
Figure 5.8 No. of paupers relieved on 1st January in Newtown poor law union, 1900-1930.	256
Figure 5.9 Annual expenditure on indoor and outdoor relief in Newtown poor law union, 1900-1930.	256
Figure 5.10 No. of outdoor paupers relieved on 1st January and 1st July in Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown poor law unions, 1910-1912.	265
Figure 5.11 Size of relief payments in Pennal district of Machynlleth poor law union, 1911-1912 and 1921-1922.	272
Figure 5.12 No. of paupers receiving relief on account of unemployment in Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown poor law unions, on 1st January 1922-1929.	274
Figure 5.13 Percentage of outdoor relief recipients from total outdoor relief recipients on account of unemployment in Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown poor law unions on 1st January 1922-1929.	274

Tables

Table 1.1 Features of peripheral welfare system as designed by King and Stewart.....	29
Table 1.2 Poor law unions included in case studies.	37
Table 2.1 Individuals elected to the Blaby poor law union board of guardians in 1894.	59
Table 2.2 Individuals elected to the Blaby poor law union board of guardians in 1907.	60
Table 2.3 Individuals elected to the Blaby poor law union board of guardians in 1913.	61
Table 2.4 Individuals elected to the Blaby poor law union board of guardians in 1925.	62
Table 2.5 Chairmen and vice-chairmen of Blaby poor law union, 1895-1930.	63
Table 2.6 Distribution of family type among outdoor relief recipients in Blaby poor law union, 1916-1926 (annual totals).	81
Table 2.7 Living arrangements of children receiving outdoor relief in Blaby poor law union, 1916-1926.	81
Table 2.8 Distribution of families who received relief in kind in Blaby poor law union, 1916-1926.	87
Table 3.1 Board of guardians in Stafford poor law union in 1894.	115
Table 3.2 Board of guardians in Newcastle union elected in 1894.	116
Table 4.1 Individuals elected to Spalding poor law union board of guardians in 1894.	175
Table 4.2 Individuals elected to Spalding poor law union board of guardians in 1904.	176
Table 4.3 Individuals elected to Spalding poor law union board of guardians in 1913.	177
Table 4.4 Chairman and vice-chairman of Spalding poor law union board of guardians, 1900-1930.	178
Table 4.5 Average weekly number of indoor and outdoor relief recipients in Spalding poor law union, 1914-1928.	190
Table 5.1: Square miles and population of Welsh unions.	236
Table 5.2 Individuals elected to Llanfyllin poor law union board of guardians in 1894.	246
Table 5.3 Individuals elected to Machynlleth poor law union board of guardians in 1894.	247

Table 5.4 Individuals elected to Newtown poor law union board of guardians in 1894.	
.....	247

Chapter 1: Introduction

On 1st April 1930, the 1929 Local Government Act came into effect. In reorganising local authority structures, it transferred responsibilities for poor relief previously held by poor law unions, and the elected boards of guardians that ran them, to county councils and their newly-formed Public Assistance Committees (PACs).¹ Poor law guardians were officially abolished. The three decades leading up to this dissolution are the central focus of this thesis. During these years, the poor law operated alongside significant Liberal welfare reforms from 1906 onwards, throughout the First World War, and into the 1920s, a period characterised by phases of high unemployment, industrial unrest, and developments in central state-led welfare provision. However, existing literature on the poor law does not reflect this. While scholarship focusing on the nineteenth-century poor law is extensive and varied, substantially less attention has been paid to the post-1900 poor law.² This is particularly the case after 1914, when an already small pool of extant research shrinks even further.³ Instead, the emergence of the early welfare state has eclipsed the twentieth-century poor law in the work of welfare historians.

This paucity within current scholarship has significant implications for our understanding both of the poor law itself and of social policy history more broadly. A

¹ 'Local Government Act, 1929' (19 & 20 Geo. 5 c.17), as reproduced on legislation.gov.uk [accessed 16/11/15]. See also A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp.150-151. Some continuity in personnel, administrative practices and attitudes towards welfare provision between boards of guardians and PACs endured; see Brundage, *Poor Laws*, p.152 and A. Digby, 'Changing welfare cultures in region and state', *Twentieth Century British History*, 17:3 (2006), pp.297-322.

² Steve King succinctly captures this range of existing literature and gaps still to be filled in 'Thinking and re-thinking the New Poor Law', *Local Population Studies*, 99:1 (2017), pp.5-19.

³ Studies incorporating the interwar poor law include M. Levine-Clark, *Unemployment, Welfare and Masculine Citizenship: 'So Much Honest Poverty' in Britain, 1870-1930* (Basingstoke, 2015); Digby, 'Changing welfare cultures', pp.297-322; A. Vinson, 'Poor relief, public assistance and the maintenance of the unemployed in Southampton between the wars', *Southern History*, 2 (1980), pp.179-226; G. Frost, 'Under the guardians' supervision: illegitimacy, family and the English poor law, 1870-1930', *Journal of Family History*, 38:2 (2013), pp.122-139; and M. Gorsky, 'Creating the poor law legacy: institutional care for older people before the welfare state', *Contemporary British History*, 26:4 (2012), pp.441-465.

lack of regional studies means that we know little about how the poor law operated at a local level during this period, underneath the national pauperism statistics collected by the Local Government Board (LGB) and its successor the Ministry of Health (MoH). As a consequence, the degree to which existing conceptions of welfare regionality, developed primarily for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, endured into these later decades is poorly understood.⁴ Additionally, there has been only patchy engagement with interactions between local poor law administration and the national welfare reforms implemented before and after the First World War. Therefore, the extent to which ordinary poor people continued to draw on the poor law as a resource in surviving poverty, turned instead towards new welfare provisions extended during this period, or used a mixture of the two over the course of their lives, has until now been sparsely investigated. Discussions of the early twentieth century poor law have instead often been focused on national-level policymaking, the difficulties surrounding the system's reform, and the ways its scope was reduced by other, new social policy interventions.⁵ In some cases, this has contributed to a general narrative of decline where the poor law was 'dismantled... from the outside', and 'condemned... to ossification'.⁶

This thesis challenges this narrative by examining poor law provision during a period and in localities which feature rarely in extant literature, and questioning how the post-1900 system has been conceptualised. It is made up of four case studies, each examining between one and three poor law unions in a Midlands or Welsh county: Leicestershire, Staffordshire, Lincolnshire and Montgomeryshire.⁷ Through an in-depth exploration of the selected unions, this thesis reconstructs how the poor law worked 'on the ground' between c.1900 and 1930. It asks whether specific local welfare cultures can be discerned in these case studies, and considers how these cultures compare with

⁴ See S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000); S. King and J. Stewart (eds.), *Welfare Peripheries: The Development of Welfare States in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe* (Bern, 2007); S. King, 'Welfare regimes and welfare regions in Britain and Europe, c.1750-1860', *Journal of Modern European History*, 9:1 (2011), pp.42-66.

⁵ See for example L. Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge, 1998), pp.259-309; J. Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: A Study in English Social Policy, 1886-1914* (Oxford, 1972), pp.148-150.

⁶ P. Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State* (Harlow, 2nd ed., 1996), p.83; D. Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy since the Industrial Revolution* (Basingstoke, 4th ed., 2009), p.184.

⁷ Justifications for this approach and the selection of these particular places are explained below in the context of current literature and resultant research questions.

each other and with existing models of welfare regionality. Based on this analysis, this thesis suggests that we need new ways of mapping regional welfare regimes. It also considers the relationship at a local level between the poor law and the key national welfare reforms introduced during this period, and argues that the older welfare system remained important in the survival strategies of the poor, despite the advent of significant alternative provisions. By exploring the poor law in these selected places during this much neglected period, this thesis demonstrates that the post-1900 poor law in much of England and Wales, as it actually functioned, has not been fully captured in existing literature.

1.1 Welfare policy and practice in England and Wales, c.1834-1930

This section provides an overview of nineteenth and early twentieth century welfare provision, sets the poor law during our period in its legislative context, and outlines the welfare landscape in which it operated and which scholars have sought to investigate. At the same time, this survey traces the development of the view among contemporary policymakers and politicians that the poor law was increasingly irrelevant as a system, a perception which has persisted into modern welfare studies and is overturned in this thesis.

The legislative foundation of the twentieth century poor law remained the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, which reformed welfare provision in response to concerns about the rising costs of pauperism.⁸ A major element of the Act was the positioning of the workhouse as the core of local welfare policy for the undeserving and/or helpless.⁹ Able-bodied poor people in particular were only to receive relief outside the workhouse

⁸ 'Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834' (4 & 5 Will. 4 c.76), printed in W. Theobald, *A Practical Treatise on the Poor Laws as Altered by the Poor Law Amendment Act* (London, 1836), pp.699-752. See also K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006), pp.212-213. For the 1834 Act's development, see M. Blaug, 'The myth of the Old Poor Law and the making of the New', *Journal of Economic History*, 23:2 (1963), pp.151-184; A. Brundage, *The Making of the New Poor Law: the Politics of Inquiry, Enactment and Implementation* (London, 1979); P. Mandler, 'The making of the New Poor Law redivivus', *Past & Present*, 117 (1987), pp.131-157; and A. Brundage, D. Eastwood and P. Mandler, 'Debate and Reply: The making of the New Poor Law redivivus', *Past & Present*, 127 (1990), pp.183-201.

⁹ M.A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834-1929: The History of a Social Institution* (London, 1981), p.3.

in instances of ‘sudden and urgent necessity’, and provision of outdoor relief (relief provided in an individual’s own home) was discouraged in subsequent directives.¹⁰ This was a controversial move, and in some areas, resistance to the implementation of the so-called New Poor Law was significant and sustained.¹¹ Indeed, the transition to the workhouse as the primary mode of poor relief never fully came to pass.¹² Notwithstanding regional differences and some variation over time, between 1840 and 1939 outdoor paupers consistently made up between 60 and 89 percent of all relief recipients nationally.¹³ Residence in the workhouse therefore remained the experience of a minority of relief recipients under the post-1834 poor law.

Attitudes towards poverty, its causes and remedies did not remain static over the nineteenth century, however. As Britain underwent rapid economic and industrial expansion, voices across the political spectrum expressed concerns about the impact these changes were having on the working classes, arguing that unrestrained capitalism and industrialisation made workers ‘poor, demoralised and... ill’.¹⁴ At the same time, thrift and individual self-discipline continued to be emphasised as antidotes to poverty.¹⁵ A severe recession in the 1860s, and the resultant increase in national poor law expenditure, provoked a backlash in Whitehall against existing levels of non-compliance with New Poor Law directives.¹⁶ A concerted campaign throughout the 1870s and 1880s discouraged the use of outdoor relief, and attitudes that emphasised

¹⁰ Scholars have disagreed over whether the complete abolition of outdoor relief for everyone, not just the ‘able-bodied poor’, was the Amendment Act’s intention – in particular, whether the late nineteenth-century ‘crusade’ against outdoor relief broke with the ‘spirit of 1834’. For the argument that the Act and subsequent legislation was supposed to eradicate outdoor relief, see A. Digby, *The Poor Law in Nineteenth Century England and Wales* (London, 1982), pp.20-26, and M. Rose, ‘The crisis of poor relief in England, 1860-1890’ in W.J. Mommsen and W. Mock (eds.), *The Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany* (London, 1981), pp.50-65. For the opposing view, see K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London, 1981), pp.56-58, 64-66. Elizabeth Hurren finds the middle road in *Protesting About Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late-Victorian England, 1870-1900* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp.20-21, 250.

¹¹ See N. Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement, 1834-1844* (Manchester, 1971); J. Knott, *Popular Opposition to the 1834 Poor Law* (London, 1986); M. Evans and P. Jones, ‘‘A stubborn, intractable body’: resistance to the workhouse in Wales, 1834-1877’, *Family & Community History*, 17:2 (2014), pp.101-121.

¹² For continuity between the old and new poor laws, see M. Rose, ‘The allowance system under the New Poor Law’, *Economic History Review*, 19:3 (1966), pp.607-620; A. Digby, ‘The labour market and the continuity of social policy after 1834: the case of the eastern counties’, *Economic History Review*, 28:1 (1975), pp.69-83.

¹³ Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp.219-220.

¹⁴ C. Renwick, *Bread for All: The Origins of the Welfare State* (London, 2017), p.40.

¹⁵ Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism*, p.25.

¹⁶ Williams, *Pauperism*, pp.169-170.

personal responsibility for poverty re-emerged, embodied by the newly-founded Charity Organisation Society. Notwithstanding some regional variation, this 'crusade' against outdoor relief slashed numbers of outdoor relief recipients across England and Wales.¹⁷

This was not to last, however, and over the course of the 1890s the 'crusade' petered out. This was partly because the rhetoric around poverty was changing, as numerous social investigations highlighted the large numbers of people whose moral failings had not caused their poverty.¹⁸ A growing awareness that the poor were poorer, more numerous and less culpable for their own situations than had hitherto been acknowledged culminated in the widely disseminated findings of the enquiries undertaken by Charles Booth and B. Seebohm Rowntree, which focused on London and York respectively and revealed large swathes of the population living in lamentable conditions.¹⁹ Moreover, they suggested that this deprivation was often due to systemic socio-economic problems, like consistently low wages or irregular work.²⁰ Rowntree also proposed the concept of the 'poverty cycle', whereby an individual became particularly vulnerable to destitution at certain life stages. Poverty was shown to be 'periodic but inevitable' for many wage earners, explaining 'why poor relief was constantly in demand... [and] why the principle of less eligibility was seldom enforced as strictly as it was supposed to be.'²¹ Poverty was therefore increasingly seen not as a personal inadequacy, but an economic driver in people's lives that they were often powerless to remedy.

Change was also afoot in the scope of local democracy, which had implications both for the ending of the 'crusade' and for the longer-term operation of the poor law. The 1894 Local Government Act introduced 'one-man-one-vote' suffrage in poor law guardian and parish council elections, abolished ex-officio guardians, and allowed non-

¹⁷ Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism*, p.45. See also P. Carter, 'Joseph Bramley of East Stoke, Nottinghamshire: a late victim of crusade against outdoor relief', *Family & Community History*, 17:1 (2014), pp.36-46; M. Mackinnon, 'English poor law policy and the crusade against outdoor relief', *Journal of Economic History*, 47:3 (1987), pp.603-625; K. Price, *Medical Negligence in Victorian Britain: the Crisis of Care under the English Poor Law, c.1834-1900* (London, 2015), pp.103-122.

¹⁸ Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism*, pp.243-244; Renwick, *Bread for All*, p.41.

¹⁹ Renwick, *Bread for All*, pp.40-48. The third, revised edition of Booth's work, published in 1902-03, ran to seventeen volumes. His conclusions can be found in C. Booth, *The Life and Labour of the People of London: Final Volume – Notes on Social Influences and Conclusion* (London, 3rd ed., 1903). See also B.S. Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (London, 3rd ed., 1902).

²⁰ Fraser, *Evolution of the British Welfare State*, pp.164-165.

²¹ Renwick, *Bread for All*, p.48.

property owners to stand in guardian elections.²² This made guardian seats far more accessible to working-class people and to women, and allowed less wealthy people to pressurise their local officials, including poor law guardians.²³ Indeed, Elizabeth Hurren has shown that as a result of the 1894 Act, the labouring classes in Brixworth union in Northamptonshire sought to rein in their zealous ‘crusading’ guardians via the ballot box.²⁴ Pat Thane has also noted that the Act provided ‘further stimulus’ for local social policy initiatives in areas where trade councils and other labour organisations were strong.²⁵ Local poor law management was therefore made more vulnerable to popular protest and influence – a vulnerability which would be further extended in the 1918 Representation of the People Act. Moreover, increased opportunity for democratic participation laid the foundations for a wider sense of welfare entitlement to develop – voting without appropriate and accessible welfare benefits began to seem like an empty political promise in an era of expanding citizenship.²⁶

There were shifting sands at a national political level too, as growing numbers of Liberals called for a shift in the party’s traditional stance of minimal state intervention in the lives of individuals. Against severe electoral failure and the developing public consciousness of abject and widespread poverty, a ‘New Liberalism’ developed which advocated ‘more purposeful and creative state action’ in the field of social welfare reform.²⁷ Electoral defeat during the 1890s left a vacuum which could be filled by ‘New Liberals’, transforming the party when it returned to power in 1906.²⁸ At first the new government were cautious in the area of social policy, partly because of revenue difficulties, but by the beginning of 1908 social reform was ‘both financially feasible

²² ‘Local Government Act, 1894’ (56 & 57 Vict. c.73), as reproduced on legislation.gov.uk [accessed 17/11/2015].

²³ Studies of the experiences of female guardians include P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government, 1865-1914* (Oxford, 1987), pp.247-302; S. King, *Women, Welfare and Local Politics 1880-1920: ‘We Might Be Trusted’* (Brighton, 2006); C. Preston, ‘“To do good and useful work”: Welsh women poor law guardians’, *Llafur*, 10:3 (2010), pp.87-102.

²⁴ Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism*, pp.214-241.

²⁵ Thane, *Foundations*, p.44.

²⁶ G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare in Britain, 1830-1990* (Oxford, 1998), pp.161-162, 182; D. Vincent, *Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in Twentieth Century Britain* (London, 1991), pp.51-52.

²⁷ See J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), pp.194-195 and Renwick, *Bread for All*, p.71. For detailed explorations of New Liberalism, see for instance M. Freedman, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford, 1978) and P. Weiler, *The New Liberalism: Liberal Social Theory in Great Britain, 1889-1914* (New York, 1982).

²⁸ M. Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1945* (Oxford, 3rd ed., 2002), p.112.

and... politically advantageous'.²⁹ Although there was no coherent welfare scheme as such, a clutch of significant new reforms nevertheless followed in the six years or so prior to the First World War.

The first of these was the 1908 Old Age Pension Act.³⁰ After almost three decades of sustained campaigning for welfare provision for the elderly,³¹ the 1908 Act could be seen as a compromise, covering only 'the very old, very respectable and the very poor'.³² It nevertheless gave a non-contributory cash benefit free from the stigma of the poor law,³³ and highlighted the extent of elderly need which the existing system was failing to meet – 490,000 people received the new pension in January 1909, despite a clause disqualifying recent recipients of poor relief.³⁴ When this clause lapsed in 1911, the number of people over 70 receiving outdoor relief in England and Wales plummeted from around 138,200 in 1910 to just 9,500 in 1912, significantly affecting the scope of the poor law.³⁵ More broadly, Martin Pugh has argued that the introduction of the pension set the stage for later changes in popular attitudes towards state intervention in welfare matters, whereby the public became less suspicious of government involvement in previously private parts of their lives.³⁶

Meanwhile, it became increasingly clear that the poor law was not well-suited to relieving the unemployed – unsurprising, given that it was designed to deter rather than provide for this group.³⁷ Consequent legislation, which attempted to cater to the out-of-work outside the poor law, was often reactive, incomplete, and thus unsustainable, made vulnerable by a consistent underestimation of the severity of unemployment – a tendency which would continue into the interwar period.³⁸ The 1905 Unemployed

²⁹ Harris, *Unemployment*, p.270. See also Thane, *Foundations*, pp.74-75.

³⁰ 'Old-Age Pension Act, 1908' (8 Edw. VII. c.40), as presented in W.A. Casson (ed.), *Old-Age Pensions Act, 1908, together with the Text of the Regulations Made Thereunder* (London, 3rd ed., 1908), pp.1-30.

³¹ For an overview of these debates, see P. Johnson, 'Self-help versus state help: old age pensions and personal savings in Great Britain, 1906-1937', *Explorations in Economic History*, 21:4 (1984), pp.330-334; P. Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford, 2000), pp.194-215 and E.P. Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany, 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 2007), pp.212-226.

³² Thane, *Foundations*, p.77.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Thane, *Old Age*, p.226.

³⁵ Ibid., p.227.

³⁶ M. Pugh, 'Working-class experience and state social welfare, 1908-1914: old age pensions reconsidered', *Historical Journal*, 45:4 (2002), p.776.

³⁷ See for instance I. Gazeley, *Poverty in Britain, 1900-1965* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp.13-14; Levine-Clark, *Unemployment*, p.84.

³⁸ W. Garside, *British Unemployment, 1919-1939: A Study in Public Policy* (Cambridge, 1990), pp.37-38.

Workmen's Act, pre-dating the Liberal victory of 1906,³⁹ was partly a response to the sharp increase in unemployment in 1904-05, establishing distress committees which could register applicants for relief and source temporary employment.⁴⁰ The casual labour problem, however, was 'too sizeable to be solved like this, and the system was unsuited to temporary needs of unemployed skilled men'.⁴¹ The main unemployment assistance provision made under the Liberal government, the 1911 National Insurance Act, was arguably a more significant social policy milestone.⁴² It provided time-limited contributory employment benefits for workers in certain key industries,⁴³ and hence set a precedent for much more widespread unemployment insurance to be introduced after the First World War.⁴⁴ Support for people at some specific life stages was therefore undergoing significant change.

In terms of child welfare, the central state stepped into a sphere which had previously been largely dominated by the poor law and children's charities.⁴⁵ The 1908 Children Act both consolidated and extended the state's role in this area.⁴⁶ This included broadening the poor law's remit (instead of seeking to narrow it, as the old-age pension and national insurance had done), expanding its responsibility for visiting, supervising and, if necessary, taking parental responsibility for vulnerable children.⁴⁷ More broadly, the use of 'homely family environments' for such children, as opposed to

³⁹ 'Unemployed Workmen's Act, 1905' (5 Edw. 7. c.18), as presented in R.A. Leach (ed.), *The Unemployed Workmen Act, 1905, with the Orders and Regulations issued by the Local Government Board under the Provisions of the Act* (Rochdale, 1905), pp.17-38.

⁴⁰ G. Boyer, 'The evolution of unemployment relief in Great Britain', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 34:3 (2004), p.424.

⁴¹ Thane, *Foundations*, p. 67. Jose Harris has argued that this Act was significant both practically and in terms of its influence on future policy – see *Unemployment*, pp.208-210.

⁴² N. Whiteside, 'Who were the unemployed? Conventions, classifications and social security law in Britain, 1911-1934', *Historical Social Research*, 40:1 (2015), p.150.

⁴³ 'National Insurance Act, 1911' (1 & 2 Geo. V. c.55), as presented in J.A. Lovat-Fraser (ed.), *The National Insurance Act, 1911, with Introduction and Notes* (London, 1912), pp.7-193.

⁴⁴ B. Harris, *The Origins of the British Welfare State: Social Welfare in England and Wales, 1800-1945* (Basingstoke, 2004), p.163.

⁴⁵ For child-oriented voluntary organisations, see H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare: Historical Dimensions, Contemporary Debate* (Bristol, 2003), pp.19-87; L. Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare and Contested Citizenship in London* (London, 2006); E. Moss, C. Wildman, R. Lamont and L. Kelly, 'Rethinking child welfare and emigration institutions, 1870-1914', *Cultural and Social History*, 14:5 (2017), pp.647-668.

⁴⁶ Thane, *Foundations*, p. 73. See also the several articles in a special issue of the journal *Law, Crime and History*, including K. Bradley, A. Logan and S. Shaw, 'Youth and crime: centennial reflections on the Children Act 1908'; D. Grey, 'More ignorant and stupid than wilfully cruel': homicide trials and 'baby-farming' in England and Wales in the wake of the Children Act 1908' and I. Lee, 'Negotiating responsibility: ideas of protecting and disciplining the child in London schools, 1908 and 1918', all in *Law, Crime and History*, 3:2 (2009), pp.1-17, 60-77, 78-97.

⁴⁷ 'Children Act, 1908' (8. Edw. 7. c.67), as reproduced on legislation.gov.uk [accessed on 17/11/2015].

the workhouse, had been gradually increasing, with over 30 percent of long-term pauper children living in cottage or scattered homes by 1908.⁴⁸ Although it was not illegal to house children in workhouses, since the mid-nineteenth century it had been widely considered inadvisable, due to the danger of moral contagion.⁴⁹ This inclination was given further official thrust through the 1913 Poor Law Institutions Order, which pressed unions to keep children over the age of three in institutions for a maximum of six weeks, pushing local officials to found cottage home systems or increase their boarding-out network.⁵⁰

A consolidating approach was also taken to housing reform, in that the 1909 Housing and Town Planning Act amalgamated a sequence of previous permissive legislation.⁵¹ The 1909 Act made it easier for local authorities to borrow money for housing projects, provided them with some powers to close down unfit housing, and encouraged town planning.⁵² These opportunities were taken up sporadically across the country, most extensively in London.⁵³ However, by 1914 little progress had been made – less than one percent of British households lived in local-authority accommodation, and overcrowding was still a problem.⁵⁴ As with unemployment relief, greater progress in housing reform would be made in the interwar period.

The Liberal government's welfare reforms during these years are crucial context for the four case studies in this thesis, as alternative options for poor people trying to

⁴⁸ N. Sheldon, 'Somewhere in the place of home: children in institutional care, 1850-1918' in K. Honeyman and N. Goose (eds.), *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England: Diversity and Agency, 1750-1914* (Farnham, 2013), p.272.

⁴⁹ See F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children* (Stroud, 1997), p.35 and L. Hulonce, *Pauper Children and Poor Law Childhoods in England and Wales, 1834-1910* (self-published, 2016), p.8.

⁵⁰ 'Poor Law Institutions Order, 1913', as summarised in LGB, *Annual Report, 1913-14* (1914), Cd.7444, pp.3-10.

⁵¹ 'Housing and Town Planning Act, 1909' as reproduced in W. Thompson (ed.), *Handbook to the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1909* (London, 1910), p.1-43.

⁵² For coverage of the debate surrounding the 1909 Housing and Town Planning Act, see P. Booth and M. Huxley, '1909 and all that: the success of the 1909 Housing, Town Planning etc. Act 1909', *Planning Perspectives*, 27:2 (2012), pp.267-283.

⁵³ For late nineteenth and early twentieth-century social housing developments, see for instance M. Stilwell, 'Housing the workers: early London County Council housing, 1889-1914', *The Local Historian*, 41:4 (2011), pp.308-320 and R.V Steffell, 'The Boundary Street estate: an example of urban redevelopment by the London County Council, 1889-1914', *Town Planning Review*, 47:2 (1976), pp.161-173. For other regions, see for example P.E. Jones, 'Council house building in Aberystwyth, 1900-1974: the local implementation of national policy', *Ceredigion*, 13 (1997), pp.79-114; R. Ryder, 'Council house building in County Durham, 1900-39: the local implementation of national policy' in M. Daunt (ed.), *Councillors and Tenants: Local Authority Housing in English Cities, 1919-1939* (Leicester, 1984), pp.39-100.

⁵⁴ Harris, *Origins*, p.243.

make ends meet. Moreover, a significant motivator behind their development was the contemporary perception of the poor law as no longer fit for purpose, satisfying ‘neither the devotees of deterrence’ nor ‘the champions of a modern social state service’.⁵⁵ Indeed, Derek Fraser has argued that ‘much of the social policy on the twentieth-century road to a welfare state had been concerned with removing categories of need from the remit of the poor law and providing...more acceptable alternatives’.⁵⁶ This is exemplified in the findings of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress, instigated in 1905. The Commission was unable to agree on the system’s reform, producing in 1909 both a majority report and a dissenting minority report.⁵⁷ Both were united, however, in the view that the poor law was not functioning effectively.⁵⁸ The Majority Report recommended reorganising relief administration around a partnership between local authorities and the voluntary sector, while the Minority Report advocated breaking up the poor law completely and replacing it with more specialised state bodies.⁵⁹ In the event, both were largely ignored. Poor law reform was ‘fatally waterlogged’ by unresolved local taxation issues, while changes in the direct taxation system, including in the controversial 1909 People’s Budget, provided revenue for more centralised welfare provision instead.⁶⁰ Additionally, the Liberal government in power by 1909 feared a backlash if they undermined local democratic bodies like boards of guardians.⁶¹ David Lloyd George therefore pushed on with developing new welfare provisions outside an unreformed poor law system. It is this clunky compromise, and the role of the poor law during a period of rapidly changing social policy, which is a key focus of this thesis.

This landscape of welfare need and provision was severely affected by the First World War. Hardship initially increased, but Britain went on to experience almost full employment during the conflict.⁶² Women in particular found a much wider variety of

⁵⁵ D. Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in Nineteenth Century Britain, 1834-1914: From Chadwick to Booth* (London, 1998), p.73.

⁵⁶ Fraser, *Evolution*, p.184.

⁵⁷ Renwick, *Bread for All*, p.53.

⁵⁸ Both reports are presented together in Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress* (1909), Cd.4499.

⁵⁹ Brundage, *Poor Laws*, p.138.

⁶⁰ Harris, *Unemployment*, pp.269-270.

⁶¹ Brundage, *Poor Laws*, p.138.

⁶² Thane, *Foundations*, p.119-120. See also J. McCalman, ‘The impact of the First World War on female employment in England’, *Labour History*, 21 (1971), p.41.

occupations open to them than prior to 1914, although it has been noted that this expansion of opportunities did not necessarily continue after 1918.⁶³ In terms of specific welfare provision, separation allowances became available to families of the armed services through the state for the first time, including not only spouses and children but also parents of servicemen – a scheme which Susan Pedersen has described as ‘remarkable in its scale and scope’, lifting families out of engagement with the poor law.⁶⁴ More broadly, the conditions of the war saw noteworthy extensions in the role of the state, from the nationalisation of industry to food rationing. Although David Gladstone points out that there was ‘no guarantee’ that these would endure after the war, they nevertheless seeded an acceptance, and indeed expectation, of government intervention in areas of life ‘never before influenced by state action’ which expanded in the interwar period.⁶⁵

The demographic impact of the conflict was, moreover, enormous. Jay Winter has estimated that around 722,000 British servicemen were killed during the war (not including interwar deaths from war-related wounds or illness).⁶⁶ Over 200,000 women were widowed, creating a colossal need for welfare support – by March 1919, around 190,000 widows’ pensions had been granted, and benefits had been provided to over 350,000 children.⁶⁷ The nature of the conflict’s impact on civilian health has been debated: while Winter has argued that the war heralded significant improvements in the health and life expectancy of those on the home front, Linda Bryder and Bernard Harris have qualified this, particularly with regard to infant mortality.⁶⁸ In terms of ex-servicemen themselves, almost 1.2 million men were entitled to disability pensions,⁶⁹ and pressure on institutional care, particularly for those suffering from psychological trauma and associated conditions, was intense. The number of specialist treatment

⁶³ See for instance McCalman, ‘First World War’, pp.36-47; G. Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience* (London, 1981), pp.173-228; D. Thom, ‘Women and work in wartime Britain’ in R. Wall and J. Winter (eds.), *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1988), pp.297-326.

⁶⁴ S. Pedersen, ‘Gender, welfare and citizenship during the Great War’, *American Historical Review*, 95:4 (1990), p.985.

⁶⁵ See D. Gladstone, *The Twentieth-Century Welfare State* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp.21-22; M. Hill, *Understanding Social Policy* (Oxford, 7th ed., 2003), p.21; Fraser, *Evolution*, pp.209-210.

⁶⁶ J. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke, 1986), pp.70-73.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.273.

⁶⁸ Winter, *Great War*, pp.103-153; L. Bryder, ‘The First World War: healthy or hungry?’, *History Workshop Journal*, 24:1 (1987), pp.141-157; B. Harris, ‘The demographic impact of the First World War: an anthropometric perspective’, *Social History of Medicine*, 6:3 (1993), pp.343-366.

⁶⁹ Winter, *Great War*, pp.273-274.

centres for such cases doubled from 15 to 29 between 1920 and 1921,⁷⁰ and despite central insistence that such cases were not sent to asylums, in reality large numbers were admitted to them, many from poor law institutions.⁷¹ In these ways, the human consequences of the war significantly strained available welfare provision, as well as highlighting the continuing presence of social problems that remained unresolved.⁷² This was arguably exacerbated by a new sense of entitlement to welfare services among both veterans and civilians, who were not inclined to return to the status quo.⁷³ This shift in the mindset of potential relief applicants was given political teeth by the 1918 Representation of the People Act, which extended the parliamentary and local government franchise among both men and women, and abolished pauper disenfranchisement – receipt of poor relief no longer prevented an individual from voting. Indeed, this Act has been positioned by Bernard Harris as one of ‘the most important consequences of the First World War’ for the poor law. It not only gave those who interacted with the system as part of their survival the opportunity to inform local and national politics – a continuation of the expansions of this nature through the 1894 Local Government Act – but also meant that continued operation of a form of welfare provision perceived to be inadequate or stigmatising was increasingly seen as politically risky.⁷⁴ At the same time, the war ‘effectively destroyed the left-wing alliance that had dominated Edwardian politics’, as the Liberals were impeded by their experiences with coalition government and the Labour party found ‘a new sense of purpose’, prompting it to abandon the pre-war ‘Lib-Lab’ electoral alliance.⁷⁵ The war therefore dramatically shifted the social and political context in which welfare policy could be formed.

The problem of the poor law reared its head again in the context of reconstruction. The Maclean Committee, appointed to revisit poor law reform, recommended in 1918 the abolition of poor law unions and their boards of guardians

⁷⁰ P. Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp.123-124.

⁷¹ P. Barham, *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War* (London, 2004), p.237.

⁷² See for instance M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes: the Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain* (London, 1981), pp.81-88, 112-135.

⁷³ M. Pugh, *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain Between the Wars* (London, 2009), p.11; Harris, *Origins*, p.183.

⁷⁴ Harris, *Origins*, p.202.

⁷⁵ M. Pugh, *State and Society: A Social and Political History of Britain since 1870* (London, 5th ed., 2017), p.218 [ebook].

alongside the introduction of a range of new bodies to handle relief provision.⁷⁶

However, these recommendations once again failed to address the perennial issue of local government finance and were immediately met with opposition from both poor law guardians and the LGB. The Cabinet accepted the report, and the poor law became the remit of the newly-formed MoH in 1919, but the prospect of real reform in this area once again faded.⁷⁷ The first two decades of the twentieth century were thus punctuated with attempts to reorganise the poor law which came to nothing in part because of ongoing disagreements about who was going to pay welfare bills.

Social policy developments therefore continued outside the ‘old’ system under Lloyd George’s Coalition government. As unemployment climbed from 1920 onwards, the National Insurance scheme suffered considerable strain, and subsequent policy addressing unemployment relief has been described as ad-hoc and unplanned, ‘a process of devising expedients as the need arose’.⁷⁸ The Out-of-Work Donation scheme, instigated in 1918, was originally intended for demobilised ex-servicemen but was extended to civilian workers; the subsequent 1920 Unemployment Insurance Act extended contributory insurance to almost all manual and many non-manual workers, but was almost immediately revealed as inadequate in the light of severe industrial recession.⁷⁹ From March 1921, it was possible to draw ‘uncovenanted benefit’, or benefits for which an individual had not paid the required minimum contributions, and the number of weeks annually for which benefits could be received was increased.⁸⁰ At the same time, the government ‘continuously sought ways further to restrict [its] coverage and cost’.⁸¹ This included the introduction of the ‘genuinely seeking work’ test and the first means test for those who had used up their insurance benefits.⁸² Although Stephanie Ward has pointed out that these tests could have limited impact in regions where Local Employment Committees applied them generously, Pat Thane has also reported that one in 20 of all claimants were failing the ‘genuinely seeking work’

⁷⁶ Harris, *Origins*, p.177. See Ministry of Reconstruction, *Local Government Committee Report on the Transfer of Functions of Poor Law Authorities in England and Wales* (1918), Cd.8917.

⁷⁷ Thane, *Foundations*, p.132.

⁷⁸ Fraser, *Evolution*, p.217

⁷⁹ W.R. Garside, *British Unemployment, 1919-1939: A Study in Public Policy* (Cambridge, 1990), pp.35-38.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.39.

⁸¹ Thane, *Foundations*, p.164.

⁸² S. Ward, *Unemployment and the State in Britain: The Means Test and Protest in 1930s South Wales and North-East England* (Manchester, 2013), p.40.

test by the end of 1923.⁸³ Despite these attempts at restriction, far-reaching precedents were laid out by the extensions in provision outlined above. The Out-of-Work Donation not only established the principle that the state had a commitment to relieve and maintain the unemployed – donations were non-contributory and at subsistence level – but also set precedents for the inclusion of dependants' allowances.⁸⁴ Subsequent extensions of unemployment insurance were as a result locked into similar provision – dependants' allowances, for instance, became properly integrated into the main insurance scheme from April 1922.⁸⁵ Meanwhile, the poor law plugged the gaps between these policies when unemployment periodically swelled.⁸⁶ This thesis reconstructs how the poor law was really operating on the ground in order to tackle this issue, and demonstrates how it administered to those who fell between the cracks of new state provisions, with old and new welfare systems often working in tandem despite policymakers' intentions that they should be separate.

Other major social policy milestones also arrived in the interwar period. These included the two Housing and Town Planning Acts of 1919,⁸⁷ which instructed local authorities to address the housing requirements of their areas, as well as providing significant government subsidies for these projects which could be accessed by private builders.⁸⁸ This was 'a decisive expansion in public responsibility for meeting housing need', establishing local authorities as key actors.⁸⁹ In total, 213,000 houses were built under this scheme.⁹⁰ These new housing estates, however, often had higher rents than overcrowded and unsanitary urban homes; addressing one area of welfare need could thus pressurise a family's ability to make ends meet at the same time.⁹¹ The increased

⁸³ Ward, *Unemployment*, p.40; Thane, *Foundations*, p.164.

⁸⁴ Fraser, *Evolution*, p.216.

⁸⁵ Garside, *Unemployment*, p.41.

⁸⁶ Thane, *Foundations*, pp.173-175; P. Ryan, 'The Poor Law in 1926', in M. Morris (ed.), *The General Strike* (London, 1976), pp.358-378; Levine-Clark, *Unemployment*, p.11, 21.

⁸⁷ 'Housing, Town Planning, Etc. Act, 1919' (9 & 10 Geo. 5. c.35), as reproduced on legislation.gov.uk [accessed 17/11/15].

⁸⁸ Harris, *Origins*, p.247. For the political background to the Addison housing programme, see M. Daunton, 'Housing' in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950: Vol II – People and their Environment* (Cambridge, 1990), pp.236-238; D. Englander, *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain, 1888-1918* (Oxford, 1983), pp.191-317; Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, p.86.

⁸⁹ P. Wilding, 'The Housing and Town Planning Act, 1919: A study in the making of social policy', *Journal of Social Policy*, 2:4 (1973), p.333.

⁹⁰ Fraser, *Evolution*, p.215.

⁹¹ See for instance M. Dresser, 'Housing policy in Bristol, 1919-30' in Daunton (ed.), *Councillors*, pp.197-202; C. Brown, *The Story of the Saff: A History of the Saffron Lane Estate, Leicester* (Leicester, 1998), pp.17-18.

role in housing provision of local authorities also augmented the potential for regional variation in the implementation of reforms, as officials responded to needs and restraints specific to particular areas. These pressing social issues – the ambivalent impact on family economies that some new welfare policies could have, and the regional differences in implementation – are two of the key themes in this thesis.

Despite these efforts in housing and unemployment provision, the Coalition government disintegrated in 1922, giving way to the Conservatives, who aside from a nine-month Labour administration in 1924 remained in charge until June 1929, when Labour formed a second minority government. The Liberals' demise in the early 1920s has been much debated, and attributed in part to their difficulty in adapting to the greatly expanded electorate facing them after the war with the 1918 Representation of the People Act.⁹² The extent to which this expansion of democracy through the 1918 Act shaped the poor law on the ground in ways that historians have not thoroughly addressed at a local level is another important strand of this thesis.

Both Labour and the Conservatives continued to grapple, as the Coalition had, with unemployment relief, making regular adjustments to the size of allowances, the 'genuinely seeking work' test, and the gaps between periods of benefits receipt. Eventually, the 1927 Unemployment Insurance Act introduced 'transitional payments' for insured workers who had not made the minimum number of required contributions, and abolished the concept of gaps where no benefit was payable, while standardising the applicability of the 'genuinely seeking work' test. This was followed by a 'systematic campaign to tighten up the existing administration of unemployment insurance'.⁹³ Outside these provisions, the key Conservative political player in terms of welfare policies during the 1920s, as well as in the real movement towards the eventual abolition of the guardians, was Neville Chamberlain. Some of his interventions attempted to curb earlier policies – for instance, he implemented the 1923 Housing Act, which 'reduced [the] space standards and subsidies' built into preceding interwar housing policy and was aimed primarily at boosting the private housing market.⁹⁴ This

⁹² Much of this scholarship has been responding to George Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London, 1935). Examples include T. Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914-1935* (London, 1966) and G.R. Searle, *The Liberal Party: Triumph and Disintegration, 1886-1929* (London, 1992). See also Renwick, *Bread for All*, pp.155-156.

⁹³ Garside, *Unemployment*, p.47.

⁹⁴ J. Boughton, *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing* (London, 2018), p.41.

was superseded in 1924 by the first brief Labour government, which retained Chamberlain's reduced space standards but refocused on housing provided by local authorities by increasing the subsidies available to them.⁹⁵ Other interventions he made, however, expanded provision instead. As Minister of Health, he ushered in the 1925 Widows, Orphans and Old Age Pensions Act - widows with dependent children had formed a significant proportion of poor relief claimants even prior to the First World War,⁹⁶ and after the conflict, not only were these groups far larger, but their treatment was politically sensitive. These payments, then, had the potential to help another group steer clear of the poor law, if not eliminate the need for relief completely. As Bernard Harris suggests, it meant that instead of bearing the full cost of statutory support for orphaned children and their families, the poor law was more likely to be supplementing assistance already provided by the state.⁹⁷ Again, the balance between old and new systems operating alongside each other and impacting on relief claimants navigating both, is a key analytical thread throughout this thesis.

Chamberlain also began to tighten central control on recalcitrant boards of guardians, largely achieved through the complex web of union financing redressed via the 1926 Board of Guardians (Default) Act.⁹⁸ It was this Act which brought rebellious boards of guardians, notably in West Ham, Chester-le-Street and Bedwellty, finally under central government control soon after.⁹⁹ The 1929 Local Government Act which put an official end to the guardians was unsurprisingly opposed by local officials themselves, and those who disliked the removal of poor relief from 'direct democratic control'.¹⁰⁰ However, perceptions of the poor law as incompatible with the modern world and unnecessary in an era of expanded, centralised welfare provision had taken root.

It is clear that the early twentieth century was a period of significant change in the welfare landscape. The range of available welfare provisions expanded substantially, and the poor law was side-lined by politicians in terms of reform.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.42.

⁹⁶ J. Millar and K.D.M. Snell, 'Lone-parent families and the welfare state: past and present', *Continuity & Change*, 2:3 (1987), pp.395-398.

⁹⁷ Harris, *Origins*, pp.203-204.

⁹⁸ Brundage, *Poor Laws*, p.147-148.

⁹⁹ For Bedwellty, see S.R. Williams, 'The Bedwellty board of guardians and the Default Act of 1926', *Llafur*, 2:4 (1979), pp.65-77.

¹⁰⁰ Thane, *Foundations*, p.177.

Crucially, however, the poor law continued to address the needs of poor people in England and Wales, proving to be ‘astonishingly resilient’ in the face of its detractors.¹⁰¹ Having outlined the complex compositional elements of the New Poor Law and the developing welfare state, we now move on to review the ways in which historians have approached and interpreted them.

1.2 Poor law and welfare state: exploring the historiography

This thesis forms an intersection between two broad categories of literature which at present overlap only rarely. As a study of the early twentieth century poor law, it sheds light on the system in a period that has been much neglected in poor law scholarship, and makes the case for its continued significance in everyday welfare provision during those decades. At the same time, it uses the poor law as a lens to examine the local implementation and reception of key national welfare reforms, and suggests this was subject to more regional variation than has been acknowledged in the extant literature. Detailed historiographical discussion of specific publications and fields of literature will take place in chapters 2-5. What follows here is a survey of six key features of current welfare scholarship, and the ways in which this thesis responds to them. In this way, the novel contributions made by this thesis are set out clearly.

The first of these historiographical strands has been highlighted already in the opening of this chapter: the lack of focused regional studies of the post-1900 poor law. Some survey texts on the poor law at a national level cover the system up to 1930, such as those by Anthony Brundage and Lynn Hollen Lees.¹⁰² These scholars depict the early twentieth century poor law as a system declining in scope, particularly in relation to outdoor relief, as welfare reforms both before and after the First World War enabled individuals to move away from it onto alternative provisions. Indeed, Hollen Lees argues that the poor law was increasingly rejected by the working classes in the interwar period, perceiving it as unacceptably stigmatising.¹⁰³ Several overview works on the early welfare state also feature discussion of the poor law during these decades. Derek

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.132.

¹⁰² Brundage, *Poor Laws*; Hollen Lees, *Solidarities*.

¹⁰³ Hollen Lees, *Solidarities*, pp.294-309.

Fraser, Bernard Harris and Pat Thane trace the struggle and failure of politicians and policymakers to reform the poor law prior to the 1929 Local Government Act, and explore the ways in which new social policy was built around it as a result between c.1900 and 1914.¹⁰⁴ All three present these reforms as encroaching onto the poor law's traditional turf – Harris, for instance, argues that the Liberal welfare reforms 'constituted a major assault on [the poor law's] traditional functions and mode of operation'.¹⁰⁵ There is, however, less uniformity in discussions of the poor law during the interwar period. Fraser continues to emphasise an ever-growing distaste, both political and popular, for the poor law during the 1920s and the continuing attempts to keep all new provision separate from it, suggesting that the stigma and shame 'deliberately implanted' in the system in 1834 put paid to any possibilities of 'self-sustained growth and adaptability'.¹⁰⁶ Harris and Thane, meanwhile, highlight the substantial role the poor law continued to play in relieving the unemployed,¹⁰⁷ which Harris suggests continued under the PACs into the mid-1930s, partly as a result of the 'failure to adopt a subsistence basis' for contributory unemployment benefits.¹⁰⁸

This literature does not include in-depth exploration of how these national-level portrayals of the poor law manifested themselves on the ground. With the exception of the poor law's role in relieving the interwar unemployed, there is little discussion about what the poor law was actually *doing* during this period – particularly in reference to the pre-1914 years, the focus is largely on the ways in which new reforms were constructed around the old system, rather than the nature of the poor law's continuing operations. As the texts discussed so far have all been overview works, it might be unfair to expect them to also include significant amounts of regional analysis. After all, narrower studies on specific places can be undertaken, as they have been for the poor law in the nineteenth century and earlier, to fill in these gaps and explore the extent to which the twentieth-century poor law as it is presented in these surveys can be observed at a local level.

¹⁰⁴ Fraser, *Evolution*, pp.175-208; Harris, *Origins*, pp.150-165; Thane, *Foundations*, 49-93.

¹⁰⁵ Harris, *Origins*, p.202.

¹⁰⁶ Fraser, *Evolution*, p.184, 213, 218, 220-221.

¹⁰⁷ Harris, *Origins*, p.203; Thane, *Foundations*, pp.173-174.

¹⁰⁸ Harris, *Origins*, p.218.

However, as it stands such studies are relatively few and far between, and their authors are not entirely in agreement on the significance of the poor law during this period. Adrian Vinson's examination of unemployment relief in interwar Southampton minimises the poor law's role, arguing that unemployment relief was only a small part of poor law activity during the 1920s, and that most unemployed people did not interact with the poor law.¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile, other work of a similar regional scale suggests a different story. Anne Digby's study of interwar north-eastern England found that a more accessible and generous poor law was sought by the increasingly enfranchised local population, who did not reject the system outright.¹¹⁰ There is continuity between Digby's findings and those presented in Hurren's work on the late nineteenth century, which showed the labouring classes clawing back control through increased participation in local democracy, calling not for an abolition of the poor law but for a rollback of more punitive policies.¹¹¹ Marjorie Levine-Clark's more recent exploration of the Black Country from 1870 to 1930 makes an even stronger case for the continued relevance of the poor law, emphasising the heavy lifting the twentieth-century poor law did in supporting the unemployed and pointing out that outdoor relief systems was often more flexible and expansive than unemployment insurance or dole provisions.¹¹²

Despite these signals that the twentieth century poor law continued to be a significant form of welfare provision, that its rejection by the poor themselves was less complete than some scholars have suggested, and that it could be more accommodating than the reforms intended to offer an alternative, little further exploration has been undertaken. This thesis addresses this significant gap in the literature through a detailed exploration of local poor relief administration in our selected case studies. It sheds light on the nature of poor law activity during this neglected period, and continues the conversation begun in the literature outlined above regarding the significance of the old system alongside the new welfare reforms, making the case that although the early twentieth century was in many ways a changeable time for poor law administrators, the system remained an important player in a shifting welfare landscape. There has been too much emphasis on the discontinuities of poor relief and rejection of the poor law, this

¹⁰⁹ Vinson, 'Poor relief', p.179, 203-204.

¹¹⁰ Digby, 'Changing welfare cultures', pp.297-232.

¹¹¹ Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism*, pp.159-241.

¹¹² Levine-Clark, *Unemployment*, p.21.

thesis argues, and continuities in the final phase of administration at a regional level have not been sufficiently explored in-depth.

The second key element of current literature which this thesis engages with is the emphasis placed on the workhouse in poor law historiography, where studies focusing on indoor relief proliferate. As Snell notes, this emphasis not only reflects a central policy plank of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, but also that the institution generated a great deal of source material, both in contemporary debate and huge amounts of administrative paperwork.¹¹³ The workhouse was a significant element of welfare provision, as has been demonstrated by scholars such as Anne Crowther, Anne Digby and Felix Driver.¹¹⁴ In her influential national survey, Crowther persuasively argues for the workhouse system's importance as an 'embryonic social service', providing hospital treatment and residential care for vulnerable people where no other service was available.¹¹⁵ Existing literature focusing on administration, experiences and symbolism of the institution is vast, in line with this framing.¹¹⁶ Demographic profiles of indoor paupers are common, examining workhouse inmates through census returns, enumerators' books or admissions and discharge registers. These focus on individual institutions, or on comparisons between or within counties, and often make suggestions about union relief policy relating to particular types of inmates.¹¹⁷ Indeed, a number of notable studies focus on the treatment and experiences of specific categories of

¹¹³ Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp.208-210.

¹¹⁴ Crowther, *Workhouse*; A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (London, 1978); F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: The Workhouse System, 1834-1884* (Cambridge, 1993).

¹¹⁵ Crowther, *Workhouse*, pp.268-269.

¹¹⁶ Recent examples include J. Purser, 'The workhouse population of the Nottingham union, 1881-1882', *Local Population Studies*, 99 (2017), pp.66-80; M. Doolittle, 'The duty to provide: fathers, families and the workhouse in England, 1880-1914' in B. Althammer, A. Gestrich and J. Gründler (eds.), *The Welfare State and the Deviant Poor in Europe, 1870-1933* (Basingstoke, 2014), pp.58-77; A. Ritch, 'English poor law institutional care for older people: identifying the 'aged and infirm' and the 'sick' in Birmingham workhouse, 1852-1912', *Social History of Medicine*, 27:1 (2014), pp.64-85; J. Reinartz and L. Schwarz (eds.), *Medicine and the Workhouse* (Woodbridge, 2013); K. Price, 'Where is the fault?': The starvation of Edward Cooper at the Isle of Wight workhouse in 1877', *Social History of Medicine*, 26:1 (2013), pp.21-37.

¹¹⁷ See for instance R. Gant, 'Brecknock Union workhouse: a census-based profile of inmates, 1841-1911', *Brycheiniog*, 46 (2015), pp.83-100; A. Gritt and P. Park, 'The workhouse populations of Lancashire in 1881', *Local Population Studies*, 86 (2011), pp.37-65; D. Jackson, 'The Medway union workhouse, 1871-1881: a study based on the admissions and discharge registers and the census enumerators' books', *Local Population Studies*, 75 (2005), pp.11-32; C. Seal, 'Workhouse populations in the Cheltenham and Belper unions: a study based on the census enumerators' books, 1851-1911', *Family and Community History*, 13:2 (2010), pp.83-100.

workhouse resident, such as children,¹¹⁸ the sick poor¹¹⁹ and the elderly.¹²⁰ A non-specialist observer might therefore be forgiven for seeing the workhouse as emblematic of the whole poor law system.

Much of this work is rigorous and valuable, shedding light on a key component of welfare provision and expenditure. Indeed, this literature often reflects on categories of poor people that made up large proportions of the pauper cohort, especially the sick poor - David Green, for instance, has estimated that as much as 75 percent of pauperism in the mid-nineteenth century was related to sickness and disability.¹²¹ This continued emphasis on the workhouse within poor law historiography more widely is, however, problematic. Outdoor relief was the more common form of relief provision in most parts of England and Wales, but studies focusing on it, either at a local or regional level or on a comparative or national basis, are rarer than those primarily interested in the workhouse. Karel Williams has compiled national statistics on outdoor relief provision for several categories of poor,¹²² and Snell has used this data, as well as LGB annual reports, to map outdoor relief over time under the New Poor Law, revealing great regional differences.¹²³ Outdoor relief on a smaller geographical scale has likewise been investigated by Michael Rose and Anne Digby, both of whom focused on continuities between the Old and New Poor Laws, in northern manufacturing districts and a number of south-eastern rural counties respectively.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, Mac Boot, George Boyer and Lynne Kiesling have explored outdoor relief in Lancashire and its role in relation to

¹¹⁸ See Crompton, *Children*; Hulonce, *Children*, pp.19-39; J. Humphries, 'Care and cruelty in the workhouse: children's experiences of residential poor relief in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England' in N. Goose and K. Honeyman (eds.), *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England: Diversity and Agency, 1750-1914* (Farnham, 2013), pp.115-134.

¹¹⁹ The essays included in Reinarz and Schwarz (eds.), *Medicine in the Workhouse* showcase a broad range of research of this type; see also Price, *Medical Negligence*, pp.123-150; P. Barlett, 'The asylum, the workhouse and the voice of the insane poor in nineteenth century England', *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 21:4 (1998), pp.421-432.

¹²⁰ Examples include D. Thomson, 'Workhouse to nursing home: residential care of elderly people since 1840', *Ageing and Society*, 3:1 (1983), pp.43-69; T. Deane, 'Old and incapable? Louisa Twining and elderly women in Victorian Britain' and S. Hussey, 'An inheritance of fear: older women in the twentieth-century countryside', both in L. Botelho and P. Thane (eds.), *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500* (Harlow, 2001), pp.166-185 and pp. 186-206; and C. Edwards, 'Inequality in nineteenth-century welfare provision: a study of access to and quality of institutional medical care for the elderly in England', (unpublished PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2002).

¹²¹ D. Green, 'Medical relief and the New Poor Law in London', in A. Cunningham, O.P. Grell and R. Jutte (eds.), *Health Care and Poor Relief in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Northern Europe* (Aldershot, 2002), p.221.

¹²² Williams, *Pauperism*, pp.169-213.

¹²³ Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp.207-338.

¹²⁴ Rose, 'Allowance system', pp.607-620; A. Digby, 'Labour market', pp.69-83.

the unemployed, both during the 1840s and during the ‘cotton famine’ in the early 1860s.¹²⁵ More recently, Marjorie Levine-Clark has completed in-depth examinations of outdoor relief through the prisms of gender, family responsibility and deservingness in the Black Country.¹²⁶ Provision, or lack thereof, outside the workhouse has also featured in literature on the ‘crusade’ against outdoor relief of the 1870s and 1880s.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, our understanding of the nature and extent of this more prevalent form of relief remains partial. This thesis responds to this imbalance by investigating how outdoor relief was administered and received in each of the seven poor law unions making up our four case studies. The emphasis on the workhouse which has tended to unbalance the historiography is redressed for the post-1900 period.

The third key element of welfare literature relevant to this thesis is related to the boards of guardians themselves and the nature of local welfare governance. Scholars have been interested both in who the guardians were in socio-economic terms, and in how power was distributed between members on individual boards over time. Elizabeth Hurren, Geoff Hooker and Karen Rothery, for instance, have all suggested that specific boards in Northamptonshire, Carmarthenshire and Hertfordshire respectively were controlled by small groups of members who drove decision-making.¹²⁸ Others have reflected on the changing composition of boards of guardians over time, often linked to the 1894 Local Government Act and 1918 Representation of the People Act. The influence of the Labour party, for instance, on the make-up of boards of guardians and the policies they pursued has been noted by Anne Digby, Bernard Harris and those who have written about the infamous Poplar union in London.¹²⁹ The experiences of female

¹²⁵ H.M. Boot, ‘Unemployment and poor law relief in Manchester, 1845-1850’, *Social History*, 15:2 (1990), pp.217-228; L. Keisling, ‘Institutional choice matters: the poor law and implicit labour contracts in Victorian Lancashire’, *Explorations in Economic History*, 33:1 (1996), pp.65-85; G. Boyer, ‘Poor relief, informal assistance and short time during the Lancashire cotton famine’, *Explorations in Economic History*, 34 (1997), pp.56-76.

¹²⁶ Levine-Clark, *Unemployment*.

¹²⁷ Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism*; A. Croll, ‘“Reconciled gradually to the system of indoor relief”: the poor law in Wales during the ‘crusade against outdoor relief’, c.1870-c.1890’, *Family & Community History*, 20:2 (2017), pp.121-144.

¹²⁸ Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism*, pp.108-112; G. Hooker, ‘Llandilofawr Poor Law Union 1836–1886: ‘The most difficult union in Wales’’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2013), pp.204-205, 149-159; K. Rothery, ‘The implementation and administration of the New Poor Law in Hertfordshire, c.1830-1847’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2016), p.314.

¹²⁹ Digby, ‘Changing welfare cultures’, pp.307-308; Harris, *Origins*, p.183; J. Davis, ‘Poplar councillors’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, www.oxforddnb.com [accessed 18/09/18]; N. Branson, *Poplarism, 1919-1925: George Lansbury and the Councillors’ Revolt* (London, 1979) and P. Ryan, ‘Poplarism, 1894-1930’ in P. Thane (ed.), *The Origins of British Social Policy* (London, 1978), pp.56-83.

guardians from 1894 onwards have likewise been explored in the work of Patricia Hollis, Steve King and Catherine Preston.¹³⁰ This valuable work notwithstanding, because of the lack of post-1900 poor law studies, there remain relatively few examinations of boards of guardians during this period – the works by Hurren, Hooker and Rothery all focus on the nineteenth century. Likewise, there has been little regional comparison undertaken of the impact of the changes in local democracy on the composition of boards and their welfare policies. In addition, there has been minimal consideration of what these key factors in local administration meant for the accessibility of welfare governance structures. Steve King has suggested future scholars should examine the question of how poor relief resources were controlled, and whether governance structures were ‘open’ or ‘closed’, as a way of measuring and comparing relief practices between regions, but so far this has not been attempted.¹³¹

This thesis responds to this neglected area. It builds group profiles of the seven boards of guardians featured in our four case studies, including their socio-economic make-up, their leadership priorities and the extent to which membership of the board changed over time, particularly focusing on the presence of female board members, in response to the significant changes in local democracy during this period. Once these have been established, this thesis applies King’s yardstick, assessing whether governance structures in individual unions were ‘open’, and inclusive, or more ‘closed’ with power concentrated in the hands of a few members and a narrow range of people serving as guardians. This thesis also compares these governance structures, both between unions and between counties - a novel approach not previously attempted in the context of poor law guardians for the post-1900 period.

The fourth key element of poor law historiography to which this thesis contributes is the geographical coverage of existing studies. In a highly localised system, poor law officials in situ had considerable autonomy, and practices were shaped by specific regional factors. Snell’s mapping of indoor and outdoor relief levels shows significant regional variation, with Wales, Norfolk and much of Lincolnshire giving very high proportions of their relief outside the workhouse, for instance, while the opposite was true in Shropshire, south Lancashire and unions in and around London. He

¹³⁰ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, pp.247-302; King, *Women*; Preston, ‘Welsh women’, pp.87-102.

¹³¹ King, ‘Welfare regimes’, p.59.

further suggests that highly urbanised areas tended to use the workhouse more extensively than many rural ones.¹³² Poor law scholarship reflects this regionality in that historians have examined the system within specific geographical parameters. The scope of studies vary, focusing on a single county, city, poor law union, or even individual parishes within unions.¹³³ This, of course, allows for extremely detailed analysis of the nuances of poor law operations in particular places, creating a mosaic of studies across England and Wales. However, this conventional approach has not tended to result in even geographical coverage, and the overall picture it draws can therefore be misleading.

In terms of English counties, London has attracted considerably more attention than most other parts of England and Wales.¹³⁴ Indeed, the London-centric scholarship is itself unbalanced, with a concentration of studies on the East End.¹³⁵ It is easy to see why welfare historians would be tempted to focus on London – as David Green has pointed out, poverty was especially acute and difficult to resolve there.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, this has meant that the metropolis is often over-represented in welfare literature. Outside London, industrial Lancashire has arguably received the most interest, including in much of Steve King's work on various aspects of welfare.¹³⁷ In contrast, the spread of

¹³² Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp.228-233.

¹³³ For work on this kind of scale, see for instance Boot, 'Unemployment'; S. Williams, 'Earnings, poor relief and the economy of makeshifts: Bedfordshire in the early years of the New Poor Law', *Rural History*, 16:1 (2005), pp.21-52; K. Waddington, 'Paying for the sick poor: financing medicine under the Victorian poor law – the case of the Whitechapel Union, 1850-1900' in M. Gorsky and S. Sheard (eds.), *Financing Medicine: the British Experience since 1750* (London, 2006), pp.95-111; I. Bailey, 'Unifiers and dividers in a north Staffordshire parish: Audley, 1840-1939' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2015), pp.104-121.

¹³⁴ Examples among this large literature include much of David Green's work, most recently *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790-1870* (Farnham, 2010) and 'Icons of the new system: workhouse construction in London under the Old and New Poor Law', *The London Journal*, 34:3 (2009), pp.264-284; P. Ashbridge, 'Paying for the poor: a middle class metropolitan movement for rate equalisation, 1857-1867', *The London Journal*, 22:2 (1997), pp.107-122; A. Levene, 'Poor families, removals and 'nurture' in late Old Poor Law London', *Continuity and Change*, 25:2 (2010), pp.233-262; A. Tanner, 'The casual poor and the City of London poor law union, 1837-1869', *The Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), pp.183-206; Waddington, 'Sick poor'.

¹³⁵ See for instance Branson, *Poplarism*; L. Marks, 'Medical care for pauper mothers and their infants: poor law provision and local demand in east London, 1870-1929', *Economic History Review*, 46:3 (1993), pp.518-542; E. Murphy, 'The New Poor Law guardians and the administration of insanity in East London, 1834-44', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 77:1 (2003), pp.45-74; P. Ryan, 'Politics and relief: East London unions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' in M. Rose, *The Poor and the City: the English Poor Law in its Urban Context, 1834-1914* (Leicester, 1985), pp.133-172.

¹³⁶ Green, 'Medical relief', p.239.

¹³⁷ E. Midwinter, 'State intervention at the local level: the new poor law in Lancashire', *The Historical Journal*, 10:1 (1967), pp.106-112; E. Midwinter, *Social Administration in Lancashire, 1830-1860: Poor Law, Public Health and Police* (Manchester, 1969); Boot, 'Unemployment', p.217-228; Keisling,

poor law studies in England outside these two regions is variable to say the least. One of the key problems with this uneven geographical distribution is that our understanding of the poor law is based largely on the system as functioning within socio-economic conditions, and indeed within physical landscapes, that were far from ubiquitous throughout England and Wales. Much of the Midlands in particular has been very patchily explored, with Nottinghamshire arguably the most intensively researched.¹³⁸ Poor law scholarship on the three English counties featured in this thesis – Leicestershire, Staffordshire and Lincolnshire – is still quite sparse. In terms of Leicestershire, poor law institutions such as workhouses, infirmaries and asylums have attracted interest (in keeping with the overall trend in poor law literature), but there is relatively little on outdoor relief in the county. Moreover, most of these studies focus on urban Leicester, as opposed to suburban, semi-rural or agricultural Leicestershire.¹³⁹ A handful of scholars have investigated the poor law in parts of Staffordshire: aside from Levine-Clark's work on the south of the county, Ian Bailey has used the poor law as one of the lenses through which he examines the parish of Audley via a microhistory approach.¹⁴⁰ Both of these studies go beyond the First World War in their coverage – a relative rarity in regional poor law work. Richard Talbot has likewise compared poor law policy in two unions in the Potteries in northern Staffordshire during the late nineteenth century.¹⁴¹ The vast majority of the county, however, remains unexplored. As for Lincolnshire, aside from Steve Hindle's work on the pre-1834 poor law in

'Institutional choice', pp.65-85; Boyer, 'Poor relief', pp.56-76; L. Darwen, 'Implementing and administering the New Poor Law in the industrial north: a case study of Preston union in regional context, 1837-1861' (unpublished PhD thesis, Nottingham Trent University, 2015); N. Quinn, 'Men of yesterday: Lancaster poor law union, 1870-1911', *Family and Community History*, 18:1 (2015), pp.3-23; King, *Women, Welfare and Local Politics*; S. King, 'It is impossible for our vestry to judge his case into perfection from here: managing the distance dimensions of poor relief, 1800-40', *Rural History*, 16:2 (2005), pp.161-189.

¹³⁸ See for instance J. Beckett, 'Politics and the implementation of the New Poor Law: the Nottingham workhouse controversy, 1834-43', *Midland History*, 41:2 (2005), pp.201-223; M. Caplan, *In The Shadow of the Workhouse: the Implementation of the New Poor Law throughout Nottinghamshire, 1836-46* (Nottingham, 1985); J.D. Marshall, 'The Nottinghamshire reformers and their contribution to the New Poor Law', *Economic History Review*, 13:3 (1961), pp.382-396.

¹³⁹ Peter Bartlett uses Leicestershire and Rutland as a case study in *The Poor Law of Lunacy: The Administration of Pauper Lunatics in mid-nineteenth century England* (Leicester, 1999). Angela Negrine has written on medical relief in Leicester - see 'Medicine and poverty: a study of the poor law medical services of the Leicester Union, 1867-1914' (unpublished PhD thesis University of Leicester, 2008) and 'Treatment of sick children in the workhouse by Leicester poor law union, 1867-1914', *Family & Community History*, 13:1 (2010), pp.34-44. See also G.T. Rimmington, 'Treatment of the sick poor in Leicester: North Evington Poor Law Infirmary, 1905-1903', *Midland History*, 29:1 (2004), pp.92-106.

¹⁴⁰ Levine-Clark, *Unemployment*; Bailey, 'Unifiers and dividers', pp.104-121.

¹⁴¹ R. Talbot, 'North-south divide of the poor in the Staffordshire potteries, 1871-1901' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2017).

Holland Fen, there are only a small number of studies examining that very large county.¹⁴² Poor law operations in these places are sorely in need of further detailed exploration, because they incorporate a range of socio-economic contexts which are not sufficiently represented in the existing literature. This thesis demonstrates that Midlands counties capture significant regional variation while also revealing local poor law administration very different in nature to that portrayed in London or industrial Lancashire.

The final county included in this thesis is Montgomeryshire. This leads us to arguably the most neglected place in terms of poor law studies: Wales. Central poor law legislation applied to Wales as well as England. As such, the latter is often theoretically incorporated into broader survey works, but is rarely given any individual attention within these.¹⁴³ There are currently no texts surveying poor law operations in Wales as a whole under the pre- or post-1834 poor law, in the way that Anthony Brundage, David Englander or Lynn Hollen Lees attempt for England.¹⁴⁴ In terms of regional or comparative work, scholarship has been less extensive in Wales, and much of it is clustered around the early decades of the New Poor Law and again preoccupied with the workhouse.¹⁴⁵ Steve King and John Stewart explicitly called for further research to be undertaken on the poor law in Wales in two articles published in the early 2000s.¹⁴⁶ Keith Snell also highlighted the potential significance of Welsh poor law studies in 2006, suggesting that ‘Wales emerges almost as a different welfare country’.¹⁴⁷ The

¹⁴² S. Hindle, ‘Power, poor relief and social relations in Holland Fen, c.1600-1800’, *Historical Journal*, 41:1 (1998), pp.67-96; J.A.H. Brocklebank, ‘The New Poor Law in Lincolnshire’, *Lincolnshire Historian*, 2:9 (1962), pp.21-33; J.A. Perkins, ‘Unmarried mothers and the poor law in Lincolnshire, 1800-1850’, *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, 20 (1985), pp.21-33; C. Rawding, ‘The Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834-65: a case study of Caistor Poor Law Union’, *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, 22 (1987), pp.15-23.

¹⁴³ Hooker, ‘Llandilofawr’, p.8.

¹⁴⁴ Brundage, *Poor Laws*; Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform*; Hollen Lees, *Solidarities*.

¹⁴⁵ A representative sample includes A.E. Davies, ‘The New Poor Law in a rural area, 1834-1850’, *Ceredigion*, 8 (1978), pp.246-290; I. Dewar, ‘George Clive and the establishment of the New Poor Law in South Glamorgan, 1836-1838’, *Morgannwg*, 11 (1967), pp.46-70; F. Hankins, ‘From parish pauper to Union workhouse inmate (part 2)’, *Bryncheiniog*, 31 (1998), pp.66-108; E.J.R. Morgan, ‘Administration of the poor laws in Pembrokeshire, 1780-1870’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Swansea, 2004); B. Owen, ‘The Newtown and Llanidloes poor law union workhouse, Caersws, 1837-1847’, *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 78 (1990), pp.115-160; K. Parker, ‘Radnorshire and the New Poor Law to c.1850’, *Transactions of the Radnorshire Society*, 74 (2004), pp.169-196; S. King and J. Stewart: ‘Death in Llantrisant: Henry Williams and the New Poor Law in Wales’, *Rural History*, 15:1 (2004), pp.69-87.

¹⁴⁶ S. King and J. Stewart, ‘The history of the poor law in Wales: under-researched, full of potential’, *Archives*, 26:105 (2001), pp.134-148; King and Stewart: ‘Death in Llantrisant’, pp.70-71.

¹⁴⁷ Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.230.

challenge set by King, Stewart and Snell has been neglected until the last five years or so. Geoff Hooker's PhD thesis provides a detailed exploration of Llandilofawr poor law union in Carmarthenshire, which clearly shows the influence of local socio-economic conditions on the way in which the union was administered.¹⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Megan Evans and Peter Jones have undertaken one of the few Wales-wide poor law studies, focusing on Welsh attitudes towards the workhouse in the aftermath of the 1834 Amendment Act, and supporting Snell's portrayal of a 'different welfare country' by arguing that Welsh unions resisted the construction and use of institutions in a distinctive way.¹⁴⁹ Other nuanced work on the Welsh poor law has recently been undertaken by Andy Croll, questioning the idea of English-Welsh difference by suggesting that the late nineteenth-century 'crusade' against outdoor relief was experienced among Welsh unions to a greater extent than previously recognised.¹⁵⁰ Notably, both these latter studies make some comparison between experiences in Wales and in England – an element missing from most work on the poor law. Croll has also made a rare foray into the twentieth century poor law in an overview of poverty and mass unemployment in south Wales.¹⁵¹ Further examinations of Wales, then, are being undertaken. However, we continue to lack a sufficient corpus of studies which explore the poor law at a local or regional level in Wales, particularly beyond the confines of the workhouse. As a result, the question of a distinctive Welsh welfare culture has not been fully addressed. This thesis engages with this major gap in the historiography, reconstructing the poor law Montgomeryshire, and then testing the 'different welfare country' hypothesis by comparing the findings of this case study with those of counties in the English Midlands, an approach not previously undertaken at a regional level in relation to Wales. In sum, by exploring poor law operations in neglected counties and understudied socio-economic contexts throughout chapters 2-6, this thesis brings a more nuanced perspective to our understanding of local welfare provision during this period. It expands our conceptions of the New Poor Law beyond the regions often featured in existing literature.

¹⁴⁸ Hooker, 'Llandilofawr'.

¹⁴⁹ Evans and Jones, 'Resistance to the workhouse'.

¹⁵⁰ Croll, 'Reconciled gradually'.

¹⁵¹ A. Croll, 'Poverty, mass unemployment and welfare' in A. Croll and C. Williams (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Vol. 5 – The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp.207-227.

This question of regional variation and geographical coverage leads us to the fifth key area of welfare historiography where this thesis makes a novel contribution: ways of classifying and comparing welfare practices. The significant figure in these efforts has been Steve King. He argued in 2000 that England was broadly divided into two zones in terms of welfare provision, whereby local welfare administrations in southern and eastern counties enforced a wider definition of entitlement, granted more substantial allowances to more people, intervened earlier in individual poverty crises, and turned down fewer people than those in the north and west.¹⁵² Within these ‘macro-regions’, King proposed six sub-regions, ‘each with distinct experiences of welfare issues such as entitlement, nominal relief levels and sentiment of relief-giving’.¹⁵³ Despite the criticisms this model has attracted from Steve Hindle and Lewis Darwen that ‘collective regional cultures’ were less important than localised nuances within regions,¹⁵⁴ subsequent studies by scholars such as Snell, Digby and Kim Price have continued to suggest a distinct regionalism to welfare attitudes and practices in England and Wales after 1850, which is where King’s model ends.¹⁵⁵

Alternative conceptions of regional welfare have also been proposed by King. In 2007, King and John Stewart outlined a ‘welfare peripheries’ model, suggesting that certain places could be classified as ‘peripheral’, and operated a distinctive kind of welfare culture.¹⁵⁶ The model defined ‘peripheral’ countries or regions as places ‘geographically on the edge of northern and/or western Europe’, at a distance from political and cultural centres, with relatively small populations and ‘unstable’ histories as ‘independent autonomous polities’, which ‘stood in the shadow of much larger and more powerful nation-states’.¹⁵⁷ Places that could be defined in this way, argued King and Stewart, had commonalities in their welfare systems which were different to those in ‘core’ European states. These common features are presented in Table 1.1, below.

¹⁵² King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p.257.

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp.261-262.

¹⁵⁴ S. Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c.1550-1750* (Oxford, 2004), p.61; L. Darwen, ‘Implementing and administering the New Poor Law’, pp.12-14.

¹⁵⁵ Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp.207-338; Digby, ‘Changing welfare cultures’, pp.297-322; K. Price, ‘A regional quantitative and qualitative study of the employment, disciplining and discharging of workhouse medical officers of the New Poor Law throughout nineteenth-century England and Wales’, (unpublished PhD thesis, Oxford Brookes University, 2008).

¹⁵⁶ S. King and J. Stewart, ‘Welfare peripheries in modern Europe’, in S. King and J. Stewart (eds.), *Welfare Peripheries: The Development of Welfare States in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe* (Bern, 2007), pp.9-38.

¹⁵⁷ King and J. Stewart, ‘Welfare peripheries’, pp.24-27.

While the authors acknowledge that these features are not ‘exclusively’ characteristic of all ‘peripheral’ societies, they argue that their presence in many peripheral places invites further exploration.¹⁵⁸ However, there has been little uptake of this model, beyond a handful of passing references in articles which have not sought to test or examine its principles.¹⁵⁹ This thesis therefore seeks to move scholarship along by reapplying and refining the ‘welfare peripheries’ model in new ways in chapters 4-6.

Table 1.1 Features of peripheral welfare system as designed by King and Stewart.

Components of a peripheral welfare regime	Limited capacity of state-sponsored legislation to change pre-established welfare practices
	Relative autonomy of local bodies such as parishes and religious organisations with a weak legal 'centre'
	Particular problems with financing welfare
	Significant role of voluntarism, mutuality and civic pride in welfare provision
	Degree of legislative instability and ongoing policy adjustment
	Relatively slow professionalisation of relief structures and personnel
	Focus on specialist welfare provision for particular categories of pauper

Source: S. King and J. Stewart, ‘Welfare peripheries in modern Europe’, in *Welfare Peripheries: The Development of Welfare States in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe* (Bern, 2007), pp.27-31.

The most recent intervention in the classification of welfare regionality was undertaken by King in 2011, when, he attempted to establish a framework which could be used for such comparisons.¹⁶⁰ In order to do this, he identified a set of ‘yardsticks’ which could be used to classify existing regional studies or provoke new ones related to the ‘practice, structure, experience and mentality’ of welfare provision, including but not limited to questions of local governance, system navigation, and adequacy of

¹⁵⁸ King and Stewart, ‘Welfare peripheries’, p.31.

¹⁵⁹ B. Harvey, ‘The Oaks Colliery disaster of 1866: a case study of responsibility’, *Business History*, 58:4 (2016), p.503; J.P. Tabin, A. Frauenfelder, C. Togni and V. Keller, ‘Whose poor? Social welfare and local political boundaries’, *European Journal of Social Work*, 14:4 (2011), p.472; Croll, ‘Reconciled gradually to the system of indoor relief’, p.122.

¹⁶⁰ King, ‘Welfare regimes’.

relief.¹⁶¹ These yardsticks could then be used to develop ‘ideal-type’ regimes, providing ways of categorising welfare practices in different places that could be plotted on a map – King suggests four such types, ranging from entitling to disciplinary cultures.¹⁶² However, once again historians have not yet tried out this model in any real way. Progress in actually developing systemic comparisons between regional and/or national welfare regimes has therefore been slow.

This thesis is well-placed to test these three different models of welfare culture in ways that have not so far been attempted. The case studies featured in this thesis form a band across the Midlands, cutting across the north-west/south-east division King makes in his ‘regional welfare cultures’ model.¹⁶³ We can therefore test its longevity into the early twentieth century. Due to the lack of poor law studies on this later period, this question has not previously been asked of this model. In addition, the selection of the specific places featured in this thesis addresses an important way in which the ‘regional welfare cultures’ model is limited. It was developed using data from 60 communities, but these were not drawn evenly from across the country due to the availability of appropriate source material, and some regions were not represented at all. Wales, and therefore Montgomeryshire, is completely absent, as is Lincolnshire, and only one parish each from Leicestershire and Staffordshire was incorporated.¹⁶⁴ Through the selection of these counties this thesis is able to test the applicability of the ‘regional welfare cultures’ model beyond its original dataset. It can also expand on the ‘welfare periphery’ formulation, not only by examining a region already identified as peripheral (Wales), but also by asking whether rural, relatively isolated places within England, such as southern Lincolnshire, might also be classified as having a peripheral welfare culture. By testing this model on poor law unions, this thesis additionally assesses the extent to which it can be applied on a much smaller geographical scale than that for which it was originally intended. Finally, the yardsticks King suggested in his ‘ideal-types’ model are used as a comparative tool within this thesis, helping us to assess similarities and differences between our four case studies and the seven poor law unions of which they are comprised. As with the ‘regional welfare cultures’ model,

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.59.

¹⁶² Ibid., pp.60-61.

¹⁶³ This is illustrated in Figure 1.1 in Section 1.4.

¹⁶⁴ King, *Poverty and Welfare*, pp.270-271.

these yardsticks were also originally designed for an earlier period – so again, this thesis takes them a stage further by investigating their usefulness into the early twentieth century.

The sixth and final element of current historiography which this thesis addresses concerns regionally-based studies of the state-led welfare reforms outside the poor law. The two categories of reform which have been explored most extensively at a local level are those connected to unemployment and housing. In terms of unemployment, this makes sense as it was ‘not distributed equally’, between industries nor regions.¹⁶⁵ There are, therefore, a number of studies which explore the experiences and management of the unemployed, including the ways their relief was accessed and negotiated both inside and outside the poor law, in specific places. These include the work of scholars we have already encountered: Adrian Vinson, Anne Digby, Marjorie Levine-Clark and Andy Croll.¹⁶⁶ In addition, Stephanie Ward has taken a relatively rare comparative approach, examining protests against the means test of unemployment relief in north-east England and south Wales during the 1930s, while John Tanner has investigated unemployed activism in Sheffield regarding poor relief.¹⁶⁷ In most of these studies, unemployment benefits outside the poor law are portrayed as inadequate, and it is acknowledged that the poor law, although also insufficient, operated as a safety net for both insured and uninsured people. There is also some acknowledgment of particular regional factors which informed attitudes and responses to welfare policy; however, with the exception of Ward and Digby’s work, most scholarship does not reflect on the possibility that pre-existing, region-specific attitudes or established ways of practising welfare could inform the role played by state-led unemployment relief reform. This thesis will investigate this question, revealing that the implementation and impact of such reforms were informed by local welfare cultures to a greater extent than the literature conveys.

¹⁶⁵ Harris, *Origins*, p.198.

¹⁶⁶ Vinson, ‘Poor relief, public assistance’; Digby, ‘Changing welfare cultures’; Levine-Clark, *Unemployment*, pp.42-49, 82-108, 172-176; Croll, ‘Poverty, mass unemployment and welfare’.

¹⁶⁷ Ward, *Unemployment*; J. Tanner, ‘The only fighting element of the working class?’ Unemployed activism and protest in Sheffield, 1919-1924’, *Labour History Review*, 73:1 (2008), pp.133-144. See also S. Thompson, *Unemployment, Poverty and Health in Interwar South Wales* (Cardiff, 2006).

In terms of housing reform, there has been a plethora of studies which focus on the development of council housing in specific places.¹⁶⁸ Many of these are sensitive to particular socio-economic contexts, regional town planning needs or the nature of local politics, and the impact of these factors on housing policy. Philip Broxholme's study of interwar Nottingham, for instance, argues that the city's political culture, which involved an 'unusual amount of inter-party consensus', contributed to its considerable progress in local housing provision.¹⁶⁹ Likewise, Tom Hulme's work on Buxton points to the significance of 'unique notions of civic responsibility' and the 'convoluted views' held by local councillors, press and populations in the town's lack of progress in tackling its housing problem during the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁷⁰ Both Broxholme and Hulme flag up the value of locally-oriented research in developing an understanding of these national-scale reforms. However, connections have not as yet been made between local responses to housing policy and established local welfare cultures. Moreover, any relationship between council housing developments and the poor law has received no attention at all.

As far as the other main welfare reforms of the period are concerned, any regional aspect to existing work is almost non-existent. Regarding the old-age pension, Margaret Jones has explored the reform within regional parameters (Wakefield and Salisbury), but her study, although detailed and nuanced, does not root her findings in a sense of place.¹⁷¹ Differences in the impact of the pension between northern and southern England have been observed by George Boyer, who found that while lower proportions of people aged 70 or over received poor relief in northern areas than elsewhere prior to 1908, the reverse was true for old age pensioners, with lower proportions of the same age group receiving the pension in the south than the north by 1912. He does suggest that this may have been a continuing expression of regional welfare customs, but spends relatively little time exploring this possibility.¹⁷² Elizabeth

¹⁶⁸ A good example of this is the studies of county Durham, Leeds and Bristol included in Daunton (ed.), *Councillors*.

¹⁶⁹ P. Broxholme, 'Back to the future? The Tory party, paternalism, and housing policy in Nottingham, 1919-1932', *Midland History*, 38:1 (2013), pp.99-118.

¹⁷⁰ T. Hulme, 'Urban governance and civic responsibility: interwar council housing in Buxton', *Midland History*, 35:2 (2010), pp.237-255.

¹⁷¹ M. Jones, 'The 1908 Old Age Pensions Act: The poor law in new disguise?' in K. Laybourn (eds.), *Social Conditions, Status and Community, 1860-c.1920* (Stroud, 1997), pp.82-103.

¹⁷² G. Boyer, '"Work for their prime, the workhouse for their age": old age pauperism in Victorian England', *Social Science History*, 40 (2016), pp.27-29.

Roberts and Pamela Graves have examined the reception of increased state intervention more generally during the early twentieth century in particular areas – Preston, Barrow-in-Furness and Lancaster for the former, and the East End of London in the latter. As in Jones’ work, Roberts pays little attention to the impact of regional context on her source material, predominately oral histories, and does not appear to think through whether the attitudes of her subjects to government assistance were informed by a pre-existing welfare culture.¹⁷³ Graves’ investigation of the East End of London is more firmly rooted in that specific place, highlighting the suspicion a distinctive community held for state welfare services which only began to break down in the 1930s.¹⁷⁴ Beyond work of this kind, however, regional studies of state-led welfare reforms are far from extensive.

One of the consequences of this lack of work has been that the new state welfare services’ interaction with the poor law at a local level has not been explored in much depth. Moreover, the possibility that the reception of these services might have been subject to regional variation, informed to a greater or lesser extent by established welfare cultures, has been little addressed. This thesis investigates these possibilities. Within the analysis of the selected case studies, it investigates the instances where the poor law came into contact with a variety of new welfare reforms, including the old-age pension, unemployment relief and social housing. It examines these interactions in our specific local contexts, and suggests not only long-term continuity in welfare cultures, but also that these informed the way early welfare state reforms were received. Indeed, by using this local lens we can see individuals making strategic choices about their relief in which the answer was not always the new reforms. Many sought help via the new provisions, but many others remained rooted in a tried and tested poor law system which they knew and understood. It is this experience, looking back to an older model of welfare in which poor relief was a major component, and forward to newer provisions that were not yet embedded into ordinary people’s makeshift economies, that does not come through strongly in current historiography, and which this thesis sheds light on by engaging with the post-1900 poor law.

¹⁷³ E. Roberts, ‘The recipients’ view of welfare’ in J. Bornat, R. Perks, P. Thompson and J. Walmsley (eds.), *Oral History, Health and Welfare* (London, 2000), pp.205-228.

¹⁷⁴ P.M. Graves, ‘A blessing or a curse? Working-class attitudes to state welfare programmes in Britain, 1919-1939’, *Labour History Review*, 74:2 (2009), pp.160-184.

1.3 Research questions

The existing literature outlined above is concerned with two broad themes: continuity and change in welfare policy and practice, and rhetoric versus reality. It grapples with the extent to which the welfare landscape, including the function and role of the poor law, changed over the nineteenth and early twentieth century. At the same time, it engages with discrepancies between central policy intentions and their implementation on the ground. Due to the neglect of the twentieth century poor law, historians' understanding of these themes remains incomplete. In order to build on the scholarship outlined above, this thesis pursues four key research questions.

Firstly, this thesis asks how the poor law operated 'on the ground' during the early twentieth century, reconstructing the nature and extent of relief provision in each case study, and the ways in which this changed over time. Technical detail of this kind has often been pieced together in regional poor law studies of earlier periods, but relatively rarely has this been attempted for post-1900 administrations. This thesis will therefore assess the dimensions of indoor and outdoor relief in the selected unions, including the types of people who interacted with the poor law and the forms that relief could take. The policy-making approach of boards of guardians towards various welfare issues related to relief provision, such as unemployment, the care of pauper children, and vagrancy, is also investigated.¹⁷⁵

The second research question considers the extent to which welfare operated in regionally specific ways. This thesis explores how features of the socio-economic contexts in our four case studies informed attitudes towards and methods of administering poor relief. Building on current conceptions of how to classify welfare systems, it compares policies and practices in individual unions, both within and between counties. In so doing, this thesis tests the longevity of existing models of regional welfare and considers alternative ways in which we might map welfare regionality.

¹⁷⁵ The specific literature related to issues such as vagrancy, which the state-led welfare reforms of the period neglected to address, will be explored in detail within the case-study chapters themselves.

Thirdly, this thesis asks whether the new welfare provisions of the early twentieth century were successful in reducing engagement with the poor law by assessing the impact of these welfare reforms on poor law operations at a local level. It examines how boards of guardians perceived the new welfare provisions, and the extent to which they adjusted their policies accordingly. Were interactions between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ welfare systems more complex than a simple transfer from the poor law to the alternative provisions? Did the rhetoric of freedom from the stigmatising poor law evolve into reality? This novel approach includes an investigation of whether the reception of the new welfare reforms differed between regions, or was informed at a local level by pre-existing welfare cultures.

The fourth research question is concerned with the nature of local welfare governance, and how this changed over time. Its focus is on the seven boards of guardians featured in our four case studies, and asks whether this particular governance structure was ‘open’ or ‘closed’ – again using Steve King’s yardstick for measuring relief practices. Were our boards of guardians accessible and inclusive, incorporating a wide representative range of local people and with power shared equitably between members, or did board members represent only a narrow range of socio-economic backgrounds, with power pooled within a handful of individuals or indeed one figure alone? Moreover, was the formulation of our boards affected by the 1894 Local Government Act and the 1918 Representation of the People Act? Moreover, how did these key features of welfare administration differ between individual unions, or between regions? Despite King’s suggestions that yardsticks like governance could be used to compare regionally distinct welfare practices, this thesis is novel in that it is the first study to test this in an in-depth way.

1.4 Case-study selection, sources and methods

In answering these research questions, this thesis focuses on four different counties from across the Midlands and central Wales, and examines a total of seven poor law unions from these counties. These are mapped in Figure 1.1, and detailed in Table 1.2 below.

Figure 1.1 Map of England and Wales with the poor law unions included in this thesis highlighted.

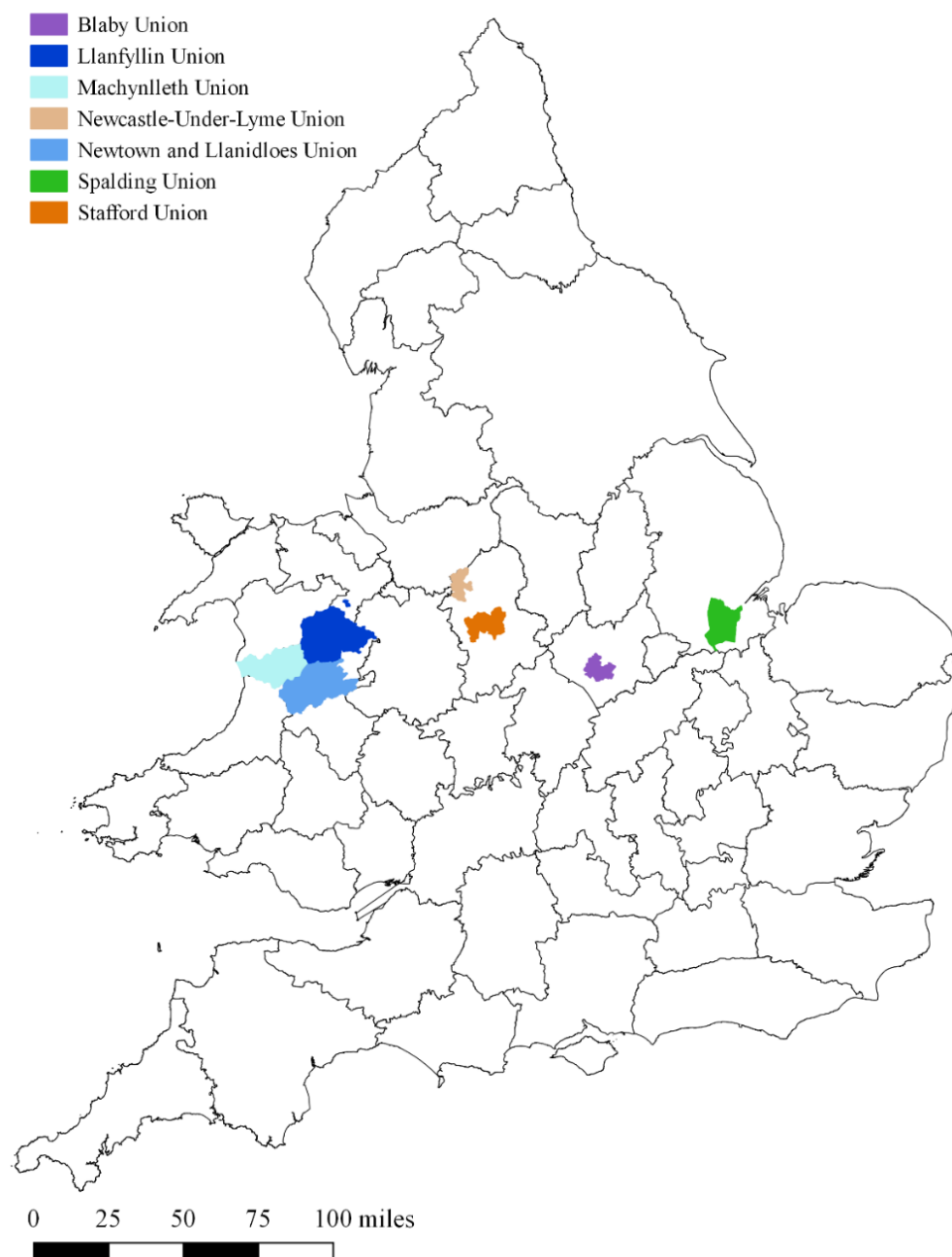


Table 1.2 Poor law unions included in case studies.

