

An Orderly County? - Managing the Poor in Early Modern

Hertfordshire

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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June 2022

## Abstract

### An Orderly County? - Managing the Poor in Early Modern Hertfordshire

A great deal has been written about the workings of the English Old Poor Law as a system and how it operated financially. However, little detailed work has been done on how the system fundamentally affected local communities. This study illustrates how 'management' of the poor was attempted in some Hertfordshire parishes from c.1500-c.1800. By creating the poor law system to divert the poor to their 'home' parishes central government created virtually insoluble parochial problems and the effects of some of these on Hertfordshire parishes are discussed. Difficulties and attempted solutions are revealed in a range of primary sources originating from forty four parishes and their court records and are a first essay at viewing the development and evolution of the system in one county.

The thesis first considers the evolution of ideas about poverty and charity to the poor and how these might have influenced the attitudes of Hertfordshire overseers and magistrates in classifying and managing their destitute poor. It then focuses on a series of 'problematic' poor and how they were 'managed' including the sick; women without breadwinners; bastard-bearers and vagrancy.

The study raises new questions about old themes most importantly those of 'belonging' or 'not belonging' to a parish or being considered 'deserving' or 'undeserving', as interpreted in some Hertfordshire parishes. It also reveals the attempts at social engineering made to bring all destitute poor into line with the 'ideal' deferential and industrious poor labourer fabricated in parish official and judicial minds. The prime strategy employed in managing these Hertfordshire poor seems to have been to keep them under control both economically, as parochial liabilities, and physically, by being properly 'placed', with a male head of household or their employer or, when all else failed, the master or mistress of the House of Correction.

## Acknowledgements

Throughout the writing of this thesis I have received a great deal of support from many people.

I would first like to thank my supervisor Professor Steven King for his patient guidance, immense knowledge and for the many stimulating discussions we have had about various facets of the Old Poor Law.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the excellent staff at Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies all of whom have been highly professional, very helpful and provided me with a constant supply of very useful sources for my research.

## Permissions

In addition I would like to thank Chris Bennett, the Hertfordshire County Archivist, for permission to use the Hertfordshire Parishes and Chuntries map.

Also the committee of the Hertfordshire Family History Society and, also, John Hill for permission to use data from his publications:

Hertfordshire Parishes Militia Ballot Lists 1757-86 CD.

John Hill *Hertfordshire Examinations: An Alphabetical Index*. (Hertfordshire Family History Society, 2004).

John Hill *Hertfordshire Poor Law Examinations as to Settlement: An Alphabetical Index* (Hertfordshire Family History Society, 2004).

John Hill *Hertfordshire Removal Orders: An Alphabetical Index* (Hertfordshire Family History Society, 2003).

I would also like to thank David Short for generously giving permission to use maps and providing files from his *An Historical Atlas of Hertfordshire* and I am very grateful to Alex Middleton who allowed me to use his Hertfordshire location map.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis is a study of welfare and control, broadly defined, in the county of Hertfordshire. This type of whole county comparative approach has been uncommon in the literature, truly mirrored only by that of Mary Barker-Read in Kent.<sup>1</sup> The Hertfordshire core timeline employed here is c.1500-c.1800, but in some chapters this has needed to be extended further both forwards and backwards in time. With the exception of Steve Hindle, who stated that his monograph on poor relief<sup>2</sup> was intended to include the 'early eighteenth-century initiatives to restrict the scale of out-relief under the terms of the workhouse test',<sup>3</sup> relatively few Old Poor Law historians seek to go much beyond 1750.

A great deal of the present analysis also ends at that date or 1799 but since this study includes a number of pauper narratives, which mostly date from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it extends beyond 1800 in the chapters employing them as sources. It has also been necessary to compare earlier with later periods to see what policies were employed to meet various issues and how these were deployed and changed over time. This present study has followed in the steps of Paul Fideler, although focusing on the much narrower spatial frame of one southern county, and so like him:

I have chosen to focus on the parish-centred character of pre-industrial social welfare and the array of influences that established its goals, its operations, and its degree of accomplishment for practitioners and recipients alike. This will require period boundary crossings from the later medieval to the early modern years and from the seventeenth to the long eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M. Barker-Read 'The Treatment of the Aged Poor in Five Selected West Kent Parishes from Settlement to Speenhamland (1662-1797)' (unpublished PhD thesis Open University, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> S. Hindle *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 8.

<sup>3</sup> *An Act For Amending the Laws relating to the Settlement, Employment and Relief of the Poor 1723. The Workhouse Test Act aka Knatchbull's Act* [9 Geo. I c.7].

<sup>4</sup> P. Fideler *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England: The Old Poor Law Tradition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), 2.

A much earlier period has also been examined in chapter four in order to trace the evolution of ideas about poverty, charity and the management of the poor from early Christian times onward. The Old Poor Law was not a static body of law but continued to evolve well into the first decades of the nineteenth century. Its evolution can be traced through the number of subsequent acts appearing at intervals throughout successive centuries each seeking to solve the newly perceived deficiencies of its predecessors.

The thesis examines a range of themes some of which have not been extensively debated in the literature since, to date, there have been few county studies.<sup>5</sup> Chapter two contextualises early modern Hertfordshire, the varied influences of London on the county's economy, politics, society and the significance of the Hertfordshire Reformation which had economic, political and social effects on the county.

Chapter three then analyses the Hertfordshire sources and the methodology to be employed in the thesis. Chapter four explores the theme of the political and religious influences that appear to have shaped the evolution and operation of the Hertfordshire Old Poor Law. This involves examining the ideas about provision of charity to the county's poor and also the effects of the Reformation on these new attitudes to charity. Since the administration of the Old Poor Law was effectively devolved to the parishes by central government the thesis requires examination of parochial issues including who held power in the parish? What sorts of people administered the Old Poor Law in Hertfordshire? How was belonging to the parish defined? And what criteria distinguished a deserving parishioner from an undeserving one?

The thesis then examines in detail five specific groups; the sick poor in chapter six; parish officials and their relationship with medical practitioners both

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<sup>5</sup> E. Hampson *The Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire 1597-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934); J. Healey *The First Century of Welfare: Poverty and Poor Relief in Lancashire 1620-1730* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014).

professional and lay in chapter seven; females from apprentices and deserted women to elderly widows in chapter eight; and those poor accused of deviancy the bastard-bearers in chapter nine and the vagrants in chapter ten. These topics have not previously been brought together as inter-related themes in one study. As the Old Poor Law is multi-faceted other topics could have been explored including the lives of poor men although the, possibly occupational, illnesses of sick poor men are examined in detail in chapter six. The power relationships in the parishes and how they appeared to work might also prove a rewarding topic for further study. The following sections will explore four current debates and their associated historiographies and then provide a more detailed description of the structure of the thesis.

## Key debates and research questions

A great deal has been written about the workings of the English and Welsh Old Poor Law as a system and how it was operated financially. The Old Poor Law literature is considerably more complex and extensive than that on the New Poor Law and some of the core issues are examined here. These provide a framework for the thesis in addition to the more detailed historiographical surveys which have been inserted into the relevant chapters. The four core issues considered here are regionality; generosity and the South/North divide; power and agency and the nature and composition of relief.

The first, regionality is a debate which has continued through several decades and is concerned with two contrasting views on the essence of the Old Poor Law dating back to the 1980s and the rise of history from below. There are two opposing arguments about whether the Old Poor Law can be seen to demonstrate a regional pattern in terms of generosity as argued by Steven King<sup>6</sup> or whether it was composed of lots of little welfare republics as asserted by Keith Snell. He observed that 'one can be surprised by the generous and widely encompassing nature of

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<sup>6</sup> S. King *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

relief...to settled inhabitants rural parishes were indeed miniature welfare states'.<sup>7</sup>

This idea was accepted and elaborated by Steve Hindle:

Parishes were, in many senses, welfare republics in which a delicate balancing of the depth of welfare resources, potentially unlimited demand, custom, understandings of the law and the need to vary policy during periods of crisis, created a rich and unsystematic patchwork of variable practice.<sup>8</sup>

Regionality in an individual county, Lancashire, has been further explored by Jonathan Healey.<sup>9</sup> Others have concentrated on individual parishes. As briefly noted, Mary Barker-Read examined 'the treatment of the aged poor' in five West Kent parishes,<sup>10</sup> Lynn Botelho also focussed on old age but in two Suffolk parishes, Cratfield and Poslingford,<sup>11</sup> and Samantha Williams analysed two Bedfordshire parishes, Campton and Shefford.<sup>12</sup> This debate remains open and can only really be closed by looking at a wider range of counties or at least large numbers of parishes in a single county. Amongst historians no consensus currently exists as to whether the Old Poor Law has a regionality and without whole county studies this cannot be either conclusively proved or disproved.

The second debate on the generosity of the Old Poor Law as a support system for the poor can also be connected to the first when looked at regionally to decide whether some regions were more generous than others. Are there indications that the Old Poor Law can be described, in some areas at least, as 'generous'? The term 'is an ambiguous one' as Steven King has observed. 'It assumes that we have some yardstick against which to measure poor law payouts and it implies that communities could choose to be generous or not'.<sup>13</sup> The fundamental codification of Tudor poor laws, the 1598 the *Poor Law Act* (39 Eliz. c.3), was not intended to be

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<sup>7</sup> K. Snell *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 105.

<sup>8</sup> S. Hindle *On the Parish?*

<sup>9</sup> J. Healey *The First Century of Welfare*.

<sup>10</sup> M. Barker-Read 'The Treatment of the Aged Poor.

<sup>11</sup> L. Botelho Lynn *Old Age and the English Poor Law, 1500-1700* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> S. Williams *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle Under the English Poor Law 1760-1834* (Woodbridge,: Boydell Press, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> King *Poverty and Welfare*, 54.

generous and spoke only of providing "the necessary relief of the lame, impotent, old, blind and such other being poor and not able to work". It was intended to only allow the poor bare subsistence levels of relief not total support.

On the question of generosity Richard Smith argued that for the aged it was generous but that as cost pressures mounted, notably in the south and midlands because of enclosure and structural and seasonal unemployment, so that generosity came under pressure.<sup>14</sup> Samantha Williams broadly concluded that 'the likelihood of receiving relief depended on family circumstances...and the elderly and lone parents (primarily women) were far more likely to receive pensions than couple-headed families, and more generous ones at that'.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast, Henry French has found that in one parish, Terling, Essex, in the 1790s pensions were increasingly being directed away from widows who had previously 'received a 'substantial proportion of all payments between 1775 and 1789....to married men as household heads'.<sup>16</sup> Whether this was a practice restricted to Terling or Essex is unknown but it demonstrates that parishes could and did develop or change their own policies on generosity. Here parochial parsimony was being abruptly directed towards widows, the traditional recipients of relief, and generosity towards a previously unimportant group for receiving relief, the male heads of households. This appears to have been a radical and local change in relief provision presumably dictated by the parish officials perceived needs of their parish poor.

The third debate examines who held the power in the Old Poor Law relief system. Central government legislation had been designed to establish senior parish officers, the churchwardens and overseers of the poor, supported when necessary by local justices, as the power-brokers. They decided who would receive relief, whether it would be in cash or kind, including extra food, fuel, clothing, housing and

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<sup>14</sup> R. Smith 'Ageing and well-being in early modern England: Pension trends and gender preference under the English Old Poor Law 1650-1800' in P. Johnson and P. Thane (eds), *Old Age from Antiquity to Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1998), 64-95.

<sup>15</sup> Williams *Poverty Gender and Life-Cycle*, 161.

<sup>16</sup> H. French 'Living in Poverty in Eighteenth-Century Terling' in S. Hindle, A. Shepard and J. Walter (eds) *Remaking English Society: Social Relations and Social Change in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013) 281-315.

rent payments, medical care, or a mixture of both. They were principally concerned with the amount of expenditure on the poor that would be tolerated by their ratepayers. Relief provision appears to have been driven by the co-operation and support of the parish ratepayers not the needs of the parochial poor. As Steven King has recently observed, 'The literature on early modern England suggests that the balancing act between the rights and duties of ratepayers, recipients, officials, and those who controlled other aspects of the makeshift economy, such as endowed charities, left little room for the agency of the poor'.<sup>17</sup>

The poor in this scenario were merely passive recipients of varying amounts of relief, as accepted by earlier poor law historians including Anthony Brundage<sup>18</sup> and Lynn Lees.<sup>19</sup> They did not find the poor using agency because they seem to have assumed that they did not have it. However, Steve Hindle has found examples of early modern individuals employing agency by deliberately bringing themselves to the attention of the parish through occupying the church porch.<sup>20</sup> Others directly petitioned the petty sessions or individual justices.<sup>21</sup>

Early modern pauper agency has been a relatively neglected topic in the literature until it was examined by Henry French and Jonathan Barry in their 2004 edited volume on *Identity and Agency*.<sup>22</sup> They observed that 'the poor had to continually work to 'establish their honesty, or their social and moral autonomy' and that there was an inherent bias on the part of parish officials against 'claims of truthfulness and honesty by the poor'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> S. King *Writing the Lives of the English Poor 1750s-1830s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 12.

<sup>18</sup> A. Brundage *The English Poor Laws 1700-1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> L. Lees *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> S. Hindle 'Destitution, Liminality and Belonging: The Church Porch and the Politics of Settlement in English Rural Communities, c.1590-1660', in C. Dyer (ed.) *The Self-Contained Village? The Social History of Rural Communities, 1250-1900* (Hatfield: Hertfordshire University Press, 2007), 46-71.

<sup>21</sup> P. King, 'The summary courts and social relations in eighteenth-century England', *Past and Present*, 183 (2004), 124-72.

<sup>22</sup> H. French and J. Barry (eds) *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* Introduction 26, 31.

More recently historians have been revisiting this debate and, as noted by Steven King, 'One of the most powerful developments in recent historiography....has been a rethinking of the matter of pauper agency'. This has been considerably stimulated by the discovery and publication of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century pauper letters by Steven King<sup>24</sup> and Thomas Sokoll.<sup>25</sup> These communications products of the growth in both postal services and pauper literacy are frequently brief although sometimes very informative. However, they need to be approached with care because all the correspondents had their own agendas.

The fourth debate seeks to examine relief and those who received it. The Old Poor Law had traditionally supported the impotent poor those who could not maintain themselves through sickness or old age. The majority of these recipients were elderly and infirm and were supported as deserving poor, throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth and into the eighteenth centuries. However, some historians argue that in the later eighteenth-century the nature of recipients changed. Henry French has carried out extensive research into one Essex parish, Terling, and found that relief was being increasingly moved from the elderly, the traditional recipients, to male heads of households with families. He also found that it was being used to make emergency payments when the family was in crisis, not provided as a weekly pension.<sup>26</sup> Samantha Williams had earlier found a similar situation in the two Bedfordshire parishes, Campton and Shefford, she studied, 'Allowances in these two communities were a temporary solution to an immediate crisis'.<sup>27</sup>

Against this argument Richard Smith, found that aged people were generally treated generously for much of the period up to the 1760s although he also observed that 'workhouses may have drawn in a number of individuals who might,

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<sup>24</sup> S. King, T. Nutt and A. Tomkins (eds) *Narratives of the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Britain Vol 1. Voices of the Poor: Poor Law Depositions and Letters* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> T. Sokoll *Essex Pauper Letters 1731-1837* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> 'French 'Living in Poverty in Eighteenth-Century Terling', 281-315.

<sup>27</sup> S. Williams 'Malthus, marriage and poor law allowances revisited: a Bedfordshire case study, 1770-1834 *Agricultural History Review* lii (2004), 82.

had they not become inmates, have been recipients of large quantities of outdoor relief in the last year or months immediately prior to their deaths, when nursing expenses, fuel allowances and dietary supplements may have been especially costly'.<sup>28</sup> Susannah Ottaway also noted that 'the aged were considered to be a particularly deserving category of the poor throughout this period'.<sup>29</sup> They were also an ever-increasing burden on the parish until they died although as Ottaway observed 'as a general rule the real value of the average pension declined in the last decades of the eighteenth century'.<sup>30</sup>

All of these debates mostly employ fractured sources from a few parishes in a wide range of counties. This leaves a lot of gaps where individual parishes have not been researched and where entire counties are not represented. By examining a larger number of parishes in Hertfordshire this thesis will aim to create a rounded overview of poor relief in that county. This will also enable Hertfordshire to be compared with other counties when considering debates on regionality, generosity, power and agency and the nature and composition of relief. It also demonstrates that more full county studies will be required in order to fully consider the core debates.

## Structure of the thesis

The following chapter discusses the reasons for researching Hertfordshire and the salient facts about the county's economy, politics and society. It examines how the county's relationship with the metropolis evolved and functioned and questions how the proximity of the metropolis appears to have affected it. In comparison it analyses how other Home Counties: Bedfordshire; Buckinghamshire; Cambridgeshire; Essex; Kent; Middlesex; Surrey and Sussex were influenced by London. Finally it discusses reasons why Hertfordshire only became a satellite of the metropolis and never developed into more than a county of small towns. The third chapter then considers the range of primary sources employed in the study, the

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<sup>28</sup> Smith Ageing and well-being, 89.

<sup>29</sup> S.Ottaway *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 8.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 227.



information that they supplied and how they were used in the chapters to pose the research questions.

Chapter four seeks to contextualise contemporary thinking on poverty and the poor. The central issue explored here is why the poor had been supported for centuries through varying and voluntary forms of charity and the motivations that might have encouraged this assistance. How and why did God's poor, the traditional recipients of freely-given Christian charity metamorphose, in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England, into a financial burden on the parish, an alien and often grudgingly-supported underclass of deserving objects? What role did the deeper ideological and religious currents that were shaping the social welfare agenda including the English Reformation play in this re-thinking? Chapter five then considers what can be learned about the attitudes which these influences might have engendered amongst Hertfordshire parish officials and the ways in which they employed the Old Poor Law. This topic has not been previously studied for Hertfordshire. The fundamental questions here are how did power operate in the parish, what drove it, who wielded it and in a profit-seeking and entrepreneurial society what opportunities did the Old Poor Law offer to those who sought to gain from involvement in its administration or by breaking its statutes in some Hertfordshire parishes?

Chapter six focuses on what can be learned about how the new attitudes and ideas about poverty might have affected a specific, large and growing group of Hertfordshire poor. These had been roughly classed in the sixteenth century as impotent as opposed to able-bodied and were lame (disabled) and infirm (elderly). The chapter covers the period from c. 1500-c.1750. In contemporary thought, those classified as impotent sick were to be pitied but were also sometimes feared as a parochial financial liability. Those injured and rendered impotent either temporarily or permanently had to be treated and their families supported. The numbers of sick appeared to be increasing so the central issue examined here is how they were treated when the Hertfordshire community was sometimes obliged to pay for their maintenance and medical treatment. This treatment was increasingly provided by a

range of medical practitioners both formally qualified and irregulars, full and part-time. Chapter seven seeks to reveal what can be learned about the relationship between lay Hertfordshire parish officials and the practitioners they were obliged to employ to treat their sick and injured poor. Previously this has been studied primarily from the practitioners' point of view and been concerned with tracing how their developing technical expertise improved their social status in the community. However, when considered from a different viewpoint, that of the parish officials', a different and more complicated picture emerges.

The thesis then considers another large group of Hertfordshire poor. What can be learned about significant events in the life-cycles of Hertfordshire poor females including orphans and foundlings sent out on their first apprenticeship by the parish and vulnerable women facing desertion and widowhood? At all these points they would have come under the management of parish officials. Chapter eight seeks to discover how the unequal relationship between the vulnerable early modern female who had no male breadwinner and her parish appears to have functioned and evolved.

Some vulnerable women became bastard-bearers and were considered deviant by parish officials. Chapter nine focuses on this sub-group of poor women consisting of pregnant and unmarried adolescent girls and single women. Who were these women and what can be learnt about their lives? Was the strong conviction displayed by central government that bastardy was uncontrollably increasing actually supported by evidence taken from Hertfordshire sources during the later sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries?

Chapter ten examines what can be learned about another deviant group, those who were indicted for being vagrant in Hertfordshire whether natives of the county or foreign wanderers and beggars. Vagrancy was perceived by Hertfordshire parish officials and the judiciary as a major county problem. What sort of people became vagrants and were they choosing to reject society outright or trying to find somewhere to re-establish themselves within it? Should beggars be given alms by charitable individuals or driven off, punished and expelled to their home parishes if

caught? The problem of dealing with poverty can be seen to come full circle as the chapter examines the relationship of vagrancy to begging and alms-seeking and then revisits the discussion on the basic duty of providing Christian charity the importance of which was considered in chapter four.

## Chapter Two: Hertfordshire and London

This chapter seeks to examine the relationship between London and Hertfordshire. The first section of this chapter will contextualise Hertfordshire and examine the variety of its geology and how this has shaped the character and variety of its soils and landscapes? The second will provide a brief historiographical introduction to the county. The third will examine how the county appeared to early modern travellers viewing it for the first time. The fourth will analyse the evolution and growth of the Hertfordshire economy and its harmful effects on the poor and the fifth the influence of London on this development. The sixth will then widen this theme to consider the socio-economic, political and cultural influences of London, including the Dissolution and Reformation, on Hertfordshire. The seventh considers the influences of London on a selection of other home counties to find how it operated and to what extent it dominated them. The final section will analyse the reasons for studying the Hertfordshire Old Poor Law and why a county-wide study may provide more insights into its operation as a system than micro-studies of a few parishes.

### Context

Early modern Hertfordshire was a relatively small landlocked agricultural county with an area of six hundred and thirty-four square miles. It consisted of a number of small market towns and villages focussed on mixed farming and providing catering, boarding, blacksmithing and other services to travellers on the network of routes into London. As can be seen from Map 2.1 below it was situated to the north of the metropolis and bounded by Essex to the east, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire to the north, Middlesex to the south and Buckinghamshire to the west.

Hertfordshire has been described as ‘little different from most other parts of southeast England... dominated by gently rolling farmland with numerous small patches of woodland and a network of minor lowland rivers, most of which

eventually drain southwards into the Thames'<sup>1</sup> Unlike some counties such as Derbyshire or Yorkshire, Hertfordshire does not have a distinctive geology but is an extension of that of its neighbouring counties. The county geology is primarily made up of chalk, boulder clay and flint with no heavy minerals such as coal or ironstone which might have launched a Hertfordshire industrial revolution. It does have a wide range of easily cultivated soils which encouraged the early development of agriculture.<sup>2</sup> Tom Williamson has divided the county into broad zones; the Boulder Clay Plateau in the north-east extending into north Essex and Suffolk; the Chiltern Dipslope in the west and the Southern Uplands of London Clay extending into Middlesex.<sup>3</sup> He found that the boulder clay mixed with chalk produces a 'relatively light loam' which is easy to cultivate even with the primitive tools of early settlers. The Chiltern Dipslope also contains light, easily workable soils comprised of chalk and gravel which also encouraged early agriculture. In the south the London Clay produces an acidic and not easily workable soil for primitive tools. The clay does not drain well and there is a lot of surface water in the form of lakes and ponds.

The county's highest point at eight hundred feet is in the Chiltern hills very near the Buckinghamshire border at Tring. These hills are basically formed from chalk overlaid with heavy clay containing flints and form a 'fundamental divide in the cultural landscape of southern Britain, separating the metropolitan counties and the south-east sharply from the central and southern Midlands'.<sup>4</sup> The range of soils in the county produce varied landscapes across the county from the Chiltern beechwoods in the north and west to the heathland, woods and pastures of the south and the river valleys of the Lea and Stort in the east.

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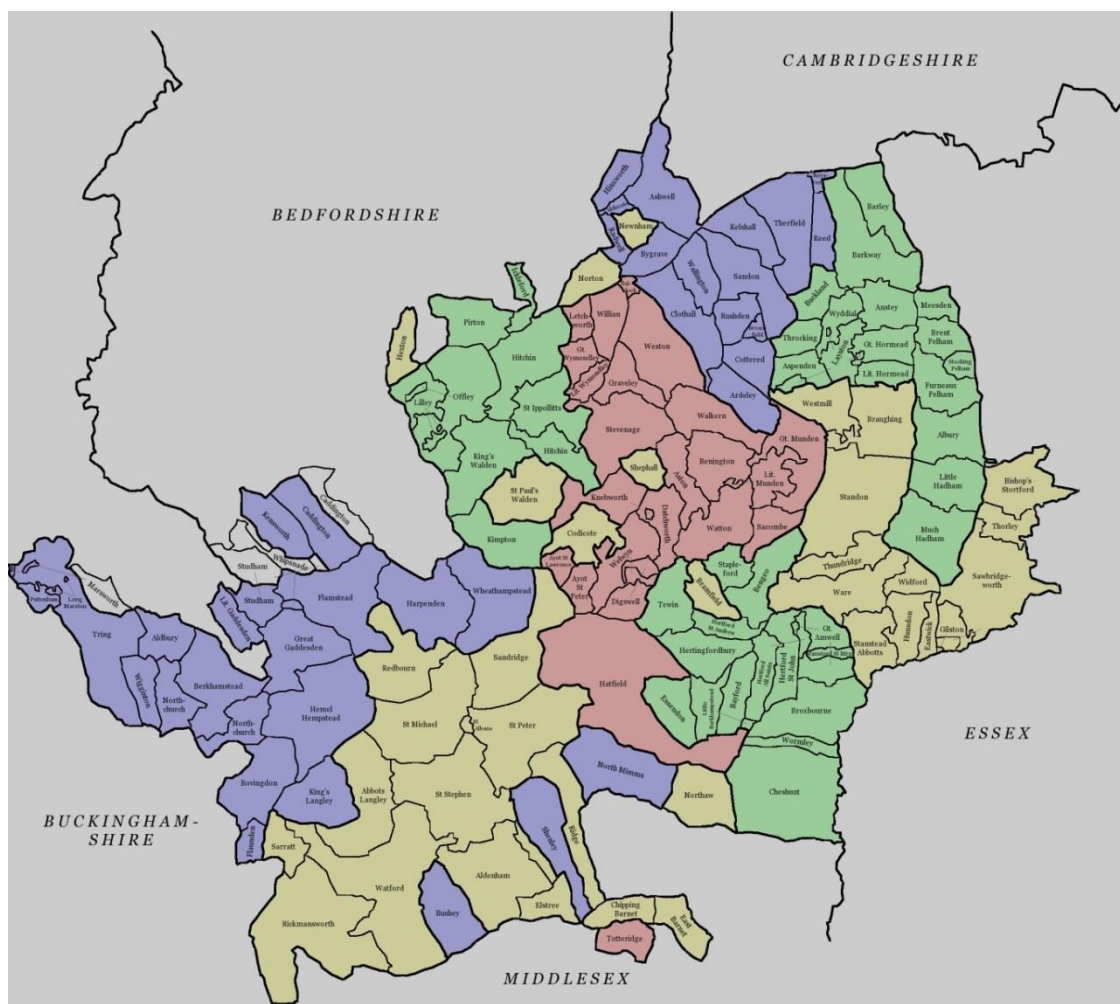
<sup>1</sup> A. Tinniswood *The Industrial Archaeology of Hertfordshire* (Hertford: Hertfordshire County Council/Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, 1998), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Agriculture is further discussed in a later section.

<sup>3</sup> T. Williamson *The Origins of Hertfordshire* (Hatfield: University Of Hertfordshire Press, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 4.

Map 2.1 Hertfordshire Hundreds<sup>5</sup> and Neighbouring Counties.  
 ©alex@midlifegeek.co.uk.



## Brief Historiography

A range of individual Hertfordshire towns and parishes have been studied by local historians writing for non-specialist readers but many of these are parish histories concentrating on the history of the parish church and the lives of local worthies. These accounts rarely mention the poor law and the parish poor<sup>6</sup> except to briefly trace the histories of local union workhouses. The Hertfordshire social historian,

<sup>5</sup> The eight Hertfordshire Hundreds were early administrative districts. On Map 2.1 Odsey hundred in the north is coloured blue as is Dacorum in the north-west and a few scattered parishes in the south; Edwinstree in the north-east is coloured green as in Hertford in the south-east, Broadwater and Hitchin in the north-west; the yellow shaded hundreds are Cashio in the south-west and Braughing in the south-east bordering Essex.

<sup>6</sup> With the exception of a series of booklets on *Hatfield and its People* (Hatfield: Hatfield Local History Society, 1964). The authors were tutored by Lionel Munby.

Lionel Munby wrote a series of books about the county aimed primarily at the general reader and the adult education student.<sup>7</sup> More recently Anne Rowe and Tom Williamson have published a series of detailed historical studies of the Hertfordshire landscape.<sup>8</sup> John Catt has studied the geological character of the county<sup>9</sup> in which the Hertfordshire poor lived and laboured but their lifestyle under the Tudors and Stuarts has not been examined more than peripherally. Nigel Goose has briefly analysed Tudor and Stuart population figures.<sup>10</sup> Others have written about Hertfordshire parks<sup>11</sup> and the numbers of homes built and remodelled by wealthy Londoners reinventing themselves as country landowners during the Stuart period.<sup>12</sup>

### Contemporary travellers' writings on Hertfordshire

Possibly the most important factor in the economic development of Hertfordshire was the physical character of the county; its geology and topography. Notes made by John Leland in 1538, for his projected *History and Antiquities of this Nation*, provide, to date, the first description of the early modern Hertfordshire landscape although covering only a short stretch of the north-western border country between Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire:

Travelling from Dunstable 'to Mergate [Markyate] al by chaumpaine, but for the moste parte fertile of corne, a vj miles. Mergate....standith on an hil in a faire woode hard by Watheling [Watling] Strete on the est side of

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<sup>7</sup> L. Munby *Hertfordshire Population Statistics 1563-1801* (Hertford: Hertfordshire Local History Council, 1964); *The Hertfordshire Landscape* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977); *The Common People are not Nothing: Conflict in Religion and Politics in Hertfordshire 1575-1780* (Hatfield: Hertfordshire Publications, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> T. Williamson *The Origins of Hertfordshire* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2010); A. Rowe and T. Williamson, *Hertfordshire: a Landscape History* (Hatfield: Herts University Press, 2013); A. McNair, A. Rowe and T. Williamson *Dury and Andrews' Map of Hertfordshire: Society and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> J. Catt *Hertfordshire Geology and Landscape* (Welwyn Garden City: Hertfordshire Natural History Society, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> N. Goose 'Tudor and Stuart Population' in David Short (ed.) *An Historical Atlas of Hertfordshire* (Hatfield: Hertfordshire Publications, 2011), 52-3.

<sup>11</sup> D. Spring (ed.) *Hertfordshire Garden History Volume II: Gardens Pleasant, Groves Delicious* (Hatfield: Hertfordshire Publications, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> P. Hunneyball *Architecture and Image-Building in Seventeenth-Century Hertfordshire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

it...Ther is...a long thorough fare...full meately welle buildid for low housing...I saw in a praty wood side St Leonardes church [Flamstead], on the lifte hand, scant half a mile off toward north weste.

He also visited Berkhamsted in the west of the county: 'Berkhamsted is one of the best market towns in Hertfordshire, with a long street of fairly good buildings running north to south and a second, rather shorter, street running east to west, where the river flows' and Royston a north Hertfordshire town bordering Cambridgeshire where he noted: 'Royston's Wednesday market is surprisingly busy, especially for corn dealing'.<sup>13</sup> These were the only journeys he described in Hertfordshire but he had observed several important factors of the Hertfordshire economy. He had noted the predominance of corn-growing in this area which in medieval times had already made it attractive to London corn-merchants, bakers and victuallers. He had also observed the importance of market towns and the existence of established settlements alongside the thoroughfares which underlined the importance of communications and travel to the county. These factors were to influence Hertfordshire development throughout the early modern period and well into the nineteenth-century.

In 1586 another traveller, William Camden, described Hertfordshire as: 'A rich country in corne fields, pastures, medowes, woods, groves, and cleere riverets. And for ancient townes it may contend with the neighbours even for the best. For there is scarcely another shire in all England that can shew more good townes in so small a compasse.'<sup>14</sup> By 1598 John Norden was noting the importance of roads to London and the travellers they brought:

It is much benefited by thorow-fares to and from London Northwardes, and that maketh the markets to bee the better furnished with such necessities, as are requisite for Innes, for th'intertainment of traуaylers. And I take it (though it be one of the least) no one Shire in England for the quantitte commes neere it for thorow-fare places of competent recent. This Shire is well furnished with market townes, the most of them plentiful of all thinges necessarie for the peoples reliefe.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> J.Chandler *John Leland's Itinerary: Travels in Tudor England* (Stroud: Sutton, 1993), 233.

<sup>14</sup> W.Camden *Britain, or, a Chorographicall Description of the most flourishing Kingdomes, England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London: 1586), 1.

<sup>15</sup> J. Norden *Speculum Britanniae: an historical and chorographical [mapping by regions] description of Middlesex and Hartfordshire* (London: Daniel Brown and James Woodman,



Inns proliferated as travel increased, for many provided not only accommodation but also stabling for horses – for carriers and later for coaches – heading to or from London. There were already 27 inns in St Albans and 125 in the rest of the county by 1577 and the inns of Hertford alone had stabling for over 530 horses in 1756'.<sup>16</sup> This short section has been included to give their first impressions of the county by the few early modern published travel-writers who visited it. As communications improved in later centuries many more travellers were attracted to Hertfordshire including in the seventeenth-century Samuel Pepys<sup>17</sup> and in the eighteenth Daniel Defoe.<sup>18</sup> The following sections will examine the factors that shaped the county.

## The Hertfordshire economy

As previously noted, Hertfordshire had no mineral resources such as coal or ironstone which meant that the economy was largely based on agriculture and the processing of agricultural products such as wheat and barley from medieval times and possibly before. There appears to have been no form of heavy-metal-based proto-typical or actual Industrial Revolution in Hertfordshire similar to the Wealden iron industry south of the Thames. John Catt noted that industry in the county employed the water-power of Hertfordshire rivers for paper-making,<sup>19</sup> silk throwing,<sup>20</sup> fulling wool,<sup>21</sup> and dressing leather.<sup>22</sup> Other industries were less successful including cloth making. 'At the beginning of the fifteenth century it was carried on at Ashwell, Berkhamsted, Hunsdon, Royston (which seems to have been a centre), Baldock, Knebworth, Hitchin, Codicote, Bishop's Stortford, Hertford and

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1598), 2-3.

<sup>16</sup> A. Rowe and T. Williamson, *Hertfordshire a Landscape History* (Hatfield: Hertfordshire University Press 2013), 253.

<sup>17</sup> M. Tomkins (comp.) *So That was Hertfordshire: Travellers Jottings 1322-1887* (Hertford: Hertfordshire Publications, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> D. Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain 1724-6* (London: Penguin, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> Catt *Hertfordshire Geology*, 10. The earliest known papermill was at Hertford in 1494. Others followed near St Albans and at Hatfield, Standon, Rickmansworth and Bushey.

<sup>20</sup> At Watford, Rickmansworth, St Albans and Tring.

<sup>21</sup> At Codicote, Braughing, Standon and Hemel Hempstead.

<sup>22</sup> At Hertford and Hitchin.

Ware (as can be seen from contemporary Exchequer Accounts) but the output was very small'.<sup>23</sup>

Also, as previously noted, the soils of Hertfordshire were primarily suited to arable farming particularly the production of wheat and barley. London provided an accessible and constantly expanding market for Hertfordshire agricultural products as these were essential items of the daily diet such as flour for bread and malt for brewing. As John Catt observed, 'The need to provide food and drink for the large population of nearby London explains the long-standing importance of agriculture as the county's dominant industry'.<sup>24</sup> London's dependence on Hertfordshire for constantly renewed supplies of bread and beer was demonstrated by the attempts of wealthy London brewers and bakers to directly take-over this very lucrative trade by ousting the Hertfordshire middlemen from their roles and dealing directly with the farmers.<sup>25</sup> E. A. Wrigley noted the influence of London on further agricultural developments in Hertfordshire as 'the extent of pasture on the London Clay increased steadily through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.... partly to provide meat and milk for the capital but partly to supply the crops of hay necessary to sustain the many draught horses kept there'.<sup>26</sup> Hertfordshire agriculture can be seen to have sought through the centuries to adapt to London consumers. Wrigley observed that from the early seventeenth century it also supplied drinking water to the capital via the New River 'constructed between 1608 and 1613 to bring water from Chadwell Springs near Ware to the capital'.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> W. Page (ed.) *A History of the County of Hertford* Vol.IV (London: Dawsons, 1971), 210.

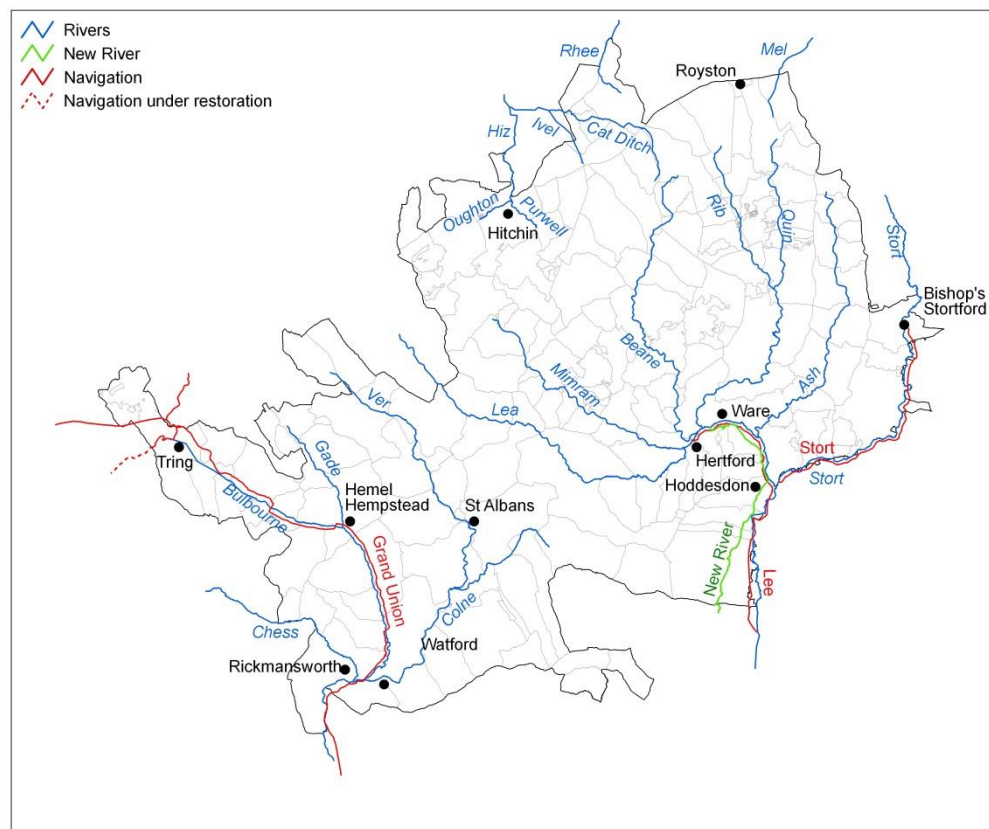
<sup>24</sup> Catt *Hertfordshire Geology*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> Page *History* Vol. IV, 208.

<sup>26</sup> E. Wrigley 'English County Populations in the later Eighteenth Century' *Economic History Review*, 60 (2007).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

Map 2.2 Hertfordshire Rivers and Navigations © David Short (ed.) *An Historical Atlas of Hertfordshire* p. 47.



As noted by Joan Thirsk, 'The county was blessed with excellent channels of communication with London; the two navigable rivers Stort and Lea (greatly improved after 1571) carried bulky goods such as corn and malt, the Great North Road and Watling Street carried animals and people'.<sup>28</sup> As can be seen from Map 2.2 above the Lea flowed through both Hertford and Ware. Its traffic increased the wealth and population of both towns and also the rivalry between them leading to the deliberate neglect of weirs and the vandalising of bridges as the two towns sought for control of the river and its trade. The Stort merged with the Lea at Hoddesdon and then flowed to join the Thames. The topography of Hertfordshire is such that, as observed by Andrew McNair, Anne Rowe and Tom Williamson's study of the eighteenth-century Dury and Andrews map of Hertfordshire, 'The principal

<sup>28</sup> J. Thirsk (ed.) *The Agrarian History of England and Wales Vol IV 1500-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 50.

valleys in the northern part of the county [thus] point roughly in the direction of London'.<sup>29</sup>

Map 2.3 Hertfordshire Turnpike Roads© David Short (ed.) *An Historical Atlas of Hertfordshire* p. 41.



Hertfordshire's roads had, from before Roman times, followed these valleys and as James Bettley recently noted, 'many of the Roman roads naturally formed the basis for later roads that were the main routes from London to the North. The extensive network of roads can be seen in Map 2.3. Of these the Old North Road, which follows much of Ermine Street, is the oldest, passing through Cheshunt, Ware, Buntingford and Royston. To its west, roughly parallel, the Great North Road became from the seventeenth century the main highway from London to Scotland, passing through Hatfield'.<sup>30</sup> Like the riverside settlements these thoroughfare towns also prospered from the constant traffic. Watling Street and Ermine Street became Elizabethan post roads, providing a daily connection with London. By 1637 there were regular coach services as well as the continually expanding carrier routes between London and Hertfordshire.

<sup>29</sup> McNair Rowe and Williamson *Dury and Andrews' Map*, 79.

<sup>30</sup> J. Bettley N. Pevsner and B. Cherry *Hertfordshire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 2.

As Deborah Spring described, this increased accessibility to London meant that 'People of wealth and influence who wanted to live outside the city, but have regular and easy access to it, took advantage of the opportunities afforded by Hertfordshire's road system'.<sup>31</sup> This consideration predated the early modern period since McNair, Rowe and Williamson note that 'proximity to the capital was a major influence on the development of Hertfordshire's landed estates, since medieval times'.<sup>32</sup> These men were mostly landowners, farmers or wealthy tradesmen looking to expand their holdings in the county.

Under the Tudors Hertfordshire palaces had been used primarily to provide nurseries for Henry VIII's children principally at Hatfield and Hunsdon and then under the early Stuarts Theobalds and Royston were established as hunting preserves virtually taking over the areas around them. Several prominent members of the Privy Council including the very powerful Cecils, father William and son Robert were Hertfordshire grandees as also were a number of courtiers, royal officials, lawyers and wealthy tradesmen seeking a salubrious country retreat away from the overcrowding and recurrent plagues of the city. Competing with one another to display their wealth they built mansions across the county some of which were on monastic sites acquired after the Dissolution (Ashridge, Little Wymondley, Hitchin Priory, Markyate, Sopwell (St Albans), Tyttenhanger). These homes were meticulously landscaped and surrounded by parks and well-hedged farmland so that by 1662 the county was rivalling Kent being described by Thomas Fuller as the 'garden of England for delight'. He also claimed that 'men commonly say that such who buy a house in Hertfordshire pay two years' purchase for the air thereof'.<sup>33</sup> The county's middling sort might well have benefitted from this influx as local employers of labour. An unknown number of Hertfordshire workers, traders and craftsmen must have been employed by the rich families migrating into the county and requiring houses to be built or extensively renovated, decorated, furnished,

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<sup>31</sup> D. Spring (ed.) *Hertfordshire Garden History Vol. II: Gardens Pleasant, Groves Delicious* (Hatfield: Hertfordshire Publications, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> McNair Rowe and Williamson *Dury and Andrews' Map*, 143.

<sup>33</sup> T. Fuller *The Worthies of England* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1952 ), 229.

landscaped and maintained with a range of domestic and outside staff recruited through local agencies and middlemen.

As the rich were migrating away from London to conserve their health and establish or enhance their social status in the county an unknown number of their virtually destitute Hertfordshire inferiors were travelling in the opposite direction seeking to find at least casual work to subsist on and possibly to gradually improve their lifestyles in the metropolis. Throughout this period the London population was only enabled to grow through the ever increasing number of immigrants.<sup>34</sup> These were needed to constantly replenish the supply of subsistence poor who were regularly attacked by the plagues and other illness that the rich aimed to flee from.

The county has been described as ‘a constellation of small towns without a dominant city, perhaps a consequence of its proximity to the capital’.<sup>35</sup> Throughout the early modern period it remained in this condition without an obvious provincial capital although Hertford, Ware and St Albans might have regarded themselves as contenders for this status. Hertfordshire grandees and gentry looked to the metropolis for political direction not amongst themselves. They divided their time between London, when parliament was sitting, and their Hertfordshire country seats in the frequently dangerous summers so that many were not permanent residents. In the lay subsidy listings of 1524-5 St Albans was the largest town with a population of over 2,100. Rowe and Williamson note that ‘there were only eleven settlements with populations of five hundred or more.

By 1547 when Hertfordshire chantries were being valued for dissolution St Albans St Peter’s parish had 1,000 adult communicants as did Ware but other towns and villages were distinctly smaller including the next largest, Hatfield with 600; Ashwell with 520; Aldenham and Bishop’s Stortford with 500 each; Baldock with 400 and Royston and Tring with 100 apiece. Figures for Hertford and Standon

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<sup>34</sup> S. King and A. Winter (eds) *Migration, Settlement and Belonging in Europe 1500-1930s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); I. Whyte *Migration and Society in Britain 1550-1830* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

<sup>35</sup> Rowe and Williamson, *Hertfordshire*, 23.

were not given.<sup>36</sup> By 1663 St Albans was still the largest town but Hertford was now in second place followed by Ware, Watford and Hitchin all of which were thoroughfare towns serving London. 'Even in 1801 only two towns in Hertfordshire, St Albans and Hertford, were home to more than 3,000 people and only another four thoroughfare towns (Ware, Hitchin, Watford and Cheshunt) had populations greater than 2,000'.<sup>37</sup> It can be seen from these figures that even the most populous Hertfordshire towns grew very slowly over the period 1524-1801. This may have been due to the continuing migration into London of predominantly young working people forced to leave home and find their first employment further afield because of the lack of local employment.<sup>38</sup> London would have been a strong attraction to such people especially if they had relatives or friends already established there to provide board and lodging and/or provide introductions to potential employers.

### The influence of London on the Hertfordshire economy

To what extent might the proximity and accessibility of London have stunted the development of Hertfordshire's towns and reduced its population by attracting migrants away from the county? What is generally agreed by historians is that London grew phenomenally fast. Barry Coward observed that 'from 1550 to 1600 the population of the capital rose rapidly from 80,000 to 200,000: at a much faster rate than the national population. In 1650 London's population had reached 400,000'.<sup>39</sup> Coward further argued that, 'London's growth was sustained by continuous massive immigration from the provinces ..... and not by a superior birth rate; on the contrary, the death rate in London far outstripped the birth rate because of the above-average incidence of plague and other diseases in the insanitary conditions of the capital'.<sup>40</sup> As an example Tim Hitchcock noted that the '1700 *Bills Of Mortality* recorded 19,443 burials compared to only 14,639

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<sup>36</sup> Page (ed.) *History* Vol. IV, 207.

<sup>37</sup> Rowe and Williamson *Hertfordshire*, 252.

<sup>38</sup> M. Kitch 'Population Movement and Migration in Pre-Industrial Rural England' in B. Short (ed.) *The English Rural Community: Image and Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 62-84.

<sup>39</sup> B. Coward and P. Gaunt *The Stuart Age: England 1603-1714* (London: Routledge, 2017), 60.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 61.



christenings'.<sup>41</sup> It would appear likely that an unknown number of Hertfordshire people went to swell that number walking or hitching rides on the carts transporting produce into the metropolis. Some of these people may have gone into service or worked as casual labourers and successfully built new lives. However, others were unlikely to return and would die there of hunger, disease or from work or traffic accidents or incidents of street violence.<sup>42</sup>

These Hertfordshire subsistence migrants would have only been able to afford to live in the filthy and overcrowded slum areas of the City suburbs which increased their risk of dying in disease outbreaks, including episodes of plague, or in fires. Because they were foreigners their arrivals, movements within parishes, injuries and deaths were probably not recorded, except possibly in some hospital records or parish registers. It is not possible to trace their numbers, origins or destinations until the eighteenth century when removal orders record Hertfordshire people being removed from City of London parishes.<sup>43</sup> Whether they were all recent arrivals or had been established there for several years is unknown. Those who were removed from Hertfordshire parishes back to the City might have been established as City parishioners for an unknown length of time. Hertfordshire people were also removed from and to a wide range of neighbouring Middlesex parishes including those in Westminster and what we would now call the East and West Ends of London.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> T. Hitchcock and R. Shoemaker *London Lives: Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City 1690-1800* (Cambridge: University Press, 2016), 29.

<sup>42</sup> C. Spence *Accidents and Violent Death in Early Modern London 1650-1750* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2016).

<sup>43</sup> City of London parishes were: Christchurch; St Bartholomew the Great; St Benet, Pauls Wharf; St Botolph without Aldgate; St Botolph without Bishopsgate; St Bride; St Dunstan in the East; St Giles without Cripplegate; St Gregory by St Paul; St Lawrence Jewry; St Mary Aldermay; St Mary Woolchurch Haw; St Mary Woolnoth; St Michael Bassishaw; St Mildred Poultry; St Peter Le Poor; St Sepulchre within; and St Stephen Coleman Street.

<sup>44</sup> Middlesex parishes included: Holborn; Kensington; Ratcliff Hamlet; Shadwell, St Paul; Shoreditch; St Anne [Limehouse?]; St Anne [Westminster?]; St Clement Danes; St George's [Middx?]; St Giles in the Fields; St James [Middx?]; St Luke [Middx?]; St Luke Old Street; St Marylebone; St Pancras; St Sepulchre without; Stepney Mile End New Town; Stepney Mile End Old Town; Stepney St Dunstan; Westminster St George Hanover Square; Westminster St James; Westminster St John; Westminster St Margaret; Westminster St Martin in the Fields; Westminster St Mary Le Strand; Westminster St Paul Covent Garden; Whitechapel.



It would appear therefore that London exerted a strong influence on the Hertfordshire economy. The county might not have produced certain commodities as other counties did for example; textiles, and fish (Essex and Sussex) or iron (Weald of Kent and Sussex) to supply to the metropolis, but it had been, from medieval times, geared to provide an increasingly wide range of foodstuffs to Londoners. Agriculture was traditionally a seasonal occupation, but supplying London was an almost constant activity probably only affected by exceptionally bad weather and acts of God such as dearths, floods, fires and plagues amongst cattle and people.

Over time Hertfordshire, like many of the other Home Counties discussed below, appears to have increasingly become a service economy for London. Before the first county-wide census in 1841 an unknown number of people, men, women and employable children were the primary producers as farmers and husbandmen, agricultural servants and casual day labourers, ploughmen, cattlemen, dairymen and women, shepherds, drovers etc. In addition there were those who processed agricultural products including, millers, maltsters and their labourers. There would have been people working in the supply chain as casual labourers, carters, coachmen, bargemen as well as the trades supporting these as, for example, carriage-makers, wagon builders, boat builders, wheel-wrights, carpenters, blacksmiths and farriers and those who supplied them with materials and tools including timber-merchants, sawyers and woodmen, iron smelters, hardware merchants, coal merchants, charcoal burners and faggot cutters. Therefore an unknown but substantial number of Hertfordshire people must have been involved directly or indirectly in supplying the London market in addition to the Hertfordshire markets scattered over the county.

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## The socio-economic, political and cultural influences of London on Hertfordshire

The London wealthy and powerful who effectively colonised Hertfordshire seem to have regarded the county as similar to Kent which they also favoured for development as a country retreat. Kent and several other Home Counties are further discussed below. To what extent they were able to influence the Hertfordshire parishes where they chose to live is unclear. This socio-political networking was largely hidden from county records except in the case of influential men such as the Cecils who were expected to openly involve themselves and dictate local policies including supporting the appointment of a series of Provost Marshalls as further discussed in chapter five.

Lesser incomers wishing to become local grandees and take part in the shaping of Hertfordshire politics were more likely to have sought to become clients and supporters of the already powerful and to have taken up appointments as magistrates in the county and borough courts or aimed to become members of parliament. There may well have been an informal network of such gentlemen supporting their social superiors and aiming both to turn Hertfordshire into their vision of an orderly county and to maintain it as such. From their point of view both the local parishioner poor and casual vagrants are likely to have been primarily seen as an undifferentiated mass of potential problems and disorder requiring firm control from local officials.

Central London government brought the backbone legislation of the Old Poor Laws to Hertfordshire, as to all the English counties, but effectively left it to each individual county to decide how to implement it on the ground in the parishes. This policy also increased the power and local influence of the parish vestrymen and those higher officials who served as churchwardens and overseers of the poor. Some of these men developed into locally powerful dynasties of oligarchs as discussed further in chapter five. As Mark Goldie observed: ‘an astonishingly high

proportion of early modern people held [parish] office'.<sup>45</sup> In Hertfordshire these can be seen to have come mostly from the middling sort as discussed further in chapter five and consisted principally of tradesmen, tenant farmers, craftsmen and professional men who may well have chosen to also become clients of the lower gentry classes who ranked above them, these were gentlemen farmers and landowners.

As has been previously discussed above, the economic and political influences of London can be seen to have melded together also bringing changes to Hertfordshire society. Individual rich landowners may have employed local people as casual servants both indoor and outdoor when they were resident in the county. They would also have employed local labourers on their building and landscaping projects. All of these were likely to have been found through local agents who would have profited both through contacts with the gentry and the payment of their fees. There were no overt warnings that the county would declare for Parliament in the Civil War despite the presence of its Royalist grandees. A series of London statutes also directed the development of the English Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The progress and directions it took were left to the counties, unless they threatened to become disorderly, but were also monitored by regular episcopal and diaconal visitations.

The Dissolution of the religious houses and the chantries were controlled from London because they were intended to bring money, property and goods directly into Henry VIII's insatiable Treasury. Both the evolution of the English Reformation and the Dissolution of the Monasteries had economic, political and social effects on Hertfordshire as in all the south-eastern counties Brian Short observed that 'it was the Dissolution that had the greatest impact on the landscape'.<sup>46</sup> Former ecclesiastical property entered private hands and Christopher Clay argues that the marketing of land, regarded by contemporaries as one of the

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<sup>45</sup> M. Goldie 'The Unacknowledged Republic:: Office-Holding in Early Modern England' in T. Harris (ed.) *The Politics of the Excluded c. 1500-1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 153-194.

<sup>46</sup> B. Short *England's Landscape: The South East* (London: Collins, 2006), 95.

safest forms of investment, thrived.<sup>47</sup> In the ensuing Hertfordshire land-grab many small landholders would be swept aside and driven off their land to work for others or become vagrants seeking employment and a home.

## The Hertfordshire Dissolution

Most of the Hertfordshire religious houses were situated in the south and west of the county with by far the most important being St Albans Abbey, founded c.793. Its loss as a major pilgrimage centre was likely to have also considerably damaged the surrounding town's economy. Additionally there were at least 18 Benedictine priories containing monks or nuns which either were granted by Henry VIII to private individuals or became the sites of parish churches. How did the Dissolution of these and the hospitals and chantries run by monks, nuns and friars affect the county? According to Nicholas Doggett who has traced their history, 'The impact of the Dissolution on Hertfordshire's towns was considerable and irrevocable. All its monasteries were suppressed and, with the exception of the churches belonging to St Albans Abbey and Royston Priory and, for a brief period, Hertford Priory, none remained in religious use. In contrast, five of its six monastic houses were converted to domestic use, two of them – Hitchin Priory and Ware Priory – becoming substantial houses in extensive grounds....'.<sup>48</sup>

However, the Dissolution was not violent as it was in some strongly Catholic areas in the north of the country. In Hertfordshire it appears to have been more of a slow decline into stagnation as Henrietta Garbett noted 'Between 1536 and 1539 the religious left their old homes without riot, and it seems probable that many of the Hertfordshire religious houses had been quietly dissolved before this date'.<sup>49</sup> In practice there do not seem to have been violent objections to the Hertfordshire Dissolution from the dispossessed monks, nuns and friars or from their local

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<sup>47</sup> C. Clay *Economic Expansion and Social Change Vol. I People, Land and Towns 1500-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>48</sup> N. Doggett 'The Influence of the Dissolution on Hertfordshire's Towns in the Sixteenth Century' in T. Slater and N. Goose (eds) *A County of Small Towns: The Development of Hertfordshire's Urban Landscape to 1800* (Hatfield: Hertfordshire Publications, 2008), 354.

<sup>49</sup> H. Garbett in Page (ed.) *History Vol. IV* (London: Dawsons, 1971), 294-364. Quote on p. 311.

communities and tenants. In his study John Scarisbrick found that St Albans Abbey was being mismanaged by a Thomas Cromwell supporter and 'riven by faction'<sup>50</sup> but the last Abbot, a King's man, was able to negotiate a very generous redundancy payment for himself, as were some of his senior monks.<sup>51</sup> The other abbots and priors of the richer Hertfordshire foundations also made lucrative deals. However, Doggett found that their lesser brethren and sisters seem to have walked away and disappeared or been transferred to their mother houses in other counties until these too were dissolved. To what extent did the Dissolution affect the Hertfordshire poor? Doggett noted that 'Hertfordshire was rather a county of friaries and hospitals, usually situated in towns' and observed that although there was a relatively high number within a small county [these were] comparatively unimportant except of course for St Albans Abbey'.<sup>52</sup>

As David Knowles stated 'it had always been a monastic tradition that food left from the monks' table should go to the poor'.<sup>53</sup> Whether St Albans monks continued to observe this practice during the disruptions of the dissolution is unclear but even if it regularly continued it would only have benefitted the neighbourhood poor from day-to-day and presumably did not survive when the monks had departed. Paul Slack argued that 'The dissolution of monasteries, chantries, religious gilds and fraternities in the 1530s and 1540s radically reduced existing sources of charity... [and finds that there] may well have been a greater readiness to countenance a compulsory poor rate, and a more decisive movement of private benefactions towards the relief of the poor, than would have occurred if the religious foundations had remained'.

It would appear likely that the local poor were not highly dependent on monastic charity to survive but continued to rely on alms from their neighbours and

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<sup>50</sup> J. Scarisbrick *The Dissolution of the Monasteries The Case of St Albans* (St Albans: The Friends of St Albans Abbey, June 1994) 5.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 10. Abbot Richard Stevenage, got a pension of £266 p.a. and 39 other senior monks received pensions and 24 were still receiving them in Mary's reign 15 years later – varying from £5 to £13.

<sup>52</sup> Doggett 'The Influence of the Dissolution', 354.

<sup>53</sup> D. Knowles *The Religious Orders in England Vol.III The Tudor Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 265.

social betters and also on informal parish charity usually given at the church door after the Sunday service and so not available to those who did not attend. Payments to individuals can be found in several Tudor Churchwardens' Accounts.<sup>54</sup> When the formal relief system of the Old Poor Law was imposed informal charity and hospitality, as traced by Felicity Heal, fell into disfavour,<sup>55</sup> but the old ways appear to have continued in the Hertfordshire parishes. This was possibly because people brought up with them continued to directly give alms to beggars as can be seen in the indictments for vagrancy in chapter ten. For a time until the older almsgivers died out it is likely that the traditional attitudes to the poor ran alongside the new and less humane and impersonal approach of the Tudor and early Stuart legislators. The general effects of the Reformation on charity are further discussed in chapter four.

## The Hertfordshire Reformation

Ronald Hutton argued that 'The first great acts of the Henrician Reformation, the establishment of the royal supremacy [1534], the reformist Injunctions of 1536 and the dissolution of the religious houses, made little discernible impact upon parish religion'.<sup>56</sup> This appears to have been a true observation for Hertfordshire where only two cases of seditious speech specifically against Church of England clergy and governance, not the royal supremacy, were brought before the Assizes in 1590.<sup>57</sup> Those indicted, John and Thomas Hale, were possibly brothers or otherwise related, and both spoke using almost identical phrases against the Church of England and its ministers and bishops at St Albans on 1 July 1590. Thomas also spoke against the claiming of tithes by ministers. He and his family were later indicted for recusancy, the failure to regularly attend their parish church services, but he appeared again at

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<sup>54</sup> A. Palmer (ed.) *Tudor Churchwardens' Accounts* Hertfordshire Record Publications, Vol. 1 (Hertford: Hertfordshire Record Society, 1985).

<sup>55</sup> F. Heal *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

<sup>56</sup> R. Hutton 'The Local Impact of the Tudor Reformation' in Christopher Haigh (ed.) *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 116.

<sup>57</sup> J. Cockburn (ed.) *Calendar of Assize Records: Hertfordshire Indictments Elizabeth I* (London: H.M.S.O. 1975), 77.

the assizes in March 1591 and promised to cease this defiance.<sup>58</sup> Other recusancy cases are further discussed below.

There appear to have been only a few disturbances or direct attacks on the clergy in Hertfordshire churches. Thomas Thakerell a Sawbridgeworth tailor was presented for 'disturbing the minister and communicants between the delivering of the wine and the prayers' but the justice of the peace rejected the presentment as not being 'within the statute'.<sup>59</sup> At Muche Monden [Great Munden] a maltman 'standing excommunicate' disturbed the minister during the sermon and caused him to leave the church. Throughout the early modern period ministers were interrupted and heckled by both men and women at Bovingdon in March 1653,<sup>60</sup> and Thorley.<sup>61</sup>

In 1615-6 three men at Much Hadham church were accused of iconoclasm, the only presentment recorded although there may have been minor incidents which did not reach court. They 'beat down' the eastern glass window and 'pulled up and destroyed the rails round the communion-table' urged on by three supporters. Plainly these men were Puritans intent on purifying the church of its Romish ornaments. One man, a Much Hadham blacksmith, claimed that he had been paid to damage the church by two men from Nobnall Green [possibly Nobland Green in the neighbouring parish of Thundridge]. The absentee minister offered to suspend all proceedings against them if they repaired the damage but it was not recorded whether his offer was accepted. This appears to have been the only act of iconoclasm presented to the Hertford Quarter Sessions which at a time of widespread religious upheaval would seem to indicate that most Hertfordshire parishioners were either not strongly engaged in or avoided religious controversy.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> W. Le Hardy (comp.) *Hertford County Quarter Sessions Rolls 1581-1850 and Books 1619-57*.

<sup>60</sup> Le Hardy (comp.) *Hertfordshire Quarter Sessions Books 1619-57* 455-80 (12 Feb. 1653).

<sup>61</sup> Le Hardy (comp.) *Hertfordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls 1581-1698* 122-3, 217 (19 May 1658).

There may have been other cases of iconoclasm presented at the St Albans Quarter Sessions where the records have not survived. However, passive resistance against the Reformation was demonstrated by a significant number of Roman Catholic recusants who were prepared to pay the fines for not attending their parish churches.

### Hertfordshire recusancy

The first statute against recusancy was enacted in 1558 under Elizabeth I and specifically targeted Catholics.<sup>62</sup> 'Popish recusants' were those convicted for 'not repairing to some Church, Chapel, or usual place of Common Prayer to hear Divine Service there, but forbearing the same contrary to the tenor of the laws and statutes heretofore made and provided in that behalf'. No Catholic recusants appear to have been indicted at the Hertford assizes before John Clarke in February 1605. He was not a Hertfordshire man but a Stepney clothworker who said at Aldenham that 'he doth confidently beleieve that the Church of Rome is the true Church of Christ and noe other'. Two Digswell labourers entered recognizances against him so he may have been openly arguing for his Catholicism not merely expressing his views in private. In the following month Robert Bastard, a Hertford yeoman, was indicted for denying the royal supremacy and saying 'That he doth confidently believe the Romysh Church to be the true Catholick Church'. The penalties that the two men suffered were not recorded but the Bastard case was 'certified into King's Bench in Easter Term 1605' which would seem to indicate that it was regarded as more serious. These were the only two named Catholics indicted throughout the period 1605-92 at the Hertfordshire assizes or the Hertford Quarter Sessions but there may have been others presented for Catholicism at the St Albans Quarter Sessions where, as previously noted, the records have not survived.

Non-Catholics who did not attend church were also later called recusants and in Hertfordshire they appear to have eventually outnumbered the Catholics but were not labelled as non-conformists in presentations. As James Cockburn observed, 'Many of the returns to the national survey of recusants ordered in 1577

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<sup>62</sup> *Act of Uniformity* 1558 (1 Eliz 1 c 2).



failed to distinguish between the two types of nonconformity'.<sup>63</sup> The later Hertfordshire recusancy cases would seem to have been frequently brought against various sects of Protestant Separatists from the Church of England, such as the Brownist-supporting Little Gaddesden carpenter, Henry Pratt.<sup>64</sup> He was indicted several times in 1607, 1612, 1614 together with another carpenter from the same parish, John Rutland.

The Reformation appears to have had comparatively little effect on the problems of Hertfordshire poverty but it did encourage people to think for themselves in religious matters and to question other aspects of life into which religion impinged including poverty and its problems. How did the religious and other changes brought by central government affect other home counties?

### The influence of London on other Home Counties

London obviously did not only influence Hertfordshire but also to a similar or lesser extent the other Home Counties. These, which can only be briefly examined here, mostly through the secondary literature, are those identified in Map 2.1 as directly bordering the metropolis: Buckinghamshire; Essex; Middlesex; Kent, Surrey and Sussex. All of them provided a range of commodities to London. The agricultural historian, Joan Thirsk, observed that Hertfordshire and Essex 'furnish certain material for generalisation. Both supplied finished produce for London – meat, milk, butter, cheese, malt, and breadcorn – while Herts sped the traveller on his way with fresh horses and fodder'. She also noted that:

The opportunities for commercial enterprise were insistent enough to tempt many farmers into credit arrangements with food merchants: this seems to be a fair deduction to draw from the fact that the property of Hertfordshire farmers at death included many more debts and credits than was usual in other parts of England.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> J. Cockburn *A History of English Assizes 1558-1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 207. For the national survey see: *Calendar of State Papers Domestic Series 12/117/9: Acts of the Privy Council 1577-8*, 87-8.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Browne sought to institute a Congregationalist church made up only of the 'elect' who would choose their own officers.

<sup>65</sup> J. Thirsk 'The Farming Regions of England: E. Four Home Counties: Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, and Essex' in Joan Thirsk (ed.) *The Agrarian History of England*

James Sharpe also noted that 'In general, the agricultural life of Essex depended upon mixed farming geared increasingly to the needs of the capital'.<sup>66</sup> Essex had a similar economy to Hertfordshire but with its textile industry and coastline was less dependent on solely agricultural processing for its industries.

Thirsk found that 'the two south-eastern counties of Kent and Sussex were as profoundly influenced in their farming by the proximity of London as the Home Counties to the north. They had in London an almost unlimited market for all agricultural produce, but, unlike Hertfordshire, if London rejected any of their grain on account of its poor quality, both counties had a long coastline and many ports from which the surplus could be carried to other parts of England'.<sup>67</sup>

In Middlesex Bosworth noted both the importance of food production and good transport networks. 'The cultivation of fruit and vegetables for the London market has always been of great importance. Fruit farms are numerous in the neighbourhood of Twickenham, Brentford and Isleworth. West Middlesex is almost wholly given over to market gardening, the produce, comprising fruit, root-crops and vegetables being conveyed by road to London. Here again we see the dependence on London for its support from an agricultural point of view'.<sup>68</sup> 'By the early sixteenth century' Brian Short observed, 'many Middlesex villages were turning to the production of cattle and sheep, in both cases to exploit their proximity to London. By the end of the century fruit and vegetables were also being grown, sometimes in gardens and also in the common fields, around Fulham, Chelsea and Kensington, in the Lea Valley at Edmonton and Stoke Newington, at Hackney and in orchards in northern Kent and Surrey. By the early seventeenth century hops were also becoming better known in Kent, especially around Maidstone and Farnham'.<sup>69</sup>

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and Wales, 54.

<sup>66</sup> J. Sharpe *Crime in Seventeenth-Century England: A County Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 14.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 55.

<sup>68</sup> G. Bosworth *Middlesex* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 66.

<sup>69</sup> B. Short *The South East* (London: HarperCollins, 2006), 120.

William Lambarde (writing in 1570) referred to the extent to which the county of Kent, like Hertfordshire, was beholden for its prosperity to the nearness of the 'populous city' and its ready means of transport by road and by water although by no means the whole of the county was well served for roads'.<sup>70</sup> Peter Brandon and Brian Short also observed that 'The 1436 Lay Subsidy roll for London disclosed that of three hundred and fifty-eight men with assessments of over £5, 37 are also specified as holding lands in Kent, thirty-three in Essex, thirty-five in Middlesex, seventeen in Surrey and fifteen in Hertfordshire. Kent was the most popular choice, partly because land could be alienated (transferred to another person) at will and so freely negotiable on the land market'.<sup>71</sup>

Brandon and Short observed of other southern Home Counties that, "The impact of London is also evident in Surrey. The densely settled area of north-east Surrey, including the adjacent part of the North Downs reflects 'places of most resort' of many wealthy persons who belonged economically to London'. 'Perhaps the most striking evidence in the shift in the economic and social life of Sussex at the close of the Middle Ages from the coast to the Weald is to be found in the large numbers of country mansions built during the late Tudor and Stuart periods. These are almost all confined to the area north of the Downs'.<sup>72</sup> Some were built by the new class of rich merchants from London, who wished to set themselves up as country gentlemen – a process which has continued ever since. Other mansions were built by the growing body of important civil servants, lawyers and placemen, a class which proliferated during the Tudor period. Many of these had been rewarded by substantial transfers of monastic land and buildings after the dissolution of the monasteries'.<sup>73</sup> Armstrong also noted that 'London depended on the timber of the Weald and the Home Counties for most of its buildings, its shipyards and fuel'.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> F. Jessup *A History of Kent* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1987), 111.

<sup>71</sup> P. Brandon and B. Short *A Regional History of England: The South-East from A.D. 1000* (Harlow: Longman, 1990), 100.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 130.

<sup>73</sup> J. Armstrong *A History of Sussex* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1995), 83.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 89.

Michael Reed observed that, many Buckinghamshire landowners did sell their wood on a large scale, particularly to the insatiable London Market.<sup>75</sup>

Similar to Kent, Surrey and Sussex, Hertfordshire was also a place of 'resort' for rich Londoners most of whom appeared to have 'belonged economically to London' and remained focused on it as their commercial and social centre to the detriment of Hertfordshire towns. Comparatively small towns like Hertford and St Albans could not compete with the range of opportunities offered by nearby London so they remained satellites of the metropolis as did all Hertfordshire towns. All roads led to London and advances in travel and transport only increased that dependence.

Provincial centres located at a much greater distance from the capital such as Lewes in East Sussex, which was 55 miles from London and Chichester in West Sussex which was 54 had more chance of developing. As also did Maidstone the county town for Kent which was 32 miles distant from the capital and Guildford in Surrey which was 28. All of these were market towns which had established themselves as county towns and all, except Guildford, held assizes and the county gaol. The existence of these institutions appears to have been the criteria on which Daniel Defoe based his designation of a county town. On his early eighteenth-century tour of Britain he described Guildford as 'A well known and considerable market-town. It has the name of being the county town, though it cannot properly be called so; neither the county gaol being here, or the assizes, any more than in common with other towns'.<sup>76</sup> Hertford and St Albans both had courts and gaols but these were not enough to counteract the overwhelming influence of London on the county's development.

The landed gentry in the counties surrounding London were increasingly accustomed to centre their society on it. The economic historian, Frederick Fisher observed that country squires were frequently educated at the Inns of Court and,

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<sup>75</sup> M. Reed *A History of Buckinghamshire* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1993), 44.

<sup>76</sup> D. Defoe *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain 1724-6* (London: Penguin, 1986), 158.

once established on their estates, many regularly visited the metropolis to take part in politics as members of parliament, to litigate in the courts and to buy and sell land. As he further noted 'London was the very centre of the land market; for the estates that were being sold were above all those of the Crown, and the normal method of sale was through the agency of London financiers... London was the great money market and London merchants the great lenders'.<sup>77</sup> London was also the financial centre to borrow money and 'as a city of conspicuous consumption' to buy luxury consumer goods.

In addition it was the place to be in order to make social contacts, find suitable partners for oneself or one's heirs and to take part in the London season. This began in the autumn, reached its climax at Christmas, and was over by June. By the early seventeenth century, for nine months from October to June London always contained a substantial population of rural landowners who swelled the city's income.<sup>78</sup> For the remaining three months they lived on their country estates and contributed to the local economy as in Hertfordshire. They might also attend local gatherings, balls and assemblies at Hertford and St Albans and purchase local produce and services but this was not enough to significantly boost the power and prestige of the towns.

As Terry Slater and Nigel Goose noted in their survey 'Unlike most other English counties Hertfordshire failed to produce a single town of truly regional significance. Its urban structure, for so long simultaneously stimulated and inhibited by the close proximity of London, retained its density and for the most part its prosperity but it remained what it had been since the later Middle Ages – a county of small towns'.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> F. Fisher *London and the English Economy 1500-1700* (London: Hambledon Press, 1990), 105-18.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Slater and Goose *A County of Small Towns*, 9.

## Why study the Hertfordshire Old Poor Law?

The county has not been the subject of social/welfare history interest<sup>80</sup> although there have been local studies of the workings of local government and the Old Poor Law in parishes and towns in several neighbouring counties including: Bedfordshire;<sup>81</sup> Buckinghamshire;<sup>82</sup> Cambridgeshire;<sup>83</sup> Essex<sup>84</sup> and Middlesex.<sup>85</sup> The lack of a county social history study is surprising because, as all existing studies demonstrate, Hertfordshire had an important relationship with London due to its good communications with and proximity to the ever-expanding metropolis.<sup>86</sup> The sometimes daily contact, of some Hertfordshire towns, with London through mail and stage-coach passengers and deliveries meant that it was well placed to receive new ideas and practices emanating from and influencing London society, political thought and governance. These would have included economic and political theories about poverty, its causes and how to combat it effectively.

A Hertfordshire study might provide rewarding insights into the management of the poor as it not yet understood how the Old Poor Law operated on the ground in Hertfordshire parishes. It could reveal whether there was a distinctive Hertfordshire approach to poverty which can be traced in parish

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<sup>80</sup> J. Calnan's thesis would appear to be the most detailed on the period but was primarily concerned with the governing class not the poor. J. B. Calnan *County Society and Local Government in the County of Hertfordshire, c.1580-c.1630, with special reference to the commission of the peace* (unpublished Cambridge Ph.D thesis, 1979).

<sup>81</sup> J. Godber *History of Bedfordshire* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1999); S. Williams *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law 1760–1834* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011).

<sup>82</sup> H. Green *Village Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Longman, 1976); *Records of Buckinghamshire* (Aylesbury: Buckinghamshire Architectural and Archaeological Society, 1978).

<sup>83</sup> E. Hampson *The Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire 1597–1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934).

<sup>84</sup> F. Emmison *Early Essex Town Meetings: Braintree 1619–36; Finchingfield 1626–34* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1970); *Elizabethan Life: Disorder mainly from Essex Sessions and Assize Records* (Chelmsford: Essex County Council, 1970); J. Oxley *Barking Vestry Minutes and other Parish Documents* (Colchester: Benham, 1955).

<sup>85</sup> A. Collins *Finchley Vestry Minutes 1768 to 1840 Parts 1 and 2* (Finchley: Public Libraries Committee, 1957 and 1958); F. Sheppard *Local Government in St Marylebone 1688–1835* (London: Athlone Press, 1958).

<sup>86</sup> It would be necessary to identify and study comparable counties both north and south of the Thames, possibly Middlesex or Essex and Surrey which were becoming almost part of the metropolis, in order to evaluate how unique this relationship might have been.

documents or that individual parishes evolved and operated their own versions. To date, no detailed research has been attempted on the effects which London ideas and practices might have had on the destitute people of Hertfordshire in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. How might London ideas and fears of the growing numbers of idle beggars and wanderers in the metropolis have been transmitted to the county and to those appointed to manage the Hertfordshire poor?

Hertfordshire was geographically close to London, 11 miles or a day's journey on foot from its southern border at Chipping Barnet, and very intricately linked to it both economically as a major supplier of goods,<sup>87</sup> services and labour and also as a major source of attitudes and fears directed towards the growing numbers of actual, potential or even, in some cases, probably imaginary disorderly poor. This may have been to some extent an obsessive fear of revolt haunting members of the propertied classes transmitted and whipped up by central government and the popular rogue literature of the time. The following chapter analyses the source material which was used to discover how the Old Poor Law was employed in Hertfordshire and its effects on the poor.

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<sup>87</sup> F. Fisher 'The Development of the London Food Market 1540-1640' in F. Fisher *London and the English Economy 1500-1700* (London: Hambledon Press, 1990), 61-80.

## Chapter Three: Hertfordshire sources and methodology

The sources used in this thesis have been researched primarily at Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS) and supplemented by contemporary printed works listed in the bibliography. The Hertfordshire sources employed date from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries with the largest amount of material appearing to originate from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This would have been when the poor law system and working-practices were becoming firmly established in the county and decisions and expenditure were being regularly and systematically recorded in most of the larger parishes.

These materials comprise vestry minutes and orders<sup>1</sup>overseers' accounts; miscellaneous documents; and correspondence and other parochial material together with the Hertfordshire assize records and the Hertford quarter sessions books and rolls. They have been deployed here to pose a range of questions about Hertfordshire attitudes and management of the poor and then employed to discover how the poor law functioned in a selection of those parishes which appear to hold the richest sources. The main database used for this research consists primarily of material from the 132 ancient parishes of Hertfordshire, shown in Map 3.1 below.<sup>2</sup>

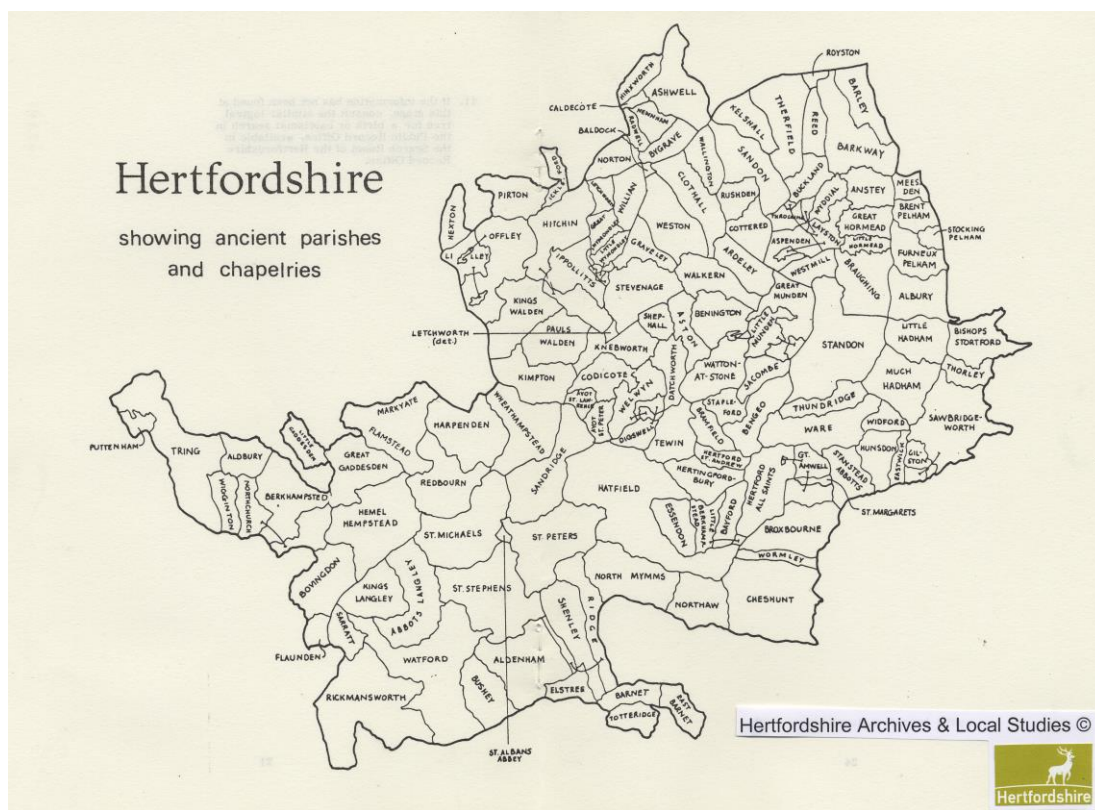
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<sup>1</sup> With the caveat that the Vestry would have been able to exercise direct control over what the clerk recorded in these minutes and would appear to have already discussed and made their major decisions and agreements in private and informal meetings amongst themselves before these, sometimes, public meetings took place. Meetings were usually only opened to the public when vitally important problems affecting the wellbeing of the whole community were under consideration such as the threat of an epidemic or dearth.

