

6. Who cares? Mismanagement, neglect and suffering in the final decades of the Old Poor Laws¹

Samantha A. Shave

the provision made in this Town for the Poor, does not preserve them from want, or even from nakedness

John Rutter²

the public purse of the parish was cruelly withholden

Philip Henvill³

Poor Law historians have focused on the ‘welfare process’ under the Old Poor Law over recent decades, a phrase coined by Lynn Hollen Lees and taken up by Steve Hindle.⁴ This work has often focused on the ‘obligation and responsibility’, as Hindle puts it, negotiated between poor-relief claimants and those vested with powers to administer the Poor Laws.⁵ On one side of the negotiation, parish officers such as overseers and assistant overseers, who

¹ I would like to thank Peter Collinge, Louise Falcini, Tim Hitchcock, Steven King and especially Tom Akehurst for their insightful suggestions and supportive comments on draft versions of this chapter. This research was generously supported by a research grant from the Marc Fitch Fund, for which I was grateful. Some of the initial research was presented at the Rural History Conference in 2019. The pamphlets can be found in digitized collections unless noted otherwise. The emphasis in the quotes selected are as in the original sources.

² J. Rutter, *A Brief Sketch of the State of the Poor, and of the Management of Houses of Industry; recommended to the consideration of the inhabitants of the town of Shaftesbury, and other places* (Shaftesbury, 1819), p. iv.

³ P. Henvill, *A Brief Statement of Facts; wherein, several instances of unparalleled inhumanity, oppression, cruelty, and neglect, in the treatment of the poor in the parish of Damerham South, in the County of Wilts, are considered and exposed* (Salisbury, 1796), p. 29.

⁴ L. H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700–1948* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 33; S. Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c.1550–1750* (Oxford, 2004), p. 363.

⁵ Hindle, *On the Parish?*, p. 6.

S.A. Shave, ‘Who cares? Mismanagement, neglect and suffering in the final decades of the Old Poor Law’ in *Providing for the Poor: The Old Poor Law, 1750–1834*, ed. P. Collinge and L. Falcini (London, 2022), pp. 167–193. License: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

were regularly providing relief in money and in kind, as well as magistrates, who had a 'supervisory' role in overseeing the relief system and could overturn an overseer's decision, have received the greatest attention in this literature.⁶ The concurrent focus on the micro-politics of the parish, the dynamics between those 'who had a stake in the allocation of resources in the local community' and poor relief claimants, has nuanced the dualism of 'entitlement' and 'subordination' of the relief recipient in Poor Law research.⁷ Unearthing these negotiations and complications also reveals where the power sat in the distribution of relief, as the chapters in this book attest.⁸ As Steven King re-emphasized, relief was 'crucially dependent upon the respective personalities of official and pauper'.⁹ Yet, because of the emphasis on how poor relief was managed and negotiated on an everyday basis, the tendency has been to focus on the actions and inactions of those who had official responsibilities to administer and influence poor relief. The interests and roles of the wider community have been overlooked and, as a consequence, undervalued. This chapter aims to shed light on members of the community who were not responsible for the day-to-day provision of poor relief, but whose actions were, nevertheless, important in the administration and quality of poor relief.

Studies focused narrowly on the core relief administrators have led to little direct information about how other people, such as land agents acting

⁶ P. Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531–1782* (Cambridge, 1990, repr. 1995), p. 11; for more literature on magistrates see P. Dunkley, 'Paternalism, the magistracy and poor relief in England, 1795–1834', *International Review of Social History*, xxiv (1979), 371–97; P. King, 'The rights of the poor and the role of the law: the impact of pauper appeals to the summary courts, 1750–1834', in *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws*, ed. P. Jones and S. King (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 235–62; S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law, 1760–1834* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 93–4. Other parish officers included churchwardens, constables and surveyors of the highways.

⁷ Hindle, *On the Parish?*, p. 363; for an introduction to the politics of the parish, see K. Wrightson, 'The politics of the parish in early modern England', in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, ed. P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 10–46. See also D. Eastwood, 'The republic in the village: the parish and poor at Bampton, 1780–1834', *Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, xii (1992), 18–28; S. Hindle, 'Power, poor relief, and social relations in Holland Fen, c.1600–1800', *The Historical Journal*, xli (1998), 67–96; J. Healey, 'The development of poor relief in Lancashire, c.1598–1680', *The Historical Journal*, liii (2010), 551–72.

⁸ This is a theme throughout the literature, such as the edited collection by Jones and King, *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute*, and research on pauper letters, most recently S. King, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750s–1830s* (Montreal, 2019).

⁹ S. King, 'Introduction: Hertfordshire in context', in *Social Welfare in Hertfordshire from 1600: A Caring County?*, ed. S. King and G. Gear (Hatfield, 2013), pp. 1–13, at p. 8.

on behalf of landowners, influenced relief under the Old Poor Law.¹⁰ There are, though, several other overlooked groups in studies of the Old Poor Law, including religious individuals, such as the Anglican clergy, who were not part of the core parish relief administration team but nonetheless oversaw poor relief. As Frances Knight explains, the ‘plight of the poor had long been a cause for Christian concern’, and bishops and senior clergy were ‘closely involved in the remaking of the poor law from an early date’.¹¹ In early workhouses, they were paid to visit the poor and sick, and more generally to instil religious observance in the institution.¹² Within the vestry, many clergy would act as the vestry chairman or assume the role of a parish officer when administering charitable and statutory assistance.¹³ When the property requirement for justices of the peace was lowered in the mid eighteenth century, John Tomlinson noted, more clergymen started to take up the role of magistrate. Indeed, in England and Wales, this increased from 11 per cent of magistrates in 1760 to just over 25 per cent in the 1830s.¹⁴ It is little wonder, therefore, that approximately 20 per cent of the ‘Rural Queries’ returned to the 1832 Royal Commission on the Poor Laws were completed with the input of a member of the clergy, demonstrating their knowledge of poor-relief provision on the ground.¹⁵ Nonconformist groups were also significantly engaged in poor relief, including Quakers who formed and managed early workhouses in Bristol and London, and who provided generous amounts of their own independently funded relief to Quaker members.¹⁶

This chapter seeks to examine how religious parishioners cared about cases of neglect and suffering under the Old Poor Law by examining two

¹⁰ S. A. Shave, ‘The land agent and the Old Poor Laws: examining the correspondence of William Spencer in Sapcote, Leicestershire’, *Agricultural History Review*, lxxviii (2020), 190–212, at 196.

¹¹ F. Knight, *The Nineteenth-Century Church and English Society* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 68.

¹² For a detailed case study see S. C. Tye, ‘Religion, the SPCK and the Westminster workhouses: “re-enchanting” the eighteenth-century workhouse’ (unpublished Oxford Brookes University PhD thesis, 2014).

¹³ A. Warne, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century Devon* (Newton Abbot, 1969), p. 148.

¹⁴ J. B. Tomlinson, ‘The decline of the clerical magistracy in the nineteenth-century English Midlands’, *Studies in Church History*, lvi (2020), 419–33, at 420.

¹⁵ *Report from His Majesty’s Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws* (Parl. Papers 1834 [C. 44]), appendix B.1, *Answers to the Rural Queries in Five Parts*, part 1: ‘clergy’ on the basis of their given title or job title (including vicar, rector, reverend, minister, curate, sub-curate, minister); my thanks to Courtney Devine for helping me to collect this data.

¹⁶ T. V. Hitchcock, ‘The English workhouse: a study of institutional poor relief in selected counties, 1696–1750’ (unpublished University of Oxford DPhil thesis, 1985).

pamphlets from two authors living in two different communities with two different Christian denominations. They expose the conditions of parishioners receiving indoor relief, vulnerable individuals who were too unwell, young or infirm to undertake work topped up by outdoor relief. These sources somewhat cloud the view within Poor Law studies that poor relief could always be negotiated and contested by relief claimants and recipients. The first pamphlet, published in 1796, about the treatment of the indoor poor of the agricultural village of South Damerham, situated on the southern boundary of Wiltshire about ten miles from Salisbury, was written by Philip Henvill.¹⁷ Henvill was a curate of South Damerham and the neighbouring parish of Martin, and had lived in South Damerham for about four years. He had then retired at some point, before coming out of retirement to write the pamphlet out of a 'strong sense of duty'.¹⁸ Before arriving in the parish, he had studied at Oxford, held curacies in parishes within southern Hampshire and was ordained in Winchester in 1787.¹⁹ In 1799 he published his sermons which were of interest to evangelical Christians.²⁰ The second pamphlet, published in 1819, was composed by John Rutter, a Quaker and local printer. A Quaker meeting was formed in his home town of Shaftesbury in Dorset in 1746. During his life he attempted to raise the quality of life of the poor in various ways and wrote on other topics including vagrancy and turnpikes.²¹ While serving on a committee to assist the overseers in their 'arduous and important duties', he became 'excited by various cases of misery, and by the numerous instances of deprivations and sufferings'.²² Together these pamphlets demonstrate that those in receipt of relief were at times severely neglected, and their only route for redress may have been the advocacy of well-meaning supporters.