Union	County	No. of parishes
Blaby	Leicestershire	26
Stafford	Staffordshire	23
Newcastle-under-Lyme	Staffordshire	11
Spalding	Lincolnshire	10
Llanfyllin	Montgomeryshire	26
Machynlleth	Montgomeryshire	12
Newtown & Llanidloes	Montgomeryshire	18

Source: Details can be found on *A Vision of Britain Through Time*, <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/> [accessed 13/12/15].

As we have seen, exploring the poor law through selected case studies of relatively small geographical areas is an established one among poor law scholars. Lewis Darwen has recently acknowledged a problem with this local study format, pointing out that if ‘we can only truly understand the workings of the Poor Law through painstaking local research, we are going to be waiting a long time before a national picture emerges’.¹⁷⁶ Darwen himself addresses this by taking ‘a tripartite approach’, addressing poor law policy at a union, county and regional level.¹⁷⁷ This thesis is a local study in the sense that the individual unions selected are examined in a high level of detail, but the inclusion of a variety of unions in a range of places allows for comparison between regions, guarding against inaccurate generalisations, and local welfare provision is consistently placed in relevant regional and national contexts.

The decision to focus on the Midlands and central Wales in particular as the area of study was made for two main reasons. First, as indicated above, these regions have not only been relatively neglected in existing poor law scholarship, but the range of local socio-economic contexts which they incorporate bear little resemblance to those represented by places which have received the most attention in current literature, such as London and Lancashire. This thesis therefore begins to fill some of the gaps that remain in the extant mosaic of regional poor law studies. It contributes to developing a more nuanced understanding of welfare operations outside those intensely studied localities.

¹⁷⁶ Darwen, ‘Implementing and administering the New Poor Law’, p.4.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

Secondly, by examining a ‘Midlands band’ running from Lincolnshire in the east, through Leicestershire in central England, to Staffordshire in the west and on to Montgomeryshire in Wales, this thesis cuts across two broad divisions which have previously been drawn through England and used to categorise local welfare regimes. One is James Caird’s division of arable and pastoral areas. Caird, a Scottish agriculturalist, undertook a famous inquiry into the state of English agriculture in the early 1850s and subsequently described the country as divided into the arable east and pastoral west.¹⁷⁸ He included Wales in the largely pastoral zone, although there was cereal production in many areas, such as Anglesey or on the southern Welsh coast.¹⁷⁹ As Alun Howkins points out, although this division ‘conceal[s] almost endless regional variations’ in landscape type and settlement patterns, the essential delineation between arable and pastoral zones remained the same at the beginning of the twentieth century as it did in the 1850s.¹⁸⁰ This matters in discussions about welfare because the nature of farming in a particular area informed the labour market. Broadly, arable areas experienced high levels of employment during the harvest and high winter unemployment, while in pastoral regions employment levels were spread more evenly over the year.¹⁸¹ This had a knock-on effect on local markets, employment and welfare provision. Snell has shown (albeit for an earlier period) that these seasonal patterns were reflected in engagements with the poor law. He further estimated that such seasonal patterns continued into the twentieth century.¹⁸² Nigel Goose likewise used poor law sources to demonstrate regional variations in mid-nineteenth century seasonal unemployment, whereby ‘primarily arable counties’ experienced a much greater contrast between their January and July workhouse occupancy levels than more pastoral counties.¹⁸³ By incorporating counties on either side of Caird’s division, this thesis captures both forms of farming and associated employment patterns. It can therefore

¹⁷⁸ G.E. Mingay, ‘Caird, Sir James (1816-1892)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, www.oxforddnb.com [accessed 09/08/17]; J. Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850-51* (London, 1852).

¹⁷⁹ A. Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside Since 1900* (London, 2003), p.7.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985), pp.19-21, 46, 48.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ N. Goose, ‘Farm service, seasonal unemployment and casual labour in mid-nineteenth century England’, *Agricultural History Review*, 54:2 (2006), pp.293-295.

explore poor relief provision in both contexts and examine the extent to which the patterns observed by Snell and Goose survived into the twentieth century.

The other division straddled by our Midlands band is King's delineation of 'regional welfare cultures', as has already been alluded to in Section 1.3. His north-west and south-east division follows similar lines to Caird, defining south-east as 'areas to the east of a line running north to south from the East Riding, through Lincolnshire, central and east Leicestershire, south Warwickshire, Wiltshire, east Somerset and then to Exeter'.¹⁸⁴ Again, this thesis incorporates both sides of this model, meaning that it can be tested in our later period. Moreover, as was outlined in the literature review in Section 1.2, the counties which feature here were not incorporated into the data on which this model was originally constructed, so this thesis is able to test the applicability of the 'regional welfare cultures' model beyond its original dataset.

An additional important advantage in undertaking an analysis of a Midlands band is that it offers the possibility for developing alternative ways of thinking about welfare regionality. In considering the Midlands as a region, it is possible to explore the extent to which there may have been a 'Midlands personality' in terms of welfare policies and practices, running across both England and Wales. Has a different organising principle for welfare cultures been disguised by the dominance of the north-west/south-east division? A set of case studies which cover the span of the Midlands in this way enables a reflection on this question, for while there has been emphasis on English and Welsh difference, there has been less investigation of cross-border commonalities.

With all this in mind, a specific rationale was pursued in the selection of the individual case studies themselves. Collectively, the poor law unions chosen needed to be drawn evenly from across the Midlands band. They were also required to be appropriately representative of the range of socio-economic conditions found across the region, enabling us to reflect on the relationship between these different contexts and local welfare regimes. At the same time, however, they ought to prioritise those types of places which have so far been little studied – in other words, they should not be dominated by larger urban centres, such as Birmingham, Nottingham or Leicester.

¹⁸⁴ King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p.5.

Finally, all case studies had to be supported by a sufficient volume of relevant, locally-generated primary source material to properly address our key research questions. All four of these requirements needed to be considered and balanced when choosing case studies, and no one of the four could be allowed to dominate at the expense of the others.

As can be seen in Figure 1.1, the seven poor law unions that are explored in this thesis adhere collectively to the Midlands band. Moreover, they capture a range of socio-economic conditions found within the region. These will be drawn in more detail in the relevant chapters, but an overview highlights the variety of contexts in which the poor law operates within this thesis. Blaby's local economy fits into the spectrum of 'market town' economies, in which both agriculture and 'modern' industry – in Blaby's case footwear and hosiery manufacture – interacted, as outlined by Jonathan Brown.¹⁸⁵ Stafford could also fit into this category, because its local economy drew on agriculture as a key source of employment in its constituent parishes outside the town itself, but as its industries were heavier and the union was on the whole more urbanised, it more closely aligns with the model of a small industrial town, as outlined by Peter Clark with reference to Loughborough.¹⁸⁶ Newcastle-under-Lyme, meanwhile, was largely a dormitory town by our period for the neighbouring Potteries. The north Staffordshire coal seam and its mining and other associated industries in the wider union provided a significant amount of its employment. In sharp contrast, the local economy of southern Lincolnshire, where Spalding union was located, was entirely dominated by agriculture. This region had a specific agricultural profile, becoming a market-gardening powerhouse during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Finally, the three Welsh unions were different again, characterised by upland pastoral and mixed farming. David Howell and Colin Baber have classified Newtown and the somewhat smaller towns Llanidloes and Machynlleth as regional service centres, forming market and communication hubs for the surrounding countryside but with little specialised industrial or manufacturing clout of their own.¹⁸⁷ Taken together, these case studies as a

¹⁸⁵ J. Brown, *The English Market Town: A Social and Economic History, 1750-1914* (Malborough, 1986).

¹⁸⁶ P. Clark, 'Elite networking and the formation of a small industrial town: Loughborough, 1700-1840' in J. Stobart and N. Raven (eds.), *Towns, Regions and Industries: Urban and Industrial Change in the Midlands, c.1700-1840* (Manchester, 2005), pp.161-162.

¹⁸⁷ D. W. Howell and C. Baber, 'Wales' in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950: Vol I – Regions and Communities* (Cambridge, 1990), p.299.

cohort form a representative sample of socio-economic contexts in which the poor law was experienced across the English Midlands and central Wales, meaning that this thesis can build a more comprehensive and nuanced picture of the twentieth century poor law in this broad region.

This brings us to the final element of case study selection rationale: adequate source material. One of the reasons that the poor law has been such an attractive area of historical study is the sheer amount of documentation generated by its everyday operation, particularly after 1834. Even small, rural unions kept extensive and often intensely detailed records, and the various central government bodies in charge of the poor law over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries likewise produced substantial volumes of material, from reports to correspondence to national and regional statistics. As this thesis is a locally-oriented one, interested in the details of specific local welfare practices and policies, administrative records created and maintained by individual poor law unions themselves are its foundational material. The selection of case studies, therefore, was based on the nature and extent of surviving records of this type for the early twentieth century. It is important to note that it was not possible to select poor law unions for which exactly the same record types survived. Therefore, the source base for each case study is slightly different. This should not be taken to mean, however, that they cannot be compared. Rather, a range of different record types have been used to answer particular questions, depending on the material available for the selected poor law unions. In the cases of Staffordshire and Montgomeryshire, the quality and quantity of source survival influenced the decision to examine more than one union in these counties – in these instances, individual unions did not have sufficient sources surviving to support a case study alone, but an image of local poor law function can be successfully reconstructed when the records of multiple unions are carefully considered. Considerable record linkage work is undertaken in all case studies, as the timelines of decision-making are tracked through several different types of document. In all seven unions included in this thesis, untapped local-level source materials are utilised to draw together detailed reconstructions of everyday poor law operations. More detail on the specific sources consulted in each case study and exactly how they have been used is provided in subsequent chapters. The rest of this section surveys the source materials employed in this thesis as a whole, and comments

on how their strengths and limitations shape the discussions we are able to have about regional welfare provision in this period.

The core source for all seven poor law unions is the board of guardians' minute books. These record the board's meetings, held either fortnightly or monthly. In total, 71 volumes of minutes, covering over 2,500 meetings, have been consulted. These records offer invaluable insights into both the routine business undertaken by boards, and the controversies and crises that sometimes came upon them. They offer an overview of the wide range of issues that came under the guardians' consideration. By observing how often and how extensively a board discussed particular subjects, an idea of its members' priorities or concerns can be developed. Communication and relationships with other boards and with the central government can also be gleaned, as the guardians' responses to questions, requests or directions from these bodies were often recorded as well. In addition, they include lists of guardians in attendance at each meeting, providing data points in mapping the power structures and dynamics on individual boards, as well as a cross-referencing resource when attempting to build an image of board membership and how this changed over time. These records, therefore, were used as a window into the everyday policy and practice in each union, as well as into long-term continuities or changes.

However, board meeting minutes are not without flaws or silences which needed to be filled with other source material. One absence is their relative lack of detailed quantitative data on the nature of pauperism in the respective unions, beyond the record of indoor and outdoor relief expenditure that most did include. The minute books were therefore further augmented by the consultation of other locally-generated poor law records. Weekly returns to poor law inspectors, workhouse admissions and discharge registers and outdoor relief lists were used for this purpose. Returns to the poor law inspectors, made by all unions in England and Wales, record the number of paupers relieved, both inside and outside the workhouse, and the amount expended on them in a union on a weekly basis. They also often include the same information for the equivalent week the previous year, in an attempt to capture changes in pauperism levels. Workhouse admissions and discharge registers, meanwhile, record more detailed information about individuals who entered and left the institution, including age and occupation, as well as keeping track of the number of workhouse residents overall. Outdoor relief lists operated as a record of payments made to relief recipients outside

the workhouse. Resembling a modern Excel spreadsheet, they also broadly categorise relief recipients according to their gender, family structure and the reason relief was being provided. These materials have been used to reconstruct the fluctuations in pauperism levels, both indoor and outdoor, over time in our selected unions. The fact that their data was recorded at such short time intervals means that moments of periods of change could be identified with much more accuracy than snapshots from census data, or amalgamated annual totals, allow for. They are also used, at different points in this thesis, to reflect on the seasonality of relief provision within the calendar year, the types of families who received poor relief, and the nature and generosity of that relief. These records often enable us to gauge the impact of policy reform and regional and national economic crises in reality on the ground. The most significant limitation for this broad category of sources is simply survival – as noted above, all seven poor law unions featured in this thesis have different combinations of these records still extant, and where they do survive, they do not always cover our whole period. Again, more detail on the distribution of this material among our case studies is given in the subsequent chapters. For now, it is important to note the important role this material nevertheless plays, in tandem with other sources, in this thesis to explore how the poor law functioned at a local level during our period.

The other key limitation of the guardians' minute books is linked to the fact that they were the 'official' record of the guardians' decisions. They rarely captured content of the discussions leading up to these decisions in any detail, and the language used was often carefully moderated. This also applies to boards' responses to communication from other unions, local bodies or central government. As a result, the motivations behind policy decisions can be hard to see through this lens. To address this, regional press coverage was consulted. In most places, at least one local newspaper covered poor law business, reporting on board meetings as well as any less regular activity, such as inquests, regional gatherings of poor law officials, and guardian elections. The resulting coverage is not exhaustive – press reports do not usually include details of individual decisions made about the cases of specific relief applicants, for instance. Nevertheless, the strength of this material is that it often includes details of actual discussions held between board members, sometimes recording exchanges verbatim, which were not captured in the official minutes themselves. This offers insights into the decision-making processes of individual boards regarding controversial issues, as well as

sometimes revealing the personalities of guardians and the nature of relationships between them. Indeed, press coverage of guardian elections was extremely useful when developing the ‘group profiles’ of boards included for each case study. Reports on nominations for election as well as on the results themselves provided a useful way of linking individual guardians with the parish they represented (information not always forthcoming from local administrative records). In addition, they often include occupations and occasionally addresses of those nominated or elected. Where these details are less clear, press reports were linked with local trade directories and census returns as well as the minute books to reveal the kinds of people who sat on the boards, with over 700 individuals represented. Through connecting press coverage with local poor law records, and cross-referencing these with additional material, this thesis provides a rich and detailed picture of welfare administration and decision-making.

In addition to this wealth of locally-generated material, the activities and attitudes of our chosen unions are supplemented by the use of numerous sources produced by central government bodies. The half-yearly pauperism returns submitted to the LGB, and later the MoH, from every union in England and Wales, are used in the case studies where local records detailing pauperism levels are patchier. Although they are limited to presenting numbers of indoor and outdoor paupers on single nights in January and June in each year, so do not provide the more granular local changes found in the records described above, these returns can still do the important work of capturing changes in pauperism levels over time at an individual union level where this information is not otherwise forthcoming. The annual reports of the LGB and MoH provide helpful national contexts to local practices and experiences. Some of the most valuable elements of these are the reports from regional poor law inspectors, which highlight trends and concerns particular to their districts and enables us to set our case studies within their regional contexts, assessing for instance how typical or otherwise they were in particular elements of their relief administration. Material of this type means that we can zoom in and out on our unions to varying degrees, observing them in extreme close-up through local records, at medium-range through the regional poor law inspector reports, and at long-range, within the broader welfare landscape of England and Wales. Evidence and reports submitted to enquiries with narrower interests, such as the 1906 Departmental Committee on Vagrancy, were consulted in a similar way, to frame the concerns of our unions in wider debates and contexts. By taking a

comparative approach, this thesis avoids treating its case studies in a vacuum; the use of these sources thus contributes to this effort by maintaining an awareness of national conversations about welfare. It is therefore possible to see how representative particular local strategies, problems or policies were.

Having outlined the main categories of source material drawn on in this thesis, two absences from the evidence base should be acknowledged. One category of sources which might be expected to appear in a study like this is the flagship MH12 series, held at The National Archives, Kew (TNA). This series currently consists largely of correspondence between poor law unions and central authorities, and contains thousands of documents offering details on the operation of specific unions and insights into the relationship between local and central government, as well as information on individual paupers and members of union staff. Unsurprisingly, MH12 is regularly drawn on by poor law scholars, and is widely viewed as a staple of poor law research. However, the series does not feature among the source material of this thesis. This is because the majority of post-1900 MH12 material, and everything related to the unions discussed here for this period, was destroyed by fire in the 1940s.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, the lack of surviving material for these years may have been a contributing factor in the general neglect of the twentieth century poor law by scholars. There is a similar absence in other series within MoH records at the TNA which might otherwise prove fruitful for poor law historians – MH13, for instance, which includes correspondence between the General Board of Health and local authorities, does not reach our period either. The varied source material outlined above upon which this thesis is based is entirely sufficient for an effective and highly detailed study. Nevertheless, given MH12's reputation as an important source for poor law scholars, it is worth explaining its absence here.

Finally, this thesis does not include pauper letters among its source material. There has been a turn over the last decade or so among poor law scholars towards the pauper voice, with increasing emphasis on the agency and experiences of relief applicants, as opposed to the actions of local or central officials and policymakers, both

¹⁸⁸ 'Poverty and the Poor Laws: Research Guide', *The National Archives Online*, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/poverty-poor-laws/ [accessed 28/08/18].

pre- and post-1834. Pauper letters, whereby individuals wrote to poor law officials petitioning for or negotiating around relief provision, have often been at the core of this work.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, there is currently a multi-year joint project between TNA and the University of Leicester focusing on the transcription and analysis of letters and other material written by paupers between 1834 and 1900 that is held in the MH12 series. This thesis is therefore outside this prevailing trend. However, this is again in large part an issue of survival – pauper letters dating from the twentieth century have rarely survived, either in MH12 for reasons already outlined and in regional archives, and there are none to be found relating to the seven unions featured here. Moreover, as Samantha Shave has recently suggested, explorations of pauper experiences – a ‘bottom-up’ approach to the history of the poor law and welfare – still require an understanding of the administrative and policymaking landscape in which poor people were operating.¹⁹⁰ This thesis builds a detailed and complex picture of those landscapes for our neglected period and places.

1.5 Chapter structures

This thesis is structured geographically, with each of the following four chapters devoted to one case study, and therefore the selected union or unions from one county. Such an approach was taken because focusing on one case study at a time allows room for specific local contexts to be laid out clearly and in detail, and for the poor law policy and practices in each union or set of unions to be explored in-depth. In other words, it enables readers to develop distinct and rounded conceptions of poor law administration in these particular places. A concluding chapter therefore completes the comparative

¹⁸⁹ A representative sample of this work includes T. Sokoll, ‘Writing for relief: rhetoric in English pauper letters, 1800-1834’ in A. Gestrich, S. King and L. Raphael (eds.), *Being Poor in Modern Europe: Historical Perspectives, 1800-1940* (Oxford, 2006), p.91-111; J. Bailey, ‘Think wot a mother must feel: parenting in English pauper letters, c.1760-1834, *Family and Community History*, 13:1 (2010), pp.5-19; S. King, ‘Negotiating the law of poor relief in England, 1800-1840’, *History*, 96:324 (2011), pp.410-435; A. Tomkins, ‘“Labouring on a bed of sickness”: the material and rhetorical deployment of ill-health in Englishmen’s pauper letters’ in A. Gestrich, E. Hurren and S. King (eds.), *Poverty and Sickness in Modern Europe: Narratives of the Sick Poor, 1780-1938* (London, 2012), pp.51-68; P. Jones, ‘Widows, work and wantonness: pauper letters and the boundaries of entitlement under the Old Poor Law’ in P. Jones and S. King (eds.), *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2015), pp.139-167.

¹⁹⁰ S. Shave, *Pauper Policies: Poor Law Practice in England, 1780-1850* (Manchester, 2017), pp. 22-25.

work of this thesis, drawing all the threads together to compare findings from all four case studies, and to answer the four research questions based on this overall picture.

Chapter Two begins with Blaby union in central Leicestershire. It examines Blaby's board of guardians, exploring the types of people who populated it and their unusual tendency of rotating the board leadership, and also considers the roles and experiences of the union's female guardians. Moving on to explore the use of indoor and outdoor relief over the course of our period, particular attention is paid to the impact of the old-age pension. A profile of Blaby's typical outdoor relief recipients is then reconstructed, as is the nature and extent of the relief distributed. Throughout these discussions, a group of paupers who did not fit this profile or receive relief in Blaby's typical forms appear – the residents of a Leicester Corporation housing estate built within Blaby union's boundaries. In the final section of this chapter, the unexpected impact of new social housing provision on the union's relief levels is explored. We observe the poor law operating in tandem with new welfare reforms and continuing to fulfil an important role, as the early welfare state left gaps through which some families fell.

In Chapter Three, we move on to Staffordshire, and Stafford and Newcastle-under-Lyme unions. A similar structure is initially pursued here, where the social make-up of these unions' boards and their approach to leadership, notably different from Blaby's, is first considered. Indoor and outdoor relief levels in the two unions are once again explored, as is the generosity of relief. The rest of this chapter is concerned with a defining feature of these unions' experience during the 1920s: severe unemployment and industrial unrest. It reconstructs guardians' coping strategies with increasingly untenable levels of need, highlighting the bind in which boards found themselves with their conflicting prerogatives to protect both paupers and ratepayers. Again, the poor law addressed significant levels of poverty alongside newly-introduced unemployment benefits – this chapter demonstrates that although the system was restricted by earlier failures to reform its financial structures, it could not be characterised as defunct.

Spalding union in Lincolnshire is addressed in Chapter Four, exploring the administration of poor relief in a local context where relief provision was driven largely by the dominance of highly seasonal and labour-intensive market gardening. As in the preceding chapters, it presents a group portrait of the Spalding guardians and their

leadership priorities, and considers the nature of governance structures in the union through the experience of one active and often controversial female board member. It explores indoor and outdoor relief distribution in the union over the period, in which a key underlying theme is continuity. The final part of this chapter investigates Spalding's relationship with the LGB and MoH, and the board's responses to directives from central authorities. It is here that Spalding's status as a 'welfare periphery', and as operating a 'peripheral welfare culture' as defined by King and Stewart, is demonstrated.¹⁹¹ The guardians are shown to be sensitive to particular local conditions when formulating welfare policy, and unwilling to alter these practices in the face of central directives which did not take these factors into account. Indeed, it is suggested that in its granular, pedantic resistance, Spalding was almost ungovernable from the centre.

Chapter Five turns to our last case study: Llanfyllin, Machynlleth, and Newtown & Llanidloes unions in central Wales. In this chapter's profile of the guardians running these three boards, the issue of language is explored alongside their social make-up, reflecting on the use of Welsh in the everyday discussion and administration of relief – a consideration not required in any of our other case studies. The unions' use of indoor and outdoor relief is explored over the period, with particular attention paid to the reception of the old-age pension, the closure of Machynlleth's workhouse in 1916, and the impact of interwar unemployment on relief in Newtown & Llanidloes. This chapter ends with an exploration of vagrancy policy among our unions, a considerable and consistent problem throughout England and Wales, and a lens through which to observe the way local policies could be shaped by those of neighbouring authorities. Like Spalding, mid-Wales is also shown to be operating a 'peripheral welfare culture', but this case study pushes the model further by suggesting that 'welfare peripheries', although often impervious to central interference, were significantly influenced by other local bodies.

Finally, Chapter 6 considers these questions in the light of all four distinct portrayals of local welfare administrations, and compares and contrasts the findings in order to draw more widely applicable conclusions. It highlights the themes evident throughout the four case studies: the poor law as a more active, pragmatic, flexible and

¹⁹¹ King and Stewart, 'Welfare peripheries'.

important local system during the early twentieth century than many studies have acknowledged; a consistently regionalised administrative system which reflected both the longevity and limitations in existing conceptions of welfare regionality; the significance of specific local contexts in the reception and implementation of national welfare reforms which were intended to be uniform; and striking similarities which cross regional and national boundaries, challenging the idea of Welsh difference and provoking discussion of a 'Midlands personality'. This final chapter ends with some reflections on opportunities for further research as indicated by this thesis' conclusions.

Chapter 2: Blaby poor law union, Leicestershire

2.1 Introduction

This first case study focuses on Blaby poor law union in Leicestershire, on the southern outskirts of Leicester city. As existing studies of the poor law in the county largely focus on urban Leicester, this chapter offers an alternative view of a semi-rural part of the county.¹ We begin with this case study because its conditions mean that it operates like a ‘control’ within the thesis. There were no dramatic local crises, such as mass unemployment due to a downturn in local industry, with associated consequences for welfare patterns, in Blaby union during our period. Nor was it a region narrowly dependent on one sector, but instead had a varied and stable local economy. In this way, Blaby appears almost as a neutral place; its poor law operations during this period therefore function as a useful baseline for subsequent chapters. At the same time, however, this chapter demonstrates that even in ‘ordinary’ places like Blaby, specific local factors continued to inform the ways welfare was administered. Moreover, Blaby union experienced particular dilemmas which are not found in the other case studies in this thesis, allowing us to explore some unexpected consequences of national welfare reforms for local poor law provision, and highlighting the continued significance and the flexibility of the older system despite the opportunities offered by the new.

This chapter begins with a brief introduction to Blaby’s socio-economic context, and the implications of these conditions for local welfare. Section 2.3 explores the nature of governance structures in the union. A group profile of the Blaby guardians is developed, and their rather egalitarian approach to board leadership is discussed. The

¹ See for instance A. Negrine, ‘The treatment of sick children in the workhouse by the Leicester poor law union, 1867-1914’, *Family & Community History*, 13:1 (2010), pp.34-44; and G. Rimmington, ‘Treatment of the sick poor in Leicester: North Evington Poor Law Infirmary, 1905-1930’, *Midland History*, 29 (2004), pp.92-106. For an example of a study which looks at Leicestershire more broadly, see P. Bartlett, *The Poor Law of Lunacy: the Administration of Pauper Lunatics in Mid-Nineteenth Century England* (London, 1999).

roles and experiences of female board members are also explored here. The following three sections examine the nature and extent of relief in the union, with a particular focus on outdoor relief. Section 2.4 tracks relief provision in Blaby over our period, and investigates the fluctuations which become apparent. This includes examining the impact of the old-age pension on local poor law activity, and what this tells us about how relief was perceived and categorised in reality ‘on the ground’. In Section 2.5, we build a picture of the twentieth-century pauper, asking what kinds of families were receiving outdoor relief in Blaby union. Section 2.6 considers the different forms relief took outside the workhouse and whether certain sorts of applicants were more or less likely to receive certain types of support. In these latter two sections, a profile of outdoor relief administration emerges, in terms of who Blaby’s typical relief recipients were and what their relief looked like. At the same time, however, a group of recipients surface during the late 1920s who did not align with this profile. Section 2.7 focuses on how this group came to be relieved by Blaby union, and in so doing explores the interaction between the ‘old’ welfare system of the poor law, and an element of the newer state-led welfare provisions which has not previously been acknowledged as having a bearing on poor law activity: social housing. A Leicester Corporation housing estate built in the mid-1920s within the boundaries of Blaby union disrupted local welfare policy, and this episode is used as a lens through which to examine the poor law’s response to the changing welfare landscape of the period, its ability to adapt to these changes and its continued role as a source of relief to those in severe need.

In this way, this chapter addresses the four key research questions of the thesis as a whole. Firstly, it sheds light on what the poor law actually looked like ‘on the ground’ during this neglected period, drawing a detailed picture of how poor relief functioned in Blaby union, and piecing together outdoor relief practices in the union, addressing a paucity in extant literature whereby the workhouse has received far more attention than the much more common welfare experience of outdoor relief.² Secondly, through this reconstruction of relief practices, this chapter asks whether a specific

² See for instance M.A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929: The History of an English Social Institution* (London, 1981); A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (London, 1978); F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: The Workhouse System 1834-1884* (Cambridge, 1993). For studies focusing on particular themes of workhouse experience, see for example F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children* (Stroud, 1997); J. Reinartz and L. Schwarz (eds.), *Medicine and the Workhouse* (New York, 2013); I. Miller, ‘Feeding in the workhouse: The institutional and ideological functions of food in Britain c.1834-70’, *Journal of British Studies*, 52:4 (2013), pp.940-962.

‘welfare culture’ can be observed in Blaby – where does it fit into existing conceptions of ‘regional welfare cultures’ which have not as yet been applied to Leicestershire?³ Thirdly, this chapter addresses local governance structures, particularly the impact of the 1894 Local Government Act and 1918 Representation of the People Act on Blaby’s board of guardians, and therefore how ‘open’ and inclusive the control of welfare resources in the union was. Finally, this chapter demonstrates that the new national welfare reforms of the early twentieth century were not always or only at one end of a straightforward ‘welfare escalator’, to use Geoffrey Finlayson’s term, from poor law to more centralised, state-led welfare services.⁴ It argues that if we observe these reforms through a local lens, it is clear that addressing one welfare vulnerability could restrict access to other elements of an individual or family’s ‘economy of makeshifts’,⁵ making their situations more precarious.

As with all four case studies in this thesis, the core sources analysed here are locally maintained administrative documents. The most important are the guardians’ minute books, which in Blaby’s case have survived in a complete run for our entire period, and outdoor relief lists, which exist in unusually large numbers after 1915. These two sources complement each other - the outdoor relief lists offer a profile of outdoor relief recipients, while the minute books give an overview of the day-to-day functioning of the union, providing the wider context of the relief practices recorded in the outdoor relief lists. This material is augmented where relevant with workhouse admissions and discharge registers, providing useful material for comparisons with the profile of outdoor relief recipients. Supplementary material is provided where appropriate from the regional press, particularly the *Leicester Chronicle*, *Leicester Daily Post* and *Leicester Daily Mercury*, which often include recorded accounts by journalists of conversations between guardians about specific issues which are not always recorded in the official meeting minutes.⁶ The final set of key source material used in this chapter is the centrally-generated annual reports of the Local Government

³ For ‘regional welfare cultures’ model, see S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000).

⁴ G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare in Britain 1830-1990* (Oxford, 1994), p.3.

⁵ This phrase was originally coined by Olwen Hufton in *The Poor of Eighteenth Century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford, 1974), and has become widely used to describe the network of survival strategies used by poor people. These strategies have been intensively explored under this articulation in A. Tomkins and S. King (eds.), *The Poor in England, 1700-1900: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003).

⁶ From the 1890s, journalists were permitted to attend in person and report in detail on board meetings.

Board (LGB), and from 1919 the Ministry of Health (MoH), which offer a broader regional and national context to Blaby union's experiences.

2.2 Regional context

Located directly south of Leicester, Blaby union was made up of 26 parishes, as displayed in Figure 2.1 on the next page, with a total population in 1911 of 27,764. Just over 30 percent of its inhabitants lived in the parish of Wigston Magna, and while the union incorporated a handful of sizeable villages, such as Oadby, Enderby and Blaby, 12 parishes had less than 500 residents. The union's most significant population increase during our period occurred in the late 1920s, when the Leicester Corporation housing estate known as the Saffron Lane estate was constructed within the parish of Lubbethorpe, and over 1,000 families moved in as a result.

Blaby union shared Leicester's dominant industries of boot, shoe and hosiery manufacture. Wigston was one of the chief centres for hosiery in the county outside the city,⁷ and several of the union's other parishes contained significant numbers of framework knitters and/or footwear production workers.⁸ For much of the nineteenth century, such workers would have been drawn into Leicester itself; however, this migratory pattern had been 'arrested' by our period as manufacturers expanded production into outlying villages, including those in Blaby union.⁹ These workforces were highly gendered, whereby the majority of the region's hosiery workers were women, while the boot and shoe trade was largely dominated by men.¹⁰ Other notable sources of employment in the union included several stone quarries, Midland Railway engine sheds in Wigston which required around 300 hands, and a military barracks in Glen Parva. These, however, were minor partners to the manufacturing sector.

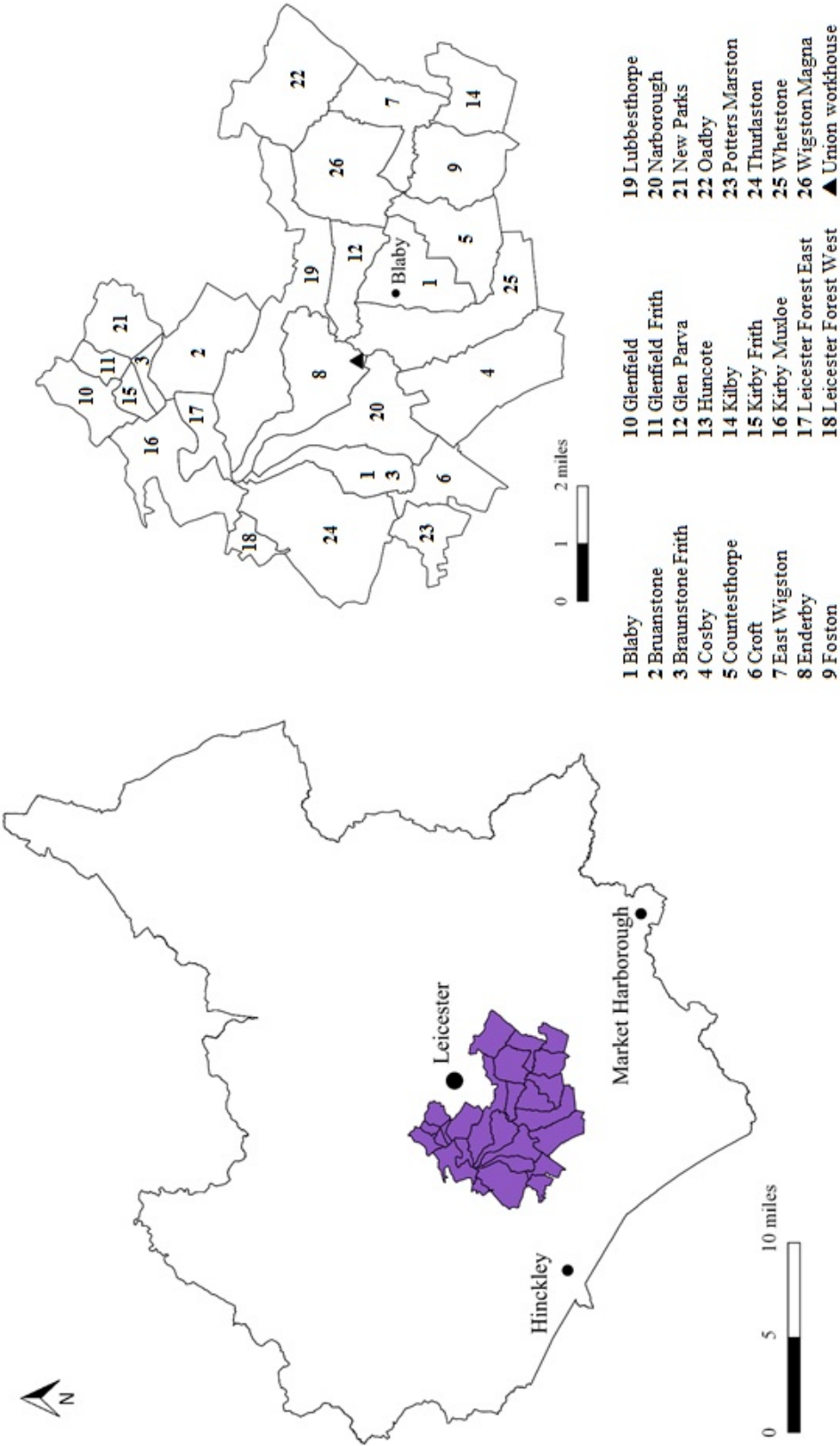
⁷ Board of Agriculture and Fisheries [hereafter BAF], *Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture: Vol II – Reports of Investigators* (1919), Cmd.25, p.146.

⁸ See for instance *Kelly's Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland, 1904* (London, 1904), p.39, 63-64, 78, 535, 579.

⁹ R. Rodger, 'Understanding Leicester: independent, radical, tolerant' in R. Rodger and R. Madgin (eds.), *Leicester: A Modern History* (Lancaster, 2016), pp.13-15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.19.

Figure 2.1 Blaby poor law union within Leicestershire, and with parishes labelled.



Despite their common industries, Blaby union was significantly less urbanised than neighbouring Leicester and agriculture, largely mixed arable and pastoral farming, remained an important sector in the local economy. Farmers were often in competition with manufacturing for labour,¹¹ but agriculture nevertheless continued to employ large portions of the local population. Broadly speaking, ‘ordinary’ labourers were employed by the week, while monthly engagements were more common for men in charge of animals; this latter group were also often allocated cottages by their employer, while ‘living-in’ farm service was quite rare in Leicestershire by this period.¹² This regional labour force was also divided by gender, with relatively few women employed in agriculture. Indeed, Board of Agriculture inspector Walter Edmonds pointed in 1919 to Leicestershire farmers’ views of female labour as ‘unsatisfactory and expensive’, and the attractions of factory work, including munitions works during the First World War, as contributing factors to this state of affairs.¹³

What does this specific context mean for welfare provision in the region? Overall, a key economic feature of the area during this period was stability. Richard Rodger has emphasised the ‘complementary’ nature of the footwear and hosiery trades, arguing that the widespread availability of work for women in the hosiery trade ‘insulated’ families against unemployment, because they were not dependent on one industry alone.¹⁴ Poor law inspector Nicholas Herbert articulated this in 1905 in relation to the large Midland towns of his district (incorporating Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutland and part of Derbyshire), commenting that in places with a large female workforce, trade depressions were not felt as severely.¹⁵ Additional stability was created, Rodger points out, because consumption-based industries like footwear and hosiery were less prone to the periodic ‘depressions and ‘lumpy’ investment patterns that were characteristic of capital goods industries’.¹⁶ Indeed, when downturns were experienced, such as in 1901-05 when a ‘prolonged depression’ in the boot and shoe trade created ‘exceptional distress’ in Leicester itself, Herbert observed that this hardship did not seem to spread outside the city into poor law unions like

¹¹ BAF, *Employment in Agriculture Vol II*, p.146.

¹² Ibid., p.148.

¹³ Ibid., p.147.

¹⁴ Rodger, ‘Understanding Leicester’, pp.19-21.

¹⁵ LGB, *Annual Report, 1904-05* (1905), Cd.2661, p.240.

¹⁶ Rodger, ‘Understanding Leicester’, p.19.

Blaby.¹⁷ The resilience of these trades endured during the First World War, and in its aftermath the Leicester region largely continued this upward trend in its key manufacturing sectors.¹⁸ Crucially, the locality was not dependent on industries like cotton textiles, coal and shipbuilding, and therefore avoided the collapse that came after the war to areas where such industries were at the core.¹⁹ Leicester in fact diversified its industrial and economic base in the interwar period, as a range of smaller trades rooted in the area, helping to create a healthy regional economy.²⁰ Blaby union reflected its neighbour by also incorporating a variety of sectors, which had a similar effect. All this means that local welfare services were not regularly required to deal with periodic, deep-seated bouts of industry-specific unemployment, which increased the need for poor relief while simultaneously making it harder for the population to pay the poor rates.

The same can be said for the union's agricultural profile. The highly seasonal employment patterns observed by Keith Snell and Nigel Goose in arable farming areas, where unemployment was very low over the summer and harvest period and high in the winter, were blunted by the mixed nature of agriculture in the region.²¹ While the wheat, oats and barley crops grown in Blaby's parishes had these seasonal labour requirements, the presence of animal husbandry in the union, where the need for workers was more evenly spread throughout the year, meant that the rural labour force, and therefore their welfare requirements, was not entirely in thrall to the seasonality of arable farming. Just as the footwear and hosiery trades created a broad, reliable economic base for the region, so too did the co-existence of these different forms of agriculture. In the rest of this chapter, we explore the extent to which we can see this specific regional context reflected in local poor law operations.

¹⁷ LGB, *Annual Report, 1903-04* (1904), Cd.2214, pp.204-205.

¹⁸ S. Begley, *The Story of Leicester* (Stroud, 2013), p.186, 189.

¹⁹ S. Glynn and J. Oxborrow, *Interwar Britain: A Social and Economic History* (London, 1976), pp.96-99.

²⁰ Begley, *Story of Leicester*, p.189.

²¹ K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985), pp.15-66; N. Goose, 'Farm service, seasonal unemployment and casual labour in mid-nineteenth century England', *Agricultural History Review*, 54:2 (2006), pp.274-303.

2.3 The Blaby union guardians

As a result of the 1894 Local Government Act, individuals elected to the newly formed Rural District Councils automatically became poor law guardians for the associated union. In areas which operated under Urban District Councils, also created through the 1894 Act, poor law guardians and urban district councillors were elected separately, although individuals could hold both roles.²² In Blaby's case, therefore, from 1895 onwards the union board had 44 members, comprised of all councillors on the Blaby Rural District Council, with the addition of ten guardians representing the five wards of Wigston, which was an urban district. By 1913, the board had increased in size to 47, as some parishes were allocated additional representatives.

This section develops a 'group portrait' of the Blaby board, reconstructing the kinds of people who became guardians, their approach to selecting their leadership, and the experiences of the board's female members. These findings are then used to address whether the expansion of the electorate during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had an impact on who was elected as guardians, and enables us to test one of Steve King's comparative yardsticks for measuring welfare practices, by assessing the governance structures in Blaby union, and the extent to which they were 'open' or 'closed'.²³

Under the 1894 Act, district councillors and poor law guardians were elected for three-year terms. The first elections under the Act were held in December 1894, and the second in spring 1898. Thereafter, the bulk of elections were thereafter held triennially. The only deviation from this was during the First World War, when contests which should have been held in 1916 were postponed until after the conflict. Tables 2.1-4 below provide representative 'snapshots' of the Blaby board's make-up after four of these triannual elections: in December 1894, and in the springs of 1907, 1913 and 1925. Table 2.5 likewise presents the people elected as chairman and vice-chairman in each

²² 'Local Government Act, 1894: Part II, Section 24 (3)' (56 & 57 Vict. c.73), as reproduced on legislation.gov.uk [accessed 22/11/15]. See also A. Macmorran and T.L. Colquhoun Dill (eds.), *The Local Government Act, 1894, and the Subsequent Statutes Affecting Parish Councils* (London, 4th ed., 1907), p.105.

²³ S. King, 'Welfare regimes and welfare regions in Britain and Europe, c.1750s to 1860s', *Journal of Modern European History*, 9:1 (2011), p.59.

year between 1894 and 1930. These are collated from guardians' minute books, regional press coverage, trade directories and census returns. Table 2.4 is less complete than the preceding three, as it was not possible to confirm the occupations of a minority of board members, or to confidently ascertain the parish they represented – a contributing factor to this is the distance of elections in the 1920s from the 1911 census, an important cross-referencing tool for these questions. Nevertheless, these tables capture the Blaby board as it looked over the course of our period. They reveal a board on which agriculturalists were the single largest occupational group represented – those working in footwear or hosiery manufacture were present, but in smaller numbers. These two categories appear more evenly matched by 1925, but this may be a false impression created by the seven board members for whom we do not have occupational information. The remaining members mainly made their living in the construction industry or in retail as small business owners, alongside a handful of clergymen and men of private means. Certainly prior to the First World War, this was a largely middle-class crowd, most of whom were employers rather than employees. In terms of board leadership, members were from a wide range of professional backgrounds. Of the men elected as chairman of the board between 1895 and 1930, displayed in Table 2.5, five were farmers, six were hosiery or footwear manufacturers, four were clergymen, and the others ranged from a military canteen manager to an umbrella manufacturer. The Blaby board was therefore led by individuals with a variety of expertise and experiences. This suggests that its members were not overly concerned with appointing leaders who fitted a specific or narrow profile; using King's governance yardstick, such an approach would be a feature of more 'open' or inclusive governance structures.²⁴

²⁴ King, 'Welfare regimes', p.59.

Table 2.1 Individuals elected to the Blaby poor law union board of guardians in 1894.

Surname	First name	Title	Parish/ward	Occupation
Pick	John Beadman	Mr.	Blaby	Licensed victualler
Turner	Joseph	Mr.	Blaby	Farmer
Gamble	Richard Frost	Mr.	Braunstone	Farmer
Blastock	William T.	Mr.	Braunstone Frith	Farmer
Crick	Frederick M.	Mr.	Cosby	Gentleman
Kirkman	Samuel Alfred	Mr.	Cosby	Farmer & landowner
Morris	William	Mr.	Countesthorpe	Hosiery manufacturer
Thornton	Thomas	Mr.	Countesthorpe	Innkeeper
Pochin	John	Mr.	Croft	Gentleman
Burgess	Robert	Mr.	Enderby	Hosiery manufacturer
Dickinson	George H.	Rev.	Enderby	Clergyman (Independent)
Rawson	George William	Mr.	Enderby	Quarry owner
Smith	William Cope Fowke	Mr.	Foston	Farmer & grazier
Whittingham	Walter Godfrey	Rev.	Glen Parva	Clergyman (C of E)
Everard	Thomas	Mr.	Glenfield	Hosier
Tebbs	John	Mr.	Glenfield Frith	Farmer
Hobill	Joseph T.	Mr.	Huncote	Miller
Tomkins	James Peebles Oman	Rev.	Kilby	Clergyman (C of E)
Berry	William	Mr.	Kirby Frith	Farmer
Underwood	John	Mr.	Kirby Muxloe	Plumber
Andrew	Thomas	Mr.	Leicester Forest East & West	Farmer
Marshall	John Thomas	Mr.	Lubbesthorpe	Farmer
Bruce	Joseph	Mr.	Narborough	Farmer
Grace	Henry Jinks	Mr.	Narborough	Quarry manager
Key	William H.	Mr.	New Parks	Farmer & grazier
Beasley	John Sleath	Mr.	Oadby	Gentleman
Matthews	John	Mr.	Oadby	Hosiery manufacturer
Raine	Isaac	Rev.	Oadby	Clergyman (C of E)
Pratt	James	Mr.	Potters Marston	Farmer
Taylor	Joseph	Mr.	Thurlaston	Builder
Worswick	Richard Worsley	Colonel	Thurlaston	Gentleman
Herrick	John	Mr.	Whetsone	Farmer
Buxton	Joseph	Mr.	Whetstone	Grazier
Johnson	Daniel	Mr.	Wigston (All Saints)	Farmer
Ross	George	Mr.	Wigston (All Saints)	Baker
Freeman	Samuel	Mr.	Wigston (Bassett)	House furnisher
Gamble	John	Mr.	Wigston (Bassett)	Boot manufacturer
Usherwood	William	Mr.	Wigston (Central)	Licensed victualler
Walker	John	Mr.	Wigston (Central)	Grocer
Dunmore	William	Mr.	Wigston (Fairfield)	Biscuit manufacturer
Wright	Orson	Mr.	Wigston (Fairfield)	Builder, contractor & timber merchant
Hassall	Richard	Mr.	Wigston (St. Wolstan)	Farmer
Shield	Eleanor	Mrs.	Wigston (St. Wolstan)	Married woman
Shipp	George	Mr.	Wigston East	Coal merchant

Source: Leicester Chronicle, 8th December 1894, p.7; Leicester Chronicle, 22nd December 1894, p.3.

Table 2.2 Individuals elected to the Blaby poor law union board of guardians in 1907.

Surname	First name	Title	Parish/ward	Occupation
Richards	John Cooper Allen	Mr.	Blaby	Farmer
Woodcock	Frederick M.	Mr.	Blaby	Gentleman
Gamble	Richard Frost	Mr.	Braunstone	Farmer
Luck	John	Rev.	Braunstone Frith	Clergyman (C of E)
Green	Arthur	Mr.	Cosby	Grazier
Robinson	John	Mr.	Cosby	Gentleman
Soars	John Thomas	Mr.	Countesthorpe	Hosiery manufacturer
Tomes	Samuel Henry	Mr.	Countesthorpe	Clergyman (C of E)
Swain	John	Mr.	Croft	Grazier
Burgess	Robert	Mr.	Enderby	Hosiery manufacturer
North	Joseph	Mr.	Enderby	Hosiery manufacturer
Young	William	Mr.	Enderby	Boot manufacturer
Bassett	Christopher	Mr.	Foston	Gentleman
Veasey	Edward	Mr.	Glen Parva	Military canteen manager
Everard	Thomas	Mr.	Glenfield	Hosier
Philpott	Octavius	Rev.	Glenfield	Clergyman (C of E)
Dalrymple	William	Mr.	Glenfield Frith	Dispensary manager
Duncan	Joseph	Mr.	Huncote	Quarryman
Deacon	Thomas Francis	Mr.	Kilby	Farmer and grazier
Smith	Susannah	Mrs.	Kirby Frith	Farmer
Freckleton	Forester Stensin	Mr.	Kirby Muxloe	Farmer
Ladkin	William	Mr.	Kirby Muxloe	Farmer
Plant	Thomas	Mr.	Leicester Forest East & West	Farmer
Warren	Benjamin	Mr.	Lubbesthorpe	Tenant farmer
Moore	Samuel Goodrick	Mr.	Narborough	Tailor
Thornton	William John	Mr.	Narborough	Nurseryman
Key	William Henry	Mr.	New Parks	Farmer and grazier
Curtis	Henry Payne	Mr.	Oadby	Licensed victualler
Matthews	John	Mr.	Oadby	Hosiery manufacturer
Raine	Isaac	Rev.	Oadby	Clergyman (C of E)
Taylor	Richard	Mr.	Potters Marston	Farmer
Bruxner-Randall	Richard George	Colonel.	Thurlaston	Military colonel
Ward	Thomas	Mr.	Thurlaston	Innkeeper
Buxton	Joseph	Mr.	Whetstone	Grocer and Chandler
Newby	Charles James	Mr.	Whetstone	Farmer
Johnson	Daniel	Mr.	Wigston (All Saints)	Farmer
Laundon	Samuel	Mr.	Wigston (All Saints)	Saddler
Gamble	John	Mr.	Wigston (Bassett)	Boot and shoe manufacturer
Herrick	Thomas	Mr.	Wigston (Bassett)	Draper
Palmer	Robert	Rev.	Wigston (Central)	Clergyman (C of E)
Whyatt	William	Mr.	Wigston (Central)	Chandler
Dunmore	William	Mr.	Wigston (Fairfield)	Biscuit manufacturer
Weston	George	Mr.	Wigston (Fairfield)	Engineer
Preston	Isabella	Mrs.	Wigston (St. Wolstan)	Married woman
Shield	Eleanor	Mrs.	Wigston (St. Wolstan)	Widow
Shipp	Charles Wright	Mr.	Wigston East	Farmer and grazier

Source: Leicester Daily Post, 12th March 1907, p.2; Leicester Daily Post, 27th March 1907, p.7.

Table 2.3 Individuals elected to the Blaby poor law union board of guardians in 1913.

Surname	First name	Title	Parish/Ward	Occupation
Richards	John C. A.	Mr.	Blaby	Farmer
Woodcock	Frederick Moore	Mr.	Blaby	Gentleman
Gamble	Robert Frost	Mr.	Braunstone	Farmer
Luck	John	Rev.	Braunstone Frith	Clergyman (C of E)
Bassett	Christopher	Mr.	Cosby	Farmer
Green	Arthur	Mr.	Cosby	Grocer
Soars	John Thomas	Mr.	Countesthorpe	Hosiery manufacturer
Tomes	Samuel Henry	Rev.	Countesthorpe	Clergyman (C of E)
Smith	Ephraim	Mr.	Croft	Farmer & grazier
Burgess	Robert	Mr.	Enderby	Hosiery manufacturer
North	Joseph	Mr.	Enderby	Hosiery manufacturer
Young	William	Mr.	Enderby	Boot manufacturer
Tomlinson	Edwin Charles	Mr.	Foston	Boot manufacturer
Veasey	Edward	Mr.	Glen Parva	Military canteen manager
Brewin	John Henry	Mr.	Glenfield	Co-operative manager
Everard	William	Mr.	Glenfield	Builder
Philpott	Octavius	Rev.	Glenfield Frith	Clergyman (C of E)
Carroll	Ian	Rev.	Huncote	Clergyman (C of E)
Deacon	Thomas Francis	Mr.	Kilby	Farmer and grazier
Smith	Susannah	Mrs.	Kirby Frith	Farmer
Freckleton	Forester Stensin	Mr.	Kirby Muxloe	Farmer
Grice	Robert J.	Mr.	Kirby Muxloe	Gentleman
Ragg	Henry James	Mr.	Leicester Forest East & West	Butcher
Turner	William J.	Mr.	Lubbesthorpe	Farmer
Thornton	William John	Mr.	Narborough	Florist
Whiteley	Warwick	Rev.	Narborough	Clergyman (C of E)
Garner	Walter	Mr.	New Parks	Merchant
Goddard	Jonathan	Mr.	Oadby	Retired overseer
Nichols	Harry James	Mr.	Oadby	Farmer
Raine	Isaac	Rev.	Oadby	Clergyman (C of E)
Sturgess-Wells	Herbert	Mr.	Oadby	Leather merchant
Taylor	Richard	Mr.	Potters Marston	Farmer
Bruxner-Randall	Richard George	Col.	Thurlaston	Retired colonel
Ward	Thomas	Mr.	Thurlaston	Innkeeper
Buxton	Joseph	Mr.	Whetstone	Grazier
Newby	Charles James	Mr.	Whetstone	Farmer
Abbott	John	Mr.	Wigston (All Saints)	Railway signalman
Barnes	Robert	Mr.	Wigston (All Saints)	Retired relieving officer
Bray	James	Mr.	Wigston (Bassett)	Fruiterer
Croson	Harry	Mr.	Wigston (Bassett)	Fish dealer
Hartopp	John W.	Mr.	Wigston (Central)	Grocer
Whyatt	William	Mr.	Wigston (Central)	Tallow chandler
Dunmore	William	Mr.	Wigston (Fairfield)	Biscuit manufacturer
Gamble	John	Mr.	Wigston (Fairfield)	Boot manufacturer
Preston	Isabella	Mrs.	Wigston (St. Wolstan)	Married woman
Shield	Eleanor	Mrs.	Wigston (St. Wolstan)	Widow
Robinson	John	Mr.	Wigston East	Gentleman

Source: Leicester Daily Post, 14th March 1913, p.7.

Table 2.4 Individuals elected to the Blaby poor law union board of guardians in 1925.

Surname	First name	Title	Parish/Ward	Occupation
Bray	Samuel	Mr.	Blaby	Hosiery manufacturer
Shoults	Alan F.	Mr.	Blaby	Nurseryman
Gamble	Frederick D.	Mr.	Braunstone	Farmer
Kirkman	Edwin	Mr.	Cosby	Farmer
Tomkins	Ambrose	Mr.	Cosby	Beer retailer
Asher	Frederick	Mr.	Countesthorpe	<i>Unknown.</i>
Soars	John Thomas	Mr.	Countesthorpe	Hosiery manufacturer
Taylor	William Henry	Mr.	Countesthorpe	Grocer
Pears	Harry	Mr.	Croft	Grocer & sub postmaster
North	Joseph	Mr.	Enderby	Hosiery manufacturer
Salt	Thomas	Mr.	Enderby	Nurseryman
Young	William	Mr.	Enderby	Boot manufacturer
Rudkin	Archibald	Mr.	Glen Parva	Farmer
Chambers	William	Mr.	Glenfield	Carpenter & joiner
Neal	Edmund G.	Mr.	Glenfield/Frith	Dairyman
Duncan	Joseph	Mr.	Huncote	Quarryman
Smith	Susannah	Mrs.	Kirby Frith	Farmer
Armson	Joseph	Mr.	Kirby Muxloe	Builder
Ragg	Henry James	Mr.	Leicester Forest East & West	Butcher
Turner	William J.	Mr.	Lubbesthorpe	Farmer
Atkins	William E. G.	Mr.	Narborough	Textile wholesaler
Whiteley	Warwick	Rev.	Narborough	Clergyman (C of E)
Kendall	Percival W.	Mr.	New Parks	Umbrella manufacturer
Mawby	George Henry	Mr.	Oadby	Grocer
Sansome	Edward James	Mr.	Oadby	Draper
Siddans	Walter	Mr.	Oadby	Draper & clothier
Smalley	Thomas	Mr.	Oadby	<i>Unknown</i>
Walker	Francis Hassall	Mr.	Thurlaston	Farmer
Attfield	Herbert William	Mr.	Whetstone	Farmer
Smith	Earle	Mr.	Whetstone	Boot manufacturer
Birkett	Thomas	Mr.	Wigston (All Saints)	Shoe manufacturer
Holmes	John Henry	Mr.	Wigston (All Saints)	Hosiery manufacturer
Dobson	Joseph Leonard	Mr.	Wigston (Bassett)	Boot & shoe rivetter
Letts	Sarah Emily	Mrs.	Wigston (Bassett)	Married woman
Hassall	Minnie	Mrs.	Wigston (Central)	Married woman
Smith	David Henry	Mr.	Wigston (Central)	Builder
Gee	Ann Alice	Mrs.	Wigston (Fairfield)	Married woman
Thornton	William	Mr.	Wigston (Fairfield)	<i>Unknown</i>
Broughton	Harriett	Mrs.	Wigston (St. Wolstan)	Married woman
Searle	Emma	Mrs.	Wigston (St. Wolstan)	Married woman
Young	M. A.	Mrs.	<i>Unknown</i>	Married woman
Cade	Henry	Mr.	<i>Unknown</i>	Insurance manager
Foulds	A. E.	Mr.	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
Howes	H.	Mr.	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
Hurst	C. P.	Mr.	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
Millman	H.	Mr.	<i>Unknown</i>	Accountant
Weston	W.	Mr.	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>Unknown</i>

Source: ROLLR, G/5/1/3, Blaby poor law union [hereafter PLU] guardians' declarations, 1925; ROLLR, G/5/8a/39, Blaby PLU, guardians' minute book [hereafter GMB], 5th May 1925.

Table 2.5 Chairmen and vice-chairmen of Blaby poor law union, 1895-1930.

	Chairman	Vice-chairman
1895	Mr. George William Rawson (Enderby)	Mr. John Matthews (Oadby)
1896	Rev. George H. Dickenson (Enderby)	Mr. John Walker (Wigston Central)
1897	Mr. John Walker (Wigston Central)	Rev. Isaac Raine (Oadby)
1898	Mr. Samuel A. Kirkham (Cosby)	Mr. John Beadman Pick (Blaby)
1899	Mr. John Pochin (Croft)	Mr. Thomas Everard (Glenfield)
1900	Mr. Thomas Everard (Glenfield)	Mr. Thomas Thornton (Countesthorpe)
1901	Mr. John Matthews (Oadby)	Mr. Richard Frost Gamble (Braunstone)
1902	Mr. Richard Frost Gamble (Braunstone)	Rev. Isaac Raine (Oadby)
1903	Rev. Isaac Raine (Oadby)	Mr. William Young (Enderby)
1904	Mr. William Young (Enderby)	Mr. George Ross (Wigston All Saints)
1905	Mr. William H. Key (New Parks)	Mr. Harry Payne Curtis (Oadby)
1906	Mr. Harry Payne Curtis (Oadby)	Mr. John Thomas Soars (Countesthorpe)
1907	Mr. John Thomas Soars (Countesthorpe)	Mr. William John Thornton (Countesthorpe)
1908	Mr. William John Thornton (Countesthorpe)	Mr. Thomas Francis Deacon (Kilby)
1909	Mr. Thomas Francis Deacon (Kilby)	Mr. William H. Key (New Parks)
1910	Mr. Richard Frost Gamble (Braunstone)	Mr. William Young (Enderby)
1911	Mr. William Young (Enderby)	Rev. Warwick Whiteley (Narborough)
1912	Rev. Warwick Whiteley (Narborough)	Mr. Edward Veasey (Glen Parva)
1913	Mr. Edward Veasey (Glen Parva)	Rev. Octavius Philpott (Glenfield)
1914	Rev. Octavius Philpott (Glenfield)	Mr. Thomas Ward (Thurlaston)
1915	Mr. Thomas Ward (Thurlaston)	Mr. Joseph North (Enderby)
1916	Mr. Joseph North (Enderby)	Mr. William Everard (Glenfield)
1917	Mr. William Everard (Glenfield)	Mr. Thomas Francis Deacon (Kilby)
1918	Mr. Richard Bruxner-Randall (Thurlaston)	
1919		
1920		
1921	Mr. William Young (Enderby)	Mr. John Robinson (Wigston East)
1922		Mr. Arthur Edward Buckingham (Whetstone)
1923	Mr. Arthur Edward Buckingham (Whetstone)	Mr. Walter Siddans (Oadby)
1924	Mr. Walter Siddans (Oadby)	Mr. Henry Ragg (Leicester Forest East & West)
1925	Mr. Henry Ragg (Leicester Forest East & West)	Mr. Percival Wheeler Kendall (New Parks)
1926	Mr. Percival Wheeler Kendall (New Parks)	Mr. John Henry Holmes (Wigston All Saints)
1927	Mr. John Henry Holmes (Wigston All Saints)	Mr. Joseph Armson (Kirby Muxloe)
1928	Mr. Joseph Armson (Kirby Muxloe)	Mr. Thomas Salt (Enderby)
1929	Mr. Thomas Salt (Enderby)	Mr. William Young (Enderby)

Source: Leicester Chronicle, 12th January 1895, p.6; Leicester Chronicle, 2nd May 1896, p.3; Leicester Chronicle, 1st May 1897, p.2; Leicester Chronicle, 30th April 1898, p.2; Leicester Chronicle, 29th April 1899, p.4; ROLLR, G/5/8a/29-41, Blaby PLU, GMB, 1900-1930.

As highlighted in Section 1.2, scholars such as Elizabeth Hurren, Geoff Hooker and Karen Rothery have demonstrated that the policy of individual boards of guardians was often dominated by a handful of forceful or influential members.²⁵ The Blaby board, however, appears to have pursued a more even-handed approach to responsibility. Table 2.5 demonstrates that for most of this period the key positions of leadership rotated among a large group of board members. Indeed, of the men who were elected as chairman between these years, only three took the role more than once, and none for more than four years in total.

This rotational approach had not always been pursued on the Blaby board, which had a history of complaints among members that the board elected the same person as chairman repeatedly. In 1890, for instance, when it was proposed that Wigston guardian Alfred Cooper be re-elected chairman, fellow board member Amos Booth registered his disapproval (while nevertheless supporting Cooper himself) of the ‘systematic re-election of the chairman year after year. On principle he objected to Mr. Cooper taking the chair simply for the reason that he had been the chairman for many years’.²⁶ In the event, Cooper was unanimously re-elected, but the issue came up in the very first meeting of the Blaby Rural District Council in January 1895 (whose personnel was exactly the same as the poor law union board, minus the Wigston guardians). There were again protests against ‘the cast-iron rule apparently observed by the Blaby Board of Guardians, “once a chairman always a chairman.”’²⁷ In neither instance was the ambivalence around single individuals leading the board for extended periods explicitly justified, but we can surmise a view that experience in the role did not automatically make a candidate the best choice. There may also have been concerns about the dominance of one parish through a persistently re-elected chairman. In the first meeting of the newly formed board of guardians in January 1895, the question arose of whether to continue dividing the members into two relief committees to address the cases of Enderby district and Wigston district respectively. Some guardians were concerned that the interests of Wigston would be overrepresented in the latter committee because that

²⁵ E. Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late-Victorian England 1870-1900* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp.108-112; G. Hooker, ‘Llandilofawr Poor Law Union 1836-1886: ‘The most difficult union in Wales’’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2013), pp.204-205, 149-159; K. Rothery, ‘The implementation and administration of the New Poor Law in Hertfordshire, c.1830-1847’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2016), p.314.

²⁶ *Leicester Chronicle*, 16th April 1890, p.11.

²⁷ *Leicester Chronicle*, 12th January 1895, p.6.

parish had more representatives than any other, which would be prevented if all relief cases were heard by the full board.²⁸ The board eventually decided to maintain separate relief committees and ‘wait until the Wigston guardians did something radically wrong’ before making a change, but it is possible that similar anxieties also applied to the leadership of the board itself.²⁹

It seems that the Blaby board accepted these fears in relation to leadership, as it largely refrained from repeatedly electing the same person as chair from 1895 onwards, while at the same time continuing to value prior experience – all members elected as chairman, with the exception of Richard Bruxner-Randall,³⁰ had previously served as vice-chairman for at least one year. Chairmen elected during our period hailed from 14 different parishes, and only two represented Wigston, suggesting that any worries members held about guardians from that parish having undue influence over the board did not come to fruition. Board members consistently attempted, then, to strike a balance between selecting experienced and effective chairmen, and preventing an individual or small number of individuals from dominating the board’s leadership. It is also worth acknowledging that this may have been partly a response to the democratic expansion of the 1894 Act, in the sense that poor law governance ought to seem more transparent and accessible in this new climate. No evidence has arisen of a specific local campaign along these lines in the years prior to 1894, so this is a cautious suggestion, but an alignment worth bearing in mind nonetheless.

This is not to say, however, that the rotational system was always implemented without challenge. There is evidence of some friction over chair and vice-chair elections in the early years of our period. After 1915, all chairmen and vice-chairmen were elected without contest, but between 1900 and 1915, there were multiple candidates for chairman on five occasions, and the vice-chairmanship was contested 10 times during the same period. The larger number of contests over the latter role is likely to have been because the vice-chairmanship acted as a gateway position to heading the board. An examination of these elections clearly reveals Enderby boot manufacturer William Young as the main player. He stood seven times to be elected as vice-chairman, and

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ William Key had previously served as chairman between 1892 and 1894, and as senior vice-chairman in 1891 – years not represented in Table 2.5.

nine times as chairman, losing on three occasions per position. No other board member came close to this number of attempts. In other words, Young seems to have been far more personally interested in taking a leading role in the union's operations than any other individual guardian. Presumably this drive would have been obvious to his colleagues, and they evidently saw Young as effective, given that they did re-elect him. However, it is notable that leadership of the board was not handed to him every time he asked for it. This again suggests that other factors could override a guardian's evident capability and enthusiasm for the role in the minds of his fellow board members – one of which may have been the balance provided by rotational leadership. As far as leadership is concerned, then, we are able to classify Blaby union as having relatively 'open' governance structures, whereby there was little opportunity for local policy to be dominated by single individuals or allied groups.

Following the 1894 Local Government Act, female board members were a consistent presence in Blaby. Ten women were elected to the board between 1894 and 1930 (including Mary Snowden, who served in 1905-1906 and so is not captured in Tables 2.1-4), with at least two female board members every year from 1898 onwards. Indeed, the number of women serving on the board grew markedly after the First World War, and from 1926 until 1930 the Blaby board had seven female members. This broadly aligns with the introduction of the 1918 Representation of the People Act which expanded the pool of people able to vote in both local and national elections, both in terms of class and gender.³¹ It is possible then that increased female representation on the Blaby board was due in part to this broader electoral change. This shift did not come about immediately - in the first election held after the end of the war, in spring 1919, the same three women who had by then been serving as guardians in the union for over a decade were returned, with no new additions, and it was not until 1921 that numbers of female board members began to rise. It is therefore difficult to conclusively point to a cause and effect relationship between the 1918 Act and the election of more women to the Blaby board, but a connection seems likely.

³¹ See for instance N. Branson, *Poplarism, 1919-1925: George Lansbury and the Councillors' Revolt* (London, 1979), pp.9-10; A. Digby, 'Changing welfare cultures in region and state', *Twentieth Century British History*, 17:3 (2006), pp.307-308.

The backgrounds of Blaby's female guardians are worth reflecting on because they indicate that the socio-economic make-up of the union's board may also have been changing as well as its gender distribution during the interwar period. The four women elected prior to the First World War were, in keeping with most of their male colleagues, largely middle-class and quite comfortably off. These included: Eleanor Shield, the wife of a Wigston butcher successful enough to retire in his mid-forties, who continued to live 'on private means' at the head of a household made up of extended family after his death in 1903; Isabella Preston, a former schoolteacher who by the time of her election in 1898 was married to the headmaster of a local boarding school; Mary Snowden, a single woman living 'on private means' with her father, who had previously run a needle-making business; and Susannah Smith, a widowed farmer representing the small parish of Kirby Frith, having returned to Leicestershire after spending much of her earlier adult life in Canada. In other words, these women were from business-owning or land-holding families, representing an expanded gender distribution within the Blaby board but not necessarily increasing diversity in social class.

The women elected from 1919 onwards, in contrast, seem to have been from a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds. As alluded to above, the gap between the 1911 census and the 1920s when these women joined the board makes it more difficult to confirm individuals' circumstances – a family could easily have gone up or down in the world in the intervening decade or so. Nevertheless, it does appear that while some were of a similar social class to the women listed above, such as Minnie Hassall, whose husband had a construction business when she joined the board in 1921, others may have been less well-off. None were listed as having occupations of their own in the 1911 census, but those of their husband are telling. Emma Searle, who was elected in 1922, is a good example of this – on the 1911 census, her husband was recorded as a labourer for a local council, having previously been employed as a railway guard. Likewise, the husband of Sarah Letts, elected in 1925, was listed in 1911 as a bootmaker and repairer, but importantly as a worker as opposed to an employer, and Ann Gee's husband was employed as a railway engine stoker in the same year – Gee also joined the board in 1925. There also appears to have been a small but noticeable increase in male members who were employed by others during our period. On the board elected in 1894, only two men could be confirmed as being paid for their work by an employer – Thomas Everard, a hosier, and Henry Grace, who managed a quarry but

did not own it. By 1907, however, there were five more members who could be classified similarly, and the 1913 election produced similar numbers – including a railway signaller and Robert Barnes, a retired relieving officer. In 1925, there were only three such men (possibly more disguised among those whose occupations could not be identified), but their combination with the women who appear to have been from less wealthy backgrounds continues a trend of expanded social class representation. In the case of Letts and Gee, almost 15 years had passed between the 1911 census and their election as Blaby union guardians – there is therefore a possibility that their circumstances might have changed. However, on the available evidence, this suggests that the Blaby board became gradually more inclusive in terms of the people it was comprised of – not only were greater numbers of women being elected, but a greater range of the social spectrum was also included.

One caveat to this portrayal of the Blaby board as progressive in this way lies in the distribution of its female members across the union: at least eight of Blaby's 10 female guardians were elected to represent Wigston wards.³² St. Wolstan's Ward in particular was represented entirely by women throughout the early twentieth century, electing Shield and Preston consistently until 1922, when Emma Searle and Harriett Broughton took over upon the former pair's retirement and held their seats until 1930. Outside Wigston, however, female guardians were virtually non-existent. This distribution among the Blaby union parishes reflects an uneven national distribution – Steve King has pointed out that although there were 975 female guardians in 1899, 300 boards in England contained no women at all.³³ By 1907, the number of female guardians in England and Wales combined had risen to 1,141, but this was still only four percent of all board members, and 254 boards remained all-male.³⁴ The distribution of women guardians among the Blaby union parishes reflects this national distribution – inclusion of women in local welfare administration was subject to regional variation, even on a micro-level of a single union. It is notable that female guardians in Blaby were clustered in the union's most urbanised parish; even within poor law unions,

³² It is unclear from existing records which parish was represented by the tenth woman, Mrs. M.A. Young, who served on the board from 1925 until 1930.

³³ S. King, *Women, Welfare and Local Politics 1880-1920: 'We Might Be Trusted'* (Brighton, 2006), p.90.

³⁴ LGB, *Number of Women Serving on Local Authorities – Statements* (1907), Cd.3591, p.3.

attitudes to welfare administration were not homogenous across all parishes – some might be more inclusive or open than others.

No female guardians took on main leadership roles in Blaby, and they also lacked representation on most of its sub-committees, except the house and boarding-out committees. This aligns with the welfare issues stereotypically associated with women, such as care within the workhouse, and matters concerning mothers and children, rather than elements such as financial decision-making – indeed, none of the Blaby board's female members sat on the assessment or finance committees.³⁵ Despite this, Steve King has demonstrated that female guardians nevertheless could have a significant impact on a range of local poor law policies,³⁶ and several of the women on the Blaby board were energetically engaged with board decision-making. Many were some of the most regular attendees at board meetings, and were active members in the house and boarding out committees; indeed, Minnie Hassall was appointed as the chair of the latter committee from 1924 onwards.³⁷ Their voices were also heard on controversial issues, such as an extended disagreement between the board and one of their vaccination officers in 1900-01. Eleanor Shield in particular often intervened in discussions about this issue, convincing the rest of the board to involve the LGB in the dispute,³⁸ and she was included in an (ultimately unsuccessful) sub-committee appointed to persuade the central authorities to sack the offending officer.³⁹ They were clearly respected by their colleagues and seen as competent and reliable; for instance, in 1909 Shield and Preston represented the board at the annual Association of Poor Law Unions conference, via an amendment to a proposal that the board's chairman and vice-chairman be sent.⁴⁰ Overall, the women on Blaby's board were not only active and enthusiastic in this work, but valued by their male colleagues and by the voters in their wards and parishes, whose loyalty made women like Shield, Preston and Smith some of the longest-serving guardians of our period.

³⁵ P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford, 1987), p.247, 251-263.

³⁶ King, *Women, Welfare and Local Politics*, pp.126-132.

³⁷ ROLLR, G/5/8d/2, Blaby PLU, boarding-out committee minute book, 3rd June 1924.

³⁸ ROLLR, G/5/8a/29, Blaby PLU, GMB, 13th February 1900.

³⁹ Ibid., 27th March 1900.

⁴⁰ ROLLR, G/5/8a/35, Blaby PLU, GMB, 11th May 1909.

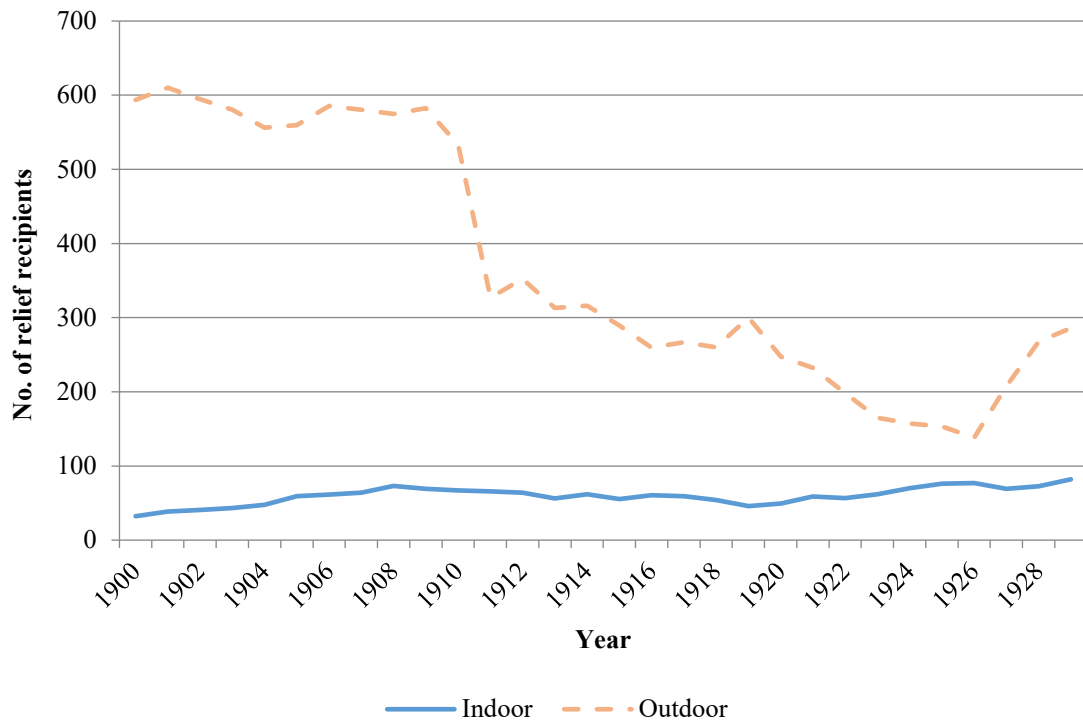
In summary, a specific approach to leadership and governance is exhibited in Blaby poor law union. The guardians were consistently preoccupied with pursuing a relatively egalitarian power dynamic, with a clear focus on avoiding ‘unfair advantage’ for any individual, small group of allies or indeed of one parish. Other evidence suggests a board becoming progressively more inclusive – operating ‘open’ governance structures, to use King’s yardstick – as it grew to incorporate a more varied range of people among its members. However, this question of inclusivity becomes more complex when we consider the specific zones of interest women board members acted in, and the way in which only a small range of the union’s wards and parishes seemed willing to elect women. These nuances in the experiences of female guardians in particular reminds us that the role of women in poor law administration, or indeed any minority group such as working-class board members, ought not to be considered purely as a numbers game. As will continue to be explored in subsequent case studies, what they did once they were on the board and how they were treated by their male colleagues is equally important for understanding how boards truly functioned ‘on the ground’.

2.4 Outdoor relief in Blaby poor law union

What kind of policies, then, did this board of guardians pursue? The guardians’ minute books for Blaby union provide an unusually detailed picture of its indoor and outdoor relief provision on a day-to-day basis: weekly totals of both indoor and outdoor relief recipients are recorded throughout our period. This kind of data had to be regularly collated because unions were required to submit weekly returns to their regional poor law inspector, stating how many people they were relieving and how much they were spending on various different categories of pauper. While weekly expenditure on indoor and outdoor relief is recorded in the minutes of guardians’ meetings for most unions, the inclusion of regular pauper totals is much rarer, and it is relatively uncommon for copies of the returns to the poor law inspector to survive for the early twentieth century. The information on numbers of paupers relieved in Blaby, then, allows us to track indoor and outdoor relief across the last 30 years of the poor law in much more detail than is

available in many unions, revealing both short and long-term trends and changes in relief provision.

Figure 2.2 Average weekly number of indoor and outdoor relief recipients in Blaby poor law union, 1900-1929.



Source: ROLLR, G/5/8a/29-41, Blaby PLU, GMB, 1900-1930.

Figure 2.2 displays the average weekly number of people receiving indoor and outdoor relief in each year in Blaby union between 1900 and 1929. Outdoor relief was clearly the guardians' welfare strategy of choice for many more people than admittance into the workhouse, and remained so for our entire period. Although the Blaby workhouse, located in the parish of Enderby, was built to house 235 inmates, the average number of people housed in the institution did not rise above 100 at any point between 1900 and 1929. This is in keeping with Keith Snell's findings that the majority of poor law unions in reality consistently preferred to relieve their poor in their own homes rather than in the workhouse across that period, despite the fact that most poor law legislation across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emphasised the

workhouse as the administrative centre of local welfare policy.⁴¹ This sustained preference for outdoor relief in Blaby union therefore reveals long-term continuity with the New Poor Law during much of the nineteenth century (notwithstanding the ‘crusade’ against outdoor relief in its later decades), not only in the policy itself of using the workhouse less extensively than outdoor relief, but in the gap maintained between central government’s rhetoric and lived reality on the ground.

Aside from the clear dominance of outdoor relief, Figure 2.2 also shows that its provision in Blaby union underwent some significant shifts over the period. One of its most striking features is the considerable decline in outdoor relief recipients around 1911. In 1910, the average weekly number of outdoor relief recipients in the union was 533; in 1911, it dropped by almost 40 percent to 327. A closer look at the actual weekly numbers of outdoor relief recipients reveals the precipitous fall began at the turn of the year. In the last week of 1910, the relieving officers reported 507 outdoor relief recipients; in the following week, the first week of 1911, only 328 were recorded.⁴²

This sizeable change in Blaby’s outdoor relief patterns coincides with the development of old-age pension legislation. The 1908 Old Age Pension Act came into force at the beginning of 1909, and entitled individuals aged 70 or above to a weekly non-contributory pension of up to five shillings. However, the Act specified that an applicant was disqualified from receiving the pension if they had been in receipt of poor relief at any time since the beginning of 1908, with the exceptions of medical relief or relief given in support of a dependent resident in an institution.⁴³ As a result, many elderly people who were dependent on the poor law at the advent of the old-age pension were not eligible for this new form of relief – Blaby’s clerk reported that there were 225 such people receiving outdoor relief within the union in January 1909.⁴⁴ Indeed, Figure 2.2 indicates that the pension had little impact on either outdoor or indoor relief numbers in the union when it first became available in 1909.⁴⁵

⁴¹ K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006), p.208.

⁴² ROLLR, G/5/8a/34, Blaby PLU, GMB, 3rd January 1911, 17th January 1911.

⁴³ ‘Old-Age Pension Act, 1908: Section 3 (1, a)’ (8 Edw. 7. c.40), as printed in W.A. Casson (ed.), *Old-Age Pensions Act, 1908, together with the Text of the Regulations Made Thereunder* (London, 3rd ed., 1908), pp.9-10.

⁴⁴ ROLLR, G/5/8a/34, Blaby PLU, GMB, 19th January 1909.

⁴⁵ This is in keeping with national pauperism levels in 1909-10, as demonstrated in K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London, 1981), p.161.

At the beginning of 1911, the disqualification lapsed. This meant that although people were still not allowed to receive poor relief and the pension at the same time (with the continuing exception of relief categorised as medical),⁴⁶ those with a recent history of pauperism were no longer ineligible for the pension. The significant decline in Blaby's outdoor relief recipients occurred at exactly this moment, indicating that many paupers took their first opportunity to move from the 'old' welfare system to the 'new'. Indeed, this was encouraged by the Blaby board, who as 1911 approached were keen to promote such a transfer. In October 1910, the union's relieving officers and workhouse master were instructed to help eligible outdoor relief recipients who 'desire[d] to apply' for the pension with filling out the required paperwork.⁴⁷ Their efforts were successful - at the end of January 1911, the union's relieving officers reported that 165 paupers had moved onto the pension.⁴⁸ The decline in levels of outdoor relief recipients, then, can be attributed to a shift from one welfare stream to another.

This is revealing in terms of the nature of poor law provision in Blaby at this time. It tells us that prior to 1911, a significant proportion of Blaby's outdoor relief recipients were 70 years of age or older. Indeed, the 225 elderly paupers identified by the clerk in 1909 as ineligible for the pension because of their dependence on non-medical poor relief made up nearly 40 percent of the average weekly number of outdoor relief recipients that year, according to Figure 2.2. This not only gives us an insight into the demographic profile of those on outdoor relief in Blaby union, and therefore assists in answering our first key research question in this thesis of what the poor law looked like 'on the ground' during this period, but also indicates long-term continuity over the New Poor Law's lifespan into the twentieth century - as Pat Thane has demonstrated, the elderly were 'the largest single group of paupers' pre-1900.⁴⁹

The considerable reduction in outdoor relief recipients in 1911 is also indicative of the kind of relief the elderly poor were receiving in Blaby. Specifically, the majority of this group were not classified as being in receipt of medical relief – if they were, they

⁴⁶ House of Commons Debate (27th July 1908), vol. 193, col. 829, hansard.parliament.uk [accessed 22/11/15].

⁴⁷ ROLLR, G/5/8a/34, Blaby PLU, GMB, 25th October 1910.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 31st January 1911.

⁴⁹ P. Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford, 2000), p.165.

could have continued to receive support from the poor law while claiming the pension at the same time, and there would not have been the decline in outdoor relief recipients when the latter form of relief became more accessible. Indeed, this option for the ‘old’ and ‘new’ welfare systems to work side-by-side in the ‘makeshift economies’ of the elderly poor has been little explored in existing work on either the poor law or the pension.⁵⁰ What, then, was the nature of the outdoor relief provided to Blaby’s aged paupers? A report presented by the Blaby house committee on the ‘Aged Deserving Poor’ at a board meeting in October 1900 sheds a little more light on this.⁵¹ The House Committee stated that outdoor relief was granted to ‘the deserving poor’ in all cases as long as they were able to ‘look after themselves, or have relatives who will attend upon them. In a great many cases allowances have been made to persons willing to wait upon them, where they are unable to wait upon themselves’. It was only in cases where ‘infirmity of body or mind’ meant that it was unsafe for an individual to be left alone that the board would move a person into the workhouse.⁵² In other words, paupers were only taken into the workhouse when they required residential care. This not only provides further evidence of a preference for outdoor, as opposed to indoor, relief when at all possible, at least for the elderly, and suggests a specific relief role that the workhouse played in Blaby union, but also implies that relief of aged paupers was rather holistic in nature, with the broad aim of enabling people to remain independent of institutional relief for as long as possible. The management of chronic conditions or short-term illnesses would doubtless have been part of this relief package, but the movement of 165 elderly paupers away from the poor law and onto the pension in the first weeks of 1911 suggests that their relief could not be classified as medical relief and as a result remain available to them.

This movement from the poor law to the state pension at the earliest possible opportunity likewise suggests that Blaby’s paupers saw the pension as a more preferable form of relief than the poor law. Although the relief provided by the poor law seems to have been relatively compassionate as described by the guardians, a considerable number of people still preferred to receive support from elsewhere. Both Thane and Derek Fraser have emphasised the ways in which the pension seemed more appealing,

⁵⁰ For exploration of ‘makeshift economies’, see Tomkins and King (eds.), *The Poor in England*.

⁵¹ LGB, *Annual Report, 1900-01* (1901), Cd.746, pp.17-20.

⁵² ROLLR, G/5/8a/29, Blaby PLU, GMB, 10th October 1900.

including the fact that it was ‘free from the taint of poor relief’, paid through the more neutral Post Office, and allowed individuals to receive relief without losing their right to vote.⁵³ Although those who received the pension still had to be viewed as ‘deserving’, in much the same way as those applying to their local poor law authorities, ‘the government and its administrators were careful to protect pensioners from the language of opprobrium which had characterised the poor relief system’,⁵⁴ and David Vincent argues that many of these ‘behavioural clauses’ proved unenforceable anyway.⁵⁵ Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that poor relief to the elderly did carry a stigma in Blaby that was recognised by the guardians. In July 1908, the Blaby board supported a resolution circulated by York poor law union calling for an amendment of the original pension legislation to allow ‘deserving persons over seventy years of age in receipt of outdoor relief... the choice of transfer from poor law relief to pension, thus removing the stigma of pauperism and placing them on an equality with others receiving old age pensions’.⁵⁶ This suggests that the Blaby guardians understood poor relief to be shameful for the elderly poor, even for the ‘deserving’. It therefore appears that Blaby aligned with the national picture of pension reception as painted by Thane, Fraser and Martin Pugh, as providing a welcome opportunity to leave the poor law behind.⁵⁷ More broadly, the impact of the pension on poor law operations in Blaby offers a glimpse into two more of our key research questions in the overall thesis. It provides insight into local welfare culture in the union, whereby relief for the elderly was holistic and attempted not just to prevent destitution but to protect the aged poor from the workhouse, but nevertheless carried enough stigma to make the pension seem like a more attractive option. In addition, these findings suggest that this specific welfare reform was successful in moving people away from the remit of the poor law, at least in the context of Blaby union. Whether similar conclusions can be drawn about the pension in different regional contexts will be explored in subsequent case-studies.

⁵³ P. Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State* (Harlow, 2nd ed., 1996), p.77; D. Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy since the Industrial Revolution* (Basingstoke, 4th ed., 2009), p.183.

⁵⁴ Thane, *Old Age*, p.225.

⁵⁵ D. Vincent, *Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in Twentieth Century Britain* (Harlow, 1991), p.40.

⁵⁶ ROLLR, G/5/8a/34, Blaby PLU, GMB, 16th June 1908.

⁵⁷ Thane, *Old Age*, pp. 226-228; Fraser, *Evolution*, p.184; M. Pugh, ‘Working-class experience and state social welfare, 1908-1914: old age pensions reconsidered’, *The Historical Journal*, 45:4 (2002), pp.787-790.

After 1911, Figure 2.2 then shows outdoor relief levels continuing to decline, albeit nowhere near as radically. The increased unemployment and industrial unrest of the 1920s seem to have made little impact on the number of people the union was supporting – indeed, outdoor relief numbers reached their lowest level during our period in 1926, the year of the General Strike. This might at first seem surprising, but becomes less so upon consideration of Blaby’s regional context as outlined in Section 2.2. It is likely that the robust, healthy regional economy in the Leicester area had an impact on the level of need experienced during the 1920s in Blaby union – communities remained relatively prosperous and economically stable, and as a result were able to provide something of a financial cushion in more difficult economic moments, meaning that fewer people ended up needing the poor law than might otherwise.

Outdoor relief numbers did begin to rise again in 1927, and continued to do so until the end of our period. In contrast to the decline in these numbers in 1911, this can be linked to a local development, rather than a national one. In September 1924 building work began on the Saffron Lane estate, Leicester Corporation’s ‘first large-scale council housing estate’ constructed after the First World War, on land they had purchased in Lubbesthorpe, within the Enderby District of Blaby union.⁵⁸ By the end of 1927, 1,814 houses had been constructed, the first of which were occupied by December 1925. Although not explicitly a slum clearance project, the new estate was designed to address serious overcrowding problems in Leicester; as a result, over 1,000 families moved into the Blaby Union during the mid- to late-1920s.⁵⁹

In February 1927, residents of the new estate began to appear in Blaby’s outdoor relief lists, and by the end of the year 46 families from the estate had received outdoor relief from the union.⁶⁰ This had a significant impact on Blaby’s outdoor relief numbers. Figure 2.2 shows that the average weekly number of outdoor relief claimants in 1926 was 138; in 1927, this rose by almost 50 percent to 208. According to the outdoor relief lists, the number of families receiving outdoor relief in the rest of Enderby District (outside the estate) stayed exactly the same between 1926 and 1927, at 84 families.⁶¹

⁵⁸ C. Brown (ed.), *The Story of the Saff: A History of the Saffron Lane Estate, Leicester* (Leicester, 1998), p.11.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.11.

⁶⁰ ROLLR, G/5/136/31, 33, Blaby PLU, outdoor relief lists, 1927.

⁶¹ Ibid.

The outdoor relief lists for Wigston District do not survive after March 1927, so it is difficult to tell whether it experienced a contributing increase in outdoor relief recipients. Nevertheless, the residents of the Saffron Lane estate *were* contributing to this increase, and continued to do so in 1928, when the average number of outdoor relief recipients rose to 268 and the number of estate families receiving outdoor relief rose from 46 the previous year to 78.⁶² There had also been an increase in the rest of Enderby District's parishes between 1927 and 1928, to 104 families, but the influx of increasing numbers of estate residents continued to have a significant impact on the union's outdoor relief numbers. This development is intriguing for two reasons. Firstly, it is an example of change in relief levels caused by physical migration, as people moved from Leicester into Blaby union. The movement of people and their impact on welfare systems was a preoccupation with historically deep roots among poor law officials. That this continued to be a factor in shifting poor relief patterns as late as the early twentieth century indicates a fundamental, long-term continuity in relief operations and the ways in which it could be affected at a local level. Secondly, the consequences of this new welfare provision, in the form of social housing, were in sharp contrast to those we have observed for the old-age pension. While the latter reduced pauperism levels, the former increased them. It is this sort of complexity that standard studies of the early welfare state (described in Section 1.2 of Chapter 1) have tended to ignore or misconstrue inside the poor law system post-1900.

This examination of outdoor relief levels in Blaby union over time has begun to answer three of our key research questions and address their overarching themes of 'continuity and change' and 'rhetoric versus reality'. In terms of uncovering how the poor law operated at a local level in Blaby union, it has demonstrated that outdoor relief was consistently the Blaby board's preferred option as opposed to the workhouse, but that the number of people it relieved in this manner changed over time. Moreover, it is clear that we can only interpret these outdoor relief levels by using different lenses to look at Blaby union, by zooming in and out on its experiences. Its regional context indicates relative economic robustness in the 1920s, and more locally the impact of a local authority's actions in the construction of Saffron Lane estate. The national context of Liberal welfare reforms such as the old-age pension, meanwhile, reveals the advent

⁶² ROLLR, G/5/136/33-34, Blaby PLU, outdoor relief lists, 1928.

of real alternatives to the poor law which had consequences at an individual union level. We have also seen indications of what attitudes towards welfare in Blaby might be and therefore what kind of welfare culture was in operation there through the prism of the elderly, whereby poor relief, although apparently holistic and not especially punitive to this category of poor, was still shameful enough to make alternative welfare provision more attractive. Finally, the relationship between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ welfare systems, the poor law and the significant national welfare reforms of the period, appears to be less straightforward than it might appear at first glance. Although the 1908 Old Age Pension Act was successful in Blaby in that many elderly paupers did abandon their poor relief to access the pension, the advent of a large social housing project in the area had the opposite effect, as outdoor relief levels climbed. The complexity of these interactions, supporting the cautions of Geoffrey Finlayson that the history of welfare should not be viewed as an ‘escalator’, with clear and linear transitions from one set of provisions to another, will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.⁶³

2.5 The twentieth-century pauper in Blaby

We now turn to the kinds of people and family types who received the poor relief which has just been explored in Blaby union. Much of the scholarship available on the poor law in its earlier incarnations has focused on this issue. Such literature is often rooted in ideas of the poverty cycle as originally outlined by B. Seebohm Rowntree, whereby individuals become more vulnerable to poverty – and therefore to becoming chargeable to the local poor law – at different points in the life-cycle, particularly during early childhood, after marriage and the birth of children who are still dependent on their parents, and in old age.⁶⁴ For instance, a range of scholars have focused on the particular vulnerability to poverty of the elderly, the sick and children,⁶⁵ while others

⁶³ Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, p.3.

