

# **Continuity or Change? Poor Relief in Wales, c.1770-1901.**

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

Cardiff University, 2023

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## **Abstract**

It will be demonstrated here that the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act had much more of an impact in Wales than other historians have allowed. For instance, the administrative framework of the New Poor Law was implemented relatively quickly in Wales. The scale of resistance to the workhouse system in Wales has also been grossly over-exaggerated. Furthermore, although many Old Poor Law policies initially continued to be practiced in Wales under the New Poor Law, by the end of the nineteenth century, many of these practices had been phased out or otherwise stopped. It will also be demonstrated here that poor relief was not as generous, nor the Welsh boards of guardians as humane as other historians have claimed.

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# Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Martin Wright and Professor Paul O’Leary for all of their help and support over the past four and a half years. Your advice and input throughout this process has been invaluable. You have both encouraged me to really push myself and to realise my full potential and for this I will be eternally grateful.

I would also like to thank Dr Andy Croll who was my supervisor at undergraduate level and who sparked an interest in me in the subject of the New Poor Law in Wales during one of his many brilliant lectures. This thesis grew largely from that little spark. Andy also very kindly provided me with some advice and secondary reading during the formation of my master’s thesis (which also looked at the New Poor Law in Wales and served as a pilot study for this thesis).

This PhD was fully-funded by the South, West and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership (SWWDTP). I would therefore like to thank everybody involved in the organisation for allowing me to fulfil my dream of completing a PhD. Without this funding none of this would have been possible.

I would also like to thank all of the staff at the West Glamorgan archives and the Pembrokeshire Record Office for all of the help and assistance that they provided me with during my numerous visits to these wonderful organisations.

Finally, I would like to thank my beautiful fiancée Aiesha Davis and our two wonderful children Evenny and Darby for all of their encouragement and unwavering support during the last three years. I could not have done this without you all. I must also thank our pet dogs (Meeka and Poppy) for dragging me away from my desk every morning for our daily walks. These daily excursions were often the only time I left the house (particularly during the lockdowns) and ensured that I stayed fit and healthy (mentally and physically) during the four and a half years that it has taken to complete this thesis.

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## **Abbreviations**

COS	Charity Organisation Society
JP	Justice of the Peace
LGB	Local Government Board
PLB	Poor Law Board
PLC	Poor Law Commission
PP	Parliamentary Papers
PRO	Pembrokeshire Record Office
WGA	West Glamorgan Archives

# Introduction

The main aim of this thesis is to determine the impact that the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act had in Wales. In a recent PhD thesis Nicola Blacklaws lamented that Wales has been ‘the most neglected area in the historiography of the New Poor Law’.<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, Steven King and John Stewart have claimed that the New Poor Law in Wales is ‘under-researched and full of potential’.<sup>2</sup> By focusing on the implementation and administration of the New Poor Law in Wales, this thesis will fill in some of the gaps in the historiography. However, the work here also has much wider significance. Firstly, the thesis addresses the main debates surrounding the historiography of the New Poor Law, but it does so a much-needed Welsh perspective. The work here will also serve as a revisionist account of the New Poor Law in Wales, challenging the work of other historians about the nature of poor relief in Wales both before and after 1834.

As a starting point, it is useful to review the main historiographical debates and to explain why a study of the New Poor Law in Wales is sorely needed. Perhaps the main bone of contention amongst historians of the New Poor Law has centred around the degree to which relief policies in England and Wales changed after 1834; this is sometimes referred to as the ‘change vs continuity’ debate. Several historians have argued that the New Poor Law was a major turning point in the history of poor relief. For example, the Webbs argued that the 1834 act imposed a new set of ‘principles’ on the poor law system, such as the use of a workhouse test and the ‘absolute refusal of outdoor relief’ to all able-bodied paupers.<sup>3</sup> Apfel and Dunkley, who focused on the administration of the New Poor Law in Bedfordshire,

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<sup>1</sup> Nicola Blacklaws, ‘The Twentieth Century Poor Law in the Midlands and Wales c.1900-1930’, PhD Thesis, University of Leicester, 2019, pp.1-358, [here p.27].

<sup>2</sup> Steven King and John Stewart, ‘The History of the Poor Law in Wales: Under Researched, Full of Potential’, *Archives*, 25-26, (2000/2001), pp.134-148.

<sup>3</sup> Sydney and Beatrice Webb, *English Poor Law History, Part II: The Last Hundred Years*, (Edinburgh, 1929), pp.1 and 88 and 510. The Webbs also stated that the 1834 act instituted a ‘dogmatically uniform direction to English poor law policy’. The Hammonds also described 1834 as ‘one of the landmarks of English history’, J.L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer*, vol:ii, (London, 1911), p.201.



also argued that poor relief polices, in this part of England at least, altered drastically after 1834.<sup>4</sup>

However, other historians have argued that, in practice, relatively little changed after 1834. For example, in his study of the workings of the New Poor Law in Lancashire, Eric Midwinter argued that 'stripped of novel titles and terminology, the humdrum workings of the Old and New Poor Laws were fairly similar'.<sup>5</sup> Anne Digby has also argued that, in the rural south-east of England, Old Poor Law practices continued largely unaltered after 1834. Digby concluded that 'the continuities, (before and after 1834), were far more striking than the differences.'<sup>6</sup> Ashforth and Rose have made similar claims in their work.<sup>7</sup>

In his seminal 1981 work, *From Pauperism to Poverty*, Karel Williams argued that proponents of the 'continuation theory', such as Digby, Ashforth and Rose, had completely misinterpreted the aims of the 1834 act. Williams claimed that the main aim of the Commissioners of the 1832-34 Report, upon which the legislation of the 1834 act had been based, had been to abolish outdoor relief for a particular category of paupers only- able-bodied men.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Williams demonstrated that, at the national level, the number of able-bodied men claiming poor relief in England and Wales reduced significantly under the New Poor Law.<sup>9</sup> Williams heralded the decrease in the number of able-bodied men as a remarkable 'achievement' for the Poor Law Commissioners and argued that 1834 was a watershed moment.<sup>10</sup>

However, in a recent PhD thesis, Lewis Darwen demonstrated that, in Lancashire, a relatively large number of able-bodied men continued to be relieved outdoors under the

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<sup>4</sup> W. Apfel and P. Dunkley, 'English Rural Society and the New Poor Law in Bedfordshire, 1834-47', *Social History*, 10, (1985), pp.37-68; They produced figures to show that in Bedfordshire, both poor relief expenditure and the number of able-bodied men in receipt of outdoor relief decreased markedly under the New Poor Law; Samantha Williams has made similar claims about the impact of the New Poor Law in Bedfordshire. See, Samantha Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life Cycle under the English Poor Law, 1760-1834*, (2011), p.68.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Midwinter, *Social Administration in Lancashire, 1830-1860: Poor Law, Public Health and Police* (Manchester, 1969), p.110.

<sup>6</sup> Anne Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law', in Derek Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century*, (London, 1976), pp.149-170 [here p.170].

<sup>7</sup> David Ashforth 'The Urban Poor Law', in Derek Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century*, (London, 1976), pp.128-148; and Michael. E. Rose 'The Allowance System under the New Poor Law', *The Economic History Review*, vol.19, Issue.3, (December, 1966), pp.607-620.

<sup>8</sup> Karel Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty*, (London, 1981), pp.53-56.

<sup>9</sup> Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty*, p.51.

<sup>10</sup> Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty*, p.75.

New Poor Law. For instance, Darwen produced figures which showed that in the mid-1840s a staggering 40% of all of the able-bodied men receiving outdoor relief in England and Wales were relieved in Lancashire.<sup>11</sup> In a similar vein, Steven King has demonstrated that, although poor relief expenditure at the national level decreased from £6,310,000 in 1834 to £4,045,000 in 1837, a 'disproportionately' large amount of this reduction was 'generated by southern (English) rural communities'.<sup>12</sup> These findings suggest that, even in the case of able-bodied men, there were significant variations in the administration of the New Poor Law.

Historians have disagreed widely about where the boundaries of these differences lay. For instance, Steven King has proposed that there were distinct 'welfare regions' in England; King cited a broad north-south divide.<sup>13</sup> More recently, David Green has argued that London should be considered as a distinct welfare region in its own right.<sup>14</sup> Nicola Blacklaws has also made the case for a 'Midlands personality' within the administration of the New Poor Law.<sup>15</sup> Other historians, such as Steve Hindle and Samantha Williams, have argued that the inter-regional or inter-Union differences were just as marked as the differences between the regions.<sup>16</sup> However, it is now generally accepted that in England at least, variation in the administration of the New Poor Law was the norm.

Another one of the main debates within the historiography of the New Poor Law revolves around the question of how cruel the new system of poor relief was. Some historians have argued that the New Poor Law was inherently cruel and that the 1834 act did little to alleviate the plight of the poor. For example, the Webbs argued that the new

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<sup>11</sup> Lewis Darwen 'Implementing and Administering the New Poor Law in the Industrial North: A Case Study of Preston Union in Regional Context, 1837-1861', *PHD thesis*, Nottingham Trent University, (August, 2015), pp.1-259, [here p.191].

<sup>12</sup> Steven King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850, A Regional Perspective*, (Manchester, 2000), p.229.

<sup>13</sup> King, *Poverty and Welfare in England*, pp. 248-249 and p.267. King also added the caveat that further research could reveal the existence of more 'welfare regions' in England.

<sup>14</sup> David Green, *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790-1870*, (London, 2010), p.194. Green demonstrated that there were typically much higher levels of indoor relief in London workhouses due to the regions' unique circumstances (including the proximity between the Unions).

<sup>15</sup> Nicola Blacklaws, 'The Twentieth Century Poor Law in the Midlands and Wales', pp.1-358.

<sup>16</sup> Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c.1550-1750* (Oxford, 2009), p.283. Hindle argued that 'the picture of a regionally differentiated poor law administration is significantly overdrawn' and that 'variations within regions were at least, if not more significant than those between them'. See also the work of Samantha Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law*, pp.164-165. Williams argued that in Bedfordshire, 'the poor law operated differently by region and from parish to parish.'

Union workhouses were ‘shocking to every principle of reason and every feeling of humanity’.<sup>17</sup> The Webbs also stated that the 1834 act, ‘notwithstanding its one-hundred and ten long and verbose sections, contained nothing that can be called a scheme for the relief of destitution, or even any explicit plan of reforms’.<sup>18</sup> In a similar vein, Anne Crowther has argued that, although the physical conditions inside the workhouse were often better than the squalid conditions facing the labouring poor in their own homes, pauper inmates ‘lost all independence’ upon entering the workhouse and were subject to strict workhouse regimes and ‘mean-spirited’ regulations, such as the separation of families.<sup>19</sup> For Crowther, the ‘real horror’ of the workhouse was its ‘psychological impact’.<sup>20</sup>

However, other historians have countered that the New Poor Law was not as cruel as has often been claimed. For example, David Roberts claimed that many of the accusations of cruelty that had been levelled against the New Poor Law had been ‘fabricated, unproven or greatly exaggerated’.<sup>21</sup> Roberts also argued that even when a ‘scandal’ had occurred, it was not due to an inherent cruelty within the New Poor Law system. He argued that the central poor law authorities had ‘worked hard’ to prevent such occurrences, and that any atrocities that were committed were in contravention to the new system.<sup>22</sup> More recently, Lesley Hulonce has also pointed out that, although the conditions inside some of the new Union workhouses were dire, the vast majority of paupers in England and Wales were relieved outdoors and never saw the inside of these establishments.<sup>23</sup> Nadja Durbach has even argued that the roast-beef dinner supplied to

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<sup>17</sup> The Webbs, *English Poor Law History, Part II*, p.138; In a similar vein, Karl Polanyi described the new Union workhouses as ‘places of horror’, in Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, (New York, 1944), p.101; G.M. Trevelyan also described the New Poor Law system as being ‘ruthless and doctrinaire’, in G. M. Trevelyan, *History of England*, (London, 1926), p.641.

<sup>18</sup> The Webbs, *English Poor Law History Part II*, p.100.

<sup>19</sup> Anne Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834-1929, The History of an English Social Institution*, (Cambridge, 1981), pp.52-53; See also the work of Ursula Henriques, ‘How Cruel was the New Poor Law’, *The Historical Journal*, vol.II, no.2, (1968), pp.365-371, [here pp.365-366].

<sup>20</sup> Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, p.270. Crowther stated that ‘for nearly a century it threatened the working class as the penalty for failure, whatever the cause of failure had been’.

<sup>21</sup> David Roberts, ‘How Cruel was the Victorian Poor Law?’ *The Historical Journal*, 6(1), (1963), pp. 97-107, [here pp.100-102]; Karel Williams has also argued that the workhouses provided a vital safety net for able-bodied paupers, Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty*.

<sup>22</sup> Roberts, ‘How Cruel was the Victorian Poor Law?’, p.103.

<sup>23</sup> Lesley Hulonce, *Pauper Children and Poor Law Childhoods in England and Wales, 1834-1910*, (Kindle, 2016), see Chapter 4. Hulonce stated that ‘apart from those Unions in London, where outdoor relief was less common until the twentieth century, the numbers of paupers receiving relief in their own homes outnumbered those in workhouses by a considerable margin’.

paupers at Christmas can be seen as evidence that the New Poor Law was not as cruel as some historians have claimed.<sup>24</sup>

Once again, it is now generally agreed that there were considerable local or regional variations in the manner in which paupers were treated under the New Poor Law, at least in England. For example, King has argued that in England, poor relief, both before and after 1834, was more paternalistic and wide-ranging in the south of England than it was in the north.<sup>25</sup> Charlotte Newman has also suggested that there was a great deal of variation in the treatment received by paupers under the New Poor Law. Newman argued that different workhouses had different facilities and that pauper inmates therefore had 'varying experiences of segregation, surveillance and specialized treatment'.<sup>26</sup>

Several historians have also pointed out that paupers were not inactive agents in the relief process and that there was a degree of 'pauper agency'. For example, Lynn Hollen Lees claimed that the application process was a 'bargain' between paupers and poor law officials, and that paupers often attempted to portray themselves in the best possible light in order to achieve the maximum amount of relief possible.<sup>27</sup> There is even evidence that some paupers actively resisted or retaliated against the new system of relief. For example, David Green has shown that some workhouse inmates in London refused to carry out their daily duties or tasks of labour and some were even punished for destroying workhouse property.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, some historians, such as Alannah Tomkins and Steven King, have pointed out that poor relief was only one element in a paupers' wider 'Economy of

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<sup>24</sup> Nadja Durbach, 'Roast Beef, The New Poor Law and the British Nation, 1834-63', *Journal of British studies*, 52, (October, 2013), pp.963-989, [here p.970]. Durbach claimed that by allowing pauper inmates this 'culturally significant meal', the poor law authorities, both central and local, were demonstrating that they still considered the poor to be a fundamental part of British society.

<sup>25</sup> King, *Poverty and Welfare in England*, p.256-257.

<sup>26</sup> Charlotte Newman, 'To Punish or Protect: The New Poor Law and the English workhouse', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 18, (1 March, 2014), pp.122-145, [here p.130]

<sup>27</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers, The English Poor Law and the People, 1700-1948*, (Cambridge, 1998), p.22; Likewise, in her work, Elizabeth Hurren demonstrated that paupers could also contest decisions made by the local poor law authorities, or even make complaints about acts of negligence, in 'World Without Welfare, Pauper Perspectives on Medical Care under the Late-Victorian Poor Law, 1870-1900', in Peter Jones and Steven King (eds.), *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws*, (Cambridge, 2015), pp.292-320.

<sup>28</sup> David Green, 'Pauper Protests: Power and Resistance in Early Nineteenth Century London Workhouses', *Social History*, vol.31, no.2, (May, 2006), pp.137-159.

Makeshifts', and that considerations of the nature of poor relief have to take into account the other streams of income that were available to the pauper applicant.<sup>29</sup>

The final major debate within the historiography of the New Poor Law concerns the issue of whether or not the power and influence of the landed elites over the poor relief system in England and Wales increased or decreased after 1834. Brundage has argued that in Northamptonshire, the passage of the 1834 strengthened the position of the landed elites. Brundage pointed out that, in Northamptonshire at least, the ex-officio members were usually appointed as the Chairmen of the board of guardians, which he argued was a pivotal position.<sup>30</sup> He also argued that the ex-officio guardians, who were predominantly drawn from the landed elites, were able to exert control over the elected guardians, who were predominantly tenant farmers, as they (the elected guardians) were bound by 'economic ties and the pervasive deference of the countryside'.<sup>31</sup> Brundage maintained that 1834 had served to strengthen the position of the landed elites by giving the ex-officio guardians 'direct control' over relief matters, whereas previously, under the Old Poor Law, in their role as magistrates, they had only possessed an indirect influence.<sup>32</sup>

However, Peter Dunkley has argued that although the landed elites, as ex-officio guardians, were able to take control of the boards of guardians in Northamptonshire, this may not have been the case in other areas, particularly in areas where the pool of resident gentry was much smaller.<sup>33</sup> Dunkley pointed out that Northamptonshire had an unusually large pool of peers on which the ex-officio element could potentially be drawn from that was simply not replicated in other areas. He maintained that in many parts of England the 1834 act severely weakened the position of the landed elites, as for the first time, they (the

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<sup>29</sup> Alannah Tomkins, and Steven King, 'Introduction', in Alannah Tomkins and Steven King (eds.), *The Poor in England, 1700-1850*, (Manchester, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Anthony Brundage, 'The Landed Interest and the New Poor Law: A Reappraisal of the Revolution in Government', *The English Historical Review*, vol.87, no.342, (January, 1972), pp.27-48, [here p.45].

<sup>31</sup> Brundage, 'The Landed Interest and the New Poor Law: A Reappraisal', p.29.

<sup>32</sup> Brundage, 'The Landed Interest and the New Poor Law: A Reappraisal', p.29. Peter Mandler reached a similar conclusion, in 'The Making of the New Poor Law Redivivus' *Past and Present*, no.17, (November, 1987), pp.131-157, [here pp.132-133]. He stated that the New Poor Law was 'a crucial marker in the remaking of the country gentry-their coming of age as the arbiters of public affairs'. Mandler also felt that 1834 had strengthened the position of the landed elite over poor law administration as from 1834 a 'property-based poor law was imposed on rural society'.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Dunkley, 'The Landed Interest and the New Poor Law: A Critical Note', *The English Historical Review*, vol.88, no.349, (October, 1973), pp.836-841, [here p.840].

landed elites) were forced to 'share with others of lesser rank what had previously been their role as ultimate arbiters in local relief matters'.<sup>34</sup>

More recently, several historians have stressed the importance of 'the power of individual personality' within the administration of the New Poor Law. For example, Karen Rothery has demonstrated that in Hertfordshire, the boards of guardians were often dominated by a handful of individuals only.<sup>35</sup> Rothery argued that these individuals were able to significantly shape poor relief policy in their local areas.<sup>36</sup> Rothery also demonstrated that in Hertfordshire at least, the individuals that dominated the Boards of Guardians were drawn predominantly from the middle classes, rather than the upper classes as envisaged by the Poor Law Commissioners.<sup>37</sup> This suggests that the persuasive power of individuals was more important than their social background or the overall composition of the Boards of Guardians. However, far more work that focuses on the guardians themselves is needed in order to test this hypothesis.

Although, as demonstrated above, there has been much debate about the impact of the New Poor Law, there exists a glaring gap in the historiography; Wales has been largely ignored. The vast majority of national surveys of the New Poor Law have focused overwhelmingly on experiences in England. For instance, despite acknowledging that opposition to the New Poor Law in Wales was 'more important' than elsewhere, Nicholas Edsall devoted only a few pages of his book, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement*, to Wales, focusing almost entirely on the opposition to the New Poor Law in the north of England.<sup>38</sup> Even poor law historians with a proud Welsh heritage, such as Keith Snell, have largely

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<sup>34</sup> Peter Dunkley, 'The Landed Interest and the New Poor Law: A Critical Note', p.838.

<sup>35</sup> Karen Rothery, 'Who do they think they are? An Analysis of the Board of Guardians in Hertfordshire', *Local Population Studies*, vol.99, Issue.1, (2017), pp.20-30; and Rothery, 'The Power of Personality in the Operation of the New Poor Law', *Genealogy*, 4, 1, (2020), pp.1-11. See also the work of Julie Light, 'Mere seekers of Fame? Personalities, Power and Politics in the Small Town: Pontypool and Bridgend, c.1860-1895', *Urban History*, vol.32, no.1, (May, 2005), pp.88-99.

<sup>36</sup> Karen Rothery, 'The Power of Personality in the Operation of the New Poor Law'; See also Karen Rothery, 'Who do they think they are? An Analysis of the Board of Guardians in Hertfordshire'.

<sup>37</sup> Rothery, 'Who do they think they are? An Analysis of the Board of Guardians in Hertfordshire', pp.20-30.

<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement, 1834-44* (London, 1971), p.128; Wales is also largely ignored in the national surveys of Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930*, (Basingstoke, 2002); and David Englander, *Poverty and poor law reform in nineteenth century Britain, 1834-1914*, (Harlow, 1998).

steered clear of entering into rigorous discussions of the nature of the New Poor Law in Wales.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, although there have been numerous localised studies of the New Poor Law in Wales (see Bibliography), relatively few of these accounts have entered into the main historiographical debates. One notable exception to this is the recent work of Francesca Richardson, who explored the impact of the New Poor Law in Nantconwy. Richardson argued that the 1834 act had a significant impact on poor relief policies, at least in this part of Wales.<sup>40</sup> However, the findings here were not compared to other parts of Wales and it is unclear if the situation in Nantconwy is representative of Wales more generally.

The dearth of rigorous academic studies of the New Poor Law in Wales, particularly ones that enter into the main historiographical debates, is perhaps surprising given that the subject appears to offer such fertile ground. The social and cultural differences between Wales and England during the nineteenth century are well established. For example, Kenneth Morgan and Matthew Cragoe have both demonstrated the different political traditions between these two countries throughout this period.<sup>41</sup> Even in the provision of welfare, significant differences between Wales and England have long been acknowledged. It has been over fifteen years since Snell noted the higher levels of outdoor relief typically found in Welsh Unions.<sup>42</sup>

Many Welsh historians, when they have mentioned the subject of the New Poor Law at all, have subsumed the topic under another heading. For example, David Williams mentions the New Poor Law, albeit fleetingly, in his work on the Rebecca Riots.<sup>43</sup> However, although Williams found clear evidence of opposition to the New Poor Law in west-Wales at least, he saw grievances against the 1834 act as being merely part of a

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<sup>39</sup> Keith Snell, *Parish and Belonging*. Snell devoted only 4 pages of his book to the topic of the New Poor Law in Wales

<sup>40</sup> Francesca Richardson, 'Rural change in North-Wales during the period of the Industrial Revolution: Livelihoods, Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy, 1750-1860', Thesis submitted for the degree of DPhil, Michaelmas term, 2015, pp.1-364.

<sup>41</sup> Kenneth.O. Morgan, *Wales in British politics, 1868-1922*, (Cardiff, 1963); Matthew Cragoe, *Culture, Politics, and National Identity in Wales, 1832-1886*, (Oxford, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.256.

<sup>43</sup> David Williams, *The Rebecca Riots*, (Cardiff, 1955).

much larger protest movement.<sup>44</sup> Several historians, such as Katrina Navickas and Neil Evans, have pointed out that Welsh history has remained largely impervious to 'postmodernism', and that Welsh historians have remained wedded to a type of social history that focuses on protest movements, the emergence of class consciousness or the creation of a new national identity.<sup>45</sup> This has largely skewed the view of Welsh historians, with many focusing only on the opposition to the New Poor Law, and has prevented many from seeing the New Poor Law as a subject that needs to be studied in its own right.

This thesis enters into the main historiographical debates discussed above, but it does so from a new geographical and cultural perspective. Firstly, an assessment will be made about the impact the 1834 act had on existing relief policies in Wales. Secondly, this thesis will establish how cruel the New Poor Law was in Wales. Finally, this thesis will explore the question of who controlled the administration of the New Poor Law in Wales. In order to accomplish these aims, this thesis compares the implementation and administration of the New Poor Law in six Welsh Unions. The six Unions under investigation here are: Swansea, Pembroke, Abergavenny, Newtown and Llanidloes, Holywell, and Pwllheli. There are several reasons why these particular Unions were chosen for this study. Firstly, each Union is located in a different 'region' of Wales. Other historians have demonstrated that in terms of the size of the population, the strength of the Welsh-language, the level of industrialisation, the quality of the transport links etc Wales, in the nineteenth century consisted of several distinct 'regions'.<sup>46</sup> The Pembroke Union was

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<sup>44</sup> Williams, *The Rebecca Riots*, p.136; Likewise, Ieuan G. Jones saw protests against the New Poor Law in Wales as part of the social upheaval involved in the formation of class consciousness, *Explorations and Explanations: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales*, (Llandysul, 1981). Even more recent attempts at investigating the Rebecca Riots from new perspectives have failed to identify the need to study the New Poor Law in Wales as a separate topic. For example, Rhian E. Jones adopted a 'cultural' approach in her investigations of the riots, focusing on the meanings of the symbols used in the movement. However, Jones also dismissed protests against the New Poor Law as being merely one aspect behind the uprisings, *Petticoat Heroes, Gender, Culture and Popular Protest in the Rebecca Riots*, (Cardiff, 2015).

<sup>45</sup> Katrina Navickas, 'What Happened to Class? New Histories of Labour and Collective Action in Britain', *Social History*, vol.36, no.2, (May, 2011), pp.192-204, [here pp.194-197]; Neil Evans, 'Writing the Social History of Modern Wales: Approaches, Achievements and Problems', *Social History*, vol.17, no.3, (October, 1992), pp.479-492. See also Louise Miskell, 'Introduction, Industrial Wales: Historical Transactions and Approaches', in Louise Miskell (ed), *New Perspectives in Welsh Industrial History*, (Cardiff, 2020), pp.1-23.

<sup>46</sup> For example see the work of Geraint Jenkins on the position of the Welsh-language in different areas of Wales, *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains*; Likewise, Steven King has stated that 'topographically Wales can be divided up into 4 or 5 basic sub-regions, while in terms of transport infrastructure we might divide the country into 6 areas varying over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', 'The History of the Poor Law in Wales', p.140; In a similar vein, Philip Jenkins posited that Wales in the nineteenth century was 'an



chosen to represent the more rural south-west of the country. Unlike much of Wales, this region is relatively low-lying, which made it more suitable for arable rather than pastoral farming.<sup>47</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, there was some industrial activity in the area.<sup>48</sup> However, in comparison to other parts of Wales, it remained largely agricultural in nature. Further evidence that south-west Wales should be considered a distinct region in its own right can be seen in the fact that the Rebecca Riots which blighted Wales in the period 1839-1843 were largely confined to this part of the country. The Swansea Union was chosen to represent the more industrial south-east of Wales. Sitting on the western edge of the south-Wales coalfield, the Swansea Union experienced relatively high levels of industrialisation during the nineteenth century, not only benefiting from the region's rich coal deposits, but becoming one of the world's largest producers and exporters of tin and copper.<sup>49</sup> The Abergavenny Union was chosen as it sits in the border county of Monmouth, which by the end of the nineteenth century was the most Anglicised part of Wales. Other historians have pointed out that any diffusion of ideas and practices between two countries would most likely start at the border regions, making Abergavenny an interesting case study. The region was also heavily industrialised by the end of the nineteenth century, although it was the iron industry that predominated here.<sup>50</sup> The problems experienced in the iron industry in Wales by the end of the nineteenth century are well documented. It will be interesting to see what impact the decline of the iron industry in this part of Wales had on the administration of the New Poor Law. The Newtown and Llanidloes Union in mid-Wales was also chosen, at least in part, due to its proximity to the English border. Steven King has argued that under the Old Poor Law relief practices began to spread into Wales through this part of the country, before heading further west.<sup>51</sup> It will be interesting to see if

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agglomeration of different societies and regions with no urban centre to unite disparate areas', *A History of Modern Wales*, pp.3-4.

<sup>47</sup> Philip Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales, 1536-1990*, (London, 1992), pp.21-23; Roger Turvey, *Pembrokeshire, The Concise History*, (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2007).

<sup>48</sup> George Edwards, *The Coal Industry in Pembrokeshire*, (Field Studies Council, 1963).

<sup>49</sup> See Derek Draisey, *Swansea and Gower in Victorian and Edwardian Times, Volume One*, (Swansea, 2011); Bernard Lewis, *Swansea and the Workhouse, the Poor Law in nineteenth century Swansea*, (West Glamorgan Archives, 2003); John Davies, *A History of Modern Wales*, (London, 1990), pp.319-343; Chris Evans, 'Welsh Copper: What, When and Where?', in Louise Miskell (ed), *New Perspectives in Welsh Industrial History*, (Cardiff, 2020), pp.25-44.

<sup>50</sup> Arthur Clark, *The Story of Monmouthshire, Volume II*, (Gwent, 1979); Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales*, pp.219-223.

<sup>51</sup> King and Stewart, 'The History of the Poor Law in Wales'.

any diffusion of ideas began in this part of Wales under the New Poor Law. The region was also the home of the Welsh woollen industry for much of the nineteenth century; it will be interesting to see what impact the decline of this industry had on the administration of the New Poor Law.<sup>52</sup> However, like the south-west of the Wales, Newtown and Llanidloes also remained largely agricultural throughout the nineteenth century, although due to the topography of the region, with its mountains and hills, pastoral rather than arable farming dominated here.<sup>53</sup> The Holywell Union was chosen to represent the more industrial part of north-east Wales. Although the level of industrialisation in this part of the country never matched that experienced in the south-east coalfield region, numerous industrial pursuits, including coal and lead mines and zinc and copper works, sprang up in this part of Wales during the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>54</sup> Many people from this part of Wales also migrated across the border to England during the nineteenth century, particularly to Liverpool, with many retaining familial links in the area, making it another interesting case study where ideas and practices from across the border may have been exchanged. The Pwllheli Union was chosen to represent the more rural north-west of Wales. Although there was some industrial activity in the region during the nineteenth century (most notably the nearby slate industry) this part of Wales remained largely agricultural in nature and remained a bastion of the Welsh language.<sup>55</sup> Like Newtown and Llanidloes the topography of the Union meant that pastoral farming dominated here, although, being situated along the north-Wales coastline, the inhabitants in the Union also depended to a considerable extent on the fishing industry, which by the end of the nineteenth century, was in severe decline. Unions with seaside/port towns at the centre have been largely ignored in the historiography of the New Poor Law, which also makes the Pwllheli Union an interesting case study. The geographical spread of these Unions can be seen more clearly in Figure One below, which is a map of all of the Poor Law Unions in Wales.

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<sup>52</sup> Geraint Jenkins, *The Welsh Woollen Industry*, (Cardiff, 1969).

<sup>53</sup> Blacklaws, 'The Twentieth Century Poor Law in the Midlands and Wales', pp.233-240.

<sup>54</sup> Rowland Tenant, *A History of Holywell and Greenfield*, (Wrexham, 2007), Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales*, pp.232-233; John Davies, *A History of Modern Wales*, (London, 1990), Chapter 7.

<sup>55</sup> D.G. Lloyd Hughes, *Pwllheli, An Old Welsh town and its History*, (Cardiff, 1999); A. H. Dodd, *A History of Caernarvonshire, 1284-1900*, (Wrexham, 1968).

**Figure One: Map of all the Poor Law Unions in Wales.**



Source: <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/map/wales.shtml>.

Here, each Union is taken to be representative of their larger 'region'. A conscious effort has been made to include some of the more industrialised Unions in Wales, as there has been a tendency in Welsh studies of the New Poor Law to focus on rural areas.<sup>56</sup> The differences in the socio-economic backgrounds between the six Unions and the impact that this had on the administration of poor relief will be explored throughout this thesis. Another reason for choosing these six Unions in particular concerns the availability of the source material. The selected Unions have relatively fuller sets of poor law records (both archival

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<sup>56</sup> See the work of Keith Parker, 'Radnorshire and the New Poor Law to Circa 1850', *Radnorshire Society Transactions*, vol.74, (1 January, 2004), pp.169-198; Francesca Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy'; and David Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, (Cardiff, 2000).

and online material) than many other Unions in Wales.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, to some extent the choices were governed by the availability of the source material. Comparing the implementation and administration of the New Poor Law in Wales will also allow us to offer an opinion as to whether or not Wales should be considered as a distinct welfare region in its own right, or if, as in England, there were local or regional variations within Wales.

Although the main aim of this thesis is to determine the impact of the New Poor Law in Wales, the work here also has wider implications. Firstly, this thesis will locate this area of Welsh history into a much larger British and European framework. It will achieve this by comparing the administration of the New Poor Law in Wales with the administration of poor relief in England; some comparison will also be made to countries across Europe. Over the last thirty years or so there has been an attempt to compare the history of Wales with the history of other parts of Europe and beyond.<sup>58</sup> This thesis, by comparing findings from Wales to findings in England and Europe will add to the growing body of work that seeks to locate Welsh history into a much broader context.

Secondly, by focusing on the period before the emergence of the 'welfare state,' this thesis will also enter into ongoing contemporary discussions about the role of local and national governments and the appropriate level of state intervention in the lives of its citizens. Did the New Poor Law in Wales provide enough of a safety net for paupers? If so, why was it eventually replaced? What lessons can be learned about the treatment of the most vulnerable members of society? How far have conceptualisations of poverty changed since the nineteenth century? These questions will be explored throughout.

Unlike many of the earlier poor law studies, particularly Welsh ones, this thesis makes considerable use of quantitative evidence, particularly the official poor law statistics. Many of the earlier poor law historians questioned the usefulness and reliability of these figures.<sup>59</sup> For example, The Webbs lamented that there was no definitive definition of some

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<sup>57</sup> For example, the records available for some of the Unions in mid-Wales (such as Rhayader) are wholly insufficient.

<sup>58</sup> For example, see the work of Louise Miskell, 'From Margam to Mauritania: The Steel Company of Wales and the Globalisation of iron ore supplies, 1952-1960', pp.155-179; and Trevor Boyns, 'Enumerating the Welsh-French coal trade, c.1833-1913: Opening Pandora's Box, pp.47-73, in Louise Miskell (ed), *New Perspectives on Welsh Industrial History*, (Cardiff, 2020).

<sup>59</sup> The Webbs stated that 'from the standpoint of the modern statistician the statistics of English pauperism are unsatisfactory and leave many questions unanswered', *English Poor Law History (Part Two)*, p.1036; Likewise,

of the terms used to categorize the poor, such as 'able-bodied' and 'non-able-bodied', and that local administrators may have varied in how they listed their paupers.<sup>60</sup> The Webbs also criticized the way the paupers were enumerated under the New Poor Law. For example, they pointed out that, up until 1849, the official returns recorded the number of paupers receiving relief over a period of time, rather than the number receiving relief at any one time. This meant that up until 1849, paupers and their families were often double counted if they received relief more than once in this period, which inflated the figures.<sup>61</sup>

However, other historians have argued that, although there are some shortcomings with the official statistics, if used correctly, they are a vital source of information. For example, Karel Williams, who made significant use of these sources in his own work, argued that 'the official statistics are a key resource for the writing of poor law history' and that, at the national level at least, any inaccuracies such as those pointed out by the Webbs were relatively minor.<sup>62</sup> Mary Mackinnon went a step further and devoted an entire article to defending the usefulness and reliability of the poor law statistics. Mackinnon argued that the figures recorded by the central authorities were relatively accurate when compared to other sources.<sup>63</sup> Mackinnon also argued that concerns about the lack of distinction between 'able-bodied' and 'non-able-bodied' paupers was largely misplaced as they often formed distinct groups.<sup>64</sup> David Green and Andy Croll have also made the case for greater engagement with the official poor law statistics.<sup>65</sup> The reliability and usefulness of the poor law statistics are now generally accepted. This can be seen in the fact that most of the

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Geoffrey Best found the challenge of trying to estimate the annual volume of pauperism so frustrating that he bemoaned the 'idiocy of the official statistics', in *Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851–1875* (London, 1979), pp. 166–168.

<sup>60</sup> The Webbs, *English Poor Law History, Part Two*, p.1048.

<sup>61</sup> The Webbs, *English Poor Law History, Part Two*, p.1042–43. They also pointed out some of the problems with the Day Counts (which were used from 1849), p.1043–1044. For example, they argued that these figures were of no use in determining the number of paupers relieved annually as there may have been seasonal variations.

<sup>62</sup> Karel Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty*, p.34. For example, Williams demonstrated that misrepresentations in the categorisation of paupers was negligible.

<sup>63</sup> Mary Mackinnon, 'The Use and Misuse of Poor Law Statistics, 1857–1912', *Historical Methods*, 21:1, (Winter, 1988,), pp.5–15.

<sup>64</sup> Mackinnon, 'The Use and Misuse of Poor Law Statistics', p.9. Mackinnon stated that the majority of paupers that were classified as non-able-bodied were elderly or permanently disabled and that younger paupers with minor or temporary physical disabilities, as well as those deemed to be physically fit were often listed as being able-bodied.

<sup>65</sup> David Green, *Pauper Capital*, p.191. Green used the statistics to demonstrate the higher proportion of indoor paupers in London. See also Andy Croll, 'Reconciled Gradually to the System of Indoor Relief: The Poor Law in Wales during the Crusade against Out-Relief, 1870–1890', *Family and Community History*, 20:2, (2017), p.125.

newer accounts of the New Poor Law now utilise the official statistics.<sup>66</sup> The danger of not using the poor law statistics is evident in the work of Geoffrey Hooker, who looked at the administration of the New Poor Law in the Llandilofawr Union. Hooker claimed, without consulting the official statistics, that the crusade against outdoor relief (in the period 1870-1890) did not happen in Wales.<sup>67</sup> However, in a recent article, Andy Croll used the poor law statistics to demonstrate that the number of paupers claiming outdoor relief in Wales decreased significantly in this period.<sup>68</sup>

Here, the poor law statistics will be used to compare the administration of the New Poor Law in each of our six Welsh case studies. This will allow us to determine whether or not there were local or regional differences within Wales. The findings from each of our six Welsh Unions will also be compared against their respective counties. This will allow us to determine whether or not there were any inter-regional variations within Wales. The Welsh figures will also be compared against the national statistics for England and Wales, as well as against selected English counties. This will allow us to determine whether or not there were any significant differences between the two countries. The following English counties have been chosen for this statistical analysis: Kent, Lancaster, Middlesex, Chester, Salop, Gloucester and Hereford. Kent was selected as a representation of the rural south-east of England. Lancaster was chosen as a representation of the more industrial north-west of England. Middlesex was selected as a representation of the London area. Other historians have identified these regions as being distinct 'welfare regions', which makes them useful for comparative purposes.<sup>69</sup> The remaining English counties: Chester, Salop, Gloucester, and Hereford, were chosen for their geographical location. These counties sit along the border between England and Wales. Very little work has been written on the history of the New Poor Law in these counties. One notable exception to this is the recent work of Nicola Blacklaws, who looked at the administration of the New Poor Law in the Midlands region. Blacklaws argued that a 'Midlands personality' stretched into the Welsh counties of

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<sup>66</sup> See the work of Croll, 'Reconciled Gradually to the System of Indoor Relief'; Lewis Darwen, 'Implementing and Administering the New Poor Law in the Industrial north'.

<sup>67</sup> Geoff Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union, 1836-1886: "The Most Difficult Union in Wales"', *PHD thesis*, (University of Leicester, 2013), pp.1-319, [here p.88]. Hooker claimed that 'there is no evidence of anything approaching a 'crusade' in Llandilofawr.

<sup>68</sup> Croll, 'Reconciled Gradually to the System of Indoor Relief', p.128-130.

<sup>69</sup> See the work of King, *Poverty and Welfare*; and Green, *Pauper Capital*.

Montgomeryshire and Radnorshire in mid-Wales.<sup>70</sup> However, this work covers the years 1900-1930 only. It is possible that the administration of the New Poor Law in the border counties of mid-Wales differed substantially in the period covered by this thesis. Moreover, whilst Blacklaws argued that a 'Midlands personality' spread into Wales, it is possible that any similarities between neighbouring counties were part of a two-way process and that relief practices in the Midlands may have been influenced by relief practices in Wales.

As alluded to above, the findings from Wales will also be compared against findings in various countries across Europe. One of the more recent developments within the historiography of the poor laws more generally has been the concept of 'welfare peripheries'.<sup>71</sup> Several historians have argued that across Europe, countries (or regions) that were governed by the laws of a more powerful, often larger, neighbouring state, developed poor relief systems that differed significantly from the systems that developed in the 'core' region.<sup>72</sup> These historians have also identified certain similarities between these so-called 'welfare peripheries', such as problematic tax bases and correspondingly lower levels of support for welfare recipients.<sup>73</sup> The work here will determine whether or not Wales had anything in common with welfare peripheries across Europe.

As well as making significant use of quantitative evidence, this thesis also makes considerable use of qualitative sources. The statistics are useful for highlighting any patterns or variations in the administration of poor relief, but in isolation they do not explain the nature of poor relief or the experiences of the paupers themselves. They also fail to explain the reasoning behind the decision-making process. Other types of sources are needed in order to fill in some of the gaps. The two main types of qualitative evidence used in this thesis are the board of guardian minute books and the nineteenth century newspapers, although various other poor law records from both the central and local authorities have also been used. The minute books are useful as they recorded the transactions at the

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<sup>70</sup> Nicola Blacklaws, 'The Twentieth Century Poor Law in the Midlands and Wales', pp.1-358.

<sup>71</sup> See Steven King and John Stewart (eds.), *Welfare Peripheries, The Development of Welfare States in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe*, (Bern, 2007).

<sup>72</sup> See the work of Steven King, and John Stewart, 'Welfare Peripheries in Modern Europe', in Steven King and John Stewart (eds.), *Welfare Peripheries, The Development of Welfare States in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe*, (Bern, 2007), pp.9-38.

<sup>73</sup> King, and Stewart, 'Welfare Peripheries in Modern Europe', p.29. For example, it is suggested that in peripheral states poor relief tended to be even more markedly 'residualist' (sic).

weekly (or fortnightly) meetings of the guardians. However, they also possess some potential problems as historical sources. The guardians were aware that these books were official public records and may not have wanted to portray themselves in a negative light. As a result, the minute books often recorded the barest of information about the proceedings. Nevertheless, important information can be gleaned from the minute books such as the conditions of the workhouse and the appointment of poor law officials. Moreover, they do contain some evidence, albeit sporadically, about the treatment of individual paupers, or groups of paupers.

Further evidence of the treatment of paupers is provided in the local newspapers which commonly published detailed reports of the board of guardian meetings. Often these reports included additional information not recorded in the official minute, such as the reaction of the guardians to statements made in the board room. Newspapers also, albeit sporadically, give a voice to the paupers themselves, for example, through their reporting of court cases involving recipients of relief. They also published opinion pieces providing contemporary views about poverty and the New Poor Law system as well as reports on salacious incidents involving paupers. However, there are also well-documented problems with using newspapers as historical sources. For example, newspapers in the nineteenth century, much like today, often have a particular political bent.<sup>74</sup> In an attempt to combat such issues a wide range of newspapers with differing political leanings have been consulted. Furthermore, where possible, the newspaper accounts have been cross-referenced with the corresponding reports in the minute books.

It is worth noting here that the lockdowns caused by the covid-19 pandemic severely limited the access to the board of guardian minute books and other poor law records kept in the archives. This thesis therefore relies heavily on online material for its qualitative and quantitative sources (much use has been made of the Welsh newspapers online database and the Parliamentary Papers website). Historians generally have tended to prioritise tangible archival material over online sources, despite the fact that primary documents are increasingly being digitized. The board of guardian minute books in particular have been a

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<sup>74</sup> For example, in 1839, the Reverend Henry Rowlands, gave £100 to the *Caernarvon Herald* to 'support the liberal interest in North Wales', Aled Jones, *Press, Politics and Society, a history of journalism in Wales*, (Cardiff, 1993), p.130. Newspapers have also been accused of sensationalising events and there are question-marks over the reliability of many of the local journalists in the nineteenth century.



staple of the poor law historian. However, the fact that this thesis has been completed largely using online material perhaps suggests that historians generally, and poor law historians more specifically, may wish to reassess the way they prioritise their access to primary sources.

A specific timeframe has also been chosen for this thesis. The work begins in the period c.1770, almost sixty-five years before the passage of the 1834 act. This will allow us to establish the nature of poor relief in Wales under the Old Poor Law. The thesis ends in 1901, just before the passage of a spate of Liberal welfare reforms in the first few years of the twentieth century, such as the Old Age Pensions Act, 1908, which began to replace or work alongside the New Poor Law system. This end-date will allow us to determine whether or not any changes in the administration of the New Poor Law in Wales occurred over time.

Chapter One explains when the Old Poor Law was implemented in Wales and why a formal poor relief system was needed at this particular time. This chapter also assesses whether or not conceptualisations of poverty and contemporary attitudes towards the poor changed over time. Chapter Two looks at the administration of the Old Poor Law in Wales. Here, the question of who controlled the administration of the poor relief system in Wales before 1834 will be addressed. This chapter also assesses the standard of the poor relief system in Wales under the Old Poor Law. Chapter Three reveals what type of relief was afforded to paupers in Wales under the Old Poor Law. This chapter also assesses whether or not the scope of poor relief in Wales before 1834 was adequate. The relationship between poor relief and the wider economy of makeshifts in Wales under the Old Poor Law will also be discussed here.

The final three chapters of the thesis assess what impact the New Poor Law had on the poor relief system in Wales. Chapter Four explores the implementation of the New Poor Law in Wales. Essentially, this chapter assesses the level of resistance to the implementation of the New Poor Law in Wales. Chapter Five looks at who controlled the administration of the New Poor Law in Wales and what impact the 1834 act had on the standard of the poor relief system. Chapter Six assesses the extent to which poor relief practices changed under the New Poor Law in Wales. This chapter will also gauge how generous poor relief was in Wales after 1834. The wider economy of makeshifts available to paupers in Wales under the New Poor Law will also be explored here.

# Chapter One: The Implementation of the Old Poor

## Law in Wales

### Introduction

In a recent PhD thesis Francesca Richardson lamented that although Wales has been largely ignored in the historiography of the New Poor Law (see Introduction), even less is known about the implementation and operation of the Old Poor Law in Wales.<sup>75</sup> Richardson stated that ‘the vast majority of the existing studies of poverty have focused on England’ and that ‘the handful of modern Welsh studies that have been produced focus mainly on the period after 1834’.<sup>76</sup> In particular, the question of when the Old Poor Law was implemented in Wales has largely avoided the gaze of welfare historians. There is one notable exception to this. In his seminal work, which was published over ninety years ago (in 1926), A.H. Dodd demonstrated that in some parts of north-Wales the Old Poor Law was implemented relatively late.<sup>77</sup> It is possible that the situation in north-Wales reflected the situation in other parts of Wales. However, far more studies that focus on the implementation of the Old Poor Law in Wales are needed in order to test this hypothesis.

This chapter focuses on the implementation of the Old Poor Law in six different regions of Wales (as outlined in the Introduction). It is worth noting here that Poor Law Unions in England and Wales were not created until after 1834; in Wales most Unions were created between 1836 and 1837. This chapter will therefore compare the implementation of the Old Poor Law in the constituent parishes that made-up our sample Unions, although references will be made to other parishes in Wales where appropriate. This will allow us to

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<sup>75</sup> Francesca Richardson, ‘Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy’, p.215.

<sup>76</sup> Richardson, ‘Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy’, p.7 and p.215. Richardson stated that this neglect left unanswered ‘unanswered such important questions as how generous was Welsh poor law provision before 1834, the extent to which it followed practices in English regions and the degree of diversity within Wales itself’.

<sup>77</sup> A. H. Dodd, ‘The Old Poor Law in North-Wales’, *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 7<sup>th</sup> Series, vol.6, (January, 1926), pp.111-132, [here p.112]. For instance, Dodd stated that, up until the middle of the eighteenth century, the vast majority of parishes in Caernarvonshire and Anglesey reported that there were ‘no assessments’ in the poor rates.

determine whether or not there were any regional or inter-regional variations within Wales, or if there were national 'Welsh' trends before 1834. Focusing on the constituent parishes of these six Unions will also allow a fair comparison of the implementation and administration of the New Poor Law in the second half of the thesis. Here the following questions will be addressed: When was the Old Poor Law implemented in Wales? Why was a formal poor relief system needed at this particular time? Was there any resistance to the implementation of the Old Poor Law in Wales? If so, why? Were there significant differences between the implementation of the Old Poor Law in England and Wales? Or were there variations within Wales? Did poor law expenditure in Wales change over time or during particular periods? If so, when, and why? As well as allowing us to determine the manner in which the Old Poor Law was implemented in Wales, the answers to these questions will also provide important context for the following chapter which focuses on the administration of the Old Poor Law in Wales.

### **The introduction of the Old Poor Law in Wales**

Under the Elizabethan poor law acts, which were codified between 1598 and 1601, every parish in England and Wales was ordered to maintain its own paupers by levying a mandatory poor-rate.<sup>78</sup> Up until this point in time, the vast majority of paupers in England and Wales had been supported largely by private charity, both formal and informal, including donations collected and distributed by the church, the provision of alms houses and the soliciting of relief from acts such as begging.<sup>79</sup>

However, by the end of the sixteenth century, an informal system of poor relief was becoming increasingly insufficient. The population of England and Wales increased significantly during the sixteenth century which put pressure on existing resources such as

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<sup>78</sup> Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930*, (Basingstoke, 2002), p.9. Brundage stated that although these Elizabethan acts were not the first parliamentary enactments to deal with the issue of poor relief, they were the first to set-up a mandatory system of publicly financed poor relief throughout England and Wales. Each parish was tasked with maintaining its own paupers. Disputes over pauper 'settlements' i.e. which parish a pauper 'belonged' to eventually led to the passage of the so-called Settlements Act 1660 which laid out some of the conditions of settlement.

<sup>79</sup> Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531-1782*, (Cambridge, 1995), p.6. Slack stated that up until the sixteenth century, poor relief had been provided by a 'miscellany of means including religious institutions (such as monasteries, fraternities and guilds), and village or parish resources (such as town 'stocks', alms-houses, and church collections). Begging was also common in England and Wales throughout the sixteenth century (and beyond).

food supplies and job opportunities.<sup>80</sup> The dire economic situation was exacerbated by a series of bad harvests in the 1590s.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the scope of poor relief expanded during the sixteenth century to include the 'labouring poor' as well the 'impotent', which put severe pressure on the existing voluntary system of relief.<sup>82</sup> Government officials throughout the sixteenth century were also haunted by the spectre of the 'sturdy vagabond' and sought new ways of dealing with this perceived threat.<sup>83</sup>

By the end of the seventeenth century the vast majority of parishes in England had begun to levy a mandatory poor rate to deal with the increase in the number of paupers in need of relief.<sup>84</sup> However, there was considerable resistance to the implementation of the Old Poor Law in Wales. For instance, in the year ending Easter 1776, over seventy years after most parishes in England had implemented the Old Poor Law, no poor rates were collected in twenty of the thirty-two parishes that later made up the Pwllheli Union.<sup>85</sup> Likewise, in the same year, the parish of Upton (in Pembroke) also recorded that no mandatory poor rate was being levied for the relief of the poor.<sup>86</sup> As late as 1803, the parochial authorities of the Upton parish noted that 'the whole of this parish is in the possession of the proprietor who takes care of the poor, without making any rate'.<sup>87</sup> Ben Harvey has also pointed out that 'until the middle of the eighteenth century, the poor laws were a dead letter in most of Wales'.<sup>88</sup> Harvey argued that, up until this point of time, most parishes in Wales were 'either too poor or refused to provide poor relief'.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law*, (Cambridge, 1990), p.3. Slack stated that 'the population of England and Wales had been increasing since at least the 1520s, and so had food prices'.

<sup>81</sup> Slack, *The English Poor Law*, p.3.

<sup>82</sup> Slack, *The English Poor Law*, p.3. Slack stated that 'alongside the "impotent poor", the widows and orphans traditionally regarded as meriting charity, there were now frequent references to labouring householders who did not earn enough to support their children'.