The chapter has three main themes. First, it examines how these two men reported and explained the mismanagement and neglect of the poor, showing that the authors knew that a minimum standard of relief was not

¹⁷ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*.

¹⁸ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 12; quotation from p. 4.

¹⁹ 'Henville, Philip (1783–1795)', Clergy of the Church of England Database, Person ID: 76902 <<https://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/persons/CreatePersonFrames.jsp?PersonID=76902>> [accessed 4 Jan. 2021], notably listed as a curate for all of these positions; Oxford detail from 'Review of new publications', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, lxix (1799), 1061.

²⁰ P. Henvill, *Sermons on Practical and Important Subjects, with a preface particularly addressed to candidates for orders and the younger clergy*, i (London, 1799), advertised in supplement to *The Evangelist Magazine*, vii (London, 1799), 562.

²¹ J. Stuttard, *The Turbulent Quaker of Shaftesbury: John Rutter (1796–1851)* (Gloucester, 2018), *passim* and publications on pp. 183–4; a discussion of Rutter's *A Brief Sketch* is on pp. 53–9.

²² Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, pp. iii–iv.

being provided. The next section outlines the authors' motivations and views of morality, and how they used these to develop critiques of the local relief regime, the parish officers implementing it, and the Old Poor Law system as a whole. These two pamphlets are then used as a lens into the micro-politics of poor relief and care from the authors' perspectives. There was a range of relationships between different groups and individuals within the parish, and these pamphlets expose how these men were combative with parish officers, yet collaborative with many others. The conclusion suggests that, to understand more about the 'welfare process' from both sides of the negotiation, further studies of more cases of neglect and suffering within the Old Poor Law system are needed, as is a greater understanding of the perspectives, actions and care of a wider community. To begin with, some local and national context is necessary, including why the indoor poor in particular received their attention.

Context

It is widely accepted that the economic and social conditions in the final decades of the Old Poor Law led the labouring poor to the vestry door, and ratepayers saw their poor-rate bills escalate. These pamphlets were published during particularly difficult years. There were significant crises when Henvill took his pamphlet to the press in 1796. Indeed, between 1794 and 1796 and between 1799 and 1801 poor harvests, limited agricultural work, higher wheat prices and a deficiency of empathy or intervention by landowners culminated in widespread hunger and food riots.²³ The end of the Napoleonic Wars pushed England into dire straits again, forming the context for Rutter's pamphlet. The rural poor struggled with yet worsening conditions and increasing societal hostility.²⁴ The £2 million spent on relief in England and Wales in 1783–5 had doubled by 1802–3, and doubled once again to £8 million by 1818. The average annual cost of poor relief, even when accounting for population growth, increased from four shillings per head in 1776 to thirteen shillings in 1818.²⁵ Both on the arable chalklands of Wiltshire, and the pastures and woodlands of Dorset, agricultural labourers and their families found it increasingly hard to make a living. From the late

²³ R. Wells, *Wretched Faces: Famine in Wartime England, 1763–1803* (Gloucester, 1988); more recently C. J. Griffin, *The Politics of Hunger: Protest, Poverty and Policy in England, c.1750–c.1840* (Manchester, 2020).

²⁴ See examples in C. J. Griffin, *Protest, Politics and Work in Rural England, 1700–1850* (Basingstoke, 2014), p. 62.

²⁵ B. Harris, *Origins of the British Welfare State: Society, State and Social Welfare in England and Wales, 1800–1945* (Basingstoke, 2004), p. 43.

eighteenth century the under- and unemployment of labourers in southern England was common, and those who had wages did not see them rise with the cost of grain. At the start of the nineteenth century, Wilson writes, 'subsistence living and often actual hunger for the Wiltshire agricultural labourer' were a common experience, and one shared in neighbouring rural Dorset.²⁶ According to the Dorset magistrate David Okeden Parry Okeden in 1830, labourers in the county were 'unappreciated', 'unrewarded' and 'in cheerless endurance of the present'.²⁷ The subsistence living experienced by many became increasingly tough as access to common land and piecework for women and children dwindled.²⁸ As a consequence, poor-relief expenditure was high. In the year 1812–13, Wiltshire spent £1 13s per head of the population relieving the poor, and Dorset 17s, when the average in England was 13s. Although the national rate declined to 10s in 1823–4, in Dorset and Wiltshire it remained slightly higher at 11s and 12s respectively.²⁹ While this gives us an idea of the amounts of relief given out rather than need per se, it does provide an indication of the extent of poverty in the two counties.

During this time, new relief policies and practices were being discussed, developed, implemented and abandoned at a fast pace on both national and local levels. The 'huge crop of pamphlets' addressing the Old Poor Law at this time were 'mostly written by farmers, ratepayers, and clergymen closely concerned with administration, and eager to have their proposals adopted nationally'.³⁰ Of course there were other outlets too, including letters, books, pieces in periodicals such as the *Annals of Agriculture*, and reports such as those produced by the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor which was established by prominent evangelical Christians in 1796.³¹ The pamphlet literature in particular,

²⁶ A. R. Wilson, *Forgotten Labour: The Wiltshire Agricultural Labourer and his Environment, 4500 BC–AD 1950* (East Knoyle, 2007), p. 189; for more on the southern counties see S. A. Shave, *Pauper Policies: Poor Law Practice in England, 1780–1850* (Manchester, 2017), pp. 6–9.

²⁷ D. O. P. Okeden, *A Letter to the Members in Parliament, for Dorsetshire, on the Subject of Poor-Relief and Labourers' Wages*, 2nd edn (Blandford, 1830), p. 10, cited in S. A. Shave, 'The dependent poor? (Re)constructing the lives of individuals "on the parish" in rural Dorset, 1800–1832', *Rural History*, xx (2009), 67–97, at 67.

²⁸ On piecework in Dorset see J. Richards, 'Rethinking the makeshift economy: a case study of three market towns in Dorset on the later decades of the Old Poor Law' (unpublished University of Leicester PhD thesis, 2019).

²⁹ *Report from the Select Committee on Poor Rate Returns* (Parl. Papers 1824 [C. 420]), p. 11.

³⁰ K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660–1900* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 110.

³¹ J. R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795–1824* (London,

however, has offered historians a rich source for understanding both the energy and nuances of Poor Law debates during years of experimentation and distress.³² Beatrice and Sidney Webb, who first took note of the importance of pamphlets in Poor Law history, identified four successive waves of pamphlet writing from the mid-eighteenth century to 1834, 'differing one from the other in general context, and each characterised by a particular note of its time'.³³ The first focused on 'the need for superior administration', arguing that parish officials should be superseded or their powers reduced through the use of Poor Law unions, and the second on the establishment and use of humane workhouses that excluded the able-bodied poor. During the period of more intense distress, there was a focus on the rising outdoor relief costs and stress within the outdoor relief system (often blamed on allowances). A final wave from 1815, in general, argued for a more restrictive relief system.³⁴ In sum, King notes, such writings provided 'alternative practical and ideological models for the treatment of the poor and the administration of relief', although Snell contends that the political economic discourse in some became 'puddles' of text in which the authors 'waded through ... Smithian, Benthamite and Malthusian dogma'.³⁵

Given the historiography, using pamphlets to examine local issues of poor-relief mismanagement might therefore be perceived as an unusual choice, as it is often assumed that pamphlets just contain national-level debate. However, a wealth of information about local relief provisions can be found in pamphlets such as those by Henvill and Rutter, whose writings do not seem to fit neatly into the Webbs' waves.³⁶ They were part of a 'strand of social commentators

1969), p. 91; J. Innes, *Inferior Politics: Social Problems and Social Policies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2009), p. 152.

³² For a concise summary see A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700–1930* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 37–60.