<sup>2</sup> The ancient parishes were: Abbots Langley; Albury; Aldbury; Aldenham; Anstey; Ardeley; Ashwell; Aspenden; Aston; Ayot St Lawrence; Ayot St Peter; Baldock; Barkway; Barley; Bayford; Bengoe; Benington; Berkhamsted; Bishop's Stortford; Bramfield; Braughing; Brent Pelham; Brickendon; Broadfield; Broxbourne; Buckland; Bushey; Bygrave; Caddington; Caldecote; Cheshunt; Chipping Barnet; Clothall; Codicote; Cottered; Datchworth; Digswell; East Barnet; Eastwick; Elstree; Essendon; Flamstead; Flaunden; Furneux Pelham; Gilston; Graveley; Great Amwell; Great Gaddesden; Great Horstead; Great Munden; Great Wymondley; Hatfield; Hemel Hempstead; Hertford; Hertingfordbury; Hexton; Hinxworth; Hitchin; Hunsdon; Ickleford; Ippollitts; Kelshall; Kensworth; Kimpton; Kings Langley; King's Walden; Knebworth; Layston; Letchworth; Lilley; Little Berkhamsted; Little Gaddesden;



Map 3.1 Hertfordshire Showing Ancient Parishes and Chapelries © Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies.



Of these parishes some 120 apparently hold documents that were in a good enough condition to be microfilmed, but it was impossible to research all of them. Moreover, not all appear to contain material relevant to the Old Poor Law, some are outside the chosen timeframe of c.1550-c.1800 and a large amount were fractured with incomplete holdings. Parishes with the earliest parish records, mainly dating from the latter half of the seventeenth century with fairly complete runs of parish material are listed as: Ashwell 1667-1732 [with gaps]; Baldock 1642-90 [with gaps]; Chipping Barnet 1646-1700 [with gaps]; Hitchin 1643-1770 [with gaps]; Stevenage 1575-1725 [with gaps]; Tring 1664-1789 [with gaps].

Little Hadham; Little Horstead; Little Munden; Little Wymondley; Long Marston; Meesden; Much Hadham; Nettleden; Newnham; Northaw; Northchurch; Norton; Offley; Pirton; Puttenham; Radwell; Redbourn; Reed; Rickmansworth; Ridge; Royston; Rushden; Sacombe; St Albans; St Michael: St Peter; Stephen; St Paul's Walden; Sandon; Sandridge; Sarratt; Sawbridgeworth; Shenley; Shephall; South Mymms; Standon; Stanstead Abbots; St Margaret; Stapleford; Stevenage; Stocking Pelham; Studham; Tewin; Therfield; Thorley; Throcking; Thundridge; Totteridge; Tring; Walkern; Wallington; Ware; Watford; Watton-at-Stone; Welwyn; Westmill; Weston; Wheathampstead; Widford; Wigginton; Willian; Wormley; Wyddial.

Hertfordshire parish record collections frequently contain unclassified bundles of bills and other documents which are now in the process of being catalogued and are likely to add additional source material. They would repay further investigation as the classifying programme progresses. The Barkway bundle which has recently been catalogued includes an early eighteenth-century medical bill.<sup>3</sup> One of the very large number of newly processed Cheshunt bundles contains a letter dated 1759 from a female out-parish pauper requesting payment of her rent by the Cheshunt overseer.<sup>4</sup> Chipping Barnet also holds a very large number of these bills and a sample previously taken for an earlier study proved to contain many from the early workhouse after its foundation in 1729.

Hertfordshire archivists are also working to get as much as possible of their data online to assist researchers and family historians and so have constructed a number of databases relevant to social welfare issues and the Hertfordshire poor. These can be searched by name and date and those used to identify potentially good sources were the Poor Law and Workhouse records; Birth, Marriages and Deaths; Hertfordshire Names Online and Crime and Punishment.

### Problems with sources

Although the Hertfordshire archives provide a wide range of sources certain categories of material relevant to this study or used by other historians for different counties apparently appear to be unfortunately missing or possibly not yet catalogued. There are, for example, apparently no petty sessions recorded within the timeframe and only a few for the nineteenth-century. Coroners' reports which might have proved informative only seem to have existed for the nineteenth-century although the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century coroners are listed several times in the Hertford quarter sessions records. From a preliminary search there appear to be no Hertfordshire examples of justices' notebooks so it was necessary to examine those printed and published for other counties, mostly dating

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<sup>3</sup> HALS DP13/18/3 1799-1819. Barkway Medical Bill 1819.

<sup>4</sup> HALS DP29/18/20 93H Letter from Ann Harris to Mr John Webster Overseer, 1759.

from the eighteenth century, to get some idea of the cases handled by these justices.<sup>5</sup> From a preliminary search these published notebooks originate from Bedfordshire, Durham, Hackney, Lincolnshire, Somerset and Wiltshire. In Hertfordshire there may possibly be similar examples of these classified under some Hertfordshire Justices of the Peaces' private papers as there are likely to be a large number of justices and it would seem unlikely that none kept notebooks of their cases.

In order to obtain some information on how other counties employed the Old Poor Law it was necessary to search for the few published vestry minutes and studies covering the Tudor and early Stuart period and then extract the relevant data which revealed Old Poor Law policies from them. Most of this material comes from towns and single parishes and dates from the later-sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Edited collections of Old Poor Law documents originating from Barking,<sup>6</sup> Braintree and Finchingfield, Essex;<sup>7</sup> Bruton, Somerset;<sup>8</sup> Wimbledon, Surrey<sup>9</sup> and Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire were also used for comparison with the Hertfordshire material.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A. Cirket (ed.) *Samuel Whitbread's Notebooks, 1810-11, 1813-14* (Bedfordshire Historical Record Society Vol. 50 (Bedford, 1971); E. Crittall (ed.) *The Justicing Notebook of William Hunt 1744-49* Vol. XXXVII (Trowbridge: Wiltshire Record Society, 1982); B. J. Davey (ed.) *The Country Justice and the Blackamoor's Head: The Practice of the Law in Lincolnshire, 1787-1838 Part 1: The Justice Books of Thomas Dixon of Riby, 1787-98* Lincoln Record Society Vol. 102 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002); M. McGarvie (ed.) *The King's Peace: The Justice's Notebooks of Thomas Horner of Mells 1770-7* (Frome: Frome Society for Local Study, 1997); G. Morgan and P. Rushton (eds) *The Justicing Notebook (1750-64) of Edmund Tew Rector of Boldon* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2000); R. Paley (ed.) *Justice in Eighteenth-Century Hackney: The Justicing Notebook of Henry Norris and the Hackney Petty Sessions Book* (London: London Records Society, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> J. Oxley *Barking Vestry Minutes & other Parish Documents* (Colchester: Benham, 1955).

<sup>7</sup> F. Emmison (ed.) *Early Essex Town Meetings: Braintree 1619-36; Finchingfield 1626-34* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1970).

<sup>8</sup> P. Randell *Stones We Cannot Eat: Poverty, the Poor Law, Philanthropy and Self Help in Bruton, Somerset c.1500-c.1900* (Brighton: Pen Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> F. Cowe (ed.) *Wimbledon Vestry Minutes 1736, 1743-88 A Calendar* Surrey Record Society. vol. 25 (Woking: The Society, 1964).

<sup>10</sup> G. Arbuthnot (ed.) *The Vestry Minute Book of the Parish of Stratford-on-Avon from 1617 to 1699 AD* (London: Bedford Press, 1901).

## Hertfordshire sources used in the chapters

Chapter four sketches the background to thinking about poverty and the treatment of the poor from Early Christian writings onward and therefore includes mostly contemporary writings including statutes and proclamations, sermons, pamphlets etc. The most important research question this chapter will pose for Hertfordshire was how were paupers valued by their parishes? This is explored through pauper Inventories<sup>11</sup> defined as all inventories of household goods and chattels found in parish records referred to as specifically belonging to paupers and not those relating to institutions. Few historians have worked on these but Joe Harley has recently studied them in Norfolk from 1690-1834, a considerably broader timeframe than the present study. In Hertfordshire five parishes to date produced them and these: Anstey; Ashwell; Ayot St Peter; Barkway and Hertford All Saints are used to provide examples from the Tudor and Stuart periods. This is a very small number but there may be more in the previously discussed uncatalogued bundles of miscellaneous Hertfordshire parish documents currently being processed.

Chapter five examines how prevailing beliefs about poverty and the poor as discussed in the preceding chapter might have affected the Hertfordshire poor. It poses questions about who held the power to make policies in the parish, what might have been their motivations in seeking parochial appointment, what were their occupations and what could be learned from this about their position in the community. The few churchwardens' accounts, dating from the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, provide brief information on these groups and also record charity given to the poor through the establishment of parochial poor-boxes etc. However, they tend to concentrate on recording parish church expenditure and maintenance. There are twelve surviving but very fragmented sets of sixteenth and seventeenth century accounts or 10.6% of the ancient parishes. These are Ashwell 1563-1603 [with gaps]; Baldock c. 1540-53; Chipping Barnet 1646-1700 [with gaps]; Knebworth 1598-1609 [with gaps]; St

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<sup>11</sup> J. Harley *Norfolk Pauper Inventories* c.1690-1834 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

Albans St Peters 1573-1603 [with gaps]; Stevenage has the longest run and also contains vestry minutes 1575-1725 [with gaps]. Totteridge covers 1613-1703 [with gaps]. Two sets of seventeenth-century accounts originate from Chipping Barnet 1646-1700; Stanstead Abbots 1663-1716 and eighteenth-century Aldenham 1728-1845; Berkhamsted 1748-1824; St Albans St Michael 1743-1845. From them it may be possible to see whether family dynasties were taking a dominant place in some vestries. There are 37 sets of vestry minutes and they come from 28% of the ancient parishes, which hold varying date ranges of material. Some also contain vestry orders which were direct instructions to individual officials or paupers.<sup>12</sup> All the vestry minutes are fractured with varying gaps in the numbers of missing years. The earliest examples tend to be, as are examples from other counties, only very basic lists of attendees and absentees, their parish offices and, sometimes, their occupations.

Chapter five also seeks to consider what it meant to belong to a parish and who might be classed as a deserving pauper? Parishes were unlikely to formally define this in writing although they may have provided some form of code of practice to their vestry clerks when dealing with correspondence about cases or petitions. They also probably did not discuss their policies in public which would have allowed them the flexibility to deal with individual cases. Only eight of these parishes (18.9%) provide useful examples which mention individual paupers or give some indications of parochial policies. They are all fractured and date mostly from the eighteenth century. These parishes are: Amwell (Great) 1749-95 [with gaps]; Ardeley 1707-82 [with gaps]; Bengoe 1725-91 [with gaps]; Brickendon 1740-91 [with gaps]; Hertford All Saints 1732-1816 [with gaps]; Hertford St John 1762 ; Royston 1781-1817 [with gaps]; Ware 1704-92 [with gaps]. Most vestry minutes were primarily concerned

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<sup>12</sup> These parishes were :Aldenham; Amwell (Great); Anstey; Ardeley; Baldock; Barley; Bengoe; Berkhamsted; Bishop's Stortford; Bovingdon; Brent Pelham; Brickendon; Broxbourne; Buckland; Bushey; Codicote; Essendon; Graveley with Chivesfield; Haddam (Much); Harpenden; Hemel Hempstead; Hertford All Saints; Hertford St Andrews; Hertford St John; Hertingfordbury; Hoddesdon; Little Berkampsted; Little Munden; Royston; Rushden; Stanstead Abbots; Thorley; Totteridge; Tring; Watford; Welwyn; Weston; Wormley.

with monitoring parish expenditure not discussing policies towards individual poor cases, unless these involved potentially high costs to the parish.

A more useful source for investigating those who belonged and those who were considered to be deserving are the indictments brought to the Hertford Quarter Sessions. These have been compiled by William Le Hardy in eleven volumes. However, since, as further discussed in chapter five the records from St Albans Quarter Sessions covering indictments for the county's southern parishes have not survived for the Tudor or Stuart period this can only be a partial survey of the county. Quarter Sessions were the meetings of the Justices of the Peace held at Easter, Trinity (June/July), Michaelmas (September) and Epiphany (January) to deal with cases. They included presentments brought for illegally erecting cottages without allotting the statutory amount of land<sup>13</sup> and for taking inmates.<sup>14</sup>

For chapters six researching the Sick Poor and seven focusing on Medical Practitioners and Parish Officials the *Hertfordshire Militia Ballot Lists* c.1758-86 [some with very large gaps] have provided a main data source in the form of a CD produced by the Hertfordshire Family History Society.<sup>15</sup> The number of parishes that can be, at least, partially surveyed, will increase to 143 because these listings split St Albans into 6 separate wards and also include former Hertfordshire parishes which subsequent boundary changes have moved into neighbouring counties. These parishes were Caddington, Kensworth and Studham [now in Bedfordshire] and Flaunden [now in Buckinghamshire]. The listed men were mostly from those regarded by contemporaries as the lower classes; those who worked for wages on the land such as day labourers, agricultural servants, husbandmen together with craftsmen and tradesmen. Those of the gentry class who would serve as officers are usually not included, except for the medical men and these included physicians, surgeons and apothecaries.

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<sup>13</sup> *An Act Against the Erecting and Maintaining of Cottages* 1589 (31 Elizabeth c. 8), permitted JPs to allow exemptions to the requirement of attaching 4 acres of freehold land to every new-built cottage.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Hertfordshire Parishes Militia Ballot Lists* 1757-86 CD © Hertfordshire Family History Society.



Chapter six primarily seeks to learn what can be discovered about the sick and injured poor, the infirmities they suffered from and how many of these appeared to have been, to at least some extent, occupational diseases? The militia ballot lists provide a virtual census of all men aged from 18 to 50 who were put into the ballot. From 1762 onwards the upper age limit for the ballot was reduced to 45. This information was compiled by the parish constable and he also included his layman's descriptions of disabilities and infirmities which would prevent service such as being one-eyed, deaf, dumb, suffering from fits or lame.

The chapter also explores how diseases amongst the poor, including women and children, were diagnosed and treated by local practitioners through examination of medical bills,<sup>16</sup> medical advice books written for the layman, recipe books collected by their owners and frequently containing both cookery and medical recipes and contemporary medical textbooks.<sup>17</sup> The most informative and wide-ranging collection of bills is, to date, that for Royston although there are other examples from Baldock,<sup>18</sup> Barkway,<sup>19</sup> Cheshunt,<sup>20</sup> and Chipping Barnet.<sup>21</sup> It is likely that many of these bills were regarded as ephemeral and discarded on payment but there may be more of them and, possibly, some earlier examples included in the unclassified bundles of parish material.

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<sup>16</sup> A team of academics and volunteers led by Alannah Tomkins (Keele) is currently working on small bills and overseers' vouchers from Cumbria, Staffordshire and East Sussex and aims to 'generate partial biographies of tradespeople, administrators, paupers, and workers who are not represented elsewhere in the historical record.' These include midwives. <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FR003246%2F1>.

<sup>17</sup> These included: W. Buchan *Domestic Medicine...* 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Dublin: Sleater, Whitestone & Chamberlain, 1781); W. Ellis *The Country Housewife's Family Companion...* (London, 1750); J. Parkinson *The Villager's Friend and Physician; or a familiar address on the preservation of health...supposed to be delivered by a village apothecary...* (London: Symonds, 1800); J. Quincy *Pharmacopeia officinalis & extemporanea: or, a complete English dispensatory, in two parts...* 15<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Longman, 1782); B. Ramazzini *Diseases of Workers: The Latin text of 1713 Revised with translation and notes by W. C. Wright* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940).

<sup>18</sup> *HALS DP12/18/1* Baldock Miscellaneous Papers 1729; *HALS DP12/18/1* Baldock Miscellaneous Papers 1732.

<sup>19</sup> *HALS DP13/18/3* Barkway Miscellaneous Papers 1818.

<sup>20</sup> *HALS DP29/18/22* Cheshunt Miscellaneous unclassified Bundle.

<sup>21</sup> *HALS DP15/12/2* Chipping Barnet Overseers' Accounts 1745-1785. Bill dated Sept .1766.

The bundles may also include further examples of letters written by sick and injured paupers living and working away from their home parishes. These communications were essentially petitions and may be classed as miscellaneous correspondence, written by paupers who needed relief or by officials or intermediaries in their host parishes to request it on their behalf. These letters are usually brief but sometimes very informative and need to be approached with care because all the correspondents had their own agendas. The pauper would have wanted to influence the home parish in their favour as a deserving case but without appearing either to be overly importunate or in too hopeless a situation to continue to survive outside the home parish workhouse. Most paupers were likely to have established their own support networks in the host parish and although they might threaten to come home this was usually a rhetorical flourish since paupers wanted to keep their independence at all costs and the home parish was well aware of this determination. The host parish officials and medical men would have wanted to be paid for their expenditure in curing and maintaining the pauper and, sometimes, burying them if the case proved beyond saving.

Only Royston of the Hertfordshire parishes researched to date appears to have sent invitations to sick paupers to come home to the workhouse, which also later contained a small infirmary, for relief although, like other parishes, they balked at any mention of infections by paupers. Home parishes usually aimed to provide their distressed paupers living both in the parish and outside it with just enough money to subsist and would negotiate with the host parish on the minimum amount required. It was in the interests of both home and host parish to keep paupers just barely independent as a pool of cheap, often seasonal, part-time labour which could be accessed on demand and ignored when not required. In reading pauper letters as a kind of formalised dialogue between pauper and parish and the negotiations between home parish and host parish we can gain some understanding of how the old poor law system operated. Thomas Sokoll documented around 750 letters from



the Essex out-parish poor in his edited volume.<sup>22</sup> Compared to this resource the total number of surviving Hertfordshire letters appears much lower, c. 50 to date, unless many more are found in the unclassified bundles in the future.

Chapter seven seeks to examine the evolution of the relationship between lay parish officials and medical practitioners. It uses the miscellaneous overseers' correspondence in which parishes negotiated over the maintenance of sick and injured non-parishioner paupers. This correspondence also includes interventions with the home parish by some medical men over the treatment and needs of their non-parishioner patients. The chapter also seeks to discover what can be learned about the development of medical services in Hertfordshire. The militia lists appear to include those medical men who served in the militia and so the numbers of them in parishes can be traced and mapped, at least partially, and the fluctuations in their numbers over the period traced. Following on from this a secondary task is to investigate the development and evolution of medical contracts in the county. These have been filed in a number of categories, including miscellaneous papers and documents and further examples may also be discovered in the unclassified bundles.

Chapter eight focuses on the lives of some vulnerable poor women and poses a series of questions about their relationship with the old poor law. Who were the women who found themselves obliged to apply to the parish for relief? What can be learned about them? How were they managed by the system? The Old Poor Law assumed that pauper women were subsumed under their father or husband and that these or other male members of the family would deal with parish officials. A large number of orphan girls or women without a male negotiator would have had to come into contact with parish officials at least three times in their lives including at first apprenticeship,<sup>23</sup> when victims of desertion and as widows. Information on

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<sup>22</sup> S. King *Writing the Lives of the English Poor 1750s-1830s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019) is the most comprehensive survey of this material; T. Sokoll *Essex Pauper Letters 1731-1837* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> M. Prak and P. Wallis (eds) *Apprenticeship in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) is considered to be the first comparative and comprehensive account of occupational training before the Industrial Revolution.

these groups can be found in apprenticeship indentures, settlement examinations and removal orders.

Indentures usually provide brief details of the girl's name and parish, her future employer's name, and sometimes also his wife's,<sup>24</sup> their parish and, usually, his occupation and sometimes that of his wife. In Hertfordshire the indentures from 24 (18.1%) of the ancient parishes ranging from large towns such as Hertford and St Albans, including both the Abbey and St Peters' parishes, to small rural hamlets including Graveley and Norton were analysed.<sup>25</sup> These produced a total of 360 indentures. However, the number of indentures might vary with the importance of the parish and also some large towns such as Ware appear to have no apprenticeship records at all, possibly because these have been discarded.<sup>26</sup> Few of the parishes appear to have kept their indentures or possibly did not indenture apprentices and employed less formal methods of setting poor children to work.

A woman might find herself either temporarily on her own, if her husband enlisted or was travelling to find work, or, she could discover that she and her children had been permanently deserted. Self-identifying deserted women appear in the 40 eighteenth-century settlement examinations (30.3%) from the ancient parishes, but not earlier although there must have been sixteenth and seventeenth-century cases. These women appear to have claimed connections to 10 Hertfordshire parishes which may have been because they were living with friends or relatives.<sup>27</sup> It is

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<sup>24</sup> This may have indicated that the girl was intended to work for them both as a domestic servant and not be trained in a craft or trade or that she would receive some basic training from the husband and also carry out some housewifery duties for his wife.

<sup>25</sup> These parishes were: Ashwell; Barkway; Berkhamsted; Bishop's Stortford; Broxbourne; Bushey; Cheshunt; Chipping Barnet; Datchworth; Essendon; Graveley; Great Gaddesden; Hertford All Saints; Hitchin; Hoddesdon; Kings Langley; Norton; Royston; Shephall; St Albans Abbey; St Albans St Peters; Standon; Wheathampstead.

<sup>26</sup> Indentures survive in varying numbers from the parishes of Ashwell, Barkway, Berkhamsted, Bishop's Stortford, Broxbourne, Bushey, Cheshunt, Chipping Barnet, Datchworth, Essendon, Graveley, Great Gaddesden, Hertford, Hitchin, Hoddesdon, Kings Langley, Norton, Royston, Shephall, St Albans: Abbey, St Albans: St Peters, Standon, Weston, Wheathampstead and form the apprentices section of Hertfordshire Archives 'Hertfordshire Names Online' listings. <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/ufs/ufsmain> Accessed several times Jan. - June 2018.

<sup>27</sup> These parishes (numbers of cases in brackets) were: Barkway (2); Broxbourne (2); Cheshunt (7); Chipping Barnet (10); Hitchin (2); Hoddesdon; Royston (2); St Albans Abbey; St

possible that an unknown number did not wish to believe themselves deserted and either did not mention or falsified their marital state when examined. Women who stated they had been deserted were liable to be given removal orders to their husbands' settlements or, if a woman claimed that she did not know, to those of his or her family if she knew them. From a preliminary survey four women claimed that they had no knowledge of their husbands' settlements and were removed to his father's. There appear to be 56 removal orders for 34 women, involving 42.4% of the ancient parishes.<sup>28</sup>

The section on widows employs primarily eighteenth-century Overseers' Accounts for Chipping Barnet 1720-45,<sup>29</sup> which unlike many of these source types are quite detailed and have been chosen for that reason although the sample is small. These five women seem to have been recognised as deserving because they had been pensioned by the parish but there may have been an unknown number of others in similar situations who did not seek pensions and remained on the margins.

Chapter nine seeks to discover what can be learned about bastard bearers and their partners. Bastardy was regarded by parish officials, supporting central government policies, as a particular problem in Hertfordshire but was this borne out by the number of court presentments? Illegitimate births were sometimes recorded in parish registers and these have been used as sources by previous historians as further discussed in chapter nine.<sup>30</sup> However, these listings are very brief and frequently incomplete because not every minister recorded illegitimate births so

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Albans St Peter; Watford.

<sup>28</sup> These parishes were: Aldbury; Aldenham; Amwell (Great); Anstey; Ashwell; Aspenden; Aston; Ayot St Peter; Baldock; Barkway; Barnet (Chipping); Barnet (East); Bayford; Berkhamsted; Bishop's Stortford; Broxbourne; Bushey; Cheshunt; Clothall; Cottered; Datchworth; Elstree; Essendon; Gaddesden (Great); Gilston; Graveley; Hadham (Much); Harpenden; Hertford All Saints; Hertford St Andrew; Hertingfordbury; Hitchin; Hornead (Great); Hoddesdon; Knebworth; Kings Langley; Norton; Pirton; Royston; Sacombe; St Albans Abbey; St Albans St Peter; Shephall; Stevenage; Tewin; Therfield; Walkern, Ware; Watford; Willian; Wormley.

<sup>29</sup> HALS DP15/12/1 Chipping Barnet Overseers Accounts 1720-45.

<sup>30</sup> Used in their primarily demographic studies by R. Adair *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) and P. Laslett K. Oosterveen and R. Smith (eds) *Bastardy and its Comparative History*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

instead of these the Hertford Quarter Sessions court records will be used which, although sometimes also incomplete, frequently provide more data about the bastard bearer and, occasionally, the putative father.

For the seventeenth-century presentments only very brief details about the offenders are usually recorded for other counties including their names, sex and, occasionally, their occupation and their parish and home county. There are gaps in the information provided both in naming who brought the case, usually the bastard-bearer's parish, and also the outcomes for the offenders. The total number of bastardy cases presented to the Hertford Quarter Sessions from 1619-1700 was 134 and they originated from 51 (38%) of Hertfordshire parishes both urban and rural. This total does not include data from the 24 parishes under the jurisdiction of the Liberty of St Albans, which had its own quarter sessions. Records for these parishes (18%) of the county have not survived before 1770 and the data from these western and southern parishes may have been comparable to that from Hertford sessions or even higher.<sup>31</sup>

From 1717-99 the total number of presentments was 133<sup>32</sup> from forty of the ancient parishes (30.3%). This total also does not include the unknown number presented to the Liberty of St Albans Sessions. Eighteenth-century cases sometimes indicate that several justices directly negotiated with the father to provide regular sums of maintenance for the child and these meetings may have been a form of Petty Sessions, although not described as such by the courts. An apparent increase in bastardy cases can be seen to have occurred from the settlement examinations recorded during the eighteenth century taken from 102 women originating from 85

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<sup>31</sup> These parishes were: Abbots Langley; Aldenham; Chipping Barnet; East Barnet; Bramfield; Caldecote; Codicote; Elstree; Hexton; Newnham; Northaw; Norton; Redbourn; Rickmansworth; Ridge; St Albans Abbey; St Michaels; St Peters; St Stephens; Sandridge; Sarratt; Shephall; St Pauls Walden; Watford.

<sup>32</sup> These parishes were: Aldbury; Aldenham; Amwell (Great); Anstey; Ashwell; Aspenden; Aston; Ayot St Peter; Barkway; Barnet (Chipping); Barnet (East); Bayford; Berkhamsted; Bishop's Stortford; Broxbourne; Bushey; Cheshunt; Datchworth; Elstree; Essendon; Gaddesden (Great); Graveley; Hertford (All Saints); Hertford (St Andrew); Hertingfordbury; Hitchin; Hornead (Great); Ippollitts; Kings Langley; Royston; Sacombe; St Albans (Abbey); St Albans (St Peter); Tewin; Watford.

Hertfordshire parishes.<sup>33</sup> Unlike the earlier court cases, settlement examinations included some of the 24 parishes under the jurisdiction of the Liberty of St Albans making a total of 40 parishes (30.3%) of the ancient Hertfordshire parishes.<sup>34</sup>

Chapter ten considers what can be learned about vagrants in Hertfordshire and those who helped them with money, food and/or shelter. It uses the same Hertford quarter sessions records as the bastardy chapter but adds to these earlier edited assize records from the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods dating, with gaps, from 1570 to 1621.<sup>35</sup> It also examines parish officials' perceived belief, which was like the rapid spread of bastardy reinforced by central government, of large numbers of vagrants infesting the county. Is this supported by the number of court cases? The edited assize court records provide a sample of 22 Elizabethan and 21 Jacobean assize cases which would seem to indicate little change in vagrant numbers during the period. Only very brief details about the vagrants are recorded including; their names, sex and, occasionally, their former occupation and their parish and home county, but not their age or condition (state of health). There do not appear to have been any more detailed vagrant examinations in the Hertfordshire archives like those used by Lee Beier<sup>36</sup> and Paul Slack<sup>37</sup> for their vagrancy studies although, given the county's fear of vagrants, it would seem likely that these examinations did take place at least in the larger towns such as Hertford and St Albans.

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<sup>33</sup> J. Cockburn (ed.) *Calendar of Assize Records Hertfordshire Indictments Elizabeth I* (London: H.M.S.O. 1975); *Calendar of Assize Records Hertfordshire Indictments James I* (London: H.M.S.O. 1975).

<sup>34</sup> These parishes were: Aldbury; Aldenham; Amwell (Great); Anstey; Ashwell; Aspenden; Aston; Ayot St Peter; Barkway; Barnet (Chipping); Barnet (East); Bayford; Berkhamsted; Bishop's Stortford; Broxbourne; Bushey; Cheshunt; Datchworth; Elstree; Essendon; Gaddesden (Great); Gravelly; Hertford (All Saints); Hertford (St Andrew); Hertingfordbury; Hitchin; Hornead (Great); Ippollitts; Kings Langley; Royston; Sacombe; St Albans (Abbey); St Albans (St Peter); Tewin; Watford.

J. Hill *Hertfordshire Poor Law Examinations as to Settlement: An Alphabetical Index of the names of those who were Examined as to their Settlement* (Hatfield?: Hertfordshire Family History Society, 2004), vii. Hill stated that he had listed all that he could find to date in the county archives. Other examples may since have been found in the uncatalogued bundles.

<sup>35</sup> Cockburn (ed.) *Assize Records Elizabeth I; James I*.

<sup>36</sup> A. Beier *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985).

<sup>37</sup> P. Slack 'Vagrants and Vagrancy in England 1598-1664' *Economic History Review* 27 (1974), 360-79.

Data from the second primary source the edited Hertford Quarter Sessions from 1626 to the end of the seventeenth century shows that there was a very distinct drop (46.1%) in the total number of indicted vagrants from 78 in 1573-1621 to 36 in 1626-1700. These records also provide only very brief information about the vagrants very similar to the assize records. The Grand Jury Presentments give some indications of county anti-vagrant policies as in the decision made to appoint the first Provost Marshall in 1624.<sup>38</sup> Indictments for harbouring are sometimes more detailed as in the 1636 Much Hadham case.<sup>39</sup> This case seems to have seriously worried both the parish officers and the court because it was exceptionally fully recorded compared to the usual brevity of such reports.

The collected Hertfordshire removal orders 1740-99 were used to research eighteenth-century vagrancy and supplement the court cases but do not appear to duplicate them possibly because the court offenders were usually presented for openly begging frequently at Hertford.<sup>40</sup> These printed documents provide brief details including the name of the person/s to be removed, sometimes the name of the wife and the ages of the children are given, where they had been apprehended and to which parish they were to be transported. A single man, woman or widow would be recorded as such. Their offence was that they were 'likely to become chargeable' to the parish where they had been found. A total of 98 vagrants received removal orders, not counting unnamed wives and unnumbered children who were not always included on the order. A total of 81 vagrants with a Hertfordshire connection can be seen to have been removed to their home parishes

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<sup>38</sup> Cockburn (ed.) *Assize Records James I, Grand Jury Presentments*, 275-1369 (18 March 1624).

<sup>39</sup> W. Le Hardy (comp.) *Hertford Quarter Sessions Books 1619-1657* 292 (3 May 1641).

<sup>40</sup> J. Hill *Hertfordshire Removal Orders: An Alphabetical Index* (Hatfield? Hertfordshire Family History Society, 2003). The Hertfordshire parishes with removal orders were: Aldbury; Aldenham; Anstey; Ashwell; Aspenden; Aston; Ayot St Peter; Baldock; Barkway; Bayford; Berkhamsted; Bishop's Stortford; Broxbourne; Bushey; Cheshunt; Chipping Barnet; Clothall; Cottered; Datchworth; East Barnet; Elstree; Essendon; Gilston; Graveley; Great Amwell; Great Hornead; Harpenden; Hertford All Saints; Hertford St Andrew; Hertingfordbury; Hitchin; Hoddesdon; Ippollitts; Kings Langley; Knebworth; Little Gaddesden; Much Hadham; Norton; Pirton; Royston; Sacombe; St Albans Abbey; St Albans St Peter; Shephall; Standon; Stevenage; Tewin; Therfield; Walkern; Ware; Watford; Wheathampstead; Willian; Wormley.

in the county from outside parishes including a large number who seem to have been established in Middlesex<sup>41</sup> and the City of London.<sup>42</sup> More detailed information about these wanderers than the courts provide may also be recorded in the eighteenth-century settlement examinations from 40 (30.3%) of the 132 Hertfordshire parishes.<sup>43</sup>

## Methodology

### 1. Old Poor Law historiography.

Early welfare historians seem to have viewed the Old Poor Law as a kind of early version of the New Poor Law, as a one-size fits all remedy for poverty, completely de-contextualising it from its early modern background. This top-down and broad-brush approach can be seen in the works of Sidney and Beatrice Webb<sup>44</sup> and Dorothy Marshall who appear to have identified and attempted to understand the Old Poor Law as a kind of primitive prototype of the monolithic New Poor Law which, as they correctly judged, had also sought and failed to deal with the problem

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<sup>41</sup> These Middlesex parishes were: Bethnal Green; Bromley; Chelsea; Clerkenwell; Cowley; Ealing; Edgware; Edmonton; Enfield; Finchley; Friern Barnet; Great Stanmore; Greenford; Hackney; Hadley; Hammersmith; Hampstead; Harefield; Harrow on the Hill; Hendon; Holborn; Hornsey; Ickenham; Islington; Kensington; Kingsbury; Liberty of the Rolls; Little Stanmore; Monken Hadley; New Brentford; Northolt; Pinner; Poplar; Ratcliff Hamlet; Ruislip; Shadwell, St Paul; Shoreditch; South Mimms; St Anne [Limehouse?]; St Anne [Westminster?]; St Clement Danes; St George's [Middx?]; St Giles in the Fields; St James [Middx?]; St Luke [Middx?]; St Luke Old Street; St Marylebone; St Pancras; St Sepulchre without; Stepney Mile End New Town; Stepney Mile End Old Town; Stepney St Dunstan; Stoke Newington; Sunbury; Tottenham; Uxbridge; Westminster St George Hanover Square; Westminster St James; Westminster St John; Westminster St Margaret; Westminster St Martin in the Fields; Westminster St Mary Le Strand; Westminster St Paul Covent Garden; Whitechapel; Whitechurch, Stanmore; Willesden.

<sup>42</sup> These parishes were: Christchurch; St Bartholomew the Great; St Benet, Pauls Wharf; St Botolph without Aldgate; St Botolph without Bishopsgate; St Bride; St Dunstan in the East; St Giles without Cripplegate; St Gregory by St Paul; St Lawrence Jewry; St Mary Aldermay; St Mary Woolchurch Haw; St Mary Woolnoth; St Michael Bassishaw; St Mildred Poultry; St Peter Le Poor; St Sepulchre within; St Stephen Coleman Street.

<sup>43</sup> These parishes were: Aldbury; Aldenham; Amwell (Great); Anstey; Ashwell; Aspenden; Aston; Ayot St Peter; Barkway; Barnet (Chipping); Barnet (East); Bayford; Berkhamsted; Bishop's Stortford; Broxbourne; Bushey; Cheshunt; Datchworth; Elstree; Essendon; Gaddesden (Great); Graveley; Hertford (All Saints); Hertford (St Andrew); Hertingfordbury; Hitchin; Hormead (Great); Ippollitts; Kings Langley; Royston; Sacombe; St Albans (Abbey); St Albans (St Peter); Tewin; Watford.

<sup>44</sup> S. and B. Webb *English Local Government: English Poor Law History: Part 1. The Old Poor Law* (London: Longman, 1927).



of poverty. Marshall stated that “The purpose of this study is to give an account both of the way in which the Poor Law affected the lives of the mass of the labouring Poor in the later part of the seventeenth and during the eighteenth century, and of the contemporary attitude toward poverty”.<sup>45</sup> Ethel Leonard writing in 1900 had seen the relationship between relieving and policing the poor, particularly vagrants, and found that ‘the poor laws themselves were at least partly police measures’ she stated that ‘the connection between the relief of the poor and orderly government in England appears fully during the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries’.

That the understanding of poverty and the proposed solutions to this perennial problem might have differed considerably in the sixteenth century, when the first poor laws were formulated, might then have developed during the following two centuries and might ultimately bear very little relation to the philosophies and aims of the New Poor Law of the nineteenth century, apart from the ever present drive to control both the poor and poverty, does not appear to have occurred to them. Ethel Leonard writing in 1900 had seen the relationship between relieving and policing the poor, particularly vagrants, and found that ‘the poor laws themselves were at least partly police measures’ she stated that ‘the connection between the relief of the poor and orderly government in England appears fully during the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries’.<sup>46</sup>

Nor do they appear to have understood that the Old Poor Law was, and it could be argued, needed to be flexibly interpreted at local level, it was not regarded as a compulsory code of practice when dealing with paupers, even though there were several comprehensive guides to the law published specifically for parish officers throughout this period so there was presumably a market for such books.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> D. Marshall *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Social and Administrative History* (New York: Kelley, 1926), i.

<sup>46</sup> E. Leonard *The Early History of English Poor Relief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 1.

<sup>47</sup> Anon. *An Ease for Overseers of the Poore* (Cambridge, Legat1601) (EEBO); Michael Dalton *The Country Justice* (London, 1666 ).



However, as the local government historian, David Eastwood, noted 'eighteenth-century administrators had been inclined to see poverty as a kaleidoscope of individual experiences rather than a monolithic social condition, and accordingly they attempted to maintain institutional responses to poverty which in theory at least, treated every application for relief on its merits'.<sup>48</sup>

Recent welfare historians have also come to realise that the Old Poor Law was a distinct and complex localised system, predicated on a different understanding of the problems of poverty. Most have now abandoned attempts to encapsulate the Old Poor Law, although this approach does still survive in general histories and textbooks. They have instead been deconstructing this highly complex topic into its component facets and then examining them in detail within the historical context. They have used varying methods, both quantitative and qualitative and sometimes melded both, to work with the data collected some of which have been adopted and adapted for this current, hybrid study. The most influential historians on its methodology have been Steven King, Steve Hindle, Paul Slack and Keith Snell.

Jonathan Healey observed that Steven King 'has explored regional variations in approaches to the poor from the beginning of the eighteenth-century to the middle of the nineteenth and has undertaken the most wide-ranging quantitative work on overseers' accounts yet seen, arguing that geographical variations reflected specifically regional welfare cultures and implementation policies'.<sup>49</sup> Steve Hindle has taken a more qualitative approach but also concentrated on parochial records (overseers', churchwardens', and charity trustees' accounts, and vestry minutes). He states of his monograph *On the Parish* that 'Although the book is, therefore,

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<sup>48</sup> D. Eastwood *Governing Rural England: Tradition and Transformation in Local Government 1780-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 121.

<sup>49</sup> J. Healey *The First Century of Welfare: Poverty and Poor Relief in Lancashire 1620-1730* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2014), 17.

S. King, 'Reconstructing Lives: the Poor, the Poor Law and Welfare in Calverley 1650-1820' *Social History* 22 (1997), 318 -38; *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); 'Locating and Characterising Poor Households in Late Seventeenth-Century Bolton: Sources and Interpretations' *Local Population Studies*, 68 (2002), 42-62.

intended as a national survey, it is perforce attuned to the issues of regional particularity and economic and cultural difference'.<sup>50</sup>

Hindle saw his own work as a rural study and complementary to Paul Slack's seminal predominantly small town survey *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* which he claims demonstrated 'the impact of sixteenth-century economic change...on both elite and popular perceptions of poverty'.<sup>51</sup> Slack seems to support this view, but emphasises the 'elite', as he claims that 'This book will seek to show how, for the first time, poverty came to be a central concern of the property-owning and governing class; how they interpreted and responded to it; and what sort of an impact their response had both on the poor minority who were its target, and – perhaps even more important – on the relatively prosperous majority who were not'.<sup>52</sup>

Keith Snell chose to research a later period and concentrated on the two highly important topics of 'settlement' and 'belonging' in his monograph *Annals of the Labouring Poor*. His chosen timeframe was 1660 to 1900 and his coverage was very wide including all 'English and Welsh counties south of Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire, and Radnor'.<sup>53</sup> He initially researched and compiled a wide range of data from settlement examinations, removal orders and associated correspondence from parish collections and found that this method was 'extremely time consuming'. He then focused on 'subjects, areas and periods where it was felt helpful to have more extensive documentation'.<sup>54</sup> Similar methods will be used in the present study but for an earlier period, with some overlap in the timeframe, and for only for one county. Hertfordshire provides a wide-range of primary sources but nothing very detailed so the approach to be used here is a meld of all of the above methods adapted to maximise the available data. It will involve counting, some case

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<sup>50</sup> S. Hindle *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 2, 5.

<sup>52</sup> P. Slack *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman, 1988).

<sup>53</sup> K. Snell *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 418.

studies and also some qualitative recorded accounts which provide illustrative examples.

## 2. Methods employed in this research

The study has classified the parishes and then concentrated on those with the most comprehensive and complete range of sources that might be expected to provide useful data. The aim was to categorise the parishes very simply on the basis of their potential usefulness as sources and to use this information to make decisions on which parishes should be investigated.

Those parishes, classified as A, which appeared to have large, fairly complete runs of churchwardens' and overseers' accounts, vestry minutes and additional sources including miscellaneous documents and correspondence directed to the overseers required intensive investigation. Exploratory research on two towns, Chipping Barnet and Royston revealed that these documents often included valuable information on individual paupers, medical bills and related matters particularly early informal contract agreements to tend sick paupers. In addition letters from paupers to overseers and medical practitioners discussing medical problems and injuries are to be found in these files. Some smaller parishes were classified as B because, although not rich in useful source material, they were listed as holding specific examples of workhouse or medical documents such as the bedding and clothing costs for Bedlam (St Bartholomew's) lunatic asylum, sent to Thorley parish in 1749,<sup>55</sup> and provided useful examples of particular medical and pauper services.

In six of the eleven chapters it has proved possible to collect, count and analyse large amounts of data. Chapter four employs a range of primary sources including tracts; lectures; sermons, central government legislation and proclamations to survey some of the ideas which may have influenced the philosophy of the Old Poor Law. No quantitative data is used in this chapter which contains purely qualitative sources dating from the early Christian period to the

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<sup>55</sup> HALS DP 108/8/1 Vestry minutes, 1714-96. List found loose in this vol.

early modern. The remaining chapters all require some form of basic statistical analysis. Chapter five examines both central government and Hertfordshire officials' attitudes to the poor. It also provides mostly seventeenth-century data on the large numbers of Hertford Quarter Sessions presentments of parishioners for both cottages and tenements erected and conversions of properties.

This apparently widespread law-breaking demonstrates a distinctively Hertfordshire approach to the question of who traditionally belonged to a parish and what criteria were used to determine this status. These buildings were illegal and most were subsequently demolished since they did not provide the stipulated 4 acres of freehold land, considered necessary for subsistence, with the dwelling and therefore contravened the 1589 statute.<sup>56</sup> This chapter also provides data on additional law-breakers of clause VI of the same act who were presented for illegally taking in lodgers, described as inmates, for varying periods.<sup>57</sup>

As previously discussed both medical chapters are heavily reliant on the *Hertfordshire Militia Ballot Lists* for data from the latter half of the eighteenth-century. There is not sufficient data available for either the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries to provide any material for statistical analysis. Chapter six on the sick poor provides data on the numbers of eighteenth-century patients suffering from disabilities, chronic health defects and injuries. It also analyses their occupations to examine how these might have affected their health. This information was recorded, in varying amounts of detail, in the county's *Militia Ballot Lists*.<sup>58</sup>

Chapter seven on parish officials and practitioners counts and analyse the numbers and categories of trained eighteenth-century medical practitioners in the *Militia Ballot Lists* by parish. These include apothecaries, doctors, physicians, surgeons and man-midwives but not lay irregular practitioners. Unknown numbers of these men,

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<sup>56</sup> *Cottages Act 1589* (31 Elizabeth c. 8).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* Clause VI.

<sup>58</sup> *Hertfordshire Militia Ballot Lists 1758-86*.

acted as part-time healers but would have been listed under their primary occupations as blacksmiths, farriers etc.

As previously discussed, chapter eight on Hertfordshire poor women used parish indentures to provide data on the numbers of Hertfordshire, female apprentices 1600-1800. These sources, as previously discussed, record their home parishes or the parish apprenticing them whether they were orphans, bastards or foundlings and, sometimes to which masters/mistresses and where they were apprenticed. For this chapter it is also possible to count the numbers of eighteenth-century women claiming to have been deserted by their husbands and also those who were served with removal orders to their home parishes, both in Hertfordshire and other counties. A number of them claimed London parishes as their home parishes and must have either taken their husbands' settlements, have belonged to families already established there or have obtained settlement through service.

Hertford Quarter Sessions presentments for bastard-bearing for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries provide brief data on the bastard-bearers for chapter nine and in some cases details of putative fathers, including home parishes and occupations, are also mentioned. Chapter ten uses the quarter sessions records for the, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but also the few cases brought at the sixteenth century assizes court. These provide similar information and also include data on those who 'harboured' or assisted vagrants with money, food or shelter.

In some chapters more detailed case studies have been used in addition to statistical analysis. Royston provided a large amount of medical data for chapter six and has contributed to an earlier and more detailed survey of eighteenth-century medical services in the parish.<sup>59</sup> As previously noted chapter eight examined the amount of recorded female apprenticeship in the county but it also focused on and compared the families and details of the occupational apprenticeships arranged by both parishes and parents for two sets of girls originating from Berkhamsted and

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<sup>59</sup> C. Herrmann 'Caring for the Sick and Poor in Eighteenth-Century Royston' in S. King and G. Gear (eds) *A Caring County: Social Welfare in Hertfordshire from 1600* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2013), 45-68.

Cheshunt. These were the two market towns which produced the highest number of indentured girls. Chapter eight also examined the fate of Chipping Barnet widows when most of them lost their parish support and were encouraged, if not coerced, into entering the newly established workhouse in 1729.

Qualitative research has been employed throughout the thesis to illustrate particular examples of the behaviour and attitudes held by the Hertfordshire parish officials and, in some cases, the views of the local judiciary. Officials did not usually record the reasoning that lay behind their policies and administration of the Old Poor Law but sometimes their actions, as in Chipping Barnet and Royston, reveal their thinking particularly when providing or withholding monetary relief or support in kind. These are isolated instances and will not be used to argue widespread tendencies although taken together they do provide some evidence of an official mindset directed towards the poor. In some vulnerable cases involving orphans, foundlings and widows, some officials displayed a strong urge to take over their lives and direct their lifestyles. However, there may be indications that, notably in the accounts of attitudes to bastard-bearers and vagrants, official hostility ran counter to the more tolerant behaviour displayed by members of the community. There were numbers of ordinary people who apparently accepted their duty of providing charity to the less fortunate, possibly because they had been brought up with these beliefs. These individuals were not prepared to leave these obligations to the state and would defy both legislation and official opinions and practices. This county-wide study has required the use of a range of different methods in order to examine the multi-faceted topic of the operation of the Old Poor Law. Previous studies have concentrated on comparing and contrasting a few selected parishes in one county. This more ambitious research has aimed to take a wider view and exploit the available Hertfordshire sources to gain some understanding of what can be discovered about what was happening under the Old Poor Law across the whole county. The following chapter seeks to understand the range of influences that might have shaped contemporary thinking about obligations to the poor and the problems of poverty

## Chapter Four: Influences on Hertfordshire Attitudes

### Context

In chapter one the range of influences that might have shaped contemporary thinking about the poor and poverty could only be briefly sketched, but in this chapter some of the important ideas in the wide range of early modern, medieval and early Christian literature, philosophy, sermons and legislation will be more fully explored. Ideas about the importance of providing charity in a truly Christian life and the role and, sometimes, obligations of the poor receiving it appear to have swung like a pendulum over the centuries and were strongly influenced by mundane political and economic conditions however unworldly and spiritual their original intentions.

The first section of this chapter examines how historians have constructed a framework for thinking and writing about the poor and the Old Poor Law and how this framework can be used to identify the gaps that still exist. The second section considers the development of ideas about giving to the poor and the historical pendulum of charitable giving and its requirements and rewards. The regular character of these cycles in attitudes towards giving alms to the poor can be traced and has led to the adoption of a chronological approach here towards the issues involved. The third section traces how the ideas about charity were affected by the English Reformation and the political thinking that evolved from this development. The fourth section discusses how the poor began to be valued essentially as economic assets which ultimately became the main consideration when dealing with them. The fifth section considers the evolution of a drive to demand deference from the poor, as an acknowledgement of their permanently low status in the community hierarchy, their duty to serve their betters and also as a fundamental requirement for being considered worthy of relief. The sixth notes the pervading fear of a growing mass of disorderly, vagrant poor and the ever-increasing drive to control them. The seventh reveals the problems involved in exerting such control

specifically on the parochial management of the poor and the effects this had on their lives. Finally the conclusion will consider what can be learnt about these topics and the framework they provide for thinking about the poor before moving on to the next chapter which will focus specifically on the broad framework of attitudes these influences might have produced in Hertfordshire. As previously noted (see chapter one) this chapter moves around chronologically a great deal because it is dealing with ideas about charity and attitudes about providing for the poor from the early Christians into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

### Thinking and writing about the poor

The earlier Tudor and Elizabethan statutes have not been studied in great detail by early historians who viewed them primarily as a set of laws and administrative procedures and sought to discover how effectively these appear to have functioned. The vital importance of local interpretation and administration of the poor laws in the parishes would not be considered until much later.<sup>1</sup> More recent research into the topic has increasingly involved recontextualising it and the reasons for its development and evolution in the early modern period and this study seeks to attempt this for one previously largely unresearched southern English county, Hertfordshire.

General surveys of the workings of the poor law have continued to attract historians although some, notably Keith Snell, Lynn Lees and Steve Hindle, were primarily concerned with the effects of these laws on the poor themselves.<sup>2</sup> The focus shifted from the successes or failures of administration to considering in detail

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<sup>1</sup> P. Slack *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman, 1988); D. Eastwood *Governing Rural England: Tradition and Transformation in Local Government 1780-1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); P. Fideler *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England: The Old Poor Law Tradition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006); M. McIntosh *Poor Relief in England 1350-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> K. Snell *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); L. Lees *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); S. Hindle *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).



the recipients of relief under the stimulus of researching history from below. It became increasingly obvious that the new framework for understanding the workings of the Old Poor Law would now need to be based more on parochial studies not merely broad-brush assumptions. Historians began to demonstrate that the Old Poor Law was very different from the New.

At its best, negotiation over Old Poor Law relief in the highly stratified Tudor and Stuart society was not ever a dialogue of equals. The middling class who administered the poor law can be seen increasingly using it to build themselves up as superior to their poorer neighbours, but it could also become a process of adjustment between neighbours of sometimes only slightly differing social status if the officials permitted it. A lot depended on the personality, social skills and humanity of officials and their ability to work the poor law system in favour of or against the poor. Parish officials varied widely in their approach to the problems of the destitute poor.

Keith Snell explored another important factor in his study of the necessity of a poor person being able to prove that they belonged to a parish.<sup>3</sup> The problematic importance of this in the lives of the Hertfordshire poor will be further explored in the next chapter. Poverty was a multi-faceted problem and therefore the poor law was made up of many different categories of relief as each parish attempted to meet the varied needs of its poorer members. More recent historians no longer see the poor law as a monolithic unchanging legalistic construction but seek to discover how it operated in practice in regions and parishes through researching parochial primary sources.

What can be seen from one important source, the usually very brief overseers' accounts, is the regularity or otherwise of provision, the range of relief given and the amounts provided. This has shown that there was a north/south divide both in the generosity of the cash amounts given and in the range of types of relief in kind on

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<sup>3</sup> K. Snell *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). This was not always an important consideration in some of the Hertfordshire parishes studied as discussed further in the following chapter.

offer. A very much more parsimonious poor relief appears to have been in general operation in the north and also in the west when compared to southern and eastern regions of England. Steven King found that there was distinct regional variation between southern and eastern regions and the less generous approach in the north and west of England.<sup>4</sup> Alannah Tomkins researched the problems faced by the urban poor trying to survive on charity and poor relief in eighteenth-century Oxford, Shrewsbury and York and found that life became increasingly difficult for them since attitudes towards them hardened as the century progressed.<sup>5</sup> As previously noted a basic framework for visualising the parochial workings of the Old Poor Law has now been constructed. This can be used for more detailed work, as in this study, to examine how the system actually functioned in practice and how it could and frequently was employed and manipulated to create a new and fundamentally skewed power relationship between richer and poorer inhabitants in Hertfordshire parishes.

### Charitable giving

In order to understand the problems which arose from one section of the community being strongly encouraged and later, at times, legally obliged to contribute towards the relief of its impotent members, it is necessary to first discuss the basic beliefs and long-established thinking about freely giving alms to the poor and which kinds of poor deserved them. The rival claims of the importance of strictly discriminatory versus spontaneous open-handed charity were debated and practised throughout the early modern period. As Paul Slack observed, in a Calvinist-leaning society 'accustomed to articulating its view of the world in terms of binary opposites', if not entirely a strictly Calvinist theocracy on the Genevan model,<sup>6</sup> the problem of who deserved or was worthy to receive charity was interminably discussed. These questions arose from the early Christians onward and probably a long time before that era

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<sup>4</sup> S. King *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> A. Tomkins *The Experience of Urban Poverty, 1723-82: Parish, Charity and Credit* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Slack *Poverty and Policy*, 25.

when people first began to question the widening inequalities in society. With the rise of Christianity the pendulum swung towards open-handed, unquestioning charity, as many early Christian theologians saw poverty as an unsought affliction similar to sickness or the infirmity of old age, not the punishable offence it would ultimately become.

Saint Paul (died 64 or 67 A.D.) appears to have been the first and most prominent early Christian to have introduced and encouraged a strongly judgemental attitude towards the poor although he may have been in a minority.<sup>7</sup> The quotation from the second epistle to the Thessalonians: 'If a man shall not worke then neither shall he eat'<sup>8</sup> attributed to him and believed to have been written in 51-52 A.D., was eagerly adopted by early modern theologians many of whom saw poverty as the self-inflicted result of a sinful predisposition to idleness or went even further and considered it as a divine punishment for sin. However, St. John Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.) stated that a man who simply asked for food was to be unquestioningly helped, for it was not the deservingness or otherwise of the recipient but the generosity and goodwill of the giver that was important to God. In his view basic charity must always be indiscriminate as all 'good things' came from God - they did not belong to the man who while he lived possessed them and hoarding them when the poor were begging for help ultimately endangered the selfish man's soul: 'So, from the good things that the Lord has given us, let us give generously to those in need'.<sup>9</sup> Later, the pendulum swung back towards increasingly discriminatory charity and what was to become a permanent compulsion to discriminate, judge and label the poor was introduced by less generous theologians following Saint Paul. One was Saint Augustine (354-430 A.D.) who advocated charity but insisted that the worthiness of the recipient was now to be judged by the donor. Charity was not to be given to evil-livers'

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<sup>7</sup> B.Tierney *Medieval Poor Law: A Sketch of Canonical Theory and its Application in England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959) discussed this alternation of emphases on the donor and the recipient who, at different times, was either required to be deserving of alms or not.

<sup>8</sup> *Bible: New Testament* II Thessalonians 3:10.

<sup>9</sup> *St John Chrysostom, Sermon on the Nativity*, 55.

such as prostitutes, dancers and other performers.<sup>10</sup> Augustine also introduced a further distinction between the reclusive, shame-faced poor, who should be given alms and the demanding beggar, who should be ignored. Janet Coleman traced the judgement on shameless beggars, which would become another obsession of early modern thinking both theological and legislative to Saint Augustine: ‘by the fifth century we already have a sketch for a reprobatory judgement on the poor man who has been reduced to begging and feels no shame. It remained important throughout our period [350-1450 A.D.] that the worthy poor be those who were ashamed of their poverty’.<sup>11</sup> Larry Patriquin was also concerned with Augustine’s role in the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor, but he hinted at an even earlier, pre-Augustinian dating for this although he did not indicate a source in his research into the origins of English poor relief.<sup>12</sup>

By the twelfth century a contrasting early medieval Christian view of poverty and the treatment of the poor had developed and this was revealed by Brian Tierney who was the first to consider the workings of the medieval poor law in England:

It hardly ever occurred to the canonists [those medieval church lawyers who formulated ecclesiastic law during the tenth century and produced the *Decretum of Gratian*, 1140] that the law should seek to ‘deter’ men from falling into poverty. Want was its own deterrent, they thought. And it never occurred to them at all that poverty was a vice which could be stamped out by punitive measures. They no more thought of punishing a man for being afflicted with poverty than we would think of punishing a man for being

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<sup>10</sup> St Augustine *On Christian Doctrine*, Book 1, Chapter 28 “How we are to decide whom to aid’. He had spent a great deal on these marginal people in his earlier years and was probably repenting his past mistakes here.

<sup>11</sup> J. Coleman ‘Property and Poverty’ in J. Burns (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought* c. 350-1450 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 607-48. Quote on p.627. Why the poor should be ‘ashamed’ of their poverty is unclear since Christ and his chosen disciples were mainly poor men who appear to have employed the resources of rich sympathisers to provide accommodation etc. as recounted in the New Testament.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Of major theoretical importance was the attempt to distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving poor. This distinction goes back at least to St Augustine (354–430AD)’: L. Patriquin *Agrarian Capitalism and Poor Relief in England, 1500-1860: Rethinking the Origins of the Welfare State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 97.

afflicted with TB. There is obviously a sharp divergence here between the basic presuppositions of medieval law and those of the poor law in more recent times.<sup>13</sup>

The 1140 *Distinctio* 86 of Gratian's *Decretum*, analysed by Tierney, fully developed a whole theory of the deserving poor and the undeserving poor which principally employed the ideas of Saint Ambrose (339-397 A.D.), from his *De Officiis* guide written for priests which sought to maximise each individual congregation's finite resources. Ambrose was the fourth-century bishop of Milan whom Tierney praised as 'one of the greatest practical poor relief administrators of all time'. He practiced a form of discrimination in that he believed that charitable resources should be prioritised for practising Christians who fell into misfortune and poverty and that they should take precedence over all other applicants. Early medieval charity had now become applicant-centred and the applicants had to prove themselves to be worthy recipients of it. Ecclesiastical accountancy dictated how official charity was to be provided and would continue to do so for centuries.

Later medieval thought then rejected this rigid differentiation and the pendulum moved back towards Chrysostom's idea of the greater importance of alms-giving for the donor's soul irrespective of the worthiness of the applicant. Medieval donors were encouraged by their priests to adopt a regime of providing indiscriminate charity as a self-benefitting good work which would shorten their time in purgatory whatever the actual recipient/s moral worth. Bronislaw Geremek, in his wide-ranging European study of poverty, noted this essentially business-like arrangement and the defined functions of the poor in this society: 'Even in the Middle Ages...there was little sentimentality. Then the poor had functions, as the means of securing divine salvation through the giving of alms, and as contractors who would pray for their benefactors'.<sup>14</sup> This made almsgiving much more straightforward to practice, it was again donor-centred and the donor could exercise his or her own discretion as to which groups or individuals they favoured and the amounts they gave.

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<sup>13</sup> Tierney *Medieval Poor Law*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> B. Geremek *Poverty a History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 18.

In one view the poor were seen as Christ-like<sup>15</sup> and in other, worldlier, eyes they were useful advocates because, as the church preached, their grateful prayers *en masse* could take years off the donors' stay in purgatory. Elaborate displays of charity, gifts and bequests to the local poor of money and property, the founding of almshouses and hospitals and the regular feeding of hordes of beggars at a rich man's gate on his leftovers emphasised their role as grateful supplicants and also resonated with the stories of Dives and Lazarus popular at this time. At the same time charity advertised the donor's power and standing in his community however magnificent or parochial. The Reformation eliminated the concept of purgatory and so permanently changed the previous donor/recipient relationship completely by breaking the contractual relationship between them.

## Charity and the Reformation

The Reformation has been previously discussed in chapter two but primarily in relation to how it evolved in Hertfordshire. This section will consider the broader question of how it affected ideas about giving to the poor. The whole concept of charity was to be again centred on the deservingness of the applicant, but with a great deal more unforgiving severity particularly in Calvinist areas. Max Weber (1864-1920), a German sociologist, developed the theory that the Protestant ethic fostered the spirit of capitalism. However Lee Beier has recently argued that the rich were, at that time, expected 'to be the 'ministers of the poor and that 'if Weber had studied sixteenth rather than eighteenth century Calvinists, he would have found that Calvin should not be held accountable for 'the fact that his rehabilitation of work and money later degenerated into men's making work and money their gods'.<sup>16</sup> In Beier's view the concept of the Protestant work ethic was erroneously based on later Calvinist thinking.

From being essentially symbiotic the relationship between rich and poor became

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<sup>15</sup> McIntosh noted that the 'image of a Christ-like beggar still carried some resonance' in late medieval England. McIntosh *Poor Relief in England*, 15.

<sup>16</sup> L. Beier *Social Thought in England, 1480-1730: From Body Social to Worldly Wealth* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 63.

skewed to favour donors who were now strongly encouraged by the church to scrutinise the worthiness of the poor before assisting them. Thinking about the need for providing charity evolved and as Gareth Jones noted 'The objects of charity were to become more secular as the majority of Englishmen reflected less on the fate of their souls and became more concerned with the worldly needs of their fellow men' this view gained in importance during the period due to the growth of humanistic ideas and demographic and economic changes as previously discussed above.<sup>17</sup> The provision of social welfare was very much affected by these ideas and Alec Ryrie has found that 'the destruction of the monasteries probably damaged England's structures for social welfare more than any other single event has ever done. Most of the hospitals, education, employment and charity that the monasteries had provided simply disappeared'.<sup>18</sup> As noted by Nigel Heard 'Provision for the poor became a public, rather than a private function, and as such was part of the government's general social control legislation as demonstrated in the series of Old Poor Laws'.<sup>19</sup>

Steve Hindle has examined the development of sentiments during the period in detail and noted the initial enthusiasm of the poor to publicly demonstrate their worthiness by eagerly accepting the badging and setting-apart of the poor that were later to prove so unpopular when the state began to impose them.<sup>20</sup> Charity remained the personal choice of the donor or, later, philanthropist, as traced by Donna Andrew in her detailed study of charity in eighteenth century London.<sup>21</sup> It retained both a political and a developing social engineering agenda seeking to

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<sup>17</sup> G. Jones *History of the Law of Charity 1532-1827* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 10.

<sup>18</sup> A. Ryrie 'Reformations' in K. Wrightson (ed.) *A Social History of England 1500-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 110. The effects of these changes in Hertfordshire have been more fully discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>19</sup> N. Heard *Tudor Economy and Society* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), 108.

<sup>20</sup> S. Hindle "'Good, Godly and Charitable Uses'": Endowed Charity and the Relief of Poverty in Rural England, c.1550-1750' in A. Goldgar and R. Frost (eds) *Institutional Culture in Early Modern Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 164-88.

<sup>21</sup> D. Andrew *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); I. Ben-Amos *The Culture of Giving: Informal Support and Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); A. Scott (ed.) *Experiences of Charity, 1250-1650* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

improve the poor to make them more useful to the rest of society whose interests they were now to be designed to serve as soon as they became capable of work; hence a strong philanthropic drive to collect, warehouse and train foundlings and the infant poor.

This was basically the Tudor apprenticeship scheme but on a much larger scale with the missionary aim of saving the poor from their perceived inherent tendency towards idleness melded with a culture of instilling cradle to grave industriousness and painfulness (painstaking and conscientious care for their work) in their lives. The problems which poor people suffered were therefore seen as self-made but also curable if they could be rescued from their own character defects and reconstructed as useful members of society. It was not realised that poverty was caused by economic and demographic factors over which the poor had no control, because the importance of these could not be seen or understood except in sudden local problems. If poverty was portrayed by contemporaries as a self-perpetuating disease caused by idleness and unwillingness to work the destitute poor could then be seen as a threatening economic burden on the community except for those deserving cases who were visibly incapable of earning their keep, the aged, decayed and impotent.<sup>22</sup>

By introducing a poor rate, to help maintain the parish impotent poor, government legislators transformed those requiring help into a greatly resented burden. This hostile attitude was reinforced through the wording of laws and royal proclamations and supported by churchmen and the prevailing religious and political sentiments of the time. Anti-poor feeling was further fuelled by much-quoted Biblical texts and tracts, notably the previously noted Thessalonians quote; contemporary writings on poverty;<sup>23</sup> evolving views on the obligations, or lack of them, of society towards the poor<sup>24</sup> and ideas of divinely inflicted poverty as

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<sup>22</sup> *An Act For the Punishment of Vagabonds and for Relief of the Poor and Impotent* 1572 (14 Elizabeth I c. 5).

<sup>23</sup> G. Clarke (ed.) *John Bellers 1624-1725 Quaker Visionary: His Life, Times and Writings* (London: Routledge, 1987).

<sup>24</sup> D. Defoe *Giving Alms No Charity and Employing the Poor a Grievance to the Nation* (London, 1704).



punishment for sin.<sup>25</sup> Inflammatory sermons also added to the growth of a denigratory and, sometimes simultaneously, fearful attitude to the ever-increasing poor. The blame-culture ideas expressed in these would inevitably have at least formed the orchestrated backdrop to thinking about the poor even if not actively motivating those of the middling sort who were subsequently required to financially support and manage them under the Tudor poor law.<sup>26</sup> This was a society attempting to explain the frightening and ultimately inexplicable phenomenon of the ever-growing numbers of poor to itself through the pulpit, through political debate and in print, and the poor were thus caught up and suffered in this maelstrom of ideas and government experimentation in controlling the uncontrollable.

### Valuing the poor

The leaders of Hertfordshire parochial communities might not have comprehended how economic and social conditions were radically changing their society, but as farmers and tradesmen they did thoroughly understand the workings of profit and loss, investment and commodities. They knew the marketplace and saw the need to value the Hertfordshire poor as a parish investment.

As Peter King observed of his study of 350 Essex pauper inventories ‘the term ‘pauper inventory’ is itself a highly problematic one. Broadly speaking, pauper inventories are defined here as all inventories of household goods and chattels found in parish records, apart from those relating to institutions owned and run by the parish such as workhouses and pesthouses’.<sup>27</sup> Two of the Hertfordshire examples were connected with the Ashwell workhouse and the Barkway Poorhouse respectively and may well have been taken when paupers entered these

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<sup>25</sup> W. Sherlock *A Discourse Concerning the Divine Providence* (London, 1694).

<sup>26</sup> Hindle “‘Good, Godly and Charitable Uses’”.

<sup>27</sup> P. King ‘Pauper Inventories and the Material Lives of the Poor in the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries’ in T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds) *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1997), 157; J. Harley ‘Pauper Inventories Social Relations and the Nature of Poor Relief under the Old Poor Law, England c.1601-1834’, *Historical Journal*, 62 (2019), 375-98.

establishments. Whether or not they had to allow the parish to sell these goods as the price for admission is unclear and parishes may have evolved their own procedures. The system used in one Hertfordshire parish has been revealed by a local historian who found that 'In some places, the position of the parish was reinforced by insisting that any old people who became dependent on the parish made a will leaving all their goods to the overseers'. This was the practice in Little Gaddesden where 'old people who had no one to care for them were given shelter in the townhouses; and when they had thus become the *bedes folk* of the parish they made a 'will and act of surrender', leaving all their goods to the overseers. At their death their belongings were sold for the relief of the poor rate.<sup>28</sup> These systems enabled ratepayers to decide who might deserve relief payments from the poor rates and who did not. Classification and valuation, not need, appear to have become paramount when providing charity to paupers. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries these considerations may have been the first step in ultimately taking control of the lives of the parish poor through making a value judgement on their deservingness and usefulness and therefore will be discussed first.

The permanent existence and inevitability of poverty had probably been accepted since the time that a gap between the few relatively rich and the mass of the undeniably poor first became evident. The better off would have then realised that it would be wise to provide at least basic support to their less fortunate neighbours rather than wait for them to seize it by force since the poor always greatly outnumbered the rich. This strategy was understood as necessary for the continued survival of both groups and would have evolved long before providing such charity had been officially endorsed by Christianity. For early Christians, as previously noted, the most pressing drive, soon appears to have become not how to distribute indiscriminate donations most effectively, as St. John Chrysostom had directed, but how to differentiate between the 'types' of poor and decide who should receive help. This was not based on their perceived need but on their

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<sup>28</sup> V. Bell *To Meet Mr Ellis, Little Gaddesden in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Faber, 1956), 20.

attitude to their predicament. The undemanding worthy or shame-faced were those who hid and shunned help out of pride or because they had lost their former wealth and position and were ashamed of their poverty. The unworthy were the vociferous embarrassing beggars who had no such inhibitions. The drive to classify the worthy recipient appears to have returned with the decline of Catholicism, the rejection of purgatory and a troubling and visible rise in the numbers of paupers. Poor people now suffered a harsher moralistic climate with parishes being legally obliged to assist those who were impotent, while not aiming to overburden poor-rate payers, including themselves. For a sick, injured or unemployable poor person, being recognised as deserving could now become vitally important and often meant the difference between minimal financial assistance and tacitly sanctioned neglect.

In 1553, a detailed analytical classification of the poor was formulated in the *Three Degrees of Poor*<sup>29</sup> which was written at the behest of the Lord Mayor and the Bishop of London on instructions from the Tudor king, Edward VI. The anonymous authors were specifically tasked to examine the perceived causes of poverty and divided these into: Impotency, Casualty and Thriftlessness.<sup>30</sup> The impotent poor, defined as those unable to maintain themselves including orphans and the infirm elderly, plainly required and deserved help as did those struck into poverty by casualty or sudden disaster such as destruction of their livelihood by fire, injury or debilitating sickness.<sup>31</sup> However, the unsettled and unsettling thriftless or rogue element who wandered about without obvious employment and were therefore condemned for not working should receive punishment and compulsory reformation of their manners. Many of the propertied classes were hyper-sensitive to the existence of unemployed wandering rogues and sturdy beggars, convincing

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<sup>29</sup> *Three Degrees of Poor John Strype's Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster* (London: 1553).

<sup>30</sup> Hindle noted that Michael Dalton in *The Country Justice* (London: 1618) 'glossed the tertiary distinction enshrined in the Elizabethan legislation': S. Hindle 'Civility, Honesty and the Identification of the Deserving Poor in Seventeenth-century England' in H. French and J. Barry (eds) *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 38-59. Quote on p.38. The '*Three Degrees of Poor*' were also noted by McIntosh *Poor Relief*, 117; Patriquin *Agrarian Capitalism*, 98; Webb and Webb, *English Local Government*, 49.

<sup>31</sup> The *Three Degrees of Poor* recognised 'grievous disease' as a cause of 'casualty' poverty but the Old Poor Law did not.

themselves that the country was infested with large gangs of them specialising in different crimes and speaking their own impenetrable language. A large number of these people were in fact unemployed and actively seeking work, but this would not be officially recognised until 1576<sup>32</sup> in a society which believed firmly in the continued existence of work being available for all who sought it at home in their parishes. In the 1576 Act unemployed people who were willing to work were finally recognised as a separate class and stocks of materials were ordered to be set up in every parish for them to work on. This was an attempt at a solution on paper but in practice was allowed to decline, since what could these people be given to do which would be useful wage-earning work but not compete against local interests and existing employments? Only local proto-industrialists would seek to provide such work, including rope-making in Ware and silk-throwing in Watford, and these developments are further discussed in a later chapter.

The, previously discussed, Edwardian ‘*Three Degrees*’ classification was later also adopted by William Harrison in his 1577 *Survey of Elizabethan England*.<sup>33</sup> It proved attractive and long-lived in official circles and was further elaborated, with directions to the Overseers for dealing with each category, in a guidebook for *The Country Justice* written by Michael Dalton a Cambridgeshire JP. This was first published in 1618 and then frequently republished well into the eighteenth century.<sup>34</sup> During the following decades the classification became binary when the ‘Casualty’ category, which accurately described many sick, injured, unemployed and homeless poor, seems to have been subsumed into the impotent poor and disappeared from separate consideration. Attitudes noticeably hardened and polarised as can be seen in the frequent use of the Thessalonians text discussed above which was interpreted with varying degrees of severity throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Puritan clergyman John Rogers of Dedham (Essex) was one who took it to extremes in 1632: ‘for those that can work

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<sup>32</sup> *An Act For Setting of the Poor on Work, and for the Avoiding of Idleness* 1576 (18 Elizabeth I c. 3).

<sup>33</sup> G. Edelen (ed.) W. Harrison *The Description of England: The Classic Contemporary Account of Tudor Social Life* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968).

<sup>34</sup> M. Dalton *The Country Justice* (London, 1618, 1635, 1655, 1661, 1677, 1682, 1697, and 1727).

and will not, let them starve'.<sup>35</sup> By 1654, Richard Young demonised some poor setting them in stark contrast as the impotent, including casualties of circumstances and sickness, and the impudent or 'God's poor and the Devil's':

Of the Poor there are two sorts, God's poor and the Devil's; impotent poor and impudent poor. The poor on whom we would exercise our beneficence is the honest labourer and the poor householder, who either through the greatness of their charge or badness of their trade; crosses, losses, sickness, suretiship or other casualties, being brought behinde hand, and not able in the sweat of their face to earn their bread, or the blinde and maimed, the aged and decrepit, the weak widows or young orphans; which are either past their labour or not yet come into it; these are the principal objects of bounty, and he that is godly and discreet will rather give to them that work and beg not [ashamed] than to them that beg and work not, for according to the Apostles' rule, they that will not labour must not eat.<sup>36</sup>

However, at least two early modern preachers remained aware of the traditional need to urge their congregations to provide charity. They saw it as a way of preventing or at least alleviating poverty, but again stipulated that it should be limited only to the deserving.<sup>37</sup> The outstanding value of the poor was now seen as their industriousness and that was one essential quality that made them deserving in the eyes of their betters. Steve Hindle provided a list of other required behaviours:

Among the canons of social respectability to which parish pensioners were expected to conform were church attendance; industriousness; sobriety; childrearing and deference. These moral criteria came to function as 'structural' constraints on the individual agency of the poor, and set the parameters according to which the deserving might shape their identity.

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<sup>35</sup> J. Rogers *A Treatise of Love* (London, 1632), 213-4.

<sup>36</sup> R. Young *The Poor's Advocate*, (London, 1654).

<sup>37</sup> S. Clarke *Medulla Theologicae, or The Marrow of Divinity* (London, 1659), 231, 246: Puritan clergyman ejected 1662 and echoing Young see above] argued that it [charity] should be extended not just to the physically helpless but also to 'the honest labourer, and poor house- keeper, who either through greatness of their charge [number of dependants], or deadnesse of trade, crosses, losses, sicknesse etc. are not able to get their bread'. He felt that giving to the poor was a duty, and that bounty to the poor was the best way to prevent poverty.

R. Baxter *A Christian Directory*, IV, 'Christian Politicks' (London, 1673), 190-3: Baxter was a Puritan clergyman. The task 'for every' one, is to relieve the most needy which are next at hand. To know what poor families are in greatest want, and to help them as we are able; and to provoke the rich to do that which we cannot do our selves; and to beg for others'. 'Giving according to our ability', he wrote, 'is as sure and great a duty as *Praying*', and should be done as regularly'.

The poor were sorted, and ultimately came to see the advantages of sorting themselves, into the moral categories approved by the overseers, which were in turn policed by the financial sanctions of the civil parish.<sup>38</sup>

Hertfordshire vestries might well have sought to instil these qualities in their poor, but there is no written indication that they considered even the most well-behaved and reformed poor to be entitled to receive relief. Accepting this idea might have eventually changed the casual practice of indiscriminate and, apparently random, parochial benevolence to favoured individuals into something more definite. It could lead to more generous expenditure on special cases particularly where injury or sickness were involved as discussed further in chapter six. Poor people might be mentioned in vestries and were occasionally summoned to attend them where some, including several women, were apparently allowed to argue their cases for relief. Examples of such cases are considered further in chapter eight.

Generally, it is apparent that the decisions about such cases had already been taken in private discussions and the overseer was then formally instructed to carry these out at vestry meetings. The constant demand for poor people to aspire to being considered deserving is further discussed in the following chapter, but was not ever officially defined in the Hertfordshire vestry minutes researched. It seems to have become a constantly evolving parochial social construct for each individual vestry's oligarchy to agree and establish amongst its most powerful members and might have varied with their changing interests and investments. For example, one parish oligarchy might wish to keep a supply of cheap agricultural labour or household skivvies available, another might want to apprentice all its employable children either locally or a long distance away from the parish and a third would hire out all its destitute poor to a contractor to spin or make rope or beat hemp. The poor must be put to some form of work as early as possible, but they must also know their place in the social hierarchy and learn to demonstrate deference to their betters, all those above them.

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<sup>38</sup> Hindle 'Civility, Honesty', 40.

## Deference and an orderly society

As noted by Steve Hindle, deference became a major preoccupation of the early modern theologians and writers, several of whom wrote popular early modern guidebooks to leading a Christian life. In return for being considered worthy of relief the deserving poor were expected to display deference to their betters in the social order or they would soon cease to be regarded as deserving and lose their relief. The church supported deference as providing God-given stability and the divinely ordained ordered society was preached from 1547 onwards every Sunday in every church in the country:

Almighty God hath created and appointed all things in heaven, earth and waters in a most excellent and perfect order. In heaven he hath appointed distinct orders and states of archangels and angels. In the earth he has assigned kings, princes, with other governors under them, all in good and necessary order...Every degree of people, in their vocation, calling and office, has appointed to them their duty and order.<sup>39</sup>

Every child was taught from an early age to know their natural place in relation to their superiors and inferiors and to rigidly keep to it unless they had the necessary wealth and connections to join the upwardly mobile. Children were not only to honour their parents and to do as they would be done by with their neighbours but also: 'to submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters; to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters...and to do my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me'.<sup>40</sup>

These ideas dated back to medieval times when elaborate social hierarchies of rank and privilege were constructed and justified, with the peasant class always at the base of the pyramid supporting the entire edifice by their labour. Larry Patriquin dated this social structure to the Norman Conquest and the beginnings of feudal society: 'At the bottom of this hierarchy were the vast majority of the people... Their

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<sup>39</sup> *Certain Sermons or Homilies, appointed by the King's Majesty to be declared and read by all Parsons, Vicars, or Curates every Sunday in their Churches where they have Cure* (London 1547), 15-6.