<sup>83</sup> Paul A. Fideler, *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England*, (Basingstoke, 2006), p.96. Fideler stated that 'local officials feeling swamped by vagrants and indigent poor in their villages and towns, had been pressing parliament for a mandatory poor rate since the later 1540s'.

<sup>84</sup> Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law*, p.18. Slack stated that 'in the forty years before 1660 poor rates became familiar...in the next forty years they became universal, at least in England'.

<sup>85</sup> Abstract of answers and returns under act for procuring returns relative to expense and maintenance of poor in England, 1803-4, PP, 1804, vol.13, 175.

<sup>86</sup> Abstract of answers and returns under act for procuring returns relative to expense and maintenance of poor in England, 1803-4, PP, 1804, vol.13, 175.

<sup>87</sup> Abstract of answers and returns under act for procuring returns relative to expense and maintenance of poor in England, 1803-4, PP, 1804, vol.13, 175.

<sup>88</sup> Ben Harvey, 'Pauper Narratives in the Welsh borders: 1750-1840', Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Leicester, (June, 2016), pp.1-317, [here pp.20-21].

<sup>89</sup> Harvey, 'Pauper Narratives in the Welsh borders', pp.20-21.

Moreover, even when a formal poor relief system was introduced in Wales, up until the end of the eighteenth century at least, the sums collected (and expended) for the maintenance of the poor were relatively small, especially in comparison to the sums collected and expended in England. Evidence of this can be seen in Table One, below, which shows the total amount of money raised and expended for the maintenance of the poor in each of our sample regions in the years ending Easter 1776 and 1785. Note: The figures for the Welsh Unions were reached by adding the totals for each of the constituent parishes that later made up the Unions.

**Table One: Amount of money raised and expended for the maintenance of the poor in England and Wales in the Years ending Easter, 1776 and 1785.**

Area	Money raised, 1776	Money expended, 1776	Money raised, 1785	Money expended, 1785
<b>National</b>				
*Wales	£48,199	£39,215	£77,150	£68,691
*England	£1,672,117	£1,517,588	£2,090,598	£1,935,546
England and Wales	£1,720,316	£1,556,803	£2,167,748	£2,004,237
<b>Sample English Counties</b>				
Kent	£87,137	£80,150	£113,061	£106,606
Lancaster	£56,163	£52,372	£80,301	£73,363
Middlesex	£189,876	£174,274	£210,912	£195,526
Chester	£31,016	£29,659	£40,848	£39,292
Salop	£25,443	£22,316	£37,048	£33,937
Gloucester	£59,158	£53,812	£69,114	£64,895
Hereford	£11,674	£10,193	£17,987	£16,727
<b>Sample Welsh Unions</b>				
Pembroke	£982	£755	£1,212	£1,092
Swansea	£764	£637	£1,202	£1,025
Abergavenny	£1,656	£1,335	£2,127	£1,759
Newtown and Llanidloes	£1,757	£1,580	£2,899	£2,732
Holywell	£1,952	£1,952	£4,075	£3,615
Pwllheli	£87	£92	£431	£421
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>				
Pembroke	£4,179	£3,049	£5,704	£5,150
Glamorgan	£6,367	£5,300	£9,750	£8,817
Monmouth	£7,468	£9,575	£9,989	£8,103
Montgomery	£5,864	£5,503	£9,495	£8,970
Flint	£4,944	£4,043	£7,958	£7,076
Caernarvon	£237	£471	£1,687	£1,579

**\*Note:** The figures England and Wales were adjusted to show Monmouth as being in Wales.

**Source:** Abstract of answers and returns under act for procuring returns relative to expense and maintenance of poor in England, 1803-4, PP, 1804, vol.13, 175.

This table shows that, in the years ending Easter 1776 and 1785, the sums collected and expended under the Old Poor Law in Wales were negligible in comparison to the sums collected and expended in England. For instance, at the national level, just £48,199 was collected and expended in Wales in the year ending Easter 1776, compared to £1,672,117 in England. Likewise, only £87 was raised for the maintenance of the poor in the thirty-two constituent parishes of the Pwllheli Union in this year.

Of course, it is possible that the larger sums collected and expended for the maintenance of the poor reflected the fact that the population totals were typically much larger in the English regions. However, even when the density of the population is taken into account, the sums collected and expended in Wales in 1776 and 1785 were trivial in comparison to the sums collected and expended in England. For instance, in the year ending Easter, 1776, £80,150 was expended on the maintenance of the poor in Kent, compared to just £39,215 in the whole of Wales, despite the fact that the population of Wales was higher than the population of Kent throughout the entire period under investigation here, (see Table Four, below). Dodd has also noted that the sums collected and expended on poor relief in Wales were negligible in the period before 1800.<sup>90</sup> This suggests that parishes in Wales had developed a relatively low-cost system of poor relief under the Old Poor Law.

There were several reasons why the Old Poor Law was implemented relatively late in Wales. Firstly, throughout much of the period under investigation in this thesis, and particularly in the period before 1800, the levels of industrialisation in Wales lagged considerably behind the levels experienced in England. For instance, L.J. Williams produced figures to show that by the middle of the nineteenth century, only 20% of the population of Wales lived in towns with a population of over 5,000, compared to around 50% of the population of England; Williams used this measurement as one of his indicators of industrialisation.<sup>91</sup> David Howell provided similar statistics in his work.<sup>92</sup> Howell also stated

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<sup>90</sup> Dodd, 'The Old Poor Law in North-Wales', p.117. Dodd stated that the first poor rate levied at Llanidloes in 1744 amounted to just £55.

<sup>91</sup> L.J. Williams, *Was Wales Industrialised?* For further discussion of the nature of industrialisation in Wales during the nineteenth century see the work of Louise Miskell, (ed) *New Perspectives in Welsh Industrial History*, (Cardiff, 2020).

<sup>92</sup> See also David Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.27. Howell stated that in 1801, towns with a population of over 1,000 comprised just 14 % of the population of Wales, compared to 30% of the population in England living in towns with a population of 2,500 or more.

that in 1801 three-quarters of the occupied population of Wales were still employed in 'agricultural pursuits'.<sup>93</sup> Up until the turn of the nineteenth century (and beyond), many agricultural labourers in Wales 'lived-in' with their employers, whereas this practice had largely died out in England.<sup>94</sup> Francesca Richardson has argued that the prevalence of live-in service in Wales, particularly in the period before 1800, shielded agricultural labourers from poverty.<sup>95</sup> Richardson also maintained that up until the end of the eighteenth century many labourers in North-Wales at least still had access to land for essentials such as food and fuel, whereas many labourers in England often had less access to land by this point in time.<sup>96</sup> Howell has argued that even industrial labourers in Wales retained 'close links with the land' during the eighteenth century.<sup>97</sup> Some labourers in Wales were even allowed to build ramshackle houses known as *tai unnos* (one-night houses) on common wasteland.<sup>98</sup> This practice also prevented many from relying on the poor-rates. Earnings from cottage industries also continued to be a vital source of income for paupers in Wales up until the end of the eighteenth century. For instance, Howell argues that, up until this point in time, earnings from 'flannel manufacturing in the farmhouses scattered across the hills and moorlands of mid and North Wales remained an important adjunct to farming, especially for women'.<sup>99</sup> The nature of farming in Wales also ensured that relatively few paupers before the turn of the eighteenth century required assistance from a formal poor relief system.

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<sup>93</sup> Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth Century Wales*, (London, 1977), p.xi.

<sup>94</sup> Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth Century Wales*, p.94. Howell stated that 'live-in farm servants disappeared in many areas of England (outside of the North) in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, giving place to outdoor labourers hired by the week or day'.

<sup>95</sup> Francesca Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.v. and p.265. Richardson stated that practice of live-in service saved labourers from the expense of paying rent and shielded them from market fluctuations in food prices etc. David Howell also argued that live-in service 'shielded labourers from any big increases in prices that might have occurred', in Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.74.

<sup>96</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.265. Richardson stated that the relatively low proportion of paupers in Nantconwy in receipt of poor relief in the period before 1800 'reflected an economy where over half of households still had access to land'. Richardson also maintained that 'occupying a small-holding or large garden, renting a meadow or cow-keep enabled inhabitants to remain independent, whilst residents could gather peat for fuel and rushes for light from the farm from which they rented a cottage or from the commons'.

<sup>97</sup> Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.78.

<sup>98</sup> Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.83. Howell stated that 'the labouring poor were sometimes encouraged by parish vestries to erect such cottages on common wasteland so that they would not become a burden on the poor rates'. Richardson made the same point in her work, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', pp.112-113.

<sup>99</sup> Cited in Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.53. Richardson made a similar observation about the importance of the cottage industries to labourers in eighteenth century Wales in her work, Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.266.



From 1745 farming in Wales became increasingly pastoral, although crops continued to be grown in some of the more lowland areas.<sup>100</sup> Howell has argued that pastoral farming 'shielded Welsh farmers from the drastic fluctuations in crop prices' that affected many parts of England.<sup>101</sup> Howell also pointed out that pastoral farming required 'constant supervision and men at hand day at night' and that this prolonged the practice of live-in service, discussed above.<sup>102</sup> In the more arable parts of England, such as the south-east, agricultural labourers were often only employed during the harvest months, which meant that they needed more assistance, at least during the long winter months. Differences in the population rates between England and Wales also ensured that, up until the end of the eighteenth century, a formal poor relief system was generally not required. For example, Howell stated that 'the increase in the population of Wales was nowhere near as rapid during the second half of the eighteenth century as it was in England'.<sup>103</sup> This meant that up until this point in time, the population in many parishes in Wales was so low that many of those in need of assistance could be provided for by other less formal means including charitable donations. Both Dodd and Richardson have noted the importance of charity in the lives of paupers in Wales during the eighteenth century.<sup>104</sup> The role that charity played in the lives of paupers under the Old Poor Law in Wales is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

The evidence here demonstrates that, in contrast to England, the Old Poor Law was implemented relatively late in Wales. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, the vast majority of parishes in Wales had begun to levy a compulsory poor rate. For example, of the thirty-two parishes that later made-up the Pwllheli Union, only three failed to collect a poor rate in the year ending Easter 1785.<sup>105</sup> Likewise, all twenty-eight of the constituent parishes of the Abergavenny Union had begun levying a poor rate by this date.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Harvey, 'Pauper Narratives in the Welsh borders', p.59.

<sup>101</sup> Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth Century Wales*, p.4.

<sup>102</sup> Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth Century Wales*, p.94.

<sup>103</sup> Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.14.

<sup>104</sup> See Dodd, 'The Old Poor Law in North-Wales'. P.113.

<sup>105</sup> Abstract of answers and returns under act for procuring returns relative to expense and maintenance of poor in England, 1803-4, PP, 1804, vol.13, 175.

<sup>106</sup> Abstract of answers and returns under act for procuring returns relative to expense and maintenance of poor in England, 1803-4, PP, 1804, vol.13, 175.

Moreover, from the end of the eighteenth century, the sums collected and expended under the Old Poor Law increased dramatically in both England and Wales. Table Two, below, shows the total amount of money spent on poor relief in England and Wales in the period 1776-1831, as well as the percentage increase during this period.

**Table Two: Sums expended for maintenance of the poor in England and Wales, 1776-1831.**

Area	1776	1785	1803	1813	1819	1821	1831	Percentage increase 1776-1831
<b>National</b>								
*Wales	£39,215	£68,691	£174,563	£263,126	£369,012	£312,768	£316,034	705%
*England	£1,517,588	£1,935,546	£4,093,402	£6,412,978	£7,162,568	£6,645,677	£6,482,854	327%
England and Wales	£1,556,803	£2,004,237	£4,267,965	£6,676,104	7,531,580	£6,958,445	£6,798,888	337%
<b>Sample English Counties</b>								
Kent	£80,150	£106,606	£215,396	£317,990	£396,515	£392,059	£345,512	331%
Lancaster	£52,372	£73,363	£161,025	£306,797	£322,059	£288,688	£293,226	460%
Middlesex	£174,274	£195,526	£367,284	£502,966	£634,746	£615,494	£681,567	291%
Chester	£29,659	£39,292	£69,799	£114,369	£117,959	£113,239	£103,571	249%
Salop	£22,316	£33,937	£69,884	£106,317	£117,543	£101,656	£87,111	290%
Gloucester	£53,812	£64,895	£113,415	£165,575	£189,901	£164,913	£168,287	213%
Hereford	£10,193	£16,727	£48,067	£82,981	£88,803	£72,244	£62,621	514%
<b>Sample Welsh Unions</b>								
Pembroke	£755	£1,092	£3,571	£4,280	£5,622	£5,232	£5,613	643%
Swansea	£637	£1,025	£3,229	£5,003	£8,113	£6,959	£6,628	941%

Abergavenny	£1,335	£1,759	£4,080	£5,900	£7,225	£5,779	£6,130	359%
Newtown and Llanidloes	£1,580	£2,732	£7,376	£12,241	£14,569	£14,290	£15,969	911%
Holywell	£2,169	£3,615	£6,921	£11,855	£13,393	£12,260	£11,881	448%
Pwllheli	£92	£421	£2,162	£3,472	£6,062	£5,371	£7,083	7,599%
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>								
Pembroke	£3,049	£5,150	£15,019	£20,389	£26,487	£22,715	£24,552	705%
Glamorgan	£5,300	£8,817	£23,136	£33,287	£49,048	£39,487	£38,751	631%
Monmouth	£5,575	£8,103	£19,762	£28,246	£34,848	£29,261	£26,612	377%
Montgomery	£5,503	£8,970	20,857	£32,297	£39,660	£36,878	£34,815	533%
Flint	£4,043	£7,076	£13,441	£19,453	£23,643	£22,185	£20,558	408%
Caernarvon	£471	£1,579	£7,157	£12,492	£20,513	£17,370	£21,204	4,402%

**\*Note:** The figures for England and Wales have been adjusted to show the county of Monmouth as being in Wales.

**Sources:** Abstract of answers and returns under act for procuring returns relative to expense and maintenance of poor in England, 1803-4, PP, 1804, vol.13, 175; Abridgement of abstract of answers and returns relative to expense and maintenance of poor in England and Wales, PP, 1818, vol.19, 82; Select Committee on poor rate returns: Report, appendix, supplemental appendix (1819-1822), PP, vol.5, 556; Account of money expended for maintenance of the poor in England, 1829-34; value of real property assessed for property tax, 1815, PP, 1835, vol.47.

This table shows that the amount of money expended on poor relief increased significantly in each of our sample regions in the period 1776-181. For instance, at the national level, poor law expenditure in Wales increased from £39,215 in 1776 to £316,034 in 1831, an increase of 705%. Likewise, in England poor law expenditure increased from £1,517,588 to £6,482,854 during the same period, an increase of 327%.

The rate of increase was generally higher in Wales during this period. For instance, poor law expenditure increased by 4,402% in Caernarvonshire in the period 1776-1831, compared to just 213% in the county of Gloucester. This was largely due to the fact that poor law expenditure in Welsh parishes typically started from a much lower baseline in 1776, due to the late implementation of the Old Poor Law in Wales. This can be seen clearly in the area that later made up the Pwllheli Union. Here, the thirty-two constituent parishes spent a total of just £92 on poor relief in 1776. By 1831, £7,083 was being spent on poor relief in the region, an increase of 7,599%, the largest increase in our sample set.

The cost of poor relief per head of the population also increased significantly in England and Wales during this period. Evidence of this can be seen in Table Three, below, which shows the amount of money expended on poor relief per head of the population in England and Wales during the period 1803-1831.

**Table Three: Amount of money expended on poor relief per head of the population in  
England and Wales, 1803-1831.**

<b>Area</b>	<b>1803</b>	<b>1813</b>	<b>1821</b>	<b>1831</b>
<b>National</b>	<b>Shillings and Pence</b>	<b>Shillings and Pence</b>	<b>Shillings and pence</b>	<b>Shillings and pence</b>
*Wales	5s. 11d	7s. 10d	7s. 11d	7s. 0d
*England	9s. 11d	13s. 6d	11s. 11d	10s. 0d
England and Wales	9s. 7d	13s. 2d	11s. 7d	9s. 9d
<b>Sample English Counties</b>				
Kent	14s. 0d	17s. 1d	18s. 5d	14s. 5d
Lancaster	4s. 9d	7s. 5d	5s. 6d	4s. 5d
Middlesex	9s. 0d	10s. 7d	10s. 9d	10s. 0d
Chester	7s. 3d	10s. 1d	8s. 5d	6s. 2d
Salop	8s. 4d	10s. 11d	9s. 10d	7s. 10d
Gloucester	9s. 1d	11s. 7d	9s. 10d	8s. 0d
Hereford	10s. 9d	17. 8d	14s. 0d	11s. 3d
<b>Sample Welsh Unions</b>				
Pembroke	7s. 2d	8s. 6d	7s. 3d	6s. 6d
Swansea	3s. 8d	4s. 11d	5s. 8d	4s. 4d
Abergavenny	8s. 10d	7s. 2d	5s. 0d	4s. 0d
Newtown and Llanidloes	9s. 5d	13s. 9d	13s. 4d	13s. 1d
Holywell	6s. 3d	9s. 1d	7s. 10d	6s. 9d
Pwllheli	2s. 9d	3s. 7d	5s. 4d	6s. 10d
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>				
Pembroke	5s. 4d	6s. 3d	6s. 2d	6s. 0d
Glamorgan	6s. 6d	7s. 10d	7s. 9d	6s. 1d
Monmouth	8s. 8d	9s. 1d	8s. 2d	5s. 5d
Montgomery	8s. 8d	12s.5d	12s. 4d	10s. 6d
Flint	6s. 9d	8s. 4d	8s. 3d	6s. 10d
Caernarvon	3s. 5d	5s. 1d	6s. 0d	6s. 5d

**\*Note:** The figures for England and Wales have been adjusted to show the county of Monmouth as being in Wales.

**Sources:** Comparative Account of Population of Great Britain, 1801, 1811, 1821 and 1831, PP, 1831; Abstract of answers and returns under Act for procuring returns relative to expense and maintenance of poor in England, 1803-4, PP, 1804; Abridgement of answers and returns relative to the expense

and maintenance of poor in England and Wales, PP, 1818; Select Committee on poor rate returns: Report, appendix, supplemental appendix (1819-1822), PP, 1822; Account of money expended for maintenance of poor in England, 1829-32; value of real property assessed for property tax, 1815, PP, 1835.

This table demonstrates that at the national level, the amount of money expended on poor relief per head of the population in Wales increased from 5s.11d in 1803 to 7s.10d in 1813; this increased again slightly to 7s.11d in 1821. Likewise, in England the cost of poor relief per head of the population increased from 9s.11d in 1813 to 13s.6d in 1813. In general, the amount of money expended on poor relief per head of the population remained lower in Wales than in England throughout this period. For example, in 1831, the cost per head of the population in Caernarvon was 6s. 5d, whereas the corresponding figure in Kent was 14s.5d. There was one exception to this. The cost of poor relief per head of the population was relatively high in the county of Montgomery during this period. In some years the cost of poor relief in Montgomery was even above the national average for England. For example, in 1831, the cost per head of the population in Montgomery was 13s.1d, compared to 10s in England. The reasons for this are discussed in detail below. However, outside of Montgomery, the cost of poor relief per head of the population was generally much lower in Wales than in England. This suggests that parishes in Wales retained a relatively low-cost system of poor relief throughout the entire Old Poor Law period.

However, in England and Wales there was a significant increase in both the amount of money expended on the maintenance of the poor, and in the amount expended per head of the population in the period after 1800. Other historians have also pointed out that poor law expenditure increased significantly in Wales in the period from the end of the eighteenth century. For example, Eirug Davies produced figures to show that in Cardiganshire the amount of money expended on the maintenance of the poor increased from £1,085 in 1776 to £20,418 in 1819.<sup>107</sup> In a similar vein, Richardson stated that 'by 1821, poor relief costs in Nantconwy were six-times higher than they had been in 1784'.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Alun Eirug Davies, 'Some Aspects of the Old Poor Law in Cardiganshire, 1750-1834', Ceredigion, *Journal of the Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society*, vol.6, no.1-4, (January, 1968), pp.1-31, [here p.13].

<sup>108</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.234.

There were several reasons behind this dramatic transformation. Firstly, the populations of both countries increased significantly from the end of the eighteenth century. There were no official censuses before 1801 but Rickman calculated, from various parish registers, that the population of England increased by 38% in the period 1750-1800.<sup>109</sup> Rickman also estimated that the population of Wales increased by around 20% during the same period, although subsequent historians have argued that the figure for Wales was even higher.<sup>110</sup> The official Censuses, which were produced every decade, beginning in 1801, also demonstrate that, from the start of the nineteenth century, the population of England and Wales grew at an even faster rate. Table Four, below, shows the population in each of our sample regions in the years 1801, 1811, 1821 and 1831. It also shows the percentage increase in the population in the period 1801-1831.

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<sup>109</sup> Cited in Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.14.

<sup>110</sup> Cited in Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, pp.14-15.



**Table Four: Population in England and Wales 1801-1831**

<b>Area</b>	<b>1801</b>	<b>1811</b>	<b>1821</b>	<b>1831</b>	<b>Percentage Increase 1801-1831</b>
<b>National</b>					
*Wales	587,128	673,915	789,271	903,366	54%
*England	8,285,852	9,476,700	11,189,604	12,991,208	57%
England and Wales	8,872,980	10,150,615	11,978,875	13,894,574	57%
<b>Sample English Counties</b>					
Kent	307,624	373,095	426,016	479,155	56%
Lancaster	672,731	828,309	1,052,859	1,336,854	99%
Middlesex	818,129	953,276	1,144,531	1,358,541	66%
Chester	191,751	227,031	270,098	334,410	74%
Salop	167,639	194,298	206,153	222,503	33%
Gloucester	250,809	285,514	335,843	386,904	54%
Hereford	89,191	94,073	103,243	110,976	24%
<b>Sample Welsh Unions</b>					
Pembroke	10,011	10,061	14,447	17,231	72%
Swansea	17,510	20,435	24,534	30,751	76%
Abergavenny	9,256	16,474	23,310	30,875	234%
Newtown and Llanidloes	15,616	17,854	21,493	24,488	57%
Holywell	22,159	26,157	31,178	35,307	59%
Pwllheli	15,820	17,741	20,073	20,697	31%
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>					
Pembroke	56,280	60,615	74,009	81,424	45%
Glamorgan	71,525	85,067	101,737	126,612	77%

Monmouth	45,582	62,127	71,833	98,130	115%
Montgomery	47,978	51,931	59,899	66,485	39%
Flint	39,622	46,518	53,784	60,012	51%
Caernarvon	41,521	49,336	57,958	65,753	58%

**\*Note:** The figures for England and Wales have been adjusted to show the county of Monmouth as being in Wales.

**Source:** Comparative account of population of Great Britain, 1801, 1811, 1821 and 1831, PP, 1831.

This table shows that, at the national level, the population of Wales increased from 587,128 in 1801 to 903,366 in 1831, an increase of 54%. The population of England increased by 57% during the same period, rising from 8,285,852 to 12,991,208. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the greater number of job opportunities they created, increases in the population tended to be even higher in the more industrial areas in England and Wales. For instance, in Wales the population of Pembroke increased by 45% in the period 1801-1831, just below the national average, compared to 115% in the more industrialised county of Monmouth, more than double the national average. However, across England and Wales, even in the more rural areas, the population increased significantly during this period. This put significant pressure on available resources such as food, housing, and employment and increased the number of paupers in need of relief.

Further hardship in this period was caused by the Enclosure Movement, which peaked in England and Wales in the years between 1760 and 1830, as commons and wastelands were suddenly taken into private ownership. As demonstrated above, many paupers in England and Wales had relied on these areas for food, fuel, and grazing.<sup>111</sup> The privatisation of these lands meant that many paupers were forced to spend more and more of their income on basic necessities, which often pushed them below the poverty line. Moreover, those that had build homes on the commons and wastelands in Wales were evicted, especially when they had no legal title to the property.<sup>112</sup> Dodd argued that in many parts of Wales ‘parish authorities suddenly found themselves faced with the task of providing for those who had been ejected from their ‘illegal’ cottages on the common’.<sup>113</sup>

The period between the end of the eighteenth century and the passage of the New Poor Law in 1834 was also blighted by severe economic problems, which also increased the number of paupers in need of some form of assistance. For instance, during the 1790s, sometimes referred to as the ‘crises years’, agricultural prices soared and unemployment increased as a result of a series of bad harvests.<sup>114</sup> This caused a great deal of hardship amongst the labouring poor in England and Wales, and many were forced to turn to the

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<sup>111</sup> Dodd, ‘The Old Poor Law in North-Wales’, pp.116-119.

<sup>112</sup> Dodd, ‘The Old Poor Law in North-Wales’, pp.116-.118. Dodd stated that the Enclosure movement ‘aggravated the problem of the Poor Law authorities by intensifying the housing shortage and depriving resources’.

<sup>113</sup> Dodd, ‘The Old Poor Law in North-Wales’, p.118.

<sup>114</sup> Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.76

poor law for help. The start of the Napoleonic Wars in 1803 also pushed many families in England and Wales into poverty as thousands of men enlisted in the British armies, leaving behind their wives and children who were often forced to apply to the parochial authorities for assistance.<sup>115</sup> The end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 brought further hardships as demobilised soldiers returned to the jobs market, causing further competition for jobs; agricultural prices also collapsed due to the renewal of foreign competition.<sup>116</sup> This also increased the number of paupers in need of relief.

Changing conceptualisations of poverty and the poor, in the final fifty years or so of the Old Poor Law, also contributed to the rapid increase in poor law expenditure in England and Wales in the period 1776-1831.<sup>117</sup> At the outset of the Old Poor Law in 1601, poor relief was largely confined to the 'impotent' poor, such as the elderly, the disabled, and children with no relatives to support them.<sup>118</sup> Able-bodied paupers, by and large, had been expected to support themselves and their families, with overseers tasked with setting able-bodied applicants to work.<sup>119</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, however, there was a growing realisation that some able-bodied paupers were in genuine need of assistance.<sup>120</sup> This ultimately led to the passage of Gilbert's Act in 1782, which sanctioned the granting of outdoor relief to able-bodied paupers, without the requirement of them being set to work.<sup>121</sup> Other local initiatives, that also sought to alleviate the distress of able-bodied paupers were also implemented in England and Wales throughout the period, the most famous of which was the Speenhamland system which was implemented in Berkshire in 1795.<sup>122</sup> The expansion of the scope of poor relief inevitably led to an increase in the number of paupers receiving relief, which also caused poor law expenditure in England and Wales to swell. Evidence of this can be seen in Table Five, below, which shows the number of paupers in receipt of poor relief in each our regions in the years ending Easter 1803 and 1813, as well as the percentage increase during this period.

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<sup>115</sup> Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.103.

<sup>116</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', pp.236-237.

<sup>117</sup> Fidler, *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England*, pp.176-177.

<sup>118</sup> Fidler, *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England*, p.100

<sup>119</sup> Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531-1782*, pp.10-11.

<sup>120</sup> Fidler, *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England*, pp.176-177.

<sup>121</sup> Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.105.

<sup>122</sup> Fidler, *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England*, pp.176-177.

**Table Five: Total number of paupers relieved in England and Wales, 1803 and 1813.**

Area	Total number of paupers, 1803	Total number of paupers, 1813	Increase 1803-13	Percentage Increase 1803-13
<b>National</b>				
*Wales	38,347	47,610	9,263	24%
*England	687,219	923,640	236,421	34%
England and Wales	725,516	971,250	245,734	34%
<b>Sample English Counties</b>				
Kent	30,694	40,560	9,866	32 %
Lancaster	30,342	51,288	20,946	69%
Middlesex	52,136	109,534	57,398	110%
Chester	15,175	20,429	5,254	35%
Salop	12,997	21,311	8,314	64%
Gloucester	24,601	29,272	4,671	19%
Hereford	8,360	10,756	2,396	29%
<b>Sample Welsh Unions</b>				
Pembroke	708	873	165	23%
Swansea	564	904	340	60%
Abergavenny	648	1,003	355	55%
Newtown and Llanidloes	1,537	2,114	577	38%
Holywell	1,223	2,467	1,244	102%
Pwllheli	655	847	192	29%
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>				
Pembroke	3,665	4,273	608	17%
Glamorgan	3,503	5,703	2,200	63%
Monmouth	3,430	4,086	656	19%
Montgomery	4,648	5,555	907	20%
Flint	2,378	3,852	1,474	62%
Caernarvonshire	1,745	2,558	813	47%

**\*Note:** The figures for England and Wales have been adjusted to show the county of Monmouth as being in Wales.

**Sources:** Abstract of answers and returns under act for procuring returns relative to expense and maintenance of poor in England, 1803-4, PP, vol.13, 175, 1804; Abridgement of abstract of answers and returns relative to expense and maintenance of poor in England and Wales, PP, 1818, vol.19, 82.

This table shows that the total number of paupers in receipt of poor relief increased significantly in each of our sample regions in the period 1803-1813. For example, at the national level, the total number of paupers receiving relief in Wales increased from 38,347 in 1803 to 47,610 in 1813, an increase of 24%. Likewise, in England the total number of paupers relieved increased from 687,219 to 923,640 during the same period, an increase of 34%. Ben Harvey has also noted that the number of paupers receiving relief in Wales increased drastically from the end of the eighteenth century. Harvey argued that this was especially true 'in the Welsh border counties'.<sup>123</sup>

Although, as demonstrated above, the level of industrialisation in Wales lagged considerably behind the levels achieved in England, some parishes in Wales were becoming increasingly industrialised by the end of the Old Poor Law period. For instance, by 1800 the towns of Newtown and Llanidloes in Montgomeryshire became the epicentres of the Welsh woollen industry, attracting hundreds of able-bodied men and women in search of employment.<sup>124</sup> Likewise, by 1820, Swansea, and the surrounding areas, was producing 90% of Britain's copper, as well as a large proportion of its zinc, lead and silver.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, there was no county in Wales that was left completely untouched by industrialisation by the end of the eighteenth century. During periods of economic expansion, industrial workers in England and Wales were shielded from poverty by relatively high wages, although the underdeveloped nature of many industries in Wales in this period meant that industrial workers here often earned less than their English counterparts.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, the emerging industrial areas were also able to take some of the strain from the growing unemployment in the more agricultural areas (caused by the rising population) by providing alternative sources of employment.

However, during periods of industrial depressions, relatively large numbers of workers could suddenly find themselves unemployed, or under-employed, and many were forced to turn to the poor laws for help. For instance, in 1833, the Visitor of the House of Industry in Swansea, Henry Sockett, stated that in the previous year (1832), the number of persons relieved on account of unemployment had been 'unusually great' due to the 'very

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<sup>123</sup> Harvey, 'Pauper Narratives in the Welsh Borders', p.69.

<sup>124</sup> Geraint Jenkins, *The Welsh Woollen Industry*, (Cardiff, 1969), p.116.

<sup>125</sup> John Davies, *A History of Wales*, (London, 1990), p.342.

<sup>126</sup> Cited in Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, pp.78-81.

depressed state of the trade in the town' in that year.<sup>127</sup> In a similar vein, in 1834, William Lutener, the overseer of the parish of Newtown claimed that the vast majority of the town's population of around 5,000, were thrust into poverty due to the decline of the region's flannel industry.<sup>128</sup> The precarious nature of the flannel industry in Montgomery in the final decades of the Old Poor Law helps to explain why, as demonstrated above, the cost of poor relief per head in the county was so high. In some of the more industrialising parishes in Wales, the problems caused by industrialisation also contributed to the rapid increase in poor law expenditure that occurred in the period after 1800.

The decline of many of the cottage industries in Wales during the period 1790-1830 also caused poor law expenditure to rapidly increase from the end of the eighteenth century. For instance, Francesca Richardson has demonstrated that in Nantconwy, the mechanisation of the textile industry during the second half of the eighteenth century, led to the demise of the cottage industry in the region, which had provided a vital source of income for many paupers in the area, particularly women.<sup>129</sup> Likewise, in 1834, Isaac Bensall, the overseer of the Llanarin parish (in Montgomeryshire) stated that there were very few employment opportunities for women in the parish as 'carding and spinning machines have superseded spinning wheels'.<sup>130</sup> The loss of earnings from this vital industry also pushed many paupers, particularly able-bodied women, into poverty. This also helps to explain why the cost of poor relief in Montgomery was so high in the period immediately before 1834.

By the eve of the New Poor Law the sums expended on the maintenance of the poor in both England and Wales had begun to stagnate or even decline. For instance, Table Two (above) shows that the total amount of money expended on poor relief in Wales decreased from £369,012 in 1819 to £312,768 in 1821, before rising slightly again to £316,034 in 1831.

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<sup>127</sup> Henry Sockett, 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of Industry and the Management of the Poor in the Town and Franchise of Swansea, 1818-32', 1834, pamphlet, <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=KMsKpaeHaSAC&pg=PA1&lpg=PA1&dq=henry+sockett+a+concise+account&source=bl&ots=W5-epoR-EK&sig=ACfU3U1wBdZ4HBY9QPbdI64-J>. Sockett even acknowledged that whilst, as Visitor of the House of Industry he had been able to reduce the number of rates collected annually in Swansea from 5 calls to 3, in 1832 he had been forced to 'temporarily' increase the number of rates back up to 4.

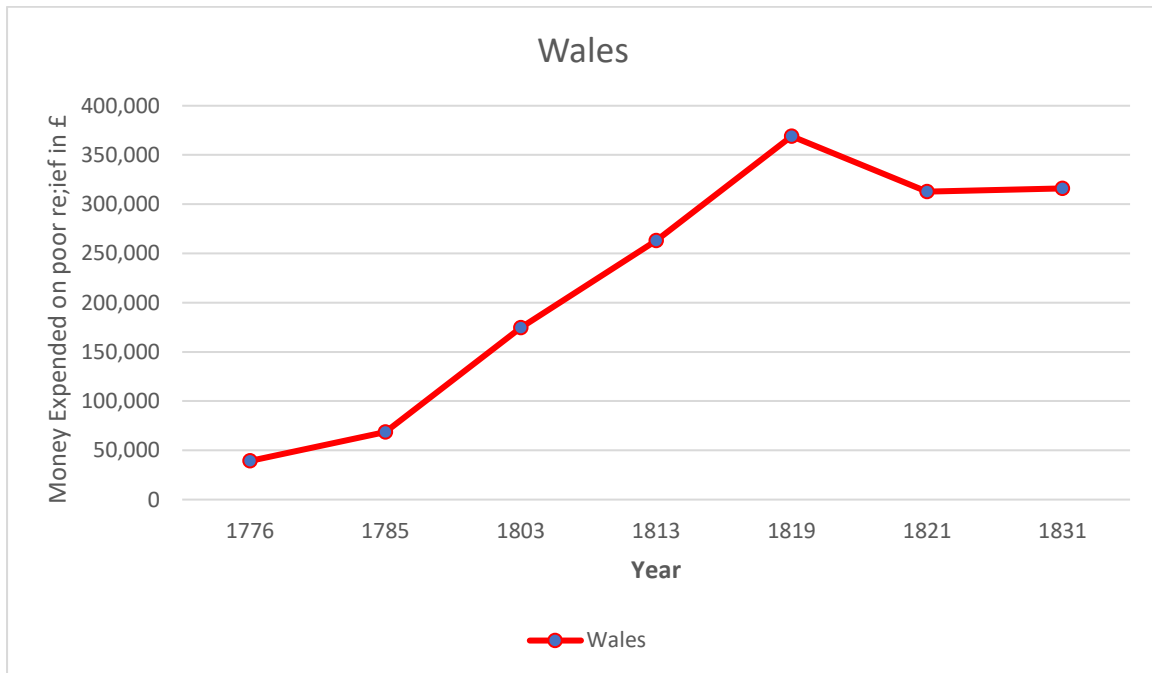
<sup>128</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the operation of the poor laws 1832-34, Parliamentary Papers [hereafter referred to as PP], 1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>129</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.11-15.

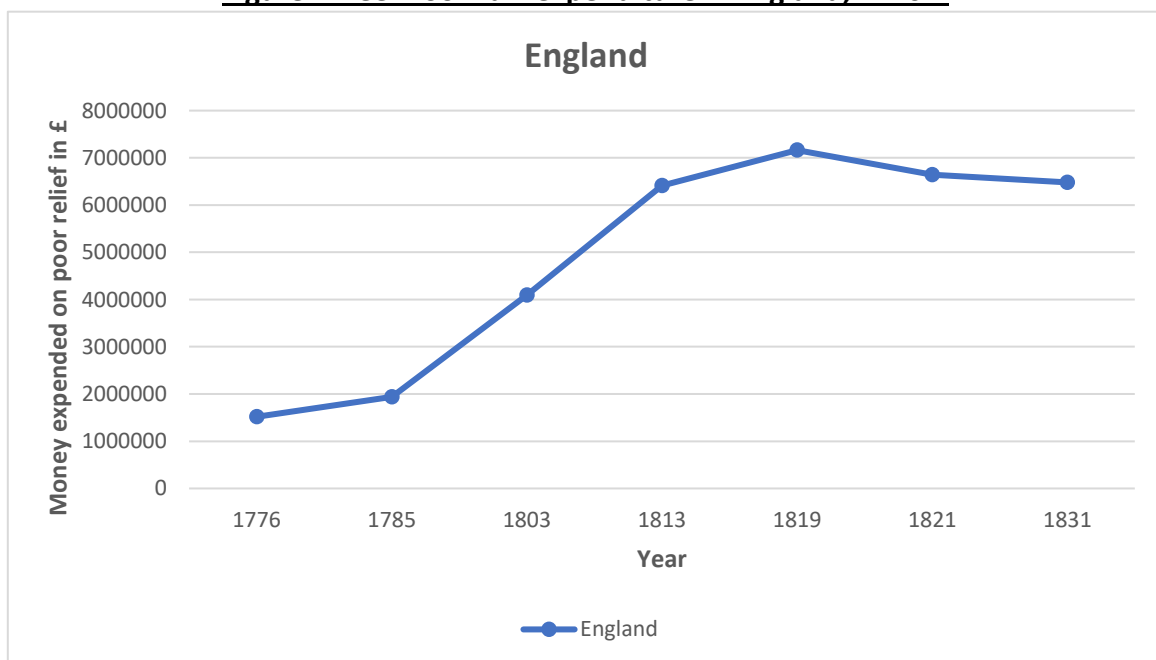
<sup>130</sup> *1834 Rural and Town Queries*

In England, poor law expenditure decreased from £7,162,568 in 1819 to £6,645,677 in 1821, before decreasing slightly again to £6,482,854 in 1831. The overall trajectory of poor law expenditure in England and Wales in the period 1776 to 1831 can be seen more clearly in Figures Two and Three (below).

**Figure Two: Poor Law Expenditure in Wales, 1776-1831.**



**Figure Three: Poor Law expenditure in England, 1776-1**





These figures demonstrate that in both England and Wales, the amount of money expended on the maintenance of the poor increased steadily in the period 1776 to 1785, before increasing rapidly in the period up to 1819; this year was a high-water mark for both England and Wales. Thereafter, up until 1831, the amount of money expended on poor relief in England and Wales stagnated or even declined.

The cost of poor relief per head of the population in England and Wales also stagnated or declined in the period after 1813. For example, as demonstrated in Table Three (above) the amount of money expended per head of the population in Wales dropped from a high-point of 7s.11d in 1821 to 7s.0d in 1831. Likewise, in England the cost of poor relief decreased from 13s.6d in 1813 to 10s.0d in 1831. The levelling-off in the sums expended on poor relief (both the aggregate sums and the cost per head of the population) were largely due to the passage of the Select Vestry Acts in 1818 and 1819. These acts, and their impact on the poor rates are discussed in detail in the following chapter. The findings here are at odds with the assertions of the Commissioners of the 1832-34 Poor Law Report, upon whose recommendations the New Poor Law was based. The Commissioners had argued in their report that poor law expenditure in England and Wales was spiralling out of control in the years immediately before 1834.<sup>131</sup> The findings here reveal that, by the eve of the New Poor Law, the cost of poor relief in England and Wales was stagnating or even declining.

However, the perception that poor relief costs were spiralling out of control in England and Wales was pervasive. By the end of the Old Poor Law many contemporaries in Wales (as well as England), particularly those in positions of power, such as parochial authorities and prominent ratepayers, called for the overhaul of the existing system of relief. For instance, in 1837, before the New Poor Law had been fully implemented in Wales, an anonymous 'freeholder of Carmarthen' wrote a letter to the editor of *The Cambrian*, in which he lamented that 'within the period frequently assigned to the life of man...the sums appropriated to the relief of the poor had increased exponentially'.<sup>132</sup> The 'freeholder' went on to question how much longer 'a system productive of such results could continue'.<sup>133</sup> He also argued that under the workings of the Old Poor Law, 'that manly and honest spirit of

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<sup>131</sup> 1832-34 Report of the Operation of the Poor laws in England and Wales, PP, 1834.

<sup>132</sup> Poor Law Amendment Act, *The Cambrian*, 22 July, 1837, p.2. He also produced figures to demonstrate how much the figures had increased in several Welsh counties.

<sup>133</sup> Poor Law Amendment Act, *The Cambrian*, 22 July, 1837, p.2.

independence, once the characteristic feature of our British population, had been annihilated' and that in its stead 'habits of intemperance and profligacy' had been allowed to fester amongst 'a considerable proportion of the heretofore industrious classes'.<sup>134</sup> The 'freeholder' concluded that the implementation of the New Poor Law would be beneficial both to the ratepayers and to the poor themselves.<sup>135</sup> In a similar vein, in the same year (1837), an unnamed magistrate from Pembroke sent a letter to the Earl of Cawdor detailing his thoughts on the practical effects of the Old Poor Law. He (the magistrate) argued that 'the Elizabethan statutes, by providing all paupers with a legal right to relief, ...had the effect of relaxing the exertions of the poor and allowed them (the paupers) to conclude that such exertions were wholly unnecessary'.<sup>136</sup> He also claimed that the New Poor Law, particularly the bastardy clause of the 1834 act, was designed to 'promote improvement in the morals of the labouring classes'.<sup>137</sup> The findings here suggest that there was at least some support for the introduction of the New Poor Law in Wales. This challenges or at least nuances the assertions of several historians, such as Megan Evans and Peter Jones, who have argued that there was considerable, almost universal resistance to the implementation of the New Poor Law in Wales.<sup>138</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It has been demonstrated here that, in comparison to England, the Old Poor Law was implemented relatively late in Wales. Up until the 1770s, the vast majority of paupers in Wales continued to be supported largely by private charity, both formal and informal. Many agricultural labourers in Wales were also shielded from poverty by the prevalence of live-in service and the access to commons and wasteland. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, this informal system of relief was becoming increasingly inadequate. Rapidly increasing population rates, the decline of the cottage industry, the Enclosure movement,

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<sup>134</sup> Poor Law Amendment Act, *The Cambrian*, 22 July, 1837, p.2

<sup>135</sup> Poor Law Amendment Act, *The Cambrian*, 22 July, 1837, p.2 He stated that 'I look to the introduction of this invaluable measure as a national blessing'.

<sup>136</sup> Pembrokeshire Archives, PG 362.5 LET, A letter to the Earl of Cawdor on the Poor Laws and their practical effect.

<sup>137</sup> Pembrokeshire Archives, PG 362.5 LET, A letter to the Earl of Cawdor on the Poor Laws and their practical effect.

<sup>138</sup> Megan Evans and Peter Jones, 'A Stubborn, Intractable Body', pp.101-121. See also the work of Anne Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law'; and Nicholas Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement*. All of these historians have claimed that resistance to the New Poor Law was particularly strong and enduring in Wales.

the expansion of the scope of poor relief, and a series of socio-economic problems meant that by 1800, the vast majority of parishes in Wales had begun collecting a mandatory poor rate, based on taxation. Moreover, from the end of the eighteenth century, both poor law expenditure and the cost of poor relief per head of the population significantly increased in both England and Wales. By the end of the Old Poor Law in 1834 the amount of money expended on the maintenance of the poor had begun to stagnate or even decline. However, by this point in time the attitudes of the parochial authorities and the ratepayers towards the paupers had already hardened. The implications of this are discussed fully in the following chapters.

# Chapter Two: The Administration of the Old Poor Law

## in Wales.

### Introduction

It is now generally accepted that in England there were considerable local or regional variations in the administration of the Old Poor Law. For instance, Steven King has proposed that there were distinct 'welfare regions' in England both before and after 1834.<sup>139</sup> King argued that poor relief in the north-west of England under the Old Poor Law was 'ramshackle and parsimonious', whereas poor relief in the south-east of England before 1834 was 'flexible' and 'benevolent'.<sup>140</sup> Steve Hindle has also argued that 'there were already significant differentials in the level of pensions between northern and southern parishes by the mid-seventeenth century'.<sup>141</sup>

However, as alluded to in the previous chapter, relatively little is known about the administration of the Old Poor Law in Wales. In particular, the issue of who controlled the administration of the Old Poor Law in Wales has been largely ignored. There is one notable exception to this. In his work, Eirug Davies claimed that in Cardiganshire the administration of the Old Poor Law was dominated by a handful of ratepayers at the vestry meetings. Davies argued that in this part of Wales the overseers were 'merely servants of the vestries' and that 'they did very little on their own, apart from providing temporary relief between vestry meetings'.<sup>142</sup> He also indicated that the magistrates in Cardiganshire seldom involved themselves in the poor relief system, at least in the period before 1834.<sup>143</sup> It is possible that the findings from Cardiganshire correspond with findings in other parts of Wales. However,

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<sup>139</sup> King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p.256-262.

<sup>140</sup> King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p.256-262.

<sup>141</sup> Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c.1550-1770*, (2004), p.283

<sup>142</sup> Eirug Davies, 'Some Aspects of the Old Poor Law in Cardiganshire', pp.7-8.

<sup>143</sup> Eirug Davies, 'Some Aspects of the Old Poor Law in Cardiganshire', p.7. Davies stated that the vestry meetings in Cardiganshire were often held in public houses, which dissuaded many of the magistrates (many of whom were clergymen) from attending.

far more studies that focus on the administration of the Old Poor Law in Wales are needed in order to test this hypothesis.

In a similar vein, relatively little is known about the standard of the poor relief system in Wales before 1834. Once again, there are some notable exceptions to this. For example, David Howell has argued that the administration of the Old Poor Law in the more rural parts of Wales was 'lax and inefficient'.<sup>144</sup> Howell pointed to the inability of some of the more rural parishes in Wales to collect the poor rates on time as evidence of this.<sup>145</sup> Eirug Davies has also argued that the standard of the poor relief system in Cardiganshire was lax and inefficient before 1834. Davies stated that many of the overseers in the county before 1834 were 'incompetent' and that they often left 'imbalances' in the parochial accounts.<sup>146</sup> It is possible that the administration of the Old Poor Law was equally lax in other parts of Wales. However, once again far more studies of the Old Poor Law in Wales are needed in order to draw any firm conclusions.

This chapter focuses on the administration of the Old Poor Law in our six sample Welsh 'regions'. The first section explores the influence that magistrates had on the administration of the Old Poor Law in Wales. The second section looks at the relationship between the parish vestry and the overseers in Wales before 1834. Exploring these two themes will help us to improve our understanding of who controlled the administration of the Old Poor Law in Wales. The final section assesses the standard of the poor relief system in Wales under the Old Poor Law. Establishing this will allow us to determine the impact that the 1834 act had on the poor relief system in Wales.

### **The influence of magistrates under the Old Poor Law in Wales**

Under the Elizabethan Poor Law acts each parish was made responsible for maintaining its own paupers. Poor relief decisions were to be made by a group of ratepayers at the vestry meetings. Each parish was also instructed to appoint overseers of the poor who were made

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<sup>144</sup> Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.114.

<sup>145</sup> Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.113.

<sup>146</sup> Davies, 'Some Aspects of the Old Poor Law in Cardiganshire', p.8.

responsible for collecting and distributing the poor rates, setting able-bodied paupers to work and supervising the poorhouse.<sup>147</sup> The overseers were elected annually by the members of the vestry.<sup>148</sup>

However, magistrates in England and Wales were given supervisory powers over poor relief matters. For instance, they had the power to overturn the decisions of the vestry and/or the overseers, with regards to a particular case of relief. They could also grant relief to a pauper directly if they saw fit. Furthermore, JPs had to nominally approve the appointment of the overseers and audit their accounts.<sup>149</sup> The question of who controlled the administration of poor relief at the local level therefore depended to a considerable extent on the level of interference from the local magistrates. In theory, interfering JPs could exert an enormous amount of influence over poor relief matters, including ultimate control over the decision-making process.

In some parts of England, the magistrates were heavily involved in the administrative process under the Old Poor Law. For example, Peter Dunkley revealed that throughout the 1820s letters were received by the House of Commons from angry ratepayers in Lincolnshire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Somerset, Durham, Cornwall and the north-Riding complaining that the magistrates had overstepped their mark in poor relief matters. Dunkley stated that the magistrates in these parts of England 'repeatedly ignored statutes limiting the control of the bench to specific aspects of administration', and that 'private meetings of local magistrates often proceeded without compunction to formulate extra-legal, and even illegal, policies pertaining to the amelioration of distress'.<sup>150</sup> Dunkley also stated that 'the formalities designed to ensure that the ratepayers' views and those of their officers were at least heard at the policy-making level were likewise sometimes not observed in these parishes'.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, p.9

<sup>148</sup> Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, p.9.

<sup>149</sup> Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, p.50.

<sup>150</sup> Dunkley, 'Paternalism, the Magistracy and Poor Relief in England, 1795-1834', *International Review of Social History*, 24(3), (1979), pp.371-397, [here p.377].

<sup>151</sup> Dunkley, 'Paternalism, the Magistracy and Poor Relief in England, 1795-1834', p.377. Dunkley also stated that 'so complete was s magisterial control in some districts that even when justices were aware that the enforcement of their policies went beyond their legal authority, they were not always deterred from insisting on the parish officers' compliance'.

However, in Wales the magistrates were seldom involved in poor relief matters before 1834. Evidence of this is provided in the 1834 *Report into the Operation of the Poor Laws*. As part of their investigations, the Commissioners of this Report sent out questionnaires to every parish or local administrative unit in England and Wales asking local authorities how poor relief was administered in their area. Responses to these questionnaires were published in the final Report. It must be noted here that only fifty-eight out of around eight-hundred and fifty Welsh parishes (including Monmouthshire) returned answers to these questions. This sample in itself may be too small to draw firm conclusions about the nature of poor relief in Wales. However, the findings here have been corroborated by evidence contained in other sources. Furthermore, every county in Wales had at least a few parishes that responded to the *Rural and Town Queries*. This will allow at least an initial assessment about the level of involvement of magistrates in Wales and whether or not there were regional differences in the administration of poor relief in Wales under the Old Poor Law.

Several questions in the *Rural and Town Queries* directly enquired about the extent to which local magistrates involved themselves in the administration of poor relief. For instance, in the *Rural Queries*, Question 43 asked: Is relief generally given in consequence of the advice or order of the Magistrates, or under the opinion that the magistrates would make an order for it if application were made to them? In response to this question a few Welsh parishes indicated that their overseers were acting under the pressure of magisterial interference. For example, James B. Davies, a local Justice of the Peace (hereafter referred to as JP), stated that in the parish of Wolvesnewton (in Monmouth) 'allowance is often given under the opinion that the magistrates would order it'.<sup>152</sup> According to Davies, it was simply cheaper for the overseer to grant relief, in the knowledge that it would be granted by the magistrate anyway if a case went to court. He claimed that granting relief in the first instance would 'save the overseer his time and the expenses of the Magistrate's clerk, a constable and of some personal charge which must necessarily be incurred by appearing to the summons'.<sup>153</sup> This response illustrates the

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<sup>152</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>153</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, Rural and Town Queries, 1834.

potential power that magistrates could exert over the decision-making process. However, it is also possible that Davies, being a Justice of the Peace himself, was trying to cast himself in the best possible light by suggesting that he, and his fellow magistrates, were generally more willing than the overseers to grant relief. He may also have been attempting to inflate his own sense of importance in relief matters. Furthermore, the vast majority of Welsh parishes that responded to this question indicated that there was little or no interference by magistrates in the administration of poor relief and that the decision-making process was largely controlled by the overseers and/or the local vestries. For example, James Henry Cotton, the vicar of the parish of Bangor (Caernarvon) stated that relief here was 'generally ordered by the vestry...the magistrates seldom interfere'.<sup>154</sup> Likewise, Isaac Bonsall, the overseer of Llanwrin parish (Montgomery) asserted that 'the magistrates of this district seldom make orders for relief or interfere further than by giving advice when required'.<sup>155</sup> The findings here are supported by evidence from other sources. For instance, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca disturbances, W. Evans, a Guardian of the Newcastle Emlyn Union maintained that in west-Wales at least, under the Old Poor Law, the parish vestry, rather than the magistrates, had decided the outcome of applications for relief and 'settled' any disputes that arose in such matters.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, in his report into the operation of the Old Poor Law in North-Wales, which was included as part of the 1834 Report, Stephen Walcott, one of the Assistant Commissioners, observed that 'the Welsh magistracy do not interfere with the management of the poor to the same extent that many of the English justices are said to do'.<sup>157</sup>

The main reason there was so little magisterial interference in relief matters in Wales was due to the simple fact that there was a distinct lack of active magistrates in Wales throughout the Old Poor Law era.<sup>158</sup> In England these positions were typically filled by

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<sup>154</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, Rural and Town Queries, 1834.

