

Charity and poor relief in England and Wales, circa 1750-1914*

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The last twenty years have witnessed a significant change in the historiography of charity and philanthropy.¹ During the 1970s, Gareth Stedman Jones highlighted the way in which organisations like the Charity Organisation Society attempted to use charity to 'remoralise' the London poor, but in the 1980s and 1990s writers such as Geoffrey Finlayson and Frank Prochaska offered a much more sympathetic account of the contribution which charity was able to make to meeting social needs.² As a result of this work, historians now have a much more nuanced view of the history of welfare provision. As Jane Lewis argued in 1995, 'rather than seeing the story of the modern welfare state as a simple movement from individualism to collectivism ... it is more accurate to see Britain as always having had a mixed economy of welfare, in

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¹ In 1980, Olive Checkland argued that the terms 'charity' and 'philanthropy' ought to be interpreted rather differently, but Frank Prochaska has argued that they can be used interchangeably. See Bernard Harris, *The origins of the British welfare state: social welfare in England and Wales 1800-1945*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 59-60.

² See Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2nd edition, 1984, pp. 262-80 (first edition published 1971); Frank Prochaska, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980; *ibid. The voluntary impulse: philanthropy in modern Britain*, London: Faber, 1988; 'Philanthropy, in F.M.L. Thompson, ed., *The Cambridge social history of Britain, 1750-1950. Vol. 3, Social agencies and institutions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 357-94; Geoffrey Finlayson, *Citizen, state and social welfare in Britain 1830-1990*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

which the state, the voluntary sector, the family and the market have played different parts at different points in time'.³

However, as Lewis herself has recognised, it is not enough simply to describe the different components of this mixed economy; it is also necessary to explore the relationship between them. In her article on 'the boundary between voluntary and statutory social service in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries', she explored the different ways in which supporters of the Charity Organisation Society and the Guilds of Help conceptualised the relationship between voluntary and statutory welfare in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods.⁴ This chapter seeks to extend Lewis's account by examining the relationship between charity and the poor law over the whole of the period between 1750 and 1914. It begins by examining the role played by charity in critiques of the Old Poor Law between 1750 and 1834. It then explores the contribution which charity made to the relief of poverty between 1834 and 1870. The final section shows how the relationship between charity and state welfare changed during the 'crusade against outdoor relief' and the subsequent expansion of state welfare provision between 1870 and 1914.

³ Jane Lewis, *The voluntary sector, the state and social work in Britain: the Charity Organisation Society/Family Welfare Association since 1869*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1995, p. 3; see also *ibid.*, 'Voluntary and informal welfare', in Robert Page and Richard Silburn, eds., *British social welfare in the twentieth century*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, pp. 249-70, at p. 249.

⁴ Jane Lewis, 'The boundary between voluntary and statutory social services in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries', *Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), 155-77.

1. *The campaign for poor law reform*

As Paul Slack has shown, both charity and the poor law played significant roles in the provision of social welfare in early-modern Britain. The amounts of money given by testators for the relief of the poor rose substantially between 1540 and 1660, and these bequests were augmented during the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the growth of subscriber charities, which played a key role in the development of schools and hospitals.⁵ However, the provision of welfare by individuals and charities existed alongside an expanding system of public relief. The Poor Law Acts of 1597 and 1601 gave the churchwardens and overseers of each parish the right to levy a tax, or poor rate, on every inhabitant and occupier of land, and made them responsible for 'setting the poor on work', maintaining those who were unable to work, and securing apprenticeships for pauper children. The cost of this system grew rapidly during the second half of the eighteenth century and this helped to fuel demands for its reform and, in some cases, abolition.⁶

One of the reformers' main complaints was that the existing system of poor relief meant that 'men labour less and spend more, and the very system that

⁵ Paul Slack, *The English poor law, 1531-1782*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 42-3; see also Joanna Innes, 'The "mixed economy of welfare" in early-modern England: assessments of the options from Hale to Malthus (c. 1683-1803)', in Martin Daunton, ed., *Charity, self-interest and welfare in the English past*, London: UCL Press, 1996, 139-80, at pp. 147-9; *ibid.*, 'State, church and voluntarism in European welfare, 1690-1850', in Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes, eds., *Charity, philanthropy and reform from the 1690s to 1850*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998, pp. 15-65, at pp. 37-8; Steve Hindle, *On the parish? The micropolitics of poor relief in rural England, 1550-1750*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004; Paul Fideler, *Social welfare in preindustrial England*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

⁶ Harris, *Origins of the British welfare state* pp. 40-5.

provides for the poor, makes poor'.⁷ In 1786, the Rector of Pewsey, Joseph Townsend, argued that the poor laws weakened hope and destroyed fear – 'the springs of industry' – because the poor knew that, if they worked hard, their efforts would be used to support others, whereas if they relied on others, 'they shall be abundantly supplied, not only with food and raiment, but with their accustomed luxuries, at the expense of others'.⁸ Other writers shared these sentiments. John Davison argued that 'the Poor Laws tell a man [that] he shall not be responsible for his want of exertion, forethought [or] sobriety',⁹ and James Geldart complained that 'no encouragement is held out to industry, sobriety or good behaviour'.¹⁰ James Ridgway thought that the Poor Laws had fuelled the fires of unrest by taking away 'the incitement to industry and good behaviour – the necessity of providing against occasional misfortune and old age, as well as the desire of making a provision for the support of a future family, has been removed'.¹¹

These critics were not simply concerned with the impact of the Poor Law on work incentives; they also felt that the provision of statutory relief undermined the proper relationship between poor relief and charity. In 1633, the poet and divine, George Herbert, argued that even though the wealthy should always be willing to

⁷ Thomas Alcock, *Observations on the defects of the poor laws and on the causes and consequences of the great increase and burden of the poor, with a proposal for redressing these grievances, in a letter to a Member of Parliament*, London: R. Baldwin and R. Clements, 1752, p. 11.

⁸ Joseph Townsend, *A dissertation on the poor laws*, London: Ridgway, 1817 (2nd edition; 1st edition 1786), pp. 14-15.

⁹ John Davison, *Considerations on the poor laws*, Oxford: University Press, 1818 (2nd edition; 1st edition 1817), p. 69.

¹⁰ James Geldart, *A short dissertation on the poor laws, with remedies suggested for their evils and defects, and a plan for improving the condition of the poor*, Cambridge: J. Smith, 1819, p. 11.

¹¹ James Ridgway, *General remarks on the state of the poor and poor laws, and the circumstances affecting their condition*, London: James Ridgway, 1832, pp. 12-13.

give charity, the poor did not have an automatic right to receive it. This meant that charity should only be dispensed with discretion, which in turn would help to promote social order.¹² The expansion of poor relief threatened to undermine this position because it encouraged the poor to believe that their right to relief was no longer conditional on good behaviour. As Thomas Alcock complained in 1752: 'the pauper thanks not me for anything he receives. He has a right to it, so he says, by law, and if I won't give, he'll go to the Justice and compel me.... This must of course create a good deal of ill-blood, hatred, murmuring and indignation on the side of the payer ... and ... still more disrespect, ingratitude and contempt on the part of the pauper'.¹³

Alcock was not the only contemporary observer who believed that the creation of an 'entitlement to welfare' weakened the natural bonds of society. Joseph Townsend argued that 'a fixed, a certain, and a constant ... provision for the poor ... tends to destroy the harmony and beauty, the symmetry and order of that system, which God and nature have established in the world',¹⁴ and Frederic Morton Eden concluded that 'the certainty of a legal provision weakens the principles of natural affection, and destroys one of the strongest ties of society, by rendering the exercise of domestic and social duties less necessary'.¹⁵ John Davison linked his concerns to the specific question of wage supplementation: 'the labourer reckons half with his master and half with the overseer. Towards his master he has neither the zeal nor

¹² See Hindle, *On the parish*, pp. 129-31.