<sup>40</sup> K. Wrightson *English Society 1580-1680* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 57; W. Jacob *The Clerical Profession in the Long Eighteenth Century, 1680-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 236.

work supported a triad of exploiters: landlords who were given rent payments in cash, in kind [and] in labour, and who also extracted various finds and user-fees from their tenants; the church, given a tithe; and the state, the source of taxation'.<sup>41</sup> At that time the poor had presumably been subsumed into the serf/peasant class and classified with them whether or not they were capable of maintaining themselves. Little had changed in this view, except early modern society was simultaneously envisaged as both a medieval hierarchical pyramid and also as a Great Chain of Being. Inherent problems were noted by Barry Coward as developing within this structure: 'Already there was a foretaste of what could happen in the presence in early Stuart England of migrant labourers, masterless men and women, who could not be integrated into the 'great chain' of order and dependence'.<sup>42</sup> The chain, a dominant concept of the early modern mindset, linked all creation from God and the archangels in heaven to the smallest piece of earthly matter. Man, whether king or labourer, formed just one link in this natural chain which must never be broken or inevitable chaos would result.<sup>43</sup> It was this philosophy that lay behind the growing fear of disorder in the early modern period.

Deference gradually developed into the concept of a Divinely-ordained master/servant relationship where it appeared in several contemporary guidebooks for servants.<sup>44</sup> The basic idea evolved into an entire literature explaining and supporting divinely ordained inequality<sup>45</sup> which kept the body Politick in existence

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<sup>41</sup> Patriquin *Agrarian Capitalism*, 46.

<sup>42</sup> B. Coward *The Stuart Age: England 1603-1714* (London: Routledge, 2014), 76.

<sup>43</sup> Many of the contemporary quotes below about published attitudes to the poor and divinely-ordained poverty are taken from R. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England 1700-80* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), 11-21.

<sup>44</sup> R. Burton (pseudonym for Nathaniel Crouch) *The Apprentices Companion* (London, 1681), 2-3.

'There is nothing more plain nor certain, than that God Almighty hath ordained and appointed degrees of Authority and Subjection; allowing Authority to the Master, and commanding obedience from the servant unto him': R. Mayo *A Present for Servants* (London, 1693), 4. Divinely-ordained inequality essential Social inequality 'is not by chance, but by the Sovereign Disposer of the Lord of all' To strive for social equality, would be 'to make a perpetual War, many quarrelling about the same thing; as when one Bone is cast amongst several Dogs'.

<sup>45</sup> G. Hickes *Sermon upon the Subject of Alms-giving* (London, 1684), 7: 'were all equally Rich, there could be no subordination, none to command, nor none to serve. But in such a case, the body Politick must dissolve'.



and was essential to its survival. This comforting theory effectively exonerated gentry society from responsibility for the growing divide between rich and poor, or any obligation to help the poor or resolve the problems of poverty except by paying the poor rate and providing voluntary charity. God had created rich and poor for his own inscrutable purposes and it was not for man to interfere in these or even try to understand them. A Wiltshire gentleman diarist perfectly expressed the *laissez-faire* sentiments thus inculcated when considering the poverty in his parish as that which “is what is not by me to be comprehended and must therefore be left, with true Acknowledgement that God is Wise, Just and Merciful”.<sup>46</sup>

Some writers were prepared to go further and argue that the poor were actually privileged over the rich because as William Sherlock and William Fleetwood glibly assured their readers, servants led a happier and simpler life than their masters.<sup>47</sup> Robert Nelson addressing ‘Persons of Quality and Estate’ went beyond this and was anxious to inform his audience that they [the poor] were ‘in a nearer Disposition, *as Poor*, towards the Attainment of the Happiness of Heaven’ and proceeded to list reasons for this state.<sup>48</sup> Other writers were acutely aware of the, unacknowledged, political reason for propagating the Divinely-inspired view of inequality, namely the unchanging dependence of the rich upon the poor for their

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<sup>46</sup> E. Bradby (ed.) *The Diary of Thomas Smith, of Shaw 1715-23* (Chippenham: Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, 1988). Thomas Smith was described as a gentleman of Melksham, Wiltshire.

<sup>47</sup> W. Sherlock *A Discourse Concerning the Divine Providence* (London, 1694), 243-4: ‘the Labour of a Poor man is more healthful, and many times more pleasant too, than the Ease and Softness of the Rich; to be sure much more easy than the Cares and Solitudes, the Pride and Ambition, Discontents and Envyings, and Emulations, which commonly attend an Exalted Fortune’;

W. Fleetwood, *The Relative Duties of Parents and Children, Husbands and Wives, Masters and Servants* (London, 1705), 384 -5: ‘Servants may have more of the Labours of Life, but then they have less of the Cares, than other People; their Bodies are more fatigu’d and exercis’d, but their Minds are less perplex’d: They are only concerned in one matter, to do the work that lies before them, whilst others have a world of things to look on, and look after’.

<sup>48</sup> R. Nelson *An Address to Persons of Quality and Estate* (London, 1715): ‘Poverty preserves the Purity of the Body, by keeping it at a Distance from Pleasure; and that of the Mind, by engaging it in a necessary Care for Subsistence. It discourages the Growth of the Passions, at least from the Despair of satisfying them; and seldom is tempted to enjoy Things forbidden, being accustomed to dispense with the Want of those that are allow’d’.

own survival.<sup>49</sup>

The poor were regarded as vitally necessary to fuel economic growth and the nation's wealth, but must never be allowed to know this and must be kept at barely subsistence levels to make them work even harder.<sup>50</sup> These mercantilist ideas, although understandably very attractive to the rich and upwardly mobile, exacerbated poverty by failing to consider that increasing numbers of extremely poor people could not be kept on the brink of destitution indefinitely. Inevitably some of the most vulnerable, the sick, the infirm aged, the dispossessed and unemployed and the young, would fail to keep themselves and require some, if only grudgingly meagre, financial assistance in order to survive.

The most economical solution to this conundrum would eventually be seen in Hertfordshire as depositing such problem members of the community in a poorhouse where they could live together, support one another and be available for such work as they were capable of doing. Later this would develop into a prototype workhouse where the destitute of all ages could be put to work for their maintenance on parochial stocks of materials and tools including hemp and spinning wheels for a contractor and/or used as a pool of cheap local labour by their parochial masters. The early literature on these often transient institutions is fragmented because of their temporary nature. In addition, the descriptions poor-

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<sup>49</sup> T. Nourse *Campania Foelix or a Discourse of the Benefits and Improvements of Husbandry* (London, 1700): 'were it not for these poor Labourers the Rich themselves would soon become poor; for either they must labour and Till the Ground themselves, or suffer it to ly waste'; Anon. *Reflexions Upon the Moral State of the Nation* (London, 1701), 18-9: 'the laborious poor....for all their pains are allow'd oftentimes no greater share out of it, than what will keep them from present Starving... those, who possess the greatest share of the riches of the World, are most indebted to those, that have nothing;...the faithful diligence of honest and ingenious Poverty is really the richest Treasure, and safest BANK OF CREDIT in any Nation'.

J. Bellers *An Essay Towards the Improvement of Physick* (London, 1714), 38: 'regularly labouring People are the Kingdom's greatest Treasure and Strength, for without Labourers there can be no Lords; and if the poor Labourers did not raise much more Food and Manufacture than what did subsist themselves, every Gentleman must be a Labourer, and every idle Man must starve'.

<sup>50</sup> A. Young *A Six Months Tour Through the North of England* (4 vols.) (London: Cassell, 1770) vol. 4, 440: 'Agriculture, arts, manufactures, and commerce, are but so many aggregates of labour: Every circumstance that can affect the prosperity of a nation, is intimately connected, and even founded on labour'.

house, church-house, town-house and workhouse were, frequently, in Hertfordshire, used interchangeably by contemporaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They might denote a location where the poor could collect raw materials to work on at home or a place where they were collected to work together sometimes under some form of surveillance. They could also be a residential workplace where frequently disabled people of any age and infirm elderly people with little or no familial support, lived frugally and did what work they were capable of doing.

The important consideration in the Hertfordshire parishes researched appears to have been that all those who used these institutions should work for the parish and contribute towards paying for at least part of their relief although it was eventually understood that the poor could never be self-supporting. As Tim Hitchcock observed it was not until the early years of the eighteenth century that ‘most of those who advocated and created workhouses intended that the poor should be *deterred* from applying for relief, not that they should finance it through their labour’.<sup>51</sup> The first of this deterrent type of workhouse was established in Hertfordshire at St Albans in 1720, followed rapidly by Hatfield in 1722 and both Hertford St Andrews and Ware in 1724, the latter two after the Workhouse Act 1723.<sup>52</sup> Joanna Innes noted that: ‘after the passage of the act, a trickle turned into a powerful current. Within fifteen years, there were probably relatively few market towns or populous industrial parishes which had not at least experimented with the establishment of a workhouse’.<sup>53</sup> This was certainly true in Hertfordshire and became the preferred solution for dealing with the impotent, infirm and unsupported poor.

Steve Hindle discussed how a culture of dependency was created and the

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<sup>51</sup> T. Hitchcock ‘The English Workhouse: A Study in Institutional Poor Relief in Selected Counties, 1696-1750’ (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1985), 6.

<sup>52</sup> *For Amending the Law relating to the Settlement, Employment and Relief of the Poor* 1723 [Workhouse Test Act aka Knatchbull’s Act] (9 George I c.7). This enabled workhouses to be set up by parishes either singly, or in combination with neighbouring parishes. In addition, relief was to be offered only to those willing to enter the workhouse.

<sup>53</sup> J. Innes *Inferior Politics: Social Problems and Social Policies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 30.

poors' behaviour was manipulated by providing or refusing their collection (poor relief) according to how their conduct pleased or displeased the vestry.<sup>54</sup>

Dissatisfied individuals could appeal to Petty Sessions if they felt that they had been unfairly treated, but it is difficult to know how many did so and with what results because, as previously discussed, these records have not survived in Hertfordshire before the nineteenth century. There were contradictory undercurrents here within some communities as Hindle also noted how pensions were used not only to control behaviour but also to bribe badly-behaved poor people into becoming more docile. He cited the case of a Hertfordshire woman brought before the sessions in 1690. Sarah Harwell was described as 'a person of very evill and bad behaviour' who abused and destroyed her neighbour's property, a description which may suggest that she was either mentally ill, or suffering from senile dementia or carrying on some kind of feud. The overseers were ordered to pay her 'soe that she doth not for the future misbehave herself'.<sup>55</sup>

This case raises several questions about the treatment of poor individuals which require further examination, most obviously why did her parish authorities find it necessary to present this seemingly unimportant case at Quarter Sessions? Furthermore, why were they then ordered by the justices to effectively bribe this apparently friendless woman, into compliance with community norms rather than consigning her to a house of correction to forcibly reform her manners? There is no further mention of her so the strategy must presumably have worked, but why was it necessary if she was merely a poor parishioner? The parochial and judicial management of Hertfordshire poor females is further discussed in chapter eight. Deference, however obtained served two functions in this society; it both built up the position in the community of the middling sort, the pension paymasters who were considered unimportant and parvenu by their own betters the local landowners, gentry and nobility. It also gave them a docile under-class which depended on their favour and so could, be more easily controlled.

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<sup>54</sup> S. Hindle 'Civility, Honesty, 38-59. Quote on page 54.

<sup>55</sup> W. Le Hardy (comp.) *Hertfordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls 1581-1698*, 447 (11 Jan. 1691-2).

## Managing the poor in the parish

Initially, it seems to have been believed in government circles that the increased financial burden of maintaining the impotent imposed on the parishes could be paid for by voluntary charity<sup>56</sup> and by incrementally increasing the pressure on the wealthier parishioners to achieve this end. The idea must have looked good on paper because providing voluntary charity to support the local destitute poor was already an integral part of parish life. The church was to play a long-lasting and key role in this scheme in partnership with and directed by State legislation, a process traced by Paul Fideler,<sup>57</sup> Marjorie McIntosh<sup>58</sup> and Paul Slack.<sup>59</sup> By the Act of 1536 poor boxes were to be established in all churches and congregations were first to be invited and/or exhorted to provide alms by their pastors and, by the 1563 Act, even to state publicly to the newly appointed parish Collectors of Alms the amount they were prepared to regularly contribute, and see it recorded in a register. Government legislators appear to have made a fundamental error of judgement at this point and doomed both this voluntary support initiative to failure and the parishioners to the eventual but inevitable imposition of a local tax to support the poor.

It is likely that even many of those initially willing to donate would have been distinctly unhappy at being expected to reveal their private almsgiving in public since these were not rich gentry people anxious to demonstrate their generosity and outdo their peers, but rather small tradesmen and farmers living in a close-knit community, buying and selling from one another and constitutionally disinclined to discuss their personal wealth in the presence of gossiping neighbours. Therefore they would join the recalcitrant members of the community who adamantly refused to give and were to be then sent to the bishop to be 'gently

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<sup>56</sup> This was the same strategy that had initially been attempted to support maimed soldiers, before pensions for them were introduced, but with little success.

<sup>57</sup> Fideler *Social Welfare*, 83.

<sup>58</sup> McIntosh *Poor Relief*.

<sup>59</sup> Slack *Poverty and Policy*.

persuaded'.<sup>60</sup> It is possible that some private negotiations were undertaken at this point and the problem could have been resolved if the bishop was sensitive to the need for privacy and discretion in monetary commitments.

However, if the bishop was not so disposed and the parishioner still refused to divulge what he was prepared to give, he would then be consigned to the judiciary and sent on to the local justices for them to 'charitably and gently persuade him'. If he continued to refuse he might then be committed by them and end up in prison with all the other recalcitrants until he was prepared to openly donate. It is unlikely that this coercive treatment increased either his generosity or sympathy towards the poor. When the idea of voluntary charitable donations, although an outwardly attractive and achievable policy, eventually proved plainly insufficient to support the growing numbers of destitute poor the parishes were finally ordered to levy a local property tax, on their better-off inhabitants in order to keep their poor by the Act for the Relief of the Poor and Impotent (14 Elizabeth I, c. 5) 1572.<sup>61</sup> This was the much-resented poor rate based upon a solution that had already been successfully trialled in Norwich.<sup>62</sup> From London this parochial devolution may have appeared an excellent scheme, but the parishioners would not have welcomed what was readily understood to be potentially another tax burden even when, as previously discussed, it went to maintain those deserving cases who were visibly incapable through age or infirmity of earning their keep and were classed as impotent.

The enforced responsibility for maintaining the unemployed and unemployable including the lame (meaning at this time people disabled in any part of the body not just the leg/s), chronically sick and decrepit who would remain a

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<sup>60</sup> By the 1563 Act the Bishop was to 'gently persuade' the recalcitrant to pay. (Fideler, 83, notes that this was a provision of the 1552 Act).

<sup>61</sup> The 1572 Act to levy poor rate. *An Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds and for Relief of the Poor and Impotent* (14 Elizabeth I c. 5). This Act made each parish responsible for providing for its own aged, impotent and sick poor; appointed "overseers" of the poor and empowered them to assess the parish; introduced compulsory poor rate; and made refusal to work for lawful wages or work provided by the overseer punishable offences.

<sup>62</sup> Norwich had already carried out a census of the poor in 1570 and decided that a local rate was needed to support them.

permanent, ever-growing and draining burden on the parish, aroused strong parochial resentment over an unwanted financial liability which continued to build throughout the period. As discussed in the preceding section on valuing the poor, the 'impotent' had been defined in the 1553 *Three Degrees of Poor* as those unable to maintain themselves, including orphans and the infirm elderly,<sup>63</sup> and it was generally accepted by contemporaries that these people required parish support. Their anger and resentment was usually, as noted by David Feldman,<sup>64</sup> directed at the migrant, would-be settlers who aimed to establish themselves in relatively prosperous counties close to London such as Hertfordshire and might in the future seek parish assistance. However, not all parishioners were hostile and the ambivalent attitudes towards such inmates and incomers in Hertfordshire are further discussed in the following chapter.

An example of the xenophobia directed against migrants can be seen in the Hertfordshire parish of Layston where the redoubtable vicar Alexander Strange and his parishioners fought against, what plainly appeared to them to be, encroaching hordes of migrants in the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>65</sup> These persistent strangers, some of whom were being simultaneously deliberately welcomed into the parish by those who wished to make money from them, were undoubtedly seen as an unwanted burden by other parishioners who saw them putting further strain on parochial resources. This situation and the problems and penalties of not belonging or being (tacitly) invited to temporarily belong as paying inmates are discussed further in the following chapter. The poor rates burden eventually became not just the tax itself but also encompassed those it partially supported and may well have produced a severe strain on the concept of neighbourliness by which the poor usually survived. The need to regularly pay it would also have created widespread anxiety and hostility to the poor amongst those already barely able to

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<sup>63</sup> *Three Degrees of Poor*.

<sup>64</sup> D. Feldman 'Settlement and the Law in the Seventeenth Century' in S. King and A. Winter (eds) *Migration, Settlement and Belonging in Europe 1500-1930s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 29-49.

<sup>65</sup> H. Falvey and S. Hindle (eds) *"This Little Commonwealth": Layston Parish Memorandum Book 1607-c.1650 and 1704-c.1747* (Hertford: Hertfordshire Record Society, 2003). This quasi-battle is further discussed in the following chapter.

afford the poor rate, and facing the certain knowledge that they were inevitably the next in line to be driven into destitution.

The government was not and could not be aware of the relentlessly growing size of the problem it was imposing on parishes for centuries to come and probably envisaged a static or at least controllable population of poor. However government policy was steadily generating an ongoing local resentment against their poor who now would have to depend on the enforced contributions of other parishioners for emergency assistance and sometimes, in the case of the old and impotent, for their survival. This would have had the effect of isolating them in many parishes as a problem group even before the poor rate was formally imposed to support them, although some parishes and individuals may have remained more sympathetic towards them than others. At this time the numbers of destitute poor had greatly increased due to economic changes in farming and trading, land enclosures and consequent dispossessions etc. Large numbers of men who had formerly been self-sufficient were thrown off their land or out of work and ceased to be able to support themselves and their families.

Central government had no way of knowing what was happening country-wide in the early decades of the poor law<sup>66</sup> and seems to have made two false assumptions, the first that full employment was still in existence and the second that the growing numbers of workless poor seeking work were in fact workshy vagrants who needed to be dragooned into working. It therefore initiated more coercive measures retaining public whippings and brandings of both men and women and introducing, as previously noted, the compulsory construction of Houses of Correction in every county. These enabled the perceived recalcitrant and criminal poor and other difficult cases including single mothers to be whipped, imprisoned and forced to at least partially maintain themselves by hard labour. Hertfordshire saw a particular need for these institutions of reformation as

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<sup>66</sup> Although as Joanna Innes has shown by the eighteenth century it was learning about problems in the localities through the judiciary and particularly the circuit judges who met JPs and local officials and are likely to have discussed local problems with them, Innes, *Inferior Politics*, 25.



previously noted and rapidly established them across the county. Joanna Innes has demonstrated that these institutions provided justices with an alternative to gaol sentences<sup>67</sup> and the Hertfordshire JPs employed them frequently to incarcerate petty criminals, bastard-bearers, debtors and defaulters as well as vagrants, who were usually beaten and sent back to their homes. The problems caused by Hertfordshire bastard-bearers and their frequently defaulting partners are considered in chapter nine. The elusive vision of at least partial self-maintenance by the poor while securely isolated and warehoused in an institutional setting was likely to have been increasingly present in both government legislators' and parochial officials' minds whenever and wherever attempts were made to manage them.

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to trace the ideas, preoccupations and fears which lay behind the social construction of the early modern poor by their betters and governors and to examine the ideas which influenced their metamorphosis from God's poor to a dependent and denigrated underclass during this period. Under Catholicism it had been possible for the richer classes to give and bequeath charitable donations freely to favourite worthy and sober members of God's poor and to choose both the recipients and the amounts given. It was believed that their gratitude and prayers would in turn shorten the donor's time in purgatory and also mark the donor out as a generous and God-fearing person in the local community for many years after their death. Both parties in this reciprocal arrangement could feel they had performed a mutually beneficial transaction.

The aim in the Hertfordshire parishes researched appears to have been to find ways of classifying, controlling, keeping and exploiting the local and, ideally, only the local home-parishioner poor as economically as possible. However, this aim is partly contradicted by the findings, in some parishes, discussed in the following chapter. Within these parishes when they first received the unwanted burden of the poor, oligarchies are likely to have begun to debate informally amongst themselves

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<sup>67</sup> J. Innes 'Prisons for the Poor: English Bridewells 1555-1800' in F. Snyder and D. Hay (eds) *Labour, Law and Crime: An Historical Perspective* (London: Tavistock, 1987), 42-122.

to what extent individuals amongst their poor were worth supporting, who performed a useful function and who were useless mouths. Additionally, which poor actually belonged to the parish and were therefore technically eligible for some support and who did not and should be encouraged or even strongly pressurised to leave. What appears to have been the most important consideration in some Hertfordshire parishes was how much this enforced expenditure on the destitute poor could be pared down.

Charity to the local poor became a legally enforceable demand but the unwilling donors were no longer receiving spiritual benefits so some looked for more tangible profits. It is likely that in some Hertfordshire parishes the poor began to be regarded as suitable objects for social engineering aimed at making their labour into a profitable commodity. Their collective assets, land and property charitably bequeathed for their maintenance, could be leased out or gradually be appropriated in various ways by powerful individuals. Providing local charity, previously a soft voluntary option for the community had hardened into an obligation and the poor would ultimately be made to suffer for this. There were too many poor therefore it was convenient for some to believe that their poverty must be either self-inflicted or God's punishment for the sin of idleness.

For the vestrymen and other chief inhabitants who sought both to lead the community and, as employers, tradesmen or shopkeepers, to profit from the poor, a promising new role emerged. It was plainly expedient both to become the defenders of the ratepayers and be seen visibly fighting to keep the poor rates down and to deliberately re-construct the poor as idle, weak and immature, verging on childlike, and incapable of making their way in the world without direction from their betters. Therefore, in parallel with economic considerations during the early modern period there was a drive towards a reformation of manners. Policy towards the poor appears to have gradually evolved into a prototypical form of social engineering where various attempts were made to mould them into acceptable behaviours and the lives their betters and employers believed they should lead.

Eventually some lives would be taken over completely, particularly those of orphan infants and children who were apprenticed away from the parish or warehoused in foundling institutions and schools of industry so that they could be trained as early as possible in industriousness and the necessary deference and pious resignation to their lot. They would be taught to read the Bible and improving texts but usually not educated to express themselves in writing. Parents who were over burdened with children were routinely coerced into giving them up for apprenticeship or service. The better sort gradually began to regard the poor living amongst them as a different and inferior species and appear in some Hertfordshire parishes to have used their own practical system of classification of potentially useful and docile hard workers and those who were unprofitable and therefore useless except possibly to serve and support one another in an institution. The following chapter traces these developments and the attitudes which fostered them in a range of Hertfordshire parishes.

## Chapter Five: Hertfordshire Attitudes to the Poor

### Context

This chapter will examine more closely the developing and intricate relationship between Hertfordshire parish officials and the impotent poor they were legally required to manage under the Old Poor Law. The chapter analyses the, sometimes, contradictory elements of Hertfordshire exclusion policies to create a framework for understanding how poor relief appears to have operated in a number of Hertfordshire parishes both urban and rural, thus establishing a framework for the thematic chapters that follow.

The first section charts how historians have written about the development of attitudes to the poor and considers the gaps that exist in their analysis which includes little information on Hertfordshire. The second traces the complicated evolving patterns of power within some Hertfordshire parishes, which have not been previously researched and discusses the possible motivations of the men who composed the policy-making vestries which directed the workings of the poor law within their parishes. It shows how, in some parishes, central government dictated exclusion policies deterring immigration were being simultaneously and purposefully undermined by the short-termist drive for profit of some parishioners. A large number of these offenders were subsequently presented at Hertford Quarter Sessions for breaking the Erection of Cottages Act 1589 (31 Elizabeth c. 8) which had been specifically formulated to control overcrowding. This section also considers what sort of men took the higher parochial offices of churchwardens and overseers. The third examines the significance of belonging to a parish for a Hertfordshire parishioner and the fourth reveals why this was not always important for a foreign incomer so long as they could pay their way. The fifth analyses the concepts of the deserving and undeserving poor, discussed in the previous chapter, as they evolved and operated in Hertfordshire and discusses how this was skewed within many parishes by tacitly accepting foreigner inmates for as long as they were profitable. Finally the conclusion discusses how attitudes to the poor in early

modern Hertfordshire appear to have been animated by primarily economic factors and local politics.

## Thinking and writing about attitudes to the poor

Reconstructing attitudes to the poor and the poor law is a complex task which has occupied historians from the beginning of the history from below movement in the 1970s. As it involves a range of interlocking themes the chapter will approach the evolution of the secondary literature on this topic chronologically rather than thematically. The major scholars who have traced the evolution of attitudes are: Paul Fideler,<sup>1</sup> Henry French,<sup>2</sup> Steve Hindle, Lynn Hollen Lees,<sup>3</sup> Joanna Innes,<sup>4</sup> Marjorie McIntosh,<sup>5</sup> Paul Slack<sup>6</sup> and Keith Wrightson.<sup>7</sup> Paul Slack in his Salisbury study was the first to examine the treatment of the poor and the social and economic influences on the attitudes that dictated that treatment from 1597 to 1666.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P. Fideler *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England: The Old Poor Law Tradition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> H. French *The Middle Sort of People in Provincial England 1600-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); S. Hindle *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England 1550-1640* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); S. Hindle 'Exhortation and Entitlement' in M. Braddick and J. Walter (eds) *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 102-22; S. Hindle 'Civility, Honesty and the Identification of the Deserving Poor in Seventeenth-Century England' in H. French and J. Barry (eds) *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 38-59; S. Hindle *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); S. Hindle 'Good, Godly and Charitable Uses': Endowed Charity and the Relief of Poverty in Rural England, c. 1550-1750' in A. Goldgar and R. Frost (eds) *Institutional Culture in Early Modern Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 164-88.

<sup>3</sup> L. Lees *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> J. Innes *Inferior Politics: Social Problems and Social Policies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> M. McIntosh *Controlling Misbehaviour in England, 1370-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); M. McIntosh *Poor Relief in England 1350-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> P. Slack *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> K. Wrightson *English Society 1580-1680* (London: Hutchinson, 1982); K. Wrightson 'Sorts of People' in Tudor and Stuart England' in J. Barry and C. Brooks (eds) *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), 28-51; K. Wrightson 'The Politics of the Parish' in P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (eds) *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996), 10-46.

<sup>8</sup> P. Slack 'Poverty and Politics in Salisbury 1597-1666' in P. Clark and P. Slack (eds), *Crisis*

Marjorie McIntosh noted parishes' attitudes of suspicion towards the disreputable and idle poor and explored the fears they raised amongst parish officials, in the context of growing poverty: 'Anxiety about rising poverty often led to supervision of the actions of people with limited means. Those who lived idly without working were inherently upsetting: they might resort to illegal means to support themselves and use their spare time in inappropriate ways'.<sup>9</sup> She went on, in a later study of poor relief from 1360-1500, to argue that attitudes towards the poor in some communities were individualistic and did not slavishly follow the dictates of the law but: 'local people at all times made selective choices about which of the needy warranted assistance'.<sup>10</sup> The State did not completely dominate local practice and attitudes although it might attempt to do so through its officials. In McIntosh's view people were not hostile to the poor as a class, although central government and the judiciary might be to varying degrees.<sup>11</sup> Both McIntosh<sup>12</sup> and Hindle<sup>13</sup> included references, many from sixteenth and seventeenth century court records, to individual Hertfordshire parishes in their work. However, as previously noted in chapter two, the county itself has not been the subject of detailed research and little is known about the poor relief provided within it.<sup>14</sup>

As Steven King observed of poor relief, 'The term 'generosity' is an ambiguous one. It assumes that we have some yardstick against which to measure poor law payouts and it implies that communities could choose to be generous or not'.<sup>15</sup> Steve

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*and Order in English Towns 1500-1700* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 164-203.

<sup>9</sup> McIntosh *Controlling Misbehaviour*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> McIntosh *Poor Relief*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

<sup>12</sup> McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour*: Hertfordshire parish references Ardeley; Cottered; Hatfield; Hexton; Hoddesdon; Little Gaddesden; McIntosh, *Poor Relief*: Hertfordshire parish references Ashwell; Bishop's Stortford; Clothall; Great Berkhamsted; Hertingfordbury; St Albans: St Peters.

<sup>13</sup> Hindle *On the Parish?* Hertfordshire parishes references: Aldenham; Ashwell; Baldock; Berkhamsted; Buntingford; Coleshill; Hinxworth; Hoddesdon; King's Langley; Knebworth; Much Hadham; Thundridge; Welwyn.

<sup>14</sup> J. B. Calnan's thesis would appear to be the most detailed on the period but was primarily concerned with the governing class not the poor. J. B. Calnan *County society and local government in the county of Hertfordshire, c.1580-c.1630*, with special reference to the commission of the peace unpublished Ph.D thesis Cambridge, 1979.

<sup>15</sup> S. King *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 55.

Hindle described Warwickshire as generous because he notes: ‘the thirty-three south Warwickshire parishes for which expenditure totals can be calculated spent almost £320 on their poor in the year 1638-9’.<sup>16</sup> He also acknowledged that: ‘Expenditure per head of population, however, diverged widely from the average of just over 8d’.<sup>17</sup>

Other historians have found that particular groups were treated more generously than others. Susannah Ottaway stated that ‘recent research has suggested that England’s poor law system had distinct regional characteristics’<sup>18</sup> and ‘demonstrates clear regional differences between northern and southern counties in the provision of relief to a traditionally ‘favoured’ group of pensioners’. She supports Steven King’s extensive studies on regional variation.<sup>19</sup> Ottaway found that eighteenth-century provision for the elderly was generous in Terling (Essex) and Puddletown (Dorset) and compares them to the low pensions given to the same group in Ovenden (Yorkshire). It would seem likely that the attitudes and actions of the vestrymen who implemented these local strategies are important considerations here and worth further examination. The following section will discuss the attitudes to the problem of poverty and the possible motivation of those who became parish officials.

### Parish officials’ attitudes and motivation

Central government views on the poor and the treatment of poverty were made clear in the wording of the statutes. However, as previously discussed in chapter three, at the local level vestry minutes and orders generally give little insight into the policies followed by individual parishes. It would appear that cases were discussed informally by vestrymen as were parochial policies. These were most

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<sup>16</sup> Hindle *On the Parish?*, 287.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> S. Ottaway *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 183.

<sup>19</sup> S. King ‘Poor Relief and English Economic Development Reappraised’ *Economic History Review* 50 (1997), 360-8; S. King *Poverty and Welfare*; S. King and A. Tomkins (eds) *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 228-57.

likely to have focused on identifiable problems, such as whether or not to build a poorhouse, if so who should build and inhabit it and, also, how to deal with troublesome individuals or families at minimum expense to the poor rates. In the absence of recorded evidence as to how and why parochial decisions on individual cases were arrived at it has been necessary to examine contemporary writings on the treatment of the poor which sometimes provide insights into how parish officials regarded their poor.

Most parish officials appear to have genuinely believed, or may have preferred to because they could then claim that poor people were incapable of running their own lives, that the majority of paupers were congenitally idle and aimed to live on the parish. This directly contradicted paupers' frequent assertions in letters to their parish officials that they had done everything possible to avoid applying for parish relief as here:

Mr John Webb in Chesson stret in Herfordshire

Hornsie [Hornsey]

ju??ia 22 1759

Sir i made bold to trouble you with these few lines to let you know thatt i am in a great deal of troble att thys time as not knowing whatt to dow for bread for my children butt if you will be so good as to aford me three pound a year to pay my house reant i will try what i can dow with not giveing you any funder troble Sir my husband hass bin gone nine weeks so thatt i have nobody left with me but my poor children so if you dont take it into consideration and let have thatt i must come to the perich and my children i have nothing to live apen butt my boy works for half a crown a week in drape work and i do a little matter of worke whatt i can but thatt is butt a small matter for four of us to be man[taind]

Ann Harris<sup>20</sup>

There was a kind of officially sanctioned mythology which grew up about apparently idle paupers who were not part of the local waged cohort and had no obvious means of supporting themselves, but yet did so. This scenario bore little resemblance to reality especially in a rigidly stratified and tightly controlled county like Hertfordshire where everyone knew their neighbours' movements and lifestyle and there was a strong need to co-operate in order to survive within the

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<sup>20</sup> HALS DP29/18/20 93H.



community. Although there would always have been some known feckless individuals in the parishes it would seem unlikely that all paupers were workshy because they and their families would have starved if they did not work either for themselves or an employer. Belief in the widespread idleness amongst the poor may have been intrinsically connected with the demographic and economic changes from the sixteenth century onwards and the need to control the growing numbers of unemployed.

Writing at the very beginning of the seventeenth century the anonymous writer of *An Ease for Overseers*, his guide for managing the poor for fellow overseers, plainly subscribed to the widespread view amongst officials that the poor were essentially idle, a tendency which should be quashed as early as possible in their childhoods:

for the poore are by nature much inclined to ease and idleness: and therefore they are to be put forth very timely...so children are fittest to be bound when they are young, otherwise by reason of their idle and base educations, they will hardly hold service but as they have wavering and straying mindes, so they will have wandering and unstaid bodies, which will sooner be disposed to vagrancie then activitie, to idlenesse then to worke.<sup>21</sup>

Sarah Jordan argued that: 'By constructing the labouring classes as naturally idle and by enforcing labouring-class industriousness, then, the comfortable classes were protecting their own economic interests'. She finds that 'they were also exonerating themselves from any claims on their charity that the labouring-class might have because if the poor were destitute it was through their own idleness and they deserved it as they had when it was their own sin and God was punishing them with destitution'.<sup>22</sup> In 1725 the members of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K) discussed the problem of poverty and the utility of workhouses in combatting this.<sup>23</sup> Many of these men were parochial officials and

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<sup>21</sup> *An Ease for Overseers* (London: Legat, 1601) [unpaginated].

<sup>22</sup> S. Jordan *The Anxieties of Idleness: Idleness in Eighteenth Century British Literature and Culture* (Rosemont: Bucknell University Press, 2003), 38.

<sup>23</sup> *An Account of Several Work-Houses for Employing and Maintaining the Poor* (Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) (London: Joseph Downing, 1725).

their attitudes had not changed since the 1600s. They too saw 'Idleness, [as] the great Cause and Fuel of Poverty.'

## Power in the parish

In order to understand the parochial politics of power in Hertfordshire it is necessary to examine how some of the evolving parish oligarchs saw themselves and their role in the community.<sup>24</sup> This is sometimes revealed in the vestry minutes and orders which they used to bolster their position. In some of these sources eighteenth-century vestrymen described themselves as the chief inhabitants or the parishioners and this expresses both their growing sense of exclusivity and self-importance in the community and the strengthening identification of their interests as those which should be considered pre-eminent in the parish.<sup>25</sup> Henry French observed this process as it developed in seventeenth and eighteenth century Dorset, East Anglia and Lancashire and found that the chief inhabitants there were not a distinct and coherent social group but were all striving to become members of the gentry class immediately above them in the social hierarchy.<sup>26</sup>

In Hertfordshire the aspirations among some vestrymen may have been similar, but their visualisation of themselves and their roles appears to have been rather more complicated. In seventeenth-century Chipping Barnet the vestrymen described themselves in 1658 at their first recorded meeting as 'the inhabitants' indicating that they already saw themselves as a distinct group representing the town.<sup>27</sup> Less than a century later, the Hertford All Saints parish vestry minutes for 1732 provided particularly florid examples of the vestrymen's self-confidence. The calligraphy of the document heading was designed to impress as a public statement which only magistrates, chief inhabitants of other parishes and future readers would peruse because it is unlikely that many parishioners outside the vestry and

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<sup>24</sup> At this time two units of administration were important the county and the parish.

<sup>25</sup> McIntosh noted that 'parishes were the only still active administrative bodies that spanned the whole country'. M. McIntosh *Poor Relief in England 1350-1600* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 116.

<sup>26</sup> French *The Middle Sort of People*.

<sup>27</sup> HALS DP15/5/1 Chipping Barnet Churchwardens' Accounts 1646-1700.

its friends would ever see it or could read it.<sup>28</sup>

However, it is impossible to demonstrate when this strongly self-confident tendency first began in Hertford All Saints because the earliest vestry minutes that could be transcribed for this project date from the eighteenth century. The vestrymen were describing themselves as the 'Cheife Inhabitants of the said Parish' as were those of neighbouring Hertford St John<sup>29</sup> and even the small Liberty of Brickendon on the outskirts of the town.<sup>30</sup> In contrast the poorer parish of Great Amwell used a much simpler preamble, 'At a legal Vestry held for the Parish of Great Amwell May 31<sup>st</sup> 1769'<sup>31</sup> as did Bengoe another small parish near Hertford: 'Att A Vestry Held the 8<sup>th</sup> July 1725 for taking James Prior Late Overseers Accounts'.<sup>32</sup> These men apparently had no pretensions to being chief inhabitants and did not claim to be; they were meeting to do an appointed specific task because they were legally required to do so. There is no indication that they, unlike French's chief inhabitants, collectively aspired to join the gentry class, although some individuals might have done so.<sup>33</sup> As Dorothy Marshall observed 'The average overseer was either a farmer in rural parishes or a shop-keeper in urban ones; he was engaged in earning his own living and was generally unwilling to waste more time and thought over his troublesome duties than was absolutely necessary'.<sup>34</sup> Examples from Brickendon; Bengoe; Great Amwell and Hertford All Saints demonstrate the nature of these 'troublesome duties' and the essentially mundane problems involved in managing the poor that Hertfordshire vestries were regularly required to deal with in the eighteenth century:

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<sup>28</sup> HALS DP48/8/1 Hertford All Saints Vestry minutes 1732-45 'At a Vestry held by the Cheife Inhabitants of the said Parish at their Vestry Table pursuant to a publick Notice for that Purpose Given the Twenty Third Day of Aprill Anno Dm<sup>o</sup> 1732'.

<sup>29</sup> HALS DP48/8/13 'At a Vestry holden June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1770 by the Chief Inhabitants of the parish of St John'.

<sup>30</sup> HALS DP48/8/16-21 'At a Vestrey holden by the Chief Inhabitants of the Liberty of Brickendon June ye 28 1750'.

<sup>31</sup> HALS DP4/8/1. Great Amwell Vestry Minutes 1749-80 31 May 1769.

<sup>32</sup> HALS DP17/12/1 Bengoe Vestry Minutes 8 July 1725.

<sup>33</sup> French *The Middle Sort of People*.

<sup>34</sup> D. Marshall *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Social and Administrative History* (New York: Kelley, 1926), 58.

It is further ordered at the said Vestry that the Overseer do buy the Widow Barleggs one Shift' (Brickendon).<sup>35</sup>

At the Vestry it was Ordered that the Churchwarden and Overseers shall Remove all such Persons now Residing in the Said Parish who are not Parishioners (Bengeo).<sup>36</sup>

Agreed that the Overseer at Ware End apply to William Chafey? Of Amwell End a Parishioner of Ware for a Certificate. [Settlement?] Agreed that Charles Dix of Hodsdon be apply'd to for a Certificate' (Great Amwell).<sup>37</sup>

Ordered That the said Overseers of the Poor Do Forthwith Give Notice to Mary Davies That she is required by the Inhabitants of this Parish immediately to take her Child out of the Poorhouse and [illegible] at her own Charge Maintain the said Child and in Default thereof that the said Overseer do apply to a Justice of the Peace to send her to the House of Corrections or take such other Measures as the Law Directs. (Hertford All Saints).<sup>38</sup>

Vestry documents are generally very brief but even these give a good indication of the local preoccupations and level of education of the participants; for example in parishes such as Bengeo, where only four or five men attended sometimes without a churchwarden, and Hertford St Johns five of whose vestrymen still signed their names with a cross in 1767.<sup>39</sup> There may have been a few more educated members and at Great Amwell the curate was evidently a Vestry member in 1795.<sup>40</sup> It would appear unlikely that the majority of Hertfordshire vestrymen and officials had received more than a very basic education since they were mostly practical men: farmers, maltsters, tradesmen, millers etc. and can be traced in contemporary local directories, publicising and building up their businesses and influence.<sup>41</sup> They might have exchanged opinions and ideas about parish concerns

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<sup>35</sup> HALS DP 48/8/16-21 Brickendon Vestry Minutes 1740-90 15 June 1758; Brickendon 28 June 1750.

<sup>36</sup> HALS DP 17/12/1 Bengeo Vestry Minutes, 15 Nov. 1784.

<sup>37</sup> HALS DP 4/8/1 Great Amwell Vestry Minutes 1749-80, 10 May 1769.

<sup>38</sup> HALS DP 48/8/8 Hertford All Saints Vestry minutes 1732-80, 23 April 1732.

<sup>39</sup> HALS DP 48/8 Hertford St Johns Vestry Minutes 1762-76, 14 May 1767 [Signed] John Walter Tho<sup>s</sup> Thuckston Abr Crouch X his Mark John Ruskin X his Mark John Becher X his Mark John Thaker X his Mark John Randall Richard Mardell James Waller Abram Crouch X his Mark.

<sup>40</sup> [Signed] Th. Vialls Curate. He may have been co-opted on this occasion because the Vestry was discussing what appear to be dearth measures and intended to provide a dole of potatoes to relieve, 'the Distresses of the Labouring Poor'. Ibid. 28 July 1795.

<sup>41</sup> For example the Royston listing of residents, *Royston 1200 – 1800: A List Of Residents* (Royston: Royston Local History Society, 2011).

when meeting their fellow vestrymen socially at inns, local markets, hunts and other informal gatherings but they do not appear to have formed a kind of parish officers' club as Henry French and Richard Hoyle found developing in neighbouring Essex at Earls Colne.<sup>42</sup>

Hertfordshire officials' attitudes towards being appointed to parish office can be seen to have been wide-ranging. A number of men, and at least one woman, appear to have shunned official duties especially the time-consuming and unpaid position of overseer and there are several court cases of four men, and one woman, refusing the post and being coerced into accepting it:

Order that John Halsey and Francis Wilkins of Great Gaddesden be bound over to answer for refusing to act as overseers'.<sup>43</sup>

'Order made commanding Robert Hadsley of Ware, gentleman, who refuses to execute the office of overseer to which he was recently appointed, to take up the office at once or be committed for contempt'.<sup>44</sup>

'Order dismissing the appeal of Elizabeth Goodwyn, widow, and William Mills yeoman against their appointment as overseers of Great [Much] Hadham'.<sup>45</sup>

However, other men appear to have welcomed parochial office and may have seen it as an opportunity to gain power and influence in their communities. From examining lists of vestry members and listings of parish officials it can be seen that in some Hertfordshire parishes official posts were frequently handed down within locally dominant families. This may have been a common practice in some Hertfordshire parishes but does not appear to have been extensively discussed for other counties.<sup>46</sup> Sometimes the same people can be seen to keep parish offices for years or serve them very frequently almost on a rota system, but to what extent these were acting as self-perpetuating select vestries is unclear. At Bramfield, a rural parish near Hertford, farmer John Carrington served as High Constable for the

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<sup>42</sup> H. French and R. Hoyle, *The Character of English Rural Society Earls Colne, 1550-1750* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 254.

<sup>43</sup> W. Le Hardy (comp.) *Hertford Quarter Sessions Books 1658-1700* p.38, (1 October 1660).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 461 (10 July 1693).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p. 141 (12 & 19 July 1714).

<sup>46</sup> M. Goldie 'The Unacknowledged Republic: Office-Holding in Early Modern England' in T. Harris (ed.) *The Politics of the Excluded* c. 1500-1850 (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 153-94.

Hundred of Cashio and Assessor and Collector of Taxes for the Parish of Bramfield for forty years.<sup>47</sup>

Closer to London in the market town of Chipping Barnet, Hedy Cohen identified 104 officers and their occupations. 'The parish officers were almost entirely drawn from the middle rank and a large number of trades were represented although what is striking is the dominance of innkeepers'. Chipping Barnet contained a large number of inns and victualling establishments serving the travellers on the busy Great North Road which passed through the town. Cohen found that: 'The office of churchwarden was perhaps the most attractive of all'. Interest and long-standing involvement in communal affairs often ran in families. The name 'Nicoll' – spelt Nicholls, Nicholl and Nicolls – appears nine times in the list of [Chipping Barnet parish] offices 1658–1780'.<sup>48</sup>

Joan Kent found that in the central Hertfordshire parish of Little Munden 14 men filled 50 out of 70 terms as constable, churchwarden, and overseer, some of them holding office five or even seven times during the period 1629-30 to 1642-3.<sup>49</sup> These dynastical practices continued into the nineteenth century and at St Albans St Michael parish 'Mr Ralph Smith of Kingsbury served as a churchwarden from 1785-99, when Stephen Smith, possibly his son or grandson, took over and served till 1827. William Smith of Shefford served as overseer 1799, churchwarden 1800, 1803 and 1804, overseer 1805, and again in 1817. Jeremiah Smith (a gamekeeper), Joseph Smith, John Smith, S. Smith and Henry Tombes Smith all figure among parish officers and vestrymen.<sup>50</sup> The principal vestrymen in the hierarchy, the churchwardens and overseers regularly nominated their friends and relatives to fill vacancies and they also sometimes involved their local business associates, usually

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<sup>47</sup> HALS: DE/X3/17.

<sup>48</sup> H. Cohen 'A Satellite Town: Population, Government and Society in Chipping Barnet 1660-1780' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Keele 1996), 220. 'Between 1658 when records began and 1660 a Daniel Nicholl was listed three times, once as churchwarden'.

<sup>49</sup> J. Kent *The English Village Constable 1580-1642: A Social and Administrative Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 285.

<sup>50</sup> E. Truwert 'The Operation of the Old Poor Law in the Parish of St Michael's, St Albans, 1721-1834' in P. Kingsford and A. Jones (eds) *Down and Out in Hertfordshire: A Symposium on the Old and New Poor Law* (Stevenage: Hertfordshire Publications, 1984), 113.

referred to as the other Inhabitants, as at Hertford All Saints. These hitherto unimportant middling people who would have previously focused primarily on the dull and uninfluential routine of monitoring the churchwardens' expenditure and the upkeep of the church now took on the management of a whole section of the community; the destitute poor. It was their core beliefs and attitudes to poverty which could and probably did, effectively shape the Old Poor Law system in a number of Hertfordshire parishes.

### Belonging to the parish

It would appear that one of the most pressing duties of parish officials was to decide who belonged to the parish if they required relief. As Steve Hindle observed 'If ratepayers were legally obliged to contribute to the communal relief fund, they had a vested interest in ensuring that its assets would be distributed only to those genuinely impotent inhabitants whom they recognised as their own'.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, as discussed in the previous chapter, there was a strong drive to classify and value those who might become chargeable to the parish through old-age, debility, short-term injury or long-term chronic sickness. However, as Jeremy Boulton noted, 'Although the [Elizabethan] poor law enshrined in law the notion that the parish was the basic unit of welfare responsibility, it had failed to define the criteria of belonging which obliged the parishes to construct their own policies at least before the settlement acts of the 1660s'.<sup>52</sup>

This section will first examine the legal definitions of belonging to a parish and what, defined an individual's home parish. It will then, investigate how these laws were employed by Collectors of the Poor (initially) and Overseers (later) to identify those poor who were considered to be parishioners. It is necessary to trace the statutes back to their fourteenth-century origins since these are what would have primarily guided their decisions. Thus, the late fourteenth-century legislation that had been originally directed against wandering beggars and aimed to relocate

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<sup>51</sup> Hindle *On the Parish?*, 300-1.

<sup>52</sup> J. Boulton "The 'Meaner Sort': Labouring People and the Poor' in K. Wrightson (ed.) *A Social History of England 1500-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 322.

them in their home parishes was now used against those who did not legally belong but had established themselves in parishes by migration not birth or service. By the *Statute of Cambridge 1388* (12 Rich. 2 c.7) it had been decreed that the poor were 'to repair, in order to be maintained, to the places where they were *born*'.<sup>53</sup> This statute was then followed by a number of similar acts throughout the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries all attempting to define where a wanderer belonged:

By *An Act Against Vagabonds and Beggars* 1495 (11 Henry 7 c. 2) they were to repair to the place where they *last dwelled*, or were *best known*, or were *born*.

By a royal proclamation in 1511 (19 Henry 7 c. 12) they were to return to where they were *born*, or *made last their abode by the space of three years*.

By *An Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds and for the Relief of the Poor and Impotent Persons* 1547 (1 Edward 6 c 3) this was further explained as, 'where they had been *most conversant* [been familiar with] by the space of three years.

Marjorie McIntosh has shown that the small Hertfordshire market town of Bishop's Stortford already collected for the poor in the 1560s (long before the 1598 legislation came into force), under the 1552 *Act for the Provision and Relief of the Poor* (5 and 6 Edward VI, c..2) and the 1563 *Act for the Relief of the Poor* (5 Elizabeth I. c. 3).<sup>54</sup> McIntosh found that an average of 35 men, women and children were temporarily relieved by Bishop's Stortford over the period for a maximum of four months in the winter. Not all of the recipients were identified as belonging to the town, and this may have been a traditional charitable initiative by the townspeople to provide non-discriminatory relief to all needy poor both parishioners and non-parishioners. Very few of these early records survive for England and as this is the only Hertfordshire example discovered to date it cannot stand as evidence of Hertfordshire relief practice at this time, but it is an indication of the size of the

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<sup>53</sup> R. Burn *The Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer Vol. III* ((London: A. Millar, 1766), 266.

<sup>54</sup> M. McIntosh 'Poor Relief in Elizabethan English Communities: An Analysis of Collectors' Accounts' *Economic History Review* 67 (2014), 331–57.



problem in one small market town with a population in the mid-sixteenth century of five hundred 'houseling folk'.<sup>55</sup>

When settlement legislation was introduced by the Act of Settlement 1662 it recognised that working men were much more mobile than legislators had previously considered and also underlined the fact that it was vitally necessary for a poor person to be able to prove that they belonged by birth to a home parish even if they had found work in a different one. If a man had not been born in the parish where he lived, he would need to have fulfilled one of the necessary conditions to have acquired settlement by serving at least one year's apprenticeship or service there, or, more unlikely, holding parish office, renting a house and paying poor rates. Women and children took their husband's or father's settlement. Illegitimate children took their mother's settlement hence the drive to send away, unattached and/or heavily pregnant foreigner women before they gave birth.<sup>56</sup> If a poor person had no formal recognised link to the parish they would be regarded with suspicion and need to have family or friends already settled there who might provide at least some emergency help if they fell into difficulties. However, since most poor peoples' connections were likely to be as poor as themselves such aid could only be minimal and would not provide more than very short-term support.

This situation was tacitly recognised by vestries requiring a poor foreigner to produce a settlement certificate from their home parish taking responsibility for them if they should require assistance, hence the references to ordering certificates to be produced in some vestry minutes.<sup>57</sup> If a certificate was not produced the parish could and would summarily eject the person and his family unless they were seriously ill or injured. Young and single poor males were often obliged to remove themselves from their home parish in order to find work or better conditions of

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<sup>55</sup> W. Page (ed.) *History of the County of Hertford* Vol. IV (London: Dawsons, 1971), 207.

<sup>56</sup> K. Snell *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25, 29; *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>57</sup> HALS DP 4/8/1 Great Amwell Vestry Minutes, 10 May 1769. 'Agreed that the Overseer at Ware End apply to William Chafey [?] Of Amwell End a Parishioner of Ware for a Certificate. [Settlement]; Agreed that Charles Dix of Hodsdon be apply'd to for a Certificate'.

service and some men decided to enlist and never returned home. These actions could also be deliberate and were a rejection of belonging in favour of a possibly better life outside the home parish. However, as Keith Snell has observed:

‘Belonging, like the parish communities that produced it, was socially, culturally and legally constructed’. An individual belonged if the parish accepted them and would be ejected if the parish considered them to be a potential charge on the poor rates. In the Hertfordshire parishes analysed Justices at Quarter Sessions had the authority to decide temporary and permanent settlement and direct the parishes to accept and provide for individuals because they were poor or sick, old and impotent, lame, blind, homeless with large families to support.<sup>58</sup> These cases are further discussed in the following section.

### Not belonging to the parish

The traditional literature on sixteenth and seventeenth century parishes generally describes an overwhelmingly binary parish society divided into rich and poor where the richer members in their roles as vestrymen and parish officials directed and controlled their inferiors and decided who belonged and who did not and also who was deserving of relief and who was not.<sup>59</sup> Steve Hindle, for example, saw the parish as ‘a little commonwealth... which effectively became a welfare republic the moral and physical boundaries of which had to be effectively policed’.<sup>60</sup>

In Hertfordshire this policing can be traced taking place in the recorded presentments for cottage-building, building conversions and receiving inmates (lodgers) from a large number of parishes which were brought to Hertford Quarter Sessions. It was a policy driven by central government legislation although the would-be profiteers were only infrequently presented at court. They came from all

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<sup>58</sup> *An Act Against the Erecting and Maintaining of Cottages* 1589 (31 Elizabeth c. 8). This Act permitted JPs to allow exemptions to the requirement of attaching four acres of freehold land to every new-built cottage.

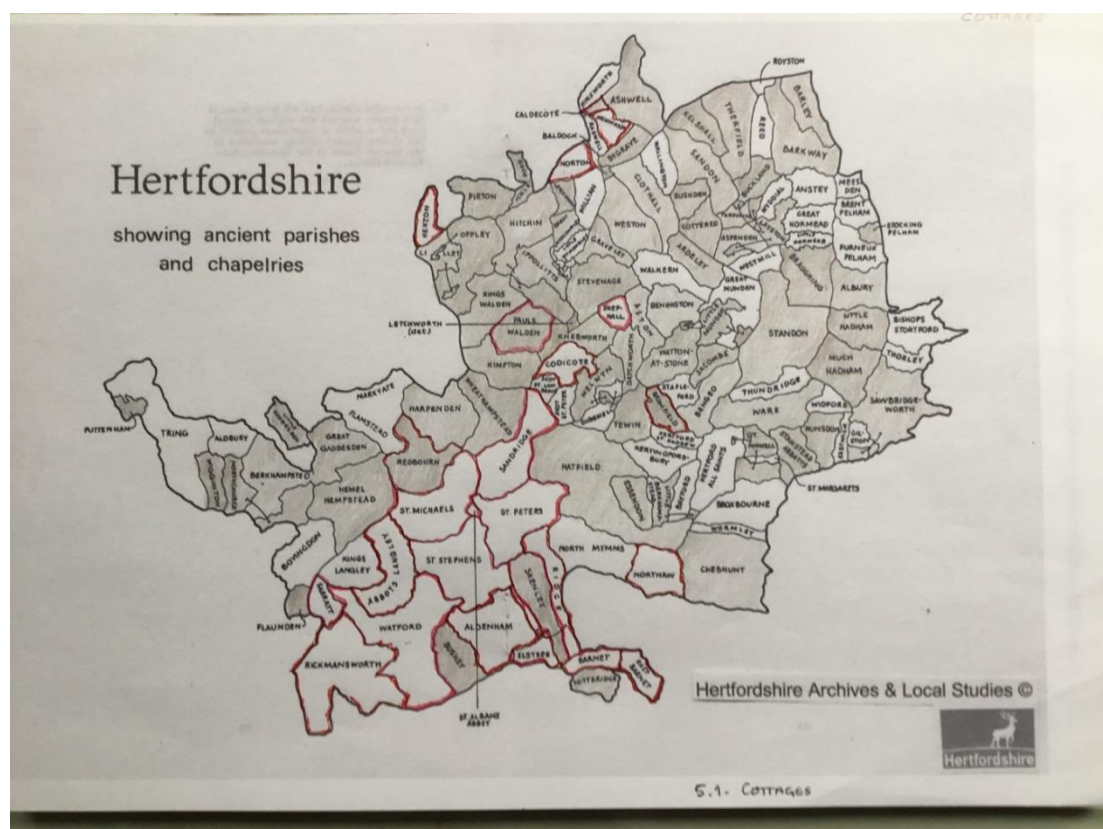
<sup>59</sup> The interpretations of ‘deserving’ by Hertfordshire parish officials will be discussed further below.

<sup>60</sup> S. Hindle ‘A Sense of Place? Becoming and Belonging in the Rural Parish’ in A. Shepard and P. Withington (eds) *Communities in Early Modern England: Networks, Place, Rhetoric* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2000), 96-114. Quote on page 97.

sections of parish society including labourers, husbandmen yeomen, tradesmen and some widows and sought to cash in on the growing numbers of dispossessed and unemployed foreigners who flooded into Hertfordshire, some on their way to London, seeking work and somewhere to live.

Map 5.1 Parishes (shaded) Presented at Hertford Quarter Sessions 1610-1700 involving Parishioners Illegally Erecting/Converting Cottages, etc.

Note: Parishes over which St Albans Quarter Sessions held jurisdiction for which data is not available are outlined in red.



From this map it can be seen that only a few parishes under the jurisdiction of Hertford Quarter Sessions were not indicted for erecting cottages at least once. Some parishes under St Albans Quarter Sessions were also indicted, possibly where individuals living under the jurisdiction of Hertford Quarter Sessions owned land. Belonging to a Hertfordshire parish was a fluid concept in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and if the individual could not claim it in their own right by birth it could be legally decreed by Hertford Quarter Sessions bench as in these

cases:

Elizabeth North, a poor lame woman, to be settled in Amwell, where she has resided for seven years, 'with one Timothy North'.<sup>61</sup>

Order that the Churchwardens and Overseers of Aldbury shall provide for John Lewyn, an impotent person now in that parish.<sup>62</sup>

Housing could also be provided to a homeless family if they deliberately made themselves conspicuous by taking up residence in the church porch. This tactic is further discussed in detail by Steve Hindle, who includes what appears to be the sole Hertfordshire case.<sup>63</sup>

Petition by William Tittmouse of Wallington, showing that he is in great want of relief, as he has a wife and two children to maintain and nowhere to lodge them, but that 'hee his wife and children are forced to lye in ye Church porch of Wallington.' Order made that the churchwardens and overseers shall pay 4s a week to Tittmouse until they shall provide him a convenient house to live in.<sup>64</sup>

These were exceptional cases since the official attitude to incomers and homeless families was definitely not welcoming. As previously noted Steve Hindle researched the seventeenth-century Vicar of Layston, Alexander Strange, and demonstrated that Strange in his 'Advice' to his parishioners written in 1636 appears to have viewed the influx of settlers from London and Layston's neighbouring parishes with their threatened commandeering of local charity provision as something like an invasion by a swarm of predatory insects or vermin. He identified the basic problem threatening his parish as the over-burdening of poor rates caused by the growing number of migrant families most of whom were now partially or wholly dependent on the poor rates. These families contained around 80 children both unemployable infants, under seven years of age, and able but idle

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<sup>61</sup> Le Hardy (comp.) *Hertford Quarter Sessions Books* 1619-57, 7, 82 (10 Jan. 1626). (most likely to have been her son or other relative who was already caring for her).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 333 (8 Jan. 1643-4). [not a parishioner because 'now in that parish' – unclear how long provision would last and what it would entail].

<sup>63</sup> S. Hindle 'Destitution, Liminality and Belonging: The Church Porch and the Politics of Settlement in English Rural Communities, c.1590-1660' in C. Dyer (ed.) *The Self-Contained Village? The Social History of Rural Communities 1250-1900* (Hatfield: Hertfordshire University Press, 2007), 46-71.

<sup>64</sup> Le Hardy (comp.) *Hertford Quarter Sessions Books* 1619-99, 355-6 (2 Oct. 1682).

older children many of whom were begging and stealing to keep themselves. All these children were being precariously supported by only a few workers who if they became sick or died would throw all their dependents on to the poor rates.<sup>65</sup> In his writings Strange succeeded in dehumanising and stereotyping these migrant families, but in a small community like Layston he must also have been well aware that some of his congregation were probably actively encouraging them to become inmates and renting property to foreigner families. His attitude may today appear distinctly unsympathetic for a clergyman, but it might well have resonated strongly with the apprehensions of those of his potential audience of parish worthies who had also observed and deplored what was happening.

The results of this immigrant invasion can be seen as some Hertfordshire vestries and individuals defended their home parish determinedly against interlopers while at the same time others, often in their own or other parishes, opened the gates and let foreigners in so that they could profit from them as described here at Ardeley:

Whereas it does appear by y<sup>e</sup> poors rates.... that y<sup>e</sup> charge of y<sup>e</sup> parish is much encreased by y<sup>e</sup> undue practice of those owners and Inhabitants who have brought into the parish several strangers and have also converted several farm Houses into new erected cottages for their habitations;...We doe hereby order and ordaine, that if any Owner, Tenant or Inhabitant of this Parish shall hereafter take or receive into any of their Houses any strangers or persons whatsoever who are likely to become a charge to this Parish, without y<sup>e</sup> consent of y<sup>e</sup> major part of y<sup>e</sup> parishioners, every such offender shall be charged to y<sup>e</sup> rates of y<sup>e</sup> Poor over and above his proportion to y<sup>e</sup> neighbours, to such over-growing charge when it shall happen, without respect to his ability or the land he occupies but according to y<sup>e</sup> damage and danger he bringeth to the Parish by his own folly.<sup>66</sup>

The mindset of these profit-seeking parishioners would seem to have been deeply contradictory towards those who did not belong by birth or marriage in their parish. In some cases they would readily unite against outsiders if they invaded and despoiled their property, but would also often grudgingly tolerate their existence as inmates in their barns and outhouses for so long as they could pay their way.

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<sup>65</sup> H. Falvey and S. Hindle (eds) *"This Little Commonwealth": Layston Parish Memorandum Book 1607- c.1650 and 1704- c.1747* (Hertford: Hertfordshire Record Society, 2003), xxxii.

<sup>66</sup> HALS DP6/8/1 Ardeley Vestry Minutes 1707-82.

Ardeley was not the only parish which displayed these irreconcilable drives to make a profit and yet simultaneously conserve the status quo. From the court records it can be noted that, although there were no indictments for taking inmates in the Elizabethan and Jacobean Assizes, throughout the remaining years of the seventeenth century at least 64 Hertfordshire parishes including Ardeley and Layston<sup>67</sup> contained parishioners who were prepared to undermine the provisions of the *Erection of Cottages Act* 1589 (31 Elizabeth 1 c. 8) and faced presentment and fines at Hertford Quarter Sessions.

As Steve Hindle has found,<sup>68</sup> appreciable numbers of small landowners would also purposefully convert their existing property to temporarily accommodate foreigners risking the fine of 10s. per month per inmate imposed by Clause VI of the *Erection of Cottages Act* 1589 which directed that 'there shall not be any inmate or more families or households than one dwelling...in any one cottage' and 'no cottage was to be erected without 4 acres of freehold land attached to it'. Sometimes this tacit toleration abruptly ceased under the strain of increasing numbers of incomers competing for vital resources such as firewood and access to water and violent brawls broke out amongst both men and women resulting in growing numbers of sessions' presentments for assault.

Early modern Hertfordshire was not an orderly society from the evidence of Hertford Quarter Sessions court cases. This may not have been the situation in all Hertfordshire parishes, and a great deal more research is necessary to discover how widespread it was, but throughout the seventeenth century parishioners from at

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<sup>67</sup> *Hertford QS Rolls* 1581-1698; *Hertford Quarter Sessions Books* 1619-99. Inmates taken in at: Aldbury, Amwell; Anstey; Ardeley; Ashwell (2); Aston; Ayot St Lawrence; Barley; Berkhamsted (3); Bishop's Stortford; Braughing; Brickenden; Buntingford; Bushey; Caddington; Caldecote; Cheshunt (3); Clothall; Cottered (4); Datchworth (3); Eastwick; Flamstead; Great Gaddesden (2); Gilston; Great Horstead; Great Munden; Hatfield (3); Hemel Hempstead; Hertford All Saints; Hertford St John's; Hertingfordbury; Hitchin; Hoddesdon/Broxbourne; Hunsdon (3); Ippollitts; Kelshall; Kimpton; King's Langley; King's Walden (2); Layston; Little Hadham; Meesdon; Much Hadham (2); Newnham; North Mimms; Northchurch; Offley; Puckeridge; Royston; St Paul's Walden; Sandon; Sawbridgeworth (2); Shenley; Standon; Stevenage (2); Tewin (2); Therfield (3); Thundridge; Tring; Wadesmill; Ware; Watton-at-Stone; Welwyn; Weston; Wheathampstead (2).

<sup>68</sup> S. Hindle 'Exclusion Crises: Poverty, Migration and Parochial Responsibility in English Rural Communities, c.1560-1660' *Rural History* 7 1996, 125-49.

least 78 (59%) of the 132 ancient parishes were presented at Hertford Quarter Sessions<sup>69</sup> for regularly breaking the laws against erecting cottages and tenements that had been specifically designed to discourage casual incomers. It is possible that some of these may have been workmates, friends and relatives or even cheap labour employed for no wages except a roof over their heads and basic food, but not all of them. The number of cases can be traced growing strongly throughout the early decades of the seventeenth-century. There were no indictments under the 1589 act in the Elizabethan Assizes but there were several at the Jacobean Assizes for cottages erected at: Amwell; Hertford All Saints; Little Munden and Stevenage. This trickle then developed into a full flood throughout the first half of the seventeenth century with numerous cases presented at Hertford Quarter Sessions rising to a peak in the 1630s of 30 parishes (22.7% of the 132 Hertfordshire parishes) with many re-offending parishes.<sup>70</sup>

This figure is likely to have been higher if it included similar cases from the Liberty of St Albans Quarter Sessions which held jurisdiction over 24 parishes in the south and west of the county. However, these records have not survived until the period 1770 to 1840. Additionally, an unknown number of Hertford cases may not have reached court, but were instead informally discussed and discouraged in the parish vestries, as at Ardeley. It would appear that large numbers of Hertfordshire inhabitants were deliberately encouraging the flow of immigrants into their towns and villages in order to make money for themselves at the expense of the wider community. In Hertfordshire this practice seems to have developed and sometimes flourished throughout the seventeenth-century possibly because of the large

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<sup>69</sup> It would appear likely there were a number of similar presentations to the Liberty of St Albans Quarter Sessions from the twenty four parishes in the west of the county.

<sup>70</sup> *Hertford Quarter Sessions Rolls* 1581-1698; *Herts Quarter Sessions Books* 1619-99: Cottages erected or properties converted at: Albury, Ardeley; Ashwell (2); Aspenden (2); Aston; Baldock; Barkway; Bengoe; Benington; Berkhamsted (3); Bramfield; Buckland; Bushey; Bygrave; Cheshunt (3); Cottered (4); Datchworth (3); Essendon (4); Great Gaddesden (2); Great Wymondley; Harpenden (2); Hatfield (3); Hitchin; Hunsdon (3); Kelshall; Kimpton; King's Walden (2); Knebworth; Layston; Little Berkhamsted; Little Hadham; Little Munden (2); Much Hadham (2); North Mymms; Pirton; Puttenham; St Albans St Peters; Sacombe (2); Sandon; Sawbridgeworth (2); Stansted Abbot; Stevenage (2); Stocking Pelham; Studham; Tewin (2); Therfield (3); Watton-at-Stone; Welwyn; Wheathampstead (2); Wigginton (3).



numbers of transients passing through the county who might find temporary employment and could afford to pay rent.

In Hertford quarter sessions' records cottages are described as having been continued (in existence) in parishes for up to five years<sup>71</sup> which implies at least a degree of complaisance if not outright complicity by some parish vestries. These vestrymen were all laymen and appear to have managed the parishioner poor using the same methods they would have employed to direct their labourers and servants. They might also have profited from the migrant poor, or directly opposed the encouragement of them or ignored them. A *laissez-faire* attitude would explain why waves of presentments were made at quarter sessions with several for the same parish in one year and then nothing for several years as the composition and attitudes of vestries and chief inhabitants changed and the pressure on basic community resources became a more intrusively obvious problem. The underlying desire to protect the parish from overcrowding and the inevitable rise in quarter session court cases of hedge-breaking, disputes over access to pasture and water, the invasion of private property, break-ins, pilfering and assaults that arose from multiple occupation could be, in many parishes, only temporarily subordinated to the profit motive.

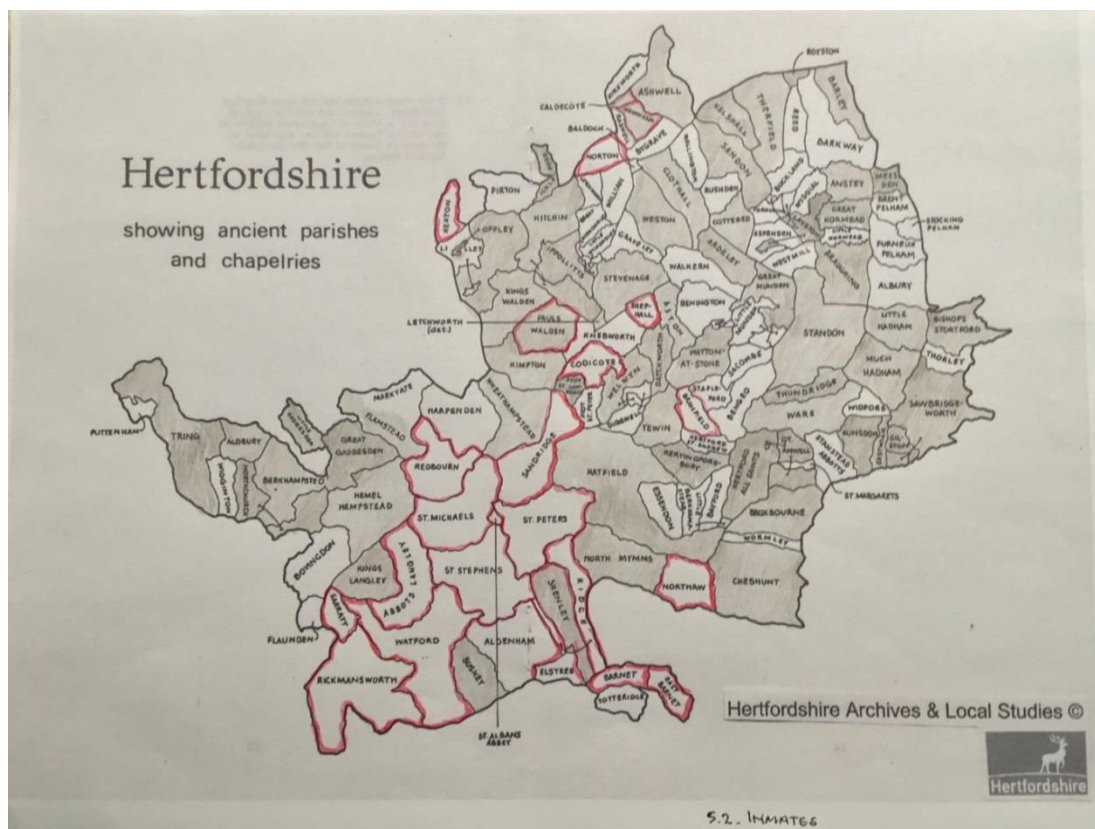
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<sup>71</sup> *Hertford Quarter Sessions Books 1622-3*, p. 24. Richard Austen a husbandman from Cottered was presented at Hertford Quarter Sessions for erecting a cottage without four acres of land and 'continuing' it for five years. He was also presented at the same time for converting part of his house and a kitchen into two cottages, both without four acres of land. Other cottages were 'continued' in many different parishes for up to three years.



Map 5.2 Parishes Presented at Hertford Quarter Sessions 1610-1700 for Parishioners Illegally Taking Inmates.

Note: Parishes over which St Albans Quarter Sessions held jurisdiction for which data is not available are outlined in red.



In addition to illegal buildings and conversions, from 1620 to 1700 people in 64 parishes (48.4%) were presented for taking foreigners as inmates into their own households thus breaking Clause VI of the 1589 *Erection of Cottages Act*. This practice was not confined to Hertfordshire since similar cases were also presented at Quarter Sessions during the seventeenth-century in other counties including neighbouring Essex,<sup>72</sup> and distant Lancashire<sup>73</sup> and Wiltshire.<sup>74</sup> There was therefore

<sup>72</sup> K. Wrightson, 'Two Concepts of Order: Justices, Constables and Jurymen in Seventeenth-Century England' in J. Brewer and J. Styles (eds) *An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Centuries* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1980), 21-46. Wrightson found 167 prosecutions in Essex for taking inmates in 1626-66.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Appendix 300-3. Wrightson found 188 Quarter Sessions prosecutions for taking inmates in three Lancashire hundreds.

<sup>74</sup> M. Ingram 'Communities and Courts: Law and Disorder in Early Seventeenth-Century

a floating population of incomers and inmates in many parishes which existed for varying amounts of time. Many parish officials seem to have been prepared to ignore their presence so these incomers could live tenuously but relatively peacefully in a parish to which they did not technically belong, sometimes for several weeks, months or possibly years if they could find sufficient casual employment to maintain themselves and their families. This was not a stratified, static community but a very fluid one in some parishes. To what extent some Hertfordshire parishioners were transforming their parishes into overcrowded slums is unclear, but the process was under way throughout the seventeenth century and was one of the factors that would facilitate the spread of epidemic illness in Hertfordshire during that century and into the next. If the need to belong to a parish was often disregarded in Hertfordshire how important was it to be deserving?

### Deserving or undeserving

The need to be considered deserving by parish officials and the community often appears to have been equally as vital as belonging to a parish. The life of such a virtuous man, Edward Shadbolt, from the Hertfordshire parish of Great Amwell was succinctly dissected and immortalised by his vicar, Thomas Hassall, in his 1635 parish register. Shadbolt plainly led a blameless but totally bleak existence and would have been considered an excellent role model by his betters.

Edward Shadbolt of Amwell, a labouring man of above threescore and ten yeares of age, allwayes a good labourer, no spender, without children, selldome eate good meate or dranke good drinke or wore good cloathes, yet lived and dyed very poore and miserable, buried Maye the xxijth, 1635.<sup>75</sup>

He was industrious, abstemious and frugal, all qualities that parish officials would highly prize in a poor person. In such a case the individual might be virtually

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Wiltshire' in J. Cockburn (ed.) *Crime in England 1550-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 110 -34. Ingram found 20 Wiltshire Quarter Sessions cases of unlawful cottages and inmates in the period 1615-24.

<sup>75</sup> S. Doree (ed.) *The Parish Register and Tithing Book of Thomas Hassall of Amwell [1573-1657]* (Hertford: Hertfordshire Record Society 1989), 126.

self-supporting, or need only enough relief for the barest subsistence before they succumbed after a life of unremitting privation.

The poor who sought to be classified as deserving but were only considered for minimal and frequently temporary assistance, unless they were very sick or infirm, were obliged to constantly display suitable deference and painfulness (conscientiousness) to their betters. They also had to belong to the parish, through birth and/or marriage or to be useful to it if they did not. They and their families had to be regular church attenders at the parish church unless bad weather or ill-health made attendance impossible or risk being presented at court for non-attendance. Their children must be baptised and sent to catechism classes, to be further indoctrinated in obedience. In the early years of the eighteenth century this is evident in the Lincoln episcopal visitations of Bishop Wake which regularly questioned its Hertfordshire incumbents about the teaching of the catechism in their parishes:

Do your Parishioners duly send their Children and Servants, who have not learnt their catechism, to be instructed by You? Do they learn any other Catechism, for their better Understanding of that of the Church? What Catechism do they learn for that Purpose?<sup>76</sup>

In contrast, an undeserving poor individual would probably have been permanently denied relief in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, once they had been categorised by officials as such, even if they could prove that they belonged to the parish. This kind of person usually had acquired a bad reputation through disorderly and disruptive behaviour; idleness, drunkenness, gambling, failure to regularly attend church services etc. They would be the object of long-term observation and general condemnation by their neighbours and community and could find themselves with a court presentation if they offended parish worthies too blatantly.

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<sup>76</sup> J. Broad (ed.) *Bishop Wake's Summary of Visitation Returns from the Diocese of Lincoln 1706-15 Part 2: Outside Lincolnshire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). [this summary excludes south Hertfordshire parishes which belonged to the diocese of London]. Bishop Wake appears to have been an innovator in producing a very detailed questionnaire and it resulted in a wide-ranging collection of responses.

To what extent Hertfordshire parishes operated a strict moral policy is unclear and would have varied with the vestry members' own views on the importance of godliness and the strength of their religious beliefs. Some vestrymen may even have been strict Calvinists with an unshakeable belief in predestination.<sup>77</sup> Hertfordshire's enthusiasm for building houses of correction may indicate a strong desire to punish wrongdoers, but would parochial officers have denied destitute parishioners' relief particularly if they were elderly and infirm even if they had previously or still led ungodly lives? Steve Hindle observed that Michael Dalton insisted in the 1643 edition of *The Country Justice* that 'charity wills us in cases of manifest extremity' that even the delinquent should not be left to starve'[citing Henry VII c..2 1495].<sup>78</sup> He described Dalton as 'the most influential judicial commentator on the Elizabethan poor laws',<sup>79</sup> so it would seem likely that at least some Hertfordshire officials and members of the judiciary would have used his book as a guide in such cases.

Those considered undeserving generally do not appear in vestry or overseers' records, except when they had been judicially punished or named in vestry meetings for misdemeanours, such as not attending church regularly themselves or not sending their children. Some disorderly individuals also frequented alehouses and/or gambled as described in this Hertfordshire example by Marjorie McIntosh:

A violent incident in Hoddesdon in 1590 began when the constables attempted to arrest two very poor local men who were, as usual, engaged in a card game for money; by their gaming they had 'played away all that ever they had, to the great impoverishing of their wives and children'. One of the players was described as 'an alehouse haunter and often times overtaken with drink will beat his wife, to the great disquiet of his honest neighbours.'<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> God had already decided who would be 'saved' and who would not.

<sup>78</sup> Hindle 'Civility, Honesty', 40.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>80</sup> HALS HAT/SR/2 182. Quoted by McIntosh *Controlling Misbehaviour*, 112.

Would such notorious undeserving members of the parish have attempted to apply for relief however great their need or might they have persuaded a better regarded friend or relative to informally sound out the likely parish attitude towards them? It is not possible to know how many Hertfordshire undeserving were marginalised because, like the incomers and inmates, they were effectively rendered invisible by not being recorded in the parish relief listings or as recipients of local charities. Steve Hindle describes them as the ‘penumbral’ poor who needed but never applied for support.<sup>81</sup> However, officials’ attitudes appear to have gradually softened from the unforgiving certainties of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and by the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Steven King has found that the wide range of parishes he researched ‘rarely maintained a consistent exclusionary stance’.<sup>82</sup>

In Hertfordshire some traditionally-minded vestries may have adopted such an attitude but others pragmatically began to outsource the practical problems of maintaining the poor to paid contractors who managed the county’s first urban workhouses from the 1720s onwards. The 1723 *Workhouse Test or Knatchbull Act*<sup>83</sup> stimulated the development of workhouses in Hertfordshire and fear of the workhouse appears to have employed as a deterrent to the poor long before the 1834 Poor Law Act. One example occurred at Hitchin which sent this anonymous report on their workhouse to the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) in 1724: ‘already we find our Poors’ Rate much lessen’d, and few common Beggars at our Doors; but really at present, those that have been in, get out as soon as they can, and few others care to enter...’<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Hindle *On the Parish?*, 10.

<sup>82</sup> S. King *Writing the Lives of the English Poor 1750s-1830s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019), 170.

<sup>83</sup> *An Act for Amending the Laws relating to the Settlement, Imployment and Relief of the Poor 1723* (9 George I c.7). Also known as the *Workhouse Test or Knatchbull Act*. Hertfordshire had already established workhouses at Hoddesdon (1703, although this was also listed as a House of Correction), St Albans Abbey (1720) and Hatfield (1722).