<sup>155</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, Rural and Town Queries, 1834. Similarly, John Llewelyn the churchwarden in the parish of Mynydd Ysllwyn (Monmouth) stated that 'the magistrates make no such orders, their only aim being to get the infirm relieved'. George Brown the overseer of Amroth (Pembroke) also maintained that relief was generally granted by order of the vestry.

<sup>156</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844.

<sup>157</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>158</sup> Philip Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales*, pp.40-41, Jenkins stated that a lack of resident magistrates was a common complaint in nineteenth century Wales.



members of the local gentry. Philip Jenkins has argued that the absence of a 'large and prosperous gentry class' in nineteenth century Wales ensured that central government faced the 'perennial problem of filling key offices such as JP' and that they were often 'forced to employ clergymen in the role'.<sup>159</sup> In his report of the operation of the poor law in North-Wales, Stephen Walcott also noted that there was a dearth of magistrates in Wales, particularly in the more rural regions.<sup>160</sup> He also pointed out that even with these appointments being opened up to the Anglican clergy, there was still a 'want of justices' in the country in 1834 as many clergymen either refused to act in this capacity or felt great unease in doing so. He stated that many clergymen with whom he spoke were reluctant to combine the two offices 'knowing that one would interfere with the other' and that if, in his role as magistrate, he (the clergyman) pursued measures or took decisions that may seem unkind to the poor, he risked losing parishioners of the humbler class from his flock.<sup>161</sup>

There is some evidence that on the few occasions when they did intervene in the administration of the Old Poor Law, magistrates in Wales, particularly clergymen, were relatively generous to the poor, or at least less likely to be economical with relief funds. For instance, in his report, Stephen Walcott listed several examples of magistrates ordering relief to paupers after their applications for relief had initially been declined by the overseers. For example, he reported of a case where a widow in Denbighshire with two children had her regular allowance of 2s a week discontinued by the parish vestry. The widow subsequently went to a magistrate in a neighbouring parish and obtained an order on the overseers for 4s a week.<sup>162</sup> Likewise, in the *Rural Queries*, Henry Scale, the overseer of Aberdare (Glamorgan) lamented that the magistrates here sometimes granted relief without being fully aware of the circumstances of the case.<sup>163</sup> Francis Price, the overseer of

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<sup>159</sup> Philip Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales*, p.41. In his report Stephen Walcott also noted that clergymen were often appointed as magistrates, particularly in the more rural parishes in Wales.

<sup>160</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>161</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>162</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>163</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834 Rural and Town Query, Scale also claimed that Welsh magistrates, particularly members of the clergy, often granted relief in appeals cases due to 'a love of popularity and the fear of odium'; Captain Evans made much the same observation in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots. When asked 'Would you like to restore the power which the

the parish of Overton (Flintshire) even maintained that Welsh magistrates were known as ‘the poor man’s friend’.<sup>164</sup> The fact that paupers in Wales sometimes went to magistrates to appeal against the decisions of the vestry also shows that they had some agency under the Old Poor Law. In his report, Walcott even intimated that some paupers in Wales took advantage of this appeals process, and the lack of resident magistrates in the country, by appealing to ‘distant magistrates’ who ‘would not have been familiar with their case’.<sup>165</sup>

However, although paupers in Wales could and sometimes did appeal to magistrates for help in relief matters, the dearth of active magistrates in the country before 1834 ensured that, by and large, the day-to-day administration of poor relief rested with the overseers and/or the parish vestry. Furthermore, even when magistrates in Wales did intervene in relief cases and overturn the decisions of the overseer, there is some evidence that these orders were often ignored or subverted. For instance, in the *Rural Queries*, the overseer of Llandinam (Montgomery) maintained that ‘magistrates often gave an order for relief but under some pretence or other it is usually quickly discontinued’.<sup>166</sup> This perhaps suggests that the magistrates were more paternalistic than the ratepayers at the vestries.

The lack of involvement from the magistrates meant that the administration of the Old Poor Law in Wales was often dominated by the vestry and their agents, the overseers. This then begs the question: What was the relationship between the two? Where did the balance of power lay? Were overseers acting independently? Or, being annually elected by a parish vestry, were they merely an agent of the ratepayers? All of these questions are addressed in the following section.

### **The relationship between the vestry and the overseers in Wales under the Old Poor Law**

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magistrates had under the Old Poor Law of ordering relief?’ he replied ‘No, they made very bad use of it. The paupers were very insolent and said they would go and see so and so (a magistrate) and he would give an order, it was very improper’.

<sup>164</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834 Rural and Town Queries; Ben Harvey has also demonstrated that paupers in Wales under the OPL were likely to secure relief if they appealed to a magistrate. Ben Richard Harvey, ‘Pauper Narratives in the Welsh borders: 1750-1840’, p.105

<sup>165</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the operation of the poor laws in north-Wales

<sup>166</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834 Rural and Town Queries.

In a handful of parishes in Wales the overseers were able to exert considerable influence over poor relief matters. Evidence of this can be seen in the *Rural and Town Queries*. For instance, Question 35 asked: 'If both the overseers and the vestry take part in deciding all or any of these (poor relief) matters, state the manner or degree in which they respectfully interfere?' A few Welsh parishes indicated that relief decisions were either decided by the overseer or that their overseers at least had some discretion in such matters. For example, John Lewis, JP, stated that in the parish of Llandewy-Velfryn (Montgomery) 'the management of the parish affairs is generally left to the overseers'.<sup>167</sup> Likewise, Henry Richards, the curate of Llangain (Carnarvon) stated that 'the vestry generally decides but the overseer is allowed to use his discretion in case of sickness or any other accident'.<sup>168</sup>

However, the vast majority of Welsh parishes that responded to this question indicated that relief decisions were generally made by the ratepayers at vestry meetings, with overseers only able to inform decisions as part of the vestry. For example, Edward Morgan, JP, asserted that in Llanasa (Flint) 'the overseers take no part in deciding these [relief] matters and act solely as the organs of the ratepayers or of their committee'.<sup>169</sup> Similarly, Evan David, Radyr Court, stated that in the parishes of Llandaff and Radyr and the Hundred of Kibbor (Glamorgan) 'the churchwardens, being ex-officio members of the Vestry, only interfere as individual members of such vestry'.<sup>170</sup> Once again, the findings here are supported by evidence from other sources. For instance, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca disturbances, Mr Evans a former Guardian of the Newcastle

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<sup>167</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834 Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>168</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834 Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>169</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834 Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>170</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834 Rural and Town Queries; Likewise, Edmund Henry Waller, the churchwarden of St Arvans (Monmouth) stated that 'the overseer has only one voice (as part of the vestry) in deciding any matter'; D. Davies, the curate of Bangor (Carnarvon) asserted that the overseer made decisions as part of the vestry and that 'in case of difference of opinion-the majority decides'; John Thomas stated that in Llanidloes (Montgomery) 'the officers (overseers) are allowed to exercise but very little authority in this county'; and in Carew (Pembroke) James Allen (Freestone Hall) stated that 'the overseers form part of the vestry and vote as others in all matters relating to the parish.

Emlyn Union claimed that under the Old Poor Law, in this area of Wales at least, ‘the whole of the vestry’ would settle relief cases rather than the overseer acting independently.<sup>171</sup>

This then leads to the question of who controlled these vestries: Who attended the vestry meetings? Did prominent individuals or particular groups of people take charge of poor relief proceedings? Or did all parishioners or ratepayers have an equal say in relief matters? Under the Old Poor Law there were two different kinds of vestry in operation: ‘Open’ vestries, which all of the ratepayers in a parish could attend; and following the 1818 and 1819 Sturges Bourne Acts, ‘Closed’ or ‘Select’ vestries where certain individuals were selected to administer poor relief. Select vestries were usually made-up from the largest ratepayers in the parish with the expectation that, as the greatest burden fell upon them, these individuals would be more economical with relief funds.<sup>172</sup> Many parishes in Wales initially took advantage of the Sturges Borne Acts and implemented Select Vestries in an attempt to reduce the poor rates which, as demonstrated in Chapter One, were increasing rapidly, particularly in the years between 1785 and 1819. Table Six, below, shows the number of Select Vestries and salaried assistant overseers (another stipulation of the act) in England and Wales in the year 1821.

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<sup>171</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844

<sup>172</sup> Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, pp.50-52.

**Table Six: The number of Select Vestries and Assistant Overseers in England and Wales in 1821.**

Area	Number of Select Vestries	Number of Assistant Overseers
<b>National</b>		
*Wales	242	169
*England	1,903	1,810
England and Wales	2,145	1,979
<b>Sample English Counties</b>		
Kent	48	71
Lancaster	126	99
Middlesex	11	27
Chester	76	56
Salop	32	52
Gloucester	47	54
Hereford	42	56
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>		
Pembroke	32	13
Glamorgan	29	44
Monmouth	16	28
Montgomery	16	10
Flint	12	12
Caernarvon	22	13

**\*Note:** The figures for England and Wales have been adjusted to show the county of Monmouth as being in Wales

**Source:** Select Committee on poor rate returns: Report, appendix; supplemental appendix (1819-22), PP, 1822, vol.5, 556

This table shows that, by 1821, at the national level, there were 242 Select Vestries and 169 Salaried Overseers in Wales. In England there were 1,903 Select Vestries and 1,810 Salaried Overseers by this point in time. As alluded to in Chapter One, many of the Select Vestries in England and Wales had been successful in lowering relief costs. For instance, parochial

officials from Walwyn's castle in Pembroke reported in *The Cambrian* in 1823 that 'we still continue to find the good effects of the Select Vestry, as since its establishment three years ago (in 1820), our rates are reduced nearly one-hundred percent'.<sup>173</sup> Likewise, in a Select Committee Report on poor rate returns in 1822 the overseer of the parish of Cardiff stated that 'the poor rates are reducing very much since the establishment of the Select Vestry'.<sup>174</sup> Eirug Davies has also demonstrated that poor law expenditure in the parish of Machynlleth in Cardiganshire decreased significantly in 1824 under a Select Vestry.<sup>175</sup>

However, by the eve of the New Poor Law, there were relatively few Select Vestries in Wales. Question 32 in the *Rural and Town Queries* asked: 'Have you a Select Vestry and/or an assistant overseer, and what has been the effect?' The vast majority of Welsh parishes that responded to this question stated that they did not have a Select Vestry. For example, John Llewelyn, the churchwarden of Mynydd Ysllwyn (Monmouth) reported that 'there is no Select Vestry but there is an assistant overseer acting under the influence of a General Vestry'.<sup>176</sup> Moreover, many of the parishes that had used Select Vestries to lower relief costs in the 1820s had discarded them by 1834 and reverted back to using 'Open' vestries.<sup>177</sup> For example, J. Thomas the overseer of Llandinam (Montgomery) explained that prior to 1834 the parish 'had possessed both' a Select Vestry and an Assistant Overseer but 'both were dropped' and now the parish possessed 'neither'.<sup>178</sup> In Radnorshire, the number of Select Vestries decreased from twenty-seven in 1827 to just five

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<sup>173</sup> Poor Rate Returns, *The Cambrian*, 8 November, 1823, p.4.

<sup>174</sup> Select Committee on Poor Rate Returns: Report, Appendix, Supplemental Appendix, (1819-1822), PP, 1822. The overseer of the parish of Steynton (in Pembroke) also stated that 'previous to the formation of the Select Vestry, the average annual expenditure was about £1,240' and that the parish 'had become in debt to the sum of £431'. However, following the implementation of a Select Vestry the poor law expenditure was reduced to £676. The overseer also claimed that 'the said debt has now been repaid' and that the balance in favour of the parish amounted to £50.

<sup>175</sup> Eirug Davies, 'Some aspects of the Old Poor Law in Cardiganshire', p.6. He produced figures to show that under an open vestry the parish in 1823 the parish had spent £639 on poor relief, whereas under a Select Vestry the following year only £439 had been spent.

<sup>176</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834 Rural and Town Queries; Likewise, Francis Price, the overseer of Overton (Flint) stated that the parish had 'no select vestry but did have an assistant overseer...and we find the interests of the parish better attended to and the bastardy better looked after'.

<sup>177</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the operation of the poor laws in North-Wales. Walcott stated that this was particularly the case in rural parishes.

<sup>178</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834 Rural and Town Queries.

in 1832.<sup>179</sup> In his report, Stephen Walcott also noted that in north-Wales, ‘Select Vestries were more common formerly than now’ and that although the provisions of the Sturges Bourne Acts had been generally adopted in the region, they had, by and large, been ‘discontinued after a year’s trial, particularly in the country parishes’.<sup>180</sup> Walcott produced figures to show that, by 1832, 77% of parishes in North-Wales had an Open Vestry.<sup>181</sup>

At first glance it may appear odd that the vast majority of Welsh parishes favoured an ‘Open’ vestry over a ‘Select’ or ‘Closed’ one, given that the former typically expended far more money on poor relief. Of course, it is possible that the welfare of the paupers was the main concern of the majority of the ratepayers in Wales and that the decision to revert back to an Open vestry reflected a more paternalistic attitude. After all, Steven King has argued that parishes in the south-east of England were far more ‘generous’ than parishes in the north-west of the country (before and after 1834) as they typically spent larger sums on poor relief.<sup>182</sup> This line of thinking would also be in keeping with the work of Alun C. Davies and Simon Hancock who claimed that paupers in Wales were relatively well provided for under the Old Poor Law.<sup>183</sup> The treatment that paupers in Wales received under the Old Poor Law is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

However, it will be demonstrated here that, although ‘Open’ vestries in Wales typically expended larger sums on poor relief, they were not necessarily more generous to the paupers themselves. For instance, in his report Walcott stated that ‘jobbery’ and ‘favouritism’ were common at ‘Open’ vestries in North-Wales.<sup>184</sup> For example, Walcott

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<sup>179</sup> Cited in Keith Parker, ‘Radnorshire and the Old Poor Law, 1800-1836’, *Radnorshire Society Transactions*, vol.72, (January, 2002), pp.139-149, [here p.146]; Likewise, in Cardiganshire the number of Select Vestries dropped from a high of twenty-four in 1825 to only seven in 1834, Cited in Alun Eirug Davies, ‘Some aspects of the Old Poor Law in Cardiganshire’, p.5.

<sup>180</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales .

<sup>181</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales. Walcott produced figures to show that by 1832, 77% of parishes in north-Wales had an open vestry.

<sup>182</sup> King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850*.

<sup>183</sup> Simon Hancock, ‘Aspects of the Old Poor Law in Pembrokeshire’, [www.pembrokeshirehistoricalsociety.co.uk/aspects-of-the-old-poor-law-in-pembrokeshire](http://www.pembrokeshirehistoricalsociety.co.uk/aspects-of-the-old-poor-law-in-pembrokeshire) (accessed 01/07/2020); Cited in Alun C. Davies, ‘The Old Poor Law in an Industrialising Parish: Aberdare’.

<sup>184</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales

noted that in many parishes, landlords often attended the meetings of the Open vestries in order to secure relief for their own tenants, thus lining their own pockets.<sup>185</sup> Moreover, Walcott maintained that the proprietors of pauper cottages often charged exorbitant rents, in the knowledge that they could secure these sums from the parochial funds.<sup>186</sup> There is also evidence of this type of jobbery being practiced in other parts of Wales. For instance, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca disturbances in South-West Wales, one witness, Mr Hughes, the clerk of the Aberystwyth Union, intimated that, under the Old Poor Law it had been common for overseers in this region of Wales, 'being the owners of cottages themselves', to pay the rents of pauper applicants; it being in their own interest to do so.<sup>187</sup> In these exchanges, it was undoubtedly the landlord, rather than the pauper, who ultimately benefited from these sometimes lavish expenditures. In a similar vein, Walcott also claimed that many ratepayers in Wales, particularly the smaller ratepayers, often attended the meetings of the 'Open' vestries simply in order 'to procure relief for paupers with whom they were in league with', in order that they may share the proceeds.<sup>188</sup> This could be seen as a degree of agency on the part of the pauper. However, once again, the inference here is that not all of the money expended on poor relief at 'Open' vestries reached the pockets of the paupers themselves.

In his report Walcott concluded that one of the main reasons that Select Vestries were unpopular in Wales was that the larger ratepayers, who typically dominated this type of vestry, had attempted to stamp-out this type of corruption, much to the annoyance of the 'smaller' ratepayers, who, under the 'Open' vestries, had been lining their own pockets with money from the relief funds. He stated that 'the restrictions which Select vestries often placed on jobbing and favouritism played a large role in parishes reverting back to an 'Open' system'.<sup>189</sup> Further evidence that the decision to administer poor relief through an 'Open' vestry was not based on any concern for the welfare of paupers can also be seen in the fact

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<sup>185</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales

<sup>186</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>187</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844.

<sup>188</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>189</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.



that another one of the main criticisms of Select vestries made by many ratepayers in Wales was that they met too often and provided paupers with too many opportunities to apply for relief. Under the Sturges Bourne Acts (1818-19), the Select Vestries were required to meet once a fortnight, in comparison to the 'Open' vestries which typically only met a couple of times a year.<sup>190</sup> Walcott stated that in North-Wales the reason commonly assigned for the decline of Select Vestries in the region is that when meetings were held once a fortnight, 'the paupers were sure also to attend and by their importunities seldom failed to obtain some relief'.<sup>191</sup>

It has been demonstrated here that, by the eve of the New Poor Law the vast majority of parishes in Wales administered relief through an Open vestry. This then begs the question: Who dominated the Open vestries in Wales? In theory, all of the ratepayers in a parish were able to attend an 'Open' vestry and thus influence the administration of poor relief. However, in practice there is evidence to suggest that these vestries were often controlled by a handful of individuals only. For example, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, Francis Price, the overseer of Overton (Flintshire) asserted that 'in some small parishes or townships, one person has his own way' at the vestry meetings and that 'he who does not please him may starve'.<sup>192</sup> In a similar vein, D. Nihill, perpetual curate at Forden, maintained that 'the most over-bearing persons rule the vestries'.<sup>193</sup> Further evidence that poor relief was typically dominated by a handful of individuals only can be seen in the fact that attendances at vestry meetings in Wales were often very small. For example, A.J. Lewis reported that open vestries in Monmouthshire 'seldom had more than one or two vestrymen present besides the parish officers'.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>191</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales. According to Walcott, the ratepayers here would rather 'forgo a Select Vestry (even though many had been successful in reducing expenditure) than withstand the importunity' of the paupers.<sup>191</sup>

<sup>192</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834 Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>193</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834 Rural and Town Queries; William Lutener, the Overseer of Newtown (Montgomeryshire) also stated that in the small country parishes 'the whole affairs are commonly managed by some two or three persons'.

<sup>194</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Report from Arthur James Lewis, on the Counties of Salop, Hereford and Monmouth. Walcott made similar observations in his report.

The evidence here supports some of the recent thinking about the nature of poor law administration at the local level. Several historians have argued that individual personalities could, and did, play a large role in shaping local relief policies. For example, Geoffrey Hooker has claimed that poor relief in the Llandilofawr Union (under the New Poor Law) was largely determined by a prominent local farmer-John Lewis.<sup>195</sup> With vestries in Wales being dominated by a small group of people, the nature of poor relief in Wales, under the Old Poor Law at least, thus depended to a large extent on the whims of the few individuals who controlled the vestry meetings. This fact was readily acknowledged by contemporaries. For instance, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, David Hughes JP claimed that in the parish of Llanfyllin (Montgomeryshire) the nature of poor relief 'depended on the humanity of the leading men'.<sup>196</sup> It is worth noting here that under the Old Poor Law at least, the individuals that dominated the administrative process were exclusively male. This is not to say that women did not have any bearing whatsoever in the administration of poor relief prior to 1834. There were female ratepayers after all who could theoretically attend vestry meetings and give their opinions on matters of relief.<sup>197</sup> However, as will be demonstrated here, men overwhelmingly dominated the decision-making process in England and Wales before 1834. Moreover, the vast majority of poor law officials under the Old Poor Law, such as the overseers and magistrates, were also men. The impact of this for pauper women, particularly single mothers with illegitimate children, is discussed in more detail later in the thesis. This then begs the question: Who were the men that dominated the Open vestries in Wales under the Old Poor Law? Were they drawn from the upper echelons of society? Or was the decision-making process in Wales dominated by men from more humble backgrounds? Was there variation in who controlled the Old Poor Law in Wales?

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<sup>195</sup> Hooker 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union'; See also the work of Karen Rothery, 'The Power of Personality' and Julie Light, 'Mere Seekers of Fame?'.  
<sup>196</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Rural and Town Queries.  
<sup>197</sup> Other historians have shown the impact that women had in the political arena even before they had secured the right to vote. See the work of Matthew Cragoe, *Culture, Politics, and National Identity in Wales, 1832-1886*, (Oxford, 2004); Sarah Richardson, 'Politics and Gender', in Chris Williams (ed), *A Companion to Nineteenth Century Britain*, (Oxford, 2004), pp.124-188; Ursula Masson, "*For Women, for Wales and for Liberalism*", *Women in Liberal Politics in Wales, 1880-1914*, (Cardiff, 2010).

In the more rural parishes in Wales, the administration of the Old Poor Law was often dominated by farmers. In the *Rural and Town Queries*, Alfred Ollivant, Clerk and JP of Lampeter-Pont-Stephen (Cardiganshire) stated that 'in this parish and several of the neighbouring ones, the preponderating influence in the vestries is that of the farmers'.<sup>198</sup> Likewise, in his report of the operation of the Old Poor Law in Monmouthshire, one of the Assistant Commissioners, A.J. Lewis, maintained that 'in rural parishes (in Monmouthshire) the vestries were generally run by farmers'.<sup>199</sup> Although all farmers, by occupying land, contributed towards the poor rates, Walcott claimed in his report that in Wales it was generally those occupying the largest farms in the district that controlled the decision-making process. Walcott stated that the smaller farmers in Wales, particularly those occupying tenements under a certain value, were often denied a vote at the vestry meetings.<sup>200</sup> It is possible that some of the smaller farmers were intimidated and subdued by their social superiors. The relationship between the smaller farmers and the landed elites is discussed in more detail below. Moreover, Walcott maintained that many of the smaller farmers in Wales were too poor and too busy to attend vestry meetings regularly or to devote enough time to the administration of poor relief.<sup>201</sup> This also helps to explain why attendances at these vestry meetings were so low.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the vast majority of farmers in Wales, even those occupying the largest farms, were tenant farmers i.e. they were forced to pay rent to a landlord, who owned the ground upon which they farmed.<sup>202</sup> Moreover, farms in Wales were typically small, especially in comparison to farms in England.<sup>203</sup> Economically, there was often very little difference between tenant farmers and agricultural labourers in Wales. Despite occupying land and sometimes being employers, many tenant farmers in Wales

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<sup>198</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>199</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Report of AJ Lewis (Assistant Commissioner) on Salop, Hereford and Monmouth; Walcott made the same observation about the control of rural vestries in North-Wales; in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots, Thomas Frankland Lewis also suggested that farmers had 'been in control of administering their own parochial funds' under the Old Poor Law.

<sup>200</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the operation of the poor laws in North-Wales.

<sup>201</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>202</sup> David Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.33

<sup>203</sup> David Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.33

were relatively poor, especially in comparison to some of their counterparts in England.<sup>204</sup> At first glance, it may appear odd, especially given the relative poverty of Welsh farmers that the administration of the Old Poor Law, in the rural areas of Wales at least, was dominated by those occupying the land rather than the landowners themselves. Indeed, throughout much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, landowners in England and Wales, as elsewhere, often saw themselves as the natural leaders of rural society.<sup>205</sup> Moreover, in their capacity as magistrates, landowners often had far more experience of local administration than their relatively poor tenants. Landlords in Wales were also typically far more educated than the farmers which arguably made them better candidates for these important roles.<sup>206</sup>

However, many landowners in Wales had become heavily Anglicized by the middle of the eighteenth century. They were often separated from the rest of society in terms of political allegiance, language and religion.<sup>207</sup> Many landowners in Wales spoke English only, or else had very little knowledge of Welsh, and were Anglican in religion; whilst the vast majority of the remainder of the population spoke Welsh and were Nonconformist.<sup>208</sup> It was also common, by this point in time, for landowners in Wales to reside outside of the country (many lived in England, where they also possessed land) and to leave their estate in the hands of an agent, who was also often brought in from outside of Wales.<sup>209</sup> This created something of a social and political vacuum which was often filled by those with lesser means. Although they were relatively poor, the occupation of land provided farmers in the more rural regions in Wales with a sense of status and standing in their local communities.<sup>210</sup> In the absence of resident landlords, it was farmers who provided social

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<sup>204</sup> R.J. Moore-Colyer, 'Landowners, Farmers and Language in the Nineteenth Century' in Geraint Jenkins (ed), *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains, 1801-1911*, (Cardiff, 2000), pp.101-130, [here p.127]. See also the work of David Williams, *The Rebecca Riots*, (Cardiff, 1955).

<sup>205</sup> Lowri Ann Rees, 'Paternalism and Rural Protest: The Rebecca Riots and the Landed Interest of South-West Wales', *The Agricultural History Review*, vol.59, no.1, (2011), pp.36-60, [here p.39]. Rees stated that 'the [land-owning] gentry strongly believed that ownership of property afforded them special rights and duties, which included helping and guiding the lower orders of society.'

<sup>206</sup> David Williams, *The Rebecca Riots*, p.34

<sup>207</sup> Cited in Moore-Colyer, 'Landowners, Farmers and Language in the Nineteenth Century'. See also Matthew Cragoe, *Culture, Politics, and National Identity in Wales*.

<sup>208</sup> Cited in David Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.34

<sup>209</sup> Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.44

<sup>210</sup> Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.33. Howell also stated that 'the possession of land, no matter what the extent, distinguished the occupants from the remainder of the lower orders, who obtained a livelihood through selling their labour'.

and political leadership in the Welsh countryside, which often included the administration of poor relief. The evidence here supports the work of historians such as David Howells who have argued that, by the end of the eighteenth century, the landed elites in Wales were moving away from their traditional paternalistic duties to the poor.<sup>211</sup>

This is not to say that landowners in Wales were completely exempt from the administration of the Old Poor Law in Wales. As already demonstrated, a small number of landlords did exert some control over relief matters via their positions as magistrates. Moreover, when resident, there is some evidence that a few landlords in Wales, on account of their senior social positions, did control the vestry meetings in their local parish, at least when they were present at the meetings. For example, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, Thomas Davies, the churchwarden of Llandevaillog stated that ‘when anything of importance occurs, all four of the landowners in the parish interfere.’<sup>212</sup> It is also possible of course that even the most substantial tenant farmer was acting under the influence of, or under pressure from, their local landlord, or the landlord’s agent if non-resident. There is some evidence that farmers were often coerced into acting in the interests of their social superiors. For example, it was reported in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* in 1832 that the ‘tenantry of a large estate in the county’ had been canvassed by the agent of the local landowner into voting for their landlord and his friend at an upcoming election. The report suggested that the tenant farmers were threatened with eviction if they did not vote in favour of their landlord.<sup>213</sup>

However, although they could and occasionally did intervene in relief matters, particularly in matters of importance, such as the decision whether or not to build a workhouse, the lack of resident landlords in Wales meant that the day-to-day administration of the Old Poor Law in the rural parishes in Wales was often left in the hands of the local farmers. Further evidence of this can be seen in the *Rural and Town Queries*. For instance, Mr E. Lloyd, Chairman of the Quarter Sessions, Corwen (Merioneth) stated that in this region of Wales at least, ‘farmers deliver their sentiments with more freedom in the

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<sup>211</sup> See Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*; See also Lowri Anne Rees, ‘Paternalism and Rural Protest’.

<sup>212</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, *Rural and Town Queries*.

<sup>213</sup> Electioneering Dialogues, no.1, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 14 July, 1832, p.3

absence of gentlemen and magistrates...especially where the quantum of relief to each individual pauper applicant is in question'.<sup>214</sup> This implies that although the farmers, in this parish at least, were acting under duress when in the presence of their landlord, the more 'mundane' decisions, such as the amount of relief granted to individual paupers, were, in the absence of the landlords, often taken by the farmers alone. Moore-Colyer has also argued that throughout the nineteenth century in Wales 'successful farmers served as minor administrators as well as employers' and that they enjoyed 'considerable local power'.<sup>215</sup>

Further evidence that the administration of the Old Poor Law in Wales, particularly in the more rural parishes, was dominated by those lower down the social scale can be seen in the fact that in many parishes, the vestry meetings often took place in, or were adjourned to, the local public house. This may also help to explain why attendances at these meetings were so low. In his report, Stephen Walcott asserted that vestries in North-Wales usually met 'at night and frequently at public houses, by which means the clergymen and the more respectable ratepayers are deterred from attending'.<sup>216</sup> Likewise, it was reported in the *Glamorgan Gazette* in 1834 that the meetings of the Merthyr vestry had been held for some time at the long room over *The Pond* (a public house), where the meetings of the local branch of the Unitarians also took place.<sup>217</sup> The fact that this meeting took place in a location well known to Nonconformists may also tell us something about the religious nature of those in charge of administering relief, at least in this parish. Indeed, at one particular meeting in December 1834, it was reported that Mr David Lewis of Dyffryn, who was described as 'a Tory and high Churchman', was fiercely opposed 'principally by the Unitarians then present' over some measure that was deemed inimical to the interests of the parish. Lewis responded to the indignation of being outvoted at the vestry by unleashing

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<sup>214</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834 Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>215</sup> R. J. Moore-Colyer, 'Landowners, Farmers and Language in the Nineteenth Century', p.117. Colyer also stated that whether or not the power held by the farmers was used as a means of exploitation 'presumably varied with the personal qualities and upbringing of the individual'.

<sup>216</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the operation of the poor laws in North-Wales.

<sup>217</sup> Religious Intolerance, *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 13 December, 1834, p.3

a tirade of ‘uncharitable epithets on them (the vestry) and their creed’.<sup>218</sup> Lewis even protested that ‘there are meetings held here for the purpose of disseminating religious principles diametrically opposed to the interests of the Established Church’.<sup>219</sup> The fact that Lewis, a prominent landowner and churchman, was outvoted also indicates that the day-to-day administration of the vestries was often dominated by those lower down the social scale. The impact of Nonconformity on the administration of poor relief is discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

The administration of the Old Poor Law in the more industrialised parishes in Wales was often dominated by local businessmen, usually either the more prominent industrialists or their agents in the region, or else members of the emerging ‘professional’ middle classes. For instance, in his study of the operation of the Old Poor Law in Aberdare, Alun Davies noted that the local ironmaster Rowland Fothergill played an important role at the vestry meetings, often finding employment for unemployed labourers.<sup>220</sup> It is unclear in this instance whether or not Fothergill was using his position to solicit cheap labour or if the welfare of the paupers was his main concern. Either way, he was a prominent figure in the administrative process before 1834. Further evidence that industrialists often dominated the vestries in the more industrial parishes in Wales can be seen in the *Rural and Town Queries*. For instance, when asked who controlled the administration of the Old Poor Law in his district, William Lutener the overseer of Newtown stated that the vestry was dominated by ‘tradesmen and manufacturers of flannel’.<sup>221</sup> Likewise, in 1833 it was reported that at a vestry meeting in Merthyr, the local ironmasters successfully quashed a poor rate that had been raised against their works at a previous vestry meeting.<sup>222</sup> They also forced through a resolution that any deficit in the rates should be made by raising a general rate, much to the

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<sup>218</sup> Religious Intolerance, *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 13 December, 1834, p.3

<sup>219</sup> Religious Intolerance, *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 13 December, 1834, p.3.

<sup>220</sup> Cited in Alun C. Davies, ‘The Old Poor Law in an Industrialising Parish: Aberdare, 1818-36’, *Welsh History Review*, 77, vol.8, no.1-4, (January, 1976), pp.285-311, [here p.288].

<sup>221</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>222</sup> Vestry Meeting-Merthyr, *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 16 February 1833, p.4.

annoyance of the small farmers to whom the greatest share of the burden fell.<sup>223</sup> This also suggests that the owners of industry were often the prepondering influence at the town vestries.

In Wales, as elsewhere, it was not uncommon for the owners of industry to live outside of the parish in which their works were situated.<sup>224</sup> In these cases, the administration of the Old Poor Law often fell into the hands of the emerging 'professional' classes. For example, in the parish of Swansea Town and Franchise, a local barrister, Henry Sockett, held the important position of Visitor of the Workhouse for fourteen years between 1818 and 1832.<sup>225</sup> Likewise, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, William Powell, the vicar and JP of Abergavenny stated that three of the four overseers in the parish were 'appointed annually from tradesmen in the town'.<sup>226</sup> In a similar vein, Walcott also maintained that in North-Wales it was 'generally the shopkeepers' that dominated vestry meetings in the towns.<sup>227</sup> The findings here support much of the recent thinking about the influence of the emerging middle classes in Wales during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>228</sup> Despite their relatively small numbers, individuals from the professional classes in Wales, on account of their increasing wealth, were often regarded as the social elites within their parish and many became heavily involved in local administration, which gave them even further prestige in their local communities.

### **The standard of the poor relief system in Wales under the Old Poor Law.**

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<sup>223</sup> Vestry Meeting-Merthyr, *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 16 February 1833, p.4.

<sup>224</sup> Neil Evans, 'Urbanisation and Social Welfare in Wales, Scotland and Ireland', in Steven King and John Stewart (eds), *Welfare Peripheries, the Development of Welfare States in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe*, (Bern, 2007), pp.181-206, [here p.186]. Evans stated that 'iron and coalmining communities in Wales were overwhelmingly working class' and that 'coal owners usually lived outside of such places, leaving managers to take care of their interests in production'.

<sup>225</sup> Henry Sockett 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of Industry'. This role involved auditing the accounts of the Governor of the workhouse and setting the number of poor-rates to be raised during the year.

<sup>226</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834 *Rural and Town Queries*.

<sup>227</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the operation of the poor laws in North-Wales.

<sup>228</sup> See the work of Any Croll, *Civilizing The Urban, Popular Culture and Public space in Merthyr 1870-1914*, (Cardiff, 2000); Neil Evans, 'The Welsh Victorian City: The Middle Class, Civic and National Consciousness in Cardiff, 1850-1914', *Welsh History Review*, vol.85, no.1-4, (January, 1984), pp.350-387; Julie Light, 'The Middle Class as Urban Elites in Nineteenth Century South-Wales', *The Welsh History Review*, vol.24, no.3, (June, 2009), pp.29-55.



In the more rural parishes in Wales, many of the farmers, particularly the smaller tenant farmers, that dominated the administration of the Old Poor Law were either illiterate, or else did not have enough time to devote to their poor law duties.<sup>229</sup> In his report Walcott stated that in many of the country parishes in north-Wales, he came across many farmers who were acting as overseers, or else otherwise involved in the running of the parish vestries, who were 'wholly incompetent to discharge their duties...either from the interference of private occupations, or from want of experience or skill [or both]'.<sup>230</sup> Walcott also noted that many of the farmer-overseers simply lacked the desire to devote enough time to these important roles. He stated that 'there is a feeling (in this region of Wales at least) that as a disagreeable and unpaid office has been forced upon the overseer, he should not be rigorously treated'.<sup>231</sup>

Moreover, many of the farmers that dominated the rural vestries in Wales held somewhat derisory views towards the paupers under their care. Evidence of this can be seen in the *Rural and Town Queries*. For instance, when asked: 'What would be the effect of making the decisions of the Vestry or Select Vestry in matters of relief final (i.e. taking away the appeals process from the magistrates)?', Alfred Ollivant, JP of Lampeter-Pont-Stephen (Cardigan) insisted that, if left to the farmers 'the poor would be very much oppressed'.<sup>232</sup> Likewise, R. Venables the vicar of Clyro (Radnorshire) asserted that 'in a country parish, the farmers are not exactly the persons to be trusted with power without some appeal'.<sup>233</sup>

Of course, the majority of those who opposed the removal of the appeals process in the *Rural and Town Queries* were magistrates themselves. It is possible that much of the condemnation of the farmers on behalf of the magistrates was due to the fact that removing the appeals process, over which they presided, would lessen their own power in

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<sup>229</sup> Williams, *The Rebecca Riots*, p.34

<sup>230</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales

<sup>231</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales; In a similar vein, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, the overseer of Llanfyllin (Montgomery) stated that 'the overseers are expected to attend the vestries regularly' and that 'if they are men of weight and information, they are useful...but this is not always the case and it is then deemed best not to trouble them with business, which they are very glad to avoid'.

<sup>232</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>233</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

relief matters, as well as potentially diminishing their own sense of importance or standing in the local community. In his report, A.J. Lewis acknowledged that both overseers and magistrates 'were far too interested in themselves to give a just representation' of the other party.<sup>234</sup>

However, there is plenty of other evidence to suggest that the welfare of the poor was seldom the main concern of the farmers in Wales. For instance, as already alluded to, jobbery and corruption were rife at the rural vestries in Wales. In the Report into the Rebecca disturbances in West-Wales, one witness claimed that under the Old Poor Law, it was common for farmers (in this region of Wales at least) to pay their poor rates in grain, or some other commodity, instead of money, which was then then passed on to the paupers in lieu of a cash dole.<sup>235</sup> The Commissioners of the Report concluded that under this 'lax and irregular system of relief...the pauper was doubtless often the sufferer' as they were unable to shop around for the best prices.<sup>236</sup> Likewise, it was also common, particularly when parishes were in arrears with the rates, for farmer-overseers to provide the paupers with their own produce, which they then charged back to the parish at highly inflated prices, thus operating a truck-like system of relief.<sup>237</sup> The findings here suggest that, despite their own relative poverty, many farmers in Wales had little sympathy for those in need of parochial relief. This is at odds with the claims of many historians such as David Howell and Keith Snell, who have argued that the relative poverty of Welsh farmers fostered a mutualistic and sympathetic relationship between the farmers and their labourers.<sup>238</sup> The findings here support the work of Moore-Colyer who argued that by the start of the nineteenth century farmers in Wales 'strove, by a variety of means, to maintain a distinctive social distance

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<sup>234</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Report from Arthur James Lewis, on the Counties of Salop, Hereford and Monmouth. Lewis stated that 'if you asked an overseer, or select vestryman, his opinion as to the propriety of magisterial control in ordering relief, his reply invariably was that he considered it mischievous'. However, Lewis also stated that 'if you asked a magistrate...they would claim that without their involvement the poor would be oppressed'.

<sup>235</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844.

<sup>236</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844.

<sup>237</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844.

<sup>238</sup> See the work of David Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.246. Howell stated that 'the persistence of the indoor servant system and of married labourers boarding at the farms down to the end of the nineteenth century and beyond certainly made for a paternalistic regime'. See also Keith Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.259-260.

from his workers'.<sup>239</sup> Colyer also stated 'that a clear and unequivocal distinction existed is further emphasized by the evidence of written agreements between the two parties in which only the farmer is accorded the dignity of the prefix "Mr", while the written accounts of the more substantial farmers, setting out perquisites and part-payment of wages in kind, underline the carefully orchestrated class differences'.<sup>240</sup>

As result of the general inability and/or the unwillingness of the Welsh farmers to carry out their poor law duties effectively, coupled with their general lack of empathy for those in need of parochial assistance, the administration of the Old Poor Law in the more rural parishes in Wales was typically lax and inefficient, often to the detriment of the paupers themselves. For example, the standard of book-keeping in rural parishes in Wales before 1834 was woefully inadequate. In his report into the operation of the Old Poor Law in South-Wales, George Clive lamented that in the parish of St Mary's, Tenby, 'the books had been kept in a most slovenly manner', with numerous 'unaccountable' charges.<sup>241</sup> Rather tellingly Clive also stated that he failed to see how many of the 'absurd charges' allowed by the overseer of the parish, Mr Reynolds, had 'worked for the poor themselves'.<sup>242</sup> Likewise, in his report into the operation of the Old Poor Law in Monmouthshire, A.J. Lewis stated that in the rural parishes 'there is a good understanding between the few vestrymen who attend the meetings and the overseers, that the acts of the latter are confirmed almost as a matter of course, without any scrupulous examination'.<sup>243</sup> Lewis also lamented that 'under such a lax system...the poor were often harshly dealt with'.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> R. J. Moore-Colyer, 'Landowners, Farmers and Language in the Nineteenth Century', p.115. For further discussion on the decline of paternalistic attitudes in the Welsh countryside in the early nineteenth century see Lowri Ann Rees, 'Paternalism and Rural Protest'.

<sup>240</sup> Moore-Colyer, 'Landowners, Farmers and Language in the Nineteenth Century', p.116.

<sup>241</sup> George Clive, Correspondence and Papers related to the Welsh district (particularly South-Wales including Cardiff and Swansea) and the eastern district (including Norfolk and Suffolk), 1836-39, at the National archives, MH 32/12. Available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Poverty, Philanthropy and Social Conditions in Victorian Britain,

[http://www.povertyinVictorianBritain.amdigital.co.uk/abc.cardiff.ac.uk/documents/details/TNA\\_MH\\_32\\_12](http://www.povertyinVictorianBritain.amdigital.co.uk/abc.cardiff.ac.uk/documents/details/TNA_MH_32_12) (accessed 22 November 2020) ; Walcott also observed the lax auditing of accounts in open vestries in north-Wales, Report of Royal Commission into the operation of the poor laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>242</sup> George Clive, Correspondence and Papers, 1836-39.

<sup>243</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Report from Arthur James Lewis, on the counties of Salop, Hereford and Monmouth

<sup>244</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Report from Arthur James Lewis, on the Counties of Salop, Hereford and Monmouth. Lewis also stated that in the rural parishes in Monmouth the farmers 'in their personal interest of keeping their rates low, sometimes forgot to be liberal'.

The general laxity of the farmers in the rural parishes in Wales also proved to be detrimental to the paupers in other ways. For example, in his report into the operation of the poor laws in North-Wales, Walcott noted that the poor rates were 'frequently uncollected in the country parishes...either from carelessness or a desire (on the part of the overseer) to gain a trifling popularity' with the ratepayers.<sup>245</sup> Likewise, in the report into the Rebecca disturbances in south-west-Wales, one witness, Mr Thomas Jones, also asserted that, under the Old Poor Law system, the overseers in this region of Wales often failed to collect all of the rates. He maintained that the overseers would often 'go to the person who was able to pay the rate and leave the others alone for twelve months and ultimately lose it (the rate)'.<sup>246</sup> As a result of the inefficient nature of the collections, parishes in Wales, particularly in the more rural regions, were commonly in arrears. For example, in the parish of Llangernyw in 1830, the local vicar, the Reverend Edmund Williams was forced to pay £30 of his own money 'towards defraying the rates'.<sup>247</sup> Further evidence that poor rates in rural parishes in Wales were not collected on time can be seen in the fact that individual ratepayers in these parishes were frequently summoned for failing to pay their rates. For example, in the parish of Vaynor (Breconshire) in 1833, 20 persons were summoned before J.B Bruce-the local magistrate, for neglecting to pay their poor rates; 6 were exonerated on account of their own poverty, but the remainder were ordered to pay their arrears.<sup>248</sup> This laxness in the collection of the rates would have undoubtedly caused a great deal of hardship for the paupers themselves who would have had to have waited for an extended period of time in order to receive their relief.

Further inefficiency in the rural parishes in Wales was caused by linguistic issues. English was the official medium of the poor laws in England and Wales, both before and after 1834.<sup>249</sup> However, in Wales, particularly in the more rural parishes, many of the ratepayers and poor law officials spoke Welsh only. In his report Walcott lamented that 'the

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<sup>245</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales; This was also complained of in the 1844 report into the Rebecca Riots.

<sup>246</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844. Here, the overseer of Pembryn (Cardiganshire) even claimed that he was afraid that if he forced poor farmers to pay the rates they would burn his crops in retaliation.

<sup>247</sup> *The Carmarthen Journal and South Wales Weekly Advertiser*, 9 April, 1830, p.3.

<sup>248</sup> Breconshire, *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 7 December, 1833, p.3.

<sup>249</sup> Cited in Steven King and John Stewart, 'The History of the Poor Law in Wales', p.139.

prevalence of the Welsh-language' in North-Wales, and 'the absence in some of the parishes that I visited of persons capable of communicating information (in English) ...were occasionally bars to my inquiries'.<sup>250</sup> Walcott also noted that in some of the 'mountainous parishes', the vestry books were 'sometimes kept in Welsh and sometimes in English'.<sup>251</sup> It is hard to see how the ratepayers and officials that were monoglot Welsh-speakers would have been able to decipher the accounts and records that were kept in English and vice versa. The fact that many of the ratepayers in Wales spoke Welsh only also proved to be problematic when vestry meetings were conducted in English. For example, at the Carnarvon vestry in April 1832 several voices cried out that 'they might as well be at a London vestry as this one', as the Welsh speakers were unable to understand the proceedings of the meeting, which were being conducted in English.<sup>252</sup> This suggests that Welsh-speaking ratepayers were often unsure about what was being transacted at the vestry meetings. Occasionally, the business of the vestry meetings was translated into Welsh for the benefit of the non-English speakers. For example, at the meeting of the Carnarvon vestry mentioned above, a Mr B. Griffith, at the request of the Chairman, addressed the company in Welsh and it was reported that 'this seemed to give great satisfaction'.<sup>253</sup> However, this then depended on the competency and integrity of the translator. Moreover, there is no evidence that this practice was universally adopted. The language-barrier in Wales undoubtedly contributed to the general inefficiency of the rural vestries. It is also possible that linguistic issues were problematic for the paupers themselves, (the majority of whom also spoke Welsh only, as their cases may not have received a fair hearing at these meetings. The fact that the language-barrier excluded many of the ratepayers from participating in the vestry meetings may also help to explain why attendances of the vestries in Wales were so low.

In the more industrialised parishes in Wales, the administration of the Old Poor Law was significantly better, or at the very least not as lax as in the rural parishes. As already

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<sup>250</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales. See also the work of Geraint Jenkins on the Welsh Language, *Welsh History and its Social Domains*.

<sup>251</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>252</sup> Carnarvon vestry, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 3 April, 1832, p.3.

<sup>253</sup> Carnarvon vestry, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 3 April, 1832, p.3.

demonstrated, the town vestries were often dominated by local businessmen, either wealthy industrialists or individuals from the emerging professional classes. These individuals were typically more educated than the farmers and often brought a degree of professionalism to the role. For example, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots, one of the witnesses, Mr Meyrick, claimed that under the Old Poor Law, the town vestries, in the south-west of Wales at least, usually 'selected an agent from each of the local works' (this was sometimes the owners themselves) and that those agents gave 'a great deal of personal attention' to the administration of poor relief.<sup>254</sup> Meyrick also stated that as a result of selecting individuals with experience in running a business, the poor rates in the town parishes were often significantly reduced.<sup>255</sup> Likewise, in 1834, Henry Sockett claimed that during his time as Visitor of the workhouse in the parish of Swansea Town and Franchise between 1817 and 1834, he reduced the number of poor rates collected annually from five to three.<sup>256</sup> Sockett was even presented with a silver plate by the ratepayers of the parish in recognition of his efforts.<sup>257</sup>

However, the more business-like approach of the town vestries did not necessarily benefit the paupers themselves, and in many instances, it actively made their situations even worse. For example, in the parish of Swansea Town and Franchise, Henry Sockett claimed that under his leadership the Swansea House of Industry was strictly regulated, much to the chagrin of pauper inmates. For instance, many paupers, including elderly inmates, were not permitted to quit the House and Yard without leave.<sup>258</sup> The indoor paupers at Swansea were also forced to attend religious services every Sunday, which was administered by a clergyman from the Church of England. This would have caused a great deal of consternation amongst paupers with differing religious persuasions.<sup>259</sup> Sockett also proclaimed that he had endeavoured to make the Swansea workhouse: 'the sort of

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<sup>254</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844.

<sup>255</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844.

<sup>256</sup> Henry Sockett 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of Industry', 1834.

<sup>257</sup> Henry Sockett 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of Industry', 1834.

<sup>258</sup> Henry Sockett 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of Industry', 1834.

<sup>259</sup> Henry Sockett, 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of Industry' 1834. However, Sockett also stated that members of the dissenting congregation were allowed to attend their own religious gatherings provided they procured certificates from their ministers detailing their regular attendances.

establishment that an honest, independent and industrious man would not wish to enter'.<sup>260</sup>

Moreover, many of the individuals that dominated the town vestries in Wales were just as corrupt and as self-serving as their rural counterparts. For example, in 1833, Henry Sockett claimed that the governor of the Swansea House of Industry had appropriated the 'most airy rooms in the House, which had been devoted to the poor, to the use of himself and his family'.<sup>261</sup> In the same year (1833) Sockett himself was charged with misappropriating relief funds, in collusion with the governor of the workhouse, after it transpired that he had failed to audit the accounts of the workhouse during the entire fourteen year period that he had been elected as the Visitor of the House.<sup>262</sup> Sockett later claimed that no illegal activity had taken place and that the reason he had not officially audited the accounts with the local magistrates, as was the custom at that time, was because he believed that 'there should be no magisterial interference' in relief matters whatsoever.<sup>263</sup> However, perhaps rather tellingly, Sockett was never elected to a position of public office ever again.<sup>264</sup> There is also evidence<sup>264</sup> that a Truck-like system of relief was commonly practised in the more industrialised parishes in Wales. For instance, in his report Walcott stated that in the town parishes, the overseers, who were usually local shopkeepers or tradesmen, often paid paupers at their own shops, or at the shops of friends or relatives, where they were forced to buy goods at highly inflated prices.<sup>265</sup>

The relatively harsh treatment received by paupers in the more industrial parishes in Wales stemmed largely from the fact that, like their rural counterparts, many of the individuals that dominated the town vestries also held derisory, Malthusian, attitudes towards the paupers under their care. For instance, in 1834, Henry Sockett claimed that the

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<sup>260</sup> Henry Sockett, 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of Industry', 1834. He even stated that at Swansea 'the fear of the restraints imposed upon them (in the House), in respect to their liberty, has led to the discovery of a number on imposters'. This indicates that the deterrent effect of the workhouse was doing its job.

<sup>261</sup> To the Editor of *The Cambrian*, *The Cambrian*, 6 April, 1833, p.3.

<sup>262</sup> Marian J. Donald, 'The Rise and Fall of Henry Sockett: Visitor to the House of Industry', *Gower Journal of the Gower Society*, vol.49, (1998), pp.64-71.

<sup>263</sup> Henry Sockett, 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of Industry', 1834.

<sup>264</sup> Donald, 'The Rise and Fall of Henry Sockett'.