³³ S. Webb and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History*, i, *The Old Poor Law* (London, 1927), p. 158.

³⁴ Webb and Webb, *English Poor Law History*, pp. 158–9.

³⁵ S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700–1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000), p. 32; Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 110; see also Knight, *The Nineteenth-Century Church*, p. 68.

³⁶ It is possible to find others too, created in urban and as well as rural contexts for this period, e.g., T. Batty, *A Disclosure of Parochial Abuse, Artifice, & Peculation, in the Town of Manchester; which have been the Means of burthening the inhabitants with the present enormous parish rates: with other existing impositions of office, in a variety of facts, exhibiting the cruel and inhuman conduct of the hireling officers of the town, towards the poor* (London, 1796); H. Wake, *Abuse of the Poor-Rate!! A statement of facts, submitted to the candid and unprejudiced by the Rev. Henry Wake, A. M. Rector of Overwallop, Hants; and vicar of Mere, Wilts.*, 2nd edn (Andover, 1818), copy in the Hampshire Record Office, 15M84/Z3/61. Ballads and

and pamphlet writers' identified by Jones and King who, when they learned about deterrent indoor relief regimes, were 'disquiet and soul-searching'.³⁷ The aim of both Henvill and Rutter was, in the first instance, to expose the problems of the mismanagement of relief in one community and thereby bring the local mismanagement of poor relief into focus. In doing this, the authors did develop some wider points about the nature of the statutory poor-relief system, but these were secondary. A notable difference, though, between the two works relates to the matter of reform. While neither author suggested a comprehensive mode of national reform, Henvill emphasized that the Poor Laws gave parish officers too much power over poor relief provision which, when left unchecked, could lead to disastrous consequences, whereas Rutter argued for the reform of the poor relief system specifically at the local level with the implementation of a new workhouse system in Shaftesbury. This is an important distinction, which will be returned to throughout this chapter.

The lack of contextual historiography about these kinds of Poor Law pamphlets does not distract from the fact that they contain rich details of poor-relief mismanagement, neglect and suffering, and of the micro-politics of relief provision. Of course, the authors tell closely edited stories, which were meant to be read by others and were devised to change the status quo. Indeed, these particular authors sought to influence their local administrators and elites, and how they operated poor relief, and it is important to acknowledge this. It was hoped that parish documents would contextualize these two works, triangulate some of the information they contained (such as relief amounts and frequencies, and parish accommodation details), and reveal how the vestries and their members reacted to the writings. Disappointingly, there are no surviving vestry minutes for either of these two places around the time the pamphlets were published; in South Damerham this was probably a result of the deficient bookkeeping practices which were disclosed by Henvill.³⁸ Accessible parish surveys might have provided some information too, but they do not feature in either Fredrick Morton Eden's 1797 survey of poverty and poor relief in England and Wales, or in the Royal Commission's 'Rural Queries' of 1832.³⁹ Some of the minutes of the meetings of the Quakers at Shaftesbury have survived for this period,

broadside also contained details of cruelty: see T. Hitchcock, 'The body in the workhouse: death, burial, and belonging in early eighteenth-century St Giles in the Fields', in *Suffering and Happiness in England, 1550–1850: Narratives and Representations: A Collection to Honour Paul Slack*, ed. M. J. Braddick and J. Innes (Oxford, 2017), pp. 153–73.

³⁷ P. Jones and S. King, *Pauper Voices, Public Opinion and Workhouse Reform in Mid-Victorian England: Bearing Witness* (Basingstoke, 2020), p. 7.

³⁸ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 46.

³⁹ F. M. Eden, *The State of the Poor* (3 vols, 1797, repr. 2001).

which may provide some information about their independent relief systems but these have been inaccessible during the pandemic.⁴⁰ To understand the involvement of individuals such as Henvill and Rutter in the relief of the poor, however, and why they were drawn in particular to highlight the problems with indoor relief we have to look elsewhere.

Christians held a variety of views about poor relief and relief recipients under the Old Poor Law, and it is not possible to summarize them here. Even the Anglican clergy within one county possessed a range of perspectives and approaches.⁴¹ Some were very vocal about the complete abolition of the poor-relief system, most famously the Reverend Joseph Townsend in Wiltshire who advocated for a compulsory contributory insurance scheme.⁴² The point for Poor Law historians to engage with, however, is just how keen individuals motivated by Christian values were to intervene in the provision for the poorest. Knight argues that in general, on the ground, many clergy took 'great pains to ensure that relief was administered in the best interests of the beneficiaries'.⁴³ They reminded parish officers of their responsibilities to provide outdoor relief, for instance, even when they had entered into unions with other parishes to provide a workhouse.⁴⁴ George Fox, the principal founder of Quakerism, explicitly encouraged meetings to collect and distribute their own monies for the poor, and membership of the Quakers was introduced in consequence of this (in 1737).⁴⁵ Local studies of how this worked in the Midlands provide more detail. Forde, in an exploration of Quakers in Derbyshire, found that 'Friends were as generous as possible' with allocating assistance in their meetings.⁴⁶ This generosity was mirrored in Staffordshire where Quaker leaders, Stuart has argued, 'acted as quasi-parish overseers', even offering money from their own pocket to be reimbursed at a later date.⁴⁷

The support of the religious community was also important in individual statutory relief requests. King's recent work on pauper letters, identified correspondence sent by or on behalf of the non-resident poor to vestries,

⁴⁰ Dorset History Centre (DHC), series NQ1/L and NQ1/J.

⁴¹ R. J. Lee, 'Encountering and managing the poor: rural society and the Anglican clergy in Norfolk, 1815–1914' (unpublished University of Leicester PhD thesis, 2003).

⁴² J. Townsend, *A Dissertation on the Poor Laws, by a well-wisher to mankind* (London, 1786).

⁴³ Knight, *The Nineteenth-Century Church*, p. 68.

⁴⁴ Shave, *Pauper Policies*, p. 96.

⁴⁵ W. C. Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism* (London, 1919), pp. 272, 459.

⁴⁶ H. Forde, 'Derbyshire Quakers, 1650–1761' (unpublished University of Leicester PhD thesis, 1977), abstract.

⁴⁷ D. Stuart, 'The early Quaker movement in Staffordshire, 1651–1743: from open fellowship to closed sect' (unpublished University of Leicester PhD thesis, 2001), p. 274.

demonstrates that relief requests were often the work of multiple people: friends, family and neighbours, as well as the wider community, of that claimant. Figures such as ‘teachers, clergymen, military men, and others’ would write letters that the relief claimant signed.⁴⁸ Strikingly, 36 per cent of all letters penned by advocates ‘were written by clergymen of different stripes’ which, King argues, highlights the ‘continuing link between welfare, advocacy, and religion’.⁴⁹ This also fits with a broader point, made by Jones and King, that the poor wanted such advocates because they ‘would have expected to have been listened-to by overseers and vestry officials’.⁵⁰ After the passage of the New Poor Law, both Anglicans and Quakers acted to help the poor in significant ways. For instance, in Hampshire, the Reverend William Brock gathered evidence about the maltreatment of three young boys in events that culminated in the Droxford–Fareham union scandal of 1837–8.⁵¹ In a similar way to other Christian groups, Quakers visited workhouses and joined boards of guardians.⁵² In 1840s Lancashire, Quakers also organized their own form of relief to their membership, in the form of money, beds and bedding, so they could help them avoid entering the deterrent workhouse system in the first place.⁵³ These ‘active bystanders’ were challenging and preventing harm.

It is little wonder that, in the swiftly deteriorating conditions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, religious people took their pen to the page. As King writes, as well as engaging in the main debates outlined by the Webbs, they could also be ‘active in channelling information on alternative models of welfare’.⁵⁴ The clergy came up with ways to supply the poor with food at lower cost, and developed indoor relief systems to save the parish money.⁵⁵ Across the county they had also devised schemes to feed the poor, often using charitable subscriptions rather than statutory

⁴⁸ King, *Writing the Lives*, pp. 34–5.

⁴⁹ King, *Writing the Lives*, p. 124.

⁵⁰ S. King and P. Jones, ‘Testifying for the poor: epistolary advocates and the negotiation of parochial relief in England, 1800–1834’, *Journal of Social History*, xlix (2016), 784–807, at 790.

⁵¹ S. A. Shave, ‘“Great inhumanity”: scandal, child punishment and policymaking in the early years of the New Poor Law workhouse system’, *Continuity and Change*, xxxiii (2018), 339–63, at 344.