<sup>84</sup> *An Account of Several Work-Houses for Employing and Maintaining the Poor... The Second Edition very much Enlarged 1732* (S.P.C..K.) (London: Joseph Downing, 1732), 63-73, listed 71 Hertfordshire Workhouses.

The anonymous Stevenage reporter in 1729 stated that the town had also found benefits when it established a workhouse:

They therefore hired a convenient House, which they furnish'd with all Sorts of necessary Goods, and then admitted as many into it, as were truly necessitous from Age or Accidents but as from the first it was called a Workhouse, many who before had feign'd Necessity, and others who were frightened with the Thoughts of Work, chose rather to quit all pretensions to a Maintenance, than run the Risque of a strict Examination, or the Hazard of being industriously employ'd.<sup>85</sup>

St Albans was similarly enthusiastic about its workhouse: 'Many of our People, who before chiefly depended on what they could get weekly or monthly, by teezing the Overseers of the Poor, now buckle to Labour'.<sup>86</sup> Enthusiasm for workhouses spread throughout the county and by the time of the Gilbert Report in 1777 Hertfordshire responded that more than 60 workhouses had been established.<sup>87</sup> Those who made these reports and corresponded with the S.P.C.K. were members of the better sort who now held the power in the community and would decide who was deserving and amongst them who got any help and how much. If the vestry were going to invest parish money in an individual they wanted a sound investment, however small the amount given.

Individual worthies might still provide more generous charity to favoured poor such as aged and infirm former servants but this was now a private transaction. Many of the Hertfordshire middling class preferred to make large public donations to their community and immortalise themselves by establishing almshouses and/or providing land or dwellings to be rented out for the benefit of the poor. They readily bequeathed their money and names to annual doles, bread distributions and gifts of clothing to the 'deserving' poor selected by their trustees.<sup>88</sup> In some parishes the same names are regularly included in these

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<sup>85</sup> *An Account of Several Work-Houses 1725*, 71.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Fourteenth Parliament of Great Britain: Third Session* (31 October 1776-6 June 1777). *Report from the Committee Appointed to Inspect and Consider the Returns made by the Overseers of the Poor, in Pursuance of Act of last Session: Together with Abstracts of the said Returns. Reported by Thomas Gilbert Esq. 15th May 1777.*

<sup>88</sup> *Fideler Social Welfare; Hindle, On the Parish?; J.Poynter Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795-1834* (London: Routledge, 1969).

parochial charity listings, denoting an inner circle of beneficiaries, sometimes replicated for decades, as here in Chipping Barnet where the seventeenth century recipients of the Physic Well Charity 1656/57 and the Fines from Conventicles and Unlawful Meetings 1682 (donated by local Justices of the Peace to the deserving poor) record a limited range of families repeatedly receiving the largest payments:

Richard Eason Given 5s. from Well alms for poor Vestry 1 Feb. 1657  
[father?]  
James Vincent Given 5s. from Well alms for poor Vestry 1 Feb. 1657  
James Vincent Given 3s. from Well alms for poor Vestry 1 Dec. 1657  
Mary Jeffrey Given 19s. 4d. from fines 27 March 1682 [was this comparatively large sum payment for her rent?]  
Goody Eason Given 2 shifts 5s. 1d. from fines 27 March 1682.  
[wife/mother?]  
Richard Eason Given 2s. 6d. from fines + 1s. 27 March; 12 April 1682 [son?]  
Widdow Hale Given 4s. from fines + 1s. + 1s 2 Feb.; 27 March; 12 April 1682  
Old Vincent [James?] Given 1s. from fines 2 Feb. 1682  
Old Vinmant Given 1s. 6d. from fines + 1s. 6d. 27 March; 12 April 1682  
John Vinmant Given 1s. from fines + 1s. 27 March; 12 April 1682  
Widdow Vinmant Given 1s. from fines + 1s. 27 March; 12 April 1682.<sup>89</sup>

Those listed were presumably considered by the Chipping Barnet vestrymen to be amongst the most deserving families in the parish. During this period in Hertfordshire the identification of deserving gradually seems to have come to depend more on the individual person's conformist behaviour and reputation, rather than merely on their accepted claim to belong to the parish, since no outsider would usually be seen as deserving of more than the most casual help unless injured or seriously ill. Steve Hindle has examined poor relief in Holland Fen, Lincolnshire, and found that 'the politics of the poor rate implied the exclusion of poor strangers in the interests of relieving the ancient settled poor'.<sup>90</sup> Another factor, the perceived usefulness of the poor to the parish seems to have increased in importance possibly influenced by the utilitarian ideas of mercantilism which saw the laborious poor as living tools or, in the increasingly frequent and depersonalising term, hands, existing solely to labour. If a man or woman was known to be a hard and conscientious worker or possessed a particular skill, for

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<sup>89</sup> HALS DP15 5/1 Chipping Barnet Churchwardens Accounts 1646-1700.

<sup>90</sup> S. Hindle 'Power, Poor Relief and Social Relations in Holland Fen, c.1600-1800' *Historical Journal* 41 (1998), 67-96.



example as an herbalist or a bonesetter or could teach a craft, such as spinning or lace-making, it appears that they were more likely to receive better treatment. When they were, if only distantly, related to a member of the vestry or their friends they might also hope to be favoured although, sometimes their relative did not want to recognise his humble origins and family members.

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to examine how the attitudes and motivations of some Hertfordshire parish officials' might have affected their management of both their poor parishioners and also casual incomers. The findings demonstrate that Hertfordshire was more complex than the binary communities containing those poor who belonged and those who did not, generally portrayed in the secondary literature of historians such as Paul Slack and Keith Snell.<sup>91</sup> As the large number of Hertford quarter sessions presentments reveal, in many parishes, belonging or not belonging was less important than even a short-term ability to pay rent and provide opportunities for some opportunistic parishioners' profit-making.

While it is probable that at least some landlords were converting or subdividing their dwellings and outhouses to take in friends, relatives or even homeless neighbours it would seem unlikely that entire tenements and dwelling houses were erected for this purpose. Parishioners in a wide range of Hertfordshire parishes both urban and rural deliberately broke the *Act Against the Erecting and Maintaining of Cottages* 1589 (31 Elizabeth c. 8) by illegally providing habitations: cottages, outhouses and tenements which were then tenanted by outsiders from other parishes, counties or London. These dwellings were erected by people both in their own home parishes or, sometimes, in other Hertfordshire parishes where they held land. A large number of Hertfordshire parishioners also lodged strangers in their homes as inmates, again breaking the 1589 law.

These actions created a floating population of incomers and inmates in many parishes which existed for varying amounts of time and appears to have been

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<sup>91</sup> Slack *Poverty and Policy*, 23; Snell *Parish and Belonging*.



tolerated, sometimes for several years, so long as there was no pressure from the vestry, judiciary and powerful landowners to evict them. This category of temporary parishioners has yet to be fully explored in Hertfordshire. Many parish officials seem to have been prepared to ignore their presence so normally unwelcome foreigners could live relatively peacefully in a parish to which they did not, technically, belong.

However, Hertfordshire parishes did not generally adopt such a flexible and tolerant attitude to their own unprofitable parishioner poor neither did the officials studied apparently aim to manage their parishes as a collection of little welfare republics as both Steve Hindle<sup>92</sup> and Joan Lane<sup>93</sup> observed in Warwickshire. On the contrary, in some of the more profit-focused parishes Hertfordshire vestrymen and their friends appear to have been primarily concerned with their own welfare not that of the poor. As only 78 (59%) of the total 132 Hertfordshire parishes have been studied here, it is possible that some of the parishes researched may have been atypical in their parsimony or that Warwickshire may have had a series of overly generous parish vestries.

The general management strategy in the Hertfordshire parishes studied appears to have been to employ those able-bodied parishioner poor who could work for as low wages as possible and to frugally maintain some of those who were incapable of keeping themselves, the recognised impotent, at the most economical cost to the parish. The welfare of the individual was subordinated throughout to the overriding compulsion to keep the poor rates down since it was the middling sort who benefitted from this tight control through paying lower rates. Parish officials were usually ratepayers themselves and needed to constantly demonstrate to their peers that they were not wasting money on useless poor.

What proportion of poor actually received some grudging assistance in a given parish as against those who were effectively excluded or did not even attempt

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<sup>92</sup> S. Hindle 'Hierarchy and Community in the Elizabethan Parish: the Swallowfield articles of 1596' *Historical Journal* 42 (1999), 835-51.

<sup>93</sup> J. Lane *A Social History of Medicine: Health, Healing and Disease in England, 1750-1950* (London: Routledge, 2001), 54.

to apply is virtually impossible to ascertain because these people did not officially exist in the poor law parish records. They might only appear in the court records as indicted criminals, poachers, petty thieves etc. and both men and women accused frequently claimed to have been driven to opportunistic crime by destitution and the need to feed their families.

Nonetheless, it cannot be claimed that all Hertfordshire poor consistently suffered grindingly harsh conditions throughout their lives. Vestries and chief parishioners were capable of acts of unpredictable generosity towards the sick, the old and the widowed provided that they were parishioners or if the vestrymen felt some familial or other obligation to them. If they did not belong and became a liability they were more likely to be returned to their home parishes unless they were incapable of travel through sickness or old age when minimal relief was sought from their home parish to maintain them. The following chapter will examine the management' of the sick and impotent poor and focuses mostly on eighteenth-century male breadwinners for whom the sources are most informative.

## Chapter Six: Managing the Sick Poor

### Context

This chapter will focus on how the new attitudes to poverty outlined in the last chapter might have affected a large group of the notionally deserving Hertfordshire poor, those who were sick and injured and who needed to be managed by each parish under the poor law system. The chapter first discusses how historians have researched and written about the sick poor and the themes covered in the literature. It then considers the medical problems of the in-parish poor patient, particularly the male breadwinner, about whom there is most source material on the illnesses and injuries suffered but also those of women and children. The third section examines how the sick and injured in-parish poor were generally medically treated in their home parishes.<sup>1</sup> The fourth is concerned with the negotiations necessary when the patient needed to apply for medical relief from their home parish when living and working away from it.<sup>2</sup> Finally the conclusion discusses what can be learnt about the sick poor and medical relief from Hertfordshire findings in the context of wider historiographical debate.

It appears that parish officials' attitudes to the sick varied throughout the county as did their general attitudes to the poor; some vestrymen were harsher than others and if they were influential their policies might have prevailed.<sup>3</sup> In some parishes the in-parish sick poor seem to have been regarded as a parochial problem

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<sup>1</sup> The following chapter Parish Officials and Medical Practitioners will discuss the range of practitioners employed to treat the sick poor.

<sup>2</sup> Contact for assistance within the home parish would probably have been made by sending a verbal message to the overseer of the poor through a member of the family, neighbour, or friend.

<sup>3</sup> The importance of regional variation has been recently explored by S. King *Sickness, Medical Welfare and the English Poor 1750-1834* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018) and specifically for rural Oxfordshire by J. Langton, 'The Geography of Poor Relief in Rural Oxfordshire 1775-1832' in P. Jones and S. King (eds) *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2015), 193-234. M. Lyle earlier focused on regional variation in the treatment of bastards in 'Regionality in the late Old Poor Law: The treatment of chargeable bastards from Rural Queries' *Agricultural History Review* 53 (2013), 141-57.

to be tidied away to a hospital or, later, the workhouse, whereas in other places they would receive care and treatment in their own homes. Officials in some parishes were anxious to obtain treatment for their sick and injured, primarily to restore them to the workforce and/or enable them to maintain their families to some extent and would spend quite 'generously' in order to achieve this objective.

### Thinking and writing about the sick poor

The earliest writers who researched medical relief, Dorothy Marshall<sup>4</sup> and Sidney and Beatrice Webb<sup>5</sup> tended to regard the Old Poor Law as a monolithic system and medical relief as merely one facet of its workings. Marshall, although less politically biased in her research than the Webbs,<sup>6</sup> negatively equated the use of medical contracts solely with farming out the poor to the lowest bidder, and thus generally providing inadequate services.<sup>7</sup> This would seem to be too broad an approach for a complicated topic. Recent historians, from the 1980s onwards, many focussing on medical relief from below, have mainly researched two topics: the identifiable patient groups of sick poor who received medical relief, and its place in their makeshift economies, and those who provided medical services to them. In the latter case these included both the practitioners, lay or medically trained and the, mainly parish-appointed, nurses and midwives.

Amongst patient groups the treatment of the aged has been fairly thoroughly researched, but for only some towns and counties and not including Hertfordshire. In her 1988 thesis Mary Barker-Read studied the elderly in five east Kent parishes from 1662 to 1797.<sup>8</sup> Her work considerably predated the studies of

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<sup>4</sup> D. Marshall *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Social and Administrative History* (New York: Kelley, 1926).

<sup>5</sup> S. and B. Webb *English Local Government: English Poor Law History: Part 1. The Old Poor Law* (London: Longman, 1927).

<sup>6</sup> A. Kidd 'Historians or Polemicists? How the Webbs Wrote Their History of the English Poor Laws' *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. XL (1987), 400-17. Alan Kidd demonstrated in his study of their contemporary background, that the Webbs were primarily politically motivated and wanted to promote a 'modern' national approach to welfare, sweeping away antiquated and inefficient systems.

<sup>7</sup> Marshall *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century*.

<sup>8</sup> M. Barker-Read 'The Treatment of the Aged Poor in Five Selected West Kent Parishes from Settlement to Speenhamland (1662-1797)' unpublished PhD thesis Open University, 1989.

Lynn Botelho<sup>9</sup> on Suffolk and Susanna Ottaway<sup>10</sup> on Dorset and Essex both published in 2004. Ottaway found that the [eighteenth-century] parish's provision of medical care [to old people] was vital to their survival. Botelho who examined an earlier period 1500 to 1700 and was concerned primarily with how the elderly survived in two Suffolk villages traced the sometimes high costs of providing medical relief.<sup>11</sup>

Women patients, as a group, have received comparatively little detailed attention until recently; although Eric Thomas<sup>12</sup> included some case studies of women as did Joan Lane<sup>13</sup> and Irvine Loudon.<sup>14</sup> These studies were all written from the practitioners' point of view, and none of these writers sought to examine the female patients' experiences of sickness. The most recent work has concentrated on patients from all levels of female society including the poor. Wendy Churchill,<sup>15</sup> seeking to 'obtain a clearer understanding of female illness and medicine during this period' (1590-1740) examined both doctors' casebooks and patients' writings. She found that there was no evidence to indicate that either the health or the medical care of females was distinctly disadvantaged by the actions of male practitioners'. Earlier historiography had portrayed females as suffering at the hands of male practitioners who did not understand them or their physiology except as inferior versions of males. Another recent writer, Olivia Weisser, following in the steps of Dorothy and Roy Porter<sup>16</sup> investigated patients' experience but also examined the intertwined themes of gender and belief to discover 'how gender determined

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<sup>9</sup> L. Botelho *Old Age and the English Poor Law, 1500-1700* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> S. Ottaway *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Lynn Botelho noted how these could escalate with just one complicated case, as had Barker-Read.

<sup>12</sup> E. Thomas 'The Old Poor Law and Medicine' *Medical History*, 24 (1980), 1-19.

<sup>13</sup> J. Lane 'Eighteenth-Century Medical Practice: A Case Study of Bradford Wilmer, Surgeon of Coventry, 1737-1813' *Bulletin of the Society for the Social History of Medicine* 3 (1990), 369-86.

<sup>14</sup> I. Loudon 'The Nature of Provincial Medical Practice in Eighteenth-Century England' *Medical History* 29 (1985), 1-32.

<sup>15</sup> W. Churchill *Female Patients in Early Modern Britain: Gender, Diagnosis and Treatment* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> D. and R. Porter *Patients Progress: Doctors and Doctoring in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

perceptions and experiences of illness in seventeenth and eighteenth-century England'. She found that the poor, of both sexes when petitioning for relief focused on providential 'accidents and misfortunes beyond their control' and were concerned to emphasise 'the material toll of illness' and the sacrifices of possessions which had to be made to meet loss of income and medical costs.<sup>17</sup>

In another recent study Hannah Newton noted that the experiences and treatment of early modern sick children have been even more neglected than that of women.<sup>18</sup> She found that poor mothers, far from feeling relieved at the loss of another mouth to feed 'may have been deeply mentally disturbed by the deaths of children'. In addition, that doctors recognised child patients as a separate category and prescribed for them accordingly not merely regarding them as miniature adults or leaving them to the domestic medicine of their mothers and grandmothers as had been previously believed by historians. She also found that 'few sources survive which provide detailed, qualitative evidence of the illnesses and medicines of the poorer sectors'. This is also true for female patients outside of direct petitioning which was usually mediated by a specialist legalistic petition writer. The problems and experiences of perhaps the most neglected group, the disabled poor have been recently discussed by David Turner who found that in the eighteenth century 'the size of the population of disabled paupers is impossible to determine, because not only are records incomplete, but also the fluctuating nature of impairment makes enumeration impossible'.<sup>19</sup>

This wide-ranging literature has been augmented by published collections of pauper letters including: Thomas Sokoll's annotated collection of around 750 Essex pauper letters from 1731-1837;<sup>20</sup> and James Taylor's letters from Kirby Lonsdale

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<sup>17</sup> O. Weisser *Ill Composed: Sickness, Gender and Belief in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> H. Newton *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> D. Turner *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> T. Sokoll *Essex Pauper Letters 1731-1837* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

1809-1836.<sup>21</sup> Most recently a collection of eighteenth century pauper narratives has been published that contains a wide range of correspondence from Berkshire, Lancashire and Northamptonshire sick and elderly poor soliciting assistance from their overseers, and also inter-parish letters between overseers and others acting as intermediaries.<sup>22</sup> Steven King has used material from 12,904 pauper letters from every English county to explore the welfare experiences of the sick poor and their interactions with poor law officials from 1750 through to the introduction of the New Poor Law in 1834.<sup>23</sup> These letters together with bills and overseers' correspondence from 117 core communities from eight English counties and 146 from Berkshire, Norfolk, Wiltshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Lancashire and West Yorkshire form by far the most comprehensive study to date. King traced the development in importance of the sick poor as they became the most important clients of the Old Poor Law during this period with ever-increasing amounts being expended on their needs.

As all poor law historians have discovered, the health problems of the poor are a difficult topic to explore. As with the previous chapter exploring Hertfordshire attitudes it is not surprising that until very recently<sup>24</sup> Hertfordshire medical relief has not been studied in any great detail, even though Hertfordshire doctors, particularly in the south of the county, regularly sent patients to London hospitals and madhouses.<sup>25</sup> Many Hertfordshire parishioners appear to have sought

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<sup>21</sup> J. Taylor 'Voices in the Crowd: The Kirkby Lonsdale Township Letters, 1809-36' in T. Hitchcock, P. King, and P. Sharpe (eds) *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1997), 109-26.

<sup>22</sup> S. King, T. Nutt and A. Tomkins (eds) *Narratives of the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Britain Vol 1. Voices of the Poor: Poor Law Depositions and Letters* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> King, *Sickness, Medical Welfare*.

<sup>24</sup> S. King and G. Gear (eds) *A Caring County: Social Welfare in Hertfordshire from 1600* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Hertfordshire patients were sent to London medical institutions including: Bedlam; St Bart's; St Luke's; Westminster Infirmary; Hoxton private madhouses etc. Some examples are as follows: W. Le Hardy (comp.) *Hertfordshire County Records: Notes and Extracts from the Sessions Rolls 1581 to 1698*. pp.130, 696:

1659 'Order at Quarter Sessions, made on the petition of Sarah Wood, of Stanstead Abbot, that the Clerk of the Peace attend the Governors of the Hospital of Bethlem at London, and represent it as the request of the justices, that they be pleased to take Thomas Wood, a lunatic, the husband of the petitioner, under their care'.

employment in the metropolis and some became sick or were injured in London institutions. Within Hertfordshire local interest has focused on contemporary celebrity practitioners.<sup>26</sup> Patients, unless recorded in local medical studies, have not been researched in any detail. The particular afflictions and problems of poor patients are barely noted at all unless they subsequently appear in the records of the London hospitals and madhouses where they were treated. This chapter aims to position Hertfordshire on the map of early modern medical care provided for the poor and to unravel and understand the problems affecting the sick and injured poor within a number of its parishes. Poor people were not generally sent away when they became sick or injured unless they suffered from violent mental disorders which threatened the order and safety of their community. The prevalent parish policy towards the sick would appear to have been dictated primarily by cost considerations. They usually received treatment in the parish from local or peripatetic practitioners so it is necessary to discover what these medical men thought to be wrong with them and why they received the treatments that they were given.

### Medical problems of the poor

The health problems of some groups of poor, particularly women and children, are difficult to trace since comparatively few of them appear in medical bills and overseers' accounts. There must have been many sick who remained completely

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HALS DP 108/8/1 Thorley Vestry minutes, 1714-96, printed table of 1749 with cost of bedding and clothing for patients in Bethlem inserted at 1758, upon the admission of a parishioner to that hospital.

HALS DP 87/18/2 Royston Misc. Correspondence files 1769-1809, 10 March 1799, William Daniel/s Royston man diagnosed as insane. Host parish Bromley vestry clerk's letter informed Royston vestry clerk about admission procedures to Bethlem for Daniel/s which required a Royston official to attend.

HALS DP 90/18/1 Overseers Correspondence St Albans: Abbey 1740-1815: Several bills and letters from E. Burrows [proprietor of a madhouse at Hoxton, Middlesex], dated November 20 1807, January 15 and 25 1808.

<sup>26</sup> These include the Hertford Dimsdale family and their leading role in smallpox inoculation and treatment both locally and in Catherine the Great's Russia and, at the other end of the medical spectrum, the originator of Godfrey's Cordial, a very popular opium-based nostrum whose inventor came from Hunsdon, a Hertfordshire parish. See Gladys Palmer, *Hunsdon Heritage: People and Places* (Hunsdon: Hunsdon Local History and Preservation Society, 1998).



hidden and they may well have self-medicated with traditional domestic/kitchen medicine. The few surviving medical bills<sup>27</sup> sent to overseers give some indication of the medical problems of those poor who sought treatment from a range of practitioners and specialists not only the medical men employed by the parish. These bills date from the eighteenth century. The earliest, from Baldock,<sup>28</sup> was signed by a Dr Bowe<sup>29</sup> who charged £1 19s 1d from July 1728 to February 1729 for treating a very small number of patients, one man, three women and two children with physic. He provided purges, juleps, cordials, an antiscorbutic powder (against scurvy), unguents and drops etc. He also bled one man for an unspecified medical problem. A slightly later unsigned Baldock bill for 1732<sup>30</sup> shows that the unnamed medic provided a comparatively expensive range of physic for an anonymous stranger described only as 'ye wooman att Dorrowthy Cowpers' who may have been a relative or a lodger or even a woman taken ill while travelling and hastily found accommodation. The bill was mostly concerned with her medicaments and contradicts the traditional idea that parish officials were only concerned to provide medical relief for their own parishioners. She appears to have had a bad leg and chest/breathing problems which may have prevented her from being moved and obliged Baldock to provide treatment for her.

By 1783 medical services in Cheshunt were provided by Dr Thomas Sanders whose half-year salary of £13 2s 6d was included within his bill.<sup>31</sup> This source enables changes in medical provision to the poor to be traced but, like his earlier counterparts in Baldock, he was also treating a very limited number of patients. The bill shows that Dr Sanders was also a man-midwife and charged £1 1s for attending a named parishioner in labour. He also inoculated ten children without charging. As Steven King noted 'smallpox remained a common problem for the poor' and as the disease was endemic in Hertfordshire so it would seem likely that this was a

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<sup>27</sup> It is likely that many of these bills were regarded as ephemeral and discarded once settled but there may be more of them and earlier examples included in the unclassified bundles of parish material.

<sup>28</sup> HALS DP12 18/1 Baldock Miscellaneous Papers 1729.

<sup>29</sup> Not listed in P. and R. Wallis, *Eighteenth Century Medics (Subscriptions, Licences, Apprenticeships)* (Newcastle: Project for Historical Bio-bibliography, 1988).

<sup>30</sup> HALS DP12 18/1 Baldock Miscellaneous Papers 1732.

<sup>31</sup> HALS DP29/18/22. Cheshunt Miscellaneous Bundle [not yet classified].

preventative measure and smallpox cases were occurring either in Cheshunt or its hinterland.<sup>32</sup> The doctor also provided a blister and a large range of medicines, mixtures, powders and draughts, for a Mrs Oram and her unspecified number of children. These do not appear to have been the standard purgatives, febrifuges (fever medicines) or emetics usually prescribed so it is unclear what medical problems had struck the family. Joan Lane noted similar kinds of medical problems in the Midlands counties she studied and that here a parish surgeon would attend the poor for 'a wide range of common complaints, such as ague,<sup>33</sup> consumption<sup>34</sup> and rheumatism' in addition to carrying out surgical procedures including amputations and treating fistulas and ulcers as did the Hertfordshire surgeons at this time.<sup>35</sup>

Medical bills were usually rather more informative, particularly about medicines and types of sickness, than the terse overseers' accounts, but the Little Gaddesden and Hemel Hempstead accounts discussed here were quite detailed. In 1697 Little Gaddesden paid a specialist nurse the very high fee of £5 for nursing one female smallpox<sup>36</sup> patient, Ann Wood, of unknown age. She then died apparently without infecting anyone else because no further cases were mentioned. Her burial fees also included a payment for bleeding, possibly as a last resort and carried out by the nurse since no practitioner was mentioned.<sup>37</sup> The following year a Widow Tudor was paid 5s for curing<sup>38</sup> James Groom's leg and a Widow Bulmer was paid considerably less, only 2s, for setting her own son's shoulder, age and name not

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<sup>32</sup> King *Sickness, Medical Welfare*, 42.

<sup>33</sup> W. Buchan in his *Domestic Medicine* (Dublin, Sleater: Whitestone & Chamberlain, 1781), 45 noted that agues were 'occasioned by the frequent vicissitudes of heat and cold, poor living, bad water, sitting or lying on the damp ground, evening dews, night air, etc. to which they [the 'labourious'] are frequently exposed.

<sup>34</sup> In Hertfordshire this was usually described as a 'wasting disease'.

<sup>35</sup> J. Lane *Social History of Medicine, 1750-1950* (London: Routledge, 2001), 47. She noted that fistulas and ulcers were expensive to treat costing several guineas.

<sup>36</sup> Smallpox was endemic in Hertfordshire and would develop into a full-scale epidemic in some part of the county every few years during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

<sup>37</sup> V. Bell *Little Gaddesden: the Story of an English Parish* (London: Faber, 1949), 81. Little Gaddesden appointed a surgeon in 1701 but appears to have relied on women practitioners at the end of the seventeenth-century and into the eighteenth.

<sup>38</sup> 'Curing' at this time was generally considered to mean at least partially alleviating the symptoms not effecting a complete cure of the problem.

given, so she must have had some expertise as a bonesetter. In 1735 another woman was providing medicine for an unspecified complaint and received 8s for it.

In eighteenth-century Hemel Hempstead treatment for a range of medical problems was paid for by the parish. An unnamed person was paid 6d for drawing a tooth in 1724 and another anonymous practitioner was paid 2s 3d for 'curing Sarah Walker of the Itch'.<sup>39</sup> In 1770 the parish gave 'Spufford' 1s towards 'curing his eyes', presumably a contribution towards the cost of being examined by a specialist eye-doctor or, more likely, buying a cheap remedy. James How was sent to the unnamed salt waters [for sea-bathing], possibly as a treatment for scrofula (surgical tuberculosis),<sup>40</sup> at a cost of £1 11s 8d in 1773 reflecting the interest in such treatments at the time.<sup>41</sup> By 1775 the parish was employing a medical practitioner since a Dr Hawkins was paid the large sum of £6 16s 6d for 'curing Austee's Boy's leg'. This fee included the cost of a 'steel machine' which was presumably involved in the treatment, but no mention of the leg having been amputated by this machine was made. Men appeared rarely in medical bills and overseers' accounts except when they suffered from a contagious disease as at Chipping Barnet in 1766: 'paid George Lawrence on account of the smallpox & his wife lying-in 10s'<sup>42</sup> or a medical problem requiring specialist treatment further discussed below.

Considerably more detailed accounts of the physical condition and health problems of working-age men in the second half of the eighteenth century were provided by the files of *Hertfordshire Militia Ballot Lists* 1758-86 [with gaps].<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Usually identified as the highly contagious skin disease 'scabies', which still exists today.

<sup>40</sup> Also known as King's Evil, a disease which produced swellings in the glands of the body, particularly the neck, and was a form of tuberculosis.

<sup>41</sup> H. Gauvin 'Sea Bathing in the Treatment of Surgical Tuberculosis' *British Medical Journal* 2 (1935), 1087-90.

<sup>42</sup> HALS DP15/12/2 Chipping Barnet Overseers' Accounts 1745-85. Bill dated Sept. 1766.

<sup>43</sup> *Hertfordshire Militia Ballot Lists 1758-86* (Hertford: Hertfordshire Family & Population History Society, 1999):

1766 – St Paul's Walden list, others missing.

1767 - All lists missing.

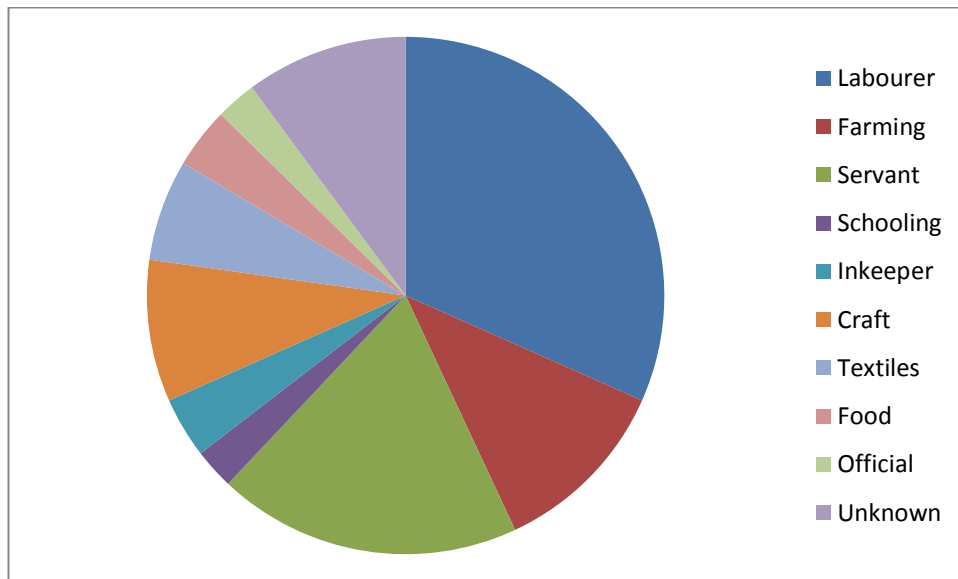
1770 - All lists missing.

1774 - All lists missing.

1776-7 - All lists missing.

1788-91 - All lists missing.

Graph 6.1 Listing of Occupations of Sick and Disabled from Hertfordshire Militia Ballot Lists 1758-86.



These provide a unique record of the most prevalent problems affecting labouring men between the ages of 18 and 45, many of which involved sight, hearing and mobility defects and would prevent them from undertaking military service. The emphasis was very strongly on these particular medical problems and disabilities usually recorded annually using simple laymen's terms by the parish constables. In Hertfordshire 227 men had foot or leg problems and 143 had hand and/or finger injuries. A total of 159 had become broken or ruptured presumably from muscular overstrain.<sup>44</sup> Joan Lane found that 'hernias [were] a common condition for the labourer and said to have afflicted between 10 and 14 per cent of the working population in 1786'.<sup>45</sup> Steven King noted that a Norfolk parish purchased a truss for a hernia patient as early as 1777.<sup>46</sup> Hertfordshire parishes were slower to adopt this new technology but eventually were apparently

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1795 - All lists missing.

1799-1800 - All lists missing.

Total lists missing - 13.

<sup>44</sup> The majority of these were labourers and agricultural servants but also others who had to lift heavy loads such as butchers, millers, smiths etc.

<sup>45</sup> Lane *Social History*, 52.

<sup>46</sup> King *Sickness, Medical Welfare*, 187.

convinced that they should provide trusses for patients.<sup>47</sup> A total of 80 cases were described by their constables as crippled or lame and had problems with fractures and dislocations which had mended badly and might lead to the man becoming crooked or deformed.

Comparatively few militia lists exist for other counties and they are much less detailed covering only a single year. Only two seem to have been published, one for Northamptonshire 1777<sup>48</sup> and another for Exeter 1803<sup>49</sup> and they give similar but very brief laymen's observations of sick and injured poor men many of whom were described as lame, rheumatic, rupture, bad leg, one eye almost dark, cripple and infirm and not fit for service.

Although it might have seemed relatively easy to avoid militia service by deceiving the medically-untrained parish constable as to one's physical fitness, only one case of such a malingerer appears to have been recorded in surviving Hertfordshire sources. This was only discovered at the time because the man boasted of his deception:

Samuel Pettiford of the Parish of Hatfield was drawn the 22nd August 1778 and pretending to be ill was refused as unfit and John Collier was drawn in his place who paid £10 for a substitute, as soon as he got home, he went immediately to work laughing at the Lieutenant and said that any person who would sham illness might always get off. Signed by Thomas Cooe and Thomas Ansell, Constables of Hatfield.

Comment by Lionel Lyde and Francis Searanke: [JPs]  
Mr. Rooke is desired to let the Lord Lieutenant know this circumstance it being a very bad example to the Parish and the neighbourhood and the man should be punished if the law admit it.<sup>50</sup>

Genuine disabling sickness and injuries would have required medical relief payments while the breadwinner was unable to work and support his family. This presented overseers with another financial dilemma as described further by Anne

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<sup>47</sup> Hernias also developed in women and children. The National Truss Society was formed in 1786, the Rupture Society in 1796.

<sup>48</sup> V. Hatley (ed.) *Northamptonshire Militia Lists 1777* (Northampton: Northamptonshire Record Society, 1973), 25, 39, 69, 149.

<sup>49</sup> W. Hoskins (ed.) *Exeter Militia List 1803* (London: Phillimore, 1972), 21, 47, 51, 65.

<sup>50</sup> *Hertfordshire Militia Ballot Lists Hatfield 1758–86* [with gaps].

Borsay. Should they pay the patient small sums of medical relief for a possibly indefinite period, for example if he had a progressive and incapacitating disease or send him to specialists for a possible cure which might remove the need for further support partially or entirely? While he was away they would still have to support his family if it was young and numerous and his wife was primarily occupied with caring for her children and incapable of much work. As Borsay notes, the 1738 *Bath General Infirmary Plan and Elevation* identified this situation as a common problem and argued that: 'Few parishes escaped those who 'by the loss of their limbs, are...a burden to themselves and their neighbours'. Yet most overseers preferred to provide an indefinite small allowance at home, unless the patient had a large, young family to support, and were unwilling or unable to pay for such poor cripples to stay privately at Bath 'long enough to receive a cure'.<sup>51</sup>

Labourers and servants in agriculture, who were usually young unmarried men but sometimes also women, regularly lost fingers, thumbs and arms working on the land in all weathers. Worn clumsy tools and unpredictable animals were dangerous and the countryside was not the healthful, bucolic paradise some medical writers claimed.<sup>52</sup> As Steven King noted from coronial records 'while domestic and work accidents killed prodigiously, they often left many more maimed and injured than died' and it would appear that there were numbers of such casualties recorded in almost every Hertfordshire parish.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Joan Lane noted a wide range of occupational injuries and diseases affecting industrial and building workers and male and female craftsmen in her book on apprenticeship.<sup>54</sup> The detailed militia list returns provide supporting evidence for these perspectives.

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<sup>51</sup> A. Borsay *Medicine and Charity in Georgian Bath: A Social History of the General Infirmary c. 1739-1830* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 212-3.

<sup>52</sup> William Buchan, a leading contemporary medical writer, asserted that: 'those who follow laborious employments are in general the most healthy of mankind' but he also noted, unlike many of his contemporaries, that 'Poverty not only occasions, but aggravates, many of the diseases of the laborious'. W. Buchan *Domestic Medicine*, 45.

<sup>53</sup> King *Sickness, Medical Welfare*, 40. Until the eighteenth century a single coroner served the whole of Hertfordshire and very few records have survived. One St Albans inquest is discussed below in the following chapter.

<sup>54</sup> J. Lane *Apprenticeship in England 1600-1914* (London: UCL Press, 1996), 43-59.

In Hertfordshire, comparatively few men appear to have suffered from mental problems. Recorded instances ranged from those designated as foolish and silly to lunatic and insane. Some of these individuals seem to have been cured or were certainly tolerated by fellow workers seen as suffering from a form of chronic illness often described as, 'out of his mind at times'. All were recorded as having an occupation so possibly because these people were still able to at least partially maintain themselves they were tolerated.<sup>55</sup> A later trend towards the institutionalisation of poor males and females with mental problems and deficiencies can be traced as developing in some, mainly urban, Hertfordshire parishes during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but the reasoning that lay behind it is unclear. Whatever problems mental or physical the sick poor suffered from the parish would be obliged to pay for the treatment of those who could not pay for their own support.

### In-parish sick poor

When medical relief was needed by parishioner poor patients like those discussed above the overseers might have negotiated directly with the male breadwinners of the patients' families or, if they were the patients, their families and intermediaries over payments and agreed verbally to pay for treatment and support. Consequently, there appear to have been no written records made of these agreements except when cases were briefly discussed at the parish vestry usually because of the potentially high costs involved. Sick and injured, lame and impotent poor people in Hertfordshire seem to have generally been valued by their parishes and quite large sums could be spent in curing them or treating their injuries as in this Chipping Barnet case: 'Mr Ehret the surgeon's bill for Henry Martin's leg £9 19s 6s'. The details of the case are somewhat uncertain, as this was the first and only mention of this practitioner and the use of a surgeon in Chipping Barnet's overseers' accounts. The fee was very high, apparently about double what would normally be charged for an amputation so it possibly represents prolonged treatment to avoid

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<sup>55</sup> Violent lunatics were sent to Bedlam by some parishes although others preferred to keep them 'securely' restrained, usually chained up as in the parish poorhouse at Barley.

amputation or to cure a very bad burn, scald, severe ulceration, breakage or other structural damage.<sup>56</sup>

However, there were parsimonious exceptions: in 1688 the only recorded example found to date was brought to Hertford Quarter Sessions: 'Recognizance for the appearance of John Canfield, shoemaker, one of the guardians of the poor of the parish of Ippolits, for refusing to relieve 'a sick poore man'.<sup>57</sup> In 1778 when a Wormley man, John Pallet, caught smallpox the parish distrained on his goods to pay for his medical costs, but he may have been considered 'undeserving' or, possibly, sufficiently well-off to pay.<sup>58</sup> Direct refusal to provide medical relief was comparatively rare as discussed further below but, as previously noted, there must have been an unknown population of Steve Hindle's penumbral poor<sup>59</sup> who never dared to risk applying because of their bad reputations in the community. Also, as will be further discussed, invisible illnesses, such as the wasting diseases, (consumption/phthisis) and internal cancers would have produced suspicion amongst overseers until the symptoms became obvious.

Considering all of the data on Hertfordshire that is available, poor patients in the parishes can be divided into three distinct groupings based on their employability: the first group consisted of infants and children not yet strong enough to be apprenticed or able to work outside the home and usually aged below seven or eight years. The age of first employment could be lower than this depending on the robustness and size of the child and probably also the need of the family to get them earning at least a few pence for the family budget by bird-scaring, stone-picking, weeding and/or running errands before the boys were apprenticed, usually to husbandry and the girls to housewifery.<sup>60</sup> These children

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<sup>56</sup> HALS DP15/12/2 Chipping Barnet Overseers' Accounts 1745-85, Bill 28 May 1776.

<sup>57</sup> *Hertford Quarter Sessions*, 1688 371 No. 50. His reasons for refusing were not recorded nor was the name of who presented him or the outcome of the case.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in D. Bushby and W. Le Hardy *Wormley in Hertfordshire* (London: Staples Press Ltd, 1954), 78.

<sup>59</sup> S. Hindle *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 10.

<sup>60</sup> Female apprentices are discussed in detail in chapter eight. See also K. Honeyman *Women, Gender and Industrialisation in England 1700-1870* (Basingstoke: Macmillan,



were usually left to domestic medicine when sick unless they required a bonesetter or surgery for accidents such as burns and scalds.

The second and largest group was formed of the employed labouring poor although in practice work, particularly on the land, was irregular being subject to seasonal conditions. The workforce consisted primarily of men with families supplemented by seasonally employed poor of both sexes, aged from about seven to seventy or even eighty plus. It would seem that work injuries were fairly frequent amongst this group since labouring on the land was a dangerous occupation and situations could rapidly escalate into life-threatening emergencies. In Gaddesden the diarist and farmer William Ellis described how a potentially lethal situation involving a dangerous cut to one of his workers had to be immediately treated by his quick-thinking, inventive or, possibly, knowledgeable workmate because there was no time to seek medical help: 'One of our Day-labourers, that was plathing (laying) a Hedge, happened to cut his Finger with a Bill, and was at a loss how to stop its bleeding, till another Labourer, working with him, took a Chew of Tobacco out of his Mouth, and by applying thereof stopt the bleeding at once'.<sup>61</sup>

The third cohort contained impotent poor of any age who were incapable of doing for themselves (maintaining themselves through work) due to extreme youth or age, incapacitating disability both physical and mental, chronic sickness, infirmity, senility or debility. Most of these rejects from the job market would still be employed in some way unless they were too young, totally disabled or plainly in their last illnesses. They were all ultimately candidates for the poorhouse/almshouse/house of maintenance or workhouse, wherever the parish were housing their impotent poor. This aspect of workhouse medical relief has not been explored in Hertfordshire, although there has been a growing body of recent work on workhouses from Tim Hitchcock onwards.<sup>62</sup> For these inmates it would

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2000); J. Humphries *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>61</sup> W. Ellis *The Country Housewife's Family Companion...* (London: 1750), 271-2.

<sup>62</sup> T. Hitchcock 'The English Workhouse: A Study in Institutional Poor Relief in Selected

appear that some parishes continued to take responsibility for their medical needs as here in an agreement made by Brickendon with the Hertford St John's Workhouse Master in 1760: 'But if any of our Poor in the workhouse should have the small Pox or any other infectious Distemper or if any of them should be sick they shall not be put out and we will be at the Charge of a Doctor, Apothecary or Surgeon who is to be employed by our Overseer of the Poor'.<sup>63</sup> At Bengoe in 1784 a less detailed agreement made with a workhouse contractor stipulated that 'The Overseers are to Pay the Doctor'.<sup>64</sup> It would seem likely that Hertfordshire vestrymen in general wanted to maintain some kind of control over expenditure on workhouse medical relief, as had the Tring vestry in 1731 which plainly saw itself in the role of gatekeeper to all medical treatment for the poor and explicitly spelled this out for both patients and practitioners:

...that noe person or persons shall goe to any Doctor or Surgeon without the Consent of the...Officers to charge the said parish with any bill or bills on any account whatsoever. And that no Doctor or Surgeon shall administer any Phisick or Medicine or Deliver any to any such person or persons as are not in the house [of Maintenance] without the approval of the said Officers.<sup>65</sup>

From these examples it can be seen that medical treatment was regarded by Bengoe and Tring vestries as substantial expenditure which needed to be rationed and controlled since it was open to abuse by both patients and medical practitioners. To what extent this was a common attitude in Hertfordshire vestries is unclear but these were laymen dealing with an area in which they had no specialist knowledge and it would seem likely that they would primarily seek to protect their parishes from over-expenditure and exploitation. Steven King argues that sickness relief was the most important component of poor relief but the Hertfordshire parishes studied do not all appear to have accepted it as the priority and seem to

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Counties, 1696-1750' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford 1985); J. Reinartz and L. Schwarz (eds) *Medicine and the Workhouse* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2013).

<sup>63</sup> HALS DP48/8/16-21 Brickendon Vestry Minutes 26 Dec.' 1760.

<sup>64</sup> HALS DP17/12/1 Bengoe Vestry Minutes 24 May 1784.

<sup>65</sup> HALS DP111/8/17 Tring Vestry Minutes 1682-1746 Transcriptions 27 April 1731 (No. 123).

have regarded it as merely one item of parish expenditure.<sup>66</sup> Whether they also noted that it was steadily increasing is unclear because they did not discuss it in vestry beyond considering individual case.

The northern Hertfordshire parish of Royston adopted a different but very comprehensive method of control by deciding to provide rooms in its workhouse for use as an infirmary in 1789: 'Order'd that at the Vestry meeting at Church it be taken into Consideration respecting the Building an Infirmary to the Workhouse.'<sup>67</sup> In 1790 the vestry inspected the workhouse and 'proposed that two new Rooms be Erected on the South End of the Workhouse for Bed Rooms that two Rooms at the North End of the House be kept entirely for Sick paupers'.<sup>68</sup> By the beginning of November the building work was complete and declared satisfactory. This decision, which does not seem to have been replicated in any other Hertfordshire parish, saved money on transporting the very sick to the nearest hospital, Addenbrookes, founded in 1766 at Cambridge. It also ensured that there were no more fees to pay and no monitoring of the medical relief of Royston patients by Addenbrookes' medics as here:

Cambr. 6 Feb. 1784

Sir

The Cambridge Officers have visited Ann Cliff, and reduced her allowance this week to four shillings. She was not well enough to appear at the Hospital, but her sister says she is much better, but only extremely weak. She certainly could not with safety be moved to Royston, while this severe weather continues. You may depend on it, that both Parish Officers and myself will attend to the Reduction of Expense as soon as can with safety be done.

I remain Sir your obed<sup>t</sup> huml Serv<sup>t</sup> Chas Collignon.<sup>69</sup>

since Royston's own rota of doctors would provide the medical services under the direct control of the vestrymen.<sup>70</sup> In Royston, the parish doctor was used in an

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<sup>66</sup> King *Sickness, Medical Welfare*.

<sup>67</sup> HALS DP87/8/2 Minutes of joint annual vestry and Poor Law Committee meetings for united parishes [in Herts and Cambs.] 1781-1798, 5 October 1789.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> HALS DP87/18/2 Royston Misc. Correspondence, Folder 1. A Ltr. From Camb about W<sup>w</sup> Cliff [Written on outside of letter]. Charles Collignon was Professor of Anatomy and Physician (1725-85) at Addenbrookes Hospital Out Patients department.

emergency when surgery or bonesetting were required or when sudden, debilitating fevers struck, but he does not appear to have been the first resort of the sick labourer. A man may well have wanted to avoid entanglement in the Royston poor law system and possible consignment of himself and his family to the workhouse where he would completely lose his independence, as for instance did others in lowland eastern England highlighted in King's recent work on the sick poor.<sup>71</sup>

Some poor and their dependants, however, received better treatment. According to a note in the Royston burial register by the curate, Edward Reynolds had been the Royston Parish Clerk for 'near 30 years' when his (?first) wife died in 1780.<sup>72</sup> In 1791 his continuing usefulness to the parish may have influenced the vestry to order him a carer for his sick (second?) wife since there was apparently no female relative available to look after her. However, by 12 January 1795 when he was also ill the Vestry was setting limits to its 'generosity' as here: 'Order'd that the Overseer Allow Ew<sup>d</sup> Reynolds what he thinks necessary /he being Ill and his Wife/not to exceed 10d Weekly'.<sup>73</sup> Seven years earlier, another sick woman, described as Henry Sanson's wife, also suffered from an unspecified and presumably untreatable or long-term 'illness'. Royston chose not to maintain her and she was ordered into hospital. The couple may have moved to Cambridge, so she could be admitted to Addenbrookes, and subsequently died there because neither she nor her husband appears in Royston burial records.<sup>74</sup>

Other women suffered fractures and dislocations which required the doctor's expertise. Of the four women who were each at different times treated for a broken arm,<sup>75</sup> a dislocated collar bone,<sup>76</sup> a fractured rib<sup>77</sup> and a badly bruised

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<sup>70</sup> Royston vestry's controlling relationship with these practitioners is further discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>71</sup> King *Sickness, Medical Welfare*, 257, 262.

<sup>72</sup> *Royston Burial Register 1678-1800* (Royston: Royston Historical Society, 1998) [unpaginated] entry 3561 for Elizabeth Reynolds wife of Edward. 18 Sept. 1780.

<sup>73</sup> HALS DP87/8/2 Minutes of Joint Annual Vestry and Poor Law Committee Meetings for United Parishes [in Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire] 1781-98, 12 Jan. 1795.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 21 July 1788.

<sup>75</sup> HALS DP87/18/ 22 Royston Overseers Bills & Vouchers 1782-1807. Mr [Richard] Crespin

head,<sup>78</sup> three were widows (Brown, Fordham and Hall). These patients seem to have received prompt treatment and may have been frail, under-nourished and/or elderly. In the case of Widow Brown the vestry minutes recorded that she had suffered from a fall and should be in the workhouse.<sup>79</sup> It was not recorded how Widow Hall had received her head injury but she may also have fallen or been struck by a heavy object while working. These episodes of everyday sickness and injury amongst the Hertfordshire poor were often complicated and time-consuming but manageable by parish officials. Royston may have been rather unusual in the survival of a, comparatively large number, of medical bills.<sup>80</sup> The parish's patients appear to have been passive and waited for their officials to decide what happened to them. There is no sense that they believed they were entitled to medical treatment or that the parish was obliged to provide it unless they were in an emergency situation such as a fall or other accident. This stands in distinction to the views of King, who has argued that medical care was often seen as a right both by officials and the poor and their families.<sup>81</sup>

In the other Hertfordshire parishes studied there is very little indication of the sick poor interacting directly with their officials unless they did so verbally or through family members. Only when they were away from the parish and compelled to do so would they contact it by post or find an intermediary to do this for them. They also needed to contact the officials of their host parish to obtain

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29-13-2. '4 March 1800 - Reducing fractured Arm, Lotions, Medicines, Bandages, Plaisters &c W Hill's Wife 10s. 6d.'

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 20 Aug. 1792. Daniel Crespins Bill Easter 1792-Easter 1793. 'Reducing Dislocated Collar Bone, Embrocations, Bandage Anne Brown 15s. 6d.'

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 23 Feb. 1796. 'Reducing fractured Ribb Bandages etc. Widow Brown 5s.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 22 May 1790. Opening a large contusion in her head [and] Dressings & Cure? Widow Hall £1 1s. 0d. (did not bleed her) (Contusion defined as bruise with damage to tissues under the skin).

<sup>79</sup> HALS DP87/8/2 *Minutes of Joint Annual Vestry and Poor Law Committee Meetings for United Parishes* [in Herts and Cambs.]. 3 Sept [1792] 'Order'd that Widow Brown be sent into the House as she has broke her Collar Bone which has been set about two Days'. (She does not appear to have gone because there is no record of a Widow Brown being buried from the workhouse).

<sup>80</sup> HALS DP87/18/8-35 Overseers' bills and vouchers 1782-1802 Thomas Nunn Bill 1785-6; Mathew Daniel Bill 1790-1; Thomas Nunn Bill 1794-5; Daniel Crespins Bill 1796-7; Thomas Nunn Bill 1797-8; Daniel Crespins Bills 1798-9; 1799-1800.

<sup>81</sup> King *Sickness, Medical Welfare*.

immediate assistance and these would then inform the home parish of the medical and nursing costs involved and the amount of maintenance required. This almost fearful attitude to officialdom was in stark contrast to the interactions of many of the Essex sick poor who at this time were regularly corresponding with their home parish officials and asserting their needs for medical relief as recorded in Thomas Sokoll's transcripts.<sup>82</sup> Hertfordshire out-parish sick only appear to have written, very deferentially, to their home parishes when in dire need and rarely more than once. Steven King has found a growing sense of entitlement to treatment in the large number of counties he researched and a belief that the home parish should provide medical relief for its sick poor.<sup>83</sup> This idea may have existed in some poor patients' mindsets, but was not openly expressed in any of the Hertfordshire parishes studied.

### Out-parish sick poor

An unknown number of Hertfordshire poor left their settlement parishes and sought temporary work at harvest-time in neighbouring counties or, as previously discussed in chapter two, more permanent situations and the opportunity to better themselves in London. Discovering what proportion of all Hertfordshire poor became out-parish poor is virtually impossible because many parishes did not keep records of who left and where they went except those parishes which archived apprenticeship indentures with brief details of the individual's first apprenticeship.<sup>84</sup> However, some larger Hertfordshire parishes did keep lists of foreigner incomers and, after the importance of settlement was recognised by a series of acts in the 1660s,<sup>85</sup> demanded and archived their settlement certificates.<sup>86</sup> It was only when an individual required relief that the name of the host parish appeared either in the inter-parish overseers' correspondence or the patient's letters detailing their

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<sup>82</sup> T. Sokoll *Essex Pauper Letters*.

<sup>83</sup> King *Sickness, Medical Welfare*.

<sup>84</sup> Apprenticeship indentures for girls will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

<sup>85</sup> *Poor Relief Act 1662* (14 Charles 2 c.12) [also known as the Settlement and Removal Act].

<sup>86</sup> HALS DP21/16/1-5 Bishop's Stortford: Settlement certificates, removal orders, examinations and related papers 1690-1876; HALS DP29/18/25-27: Cheshunt Miscellaneous unsorted bills, vouchers, settlement papers etc. 17th-19th century; HALS DP15/18 Chipping Barnet Miscellaneous settlement certificates, examinations [n.d.].

medical problems.<sup>87</sup>

How many Hertfordshire poor became sick or were injured and needed assistance from their settlement parish also cannot be known because not all would contact their officials and much of the correspondence appears to have been lost.<sup>88</sup> For example, Chipping Barnet, a large parish only eleven miles from London which was likely to have attracted out-parish poor and many of whose own parishioners would have left to find work in London and other parishes, only retained five letters asking for help and no examples of overseers' correspondence discussing medical relief.<sup>89</sup> As King has observed for Lancashire the administration and filing of payments made to out-parish poor was patchy at best and only certain payments were recorded.<sup>90</sup> It is unlikely that Hertfordshire records were any better managed or filed so large numbers may have been lost, misfiled or never included. Many sick poor may not have applied for assistance not knowing that they could do so or fearing that they lacked the writing skills to communicate their needs and failing to find a suitable intermediary to do this for them. Others may have had problems with their home parish officials or have been fugitives from the law and so had no desire to bring themselves to the attention of their home parish or any other authorities.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> S. King *Writing the Lives of the English Poor 1750s–1830s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019). There is now an extensive literature on pauper narratives, their usefulness and veracity as sources and how to interpret them including: King, Nutt and Tomkins, *Narratives of the Poor*, xxxiii – liv; T. Sokoll 'Old Age in Poverty: The Record of Essex Pauper Letters, 1780-1834' in T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds) *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1997), 127-54; Sokoll *Essex Pauper Letters*, 3-9; J. Taylor *Poverty, Migration and Settlement in the Industrial Revolution: Sojourners' Narratives* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1989).

<sup>88</sup> Thomas Sokoll documented c.750 Essex Letters from the out-parish poor in his edited volume.

Compared to this the total number of surviving Hertfordshire letters to date is a fraction, possibly less than 100 unless many more are found in the unclassified bundles at Hertfordshire Archives.

<sup>89</sup> HALS DP15/18/3 Chipping Barnet Misc. Docs.

<sup>90</sup> S. King "'It is impossible for our Vestry to judge his case into perfection from here": Managing the Distance Dimensions of Poor Relief, 1800-40' *Rural History* 16 (2005), 161-89.

<sup>91</sup> There are many accounts in the quarter sessions of petty criminals, putative fathers and vagrants escaping from custody, or bribing the constable who had arrested them, and it is likely that these would have made for the metropolis where they could disappear.

Reading the unusually comprehensive, for Hertfordshire, Royston collection of over 50 letters from the poor it would appear that only a few Royston out-parish sick wrote directly to their parish overseer. However, in the case of sick or injured out-parish Royston workers the host parish or institution treating the patient usually contacted Royston directly because they were anxious to obtain payment for the patient's medical and maintenance expenses as soon as possible. They frequently had already agreed payment for immediate treatment with surgeons and apothecaries, and needed to negotiate with Royston officials for the patient's needs including medicines, nursing and care, food, lodging, fuel and eventual transport back to the home parish. If the patient died it would be necessary to mutually agree funeral expenses.

Out-parish sick poor needed to draw the attention of their host parish officials to their distress before anything would be done for them. A family member or helpful neighbour could be sent to the overseers if the family had accompanied the breadwinner or the landlord/landlady might oblige if they were renting accommodation. However, a man might have come alone, be newly arrived in the parish and living on the outskirts of the village or town in which case he would have to make an effort to attract the assistance of any passer-by who was prepared to help him and not everyone would want to get involved with a sick stranger given the risks of contagious illness. Sick or injured people when seemingly at their most powerless living and working away from their family and friends in a settlement parish were often forced to use whoever would assist them purely because of their isolated situation.<sup>92</sup> As King has recently observed, 'One of the most powerful developments in recent historiography, however, has been a rethinking of the matter of pauper agency. The voices of [the poor themselves]....have been increasingly rediscovered, reproduced and re-interpreted'.<sup>93</sup> The dying out-parish patient, William Cook, was the only out-parish case found in the current research

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<sup>92</sup> For a full discussion and many examples of the use of agency by the poor see H. French and J. Barry (eds) *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004) but there is no mention of sickness having been given as a reason for employing it.

<sup>93</sup> King *Sickness, Medical Welfare*, 6.



who was prepared to make a direct attempt to persuade his parish, Royston, to give him an allowance to maintain his starving family in Norwich. He described his problems to his 'home' parish overseer in March 1801:

To M<sup>r</sup> King Wrotham overseer of Royston which is part in Hertfordshire & part in Cambridgeshire [Written on outside of letter]  
March 21<sup>st</sup> 1801

Worthy Gentlemen It was with much Reluctance that I prevailed with myself to be thus Troublesom Neither could I have presumed to do it had I not Laboured under the Calamitous Circumstance that I now be/ do [?] and God knows whether I shall ever Experience an Alteration for the Better in this world Thow I have tried various means & nothing I unhappily find yields me any Benefit after I was Discharged for being Consumptive & God knows very Properly for I keep wasting Dayly & find that there is no likelihood of my Continuing Long – not [?] this heavy misfortune & every necessary of life being at such High & Exorbitant Rate keeps Both me & my wife & Child quite in a starving Condition – Therefore I submissively Hope that you will Consider the Promises [?] so far Extend your Charity to ward me as send us a little Relief & that as soon as possible or Else we must be under the Disagreeable Necessity of making Application to the Guardians of the Poor in Norwich who will of Course pass us Settlement – But as tis [?] quite a Custome for the parishes in General to allow a Constant weekly stipend I hope that you will do the same & by Directing to the Crown in St Stephens you will do a very acceptable Faver to  
Worthy Gentlemen your very humble servant in great Distress  
Will<sup>m</sup> Cook<sup>94</sup>

He was the only patient to even hint at entitlement to a 'Constant weekly stipend' which he had learned in his host parish, Norwich, was 'quite a Custome for the (presumably Norfolk) parishes to allow'. At no point does he hint at entitlement to relief but only local 'Custome'. Royston may have sent him some money although there is no record of this or of a written response to his letter. Mr Wrotham would not have wanted to offer places in the Royston workhouse to a consumptive and his family, which was the usual Royston strategy employed with destitute out-parish problem cases, and Cook would have been well aware of that policy. He was using the frequently employed threat to return 'home' made by out-parish poor to their home parishes to stir them into action. His widow did later return to Royston in 1803 and may have obtained a weekly allowance then<sup>95</sup> since there is no mention of

<sup>94</sup> HALS DP87/18/2 Royston Miscellaneous Correspondence 1794-1803.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. The Norwich surgeon who had treated her 'putrid fever' had been told this when he enquired about his unpaid bill. Hertfordshire parish officials' failures to pay medical bills are

her or her child entering the Royston workhouse which she would have been forced into if she was destitute.

As previously noted, sick out-parish men had to bring their host parish's attention to their medical and maintenance needs and get themselves cured and back to work as soon as possible so they and their families could survive. After 1795 the host parish was able to claim any costs already incurred from the settlement parish and negotiate for future expenditure on the patient.<sup>96</sup> How these negotiations were carried out by correspondence followed a distinct and formalised pattern. All those involved in this process, both officials and ordinary parishioners in the host parish, seem to have first ascertained exactly which parish the patient belonged to, thus underlining the importance of belonging to a parish in a poor person's existence, as discussed in the previous chapter. John Hall decided that he should ask his Hemel Hempstead landlord to inform the overseers of his parish, St Albans Abbey, that he urgently required relief. Like most advocate letters this can be read several ways, but it appears that possibly Hall was motivated by being too sick or unable to write or he may have thought that Abbey officials were more likely to respond favourably to his landlord who was of a higher social class than himself and to whom they would have owed rent if he had run up arrears while sick.<sup>97</sup>

To the Overseers of the Poor of the Abbey Parish St Albans [Written on  
outside of letter] [Undated]  
Hemel hemsted  
Gentlemen

I trouble you with this letter at the request of a Person who rents a small  
Tenement of me in this Neighbourhood of the name of John Hall & who  
now lays dangerously ill & stands in need of some Parochial relief – He  
belongs to your parish tho he has I believe for some time <sup>past</sup> resided in  
this – your answer will oblige

Gentlemen Yr Ob.Servt.  
John [?] Casbourne [?]<sup>98</sup>

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discussed more fully in the following chapter.

<sup>96</sup> 1795 *Removal Act* (35 Geo. 3. 4) stated that no non-settled person could be removed from a parish unless he or she applied for relief.

<sup>97</sup> S. King and P. Jones 'Testifying for the Poor: Epistolary Advocates and the Negotiation of Parochial Relief in England, 1800-34', *Journal of Social History* 49 (2016), 784-807.

<sup>98</sup> HALS DP90/18/1 Overseers Correspondence St Albans: Abbey 1740-1815: Undated letter

What happened to those who could not lay claim to a settlement parish, were too sick to remember where they came from or could not prove where they belonged is uncertain, but they would have been destitute and marooned in a foreign parish instantly causing financial problems to their host officials. An injured or very sick patient might need to be urgently treated but the out-parish would have to pay for all medical/care costs without any expectation of being recompensed until they could discover and contact the patient's settlement parish. Before 1795 and the provisions of the Poor Removal Act an outsider sick or injured poor person could legally be denied medical assistance as seen here in, the overseers' accounts of Chipping Barnet:

April 1766.

Expenses for a poor woman that had her leg broke 12s 9d.<sup>99</sup>

May 16 1774.

Paid 2s 6d to a messenger from Pinner on the Widow Groves breaking her thigh. Paid 7s 2d for expences horse and cart going twice to bring her home.

Paid Mrs Dowsall £2 18s maintenance of Sarah Groves under her misfortune.<sup>100</sup>

June 1774

Paid Joseph Butler [non-parishioner bonesetter] £3 9s 9d for reducing a fracture of the thigh for the Widow Groves & cure as per bill.<sup>101</sup>

These accounts are typically terse, but reveal how Barnet and Pinner (Middlesex) officials' interpretation of the poor laws classified the two women, both of whom had similar injuries, and dictated their treatment. The 1766 unnamed woman received basic unspecified expenses from Barnet because she was a destitute transient and could not be charged. Barnet was not legally obliged to do anything for her at all but generously spent 12s 9d on her expenses without any expectation of repayment from her settlement parish which was apparently unknown. Widow Groves was provided with a range of services when she returned home because she was a Barnet parishioner. She does not appear to have received

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from Hemel Hempsted.

<sup>99</sup> HALS DP15/12/2 Barnet Overseers Accounts 1745-85, April 1766.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. June 1774.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 16 May 1774.

any medical help in Pinner, which sent a messenger to inform Barnet of her accident but did not bill for any other expenses. She was not a Pinner parishioner and had no rights to relief so Barnet overseers brought her home and paid for her, comparatively expensive, medical and care needs. Pinner was not a thoroughfare town, like Chipping Barnet, with a constant stream of travellers passing through. Its poor law officials may also have been extremely parsimonious but it would seem more likely that they were probably unaccustomed to efficiently assisting sick and injured transients unlike the Hertfordshire towns, and decided to alert her home-parish to retrieve and treat her.

Chipping Barnet can be seen adopting various measures to deal efficiently with sick travelling poor. Throughout the eighteenth-century the parish paid its midwife the standard fee of 5s for each stranger woman she delivered. It also regularly reimbursed lodging-house keepers for sick transients' board and lodging and, if required, paid for dedicated nursing even for smallpox. At least one Chipping Barnet lodging-house, Levitts, specialised in nursing sick travellers because the overseers paid numerous bills to the proprietor for his provision of accommodation at 18d a day.<sup>102</sup> However, Chipping Barnet was not the only town serving sick travellers, and as has been previously discussed Baldock was also prepared to spend money on a stranger woman's medical treatment in 1732.<sup>103</sup> It would seem likely that further examination of the medical bills and overseers' accounts from other Hertfordshire towns would provide similar examples of charitable attitudes towards the sick and injured traveller because the thoroughfare towns lived off transients and were fully aware of their responsibilities towards them.

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to understand how the new attitudes to the poor previously discussed specifically affected the sick poor and how the Old Poor Law influenced the provision of medical relief in Hertfordshire. The typical in-parish patient was usually the male breadwinner because he was often vulnerable to

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<sup>102</sup> HALS DP15/12/2 Chipping Barnet Overseers' Accounts 1745-85.

<sup>103</sup> HALS DP12/18/1 Baldock Misc.Papers 1732.

injury and disease in his daily work. He would have been classified as useful and so most records were concerned with this category of patient. There are few indications from medical bills and overseers' accounts of how the sick and injured poor were treated in their home parishes. It would appear that parishes sought to mend/cure their working male poor as cheaply as possible to enable them to continue working with little or no parish relief. Those who could be made economically viable, even minimally, were usually prioritised for treatment primarily because of the pervading fear of pauper idleness and consequent disorderliness previously discussed.

The section traced the treatments that the sick and injured poor, and sometimes their families, received. Broken limbs, dislocations, bad burns, scalds and life-threatening fevers were promptly treated whether suffered by men, women or children but chronic illnesses such as rheumatism were usually, but not always, considered a normal part of the aging process and might not receive medical relief. Some parishes would also supply medicines for women who are likely to have been considered deserving and may have possessed valuable skills or influential friends. Many parishes both maintained and would pay for the services of a village midwife or even a more expensive man-midwife if a delivery proved to be difficult.

The negotiations necessary for claiming financial out-parish relief towards medical treatment by the, usually male, patient when living away from their home parish frequently required him to use agency by shifting for himself or finding intermediaries to contact parish officials. At home he was obliged to be a passive recipient of his vestry's decisions whether favourable or not, but as an out-parish patient he was frequently forced to use agency and find an advocate, his doctor, surgeon, host parish officers, a clergyman or employer to rely on as an intermediary in order to obtain assistance from his home parish. If he had been injured in a work accident he would be treated by the parish medical man and generally a report on his condition, treatment and costs would be sent back to his home parish if he was capable of naming it. In some cases he seems to have found his host parish prepared to be more generous in its treatment of him than his home parish and this

could act to his advantage if his home parish did not wish to appear to be parsimonious. This aspect has not been extensively discussed in the literature on early modern medicine or for Hertfordshire and would seem to require further research.

## Chapter Seven: Parish Officials and Medical Practitioners

### Context

This chapter is primarily concerned with the evolution and workings of the relationship between parish officials and medical practitioners as the Hertfordshire parishes took over responsibility for the management of growing numbers of sick and injured poor discussed in the previous chapter. How did the parish officials' contractual relationships with the practitioners they chose to treat the sick poor evolve in Hertfordshire and did the power balance change over time? How did these laymen officials understand and describe sickness? Which treatments and what kind of institutions were they prepared to pay for and which not? Were they as generous in Hertfordshire as has been argued for other counties in the literature, principally Warwickshire, and what seem to have been the driving forces that lay behind this generosity?<sup>1</sup>

The first section will briefly contextualise the relationship between officials and the, mainly, male practitioners they employed. The second considers how historians have viewed this relationship, which has previously been studied primarily from the practitioners' point of view tracing how their developing technical expertise (vaccination/inoculation) improved their status in the community.<sup>2</sup> However, when considered from the parish officials' viewpoint a different, less clear-cut picture emerges. The third focuses on those who practised as Hertfordshire medical practitioners both those apprenticed to work in the emerging medical professions and the laymen and women who became, often part-time, healers. The fourth section examines the growth of formal medical contracts in Hertfordshire parishes and how they were managed by parish officials. The fifth is

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<sup>1</sup> J. Lane *A Social History of Medicine: Health, Healing and Disease in England, 1750-1950* (London: Routledge, 2001); S. Hindle 'Civility, Honesty and the Identification of the Deserving Poor in Seventeenth Century England' in H. French and J. Barry (eds) *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 38-59.

<sup>2</sup> A. Digby *Making a Medical Living: Doctors and Patients in the English Market for Medicine, 1720-1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); I. Loudon *Medical Care and the General Practitioner 1750-1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

concerned with how these lay officials described pauper illness and accident amongst themselves. The sixth discusses how officials used Inter-parish correspondence to communicate and negotiate with their counterparts and medical men both in other Hertfordshire parishes and those in other counties about the needs of sick and injured poor working away from their home parishes. The seventh section looks at paying for medical treatment for both in-parish and out-parish sick poor and how payment was negotiated. A concluding section draws together the findings and analyses what appear to have been the salient features of the parish officials' relationships with medical practitioners.

### Thinking and writing about the official/practitioner relationship

The progress of this relationship and, more specifically, the most traceable manifestation of it, the chronological sequence of medical contracts, has been extensively discussed in the literature.<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Marshall was concerned to trace their origin, timescale and evolution<sup>4</sup> and has been followed in this by more recent historians including Irvine Loudon,<sup>5</sup> Joan Lane,<sup>6</sup> Hilary Marland,<sup>7</sup> Steven King,<sup>8</sup> and Samantha Williams.<sup>9</sup> They have aimed to unravel the nature and scale of contracts in several English counties and parishes but do not include any Hertfordshire material. Contracts appear to us now to be a stable indication of the development of medical services although it is also equally possible that this is in some cases an illusion and their popularity and use actually fluctuated with the numbers of sick poor and the perceptions of parish officials of set contracts as either a cheaper or more expensive method of paying bills. The current consensus is that contracts

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<sup>3</sup> Digby *Making a Medical Living*; Loudon *Medical Care*; M. Pelling *The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early Modern England* (London: Longman, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> D. Marshall *The English Poor in the Eighteenth-Century: A Study in Social and Administrative History* (New York: Kelley, 1926).

<sup>5</sup> Loudon *Medical Care*.

<sup>6</sup> Lane *A Social History*.

<sup>7</sup> H. Marland *Medicine and Society in Wakefield and Huddersfield 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> S. King, *Sickness, Medical Welfare and the English Poor, 1750-1834* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> S. Williams 'Practitioners' Income and Provision for the Poor: Parish Doctors in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Centuries' *Social History of Medicine* 18 (2005), 159–86.



began to be used around the mid-eighteenth century and subsequently grew as the century progressed. However, much earlier, if apparently temporary contracts, can be traced in at least two Hertfordshire parishes (see further discussion below) and it would seem likely that others may have existed and the documentation was discarded when they ended.

Marland brought another element into the debate about the nature of medical relief, that is of the professional or irregular (medically untrained) designation of the practitioners employed by parishes, and this has also interested some other, historians, principally researching medical, as opposed to welfare issues, such as Anne Digby and Irvine Loudon.<sup>10</sup> Such a modern preoccupation with qualifications might appear anachronistic since the Hertfordshire parish officials were entering the medical marketplace because they were seeking a service-provider for their sick poor. They were primarily concerned to get the job of curing the sick or injured poor person done, preferably at the lowest possible cost to the parish. Officials often employed a locally recognised medical specialist who might or might not be given the title of 'doctor' or 'surgeon' in parochial records, to perform a cheap but ideally effective service. It would appear unlikely that they would have been concerned whether or not he or she had been formally apprenticed as a surgeon or apothecary and was technically qualified. If a poor person broke a leg (a fairly common injury), for example, a surgeon or surgeon-apothecary or a part-time bonesetter might be equally likely to be employed provided they had a good reputation for successful cures of broken bones.<sup>11</sup>

The evidence for Hertfordshire suggests that vestrymen appear to have decided who was considered a good doctor on their results and reputation, and possibly their religious affiliations, rather than their formal qualifications. How and what motivated parishes to evolve policies and practices to treat their sick poor has not previously been studied in detail across one English county. It is a large and wide-ranging topic and like this whole project, it is primarily issue-driven with the

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<sup>10</sup> Marland *Medicine and Society*; Digby, *Making a Medical Living*; Loudon *Medical Care*.

<sup>11</sup> Some medical practitioners explicitly excluded broken bones from their contracts presumably because these were time-consuming to treat and often proved difficult to set successfully.

result that emphasis has been placed on those parishes with the most informative sources. It should be recognised that these may not have been the most innovative and successful in their practices. It is also possible, as with all the topics investigated in this research, that important source material was regarded as ephemeral by parish officials and discarded, lost or misplaced, as has been extensively discussed by Steven King in his recent study on the sick poor.<sup>12</sup>

### Who were medical practitioners?

This topic has not been previously explored in Hertfordshire although sources exist to provide some basic data at least for the latter half of the eighteenth century. From the *Hertfordshire Militia Ballot Lists* 1758-86; the 1988 Wallis listing of eighteenth century medics;<sup>13</sup> and for the last years of the eighteenth century, the Hertfordshire edition of the *Universal British Directory*<sup>14</sup> it can be seen that by the later decades of the eighteenth century a comparatively large number of parishes and towns had male medical practitioners described as doctors, surgeons, physicians and apothecaries. The parishes which had medical practitioners listed in the *Militia Ballot Lists* at least for one year are shown below in Map 7.1. and have been shaded.

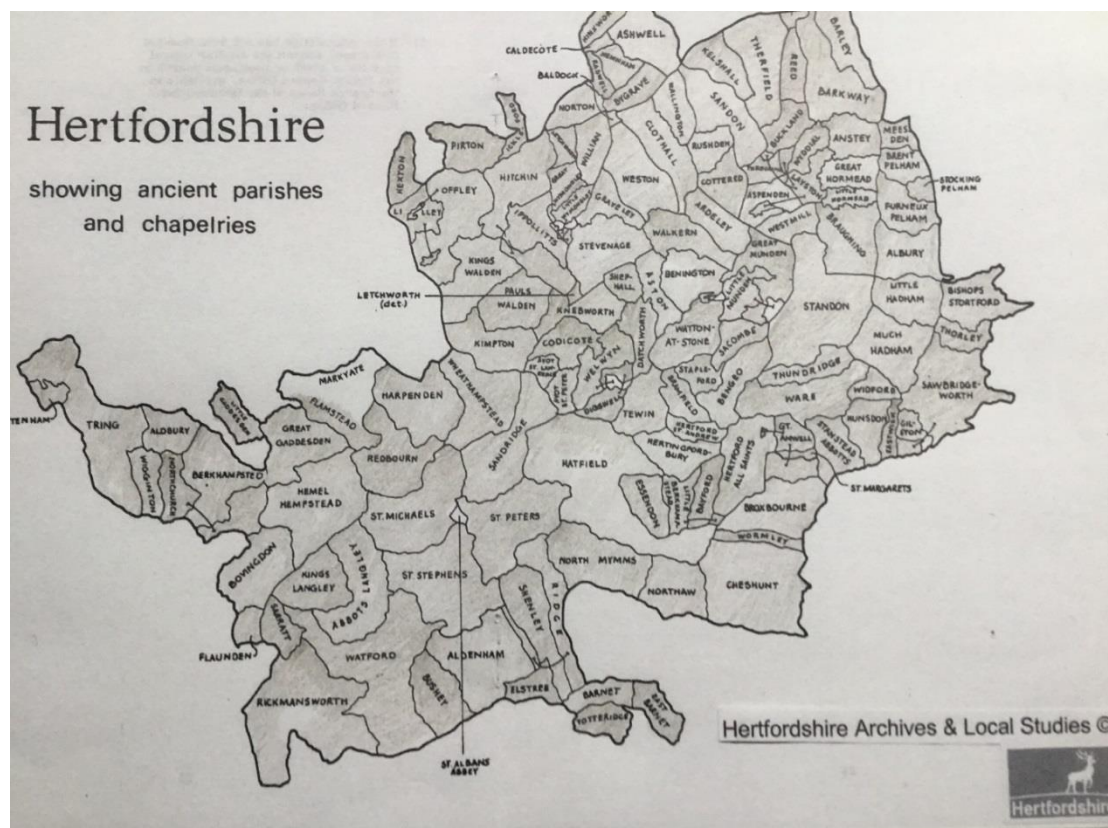
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<sup>12</sup> King *Sickness, Medical Welfare*, 10, 91 and 338.

<sup>13</sup> P. and R. Wallis *Eighteenth Century Medics (Subscriptions, Licences, Apprenticeships)* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Project for Historical Bio-bibliography, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> *Universal British Directory of Trade, Commerce and Manufacture 1791-8* (Hertfordshire extracts) (London: 1791-8).

Map 7.1 Medical Practitioners in Hertfordshire Parishes (shaded) from Militia Ballot Lists 1758-86.



Two observations can be made about this map and the underlying data. Information on medical practitioners from the Militia Lists is fractured and at the highest point in 1778 only 46 lists (34.8%) from the 132 ancient parishes appear to have survived. For most years the numbers of surviving lists are in the twenties and thirties and below so it would appear that militia lists were regarded as ephemeral in most parishes. Also surgeons were throughout the period the broadly preferred service providers in most parishes.

The militia lists record that during the second half of the eighteenth century one or more apothecaries were employed in: Aspenden, Bushey, Cheshunt, Chipping Barnet, Hatfield, Hemel Hempstead, Hertford, Hitchin, Hoddesdon, Layton, Rickmansworth, Royston, Sawbridgeworth, St Albans Holywell, St Paul's Walden, Stevenage, Tring, Ware, Watford. Doctors were listed for all parishes except Barkway (which may have used nearby Royston doctors), Berkhamsted and

Frithsden, Bramfield (which employed Hertford doctors and surgeons), Braughing, Harpenden, Hitchin (which employed surgeons), Thundridge, Welwyn, Wyddial. There were Man Midwives listed for Hitchin and Ware, Physicians in Bishop's Stortford, Hertford, Hunsdon, St Albans St Peter and Ware.

All of these medical men would have been 45 or under when they served in the Hertfordshire Militia although a few were older and noted as being aged.<sup>15</sup> In the first listing in 1758, 24 Hertfordshire towns and villages listed at least one medical practitioner, although Wallis found only 15 Hertfordshire towns with medics. There were three physicians, two for Bishop's Stortford<sup>16</sup> and one for Hunsdon; eight doctors, one of whom was also listed as a surgeon; 25 surgeons one of whom was also a farrier and horse-doctor<sup>17</sup> and another who later was also listed as a farrier and seven apothecaries. One Royston surgeon was listed as a butcher and returned to that trade.<sup>18</sup> Some of the multiple occupational listings may have been clerical errors but there does seem to have been a connection between horse and human doctoring and surgery amongst militiamen.