<sup>265</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

vast majority of the paupers in the Swansea workhouse were 'worthless and idle'.<sup>266</sup>

Likewise, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, the overseer of Holyhead, Mr Norris. M. Goddard, claimed that the able-bodied paupers in the parish were lazy and frivolous with their money. Goddard stated that 'it is a lamentable fact that the labouring poor of this parish expend all of their earnings as soon as they receive them' without ever attempting to save in case of emergencies such as unemployment.<sup>267</sup>

### **Conclusion**

It has been demonstrated here that the administration of the Old Poor Law in Wales was dominated by the ratepayers at the vestry meetings rather than by the magistrates. Paupers in England and Wales did have the right to appeal to a local magistrate in order to overturn the decision of the vestry. However, the lack of active magistrates in Wales meant that, by and large, the day-to-day administration of the Old Poor Law was often left in the hands of the ratepayers. It has also been demonstrated here that the overseers in Wales often had limited powers when it came to making relief decisions; in most cases they simply acted as an extension of the vestry. It has also been revealed here that a handful of individuals only dominated the administration of the Old Poor Law in Wales. In the more rural parishes, farmers often dominated the vestry meetings. In the more industrialised parishes in Wales, the Old Poor Law was often controlled by the leading industrialists or members from the emerging middle classes. The evidence here also suggests that the poor relief system in Wales before 1834 was typically lax and inefficient, particularly in the more rural parishes.

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<sup>266</sup> Henry Sockett, 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of Industry', 1834. Further evidence that Sockett did not have the interests of the paupers at heart can be seen in the fact that he also called for the names of the indoor paupers to be pinned to the door of the local church in the hope that this would act as a deterrent.

<sup>267</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.



# Chapter Three: Poor Relief and the Economy of

## Makehifts in Wales under the Old Poor Law

### Introduction

Some historians have argued that, prior to 1834, poor relief in Wales was relatively generous and wide-ranging. For instance, Dodd claimed that relief practices in North-Wales before 1834 included the payment of pauper rents, exemption from the rates (for those deemed to be too poor to pay them), and the payment of cash doles to able-bodied paupers, including able-bodied men with large families and unemployed labourers.<sup>268</sup> Alun C. Davies has described the Old Poor Law system in Aberdare as being a 'welfare state in miniature'.<sup>269</sup> In a similar vein, Simon Hancock has argued that 'although it was perhaps stretching the facts to represent the Old Poor Law as a cradle-to-grave regime... poor relief in Pembrokeshire before 1834, was undoubtedly paternalistic and wide-ranging'.<sup>270</sup> Hancock also claimed that up until 1834, poor relief in Pembroke was the 'main means of support for the poor'.<sup>271</sup>

However, other historians have argued that poor relief in Wales was woefully inadequate during the Old Poor Law. For example, David Howell argued that the sums provided to paupers in 'rural' Wales before 1834 were so small that they did not provide 'even the barest modicum of comfort and dignity'.<sup>272</sup> Likewise, Ben Harvey has argued that 'the scope of welfare payments' in the border counties of mid-Wales before 1834 was 'limited', especially when contrasted with the relief afforded in some English regions, particularly those in the south-east of England.<sup>273</sup> Richardson has also argued that the doles

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<sup>268</sup> Dodd, 'The Old Poor Law in North-Wales', p.127.

<sup>269</sup> Davies, 'The Old Poor Law in an Industrialising Parish: Aberdare', p.285.

<sup>270</sup> Simon Hancock, 'Aspects of the Old Poor Law in Pembrokeshire'. Hancock also claimed that before 1834, poor relief, in Pembroke at least, was the 'main means of support for the poor'

<sup>271</sup> Simon Hancock, 'Aspects of the Old Poor Law in Pembrokeshire', According to Hancock, other streams of a pauper's income (such as charitable donations) played a subsidiary role only.

<sup>272</sup> Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.113.

<sup>273</sup> Ben Harvey, 'Pauper Narratives in the Welsh borders', p.256. Harvey also noted that the level of pauperism was generally lower in Welsh parishes (than in English ones) in the early nineteenth century suggesting that

granted in Nantconwy under the Old Poor Law were 'low and residual' in comparison to the allowances received in many English parishes.<sup>274</sup> According to Richardson, poor relief in this part of Wales was 'merely designed to supplement money earned from paid employment and relief received through private charity'.<sup>275</sup>

It is possible that these differences in opinion may reflect the fact that there were significant variations in the implementation and administration of the Old Poor Law within Wales, as Steven King has argued was the case in England.<sup>276</sup> It is also possible that the nature of poor relief in Wales changed over time, or during particular periods. This is suggested in the work of Ben Harvey. Harvey argued that that Wales experienced a 'particularly sharp increase' in the number of persons claiming relief from the end of the eighteenth century, and that parochial authorities in the region 'reacted sharply as a result'.<sup>277</sup> However, far more studies, particularly ones that compare the operation of the Old Poor Law in different 'regions' of Wales are needed in order to test these hypotheses.

This chapter focuses on poor relief and the Economy of Makeshifts in Wales under the Old Poor Law. The first section looks at what types of relief paupers in Wales received before 1834. The second section assesses how generous and wide-ranging poor relief was in Wales under the Old Poor Law. The final section explores the wider economy of makeshifts used by paupers in Wales before 1834.

### **Poor Relief Practices in Wales under the Old Poor Law**

From 1722, Knatchbull's Act, otherwise known the 'workhouse test act', enabled parishes, or groups of parishes, to erect a workhouse for the purpose of relieving paupers indoors,

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either poor law authorities in Wales had adopted a 'harsher attitude towards paupers' or that paupers in Wales were forced to find 'alternative welfare streams', p.70; see work of King, *Poverty and Welfare*, for comparison with 'generous' relief in the south-east of England.

<sup>274</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.v. Richardson also stated that in the 1760s the average Nantconwy allowances were less than half the typical pension of about 1s.7d paid in the South and East of England, and that the doles continued to be typically lower in Nantconwy throughout the Old Poor Law period, p.230 and p.241.

<sup>275</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.v.

<sup>276</sup> King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p.249.

<sup>277</sup> Ben Harvey, 'Pauper Narratives in the Welsh Borders', p.154. He also said that 'the informal world of face-to-face welfare with makeshift provisions that existed in the border counties was being replaced by one of paperwork and bureaucracy', p.154.

where they would be forced to work for their relief.<sup>278</sup> The principle behind the act was that it would act as a deterrent against 'irresponsible' or 'fraudulent' claims against the parish.<sup>279</sup> Many parishes in England quickly implemented the strictures of this act and erected a workhouse for the maintenance of their paupers.<sup>280</sup>

However, there was considerable resistance to the building and use of workhouses in Wales under the Old Poor Law, particularly in the more rural parishes. This can be seen in the fact that in 1777, there were only nineteen workhouses in the whole of Wales, compared to over two-thousand in England.<sup>281</sup> Likewise, in his report in 1834 Stephen Walcott lamented that there were only three fully-fledged workhouses in the whole of North Wales; in the parishes of Overton, Hawarden and Forden.<sup>282</sup> The opposition to the use of the workhouse system in Wales before 1834 could be seen as further evidence of Welsh resistance to the implementation of the Old Poor Law more generally, see Chapter One.

The number of workhouses and/or poorhouses in Wales did increase by the eve of the New Poor Law, particularly in the more industrial parishes. For instance, in his report Walcott noted that in North Wales, as well as the aforementioned workhouses at Overton, Hawarden and Forden, there were poorhouses in the towns of Carnarvon, Bangor, Llangollen and Holyhead by 1834.<sup>283</sup> Arguably the most notorious of all of these establishments was the House of Industry at Forden. Walcott reported that this workhouse, which was established in 1795 as part of an incorporation of eighteen parishes from England and Wales, was capable of accommodating up to seven-hundred paupers.<sup>284</sup> There were also notable workhouses at Swansea and Cardiff by 1834.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, p.12. This act also allowed local JPs to sub-contract the administration of relief to someone who would feed, clothe and house the poor for a weekly rate from the parish.

<sup>279</sup> Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, p.12. It was also initially believed that the parish could profit from the labour of the pauper claimants.

<sup>280</sup> Megan Evans and Peter Jones, 'A Stubborn, Intractable Body', p.110.

<sup>281</sup> Cited in Evans and Jones, 'A stubborn, intractable body', p.110.

<sup>282</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>283</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>284</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>285</sup> Cited in Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn, Intractable Body', p.110.

The fact that workhouses, and/or poorhouses, were more common in the more industrial parishes in Wales is perhaps unsurprising. Firstly, town parishes, in England and Wales, typically had much bigger populations and consequently a larger number of paupers to deal with. For instance, in 1831, the population of the parish of Swansea Town and Franchise was 13,256, compared to just 92 in Nicholston.<sup>286</sup> Towns were also more likely to suffer from the problems caused by industrialisation such as large numbers of able-bodied applicants, particularly during sudden economic downturns. This can be evidenced in the fact that able-bodied men were more frequently listed as being in receipt of relief, both indoor and outdoor, in the more industrial areas of Wales. For example, in the *Rural and Town Queries* in 1834, Henry Knight the Rector of the parish of Neath stated that seventy-eight able bodied men had been relieved by the parish during the last year.<sup>287</sup> Likewise, in his report, Walcott maintained that 'in the towns and populous places of North Wales, the utility of the workhouse is not only admitted, but amongst the intelligent, their introduction is strongly desired'.<sup>288</sup>

However, the proportion of parishes in Wales with a workhouse, even in the more industrial areas, remained relatively small throughout the entire period under investigation here, especially in comparison with the proportion of parishes in possession of a workhouse in England. For instance, in *the Rural and Town Queries*, just 40% of the Welsh parishes that responded to the questionnaire, just nineteen out of fifty-eight parishes in total, indicated that they had a workhouse in 1834, compared to 61% in England, almost eight-hundred parishes. Likewise, in his report in 1834, A.J. Lewis lamented that 'the vast majority of parishes in Monmouth have no workhouse or poorhouse', whereas such establishments were relatively common in Shropshire and Hertfordshire.<sup>289</sup>

Moreover, the workhouses that were established in Wales before 1834 were relatively small, especially in comparison to many of the workhouses found in England. For instance, in his report Walcott stated that the workhouse in the parish of Overton was 'a

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<sup>286</sup> Comparative Account of Population of Great Britain, 1801, 1811, 1821, 1831, PP, 1831.

<sup>287</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>288</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>289</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Report from Arthur James Lewis, on the Counties of Salop, Hereford and Monmouth.

small, incommodious building...little more than a brick cottage'.<sup>290</sup> Likewise, in his report of the Old Poor Law in South Wales in 1837, George Clive stated that the poorhouse at Tenby could only accommodate 'a handful of paupers'.<sup>291</sup> In comparison, many of the workhouses in England had the capacity to maintain hundreds or even thousands of paupers at any one time. For instance, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, the overseer of the parish of Bethnal Green, Middlesex, stated that the workhouse was home to nearly nine-hundred paupers in 1834.<sup>292</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the lack of workhouses in Wales before 1834, coupled with the fact that the existing workhouses were relatively small establishments, meant that the vast majority of paupers in Wales were maintained outdoors under the Old Poor Law. Table Seven, below, shows the number and percentage of paupers relieved indoors and outdoors in England and Wales in the year ending Easter 1813.

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<sup>290</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales. Walcott also noted that the poorhouses in north-Wales 'generally consisted of several small adjoining tenements'.

<sup>291</sup> George Clive, Correspondence and Papers, 1836-39.

<sup>292</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Rural and Town Queries.

**Table Seven: Number and percentage of paupers relieved indoors and outdoors in the year ending Easter 1813.**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Total Number of Permanent Paupers</b>	<b>Number relieved Indoors</b>	<b>Number relieved Outdoors</b>	<b>Percentage relieved Indoors</b>	<b>Percentage relieved Outdoors</b>
<b>National</b>					
*Wales	31,076	927	30,149	3%	97%
*England	500,439	96,295	404,144	19%	81%
England and Wales	531,515	97,222	434,293	18%	82%
<b>Sample English Counties</b>					
Kent	22,243	8,077	14,166	36%	64%
Lancaster	28,671	5,138	23,533	18%	82%
Middlesex	33,993	16,698	17,295	49%	51%
Chester	9,490	589	8,901	6%	94%
Salop	12,863	4,993	7,870	39%	61%
Gloucester	15,129	1,871	13,258	12%	88%
Hereford	6,090	280	5,810	5%	95%
<b>Sample Welsh Unions</b>					
Pembroke	699	0	699	0%	100%
Swansea	658	56	602	8%	92%
Abergavenny	603	71	532	12%	88%
Newtown and Llanidloes	1,668	0	1,668	0%	100%
Holywell	1,249	0	1,249	0%	100%
Pwllheli	634	0	634	0%	100%
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>					
Pembroke	3,247	25	3,222	1%	99%
Glamorgan	3,455	116	3,339	3%	97%
Monmouth	2,417	121	2,296	5%	95%
Montgomery	4,086	163	3,923	4%	96%
Flint	2,040	77	1,963	4%	96%
Caernarvon	1,594	47	1,547	3%	97%

**\*Note:** The figures for England and Wales have been adjusted to show the county of Monmouth as being in Wales

**Source:** Abridgement of abstract of answers and returns to expense and maintenance of poor in England and Wales, PP, 1818, vol.19, 82.

This table shows that, at the national level, just 3% of paupers in Wales were relieved indoors in the year ending Easter 1813. In comparison, almost 20% of paupers in England were maintained in a workhouse in this year. In some parts of England, the proportion of paupers relieved indoors was even higher. For example, 49% of paupers in Middlesex were relieved indoors in 1813. In some English parishes, particularly in the London area, the percentage of paupers maintained in a workhouse was even higher than the percentage relieved outdoors. For instance, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, the overseer of the parish of St-Bride, in the City of London (Without), revealed that in 1834, two-hundred paupers were relieved indoors, compared to just one-hundred-and-sixty receiving outdoor relief.<sup>293</sup>

There was a degree of variation in the proportion of paupers receiving indoor relief within Wales, with a higher percentage typically found in the more industrial parishes. For instance, in the county of Monmouth 5% of paupers were relieved indoors, slightly above the national average for Wales, in 1813, compared to just 1% in Pembroke, slightly below the national average for Wales. Likewise, in the region that later made-up the Abergavenny Union, 12% of paupers were maintained in a workhouse in 1813, four times the national average. This was largely due to the fact that, as noted above, workhouses were more common, and typically larger, in the more industrial parishes in Wales.

However, even in the more industrial areas of Wales, the proportion of paupers relieved indoors in 1813 was considerably below the national average for England. In his report in 1834, Walcott noted that even in the parish of Forden, which possessed a relatively large workhouse, 'the paupers in the House form the exception rather than the rule, with some of the incorporated parishes sending no paupers at all there and the others sending a few only'.<sup>294</sup> Likewise, in his report into the operation of the Old Poor Law in

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<sup>293</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>294</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

South Wales, George Clive stated that, although the parish of Swansea Town and Franchise possessed a workhouse capable of holding two-hundred paupers, the number of paupers relieved indoors 'seldom or ever exceeded over one-hundred paupers' and was often considerably less.<sup>295</sup> Clive also pointed out that in 1833, £1,845 was spent on maintaining the outdoor poor in the parish, whilst the cost of indoor relief amounted to just £600, despite the fact that maintaining a pauper at the House of Industry was considerably more expensive.<sup>296</sup>

Paupers in Wales before 1834 were also far more likely than their counterparts in England to be relieved 'permanently', usually in the form of a regular weekly allowance, as opposed to being relieved 'casually' or 'occasionally', where relief was provided temporarily or on an ad hoc basis. Table Eight, below, shows the number and percentage of paupers in England and Wales relieved 'permanently' and 'occasionally' in the year ending Easter 1813.

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<sup>295</sup> George Clive, *Correspondence and Papers, 1836-39*.

<sup>296</sup> George Clive, *Correspondence and Papers, 1836-39*.



**Table Eight: The number and percentage of paupers relieved ‘permanently’ and ‘occasionally’ in England and Wales in the year ending Easter, 1813.**

Area	Total Number of Paupers	Number of Permanent Paupers	Number of Occasional Paupers	Percentage of Paupers relieved Permanently	Percentage of Paupers relieved Occasionally
<b>National</b>					
*Wales	47,610	31,076	16,534	65%	35%
*England	923,640	500,439	423,201	54%	46%
England and Wales	971,250	531,515	439,735	55%	45%
<b>Sample English Counties</b>					
Kent	40,560	22,243	18,317	55%	45%
Lancaster	51,288	28,671	22,617	56%	44%
Middlesex	109,534	33,993	75,541	31%	69%
Chester	20,429	9,490	10,939	46%	54%
Salop	21,311	12,863	8,448	60%	40%
Gloucester	29,272	15,129	14,143	52%	48%
Hereford	10,756	6,090	4,666	57%	43%
<b>Sample Welsh Unions</b>					
Pembroke	873	699	174	80%	20%
Swansea	904	658	246	73%	27%
Abergavenny	1,003	603	400	60%	40%
Newtown and Llanidloes	2,114	1,668	446	79%	21%
Holywell	2,467	1,249	1,218	51%	49%
Pwllheli	847	634	213	75%	25%
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>					
Pembroke	4,273	3,247	1,026	76%	24%

Glamorgan	5,703	3,455	2,248	61%	39%
Monmouth	4,086	2,417	1,669	59%	41%
Montgomery	5,555	4,086	1,469	74%	26%
Flint	3,852	2,040	1,812	53%	47%
Caernarvon	2,558	1,594	964	62%	38%

**\*Note:** The figures for England and Wales have been adjusted to show the county of Monmouth as being in Wales

**Source:** Abridgement of abstract of answers and returns to expense and maintenance of poor in England and Wales, PP, 1818, vol.19, 82.

This table shows that, at the national level, 65% of paupers in Wales were relieved ‘permanently’ in the year ending Easter, 1813. In comparison only 54% of paupers in England received ‘permanent’ relief in this year. In some parts of England, the proportion of paupers receiving ‘occasional’ relief was even higher than the proportion relieved ‘permanently’. For instance, in Middlesex, just 31% of paupers received ‘permanent’ relief in 1813, compared to 69% of paupers relieved ‘occasionally’.

Once again, there was a degree of variation in the proportion of paupers receiving ‘permanent’ relief within Wales, with a higher percentage of paupers being granted relief ‘permanently’ in the more rural regions. For instance, 80% of paupers in the parishes that later made up the Pembroke Union received ‘permanent’ relief in 1813, compared with just 60% in the region that later formed the Abergavenny Union. This was possibly due to the fact that industrial parishes had a larger number of able-bodied applicants who were more likely to require temporary relief only. Evidence of this can be found in the *Rural and Town Queries*. Here, Henry Knight the overseer of the parish of Neath, stated that ‘5s or a pair of shoes, is sometimes given to able-bodied men, to start them to work’.<sup>297</sup>

However, the proportion of paupers relieved ‘permanently’ was typically higher in Wales than in England. This can be seen in the fact that the percentage of paupers receiving ‘permanent’ relief was above the national average for England in ten out of the twelve Welsh regions under investigation here. Only in the area that later made-up the Holywell Union, and its corresponding county of Flint, was the proportion of paupers relieved

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<sup>297</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

‘permanently’ lower than the national average for England; with just 51% and 53% receiving ‘permanent’ relief in Holywell and Flintshire respectively, compared to 54% in England. It is unclear why the percentage of paupers receiving ‘permanent’ relief was comparatively lower in this region of Wales. It is possible that a higher level of ‘occasional’ relief in this part of Wales was due, at least in part, to the economic problems occurring in the region at this time.<sup>298</sup> Either way, even in this part of Wales, the majority of paupers, albeit a slim one, were relieved ‘permanently’ in 1813.

As already alluded to, some paupers in Wales were relieved in kind under the Old Poor Law. For instance, in the parish of Llanrhidian, later one of the constituent parishes of the Swansea Union, it was noted in the vestry minute book in 1834 that ‘buttons and thread’ had been provided to Morgan Heath, so that he could mend his own clothes.<sup>299</sup> Likewise, in his report, Walcott stated that in North Wales, a handful of paupers (more often those in receipt of casual relief) were sometimes provided with ‘fuel, clothes, seed potatoes or medical assistance’.<sup>300</sup> Walcott pointed out that this form of relief was sometimes given to paupers, particularly able bodied paupers, as a deterrent.<sup>301</sup>

However, the vast majority of paupers in Wales before 1834, were provided with a regular (weekly) cash dole. In his report Walcott stated that in North Wales, ‘although confined to the aged, the married, and widows with large families’, monetary payments ‘absorbed the largest proportion of the sums spent on the poor’.<sup>302</sup> Likewise, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, the overseer of the parish of Neath, Henry Knight, stated that the vast

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<sup>298</sup> For instance, in Holywell, the copper industry (which had been flourishing at the end of the eighteenth century) gradually declined from the turn of the nineteenth century, due the sudden fall in national copper prices (which was caused by cheaper imports of copper ore). Cited in Rowland Tennant, *A History of Holywell and Greenfield*, (Wrexham, 2007), p.133

<sup>299</sup> Llanrhidian Vestry Minute Book, 1833-94, West Glamorgan Archives, P/111/3.

<sup>300</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>301</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales. Walcott stated that giving able-bodied paupers seed-potatoes (to grow their own food), ‘encouraged industrious habits and was not so liable to misappropriation as money’.

<sup>302</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

majority of able-bodied men that had been granted relief in the last year had been relieved with 'small sums' of money.<sup>303</sup>

It was also common in Wales under the Old Poor Law for parishes to pay, or at least contribute towards, the rents of paupers. In the *Rural and Town Queries*, question 21 asked: Are cottages frequently exempted from the rates and is their rent often paid by the parish? In response to this question, over two-thirds of the parishes in Wales (68%) indicated that they paid, either in part or in full, the rent of their paupers.<sup>304</sup> For example, Henry Scale stated that in 1833, the parish of Aberdare paid the rents of 30 of its paupers.<sup>305</sup> Likewise, in his report into the operation of the Old Poor Law in North Wales, Walcott observed that the practice of paying the rents of paupers out of the poor rates 'is nearly universal'.<sup>306</sup> Sometimes considerable sums of money were expended for this purpose. For example, George Mears, the overseer of Llanidloes asserted in 1834 that 'the rent paid for paupers amounts to no less than £800 a year in this parish'.<sup>307</sup> Some parishes even built rows of cottages for the reception of paupers.<sup>308</sup> In her work Francesca Richardson has argued that the payment of pauper rents was an acknowledgement on the part of the parochial authorities, that many paupers, particularly in the pastoral areas, where labourers did not have the benefit of extra harvest earnings, were unable to survive on their meagre wages alone.<sup>309</sup>

The payment of non-resident relief was also common in Wales before 1834. In his report Walcott stated that 'relief to out-resident paupers [as well as to able-bodied as to the

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<sup>303</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>304</sup> Figures taken from responses to the 1834 Rural and Town Queries; Walcott and Clive also noted the prevalence of this practice in their respective districts of North and South-Wales.

<sup>305</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>306</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales. He also stated that in Anglesey and Caernarvonshire overseers frequently give written guarantees making the parish responsible for the rent of the cottages let to the poor; George Clive also noted the prevalence of this practice in south-Wales under the Old Poor Law, Clive, Correspondence and Papers, 1836-1839.

<sup>307</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>308</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor laws in North-Wales.

<sup>309</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy, 1750-1860', pp.248-9.

impotent] is very generally granted in North Wales, sometimes at great distances'.<sup>310</sup>

George Clive also maintained that the payment of non-resident relief was common in South Wales under the Old Poor Law.<sup>311</sup> Often the decision to grant out-parish relief was the result of a bargain struck between the home parish and the pauper applicant. Walcott stated that the usual mode for proceeding is 'for the party to inform the overseers that his wages are not sufficient to maintain him, and threaten, unless his rent be paid or some relief afforded, to apply for assistance where he is' and that 'to prevent the return of the pauper (which could be costly as the home parish would have to pay the removal fees as well as the cost of maintaining them whence they returned), the relief is generally granted'.<sup>312</sup> Evidence of such a transaction is supplied in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots. Here, one of the witnesses Mr John Davies, clerk to the Brecon Union, explained that under the Old Poor Law there was a case in one of the constituent parishes of the Union where a man with a wife and seven children was settled in a town parish but was residing in a country parish seven miles away. Davies complained that this family would go to the home parish regularly and would threaten to return unless provided with some relief.<sup>313</sup> As well as demonstrating the existence of out-parish relief in Wales before 1834, this transaction demonstrates a degree of agency on the part of the paupers.

One of the main grievances of the Commissioners of the 1832-34 Report into the operation of the poor laws in England and Wales, upon which the New Poor Law was based, was the prevalence of the 'allowance' system i.e. the granting of relief to able bodied men on low wages.<sup>314</sup> The Commissioners argued that this system suppressed wages, demoralized the poor by reducing their incentive to work and subsequently increased the

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<sup>310</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor laws in North-Wales.

<sup>311</sup> George Clive, Correspondence and Papers, 1836-39.

<sup>312</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>313</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844. He stated that the children and wife would bussa ('kick up a fuss') as soon as they came down, and the people would obtain money for them from the overseers' in an attempt to get rid of them.

<sup>314</sup> The Commissioners described it as 'the master evil of the present system', cited in Sydney and Beatrice Webb, *English Poor Law History, Part II*, p.510.

poor rates.<sup>315</sup> The Commissioners also maintained that this practice was ‘widespread’ under the Old Poor Law, at least in England.<sup>316</sup>

In Wales, the allowance system was seldom practiced before 1834. In his report Walcott stated that in North Wales, ‘no single able-bodied men in the employment of individuals ever obtains parochial relief’.<sup>317</sup> Likewise, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, when asked whether or not able-bodied labourers in employment were allowed poor relief, Thomas Williams, the overseer of Llanvapley (in Monmouth) stated that ‘this system has never prevailed here’.<sup>318</sup> In a similar vein, in the Third Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission in 1837 it was stated that ‘some of the particular forms of abuse which prevailed in England under the Old Poor Law, such as the allowance system, have not been introduced into the Welsh counties’.<sup>319</sup>

However, although the allowance system per se was rarely practised in Wales under the Old Poor Law, it was common for Welsh parishes before 1834, to grant a type of ‘family allowance’ to married labourers with large families. For instance, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, John Lloyd, the overseer of Llanerfyl (Montgomery) stated that relief was sometimes given to able-bodied labourers ‘if his family was too numerous and his wages too low’ to support them independently.<sup>320</sup> Likewise, in his report, Walcott noted that relief was commonly given to married labourers in North Wales who were unemployed and had more than three children.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Michael. E. Rose, ‘The Allowance System’, p.607. The Webbs also argued that the allowance system was ‘calamitous’ (both for the recipients and those granting the relief) and needed to be eradicated, *English Poor Law History, Part II*. However, Mark Blaug has since argued that the allowance system was a reaction to, rather than a cause of low wages, ‘The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New’, *The Journal of Economic History*, vol.23, no.2, (January, 1963), pp.151-184, [here p.162].

<sup>316</sup> The Commissioners concluded that the practice was ‘widespread in the south, but also in the process of extending itself over the north of England, nor was it confined only to the countryside’, cited in Cited in Mark Blaug, ‘The New Poor Law Re-examined’, *The Journal of Economic History*, vol.24, no.2, (June, 1964), pp.229-245, [here p.230].

<sup>317</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>318</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, *Rural and Town Queries*. In a similar vein, Thomas Stokes, the overseer of St Issells (Pembroke) reported that ‘no case of this sort has ever occurred in the parish’

<sup>319</sup> Cited in Pauperism in Wales, *The Cambrian*, 4 November, 1837, p.4.

<sup>320</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, *Rural and Town Queries*.

<sup>321</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

It was also common in Wales before 1834, for parishes to help support single mothers with illegitimate children. In his report, Walcott stated that in North Wales it was 'customary' for the mother of an illegitimate child to receive some form of support from the parish.<sup>322</sup> Some parishes in Wales spent vast sums of money on these so-called 'bastardy-payments'. For instance, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, John Lewis, the JP for Llandewy-Velfry and Henllan Hamlet (Pembroke) stated that 'the expense to the parish of maintaining bastards is, I am assured by the overseer, about one-third of the total poor rate'.<sup>323</sup> This was largely due to the fact that in Wales, unlike in England, illegitimacy was seen as less of a social problem throughout the period under investigation here. For instance, in his report into the operation of the Old Poor Law in North Wales, Walcott stated that many illegitimate births in the region resulted from traditional Welsh courting customs, such as Bundling.<sup>324</sup> Likewise, in his report in 1836, George Clive maintained that in South Wales, illegitimacy was simply seen as the 'natural consequence of the existence of the two sexes'.<sup>325</sup>

### **The Scope of the Old Poor Law in Wales**

Although, as demonstrated above, the vast majority of paupers in Wales before 1834 were relieved outdoors, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that opposition to the workhouse system in Wales was based more on financial rather than humanitarian grounds. For many parishes in Wales, particularly in the more sparsely populated rural areas, building a workhouse before 1834 was simply not a viable option. In his report, Walcott himself conceded that in North Wales 'the parishes are frequently so extensive and thinly populated that, but few could join together' for the purpose of building a workhouse.<sup>326</sup> Building and maintaining a workhouse could be expensive, with an initial outlay for the building work and

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<sup>322</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>323</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>324</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales. Walcott stated that courtship customs such as bundling had 'carried on from time immemorial and were not considered to be either immoral or indecent.

<sup>325</sup> George Clive, Correspondence and Papers, 1836-39. Clive stated that 'in parts of Wales, it is the general practice for farm servants of both sexes to sleep in the same room'.

<sup>326</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

materials and ongoing running costs, and many poor law officials in Wales were against spending parochial funds on what they considered to be lavish and unnecessary expenditures. For instance, in the *Rural and Town Queries* in 1834, John Lloyd, the overseer of Llanerfyl (Montgomeryshire) stated that 'in country parishes such as this, I do not think that a workhouse or poorhouse would be beneficial, owing to the great expense attending the management of it'.<sup>327</sup>

Further evidence that Welsh resistance to the workhouse system was not based on ideological grounds can be seen in the fact that, although many parishes in Wales did not possess a workhouse of their own before 1834, they were willing to pay a subscription to a neighbouring parish for the use of their workhouse, as and when required. For instance, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, Henry Jones, the vicar of Northop stated that 'there is no workhouse in the parish...but we are in connexion with one at Chester'.<sup>328</sup> Likewise, in the parish of Llanover Lower, B. Hall, a local magistrate, revealed that the parish was paying a subscription, along with many other parishes from England and Wales, to use the House of Industry at Forden.<sup>329</sup>

In some instances, the decision to grant outdoor relief in Wales was also based on the fear of the parochial authorities that mixing 'undesirable' paupers with the more respectable ones (inside the workhouse) would have devastating consequences. For instance, in 1834 Henry Sockett, the visitor of the workhouse at Swansea, claimed that, in some cases 'we have avoided taking paupers into the House on account of dirty habits, offensive diseases, and bad morals, so as to not corrupt the more vulnerable and susceptible inmates' (such as the children).<sup>330</sup> Sockett also maintained that in deciding whether or not to grant outdoor relief, 'we have been governed by the consideration of their other resources'.<sup>331</sup> This also suggests that the decision to grant outdoor relief was based more on financial considerations than ideological ones.

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<sup>327</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>328</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries. In his report, Walcott also revealed that the parish of Holywell was also paying a subscription for the use of the Chester workhouse.

<sup>329</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>330</sup> Henry Sockett, 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of Industry',

<sup>331</sup> Sockett, 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of industry',



Further evidence that the prevalence of outdoor relief in Wales before 1834 was not based on humanitarian concerns can be seen in the fact that the sums provided to the outdoor paupers were often woefully inadequate. For example, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, Evan David, the overseer of the parishes of Llandaff, and Radyr and the Hundred of Kibbor, acknowledged that the sums afforded to paupers in this parish were 'barely sufficient to find them subsistence'.<sup>332</sup> Likewise, in his report, Walcott noted that in North Wales elderly paupers typically received just 1s a week from the parish.<sup>333</sup> Richardson argued that the pastoral nature of farming in Wales meant that there was no need for local farmers, in their capacity as poor law administrators, to provide generous relief payments in order to retain a pool of surplus labour to be used at harvest time, as was the case in certain parts of England, such as the south-east.<sup>334</sup>

Moreover, in some parishes in Wales, at least in those with access to some form of indoor relief, the threat of the workhouse was used to keep relief doles as low as possible. In his report Walcott demonstrated that in the parish of Hawarden there was little difference in the number of outdoor paupers relieved both before and after the establishment of a workhouse in 1830. However, there was a significant decrease in the amount of money expended on outdoor relief following the opening of the workhouse in 1832. This, he argued, indicated that the role of the workhouse in this region of Wales at least was to 'reduce the amount of the demands of the paupers below the cost of maintenance in the House, rather than reducing their numbers'.<sup>335</sup> Likewise, in his report into the operation of the Old Poor Law in Monmouthshire, A. J. Lewis stated that the workhouses in this county, which he described as being 'almost deserted', 'seem scarcely to

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<sup>332</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor laws 1832-34, PP,1834, *Rural and Town Queries*.

<sup>333</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, *The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales*.

<sup>334</sup> Frances Richardson, 'The Impact of the New Poor Law on Livelihoods of the Poor in North Wales', *Economic History Society*, (2017), pp.1-7, [here p4]. She argues that the higher dole payments in the arable areas of south-east England is evidence of the need to retain a pool of surplus labour.

<sup>335</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, *The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales*. Walcott also stated that the Overton workhouse was 'chiefly used by the overseers as an instrument of compelling a good bargain with applicants for relief'.

answer any other end but that of terrifying paupers into a willingness to accept the quantum of allowance the contractor may think it fit to offer them'.<sup>336</sup>

There is some evidence that paupers in Wales were aware that it cost the parish considerably more to maintain them and their families in a workhouse and that they used this knowledge to obtain outdoor relief. For instance, in his report, Walcott stated that in the parish of Forden, which possessed a relatively large House of Industry, 'the paupers know that while they confine their demands within the cost of maintenance, there is little risk of them being sent to the workhouse'.<sup>337</sup> Once again, this displays a degree of agency on the part of the paupers themselves. However, given the inadequacy of the doles typically provided by Welsh vestries it is difficult to see how the provision of outdoor relief materially benefited the paupers to any considerable extent.

The fact that the regular weekly doles in Wales were woefully inadequate was compounded by the fact that, as demonstrated above, relatively little casual (or temporary) relief was granted in Wales under the Old Poor Law. For example, in the *Rural Queries*, D. Nihill, the curate of the House of Industry at Forden stated that in that parish, of the fifty-three paupers that had been relieved in the last year, only five had received 'casual or occasional relief'.<sup>338</sup> In a similar vein, Lewis Ellis, the assistant overseer of Machynlleth maintained that 'only a trifle' of the total poor law expenditure of the parish was spent on the relief of the casual poor.<sup>339</sup> In her work, Francesca Richardson has demonstrated that in some parishes in England, particularly in the rural south-east, relatively large sums of money were expended on providing casual relief (in cash and in-kind) under the Old Poor Law, which 'supplemented to a considerable extent' the regular weekly allowances'.<sup>340</sup> However,

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<sup>336</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Report of AJ Lewis (Assistant Commissioner) on the Counties of Salop, Hereford and Monmouth.

<sup>337</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>338</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>339</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Rural and Town Queries. Likewise, Henry Knight stated that in Neath, although 78 able-bodied men had received casual relief in the last year, most of these had 'small sums given them'.

<sup>340</sup> Frances Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.247. She even revealed that in some English parishes casual payments made up a majority of the expenditure on poor relief by 1820.

in Wales the vast majority of paupers were unable to 'top-up' their meagre doles with temporary assistance.

Further evidence that the prevalence of outdoor relief in Wales under the Old Poor Law was not based on humanitarian concerns can be seen in the fact that many parishes in Wales 'farmed-out' their poor to a local contractor, who agreed to maintain the paupers in return for an annual stipend from the parish. For example, it was reported in *The Cambrian* in 1837 that in the parish of Dolgelley, and other parts of North Wales, the poor, particularly the elderly, 'were annually put up to a sort of Dutch auction and are let among the attendants at the vestry to whoever will take them'.<sup>341</sup> In most cases, the paupers were 'sold' to the lowest bidder, often to detriment of the paupers themselves. For instance, it was reported in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* in 1832 that a meeting was held in the vestry of St Mary's Church, Monmouth, 'for the purpose of receiving the tenders of persons wishing to farm the poor for the ensuing year' and that the offer of Mr Perring (for £1090), 'being the lowest, was of course accepted'.<sup>342</sup> In his report of the operation of the poor laws of Monmouthshire, A.J. Lewis demonstrated that farming-out the paupers to a local contractor was often cheaper than maintaining them individually. He stated that in the town of Monmouth, 'previous to the introduction of the farming system the poor rates used to exceed £2,000 a year, but since its introduction the rates have reduced to £1,300 per annum'.<sup>343</sup> Lewis also pointed out that the mode of farming out the poor in Wales was 'materially different from what obtains in parts of England such as Shropshire and Herefordshire'.<sup>344</sup> He observed that in Wales the poor were contracted out for an annual sum, as demonstrated above; whereas in England the parish entered into an agreement with the governor of the local workhouse to allow him a certain sum per week for each pauper relieved in the workhouse. According to Lewis it was therefore in the interests of the contractor in Wales to maintain as few paupers as possible in a workhouse; and in the

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<sup>341</sup> Pauperism in Wales, *The Cambrian*, 4 November, 1837, p.4; Likewise, in his report, Walcott noted that in many parishes, 'the impotent are put up to auction in the vestry and farmed out to those who will maintain them on the cheapest terms'. In his report, A.J. Lewis also noted that 'the practice of farming-out the poor prevails to a considerable extent in Monmouthshire'.<sup>341</sup>

<sup>342</sup> Monmouth, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 17 March, 1832, p.3

<sup>343</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Report of AJ Lewis (Assistant Commissioner) on the Counties of Salop, Hereford and Monmouth.

<sup>344</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Report of AJ Lewis (Assistant Commissioner) on the Counties of Salop, Hereford and Monmouth.

interests of the contractor in England to relieve as many as possible inside a workhouse.<sup>345</sup> In Wales therefore, this practice contributed to the prevalence of outdoor relief. The farming-out system in Wales benefited the contractor and the ratepayers rather than the paupers. This can be seen in the fact that in Wales, in a bid to turn a profit, contractors often gave the outdoor paupers the smallest sums possible.<sup>346</sup> Moreover, there were no regulatory checks in place to ensure that the paupers were not being exploited or mistreated under this system of relief. Some of the contractors in Wales also forced the able-bodied paupers to work for them in an attempt to turn a further profit.<sup>347</sup>

It was also common in Wales before 1834, for parishes to place certain groups of paupers, particularly the elderly and infirm and young children, with friends or relatives, who were expected to maintain them in return for a small weekly dole. For instance, in his report, Walcott stated that in North Wales 'orphaned and deserted children, if too young for work, are left with friends and relatives' who were granted 'a small premium' until the child reached working age, where they were expected to earn enough money to pay for their own upkeep.<sup>348</sup> Likewise, in their annual report in 1837, the Poor Law Commissioners maintained that under the Old Poor Law, elderly paupers in Wales were often 'let to their own children' who promised to maintain them for a 'subsidiary' payment.<sup>349</sup> The Commissioners also stated that elderly paupers in Wales were sometimes placed with other

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<sup>345</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Report of AJ Lewis (Assistant Commissioner) on the Counties of Salop, Hereford and Monmouth. Lewis stated that 'he who contracts to maintain the poor at a gross annual sum saves more out of the yearly allowance by keeping the poor out of the workhouse, for the poor invariably prefer taking the smallest pittance as out-pensioners rather than enter the workhouse'.

<sup>346</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Report of AJ Lewis (Assistant Commissioner) on the Counties of Salop, Hereford and Monmouth. Lewis, stated that in Monmouth the poor were often forced to accept the 'smallest pittance as out-pensioners rather than enter the workhouse'.

<sup>347</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Report of AJ Lewis (Assistant Commissioner) on the Counties of Salop, Hereford and Monmouth; He stated 'It is further observed that by the Monmouthshire system of farming the poor, the employment of able-bodied applicants for relief rests exclusively with the contractor. As he has to relieve them out of the yearly stipend allowed him, he is in return, permitted to have the profit of their labour'.

<sup>348</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales. Walcott also stated that in rural parishes these children were sometimes placed with farmers, who agreed to maintain them (with help from the parish) until the services of the child became valuable. Likewise, Walcott maintained that children in the more industrial parishes were sometimes apprenticed to tradesmen-although he also noted that this was quite rare.

<sup>349</sup> Third Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, PP, 1837.

paupers with whom they had no connection.<sup>350</sup> Either way, the welfare of the paupers was seldom the main concern of the parochial authorities in Wales. Although an extra stream of income would have been welcomed by most pauper families, it is difficult to see how the payment of relatively small sums of money to families that were also toiling in poverty, would have materially benefited either party; in some ways it made their situations even worse as they suddenly had another person to feed and clothe which could be costly.

Furthermore, although the vast majority of outdoor paupers in Wales were relieved 'permanently' under the Old Poor Law, this was often due to a laxness of the part of the parochial officials, rather than being born out of any humanitarian concern for the welfare of the paupers. In his report, Walcott stated that in many parishes in North Wales, due to a laxity on behalf of the parochial officials, the lists of the paupers in receipt of poor relief were only reviewed once a year.<sup>351</sup> Walcott lamented that this often resulted in paupers continuing to receive relief long after their situations had improved.<sup>352</sup>

Moreover, although the vast majority of paupers in Wales were relieved outdoors under the Old Poor Law, some paupers, particularly in the more industrialised parishes, were forced to work in order to receive their relief. For example, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, Henry Knight, the overseer of Neath, stated that 'relief is never afforded to able-bodied men, without endeavouring to procure them work'.<sup>353</sup> Likewise, in 1834, Henry Sockett maintained that during his time as Visitor of the Swansea House of Industry, an Outdoor Labour Test was often provided to able-bodied applicants as a deterrent, particularly during periods of industrial depression.<sup>354</sup> Moreover, those that were forced to perform a task of labour in order to receive their relief from the parish were often paid less

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<sup>350</sup> Third Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, PP, 1837. Walcott made similar observations about the treatment of elderly paupers in his report. He stated that it was common for widows (particularly those with no children) to be placed together with the youngest supporting the oldest.

<sup>351</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>352</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales. Walcott stated that 'It is a lamentable fact that when a pauper gets on this (relief) list, he considers it a provision for life, and seldom anything but death relieves the parish of the burden'. Likewise, Henry Sockett stated that 'once a pauper has received relief from the parish, it is difficult to get rid of them', Sockett, 'A Concise History of the House of Industry', 1834.

<sup>353</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, *Rural and Town Queries*.

<sup>354</sup> Henry Sockett, 'A Concise History of the House of Industry', 1834; In a similar vein, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, George Thomas, clerk to the House of Industry at Forden, claimed that 'when able-bodied applicants were given work instead of money, they cease to be troublesome'.

than the going rate received by an independent labourer. In his report Walcott maintained that 'in the towns of St Asaph, Holywell and Montgomery, the able-bodied unemployed were set to break stones for the roads, at wages rather under the current rate of the neighbourhood'.<sup>355</sup> There is also evidence that forcing paupers to work for such a miserable pittance did dissuade some from claiming relief altogether. For instance, in 1834, George Thomas, the overseer of Llandyssil stated that when able-bodied men were made to work for their relief, 'they cease to be troublesome'.<sup>356</sup>

Forcing the outdoor paupers to work for their relief was seldom a requirement in the more rural parishes in Wales before 1834. For instance, in his report Walcott maintained that in North-Wales, 'work is scarcely ever made the condition of relief outside of the town parishes...even in the case of unemployed able-bodied men'.<sup>357</sup> In a similar vein, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, Robert Roberts the overseer of Llangian (Caernarvonshire) stated that 'those who are out of employment [and belonging to the parish] are maintained, 'summer and winter out of the poor rates...without having to work for it'.<sup>358</sup>

However, the lack of an Outdoor Labour Test in rural parishes in Wales was often due to the laxity of the parochial officials, rather than being founded on any humanitarian concerns. For instance, in his report Walcott stated that relatively few able-bodied men were forced to work for their relief in north-Wales due to the 'absence of parochial employment' in the country parishes.<sup>359</sup> Likewise, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, Henry Jones, the vicar of Northop stated that able-bodied men in the parish were often relieved

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<sup>355</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales. He also reported that of the 168 men in north-Wales listed as working on the roads and being in the receipt of relief, 68 of them were in Holywell and St Asaph alone.

<sup>356</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>357</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>358</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, Rural and Town Queries. Likewise, Robert Williams, the rector of Aber maintained that all of the labourers in the parish were generally in employment and when unable to support their families, deriving assistance from the poor rates.

<sup>359</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

without being required to perform a task of labour as there were often 'no stones to be broken on the road'.<sup>360</sup>

There is also evidence that many of the additional forms of relief provided to paupers in Wales under the Old Poor Law were not necessarily paternalistic. For instance, although many paupers in Wales had their rents paid for by the parish, they were often forced to live in sub-standard houses. The Poor Law Commissioners stated in their third report in 1837 that under the Old system in Wales it had been common practice for unscrupulous proprietors to build 'miserable hovels' for the reception of paupers 'often on the sides of mountains or other barren locations' in the knowledge that, without a workhouse, the parish would be forced to provide some form of accommodation for those who could not afford to pay it themselves.<sup>361</sup> Likewise, in his report into the operation of the Old Poor Law in South Wales in 1836, Assistant Commissioner Clive stated that although some of the paupers were given a weekly cash dole and had their rents paid for by the parish, 'I am ashamed to go into their houses, they are like pig sty's'.<sup>362</sup> Moreover, the decision of the parishes that built their own cottages for the reception of paupers was often taken not for the benefit of the paupers themselves but in an attempt to reduce the expenditure on rents. Walcott stated that in North Wales pauper cottages were often built by the parishes as they were simply a 'cheaper way of paying the rents of paupers' as they undercut the exorbitant rents charged by the unscrupulous proprietors.<sup>363</sup> By 1834, some parishes in Wales, particularly those with access to either a workhouse or a poorhouse, even used the threat of indoor relief to cease the payments of pauper's rents, where they had previously paid it. For instance, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, L. Child, stated that the establishment of a workhouse in Llanstadwell 'prevented the necessity of providing

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<sup>360</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, *Rural and Town Queries*. Likewise, W. Clive also maintained that it was common for able-bodied men to be granted relief without the requirement of being made to work, as 'the parish has no stated mode of employing its able-bodied applicants'.

<sup>361</sup> Pauperism in Wales, *The Cambrian*, 4 November, 1837; Often these cottage proprietors would then charge exorbitant rent prices, for example in Montgomery it was reported here that one proprietor obtained ten cottages from the landowner at a yearly rent of £18 and re-let them for £50 with eight of his tenants being parish paupers.

<sup>362</sup> George Clive, *Correspondence and Papers*, 1836-39.

<sup>363</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, *The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales*. He also stated that other attempts were made by parishes to reduce the costs of paying the rents of paupers such as forcing paupers to live together-often an able-bodied pauper living with an elderly pauper-whom they were also expected to look after.

separate houses for the maintenance of the poor'.<sup>364</sup> The evidence here could be seen as further evidence that parochial authorities in Wales were not against the use of workhouses on ideological grounds. It is also worth questioning who really benefited this type of relief. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, there is some evidence that parochial officials in Wales were using the payment of pauper rents to line their own pockets.

Likewise, although non-resident relief was common in Wales before 1834, the sums provided to non-resident paupers was often even less than the miserable sums granted to paupers residing in their 'home' parish. For instance, in his report, Walcott stated that 'the common excuse given to him for the existence of this practice in North Wales was that 'the out-pauper is satisfied with less relief than a resident pauper and more likely to get employment where he is'.<sup>365</sup> Moreover, by 1834, some parishes in Wales, particularly those with access to a workhouse, began to use the threat of indoor relief against their non-resident paupers. For example, in their Third Annual Report in 1837, the Poor Law Commissioners stated that by the end of the Old Poor Law, several parishes in Wales had built either a workhouse or a poorhouse for the sole purpose of dissuading non-resident paupers from applying to their home parish for relief.<sup>366</sup>

Similarly, although many parishes in Wales paid a type of family allowance under the Old Poor Law, relatively few able-bodied men in Wales actually received this type of relief, especially in comparison to the number of able-bodied men relieved under the Old Poor Law in certain parts of England. For instance, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, Francis Price, the overseer of Overton in Flintshire, stated that 'able-bodied labourers are not in the habit of receiving any allowance or regular parochial relief' as 'we consider that a good labourer ought to be paid such wages as will support both himself and his family'.<sup>367</sup> In a similar vein, the overseer of the parish of Neath claimed that relief was only granted to able-bodied men

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<sup>364</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>365</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>366</sup> Cited in Pauperism in Wales, *The Cambrian*, 4 November, 1837, p.4.

<sup>367</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.



‘in very few cases’.<sup>368</sup> Other historians have also claimed that relatively few able-bodied labourers in Wales were in receipt of poor relief in the years leading up to 1834. For example, Richardson argued that in Nantconwy the number of labourers with dependent families claiming relief was ‘relatively small due to the prevalence of farm service and the fact that children were able to earn their keep from the age of ten’.<sup>369</sup> Likewise, in his work, focusing on the Old Poor Law in Aberdare, Alun Davies claimed that, the practice of granting ‘family’ allowances to able-bodied men decreased significantly after 1820 as the region became increasingly industrialised offering more employment opportunities and higher wages to labourers in this part of Wales.<sup>370</sup> Moreover, as alluded to above, the sums provided to able-bodied men (on behalf of their families) were often woefully inadequate. For instance, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, the overseer of Llanerfyl in Montgomeryshire stated that the parish usually granted ‘to families consisting of many children’, the paltry sum of ‘1s for each child above the number the parents were able to maintain, which number is usually from three to four’.<sup>371</sup> Likewise, the overseer of Clyro and Clyro-Bettws in Radnorshire stated that able-bodied men ‘having four children under nine years old are allowed 2s per week’.<sup>372</sup> This also suggests that the prevalence of outdoor relief was based more on financial rather than humanitarian considerations as it would have cost the parishes considerably more to maintain an able-bodied man and his entire family in the workhouse.

In a similar vein, although single mothers with illegitimate children were often relieved under the Old Poor Law in Wales, the sums they received from the parish were so low that many were forced to abandon their offspring altogether in order to enter into

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<sup>368</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries. Likewise, in his report into the operation Old Poor Law in Monmouth, A.J. Lewis claimed that, in comparison to Salop and Hereford, very few able-bodied men in this region of Wales were in receipt of poor relief as ‘there is ample employment for those who are willing to work’.

<sup>369</sup> Richardson, ‘Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy’, p.3.

<sup>370</sup> Alun C. Davies, ‘The Old Poor Law in an Industrialising Parish: Aberdare’, p.299. Steven King has also argued that in Montgomeryshire, by the 1820s, few able-bodied men were on the relief lists in contrast to some areas in England, such as Oxfordshire and Wiltshire, where men dominated the relief rolls, in Steven King and John Stewart, ‘The History of the Poor Law in Wales’, p.141.

<sup>371</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>372</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries. Likewise, William Garner, the vestry clerk at Llanfairaryryn (Carmarthen) lamented that the sums unmarried mothers received from the parish were ‘too little to pay the woman for her trouble and to do justice to the child’.<sup>372</sup>

employment, where they were expected to earn enough to support themselves and to contribute towards the maintenance of their child or children. For instance, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, George Thomas, the clerk to the directors of the Montgomery and Poole House of Industry, stated that single mothers with illegitimate children usually received just 8d per week, 'a sum insufficient for the maintenance of the child'.<sup>373</sup> Likewise, in his report, Walcott stated that, 'the sums provided to unmarried mothers do not repay the cost of keeping it (the child)' and that 'in most parishes (in North Wales), the child is put-out to nurse' to allow the mother to enter into domestic service.<sup>374</sup> Walcott also pointed out that mothers who nursed out their children were also expected to 'furnish the child with clothes...which she usually does'.<sup>375</sup> The fact that unmarried mothers were forced to abandon their own children in order to survive also suggests that the welfare of the paupers was not the main concern of the parochial authorities in Wales.