¹³ Alcock, *Observations*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁴ Townsend, *Dissertation on the poor laws*, pp. 40-1.

¹⁵ Frederic Morton Eden, *The state of the poor*, London: J. Davis, 3 volumes, 1797, volume 1, p. 467.

the attachment he ought to have to his natural patron and friend; and with his parish he keeps up a dependence which ... [is] at once abject and insolent'.¹⁶

Although these critics were particularly concerned with the impact of statutory relief on the morals of the recipient, they also thought that it was harmful to the giver. Thomas Alcock believed that the imposition of a compulsory levy tended to 'crowd out' voluntary charity because 'I'm obliged to pay so much to the poor by law, that I am not of ability to bestow in voluntary contributions', and he went on to express concern that 'this checks and weakens the charitable principle within; and this principle, by not being exercised ... grows weaker and weaker, and, in time, perhaps, is quite extinguished'.¹⁷ However, not all authors shared this pessimism. Frederic Eden, writing four decades later, thought that 'the numerous appeals, even from impostors, which are made to the feelings of the humane and charitable, are a sufficient proof that voluntary charity flows in too copious a stream ... if there is a defect in British benevolence, it is, that it is too unbounded and indiscriminate'.¹⁸

Despite these differences, most commentators agreed that there was more virtue in voluntary charity than there was in a compulsory levy. Alcock argued that 'all virtue must be free; if you force charity [*sic.*], you destroy her', and that 'as charity is said to cover a multitude of sins, a Christian by being forced to it, may think himself deprived of the blessing of it'.¹⁹ Eden quoted Edmund Burke's comments on the Church in support of his view that 'it is better to cherish virtue and humanity, by leaving much to free will ... than to attempt to make men mere machines and

¹⁶ Davison, *Considerations*, p. 58.

¹⁷ Alcock, *Observations*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁸ Eden, *State of the poor*, vol. 1, p. 458.

¹⁹ Alcock, *Observations*, p. 11.

instruments of a political benevolence',²⁰ and John Davison concluded that 'the rich have been great losers, on their side, by the general substitution of a legal impost, for the natural cultivation of their own living, active and discriminating virtue'.²¹ The Scottish Evangelical, Thomas Chalmers, expressed a similar view when he claimed that the tenderness and delicacy of charity 'have been put to flight by this metamorphosis of a matter of love' into one of 'angry litigation'.²²

In view of these sentiments, it is not surprising that many contemporaries believed that charity could play an important role in helping to 'lift' poor people off what might now be regarded as their 'dependency' on poor relief. During the 1790s, Arthur Young published a series of accounts of charitable relief schemes in the *Annals of Agriculture*. John Critchley described a scheme which had been introduced in Rutland in 1785 to 'promot[e] industry amongst the children of the labourers'. The scheme was financed by a combination of parish payments and individual subscriptions, and provided work opportunities to the children of poor families. The children who 'produced the greatest quantity of work, of different kinds, and of the best quality' received small premiums, and premiums were also offered to young people who entered apprenticeships or went into service, and to day-labourers who had brought up four or more children ('born in wedlock') to the age of fourteen years without recourse to the parish.²³ A rather different scheme was introduced in the parish of Long Newton in 1800. This scheme offered 32 families

²⁰ Eden, *State of the poor*, p. 467.

²¹ Davison, *Considerations on the poor laws*, p. 118.

²² Boyd Hilton, *The age of atonement: the influence of Evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1795-1865*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 101.

²³ John Critchley, 'Management of the poor in Rutlandshire', *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. 22 (1794), pp. 416-26.

the opportunity to become tenant-farmers in return for an agreement to forego any future entitlement to poor relief. If a family was obliged to apply for relief (other than medical relief), the tenancy was forfeited.²⁴

Although these schemes were designed, in part, to supplement the Poor Law, many writers argued that the scope of poor relief should either be restricted, or curtailed altogether, and replaced by voluntary provision. John Davison thought that the Poor Law should be gradually reduced, so that by the end of ten years 'there would be a legal revenue for the support of the aged and infirm', and a voluntary fund for the relief of all other kinds of need, although he conceded that some form of statutory relief may still be necessary in 'certain definite cases of severer distress'.²⁵ Joseph Townsend went further. In 1786, he called for the poor law to be abolished altogether over a ten-year period, and concluded that 'to relieve the poor by voluntary donations is not only most wise, politic and just; is not only most agreeable both to reason and to revelation; but ... is most effectual in preventing misery, and most excellent in itself, as cherishing ... the most amiable affections of the human breast'.²⁶

As these extracts have demonstrated, there was substantial support for the view that there was a fundamental difference between the 'forced' charity of the poor law and the voluntary charity of private philanthropy, and it is clear that many contemporaries believed that the balance between them needed to be readjusted, in favour of the latter. However, others believed that some form of public welfare

²⁴ Thomas Estcourt, 'An account of the result of an effort to better the condition of the poor in a country village', *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. 43 (1804), pp. 1-8.

²⁵ Davison, *Considerations on the poor laws*, p. 121.

²⁶ Townsend, *Dissertation on the poor laws*, p. 107.

provision was essential, partly because of the practical obstacles which stood in the way of complete abolition, and partly because there was no guarantee that a purely voluntary system of social welfare would necessarily be fairer. In 1795, Capel Lofft argued that charity 'is too precarious for the extent and importance of the object',²⁷ and Jeremy Bentham observed that charity 'is formed entirely at the expense of the most humane, of the most virtuous individuals in the society, often without proportion to their means'.²⁸ The anonymous editor of the second edition of Joseph Townsend's *Dissertation on the Poor Laws* thought that nothing 'could be more unwise ... than to withdraw within so short a period as ... ten years, the whole provision on which millions now depend for subsistence'.²⁹ This was possibly one of the most important reasons why, when the Royal Commission on the Poor Law sat down to begin its investigations in February 1832, it focused its efforts on the reform of the poor law, rather than its abolition.³⁰

2. *Charity under the New Poor Law*

Although the Poor Law Amendment Act did not abolish poor relief, it was designed to restrict it, and this had significant implications for the role of charity, especially in urban areas where the introduction of the New Poor Law had faced initial resistance. The increased role played by charity in the relief of poverty has not always received

²⁷ Capel Lofft, 'Relief of the poor', *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. 24 (1795), pp. 559-62, at p. 561.

²⁸ John Bowring, ed., *The works of Jeremy Bentham*, Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843, vol. 1, p. 315.

²⁹ Townsend, *Dissertation on the poor laws*, p. viii.

³⁰ See Harris, *Origins of the British welfare state*, p. 46.

the attention it deserves in debates about the introduction of the New Poor Law,³¹ but its significance has emerged quite strongly in a number of local studies.

It would certainly be wrong to assume that the advent of the New Poor Law led automatically to an increase in charitable subventions. According to William Apfel and Peter Dunkley, the Assistant Poor Law Commissioner for Bedfordshire, D.G. Adey, 'was unusually conscientious in scrutinising parish accounts, and by 1837 he felt able to assure Somerset House that the parochial use of "private subscriptions" to circumvent the financial demands of the Boards of Guardians was no longer to be found in the county'.³² However, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the introduction of new restrictions on the distribution of poor relief did lead to the increased use of charitable resources in other parts of the country.