⁶⁴ B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (London, 3rd ed., 1902), pp.169-171.

⁶⁵ For the sick poor, see J. Reinartz and L. Schwarz (eds.), *Medicine and the Workhouse* (Woodbridge, 2013) and A. Gestrich, E. Hurren, and S. King (eds.), *Poverty and Sickness in Modern Europe: Narratives of the Sick Poor 1780-1938* (London, 2012); D. Brown, ‘Workers, workhouses and the sick poor: health and institutional care in the long nineteenth century’, *Journal of Urban History*, 43:1 (2017), pp.180-188. For the elderly, see L. Botelho, *Old Age and the English Poor Law 1500-1700* (Woodbridge, 2004); S. Ottaway, *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth Century England* (Cambridge, 2004), pp.173-220; Thane, *Old Age*; N. Goose, ‘Poverty, old age and gender in nineteenth-century England: the

such as David Thomson and more recently Megan Doolittle and Marjorie Levine-Clark have considered life-cycle poverty and family responsibility, examining how the rights and obligations to receive and provide support between relatives were affected by the life-stage of those involved.⁶⁶

Work on the pre-1900 poor law has also been interested in how different types of families were treated by the poor law, and what form their relief was likely to take. Unmarried mothers, as perhaps the archetypal ‘undeserving poor’, could struggle to claim relief, particularly when they travelled away from their home communities, as locals often feared they would continue to have illegitimate children and thus create more claims on the rates.⁶⁷ Many studies of individual workhouses have focused on the demographic profile of inmates, as alluded to in the introductory chapter of this thesis, reflecting on the kinds of paupers who were admitted indoors.⁶⁸ Due to the highly regionalised nature of poor law operations, different approaches were taken in different areas to different types of people and families. For instance, Steve King has tracked the shifts in the age and gender distributions of paupers in particular regions of England during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, suggesting for example that ‘the “traditional” poor – widows, children and the disabled’ continued to be the focus of northern and western ‘communal relief culture’ to a much greater extent than in the

case of Hertfordshire’, *Continuity and Change*, 20:3 (2005), pp.351-384. For children, see A. Levene, *The Childhood of the Poor: Welfare in Eighteenth-Century London* (Basingstoke, 2012); S. Taylor, ‘Poverty, emigration and family: experiencing childhood poverty in late nineteenth century Manchester’, *Family and Community History*, 18:2 (2015), pp.89-103; L. Hulonce, *Pauper Children and Poor Law Childhoods in England and Wales 1834-1910* (self-published, 2016).

⁶⁶ D. Thomson, ‘I am not my father’s keeper’: families and the elderly in nineteenth century England’, *Law and History Review*, 2:2 (1984), pp.265-286; M. Doolittle, ‘The duty to provide: fathers, families and the workhouse in England 1880-1914’, in B. Althammer, A. Gestrich and K. Gründer (eds.), *The Welfare State and the ‘Deviant Poor’ in Europe 1870-1933* (Basingstoke, 2014), pp.58-77; Levine-Clark, *Unemployment*, pp.183-230.

⁶⁷ T. Evans, *Unfortunate Objects: Lone Mothers in Eighteenth Century London* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp.208-209. More recent scholarship on illegitimacy and the poor law includes G. Frost, ‘Under the guardians’ supervision: illegitimacy, family and the English poor law, 1870-1930’, *Journal of Family History*, 38:2 (2013), pp.122-139; S. Williams, ‘The maintenance of bastard children in London 1790-1834’, *Economic History Review*, 69:3 (2016), pp.945-971; B. Harvey, ‘The putative fathers of Swinton, England: Illegitimate behaviour under the Old Poor Laws, 1797-1835’, *Journal of Family History*, 40:3 (2015), pp.373-397; T. Nutt, ‘Illegitimacy, paternal financial responsibility, and the 1834 Poor Law Commission Report: the myth of the old poor law and the making of the new’, *Economic History Review*, 63:2 (2010), pp.335-361.

⁶⁸ Recent examples include J. Purser, ‘The workhouse population of Nottingham union, 1881-1882’, *Local Population Studies*, 99 (2017), pp.66-80; L. Darwen, ‘Workhouse populations of the Preston union, 1841-1861’, *Local Population Studies*, 93 (2014), pp.33-53; A. Gritt and P. Park, ‘The workhouse populations of Lancashire in 1881’, *Local Population Studies*, 86 (2011), pp.37-65.

south and east.⁶⁹ However, there have been few studies which have explored this question in the context of our later period.

Blaby's unusually good survival of outdoor relief lists for our period between 1915 and 1928 allows us to investigate who the twentieth century pauper was, and the extent to which they resembled the outdoor relief recipients encountered in studies of earlier periods. Each individual recorded as receiving relief in these documents was categorised according to marital status and existence of dependent children by the relieving officer, using a standardised system. Tables 2.6-7 present the annual totals of different family types which are recorded in Blaby's surviving lists. Some years have patchier coverage in terms of extant documents than others, whereby the records for only one district – Enderby or Wigston – or for only part of the year have survived. These Tables have therefore been compiled using the information from those years where there is no more than three months' worth of records from both districts missing. In the lists included, 105 cases were not allocated a category, but as only seven percent of all cases recorded, this does not have a significant impact on the conclusions drawn. Table 2.6 provides an overview of the different family compositions as represented in the outdoor relief lists, while Table 2.7 displays the proportions of children who appear in the lists within the family types represented.

⁶⁹ King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p.210.

Table 2.6 Distribution of family type among outdoor relief recipients in Blaby poor law union, 1916-1926 (annual totals).

Family type		Year							
		1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1922	1923	1926
Lone man	Childless	14	24	16	20	20	13	13	7
	Child/ren	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Single woman	Childless	30	35	24	22	21	19	16	22
	Child/ren	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Married couple	Childless	21	29	22	22	21	24	22	20
	Child/ren	13	10	11	12	11	15	11	13
Married woman w/ absent spouse	Childless	3	4	6	6	5	5	2	0
	Child/ren	5	5	5	3	4	7	5	9
Widow	Childless	54	62	58	65	43	29	27	34
	Child/ren	32	36	44	47	42	29	23	10
Lone orphan or illegitimate child		2	2	2	3	2	1	0	0
Orphan sibling group		1	0	1	2	1	1	1	0
Family arrangements unclear	Men	14	4	3	3	2	7	12	12
	Women	12	6	7	9	4	9	8	12
	No gender	3	3	1	0	0	2	1	0
Total family units:		206	218	201	214	177	165	143	140
Total men:		64	68	53	57	55	59	58	52
Total women:		170	187	177	186	151	137	114	121
Total children:		143	147	187	187	166	151	105	91
Total individuals:		377	402	417	430	372	347	277	264

Source: ROLLR, G/5/136/3-28, 30-32, Blaby PLU, outdoor relief lists, 1916-1926.

Table 2.7 Living arrangements of children receiving outdoor relief in Blaby poor law union, 1916-1926.

Parent/guardian	Year							
	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1922	1923	1926
Lone man:	3%	1%	1%	0	2%	0	0	0
Single woman:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1%
Married couple:	25%	24%	21%	19%	17%	30%	24%	52%
Married woman w/ absent spouse:	12%	11%	9%	4%	7%	14%	11%	21%
Widow:	55%	63%	66%	72%	71%	54%	62%	26%
None:	4%	1%	3%	5%	3%	3%	3%	0
Total children:	143	147	187	187	166	151	105	91

Source: ROLLR, G/5/136/3-28, 30-32, Blaby PLU, outdoor relief lists, 1916-1926.

Perhaps the clearest feature of the data displayed in Table 2.6 is the prevalence of women and children, and the relative minority status of adult men, among outdoor relief recipients. The latter consistently made up less than 20 percent of the total number of individuals represented on this sample of outdoor relief lists, and male-headed

households were in the minority. Excluding those for whom family arrangements are unclear, in each of the seven years featured in Table 2.6 female-headed households made up between 49 and 66 percent of the total number of families.⁷⁰ In particular, lone women – widows and single women without dependent children – were consistently the largest family types represented. This might seem somewhat counter-intuitive, as one might expect larger families to be more numerous, as they would need more resources to avoid the jaws of absolute poverty. Equally, however, a lone woman's lack of a spouse meant that her survival depended on her own earning power – she had no obvious partner in her efforts to make ends meet, and consequently a smaller margin for economic misfortune, with greater likelihood of requiring additional support. Widows in particular could also be treated more leniently under poor law legislation - the 1911 Relief Regulation Order, for instance, gave guardians the authority to justify relieving them without applying the workhouse test.⁷¹ As no lists survive prior to the First World War, it is difficult to ascertain the longevity of this distribution of family types in Blaby, or the extent to which it had been skewed by the impact of the war. However, no significant shift in this profile can be observed over the course of the conflict – for instance, there is no notable increase in the number of widows receiving outdoor relief during the war years – which suggests that this distribution of family types was a relatively well-established one.

Children made up a significant percentage of the individuals featured in the outdoor relief lists – indeed, in 1918, 1920 and 1922 there were more children in the outdoor relief lists than there were adult women. However, in terms of family units, the majority of families receiving relief did not include children. The gap between the number of families with and families without children began to shrink from 1920, but nevertheless no more than 35 percent of families in any of the sample years contained one or more children. Furthermore, as Table 2.7 demonstrates, with the exception of 1926 children were not concentrated in those families headed by a married couple – just as female-headed households were by far the most common family type to receive

⁷⁰ The instances where married women are recorded without the caveat that they were living apart from their husbands are not included in this figure; neither are those women classified as 'suffering from mental infirmity' or those instances of females (as we can tell by their recorded first name) who are not given a categorisation, as their marital status cannot be discerned.

⁷¹ 'Relief Regulation Order, 1911 (2, iii)', printed in LGB, *Annual Report, 1911-12* (1912), Cd.6327, p.38.

outdoor relief, children were far more likely to be part of those families.⁷² This absence of children in the majority of families may reflect a large proportion of elderly outdoor relief recipients observed prior to 1911. Particularly in the cases of childless widows and married couples, we may be seeing the manifestation of a particular stage in Rowntree's poverty cycle, where offspring are no longer dependent on their parents for survival, and ageing has reduced the widow or couple's ability to work and make ends meet, but they are not yet eligible for the pension or infirm enough to require residency in the workhouse. As ages of recipients were not recorded in outdoor relief lists beyond whether an individual was an adult or a child, this cannot be categorically confirmed. However, given what we have already established about the large proportion of relief recipients aged 70 or over before the advent of the old-age pension, this demographic profile seems likely. This extends the longevity of Thane's argument that the elderly continued to be a significant element among paupers – even after the introduction of the pension, older people (if not quite as old as before) predominated.

In summary, these findings continue to address our key research question of how the poor law operated at a local level during this period by establishing that Blaby's typical outdoor relief recipients were made up of large numbers of female-headed households, many of which were lone women, and childless married couples, with a significant proportion likely to be older people. The years 1927 and 1928 were not included in Table 2.6 because of the poor survival of Wigston District outdoor relief lists. However, it is in Enderby District's surviving records for these years that we find the exceptions to the trends displayed in Table 2.6, by returning to the Saffron Lane estate residents who began receiving outdoor relief in these years. Not only were estate residents pushing up Blaby's outdoor relief numbers, but their demography differed significantly from that of the union's other outdoor relief recipients. Within the 46 families resident on Saffron Lane estate recorded as receiving outdoor relief in 1927, there were no single people at all, two childless married couples, and three childless widows. The remaining 41 families all contained between one and five children, and 39 were headed by a married couple; the remaining two were headed by married women living apart from their husbands. By 1928, 74 out of the 78 families receiving outdoor

⁷² For up-to-date discussion on family structures of children, see K. Schürer, E.M. Garrett, H. Jaadla and A. Reid, 'Household and family structure in England and Wales (1851-1911): continuities and changes', *Continuity and Change*, 33:3 (2018), pp.32-39.

relief had at least one child; 56 had more than one, and there were still only five female-headed households.⁷³ This distribution of family types was certainly representative of those typically allocated council housing, particularly in this early period,⁷⁴ but not of Blaby's typical outdoor relief recipients. The Saffron Lane families stick out within these documents – the extent to which the advent of social housing in the locality was changing the nature of poor relief provision becomes increasingly clear.

2.6 The nature and extent of relief in Blaby

Having established the kinds of families typically relieved in Blaby, the next element in understanding what the poor law looked like during this period is to investigate the generosity of that relief. One way to understand this is to examine expenditure levels on outdoor relief over the course of our period, and to ascertain whether expenditure rose and fell in line with the outdoor pauperism levels portrayed in Figure 2.2. Thus, Figure 2.3 shows the total yearly expenditure on outdoor relief in Blaby union between 1900 and 1929.⁷⁵

In two key ways, Figure 2.3 mirrors trends displayed in Figure 2.2. First, the significant decline in expenditure in 1911 reflects the decline in outdoor relief recipients in Blaby as the pension was taken up. Secondly, the notable increase in expenditure from 1927 correlates with the increase in outdoor relief recipients that the Saffron Lane estate brought to the union. However, the period in which Figure 2.3 does not match Figure 2.2 is in the early 1920s. From 1919, the number of outdoor relief recipients was steadily declining, but the same cannot be said of outdoor relief expenditure – Figure 2.3 shows a spike from 1919 to 1921. From 1922 expenditure began to go back down, although not perhaps as much as we might expect, considering that the number of outdoor relief recipients in Blaby reached their lowest point in 1926. In other words, in

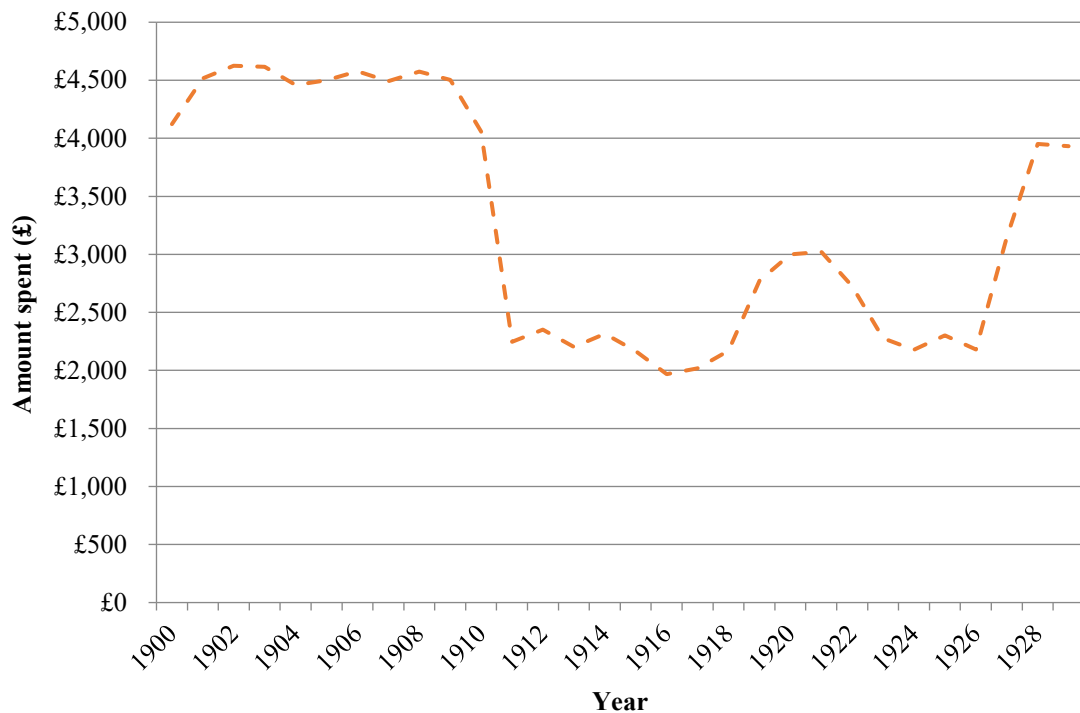
⁷³ ROLLR, G/5/136/31, 33-34, Blaby PLU, outdoor relief lists, 1927-1928.

⁷⁴ A. Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment* (London, 2001), p.130.

⁷⁵ The minute books from which this data is drawn do not specify whether the outdoor relief figures it records exclude the cost of relief provided in forms other than cash. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this category is excluded, and the amounts are clearly intended as regular summary totals, so subsequent discussion is based on the premise that expenditure on relief in kind is included.

the early 1920s the union appears to have been spending larger sums of money on a smaller number of paupers.

Figure 2.3 Annual expenditure on outdoor relief in Blaby poor law union, 1900-1930.



Source: ROLLR, G/5/8a/29-41, Blaby PLU, GMB, 1900-1929.

To understand why this happened, we need to explore what forms outdoor relief took in Blaby union. Broadly speaking, outdoor relief came in one of two forms – cash payments, or ‘relief in kind’, which could include but was not limited to food, clothing and fuel. After 1834, attempts to restrict the distribution of relief outside the workhouse applied in particular to the provision of relief in cash. The 1842 Outdoor Labour Test Order and the Outdoor Relief Regulation Order issued in December 1852 (amending a similar Order from earlier that year) specified that if an individual was to receive outdoor relief, at least half of it had to be given in ‘food, clothing and other articles of

necessity.’⁷⁶ Later legislation, such as the 1911 Relief Regulation Order, also tried to restrict relief other than that which was ‘institutional’.⁷⁷

None of this was watertight. The revised Outdoor Relief Regulation Order only applied to able-bodied men (of whom Blaby union relieved relatively few until the late 1920s, as we have seen), and included caveats giving guardians ‘permission to give outdoor relief without a [workhouse] test to any class of pauper’.⁷⁸ Moreover, it was accompanied by an Instructional Letter which allowed leeway for guardians to interpret the Orders as strictly or otherwise as they wished.⁷⁹ Historically cash was on the whole preferred by the poor, as it allowed them more flexibility than relief in kind.⁸⁰ Poor law officials could also be ambivalent about relief in this form. Although it was sometimes seen as an effective method of keeping costs down,⁸¹ and of ensuring that money allocated to a family was spent appropriately in the eyes of the union, it was also complicated to provide, as negotiating with suppliers was time-consuming, and the transportation, storing and preservation of goods could be difficult.⁸²

The proportions of relief in cash and relief in kind distributed in Blaby union reflected this ambivalence, as families who received relief in kind were consistently in the minority. This is demonstrated in Table 2.8, which shows the number of families who received relief in kind in each of the same sample years as used in Tables 2.6-7. In all of the sample years, over half of families on outdoor relief received only cash payments, with no relief in kind at all. Levels of relief in kind were highest in 1926, the year when overall numbers of those on outdoor relief were at their lowest. Given how complex and time-consuming the distribution of relief in kind could be, this may indicate that Blaby’s relieving officers were more willing to utilise it when demand for

⁷⁶ ‘General Outdoor Labour Test Order, 1842: Article 1’, printed in Poor Law Commission [hereafter PLC], *Annual Report, 1842* (1842), p.103; ‘General Order of the Poor Law Board for Regulating Out-door Relief, August 1852: Article 1’, printed in Poor Law Board [hereafter PLB], *Annual Report, 1852* (1853), p.17; ‘General Order of the Poor Law Board for Regulating Out-door Relief, December 1852: Article 1’, printed in PLB, *Annual Report, 1852* (1853), p.24.

⁷⁷ ‘Relief Regulation Order, 1911’, printed in LGB, *Annual Report, 1911-12*, p.38.

⁷⁸ Rose, *English Poor Law*, p.294.

⁷⁹ Rose, *English Poor Law*, p.146. See ‘Circular letter from the Poor Law Board to Boards of Guardians on the above Order of the 14th December 1852’, printed in PLB: *Annual Report, 1852* (1853), pp.28-31.

⁸⁰ M. Hanly, ‘An economy of makeshifts and the poor law: a game of chance?’ in S. King and A. Tomkins (eds.), *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003), p.94.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.78.

⁸² Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.226.

relief was lower, and they therefore had more time to organise the purchase, storing and distribution of the relevant goods.

Table 2.8 Distribution of families who received relief in kind in Blaby poor law union, 1916-1926.

Year	No. of families who received outdoor relief	No. of families who received relief in kind on at least one occasion		Families who <i>only</i> received relief in kind	
		No.	Percent	No.	Percent
1916	206	50	24	23	11
1917	218	51	23	22	10
1918	201	51	25	18	9
1919	214	58	27	20	9
1920	177	29	16	8	5
1922	165	50	30	23	14
1923	143	37	26	19	13
1926	140	67	48	30	21

Source: ROLLR, G/5/136/3-28, 30-32, Blaby PLU, outdoor relief lists, 1916-1926.

As well as showing that most families received outdoor relief in the form of cash, Blaby's surviving outdoor relief lists also allow us to examine how much of it such families received. Figure 2.4 depicts the size of cash relief payments made in each of our sample years in Blaby union, and goes some way to explaining the 'hump' observed in the early 1920s in Figure 2.3. For the last three years of the First World War, cash relief payments larger than 5s. were relatively rare, and less than 10 percent were larger than 10s. However, from 1919 onwards the proportion of payments of 5s. or less shrank, while the proportion of payments between 5s. and 10s. increased. There was also an increase in the number of families who received even larger sums. By 1923, almost 30 percent of outdoor relief payments in the union were larger than 10s., and from 1919 onwards there was a small handful of families receiving very large weekly pensions, including one Narborough widow with seven children who received 50s. per week for over six months in 1920, the largest cash pension that appears in Blaby's outdoor relief lists.⁸³ The fact that families were receiving on average larger pensions from 1919 pushed overall expenditure on outdoor relief up in the union even as the actual numbers of people receiving relief was going down. When overall spending

⁸³ ROLLR, G/5/136/20, Blaby PLU, outdoor relief list, 1920.

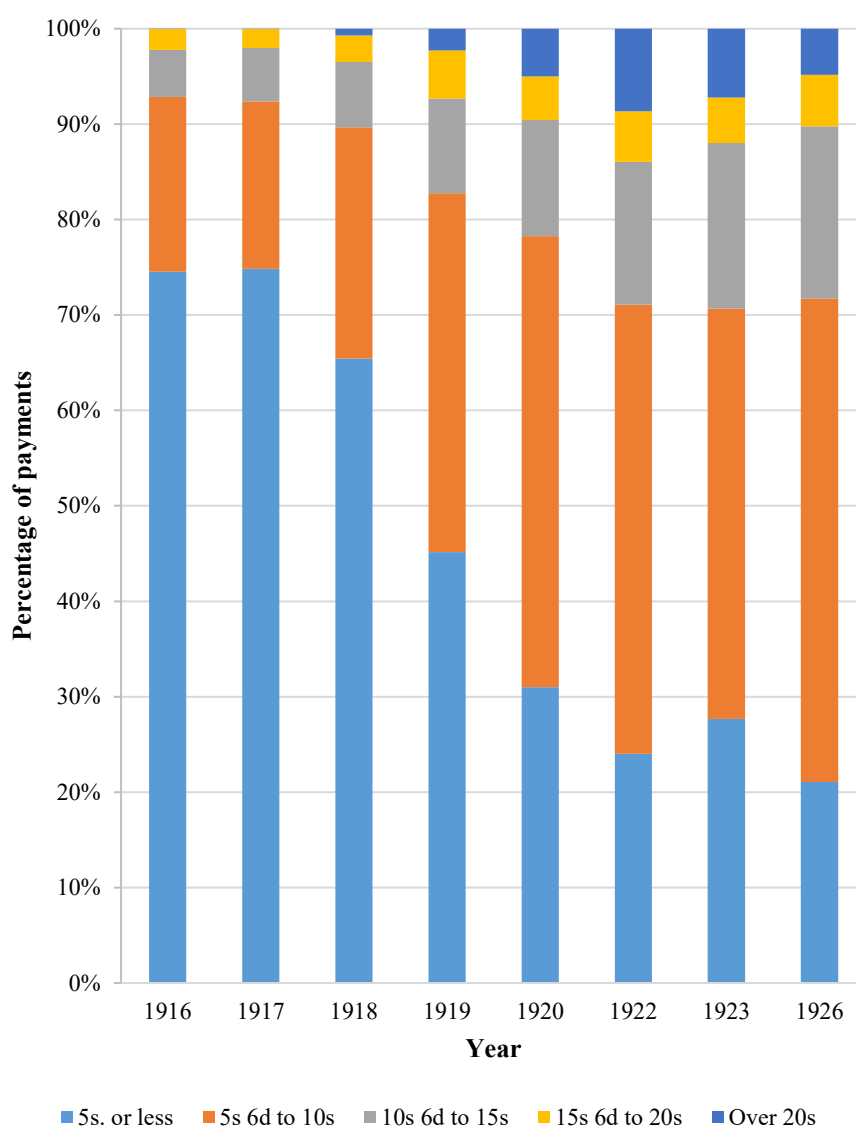
began to go back down again from 1922, this seems to indicate the point at which the number of families on outdoor relief was so low that even with larger cash pensions, less money was being spent overall on outdoor relief.

This growth in the size of relief payments aligns with national trends in poor law expenditure. Karel Williams has demonstrated that expenditure on outdoor relief in England and Wales increased significantly after the First World War, and Keith Snell has likewise shown that the average weekly dole per outdoor pauper increased dramatically in size at the same point.⁸⁴ The reasons behind this in Blaby are difficult to pin down. One might reasonably suggest price changes as a possible contributing factor – were larger payments being given to maintain the value of outdoor relief provision as the cost of living increased? This does not quite add up for the years covered by Figure 2.4. According to Charles Feinstein’s historical price indices for consumer goods, retail prices were actually going down over the course of the early to mid-1920s, the period in which smaller payments became less common in Blaby: between 1919 and 1926, prices of consumer goods overall experienced a 15 percent deflation.⁸⁵ In other words, an individual could buy more with 5s. in 1926 than they could in 1919. Blaby’s outdoor relief provision was therefore increasing in value during the 1920s. Without records which provide more detailed insight into the ‘nuts and bolts’ of the decision-making processes around payments made to individual families, the Blaby board’s motivations for this – and the extent to which they were taking a more generous stance on relief - are unclear. It is nevertheless a useful piece in our reconstruction of the poor law during the early twentieth century, and a local manifestation of a trend so far suggested only at a national level.

⁸⁴ K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London, 1981), pp.171-172; Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.292.

⁸⁵ C.H. Feinstein, *National Income, Expenditure and Output of the United Kingdom, 1855-1965* (Cambridge, 1972), T.132.

Figure 2.4 Size of cash payments made to outdoor relief recipients in Blaby poor law union, 1916-1926.



Source: ROLLR, G/5/136/3-28, 30-32, Blaby PLU, outdoor relief lists, 1916-19120, 1923, 1926.

It has been demonstrated that Blaby's relief was predominately given in the form of cash during this period, taking advantage of the loopholes provided in central government directives, and that these cash payments grew larger in size into the 1920s. Once again, the years 1927 and 1928 are not included in Table 2.8 or Figure 2.4 because of the lack of record survival for Wigston District. However, as in the above discussion of family types, the records that do survive for those years again indicate exceptions to

the profile of relief provision in Blaby as we have understood it within the Saffron Lane estate population. The trends demonstrated in Table 2.8 are reflected in the wider Enderby District in 1927, when 29 families - 34 percent – received relief in kind, and only 14 of those received *only* relief in kind. These proportions remained much the same in 1928, with 34 families in the wider district receiving relief in kind, 20 of whom did not receive cash relief in addition. This trend was completely reversed, however, in the relief patterns of the estate families. In 1927, every single one received relief in kind at least once, and 29 of them – 63 percent – were recorded as receiving relief in kind only. In 1928, four estate residents received relief in cash and no relief in kind. However, the remaining 74 families all received relief in kind at some stage, and 47 received no additional cash.⁸⁶

Having already seen that the estate families were of a different demographic profile to the rest of Blaby's outdoor relief recipients, this could be connected to the differing nature of their relief – that married couples with children were more likely to receive relief in kind than other family types. It is true that the four estate residents who received only cash relief in 1928 were unusual in the estate context: they were a lone man; two married women who were living apart from their husbands; and a widow, and all were childless.⁸⁷ However, that is not borne out in the rest of the outdoor relief lists, which indicate that although some married couples with children outside the estate did receive relief in kind, no greater proportion of those families experienced it than other family types. This is the case not just in 1927-1928, but also in earlier years.

The more likely explanation may be linked to the 1911 Relief Regulation Order, which specified that if guardians chose to relieve a 'male person' outside of an institution at least half of relief had to be given in kind. As alluded to above, the Order undermined itself by allowing for guardians to depart from its protocols if they saw fit and the LGB agreed.⁸⁸ The preference for relief in kind for the estate families, then, the majority of whom were headed by men, may be an indication of the Blaby guardians' interpretation of that order, as they adhered for the most part to the specification about

⁸⁶ ROLLR, G/5/136/31, 33-34, Blaby PLU, outdoor relief lists, 1927-1928.

⁸⁷ ROLLR, G/5/136/33-34, Blaby PLU, outdoor relief lists, 1928.

⁸⁸ 'Relief Regulation Order, 1911: Article 12', printed in LGB, *Annual Report, 1911-12*, p.42.

how much relief was allowed to be given in cash, in the face of rising numbers of applicants to whom legislation theoretically left fewer options.

So far, we have continued to address our key research question of how the poor law functioned during our period by piecing together an image of relief provision in Blaby union, both in terms of who received outdoor relief and what that relief looked like. The majority of recipient families were female-headed, with adult men and what we might describe as the ‘classic’ nuclear family rarely in evidence. Despite the large number of children featured in the outdoor relief lists, the majority of families receiving outdoor relief were childless, suggesting that outdoor relief recipients continued to be relatively elderly both before and after the old-age pension became accessible in 1911. Most received their relief in the form of cash payments, which grew in size in the interwar period and were sometimes, but far from regularly, accompanied by relief in kind.

The exceptions to this profile of pauperism in Blaby have been the families from the Saffron Lane estate, fitting neither the demographic nor usual relief profile of Blaby union. They have served to hint at a more complex relationship between old and new welfare structures, where people making use of the welfare reforms of the period, in this case social housing, could also move onto the poor law as well as off. It is Blaby union’s relationship with the Saffron Lane estate, and what this tells us about the significance of the poor law and the success of iconic welfare reforms in moving people away from pauperism, that is the focus of the next section.

2.7 Blaby poor law union and social housing

Histories of social housing are varied, from overview assessments of housing policy, to examinations of the tenements and model villages of the nineteenth century and the garden cities and council estates of the twentieth.⁸⁹ London has been the focus

⁸⁹ Overview texts include Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, S. Lowe and D. Hughes (eds.), *A New Century of Social Housing* (Leicester, 1991); J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1985* (Newton Abbot, 1986); and M J. Daunton (ed.), *Councillors and Tenants: Local Authority Housing in English Cities, 1919-1939* (Leicester, 1984); J. Melling (ed.), *Housing, Social Policy and the State* (London, 1980); A.S. Wohl, *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London* (London, 1977). The wide range of more narrowly-focused literature is highlighted in subsequent footnotes.

of the largest number of studies,⁹⁰ but working-class housing in places as varied as Buxton, Nottingham, Leeds and Worcestershire also features in existing literature.⁹¹ However, there are few such studies of Leicestershire,⁹² and historians have so far paid little attention to the relationship between social housing and the poor law both within and outside the Midlands.⁹³ This is despite the fact that all municipal housing built before 1930 fell within the boundaries of a poor law union, and that the movement of people usually warranted by the construction of a council estate could result, as we have observed in Blaby's case, in an influx of potential claimants on local poor law resources. Having already seen the impact that the Saffron Lane estate families had on Blaby union's poor law operations, and the way in which they stood out from the union's typical relief recipients, this chapter's final section explores how the Blaby board responded to this development, how they sought to manage this increased level of need, and reflects on what this means for the relationship between the 'old' welfare system of the poor law and the 'newer' early welfare state reforms. It argues that individuals could slip through the gaps between the latter provisions due to specific local factors which influenced how particular reforms were implemented, and asserts that the poor law therefore continued to play a significant role in plugging those gaps.

⁹⁰ See for example K. Bailey, 'The richest crop that it can grow': building estate development in nineteenth century Battersea', *The Local Historian*, 47:1 (2017), pp.13-28; M. Stilwell, 'Housing the workers: early London county council housing 1889-1914', *The Local Historian*, 41:4 (2011), pp.308-320; S. Pepper and P. Richmond, 'Stepney and the politics of high-rise housing: Limehouse Fields to John Scurr House, 1925-37', *The London Journal*, 34:1 (2009), pp.33-54.

⁹¹ See for example T. Hulme, 'Urban governance and civic responsibility: interwar council housing in Buxton', *Midland History*, 35:2 (2010), pp.237-255; P. Broxholme, 'Back to the future? The Tory party, paternalism, and housing policy in Nottingham 1919-1932', *Midland History*, 38:1 (2013), pp.99-118; J. Dunleavy, 'Ideal and reality: the principles of the garden city movement and the first council houses in Worcestershire', *The Local Historian*, 45:2 (2015), pp.97-114.

⁹² An exception to this is Brown, *Story of the Saff*.

⁹³ Existing work examining housing and the poor law focuses on earlier periods, such as M. Ayres, 'From poorhouse to workhouse: the erosion of publicly-owned housing in rural Dorset after 1834', *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society*, 131 (2010), pp.65-78; J. Broad, 'Housing the rural poor in southern England, 1650-1850', *Agricultural History Review*, 48:2 (2000), pp.151-170; R. Wells, 'The Poor Law Commission and publicly-owned housing in the English countryside, 1834-47', *Agricultural History Review*, 55:2 (2007), pp.181-204; C. Leivers, 'Housing the elderly in nineteenth-century Derbyshire: a comparison of almshouses and workhouse provision', *Local Population Studies*, 83 (2009), pp.56-65. Focused on an earlier period, several essays refer to the role of the poor law in finding, paying for and maintaining housing in J. McEwan and P. Sharpe (eds.), *Accommodating Poverty: The Housing and Living Arrangements of the English Poor, c.1600-1850* (Basingstoke, 2011). Helen Caffrey, although not concerned with the poor law, does consider the relationship between a local welfare culture where almshouses were prominent and the later development of social housing specifically for the elderly: 'Housing the elderly poor: from philanthropist to local authority', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 87:1 (2015), pp.170-192.

It is difficult to ascertain whether the influx onto Blaby union's outdoor relief lists from the Saffron Lane estate was anticipated. Indeed, the guardians' minute books suggest that the Blaby board did not realise the potential implications of the new council estate until they were upon them. The first indication that anything was afoot appeared in the minutes of the meeting held on 8th February 1927, when the cases of three relief applicants were considered under the heading of 'Unemployment Cases'. This was unusual for the Blaby guardians, who did not normally group the relief applications they discussed in this or indeed any way when recording them in the minutes. The applicants were married men, two of whom had dependent children – three in one family, and four in another. The relieving officer reported that these men had previously worked on relief schemes – programmes set up to provide work for unemployed people, for which they would receive relief in exchange - in Leicester, 'and had been allowed to rent houses on the new estate.'⁹⁴ As their new residences were outside the city, they were now disqualified from relief work provision in Leicester; this therefore cut them off from their source of relief, provoking their applications to Blaby union.⁹⁵ This was compounded by the rents required in estate housing –the clerk stated that 'the difficulty arose through the people to whom the houses were let not being in a position to pay the 14s. 6d. rent'.⁹⁶

The board did not feel that they could take responsibility for these cases. Chairman Percival Kendall pointed out that 'the guardians could not find these men any work, and they were unable to grant relief to able-bodied men unless they provided work for them',⁹⁷ although the applicant with four children was granted outdoor relief of 15s. in cash and 15s. in kind per week for an unspecified time period.⁹⁸ The guardians were not unsympathetic to the applicants' predicament - Joseph Armson argued that 'it was most unfair to let a man rent a house at 14s. a week, and then [to] stop his work', while William Atkins described the situation as 'ridiculous'.⁹⁹ The clerk reported that he had 'requested Leicester... to accept settlement in all these cases but had not yet received a reply'. He was instructed to attend a meeting of the Leicester

⁹⁴ *Leicester Daily Mercury*, 8th February 1927, p.1.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ ROLLR, G/5/8a/40, Blaby PLU, GMB, 8th February 1927.

⁹⁹ *Leicester Daily Mercury*, 8th February 1927, p.1.

guardians to discuss the issue and enquire whether ‘they will accept settlement in these cases, repay relief and find them work on the Leicester Corporation Relief Schemes’.¹⁰⁰ This type of enquiry was not necessarily unusual. Issues of settlement and removal in relation to particular cases came up often in Blaby union’s meetings, and it was common for clerks of different boards to discuss who was responsible for certain paupers and how much non-resident relief was to be paid. It was, however, unusual for the clerk to be directed to attend the meeting of another board to address this kind of question, as opposed to negotiating via letter, suggesting a new level of urgency and/or a need for delicate in-person negotiation in this particular situation. The board also resolved to form two committees, one for each district, to ‘deal with cases of unemployment’. These were in addition to the relief committees that already considered relief applications for each district.¹⁰¹

This sequence of decisions has a number of implications. First, it appears that unemployment was becoming an issue in Blaby union in a way it had not been earlier in the decade, as has been discussed above – the union had no relief works projects ongoing, and had not operated separate committees to handle unemployment relief until this point. Secondly, this problem was being moved into Blaby from Leicester – as unemployed men and their families moved into their new houses, their relief requirements were exported over the union boundaries. This kind of transition between poor law unions was not unheard of. Elizabeth Hurren has demonstrated that retrenchment of outdoor relief in Brixworth union in Northamptonshire ‘convinced many in the district to migrate’ during the 1870s and 1880s, thereby ‘resolving its social problems by exporting them to its neighbours’.¹⁰² Early twentieth-century Leicestershire obviously presents a different regional context to late nineteenth-century Northamptonshire. Nevertheless, here we see a similar process beginning to occur, this time triggered by welfare provision outside the poor law. Thirdly, as individuals lost access to their existing poor relief when they took advantage of the new Corporation housing, the gaps between ‘old’ and ‘new’ welfare provision were exposed. Rather than increasing families’ stability, residence on the Saffron Lane estate could actually place

¹⁰⁰ ROLLR, G/5/8a/40, Blaby PLU, GMB, 8th February 1927.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Hurren, *Protesting About Pauperism*, p.152.

more pressure on budgets, through both rent costs and disqualification from the relief schemes previously utilized.

Moreover, there was little cooperation between the Leicester guardians and the Leicester Corporation Housing Committee (LCHC) which might have prevented this. The day after the Blaby guardians' misgivings about the situation were reported in the *Leicester Daily Mercury*, the newspaper recorded the Leicester board's rather indifferent reaction, arguing that the numbers of people who had actually been disqualified from the relief works by their move to the Saffron Lane estate was very small, and that the Blaby guardians should start their own relief works. One Leicester guardian dismissed comments about the unfairness of allowing an individual to rent a house and then blocking his access to relief schemes as 'not correct', because 'the authority that lets the houses has nothing to do with the relief works'.¹⁰³ In other words, the bodies that governed these two forms of relief provision did not take the operations of the other into account when making individual welfare decisions.

The Blaby guardians were evidently aware of the role of LCHC in creating this situation. On 22nd February, in the first explicit reference to the Saffron Lane estate in the guardians' minutes, the clerk was directed to write to that committee 'protesting against the allocation of homes... to persons unemployed at the time of allocation of houses on their Saffron Lane Estate, Lubbethorpe, thus causing such persons to become chargeable to this union when they applied for relief owing to destitution'.¹⁰⁴ By this point, four estate residents had appeared in the outdoor relief lists, all married men with children.¹⁰⁵

This protest indicates that the Blaby board's aversion to these cases was financial, rather than an issue of deservedness. The fact that some of the Saffron Lane estate's new residents were already unemployed when allocated their houses made them, to use classic poor law terminology, 'at risk of becoming chargeable' - vulnerable to becoming destitute and making claims upon their local poor law administration – and therefore very undesirable union residents. These were not the 'undeserving poor' – indeed, according to a history of the estate produced by a group of residents, to be

¹⁰³ *Leicester Daily Mercury*, 9th February 1927, p.7.

¹⁰⁴ ROLLR, G/5/8a/40, Blaby PLU, GMB, 22th February 1927.

¹⁰⁵ ROLLR, G/5/136/31, Blaby PLU, outdoor relief lists, 1927.

allocated a house ‘at least three references’ were required ‘to say that you were of good character’,¹⁰⁶ and the guardians clearly thought these families had been unfairly treated. The problem was that these families posed a financial risk, exacerbated by the high rents for Corporation housing.

The potential expense of the Saffron Lane residents was evidently at the forefront of the guardians’ minds at the next board meeting on 8th March, when the Finance Committee recommended that the poor rates for the forthcoming six months be raised by an extra penny in the pound, ‘for extra relief likely to be required owing to unemployed men applying for relief after being allocated houses on the new Corporation Estate in Lubbesthorpe’.¹⁰⁷ Although this proposal was eventually rejected, this indicates awareness among the guardians, especially it seems among those involved more deeply in the finances of the union, that the estate residents could strain Blaby’s ordinary arrangements.

During the same meeting, the clerk reported on an interview that he, chairman Kendall and vice-chairman John Holmes had attended with the Leicester guardians. The news was not promising. The Leicester guardians ‘were not prepared to allow non-resident relief to the destitute unemployed men resident on the Saffron Estate, Lubbesthorpe’, despite accepting the settlement of these cases, ‘but they would be prepared to consider the matter if this board [Blaby] agreed to pay the first six months. If this was not acceptable to this board then they suggested that the matter should be deferred for three months’.¹⁰⁸

This created a real dilemma for the Blaby guardians. The destitute estate families, by virtue of living within Blaby’s boundaries and having applied for poor relief, could not be ignored, and their location made them unavoidably Blaby’s problem. However, their settlement was in Leicester, theoretically making their relief Leicester’s responsibility, via either non-resident relief or removal back to their union of settlement. Blaby had non-resident relief arrangements with a number of unions, including Leicester. But on this occasion the Leicester board saw fit to refuse to provide non-resident relief to the unemployed men on the Saffron Lane estate. This meant that Blaby

¹⁰⁶ Brown, *Story of the Saff*, p.7.

¹⁰⁷ ROLLR, G/5/8a/40, Blaby PLU, GMB, 8th March 1927.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

faced the distinctly unappealing prospect of having to use Blaby ratepayers' money to relieve families who did not technically belong to the union.

Why did the Leicester board refuse to provide non-resident relief on this occasion? Legally, they were backed up by the 1911 Relief Regulation Order, which did not allow outdoor relief as a result of unemployment. The Leicester guardians may have viewed offering non-resident relief to the estate families as opening the floodgates – once they had relieved a few, they may have reasoned, how could they refuse relief to the others that they estimated might apply in the future? If this was the case, they would have been right, as we know from Blaby's records which show increasing numbers of applicants from the estate over 1927-28. Similarly to the Brixworth union in Hurren's work, Leicester could therefore be seen as seizing the opportunity to wash its hands of these potential drains on the rates by refusing any responsibility once Blaby realized the trouble that Leicester's exports might cause them. Moreover, if the Leicester board was able to defer long enough, potential applicants could become irremovable from Blaby after living in the union continuously for a year under the 1865 Union Chargeability Act, even if their settlement still lay in Leicester, after which they would be paid for by their union of residence.¹⁰⁹ Their reference to deferred payments in the discussion with Blaby's representatives could therefore have been an attempt to wait for this transition to occur.

The Blaby board responded by authorizing the clerk to 'take order of removal against Leicester parish in each particular case' – in other words, to begin proceedings where appropriate to have applicants belonging to Leicester removed from their recently acquired Corporation houses and sent back to their union of settlement.¹¹⁰ Despite various irremovability clauses, such as that mentioned above, making it more difficult to remove medium- to long-term 'non-settled poor', removal was not impossible even in this relatively late period. The second part of Blaby's response was a decision, 'in view of the exceptional circumstances now existing in this union' to exercise Act XI of the Relief Regulation Order for a period of 13 weeks, which enabled the guardians 'to afford a male person relief other than institutional relief' in exchange for work set by

¹⁰⁹ 'Union Chargeability Act, 1865' (28 & 29 Vict. c.79), printed in PLB: *Annual Report, 1865-1866* (1866), pp.26-28. See Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.270, 311.

¹¹⁰ ROLLR, G/5/8a/40, Blaby PLU, GMB, 8th March 1927.

the board, which in this case was ‘working in the garden at the workhouse, and wood sawing and chopping’.¹¹¹ The board had decided to relieve the Saffron Lane estate families themselves.

This scheme continued for the next two years, with the board obliged to reapply for MoH sanction of a renewal every three months. As is attested by the outdoor relief lists, the number of estate families receiving outdoor relief of some kind continued to grow. Despite authorizing the clerk to enforce removals if needed, it appears that was rarely actually implemented. This may have been because some families had indeed become irremovable. In May 1927, the clerk reported that he had taken orders of removal against Leicester in the cases of two estate families, but they had both ‘gone off relief’ after the orders had been made. The wife of one estate resident who had appeared on the outdoor relief lists was removed back to Leicester with her youngest child in December 1928, while her three elder children were admitted to the Countesthorpe Cottage Homes.¹¹² However, this was after the family had entered the Blaby workhouse, and the woman and young child in question were to be removed to the Leicester institution, perhaps indicating that this was a more complex situation than most cases where residential care of some kind was merited. There seemed to be uncertainty as to the advisability of the removal of the unemployed – in the autumn of that year, a committee was appointed to investigate this question, and the advice of a lawyer was obtained, but the issue was not much clarified.¹¹³ It does appear that the Blaby guardians continued to keep the option of removal open, including in unemployment cases unrelated to the Saffron Lane estate, even when this seemed to be at odds with practice in other unions. In July 1928, Salford union protested against a removal order Blaby had obtained against them and suggested that Blaby ‘should adopt the practice of other unions in cases of unemployment’, but the board resolved that they ‘cannot see their way to depart from their previous decision to take orders in these cases’.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² ROLLR, G/5/60/4, Blaby PLU, workhouse admissions and discharge register, 3rd December 1928, 17 December 1928. The Countesthorpe Cottage Homes, although within the boundaries of Blaby union, were owned and operated by Leicester.

¹¹³ ROLLR, G/5/8a/40, Blaby PLU, GMB, 3rd May 1927.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 31st July 1928.

Aside from removal, however, it is clear that Blaby was obliged to expand their operations to cater for their new pauper population on the Saffron Lane estate. In January 1928, they were obliged to rent a room for the Enderby District Relieving Officer on the estate itself so he could more conveniently interview applicants and distribute relief.¹¹⁵ In July of the same year Dr. Berridge, one of the union's medical officers, asked for his yearly salary to be more than doubled from £10 to £25 per annum as 'he was unable to carry out the extra work on the Corporation Estate, Lubbesthorpe' on his current salary.¹¹⁶ The guardians did not agree to this, but the fact that Berridge felt justified in his request indicates a significant increase in demands on his time had developed as a result of the new estate. Perhaps Berridge's appeal was a tactical one, which he did not expect to be granted but would force the guardians to rethink the coverage of the estate by their poor law officials. If this was his intention, it worked. The guardians employed a Dr. Philip Snoad as District Medical Officer and public vaccinator specifically for Lubbesthorpe,¹¹⁷ implying that his focus was entirely on the Saffron Lane estate, given that in 1921 that parish had a population of only 118. These developments demonstrate that the demands the Corporation estate made on Blaby union were not only financial, as evident in the outdoor relief lists, but also administrative, logistical, and medical.

There were small signs over this period that the population of the estate was becoming part of the union's ecosystem. Leicester did in the end agree to provide non-resident relief in a handful of cases. These were largely the atypical family types in the context of the estate residents who were receiving relief – four widows in 1927, and three of the same women as well as two more widows, a single man, a married man with four children and a male recipient without a marital categorization in 1928. This evidence supports the suggestion that Leicester used the 1911 Relief Regulation Order to avoid relieving unemployed men with families, only relieving those who were likely to have required relief for other reasons. Other examples of the estate's integration include women resident in Lubbesthorpe fostering children the Blaby guardians had seen fit to board out,¹¹⁸ and in October 1929 Blaby accepted without argument the

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 10th January 1928.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 10th July 1928.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 4th September 1928.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 16th April 1929 and 26th November 1929.

chargeability of a woman and her child who had fallen suddenly ill while in Leicester, 'their home address being at Lubbesthorpe'.¹¹⁹ Other residents of the estate received non-resident relief from places other than Leicester – for instance, one married man with children lived in Lubbesthorpe but their outdoor relief was covered by Market Bosworth union.¹²⁰ Although these cases do not refer explicitly to the estate by name, given the small size of Lubbesthorpe parish's population prior to the estate's construction, it seems likely that they referred to Saffron Lane residents. In June 1929, the MoH decided not to renew the allowance for Blaby union to deviate from the regulations of the 1911 Order as 'there are not sufficient cases to justify continued adoption of the powers under this article'. However, 'relief may be given conditional upon performance of a task'.¹²¹ The Blaby guardians accepted the Ministry's decision. The Saffron Lane estate families were no longer to be dealt with via a solution designed only for short-term problems; the lapsing of the allowances made for them under the 1911 Order indicates that they were no longer exceptions to union policy, but integrated into it.

Despite the intentions of politicians and policy-makers to move people away from pauperism via the new welfare reforms of the early twentieth century, this case study has demonstrated that the reality of implementation at a local level was more complex than might be imagined by a national-scale observer. In the relationship between Blaby union and the Saffron Lane estate, the 'old' and 'new' welfare systems working alongside each other. Indeed, in several cases the new social housing provision would be inaccessible without support from the poor law. In order to benefit from this element of the 'new' welfare system, the 'old' was still required to make ends meet. Returning to one of our key thesis research questions, then, it is clear that in this context, the welfare reform of this period was unsuccessful in detaching people from engagement with the poor law. In this instance, the Saffron Lane estate only succeeded in moving the need for relief from one locality to another, displaying long-term continuity with poor law rhythms which have been observed for earlier periods. As a result, Blaby union's experience clearly exemplifies the poor law's continued significance in the poor's survival strategies. Its officials moreover demonstrated

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 1st October 1929.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 26th November 1929.

¹²¹ Ibid., 11th June 1929.

considerable flexibility, utilising a number of procedural avenues available to them in order to tackle a problematic situation which trapped them between their responsibilities to their own ratepayers and to the destitute. The poor law remained a crucial part of the welfare landscape, functioning as a safety net underneath, and stepping stone to, the state-led alternatives on offer.

2.8 Conclusions

In this first case study, we have investigated local poor law administration in a level of detail rarely attempted for this later period. The opening section of this chapter described Blaby as a baseline in this thesis, as it was a semi-rural region without crises or dramatic socio-economic changes, and with a broad-based and varied labour market, during the early twentieth century. In such a context, a set of distinct relief practices have emerged, some of which indicate a long-term continuity with the New Poor Law of earlier decades, and others which demonstrate that poor law administration was changing in Blaby during these years, although not always in line with existing narratives.

One way in which Blaby union appears unusual in the context of existing literature is in terms of the issue of governance structures, power distribution within them and whether they were ‘open’ or ‘closed’, to use Steve King’s phrase. Blaby pursued a rather egalitarian approach whereby – despite the efforts of the occasional outlier – authority was shared out among a wide range of board members and parishes. It is difficult in this case study to see a dominant individual or allied group who exerted disproportionate influence of board decision-making, making Blaby an exception in the context of extant work on guardian dynamics. This raises the question of just how unusual policy of this kind was, which will be addressed in comparison with the subsequent case studies in this thesis. Another feature of governance in Blaby which is more aligned with existing studies, although at the same time indicates change in terms of the poor law timeline, was that the legislation expanding both the electorate and the pool of potential electoral candidates in 1894 and 1918 did affect who was returned as guardians in the union. The board became increasingly more inclusive over the course of our period, incorporating more women and a wider variety of social classes.

Although female board members, for instance, rarely led on ‘typically male’ issues such as union finance, these factors suggest a board where governance structures were more ‘open’ than ‘closed’ during our period.

In terms of actual relief provision, there is more evidence of continuity in Blaby’s policies. Poor relief in the union lacked an ‘institutional focus’, with outdoor relief consistently the majority experience among those interacting with the poor law, and was therefore in keeping with the dominance of relief outside the workhouse observed by other scholars in most regions for the majority of the nineteenth century.¹²² A typical relief profile became evident among those receiving this relief which indicated that, in part because of a stable socio-economic context not overly subject to cyclical or seasonal fluctuations, Blaby was primarily relieving various forms of life-cycle poverty. Thus, Blaby paupers were likely to be relatively elderly, both before and after the introduction of the pension, and rather *unlikely* to be adult men, with pauper children largely clustered in families headed by widows instead of married couples. Although the middle stage highlighted by Snell of married couples with multiple dependent children seems to have been represented by a relative minority of cases in the union, this does align with other work which has emphasised, for instance, the historic proliferation of the elderly among poor relief recipients.

However, the clarity of this ‘typical profile’ of relief provision in the union meant that, upon their arrival, the Saffron Lane estate families looked and were treated differently in extant records, being on the whole unlike Blaby’s usual pauper population both in terms of their demographic profile and the type of relief most received. The relationship between the Saffron Lane estate and Blaby union led us to perhaps the most important finding of this case study in terms of how we conceive of the poor law and the early welfare state. While the response to the old-age pension in the union broadly aligned with the established story of the poor law’s decline in scope, as new welfare reforms addressed the poor’s needs in a more regionally uniform and less stigmatising way, the impact of local social housing provision on poor law operations in Blaby has shown that this was not always so. In reality, the ‘old’ and ‘new’ welfare systems not only worked alongside each other in Blaby union, but social housing was actually made accessible in some cases by continued use of the poor law. By reconstructing this

¹²² See Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp.211-212.

relationship, this case study has two important implications. Firstly, it emphasises the continued significance of the poor law as an element in the survival strategies of poor people that was not always diminished by the advent of alternative welfare resources, demonstrating that relegation of the poor law to a minor role during this period is misguided. Secondly, it shows the essentiality of examining iconic welfare reforms such as interwar social housing provision both through a local as opposed to national lens. Very specific local conditions - the particular physical location of the new estate in relation to the union itself, to Leicester union and to Leicester Corporation – were the key contributing factors in generating Blaby's Saffron Lane dilemma. It is these local relationships and interactions that reveal the reality of these reforms' impact – interactions which are invisible when taking a more distant view. In the next chapter, these issues are explored in a markedly different area of the Midlands, in Staffordshire.

Chapter 3: Stafford and Newcastle-under-Lyme poor law unions, Staffordshire

3.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter explored the poor law in a semi-rural locality which was broadly stable in socio-economic terms, despite occasional pressure on its welfare provision and administrative structures. Now, this thesis moves from the East Midlands to our next case study of two poor law unions in the West Midlands: Stafford and Newcastle-under-Lyme (hereafter referred to simply as Newcastle) in north Staffordshire. Here we find a much more heavily industrialised regional context, and therefore a much higher vulnerability to the industrial unrest and economic downturns experienced by key industries during our period, particularly in the 1920s. Stafford and Newcastle therefore provide a strikingly different and valuable lens through which to consider the research questions of this thesis.

In the following Section 3.2, a brief overview of the local socio-economic context of both unions is provided.¹ Section 3.3 then examines the boards of guardians in Stafford and Newcastle, and the impact (or lack thereof) of expansions in local democracy in 1894 and 1918 on their make-up. It explores how the nature of board leadership in Stafford and Newcastle differed to Blaby union, and what their practices in this area suggest about guardians' priorities in terms of relief administration.² Section 3.4 considers the uses of indoor and outdoor relief in these unions, using expenditure

¹ Regional scholarship focusing on Staffordshire has so far been mostly dominated by economic and religious history. A useful reference guide to the available literature is C.J. Harrison (ed.), *A Bibliography of the History of Staffordshire* (Keele, 2004). Perhaps the best general introduction to the county is M.W. Greenslade and D.G. Stuart, *A History of Staffordshire* (Chichester, 3rd ed., 1998).

² For guardian studies, see S. King, *Women, Welfare and Local Politics, 1880-1920: We Might Be Trusted* (Brighton, 2006); K. Rothery, 'The implementation and administration of the New Poor Law in Hertfordshire, c.1830-1847', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2017) and 'Who do they think they are? An analysis of the boards of guardians in Hertfordshire', *Local Population Studies*, 99:1 (2017), pp.20-30.

records as a starting point. The relief patterns of Stafford and Newcastle over time are examined, including a discussion of the impact of the old-age pension on relief operation in these West Midlands unions. The effect of the 1920s' unemployment crises are the central feature of the rest of the chapter, exploring in Section 3.5 how these crises manifested themselves in Stafford and Newcastle unions. How did they approach the problem of unemployment relief? To what extent did these approaches change over time, and what do they tell us about how the guardians perceived their responsibilities as officials tasked with relieving distress? Experiences of the 1926 coal strike are considered separately, in Section 3.6, and the way that crisis was tackled is compared with earlier in the decade. This discussion feeds into the question of the poor law's flexibility and adaptability under pressure. The New Poor Law and its theoretical emphasis on the workhouse (albeit patchily enforced) was not constructed to cope with enormous urban or industrial unemployment.³ The extent to which local poor law officials were able to cope successfully when such situations arose is therefore a pivotal consideration in this chapter.

In this way, this second case study addresses key research questions outlined in Section 1.3 of Chapter 1. First, it adds to the regional mosaic of existing poor law studies by examining how the poor law operated 'on the ground' in these industrialised but not predominantly urban places, during the much neglected early twentieth century. Secondly, through the boards of guardians it considers the governance structures in the two unions, the impact of legislation expanding access to local democracy in 1894 and 1918, and the extent to which they might be described as 'open' or 'closed'.⁴ Thirdly, it assesses whether a recognisable 'regional welfare culture' can be observed in north Staffordshire, exploring where our two unions fit in key models of welfare practice and testing whether these model can be applied to the early twentieth century.⁵ Finally, this case study investigates how successful specific welfare reforms of the period were in enabling people to avoid turning to the poor law in this locality, focusing particularly on the old-age pension and unemployment support. It examines the relationship between

³ M. Rose, *The English Poor Law 1780-1930* (Newton Abbot, 1971), p.110.

⁴ See S. King, 'Welfare regimes and welfare regions in Britain and Europe, c.1750-1860', *Journal of Modern European History*, 9:1 (2011), p.59.

⁵ S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000), p.257, 261-262.

these welfare reforms and the nature and extent of poor relief provision, suggesting again a complex relationship between ‘old’ and ‘new’ welfare systems.

The decision to examine two unions in this case study was motivated by several factors. It allows for the intra-regional comparison of welfare administrations (which is largely lacking in existing literature) between unions in the same county, as well as the comparison between Staffordshire unions and other Midlands and Welsh unions made by this thesis more widely.⁶ Stafford and Newcastle unions in particular capture the main features of Staffordshire’s industrial landscape, incorporating coal-mining and iron and steel works as well as large electrical engineering factories, lighter textile manufacturing, and in Stafford union’s case agricultural production. As a result, their experiences can be seen as more representative of the wider county. At a purely practical level, the use of both unions combines two sets of surviving records which, although stronger in terms of the period covered and variety of documents than most other Staffordshire unions, would still be a little thin if considered alone. Stafford union has a greater range of document types surviving, including some weekly returns to the poor law inspector, but less consistent coverage of the full period, while the opposite is true for Newcastle union. Together, therefore, these two unions provide the breadth and depth of source material for a detailed and representative case study analysis.

As in all the case studies, both qualitative and quantitative material is utilised. Data extracted from minute books, returns to poor law inspectors, outdoor relief lists and application and report books are used to re-construct relief patterns. At the same time, these sources are linked with the outlines of guardians’ meetings found in their minute books and reports on poor law matters in regional newspapers, particularly the *Staffordshire Advertiser*. These put flesh on the skeleton of local welfare operations created by expenditure data and levels of relief recipients, providing insights into the discussions that lay behind various relief decisions, and also into differences in attitudes between guardians themselves. Where appropriate some material generated at the central government level is also utilised, such as the annual reports of the general poor

⁶ Two examples which do involve intra-regional comparison in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are M. Levine-Clark, *Unemployment, Welfare and Masculine Citizenship: ‘So Much Honest Poverty’ in Britain, 1870-1930* (Basingstoke, 2015), and R. Talbot, ‘North-south divide of the poor in the Staffordshire Potteries, 1871-1901’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2017).

law inspectors responsible for Staffordshire, included in the majority of Local Government Board (LGB) and some Ministry of Health (MoH) annual reports.

3.2 Regional context

Despite Staffordshire having been described in traditional histories as ‘one vast coalfield’,⁷ both Stafford and Newcastle unions contained variety beyond the industry often associated with the county.⁸ Engineering firms were some of the most significant employers in the town of Stafford by the early twentieth century, particularly the German company Siemens which opened a large electrical engineering works there in 1903. Indeed, this sector rather supplanted footwear manufacture, which had been the dominant industry in the town during much of the nineteenth century.⁹ Stafford union was classified by poor law inspector Robert Duff as semi-rural; it was made up of 25 parishes, most of which were much smaller than the union town (23,500 of the union’s 35,000 inhabitants lived in Stafford) and still chiefly concerned with agriculture, although several also contained businesses related to the region’s coal and iron industries, such as coal merchants and nail makers. This meant that levels of welfare need in the union could still be gravely affected by economic disruption in the mining or other heavy industries, even without having the core of those industries represented in the union itself.

Although Newcastle union bordered Stoke-on-Trent and the Pottery towns, as can be seen in Figure 3.1, none of its eleven parishes were centres of the ceramics industry.¹⁰ During the nineteenth century and earlier, a range of trades flourished in the town and its immediate surroundings, including ironworking, brewing, light

⁷ M.W. Greenslade and J.G. Jenkins (eds.), *Victoria County History: Staffordshire – Vol. II* (Oxford, 1967), p.68.

⁸ Much existing literature on Staffordshire’s trade and industrial history has focused on mining, iron and steel production, as well as ceramics manufacture in the Potteries. These include but are not limited to J. Benson (ed.), *The miners of North Staffordshire 1840-1914* (Keele, 1993); A.D.M. Phillips (ed.), *The Potteries: Continuity and Change in a Staffordshire Conurbation* (Stroud, 1993); L.H. Merrett, ‘Staffordshire industries’, *Industrial Archaeology*, 8, (1978), pp.60-66; and P. Booth, ‘The Staffordshire pottery industry in the nineteenth century and its markets’, *Staffordshire Studies*, 13 (2001), pp.109-26.

⁹ M.A. Greenslade and D.A. Johnson (eds.), *Victoria County History: Staffordshire – Vol. VI*, p.220.

¹⁰ J.G. Jenkins (ed.), *Victoria County History: Staffordshire – Vol VIII* (Oxford, 1963), p.52.

manufacturing of various kinds, silk throwing and tanning.¹¹ Many of these trades had significantly declined by the early twentieth century, but brewing and paper-making (supplying the neighbouring ceramics factories) survived into the 1900s, as did uniform manufacture for railway employees, the police and the army.¹² As Anthony Phillips points out, the absence of heavy industry on a significant scale in the town meant that it did not experience rapid industrialisation and escaped ‘many of the social and developmental problems encountered in the Pottery towns’.¹³ By the late nineteenth century, Newcastle had become largely residential, housing large numbers of people who worked in the Potteries.¹⁴ By 1921, for example, 52 percent of occupied persons living in Newcastle were working elsewhere, mostly in Stoke-on-Trent.¹⁵ Outside the town itself, the North Staffordshire coal seam was another major source of local employment.¹⁶ Extensive coal mines and iron works were present in the parishes of Audley and Madeley, employing almost all of their 17,500 residents.¹⁷ Similarly to Stafford, then, the union was vulnerable to disruptions in heavy industry, both as a direct source of income for large numbers of residents and because of the knock-on effects on other major local employers such as the ceramics sector.

¹¹ Ibid., pp.50-52.

¹² *Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire, 1912* (London, 1912), p.307.

¹³ A.D.M. Phillips, ‘The growth of the conurbation’ in Phillips (ed.), *The Potteries*, p.128.

¹⁴ Jenkins (ed.), *Staffordshire – Vol VIII*, p.52.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The Black Country has received more scholarly attention than most other mining areas of the county, including Marjorie Levine-Clark's excellent recent contribution *Unemployment, Welfare and Masculine Citizenship*. Other Black Country literature includes G. Barnsby, *Social Conditions in the Black Country* (Wolverhampton, 1980); S. Blackburn, ‘Working-class attitudes to social reform: Black Country chainmakers and anti-sweating legislation 1880-1930’, *International Review of Social History*, 33:1 (1988), pp.42-69; to D. Phillips, *Crime and Authority in Victorian England: The Black Country 1835-1860* (London, 1977); R.H. Trainor, *Black Country Elites: The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area 1830-1900* (Oxford, 1987).

¹⁷ *Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire, 1904* (London, 1904), p.31, 378.

Figure 3.1 Stafford and Newcastle unions within Staffordshire.

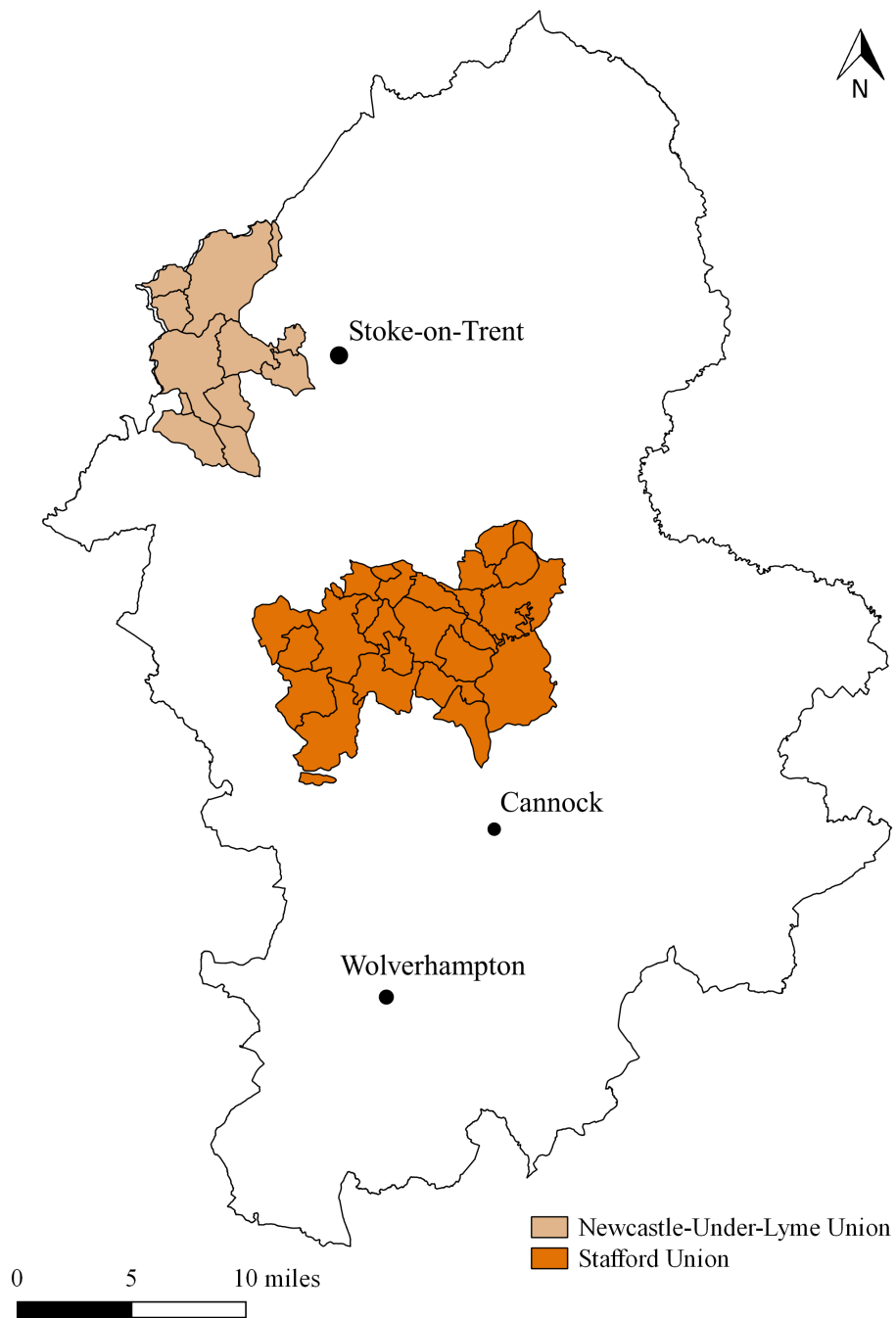
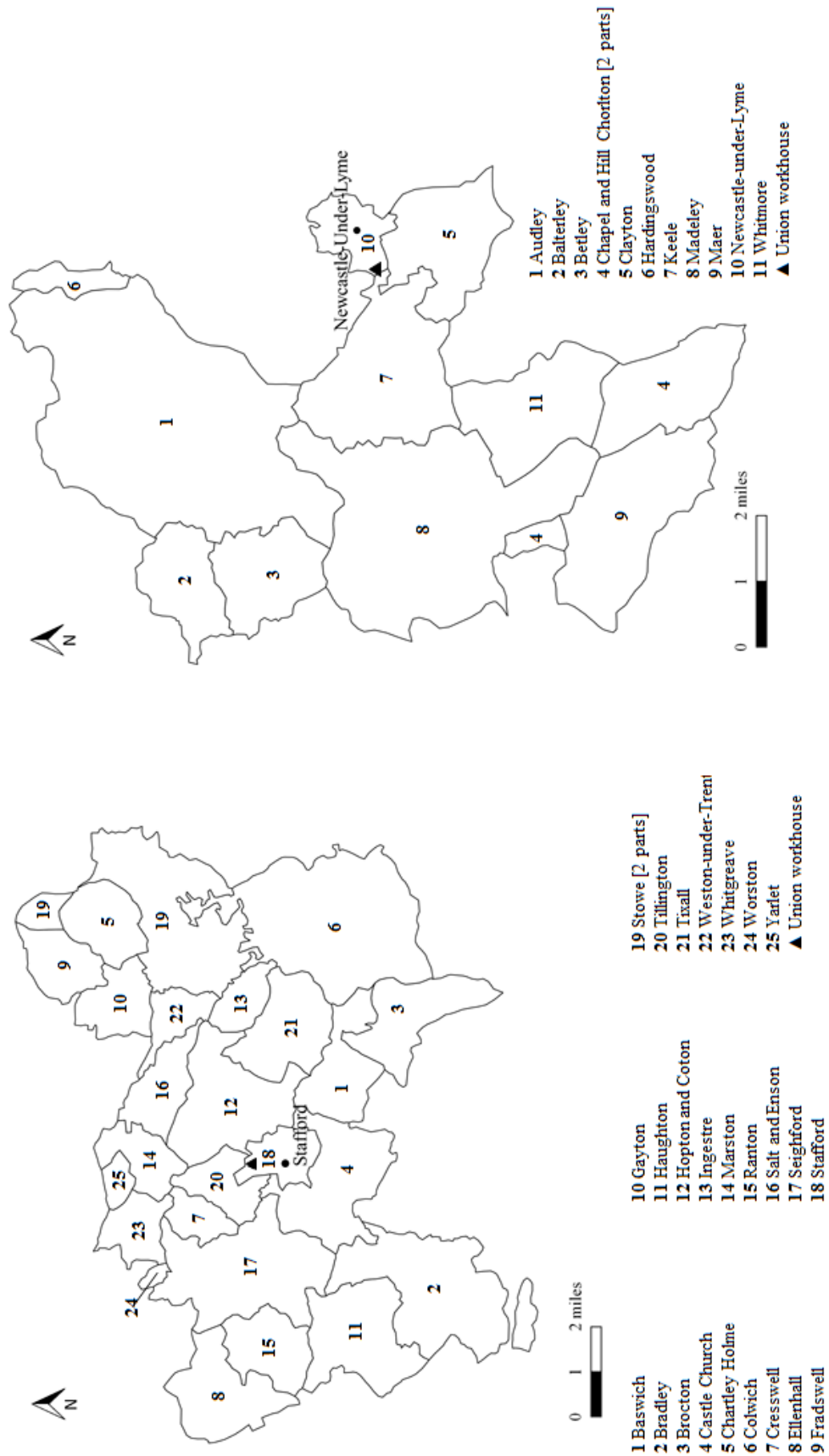


Figure 3.2 Stafford and Newcastle unions with parishes labelled.



3.3 The Stafford and Newcastle guardians

This socio-economic context, with heavy industry and coal-mining looming large, could easily be associated with a certain kind of local political trajectory, and therefore a particular kind of board of guardians. In Anne Digby's work on north-eastern England, where labour markets were dominated by broadly similar types of industry, she highlights the increasing influence in local government of the Labour party in the interwar period, particularly after the 1918 Representation of the People Act enfranchised largely working-class populations, who often campaigned for less draconian welfare policies.¹⁸ One might expect such trends to be visible on the boards of guardians in north Staffordshire too, perhaps with groundwork laid by electoral pressure applied by more working-class people in the wake of the 1894 Local Government Act.¹⁹

However, this was not the case. Outside the boards of guardians, neither Stafford nor Newcastle were particularly lively in political terms, and were somewhat removed from national party politics. Prior to 1885, Stafford had consistently elected one Liberal and one Conservative MP for some 50 years, and after its representation was reduced to one, returned three Liberals and two Conservatives over the next four decades. Miners' leader Alexander MacDonald was elected as a Stafford MP in 1874, and as an endorsed candidate of the Labour Representation League became one of the first 'overtly labour' members of parliament,²⁰ but the Labour party itself subsequently struggled to become a significant political force in the locality. David Rolf has suggested this was partly due to the high in-migration experienced in the West Midlands,²¹ as local solidarity was weakened by high immigration of workers attracted to the 'new industrial undertakings'.²² The constituency of Newcastle meanwhile was dominated by Josiah Wedgwood, who served as MP from 1906 until 1942, first as a Liberal and then from

¹⁸ A. Digby, 'Changing welfare cultures in region and state', *Twentieth Century British History*, 17:3 (2006), pp.300-301.

¹⁹ See for instance E. Hurren, *Protesting About Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Victorian Britain, 1870-1900* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp.214-241.

²⁰ R. Lewis, 'MacDonald [formerly McDonald], Alexander', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, www.oxforddnb.com [accessed 29/01/2018].

²¹ This is demonstrated in C. Pooley and J. Turnbull, *Migration and Mobility in Britain since the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1998), pp.82-83.

²² D. Rolf, 'Labour and politics in the West Midlands between the wars', *North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies*, 18 (1978), p.42.

1919 as a Labour member. David Cannadine has pointed out that this was ‘a remarkable tribute both to his unrivalled local appeal, and to the fidelity of the voters’, given that he could be a figure of controversy both personally and politically.²³ Wedgwood rarely totally aligned with the parties he represented, however, ‘more often against the government than on its side’ as a Liberal and ‘steadily more independent’ of the Labour party throughout the 1920s.²⁴ This distance is reflected in the lower levels of local politics in Newcastle. Frank Bealey *et al.* have suggested that in municipal politics, the chief division was ‘in no way connected with national parties, with Conservatives and Liberals on both sides’: so-called Improvers who were keen to advance social conditions in the borough, and the Economizers who ‘were opposed to any improvement that would increase the rates’.²⁵

This less than vigorous engagement with party politics was mirrored in elections for the Stafford and Newcastle boards of guardians, where the limited success of the Labour candidates reflected the region’s wider tendencies, in contrast with Digby’s findings. In Stafford’s case, the immediate aftermath of the 1894 and 1918 Acts did see increased diversity in political representation on the board, but this did not translate into permanent change. In the first elections under the 1894 Act in December that year, the *Staffordshire Advertiser* reported that ‘very considerable advantage had been taken [in Stafford union] of the abolition... of the previously existing qualifications for guardians, whether by property or sex’.²⁶ Four of Stafford’s 46 guardian seats were obtained by ‘Labour representatives’ on this occasion, and two women ‘polled strongly, though they failed to gain a seat’.²⁷ However, this promising start did not bear fruit in subsequent years. The contest for the four guardian seats in the parish of Colwich was reported to have been ‘fought politically’ in 1898, where four Conservatives were successful against an ‘Independent Conservative’ and a Liberal candidate.²⁸ However, that this was thought to be worthy of press comment perhaps indicates that an explicitly political election was rare, and particularly in the parishes outside Stafford town itself, a

²³ D. Cannadine, ‘Josiah Wedgwood and the History of Parliament’, *Staffordshire Studies*, 11 (1999), p.6.

²⁴ C.V. Wedgwood, revised by M. Pottle, ‘Wedgwood, Josiah Clement, first Baron Wedgwood’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, www.oxforddnb.com [accessed 30/11/2017].

²⁵ F. Bealey, J. Blondel and W.P. McCann, *Constituency Politics: A Study of Newcastle-under-Lyme* (London, 1965), p.43.

²⁶ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 22nd December 1894, p.6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 9th April 1898, p.3.

contest of any kind was quite unusual. In the decade or so after the 1918 Representation of the People Act there was an increased Labour presence on the Stafford board, as the party contested 11 out of the 16 seats allocated to the urban wards in 1922 and won six, but it held only four in 1925, and two in 1928. This minority position of Labour did not mean that there was an overt Liberal or Conservative dominance on the Stafford board - in the elections during the 1920s, the majority of candidates for seats in the Stafford wards were recorded as 'independent'. Overall, then, the Stafford board was not politically charged in the sense that Digby's case studies were, and the 1894 and 1918 Acts had little long-term impact in this way.

The culture in Newcastle was not dissimilar, with party political elements rarely in evidence in the union's guardian elections, and contests for seats far from guaranteed with the division between the 'Improvers' and 'Economizers' identified by Bealey *et al.* more visible. In the 1894 contest for the seven seats allocated to Newcastle town, for instance, six candidates 'ran together on what may be termed "moderate" principles, as distinguished from the "progressive" attitudes taken' by four others.²⁹ The 'progressives' were defeated, with the return of five of the 'moderates' and two 'independent' candidates.³⁰ Likewise, in 1904 the only contest in the union took place at Madeley, where 'a good deal of opposition was raised during the campaign to the sewage scheme being at present carried out, and two of the old members [of the rural district council and board of guardians] lost their seats.'³¹ The nature of this opposition is not clear, but given that the scheme's implementation had a considerable impact on the calls set by the Rural District Council the previous October, it seems likely that it was connected to expenditure.³² Election result announcements in the press during the interwar period barely mentioned allegiances of any kind, let alone party politics. As in Stafford, the 1894 and 1918 Acts do not seem to have changed political representation among Newcastle guardians in any noticeable way, with established positions based around attitudes to local government expenditure remaining an organising principle.

Who were the guardians representing these two unions? Tables 3.1 and 3.2 present the boards elected in Stafford and Newcastle in the December 1894 election,

²⁹ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 22nd December 1894, p.6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 2nd April 1904, p.6.

³² *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 10th October 1903, p.5.

offering an image of the typical group profile in each union. Due to the lack of contests in these unions, and often the scant details supplied in existing sources about individual guardians, it is difficult to confirm the parishes and occupations of board members and therefore to build complete pictures of the full board during our period, even when cross-referencing press coverage, trade directories and the census. However, extant material indicates that the boards looked broadly the same in terms of occupation, gender distribution and social class throughout most of the early twentieth century. Although Newcastle's board was much smaller than Stafford's, both included a range of agriculturalists, professional and businessmen, with farmers and shoe manufacturers – attributes in common with Blaby – well-represented among Stafford's guardians. Strikingly, relatively few representatives of the mining industry were present. Even the parish of Audley, which was dominated by coal-mining, elected a farmer, a retired publican and two women married to a farmer and grocer respectively in 1894. Some members of working-class origins are visible on the Stafford board in Table 3.1, notably William Salisbury, one of the union's longest serving guardians who spent eight years as vice-chairman and four as chairman of the board - he left school at the age of 10 and spent his working life in engineering firms, rising to the position of foreman.³³ However, there is little surviving evidence that suggests employees rather than employers joined either board in greater numbers over the course of our period.

³³ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 20th November 1920, p.5.

Table 3.1 Board of guardians in Stafford poor law union in 1894.

Surname	First name	Title	Parish/ward	Occupation
Levett	William Swynnerton Byrd	Capt.	Baswich	Gentleman
Twigg	Henry	Mr.	Baswich	Gentleman
Sillito	Walter John	Mr.	Bradley	Farmer
Chetwynd	Charles	Mr.	Brocton	Gentleman
Moore	R.	Mr.	Castle Church	Retired farmer
Pitt	Edwin	Mr.	Castle Church	Shoe manufacturer
Sandy	Henry	Mr.	Castle Church	Seedsman & estate agent
Butland	Benjamin Joseph	Rev.	Colwich	Clergyman (Roman Catholic)
Dobree	Osmond	Rev.	Colwich	Clergyman (C of E)
Gouldbourn	Joseph	Mr.	Colwich	Farmer
Weetman	Henry	Mr.	Colwich	Cotton manufacturer
Addison	James Flockhart	Mr.	Ellenhall	Solicitor
Chadwick	Samuel	Mr.	Fradswell	Farmer
Jones	W.	Mr.	Gayton	Unknown
James	Lewis Henry	Mr.	Haughton	Farmer
Dodd	Samuel	Mr.	Hopson and Coton	Farmer
Mynors	Walter Charles Towers	Mr.	Ingestre	Land agent
Ravenscroft	John	Mr.	Marston	Farmer & cheesemaker
James	William W.	Mr.	Ranton	Farmer
Jones	Samuel Wickham	Rev.	Salt and Enson	Clergyman (C of E)
Collier	James	Mr.	Seighford with Worston	Farmer
Perry	Edwin Creswell	Rev.	Seighford with Worston	Clergyman (C of E)
Acton	Edward Charles	Canon	Stafford (East)	Clergyman (Roman Catholic)
Concoran	Bartholomew	Mr.	Stafford (East)	Painter & plumber
Croudace	James Henry	Mr.	Stafford (East)	Surgeon
Cull	Edwin	Mr.	Stafford (East)	Shoe laster
Ebborn	William	Mr.	Stafford (East)	Shoe manufacturer
Peach	William	Mr.	Stafford (East)	Shoe manufacturer
Podmore	John	Mr.	Stafford (East)	Shoe manufacturer
Salisbury	William	Mr.	Stafford (East)	Mechanic
Bishop	Edward	Mr.	Stafford (West)	Wine and spirit merchant
Flamack	George J.	Mr.	Stafford (West)	Retired Inland Revenue officer
Gislingham	Frank	Mr.	Stafford (West)	Printer's reader
Greatrex	Frederic	Mr.	Stafford (West)	Solicitor
Hammond	Alfred	Mr.	Stafford (West)	Shoe finisher
Jordan	Harry Hewitt	Mr.	Stafford (West)	Solicitor
Norman	Denham Rowe	Rev.	Stafford (West)	Clergyman (C of E)
Wormal	George	Mr.	Stafford (West)	Architect
Turnock	Hugh Smith	Mr.	Stowe with Chartley	Farmer
Woolley	Frederick	Mr.	Stowe with Chartley	Farmer
Carter	Henson	Mr.	Tillington with Creswell	Paste-fitter
Sampson	William	Mr.	Tillington with Creswell	Farmer
Wall	Charles	Mr.	Tillington with Creswell	Painter
Dodd	Henry	Mr.	Tixall	Farmer & threshing machine owner
Foster	Henry	Mr.	Weston-on-Trent	Brewer & farmer
Knight	James	Mr.	Whitgreave and Yarlet	Farmer & farm bailiff

Source: Staffordshire Advertiser, 8th December 1894, p.6; Staffordshire Advertiser, 22nd December 1894, p.6.

Table 3.2 Board of guardians in Newcastle union elected in 1894.

Surname	First name	Title	Parish/ward	Occupation
Booth	George	Mr.	Audley	Farmer
Corbett	Sarah	Mrs.	Audley	Married woman
Gater	James	Mr.	Audley	Retired publican
Washington	Sarah	Mrs.	Audley	Married woman
Billington	John Somner	Mr.	Balterley	Farmer
Wrench	John	Mr.	Betley	Farmer
Wilkinson	Robert Samuel	Mr.	Chapel and Hill Chorlton	Farmer
<i>Unknown</i>			Clayton	<i>Unknown</i>
Colclough	John	Mr.	Hardingswood	Farmer
Boothby	Henry Vernon	Mr.	Keele	Estate agent
Brown	Michael	Mr.	Keele	Farmer & publican
Daltry	Thomas William	Rev.	Madeley	Clergyman (C of E)
Settle	Joel	Mr.	Madeley	Colliery manager
Billington	William Sutton	Mr.	Madeley	Farmer
Rawes	Thomas	Mr.	Maer	Farmer
Mellard	Richard B.	Mr.	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Ironmonger
Hyslop	Samuel	Mr.	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Licensed victualler
Whittingham	John Addison	Mr.	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Licensed victualler
Hand	John	Mr.	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Maltster
Mosley	Ralph	Mr.	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Gentleman
Edge	Thomas	Mr.	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Smallware dealer
Maguire	Martin	Rev.	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Clergyman (Roman Catholic)
Mainwaring	Percy	Rev.	Whitmore	Clergyman

Source: Birmingham Daily Post, 6th December 1894, p.5; Staffordshire Advertiser, 22nd December 1894, p.6; Staffordshire Chronicle, 22nd December 1894, p.8.

Female guardians were even fewer in both Stafford and Newcastle than in our Leicestershire case study. The latter included two women, Sarah Corbett and Sarah Washington, elected in 1894, arguably an indication that the Local Government Act that year initially had a small but visible impact there. Both served for ten years, and when they retired in 1904, chairman Percy Mainwaring stated that the board missed them, as ‘the only two lady members the board had ever possessed, and whose services had been most useful in many ways’.³⁴ Despite the apparent value of their contributions, the Newcastle board remained all-male until 1925, when Emily Sykes (the wife of Audley

³⁴ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 23rd April 1904, p.6.

vicar and existing member William Sykes) was elected alongside her husband.³⁵

Women fared little better on the Stafford board, where no female board members were elected until 1910. The two women returned in that year, Alice Haywood and Annie Dix, received a rather telling welcome from chairman Walter Mynors in their first annual meeting. Mynors ‘hoped in course of time [Haywood and Dix would] prove by their work and by endeavouring to carry out the duties to the best of their ability, that women were necessary and useful’ on the board – possibly an indication that, despite the increasingly widespread view that women offered important skills and perspectives in welfare administration, the Stafford voters and indeed Stafford guardians still needed to be convinced.³⁶ Haywood and Dix retained their seats for the rest of our period, but no other women joined them. The steady increase in female representation that we observed in Blaby simply did not occur in our north Staffordshire unions.

So far, the Stafford and Newcastle boards appear to have been conservative, slow-changing bodies. This view is reinforced by the nature of leadership in these unions. Although both boards periodically entertained the notion of rotating the roles of chairman and vice-chairman amongst themselves, there was very little variation among the men who were actually elected to these positions. This is particularly noticeable in comparison to Blaby, where responsibility on the board was distributed relatively evenly among guardians. In Stafford, between 1905 and 1925 (the period which is covered by surviving minute books) the chairmanship and vice-chairmanship were shared between just six men. In April 1901, Stafford East guardian William Peach ‘spoke in favour of the offices... rotating’, particularly in the case of the vice-chairmanship; however, the rest of the board was ‘decidedly against any change in this matter’,³⁷ and the following fortnight Walter Mynors, leader of the board since 1892 and at that time Mayor of Stafford, was re-elected as chairman.³⁸ The rotation question was raised again in 1906, 1907 and 1911, focused mainly on the role of vice-chairman; however, each time the sitting office-holder was re-elected.³⁹ William Salisbury captured the overall feeling among board members when he proposed the election for

³⁵ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 11th April 1925, p.7.

³⁶ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 30th April 1910, p.5.

³⁷ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 13th April 1901, p.4.

³⁸ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 27th April 1901, p.2.

³⁹ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 5th May 1906, p.7; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 4th May 1907, p.7; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 29th April 1911, p.11.

the fourth year in a row of the Reverend George Bruton in 1915 and stated that ‘there was a time when he thought that the office should rotate, but then they had a chairman who was invaluable [referring to Walter Mynors], and thus he was re-elected time after time. They had another such chairman in the Rev. G. C. Bruton’.⁴⁰ In 1923 the board eventually passed a resolution adopting ‘the principle of allowing the chairmanship and vice-chairmanship of the Board, and of the various committees, to rotate annually’. However, the resolution included the proviso that individuals could remain in office for longer ‘with the express wish of the board’.⁴¹ This proved to be a get-out clause; although different board members reminded their colleagues of the resolution in annual meetings for the following five years, rotation was never actually implemented.⁴² Despite some instincts towards a more egalitarian approach, then, the board appear on the whole to have been quite conservative in terms of their organisation, prioritising the leadership of individuals with a proven record of effectiveness for as long as possible over sharing the responsibility of the role.

On Newcastle union’s much smaller board, this tendency was even more pronounced.⁴³ Although nine different men were elected as vice-chairman between 1900 and 1928, the Reverend Percy Mainwaring, rector in the village of Whitmore, was elected chairman of the board in every year from 1894 until 1927, when he retired due to ill-health.⁴⁴ He was challenged only once, when in 1917 Mr. Ashwell suggested an alternative candidate, as ‘he had every confidence in Mr Mainwaring, but he was a very busy man and fully occupied with public work, and... if they relieved him of the duties for a time... Mr Mainwaring would be able to have a much-needed rest.’⁴⁵ However, Ashwell was the only board member who voted for the alternative candidate, with fellow guardian James Beattie remonstrating that Mainwaring was ‘one of the finest chairmen it was possible for any board to have’. Mainwaring duly accepted his re-

⁴⁰ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 24th April 1915, p.11.

⁴¹ Staffordshire Record Office [hereafter SRO], D659/1/1/26, Stafford poor law union [hereafter PLU], guardians’ minute book [hereafter GMB], 24th March 1923.

⁴² *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 28th April 1923 p.5; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 26th April 1924, p.10; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 25th April 1925, p.5; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 24th April 1926, p.5; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 23rd April 1927, p.10.

⁴³ The Newcastle board occasionally co-opted additional guardians to swell their numbers, but this did not happen regularly.

⁴⁴ SRO, D339/1/31, Newcastle-under-Lyme [hereafter Newcastle] PLU, GMB, 9th May 1927; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 14th May 1927, p.5.

⁴⁵ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 28th April 1917, p.3.

election, stating pointedly that ‘he had not neglected his parish duties because of the time he had given to the work of the guardians and he really hoped it was thoughtfulness for his health which had prompted Mr. Ashwell to propose a new chairman’.⁴⁶

This lack of variation in leadership arguably reflects the lack of vibrancy in the local political scene in Newcastle. In such a context, it is perhaps unsurprising that Mainwaring remained largely unopposed. This might do him a disservice, however. It seems that Mainwaring was a popular chairman, and the consistent preference the board displayed for his leadership indicates an inclination for continuity and for personnel deeply embedded in the work of the board. Mainwaring was only the third chairman Newcastle union had had since its formation in 1838; the very first chairman had been his grandfather, Admiral Rowland Mainwaring, and his father had served as vice-chairman to the Admiral’s successor.⁴⁷ Other members of the board, as well as union officials, also had family histories connected with union service. For instance, the fathers of long-standing guardians John Somner Billington and Henry Dodd had also served on the board, and John Knight, union clerk for much of our period, succeeded his father in the post.⁴⁸ This pattern strongly indicates a culture where personal connection was important, and long-standing family associations with the board’s work could be prized.