Further evidence that the welfare of the paupers was seldom the main concern of the parochial authorities in Wales can be seen in the treatment of indoor paupers under the Old Poor Law. Although indoor paupers only made-up a tiny minority of the pauper host in Wales before 1834, there were always a small number of paupers maintained in either a workhouse or a poorhouse. In some of the town parishes in Wales, at least in those with access to a workhouse, many indoor paupers were made to work for their relief. For example, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, James Hollings, the overseer of Monmouth stated that in the workhouse of that parish, 'the females are employed in sewing and cleaning the House, and the males are employed in agricultural work'.<sup>376</sup> Likewise, Henry Knight reported that the able-bodied men at the Neath workhouse were also forced to work for their relief. He stated that 'two of the men are employed in cleaning the streets and two were

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<sup>373</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, *Rural and Town Queries*

<sup>374</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales; The Poor Law Commissioners also stated in their Third Annual Report in 1837 that under the Old Poor Law system in Wales, 'the first object of unmarried mothers is to separate themselves as rapidly as possible from their children, abandoning their duties as mothers, to find their way as quickly as possible into service'.

<sup>375</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor Laws in North-Wales.

<sup>376</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, *Rural and Town Queries*.

employed in breaking stones for the roads'.<sup>377</sup> At the House of Industry in Swansea, even some of the elderly paupers, and many of the children, were forced to work. For instance, men that were classed as aged or infirm but capable of working in some degree, were employed in cultivating the garden, acting as scavengers in the town, and picking oakum; whilst elderly and infirm women were employed in sewing, washing, ironing and cooking.<sup>378</sup> Sockett claimed that, by forcing the paupers at the Swansea House of Industry to work for their relief, he was promoting habits of decency, cleanliness and industriousness' among the lower orders.<sup>379</sup>

Paupers in the smaller rural workhouses and/or poorhouses in Wales were rarely made to work for their relief. For example, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, the overseer of the parish of Abergavenny (William Powell) stated that 'the paupers being generally aged or infirm persons, or young persons, are not employed in any manufacture' in the workhouse.<sup>380</sup> Likewise, Benjamin Phillips, the overseer of Narberth reported that 'none (of the ten pauper inmates of this parish) are employed in the workhouse'.<sup>381</sup> In his report, Walcott conceded that it would be difficult, given the general profile of the inmates in the more rural parishes in Wales, to turn a profit from the labour of the indoor poor.<sup>382</sup>

However, although they were not forced to work for their relief, the indoor poor in the more rural parishes in Wales were often forced to live in the most deplorable conditions. Workhouses (and/or poorhouses) in Wales, especially the smaller establishments typically found in the country parishes, were often badly constructed or else had fallen into a state of disrepair by 1834. For example, it was reported in the *North Wales Chronicle* in 1833 that the small poorhouse at Carnarvon was 'not suitable for human

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<sup>377</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries; Walcott also reported that able-bodied paupers were forced to work in the workhouses at Forden, Hawarden and Overton; Henry Sockett also stated that able-bodied paupers were made to work in the House of Industry at Swansea, in Sockett, 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of Industry',

<sup>378</sup> Sockett, 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of Industry', 1834. Sockett also stated that girls were employed in domestic duties as well as spinning, knitting and sewing; and boys were employed in picking oakum and basket making.

<sup>379</sup> Sockett, 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of Industry', 1834. He also claimed that the majority of paupers were 'worthless and idle' which may further explain why he decided to implement a strict workhouse regime.

<sup>380</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>381</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries

<sup>382</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries

habitation', despite only being built the previous year.<sup>383</sup> In a similar vein, Assistant Commissioner Clive reported in 1837 that 'the poorhouse at Tenby is in a most filthy state; in the yard, immediately before the door, public privies have been erected, the disgusting state of which baffles description'.<sup>384</sup> Clive even claimed that the poorhouse at Pembroke was 'literally a brothel'.<sup>385</sup> Moreover, the smaller country workhouses were usually unstaffed and unregulated, with paupers left to fend for themselves, often with dire consequences. For example, at the poorhouse at St Mary's, Tenby, in 1836 Assistant Commissioner Clive found 'a paralytic man' who was completely unattended, and whose condition he described as 'most terrible'.<sup>386</sup> The poor conditions in these workhouses and the lack of pauper care suggest that the welfare of the paupers was not the main concern of the parochial authorities.

Some of the indoor paupers in Wales retaliated against the harsh conditions that met them inside the workhouses. For instance, it was reported in the *Cambrian* in 1832 that Daniel Evans refused to carry out his daily task work while confined at the Swansea House of Industry.<sup>387</sup> Likewise, in Monmouth in 1834, a pauper by the name of Morris, an inmate of the notorious House of Industry at Forden, was charged with 'misconduct at the workhouse and absenting himself without leave'.<sup>388</sup> In 1831, one pauper, Edward Williams, was even charged with setting fire to, and destroying, a newly erected poorhouse in the parish of Shire-Newtown.<sup>389</sup> Others simply left the workhouse, or refused to enter in the first place, and attempted to make it on the outside without any help from the parish whatsoever. For instance, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, Rowland Williams, the vicar of Meifod (in Montgomeryshire) claimed that 'the poor have a great dread of the workhouse' and that they often refused to enter such establishments.<sup>390</sup> This shows a degree of agency amongst

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<sup>383</sup> Public Vestry at Carnarvon, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 10 March, 1831, p.3.

<sup>384</sup> George Clive, Correspondence and Papers, 1836-39.

<sup>385</sup> George Clive, Correspondence and Papers, 1836-39, The overseer informed him that 'there are a number of bad women in the poorhouse, and that at all times, 10 or 12 mariners would come up at night'.

<sup>386</sup> George Clive papers, Correspondence and Papers, 1836-39. Clive even stated that the overseers were 'ashamed to show me this man'.

<sup>387</sup> Well-Merited Punishments, *The Cambrian*, 26 May, 1832, p.3

<sup>388</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 5 July, 1834, p.3.

<sup>389</sup> Pontypool, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 31 December, 1831, p.3.

<sup>390</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries. He also stated that 'it is also notorious that when paupers (in the parish) come to swear their settlements, they show a strong inclination to be removed to parishes where there are no workhouses'.

the Welsh paupers. The fact that many chose to leave the workhouse many also help to explain why the number of indoor paupers in Wales was so low throughout the period under investigation here.

However, in most cases refractory paupers were heavily punished under the Old Poor Law, and their lives did not materially improve as a result of their actions; in some cases, they were left even worse off. For example, in the case referred to above, Daniel Evans was sent to the House of Correction at Swansea.<sup>391</sup> Likewise, as a result of his actions, Edward Williams was sent to Monmouth gaol for several months.<sup>392</sup> Moreover, there is little evidence that absconding from the workhouse, and forgoing parochial relief altogether, improved the lives of the paupers in any way. In the *Rural and Town and Town Queries*, Rowland Williams lamented that those that refused the offer of the workhouse in Montgomery 'frequently suffered from great hardship'.<sup>393</sup>

Many paupers under the Old Poor Law in Wales were denied access to poor relief altogether, sometimes for spurious reasons. For example, in Merthyr in 1831, poor relief was denied to several able-bodied men who were on strike from the Dowlais Iron Works following a dispute with the proprietors of the works. In a review of the decision of the vestry not to grant these men any relief, the magistrates decided that 'the applicants, being able to work upon complying with a reasonable condition, we (the magistrates) have no right to order them to be maintained out of the poor rates'.<sup>394</sup> Ironmasters were often heavily involved in the vestry meetings in Merthyr before 1834.<sup>395</sup> The decision of the vestry (and the magistrates) not to relieve striking ironworkers could therefore be seen as clear evidence of a conflict of interest on their behalf. In a similar vein, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, William Powell, JP stated that in the parish of Abergavenny 'every object is thrown in the way of those persons obtaining relief who have thrown themselves out of employ'.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> Well-Merited Punishments, *The Cambrian*, 26 May, 1832, p.3

<sup>392</sup> Pontypool, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 31 December, 1831, p.3.

<sup>393</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>394</sup> Merthyr Tydfil, *The Carmarthen Journal and South Wales Weekly Advertiser*, 21 October, 1831, p.3

<sup>395</sup> This can be seen in the fact that at a vestry meeting in Merthyr in February 1833, a number of ironmasters voted against increasing the poor rate against their works, Vestry Meeting Merthyr, *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 16 February, 1833, p.4; Alun C. Davies also noted the involvement of ironmasters in the administration of the Old poor Law in Aberdare, in Davies, 'The Old Poor Law in an Industrialising Parish: Aberdare, 1818-36'.

<sup>396</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the operation of the poor laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

Likewise, Benjamin Phillips, the overseer of Narberth stated that, in every application for relief, 'attention is always paid to the character of the applicant and the cause of his distress'.<sup>397</sup> This suggests that in Wales, the decision of whether or not to grant relief was sometimes based on questions of morality, rather than need. The fate of those unable to secure poor relief in Wales before 1834 is discussed in detail in the section below.

### **The Economy of Makeshifts under the Old Poor Law in Wales**

The relatively small sums provided to paupers in Wales before 1834, coupled with the fact that many paupers were denied access to poor relief altogether, meant that those in need of assistance were often forced to rely upon a diverse economy of makeshifts in order to survive. First and foremost, it is worth mentioning that able-bodied paupers in Wales, particularly able-bodied men, were expected to earn enough money to support themselves and their families without ever calling on the parish for help. For instance, in Walcott's report, Mr Price, the overseer of the parish of Overton stated that 'a man with a good character would never be out of work'.<sup>398</sup> Likewise, in 1834, Henry Sockett maintained that during his time as Visitor of the Swansea workhouse he made every effort 'short of cruelty' to ensure that those that were able to work, did so, and that they earned enough, 'through their own exertions, to maintain themselves and their families'.<sup>399</sup>

However, many paupers in Wales before 1834, even able-bodied men in full-time employment, did not earn enough to live independently. In the *Rural and Town Queries*, B. Hall, JP in the parish of Llanover Lower stated that 'a man (in this region of Wales) may earn 6s or 7s or 8s a week; still this may not support his family'.<sup>400</sup> In a similar vein, in his report into the operation of the Old Poor Law in South Wales, George Clive stated that in the counties of Carmarthen, Pembroke, Cardigan and parts of Brecknock, 'wages are generally very low...averaging between six and eight shillings a week' and that very few labourers

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<sup>397</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the operation of the poor laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

<sup>398</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP, 1834, The Report of Stephen Walcott into the Operation of the Poor laws in North-Wales.

<sup>399</sup> Sockett, 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of Industry'.

<sup>400</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, Rural and Town Queries.

were able to top-up their earnings with harvest work due to the pastoral nature of Welsh farming.<sup>401</sup>

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, the families of able-bodied men in England and Wales were also expected to work and contribute to the family income.<sup>402</sup> In the town parishes in Wales, some women and children were able to find employment and support the family financially. For example, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, William Lutener, the overseer of Newtown stated that 'women are employed in various branches of the flannel industry and children (over the age of 8 or 9) frequently work in a factory'.<sup>403</sup> Likewise, William Williams, the churchwarden of the Aberystwith parish (Monmouth) reported that a few women were employed at the local ironworks.<sup>404</sup>

However, outside of the more industrialised parishes in Wales there were very few employment opportunities for women and children. For instance, in the *Rural and Town Queries*, Thomas Williams, the overseer of Llanvabwy stated that 'there is very little employment for women and children, except at harvest time'.<sup>405</sup> In a similar vein, David Davies, the overseer of Llanerfyl lamented that 'the wives and children of labourers have seldom any employment, excepting for a few days, occasionally at harvest time'.<sup>406</sup> This contrasted sharply with the situation in the south-east of England where the arable nature of farming in this region meant that women and children were able to gain employment during the harvests.<sup>407</sup> The factory system in the textile industry in the north-west of England also provided plenty of employment opportunities for women and children,

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<sup>401</sup> George Clive, *Correspondence and Papers, 1836-39*. Clive pointed out that the wages of the colliers in parts of south-Wales (such as Glamorgan) were typically higher (averaging around 14s a week). However, according to Clive, even in this region of Wales very few labourers were able to afford basic luxuries such as 'animal food'.

<sup>402</sup> Barry Reay, *Microhistories: Demography, Society and Culture in Rural England, 1800-1930*, (Cambridge, 1996). In his work Reay demonstrated that earnings from women and children was a vital source of income for pauper families, pp.99-101.

<sup>403</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, *Rural and Town Queries*.

<sup>404</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, *Rural and Town Queries*.

<sup>405</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, *Rural and Town Queries*.

<sup>406</sup> Report of Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws 1832-34, PP,1834, *Rural and Town Queries*.

<sup>407</sup> Barry Reay, *Microhistories*, p.99-101.

although employment opportunities for children below a certain age were curtailed by the introduction of the Factory Act of 1833.<sup>408</sup>

The combination of low wages and woefully inadequate relief doles meant that many paupers in Wales before 1834 were forced to rely on charity, both private and public, in order to survive. Some went about their local parish begging for relief, particularly during times of distress. For example, it was reported in Merthyr in 1831 that unemployed iron-workers regularly 'come down the valley in gangs, begging pence by the way'.<sup>409</sup> It was also stated that these men begged without 'exhibiting any improper conduct', which suggests that begging for charity was an acceptable practice provided it was conducted in a 'seemly' manner.<sup>410</sup> In a similar vein, in 1834, Henry Sockett stated that in Swansea, the low outdoor doles provided to elderly women (who were able to earn some money but not enough to maintain themselves) 'has furnished them with pretences to abuse the Guardian (of the Workhouse) for his niggardliness and justified them in becoming common beggars in the street'.<sup>411</sup> Other historians such as Dodd and Richardson have also noted that begging remained a common tactic used by paupers under the Old Poor Law in Wales.<sup>412</sup>

More commonly, charitable donations, sometimes sizeable ones, from wealthy patrons or from subscriptions raised for the relief of the poor, were dished out to paupers at times of need, particularly during religious festivals or celebrations such as Christmas and Easter, or in the cold winter months. For example, it was reported in December 1831 that the poor at Pontypool were relieved at Christmas 'by the benevolence of C. H. Leigh Esq, who as is usual at this time of year, caused two fat beeves (sic) to be slaughtered and distributed, with a sack of coal to each pauper family'.<sup>413</sup> Likewise, it was reported in *The Cambrian* in January 1830 that the Reverend E. Picton 'caused several tons of coal and various articles of clothing to be distributed amongst the poor of Ferryside,

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<sup>408</sup> Clark Nardinelli, 'Child Labour and the Factory Acts', *The Journal of Economic History*, vol.40, no.4, (December, 1980), pp.739-755, [here p.741]

<sup>409</sup> *The Cambrian*, 1 October, 1831, p.3.

<sup>410</sup> *The Cambrian*, 1 October, 1831, p.3.

<sup>411</sup> Sockett, 'A Concise Account of the Origin of the House of Industry', 1834.

<sup>412</sup> See Dodd, 'The Old Poor Law in North Wales', p.113. See also Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.225. Richardson stated that 'begging formed an important and accepted part of the mixed economy of welfare in late eighteenth century Wales, both before and after the introduction of poor rates'.

<sup>413</sup> Pontypool, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 1831, p.3. It was also noted here that the poor at Pontypool benefited from a charitable soup establishment and that in addition to this a quantity of bread was given away according to the bequest of the late Mr Chas Price, of this town.



Carmarthenshire, to help see them through the present severe weather'.<sup>414</sup> In the towns charitable donations could sometimes reach thousands of paupers. For instance, it was reported that in Swansea in 1830 the subscription raised by the 'Swansea Charity', 'has furnished food and fuel to at least 2,500 persons, and that together with the pease-soup daily delivered at the House of Industry, to persons not receiving parish relief, there have been relieved between 3,000-4,000 individuals'.<sup>415</sup> It was also common in Wales for wealthy philanthropists to leave charitable bequests in their wills to be dished out to paupers at regular intervals or at times of great distress. For example, it was reported in Monmouth in 1832 that Mr Thomas Mason had left £100 in his will, which was to be 'put out at interest, in the name of the Vicar; with half of such interest to be given at Easter and the other half at Christmas, yearly, for ever, to such poor persons as his executors should think proper objects'.<sup>416</sup>

However, the sums raised by private charity were not inexhaustible nor was charity given at regular intervals; as we have seen they were often granted at particular times of the year only, or at special occasions. There is also some evidence that, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the amount of charity being collected to assist with the relief of the poor was becoming increasingly inadequate. For example, Richardson noted that as early as the 1770s, there were reports that several paupers north-Wales had 'perished from want' after failing to solicit any form of relief, either through sickness or old age.<sup>417</sup> Fred Hankins has also suggested that in Wales the amounts raised for charitable purposes were increasingly inadequate during the nineteenth century, particularly in the towns which saw large population increases.<sup>418</sup> David Howell has also argued that charity in the rural areas of Wales was increasingly insufficient as a result of absentee landlords and the growing divide in society, between the landlords and the rest of society; as well as the relative poverty of

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<sup>414</sup> *The Cambrian*, 30 January, 1830, p.3

<sup>415</sup> Swansea, *The Cambrian*, 13 February 1830, p.3

<sup>416</sup> Charitable Donations, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 25 February, 1832, p.3; Richardson has also demonstrated that this practice (of leaving bequests the poor in wills) was common in North-Wales, in Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.224.

<sup>417</sup> Cited in Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.217. David Howell also suggests that charitable donations were becoming increasingly insufficient by the end of the eighteenth century. He produced figures to show that in 1786 recorded bequests in Cardiganshire totalled just £63, in Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.112.

<sup>418</sup> Fred Hankins, 'From Parish Pauper to Union Workhouse Inmate', (Part one), *Brycheiniog*, vol,29, (1 January, 1996, pp.53-85, [here p.66]. Hankins argues that the sums raised by charities could not keep pace with the rise in population;

the small tenant farmers. Howell maintained that, in the rural areas, the amounts raised for charity were 'paltry when compared to the sums spent in pursuit of conspicuous consumption and in striving to cut a figure in the world'.<sup>419</sup> He also provided figures which demonstrated how low the figures raised for charity in the more rural counties of Wales could be. For example, in 1786 the total sum raised for charity in Cardiganshire was just £63, compared to £1,369 in Denbighshire.<sup>420</sup> Although private charity played a large part in the lives of the poor in Wales, it was not always sufficient enough to keep them above the poverty line; and as the nineteenth century progressed the sums raised for charitable purposes were becoming increasingly insufficient. The fact that the amount of charity in Wales was becoming increasingly inadequate in Wales reflected the fact that, by the end of the eighteenth century, many of the larger landowners in Wales, who had previously supplied both charity and employment were becoming increasingly distanced from the rest of the population. The evidence here challenges the work of other historians such as Matthew Cragoe who have argued that, up until the end of the nineteenth century, landlord-tenant relationships in Wales were 'generally good' and that they (the landlords) were still relatively paternalistic.<sup>421</sup>

Furthermore, the vast majority of charitable relief in Wales was given in-kind rather than in cash. As we have already alluded to charity in Wales was often given in the form of food, or fuel or clothing. Further evidence of this can be seen in the parishes of Llangedwyn, Llanfechain and Llanrhaiadr in 1830 where, on the occasion of the wedding of Richard Hill Miers Esq and Miss Bonnar (of Bryn-y-Gwalie), an ox and several sheep were roasted and distributed to the poor, by the tenants and friends of the Bryn-y-Gwalie family.<sup>422</sup> The fact that so much of the charity provided in Wales was granted as relief in-kind may help to explain why so little casual relief was granted by the vestries. However, David Howell has claimed that the provision of charity in the form of relief in-Kind in eighteenth century Wales also reflected the lack of coinage in the country.<sup>423</sup> In a similar vein, Ben Harvey has

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<sup>419</sup> David Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, (Cardiff, 2000).

<sup>420</sup> Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.112; more recently Ben Harvey, has also argued that community support was stronger in the English border counties than in the adjacent Welsh counties, in Harvey, 'Pauper Narratives in the Welsh borders, 1750-1840', p.201.

<sup>421</sup> See Matthew Cragoe, 'The Anatomy of an Eviction Campaign: The General Election of 1868 in Wales and its Aftermath', *Rural History*, vol.9, Issue.1, (1998), pp.177-193.

<sup>422</sup> *The Cambrian*, 30 January, 1830, p.3.

<sup>423</sup> David Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales*, p.42

more recently asserted that relieving the paupers with charitable donations of food, fuel and clothing was simply an older method of welfare, particularly found in places such as Wales where the collections of money were not well-organized.<sup>424</sup> It is therefore also worth questioning whether the decision to grant charitable donations in-kind rather than in cash (even in instances where money was raised for the purpose) may reflect a distrust on the part of the providers of charity. Did wealthy patrons and the subscribers of charities, like the parochial authorities, have concerns that cash sums would be misappropriated by the paupers? There is certainly some evidence that the circumstances of the recipients of charity were entered into before they were allowed their relief. For example, in Swansea in 1830, it was stated that the circumstances of the paupers, including their situation and family size, were inquired into before any charity was allowed; and there were frequent references in the Welsh newspapers for charity to be distributed to the 'deserving poor' only.<sup>425</sup>

There is also some evidence that in Wales, the parochial authorities, and the executors of the wills of wealthy patrons did not always do all that they could to ensure that charitable bequests reached the persons that they were intended for. For example, in Monmouth in 1832 an aggrieved parishioner wrote to the editor of the *Monmouthshire Merlin* questioning whether two charitable bequests that had been left in the wills of Thomas Mason and James Gabriel, for the purpose of relieving the poor in times of distress, 'had been regularly appropriated for their benefit'. It was further suggested that 'the churchwardens and overseers should keep a sharp look-out for all bequests for, as executors will seldom take the trouble of paying any legacy until it is demanded'.<sup>426</sup> The author of this letter also lamented that 'as no mention is made of either of these legacies in the vestry room list of charitable donations; I fear they have never been received'.<sup>427</sup>

Another problem with the system of charity that existed in Wales under the Old Poor Law concerned the individuals in charge of collecting and distributing the charitable donations. Prior to 1834, the Anglican clergy in Wales were heavily involved in providing charity to paupers in need of assistance. For example, it was reported that in Carmarthen in

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<sup>424</sup> Ben Harvey, 'Pauper Narratives in the Welsh Borders', p.229.

<sup>425</sup> Swansea, *The Cambrian*, 13 February 1830, p.3

<sup>426</sup> Charitable Donations, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 25 February, 1832, p.3

<sup>427</sup> Charitable Donations, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 25 February, 1832, p.3;

1830 the Reverend James Griffiths, with the assistance of his churchwardens, relieved 'upwards of one-hundred-and-fifty persons, from charitable bequests placed at his disposal'.<sup>428</sup> Likewise, it was reported in Chepstow in 1830 that 'at a meeting of the minister, churchwardens and other inhabitants, it was proposed by the Reverend Mr Davis, the minister, that a subscription should be set on foot for supplying the poor of the town at this cold and inclement season, with coals, blankets etc.'<sup>429</sup> However, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, Nonconformity was rapidly replacing Anglicanism as the biggest religion in Wales; by 1851 the vast majority of religious worshippers in Wales who attended a place of worship on the Census Sunday identified as Nonconformist.<sup>430</sup> It is therefore also worth questioning whether or not the involvement of the Anglican clergy in the provision of charity to the poor proved to be problematic in a predominantly Nonconformist country like Wales. At the very least the participation of the Anglican Church in the provision of charity raises questions about how strictly paupers adhered to the principles of Nonconformity or else where their true loyalties or sentimentalities lay. Did paupers in Wales have divided loyalties when it came to their religious positioning? Or did the rise of Nonconformity and the decline of the Anglican Church in Wales contribute to the increasingly inadequate levels of charity discussed earlier? These questions will be discussed further in the following chapters.

Those that were unable to procure enough relief, either from the parish or via charity, were often forced into committing criminal acts in order to survive. Court records and police charge books from the early nineteenth century were filled with instances of paupers being charged for stealing items of food or clothing, often from other paupers. For instance, in Newbridge in 1834, Thomas Rees, a boatsman, was charged with stealing a turkey from the premises of William Stephens, a chain-maker.<sup>431</sup> In a similar vein, in Carnarvon in 1831, Elizabeth Phillips, Anne Owens and Catherine Hughes were indicted for stealing pieces of timber and iron from the property of Mr William Humphreys. It transpired at the hearing that these women had 'gone about the country begging', but being unable to

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<sup>428</sup> Carmarthen, *The Carmarthen Journal and South Wales Weekly Advertiser*, 31 December, 1830, p.3.

<sup>429</sup> *The Cambrian*, 30 January, 1830, p.3; W.P. Griffiths, makes the same point about involvement of the Anglican clergy in the collection and distribution of charity in Wales in Griffiths, *Poor Law in Wales*, <http://wiki.brookes.ac.uk/download/attachments/16614522>, [accessed 10/02/2017].

<sup>430</sup> Cited in John Davies, *A History of Wales*, p.412.

<sup>431</sup> *The Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 6 December, 1834, p.3

procure any charity, they had resorted to stealing the timber and iron. In this case all three of the defendants were imprisoned for six weeks.<sup>432</sup> With limited job opportunities, particularly in the more rural parishes, some women in Wales were even forced into prostitution in order to earn enough money to get-by. For instance, in Merthyr in 1833, Frances Davis, Rachel Jones, and Joan Argust were all committed for one month to the House of Correction at Swansea 'for being common prostitutes' and 'wandering in the public streets and behaving in a riotous and indecent manner'.<sup>433</sup>

Some paupers, out of sheer desperation, and seemingly being unable to see any way out of their dire situations, decided to take their own life. For example, in the parish of Llangevelach in 1808, an inquest was ordered into the death of William Evan, pauper. At the inquest it transpired that William was found hanging in the miserable hovel in which he lived, after having exhibited 'symptoms of derangement' for some time. The Jury simply returned the verdict of 'lunacy' as being the cause of death.<sup>434</sup> Likewise, in Abersychan in 1832, Mrs Evan Lloyd was found hanging in a woodland a short distance from her home. At the inquest into her death, it was reported that 'a reduction in her circumstances' had led her to commit this horrific act.<sup>435</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It has been demonstrated here that, before 1834, the vast majority of paupers in Wales were relieved outdoors. Most paupers in Wales also received a regular cash weekly dole. It was common for parishes in Wales under the Old Poor Law to pay for, or contribute towards, the rents of paupers. Many labourers were also excluded from paying the poor rates on account of their own poverty. It was also common in Wales under the Old Poor Law for parishes to pay non-resident relief, which encouraged paupers to migrate in search of employment. Family allowances and bastardy payments were also common in Wales before 1834.

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<sup>432</sup> Carnarvon Quarter Sessions, *The North-Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 5 July, 1831, p.3.

<sup>433</sup> *The Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 28 September, 1833, p.3

<sup>434</sup> *The Cambrian*, 26 November, 1808, p.3.

<sup>435</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 5 may, 1832, p.3.

However, the doles provided to the outdoor paupers in Wales before 1834 were typically small, especially in comparison to the amount of relief provided in parts of England. Moreover, outdoor paupers were often forced to live in sub-standard houses, sometimes rented to them by unscrupulous landlords. Furthermore, although non-resident relief was often granted in Wales before 1834, the sums provided to paupers living outside of their parish of settlement were even smaller than those received by paupers living in their 'home' parish. By 1834, some parishes in Wales also began to use the threat of the workhouse to prevent such payments. Likewise, although many parishes in Wales before 1834 paid family allowances to able-bodied labourers with large families, the number of paupers in receipt of this type of relief was extremely low. Similarly, although 'bastardy payments' made up a significant proportion of overall poor law expenditure in many Welsh parishes under the Old Poor Law, the low amounts provided to single mothers with illegitimate children meant that many were forced to abandon their offspring in order to enter into domestic service, where they were expected to earn enough to support themselves and to contribute to the maintenance of their child (or children), who were usually put out to nurse by the parish, often with another pauper family.

The inadequacy of the relief provided to paupers in Wales under the Old Poor Law meant that many were forced to rely on a diverse economy of makeshifts in order to survive. The low sums provided to paupers in Wales before 1834 were only ever meant to be subsidiary to the earnings they were expected to garner from their own employment. Charity continued to play a large part in the lives of paupers in Wales throughout the period under investigation here; for many it was a vital source of income. Those that were unable to secure any relief via charity were forced to steal, or commit other 'criminal' acts, in order to get-by. Some paupers, those that could no longer bear their miserable existence, decided to take their own life.

## Chapter Four: The Implementation of the New Poor

### Law in Wales.

#### Introduction

Under the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, parishes in England and Wales were grouped together to form new Poor Law Unions.<sup>436</sup> Each Union was to elect a Board of Guardians, with each of the constituent parishes within the Union having at least one representative on the Board.<sup>437</sup> The guardians were tasked with overseeing the administration of poor relief within their Union, although a new central body- The Poor Law Commission- was also set-up to supervise the administrative process and to ensure uniformity in practices across England and Wales.<sup>438</sup> One of the first tasks of the boards of guardians was to appoint the new Union Officers; this included (but was not excluded to) the Relieving and Medical Officers, and the Master and Matron of the workhouse. The central authorities also authorized the boards of guardians to establish a new Union workhouse; the workhouse system was one of the central tenets of the new system of relief.<sup>439</sup>

In some parts of England, particularly in the more rural areas, the New Poor Law was implemented relatively quickly. For instance, Anne Digby argued that in the rural south-east of England there was 'no concerted local opposition' against the New Poor Law.<sup>440</sup> Digby maintained that 'by 1840, the provisions of the Poor Law Amendment Act had been implemented effectively' in the region with 'the swift formation of Unions, the erection of new Union workhouses, and the implementation of reformed relief policies'.<sup>441</sup> Digby attributed the lack of opposition in the south-east of England to the fact that, unlike in some

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<sup>436</sup> Dewar, 'George Clive and the New Poor Law in South Glamorgan', p.46. There was no limit on the number of parishes that a Union could be made-up of but most of these new administrative units had an urban centre with a rural hinterland.

<sup>437</sup> Dewar, 'George Clive and the New Poor Law in South Glamorgan', p.46.

<sup>438</sup> Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.16.

<sup>439</sup> Thomas, 'The Poor Law in West Glamorgan', p.46.

<sup>440</sup> Anne Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law', p.149.

<sup>441</sup> Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law', p.149.

parts of England, such as Northamptonshire, there were relatively few landed magnates in the region who would have been capable of leading resistance movements.<sup>442</sup>

However, in other parts of England, particularly in the more industrial regions, there was considerable resistance to the implementation of the New Poor Law. For instance, Nicholas Edsall demonstrated that many Unions in the north-west of England initially refused to elect boards of guardians, or else elected guardians who were vehemently opposed to bringing the new law into operation.<sup>443</sup> Edsall also pointed out that many Unions in this region of England refused to build a new Union workhouse; in some instances they were able to hold out for several decades after 1834.<sup>444</sup> Some parishes in the region even refused, at least initially, to join their new Unions.<sup>445</sup> Edsall maintained that the recent history of organised protest movements in the region, such as the 1836 Factory Reform Movement, meant that the north already had many leaders around whom resistance to the New Poor Law could coalesce.<sup>446</sup>

More recently, the work of David Green has revealed that there was also considerable resistance to the implementation of the New Poor Law in London. Green argued that 'the introduction of the New Poor Law aroused widespread opposition in the Capital'.<sup>447</sup> He pointed out that, until 1867, about one-third of London parishes remained outside the terms of Poor Law Amendment Act.<sup>448</sup> There was also strong opposition to the building of new Union workhouses in London. Green stated that in London, 'new workhouse construction was slow, compared to the rest of the country'.<sup>449</sup> He attributed this to the fact that many Unions in London had already developed specialised institutions for paupers and

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<sup>442</sup> Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law', pp.150-153. Digby also argued that the fact that the rural south-east was less densely populated meant that it was harder to concentrate action effectively, p.152.

<sup>443</sup> Nicholas Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement*, pp.80-84. Edsall stated that 'there was hardly a Poor Law Union in the textile district that did not have one or two townships that refused to elect a guardian', p.84.

<sup>444</sup> Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement*, p.219. Todmorden held out until the 1870s and was one of the last Unions in England and Wales to build a new workhouse; David Ashforth makes a similar point in his work. He stated that 'no workhouses were built in the West Riding throughout the 1840s', in Ashforth, 'The Urban Poor Law', p.133.

<sup>445</sup> Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement*, p.105. Parishes from the proposed Salford Union, for instance, hoped to prevent the creation of the Union by withholding information upon which the Union would be based.

<sup>446</sup> Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement*, p.48. Edsall stated that 'no area in England, not even London, was as productive of popular movements'. This, he argued that gave opponents of the New Poor Law in this part of England the confidence and structure upon which to build an organised campaign.

<sup>447</sup> Green, *Pauper Capital*, p.18.

<sup>448</sup> Green, *Pauper Capital*, p.19.

<sup>449</sup> Green, *Pauper Capital*, p.19



that the general 'mixed' workhouses were less needed in the Capital.<sup>450</sup> Green also maintained that the sheer size of the parishes typically found in the Metropolis made it difficult for the Poor Law Commissioners, and their assistants, to implement the New Poor Law in the region.<sup>451</sup>

The current neglect of Wales within the historiography (see Introduction) means that relatively little is known about the manner in which the New Poor Law was implemented in Wales. Several historians have claimed that there was considerable resistance to the implementation of the New Poor Law in Wales. For instance, in his work, Nicholas Edsall claimed that 'nowhere [outside of the north of England] was opposition to the New Poor Law so broadly based as it was in Wales'.<sup>452</sup> Edsall maintained that resistance to the New Poor Law 'developed in a majority or near majority of Welsh Poor Law Unions during the Spring and Summer of 1837'.<sup>453</sup> In a similar vein, John Knott claimed that 'it was in Wales that the most forceful rural opposition to the New Poor Law was displayed'.<sup>454</sup> More recently, Evans and Jones stated that 'there is a broad consensus amongst historians that Wales was particularly resistant to implementing the New Poor Law after 1834'.<sup>455</sup>

However, far more work is needed to flesh out these speculative bones. This chapter focuses on the implementation of the New Poor Law in our six sample Welsh Unions. The first section establishes when the New Poor Law was introduced in Wales. The second section assesses the level of opposition to the New Poor Law in Wales. The final section looks at the implementation of the workhouse system in Wales under the New Poor Law.

### **The Introduction of the New Poor Law in Wales**

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<sup>450</sup> Green, *Pauper Capital*, pp.18-19

<sup>451</sup> Green, *Pauper Capital*, p.18.

<sup>452</sup> Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement*, p.129. Edsall also stated that the resistance to the New Poor Law was even more important, 'as it involved a far larger area'. He also claimed that 'Wales was the prize exhibit of the New Poor Law's opponents', p.128.

<sup>453</sup> Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement*, p.128. He also claimed that in Wales, the vast majority of the guardians, magistrates, and overseers, were self-declared and active opponents of the 1834 act, p.129.

<sup>454</sup> John Knott, *Popular Opposition to the 1834 Poor Law*, (New York, 1986), p.83

<sup>455</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn Intractable Body', p.101. See also Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.271. Richardson 'argued that the ratepayers in North Wales were 'universally opposed to the New Poor Law, especially the workhouse'. Higginbotham also maintained that opposition to the 1834 act in Wales was 'widespread', in Peter Higginbotham, *Workhouses of Wales and the Welsh Borders*, (Gloucester, 2022), p.18

The Poor Law Commissioners and their assistants initially ignored Wales and chose to focus instead on the areas that they deemed to be more 'troublesome', such as the so-called Speenhamland counties in the rural south-east of England.<sup>456</sup> That the Commissioners were singularly unconcerned with the situation in Wales, at least initially, can be seen in the fact when they received a letter from a prominent landowner in Newport in 1835 complaining that the New Poor Law was not yet in operation in the region, the Commissioners replied that 'the abuses in poor law administration in the Principality will receive the earliest attention of the Commissioners that is consistent with the more urgent claims of more pauperized districts'.<sup>457</sup>

However, by the beginning of 1836, the Poor Law Commissioners began to turn their attentions to Wales. On the 27 January 1836, they appointed George Clive, a former barrister, as the inaugural Assistant Commissioner for South Wales. Clive began his duties in Monmouth, before moving westwards into Carmarthen; he later covered the counties of Glamorgan and Pembroke.<sup>458</sup> In the same year (1836), the Commissioners appointed William Day, a landowner from Herefordshire, as the Assistant Commissioner for North-Wales; Day was later assisted by Sir Edmund Head and Richard Digby Neave.<sup>459</sup> In 1841, William Day became the sole Assistant Commissioner for Wales; a post he held until 1844, when he was replaced by Colonel Wade.<sup>460</sup>

Unlike in some parts of England, such as the industrial north-west, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, given the level of opposition to the implementation of the Old Poor Law in Wales (see Chapter One), the administrative framework of the New Poor Law was implemented relatively quickly in Wales. For instance, by the end of 1837, the vast majority of parishes in Wales had been incorporated into their new Unions.<sup>461</sup> For example, the Swansea Union, initially comprising of twenty-seven parishes, was created on 13 October 1836.<sup>462</sup> Likewise, the Newtown and Llanidloes Union was formed on 13 February 1837 with

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<sup>456</sup> Dewar, 'George Clive and the New Poor Law in South-Glamorgan', pp.48-49.

<sup>457</sup> Dewar, 'George Clive and the New Poor Law in South-Glamorgan', pp.48-49.

<sup>458</sup> Dewar, 'George Clive and the New Poor Law in South-Glamorgan', pp.49-50.

<sup>459</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', pp.282-283

<sup>460</sup> R.A. Lewis, 'William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, 9, (1963/64), pp.163-195 [here p.163pp.194-195].

<sup>461</sup> Peter Higginbotham, *Workhouses of Wales*, pp.17-18 Higginbotham stated that 'by the time of the Poor Law Commissioners' third annual report (in 1838), all 47 new Welsh Unions had officially come into existence'.

<sup>462</sup> Lewis, *Swansea and the Workhouse*, p.20.

relatively little fanfare.<sup>463</sup> The only exception to the Unionization of Wales was the continuation of the Montgomery and Pool Incorporation. Here, several Welsh parishes, as part of the Incorporation, managed to stay outside of the purview of the New Poor Law long after the passage of the 1834 act.<sup>464</sup> However, the Montgomery and Pool Incorporation already possessed a large workhouse at Forden, with each of the constituent parishes paying their share of the costs of the establishment.<sup>465</sup> In the ninth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners in 1843, William Day, the Assistant Commissioner for Wales stated that 'the nature of the Incorporation rendered it 'exceedingly difficult to apply the provisions of the 1834 act with any advantage'.<sup>466</sup> Moreover, the Incorporation was dissolved in 1870 and the remaining Welsh parishes were incorporated into the new Forden Union.<sup>467</sup>

There was also relatively little opposition to the election of the new boards of guardians in Wales. For example, the Swansea guardians were all elected on 24 October 1836, just a few short weeks after the formation of the Union.<sup>468</sup> Moreover, at their very first meeting on 25 October 1836, the Swansea guardians elected a chairman-Sir John Morris Bart, a vice-chairman-Reverend Dr Hewson and a clerk-Mr Charles Collins.<sup>469</sup> They also resolved that a workhouse 'capable of containing two-hundred paupers at least, should be provided for this Union as soon as possible'.<sup>470</sup> In a similar vein, the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians held their first meeting on 14 February 1837, a day after the guardians had been elected to the board.<sup>471</sup> Rowland Tennant has also demonstrated that

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<sup>463</sup> Owen, 'The Newtown and Llanidloes Workhouse', p.118.

<sup>464</sup> Higginbotham, *Workhouses of Wales*, p.12. The Incorporation continued to work under a Local Act after 1834.

<sup>465</sup> Higginbotham, *Workhouses of Wales*, p.12.

<sup>466</sup> William Day, Report on the administration of relief to the poor in the parishes or Unions under Local Acts, Poor Law Comms Ninth Annual Report, 1843, PP.

<sup>467</sup> Roger Brown, *The Parish Pauper and the Poor Law in Welshpool*, (Powys, 2002).

<sup>468</sup> Swansea Union of Parishes, *The Cambrian*, 29 October, 1836, p.3.

<sup>469</sup> Swansea Union of Parishes, *The Cambrian*, 29 October, 1836, p.3.

<sup>470</sup> Swansea Union of Parishes, *The Cambrian*, 29 October, 1836, p.3. A Committee was set-up to this end and was instructed to 'report back to the board on the expediency of adapting the present Swansea workhouse to such purpose or taking it down and erecting a new one on the present or any other site'. In his work which focused on the Swansea workhouse, Bernard Lewis also noted the apparent speed at which the Swansea Union had been established. Lewis stated that in Swansea 'the administrative arrangements required for the operation of the new system seem to have been put in place reasonably quickly', in Lewis, *Swansea and the Workhouse*, p.20.

<sup>471</sup> Owen, 'The Newtown and Llanidloes Workhouse', p.118

the Holywell board of guardians held their first meeting on 27 February 1837, just two days after the formation of the Union.<sup>472</sup>

The boards of guardians in Wales also moved quickly to appoint the new Union Officers. For instance, at their very first meeting in October 1836, the Swansea guardians elected four Medical Officers and four Relieving Officers, one for each of the four districts in their Union.<sup>473</sup> The guardians of the Newtown and Llanidloes Union also moved quickly to fill some of the vacancies created under the 1834 act. On 3 March 1837, just a few weeks after the formation of the Union, an advertisement was placed in the local newspapers informing the inhabitants of the Union that the guardians intended to meet at the Buck Inn, Caersws, on the following Saturday to 'proceed with the elections of the Relieving and Medical Officers of the Union'.<sup>474</sup>

Other historians have also pointed out that the administrative framework of the New Poor Law was implemented relatively quickly in Wales. For instance, W. Donald Jones stated that there was 'no opposition' to the establishment of the three Unions in Pembrokeshire.<sup>475</sup> Jones maintained that in this region of Wales, 'public reaction to the New Poor Law was generally favourable'.<sup>476</sup> Likewise, Eirug Davies claimed that 'the extension of the New Poor Law to Cardiganshire in 1837 was not greeted by any sort of violent movement or protest'.<sup>477</sup> In a similar vein, Dewar claimed that the assistant commissioner for south-Wales, George Clive, established all five of the Monmouthshire Unions, including the Abergavenny Union, in 1836 at an 'impressive speed'.<sup>478</sup> Clive himself stated in his

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<sup>472</sup> Rowland Tennant, *A History of Holywell*, p.52. Tennant also noted that the Holywell Guardians 'immediately set in motion plans to build a new workhouse'.

<sup>473</sup> Swansea Union of Parishes, *The Cambrian*, 29 October, 1836, p.3.

<sup>474</sup> Newtown and Llanidloes Union, *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 3 March, 1837, p.2.

<sup>475</sup> W. Donald Jones, 'The Implementation of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act in South-west Wales with Special Reference to the Haverfordwest, Narberth, and Pembroke Unions', *Master's Thesis*, (Pembrokeshire Archives, 2001), pp1-90. (Archive Code: HDX/1574/1), [here p.11-15].

<sup>476</sup> Jones, 'The Poor Law in South-West Wales', p.11-15. Jones claimed that this initial period of compliance was no doubt aided by the fact that 'Old Poor Law practices continued to be applied until the New Poor Law was "bedded-in"'.

<sup>477</sup> Alun Eirug Davies, 'The New Poor Law in a Rural Area, 1834-1850', *Journal of the Ceredigion Antiquarian Society*, vol.8, no.3, (1978), pp.245-275, [here p.245]. Davies also stated that 'the local inhabitants generally accepted the administrative changes without demur'

<sup>478</sup> Dewar, 'George Clive and the New Poor Law in South Glamorgan', pp.49-50; J. E. Thomas and Marian Williams made similar claims about the speed with which the administrative framework was implemented in Wales in their work. See Thomas 'The Poor Law in west Glamorgan', p.46; and Marian Williams, 'Some Aspects of the History of Poor Law Provision in Cardiff', p.31.

report to the Poor Law Commissioners in 1836 that he had encountered 'no determined resistance' in this district.<sup>479</sup> In December 1838, Thomas Frankland Lewis, a prominent Welsh landowner, and one of the three original members of the Poor Law Commission, even wrote a letter to the Home Office claiming that in Wales, the changes then being introduced under the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act were 'less unpopular' than he had anticipated.<sup>480</sup>

Further evidence that the New Poor Law was implemented relatively quickly in Wales can be seen in the fact that in each of our sample regions (bar one, the Pembroke Union) the amount of money expended on poor relief decreased in the years immediately after 1834, whereas, as demonstrated in Chapter One, poor law expenditure had significantly increased during the final fifty years or so of the Old Poor Law. Evidence of this can be seen in Table Nine, below, which shows the average amount of money spent on poor relief in England and Wales in the three years before and the three years after the implementation of the 1834 PLAA. (Note: the figures for 1833 were not available at the parish level so the figures for the years 1831, 1832 and 1834 have been used here to represent the three years before the NPL. Also note that, as demonstrated above, the New Poor Law was only implemented in Wales between 1836 and 1838 and so the figures for the years 1839, 1840 and 1841 have been used here to represent the first three years of the implementation of the new system).

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<sup>479</sup> Report of George Clive on the counties of Monmouth, Carmarthen and parts of Gloucester and Glamorgan, Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, PP, 1836.

<sup>480</sup> Cited in David Williams, *The Rebecca Riots*, (Cardiff, 1955), p.140.

**Table 9: Average Poor Law Expenditure in England and Wales, 1831-1834 and 1838-1840.**

Area	Average Expenditure 1831-34	Average Expenditure 1839-41	Increase	Decrease	Increase (Percent)	Decrease (Percent)
<b>National</b>						
*Wales	£321,820	£281,456		£40,364		13%
*England	£6,395,884	£4,300,144		£2,095,740		33%
England and Wales	£6,717,703	£4,581,600		£2,136,103		32%
<b>Sample English Counties</b>						
Kent	£351,250	£200,785		£150,465		43%
Lancaster	£282,667	£239,922		£42,745		15%
Middlesex	£650,713	£409,985		£240,728		37%
Chester	£100,450	£74,527		£25,923		26%
Salop	£86,255	£55,790		£30,465		35%
Gloucester	£167,432	£124,670		£42,762		26%
Hereford	£60,924	£42,042		£18,882		31%
<b>Sample Welsh Unions</b>						

Pembroke	£5,781	£6,434	£653		11%	
Swansea	£7,257	£6,859		£398		6%
Abergavenny	£6,123	£4,896		£1,227		20%
Newtown and Llanidloes	£16,393	£12,977		£3,416		21%
Holywell	£11,670	£10,087		£1,583		14%
Pwllheli	£6,914	£5,790		£1,124		16%
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>						
Pembroke	£25,078	£23,705		£1,373		5%
Glamorgan	£40,653	£32,576		£8,077		20%
Monmouth	£27,439	£22,530		£4,909		18%
Montgomery	£35,472	£28,514		£6,958		20%
Flint	£20,585	£18,030		£2,555		12%
Caernarvon	£20,711	£20,629		£82		0.4%

**\*Note:** The figures for England and Wales have been adjusted to show the County of Monmouth as being in Wales.

**Sources: 1831, 1832 and 1834:** Account of money expended for maintenance of poor in England, 1829-1834; volume of real property assessed for property tax, 1815, PP, 1835; **1839:** Poor Law Coms: Appendix (E) to fifth annual report, 1839, PP, 1840; **1840:** Poor Law Coms: Seventh annual report, Appendices, PP, 1841; **1841:** Poor Law Coms: Appendices (B) to (F) to eighth annual report, PP, 1842.

This table shows that poor law expenditure decreased in all but one of our sample regions (21 out of 22 regions in England and Wales) in the years immediately following the implementation of the New Poor Law. For instance, at the national level, the average amount of money expended on poor relief in England dropped by 33% from £6,395,884 in the period 1831-1834 to just £4,300,144 in the three years between 1838 and 1840. Likewise, poor law expenditure in Wales decreased by 13% from £321,820 to £281,456 during the same period.

The reductions in poor law expenditure were typically much larger in England than in Wales. For instance, the amount of money expended on poor relief in Caernarvonshire dropped by just 0.4% during the period 1831-1834 and 1838-1840; in comparison poor law expenditure in Middlesex fell by 37% over the same period. Moreover, in one region of Wales-the Pembroke Union- the amount of money expended on poor relief actually increased by 11% in the years immediately after 1834, from an average of £5781 in the period 1831-1843 to an average of £6,434 in the years between 1838 and 1841. The reasons for this are discussed in detail below.

Moreover, the largest reductions in Wales typically occurred in the more industrial regions, whereas (as Steven King has noted) the biggest reductions in England typically came in the more rural regions. For instance, poor law expenditure in Kent decreased by a staggering 43% in the period between 1831-1834 and 1838-1840, considerably above the national average for England, compared to just 15% in Lancaster, well below the national average. The relatively small reductions made in poor law expenditure in Lancaster were due, at least in part to the fact that there was considerable resistance to the implementation of the New Poor Law in this part of England, at least in the period up to 1845. In contrast, in Wales the largest reductions in poor law expenditure were typically made in the more industrial regions. For instance, in Glamorgan the amount of money expended on poor relief decreased by 20% in the period between 1831-1834 and 1838-1840, compared to just 5% in Pembroke.

However, in general, poor law expenditure in both England and Wales decreased after 1834; in some cases, significant reductions were made. For example, the amount of money expended on poor relief in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union dropped from an average of £16,393 in the period 1831-1834 to £12,972 in the years between 1838 and



1840, a reduction of 21%. The fact that poor law expenditure decreased in the vast majority of our sample Welsh regions in the years immediately after 1834 could be seen as further evidence that the New Poor Law was implemented relatively quickly in Wales.

There were several reasons why the New Poor Law was implemented so quickly in Wales. Firstly, as alluded to in Chapter One, many of the ratepayers and poor law officials in Wales were swayed by the promise, held out by proponents of the new system, that implementing the New Poor Law would reduce the number of paupers and hence the cost of poor relief. For instance, in the second annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners in 1836, Major Marriott, a magistrate in Monmouth, argued that 'the vigorous application of the workhouse system will have most beneficial benefits'.<sup>481</sup> Likewise, Job Jones, the overseer of the Carmarthen parish stated that there is no parish in the kingdom where the new system will work as well as it will here'.<sup>482</sup> Jones, like many other poor law officials in Wales, particularly endorsed the proposed changes to the bastardy laws.<sup>483</sup> The cost of relieving bastard children in Wales had increased significantly in Wales by the end of the Old Poor Law and many looked forward to the reduction in the rates that the 1834 act offered.

Moreover, in Wales, unlike in some parts of England, such as the industrial north-west, proponents of the New Poor Law were aided by generally favourable press reviews of the workings of the 1834 act. For instance, in 1837, *The Cambrian* published an article claiming that 'in the parishes that have been placed under the control of the new Unions, the savings have been very considerable'.<sup>484</sup> This was clearly an attempt by the author of the article to persuade parishes in Wales to implement the New Poor Law system in their area. In a similar vein, an article published in *The Welshman* in 1835 argued that under the Old Poor Law, the working population were 'plunging into a general mass of wretchedness and

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<sup>481</sup> Cited in Report of George Clive on the counties of Monmouth, Carmarthen and parts of Gloucester and Glamorgan, Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, PP, 1836.

<sup>482</sup> Cited in Report of George Clive on the counties of Monmouth, Carmarthen and parts of Gloucester and Glamorgan, Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, PP, 1836.

<sup>483</sup> Cited in Report of George Clive on the counties of Monmouth, Carmarthen and parts of Gloucester and Glamorgan, Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, PP, 1836.