In Carlisle, the Poor Law Commission began the process of introducing the New Poor Law in the late-1830s, but the new regime faced its first real test when recession hit the town's textile industry in the spring of 1840. 450 weavers were placed on short-time work and the Guardians saw little alternative but to revert to the traditional policy of subsidising the weavers' reduced wages from the poor rate. However, the Assistant Commissioner for Cumbria, Sir John Walsham, persuaded the Board to abandon this policy in favour of a stricter application of the 'principles of 1834'. Although the workhouse test was not applied formally, applicants for relief had to submit to an outdoor labour test, and relief was only granted to men who were wholly unemployed.

³¹ See also the comments by Peter Searby in Peter Searby, 'The relief of the poor in Coventry, 1830-63', *Historical Journal*, 20 (1977), pp. 345-61, at p. 346.

³² William Apfel and Peter Dunkley, 'English rural society and the New Poor Law: Bedfordshire, 1834-47', *Social History*, 10 (1985), 37-68, at p. 43. 'Somerset House' was the physical location of the headquarters of the Poor Law Commission.

As R.N. Thompson has pointed out, this policy may have achieved the desired effect of reducing the poor rate, but only at the expense of increasing the hardship experienced by the weavers and their families. In the autumn of 1841, a detailed survey was carried out and this led to the establishment of a local mendicancy society 'with the purpose of raising a subscription from the public, and distributing the proceeds to the needy'. There was little common membership between the Board of Guardians and the mendicancy society but they were both drawn from the same local elite, and a joint committee was set up 'to plan and coordinate their respective spheres of activity'.³³

Although Thompson argued that that the establishment of the mendicancy society, and that of similar committees formed in Carlisle in the 1850s and 1860s, 'represented a spontaneous but conscious effort by the local community to evade the restrictions of the official poor relief policy', it was not inconsistent with the aims of some of the early poor-law reformers.³⁴ Although the Poor Law authorities were obliged to give relief to all those who met their 'test of destitution', the mendicancy society was able to award relief to applicants on the basis that they were either 'deserving' or 'undeserving'.³⁵ This was precisely the kind of discretionary approach to the relief of poverty which the critics of the Old Poor Law had been seeking to encourage when they advocated an enhanced role for charity before 1834.

Although the Poor Law Amendment Act was designed to lay the foundations for the development of a more uniform set of relief policies throughout England and

³³ R.N. Thompson, 'The working of the Poor Law Amendment Act in Cumbria, 1836-71', *Northern History*, 15 (1979), 117-37, at p. 122.

³⁴ *Ibid.*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

Wales, it failed to give the Poor Law Commissioners a clear set of powers in relation to those areas which were already covered by local Acts. One such area was Coventry, in the east Midlands, which received considerable amounts of advice and pressure from the central Commissioners, but was not directly controlled by them. However, the city was brought under the authority of the Commission in 1842, and by 1844 'the united parishes had been brought as firmly under the control of the Poor Law Commission as any ordinary union'.³⁶ The establishment of the new regime was accompanied by the virtual elimination of the payment of wage subsidies and a significant reduction in the number of families receiving poor relief.

The impact of the New Poor Law in Coventry meant that a greater burden was now placed on the provision of charitable relief. According to Peter Searby, 'as the amount spent on statutory relief fell, the charities became relatively more important still. In no year between 1847 and 1860 did the cost of statutory outdoor relief reach £2000, and in 1853 it amounted to £800 only, while the most effective dole charities – the five controlled by the general charities trustees – alone disposed of £550 a year'.³⁷ These sums were supplemented by special appeals during periods of particular need. More than £1000 was raised in the winter of 1847/8, and similar amounts were distributed in 1855 and the winter of 1857-8. However, when the city's weavers went on strike in protest against planned cuts in wages in the spring of 1860, only £390 was forthcoming.³⁸

As Searby has pointed out, the much smaller amounts of money which were donated in the spring of 1860 illustrated the limits of mid-Victorian paternalism, but

³⁶ Searby, 'The relief of the poor in Coventry', p. 354.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

the relief funds were reopened in the autumn, after wages had been cut and the strike defeated. On this occasion, local funds proved quite inadequate and a national appeal was launched. This new appeal raised over £41,000, including donations from the Queen and from schools all over the country, but the funds were largely exhausted by the spring of 1862, and a second appeal had to be issued. This appeal raised a further £11,800, and the money was spent during the winter of 1862-3.³⁹

Charity also played a critical role in the relief of distress in the Lancashire cotton districts. H.M. Boot found that 'the average lag between becoming unemployed and receiving [poor] relief' in the late-1840s 'was as long as six weeks', and that many individuals must have held out for much longer. He argued that their ability to do so 'attests to the depth of private and communal resources they could resort to in times of distress, their hostility to the poor law, and the depth of poverty reached before they obtained relief from the poor law authorities'.⁴⁰ Lynne Kiesling drew similar conclusions from her study of the relationship between unemployment and poor relief in the same areas during the cotton famine of the early-1860s: 'the creation of local private relief committees ... enabled many unemployed workers to avoid public relief entirely.... [Although] the private relief committees did not begin giving relief until mid-1862, [b]y early-1863 their expenditure ... far outpaced public expenditure, reflecting both supply and demand constraints'.⁴¹

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 359-60.

⁴⁰ H.M. Boot, 'Unemployment and poor relief in Manchester, 1845-50', *Social History*, 15 (1990), 217-28, at p. 22.

⁴¹ L. Lynne Kiesling, 'Institutional choice matters: the poor law and implicit labor contracts in Victorian Lancashire', *Explorations in Economic History*, 33 (1996), 65-85, at p. 74.

In fact, Kiesling's account may be slightly misleading. On 12 May 1862, the Poor Law Board instructed H.B. Farnall to visit the cotton districts in order to ascertain 'the manner and form in which the poor are either relieved out of the poor rates, or ... by private subscriptions', and he compiled a series of reports over the next six weeks. Special relief funds had already been set up in Preston, Blackburn and Ashton, and more than £10,000 had been distributed by the time of his visit; he also noted that a further £2888 had been distributed in the borough of Stockport (encompassing the townships of Stockport, Heaton Norris, Brinnington, Cheadle Bulkeley and Cheadle Moseley), and that £45 had been distributed in the township of Hyde within the previous week.⁴² In December 1862, when the total number of paupers throughout the cotton district reached its peak, 271,983 individuals (out of a combined population of 1,984,955) were dependent on statutory relief and a further 236,310 people received assistance from local charity committees. The amount expended by the local Boards of Guardians on outdoor relief during the week ending 6 December 1862 was £18,728, whereas the amount expended by local charity committees in the week ending 27 December was £24,743.⁴³

These accounts suggest that charity was likely to play a particularly important role in the relief of poverty during periods of exceptional hardship, but how significant was charity during 'normal' periods? Derek Fraser argued that 'the Poor Law was catering for only a minor part of the demonstrable need in Victorian England'⁴⁴ and

⁴² PP 1862 (389) xlix, Part 1, 89, Copy of Mr Farnall's reports to the Poor Law Commissioners on the distress in the cotton manufacturing district. See especially pp. 3 (Preston), 7 (Blackburn), 10 (Wigan), 13 (Ashton), 18 (Stockport borough and Hyde).

⁴³ PP 1864 (60) lii, 9. Copy of report of H.B. Farnall, Esq., of the 28th day of June, on distress in the cotton manufacturing districts, pp. 1-2, 6.

⁴⁴ Derek Fraser, 'Introduction', in D. Fraser, ed., *The new poor law in the nineteenth century*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1976, pp. 1-24, at p. 11.