⁵² Examples in S. Stanley Holton, *Quaker Women: Personal Life, Memory and Radicalism in the Lives of Women Friends, 1780–1930* (London, 2007), pp. 216, 225.

⁵³ R. Watson, ‘Poverty in north-east Lancashire in 1843: evidence from Quaker charity records’, *Local Population Studies*, lv (1995), 28–44.

⁵⁴ King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p. 32.

⁵⁵ Shave, *Pauper Policies*, pp. 159–65.

relief funds. In 1798 the Reverend Thomas Gisborne described the practice of supplying milk to Staffordshire's poor, and the Reverend Tovey Jolliffe supplied soup throughout the winter and beef at Christmas to the poor of Skelton in Cumberland in 1820.⁵⁶ During a period of escalating poor rates, this interest could take an extreme direction: the infamous Reverends J. T. Becher and R. Lowe designed and implemented the harsh and deterrent 'anti-pauper system' in Nottinghamshire which served as inspiration for the New Poor Law.⁵⁷ Ideas to restrict poor relief had been present for some time, and many poorhouses or workhouses, even those established under the optional Gilbert's Act (1782) which were supposed to be safe havens for the most vulnerable, developed a more deterrent emphasis.⁵⁸ At the same time, parishes were putting the poor to work on roads and requiring them to seek work in return for assistance, as well as restricting relief to stabilize or reduce their poor rates. Sturges Bourne's Acts, passed in 1818 and 1819, permitted the appointment of select vestries and assistant overseers, which both reflected and legitimized harsher treatment of the poor.⁵⁹ At the end of the eighteenth century (1793), an Act was passed allowing magistrates to fine overseers and other parish officers for 'Neglect of Duty in their respective offices' after hearing a complaint made on oath.⁶⁰ While this may seem like an anomaly given the direction of legislation and practice in this period, it is an obvious indication of growing negligence towards the poor.

It was within this changing policy landscape, and hardening attitudes towards the poor, that Henvill and Rutter wrote their pamphlets. It is perhaps little wonder that they focused on the neglect of indoor relief recipients living in deteriorating housing stock. As John Broad's research has shown, the provision of accommodation for the poor became an important function of vestries during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The early Poor Law, including the 1601 Act for the Relief of the Poor and Knatchbull's Act of 1723, 'permitted parish authorities to build or acquire a housing stock

⁵⁶ Rev. Thomas Gisborne, 'Extract from an account of a mode, adopted in Staffordshire, for supplying the poor with milk', in *The Reports of the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor* (London, 1798), i.129–34; *Carlisle Patriot*, 30 Dec. 1820, p. 3.

⁵⁷ D. Marshall, 'The Nottinghamshire reformers and their contribution to the New Poor Law', *The Economic History Review*, xiii (1961), 382–96.

⁵⁸ Shave, *Pauper Policies*, pp. 56–110; Shave, 'The land agent'.

⁵⁹ S. A. Shave, 'The impact of Sturges Bourne's Poor Law reforms in rural England', *The Historical Journal*, lvi (2013), 399–429, with corrigendum in *The Historical Journal*, lvii (2014), 593.

⁶⁰ 33 Geo III, c 55; Henvill himself was aware of a 'case recently determined in the Court of King's Bench' of an overseers' neglect to visit poorhouses: Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 49.

from the poor rate' to provide indoor relief. This sometimes merged with charity accommodation, which, although it was used to generate money for distribution, would sometimes be let to poor individuals and families 'rent free'.⁶¹ During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, not only was there an increasing rural population, and deepening poverty as time went on, but also rural housing became overcrowded and of poor quality.⁶² This impacted on those receiving indoor relief within houses or cottages rather than in the larger purpose-built institutions that were often founded under the workhouse Acts or specially formulated local Acts. Indeed, a dwelling that may have contained just one person in the seventeenth century, Sharpe and McEwan explain, would now house several people, and the level of parish housing stock was 'subject to the decisions of parish officials who might be under pressure to put the money to other uses'.⁶³

It is not too unusual to find petitions pleading for more housing in southern England. In the 1820s in Wimborne Minster (Dorset) four members of the select vestry asked the lords of the manors of Kingston Lacy and Wimborne for waste to build cottages for poor parishioners.⁶⁴ In the same decade the rector of Cliddesden (Hampshire) led a petition to Lord Portsmouth detailing that 210 poor people were housed in a total of twenty-nine cottages of poor quality, where the typhus fever was raging and causing deaths; a neighbouring parish was similarly overcrowded.⁶⁵ As illustrated by these cases, where the majority of land was held by one or few landowners ('close' parish), advocacy on behalf of the labouring poor was an important mechanism for redress.⁶⁶

⁶¹ J. Broad, 'Housing the rural poor in southern England, 1650–1850', *Agricultural History Review*, xlviii (2000), 151–70, at 157; for the use of charity and parish funds see J. Broad, 'Parish economies of welfare, 1650–1834', *The Historical Journal*, xlii (1999), 985–1006; for an urban context see A. Tomkins, *The Experience of Urban Poverty, 1723–1782: Parish, Charity and Credit* (Manchester, 2006).

⁶² Broad, 'Housing the rural poor'; Broad, 'The parish poor house in the long eighteenth century', in *Accommodating Poverty: The Housing and Living Arrangements of the English Poor*, ed. J. McEwan and P. Sharpe (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 246–62.

⁶³ P. Sharpe and J. McEwan, 'Introduction: Accommodating poverty: the housing and living arrangements of the English poor, c.1600–1850', in *Accommodating Poverty*, ed. McEwan and Sharpe, pp. 1–21, at p. 15.

⁶⁴ DHC, PE/WM/VE/2/2, Wimborne Minster, Select vestry order book, 31 Dec. 1822.

⁶⁵ Hampshire Record Office, 8M62/79, Petition 'To the Trustees of the Estate of the Right Honourable The Earl of Portsmouth' [The Right Honourable Lord Grantley, The Honourable Newton Fellows and John Hanson Esq., signed on behalf of the vestry by Col. Lamb J. Brooks], 1827.

⁶⁶ For more on this see B. A. Holderness, "'Open" and "close" parishes in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', *Agricultural History Review*, xx (1972), 126–39.

These pamphlets demonstrate that the same was true of deficient parish owned or rented properties for the accommodation of the most vulnerable poor, and the neglect caused to the residents. Henvill's South Damerham had a small population (529 inhabitants in 1801) and was under the control of a few individuals, in particular one controlling farmer.⁶⁷ The parish was remote. Henvill wrote that the poor 'knew not on whom to look for redress' – there was no Wiltshire magistrate 'within many miles of the parish'.⁶⁸ When Rutter wrote this pamphlet, Shaftesbury was a borough formed of St Peter, St James and Holy Trinity parishes, and in 1821 it consisted of 546 inhabited households, and a population of 2,903.⁶⁹ Shaftesbury was also under the control of a few people. The town was largely owned by Lord Grosvenor. In 1830 two parliamentary candidates were presented by Grosvenor for the town, but in a step of resistance Rutter and others proposed their own. The returning officer of the election was one of Grosvenor's agents, and concerns about election rigging (certainly a number of votes that could have secured a seat were rejected) led to unrest and property damage.⁷⁰

Reporting and explaining mismanagement, neglect and suffering

Having explored the context of these two pamphlets, attention now turns to the first theme drawn out from their contents: how these two men reported and explained the mismanagement, neglect and suffering they came across in their local communities. Both authors relied on a reportage or exposé style, as if they were bringing something to light for the first time. Henvill's attention was actually drawn to the plight of the indoor poor in South Damerham because of what he had heard about the condition of

⁶⁷ 'Table of population, 1801–1951', in *The Victoria History of the County of Wiltshire*, iv (London, 1959) <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/wilts/vol4/pp315-361#h3-0028>> [accessed 4 Jan. 2021]; this source also confirms that South Damerham was placed in Hampshire from 1894.

⁶⁸ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, pp. 14, 48.

⁶⁹ House of Lords, *The Sessional Papers, 1801–1833*, ccxciii (1831), *Returns relating to Parliamentary Representation* (C. 105), no. 16, *Limits, Houses, and Population of Cities, &c. in England and Wales*, p. 147. A Vision of Britain through Time, GB Historical GIS/University of Portsmouth, 'Population Statistics', 'Total Population': Shaftesbury St Peter AP/CP <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10458651/cube/TOT_POP>; Shaftesbury St James CP/AP <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10458535/cube/TOT_POP>; Shaftesbury Holy Trinity CP/AP <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10458389/cube/TOT_POP> [accessed 8 Jan. 2021].