<sup>484</sup> Amendment of the Poor Law Act, *The Cambrian*, 21 October, 1837, p.4. Other historians such as Bernard Lewis and J.E. Thomas have also noted that *The Cambrian* generally supported the implementation of the New Poor Law.

misery'.<sup>485</sup> The article claimed that the New Poor Law would restore a sense of pride and industriousness into the lower orders by only providing for the truly 'deserving'.<sup>486</sup>

There was some opposition to the New Poor Law in the Welsh press. For example, in 1837 in an article published in the *North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality* it was argued that 'although the New Poor Law system may be beneficial in crowded towns and populous districts...it is not suited to a thinly populated country like Wales'.<sup>487</sup> In a similar vein, in an article published in the *Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* in 1835 it was stated that the bastardy clauses of the New Poor Law are a 'disgrace and a curse to a Christian country'.<sup>488</sup> The author of the article also called for the repeal of 'this infamous Bill', maintaining that it was cruel and unnecessary and did little to alleviate the plight of the poor or reduce the cost of poor relief in any meaningful way.<sup>489</sup>

However, in Wales, as elsewhere, whether or not a particular newspaper supported or opposed the New Poor Law depended to a considerable extent on the political persuasion of the newspapers' proprietor or editor. Liberal-leaning newspapers such as *The Cambrian* tended to support the implementation of the New Poor Law, whilst newspapers with a conservative-bent, such as *The North Wales Chronicle* tended to oppose it. The fact that by 1834, the vast majority of newspapers in Wales were controlled by middle class, Liberal, Nonconformist elites meant that there was considerable support for the New Poor Law in the Welsh press.<sup>490</sup> Andy Croll has recently argued that the Welsh press played a vital role in garnering support for the 'crusade against outdoor relief' in Wales during the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>491</sup> The findings here suggest that local newspapers also played a significant role in the swift implementation of the New Poor Law in Wales.

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<sup>485</sup> What has reform done for the People?, *The Welshman*, 6 March, 1835, p.3.

<sup>486</sup> What has reform done for the People?, *The Welshman*, 6 March, 1835, p.3.

<sup>487</sup> The People versus the amended poor law, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 21 March, 1837, p.2.

<sup>488</sup> *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 24 October, 1835, p.2.

<sup>489</sup> *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 24 October, 1835, p.2.

<sup>490</sup> Cited in Sandra Thomas 'The Cambrian, the First Newspaper Published in Wales (part one)', *Gower Journal of the Gower Society*, vol.54, (2003), pp.58-68.

<sup>491</sup> Croll, 'Reconciled Gradually to the System of Indoor Relief', p.138. Croll stated that in Wales newspaper support was 'critical in convincing a majority of the guardians to abandon, perhaps reluctantly, their liberal approach to out-relief'.

The fact that the administrative framework of the New Poor Law was implemented relatively quickly in Wales was also due, at least in part, to the efforts of the various Assistant Commissioners for Wales. Many of the Assistant Commissioners for Wales were extremely hard-working and capable individuals. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that, despite being based in England, they each made hundreds of visits to their respective regions in order to oversee the formation of the Unions and the election of the boards of guardians. For instance, William Day, made 655 visits to Wales between 1836 and 1840.<sup>492</sup> In a similar vein, Sir Edmund Head, who assisted Day in implementing the New Poor Law in mid-Wales, made 602 visits during the same period.<sup>493</sup> The number of trips made to Wales by Day and Head suggest that both men were particularly fastidious in carrying out their duties. In his work, David Williams stated that Day, was ‘constantly in attendance at meetings of board of guardians up and down the country’ and that he ‘worked tirelessly to ensure a smooth transition to the new system of relief, involving himself heavily in the innumerable details of the change-over such as the appointment of poor law officials and the building of the new Union workhouses’.<sup>494</sup>

Further evidence that the Assistant Commissioners for Wales were talented and hard-working individuals can be seen in the fact that, following their stints in Wales, several of them were subsequently promoted by the Poor Law Commissioners. For instance, in 1841, Sir Edmund Head was given a seat on the Poor Law Commission itself, alongside Thomas Frankland Lewis and George Nicholls.<sup>495</sup> This promotion suggests that Head was a capable and respected individual. Indeed, the Home Secretary at the time, Lord Normanby, with whom the decision rested with, stated that he had been impressed by Head’s Poor Law Record.<sup>496</sup> The fact that William Day was chosen by the Poor Law Commissioners to be the

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<sup>492</sup> Cited in Alun Eirug Davies, ‘The New Poor Law in a Rural Area’, p.246,

<sup>493</sup> Cited in Alun Eirug Davies, ‘The New Poor Law in a Rural Area’, p.246,

<sup>494</sup> David Williams, *The Rebecca Riots*, p.141.

<sup>495</sup> Cited in Donald Kerr, “‘The Making of a Scholar and Governor, 1805-1847’”. Sir Edmund Head: A scholarly Governor’, Toronto, University of Toronto, (2019), pp.1-8, [here p.10]. Head remained as one of the three Poor Law Commissioners until it was replaced by the Poor Law Board in 1847 (following the Andover scandal), p.10.

<sup>496</sup> Cited in Donald Kerr, ‘Sir Edmund Head’, p.14

inaugural Assistant Commissioner for the whole of Wales also suggests that he was held in high regards by his superiors.<sup>497</sup>

The efforts of the Assistant Commissioners for Wales were also praised by the various boards of guardians themselves. For instance, in 1838, at a meeting of the Llandoverly guardians, upon it being made known that the scheduled meeting was the last occasion on which the Assistant Commissioner for the region, George Clive, would be attending the board, a large number of guardians attended to show their gratitude for his efforts.<sup>498</sup> Following the transaction of the business, the Vice-Chairman, Morgan Morgan Esq, made a speech eulogising the 'gentlemanly conduct' of Mr Clive, and moved a vote of thanks to him for his 'uniform urbanity and kind conduct while attending the board'.<sup>499</sup> The motion to thank Mr Clive was seconded and unanimously agreed to by the guardians.<sup>500</sup> This is in stark contrast to the frosty reception received by Alfred Power, one of the original Assistant Commissioners in the north-west of England. Edsall stated that, during his visits to the region, Power was often 'met by hostile crowds'.<sup>501</sup>

This is not to suggest that the Assistant Commissioners did not encounter any problems in Wales whatsoever. In carrying out their duties they were often forced to overcome significant obstacles, including some that were unique to Wales. Most notably, there was a linguistic barrier between the English-speaking Commissioners and the Welsh-speaking guardians and ratepayers. Throughout the entire period under investigation here, only one of the Assistant Commissioners for Wales, Aneurin Owen, could competently converse in the Welsh-language.<sup>502</sup> For example, William Day lamented that, despite being of Welsh-heritage, he was often unable to understand the proceedings of the guardians at the board meetings in Welsh Unions as they often spoke in an 'unknown tongue'.<sup>503</sup> In a similar vein, in 1837, George Clive wrote a letter to the Poor Law Commissioners, begging them to translate the 1834 act into Welsh complaining that 'in many parts of Wales, English

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<sup>497</sup> Cited in R. A. Lewis, 'William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners', p. 183. As well as being placed in charge of the whole of Wales, Day was also allotted parts of Chester, Salop and Hereford, making him responsible for over 50 Unions in England and Wales.

<sup>498</sup> *The Cambrian*, 13 October, 1838, p.3.

<sup>499</sup> *The Cambrian*, 13 October, 1838, p.3.

<sup>500</sup> *The Cambrian*, 13 October, 1838, p.3.

<sup>501</sup> Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement*, p.68

<sup>502</sup> Alun Eirug Davies, 'The New Poor Law in a Rural Area', p.259.

<sup>503</sup> Richardson 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.283

is quite unknown'.<sup>504</sup> Clive also stated that 'I find the greatest difficulty in these Welsh Unions from the language, which renders it necessary always to employ natives for Relieving Officers...and a wretched business they make of it'.<sup>505</sup> The problems caused by the language barrier in the relief system in Wales are discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

The Assistant Commissioners for Wales also had to contend with the poor transport links which were found in Wales throughout much of the nineteenth century. Philip Jenkins stated that up until the final decades of the nineteenth century, large parts of Wales, particularly the more rural parts of the country, remained virtually 'inaccessible'.<sup>506</sup> Dot Jones made similar observations about the poor state of transport links in nineteenth century Wales in her work.<sup>507</sup> Jones stated that, with regards to the expansion of the railways, 'the pattern of industrial development, capital accumulation, population distribution and the added difficulties of topography in Wales led to a very different pattern of railway growth from that experienced in England'.<sup>508</sup> Jones pointed out that in 1850, 'there were only two major passenger lines in the whole of Wales'.<sup>509</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, transport links in Wales, particularly in the more industrialised regions, had improved dramatically. In his work, Jenkins pointed out that during the second half of the nineteenth century, many new railway lines were built across Wales.<sup>510</sup> However, throughout much of the period under investigation here, the standard of the transport links found in Wales lagged considerably behind that found in many parts of England.<sup>511</sup> This hindered the progress that the Assistant Commissioners for Wales were able to make. In a letter to the Poor Law Commissioners in 1841, William Day lamented that he was often forced to travel around the country on horseback and that the

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<sup>504</sup> Dewar, 'George Clive and the New Poor Law in South-Glamorgan', p.51.

<sup>505</sup> Dewar, 'George Clive and the New Poor Law in South-Glamorgan', p.58.

<sup>506</sup> Philip Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales*, p. 243. Jenkins also stated that 'Wales has always been characterised by difficult internal communications and dispersed settlement'.

<sup>507</sup> Dot Jones, 'The Coming of the Railways and Language Change in North-Wales, 1850-1900', in Geraint Jenkins (ed), *The Welsh language and its social domains, 1801-1911*, (Cardiff, 2000), pp.131-149; *Medical negligence in Victorian Britain, the crisis of care under the English Poor Law, 1834-1900*, (London, 2015).

<sup>508</sup> Dot Jones, 'The Coming of the Railways and Language Change in North-Wales, 1850-1900', in Geraint Jenkins (ed), *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains, 1801-1911*, (Cardiff, 2000), pp.131-149 [here p.133].

<sup>509</sup> Dot Jones, 'The Coming of the Railways and Language Change in North-Wales, 1850-1900', in Geraint Jenkins (ed), *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains, 1801-1911*, (Cardiff, 2000), pp.131-149 [here p.133].

<sup>510</sup> Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales*, p.245.

<sup>511</sup> Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales*, pp.243-245.

poor transport links he encountered in Wales often slowed down his progress.<sup>512</sup> Day also stated that 'the mountainous nature of this country, the thinness of the population, and the almost entire absence of large markets or other general places of resort were obvious obstacles to the formation of Unions'.<sup>513</sup>

Moreover, up until the end of the nineteenth century at least, the relationship between the central and local authorities in Wales was often a precarious one. Evidence of this fractious relationship can be seen in a letter written by William Day to the Poor Law Commissioners in 1841 in which he stated that: 'you cannot know the miseries of 30 or 40 Welsh guardians who won't build a workhouse, and consequently meet in the parlour of a pot-house twelve feet by fourteen and keep all the windows shut and spit tobacco on your shoes'.<sup>514</sup> In a similar vein, in 1839, Richard Digby Neave lamented that 'when a motion is passed in England it is acted upon; but in Wales, a point carried often has no permanent consequences, being rescinded by notice in the absence of its supporters'.<sup>515</sup> Further evidence that the relationship between the Welsh boards of guardians and the Assistant Commissioners was a somewhat contested one can be seen in the fact that in 1841 the Abergavenny board of guardians sent a petition to the House of Commons asking the government to reduce the number of Assistant Commissioners in England and Wales, or else to abolish the position altogether. The Abergavenny guardians argued that 'the duties discharged' by the Assistant Commissioners were 'wholly unnecessary' and that they (the guardians) should be given 'full discretion' over relief matters.<sup>516</sup> The precarious nature of the relationship between the guardians and the Assistant Commissioners in Wales is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

However, unlike in some parts of England, such as the industrial north-west, the Assistant Commissioners for Wales were talented and resourceful enough to overcome many of the problems that they encountered. For instance, in order to diffuse some of the hostility directed towards them, the Assistant Commissioners in Wales were willing to

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<sup>512</sup> R.A. Lewis, 'William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners', p.177.

<sup>513</sup> R.A. Lewis, 'William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners', p.177.

<sup>514</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.283.

<sup>515</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.283.

<sup>516</sup> Abergavenny, New Poor Law, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 27 February, 1841, p.3. The Abergavenny guardians argued that in their respective districts, the individual board of guardians must, 'from a knowledge of the local circumstances and peculiarities, be the most fit and competent judges' of the wants and needs of the poor.

compromise with the guardians on certain issues, as long as it meant that the main principles of the 1834 act were enforced. Evidence of this can be seen in a letter written by William Day to the Poor Law Commissioners in 1839. Day argued that 'we are not popular' in Wales and that 'in order to regain our due influence we must concede certain points'.<sup>517</sup> Day also stated that 'the main points we have to contend for are the abolition of relief in aid of wages, the integrity of the workhouse discipline and the large restriction of non-resident relief; secure these points and we may yield Christmas dinners and allow the guardians to put their unchaste women in yellow dresses if they please'.<sup>518</sup> Other historians have also argued that the Assistant Commissioners for Wales were tactful and resourceful enough to overcome many of the difficulties that they faced. For example, Lewis concluded that Day was 'a man of intelligence and experience' who, during his time as Assistant Commissioner for Wales, was able to make an assessment of the local situation and 'cut and alter his proposals to take account of resistances he encountered'.<sup>519</sup> Dewar also praised the work of George Clive, the inaugural Assistant Commissioner in south-west Wales. Dewar maintained that Clive showed 'plenty of energy and resourcefulness', and that although he formed a low opinion of many of the people he met in Wales, 'he appears to have been tactful in his dealings with them'.<sup>520</sup> Croll and Richardson have made similar claims about the abilities of some of the Assistant Commissioners for Wales in their work.<sup>521</sup>

The lack of a resident gentry, or other individuals around whom opposition to the New Poor Law could coalesce, also ensured that the administrative framework of the New Poor Law was implemented relatively quickly in Wales. In some parts of England, especially in areas where the pool of resident gentry was relatively large, the landed elites became heavily involved in the Unionization process. For instance, Brundage demonstrated that in Northamptonshire, the region's Assistant Commissioner, Richard Earle, was forced to work closely with the Duke of Grafton in deciding the boundaries of the Pottersbury Union.<sup>522</sup> Grafton requested that the parishes of his estate be formed into a single Poor Law Union,

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<sup>517</sup> Cited in R.A. Lewis, 'William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners', p.170.

<sup>518</sup> R.A. Lewis, 'William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners', p.170.

<sup>519</sup> R.A. Lewis, 'William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners', p.167.

<sup>520</sup> Dewar, 'George Clive and the New Poor Law in South-Glamorgan', p.69.

<sup>521</sup> See, Croll, 'Reconciled Gradually to the System of Indoor Relief', pp.125-131. See also Richardson, 'The impact of the New Poor Law on livelihoods of the poor in North Wales', p.4.

<sup>522</sup> Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, p.72.

even though this would make an unusually small Union, oddly shaped and without a market town.<sup>523</sup> The social standing of the Duke of Grafton meant that the Assistant Commissioner was forced to accede to his request.<sup>524</sup> Brundage concluded that in some cases, the involvement of the landed elites slowed down, or at the very least ‘complicated’ the Unionization process.<sup>525</sup>

However, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the number of large landowners residing in Wales was relatively small. Jenkins stated that although there were a few ‘leviathans of wealth [such as the Bulkeleyes of Anglesea or the Mostyns of Flintshire], Wales did not possess a local squirarchy on the English model’.<sup>526</sup> Jenkins also claimed that by the eve of the New Poor Law, many of the largest landowners in Wales were either non-resident or had become heavily Anglicized.<sup>527</sup> The lack of involvement from the resident gentry in Wales was noted by several of the Assistant Commissioners. For example, in a report to the Poor Law Commissioners in 1837, Sir Edmund Head observed that in Cardiganshire the gentry ‘seldom involved themselves’ in the implementation and administration of the New Poor Law.<sup>528</sup> Likewise, in his report in 1836 William Day also noted the ‘paucity of country gentlemen’ in Wales.<sup>529</sup> The lack of a resident gentry in Wales meant that Assistant Commissioners here rarely had to consult with local landowners over issues such as the boundaries of the new Poor Law Unions etc. This may have helped to speed up the Unionization process in Wales. Brundage himself conceded that, in areas where the pool of resident gentry was relatively small, the Assistant Commissioners were ‘free to form poor law Unions with administrative efficiency and the convenience of the general inhabitants in mind’.<sup>530</sup> David Williams also argued that the absenteeism and/or Anglicization of Welsh landowners meant that many agricultural communities ‘lost the leadership and steadying influence that an educated gentry could have supplied’.<sup>531</sup> In a similar vein, Evans and Jones pointed out that, unlike in the north-west of England, there had been no history of ‘open

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<sup>523</sup> Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, p.72

<sup>524</sup> Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, p.72.

<sup>525</sup> Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, p.72

<sup>526</sup> Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales*. p.40

<sup>527</sup> Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales*, p.40.

<sup>528</sup> Cited in Eirug Davies, ‘The New Poor Law in a Rural Area’, p.258. Anne Digby made a similar observation about the lack of gentry involvement in Wales in her work, in Digby, ‘The Rural Poor Law’, p.153.

<sup>529</sup> Cited in R.A. Lewis, ‘William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners’, p.177.

<sup>530</sup> Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, p.72.

<sup>531</sup> Williams, *The Rebecca Riots*, p.17.



resistance to central authority' in Wales upon which to build an anti-poor law movement.<sup>532</sup> Rhian Jones makes a similar observation about the lack of leaders in Welsh society in her work.<sup>533</sup> The lack of individuals around whom opposition could coalesce also ensured that the administrative framework of the New Poor Law was implemented relatively quickly in Wales.

### **Opposition to the New Poor Law in Wales**

Although, as demonstrated above, the administrative framework of the New Poor Law was implemented relatively quickly in Wales, in many parts of the country, the imposition of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act provoked an angry response, particularly amongst the labouring classes- those most likely to be caught up in the new system of relief. For instance, in west-Wales, a series of (sometimes violent) disturbances, collectively referred to as the Rebecca Riots, broke out throughout the period 1839-1844, following the implementation of the New Poor Law in the region. Many of the earlier historians of the Rebecca Riots concluded that these very public displays of anger, which included attacks on property, revolved around a single issue-the introduction of toll gates in the region; many of the earlier historians also claimed that the Riots were 'entirely the affair of small-farmers'.<sup>534</sup>

However, it is now well established that the reasons behind the Riots were multi-faceted and that the protests were not confined solely to farmers. For instance, David Williams argued that as well as smouldering resentment to the charges brought about by the introduction of the toll gates, the protesters in west-Wales also had a number of other grievances that they were baulking against including the payment of the tithe and the introduction of the New Poor Law.<sup>535</sup> David JV Jones has also pointed out that farm

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<sup>532</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn Intractable Body', p.104. Rhian Jones, makes a similar observation about the lack of leaders in Welsh society in her work in Rhian Jones, *Petticoat Heroes, Gender, Culture and Popular Protest in the Rebecca Riots*, (Cardiff, 2015), p.

<sup>533</sup> Rhian Jones, *Petticoat Heroes, Gender, Culture and Popular Protest in the Rebecca Riots*, (Cardiff, 2015), p.15. Jones stated that in Wales, 'the cultural and often physical withdrawal of the gentry, with its consequent removal of community leadership and paternalistic ties, left a vacuum'.

<sup>534</sup> Cited in Rhian Jones, *Petticoat Heroes*, pp.1-4 Jones stated that Henry Tobit Evans, for instance, 'tended to present the riots as anomalous, confined to anti-toll gate activities of Carmarthenshire tenant farmers', p.4.

<sup>535</sup> David Williams, *The Rebecca Riots*, pp136-138. Williams stated that 'although the movement has usually been represented as the uprising of an oppressed peasantry against the burden of the toll gates...its causes were far more deep-seated than that', p.vii.

labourers were also involved in the disturbances.<sup>536</sup> More recently, Rhian Jones has demonstrated that women also participated in the Riots.<sup>537</sup> She argued that 'although the leading figures and the majority of the participants in the Rebeccaite (sic) attacks were male, women were also highly visible in the movement, not only as supports but also symbolically in the images Rebecca drew on for support'.<sup>538</sup>

Evidence that the New Poor Law was one of the main grievances of the Rioters can be seen in the 1844 Report into the disturbances. The Commissioners of the Report themselves concluded that the chief grounds of complaint were 'the frequency and amount of payment of the tolls, the increase in the amount payable for the tithe, and the operation of the Poor Law Amendment Act'.<sup>539</sup> Likewise, in their tenth annual report in 1844 the Poor Law Commissioners stated that 'the disturbances which have taken place in South Wales in the course of the last year, have directed attention among other subjects, to the administration of the Poor Law in that district'.<sup>540</sup> There is also some evidence that anti-poor law meetings took place in the region during these years. For instance, it was reported in *The Welshman* in 1844 that a meeting of the Pembroke Anti-Tithe and Anti-Poor Law Association had recently taken place in the Pembroke Union.<sup>541</sup> It was noted that the meeting had been 'very well attended' and that two petitions denouncing the New Poor Law had been drawn up by the attendees-one to be sent to the House of Lords and the other to the House of Commons.<sup>542</sup> The petition stated that 'your petitioners are with great reason dissatisfied with the New Poor Law, in its present shape' and that they consider it 'by no means to benefit this country'.<sup>543</sup>

Further evidence that one of the primary causes behind the Rebecca disturbances in west-Wales was the implementation of the New Poor Law can be seen in the fact that, during the period 1839-1843, several of the newly built workhouses in the region were

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<sup>536</sup> DVJ Jones, *Before Rebecca, Popular Protest in Wales, 1793-1835*, (London, 1973). Cited in Rhian Jones, *Petticoat Heroes*, p.5.

<sup>537</sup> Rhian Jones, *Petticoat Heroes*, p.6.

<sup>538</sup> Rhian Jones, *Petticoat Heroes*, p.6.

<sup>539</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on riots, and turnpike roads, minutes of evidence, appendix, PP, 1844, pp.1-2.

<sup>540</sup> Tenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, with Appendices, 1844, PP, p.34.

<sup>541</sup> Pembroke Anti-Tithe and Anti-Poor Law Association, *The Welshman*, 26 January, 1844, p.3

<sup>542</sup> Pembroke Anti-Tithe and Anti-Poor Law Association, *The Welshman*, 26 January, 1844, p.3

<sup>543</sup> Pembroke Anti-Tithe and Anti-Poor Law Association, *The Welshman*, 26 January, 1844, p.3

attacked. For instance, on 19 June 1843 an angry mob stormed the Carmarthen workhouse.<sup>544</sup> It was later reported in *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* that during the attack, the rioters broke into the schoolroom of the workhouse and vowed to 'free' the children therein.<sup>545</sup> One of the rioters, an unidentified man, even vowed that, in seeking justice for the children he would 'spill every drop of blood in his body'.<sup>546</sup> In the event, Sarah Thomas, the schoolmistress, informed the rioters that the children had nowhere else to go and that they would be better off in the workhouse.<sup>547</sup> The newspaper also reported that several women had participated in the riots. For instance, it was stated that during the attack, Fanny Evans had led the protestors upstairs. It later transpired that Evans had intimate knowledge of the layout of the workhouse having previously stayed at the workhouse as an inmate. When asked by the schoolmistress if she was not ashamed of herself, Evans replied that she had seen enough of the workhouse and was determined to go on with it (the attack).<sup>548</sup> Another woman, Frances Evans, was also charged with 'having participated in the riot at the Carmarthen workhouse, and with having incited and led the mob on that occasion'.<sup>549</sup> In the end the military were drafted in to break up the riot and to save the workhouse from complete destruction.<sup>550</sup> Other workhouses in west-Wales, including The Narberth workhouse, were also attacked during this period.<sup>551</sup> The fact that workhouses, which were seen by many as the symbol of the New Poor Law system, were attacked by the rioters further suggests that many of the ratepayers in the region were unhappy with the new system of relief. The fact that several women were not only involved in, but also led, the attack of the Carmarthen workhouse also supports the claims of Rhian Jones that the Rebecca protests were not confined to men only.

Many of the witnesses in the 1844 Report were particularly aggrieved at the expense of the salaries paid to the new Union officers. For instance, Mr James Rogers, corn dealer of St Clears, Carmarthenshire stated that one of the main objections to the 1834 act was 'the

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<sup>544</sup> Cited in Higginbotham, *Workhouses of Wales*, p.20.

<sup>545</sup> *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 15 July, 1843, p.4.

<sup>546</sup> *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 15 July, 1843, p.4.

<sup>547</sup> *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 15 July, 1843, p.4.

<sup>548</sup> *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 15 July, 1843, p.4.

<sup>549</sup> *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 15 July, 1843, p.4.

<sup>550</sup> *The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 15 July, 1843, p.4.

<sup>551</sup> Cited in Higginbotham, *Workhouses of Wales*, p.20.

expensive mode of carrying it out'.<sup>552</sup> Rogers lamented that instead of supporting the poor, vast sums of money were being 'squandered away on useless salaries and extravagant expenditure'.<sup>553</sup> In a similar vein, John Rees, a tenant farmer from New Quay, stated that 'the salaries of the Union officers are a very great grievance'.<sup>554</sup> The Commissioners of the 1844 Report themselves noted that the opinion amongst the ratepayers in the region that an excessive amount of salary is paid to all the officers of the Union, especially to the Relieving Officer and the Medical Officers, 'was all but universal' and that 'frequent contrasts were drawn between the paid services of those who dispersed the rates and the gratuitous but more onerous duties of those who collected the poor-rate'.<sup>555</sup>

Many of the ratepayers, in this region of Wales at least, were also upset at the workings of the bastardy clause of the New Poor Law. Under the 1834 act mothers were made solely responsible for the maintenance of their children. The Commissioners of the 1834 report had recommended that an illegitimate child should be 'what providence has ordained it to be, a burden on its mother'.<sup>556</sup> The Bastardy Clause also made it more difficult for unmarried mothers to secure affiliation orders.<sup>557</sup> These changes in the law were deemed by many of the ratepayers to be particularly abhorrent. For instance, in the 1844 Report, the Reverend R.B. Jones stated that the bastardy clauses were 'very unpopular' in Wales.<sup>558</sup> He referenced an incident where one of his parishioners wrote a threatening 'Rebecca' letter to the putative father of a bastard child due the fact that the mother of the child was starving and 'going about house to house' begging for food.<sup>559</sup> In a similar vein, Mr

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<sup>552</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.464.

<sup>553</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.464.

<sup>554</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.56.

<sup>555</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.29.

<sup>556</sup> The Commissioners of the 1834 report had recommended that an illegitimate child should be 'what providence has ordained it to be, a burden on its mother'. Cited in Pat Thane 'Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England', *History Workshop*, no.6, (Autumn, 1978), pp.29-51, [here p.32].

<sup>557</sup> Thomas Nutt 'Illegitimacy, Paternal Financial Responsibility and the 1834 Poor Law Commissioners Report: The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New', *Economic History Review*, 63, 2, (2010), pp.335-361.

<sup>558</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844.

<sup>559</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844.

Hughes, a farmer, stated that 'we strongly object to the bastardy clause'.<sup>560</sup> Hughes lamented that 'under the Old Poor Law the father was obliged to pay in part but now the father gets off and the girl is obliged to pay'.<sup>561</sup> Likewise, Captain L. Evans claimed that 'the bastardy clauses have caused more crime, infanticide and general demoralization than ever was known in Wales'.<sup>562</sup> One witness, Evan Jones, even argued that 'the bastardy clauses do not belong in Wales...they do not work well here'.<sup>563</sup>

The loss of discretion over poor relief matters was also cited by the rioters as being one of their main grievances. In the 1844 Report many ratepayers and poor law officials in the region bemoaned the centralizing tendencies of the 1834 act. For instance, Mr Thomas, of Bronglyn, lamented that the ratepayers no longer had discretion in the levying of the poor rates nor in the expenditure thereof'.<sup>564</sup> In a similar vein, Thomas Frankland Lewis, a prominent Welsh landowner and one of the original Poor Law Commissioners, stated that 'many of the farmers evinced a strong desire to recover the power of administering their own parochial funds, and to be exempted from the control to which they are now subject'.<sup>565</sup> The ratepayers in west-Wales were particularly aggrieved that they no longer had the option to provide outdoor relief to able-bodied labourers, particularly those with large families. For instance, John Rees, a farmer from New Quay, stated that the ratepayers 'expected to have a little more liberty to give relief to able-bodied men that have brought up six or seven or eight children'.<sup>566</sup> Likewise, when questioned upon the subject of the provision of outdoor relief to able-bodied men, J. Lloyd Davies, Esq, a landowner in Cardigan, lamented that there was 'a great difference between restraining the habit (of providing outdoor relief to able-bodied men) and putting an end to it entirely'.<sup>567</sup> Davies

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<sup>560</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844.

<sup>561</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844.

<sup>562</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.75.

<sup>563</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844.

<sup>564</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.133.

<sup>565</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844.

<sup>566</sup> 1844, p.104.

<sup>567</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.5.

posited that 'if they (the poor Law Commissioners) had given the farmers, and some of the country gentlemen in the region, some discretion on the subject, I think it would have been a very good thing'.<sup>568</sup>

The ratepayers from the individual parishes also bemoaned the fact that they no longer had full control over the decision of whether or not to relieve paupers from their own parish. Under the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, relief decisions now rested with the Board of Guardians, made up from representatives from every parish in the Union; the Relieving Officer(s) of the Union also now determined which cases to present before the boards; they also made a decision over whether or not a pauper was deserving of relief. In the 1844 Report, Henry Leach, Esq, the Chairman of the Haverfordwest Union, maintained that the parishes 'wished to get back the management of their own funds' so that the ratepayers could decide for themselves how to spend the money collected in their own parish.<sup>569</sup> In a similar vein, it was reported in *The Welshman* in 1843, that the ratepayers in west-Wales 'wanted to administer their own money to their own poor' and that, whether or not the operation of the New Poor Law reduced the poor rates, 'they (the ratepayers) do not like to see relief administered by a Relieving Officer who does not and cannot know the wants of the poor as well as themselves'.<sup>570</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of ratepayers from the Newcastle Emlyn Union in 1843, one farmer, Evan Jones, argued that each parish should 'look after its own poor'.<sup>571</sup> Jones questioned what the guardians of distant parishes could possibly know of the paupers living in his parish? He also lamented that when his parish determined to give relief to their own poor, 'the guardians of other parishes often voted against them'.<sup>572</sup>

Some of the ratepayers in west-Wales also opposed the implementation of the New Poor Law on ideological grounds. For instance, at a meeting of ratepayers from the parishes of Begelly, St Issells, Amroth, Reynoldstone, Redburth, Yerboston, Carew, Lawrenny, Monkton, Jeffreyston, East Williamstow, Narberth South, St Florence and Loveston, which

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<sup>568</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.5

<sup>569</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.164.

<sup>570</sup> The Poor Farmers and the Poor Law, *The Welshman*, 4 August, 1843, p.2.

<sup>571</sup> Newcastle Emlyn, *The Welshman*, 1 September, 1843, p.4.

<sup>572</sup> Newcastle Emlyn, *The Welshman*, 1 September, 1843, p.4

had been called by public notice and took place on 10 November, 1843, it was resolved that 'The New Poor Law, in its current state is a great and crying evil'.<sup>573</sup> Likewise, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca disturbances, Mr James Rogers, complained that under the 1834 act, 'the poor are neglected' and that many paupers 'now find it difficult to obtain access to the Board of Guardians to make known their complaints'.<sup>574</sup> In a similar vein, in 1843, a magistrate from Llanelly stated that he found the New Poor Law to be 'extremely oppressive'.<sup>575</sup> He also stated that, in his capacity of one of the Guardians of the Llanelly Union, whenever he found a widow applying for relief 'to whom 1s or 1s 6d a week from the parish would enable her to support her family in her own cottage...he never hesitated to give it, though it was against the law'.<sup>576</sup> The findings here demonstrate that there was a degree of public sympathy for paupers in this region of Wales at least, particularly amongst the local magistrates.

Although the Rebecca disturbances were a highly localised affair, occurring predominantly in the south-west of Wales, public demonstrations of anger against the New Poor Law were not confined to this region of Wales alone. For instance, the implementation of the 1834 act was often cited as one of the main reasons behind the Chartist movements that broke out in Montgomeryshire in the late 1830s. For instance, it was reported that at a Chartist meeting in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union on Christmas Day, 1839, one speaker, Mr Charles Jones, of Welshpool, addressed the crowd and denounced the workings of New Poor Law, insisting that 'the poor shall have their good things hereafter, whilst the rich shall be sent away empty'.<sup>577</sup> Jones also lamented that since the passage of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, paupers (in England and Wales) were being locked up in dungeons in the new 'bastilles'.<sup>578</sup>

Further evidence of the link between Chartism and anti-Poor Law agitation in the region can be seen in the fact that on 28 May 1838, the contractor in charge of building the Newtown and Llanidloes workhouse, Hugh Morris, complained that part of the external

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<sup>573</sup> Tolls, Tithes, Poor Law, *The Welshman*, 24 November, 1843, p.4

<sup>574</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844.

<sup>575</sup> The Poor Farmers and the Poor Law, *The Welshman*, 4 August, 1843, p.2.

<sup>576</sup> The Poor Farmers and the Poor Law, *The Welshman*, 4 August, 1843, p.2.

<sup>577</sup> Newtown Great Radical Demonstration, *Morning Chronicle*, 2 January, 1839, p.3.

<sup>578</sup> Newtown Great Radical Demonstration, *Morning Chronicle*, 2 January, 1839, p.3.

walls had been knocked down by 'evil and disposed persons'.<sup>579</sup> Moreover, in the December of that year, local authorities obtained evidence that Chartists in the region were planning on attacking the workhouse over the Christmas period. In the event, local magistrates asked for the services of a detachment of the Montgomeryshire Volunteer regiment to protect the site. It was later reported that a detachment of two troops proceeded to Newtown on Christmas Eve and were stationed in a field adjoining the workhouse where they remained over the festive period. The presence of these troops appears to have staved off the Chartist threat as no attack was made at this time.<sup>580</sup> Another attack on the workhouse was planned for May 1839, following a meeting of Chartists in Llanidloes, but this was also aborted on the threat of a military presence being drafted in.<sup>581</sup> David Williams has argued that Chartism in Wales was 'but a development of poor law agitation'.<sup>582</sup> He also stated that although the Chartist movement 'found expression in a demand for political change, the six points of the Charter were primarily directed to the removal of social distress'.<sup>583</sup>

Across Wales, many of the Relieving Officers and guardians were also attacked following the implementation of the New Poor Law. For example, it was reported in *The North Wales Chronicle* in 1837 that the Relieving Officer of the Llanfyllin Union had been attacked by an angry mob whilst carrying out his official poor law duties, following the decision of the Board of Guardians of that Union to cease the payment of pauper rents.<sup>584</sup> A fortnight after this violent outburst of anger, the Assistant Commissioner, William Day attempted to meet with the Guardians of the Union in order to conduct an investigation into the assault. However, Mr Day and the Guardians were prevented from conducting any business by another angry mob of over four hundred individuals who hurled stones, eggs and muck at the beleaguered poor law officials.<sup>585</sup> It was reported in the local newspaper that Mr Day and the guardians were forced to make a hasty retreat 'amidst the hooting and yelling's of their pursuers'.<sup>586</sup> Local magistrates were again forced to call in the troops to

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<sup>579</sup> Owen, 'The Newtown and Llanidloes Workhouse', p.119.

<sup>580</sup> Owen, 'The Newtown and Llanidloes Workhouse', p.119

<sup>581</sup> Political Commotion in Wales, *Sun* (London), 7 May, 1839, p.2.

<sup>582</sup> Williams, *The Rebecca Riots*, p.147.

<sup>583</sup> Williams, *The Rebecca Riots*, p.147. Williams also noted that the Rebecca Riots coincided with the revival of Chartism and that both movements shared similar tactics such as subversive meetings, p.151.

<sup>584</sup> *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 2 May, 1837, p1.

<sup>585</sup> *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 2 May, 1837, p1.

<sup>586</sup> *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 2 May, 1837, p1.



quell the riots.<sup>587</sup> Other historians have also noted that the implementation of the New Poor Law produced angry responses in north-Wales. For instance, W.P Griffith stated that ‘although North Wales did not experience the explosion of a Rebecca phenomenon, this does not mean that the New Poor Law went unopposed’.<sup>588</sup> Griffith pointed to mass protests in the Bala Union in the 1850s following the establishment of a workhouse in the region as evidence of this.<sup>589</sup>

Many ratepayers in Wales, particularly those in the more rural regions, also complained that far from reducing poor law expenditure, their poor-rates had actually increased under the New Poor Law. Evidence of this can be seen in a meeting of the Gower ratepayers in the Swansea Union in 1843. At this meeting the ratepayers discussed the possibility of forming their own Union. During these discussions, the Reverend Samuel Philips stated that ‘the expenditure in the Gower parishes had increased very considerably since the formation of the Union’.<sup>590</sup> Philips maintained that he held in his possession a statement of the expenditure of the western parishes of the Swansea Union ‘for three years previous to, and three years after the establishment of the Union, which showed an increase in the last three years of £260 per annum’.<sup>591</sup> In a similar vein, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca disturbances, the Reverend R. B. Jones, a guardian from the Narberth Union claimed that under the New Poor Law, the poor-rates in his parish ‘very soon became doubled’.<sup>592</sup> The Commissioners of the Report themselves concluded that whilst poor law expenditure in the larger town parishes in Wales decreased under the New Poor Law, in the more rural parishes, the poor-rates increased significantly after 1834.<sup>593</sup> The Commissioners

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<sup>587</sup> *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 2 May, 1837, p1.

<sup>588</sup> Griffith, W. P, *Poor Law in Wales*.

<sup>589</sup> Griffith, W. P, *Poor Law in Wales*.

<sup>590</sup> Public Meeting to Petition for a Separation of the Gower parishes from the Swansea Union, *The Cambrian*, 7 October, 1843, p.3.

<sup>591</sup> Public Meeting to Petition for a Separation of the Gower parishes from the Swansea Union, *The Cambrian*, 7 October, 1843, p.3. At the same meeting another ratepayer, a farmer from Port Eynon, claimed that in the 6 years before 1834 poor law expenditure in the parish totalled £401; however, in the six years after 1834 the total sum expended on poor relief had risen to £656.

<sup>592</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844 p.29.

<sup>593</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.29. Likewise, Colonel, G.R. Trevor, the vice-lieutenant of the county of Carmarthen stated that ‘I believe that in the town districts [within the Carmarthen Union] a material saving has been made under the New Poor Law, but that there has been an increase of expense in the country parishes, which are certainly less able to bear the burden’, p.106.

attributed this to the fact that poor law expenditure was 'more vigorously watched' in the town parishes.<sup>594</sup> Further evidence that the New Poor Law increased expenditure in the more rural parts of Wales can be seen in a letter sent to the editor of the *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* in 1846. Here, O.O. Roberts maintained that the New Poor Law had 'taken from the ratepayers, pounds where under the Old Poor Law only a few shillings were taken'.<sup>595</sup> This may help to explain why, as demonstrated above, the reductions in poor law expenditure were lower in the more rural regions of Wales.

Some of the opposition to the New Poor Law in Wales also came from the paupers themselves. For instance, in the Pembroke Union in 1847, one guardian stated that he 'nearly got his head broken' by a pauper, following a statement that he (the guardian) had made at the last board meeting, which had been published in the local newspaper.<sup>596</sup> Likewise, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots, one witness, Mr Thomas Jones, stated that in the Carmarthen Union, an able-bodied man attacked Captain Lloyd, one of the guardians of the Union, and threatened to shoot him following the decision of the guardians to cease outdoor relief to able bodied men.<sup>597</sup> Similarly, in Anglesey in 1841 the Reverend William Jones stated that whilst he supported the New Poor Law, 'nothing is to be heard but the loudest complaints both from those who pay taxes and from those who receive parochial relief'.<sup>598</sup> Some paupers in Wales even sent letters or petitions to the central authorities, outlining their complaints against the new system of relief. For instance, in the Tregaron Union in 1837, one pauper, William Jones, wrote to the Commissioners complaining that his relief had been stopped, despite the fact that he was a 'cripple' with five young children and no means of obtaining work.<sup>599</sup> Jones even stated that he had 'come to London so that Her Majesty's Commissioners may witness with their own eyes (sic) so

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<sup>594</sup>Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.29 In a similar vein, a petition from the ratepayers in west-Wales that had been sent to the Commissioners and published as part of the 1844 Report stated that "however beneficial enactments may have been found to have worked in the large manufacturing districts, your petitioners are thoroughly convinced of the baneful and ruinous consequences in the rural areas', p.78.

<sup>595</sup> The New Poor Law and the Erection of Union Workhouses, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 12 December, 1846, p.3.

<sup>596</sup> Pembroke board of guardians, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 1 October, 1847, p.2.

<sup>597</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844.

<sup>598</sup> Eirug Davies, 'The New Poor Law in a Rural Area', p.258.

<sup>599</sup> Cited in Eirug Davies, 'The New Poor Law in a Rural Area', p.263.

helpless a cripple I am'.<sup>600</sup> In a similar vein, in 1890 the Local Government Board, who in 1871 replaced the Poor Law Board as the central authority of the Poor Law system, wrote to the Guardians of the Holywell Union informing them that they had received a letter from a pauper, John Jones, who was currently residing in the Union workhouse. Jones, who was 77 years old, had written a letter directly to the Local Government Board begging them to overturn the decision of the Guardians to place him in the workhouse. He claimed that he had never troubled the parish for relief before and that he had paid the poor-rates his whole lifetime.<sup>601</sup> Jones appealed to the Board to 'consider the matter and to let me know your opinion'.<sup>602</sup> King has also noted that Welsh paupers frequently wrote to the central authorities to air their grievances.<sup>603</sup> The evidence here suggests that paupers in Wales had a degree of agency under New Poor Law.

A degree of opposition to the New Poor Law in Wales also stemmed from the upper classes. For instance, David Williams stated that many landlords in Wales complained that they had lost earnings since the implementation of the New Poor Law on account of the fact that the 1834 act prohibited the payment of the rents of paupers.<sup>604</sup> Other historians, such as Evans and Jones and Keith Snell, have argued that some landlords in Wales also opposed the centralizing tendencies of the New Poor Law, as it diminished their standing and self of importance in their local communities.<sup>605</sup> Lowri Ann Rees has also claimed that 'the gentry strongly believed that ownership of property afforded them special rights and duties, that included helping and guiding the lower orders of society'.<sup>606</sup> The imposition of a central poor law authority therefore threatened the gentry's place in society. Evidence of this can be seen in an article published in the *Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette*, in 1834.

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<sup>600</sup> Cited in Eirug Davies, 'The New Poor Law in a Rural Area', p.263.

<sup>601</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint, Denbigh*, 23 January, 1890, p.8. He (the pauper) stated that 'I tried to get a little allowed for me for out-relief but the guardians refused'.

<sup>602</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint, Denbigh*, 23 January, 1890, p.8.

<sup>603</sup> King and Stewart, 'The History of the Poor Law in Wales', p.145. King cited the example of William Jones, an elderly pauper from Montgomeryshire, who wrote to the Poor Law Commissioners in 1839, cataloguing a series of abuses coincident with the threat and practice of local poor law reorganization such as the late payment of allowances, 'which put him (the pauper) and other paupers at the mercy of the pawnbrokers'.

<sup>604</sup> Williams, *The Rebecca Riots*, p.141.

<sup>605</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn Intractable Body'. They stated that some of the gentry opposed the New Poor Law because it 'broke the cherished chain of responsibility between the poor and those who knew them well', p.13.

<sup>606</sup> Lowri Ann Rees, 'Paternalism and Rural Protest', p.39.

Here, it was stated that ‘the parties best qualified to administer the Poor Laws are not the Commissioners residing in London, who are ignorant of the localities, but the “landowners and occupiers”, who have a deep and personal interest in the welfare of all around’.<sup>607</sup>

Likewise, in Bala in 1840, the local gentry told William Day, the assistant commissioner, that ‘they knew perfectly well how to manage their own poor, and the less of the assistant commissioner they saw, the better’.<sup>608</sup>

However, unlike in some parts of England, such as the industrial north-west and London, opponents of the New Poor Law in Wales were reacting to changes that had already been made under the 1834 act, rather than attempting to block the implementation of the New Poor Law in the first instance. For example, as alluded to above, many of the ratepayers in west-Wales were protesting against the changes that had been made under the Bastardy clauses of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. In her work, Rhian Jones argued the Rebecca protesters were simply attempting to uphold the customary rights of unmarried mothers in this part of Wales.<sup>609</sup> The fact that the implementation of the New Poor Law was often cited as being one of the main reasons behind such public displays of anger in Wales during the 1830s and 1840s in itself suggests that something had changed.

Moreover, although the implementation of the New Poor Law provoked an angry response in Wales, particularly amongst the labouring classes, the vast majority of the ratepayers in Wales did not wish to return to the Old Poor Law system of relief in its entirety; many simply wanted to abolish or amend certain aspects that they disagreed with or that they felt did not work well. For example, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca disturbances, John Rees, farmer, stated that, although he was very much opposed to the bastardy clause of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, ‘an amendment in this act is all I want’.<sup>610</sup> Likewise, Thomas Frankland Lewis stated that although some of the smaller farmers wished to return to the Old Poor Law system, ‘the better educated persons with whom we generally communicated, depreciated with equal earnestness the idea of

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<sup>607</sup> The Glamorgan, *Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian*, 26 July, 1834, p.3.

<sup>608</sup> Richardson, ‘Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy’, pp.283-4.

<sup>609</sup> Rhian Jones, *Petticoat Heroes*, p.5. Jones stated that the Rebecca movement was ‘broadly concerned with the defence of traditional rights of rural communities and with popular opposition to injustice’.

<sup>610</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, *Minutes of Evidence, Appendix*, PP, 1844, p.56. He also stated that there was as much talk against the Old Poor Law as there is against the New’ and that ‘I would rather have an amendment in this act than have the Old Law back’.

recurring to the Old system'.<sup>611</sup> Lewis maintained that 'the popular objections were for the most part, directed rather against particular features or provisions in the Act'.<sup>612</sup> David Williams also pointed out that 'few, if any of the witnesses before the Rebecca Committee wished to return to the Old system'.<sup>613</sup> The findings here refute the claims of Evans and Jones, who argued that the vast majority of the ratepayers in Wales wished to completely overhaul the New Poor Law system.<sup>614</sup>

Furthermore, although many of the ratepayers and guardians in Wales wanted the ultimate control over relief matters to be returned to the local vestries, there is some evidence that this was not based on any considerations about the welfare of the poor. For instance, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca disturbances, Henry Leach, Esq, the chairman of the Haverfordwest Union argued that the individual parishes simply wanted to return to a time when so much of the relief went towards 'the payment of their own labourers, so much to the payment of rent of the cottages, so much to their own pockets, so much for dinners'.<sup>615</sup> Leach recalled an instance in his own parish where, under the Old Poor Law, £40 was spent by the local poor law authorities on a dinner for themselves. He added that it was 'not at all surprising that they should wish to get the management of those funds back into their own hands' as the jobbery and corruption that had previously prevailed in the parish could return. In a similar vein, when asked if he believed that the farmers wished to return to the system of paying able-bodied labourers relief in aid of wages, Thomas Jones, the clerk to the Carmarthen Union, replied 'Yes, to save themselves and not the poor'.<sup>616</sup> Jones

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<sup>611</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844. Likewise, when asked if he wanted to go back to the Old Poor Law, another witness, Mr Williams replied 'not altogether but some of it'. Williams indicated that he would like to alter the bastardry clauses of the 1834 act.

<sup>612</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844. Thomas Jones, the clerk to the Carmarthen Union also claimed that although the New Poor Law was unpopular with the poor and 'a few farmers', the 'more intelligent' farmers were generally in favour of the new system of relief'. p.227.

<sup>613</sup> Williams, *The Rebecca Riots*, p.145-6.

<sup>614</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn Intractable Body', p.114. They stated that the vast majority of the ratepayers in Wales called for 'the reinstatement of the Old Poor Law, and the rejection of the New'.

<sup>615</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.164

<sup>616</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.230.

maintained that many of the farmers simply wished to shift the cost of relieving able-bodied paupers from themselves and onto the 'tithe owner and shopkeeper'.<sup>617</sup>

Similarly, although (as demonstrated above) many of the Gower ratepayers bemoaned the fact that their poor-rates had increased after 1834, the vast majority of them still wanted to form their own Poor Law Union, which they eventually did so in 1857.<sup>618</sup> At the meeting of the Gower ratepayers in 1843, Thomas Penrice argued that if they formed their own Union, they would be able to 'build a smaller workhouse and pay their Officers lower salaries'.<sup>619</sup> Penrice also maintained that if they established their own Union they (the ratepayers) would 'not be obliged to pay their clerk £90 a year, and an additional £30 for a room in which to keep the accounts; the services of a clerk in Gower could be obtained for just £10 or £15 per annum'.<sup>620</sup> Likewise, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots, the Reverend R.B. Jones, stated that although the poor rates in many parishes in west-Wales had increased since 1834, he was optimistic that if 'the principles of the New Poor Law' were properly enforced, the poor rates will be 'much lower in the future'.<sup>621</sup>

Likewise, although there was a degree of sympathy for the paupers who were toiling under the New Poor Law in Wales, this sympathy did not always extend to the boards of guardians-those who ultimately decided whether or not a particular pauper was entitled to poor relief. Evidence of this can be seen in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots. Here, when asked if he had heard any complaints about the bastardy clause of the 1834 act, one witness, Mr A, Cuthbertson stated that 'I do not hear any complaint amongst the guardians against it, although out of doors (amongst the wider public) I hear complaints'.<sup>622</sup> Another witness, Captain J.M. Child recalled the case of one pauper, Margaret Hughes, who was indicted for the murder of her two bastard children. At Court, Hughes was found to be guilty

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<sup>617</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.230.

<sup>618</sup> Lewis, *Swansea and the Workhouse*, p.22.

<sup>619</sup> Public Meeting to Petition for a Separation of the Gower parishes from the Swansea Union, *The Cambrian*, 7 October, 1843, p.3.

<sup>620</sup> Public Meeting to Petition for a Separation of the Gower parishes from the Swansea Union, *The Cambrian*, 7 October, 1843, p.3, Penrice also stated that, in their own Union, they would not be obliged to pay £20 a year for an auditor' as there were 'many benevolent persons who would perform this duty gratuitously'.

<sup>621</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.102-103.

<sup>622</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.371.

of committing this most terrible of crimes. However, Captain Child informed the Commissioners that, to the surprise of all persons present, the Jury acquitted the prisoner of all charges. When asked why they had acquitted the pauper, one of the Jury replied: 'How could we do otherwise, when the New Poor Law acts so harshly against these poor women?'.<sup>623</sup> This also suggests that whilst there was some sympathy for the poor in Wales, particularly from the magistrates, many paupers were harshly dealt with under the new system of relief.

Moreover, although paupers in Wales had a degree of agency under the New Poor Law, the balance of power was tilted firmly in the favour of the new boards of guardians and/or the central authorities. For instance, although paupers in Wales were able to appeal to the board of guardians and/or the central authorities to complain about any grievances that they had, their complaints were often ignored. For example, in the case referred to above, when the Local Government Board received a letter from a pauper living in the Holywell Union in 1890, asking them to reconsider the decision of the guardians of that Union to withhold outdoor relief, they simply responded that 'subject to the regulations in force in the Holywell Union, the gentlemen who decide whether relief be given or not, could not be interfered with by them', as they (the Local Government Board) were 'expressly prohibited by law from such interference'.<sup>624</sup> Buoyed by this response, the Holywell guardians agreed to 'take no further notice of the letter'.<sup>625</sup>

Likewise, although some of the opposition to the New Poor Law in Wales came from the upper classes, as noted above the number of resident landowners in Wales was relatively small.<sup>626</sup> Moreover, by 1834, many landowners in England and Wales were moving away from the administration of poor relief at the local level in order to concentrate on larger, national issues. Hooker stated that, by the eve of the New Poor Law, 'many of the gentry-types had a bigger picture than Union affairs' and that as MPs, they were focusing on

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<sup>623</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.80

<sup>624</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 23 January, 1890, p.8.

<sup>625</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 23 January, 1890, p.8.