The preponderance of surgeons probably reflected the need for them in a militia, but must also indicate a greater preference for their services amongst the townsfolk who used them.<sup>19</sup> In some towns there were several surgeons and sometimes no other medical practitioners; two at Berkhamsted; three at Bishop's Stortford; two at Hatfield; three at Hitchin and Royston and four at St Albans. The career of at least one doctor can be traced. John Brittin was listed in the small village of Bovingdon militia list as a farrier in 1758 and 1759. His name appeared in

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<sup>15</sup> *Hertfordshire Militia Ballot Lists 1758-86* (Hertford: Hertfordshire Family & Population History Society, 1999). Chipping Barnet List entry for Philip Bodham Roberts 1781 Doctor Aged.

<sup>16</sup> One of whom was Thomas Dimsdale.

<sup>17</sup> *Militia Ballot Lists* William Errat listed as Surgeon in 1758. Mr William Errat [same man or relative?] listed as Doctor 1759-60 and also listed as Horse Farrier & Horse Doctor at Layston in 1762-4.

<sup>18</sup> *Militia Ballot Lists* Daniel Lewer listed as Surgeon [previously] and 1784-86 - Butcher at Royston.

<sup>19</sup> The Company of Surgeons had been established in 1745 and the Royal College of Surgeons of London in 1800. Irvine Loudon noted that the 'Company' enabled surgeons to formally sever 'their links with the barbers' which made them considered to be 'tradesmen'. Loudon, *Medical Care*, 20.

1760 as a servant/assistant, presumably to a Bovingdon medical man, because in 1761 he was a doctor at Bovingdon and in 1762 a surgeon. He then disappeared from Bovingdon and the Hertfordshire militia lists.<sup>20</sup>

In the last listing for Hertfordshire from 1801 the number of medical men serving in the militia had shrunk dramatically to seven surgeons; one from Bishop's Stortford; three from Hertford; two from Hoddesdon and one from the small village of Thundridge. It would seem that militia service was no longer attractive to surgeons some of whom had or were diversifying into man-midwives<sup>21</sup> and/or evolving into surgeon-apothecaries.<sup>22</sup> What is obvious from following the full run of militia lists is that the traditional tri-partite division of physicians, surgeons and apothecaries extensively discussed by Irvine Loudon<sup>23</sup> does not appear to have been very strong amongst Hertfordshire medics. As previously noted, farriers and horse doctors like John Brittin could become surgeons and doctors and surgeons could become farriers.<sup>24</sup> Surgeons could be listed as doctors or vice-versa in consecutive lists and there was a tendency for surgeons to become apothecaries when they aged and presumably could no longer ride out to attend distant patients.<sup>25</sup>

One apothecary also became a victualler thus reverting to a tradesman.<sup>26</sup> The militia lists would also have contained an unknown number of male irregulars, bonesetters, tooth-pullers, male-midwives, herbalists etc. who would have been classified under their main occupations not their medical identities. As Margaret Pelling observed, the early modern medical marketplace was very fluid, many medical practitioners both male and female were in fact part-timers and might well carry on several occupations simultaneously, such as farming, shop keeping,

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<sup>20</sup> *Militia Ballot Lists* 1758, 1759 John Brittin listed as farrier 1758 and 1759; then as Servant 1760; then Doctor and Surgeon in the same year 1762, at Bovingdon.

<sup>21</sup> *Militia Ballot Lists* 1762 Obadiah Hughes Worsley Man Midwife & Surgeon later reverted to Surgeon 1763-4 – Ware.

<sup>22</sup> This was explored further by Digby *Making a Medical Living*.

<sup>23</sup> Loudon *Medical Care*, 19.

<sup>24</sup> *Militia Ballot Lists* 1758, 1759 John Kingston, Surgeon then Horse Farrier Tring.

<sup>25</sup> *Militia Ballot Lists* 1758-61 Surgeon; 1762 Charles Dance, Apothecary Surgeon Above Age Chipping Barnet.

<sup>26</sup> *Militia Ballot Lists* 1759 William Rolfe Tring. 'Apothecaries had been members of the Company of Grocers but separated from them in 1615'. Loudon, *Medical Care*, 20.

distilling, or running an inn, as well as their medical practice.<sup>27</sup> Parishes employed a range of practitioners both medically trained and irregular. Sometimes the specific types of practitioners are recorded both lay and professional, for example, the bonesetter used by Chipping Barnet for Widow Groves as previously observed in chapter six, who may have been too elderly to appear in the Chipping Barnet militia list at the time or have been recorded under his primary occupation or may not have been a parishioner although the parish officials knew of his existence and his specialist skills.<sup>28</sup>

Practitioners whose services were used by parish officials might also have been peripatetic like the itinerant eye specialist employed by Tring whose main advantage would have been that his services were probably much cheaper than sending the patient to specialists in London. Travelling medical men were sometimes very experienced in their specialities and reports of their successes would be transmitted round the countryside. However, many were quacks and could do more harm than good,<sup>29</sup> so Tring's, vestry, like most parishes, warily protecting its ratepayers from a comparatively large expense on one patient, only offered payment on cure: 'At a publick vestry then held it is Agreed that Thomas Kemster shall be Cured of his eye sight by ye Doctor that Is now at Tring to have them Couthed [couched – treatment to remove cataracts] for ye valew of two pounds and two shillings to be payed when Cured'.<sup>30</sup> As previously observed some Hertfordshire parishes availed themselves of the services offered by specialist medical institutions in London and sent chronically mentally disturbed patients into

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<sup>27</sup> M. Pelling 'Occupational Diversity: Barber-surgeons and Other Trades, 1550-1640' in M. Pelling *The Common Lot*, 203–29.

<sup>28</sup> HALS DP15/12/2 Chipping Barnet Overseers Accounts 1745-1785, June 1774. 'Paid Joseph Butler for reducing a fracture of the thigh for the Widow Groves & cure as per bill.' M. Heery, 'Neglected Practitioners: the bonesetters of early modern England' *Local Historian* Vol. 40 (2010), 126-35. Many doctors seem to have specifically excluded setting broken limbs from their contracts or required extra payment for them so that lay bonesetters were employed by parishes for their injured poor.

<sup>29</sup> Roy Porter made an extensive study of these irregular practitioners in R. Porter *Quacks: Fakers and Charlatans in English Medicine* (London: NPI Media Group, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> HALS DP111/8/17 Tring Vestry Minutes 1682-1746, 8 March 1718 (No. 121).

It was not stipulated how a successful 'cure' would be judged, presumably if the patient reported some definite improvement in his sight.

London mental hospitals such as Bedlam<sup>31</sup> and, later, private asylums such as those established at Hoxton.<sup>32</sup> Having mapped what can be learned of the availability of medical practitioners in Hertfordshire a framework has been constructed for the following section which considers the growth of medical agreements and contracts in the county. Other historians including King and Williams focus solely on contracts and not the availability of the medical men to make them.

## Medical agreements and contracts

As previously noted, in the eighteenth century, and in some cases even earlier,<sup>33</sup> presumably driven by the ever-growing numbers of sick poor, Hertfordshire parishes began to undertake fixed-price agreements and formal contracts with local medical practitioners to provide services for them. In his recent book Steven King identified five categories of medical contract between parishes and practitioners ranging from 'limited and episodic' to 'full engagement'.<sup>34</sup> All of these categories can be seen in Hertfordshire parishes at various times as the parishes experimented with providing medical services to the poor. One of the few historians to research this topic in parochial detail, but from the viewpoint of practitioners' income not parochial officials' considerations as here, is Samantha Williams.<sup>35</sup> She observed that in her sample of 19 East Bedfordshire parishes formal medical contracts appear only in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

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<sup>31</sup> HALS DP87/18/2 Royston Miscellaneous Correspondence files 1769-1809 (10 March 1799), Details on admission procedures to Bethlem for patient Daniels which required a Royston official to attend.

<sup>32</sup> HALS DP90/18/1 Overseers Correspondence St Albans: Abbey 1740-1815: Several bills and letters from E. Burrows [proprietor of a madhouse at Hoxton, Middlesex], (20 November 1807, 15 and 25 January 1808).

<sup>33</sup> As in the 1701 Chipping Barnet example further discussed below.

<sup>34</sup> King *Sickness, Medical Welfare*, 150.

<sup>35</sup> Williams 'Practitioners Income'. She used the Bedfordshire Samuel Whitbread correspondence (Bedfordshire Record Office) as did Loudon, *Medical Care*, 232–3.



Table 7.1 Chronological List of Medical Agreements and Contracts 1701-98 from Parish Records

Date	Parish	Medical Practitioner	Medical Agreement
1701	Chipping Barnet	Physician and Surgeon	Contract for life.
1729-1858	Little Gaddesden	Surgeon	Annual contract
	Norton	Not given	Medical treatment of the poor.
1746-94	Hexton	Not given	Agreements for the medical treatment of the poor
1758	St Albans St Michael	Not given	.
1761	Hertford St Andrew	Not given	
1766-7	Great Gaddesden	Surgeon	
1769 and 1776	Hertford All Saints and St John	Surgeon	Surgery and physic for the poor.
1769	Rushden		Care of sick poor
1782	Royston	Doctor	Three doctors on rota for the poor.
1783-1809	Ayot St Lawrence	Not given	Agreements to serve as medical attendants to paupers.
1786-1835	Little Munden		Appointments of medical attendants for the poor
1790 and 1793	Wormley	Midwife/pharmacist/surgeon/ Pharmacist/surgeon	To attend parish poor
1791-1818	St Albans St Michael		Medical agreements
1797-99	Stapleford	Not given	Agreements for the supply of medicine to the poor
1798	Ware	Doctor	Annual attendance on the poor.

In contrast, in some Hertfordshire parishes the situation appears to have been more fluid and agreements were made throughout the eighteenth century. Nothing earlier, apart from the 1694 Watford agreement discussed below, has apparently survived. It would seem likely that Hertfordshire medical contracts with trained practitioners would have begun as regular semi-official agreements with one or more parish-selected local practitioners to treat sick and injured poor. The earliest of these may have been recorded in vestry orders and miscellaneous documents which have yet to be examined. The only seventeenth-century extant medical case discovered in this research was recorded in the churchwardens' accounts of



Chipping Barnet.<sup>36</sup> In November 1658 a poor woman of unknown age called Goody Leighton fell sick but her illness obviously caused concern to the parish officials because they decided to 'have the doctor examine her' and to pay for her 'cure' if he thought she was curable. No details of the fee paid are given or diagnosis of the illness. This shows that Chipping Barnet had access to the services of at least one resident or local doctor, but it was very unusual for the parish to pay for a consultation. There must have been something that appeared to seriously threaten the community in her case since she and her family died soon after.

In the eighteenth-century arrangements with medical men were increasingly formalised into annual contracts as it became cheaper to dispense with individual bills for the treatment of each sick pauper and pay a lump sum for all of them. A frugal and/or godly parish would stipulate exactly which treatments it was prepared to pay for as did Watford in 1694: 'It is ordered that in case of sickness no physic be allowed to the poor but in providential distress [acts of God] plague or small pox, broken bones or wounds'.<sup>37</sup> It would appear that the god-fearing Watford vestry at this time assumed all other sickness had been caused by sinful behaviour and was divine punishment. Sometimes the practitioners themselves specifically excluded certain time-consuming and potentially dangerous and life-threatening diseases and surgical cases as further discussed below. At Chipping Barnet John Huddleston a vestry member and physician who had served as Churchwarden 1695-6 was given what appears to have been a very unusual contract for life in April 1701: 'Ordered by Vestry for the year ensuing that [he] is to be Surgeon and Physician for the Parish Poor they paying him £3 for the year and for during his natural life'.<sup>38</sup> Another contract for the same year was recorded with a surgeon at Little Gaddesden, but it does not appear to have been for life.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> HALS DP15/5/1 Chipping Barnet Churchwardens' Accounts 1646-1700.

<sup>37</sup> HALS DP117/8/1 Watford Vestry Orders 1693-1781.

<sup>38</sup> HALS DP15/5/2 Chipping Barnet Churchwardens' Accounts 1701-51.

<sup>39</sup> V. Bell *Little Gaddesden: the Story of an English Parish* (London: Faber, 1949), 81. Surgeon John Fowler [annual contract for £2. 10s.]. Great Gaddesden also appointed a surgeon but records show that it was considerably later in 1766. HALS DP39/18/3 Misc.1742-1823. Great Gaddesden Surgeon Contract 1766 renewed 1767.

These 16 documents in Table 7.1 were among a number of Hertfordshire medical agreements/contracts which have been identified. The survival of four of them dated before 1750 appears to contradict the existing literature on the history of medical practitioners which, as previously noted, tends to date the spread of medical contracts to the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>40</sup> Steven King found eight of the parishes he researched were using 'traceable' doctoring contracts dating from 1750. He also noted that Chippenham, Wiltshire employed four surgeonesses in the 1750s and 1760s.<sup>41</sup> There is no record to date of any Hertfordshire parish employing a surgeoness to treat its poor although women may have worked for a parish in that capacity treating women and children. It is possible that other early doctors' and surgeons' agreements and contracts existed and have been treated as ephemera when the contract expired since there would have been little reason to keep them when the parish employed a new doctor. It is also possible that there may be more in the large number of previously uncatalogued bundles of documents currently being processed at Hertfordshire archives. It would seem likely that parishes chose local doctors to attend the poor and used them regularly for several years before deciding to make a formal agreement with them. Whether it was the parish vestry or the doctor who initially suggested this and named an annual fee cannot be known unless formally recorded in yet unresearched vestry minutes and orders. Some parishes including St Albans St Stephens went out to tender for their medical services.<sup>42</sup>

Irvine Loudon saw vestries as the instigator of contracts and noted that 'vestries found it easier to control expenditure through a salaried system than an open-ended one'.<sup>43</sup> He did not provide any Hertfordshire examples but it is likely that this consideration was a major influence towards the rise of medical contracts in the county although some small parishes, like Bramfield continued to find it more

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<sup>40</sup> Examples of dating earliest medical contracts to mid-eighteenth century: Digby *Making a Medical Living*; Loudon *Medical Care*; Williams, 'Practitioners' Income'.

<sup>41</sup> King *Sickness Medical Welfare*, 151.

<sup>42</sup> E. Truwert 'The Operation of the Old Poor Law in the Parish of St Michael's, St Albans, 1721-1834' in P. Kingsford and A. Jones (eds). *Down and Out in Hertfordshire: A Symposium on the Old and New Poor Law* (Stevenage: Hertfordshire Library Service and Local History Council, 1984), 99-151.

<sup>43</sup> Loudon *Medical Care*, 234.

economical to pay for individual cases.<sup>44</sup> As the numbers of the sick poor increased and the cost of doctors' bills for them mounted it would have made economic sense to negotiate a fixed sum. In the course of the eighteenth century the small parishes of Norton,<sup>45</sup> Hexton,<sup>46</sup> Rushden,<sup>47</sup> Ayot St Lawrence,<sup>48</sup> Kings Langley,<sup>49</sup> Little Munden,<sup>50</sup> Wormley<sup>51</sup> and Stapleford<sup>52</sup> made either agreements or appointments for medical treatment of the poor.

In some cases Hertfordshire towns appear to have been later in adopting medical contracts than these village parishes. As previously discussed, in Chapter 5, Baldock was paying a doctor's bills in 1729<sup>53</sup> and 1732<sup>54</sup> for a few poor patients. In the principal towns, St Albans St Michaels first contracted for medical attention to the poor in 1758,<sup>55</sup> Hertford St Andrew followed in 1761 and agreed to pay £6 for a one year contract,<sup>56</sup> Hertford St John made a two-year contract for five guineas in 1769 with Mr Frost, who specifically excluded treating some medical cases: for every 'disorder' that may happen [to the poor] in the physical profession at the rate of five guineas a year all cases in surgery of any common nature included in the same sum [but] all fractured limbs, large swellings, fractured skulls ... and smallpox excepted ...'.<sup>57</sup> The latter case covered both surgery and physic and was renewed for another two years in 1776 at double the fee.

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<sup>44</sup> HALS DP 22/12/1 Bramfield Overseers' Accounts 1750-78.

<sup>45</sup> HALS DP75/18/2 Norton Overseers' miscellaneous papers 1729-1858 Medical treatment of the poor.

<sup>46</sup> HALS DP51/12/1-3 Hexton Agreements for medical treatment of the poor.

<sup>47</sup> HALS DP88/8/1 Rushden Vestry book 1769 Care of sick poor.

<sup>48</sup> HALS DP10/12/1 Ayot St Lawrence Overseers' Accounts 1783-1809 Agreements to serve as medical attendants to paupers.

<sup>49</sup> HALS DP64 Kings Langley Overseers' Accounts [n.d.] Mr Hugh Smith of Hempstead agreed that he should be paid £6 for attending all poor persons in the parish.

<sup>50</sup> HALS DP71/8/1 Little Munden Appointments of medical attendants for the poor.

<sup>51</sup> HALS DP126/8/1 Wormley Vestry Minute Book 1765-1810 Appointment of pharmacist/surgeon to attend poor.

<sup>52</sup> HALS DP104/12/1 Stapleford Agreements for the supply of medicine to the poor.

<sup>53</sup> HALS DP12/18/1 Baldock Misc. Papers Doctors Bill 1729.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Doctors Bill 1732.

<sup>55</sup> HALS DP94/5/1 St Albans St Michael Churchwardens' Accounts 1743-1845.

<sup>56</sup> HALS DP49/8/1 Hertford St Andrew Vestry Minute Book 1731-63.

<sup>57</sup> HALS DP48/8/13 Hertford All Saints and St John Overseers' Accounts, Vestry Minutes and Orders relating to Poor Law matters, St John's 1768-78.

Royston, as previously discussed, operated a rota system with, at one time, three apothecary-surgeons, but it is not possible to know when this system began because no written contract with any of them now exists although it seems unlikely that the parish would have omitted to keep such records. The parish doctor was first mentioned in 1782 when he was ordered by the vestry to attend a patient.<sup>58</sup> Anne Digby in her study of the medical marketplace from 1720 to 1911 observed that 'Payments to parish doctors tended to increase...because they became skilful at inserting a growing range of exclusions in their contracts as they gained a market advantage'.<sup>59</sup> Although she did not provide any Hertfordshire examples these exclusions did progressively appear in Hertfordshire contracts particularly within the larger towns as above in Mr Frost's agreement with Hertford St Johns.<sup>60</sup> In 1791 Hertford All Saints contracted Mr Jope for annual attendance on the poor, excluding fractures<sup>61</sup> and in 1798 Ware paid Mr Burr £28 with additional payment for 'broken bones and other violent accidents'.<sup>62</sup>

Many parishes seem to have left their contracted medical men to use their own judgement in treating pauper patients although, when it appeared that they were being too generous, or too many claims were being made, a vestry might abruptly put a cap on medical relief demanding that all fees, over a certain amount, were formally approved by themselves. This controlling measure, as previously noted in chapter five, was instituted at Tring which at this time did not seem to be operating a formal contract with any one selected doctor or surgeon but employing a range of them. It would appear that patients who were not eligible for treatment as inmates of the workhouse had been self-referring to the local medical men and had been accepted by them without parish vestry approval. The vestry saw itself losing its vital control over spiralling expenditure on medical relief and moved to

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<sup>58</sup> HALS DP87/8/2 Royston Minutes of Joint Annual Vestry and Poor Law Committee Meetings for United Parishes [in Herts and Cambs.] 1781-1798.

<sup>59</sup> Digby *Making a Medical Living*, 226.

<sup>60</sup> HALS DP/48/8/13 Hertford All Saints and St Johns Vestry Minutes 1768-78 21 April 1769. As previously noted many doctors seem to have specifically excluded setting broken limbs from their contracts or required extra payment for them so that lay bonesetters were also employed by parishes for their injured poor.

<sup>61</sup> HALS DP 48/8/9 Hertford All Saints and St John Vestry Minutes 178-1816.

<sup>62</sup> HALS DP116/12/13 Ware Overseers' Accounts 1797-1836.

prevent this from happening.

How widespread the practice of capping expenditure was in Hertfordshire parishes is unclear, but Steven King<sup>63</sup> found that 'officials in Norfolk in particular seem to have tried to cap cash allowances at the same time as they expanded the use of workhouses'. Tring was the only example of Hertfordshire capping found in this research and it had already established a House of Maintenance for the poor in 1718 so was not motivated by attempting to channel the poor into a newly established workhouse. It appears that in Hertfordshire there may also have been informal verbal admonitions from parish officials to doctors who had treated individual cases without parish approval or were thought to overspend on medical relief or prescribe extravagantly for individual patients. Certain types of remedy were thought too expensive and delicate for labourers who were believed to have strong, tough constitutions which could easily accept cheap and strong medicines.<sup>64</sup> Parish officials could prove to be not only controlling, as at Tring, but some were also downright dishonest in their dealings with medical men. Irvine Loudon referred to 'the parish system of medical relief'....being 'open to local petty abuse' but did not give any details of what this might have involved.<sup>65</sup> According to Eric Thomas a small number of similar cases have come to light in Essex like the 'Shopkeeper Overseer of Chelmsford, accused of retaining £2 which should have been paid to Surgeon'.<sup>66</sup>

Some Hertfordshire vestrymen seem to have assumed that they could bluff their way through the medical marketplace using the same practices acquired in their usual habitats, the street and/or livestock markets. At least one sick poor patient was caught up in his parish's attempt to evade payment for his surgical treatment and apparent cure originally ordered by one vestry and reneged on by their successors, a common ploy amongst defaulting parishes. Since Thomas

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<sup>63</sup> King *Sickness, Medical Welfare*, 45, 134.

<sup>64</sup> J. Quincy *Pharmacopeia Officinalis & Extemporanea: or, A Complete English Dispensatory, in two parts....* (London: Longman 1782).

<sup>65</sup> Loudon *Medical Care*, 232.

<sup>66</sup> E. Thomas 'The Treatment of Poverty in Berkshire, Essex and Oxfordshire, 1723-1834' unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London, 1970, 297.

Tristam's need for treatment had previously been neglected by his parish, he may have been considered a bad investment. The parish, Ippolitts, was subsequently taken to court by the defrauded surgeon, William Bromfield, for the payment of £3, a comparatively small sum for such a delicate operation. From his testimony of the precautions that he had taken it is clear that Bromfield had obviously met this parochial stratagem before:

Sessions order made on the complaint of William Bromfield, of Hitchin, 'chyrurgeon'. The complainant states that Thomas Tristam of Ippolitts, came to him by the order of the overseer of the said parish, with a 'fistula in ano', and the overseers and wardens taking no care of the poor man, either to relieve, or to engage to pay for the said cure, complainant refused to proceed in the cure without particular order either from the next overseers, or some warrant from a justice to compel the said wardens and overseers to pay for the cure and relief of the poor man. Such an order was accordingly made by George Throgmorton, esq. [local JP?], and was received by the said wardens and overseers who promised to carry it out, and the said chyrurgeon 'presumed to make a cure and demanded satisfaction'; but the said wardens and overseers refused to pay. the matter having been brought before the court, it is ordered that they forthwith pay to William Bromfield the sum of three pounds for the cure, and seven and sixpence the cost of this order.<sup>67</sup>

There is no indication in the records that the order was obeyed and that William Bromfield's bill was paid. Incoming parish churchwardens and overseers frequently disowned the debts and promises of their predecessors in office, but because the Hertfordshire session records mostly do not indicate outcomes it is uncertain how often they got away with it. This may indicate that, in some cases, Hertfordshire was less concerned than Essex to bring overseers and vestries to court.<sup>68</sup> When they did actually pay medical bills Hertfordshire vestries were very decided as to what they would and would not regard as acceptable expenditure on the deserving poor and they made the decisions as to who would have access to medical relief as can be seen below.

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<sup>67</sup> W. Le Hardy (comp.) *Hertford Quarter Sessions Rolls* 1688, 374, 132.

<sup>68</sup> None of the Middlesex, Warwickshire or Wiltshire sessions court records studied contain similar cases of attempts to renege on medical bills.

## Parish officials' descriptions of illness

Like most laymen, overseers were not verbose or informative about sickness and the sick poor were usually tersely described as very ill, infirm or sick. These are examples of language employed to describe the sick poor in vestry minutes, orders and overseers' accounts and also, as previously noted, employed by most parish constables when compiling the militia lists: Ill, illness, very ill, very ill and not like to live; in a decline; will not be able for work any more; sick; very sick; bad hurt on leg; lame; very lame. Various descriptions of ailments probably taken from doctor's reports as follows: bad/sore leg; bursting of blood vessel; bad fever; fits; use of limbs taken away; broken collar bone; broken leg.

Roy Porter was the first to research what he terms the 'language of sickness' and accessibly describes how it was employed in the eighteenth-century by the articulate and educated middle/upper class patients who frequently and seemingly knowledgably discussed illnesses and remedies in their correspondence and journals.<sup>69</sup> However, neither the poor nor the officials recording their medical problems were informative about poor patients' illnesses as recently noted by Steven King:

However we interpret these narratives, the imprecision extends to overseers' accounts, vestry minute books and even the bills of doctors employed to treat the parish poor. These sources tend to offer sometimes minute detail on the nature of accidental ill-health (burns, workplace accidents etc.) but to be less specific about chronic or infectious illnesses outside of smallpox.<sup>70</sup>

In Hertfordshire details were sometimes provided of specific injuries and occasionally of accidents and these also appear in burial registers.<sup>71</sup> For example, a detailed account of a Royston man's accident in his Huntingdon host parish was

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<sup>69</sup> R. Porter "'Expressing Yourself Ill'": The Language of Sickness in Georgian England' in P. Burke and R. Porter (eds) *Language Self and Society: A Social History of Language* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 276-99.

<sup>70</sup> King *Sickness Medical Welfare*, 37.

<sup>71</sup> Fatal accidents were also sometimes briefly described in the parish burial register as at Royston: entry 3871 for 4 Jan. 1789 William Mead 1778-84 'killed by a cart being overthrown'; entry 3876 for 14 Feb. 1789 James Trigg 'killed by a fall from a horse' *Royston Burial Register 1678-1800* (Royston, 1998) [unpaginated].

written down by their officials:

Undated

Sir, a Misfortune has happened to Thos Cornwell Bricklayer of your parish on Monday 11 Instant he fell from off a Ladder & Dislocated his Shoulder & Bruised himself Very much on St Nicholas Over [?] of the parish of Gelling Were he Got his mischief Was of Course first to Send for a Doctor Who Set the Shoulder & has attended him Since the man has been Very Ill But is Getting Beter. Tho<sup>s</sup> Cornwell Says he Served his apprenticeship with Mr Watton bricklayer at Royston. I should Be Glad of an answer Immediately to know your mind. Wither you Will fetch him home or I myself Send him as hie Now is Moveabel

John James Linford Overseer of Gelling Huntingdonshire near Caxton  
Thomas Bennett Churchwarden

I hope you Will not Give us the trouble of taking the man to the Justis for his Examination for it Will Be attended With more Expense Wich I Shall Expect to be Reimbursd from your parish.<sup>72</sup>

Fatal accidents were often recorded more graphically from eye-witness accounts which appear occasionally in coroners' enquiries, as here at St Albans which describes one incident which took place on the 5th January 1792:

An inquisition indented taken for our Sovereign Lord the King...to enquire for our said Lord the King when where how and in what manner Thomas Humbley came to his death...upon their oath say that the said Thomas Humbley on the 5th day of January [1792] being carefully driving of a waggon drawn by eight horses. It so happened that the horses took fright by the beating of a drum and the flying of a flag belonging to a certain recruiting party. Thomas Humbley in endeavouring to stop the horses was thrown down and the near wheels of the waggon accidentally casually and by misfortune went over the head of Thomas Humbley whereby he was instantly crushed to death. And that the said accident happened through the inhumanity of the Sergeant commanding the said recruiting party at that time. That the two near wheels of the waggon were moving to the death of the said Thomas Humbley and are of the value of one shilling and the property and in the possession of John Adams of Daventry in the county of Northampton, carrier.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> HALS DP87/18/3 Royston Miscellaneous correspondence 1804-9.

<sup>73</sup> D, Dean (ed.) *St. Albans Quarter Sessions Rolls 1784-1820* (Hertford: Hertfordshire Record Society, 1991), 27, Item no. 435/10. Few similarly informative accounts seem to have survived. It is notable that although the cost of the wheels and the ownership of the wagon that killed him were recorded any further details about the dead man, even his possible age, or where he came from, were conspicuously absent.



Emergency situations could arise out in the fields when medical assistance had to be provided directly by witnesses and workmates, friends or family as in the William Ellis example previously discussed. Potentially lethal problems could also occur in the middle of towns and on 3 September 1760 the Hertford vestries, All Saints, St Andrew's, St John's and Brickendon, in a rare combination for them, moved to protect the town against the problem of stray and potentially rabid dogs:

... as well from the knowledge of several accidents which have happened in this neighbourhood as by repeated advices from the City of London & County of Middlesex ... that many dogs have lately run mad and bit both man and beast who have thereby lost their lives to the great terror of the public, and it being known by fatal experience that these unhappy incidents are greatly increased by the number of dogs which are suffered to run about the streets and highways and are bit by those that run mad. We do therefore ... resolve that public notice be given in this church likewise fixed on the church door and town post on Sunday next that all dogs which are found loose ... for one month after Sunday next will be killed and that this parish [together with All Saints, St Johns and Brickendon] will pay one shilling per head for each dog which shall be so killed and buried.<sup>74</sup>

Other fatalities in the town could not be predicted and were caused by human error. John Carrington, a farmer, who served Bramfield parish for many years, at different times, as surveyor, overseer and chief constable, noted in his diary for 31st May 1803 a fatal misunderstanding or faulty transmission of medical instructions at Hertford:

On Wittson [Whitsun] Tuesday in the morning about 4 clock, the 31<sup>st</sup> was found dead in their bed, John Ramsey's, wife and child, which lived in St Andrews church yard, Hartford. The affair was as thus, she had a vellent [violent?] paine in her face & teeth, and sent to Dr Bradleys in the town, for something to ease her, they sent her some lodnahm [laudanum, a strong much- prescribed opiate usually to be taken by mouth] to put to a poltess [poultice] to lay on her cheek, but she took it inwardly and the child about 6 month old sucking received the same.<sup>75</sup>

He had previously described a similar case which took place on 1st Dec 1798 at Great Munden probably caused by illiteracy and the fact that poisons were usually supplied in the same or similar bottles to medicines and dispensed by the same

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<sup>74</sup> HALS DP/49/8/1 Hertford St Andrew's Vestry Mins 1731-63.

<sup>75</sup> S. Flood (ed.) *John Carrington, Farmer of Bramfield, His Diary, 1798-1810 Vol. 1. 1798-1804* (Hertford: Hertfordshire Record Society, 2015), 181, 31 May 1803.

person:

Mr Reed of Great Munden Bury poysend by accident this month, as follows, he thought him silf not quite well and sent his man to the Doctrs for something to take and ordered him to bring a viall of vitterll (vitriol) for to dress his sheep on some complaint. But the nurs or housekeeper gave him the vitterll ad he languished 2 days in great misery and died.<sup>76</sup>

Local tragedies and accidents were newsworthy and would receive widespread reporting in the area. These are vivid third or fourth hand accounts involving strangers where Carrington had obviously spoken to several witnesses. They contrast strongly with the brief entries which he usually made in his diary about his own or his family's illnesses: '...to Ware to see brother [in-law] Hasler, found him very ill, not like to live. He had 2 very bad fitts while I was there, but survived againe'.<sup>77</sup> Everyday illness was not a topic to be relished or dwelt upon at length in his social milieu. It is likely that Carrington employed similar laconic language when entering details of the sick Bramfield poor in his overseers' accounts presumably taken directly from the descriptions of relatives and friends applying for relief for them. Parish officials can also be seen using their own coded language when dealing with one another over their sick and injured out-parish poor as further discussed below.

### Inter-parish correspondence

As previously discussed, parish officials frequently had to negotiate with their counterparts in other Hertfordshire parishes, London and other counties over the treatment and subsequent transport home of Hertfordshire poor taken sick or injured whilst living and working away.<sup>78</sup> Sometimes a pauper could not be traced to his settlement parish as here:

Copy of Ltr to Leak, Lincolnshire [Written on outside of letter]  
Royston Herts 12<sup>th</sup> Febry 1783

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 14, 1 Dec. 1798.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 188, 26 February 1804.

<sup>78</sup> Examples are all taken from Royston and St Albans Abbey because these are the only Hertfordshire parishes researched for this thesis which appear to have preserved fairly extensive correspondence with other parishes about their out-parish poor.

Sirs

I am Ordered by Vestry to acquaint you that W<sup>m</sup> Cooper which belongs to your Parish as appears by his Examination is now very Ill and cannot do without Assistance <sup>^of his parish</sup> and now received Allowance from this parish should be glad to know if your parish will Undertake to repay what shall be allowed him during his Illness & what you'll please to allow him and his Wife a Week your Immediate answer will much Oblige your Hble. Serv<sup>t</sup>  
Henry Watson Vestry Clerk<sup>79</sup>

The Lincolnshire officials replied that William Cooper was not their parishioner and Royston should try other parishes with the same name, of which there were at that time several. There are no extant letters indicating that Royston found his parish. Despite problems of linking home parish with foreigner patient, the out-parish system for dealing with such cases was vital to the stability of the Old Poor Law as Steven King<sup>80</sup> has demonstrated. It had evolved, by the later eighteenth century, into the development of an informal code of conduct amongst parishes which will be examined here. Parishes sought to resolve a series of questions, but primarily which parish should take responsibility for the expenses incurred by the patient, thus emphasising the importance of belonging to a parish as discussed in an earlier chapter. In the Thomas Cornwell case previously noted a former Royston apprentice was injured while working in Huntingdonshire. The host parish churchwarden and overseer followed a frequently practiced strategy amongst parish officials, first ascertaining from the patient what parish he could claim as his settlement parish, then asserting Royston's obligation to take responsibility for him because of his former apprenticeship there before openly threatening a settlement examination and additional expense if Royston made difficulties about reimbursement.<sup>81</sup> In their dealings with suddenly incapacitated and failing Hertfordshire out-parish patients, overseers' correspondence indicates that their host counties appear to have treated them well and sometimes even championed them against their home parish.

In another case involving Royston, a Lincolnshire surgeon was prepared to act as an intermediary and bargain on behalf of his, apparently friendless, foreigner

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<sup>79</sup> HALS DP87/18/2 Royston Miscellaneous Correspondence 1769-1793.

<sup>80</sup> S. King, "It is impossible for our Vestry to judge his case into perfection from here": Managing the distance dimensions of poor relief, 1800-40' *Rural History*, 16 (2005), 161-89.

<sup>81</sup> HALS DP87/18/3 Royston Miscellaneous correspondence 1804-9.

patient. He had plainly questioned this man, a patient called Rayney, closely about his dealings with his home parish and hinted strongly that the man having lived for 30 years without applying for relief was now entitled to it in his distress. There is also an element of self-interest here because it is likely that the surgeon had treated him gratis and hoped Royston would pay something for his services, although no bill was included. He suggested the amount that Royston should pay weekly for Rayney's maintenance and threatened to return him home if Royston did not pay it:

To The Gent: Overseers of Royston Parish Herts

Gent<sup>n</sup>

I beg leave to recommend to your observation, a poor man by the name of Rayney [?], belonging to your parish, who has resided at this place upwards of thirty years, all which time he has never made application to you for any assistance but I do assure you at this time he is greatly in want of some relief, as his health is so greatly impaired, that he is totally incapable of doing any thing for his support, he only requests you will have the goodness to allow him two shillings per week, which request I insist you will readily comply with or he must return to Royston

I am Gent<sup>n</sup> Your obt Sert M M [?] Rogers Surgeon  
Burghy near Spilsby Lincolnshire May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1807<sup>82</sup>

There was no extant draft reply from Royston to this letter, but as can be seen here, host parishes regularly adopted a kind of ritualised threat display towards any attempts to ignore the problem of out-parish sick by their settlement parishes. As Eric Thomas found in his early study of Old Poor Law medical relief in Berkshire, Essex, and Oxfordshire from c.1720 to 1834, parishes would sometimes pay quite high fees for institutional care and treatment for their own parishioners,<sup>83</sup> but why would a Lincolnshire surgeon consider that Royston would be prepared to spend regular sums of money on an infirm and possibly dying pauper in a distant county purely because he had been born in that parish? Royston does not appear to have replied.

Another Royston man, Dixon, was championed by a Newmarket parish official John Hilton, and, as in the previous example, Hilton stipulated the exact sum

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid. It would seem most unlikely that the patient himself would have dared to come up with the unusually 'generous' proposed weekly sum for his upkeep.

<sup>83</sup> E. Thomas 'The Old Poor Law and Medicine' *Medical History* 24 (1980), 1-19.

of, probably increased, weekly relief that Royston should be prepared to pay for his future upkeep:

Mr Henry Watson Vestry Clerk Royston Herts

Sir

In answer to your dated 24<sup>th</sup> instant, have to inform you that We shall be Glad you would pay Dixon 2 shillings and Sixpence per Week we were lately at 3£ expence to send him to Bath infirmary.

I am Sir y<sup>r</sup> most obed<sup>s</sup> John Hilton

Newmarket Nov 30<sup>th</sup> 1802<sup>84</sup>

The generous Mr Hilton had already spent £3 on sending Dixon to Bath infirmary for unspecified treatment, possibly for a rheumatic/arthritis complaint, without informing Royston beforehand. Unlike the previous example there is no indication of how long this man had been living in Newmarket. The host parish was under no obligation to send him to hospital, but it had not involved them in a great deal of expenditure if this figure included travel as well as hospital fees. This was, apparently, another act of disinterested benevolence towards a stranger although the treatment might also have been intended to make him a more useful worker in his host parish. There is no extant draft reply from Royston to this letter. However, host parishes did not threaten to return injured poor before they were moveable even when comparatively generous expenditure would have been required for treating them, as in the Thomas Cornwell example. When negotiating over the costs of sick out-parish patients the host parish would usually offer a deal and then reinforce it by threatening to return the patient if their terms were not met.

It is not known whether Royston reimbursed Dixon's hospital costs at Bath or complied with the increase in relief payments because no draft reply was kept by Henry Watson, the then Royston vestry clerk, to either this letter or to the previous one although he frequently did keep drafts of his replies. As previously discussed Royston had created its own infirmary within the workhouse and so did not send patients to Addenbrookes hospital or any other medical institutions after the

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<sup>84</sup> HALS DP87/18/2 Royston Miscellaneous correspondence 1794-1803.

necessary modifications were completed in 1790. However, some other Hertfordshire parishes did use institutions for smallpox cases as at Chipping Barnet<sup>85</sup> or for lunatics who could no longer be safely managed in the parish. A number of Hertfordshire parishes paid for the admittance of their lunatic parishioners to Bethlehem hospital and their maintenance there probably because these individuals were becoming more violent, increasingly difficult to control and posing a danger to the community. Infectious disease was also a threat and so Chipping Barnet initially sent a number of parishioners and non-parishioners to the London smallpox hospital established in 1745-6,<sup>86</sup> although later they were treated in the parish by a number of apparently immune carers if not specialist nurses. The small parish of Braughing sent a rheumatic female parishioner to St Bartholomew's hospital for treatment and, as discussed further below, Hertford All Saints sent a probably rheumatic male parishioner to take the waters at Bath for an unspecified period.

As Steven King has recently noted 'for the pre-1834 period our understanding of how and when the sick poor utilised the medical functions of most institutions is surprisingly thin'.<sup>87</sup> Only a few documents have survived indicating the use of medical institutions by Hertfordshire vestries and most of the surviving correspondence concerns lunatics. The use of London lunatic hospitals and asylums has been briefly discussed above in the medical practitioners section and also in the previous chapter. In the 1720s, two letters were sent from the Braughing Vestry: one to Bart's Hospital about Mary Mason, who was afflicted with rheumatism and dropsy,<sup>88</sup> and another to Bethlem Hospital about a lunatic called Anthony William.<sup>89</sup> In both these cases the vestrymen were concerned to provide better care for their sick parishioners than they could receive in the parish. The earliest extant contact with a London institution was in 1758 when a printed table of costs for Bethlem patients, dated to 1749, was inserted into the vestry minutes of the small parish of

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<sup>85</sup> HALS DP15/12/1 & 2 Chipping Barnet Overseers' Accounts 1741-71; 1745-85.

<sup>86</sup> HALS DP 15/12/2 Chipping Barnet Overseers' Accounts 1745-85.

<sup>87</sup> King *Sickness, Medical Welfare*, 252.

<sup>88</sup> HALS DP23/8/1 Braughing Vestry Minutes [undated].

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

Thorley.<sup>90</sup> At some time in or before 1749 this information had been acquired by the vestry, but whether a lunatic patient was subsequently sent to the hospital is unrecorded. The Hitchin records included receipts for the maintenance for a lunatic, but whether this was in an institution or a private establishment is unclear.<sup>91</sup> In 1786 the Brickendon overseer had been contacting Bethlehem Hospital over the admission procedures for a lunatic:

At a Vestry held this Day by the Overseer and Chief Inhabitants of the Liberty of Brickendon at the House of W<sup>m</sup> Sykes at the Black Swan within the same Liberty for the dispatch of Parish Busine<sup>s</sup> it was agreed that the Overseer (having an Order from the Worshipful the Governors of Bethlehem Hospital) remove Mary Seeseley [?] A Lunatick to the said Hospital and it being necessary to find two Bondsmen in the sum of £100 who are to be resident in London it is agreed that the Overseer be directed to give a Bond of Imdemnification [agreement not to sue] on the Part of the Parish to the said Parties so bounden to the Governors as above.<sup>92</sup>

The formality of the language employed here is probably deliberate; the institution (usually commonly referred to as ‘Bedlam’ or ‘Bethlem’) and its Governors were deferentially given their full correct titles. However, as previously noted, in dealing with their counterparts in other parishes officials used different language and distinctive, sometimes quite combative approaches. Mr Hilton the polite Newmarket overseer had merely reminded his Royston counterparts of their obligations, but in a slightly later example St Albans Abbey parish officials employed more unsubtle carrot and stick tactics on Birmingham Overseers. This letter can be read in several ways, but it would appear here to be used as a rhetorical device which flagged up in advance the possible need for more expenditure on this case and assumed that the ‘home’ parish would ‘comply’:

Feb 26 1810

Gentlemen

We think it proper to inform you your Parishioner Joseph Rudhall is here very dangerously ill and has applied to us for Relief. Under a impending? Order of Removal we are relieving him with 7 Sh Wk. and you may rest assured no unnecessary expence shall be incurred. He has a Wife and one Child. Should they require [?] A shilling or two - <sup>more</sup> a Week in the event of a long illness hope [?] you will comply with it

<sup>90</sup> HALS DP108/8/1 Thorley Vestry Minutes 1714-1796.

<sup>91</sup> HALS DP53/18/4 Hitchin Miscellaneous papers 1760-1835.

<sup>92</sup> HALS DP48/8/18 Brickendon Vestry Minutes 1776-1792, 15 February 1786.

We are  
Your hble Servs Overseers of Abbey Parish St Albans<sup>93</sup>

Abbey parish also assured Birmingham that ‘no unnecessary expence shall be incurred’, which was another almost ritualistic observation, as was the phrase ‘I have acted the same as I should have done if she had been one of ours’ employed by the Luton overseer here:

To the Overseers of St Albans [Written on outside of letter]

Sir

These few lines inform you that your Pauper John Barnes wife Died this Morning. I have ordered her Coffin and other things Necessary. If you think any thing Wrong should be Oblige to you to let me know I have acted the same as I should have done if she had been one of ours and answer if Convenient will oblige

Your Humble Servant John Boast [?] Overseer<sup>94</sup>

In the early nineteenth-century Hertfordshire inter-parish correspondence variants of this sentiment were frequently employed between officials who seem to have been anxious to assure one another that their poor were receiving the same treatment as those of the host parish. This seems to have been a kind of coded assertion that I have spent as little on your patient as you would wish me to and expect you to do the same for one of my poor if it proves necessary in the future. The conclusion may fairly be reached that when examining early nineteenth-century inter-parish correspondence about sick and distressed poor, an unwritten code of practice was operated by parish officials and also vestries, usually through their clerks’ or overseers’ correspondence and that Hertfordshire was expected to comply with this in its dealings with parishes in other counties. Hertfordshire parishes attempting to evade responsibilities towards their sick and injured parishioners, who urgently required help, were firmly rebuked by the host parish and attempts would be made to shame them into co-operation. Any further attempts at breaking the rules would result in the home parish almost immediately receiving their transportable out-parish poor back by a rapid removal and many of these rejects would be women and children as discussed in the following chapter.

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<sup>93</sup> HALS DP90/18/3 St Albans Abbey Overseers Correspondence 1740-1815.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.



## Paying for medical treatment

The treatments parishes were prepared to pay for in order to cure their sick poor, the hospitals and asylums they used and the amount of money they would decide to expend on hospital fees and maintenance also seem to have followed some unwritten guidelines. In the following example of a rare decision made at a vestry meeting it can be seen that some parishes were occasionally inclined to spend more than the average on particular sick individuals:

At this Vestry It is ordered that Richard Humberstone have a Certificate from this Parish to the General hospital at Bath and that <sup>Blank form of</sup> the same be forthwith wrote for to Dr Harlby one of the physicians of the s<sup>d</sup> Hospital or Mr John Brett Register of the said Hospital agreeable to the [?] in that behalf made. Also it is ordered That all money Exceeding the Sum of Twenty Shillings on ac<sup>ct</sup> of the s<sup>d</sup> Rich<sup>d</sup> Humberstone going to Bath Hospital will be accountable. It is also ordered that five shillings [?] be paid to the s<sup>d</sup> Rich<sup>d</sup> Humberstone for and toward leaving this parish? for Bath.<sup>95</sup>

Since Richard Humberstone was not recorded in the militia lists it is impossible to know his occupation or what he suffered from, but his parish, Hertford All Saints, definitely believed that he could travel to Bath and had made preliminary arrangements for him to be admitted there. He was, presumably, considered to be both deserving and a good investment.<sup>96</sup> An equally important consideration was that he might also have had a large young family which the parish would be obliged to support for several years if he could not.<sup>97</sup> The arguments that lay behind the vestry's decision were, as usual, hidden from view. A sick or injured poor person was less than useful and immediately became a financial liability and a damaged tool so why might they be better treated than when well? It is likely that, as Anne Borsay observes in her previously noted study of Georgian Bath, the prime motivation here was probably economic, not charitable, a desire to get sick poor

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<sup>95</sup> HALS DP48/8/2 Hertford All Saints Vestry Minutes 1796-1818, 4 Dec. 1752. As previously noted All Saints vestry recorded, checked and commented on its overseers' expenditure monthly at every vestry meeting.

<sup>96</sup> The Royal Mineral Water Hospital at Bath specialised in paralytic disorders in the later eighteenth-century and before that rheumatic diseases: *Narrative of the efficacy of the Bath waters in various kinds of paralytic disorders admitted into the Bath hospital, from the end of 1775, to the end ... relations of fifty-two of their cases....* (Bath, 1787).

<sup>97</sup> The Militia exempted men with large families of children under 10 years for that reason.

people working and at least to some degree useful again, if at all possible. 'The Bath Infirmary openly expressed its commitment to rendering the sick poor productive for the community'.<sup>98</sup>

Any possibility of poor people being unproductively idle was also an anathema to Hertfordshire vestries who always seem to have strived to keep all their poor working at some simple task however minimal their physical and/or mental abilities. It would have become obvious in the course of time that some damaged poor could never be properly mended and would become a permanent burden on the parish, but those who could be eventually returned to some kind of work would not be idle and might ultimately cost the parish less even if some relatively high initial outlay for treatment had to be made.

This generosity was not always limited to useful and employable males as can be seen from medical bills where widows received a series of medications some of which were comparatively expensive as previously noted in Baldock.<sup>99</sup> Possibly these women had useful skills which they could pass on to others and/or supportive relatives or friends presumably living nearby who were prepared to make formal demands for treatment or complaints to the parish and even use a justice of the peace to fight for their medical care, as did this St Albans woman:

To the Overseers of the Poor of the parish of St Alban one of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the said Borough

Whereas Complaint hath been on oath before me by Susan Piggott that Susan Smith of the parish of St Alban in the said Borough is very ill and unable to support herself without parochial relief. These are to command you to pay unto the said Susan Smith the weekly sum of Six Shillings for one month or forthwith appear before me to shew cause if any you have to the contrary. Given under my hand and seal this 19<sup>th</sup> day of August 1809 – F. G? Searanche?<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> A. Borsay *Medicine and Charity in Georgian Bath: A Social History of the General Infirmary c.1739-1830* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 225.

<sup>99</sup> HALS DP12/18/1 Baldock Miscellaneous Papers 1501-1732 (1729). All the fairly expensive items, costing a total of 12s. 8d. appear to have been prescribed for Widow Johnson. She may well have been elderly because she was given Cordials which were intended to stimulate and strengthen failing bodies. There were also bills for men and women from Anstey, Barkway and many for Royston. More bills may exist in the uncatalogued parish bundles already discussed.

<sup>100</sup> HALS DP90/18/3 St Albans Abbey correspondence 1740-1815.

Steve Hindle has argued that parish authorities and the magistracy constructed the identity of the deserving poor 'by reference to a series of behavioural and normative characteristics'.<sup>101</sup> Here Susan Smith, probably through the advocacy of Susan Piggott, (who may have been a friend, relative or landlady) was successfully constructed as a deserving pauper by a magistrate and became eligible for the medical relief her parish had not provided. James Taylor tried to penetrate the mindset of the Cumbrian Kirkby Lonsdale vestrymen when they decided whether to give or withhold relief. He found that responses to the sick poor's letters 'suggest a kind of formula: Are these claimants ours? What is their character? Is there anyone in Kirkby Lonsdale to plead their cause? Do we have the means to check the accuracy of the claim? Is this a dangerous precedent? What can we afford to give? Only then would compassion enter in'.<sup>102</sup>

The mindset of some Hertfordshire vestries including Royston, Hertford All Saints and St Albans Abbey was also revealed, but only in the surviving letters transmitting their decisions to their sick out-parish poor. Not all requests for help received a response and the underlying attitude in these parishes was very likely *laissez faire*; why not ignore this letter and let the host parish deal with it, as who, except the pauper concerned, is going to protest if we do? As with resident pauper medical relief cases the other questions were likely to have been; is this particular individual worth the expenditure if they are not contributing their labour to the parish? If we decide to give relief what is the lowest possible amount that we can provide?

As previously discussed, parishes were only galvanised into high expenditure when individuals or epidemics threatened the whole community. Parish officials could be decidedly and probably deliberately parsimonious in providing access to medical treatment for the sick and economically useless poor. At least one parish demonstrated in its inter-parish correspondence that it adamantly refused to pay

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<sup>101</sup> Hindle 'Civility, Honesty', 38-59.

<sup>102</sup> J. Taylor 'Voices in the Crowd: the Kirkby Lonsdale Township Letters, 1809-36' in T. Hitchcock P. King and P. Sharpe (eds) *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor 1640-1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1997), 121.

for a particular case. This exchange is worth studying in detail both because of its rarity in the sample studied and also because it reveals the strongly economic reasoning that lay behind treating or not treating the sick poor. A Royston parishioner, Sarah Gayler, had apparently on her own initiative brought her scorbutic son to London for consultations and he was now a long-term in-patient in an unnamed London hospital. She had then approached the parish officials of her, unnamed, host parish to provide money for her son's prescribed salt-water treatment. They agreed and then asked Royston to repay their expenditure on him. The churchwarden of the unnamed host parish (John Burrill) and the overseers (Joseph Enby and Thomas Bedford) contacted Royston on Sarah Gayler's behalf pointing out the specifically economic advantages of funding the treatment: 'if you think proper to defray the Expence will save the family from being further Troblesome to your parish...'

Ltr. From W. Gayle [Written on outside of letter – but letter signed by John Burrill]

Gen<sup>n</sup>

Sarah Gayler has apply'd to us for relief on account of her son (her husband being ill) the son has a Scorbutic disorder nearly in the last stage, have had the advice of every Eminent Surgeon, amongst them Surgeon Potts, who informed Mrs Gayler nothing will do except the Salt water. It is not in their power to bear that expence if you think proper to defray the Expence will save the family from being further Troblesome to your parish, the Boy has been in the Hospital Eleven weeks & finds no relief your – Determination will be Esteemed a favour from

Gent<sup>n</sup> your hble Serv<sup>ts</sup> John Burrill } Churchwarden

Joseph Enby [?] }

Thos. Bedford } <sup>Overseers</sup> May 1 1784

Direct to Sarah Gayler

Rg. Red Lyon Court Grub St<sup>103</sup>

Sarah Gayler herself added a plea for a quick reply 'by the coach' so that the 'commity' [committee?] could make their decision. For a poor woman she

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<sup>103</sup> Her address was listed in John Roque, *An Alphabetical Index of the Streets, Squares, Lanes, Alleys, &c. Contained in the Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster, and Borough of Southwark*, ... engraved / by John Pine Bluemantle Pursuivant at arms, ... from an actual survey made by John Roque 1762. However, there is no map or plan only a reference number so the parish where she was staying and its helpful parish officials cannot be traced. It may have been in the Moorfields area.

demonstrated both agency and an intelligent understanding of how the relief system worked: 'pray be so kind as to give me an answer Tuesday by the coach with out fail as I must meat the commity in the afternoon in so doing your will much oblige your Sarah Gayler'.<sup>104</sup> The Royston Vestry Clerk, Henry Watson, appears to have replied to her three days later, but completely disregarded the medical treatment aspect and was apparently under the erroneous impression that she was asking for a regular cash allowance to maintain her son in his illness, although neither she nor her host parish intermediaries had mentioned this. In his extant draft letter he informed her that the Committee had refused her application and gave the standard Royston reply to out-parish sick poor that she and her son must enter Royston workhouse if they could not live away from the parish unsupported. Watson apparently assumed that her son would be capable of travel (and presumably also her sick husband who was with her). It is obvious from this letter that the host parish had a better understanding of her problems and were more prepared to offer help than her home parish.

There is no extant copy of a letter to Sarah Gayler's host parish churchwarden and overseers' who had made the original request on her behalf, so probably Royston decided not to engage directly in correspondence with them even though their involvement was explicitly acknowledged in the draft and Sarah's was deliberately deleted, 'I Rec'd a ~~your~~ letter from Mr Burrill'. From the parish clerk's deletions it would appear that the draft letter had been discussed by the Royston vestrymen and they had seemingly decided it was less trouble to respond to an invented application for maintenance that she had not made rather than her actual request for treatment expenses:

Copy of Ltr to Mrs Gayler [Written on outside of letter]

Mrs Gayler

I Rec'd a ~~your~~ letter from Mr Burrill – by w<sup>ch</sup> it appears you had applied <sup>^ to</sup> ~~him~~ for Relief for your Son, ~~A letter I laid before the Commite and I said~~ am directed by the Commite before whom I laid your letter to Acquaint you that they will not grant you any Allowance on Acco<sup>t</sup> of your Son or otherwise as they have fited up a Decent Workhouse for the reception of

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<sup>104</sup> HALS DP87/18/2 Royston Miscellaneous Correspondence 1769-93 (May 1784).

the poor & if it is not in your power to do with<sup>t</sup> the Assistance of your parish  
 you must ~~come~~<sup>return</sup> Home as<sup>t</sup> [?]  
 I am Yr Hble Servt JW [?]  
 Royston 4 May 1784.<sup>105</sup>

This is the only written refusal of assistance to a sick out-parish pauper found to date in Hertfordshire parishes, although it is quite possible that others were made and those in writing subsequently discarded. Royston seems to have kept all its written records including some drafts and this example reveals the Royston official mindset and lack of concern for individuals very well. Sarah Gayler was probably not regarded as a deserving pauper by her parish, since she had previously refused to nurse her ailing mother when ordered to do so by the vestry. Her husband was sick and her son had been diagnosed as very ill, 'nearly in the last stage', so the vestry probably considered that the family was not worth investing in as an economic unit. She and her husband and son then returned to Royston and the son later died in the workhouse.

As noted in the previous chapter, the Royston vestry did eventually decide to spend some money on repairing its in-parish sick and injured resident poor and constructed infirmary rooms for them in its newly renovated workhouse. This innovatory strategy enabled the parish to save both the payment of transport to and admission fees at the nearest hospital, Addenbrookes in Cambridge, and also the expenditure needed to make patients decent before they were sent there and then maintain them while they were treated.<sup>106</sup> That Addenbrookes monitored the physical upkeep of their patients and were prepared to champion them can be seen from this letter sent by an Addenbrookes apothecary complaining about the neglect of his Royston patient:

Sir  
 I have taken the liberty of troubling you with these few lines in order to inform you that W<sup>m</sup> Smith, your parishioner, (now in Addenbrooke's Hospital) [is? – letter covered by debris from a disintegrated seal] very much in want of a couple of [or? letter torn] a pair of stockings, therefore

<sup>105</sup> HALS DP87/18/2 Royston Miscellaneous Correspondence 1769-93 (May 1784).

<sup>106</sup> There is no record to date of other parishes setting up infirmaries for their sick poor although some were following a strategy of collecting them together in their poorhouses.

shall [be? – letter torn] much obliged to you to speak to the Overseer &  
desire he will send them –

I am Sir  
Your very hum<sup>e</sup> Serv.  
John Cotton<sup>107</sup>

Royston vestrymen often openly directed the work of their rota of parish doctors through vestry orders and, probably more frequently, through informal brief meetings in the streets of the town, and could therefore effectively both gate-keep access to medical relief and, as in the following example, manipulate and use the doctor's visits to their advantage. 7<sup>th</sup> March 1785 – 'Order'd that the parish Doctor do attend John Britton and his Family to see if they are well enough to go into the Workhouse'.<sup>108</sup> Plainly the vestry's concern here was not the health of the Britton family, but ascertaining whether they were well enough to be moved out of their home, probably needed to accommodate another more economically viable family, and be consigned to the workhouse. However, as previously noted during its 1800-01 epidemic even Royston sanctioned a very high level of expenditure during a serious outbreak of an undiagnosed but apparently virulently infectious disease. The vestry must have judged that it was too threatening to the general community to try and cut costs.<sup>109</sup> There are likely to have been many more verbal and unrecorded directions given to other parish doctors regarding the treatment of the sick poor and the amount to be expended on them. It is probable that the undeserving fared much worse than the deserving even when sick and may have sought treatment from local lay practitioners or charity from local physicians. Therefore some parishes would have been operating a two-tier system where the deserving received varying amounts of medical relief and the undeserving were left to their own devices.

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<sup>107</sup> HALS DP87/18/2 Royston Misc. Correspondence 1769–93.

<sup>108</sup> HALS DP87/8/2 Minutes of Joint Annual Vestry and Poor Law Committee meetings 1781–98.

<sup>109</sup> Many poor people appear to have been living in and around the town in the back streets and outlying rural areas. They probably came into daily contact with all ranks of townsfolk as sellers of services, produce and sometimes live-in or live-out employees. Therefore, it made sense, from the town oligarchy's point of view, to ensure that those infected were regularly medicated even when it cost a steadily increasing amount of money.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined how a range of Hertfordshire parishes evolved policies and practices to treat their sick poor. The Hertfordshire parishes researched appear to greatly modify if not contradict the current literature in this area. Historians of medicine including Anne Digby and Irvine Loudon have written about the relationship between parish officials and medical practitioners.<sup>110</sup> They wrote from the practitioners' point of view not that of the parish officials who employed them. This study has aimed to examine the officials' view of the relationship and fill that gap. Both Digby and Loudon also traced the development of contracts to the latter half of the eighteenth century while emphasising the importance of the traditional tripartite division into elite physicians and lower-ranked surgeons and apothecaries which was not obvious in the Hertfordshire parishes studied. Samantha Williams found that the Bedfordshire medical contracts she researched began to be used around the mid-eighteenth century,<sup>111</sup> but some Hertfordshire contracts pre-dated these by several decades.

From this research the attitude towards contracts in Hertfordshire would seem to have been more flexible than other writers have found in some counties. It is unknown how many contracts would have been discarded at the end of the term, usually annual, and since relatively few examples have survived it is difficult to understand the degree of flexibility involved. It would seem likely that King's 'fluid' range of commitment to formal contracts<sup>112</sup> also existed in Hertfordshire, possibly because vestries were initially unwilling to accept the regular expenditure involved and might have decided that to pay on a case-by-case basis would save money.

Medical contracts would have become more necessary when the first workhouses were founded in the early eighteenth century and the care of the poor was farmed out to laymen contractors. Hertfordshire parish officials appear to have adopted a pragmatic attitude to providing medical services to the sick poor both inside and outside the workhouse. However, some vestries continued to order all

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<sup>110</sup> Digby *Making a Medical Living*; Loudon, *Medical Care*.

<sup>111</sup> Williams 'Practitioners' Income'.

<sup>112</sup> King *Sickness, Medical Welfare*, 150.



kinds of medical and irregular practitioners to treat certain deserving poor in the same way that they directed tailors and shoemakers to equip the destitute and victuallers, bakers and butchers to provide extra food for them.

All types of medical men, and some women, were involved in the provision of cures and the Hertfordshire medical marketplace was very varied. It included university-trained physicians, who sometimes already held higher social status in the community as members of the land-owning classes and were vestrymen. They may have given their services freely in charity to the local poor which would explain the early seventeenth-century agreements in Chipping Barnet and Little Gaddesden and the lack of medical bills entered in the Chipping Barnet overseers' accounts. There may also have been similar early but unwritten charitable provisions in other parishes.

What seems clear is that all medical men were commonly designated by parishes as doctors including irregular, often part-time, specialists in particular areas such as bone-setters and eye-doctors. Although the traditional literature tends to concentrate on the role of trained practitioners and to uniformly dismiss the irregular remainder as quacks and charlatans,<sup>113</sup> it would appear more likely that these distinctions were not important to contemporaries and that all these men and possibly some women were seen by laymen parish officials purely as medical service-providers.

From the treatments that the sick poor, and sometimes their families, received from these practitioners it would appear that the prime factors influencing parish officials to employ them was the size of their fees and their local reputations. Economic considerations tended to dictate treatments although the amounts spent on individuals varied quite widely. It would seem likely that undeserving or useless male and female poor were effectively barred from obtaining parish medical help because the ruling oligarchy would refuse to consider them unless their sickness, physical or mental, threatened the community or they had powerful advocates,

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<sup>113</sup> Porter *Quacks*.

such as a churchman, sympathetic employer or even justice of the peace to support them within the parish. Vestries were powerful in their parishes and would defend their economic interests unless opposed by a greater authority in the community. A number of Hertfordshire officials actively sought to directly control medical expenditure and keep poor-relief payments down. They acted as gatekeepers to medical relief both through capping in-parish spending on the sick and specifying what treatments and cures for their out-parish poor they were prepared to pay for and those they would refuse. I have found, to date, only one direct written refusal to pay for treatment, for an economically useless and very sick young man, but how many other requests were rejected and the paperwork discarded is unknown. There would also have been an unknown number of verbal requests made directly to parish officials.

Initially the parish oligarchies were firmly in control, rather than the medical men, but gradually lost power to them. The initial unequal power relationship between parish officials and practitioners can be seen to have evolved over time as the numbers of sick and injured poor steadily increased. The doctors steadily became more powerful agents within the poor law system, and finally necessary basic components of it, enabling them to negotiate increasingly remunerative contracts. However, there were clashes between officials and practitioners, disputes over non-payment of bills and a sometimes uneasy working relationship between some parishes and the medical men it employed and might attempt to defraud.

The chapter has also demonstrated the importance of dialogue/negotiation with individual sick parishioners living and working outside the parish and with the officials of their host parishes. These parishes would offer help to the patient but threaten the home parish with we will send him/them back if you make problems. The more determined poor who wanted to remain away from their place of settlement would also threaten their home parish; I will come back with my large family and/or my possibly infectious and expensive medical problems if you will not support me where I am now living. How much of this was bluff and counter bluff is unclear because parish officials did not record outcomes, but the movement of

individuals can sometimes be traced for the latter half of the seventeenth century through parish removal orders. The provision of medical relief and relationships with medical practitioners appears to have caused a range of problems to the parishes. The following chapter examines another large and sometimes equally problematic group of the poor; vulnerable girls and women, who lacked a breadwinner and their relationship with officials.

## Chapter Eight: Managing Poor Women

### Context

Women formed a distinct group under the Old Poor Law and received widely different treatment from men as has previously been discussed in chapter five. It was found that sick women were frequently left to their own sphere of domestic medicine unless requiring surgical treatment or specialist male midwifery. This chapter focuses on the treatment by their parishes and judicial officials of another range of vulnerable Hertfordshire poor women and examines the considerations that appear to have shaped policies in a patriarchal society towards these frequently demanding claimants. The Old Poor Law was designed for and focused on supporting working men so the gap in knowledge considered here is what happened when women were forced to engage with it?

Women who tried to avoid dependence on the parish found themselves in court for disorderly conduct including running unlicensed alehouses or practising trades they had not been formally apprenticed to or where they had not completed the full term of apprenticeship. These women were seeking to survive by employing their domestic talents for baking or brewing to, at least partially, support themselves and their families, but the Old Poor Law would not allow this even though it resulted in unwanted burdens on the poor-rates. It is possible that some of these women sought more freedom from parish regulation by moving to London where their backgrounds and lack of formal apprenticeships would not be known.

The women discussed here, comprising female apprentices, deserted women and widows were all made problematic by the rigid and frequently inaccurate assumptions of their society about both female lives and their relationships with their breadwinners. Young girls were expected to be able to rely on a male breadwinner (father, brother, or even uncle or grandfather) until they entered their first employment. If they had no breadwinner because they were orphans or foundlings their parish officials were legally obliged to place them in

work either locally or outside the parish.<sup>1</sup> Mature women were expected to marry a breadwinner for life and devote themselves to their families, although some might take on some part-time, low-paid work such as harvesting, weeding or spinning when their children entered the workforce. Widows were provided with a small allowance and expected to maintain themselves until they became incapable when they were classed as deserving and given a small allowance to subsist on until they died.

The prime strategies employed by officials in managing poor females of any age settled in the parish were to keep them under devolved control. It was assumed that this could be achieved either through their male relatives or their employer. Officials aimed to send them out to work from an early age and then, when they married, they became their breadwinner's responsibility. Females probably did not often directly interact with parish officials except when the breadwinner was absent, ill or otherwise incapacitated, in which case they would probably need to find a male intermediary to contact and negotiate with officials, although some women were prepared to argue their cases for relief at vestry meetings.

Females without any male breadwinner automatically became heads of households and invariably had to be dealt with directly by the parish because they and their dependents could not survive without parish assistance. Most women were barely paid enough to exist when single and in work and they could not provide for a family solely on their own minimal wages. If deserted or widowed they immediately became vulnerable to economic pressures and could rapidly be reduced to destitution especially if they had young dependent families hindering them from taking on regular work. They were expensive burdens on the poor rates. Women who had only been settled in a parish through marriage were abruptly severed from it and would be removed with their dependents to their home parishes. The destitute, unsupported female, of any age and with or without dependents was a problem and later would become very prevalent if not dominant in early workhouses. There has been little research on poor dependent women in

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<sup>1</sup> *An Act For the Punishment of Vagabonds and Relief of the Poor and Impotent Persons* 1547 (1 Edward VI c. 3).

this period as opposed to more general studies on women. Not until Andrew August studied poor women's lives in late-Victorian London was the topic fully explored.<sup>2</sup>

The following section examines what has been written in detailed studies on poor women within specific groups, but focuses on the literature covering the particular areas and topics discussed in detail in the chapter; female apprenticeship, desertion and widowhood. The third section examines female apprenticeship in detail. This was the first time that a girl's parish, and sometimes her parents' choices, directly influenced her life and set her on the road to life-long toil. The fourth considers the problems deserted women caused to their parishes and how officials dealt with them and the fifth looks at the treatment and, in some cases, manipulation of widows into serving the parish. Finally the chapter discusses what has been revealed about how Hertfordshire women were managed and their interactions with parish and judicial officials.

### Thinking and writing about poor women

The general studies of the Old Poor Law produced by various poor law historians including Paul Fideler, Geoffrey Oxley, and Paul Slack were primarily concerned with policy and administration,<sup>3</sup> and do not provide detailed studies of poor individuals, male or female. However, a great deal has now been written on the subject of early modern women and the literature covers many areas, age groups and social classes. Therefore this section will concentrate on two areas; material relating to the specific groups of women discussed in the chapter and the studies that include Hertfordshire.

Ivy Pinchbeck, a pioneer of women's history, noted in one of her later works the importance of parish apprenticeship and the philosophy that lay behind it as, 'an integral part of a general policy, whose aim was to conserve a social order,

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<sup>2</sup> A. August *Poor Women's Lives: Gender, Work and Poverty in Late-Victorian London* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> P. Fideler *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England: The Old Poor Law Tradition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006); G. Oxley *Poor Relief in England and Wales, 1601-1834* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1974); P. Slack *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman, 1988).

hierarchical in character, sanctioned by Providence, and maintained by particular concepts of mutual responsibility'.<sup>4</sup> However, little has been written about specifically female apprenticeship, for example whether the girls were indentured by their parish or family, since most historians have concentrated on boy apprentices<sup>5</sup> and/or on the impact of the industrial revolution on child employment.<sup>6</sup>

During this period, women's employment was almost synonymous with some form of domestic service, which was a prime hunting ground for sexual predators both employers and fellow servants as will be further discussed in chapter nine. Domestic or agricultural service probably formed the major occupation of poor Hertfordshire girls and single women. Many girls went into unpaid domestic service when they were first apprenticed to housewifery and then entered paid service in their later teens when they were most vulnerable and likely to become bastard-bearers. The more enterprising would seek for employers at hiring fairs usually for an annual term and remain in service, aiming to better themselves and gain more domestic skills until they married. Some would not marry and aim to train for positions as upper servants, cooks or housekeepers in large households in Hertfordshire or London. As previously discussed in chapter two, London was a constant attraction to young people, both men and women, seeking to better themselves. The career paths of poor women can be traced in eighteenth-century Hertfordshire settlement examinations further discussed in a later section.

Historians have also looked at poor women in a range of age groups. The first group to be researched in any detail were the elderly of both sexes. The drive to control and manipulate them is very evident in some of the

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<sup>4</sup> I. Pinchbeck and M. Hewitt *Children in English Society: Vol.1 From Tudor Times to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1969), 223.

<sup>5</sup> J. Humphries *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> K. Honeyman *Child Workers in England, 1780-1820: Parish Apprentices and the Making of the Early Industrial Labour Force* (London: Routledge, 2007). These children were not local but imported from London parishes.

Hertfordshire parishes discussed in later sections,<sup>7</sup> and has also been observed by Andrew Wear in a London parish discussed further below. Margaret Pelling studied older women in early modern Norwich and found that many continued working. These women do not seem to have wanted to throw themselves on the parish and lose what small independence they possessed. A few widows remarried possibly to gain themselves some non-parochial support in old age.<sup>8</sup> Other women preferred to remain parish widows precisely because they would receive community support.<sup>9</sup> This came at a price and Andrew Wear found that the lives of the sick poor in St Bartholomew's Exchange were virtually taken over by their parish in return for a small pension in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>10</sup>

Lynn Botelho also focused on this period in examining the villages of Cratfield and Poslingford in Suffolk. Botelho used family reconstitution from parish registers to analyse the treatment under the poor law of women over fifty, then considered elderly, although not unemployable, by contemporaries. She found that the pensions provided there were inadequate for survival and that even very elderly poor women were obliged to continue to work for their livings.<sup>11</sup> At the same time Susannah Ottaway investigated the lives of both elderly men and women, from all classes, principally in eighteenth-century Dorset and Essex. Ottaway found that women worked for the parish fostering children and caring for the sick, as they did in Hertfordshire, and began to receive

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<sup>7</sup> Berkhamsted Indentures; Cheshunt Indentures; Chipping Barnet Churchwardens Accounts; Hertford All Saints Vestry Minutes and Orders; Royston Vestry Minutes and Orders and Settlement Certificates and Examinations and Removal Orders indexed from a wide range of parishes.

<sup>8</sup> M. Pelling 'Old Age, Poverty and Disability in Early Modern Norwich: Work, Remarriage and other Expedients' in M. Pelling, *The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early Modern England* (London: Longman, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> J. Smith, 'Widowhood and Ageing in Traditional English Society' *Ageing and Society* 4 (1984), 429–49.

<sup>10</sup> A. Wear 'Caring for the Sick Poor in St Bartholomew Exchange: 1580-1676' in W. Bynum and R. Porter (eds) *Living and Dying in London: Medical History, Supplement* 11 (1991), 41–60.

<sup>11</sup> L. Botelho *Old Age and the English Poor Law, 1500-1700* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004).



poor relief earlier than men presumably as part-payment for this work.<sup>12</sup> More recently Samantha Williams researched policies towards the poor in two Bedfordshire villages, Campton and Shefford, during the final decades of the old poor law and traced the problems that arose as both unemployment and poor relief costs spiralled.<sup>13</sup>

Several historians have made in-depth studies of some poor women in particular counties. Neighbouring Cambridgeshire was the first county study on the poor to be undertaken in 1934 and it included some poor women.<sup>14</sup> This was followed, in 1996 by Pamela Sharpe's study of women's work in Essex from 1700 to 1850.<sup>15</sup> Since then historians have largely concentrated on individual parishes or towns. As previously noted, Lynn Botelho studied older women's lives in two villages in sixteenth and seventeenth century Suffolk.<sup>16</sup> Richard Wall has studied poor relief in an Essex parish from 1795-7,<sup>17</sup> and Samantha Williams, as previously discussed, examined the poor in two Bedfordshire villages, during a slightly later period,<sup>18</sup> and found that the lone mother and her dependent children and the elderly dominated the relief rolls.<sup>19</sup> This was also the case in the Hertfordshire parishes studied here.

Hertfordshire is missing from this now fairly extensive literature on early modern women in spite of the range of source material available for study. This means that little or nothing is known about the lives and management of poor females in the county and hitherto no comparisons could be made even with the

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<sup>12</sup> S. Ottaway *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> S. Williams *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle Under the English Poor Law 1760-1834* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> E. Hampson *The Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire 1597-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934).

<sup>15</sup> P. Sharpe *Adapting to Capitalism: Working Women in the English Economy 1700-1850* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Botelho *Old Age and the English Poor Law*.

<sup>17</sup> R. Wall 'Families in Crisis and the English Poor Law as Exemplified by the Relief Programme in the Essex Parish of Ardleigh 1795-7' in E. Ochiai (ed.) *The Logic of Female Succession: Rethinking Patriarchy and Patrilineality in Global and Historical Succession* (Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2003), 101-27.

<sup>18</sup> Williams *Poverty, Gender and Lifecycle*.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

documented towns in the neighbouring county of Essex.<sup>20</sup> Whether Hertfordshire women lived under different rules from their Essex counterparts is not known. How the treatment of Essex women by their parish officials differed from that of Hertfordshire women is also unknown. More importantly there has been no comparison between other, more distant, counties such as Suffolk, Hampshire Bedfordshire and others mentioned previously which have already been studied. Up to now there has been no understanding of how the way Hertfordshire operated its poor laws differed to or echoed the poor law management of females in other counties.

### Female apprentices

The first group to be studied here is that of Hertfordshire female apprentices, both those apprenticed by their parents or relatives and the orphans and foundlings indentured by their parish. The study concentrates on two Hertfordshire parishes, Berkhamsted and Cheshunt, which produced the highest number of female indentures from 1600-1800 (see Table. 8.2 below). A number of questions arise: what can be learned about these girls and what were their backgrounds and the trades they entered? Does apprenticeship appear to have offered a useful entry into skilled work for them or did they merely become cheap maids-of-all-work or unpaid drudges receiving only minimal board and lodging? From the 1536 *Act For Punishment of Sturdy Vagabonds and Beggars* (27 Henry VIII, c. 25) onwards vagrancy and children were to be linked and a series of statutes directed that poor children were to be put to service to deter them from becoming idle vagabonds.<sup>21</sup> In 1598, *An Act For the Relief of the Poor* (39 Elizabeth I c.30) required the appointment of an overseer for every parish, and by the consolidating act of 1601, (43 Eliz. I c.2), churchwardens and overseers were ordered to bind out poor children as apprentices if they judged that their parents were not able to maintain them. The

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<sup>20</sup> F. Emmison *Early Essex Town Meetings: Braintree 1619-36; Finchingfield 1626-34* (London: Phillimore, 1970); J. Oxley, *Barking Vestry Minutes and other Parish Documents* (Colchester: Benham, 1955).

<sup>21</sup> *For the Punishment of Vagabonds and Relief of the Poor and Impotent Persons* 1547 (1 Edward VI c. 3); *Touching the Punishment of Vagabonds and other Idle Persons* 1550 (3 & 4 Edward VI c.16); *For the Punishment of Vagabonds and for Relief of the Poor and Impotent* 1572 (14 Elizabeth I c. 5).

underlying strategy of all this Tudor legislation was to train the children of the workshy poor to be industrious and conscientious workers from their earliest years. As Steve Hindle observed even very young children were to be given some work which it was thought would guard against them developing idle habits in youth. Idleness was being diagnosed here as a form of preventable disease endemic in the poor: 'The Hertfordshire Justices of the Peace noted in 1631 that 'those poore children who were not yet of fitt yeares to be putt forth (apprenticed) they had caused to be sett to spinning or such small worke as is moste meete for them according to the tendernesse of their age that idlenesse may not fasten in them'.<sup>22</sup>

Although some parents apprenticed their daughters to particular, frequently textile, trades, as can be seen below, apprenticeship could also remove orphaned, foundling and bastard girls from becoming burdens on the poor rates when they reached what the parish officials considered an employable age. In some parishes, this could be as young as seven years of age. Also, as previously discussed in chapter four, parents who were perceived as overburdened with children were routinely coerced into giving them up for apprenticeship or service by their parishes to save expenditure. The Hertfordshire parishes studied did usually equip children apprenticed outside the parish with new clothing and footwear presumably so that they did not shame the home parish by presenting a poverty-stricken appearance.

The apprenticeship indenture was the formal contract the parish made with the child's future employer and the girl's maintenance then became the responsibility of her employer once she had been indentured. If she was sent to another parish it was likely that she would marry there and become that parish's responsibility. Hertfordshire female apprenticeship will be examined here primarily to understand how many girls were indentured in these parishes by their parents, how many were put out to masters by the parish and where they were sent, whether some might have gone to work for relatives and, finally, what

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<sup>22</sup> S. Hindle "'Waste'" children? Pauper apprenticeship under the Elizabethan poor laws, c.1598 -1697' in P. Lane, N. Raven and K. Snell (eds) *Women, Work and Wages in England, 1600-1850* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), 28-46. Quote on page 36.

trades and crafts girls were trained for apart from domestic and agricultural service.

The topic of female apprenticeship has not been widely researched in the literature or in Hertfordshire apart from the Hindle essay quoted above. Male and female apprenticeship has been studied nationally by Joan Lane, but she included no Hertfordshire references.<sup>23</sup> There are a few local studies including one for Norfolk, but very few girl apprentices were included in these Great Yarmouth listings.<sup>24</sup> Predominantly male apprenticeship has been widely researched in some other counties. There is a strong emphasis throughout the literature on industrial apprenticeships but, as previously noted in chapter two, Hertfordshire was an agricultural not an industrial county. Ann Kussmaul's country-wide survey of marriage and mobility patterns amongst young male and female servants in husbandry included several Hertfordshire parishes of varying sizes including Aldenham, Barkway, Digswell, Great Amwell, Reed, Sacombe and Westmill.<sup>25</sup> She noted the enduring statutory importance of compulsory agricultural labour:

'The *Statute of Labourers* 1350-1 compelled all men and women, sound of body, free or bond, and younger than sixty, without craft, merchandise, living, land, or service, to serve in husbandry. No changes were made to the legislation until the Statute of Artificers in 1562-3, which added only a lower age limit, twelve. The legislation was repealed, along with the rest of the statute, in the second decade of the nineteenth-century.'