Ellen Ross has claimed that 'in the 1870s, eleemosynary contributions were greater by far the whole national expenditure on poor relief'.⁴⁵ Norman McCord also claimed that despite the problems involved in estimating the extent of charitable donations, 'it is very clear that unofficial far outweighed official exertion'.⁴⁶ However, these statements assume that even if the poor law authorities and charity organisations were not necessarily relieving the same people, they were directed towards the same ends. As Robert Humphreys argued in 1995, 'if reference to the charitable generosity of the Victorians includes the vast amounts of capital used to build the public edifices that mushroomed in nineteenth-century Britain, this would have little bearing on the provision of direct financial relief to the poor in the sense of providing an alternative to poor law outdoor doles'.⁴⁷

One of the most intractable problems facing the historian who wishes to estimate the extent of charitable support in the nineteenth century is the fact that a great deal of charitable activity took place on an informal basis and was unlikely to be recorded. This is particularly true of what several authors have described as the 'charity of the poor to the poor',⁴⁸ but may also have been true of other kinds of charity as well. During the 1890s and early-1900s, Jack Lanigan and his brother obtained a bowl of soup and a chunk of bread every day for lunch from the local police station, and Alice Foley recalled how the local priest, Canon Burke, 'stuffed

⁴⁵ Ellen Ross, 'Hungry children: housewives and London charity, 1870-1918', in Peter Mandler, ed., *The uses of charity: the poor on relief in the nineteenth century Metropolis*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990, pp. 161-96, at p. 164.

⁴⁶ Norman McCord, 'The Poor Law and philanthropy', in Derek Fraser, ed., *The new poor law in the nineteenth century*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1976, pp. 87-110, at p. 97.

⁴⁷ Robert Humphreys, *Sin, organised charity and the poor law in Victorian England*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995, p. 170.

⁴⁸ See e.g. Prochaska, 'Philanthropy', p. 362.

some food tickets' into her sister's hands 'to help tide the family over a cruel Christmas'.⁴⁹ It is very difficult to know the extent to which incidents of this kind are likely to have found their way into the tables of official charity statistics.

Instead of examining the records left by charity organisations and committees, some authors have attempted to use household budget surveys to assess the extent to which working-class families supplemented their incomes with charitable donations, but this evidence is also difficult to interpret. In 1887, the Paddington District Nursing Association examined the household budgets of 923 families in which a main earner was ill, but only a few were surviving on charitable donations, and the authors of a second survey, focusing on the families of unemployed men in the same year, found that only one household in eight was receiving assistance from the parish, benefit club or charitable relief. However, as Ellen Ross has pointed out, such surveys are very likely to underestimate the extent to which poor families were receiving charitable assistance: 'investigators normally asked only about earnings in the form of wages, but charities ... generally doled out goods in kind'.⁵⁰

One contemporary investigator who did attempt to estimate the extent of charitable provision was Charles Booth. In 1892 he published the results of an enquiry into the incomes of 9125 people over the age of sixty-five in living 262 rural parishes across the country. He found that 2008 individuals received some support from the Poor Law and that 2304 were either partly or wholly dependent on their relatives, but the extent of charitable support should not be underestimated. Even though only 112 individuals (1.3%) were wholly dependent on charity, a further 1552

⁴⁹ John Burnett, ed., *Destiny obscure: autobiographies of childhood, education and family from the 1820s to the 1920s*, London: Allen Lane, 1982, pp. 88, 92.

⁵⁰ Ross, 'Hungry children', p. 170.

(17%) used charity to supplement the income they obtained from other sources

(see Table 2.1).⁵¹

Table 2.1. Sources of maintenance among elderly people in 262 rural parishes in 1892.

	Number	%
Parish only	458	5.02
Parish & charity	469	5.14
Parish & relations	462	5.06
Parish, charity & relations	293	3.21
Parish & earnings	326	3.57
Charity only	112	1.23
Charity & relations	256	2.81
Charity and earnings	406	4.45
Charity, relations & earnings	128	1.40
Relations only	486	5.33
Relations & earnings	369	4.04
Relations & means	211	2.31
Relations, earnings & means	99	1.08
Earnings only	2,224	24.37
Earnings and means	692	7.58
Means only	2,134	23.39
Total	9,125	100.00

Source: Charles Booth, *The aged poor in England and Wales*, London: Macmillan, 1894, p. 339.

In 1838, James Whishaw published a brief account of the characteristics of the endowed charities of Cornwall in the *Journal* of the London Statistical Society. The total number of such charities was 240, with a combined income (in 1836) of £3661 2s 9d. Whishaw calculated that just under half the total amount raised was

⁵¹ Charles Booth, *The aged poor in England and Wales*, London: Macmillan, 1894, pp. 339-40; see also David Thomson, 'Public, private and the English elderly', in Michael Katz and Christoph Sachse, eds., *The mixed economy of social welfare: public/private relations in England, Germany and the United States, the 1870s to the 1930s*, Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1996, pp. 319-39.

given to charities for the benefit of 'the poor'. This included £510 for the 'poor not receiving relief', £523 for the 'poor generally', £435 for almshouses, and £352 as a contribution to the poor rate. Many of these charities failed to discriminate between the different categories of poor person and distributed relief in cash and in kind, but others specified that assistance should only be given to 'poor labourers', the 'deserving poor', 'poor widows', the 'poor of good character', and the 'industrious poor', and offered assistance in the form of bread or clothing.⁵²

Whishaw published a second paper, on the endowed charities of Herefordshire, in the following year. In 1836, there were 730 charities in Herefordshire, with a combined income of £13,153 3s 6d. The breakdown of expenditure was similar to that of Cornwall, but there were some differences. In Cornwall, 13.94 per cent of total income was used to support the 'poor not receiving relief' and 14.29 per cent went to charities which supported the 'poor generally', but in Herefordshire only 3.95 per cent of total income was used to support the 'poor not receiving relief' and 33.18 per cent went to charities which supported the 'poor generally', whilst only 0.37 per cent was used to subsidise the poor rates. However, the biggest differences were those between charities in the city of Hereford and those elsewhere in the county. In 1836, only 1.36 per cent of the money granted to charities in the city of Hereford was used to support the 'poor not receiving relief' and a further 12.72 per cent was used to support the 'poor generally', but more than 60

⁵² James Whishaw, 'Endowed charities in Cornwall', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, vol. 1, no. 3 (July, 1838), pp. 149-53, at pp. 151-2.

per cent of total income was used to support the city's eleven almshouses and hospitals (see Table 2.2).⁵³

It is interesting to compare these figures with those obtained from other urban areas later in the century. Martin Gorsky's account of the history of the formation of Bristol's charities suggests that an increasing proportion of the charities formed from the 1830s onwards were concerned with moral and religious reform, but his figures also demonstrate the problems associated with any attempt to place individual charities within clearly-defined boundaries. For example, Gorsky listed 'Dorcas societies' under the general heading of 'Health', but they were also concerned with the relief of poverty, and often had a strong religious purpose.⁵⁴ Similar arguments could be made about the large number of soup kitchens and similar activities provided by organisations such as the Salvation Army at the end of the nineteenth century. Although these organisations were primarily interested in saving people's souls, they also provided a wide range of social services, including visiting societies, provident funds, soup kitchens, mothers' meetings, coal and clothing clubs, blanket societies, infants' friends societies, penny banks, and maternity groups, which were directly concerned with people's material needs.⁵⁵

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 'An account of the endowed charities in Herefordshire', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, vol. 2, no. 4 (July, 1839), pp. 234-50, at pp. 234-5, 240

⁵⁴ Martin Gorsky, *Patterns of philanthropy: charity and society in nineteenth-century Bristol*, Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 1999, p. 138; Harris, *Origins of the British welfare state*, pp. 64-6.

⁵⁵ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1989, pp. 122-3.