⁷⁰ D. Hardiman, 'The turbulent Quaker of Shaftesbury and the riots in the Commons' (22 June 2021), Shaftesbury Gold Hill Museum <<https://www.goldhillmuseum.org.uk/the-turbulent-quaker-of-shaftesbury-and-riots-in-the-commons>> [accessed 30 July 2021].

Providing for the Poor

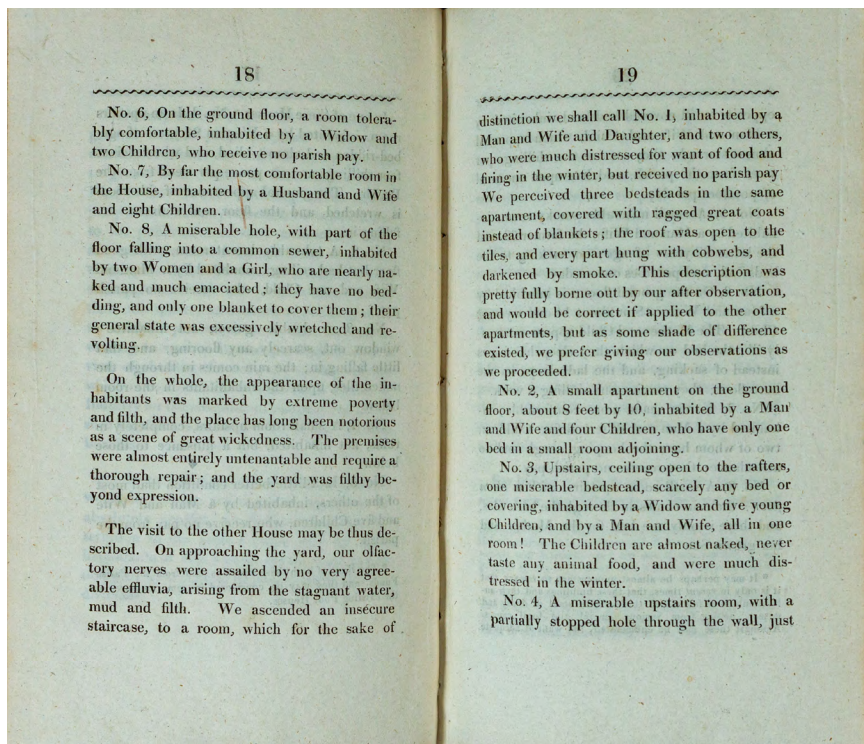


Figure 6.1 John Rutter, *A brief sketch of the state of the poor, and of the management of houses of industry: recommended to the consideration of the inhabitants of...Shaftesbury, and other places*. Shaftesbury, 1819, pp. 18-19.

one parishioner, Elizabeth Haskol. Haskol was 'confined to her room' and laid upon a hard 'oaken floor' over several years.⁷¹ The building she resided in had missing internal doors and 'about a yard from her head' was a large hole where a window would have been.⁷² She had not been provided with a bed, sheets or blankets, and as she declined 'reports of her deplorable condition began to be rumoured through-out the parish'.⁷³ A woman 'sent' to visit Haskol conveyed further details, written up by Henvill in disturbing detail: 'she lay a *perfect skeleton*, her bones being *nearly through her skin*', with few coverings and '*vermin crawled about her, like bees round a hive*'.

⁷¹ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 16.

⁷² Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 23.

⁷³ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 17.

When Henvill said he would visit Haskol himself, the woman replied that he could not because “*she has not clothes to cover her nakedness*”.⁷⁴ Haskol’s case was not isolated, however, and Henvill referred to several other people in distress. He heard that Anne Russel, who was pregnant and lived in the same house, was without coverings or other necessary items and was too cold to give birth.⁷⁵ He then visited the house with his wife. He exclaimed, ‘Good God! What a scene of wretchedness and misery’, and described some residents as having ‘squalid, emaciated, countenances’.⁷⁶ The inspection was not over, though. On their return to the vicarage Elizabeth Marlow asked him to visit her unwell husband, Edward, who had been refused medical relief by the overseer.⁷⁷ The man was dying on a bedstead and lying in ‘rotten’ diarrhoea, in the same space where their children were expected to sleep.⁷⁸

Rutter’s style of reporting is different from Henvill’s. Instead of descriptions of cases (which he thought would be ‘tedious’), Rutter methodically provided notes on his observations of two houses with eight rooms each (Figure 6.1). These were his observations of ‘some inhabitants of this Town’; rather thoughtfully, he decided to keep the identities of the inhabitants anonymous.⁷⁹

Both houses were not owned by the parish per se but were rented from ‘Parish Funds’, and were effectively the only two ‘Poor Houses’ the town had.⁸⁰ Rutter did not visit these houses alone, so these were probably the notes he took while he was part of the committee mentioned earlier.⁸¹ The first poorhouse, he wrote, had ‘long been notorious as a scene of great wickedness’. He noted how the inhabitants were ‘marked by extreme poverty and filth’, while the building needed repairing and the yard cleaning. A pool of ‘stagnant water, mud and filth’ greeted them in the yard of the second house.⁸² Rutter described how each of the buildings had fallen into disrepair and within his methodical lists recorded the sizes of the rooms (often small), using words such as ‘wretched’ and ‘miserable’ to describe what he saw. After observations on the second house, he discussed the remedy – a well-managed workhouse. Mirroring the

⁷⁴ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, pp. 17–18.

⁷⁵ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 20; Anne Russel’s name given on p. 26.

⁷⁶ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 20.

⁷⁷ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 24; Edward Marlow’s name given on p. 26. The experience of the Marlows can be contrasted with the wide-ranging medical assistance provided in Darlaston: see Interlude 6 (J. Kisz, ‘Abel Rooker (1787–1867), surgeon’) after this chapter.

⁷⁸ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 25.

⁷⁹ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 16.

⁸⁰ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 17.

⁸¹ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 18; he uses the word ‘we’.

⁸² Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 18.

views of other reformers of this time, he thought that workhouses would reduce the poor rates and ‘remedy the distresses of paupers’.⁸³

From both of these descriptions, the authors had ideas about the minimum standards of care that could be expected. Rutter may have emphasized the structural inadequacies of the buildings, but he was clearly excited by the deficient conditions, and the lack of outdoor relief to assist the poor accommodated there. Beds were either not of good quality or of sufficient quantity, and bedclothes and clothing were inadequate. While several family groups received money or some food (primarily potatoes) from the parish, five family groups did not receive any relief in cash or kind (Figure 6.1). By noting its absence, it is clear that he expected them to be receiving something in addition to the shelter. Henvill also thought that parishioners at South Damerham were not receiving the correct standard of assistance, as evinced by his actions. After he was informed of Haskol’s situation, Henvill swiftly represented her case to the overseer, requesting that she be cleaned and supplied with bedding by the end of the week. This was, apparently, fulfilled.⁸⁴

Henvill stressed that, while the Poor Law had reinforced a liberal and benevolent spirit among the ratepaying community, there were notable problems in the ways in which the laws were being *implemented*. In his words, the ‘most obvious objection, arises not, indeed, from a defect in the laws themselves, as from mal-conduct in the administration of them’.⁸⁵ There was clearly a strong sense of the injustice, and in this pamphlet there was an obvious cause. He noted that his wife said ‘the Parish-Officers *ought to be dragged there*’,⁸⁶ and observed that parish officers had a habit of passing the burden of an individual’s need around, and that the overseers had not even visited the poorhouse, which he thought was required by law.⁸⁷ As a consequence, he claimed that they were avoiding their duty. When parish nurses were allocated to the vulnerable poor, further abuses arose. He thought that Haskol’s carer had taken her allowance and eaten her food. Henvill suggested that this was due to the carer’s bad character, and to her parish wages being so low, at just *6d* a week.⁸⁸ Each case Henvill added further damaged the reputation of the parish officers. Sarah Gibbs, a widow who was provided with *4s* per week, experienced frequent threats that such an allowance would be withdrawn ‘*because she had a house*’. While it was

⁸³ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 40.

⁸⁴ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 18.

⁸⁵ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 6.

⁸⁶ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 22.

⁸⁷ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, pp. 49–50.