<sup>626</sup> Cited in Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth Century Wales*; See also Lowri Ann Rees, 'Paternalism and Rural Protest', pp.36-60.

issues with a 'county or national dimension'.<sup>627</sup> Hooker argued that for the vast majority of the gentry, 'poor law matters had become a low-status activity'.<sup>628</sup> Furthermore, some of the landowners in Wales, at least some of those that were resident, supported the implementation of the New Poor Law. For example, in his report to the Poor Law Commissioners in 1836, George Clive stated that in his attempts to implement the New poor Law in Monmouthshire, 'I have to acknowledge the assistance of the more enlightened members of the gentry'.<sup>629</sup>

### **The Implementation of the Workhouse System under the New Poor Law in Wales**

Other historians have claimed that there was considerable resistance to the use of the workhouse system in Wales under the New Poor Law. For instance, Evans and Jones argued that 'resistance to the workhouse was stronger in Wales than in any English region'.<sup>630</sup> Evans and Jones also stated that Welsh resistance to the workhouse system was based on 'a long-standing and coherent antipathy to the punitive nature of the workhouse, rather than simply being founded on short-term financial or practical considerations'.<sup>631</sup> They also argued that this resistance was 'not confined to a particular county or region of Wales'.<sup>632</sup> Likewise, Snell has argued that 'Welsh social relations were at odds with the idea of workhouse testing'.<sup>633</sup> In a similar vein, Edsall claimed that in Wales, the New Poor Law in general, and the workhouse system in particular, was often referred to as an 'English device', wholly unsuited to the cultural traditions of Wales.<sup>634</sup>

However, in some parts of Wales, particularly in the more industrialised areas, the boards of guardians moved quickly to establish the new Union workhouses. For instance, four out of the original five Unions in Monmouth built a new workhouse almost

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<sup>627</sup> Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.168-9.

<sup>628</sup> Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.168-9 Hooker also claimed that for the gentry, the need to indulge in paternalism was met by providing agricultural prizes or monetary contributions towards schools, chapels, churches etc or very directly by charging reasonable rents or offering rebates in hard times.

<sup>629</sup> Report of George Clive on the Counties of Monmouthshire, Carmarthen, and parts of Gloucester and Glamorgan, 1 June, 1836, Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, PP, 1836.

<sup>630</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn Intractable Body', p.109.

<sup>631</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn Intractable Body', p.101.

<sup>632</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn Intractable Body', p.106

<sup>633</sup> Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.259.

<sup>634</sup> Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement*, p.129



immediately.<sup>635</sup> Likewise, in Glamorgan, three of the five original Unions possessed a workhouse by the end of 1839.<sup>636</sup> Moreover, although the Swansea guardians voted against building a new workhouse until the 1860s, the existing House of Industry at Swansea was adapted and used as the Union workhouse from the inception of the Union until the opening of the new workhouse at Mount Pleasant in 1863.<sup>637</sup> In a similar vein, both of the Unions in Flintshire (Holywell and St Asaph) had built a new Union workhouse by 1840.<sup>638</sup> Richardson also noted that the first six Unions in Flintshire and Denbighshire agreed to build a workhouse 'without too much complaint'.<sup>639</sup> This suggests that there was a far greater need for, or support for, the use of workhouses in the more industrialised areas of Wales. In the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots, one witness, Mr John Jones, a farmer from Carmarthen, stated that in Wales workhouses were 'more applicable to the town parishes than to the country parishes'.<sup>640</sup> This was the opposite of the situation in England, where Unions in the more rural areas, such as the south-east, tended to build their workhouses relatively quickly, whilst Unions in the more industrial areas, such as the north-west, resisted building a workhouse for many years.<sup>641</sup>

Unions in the south-west of Wales also established new workhouses relatively quickly. For instance, all three of the Unions in Pembrokeshire (Pembroke, Haverfordwest and Narberth) had a workhouse by the end of 1840.<sup>642</sup> Donald Jones stated that these three Unions 'moved quickly to find suitable land on which to build a workhouse'.<sup>643</sup> Likewise, Hooker demonstrated that there was little resistance to the establishment of a workhouse in the Llandilofawr Union.<sup>644</sup> At first glance, it may be surprising that Unions in this region of Wales, which remained largely agricultural throughout the period under investigation here,

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<sup>635</sup> Higginbotham, *Workhouses of Wales*.

<sup>636</sup> Higginbotham, *Workhouses of Wales*.

<sup>637</sup> Lewis, *Swansea and the Workhouse*, p.32.

<sup>638</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.284.

<sup>639</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.284

<sup>640</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.150.

<sup>641</sup> See the work of Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law'; and Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement*

<sup>642</sup> W. Donald Jones, 'The Implementation of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act in South-West Wales with special reference to the Haverfordwest, Narberth, and Pembroke Unions', *Master's Thesis*, (Pembrokeshire Archives, 2001), pp1-90. (Archive Code: HDX/1574/1), [here p.37].

<sup>643</sup> W. Donald Jones, 'The Implementation of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act in South-West Wales', p.37.

<sup>644</sup> Geoff Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.219 Hooker stated that the Llandilofawr guardians 'agreed to build a workhouse within hours of the formation of the Union' and that there was 'no record of any significant local opposition to the idea'.

decided to build a workhouse so quickly. This appears to be particularly surprising given that, as noted above, this region of Wales was blighted by the Rebecca disturbances during the period 1839-1843, when the first wave of workhouse-construction was taking place across England and Wales. It is possible that the nature of agriculture in Wales impacted the decisions of the guardians of the Unions in this part of the country to establish a workhouse so quickly. Unlike in much of the rest of the country where agriculture was dominated by pastoral farming, in the low-lying south-west of Wales, arable farming dominated.<sup>645</sup> As noted in Chapter One, arable farmers and labourers were less shielded from poverty and the need for the poor relief. It could be argued therefore that the deterrent nature of the workhouse was more needed in these types of areas, where the number of paupers, particularly during bad harvests or during the long winter months, could be relatively high. The pattern of workhouse building in Wales under the New Poor Law also reflected the pattern under the Old Poor Law. Or, to put it another way, areas in Wales that possessed workhouse stock before 1834, were also more likely to build a new Union workhouse after 1834. South-west Wales for instance, possessed a relatively large number of workhouses and/or poorhouses under the Old Poor Law, at least in comparison to the rest of Wales. For instance, a parliamentary report published in 1777 revealed that of the nineteen workhouses in Wales, eleven were in west-Wales.<sup>646</sup>

The fact that there was a degree of regionality to Welsh resistance of the workhouse was also noted by William Day, the first assistant commissioner of Wales. For instance, after visiting the 26 south-Wales Unions in 1840, he claimed that there was 'less direct opposition' to the workhouses in south-Wales than in north-Wales.<sup>647</sup> Edsall has also conceded that there was some variation in the building of workhouses in Wales under the New Poor Law. He stated that in the majority of the Unions in south-Wales, 'the process of reorganization, including commitments to the building of new workhouses, had been carried too far to be easily reversed'.<sup>648</sup>

Some Unions in Wales, particularly those in mid and north-west Wales did hold out on building a new Union workhouse for a considerable period of time. For instance, in mid-

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<sup>645</sup> Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales*, p.21.

<sup>646</sup> Higginbotham, *Workhouses of Wales*, p.13.

<sup>647</sup> Eirug Davies, 'The Poor Law in a Rural Area', p.263.

<sup>648</sup> Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement*, p.130.

Wales, the Rhayader Union resisted building a workhouse for 41 years, from the formation of the Union in 1836, to its eventual compliance in 1877.<sup>649</sup> Along with the Todmorden Union in the north-west of England, Rhayader was the last Union in the whole of England and Wales to build a workhouse.<sup>650</sup> Likewise, the Presteigne Union refused to build a workhouse altogether and was eventually dissolved in 1877, with its constituent parishes reassigned to neighbouring Unions.<sup>651</sup> Richardson has also pointed out that only three of the ten Unions in the north-west region of Wales built a workhouse before 1845.<sup>652</sup> For example, the Conway Union held out until 1859; whilst the Anglesey Union did not build a workhouse until 1868.<sup>653</sup>

Moreover, even when they were established, workhouses in Wales under the New Poor Law continued to be relatively small. For example, in 1872, Assistant Commissioner Longe described the Llandilofawr workhouse as being 'one of those small economically constructed workhouses so constantly met with in Wales'.<sup>654</sup> Keith Parker has also noted that the workhouses that had been built in Radnorshire by the end of the 1840s were 'small and cheaply built'.<sup>655</sup> Crowther makes a similar observation about the small size of the workhouses in Wales in her work. She stated that 'Welsh workhouses remained mainly small almshouses, not intended for the able-bodied'.<sup>656</sup>

There is also evidence that workhouses in Wales were seldom used under the New Poor Law. Evidence of this can be seen in Tables 10 and 11, below, which show the proportion of poor law expenditure spent on indoor and outdoor relief in each of our sample regions in the period 1841-1901.

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<sup>649</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn Intractable Body', p.105. Evans and Jones pointed out that the Local Government Board had threatened to dissolve the Rhayader Union and claimed that this was the only reason for their eventual compliance.

<sup>650</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn Intractable Body', p.102-3.

<sup>651</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A stubborn Intractable Body', pp.102-3.

<sup>652</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.286

<sup>653</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.286

<sup>654</sup> Cited in Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', pp.243-244.

<sup>655</sup> Parker, 'Radnorshire and the New Poor Law', pp.186-187.

<sup>656</sup> Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, p.47.

**Table 10: Proportion of Poor Law Expenditure in England and Wales Spent on Indoor Relief, 1841-1901.**

<b>Area</b>	<b>1841</b>	<b>1851</b>	<b>1861</b>	<b>1871</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>1891</b>	<b>1901</b>
<b>National</b>							
*Wales	6%	7%	9%	11%	17%	18%	23%
*England	24%	23%	27%	31%	43%	47%	53%
England and Wales	23%	22%	26%	29%	41%	45%	51%
<b>Sample English Counties</b>							
Kent	38%	32%	34%	37%	50%	56%	55%
Lancaster	22%	25%	35%	42%	55%	58%	64%
Middlesex/London	55%	48%	59%	53%	76%	80%	82%
Chester	15%	13%	20%	28%	36%	37%	45%
Salop	26%	23%	26%	35%	55%	59%	57%
Gloucester	23%	24%	24%	26%	35%	35%	38%
Hereford	17%	14%	13%	23%	34%	27%	31%
<b>Sample Welsh Union</b>							
Pembroke	13%	8%	11%	11%	19%	18%	28%
Swansea	17%	12%	12%	12%	18%	25%	29%
Abergavenny	23%	16%	17%	23%	32%	27%	34%
Newtown and Llanidloes	4%	9%	12%	15%	15%	14%	12%
Holywell	1%	6%	8%	13%	16%	13%	16%
Pwllheli	1%	3%	3%	5%	7%	7%	9%
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>							
Pembroke	17%	5%	8%	9%	13%	18%	17%
Glamorgan	8%	6%	12%	15%	19%	25%	28%
Monmouth	9%	13%	15%	19%	25%	27%	28%
Montgomery	18%	10%	13%	18%	20%	14%	19%
*Flint	2%	9%	7%	11%	15%	13%	16%
Caernarvon	0.1%	4%	4%	6%	11%	7%	13%

**Table 11: Proportion of Poor Law Expenditure in England and Wales Spent on Outdoor Relief, 1841-1901**

Area	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901
<b>National</b>							
*Wales	94%	93%	91%	89%	83%	82%	77%
*England	76%	77%	73%	69%	57%	53%	47%
England and Wales	77%	78%	74%	71%	59%	55%	49%
<b>Sample English Counties</b>							
Kent	62%	68%	66%	63%	50%	44%	45%
Lancaster	78%	75%	65%	58%	45%	42%	36%
Middlesex/London	45%	52%	41%	47%	24%	20%	18%
Chester	85%	87%	80%	72%	64%	63%	55%
Salop	74%	77%	74%	65%	45%	41%	43%
Gloucester	77%	76%	76%	74%	65%	65%	62%
Hereford	83%	86%	87%	77%	66%	73%	69%
<b>Sample Welsh Unions</b>							
Pembroke	87%	92%	89%	89%	81%	82%	72%
Swansea	83%	88%	88%	82%	82%	75%	71%
Abergavenny	77%	84%	83%	77%	68%	73%	66%
Newtown and Llanidloes	96%	91%	88%	85%	85%	86%	88%
Holywell	99%	94%	92%	87%	84%	87%	84%
Pwllheli	99%	97%	97%	95%	93%	93%	91%
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>							
Pembroke	92%	95%	92%	91%	87%	88%	83%
Glamorgan	91%	94%	88%	85%	81%	77%	72%
Monmouth	82%	87%	85%	81%	75%	73%	72%
Montgomery	97%	90%	87%	82%	80%	82%	81%
*Flint	98%	91%	93%	89%	85%	86%	84%
Caernarvon	99.9%	96%	96%	94%	89%	90%	87%

**\*Note:** The figures for Wales and England have been adjusted to show the county of Monmouth as being in Wales. Note also that the figures for Flint include the Holywell and St Asaph Unions.

**Sources:** Return of sums expended for relief of poor in Unions in England and Wales, 1841-42, PP, 1843; Poor Law Board: Fourth Annual Report, 1851, Appendix, PP, 1852; Poor Law Board: Fourteenth Annual Report, 1861-62, PP, 1862; Local Government Board, First Report, 1871-72, PP, 1872; Abstract returns to Home Secretary, pursuant to local taxation returns act, for accounts of corporations, coms, vestries etc, 18801-81, PP, 1882; Annual Local Taxation Returns, 1890-91 (Parts I-VI), PP, 1892; Local Taxation Returns (England), the annual local taxation returns, PP, 1902.

These tables show that, throughout the entire period under investigation here, relatively little money was expended on indoor relief in Wales. For example, in 1841 just 6% of the money expended on poor relief was spent on the workhouse; in comparison 24% was spent on indoor relief in England in this year. In some parts of England, the proportion of poor relief expended on indoor relief was considerably higher. For example, in Kent 38% of poor relief was expended on indoor relief in 1841, whilst in London the proportion expended on indoor relief in this year was even higher than that expended on outdoor relief, being 55% indoor and 45% outdoors.

The proportion of relief expenditure being spent on indoor relief in Wales did increase slightly over time. For example, at the national level, the amount of relief spent on maintaining paupers inside the workhouse increased from 6% in 1841 to 23% in 1901. The proportion of poor relief expended on indoor relief was also typically higher in the more industrialised areas of Wales. For example, in Glamorgan in 1901, 28% of the money spent on poor relief was spent indoors, compared to just 13% in Caernarvon. However, up until the end of the nineteenth century at least, the proportion of poor relief expended indoors in Wales lagged considerably behind the proportions expended on the workhouse in England. For instance, at the national level, just 23% of relief expenditure was expended on indoor relief in Wales in 1901 compared to 53% in England.

There were several reasons why the workhouse system was deemed to be inimical to Wales. Some of the ratepayers in Wales were opposed on ideological grounds. For instance, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca disturbances, Captain Lewis Evans stated that one of the 'main grievances' against the workhouses in Wales was the 'separation of a man and his wife'.<sup>657</sup> Evans was particularly disgusted with the separation of elderly couples, many of whom had lived together their entire adult lives.<sup>658</sup> In a similar vein, when asked about whether or not it was common for guardians in west-Wales to take some, or all, of the children of able-bodied men into the workhouse, John Rees, a farmer from New Quay, replied that 'in our country we think that it is worse than in Africa to take the children from

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<sup>657</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.75.

<sup>658</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.75.

the parents'.<sup>659</sup> Some of the ratepayers in Wales also opposed the cruel treatment of pauper inmates inside the workhouse. For instance, in February 1843, at the height of the Rebecca Riots, the Master of the Narberth workhouse was sent three threatening letters warning him about the poor quality of the food given to the pauper inmates.<sup>660</sup> Likewise, in 1896 an article published in *The Cambrian News* stated that 'workhouses (in Wales) are either worse than prisons or are so badly conducted as to inflict unnecessary humiliation upon people whose only crime is the misfortune of being poor'.<sup>661</sup>

However, although there was some sympathy for the paupers in Wales, the vast majority of ratepayers and guardians opposed the workhouse system for the same reason that they had done so under the Old Poor Law-it was simply too expensive. Building a Union workhouse cost thousands of pounds-an initial outlay that many ratepayers and guardians were not prepared to make, especially those representing the more rural parishes, where the number of paupers in need of relief was relatively small. There were also considerable running costs and staff salaries to be paid. For the vast majority of ratepayers and guardians in Wales, financial considerations were far more pressing than ideological ones. For instance, in 1837, ratepayers from the Swansea Union wrote a letter to the Mayor of Swansea asking him to call a public meeting of the inhabitants of Swansea, for the purpose of considering the expediency of erecting a new workhouse or making any extensive alterations to the existing one.<sup>662</sup> The ratepayers argued that sanctioning the building of a new workhouse would 'impose a grievous increase in the poor rates, without the absolute necessity of such a measure having been demonstrated'.<sup>663</sup> In a similar vein, in 1836, ratepayers from the Newport Union wrote a letter to the guardians of that Union, outlining their opposition to the building of a new workhouse. They argued that 'it is highly inexpedient to expend a very large sum of the public money, until it be seen that the

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<sup>659</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.55. Likewise, Stephen Evans, a farmer from Carmarthen stated that 'the separating of man and wife in age and infirmity we consider is not agreeable with the law of God', p.75.

<sup>660</sup> Turvey, *Pembrokeshire, The Concise History*, p.112. Turvey also points out that the Narberth workhouse was later stormed by the Rebecca protesters.

<sup>661</sup> Poverty and Pauperism, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 27 November, 1896, p.5.

<sup>662</sup> To the Mayor of Swansea, *The Cambrian*, 28 January, 1837, p.3.

<sup>663</sup> To the Mayor of Swansea, *The Cambrian*, 28 January, 1837, p.3. Bernard Lewis also argued that the ratepayers in Swansea opposed the building of a new workhouse on financial rather than humanitarian grounds, p.36.

present workhouse system is a good one and likely to be permanent'.<sup>664</sup> The Newport ratepayers maintained that building a new workhouse, instead of altering the old one, would be 'throwing away £2,000 of public money, for which no adequate advantages would be received'.<sup>665</sup> They also lamented that building a new workhouse would mean that there would be more staff that would need to be paid.<sup>666</sup> This extra staff, they lamented, 'would not work for nothing'.<sup>667</sup> The Newport ratepayers concluded that if a workhouse was built, 'no small sum raised in the poor rates will be expended in salaries'.<sup>668</sup> In his work, Keith Parker also argued that opposition to the workhouse system in Radnorshire was based on 'economy rather than compassion'.<sup>669</sup>

Many of the ratepayers and guardians in Wales also pointed out that, as under the Old Poor Law, it was far cheaper to relieve paupers outside of a workhouse than inside. For example, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots, Captain Evans cited a case where an able-bodied man and his family had been ordered into the workhouse. Evans claimed that whereas it would have only cost the Union 2s a week to relieve the man in his own home, the cost of maintaining the entire family, which consisted of the husband and wife and their 6 children, inside the workhouse amounted to no less than 24s a week.<sup>670</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1876, Mr Jenkins, a guardian of the Union, stated that the cost of bringing widows and their children into the workhouse was 'very expensive'.<sup>671</sup> Jenkins informed his fellow guardians that the cost of relieving a widow and her children inside the workhouse cost the Union 16-17s a week, compared to just 4-5s a week for maintaining them outside of the workhouse.<sup>672</sup> At the same meeting,

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<sup>664</sup> To the Guardians of the Newport Union, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 24 December, 1836, p.3.

<sup>665</sup> To the Guardians of the Newport Union, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 24 December, 1836, p.3.

<sup>666</sup> To the Guardians of the Newport Union, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 24 December, 1836, p.3. They stated that 'in the report of the Poor Law Commissioners we find the names of school masters and school mistresses, chaplains, porters, nurses etc'.

<sup>667</sup> To the Guardians of the Newport Union, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 24 December, 1836, p.3.

<sup>668</sup> To the Guardians of the Newport Union, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 24 December, 1836, p.3

<sup>669</sup> Parker, 'Radnorshire and the New Poor Law', p.196. In her work Richardson also argued that although the ratepayers and guardians in Wales opposed the workhouse 'for a variety of reasons...they regarded workhouses as more expensive than outdoor relief' and argued that if they built a new workhouse, the parish poorhouses that had already been established under the Old Poor Law would become 'redundant', in Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.287.

<sup>670</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.78.

<sup>671</sup> Newtown, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 21 January, 1876, p.6

<sup>672</sup> Newtown, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 21 January, 1876, p.6



another guardian, Mr Morgan stated that it would be 'monstrous to suppose that they (the guardians) meant to bring all the paupers in the Union into the House- it would not hold them all'.<sup>673</sup> In a similar vein, at a Poor Law conference held in Swansea in 1873, Mr Roch, the Chairman of the Pembroke Union claimed that if they were forced to apply the workhouse test to every single pauper in the Union that applied for relief, 'a large number would probably enter and they would have to build a larger workhouse'. This increased expenditure argued Roch, would be 'a matter of grave consideration'.<sup>674</sup>

The Poor Law authorities themselves acknowledged that Welsh boards of guardians opposed the workhouse on financial rather than humanitarian grounds. For example, in 1841, William Day stated that the population of the Tregaron Union was so small, and the ratepayers so poor, that 'it would be impossible to persuade them to build a workhouse'.<sup>675</sup> Likewise, in his report of operation of the New Poor Law in Carmarthenshire, (published in 1838) Assistant Commissioner Neave argued that the lack of indoor paupers in Wales was far from humane. Neave stated that in Wales 'such paupers as require workhouse protection were left to find their own solution elsewhere'.<sup>676</sup> There is no sense at all, throughout the entire 49-page report, that opposition to the workhouses in this part of Wales at least was based on philosophical or emotional grounds.<sup>677</sup> Bernard Lewis has even argued that many of the ratepayers in the Swansea Union were not opposed to the separation of families in the workhouse. As evidence of this, Lewis pointed to an article published in *The Cambrian* in 1837, which argued that 'the separation of families in the workhouse was no different than that of the armed forces'.<sup>678</sup> In any case, as noted above, many of the workhouses that were established in Wales after 1834 were often so small and badly managed that the separation of families, or the different categories of paupers in general, was often a dead letter. Evidence of this can be seen in a report submitted by the renowned social explorer Joseph Rowntree to the editor of *The North Wales Chronicle*, following his visit to the Newtown and Llanidloes workhouse in 1864. As well as highlighting the awful conditions he encountered in the workhouse, Rowntree argued that 'classification

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<sup>673</sup> Newtown, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 21 January, 1876, p.6

<sup>674</sup> Conference of Guardians at Swansea, *The Welshman*, 18 April, 1873, p.2

<sup>675</sup> Jones, 'The Implementation of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act in South-West Wales', p.23.

<sup>676</sup> Hooker, 'The Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.222.

<sup>677</sup> Hooker, 'The Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.222.

<sup>678</sup> Lewis, *Swansea and the Workhouse*, p.20.

ought to be more strictly attended to in this and most of the Unions in Wales'.<sup>679</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Swansea Board of guardians in 1876, the Chairman lamented that 'the classification at the Swansea workhouse was not yet perfect'.<sup>680</sup> It was frequently noted that, at the Swansea workhouses, paupers, even dangerous lunatics, were mixed together. For example, in 1898, the Visiting Committee of the Swansea workhouse asked for several of the children currently residing at the workhouse to be removed to the children's homes at Cockett due to the fact that there were several 'dangerous' lunatics at the workhouse.<sup>681</sup>

Further evidence that the vast majority of ratepayers and guardians in Wales did not oppose the implementation of the workhouse system on ideological grounds can be seen in the fact that many Unions in Wales- those with no workhouse of their own, attempted to place some of their indoor paupers into the workhouse of a neighbouring Union. For instance, in 1850 the guardians of the Lampeter Union, which had no workhouse until 1876, wrote a letter to the Poor Law Board asking them if they could send paupers (those that they had prohibited from receiving outdoor relief) to the Aberayron workhouse.<sup>682</sup> The Tregaron Union also tried to come to some sort of arrangement with the Aberayron Union that would allow them to use their workhouse.<sup>683</sup> Likewise, in 1879, the guardians of the Holywell Union wrote a letter to the Local Government Board asking them if they could send some of their inmates to the workhouse at Chester.<sup>684</sup> When questioned about the reasons for these proposed arrangements, the Clerk of the Union informed the central authorities that the Holywell workhouse was at full capacity and that instead of spending significant sums making alterations to their own workhouse, it was cheaper for them to send some of their paupers to the Chester workhouse and pay a few shillings for their maintenance there.<sup>685</sup> In a similar vein, in 1898, the guardians from the Pwllheli Union agreed to accept six inmates from the Ffestiniog Union into their workhouse, whilst the Ffestiniog workhouse

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<sup>679</sup> The Poor and the Poor Laws, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 17 December, 1864, p.10

<sup>680</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, cost of intoxicating drinks in the Union, *The Cambrian*, 24 March, 1876, p.8.

<sup>681</sup> West Glamorgan Archives, U/S 1/29, Swansea Board of Guardian Minute Book, 15 September, 1898.

<sup>682</sup> Ceredigion Archives, CBG/375, Lampeter Board of Guardian Minute Books, 15 June, 1850.

<sup>683</sup> Jones, "The Implementation of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act in South-West Wales", p.23.

<sup>684</sup> Holywell, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 21 February, 1879, p.4

<sup>685</sup> Holywell, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 21 February, 1879, p.4

was undergoing renovations.<sup>686</sup> Blacklaws has also pointed out that when the Machynlleth workhouse closed in 1914, the remaining pauper inmates were sent to workhouses in the surrounding Unions.<sup>687</sup> This, Blacklaws argued, demonstrated that the Machynlleth guardians were not opposed to the workhouse 'in principle'.<sup>688</sup> Blacklaws maintained that the decision of the Machynlleth guardians to close the workhouse was based more on 'pragmatism' and concerns over expenditure rather than being founded on any humanitarian concerns.<sup>689</sup> In a similar vein, Eirug Davies argued that any opposition to the implementation of the workhouse system in Wales that was based on ideological grounds was 'illogical', given that an ever-increasing number of parishes in Wales had begun to provide some form of indoor relief under the Old Poor Law.<sup>690</sup>

Many of the ratepayers and guardians in Wales also complained that too much money was being spent on the indoor poor and that the pauper inmates were living in better conditions than many of the ratepayers and guardians themselves were accustomed to. For instance, at a meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1892, during a heated debate over whether or not the guardians should spend thousands of pounds on making alterations to the workhouse, including the building of a separate ward for tramps, one guardian, Mr W. Jones, argued against the proposals and stated that 'many of the guardians lived in worse conditions, in some cases 'a great deal worse' and that it would be unfair to ask them to spend significant sums of money relieving the indoor poor.'<sup>691</sup> At the same meeting, another guardian, Mr John Jones stated that he was 'greatly surprised at the proposal to provide a better place for the tramps.'<sup>692</sup> Jones complained that as a farmer he paid £180 a year in rent and 'slept every night in a worse place'.<sup>693</sup> In a similar vein, at a meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1897, Mr Isaac Hughes claimed that inmates

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<sup>686</sup> Pwllheli, *The North Wales Express*, 16 September, 1898, p.7

<sup>687</sup> Nicola Blacklaws, Nicola, *Wales, Welfare and the Workhouse*.

<sup>688</sup> Blacklaws, Nicola, *Wales, Welfare and the Workhouse*.

<sup>689</sup> Blacklaws, Nicola, *Wales, Welfare and the Workhouse*.

<sup>690</sup> Eirug Davies, 'The New Poor Law in a Rural Area' p264. Davies stated that 'the very fact that parish vestries before 1834 had already set up poorhouses meant that the authorities had accepted the workhouse system in principle.

<sup>691</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 19 August, 1892, p.8.

<sup>692</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 19 August, 1892, p.8.

<sup>693</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 19 August, 1892, p.8.

of the Union were 'living in a good style- a great deal better than many of the poor ratepayers who had to scrape up the rates'.<sup>694</sup> He also stated that whenever he was asked the question 'Was life worth living?' his reply would be 'yes, if you live in a workhouse'.<sup>695</sup> The findings here also suggest that the majority of ratepayers and guardians in Wales opposed the implementation of the workhouse system on financial rather than ideological grounds.

Moreover, by the end of the 1870s, every Union in Wales possessed a new Union workhouse. Many boards of guardians in Wales took the decision to build a new workhouse following the passage of the Union Chargeability Act in 1865, which spread the financial cost of maintaining the paupers across the whole Union, rather than each parish paying for their own paupers as had been the case up until this point in time.<sup>696</sup> After 1865, even the most recalcitrant Unions in Wales now felt comfortable enough to take out a loan from the Public Works Loan Board, with which to build their workhouse.<sup>697</sup> The evidence here also suggests that Unions in Wales had been opposed to the building and use of workhouses due to financial rather than humanitarian considerations.

As alluded to above, some of the opposition to the workhouse system in Wales came from the paupers themselves. For example, an article published in *The Welshman* in 1843 claimed that paupers in Wales resented being 'locked up in the Union workhouse as if in a prison and being worse fed than if they were sent to gaol for a felony'.<sup>698</sup> In a similar vein, at a meeting of ratepayers in Carmarthen in 1843, a 'respectable' farmer named Gravel stated that 'our poor countrymen would rather work by the side of a hedge when the winter is cold than be taken into the workhouse and be kept in them with the door shut'.<sup>699</sup> Likewise, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca riots, the Reverend R.B. Jones claimed that a pauper residing in his parish (in the Narberth Union) refused to enter the workhouse as it was too far away from her support network.<sup>700</sup> The fact that the pauper refused to enter the

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<sup>694</sup> Holywell, *The Rhyl Journal*, May 8, 1897, p.5.

<sup>695</sup> Holywell, *The Rhyl Journal*, May 8, 1897, p.5.

<sup>696</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn Intractable Body', pp.103-104

<sup>697</sup> Cited in Keith Parker, 'Radnorshire and the New Poor Law to circa 1850', *Radnorshire Society Transactions*, vol.74, (1 January, 2004), pp.169-198, [here p.185

<sup>698</sup> The Poor Farmers and the Poor Law, *The Welshman*, 4 August, 1843, p.2.

<sup>699</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn Intractable Body', p.113.

<sup>700</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.103.

workhouse, forgoing access to poor relief altogether, suggests that they were vehemently opposed to the workhouse system. The fact that they had the choice to refuse the workhouse could also be seen as evidence that paupers in Wales had a degree of agency under the New Poor Law system.

Further evidence that paupers in Wales were opposed to the workhouse system can be seen in the fact that, throughout the period under investigation here, many paupers in Wales refused to carry out their daily task work, or else acted in a recalcitrant manner during their stay at the workhouse. For example, in the Pembroke Union in 1846, one pauper, Sarah Cole, who had been residing at the Union workhouse, was brought before the Mayor, Morgan Davies Esq, after refusing to pick oakum when asked to do so by the Master of the workhouse, Mr Joseph. Joseph also informed the Mayor that when he remonstrated with the pauper about the impropriety of her conduct, she took off her clog and broke five panes of glass and afterwards struck him in the face.<sup>701</sup> Likewise, it was reported in the Swansea Union in 1868 that Mary Davies had used abusive language and thrown a pair of boots at the Matron of the workhouse.<sup>702</sup> As well as demonstrating opposition to the New Poor Law from the lower orders, the findings here also demonstrate that paupers in Wales had a degree of agency under the new relief system.

However, paupers that refused to carry out their daily task work or were found guilty of damaging workhouse property (or otherwise behaving in a refractory manner) were often severely dealt with. For instance, in the case referred to above, Sarah Cole was sent to gaol for one calendar month, with hard labour.<sup>703</sup> In a similar vein, in the Swansea Union, Mary Davies, on account of her misdemeanours, was locked up in a refractory ward, often described as a 'dark room', for ten hours and had her normal workhouse diet substituted with bread and water.<sup>704</sup> In reviewing this case, the Swansea guardians recommended that Mary's new diet of bread and water be continued for an additional twenty-four hours.<sup>705</sup> Moreover, although paupers always had the choice to refuse the offer of the workhouse, those that gave up their right to relief altogether were often forced to endure great

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<sup>701</sup> *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 10 July, 1846, p.2

<sup>702</sup> WGA, U/S 24, Workhouse Punishment Book, Swansea Union, 1855-1880

<sup>703</sup> *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 10 July, 1846, p.2

<sup>704</sup> WGA, U/S 24, Workhouse Punishment Book, Swansea Union, 1855-1880

<sup>705</sup> WGA, U/S 24, Workhouse Punishment Book, Swansea Union, 1855-1880

hardships. In the case referred to above, the Reverend Jones lamented that the pauper who refused to enter the workhouse in the Narberth Union was 'half-starved' and wandering about the parish 'from house to house' begging for relief'.<sup>706</sup>

A degree of opposition to the workhouses in Wales also came from the upper classes of society. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that landlords in Wales often refused to sell any of their land to the boards of guardians, for the purpose of building the new establishments. For example, in 1836, the building of the Pembroke workhouse was delayed by a couple of months after Sir John Owen, MP, refused to sell a plot of his land to the Pembroke board of guardians, after initially agreeing upon the sale.<sup>707</sup> In her work, Francesca Richardson demonstrated that the Llanrwst board of guardians also had some trouble in acquiring a site for their workhouse after the Gwydir estate, the most prominent landowners in the region, declined to sell any land to the Union.<sup>708</sup> Here, Digby Neave, the Assistant Commissioner for north-Wales, was forced to intervene; he recommended that the guardians purchase 3 fields from another local landowner, Owen Owens. Owens initially agreed but subsequently withdrew his offer. Eventually, Lord Mostyn, the Chairman of the St Asaph Union agreed to sell some of his land to the guardians.<sup>709</sup>

However, once again, opposition to the workhouse system on the part of the upper classes was often based more on financial rather than ideological or humanitarian concerns. In her work, Charlotte Newman argued that some landowners in England and Wales simply did not want the stigma of having a workhouse for the poor on their land; many were afraid that it would devalue their land and the properties thereon.<sup>710</sup> Evidence that some landlords in Wales were opposed to the building of workhouses and other poor law establishments on their land for fear of loss of earnings and prestige can be seen in an article published in the *South Wales Daily News* in 1899. Here, the owners and tenants of property in Romilly Road,

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<sup>706</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.103.

<sup>707</sup> Jones, 'The Implementation of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act in South-West Wales', p.37. Eventually, another landowner, John Adams (who was also a guardian and vice-chairman of the Union) agreed to sell a plot of his land at Coldwell.

<sup>708</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.285.

<sup>709</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.285.

<sup>710</sup> Newman, 'To Punish or Protect' pp.124-125. Newman stated that the majority of workhouses during the New Poor Law were situated away from population centres' and that 'the secluded locations of these buildings physically removed paupers to the margins of society'.

appeared before the Cardiff board of guardians to protest against the intention of the board to establish homes for poor law children in Romilly Road. Before the deposition was heard the clerk stated that a letter had been received from a number of the residents in the locality enclosing a petition protesting against the board utilizing two homes in Romilly Road as homes for poor law children and expressing a hope that the board would find sites elsewhere. The petitioners argued that, if the proposal was carried out, it would have a 'deteriorating effect upon the value of property in the neighbourhood, lower the respectability of the locality and destroy its quietness'.<sup>711</sup>

### **Conclusion**

It has been demonstrated here that, despite the claims of previous Poor Law historians, there was relatively little opposition to the implementation of the New Poor Law in Wales. For instance, unlike in some parts of England, such as the industrial north-west and London, the administrative framework of the New Poor Law was implemented almost immediately in Wales. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, as alluded to in Chapter One, by 1834, there was considerable support for a harsher, more restrictive system of poor relief in Wales. This was largely due to the fact that poor law expenditure in England and Wales had increased significantly in the final fifty years or so of the Old Poor Law. Secondly, proponents of the New Poor Law in Wales were aided by favourable press reviews of the potential benefits of the new system. The fact that the administrative framework of the New Poor Law was implemented so quickly in Wales was also due, at least in part to the efforts of the various Assistant Commissioners for Wales. Unlike in some parts of England, the Assistant Commissioners in Wales were hard-working and relatively well-respected individuals, who were able to carry out their duties with relatively little fanfare. The work of the Assistant Commissioners in Wales was also made easier by the lack of a resident gentry. Unlike in some parts of England, particularly the industrial north-west and London, there was a distinct lack of individuals in Wales around whom opposition to the New Poor Law could form.

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<sup>711</sup> Homes for Poor Law Children, *South Wales Daily News*, 24 April, 1899, p.6.

Furthermore, although the introduction of the New Poor Law did provoke an angry response, particularly amongst the labouring classes, the vast majority of the ratepayers in Wales did want to revert back to the Old Poor Law system in entirety; most simply wanted to amend a particular clause of the 1834 act that they disagreed with. Moreover, although some opposition to the New Poor Law came from the paupers themselves, the balance of power was tilted heavily in favour of those in charge of administering poor relief.

It has also been demonstrated here that the level of opposition to the workhouse system in Wales has been grossly over-exaggerated by previous poor law historians. Whilst some Unions in Wales did resist building a new workhouse for a considerable period of time, many Unions in Wales, particularly those in the more industrial regions, decided to build a workhouse relatively quickly. Of our six case studies, five (Pembroke, Abergavenny, Pwllheli, Holywell and Newtown and Llanidloes), had built a new workhouse by the end of 1840. The Swansea Union did not build a new workhouse until 1863. However, up until this point of time, the Swansea guardians simply made use of existing workhouse stock (at the Old Bathing House). Moreover, by the end of the 1870s every Union in Wales had built a new Union workhouse.



# Chapter Five: The Administration of the New Poor

## Law in Wales

### Introduction

One of the main aims of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act was to ‘professionalize’ and ‘standardize’ the poor relief system in England and Wales.<sup>712</sup> The Commissioners of the 1832-34 Report, condemned the Old Poor Law as a ‘ramshackle system of local welfare initiatives’ and called for the introduction of a more ‘effective’ and ‘efficient’ system of poor relief.<sup>713</sup> In particular, the Commissioners criticized the appointment of unpaid officials, stating that ‘neither diligence nor zeal are to be expected from persons on whom a disagreeable and unpaid office has been forced, and whose functions cease by the time that they have begun to acquire a knowledge of them’.<sup>714</sup> They also questioned the representativeness of the ratepayers’ meetings (or vestries), because they excluded large landowners who were not actually resident in the area; the Commissioners described them as ‘the most irresponsible bodies that were ever entrusted with the performance of public bodies, or the distribution of public money’.<sup>715</sup> In their Report, the Commissioners proposed several remedial measures that they believed would dramatically improve the administration of the poor relief system including uniform accounting and contracting systems, the hiring of paid officers, the creation of boards of guardians and the introduction of a central authority.<sup>716</sup>

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<sup>712</sup> Cited in Bernard Harris, *The Origins of the British Welfare State, Social welfare in England and Wales, 1800-1945*, (Basingstoke, 2004). p. 45. Harris stated that ‘although the 1832-34 Report is best known for its criticisms of the existing methods of poor relief, it also devoted a great deal of attention to questions of administration’. The Webbs had also claimed that the New Poor Law ‘arose out of the misdeeds of local administration’ that had become a feature under the Old Poor Law, in *English Poor Law History, Part II*, p.469.

<sup>713</sup> Cited in Darwen, ‘Implementing and administering the New Poor Law in the industrial north’, p.2; and in King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p.227.

<sup>714</sup> Cited in Harris, *The Origins of the British Welfare State*, p.45.

<sup>715</sup> Cited in Harris, *The Origins of the British Welfare State*, p.45.

<sup>716</sup> Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, p.67. See also Darwen, ‘Implementing and Administering the New Poor Law in the industrial north’, p.2.

Many of the earlier Poor Law historians argued that the standard of the poor relief system in England and Wales improved dramatically under the New Poor Law. For example, W. N. Molesworth stated that the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act was a 'defining moment in the formation of the age of progress'.<sup>717</sup> In a similar vein, G. M. Trevelyan described the New Poor Law as 'an important step in social reorganization'.<sup>718</sup> Trevelyan also stated that 'the national and centralized character of the New Poor Law, though too harshly used in the first generation, made it easier to carry out the alleviations and improvements on which the late public had insisted'.<sup>719</sup> Some historians, such as Ruth Hodgkinson, have even claimed that the 1834 act paved the way for the emergence of the welfare state in Britain in the years immediately following the end of the Second World War.<sup>720</sup> More recently, Darwen stated that the centralizing principle of the New Poor Law 'marked the beginning of the nineteenth century "revolution in government", which saw an increased role for the state in local affairs'.<sup>721</sup>

However, it is now generally agreed that in England there were considerable local or regional differences in the administration of the New Poor Law, as there had been under the Old Poor Law. For instance, Crowther argued that the standard of medical relief provided to paupers in workhouses in England after 1834 was 'diverse', ranging from the provision of 'full-time doctors and well qualified nurses in London workhouses' to the 'perfunctory part-time doctors and untrained nurses found in the small rural workhouses'.<sup>722</sup> Crowther also pointed out that many of the improvements that had been made in the area of medical relief did not happen immediately after 1834 and that even in the more industrial areas of

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<sup>717</sup> Cited in David Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in Nineteenth Century Britain, 1834-1914*, (Harlow, 1998), p.80.

<sup>718</sup> G. M Trevelyan, *History of England*, (London, 1926), p.641.

<sup>719</sup> Trevelyan, *History of England*, p.642. Trevelyan pointed to the increasing use of professional nurses within the poor law system as evidence of this, p.653.

<sup>720</sup> Ruth Hodgkinson, *The Origins of the National Health Service, the Medical Services of the New Poor Law, 1834-1871*, (London, the welcome historical medical library, 1967); David Englander and Bernard Harris have made the same observation in their work.

<sup>721</sup> Darwen, 'Implementing and Administering the New Poor Law in the Industrial North', p.2. Francesca Richardson has also stated that under the New Poor Law the poor relief system in England and Wales 'became more professionalized through the appointment of paid officials (including Clerks, Medical Officers and Relieving Officers)', in Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.281.

<sup>722</sup> Anne Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, p.181. Crowther also stated that 'conditions within workhouses were affected by the size of the Union, the wealth of the ratepayers, the calibre of the guardians, and the activities of local pressure groups', p.7.

England, improvements were made gradually over the course of time.<sup>723</sup> In a similar vein, King has argued that in England, the strength of the relationship between the central and local poor law authorities varied from place to place. King stated that in Lancashire and Yorkshire the relationship between the central and local authorities was 'hostile and belligerent', whereas in the rural South-East of England, the relationship was 'warmer' and the Unions 'more compliant'.<sup>724</sup> It is also now understood that in some parts of England, such as Northampton, the boards of guardians were dominated by the ex-officio guardians, whereas in other parts of England, such as Hertfordshire and Sussex, the elected guardians controlled the administration of the New Poor Law.<sup>725</sup>

In contrast, relatively little is known about the administration of the New Poor Law in Wales. For instance, of the existing Welsh studies, only Geoff Hooker has focused to any appreciable extent on the individuals that made up the boards of guardians in Wales. Hooker found that in the Llandilofawr Union, the elected guardians rather than the ex-officio members, dominated the administration of the New Poor Law.<sup>726</sup> Hooker also suggested that the relationship between the central authorities and the Llandilofawr board of guardians was extremely hostile.<sup>727</sup> It is possible that the findings from the Llandilofawr Union were replicated in other parts of Wales. However, far more studies that focus on the boards of guardians in Wales are needed in order to test this hypothesis.

In a similar vein, relatively few of the Welsh studies have considered the extent to which the standard of the poor relief system in Wales improved after 1834. Over twenty years ago Steven King and John Stewart suggested that the provision of medical relief, in some parts of Wales at least, continued to be wholly inadequate under the New Poor Law.

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<sup>723</sup> Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, pp.161-162. For instance, improvements in the provision of medical relief in the London workhouses only occurred after the passage of the 1867 Metropolitan Poor Act, which had been implemented following the workhouse scandals of the 1860s.

<sup>724</sup> King and Stewart, 'Death in Llantrisant', pp.69-70.

<sup>725</sup> See work of Brundage, 'The Landed Interest and the New Poor Law'; Rothery, 'The Power of Personality in the Operation of the New Poor Law'; and Dunkley, 'The Landed Interest and the New Poor Law: A Critical Note'. Brundage demonstrated the ex-officio guardians dominated the board meetings in Northamptonshire, whilst Rothery and Dunkley revealed that on other parts of England the elected guardians dominated the administration of the New Poor Law.

<sup>726</sup> Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', pp.2-4. Hooker stated that 'from the beginning the Union was controlled by a small group of elite squires' and that the ex-officio guardians were 'almost entirely uninvolved in Union business'.

<sup>727</sup> Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.302. Hooker pointed to fact that the poor Law Commissioners called Llandilofawr 'the most difficult Union in all of Wales'.

King and Stewart argued that the poor law medical service in the Cardiff Union for instance was in complete 'disarray' in the years immediately after 1834 and that sick paupers in the region were 'caught up in a regime of strict cost control and implicit opposition to the expansion of medical welfare'.<sup>728</sup> However, once again, far more studies that focus on the administration of the New Poor Law in other parts of Wales are needed in order to determine whether or not findings in the Cardiff Union were atypical.

This chapter focuses on the administration of the New Poor Law in each of our six sample Welsh regions. The first section looks at the relationship between the central and local Poor Law authorities in Wales. The second section looks at who dominated the boards of guardians in Wales. The final section assesses the extent to which the poor relief system improved in Wales under the New Poor Law.

### **The Relationship Between the Central and Local Poor Law Authorities in Wales under the New Poor Law.**

Although, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, the administrative framework of the New Poor Law was implemented relatively quickly in Wales, from the outset the relationship between the Welsh boards of guardians and the central poor law authorities was extremely hostile. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that, throughout the entire period under investigation here, the Welsh boards of guardians routinely ignored many of the central authorities' orders and instructions. For example, in 1846 the Poor Law Commissioners wrote a letter to the Pembroke board of guardians prohibiting the appointment of Joseph Lewis as the Master of the Union's workhouse. The Commissioners declared that Lewis was 'ineligible' for the office due to the fact that he had been found guilty of committing some sort of offence a few years previously whilst acting as one of the collectors of the Union.<sup>729</sup> The Pembroke guardians simply ignored the letter and duly appointed Lewis as the workhouse master at another meeting a few weeks later.<sup>730</sup> Further evidence that the relationship between the central and local Poor Law authorities in Wales was less than cordial can be seen a letter sent by an irate ratepayer from the Pwllheli Union

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<sup>728</sup> King and Stewart, 'Death in Llantrisant', pp.82-83

<sup>729</sup> Pembroke Union, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 12 June 1846, p.3.

<sup>730</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, Election of Master and Matron, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 21 August, 1846, p.3

to the editor of the *North Wales Chronicle* in 1863. Writing under the pseudonym 'Unionist', the ratepayer questioned why the Pwllheli board of guardians were 'always getting into scrapes with the Poor Law Board'.<sup>731</sup> The Unionist also stated that 'the majority of the Pwllheli guardians choose to incur the snubbing of their superiors' even when doing so proved to be detrimental to the paupers themselves.<sup>732</sup>

Several of the Assistant Commissioners themselves complained that their orders and instructions were often ignored by the boards of guardians in Wales. For instance, in 1846, Colonel Wade lamented that in Wales the 1844 Outdoor Relief Prohibitory Order was 'hardly worth the paper it is printed on' because it was systematically evaded with the connivance of the guardians.<sup>733</sup> Wade's predecessor, William Day, had also complained that in Wales, able-bodied men continued to receive outdoor relief after 1834 by means of a medical certificate which had been issued because 'his son had a withlow on his finger, or his daughter a hangnail'.<sup>734</sup> In a similar vein, in his evidence to a Royal Commission on the operation of the poor laws in England and Wales in 1906, Mr Bircham, who had been the Poor Law Inspector for Wales since 1892, lamented that 'there are hanging up in the Cardiff board of guardians room, a list of rules that I drew up with the guardians thirty years ago' and that 'you might as well print a page of the proverbs and put them there as the guardians always find plenty of exceptions to them'.<sup>735</sup> Other historians have also noted that the relationship between the Welsh boards of guardians and the central authorities was somewhat volatile. For example, Eirug Davis stated that relations between the central and local poor law authorities in Cardiganshire were 'often strained'.<sup>736</sup>

The guardians in Wales also regularly ignored requests from the central authorities to furnish them with information regarding the administration of the New Poor Law in their Union. Evidence of this can be seen in a letter sent by the Poor Law Board to the Swansea board of guardians on 5 June, 1865. Here, the Secretary of the Poor Law Board stated that he had been directed to draw the attention of the guardians to a letter that the Board had

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<sup>731</sup> Pwllheli Union, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 31 January, 1863, p.3

<sup>732</sup> Pwllheli Union, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 31 January, 1863, p.3

<sup>733</sup> Cited in Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law', p.159.

<sup>734</sup> Cited in Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law', p.159.

<sup>735</sup> Cited in Lewis, *Swansea and the Workhouse*, p.11.

<sup>736</sup> For example, see work of Eirug Davies, 'The New Poor Law in a Rural Area', p.258-259.

sent to them on 28 October 1864 regarding the accommodation of the Swansea workhouse. The Board lamented that although they had since written two more letters (on 26 January and 2 June, 1865) asking for the guardians to provide them with this information, 'no notice appears to have been taken of their letters'.<sup>737</sup> The Poor Law Board requested that the guardians 'at once furnish them with an affirmation on the delay which has occurred in replying to the three letters, and also with the information first applied for in their letter of October last year'.<sup>738</sup> In a similar vein, in 1888, the Pembroke board of guardians received a letter from the Local Government Board with reference to a report made by the District Auditor, respecting certain bills presented by Mr John at the last audit of the accounts and asking what observations the board had to make on the matter; the central authorities suspected that some impropriety had taken place. However, it was reported that the subject was not even discussed' by the guardians.<sup>739</sup> Steven King and John Stewart have also noted that requests for information were often ignored by the guardians in Wales.<sup>740</sup>

On occasion, the Welsh boards of guardians used covert methods to ignore the orders and instructions from the central authorities. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1855. Here the Poor Law Inspector, Mr Doyle, who was in attendance, called for the dismissal of Mr Jones, one of the Relieving Officers of the Union. It transpired that Jones had stolen funds belonging to the Union in order to pay off some of his own personal debts. Under questioning from the Poor Law Inspector, Mr Jones admitted that he had 'sometimes paid paupers 2s 6d per week, when they should have received 3s 6d a week', pocketing the difference himself. Despite this admission of guilt, several of the Pwllheli guardians attempted to exonerate Jones and recommended that he should be allowed to continue on as Relieving Officer. For instance, Mr Pugh argued that, prior to his appointment as Relieving Officer to the Pwllheli guardians, Jones had been a 'respectable farmer' and that he had simply gotten into monetary 'difficulties' since his appointment. Pugh then produced a list of debts which Mr Jones had paid in the county court out of the Union funds, with the intention of replacing them at a future period out of

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<sup>737</sup> WGA, U/S 5/2 Swansea Union Poor Law Letter Books, 1864-69, 11 September, 1865 [here 5 June, 1865]

<sup>738</sup> WGA, U/S 5/2 Swansea Union Poor Law Letter Books, 1864-69, 11 September, 1865 [here 5 June, 1865]

<sup>739</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, *The Tenby Observer Weekly List of Visitors and Directory*, 15 March, 1888, p.6.

<sup>740</sup> King and Stewart, 'Death in Llantrisant'.

his salary. In response Mr Doyle, simply stated that the Poor Law Board would 'unquestionably issue an order for Mr Jones' dismissal as soon as it could be printed, which would render him ineligible to serve at any future period in any office under their authority'.<sup>741</sup> He again implored the guardians to dismiss Jones from his post immediately, adding that the guardians 'must see how unfit he was to be trusted again' with the finances of the Union. Another guardian, the Reverend T. Owen retorted that 'we have had a little more experience than you Mr Doyle at this Board and can better imagine what strange things may be done'. Mr Pugh then handed a note to the Chairman which he read aloud: 'I hereby beg leave to resign as Relieving Officer with immediate effect, signed Mr Griffith Jones'. Mr Doyle advised the guardians not to accept his resignation as this would allow them to re-appoint Mr Jones at a later date, whereas his dismissal would bar him from running for public office in the future. In response to this, Mr Pugh proposed that the remainder of the conversation should be conducted in Welsh so that the Poor Law Inspector would not be able to interfere in the decision. Pugh then proceeded to address the guardians in Welsh. He proposed that the resignation be accepted in the hope that the guardians would re-elect Jones at a later date. Pugh also stated that 'we need not fear government employees or any of the black-coated gentry'.<sup>742</sup> In the end the guardians decided not to accept Jones' resignation. However, the incident reveals the covert tactics that the guardians in Wales often resorted to in their dealings with the central authority.