The board’s preference for Mainwaring also indicates the approach to welfare administration favoured by the Newcastle guardians. In April 1912, Mainwaring’s recent engagement to be married was marked by his guardian colleagues, and board members took the opportunity to pay tribute to his service. John Billington referred to Mainwaring’s time on the county council, where he ‘invariably carried the day in the interests of economy’.⁴⁹ Mr. Gradwell-Goodwin concurred, and observed that ‘as a parson they might expect [Mainwaring] to be unduly indulgent towards the poor but...he possessed very uncommon business qualities and sound judgment, and whilst being always mindful of the poor...he had never omitted to give due consideration...to

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 6th April 1912, p.10.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

those who had to bear the burden, many of whom were themselves very poor'.⁵⁰ Likewise, when Mr Ashwell's alternative candidate was rejected in April 1917, one board member commented that 'he was pleased at the re-election of Mr Mainwaring, who was a thorough businessman'.⁵¹ It was not only Mainwaring's established family connections to the board that made him an appealing chairman, but also his emphasis on economy and rejection of excessive expenditure. The protection of poorer ratepayers was a particular concern; when re-elected to the chair in April 1922, Mainwaring commented that 'in fixing the scale of relief they must be careful of the interests of those poor ratepayers who were on the borderline of poverty'.⁵² Similar sentiments, albeit without the figurehead of a single guardian, are also evident in Stafford union. When Samuel Dodd was elected to the Stafford vice-chair in 1910, he remarked that 'as a large ratepayer himself he should do his upmost to keep the rates down', while Alice Heywood supported her proposal of William Salisbury's re-election as vice-chair in 1916 by commenting that 'he had acted in a business-like way'.⁵³ In 1928, George Horne was elected as chairman of the Stafford board for the fifth year running, and in his welcome to that year's new guardians he referred to the board's unofficial motto: 'efficiency with economy'.⁵⁴ Both the Stafford and Newcastle guardians might be categorised, then, as 'Economisers'.⁵⁵ They viewed effective union leadership and administration to be that focused on economies and restricted expenditure, without being 'unduly indulgent'. Elizabeth Hurren has suggested that in order for a union to maintain a poor law record of financial competency, it often required a long-standing chairman with a dominant personality committed to doing this difficult work.⁵⁶ This may be another reason, then, why the boards preferred long-serving chairmen.

In summary, Stafford and Newcastle poor law unions were traditionalist in their managerial make-up. The overall impression is of quite 'closed', narrow leadership structures, in contrast with the more 'open', inclusive approach pursued in Blaby.⁵⁷ Both boards did incorporate members from less well-to-do backgrounds, some of whom

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 28th April 1917, p.3.

⁵² *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 29th April 1922, p.9.

⁵³ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 30th April 1910, p.5; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 22nd April 1916, p.6.

⁵⁴ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 5th May 1928, p.11.

⁵⁵ Bealey, Blondel and McCann, *Constituency Politics*, p.43.

⁵⁶ Hurren, *Protesting About Pauperism*, p.257.

⁵⁷ See King, 'Welfare regimes', p.59.

such as William Salisbury became long-standing and influential guardians. However, women did not make as effective in-roads into poor law administration in this case-study, even after the 1918 Representation of the People Act. Moreover, these boards prioritised continuity, and a particular type of approach to welfare which prioritised ‘efficiency with economy’, over egalitarianism in their leadership. Particularly in Newcastle, the chairman and vice-chairmanship were not in reality open to any board member who wished to stand for the roles. Guardians in Stafford and Newcastle had to be ‘business-like’, if not businessmen. More broadly, these findings speak to some of our key research questions as outlined at the beginning of this third chapter. Firstly, these men (and few women) were the personnel who made relief decisions in these unions – understanding their socio-economic profile in general terms and the distribution of power within the individual boards is important contextual information as we move forward to discuss the relief these bodies actually distributed. Secondly, a distinct approach to leadership and priorities about general relief management is visible in our Staffordshire unions, which moreover differs in key ways from our preceding Leicestershire case study. We can therefore start to suggest the existence of a distinctive ‘welfare culture’ here. Finally, it appears that the 1894 Local Government Act and 1918 Representation of the People Act had a rather limited impact in this case study; established families and individuals were difficult to shift from their traditional roles.

3.4 Indoor and outdoor relief in north Staffordshire

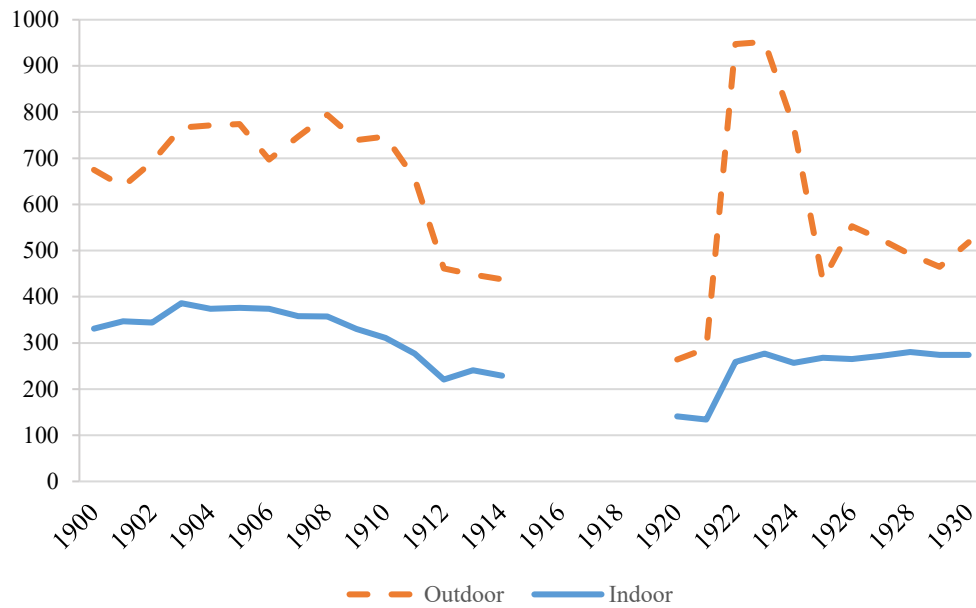
Having now met the guardians in Stafford and Newcastle unions, we move on to the nature of relief provision they oversaw, and the distribution of indoor and outdoor relief in these unions over time. Slightly different methods were required to track this distribution in our Staffordshire unions than those undertaken in the preceding Leicestershire case study. The Blaby clerk recorded weekly totals of people receiving outdoor and indoor relief in the guardians’ minute books, and this data was used to reconstruct the use of both forms of relief during our period (see Figure 2.2). However, none of the other unions featured in this thesis, including Stafford and Newcastle, have surviving documentation which consistently recorded pauperism levels in this amount

of detail. We therefore need another method for examining the use of indoor and outdoor relief over time in Staffordshire.

One way of doing this is through the pauperism returns collated by central government. As outlined in Chapter 1, these returns were made on 1st January and 1st July by every union in England and Wales, detailing the total number of paupers in receipt of relief on those specific days - during the interwar period, only the January returns continued. Figures 3.3-4 display the total number of indoor and outdoor paupers in Stafford and Newcastle unions on 1st January in each year that returns were made during our period.⁵⁸ Although these returns provide statistical snapshots of pauperism at particular moments, they nevertheless give us an outline of continuities and changes in indoor and outdoor relief use in these Staffordshire unions. When linked with other records, as will be undertaken in this section, they enable historians to engage with the particularities of indoor and outdoor relief on location – a central feature of this thesis.

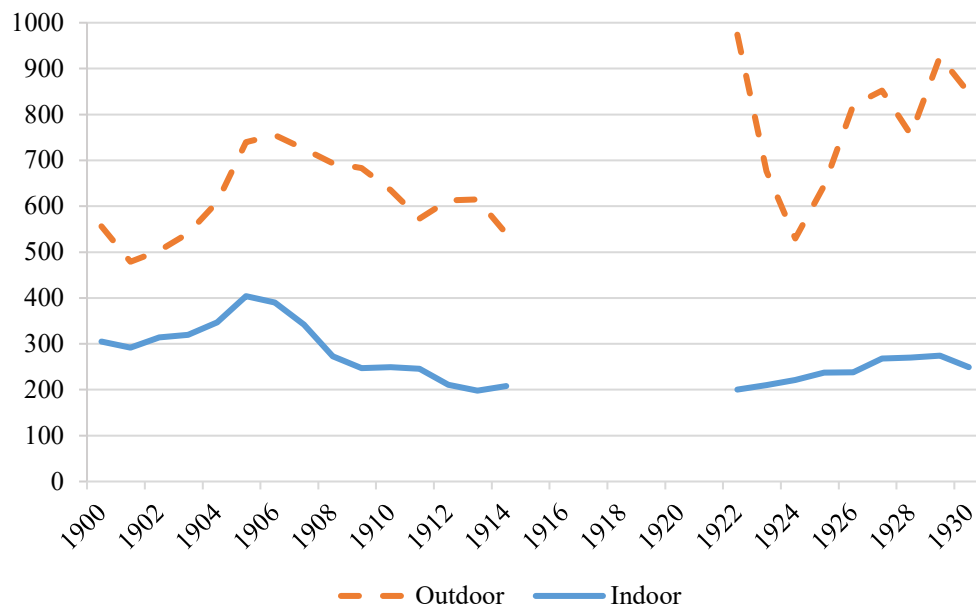
⁵⁸ No data is included from 1915 to 1921 because returns were not made during the First World War, and those for the first three years after the conflict were aggregated so that numbers of relief recipients for individual unions are not visible.

Figure 3.3: No. of paupers relieved on 1st January in Stafford poor law union, 1900-1930.



Source: LGB: Half-yearly pauperism returns for England and Wales, 1900-1914, 1922-1930; SRO, Stafford PLU, D659/1/2/134-135, weekly returns to the LGB inspector, 1920-1921.

Figure 3.4: No. of paupers relieved on 1st January in Newcastle-under-Lyme union, 1900-1930.



Source: MoH: Half-yearly pauperism returns for England and Wales, 1900-1914, 1922-1930.

Two important findings can be drawn from Figures 3.3-4. They suggest that both these unions used their workhouses more extensively than Blaby union did. The Staffordshire unions' institutions were larger than in our Leicestershire case study, with the capacity for around 400 inmates each compared to Blaby's 325, and were consistently closer to capacity than the latter ever was during our period. This is not the full story, however. Despite the fact that the north Staffordshire workhouses were more well-used than in the Leicestershire case study, the pauperism returns clearly show that, overall, outdoor relief was consistently the more common experience for paupers in Stafford and Newcastle – as was the case in Blaby. Thus, although Leicestershire and Staffordshire differed on how much they used their workhouses, both case studies nevertheless fit into the broad trend observed by scholars like Snell that outdoor relief remained the dominant form of poor law provision.⁵⁹ Figures 3.3-4 do not portray Stafford and Newcastle as unions with a dominant 'institutional focus', to use Steve King's phrasing.⁶⁰

Before exploring some of the key turning points in local poor relief provision as indicated by Figures 3.3-4, we need to first address a striking discrepancy which emerges when the pauperism returns plotted in these figures are set alongside Stafford and Newcastle's expenditure records. Both unions recorded weekly expenditure on indoor and outdoor relief for the majority of our period, and Figures 3.5-7 below use these records to present Stafford and Newcastle's annual spending on both forms of relief.⁶¹ Newcastle's expenditure has been split across two figures – 3.6 showing 1900 to 1925, and 3.7 showing 1900 to 1927. This is because the enormous spike in expenditure Newcastle experienced in 1926 dwarfs that of the earlier years and disguises any fluctuations in expenditure prior to that. Stafford's record-keeping was less consistent than Newcastle – minute books for the first and last five years of our period do not survive, and outdoor relief expenditure is not recorded at all during the First World War. Nevertheless, the extant totals still offer an insight into the distribution of spending in this region, which does not align with the proportions of relief given inside and outside the workhouse presented by Figures 3.3-4. For around two thirds of

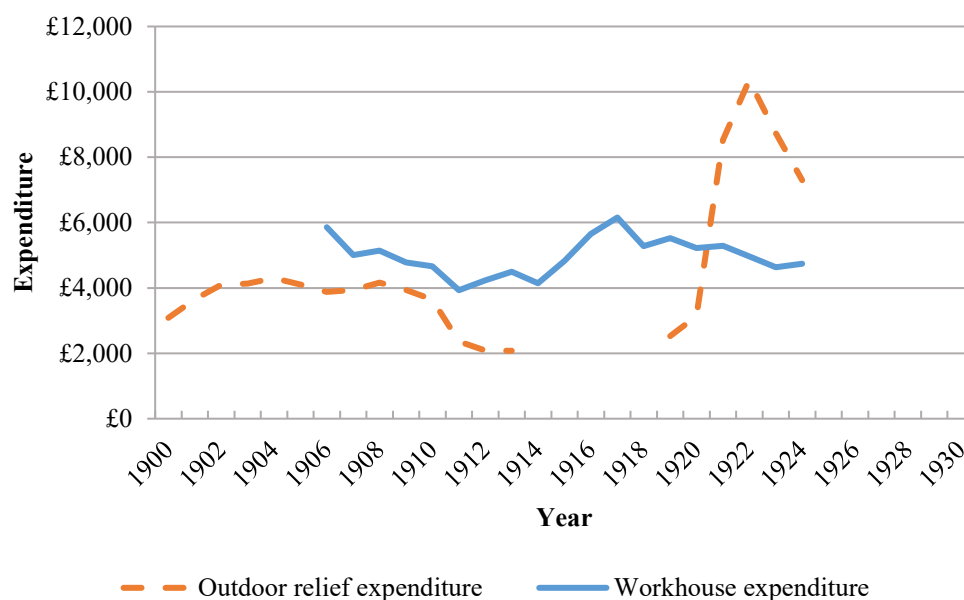
⁵⁹ K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006), p.211.

⁶⁰ King, 'Welfare regimes', p.58.

⁶¹ It should be noted that the indoor relief expenditure is drawn from that recorded in the workhouse master's day book, and therefore does not include staff's wages.

our period (excluding the 1920s, which will be discussed separately in Sections 3.5 and 3.6), Figures 3.5-6 show that both Stafford and Newcastle spent considerably more on the workhouse than on outdoor relief. This is despite the evidence provided by the pauperism returns in Figures 3.3-4 that overall more people received the latter form of relief than were admitted to the former. How can we reconcile this inconsistency between the nationally-collected pauperism returns and local expenditure records?

Figure 3.5 Annual indoor and outdoor relief expenditure in Stafford poor law union, 1900-1930.



Source: SRO, D659/1/1/21-26, Stafford PLU, GMB, 1905-1925.

Figure 3.6 Annual indoor and outdoor relief expenditure in Newcastle, 1900-1925.

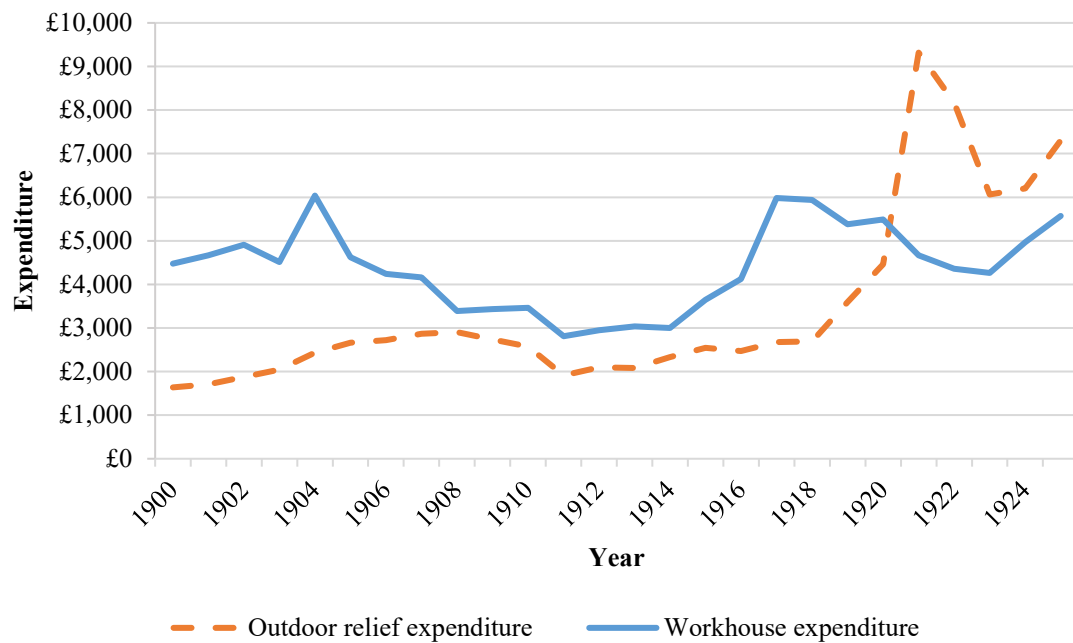
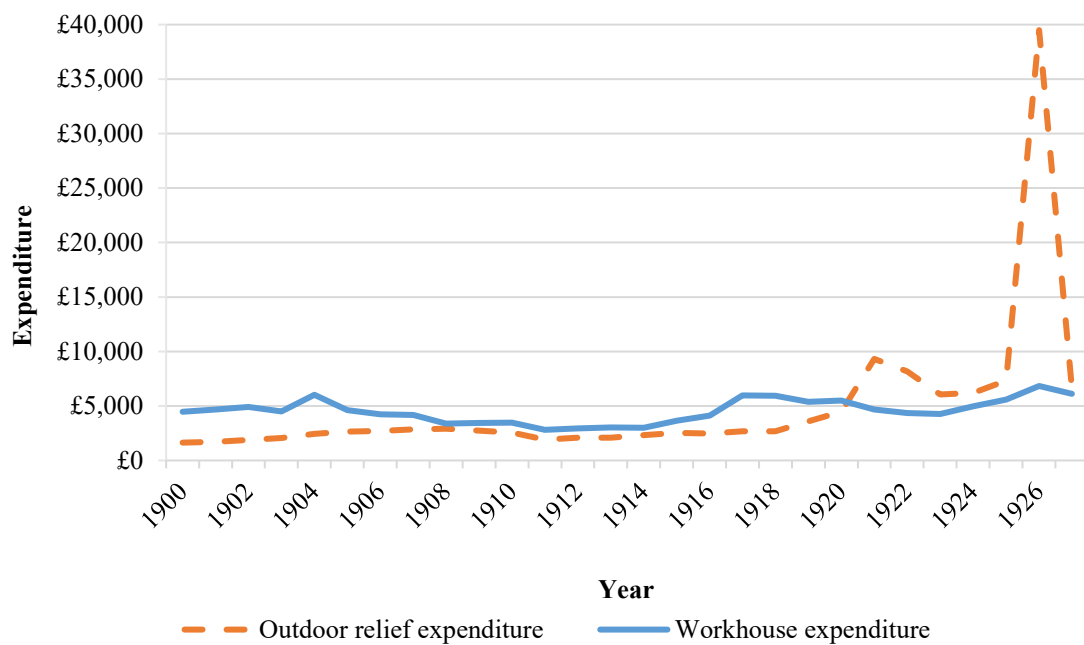


Figure 3.7 Annual indoor and outdoor relief expenditure in Newcastle, 1900-1927.



Source: SRO, D339/1/15-34, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 1900-1928.

Drilling down into the expenditure data itself helps us to shed light on this apparent contradiction, as well as revealing some specifics of welfare culture in north Staffordshire. Spending on indoor relief in Staffordshire was inflated by factors other than the number of indoor paupers. A good example of this is when both these unions experienced rising workhouse expenditure during the First World War. As well as increasing costs of food and fuel, the institutions came under additional pressures which required more resources on an everyday basis, even if they would in due course be compensated by the War Office.⁶² Stafford's workhouse was not directly used by the military for war-related service, as many others were; instead, it hosted inmates from other unions who had been displaced as a result of these requisitions, including at least 10 paupers from Stourbridge in the Black Country and 20 from Stoke-on-Trent.⁶³ Newcastle's workhouse also hosted paupers from Stoke-on-Trent, whose conditions had to be re-negotiated in December 1917 when the original charge of 1s. 3d. per day per person became 'insufficient to cover the actual cost, there being a margin of £200 10s. 10d.' as a result of the 'extraordinary rise in the cost of maintenance owing to food prices'.⁶⁴ In spring 1918, much of the Newcastle infirmary was given over to more than 60 convalescent wounded soldiers – another financial pressure.⁶⁵ In other words, higher expenditure on the workhouse did not automatically translate into Newcastle or Stafford admitting more of their own paupers into their institution.

Aside from fluctuations like these which were connected to particular outside factors, workhouse expenditure in our Staffordshire unions was also kept comparatively high by the need for supplies which were not required when relieving people in their

⁶² Scholars have paid some attention to the requisition of asylums for military use during the First World War, see for instance I.M. Beech, 'The universal khaki: the impact of the asylum war hospitals scheme on Cardiff City Mental Hospital, 1915-1920', *Llafur*, 9:2 (2005), pp.2-26; S. Cherry, *Mental Health Care in Modern England: The Norfolk Lunatic Asylum/St. Andrew's Hospital c.1810-1998* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp.144-170; P. Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp.68-84; D. Palmer, 'The impact of the First World War on asylum and voluntary hospital nurses' work and health' in J. Brooks and C. Hallett (eds.), *One Hundred Years of Wartime Nursing Practices, 1854-1953* (Manchester, 2015), pp.143-161. However, there has been relatively little work focusing on workhouses, either generally or on specific institutions, during the war. Exceptions include M.A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834-1929: The History of an English Social Institution* (London, 1981), pp.92-96 and S. Pope, 'Norfolk in World War I', *Wellcome History Online*, <https://wellcomehistory.wordpress.com/2014/12/04/norfolk-in-world-war-i/> [accessed 15/11/2016]. There is also a page on the uses that workhouses could be put to during the war on www.workhouses.org.uk/wartime/ [accessed 01/02/2017].

⁶³ SRO, D659/1/1/24, Stafford PLU, GMB, 29th May 1915, 12th June 1915, 21st August 1915.

⁶⁴ SRO, D339/1/22, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 3rd December 1917.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 22nd March 1918.

own homes. These included maintenance and improvements to the physical structure of the buildings themselves and of the furniture within them, costs associated with the gardens and other farming pursuits undertaken in both unions, and the purchase of materials used in the work set for the inmates and casual poor. Indeed, this latter category of poor were a group with which the Staffordshire unions perennially had to contend and spend money on in the context of the workhouse, especially in the first five years or so of our period in the aftermath of the Boer war.⁶⁶ Newcastle in particular experienced difficulties on this issue during these earlier years, as vagrants moved along an established route between Stafford and Stoke.⁶⁷ In many ways, then, the nature of indoor relief provision as offered in Stafford and Newcastle meant that often considerable expenditure was required. This goes some way to explaining the unions' higher spending patterns in this area.

As well as considering factors which helped to elevate workhouse expenditure, however, we should also consider the extent to which outdoor relief expenditure was restricted in our Staffordshire unions. For this, we need to examine the size and value of outdoor relief payments made during our period, which can most clearly be seen through a union's outdoor relief lists. These documents are somewhat fragmentary for these two unions. Nevertheless, the surviving primary material offers an insight into the payments made to outdoor relief recipients, and the compression of outdoor relief expenditure, helping to create the apparent discrepancy between Figures 5.3-4 and 5.5-6.

Figure 5.8 presents the value of all outdoor relief payments made in Stafford union in 1912, and in the Newcastle district of Newcastle union in 1916 – drawn from the most comparable and complete sets of surviving outdoor relief records for each union. Although this is undeniably a snapshot of relief provision, it does strongly suggest that widespread use of low-value relief payments in north Staffordshire. In Stafford over the course of 1912, nearly 70 percent of outdoor relief payments were less than 5s. in value, with over 50 percent totalling less than 4s. Newcastle district appears somewhat less frugal but by no means generous, with 55 percent of outdoor relief payments at less than 5s. in value and just over 40 percent at less than 4s. In

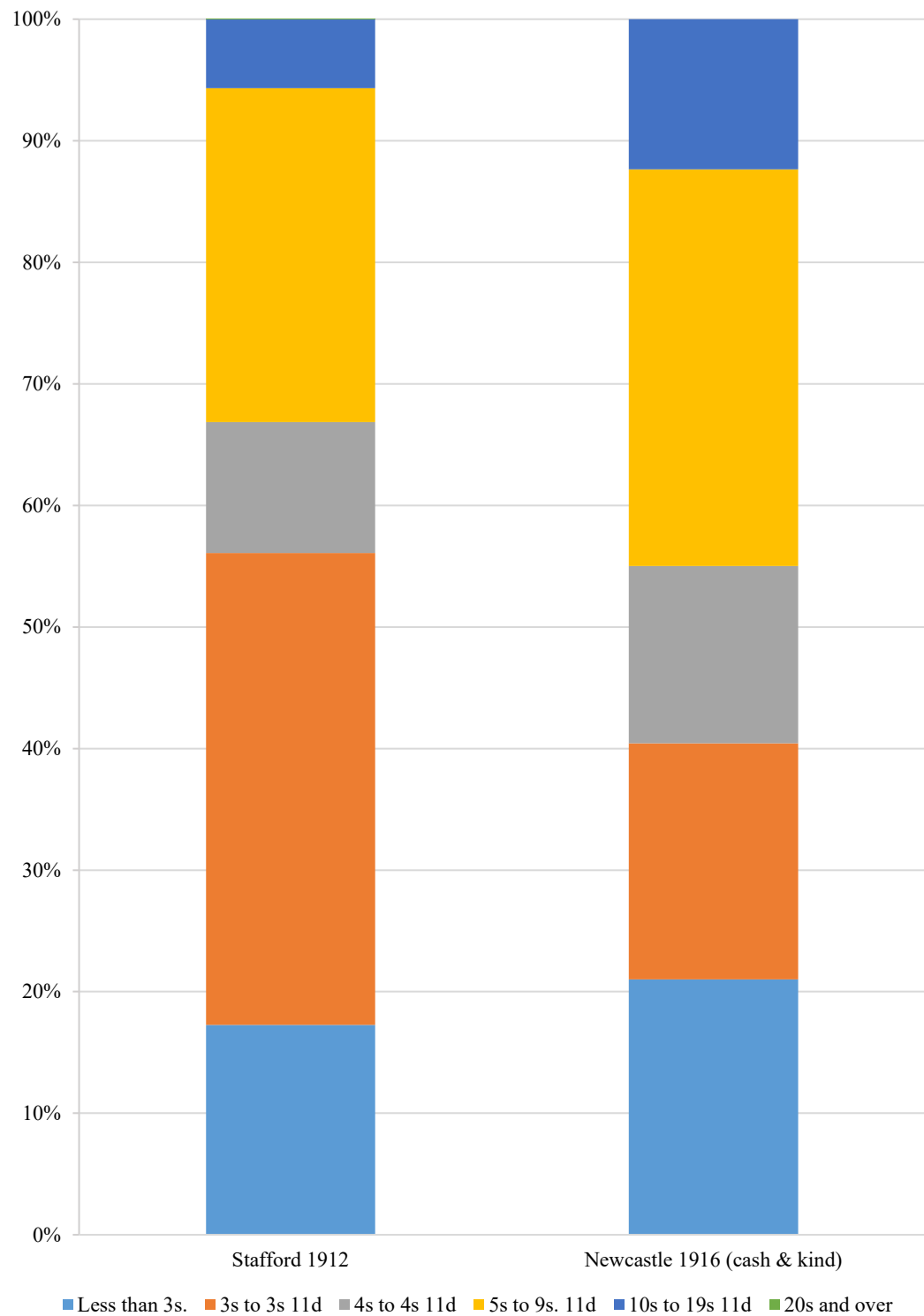
⁶⁶ LGB: *Annual Report, 1901-02* (1902), Cd.1231, p.118.

⁶⁷ See for instance *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 19th November 1904, p.7.

comparison, of Blaby union's 1916 outdoor relief payments (the closest year to the Staffordshire samples for which we have data), less than 30 percent were smaller than 4s. Both Staffordshire unions also distributed a higher proportion of payments of less than 3s. in value than Blaby – while only around five percent of the latter's payments in 1916 were of this very small size, over 15 percent in Stafford and just over 20 percent in Newcastle district in our sample were of less than 3s. Although the fragmentary nature of surviving sources does not allow us to confirm that this preference for very small relief payments remained the case in north Staffordshire throughout our period, or assess alignment between price changes and payment size, as in the Leicestershire case study, the balance of evidence that we do have suggests that these small payments were a contributing factor in limiting outdoor relief expenditure in Stafford and Newcastle. These small payments also align with the attitudes towards welfare provision that we have seen expressed among the north Staffordshire guardians above: these were parsimonious boards, intent on keeping costs down. In fact, the source material drawn on in Figure 5.8 indicates an additional controlling strategy in Newcastle: while Stafford union resembled Blaby in that it utilised relief in kind relatively rarely, Newcastle deployed relief in kind extensively, usually in tandem with cash payments.⁶⁸ This partially explains why Newcastle's payments tended to be slightly larger in value than Stafford's, but also indicates a board invested in keeping a tight hold not only on relief expenditure itself, but also on how much freedom paupers had to make decisions about how to use the relief they received.

⁶⁸ For Figure 5.8's purposes, the value of cash and kind in individual payments have been combined: for instance, if a payment of 2s. in cash and 6d. in kind was recorded in the outdoor relief lists as distributed to one case, that payment would be counted as 2s. 6d. in Figure 5.8.

Figure 3.8: Value of outdoor relief payments in Stafford and Newcastle-under-Lyme unions.



Source: SRO, D659/1/6/14-16, Stafford PLU, outdoor relief lists, 1912; SRO, D1338/3/62-64, Newcastle PLU, outdoor relief lists, 1916.

These findings begin to indicate where these Staffordshire unions fit into some of the welfare regionality models outlined earlier in this thesis. The source material, although sparser than the previous case study, nevertheless provides an entry point into a region of low-value out-door relief payments. Indeed, this could have contributed to the more extensive use of the workhouse in north Staffordshire, notwithstanding the overall prevalence of outdoor relief, as the typically small provision outside the workhouse made entry into the institution a more practical option. Stafford and Newcastle certainly align with King's original characterisation of northern/western localities as 'far from "generous" to most of those who received relief'.⁶⁹ Comparing these payments against wages in the region further supports this: according to a 1906 Board of Trade report into wages, a non-specialised male agricultural labourer was paid around 15s. 11d. per week in Staffordshire, boot and shoe operatives around £1 8s. per week, and manual workers in engineering firms around £1 12s.⁷⁰ Outdoor relief payments appear extremely small in comparison. In King's division of England into sub-regions, he suggests that the 'midwest' region which included Staffordshire became one of the most generous in the north/west zone by 1800 after beginning the eighteenth century as one of the least.⁷¹ Without comparative data from other unions in King's north/west region (Marjorie Levine-Clark's study of Stourbridge and Dudley, for instance, does not focus on the size of poor relief payments),⁷² we cannot confirm whether the unions in this area continued to be generous in relative terms over a century later. However, given that Stafford and Newcastle's payments were already so small, it seems unlikely that they would be substantially more generous than unions elsewhere in this zone. This trend, therefore, may not have continued into our later period.

The discrepancy between Figures 3.3-4 and 3.5-6 which prompted this discussion, unpicking outdoor and indoor relief expenditure (and by extension reflecting on north Staffordshire welfare cultures), related only to the first two decades of our period. Both sets of figures reveal significant shifts during the 1920s, both in numbers of outdoor relief recipients and expenditure on that form of relief. These shifts, the poor law's response to considerably increased regional unemployment and relationship with

⁶⁹ King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p.203.

⁷⁰ Board of Trade [hereafter BOT]: *Standard Time Rates of Wages in the United Kingdom at 1st October 1906* (1906), Cd.3245, p.16, 52, 110, 118.

⁷¹ King, *Poverty and Welfare*, pp.263-264.

⁷² Levine-Clark, *Unemployment*.

the new welfare provisions intended to address that unemployment will be explored in the following two sections of this chapter. However, we must first consider an earlier important juncture for the lived experience of early twentieth-century welfare: the end of the disqualification clause (explained in Chapter 2) preventing recent poor relief recipients from receiving the old age pension at the beginning of 1911. The number of outdoor relief recipients in Stafford declined by 26 percent between the first two weeks of 1911 according to surviving returns to the regional poor law inspector,⁷³ closely aligning with the widened availability of the pension. Figure 3.3 demonstrates a 47 percent drop in outdoor pauperism between January 1911 and January 1912; moreover, the union's annual outdoor relief expenditure dropped from £3,648 in 1910 to £2,363 in 1911, as shown in Figure 3.5 – a reduction of 35 percent. Newcastle union also experienced reductions in outdoor relief recipients and expenditure at this point, although to a lesser degree than Stafford. The union's expenditure on outdoor relief declined by 25 percent between 1910 and 1911, which although less than Stafford is still notable. On the whole, as demonstrated in the work of Karel Williams and Pat Thane and again in the previous chapter of this study,⁷⁴ the first of the Liberals' key welfare reforms keenly affected the scope of local relief provision in Staffordshire, too.

Despite this, it is striking that where references to the pension are made in either minute books or local press reports for these two unions, there is little mention of outdoor relief recipients, the group of paupers with whom the pension is usually associated. Instead, most of the discussion about the pension's impact on relief provision was in relation to workhouse inmates. The 1909 Royal Commission on the Poor Laws predicted that the pension had little relevance for the indoor poor, because they would be unable to support themselves on its payments alone outside the institution.⁷⁵ Indeed, although David Thomson has argued that the old-age pension was an 'alternative' to the workhouse, and asserted that 'a rapid decline in the proportions [of elderly] in institutions took place',⁷⁶ other scholars take a more cautious view. While Crowther concedes that some 'healthier old people' left the workhouse upon the arrival

⁷³ SRO, D659/1/2/134, Stafford PLU, weekly returns to the LGB Inspector, 1911.

⁷⁴ K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London, 1981), p.207; P. Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford, 2000), pp.226-227.

⁷⁵ Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, p.84.

⁷⁶ D. Thomson, 'Workhouse to nursing home: residential care of elderly people in England since 1840', *Ageing and Society*, 4:4 (1984), p.65.

of the pension, she also points out that the sick and infirm remained.⁷⁷ Thane's findings align with this, suggesting that the numbers of elderly people receiving indoor relief were 'more sensitive to physical and/or mental incapacity than to absolute poverty'.⁷⁸ Both of our Staffordshire boards noted the probability of a limited transition to pensions for elderly inmates. The Newcastle workhouse master reported in November 1910 that 24 inmates intended to claim old-age pensions, but he was unsure how many would actually receive them, as the local pension sub-committee was having difficulty confirming the ages of claimants.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, in December 1910 the Stafford clerk informed the guardians that only 'one-sixth' of eligible workhouse inmates 'had decided to accept them, the others having decided to remain where they were at present'.⁸⁰ The use of the word 'decided' is interesting here. It implies that rather than being instructed or obliged to remain in the workhouse, these inmates made a strategic choice to do so. It is likely that this choice was heavily influenced by the inaccessibility of the support they required outside the institution, and these individuals made a tactical judgment to continue utilising a form of relief more suited to their welfare needs. This glimpse into conversations about the pension in these unions serves as a reminder that, as indicated by Thane and Crowther, the transition to this key welfare reform was not possible, or indeed preferable, for many elderly paupers. Indeed, the pension payments were evidently not developed with aged workhouse inmates in mind. As a result, it did not provide an escape from the poor law for everyone.

This section has demonstrated the value of record linkage work – neither centrally-collected pauperism returns nor local expenditure records told the full poor law story of outdoor and indoor relief distribution in our north Staffordshire unions. A more complete understanding could only be achieved by examining them together. We have thus started to reconstruct how the poor law manifested itself in these north Staffordshire unions in the early twentieth century, addressing the first key research question of this thesis relating to what the poor law looked like at a local level during

⁷⁷ Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, p.219.

⁷⁸ Thane, *Old Age*, p.329.

⁷⁹ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 19th November 1910, p.8.

⁸⁰ *Lichfield Mercury*, 23rd December 1910, p.2. Exactly how many of Stafford's elderly inmates did eventually leave the institution for the pension is difficult to say – the surviving discharge register records six individuals discharging themselves on 6th January, an usually large group in one day for the Stafford workhouse, but it is not clear if this was because they intended to claim the pension – see SRO, D659/1/4/15, Stafford PLU, workhouse admissions and discharge register, 6th January 1911.

this period. In so doing, a distinctive welfare culture has emerged here, with a focus on economy and in restriction – of relief, and of power. These unions did not pursue expansive or inclusive policies, either in the generosity of relief they provided – a likely contributing factor to their more extensive use of the workhouse, although they stopped short of using indoor above outdoor relief overall - or in their governance structures. This in turn starts to address our second research question – in this way, Stafford and Newcastle align with the broad characterisation of northern and western welfare cultures as presented by King, although not as closely with his classification of sub-regions. Through the impact of the old-age pension in these north Staffordshire unions, moreover, this case study has offered its first opportunity to consider the complexities of the relationship between the poor law and the period's national welfare reforms. Again, by examining the trends revealed by pauperism returns and expenditure records alongside records of discussions between guardians and other officials on the roll-out of the pension, it is evident that at the same time as some paupers left outdoor relief behind, others made proactive decisions about their welfare requirements for which the new welfare provision was not always the answer. This, then, was the state of play when unemployment became an increasingly bigger factor in the two unions' relief strategies during the 1920s. It is to this problem, and the unions' responses, that we now turn.

3.5 Unemployment: the early 1920s

It is evident from Figures 3.3-4 and 5-7 that something significant changed in Stafford and Newcastle from the early 1920s, as from 1921 the amount the two unions were spending on outdoor relief shot up. In 1920, Newcastle union's outdoor relief expenditure totalled £4,463; Stafford union spent £3,136 on outdoor relief in the same year. This was higher than previous years, but turned out to be the tip of the iceberg. The following year, Newcastle union spent a total of £9,318 on outdoor relief, and although its expenditure receded again over the next three years or so, it never returned to pre-1920 levels. Stafford union experienced a similar increase between 1920 and 1921, to £8,528. Its expenditure peaked in 1922, slightly later than Newcastle's, when it

spent a total of £10,356, and also struggled to bring outdoor relief spending back down to previous levels.

This pattern of expenditure aligns with nationally escalating unemployment following the First World War – by 1921, approximately 2,212,000 people were out of work, and Staffordshire coalmining and iron and steel works were badly affected.⁸¹ This was exacerbated further by the 1921 coal dispute - in March that year, Parliament ended government control of the coal industry, resulting in a miners' strike lasting three months from 2nd April. At the same time, the early 1920s saw significant expansions in unemployment provision outside the poor law (see Section 1.1 of Chapter 1). The pre-First World War system, developed via the 1905 Unemployed Workmen's Act and the 1911 National Insurance Act, consistently underestimated the severity of unemployment fluctuations and this endured in the interwar period.⁸² The national insurance fund had a £21 million surplus by the end of the war, which was considered sufficient to cover any increased demand, despite warnings from the Ministry of Reconstruction that extending the scheme during a time of distress would be 'disastrous'.⁸³ As unemployment levels rose from 1920, the non-contributory out-of-work donation introduced for ex-servicemen and then civilian workers not only established that the state had a commitment to maintain the unemployed, and for the inclusion of dependent allowances; its high cost also demonstrated the need for wider unemployment insurance cover.⁸⁴ The extensions of insurance in 1920 and 1921 therefore followed this blueprint.

These reforms were deliberately separate from the existing poor law system, which was increasingly viewed as not fit for purpose, as we saw in Chapter 1. Indeed, scholars such as Adrian Vinson have argued that relief of the unemployed was a minor part of poor law activity.⁸⁵ However, this certainly does not appear to be the case in our Staffordshire unions. Moreover, Anne Digby and Bernard Harris have indicated that the poor law remained a mainstream source of support during this period for the unemployed, largely because the new welfare reforms did not have sufficient scope to

⁸¹ B. Harris, *The Origins of the British Welfare State: Social Welfare in England and Wales 1800-1945* (Basingstoke, 2004), p.198.

⁸² W. Garside, *British Unemployment 1919: 1939: A Study in Public Policy* (Cambridge, 1990), pp.37-38.

⁸³ D Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy since the Industrial Revolution* (Basingstoke, 4th ed., 2009), p.216.

⁸⁴ Fraser, *Evolution*, p.216; P. Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State* (Harlow, 2nd ed., 1996), p.138.

⁸⁵ A. Vinson, 'Poor relief, public assistance, and the maintenance of the unemployed in Southampton between the wars', *Southern History*, 2 (1980), pp.203-204.

prevent individuals from falling into destitution.⁸⁶ More recently, Marjorie Levine-Clark has demonstrated the severe difficulties experienced by Black Country unions Dudley and Stourbridge in the early 1920s as a result of unemployment, showing that in the first three months of 1921 the Dudley board of guardians relieved 300 more people per week than they had at the same time the previous year, and during the coal strike itself were relieving up to 2,700 applicants per week.⁸⁷ Figures 3.3-5 clearly indicate a similar experience in Stafford and Newcastle.

Neither of our boards were experienced in providing relief under these circumstances. Indeed, Stafford guardian Reverend William Branch commented in March 1921 that ‘they had had to face a situation they never had before’ and ‘had had to feel their way sensitively’.⁸⁸ From mid-February 1921, Stafford union adopted a new weekly scale of relief for unemployed cases: 8s. each for men and wives, and 5s. per child, usually in the form of grocery vouchers.⁸⁹ This did not apply to striking men themselves, as guardians were prevented from relieving individuals on strike by the 1900 Merthyr Tydfil judgement.⁹⁰ The union’s existing relief committee (a sub-set of guardians who assessed relief applications) were to interview unemployed relief applicants.⁹¹ In Newcastle’s case, when in May 1921 the clerk drew the board’s attention to a rising tide of relief applications from the unemployed, the guardians resolved that no relief would be granted to able-bodied men, but that their dependants could receive relief, in kind and on loan. A labour test was thought to be ‘impracticable’ because of the large number of applicants, but claimants were still required to attend a board meeting and be interviewed by the guardians. Newcastle had not previously operated separate relief committees, and chose not to form them now. The board also initially decided against instigating a specific relief scale, although they eventually did so in June 1922.⁹²

⁸⁶ Digby, ‘Changing welfare cultures’, pp.297-322; Harris, *Origins*, p.218.

⁸⁷ Levine-Clark, *Unemployment*, p.161.

⁸⁸ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 5th March 1921, p.5.

⁸⁹ SRO, D659/1/1/25, Stafford PLU, GMB, 21st February 1921.

⁹⁰ For the advent of this judgement, see A. Croll, ‘Strikers and the right to poor relief in late Victorian Britain: the making of the Merthyr Tydfil judgement of 1900’, *Journal of British Studies*, 52:1 (2013), pp.128-152.

⁹¹ SRO, D659/1/1/25, Stafford PLU, GMB, 21st February 1921.

⁹² SRO, D339/1/26, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 16th June 1922.

In the face of similar conditions Newcastle chose neither to form a relief committee, nor at first to use a relief scale for unemployed cases, while Stafford union operated both of these, highlighting slightly different organisational styles. The creation of relief committees in Newcastle had been proposed before: in April 1912 James Beattie suggested that they might help relief work to be done more ‘expeditiously’, and the clerk confirmed that ‘the system was in vogue in all large unions’.⁹³ Chairman Mainwaring, however, was strongly opposed to the proposal, arguing that ‘every member of the board should have the opportunity of saying something’ about relief applications the board received, and the proposition was withdrawn after other guardians agreed with Mainwaring.⁹⁴ The suggestion was made again in March 1923, but Mainwaring again blocked it by offering to deal with recent applications himself at the beginning or end of each meeting, so as not to take up the time of the board, and the motion was again withdrawn,⁹⁵ although later in that year the board did form an Unemployment Relief Committee.⁹⁶ Newcastle’s approach seems indicative of a desire for tight control on the relative minutiae of relief. Mainwaring himself clearly disliked delegation. This might also partly explain the Newcastle board’s widespread use of relief in kind, which we have already observed and which continued into their unemployment relief policy – it allowed the board to ‘micro-manage’ the relief given to individuals, narrowly prescribing it in exactly the forms deemed most appropriate.

The different approaches taken by Stafford and Newcastle over this issue demonstrate that poor law practice varied within regions as well as between them during our period, and highlight the role that individual personalities could play in the decision-making of individual unions. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that variation over small geographical distances was a feature of north Staffordshire more widely – Richard Talbot also found considerable differences in the ways that two neighbouring unions in the Potteries (Stoke, and Burslem & Wolstanton) operating in exactly the same socio-economic conditions treated particular kinds of paupers.⁹⁷ One key strategic similarity, however, is that neither made any reference to the workhouse. Michael Rose has argued that the workhouse test was ‘irrelevant in the face of large-scale industrial

⁹³ *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 15th April 1912, p.4.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ SRO, D339/1/27, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 19th March 1923.

⁹⁶ SRO, D339/1/28, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 7th August 1923.

⁹⁷ Talbot, ‘North-south divide of the poor’, pp.287-296.

unemployment’;⁹⁸ when faced with waves of ‘honest poverty’, not the ‘residuum’, to use Levine-Clark’s words,⁹⁹ the workhouse was not a solution. Besides, the workhouses of our Staffordshire boards were often close to capacity even in less volatile times, as we have seen in Section 3.4 – the weight of unemployed able-bodied admissions might cause the system to break down.

The unemployment crisis meant normal relief policies could not always be followed. These included the practice of considering the kinship networks of paupers when making relief decisions.¹⁰⁰ Both boards’ minutes regularly referred to negotiation with family members for contributions to a pauper’s maintenance, although more so in the case of Newcastle, where day-to-day relief decisions were not hidden in the separate discussions of a relief committee.¹⁰¹ Surviving application and report books for both unions also regularly include a significant minority of cases where the existence or otherwise of potentially helpful relatives was recorded.¹⁰² However, it appears that this strategy became less workable during the early 1920s. In February 1921, for instance, an unemployed man was permitted by the Newcastle board to suspend his 5/- weekly contributions to the maintenance of his son in the union hospital ‘so long as the father is out of employment’.¹⁰³ Similarly, the following month a sympathetic hearing was given to a man who had appeared before the guardians to discuss his contribution towards the maintenance of his wife, who was being treated in the Stoke-on-Trent hospital at Newcastle’s cost. The guardians ‘were satisfied that the man was unemployed and had

⁹⁸ Rose, *English Poor Law 1780-1930*, p.239.

⁹⁹ Levine-Clark, *Unemployment*, p.5.

¹⁰⁰ The role of kinship networks in relation to the poor law both pre- and post-1834 has generated a substantial literature, although less so on the early twentieth century. These include but are not limited to D. Thomson, ‘“I am not my father’s keeper”: families and the elderly in nineteenth century England’, *Law and History Review*, 2:2 (1984), pp.265-286; S. Barrett, ‘Kinship, poor relief and the welfare process in early modern England’ in S. King and A. Tomkins (eds.), *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003), pp.199-227; S. King, ‘Friendship, kinship and belonging in the letters of urban paupers 1800-1840’, *Historical Social Research*, 33:3 (2008), pp.249-277; A. Tomkins, ‘Poverty, kinship support and the case of Ellen Parker 1818-1827’ in P. Jones and S. King (eds.), *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2015), pp.107-138; J. Healey, ‘By the charity of good people’: poverty and neighbourly support in seventeenth century Lancashire’, *Family and Community History*, 19:2 (2016), pp.83-94.

¹⁰¹ Literature on this issue has often focused on errant fathers’ contributions towards the support of their illegitimate children. Recent examples of this include G. Frost, ‘Under the guardians’ supervision: illegitimacy, family and the English poor law, 1870-1930’, *Journal of Family History*, 38:2 (2013), pp.124-128 and B. Harvey, ‘The putative fathers of Swinton, England: Illegitimate behaviour under the Old Poor Laws, 1797-1835’, *Journal of Family History*, 40:3 (2015), pp.373-398.

¹⁰² See for instance SRO, D659/1/6/3, Stafford PLU, application and report book, 1911-12 and SRO, D1338/3/22, Newcastle PLU, application and report book, 1902.

¹⁰³ SRO, D339/1/25, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 21st February 1921.

been out of work for some time owing to Shelton Steel Works having closed down'.¹⁰⁴ Guardians' willingness to suspend the maintenance they usually expected from family members due to the impact of unemployment indicates a certain pragmatism under these unusual circumstances.

Despite these intermittent examples of flexibility, however, there is also considerable evidence of both boards' attempts to keep tight control of unemployment relief. This included the items that relief could purchase – as we have seen, not entirely out of character for Newcastle. Such regulation could even go beyond the use of grocery vouchers. In June 1921, the Newcastle clerk reported that although 'no... deliberate fraud had been discovered', there were a few cases 'where the recipients of relief had obtained Articles with their Orders which were not necessities' – items categorised as 'luxuries' such as cake, lobster and jelly.¹⁰⁵ The guardians' displeasure seems to have been directed at the tradesmen who provided the unauthorised goods rather than the relief recipients themselves, as there is no mention of any sanctions being meted out to the individuals in question. Instead it was recorded that the offending items would not be paid for, 'as the Tradesmen had supplied them in the face of explicit instructions to the contrary'.¹⁰⁶

This small incident is revealing in a number of ways. First, it shows that the board had clear and defined ideas about which items it was appropriate for the unemployed to purchase while receiving relief, and that this went beyond an emphasis simply on necessities to certain foodstuffs in particular. However, that some relief recipients chose to purchase such goods anyway (and it is hard to imagine that the list of 'approved items' had not been communicated to them) suggests a discrepancy between the guardians' perception of suitable consumption patterns while on relief and that of some unemployed people. We cannot know why these families purchased these particular foods – they may simply have arrived at the shop in question at a moment where other goods were in short supply. That the tradesmen had been instructed not to hand over particular items indicates that the guardians actually expected some attempted deviation from the approved relief goods. Paul Johnson has demonstrated that the very

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 21st March 1921.

¹⁰⁵ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 18th June 1921, p.7.

¹⁰⁶ SRO, D339/1/25, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 13th June 1921.

poor were often perceived by the middle classes as unable or unwilling to act in their own best interests, even after social investigators such as Joseph Rowntree and Charles Booth had begun to reveal systemic reasons behind poverty.¹⁰⁷ It seems likely that it was partially this attitude that informed these restrictions, alongside the desire to maximise the amount of supplies that could be purchased with relief.

Both boards likewise consistently employed the means-test on unemployed applicants, incorporating all household income including unemployment insurance payments and support provided by unions or other organisations.¹⁰⁸ However, this could be complicated by the legal stipulation that relief could be given to the dependants of striking men but not the men themselves. Should, then, relief provided to the men by other organisations be included in the means-test of their dependents? Newcastle encountered this problem in relation to food vouchers distributed by trade unions. Several of the 70 unemployed people who applied for relief on 26th May 1921 stated that ‘the food Vouchers now being issued by the Miners’ Union might be discontinued at any time’.¹⁰⁹ It is possible that these individuals mentioned this in the hope that it might work in favour of their relief applications, but this would be in vain; the guardians considered ‘that as the Miners’ Vouchers are granted to men only irrespective of their dependants, and that as relief is not being granted by the Guardians to such men, the discontinuance of the Miners’ Vouchers should not call for any revision of relief except perhaps in exceptional cases’.¹¹⁰

Weeks later, the applicants’ fears materialised. Several individuals who appeared before the board on 20th June mentioned that ‘the 10s. Vouchers which had been issued by the Miners’ Union had now been discontinued’.¹¹¹ The clerk reminded the board of their previous conclusion on this matter, and Mainwaring pointed out that if the board ‘proceeded to increase the relief in each case where such a Voucher had been

¹⁰⁷ P. Johnson, *Saving and Spending: The Working-class Economy in Britain 1870-1939* (Oxford, 1985), pp.25-26. These attitudes were contributed to by the apparent paradoxes that could be observed in the survival strategies of the very poor, as shown in D. Vincent, *Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in Twentieth Century Britain* (Harlow, 1991), pp.9-10.

¹⁰⁸ The means test has most often been explored in the context of the 1930s and later. See for instance A. Deacon and J. Bradshaw, *Reserved for the Poor: the Means Test in British Social Policy* (Oxford, 1983) and more recently S. Ward, *Unemployment and the State in Britain: the Means Test and Protest in 1930s South Wales and North-East England* (Manchester, 2013).

¹⁰⁹ SRO, D339/1/25, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 26th May 1921.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ SRO, D339/1/26, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 20th June 1921.

previously received, it would be tantamount to admitting that the relief given had included the men, which was not the case'.¹¹² A similar position was taken with state-organised unemployment benefits. In July 1921, the Newcastle clerk reported that a number of applicants had asked for an increase in their relief after having their unemployment benefits reduced. The guardians refused, apparently with much less discussion than had been provoked by the food vouchers.¹¹³

These discussions offer a complex view of the means-test used by these unions during this period. Guardians could and did ignore certain household income streams, but this did not always result in more generous relief being given. It also arguably demonstrates one of the ways in which central government restricted the option of boards to cope with crises such as these. This restriction was enforced not just via legislation which limited the amount of relief that could be given and to whom, but also by the fact that the MoH did not compensate unions for their extraordinary expenditure during a national crisis. Despite state unemployment provision, much of the responsibility for relieving the long-term unemployed was still held at a local level by the poor law.¹¹⁴ From early autumn 1921 into the summer of 1922, Stafford board called (without success) for unemployment relief to be nationally funded.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the lack of an appropriate national response also restricted the Staffordshire unions, as in the absence of central support they were required to keep an even firmer grip on spending. Admittedly, whether the guardians would have increased their relief in response to the withdrawal of other forms of support if they had had the option is uncertain. Nevertheless, it is notable that they were unable to adjust their approach in response to the changing needs of their applicants. Finally, the fact that some unemployed people used multiple sources of relief, including poor relief, state unemployment benefits and trade union support, indicates that the provision of the 1911 National Insurance Act and its extensions in 1920 and 1921 were not in reality always able to protect people from the need to claim poor relief as intended.¹¹⁶ It simply formed

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 11th July 1921.

¹¹⁴ Thane, *Foundations*, pp.162-163.

¹¹⁵ SRO, D659/1/1/26, Stafford PLU, GMB, 16th July 1921, 10th September 1921, 22nd April 1922, 17th June 1922, 15th July 1922; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 23rd July 1921, p.10; *Lichfield Mercury*, 16th September 1921, p.3.

¹¹⁶ Fraser, *Evolution*, p.208.

another element in an emergency 'economy of makeshifts' constructed by those who were out of work in Staffordshire in order to make ends meet.

Another reason why applicants might have mentioned the changes in food voucher distribution could have been the fear of legal action. The maximum penalty for making false statements regarding their financial situation and household income when applying for relief was one month's imprisonment with hard labour. Guardians did not always prosecute those found to have committed relief fraud, sometimes opting instead to simply 'severely reprimand and warn' the offender.¹¹⁷ When individuals were prosecuted, they did not always receive the maximum penalty. For instance, when the Stafford magistrates found one man guilty 'making false statements to the Relieving Officer...for the purposes of obtaining relief' in December 1921, he was spared prison and handed a £2 fine - a hefty enough punishment, considering that the relief he fraudulently obtained was only worth 15s.¹¹⁸ However, imprisonment was not unheard of. In January 1923, the Stafford guardians took proceedings against one case for concealing his receipt of state unemployment benefits 'whilst receiving full scale [poor] relief'.¹¹⁹ When this case came before the magistrates the following month, it transpired that the defendant had been drawing unemployment benefits since the previous November, despite continuing to receive poor relief from the guardians. He argued that he had claimed poor relief because 'he was never sure of drawing out-of-work pay', but the magistrates were unmoved and imposed the maximum penalty for relief fraud.¹²⁰ The lengths the guardians were prepared to go in order to prevent anyone from getting more relief than they were perceived to deserve are clear.

The question of labour tests for the unemployed was also a topic of regular discussion. We have seen that Newcastle union decided against them, but Stafford union often revisited the issue. In August 1921, Samuel Dodd asked if work could be found for 103 able-bodied unemployed men who according to the clerk were costing the union between £80 and £90 per week, and suggested wood-chopping. However, it was established that this would not be economical due to the price the firewood would have to be sold at in order to cover costs. Alexander Billington suggested that men could be

¹¹⁷ See for instance SRO, D339/1/26, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 5th August 1922.

¹¹⁸ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 17th December 1921, p.9.

¹¹⁹ SRO, D659/1/1/26, Stafford PLU, GMB, 27th January 1923.

¹²⁰ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 10th February 1923, p.3.

put to work on improving the area's water courses – an option that was not taken up at the time, but that the guardians returned to in 1924. The workhouse master meantime pointed out that 'they were getting flooded out with tramps, and it took him all his time to find them something to do'.¹²¹ The board were therefore faced with the recurrent problem that labour tests produced – how to make such schemes economically viable *and* provide enough work for the amount of people who required it. The master's remarks also highlight another employment-related problem: an increase in vagrancy. In November 1921, the Stafford board acted upon a suggestion from the Rural District Council that 'a number of men be required to do a certain amount of work on the Council Roads, in return for the relief granted'.¹²² It seems, then, that each union's approach to tackling unemployment relief could shift over the space of weeks or months, with specific issues or questions returned to and reassessed on multiple occasions.

A particular group of relief applicants in which both the issue of vagrancy and the question of the labour test could coalesce was ex-servicemen. On this, Stafford and Newcastle differed. In November 1921, Newcastle union's casual wards were re-opened. They had been closed since 1914, when Newcastle began to co-ordinate their approach to vagrants with neighbouring unions Stoke-on-Trent and Burslem & Wolstanton. The three unions maintained only one casual ward – at Stoke-on-Trent - between them, as they had 'very few cases of genuine working men [among casual paupers], and were chiefly troubled by old casuals, who could stay in the district a week by utilising the three casual wards, but would have to move on in a day or two if there were only one'.¹²³ All vagrants who applied to Newcastle or Burslem & Wolstanton were therefore sent to the Stoke-on-Trent institution instead. This appears to have been effective in reducing vagrancy levels in the area until the autumn of 1921, when they were re-opened in order to 'take the overflow' from Stoke's now overcrowded vagrant wards.¹²⁴ In the board meeting immediately following the re-opening, the workhouse master reported that several of the casual paupers admitted were ex-servicemen. He specified, however, that 'many of them... were accustomed to the life of a vagrant

¹²¹ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 20th August 1921, p.10.

¹²² SRO, D659/1/1/26, Stafford PLU, GMB, 5th November 1921.

¹²³ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 13th December 1913, p.10.

¹²⁴ SRO, D339/1/26, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 24th October 1921.

before the War', and suggested that 'it was desirable that some light task of work should be imposed such as three hours wood sawing'. The men in question were 'as far as possible kept separate from the habitual tramps', but the master pointed out that 'it was most demoralising to these men to be provided with lodgings, food and a ticket for a midday meal, without their having to do any work at all'.¹²⁵ Despite the misgivings about wood-chopping schemes expressed earlier in the year, the master's suggestions were adopted.

The Stafford Board responded differently. In May 1922, the MoH contacted the Stafford board asking for its views 'with reference to the full detention and tasks of work for a certain class of ex-servicemen'.¹²⁶ In response, the guardians resolved 'that no ex-servicemen be required to perform a task of work or be detained for the full period'.¹²⁷ Although the vagrancy status of the ex-servicemen in question was not explicitly mentioned here, the MoH's reference to 'detention' implies that it was referring to the casual poor - according to the 1882 Casual Poor Act, a vagrant could be detained in the workhouse for up to four days after admission.¹²⁸

Levine-Clark's recent exploration of ex-servicemen and the politics of relief elsewhere in the region is useful when considering the complex attitudes to vagrant ex-servicemen on display here. She argues that at both the national and local level, welfare deservingness was 'grounded in the work imperative and family liability' - as a result young single men were seen as much lower relief priorities.¹²⁹ During the First World War, military service enabled single men to be 'transformed... into full citizens' and become higher priorities in terms of relief,¹³⁰ but Levine-Clark asserts that by the early 1920s 'the relationship between welfare deservedness and military service had all but collapsed', and 'hierarchies of preference delegitimised the needs of single ex-servicemen'.¹³¹

In the Newcastle board's own hierarchy, it seems that vagrant ex-servicemen were viewed as superior to casual paupers with no military background, as they were

¹²⁵ Ibid., 26th November 1921.

¹²⁶ SRO, D659/1/1/26, Stafford PLU, GMB, 20th May 1922.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700-1930* (Basingstoke, 2002), p.119.

¹²⁹ Levine-Clark, *Unemployment*, p.158.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.137.

¹³¹ Ibid., p.158

accommodated separately from them. They were also viewed as not yet morally compromised, given the master's statement that it would be 'demoralising' for such men to receive assistance with no work in return, a status not attributed to the non-military casual paupers. The Master's qualification that many of the ex-servicemen had experienced vagrancy prior to the war indicates that there was a further hierarchy of 'deservingness' within the category of 'ex-serviceman', however, accounting for previous vagrancy as well as the 'transformative' effects of military service. The MoH's reference to 'a certain class of ex-servicemen' suggests they also differentiated between military veterans, insofar as it would be appropriate for some to 'be detained for the full period' but presumably not others. The Stafford board, however, made fewer such distinctions – for them, ex-servicemen should not be detained or given labour tasks to perform, apparently regardless of their previous experiences with vagrancy. This implies that they felt differently to Newcastle about the potential 'demoralising impact' of giving relief to these men without requiring them to work for it. The discrepancy between the two unions' positions on this issue highlights the flip side of the legal restrictions placed on the board. On some issues, there was the flexibility available to come to markedly different conclusions. Moreover, this example again highlights that variations could exist in relief policy even between unions in the same county, facing very similar circumstances.

The nature of Stafford and Newcastle's responses to unemployment explored above matter because they speak to some of the key concerns of this thesis. The significantly increased financial expenditure by both unions, in spite of the state-led unemployment benefits available, continues to demonstrate the important role the poor law played in a local climate of drastically increased need. Applicants used the poor law as well as trade union and unemployment assistance payments, instead of leaving the poor law behind. In addition, the endurance of a pre-existing local welfare culture is evident in both unions' choices, continuing attempts to restrict and control relief provision. Indeed, nuances between policy in Stafford and Newcastle have emerged, despite having broadly similar priorities in terms of welfare administration, emphasising the value of examining two unions within the same case-study.

This final part of our discussion of the early 1920s addresses how the unemployed themselves responded to the unions' relief provisions. Regular face-to-face contact between relief applicants and poor law officials was part of gaining and

maintaining relief payments. However, both boards were also regularly in touch with representatives of the unemployed. These exchanges demonstrate that relations between relief distributors and recipients could be relatively cordial, even in moments where the latter took to public protest. During the Newcastle board meeting on 17th May 1921, for instance, where the union's approach to escalating unemployment was being decided, a large crowd assembled outside the union offices. They were led by two members of the National Administrative Council of Unemployed who had 'come into the district to organise the unemployed in regard to their applying for relief'.¹³² The guardians refused to meet with these organisers, the chairman stating that 'the Guardians did not like to have their work interfered with by outsiders; they wanted to deal with the men and women directly concerned'.¹³³ Instead, the chairman and another board member, John Mayer, addressed the crowd from an upstairs window, both clearly intending to reassure their audience. Mayer asked the crowd 'to preserve order, and not to create any disturbance', but also told them that 'the Guardians sympathised with the unemployed, and would do whatever the law allowed them to do in the way of relieving distress', which was met with 'loud applause'. The board did admit a deputation of four Newcastle men to discuss the strategy they had agreed to tackle the area's unemployment. The chairman explained that 'whatever the deputation had been told [perhaps a reference to the NACU organisers], they must remember that the Guardians had no bottomless purse, and were bound by strict rules and regulations'. He also reiterated, however, that 'the Board sympathised very much with the men who were affected by the industrial situation', and 'that the Guardians would do their very best within their powers to meet the unparalleled distress that existed'. Both the deputation and the outside crowd then dispersed with little recorded disturbance.¹³⁴ Clearly the unemployed had aimed to pressure the board into generosity; nevertheless, the whole exchange appears to have been conducted relatively calmly and with mutual respect.

There is, however, evidence of a much more fraught relationship developing in the communications between the boards and the unemployed. Organisations representing the out-of-work regularly asked the guardians for more generous relief terms, and registered protests regarding particular actions the boards had taken. These

¹³² This incident is also mentioned in Bailey, 'Unifiers and dividers', p. 120.

¹³³ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 21st May 1921, p.12.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

ranged from the requirement that relief given to unemployed persons or their dependants be paid back as a loan,¹³⁵ to Stafford's decision not to give extra Christmas relief to the unemployed.¹³⁶ Protests did not always focus on actions; there were also occasional complaints about comments guardians were recorded as making about the unemployed. For instance, in July 1922 the Newcastle Trades and Labour Council wrote to the Newcastle board protesting about a guardian's remark made at a recent meeting that some relief applicants that the board saw 'did not seem the class that wanted to work'.¹³⁷

The majority of contact the unemployed made with guardians, however, was concerned with relief scales. In Stafford's case, this began almost immediately after they had set their unemployed relief scale in February 1921. Later that month, the board received a letter from the Electrical Trades' Union, forwarding a resolution condemning the guardians' relief scale and suggesting that 'in view of the relief given by other boards it emphasises the fact that the majority of the Board are unsympathetic to the unemployed' – a suggestion which deeply offended many of the board members.¹³⁸ In March 1921 alone, six resolutions were received from local trade union branches contesting the union's relief scale.¹³⁹ A deputation from the Stafford Trades Council and Labour Party was received by the board in November 1921, asking for reconsideration of the relief scale, 'especially with regard to the amount allowed for Rent and also the amount allowed for a man and wife or in cases where there was only one or two children... The amount allowed for single men and women in lodgings was [also] inadequate and should be increased'.¹⁴⁰ The Trades Council sent a further two resolutions in April 1922, contesting the reduction in the relief scale that Stafford had made the previous month.¹⁴¹ It is likely that further communications on this issue were received by the Stafford board, but that they were directly received by the Relief Committee and therefore absent from the minutes of the whole board meetings.

¹³⁵ SRO, D339/1/26, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 3rd October 1921; SRO, D659/1/1/26, Stafford PLU, GMB, 22nd April 1922.

¹³⁶ SRO, D659/1/1/26, Stafford PLU, GMB, 31st December 1921.

¹³⁷ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 15th July 1922, p.11.

¹³⁸ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 5th March 1921, p.5.

¹³⁹ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 2nd April 1921, p.10.

¹⁴⁰ SRO, D659/1/1/26, Stafford PLU, GMB, 5th November 1921.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 22nd April 1922.

It might be reasonable to suppose that, as Newcastle did not initially use a relief scale, they might receive less petitioning, and indeed that board did appear to receive much less communication from the organised unemployed than Stafford, although they were on occasion maligned for *not* having a relief scale.¹⁴² When the Newcastle board did enact one in May 1922, and then reduced it shortly after in response to a fresh increase in relief applications, no complaints from the union's unemployed were recorded similar to those Stafford received.¹⁴³ The same silence is notable when, in June 1923, the union decided to instigate a full labour test for unemployed applicants, involving stone-breaking, wood sawing and chopping, water pumping and gardening.¹⁴⁴ The Newcastle unemployed were not averse to action, as demonstrated by their gathering outside the union offices when the region's unemployment crisis was beginning. Why that union's poor were apparently less vocal than those in Stafford is unclear. Nevertheless, the discrepancy does serve as a reminder that the unemployed should not be considered as one homogenous group with entirely aligned views on how their relief should be distributed.

It is evident however that the unemployed in both unions were often frustrated, and despite the guardians' frequent references to the legal and economic restrictions they faced in relieving the unemployed, felt that there was room for more generosity. On occasion, this dissatisfaction could spur some to go beyond letters and resolutions. Over the winter of 1923-1924, around 20 unemployed men refused to continue their labour test, working on a river cleansing project, on account of the low wages paid by the Stafford board (30s. a week) and the wintry weather. They assembled at the union offices on 9th January 1924 while the Stafford Relief Committee was sitting, led by Town Councillor T. Roberts, who had been elected as an 'unemployed trade union organiser'.¹⁴⁵ They were refused an audience, with the clerk informing them that the committee had no power to give them further relief if they did not conduct the work

¹⁴² See for instance SRO, D339/1/26, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 24th October 1921.

¹⁴³ SRO, D339/1/27, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 29th May 1922, 12th June 1922, 16th June 1922; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 17th June 1922, p.4. This latter source suggests that 'new regulations cutting off Government unemployed pay' were behind the increase in applications – it is likely that this referred to the stipulation in the 1922 Unemployment Insurance Act that in cases where individuals had made at least 20 payments into the scheme but had also received at least 20 days' worth of benefits, further benefits could only be received for periods of five weeks at a time, followed by another five week period where none would be payable.

¹⁴⁴ SRO, D339/1/27, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 11th June 1922.

¹⁴⁵ *Tamworth Herald*, 19th January 1924, p.2.

allocated to them. In response, the unemployed did not allow the committee members to leave the building; eventually they had to be dispersed by the police.¹⁴⁶ The next day, the men visited the union workhouse and demanded food from the Master, declaring ‘that they were starving’. When he refused, the men forced their way into the institution and ate the food that had been prepared for the inmates. Once again, the police had to be summoned to remove them from the premises. The group returned to the workhouse a few hours later – this time, however, the police arrived more quickly and the men left ‘without accomplishing their object.’¹⁴⁷

This group of unemployed men seem to have broken away from the policies of the various local advocacy organisations. The Stafford Trades Council and Labour Party passed a resolution following the incident stating that it ‘repudiates the action of irresponsible persons who raided the Stafford Workhouse...[B]y other methods sympathetic consideration might have been secured’.¹⁴⁸ Somewhat unsurprisingly, the Stafford guardians chose to uphold the Relief Committee’s decision not to supply these men with outdoor relief unless they returned to their work, although they also eventually opted not to instigate criminal proceedings against the ringleaders either.¹⁴⁹ There were perhaps limits to the discretionary powers of the guardians when confronted with the possibility of a strong social protest from within the local community.

The ‘raid’, as it was called in the local press, on the Stafford workhouse is telling. First, the way in which the regional Trade Council distanced themselves from the incident further supports the assertion of differences in approach and attitude among the organised unemployed. Secondly, it raises the question of the extent to which the unemployed could feel they had a ‘right’ to relief from the board. In the eyes of these particular men their entitlement to relief was evidently not tied to performing work tasks for the guardians, or indeed to behaving with the deference traditionally associated with receipt of poor relief, and their demand for food from the workhouse has the air of taking what they were ‘owed’. This is arguably emblematic of a shift in attitudes

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 12th January 1924, p.5; *Tamworth Herald*, 19th January 1924, p.2.

¹⁴⁸ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 12th January 1924, p.5.

¹⁴⁹ SRO, D659/1/1/26, Stafford PLU, GMB, 12th January 1924.

towards welfare provoked by changes in the role of the state, the nature of citizenship and in democratic participation.

The First World War had seen a significant extension in the role of the state, laying the groundwork for its involvement in other areas of life in the interwar period.¹⁵⁰ At the same time, as discussed above, the slow expansion of the electorate which had been occurring since the 1880s culminated in the 1918 Representation of the People Act, which enfranchised poor relief recipients and enabled them to vote in guardians' elections. The out-of-work donations set up in the aftermath of the war set the precedent that it was acceptable for the state to provide non-contributory relief at a subsistence level. This resulted in an increasing sense among the working poor of entitlement to welfare resources as the right of a citizen.¹⁵¹ Indeed, Geoffrey Finlayson and more recently Elizabeth Hurren have argued that political citizenship, the rights of an individual to take part in the democratic process, were meaningless if they were not accompanied by access to social welfare – especially given that paupers could now elect those who controlled their access to relief at a local level.¹⁵² However, scholars have not always agreed about what this meant for the poor law. Lynn Hollen Lees and more recently Stephanie Ward have suggested a popular rejection of the poor law by a poor citizenry no longer accepting of a shameful, tainted form of welfare.¹⁵³ However, this does not quite match up with the actions of Stafford's workhouse raiders. They were not rejecting the poor law, but demanding to be supported by it. Both Hurren and Digby have indicated that the poor applied their increased sense of welfare entitlement to the poor law.¹⁵⁴ This interpretation fits more closely with the behaviour of these unemployed men – newly developed attitudes towards welfare were acted out upon their 'old' welfare system. The New Poor Law still therefore figured prominently in the relief strategies of unemployed claimants in north Staffordshire.

¹⁵⁰ Fraser, *Evolution*, pp.209-210.

¹⁵¹ L. Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge, 1998), pp.298-305.

¹⁵² Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, pp.161-162; Hurren, *Protesting About Pauperism*, pp.251-252.

¹⁵³ Hollen Lees, *Solidarities*, pp.294-309; Ward, *Unemployment and the State*, pp.43, 47, 99-103

¹⁵⁴ Hurren, *Protesting About Pauperism*, pp.214-241; Digby, 'Changing welfare cultures', pp.297-322.

3.6 1926: Newcastle union and locked-out miners

The majority of the preceding discussion has focused on the early 1920s. However, as is clear from Figure 3.5, relief levels in 1921 and 1922 paled in comparison to those in 1926, when outdoor relief expenditure in Newcastle shot up to £39,496 – a five-fold increase from the previous year. Most of this expenditure was concentrated between May and November, and was responding to the miners' strike of that period, which began on 30th April. Pat Ryan has shown that the coal dispute caused poor law figures 'to reach unprecedented totals' nationally.¹⁵⁵ On 1st May 1926 there were 1,222,001 people on relief across England and Wales. By the middle of June this figure had increased to 2,405,045, with the 'high water-mark' reached in mid-August, when 2,490,167 people were recorded as receiving poor relief.¹⁵⁶ The strike had an almost immediate impact on numbers of relief applications in Newcastle. In the first board meeting after the industrial action had begun, on 10th May, around 70 additional relief applications were made as a result of the strike.¹⁵⁷ By 25th May, the number of unemployed cases had risen to 1,024, incorporating 4,614 individuals.¹⁵⁸ By 7th June, between 3,000 and 4,000 grocery vouchers had been issued to the unemployed in Audley district alone.¹⁵⁹ This was a scale quite unlike that experienced four or five years previously.

Almost at once, the Newcastle guardians were forced to move away from the policies they had enforced earlier in the decade. Three relief sub-committees were formed to hear unemployed applications for relief, a strategy that was strenuously avoided in the early 1920s, but now became essential due to the sheer number of

¹⁵⁵ P. Ryan, 'The Poor Law in 1926', in M. Morris (ed.), *The General Strike* (London, 1976), p.362. The 1926 strike and subsequent lock-out has been the subject of a large and varied scholarship. For examples, see S. Bruley, *The Women and Men of 1926: A Gender and Social History of the General Strike and Miners' Lockout in South Wales* (Cardiff, 2010); D. Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850-1926* (Oxford, 1992); K. Gildart, 'The miners' lockout in 1926 in the Cumberland coalfield', *Northern History*, 44:2 (2007), pp.169-192; H. Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout: Meanings of Community in the Durham Coalfield* (Oxford, 2009); and J. McIlroy, A. Campbell and K. Gildart (eds.), *Industrial Politics and the 1926 Mining Lockout: The Struggle for Dignity* (Cardiff, 2009).

¹⁵⁶ Ryan, 'The Poor Law in 1926', p.362.

¹⁵⁷ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 15th May 1926, p.7.

¹⁵⁸ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 29th May 1926, p.7.

¹⁵⁹ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 12th June 1926, p 5.

applicants.¹⁶⁰ The scale of unemployment relief that had been in place since 1922 was also amended. This included an extra 5s. to women, when it was pointed out ‘that in the case of a striker no relief could legally be given to the man’.¹⁶¹ Adjustments the MoH subsequently made to the relief scale removed this provision, but nevertheless this attempt to get round the Merthyr Tydfil judgement by giving larger relief payments to dependants was at odds with the board’s earlier position, when they were at pains to avoid even the perception that they were relieving able-bodied or striking men. Further evidence of this shift can be found when the Reverend William Sykes referred to the possibility of strike pay being issued to miners, and asked how it should be dealt with. Chairman Mainwaring replied that ‘the law was quite clear that all income must be taken into account’.¹⁶² Again, this seems to contradict the conclusions drawn in the earlier discussion on food vouchers outlined above. Indeed, in July 1926 the guardians voted to count as income one-half of the value of any food voucher issued by the Miners’ Federation.¹⁶³ One might argue that the board were in fact adhering to the same fundamental policy in both 1921-1922 and 1926 – that of reducing expenditure wherever possible, which was the result of both the earlier and the later approach to means-testing. Their overall aim, then, had not changed, but the different scale of the situation in 1926 forced the guardians to shift their strategy for achieving it.

As well as instigating these changes in relief policy, the strike pushed Newcastle into serious financial trouble. A major contributing factor in this was that the strike impacted significantly on the ability of parish overseers and collectors to collect the rates, from which relief was paid. This problem was flagged up very early in the strike. At the beginning of May, the clerk re-deployed a temporary assistant collector to the guardians as an assistant to the Newcastle district relieving officer, ‘it being useless for him to attempt to collect in present circumstances’.¹⁶⁴ The MoH asked that overseers be ‘pressed to obtain... as much of the overdue call as it was possible to collect’, and the clerk suggested to the overseers that they approach their larger ratepayers ‘with a request that rates might be paid at an early date’, but it seems there was little that could

¹⁶⁰ SRO, D339/1/30, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 10th May 1926.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 25th May 1926.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 5th July 1926.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 10th May 1926.

practically be done.¹⁶⁵ The explanation for this difficulty is clear – large numbers of rate-payers were unable, through the strike and resultant loss of earnings, to afford the rates. Even when the strike was dying away and some miners were returning to work, rate payments were not always forthcoming. In October, the overseers of Betley parish returned the latest precepts that had been served on them by the guardians, stating that they refused ‘to accept the responsibility to pay back any of the relief given to the miners’.¹⁶⁶ This was due in part to the Farmers’ Association ‘holding meetings of protest that they will not pay the proportionate part added to the rates’.¹⁶⁷

This resistance from one of the union’s more rural parishes certainly indicates a certain level of animosity towards the striking miners and a perception of them as ‘undeserving’ of relief from the community. Indeed, several local studies on the 1926 lockout include evidence of ambivalence towards miners felt by others in their localities, provoked by a variety of factors. These include the stagnation of other key industries that relied on the collieries to maintain production, and the perception that miners received preferential treatment from charities or friendly societies, as well as the view promoted by some national organisations and press that miners were no worse off during the lockout as a result of poor relief and other philanthropic support.¹⁶⁸ As we have seen, it is clear that in the early 1920s, protection of the poorest rate-payers was a factor often at the forefront of guardians’ minds, but there are no surviving references to people either being unable to pay, or refusing to pay on the grounds of principle. This state of affairs was new for Newcastle in 1926, and might reflect the perceived different nature of unemployed relief applicants. Moreover, the dissatisfaction of the Farmers’ Association also indicates an urban-rural divide within the union. In September, the same organisation had argued that relief should be discontinued to striking miners, the only recorded instance of any group lobbying the guardians holding that view.¹⁶⁹ It was also the only group whose members were likely to live in the more rural parts of the union; others in contact with the board on this issue, such as the local trade councils, were concentrated in the more urban or industrial areas. Individuals who owned or

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 25th May 1926.

¹⁶⁶ SRO, D339/1/31, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 25th October 1926.

¹⁶⁷ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 30th October 1926, p.3.

¹⁶⁸ See for instance, Barron, *1926 Miners’ Lockout*, p.37; Bruley, *Women and Men of 1926*, p.82; Gildart, ‘The miners’ lockout’, pp.169-192.

¹⁶⁹ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 2nd October 1926, p.10.

rented farming land had the potential to be significant contributors to the rates, which is likely to have prompted their protests against paying totals inflated by relief to urban or semi-urban miners.

As a result of the huge wave of relief applicants and the near impossibility of collecting the rates fully across both relief districts, Newcastle union spiralled into debt. Despite the large amounts distributed in relief during 1921-1922, Newcastle appears always to have been operating within its means. In 1926, however, this was impossible. On 25th May, the board received written consent from the MoH for an overdraft of £2,000 on their banking account. By the time this arrived, however, it was insufficient, and the clerk was instructed to write back to the MoH and ask for a further £2,500 loan to be permitted.¹⁷⁰ By 25th October, the union was £36,500 in debt to the Midlands Provincial Bank.¹⁷¹

The decision of the board to take out substantial loans in order to cover their extraordinary relief expenses highlights both the limitations and the flexibility of the poor law in such an exceptional financial situation. It illustrates unions' dependency on the collection of the rates. Despite the Newcastle board's earlier somewhat paternalistic emphasis on protecting poorer ratepayers, it is clear that the guardians could find themselves at the mercy of those ratepayers too. The use of private bank loans to cover relief expenditure does indicate a certain measure of pragmatism, as the board stepped outside of typical poor law relief-funding structures to address the union's unusual economic circumstances.¹⁷² However, the significant level of debt Newcastle was in after five months of relieving the families of striking miners indicates just how unsuited local poor law structures were to dealing effectively with this type of poverty. Nevertheless, the system was still an important source of relief for claimants, as this chapter has demonstrated, and it needed to be kept afloat.

Alongside the evident mounting financial pressure on the board, the Newcastle guardians became increasingly divided, with some remaining sympathetic to the striking miners while others began to lose patience with them. In July, Mr. Beech, Mr.

¹⁷⁰ SRO, D339/1/30, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 25th May 1926.

¹⁷¹ SRO, D339/1/31, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 25th October 1926.

¹⁷² It was not unheard of for boards to take out loans with private banks, but these were usually for specific projects, such as maintenance or improvement work on union institutions.

Hodgkinson and Mr. Sims proposed (unsuccessfully) an increase in the relief given to women and children and to exclude food vouchers from means-testing, in response to a deputation from the Minnie Pit Branch of the North Staffordshire Miners' Federation.¹⁷³ This particular branch arguably had the potential to wield more influence than others. In January 1918, an explosion in the Minnie Pit had killed 155 miners, widowing 67 women.¹⁷⁴ Representatives of that community might therefore be seen as symbolic of women and children made vulnerable by the coal industry through no fault of their own. Hodgkinson was vocal in his support despite the apparent personal impact of the strike, stating in August that 'he had suffered, perhaps, as much as anyone round that board, having been thrown out of work for many weeks, but he was prepared to stand by the miners. It was not their fault that they were out'.¹⁷⁵ The Reverend William Sykes, for his part, avoided prosecuting applicants for making false statements in his position as chairman of the Audley Special Relief Committee.¹⁷⁶ When it was proposed on 14th September that relief to the unemployed be stopped in ten days' time, he argued vociferously against it, reminding his colleagues that '5,000 people in the Audley district would be affected by the resolution if it were carried. He was aware of the economic side of the matter, but when it came to deciding between £.s.d and good ethics, he was in favour of good ethics'.¹⁷⁷

As that proposal demonstrates, however, other guardians were becoming exasperated by the situation. In August, Mr. T. Hulse and Mr. J.R. Critchlow proposed discontinuing the weekly Madeley Special Relief Committee, which would require unemployed applicants from Madeley to travel to Newcastle, over 30 miles away, to apply for their relief.¹⁷⁸ Although the rest of the board decided against this after seeing a deputation of the unemployed on the subject, the proposal suggests a disinterest in the convenience or accessibility of relief for the miners, or perhaps even an attempt to dissuade relief applications by making it more difficult for Madeley residents to be seen by the relief committees. In the same meeting, Critchlow argued that 'there were so

¹⁷³ SRO, D339/1/30, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 5th July 1926.

¹⁷⁴ Ian Bailey discusses this catastrophe in detail in 'Unifiers and dividers', pp.184-208. See also John Lumsdon, *North Staffordshire Mines History Online*, northstaffsminers.btck.co.uk/MemorialRecallsVictimsofMinniepit [accessed 21/06/2016].

¹⁷⁵ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 4th September 1926, p.5.

¹⁷⁶ SRO, D339/1/30, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 30th August 1926.

¹⁷⁷ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 18th September 1926, p.3.

¹⁷⁸ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 4th September 1926, p.5.

many people who would not help themselves. The mines were now open and the colliers must go back. He did not agree with the robbing of widows and other poor people upon whom these extra rates would fall. The only people for whom he had any pity were those who were thrown out of work through no fault of their own'.¹⁷⁹ This demonstrated how widows could be used to support both sides of the argument over relief – still perceived as particularly vulnerable, but this time portrayed as ratepayers that should be protected instead of as relief recipients themselves. Both Hulse and the Reverend G.B. Mildred spoke strongly in favour of stopping relief, once again invoked the rate-payers. Mildred stated that 'the Guardians were not justified in taking money out of the ratepayers' pockets to pay men who could have work if they were willing to do it', while Hulse argued that 'the Board had been financing the miners at the cost of the ratepayers, in order that the miners might fight the government. That was not justice, and it was not the purpose for which they were appointed guardians'.¹⁸⁰ In other words, the board should attempt to remain apolitical.

These policy-making divisions among the guardians mirrored those developing nationally among miners as to whether to continue to strike. As winter approached, it became apparent that 'serious under-nourishment of whole industrial districts' was a real risk and some regional leaders began to arrange withdrawals from the strike and acceptance of compromise settlements.¹⁸¹ Indeed, from mid-November the miners' national leaders advised their members to make their own district settlements, 'generally involving significant increases in the length of the working day'.¹⁸² It seems then that the Newcastle guardians' debate on whether to continue relief had begun at a moment when mining resistance had begun to crumble.

In the event, the proposal to discontinue unemployment relief after 25th September was passed, with a majority of two votes.¹⁸³ There were a number of factors at play in the guardians' increasing reluctance to continue paying for relief. The enormous financial burden seems obvious, although notably none of the more vocal

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 18th September 1926, p.3. Anne Digby has demonstrated a similar awareness among welfare officials in Durham that most of the cost of relieving the unemployed fell on poorer local communities, partially as a result of rising poor rates, in 'Changing welfare cultures', p.305.

¹⁸¹ A. J. Reid, *United We Stand: A History of Britain's Trade Unions* (London, 2005), pp.315-316.

¹⁸² Ibid., p.316.

¹⁸³ SRO, D339/1/30, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 14th September 1926.

opponents of continued relief mentioned it in their discussions. It is worth noting that chairman Mainwaring's presence was much reduced during this period. Historically an extremely regular attendee, of the 12 board meetings held between the beginning of the strike and the end of 1926, Mainwaring only attended three – two in May, and one in early July – while otherwise absent due to health problems. If he had been present more often, the financial implications of the unemployment relief might have been emphasised more strongly, given his keen focus on controlling the board's relief expenditure.

Instead, the issues raised were the impropriety of relieving men who were unemployed ostensibly by choice, the perennial argument of protecting the most vulnerable rate-payers, and the embroilment of the guardians in a political dispute. At their root, all these arguments were concerned with what boards of guardians were for, and where their social responsibilities lay. From the viewpoint of guardians such as Critchlow, Mildred and Hulse, able-bodied men who could get work, no matter how politically distasteful, were not the responsibility of the guardians – a view which the union clerk often pointed out had legal authority, and as we have seen was supported by certain groups of rate-payers. They also had an equal responsibility to look after the rate-payers' interests as they did to protect the poor from destitution. Finally, the board should not, as far as possible, be drawn into political disputes by supporting one side over another.

It is striking that these guardians did not see the *withholding* of relief as taking sides in the dispute, and marks a significant shift from attitudes in earlier decades. Andy Croll has demonstrated that prior to the 1900 Merthyr Tydfil judgment, the *provision* of relief was perceived as the apolitical action – the consensus between poor law officials, both central and local, was that 'guardians were legally obliged to relieve destitute strikers' and should therefore act accordingly. Withholding relief was seen to be siding with the employers against the strikers - inappropriate political involvement, even if that was individual guardians' personal inclination, and not the role of the poor law, which should be focused on levels of destitution.¹⁸⁴ However, in the aftermath of the Merthyr judgement, by the 1920s this perception had reversed. The provision of relief to striking men was now seen as the political statement, as increasing numbers of guardians, some

¹⁸⁴ Croll, 'Strikers and the right to poor relief', pp.132-137.

of whom were working-class and/or socialist, returned by an expanded electorate including greater numbers of the poor themselves after the 1918 Representation of the People Act, ran up debts much larger than Newcastle's to support such cases.¹⁸⁵

As the first board in Staffordshire to discontinue unemployment relief, the guardians' decision was controversial. An opinion piece in the *Staffordshire Advertiser* described the union as taking a 'bold course', but remarked that it was 'characteristic of the Newcastle Board...not to be guided solely by what other similar bodies are doing'¹⁸⁶ – a judgement which aligns with the union's earlier rejection of widely held practices such as relief committees and relief scales. The anger felt by the unemployed themselves at this decision was made clear from the outset. As the guardians left the union offices on 14th September after the vote had been held, crowds of men and women met them with cries of 'here come the babykillers', 'you've got a good dinner to go home to' and 'what about my starving children?'.¹⁸⁷ At the following board meeting, on 27th September, alarm was expressed at the guardians' decision from many quarters. The board received deputations from the Mayor of Newcastle's Distress Fund Committee, headed by Josiah Wedgewood, and from the North Staffordshire Miners' Federation.¹⁸⁸ A deputation from the Audley Women's Section of the Labour party also attended, but the board decided not to receive them into the meeting 'on the ground that it [the deputation] was of a political character'¹⁸⁹ – a further attempt by the board to remain aloof from politics in their handling of the dispute. They also recorded the receipt of 17 resolutions from various other organisations asking the board to continue the relief.¹⁹⁰

Again, the subsequent debate over whether to reinstate unemployment relief seemed only to be tangentially concerned with the financial position of the board. Wedgewood suggested that the withdrawal of relief was being used to compel the miners to go back to work, which vice-chairman James Beattie denied, retorting that the decision 'was prompted entirely by financial reasons. They really did not know where

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p.152. For a focused examination of one of these boards, see S.R. Williams, 'The Bedwellty board of guardians and the Default Act of 1927', *Llafur*, 2:4 (1979), pp.65-77.

¹⁸⁶ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 18th September 1926, p.3.

¹⁸⁷ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 2nd October 1926, p.10.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

the money was to come from'.¹⁹¹ The Reverend Daniel Kelly countered that if the board confirmed their decision to stop relief, some of the applicants might enter the workhouse, which would be significantly more expensive.¹⁹² However, these were the only instances in the lengthy discussion where the board's actual financial ability to cover relief costs on such a scale was mentioned. Those who spoke against reverting to unemployment relief provision continued to focus on the ratepayers, with the Reverend Mildred arguing that 'they were Guardians of the Poor who were unable to earn their own living, and they were also Guardians of the ratepayers who paid the money, some hundreds of whom found it was as much as they could do at present to keep body and soul together'.¹⁹³ There was also reference to the illegality of maintaining able-bodied men, and that the guardians had no real way of knowing when the strike would be over – when Wedgwood claimed that 'the lamentable coal dispute could not go on much longer', Mildred retorted that 'they had been told that before'.¹⁹⁴ These guardians' concerns was with the remit of the board – a remit that encompassed ratepayers as well as the poor, and which was restricted by legislation.

The arguments of those who wanted to see relief reinstated, meanwhile, focused largely on the morality of the decision. Dependents of striking miners loomed large. Samuel Finney, former MP for neighbouring Burselm and representing the Miners' Federation, asserted that they were asking on behalf of the 'women and children'; while Mr W. Boulton said that 'women and children were suffering more acutely than at any time during this dispute', and Emily Sykes pointed out that 'they did not want to see the women and children on the verge of starvation'.¹⁹⁵ A theme of honourableness and moral fortitude ran through many of the arguments of this 'pro-relief' side – both in terms of the guardians and the miners. Wedgwood claimed that if they continued to offer relief for another three weeks, 'the honour of Newcastle would be saved', and Mrs. Sykes argued that the guardians would be called 'a hard-hearted lot' if they took away relief that was 'only just [keeping] the people alive'. Several people brought up the upstanding nature of the striking men, arguably an engagement with the rhetoric of 'deservingness' consistently central to poor law decision-making. The Reverend Kelly

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

said that ‘the great body of men were of a very fine type, men who did not come for relief for love of the game, or to avoid work.’¹⁹⁶ William Sykes pointed out that in Audley district many of the 1,420 men who had been relieved were ‘members of their churches and chapels, and were the backbone of the friendly societies, showing that they were thrifty’.¹⁹⁷ He also noted that Audley men had publicly stated that they intended to repay their relief. Ex-servicemen were again discussed as a particular category, who would be ‘robbed of their sense of decency’ if forced to go back to the mines. Guardian Mr. J. Beech, who was himself a miner, went so far as to compare the courage of the men who had been in the army during the war with that which they were currently demonstrating, with ‘the only difference between now and then was that today they were fighting for more bread and butter for their children’.¹⁹⁸ The overarching implication of these arguments was that the board was morally obliged to continue relief to these vulnerable and ‘deserving’ people. Legal restrictions could not override the distress that the guardians were elected to alleviate.