Table 2.2. *Incomes of the endowed charities of Cornwall and Herefordshire (including the city of Hereford) in 1836.*

	Cornwall		Hereford (city)		Herefordshire (all)	
	£	%	£	%	£	%
Schools and other purposes connected with education	982.61	26.84	140.59	6.82	3,528.61	26.83
Poor not receiving relief	510.21	13.94	27.93	1.36	519.33	3.95
Poor generally	523.35	14.29	262.19	12.72	4,364.87	33.18
Almshouses and hospitals ^a	434.94	11.88	1,277.23	61.97	3,771.35	28.67
Horwell's charity ^b	147.87	4.04	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Apprenticing	52.00	1.42	83.03	4.03	310.97	2.36
Clergymen (for preaching sermons on particular days)	41.62	1.14	1.05	0.05	55.85	0.42
Repairs of churches, and otherwise in support of church rates)	608.20	16.61	15.80	0.77	117.04	0.89
Poor rates	352.13	9.62	0.00	0.00	49.20	0.37
Miscellaneous	8.21	0.22	253.21	12.29	435.96	3.31
Total	3,661.14	100.00	2,061.04	100.00	13,153.18	100.00

Notes: ^a In Cornwall, 'the number of poor who are wholly or in part maintained in almshouses ... is 63. They are generally selected from that class of indigent persons who contrive to support themselves without assistance from the parish rates'. In Herefordshire, '170 poor persons are wholly or in part maintained and clothed in the endowed almshouses of this county'. The total for Herefordshire included both almshouses and hospitals, but no bequests were made to endowed charities for hospitals in Cornwall. ^b This charity received a total of £147 17s 4d 'for maintaining and clothing ... six poor boys'. It also received £19 16s to pay for the cost of employing a schoolmaster to teach the boys reading, writing and arithmetic, and a further £25 as a contribution to their apprenticeship costs. The last two sums are shown under separate headings in the table.

Sources: James Wishaw, 'Endowed charities in Cornwall', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, vol. 1, no. 3 (July, 1838), pp. 149-53, at pp. 151-2; *ibid.*, 'An account of the endowed charities in Herefordshire', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, vol. 2, no. 4 (July, 1839), pp. 234-50, at pp. 234-5, 240.

Robin Dryburgh has recently examined the role played by charity in the relief of poverty in Bolton in the mid-nineteenth century. His account focuses on the town's endowed and associated (or subscription) charities and he concludes that these organisations played a very minor role in the relief of poverty over the period as a whole, even though they made a much larger contribution during periods of particular distress. However, he also recognises that his estimates of charitable expenditure take little account of the 'unknowable amount of private alms-giving', and that Bolton may not have been typical of other parts of the country. His conclusions on this point are similar to those reached by Keith Gregson in his study of charitable activity in the north-east of England later in the century.⁵⁶

Some of the most detailed records on charitable income and expenditure come from London in the 1850s and 1860s. In 1862, Sampson Low Jr. published details of 640 metropolitan charities with a combined income from dividends and voluntary contributions of just over £2.4 million. His figures suggest that 15 per cent of total income was associated with charities which were primarily concerned with medical services, 10 per cent with benevolent pension funds and the relief of professional groups, and 11 per cent with education and children. However, the two largest categories were both associated with different forms of missionary work: 15.09 per cent of all funds belonged to charities which were engaged in domestic missionary work, and 26.06 per cent with charities engaged in missionary work

⁵⁶ Robin Dryburgh, "The mixed economy of welfare". The New Poor Law and charity in mid-nineteenth century England". University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 2004, pp. 291-2. Gregson's conclusion was that the north-east 'experienced all shades of activity from an almost total lack of charitable effort and cooperation with the Poor Law, through a cooperation with the Poor Law, to a cooperation almost verging on integration'. See Keith Gregson, 'Poor law and organised charity: the relief of exceptional distress in north-east England, 1879-1910', in Michael Rose, ed., *The poor and the city: the English poor law in its urban context, 1834-1914*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1985, pp. 94-131, at p. 122.

overseas. Similar findings were also reported by George Hicks when he analysed the records of 364 London charities seven years later.⁵⁷

These figures underline the importance of Humphreys' warnings about the need to avoid facile comparisons between the sums raised by voluntary charities and those distributed by the Poor Law, but it would also be wrong to underestimate the extent to which charity was being used to address genuine social needs. In 1869 Hicks commented that 'it will not pass unobserved ... that the names of some of our charities seem to speak for themselves of the inefficiency of the Poor Law.... Such, for instance, as those for homeless men, houseless men, refuges for the destitute, and others'. Even though these organisations only accounted for a relatively small proportion of total charitable revenue, this did not prevent him from concluding that 'there will always be large scope for individual charity [outside the Poor Law], but at present, the public, instead of supplementing ... the Poor Law ... is doing the work of the Poor Law itself'.⁵⁸

It is also important to recognise that neither Hicks nor Low believed that their analyses were exhaustive. When Low published the first edition of his survey in 1850, he explained that 'this summary does not include local charities, or the charities in the gift of the corporate companies, etc.',⁵⁹ and Hicks explained that 'the prevailing absence of uniformity' and the 'many highly-objectionable ways of preparing their balance sheets' meant that the records of many charitable

⁵⁷ See Harris, *Origins of the British welfare state*, pp. 65-8.

⁵⁸ George Hicks, 'A synopsis of reports of some of the Metropolitan charities', *Times*, 11 February 1869, pp. 3-5; *ibid.*, 'The metropolitan charities', *Times*, 11 February 1869, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Sampson Low, Jr., *The charities of London, comprehending the benevolent, educational and religious institutions, their origin, design, progress and present position*, London: Sampson Low, 1850, pp. 451-2.

organisations '[lacked] the value which would otherwise belong to them'.⁶⁰ In 1869, Thomas Hawksley attempted to overcome these deficiencies by conducting his own analysis of the capital's charitable organisations. He estimated that the total income of the city's registered charities was £5.3 million, of which £4 million was spent in the capital itself. Approximately £630,000 was spent by charities concerned with the relief of disease, £1.7 million on 'the ordinary necessities of life', and a similar amount on 'educational, moral and religious purposes'. However, he also argued that these figures failed to take account of what he called 'the benefactions of the charitable and the religious', the donations made by 'the compassionate, the weak-minded and the thoughtless', the funds distributed by the Mendicity Society, those authorised by magistrates' courts, and those distributed by local and parochial funds. When these figures were added to the equation, he estimated that the total value of the funds distributed within the capital was at least £5.6 million.⁶¹

3. *The ideology of charity in the later-nineteenth century*

Although George Hicks believed that charities were 'doing the work of the Poor Law', this did not mean that mid-Victorian philanthropists wanted the state to relieve them of their responsibilities. As Sampson Low argued in 1862, those who 'look upon charity merely as an economical resource, and who conceive that it ought to be dispensed with in favour of rates of shillings and pence in the pound' were 'forgetting

⁶⁰ Hicks, 'The Metropolitan charities'.