⁸⁸ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, pp. 50–2.

common for those in receipt of outdoor relief to give up their possessions, the cottage was her son's, and he had to attend the vestry from some distance to make the ownership clear to them.⁸⁹

Rutter took a different path, but this was in part related to his aim of promoting a scheme for reform. The buildings had only been in this state very recently due to 'general and local causes': 'the want of adequate employment, – the high price of provisions, – the present law of settlement, – the increased depravity both of individuals and families, – *and the moral impossibility of regulation by any other means than a radical change of system*'.⁹⁰ Evidently, the economic and socio-legal contexts had exacerbated the condition of the labouring classes. Notably, he wrote that the labouring poor were 'remarkably patient under the prevalence of both general and local pressures', highlighting their endurance in such conditions.⁹¹ Unlike Henvill, Rutter placed less blame on the inability of the parish to adapt their relief provision to meet the needs of parishioners. The 'remedy' for such 'evils', he argued, would be the provision of one well-regulated workhouse. He drew on the example of the Fordingbridge workhouse in Hampshire. The workhouses of Boldre, Hampshire, Sturminster, Dorset and St Martin-in-the-Fields in London also provided further evidence of their effectiveness; Rutter had either visited these, corresponded about them or read about them in publications. The resulting 'House of Industry' scheme was detailed in three succinct sections, focusing on the house and appendages, its internal regulation and management, and the employment of its residents.⁹²

Morality and duty

As was the common view within Poor Law debates, the suffering of the poor and their need for poor relief was explicitly linked to their morality. The provision in Shaftesbury, Rutter claimed, 'generally induces habits of indolence and negligence, and frequently affords encouragement to vice of the grossest nature'.⁹³ Rutter's proposed remedy, to provide a well-managed, industrious institution rather than mere accommodation in rented houses without money, clothing or food, would increase both the 'moral condition and comfort of the Poor' in the community.⁹⁴ Indeed, when discussing

⁸⁹ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 27.

⁹⁰ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, pp. 20–1.

⁹¹ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 39.

⁹² Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, pp. 26–39.

⁹³ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. iv.

⁹⁴ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. v.

the new institution at Fordingbridge, Rutter exclaimed that ‘immorality and profligacy daily decreased’ and ‘the morals of the lower classes were ... materially improved’.⁹⁵ This was evidently linked to their religious instruction, with regular attendance at services, prayers every evening, and the policing of language and behaviour, the latter of which was ‘inculcated and enforced’.⁹⁶ As was the dominant discourse at this time, good morals meant good workers. Rutter noted how the poor women were being sought out as domestic servants after institutionalization.⁹⁷ The maladministration of poor relief also reflected negatively on the moral standing of all those involved in the welfare process: overseers, vestrymen and landowners should feel morally responsible for the administration and maladministration of poor relief, including medical assistance. Henvill was more direct in his criticisms than Rutter. Parish administrators were, in his view, ‘unworthy of that confidence which the legislature seems to have reposed in them’, and parishioners should be given ‘*what the law entitles him [sic] to expect*’.⁹⁸

This led to thoughts about the operation of the entire poor-relief system. For Henvill, the Poor Laws were still ‘undoubtedly good’: they were part of the ‘spirit of liberality and benevolence’. Foreshadowing Malthus’s *Principle of Population*, Henvill noted the rise in population and the price of provisions, which should have resulted in ‘revision’ to the Poor Law.⁹⁹ But he also equated the failures of the Poor Law system with greed, demonstrating some class prejudice. He suggested that the yeomen of the past were different from those of the ‘present day’, whose lives were full of ‘the luxuries, the extravagancies, and the refinements of the age’.¹⁰⁰ The wealthy also lacked interest in the wider community, he suggested, a point which supports the view that old paternalist structures within rural society of this time were breaking down. Rutter had a similar viewpoint, quoting directly from the periodical *Philanthropist*, which he described as ‘valuable’, to argue that the ‘effect of the present system’ is to demoralize the poor and oppress those giving relief.¹⁰¹ Rutter then developed this point by drawing on extracts from a sermon by the Reverend George Richards on the Poor Law.¹⁰² The virtue and peace that the relief system once created was now

⁹⁵ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 24.

⁹⁶ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 33.

⁹⁷ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 24.

⁹⁸ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, pp. 6, 56.

⁹⁹ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, pp. 5–6.

¹⁰⁰ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 6.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 8.

¹⁰² Rev. G. Richards, *The Immoral Effects of the Poor Laws Considered, in a sermon preached*

‘almost annihilated by the operation of the Poor laws’, and societal disorder, dissatisfaction and crime stemmed from the increased provision of poor relief.¹⁰³ Notably, Richards’s writings had ‘conflated criminality and the poor’ which, as Philipson tells us, meant such writings were ‘often (ill) disguised as attacks on the “undeserving poor”’, typically the unemployed labourer.¹⁰⁴

By extension, the authors believed that the flawed management of poor relief and the low mood of the poor brought the morality *and* the prosperity of the whole country into question. It was often argued that employing the poor in profitable work would reduce the poor rates and ‘even [cause] an increase in national wealth’.¹⁰⁵ The Webbs identified the origin of this discourse in the work of Sir Josiah Child and late seventeenth-century philanthropic pamphlets, whence it was ‘repeated generation after generation for a century and a half ... buoyed up by splendid hopes, moral as well as material’.¹⁰⁶ Rutter followed this same path. Quoting Richards, he believed that ‘Industry, the ground work of national prosperity, and of individual happiness has decreased amongst the lower classes’.¹⁰⁷ He asked the reader to pay an interest in the Poor Law, exclaiming that those debating them ‘loudly call upon all who feel a love for their country’ to help the poor.¹⁰⁸ A similar discourse is present in Henvill’s work. He contends that the poor should be an indicator of a ‘civilized and humane people’, which is ‘highly becoming the subjects of a great, powerful, and generous nation’.¹⁰⁹ He compares English poorhouses to homes in Africa, using the racist language of his time: ‘That a degree of nastiness should prevail in an English Poor-House, which would be banished from the residence of a Hottentot’.¹¹⁰ The idea of the civilized nation is then reflected back onto the community: an ‘English Village’, which for Henvill was a place of peace and rest for ‘the honest, and industrious peasant’ who ‘may find a comfortable asylum in the place which gave him birth’.¹¹¹

at the parish church of Bampton, Oxfordshire; on Monday in Whitsun week, 1818, at the Annual Meeting of the Friendly Societies of that place (London, 1818).

¹⁰³ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁴ T. Philipson, ‘The sick poor and the quest for medical relief in Oxfordshire, ca.1750–1834’ (unpublished Oxford Brookes University PhD thesis, 2009), p. 132.

¹⁰⁵ Webb and Webb, *English Poor Law History*, p. 408.

¹⁰⁶ Webb and Webb, *English Poor Law History*, p. 408.

¹⁰⁷ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, pp. 8–9.

¹⁰⁸ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁹ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 56.

¹¹⁰ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 17

¹¹¹ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, pp. 55–6.

Attached to their sense of morality were the authors' feelings and their sense of duty. Rutter was 'excited by various cases of misery, and by the numerous instances of deprivations and sufferings'.¹¹² Henvill connected his excitement to a belief that the truth had not seen the light of day. He wrote that he did not want to 'exaggerate' details but at the same time he did not need to, as they were 'already too flagrant, and too notorious'.¹¹³ The duty to expose the 'facts' of these cases of neglect was explicit in both accounts; for both men, their interest in the poor was seen as part of their role or duty within society. This is most obvious in Henvill's piece. The epigraph selected for the title page of the pamphlet states "none [is] so proper as the Priest or Deacon to be an Advocate"¹¹⁴ for the poor, that such people were 'none so fit to comfort them' and it was 'his Duty to use his best Endeavours that suitable Provision be made for them'.¹¹⁴ Inside the pamphlet he mirrors this language: he has acted with 'earnest endeavour' to 'promote the interests of humanity', which is part of his role in discharging his parochial duties.¹¹⁵ Henvill stressed that 'I came not to Damerham, to be taught my duty, but to *practise it*'.¹¹⁶ While Henvill regarded his *own* duty as driving the publication, Rutter focused on the wider communal duty, writing 'that any reluctant feelings' we have in relation to the 'publication of such melancholy facts, are entirely removed by our sense of duty'.¹¹⁷ The communal discourse features elsewhere in the pamphlet – the reforms, he urged, needed the support of all people in the community, not just the wealthy benevolent class, to help 'our suffering neighbours'.¹¹⁸

Exploring the morality and duty evident in Henvill's and Rutter's pamphlets has illuminated something about how they considered their role own within the welfare process. Henvill was a moral authority in the parishes he served through his curacy, and Rutter was a prominent vocal individual and business owner. But, in addition to the differences in their methods of reporting and explaining the mismanagement and suffering, this analysis has highlighted their very different motivations. Rutter argued for a workhouse regime, using the cases of suffering as a foundation to his argument for relief reform. Unlike Henvill, he did not seek to help a particular individual in need at that moment. He perceived and wrote about those in parish accommodation in the way

¹¹² Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. iv.