In the end, however, the board upheld their original decision to discontinue relief, again with a majority of two. Wedgewood raised the situation in the House of Commons when speaking to Minister of Health Neville Chamberlain the following day, expressing concern that there would be a large influx of workhouse inmates as a result of the relief stoppage and that the Newcastle workhouse would be unable to adequately house them all.¹⁹⁹ However, this feared influx did not come to pass. The guardians later formed an alliance with the North Staffordshire Colliery Owners’ Association, whereby miners were forced to repay relief when they returned to work through automatic deductions from their wages – of which the collieries took a five percent cut themselves.²⁰⁰ This arrangement had echoes of the 1901 Taff Vale judgement, which ruled that unions could be liable for profits lost by employers as a result of strike action, before being reversed by the 1906 Trade Disputes Act.²⁰¹ In a similar way, the union forced the miners to help re-coup the enormous costs of their relief. Despite the

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ *The Scotsman*, 29th September 1926, p.10.

²⁰⁰ SRO, D339/1/31, Newcastle PLU, GMB, 22nd November 1926.

²⁰¹ T.H. Hatton, ‘Unemployment and the labour market, 1870-1939’ in R. Floud and P. Johnson (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain – Vol II: Economic Maturity, 1860-1939* (Cambridge, 2004), p.367.

relatively minor part the union's financial pressures played in debates about relief, ultimately the focus returned to them, with the guardians' attempts to recoup their enormous outgoings by any means necessary.

3.7 Conclusions

Returning to the models of regional welfare highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, this case study has demonstrated a locally specific welfare culture in place in Stafford and Newcastle-under-Lyme unions between 1900 and 1930. Using Steve King's yardsticks for measuring welfare culture to the body of evidence presented here,²⁰² we can see that in some areas the policies and practices in the Staffordshire union differed markedly from those observed in Leicestershire. Union governance coalesced around a relatively small number of individuals, arguably creating a governance structure that was more 'closed' than it was 'open', despite intermittent democratic attempts to make changes in positions of power. Indeed, the electoral legislation in 1894 and 1918 made little impact on the boards' demographic profile, as established figures maintained their positions for considerable periods of time. Relief itself was largely far from generous – in keeping with King's original portrayal of the north/west zone - and tightly controlled. There are also glimpses of rather singular policy-making by our Staffordshire boards, whereby they did not always administer their affairs in ways widely pursued in other unions, with both boards resisting sub-division or delegation of responsibility wherever possible, whether that might be relief sub-committees, or relief scales. Perhaps most strikingly, Newcastle's decision to stop relief in 1926 flew in the face of policy elsewhere in the region.

The most obvious contrast between Blaby and the Staffordshire unions was the impact that unemployment had on local poor law administration. This serves to highlight how differently a notionally national trend, or relatively short-term event such as the 1926 strike, could be experienced by poor law unions in different localities. Moreover, the exploration of how guardians chose to deal with unemployment in the Staffordshire unions emphasises differences in approach and policy even between

²⁰² King, 'Welfare regimes', p.59.

unions situated much closer together, as Stafford and Newcastle differed in positions on relief committees, relief scales, and vagrant ex-servicemen. These West Midlands case studies thus demonstrate the longevity of another element of King's conception of regional welfare cultures: capacity for intra-regional as well as inter-regional variation, into the early twentieth century. The Staffordshire unions were not only distinct from those in other regions, but also distinct from each other.

Some of the welfare reforms that feature in these case studies, specifically the old-age pension and unemployment support, were not entirely successful in removing people from the remit of the poor law as they were intended. The pension left a particular category of paupers, those resident in workhouses, to be supported by the board of guardians. Such paupers made strategic choices based on the nature of their residential care needs; the pension did not offer them the support required to move on from the poor law. Perhaps more strikingly the poor law continued, in keeping with Levine-Clark's findings in Stourbridge, to work to prevent total destitution among the unemployed. State unemployment benefits had not yet usurped the older form of welfare. The 'old' and 'new' concepts of modern welfare therefore often ran in parallel, and in specific contexts could intermingle with each other too.

This is not to say, however, that the poor law was well-suited to this task. We have seen evidence of relative flexibility, as guardians moved away from policies that were no longer useful and took on new strategies when necessary. Despite this, boards found themselves restricted by the legal limits of their authority, and by the union's funding streams – as they tried on occasion to explain to those who were excluded from poor law legislation. Ultimately there was little room for manoeuvre; as has been observed in the case of the 1926 strike, when the rates could not be paid, tinkering with means tests and relief scales was somewhat academic. As the boards were restricted, this in turn meant that they placed restrictions on the poor themselves, even down to the items they could purchase with relief. Our Leicestershire union was able to respond to changes in local welfare need and relieve those who had fallen through the cracks between 'old' and 'new' welfare. To an extent, the Staffordshire unions did the same as they picked up where unemployment benefits dropped off, but they did eventually reach their limit, which seems largely due to an issue of scale. Particularly by 1926, the volume of need went beyond the capacity of local poor law administration and orthodox structures.

Finally, the debate about whether to stop offering relief in 1926 opened up questions of what the role of the guardians was supposed to be in a more democratic era. Was their main responsibility to relieve the ‘deserving’ and vulnerable, and how were they to be defined? Or was their role to protect the ratepayers? These roles could not always be served effectively at the same time, particularly in such dire socio-economic conditions. The Newcastle board wrestled with this question, which was further complicated by the fact that neither the needy nor the ratepayers were homogenous groups. Both were perceived as having hierarchies within them – strikers, ex-servicemen, and poor ratepayers, for example. Arguably, Newcastle’s decision to discontinue unemployment relief in the autumn of 1926 indicates an emphasis on vulnerable ratepayers, rather than relief applicants. However, just as there were divisions within the poor and the ratepayers, so too were there divisions within boards, where guardians differed, sometimes fundamentally, on who the board should prioritise. Boards cannot, therefore, be treated as homogenous groups either.

Overall, this West Midlands case study has presented a poor law continuing to play an often essential role in the survival strategies of the poor in Stafford and Newcastle. It has also offered an insight into a poor law system functioning in a very specific socio-economic context, and addressing welfare problems unfamiliar to the union we encountered in the preceding Leicestershire case study. In the next chapter, we investigate how the poor law manifested itself in a region which contrasts sharply with both Blaby and north Staffordshire: the market-gardening capital of southern Lincolnshire.

Chapter 4: Spalding poor law union, Lincolnshire

4.1 Introduction

Chapters 2 and 3 have examined poor law operations in contrasting contexts. Both suggested the existence of specific ‘welfare cultures’ in these places, extending conceptions of welfare regionality originally applied to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into the early twentieth century.¹ Exploring local implementation of the period’s key welfare reforms through the lens of the poor law, the first two case studies also demonstrated the continued role of the poor law in relieving people alongside newer welfare provisions. They also indicated that these national reforms could manifest themselves differently ‘on the ground’ according to specific local conditions, making a novel contribution to existing historiography. We now further expand our comparative approach to Spalding poor law union in southern Lincolnshire, a heavily agricultural region that differed substantially in socio-economic terms from Leicestershire and Staffordshire.

Section 4.2 offers an overview of Spalding’s regional context. Section 4.3 constructs a group profile of the Spalding board of guardians, with particular attention paid to the experiences of the union’s female board members. It explores the extent to which local administration was driven by personalities, and asks how ‘open’ or ‘closed’ the union’s governance structures were, testing one of the key yardsticks for measuring welfare cultures in Steve King’s ideal types model.² Section 4.4 addresses outdoor and indoor relief provision, and argues that Spalding poor law union had a distinctive welfare culture, the sentiment of which aligned with Steve King’s portrayal of welfare regimes in southern and eastern England.³ It examines the introduction of the old-age

¹ See S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000).

² S. King, ‘Welfare regimes and welfare regions in Britain and Europe, c.1750s to 1860s’, *Journal of Modern European History* 9:1 (2011), p.58.

³ King, *Poverty and Welfare*, pp.174-176.

pension, considers the generosity of relief payments in the union, and assesses the impact of Spalding's highly seasonalised labour market on poor relief provision. Finally, Section 4.5 focuses on Spalding's relationship with central welfare authorities. It explores the Spalding board's resistance to changes in poor law administration as handed down by the Local Government Board (LGB) and the Ministry of Health (MoH), measuring the distance between local and central poor law practice, and arguing that Spalding operated a 'peripheral welfare culture' in the sense suggested by Steve King and John Stewart.⁴

This third case study thus addresses the four key research questions of this thesis. Firstly, it reconstructs how the poor law operated in a county which has been under-researched by welfare historians.⁵ Lincolnshire had some of the highest outdoor relief costs and pauperism levels in England and Wales by the early twentieth century.⁶ Its neglect by historians, however, means that we know little about how or why these levels were incurred. As one of the most highly pauperised unions in the county, Spalding starts to fill in a significant gap in our understanding of poor relief in this period.⁷ Southern Lincolnshire exemplifies a different economic regime to those previously explored, as an agricultural juggernaut with highly seasonal employment patterns absent in our other case studies. The relationship between seasonal unemployment and the poor law has been explored in earlier periods by Nigel Goose and Keith Snell;⁸ this chapter explores the understudied seasonality of poor relief in this later period. This third case study likewise enables us to test more recent work on the socio-economic nuances of the relationship between types of farming and poor relief levels. Jack Langton has suggested in his work on eighteenth-century Oxfordshire that 'commercial' arable areas with efficient access to external markets had higher relief

⁴ S. King and J. Stewart (eds.), *Welfare Peripheries: The Development of Welfare States in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Europe* (Bern, 2007).

⁵ See for instance R. Dyson, 'The experience of poverty in a rural community: Broughton, North Lincolnshire, 1760-1835', *Local Population Studies*, 70 (2003), pp.11-29; S. Hindle, 'Power, poor relief, and social relations in Holland Fen c.1600-1800', *The Historical Journal*, 41:1 (1998), pp.67-96; J.A. Perkins, 'Unmarried mothers and the poor law in Lincolnshire, 1800-50', *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, 20 (1985), pp.21-33; and C. Rawding, 'The Poor Law Amendment Act 1834-65: a case study of Caistor Poor law union', *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, 22 (1987), pp.15-23.

⁶ See LGB: *Annual Report, 1901-02* (1902), Cd.1231, p.117; LGB: *Annual Report, 1907-08* (1908), Cd.4347, p.332.

⁷ LGB: *Annual Report, 1906-07* (1907), Cd.3665, p.320; LGB: *Annual Report, 1907-08*, p.330.

⁸ N. Goose, 'Farm service, seasonal unemployment and casual labour in mid nineteenth-century England', *Agricultural History Review*, 54:2 (2006), pp.274-303; K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985), pp.15-66.

burdens.⁹ Spalding, as we will see, aligns closely with Langton's model of an intensely farmed, well-connected arable area; we can therefore assess whether a connection remained between these conditions and high levels of pauperism, in our later period and beyond Oxfordshire.

Secondly, this case study explores the nature of the distinct regional welfare culture visible in Spalding. Both King's earlier hypothesis of 'regional welfare cultures' along the north-west/south-east divide¹⁰ and his more recent conception of 'ideal type' regimes¹¹ are tested in the context of southern Lincolnshire. This case study also allows us to engage more deeply with King and Stewart's model of welfare peripheries, discussed in Chapter 1. Their template suggests a specific set of criteria which define a peripheral place: relative geographic isolation; small and/or dispersed populations; 'unstable histories as independent, autonomous polities'; and existence in the shadows of 'much larger and more powerful nation states'.¹² They then argue that distinctive welfare regimes were to be found in such places, highlighting similarities in sentiment and operation of welfare between 'peripheral' regions which might be separated by significant geographical distance.¹³ This model was originally deployed in the context of nation-states, or regions much larger than poor law unions.¹⁴ This chapter extends this perspective by demonstrating that Spalding union can be defined as a peripheral place according to King and Stewart's criteria, and that their model can therefore be applied on a smaller physical scale – another novel contribution in this thesis.¹⁵ The assertion that Spalding operated elements of a peripheral welfare culture provides a template for how such a culture might manifest itself at this local level. In other words, the peripheral model offers an alternative lens through which to highlight similarities and differences between poor law unions in England and Wales, and this case study

⁹ J. Langton, 'The geography of poor relief in rural Oxfordshire, 1775-1832' in P. Jones and S. King (eds.), *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2015), p.234.

¹⁰ King, *Poverty and Welfare*.

¹¹ King, 'Welfare regimes', pp.42-65.

¹² King and Stewart, 'Welfare peripheries', pp.24-27.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.27-31.

¹⁴ Indeed, the only chapter which focuses on a region within a nation is A. Gestrich and J. Stewart, 'Unemployment and poor relief in the west of Scotland, 1870-1900' in King and Stewart (eds.), *Welfare Peripheries*, pp.125-148.

¹⁵ Our preceding case studies – Blaby, Stafford and Newcastle-under-Lyme – could not be defined as peripheral places in this way. We will, however, be testing the welfare peripheries model again in the following chapter, which focuses on central Wales.

demonstrates how this might be achieved, and moreover how the application of this model to unions like Spalding could begin to re-shape the way welfare regionality is perceived.

A third theme in this chapter is the nature of governance and the impact of the 1894 Local Government Act and 1918 Representation of the People Act on the demographic profile of Spalding's guardians. We have seen very different experiences in this area of administration in Leicestershire and Staffordshire – indeed, the two preceding case studies were arguably on opposite ends of a spectrum. This chapter asks where Spalding fits on this scale in terms of power distribution and gender and class representation, and the extent to which this changed over time. The guardians, their attitudes and priorities are incorporated into how we classify welfare culture, an element not previously considered in detailed regional studies of welfare provision for this period.

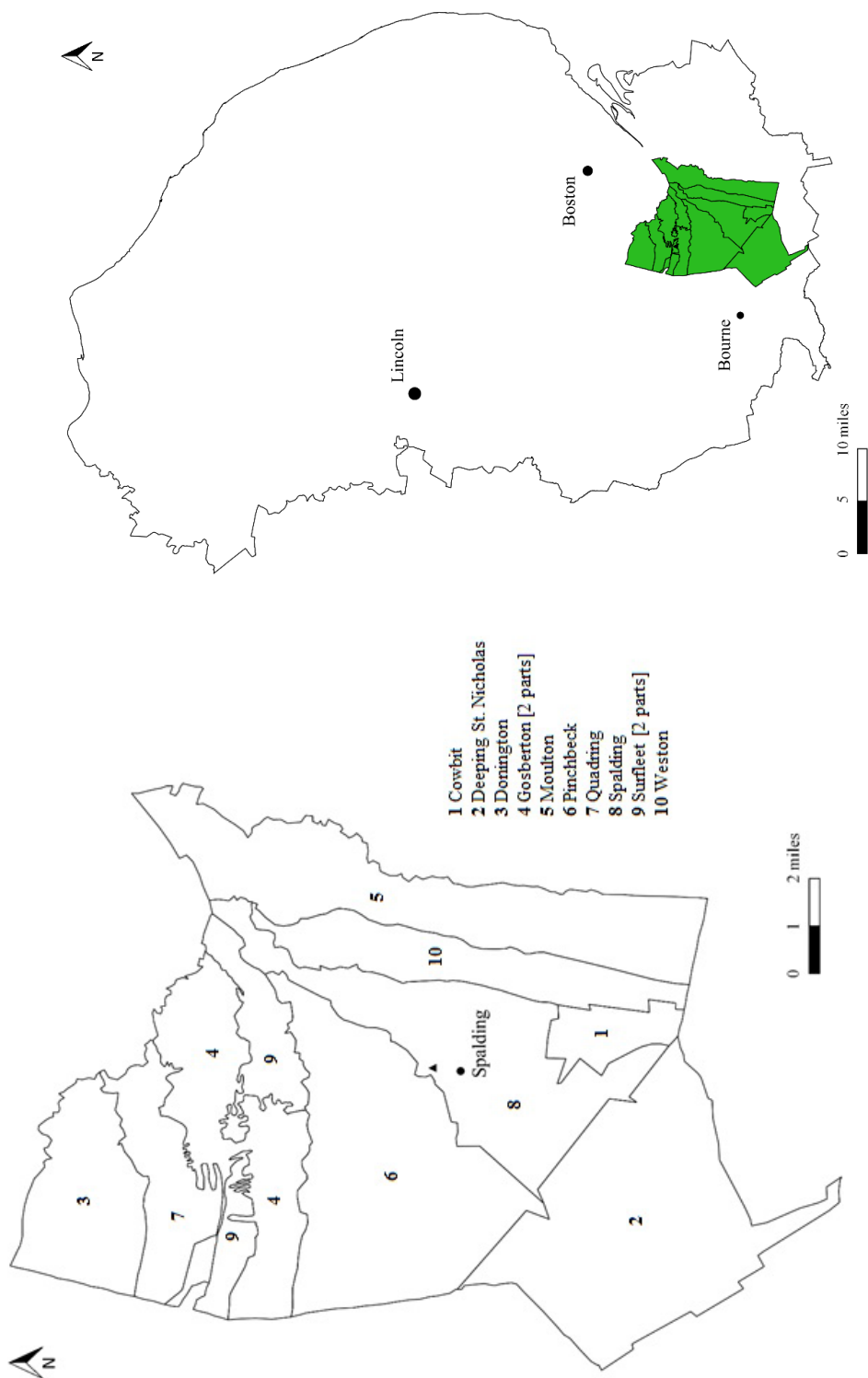
Finally, this chapter resumes the analysis undertaken in the earlier chapters of the local impact of key welfare reforms in this period, focusing largely on the implementation of the old-age pension. Building on the findings of the preceding case studies, it examines the ways a particular regional culture could influence how welfare reforms like the pension were received. It adds further nuance to this thesis' conception of the complex relationship between 'old' and 'new' welfare provisions and the nature of movement between the two, making another new contribution to this neglected subject matter.

In terms of source material and methodology, both qualitative and quantitative methods have been utilised here. The board of guardians' minute books form the core of this case study, providing expenditure data as well as meeting outlines, and these are linked to surviving outdoor relief lists and workhouse admissions and discharge registers. Regional press coverage from several Lincolnshire newspapers is used where appropriate to provide more detailed insights into some of the discussions between guardians. A number of official reports generated by government enquiries, such as those into the wages and conditions of agricultural labourers compiled during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as the annual reports of the LGB and MoH into poor law administration, provide valuable contextual information for poor law operations.

4.2 Regional context

As displayed in Figure 4.1 below, Spalding union was located in southern Lincolnshire, within an area known as the Holland district. Although one of the smallest unions in Lincolnshire in terms of geographical size, with 10 parishes covering 128 square miles, it was nevertheless somewhat larger than the unions in our Leicestershire and Staffordshire case studies. Spalding was also more sparsely populated than our preceding chapters, with just under 23,000 inhabitants in 1911 - within Lincolnshire, however, this level of population density was fairly typical. This relatively small population, moreover, did not prevent the region from becoming one of the engine rooms of Lincolnshire agriculture.

Figure 4.1 Spalding poor law union within Lincolnshire, and with parishes labelled.



Spalding's Fenland landscape was flat, marshy and naturally prone to flooding. Much of the area was subject to extensive drainage systems, particularly the parish of Deeping St. Nicholas, but some parts of the union nevertheless remained underwater as many as eight months of the year.¹⁶ Nearly half the union's population lived in the town of Spalding itself, a transport and administrative centre for the surrounding area, with railway and canal links to northern towns, Midlands manufacturing districts and London.¹⁷ Both the town and the wider union were completely dominated by farming. Farm holdings were typically quite small in this part of the county, in contrast to northern Lincolnshire: almost 60 percent of agricultural holdings in the Holland district were less than 20 acres in size.¹⁸ Although there was some permanent pasture, agriculture in the Spalding area was mainly arable, with the practice of market gardening a major component. The union was one of the most intensively cultivated parts of south Lincolnshire, especially around the parishes of Spalding and Quadring.¹⁹ As well as grain crops and a wide variety of fruit and vegetable produce, many smallholders and farmers also grew bulbs and cut flowers, a regional industry which expanded rapidly from the late nineteenth century,²⁰ all of which was primarily sold in northern and London markets.²¹

This turn towards market gardening and diversification in produce helped to protect the local economy from disaster during the two major agricultural recessions of the late nineteenth century.²² As assistant commissioner Arthur Wilson Fox explained to the Royal Commission on Agricultural Depression in 1895, southern Lincolnshire's versatile soils meant that farmers could be more flexible in what they grew, while northern farmers faced with soil chiefly adapted to wheat or barley were 'crippled'

¹⁶ *Kelly's Directory of Lincolnshire, 1909* (London, 1909), p.167, 156.

¹⁷ N. Wright, *Spalding: An Industrial History* (Lincoln, 2nd ed., 1975), p.4.

¹⁸ Board of Agriculture and Fisheries [hereafter BAF], *Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture: Vol II – Reports of Investigators* (1919), Cmd.25, p.154.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.156.

²⁰ J. Brown, *Farming in Lincolnshire 1850-1945* (Lincoln, 2005), pp.223-224.

²¹ Royal Commission on Agriculture [hereafter RCA]: *Report by Mr. Wilson Fox on the County of Lincolnshire* (1895), C.7671, p.9, 105.

²² These agricultural recessions (or depressions) have been explored in a range of literature, although less so in recent years. Examples include E.H. Hunt and S.J. Pam, 'Agricultural depression in England, 1873-96: skill transfer and the "redeeming Scots"', *Agricultural History Review*, 59:1 (2011), pp.81-100; M. Turner, 'Agriculture, 1860-1914' in R. Floud and P. Johnson (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain: Vol II – Economic Maturity, 1860-1939* (Cambridge, 2004), pp.133-160; and F.M.L. Thompson, 'The anatomy of English agriculture, 1870-1914' in B.A. Holderness and M. Turner (eds.), *Land, Labour and Agriculture, 1700-1920* (London, 1991), pp.210-40.

when prices for these crops fell.²³ Lincolnshire farmers were, according to Fox, ‘ready to try anything or do anything or to adopt any system of cultivation if there is a reasonable prospect of its paying’, a successful strategy in the south of the county.²⁴ Fox also highlighted the importance of proximity to trade and transport centres, pointing out that small farms near southern Lincolnshire towns which therefore sent their produce over only small distances had done ‘fairly well in some cases’ even in the midst of major recessions.²⁵ The adaptability of farmers in the Spalding area, then, coupled with their access to efficient trade networks, meant that they were able to weather the worst years of the downturns.²⁶ This was a forward-thinking and enterprising agricultural district. In its intensity of production and access to national trade routes, we can begin to see similarities between conditions in Spalding and in Langton’s highly pauperised ‘improved agricultural’ regions,²⁷ laying the groundwork for us to test the relationship between intense cultivation and poor relief levels later in this chapter.

This general economic context created specific local employment patterns. Much of the produce grown in the district was very labour-intensive in its cultivation, harvest and marketing.²⁸ Consequently, although as a rule small farms like those in Spalding employed fewer labourers than larger outfits and gave them less regular work,²⁹ there was nevertheless a high proportion – 49 percent – of so-called ‘ordinary labourers’ among the Holland district’s agricultural workers, compared to 33 percent in England and Wales as a whole.³⁰ Both the potential instability of labourers’ employment in areas where small farms predominated, and the need for readily accessible labour generated by the nature of local agriculture, were reflected in the region’s hiring practices. Foremen and men in charge of animals were hired by the year, beginning in May. Most ‘ordinary labourers’, by contrast, were engaged on a weekly or

²³ RCA: *Minutes of Evidence on Agricultural Depression Vol IV* (1895), C.8021, p.104, 108; RCA: *Wilson Fox on Lincolnshire*, p.61.

²⁴ RCA: *Minutes of Evidence Vol VI*, p.108.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.104.

²⁶ Joan Thirsk and Alun Howkins have both argued that ability and willingness to adapt was a major factor in agricultural success rates during depressions. See J. Thirsk, *Alternative Agriculture: A History from the Black Death to the Present Day* (Oxford, 1997), p.218; A. Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside since 1900* (London, 2003), p.10.

²⁷ Langton, ‘The geography of poor relief’, p.234.

²⁸ BAF: *Employment in Agriculture Vol II*, p.158.

²⁹ RCA: *Wilson Fox on Lincolnshire*, p.80.

³⁰ BAF: *Employment in Agriculture Vol II*, p.158.

daily basis, aligning with the short-term hiring practices of small farmers.³¹ However, annual contracts for labourers were more common in the Holland district than in other parts of Lincolnshire to keep the workforce closer to individual farms, reflecting the labour-hungry nature of the region's crops. Attempts to keep labour nearby were nevertheless made more difficult by the perennial paucity in labourers' cottages in the area. This dearth of housing and the dispersed nature of the union's population meant that labourers often had to travel several miles to get to work, and also caused overcrowding into poor quality dwellings in Spalding town and the union's larger villages like Gosberton and Surfleet. Indeed, Fox described these conditions as 'an extraordinary anomaly in so prosperous a community'.³² Long walks at the beginning and end of working days, and living conditions in 'districts which can only be described as slums',³³ put considerable bodily strain on those already undertaking hard physical exertion in damp fields which could aggravate medical conditions like asthma and rheumatism.³⁴

In addition, the dominance of produce farming, as opposed to livestock production, meant that the local labour market was subject to significant seasonal fluctuations, with low unemployment during the spring and summer, and high unemployment during the winter months.³⁵ Indeed, this seasonality could be even more pronounced in market gardening than in grain-dominated areas, because of the relatively short 'picking windows' for some individual fruits or vegetables. There was also a specific gendered element to labour in this agricultural area. Although rarely involved in the corn harvest (apart from during the First World War), women were employed in setting potatoes from March to May, hoeing and weeding potato and corn crops from April onwards, and soft fruit-picking and cabbage cutting from May until the potato harvest, which carried them through until December.³⁶

This, then, was the general socio-economic context in which the Spalding board of guardians was administering poor relief. The local poor law operated within

³¹ RCA: *Wilson Fox on Lincolnshire*, p.84.

³² BAF: *Employment in Agriculture Vol II*, p.171.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.157.

³⁴ E. Hurren, *Protesting About Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late-Victorian England, 1870-1900* (Woodbridge, 2007), p.104.

³⁵ Keith Snell has demonstrated such trends in grain-growing counties other than Lincolnshire in *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p.20.

³⁶ BAF: *Employment in Agriculture Vol II*, p.158.

communities that were entirely geared towards a specific form of agricultural production, with significant implications for employment patterns, gendered distribution of labour, and substandard housing. These conditions also included men and women walking long distances to and from work, becoming more arduous as they aged. In due course, we will observe the ways in which this context informed poor law provision in Spalding. In the meantime, the guardians who set local social policy were also operating in these intensely productive, sparsely populated rural conditions; we turn to them next.

4.3 The Spalding guardians

The Spalding board of guardians elected in December 1894 as a result of the 1894 Local Government Act was made up of 30 members: 20 representatives of the rural parishes, who became guardians upon their election to the new Rural District Council, and two representatives each for the five Spalding town wards. Over the course of our period, the board expanded to 33 members to include extra representatives in Donington, Quadring and Weston. The following section presents a group portrait of the Spalding guardians. Through this profile and the subsequent discussion of gender relations on the Spalding board, we can assess the impact of extensions in local democracy in 1894 and 1918 on the board's make-up. We can also apply the yardstick of 'open/closed' governance structures as suggested by King,³⁷ testing the board's rhetoric about the importance of its own openness and inclusivity, versus the reality of female guardians' experiences. In addition, this section reveals the enduring importance of personality on the Spalding board, and the way welfare decision-making could be driven or derailed by personal relationships.³⁸

³⁷ King, 'Welfare regimes', p.58.

³⁸ Previous studies have shown that the personalities of key actors had a significant impact on welfare policy at a local level. See for instance Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism*; J. Beckett, 'Politics and the implementation of the New Poor Law: the Nottingham workhouse controversy, 1834-43', *Midland History*, 41:2 (2016), pp.201-223; S. King, *Women, Welfare and Local Politics 1880-1920: We Might Be Trusted* (Brighton, 2006); G. Hooker, 'Llanidlofawr Poor Law Union, 1836-1886: "The most difficult union in Wales"', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2013), pp.161-205; K. Rothery, 'The implementation and administration of the New Poor Law in Hertfordshire, c.1830-1847', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2016), pp.135-174. See also several chapters in S. King and G. Gear (eds.), *Social Welfare in Hertfordshire from 1600: A Caring County?* (Hertfordshire, 2013) which highlight the personalities of welfare officials.

Tables 4.1-3 detail the individuals returned as guardians in selected triennial elections collated from regional press coverage, trade directories and guardians' minute books. They represent a typical Spalding board during this period in terms of occupations and gender distribution. Electoral years in the interwar period have not been included in these illustrative examples because in that period it is often unclear from available source material which parishes or wards individuals were representing. This made it more difficult to confirm a complete set of board members for a given year. However, the more partial material that can be compiled from these later years nevertheless still aligns with the overview provided by Tables 4.1-3.

Table 4.1 Individuals elected to Spalding poor law union board of guardians in 1894.

Surname	First name	Title	Ward/Parish	Occupation
Dove	John Thomas	Rev.	Cowbit	Clergyman (C of E)
Benson	William Matthew	Rev.	Deeping St. Nicholas	Clergyman (C of E)
Eady	John	Mr.	Deeping St. Nicholas	Publican & wheelwright
Smith	Richard/Robert	Mr.	Deeping St. Nicholas	Farmer
Cocks	William	Mr.	Donington	Nurseryman, seedsman & seed farmer
Gunson	Joseph	Mr.	Donington	Farmer & grazier
Bevis	Reuben	Mr.	Gosberton	Postmaster
Casswell	George	Mr./Major	Gosberton	Farmer
Davison	Herbert	Dr.	Gosberton	Physician & surgeon
Cock	Joseph Shepperson	Mr.	Moulton	Farmer
Foster	Emily M.	Miss.	Moulton	Private means
Thorpe	B.	Mr.	Moulton	Unknown
Hooson	William	Rev.	Pinchbeck	Clergyman (<i>denomination unknown</i>)
Parker	Charles	Mr.	Pinchbeck	Farmer & market gardener
Robinson	James	Mr.	Pinchbeck	Farmer
Wayet	Frank Field	Rev.	Pinchbeck	Clergyman (C of E)
Robinson	John	Mr.	Quadring	Farmer
Marsden	Maurice	Rev.	Spalding (central)	Clergyman (C of E)
Stableforth	Eva	Miss	Spalding (central)	Private means
Lowden	William Boston	Mr.	Spalding (east)	Farmer
Taylor	Martin	Mr.	Spalding (east)	Market gardener
Jones	John Chatwin Jones	Rev.	Spalding (north)	Clergyman (Baptist)
Shadford	Major	Mr.	Spalding (north)	Retired chemist
Armstrong	William	Mr.	Spalding (south)	Miller
Pickworth-Farrow	Mary	Mrs.	Spalding (south)	Married woman
Hall	George	Mr.	Spalding (west)	Auctioneer
Wilson	Joseph	Mr.	Spalding (west)	Journalist
Ouzman	John	Mr.	Surfleet	Farmer
Smith	Alfred Ernest	Mr.	Surfleet	Brewer, maltster & spirit merchant
Spokes	John Henry	Rev.	Weston	Clergyman (C of E)

Source: *Stamford Mercury*, 14th December 1894, p.2; *Stamford Mercury*, 21st December 1894, p.2; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 20th December 1894, p.7.

Table 4.2 Individuals elected to Spalding poor law union board of guardians in 1904.

Surname	First name	Title	Parish/ward	Occupation
Dove	John Thomas	Rev.	Cowbit	Clergyman (C of E)
Crick	Thomas Laxton	Mr.	Deeping St. Nicholas	Butcher & innkeeper
Preston	Albert James	Mr.	Deeping St. Nicholas	Machine owner & farmer
Wilkinson	Thomas	Mr.	Deeping St. Nicholas	Farmer
Gunson	Joseph	Mr.	Donington	Farmer & grazier
Hague	Thomas Bucknell	Mr.	Donington	Plumber & painter
Davison	Herbert	Dr.	Gosberton	Physician & surgeon
Freemantle	Edward	Mr.	Gosberton	Farmer
Page	Charles	Mr.	Gosberton	Grocer and draper
Cock	Joseph Shepperson	Mr.	Moulton	Farmer
Foster	Emily M.	Miss	Moulton	Private means
Ward	Joseph	Mr.	Moulton	Farmer
Chappell	Edward	Mr.	Pinchbeck	Farmer
Hooson	Percy Lane	Mr.	Pinchbeck	Clergyman (C of E)
Sneath	Edward	Mr.	Pinchbeck	Farmer & fruit merchant
Wayet	Frank Field	Rev.	Pinchbeck	Clergyman (C of E)
Casswell	Henry	Mr.	Quadring	Farmer
Allen	Alice	Miss	Spalding (central)	Private means
Palmer	Septimus	Mr.	Spalding (central)	Retired clothier
Culpin	Richard	Mr.	Spalding (east)	Market gardener
Taylor	Martin	Mr.	Spalding (east)	Market gardener
Atton	John Thomas	Mr.	Spalding (north)	House decorator & stonemason
Jones	John Chatwin	Rev.	Spalding (north)	Clergyman (Baptist)
Fletcher	William	Mr.	Spalding (south)	Outfitter
Pickworth-Farrow	Mary	Mrs.	Spalding (south)	Married woman
Hall	George	Mr.	Spalding (west)	Auctioneer
Wilson	Jospeh	Mr.	Spalding (west)	Newspaper editor
Ouzman	John	Mr.	Surfleet	Farmer
Smith	Alfred Ernest	Mr.	Surfleet	Brewer, maltster & spirit merchant
Atkinson	William John	Mr.	Weston	Farmer
Eggleston	John Francis	Mr.	Weston	Farmer & potato merchant

Source: Stamford Mercury, 18th March 1904, p.6; Boston Guardian, 2nd April 1904, p.8.

Table 4.3 Individuals elected to Spalding poor law union board of guardians in 1913.

Surname	First name	Title	Parish/ward	Occupation
Lynn	Elijah	Mr.	Cowbit	Farmer
Benson	William Matthew	Rev.	Deeping St. Nicholas	Clergyman (C of E)
Chappell	Albert Edward	Mr.	Deeping St. Nicholas	Farmer
Preston	Albert James	Mr.	Deeping St. Nicholas	Farmer
Bedford	James	Mr.	Donington	Solicitor
Gleed	Richard	Mr.	Donington	Private means
Harrison	Thomas	Mr.	Donington	Farmer
Dickinson	William	Mr.	Gosberton	Farmer
Freemantle	Edward	Mr.	Gosberton	Farmer
Page	Charles	Mr.	Gosberton	Grocer & draper
Beba	John William	Mr.	Moulton	Farmer
Thorpe	John Thomas	Mr.	Moulton	Threshing machine owner
Ward	Joseph	Mr.	Moulton	Farmer
Chappell	Edward	Mr.	Pinchbeck	Farmer
Lane	James	Mr.	Pinchbeck	Farmer
Royce	Emma	Mrs.	Pinchbeck	Married woman
Wayet	Frank Field	Rev.	Pinchbeck	Clergyman (C of E)
Casswell	Henry	Mr.	Quadring	Farmer
Robinson	John	Mr.	Quadring	Farmer
Bullock	Richard	Rev.	Spalding (central)	Clergyman (C of E)
Palmer	Septimus	Mr.	Spalding (central)	Retired clothier
Hearnshaw	Mary Rebecca	Mrs.	Spalding (east)	Married woman
Taylor	Martin	Mr	Spalding (east)	Market gardener
Atton	John Thomas	Mr	Spalding (north)	House decorator & stonemason
Jones	John Chatwin	Rev.	Spalding (north)	Clergyman (Baptist)
Fletcher	William	Mr.	Spalding (south)	Outfitter
White	Alfred Willis	Mr.	Spalding (south)	Farmer & bulb grower
Hall	George	Mr.	Spalding (west)	Auctioneer
Marshall	Watson	Mr.	Spalding (west)	Private means
James	George	Mr.	Surfleet	Farmer
Smith	Alfred Ernest	Mr.	Surfleet	Brewer
Gibson	J. A.	Mr.	Weston	Farmer
Pick	George	Mr.	Weston	Farmer

Source: Lincolnshire Echo, 14th March 1913, p.5; Nottingham Journal, 9th April 1913, p.6.

Table 4.4 Chairman and vice-chairman of Spalding poor law union board of guardians, 1900-1930.

	Chairman	Vice-chairman
1900	Rev. John Thomas Dove (Cowbit)	Rev. John Chatwin Jones (Spalding North)
1901		
1902		
1903		
1904		
1905		
1906		
1907	Rev. John Chatwin Jones (Spalding North)	Rev. Frank Field Wayet (Pinchbeck)
1908		
1909		
1910		
1911		
1912		
1913		
1914		
1915		
1916		
1917	Rev. Frank Field Wayet (Pinchbeck)	Mr. William Fletcher (Spalding South)
1918		
1919		
1920		Mr. John Thomas Atton (Spalding North)
1921		
1922		
1923	Mr. John Thomas Atton (Spalding North)	Mr. Cornelius D. Hall (Spalding West)
1924	Mr. Richard Gleed (Donington)	Mr Albert Berrill (Spalding North)
1925		
1926		
1927		
1928		
1929		
1930		

Source: Lincolnshire Archives [hereafter LA], PL/13/102/20-30, Spalding poor law union [hereafter PLU], guardians' minute books [hereafter GMB], 1900-1930.

The board reflected Spalding's agricultural profile. In each election year, at least one third of guardians returned were farmers, graziers, or market gardeners, and a significant minority had links with agricultural production, such as millers, farm machinery owners, and auctioneers. These served alongside a mixture of businessmen and professional men. No members during our period could be clearly identified as 'employees' rather than 'employers', however. It is possible that some individuals whose socio-economic status was not discernible during the interwar period fitted into this category, following the 1918 Representation of the People Act. There is evidence to suggest, for instance, that Alfred Machin, a Quadring guardian elected in 1922, might have come from labouring-class stock. He was listed in the 1911 census as a farmer, but as a worker rather than an employer; by 1919, however, he appeared as a commercial resident in *Kelly's Directory* as a 'farmer', suggesting he was now operating on his own account.³⁹ Aside from this case, there nevertheless seemed to be little take-up in Spalding of increasing opportunities for less wealthy people to become guardians. In this way, the union was traditional and conservative similarly to our Staffordshire case studies.

After the agriculturalists, the most significant occupational category on the board was clergymen. There were between three and seven such men among the Spalding guardians at any one time until the elections of 1925, when only two were returned. These church figures loomed large in union leadership. Table 4.4 lists the chairmen and vice-chairmen between 1900 and 1930 - of the five men who served as chairman between 1900 and 1930, three were clergymen. Like the Staffordshire boards, then, Spalding guardians displayed sustained preference for individuals possessing specific traits. Indeed, both East and West Midlands guardians appear to have preferred the same type of people to lead them: not necessarily traditional landed elites, but nevertheless establishment figures who already played roles in local public life.⁴⁰ There was a striking consensus throughout our period on the Spalding board's leadership: no contests were recorded for the chairmanship between 1900 and 1930, and only one for the vice-chairman. Thus, even fewer contests were held in Spalding than in the Newcastle board dominated by the Reverend Percy Mainwaring. The Spalding board

³⁹ *Kelly's Directory of Lincolnshire 1919* (London, 1919), p.461.

⁴⁰ This fits with the decline in the powers of the aristocracy 'as a social and political force' observed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Howkins, *Death of Rural England*, pp.21-23.

prioritised leadership stability, further indicated by the tendencies for most individuals to serve for several years, sometimes decades. Indeed, two chairmen actually died in post: the Reverend John Dove, vicar of the parish of Cowbit, died in November 1906 at the age of 84 after chairing the board for 30 years, and Baptist minister John Chatwin Jones, who represented Spalding North and succeeded Dove in the chair, died at 94 years old in January 1917.⁴¹ The two subsequent chairmen, the Reverend Frank Field Wayet of Pinchbeck and stonemason John Atton of Spalding North, both resigned from the board due to ill-health after over two decades of service.⁴² Evidently, leadership of the Spalding board was in effect a lifetime appointment.

Contests for guardian seats in election years were not guaranteed either - in some years there were contests in as few as two parishes, such as in 1901 when only Donington and Deeping St. Nicholas had more nominations than seats.⁴³ Occasionally there was an upset, such as the defeat in 1913 of John Ouzman, chairman of the Rural District Council for the previous decade.⁴⁴ Indeed, some board members responded anxiously to this turn of events, coupled with the retirement in the same year of Edward Sneath, who had been a guardian since 1901. A month after the 1913 elections, Thomas Harrison proposed that the board should co-opt Ouzman to 'recognise past service', and George Hall similarly suggested the co-option of Sneath.⁴⁵ Although these proposals were in the end rejected,⁴⁶ these discussions indicate a high value placed on stability and continuity in board membership, with a reluctance to lose experienced members. For the most part, the majority of parishes returned their representatives with little excitement and often unopposed.

The Spalding board consistently included between one and three female guardians throughout our period, with 11 different women elected between 1894 and 1930. The 1894 Local Government Act heralded the return of two women, and three were elected in 1898. However, there was no progression towards greater numbers of women on the board as was observed in Blaby, including in the interwar period. The

⁴¹ *Lincolnshire Echo*, 6th November 1906, p.4; *Birmingham Gazette*, 15th January 1917, p.3.

⁴² LA, PL/13/102/27, Spalding PLU, GMB, 4th August 1922; LA, PL/13/102/28, Spalding PLU, GMB, 16th March 1925.

⁴³ *Stamford Mercury*, 15th March 1901, p.6.

⁴⁴ *Nottingham Journal*, 9th April 1913, p.6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

1918 Representation of the People Act then appears to have had a limited impact on gender representation in Spalding, similarly to its minimal effect on the social classes included among local guardians. Indeed, the women elected were also fairly well-off, reflecting the socio-economic status of their male counterparts. Five were single women, three of whom lived independently on private means and two lived with their parents (drapers and farmers respectively) when elected. Of the married women, two were married to farmers, one to a chemist, one to a Primitive Methodist minister, and one to a draper. The eleventh woman, Emma Royce, had the most unusual social background – originally from South Africa, she married Spalding native William Royce, a building contractor who from 1918 until his death in 1924 was MP for Holland District. Like their male colleagues, then, Spalding union's women guardians were solidly middle-class and embedded in the local establishment.

The roles and reception of women guardians on the Spalding board were, however, complex. Some female guardians were certainly valued by their male colleagues. Eva Stableforth in particular, who was elected for Spalding Central in the 1894 elections, was extremely popular. She was commended for her work with the union's boarding-out committee, and her announcement that she would not stand for re-election in 1898 because she could not commit enough time to the role was received regretfully by her fellow guardians, who attempted to convince her otherwise.⁴⁷ She could not be persuaded, but remained a key member of the boarding-out committee for over 20 years. Indeed, Stableforth's successful work on behalf of the board appears to have paved the way for other female guardians - the *Lincolnshire Free Press* opined that 'it is sincerely to be hoped that a large-hearted and active lady will be prevailed upon to succeed her.'⁴⁸ Shortly thereafter Annie Hobson, daughter of a Spalding draper was duly elected in Stableforth's place.⁴⁹ Some board members even displayed disquiet in years where there were few prospects of women being elected. In 1922, Emma Royce was not nominated for re-election due to an accidental administrative error, having served on the board since 1907.⁵⁰ A contest for the three seats in Donington that year also meant that Elizabeth Hall, one of the sitting guardians for that parish, might not be

⁴⁷ *Lincolnshire, Boston and Spalding Free Press*, 8th March 1898, p.8; *Lincolnshire, Boston and Spalding Free Press*, 15th March 1898, p.5; *Lincolnshire, Boston and Spalding Free Press*, 5th April 1898, p.8.

⁴⁸ *Lincolnshire, Boston and Spalding Free Press*, 8th March 1898, p.8.

⁴⁹ *Lincolnshire, Boston and Spalding Free Press*, 15th March 1898, p.5.

⁵⁰ *Lincolnshire Standard and Boston Guardian*, 25th March 1922, p.5.

returned. These factors prompted one board member to suggest asking the MoH to empower the board to co-opt female members when none were elected, as ‘the services of ladies were indispensable’.⁵¹ The guardians left this question for the newly-elected board, who did not act on it – possibly because, although Elizabeth Hall was indeed defeated, they were not an entirely male cohort, as Mary Ann Banks was returned for Spalding East. The male guardians clearly thought that female representation on the board was important in order for relief to be administered effectively.

It is also noteworthy that female guardians sometimes navigated themselves into aspects of the board’s work not typically associated with women. Patricia Hollis has observed that areas of poor law administration traditionally categorised as female responsibilities were those concerning the quality of care provided to paupers, particularly children,⁵² and we have seen that this is where the Blaby female guardians largely acted. In keeping with this, the Spalding female guardians were consistently elected to the asylum and house sub-committees, as well as the boarding-out committee. However, ‘pressure on the boundary between male and female areas of responsibility’ observed by Steve King is occasionally evident in Spalding.⁵³ For instance, Augusta Dyson, elected to succeed the Reverend Dove in Cowbit in 1907, served on the assessment committee and was reported to be the only woman in Lincolnshire to hold such a position.⁵⁴ Likewise, from 1925 Mary Ann Banks and Alice Frost both sat on the finance committee, alongside their roles on the asylum, house and boarding-out committees.⁵⁵ It is worth reiterating that there was no similar female presence on these committees in either of our previous case studies in Leicestershire or Staffordshire. This suggests an extension of women’s accepted roles within poor law administration in Spalding, as they participated in monitoring and decision-making on auditing and balancing the union’s budget. Such findings can therefore begin to test King’s ‘ideal

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford, 1987), p.247, 251-263. More recently, Krista Cowman has shown that in some areas the local political elites were only willing to support female candidates in guardian elections if they confined themselves to ‘women’s issues’ in *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother: Women in Merseyside’s Political Organisations 1890-1920* (Liverpool, 2004), pp.49-50. Female guardians themselves often adhered to these perceptions of women’s work, as can be seen for instance in Leicester in S. Francis, ‘Worthy citizens: Middle-class women and the public sphere in Leicester c.1850-1900’, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2013), pp.179-201.

⁵³ King, *Women, Welfare and Local Politics*, p.16.

⁵⁴ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 30th April 1907, p.7.

⁵⁵ LA, PL/13/102/28, Spalding PLU, GMB, 20th April 1925.

types' model of welfare regimes, specifically addressing whether Spalding's governance structures were 'open' or 'closed'.⁵⁶ In Spalding union, the lack of working-class guardians suggests relatively narrow or closed authority structures. However, that the board was more open to women than elsewhere, valued their contributions and saw their membership as important to effective relief administration, suggests more inclusive governance arrangements. If we use gender to examine the nature of authority in Spalding union, then, we see a board which was prepared to embrace greater representation – even if women were not necessarily elected in increasing numbers.

There were, however, limits to this acceptance and inclusion. Alongside the support for female board members outlined above, striking evidence indicates that some women on the Spalding board were treated with much less respect by their colleagues, despite their valuable work on the board's behalf. This was manifested in the experiences of Mary Pickworth Farrow, a farmer's wife who represented Spalding South from 1894. Two incidents during board meetings in January 1905 illustrate the belittling of a female guardian by male colleagues. Both centred on an apparently inconsequential issue: whether to have a window open in the boardroom. At the beginning of the meeting held on 2nd January, Farrow stated that she would like to have a window open. A disproportionately bad-tempered exchange followed, where fellow guardian Edward Sneath threatened to leave the room if a window was opened, Farrow called Sneath selfish, and appealed to chairman Reverend Dove, but he demurred from settling the matter.⁵⁷ As the guardians assembled the following fortnight, Sneath closed a window; Farrow promptly opened it again. The Reverend John Chatwin Jones, apparently siding with Sneath, stated that 'if they were to have the windows open he should propose that the ladies sit with their bonnets off'.⁵⁸ The question of whether to have a 'stuffy atmosphere and no fresh air' was then put to a vote, which Farrow lost by 13 votes to four. While the Reverend Frank Field Wayet grumbled that 'it was all humbug voting on this question', the offending window was closed and then opened again. Sneath 'thereupon declared that they had better leave the room if they were going

⁵⁶ King, 'Welfare regimes', p.59.

⁵⁷ *Stamford Mercury*, 6th January 1905, p.4.

⁵⁸ The two other women on the board at the time, Alice Allen and Emily Foster, were also present.

to be domineered over by a woman', and the window was closed, after which the meeting continued without further reported incident.⁵⁹

This exchange was recorded in a number of regional papers both in Lincolnshire and beyond, where it was framed as an entertaining aside.⁶⁰ Indeed, it is possible that these interactions may have been good-humoured, but the ostentatious rejection of Farrow's preference in a vote arguably signalled underlying tensions between board members. Moreover, when the context of Farrow's wider experiences as a guardian is considered, it appears unlikely that the underlying tone was light-hearted. In fact, Farrow received sustained unfriendly treatment from some of her colleagues. In July 1908, she resigned from the board, and stated in her resignation letter:

During the 13 years I have been a member for the Board I have endeavoured to do my duty fearlessly and conscientiously... However...I cannot longer sit under the ruling of the present chairman [the Reverend Jones, who replaced the Reverend Dove in 1906], and endure the personalities and disgusting observations which have been frequently hurled at me, and which the chairman has made no effort to check. Whatever my weaknesses, I cannot longer submit to such treatment, and, therefore, much as I regret parting with those of my colleagues who have treated me with courtesy and kindness, I feel that my sense of dignity and honour leaves me no alternative but to resign my seat.⁶¹

In the fraught discussion during the board meeting that followed the receipt of this letter, Joseph Wilson and Septimus Palmer paid tribute to Farrow's work as one of the board's 'most useful members'.⁶² Wilson described the resignation as 'the most painful incident which had occurred since he had been a member of the Board', and supported Farrow's allegations, stating that she had often been subject to 'insulting attacks' in particular from George Hall, 'whose personalities and objectionable language had been allowed to pass unchecked by the Chairman...[who] in matters in which Mrs Farrow was concerned... had acted in a partisan manner.'⁶³ Reverend Jones had accentuated Hall's insults 'by his own innuendos and sarcasms', Wilson further claimed, asserting

⁵⁹ *Stamford Mercury*, 3rd February 1905, p.4.

⁶⁰ See for instance *The Yorkshire Post*, 1st February 1905, p.3; *The London Daily News*, 1st February 1905, p.9.

⁶¹ *Boston Guardian*, 18th July 1908, p.3.

⁶² *Sheffield Independent*, 14th July 1908, p. 11; LA, PL/13/102/23, Spalding PLU, GMB, 13th July 1908.

⁶³ *Boston Guardian*, 18th July 1908, p.3; *Sheffield Independent*, 14th July 1908, p.11. Hall is named in the *Sheffield Independent* report of this meeting, but not in the more local *Boston Guardian*'s coverage – perhaps an attempt to protect him from scandal in his immediate neighbourhood.

that Hall's language 'would make even some of the men blush'.⁶⁴ Canon Richard Bullock concurred, stating that 'not a single word had been said to crush the member who had made these objectionable remarks'.⁶⁵

Reverend Jones rejected the accusations that he had treated Farrow unfairly, but he did acknowledge Hall's verbal attacks, remarking in his own defence that he had once threatened to suspend a board meeting if Hall did not apologise.⁶⁶ The board's eventual unanimous resolution expressed regret at Farrow's decision and asked her to withdraw her resignation.⁶⁷ A fortnight later, however, John Beba (who had not attended the previous meeting) suggested that this resolution should be rescinded, and the Reverend William Benson protested against the criticism levelled at the chairman, arguing that all board members were to blame for leaving Hall's offensive remarks unchecked. Reverend Jones himself unsurprisingly agreed with the latter, asking 'why other members of the Board had not protested against the offensive remarks... which had existed over some years'.⁶⁸ Beba's proposal to rescind the supportive resolution was withdrawn, but two months later Farrow wrote confirming her resignation, although she retained her position on the boarding-out committee.⁶⁹

It is thus clear that Farrow did have some supporters among her colleagues. The regretful resolution passed in response to her resignation was in the event unanimous, and aside from Joseph Wilson, who was her most regular ally on matters of board business, Septimus Palmer, Richard Bullock, John Eggleston and Frank Field Wayet also spoke in her favour.⁷⁰ However, the evidence presented above indicates that at least four guardians were either ambivalent about Farrow or openly antagonistic towards her: George Hall, Edward Sneath, the Reverend Jones and John Beba. We also know that the insults and offensive language targeting Farrow had been going on for years – Hall, the apparent primary culprit, had been on the board since 1898, so he could conceivably have been behaving like this since he was first elected. The Reverends Benson and

⁶⁴ *Boston Guardian*, 18th July 1908, p.3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Sheffield Independent*, 14th July 1908, p.11.

⁶⁷ LA, PL/13/102/23, Spalding PLU, GMB, 13th July 1908.

⁶⁸ *Boston Guardian*, 1st August 1908, p.8.

⁶⁹ LA, PL/13/102/23, Spalding PLU, GMB, 7th September 1908.

⁷⁰ *Boston Guardian*, 18th July 1908, p.3; *Boston Guardian*, 1st August 1908, p.8.

Jones therefore arguably had a point – why had the rest of the board allowed this bullying to continue? Was it because they, too, found Farrow objectionable?

We must consider whether Farrow's mistreatment was due to her gender. Throughout her time on the board, she was often in opposition to prevailing opinion among her male colleagues, including prior to Reverend Jones' tenure as chairman. In 1898, for instance, Farrow and Wilson advocated the use of steam power in the workhouse laundry, arguing that the work was too physically taxing for the inmates. Although the proposal received support from several other guardians and the workhouse master, both Hall and Reverend Jones objected for reasons of expense. Farrow countered their misgivings, and a compromise was reached, but not without a barbed comment from Jones – when he stated that 'no man in his senses would spend this on his own account', and Farrow replied that 'I certainly would', Jones retorted 'I said any man, you are a lady'.⁷¹ On two other occasions, in September 1900 and November 1902, Farrow heavily criticised her colleagues when they chose to appoint new poor law officials by secret ballot instead of voting openly.⁷² Further tension arose in May 1902 when Farrow discovered that butter being supplied to the workhouse by fellow guardian Martin Taylor was rancid. She supported the proposition that the board purchase its butter from outside the union in future. This out-sourcing proposal in particular scandalised some of her colleagues, including Sneath and Hall, who focused on the greater expense of acquiring produce from outside the district and on the prerogative to support local businesses. Meanwhile, Farrow's priority was the indoor paupers' quality of life, arguing that 'as the inmates are only allowed half an ounce [of butter] each, they should have it good'.⁷³ Evidence of a further clash with Hall and Reverend Jones can be found in 1901, when Farrow supported Joseph Wilson's motion to accommodate around 55 elderly paupers from Nottingham union in the Spalding workhouse on the suggestions of the LGB inspector, as Spalding's own institution was very sparsely populated at the time, with only around 80 inmates. However, Hall moved 'a direct

⁷¹ *Lincolnshire, Boston and Spalding Free Press*, 9th August 1898, p.5.

⁷² *Stamford Mercury*, 7th September 1900, p.4; *Stamford Mercury*, 28th November 1902, p.4.

⁷³ *Peterborough Advertiser*, 21st May 1902, p.7; LA, PL/13/102/21, Spalding PLU, GMB, 12th May 1902.

negative', seconded by Reverend Jones, and after a 'heated discussion' Wilson's proposal was rejected.⁷⁴

Farrow was clearly unafraid to express her views openly or scrutinise the behaviour of her fellow board members – an approach which might cultivate enemies regardless of gender. However, Reverend Jones' dismissive comment in the laundry discussion, and Sneath's aversion to being 'domineered over by a woman', indicates that Farrow did face an element of gendered opposition in her efforts to participate in the board's work. Ironically, she had not even breached traditional spheres of female interest in these instances –laundry alterations and quality of workhouse food aligned closely with acceptable 'womanly' domestic matters, as outlined above. Yet Farrow's experience contrasts sharply with the support and respect displayed by male guardians towards Eva Stableforth. The latter's reception if or when she disagreed with male colleagues over controversial issues, however, is not evident in surviving source material. It is therefore important to compare Farrow's treatment with examples of other female guardians on the board who did so.

There is evidence, sparse but extant, of other female guardians' involvement in sensitive debates. For instance, in 1912 Emma Royce waded into a dispute where one of the union's medical officers accused the Gosberton district relieving officer of refusing to grant medical orders in necessitous cases. Royce brought the issue before the board, and a lengthy discussion was held in the presence of both officers. She appeared to take the side of the medical officer, supplying information about the cases in question and stepping in when she thought the relieving officer was relating events inaccurately. In the event, Royce too found herself on the wrong side of board opinion, as the other guardians concluded that the relieving officer had on the whole behaved correctly (although they urged him to work more cordially with his fellow officers). But in this case, Royce's male colleagues spoke of her involvement positively: Alfred White, when giving an even-handed summary of the situation, commented that 'the Board must take notice of what Mrs Royce had said... Hers was an independent view, and the Board ought to accept it'.⁷⁵ Although tempers flared during the discussion (at one point, the

⁷⁴ *Lincolnshire Echo*, 16th September 1901, p.3; LA, PL/13/102/21, Spalding PLU, GMB, 16th September 1901.

⁷⁵ *Lincolnshire Standard and Boston Guardian*, 5th October 1912, p.11.

relieving officer is recorded as saying ‘Allow me to speak, please, Mrs. Royce’), there is no evidence of any open antagonism towards Royce. The board could, then, tolerate and explicitly value female members who took minority positions on important issues and argued their case.

The hostile behaviour of some male guardians towards Farrow resulted, it seems, from a combination of factors. As an outspoken person on many issues, she was perhaps at greater risk of clashing with colleagues than a less forthright individual might be. Yet it seems that these disagreements were received more negatively partly because of her gender. On the whole, it appears that just as the aggression expressed towards Farrow does not tell the whole story of female guardians’ position on the Spalding board, neither does the guardians’ apparent enthusiasm for the inclusion of female members, or the popularity of Eva Stableforth. Returning to the ‘ideal-types model’ and the question of governance structures, Farrow’s eventual resignation leads us to question whether administrative bodies which forced active and effective members out can really be described as ‘open’. It indicates a discrepancy between the rhetoric of inclusion – the concern over female representation on the board, and the high praise for some of the work female guardians did – and the reality of Farrow’s treatment. Moreover, the long-standing objectionable behaviour of George Hall, and the apparent reluctance of other guardians to address it, suggests a board in which the established roles of individuals within the group dynamic were hard to shift. This was arguably another manifestation of the Spalding board’s tendency towards stability and continuity regardless of any impetus for change. Similarly to the inclination of some guardians to retain former board members, even when others had been elected in their place, it seems that there was little inclination to change even inappropriate behaviour of long-standing guardians once it was entrenched. In this way Spalding was a traditionalist, conservative place in a similar way to our Staffordshire case studies. The door to change was at best half-open.

Overall, the interactions between guardians observed above highlight that welfare operations in Spalding union were to a significant extent driven by the personalities of particular board members, and how influential the blend of personalities on the board as a whole could be on the way in which issues of local poor law practice were discussed. The preceding chapter on Staffordshire aligned with existing studies, showing the impact of leading personalities on local welfare policy by demonstrating

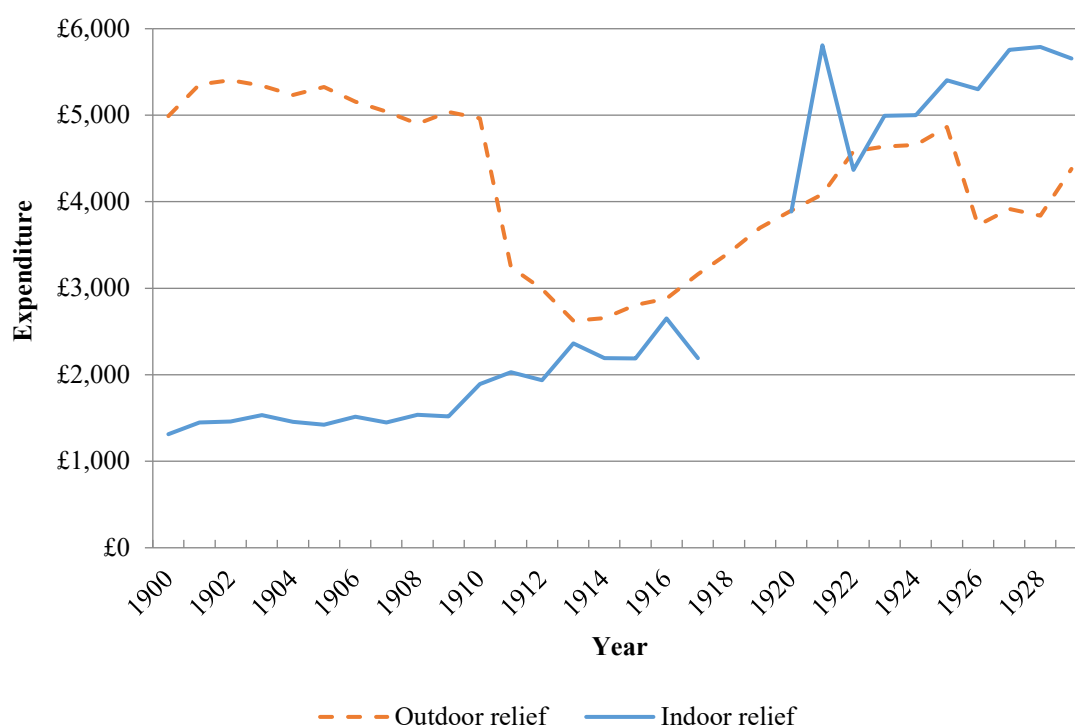
the dominance of the Reverend Percy Mainwaring in Newcastle union, and the way his micro-managing tendencies informed the administrative structures put in place by the board.⁷⁶ Spalding union further confirms this line of argument, as cordial relationships or personality clashes between individual guardians informed policy discussions. Welfare administration was a highly personal activity for the Spalding guardians, where individual relationships – or lack of them – loomed large. We need therefore to now turn to their policy agenda by examining indoor and outdoor relief levels.

4.4 Indoor and outdoor relief in Spalding union

What kind of poor law union, then, did the Spalding board run? This fourth section will explore indoor and outdoor relief in Spalding, focusing on three key aspects: the broad patterns of indoor and outdoor relief and the nature of regional welfare culture in Spalding, with particular reference to the impact of the old-age pension; the relationships between poor relief, seasonality, and gender; and a specific fluctuation in workhouse expenditure. We begin with ascertaining the proportions of indoor and outdoor relief in this union. Figure 4.2 below shows the annual expenditure in each year on relief in Spalding union as recorded in guardians' minute books, and it is evident that for the first two decades of the period, considerably more money was spent in Spalding on outdoor relief than on indoor relief. The Staffordshire case studies have demonstrated that higher expenditure on one type of relief does not always equate to higher numbers of paupers receiving it. However, Spalding's surviving outdoor relief lists and workhouse admissions and discharge registers confirm that outdoor relief was more widely used than the workhouse in the union. Table 4.5 hence shows the average weekly numbers of indoor and outdoor relief recipients as recorded in those documents. Although the number of workhouse inmates slowly rose over the course of the period while the numbers of outdoor relief recipients were declining, it is apparent from the data compiled that there remained more outdoor relief recipients than there were workhouse inmates, with the union's workhouse remaining far from its capacity of 400.

⁷⁶ For example, E. Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism*, Beckett, 'Politics and the implementation of the New Poor Law', pp.201-223; King, *Women, Welfare and Local Politics*; Hooker, 'The most difficult union in Wales'.

Figure 4.2 Expenditure on indoor and outdoor relief in Spalding poor law union, 1900-1930.



Source: LA, PL/13/102/20-30, Spalding PLU, GMB, 1900-1930.

Table 4.5 Average weekly number of indoor and outdoor relief recipients in Spalding poor law union, 1914-1928.

	Average weekly no. of workhouse inmates	Average weekly no. of outdoor relief recipients ⁷⁷
1913	117	No data available
1914	114	206
1915	105	199
1919	No data available	166
1920	No data available	159
1921	No data available	151
1922	No data available	167
1925	122	No data available
1926	139	No data available
1927	135	No data available

Source: LA, PL/13/302/1-3, Spalding PLU, workhouse admissions and discharge registers, 1913-1915, 1925-1927; LA, Spalding PLU, PL/13/501/15-17, 21-27, outdoor relief lists, 1914-1915, 1919-1922.

⁷⁷ This average does not incorporate the family members of each applicant, so the numbers shown in this column are an underestimate.

Spalding had this preference for outdoor relief in common with our previous case studies, and with unions in many other regions during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁷⁸ However, in Spalding's case it was also informed by specific elements of a Lincolnshire welfare culture, alluded to by poor law inspectors of the period, who consistently commented on both a preference for outdoor relief and the significant expense of that relief in the county. In 1902, for instance, Nicholas Herbert highlighted that the cost of outdoor relief in Lincolnshire was the highest in England. He attributed this to the tendency in Lincolnshire for relieving officers to make few enquiries about the circumstances of relief applicants; instead, information was supplied by the guardians representing the relevant parish, who were seen to 'know best' about the conditions of their local poor. Herbert suggested that these guardians were likely to take a generous view of individual cases because it was 'very difficult to refuse assistance to a neighbour'.⁷⁹ Although he reported in 1904 that rates of outdoor pauperism in Lincolnshire had decreased as the circumstances of individual cases were being investigated more rigorously, it remained higher than the other counties in the North Midland district.⁸⁰ Later reports also commented on Lincolnshire's high ratios of pauperism per 1,000 of the population, and on unions' continued 'disinclination to offer the workhouse', on 'economic as well as humane grounds'.⁸¹

This portrayal, as we shall see in the next chapter, resembles the profound ambivalence of Welsh unions towards the workhouse under the New Poor Law as described by Snell. He has indicated that in sparsely populated rural Welsh communities, guardians often had established personal connections with their neighbourhood poor, which made the former disinclined to pressure the latter into the workhouse. This was a tendency, he suggests, reinforced by the prevalence of nonconformity in Wales, as connections between guardian and poor might often be strengthened by attendance at the same small chapels.⁸² Spalding shared several of these characteristics: it was predominantly rural, with a small population and large

⁷⁸ See K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006), pp.228-232.

⁷⁹ LGB: *Annual Report, 1901-02*, pp.117-118.

⁸⁰ LGB: *Annual Report, 1903-04* (1904), Cd.2214, p.205.

⁸¹ LGB: *Annual Report, 1907-08*, p.332; LGB: *Annual Report, 1908-09* (1909), Cd.4786, p.74.

⁸² Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp.256-261.

nonconformist communities.⁸³ The union's preference for outdoor relief thus expressed a regional culture where neighbourly connections made the provision of outdoor relief a much more appealing choice for guardians. Here, then, we can start to build an image of an identifiable regional welfare regime within which Spalding operated. This relatively sympathetic approach to relief provision fits in with King's conception of welfare culture in southern and eastern England, where poor law officials 'on balance probably turned down relatively few people'.⁸⁴ However, the similarities between Lincolnshire and Snell's depiction of attitudes towards relief in Wales, on the western side of King's original division, also complicate his model. Together (as we will see later in Chapter 5) they suggest that certain attitudes towards welfare existed in both eastern and western zones, blurring the division between the two. In the light of these findings, and of those presented in the following chapter on Welsh poor law unions, King's model should therefore be refined to incorporate this more nuanced characterisation of regional welfare sentiment: a novel contribution to which we also return in the thesis' overall conclusion.

Not only was Spalding operating within a regional culture especially inclined towards outdoor relief, but the union was also highlighted by poor law inspectors as having particularly high levels of pauperism even in the context of Lincolnshire. In 1907, Gerald Walsh highlighted Spalding among a handful of other unions in his district with high rates of pauperism, and the following year he stated that Spalding had the highest ratio of pauperism in Lincolnshire, at 41.7 paupers per 1,000 inhabitants – between 1900 and 1914, the county as a whole had an average ratio of around 30.7.⁸⁵ The union continued to maintain a pauper ratio of 40.4 into 1909, which was very high compared to a ratio of 22.5 in England and Wales as a whole.⁸⁶ Even after the significant reduction in pauperism nationally during the First World War, in 1920 Spalding still maintained a ratio of 21, considerably higher than the North Midland district average of 14.⁸⁷

⁸³ Although the religious ministers with seats on the board were mostly Anglican, other guardians were active outside the Church of England, including Baptists, Congregationalists and representatives of the United Methodist Free Church.

⁸⁴ King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p.257.

⁸⁵ LGB: *Annual Report, 1906-07*, p.320; LGB: *Annual Report, 1907-08*, pp.330-332.

⁸⁶ LGB: *Annual Report, 1908-09*, p.74.

⁸⁷ MOH: *Annual Report, 1919-20* (1920), Cmd.932, p.106.

What was it about Spalding which generated such consistently high levels of pauperism? Aside from the generous attitudes towards relief in the region outlined above, the particular forms of agricultural production in the Spalding area also lent themselves to high relief costs and high numbers of paupers. As alluded to above, Jack Langton has demonstrated that ‘improved commercial arable farming areas’ in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Oxfordshire supported higher rates of pauperism, in terms of pauper ratio and expenditure, than less intensely farmed agricultural areas or pastoral areas.⁸⁸ He argued that this was because these areas required high volumes of labour which experienced intermittent and seasonal unemployment linked to the varying demands of the agricultural year.⁸⁹ This labour pool had to be maintained in the off season to prevent the migration of labourers causing a labour shortage when the acute harvest demand for workers came around again. Poor relief provision was one of the ways this could be achieved. Langton suggested that high levels of poor relief were therefore a symptom of ‘fully functioning agricultural commodity markets in a seasonal natural environment’.⁹⁰ Although removed from Langton’s case study in terms of location and period, Spalding union had attributes in common with the areas he described. The region was entirely dependent on agriculture, and was intensively – and successfully, given the area’s survival through the major agricultural recessions of the late nineteenth century – farmed for national commercial purposes. Spalding’s agriculture required large volumes of labour, but not at a consistent level throughout the year. It was therefore important to encourage agricultural workers to remain in the locality rather than moving away in periods when work was scarcer – an issue revealed by the more widespread use of annual contracts for labourers in the area. In order to achieve this, the labouring population needed seasonal support. These conditions, coupled with substandard housing, long travel distances to and from work and demanding physical labour, contributed towards a population in need of poor relief, which the prosperity of the area’s farming was able to supply. We can suggest, then, that high levels of poor law provision helped to maintain a labour force synced to highly seasonal employment opportunities, building in Spalding’s case on a permissive regional welfare culture. Indeed, government

⁸⁸ Langton, ‘Geography of poor relief’, p.194.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.234.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.232.

⁹⁰ Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.234.

inspectors' rather dim view of the extensive pauperism in Lincolnshire indicates a misunderstanding of the nature of work and the consequent role of welfare under these specific local conditions. Discrepancy of this kind between central and local understandings of welfare needs is highlighted by King and Stewart as a key feature of 'peripheral welfare cultures' too – a theme which will be explored in more detail in Section 4.5.

Beyond these broader pauperism trends, however, Figure 4.2 suggests that outdoor relief levels in Spalding were subject to significant fluctuation over the course of our period, too. For instance, the amount expended on outdoor relief was lower in the three years before the First World War than it had been for the previous decade. Snell has identified a significant decline in outdoor relief from 1899 to 1912, and attributes this in part to 'growing public expenditure and expanding non-poor law 'public assistance' under separate legislation'.⁹¹ In other words, in these years before the First World War, the poor law experienced the cumulative effects of these alternative forms of early welfare state provision, as the labouring poor were offered other means to find support. However, as has been indicated in both our two previous case studies, these reforms were not always received uniformly at a local level. Moreover, some of the most substantial welfare legislation of this period such as the 1911 National Insurance Act was not initially applicable to the agricultural workers who proliferated in the Spalding area. It would therefore be a mistake to link these too directly with Spalding's lower levels of relief expenditure. The reform which clearly *was* relevant and impactful in Spalding union, however, was the old-age pension – hence, a key feature of Figure 4.2 is the 34 percent decline in annual expenditure on outdoor relief in 1911. This mirrors a similar reduction in our Leicestershire and Staffordshire case studies, as well as in national expenditure, responding to the lapse of the pauper disqualification from the 1908 Old Age Pension Act, which as Margaret Jones has shown made 160,135 new pensions payable and according to Karel Williams allowed 122,415 people to move away from the poor law during January 1911.⁹²

⁹¹ Ibid., pp.220-221.

⁹² K. Williams, *For Pauperism to Poverty* (London, 1981), pp.171, p.207, p.212; M. Jones, 'The 1908 Old Age Pensions Act: The poor law in new disguise?' in K. Laybourn (ed.), *Social Conditions, Status and Community 1860-c.1920* (Stroud, 1997), p.98.

However, a closer look at the Spalding board's policy towards the pension suggests that this figure might not tell the whole story. Although from 1911 onwards recipients of poor relief were no longer disqualified from the national pension, applicants were not permitted to receive both the pension and poor relief at the same time, with the exception of medical relief. We might reasonably expect this to motivate guardians and relieving officers to encourage paupers onto the pension, thereby reducing their own outgoings. Indeed, we have seen some evidence of this in Blaby and in the Staffordshire unions, and this appears to have been a policy that Spalding relieving officer George Handford also pursued when the poor law disqualification first lapsed at the beginning of 1911. The Donington Pensions Committee, one of the bodies who administered old-age pension applications at a local level, wrote to the Spalding board in January of that year, complaining that Handford had claimed that the board would no longer give non-medical outdoor relief to any person over 70 years of age, and had pressurised applicants to take up the new pension.⁹³ This went against the advice of the LGB that 'it is not obligatory for any person to claim an old age pension', and 'the fact that the person who might be qualified for an old age pension has not claimed one would not...be grounds for withholding poor relief from him if he is in need of it'.⁹⁴ The guardians distanced themselves from Handford's actions (although when questioned he maintained that he had been acting on the board's instructions) and the chairman told him not to apply such pressure in future.⁹⁵ This suggests a conscious choice not to discourage paupers who might have been eligible for the pension from continuing to apply for poor relief.

Such a stance raises the possibility that, although the advent of the pension did have a notable impact on outdoor relief expenditure in Spalding, this might have been mitigated by the guardians' approach to those newly eligible for it. The conflict between the board and Handford also suggests that some individuals did not fit into the general hypothesis presented by Pat Thane and Martin Pugh that the pension would be preferred by most paupers to claiming from the poor law, as the former was perceived to carry

⁹³ LA, PL/13/102/24, Spalding PLU, GMB, 23rd January 1911.

⁹⁴ *Lincolnshire, Boston and Spalding Free Press*, 24th January 1911, p.12.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

considerably less stigma.⁹⁶ The Spalding guardians' discussion of the issue implies that some applicants did not want to take advantage of the old age pension. The Donington Pensions Committee had specified in their complaint about Handford that 'the Relieving Officer had brought pressure to bear upon claimants to force them to make a claim for a pension *against their wish* [author's emphasis]'.⁹⁷ The question of why some individuals preferred not to move from the poor law to the pension is intriguing. We have already observed in the Staffordshire case studies that some indoor paupers made a strategic choice to remain in the workhouse rather than move out to receive the pension. In 1912, Gerald Walsh commented on a similar tendency in the North Midland district which included Lincolnshire, highlighting the very small number of indoor poor moving onto the pension and stating that 'a very large number stoutly refused to apply for their pensions, expressing themselves as thoroughly content with their treatment and with the conditions under which they lived'.⁹⁸ He also pointed out that some former workhouse residents had returned to the institution, having been living 'under conditions in which an ordinary relief committee would have considered it wise and humane to refuse outdoor relief and make an offer of the workhouse'.⁹⁹ It is possible that some outdoor relief recipients in Spalding were also making a strategic choice about the form of relief most suitable for them, although there is little surviving evidence in the Spalding records that explicitly expresses such insecurity.

Moreover, a perception of poor relief by the elderly as almost an entitlement could also be a contributory factor to such a decision. In his discussion of mid-nineteenth century poor relief, David Thomson points out that an elderly person would have to have been 'unusually unfortunate or offending not to have qualified for a Poor Law pension.'¹⁰⁰ Pat Thane's findings for the early twentieth century align with this view.¹⁰¹ These tendencies imply that poor relief was often quite easily accessible, and perhaps therefore more acceptable, to the elderly. Indeed, these broad inclinations may

⁹⁶ P. Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford, 2000), p.277; M. Pugh, 'Working-class experience and state social welfare, 1908-1914: old-age pensions reconsidered', *The Historical Journal*, 45:4 (2002), p.791.

⁹⁷ LA, PL/13/102/24, Spalding PLU, GMB, 23rd January 1911.

⁹⁸ LGB: *Annual Report, 1911-12*, Cd.6327, p.112.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ D. Thompson, 'The decline of social welfare: falling state support for the elderly since early Victorian times', *Ageing and Society*, 4:4 (1984), p.468.

¹⁰¹ Thane, *Old Age*, p.227.

have been exacerbated in Spalding union by the welfare culture found there. We have already suggested that Spalding took a rather sympathetic attitude towards welfare provision, aligning with King's argument that southern and eastern England developed a 'more relaxed and inclusive' welfare culture.¹⁰² Arguably, the Spalding guardians also demonstrated this in their reluctance to push the elderly onto the old-age pension – poor relief should remain accessible to individuals regardless of the newer welfare reforms. It is possible then that these local sentiments – the relative availability of poor relief to the elderly and the regional tendency towards inclusive relief provision – combined into a feeling among the elderly of entitlement to poor relief. In fact, some Spalding paupers may have viewed poor relief as essentially the same as a state-provided pension. By way of example, in April 1900 a 78 year old man presented himself at the guardians' meeting and explained that he had 'come for his old-age pension'.¹⁰³ The following exchange ensued:

Chairman: They've not come yet. You must apply to the House of Lords.

Applicant: I thought I was entitled to one.

Chairman: You are in advance of the times.

Clerk: He means he wants outdoor relief.

Chairman: That's different.'¹⁰⁴

The man was duly provided with weekly outdoor relief of 2s 6d.¹⁰⁵ Although there had been campaigns for the old age pension ongoing since the late nineteenth century, their advent in Britain was still years away in 1900.¹⁰⁶ Even so, this pauper saw little difference between poor relief and a state pension; moreover, he felt *entitled* to relief that he could receive from the guardians. Regrettably, in the surviving sources it is hard to make any secure pronouncements on levels of entitlement to relief felt more generally by Spalding union's elderly. However, given the regional context outlined above, it seems likely that some of Spalding's aged paupers saw little urgent need for the state pension, as they were already receiving sufficient support from an established welfare source. Indeed, Charles Booth observed in 1894 that outdoor relief was 'given

¹⁰² King, *Poverty and Welfare*, pp.257-258.

¹⁰³ *Framlingham Weekly News*, 28th April 1900, p.4.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Thane, *Old Age*, p.197.

freely' to the elderly in Spalding.¹⁰⁷ They therefore felt secure within a familiar system which they knew how to navigate and which could more adequately cater to their needs than the new form of provision. We once more see that the relationship between 'old' and 'new' welfare provision during this period was far from straightforward 'on the ground'.

Moreover, there could also have been an element of distrust of state welfare involved in the reduced uptake of the pension in Spalding union. Thane and Pamela Graves have demonstrated widespread suspicion of state welfare policies, both prior to the First World War and into the 1920s, but in both cases their studies were referring to policies other than the old-age pension, such as unemployment benefits or state oversight of children.¹⁰⁸ In fact, the widely accepted view is that recipients of the new pensions were extremely grateful for them. Thane refers to 'grateful pensioners [who]... offered flowers, apples, even rashers of bacon to the postmasters and mistresses who handed them their first pension',¹⁰⁹ and Elizabeth Roberts suggested in her work on Preston, Barrow-in-Furness and Lancaster that pensions 'were welcomed [and] regarded as a right and as deferred wages'.¹¹⁰ However, although around 40 percent of the over-70 age group nationally qualified for the largest possible pension, only a minority of this group had received poor relief.¹¹¹ Thane interprets this as showing 'the extent of severe unmet need before the introduction of the pension'.¹¹² A significant proportion of those receiving the new pensions had therefore already been studiously avoiding the poor law. Their gratitude, then, is easily understood. If, however, like the paupers in Spalding union, individuals had been receiving poor relief within a relief culture where the elderly poor could feel something approaching entitlement to that relief (a relief culture which, according to King's conclusions about the north-west regions, would not have been forthcoming in Roberts' towns of interest), many may well have understandably viewed an alternative, untested (by them) source of national provision with suspicion.

¹⁰⁷ C. Booth, *The Aged Poor in England and Wales* (London, 1894), p.174.

¹⁰⁸ P. Graves, 'A blessing or a curse? Working-class attitudes to state welfare programmes in Britain 1919-1939', *Labour History Review*, 74:2 (2009), pp.160-184; P. Thane, 'The working-class and state 'welfare' in Britain 1880-1914', *The Historical Journal*, 27:4 (1984), pp.877-900.

¹⁰⁹ Thane, *Old Age*, p.227.

¹¹⁰ E. Roberts, 'The recipients' views of welfare' in J. Bornat, R. Perks, P. Thompson and J. Walmsley (eds.), *Oral History, Health and Welfare* (London, 2000), p.214.

¹¹¹ Thane, *Old Age*, p.227.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

This fourth section's exploration of the old-age pension's local implementation has provided further evidence for distinctive regional variation in the reception of welfare reforms during this period. This case study has given perhaps the clearest indication that this reception could be linked to specific local conditions, welfare cultures and attitudes towards relief, within which both the poor and the guardians were enmeshed. In Spalding union's case, this resulted in an unwillingness among the guardians to pressurise paupers to move away from the poor law. Moreover, these new findings further demonstrate the applicability and longevity of King's theory of regionalised welfare into the early twentieth century, as this Lincolnshire union continues to fit in with his conception of south-east welfare regimes.¹¹³

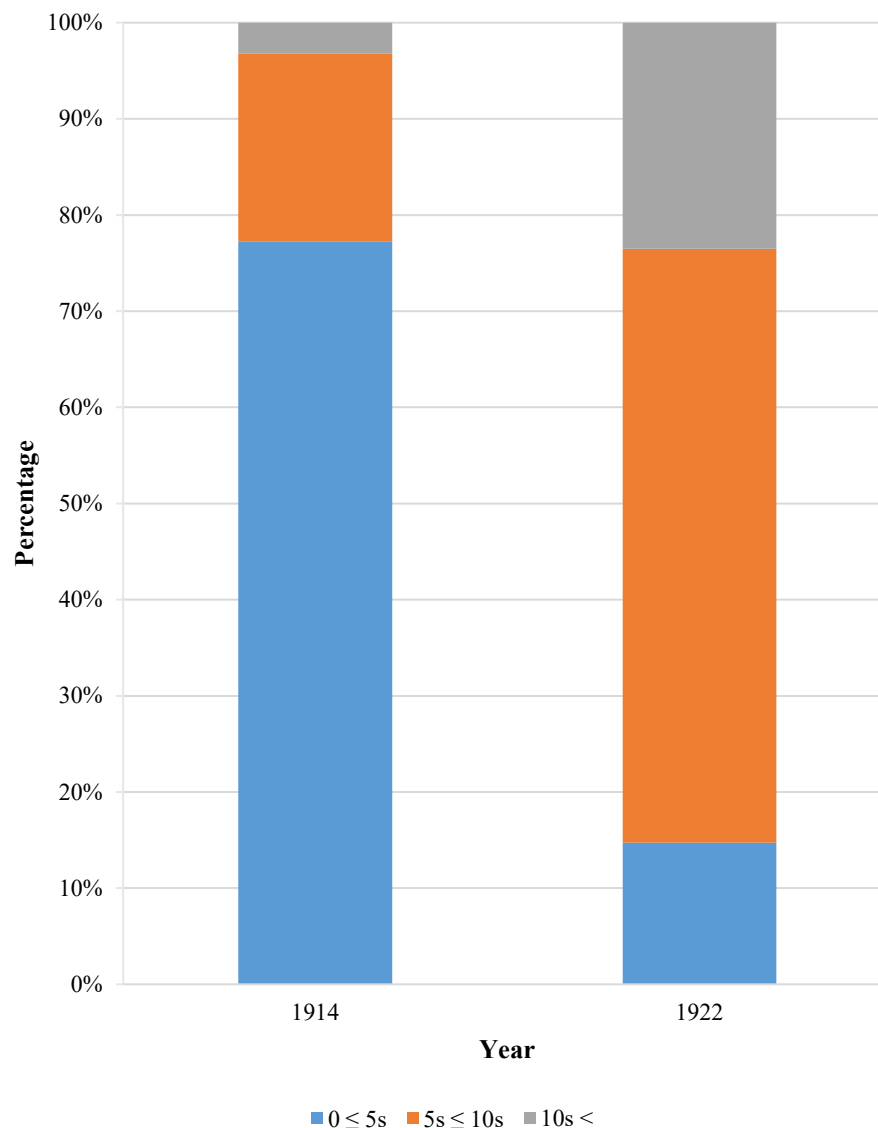
Returning to more general relief trends in Spalding union, its outdoor relief expenditure fell between 1900 and 1913, but thereafter began to rise steadily. By the mid-1920s expenditure levels were almost as high as they had been before the national pension offered some an alternative to poor relief. However, as Table 4.5 indicates, the number of families receiving outdoor relief during this period actually declined, rather than rising along with expenditure. If Spalding was relieving smaller numbers of families via outdoor relief as the 1910s and 1920s progressed, why was expenditure on that relief category going up?

We observed a similar trend in Blaby, whereby the Leicestershire union's outdoor relief expenditure in the early 1920s increased, while actual numbers of relief recipients was declining. In that instance, the distribution of larger outdoor relief payments was identified as a contributing factor. It appears that a similar process was at play in Spalding, although our surviving source material does not quite cover the same specific timeframe. Figure 4.3 demonstrates the size of weekly cash relief payments to families in Spalding union in 1914 (the earliest complete outdoor relief list surviving) and 1922 (the latest complete list). These suggest that over time, outdoor relief payments had grown significantly in size. In 1914, less than 20 percent of weekly outdoor relief payments were over 5s., and less than three percent were larger than 10s. However, by 1922 almost 85 percent of payments were over 5s. This then goes some way to explaining the rising outdoor relief expenditure in the union from 1913 into the 1920s – despite the decline in the number of families receiving outdoor relief, larger

¹¹³ King, *Poverty and Welfare*, pp.141-180.

payments inflated the union's overall expenditure. This case study therefore not only provides an additional local example which supports Snell's findings, outlined in Chapter 2, on similar increases in national poor law expenditure, but also indicates commonalities between the experiences of Blaby and Spalding.

Figure 4.3 Size of weekly outdoor relief payments in Spalding, 1914-1922.



Source: LA, PL/13/501/4, 11, 15, 19, Spalding PLU, outdoor relief lists, 1914 and 1922.

In the Leicestershire case study, we were also able to suggest that the real value of payments, as well as their actual size, was going up over the 1920s, as larger

pensions were being given even as prices were falling. As we do not have surviving sources which provide relief payment sizes in Spalding after 1922, we cannot properly assess whether the same was true here. However, it is possible to make a broader assessment. According to Feinstein's historical price indices, consumer goods' prices in 1922 were 102 percent higher more than they had been in 1914.¹¹⁴ The significant growth in Spalding's outdoor relief payment sizes between these two years keeps pace with this, then, but does not necessarily indicate an increase in the real value of relief payments, in the way that available source material for Blaby does.

We can, however, try to understand the value of Spalding's relief payments using alternative means: by placing them in the context of local wages. Prior to the First World War, average earnings for an agricultural labourer in Lincolnshire were comparatively low – between 14s. and 15s. a week in 1900, rising to around 17s. by 1914.¹¹⁵ There was also often a seasonal fluctuation in wages, with reductions in winter because of the shorter hours typically worked.¹¹⁶ During the war wages increased, partly as a result of a national minimum wage of 25s. per week for labourers in place by the summer of 1917.¹¹⁷ As a result, by 1919 average wages were considerably higher, up to 36s. per week.¹¹⁸ Meanwhile, payment for piece-work varied significantly – for instance, in the immediate interwar period pay for potato picking could be up to £3 an acre, while grain harvest tasks could range from 1s to £2 an acre, with as little as 5s. 6d. an acre for hoeing.¹¹⁹ Women's wages were both lower and much more variable than for men within the region both before and after the war – by 1914, most women in the Spalding area could expect a day wage of around 2s., increasing to around 4s. by 1919.¹²⁰ Most potato, fruit and flower-picking that women undertook was paid via piece-work, which could be relatively lucrative – one farm owner was quoted in the 1919 Board of Agriculture report as stating that women picking his fruits could earn up

¹¹⁴ C.H. Feinstein, *National Income, Expenditure and Output of the United Kingdom, 1855-1965* (Cambridge, 1972), T.132.

¹¹⁵ Board of Trade [hereafter BOT]: *Report by Mr Wilson Fox on the wages and earnings of agricultural labourers in the United Kingdom* (1900), Cd.346, p.35, 186; BAF: *Employment in Agriculture Vol II*, p.162.

¹¹⁶ BAF: *Employment in Agriculture Vol II*, p.162; A. Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men: Rural Radicalism in Norfolk 1870-1923* (London, 1985), pp.24-25.

¹¹⁷ BAF: *Employment in Agriculture Vol II*, p.162; P. Horn, *Rural Life in England in the First World War* (New York, 1984), p.60.

¹¹⁸ BAF: *Employment in Agriculture Vol II*, p.162.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.164.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.168.

to £6 extra during the three to four month picking season.¹²¹ Given this context, the outdoor relief levels demonstrated in Figure 4.3 can be seen to be increasing alongside wages in the area, as well as costs of living more broadly. However, it is also clear that poor relief would not have plugged the income gap of an out-of-work or sporadically employed adult, either before or after the First World War. This suggests, therefore, that weekly poor relief in Spalding continued to form part of an ‘economy of makeshifts’ made up of other types of income¹²² - implying that most recipient families were living on the threshold of relative to absolute poverty, not complete destitution.

So far, we have examined trends in outdoor relief over our period. However, given the seasonality of work in Spalding, it is also useful to consider relief patterns within the calendar year.¹²³ Beginning with indoor relief, a discernible although not drastic seasonal pattern can be observed in Figures 4.4-5 below, which present the weekly number of workhouse inmates across those years for which we have surviving admissions and discharge registers.¹²⁴ It appears that typically (with the exception of 1926) there were more people in the Spalding workhouse in the first three months or so of each year, which was then followed by a decline over the course of April and early May. Numbers of inmates remained lower during the summer months and into early autumn, before beginning to increase again during the last two winter months of the year. This aligns with the agricultural year in much of southern Lincolnshire. Although Andrew Walker has shown that in Lincoln the annual hiring fair had largely ‘wither[ed] away’ by the 1920s,¹²⁵ May still marked the beginning of harvest season, so it would

¹²¹ Ibid., p.169.

¹²² For engagement with the poor’s economy of makeshifts, see the essays in A. Tomkins and S. King (eds.), *The Poor in England, 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003).

¹²³ For the seasonality of rural labour patterns see E.J.T. Collins, ‘Migrant labour in British agriculture in the nineteenth century’, *Economic History Review*, 20:1 (1976), pp.38-59; A. Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1981); pp.274-303; J. Burnette, ‘The seasonality of English agricultural employment: Evidence from farm accounts 1740-1850’ in R. Hoyle (ed.), *The Farmer in England 1650-1980* (Farnham, 2013), pp.135-164. A number of scholars have also linked welfare practices with the seasonality of employment. See for instance M. Blaug, ‘The myth of the old poor law and the making of the new’, *Journal of Economic History*, 23:2 (1963), pp.151-184; Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*; pp.15-66; Goose, ‘Farm service, seasonal unemployment’.

¹²⁴ The two ‘chunks’ of admissions data have been presented in separate figures for visual clarity.

¹²⁵ A. Walker, ‘Encountering rus in urbe in the twentieth-century county town: Lincoln’s fairs and its agricultural show’, *International Journal of Regional and Local Studies* 6:2 (2013), p.93.

seem likely that claimants left the Spalding workhouse in the hope of finding work at the beginning of the new agricultural year.¹²⁶

Although Figures 4.4-5 do indicate some seasonal pattern to workhouse admissions, they do not show as dramatic a level of fluctuation as demonstrated in Snell's work on seasonal unemployment in southern and eastern counties.¹²⁷ This might be because Snell used settlement examinations to reconstruct seasonal trends; it is possible that the data extracted from admissions and discharge registers has been 'smoothed out' because individuals entered the workhouse for a number of other primary reasons besides unemployment – use of the infirmary, for instance, or increased care requirements due to age or disability. However, we should also consider the fact that Figures 4.4-5 combine male and female admissions. When we separate these, as in Figures 4.6-9, there is a difference worth noting. The seasonality of male admissions, although still not enormous, is nevertheless more pronounced, largely aligns more closely with the harvest, and mirrors Snell's findings for male seasonal unemployment more closely. There is much less seasonality evident in the numbers of women entering the workhouse across the year. It seems likely that this was partly due to the nature of women's piece-work in the region, where they were largely excluded from the cereal harvests but engaged in specific labour around the other types of specialist crops produced in southern Lincolnshire, resulting in more even employment coverage across the year. Overall, then, we are observing a distribution generated by several factors: some enduring influence of the arable agricultural year on relief provision in Spalding, the distinct kinds of gendered work undertaken in the region throughout that year, and the 'smoothing' effect of the other motivations that could provoke entry to the workhouse unconnected to unemployment, predominantly by men.