In her research on child workers Katrina Honeyman, provided some references to the few eighteenth-century Hertfordshire silk and cotton mills at and around Watford in the south, but specifically states that these employed London and Surrey children.<sup>26</sup> Her earlier research on women and industrialisation contains

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<sup>23</sup> J. Lane *Apprenticeship in England 1600-1914* (London: UCL Press, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> P. Rutledge (ed.) *Great Yarmouth Apprenticeship Indentures 1563-1665* (Norwich: Norfolk & Norwich Genealogical Society, 1979).

<sup>25</sup> A. Kussmaul *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Hertfordshire refs. 16, 18, 49, 57-8, 72.

<sup>26</sup> Honeyman *Child Workers in England*, 89.

no Hertfordshire references.<sup>27</sup> Jane Humphries' research concentrated on eighteenth and nineteenth-century boys. She has observed that 'an analogous study of girls' experience of home life, schooling, apprenticeship, first job and occupational history remains to be undertaken: delayed not because it is less important but to concentrate resources'.<sup>28</sup>

Table 8.1 Hertfordshire Apprentices from Indentures 1600-1800

Date	No. of Indentures	Boys Apprenticed	Girls Apprenticed
1600-1650	196	154 (78.5%)	42 (21.4%)
1650-1700	301	202 (67.1%)	99 (32.8%)
1700-1750	808	631 (78%)	177 (21.9%) – high point
1750-1800	624	582 (93.2%)	42 (6.7%)
Totals	1,929	1,569	360

Note: these statistics are taken from the collected indentures held at HALS on the Herts Names Online database.

As can be seen from Table 8.1 the total number of Hertfordshire girls indentured during this period was always much lower than that of boys. In 1600-1650 out of the 196 county indentures 42 (21.4%) were for girls and 154 for boys. In 1650-1700 out of 301 records, 99 (32.8%) were for girls and 202 for boys. In 1700-50 the numbers of indentures for both sexes reached its peak with a total of 808 records, of these 177 (21.9%) were for girls and 631 for boys. In 1750-1800 out of 624 records the number of girls shrank drastically to 42 (6.7%) and the number for boys also reduced to 582.

These Hertfordshire figures contrast with those of Deborah Simonton, who found that numbers of female apprenticeships increased in Essex and Staffordshire during the latter half of the eighteenth century. In comparison, Hertfordshire figures had already reached their highest point in the first half of the eighteenth century

<sup>27</sup> K. Honeyman *Women, Gender and Industrialisation in England, 1700-1870* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> Humphries *Childhood and Child Labour*, 21. She stated on her webpage <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/people/professor-jane-humphries#tab-271226> [accessed 12/07/2019] that she is now undertaking this using similar sources to the first book but researching the autobiographies of working women.

and were rapidly shrinking in the latter half.<sup>29</sup> The reasons for the Hertfordshire decline are unclear because female parish apprenticeship seems to have remained the parish officials' preferred method of disposing of unwanted young single women and they needed to continue finding employment for them. It would seem possible that they found it easier to place girls into annual contracted service as agricultural servants at this time instead of apprenticing them since as Kussmaul has shown agricultural service was extremely common.<sup>30</sup>

It is likely that the obvious imbalance between the sexes throughout the period 1600-1800 reflected the Hertfordshire parish officials' strategy to place a potentially idle and trouble-making boy under a named master who could be expected to exercise control over him. This relationship could sometimes prove problematic and there are cases in the Hertford Quarter Sessions of male apprentices absconding or even attacking their masters, but not females. Girls were considered by contemporaries to be more manageable and so more informal and flexible arrangements may have been made to employ them locally, probably in short-term domestic positions, without resorting to full apprenticeship. At least one parish, Hoddesdon, did not provide any details of 10 employers' occupations out of the 11 indentures recorded 1650-1700 or 18 recorded in 1700-50. This would seem to support Marjorie McIntosh's observation that during the late sixteenth-century, 'The requirement that a female apprentice should receive training in a particular craft had weakened or been abandoned entirely'<sup>31</sup> and would explain the Hoddesdon parish officials' lack of interest in the girls' future training and employment.

Steve Hindle noted that even in the early years of the seventeenth century apprenticeship of both sexes in the county was not a long-lasting or stable condition and that: 'Although the Hertfordshire bench, for example, apprenticed over 1,500

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<sup>29</sup> D. Simonton 'Apprenticeship, Training and Gender in Eighteenth-Century England' in M. Berg (ed.) *Markets and Manufacture In Early Industrial Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991), 227-58.

<sup>30</sup> Kussmaul *Servants in Husbandry*.

<sup>31</sup> M. McIntosh *Working Women in English Society 1300-1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 135.

poor children when moved to do so by the judges in 1619, the grand jury complained in 1624 that most of them had left their masters and 'now live idly at home with their friends to the hurt of the common wealthe'.<sup>32</sup> Central government might demand child apprenticeship, but local Hertfordshire authorities apparently could not maintain it in the county. Hertfordshire parishes would seem to have adopted a scattered and tentative approach to it as can be seen below.

Table 8.2 Indentured Female Parish Apprentices by Parish 1600-1800

Date	Parishes with Indentures for Female Apprentices [numbers in brackets]
1600-50	Berkhamsted (4); Cheshunt (21).
1650-1700	Berkhamsted (7); Cheshunt (16); Chipping Barnet (1); Datchworth (1); Great Gaddesden (1); Hertford (1); Hitchin (31); Hoddesdon (11); St Albans St Peters (7); Standon (2).
1700-50	Ashwell (4); Barkway (3); Berkhamsted (5); Broxbourne (6); Bushey (1); Cheshunt (35); Chipping Barnet (17); Datchworth (2); Essendon (2); Graveley (2); Hertford (14); Hitchin (17); Hoddesdon (18); Kings Langley (2); Norton (1); Royston (2); Shephall (1); St Albans St Peters (23); Standon (3).
1750-1800	Ashwell (6); Bishop's Stortford (1); Bushey (1); Cheshunt (9); Chipping Barnet (6); Hitchin (3); Royston (5); St Albans Abbey (1); Wheathampstead (1).

From the above table it can be seen that the parishes with the highest number of surviving female indentures were Berkhamsted, Cheshunt, Hitchin and St Albans St Peters. Those with the greatest numbers, Berkhamsted and Cheshunt, are considered in more detail below. Cheshunt consistently indentured a large number of females throughout even from 1600-50 when 21 girls were recorded and would appear to have had a large number of female parish children to dispose of in this way. Some parishes appear to have briefly experimented with putting out a few female apprentices possibly influenced by neighbouring parishes and then decided against it. Such parishes ranged from small villages to market towns and include Datchworth (3); Great Gaddesden (1); Essendon (2); Graveley (2); Kings Langley (2);

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<sup>32</sup> S. Hindle *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

Norton (1); St Albans Abbey (1) and Wheathampstead (1). The reasons for these fluctuations are unclear.

Map 8.1 Outline Hertfordshire map showing Berkhamsted and Cheshunt.  
© Hertfordshire Family History Society.

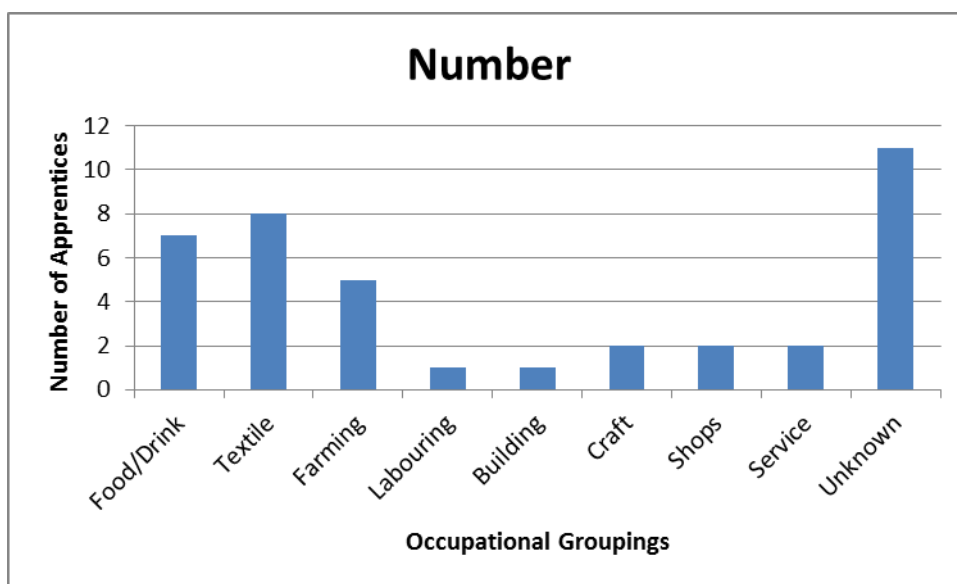


### Berkhamsted female apprentices

Berkhamsted is a western Hertfordshire market town close to the Buckinghamshire boundary and 26 miles northwest of London. Lionel Munby found that in 1603 the parish of Berkhamsted St Peter had a population of 400 adults (over 16 years of age), which had risen to 550 by 1676. He noted that there were 200-500 families living there in the first quarter of the eighteenth-century and the first census in 1801 recorded 1,690 people.



Graph 8.1 Occupational Groupings of Berkhamsted Female Apprentices from Indentures 1600-1755. [Berkhamsted ceased apprenticing girls in 1755].



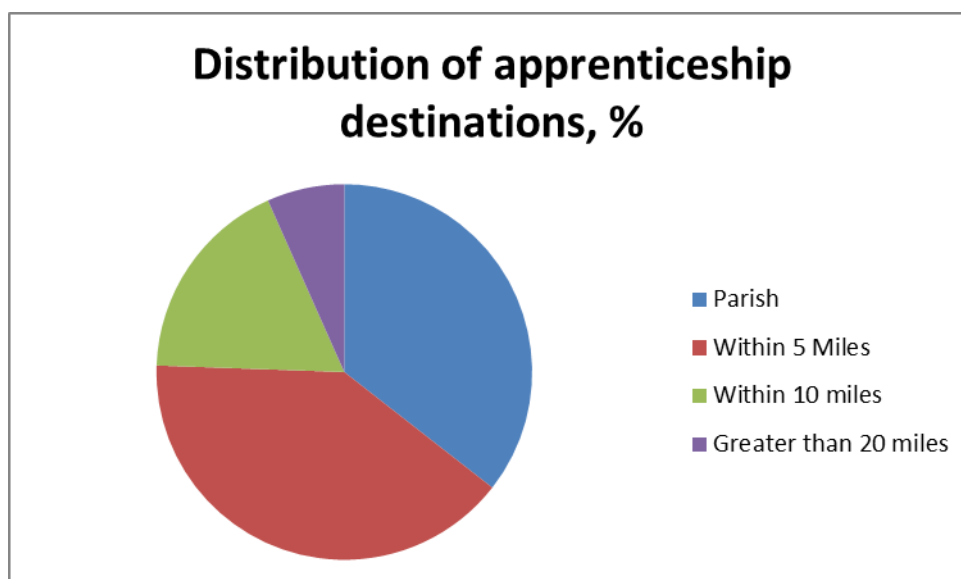
Note: Graph 8.1 sets out the occupational destination of apprentices, with occupations grouped (both here and in subsequent graphs) according to broad occupational categorisations.

From the above graph 8.1 it can be seen that, of the total of 41 female apprentices from Berkhamsted, three of whom were apprenticed twice for unknown reasons,<sup>33</sup> 11 (28.9%) went into unknown occupations most probably housewifery which was so common as a female occupation that it was not mentioned in indentures. Another group of 11 (28.9%) went into a range of crafts and trades, and they have been distributed between several categories in this graph. The next largest group of seven (18.4%) were probably destined to become agricultural servants and to become skilled, as previously discussed, in field and farm crafts. Five (13.1%) were sent into the catering trades providing food and drink, and also, importantly, accommodation for the growing numbers of travellers. Although Berkhamsted was not situated on a major road into London it was a market town. Three (7.8%) were sent into specific textile trades, with a disjuncture between this figure and the 'textile' bar in the graph above explained by the

<sup>33</sup> Possibly because they had proved unsatisfactory in their first placements as discussed by Lane *Apprenticeship in England*, 39.

classification of particular craft trades. Only two went into shops since shop-keeping was then a predominantly male occupation. Two sisters went to a musician.

Graph 8.2 Distribution of Berkhamsted Female Apprenticeship Destinations from Indentures 1600-1755. [Berkhamsted ceased apprenticing girls in 1755].



All of the following data is located at:  
[https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/ufs/HALS\\_APPRENTICES](https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/ufs/HALS_APPRENTICES)

During the period 1600-50 in the first set of indentures, only four girls were apprenticed by Berkhamsted parish officials in comparison to 11 apprenticed by their fathers. Some of these girls were possibly sent by their fathers to friends or relatives in other parishes and counties as can be seen by the Lowen example discussed below. Three fathers apprenticed their daughters to domestic and/or agricultural service with Berkhamsted husbandmen.<sup>34</sup> One girl was indentured to a Berkhamsted cordwainer, a leather worker specialising in shoe-making, a trade in which both men and women were employed so this may have been a genuine

<sup>34</sup> Berkhamsted Parish Indentures : HALS DP19/14/1/4 16 Aug. 1632 Jane Clarke apprenticed to John & Mary Stamborowe, Husbandman of Berkhamsted by father William Clarke; HALS DP19/14/8/34 21 Dec. 1642 Anne Gadridge apprenticed to John and his wife Ellen Rolfe, Husbandman of Berkhamsted by father Richard Gadridge; HALS DP19/14/8/33 24 July 1642 Judith Surman apprenticed to Lewis & Mary LLOYD, Husbandman of Berkhamsted by father Thomas Surman.

apprenticeship.<sup>35</sup> Another to a London joiner; this was the first Berkhamsted apprenticeship recorded to a London master, but joinery was usually considered a male occupation so he may have wanted a servant.<sup>36</sup> As previously noted two sisters were sent to a Berkhamsted musician, possibly to train as musicians but more likely be his servants<sup>37</sup> and another girl to a Berkhamsted tailor.<sup>38</sup> One went to a Berkhamsted widow most likely as a servant or carer if she was an elderly widow,<sup>39</sup> and two to a master whose occupation was not given.<sup>40</sup> The Berkhamsted indentures show that only two girls were apprenticed by the parish both in 1613, one to a master in Buckinghamshire<sup>41</sup> and another to a local employer.<sup>42</sup> Neither man's occupation was recorded but it would appear likely that the girls were going as domestic and/or agricultural servants.

The second set of indentures date from 1628 when one girl was sent to a Berkhamsted clothworker<sup>43</sup> and another to a married couple whose occupation and parish were not given.<sup>44</sup> There were no parish apprenticeships for a period in the mid-seventeenth century, possibly due to the uncertain conditions of the Civil War

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<sup>35</sup> HALS DP19/14/1/7 24 July 1642 Katherine Surman apprenticed to George and Mary Geery Cordwainer of Berkhamsted by father Thomas Surman.

<sup>36</sup> HALS DP19/14/8/31 13 April 1637 Elizabeth Tripp apprenticed to Michael & Joan Richards, Joiner of London by father John Tripp.

<sup>37</sup> HALS DP19/18/1/1&3 6 Sept. 1621 Elizabeth & Katherine Persivall apprenticed to Richard Stone, Musician of Berkhamsted by father Michael Persivall (late). Father settling both his daughters before his death with his choice of local master and not leaving the decision to the parish who might separate them? There are several examples of this amongst the indentures.

<sup>38</sup> HALS DP19/14/8/23 & DP19/18/1/4 27 March 1623 & 24 March 1622 Christabel Edwardes apprenticed to Robert and his wife Joan Bab Tailor of Berkhamsted by father Roger Edwardes.

<sup>39</sup> HALS DP19/14/8/22 15 June 1622 Frances Grover apprenticed to Mary Baylis, Widow of Berkhamsted by father John Grover.

<sup>40</sup> HALS DP19/14/8/14&15 20 Dec. 1618 Elizabeth Persivall apprenticed to John, wife Phoebe, daughter Eliz. Webb by father Michael Persivall and HALS DP19/14/8/ 16&17 Katherine Persivall apprenticed to John, wife Phoebe, daughter Eliz. Webb by father Michael Persivall.

<sup>41</sup> HALS DP19/14/8/10 26 Nov. 1613 Elizabeth Barnatt apprenticed to John Morgan of Marsworth, Bucks.

<sup>42</sup> HALS DP19/14/8/11 14 June 1613 Elizabeth Foster apprenticed to Thomas Lawrence of Berkhamsted.

<sup>43</sup> HALS DP19/14/8/26 18 April 1628 Mary Oakeman apprenticed to William Overstreet, Clothworker of Berkhamsted.

<sup>44</sup> HALS DP19/14/8/27 5 June 1628 Alice Chappell apprenticed to Robert Partridg [e?] and Frances his wife.

1642-51 but a girl was apprenticed to a local husbandman in 1664.<sup>45</sup> She was followed by two girls in 1672, who appear to have been sisters, and were apprenticed to local masters, in Berkhamsted<sup>46</sup> and Northchurch.<sup>47</sup> These employers' occupations were not given, but they may have taken the girls as domestic and/or agricultural servants. Three girls were apprenticed by their fathers who indentured them to an Uxbridge bricklayer,<sup>48</sup> a Berkhamsted maltster<sup>49</sup> and a London haberdasher.<sup>50</sup> In 1680 one girl was apprenticed to a local higgler or travelling pedlar who was apparently not a wanderer as many such traders were but rather an established Berkhamsted parishioner.<sup>51</sup> In 1683 another girl went into what was probably domestic service at the neighbouring parish of Great Gaddesden with a master whose occupation was not given and in 1687 another was sent to a collar maker (for draught animals) in nearby Little Gaddesden.<sup>52</sup> This was also a masculine occupation so it is likely she went as a servant.

From this evidence it would appear that in the seventeenth century Berkhamsted did not have a large number of parish girls requiring to be formally placed with masters, a more informal system of employment such as using local contacts and the later Berkhamsted hiring fairs<sup>53</sup> may have existed enabling the parish or their relatives to place them. It is also possible that an unknown number

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<sup>45</sup> HALS DP19/14/8/38 18 Nov. 1664 Mary Wheeler apprenticed to William Davis, Husbandman of Berkhamsted.

<sup>46</sup> HALS DP19/14/1/9 15 July 1672 Martha Umphrey apprenticed to John Francis of Berkhamsted.

<sup>47</sup> HALS DP19/14/8/40 17 June 1672 Mary Umphrey apprenticed to James Lane of Northchurch.

<sup>48</sup> HALS DP19/14/8/42 13 Feb. 1675 Mary Gould apprenticed to Robert Bennett and his wife Sarah, Bricklayer of Uxbridge, Middlesex by father Thomas Gould.

<sup>49</sup> HALS DP19/14/8/36 25 May 1654 Mary Ray apprenticed to Stephen Blunt, Maltster of Berkhamsted by her father Tobias Ray.

<sup>50</sup> HALS DP19/14/1/13 10 July 1680 Mary Teddar apprenticed to Nicholas Hicke, Haberdasher of London, Middlesex by her father Abraham Teddar.

<sup>51</sup> HALS DP19/14/1/12 18 June 1680 Elizabeth Grove of Berkhamsted apprenticed to John Rolfe, Higgler of Berkhamsted.

<sup>52</sup> HALS DP19/14/1/17 22 August 1687 Lydia Wright/Right apprenticed to Mathew Hoar, Collar Maker of Little Gaddesden.

<sup>53</sup> Kussmaul *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* Appendix 4 Table A4.1, 154-5, List of eighteenth- and nineteenth century Hertfordshire hiring fairs. Berkhamsted 1792 Michaelmas Fair.

of Berkhamsted female indentures may have been lost or discarded. How Hertfordshire parish apprentices were initially matched with prospective masters is unclear, possibly because it was done by parish officials from different parishes making arrangements amongst themselves or with their business or family contacts who were seeking apprentices locally or in London and further afield.

In the eighteenth century the pattern of sparse parish apprenticeships continued with only five girls being apprenticed by the parish, four by their fathers and two by their mothers. The latter were apprenticed with a Hemel Hempstead husbandman<sup>54</sup> and a London Cook<sup>55</sup> presumably because their fathers had died or absconded and their mothers did not want the parish to place their children. The fathers apprenticed their daughters to a husbandman from neighbouring Northchurch,<sup>56</sup> another London cook<sup>57</sup> and a Buckinghamshire weaver.<sup>58</sup> A man who from his name was not her father but may have been her step-father apprenticed a girl to a Holborn tallow chandler.<sup>59</sup> In 1701 two girls were apprenticed by the parish to a London joiner<sup>60</sup> and a Covent Garden cook<sup>61</sup> although whether the girls were being trained as a joiner and a cook or merely became domestic servants is unclear. In 1746 two girls were indentured to a City victualler (food and, if licenced, alcohol seller/innkeeper)<sup>62</sup> and a City shoemaker<sup>63</sup> and one was sent to a Buckinghamshire

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<sup>54</sup> HALS DP19/14/2/28 18 Sep. 1731 Sarah Gold apprenticed to Benjamin Field, Husbandman of Hemel Hempstead by Susannah Gold mother.

<sup>55</sup> HALS DP19/14/2/11 7 April 1705 Anne Climpson apprenticed to Job Adams, Cook of London, Middlesex by mother [? not stated] Judith Climpson.

<sup>56</sup> HALS DP19/14/2/9 12 June 1703 Anne Bates apprenticed to Ralph Inland, Husbandman of Northchurch by father.

<sup>57</sup> HALS DP19/14/2/4 19 April 1703 Anne Hall apprenticed to John Adams, Cook of London by father Thomas Hall.

<sup>58</sup> HALS DP19/14/2/20 18 June 1711 Sarah Wilkason apprenticed to William Dover, Weaver of Bierton [Berton?], Buckinghamshire by father Thomas Wilkason.

<sup>59</sup> HALS D/P/19/14/2/5 26 April 1703 Sarah Andrews apprenticed to Joseph Tripp, Tallow Chandler of Holborn, Middlesex by [?step- father] Roger Nicotts.

<sup>60</sup> HALS DP19/14/2/3 18 August 1701 Lydia Leech apprenticed to Robert Thomson of London, Middx, joiner.

<sup>61</sup> HALS DP19/14/2/2 16 August 1701 Abigail Wellins of Berkhamsted apprenticed to Thomas Dutton, St Paul Covent Garden, Middx, cook.

<sup>62</sup> HALS DP19/14/3/3 24 April 1746 Susannah Hall apprenticed to John Leneve, Victualler of City of London.

<sup>63</sup> HALS DP19/14/3/4 13 Nov. 1746 Elizabeth Miller apprenticed to Richard Wad, Shoe Maker of City of London.

yeoman.<sup>64</sup> Some of these masters may have been relatives because poor relations were sometimes employed by their richer family members in charity,<sup>65</sup> and the girls were being sent out of the parish although there were several local joiners, cooks, victuallers, shoemakers and yeomen who might have employed them.

In the second half of the eighteenth century two girls were apprenticed by their father to the same Southwark pin maker<sup>66</sup> and there were no parish apprentices sent out. Since it is unlikely that the number of parish girls available for apprenticeship had abruptly declined, it would seem possible that patterns of employment for them had changed and apprenticeship had ceased to be a viable option for officials seeking work for parish children in Berkhamsted. Why this situation might have arisen in a gradually expanding Hertfordshire market town when, as previously discussed, Essex and Staffordshire were experiencing a surge in numbers remains to be researched as does whether other Hertfordshire parishes experienced a similar decline.

### Cheshunt female apprentices

The pattern of female apprenticeship was different in Cheshunt, another market town on the eastern side of the county 12 miles north of London. Lionel Munby found that there are no population figures for the parish of Cheshunt until 1676 when there were 506 adults (over 16 years of age). He noted that that there were around 500 families living there in the first quarter of the eighteenth-century and the first census in 1801 recorded 3,173 people.

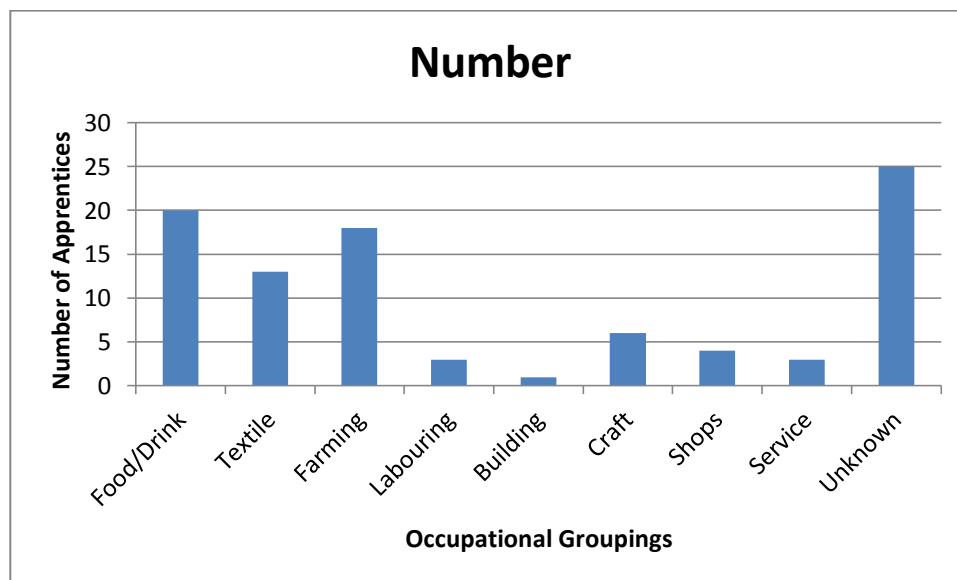
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<sup>64</sup> HALS DP19/14/3/5 5 Dec. 1746 Mary Wilkinson apprenticed to Thomas the younger Deane, Yeoman of Edlesborough, Buckinghamshire.

<sup>65</sup> R. Richardson noted that Samuel Pepys reluctantly employed his sister in a maidservant capacity'. R. Richardson *Household Servants in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 69.

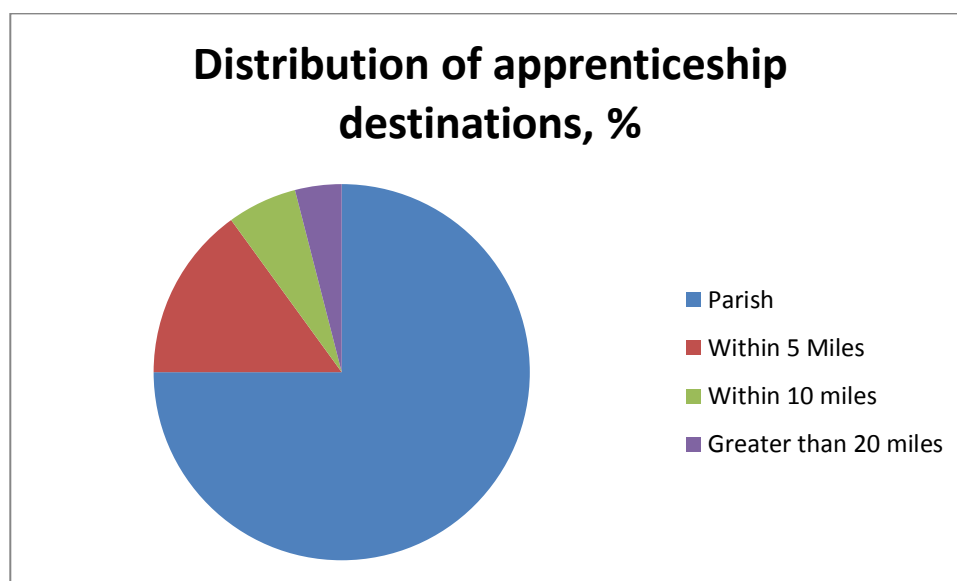
<sup>66</sup> HALS DP19/14/3/20&21 10 Dec. 1755 Elizabeth and Jane Babb apprenticed to Mary Jones, Pin Maker of Southwark, Surrey by father Thomas Babb.

Graph 8.3 Occupational Groupings of Cheshunt Female Apprentices from Indentures 1600-1800.



From the above graph 8.3 it can be seen that the pattern of occupations is very similar to that of Berkhamsted, but the number of apprenticeships was much higher. The largest number of female apprentices, 25 out of the total of 94, went, as in Berkhamsted, into unknown occupations (26.5%) probably housewifery. The next largest group of 20 (21.2%) went into the catering trades, again as at Berkhamsted, providing food and drink, and also accommodation for the growing numbers of travellers on the busy main road into London. The third largest group of 17 (18%) were again probably agricultural servants training to become skilled, as previously discussed, in field and farm crafts. Two of these girls were to be employed by gardeners. Six (6.3%) were sent into the textile trades and a slightly smaller number, five, (5.3%) went into a range of crafts. As at Berkhamsted, only four, (4.2%) went into shops since shop-keeping was then a predominantly male occupation.

Graph 8.4 Distribution of Cheshunt Female Apprenticeship Destinations Apprentices from Indentures 1600-1800.



From the above graph 8.4 it can be seen that; about three-quarters of the girls were employed within the parish. Of those who were sent out into other parishes the largest number were kept close to the home parish within five miles of it. Only a very small proportion went to parishes further away than 20 miles.

Between 1600 and 1650 Cheshunt parish officials apprenticed 21 girls locally, while only six were apprenticed by their fathers to a City glover,<sup>67</sup> a London bricklayer,<sup>68</sup> a Cheshunt widow,<sup>69</sup> a Hertford tailor,<sup>70</sup> a Hertford gardener, possibly a market gardener,<sup>71</sup> and a Cheshunt shoemaker.<sup>72</sup> Initially, parish apprenticeships appear to have been quite sparse, as in Berkhamsted. The first female parish

<sup>67</sup> HALS DP29/14/8 6 March 1648 Ann Graves apprenticed to Gabriel Pritchard, Glover of Cripplegate, Middlesex by father John Graves.

<sup>68</sup> HALS DP29/18/27E/35 29 Jan. 1632 Anne Hayward apprenticed to Thomas and wife Elizabeth Clarke, Bricklayer of London by father Thomas Hayward deceased.

<sup>69</sup> HALS DP29/14/8 3 Dec. 1646 Alice Meade apprenticed to Susan Creak, Widow of Cheshunt, by father Edward Meade deceased.

<sup>70</sup> HALS DP29/18/27E/27 & DP29/18/27E/29 4 August 1632 Jane Morse apprenticed to Clement Cooper, Tailor of Hertford by father John Morse.

<sup>71</sup> HALS DP29/18/27E/28 & DP29/18/27E/30 4 August 1632 Sara Morse apprenticed to John Jersey, Gardener of Hertford by father John.

<sup>72</sup> HALS DP29/14/1/18 20 Dec.. 1628 Elizabeth Walker apprenticed to William & Katherine Haggis, Shoe Maker of Cheshunt by father John Walker.



indenture dates from 1618 and was to a button maker in the apprentice's own parish of Broxbourne.<sup>73</sup> This was followed in 1621 by that of a girl who was indentured to a Cheshunt victualler bearing the same surname as herself, 'Lowen',<sup>74</sup> and almost certainly a relative. In 1623 a girl was apprenticed to a local labourer<sup>75</sup> although why a labourer would need an apprentice is unclear, perhaps he did not have sons or other male relatives to work with him. In 1628 another two girls were apprenticed to Cheshunt employers, a cook<sup>76</sup> and a widow,<sup>77</sup> and in the following year one girl went to another 'Lowen' who was a local husbandman.<sup>78</sup> In 1632 three girls went to local employers in a slightly wider range of occupations; a Cheshunt cooper,<sup>79</sup> a miller<sup>80</sup> and another widow,<sup>81</sup> and the following year a larger batch of ten girls was sent out to local yeomen and widows but also a Cheshunt brewer,<sup>82</sup> innholder<sup>83</sup> and mercer<sup>84</sup> (a dealer in fine textiles including silks and velvets). In 1634 and 1635 two girls were apprenticed to local widows and there was then a hiatus until 1642 when one parish girl went to a London clothmaker.<sup>85</sup>

As previously noted Cheshunt was situated only 12 miles from the

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<sup>73</sup> HALS DP29/14/1/12 2 June 1618 Elizabeth Parsons of Broxbourne apprenticed to Francis Beerpecke, Button Maker of Broxbourne.

<sup>74</sup> HALS DP29/18/27E/37 & DP29/18/27/E/38 2 Feb. 1629 Sara Awberry apprenticed to John Lowen, Husbandman of Cheshunt.

<sup>75</sup> HALS DP29/14/1/3 1 Nov. 1623 Elizabeth Paston apprenticed to Henry Joye, Labourer of Cheshunt.

<sup>76</sup> HALS DP29/14/1/17 27 April 1628 Dorothy Denham apprenticed to Richard and his wife Dorothy Diche, Cook of Cheshunt.

<sup>77</sup> HALS DP29/18/27E/2 & DP29/14/1/16 1 Dec. 1628 Mary Bushey apprenticed to Elizabeth Gyesse, Widow of Cheshunt.

<sup>78</sup> HALS DP29/18/27E/37 & DP29/18/27/E/38 2 Feb. 1629 Sara Awberry apprenticed to John Lowen, Husbandman of Cheshunt.

<sup>79</sup> HALS DP29/18/27E/31 & DP29/18/27E/33 8 April 1632 Elizabeth Grubbe apprenticed to John Sterlinge, Cooper of Cheshunt.

<sup>80</sup> HALS DP29/18/27E/7 6 March 1632 Annis Pemmerton [Pemberton?] apprenticed to Thomas Harlowe, Miller of Cheshunt.

<sup>81</sup> HALS DP29/18/27E/17 6 March 1632 Margaret Pemberton apprenticed to Joane Parnell, Widow of Cheshunt.

<sup>82</sup> HALS DP29/18/27E18 10 March 1633 Mary Boastie apprenticed to John Fearsie, Brewer of Cheshunt.

<sup>83</sup> HALS DP29/18/27E/22 6 March 1633 Joane Chambers apprenticed to Richard Heath, Innholder of Cheshunt.

<sup>84</sup> HALS DP29/14/1/26 6 March 1633 Frances Singesnell apprenticed to John Wright, Mercer of Cheshunt.

<sup>85</sup> HALS DP29/14/2 9 Nov. 1642 Sarah Bushie apprenticed to John and his wife Mary Arnold Clothworker of London.

metropolis but few girls were sent there during this period. Not until 1642 was the first apprentice indentured to a London master. Cheshunt officials were apparently trying out the pros and cons of apprenticeship fairly cautiously as witness the first girl being apprenticed in her own parish in 1618. Parishes tended to imitate one another's practices when initiating new policies, such as female apprenticeship or, later when establishing workhouses, but there was no neighbouring Hertfordshire parish for Cheshunt officials to follow. As previously discussed, Berkhamsted was the only parish apprenticing girls in this period and it was at the other side of the county. Possibly, Cheshunt officials were looking to neighbouring Middlesex for ideas and innovations in poor law practice. Certainly by the eighteenth-century Cheshunt officials had developed confidence in sending female apprentices outside the parish and to London. This may have been seen as a way of ridding themselves of numbers of unwanted surplus females by providing them with the opportunity to marry and settle in other parishes.

After the Civil War, 1642 to 1651, there was a very long gap until 1671 when a girl was apprenticed to a local baker.<sup>86</sup> During the second half of the seventeenth century seven girls were apprenticed by their fathers to local masters and 16 girls were placed by the parish. The fathers apprenticed their daughters to an innholder,<sup>87</sup> labourer,<sup>88</sup> gentleman,<sup>89</sup> weaver,<sup>90</sup> alehouse keeper<sup>91</sup> and husbandman<sup>92</sup> while one was sent to a Chingford farmer in neighbouring Essex, who may have been a relative.<sup>93</sup> In the same period the parish apprenticed girls to the

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<sup>86</sup> HALS DP29/14/2 25 Oct. 1671 Anne Ward apprenticed to John Paine, Baker of Cheshunt.

<sup>87</sup> HALS DP29/14/4/8 21 May 1696 Eade Clemmons apprenticed to William Chalkly, Innholder of Cheshunt by father Edmund Clemmons.

<sup>88</sup> HALS DP29/14/2 20 March 1685 Anne Constable apprenticed to Thomas Hankin, Labourer of Cheshunt by father John Constable.

<sup>89</sup> HALS DP29/14/3 14 April 1685 Mary Harvey apprenticed to John Chapman, Gentleman of Cheshunt by father John Harvey.

<sup>90</sup> HALS DP29/14/3/40 14 April 1685 Sarah Harvey apprenticed to Thomas Buttler, Weaver of Cheshunt by father John Harvey.

<sup>91</sup> HALS DP29/14/3/38 22 April 1685 Elizabeth Tuffnall apprenticed to Thomas Howe, Ale House Keeper of Cheshunt by father Charles Tuffnall.

<sup>92</sup> HALS DP29/14/3/33 24 June 1692 Elizabeth Usher apprenticed to William Robinson, Husbandman of Cheshunt by father John Usher.

<sup>93</sup> HALS DP29/14/3/32 25 Oct. 1693 Elizabeth Grice apprenticed to John Trapps, Farmer of Chingford, Essex by father William Grice.

same range of masters as before, but also a cowleech's wife<sup>94</sup> and a shop keeper.<sup>95</sup> There were another three positions where the masters' occupations were not given. Eleven of the girls were indentured during the 1690s.

In the first half of the eighteenth century the numbers of female parish apprentices significantly increased, unlike Berkhamsted, when 35 girls were apprenticed. Several went outside the parish to a Hatfield husbandman,<sup>96</sup> a Ware baker<sup>97</sup> and an Enfield (market?) gardener.<sup>98</sup> The metropolis began to exert its pull in this period and many more girls than previously were sent to London or London 'suburbs' indentured to a hat maker;<sup>99</sup> a Stepney throwster (silk weaver);<sup>100</sup> a silk stocking framework knitter;<sup>101</sup> a fruiterer;<sup>102</sup> a smith (the metal worked unspecified);<sup>103</sup> a stay maker;<sup>104</sup> a Clerkenwell victualler;<sup>105</sup> and a Clerkenwell sack maker, who took on 2 sisters.<sup>106</sup> It would appear possible that at least one of the Cheshunt parish officials or vestrymen had family and/or business connections with the village of Clerkenwell.

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<sup>94</sup> HALS DP29/14/2 12 Nov. 1672 Hester Harrodine apprenticed to Elizabeth wife of John Cordle, Cowleech of Cheshunt.

<sup>95</sup> HALS DP29/14/3/14 2 Feb. 1698 Mary Overall apprenticed to John Lowen, Shop Keeper of Cheshunt.

<sup>96</sup> HALS DP29/18/25B 1 Sep. 1730 Mary Marley apprenticed to Robert Tarry, Husbandman of Hatfield.

<sup>97</sup> HALS DP29/14/4/26 7 Dec. 1716 Elizabeth Goodgame apprenticed to John Bennet, Baker of Ware.

<sup>98</sup> HALS DP29/14/5/4 6 April 1733 Mary Bates apprenticed to John Joyce, Gardener of Enfield.

<sup>99</sup> HALS DP29/14/4/1 8 Sep. 1707 Sarah Hall apprenticed to George Caple, Hat Maker of London.

<sup>100</sup> HALS DP29/14/4/9 24 June 1708 Ann Craine apprenticed to Jacob Mickloe, Throwster of Stepney.

<sup>101</sup> HALS DP29/14/4/22 3 Nov. 1712 Martha Tayler apprenticed to William Elston, Silk Stocking Framework Knitter of London.

<sup>102</sup> HALS DP29/14/4/28 31 March 1718 Mary Frances apprenticed to Alice (widow?) Griffin, Fruiterer of London.

<sup>103</sup> HALS DP29/14/4/29 2 August 1718 Elizabeth Ward apprenticed to William Bosworth, Smith of London.

<sup>104</sup> HALS DP29/14/5/17 13 Sep. 1736 Sarah Clarke apprenticed to John Linlea, Stay Maker of St Martin in the Fields.

<sup>105</sup> HALS DP29/14/5/24 7 August 1739 Elizabeth Bates apprenticed to Lawrence Tipler, Victualler of Clerkenwell.

<sup>106</sup> HALS DP29/14/5/23 25 June 1739 Ann Miller and Frances Miller apprenticed to William Cass, Sack Maker of Clerkenwell, Middlesex.

In the second half of the eighteenth century the number of parish apprenticeships declined as at Berkhamsted and there were no girls apprenticed by their parents. Most of the nine parish girls went to employers in the London suburbs except for one who went to a local baker<sup>107</sup> and another sent to the Hertfordshire parish of Wormley.<sup>108</sup>

From these two studies of female parish apprentices in Berkhamsted and Cheshunt it can be seen that; the two parishes had widely differing numbers of female parish apprentices to place throughout the period 1600-1800. Berkhamsted had only seven as the maximum number in 1650-1700 and 0 in 1750-1800. Cheshunt had 35 as the maximum in 1700-50 and nine at the lowest 1750-1800. There are no population figures until 1676 for Cheshunt but it had 506 adults over sixteen in that year. Berkhamsted had slightly more at 550 so the two communities were roughly comparable in size at that time. However, Cheshunt grew at a considerably faster rate in the eighteenth-century. By the time of the first census in 1801 Berkhamsted recorded 1,690 people but Cheshunt had 3,173. The two parishes followed different policies when placing apprentices. Berkhamsted placed most girls in the home parish and only six outside the county during the whole period 1600-1800. Cheshunt, during the same timeframe kept 35 at home and sent 17 outside the county.

What can be learnt from these two detailed parish studies about female apprenticeship in Hertfordshire? It would seem probable that each parish like Berkhamsted and Cheshunt followed its own pattern of apprenticeship according to the number of girls of suitable age available. There was no distinctly Hertfordshire approach to apprenticeship as these two parishes demonstrate. Their parish officials were acting as typical representatives of what Steve Hindle described as welfare republics 'the unit of obligation and control was the little commonwealth of

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<sup>107</sup> HALS DP29/14/4/26 7 Dec. 1716 Elizabeth Goodgame apprenticed to John Bennet, Baker of Ware.

<sup>108</sup> HALS DP29/14/6/8 31 March 1755 Sarah Wilkinson apprenticed to Thomas Dickinson of Wormley.

the parish, which effectively became a welfare republic'.<sup>109</sup> Berkhamsted kept a large proportion of their female apprentices in the parish and ceased to apprentice girls in the second half of the eighteenth century. In contrast, Cheshunt, dealing with larger numbers of female apprentices and situated much closer to London, chose to send a proportion of them there particularly favouring Clerkenwell and Stepney where they appear to have had contacts and from where some of the officials' families or friends may have originated.

As Joan Lane noted 'At all periods, the largest number of female apprentices were indentured to housewifery, girls chiefly from a poor background, bound by their overseers, often remaining in their community as a source of cheap labour to the ratepayers'.<sup>110</sup> At the same time there was also a conflicting drive to send them away from the parish to become an employer's responsibility and gain a new settlement. These two strategies had somehow to be balanced and the requirements of potential employers fulfilled. Cheshunt appears to have sent more girls out, especially to London employers, but it had a larger and growing population than Berkhamsted throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was only 12 miles from London. Keith Snell observed that the gain of an external settlement was one of the reasons for female parish apprenticeship 'and this helped to preserve their apprenticeship into the nineteenth century, even if female apprenticeships were often to sweated needlework trades, housewifery and other such employment'.<sup>111</sup>

Girl apprentices whether indentured by the parish or their parents were, like all female workers, only offered a narrow and low status range of work opportunities even in seventeenth and eighteenth-century London as Peter Earle noted.<sup>112</sup> In small market towns like Cheshunt and Berkhamsted the suitable

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<sup>109</sup> S. Hindle 'A Sense of Place? Becoming and Belonging in the Rural Parish' in A. Shepard & P. Withington (eds) *Communities in Early Modern England: Networks, Place, Rhetoric* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 96-114.

<sup>110</sup> Lane *Apprenticeship in England*, 38.

<sup>111</sup> K. Snell *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 149.

<sup>112</sup> P. Earle 'The Female Labour Market in London in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century' *Economic History Review* 42 (1989), 339-44.

occupations for girl apprentices were likely to have been even narrower and in small rural parishes it is likely that most parish apprentice girls went directly into housewifery until they married. This group of young poor women, as can be seen, were relatively easily placed by parish officials. However, other groups of parishioner women were less easily managed than apprentices and some of them, at least, were definitely parish responsibilities. They had to be supported, however minimally, together with their frequently large number of dependent children. Probably the most unpopular and expensive burdens on the parish were deserted wives with large numbers of 'infants'. The problems they caused to parish officials will be discussed next.<sup>113</sup>

### Deserted women

This section focuses on the previously unresearched lives of deserted women in Hertfordshire. A girl would be very likely to come into contact with parish officials if her husband temporarily or permanently deserted her and she had married out of her home parish, as many women were encouraged to do. If she had no other substitute breadwinner, father or close male relative, to maintain her and her family she would be forced to seek support from her parish of settlement and, even if she secured an allowance, might subsequently have to defend it as in the following example:

Sam<sup>l</sup> Tibbs Aldbury Hemel Hempstead 27 July 1806 Wm Woollam Overseer  
Abby Mills St Albans [Written on outside of letter]

Sir

Mrs Narraway has attended our Vestry today and in consequence of her complaining greatly of distress the Parishioners have ordered her 2/6 per week.

We do not think she ought to be in the distress she says she is in, and I will be very much obliged to you to inquire into her real wants and to have the goodness to allow her the above Sum of 2/6 weekly from next Saturday having paid her for this week now coming in and I will repay you with Thanks.

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<sup>113</sup> A child, usually under seven years of age, who could not yet do any useful work to contribute towards 'doing' for itself was classified as an infant.

I find by her, her Husband is abroad with the regiment and we do not intend to continue the above allowance any longer than till he returns to England again. I am sure I need not add that you will have the goodness to attend to her, and if what she relates is not true, I will thank you to inform me of that or anything else relating to her wishing to do all that is absolutely right – proper and fair to be done by her

Aldbury Hemelhempsted Herts Sunday 27 July 1806

I am Sir your much Obliged Sevt Sam<sup>l</sup> Tibbs<sup>114</sup>

The suspicion of her home parish official that even the temporary allowance granted to her was too ‘generous’ was made obvious here, but his desire for the much larger and busier host parish St Albans Abbey to effectively spy on her was not taken up and he was formally instructed to obey vestry orders: ‘you will therefore have the goodness to see that she is regularly paid that sum weekly from that time, till it is found necessary by you [to?] lessen it, of which you will be kind enough to give us information’.<sup>115</sup> Mrs Narraway had convinced her vestrymen of her need and fought and won her case, but she was probably an exception and her husband was expected to return at the end of his service.

Permanently deserted women who had formerly been settled with their husbands were a different problem for officials as they were now out of place and became unwanted candidates for relief, or removal, if they were non-parishioners. As noted by Jane Humphries a poor female head of household might exist in fact,<sup>116</sup> but because female wages were set so low could not be an effective breadwinner and maintain herself and her now dependent family, so the parish officials would have to step in and act as parochial fathers. Humphries found that ‘female headed households did not constitute a parasitic sub-culture in early industrial Britain’ but they seem to have been regarded as such in primarily agrarian Hertfordshire. The poor law officials’ mindset seems to have needed to be able to attach a woman to a breadwinner who would take responsibility for her and her children. If he abandoned her she immediately became an anomaly and a potential burden on the

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<sup>114</sup> HALS DP90/18/1 St Albans Abbey Overseers Correspondence 27 July 1806 1740-1815.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> J. Humphries ‘Female-Headed Households in Early Industrial Britain: The Vanguard of the Proletariat?’ *Labour History Review* 63 (1998), 31–65.

parish. At this point neighbourliness became very important to her and she might survive, at least temporarily, with the support of friends.

If she was friendless the parish officials might find it necessary to take over the absent husband's role and maintain the family while searching for him. The deserted woman could become totally dependent on their generosity and they would completely direct her life and that of her employable children. However a lot would depend on the attitudes of these parish officials, as some overseers are likely to have tacitly/deliberately overlooked the problems that such a woman presented unless she brought them to their attention by asking for relief since her situation could become very complicated involving constables, warrants and the judiciary.<sup>117</sup> Officials needed to weigh up the time and effort involved in dealing with these complications against adopting a *laissez-faire* attitude and hoping that the apparently well-supported woman might eventually find herself another breadwinner. The area of male-female relationships appears to have been very opaque within the community and as Patricia Crawford observed:

The boundaries between married and de facto, legitimate and illegitimate children were often unclear; neighbours might assume that a couple were married, but did not really know. The household of a legally married couple could contain the illegitimate children of either. The children's legal status mattered only when parents applied to the parish for relief; parish authorities could despatch any illegitimate children to the parish of their birth, which was legally liable to support them.<sup>118</sup>

Not many mothers would want to deliberately deprive themselves of their young children in this way. Crawford also found that: 'A deserted wife or widow had legitimate rights to relief in the parish where her husband had his poor law settlement, if she knew where this was, but she and her children could be even less welcome there than the mother of a 'bastard'.<sup>119</sup> This sentiment can be found in several of the Hertfordshire parishes studied. The putative father of a bastard, if tracked down, could be brought before the justices and made to formally agree to contribute a fixed amount to the maintenance of his family, but

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<sup>117</sup> *An Act For the Due Execution of Laws against Rogues* 1610 (7 James 1 c. 4).

<sup>118</sup> P. Crawford *Parents of Poor Children in England, 1580-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 152.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* 156.



a deserted wife or widow's family became the unwanted responsibility of the parish where it was finally agreed that she could claim settlement.

Pamela Sharpe has recently discussed the problems faced by bastard-bearers,<sup>120</sup> widows and single women trying to obtain settlement in a parish and in particular the topic of maiden settlement after 1662. She found that 'over time it became harder for women to gain a settlement in their own right' and that it was 'unmarried mothers, widows and single women who were hit hardest by the need to control spending on relief'.<sup>121</sup> A woman could obtain her maiden settlement in a parish by working for a full year before she was married or serving a legal indentured apprenticeship and living in that parish for forty days during the course of it. This enabled Hertfordshire officials to remove a deserted woman from the parish where she was living and send her back to the parish where she had served for a year or been apprenticed when she was a girl.

However, during the course of the eighteenth century contracts were being deliberately shortened to prevent such settlement claims and the woman would be removed to her former husband's parish. Single women could be removed by derivative settlement to their father's parish, if they knew it, or even to their grandparents' parish, if they were still living. For the officials of the parish where she had been stranded and the deserted woman herself, knowledge of her husband's settlement was all important. Sometimes this was problematic as frequently the husband had either not told his wife where his settlement was, or she claimed he had not so that she could not be returned to it. As noted by both Tim Hitchcock<sup>122</sup> and James Taylor<sup>123</sup> in their studies of settlement, some women facing examination and removal could and did edit their life histories to achieve what they considered to be the least damaging outcomes for themselves.

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<sup>120</sup> Bastard-bearers will be more fully discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>121</sup> Sharpe 'Parish Women', 171-2.

<sup>122</sup> T. Hitchcock and J. Black (eds) *Chelsea Settlement and Bastardy Examinations 1733-66* (London: London Record Society, 1999), vii.

<sup>123</sup> J. Taylor *Poverty, Migration, and Settlement in the Industrial Revolution: Sojourners' Narratives* (Palo Alto: Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship, 1989), 41.

Most of the marriage breakdowns leading to the husband's desertion and the wife's removal appear to have taken place within the early years of the marriage. Joanne Bailey in her studies of Buckinghamshire, Durham, Newcastle, North Yorkshire, Northumberland and Oxfordshire found that: 'Rural families which broke up in the south of England between 1700 and 1880, had more young children than those who stayed together'.<sup>124</sup> In this she agreed with the earlier research of Keith Snell also on marriage breakdown in the southern counties from 1700 to 1880.<sup>125</sup> Hertfordshire was classified by both writers as an eastern county but the pattern appears to be similar.

The first Hertfordshire woman recorded as having received a removal order was Elizabeth Crampton in 1704.<sup>126</sup> Her husband had abandoned her together with his two children in Hertford St Andrew parish where he had moved having received a settlement certificate in 1701 from his own parish St Olaves, Southwark, to enable him to work as a woolcomber in Hertford.<sup>127</sup> His wife and family were removed to Southwark in April.<sup>128</sup> Between 1704 and 1799 Hertfordshire officials removed more deserted women and children to their husband's settlements, the majority within Hertfordshire and also several to outside the county in Northampton,<sup>129</sup> Middlesex,<sup>130</sup> Huntingdonshire<sup>131</sup> and Yorkshire.<sup>132</sup> However, in the latter case, this woman's husband appears to have lied to her both about his settlement there and

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<sup>124</sup> J. Bailey *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England, 1660-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>125</sup> K. Snell *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 360.

<sup>126</sup> J. Hill *Hertfordshire Removal Orders: An Alphabetical Index* (Hertfordshire Family History Society, 2003), 22.

<sup>127</sup> HALS DP49/13/1/9 11 Jan. 1701. Settlement Certificate for Edward Crampton from St Olaves, Southwark, Surrey to Hertford St Andrew.

<sup>128</sup> HALS DP49/13/1 22 April 1704. Removal Order for Elizabeth Crampton from Hertford St Andrew to Southwark.

<sup>129</sup> HALS DP117/13/1 13 June 1743. Removal Order for Martha Royston from Watford to Brackley St Peter.

<sup>130</sup> HALS DP15/13/3 18 Dec. 1771. Removal Order for Mary Sanford with 3 children from Chipping Barnet to Kingsbury.

<sup>131</sup> HALS DP15/13/3 2 March 1781. Removal Order for Rose Cox with 4 children and a grand-child from Chipping Barnet to St Neots.

<sup>132</sup> HALS DP24/16/1 27 Sep. 1781. Removal Order for Lydia Moore and child from Broxbourne to Arksey.

his 'other' earlier marriage:

'On 7 Dec 1778 she was married by licence in Broxbourne to Thomas Moore, labourer. He swore on oath that he was born in Arksey (Yks). She has a child Mary (2) born in wedlock. Her husband has now left her. On 4 Oct 1781 she and her child were removed from Broxbourne to Arksey and she has now returned without producing a settlement certificate'.<sup>133</sup>

Four women either claimed that they did not know their husband's settlement<sup>134</sup> or discovered that he did not have one. A Barkway woman had married an Irishman who then disappeared,<sup>135</sup> another deserted wife 'believes his settlement was in Waltham St Lawrence (Berkshire)' but was not removed there<sup>136</sup> and another had married a foreigner with no English Settlement.<sup>137</sup> In two such cases the officials sent one woman back to her father-in-law's parish because her husband had been apprenticed to him,<sup>138</sup> while another woman was despatched to Dunstable as her mother-in-law was 'believed to have a settlement there'.<sup>139</sup> These women had been matched up with their settlements or where they had some, often tenuous and uncertain hearsay, claim to settlement, but what happened to several other women who could not state their husband's settlement or that of any of his relatives and did not receive removal orders is unclear.

All of these rehomed women and children would, as Crawford observed, have been regarded as unwelcome additional burdens by their new parishes that

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<sup>133</sup> J. Hill, *Hertfordshire Examinations as to Settlement An Alphabetical Index* (Hertfordshire Family History Society, 2003), 111. Possibly Thomas Moore's settlement parish was in Lincolnshire but it was never recorded. (See also a copy of the marriage register dated 12 Feb. 1782 that states Thomas Moore was married in Owston (Lin) on 23 Nov. 1769 to Elizabeth Worrall). Hill stated that he had listed all the certificates that he could find to date in the county archives. Others may have been discovered since 2004.

<sup>134</sup> HALS DP15/16/1 18 Feb. 1797. Blanch Smith of Chipping Barnet and child. She may have been sent to Highgate where she had served at an inn for nearly two years.

<sup>135</sup> HALS DP13/13/3. 31 Oct. 1750. Sarah Mackennie from Barkway married Hale Mackennie, an Irishman, who left her and his Irish parish proved impossible to trace. It is likely that she had to remain in Barkway.

<sup>136</sup> HALS DP15/13/3 14 July 1776. Elizabeth Harborough removed from Chipping Barnet.

<sup>137</sup> HALS DP24A/13/11 14 Jan. 1785. Removal Order for Sarah Waggoner from Hackney to Hoddesdon where she was born.

<sup>138</sup> HALS DP15/18/2. 6 March 1752. Removal Order for Mary Holmes from Chipping Barnet to Upper Liberty of St Andrew, Holborn. He had left her four years previously so she is likely to have made some kind of living in Barnet since then.

<sup>139</sup> HALS DP90/13/6 10 Jan. 1785. Removal Order from St Albans Abbey to Dunstable for Margaret Peters and two children from St Albans Abbey to Dunstable.

would have to support them until all the children could be apprenticed out of the parish and the family removed from the poor rates.<sup>140</sup> As previously discussed in chapter four parish officials did not want more expenditure and useless mouths foisted on them and some would go to court to avoid this often spending a great deal on legal fees. Deserted childless women might have attained a modicum of independence if they could work and maintain themselves by the usual economy of makeshifts and might eventually remarry in the parish. Those who remained unmarried may have formed at least part of the class of single women sometimes found in parish listings and burial registers. A great deal more work is required to trace what happened to these women and their children.

Hertfordshire seems to have imported more removed deserted women and children than it exported largely because many of them had been abandoned in London, the City and suburban parishes, where it was easy for the husband to disappear. These removal orders also provide an informative indication of the London and City parishes women were being brought to by their husbands who were seeking employment. As can be seen in chapter two migrants from Hertfordshire tended to concentrate in particular London and Middlesex parishes thus forming little enclaves within the metropolis. It would seem likely that they sought to do this and helped one another within these communities.

As previously noted Elizabeth Crampton had been removed from Southwark. Women were removed to St Albans Abbey from St Sepulchre<sup>141</sup> and St Botolph without Aldgate<sup>142</sup> and to St Albans St Peter from Shoreditch.<sup>143</sup> Cheshunt received one woman removed from Clerkenwell<sup>144</sup> and another from St Giles without

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<sup>140</sup> Crawford *Parents of Poor Children*, 152.

<sup>141</sup> HALS DP90/13/6 2 March 1770. Removal Order for Margaret Roberts and two children from St Sepulchre within to St Albans Abbey.

<sup>142</sup> HALS DP90/13/6 29 March 1775. Removal Order for Rosamond Johnson from St Botolph without Aldgate to St Albans Abbey.

<sup>143</sup> HALS DP93/13/7 26 Sep. 1768. Removal Order for Mary Wallis and two children from Shoreditch to St Albans St Peter.

<sup>144</sup> HALS DP29/18/27B 25 April 1771. Removal Order for Susannah Freelove from Clerkenwell to Cheshunt.

Cripplegate<sup>145</sup> as did Hoddesdon.<sup>146</sup> Hitchin removals came from Rotherhithe,<sup>147</sup> Southwark<sup>148</sup> and St Marylebone.<sup>149</sup> A deserted woman was removed to Chipping Barnet from Battersea.<sup>150</sup> Another woman came into Hertfordshire from neighbouring Essex where her Irish husband had left her,<sup>151</sup> but the pull of London was much stronger than that of neighbouring counties and she is the only example. Widowhood can be considered as the ultimate form of desertion in a marriage and parish officials could not remedy this except through offering varying amounts of support to selected deserving widows.

## Widows

The gap in knowledge to be studied here concerns the lives and lifestyle of Hertfordshire widows. Payments to widows can be clearly traced in Overseers' Accounts, as in the Chipping Barnet example discussed in a later section, because they are named as such. However, little else can be discovered about them such as their ages or state of health which makes it very difficult to compare parishes. It would be theoretically possible to examine Hertfordshire Overseers' Accounts and discover how many widows were receiving relief in some years, the number of them in each parish and the amounts they were paid but this all the data that could be obtained from such a search. As Steven King has found for Lancashire and other counties 'no meaningful time series or long terms parish case studies are possible based only on Overseers' Accounts therefore it is necessary to take a different approach' as in this study.<sup>152</sup> As previously discussed, in chapter three,

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<sup>145</sup> HALS DP29/13/1 31 Aug. 1773. Removal Order for Mary Melton from St Giles without Cripplegate to Cheshunt.

<sup>146</sup> HALS DP24A/13/5 16 March 1784. Removal Order for Ann Chandler and child from St Giles without Cripplegate to Hoddesdon.

<sup>147</sup> HALS DP53/13/4 26 Oct. 1781. Removal Order for Ann North and three children from Rotherhithe to Hitchin.

<sup>148</sup> HALS DP53/13/4 14 Jan. 1796. Removal Order for Elizabeth Bosted and three children from Southwark to Hitchin.

<sup>149</sup> HALS DP53/13/4 17 Oct. 1799. Removal Order for Martha Green and two children from St Marylebone to Hitchin.

<sup>150</sup> HALS DP15/18/3 3 Oct. 1795. Removal Order for Sarah Dickins and six children from Battersea to Chipping Barnet. Her family contained the largest number of deserted children.

<sup>151</sup> HALS DP21/16/4 28 Feb. 1775. Removal Order for Mary Corral from Nazeing (Essex) to Bishops Stortford.

<sup>152</sup> S. King *Sickness and Medical Welfare*

Hertfordshire Overseers' Accounts do not include much useful data until the eighteenth century and even then there are problems.

Whereas Amy Peacock as discussed below was plainly a young widow with at least two children to maintain, the Chipping Barnet widows also discussed below do not appear to have had children and may have been at the end of their lives because most of them were destined for the workhouse. Thus although widows can be traced in the accounts and the amount of their allowances can be noted, their individual circumstances cannot be known. What does become apparent is that the Old Poor Law system treated individual widows differently, presumably classifying them according to their ages and perceived usefulness to the community. As previously discussed in chapter three these problems are common to all studies of the Poor Law particularly those of women who were routinely subsumed under their breadwinners until those breadwinners deserted or died and the woman had to be considered as an individual. As previously discussed in chapter four her value or potential cost to her parish were prime considerations when reviewing her need for parochial support.

Young widows with children were a particular and, potentially, long-term financial burden on the parish and, as previously noted, were regarded with suspicion especially when they sought to oppose or circumvent the decisions of their parish officials. In 1672 two Hertfordshire parishes wrangled over the settlement of a freeman's family 'fallen into want' and forced on the parish by the death of their father. The complicated case came to Hertford Quarter Sessions and, to date, is the only Hertfordshire example of such a dispute to have been recorded:<sup>153</sup>

The petition of Amy Peacock of Hartingfordbury, to the justices of the peace at Hertford, setting forth that she was removed by an order of sessions from Hertford to Hartingfordbury, and that there she and her children suffered much want through the cruelty and injustice of the overseers, who deducted a shilling from her weekly allowance, and offered

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<sup>153</sup> Most of these disputes are likely to have been negotiated by correspondence between parishes or possibly in Petty Sessions so it is impossible to know how many similar cases there were.

'that if the petitioner would by stealth and privately kрееpe into the parish of All Saints, Hartford, again, or into any other parish,' they would give her five pounds 'which thing and motion the petitioner utterly rejected.' she therefore begs their worships to take her case into consideration.<sup>154</sup>

#### Hartingfordbury Officials' Defence

The petition of Thomas Parcell, John Browne, Henry Clerke, and Francis Wildman, churchwardens and overseers for the poor of the parish of Hartingfordbury, to the justices of the peace for Hertford, setting forth that Amy Peacock, widow of Thomas Peacock, late freeman of the parish of All Saints, Hertford, has since her husband's death fallen into want, so that two of her children have been taken from her charge, and maintained by the said parish of All Saints, at the rate of 3s per week for six months, during which time she went to Hertingfordbury to nurse her mother who was sick, and being there about 40 days was adjudged an inhabitant of Hertingfordbury, and her two children were sent after her to be maintained there. They beg, therefore, that the case may be taken into consideration by the bench.

Widow Amy Peacock claimed that she and her family had been badly treated by her small home parish, Hertingfordbury, and that their officials had reduced her allowance and then tried to bribe her to secretly return to the much richer parish of Hertford All Saints (where she had formerly lived with her husband) or any other parish, by offering her five pounds. There were no records of the decision made in this case or whether Amy Peacock subsequently got her full allowance or which parish was judged to be responsible for her and her two children. It would seem that she had friends who had advised her to petition the court and that many similar disputes were settled informally.

Older, still vigorous widows whose children had gone to service or were married and living in another, possibly distant parish and so unable to support their parents could be a parochial asset, possibly the only class of female poor relief claimant which could be described as such. They could also be more successfully manipulated than Amy Peacock since the poor widow as well as being the 'embodiment of the 'deserving' poor'<sup>155</sup> was totally dependent on her parish, and, in some parishes, could be bribed or coerced into earning every penny of her usually

<sup>154</sup> W. Le Hardy (comp.) *Hertfordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls 1672*, 231 No. 635.

<sup>155</sup> P. Sharpe 'Survival Strategies and Stories: Poor Widows and Widowers in Early Industrial England' in Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner (eds) *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. (London, Longman, 1999), 220 -39. Quote on page 221.

very small allowance. Writers such as Botelho noted that early modern widows in Suffolk had to work in order to survive, but found that they had some agency in choosing how to live out their declining years.<sup>156</sup> It would seem that some Hertfordshire widows during the same period had very little agency, as they were given young children to foster and parish guests to board, sent to care for the sick, keep watch by the dying and lay out the dead and were probably verbally directed by parish officials, most probably the overseer, to carry out the tasks required of them. Payments for this work then appeared in the overseers' accounts but these informal arrangements with widows do not appear to have been discussed at vestry meetings or in the minutes.

Susannah Ottaway stated that 'old women, especially widows, had a particularly privileged place in the minds of their contemporaries' and the 'availability and importance of the Old Poor Law system in providing a safety net for the aged should not be dismissed'.<sup>157</sup> Yet, this was a very minimal safety net in the Hertfordshire parishes studied and as further discussed below could be rapidly withdrawn once the widow became an infirm burden. It was not in the interests of the parish to provide a welfare state for the elderly because they would inevitably require more resources as they aged and became progressively less useful. Eventually they would become prime candidates for the poorhouse or, later, the workhouse but before that the parish would have certainly got its money's worth out of them.

Mature married women frequently designated Goodwife or Goody in parish records, were generally seen as deserving, if their husbands had a good reputation, even when they were not parish-born but had married into the parish, lived there for years and were then widowed. They should have then been removed to their, probably barely remembered, home parishes, but if a vulnerable widow would agree to serve her adopted parish she was considered useful and allowed to remain on a very basic parish allowance. Another convenient parochial assumption was that old people could survive on very little money or food. An elderly widow was

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<sup>156</sup> Botelho *Old Age and the English Poor Law*.

<sup>157</sup> Ottaway *The Decline of Life*.



expected to continue to do for herself for as long as possible and she achieved this, as noted by Pamela Sharpe,<sup>158</sup> at least partially, by working for the parish which could fulfil its obligations to her as a deserving pauper whilst profiting from her skills as an experienced maid of all work and controlling her through her permanent need for an allowance. As previously noted, Sharpe observed that ‘social welfare provision can be viewed as a way not only to protect but also to control’ and this would appear to have been true of some of the Hertfordshire parishes where it can be traced, notably in Chipping Barnet, Hertford All Saints and St Albans Abbey parishes.

Under her unwritten contract with the parish a widow might well be expected to provide whatever services were required of her. In return she was then likely to be rewarded with more generous treatment when she needed her rent paid or extra food, fuel, clothing or bedding bought for her and/or any children she had living with her. Since she was serving the parish and providing savings on the poor rates it was in the parish’s interest to keep her at least basically housed and fed. The ability to be useful by taking in outsiders whom the parish wanted temporarily lodged could keep a woman in her home instead of being consigned to the workhouse as in this Chipping Barnet example of the treatment of five widows in the transition period when the first workhouse was established in 1729:<sup>159</sup>

Table 8.3 Pensions Paid to Chipping Barnet Widows September/October 1729 from Overseers Accounts 1720-45.<sup>160</sup>

Name	September 1729 Pension	October 1729 Pension
Widow Field/s	7 Sept. 1729 Paid 10s. for 4 weeks	5 Oct. 1729 Paid 2s. for 4 weeks
Widow Nevill	7 Sept. 1729 Paid 16s. for 4 weeks	5 Oct. 1729 Paid 8s. for 4 weeks
Widow Pardee	7 Sept. 1729 Paid 10s. for 4 weeks + rent 6s + shift 3s 1 Feb. 1730 Paid her 1s. 1d. for lodging a man and his wife	5 Oct. 1729 Paid 2s. 6d. for 4 weeks + rent 6s.
Widow Sutton	7 Sept. 1729 Paid 8s. for 4 weeks +	5 Oct. 1729 Paid 4s. for 4

<sup>158</sup> Sharpe ‘Survival Strategies and Stories’, 226.

<sup>159</sup> HALS DP15/12/1 Chipping Barnet Overseers Accounts 1720-45.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

	rent 10s.	weeks
Widow Woodley	7 Sept. 1729 Paid 8s. for 4 weeks	No payments made

As can be seen in Table 8.3 above four apparently childless widows, or whose children were grown but unable to support them, and whose ages and state of health are unknown, since overseers' accounts do not record these, had their varying small weekly allowances drastically cancelled in October 1729. This was presumably intended to force them to enter the new workhouse which was opened at Chipping Barnet in the same month. Only one, Widow Pardee, was permitted to stay in her home and continued to have her, relatively high, monthly rent of 6s. paid by the parish. In the following year she was also paid by officials 1s. 1d. for lodging a man and his wife for an unspecified period. Providing temporary lodgings for outsiders was one of the ways in which poor widows could make themselves useful to the parish and it may be that this factor – having sufficient living space to be able to provide basic accommodation on demand and presumably also being spry enough to take on extra work kept Widow Pardee out of the workhouse at least temporarily. An experienced housewife and wise-woman, whether married or widowed could also be employed by the parish as an herbalist, a midwife, or in caring for and sometimes nursing the sick.

In the Surrey parish of Wimbledon a presumably vulnerable and dependent widow was recorded in the vestry minutes being openly bribed/blackmailed by the vestrymen into agreeing to take on parish work: '4 August 1751 Wid. Greenfeild allowed 1s. 6d. p.w. pension for one month on condition she can be serviceable to any of the poor when sick, and [if she] is attentive to the satisfaction of the officers she shall then be allowed 2s. p.w. pension during that time'.<sup>161</sup> The message was clear - be serviceable to the parish and attentive to the satisfaction of the officers by taking on additional work and you will be considered deserving and be given more to live on. All vestry members and parish officials knew that a poor widow of whatever age was utterly dependent on her pension for survival and they may well have coerced them into performing various unpopular services such as acting as a

<sup>161</sup> F. Cowe (ed.) *Wimbledon Vestry Minutes 1736, 1743-1788, 22: A Calendar* (Woking: Surrey Record Society, 1964). To date there are no similar Hertfordshire examples.

plague searcher when necessary and housing and nursing infectious strangers. Wimbledon Vestry clearly assumed that all paupers considered capable of care work and therefore not ill, since few paupers were ever in good health, should be routinely forced into nursing their sick fellows and openly stated this policy in their 1751 minutes: '4 August 1751 'If any pension poor are hearty and able to nurse such as are sick and they refuse when ordered by the officers they shall have their pensions taken off'.<sup>162</sup>

Hertfordshire officials presumably employed the same strategies as Wimbledon judging from the number of, mainly widow pensioners noted as engaged in fostering/nursing', children<sup>163</sup> and caring for one another in overseers' accounts. It is likely that many Hertfordshire widows were verbally directed to their tasks because entries involving payments to widows, for providing services such as nursing, care or accommodation, appear in overseer's accounts from several parishes. Hertfordshire widows could see how the system operated in their parishes and accepted it because they had no choice, so there was no need for officials to spell it out in policy documents. It would seem likely that such agreements were made informally and verbally with parish officials. Two examples from Hertford All Saints illustrate how being 'serviceable' could also pay off, in small ways, to the widow's advantage with plainly some form of verbal negotiation having previously taken place: 'Ordered That the Overseers of the poor Do pay twelve Shillings And Six pence to widow Sarah Camfeild's Cloaths out of Pawn if pawned, but if not pawned the Overseers are not to part with the said Sum.'; 'Ordered That the Overseers of the Poor Do pay the Widow Stratton pig five Shillings'.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid. In 1751 no workhouse had yet been established to accommodate the sick in Wimbledon.

<sup>163</sup> HALS DP 15/8/1-2 Chipping Barnet Vestry Minutes 1657-1659 6 April 1658 Old Widow Norris Allowed 2s. a week pension for blind child. The pension was specifically given to her for keeping the child. She had previously been bribed as recorded by the January 4 vestry entry, 'Given 'suit of apparel' and if she sent her son-in-law and his wife out of her house would be considered for a weekly pension.' She seems to have complied because she was then given the blind child and, presumably, the pension.

<sup>164</sup> HALS DP48/8/1 Hertford: All Saints & St Johns Vestry Minutes 1732-1745 Twenty Seventh Day of Aprill Anno Dm<sup>o</sup> 1732.

This apparent parochial benevolence was in fact conditional on the widow remaining useful. Widows were treated quite generously if they were hard workers and prepared to serve the parish but were usually abruptly rejected as soon as they became burdens. Royston disposed of its no longer useful parishioners, both male and female, in this way: 'Order'd that the Widow of Cornelius Hankin be not allowed anything but be sent [to?] the Workhouse as soon as she can be removed she being now Ill'. Widow Hankin was no longer considered useful to the parish and could be discarded. She would have continued to labour in the workhouse at whatever work she was capable of, spinning, washing, cooking, or cleaning, until she died three years later. While she remained employable a widow was considered a useful resource and might receive additional rewards in kind if she gained a reputation as a reliable, deferential and hard-working favourite amongst the vestry and parish officials.

However, she remained a potential problem and her apparently secure position as a mainstay of the relief system became increasingly threatened as she aged and gradually became infirm. When a non-parishioner widow could no longer serve and required more support herself she would discover that the unwritten contract between herself and the parish no longer existed, she did not belong and could be sent back to become an unwelcome liability to her home parish. A Gloucestershire woman married and established in Hertingfordbury may have been suffering from some form of degenerative disease because in 1596 the parish urgently wanted to remove her. To date this appears to be one of the earliest recorded Hertfordshire examples of a callous disposal policy.

'The inhabitants petitioned the Sessions held in Hatfield in 1596 concerning Widow Margaret Watkyns, who was originally from Woollaston, Gloucs but had moved to their area. Because Margaret could no longer maintain herself 'and has become a charge upon the parish', the JPs ordered that she be sent back to Woollaston, conveyed by the constables of each parish through which she travelled'.<sup>165</sup>

Widow Margaret Watkyns, although presumably infirm and unable to work

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<sup>165</sup> HALS HAT/SR 8/41.

and 'maintain herself', was considered capable of making a long cross-country journey, if she was fortunate by a series of local carriers' carts and not on foot and escorted by constables. There is no mention of her being allowed any money for transport and living costs on her journey unless the constables were obliged to provide lodgings for her.<sup>166</sup> Non-parishioner widows who had seemingly been neglected and forgotten and were then found to be too frail to travel became the subjects of negotiations between the officials of the unwilling 'host' parish and the equally unenthusiastic 'home'. This kind of transaction was still taking place at the beginning of the nineteenth-century:

Sir

I rec<sup>d</sup> Yours and nothing but the Age of the Widow Holesworth [?] should prevent Our having her Home as we could have her taken care of much cheaper if she was at home therefore will thank you to allow her 2s pr Week as before and lay about Twenty Shillings Out upon her in buying the most necessary Articles <sup>of clothing</sup> she is Want of with it.<sup>167</sup>

It is notable that in these inter-parish communications the over-riding concern was for keeping both sets of parish costs down and finding the most economical way of dealing with the problem. The individual's needs were not ascertained, apart from clothing, since a ragged, destitute, widow would reflect badly on both her home and host parishes.

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to explore several gaps in knowledge and discover how the unequal relationship between the early modern poor woman and her Hertfordshire parish appears to have functioned when changes in her circumstances forced her to go on the parish. It has shown that throughout her life a woman was subordinated

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<sup>166</sup> By the seventeenth century a daily tariff existed, laid down by the courts, for the travelling costs allowed to constables for removing, escorting and transporting poor and/or disabled people according to whether they travelled on foot or by cart.

<sup>179</sup> HALS DP/90/18/4 St Albans Abbey Overseers Correspondence 1740-1815. Letter from Jos<sup>h</sup> Tanner [Overseer?] Hamp<sup>d</sup> Norris 26 April 1806 [Written to Robert Russell Overseer? Of St Albans Abbey parish by his counterpart in Hampstead Norris, Berks]. Widow Holesworth appeared to have been completely destitute and with no family or local friends to support her.

to her breadwinner. If he became unable to support her through illness or injury, was imprisoned, died or deserted her, she became instantly vulnerable, having lost his wages and protection, and would be forced to apply to her parish for assistance. The problem of vulnerable women being penalised by laws which constructed them solely as financial liabilities and took no account of the reality of their lives has not been previously explored in Hertfordshire or, very widely, in the general secondary literature although it was central to women's existence.<sup>168</sup>

A series of case studies from several parishes have analysed how such vulnerable women in Hertfordshire were managed by both parish and judicial authorities at different stages of their lives: as girl apprentices entering the labour market, as deserted women temporarily or permanently abandoned by their husbands and as widows. It appears that Hertfordshire parish officials operated different strategies when dealing with different age groups of poor women but that, as was usual in Hertfordshire, they were primarily concerned with the individual woman's inevitable cost or potential cost to the parish and who would control her life and work.

It was expected that an apprenticed girl whether sent out of the parish or remaining there would eventually marry and her husband would then become responsible for her. In theory until her husband ceased being able to act as a breadwinner, temporarily or permanently, the couple would have no more claims on the parish until they became too old to maintain themselves. However, this apparent stability in her lifecycle could prove to be illusory and a woman might at some point find herself deserted, sometimes only temporarily, when her husband travelled to find work or enlisted.<sup>169</sup> Other problems could result from the man being sent to prison for debt or as a felon, or transported or hanged for his crimes. In other cases the wife discovered that he had permanently abandoned her, or was a bigamist. Deserted parishioner women and also young widows with small children

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<sup>168</sup> Exceptions being J. Bailey *Parenting in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012); P. Crawford *Parents of Poor Children*; Williams *Poverty Gender and Lifecycle*.

<sup>169</sup> Even though men with families were not supposed to be taken from them so they then had to go on the parish.

were expensive drains on the poor rates, as discussed by Joanne Bailey and Patricia Crawford, until the children became employable and could be apprenticed out of the parish.<sup>170</sup> These women were also mostly useless because their young families occupied them in their homes and they could not do much to contribute towards their household maintenance or carry out tasks for the parish except possibly wet-nursing and fostering orphaned or abandoned infants. Even if she was not abandoned a woman would at some time in her life be forced to seek some parish assistance to survive particularly if she became sick or incapacitated through accident or overwork.