¹¹³ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 12.

¹¹⁴ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 3.

¹¹⁶ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 54.

¹¹⁷ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 16.

¹¹⁸ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 40.

many pamphleteers wrote about the poor at this time – as a problematic, homogeneous group that required moral and spiritual reform, which would ultimately benefit the wider community. Suffering was, he thought, to be dealt with through substantial reforms and individuals like him felt it to be their duty to campaign, to be reformers. Henvill showed more care towards the individual – he tried to understand their circumstances and neglect in more depth. His narrative, however, is more patronizing in some respects. He saw himself as an important advocate for morality and duty, and as a truth-teller, for *victims* of the system. Of course, while Henvill did provide us with a few (probably edited) words spoken by the poor, they were both very absorbed in creating a channel for their own views and positions. Each wanted their principles to be practised and reflected in their communities and beyond, at a national level. As such, they served as significant critical voices on parish poor-relief provision, as overseers of the overseers and of other parish officials, by inspecting and questioning the provision and withholding of relief.

Micro-politics

To examine Henvill and Rutter's positions in more detail we now turn to the final theme of the chapter. These pamphlets expose the micro-politics of poor relief from the perspective of the authors. When the involvement of land agents in poor relief is examined, it is apparent that there were moments of harmony as well as of conflict between land agents and parish officers, and also with the workhouse committees they had brought into existence.¹¹⁹ This section draws out the complex relationships of both pamphleteers and parish officers. Notably, both Henvill and Rutter saw themselves as peripheral to the core group that was able to administer relief under law, the parish officers. That liminal position was ultimately helpful, for it enabled them to highlight the abuse within the system and to engage with other like-minded people, such as magistrates, local reformers and others interested in the welfare of the poor. These individuals provided more evidence of mismanagement, neglect and suffering, helping the authors to seek redress.

Henvill wrote about both moments of cooperation and of conflict between him and the parish officers. The moments of cooperation seem fleeting, and the overseers fell short of his expectations. For instance, Henvill managed to get the overseer to provide more relief for Haskol, and the hole in the wall was resolved.¹²⁰ Henvill had expected a new frame and window to be installed rather than light-sapping boards which, he wrote,

¹¹⁹ Shave, 'The land agent'.

¹²⁰ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, pp. 18, 24.

had become ‘a Monument of the Brutality of a Damerham Overseer’.¹²¹ He also noted others’ frustrations with the overseers in agonizing detail and with immense passion, reflecting his own anger about their conduct. For instance, when Elizabeth Marlow asked the overseer for a doctor to be sent to her husband, Edward, Henvill reported the interactions in full. The overseer said to her that Edward was a “‘a rogue’” and “‘nothing was the matter with him’”.¹²² Such deliberate meanness was experienced by others. One poor woman, who could not see a way of spending a bad sixpence just granted to her was told by the overseer that ‘while *she kept it*, she would always *have money in her pocket!*’¹²³ Henvill also provided details about the treatment of Sarah Gibbs, who ‘*could not articulate to be understood*’, illustrating the fear and intimidation that such parishioners felt when facing the vestry; apparently, Gibbs died soon after the ordeal.¹²⁴ Another widow parishioner noted how the poor would “‘*tremble*’” on seeing one person in particular.¹²⁵ The frustration of the poor with the overseers of the parish mirrored his own; they not only neglected their roles but also showed signs of maladministration, from the failure to have their accounts settled (i.e. checked by a magistrate) for four to five years to keeping parish records on ‘detached pieces of paper’.¹²⁶

Henvill’s frustration reached its peak after almost two years of remonstrating with the parish officers. He decided to call a vestry meeting in January 1795, when these severe cases of neglect had come to his attention and when he had noticed an increase in distress among the poor.¹²⁷ The overseer did not attend the vestry meeting, and as the parish books were in his possession it was proposed that the meeting be adjourned. If Henvill agreed to the adjournment, a farmer said, they could approach ‘Mr. ___’ for help in providing for the poor, and if the latter did not help the farmer said that he himself would. ‘Mr. ___’ met with Henvill the next morning and ‘seemed to be somewhat convinced’ of the need to help the poor; Henvill was instructed to find out what they needed, and the gentleman would purchase it. However, in a vestry meeting without Henvill, both the gentleman and farmer decided not to provide

¹²¹ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 24.

¹²² Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 25.

¹²³ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 47.

¹²⁴ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 27.

¹²⁵ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 47.

¹²⁶ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, pp. 45–6 (quoted from p. 46); the law required accounts to be signed off by a magistrate annually, and this was reinforced in 1743–4 under 17 Geo II, c 38.

¹²⁷ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 31.

anything to the poor.¹²⁸ Henvill drew his next card: threatening to inform the magistrate, possibly utilizing the 1793 Act. This resulted in various articles being provided to the poor. Although he eventually achieved what he had set out to do, Henvill then entered into a bitter battle over the timings of vestry meetings. Essentially, he thought that he should now start attending these meetings, but they would have to be held in the afternoons to allow him to take his morning services, which was also required under the 1601 Act. The vestry rejected his requests and continued to meet almost exclusively in the morning. He then warned the parish officers and secured the attention of a magistrate. Their unlawful meetings led to a summons; two were fined and one was excused due to illness.¹²⁹ Henvill explained that he was quite willing to drop this prosecution if poor parishioners were to 'be better treated', but it was to no avail. The farmer, who had misled Henvill throughout this period, was also instrumental in ensuring the parish officers ignored this deal.¹³⁰ Notably, this farmer had had his eye on Henvill from the start of his post, when he asked him to promise '*not to concern myself with parish matters*', which Henvill had interpreted as referring to 'political disputes', not the allocation of statutory poor relief.¹³¹

Rutter did not detail his interactions with the core relief administrators or even the committee members with whom he worked to investigate poor relief in the town. By using the term 'fellow Townsmen', he avoided naming individuals or groups. Such 'fellow Townsmen' should become acquainted with the misery he had exposed 'as a means of inducing them to devote a portion of their time, in endeavouring to remove it'.¹³² Was he directing this at the parish officers or the wider vestry, at ratepayers or the whole community? It is difficult to know. The term 'fellow Townsmen' may have been used quite deliberately by Rutter; both non-conflictual and non-hierarchical, it could have reflected his Quaker faith. Maladministration was therefore distanced from any one group or person.¹³³ He did allude to the very divisive politics of the town, arguing that a new purpose-built workhouse would 'in a great measure' solve the 'jarring contentions of party and acrimony of opposite interests'.¹³⁴ Rutter placed Shaftesbury's circumstances

¹²⁸ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 33.

¹²⁹ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, pp. 34–6.

¹³⁰ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 39.

¹³¹ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 42.

¹³² Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 16.

¹³³ For more examples of Rutter's approach to a wide range of social and political issues in Shaftesbury throughout his lifetime see Stuttard, *The Turbulent Quaker*.

¹³⁴ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 39.

within a wider context: distress ‘prevails in many other places, and has in great measure originated from the same causes’.¹³⁵ It would be wrong to assume that his trials and tribulations with the parish officer were not as tumultuous as Henvill’s. It is likely that there were personal discussions, meetings and letters on this topic, but they were not divulged by Rutter here. Keeping on good terms, of course, was also strategic, as it was more likely to result in his ideas for reform being implemented.