⁶¹ Thomas Hawksley, *The charities of London and some errors of their administration, with suggestions for an improved system of private and official charitable relief*, London: John Churchill and Sons, pp. 3-7; see also Harris, *Origins of the British welfare state*, p. 68.

that this would destroy all opportunity for generous impulse and active faith, without ensuring the exercise of one whit more judgement'.⁶² Even the Charity Organisation Society believed that 'no Christian society can exist unless there is a sphere for mutual sympathy, and mutual love, as well as justice'.⁶³

However, it was one thing to argue that charity should provide an opportunity for the exercise of judgement and discretion; another to believe that these qualities were being reflected in the way in which charity was currently being dispensed. During the 1860s, there was increasing disquiet about the 'unsystematic and indiscriminate way' in which many charities operated and a growing army of critics complained that the proliferation of charities was creating a new form of 'welfare dependence'.⁶⁴ In the first place, they complained that too many charities (and too many individuals) were dispensing charity without proper investigation or judgement; and, second, that their failure to coordinate their efforts with other charities led to unacceptable levels of what Lynn Lees has called 'double- or even triple-dipping'.⁶⁵

These ideas were reflected in the development of a number of organisations designed to render charity more discriminating and more effective. These organisations included the Society for the Relief of Distress, founded in London in 1860; the Liverpool Central Relief Society (1863); and the Society for Improving the Condition of the Poor in Edinburgh, in 1867. However, the most important

⁶² Sampson Low, Jr., *The charities of London in 1861, comprising an account of the operations, resources and general condition of the charitable, educational and religious institutions of London*, London: Sampson Low, Son & Co., 1862, p. xiii.

⁶³ Quoted in Michael J.D. Roberts, 'Charity disestablished? The origins of the Charity Organisation Society revisited, 1868-71', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 54 (2003), 40-61, at p. 47.

⁶⁴ David Owen, *English philanthropy, 1660-1960*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, pp. 215-8.

⁶⁵ Lynn Hollen Lees, *The solidarities of strangers: the English poor laws and the people, 1700-1948*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 268-9.

organisation was the Society for Organising Charity and Repressing Mendicity, or Charity Organisation Society, which was founded in London in 1869.⁶⁶

As its full title suggests, the COS was concerned both to organise charity and to 'repress mendicity'. It established a network of District Committees which, as David Owen has explained, were designed to be broadly coterminous with the capital's Poor Law Unions. Within each district, the Society aimed to coordinate the work of local charities and to ensure that no applicants received relief until their circumstances had been thoroughly investigated.⁶⁷ It also laid down strict conditions for the granting of relief. Applicants were only considered eligible if they were 'doing all they can to help themselves' and if they were the kind of people for whom 'temporary assistance is likely to prove a lasting benefit'. Persons 'who have thrown themselves out of employment through their own fault ought not to count upon being helped by charity', and those 'of drunken, immoral or idle habits' should only expect to receive assistance if 'they can satisfy the Committee that they are really trying to reform'.⁶⁸

The Society also aspired to play a key role in coordinating the relationship between charities and the Poor Law. In November 1869, the President of the Poor Law Board, George Goschen, issued a famous 'Minute' in which he claimed that there had been a considerable increase in the number of outdoor paupers in London, and this increase had been particularly marked in areas where charities were also known to operate. He argued that the 'indiscriminate distribution of charitable funds'

⁶⁶ Kathleen Woodroffe, *From charity to social work in England and the United States*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962, pp. 25-8; Owen, *English philanthropy*, pp. 218-21. See also Roberts, 'Charity disestablished?'

⁶⁷ Owen, *English philanthropy*, pp. 222-3.

⁶⁸ Woodroffe, *From charity to social work*, p. 41.

tended to increase, rather than decrease, the demand for public relief and that 'it appears to be a matter of essential importance ... to bring the authorities administering the Poor Laws and those who administer charitable funds to as clear an understanding as possible, so as to avoid the double distribution of relief to the same persons, and ... secure ... the most effective use ... of the large sums habitually contributed by the public towards relieving such cases as the Poor Law can scarcely reach'.⁶⁹

Goschen believed that there ought to be a much stricter division of labour between the Poor Law and private charity. He argued that the Poor Law authorities should confine their attention to the relief of destitution, for which they had a legal responsibility, and that charities should confine their attention to the relief of those who were not already destitute. He also argued that there was no justification for charitable organisations to assist those who were already receiving poor relief, since the Poor Law authorities were obliged to ensure that the relief which they provided was itself 'adequate'. If charities did wish to 'interpose' in such cases, 'they should confine their assistance to donations of bedding and clothing, or any similar articles which the Guardians may not consider themselves bound to provide ... and which can be easily distinguished from other relief'.⁷⁰

Although the responsibilities of the Poor Law Board were transferred to the Local Government Board in 1871, the Goschen Minute helped to lay the foundations for a more far-reaching change in poor law policy during the 1870s. In December 1871, the Local Government Board issued a Circular (no. 20) prohibiting the

⁶⁹ 'Relief to the Poor in the Metropolis – Minute of the Poor Law Board', *Twenty-second Annual Report of the Poor Law Board, 1869-70* (PP 1870 C. 123 xxxv, 1), p. 9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

distribution of outdoor relief to single able-bodied men and women, to women whose husbands had deserted them for less than twelve months, and to able-bodied widows with only a single dependent child. It said that outdoor relief should only be given to applicants after they had been visited by a Relieving Officer, and should be granted for no more than three months. The introduction of this 'crusade' against outdoor relief led to a sharp reduction in the number of people receiving poor relief outside the workhouse. Between 1871 and 1880, the total number of 'outdoor paupers' fell by more than 268,000, and the number of adult women and children (excluding 'lunatics, insane persons and idiots') receiving outdoor relief fell by nearly 218,000.⁷¹

During the 1870s, branches of the Charity Organisation Society were set up in many parts of Britain, and in other cases local 'charity organisation societies' were established which 'corresponded' with the London society whilst remaining independent of it.⁷² These organisations have often been cited as evidence of the popularity of COS thinking during this period. However, other writers have highlighted the tensions which existed between the London society and its provincial offshoots, and the limited extent to which they were able to exercise a dominant influence on the development of both local charities and poor law policy.⁷³

One of the main ways in which the COS sought to increase its influence was by campaigning actively to ensure that its supporters were elected as members of

⁷¹ PP 1872 C. 516 xxviii, 1. *First Report of the Local Government Board 1871-2*, pp. 63-8. See also Harris, *Origins of the British welfare state*, pp. 54-5.

⁷² Charles Loch Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society 1869-1913: its ideas and work*, London: Methuen & Co., 1961, p. 92.

⁷³ Finlayson, *Citizen, state and social welfare*, pp. 149-50; Robert Humphreys, *Sin, organised charity and the poor law in Victorian England*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995, p. 7.

local Boards of Guardians. In 1875, a branch of the COS was set up in Southampton by a local Poor Law Medical Officer, Dr Richard Griffin, who claimed that the way in which the Poor Law was administered by the Southampton Board of Guardians meant that it was little more than a 'system of pauper breeding'.⁷⁴ During the next few years, a Deputy President of the Southampton COS, George Lungley, was elected to chair the local Board of Guardians, and John Hill, a COS member, held the post of Relieving Officer from 1877 to 1890. These appointments helped the COS to become 'the strongest force for strict Poor Law enforcement' in the city during this period.⁷⁵

However, although the COS achieved some success in its efforts to change the broad direction of poor law policy in areas such as Southampton, it failed to achieve the closer working relationship which was an integral part of national COS policy. In Oxford, although the local Board of Guardians shared the Society's commitment to the crusade against outdoor relief, 'it took about ten years to develop much liaison between the two agencies involving more than a semblance of coordinated action but even this was never "formulated"'.⁷⁶ In South Shields, there appears to have been 'no vital cooperation between the Society and the Guardians and the numerous regional poor law sources ... provide no evidence of such activity', and the Reverend Campion Mackgill of Croydon COS 'did not see "much chance of our Society working with the Board of Guardians"'.⁷⁷ Although there were some

⁷⁴ Ruth Hutchinson Crocker, 'The Victorian Poor Law in crisis and change: Southampton, 1870-1895', *Albion*, 19 (1), Spring 1987, 19-44, at p. 23.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁷⁶ Humphreys, *Sin, organised charity and the poor law*, p. 83.