In contrast, deserving and hard-working widows, apparently selected as such by their parish officials, enjoyed a honeymoon period of approval and small additional payments in some Hertfordshire parishes but this only lasted while they could work, very often for the parish, and maintain themselves. This utilitarian attitude contrasts strongly with Susannah Ottaway's statement that 'old women, especially widows, had a particularly privileged place in the minds of their contemporaries'.<sup>171</sup> It would appear that in the Hertfordshire parishes studied official benevolence towards all widows was based on their usefulness and cost to the parish.

The employable Hertfordshire poor widow was recognised as deserving, as Pamela Sharpe found all poor widows were,<sup>172</sup> but she was also almost totally dependent on the parish if her children had grown and moved away and could therefore be manipulated into earning every penny of her, usually, very small allowance. In a range of the Hertfordshire parishes studied, such as Chipping Barnet and Hertford All Saints, these small sums do not appear to have been old-age pensions freely bestowed by the parish to maintain an old person but payments for services provided by the elderly individual to the parish. To what extent this was a common policy in Hertfordshire parishes is unclear.

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<sup>170</sup> Bailey *Parenting in England*; Crawford *Parents of Poor Children*.

<sup>171</sup> Ottaway *The Decline of Life*.

<sup>172</sup> Sharpe 'Survival Strategies'.

Since she was serving the parish and providing savings on the poor rates it was in the parish's interest to keep her at least basically housed and fed and the parish effectively became her employer and bread-winner until she aged and became too much of a burden to support. She was then abruptly rejected and consigned to the poorhouse/townhouse, or later, workhouse. Many Hertfordshire parishes seem to have followed a policy of collecting their elderly and other impotent poor who were incapable of maintaining themselves in townhouses/poorhouses/almshouses – terms all used interchangeably – long before they adopted 'workhouses' in the early eighteenth century. Possibly it was thought to be more cost-effective than leaving them in their own homes since it saved on rent, fuel and food and they could look after one another. If she had married into the parish attempts would be made to send a widow back to her home parish so that expenditure on her ceased unless she was too infirm to travel in which case she too would end in the poorhouse being supported by her host parish. The following chapter will investigate the problems caused when a young woman moved out of her designated place in society, for whatever reason, and became doubly vulnerable by becoming a single mother.



## Chapter Nine: Managing Bastardy

### Context

This chapter focuses on the pregnant and unmarried adolescent girls and single women who were considered by government legislators to be lewd and disorderly having irresponsibly removed themselves from their ordained place in society as wives. By 1576, central government saw them as a growing symptom of the endemic disease of idleness in society, and to those eligible to pay the poor rate they were, probably deliberately, portrayed as parochial liabilities. Their bastards were 'being now left to be kept at the charges of the parish where they be born, to the great burden of the same parish'. They were also accused of 'defrauding of the relief of the impotent and aged true poor of the same parish, and 'the evil example and encouragement of lewd life'.<sup>1</sup> The gap explored here is who were these young Hertfordshire women and what can be discovered about their lives?

The 1576 statute was the first central government attack on bastard-bearers, who had previously come under the jurisdiction of the church courts.<sup>2</sup> It would appear that the underlying government motive for attacking them at this time was cutting expenditure. Martin Ingram found that 'it is clear that the passage of the anti-bastardy measure of 1576 reflected the economic and fiscal concerns of the time – pressures that were to increase further by the end of Elizabeth's reign. Reduced mortality and increased fertility were expanding the population apace. The resulting pressure on resources, combined with a variety of changes in land use, helped to fuel price inflation, while the increasing availability of labour drove down the real value of wages'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *An Act For the Setting of the Poor on Work, and for the Avoidance of Idleness 1576* (18 Elizabeth c. 3 s. 1).

<sup>2</sup> It would be necessary to examine the Hertfordshire Church Court records in order to understand how they judged and punished bastardy cases. It would seem that punishment most probably involved public shaming of the couple by penance in the village and/or parish church.

<sup>3</sup> M. Ingram *Carnal Knowledge: Regulating Sex in England, 1470-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 412.

This first section has briefly contextualised bastardy and the problems bastard-bearers and putative fathers caused to poor law officials. The second examines the literature of bastardy concentrating on the themes relevant to this study that have been researched and then considers what gaps in this literature remain particularly for Hertfordshire. The third discusses what can be learned about bastard-bearers and putative fathers from a detailed study of seventeenth century Hertfordshire bastardy orders. The research in this section aimed to discover how many bastardy cases were taken to Hertford Quarter Sessions, which parishes presented bastard bearers and reputed fathers and the outcomes for all participants of the court's decisions. The fourth section investigates eighteenth century settlement examination cases from a much wider range of Hertfordshire parishes and seeks to discover the bastard-bearers' occupations and those of their partners, which parishes they came from and how many were akin to Laslett's 'repeaters' in producing more than one base born child. Finally, the conclusion draws together the findings and analyses what appear to be the salient features of bastardy cases in Hertfordshire.

### Thinking and writing about bastardy

The literature on bastardy is very substantial and therefore this section will concentrate on two areas; material relating to the issues discussed in the chapter and the few studies that involve Hertfordshire. Most of the detailed studies on bastardy have concentrated on demography and comparative studies of regions and counties; consequently, a great deal has been revealed about numbers and regional and country-wide trends in bastardy but not much about the bastard-bearers and putative fathers. The newly founded Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure began collecting demographic data on illegitimacy in 1964. Three members of the Cambridge group, Peter Laslett, Karla Oosterveen and Richard M. Smith later went on to produce what is now widely regarded as the seminal study in the field in 1980.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> P. Laslett, K. Oosterveen and R. Smith (eds) *Bastardy and its Comparative History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

Laslett researched Norfolk, Shropshire, Nottinghamshire, Cumberland, the North Riding of Yorkshire, Suffolk and Herefordshire. He used only one rural Hertfordshire parish for a detailed case study, Aldenham, where he found what he claimed was an atypically low bastardy ratio. This observation is challenged by the figures discussed below. In the same work Laslett introduced the controversial idea of the bastardy-prone sub-society arguing that some women and families were more prone to bastard-bearing, and this continues to inspire discussion and argument as to whether it actually existed. There is little evidence of this in Hertfordshire.

Richard Adair in his wide-ranging regional study involving 250 English parish registers dating from 1538-1754<sup>5</sup> found that there was more bastardy in the north and west of the country, which he designated 'the Highlands', than in the south and east, designated 'the Lowlands', and argued that this was because of different courtship and engagement practices in the two regions. Engagement or spousal was regarded as much more important in the Highlands than in the Lowlands and Highland espoused couples would consider themselves as being in a stable sexual relationship. Highland women were much more likely to marry the father of their illegitimate child and he would then maintain them. Adair found that the much more flexible and amorphous patterns of courtship in the Lowlands led to more problems usually over putative fathers and maintenance of the mother and her child.

Laslett and his successors were concerned to research and compare numbers of bastard-bearers in groups of counties but not interested in examining any facet of their lives within the community. Other historians, notably Keith Wrightson and David Levine, began to reveal the social context of bastardy<sup>6</sup> while Alan Macfarlane looked at attitudes towards bastard-bearers and bastards in Earls Colne, Essex.<sup>7</sup> These studies began a whole series of microstudies of individual

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<sup>5</sup> R. Adair *Courtship Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 28.

<sup>6</sup> D. Levine and K. Wrightson 'The Social Context of Illegitimacy in Early Modern England' in Laslett et al. (eds) *Bastardy and its Comparative History*, 158-75. One of the nine parishes they studied was Aldenham.

<sup>7</sup> A. MacFarlane 'Illegitimacy and Illegitimates in England' in Laslett et al. (eds) *Bastardy and*

settlements none of which included Hertfordshire.

Further studies of bastardy by a number of authors focussed on topics and timeframes in different counties. They revealed a range of attitudes to bastardy over the country and include work by Patricia Broomfield,<sup>8</sup> Catherine Day,<sup>9</sup> Steven King,<sup>10</sup> and Barry Reay.<sup>11</sup> Thomas Nutt who focused on bastardy cases at Chelmsford, Essex Petty Sessions found that 'notions of morality, it seems, were generally overridden by an economic desire to enforce paternal liability' as can be seen developing in neighbouring Hertfordshire.<sup>12</sup> Alys Levene, Thomas Nutt and Samantha Williams have shown in their survey that the investigation of illegitimacy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has moved from the previous primarily quantitative emphasis of earlier studies towards the lived experience of bastard bearers and putative fathers.<sup>13</sup> However, little has been done to investigate this lived experience in earlier centuries.

The central question examined in this chapter is whether the Hertfordshire cases in a range of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century court records and eighteenth-century settlement examinations can be described as uniformly and incorrigibly lewd women, hardened inhabitants of Laslett's bastardy-prone sub-

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*its Comparative History*, 71-85.

<sup>8</sup> P. Broomfield 'Incidences and Attitudes: a View of Bastardy from Eighteenth-Century Rural North Staffordshire, c.1750-1820' *Midland History* 27 (2002), 80-98. She found that bastardy was tolerated within some North Staffordshire families in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries and that there was some sympathy for the mother.

<sup>9</sup> C. Day *Wiltshire marriage patterns, 1754-1914 : Geographical Mobility, Cousin Marriage and Illegitimacy* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), examined marriage patterns in two rural Wiltshire parishes, Stourton and Kilmington, from the late eighteenth-century to the early twentieth century and found that having illegitimate children was an impediment to marriage. She explored the mobility patterns of parents of illegitimate children, particularly cousins, which had not previously been researched.

<sup>10</sup> S. King 'The Bastardy Prone Sub-society Again: Bastards and Their Fathers and Mothers in Lancashire, Wiltshire and Somerset, 1800-1840' in A. Levene T. Nutt and S. Williams (eds) *Illegitimacy in Britain 1790-1920* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 66-86. He examined the possibility of a bastardy-prone sub-society in nineteenth-century Lancashire and found that the concept needed to be revisited.

<sup>11</sup> B. Reay *Microhistories: Demography, Society and Culture in Rural England 1800-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). He researched the Blean area of Kent from 1800-1930 and argued that there was no bastardy-prone sub-society there.

<sup>12</sup> T. Nutt 'The Paradox and Problems of Illegitimate Paternity in Old Poor Law Essex' in Levene et al. *Illegitimacy in Britain*, 102-21. Quote on p. 121.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

society, or instead unfortunates who had anticipated marriage or whose betrothals had gone wrong? These situations could arise through the loss of putative fathers by their absconding, moving away to find work, being enlisted, marrying someone else, or dying. Adair noted that increased mobility in job-seeking and 'Insecurity for both sexes disrupted marriage strategies and led to the rise in bastardy which has been observed'.<sup>14</sup>

According to Paul Griffiths 'The 'fate of the pregnant single woman was often a sorry tale of cruelty and bureaucratic indifference'.<sup>15</sup> This may well have been the situation the individual bastard-bearer found herself in while struggling to live in the anonymity of the metropolis, but the majority of Hertfordshire parish officials, anxious to trace putative fathers, negotiate maintenance agreements and keep the poor rates down, showed no signs of indifference to the perpetrators of bastardy. Most of them appear to have been very well informed about the identities of putative fathers in the parishes studied. These officials would track the man down and bind him to pay for his child's upkeep through court proceedings if that became necessary. They were prepared to spend fairly large sums of money in the short-term hunting for him in order to save it in the long-term. The bastard-bearer would also receive rapid attention from her parish and several women in the moralistic early Stuart years were whipped and also imprisoned in the house of correction sometimes for a full year.

As part of his study Richard Adair examined a sample of eight parish registers from mostly small rural, Hertfordshire parishes out of the (6%) of the 132 then in existence. Adair assigned Hertfordshire to a large eastern tranche of counties comprising Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Rutland and Suffolk.<sup>16</sup> The Hertfordshire parishes he chose were: Berkhamsted St Peter (1538-60); Codicote (1581-1750); Furneaux Pelham (1581-

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<sup>14</sup> Adair *Courtship Illegitimacy and Marriage*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> P. Griffiths *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England 1560-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 283.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 229.

1750); Great Gaddesden (1581-1750); Hunsdon (1559-1754); King's Langley (1558-1754); Much [Great] Hornead (1538-1754) and Shephall (1581-1750). These parishes were selected as fulfilling Adair's criteria that there was a printed copy of the register available and that it had been compiled from the sixteenth century onwards. His research leaves a notable gap not only in our understanding of the size of the bastardy problem in the remaining 124 Hertfordshire parishes. Parish registers cannot provide any indication of the characteristics and treatment by that parish of its bastard bearers and putative fathers. Was there an actual epidemic of bastardy in Hertfordshire during the early modern period as most contemporary legislators and judicial manual writers perceived infecting the entire country or was Hertfordshire merely demonstrating Adair's typical courtship patterns of a Lowland county?

It would seem that in order to even attempt to understand the management of early modern bastardy in Hertfordshire more information than that provided by the figures in Adair's eight sets of parish registers is required. Questions still remain for Hertfordshire and this research seeks to provide some answers to these. Did attitudes change during the course of the seventeenth-century since by its later decades the drive towards vengeful punishment for sinfulness had largely disappeared in the Hertfordshire courts, replaced by a more pragmatic approach expressed in substantial numbers of maintenance orders being agreed and recorded in the Hertford Quarter Sessions, similar to those observed by Thomas Nutt in Chelmsford Petty Sessions. It would seem that the motivation and overriding importance of economic considerations in Essex were very like those operating in the Hertfordshire parishes researched.<sup>17</sup> With the growing numbers of bastardy cases recorded in the eighteenth century financial considerations appear to have completely eclipsed the drive to condemn and punish in the Hertford Quarter Sessions courts, although they had always been present in the 1576, 1610 and 1624 government legislation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Nutt 'The Paradox and Problems'.

<sup>18</sup> *An Act For the Setting of the Poor on Work, and for the Avoidance of Idleness 1576* (18 Elizabeth, c. 3 s. 1); *Act For the Due Execution of Diverse Laws and Statutes Heretofor Made*

There are a range of sources for tracing bastardy cases apart from parish registers. These include bastardy bonds, settlement examinations, church court records, quarter sessions' cases etc. In this study early modern bastardy is examined as it was recorded in seventeenth-century Hertford Quarter Sessions' presentments and the eighteenth-century settlement examinations of women from a range of parishes originating from inside and outside the county of Hertfordshire. The chapter aims to discover what these brief, formulaic records reveal about the bastard bearers, the putative fathers and their lives. Were their disorderly lifestyles and numbers posing a threat to the orderly county of Hertfordshire?

However, there is an important omission in the following study. Details about how complicated parish disputes over the mother's settlement were sometimes, expensively and acrimoniously, resolved in the courts can be traced in the Hertford Quarter Sessions records,<sup>19</sup> but it has not been possible to analyse them within the scope of this current study. The focus here will remain upon the bastard-bearers' settlement examinations not the resolution of disputes over them. If the Hertfordshire Petty Sessions records still existed from the period, they would have probably produced considerably more cases and useful indications of how these were resolved, presumably, by negotiation.

### Presentments for bastardy in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Hertfordshire

For this section the compiled Hertford Quarter Sessions Rolls and Books from 1620 to the end of the seventeenth century were examined to clarify the social classes of people who were presented as bastard-bearers and putative fathers during this period and whether they formed an ever-growing threat to their parishes. These published volumes, with gaps, are housed in the Hertfordshire archives.<sup>20</sup>

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*Against Rogues, Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars and Other Lewd and Idle Person 1610; Act To Prevent the Murthering of Bastard Children 1624 (7 & 8 James I c. 4).*

<sup>19</sup> W. Le Hardy (comp.) *Hertford Quarterly Sessions Rolls 1581–1698 and Hertford Quarterly Sessions Books 1619–1657 and 1658–1700*. The dates of the session are usually given in full for Sessions Books which contain most of the bastardy cases.

<sup>20</sup> W. Le Hardy *Quarter Sessions and Other Records in the Custody of the Officials of the*

In the 1620s there were 11 cases out of which the outcomes for six bastard-bearers were not recorded. Two remained in their home parishes, another two were removed and one was returned to her former employer's parish. Four of the outcomes of the 11 named reputed fathers were not recorded, two of them absconded and two were gaoled until they could provide sureties. One was discharged because he had fulfilled the order against him and another was to be examined by a Justice of the Peace although the reason for this was not given. One man was involved in a long-running dispute with his parish over who was to pay for his bastard child; her mother who had subsequently married refused to do so as did her husband. Another man had taken on the care of a child, whose father had absconded, and petitioned that he had not been paid for its keep for 48 weeks by either the parish or the mother as had been previously agreed.

In the 1630s the number of couples indicted increased to 17 out of which the outcomes for 12 women were not recorded. Two women were sent to the House of Correction; one for three months and one for a year. Another was sent home by her employer and another was to keep her child until it was three years old and it was to then live with the reputed father until it was 10 years old when it would be apprenticed. Little is known about the last case, not even her home parish, and the reputed father absconded. Four of the outcomes of the 17 named reputed fathers were not recorded. Two had absconded and one was to be apprehended. A further four were gaoled until they could provide sureties and one's maintenance of his child was 'to be arbitrated'. Four had agreed to make maintenance payments and these were of varying amounts ranging from 1s. to 20d. weekly and for different periods until the child became 10 years old in one case and 12 years old in another. Mostly the child's age at future apprenticeship was not stipulated possibly because it might not survive since life expectancy for infants (children under seven years of age) was low.<sup>21</sup>

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*County: Guide to the Hertfordshire Record Office. Part I* (Hertford: Hertfordshire County Council, 1961), 12-20.

<sup>21</sup> E. Wrigley and R. Schofield *The Population History of England 1541-1871: A Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 358.



In the 1640s there was a further increase to 24 indictments, this was the highest number for any decade in this period. The outcomes for 12 of these women were not recorded. Six were sent to the Hertford House of Correction, three for one year, the mandated sentence, and the others for an unspecified time. One woman ran away and was subsequently reported to have married a man in the Hertfordshire parish of Amwell and another later married the reputed father of her child who was then discharged from prison. One was returned to her employer in Albury and one, who bore two bastards and whose partner was not named was to be settled in Wormley which may or may not have been her unrecorded home parish. The father of one woman refused to allow her to marry the father of her child and later took on its maintenance himself with relief from his parish, Baldock.

Four of the outcomes of the 21 named fathers were not recorded. Another man had escaped from custody and three had absconded. Seven were gaoled until they could provide sureties and one was sent to the House of Correction but no sureties were mentioned so he may not have been able to provide them. Two men were to be examined by Justices of the Peace. As previously noted one wanted to marry his lover but was rejected by her father. One man agreed to pay the laying-in costs to his partner's parish and one was bound over in sureties

In the 1650s the number of cases decreased abruptly to 15 and the outcomes for eight of these women were not recorded. Five were sent to the House of Correction, two specifically to earn some money towards their keep and one until she and her partner gave good security for the permanence of the order. Another woman may have absconded she was described as 'late' of Barkway and one who had been employed in Cambridge was sent back there. Three of the outcomes of the 10 named fathers were not given and one may have absconded because he was described as 'late' of Hertford All Saints. Four were gaoled until they could provide sureties, one for Middlesex Sessions since he belonged to Clerkenwell. One man was gaoled but sureties were not mentioned. Another was bound with two good sureties of £20 for the order. Another man agreed to pay 2s. weekly to Harpenden overseers and another 20d. weekly to an unspecified parish.

In the 1660s there was a very slight increase to 17 cases and the outcomes for 14 of these women were not recorded. One was only known to have Wheathamstead as her home parish as did her partner, they agreed with the overseers that they were to be charged 23s. to be paid to the churchwardens. The payment may have been for laying-in fees. Two women were sent to the House of Correction and one was removed to Edmonton, Middlesex which may have been her home parish. Two of the outcomes of the 16 named fathers were not given and one of these was unnamed. One man may have absconded because he was described as 'late' of Pirton. Seven were gaoled until they could provide sureties, one 'closely'. Seven others had made agreements to pay the overseers of their partners' home parishes sufficient maintenance for the child and one would provide 1s. 6d. weekly which seems to have been almost the standard amount of maintenance.

The 1670s produced a runaway and 17 cases. Of these four women were not named and the outcomes for all of them were not given. Only one of the fathers was not named but the child was chargeable to Standon although it had been born in Amwell. One man had absconded after another had prevented the constable executing the warrant against him. Another two absconded and their wages and goods were to be used for child maintenance as was a third man's although he was not described as having absconded. One woman's parish did not prosecute so the man was discharged. Four were gaoled until they could provide sureties and six were referred to Justices of the Peace presumably to negotiate maintenance costs. One man had appealed and had his appeal dismissed and one had his appeal referred to the justices. Another man was discharged and had agreed a bond with Bushey for an unspecified amount. In the 1680s there was another decrease to 12. Finally, the 1690s had 13 cases. None of these could be described as large numbers much less an 'epidemic'.

## Hertfordshire bastardy in the eighteenth-century

A woman who knew she was carrying a bastard child was obliged to attend for settlement examination prior to its birth, but in practice many examinations occurred after the birth. Bastardy examinations were particularly concerned to discover the identity of the father, in order to force him to provide a bond and indemnify the parish against the costs of maintaining the child, and they required the presence of two Justices of the Peace sitting in petty sessions.<sup>22</sup> Only one example of a bastardy examination requiring a bond appears to have survived in Hertfordshire archives and that dates from the early nineteenth-century.

Unlike the earlier court records, settlement examinations included some of the 24 parishes under the jurisdiction of the Liberty of St Albans making a total of 40 parishes (30.3%) of the 132 Hertfordshire parishes.<sup>23</sup> However, the figures cannot provide an accurate picture of Hertfordshire bastardy at this time since many other settlement examinations for bastard bearers originating in the remaining parishes may have been lost, discarded or misplaced. Keith Snell in his study of English and Welsh parishes has found that: 'Surviving gender ratios of certificates make it obvious that very few female migrants can ever have had one'.<sup>24</sup> This was presumably because women were subsumed under their husbands, fathers or the male relative responsible for them and these men would hold any settlement documentation. If female settlement certificates were a rarity it would appear that the women holding them were in a minority and that an unknown number of

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.londonlives.org/static/EP.jsp>. Accessed numerous times during this study.

<sup>23</sup> These were: Aldbury; Aldenham; Amwell (Great); Anstey; Ashwell; Aspenden; Aston; Ayot St Peter; Barkway; Barnet (Chipping); Barnet (East); Bayford; Berkhamsted; Bishop's Stortford; Broxbourne; Bushey; Cheshunt; Datchworth; Elstree; Essendon; Gaddesden (Great); Gravelly; Hertford (All Saints); Hertford (St Andrew); Hertingfordbury; Hitchin; Hornead (Great); Ippollitts; Kings Langley; Royston; Sacombe; St Albans (Abbey); St Albans (St Peter); Tewin; Watford.

J. Hill *Hertfordshire Poor Law Examinations as to Settlement: An Alphabetical Index of the names of those who were Examined as to their Settlement* (Hertfordshire Family History Society, 2004), vii. states that he had listed all that he could find to date in the county archives. Other examples may since have been found in the uncatalogued bundles discussed in the Sources and Methodology chapter.

<sup>24</sup> K. Snell *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 100.

women were without certificates and therefore went unrecorded in the Hertfordshire system. Some women may have avoided the process of examination altogether.

In comparison to the much higher figures for parishes in neighbouring counties the number of surviving Hertfordshire settlement examinations appears very low. As previously noted, Thomas Nutt found 'over 11,000 cases of proceedings in paternity cases which were heard before the Chelmsford division court of petty sessions between 1814 and 1834'.<sup>25</sup> It would seem unlikely that cases were appreciably lower in the previous century. In the metropolis Jeremy Boulton found that at St Martins in the Fields some 25,881 individuals were examined between 1725 and 1794.<sup>26</sup> Tim Hitchcock and John Black researched 469 Chelsea settlement and bastardy examinations from 1733-66.<sup>27</sup> The Hertfordshire figures only appear comparable with the 97 examinations analysed by James Taylor, but he employed a much wider timeframe 1709-1857.<sup>28</sup> He researched three widely scattered areas; St Martin Vintry, London, a range of Devon parishes and Kirkby Lonsdale, Westmoreland. Some of these studies also include bastardy examinations which are explained here on the *London Lives 1690-1800* website by Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker.<sup>29</sup> The Hertfordshire data is fractured with the added complication that women undergoing examination may have deliberately manipulated the information they provided as found by Taylor and Hitchcock in their research. Consequently it is difficult to say what proportion of bastard bearers is represented here but several observations can still be made:

The total number of bastardy cases for the eighteenth century is almost exactly the same, 133, as that for the seventeenth century, 134, so it can be

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<sup>25</sup> Nutt *'The Paradox and Problems'*, 107.

<sup>26</sup> J. Boulton, 'Double Deterrence: Settlement and Practice in London's West End, 1725-1824 Comparative Perspectives' in S. King and A. Winter (eds) *Migration, Settlement and Belonging in Europe 1500-1930s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 59.

<sup>27</sup> T. Hitchcock and J. Black (eds) *Chelsea Settlement and Bastardy Examinations 1733-66* (London: London Record Society, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> J. Taylor *Poverty, Migration and Settlement in the Industrial Revolution: Sojourners' Narratives* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, The Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship, 1989), 6.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.londonlives.org/static/EP.jsp>.

demonstrated that there was no great increase in numbers over the period. Before 1750 only five women were examined and these cases were widely spaced throughout the decades. In some years there were no examinations at all although an unknown number of women may have evaded parish officials. Between 1750-9 there were 16 examinations. The number then increased to 28 in the 1760s and then declined to 22 in the 1770s. Examinations then increased in the 1780s when 30 women were examined, two of whom were recorded as 'repeaters' with two bastards each. These were apparently the only examples of Laslett's bastardy-prone sub-society, which therefore hardly appears to have existed in the Hertfordshire parishes studied.<sup>30</sup> Finally in the 1790s numbers reached their highest point when 32 examinations were recorded. However 32 bastard-bearers over a decade cannot be seen as an 'epidemic' of bastardy in the county. From these sources an even pattern of widespread bastardy cases emerges across the county with all of the 85 parishes (64.3%) represented indicating one or more cases reported in settlement examinations.

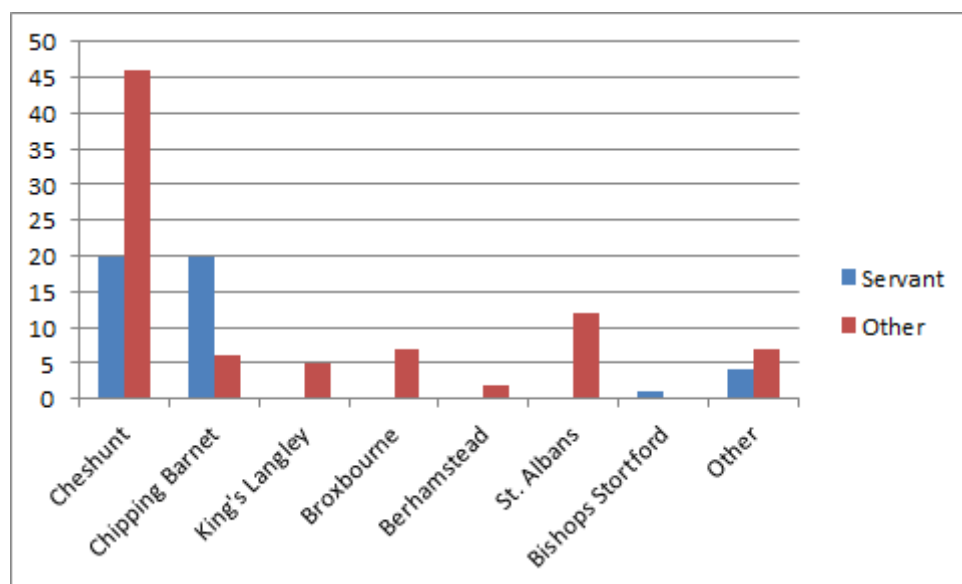
Some of the women who left London to lie in may have returned to their Hertfordshire home parishes but others may only have taken temporary lodgings in Hertfordshire to give birth so they were described as 'residing in' a parish. The sixteen Hertfordshire parishes with bastard-bearers were Aldenham; Anstey (2); Barkway (3); Berkhamsted (2); Bishop's Stortford (2); Broxbourne (8); Cheshunt (61) Chipping Barnet (28); Datchworth (11); Essendon (2); Great Amwell; Hoddesdon; Kings Langley (5); Much Hadham (11); St Albans St Peter (14) Ware (13). Much larger numbers of bastard bearers can be traced in the towns notably Cheshunt with 61 claiming settlement there and 28 at Chipping Barnet. Only 14 women claimed settlement from St Albans St Peter and apparently no one from the more urban Abbey parish, which seems unlikely although the records may have been lost or discarded. Ware had 13 claimants and, surprisingly, the small villages of Datchworth and Much Hadham both had 11. Adrian Wilson found that in the

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<sup>30</sup> Laslett *Bastardy and its Comparative History*, 217-45.

parishes he researched, which do not include Hertfordshire,<sup>31</sup> 'the great majority of bastard-bearers – from 60% to 90% of them, depending on the parish – were 'strangers' to the parish in which they gave birth: that is, they had themselves been born and baptised elsewhere. Most of them, in fact, were probably servants'.<sup>32</sup> In Hertfordshire as can be seen from Graph 9.1. below Cheshunt and Chipping Barnet dominated the figures for servants but none were recorded for Berkhamsted, Bishop's Stortford, Broxbourne, Kings Langley or St Albans St Peter. At a time when most women were in service this appears a strange omission were they between employments or had they been dismissed?

Graph 9.1 Parishes of Bastard-Bearers 1750-99 from Settlement Examinations



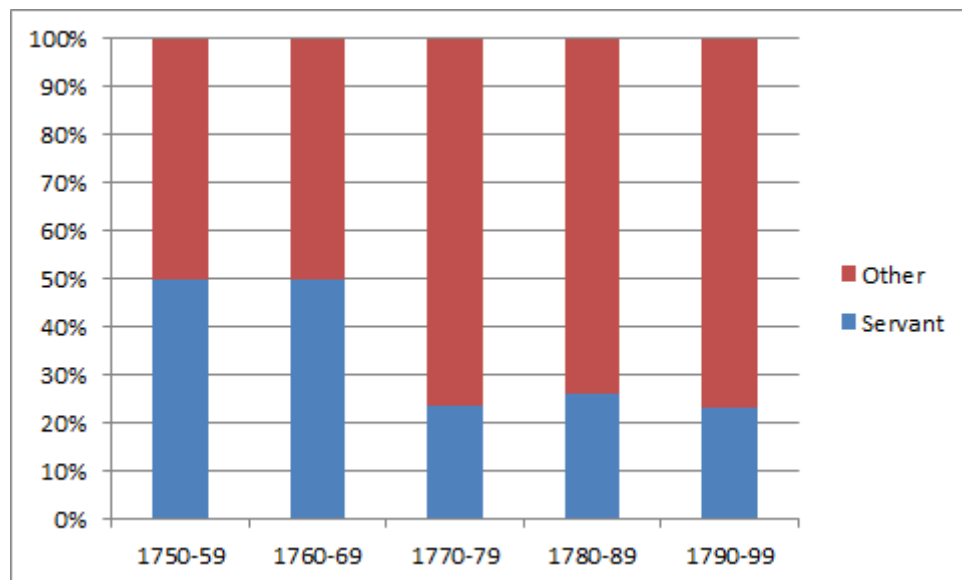
The distribution of claimed occupations by female bastard bearers by decade records small numbers but suggests a widening of the pool of bastard bearers over time. Cheshunt appears to have had a noticeably large number of bastard-bearers claiming other occupations than servant throughout the period. The reasons for this are unclear since, like Chipping Barnet, St Albans and Bishop's Stortford, Cheshunt's catering/carriage trades would have required a constant supply of female servants.

<sup>31</sup> A. Wilson *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 42.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

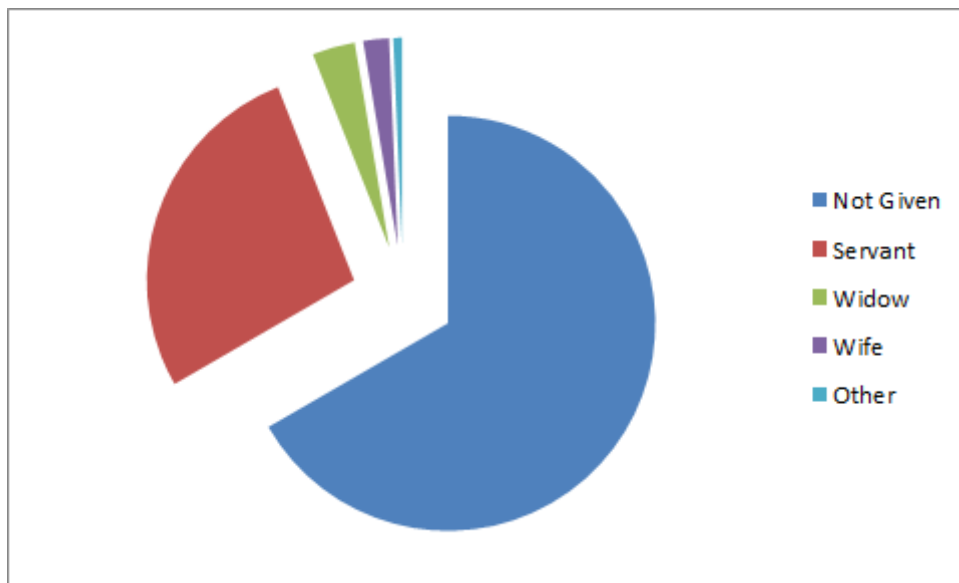
It is possible that single women were more tightly controlled in other parishes which might explain the attraction of Cheshunt to bastard-bearers. St Albans appears to have recorded no servant bastard-bearers which would seem unlikely

Graph 9.2 Occupations of Bastard-Bearers 1750-99 from Settlement Examinations



As can be seen from Graph 9.3 below 37 (28.3%) of the Hertfordshire women gave their occupation as servant and one as farmer's daughter. Ninety-three (69.9%) women did not record an occupation so may have been between employments or unemployed although none were described as vagrant. Only one woman stated that she was married to the father of her child. A total of 14 women received removal orders from the parish where they were residing, or where their child had been born, to other Hertfordshire parishes or further afield to neighbouring Enfield, and also Luton, St Marylebone and Whitechapel.

Graph 9.3 Status of Bastard-Bearers 1750-99 from Settlement Examinations



Information on the reputed fathers shows that:

Fifty claimed Hertfordshire home parishes at Anstey; Berkhamsted; Bishop's Stortford (3); Brickenden; Broxbourne (2); Buntingford; Cheshunt (15); Chipping Barnet (3); Datchworth; Essendon (2); Hatfield (2); Hertford (3); Hoddesdon (2); Kings Langley (4); Northchurch; Redbourn; St Albans (2); Abbey; St Peter (2); Watford; Wormley (2). Those from outside Hertfordshire again came predominantly from neighbouring counties: Cambridgeshire,<sup>33</sup> Essex<sup>34</sup> and Middlesex.<sup>35</sup> Of the three who came from further afield one came from Golden Lane London; one from Humberstone (Leics) and one from Dorking (Surrey). 56 (42.1%) did not give their home parish.

They came from a much wider range of occupations than those from the pre-1750 period, possibly reflecting greater social mobility and more opportunities for men in this period. None came from the gentry although these would have continued to keep numbers of female servants. Reputed fathers were

<sup>33</sup> Duckser' [Duxford?] (Cambs).

<sup>34</sup> Epping (Essex); Great Warley (Essex); Harlow (Essex); Shenfield (Essex); Stansted Mountfitchet (Essex); Waltham Cross (Essex).

<sup>35</sup> Bow (Middx); Bulls Cross, Enfield (Middx); Edmonton (Middx); Enfield Highway (Middx); Finchley (Middx); Holborn (Middx); Shadwell High Street (Middx); South Mimms (Middx); St Marylebone (Middx); Willesden (Middx).



predominantly from the lower classes of shopkeepers, tradesmen and craftsmen and included: apprentices (2); blacksmith; butcher (2); bricklayer's labourer; carpenter (4); carrier; coach master; coachman (3); collar maker; cordwainer; cow doctor; day labourer; farmer (4); farmer/yeoman; flour dresser; gardener; gunsmith; hatter; husbandman (3); journeyman shoemaker; labourer (25); mariner; midwife; Navy midshipman; plasterer; postboy; postchaise driver; sawyer; servant (18); shoemaker; soldier (7); stocking weaver; surgeon; wheelwright; woodman; yeoman; yeoman's son. Thirty-six (27%) did not give an occupation but none were classed as vagrants.

The earliest surviving Hertfordshire settlement examination dates from 1717,<sup>36</sup> although there are likely to have been an unknown number of recorded cases from the later seventeenth century when legislation came into force and was progressively strengthened through the 1662, 1685 and 1691 Settlement Acts. These early examples have since disappeared or, as previously discussed, may still exist in the very large collection of unclassified bundles in the Hertfordshire archives. The settlement examination required the woman to give her name and a very brief life history, although some also provided details of their ages, occupations or former occupations, and the names of the reputed father/s of their child or children and their occupation/s.

This section records details of all the cases indicating that single women were pregnant or already had given birth to bastard children from 1717 until the end of the eighteenth century. What can be learned about these women from the accounts they chose to present in their settlement examinations? The more elaborate and detailed examples of these would almost certainly have, to some extent, been constructed by some street-wise women to present themselves as favourably as possible because this was a rare opportunity for them to exercise some agency in their lives. Many would have known how the system worked and

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<sup>36</sup> HALS DP15/18/1 5 Aug. 1717 Chipping Barnet Settlement Examinations. Ann Benteley. A single woman who, on 23 August last, was delivered of a female bastard in Arundel (Ssx), reputed father Joseph Earham, late a trooper in Capt Benbow's Troop of General Lumley's Regt.

would have tried to use it to their advantage. A number of women seem to have developed selective memories since as James Taylor observed 'examinees could not always know what evidence they might give or withhold would help or hinder their good future. It seems likely that the most frequent lapse from truth was omission of evidence the examinees thought might be to their disadvantage'.<sup>37</sup>

As previously discussed, there is no evidence of Laslett's bastardy prone sub-society since few of these women had given birth to more than one child and then usually with the same partner.<sup>38</sup> They appear to have been in established relationships similar to the army examples described by Noel St John Williams<sup>39</sup> and Jennine Hurl-Eamon.<sup>40</sup> Ann Harris stated that she had given birth to two children, one born four years previously, fathered by John Strange, a Navy midshipman, but also claimed not to know the vessel he was sailing in possibly seeking to avoid problems for him.<sup>41</sup> This was obviously a long-term established relationship as was that of Elizabeth Selby a deserted wife whose husband had left her more than four years previously. She had been delivered of two bastards both fathered by John Etteridge, a Cheshunt labourer.<sup>42</sup>

Keith Snell used settlement examinations to research family break-up and found 289 cases of family desertion, taken from 4,961 examinations for south-eastern counties, including Hertfordshire, from 1700–1880. He observed that the

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<sup>37</sup> J. Taylor *Poverty, Migration*, 41.

<sup>38</sup> Laslett *Bastardy and its Comparative History*, 81-3.

<sup>39</sup> N. Williams *Judy O' Grady and the Colonel's Lady: The Army Wife and Camp Follower Since 1660* (London: Brassey's, 1988).

<sup>40</sup> J. Hurl-Eamon "The lowest and most abandoned trull of a soldier": The Crime of Bastardy in Early Eighteenth-Century London" in R. Hillman and P. Ruberry-Blanc (eds) *Female Transgression in Early Modern Britain: Literary and Historical Explorations* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 163-90.

<sup>41</sup> HALS DP29/13/3 10 Nov. 1761 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations. A single woman who, 5 weeks ago, in the house of John Izzard in Waltham Cross, she was delivered of a female bastard, reputed father John Strange, midshipman in H.M. Navy, vessel unknown. About 4 years ago, in the house of John Halden in Waltham Cross, she was delivered of a male bastard, reputed father also John Strange.

<sup>42</sup> HALS DP29/13/9 6 Sept. 1794 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations. She has been left by her husband for more than 4 years, his whereabouts unknown. Since then she has been delivered of two bastards, James in August 1791 and Ann in July 1794, both in Cheshunt, reputed father John Ettridge, labourer, of Cheshunt.

wife was usually the deserted partner, the couple had 2.55 children which was higher than other families and the proportion of break-up families with children was higher than for other families, 61 per cent as opposed to 54.<sup>43</sup> Most of the women in this study had, as previously discussed, only one child. The majority were unmarried and 65 claimed to have no occupation although whether this was because they had been dismissed by their former employers for becoming pregnant, they were working casually to keep themselves or they genuinely were completely unemployed is uncertain. It would seem unlikely that their parishes would permit them to idly stay at home with family support or, if the family received relief, under parish maintenance.

Only one of the bastard-bearing women was an apprentice. Her master, for nine years, was a Cheshunt ale-house keeper so she had possibly been a very young parish apprentice who had grown up in her employer's household. She originated from Hertford St John and was to be removed there. The putative father of her child was described as Edward Parker Jnr. the son of Edward Parker, yeoman, of Cheshunt, and of a higher rank than her so she may have chosen him as a possible husband and been trying to better herself socially.<sup>44</sup> Another 35 bastard-bearing women identified themselves as having been employed as domestic or agricultural servants. Many of these women had initially been employed as yearly servants but some had worked for the same master for considerably more than one year. Hertfordshire was not an unusual case. Tim Hitchcock found that 'The women who bore illegitimate children in Chelsea were mainly young, unmarried, migrant servants'.<sup>45</sup> Although their ages were not given in the examinations, the Hertfordshire women are likely to have been well established in their jobs and probably in their early or mid-twenties when they gave birth. A total of 17 of them described and named the reputed fathers of

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<sup>43</sup> K. Snell *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 360.

<sup>44</sup> HALS DP29/18/27J 25 April 1755, Cheshunt Settlement Examinations. She is a single woman residing in Cheshunt. She was apprenticed 9 years ago to William Clarke, alehouse keeper, of the 'Queen's Head', St John, Hertford, living there ever since. She is now pregnant with a bastard likely to be chargeable, reputed father Edward Parker Jr. the son of Edward Parker, yeoman, of Cheshunt. Removal Order from Cheshunt to Hertford (St John).

<sup>45</sup> Hitchcock *Chelsea Settlement and Bastardy*, xvii.

their children as fellow servants or former fellow servants. It was known that some masters might bribe their male servants to take responsibility for their own bastards or those of their relatives. A cash gift to the couple would enable them to set up their own household and her generous employer could avoid damaging local gossip and scandal-mongering. Several women would not name the father of their child possibly having made an agreement with their employer for claiming amnesia about the reputed father in exchange for an employer-arranged marriage and a willing husband chosen for them. These arrangements might include either a one-off bribe or continuing unofficial maintenance payments which the employer would not want to reveal to the parish any more than his identity which might damage his local reputation.

Elizabeth Wate, a widow and servant, may have made such an agreement with her employer because she had been living with him for '7 or 8 years'. She claimed, like many women, that she did not know her late husband's settlement, requested 'a warrant for her examination as to her own settlement' and then 'refused to be sworn' as to the father of her child.<sup>46</sup> Richard Lilly, a Hoddesdon surgeon, did not make such an agreement with his servant, Mary Dunn, and she seems to have felt entitled to cite him as the reputed father of her child.<sup>47</sup> There is no indication here that Lilly was served with a warrant or made to provide maintenance for his child nor did Mary Dunn then marry another man in Great Amwell.<sup>48</sup> Another, married woman servant, cited the father of her child as her former master, a wheelwright, but he was not obliged to provide maintenance

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<sup>46</sup> HALS DP29/13/9 5 Jan. 1793 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations. A widow, she was delivered of a bastard likely to be chargeable. She requests a warrant for her examination as to her settlement.

Undated – A widow who says her maiden settlement was in Walthamstow (Essex). About 7 years ago she was married by banns to Richard Wate in St Luke, Old Street (Mdx.). Her husband drove the Islington stage. He died over a year ago and never said where he was settled. She herself lived 7 or 8 years in Walthamstow as a yearly servant to Mr Parr. She refused to be sworn.

<sup>47</sup> HALS DP29/13/5 1 June 1757 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations. A single woman, residing in Amwell, she is pregnant with a bastard likely to be chargeable, reputed father Richard Lilly, surgeon, of Hoddesdon. She worked 9 months for him and resided in his house.

<sup>48</sup> Neither Richard Lilly nor Mary Dunn were listed in Thomas Hassall's Amwell marriage records.

even though this was probably an arranged marriage and her husband would accept the child.<sup>49</sup>

The provision of a reliable source of maintenance for the mother and child was paramount for both the parish and the pregnant woman herself. The putative father, if he was a servant, would have had little ability to pay much maintenance even if he managed to keep his job and was not also dismissed. Servants had little opportunity to better themselves since they were as dependent on continuous employment as their partners and would be unable to afford to set up a household on their own income. Samantha Williams has examined the plight of the pregnant unmarried servant in early nineteenth-century London and found that many, when they lost their places through pregnancy, went into lodgings or stayed with friends to await the birth.<sup>50</sup> Female servants, and some males, particularly when working in inns and public houses were sometimes given only bed and board and were allowed to keep their vails (customers' tips) but received no wages. They faced immediate destitution unless they received some form of charitable relief. The unemployed women appeared to be in an even worse situation. Six of them claimed to have been deserted by their partners and official justices' warrants were sent out to track down these men, who had often enlisted or fled to London where they could easily disappear. If they were found they would be brought back to make formal maintenance arrangements in the courts for paying at least some small weekly amount towards the upkeep of mother and child. Overseers of the poor may also have despatched unofficial searchers to track down absconding fathers believed to have taken refuge in neighbouring parishes.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> HALS DP15/13/3 8 June 1775 Chipping Barnet Settlement Examinations. She is the wife of John Nicolls. On 19 Sept. 1768 she was delivered of a bastard, now named John, in the house of Edward Francis, carpenter, in Wood Street, Chipping Barnet, reputed father Samuel Bartlet, wheelwright, of Chipping Barnet with whom she lived as a servant.

<sup>50</sup> S. Williams "I was Forced to Leave my Place to Hide my Shame: the living arrangements of Unmarried mothers in London in the early nineteenth century", in J. McEwan and P. Sharpe (eds) *Accommodating Poverty: The Housing and Living Arrangements of the English Poor, c.1600–1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 203.

<sup>51</sup> How parish officials worked with the local courts to manage the poor requires further research for Hertfordshire.

Where the woman's father had an established settlement she was likely to be removed back to his parish as occurred in the case of unemployed Sarah Hartley,<sup>52</sup> but sometimes these removal orders were subsequently quashed with no reason given. Possibly her father's parish fought against it or claimed that he was too poor to support her. Elizabeth King was another one of these women. She originally lived with her father in Hatfield Broad Oak before she went into service at Waltham Cross and was to have been removed back there when she became pregnant two years later. However, the removal order was quashed and she presumably remained in Cheshunt, where she was then living, and gave birth there.<sup>53</sup> Not all women had, like Elizabeth, formed close relationships with fellow servants, but instead some had been attracted to soldiers as were Jane Richardson<sup>54</sup> and Elizabeth Cooper.<sup>55</sup> These two women became acquainted with men serving in a regiment probably quartered at the local barracks in Chipping Barnet. Private soldiers had usually enlisted for decades and some women chose to become camp followers,<sup>56</sup> but not these two former servants. Hertfordshire is a completely land-locked county so presumably the sailors cited as putative fathers were met through friends and relatives. The two described as London mariners who fathered children

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<sup>52</sup> HALS DP15/18/3 10 May 1797 Chipping Barnet Settlement Examinations. A single woman, she was born in Luton (Bdf) where her father Thomas Hartley was settled by birth. She is now pregnant with a bastard likely to be chargeable. – Removal Order from Chipping Barnet to Luton.

<sup>53</sup> HALS DP29/13/3 12 Sept. 1758 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations. She was recently a servant to John Barrington of Waltham Cross. She formerly lived with her father in Hatfield Broad Oak (Essex) [5 miles from Stortford] when, about 2 years ago last May, she went as a yearly servant there to John Smith, bailiff to John Barrington Esq. Her master instructed her to go to Barrington in Cheshunt. She served 2 years for 40/ and 3 Gns a year respectively. For the last 9 weeks of her service she was in her master's house in Bradfield (Brk). When she was discharged, she was pregnant and was instructed to return to Hatfield Broad Oak. Removal Order from Hatfield Broad Oak to Cheshunt, order quashed.

<sup>54</sup> HALS DP15/13/3 30 Dec. 1769 Chipping Barnet Settlement Examinations. A single woman who, in June 1768, went as a yearly servant to Samuel Bartlett, wheelwright, of Chipping Barnet for £3 a year. She is now pregnant with a bastard likely to be chargeable, reputed father one Bland, commonly called General Bland, a trooper in the Royal Regt. of Horse Guards Blue.

<sup>55</sup> HALS DP15/13/3 7 Jan. 1771 A single woman who, about 5 or 6 years ago, went as a yearly servant to Mrs Mary Wroughton of Chipping Barnet for £5 a year. The deponent is pregnant with a bastard likely to be chargeable, reputed father John Horsfield, a trooper in the Royal Regt. of Horse Guards Blue.

<sup>56</sup> Williams, *Judy O' Grady and the Colonel's Lady*.

on Martha Cowell in Cheshunt<sup>57</sup> and Mary Chapman in Great Amwell<sup>58</sup> were probably boatmen on the River Lea.

Several women had taken up with travelling harvesters and agricultural day labourers or peripatetic craftsmen including carpenters, sawyers, bricklayers, while others had met up with tradesmen including butchers, blacksmiths, and shoemakers. A few women became involved with coachmen both on the main stagecoach routes and those locally employed. At least one Cheshunt couple had anticipated marriage but received the open support of both sets of parents who knew of the relationship' between Ann Spicer and Joseph Haynes and that: 'He has promised her marriage and actually bought a wedding ring'.<sup>59</sup> Another likely anticipated marriage between a servant, Elizabeth Venables and George Beck, a labourer, both living and working in Essendon, did not take place because the reputed father died before the wedding.<sup>60</sup>

Death was not the only unforeseen factor that ended relationships. Several women stated that they had subsequently discovered that the reputed father of their child was already married, presumably learning this through local gossip. However, at least one wife did discover the identity of her rival and sent her a letter laying claim to and defending their shared husband, and this has survived. A few men were rumoured and subsequently discovered to be indulging in an unknown number of relationships simultaneously. In Hertfordshire one woman, Phillis Derrick (alias Turpin), who was without an occupation and consequently had become an

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<sup>57</sup> HALS DP29/18/27K 4 July 1772 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations. A single woman, she is now pregnant with a bastard likely to be chargeable, reputed father John Lee, mariner, of London.

<sup>58</sup> HALS DP4/13/2 15 Sep. 1799 Great Amwell Settlement Examinations. A single woman who, on 23 June 1796, at the home of John Chapman [her father's house?], was delivered of a female bastard child, reputed father Robert Holborn, mariner, of London.

<sup>59</sup> HALS DP29/13/4 10 Jan. 1763 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations. She was a farmer's daughter and her intended husband was a husbandman so both came from a significantly higher social class than the majority of bastard-bearers.

<sup>60</sup> HALS DP37/13/2 17 Nov. 1794 Essendon Settlement Examinations. A spinster aged 27, she was born in Hertingfordbury where her father lived but who was settled in Essendon. She went as a yearly servant to Thomas Marlborough of Essendon, serving 2 years. She has had no other settlement since. About 11 weeks ago in Essendon, she was delivered of a female bastard, now called Sarah, reputed father George Beck, labourer, of Essendon, who has since died.

inmate of several Hertfordshire workhouses, in two of which she gave birth, is recorded in October 1798, as having, unknowingly, married a bigamist, Thomas Turpin, and thus bastardised any children he fathered on her.<sup>61</sup> His other wife still living may have been Frances Corrant who in her settlement examination taken in February of the same year, 1798, named her daughter Rebecca Turpin. She did not explicitly claim that Thomas was the father or that she had any other children by him, but neither did she defend him.<sup>62</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to discover who were bastard-bearers in Hertfordshire and what can be learned about them, their partners and attitudes towards them through the fractured sources available. Many of those who were indicted for bastardy at Hertford Quarter Sessions were not Hertfordshire parishioners but temporary residents who came from neighbouring counties and London to give birth in the countryside.

Much of the secondary literature has concentrated on demographic research based on parish registers, initially led by Peter Laslett in 1980, but since continued in many other studies which were primarily seeking to discover whether and, if so, when, a bastardy explosion was taking place in England.<sup>63</sup> Laslett examined only one rural Hertfordshire parish, Aldenham and found what he claimed was an atypically low bastardy rate. The present study has revealed that a low bastardy rate in Hertfordshire parishes was not atypical but instead typical in both urban and rural parishes.

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<sup>61</sup> HALS DP29/13/9 28 Oct. 1798 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations. A single woman who on 15 June 1792, was delivered of a female bastard, now named Sarah, in the poor house in Bushey. The child is now in the workhouse in Cheshunt. On 1 March 1795 the deponent was delivered of a male bastard, now named William, in the workhouse in Welwyn. This child is also in the workhouse in Cheshunt. The father is Thomas Turpin. He had a wife still living when he married the deponent.

<sup>62</sup> HALS DP29/13/9 28 Feb. 1798 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations. On 26 March 1790 she was delivered in Welwyn of a female bastard, now called Rebecca Turpin, which is now chargeable to Cheshunt.

<sup>63</sup> Laslett et al. *Bastardy and its Comparative History*.



The research for this chapter has employed different sources from parish registers to investigate a much larger range of Hertfordshire parishes than those previously considered and provides a bigger picture. The sources include bastardy orders, settlement certificates and removal orders. It has found that there is no evidence that bastardy cases rapidly grew during 1620-1799 in Hertfordshire. As previously discussed the numbers of bastardy cases were not high during this period although the numbers from the 24 parishes under the Liberty of St Albans are not available. The total number of bastardy cases presented in the whole period to the Hertford Quarter Sessions from 1619-1700 was 134 and they originated from 51 (38%) of Hertfordshire parishes both urban and rural. The total number of bastardy cases recorded in settlement examinations from 1700-99 was 133 from 40 (30.3%) of the 132 Hertfordshire parishes. These examinations include data from the missing 24 St Albans parishes and in theory should produce a higher figure compared to the earlier period if bastardy was a growing problem.

In another survey, published in 1996, Richard Adair researched eight Hertfordshire parishes using printed parish registers from 1558-1750.<sup>64</sup> Only one of these, Berkhamsted St Peter, could be classed as a town. From these he classified Hertfordshire as a Lowland county since he claimed that the much more flexible and amorphous patterns of courtship in the Lowlands led to more problems usually over putative fathers and maintenance of the mother and her child. This is demonstrated by the number of maintenance cases brought to the Hertford Quarter Sessions involving inter-parish disputes of liability to pay.

The central government panic about the growth of bastardy as expressed in sixteenth and seventeenth-century legislation appears to have been considerably exaggerated, and possibly manufactured, when compared with figures recorded in the Hertfordshire parishes studied. Why central government should attempt to influence local government in this way is unclear, but a similar

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<sup>64</sup> Adair *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage*. The Hertfordshire parishes he chose were: Berkhamsted St Peter (1538-60); Codicote (1581-1750); Furneaux Pelham (1581-1750); Great Gaddesden (1581-1750); Hunsdon (1559-1754); King's Langley (1558-1754); Much [Great] Hornead (1538-1754) and Shephall (1581-1750).

panic was also created against vagrants as will be discussed in the following chapter. While it is also possible, as Adair observes, that bastards were not registered or under-registered by clergymen in other, as yet unresearched, parishes they would have to be very numerous to justify the government hype against bastardy as expressed in the early poor laws.<sup>65</sup>

From when the government first discovered and legislated against the perceived surge of bastardy in 1576 there was an unremitting war declared and waged against all such manifestations of disorderliness. In the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries morally disapproving attitudes towards bastard-bearers as sinful parish wastrels were encouraged and possibly deliberately reinforced in some minds by the 1610 Act which indiscriminately castigated all bastard-bearers as 'lewd women'<sup>66</sup> and encouraged their punishment in houses of correction together with rogues and the disorderly. More research needs to be done on the motivations and influence of central government policy and attitudes on the local management of the poor, particularly the disorderly who bore or fathered bastards or lived as vagrants or did both.<sup>67</sup>

An especially informative feature of Hertfordshire is the apparently relaxed attitudes that seem to have been prevalent in the parishes studied even when the government legislation was at its most virulent. Bastardy seems to have been regarded as a fact of parish life like birth, marriage and death and a number of bastard-bearers appear to have returned to their families to give birth. Individual parishioners may have expressed strong disapproval amongst themselves or even displayed open or tacit acceptance, but this is not recorded. It is probable that the Hertfordshire parishioners amongst whom they lived reflected as many different attitudes to bastardy as there were vestrymen and there also could well have been underlying moral disapproval and simmering anger in some overseers at being forced into the additional expense of maintaining bastards while still attempting to

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>66</sup> *An Act For the Due Execution of Diverse Laws and Statutes Heretofor Made Against Rogues, Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars and Other Lewd and Idle Persons 1610* (7 James c. 4).

<sup>67</sup> Wrightson and Levine did this for Terling, Essex.

balance the poor rates. Another form of disorderly living which was believed by the government to be dangerously and uncontrollably increasing was vagrancy. This form of social deviancy will be further explored in the following chapter.

## Chapter Ten: Managing Vagrancy

This chapter investigates the subject of early modern vagrancy and traces how the danger of disorderliness it posed was perceived and combatted in Hertfordshire; the attempts that were made to bring it under control, through the operation of a series of progressively more coercive vagrancy statutes and the attitudes of some individuals towards the problem as revealed by their recorded words and actions.

The first section will briefly contextualise what has been recently described as an ‘ambiguous and fraught subject’.<sup>1</sup> The second section focuses on how historians have viewed vagrancy and the themes that have been researched and then considers, based on this survey, what gaps appear to still exist. The third discusses the background to central government vagrancy legislation and then examines in detail Hertfordshire strategies against vagrancy and how these were operated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The fourth analyses vagrancy cases in those centuries and the minimal background information provided about indicted individuals and their treatment. What sort of people were brought before the Hertfordshire courts and indicted for vagrancy? Were they indeed, as central government portrayed them, virtually a criminal army terrorising the county? The fifth then examines the contrasting and sometimes openly empathetic attitudes to vagrants displayed by ordinary seventeenth century Hertfordshire people presented for harbouring and supporting them, and attempts to discover who they were and possible causes for their charitable impulses. The sixth considers how the growing problem of vagrancy in the eighteenth century was managed, as reflected in information provided by the vagrants themselves in Hertfordshire settlement examinations. It examines the decisions made about their disposal in removal orders from a range of parishes. A concluding section draws together the findings and analyses what appear to have been the salient features of early modern vagrancy in Hertfordshire, the measures taken against it and why these ultimately failed.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Hitchcock *Vagrancy in English Culture and Society 1650-1750* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 12.

## Context

Contemporaries were apparently officially encouraged to regard vagrants as rootless and choosing to live an aimless existence outside the established hierarchies of master/mistress and servant in the community. They were viewed by the authorities as both potentially rebellious and criminal, although, as will be shown here, this human flotsam and jetsam of the road was very infrequently brought to court after involvement in organised crime. Opportunistic crime was a different matter and many vagrants found themselves charged with stealing food, poaching fish and game and pilfering odd items of clothing throughout the early modern period. They were rarely accused of stealing money or valuable items in the courts even though one of the main charges against them was that they 'loytered idly', presumably looking for opportunities to break into empty or insecurely guarded properties. They apparently had no visible means of support and that readily made them objects of suspicion in the community.

## Thinking and writing about vagrancy

Social historians began to research vagrancy during the growth of interest in history from below beginning in the 1970s with John Pound's research into the causes of poverty and the various attempts by central government to control the vagrant poor in Tudor England.<sup>2</sup> Those following him have attempted to answer various questions and explore different facets of the inter-twined poverty/vagrancy problem and its origins. Paul Slack examined the backgrounds of vagrants particularly those from well-preserved runs of registers recording the details of punished and rehomed vagrants compiled in Colchester 1630-1664 and Salisbury 1598-1638.<sup>3</sup> These informative records do not appear to have survived in Hertfordshire. He concluded that: 'Vagabonds became the scapegoats for all social problems, they were carriers of rumour, sedition, and disease, and they infected

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<sup>2</sup> J. Pound *Poverty and Vagrancy in Tudor England* (London: Longman, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> P. Slack 'Vagrants and Vagrancy in England 1598-1664' *Economic History Review* 27 (1974), 360-79.

others with their "licentious liberty".<sup>4</sup> This was certainly the view taken of them by the 'governing classes' and judiciary in Hertfordshire and, in some parishes, it can be traced filtering down to the parish officials and constables. Slack's type of contextual study has not, to date, been attempted for Hertfordshire although he found that in the returns made by justices of the peace to the Privy Council in the 1630's basic information was provided about 132 vagrants found in Hertfordshire but not all belonging by birth to the county.<sup>5</sup> The Privy Council was only interested in the bare statistics of those caught and punished, not their sex, ages or backgrounds. This does not sound a particularly high figure, but it is unknown how many vagrants had escaped the attention of the authorities at this time.

Lee Beier also examined vagrants' backgrounds and decided that the poor could be divided into two basic classes, the settled and the vagrant although, as previously discussed in chapter five, the situation was much more fluid in Hertfordshire due to the passive toleration and sometimes open encouragement of cottage building and inmate-taking. Constant movement between the only temporarily settled inmates and incomers and the transient wanderers was probably likely to be taking place. Beier later published a more detailed analysis for several counties, not including Hertfordshire, entitled '*Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640*'. He also researched the examinations of 1,604 vagrants arrested in Chester, Leicester, Reading and Warwick and in the counties of Somerset and Wiltshire from 1571 to 1642. In addition, he examined the records of 5,046 vagrants punished for misdemeanours and not only for vagrancy. In this book he seems to have accepted the Tudor and Stuart government stereotype of the vagrant as a wandering unemployed young man whose disorderliness was seen as a serious threat to the stability of the state.

Wandering women were not discussed by him except as equally stereotypical deserted wives, prostitutes and bastard-bearers. The wanderer might have actually been seeking part-time or permanent employment, but

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 360.

<sup>5</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Domestic Series: Charles I March 1625-January 1649* (London: H.M.S.O., 1897), 526 (March 10 1636); 583 (July 6 and July 12 1638).

officials saw him merely as an idle, unproductive and drifting beggar and, more seriously, a potential criminal or spreader of seditious rumour.<sup>6</sup> The emphasis in the literature has followed Beier and until very recently, with the publication of more wide-ranging studies, has been on male vagrants. David Hitchcock in his much more recent book recognised that there were also numbers of female vagrants on the roads during the century from 1650 to 1750 and devoted a chapter to the lives and judicial treatment of 'Masterless Women'.<sup>7</sup> The lives of vagrant women in the period before 1650 have not been investigated in detail to date.

Many cases involving older men and female beggars and wanderers are recorded in the Hertfordshire court records from the first assize cases in the late sixteenth century to the quarter sessions records from the end of the eighteenth century. Hitchcock recently observed 'vagrants still remain 'shadowy figures' almost thirty years after Beier described them'.<sup>8</sup> Hitchcock believes that this is largely because few vagrancy records have survived outside London.<sup>9</sup> He argues that the principal reason for this was the 'relative paucity of detailed primary sources [particularly vagrant passes] for certain periods, particularly after 1662 and before 1744 [when copies of vagrant passes began to be archived]'. London has the best survival rate for eighteenth-century vagrancy records and so research has concentrated on the metropolis'.

This paucity of records exists in Hertfordshire where only the brief details in the court records are given and there appear to be few vagrant passes. The earliest surviving example in the Hertfordshire archives dates from 1820. Audrey Eccles has found that Hertfordshire provided collection centres where vagrants from Hertfordshire and London were held for transportation to their home parishes.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A. Beier *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> Hitchcock *Vagrancy in English Culture*.

<sup>8</sup> D. Hitchcock 'Poverty and Mobility in England, 1600-1850' *Rural History* 24 (2013), 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> A. Eccles 'The Adams' Father and Son, Vagrant Contractors to Middlesex 1757-94' *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society* 57 (2007), 83-91.

She notes that the Adams family operated at least one Hertfordshire vagrant depot at Ridge, so Hertfordshire formed part of the wider campaign of removing vagrants from London as well as ejecting its own.

This chapter seeks to fill two gaps and answer two questions; who were these people and what was their relationship with the settled population? The decline of charitable, alms-giving was explored by Felicity Heal who traced the take-over of private voluntary household hospitality previously and voluntarily bestowed on beggars and vagrants by generous individuals and groups and its replacement by the impersonal charity and rigid classifications of the Old Poor Law.<sup>11</sup> Research then focused on the vagrancy problems in the towns which were studied by Paul Slack<sup>12</sup> Tim Hitchcock<sup>13</sup> and, for a later period in London, Christopher Ferguson.<sup>14</sup> The latter found that many Londoners 'continued to tolerate, support or even protect beggars' and this also appears to have been the case in Hertfordshire during the previous centuries.

Vagrancy and attempts at controlling it then seem to have ceased to be of major interest for welfare historians until Robert Jutte took a European perspective on these deviant people, moving away from the authorities' view of them and looking specifically at their agency in shaping their lives through networking amongst themselves.<sup>15</sup> It appears likely that they also did this informally in Hertfordshire, but they seem to have left no written records that will allow such analysis. Historians have since researched different facets of the vagrancy problem including attempts to combat it through removal and dispersal. Transportation of vagrants back home to their settlements in the eighteenth century could sometimes become a lucrative family business for contractors and, as previously noted, Audrey Eccles researched one such family, with a base in Hertfordshire but servicing

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<sup>11</sup> F. Heal *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> P. Slack *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman, 1988).

<sup>13</sup> T. Hitchcock 'The London Vagrancy Crisis of the 1780s' *Rural History* 24 (2013), 59-72.

<sup>14</sup> C. Ferguson 'The Political Economy of the Street and Its Discontents: Beggars and Pedestrians in Mid-Nineteenth-century London' *Cultural and Social History* 12 (2015) 27-50.

<sup>15</sup> R. Jutte *Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).



Middlesex. There were similar dynasties in Hertfordshire but these have yet to be studied.

Eccles revisited vagrancy with a major study of six English counties, Cambridgeshire, Dorset, Hampshire, Lancashire, Middlesex and Westmoreland,<sup>16</sup> which employed quarter session records to 'give the first account of vagrancy law in provincial England'. However, her survey is limited to the eighteenth century with only a brief contextual account of pre-eighteenth century law. As previously discussed Hertfordshire was a county whose governors, notably the lord lieutenant Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, and his supporters on the Grand Jury appear to have believed that it was besieged by vagrants throughout the early modern period, as further discussed below. Yet very little of the secondary literature has focused on the county beyond a few references to the importance of its position as a major thoroughfare for those travelling into and out of London as can be seen from Map 10.1 below.

Map 10.1 Hertfordshire Turnpike Roads © David Short Atlas (ed.) *An Historical Atlas of Hertfordshire* p. 41.



<sup>16</sup> A. Eccles *Vagrancy in Law and Practice under the Old Poor Law* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

As can be seen from Map 10.1 Hertfordshire was well supplied with north-south thoroughfare routes into London but not from east to west. It also had a lot of footpaths criss-crossing the entire county so there were plenty of entry routes which would not attract the attention of the authorities.

### The legislative background

This is a very complex topic ranging from the first attempts to control both wandering beggars and mobile labourers in the fourteenth century to the increasingly complex settlement laws of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In order to make sense of the drive against vagrancy this section will take a chronological approach to the legislation and trace how it became progressively more repressive.

As previously discussed in chapter five the drive to control wandering beggars and vagrants and keep them in their home communities dated back to the mid-fourteenth century and the Ordinance of Labourers 1349 (36 Edward III c. 8) which banned donations to beggars who were physically capable of labour.<sup>17</sup> The 1349 Ordinance was shortly followed by the Statute of Labourers of 1351 (38 Edward III c. 7) which was primarily intended to regulate the problems of labour costs and shortages caused by the Black Death by setting maximum wage rates.<sup>18</sup> In a rigidly hierarchical society emerging from feudalism those of the able-bodied lower sort who left to find better conditions were seen as deserving punishment and should then be restored to their decreed place in their home community. The Statute of Cambridge 1388 (12 Richard II c. 7) attempted to tackle the problem of the impotent poor who were permitted to beg but only within their own communities.

The next series of State interventions in the problem of poverty, under the Tudors, was again made not out of charity towards the poor but was driven by fear of their numbers and their involvement in possible insurrections. This is revealed by

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the number of proclamations, statutes and sermons on the themes of order and obedience throughout the Tudor and early Stuart period. As fear of the volatility of the poor increased the drive to control them grew and laws demonising them proliferated. As noted by Paul Slack:

the problem of poverty was invariably presented as the problem of wandering beggars and vagabonds: men who were 'suspect persons', embodiments of 'idleness, mother and root of all vices', people of 'vile, wretched and filthy purposes', and originators of 'all vices and enormities to the high displeasure of God and disturbance of the King's peace and his subjects'.<sup>19</sup>

He also quoted Juan Luis Vives the Spanish Renaissance humanist, who in the 1520s was tutor to Henry VIII's daughter Mary, on the dangers of neglecting the poor: 'in a state the poorer members cannot be neglected without danger to the powerful ones'.<sup>20</sup>

It would appear that the Tudor governing classes were primarily motivated by a desire for the restoration and preservation of pre-sixteenth-century certainties and sought to control the wandering poor especially in London where their numbers posed a highly visible threat. Tudor legislation employed two main strategies to achieve this; it attacked those identified as potentially dangerous able-bodied vagrants with increasing severity throughout the sixteenth and into the seventeenth centuries. It was decided that these people urgently needed to be punished, dispersed to their homes and put to work there. Simultaneously, central government was also attempting to resettle the impotent wandering beggars by working towards some permanent provision for them in their home parishes. The intention was plainly that the parishes should take on the burden of their own poor both able-bodied and impotent and initially it was believed that the impotent could be supported through existing voluntary parochial charity.

The 1495 *Vagabonds and Beggars Act* established a pattern of public punishment for the able-bodied rogues followed by immediate ejection from the

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<sup>19</sup> Slack *Poverty and Policy*, 23-4.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 23. Vives saw the poor as a health risk spreading disease as well as threatening disorder.

township and the demand that the 'suitable to work shall resort to the Hundred where he last dwelled, is best known, or was born and there remain'.<sup>21</sup> This idea ignored the fact that many vagrants either did not know or chose not to remember their birthplace and others might have had problems with the places where they were 'best known' which had caused them to leave. The Act of 1563 aimed to suppress the roaming beggar and place them firmly in a parish to which they had some sort of connection by empowering parish officers to 'appoint meet and convenient places for the habitations and abidings' of such classes.<sup>22</sup> Policies oscillated between practical initiatives like the 1563 statute to settle vagrants and others including the *Statute for the Punishment of Vagabonds* 1572 which reiterated the panic fear that was being generated:

Where all the parts of this Realm of England and wales be presently with rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars exceedingly pestered, by means wherof daily happens in the same realm horrible murders, thefts, and other great outrages, to the high displeasure of Almighty God, and to the great annoy of the common weal.<sup>23</sup>

On 24 September 1577 a minute for the 'repressing of roges and vagabonds haunting the highe wayes within the counties of Middlesex, Kent, Essex, Hartford, Bucks, Barks and Surrey' was sent from the Privy Council.<sup>24</sup> In the late 1570s Gregory Durston found that the Privy Council wrote to the Surrey JPs complaining that vagabonds plagued the highways within 30 miles of London.<sup>25</sup> A large part of Hertfordshire was included within that radius and yet, as is further discussed below, comparatively few vagrants were brought to trial in the county at this time.

The wandering poor were presumed by officials to be criminally inclined, even though most were only suspected of committing crimes. Vagrancy statutes, as Slack noted, were deliberately and purposefully designed to criminalise the non-impotent poor because they were seen as idle, and idleness was the root of all evil:

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<sup>21</sup> *An Act Against Vagabonds and Beggars* 1495 (11 Henry VII c. 2).

<sup>22</sup> *An Act for the Relief of the Poor* 1563 (5 Elizabeth 1, c. 3).

<sup>23</sup> 14 Elizabeth I c. 5.

<sup>24</sup> J. Dasent (ed.) *Acts of the Privy Council: New Series Vol. X A.D. 1577-8* (London: H.M.S.O, 1895), 99.

<sup>25</sup> G. Durston *Jacks, Knaves and Vagabonds: Crime, Law, and Order in Tudor England* (Hook: Waterside Press, 2020), 43. Quoting a document from the Surrey History Centre 6729/11/56.

'The able-bodied poor fell traditionally among the idle: if they could not support themselves it was their own fault. From the beginning, therefore, Tudor vagrancy statutes cast a net wide enough to embrace almost all of them'.<sup>26</sup>

From 1495 onwards wandering vagabonds were consistently blamed by government as the authors of their own problems, they were defined as 'idle and suspect persons living suspiciously'. By 1531 it had been officially recognised that not all vagrants were male: 'any man or woman able-bodied and vagrant can give none reckoning how he doth lawfully get his living'. Their crime was that they were 'loitering or idly wander by the highways side or in streets in cities towns or villages, not applying themselves to some honest art'. They would 'not offer themselves to labour with any that will take them according to their faculty' and some were runaway apprentices. The able-bodied poor were expected to work for a master or mistress firmly cementing themselves into the community but these people did not comply which was deeply unsettling to a strictly regulated society. The 1531 Act also introduced, for the first time, a note of fear of losing governmental control since 'throughout this realm of England vagabonds and beggars have of long time increased and daily do increase in great and excessive numbers'.

This fear was repeated and amplified in the 1572 statute but it was deliberately oblique about the actual criminality of the offenders: 'Where all the parts of this realm of England and Wales be presently with rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars exceedingly pestered, by means wherof daily happeneth in the same realm horrible murders, thefts, and other great outrages, to the high displeasure of Almighty God, and to the great annoy of the common weal'. The 1572 Act indicated the age at which a person could be both considered a rogue, vagrant or sturdy beggar and punished for it: 'above the age of 14 years'. What happened to those who were younger does not appear to have been stipulated; presumably their parents and older siblings were imprisoned until the next sessions, convicted and punished, but not themselves.

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<sup>26</sup> Slack *Poverty and Policy*, 28.

It would appear that from the start the solution to the perceived crime of vagrancy had been punishment, first by imprisonment under the fourteenth-century laws, then stocking offenders for three days and nights, instead. Slack believes that this was primarily intended to relieve the problems of overcrowding the prisons with beggars but was portrayed as the king's pity for them.<sup>27</sup> Stocking appears to have been ineffective as a deterrent since a doubled punishment was provided for re-offenders and was replaced by what became the standard punishment; a public whipping for both sexes followed by returning them to where they appeared to belong, their home parish or where they were 'best known' so their parish officials' could deal with the problem. The punishment of whipping was used until 1598 and vagrants with no home to return to or those considered dangerous were then being imprisoned in houses of correction, sent to the galleys or exiled to the developing colonies in North America and the West Indies. For incorrigible rogues who persistently re-offended the only solution was seen as a felon's execution.

There was no way of ensuring that these offenders after having been punished would actually return home or that they would cease maintaining themselves by begging. The 1495 Act ordered that after punishment the offender 'shall be enjoined upon his oath to return forthwith without delay in the next and straight way to the place where he was born, or where he last dwelled before the same punishment by the space of three years, and there put himself to labour like as a true man oweth to do'. This does not seem to have been effective since by the 1531 statute a punished offender was to be provided with 'a sealed letter witnessing that he had been punished and where he is to go and within which time he may lawfully beg shewing the letter'. The letter was later replaced with a pass but there was nothing to prevent a vagrant from discarding a letter or pass and carrying on his preferred way of life, except the fear of being caught. By 1536 it had been realised that even if an offender returned home no provision had been made for their employment in 'continual labour' nor instructions given that they were to be kept to it by the local 'governors and ministers' given this task.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 115.

There appears to have been a continuity of ideas about the threat to society posed by vagrancy and the need to fight it but methods of dealing with vagrants were frequently revised throughout the Tudor and early Stuart period. As previously discussed the move from pre-1495 imprisonment to stocking in that year and then in 1531 a public and shaming whipping were designed to combat what was seen as an ever-growing problem. Other changes seem to have been made to correct unanticipated problems with the existing legislation as in 1572 which excluded from punishment itinerant harvest workers, people who had been robbed while travelling and servants whose masters had sent them away or died. These people were now seen to have been wrongly indicted for a crime they had not committed. The 1598 Act introduced a new category of vagrant those refusing to work for statutory wages and the 1610 Act was widened and aimed specifically at 'rogues, bastard-bearers and other 'idle and disorderly persons'; vagabonds were presumably subsumed in this category or as rogues.

In the 1495 statute re-offenders were ordered a doubled stocking lasting six days and nights which would seem to indicate that there were significant numbers of re-offenders to be legislated against. In an attempt to regulate the movements of impotent beggars, they were to return to their home parishes, where they were allowed to beg, but not to leave their hundreds. By the 1531 Act the disabled were to be surveyed and licensed to beg by justices, mayors, bailiffs etc; but if they left the area where they were licenced, they were to be whipped or placed in stocks. It would appear that the disabled poor were not staying in their licenced areas and had to be penalised if they did not. The 1552 Act sought to put their activities more tightly under control by decreeing that 'none [were] to sit openly begging, presumably this meant without a licence.

The 1604 law sought to coerce the community into co-operation; all persons were expected to apprehend vagrants upon pain of a 10s fine. It appears that communities were not observing the 1531 Act *Concerning Punishment of Beggars and Vagabonds*) which urged the 'subjects of every town, parish, and hamlet to arrest the said vagabonds and idle persons and them to bring to any of the Justices

of the Peace of the same shire or liberty'. The 1610 Act complained of the apparent lack of enthusiasm for building houses of correction in every county to house vagrants and other problem offenders. It noted that the 1576 and 1598 Acts requiring this had not been widely observed and imposed a £5 fine on the justices for non-compliance by a stated deadline, Michaelmas 1611. However, Hertfordshire had been developing its own campaign against vagrancy throughout the Tudor and early Stuart period. The strategies are discussed further below, and the county would build several houses of correction in the 1620s, 1630s and 1650s.

### Strategies against vagrancy in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Hertfordshire

In 1548 in Hertfordshire there was serious rioting in the village of Northaw over the enclosure of common land involving men not only from Hertfordshire but also neighbouring Essex and Middlesex.<sup>28</sup> The Hertfordshire authorities seem to have assumed that trouble-making vagrants were involved in this disorder. Since they could not control vagrant traffic on the many routes through the county, they appear to have developed a series of strategies to combat vagrancy. As previously noted, the 1576 *Act for the Setting of the Poor on Work, and for the Avoidance of Idleness*<sup>29</sup> had required houses of correction or bridewells, on the model of the London Bridewell, to be set up in every county. These were intended to deal with both the idle local poor and wandering rogues. William Le Hardy found that, several decades later, in the early seventeenth century Hertfordshire established seven houses of correction where vagrants could be held pending removal to their home parishes.<sup>30</sup>

The earliest may have been at Bishop's Stortford which was established by 1622.<sup>31</sup> Another existed at Hatfield by 1626<sup>32</sup> and two at Hertford, the county town,

<sup>28</sup> D. MacCulloch and A. Fletcher *Tudor Rebellions* (London: Routledge, 2020), 71.