In the micro-politics of relief these men appear separate from the parish officers, but are they separate from the overall vestry? Rutter’s position is ambiguous from the source. His generalizing and distant tone could suggest that he was not a vestryman at the time his pamphlet was published, although he did acknowledge being part of a committee to assist the overseers, which may indicate he was, or had been, a vestryman. Nevertheless, with the wording ‘townsmen’ he assumed that every gentleman of standing was, or should be, concerned about the poor. The tone of Henvill’s writing is very different, and what is especially revealing are two sections in his pamphlet that demonstrate clearly how he felt not being part of the vestry. First, in justifying his own ‘measures’ to seek redress from the magistrates, he questioned whether he had ‘*quarrelled with the parish*’,¹³⁶ writing about how ‘the parish’ had obstructed relief and care toward the poor:

If they enter into combinations, – have their previous meetings, and preconcert their plans, merely to oppose, and overthrow, whatever proposition I may make for the benefit of the Poor and of the parish, – *is it I who quarrel with them?* ... do they not rather “*seek a quarrel against me,*”¹³⁷

So ‘the parish’ is used to mean the wider parish community, but it also used to describe its representatives – the vestry – a group with which he did not identify. This distancing is notable elsewhere. Reflecting on the writing of the pamphlet, he said that he had removed the names of individuals whom he had challenged: ‘The Parties will know *their own portraits*; and the parish cannot mistake them.’¹³⁸ The term ‘the parish’ means the wider parish community here, while ‘parties’ describes the vestrymen. Henvill saw himself as separate from the vestry, the group that did not include him and moreover sought to exclude him.

These pamphlets also tell us about the relationships these men had with people outside of the vestry. Rutter spoke of how Jesse Upjohn, ‘one of our

¹³⁵ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. v.

¹³⁶ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 36.

¹³⁷ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 37.

¹³⁸ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 53.

Townsmen', was pivotal to the workhouse at Fordingbridge.¹³⁹ His 'meritorious exertions' had improved their workhouse through a system of superintendence, which was supported by 'a Committee of the respectable inhabitants', plus magistrates and 'neighbouring Gentleman', both in spirit and with money. They had 'afforded very material support' to the new workhouse, which enabled it to become a 'success'.¹⁴⁰ The conditions and savings were described in detail, whereby the indoor poor now exhibited 'orderly conduct' and a 'comfortable appearance' (instead of 'insolence and misery') and the poor rates were reduced by a third.¹⁴¹ While Rutter had examined Upjohn's documents about this workhouse, it is very likely the two men had met to exchange their ideas or Rutter had visited the workhouse in person.¹⁴² The willingness of reformers such as Upjohn to pass on their knowledge and experiences was not unusual at this time, and many such men published their own pamphlets proclaiming to have found a remedy within the bounds of existing legislation.¹⁴³

While Rutter's peripheral status allowed him to engage with poor-relief reformers, Henvill's peripheral status enabled him to engage with other people within the local community regarding the neglect of the indoor poor. An apothecary was finally sent to Edward Marlow after a delay of two days, but it was too late. Marlow was dying of the typhus fever. The apothecary who went with Henvill to the poorhouse exclaimed that in all his time visiting poorhouses he had "*never seen any thing so bad as this [sic]*". Henvill's position enabled him to gather more perspectives on the condition of the indoor poor, which bolstered his own views. When he suggested to the apothecary that he might be asked for evidence to corroborate a testimony, the apothecary said that Marlow's circumstances had left "*such an impression on his mind*" and he "*so often repeated them since*".¹⁴⁴ Henvill also recounted the discussions he had with the labourer Richard Cutler and his wife, who resided close to the poorhouse. Concerned about the poor treatment of Haskol in particular, they had given her food, fuel (which was shared throughout the house) and, on one occasion, a haircut to alleviate an extensive lice infestation. While this case of charity and benevolence was much admired by Henvill, it had also further

¹³⁹ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 23.

¹⁴⁰ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, pp. 23–4. First quote from p. 23, other quotes from p. 24. There are other examples of this, for instance at the Uttoxeter workhouse, Staffordshire: Derbyshire Record Office, D239/Z/6, Fitzherbert of Tissington Papers, Memorandum Uttoxeter workhouse, 10 May 1782.

¹⁴¹ Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, p. 25.

¹⁴² Shave, *Pauper Policies*, p. 155; Shave, 'The land agent', pp. 206–7.

¹⁴³ Shave, *Pauper Policies*, pp. 159–65.

¹⁴⁴ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 26.

evidenced the problems in the parish and given him more confidence in his own judgements.¹⁴⁵

Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore the interests and roles of members of the wider community which have often been overlooked and undervalued in studies of the welfare process under the Old Poor Law. The two men in this study, Henvill and Rutter, while they did not act as parish officers and at times did not even attend the parish vestry, wanted to bring cases of mismanagement, neglect and suffering to wider attention. They were both advocates of the poor, with strong principles and values, but advocates came in different forms. Rutter was a lobbyist, playing a game of persuasion, being careful not to blame, and therefore possibly alienate, any one person or group. This was possibly a reflection of this Quaker values, but it was also part of his plan to find a solution to what he saw. While his aim was to advocate for the better treatment of the poor, he was also an advocate of reform, and he saw himself as playing a pivotal part in that reform. Henvill, on the other hand, was much more interested in the lives of those who were suffering, and was more antagonistic and confrontational with those in power. His frustration with specific individuals, the parish officers and vestry is obvious throughout his pamphlet. While both men were not parish officers themselves, and therefore did not have the legal responsibilities and powers to give and withhold poor relief, they were important individuals within the welfare process. These were self-informed advocates who investigated and reported on what they observed and experienced. They made sense of this using both local and national contextual knowledge, and protested against it using their knowledge on the Poor Law and their views of what poor relief and care should be. Their investigative and outsider positions also enabled them to befriend others, gathering their testimonies about the indoor poor and their guidance on alternative ways of providing relief.

The lack of parish records means that there is limited evidence about the actual effect these men had on the lives of the poor. From Henvill's pamphlet we learn that he had some immediate successes with individual cases and saw improvements in the general provision of poor relief in the six months prior to its publication.¹⁴⁶ The impact of Rutter's pamphlet is quite unknown. By 1832, Okeden, in his role as assistant commissioner for the Royal Commission, reported that only six to eight workhouses were in operation in Dorset and

¹⁴⁵ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, pp. 28–30.

¹⁴⁶ Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, p. 48.

that use of them as workhouses ‘seems almost abandoned’.¹⁴⁷ A new workhouse was unlikely to have been established in Shaftesbury until 1840, when the town hosted a large new union workhouse under the New Poor Law for nineteen parishes. While waiting for it to be built, the board of guardians housed the indoor poor in parish accommodation elsewhere, not in Shaftesbury, providing further evidence that little changed.¹⁴⁸ Of course, to assume that the only function of their efforts was to help the poorest would probably be naive. They may have wanted affirmation and praise and, while we cannot be privy to their conversations, there were reviewers who were willing to offer it.¹⁴⁹ They may have wanted recognition for their efforts and may have elaborated on their observations and experiences to gain a wider readership. This we do not know. Indeed, their publications sold outside their immediate communities: Henvill’s was sold in Salisbury, Winchester and London, and Rutter’s to ‘neighbouring booksellers’.¹⁵⁰ While this was all possible, writing about cases of parish neglect and cruelty may have encouraged others elsewhere to question similar conditions within their own communities.

These pamphlets clearly say more about their authors and their motivations, actions and perspectives than about those whom they were trying to help. Nevertheless, they also provide us with a rare lens on the experiences of the most vulnerable poor under the Old Poor Law, living in substandard accommodation often without additional relief. The indoor poor in these communities were often too unwell to obtain help. They were out of sight, unlike their outdoor counterparts, and so they could be easily ignored by their patrons. The case of South Damerham is striking because there was such a concerted effort to suppress the poor here, which continued for years perhaps because it was so ‘close’ in terms of power. Here the magistrates were absent, failed to check up on the parish relief system, or to be present and therefore accessible when the poor needed redress. Many of the legal processes within the welfare process were not working as well as we might often assume. Henvill and Rutter were the critical voices of the system when the voices of the poor were stifled or shut away. By exploring more pamphlets of this type, we can understand more about those moments when the poor could not negotiate poor relief or seek redress within the welfare process alone.

¹⁴⁷ *Report from His Majesty’s Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, (Parl. Papers 1834), [C. 44] appendix A, *Reports from Assistant Commissioners*, part 1, report 3, D.O.P. Okeden, p. 12.

¹⁴⁸ DHC, BG/SY A1/1, Shaftesbury union minute book, 2 Nov. 1835.

¹⁴⁹ Review of Henvill, *A Brief Statement*, in ‘Monthly Catalogue’, *The Critical Review; or, Annals of Literature; extended and improved by a society of Gentlemen*, xxx (1800), 235.

¹⁵⁰ Title pages of Rutter, *A Brief Sketch*, and Henvill, *A Brief Statement*.