¹²⁶ There is little detail recorded about those who were discharged from the workhouse, however, so it is difficult to provide more evidence in support of this possibility.

¹²⁷ Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, pp.20-21.

Figure 4.4 Seasonal distribution of inmate numbers (male and female) in Spalding workhouse, 1913-1915.

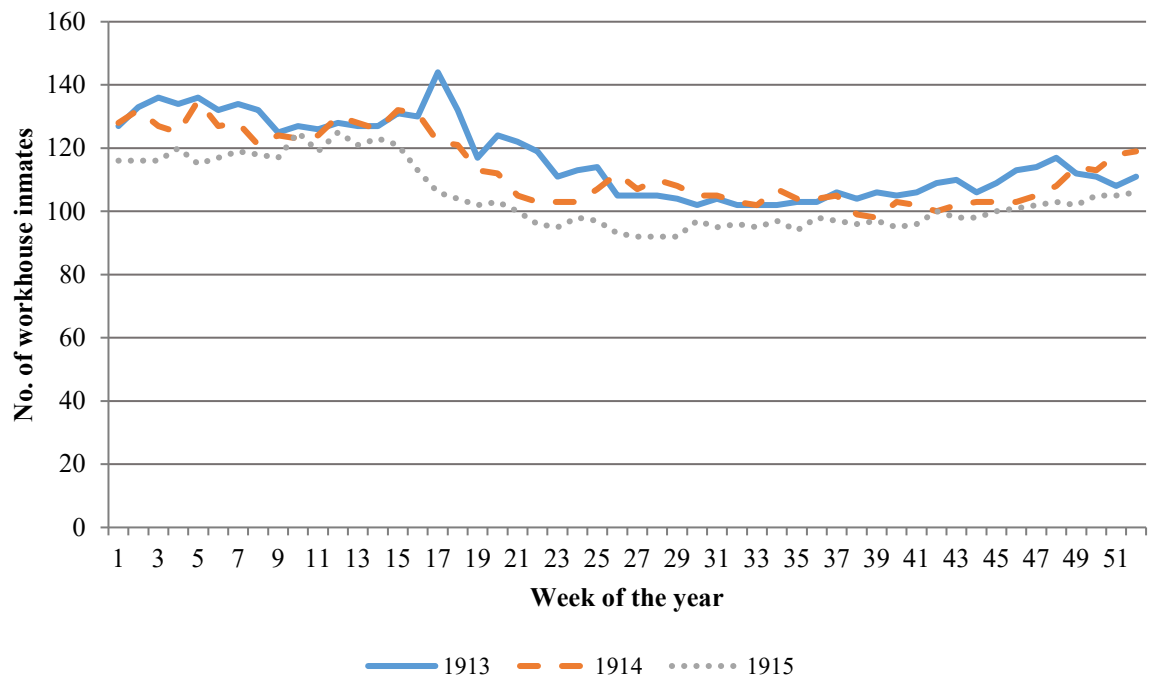
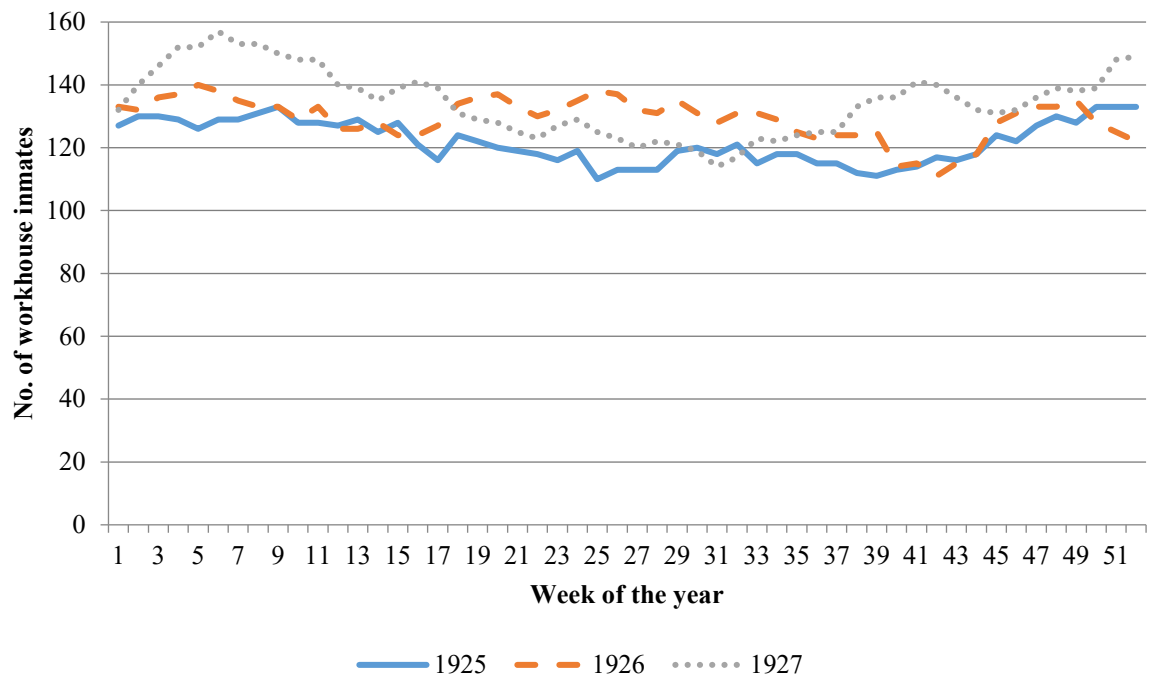


Figure 4.5 Seasonal distribution of inmate numbers (male and female) in Spalding workhouse, 1925-1927.



Source: LA, PL/13/302/1, Spalding PLU, workhouse admissions and discharge registers, 1913-1915 [4.4]; LA, PL/13/302/2-3, Spalding PLU, workhouse admissions and discharge registers, 1925-1927 [4.5].

Figure 4.6 Seasonal distribution of male inmate numbers in Spalding workhouse, 1913-1915.

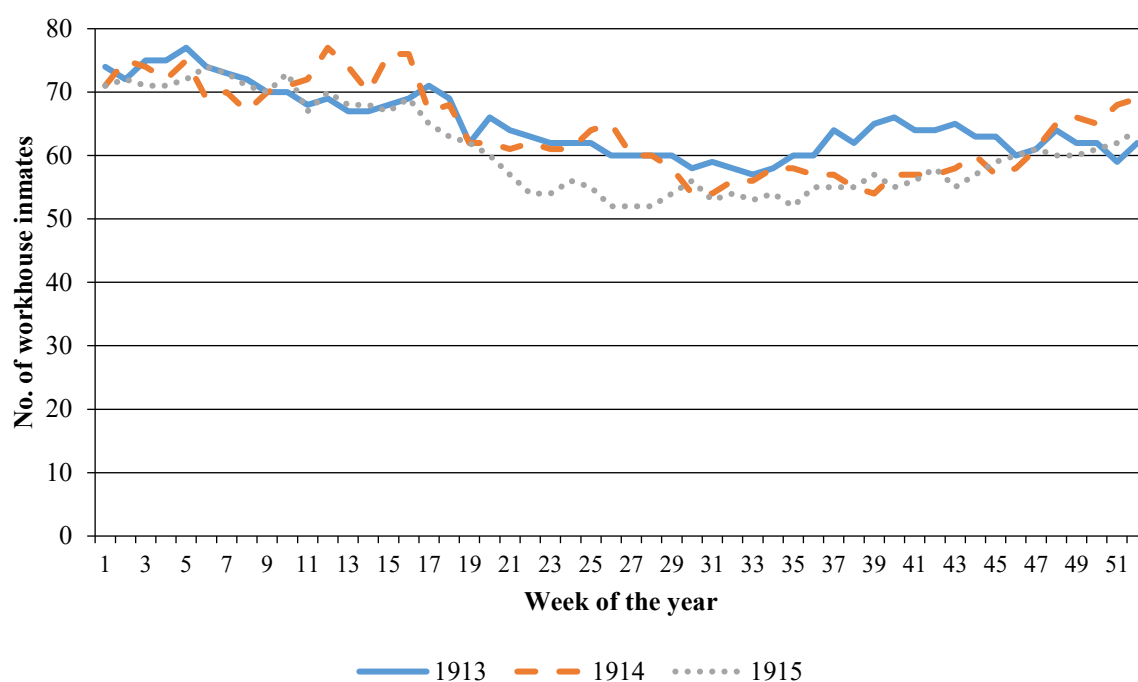
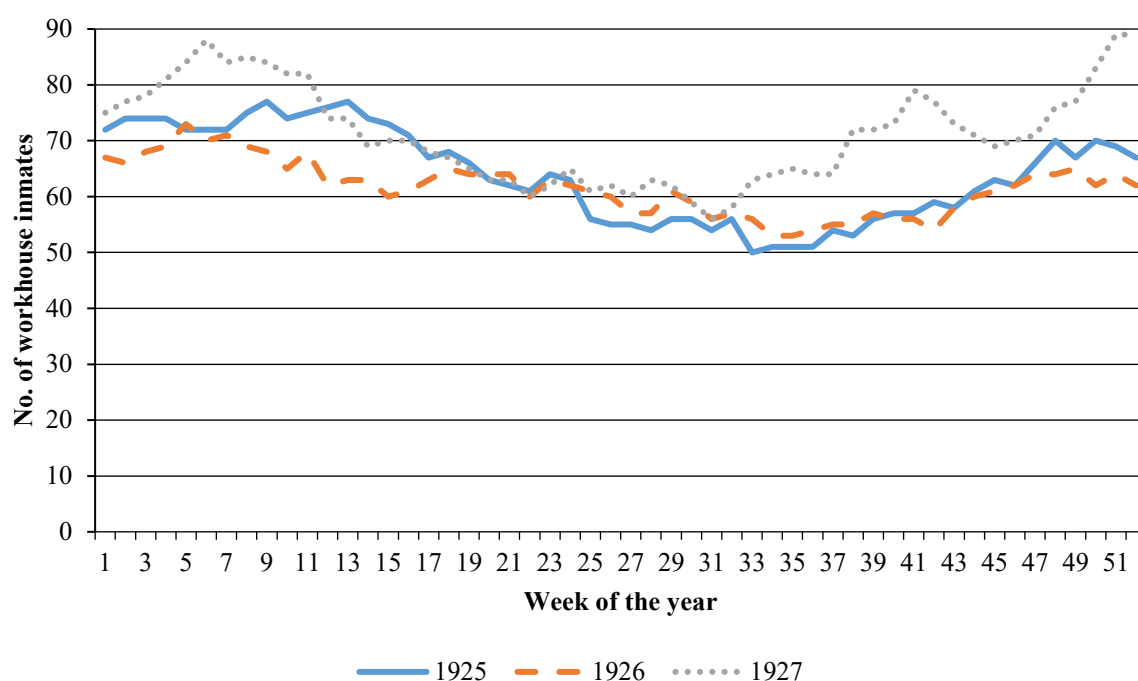


Figure 4.7 Seasonal distribution of male inmate numbers in Spalding workhouse, 1925-1927.



Source: LA, PL/13/302/1, Spalding PLU, workhouse admissions and discharge registers, 1913-1915 [4.6]; LA, PL/13/302/2-3, Spalding PLU, workhouse admissions and discharge registers, 1925-1927 [4.7].

Figure 4.8 Seasonal distribution of female inmate numbers in Spalding workhouse, 1913-1915.

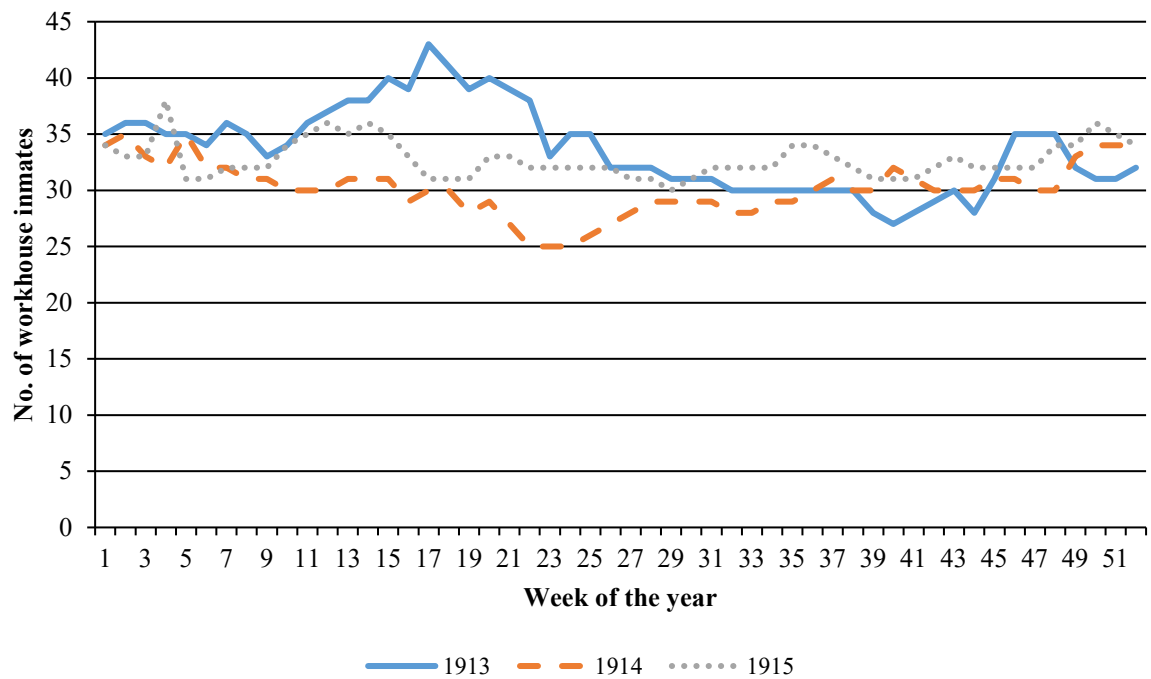
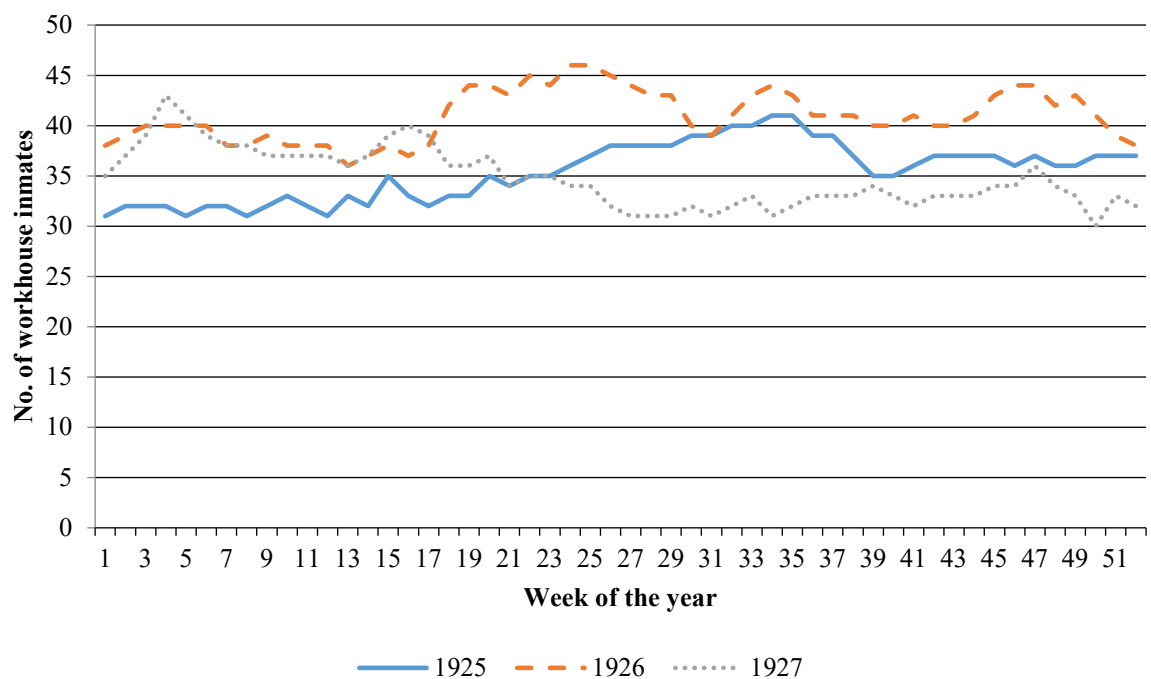


Figure 4.9 Seasonal distribution of female inmate numbers in Spalding workhouse, 1925-1927.



Source: LA, PL/13/302/1, Spalding PLU, workhouse admissions and discharge registers, 1913-1915 [4.8]; LA, PL/13/302/2-3, Spalding PLU, workhouse admissions and discharge registers, 1925-1927 [4.9].

Figure 4.10 Seasonal distribution of outdoor relief recipients in Spalding union, 1914-1915 and 1919.

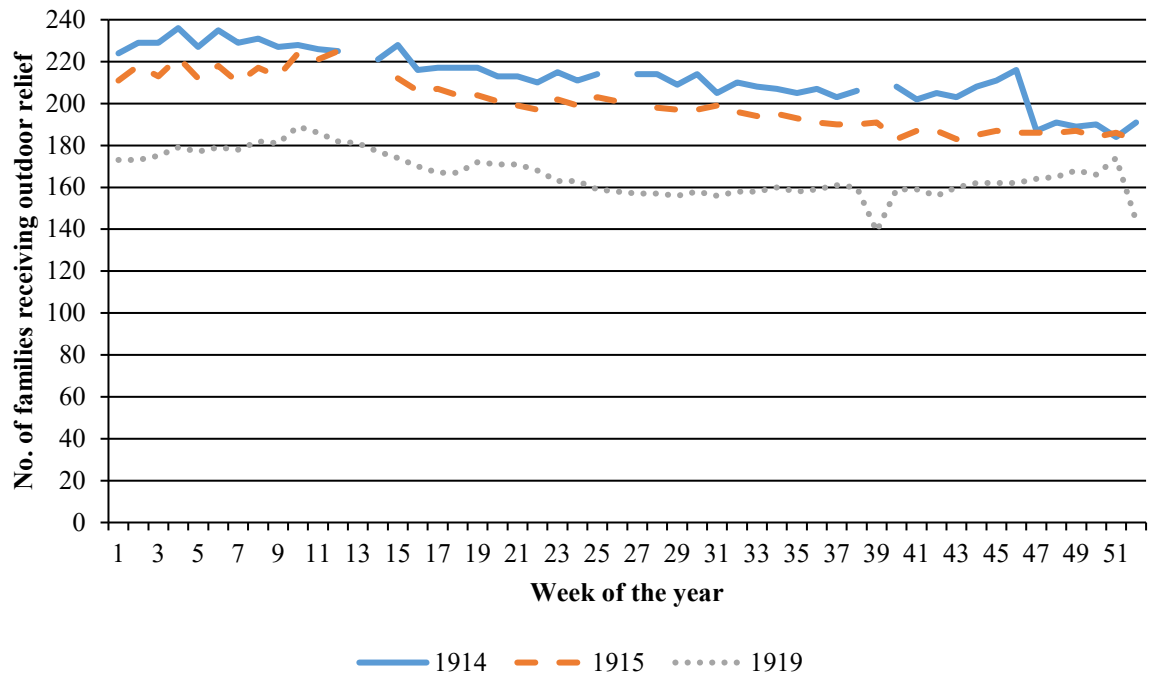
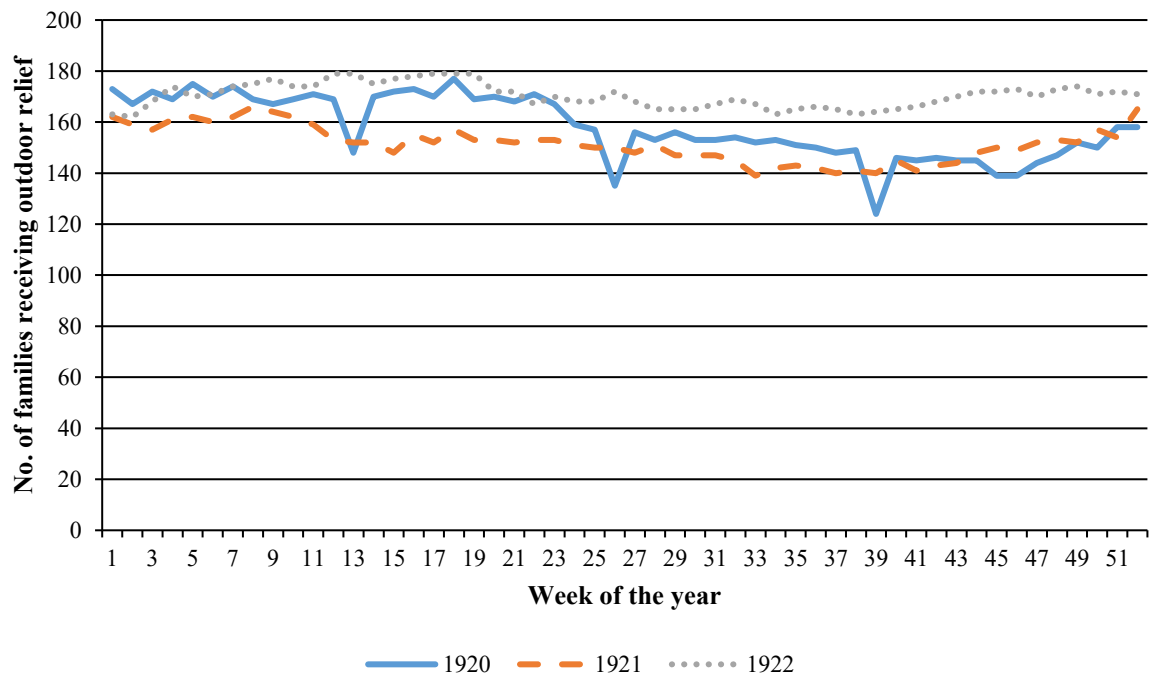


Figure 4.11 Seasonal distribution of outdoor relief recipients in Spalding union, 1920-1922.



Source: LA, PL13/501/15-17, Spalding PLU, outdoor relief lists, 1914-1915 [4.10] and LA, PL13/501/21-28, Spalding PLU, outdoor relief lists, 1919-1922 [4.11].

Moving on to outdoor relief, Figures 4.10-11 demonstrate the seasonal distribution of families who received outdoor relief in the complete years available in surviving outdoor relief lists. A key feature here is a relative lack of seasonal variation in Spalding's outdoor relief distribution. The gradual decline in recipients over the entire period covered in Table 4.5 can be seen clearly, but there is not much in the way of alignment with the agricultural year. In 1920, the data captures small but regular dips in the number of recipients; a similar dip is captured once in 1919. These occur roughly every 12 weeks, a relatively common length of time for a relief application to be granted, which perhaps indicates the points in the year where relieving officers reviewed their cases and took the opportunity to discontinue relief to those no longer in need. However, levels of recipients immediately recovered, implying that such reviews often raised issues which resulted in a temporary discontinuation of relief for some families while they were resolved. Moreover, and importantly, these reviews mirror the ecclesiastical timetable which historically underpinned both pre- and post-1834 poor laws: week 13 coincided with Lady Day in late March (when annual rents were traditionally due, potentially provoking family crises); week 25 coincided with the summer solstice in late June when employment in places like Spalding was higher; while week 37 aligned with Michaelmas towards the end of the harvest period. In other words, we can observe a long-term continuity here, where the seasonality of some elements of relief administration like reviews of outdoor relief cases moved with the seasonality of the deeply-established agricultural and church year.

What do these seasonal patterns tell us about overall relief provision in Spalding? They suggest a less than straightforward relationship between relief and seasonal unemployment. There was a stronger link between workhouse admissions and the agricultural year, suggesting that the Spalding workhouse still retained, even in this relatively late period, an element of its traditional role that has been observed by scholars of earlier periods,¹²⁸ whereby it could be used as a short-term fix to a finite period of need. This relationship is more evident for men than for women, however. The same seasonal patterns are not visible in outdoor relief provision, suggesting that the

¹²⁸ See for instance T. Hitchcock, "'Unlawfully begotten of her body': illegitimacy and the parish poor in St. Luke's, Chelsea", in T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor 1640-1840* (London, 1997), pp.70-86, and J. Harley, 'Material lives of the poor and their strategic use of the workhouse during the final decades of the English old poor law', *Continuity and Change*, 30:1 (2015), pp.71-103.

needs it was alleviating were not subject to such seasonal upswings and downturns, but longer-term vulnerabilities - age, infirmity, and an otherwise inability to make ends meet. However, there is nevertheless a slightly different expression of seasonality in outdoor relief, whereby the levels of relief needs remained in sync with very old church, hiring and seasonal traditions. This is a union where cycles of relief therefore retained a distinctive rural, agricultural character. Overall, such trends point to more continuity than discontinuity in Spalding. Ordinary life maintained a predictable rural pattern of relief for those in need. It was a relatively 'steady' sort of location in which to claim poor law assistance. Crucially, the poor law was far from moribund or defunct.

Returning to Figure 4.2 and Spalding union's annual expenditure, we initially focused on outdoor relief. In terms of workhouse expenditure, its relatively low levels in the early part of the period match the emptiness of the institution that has already been observed. The relevant figures are missing between 1918 and 1920, but it is nevertheless clear that by 1921 Spalding had drastically increased its annual expenditure on the workhouse to almost £6,000. Although it dropped down again the following year, it continued to rise subsequently so that for the first time the workhouse cost the union more than its outdoor relief recipients. Like in Staffordshire, we need to get behind this data, because we have already seen that the workhouse was not the main instrument of social policy in Spalding either.

One contributing factor to this expenditure trend is likely to have been the rising cost of everyday essentials, such as food, clothing and fuel by the early 1920s. However, a variety of refurbishment work was also being undertaken in the institution during this time which pushed annual expenditure up. Adjustments to the Spalding institution, both large and small and often concerned with sanitary facilities, were regularly made over the course of the early twentieth century – from new baths installed in 1902-3¹²⁹ to refurbishment of the nurses' quarters in 1915.¹³⁰ These were very much in keeping with another key aspect of welfare reform ongoing in this period – that of public health. The state's administrative powers in this area had grown considerably, with flurries of legislation throughout the mid-to late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, involving not just the management of sewage and clean water but also the

¹²⁹ LA, PL/13/102/21, Spalding PLU, GMB, 27th October 1902.

¹³⁰ LA, PL/13/102/25, Spalding PLU, GMB, 31st July 1915.

provision of specialist medical institutions, better monitoring of infectious diseases and, into the twentieth century, state supervision of child health and financial support for the sick.¹³¹ The poor law had an established history of involvement with public health, most obviously in its supervision of smallpox vaccination since 1840,¹³² and its provision of medical relief has been the focus of a large volume of literature.¹³³ The Spalding guardians could be wary of public health improvements – they chose for instance in 1903 not to action the medical officer’s recommendation that water closets be installed instead of pan closets.¹³⁴ That said, regular low-level sanitary improvements arguably expressed the wider national increase in interest in public health, particularly after the First World War. Moreover, in January 1921 the MoH sanctioned the expenditure of £2,500 in order to carry out ‘certain structural alterations in the Spalding Union Institution’,¹³⁵ and in the following November the guardians applied to the Ministry again for a further £2,000 for the same purposes.¹³⁶ Details as to the exact nature of these alterations have not survived, but it seems that the guardians were once again set on improving the institution’s sanitary conditions, including ‘alterations to the laundry’, and the addition of a ‘disinfector house’, which the guardians hoped they could hire out to other local authorities. There were also various other alterations and renovations in the main building itself, such as repairs to the sewers and water supply systems. It seems, then, that this work was the main cause behind such a spike in expenditure on the workhouse in the early 1920s.

¹³¹ For instance ‘Public Health Act, 1875’ (38 & 39 Vict. c.55), accessed on legislation.gov.uk [accessed on 24/11/15]; see also Harris, *Origins*, p.111. Perhaps the most useful general texts on the history of public health are still F.B. Smith, *The People’s Health 1830-1910* (London, 1979) and A. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London, 1983). In terms of literature that deals with specific aspects of public health policy, these include S. Halliday, *The Great Stink of London: Sir Joseph Bazalgette and the Cleansing of the Victorian Metropolis* (Stroud, 1999); B. Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild: A History of the School Medical Service in England and Wales 1908-1974* (Buckingham, 1995); and N. Durbach, *Bodily Matters: the Anti-Vaccination Movement in England 1853-1907* (London, 2005).

¹³² Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, pp.133-134.

¹³³ These include but are not limited to J. Reinartz and L. Schwarz (eds.), *Medicine and the Workhouse* (Woodbridge, 2013); S. King, ‘Regional patterns in the experiences and treatment of the sick poor, 1800-40’, *Family and Community History*, 10:1 (2007), pp.61-75; K. Waddington, ‘Paying for the sick poor: financing medicine under the Victorian Poor Law – the case of the Whitechapel union 1850-1900’ in M. Gorsky and S. Sheard (eds.), *Financing Medicine: The British Experience since 1750* (Oxford, 2006), pp.95-111.

¹³⁴ LA, PL/13/102/21, Spalding PLU, GMB, 25th May 1903.

¹³⁵ LA, PL/13/102/27, Spalding PLU, GMB, 24th January 1921.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 28th November 1921.

It is worth acknowledging that another reason why this extensive renovation and expenditure was required related to the union's experiences in the First World War. In October 1917, the Spalding workhouse was commandeered by the military to accommodate 'German prisoners from the various internment camps'.¹³⁷ Inmates were immediately relocated to the institutions of neighbouring unions Boston, Bourne, Holbeach and Grantham, and the live-in workhouse staff moved into temporary accommodation.¹³⁸ The workhouse continued to be occupied by the military until March 1919, and the scattered Spalding indoor poor did not return until late summer 1920. This not only explains the lack of regular record-keeping on workhouse expenditure from 1917 to 1920, as there were no paupers in the institution itself during that time, but increased spending in the aftermath of the war could also be attributable to repairs required after almost three years of heavy wartime use.

Spalding union's experience here was not necessarily uncommon. Many workhouses across the county were requisitioned during the war as barracks for munitions workers, temporary camps for aliens, and hostels for refugees among other uses.¹³⁹ Peter Higginbotham's excellent online database on the history of workhouses across the country includes an extensive (although not exhaustive) list of workhouses that were used for these purposes during the war, and states that up to 74,000 beds were provided to the military by poor law unions across England and Wales.¹⁴⁰ It demonstrates that when required, local poor law administrators could display flexibility, and that regional networks of unions were able to absorb a certain amount of unexpected pressure. The co-operation of neighbouring unions was crucial to the smooth transfer of the workhouse to military control.¹⁴¹ Such findings suggest more attention ought to be paid by scholars to relationships between local poor law authorities and their impact on regional welfare provision, both in a wartime context, and more generally in terms of interactions and policy-making 'on the ground', where it mattered most. Indeed, intra-regional relationships between neighbouring unions could be just as

¹³⁷ LA, PL/13/102/26, Spalding PLU, GMB, 18th October 1917.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ M.A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929: The History of an English Social Institution* (Oxford, 1981), p.93.

¹⁴⁰ P. Higginbotham, 'The workhouse in wartime', www.workhouses.org.uk/wartime [accessed 05/05/2018].

¹⁴¹ For an example of Grantham union's forbearing attitude under these difficult circumstances, see *Grantham Journal*, 20th October 1917, p.6 and *Grantham Journal*, 27th October 1917, p.8.

significant for our understanding of welfare operations as regional relationships and patterns across Lincolnshire and the Midlands – a theme explored more extensively in Chapter 5. In addition, this wartime experience raises an important question concerning the complexities of central-local relations between Spalding and London, to which we now turn.

4.5 Central-local relations

The temporary occupation of Spalding workhouse by the military is a clear example of national (or indeed international) policy directives having a direct impact on local welfare administration. However, in normal circumstances Spalding was regularly receiving policy directives from the LGB and later the MoH, whose decisions also attempted to alter poor law administration at a union level. The Spalding guardians could not refuse the demands of the armed forces in 1917, but they were less deferential towards their own central welfare authorities' attempts to change how the poor law was administered locally.

In this chapter's final section, we therefore examine the complex relationship between Spalding union and its central authorities, and at the same time explore more extensively another key conception of welfare regimes: King and Stewart's theory of 'welfare peripheries', in which they suggest that places which can be classified as 'peripheral' could develop distinctive welfare cultures that might have more in common with each other, despite geographic disparity, than with 'central' places.¹⁴² In the edited collection where this model was first explored, there was no attempt to test it on any significantly smaller administrative units like poor law unions, and subsequent work referring to the concept of welfare peripheries has not done so either.¹⁴³ Studies which do apply this model at a local level are therefore overdue. Through testing the concept

¹⁴² King and Stewart, 'Welfare peripheries', p.34.

¹⁴³ There has been relatively little take-up of this model since its publication in 2007. Passing references have been made in J. Tablin, A. Franenfelder, C. Togni and V. Keller, 'Whose poor? Social welfare and local political boundaries', *European Journal of Social Work*, 14:4 (2011), pp.463-477; B. Harvey, 'The Oaks Colliery disaster of 1866: a case study in responsibility', *Business History*, 58:4 (2016), pp.501-531; and A. Croll, "'Reconciled gradually to the system of outdoor relief": the poor law in Wales during the 'crusade against out-relief', c.1870-1890', *Family and Community History*, 20:2 (2017), pp.121-144.

of ‘peripheral welfare’ regimes, this section continues to address one of this thesis’ key research questions: the extent and nature of ‘regional welfare cultures’ in this case study.

Spalding union provides an opportunity to begin assessing the model’s applicability on this smaller scale, because it fits into King and Stewart’s five suggested criteria for a peripheral place in ways that our previous case studies in Leicestershire and Staffordshire do not.¹⁴⁴ First, the union was somewhat geographically isolated – it was over 100 miles from London, and almost 50 miles from its county town of Lincoln, evidently removed from central policy-making bodies and from the immediate economic and social influence of other regional urban or government centres. Secondly, it was composed of terrain which could be treacherous as well as extremely productive because of the Fenlands’ marshy nature and propensity for flooding, with the potential to make travel and communication even over small distances very challenging. Thirdly, its population was relatively small but dispersed. A fourth feature of peripheral places suggested by King and Stewart is that the place in question ‘stands in the shadow of much larger and more powerful nation states’. This too arguably applies to Spalding, as it was overshadowed by larger unions within the North Midland district with more apparently pressing or obvious poverty problems which drew the attention of central government. The poor law inspectors’ annual reports provide a good illustration of this, where considerably more space was consistently devoted to welfare operations in Nottingham, Derby and Leicester with their larger populations and more dramatic unemployment crises than to rural unions like Spalding. The final element, ‘an unstable history as an independent, autonomous polity’, can also be applied to Spalding. King and Stewart use Scotland, Wales and Ireland to illustrate this feature, suggesting that although all three nations were subordinate parts of the larger political unit of the United Kingdom, they retained a degree of welfare autonomy.¹⁴⁵ This relationship, of relative autonomy within a broader policy structure, is similar to the relationship between poor law unions and central welfare authorities. Despite being a much smaller area than those explored in the model’s original outing, then, we can therefore classify Spalding as a peripheral place in what follows.

¹⁴⁴ King and Stewart, ‘Welfare peripheries’, pp.24-27.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.26.

Having established this, we can return to one of our key thesis research questions on the nature and extent of welfare regionality, by asking whether the welfare culture of this peripheral place resembles the model of a ‘peripheral welfare regime’. This regime is made up of seven common features, as outlined in Chapter 1: the limited capacity of state-sponsored legislation to break down historical patterns of welfare provision; the relative weakness of legal centres and autonomy of smaller local bodies; the persistence of the financing of welfare as a problem; the greater role of voluntarism, mutuality and civic pride in relief management; a tendency of welfare systems towards instability; the slow professionalization of relief structures and personnel; and a focus on removing certain groups of poor people from the remit of general welfare legislation.¹⁴⁶ To explore all seven of these features in reference to Spalding would require more space than this thesis chapter allows. However, we can focus on the first core element - the extent to which centrally-generated welfare legislation was able to change welfare practices in this union. By exploring the relationship between Spalding and the central authorities, we can therefore examine the ways in which Spalding responded to policy changes handed down from outside the union itself, and the effect these instructions had on relief practice.

Surveying Spalding’s relationship with the LGB and the MoH over our period, there is evidence to suggest that the union actually wanted *more* central government involvement in certain areas of their poor law administration. Across our period, they variously called for dependants of soldiers and sailors killed or disabled while on active service to be supported from a national fund, not by the poor law or local charity; for institutions for ‘imbecile children’ to be provided ‘at the expense of the National Exchequer’; and for the National Health Insurance Commissioners to ‘assist poor law authorities in tracing, through the medium of their insurance cards, men who have deserted their families, and thus causing them to be chargeable’.¹⁴⁷ However, it would be misplaced to interpret these pronouncements as explicitly advocating for a transferral of regional powers to the national level, in keeping with the ‘increased centralism’ in attitudes to social policy that Anne Digby observed during the early twentieth

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.27-31.

¹⁴⁷ LA, PL/13/102/20, Spalding PLU, GMB, 2nd April 1900; LA, PL/13/102/21, Spalding PLU, GMB, 13th October 1902; LA, PL/13/102/25, Spalding PLU, GMB, 1st March 1915.

century.¹⁴⁸ Spalding did not have a ‘vision of the state as a purposive instrument of social change and improvement’;¹⁴⁹ we have already observed features of welfare provision in Spalding that went against an idea of straight-line progress from localised to centralised relief. Where the guardians supported an expansion in central involvement, therefore, it is clear that the Spalding board were not advocating this approach because of a more collectivist attitude towards state welfare. Rather, their motivations were distinctly pragmatic and locally-oriented – the reforms they supported all had the common theme of saving local bodies money.

There thus remained limits to the Spalding guardians’ desire for central involvement. More specifically, when the LGB or the MoH issued directives attempting to change Spalding’s existing organisation or approach to particular poor law concerns, the guardians were much less interested in their input. An excellent illustration of this is the drawn-out disagreement between the Spalding guardians and the LGB over Spalding’s boarding-out committee. Indeed, through this exchange we can observe and test the ‘welfare peripheries’ model and thereby assess the government’s ability to alter established administrative patterns in Spalding union over time.

In the Boarding-Out (Within Unions) Order 1909, the LGB specified that boarding-out committees had to be staffed entirely by individuals from outside the board, *or* entirely by guardians.¹⁵⁰ This made Spalding’s existing boarding-out committee non-compliant, as at that time it was comprised of eight guardians (including all three female board members) and five non-elected women from outside the board. Neither the text of the original order, nor the accompanying circulars, offer any justification for this restriction; however, in 1913 Ina Stansfeld, superintendent lady inspector for the LGB, described a boarding-out committee not staffed by guardians as ‘a voluntary body *independent of any poor law authority* [author’s emphasis] and acting under an authorisation issued by the Local Government Board’.¹⁵¹ It appears the stipulation included in the 1909 order was a way for the LGB to draw clearer

¹⁴⁸ A. Digby, *British Welfare Policy: Workhouse to Welfare* (London, 1989), p.42.

¹⁴⁹ C. Bellamy, *Administering Central-Local Relations 1871-1919: The Local Government Board in its Fiscal and Cultural Context* (Manchester, 1988), p.5.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Boarding Out (Within Unions) Order 1909 - Article II’, in LGB: *Annual Report, 1909-10 - Appendix* (1910), p.6.

¹⁵¹ ‘Report of Miss Stansfeld on Boarding Out of Pauper Children’, in LGB: *Annual Report, 1912-13 - Appendix* (1913), p.90.

administrative lines between elected authorities – boards of guardians – and those volunteering to assist with welfare administration, but who had not been elected.

Regardless, the reasoning behind this alteration does not seem to have been communicated to the Spalding board either, who perceived this alteration as disrupting effective established practices. Spalding had had a boarding-out system in place since 1895, and was consistently lauded as a beneficial and useful programme thereafter, with the boarding-out committee producing very positive reports on the progress of the children under their supervision.¹⁵² Indeed, when in April 1902 the Reverend John Chatwin Jones (the same guardian who would clash with Mary Pickworth Farrow some years later) proposed ending the programme, provoked by the prosecution of two boarded-out boys for a number of thefts,¹⁵³ the rest of the board shouted him down and gave full-throated support to the work of the Boarding-Out Committee who were lauded as ‘devoting themselves to the highest welfare of the children’.¹⁵⁴ Reverend Jones’ motion was unanimously rejected, and boarding-out continued to be pursued wherever possible.¹⁵⁵

Given the small proportion of female guardians, a mixed boarding-out committee served the Spalding board well. The inclusion of guardians ensured the views of the wider board were represented, while the presence of women from outside the board enabled much of the regular female visiting work seen as crucial to the success of a boarding out system, to be carried out.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, it also enabled the board to comply with the LGB stipulation, made in 1911, that at least one-third of boarding-out committee members were women.¹⁵⁷ A sub-committee was therefore appointed to consider the LGB’s 1909 order, and its report stated that ‘it would be very detrimental to the interests of the children that the present system of a joint Committee of guardians and other persons should be abolished’. It further pointed out that ‘the committee had in

¹⁵² See for instance LA, PL/13/102/21, Spalding PLU, GMB, 18th February 1901; LA, PL/13/102/23, Spalding PLU, GMB, 6th May 1907.

¹⁵³ *Peterborough Advertiser*, 9th April 1902, p.7.

¹⁵⁴ *Peterborough Advertiser*, 23rd April 1902, p.2. The report in the guardians’ minutes of this discussion can be found here: LA, PL/13/102/21, Spalding PLU, GMB, 14th April 1902.

¹⁵⁵ *Peterborough Advertiser*, 23rd April 1902, p.2..

¹⁵⁶ The inspection of foster homes was in keeping with the wider tradition established in nineteenth-century philanthropy and social work of female visiting. See for instance J. Lewis, ‘Women, social work and social welfare in twentieth century Britain: from (unpaid) influence to (paid) oblivion?’ in M.J. Daunt, *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past* (London, 1996), pp.152-167.

¹⁵⁷ Thane, *Foundations*, p.73.

the past done excellent work not only amongst the Boarded out Children but amongst the young widows chargeable to the rates and amongst the nursing children'.¹⁵⁸ The guardians submitted an 'urgent appeal' to the LGB, requesting to be allowed to carry on with a mixed committee.¹⁵⁹ When central government denied this appeal, the guardians appointed a deputation to go before LGB president John Burns and discuss the matter, enlisting the help of Spalding MP Francis McClaren to try and secure an audience.¹⁶⁰ The LGB, however, denied the deputation leave to interview them (much to the board's chagrin)¹⁶¹ and were unmoved by their protests.¹⁶² As a result, in October 1910 the Spalding guardians reluctantly acceded; the relevant guardians resigned from the boarding-out committee so the women from outside the board could continue with their work.¹⁶³

This policy was relatively short-lived. The 1911 Boarding-Out Order reversed the 1909 Order, once again allowing unions to appoint mixed committees,¹⁶⁴ and the Spalding board promptly reverted to this, with the clerk commenting that 'the Board of Guardians' view on the matter was one of common sense... and now the Board above appreciated their views'.¹⁶⁵ The Spalding guardians' exchange with the LGB on the issue indicates a certain rigidity about the latter body's policy adjustment. They were unwilling, at least initially, to allow both for the restrictions of local conditions – the relative scarcity of female guardians – and for boards to display a level of flexibility in response to these conditions. It also suggests the existence of a 'peripheral welfare culture' in Spalding, in that there was real and sustained resistance towards central tinkering with local policy, even with what might seem minor bureaucratic details that nevertheless felt significant 'on the ground'.

¹⁵⁸ LA, PL/13/102/23, Spalding PLU, GMB, 21st February 1910.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 18th April 1910, 2nd May 1910, 16th May 1910.

¹⁶¹ *Lincolnshire Echo*, 28th June 1910, p.4.

¹⁶² LA, PL/13/102/23, Spalding PLU, GMB, 22nd August 1910.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 3rd October 1910.

¹⁶⁴ 'Boarding-Out Order, 1911' in LGB: *Annual Report, 1911-12* (1912), Cd.6327, p.9.

¹⁶⁵ *Lincolnshire, Boston and Spalding Free Press*, 31st October 1911, p.12; LA, PL/13/102/24, Spalding PLU, guardians' minute book, 27th November 1911. No justification is given for why the LGB reversed their policy, but an LGB circular issued in October 1911 mentioned that 'the 1909 Order's provision regarding composition of committees has led to considerable difficulties, and representations on the subject have been made by several boards of guardians,' which indicates Spalding was not alone in this.

Indeed, Spalding's opposition to central regulation continued in this area even after they were permitted to revert to their usual committee make-up. When their mixed boarding-out committee was reformed in November 1911, the guardians asked the LGB to confirm that Eva Stableforth, still the secretary of the boarding-out committee, could 'continue' to distribute weekly payments to the union's foster parents.¹⁶⁶ When the LGB declined to authorise this in January 1912 (despite the fact that it was apparently an established practice, given that the guardians were asking for Stableforth to be allowed to 'continue' with this task) and stated that payments to foster parents should be distributed by a paid union official, the clerk was directed to write again 'urging the LGB to comply with the board's request'.¹⁶⁷ The LGB refused, and the clerk was again directed to reply 'urging the necessity of the present system.'¹⁶⁸ This exchange was repeated in three subsequent guardians' meetings over the course of 1912.¹⁶⁹ After the clerk's request for an exception to be granted in September that year, the matter seems to have dropped. There is no evidence to suggest that payments to foster parents stopped being distributed through Stableforth, and there is no other communication on the issue recorded in the Spalding minutes. The LGB, it seems, gave up.

The Spalding board's intransigence here strongly suggests a 'peripheral welfare culture', where not only was there discrepancy between central government policy and local practice, but the latter was impervious to the pressures of the former. The Spalding union operated according to specific local conditions - the sustained preference for Stableforth's role in distributing boarding-out payments was evidently another expression of the 'regional welfare culture' which prioritised 'neighbourliness' and personal connection between recipient and local authority. Through her many years working as part of the board, Stableforth would have been a familiar face to the local poor and after almost 20 years on the boarding-out committee have possessed considerable expertise on the individual conditions of families and children. It seems reasonable to suppose that potentially sensitive matters such as payments for foster children were seen to be best managed by such a person. Moreover, this regular contact with foster parents may also have served as an opportunity for Stableforth to receive

¹⁶⁶ LA, PL/13/102/24, Spalding PLU, GMB, 27th November 1911.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 8th January 1912.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 22nd January 1912.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 5th February 1912, 19th August 1912, 30th September 1912.

informal updates, concerns or requests from those caring for pauper children; the clerk or another paid official may have been less likely to receive these confidences. Centrally-generated regulations made no allowances for established local customs like these, and as such made few in-roads into actual local policy-making, which, of necessity, had to be pragmatic. This was therefore a difficult union to govern from the centre, where even relatively small administrative changes were sometimes vigorously resisted.

Indeed, the very physical landscape in Spalding union informed local welfare operations in a fundamental way that central authorities did not always understand or acknowledge. The dispersed nature of the population in the union generally, directed in part by large swathes of marshy land historically prone to flooding which could be difficult to traverse, was recognised as an important factor in welfare administration by the Spalding guardians. For instance, they cited this ‘scattered nature’ when they swatted away suggestions from the Registrar General that Gosberton and Donington districts be combined for the purposes of registering births and death.¹⁷⁰ The guardians recognised the landscape to be particularly challenging in the parish of Deeping St. Nicholas. This parish was the largest in Spalding union at 23.5 square miles, and with less than 1,500 residents also had the lowest population density. In addition, it was one of the union’s most inconvenient parishes to travel in due to its especially boggy natural conditions, despite the extensive drainage in place by the early twentieth century, and isolated settlements with few substantial roads. The impact of these conditions on poor law operations is illustrated by the guardians’ request in January 1904 for the appointment of an additional registrar for births and deaths in the Deeping St. Nicholas district, after a guardian complained about the difficulties and long walking distances experienced by its residents when registering deaths and accessing urgent relief due to its isolation.¹⁷¹ Indeed, travelling a landscape laced with canals and drainage dykes in wet, dark, foggy conditions would have been verging on dangerous in autumn and winter. The Registrar General, however, refused this request on the grounds that the

¹⁷⁰ LA, PL/13/102/23, Spalding PLU, GMB, 19th September 1910.

¹⁷¹ LA, PL/13/102/21, Spalding PLU, GMB, 4th January 1904; *Stamford Mercury*, 8th January 1904, p.5.

local population was too small to merit more staff - a failure to recognise the realities of physical geography in a rural place like Spalding.¹⁷²

The local-central disconnect regarding the impact of landscape and settlement patterns is further exemplified in the appointments of the three district medical officers for Deeping St. Nicholas. Ideally, medical officers were supposed to live within the district that they served, but doctors who lived elsewhere were often appointed in Deeping St. Nicholas because no one appropriately qualified lived there. The Spalding guardians were aware that this was not in line with the preferences of central authority, and regularly stated when appointing (or, more usually, reappointing) medical officers for Deeping St. Nicholas that there were ‘no medical men in the district’. This actually followed established regulations – the 1855 General Order issued by the Poor Law Board on the subject stipulated that in such circumstances boards should record ‘a special Minute’ in their normal meeting records outlining their reasons for appointing a person from outside the district in question.¹⁷³ Thus, when the guardians decided to reappoint John Power, William Stanton and Henry Benson in March 1904, the fact that Power lived in Spalding town and the latter two men in Market Deeping (in neighbouring Bourne poor law union) was not out of the ordinary. However, the LGB nevertheless asked for an explanation as to why the individuals in question did not live in Deeping St. Nicholas. It is not difficult to imagine the exasperation of the Spalding guardians on receipt of this request, which may have informed the tone of their response:

There being no medical practitioners resident within Deeping St. Nicholas district, it is therefore being necessary to continue the appointments [of Power, Stanton and Benson] as there are no alterations whatever in the circumstances which have existed for a great number of years and no better arrangements can now be made.¹⁷⁴

The LGB subsequently accepted the appointment, but there is later evidence that the Spalding guardians thought the central authorities would continue to question them – in March 1910, the same three men were reappointed ‘having regard to the exceptional circumstances of the... scattered nature of the district and the fact that no medical man

¹⁷² LA, PL/13/102/21, Spalding PLU, GMB, 18th January 1904; *Boston Guardian*, 30th January 1904, p.2.

¹⁷³ ‘Medical Officers: General Order of the Poor Law Board regulating the Continuance in office of Medical Officers, Article 2’, in PLB: *Annual Report, 1855 (Appendix)* (1855), p.16.

¹⁷⁴ LA, PL/13/102/22, Spalding PLU, GMB, 25th April 1904.

resides in the district, as already explained to the Local Government Board and for many years approved by them'. The Spalding guardians evidently saw the need to remind the LGB about the specific local conditions under which they operated and pre-empt any potential pushback; they did not feel confident that the central authority would naturally defer to their particular context. This further contributes to an image of a peripheral place where the divergence between practice 'on the ground' and centrally-generated regulations was clear in many core elements of welfare administration.

A discrepancy between attitudes of central government and local conditions is also apparent in instances where the LGB prevented Spalding from making pragmatic use of available resources. In 1907, for instance, the guardians proposed that disused school buildings at the workhouse be utilised to accommodate 'imbecile' children who were unable to attend elementary schools.¹⁷⁵ The problem of appropriate accommodation for 'feeble-minded' children was a thorny one in the wider county as well as in Spalding, and the board were arguably trying to come up with a workable solution in the meantime.¹⁷⁶ The central authorities did not see the situation this way. In letters to the Spalding guardians, the LGB commented that 'the School Buildings cannot properly be used for other than poor law purposes', and observed that 'it was obviously necessary that the guardians should have a sufficient margin of indoor accommodation to be in a position to offer the workhouse test to applicants for relief', and that the school buildings should be reserved for this purpose.¹⁷⁷ This latter point in particular shows a significant lack of practical insight into the particularities of Spalding union, specifically that its workhouse was far from full, and that even if the guardians had increased admittances to the workhouse by several degrees, the use of additional buildings would still not have been required. Once again, central policy did not translate into the local conditions and priorities in a peripheral place like Spalding.

Similar tensions emerged again around the management of pauper children. The 1913 Poor Law Institutions Act disallowed unions from keeping children in workhouses for more than six weeks, with the exception of those receiving medical care.¹⁷⁸ This was

¹⁷⁵ LA, PL/13/102/23, Spalding PLU, GMB, 4th November 1907.

¹⁷⁶ LA, PL/13/102/22, Spalding PLU, GMB, 11th February 1907.

¹⁷⁷ LA, PL/13/102/23, Spalding PLU, GMB, 16th December 1907.

¹⁷⁸ 'Poor Law Institutions Order, 1913: Article 4', as reproduced on workhouses.org.uk [accessed 05/05/2018].

not a radical shift in policy for Spalding, who as well as boarding out pauper children also utilised a wide range of specialist, Church and training institutions outside the poor law, from single-sex industrial schools in York and Frome to homes run by the Waifs and Strays Society.¹⁷⁹ Despite this, the Spalding board was never able to keep the workhouse entirely child-free, and there were occasions when the central authorities pressurised the guardians to rehouse the children who were still institutional inmates. The relevant provision of the 1913 Act came into force from April 1915, and in October 1914 the LGB ‘request[ed] to be informed as to the steps the guardians were taking for the carrying out...the removal of children from the workhouse’.¹⁸⁰ At this time, the Spalding guardians were planning the construction of a small children’s home on a separate site, and so responded to the LGB telling them so. The LGB did not accept this, however, and ‘request[ed] that the guardians should at once take steps to provide separate accommodation for the children under their care’.¹⁸¹

There was, however, a pragmatic reason behind Spalding’s failure to find homes outside the workhouse for some children: the boarding-out committee were struggling to find suitable foster placements.¹⁸² In terms of family structures which constituted suitable foster families, standard definitions were not overly restrictive. LGB inspectors commented in their annual reports that the most effective foster parents were often couples who had married very young and whose own children had long since left home, while very elderly foster parents were ‘the reverse of desirable’, particularly for very young children.¹⁸³ However, widows and single women could also be accepted as foster parents; the inspectors only remarked that foster families ought not to be economically reliant upon the payment they received for a boarded-out child, and needed to be able to provide suitable separate sleeping accommodation and a clean living environment.¹⁸⁴

These definitions, however, were somewhat academic if no-one applied to the guardians to take on children in the first place. In March 1920, the MoH demanded that ‘children now in the Bourne workhouse’ be removed¹⁸⁵ – this was while the Spalding

¹⁷⁹ See for instance LA, PL/13/102/20, Spalding PLU, GMB, 19th February 1900; LA, PL/13/102/21, Spalding PLU, GMB, 18th March 1901, 6th January 1902.

¹⁸⁰ LA, PL/13/102/25, Spalding PLU, GMB, 24th October 1914.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 21st December 1914.

¹⁸² This also may have been one of the motivations behind the plans to build a children’s home.

¹⁸³ LGB: *Annual Report, 1909-10* (1910), Cd.5260, p.114.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.115.

¹⁸⁵ LA, PL/13/102/26, Spalding PLU, GMB, 22nd March 1920.

workhouse was being used by the military. However, in January that year Eva Stableforth reported that no applications had been received in answer to an advertisement for foster parents, and as a result the clerk successfully applied to the MoH for permission to increase the weekly allowance paid to foster parents per child from 7s. 6d per week to 10s. per week.¹⁸⁶ However, this did not necessarily solve the problem. In the case of the children housed in Bourne workhouse,¹⁸⁷ the guardians' original plan had been to board out as many possible, and send the remainder to Basford union's cottage homes in Nottinghamshire.¹⁸⁸ However, in July the agreement with Basford was finalised;¹⁸⁹ there is no reference in the meantime to any children belonging to Spalding being boarded out from Bourne, which suggests that raising the weekly allowance did not result in more foster parents coming forward. The lack of foster homes in the locality made it more difficult for Spalding to keep children out of the workhouse, and there was no legislative provision for such a situation. The lack of good-quality housing for the labouring classes in the area would have contributed to this trend, as children could not be boarded out in accommodation without separate sleeping arrangements and a sufficiently sanitary environment. The eventual solution of sending the children originally housed in Bourne to Basford cottage homes was more expensive than boarding-out, as Basford charged 15s. 9d per week for each child.¹⁹⁰ National policy, again, did not always map cleanly, or cheaply, onto individual unions – particularly, it seems, onto 'welfare peripheries' like Spalding.

The range of examples presented here where the Spalding guardians thwarted, were foiled by or struggled to adhere to central regulations demonstrates the disconnect between centrally-conceived policy and conditions in a specific place. Together, they create an image of local welfare administration which was pragmatic and deeply sensitive to local conditions, and a central authority which repeatedly demonstrated a misunderstanding of these conditions. Spalding can certainly be classified as having a 'peripheral welfare culture' – although central authorities could prevent them from instigating new policies, they seemed unable to force the Spalding guardians to change

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 26th January 1920.

¹⁸⁷ Bourne workhouse received 29 Spalding inmates in 1917, but it is unclear how many of these were under the age of 16.

¹⁸⁸ LA, PL/13/102/26, Spalding PLU, GMB, 22nd March 1920.

¹⁸⁹ LA, PL/13/102/27, Spalding PLU, GMB, 12th July 1920.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

policy that had already been established, however apparently inconsequential that policy was. In this way, Spalding union was often ungovernable from the centre.

4.6 Conclusions

This case study has enabled exploration of a county about which we previously knew very little in welfare terms, despite its persistently high levels of pauperism.¹⁹¹ Spalding has added an essential comparative element to this thesis, offering a specific local context very different to those featured in preceding chapters. By exploring poor law operations within these conditions, deeply-rooted continuities have been revealed, with relief administration and provision locked into the rhythms of the farming and church year. This continuity has demonstrated the longevity of these seasonal relationships which have observed in earlier periods.¹⁹² Moreover, it has indicated that the connection made by Jack Langton between the nature of agriculture pursued in a region and levels of pauperism found there endured beyond eighteenth and early nineteenth century Oxfordshire into twentieth century Lincolnshire.¹⁹³ Now that the endurance of this hypothesis has been demonstrated in Spalding, it could usefully be tested in other localities similarly dominated by intense, productive commercial farming.

Spalding's socio-economic context created a specific local welfare culture. Relief in the union was not institutionally focused, which seems to have been motivated in Spalding's case by an open, inclusive, almost 'humanitarian' attitude, whereby the offer of indoor relief or the refusal of outdoor relief was unattractive to guardians who did not want to mistreat their 'neighbours'. Spalding thus stands apart from our previous case studies, where such motivations are less apparent (although this will once again be tested in the next chapter's Welsh case study). This inclusive welfare sentiment suggests the continued applicability of King's portrayal of south-west attitudes towards welfare

¹⁹¹ The few exceptions include Dyson, 'The experience of poverty in a rural community'; Hindle, 'Power, poor relief, and social relations'; Perkins, 'Unmarried mothers and the poor law'; and Rawding, 'The Poor Law Amendment Act'.

¹⁹² Goose, 'Farm service, seasonal unemployment'; Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, pp.15-66.

¹⁹³ Langton, 'Geography of poor relief'.

into the early twentieth century.¹⁹⁴ It also addresses a coverage gap in that model, as Lincolnshire data was not originally included.

Indeed, through the exploration of the old age pension's reception in Spalding, this case study has provided a clear example of how the specifics of a 'regional welfare culture' informed the reception of welfare reforms outside the poor law. Building on the evidence presented in preceding chapters that indoor paupers did not always choose to move away from the poor law and take advantage of this new relief provision, Spalding has demonstrated that pre-existing attitudes towards welfare could inform the impact of the pension on outdoor relief too. The durability of regional variation in attitudes towards, and provision of, relief into the national welfare reforms of the early twentieth century is clear. By using the poor law to access the nature of established welfare sentiment in particular places, this thesis offers nuance to perceptions of the reception of the early welfare state provisions, like pensions, and indeed the new provisions of the interwar period. The impact of the Liberal welfare reforms, despite contemporary intentions for national uniformity, nevertheless cannot be fully understood without a local lens.

This case study has tested yardsticks from King's more recent 'ideal-types' model – specifically, that of open/closed governance structures.¹⁹⁵ Just as welfare provision itself remained personal, welfare supervision among the board remained deeply personal. As in Staffordshire, board leadership was dominated by a handful of long-serving guardians, and in keeping with the theme of deep-seated continuity outlined above, the board valued those with a record of long service. However, these preferences could result in a body whose governance was more 'closed' than 'open'. There was little shift in the board's socio-economic make-up over the course of our period, and the experiences of Mary Pickworth Farrow suggest a discrepancy between the rhetoric of support for female guardians, and the reality of their treatment if seen to become too confrontational.

Finally, the focus on Spalding has provided an opportunity for this thesis to test Steve King and John Stewart's 'welfare peripheries' model on a local scale, revealing a 'peripheral welfare culture' in southern Lincolnshire, where central policies and

¹⁹⁴ King, *Poverty and Welfare*.

¹⁹⁵ King, 'Welfare regimes', p.59.

instructions often made little sense on the ground.¹⁹⁶ These directives were resisted by local officials, whose behaviour might seem petty but in fact simply expressed the distance between central and local understandings of effective welfare administration. Spalding was therefore, in a bureaucratic and granular way, almost ungovernable from the centre. The successful definition of Spalding as a ‘welfare periphery’ provokes questions about other places that could be defined as peripheral, such as Norfolk, east Yorkshire, Shropshire and, of course Wales, which we will explore in the following chapter. It encourages historians to consider whether ‘peripheral welfare cultures’ could be found in these places too. If this were found to be the case, it would reframe the way we think about the classification of welfare cultures in England and Wales, particularly the way we think about central rhetoric versus local reality – what does central policy-making mean if swathes of peripheral places are simply not playing along? And what does this reveal about the relationships between these places and the rolling out of the early welfare state? Spalding suggests this was far more complicated a process of transition than it appears from a national viewpoint.

Overall, it is clear that Spalding provides an insight into significant swathes of England and Wales where the agricultural year still shaped ordinary lives and therefore the nature of poor relief provision. Where central government was unable to understand the policy implications of specific local conditions, local practice was stubbornly unmoved by attempts from the centre to make changes. In the next chapter, we will seek to deepen our understanding of ‘peripheral welfare cultures’ by turning to central Wales.

¹⁹⁶ King and Stewart, ‘Welfare peripheries’, pp.27-31.

Chapter 5: Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown & Llanidloes poor law unions, Montgomeryshire

5.1 Introduction

In this fourth and final case study, we move across the border into Wales to examine three unions: Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown & Llanidloes (hereafter referred to as Newtown). Our three English case studies have demonstrated a range of attitudes towards welfare provision and of regional contexts, crises and continuities informing local poor law administration. Wales, identified by poor law scholars as distinctive but relatively neglected in terms of focused regional studies, provides a further comparative dimension in this thesis.

Section 5.2 provides a brief overview of the ways existing literature has approached the implementation of welfare reform in Wales. Section 5.3 then discusses the selection of our Welsh unions, and the source material this case study uses to examine them. Section 5.4 outlines our chosen Welsh unions' local context, indicating the socio-economic conditions in which they functioned. Section 5.5 focuses on the guardians elected to the three board, and consider how Steve King's yardstick measuring 'open' or 'closed' governance structures might be applied here.¹ Section 5.6 addresses the nature and extent of poor relief provision in these Welsh unions. It assesses the broad trends in their outdoor and indoor relief over our period. It then focuses on three key shifts in these unions' provision: the closure of Machynlleth union's workhouse; the impact of the old age pension in Welsh poor law unions; and Newtown union's elevated outdoor relief expenditure during the 1920s. Finally, Section 5.7 explores our unions' policies relating to vagrancy, suggesting that when it came to policy-making around specific issues, the approaches of fellow boards of guardians and

¹ S. King, 'Welfare regimes and welfare regions in Britain and Europe, c.1750s to 1860s', *Journal of Modern European History*, 9:1 (2011), p.59.

other local authorities were more important than the recommendations of the central authorities, echoing and extending the findings of the Spalding chapter.

This case study thus addresses our key thesis research questions. Firstly, it sheds light on the New Poor Law in Wales, of which there are precious few studies.² In 2013, Geoff Hooker highlighted the enduring dearth of work on this subject – of the 25 relevant publications that he identified, he categorised only seven as ‘rigorous academic studies’.³ The subsequent five years have provided only a handful of new publications to add to this total.⁴ Nevertheless, there is an ongoing conversation within poor law historiography about the distinctiveness of Welsh welfare practices. While some have suggested that the poor law in Wales had a particular character which set it apart from England,⁵ Andy Croll has recently contended that the late nineteenth-century ‘crusade’ against outdoor relief began to ‘erode’ the difference of Wales.⁶ However, the lack of detailed Welsh studies has meant that these arguments have rarely been put to the test. Moreover, industrial south Wales has also featured more prominently in work on welfare provision outside the poor law in comparison to rural Wales, where our unions were located.⁷ This case study therefore reconstructs local poor law operations in a period and location which have sorely lacked attention. Indeed, this comparative thesis sets central Wales beside other regions across the English Midlands, and therefore is able to address the question of Welsh distinctiveness. As we shall see, Welsh unions

² See S. King and J. Stewart, ‘The history of the poor law in Wales: under-researched, full of potential’, *Archives*, 24:105 (2001), pp.134-148 and S. King and J. Stewart, ‘Death in Llantrisant: Henry Williams and the New Poor Law in Wales’, *Rural History*, 15:1 (2004), pp.69-87.

³ G. Hooker, ‘Llandilofawr Poor Law Union, 1836-1886: The most difficult union in Wales’, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2013), pp.15-17.

⁴ These include A. Croll, ‘Strikers and the right to poor relief in late Victorian Britain: the making of the Merthyr Tydfil judgment of 1900’, *Journal of British Studies*, 52:1 (2013), pp.128-152; M. Evans and P. Jones, ‘“A stubborn intractable body”: resistance to the workhouse in Wales, 1834-1877’, *Family & Community History*, 17:2 (2014), pp.101-121 and A. Croll, ‘“Reconciled gradually to the system of indoor relief”: the poor law in Wales during the ‘crusade against out-relief’, c.1870-1890’, *Family and Community History*, 20:2 (2017), pp.121-144. Cardiff poor law union features extensively in G. Frost, ‘Under the guardians’ supervision: illegitimacy, family and the English Poor Law, 1870-1930’, *Journal of Family History*, 38:2 (2013), pp.122-139; likewise, Lesley Hulonce draws heavily on Welsh examples in *Pauper Children and Poor Law Childhoods in England and Wales* (self-published ebook, 2016).

⁵ K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006), p.230; Hooker, ‘Llandilofawr’, p.294, 297; Stewart and King, ‘Death in Llantrisant’, p.71

⁶ Croll, ‘Reconciled gradually’, p.140.

⁷ See for example S. Ward, *Unemployment and the State in Britain: The Means Test and Protest in 1930s south Wales and north-east England* (Manchester, 2013); B. Curtis and S. Thompson, ‘Disability and the family in south Wales coalfield society, c.1920-1939’, *Family and Community History*, 20:1 (2017), pp.25-44; and A. Croll, ‘Poverty, mass unemployment and welfare’ in C. Williams and A. Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History – Vol. 5: The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp.207-227.

had significant policies and practices in common with unions across the border in ways seldom appreciated by poor law historians. Articulating the complexity of these connections begins to correct the standard historiography that has tended simultaneously to neglect Wales and to categorise it as distinctive, without fully exploring everyday administration ‘on the ground’. This thesis therefore shows how we might rethink welfare cartography across *both* England and Wales.

The question of Welsh welfare distinctiveness leads on to a second key research question – the extent to which a recognisable ‘regional welfare culture’ can be discerned in central Wales. Similarly to Lincolnshire, Welsh data was not included in Steve King’s ‘regional welfare cultures’ model,⁸ and it has not been tested in a Welsh context, although Pamela Michael has briefly suggested that poor law regimes in north Wales resembled the welfare culture in northern and western England.⁹ This case study begins to expand this model by assessing whether they fit into King’s characterisation of north-west/south-east regions. The Welsh unions also offer another opportunity to test King and Stewart’s ‘welfare peripheries’ model, as introduced in Chapter 1 and examined in the Lincolnshire case study.¹⁰ Unlike Lincolnshire, Wales was used by Neil Evans as an example of a peripheral place in King and Stewart’s original edited volume, but his focus was largely on urban Wales.¹¹ With the rural poor law unions featured in this chapter, this case study considers how the concept of ‘peripheral welfare culture’ applies to less urbanised areas of Wales. Moreover, it proposes a further element which could be added to this working model. While King and Stewart emphasised the distance, physically and in policy terms, between a welfare periphery and the centre, this chapter suggests that in peripheral welfare regimes, not only were central policy directives relatively ineffectual, but that relationships with other regional welfare bodies were significant and influential. Furthermore, the addition of unions from central Wales to this study enables us to consider the extent to which a common ‘Midlands personality’ can be perceived among them, to be followed up in the overall thesis conclusion – by examining mid-Wales alongside the English Midlands, can an

⁸ King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p.15.

⁹ P. Michael, *Care and Treatment of the Mentally Ill in North Wales, 1800-2000* (Cardiff, 2003) p.13.

¹⁰ S. King and J. Stewart (eds.), *Welfare Peripheries: The Development of Welfare States in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe* (Bern, 2007).

¹¹ N. Evans, ‘Urbanisation and social welfare in Wales, Scotland and Ireland’ in King and J. Stewart (eds.), *Welfare Peripheries*, pp.181-205.

alternative conception of welfare regimes be suggested, whereby unions from this central band have common features across national boundaries?

Finally, this case study examines the impact of key welfare reforms of the period on poor law provision in Wales, such as the old-age pension and assistance for the unemployed. It continues to contribute to the argument developed over the preceding three chapters that these national reforms were interpreted at a local level according to specific regional conditions. Indeed, in the case of unemployment relief, this case study demonstrates that by using poor law activity as a lens, the significance of particular reforms in unexpected places can be revealed.

5.2 Welfare reform in its Welsh context

According to existing literature, how were key welfare reforms such as those identified above rolled out and received in Wales? The impact of reforms related to unemployment relief and to disability, both mental and physical, in Wales has received the most attention in existing literature. Indeed, unemployment and physical impairment are often bound up together in work on Welsh poverty.¹² This is because of the common focus on industrial regions in these studies, particularly the south Wales coalfields. In these areas, legislation like the 1897 Workmen's Compensation Act, 1905 Unemployed Workmen's Act, the 1911 National Insurance Act, and the various unemployment acts of the 1920s, including the King's Roll for Disabled Ex-Servicemen, were especially pertinent. Trade depressions and labour unrest had significant welfare implications in industrial Wales.¹³ However, legislation such as the above was also particularly relevant due to the incapacitating diseases and injuries associated with coal mining and other heavy industries.¹⁴ Despite these vulnerabilities, a number of recent studies have shown

¹² A good recent example is D. M. Turner and D. Blackie, *Disability in the Industrial Revolution: Physical Impairment in British Coalmining, 1780-1880* (Manchester, 2018).

¹³ See for instance S. Bruley, *The Men and Women of 1926: A Gender and Social History of the General Strike and Lockout in South Wales* (Cardiff, 2010); J. McIlroy, 'South Wales' and K. Gildart, 'North Wales' in J. McIlroy, A. Campbell and K. Gildart, *Industrial Politics and the 1926 Mining Lockout: The Struggle for Dignity* (Cardiff, 2004), pp. 139-156 and pp. 157-172; D. Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850-1926* (Oxford, 1992).

¹⁴ See for instance Turner and Blackie, *Disability in the Industrial Revolution*, Curtis and Thompson, 'Disability and the family'; and B. Curtis, 'The South Wales Miners' Federation and the perception and representation of risk and danger in the coal industry, 1898-1947', *Morgannwg*, 58 (2014), pp.71-88.

the limited effect of some state-funded reforms on physically disabled Welsh workers, and the continued importance of voluntarism, mutualism and the trade union movement in providing unemployment relief.¹⁵ Moreover, into the 1920s state unemployment relief was increasingly exhausted by the scale of deprivation in depressed areas.¹⁶ Some existing literature has indicated the continued role of the poor law in these circumstances, which nevertheless became increasingly overwhelmed too – as, indeed, we have seen in Chapter 3.¹⁷ State interventions did not address the unemployed and/or disabled effectively enough to make the poor law obsolete. There has been little interest in the impact of unemployment on rural, agricultural mid-Wales during this period, however. As we will see in later discussion, examination of the poor law in these more rural parts of Wales reveals increased unemployment – and therefore reforms in unemployment relief – to be a dimension in lived welfare experiences, until now disguised by the current lack of regional case studies focused on Wales.

Provision for poor people with mental illnesses and disabilities in Wales has also received some attention, and David Hirst and Pamela Michael have shown that Wales was historically behind the curve of increasing institutionalisation. The construction of county asylums was slower than in England, and the majority of people with learning disabilities or mental illnesses remained ‘in the community’, supported by the poor law.¹⁸ The 1913 Mental Deficiency Act, which required ‘specialist local authority institutions’ for those classified as ‘mental defectives’¹⁹ appears to have had a similarly limited impact – in her comprehensive study of North Wales Hospital in Denbighshire, Michael demonstrated that most people classified in this way remained at home with family members, or in workhouses if institutional care was required.²⁰ Those with

¹⁵ See B. Curtis and S. Thompson, ‘“This is the country of premature old men”: ageing and aged miners in the south Wales coalfield, c.1880-1947’, *Cultural and Social History*, 12:4 (2015), p.597; B. Curtis and S. Thompson, ‘“A plentiful crop of cripples made by all this progress”: disability, artificial limbs and working-class mutualism in the south Wales coalfield, 1890-1948’, *Social History of Medicine*, 27:4 (2014), p.714; M. Mantin, ‘Coalmining and the National Scheme for Disabled Ex-Servicemen after the First World War’, *Social History*, 41:2 (2016), pp.155-170.

¹⁶ Ward, *Unemployment and the State in Britain*, pp.39-40.

¹⁷ Croll, ‘Poverty, mass unemployment and welfare’; S.R. Williams, ‘The Bedwellty board of guardians and the Default Act of 1927’, *Llafur*, 2:4 (1979), pp.65-77.

¹⁸ D. Hirst and P. Michael, ‘Family, community and the ‘idiot’ in mid-nineteenth century north Wales’, *Disability and Society*, 18:2 (2003), p.147; Michael, *Care and Treatment of the Mentally Ill*, pp.2-3.

¹⁹ ‘Mental Deficiency Act, 1913’ (3 & 4 Geo. 5. c.28), as printed in J. Wormald, *A Guide to the Mental Deficiency Act, 1913* (London, 1913). See also A. Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy in Britain since 1750* (Basingstoke, 2005), p.71.

²⁰ Michael, *Care and Treatment of the Mentally Ill*, pp.122-124.

mental illnesses or disabilities were not therefore entirely lifted away from poor law provision in Wales by the targeted legislation intended to address them. Indeed, in terms of medical care more broadly, state intervention, especially for children, has been shown to be marked by ambivalence in Wales, both by recipient families and the state itself,²¹ and facilities were limited in places where fewer financial resources were available.²² This scholarship reveals care of the mentally ill or disabled to be an area where Wales proved historically resistant to reform.

Aside from this work on the unemployed and the disabled, however, the reception and impact of reforms addressing other groups of poor people have received less attention, and so our understanding of them is even more incomplete. The old-age pension as received in Wales, which receives closer attention later in this chapter, has not been discussed in existing literature in any great depth. Pat Thane and David Thomson make limited reference to its regional reception at all, let alone in Wales.²³ Likewise, Martin Pugh's work on the reception of the old-age pension draws on Post Office records and uses examples from across England, but does not reflect on its specific impact on Wales either.²⁴ Oliver Betts recently hinted at some ambivalence about the pension in Wales, indicating that poor law guardians were wary about the potential of pension provision to diminish personal responsibility, but this was in the context of North Wales Poor Law Conference meetings, and did not refer to policy responses to the pension in individual poor law unions.²⁵ This case study therefore builds on the findings of preceding chapters which address the regional reception of the pension, asking the same questions of Wales.

Overall, the existing literature does suggest that developments in state welfare provision had particular implications or were received in certain ways in Wales as a

²¹ See for instance D. Hirst, 'The early school medical service in Wales: public care or private responsibility?' in A. Borsay (ed.), *Medicine in Wales: Public Service or Private Commodity?* (Cardiff, 2004), pp.65-85.

²² See several chapters in A. Borsay (ed.), *Medicine in Wales*.

²³ Thane, *Foundations*, pp.75-77; P. Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford, 2000), pp.194-228; D. Thomson, 'The decline of social welfare: falling state support for the elderly since early Victorian times', *Ageing and Society*, 4:4 (1986), pp.451-482.

²⁴ M. Pugh, 'Working-class experience and state social welfare, 1908-1914: old-age pensions reconsidered', *The Historical Journal*, 45:4 (2002), pp.775-796. Indeed, welfare books and articles are often styled as covering 'England and Wales' but in reality with little Welsh content.

²⁵ O. Betts, 'Four Nations poverty, 1870-1914: the view from the centre to the margins' in N. Lloyd-Jones and M.M. Scull (eds.), *Four Nations Approaches to Modern 'British' History: A (Dis)United Kingdom?* (Basingstoke, 2018), p.223.

result of existing cultural norms or socio-economic contexts. However, this literature is also lopsided, clustered around only a small range of welfare reforms and largely around a limited geographical area. It is therefore used by this case study as a springboard to explore neglected mid-Wales localities and to use the poor law as a lens through which to examine the local implementation of specific welfare reforms in Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown and Llanidloes poor law unions.

5.3 Welsh sources and methods

The unions selected for this fourth case study needed to fit three criteria. First, they needed to be broadly representative of poor law operations in Wales, so that findings would be relevant outside the individual localities studied. Secondly, they needed to align with the ‘Midlands band’ built by our English case studies, excluding unions in the extreme north or south of Wales. Finally, their source material had to be sufficiently rich in order to support a detailed local study.

In terms of representativeness, this was established through the extent to which indoor and outdoor relief were used according to existing research. Keith Snell has mapped outdoor relief as a percentage of total relief given in the year ending Lady Day 1875, and demonstrated that virtually all Welsh unions gave over 80 percent of their relief outside the workhouse.²⁶ All three of our unions fit with this picture: 85 percent of Newtown union’s relief was outdoor, 87 percent of Llanfyllin’s and 92 percent of Machynlleth’s.²⁷ They can therefore be taken as representative of a wider Welsh experience in the broad shape of local poor relief provision. As to their location within Wales, all three fall within the historic county of Montgomeryshire which covers the central band of the country – aligning with the Midlands line drawn by our Leicestershire, Staffordshire and Lincolnshire case studies (see Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1). We can therefore consider similarities and differences in poor law administration across national boundaries: a theme explored in-depth in the overall thesis conclusion.

²⁶ Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp.299-230.

²⁷ The data Snell used is from Local Government Board [hereafter LGB]: *Annual Report, 1875-76* (1876), p.270.

Similarly to the Staffordshire case study, which included two unions, this chapter examines three Welsh unions together. This is partly because of the rather fragmentary survival of local Welsh poor law records after 1900, exemplified by the fact that none of the three unions featured here have a full set of guardians' minute books surviving for our period – the most commonly complete category of records for English unions. However, taken together Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown unions' extant minutes cover our entire period, and the inclusion of each allows an exploration of an issue which could not be addressed in as much depth by the other two, as will be seen in Section 5.6. The strengths of surviving records for each of our selected unions have thus been utilised to consider a range of key issues in early-twentieth century welfare provision. These minute books are supplemented by other locally generated records, including Machynlleth's surviving outdoor relief lists. Overall, this record-linkage work shows that the Welsh poor law can and should be studied in-depth.

Central records play an important supporting role in this case study. In particular, this chapter utilises the pauperism returns submitted by all unions in England and Wales to the central authority, which were also used in the Staffordshire case study. Although not without flaws, these returns nevertheless complement the annual relief expenditure that can be extracted from locally produced records to reveal broad and specific relief patterns over the course of our period.²⁸ Annual reports from the poor law inspectors again offer overviews of regional patterns and problems in poor law provision, while reports and evidence presented to various enquiries about conditions of agriculture provide valuable socio-economic context to our Welsh unions' poor law operations. Local press reports are also utilised to capture details of guardians' discussions that are not recorded in meeting minutes. Newspapers published in Wales are not as easily accessible as the English regional press. The digitised newspaper database Welsh Newspapers Online, operated by the National Library of Wales and incorporated into the British Library's British Newspapers Online, does not include publications from Wales after 1919. Moreover, several Welsh newspapers have been digitised only sporadically for the preceding two decades, and this is especially the case for central Wales' regional press. These publications are available in other formats at

²⁸ Andy Croll makes a convincing case for the use of these returns in 'Reconciled gradually to the system of indoor relief', pp.124-125.

the above two libraries, but this erratic coverage by what has become a vital digital resource may have contributed to the neglect of Wales by poor law scholars. Altogether, combinations of a wide range of source material in this chapter allows us to engage with a mosaic of poor law policies and practices.

It should also be acknowledged that this study does not incorporate Welsh language press, due to linguistic limitations of the author. By the late 1890s there were around 25 newspapers published in Welsh,²⁹ and their journalism was regarded as interpreting the world in a ‘specifically Welsh way’.³⁰ Therefore, some nuances may have been overlooked by not drawing on Welsh-language publications. Welsh had no official status in Wales during this period, with English as the language of government and administration, so poor law documentation therefore had to be completed in English.³¹ However, Welsh guardians nevertheless viewed spoken Welsh as an important part of everyday poor law business, as will be discussed later in this chapter. The English-language records as outlined above provide ample material for a detailed study of poor law operations in Wales. Even so, it is appropriate to recognise the potential and relevance of Welsh language sources, and that in future work on Welsh unions, this is an element that could be usefully incorporated. The overall conclusion of this thesis explores such future research opportunities.

²⁹ T. Brinkley, ‘A cauldron of rebirth: population and the Welsh language in the nineteenth century’, *Welsh History Review*, 13 (1986), p.230.

³⁰ A.G. Jones, *Press, Politics and Society: A History of Journalism in Wales* (Cardiff, 1993), p.186. The Welsh-language press has most often been approached from the angle of national identity, either within Wales itself or in the Welsh diaspora. See for example A.G Jones, ‘The nineteenth-century media and Welsh identity’ in L. Brake, B. Bell and D. Finkelstein, *Nineteenth Century Media and the Construction of Identities* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp.310-325; R.L. Lewis, ‘Reconstructing Welsh identity in the American coalfields’, *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 6:1 (2011), pp.35-39; R. Smith, ‘Journalism and the Welsh language’ in G.H. Jenkins and M.A. Williams (eds.), *‘Let’s Do Our Best For the Ancient Tongue’: The Welsh Language in the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2nd ed., 2015).

³¹ It was not until 1967 that the Welsh Language Act offered some protections for the use of Welsh in legal proceedings, and Welsh was not officially recognised as equal with English in ‘the conduct of public business’ until 1993.

5.4 Regional context

Between them, Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown unions covered almost the entire historic county of Montgomeryshire in central Wales, as can be seen in Figures 5.1-2.³² These unions were much larger in terms of geographical size than those in our other case studies, but their populations were considerably smaller, as illustrated in Table 5.1. In Machynlleth union, almost 4,000 people lived in its two small coastal towns, Towyn and Aberdovey, and 6,000 of Newtown union's residents were clustered in its two union towns, Newtown and Llanidloes. On the whole, however, the unions' inhabitants were scattered across a dramatic landscape which could be difficult to navigate, featuring both 'undulating hills and rich lowlands' in the east, and more 'mountainous and rough' land to the west.³³ As we shall see, the dispersal and sometimes isolation of these small populations across substantial distances had important implications for the way local poor law administrations functioned.

Table 5.1: Square miles and population of Welsh unions.

Union	Square miles	Population (1911)
Llanfyllin	304	16,683
Machynlleth	204	10,853
Newtown & Llanidloes	275	20,294

Source: Details can be found on *A Vision of Britain Through Time*, <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/> [accessed 13/12/15].

³² Four of Llanfyllin's parishes – Llanarmon Mynydd Mawr, Llancadwaladr, Llangedwyn and Llanrhaiadr-yn-Mochnant (North) – fell outside Montgomeryshire into Denbighshire. Similarly, within Machynlleth union Scybor-y-Coed was part of Cardiganshire, and Pennal and Towyn were part of Merionethshire.

³³ Board of Agriculture and Fisheries [hereafter BAF]: *Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture Vol II: Reports of Investigators* (1919), Cmd.25, p.478.

Figure 5.1 Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown poor law unions within Wales.

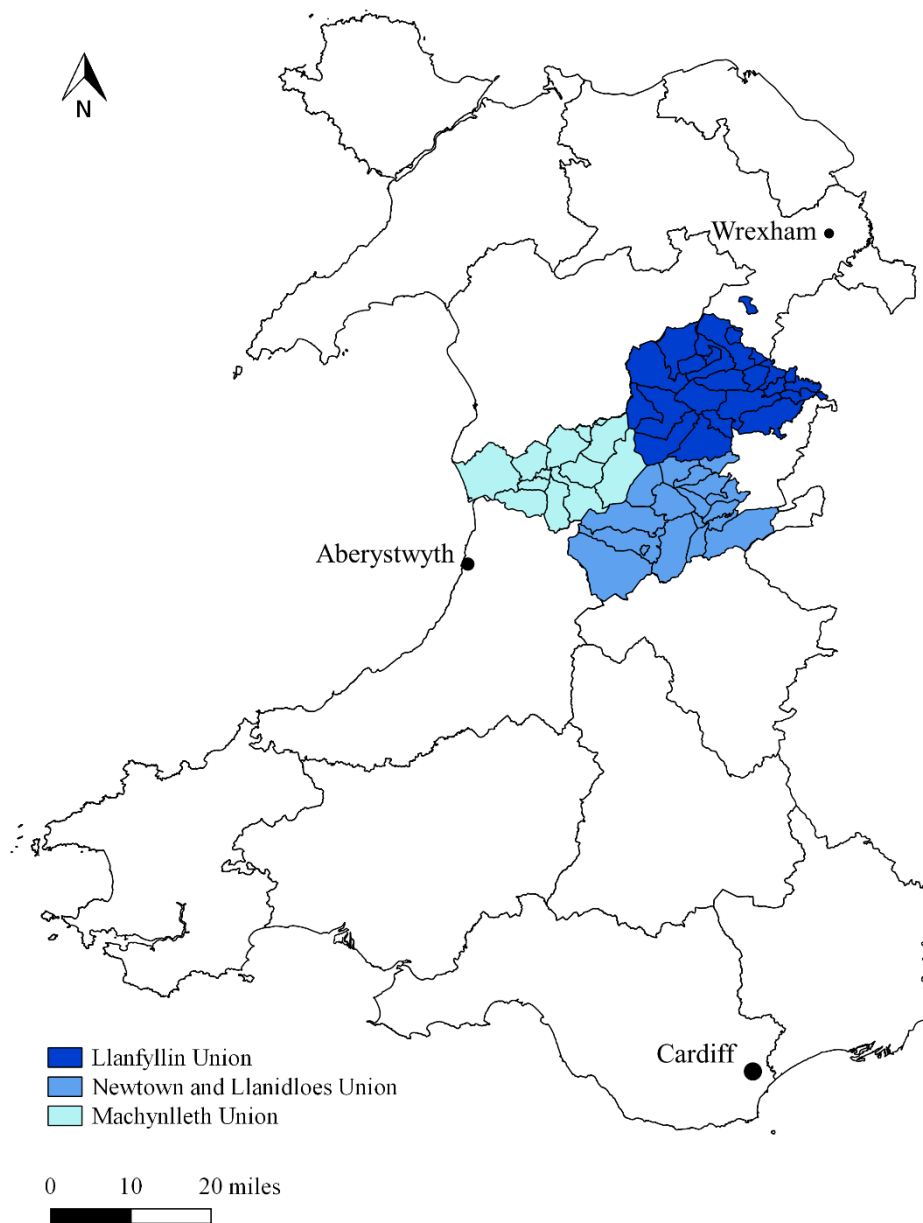
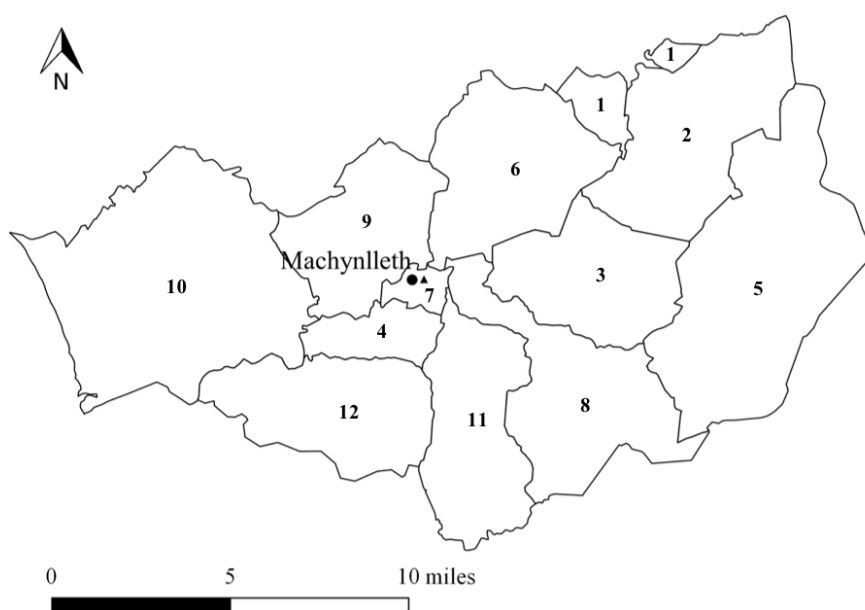
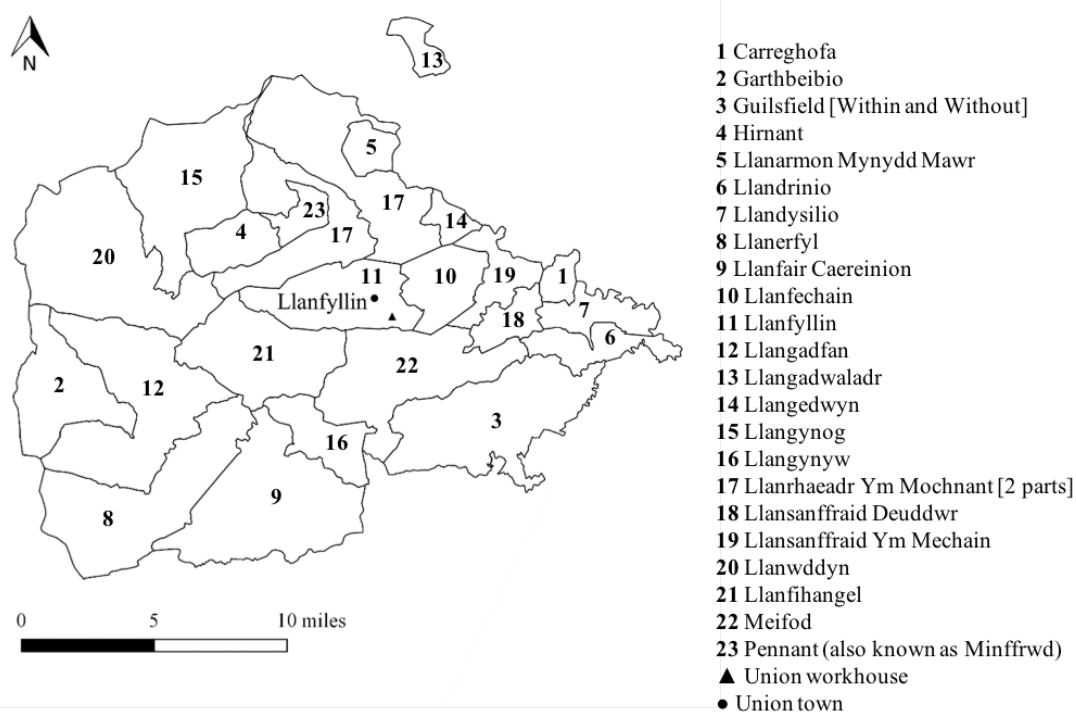
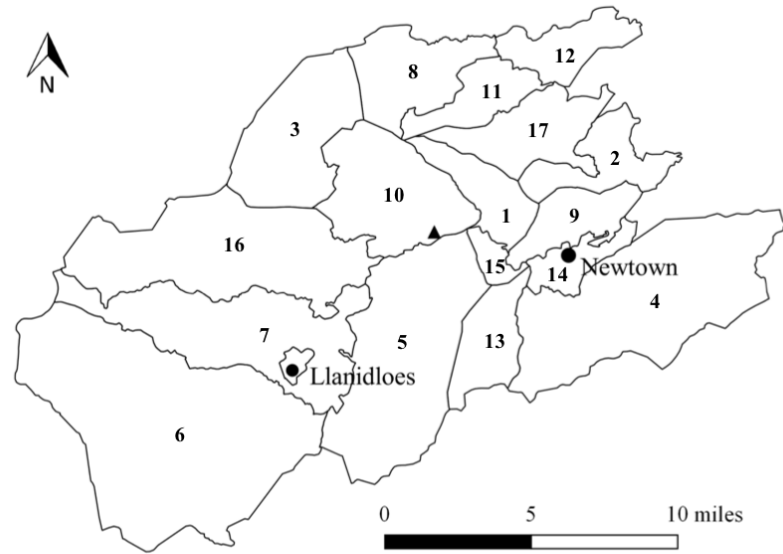


Figure 5.2 Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown poor law unions with parishes labelled.





- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 Aberhafesb | 11 Llanwyddelan |
| 2 Betws/Bettws | 12 Manafon |
| 3 Carno | 13 Mochdre |
| 4 Ceri/Kerry | 14 Newtown |
| 5 Llandinam | 15 Penystyrywaid |
| 6 Llangurig | 16 Trefeglwys |
| 7 Llanidloes [Within and Without] | 17 Tregynon |
| 8 Llanllugan | ▲ Union workhouse |
| 9 Llanllwchaearn | ● Union town |
| 10 Llanwnnog | |

All three unions were predominantly agricultural, but of a different character to that of the Lincolnshire case study. Livestock farming was generally more prevalent, and market gardening was almost non-existent. Approximately 70 percent of cultivated land across Montgomeryshire was permanent pasture, with sheep largely concentrated on the upland regions and horses and cattle in the lowlands.³⁴ Agriculture of this type fed a specific regional labour market. Broadly speaking, employment opportunity was not as dependent on the harvest as in arable regions, with less pronounced increases in unemployment during the winter months,³⁵ and large reserves of labour on hand for harvesting or picking were not required. General unskilled labourers therefore made up a smaller proportion of Montgomeryshire farm workers than in southern Lincolnshire, or indeed in England and Wales as a whole, at only 18 percent according to the 1911

³⁴ Royal Commission on Labour [hereafter RCL]: *The Agricultural Labourer Vol II: Wales* (1893), C.6894, p.79, 81, 89; BAF: *Employment in Agriculture Vol II*, p.479.

³⁵ See K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change in Agrarian England 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985), pp.20-21, 48.

census, while men in charge of animals made up another 22 percent.³⁶ Yearly or half-yearly hiring of live-in farm servants was typical, whereby unmarried labourers received room and board from their employer.³⁷ This remained the case into the interwar period, supporting Alun Howkins' findings that living-in farm service endured in many regions into the 1920s and 1930s.³⁸ Most married men meanwhile were hired by the week or fortnight, and lived in rented cottages.³⁹ The system of live-in hiring was maintained partly by the scarcity of cottage accommodation in Montgomeryshire, and indeed north Wales more widely.⁴⁰ Cottages often had sub-standard sanitation, similar to conditions in Spalding, with overcrowding in villages common, as well as associated problems of long walking distances from work. The Machynlleth Rural District Surveyor concisely summarised the situation in a 1919 Board of Agriculture report, remarking that cottages in his district were 'old and small, with defective lighting and ventilation... [T]here are many houses that should be closed down, but where shall people go?'⁴¹

Yearly hiring was both a cause and a consequence of the lack of casual farm work available in Montgomeryshire. Most farms were less than 50 acres in size, so farmers could 'engage as many men as they require for the year, and in districts situated a long way from villages it is not possible to get day labourers'.⁴² For similar reasons, piece-work was also quite uncommon. Moreover, it was difficult for unemployed labourers to find work further afield, according to one inhabitant of Llanfyllin union, who remarked to the Board of Agriculture inspector that 'each locality requires labour peculiar to itself, and a man fairly skilled in one locality would not of necessity be accounted skilled in another'.⁴³ The extent to which this was actually the case or more an expression of local xenophobia is difficult to unpick;⁴⁴ intra-regional migration was nevertheless not necessarily fruitful for Montgomeryshire farm labourers, where

³⁶ BAF: *Employment in Agriculture Vol II*, p.479.

³⁷ Board of Trade [hereafter BOT]: *Wages, Earnings and Conditions of Employment of Agricultural Labourers in the United Kingdom* (1905), Cd.2376, p.69.

³⁸ A. Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside Since 1900* (London, 2003), p.77.

³⁹ BOT: *Employment of Agricultural Labourers*, p.69.

⁴⁰ BAF: *Employment in Agriculture Vol II*, p.483.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.484.

⁴² BOT: *Employment of Agricultural Labourers*, p.69.

⁴³ BAF: *Employment in Agriculture Vol II*, p.480.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of this theme, see Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp.28-80.

employment was more likely to be found where one was a known quantity. As we shall see, being known locally was also an important component in interactions with the poor law in rural central Wales.

Alternative employment outside agriculture was limited in Montgomeryshire by our period. The county, particularly the town of Newtown, had been the heart of Welsh flannel manufacture in the early nineteenth century.⁴⁵ However, by the early twentieth century the heyday of Montgomeryshire textile production had passed in the face of competition from mills in northern England. By 1913, only one factory in Newtown remained in full production, alongside one or two rural mills.⁴⁶ Lead and slate mining had also been notable presences in the region, but by the 1900s this industry was similarly past its prime. By 1911, only 4,000 of Montgomeryshire's 24,410-strong working population – 16 percent – were employed outside agriculture, including 700 people working for Royal Welsh Warehouses, a mail-order company founded in Newtown in the 1870s.⁴⁷ Overall, then, the industrial share of the workforce in these Welsh unions had decayed by the early twentieth century.

This did not mean, however, that individuals were confined to agriculture in the county. Montgomeryshire's population had been declining since the 1870s, from 78,400 in 1871 to 62,201 in 1911.⁴⁸ An 1893 Royal Commission of Labour report attributed this partly to the higher wages offered in the south Welsh coalfields.⁴⁹ The 1919 Board of Agriculture report concurred, also suggesting the emigration of young women to English towns for domestic service work as another contributing factor.⁵⁰ Indeed, Arthur Ashby and Ifor Evans also highlighted the migration of young women as contributing to the area's declining population, pointing to the introduction of harvesting machinery and transition to the sale of liquid milk as reducing the availability of typically female regional agricultural work.⁵¹ Agricultural wages were

⁴⁵ Slater's *Directory of North and Mid-Wales, 1895* (Manchester, 1895), p.260, 287, 306, 374.

⁴⁶ J.G. Jenkins, *The Welsh Woollen Industry* (Cardiff, 1969), p.162.

⁴⁷ BAF: *Employment in Agriculture Vol II*, p.479.

⁴⁸ Kathryn Cooper has explored a similar decline in Cardiganshire – see *Exodus From Cardiganshire: Rural-Urban Migration in Victorian Britain* (Cardiff, 2011).

⁴⁹ RCL: *The Agricultural Labourer Vol II*, p.81.

⁵⁰ BAF: *Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture Vol I: General Report* (1919), Cmd.24, p.186.

⁵¹ A.W. Ashby and I.L. Evans, *The Agriculture of Wales and Monmouthshire* (Cardiff, 1944), pp.74-76. For female agricultural work, see J. Burnette, 'The wages and employment of female day-labourers in English agriculture 1740–1850', *Economic History Review*, 57:4 (2004), pp.664-690; P. Sharpe, 'The

certainly low in the county, among the lowest in Wales both before and after the First World War; indeed, a labourer from Llanfyllin union confirmed in the 1893 Royal Commission on Labour report that ‘it is impossible for agricultural labourers or their families to live, except in great poverty’, and unless wages improved ‘the best men cannot be kept on the land’.⁵² The scarcity of housing for agricultural workers also contributed to population decrease, as demonstrated by one informant from Llanfyllin union who commented in 1919 that ‘if cottages were good it would be an inducement’ for people to remain.⁵³ The absence of employment alternatives to agriculture in Montgomeryshire did not result, therefore, in a glut of labourers – the often difficult conditions of farm service prompted the pursuit of other options outside the county.

This specific regional context had a number of implications for welfare operations. The unions’ significant geographical size, difficult physical landscape and small, dispersed population had the potential to make relief distribution and administration labour-intensive and time-consuming, as relieving officers and other paid officials travelled considerable distances to address the needs of far-flung poor. Moreover, efficient welfare administration in such a context required an understanding of particular logistical challenges, which as we have seen in the Lincolnshire case study, could be present in local bodies but was not guaranteed in central authorities. Additionally, the nature of farm labour in central Wales informed the labouring population’s vulnerability to destitution. If individuals did not secure a labouring position, other kinds of work in the area were scarce. The extent to which these elements of Montgomeryshire’s socio-economic context influenced local poor law administration will be explored in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

This overview of our Welsh unions’ local context demonstrates that they can be defined as ‘peripheral places’ according to Steve King and John Stewart’s ‘welfare peripheries’ model.⁵⁴ As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, King, Stewart and

female labour market in English agriculture during the Industrial Revolution: expansion or contraction?’ in N. Goose (ed.), *Women’s Work in Industrial England: Regional and Local Perspectives* (Hatfield, 2007), pp.51-75; N. Verdon, ‘A diminishing force? Reassessing the employment of female day labourers in English agriculture’ in P. Lane, N. Raven and K.D.M. Snell (eds.), *Women, Work and Wages in England 1600-1850* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp.190-211.

⁵² BOT: *Employment of Agricultural Labourers*, p.73, 76; BAF: *Employment in Agriculture Vol I*, p.192. RCL: *The Agricultural Labourer Vol II*, p.87.

⁵³ BAF: *Employment in Agriculture Vol II*, p.484.

⁵⁴ King and Stewart, ‘Welfare peripheries’.

Neil Evans classified Wales as a ‘peripheral place’. It is evident that the four criteria used to define such places are also applicable on a smaller scale to our chosen Montgomeryshire unions. They were geographically ‘on the edge’, in that they were of considerable distance from their central authorities, and their landscapes could be difficult to travel through and isolating for inhabitants, and their populations were very small and getting smaller over the course of our period. These unions had an ‘unstable history as an independent autonomous polity’, not only as part of Wales,⁵⁵ but also as local bodies with a considerable amount of local decision-making power within the larger framework of the LGB and the MoH. Finally, Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown unions were often overshadowed by more densely populated Welsh unions in the minds of central poor law officials. Just as inspectors for English districts reported at length on their larger manufacturing or industrial unions, with relatively little attention paid to smaller or less urgently problematic unions like Spalding, the inspectors for Wales often focused on the heavily industrialised unions in south Wales at the expense of rural, predominantly agricultural unions further north. Having identified Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown as ‘peripheral places’, then, the extent to which elements of ‘peripheral welfare cultures’ can be observed in these places is a central concern throughout the rest of this chapter.

5.5 The mid-Wales guardians

The boards of guardians representing our three unions varied in size, in accordance with their number of parishes and population densities. As of the December 1894 elections prompted by the Local Government Act of that year, Llanfyllin’s board had 33 members, Newtown’s had 29, and Machynlleth had only 17, with the option to co-opt up to four additional guardians. This section explores the kinds of people who served as guardians in central Wales, and the leadership priorities of those elected. Can the 1894 Local Government Act or 1918 Representation of the People Act be seen to have made

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.26.

an impact upon their demographic profile? To what extent, to use Steve King's yardstick, was governance in Wales 'open' or 'closed'?⁵⁶

Developing a socio-economic profile of these Welsh boards is less straightforward than it has been in previous case studies. One reason for this is the relatively limited diversity of names in mid-Wales at this time. The resultant proliferation of the same or similar names among the guardians themselves makes it harder to link individuals to census data, trade directories, or press coverage.⁵⁷ This difficulty only increases after 1894, and again after 1918, when the option of standing for election as a guardian was extended to more people lower down the social scale, who could not now be discounted when trying to identify a guardian with a very common name. In addition, the surviving records are not always clear as to which parish guardians represented, and in instances where one board contained multiple guardians with the same name at the same time, it can be even more difficult to confirm personal details about individuals. In this case study, then, records are less explicitly forthcoming than those available for our other case studies.

Despite these challenges, it is still possible to reconstruct a 'group personality' of these boards. Existing evidence indicates that these unions were dominated by farmers, in line with their largely agricultural nature. Tables 5.2-4 show the guardians elected to the three Welsh unions in 1894, as pieced together using the sources mentioned above. They demonstrate that 60 out of 79 individuals – 75 percent – returned that year across the three boards were farmers. Of the three unions, the Newtown board had the smallest proportion of these men, reflecting the presence of its larger towns, Newtown and Llanidloes, but farmers nevertheless made up over half of its guardians. Similar distributions can also be discerned further into the early twentieth century. The minute books for Llanfyllin union, unlike the other two Welsh unions, record the parish represented by each guardian attending a meeting – possibly to help differentiate between multiple members with the same names. This makes it easier to

⁵⁶ King, 'Welfare regimes', p.59.

⁵⁷ There are few trade directories available for north and central Wales in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly those which go beyond lists of tradesmen to include more detail on individual parishes. Kelly & Co Ltd., producers of the valuable *Kelly's Directories*, for instance, published volumes for Monmouthshire and South Wales but not for the northern parts of the country. The rival *Slater's Directory* produced some for northern Wales; however, the 1895 version is the latest produced on the region.

identify individuals by cross-referencing the minute books with census and local press sources, and reveals that many of the union's most active guardians, who served for long periods and regularly attended meetings, were indeed farmers. Although it is harder to pinpoint the socio-economic backgrounds of guardians in Machynlleth and Newtown, evidence suggests that they also consistently included significant contingents of farmers. In 1900, for instance, a member of Towyn Urban District Council described the Machynlleth board of guardians as being 'mostly farmers.'⁵⁸ Indeed, even the guardians representing Towyn, the most urbanised part of the union, included agriculturalists – Table 5.3 shows that three of the five representatives of that parish were farmers, and in the 1901, 1904 and 1907 elections, at least two were farmers.⁵⁹ In Newtown's case, efforts were made to prevent meetings clashing with local agricultural activity – for example, in discussions about changing the day of board meetings in January 1895, one guardian pointed out that it was important not to clash with Llanidloes market day;⁶⁰ years later, in April 1910, the board voted to change the date of the following month's meeting so as not to overlap with a local sheep fair.⁶¹ This suggests that board members needed to attend these events for commercial reasons; unsurprisingly then, these largely agricultural regions were represented by largely agricultural boards.

⁵⁸ *Montgomery County Times*, 27th January 1900, p.7.

⁵⁹ *Cambrian News*, 15th March 1901, p.8; *Cambrian News*, 11th March 1904, p.5; *Cambrian News*, 8th March 1907, p.8.

⁶⁰ *Montgomery County Times*, 12th January 1895, p.3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 30th April 1910.

Table 5.2 Individuals elected to Llanfyllin poor law union board of guardians in 1894.

Surname	First name	Title	Parish	Occupation
Asterley	William	Mr.	Carreghofa	Farmer
Jones	Thomas	Mr.	Garthbeibio	Draper and grocer
Jones	David	Mr.	Guilsfield	Farmer
Jones	John	Mr.	Guilsfield	Farmer
Pryce	David	Mr.	Guilsfield	Farmer
Davies	Edward	Mr.	Guilsfield Urban	Farmer
Ashford	John	Mr.	Hirnant	Farmer
Thomas	Samuel	Mr.	Llanarmon Mynydd Mawr	Farmer
Hughes	Hugh	Mr.	Llancadwaladr	Farmer
Turner	Richard	Mr.	Llandrinio	Farmer
Evans	David	Mr.	Llandysilio	Farmer
Vaughan	William	Mr.	Llanerfyl	Farmer
Evans	Evan	Mr.	Llanfair	Retired farmer
Jones	Thomas	Mr.	Llanfair	Farmer
Watkin	Nathaniel David Thomas	Mr.	Llanfair	Farmer
Roberts	Robert	Mr.	Llanfechain	Farmer
Jones	Evan	Mr.	Llanfihangel	Farmer
Jones	William	Mr.	Llanfyllin	Farmer
Richards	Robert	Mr.	Llanfyllin	Farmer
Owen	Richard	Mr.	Llangadfan	Hotel keeper
Moreton	William	Mr.	Llangedwyn	Farmer
Jones	Griffith	Mr.	Llangyniew	Farmer
Jones	Thomas	Mr.	Llangynog	Farmer
Buckley	Charles	Mr.	Llanrhaiadr (Denbigh)	Farmer
Morris	Thomas	Mr.	Llanrhaiadr (Denbigh)	Farmer
Williams	Ellis	Mr.	Llanrhaiadr (Denbigh)	Farmer and hotel keeper
Roberts	Robert	Mr.	Llanrhaiadr (Mont.)	Farmer
Kempster	George	Mr.	Llansaintffraid (Deythur)	Miller
Roberts	Evan	Mr.	Llansaintffraid (Pool)	Farmer
Jones	David	Mr.	Llanwddyn	Farmer
Roberts	Thomas	Mr.	Meifod	Farmer
Roberts	William	Mr.	Meifod	Farmer
Jones	Charles	Mr.	Pennant	Farmer

Table 5.3 Individuals elected to Machynlleth poor law union board of guardians in 1894.

Surname	First name	Title	Parish	Occupation
Hughes	Ellis	Mr.	Cemmes	Farmer
Davies	John	Mr.	Darowen	Farmer
Pritchard	Edward	Mr.	Isygarreg	Farmer
Jones	Evan Morris	Mr.	Llanbrynmair	Farmer
Smith	H. Lester	Mr.	Llanbrynmair	Land agent
Hughes	Edward	Mr.	Llanwrin	Farmer
Lloyd	Maglona	Mrs.	Machynlleth	Married woman
Rowlands	John	Mr.	Machynlleth	Solicitor
Owen	Nicholas Bennett	Mr.	Penegoes	Private means
Parry	William	Mr.	Pennal	Farmer
Edwards	Morgan	Mr.	Scybor-y-coed	Farmer
Evans	Evan	Mr.	Towyn	Farmer
Jones	John Hughes	Mr.	Towyn	Timber merchant
Jones	William	Mr.	Towyn	Corn merchant
Owen	John	Mr.	Towyn	Farmer
Rees	John	Mr.	Towyn	Farmer
Lewis	David	Mr.	Uwchygarreg	Farmer

Table 5.4 Individuals elected to Newtown poor law union board of guardians in 1894.

Surname	First name	Title	Parish	Occupation
Whitticase	John	Mr.	Aberhafesp	Farmer
Lewis	John	Mr.	Bettws	Farmer
Lewis	John	Mr.	Carno	Cattle dealer
Alderson	William	Mr.	Kerry	Farmer
Astley	Richard	Mr.	Kerry	Innkeeper
Jones	David	Mr.	Kerry	Farmer
Kinsey	Thomas Evan	Mr.	Llandinam	Farmer
Powell	Evan	Mr.	Llandinam	Farmer
Hughes	Thomas Henry	Rev.	Llangurig	Clergyman (C of E)
Jerman	Daniel	Mr.	Llangurig	Miller and farmer
Hamer	David	Mr.	Llanidloes Within	Draper
Meddins	Samuel	Mr.	Llanidloes Within	Grocer
Evans	Richard	Mr.	Llanidloes Without	Miller
Williams	Evan	Mr.	Llanidloes Without	Timber merchant
Morris	Evan	Mr.	Llanllugan	Farmer
Lloyd	Annie Margaretta	Miss	Llanllwchaiairn	
Pryce	Richard	Mr.	Llanllwchaiairn	Farmer
Davies	Matthew	Mr.	Llanwnog	Farmer
Jones	Evan	Mr.	Llanwnog	Farmer
Lewis	Evan	Mr.	Llanwyddelan	Farmer
Andrew	Richard	Mr.	Manafon	Farmer
Lewis	David	Rev.	Mochdre	Clergyman (C of E)
Bennett	Richard	Mr.	Newtown	Draper
Francis	William	Mr.	Newtown	Iron merchant
Morgan	Cornelius	Mr.	Newtown	Farmer
Davies	Evan	Mr.	Penstrowed	Farmer
Bennett	Nicholas	Mr.	Trefeglwys	Farmer
Davies	Matthew Henry	Mr.	Trefeglwys	Gentleman
Phillips	Thomas	Mr.	Tregynon	Farmer

Source [Tables 5.2-4]: Montgomery County Times, 8th December 1894, p.3; Montgomery County Times, 22nd December 1894, p.3.

In their farming interests, our Welsh boards resembled the Spalding board of guardians. In another way, however, the Welsh boards were quite different: language. Just over half of adults living in Montgomeryshire did not report speaking Welsh on the 1911 census.⁶² Nevertheless, it remained a key component of everyday life and of poor law administration, even though official records had to be kept in English. The annual reports of the poor law inspectors for Wales rarely mention the use of Welsh, but two passing references are telling. In his 1895 report, Francis Bircham commented that the insistence of many Welsh guardians that workhouse nurses should have some knowledge of Welsh was limiting the supply of properly trained candidates to fill those positions.⁶³ This implies that at least some paupers with whom such nurses would be interacting would speak mainly Welsh, and their care therefore needed to be administered in that language. Indeed, this was viewed as a skill of such importance that it could act as a deal-breaker when boards were hiring staff – a position also taken in the North Wales Hospital in Denbigh, where spoken Welsh among staff was prioritised.⁶⁴ Some decades later, in 1927, inspector James Evans remarked that Llanfyllin and Machynlleth unions were among 14 in his district where guardians' meetings were conducted in Welsh.⁶⁵ Clearly, in these unions at least, Welsh was just as much a language of welfare administration as English. The use of Welsh in board meetings and the requirement for nurses to speak Welsh reveals that while English may have been the official, audited language of welfare, Welsh was the language of *local* welfare discussions and decision-making.

An example of the value placed on spoken Welsh by boards in Wales can be found in 1906 when inspector Bircham was approaching retirement, and boards of guardians from across Wales called for a Welsh-speaking replacement. Llanfyllin and Machynlleth were among these; in March 1906, the Llanfyllin guardians wrote to the LGB urging them to appoint 'a gentleman conversant with the Welsh language', and Machynlleth passed a similar resolution the following month.⁶⁶ Their reasoning was summarised in the *Montgomeryshire Echo* in March 1906:

⁶² *Census of England and Wales, 1911 – Vol. XII: Language Spoken in Wales and Monmouthshire*, Cmd. 6911.

⁶³ LGB: *Annual Report, 1894-95* (1895), C.7867, p.63.

⁶⁴ Michael, *Care and Treatment of the Mentally Ill*, p.58.

⁶⁵ Ministry of Health [hereafter MoH]: *Annual Report, 1926-27* (1927), Cmd.2938, p.266.

⁶⁶ PA, M/G/B/8/23, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 22nd March 1906; *Cambrian News*, 11th May 1906, p.6.

A very large proportion of the poor people...use Welsh as the mother tongue, and a considerable number of guardians are in the same position, understanding English more or less as a foreign language and habitually thinking and speaking in Welsh. A poor law inspector is obviously at a great disadvantage when...he has either to employ an interpreter or to rely upon their slight knowledge of Welsh in order to exchange opinions or obtain information.⁶⁷

Bircham's successor Hugh Williams, did speak Welsh and was consequently received very positively by the boards in his new district.⁶⁸ Indeed, the Machynlleth guardians were delighted when he addressed their meeting in Welsh on his first visit to the union in May 1907.⁶⁹ A precedent had been set with Williams' appointment, as a later appointment to the post, James Evans, also spoke Welsh.⁷⁰ Clearly, the LGB and subsequently the MoH had to contend with the specific linguistic profiles of Welsh unions when attempting to manage them, an additional factor not relevant in English unions, and through which poor law inspectors had to mediate.

There is no surviving evidence of Newtown union lobbying the government for Welsh-speaking inspectors. This could be linked to the union's different language distribution. In Machynlleth union, 90 percent of people aged 15 or over spoke Welsh well enough to be recorded as speaking either Welsh only or both English and Welsh on the 1911 census, while in Llanfyllin union 71 percent of this age group were recorded this way. In contrast, 60 percent of this age group in Newtown union spoke only English.⁷¹ It is likely that this relative dominance of English was reflected among the Newtown guardians, especially seeing as their board meetings were not conducted in Welsh. This discrepancy between Newtown and our other two Welsh unions demonstrates intra-regional variation in poor law administration within central Wales, and warns against the idea that Welsh unions all operated in the same way.

What did leadership on these boards look like? As in Spalding and the Staffordshire boards, contests for seats on the board in individual parishes were far from

⁶⁷ *Montgomeryshire Echo*, 31st March 1906, p.6.

⁶⁸ Evidence of this can be found in Carmarthen (*Weekly Mail*, 22nd December 1906, p.10); Swansea (*Evening Express*, 7th September 1906, p.3); and Machynlleth (*Montgomeryshire Express and Radnor Times*, 14th May 1907, p.6).

⁶⁹ *Montgomeryshire Express and Radnor Times*, 14th May 1907, p.6.

⁷⁰ MoH: *Annual Report, 1926-27* (1927), Cmd.2938, p.266. It is unclear whether William Elias, who held the post between Hugh Williams and James Evans, was bilingual.

⁷¹ 'Census of England and Wales, 1911 – Vol. XII: Language Spoken in Wales and Monmouthshire', Cmd.6911, pp.36-38.

regular.⁷² There were also relatively few contests in annual meetings for the positions of chairmen and vice-chairmen. However, the Welsh guardians did change their leadership personnel more frequently than in Stafford, Newcastle-under-Lyme or Spalding. Surviving minute books for Machynlleth and Newtown indicate that although these boards often maintained continuity in their chairmen, their vice-chairmanship would pass between members every two or three years. The Llanfyllin board had a similar experience – between 1900 and 1915, for instance, the union has six different chairmen and nine different vice-chairmen. This pattern more closely resembles that of the Blaby board in Leicestershire, whose board leadership rotated regularly. Most guardians who served for a period as chairman or vice chairman in the Welsh unions continued to sit on the board after stepping down, and typically were some of the most regular attendees both before and after their time in leadership roles. This was again in contrast to practices in Stafford, Newcastle-under-Lyme or Spalding, where once the chair had been occupied the individual in question would usually only vacate it to leave the board entirely. This arguably indicates that progression to the leadership of the Welsh boards was less linear or hierarchical than in Staffordshire or Lincolnshire – in mid-Wales, the chair was a position that guardians felt comfortable returning to the rank and file from, an almost non-existent occurrence in Spalding or the Staffordshire unions. Our Welsh unions, then, could be seen as operating a more egalitarian, more co-operative ethos than the latter two case studies.

In terms of female representation, our three Welsh unions differed somewhat from each other. Poor law inspector Bircham reported in 1896 that 86 women had been elected in Wales in the December 1894 elections, but pointed out that ‘they were not so equally distributed as one would wish’.⁷³ Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown reflect this. Tables 5.1-3 demonstrate that the Llanfyllin board contained no women in 1894, with Machynlleth and Newtown returning one female member each. Within the periods covered by our surviving minute books, four women served on the Machynlleth board, and seven in Newtown, and both boards consistently included at least one female member. Indeed, both Newtown and Machynlleth co-opted women to the board on

⁷² See for instance *Montgomeryshire County Times*, 2nd April 1904, p.7, where only Newtown, Kerry and Llanwnnog parishes were contested in Newtown union.

⁷³ LGB: *Annual Report, 1895-96* (1896), C.8212, p.221. For women guardians in Wales, see C. Preston, “‘To do good and useful work’: Welsh women poor law guardians, 1894-1914”, *Llafur*, 10:3 (2010), pp.87-102.

occasion.⁷⁴ This chimes with findings in Spalding union, where co-option was suggested when an all-male board looked likely; although motivations for the selection of these women are not explicitly stated, their co-option suggests that they were seen as valuable assets to the board's work. Indeed, Catherine Preston has argued that in Wales, as in England, women were seen as possessing important skills for the 'domestic' management of poor relief.⁷⁵ In Llanfyllin, however, only one woman was elected over the course of our period: Mary Newill Owen, an unmarried woman employed in her father's stationery business, represented the parish of Guilsfield from 1922 until 1930. This can partly be explained by the Llanfyllin' board's aversion to the practice of co-opting guardians – in both the 1905 and 1910 annual meetings, the question of co-option was raised and resoundingly defeated after a vote was taken.⁷⁶ The Llanfyllin guardians therefore appear disinclined to co-opt women as additional colleagues and thus improve the gender distribution of the board. It is striking that the three unions differed in this way, and suggests that Machynlleth and Newtown considered female representation on the board to be more valuable and worth actively pursuing than Llanfyllin did, perhaps partly as a result of a self-fulfilling prophecy – having never had any female guardians before Mary Newill Owen in 1922, the board had had little chance to benefit from the work of an active and engaged female member.

This relatively brief sketch of the boards in Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown has given some indications of the kind of governance structures operating in these unions. Intra-regional variation in the complexion of boards and the way their administration operated are evident through discrepancies in language spoken and in female representation between the unions. This acts as our first indication that, just as the poor law in England could vary over relatively small distances (such as in Stafford and Newcastle), the poor law in Wales functioned in the same way. As a result, connections can be drawn between elements of Welsh board operations and each of our three preceding case studies. Although not as regularly rotational in chairmen and vice-chairmen as Blaby, the Welsh boards' frequency in leadership changes much more closely resembled the Leicestershire union than the Staffordshire or Lincolnshire case

⁷⁴ PA, M/G/N/M/26-27, Newtown PLU, GMB, 10th May 1926 and 17th April 1929.

⁷⁵ Preston, 'To do good and useful work', p.88.

⁷⁶ PA, M/G/B/8/22, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 20th April 1905; PA, M/G/B/8/24, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 12th May 1910.

studies. This not only indicates more equitable boards, but also suggests that single individuals could not be imbued with a sense of outsized authority by holding leadership positions for considerable amounts of time. Greater power parity was therefore maintained between chair and board. Similarities can be drawn however between the Staffordshire boards, particularly Newcastle, and Llanfyllin, in their lack of female representation, while Machynlleth and Newtown seem closer to Spalding in their practice of co-opting women when none were elected.

How then do these group ‘personality traits’ fit into Steve King’s ‘open/closed’ governance yardstick?⁷⁷ The circulation of authority among members and, in Machynlleth and Newtown’s case, the consistent female representation on the board, indicates a relatively ‘open’ local system of governance. However, the use of Welsh in Llanfyllin and Machynlleth board meetings and English in Newtown complicates this question, because whether this broadens union governance depends on whose perspective is taken. Guardians who did not speak the language mainly used at meetings would find themselves largely excluded from proceedings, but at the same time the language spoken in the meetings matched that primarily spoken in the individual localities – in this sense, governance structures were ‘open’ and accessible to those engaging with its services. We might conclude, then, that Welsh guardians operated relatively open, but locally specific, forms of governance, incorporating elements like language which did not have to be considered in English regions. Our three individual unions therefore fell in slightly different places along the ‘open/closed’ spectrum. Such findings are a reminder of the importance of engaging with the particularities of local community, as Keith Snell has indicated.⁷⁸

5.6 Indoor and outdoor relief in central Wales

The relief provision administered in these local communities is where we turn next. This section presents an overview of relief provision in the three unions across our period, and considers its interaction with particular elements of welfare culture in

⁷⁷ King, ‘Welfare regimes’, p.59.

⁷⁸ Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp.496-504.

Wales. It then examines three key aspects of poor law activity: Machynlleth's closure of their own workhouse in 1916; the advent of the old-age pension among our Welsh unions, particularly Llanfyllin; and the impact of unemployment in the 1920s on local welfare administration. Through these selected issues, this section will address our key research questions of regional welfare cultures and the relationship between the poor law and national welfare reforms.

The following Figures 5.3-8 provide an overview of available data on numbers of paupers and expenditure on indoor and outdoor relief over the course of our period. The Figures are presented in pairs according to the union they relate to. The first figure in each pair shows the total number of paupers in receipt of relief on 1st January in the years displayed, drawing from returns made by our unions to central government (no data is available from these between 1915 to 1921). The second figure in each pair shows the annual expenditure on indoor and outdoor relief within the union, drawn from surviving minute books and in Machynlleth's case from surviving weekly returns to the poor law inspector. The patchier coverage of the period in these graphs reflects the gaps in available documents. This is why Figure 5.8, the second in the Newtown pair, does not include data for much of the pre-war period, while Machynlleth union did not record indoor relief expenditure at all in its surviving documents. Data from both the nationally-collected pauperism returns *and* the less complete local expenditure records have been included for two reasons. First, the pauperism returns provide a more effective way of comparing the three unions than the local expenditure data alone – as the latter is largely dependent on minute book survival, which differs between the three unions across our period, particularly for the 1900s and 1910s. By using the returns, we have a more consistent method of measuring and comparing pauperism levels for all three unions. Secondly, the inclusion of the expenditure data allows us to explore the relationship between the number of paupers relieved and relief expenditure over time. By using both nationally collected and locally maintained sources, the examination of regions such as central Wales where records might seem too fragmentary to be useful for detailed, in-depth work, becomes accessible to poor law scholars.

Figure 5.3 No. of paupers relieved on 1st January in Llanfyllin poor law union, 1900-1930.

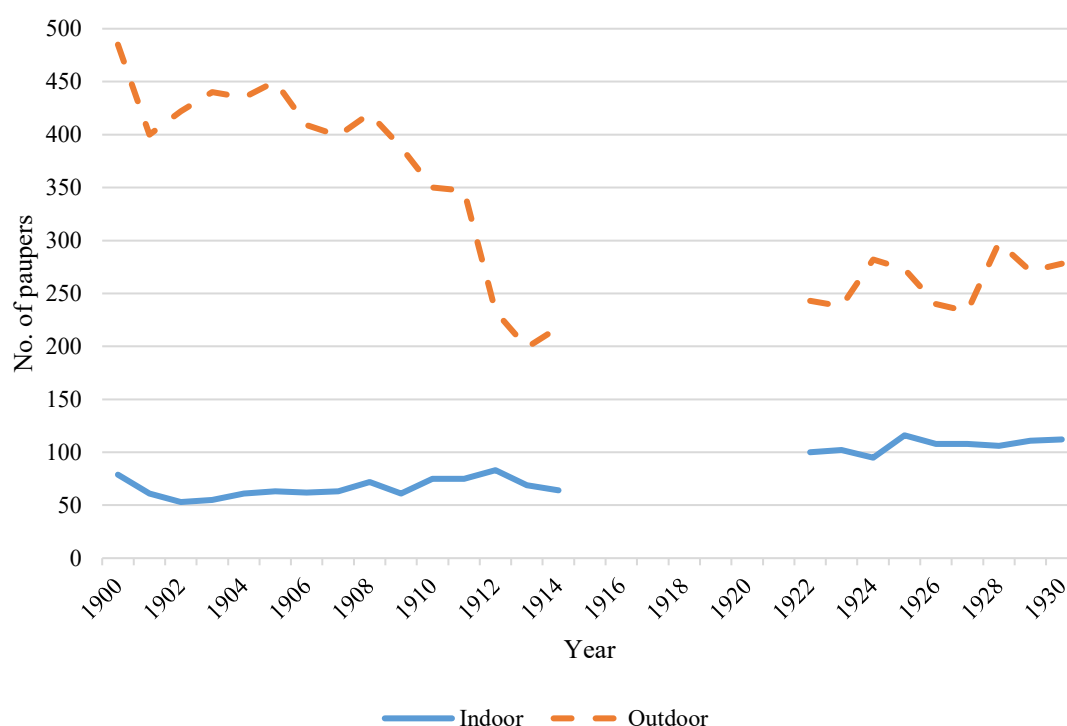
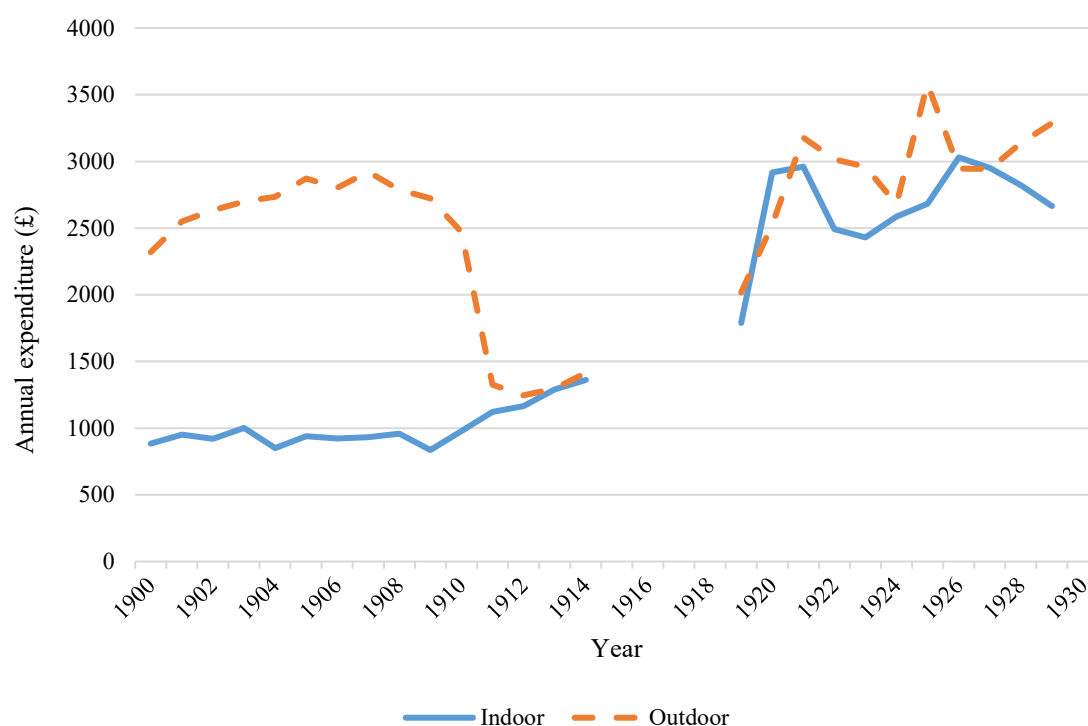


Figure 5.4 Annual expenditure on indoor and outdoor relief in Llanfyllin poor law union, 1900-1930.



Source: LGB, Half-yearly pauperism returns for England and Wales, 1900-1914, 1922-1930 [5.4]; PA, M/G/B/8/21-31, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 1900-1930 [5.5].

Figure 5.5 No. of paupers relieved on 1st January in Machynlleth poor law union, 1900-1930.

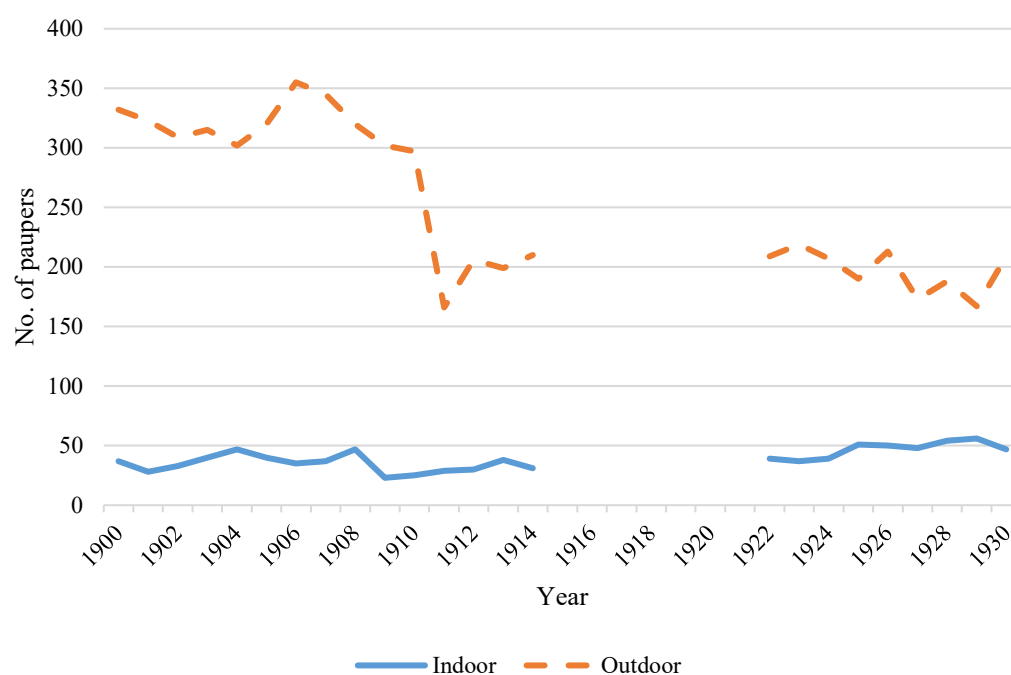
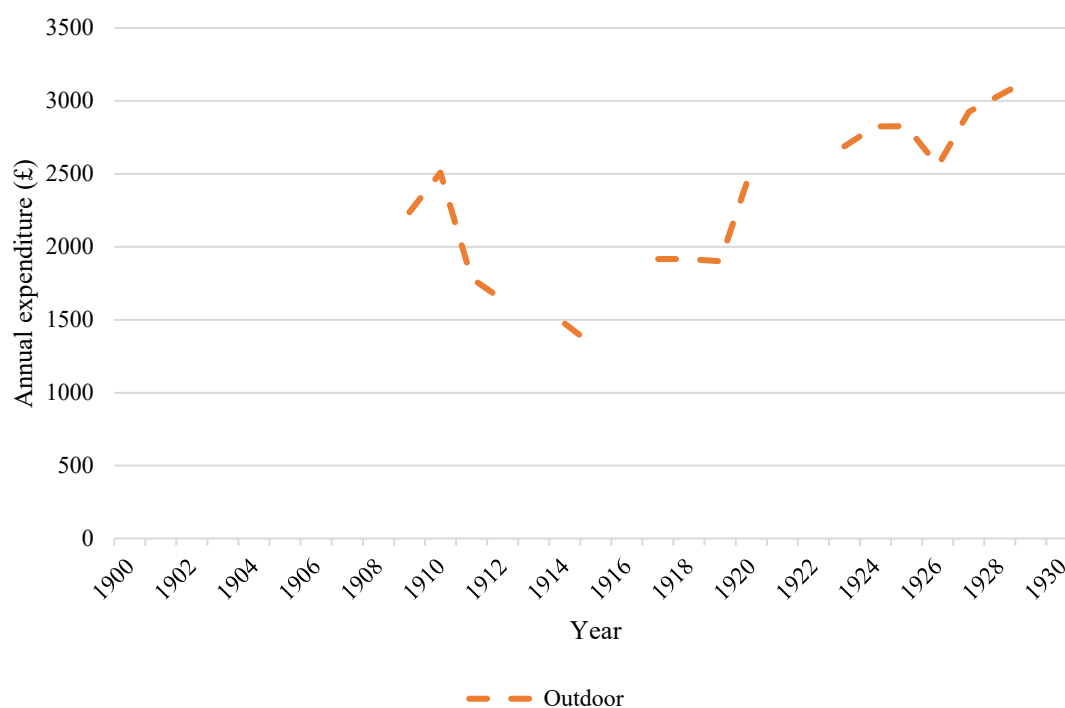


Figure 5.6 Annual expenditure outdoor relief in Machynlleth poor law union, 1900-1930 [indoor relief expenditure missing due to 1916 workhouse closure].



Source: LGB: Half-yearly pauperism returns for England and Wales, 1900-1914, 1922-1930 [5.6]; NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 69-74, Machynlleth PLU, guardians' weekly returns to the poor law inspector, 1910-1913, 1919-1921, 1922-1930. [5.7].

Figure 5.7 No. of paupers relieved on 1st January in Newtown poor law union, 1900-1930.

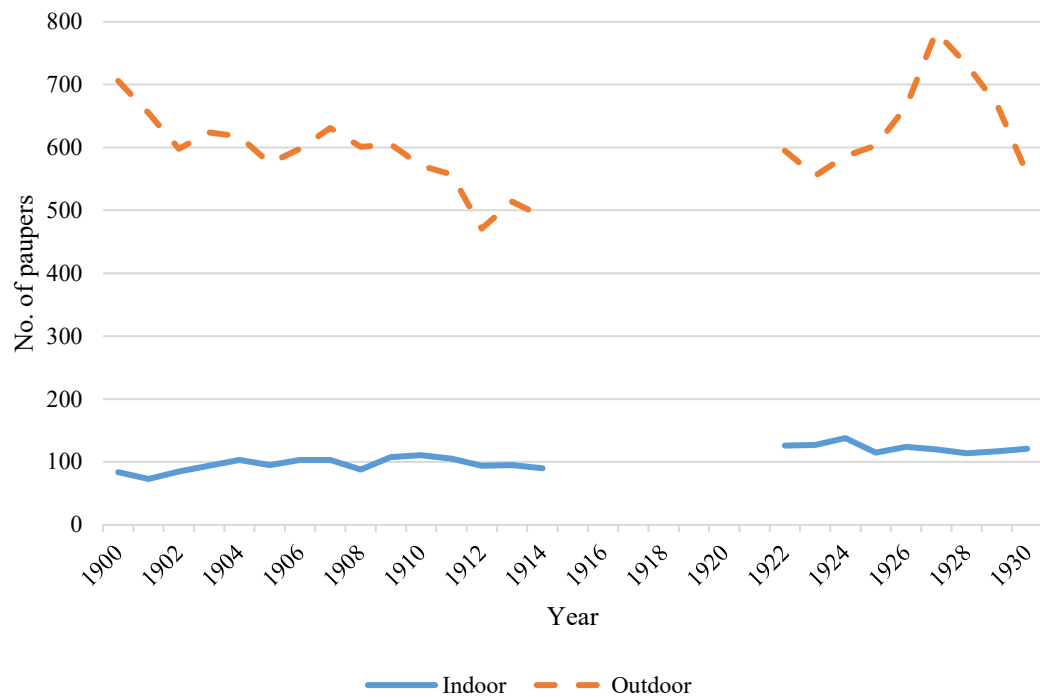
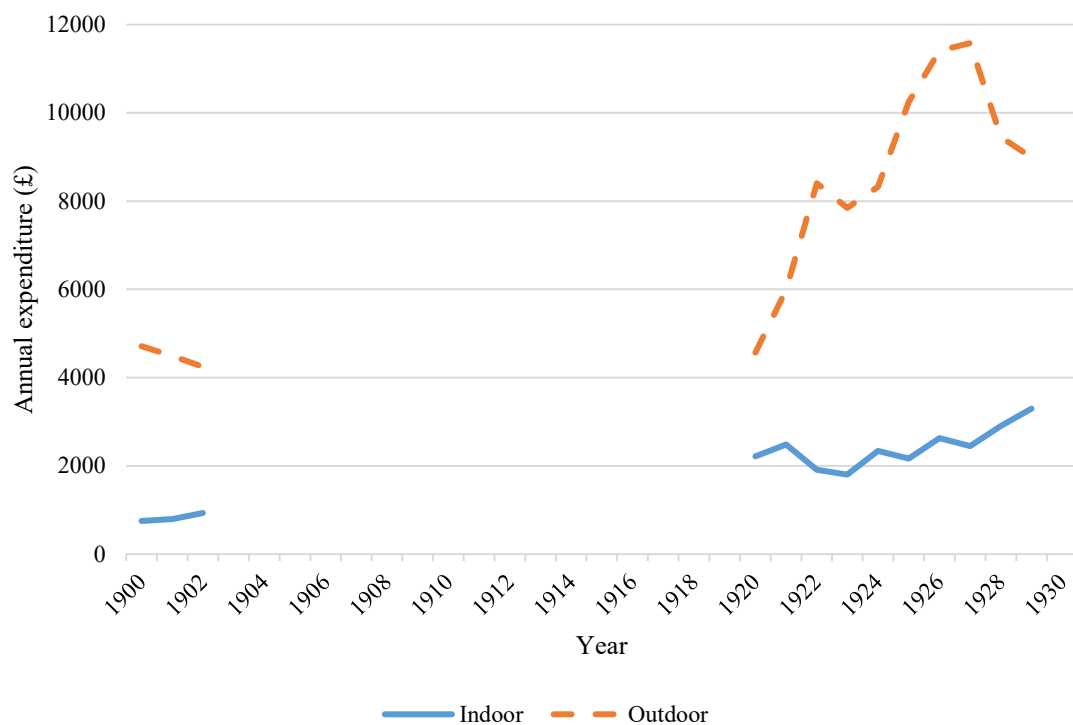


Figure 5.8 Annual expenditure on indoor and outdoor relief in Newtown poor law union, 1900-1930.



Source: LGB: Half-yearly pauperism returns for England and Wales, 1900-1914, 1922-1930 [5.8]; PA, N/G/N/M/24-27, Newtown PLU, GMB, 1900-04, 1919-1930 [5.9].

Figures 5.3-8 indicate that our three Welsh unions were administering poor relief on different scales. Newtown union consistently relieved significantly more paupers in total (indoor and outdoor combined) than Llanfyllin and Machynlleth, although the workhouse populations in Newtown and Llanfyllin were fairly evenly matched during the 1920s in terms of absolute numbers. The difference in numbers of outdoor paupers between the three was particularly pronounced, with Newtown relieving at least 100 more such cases than the other two in every year where data is available. The discrepancy between the expenditure data on outdoor relief is even wider, although Llanfyllin and Newtown's expenditure on their respective workhouses comes much closer together during the 1920s. Newtown's pauperism rate – number of paupers per 1,000 of the population – was also reliably higher than the other two unions, averaging at 32.5 between 1900 and 1914 compared to 29.2 in Machynlleth and 25.6 in Llanfyllin. The larger pauper totals in Newtown could not, therefore, entirely be explained by that union's larger population (almost double the size of Machynlleth's, and over twenty percent larger than Llanfyllin's), as its pauperism levels were also proportionally higher. It is possible that this points to a more 'open' or inclusive attitude in relief provision among the Newtown guardians, but could also be attributed to the specifics of the local economy in the union. Given the decline of the specialist textile industries which had once dominated the towns of Newtown and Llanidloes over the preceding decades, as detailed in Section 5.4, these higher pauperism levels could also reflect a locality not sufficiently recovered from those setbacks.

Figures 5.3-8 likewise clearly indicate the consistent preference for outdoor relief over indoor relief in all three unions, with outdoor pauperism levels remaining much higher than those in the workhouse throughout our period. This aligns with Keith Snell's observations that workhouse relief was 'very much a minority experience' in Wales.⁷⁹ He has suggested that this was in part because 'Welsh social relations were at odds with ideas of workhouse testing' - as a result of living in small, often isolated communities in which nonconformity and chapel-going were significant elements, guardians often had long-standing personal connections with the poor. Such guardians were therefore reluctant to enforce the workhouse test on individuals who were known

⁷⁹ Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.256.

personally to them.⁸⁰ They were in this way akin to Spalding guardians, who maintained strong poor relief links to their parish poor ‘on the ground’.

Reports of the poor law inspectors for Wales during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century describe a related tendency among Welsh guardians: board members’ advocacy for their ‘own’ poor. In 1891, Francis Bircham linked the minimal use of the workhouse test in Wales to the fact that ‘they [the poor] themselves are personally well-known to their guardians who advocate their claims with a pardonable partiality’.⁸¹ This continued to be reported into our period. In 1902, Bircham remarked that guardians advocated for applicants they ‘happen to know’ with the best of intentions, albeit with an occasional disregard for the ratepayers.⁸² His successor Hugh Williams likewise commented in 1907 that ‘guardians almost compete to do the best for “their own”, resulting in indiscriminate relief being granted’.⁸³ This approach was so engrained, Williams reported, that when the LGB suggested that guardians should not adjudicate on cases from their own parishes, as ‘anxiety to deal generously with the poor of their own neighbourhood’ might compromise their objectivity, many Welsh guardians argued that they were ‘in possession of the whole facts’ as parish representatives, and should therefore be allowed to make judgements on these cases.⁸⁴ It is difficult to see explicit evidence of this in our unions because discussions of most relief applications were not included in board meeting minutes or newspaper reports. Nevertheless, there are some indications that similar advocacy attitudes were at play. This offending suggestion was made in an LGB circular distributed in 1908 – Llanfyllin, the only board of our three with minutes surviving for that year, implemented some of the circular’s other recommendations, but not this one, implying that the board maintained the prerogative.⁸⁵ Another rather dramatic example occurred in July 1925 when Llanllwchaiarn representative Alfred Giles vociferously contested the decision of one of the Newtown union’s medical officers to detain two young women from his parish as lunatics, justifying his continued pressing of the matter by stating that ‘the people were living in his parish’.⁸⁶ This cultural emphasis on very localised connections, where

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp.259-260.

⁸¹ LGB: *Annual Report, 1890-91* (1891), C.6460, p.257.

⁸² LGB: *Annual Report, 1901-02* (1902), Cd.1231, p.143.

⁸³ LGB: *Annual Report, 1906-07* (1907), Cd.3665, p.350.

⁸⁴ LGB, *Annual Report, 1910-11* (1911), Cd.5865, p.104.

⁸⁵ PA, M/G/B/8/24, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 12th May 1910.

⁸⁶ *Montgomery County Times*, 18th July 1925.

guardians not only administered welfare for the whole union but actively championed their own poor, continued to contribute to the minor role of the workhouse in overall poor relief in these Welsh unions. Put simply, the workhouse would not be viewed as ‘the best deal’ for your parish’s poor. It also suggests that the nineteenth-century reforms such as the 1865 Union Chargeability Act, which aimed to make the union rather than individual parishes the key unit of poor law administration, had not been able to disassemble these deep, highly localised connections.⁸⁷ The parish remained the primary community in which Welsh guardians located themselves.

Given this set of attitudes towards welfare provision, we can begin to assess where Wales fits within Steve King’s north-west/south-east model of regional welfare culture.⁸⁸ On one hand, Welsh unions could be categorised as operating a relatively inclusive welfare culture, more in line with King’s conception of southern and eastern England, expressed by the way in which an individual’s parish guardian would champion their cause. On the other hand, it could be argued that for paupers who had a more distant or less positive relationship with their representative guardians, relief would have been more difficult to obtain. King’s model does not reflect in detail on the significance of personal connection with local welfare authorities and how this might inform a local welfare regime; this case study therefore suggests that the nature of these personal relationships should be considered carefully as an additional contributing factor in the nature and accessibility of regional welfare.

The lack of emphasis on indoor relief in our unions as illustrated in the above Figures 5.3-8 is also unsurprising given the historical opposition in Wales towards the elements of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act which centred use of the workhouse. A range of scholars have acknowledged Wales as a hotbed of sustained hostility to this element of the New Poor Law.⁸⁹ More recently, Megan Evans and Peter Jones have undertaken important work on Welsh resistance to the workhouse, demonstrating that Welsh boards were extremely effective in this resistance over time.⁹⁰ They describe

⁸⁷ ‘Union Chargeability Act, 1865’ (28 & 29 Vict. c.79), in Poor Law Board [hereafter PLB]: *Annual Report, 1865-66* (1866), 14784, p.26.

⁸⁸ King, *Poverty and Welfare*.

⁸⁹ N. Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement, 1834-44* (Manchester, 1971), pp.128-129; J. Knott, *Popular Opposition to the 1834 Poor Law* (Beckenham, 1986), p.83; M.A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834-1929* (London, 1981), pp.44-46; Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp.256-261.

⁹⁰ Evans and Jones, ‘A stubborn, intractable body’, p.104, 108.

Welsh avoidance methods as ‘quiet, covert, and at times barely recognisable as resistance at all’, often including ‘apparent, if partial, compliance followed by retraction and recalcitrance’.⁹¹ The experiences of our three Welsh unions in the early to mid-nineteenth century aligned closely with these findings. The construction of workhouses in both Newtown and Llanfyllin was disrupted by popular protest, including a confrontation in Llanfair (a town in Llanfyllin union) whereby Assistant Poor Law Commissioner William Day, the union chairman and other guardians were met by a 400-strong mob, who pelted them with paving stones, mud and eggs and assaulted some members of the group.⁹² In both these unions, the workhouse was thus rejected by the local community.

Nevertheless, in both instances their new institutions were eventually constructed, with capacity for 350 at Caersws (where Newtown’s workhouse was located, between the towns of Newtown and Llanidloes) and 250 at Llanfyllin, and both were operational by the early 1840s - an early date in the context of wider Wales. Machynlleth, however, held out for much longer, taking around 25 years to build a workhouse after the union’s formation in 1837. In contrast to the flashpoints of protest experienced in Newtown and Llanfyllin, Machynlleth’s opposition more closely resembled the foot-dragging described by Evans and Jones, who even quoted William Day as complaining in 1838 about the ‘obstinate impracticality of the [Machynlleth] guardians on the subject of the workhouse’.⁹³ The Poor Law Board [hereafter PLB] in fact threatened the guardians in 1854 with the union’s dissolution unless they began building,⁹⁴ and plans for a small workhouse with room for 60 inmates were finally produced and approved by the PLB in August 1859.⁹⁵ Despite this, in April 1860 the threat to dissolve the union if no workhouse was erected had to be repeated.⁹⁶ The guardians did then award a construction contract, intended to be completed by August 1861; however, the guardians did not appoint a Master and Matron until November 1861,⁹⁷ and the first PLB annual report to record expenditure on ‘in-maintenance’ by

⁹¹ Ibid., p.115, 105.

⁹² *North Wales Chronicle*, 2nd May 1837, p.1. For Newtown, see Owen, ‘Newtown & Llanidloes Poor Law Union’, p.120.

⁹³ Evans and Jones, ‘A stubborn, intractable body’, p.105.

⁹⁴ *Eddowes’ Shrewsbury Journal*, 7th June 1854, p.6; *Eddowes’ Shrewsbury Journal*, 18th April 1860, p.7.

⁹⁵ *Morning Chronicle*, 18th August 1859, p.7.

⁹⁶ *Eddowes’ Shrewsbury Journal*, 18th April 1860, p.7.

⁹⁷ *North Wales Chronicle*, 5th October 1861, p.4.

Machynlleth union dates from 1862-1863.⁹⁸ This implies that the guardians continued to drag their feet over the whole process. Their ambivalence was clear, and therefore provides a textbook example of Evans and Jones' resistance in the form of compliance followed by recalcitrance.

This historic pattern not only indicates an approach to local poor relief with very limited institutional focus, but also supports the classification of central Wales as having a 'peripheral welfare culture'. In the existing literature outlined above, no connection has been made between King and Stewart's welfare peripheries model and Welsh hostility to a system imposed by central government. However, the trajectory of Machynlleth's behaviour in particular indicates a region which remained largely impervious to the efforts of a central authority to implement new policy for a considerable period of time – one of the key distinguishing features of a 'peripheral welfare culture'.

Moving forward again into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the poor law inspectors for Wales reported continued ambivalence towards indoor relief, as has already been alluded to in the context of a regional advocacy culture. They described a general disinterest in the workhouse as a relief option, particularly for physically healthy paupers, and a disinclination to apply the workhouse test strictly which was unlikely to change.⁹⁹ Francis Bircham attributed this, like Snell, Evans and Jones, to deeply engrained elements of rural Welsh life:

'in the agricultural and mountainous parts of Wales the poor have an individuality, and can with some small assistance from the rates exist in a way unknown in more populous localities. They are scattered over a very large and thinly populated area; their houses in secluded valleys and on hill sides are often many miles distant from the union workhouse'.¹⁰⁰

The workhouse simply did not make sense in the context both of the scattered distribution of a small population, and the social relations at play.

Machynlleth union again took this rejection one step further in our period. In September 1913, Towyn guardian the Reverend Robert Richard Roberts presented an analysis of the board's accounts for the year ending the previous March, which

⁹⁸ PLB: *Annual Report 1862-63* (1963), p.152.

⁹⁹ See for instance LGB: *Annual Report, 1890-91* (1891), C.6460, p.256.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.257.

suggested that it might make financial sense for the guardians to board out their indoor poor in the workhouses of neighbouring unions.¹⁰¹ Nine months later, a sub-committee appointed to consider the question recommended that the union workhouse be closed, and existing and future inmates boarded out as Roberts suggested.¹⁰² The LGB agreed, and the institution was officially closed on 31st March 1916, when the majority of inmates travelled to the Newtown workhouse at Caersws, who had agreed to maintain them at a weekly cost of 6s. 3d. per person.¹⁰³ Those represented in Figure 5.7 as receiving indoor relief from Machynlleth union were therefore accommodated elsewhere. Although the union did purchase and renovate a new site in the 1920s to provide vagrant accommodation (an issue which will be discussed more extensively in the next section), the union never again operated its own workhouse.

This chain of events suggests a continuity with attitudes towards indoor relief earlier in the nineteenth century. However, the guardians' motivations for the 1916 closure appear pragmatic rather than ideological. Both the Reverend Roberts and the sub-committee which subsequently addressed the issue claimed that demand for the workhouse had reduced, partly as a result of the boarding-out of children, and further reductions would be necessary due to the 1913 Poor Law Institutions Act, which restricted the length of time that children could be housed in workhouses. The committee also pointed out that the board had been instructed to undertake extensive improvements to the workhouse's sanitary system, which 'would cost the ratepayers several hundreds of pounds.'¹⁰⁴ Allusions were likewise made to pressures from central government for improved classification of inmates, implying that this would be difficult in the current facilities. Finally, both Roberts and the committee referred to the disproportionate expenditure required to maintain so few inmates; the annual cost per

¹⁰¹ NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 3a, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 17th September 1913.

¹⁰² Ibid., 27th May 1914.

¹⁰³ NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 3a, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 24th June 1914, 22nd March 1916.

¹⁰⁴ NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 3a, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 27th May 1914. This increasing emphasis on improved sanitation was part of local authorities' growing responsibilities for public health, as we have seen in earlier chapters. See for instance E. Hurren, 'Poor Law versus public health: Diphtheria, sanitary reform, and the 'Crusade' against outdoor relief 1870–1900', *Social History of Medicine*, 18:3 (2005), pp.399–418; A. Levene, M. Powell, J. Stewart and B. Taylor, *Cradle to Grave: Municipal Medicine in Interwar England and Wales* (Oxford, 2011); A. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London, 1984).

inmate for the year ending 30th September 1913 was given as £23.3.6, which rose to £27.4.9 if the salaries of officers were included.¹⁰⁵

These motivations do not quite align with the reasons that Snell, Evans and Jones have suggested for Welsh unions' opposition to the workhouse in the early to mid-nineteenth century. In their reluctance to maintain the building, the guardians may have been pursuing a policy of deliberate neglect which would enable them to persuade central government that the premises no longer offered acceptable accommodation – another layer to their avoidant techniques. Indeed, the closure of the workhouse as a strategy to avoid complying with these new regulations could be seen as a further expression of a 'peripheral welfare culture', whereby Machynlleth again evaded adherence to central guidelines on poor law practice by circumventing the use of their own institution altogether. There is little evidence of ideological or social distaste in the arguments of the Machynlleth board in 1914, however. Indeed, the fact that the guardians planned to place their indoor poor in other institutions does not indicate a board rejecting workhouse use on principle; in fact, aside from the unsatisfactory sanitary conditions, the welfare of the inmates themselves does not feature in the board's agreed reasons for planning to close their workhouse. These more pragmatic justifications may then indicate a subtle but important shift in attitudes towards the workhouse from those held in the mid to late nineteenth century as suggested by other scholars. Guardians remained reluctant to make extensive use of the institution, but their motivations were more financial and logistical than they were exclusively conceptual.

Shifting our focus to outdoor relief provision, Figures 5.3-8 show that, as in all the preceding case studies, numbers of outdoor relief recipients did not remain stable in any of the three Welsh unions over the course of the period. As in earlier chapters, an important example of change occurred in 1911 when the old-age pension became accessible to paupers. There are two notable differences between the three unions in this area, however. First, substantial declines in both numbers of outdoor paupers and expenditure on outdoor relief occurred between 1910 and 1912 in Llanfyllin and Machynlleth. Numbers of outdoor paupers reduced by 32 percent between 1911 and 1912 in the former, and by 44 percent between 1910 and 1911 in the latter; a much smaller reduction, however, of only 15 percent, appears between 1911 and 1912 in

¹⁰⁵ NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 3a, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 27th May 1914.

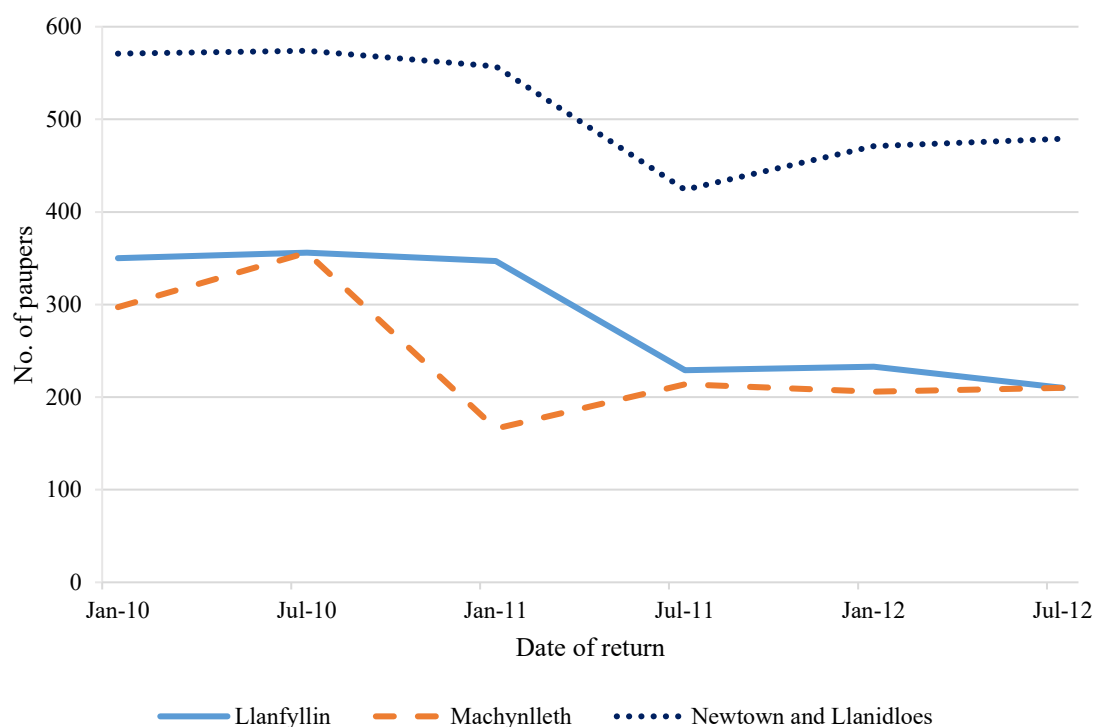
Newtown. Second, these decreases occurred at slightly different times among the three: in Llanfyllin and Newtown, the main decline (such as it was in the latter) happened between 1911 and 1912, *after* paupers were able to access the pension, while Machynlleth experienced the largest reduction in number of paupers between 1910 and 1911, *prior* to the pauper disqualification's actual lapse.¹⁰⁶ Do such variations at this crucial juncture could suggest differences between the impact and administration of the old age pension across three neighbouring unions?

To answer this, it is helpful to zoom in a little closer on pauperism levels between 1910 and 1912, either side of the pauper disqualification's abolition. Figure 5.9 on the next page displays the number of outdoor paupers relieved on 1st January in our unions in these three years, but also includes the figure provided in the 1st July returns for those years as well (as highlighted in earlier chapters, summer returns were only made before the First World War). Presented in this way, Newtown's experience bears a closer resemblance to that of Machynlleth and Llanfyllin, as numbers of outdoor paupers in Newtown are shown to have declined by 23 percent between January and July 1911. It nevertheless continues to suggest that there were differences between the unions in the scale of the old-age pension's impact. This is not satisfactorily explained by different demographic profiles, as Newtown only had a marginally smaller proportion of elderly inhabitants than Llanfyllin and Machynlleth – five percent of the former's residents were aged 70 or over, compared to four percent for the latter two.¹⁰⁷ The most obvious explanation would be that the elderly poor made up a smaller proportion of outdoor relief recipients in Newtown than in the other two unions, but because minute books or other locally-generated documentation do not survive for Newtown, this cannot be confirmed.

¹⁰⁶ As has been indicated in earlier chapters, when the pension initially became available in 1909, people who had received poor relief (other than medical relief) in the preceding twelve months were disqualified from receiving it; this clause lapsed from 1st January 1911.

¹⁰⁷ This statistics were calculated through the population and age data available on Vision of Britain, www.visionofbritain.org.uk [accessed 12/12/17].

Figure 5.9 No. of outdoor paupers relieved on 1st January and 1st July in Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown poor law unions, 1910-1912.



Source: LGB, Half-yearly pauperism returns for England and Wales, 1910-1912.

Figure 5.9 does align with Figures 5.3-8 in that it suggests that the impact of the pension was felt at different times across the unions; however, upon closer inspection this difference appears to be a red herring. Pensions for those previously in receipt of outdoor relief became payable for the first time on Friday 6th January 1911, so the latter had to be stopped before that date – as outlined in Chapter 3. In Newtown union’s case, relieving officers terminated relief to the relevant recipients on 2nd January, the previous Monday.¹⁰⁸ The returns made for 1st January therefore captured those paupers whose poor relief stopped the very next day. In contrast, Machynlleth made their last payment to their prospective paupers on 29th December 1910,¹⁰⁹ which removed them from the scope of the 1st January 1911 return, creating the impression that the impact of the pension was felt earlier in that union. The Llanfyllin minute books do not record the exact date that relief to their relevant cases was stopped, stating only ‘the end of this

¹⁰⁸ *Montgomery County Times*, 24th December 1911, p.6.

¹⁰⁹ *Cambrian News*, 23rd December 1910, p.5.

quarter', but it seems reasonable to suggest that they made arrangements similar to Newtown, cutting off their paupers a few crucial days later. This discrepancy, as constructed by the pauperism returns, is not therefore necessarily a reflection of different approaches to the transition between our unions. Moreover, it is a reminder that centrally-collected statistics can be misleading, demonstrating the importance of cross-referencing these with local record-keeping as has been undertaken here.

Other surviving sources, however, do provide insights into attitudes towards the advent of pensions for elderly paupers among our Welsh unions. We have the most material for Llanfyllin, the only one of our boards for which minutes survive between 1910 and 1912. These indicate an approach to the impending increase in pension availability somewhat different from that taken in the preceding case study of Spalding. While there is little evidence of the Lincolnshire guardians encouraging elderly paupers to move onto the pension in 1911, indeed chastising a relieving officer for pressurising recipients to do so, the Llanfyllin board actively prepared to transfer as many eligible people as possible to the pension, resembling Blaby union in this way. It is difficult to ascertain just how many such people the board was supporting by the beginning of 1911. In February 1909, the clerk reported that there were 184 poor relief recipients aged 70 or over in the union, 20 of whom were workhouse inmates, so it seems reasonable to suppose that numbers remained similar two years later.¹¹⁰ The Llanfyllin guardians anticipated substantial savings to be brought about by the national pension. The retiring chairman remarked at the annual board meeting in May 1910 that 'he hoped that next year all paupers over 70 would be receiving old age pensions', and in December 1910 the clerk also commented that 'they would lose a large number of paupers at the beginning of the New Year, and he was glad to mention that the saving to the ratepayers... would be 2s. in the £. in rates.'¹¹¹ The guardians were therefore determined to make all eligible paupers aware of their options regarding the pension. In September 1910, four months before the pauper disqualification would lapse, the board produced 200 copies of a leaflet for pauper applicants explaining how to apply for the pension.¹¹² Presumably these were then distributed to the paupers themselves; when the following month Denbigh County Council asked the board to guide eligible paupers to

¹¹⁰ PA, M/G/B/8/24, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 18th February 1909.

¹¹¹ *Montgomery County Times*, 14th May 1910, p.8; *Montgomery County Times*, 24th December 1910, p.8.

¹¹² PA, M/G/B/8/24, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 29th September 1910.

take the pension, the clerk replied that ‘this had already been done’.¹¹³ In the last board meeting before the disqualifications’ lapse, in December 1910, the guardians assiduously tied up loose ends, asking all unions relieving non-resident Llanfyllin poor to discontinue relief, freeing them to apply for the pension. Guardians also decided to apply for the pension on behalf of two paupers who were in the workhouse due to illness.¹¹⁴ The clerk subsequently reported in the board’s January 1911 meeting that 109 paupers had left the poor law behind to receive the pension, who combined had been costing the union £19. 1s. 6d. a week in outdoor relief, with an additional 11 non-resident cases who had acted similarly.¹¹⁵

This evidence gives the impression of a pragmatic and financially-focused board, who took the opportunity of the pension to reduce their outgoings. However, they do not seem to have put explicit pressure on their elderly relief recipients to apply for the pension – an approach which appears also to have been the case in Machynlleth and Newtown. A useful illustration of this centres around the provision of medical relief. In November 1910, the Welshpool Pensions Sub-Committee wrote to the unions in its jurisdiction, including Llanfyllin and Newtown, pointing out that ‘many’ eligible relief recipients ‘were hesitating to apply for old age pensions because they feared they would lose the services of the poor law medical officer’. The committee asked boards of guardians to ‘allow those old people the services of the medical officer’ and to inform the relevant cases of this policy if they agreed to do so.¹¹⁶ Both Llanfyllin and Newtown agreed to this arrangement, with the Newtown clerk commenting that ‘he did not see any reason against medically relieving paupers who ultimately became pensioners, for they had already done the same thing now in relieving some of the present pensioners with medical assistance’.¹¹⁷ Indeed, the Pensions Sub-Committee later reported that Clun and Forden unions had also approved of the suggestion.¹¹⁸ Machynlleth, which was not served by the Welshpool sub-committee, undertook a similar arrangement – in July 1911, the clerk reported that ‘acting upon a suggestion made by the board, he had written to the medical officers of the board regarding attendance upon old age

¹¹³ Ibid., 27th October 1910.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 22nd December 1910.

¹¹⁵ *Montgomery County Times*, 21st January 1911, p.3.

¹¹⁶ *Montgomery County Times*, 26th November 1910.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ *Montgomery County Times*, 10th December 1910, p.3.

pensioners' and had so far received a response from the Machynlleth district doctor who stated he was 'quite prepared to do this upon receiving an order from the relieving officer'.¹¹⁹

The continuity in provision of medical relief for old age pension recipients demonstrates that in the reality of local welfare experience, poor relief and the pension were not mutually exclusive. Regional officers were not contravening the original pension legislation – as highlighted in earlier chapters, medical relief provided by the poor law did not disqualify an applicant from receiving the pension. It nevertheless provides clear evidence at a local level that the old-age pension and the poor law in many cases remained part of the same individual or family's welfare arsenal. Poor law officials and local pensions administrators were comfortable with the idea of families accessing both at the same time - indeed, Newtown and Llanfyllin boards both protested against a quirk of pension regulations whereby a man otherwise eligible for the pension could be disqualified if his wife was in receipt of poor relief.¹²⁰ Medical relief formed a thread of continuity between the poor law and the pension that has been little acknowledged by existing literature on the latter, or on medical care for the elderly – Pat Thane, for instance, describes the pension as an 'amendment' of the poor law, but does not go into detail about the significance of continuing poor law medical relief alongside the new provision.¹²¹ The fact that some individuals were reluctant to take the pension if it meant the loss of medical care, and could be encouraged to do so by the assurance that medical attendance would still be accessible to them, is particularly telling in this regard. It suggests that instead of the pension helping the elderly to become independent of the poor law, in some cases the continued use of poor law services made the pension accessible – without continued access to medical assistance, such cases would have remained on poor relief. It seems likely that this eventuality was on the minds of our Welsh guardians when they agreed to provide medical services to

¹¹⁹ *Montgomery County Times*, 29th July 1911, p.3.

¹²⁰ *Montgomery County Times*, 21st January 1911, pp.2-3.

¹²¹ P. Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford, 2000), p.225. For medical care for the elderly under the New Poor Law, see C. Edwards, 'Age-based rationing of medical care in nineteenth-century England', *Continuity and Change*, 14:2 (1999), pp.227-265; A. Ritch, 'English Poor Law institutional care for older people: identifying the 'aged and infirm' and the 'sick' in Birmingham workhouse 1852–1912', *Social History of Medicine*, 27:1 (2014), pp.64-85; and D. Thomson, 'Workhouse to nursing home: Residential care of elderly people in England since 1840', *Ageing and Society*, 3:1 (1983), pp.43-69.

old age pensioners – if they refused to do so, the anticipated respite for the local rates would not be realised. Their choice once again had a hard-headed element, rather than entirely oriented around the well-being of their local poor. Strategic decision-making was also evident on the side of the elderly poor themselves, as they weighed up the costs and benefits of moving away from the poor law. Such decision-making was in evidence in Spalding and Staffordshire too; our Welsh unions provide further evidence to support the view that the choice between the two forms of relief was not always obvious, straightforward, or definitive. We can again challenge notions of a redundant ‘old’ system giving way to a ‘new’ one.

Overall, then, the broad statistics as displayed in Figures 5.3-8 demonstrate a reduction in outdoor relief provision in response to the old-age pension which was in line with general national trends, and with the broad experiences of our other poor law unions which also featured declines in outdoor relief. Nevertheless, it is clear that when we take into account the preparation for and decision-making at a local level around the advent of this new welfare source, a linear progression from poor law to pension was not necessarily a foregone conclusion. Although Welsh guardians reveal themselves to be pragmatic, welcoming the prospect of reducing their relief lists, they did not always operate a pension/poor law binary choice, using the services of the latter in some cases to support access to the former. As was demonstrated in Blaby in relation to social housing, and in Staffordshire in relation to unemployment relief, the poor law continued to cater to needs of the elderly poor which the new old age pension left unaddressed. Although the trend in so much general literature on pensions (and Liberal welfare reforms more broadly) stresses the categories of poor, including the elderly, being removed from the ambit of the poor law, in reality there was a much more nuanced ‘mixed economy of welfare’ in operation when it came to the pension.¹²²

A further striking element displayed in Figures 5.8 is Newtown’s spiralling annual outdoor relief expenditure over the course of the 1920s, climbing from £5,987 in 1921 (having already leapt from £4,564 spent in 1920) to £8,407 in 1922, then on to

¹²² Thane, *Old Age*, p.225. For more on the concept of the mixed economy of welfare, or economy of makeshifts, see J. Innes, ‘The mixed economy of makeshifts in early-modern England: assessments of the options from Hale to Malthus, 1683-1803’ in M. Daunton (ed.), *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past* (London, 1996), pp.139-180; A. Tomkins and S. King (eds.), *The Poor in England, 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003).

£10,244 the following year, peaking at £11,582 in 1927. This is mirrored by a similar increase in the number of paupers receiving outdoor relief in the union as captured by the pauperism returns, growing from 555 on 1st January 1923 to 784 in 1927, an increase of 41 percent. Such an escalation is notable in itself, but is particularly so when compared with Llanfyllin and Machynlleth over the same period. Allowing for the slightly patchier nature of Machynlleth's available data, all three unions nevertheless followed the same broad expenditure pattern over the course of the decade, with two significant increases at around the same times – the first between 1919 and 1922, and then a second between 1925 and 1928. However, the element that sets Llanfyllin and Machynlleth apart from Newtown is that they did not see concurrent growth in numbers of outdoor relief recipients. Both experienced relatively small peaks over the course of the decade, but nothing to match the changes in their annual expenditure, as in Newtown, which required more explanation below.

As has been alluded to in preceding case studies, expenditure on outdoor relief was subject to significant increases at a national level during and after the First World War, due partly to the growth in the size of the average weekly dole per outdoor pauper, and the bouts of unemployment which pushed large numbers onto the poor law despite the newer out-of-work benefits, as was demonstrated in our Staffordshire case study.¹²³ Indeed, the expenditure spikes experienced in our Welsh unions align with the larger upsurges in the national data collated by Karel Williams, in the early 1920s and 1925 to 1927-8.¹²⁴

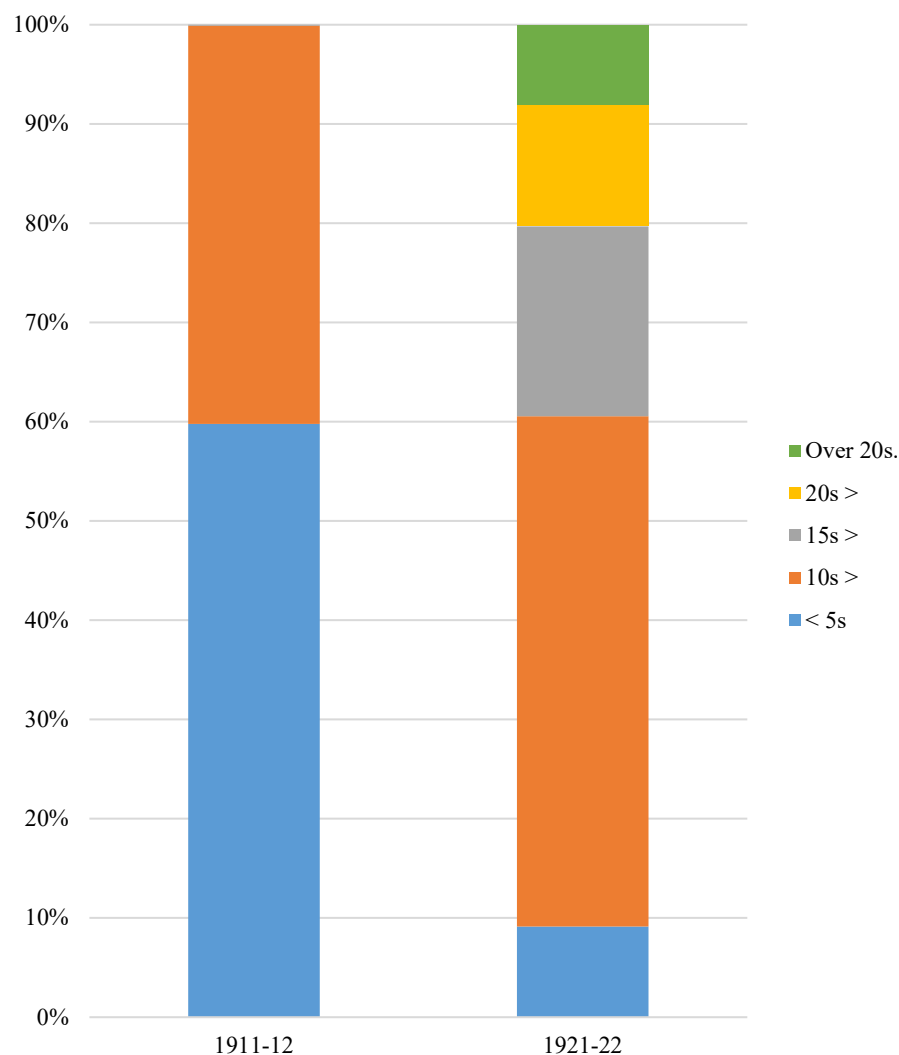
In earlier chapters, we have observed that increased outdoor relief expenditure was informed by unions distributing larger payments during the interwar period. Source material which allows us to access the size of relief payments is sparser for this case study than for others. The only surviving outdoor relief lists for these Welsh unions are from Pennal district in the south-west of Machynlleth union, which was made up of three parishes: Pennal, Scybor-y-coed and Towyn, with a combined 1911 population of 4,777, most of whom lived in Towyn. The district's outdoor relief lists survive between 1911 and 1922, as well as an abstract book containing summaries of expenditure

¹²³ K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London, 1981), pp.169-172; Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp.212-213.

¹²⁴ Williams, *Pauperism*, p.172.

between 1908 and 1924. This small pool of source material, however, indicates that similar increases in outdoor relief payment sizes occurred in Welsh unions over the course of our period. Figure 5.10 displays the size of all individual outdoor relief payments made in cash in Pennal district during the twelve months at either end of the period covered by these surviving records: the year beginning April 1911, and the year beginning April 1921. There had evidently been a shift in the amounts distributed. In 1911-12, 60 percent of payments made were less than 5s., while payments of 10s. or over occurred on only two occasions. In contrast, by 1921-22 only ten percent of payments were less than 5s., and 38 percent were of 10s. or more. This indicates, then, that just as in our preceding case studies, the size of outdoor relief cash payments increased in Wales too over the course of our period, contributing to higher annual outdoor relief expenditure into the 1920s. As in Spalding, we do not have the available data in the 1920s to consider whether Welsh payments increased in real value over the course of the decade. However, as stated in the Lincolnshire case study, consumer prices had more than doubled by 1922 from their 1914 levels, so it is possible to infer from the source material we do have that relief payments in Machynlleth did grow alongside prices in this same period, and therefore should not be necessarily interpreted as increased generosity.

Figure 5.10 Size of relief payments in Pennal district of Machynlleth poor law union, 1911-1912 and 1921-1922.



Source: NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH, 80-81, Machynlleth PLU, outdoor relief lists (Pennal district), 1911-12, 1921-22.

In Newtown's case, the increases in outdoor relief expenditure shown in Figure 5.8 were particularly large –too large to be attributed solely to larger outdoor relief payments. The scale and period in which these increases occurred resemble those experienced in our Staffordshire case study, where they were generated by spiralling regional unemployment. Central Wales is not an area typically associated with the unemployment problems of this period, as a largely agricultural region where the heavy and manufacturing industries most badly affected played a relatively minor role in the regional economy and labour market. Indeed, historians of Welsh interwar

unemployment have mostly focused on heavily industrialised south Wales, or on the mining areas of northern Wales, with relatively little attention paid to the zone in between, where our unions were situated.¹²⁵ Does Newtown's higher outdoor relief expenditure in the 1920s, and its similarity with trends observed in north Staffordshire, indicate that unemployment was a bigger problem, and therefore had more of an impact on local welfare provision, than has previously been acknowledged for mid-Wales?

A closer examination of the pauperism returns for the 1920s indicates that increased unemployment was a larger and more consistent element in Newtown's poor law administration than in Llanfyllin or Machynlleth. The pauperism returns from the interwar period specified how many outdoor relief recipients were relieved on account of unemployment; Figures 5.11-12 below display these numbers for our three Welsh unions. It demonstrates that while unemployment barely made a dent on Machynlleth's pauperism levels, and did not do so in Llanfyllin until the later parts of the decade, it accounted for at least 20 percent of Newtown's outdoor relief cohort in these years, and in 1927-28 this rose to 50 percent. The impact of unemployment here was not of the same scale as that encountered in Stafford and Newcastle-under-Lyme, or in mining communities in south Wales. Nevertheless, even in this less industrial parts of mid-Wales, increased unemployment was felt in local poor law administration. Existing studies which have demonstrated the continued role of the poor law in relieving the unemployed in the 1920s, such as those by Marjorie Levine-Clark and Anne Digby, have focused on heavily industrial areas in the north of England and in south Staffordshire;¹²⁶ this case study, however, reveals a local poor law system doing the same type of work, albeit not on the same scale, in a much less urbanised region. Moreover, this is arguably an example where looking at a locality through the lens of the poor law during this period reveals regional experiences that otherwise go unnoticed.

¹²⁵ See for instance Bruley, *Women and Men of 1926*; A. Chandler, 'The Black Death on wheels: unemployment and migration – the experience of inter-war South Wales', *Paupers in Modern Welsh History*, 1 (1982), pp.88-108; D. Leeworthy, 'A diversion from the new leisure: Greyhound racing, working-class culture, and the politics of unemployment in inter-war South Wales', *Sport in History*, 32:1 (2012), pp.53-73; S. Thompson, *Unemployment, Poverty and Health in Interwar South Wales* (Cardiff, 2006); Ward, *Unemployment and the State in Britain*; Campbell, Gildart and McIlroy (eds.), *Industrial Politics and the 1926 Mining Lock-out*.

¹²⁶ A. Digby, 'Changing welfare cultures in regions and state', *Twentieth Century British History*, 17:3 (2006), pp.297-232; M. Levine-Clark, *Unemployment, Welfare and Masculine Citizenship: 'So Much Honest Poverty' in Britain, 1870-1930* (Basingstoke, 2015).

Figure 5.11 No. of paupers receiving relief on account of unemployment in Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown poor law unions, on 1st January 1922-1929.

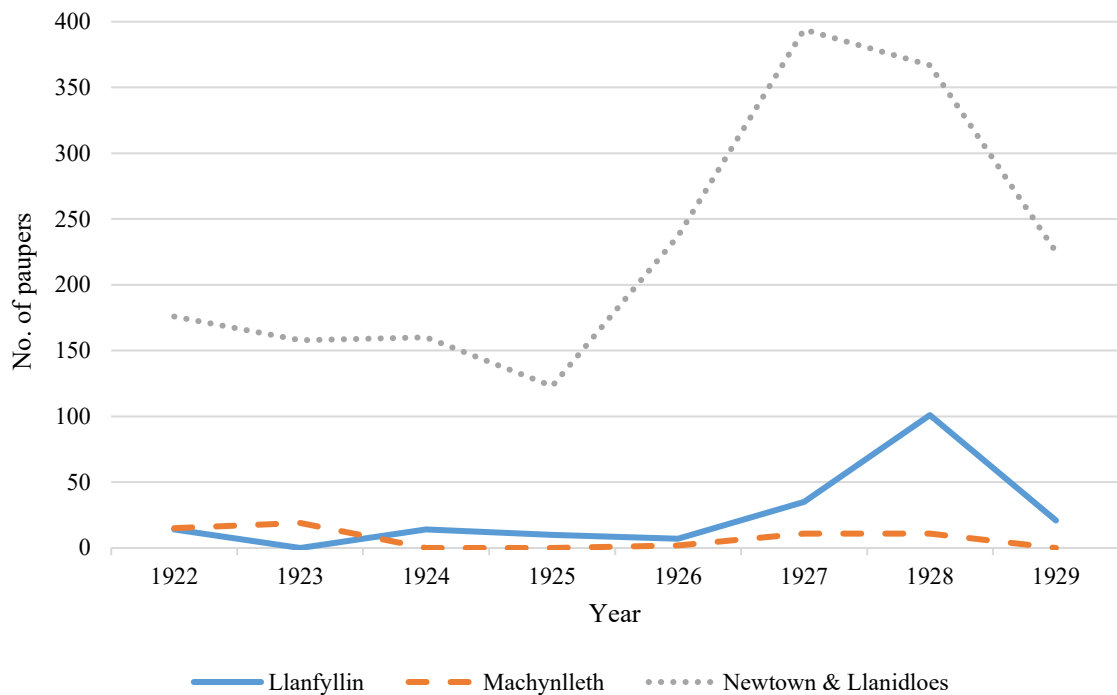
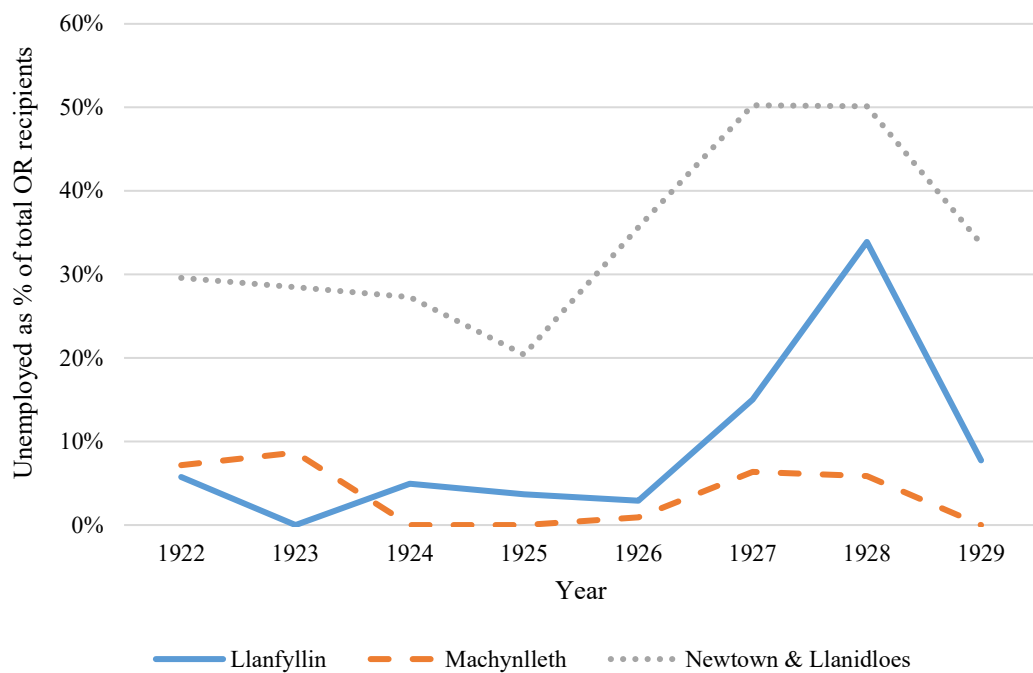


Figure 5.12 Percentage of outdoor relief recipients from total outdoor relief recipients on account of unemployment in Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown poor law unions on 1st January 1922-1929.