<sup>29</sup> 18 Elizabeth I c. 3.

<sup>30</sup> W. Le Hardy *Quarter Sessions and Other Records in the Custody of the Officials of the County. Guide to the Hertfordshire Record Office. Part I* (Hertford: Hertfordshire County Council, 1961), 29.

<sup>31</sup> W. Le Hardy (comp.) *Notes and Extracts from the Sessions Rolls 1581-1698*. (Hertford: . Longmore, 1905), 56. Resignation letter to Justices from master of correction house. (1622).



by 1629, one serving the County and one the Borough,<sup>33</sup> (although Le Hardy suggested that there were probably earlier established versions of these). A Buntingford house had been erected by 1630<sup>34</sup> and by 1638 there was one at Great Berkhamsted.<sup>35</sup> At least two more were recorded later in the century, one existing at Hitchin before 1650<sup>36</sup> and one erected at Hemel Hempstead in 1651.<sup>37</sup> The Liberty of St Albans house was also established during the seventeenth century. Le Hardy noted that ‘many more [houses in the Liberty] may have existed before 1758, when the Liberty Sessions Records begin’.<sup>38</sup>

Most counties were contented with only two houses of correction as reprovably noted by the Hertfordshire Grand Jury in 1624: ‘There are 7 houses of correction in the county, whereas no other county has more than two. Two houses well-governed and appointed would be more beneficial’ [marginal note added] ‘to be considered of next sessions’. There is no indication in the records that the question was ever formally discussed at sessions so presumably it was decided informally that Hertfordshire should keep all its houses of correction although they seem to have rapidly deteriorated into crumbling, insecure, and insanitary lock-ups requiring almost constant maintenance which they did not receive.

Hertfordshire perceptions and the strategies directed against vagrancy were apparently liable to periodic central government panics and fears, as with bastardy discussed in the previous chapter, but even more emphatically. Hertfordshire governors appear to have aimed to construct a vagrant-proof fortress against wanderers by enforcing strict surveillance of county borders and of all parishes and

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 60-9. Letter from master asked for removal of sick inmates awaiting transportation (1626).

<sup>33</sup> W. Le Hardy (comp.) *Calendar to the Sessions Books 1619-57* (Hertford: Longmore, 1928), 112. Petition from Hertford Borough inhabitants stated that they maintained their house of correction and not the county (13 April 1629).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 124. Two poachers committed there (5 April 1630).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 256. Inhabitants ordered to give Justices an account of money received from its sale (9 and 10 July 1638).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 408 (f.112) Order that the widow of the late master there should give up possession to his successor (30 September 1650).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 416 (f.118d) Order that a house to be erected and the Justices should appoint a master.

<sup>38</sup> Le Hardy *Quarter Sessions and Other Records*, 53.

villages by constables. These men were to apply punishment and/or imprisonment and expulsion to all those who could not account for themselves and their journeys. As Lionel Munby observed, by the 1620s fear of sedition and the spread of Roman Catholicism had combined with the fear of vagrancy although the faith of vagrancy offenders does not seem to have been recorded by the courts. John Williams, Bishop of Lincoln and Lord Keeper of the Great Seal whose diocese covered a large area of Hertfordshire, was apparently apprehensive about the numbers of potentially seditious vagrants 'swarming' within the county and wrote chastising the Earl of Salisbury and Hertfordshire Justices of the Peace on 21 September 1622.<sup>39</sup>

the common and statute laws of this kingdom...do utterly condemn and extirpate beggars, rogues, vagabonds, Egyptians [gypsies], and such lazy and unprofitable members of the commonwealth'. The Justices of the Peace had allowed the county 'to swarm with whole troupes of [such] idle persons'. They must enforce the 'laws for the punishing, employing, chastising and rooting out of these idle people (symptoms of Popery and blind superstition).

This letter provides a revealing indication that the government identified vagrancy with sedition, for that is what Roman Catholicism was thought to be.<sup>40</sup> Why the bishop should assume that part of his diocese was swarming with seditious vagrants at a time when very few were being indicted, and none in 1622, is unclear. Nonetheless the reason why the county was apparently singled out for special attention by the Privy Council at this time was probably due to the frequent presence of James I travelling and hunting within its borders as noted below. Hertfordshire responded in 1624, by a series of security measures including one appointing a series of Provost Marshalls<sup>41</sup> to harry and hunt down those vagrants who were already at large in the county.

Order that for the better clearing the county of rogues, a marshall be provided who shall have authority to punish and chase away all rogues and vagrant persons, to supervise the constables of every town, and to punish

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<sup>39</sup> Le Hardy *Hertford Quarter Sessions Rolls*. Letter to the Earl of Salisbury and Justices, 56-8 (21 September 1622).

<sup>40</sup> L. Munby *The Common People are Not Nothing: Conflict in Religion and Politics in Hertfordshire 1575-1780* (Hatfield: Hertfordshire Publications, 1995), 5.

<sup>41</sup> Military post originally created primarily to discipline and manage discharged soldiers. Further discussed below.

such as shall be negligent in their duties in this respect. He shall also personally visit every hundred of the county with especial regard to the outer borders and streets for the exclusion of rogues from the county, principally about Theobalds and Cheshunt, where the King mostly resides.<sup>42</sup>

Additional measures would seem to indicate that justices had neither been meeting regularly between sessions nor been closely observing the requirements of the 1610 statute (7 James I c. 4):

It is also ordered that all the Justices of the Peace shall henceforth observe their meetings between every session, twice at the least, and as often as necessary, and conduct searches and examine and punish the constables according to the statute of 7 James I. Also that the constables of every town and hamlet shall, at the charge of the parish, have watching in the night and warding in the day for the apprehension of all such rogues and vagrants.

Hertford Quarter Sessions noted that the harbouring of vagrants, further discussed below, was a problem and that not all offenders were being presented, apparently as an economy measure:

[It is also] ordered that all such persons as shall harbour such rogues and vagabonds shall be prosecuted, and that the justices shall overlook the prices of victuals and horsemeat in inns, alehouses and hostleries, and present all offenders at the sessions. And also that copies of these orders be sent to the High Constables for distribution, and to publish the same both by their directions to the petty constables and in the markets adjoining. John Curtis is appointed marshal by the consent of William Earl of Salisbury, at a wage of 100 marks yearly.<sup>43</sup>

Steve Hindle observed that, 'The martial law of the 1590s entailed the appointment of salaried military officers who rode armed with a dozen or two deputies and were empowered to execute summary justice on vagrants in general and on disbanded soldiers in particular. These 'provosts-marshal' were to apprehend 'vagrante persons that go up and down the countrie living lewdlie without labouring'; to punish 'ill disposed idle vagrants and lewde persons behaving themselves dishonestlie and against peaceable quiet and good order'; and to

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<sup>42</sup> The king also frequently traversed the county to hunt at Royston on the Cambridgeshire border.

<sup>43</sup> J. Cockburn (ed.) *Hertford Calendar of Assize Records James I, Grand Jury Presentments*, 275-1369 (18 March 1624).

prevent all unlawful assemblies, especially of suspected persons'.<sup>44</sup> Appointments were made in the south in the late Elizabethan and early Stuart periods. Hindle argued that 'the counties of Hertfordshire, Leicester, and Rutland, Sussex, and Worcestershire undoubtedly benefitted from martial law in the 1620s and 1630s but other counties resisted the pressure to declare martial law'.<sup>45</sup>

However, in the following decade Hertfordshire continued to have problems with vagrancy. A number of the magistrates' reports during the 1630s included in the *State Papers Domestic* provide actual figures of vagrants punished in Hertfordshire although there was no indication of whether they were Hertfordshire born, had connections there or were merely passing through. John Gerrard, Charles Caesar, and William Prestley reported from Broadwater [hundred] and the half hundred of Hitchin in August 1631 that 125 vagrants had been punished in Broadwater and 146 in Hitchin since April, while John Luke, Garrard and William Cade in their returns from Dacorum [hundred] in August 1631 indicated that 208 vagrants had been punished in that division. Such reports continued through most of the 1630s.<sup>46</sup>

17. Certificate of Robert Chester and Francis Taverner, Justices of the Peace for the half hundred of Hitchin, co. Herts. Since last summer assizes they have ...punished and sent on 72 rogues, and punished in the house of correction six sturdy vagabonds.<sup>47</sup>

145. Certificate of Justices of the Peace for the Hundreds of Edwinstree and Odsey, co. Herts. ...46 vagrants punished and sent away, and nine persons punished in the House of Correction at Buntingford.<sup>48</sup>

146. Certificate of the Justices of the Peace for the Half Hundred of Hitchin, co. Herts., from Lent assizes last. 42 rogues have been punished, and 17

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<sup>44</sup> S. Hindle *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, 1550-1640* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 162.

<sup>45</sup> *Herts Quarter Sessions*, V, 398. Petition by the inhabitants of the County, showing that formerly there has always been a Provost Marshall employed within the County for apprehending and suppressing of beggars, rogues and vagabonds, and that for want of such Provost Marshall the same have daily increased, so that none may safely travel or keep their goods in peace (1 and 2 October 1649).

<sup>46</sup> J. Kent *The English Village Constable 1580-1642: A Social and Administrative Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 203.

<sup>47</sup> *Calendar of State Papers: Domestic Series: Charles I* (10 March 1636)

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 583 (6 July 1638).

sturdy vagabonds sent to the House of Correction; 10 apprentices have been bound (whose names and those of their masters are given); the highways have been cared for; and the poor who have endured great extremities for work of work and dearth of corn, have lately been employed in weeding corn and making hay, by which they are well quieted and comforted.<sup>49</sup>

In 1649, during the Civil War, provost marshalls were still being appointed for individual hundreds and even half-hundreds in Hertfordshire, these were long-surviving medieval administrative units containing small groups of parishes. Postholders were no longer required to be of gentry status as the first had been but woolcombers and bakers may have had less authority and support in the county than the first Provost Marshall.

Order that John Taylor of Hertford, woolcomber, be appointed Provost Marshall as aforesaid at a salary of £40 yearly, which sum is to be raised in the several divisions. John Duncombe of Hitchin, baker, is appointed Provost Marshall for the Half Hundred of Hitchin for the year ensuing and so on from time to time as the Court shall direct.<sup>50</sup>

## Indictments for vagrancy in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Hertfordshire

In this section two sets of court records were examined to clarify what sort of people were classed as vagrants during this period and whether they potentially could form a criminal army terrorising the county as central government routinely portrayed them. The first set is the edited Hertfordshire assize records dating, with gaps, from 1570 to 1621<sup>51</sup> and the second those of the compiled, Hertford quarter sessions from 1626 to the end of the seventeenth century. The edited assize court records provide a sample of 22 Elizabethan and 21 Jacobean assize cases which seems to indicate little change in vagrant numbers during the period. However, the assize records from 1541-70 have not been included in the edited volume so there may have been an unknown number of earlier cases as people were driven on to

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. (12 July 1638).

<sup>50</sup> *Hertford Quarter Sessions Book*, 398. Appointment of Provost Marshall in response to petition (1 and 21 October 1649).

<sup>51</sup> J. Cockburn (ed.) *Calendar of Assize Records Hertfordshire Indictments Elizabeth I* (London: H.M.S.O. 1975); *Calendar of Assize Records Hertfordshire Indictments James I* (London: H.M.S.O. 1975).

the roads through a series of bad harvests, unemployment, homelessness and destitution. The original Hertford assize records are in the National Archives.<sup>52</sup> The data is, like that of all the early Hertfordshire vagrancy cases, both stereotyped and fractured. Only very brief details about the vagrants were recorded including; their names, sex and, occasionally, their former occupation and their parish and home county, but not their age or condition (state of health). Only two were listed as not able-bodied.

Both Beier and Slack used vagrant examinations for their studies. These sources dating from 1560 to 1640 provide, as Beier notes, 'fuller evidence than other records. They give information about vagrants' personal background, including family life, work-histories, sex-lives, haunts and confederates'<sup>53</sup> and offer much more informative data for analysis than the quarter sessions records.<sup>54</sup> Records of vagrant examinations do not appear to have survived in Hertfordshire although it would seem likely that they did take place in the larger border towns given the county's fear of vagrants. Hertfordshire indictments of vagrants described these people as having been 'vagrant....wandering, and mis-ordering themselves' according to the 1572 statute but individuals were not classified as 'rogues, vagabonds or sturdy beggars'. It is unclear how they were offending and whether they were actually begging or merely idly wandering in the home parishes where they were frequently apprehended. Their ages were not recorded. Those taken in Hertford and giving no details of a home parish were most fitted to the provisions of the statute but all were punished by whipping and sent to their home parishes.

There was no great surge of vagrancy in the county at this time even though, as previously discussed, the county governors were convinced that it was being overrun with vagrants and took a series of measures to counteract this supposed invasion. A total of 78 vagrants were indicted at the Hertford Assizes and Quarter

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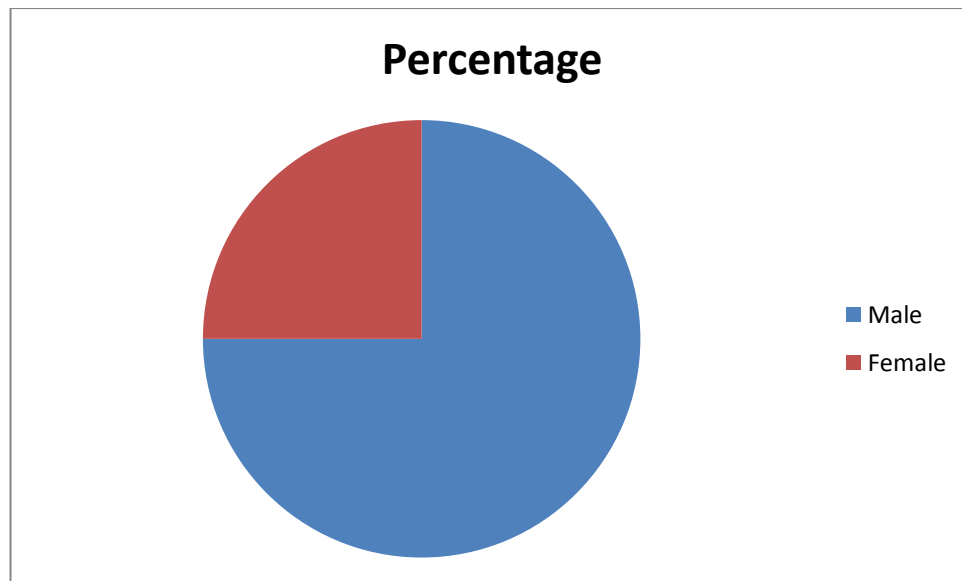
<sup>52</sup> National Archives *Records of the Home Circuit, Norfolk Circuit and South-Eastern Circuit of the Justice of Assize 1541-1876*. ASSI 32; 40.

<sup>53</sup> Beier *Masterless Men*, xxi.

<sup>54</sup> A relatively small number of places have been researched: Chester; Colchester; Leicester; Reading; Salisbury Warwick and the counties of Somerset and Wiltshire by Beier *Masterless Men*, xx.

Sessions between 1573-1621. As can be seen from Graph 10.1 below of these 58 (74.3%) were male and 20 (25.6%) female.

Graph 10.1: Vagrancy by Gender: Hertford Assize Courts Indictments 1573-1621



Lee Beier argues that ‘males may have been arrested more than females because the authorities considered them greater threats’.<sup>55</sup> In comparison to the Hertfordshire total, Slack found much larger numbers of vagrants, 651, in one Wiltshire town, Salisbury, between 1598-1638.

The county’s governors may have been deliberately inflating the size of the problem and whipping up a panic amongst the populace particularly the propertied classes many of whom were, as previously discussed in chapter two, newly-established in the county. It is also possible that they were panicked by the growth in the numbers of vagrants in the London Bridewell, the first house of correction founded in 1553. As Slack found ‘The number of vagrants punished there rose from 69 a year in 1560-1, to 209 in 1578-9, 555 in 1600-1 and 815 in 1624-5: a growth-rate three times greater than that of the City’s population as a whole’.<sup>56</sup> Hertfordshire officials would have been well aware that an unknown number of

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 52.

<sup>56</sup> Slack *Poverty and Policy*, 93.

these people, once released, would almost certainly find their way home in or through Hertfordshire and would need to be managed.

Three of those indicted for vagrancy from 1573-1621 in the Hertford assize courts shared the same family name but there was no mention of men travelling with their wives or families. Vagrant examinations sought to establish and verify relationships amongst vagrants but indictments did not. No children were mentioned but they were likely to have been disregarded as too young to be indicted until the 1572 Act for the Relief of the Poor prescribed a lower age limit of 14 for conviction.<sup>57</sup> It would also seem likely that as Slack suggests 'A few apparently solitary vagrants may have had families with them who escaped detection'.<sup>58</sup> Also, as discussed further in the following section, some constables seem to have ignored or even assisted vagrants.

There are obvious gaps in the recorded cases from 1573-1621, for example no vagrants were indicted between July 1592 and March 1600. What could have caused this relatively long gap? It is difficult to believe that vagrancy ceased during this period but did official preoccupations with it lapse for some reason possibly the bad harvests of the 1590s? The majority of the recorded cases seem to have involved either mainly Hertfordshire male parishioners seized in their own towns and parishes and possibly begging there without licences or both males and females apprehended in Hertford and not providing details of their home parish. These may have been genuine wanderers from other counties as 49 (62.8%) people gave no details of their home parish or county.

Only 25 (32%) gave their status or occupation. Ten were described as labourers and some of the Hertfordshire men might have been genuinely seeking employment although this is uncertain. A Hertford smith was found wandering in Hertford and may have been looking for work. Two Hertford men were declared 'impotent' and were probably either elderly or of working age but physically or mentally incapable of maintaining themselves. Three women were listed as

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<sup>57</sup> 14 Elizabeth I c.5, SR 4 (i): 590-8.

<sup>58</sup> Slack *Poverty and Policy*, 98.



spinsters and one was a widow. Four men were tinkers from the same Hertfordshire village, Watton-at-Stone, and another four were Hertfordshire yeomen two of whom were using forged licences to beg. Only two were discharged soldiers although Hindle found that 'bands of deserting, emaciated troops also swelled the numbers of vagrants tramping and stealing their way across the country, contributing to the general panic about petty crime in the suburbs of towns in the 1590s'.<sup>59</sup>

Audrey Eccles also noted that 'groups of disbanded soldiers were much feared: on discharge they were allowed to keep their arms and uniform, and although parishes were supposed to support them there was little or no legal obligation for them to do so, hence they were alleged to be wandering about wresting what they needed from a terrorised public'.<sup>60</sup> These men were a particular cause for concern amongst the governing classes but only one was tried and found guilty of using 'seditious words'. On 16 June 1602 he was arrested at Much Hadham 'as a vagrant soldier who had failed to return and take up employment in his place of settlement'. He was also anonymously reported as saying after his arrest that 'he were att libertye agayne as he had byn, he would never betrae man while he lyved, and that if he were a souldier agayne as he had byn, he would rather fight against his cuntrye then with it'.<sup>61</sup> He was found guilty on that second charge but his punishment was not recorded. He may have been betrayed by a local enemy deliberately acting as an anonymous informer.<sup>62</sup> David Cressy found that seditious words were spoken in Hertfordshire but by settled men not vagrants.<sup>63</sup> Slack's findings, from Salisbury 1598-1638, and Colchester 1630-64,<sup>64</sup> that vagrants were regarded as 'carriers of rumour, sedition, and disease, and that they infected others

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<sup>59</sup> Hindle *The State and Social Change*, 54.

<sup>60</sup> Eccles *Vagrancy in Law and Practice*, 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Hertfordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls 1558-1894* CD 173-1077. John Tompson of Much Hadham, labourer, indicted for vagrancy and seditious words.

<sup>62</sup> *Assize Records: Elizabeth I; Quarter Sessions Rolls 1581, 173-1077*.

<sup>63</sup> D. Cressy *Dangerous Talk: Scandalous, Seditious and Treasonable Speech in Pre-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010), 13. Quoting 'The King's Maiesties Declaration to His Subiects, Concerning Lawfull Sports (1633), 8'.

<sup>64</sup> Slack 'Vagrants and Vagrancy in England'.

with their licentious liberty' do not appear to have been widely-held sentiments in the Hertfordshire parishes.

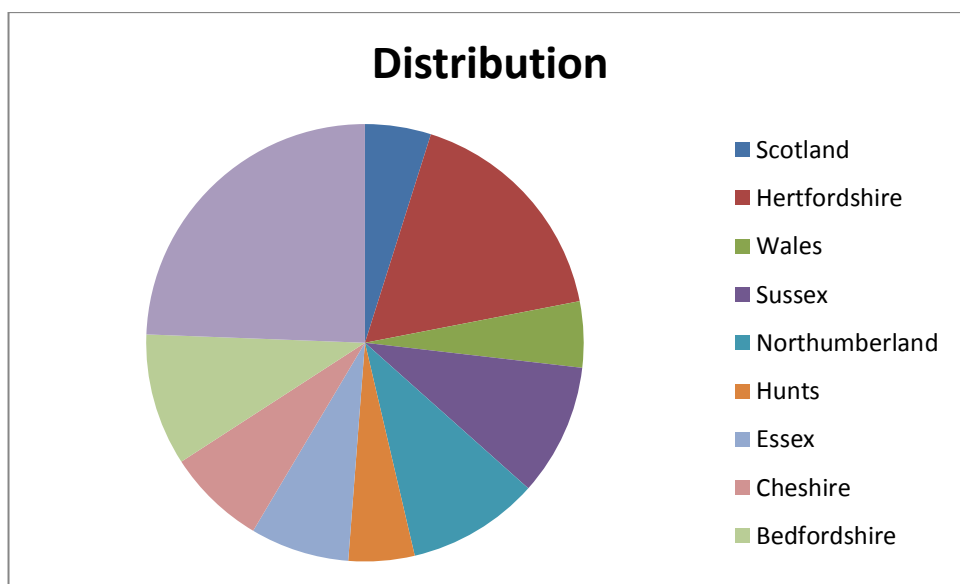
There is no indication that any vagrants were also being indicted for committing crimes, thefts or burglaries, although they may have been or were used for cover by those who did. Nor does it appear that they were terrorising the county in the later Elizabethan period. That conviction was to appear under early Stuart rule, supported by central government diktats, and was to grow throughout the seventeenth century so that by 1609 regular weekly searches were being carried out, in theory, in all Hertfordshire parishes for rogues and vagrants and also for stolen goods.

However, there is no mention of any 'Egyptians' (gypsies) being indicted in the assize records, although the neighbouring Middlesex assize courts tried a few cases involving them. Neither were there any cases of vagrants being convicted for sedition apart from the previously mentioned Elizabethan case. The bishop of Lincoln, as previously noted, writing in 1624, twenty years after the Thompson case appears to have been expressing some kind of panic reaction amongst the members of the Privy Council to a threat of Hertfordshire lawlessness amongst the unprofitable. In that year no vagrants were indicted at Hertford Quarter Sessions but this fear would spread amongst the county's landowners and judiciary leading, as further discussed below, to the highest number of cases being brought for harbouring or helping vagrants during the 1620s.

The second set of data presented in Graph 10.2 below is taken from the Hertford Quarter Sessions from 1626 to the end of the seventeenth century. Here again several observations can be made. There was a very distinct drop (46.1%) in the total number of vagrants from 78 in 1573-1621 to 36 in 1626-1700. Twenty-one (58.3%) of this total were male compared to 58 (74.3%) in the earlier period and 14 (38.8%) were female compared to 20 (25.6%). There were also at least four children and two infants. Five of those indicted shared the same family name and three women were listed as wives but their names were not given. The number of male vagrants who gave their status or occupation had greatly decreased from 25 (32%)

in the earlier period to three in the later. Thirty-one male vagrants (86.1%) gave no occupation.

Graph 10.2: Vagrancy by Place of Origin: Hertford Quarter Sessions Indictments 1626-1700.



Five men and two women (19.4%) from those presented gave Hertfordshire home parishes, but all were indicted for vagrancy so they may have been homeless and found begging and/or wandering in their own parishes. Thirteen (36.1%) claimed to originate from a narrow range of eight English parishes: Ampthill (Beds), Prestbury (Cheshire), Matching, Thaxted (Essex), St Neots (Huntingdon), Berry (Lancashire), Berwick-on-Tweed (Northumberland), Teddington (Sussex), Ripon, Skipton (Yorkshire) and St Mary, York. One man claimed his home parish was Ayr (Scotland) and another that his was Mold (Flintshire). The importance of Hertfordshire as a thoroughfare county, as previously discussed in chapter two, can be seen here since it would seem likely that they and the travellers from Bedfordshire, Cheshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Northumberland and Yorkshire had followed the major north-south routes or the droveways from Scotland and Wales and may have been intending to reach London.

As Jeremy Boulton noted 'Migration to the capital was crucial for sustaining overall population growth<sup>65</sup> and some of these people may have been economic migrants seeking work in London, but it does not appear from these limited figures that very large numbers were passing through Hertfordshire. Beier argued that 'contrary to contemporaries' statements, vagrants did not actually arrive in the metropolis as vagrants, but became down and out because of conditions there'.<sup>66</sup> He believed that London was involved in creating its own vagrancy problems. This is possibly why not all vagrant traffic was north-south; some was in the opposite direction. A woman had left her home parish in Cripplegate, London and seemed to be heading north through Hertfordshire. One man had also journeyed north from Teddington (Sussex) to Letchworth and another two came west from Essex, Matching and Thaxted. None of those indicted appear to have originated from the other Home Counties including Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Kent or Surrey or from the west or south-western English counties.

Another 13 (36.1%) either claimed that they could not or did not name their home parish. Long-term wanderers frequently did not know where they had been born and might have concealed the parish where they had last resided,<sup>67</sup> because they had encountered problems there and did not want to return. As discussed in the previous chapter, this amnesia provided some basic form of agency in deciding their immediate future. As in the earlier tranche there is no indication that any vagrants were also involved in committing crimes, thefts or burglaries. That conviction was to appear under Stuart rule supported by central government policy and was to grow throughout the seventeenth century so that, as previously noted, in 1610 it was enacted that the justices should arrange for regular searches to be carried out for rogues and idle persons.<sup>68</sup> This repeated the much earlier requirements of the 1495 Act that similar searches should be made

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<sup>65</sup> Jeremy Boulton 'London 1540-1700' in Peter Clark (ed.) *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain Volume II 1540-1840* ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 317.

<sup>66</sup> Beier *Masterless Men*, 41.

<sup>67</sup> *An Act Against Vagabonds and Beggars* 1531 (11 Henry VII c. 2).

<sup>68</sup> *An Act for the Due Execution of Divers Laws and Statutes heretofore made Against Rogues, Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars and other Lewd and Idle Persons* 1610 (7 & 8 James I c. 4).

for 'such vagabonds, idle and suspect persons, living suspiciously' who needed to be put in the stocks.<sup>69</sup> During the entire period of the Civil War (1642-51) only one vagrant was presented and sent to the House of Correction. This indicates that the county was, at least temporarily, preoccupied with more important problems than controlling vagrancy.

### Harbouring vagrants in seventeenth-century Hertfordshire

In this section quarter sessions presentments will be examined to understand what sorts of people were prepared to break the law and risk such fines for harbouring and/or relieving vagrants in Hertfordshire and in which parishes this was happening. The data for this section has been extracted from the compiled Hertford Quarter Sessions Books which episodically records presentments for harbouring or relieving vagrants during the period 1620-1700. There appear to have been no presented offences of this type before 1620 although cases may have existed and been resolved locally. From the seventeenth century onwards an escalation of vagrancy cases can be observed coupled with increased numbers of indictments for harbouring and sheltering vagrants. The possible reasons for this apparent sympathy for vagrants are further discussed below.

A total of 20 harbourers from 26 parishes were presented from 1620-1700. Harbourers from the 1620s offending parishes did not re-offend apart from Cheshunt and Welwyn so there must have been some kind of deterrent effect from presentment and fines of up to £1. The total represents 19.6% of the 132 Hertfordshire ancient parishes but does not include figures for the Liberty of St Albans, which had its own court. The records of this court have not survived prior to 1770 and would have included those for the 24 parishes in the west of the county which came under its jurisdiction.

As early as 1572 central government was well aware that its harsh attitude towards vagrants did not command universal support. Therefore, it began imposing what would have been seen by contemporaries as heavy fines for disobedience.

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<sup>69</sup> *An Act Against Vagabonds and Beggars* 1495 (11 Henry VII c. 2).

VI. And further be it enacted that if any person or persons...give any harbour [shelter], money or lodging or any other relief to any rogue, vagabond or sturdy beggar...[he or they] shall make such fine....as by the discretions of the said justices...at their general sessions shall be assessed, so as the same exceed not twenty shillings; And also if any person or persons do disturb or let the execution of this act...[he or they] shall forfeit and lose five pounds and... have imprisonment at the Queen's Majesty's pleasure.<sup>70</sup>

Several observations can be made from this data which are important for the qualitative analysis that follows. What stands out very obviously is that the data is fractured, as it provides very little detail about the vagrants; very few of their names; none of their home parishes and is chronologically very uneven. There was a distinct peak in the 1620s which may have been at least partially caused by a wave of plague in Hertfordshire affecting several towns and villages across the county during the first half of the decade. These plague-afflicted settlements included Hemel Hempstead (in 1623);<sup>71</sup> Layston (in 1624-5);<sup>72</sup> Abbots Langley;<sup>73</sup> Berkhamsted;<sup>74</sup> Hemel Hempstead;<sup>75</sup> Hertford;<sup>76</sup> Hoddesdon;<sup>77</sup> St Albans;<sup>78</sup> Watford (in 1625);<sup>79</sup> Great Gaddesden (in 1625-6).<sup>80</sup> It is possible that at least some of the unnamed vagabonds and vagrants had fled from these areas.

Slack found more detailed records of vagrants in Salisbury in the town's vagrant examinations but makes no mention of harbouring;<sup>81</sup> Beier also used these

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<sup>70</sup> *An Act For the Relief of the Poor 1572* (14 Elizabeth I c. 5).

<sup>71</sup> V. Bryant *A History of Potten End* (Hemel Hempstead: E.W.Bryant, 1986), 30.

<sup>72</sup> H. Falvey and S. Hindle (eds) *"This Little Commonwealth": Layston Parish Memorandum Book 1607-c.1650 and 1704-c.1747* Hertfordshire Record Publications Vol. XIX (Hertford: Hertfordshire Record Society, 2003), xvii.

<sup>73</sup> Bryant *History of Potten End*, 30.

<sup>74</sup> G. Robinson *The Book of Hemel Hempstead and Berkhamsted* (London: Barracuda Books, 1975), 44.

<sup>75</sup> S. Yaxley (ed.) *History of Hemel Hempstead* (Hemel Hempstead: Borough of Hemel Hempstead, 1973), 199.

<sup>76</sup> J. Cooper *Hertford: A History* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2007), 77.

<sup>77</sup> S. Garside *Hoddesdon a History* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2002), 31.

<sup>78</sup> M. Freeman *St Albans: A History* (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2008), 147.

<sup>79</sup> R. Bard *Watford Past* (London: Historical Publications, 2005), 18.

<sup>80</sup> Bryant *History of Potten End*, 30.

<sup>81</sup> Slack 'Vagrants and Vagrancy in England'.

but did not record harbourers;<sup>82</sup> Eccles used eighteenth-century Quarter Sessions records and briefly mentioned harbouring cases and also inmates.<sup>83</sup> Neither the Essex nor the Middlesex Assizes record harbouring cases involving vagrants, but only felons.

However, harbouring large numbers of vagrants could get out of hand and criminals may well have sometimes infiltrated these groups. A sole example survives in Hertfordshire records when Richard Haynes of Great (Much) Hadham was presented for 'being a common harbourer of rogues' in 1636.<sup>84</sup> In the following decade he reoffended on a much larger scale and his activities demonstrated exactly what central government and the local judiciary were attempting to guard against through the legislation traced by Slack.<sup>85</sup> However, this is the only case of what might be described as seriously disruptive harbouring that this research has revealed.<sup>86</sup> The anxiety and fear of the inhabitants of his home parish, Much Hadham, and those of the neighbouring parishes of Sawbridgeworth, Guilston (Gilston) and Widford,<sup>87</sup> expressed in the following example of a petition to the quarter sessions, even allowing for local exaggeration of numbers, rumour-mongering and gossip was almost palpable:

Information by the inhabitants of Much Hadham that, at a private house and barn adjoining in the occupation of Richard Haynes and Susan his wife in the said parish, there is and hath been a constant lodging and meeting of vagrant persons, sometimes to the number of 60, sometimes 40, and seldom less than 20, to the terror of most of the neighbours and to the great damage of the said inhabitants there and of the adjacent parishes of Sawbridgeworth, Guilston [Gilston] and Widford. The petitioners have had to 'raise greate ayde to assist the constables of Much Hadham' in apprehending some of the said vagrants, the neighbours thereabouts not

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<sup>82</sup> Beier *Masterless Men*.

<sup>83</sup> Eccles *Vagrancy in Law and Practice*.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* 1636, 222 (3 & 4 Oct.).

<sup>85</sup> Slack *Poverty and Policy*, 28, 124, 126.

<sup>86</sup> Possibly also exacerbated by the descent into the disorder of the Civil War 1642-51.

<sup>87</sup> These all seem to have been very small communities at that time although the available figures are very patchy. Later in the century Lionel Munby quoted Guilston as having a population of 90 adult members (over 16) in 1676; there are no population figures until the first quarter of the eighteenth century for either Much Hadham (156 families) or Widford (40 families) and none for Sawbridgeworth until the third quarter of the eighteenth century when he stated there were 300/400 houses there. Lionel Munby *Hertfordshire Population Statistics 1563-1801* (Hertford: Hertfordshire Local History Council, 1964).

daring to assist 'in regard of their greate multitudes' and frequent resort thither, and that, when petitioners have gone to the said place to apprehend them, the said vagrants fled to a barn in the parish of Sawbridgeworth belonging to one widow Ward of Warrens in the said parish, and sometimes to a certain barn in Widford, and so have escaped apprehension and do molest the country thereabout 'intollerable contrarie to the lawes.' Petitioners pray that the constables of every parish at 'fitting times hereafter' and with sufficient aid, meet for the apprehending of the said vagrants, that thereby 'the knott and concourse of them may be broken' and the country freed from such inconveniences and terrors.<sup>88</sup>

The inhabitants of these four communities saw themselves as being severely intimidated by a varying number of interlopers who were using Much Hadham parish as a base. The intruders seem to have been well-organised with several bolt-holes available in different neighbouring parishes, and one supporter in Sawbridgeworth, Widow Ward, possibly another in Widford and the ability to evade and out-manoeuvre the frightened inhabitants of all four parishes. The vagrants would have greatly outnumbered the forces of law and order, the local constables and headboroughs. Why Richard Haynes and his wife and Widow Ward chose to shelter large groups of vagrants is unclear, but Haynes was threatened with imprisonment if he could not provide sureties.<sup>89</sup> Considering the amount of disruption he seems to have caused in his own and neighbouring parishes Haynes, classed as a relatively lowly husbandman, seems to have got off very lightly. He was 'convicted for harbouring of rogues and vagabonds, fined 10s. and committed to gaol for 14 days'.<sup>90</sup> There is no mention of what ultimately happened to his wife or Widow Ward or to the vagrants and how they were challenged and, presumably, evicted.

This case would have provided ample ammunition for the anti-vagrant party in the county, but there may also have been other smaller skirmishes which were not reported. The complaining Much Hadham inhabitants would have been the leading and probably richest parishioners including the churchwardens, overseers and probably also the principal traders and yeomen. They would have been capable and competent at defending their interests, demanding official

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<sup>88</sup> *Hertford Quarter Sessions Books*, 292 (3 May 1641).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* 293.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* 383.



assistance and dealing with the courts, but lesser people in smaller and isolated hamlets suffering from similar problem incomers would not. Later in the century the Hertfordshire judiciary and officials still perceived themselves as being invaded by these menacingly numerous people and expressed their fears for themselves and their property:

Foreasmuch as the Grand Inquest has informed this Court that the dayly concurse and great increase Rougues, Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars is a great greivance and annoyance to the inhabitants of this County and through the negligence or ignorance of those officers who have beene intrusted in this Concerne they are now growen soe insolent and presumptuous that they have oft by threats and mennaces extorted money and victualls from those who live in howses remote from neighbours whilst their husbands and servants have beene imployed abroad in the management of their lawful vocations and have putt the people into a general Consternation or feare that they will fire their howses or steale their goods, the Consequences whereof may prove very dangerous to this County, if not timely prevented.<sup>91</sup>

Harbouring and entertaining were now openly and officially interpreted as intimidation of and extortion from the property-owning classes, but in fact very few cases were recorded at Quarter Sessions throughout the remaining decades of the century apart from the 1672 case previously discussed. In the 1680s a Caldecote man whose occupation was not given was bound over for harbouring but his was the sole case reported.<sup>92</sup> In 1696 four men of unknown occupations 'entertained vagrants' at Bishops Hatfield and that also was the only case presented throughout the decade.<sup>93</sup> It appears that presentments for harbouring abruptly declined at the end of the century. Possibly the traditional charitable impulse had gradually disappeared as the older members of the community who practiced it died out and attitudes to the poor hardened. Hertfordshire officials remained convinced that vagrants were flooding Hertfordshire. Audrey Eccles notes that in neighbouring Middlesex: 'The Middlesex bench in 1744 sought a law against harbouring inmates'<sup>94</sup> so this was a wider concern.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 285 (f. 101) (10 July 1676).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 414, 36 (23 April 1688).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 49 (11 Jan. 1696-7).

<sup>94</sup> Eccles *Vagrancy in Law and Practice*, 54.

## Hertfordshire vagrancy in the eighteenth century

From 1740-99 a total of 98 vagrants received removal orders, not counting unnamed wives and unnumbered children who were not always included on the order. A total of 81 vagrants with a Hertfordshire connection were removed to their homes parishes in the county. Of those vagrants without a Hertfordshire connection four had settlement or other ties to the metropolis through marriage, family or having been apprenticed or in service there. More detailed information about these wanderers than the courts provide were also recorded in the eighteenth-century settlement examinations from 40 (30.3%) of the 132 Hertfordshire parishes.<sup>95</sup> The same caveat for these sources applies here, as in the previous chapter, that some examinees could use these as presentations to construct their stories to show themselves in the best light. What proportion of vagrants was examined cannot be known, but it is unlikely that many actively sought settlement examinations because all of those discussed below had been apprehended.<sup>96</sup> The cases researched date from 1746 to 1799 and they include brief backgrounds of individual vagrants and sometimes their birthplaces, former employers and occupations and ages. From these it is possible to pose such questions as what sort of people became vagrants and what reasons did they give in their examinations for their vagrancy? What decisions were made by those examining them and do these appear to have evolved and to be following some particular county-wide strategy developed to combat vagrancy?

Vagrants sometimes begged but they were not accused of other crimes, although they may have knowingly or unknowingly associated with criminals in their travels. Beggars and vagrants were no longer routinely punished but instead the prime aim of parish officials and justices seems to have now become to move them

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<sup>95</sup> These parishes are listed in J. Hill *Hertfordshire Settlement Examinations as to Settlement: An Alphabetical Index*, (Hatfield?: Hertfordshire Family History Society, 2004), vii: Aldbury; Aldenham; Amwell (Great); Anstey; Ashwell; Aspenden; Aston; Ayot St Peter; Barkway; Barnet (Chipping); Barnet (East); Bayford; Berkhamsted; Bishop's Stortford; Broxbourne; Bushey; Cheshunt; Datchworth; Elstree; Essendon; Gaddesden (Great); Graveley; Hertford (All Saints); Hertford (St Andrew); Hertingfordbury; Hitchin; Hormead (Great); Ippollitts; Kings Langley; Royston; Sacombe; St Albans (Abbey); St Albans (St Peter); Tewin; Watford.

<sup>96</sup> Eccles *Vagrancy in Law and Practice*; Hitchcock *Vagrancy in English Culture*.

on to where they had any claim to belong either through their parents, their husbands' or their own right to settlement through service or apprenticeship. One of the cases was that of a 92 year old widow incongruously described as a 'rogue and a vagabond' in the removal order which sent her from her birthplace, St Albans St Michael parish to her late husband's settlement parish of Watford, the right of settlement in which he had gained through service.<sup>97</sup> She was the only woman of the three rogues and vagabonds who were listed as being removed in the 1740s.

The other two were an 18 year-old runaway apprentice<sup>98</sup> and a married Cheshunt gardener with a wife and two young children whom he may have deserted because they were not included in the removal order.<sup>99</sup> These men had deviated from the normal patterns of lifestyle and were caught outside them. The number of examinations is uneven across the period, with just three in the 1740s, 15 in the 1750s, six in the 1760s, 15 in the 1770s and then 40 in the 1780s and an abrupt drop to 18 in the 1790s. A total of 27 vagrants had been born in Hertfordshire and a further 21 had been apprenticed or in service in Hertfordshire parishes. Others had family ties to the county, 33 had husbands, fathers or a mother formerly settled there or who had been apprenticed or in service. There appears to have been no great surge in vagrancy removals during this century until 1780-9 when 42 vagrants were removed plus their recorded wives and children.

The gender distribution of those examined (Figure 10.3) changed slightly over time but the sample remained dominated by females throughout. These numbers consisted of 19 wives, 14 single women and 18 widows. In 1780-9 they formed as much as 66% of the total. The number of vagrant women in Hertfordshire may have been even higher because, as previously noted, Keith Snell in his study of English and Welsh parishes has found that: 'Surviving gender ratios of certificates

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<sup>97</sup> HALS DP117/13/1. 12 June 1746 Watford Settlement Examinations.

<sup>98</sup> HALS DP87/13/3. 10 Nov. 1746 Royston Settlement Examinations. This was unusual, as discussed in an earlier chapter female apprentices did not often abscond so she may have been badly treated by her master or mistress.

<sup>99</sup> HALS DP29/18/27K 20 Jan. 1748 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations.

make it obvious that very few female migrants can ever have had one'.<sup>100</sup> This was presumably because women were subsumed under their husbands, fathers or the male relative responsible for them and these men would hold any settlement documentation. If female settlement certificates were a rarity it would appear that the women holding them were in a minority and that an unknown number of women were without certificates and therefore went unrecorded in the Hertfordshire system. A few female vagrants had travelled long distances as one woman had a settlement in Edinburgh and a widow was sent to her deceased husband's settlement in Waterford (Ireland). It is possible that some widows and single women may have been ejected by their parishes anxious to save on their relief payments. Slack found this was done in the sixteenth-century and with the increased spending of the 1790s it would seem likely that struggling parishes would employ such expedients to cut their expenditure.<sup>101</sup>

In the neighbouring county of Middlesex Audrey Eccles researched eighteenth-century examinations for 239 rough sleepers and found that '68% of the adult Middlesex rough sleepers were female'. She argues that this preponderance of females was 'reflecting the economic vulnerability of any female unsupported by a husband or father'.<sup>102</sup> This same 'vulnerability' also dominated the lives of their Hertfordshire counterparts and drove them too into vagrancy. Eccles found that 67% of her sample was composed of single women demonstrating the precarious nature of female employment since many were domestic servants and could be hired and fired at will. The remaining women were widows (17%) or married but not with their husbands (also 17%). Eccles also noted that 'nearly three quarters of the married women said they were deserted, some only a short time ago; a few were married to seamen or soldiers, which might have the same effect'.<sup>103</sup>

Given that the Hertfordshire sample was limited to 40 identified parishes it is difficult to say anything meaningful about the cross-county distribution of rogues

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<sup>100</sup> K. Snell *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 100.

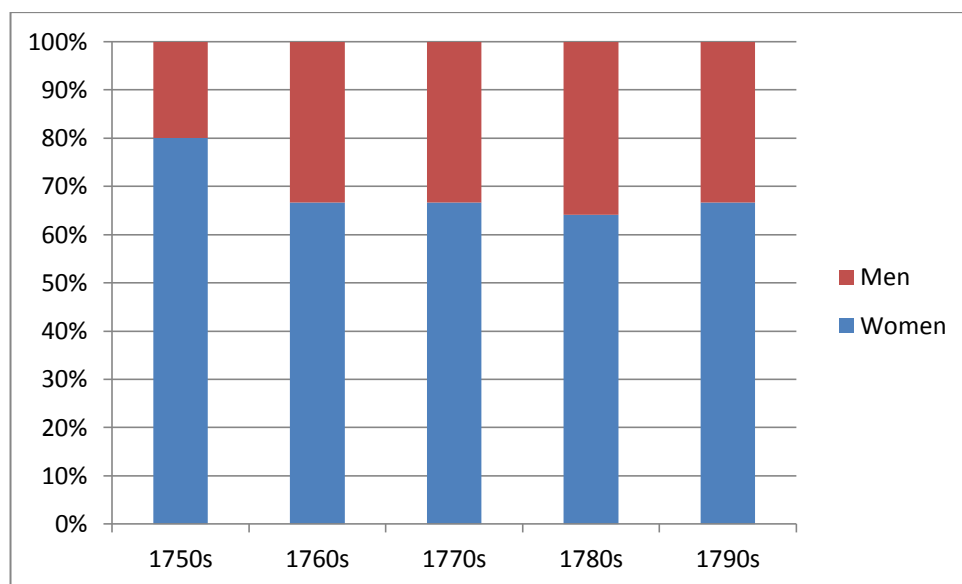
<sup>101</sup> Slack *Poverty and Policy*, 99.

<sup>102</sup> Eccles *Vagrancy in Law and Practice*, 207.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* 207.

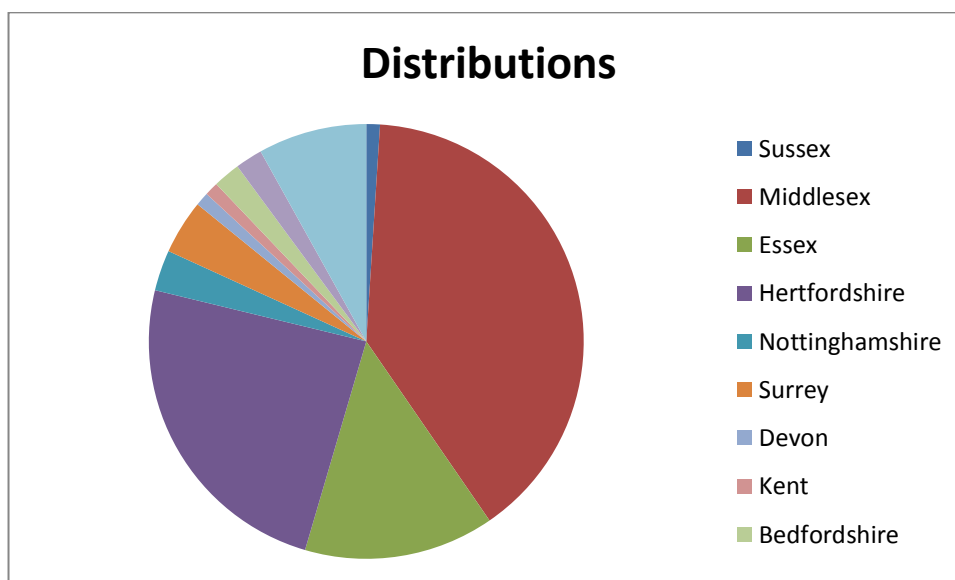
and vagabonds. Even so, there were distinct physical concentrations in the sample, both in terms of where people (largely women) were apprehended and the parishes to which they were returned.

Graph 10.3: Gender distribution of those examined for settlement 1746-99

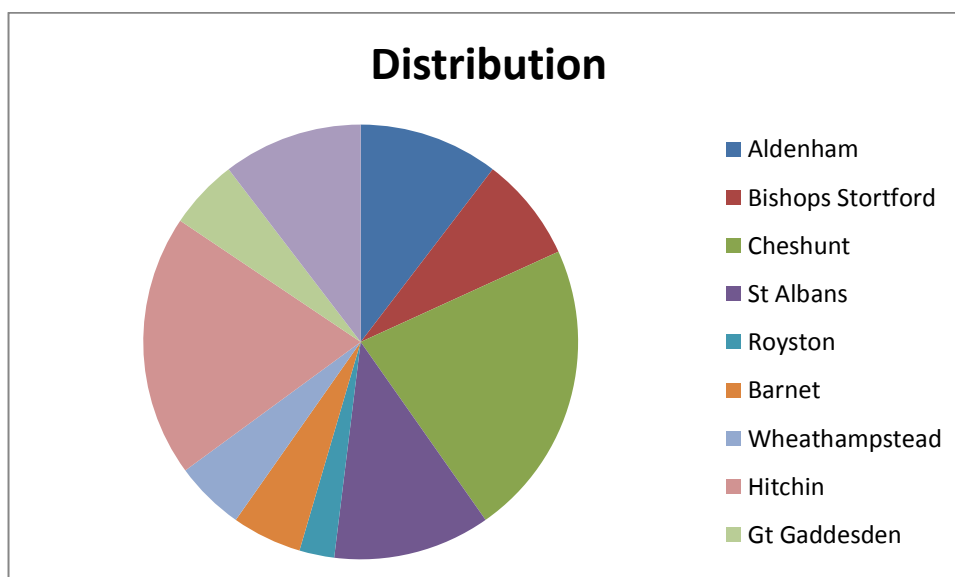


Graphs 10.4 and 10.5 below trace respectively the spatial distribution of apprehension and return. The interplay between Hertfordshire parishes was clearly very limited, pointing to an external vagrant problem. Nonetheless, the concentration of apprehension parishes in just three major areas is suggestive. Equally the return concentrations, with particular foci on Aldenham, Cheshunt, Hitchin and St Albans points to significant prior out migration from what we can conceive as a broadly urbanised belt of Hertfordshire communities, apart from Aldenham which was a village.

Graph 10.4: Spatial Distribution of apprehensions of those examined for settlement 1746-99



Graph 10.5: Spatial distribution of returns of those examined for settlement 1746-99



Throughout the eighteenth century the Hertfordshire cases suggest it was these, already marginal, types of people whose lives had been disrupted in some way by death, misfortune, unemployment or bad relationships who became vagrants. Amongst the women there were widows, single women, serving soldier's wives who had temporarily lost their breadwinner and were unemployed, women

who had left their husbands and deserted wives whose husbands had absconded or enlisted. Hitchcock found that 'by far the most common reason for female mobility 1650-1750 was the search for work temporary or more permanent'.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, many of the men had somehow fallen out of employment, through dismissal or the rejection of employers' offers of work; others had left their families and were runaway husbands. Deserting fathers were one category of Hertfordshire vagrant who were almost invariably incarcerated for leaving their wives and children on the parish.

Younger men and boys were often apprentices who had absconded from their masters presumably disenchanted with their treatment and discipline, the prospect of a long apprenticeship, their work conditions or all of these. The patterns shown by the numbers of these examinations over the century are incomplete. From the first records in the 1740s the number mounted from three to 15 in the 1750s including 12 women and three men, then reduced to six in the 1760s with four women and two men and then returned to 15 in the 1770s with 10 women and five men. In the 1780s it reached a peak of 40 including 25 women, 14 men and one boy and then dwindled to 18 in the 1790s with 12 women and six men. The reasons for these fluctuations are unclear but the decline after the 1780s may have been connected with the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars of the 1790s onwards and some vagrant men enlisting or being impressed into the army or navy when brought before the courts.

In the eighteenth century the women outnumbered the men possibly because they were easier to apprehend especially those who had infants and young children travelling with them. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a preponderance of women had not appeared in the court cases possibly because constables did not bother to present them. In the eighteenth century several women do not appear to have been vagrants at all, but may have been travelling, for protection, with male counterparts who were vagrants. Possible examples of these women are the three serving soldiers' wives apprehended in the 1750s. One

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<sup>104</sup> Hitchcock *Vagrancy in English Culture*, 11.

with a 10 month baby claimed to have been saying farewell to her husband on his 'embarkation to Gibraltar' and was removed to his settlement parish, Watford.<sup>105</sup> Another, with one child, was found in Newark on Trent (Nottingham) and removed to her husband's settlement parish, Bishops Stortford,<sup>106</sup> and another with one child who was living in Devon was removed to her husband's settlement parish of Barkway.<sup>107</sup>

All of these women were classed as rogues and vagabonds presumably because they were out of place being away from their husbands' settlement parishes. A deserted wife with two children was found in East Barnet and also considered to be a rogue and vagabond, so she was removed to her husband's settlement parish of Cheshunt.<sup>108</sup> Three further women were classed as rogues and vagabonds, but there is no evidence that any of these women had been apprehended because they were involved with criminals or any criminal activity. Two others were described as single and had no children with them. One was removed to her birthplace, Aldenham, from Clerkenwell,<sup>109</sup> one was also removed to Aldenham from St Clement Dane because it was her late father's settlement parish through service,<sup>110</sup> and one was taken from Enfield to Cheshunt because it had been 'where her father had been settled'.<sup>111</sup> Two women may have deserted their husbands because they were found wandering and begging far from their home parishes. One had recently married in her home parish, Kings Langley, and had returned there; she was removed to Crooked Lane, London, her husband's parish.<sup>112</sup> Another had been married for 11 years and came from Buildwas, Shropshire, to where she was removed after having been found in Cheshunt.<sup>113</sup> Another woman had been a widow for 20 years and was removed from where she was found wandering, in Edmonton, to her late husband's settlement parish of

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<sup>105</sup> HALS DP117/13/1 14 April 1752 Watford Settlement Examinations.

<sup>106</sup> HALS DP21/16/3 19 Sept. 1757 Bishops Stortford Settlement Examinations.

<sup>107</sup> HALS DP13/13/1 12 Feb. 1759 Barkway Settlement Examinations.

<sup>108</sup> HALS DP29/13/4 3 Dec. 1757 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations.

<sup>109</sup> HALS DP3/16/1 24 Jan. 1754 Aldenham Settlement Examinations.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 15 May 1756.

<sup>111</sup> HALS DP29/13/4 19 Dec. 1757 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations.

<sup>112</sup> HALS DP64/13/1 18 April 1755 Kings Langley Settlement Examinations.

<sup>113</sup> HALS DP29/13/4 12 May 1755 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations.



Cheshunt.<sup>114</sup>

Several single women were found wandering and one 16 year old may have been sick or starving because she was 'begging and lying in the street' and was removed from Cheshunt to her late father's settlement of Buntingford.<sup>115</sup> There were no disabled vagrants of either sex mentioned as being examined except one lame girl. She was settled with her mother in Aldenham after wandering and begging in Watford, the nearest large town.<sup>116</sup> As David Turner has recently shown, there were large numbers of disabled beggars and vagrants wandering the roads in the eighteenth century.<sup>117</sup> In Hertfordshire disabled people were regularly transported about and across the county from London in carts so it is possible that when apprehended they were carted either directly to their home parishes, or any other parish they had some connection with, or the nearest workhouse of which there were many being established across Hertfordshire during the eighteenth century, if they could provide no details of a settlement parish.

Disabled vagrants may have pursued sedentary activities such as basket-making to keep themselves, but the occupations formerly pursued by the able-bodied show a preponderance of former servants amongst the men and several of the girls and women had also been in service. It is not clear how many were likely to have been agricultural servants unless the former employer was stated to have been a farmer, but many male and female vagrants seem to have begun their working lives in the traditional way as yearly servants, and some as parish apprentices as previously discussed for girls and single women in chapter eight. It is possible that these servants were later dismissed, had disagreements with their employers or left to find better places and failed to do so. Some of the men had chosen or been apprenticed to trades such as baker,<sup>118</sup> razor grinder,<sup>119</sup> and

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<sup>114</sup> HALS DP29/18/25B 14 April 1790 Hertfordshire Removal Orders.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 28 Dec. 1759 (It would seem that she had not been offered relief there).

<sup>116</sup> HALS DP3/16/1 23 Feb. 1759 Aldenham Settlement Examinations.

<sup>117</sup> D. Turner *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>118</sup> HALS DP29/13/4 25 March 1773 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations.

<sup>119</sup> HALS DP64/13/1 15 Nov. 1775 Kings Langley? Settlement Examinations [his removal order was from Watford].

sawyer<sup>120</sup> while others had worked for brickmakers,<sup>121</sup> victuallers<sup>122</sup> and innholders.<sup>123</sup> Two apprentices had absconded from a gingerbread baker<sup>124</sup> and a weaver respectively.<sup>125</sup> Only one man claimed to have fallen on hard times, saying that he had been a former property-owner who had 'occupied a freehold estate in St Albans (Abbey) on which he paid all taxes'. He was returned there from Aldersgate where doubtless the truth of his claim was tested.<sup>126</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to identify the nature of vagrancy in Hertfordshire and what can be learned about the vagrants and attitudes towards them through the fractured sources available. Many of those who were indicted for vagrancy at the Assizes and Quarter Sessions were not Hertfordshire-born but came from towns and villages all over England and places further afield including Wales, Scotland and Ireland. As discussed in chapter two, Hertfordshire was a 'thoroughfare' county with many routes running through it to London and much of the secondary literature has concentrated on this since, as Slack has stated, 'the main roads south through Hertfordshire were pestered with [vagrants]'.<sup>127</sup>

This was certainly the view taken by the Hertfordshire governors of the time, notably the lord lieutenant Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, and his supporters on the Grand Jury who appear to have believed that the county was besieged by criminal vagrants throughout the early modern period. As previously discussed, they attempted to wage war on vagrants, punish them if they got in and then eject them to their home parish or where they had last resided (if stated). They also indicted those who relieved, sheltered or assisted vagrants particularly during the early decades of the seventeenth century. This practice of harbouring indicates some sympathy for

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<sup>120</sup> HALS DP90/13/6 28 Jan. 1790 St Albans: Abbey Settlement Examinations.

<sup>121</sup> HALS DP24/13/3 28 May 1752 Broxbourne Settlement Examinations.

<sup>122</sup> HALS DP21/16/5 28 May 1782 Bishops Stortford Settlement Examinations.

<sup>123</sup> HALS DP21/16/4 1 June 1756 Bishops Stortford Settlement Examinations.

<sup>124</sup> HALS DP29/18/27K 29 July 1789 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations.

<sup>125</sup> HALS DP29/13/1 26 Oct. 1782 Cheshunt Settlement Examinations.

<sup>126</sup> HALS DP90/13/6 4 Oct. 1788 St Albans: Abbey Settlement Examinations.

<sup>127</sup> Slack *Poverty and Policy*, 96.

vagrants amongst the governed and has not been previously investigated for Hertfordshire. It is notable that although vagrants were seen as criminals by the legislators and judiciary, and were believed to spend a great deal of their time loitering and canvassing likely prospects for burglary they were mostly committed for opportunistic crimes such as poaching and pilfering food and clothing.

What can be learnt about the sort of people who were believed to be posing a threat to order in Hertfordshire? According to Beier it would appear that a large proportion of the vagrants apprehended were able-bodied males.<sup>128</sup> This would also appear to be true for the early Hertfordshire offenders, although the small amount of vagrancy committed by both males and females in the 1590s in their home parishes might seem to indicate that they had returned home from wandering and were seeking some form of support from former neighbours. There may also have been a certain amount of confusion about the legislative terminology involved here since, as previously noted, a handful of others, most of whom were married couples were convicted also in the 1590s for being rogues without any mention of vagrancy. Slack found that in his large Salisbury sample of 3,000 vagrants slightly more than half were single men and a further quarter were single women.

It would seem likely that in Hertfordshire the proportion of women was also steadily increasing until in the eighteenth-century, as has been previously discussed, they formed a large number of those being examined for settlement. There were also deserted wives, deserting wives, mothers with children, widows and single women seeking work, and it would seem possible that these liminal people were also contained in the vagrant populations of former centuries since their problems were perennial and unchanging. It would also seem likely that women and children concealed themselves from officials as much as possible and that these male officials may have deliberately ignored their presence and the problems of processing them as the chattels of suspected criminals. Since some Hertfordshire constables appear to have been less than enthusiastic in pursuing male vagrants the

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<sup>128</sup> Beier *Masterless Men*, 52.

added complications of dealing with their families may have deterred them from further action.

Vagrancy remains, as David Hitchcock states, a grey area and requires a great deal more research, but this study of one county's attitudes to and interactions with vagrants is intended to add some definition to two issues. The first being the possible conflict between Hertfordshire officials' persecution of vagrants and the empathy shown towards them by some members of the community in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The second is concerned with the gender balance between vagrants in the county throughout the period. It has been argued by Beier that 'Vagrant women were basically of three sorts: those looking for husbands who had deserted them, prostitutes and unmarried pregnant girls'.<sup>129</sup> Certainly in the Hertfordshire data there are numbers of both deserted and deserting wives, but there is no mention of women vagrants being charged with being lewd women: that epithet was, as discussed in the previous chapter, reserved for seventeenth-century bastard-bearers indicted under the 1610 Act. Beier also seems to have omitted the single women who were between employments or had been dismissed from their precarious domestic service occupations.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> *An Act for the Due Execution of Divers Laws and Statutes Heretofore Made Against Rogues, Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars and other Lewd and Idle Persons* 1610 (7 & 8 James I c. 4).

## Chapter Eleven: Conclusion

In chapter one, four debates that remain to some extent unresolved were discussed. These are: regionality/welfare republics; the generosity of the Old Poor Law; power and agency and the nature and composition of relief. It seemed possible that these might be taken forward with a study of a whole county that has so firmly been linked in historiography to the south-eastern welfare model of large-scale poverty and relatively generous benefits. This chapter will revisit these debates and consider what the Hertfordshire findings have added to them. It will then briefly consider ideas for future research in Hertfordshire.

Regionally, Hertfordshire was a southern county and might be expected to be relatively generous to its poor as Steven King has argued.<sup>1</sup> However, from the parishes researched to date generosity does not appear to have strongly featured in Hertfordshire poor relief and some parishes, including Royston and Hertford All Saints, closely monitored all expenditure on the poor at their vestry meetings. There appears to have been a strong streak of parsimony in some parishes as will be further discussed in the generosity debate below.

Keith Snell suggested that 'one can be surprised by the generous and widely encompassing nature of relief...to settled inhabitants rural parishes were indeed miniature welfare states' and before about 1780 relief policy was usually generous, flexible, and humane'.<sup>2</sup> The Hertfordshire parishes studied seem to have followed the pattern of little welfare republics although several appear to have been oligarchies and their primary motivation does not seem to have been the welfare of their poor. The aim in the Hertfordshire parishes researched appears to have been to find ways of classifying, controlling, keeping and exploiting the local and, ideally, only the local home-parishioner poor, as economically as possible. What seems to have been the most important consideration in some Hertfordshire parishes was

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<sup>1</sup> S. King *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> K. Snell *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 5.

how far the enforced expenditure on the destitute poor could be pared down to bare subsistence level, rather than their welfare. Relief provision in the parishes researched appears to have been driven by the co-operation and support of the parish ratepayers not the needs of the parochial poor.

The fundamental Old Poor Law statute, which codified the earlier statutes, the 1598 *Poor Law Act*,<sup>3</sup> was not intended to be generous to the poor since this might encourage idleness, as previously discussed in chapter five. This statute was designed only to provide "the necessary relief of the lame, impotent, old, blind and such other being poor and not able to work". It was intended to only allow the poor bare subsistence levels of relief not total support and the Hertfordshire parishes researched appear to have accepted this as a guideline. The staple diet of the poor was bread and some parishes provided bread doles at times of dearth. Steve Hindle argued that parish relief was not vitally important in maintaining the poor and 'a tradition of informal relief ....long ensured that the victuals begged from neighbours were far more significant than cash payments provided by overseers'.<sup>4</sup> Informal begging was an important constituent of parish charity and the Old Poor Law condemned but did not replace it. Chapter ten discussed cases of beggars visiting other households in their home parishes to seek alms.

The earliest and only reported case of a parish official's refusal to provide relief to 'a sick poore man' (a subset of the classically impotent poor) was that of John Canfield at Ippollitts in 1688.<sup>5</sup> His reasons for refusing were not recorded. Nor was the name of who presented Canfield or the outcome of the case. As previously discussed in chapter eight, four Chipping Barnet widows abruptly lost their pensions and were forced into the newly established parish workhouse.<sup>6</sup> The parish of Tring capped medical expenditure in 1731 largely because the sick poor were referring themselves to doctors and the vestry feared losing control of medical relief

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<sup>3</sup> (39 Eliz. c.3).

<sup>4</sup> S. Hindle *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 296.

<sup>5</sup> *Hertford Quarter Sessions*, 1688 No. 50.

<sup>6</sup> HALS DP15/12/1 Chipping Barnet Overseers Accounts 1720-45 - 1729.

expenditure.<sup>7</sup> Royston followed a policy of removing their useless poor into the workhouse probably to provide accommodation for more useful families. In the case of a Widow Brown, whose age was not given, the vestry minutes recorded that she had suffered from a fall and should be in the workhouse.<sup>8</sup>

However, as previously discussed in chapter seven, some of these parishes were also capable of acts of quixotic generosity involving medical relief. Possibly rate-payers were thought to be more sympathetic towards the sick and suffering and would have been aware of such patient's family backgrounds and personal histories. As previously discussed in chapter six, Baldock paid the bill of an anonymous practitioner who provided a comparatively expensive range of physic for an anonymous visitor taken sick in the town.<sup>9</sup> Chipping Barnet paid Ehret the surgeon the very high bill of '£9 for Henry Martin's leg' although the apparently severe problems it was causing him were not described in the overseers' accounts.<sup>10</sup> Hertford All Saints paid for Richard Humberstone to travel to Bath for treatment for an unspecified complaint, the costs of which the parish also paid.<sup>11</sup> Their motivation for doing this is unclear but he may have been related to a vestry member.

These were, however, isolated cases. Overall the Hertfordshire parishes studied could not be described as uniformly generous towards their poor. There may be examples of more generous or very harsh parishes yet to be revealed so it is impossible to definitively classify the county of Hertfordshire at this stage. Steve Hindle and Joan Lane<sup>12</sup> have found that Warwickshire was generous in its provision for the poor but there is no evidence, to date, that Hertfordshire followed this pattern. This may have been because, as previously discussed in chapters four and five, Hertfordshire vestrymen were primarily tenant farmers, craftsmen,

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<sup>7</sup> HALS DP111/8/17 Tring Vestry Minutes 1682-1746.

<sup>8</sup> HALS DP87/8/2 Minutes of Joint Annual Vestry and Poor Law Committee Meetings for United Parishes [in Herts and Cambs]. 3 Sept. 1792.

<sup>9</sup> HALS DP12 18/ 1 Baldock Miscellaneous Papers 1732.

<sup>10</sup> HALS DP15/12/2 Chipping Barnet Overseers' Accounts 1745-85 Bill 28 May 1776.

<sup>11</sup> HALS DP48/8/2 Hertford All Saints Vestry Minutes 1796-1818, 4 Dec. 1752.

<sup>12</sup> J. Lane *A Social History of Medicine: Health, Healing and Disease in England, 1750-1950* (London: Routledge, 2001); S. Hindle 'Civility, Honesty and the Identification of the Deserving Poor in Seventeenth-Century England' in H. French and J. Barry (eds) *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 38-59.

shopkeepers and tradesmen who were used to running their own businesses and took an essentially pragmatic attitude to managing their poor. As shown in chapter four they put a value on their poor and sorted them into the useful and the useless. These were the able-bodied and the impotent as the Old Poor Law described them and those who were too young or too old to maintain themselves. They and their poor-rate payers were apparently not prepared to waste money on the useless.

The debate on power in the Hertfordshire parishes studied needs to be considered in its context. The central government Old Poor Law legislation had been designed to establish senior parish officers, the churchwardens and overseers of the poor, supported when necessary by local justices, as the power-brokers and decision-makers for their poor who would be expected to accept its rulings. This model appears to have been followed in the parishes studied to a greater or lesser extent. The larger and richer parishes such as Hertford All Saints and Royston engaged more with it than the smaller and poorer parishes like Brickenden and Bengoe, as previously discussed in chapter five. Most of the available material including Tudor churchwardens' accounts, vestry minutes and orders originates from the late sixteenth and the eighteenth century with a gap from the early seventeenth century until its end so it is not possible to trace the development of oligarchic rule in Hertfordshire which may have been evolving during this period and would emerge in the documents of the eighteenth century.

The agency of the poor in Hertfordshire parishes is hard to trace before the growth of literacy and the discovery of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century pauper letters, although relatively few of these have survived in Hertfordshire compared to other counties. Thomas Sokoll documented 758 Essex Letters from the out-parish poor in his edited volume.<sup>13</sup> The total number of surviving Hertfordshire letters to date is a fraction of this, possibly less than 200 and the number of letters that have not survived is unknown. Poor and/or sick individuals may have negotiated verbally with overseers if they still lived in the parish. If they lived away

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<sup>13</sup> T. Sokoll *Essex Pauper Letters 1731-1837* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); J. Taylor *Poverty, Migration, and Settlement in the Industrial Revolution: Sojourners' Narratives* (Palo Alto: Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship 1989).



from it they would have been forced to use agency and either communicate directly with officials in writing or find someone willing to do so on their behalf. It would seem possible that the increased mobility and literacy of the poor compelled them to develop new ways of communicating with both the home parish and their host parishes.

Out-parish women threatened by deductions from their relief payments were also obliged to use agency. By the early nineteenth century at least one woman was prepared to travel to her home parish and put her case to the vestry in person.<sup>14</sup> She was successful but others may have failed or the vestry clerk may not have recorded their applications. More recently historians have been revisiting this debate and, as noted by Steven King, 'One of the most powerful developments in recent historiography....has been a rethinking of the matter of pauper agency'.<sup>15</sup> In Hertfordshire this can be seen in letters from the sick and injured poor living away from their home parishes and writing to their overseers to request assistance including the Royston pauper William Cook.<sup>16</sup> Sick people when seemingly at their most powerless living and working away from their family and friends were often forced to use whoever would assist them purely because of their isolated situation.<sup>17</sup> Some out-parish sick appear to have enlisted their landlords<sup>18</sup> as intermediaries between themselves and their home parishes. In Hertfordshire the poor seem to have employed agency or used intermediaries when circumstances such as sudden illness or problems with relief obliged them to do so. Those living and working away from home were frequently in this position and were stimulated into actions which would have been foreign to them in their home parishes.

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<sup>14</sup> HALS DP90/18/1 St Albans Abbey Overseers Correspondence 1740-1815 (27 July 1806).

<sup>15</sup> S. King *Sickness, Medical Welfare and the English Poor 1750-1834* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 7.

<sup>16</sup> HALS DP87/18/2 Royston Miscellaneous Correspondence 1794-1803 (21 March 1801). His was the only out-parish case of a pauper prepared to request relief found in the current research and his widow was subsequently granted relief by Royston.

<sup>17</sup> For a full discussion and many examples of the use of 'agency' by the poor see H. French and J. Barry (eds) *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004) but there is no mention of sickness having been given as a reason for employing it.

<sup>18</sup> HALS DP90/18/1 Overseers Correspondence St Albans: Abbey 1740-1815: Undated letter from Hemel Hempsted.

The final debate considers the nature and composition of relief. The Old Poor Law had traditionally supported the impotent poor, those who could not maintain themselves through sickness or old age. The majority of these recipients were elderly and infirm and were supported as deserving throughout the early modern period. The elderly were given minimal allowances which some widows may have had to work for as previously discussed in chapter eight. Steve Hindle observed that: 'To judge by the parish accounts of Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Essex, late Elizabethan parish relief was relatively small-scale and generally unsystematic, practised largely in market towns and larger rural parishes.'<sup>19</sup>

In the Hertfordshire parishes studied it can be seen that some of the larger parishes appear to have rejected the complications of paying outdoor poor relief by the later seventeenth century, and possibly earlier. These parishes preferred to save on paying individual relief and rents by demonstrating a tendency to warehouse their impotent or homeless poor, both individuals and families, in poor-houses and other communal housing where they could assist one another and be catered for as a group.. This was practised in seventeenth-century Hertford All Saints where Jean Purkis has found that, 'The two 'poor' houses [were given] by the will of Alderman Edward Carde, dated 1631.'<sup>20</sup> In Kimpton the parish townhouse, the successor of the church house was taken over for housing as can be seen from this case brought in 1621 'Petition of Daniel Stamer, carpenter, setting forth that about 17 or 18 February, 1621, a bay of the old Towne House in Kympton, in which there were 4 or 5 householders, fell down, and the rest of the house being rotten and ready to fall the poor occupants were taken forth and harboured with neighbours until they could be provided for.'<sup>21</sup> Plainly the poor were being housed in badly maintained buildings here which would have saved money on the poor-rates.

The church-houses which had previously been used for church-ales and other social events had also been brought into use as accommodation for poor

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<sup>19</sup> Hindle *On the Parish?*, 295.

<sup>20</sup> Jean Purkis *Tales of Hertingfordbury Road* (Hertford: Hertford Oral History Group, 2002), 15.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p. 55 – 19 (Full date not given 1622).

families as here at Northchurch in 1684, 'Ralph Hodson, of the said parish, labourer, is destitute of a house and unable to take one 'for that his wife is distracted,' and the church house being full of poor people, 'viz., five several families...'<sup>22</sup>

In the eighteenth century Hertfordshire had founded at least 60 workhouses as recorded by its responses to the 1777 government survey.<sup>23</sup> It was already anticipating the segregation and isolation of the poor that was to be a feature of the New Poor Law from 1834. Union workhouses were built on a much larger scale and intended to house the poor from several parishes. Some of the early Hertfordshire workhouses were very small holding less than 10 inmates although some were much larger, Ware could accommodate 90 and Rickmansworth 80.

For a time in the eighteenth century many Hertfordshire parishes, probably at least partially stimulated by the 1723 Workhouse Test or 'Knatchbull' Act<sup>24</sup> which enforced registration for all paupers requiring relief,<sup>25</sup> appear to have been encouraged both to establish workhouses<sup>26</sup> and to ensure the compulsory entry of the parishioner poor into them when they applied for assistance and were sufficiently able in health to be moved out of their homes.<sup>27</sup> However Hertfordshire had been establishing workhouses even before the promulgation of this act. In 1720 a workhouse was purpose-built, not rented, in St Albans at a cost of 'about 250l'. Another was built in Hatfield at a cost between £300-400'.<sup>28</sup> Both examples were reported by a correspondent to the pro-workhouse Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) in 1725.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Hertfordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls p. 347-608 (11 July 1684).

<sup>23</sup> Fourteenth Parliament of Great Britain: third session (31 October 1776-6 June 1777) *Report from the Committee appointed to inspect and consider the Returns made by the Overseers of the Poor, in pursuance of Act of last Session: - Together with Abstracts of the said Returns. Reported by Thomas Gilbert Esq. 15th May 1777.*

<sup>24</sup> *An Act for Amending the Laws relating to the Settlement, Imployment and Relief of the Poor* (9 Geo. I c.7) aka Knatchbulls Act 1723.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* Section IV

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *An Account of Several Work-houses for Employing and Maintaining the Poor 1725* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1725).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

Why did Hertfordshire parishes seemingly become so invested and involved in early workhouse-provision? Did the parish oligarchies perceive themselves as over-burdened with excessive numbers of paupers and consequent overly high poor rates? Were they perturbed at the large numbers of transient poor who appeared to be flooding into and through Hertfordshire? Were they seeking to control their poor and create a cheap labour-pool to serve their needs at the lowest possible cost to themselves? Probably they were primarily motivated by any or all of these considerations although different vestrymen would be driven by a variety of perceptions of their own and their communities' needs.

Outdoor relief appears to have been unpopular in some Hertfordshire parishes especially large towns such as Hertford, St Albans and Ware so there is no way of discovering the nature and composition of relief granted to their individual pensioners if any were permitted to remain on outdoor relief. It is possible that some of the small rural parishes who were unable to afford to set-up a workhouse did maintain their poor on outdoor relief if there were only a few of them as at Brickenden. The parishes studied appear to have tended to choose the least expensive option presumably strongly influenced by their ratepayers' opinions and expectations. It would seem that other counties might have sought to free themselves from the chore of outdoor-relief payments and adopted similar policies to Hertfordshire so further county-wide or larger-scale studies might investigate this.

This present study would seem to indicate that Hertfordshire to some extent manipulated its operation of the Old Poor Law to benefit not the poor but the aspiring better sort who could seize the power and resources from it which they had not had the opportunity to possess previously. From the welfare point of view this is a pessimistic survey more aligned with Dorothy Marshall and the Webbs' beliefs that under the operation of the Old Poor Law the poor were being exploited. It would appear that in Hertfordshire they were. The current optimistic findings of more modern historians have been led by Steven King who in his much larger surveys has found that the ideas of entitlement to notably, medical relief, were

spreading amongst the poor in many counties. It is possible that these ideas, or some form of them, did exist in some Hertfordshire parishes not yet studied but that would require further research.

### Future Research

It would be useful to examine another tranche of relatively well-sourced parishes, comparable to those studied here, in order to confirm the distinctive nature of the Hertfordshire Old Poor Law as identified in this thesis, and discover if each parish demonstrated strong similarities in management strategies, as they were apparently inclined to do, or were there exceptions to this? Obviously the problems were the same but would some parishes have been more innovative in their practices?

Also it would be valuable to have more understanding of the workings of the power relationships within the parishes using a broadly prosopographical approach. This was begun for Hertford All Saints trying to discover why some individuals appear to have benefitted appreciably more than others. Similar studies could be undertaken for other well-established towns including St Albans; Ware; Royston; Cheshunt and Chipping Barnet to try to uncover the social dynamics within them and its effects on their poor and the workings of the poor law.

It could also be informative to investigate whether there was some kind of urban/rural 'divide'; if a different 'brand' of poor law operated in the small, rural parishes or if parishioner poor were treated any differently in a small community where they and their reputations were well-known and where the poor probably greatly out-numbered the local better sort.

It might prove rewarding to attempt to trace how the fear of disorder appeared and evolved in Hertfordshire and possible reasons for this. Why does central government appear to have manipulated Hertfordshire fears about the growth of bastardy and vagrancy within the county? Considering the supposed links between criminality and vagrancy in Hertfordshire it should be possible to trace individual Hertfordshire indicted offenders back to their supposed parishes and see

if in fact they appear in these parish registers since Hertfordshire has very full holdings of these for many parishes.

It would also be informative to investigate one particular aspect of disorder by examining church court records to see how they handled moral and social problem individuals such as bastard-bearers and whether they were less heavy-handed and punishment-oriented than the secular quarter sessions which replaced them. The important role of religion within some parishes could be usefully examined as has been done in Terling, Essex.<sup>30</sup>

From this range of examples requiring further research it can be readily appreciated that a great deal of work remains to be done if we are to even begin to understand the workings of the Old Poor Law in Hertfordshire. This limited study has only begun to explore a few salient issues. The system was embedded in its society and this was, like all societies, multi-faceted. It is to be hoped that in future other researchers will examine different counties in detail so that more becomes known about this topic and more comparisons can be made between counties than is at present possible. The Old Poor Law needs to be understood, as it worked, in individual parishes because it was essentially a parochial system and it was individuals, their expectations, aspirations and personalities that primarily shaped it in Hertfordshire.

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<sup>30</sup> Keith Wrightson and David Levine (eds) *Poverty and Piety in an English Village Terling 1525-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

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<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/edw-eliz/1547-80>

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/edw-eliz/1595-7>

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