⁷⁷ Gregson, 'Poor law and organised charity', p. 103; Humphreys, *Sin, organised charity and the poor law*, p. 86.

examples of closer cooperation, they were comparatively rare. In West Hartlepool, the two organisations worked closely with each other during the 1890s, and in 1908 the Guardians agreed to make a contribution to the Society's funds, but there was little evidence to suggest that this degree of cooperation was replicated elsewhere in the north-east.⁷⁸

The Society's efforts to forge closer links with Boards of Guardians were hampered by its failure to establish stronger ties with other charities. Brighton's Charity Organisation Society regularly bemoaned its 'failure to convert the town's charities' and in 1886 it was forced to admit that 'the work of the Society is still only in its infancy'. In 1890 an editorial in the local newspaper concluded that the Leamington Spa COS was 'still decidedly unpopular and probably not even the Vigilance Association excites a more general sentiment of mistrust'. In Oxford, members of the COS were confident that the 'frightful condition of the population' could be improved if their principles 'were more acted upon', but their meetings 'failed to call forth much interest' and were 'thinly attended'. Reading's Charity Organisation Society faced persistent financial problems and complained of 'some misunderstanding' with regard to the nature of its work.⁷⁹

The Society's comparative isolation was particularly apparent during periods of economic crisis. In Manchester, 'the willingness of a significant section of the middle class to give generously and unquestioningly at times of crisis seriously undermined the attempt of the poor law authorities and the charity organisers to restrict and contain relief-giving', and the Wood Street Mission attracted particular

⁷⁸ Gregson, 'Poor law and organised charity', p. 118.

⁷⁹ Humphreys, *Sin, organised charity and the poor law*, pp. 64-83.

criticism when it opened its doors to homeless unemployed men in the winter of 1902/3.⁸⁰ These complaints echoed the criticisms which the Secretary of the London Charity Organisation Society, Charles Stewart Loch, had aimed at the organisers of the Mansion House appeal in London in 1886: 'Here, then, Society at large with a fund of £78,000 in its hand, became a panic-stricken pauperiser ... able ... to undo in a few weeks "the quiet work of years"'.⁸¹

One of the main reasons why the COS failed to achieve more prominence within the charitable sector was the contrast between its emphasis on the 'scientific' nature of charity and the emphasis which others placed on its spontaneity. Charles Loch recognised that 'the words Charity and Organisation' might appear to be 'a contradiction in terms'⁸² but the COS was unable to overcome the hostility which this contradiction often evoked. The 'influential' Reverend Albert Wilberforce told a Poor Law conference in Southampton that even though he sympathised with the Society's aims, he 'could hardly regard distress in the light in which it had been viewed by other speakers',⁸³ and a Birkenhead clergyman doubted whether it would ever be possible for 'heaven-born charity to pass through the rolling, pressing, squeezing, drying process of a vast piece of machinery and still preserve some of the aroma and flavour of its divine origin'.⁸⁴ There are at least some similarities between these

⁸⁰ Alan Kidd, 'Outcast Manchester, voluntary charity, poor relief and the casual poor, 1860-1905', in Alan Kidd and Kenneth Roberts, eds., *City, class and culture: studies of cultural production and social policy in Victorian Manchester*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985, pp. 48-73, at pp. 60-3.

⁸¹ Jones, *Outcast London*, p. 300.

⁸² Charles Stewart Loch, 'Charity organisation', *Charity Organisation Society Occasional Papers*, 1st series, no. 36 (1894), p. 153; quoted in Judith Fido, 'The Charity Organisation Society and social casework in London, 1869-1900', in Anthony Donajgrodski, ed., *Social control in nineteenth-century Britain*, London: Croom Helm, 1977, pp. 207-30, at pp. 211-2.

⁸³ Crocker, 'The Victorian poor law', pp. 39-40.

⁸⁴ Humphreys, *Sin, organised charity and the poor law*, p. 92.

views and the sentiments expressed by the Vice-Chairman of the Newcastle Board of Guardians, William Todd, a few years earlier. Although he shared the COS's view that many charities were poorly-managed and 'a source of evil', he also recognised that 'the moment you add organisation to [charity] ... its lustre ... light and life are gone'. He therefore concluded that the only appropriate policy was to 'leave it to its gladdening destiny, to cherish and comfort the deserving poor'.⁸⁵

COS traditionalists also found themselves increasingly isolated by changes in public welfare provision. Ironically, one of the first examples of this was triggered by legislation passed only a year after the Goschen Minute was issued and a year before the 'Crusade against Outdoor Relief' was formally launched. When the Forster Education Act was passed in 1870, School Boards were given the power to make education compulsory for children between the ages of five and ten in the areas they served, but many parents were unable to afford the fees which the new schools charged. This meant that the School Boards were forced to remit the fees charged to the children of parents on low incomes, but even though fee remission could be seen as a form of State benefit, it was provided outside the framework of the Poor Law and the parents were spared the disabilities which Poor Law provision would have implied.⁸⁶

The arrangements for remitting school fees were not the only way in which changes in social policy affected the relationship between the State and the individual. When Parliament passed the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834, it was primarily concerned with the payment of poor relief and the situation of the able-

⁸⁵ Gregson, 'Poor law and organised charity', p. 121.

⁸⁶ Alan Gillie, 'The origin of the poverty line', *Economic History Review*, 49 (1996), 715-30.

bodied male pauper, and had largely neglected the provision of medical relief, even though this had been an important part of the Old Poor Law.⁸⁷ However, in 1867 Parliament established a separate administrative authority – the Metropolitan Asylums Board – to oversee the development of poor law medical services in London, and in 1871 the Board took an important step towards the creation of a public medical service when it agreed to admit non-pauper patients to the hospitals under its control. This provided an important precedent for the Medical Relief (Disqualifications Removal) Act of 1885, which meant that individuals who received medical assistance from the Poor Law's medical services were no longer subject to the same legal penalties which prevented the recipients of non-medical poor relief from voting in Parliamentary elections.⁸⁸

These changes were primarily concerned with the funding of education and the provision of health care, but the period also witnessed changes in attitudes to the relief of poverty itself. The Charity Organisation Society had argued that individuals who were in need of assistance but outside the scope of the Poor Law should be supported by charity, but there was a growing demand for this assistance to be provided, or at least supported, by the State. In 1886, the President of the Local Government Board, Joseph Chamberlain, issued a Circular inviting Boards of Guardians and other local authorities to investigate the use of public works to provide temporary relief to 'artisans and others who have hitherto avoided Poor Law assistance', and in 1895 the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor highlighted the plight of poor elderly people who were too proud to apply for poor relief. During the

⁸⁷ Michael Flinn, 'Medical services under the New Poor Law', in Derek Fraser, ed., *The New Poor Law in the nineteenth century*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1976, 45-66; see especially pp. 45-8.

⁸⁸ See Harris, *Origins of the British welfare state*, pp. 56, 97.

early years of the twentieth century the Liberals introduced a series of measures which have become known collectively as the 'Liberal welfare reforms'. In addition to the introduction of free school meals and school medical inspection, they also included old-age pensions, unemployment insurance and health insurance.⁸⁹

The slow expansion of state welfare had important implications for the development of the relationship between charity and the state. The founders of the Charity Organisation Society sought to distinguish between the 'deserving poor', who were capable of being helped by charity, and the 'undeserving poor', who should be left to the less tender mercies of the Poor Law. They wanted to be able to cooperate with Boards of Guardians in order to keep the two groups separate. However, the expansion of state welfare provision meant that a growing number of the 'deserving' poor were likely to receive assistance from public agencies and this led to a very different view of the role which voluntary organisations might play in the development of welfare provision.⁹⁰

These new ideas affected the development of social thought inside and outside the Charity Organisation Society. As José Harris and others have shown, the COS was prepared to cooperate with other agencies in the provision of statutory benefits and services, but it often did so with a certain amount of ill-grace. During the 1880s and 1890s the COS supported the establishment of public works schemes for unemployed workers, but only when the schemes were administered under its

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-8, 157-65.