Source [Figures 5.12-13]: MoH, Half-yearly pauperism returns for England and Wales, 1922-1929 [5.12-13].

A survey of the Newtown guardians' minutes confirms that unemployment became a significant problem in the union during the early 1920s. A clear expression of this is found in April 1922, when the Newtown board successfully applied to the Unemployment Grants Committee for funds to undertake drainage and sewage disposal works on the workhouse site, in which half of unskilled labour employed was to be unemployed ex-servicemen in receipt of relief.¹²⁷ The Unemployment Grants Committee was the government body set up in December 1920 to financially support relief work schemes organised by local authorities to address unemployment.¹²⁸ One of the Committee's key principles was that grants 'would be approved only in areas where the existence of serious unemployment, which was not otherwise provided for, was certified by the Ministry of Labour'.¹²⁹ Its approval of the Newtown guardians' scheme, therefore, indicates that levels of local unemployment were sufficiently severe to warrant central assistance in the wake of the First World War.

Indeed, relief works of various kinds continued to feature in the Newtown board's approach to unemployment later in the decade. Throughout the 1920s, they collaborated with other local bodies to devise ways of offering work to unemployed men. This involved sharing information about unemployed recipients of outdoor relief with local labour exchanges, or with other local authorities such as county, rural, urban or borough councils, and sometimes requesting that outdoor relief recipients were prioritised in allocations to work programmes.¹³⁰ In 1923, the guardians collaborated with two relief works projects organised by the Newtown Urban District Council, where the guardians paid the council the funds that would have otherwise been disbursed as outdoor relief to men employed on these schemes, and the council in turn paid the labourers' wages.¹³¹ In the second of these projects, which involved the erection of six 'workmen's dwelling-houses', it was a condition of the contract that 75 percent of labour would be outdoor relief recipients with families.¹³² Similarly, in July 1928 the

¹²⁷ PA, M/G/N/M/24, Newtown PLU, GMB, 19th April 1922; 17th May 1922.

¹²⁸ For the operation of the Unemployment Grants Committee, see K. Hancock, 'The reduction of unemployment as a problem of public policy', *Economic History Review*, 15:2 (1962), pp.334-338; W.R. Garside, *British Unemployment, 1919-1939: A Study in Public Policy* (Cambridge, 1990), pp.302-306; Levine-Clark, *Unemployment*, pp.154-155.

¹²⁹ Garside, *British Unemployment*, p.303.

¹³⁰ See for instance PA, M/G/N/M/24, Newtown PLU, GMB, 15th November 1922.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 17th January 1923, 21st March 1923.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 21st March 1923.

Newtown board co-ordinated with the Newtown Rural District Council on a road widening scheme, where men in receipt of poor relief were again prioritised in exchange for the guardians paying to the council the amount which the men were receiving in relief.¹³³ In the same month, they also agreed with a contractor employed to paint the outside of the workhouse that he would only employ men currently in receipt of relief.¹³⁴ All four of these projects were sanctioned by the MoH.

This thread of relief works throughout the 1920s is suggestive in three ways. First, the MoH's approval of all these projects indicates that local and central welfare bodies were united in recognising that regional unemployment levels needed to be addressed. The impact of increased unemployment on welfare provision in this part of semi-rural Wales throughout the 1920s was therefore acknowledged. Secondly, their collaboration with other parts of local government underlines the importance of relationships with other regional authorities in relieving welfare pressures – an element of poor law administration which will be expanded on in Section 5.7. Thirdly, the arrangement where the guardians in effect continued to pay outdoor relief to men employed on relief works, but via their collaborative partner instead of directly to the applicants themselves, tells us something about the guardians' priorities, and their view of the relationship between work and relief. The Newtown board were not really moving families off poor relief by developing these projects, because they continued to pay out the same amounts per individual as if relief works had not been in operation. This suggests, therefore, that limiting relief expenditure was not necessarily the guardians' top priority here. It was more important for unemployed people to work in exchange for relief, preventing the 'demoralising' impact of receiving support without labour conditions attached, recalling the concerns raised in the Staffordshire unions about 'demoralisation' of different categories of vagrant. Indeed, when in August 1928 the MoH inspector James Evans suggested that the guardians might prefer the road-widening scheme to be 'taken as task work, which would enable the guardians to continue to relieve the men, half the relief being given in money and half in kind', the Newtown board decided to stand by the original plan to pay the council who would then

¹³³ PA, M/G/N/M/26, Newtown PLU, GMB, 11th July 1928.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

pay the working men.¹³⁵ The guardians clearly preferred outdoor relief to the unemployed to resemble ‘ordinary’ work as closely as possible.

Beyond these projects explicitly addressing the relief of the unemployed, this category of relief applicants impacted on other areas of welfare administration in Newtown union. On the face of it, the Newtown board’s approach bore little resemblance to those observed in Stafford and Newcastle-under-Lyme. No defined relief scale for unemployed applicants is recorded, no sub-committees focused specifically on unemployment were formed, and the union did not require substantial loans to cover outdoor relief costs. In other words, few structural changes to ordinary relief operations were made in Newtown. However, it is nevertheless evident that unemployment relief created a considerable amount of extra work on an everyday basis over the course of the 1920s. For instance, guardians, relieving officers and the clerk spent substantial time and effort reviewing unemployment cases where relief had been given on loan, assessing whether there was scope for repayments, and in some cases pursuing this reimbursement.¹³⁶ The district relief committees, of which there were two, met weekly instead of fortnightly (as previously) to interview unemployed applicants and investigate their circumstances.¹³⁷ This category of applicants also generated more bureaucracy, as the MoH requested regular returns and sometimes additional lists detailing those relieved on account of unemployment, as well as reports on individual cases.¹³⁸ Unemployment relief thus became a sizeable part of Newtown’s administration during this decade.

This additional pressure is illustrated in a dispute between the MoH and the Newtown guardians about the use of pay stations. These were rented rooms or offices where relief applicants met with the relieving officer of their district to receive payments, answer queries and provide updates on their circumstances. The use of pay stations was an established practice in Newtown because its geography could make travel problematic – the region’s dramatic hill and valley landscape, peppered with remote villages and isolated dwellings, meant it was more efficient for paupers to

¹³⁵ Ibid., 15th August 1928.

¹³⁶ PA, M/G/N/M/25, Newtown PLU, GMB, 19th March 1924, 18th June 1924.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 6th October 1925.

¹³⁸ PA, M/G/N/M/24, Newtown PLU, GMB, 20th September 1922; PA, M/G/N/M/26, Newtown PLU, GMB, 23rd November 1927, 21st March 1928.

converge on central locations than for relieving officers to visit families individually at home. Monthly visits to pauper dwellings were introduced in July 1921, as a compromise with the MoH who had asked the Newtown board to consider paying applicants in their own homes, with relieving officers travelling 'by motor bicycle' in between appointments, instead of maintaining pay stations.¹³⁹ In response to a further government request to abolish pay stations in 1922, the Newtown clerk reported that although the monthly visiting policy had entailed 'much extra labour' for the relieving officers, it largely worked smoothly until the number of unemployed relief applicants increased to the point at which 'it was found extremely difficult to carry out the arrangement.'¹⁴⁰ He argued that 'under the present circumstances it would be practically impossible' to pay all relief at the homes of applicants 'unless additional assistance was given'.¹⁴¹ As a result of the clerk's findings, the Newtown guardians applied to the MoH for continued sanction of their pay stations. When the central authority replied two months later, however, they maintained that they would prefer the Newtown board to hire additional staff to implement weekly visitations, and asked the guardians to reconsider.¹⁴²

The board appointed a committee to examine the question further, but their report delivered to their colleagues in October 1922 was emphatic. They pointed out that 'the times in which we are living are anything but normal, as is proved by the great increase in the number of persons relieved as compared with previous years.'¹⁴³ Of the 250 families on outdoor relief in the union at the time, 52 of these – 20 percent – were being relieved on account of unemployment. The committee also emphasised that the unemployed were all relieved in kind, which resulted in 'a considerable amount of extra clerical work', and that this category of applicant required weekly visits 'as their cases are different to the ordinary poor and subject to more frequent changes, often necessitating extra visits, and alterations in the amount of relief granted'. These conditions contributed to the relieving officers' 'great difficulty at present in carrying out their duties', including continuing monthly home visits. The difficult terrain of the union was again underlined, as the committee described it as 'rough and very hilly, and

¹³⁹ PA, M/G/N/M/24, Newtown PLU, GMB, 20th July 1921.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 17th July 1922.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 20th September 1922.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 18th October 1922.

in many cases difficult to access'. Despite the strain on outdoor relief administration they clearly outlined, the committee did not want to employ more staff, arguing that this would just cause further expense and pressure on the ratepayers, who were already experiencing 'great difficulty... in meeting the demands of the overseers, without adding anything thereto'.¹⁴⁴ Instead, they recommended continuing existing arrangements 'until we arrive at normal times, when the unemployed would cease to be chargeable, and greatly reduce the work of distributing out-relief'.¹⁴⁵ The matter was for the time being allowed to rest.

This exchange demonstrates how, as in our Staffordshire case study, existing welfare systems were strained by increased unemployment and boards were reluctant to put additional pressure on ratepayers. There was also, similarly to Spalding, a disconnect between central and local understandings of the unions' physical landscape. Newtown's poor were not clustered together in a handful of areas in a large city or manufacturing district, or even conveniently located along a train line. They were scattered throughout a union of significant size, larger than many English unions, where the geography could be unforgiving. The inhospitable nature of some Welsh landscapes had long been a concern of poor law officials – in his work on medical negligence under the nineteenth-century poor law, Kim Price highlighted that Welsh-based poor law doctors often had to cover greater distances than many working in England, and were inhibited by a relatively poor road network and hazardous topography.¹⁴⁶ In their requests that Newtown visit all paupers in their homes, the MoH neglected to take these topographical conditions sufficiently into account, and their suggestions – such as the use of motorbikes and employment of additional staff – to address them were oblivious to the implications of vehicle breakdown on muddy Welsh hillsides, for instance, and were considered inappropriate by the Newtown board.

This stand-off contributes to the image laid out in the opening of this chapter of central Wales as a peripheral place, at significant distance from central government, physically difficult to navigate, and ill-understood by outside officials. It also suggests the presence of a 'peripheral welfare culture', in that the Newtown board, having

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ K. Price, *Medical Negligence in Victorian Britain: The Crisis of Care under the English Poor Law, c.1834-1900* (London, 2015), pp.170-171.

compromised once with the government regarding their recommendations on relief distribution, were thereafter reluctant to change their own systems any further. Indeed, when inspector James Evans raised the abolition of pay stations again in 1923, when the impact of unemployment had lessened for the time being, the board's response was if possible more forceful than in 1922. They reiterated the impracticality of paying all outdoor relief at applicants' homes 'owing to the nature of the district', in many parts of which motorbikes would be of limited utility off the main roads. They also stated that while the board could 'understand the necessity of a weekly visit in industrial areas where the circumstances of the poor are subject to frequent changes... in a district like this, where circumstances rarely, if ever, change', such visits were unnecessary. Moreover, the report produced on the issue stated that 'the guardians particularly desire me [the clerk] to point out that they are personally acquainted with the poor in the parishes they respectively represent and are soon made aware of any changes in the circumstances of the recipients of relief. Consequently, the poor are in no way neglected'.¹⁴⁷ This assertion of deep personal knowledge is of course in keeping with the approach of poor law guardians in Wales previously highlighted, whereby they advocated for the interests of poor and ratepayers from their own parishes in an explicit and sometimes adversarial way. The message could not have been clearer: the Newtown guardians understood their poor and local conditions much better than MoH officials and would continue formulating their policy in accordance with this superior knowledge, not in line with central recommendations. A 'peripheral welfare culture' was clearly at play here – central input on welfare administration was almost irrelevant, and unable to penetrate locally devised systems.

To briefly summarise, our Welsh unions were not experiencing an unemployment crisis on the same scale as in the Staffordshire case study. However, by examining these localities through the lens of the poor law, it has become apparent that unemployment nevertheless had a notable impact on welfare provision in semi-rural central Wales, an area which has not typically received much attention in existing work on unemployment in the 1920s and 1930s. We have also seen that the poor law formed part of a network of local authorities working together to address unemployment relief, and how the Newtown guardians used this network to help prioritise creating relief

¹⁴⁷ PA, M/G/N/M/25, Newtown PLU, GMB, 20th September 1923.

work schemes among unemployed relief recipients. Examining unemployment in this way has also revealed expressions of King and Stewart's 'peripheral welfare culture' in Newtown. Although central and local government were united in the view that unemployment relief was a problem, they did not always agree on how best to manage the situation. The Newtown guardians were not entirely uncompromising, but were nevertheless resistant to policy changes which did not sufficiently take into account the union's specific physical landscape or their own deep parish connections. Once more, a sense of community and local belonging shaped policy 'on the ground'.

5.7 Vagrancy in central Wales

This final section explores the issue of vagrancy in our Welsh unions. It examines the vagrancy policy in Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown, and suggests that even though there was variation in approach between these three unions, it is possible to see a regional network in policy formation. Unions were not operating in isolation, unaffected by the decisions of their neighbours. This section further argues that Welsh unions' lack of conformity with central directives about vagrancy is another expression of King and Stewart's 'welfare peripheries' model. Moreover, it seeks to expand this model, by suggesting not only that central government priorities and recommendations had little impact on a welfare periphery, but that smaller-scale local or regional bodies had significant influence over the policy development of such places. It emphasises that welfare peripheries should not be considered to be so isolated that they essentially functioned in a vacuum – just because they paid little attention to the LGB or MoH, it should not be assumed that they paid no attention to anyone else.

Rachel Vorspan summarised the views of poor law officials, both central and local, when she identified vagrancy as 'the most intractable problem confronting poor law administration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries'.¹⁴⁸ The LGB and the MoH both issued several directives aimed at controlling vagrant levels by co-ordinating regional approaches to the issue. For instance, the 1871 Pauper Inmate

¹⁴⁸ R. Vorspan, 'Vagrancy and the New Poor Law in late-Victorian and Edwardian England', *English Historical Review*, 92:362 (1977), p.59.

Discharge and Regulation Act set out how vagrants were to be treated upon admittance to the casual wards, followed by the 1882 Casual Poor Act, which specified that vagrants should be detained for two days following their admission, and for longer periods if they were admitted to the same workhouse more than once within a one-month period.¹⁴⁹ Subsequent orders in the early twentieth century made further efforts to foster uniformity and co-operation among unions. The Casual Paupers Order circulated in February 1913 encouraged the formation of joint vagrancy committees between boards of guardians to co-ordinate policy on diet, detention and work tasks for the casual poor.¹⁵⁰ This Order also recommended the use of way-ticket systems – upon entering a county, a vagrant would be issued a ticket specifying their route and destination, which would then give them access to casual wards and bread-stations along that route.¹⁵¹ Joint vagrancy committees were in fact being formed in some parts of England and Wales from the 1870s in order to ‘lay down common regimes on a mutual support basis’.¹⁵² The North Wales Joint Vagrancy Committee (hereafter NWJVC) was among these relatively early adopters, functioning at least since the early 1880s. Several directives then tried to reinforce existing regulations. In 1914, another Casual Paupers Order was issued relating to the dietary of casual paupers, reiterating that every pauper being discharged should be provided with a midday meal (either the food itself or a ticket entitling the carrier to a meal at specified locations),¹⁵³ and in 1925 the Casual Poor (Relief) Order collated most previous regulations, restating that vagrants should be detained over two nights, and should not be discharged on Sundays.¹⁵⁴

However, such directives never achieved any long-term impact on numbers of vagrants or strategies for dealing with vagrancy. Central government alleged that this was due to variations in levels of compliance with regulations, declaring that if poor law officials applied the rules ‘with sufficient rigour’, levels of vagrancy could be

¹⁴⁹ ‘Pauper Inmate Discharge and Regulation Act, 1871’ (34 & 35 Vic. c.108), summarised in LGB: *Annual Report, 1871-72* (1872), pp.57-60; ‘Casual Poor Act, 1882’ (45 & 46 Vic. c.36), summarised in LGB: *Annual Report, 1882-83* (1883), pp.62-70.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Local Government Board circular to Boards of Guardians, 4th February 1913’, as reproduced in LGB: *Annual Report, 1912-13* (1913), Cd.6980, pp.3-5.

¹⁵¹ D. Jones, *Crime, Protest, Community and Police in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Oxford, 2nd ed., 2016) p.191.

¹⁵² L. Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds: Vagrant Underworld in Britain 1815-1985* (London, 1988), p.85.

¹⁵³ ‘Casual Paupers Order, 1914’ as printed in *The London Gazette*, 25th September 1914, pp.7610-11.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Casual Poor (Relief) Order, 1925’ as printed in *The London Gazette*, 7th April 1925, pp.2391-94.

contained.¹⁵⁵ This view did not acknowledge the socio-economic factors that could result in higher levels of casual poor, but there was indeed a lack of uniformity among poor law unions' approach to vagrancy. As Glen Matthews bluntly puts it, guardians 'failed on every occasion to implement legislation in its entirety', and unions were reluctant to 'co-operate among themselves in these matters'.¹⁵⁶ Lionel Rose likewise suggests that the essentially parochial focus of the poor law and the police prevented both from effectively tackling the problem of vagrancy, in that local officials were less interested in tackling the causes of vagrancy than simply moving the problem – and its related expenses – out of their jurisdiction as quickly as possible.¹⁵⁷ Matthews also points to financial disincentives; many boards of guardians were not prepared to undertake the costs of a co-ordinated way-ticket system, preferring to keep closer control of expenditure by pursuing their own policy.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, Brian O'Leary argues that guardians were especially ill-inclined to spend money on vagrants, viewing them as a particularly undeserving class of pauper.¹⁵⁹ As neither the LGB nor the MoH could force their hands, unions could simply choose not to comply.

Vagrancy was certainly a long-standing problem in Wales, as in England. David Jones highlights at least eight flashpoints between the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars and the early 1890s when the issue became 'particularly acute' in Wales.¹⁶⁰ A similar pattern of fluctuation persisted into the twentieth century. Workhouse casual ward admissions reached record levels across England and Wales in the aftermath of the Boer War, followed by a decline from 1911 to the end of the First World War, after which numbers began to significantly increase once again.¹⁶¹ Poor law inspector Francis Bircham reported rising vagrancy levels in Wales between 1900 and 1905, from 56,057 vagrant admissions across Wales in the year ending Michaelmas 1900, to 123,000 in the year ending Michaelmas 1905, a number that had 'never been reached in any previous

¹⁵⁵ R. Humphreys, *No Fixed Abode: A History of Responses to the Roofless and the Rootless in Britain* (Basingstoke, 1999), p.107, 113.

¹⁵⁶ G. Matthews, 'The search for a cure for vagrancy in Worcestershire 1870-1920', *Midland History*, 11:1 (1986), p.100.

¹⁵⁷ Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds*, p.7. See also P. Lawrence, 'The Vagrancy Act (1924) and the persistence of pre-emptive policing in England since 1750', *British Journal of Criminology*, 57:3 (2017), pp.513-531.

¹⁵⁸ Matthews, 'Search for a cure for vagrancy', p.100.

¹⁵⁹ B. O'Leary, 'A reluctant response to vagrancy: the evolution of Poor Law casual relief in England and Wales 1834-1919', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2014), p.493.

¹⁶⁰ Jones, 'A dead loss to the community', p.315.

¹⁶¹ Humphreys, *No Fixed Abode*, p.113, 116, 125.

year'.¹⁶² Peter Harding Roberts, clerk to the Holywell board of guardians in northern Flintshire and secretary to the North Wales Poor Law Conference, likewise stated in his evidence to the Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in May 1905 that 60,916 people were relieved in north Welsh casual wards in 1904 (the population of the district at the time was just under 500,000).¹⁶³ As was the case in most places, the First World War drastically reduced vagrancy levels in Wales, but poor law inspector Hugh Williams highlighted in 1920 that 'since the end of 1918 there has been an upward trend'.¹⁶⁴ Levels of vagrancy remained high across much of Wales and England for most of the 1920s.

Roberts' 1905 evidence provides a useful overview of practice concerning vagrants among north Welsh unions. He described an almost complete lack of uniformity between unions, with variation in separate cell provision, dietaries, work tasks, use of ticket systems and length of detention.¹⁶⁵ Acts, orders and circulars issued by central government 'do not appear to be strictly enforced in any of the unions', with the exception of the detention of vagrants over Sundays, which most north Welsh boards applied consistently.¹⁶⁶ Aside from this, only four unions enforced a system where vagrants were issued a ticket by an Assistant Relieving Officer for Vagrancy (usually a police officer), the colour of which denoted how many nights they would be detained and how much work they would be required to do; in the North Wales district's remaining 16 unions, vagrants were often only detained for one night (in spite of LGB specifications that detention should be over two nights).¹⁶⁷ Overall, Roberts portrayed the guardians in his district as overly lenient towards this class of pauper. Indeed, he reported one suggestion from an unidentified board that 'as a remedy... we should treat vagrants more leniently, to treat them as Christians'.¹⁶⁸

How did this depiction of vagrancy in Wales manifest itself in Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown? Both Llanfyllin and Machynlleth asked the central

¹⁶² LGB: *Annual Report, 1900-01* (1901), Cd.746, p.173; LGB: *Annual Report, 1901-02* (1902), Cd.1231, p.144; LGB: *Annual Report, 1902-03* (1903), Cd.1700, p.156-157; LGB: *Annual Report, 1903-04* (1904), Cd.2214, p.245; LGB: *Annual Report, 1904-05* (1905), Cd.2661, p.531.

¹⁶³ *Report of the Departmental Committee on Vagrancy 1906: Vol II* (1906), Cd.2891, p.195.

¹⁶⁴ MoH: *Annual Report, 1919-20* (1920), Cmd.932, p.127.

¹⁶⁵ *Departmental Committee on Vagrancy 1906: Vol II*, p.195.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.198.

authorities to take action on the issue of vagrancy. As early as July 1902, the Llanfyllin board resolved ‘that the Local Government Board be pressed to deal with the question of vagrancy which has become very urgent’.¹⁶⁹ They passed a similar resolution in August 1911 as ‘the number of vagrants [appears] to be increasing’.¹⁷⁰ Machynlleth union was without casual wards of their own for over a decade after closing down their workhouse; however, they expressed similar views when new casual wards were opened in 1927, stating that ‘the time has arrived for the Government to deal with [increases in casual poor admissions]... as the numbers have become so great that it is no longer justifiable to ask Boards of Guardians to make provision for them’.¹⁷¹ Although the surviving minutes of the Newtown board do not include similar calls for government intervention, there is evidence that they were also affected by it – for instance, in November 1908 the workhouse master highlighted a ‘considerable increase’ in the number of vagrants being admitted to the workhouse.¹⁷² The Newtown guardians also supported a resolution circulated in November 1928 arguing that the cost of medically examining casual paupers for signs of smallpox ought to be covered by central government, not individual unions or vagrancy committees.¹⁷³ This at least suggests that Newtown were not averse to more central support on issues related to the casual poor, even if they did not lobby the LGB or MoH to address the question. The three unions, then, were united in the view that central government should take a greater role in vagrancy management. This might seem at odds with evidence presented above, where the Newtown board rejected MoH intervention over unemployment relief administration; however, this may be connected to the nature of this particular problem. When Newtown guardians resisted increased visitations at paupers’ homes, they argued that they had deep knowledge of their own poor who lived in their parish, and knew best how to manage their cases. Vagrancy, by contrast, was often perceived as an issue coming from outside the union – indeed, from outside Wales. In 1905, Francis Bircham reported that ‘vagrants are not as yet diminishing in numbers in Wales, but we in this district are rather more sinned against than sinning in this respect, most of this class

¹⁶⁹ PA, M/G/B/8/21, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 17th July 1902.

¹⁷⁰ PA, M/G/B/8/25, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 3rd August 1911.

¹⁷¹ NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 7, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 3rd August 1927.

¹⁷² *Montgomeryshire Echo*, 28th November 1908, p.4.

¹⁷³ PA, M/G/N/M/27, Newtown PLU, GMB, 21st November 1928.

coming from other parts of the country'.¹⁷⁴ Harding Roberts also highlighted that most vagrants in Wales were English or Irish, arguing that Welsh unions should not 'be called upon to maintain persons who are not of their own nationality nor of their own chargeability'.¹⁷⁵ In other words, vagrants were not local people and would not have been classed by guardians as 'our poor' – they should not therefore be administered by boards of guardians.¹⁷⁶

Another indication that all three unions were struggling under the pressures of increasing vagrancy in the 1920s was that they all undertook building work during that decade to improve their facilities for the casual poor. The Machynlleth guardians, having disposed of their casual wards in 1916, found themselves under pressure from the MoH from 1922 onwards to provide accommodation for vagrants.¹⁷⁷ They eventually purchased a site for new casual wards known as Newlands on the outskirts of Machynlleth town costing £2,058 17s. 8d. in September 1927, and spent a further £991 on adapting it, including installing a disinfecter and improving the heating arrangements.¹⁷⁸ Likewise, the casual wards at both Llanfyllin and Newtown's workhouses underwent improvements during the 1920s, including extensions to day rooms and dormitories, and improving sanitary and heating arrangements.¹⁷⁹ Many of these alterations were in keeping with the increased emphasis on public health, sanitation and control of infectious disease nationally, referred to above in reference to Machynlleth's workhouse closure, but also suggest that existing facilities were not adequate to cater for the numbers of casual poor facing the guardians.

Indeed, this pressure to provide adequate accommodation for vagrants provoked intra-union tension. When the Machynlleth guardians began searching for existing buildings which could be modified into new casual wards, local objections were plentiful. In October 1925, when poor law inspector James Evans complained that there had been no progress in providing casual accommodation in Machynlleth since it was

¹⁷⁴ LGB: *Annual Report, 1904-05* (1905), Cd.2661, p.277.

¹⁷⁵ *Departmental Committee on Vagrancy 1906: Vol II*, p.196.

¹⁷⁶ This is perhaps evidence of local xenophobia in operation, as discussed in Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp.28-80.

¹⁷⁷ NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 4, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 21st June 1922.

¹⁷⁸ NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 7, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 28th September 1927, 21st December 1927.

¹⁷⁹ See for instance PA, M/G/N/M/25, Newtown PLU, GMB, 21st May 1924; PA, M/G/N/M/26, Newtown PLU, GMB, 20th October 1926; PA, M/G/B/8/29, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 10th September 1925; PA, M/G/B/8/30, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 1st November 1928.

highlighted as a problem over three years ago, he was informed that ‘the Board and the delegates of the Machynlleth UDC had done their utmost to obtain sites, but that public opposition had been made to every site’.¹⁸⁰ This statement implies that the Machynlleth guardians and MUDC were working together; however, other evidence suggests it was the MUDC who took every opportunity to reject potential sites. When the board suggested the purchase of three cottages in Machynlleth town for conversion in March 1924, the MUDC registered their disapproval almost immediately (a view subsequently supported by the MoH).¹⁸¹ In February 1926, when the issue was still unresolved, the MUDC asked the board to send them a list of proposed sites ‘for their consideration before anything is decided upon’.¹⁸² The clerk did so, and at the following board meeting received the MUDC response, stating that ‘in the interests of [Machynlleth] inhabitants generally they objected to all the sites mentioned, such being in, or in too close proximity to the town and asking the Board to kindly secure a site outside the urban area’. They also informed the guardians that the MUDC’s objections had been communicated to the owners of the listed sites, asking them not to sell – an obstructive strategy they deployed again later in the year.¹⁸³

By the time the guardians settled on the Newlands property as an appropriate casual ward site, it appears that they chose not to involve the MUDC. The board resolved to purchase Newlands in January 1927.¹⁸⁴ In March, they received an indignant letter from the MUDC stating ‘that they regretted that, as representatives of the ratepayers of the town, they had not been made officially acquainted with the proposal of this Board to acquire Newlands and that as they considered the best interests of the town would be seriously affected, they had decided to strongly oppose the proposal’. The guardians’ response was quelling. It reminded the MUDC that the guardians had a statutory duty to provide accommodation for vagrants and that they had tried their best to work with the MUDC until ‘such co-operation was no longer practicable’.¹⁸⁵ Perhaps suitably chastened, the MUDC backpedalled, deciding ‘to give the Council’s blessing to the project’ and even asking the guardians to bring the union’s indoor poor back from

¹⁸⁰ NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 7, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 28th October 1925.

¹⁸¹ NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 4, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 19th March 1924, 16th April 1924.

¹⁸² NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 7, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 17th February 1926.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 17th March 1926, 29th September 1926.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 26th January 1927.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 16th March 1927.

Caersws to be housed at Newlands – a request which the board studiously ignored.¹⁸⁶ These interactions suggest a strained if not openly obstructionist relationship within Machynlleth itself, where union policy, or in this case union statutory requirements, was at odds with the priorities of other local authority bodies. This episode also indicates how local government structures such as Urban District Councils were able to impede or restrict poor law authorities, if not in the end actually prevent them from acting. Indeed, in this instance the poor law appears as a system being squeezed – by local democratic government bodies and the priorities of the local communities in which it operated on one side, and the implementation of centrally-generated legal requirements on the other. The poor law was not just intertwining and overlapping with the new social policy reforms of the period, but also with other elements of local government.

Aside from the common experiences of increased vagrancy levels and workhouse alterations as a response, the strategies employed for handling vagrants by the three unions did lack uniformity in much the way that Roberts described in 1905. For instance, although a ticket system was in place in Llanfyllin and Newtown, it did not quite align with the system as outlined by Roberts. According to his evidence, red tickets were given to ‘bona fide working men’ who would be admitted for one night and discharged without a labour task; white tickets denoted ‘real’ vagrants, who would be detained for two nights and required to complete a labour task in the intervening day; blue tickets marked a vagrant who had returned to the same casual ward for the second time within a one-month period, and would be detained for three nights and required to complete a larger volume of work, whether that be stone-breaking, oakum picking or another form of labour.¹⁸⁷ It appears that Llanfyllin practised a slight variation on this. In June 1907, a casual pauper admitted on a red ticket refused to perform a task of work and was sentenced to 14 days’ imprisonment with hard labour,¹⁸⁸ suggesting either that red tickets were used for a different category in Llanfyllin, or that in that union ‘bona fide working men’ were still expected to complete a work task. It also seems that Llanfyllin adopted a somewhat flexible approach to the system – in December 1904, the guardians asked the Assistant Relieving Officer for Vagrants to ‘exercise his discretion whenever a person applies for admission on a second occasion as to whether to grant a

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 13th April 1927.

¹⁸⁷ *Departmental Committee on Vagrancy 1906: Vol II*, p.195.

¹⁸⁸ PA, M/G/B/8/23, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 13th June 1907.

white or blue ticket'.¹⁸⁹ Meanwhile, in Newtown, the police officer who dealt with vagrants was asked in April 1901 to give red tickets to all able-bodied male vagrants, apparently regardless of whether they were 'habitual' vagrants or not¹⁹⁰ – which differs both from Roberts's description of the system and Llanfyllin's apparent implementation. Even with a ticket system in place, then, the categorisation and treatment of casual paupers was not set in stone, both within and between unions. As a result, it seems likely that individual vagrants might be categorised and therefore treated differently depending on which union they entered – almost an exemplar for the lack of uniformity bemoaned by Roberts and others.

One aspect of vagrant treatment the ticket system was supposed to regulate was length of detention. According to LGB and MoH directives, casual paupers were to be detained for at least two nights and were not to be discharged on Sundays. However, once again discrepancies can be observed between our three unions. In August 1912, the Llanfyllin workhouse master reported that he had been detaining casual paupers being admitted for the first time for two days and reported as a result 'a large decrease in the number relieved' (without specifying any figures); as a result, the guardians decided to continue this practice.¹⁹¹ This implies that two-day detention was not always carried out in earlier years; in February 1913, the master reported on the effect of two-day detention over the previous five months as compared with the corresponding five months of 1911-12, 'showing a decrease [in casual admissions] of 900'.¹⁹² This caused some classic problems caused by severe casual ward administration that have been highlighted by Vorspan: 'sleeping out, begging, and petty crime'.¹⁹³ In this same meeting, Llangadfan guardian Robert Hughes drew attention to 'the nuisance caused by Tramps begging and sleeping in outbuildings of farms'.¹⁹⁴ It seems likely that this issue was more pressing given the timing of the discussion: February conditions on the Welsh hills would have been brutal for itinerant poor trying to avoid a stricter casual regime. It is possible that Hughes was partly motivated by this, although his use of the word 'nuisance' suggests less humanitarian interests. From this point onwards, two-day detention nevertheless

¹⁸⁹ PA, M/6/B/8/22, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 1st December 1904.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 10th April 1901.

¹⁹¹ PA, M/6/B/8/25, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 1st August 1912.

¹⁹² Ibid., 13th February 1913.

¹⁹³ Vorspan, 'Vagrancy and the New Poor Law', p.64.

¹⁹⁴ PA, M/6/B/8/25, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 13th February 1913.

became standard practice in Llanfyllin – in response to two enquiries on the subject in 1926, the Llanfyllin clerk reported that casuals were detained for two nights.¹⁹⁵

Surviving evidence also indicates that Llanfyllin consistently detained over Sundays – the clerk replied to a query from Aberystwyth Union on the practice that they did so in December 1906, and gave the same response to James Evans in January 1926.¹⁹⁶

In Newtown's case, however, two-night detention was not always implemented in our period, although it seems to have been partially in place by mid-1928. In September 1901, the board decided to abolish detention of vagrants for more than one night for a one-month trial period, which there is no record of being revoked¹⁹⁷ – implying that prior to this, some casual paupers were detained for longer periods. In addition, casuals were not always detained over Sundays in Newtown, which according to Roberts' evidence makes the union something of an anomaly within Wales. Newtown were still pursuing this approach in the early to mid-1920s,¹⁹⁸ but were moving back towards two-night detentions by the June quarter of 1927, when 347 of the 562 vagrants relieved in its casual ward over that period had been detained over two nights;¹⁹⁹ by August 1928, two-night detention was being implemented in all cases.²⁰⁰

Why did Llanfyllin and Newtown pursue different policies in this area? It seems there were a number of contributory factors. In November 1921, when explaining the lack of Sunday detentions in the union in response to a query from the NWJVC, the Newtown clerk stated that this was 'owing to the increase in the number of vagrants and the want of accommodation it has been found impossible to do so'.²⁰¹ Newtown's workhouse was actually larger than Llanfyllin's, so it might seem odd that Llanfyllin, with a smaller institution, was apparently consistently able to detain for two nights when Newtown was not. This may be connected less with the actual capacity of the wards and more with the conditions and available facilities and staff in them; prior to building work undertaken on the Caersws workhouse in the late 1920s, the MoH

¹⁹⁵ PA, M/6/B/8/29, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 25th January 1926, 25th February 1926.

¹⁹⁶ PA, M/6/B/8/23, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 27th December 1906; PA, M/6/B/8/29, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 25th January 1926.

¹⁹⁷ PA, M/G/N/M/23, Newtown PLU, GMB, 25th September 1901.

¹⁹⁸ See PA, M/G/N/M/24, Newtown PLU, GMB, 16th November 1921; PA, M/G/N/M/25, Newtown PLU, GMB, 20th February 1924; PA, M/G/N/M/26, Newtown PLU, GMB, 10th November 1926.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19th October 1927.

²⁰⁰ PA, M/G/N/M/27, Newtown PLU, GMB, 15th August 1928.

²⁰¹ PA, M/G/N/M/24, Newtown PLU, GMB, 16th November 1921.

inspector commented more than once that the casual accommodation left much to be desired, ‘especially as regards heating and the arrangements for drying clothes’.²⁰² It is possible, then, that Newtown’s facilities were not in a fit state to manage a certain level of vagrants for more than one night. It is after further alteration and extension work had been completed that indications begin to arise in the surviving minutes that two-night detention was being pursued, which further suggests that inadequate facilities were the main hindrance.

The Newtown board also gave another explanation for their detention practice: they were constrained by the vagrant policies pursued by neighbouring unions. In November 1921, the clerk highlighted that there were no vagrancy wards in operation at adjacent unions Forden or Machynlleth,²⁰³ implying that this increased pressure on Newtown’s wards and made it harder to detain over Sundays. A similar point was raised in February 1924, when a committee appointed to respond to a critical MoH report stated that ‘adjoining Unions detain vagrants for one night only, and unless they adopt the two nights’ detention it would not be practicable in this Union’.²⁰⁴ Of the six unions which bordered Newtown, we already know that Llanfyllin was largely pursuing two-night detention, and that Machynlleth was not operating casual wards until slightly later in the decade. The committee must therefore have been referring to some or all of the remaining four: Forden, Knighton, Rhyader and Aberystwyth. It is striking that, in this sense, Newtown and adjacent unions in mid-Wales were pursuing a kind of uniformity in vagrancy practice, as the LGB and MoH were advocating for, even though the practice itself was at odds with vagrancy legislation. Moreover, Newtown was clearly concerned about the export of vagrancy problems from other unions – a perennial problem with central government schemes to reduce expenditure and/or levels of pauperism without addressing the underlying causes of poverty or welfare dependency that stretched back to the crusade against outdoor relief in the late nineteenth century, where social problems were moved around a region rather than solved.²⁰⁵ Centrally formulated policy thus continued to fail to control for ‘overflow’ of this kind which made actual implementation ‘on the ground’ problematic.

²⁰² PA, M/G/N/M/26, Newtown PLU, GMB, 20th January 1926.

²⁰³ PA, M/G/N/M/24, Newtown PLU, GMB, 16th November 1921.

²⁰⁴ PA, M/G/N/M/25, Newtown PLU, GMB, 20th February 1924.

²⁰⁵ See for instance Hurren, *Protesting About Pauperism*, p.152.

These references to the policies of other boards suggests that unions existed in a regional network of influence and impact. Although the Newtown guardians were not following central regulations to the letter, they were clearly paying attention to the practices of their neighbours and factoring them into their own decision-making. In this case, it is likely that Newtown feared quickly becoming overwhelmed with casual poor who had been discharged after one night in neighbour unions if they themselves detained for two. The minutes of all three unions record both the receipt of queries from other unions regarding vagrant policy, and of our boards making similar enquiries of their neighbours – more specific communications than the circulars and copies of resolutions regularly received from boards across England and Wales. For instance, in November 1914 Machynlleth received responses from Newtown, Dolgelley and Aberystwyth unions to a query about the locations of their food stations and expenditure on midday meals for discharged vagrants;²⁰⁶ Llanfyllin received a letter from Forden union in 1903 on the subject of disinfecting vagrants' clothes,²⁰⁷ and from Aberystwyth in 1906 about Sunday detentions.²⁰⁸ On occasion, these communications made explicit reference to how the practices of one union were impacting on another. In May 1925, for example, the Llanfyllin board received a letter from the Corwen board (directly to Llanfyllin's north) complaining that nine vagrants discharged from Llanfyllin had been admitted to their workhouse and caused overcrowding, 'as all the men there [Corwen] had been detained there over Sunday'.²⁰⁹ The Llanfyllin guardians in turn complained to Forden union in February 1926 that 'casuals are not detained at their Institution over Sunday...causing a large number of men to visit Llanfyllin'.²¹⁰ In November 1926, Rhayader union's workhouse master wrote to the Newtown board pointing out that he was finding it difficult to carry out vagrancy regulations properly 'owing to the unusual number of tramps caused by their only being kept for one night at Caersws'.²¹¹ One union's vagrancy strategies almost always had consequences for their neighbours.

Regional co-operation and influence can be further explored through the lens of the NWJVC, a vehicle intended to facilitate collaboration. Again, our three unions

²⁰⁶ NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 3a, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 9th December 1914.

²⁰⁷ PA, M/G/B/8/22, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 29th January 1903.

²⁰⁸ PA, M/G/B/8/23, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 27th December 1906.

²⁰⁹ PA, M/G/B/8/29, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 21st May 1925.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25th February 1926.

²¹¹ PA, M/G/N/M/26, Newtown PLU, GMB, 10th November 1926.

differed - while Newtown was a member of the NWJVC, both Llanfyllin and Machynlleth declined to join on several occasions, even in the face of pressure from other unions and the central authorities. The Llanfyllin guardians, having previously considered and rejected a revised ticket scheme suggested by the NWJVC in 1913,²¹² opted in October 1914 to supply the midday meal required by the 1914 Casual Poor Order out of their own workhouse stores, rather than contributing to a district-wide system.²¹³ The NWJVC asked the Llanfyllin board to join the committee the following month, but the guardians chose not to.²¹⁴ Over the following 25 years (acknowledging that Llanfyllin's minutes are missing between spring 1915 and summer 1919), the union was asked at least nine additional times to consider joining the NWJVC, by both the committee itself and the MoH.²¹⁵ Every time, the Llanfyllin guardians declined. On one occasion, in May 1924, a deputation from the NWJVC attended a Llanfyllin guardians' meeting to make the case for joining the committee.²¹⁶ However the board again unanimously decided not to, stating that because two of Llanfyllin's adjoining unions, Forden and Oswestry, were not members either, 'the Board are of the opinion that no good purpose will be served in joining'.²¹⁷ More pressure was applied the following year, when in October 1925, inspector James Evans wrote to the Llanfyllin board pointing out that the NWJVC had applied for statutory powers, and 'that there is no time to lose if the Board wishes to join in', but the guardians continued to reject his advice, remaining outside the combination.²¹⁸

Machynlleth union's experience was very similar. When asked to join the NWJVC in October 1914, the Machynlleth clerk requested more information and contacted neighbouring unions to find out where their food stations were situated and expenditure on midday meal provision.²¹⁹ After considering his findings, however, the Machynlleth board decided not to join the committee.²²⁰ Machynlleth received advice

²¹² PA, M/6/B/8/26, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 31st July 1913.

²¹³ Ibid., 22nd October 1914.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 19th November 1914.

²¹⁵ PA, M/6/B/8/26-30, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 14th October 1914, 21st July 1921, 8th December 1921, 11th October 1923, 22nd May 1924, 21st May 1925, 8th October 1925, 5th November 1925, 29th December 1927.

²¹⁶ PA, M/6/B/8/29, Llanfyllin PLU, GMB, 22nd May 1925.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 19th June 1925.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 8th October 1925.

²¹⁹ NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 3a, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 11th November 1914.

²²⁰ Ibid., 3rd February 1915.

and requests to join the NWJVC at least seven times between 1921 and 1929, beginning shortly after concerns were first raised about Machynlleth's lack of casual poor provision.²²¹ In fact, the first was from Newtown union in October 1921, who wrote stating that 'this Board would be well advised to join the North Wales Vagrancy Committee'.²²² The Machynlleth guardians also received a visit from the committee's deputation in May 1924²²³ – evidently the NWJVC was having something of a recruitment drive prior to applying for statutory powers. The Machynlleth guardians appear to have put more consideration into requests than the Llanfyllin board, often asking the clerk to undertake some more research before they reconsidered. They also often prevaricated rather than explicitly refusing to join, repeatedly deferring the decision until various sub-committees had met or until after the union's new casual wards had been set up. On more than one occasion, the board decided to call a joint meeting between the guardians and the MUDC to consider the matter,²²⁴ but the results of such meetings were never reported in the guardians' minutes, perhaps suggesting that the decision had once again been delayed. This behaviour bears some resemblance to the union's earlier avoidant tactics when trying to avoid implementing the workhouse test. In response to the final recorded invitation from the NWJVC, in February 1929, the guardians responded with 'no action be taken at the present time'.²²⁵

Newtown union, however, consistently supported the idea of the joint committee, and it seems had been a member since its founding. In February 1920, the board passed a resolution stating that every board of guardians should be associated with a joint vagrancy committee,²²⁶ and we have seen that they shared these views with Machynlleth the following year. The guardians also unanimously supported the NWJVC in its request that the MoH make it compulsory for all boards to join a vagrancy committee in January 1923.²²⁷

Joint vagrancy committees were supposed to synchronise vagrant policy across several poor law unions. However, it was Newtown, the apparently enthusiastic member

²²¹ NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 3a-8a, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 6th October 1921, 30th November 1921, 31st October 1923, 10th June 1925, 30th September 1925, 28th October 1925, 13th February 1929.

²²² NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 4, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 6th October 1921.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 14th May 1924.

²²⁴ For instance, NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 7, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 10th June 1925.

²²⁵ NLW, GB0210 EVANSMACH 8a, Machynlleth PLU, GMB, 13th February 1929.

²²⁶ PA, M/G/N/M/24, Newtown PLU, GMB, 18th February 1920.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17th January 1923.

of the NWJVC, who did not adhere to central regulations regarding length of detention or Sunday detentions. Meanwhile Llanfyllin, who consistently rejected the opportunity to collaborate with neighbouring boards through this centrally sanctioned channel, pursued a policy that was closer to the preferences of the LGB and subsequently the MoH. This perhaps suggests that joint vagrancy committees were not always the co-ordinating force that central authorities hoped – just because unions were members, they would not necessarily follow vagrancy regulations more closely. In addition, a lack of co-operation with a vagrancy committee did not necessarily mean a lack of engagement with other local welfare authorities. In the case of our three boards of guardians, the most relevant dialogue with neighbouring unions over vagrancy policy occurred outside the parameters of the vagrancy committee.

What does this exploration of local strategies towards vagrancy tell us about welfare operations in central Wales? Firstly, intra-regional variation was clearly a fundamental part of poor law practice in relation to this issue – even unions adjacent to each other differed on approaches to particular casual poor questions. Secondly, our three unions varied not only between each other but also over time in the extent to which they pursued policy in line with central directives. Aside from Machynlleth's new casual ward provision, which the MoH was able to push through on a statutory basis, central government recommendations appear to have had little bearing on how or when vagrancy policy was developed or altered. This further supports the classification of central Wales as having a 'peripheral welfare culture'²²⁸ – unions had little interest in rigidly adhering to LGB or MoH advice. Indeed, their attitude towards requests to adjust their practices not only suggests long-term continuity with the delaying strategies pursued in earlier decades, but also aligns with the approach of the other 'welfare peripheries' featured in this thesis. Spalding union also resisted unwelcome directives in a low-key, bureaucratic but persistent manner which was largely effective. Our Welsh unions did, however, show considerable interest in the practice of their regional colleagues, and on multiple occasions formed their own practice in response. This does not necessarily mean active regional collaboration – indeed, Llanfyllin and Machynlleth repeatedly rejected such co-operation. Nevertheless, any uniformity that can be discerned among the policies of the region's unions came from attempts by one union to

²²⁸ King and Stewart, 'Welfare peripheries', pp.27-31.

match the procedures of some or all of their neighbours. It is possible, therefore, to suggest an additional element to King and Stewart's definition of a welfare periphery: that such places, although relatively resistant to central policy, could be influenced, sometimes heavily, by the policies of their regional counterparts. Although welfare peripheries might be physically isolated or inaccessible, this did not mean that policy formation was an entirely internal process. The application of the model to poor law unions, provides an effective lens through which to see this process at work.

5.8 Conclusions

In this final case study, we have focused on another region which has been neglected by poor law scholars, despite periodic calls for further attention to be paid to Wales.²²⁹ This is especially true for central Wales, where Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown unions were located - even contemporary poor law inspectors showed little interest in the area in comparison with the more heavily industrialised Welsh unions. These unions are therefore well-placed as an entry point into this under-researched area, and by studying all three alongside each other this case study overcomes the issue of partial or fragmentary record survival which can make the exploration of the poor law in Wales more challenging than studies of many English localities.

Was Wales a 'different welfare country'?²³⁰ Llanfyllin and Machynlleth certainly conducted welfare administration in a different language, despite their English record-keeping. It was also evident that an overwhelming preference for outdoor relief endured into the early twentieth century, but this was not substantially different to the distribution of relief in most of our English case studies. If we utilise one of Steve King's yardsticks for measuring welfare regimes, all case studies included in this thesis have displayed a relative lack of institutional focus.²³¹ Motivations for this, however, were distinct from the other unions covered in this thesis. Antipathy towards the workhouse had deep historical precedent in Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown,

²²⁹ See King and Stewart, 'History of the poor law in Wales' and King and Stewart, 'Death in Llantrisant'.

²³⁰ Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.230.

²³¹ King, 'Welfare regimes', p. 9.

although by our period the motivations expressed for this were pragmatic and financial rather than profoundly ideological. Guardians were concerned with controlling relief expenditure, as exemplified in their clear anticipation of reduced rates with the advent of the old-age pension, but they were also invested in advocating for their *own* parish and their *own* poor. Indoor relief was not necessarily an appropriate response to these elements of local welfare administration.

The question of governance structures in the Welsh unions was made more complex by the operation of two different languages in welfare administration. Governance undertaken in Welsh was less accessible to the central government and increased the need for a bilingual poor law inspector, while in Machynlleth and Llanfyllin making welfare systems more accessible to those who actually required them. The role of language in the operation of the New Poor Law has been understudied,²³² but clearly had a bearing on how unions operated and varied between even our three unions. Future research into welfare in Wales would do well to consider the significance of languages being used. Might another model of regime classification be developed, where unions which operated in Welsh had features in common with each other as distinct from those whose primary language was English?

This case study has also examined the ways welfare reforms manifested themselves through their relationship with the poor law. The implementation of the old-age pension in our Welsh unions demonstrated that the availability of these alternative welfare streams did not always or only lift individuals away from the poor law. Instead, both the poor law and the old-age pension remained elements of local welfare landscapes, rather than on mutually exclusive ends of a sliding scale. Indeed, continued provision of medical relief from the poor law supported some paupers' access to the pension. This contributes to the image developed through preceding case studies of the early-twentieth century poor law as a system which 'caught' individuals who fell through the gaps between the welfare reforms of the period – it addressed unexpected consequences of social housing in Blaby, rose (albeit imperfectly) to the needs of the industrial unemployed in Staffordshire, and in Wales formed a stepping stone from

²³² The importance of the use of Welsh by patients and staff in North Wales Asylum, Denbigh, has been highlighted by Pamela Michael in *Care and Treatment of the Mentally Ill*, p.58, 61-62, 138, 141, 174-175.

which many elderly could reach the old-age pension. It was not a defunct or unnecessary system, despite the strides made in state-administered welfare provision over this period. Moreover, the relationships observed here between poor law unions and local government bodies, such as rural and urban district councils, also indicate local dimensions of poor law administration which have been little acknowledged in literature thus far. More reflection is called for here, to which the thesis' overall conclusion turns.

This case study has, meanwhile, also engaged with Steve King and John Stewart's model of welfare peripheries.²³³ Poor law unions in rural central Wales operated a 'peripheral welfare culture', whereby central government changes often made little sense to guardians who were confident in their own superior understanding of 'their' local conditions. Moreover, this case study has shown how this model might be extended. In peripheral welfare cultures, central government had limited capacity to change practices 'on the ground'; however, policy in such cultures could be influenced by the policies of other local bodies. As seen through the lens of approaches to vagrancy, Llanfyllin, Machynlleth and Newtown were more likely to adjust their own approach towards a specific issue in response to the strategies pursued by their regional neighbours, regardless of whether that was in line with central government recommendations or not. Welfare peripheries did not operate in isolation. They were not always necessarily interested in active collaboration with other local bodies, but they were aware of potential consequences if their own practices failed to take into consideration those of others. This thesis' proposed extension of the 'welfare peripheries' model encourages scholars using the model to look beyond central-local relations and consider the significance of local networks, and indeed the ways in which these in turn helped to perpetuate peripheral welfare cultures, regionally and inter-regionally.

Overall, Wales is significant for welfare scholars. By continuing to piece together welfare regimes in Wales, we can contribute to filling in the significant gaps in our mosaic of local welfare provision in the early twentieth century. Moreover, the inclusion of Wales in comparative studies adds nuance to conceptions of welfare culture, including in this case across the broader Midlands. When existing models of

²³³ King and Stewart, 'Welfare peripheries', pp.27-31.

regional welfare are applied to Wales, contributing factors and alternative yardsticks not otherwise considered rise to the surface. However, the similarities that can also be observed between our Welsh case studies and English studies also raises the question of the existence of a Midlands model of welfare – did unions in the Midlands, across England and Wales, have more in common with each other than with other unions within their own nations? This is a question that will be explored more fully in the following concluding chapter, now all case studies have been completed. The specifics of attitudes towards and implementation of welfare in Wales nevertheless offer new ways to think about exploring and classifying local welfare cultures.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 The changing context of the New Poor Law, c.1900-1930

By 1930 and the abolition of the boards of guardians (if not the poor law itself, which continued as public assistance until 1948), the economic and social landscape of England and Wales looked very different to the one in which the poor law had been operating at the turn of the twentieth century. Some of the changes that had occurred during this period were rapid and traumatic. The First World War had far-reaching demographic consequences, and also provoked changes in the way people – both politicians and the wider population – thought about the role of the state, especially in relation to social policy. Key heavy industries, the lifeblood of many regions, experienced swift and significant decline during the 1920s, creating severe, prolonged unemployment and enormous industrial unrest. Other changes were more gradual, but no less impactful. Although there was considerable continuity in the experiences of agricultural workers in many rural areas,¹ such places nevertheless accommodated shrinking populations, as individuals and families migrated to industrial areas, market towns or cities. These urban areas were reconfigured, as local authorities worked to improve sanitation and housing while simultaneously struggling to combat persistent overcrowding. Local and national politics had also shifted as the electorate expanded – the voting public of 1930 was not the same population which rejected the Liberals in the early 1890s, or even that which brought them victory in 1906. Alongside these changes, attitudes towards poverty – both in terms of what caused it and what should be done to reduce it – had altered, and of course so had the range of state-led welfare reforms available to many categories of poor people. These social, economic and political factors had transformed the demands on the administration of welfare.

¹ A. Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside since 1900* (London, 2003), p.14, 36, 111.

The New Poor Law, still very much a product of policy decisions made in the early to mid-nineteenth century, was not designed to cope with this level of socio-economic change, and politicians and policy-makers did not reform the system. Nevertheless, it continued to address the needs of its applicants alongside the welfare reforms of the period, and to play a key role in the survival strategies of the poor. This concluding chapter draws together the findings of the four case studies explored in this thesis over the course of these crucial decades, focusing on the novel contributions that this thesis has made and how these revise our historical appreciation of the New Poor Law c. 1900-1930.

6.2 Key gaps in the historical literature

This thesis set out to act as a counterweight to a welfare literature which is currently unbalanced in a number of important ways. In its examination of poor law administration ‘on the ground’, it centred its enquiries around the operation of outdoor relief, not the workhouse, shedding light on a type of provision which was more commonly experienced,² but is nevertheless under-researched in a historiography which has focused disproportionately on indoor relief.³ Likewise, this thesis has responded to the lopsided geographical coverage of existing poor law research, in which Wales and much of the Midlands have been significantly neglected, particularly in rural or semi-rural areas. It sought to address these notable absences on the map of poor law studies through its band of case studies across the English Midlands and central Wales, exploring welfare operations informed by regional contexts which diverged from those represented in much extant scholarship.⁴ Moreover, this thesis has tested several ways

² See for instance K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006), pp.207-338.

³ M.A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834-1929: A History of an English Social Institution* (London, 1981) is one of the most influential examples of this. Other examples of the range of these studies include J. Purser, ‘The workhouse population of the Nottingham union, 1881-1882’, *Local Population Studies*, 99 (2017), pp.66-80; A. Ritch, ‘English poor law institutional care for older people: identifying the aged and infirm and the sick in Birmingham workhouse, 1852-1912’, *Social History of Medicine*, 27:1 (2014), pp.64-85; F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children* (Stroud, 1997).

⁴ Notable examples include the work of David Green, particularly *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790-1870* (Farnham, 2010) and S. King, *Women, Welfare and Local Politics, 1880-1920: We Might Be Trusted* (Brighton, 2006).

in which historians have classified and categorised regional welfare practices.⁵ A central aim has been to understand the nature of local relief provision, and to compare poor law operations across traditional regional divisions and national boundaries. This comparative approach has not been pursued in existing literature. As a result, this thesis questioned a number of traditional features of welfare historiography, such as the north-west/south-east ‘regional welfare culture’ model, and the portrayal of Wales as a ‘different welfare country’.⁶ As we will see, these ideas need to be refined in light of its findings.

By focusing on the early twentieth century, this thesis fleshes out the rather skeletal existing story of the poor law during this period. Detailed regional studies of the poor law during this period are lacking, and understandings of the post-1900 system have been somewhat centrally-oriented, drawn largely from national-level statistics and focusing on the attitudes and actions of politicians and policymakers towards it, rather than examining the realities of administration on the ground. As a result, the focus of discussion in much existing literature has been around unsuccessful attempts to reform the poor law, the contributing factors in the failure of those efforts, and the positioning of new welfare provisions – particularly prior to the First World War – as alternatives to the older system which were not as tainted by stigma, or enmeshed in knotty issues of local politics and finance. The poor law’s continued relief role despite social policy developments up to 1930, especially to the unemployed, has been acknowledged in some cases but rarely explored in-depth at a local level.⁷ Indeed, the highly regionalised nature of welfare administration and experience observed in the nineteenth century and earlier has also been widely forgotten in this later period. In other words, there have been relatively few attempts to piece together the reality of poor law activity in the early twentieth century, the nature of its role in the welfare landscape, and the extent to which

⁵ S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000); S. King and J. Stewart, ‘Welfare peripheries in modern Europe’ in King and Stewart (eds.), *Welfare Peripheries: The Development of Welfare States in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe* (Bern, 2007), pp.9-38.

⁶ See Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.225.

⁷ Exceptions include A. Digby, ‘Changing welfare cultures in region and state’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 17:3 (2006), pp.297-322; L. Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge, 1998); A. Vinson, ‘Poor relief, public assistance, and the maintenance of the unemployed in Southampton between the wars’, *Southern History*, 2 (1980), pp.179-225; M. Levine-Clark, *Unemployment, Welfare and Masculine Citizenship: ‘So Much Honest Poverty’ in Britain, 1870-1930* (Basingstoke, 2015).

the system, and the regional variation that historically characterised it, was starved out of operation by the reforms built around it.

The four case studies in this thesis have sought to uncover the decision-making of local poor law administration which is missing from existing account of the early twentieth-century system. An important objective has been to set the implementation of the Liberal welfare reforms in the specific contexts of the Midlands and central Wales and interrogate their relationship with the poor law at this level. Sections 6.4-5 reveal the details of a complex relationship between ‘old’ and ‘new’ welfare systems, in which the two systems intermingled, pre-existing welfare cultures continued to inform the roll-out and reception of the state-led provisions, and the poor law’s role in the post-1900 welfare landscape remained significant. In sum, this thesis set out to form a bridge between poor law historiography and scholarship on the early welfare state, and indeed to show how the two can and should be integrated.

6.3 Key research questions: a reflection

In order to respond to these features of extant historiography, this thesis pursued four key research questions. Firstly, it sought to understand what the poor law looked like ‘on the ground’ during this neglected period, reconstructing everyday poor law operations in our chosen unions. Secondly, this thesis investigated the extent to which distinct regional welfare cultures could be observed in our chosen case studies. It considered the ways policies in our seven selected poor law unions were informed by particular local factors; the various existing models of welfare regionality proposed by Steve King (and John Stewart in the case of the ‘welfare peripheries’ model) could then be applied to the welfare cultures which became apparent in each location.⁸ We are therefore now in a position to critique and refine these conceptions of regional welfare, and to suggest that historians should rethink the ways we classify welfare provision in the early twentieth century. Our third research question concerned the relationship

⁸ S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000); S. King and J. Stewart, ‘Welfare peripheries in modern Europe’ in *Welfare Peripheries: The Development of Welfare States in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe* (Bern, 2007), pp.9-38; S. King, ‘Welfare regimes and welfare regions in Britain and Europe, c.1750s to 1860s’, *Journal of Modern European History*, 9:1 (2011), pp.42-65.

between the poor law and the various national welfare reforms of the period, asking how successful these reforms were in lifting people away from reliance on the poor law by examining the reception of several iconic reforms on the poor law at a local level. The specific chapters in which individual reforms were addressed were dependent on the particular conditions of each region. Thus, the old-age pension was discussed in all four case studies, while the role of the poor law in relieving the unemployed alongside National Insurance and subsequent relief provision featured in the Staffordshire and Montgomeryshire chapters, as these were the two regions where these issues were most clearly relevant. Likewise, Leicestershire is the only case study to feature an examination of the relationship between the poor law and social housing, simply because Blaby was the only union in which interactions with that particular reform could be reconstructed in detail. Moreover, this third research question enabled us to reflect on the extent to which these newer reforms differed in their reception and impact at a local level, applying a regionally nuanced approach which has been rare in considerations of most early twentieth century reforms. Finally, this thesis asked whether the increasingly expanded electorate of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries informed local poor law administration. By assessing the make-up of each board of guardians, and exploring female and working-class representation among board members, each chapter asked whether the 1894 Local Government Act or the 1918 Representation of the People Act had an effect on who ran local welfare in our case studies. How ‘open’ or egalitarian our boards of guardians were, and whether this changed over time, was a key concern.

These four core research questions address two overarching themes: continuity and change, and rhetoric versus reality. In each case study, we have been concerned with the extent to which we could observe continuity and change over time in local welfare practice. In a period of turbulence for national welfare policy, how did poor law operations change during these decades in our case studies? To what extent can long-term continuity be observed in how the poor law functioned? At the same time, this thesis investigated the distance between central rhetoric and local realities. In each chapter, we encountered instances where central policy did not map straightforwardly onto specific local conditions, or where centrally generated reforms had unintended consequences ‘on the ground’. Just as the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act failed to

supplant existing welfare processes in many regions, so too these established welfare structures proved difficult to displace right up until the 1929 Local Government Act.

6.4 Main findings

Now that all four case studies have been completed, we can bring our findings together thematically and address our four research questions by drawing on the evidence presented from across our Midlands band. It is evident that there were some broad commonalities between the experiences of our case studies. Perhaps the most obvious is the consistent dominance of outdoor relief, demonstrating continuity with the nineteenth century (fluctuations such as the ‘crusade’ in the 1870s and 1880s notwithstanding).⁹ Although expenditure on the workhouse could be significant, even larger than spending on outdoor relief in some individual unions, this did not necessarily reflect policies which emphasised admittance to institutions. Underneath the financial data was a system largely supporting the labouring poor at home. Another similarity among almost all the case studies was the increasing size of outdoor relief payments over the course of the period. This also aligns with findings at a national level in the work of scholars like Keith Snell.¹⁰ In addition, all unions in our case studies had similar reactions (in terms of pauperism levels and expenditure) to some key national developments during the early twentieth century. A decline in outdoor pauperism during the First World War, for example, was common across our unions; and with the exception of Newtown union, the remaining six experienced significant reductions in outdoor pauperism when the old-age pension became available to poor relief recipients in 1911. In these ways, our unions fitted in with broad national trends in the shape of relief provision over the course of this period.

Throughout these general fluctuations in pauperism over the course of the period, the first major finding of this thesis is the significant role the poor law continued

⁹ For the crusade, see E. Hurren, *Protesting About Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late Victorian England* (Woodbridge, 2007); P. Carter, ‘Joseph Bramley of East Stoke, Nottinghamshire: a late victim of the crusade against outdoor relief’, *Family & Community History*, 17:1 (2014), pp.36-46; and K. Price, *Medical Negligence in Victorian Britain: the Crisis of Care under the English Poor Law, c.1834-1900* (London, 2015), pp.103-122.

¹⁰ Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.212.

to play in the welfare landscape, and the complexity of its relationship with the Liberal welfare reforms and their interwar successors. The four case studies have revealed a poor law which remained an important source of support in this last phase of its operation. This was, of course, not the intended outcome of the new social policies developed during these decades. By using the poor law as a lens to examine the implementation of state-led welfare reforms, this thesis has demonstrated that the aim of reducing the older system's scope was not always or entirely achieved. Instead of replacing the poor law, these reforms intermingled with it. The clearest example of this was the old-age pension. Although most unions featured in this thesis experienced significant declines in numbers of outdoor paupers and expenditure when the pension became accessible to poor law recipients, in several cases some elderly poor could not or would not relinquish the support of the poor law, both inside and outside the workhouse. Paupers made choices about whether the new welfare provision could adequately cater to their needs, and some decided that it did not. Indeed, the Welsh case study demonstrated that the pension and poor relief could be and were received simultaneously, with the poor law continuing to cover specific needs (i.e. medical relief) that the pension was unable to address. The Staffordshire and Leicestershire case studies reveal similar experiences in relation to unemployment relief and social housing; in both instances, the state-led reforms were found to be limited, with the poor law acting as a safety net to catch those who fell through the gaps in-between the new provisions. The latter case, whereby moving into a Leicester Corporation-owned house meant that individuals were cut off from their relief work and left unable to pay a higher rent, is a particularly good example of the way in which early elements of the welfare state were detached from each other and sometimes from the holistic circumstances of relief recipients. Moreover, this thesis has demonstrated that the poor law not only functioned alongside the new reforms, but also operated as a stepping-stone enabling more people to access these alternative provisions. Without outdoor relief provision from Blaby, some Saffron Lane estate residents could not have paid their rent; without the Welsh unions' medical relief, the old-age pension would have remained inaccessible for elderly paupers who could not afford the services of the medical officer themselves. Anne Digby and Marjorie Levine-Clark have both highlighted the continued

significance of the poor law for the unemployed during the early twentieth century.¹¹ This thesis supports their argument, but also builds on it by showing that the poor law remained crucial to several other categories of poor, beyond the out-of-work, who the various welfare reforms of the period intended to ‘liberate’ from the old system. Indeed, if the poor law had been abolished two decades earlier, some of these new provisions would have been out of reach for paupers who needed both in their efforts to make ends meet.

This framing of the poor law aligns with the work of scholars such as Geoffrey Finlayson, who argued that historians were in danger of developing ‘a kind of Welfare State escalator’ or ‘collective train’, which traced a straightforward progression towards the ‘modern welfare state’, with research focus coalescing around certain significant ‘stations’, such as the Liberal welfare reforms.¹² By demonstrating that movement from the ‘old’ system of the poor law to the ‘new’ welfare provisions was not linear, inevitable or cumulative, this thesis disrupts this ‘collective train’. This complexity in the local reception of national reforms is also relevant for our second major key finding: the legislation of 1894 and 1918 which enabled a wider range of people to stand and vote in local government elections did not always result in progress towards more diverse boards of guardians. This becomes clear when we use Steve King’s yardstick of ‘open’ or ‘closed’ governance in relation to all four case studies.¹³ If we visualise a sliding scale, with ‘open’, accessible and inclusive governance structures at one end and ‘closed’, restricted and remote governance structures on the other, it is evident that our case studies were situated at different points on that spectrum. At the ‘open’ end of the scale was Blaby. Here, board leadership rotated regularly among board members, preventing the disproportionate influence of one individual or small group, and female guardians were a consistent and growing presence, particularly during the 1920s. The 1894 and 1918 changes to local democratic operations were impactful here. In contrast, at the ‘closed’ end of the scale were the Staffordshire boards, where a small handful of board members assumed leadership positions, held them for long periods of time and, in the case of Newcastle-under-Lyme in particular, dominated boardroom decision-making. Stafford and Newcastle also included comparatively few women among their

¹¹ Digby, ‘Changing welfare cultures’; Levine-Clark, *Unemployment*.

¹² G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare in Britain, 1830-1990* (Oxford, 1994), p.3.

¹³ King, ‘Welfare regimes’, p.59.

guardians. The impact of democratic expansion was thus much less visible in these unions. The Lincolnshire and Montgomeryshire case studies fell in between these two positions. Spalding's board resembled the Staffordshire unions in its irregular leadership changes, but included more female members - although we have seen that not all were received harmoniously. Meanwhile, the Montgomeryshire boards had very few women indeed among their ranks, but were much more 'open' than Spalding, Stafford or Newcastle to sharing board leadership equitably. Moreover, even in Blaby where the demographic profile of board members arguably changed the most, there is little evidence indicating that these changes actually brought about any shifts in policy, in the manner observed by Anne Digby and Elizabeth Hurren.¹⁴ This thesis has therefore demonstrated more continuity than discontinuity in the impact of local democracy. Just as in the case of the national welfare reforms, the story of the poor law's relationship with changes in local government participation is a subtle and complex one.

Much of this complexity is generated because the reception and implementation of national reforms, both welfare and local government-related, were informed by specific local conditions. For instance, developments in unemployment support were of limited relevance in the market gardening powerhouse of south Lincolnshire, whereas they loomed much larger in industrial north Staffordshire; likewise, the physical boundaries of Blaby union and neighbouring Leicester had a significant effect on the consequences for both unions with regard to the Saffron Lane estate's construction. Moreover, this variation was driven by more than socio-economic context; it was also formed by pre-existing attitudes to welfare operating in our case studies. The Spalding board's response to reports that their relieving officer was pressurising elderly paupers to take the pension is a particularly good example of this. In a local culture where relief was provided with a relatively humanitarian sentiment, guardians were unwilling to actually remove relief as an option for those eligible for the pension, and some paupers were wary of abandoning a tried and trusted welfare source for a new, untested one. The implementation of reforms such as the pension was not only more complex in their relationship to the poor law but also more regionally specific than is apparent through national statistics collected by the LGB in London, or indeed to welfare historians subsequently. This leads us to our third key finding: the longevity of welfare

¹⁴ Digby, 'Changing welfare cultures'; Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism*, pp.214-241.

regionality. The pronounced local variation in welfare administration and experience on which historians concur in poor law studies of earlier periods was evidently still at play in the early twentieth century.¹⁵ The character of decision-making, policy formation and relief practices, including governance structures, forms and generosity of relief, and the nature of local welfare crises, was often informed in each case study by particular regional dynamics. Individual elements of administration, or attitudes towards specific welfare issues, in some poor law unions resembled those in others (again, explored in more detail below). Overall, however, identifiable welfare regimes functioned in all four case studies.

Having established that regional variation in welfare provision was still alive and well in our period, we can engage in a novel way with the classification and categorisation of welfare regimes, testing existing models of welfare regionality in new places and in a new time period. In its fourth key finding, this thesis demonstrates that while there is some longevity in these models, they are also in need of refinement. Beginning with Steve King's 'regional welfare cultures' model which divides the north and west from the south and east,¹⁶ our case studies at first appear to align relatively neatly with King's characterisations of these regions. The Staffordshire unions certainly displayed attributes matching the northern/western welfare culture as presented by King, where relief payments were small and tightly controlled, with concerns about rate-payers and economic efficiency at least as important to guardians as adequately supporting the destitute. Meanwhile, Spalding more closely resembled the southern/eastern welfare culture, where poor relief was an important structural part of maintaining the local economy and labour market, so much so that guardians relieved 'poverty', not just 'destitution', and were more inclined to grant applications for relief. Although not as closely informed by 'neighbourliness' as the Lincolnshire case study, Blaby also fitted more closely with the southern/eastern culture. The addition, however, of Wales brings complications. The Welsh unions had some experiences in common with their fellow western unions in Staffordshire, such as their lack of female guardians, and in Newtown's case the rise of unemployment as a particular relief problem (albeit not on the same scale). Welsh guardians also demonstrated some preoccupation with

¹⁵ See Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp.223-234.

¹⁶ King, *Poverty and Welfare*.

making financial savings where possible. Nevertheless, they were disinclined to refuse relief applications due to close local relationships between guardian and parish – not a feature reflected in the northern/western welfare culture as suggested by King. Put simply, the ‘regional welfare cultures’ model does not accurately represent the experiences of Wales.

In fact, the Montgomeryshire unions had much more in common in terms of sentiment and local policy-making with Spalding, at the opposite end of our Midlands band. Their similarity not only demonstrates the limitations of the ‘regional welfare cultures model’ in relation to Wales, but also highlights that King and Stewart’s ‘welfare peripheries’ model might be a more appropriate method of classification.¹⁷ South Lincolnshire and Montgomeryshire operated ‘peripheral welfare cultures’, despite being much smaller geographical units than those King, Stewart and their contributors originally used. These case studies could not only be defined as ‘peripheral places’ according to King and Stewart’s criteria,¹⁸ but were shown to function as ‘welfare peripheries’ in the ways their respective landscapes and socio-economic contexts informed welfare practices and, crucially, responses to outside input. Both regions had very different economies and labour markets, despite both being centred on agriculture. Nevertheless, guardians in both locations made staffing and relief provision decisions based on particularities of their physical conditions, from continuing to maintain pay stations to requesting additional staff for logistically difficult areas. Moreover, their vital feature in common which reveals both Spalding and the Welsh unions to be ‘welfare peripheries’ is the disconnect between their own understanding of local welfare provision and those of the central government, and the way in which the boards of guardians often remained impervious to attempts by the LGB or MoH to instigate change. The classification of south Lincolnshire and Montgomeryshire as ‘peripheral places’ not only demonstrates that Wales may not necessarily have been a ‘different welfare country’ in the sense of being fundamentally different from England, but also offers an alternative way of thinking about the categorisation of local practices. The influence of the north/west to south/east division in conceptions of poor law administration, and the neglect of counties such as those featured in this thesis, in fact

¹⁷ King and Stewart, ‘Welfare peripheries’, pp.27-31.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.24-27.

helps to disguise important similarities between places on opposite sides of the Welsh-English border. This finding, that ‘welfare cultures’ cannot always be neatly categorised, either along national lines or along the traditional east/west division, adds nuance to a historiography which has lacked comparative studies and has therefore too often failed to acknowledge the complex web of similarities and differences in welfare practices ‘on the ground’.

Just as the ‘welfare peripheries’ model has been used here to refine King’s original conception of ‘regional welfare cultures’, this thesis has also identified two ways in which the peripheries model itself can be refined. Firstly, it does not take sufficient account of local networks of influence operating between poor law unions. This is illustrated most clearly in the Welsh case study, which displayed evidence not only of the relative impotence of central government in terms of changing welfare practices, but also of the significance of relationships between local bodies in policy formation. Secondly the model is, almost by definition, a rather binary one, which sets up ‘periphery’ and ‘centre’ in sharp contrast to each other but with little allowance for the nuance of a middle ground. When we consider the thesis as a whole this becomes clear, as our Leicestershire and Staffordshire case studies do not fit into the criteria presented for peripheral places, but neither can they be defined as ‘core’ or ‘central’ places. Again, the ability to identify this need for further refinement is another benefit of taking the comparative approach that has been pursued here.

Our four case studies have thus enabled us to demonstrate both the durability and the limitations of existing conceptions of welfare regionality. However, this thesis also offers, in its fifth key finding, alternative ways of comparing and contrasting welfare regimes, which rise to the surface through the comparative examination of these Midland and Welsh unions. Thus, three new sets of criteria by which we could seek to categorise welfare provision are proposed.

The first is provoked by examining poor law practices through the geographical distribution of our case studies. The Midlands region which our case studies span has not been explored in poor law studies in and of itself before, either with or without the inclusion of Wales – perhaps another consequence of the north-west/south-east ‘regional welfare culture’ model’s dominance. We have already seen that our four counties administered their welfare provision in locally specific ways. Nevertheless, this

thesis provides the opportunity to ask whether there were any common threads of sentiment or organisation which united our four case studies. In other words, to what extent can a 'Midlands personality' be observed in terms of welfare provision?

Such commonalities do appear when we consider the ways in which our unions responded to emergencies, or difficult and/or unexpected situations. In these instances, all our unions were pragmatic, hard-headed and flexible. They did their best to work around complicating factors, and find realistic, workable solutions where relief obligations could still be met. Despite the evident variation in their typical practices, all the guardians featured were problem-solvers. Examples of this include Blaby's responses to the dilemma of the Saffron Lane estate residents, the Staffordshire unions' pragmatism in the face of increasing unemployment, Spalding's proactivity in their resource and personnel management, and Machynlleth's alternative indoor relief arrangements in the face of expensive workhouse renovation. This is not to say that these boards of guardians were similarly motivated – as we have seen, their local cultures and priorities had many differences. Nor were they always successful - this is particularly apparent in Staffordshire, where the scale of distress generated in the early to mid-1920s became too much for the local poor law system. Nevertheless, in all four case studies there were instances of poor law officials taking advantage of multiple resources, attempting to stretch or re-interpret legislation, or enlist the help or advice of colleagues in order to address a persistent problem. We cannot say definitively that this 'personality trait' was developed as a result of *being in* the Midlands. However, the fact remains that these traits were consistently found across our Midlands band and in Wales, crossing national and regional boundaries, and this should not be dismissed. If not a 'Midlands personality' – a character inherent, specific to and produced by this particular region – then this is instead a 'personality of the Midlands': not necessarily a *product* of the Midlands counties, but an observable and important characteristic common across all our case studies. By highlighting this similarity among our set of unions, this thesis challenges future research to map traits of this kind, and to assess whether this type of approach to welfare problems offers another way of differentiating between local practices.

The second alternative organising principle suggested by this thesis is drawn from Wales, the only case study where the language used to discuss and administer relief was not necessarily a foregone conclusion, and preferences differed within the

three Welsh unions featured in Chapter 5. In its exploration of Montgomeryshire, this thesis is the first recent study to highlight this element of Welsh poor law administration, or to question whether language or dialect use informed the accessibility of procedure, either by central government or by the poor themselves. A detailed multi-regional comparison within Wales on this issue was beyond the scope of this thesis, and so few studies have currently been done on the New Poor Law in Wales¹⁹ that comparisons using existing material are not yet possible either. Nevertheless, the study of Montgomeryshire featured here suggests language use as an additional lens through which to observe and classify welfare culture, raising questions about central-local relations and accessibility of relief. As we will discuss below, these factors could be fruitfully taken up in future scholarship, particularly that conducted by Welsh-speaking researchers.

Finally, the continued importance of the parish and of deep local connection in welfare administration observed in at least two of our case studies offers yet another way of mapping welfare practices. The small, dispersed and often isolated populations in both Spalding and mid-Wales meant that poor law administration was an acutely personal affair in those case studies. Connections between guardians and the poor of their own parish made the former disinclined to refuse applications from the latter or to force admission to the workhouse. Indeed, the parish unit continued to be important in these unions during this late period, indicating that the mid-nineteenth century legislative attempts to emphasise the union as the key administrative unit had not been entirely successful. This novel finding therefore extends the work of David Eastwood, who argued for the importance of the parish as a unit of local government in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and supports Keith Snell's portrayal of the parish as a 'flourishing', 'long-enduring' centre of administrative, legal, social and cultural significance, by demonstrating the continued role of the parish from a local

¹⁹ As was discussed in detail in the Welsh chapter itself, the best among a sparse selection are: S. King and J. Stewart: 'Death in Llantrisant: Henry Williams and the New Poor Law in Wales', *Rural History*, 15:1 (2004), pp.69-87; G. Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union, 1836-1886: 'The most difficult union in Wales'', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2013); M. Evans and P. Jones, 'A stubborn, intractable body': resistance to the workhouse in Wales, 1834-1877', *Family & Community History*, 17:2 (2014), pp.101-121; and A. Croll, 'Reconciled gradually to the system of indoor relief': the poor law in Wales during the 'crusade' against outdoor relief', *Family & Community History*, 20:2 (2017), pp.121-144.

perspective into the twentieth-century.²⁰ The influence of such personal connections with parish on approaches to welfare offers another way of categorising welfare regimes: the classification of unions according to the importance (or otherwise) of this parish-oriented relationship.

The five major key findings of this thesis laid out above in many ways present the twentieth-century poor law as a story of continuity, even as social, economic, demographic and political conditions shifted around it. The system retained its distinctive regional personalities, albeit not quite those which scholars have previously attributed to it, manifesting as a mosaic of ‘poor laws’, rather than a single, uniform ‘poor law’. It also continued to act as an important element of the welfare landscape which could not be supplanted by reforms developed outside it. Ironically, this story of continuity also demonstrates the need for change, in terms of how historians perceive and position the poor law during this period. The ways in which the findings of this thesis intervene in existing historiography are laid out in the following section.

6.5 Implications for current historiography

Through the reconstruction of poor law administration in our four case studies, it is evident that, in the relative absence of regional work on the early twentieth century poor law, the nuance and vitality of local decision-making in a system which remained very much ‘open for business’ has been overlooked. In the seven poor law unions featured in this thesis, policy-making was acutely sensitive to local concerns, responsive and flexible – albeit within the broader confines of financial structures. Local poor law administration was not static, but evolved and adapted in the face of national policy change both within and outside the system itself, of dramatic regional crises, and of the fluctuating rhythms of poverty over the course of our period. As we have seen, the specifics of this decision-making could have very important consequences for local communities. Current historiography, largely taking a national perspective rather than

²⁰ D. Eastwood, *Governing Rural England: Tradition and Transformation in Local Government, 1780-1840* (Oxford, 1994); Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.499.

delving into local archival materials, has not sufficiently captured this complex and vibrant form of social policy development.

Relatedly, the varied and essential welfare activity of the poor law right up to 1930 and the guardians' abolition undermines the tendency in existing literature to imply that the 'old' system's termination was almost inevitable, doomed from the Liberals' 1906 victory onwards and by repeated failures to act on recommendations for reform.²¹ Although this was an era in which the extension of the franchise increased political pressure – both local and national – to deliver the citizenship rights of improved welfare provision,²² it was by no means guaranteed that either Liberal or Conservative governments would deliver on this. In the meantime, the poor law remained functional, providing a baseline level of social stability. While not politically expedient, particularly in the interwar period, to promote the workhouse as the primary mode of relief – and we have seen in our four case studies that relatively limited use of the workhouse was a consistent policy – the poor law was, at a granular level, getting the job done, providing outdoor relief in a way that was familiar and well-understood by both local officials and applicants. Focused local studies like those undertaken in this thesis throw this into sharp relief. The system was certainly out of its depth at times, but on the whole guardians were able to use their extensive personal and institutional experience to grapple with central government directives, network with other local bodies, prioritise 'their own poor' and keep the welfare show on the road, including and perhaps especially when the newer welfare reforms fell short. Simply put, the system was still working. Anne Digby has described the poor law as 'bankrupt in policy terms' by 1918.²³ While it is arguably true that the system at a national level was bankrupt in *political* terms, as those in power lacked the political will to make reforms which could have made the poor law more sustainable,²⁴ the policies and practices of the system remained effective 'on the ground'.

²¹ See for instance Digby, 'Changing welfare cultures', p.302; Hollen Lees, *Solidarities*, p.295; D. Thomson, 'Welfare and the historians' in L. Bonfield, R. M. Smith and K. Wrightson (eds.), *The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure* (Oxford, 1986), p.376.

²² Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*; D. Vincent, *Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in Twentieth Century Britain* (Harlow, 1991), pp.52-69.

²³ Digby, 'Changing welfare cultures', p.302.

²⁴ Thane, *Foundations*, p.182.

Despite its continued functionality, this thesis has also revealed the range of competing pressures under which the poor law operated during this period, which again poor law historiography has not often engaged with. First, there was the issue of the relationship between poor law unions and central government. The case studies in this thesis, particularly those on Lincolnshire and Montgomeryshire, have revealed several instances where the LGB or MoH sought to change or restrict welfare practices at a local level without taking into consideration the specifics of regional conditions which informed those practices. Poor law officials therefore needed to broker a middle ground between their own socio-economic contexts and the directives of London civil servants. This is an element of welfare administration which has been acknowledged to some extent in relation to the nineteenth-century poor law, particularly around the implementation of the workhouse system in the aftermath of the 1834 Amendment Act²⁵ and the ‘crusade’ against outdoor relief in the 1870s and 1880s, but has not been sufficiently explored in the commentary which does exist on the post-1900 system. Secondly, as has already been alluded to, the poor law was operating in a society where concepts of citizenship and the role of access to appropriate welfare provision within that citizenship were shifting. Section 6.4 laid out the rather limited impact of changes in local democracy on our four case studies, in terms of personnel; however, boards of guardians were nevertheless increasingly answerable to an expanding electorate in which both ratepayers and the poor were included. Newcastle union’s experience during the 1926 strike is an example of where these pressures were acute and urgent. Again, the relationship between social policy developments and newly constituted electorates has been only rarely considered in light of the poor law. Finally, several of the unions featured in our four case studies found themselves in networks of influence and impact with other local government bodies outside the poor law itself, such as rural and urban district councils, specialist committees and county councils. These relationships could be collaborative, such as in Newtown where the guardians and district councils co-operated to address issues of increased unemployment. However, they could also be combative, as these bodies made unilateral decisions without considering the implications for poor law administration, like the Leicester Corporation Housing

²⁵ See for instance M. Evans and P. Jones, ‘“A stubborn intractable body”: resistance to the workhouse in Wales, 1834-1877’, *Family and Community History*, 17:2 (2014), pp.101-121, and J. Beckett, ‘Politics and the implementation of the New Poor Law: the Nottingham workhouse controversy, 1834-43’, *Midland History*, 41:2 (2016), pp.201-223.

Committee, or actively tried to prevent poor law guardians from carrying out their obligations, as the Machynlleth Urban District Council did. We therefore can observe a poor law in which administration was encroached upon not only by the new welfare reforms of the period, but also by new forms of local government. The intricacies of these interactions and the way in which these agencies overlapped has seldom been reconstructed in the way this thesis has been able to achieve. This neglect can in large part be traced back to the paucity of regional poor law studies in this period – it is only by using a local lens that the details of these relationships can be seen.

Indeed, the local, comparative approach taken in this thesis has demonstrated that we need new ways to map the poor law in terms of the nature of welfare regionality. As outlined in Section 6.4, it is evident that existing strategies for classifying different regional practices and sentiments have some enduring longevity but nevertheless need refining. This thesis has also uncovered new findings which suggest alternative ways of approaching regional variation in welfare administration. Notwithstanding such amendments, however, this thesis' engagement with existing models overall suggests that regional typologies which accurately encompass and categorise the nuances of lived realities are difficult to come by. This is especially true when the experiences of places which have until now been neglected, such as the counties featured here, are incorporated. So, what can historians do to understand welfare regionality more comprehensively? The methodology and findings of this thesis indicate that we have until now been rather too simplistic in our efforts to make sense of the resemblances and contrasts between local regimes. Instead, a fuller, more complex understanding of how the poor law worked in our four case studies was gained by taking a 'multiple lens' approach. This means using specific elements of welfare organisation and sentiment, such as distribution of power among board members, responses to the old-age pension, or seasonality of relief patterns, as lenses through which to observe selections of localities. An approach like this is broadly what Steve King recommended in his proposal of 'yardsticks' to measure welfare practices.²⁶ However, no existing literature has tested this methodology in detail in a comparative study. This thesis has done so, using some of King's own suggestions (such as 'open/closed' governance) as well as others such as those listed above, and

²⁶ King, 'Welfare regimes', p.59.

demonstrated that comparing regional welfare practices in this way reveals the complexities which are obscured by larger-scale models. This is not to say that existing models should be rejected outright; rather, that they can fruitfully be used (appropriately refined) as lenses themselves, as individual tools among many.

In sum, the findings of this thesis have important implications for the ways historians think about the poor law during the early twentieth century. It shifts existing perceptions of the nature of poor law policy-making and the system's contemporary significance, as well as highlighting elements of administration and experience which were crucial to fully understanding the welfare landscape but have been downplayed or neglected in existing literature. Moreover, it has made a methodological intervention by moving away from dependence on broadscale models of welfare regionality, instead offering a refined case-study analysis approach more able to capture the nuances of local sentiment and organisation, and demonstrating that it can work in practice. In the following and final section, this chapter looks ahead to consider the ways in which scholarship could move forward with the findings of this thesis in mind.

6.6 Future research opportunities: looking ahead

Overall, this thesis has provided an original study of four counties. It has demonstrated the value of exploring the poor law during this later period, and of comparatively addressing less controversial or obviously attention-grabbing regions. A future study might incorporate larger numbers of unions or counties like these, or compile different geographical combinations for comparison – for instance, by comparing unions from the Midlands with selections from northern and southern England, London and Wales. In particular, the impact of Wales as a comparative element has been significant in this thesis. Subsequent research projects would benefit both from continuing to build a more complete picture of Welsh manifestations of the poor law, and by maintaining Wales as a feature in work which seeks to grasp the regional nuances of welfare experience and administration.

Connected to this, the role of communication and networks between local welfare authorities has been highlighted in this thesis. Studies which focus on the way these networks functioned in relation to different elements of relief administration, from

the everyday management of non-resident/non-settled poor to collaboration or disagreement on strategies to address specific categories of pauper, would therefore be welcome. These could map the regional extent of a union's relationship with its welfare counterparts, or explore whether factors other than physical proximity informed the nature of relationships between unions – were unions with very similar welfare cultures, for instance, more likely to consult or influence each other? Moreover, this thesis has revealed a system in which 'old' and 'new' welfare administrations also interacted with local government bodies. These interactions could also be usefully investigated, given that this matrix of impact and influence has seldom featured in poor law studies.

There is also room for further examination of interactions between the poor law and specific welfare reforms beyond those covered in this thesis. Now it has been ascertained that the reception of some reforms was informed by existing local conditions, our understanding of the impact of the old-age pension, unemployment insurance and social housing would be enhanced by additional comparative studies which examine these provisions through the lens of local poor law operations in different parts of the country. For instance, out of our four case studies, only Blaby was confronted with the implications of new social housing for poor relief; comparisons with other unions which experienced in-migration as a result of social housing, would help to clarify just how unusual Blaby's experience was. Moreover, this thesis has only been able to touch on a selection of the welfare reforms which characterised the early twentieth century. How did, for instance, the 1908 Children Act interact with local poor law operations? How was legislation related to assisting those with disabilities implemented across different parts of England and Wales? A more nuanced, more comprehensive image of the early welfare state could be developed by pursuing these compelling questions too.

Looking ahead, this thesis offers an important realignment in our perceptions of the twentieth century poor law which it is worth re-emphasising here. It would be easy to see the abolition of the boards of guardians as inevitable, the poor law as a neglected and decaying system by our period. For its evidence, such a position might draw on the myriad of alternative welfare provisions increasingly available, the damning indictments of the system by both the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Maclean Committee, the inability of central government to grasp the nettle of poor law reform, and the way in which the local-level poor law struggled to handle crises such as

mass interwar unemployment. The protests of poor law guardians leading up to the 1929 Local Government Act against their approaching abolition might seem, in this light, like relics of a bygone age of welfare trying to maintain their authority. Indeed, it is likely that this was a factor for many board members. However, the focus on these dynamics distracts from the real story of the poor law during this period, which can only be fully seen from a local perspective. This is still a story of a deeply flawed system which could be harsh and was tainted with the spectre of the workhouse. But at the same time, the poor law remained deeply attuned to the specifics of locality. Indeed, it carried its long-established regional welfare cultures into the early twentieth century, from which the new welfare reforms of the period could not remain immune. To be too distracted by Finlayson's 'significant stations' on the 'collective train' is to overlook the poor law's continued significance during this period, despite the efforts of contemporary social policy. In this story, the guardians across England and Wales who argued that they remained well-placed to deliver efficient, effective and humane relief to the poor, both as experienced welfare administrators and as directly elected community representatives, do not seem quite so misguided. We therefore end as we began this thesis – with a welfare landscape in which the poor law remained enduringly relevant to the lives of the poor, and relief provision, both in and outside the poor law, could not help but be informed by pre-existing regional cultures. A future scholarship which is aware of this framing will produce a more rounded and more nuanced picture of the realities of welfare during the last years of the poor law and the first years of the welfare state.

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