⁹⁰ As the organiser of the Bradford Guild of Help, Walter Milledge, explained in 1908, 'the state is assuming responsibilities which have hitherto been ... very partially undertaken by philanthropic agencies. The result, however, will be to broaden the outlook for the philanthropist and to enlarge his [*sic.*] opportunities for constructive work.' Quoted in Keith Laybourn, 'The Guild of Help and the changing face of Edwardian philanthropy', *Urban History*, 20 (1993), pp. 43-60, at p. 49.

control.⁹¹ After 1906, the London COS also played a key role in the development of the Children's Care Committees which were set up by the London County Council to supervise the provision of free school meals under the Education (Provision of Meals) Act.⁹² However, this did not prevent leading members of the Society from condemning the introduction of free school meals as a gross assault on the principle of parental responsibility, and when the Care Committees were established, COS members used their position to ensure that the food provided 'was of such a character as to constitute in itself a definite test of need'.⁹³

Although the COS felt that it had little option other than to cooperate with State agencies in circumstances where they had already taken the decision to expand the benefits of State provision, other agencies, such as the Guilds of Help and the Councils of Social Welfare, were much more positive.⁹⁴ These organisations often used similar methods to the COS – they also emphasised the importance of individual casework and the links between middle-class 'helpers' and their working-class 'clients' – but they showed a much greater understanding of the economic causes of poverty and were more sympathetic to the expansion of State-sponsored

⁹¹ José Harris, *Unemployment and politics: a study in English social policy 1886-1914*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972, pp. 109-10.

⁹² Lewis, *The voluntary sector*, pp. 62-5. See also Ross, 'Hungry children', pp. 178-9.

⁹³ Helen Bosanquet, *Social work in London, 1869-1912: a history of the Charity Organisation Society*, London: John Murray, 1914, pp. 249-59; Jane Lewis, 'The boundary between voluntary and statutory social services in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries', *Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), 155-77, at p. 167.

⁹⁴ For more information about these organisations, see Michael Moore, 'Social work and social welfare: the organisation of philanthropic resources in Britain, 1900-14', *Journal of British Studies*, 16 (1977), pp. 85-104; Michael Cahill and Tony Jowitt, 'The new philanthropy: the emergence of the Bradford City Guild of Help', *Journal of Social Policy*, 9 (1980), pp. 359-82; Laybourn, 'The Guild of Help and the changing face of Edwardian philanthropy'; *ibid.*, *The Guild of Help and the changing face of Edwardian philanthropy: the Guild of Help, voluntary work and the state, 1904-19*, Lampeter: Edward Mellen Press, 1994; Lewis, 'The boundary between voluntary and statutory social service'.

solutions to it.⁹⁵ As a result, they not only represented a significant departure from the 'old' philanthropy of the Charity Organisation Society, but also anticipated the development of the 'new philanthropy' which achieved its full flowering during the interwar years.⁹⁶

4. Conclusion

As José Harris observed in 1983, 'writers on social questions often refer to "social policy" as though it were a peculiarity of modern or advanced societies, but this view is misplaced. All political regimes have social policies of some kind, even if such policies consist simply in leaving the pursuit of welfare to the family or the local community or the corporation or the market'.⁹⁷ One important dimension of this is the question of how far needs should be met by state provision, and how far they should be met by private charity. This chapter has tried to examine how the boundary between statutory and voluntary provision changed, in the specific context of the relief of poverty and destitution, between *circa* 1750 and 1914. At the beginning of this period, a growing number of commentators began to argue that more emphasis should be placed on the importance of voluntary provision, and that the provision of welfare by public agencies should be sharply curtailed. This led to a significant increase in the relative importance of the role played by charity in the

⁹⁵ Laybourn, 'The Guild of Help', p. 49.

⁹⁶ See Harris, *Origins of the British welfare state*, pp. 186-90.

⁹⁷ José Harris, 'The transition to high politics in English social policy, 1880-1914', in Michael Bentley and John Stevenson, eds., *High and low politics in modern Britain: ten studies*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, pp. 58-79, at p. 58.

relief of poverty in many parts of the country after 1834. However, by the early years of the twentieth century, it was widely accepted that the state would have to play a greater role in welfare provision, and voluntary organisations became increasingly concerned with the question of how far they could find a role for themselves in the new world which was beginning to emerge.

These issues became increasingly important after 1914. The First World War generated a new sense of entitlement on the part of those in need of state welfare, and the rise of mass unemployment after 1918 forced the state to accept a much greater responsibility for welfare provision. The voluntary sector was also forced to reconsider its position. Although voluntary organisations continued to play an important part in meeting general relief needs, especially during the 1920s, they also began to argue that their most important role was not to provide an alternative to state welfare, but to complement it by offering services for which the state had not yet taken responsibility. As G.D.H. Cole explained in 1945, after 1918 'the old Charity Organisation Society case against outdoor relief simply went by default; and all the voluntary charities had to accommodate themselves ... to the changed situation'.⁹⁸ Elizabeth Macadam tried to reflect this in her book, *The new philanthropy*. She argued that the voluntary sector should use its ability to provide a 'more flexible, closely-individualised and highly-specialised' service to develop schemes 'which are experimental and of insufficiently-recognised value to have yet

⁹⁸ G.D.H. Cole, 'A retrospect of the history of voluntary social service', in A.F.C. Bourdillon, ed., *Voluntary social services: their place in the modern state*, London: Methuen and Co., 1945, pp. 11-30, at p. 24.

acquired a claim on the state' and to bring 'pressure to bear on the state to amend existing and introduce fresh provision for social needs'.⁹⁹

Many of these issues have resurfaced in more recent debates about the role of the state and the relationship between the statutory and voluntary sectors. During the 1970s and 1980s, there was renewed argument about the threat of 'welfare dependency' and the need to reinvigorate 'civil society' by placing greater reliance on the voluntary sector, and many of these arguments have continued under 'New Labour'.¹⁰⁰ However, whereas earlier debates focused on what Beveridge called the 'moving frontier' between charity and state welfare,¹⁰¹ this frontier has become increasingly blurred as governments have explored new ways of delivering public services through voluntary agencies.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Macadam, *The new philanthropy: a study of the relations between the statutory and voluntary social services*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1934, pp. 18, 287.

¹⁰⁰ Some of the arguments about the 'crisis' of the welfare state during the 1970s and 1980s and the rise of 'welfare pluralism' were reviewed in Norman Johnson, *The welfare state in transition: the theory and practice of welfare pluralism*, Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1987. On New Labour and the voluntary sector, see Edward Brundson and Margaret May, 'Evaluating New Labour's approach to independent welfare provision', in Martin Powell, ed., *Evaluating New Labour's welfare reforms*, Bristol: Policy Press, 2002, pp. 61-84, at pp. 61-71.

¹⁰¹ Geoffrey Finlayson, 'A moving frontier: voluntarism and the state in British social welfare, 1911-49', *Twentieth Century British History*, 1 (1990), pp. 183-206.

¹⁰² See e.g. Jane Lewis, 'What is New Labour? Can it deliver on social policy?', in Jane Lewis and Rebecca Surender, eds., *Welfare state change: towards a third way*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 207-38.