Several of the assistant commissioners themselves complained that the guardians in Wales often used the Welsh language in order to undermine their authority. For instance, in 1844, William Day lamented that the board of guardians meetings in Wales were often conducted 'in an unknown tongue'.<sup>743</sup> Likewise, in 1906, when asked whether or not he felt his inability to speak Welsh was a hindrance in his work, Inspector Bircham stated 'I certainly do' and that although he knew a little Welsh 'if they (the Welsh boards of guardians) do not want me to understand it, it is like a person using a foreign language

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<sup>741</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 27 October, 1855, p.4.

<sup>742</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 27 October, 1855, p.4.

<sup>743</sup> Cited in Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p283.

before you'.<sup>744</sup> The findings here suggest that the Welsh boards of guardians were particularly subversive in their dealings with the central authorities.

The relationship between the central and local Poor Law authorities in Wales did improve over time. For instance, from 1873 annual Poor Law conferences were held in Wales; typically, these were split over two locations with one being held in South Wales and one being held in the North of the country. These conferences were attended by delegates from each of the Unions in their respective regions. The Assistant Commissioners for Wales also attended these meetings, often overseeing the proceedings and explaining any new policy procedures. The purpose of these conferences was twofold. Firstly, they were an attempt by the central authorities to increase their authority over the administration of the New Poor Law. Here, resolutions were passed that the delegates would then take back to their individual Unions. The conferences also provided an opportunity for neighboring Unions to see what was working well (and not so well) in other Unions. It was hoped that this would encourage the standardization of poor relief practices. At these conferences, the Assistant Commissioners did have some success in convincing Welsh boards of guardians to alter some of their existing relief practices, pulling them more in line with the orders and instructions from the central authorities. For example, at the inaugural annual poor law conference for South Wales in 1873, the Poor Law Inspector for Wales, Mr Doyle, attempted to persuade the guardians to make more use of the workhouse test and correspondingly to grant less outdoor relief in their Unions. Doyle produced statistics to show that in many Unions in England, when the workhouse test was applied more often, the overall number of paupers decreased significantly, thus saving the ratepayers substantial amounts of money.<sup>745</sup> Mr Roch, the representative from the Pembroke board of guardians stated that he was 'inspired by the recommendations of Mr Doyle' and that he felt that further implementation of the workhouse test in his Union would be 'very beneficial'.<sup>746</sup> He also

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<sup>744</sup> Cited in Lewis, *Swansea and the Workhouse*, p.11.

<sup>745</sup> Conference of Guardians at Swansea, *The Welshman*, 18 April, 1873, p.2; Croll also identified Doyle's report 'A statistical statement of the pauperism and expenditure of the several Unions in Wales and Monmouth' as being a 'key moment' in the crusade against outdoor relief in Wales, Croll, 'Reconciled Gradually to the System of Indoor Relief', p.130.

<sup>746</sup> Conference of Guardians at Swansea, *The Welshman*, 18 April, 1873, p.2



promised that his board would be 'willing to give it a fair trial'.<sup>747</sup> At this the delegates cheered 'Hear Hear'.

By the end of the nineteenth century, several of the Assistant Commissioners for Wales were being praised for their work. For example, in 1888, in their obituary of Inspector Doyle, the *South Wales Daily News* wrote that 'by his tact, zeal and perseverance exceptional difficulties were surmounted' and that through his efforts 'Unions throughout the Principality were reconciled gradually to the system of indoor relief'.<sup>748</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Pwllheli guardians in 1878, Mr Murray-Browne called the attention of the board to the subject of outdoor relief and explained that his reason for doing so was that since his last visit a memorandum had been published by the Local Government Board on the subject. He then informed the guardians that he had arranged for a Welsh-language edition of this to be published and circulated to all of the Union in Wales. This news was greeted with warm 'applause from the guardians'.<sup>749</sup> Further evidence that the relationship between the central and local authorities had improved can be seen at another meeting of the Pwllheli guardians in 1892. Here, when it was announced that Mr Murray-Browne had been appointed to another district, the chairman stated that they (the guardians) would 'no doubt feel his loss' and that 'he had always been a help to the guardians'.<sup>750</sup> In 1890 the Pwllheli guardians even voted against a resolution to get rid of the intervention of the Local Government Board in the proceedings of the guardians.<sup>751</sup>

From the 1870s the Welsh boards of guardians, particularly those in the more industrialized areas, also began to ask the central authorities for advice on matters of relief, particularly in regard to the relief provided to able-bodied men during periods of economic downturn. For example, on 19 July 1879 the Abergavenny guardians met to discuss how to relieve able-bodied men that had become destitute on account of the local ironworks at Blaenavon being stopped due to financial problems. One of the guardians, the Reverend W.

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<sup>747</sup> Conference of Guardians at Swansea, *The Welshman*, 18 April, 1873, p.2

<sup>748</sup> Croll, 'Reconciled Gradually to the System of Indoor Relief', pp.129-130.

<sup>749</sup> Outdoor Relief in the Pwllheli Union, *The Carnarvon News and Merionethshire Standard*, 21 June, 1878, p.3

<sup>750</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 13 May, 1892, p.6.

<sup>751</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 10 January, 1890, p.6.

Rees stated that the local board (who were in charge of public works) had intended on making a new road from Blaenavon to Brynmawr and that 'the guardians might employ pauper labor upon that'.<sup>752</sup> However, another guardian, Mr Scanlan, argued that this could not legally be done as 'the relief which would be given would be a common charge upon the Union and the guardians could not expend money in any works which would not be in some extent at least remunerative and of some benefit to the whole Union rather than just a certain locality'.<sup>753</sup> Scanlan suggested that the guardians could buy limestone, break it by pauper labor, and sell it to the local board at a cheap rate. A representative from the local board also informed the guardians that they did not have the funds to build a new road in any case. The guardians then discussed where they could get plenty of limestone within easy distance of Blaenavon and likelihood of a market being found for the produce. One guardian pointed out that there were no quarries where stone could be obtained very near to Blaenavon and that even if there were, there was no market for them. Ultimately, the guardians resolved that Mr Scanlan should 'lay the case and difficulties which presented themselves before the Local Government Board at once, pressing for an immediate reply, upon which they would advise the guardians what to do under the circumstances'.<sup>754</sup>

Other historians have also argued that the relationship between the central and Poor Law authorities in Wales improved over time. For instance, Dot Jones stated that between 1870 and 1876 both F.D. Longe and Andrew Doyle had some success in altering poor relief policies in the Aberystwyth Union.<sup>755</sup> Jones argued that this was in stark contrast to the previous Inspector for the region, Mr Graves, who she claimed, 'appears to have done nothing to correct an increasingly lax system of poor relief in the Union'.<sup>756</sup>

However, although the Assistant Commissioners had had some success in convincing the boards of guardians in Wales to adopt some of their policies at the annual Poor Law Conferences, not all of the points raised at these meetings were taken on board. For

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<sup>752</sup> Probable Stoppage of Blaenavon Works, Pauper Relief of Men, *South Wales Daily News*, 19 July, 1879, p.4.

<sup>753</sup> Probable Stoppage of Blaenavon Works, Pauper Relief of Men, *South Wales Daily News*, 19 July, 1879, p.4.

<sup>754</sup> Probable Stoppage of Blaenavon Works, Pauper Relief of Men, *South Wales Daily News*, 19 July, 1879, p.4.

<sup>755</sup> Dot Jones, 'Pauperism in the Aberystwyth Poor Law Union', p.88, Jones stated that both Longe and Doyle 'enthusiastically transmitted the new and strong directive from the central authority to clear the outrelief lists by offering the workhouse'.

<sup>756</sup> Dot Jones, 'Pauperism in the Aberystwyth Poor Law Union', p.88.

example, at the annual Poor Law Conference for South Wales in 1892, Mr C.S. Lock, the secretary of the London Charity Organization Society, delivered a paper recommending the discontinuance of outdoor relief 'in every shape or form'.<sup>757</sup> Lock argued that the very existence of outdoor relief 'destroyed self-dependence and increased pauperism'.<sup>758</sup> However, it was reported that whilst all of the members agreed with Mr Lock 'in theory', 'the vast majority of the delegates felt that it would be very difficult to adopt his recommendation, and that of the Poor Law Commissioners (who also called for the reduction or abolition of outdoor relief) in its entirety'.<sup>759</sup> Likewise, some of the resolutions that were passed at these conferences were later rejected by the individual boards of guardians. For instance, at a meeting of the Pwllheli guardians in 1892, the Chairman stated that at the recent Poor Law Conference for North Wales, which he himself had attended, a resolution had been passed prohibiting outdoor relief to non-resident paupers. The Chairman informed the guardians that the Conway board had acted upon this advice. He proposed that the Pwllheli guardians should also abolish outdoor relief to non-resident paupers. However, the resolution which he had proposed to that effect was defeated by a large majority.<sup>760</sup>

Furthermore, although some of the Assistant Commissioners for Wales, such as Andrew Doyle and Murray-Browne, were held in high esteem by the guardians in Wales, others, such as their successor Mr Bircham, continued to receive a hostile reception. For example, during a meeting of the Swansea guardians in 1897, the Reverend John Davies stated that he resented the 'interference' of Mr Bircham, the Local Government Board Inspector.<sup>761</sup> Davies claimed that Mr Bircham had bad-mouthed the Swansea guardians to other boards in Wales, including those at Aberystwyth and Cardiganshire, simply because they (the Swansea guardians) 'did not agree with him'.<sup>762</sup> Davies added that he (Mr Bircham) 'had nothing to do with them' and that 'they were responsible to the government,

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<sup>757</sup> Poor Law Conference, *The Aberystwyth Observer*, 2 June, 1892, p.8.

<sup>758</sup> Poor Law Conference, *The Aberystwyth Observer*, 2 June, 1892, p.8.

<sup>759</sup> Poor Law Conference, *The Aberystwyth Observer*, 2 June, 1892, p.8.

<sup>760</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 1 January, 1892, p.6.

<sup>761</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, Lively Attack on Mr Bircham, *South Wales Daily News*, 17 September, 1897, p.5.

<sup>762</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, Lively Attack on Mr Bircham, *South Wales Daily News*, 17 September, 1897, p.5. Davies also stated that all he (Mr Bircham) did was 'gas, gas, gas' about the Swansea guardians.

and to the country and not to him'.<sup>763</sup> Likewise, in the same year (1897), the Holywell board of guardians received a letter from the Local Government Board stating that they had received a report from Mr Bircham on the state of the Holywell workhouse. In his report Mr Bircham suggested 'the provision of baths for each ward, provided with hot and cold water, better sanitary conveniences, the brightening and better furnishing of the Day Rooms for boys and girls, and the establishment of a cottage home for the children'.<sup>764</sup> In response, one of the guardians, Mr Evans, stated that he considered this to be 'the biggest insult the board had ever had' and that 'it is a piece of impudence from beginning to end'.<sup>765</sup> At this the rest of the guardians burst into laughter. The subject was then dropped.<sup>766</sup>

Moreover, although, from time to time, the guardians in Wales actively sought out advice from the central authorities and their agents, they did not always take this advice on board. For instance, in the case of Peter Logan, which was discussed by the Swansea board of guardians in 1891, referred to above, the Poor Law Inspector, Mr Bircham advised that 'acting upon principle, they (the guardians) should always endeavor to give able bodied paupers hard work to do, and not make the workhouse too pleasant for them'.<sup>767</sup> Bircham also argued that they should not 'put a plumber to do plumbing but should to break stones' as they would not like this and 'would probably leave'.<sup>768</sup> He also stated that the guardians should 'take the doctor's advice as to the health and ability of the man to do the work'.<sup>769</sup> However, after some consultation the guardians simply agreed to leave the matter in the hands of the workhouse master.<sup>770</sup> Further evidence that the Welsh boards of guardians did not always act on the advice of the assistant commissioners can be seen during a meeting of the Pembroke board of guardians in 1889. Here, Mr Bircham informed the guardians that the number of outdoor paupers in the Union had risen slightly compared with the same period last year. Bircham stated that he took this as evidence that the administration was

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<sup>763</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, Lively Attack on Mr Bircham, *South Wales Daily News*, 17 September, 1897, p.5.

<sup>764</sup> Holywell, *The Rhyl Journal*, May 8, 1897, p.5.

<sup>765</sup> Holywell, *The Rhyl Journal*, May 8, 1897, p.5

<sup>766</sup> Holywell, *The Rhyl Journal*, May 8, 1897, p.5

<sup>767</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian*, 20 November, 1891, p.6.

<sup>768</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian*, 20 November, 1891, p.6.

<sup>769</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian*, 20 November, 1891, p.6.

<sup>770</sup> Swansea board of Guardians, *The Cambrian*, 20 November, 1891, p.6.

‘getting a little slack’.<sup>771</sup> It was reported that at this comment, the guardians ‘smiled and exchanged significant glances’.<sup>772</sup> The findings here suggest that the guardians in Wales continued to ignore many of the Orders and instructions from the central authorities throughout the period under investigation here.

There were several reasons why the Welsh boards of guardians were able to circumvent the power of the central authorities. Firstly, the number of Assistant Commissioners operating in England and Wales was reduced from 21 in 1836 to just 9 in 1841; from this date a single Assistant Commissioner covered the whole of Wales.<sup>773</sup> This decision proved to be fatal for the central authorities in their attempts to assert their control over the administrative process in Wales. As other historians such as Anthony Brundage have pointed out, the reduction in the number of Assistant Commissioners made ‘meaningful inspections impossible’.<sup>774</sup> This point was acknowledged by many contemporaries. For instance, following an inspection of the Newtown and Llanidloes workhouse in 1864, the renowned social explorer, Joseph Rowntree, wrote a letter to the editor of the *North Wales Chronicle* arguing that ‘the visits of the Poor Law Board Inspectors ought to be much more frequent’ and that ‘more time should be devoted to the scrutiny of every department’.<sup>775</sup> Rowntree also lamented that in some of the more populous Unions in Wales, ‘more than twelve months have elapsed without a visit from the Inspector’.<sup>776</sup> The lack of regular and frequent inspections from the assistant commissioners meant that for large stretches of time, the guardians in Wales, as elsewhere, were, by and large, left to their own devices.

It could also be argued that, throughout the period under investigation here, the central authorities were simply not strong enough when dealing with recalcitrant boards,

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<sup>771</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, *The Welshman*, 16 August, 1889, p.6.

<sup>772</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, *The Welshman*, 16 August, 1889, p.6.

<sup>773</sup> Cited in Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, p.88. See also R.A. Lewis, ‘William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners’, p.163.

<sup>774</sup> Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, p.88. See also R.A. Lewis. ‘William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners’, Lewis stated that the drop in the number of Assistant Commissioners meant that the supervision and control of the central authority was ‘spread perilously thin’, p.183.

<sup>775</sup> The Poor and the Poor Laws, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 17 December, 1864, p.10.

<sup>776</sup> The Poor and the Poor Laws, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 17 December, 1864, p.10.

such as those found in Wales. Evidence of this can be seen in the Pembroke Union in 1846. Following the row between the Pembroke guardians and the Poor Law Commissioners over the appointment of Mr and Mrs Lewis as Master and Matron of the workhouse, referred to above, the central authorities were eventually forced to reach a compromise with the guardians. The guardians informed the Commissioners that they would be willing to accept the resignation of Mr and Mrs Lewis if they (the Poor Law Commissioners) would allow the guardians to reduce the combined salary of these posts from £80 to £60 per annum. The Commissioners begrudgingly accepted these terms and sanctioned the reduction in the salary of the Master and Matron. In response to this news, the Reverend Cockburn maintained that the Commissioners had only agreed to the reduction because 'we showed our teeth at the last meeting'.<sup>777</sup>

The fact that the central authorities were often not strict enough in dealing with recalcitrant boards was partly due to the fact that they were only ever supplied with limited powers. For instance, as noted above, the central authorities did not have the power to compel boards of guardians to build a new Union workhouse, or even to extend existing structures; this had to be agreed to by a majority of the guardians themselves.<sup>778</sup> This lack of power was often acknowledged by the central authorities themselves. For example, at a meeting of the Pwllheli guardians in 1888, Mr Lloyd Murray-Browne, the Poor Law Inspector for Wales referred the guardians to a resolution passed at a poor law conference in Denbigh, which was in favor of a contribution from the funds of the Government towards the cost of indoor pauperism. Fear was expressed by many of the Pwllheli guardians that such a contribution would lead to an enormous change of policy and would 'be the means of sweeping hundreds in every Union into the workhouse'. However, Mr Murray-Browne stated that he believed such ideas to be 'chimerical', and maintained that 'at most, the Government could only fill the existing workhouses' i.e. they could not force the guardians to extend or to build new ones.<sup>779</sup> The central authorities were also prohibited from interfering in individual cases of relief. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Pwllheli guardians in 1874. Here, the clerk read a copy of a letter which had been sent to the

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<sup>777</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 24 July, 1846, p.3.

<sup>778</sup> Cited in Brundage, *The English poor laws*, p.76.

<sup>779</sup> Pwllheli, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 1 June, 1888, p.5.

Local Government Board by a pauper, Ellen Williams, who was residing in the Union. Ellen informed the central authorities that she was an elderly widow (60 years of age) without any children to support her and was receiving just 1s a week from the Union. She also claimed that she had applied to the guardians on several occasions for an increase in her weekly as she 'could not possibly live off of 1s a week' but that her applications had been ignored by the guardians.<sup>780</sup> Ellen asked the central authorities if they would be able to intervene and force the guardians to increase her relief as she was 'dying from hunger'.<sup>781</sup> However, it was reported that the Local Government Board wrote to Ellen to say that they would not be able to interfere in the case as 'it rests entirely with the guardians to determine the relief which should be afforded in any case' and that the Board had 'no power to interfere'.<sup>782</sup>

Moreover, as other historians such as Karel Williams have noted, many of the Orders from the central authorities contained loopholes which allowed the boards of guardians to deviate from their rules and regulations. For example, Williams stated that although the 1844 Prohibitory Order prohibited outdoor relief to 'able-bodied persons', under clause five of the Order, 'able-bodied widows with dependent children were specifically exempted from the restrictions'.<sup>783</sup> Williams also pointed out that the individual boards of guardians could legally dispense relief to paupers in contravention of the 1844 and 1852 Relief Orders, 'as long as they reported such cases to the central authority for approval'.<sup>784</sup> The guardians in Wales frequently took advantage of these loopholes in order to circumvent these Orders. For example, in 1898 the Swansea guardians received a letter from the Local Government Board approving of 'the departure from the regulations relating to the administration of outdoor relief' in the case of five able-bodied men.<sup>785</sup>

This is not to suggest that the central authorities did not possess any powers whatsoever, or that they never attempted to impose their authority over the guardians. For

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<sup>780</sup> Pwllheli Union, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 31 July, 1874, p.10.

<sup>781</sup> Pwllheli Union, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 31 July, 1874, p.10.

<sup>782</sup> Pwllheli Union, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 31 July, 1874, p.10.

<sup>783</sup> Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty*, p.65. Williams also pointed out that under clause two of the 1852 Outdoor Relief Regulation Order, the restrictions on outdoor relief were suspended for sick paupers (including able-bodied men).

<sup>784</sup> Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty*, p.68.

<sup>785</sup> WGA, Swansea board of guardian minute book, February-October 1898, U/S 1/29.

instance, on occasion, the central authorities threatened the more recalcitrant boards with remedial actions. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Pwllheli guardians in 1864. Here, the clerk read a letter from the Poor Law Board informing the guardians that they had received a report from their Poor Law Inspector, Mr Doyle, criticizing the management of the workhouse. In the report Doyle stated that, 'in his opinion, the defects are such as would effectually be controlled if the visiting committee regularly inspected the workhouse as required by Article 148 of the Consolidated Order'.<sup>786</sup> Doyle lamented that, as far as he could ascertain, the visiting committee had not visited the establishment since his last visit over six months ago (in November, 1863). The Poor Law Board informed the guardians that under the statute 10 and 11 vic cap 109, section 24, they would be forced to appoint a visitor 'at a salary to be paid out of the Common Fund of the Union', unless they received an assurance from the guardians that the duties of the visiting committee will be duly performed'.<sup>787</sup> The guardians instructed their clerk to write to the Poor Law Board assuring them that the visiting committee would perform their duties in the future in accordance with the regulations of the Consolidated Order.

However, these threats often went unheeded in Wales. For example, at a meeting of the Pwllheli guardians in 1869, the clerk read a letter from the Poor Law Board informing them that they had received a report from Inspector Doyle calling their attention to the unsatisfactory conditions at the workhouse, particularly in regard to the accommodation of the sick. Doyle informed the board that in July of the previous year (1868) the visiting committee of the Union had acquiesced to a suggestion made by him for providing better accommodation for the sick, but that 'nothing had been done to that object'.<sup>788</sup> The Secretary of the Poor Law Board, H. Fleming, informed the guardians that 'unless a remedy is without further delay provided, they will be constrained to have recourse to the compulsory powers which the legislature has conferred upon them'.<sup>789</sup> In response to this threat, one of the guardians, Mr E. Evans, stated that he had attended the board of guardian meetings for 25 years and that it was 'always the custom of the Poor Law Board to use a

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<sup>786</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 7 May, 1864, p.5.

<sup>787</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 7 May, 1864, p.5.

<sup>788</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 17 April, 1869, p.4.

<sup>789</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 17 April, 1869, p.4.



threat unless everything they required was complied with', but that he 'never saw them take any other proceedings'.<sup>790</sup> In the end, the guardians simply agreed to refer the matter back to the visiting committee. Likewise, in the Holywell Union in 1894 an argument arose amongst the guardians over the granting of relief-in-kind to paupers, which they had been using as a temporary form of relief. One of the guardians, the Reverend Watkin Williams argued that 'if any government official looked over their relief books and saw the grants made for relief-in-kind it would not be allowed'.<sup>791</sup> However, another guardian, Mr Hughes stated that they 'need not be afraid of any government official' and that 'we are not afraid of any inquiry into our expenditure'.<sup>792</sup>

It was also common in Wales for boards of guardians to agree, often under some duress, to follow the orders and instructions from the central authorities, only to fall back on them at a later date. For example, at a meeting of the Pwllheli guardians in 1886, the wife of a pauper by the name of John Evans applied to the board for a continuation of 2s 6d per week. It transpired that at the previous meeting, the pauper had had her relief withheld on the suggestion of the Poor Law Inspector, Mr Marray-Browne, who had been in attendance. However, in the absence of the Inspector, the guardians agreed to reverse the decision and granted the pauper her usual allowance.<sup>793</sup> Other historians have also argued that the guardians in Wales regularly reversed decisions that had been forced upon them by the central authorities. For instance, Megan Evans and Peter Jones stated that 'the pattern of apparent, if partial, compliance, followed by retraction and recalcitrance was repeated in Unions throughout Wales'.<sup>794</sup> The findings here also suggest that in Wales, the balance of power rested firmly with the boards of guardians, rather than with the central agencies.

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<sup>790</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 17 April, 1869, p.4.

<sup>791</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *The Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint, Denbigh*, 23 August, 1894, p.8.

<sup>792</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *The Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint, Denbigh*, 23 August, 1894, p.8.

<sup>793</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The North Wales Express* 24 September, 1886, p.7.

<sup>794</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn, Intractable Body', p.105.

## The Boards of Guardians in Wales under the New Poor Law

The boards of guardians in England and Wales were made-up from both elected and unelected members, with local magistrates allowed to sit on the boards as ex-officio guardians. The Commissioners of the 1832-34 Report envisaged that the ex-officio guardians, on account of their superior social standings, and experience in local administration, would inevitably dominate the board of guardians' meetings and effectively preside over the administration of poor relief.<sup>795</sup> In their third annual report in 1837 the Poor Law Commissioners also stated that the influence of the ex-officio guardians would help to 'raise the character of the Welsh farmers...by accustoming them to the transaction of business, and by habituating them to act openly and in public, under circumstances in which conduct is scrutinized and character formed'.<sup>796</sup>

However, throughout the entire period under investigation here, the elected rather than the ex-officio guardians dominated the administration of the New Poor Law in Wales. Evidence of this can be seen in the Pembroke Union in 1846. Here, a meeting of the guardians had been called for the purpose of electing a surgeon for the Tenby District. It was noted in the newspaper report of the meeting that although several of the ex-officio guardians had turned up to cast their votes, their attendance at the board was 'more remote than an angel's visit'.<sup>797</sup> In a similar vein, at a meeting of the Swansea guardians in 1878 it was noted that 'as a rule' the ex-officio guardians were 'conspicuous by their absence' and that they only ever turned up 'when the appointment of an office, or the dispensing of some little patronage, gives extra importance to the meeting'.<sup>798</sup>

Further evidence that the elected rather than the ex-officio guardians dominated the administration of the New Poor Law in Wales can be seen in the fact that they (the elected guardians) often significantly outnumbered the ex-officio guardians at the board meetings.

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<sup>795</sup> Cited in Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.161-2

<sup>796</sup> Cited in Pauperism in Wales, *The Cambrian*, 4 November, 1837, p.4

<sup>797</sup> Pembroke Union, *The Welshman*, 1846, p.4.

<sup>798</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, *South Wales Daily News*, 22 April, 1878, p.2. Likewise, at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes Union in 1888, it was even reported that the attendance of the ex-officio guardians was so 'irregular' that the elected guardians refused to pass a motion thanking them for their services at the board meetings.<sup>798</sup> It was also claimed that several of the ex-officio guardians of the Union failed to attend a single meeting throughout the entire year, with the exception of the annual meeting, where paid positions were handed out, cited in *Rhyl Recorder and Advertiser*, 5 May, 1888, p.2.

For example, at a meeting of the Pwllheli guardians in 1854 it was reported that there were 28 elected guardians in attendance, compared to just 6 ex-officio members.<sup>799</sup> Several of the Assistant Commissioners themselves acknowledged the lack of involvement from the ex-officio guardians in Wales. For instance, in 1837, William Head wrote a letter to the Poor Law Commission informing them that in Cardiganshire the gentry 'exerted very little influence or control' over the administration of the New Poor Law.<sup>800</sup> Likewise, in 1868, Assistant Commissioner Graves stated that in Wales 'the discontinuous and spasmodic apportionments and interferences of ex-officios, who shirk the work which is useful or dull, and pick out the subjects which are pleasingly exciting, are often unwelcome to the elected guardians, especially when they, the regular toilers, are swamped by a set of aristocratic interlopers'.<sup>801</sup> Other historians have also demonstrated that the elected rather than ex-officio guardians dominated the administration of the New Poor Law Wales. For example, Dot Jones stated that in the Aberystwyth Union the ex-officio guardians were 'practically ignored' and that they only turned up to the board meetings when 'an appointment or a motion of personal interest was on the agenda'.<sup>802</sup>

There were several reasons why the elected rather than the ex-officio guardians dominated the board meetings in Wales. Firstly, as alluded to above, by 1834, the pool of resident gentry in Wales relatively small. For instance, a parliamentary report from 1872 revealed that 60% of the land in Wales was owned by just 571 individuals or families.<sup>803</sup> Moreover, as other historians have pointed out, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, many of the more prominent landowners in Wales resided outside of the country.<sup>804</sup> This

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<sup>799</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 11 February, 1854, p.4. In a similar vein, at a meeting of the Swansea guardians in 1894, it was reported that just 5 ex-officio guardians were in attendance compared to 17 elected guardians, cited in Swansea Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian*, 27 April, 1894, p.6

<sup>800</sup> Cited in Eirug Davies, 'The New Poor Law in a Rural Area', p.258.

<sup>801</sup> Cited in Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.175.

<sup>802</sup> Dot Jones, 'Pauperism in the Aberystwyth Poor Law Union, p.88. In a similar vein, Marian Williams has argued that in the Cardiff union, the ex-officio guardians were 'largely inactive', in Marian Williams, 'Some Aspects of the History of Poor Law provision in Cardiff', p.119.

<sup>803</sup> Philip Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales, 1536-1990*, (London, 1992), p.278. Jenkins produced figures to show that of the 571 individuals or families, 31 were listed as 'peers', 148 as 'great landowners' and 392 as 'squires'.

<sup>804</sup> Moore-Colyer, 'Landowners, Farmers and Language in the Nineteenth Century', p.121. Colyer stated that 'as was the case in the rest of Britain, many nineteenth century Welsh landowners were, for a variety of reasons, either wholly or partially absent from their estates'.

meant that the number of individuals who were qualified to sit as ex-officio guardians in Wales was often relatively small. Evidence of this can be seen in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca disturbances. Here, one witness, Thomas Jones, the clerk of the Carmarthen Union indicated that there were only twelve ex-officio guardians residing within the Union, compared to 33 elected guardians.<sup>805</sup> Jones also stated that the ex-officio guardians 'very seldom' attended the board of guardians' meetings and that 'we very often have 3 or 4 boards without seeing one ex-officio guardian'.<sup>806</sup> In 1837, Lord Dynevor, a prominent landowner and peer from Carmarthen, also complained to the Home Secretary of 'the great difficulty of providing active magistrates' in Wales.<sup>807</sup>

Some of the ex-officio guardians in Wales also became quickly disenchanted with being outnumbered and outvoted by the elected guardians. This also contributed to their low attendance at the board meetings. In 1878 an angry ratepayer wrote a letter to the editor of *The Cambrian and Merionethshire Standard* lamenting that 'because the more ignorant portion of the community support the tap-room candidate, the sober inhabitant [meaning the ex-officio guardian] declines to take further part in the management of the town's affairs' and that as a result, 'a proposal to reform the administration of relief is defeated by a large majority'.<sup>808</sup> The ratepayer went on to say that 'the ex-officio guardian, therefore, at once leaves his less cultivated neighbors to at liberty to demoralize a fifth part of the country'.<sup>809</sup>

Moreover, by 1834 many of the more prominent landlords that were resident in Wales had begun to turn their attentions away from the administration of poor relief. For instance, Hooker argued that in the Llandilofawr Union the 'gentry types' were far more interested in political activities that had 'county or national dimensions', such as becoming an MP.<sup>810</sup> Hooker stated that for many of the more prominent landowners in England and

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<sup>805</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.231

<sup>806</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.231

<sup>807</sup> Cited in Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.162.

<sup>808</sup> The Public Life of Small Towns, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 1 February, 1878, p.4.

<sup>809</sup> The Public Life of Small Towns, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 1 February, 1878, p.4.

<sup>810</sup> Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', pp.168-9

Wales, poor law matters had come to be regarded as a 'low status activity'.<sup>811</sup> Evidence of this can be seen in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots. Here, one of the witnesses, Thomas Jones, the clerk to the Carmarthen Union argued that the more respectable members of the community, such as the larger landowners, did not want to sit on the boards 'because they are bothered by the poor'.<sup>812</sup> In a similar vein, in an article published in *The Cambrian News* in 1878, it was lamented that the 'high-minded' magistrates in Wales often neglected their duties as ex-officio guardians because 'it would bring them into contact with that which is unpleasant'.<sup>813</sup>

This is not to say that the ex-officio guardians were entirely absent from the board meetings or that they had no influence whatsoever over the administration of the New Poor Law in Wales. For instance, although they were often outnumbered by the elected guardians, some of the ex-officio members, albeit a relatively small number, regularly attended and participated at the board meetings. For example, in the obituary of Mr Ll. J. Henry in 1895 it was noted that Henry, a prominent landowner from Holywell, had been appointed as a JP in 1888 and that he had been 'a frequent attendant as an ex-officio guardian at the Holywell Union'.<sup>814</sup> Likewise, it was reported in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union in 1888, that although the vast majority of the ex-officio guardians were usually absent from the board meetings, 'there were a few honorable exceptions' and that 'the most regular attendants of the ex-officios (sic) are amongst the most useful members of the

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<sup>811</sup> Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', pp.168-9. Kenneth Morgan has made similar claims in his work, K.O. Morgan, *Wales in British politics*. See also Peter Dunkley, 'The Landed Interest and the New Poor Law: A Critical Note', p.840. Dunkley stated that 'some magnates, particularly those of a Tory or paternalistic bent, were hostile to the entire system, (the 1834 act being a Whig reform) whilst others were simply not concerned with relief matters'.

<sup>812</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.230

<sup>813</sup> The Public Life of Small Towns, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 1 February, 1878, p.4.

<sup>814</sup> *Wrexham and Denbigshire and Cheshire Shropshire and North Wales Register*, 7 September, 1895, p.4. In a similar vein, at a meeting of the Swansea guardians in 1889, Mr Ll. Davies indicated that 5 of the ex-officio guardians turned up on a regular basis, cited in Swansea Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian*, 29 November, 1889, p.8.

board'.<sup>815</sup> Hooker also found that a handful of ex-officio members turned up regularly at the Llandilofawr board of guardian meetings.<sup>816</sup>

Some of the ex-officio guardians in Wales, at least those who attended regularly, were able, on occasion, to use their influence to exert pressure on the elected guardians. For example, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots, Captain L. Evans stated that 'many of the elected guardians are tenants to the magistrates' and that they were 'obliged to vote with them'. In 1893, as part of the evidence given to the Welsh Land Commission, one witness, Mr L. George, stated that 'Welsh farmers lived in a state of paralytic fear of their landlords'.<sup>817</sup> The clerical element on the boards could also, on occasion, persuade the elected guardians to vote in line with their way of thinking. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1877. Here, the Reverend T.Z. Davies, an ex-officio guardian, proposed that the inmates of the workhouse should be allowed their 'usual Christmas treat, not forgetting a glass of beer with their dinner'.<sup>818</sup> Davies intimated that providing for the paupers at this most festive time of year was well within the spirit of Christianity. In response to the proposition, one of the elected guardians, Mr Reney, stated that he opposed the granting of beer to the paupers as 'it was mainly through drink that their gaols and workhouses were filled'.<sup>819</sup> Another guardian, Mr David Owen, seconded the amendment (not to provide alcohol to the paupers) adding that he did not think it right that they (the guardians) should supply the inmates with 'luxuries out of the poor rates, whilst there were many persons who had to stint themselves of the common necessities of life to pay the rates out of which they would have to pay for those luxuries'.<sup>820</sup> However, upon a vote being taken, only two guardians voted for the amendment, with the remainder voting in favour of providing beer to the paupers, in line with the wishes of the Reverend Davies.

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<sup>815</sup> *Rhyl Recorder and Advertiser*, 5 May, 1888, p.2. It was also stated that the few ex-officios who did attend regularly, 'took an interest in the administration of the poor laws' and that they had 'as a rule, more time at their disposal than the elected guardians' which made them important acquisitions at the board meetings.

<sup>816</sup> Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.174. He stated that although often outnumbered, '2 or 3 ex-officios (sic) regularly turned up at the board meetings'.

<sup>817</sup> The Welsh Land Commission, *Sittings in North Wales*, *South Wales Daily News*, 20 September, 1893, p.6.

<sup>818</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 28 December, 1877, p.4.

<sup>819</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 28 December, 1877, p.4.

<sup>820</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 28 December, 1877, p.4.

Moreover, in Wales, as in England, the ex-officio guardians were often elected as the chairman of the boards of guardians.<sup>821</sup> For example, in 1836 Sir John Morris Bart was elected to be the first chairman of the Swansea board of guardians.<sup>822</sup> The Reverend Dr Hewson was also appointed as the first vice-chairman of the Swansea board of guardians; it was reported that both Bart and Hewson were ‘unanimously’ elected by their fellow guardians.<sup>823</sup> At another meeting of the Swansea guardians in 1845, during the discussion over who should succeed The Reverend Doctor Hewson as the chairman of the board of guardians (following his death), one guardian, Mr Gape (who had served as the vice-chairman during the previous year) argued that ‘the chair ought to be filled by a gentleman possessing large property and influence in the neighborhood’.<sup>824</sup> In the event, the prominent landowner, J. Dilwyn Llewelyn Esq was ‘unanimously elected in as the new chairman.’<sup>825</sup> Brundage has argued that these positions were pivotal as the chairmen ultimately decided which guardians were allowed to speak at the meetings, which pieces of business were to be discussed, and how long the meetings should last; they also had the casting vote in the event of a tie.<sup>826</sup> Evidence that the chairmen of the boards of guardians were hugely influential figures can be seen in the Swansea Union in 1893. For instance, when the sitting Sir John T.D. Llewelyn informed the guardians that he would be unable to attend the meetings due to other commitments, the guardians decided to move the day and time of the meeting to fit in with his schedule.<sup>827</sup> In Wales the position of the chairman was made even more important by the fact that, as bilingual speakers, they often had to translate proceedings from English into Welsh (or vice versa) for those who were monoglot speakers. In the 1844 Report into the Rebecca disturbances, Mr Thomas Jones, the clerk of the Carmarthen Union intimated that this was one of the main reasons why ex-officio

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<sup>821</sup> Brundage, ‘The Landed Interest and the New Poor Law: A Reappraisal’, pp.45-46.

<sup>822</sup> Swansea Union of Parishes, *The Cambrian*, 29 October, 1836, p.3.

<sup>823</sup> Swansea Union of Parishes, *The Cambrian*, 29 October, 1836, p.3.

<sup>824</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian*, 19 April, 1845, p.2.

<sup>825</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian*, 19 April, 1845, p.2.

<sup>826</sup> Cited in Brundage, ‘The Landed Interest and the New Poor Law: A Reappraisal’, p.29.

<sup>827</sup> Cited in Lewis, *Swansea and the Workhouse*, p.25. Lewis argued that ‘Llewelyn was clearly a figure of prime importance in local affairs’. Likewise, it was reported in the Holywell Union in 1884, that when Lord Mostyn (who had been elected as chairman for over 30 years) became too frail to attend the board meetings due to his advanced age (now being in his 80s) the guardians unanimously elected him as their ‘honorary’ chairman, a position he held until his death, Death of Lord Mostyn, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 20 March, 1884, p.5.

gentlemen, who were more likely to be bilingual, were regularly appointed and re-appointed as the chairman of the boards of guardians in Wales.<sup>828</sup> The problems of the Welsh language in the administration of the New Poor Law are discussed in more detail in the section below.

Furthermore, as alluded to above, on certain occasions, particularly when there was some sort of patronage to be bestowed, the ex-officio guardians turned up in their droves, and swamped (or attempted to swamp) the votes of the elected guardians. Evidence of this can be seen in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots. Here, one witness, Mr John Thomas, the guardian of the Llanginning (Llangynin) parish, Carmarthenshire, stated that 'a few months ago the Chaplain of the workhouse had offered to give up his salary and perform the duties for nothing' and that 'the majority of the elected guardians had agreed to this'.<sup>829</sup> However, the Poor Law Commissioners ordered that a fresh election for the position be held. Thomas argued that this 'was throwing away the ratepayers' money without their consent'.<sup>830</sup> He also lamented that 'whatever good the elected guardians wish to effect, they are unable to do it as they are outvoted by the ex-officio guardians, who have not so much interest in the payment of the rates'.<sup>831</sup> Further evidence that the ex-officio guardians sometimes swamped the votes of the elected guardians can be seen in a letter sent from an irate ratepayer of the Swansea Union to the editor of *The Western Mail* in 1876. The complainant explained that at a recent meeting of the Swansea board of guardians, an ex-officio guardian proposed that the salary of one of the Union's medical officers, Dr H. Thomas, should be increased five-fold. The ratepayer lamented that with the backing of his

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<sup>828</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.233. Likewise, at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1895, Mr Bennett was elected as the chairman of the board by 19 votes to 8. Mr Cornelius Morgan stated that he was glad that Bennett had been selected as he was the only candidate who could speak Welsh. At the same meeting the clerk also noted that in the past another chairman, the Reverend John Evans, had been elected, at least in part, for his ability to speak Welsh, cited in Newtown and Llanidloes Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 5 January, 1895, p.8.

<sup>829</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.83.

<sup>830</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.83

<sup>831</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.83



relatives 'who were also unelected members, and who are seldom seen at the board unless there be something attractive going on, the proposition was carried'.<sup>832</sup>

However, although some of the ex-officio guardians in Wales were able, on occasion, to exert considerable influence over the elected guardians, the fact that so few of them attended regularly, meant that they were often simply ignored and/or outvoted by the elected guardians. Evidence of this can be seen in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots. Here, Mr John Lewis, the vice-chairman of the Llandilo Union stated that the ex-officio guardians 'ceased to attend the board meetings' because they were so fed up with being outvoted by the elected members.<sup>833</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Pembroke board of guardians in 1846 it was reported that although an unusual number of ex-officio guardians had turned up to vote for their preferred candidate in the election of the surgeon for the Tenby district, on this occasion 'success went not with their votes'.<sup>834</sup> Moreover, not all of the elected guardians in Wales were afraid of their social superiors. For instance, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots, Captain. L. Evans stated that although some of the elected guardians were tenants to the magistrates and were sometimes forced to vote with them, 'latterly they have been independent and have outvoted them'.<sup>835</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Cardiff board of guardians in 1878, it was claimed that in a neighboring Poor Law Union, there was a 'homely looking farmer' whose 'straightforward manner commanded and received the respect of the board'.<sup>836</sup> It was also stated that he (the farmer) 'was not one of those who thinks it necessary to observe who is present before he ventured to speak his mind'.<sup>837</sup> The introduction of the secret ballot in 1894 (as part of the Local Government Act) also meant that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the elected guardians in Wales were shielded from incurring the wrath of their social superiors if they dared to vote against them at the board meetings. Evidence of this can be seen in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union in 1895. Here, a meeting of the guardians had been called

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<sup>832</sup> Increased Expenditure at Swansea, *The Western Mail*, 12 October, 1876, p.3.

<sup>833</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.349.

<sup>834</sup> Pembroke Union, *The Welshman*, 21 August, 1846, p.3

<sup>835</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.77.

<sup>836</sup> Our Newly Elected Guardians, Cardiff Union, *South Wales Daily News*, 18 April, 1878, p.2.

<sup>837</sup> Our Newly Elected Guardians, Cardiff Union, *South Wales Daily News*, 18 April, 1878, p.2.

for the purpose of electing a new chairman. At the outset, the acting Chairman, Mr Cornelius Morgan, remarked that 'as a great number of gentlemen were there that day, some of whom he had never seen before, to prevent any friction, and in order to accord every liberty to the guardians that met that day, it was necessary that the election of the chairman 'should be conducted by ballot'.<sup>838</sup> This meant that the elected guardians were free to vote for their preferred candidate without fear of reprisal.

Furthermore, although the ex-officio members were usually elected to sit as the chairman of the board of guardians, many of these individuals rarely attended the board meetings. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1872. Here Lord Mostyn, who had just been re-elected as the Chairman of the board, stated that although he was grateful to the guardians for re-electing him to the post, 'he had other vocations, as they all knew' and that he would soon be departing for London on business which meant that he 'would not have the pleasure of meeting them for two months'.<sup>839</sup> In the absence of the ex-officio chairmen, this important position often fell into the hands of an elected guardian. For example in the Pwllheli Union in 1889, it was reported that the chairman, Mr B. T. Ellis 'had not attended any of the meetings for a long time' and that another guardian, Mr J. T. Jones, had been 'doing all of the work'.<sup>840</sup> Hooker has also argued that in the Llandilofawr Union, although the Earl Cawdor had been elected as the chairman of the board in 1875, one of the more prominent elected guardians, John Lewis (who was also vice-chairman), often utilized his absences to turn the normal 'chairman/vice chairman' or 'aristocrat/working farmer' power balance upside down and assumed the 'effective control of the Union's affairs'.<sup>841</sup>

More importantly, even when they were present, the ex-officio chairmen did not always command the respect of the elected guardians. Evidence of this can be seen at a

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<sup>838</sup> Newtown and Llanidloes Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 5 January, 1895, p.8.

<sup>839</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 26 April, 1872. Likewise, when he was elected as the chairman of the Holywell board of guardians in 1889, Mr J. S. Bankes stated that 'owing to his numerous business engagements of a public character calling for such a large amount of his time, he could not promise the members to be very regular', cited in Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint, Denbigh*, 2 May, 1889, p.8

<sup>840</sup> *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 15 March, 1889, p.4.

<sup>841</sup> Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.196.

meeting of the Pembroke board of guardians in 1841. Here, it was reported that the chairman, Lord Cawdor, had tendered his resignation following a dispute with the elected guardians. One of the ex-officio guardians, John Adams Esq wrote a letter to Earl Cawdor in which he stated that 'it is with feelings of regret that we received your Lordship's determination to resign the duties of chairman of the board of guardians of this Union'. Adams also stated that 'our regret is increased by the knowledge that the cause of your retirement is the difference of opinion which exists between your Lordship and the great majority of guardians'.<sup>842</sup> In a similar vein Keith Parker demonstrated that in 1837 the elected guardians of the Presteigne Union foiled an attempt by the ex-officio chairman, Sir Harford Jones Brudges, to impose his candidate for the post of medical officer of the Union. Parker saw this as further evidence that the elected guardians 'were not in awe of their ex-officio colleagues'.<sup>843</sup>

Moreover, by the end of the nineteenth century, some of the elected guardians in Wales had replaced the ex-officio members as the chairmen of the boards. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1890. Here, one of the elected guardians, Mr Samuel Davies, who had just been appointed as the chairman of the board stated that 'soon all of the ex-officio guardians would be overthrown' and that 'there was a constant bowling over of the ex-officios all over the country'.<sup>844</sup> At this another one of the elected guardians cried: 'Hear Hear'.<sup>845</sup> Likewise, in 1886 it was reported that in the Bangor and Beaumaris Union the long-standing ex-officio chairman had been 'dethroned' and replaced with an elected member and that as a result the subsequent meetings had been 'characterized by an absence of bickering which had previously prevailed'.<sup>846</sup>

Furthermore, although, as demonstrated above, the ex-officio guardians in Wales often turned up in their droves to swamp the votes of the elected guardians whenever some form of patronage was to be bestowed, the vast majority of them had little interest in the

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<sup>842</sup> Pembroke Union, *The Welshman*, 26 March, 1841, p.2.

<sup>843</sup> Parker, 'Radnorshire and the New Poor Law', p.175.

<sup>844</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer and Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint, Denbigh*, 1 May, 1890, p.8.

<sup>845</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer and Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint, Denbigh*, 1 May, 1890, p.8.

<sup>846</sup> Caernarvonshire Magistrates and Welsh Guardians, *The North Wales Express*, 30 April, 1886, p.4.

day-to-day administration of the New Poor Law. For instance, at a meeting of the Pembroke guardians in 1869, Mr J.L. Philips stated that 'the magistrates generally left the affairs of the Union to be managed by the elected guardians'.<sup>847</sup> Likewise, it was reported in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* in 1878 that although the ex-officio guardians in Wales were 'sometimes whipped for a special question', their attendance at the board meetings was 'but very rare and spasmodic' and that they seldom participated in the 'burden and drudgery of the ordinary routine'.<sup>848</sup> Further evidence that the ex-officio guardians in Wales were singularly unconcerned with the day-to-day administration of the New Poor Law can be seen in the Swansea Union in 1879. Here, a meeting of the guardians had been called for the purpose of electing a new registrar of births and deaths following the death of the incumbent, Mr John Oakshot. It was noted in the newspaper report of the meeting that on account of the large attendance of ex-officio guardians, who 'hardly ever' attended these meetings, there was 'scarcely sitting room for all'.<sup>849</sup> It was also stated that the majority of the ex-officio guardians had 'come trooping in just in time for the public business' to be commenced with and that 'the real poor law work of the day had already been completed' by the elected guardians.<sup>850</sup> In the event, Mr Arthur Richards, the son of one of the ex-officio guardians was elected to the office. It was reported that immediately following the vote, the ex-officio guardians, who had swamped the votes of the elected guardians (in a clear case of nepotism), 'rose in a mass and left the room, pursued by the playful sarcasm of the chairman', who called out after them: "What going so soon gentlemen? We have not yet finished the business".<sup>851</sup>

As under the Old Poor Law it was often a handful of individuals only who dominated the administration of the New Poor Law in Wales. For example, in the Pwllheli Union in 1855, an ex-officio guardian, W. Jones Esq complained that the relief cases had been decided before 11 o'clock, 'when but few guardians were present'.<sup>852</sup> Jones was particularly perplexed that the relief cases appertaining to his parish had been disposed of in his

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<sup>847</sup> *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 12 March, 1869, p.2.

<sup>848</sup> The Constitution of Boards of Guardians, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 29 March, 1878, p.5.

<sup>849</sup> Appointment of Registrar of Births and Deaths at Swansea, *The Western Mail*, 19 December, 1879, p.2.

<sup>850</sup> Appointment of Registrar of Births and Deaths at Swansea, *The Western Mail*, 19 December, 1879, p.2.

<sup>851</sup> Appointment of Registrar of Births and Deaths at Swansea, *The Western Mail*, 19 December, 1879, p.2.

<sup>852</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 27 October, 1855, p.4

absence. In a similar vein, at a meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1894, an argument broke out between the Reverend Watkin Williams and Mr William Thomas when the former attempted to involve himself in the case of a pauper from the Ysceifiog parish (where Mr Thomas was an elected member). An irate Mr Thomas declared that 'it would be better if the Reverend attended to his own parish'.<sup>853</sup> In reply, Williams argued that every guardian had a right to interest himself in any case that was brought before the board but that there was a 'certain clique' of guardians who usually decided all of the relief cases 'who didn't like that'.<sup>854</sup> At another meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1899, one of the elected guardians, Mr Williams lamented that 'there is not a board in the whole of north-Wales where there are so many absent'.<sup>855</sup> Williams also argued that 'every guardian ought to sit here when there is something going on'.<sup>856</sup>

Further evidence that a handful of individuals only dominated the administration of the New Poor Law can be seen in the fact that attendances at the board meetings in Wales were generally very low. For example, in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union throughout the period 1837-47 the average number of guardians who attended the meetings never went above 13 and in some years was considerably lower.<sup>857</sup> In 1838, the Assistant Commissioner for Wales, William Day noted that the attendance of the guardians in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union is 'very bad' and that the board meetings usually revolved around the chairman and a small number of elected guardians.<sup>858</sup> In a similar vein, in the Pwllheli Union in 1853, it was noted that the board of guardians' meeting was attended by the chairman and 13 of the elected guardians only.<sup>859</sup> On occasion, the attendances at the board meetings in Wales were so low that the guardians struggled to form a quorum. For example, in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union in 1897, only 4 guardians turned up to the board meeting.

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<sup>853</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 30 August, 1894, p.8

<sup>854</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 30 August, 1894, p.8

<sup>855</sup> Welsh Guardians and their duties, discussion at Holywell, *The Chester Courant and Advertiser for North Wales*, 23 August, 1899, p.7.

<sup>856</sup> Welsh Guardians and their duties, discussion at Holywell, *The Chester Courant and Advertiser for North Wales*, 23 August, 1899, p.7.

<sup>857</sup> Owen, 'The Newtown and Llanidloes Poor Law Union Workhouse', p.117. In 1839, the average number of guardians who attended was just 8.

<sup>858</sup> Owen, 'The Newtown and Llanidloes Poor Law Union Workhouse', p.118.

<sup>859</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 8 July, 1853, p.7.

As the quorum for convening the meetings had been set at 7, the guardians decided to adjourn. In the event, the clerk of the Union informed the guardians that they would not be able to disperse until one hour after the meeting had been scheduled to start (at 11.00am). Eventually, before the hour was up, two more guardians appeared at the board meeting. However, the total number of guardians now present (6) still fell short of the quorum. The Chairman of the guardians was then forced to fetch another guardian, whom he knew lived locally, before the business of the board could be transacted.<sup>860</sup> Other historians have also demonstrated that the board meetings in Wales were dominated by a handful of individuals only. For instance, Hooker stated that in the Llandilofawr Union, 'a small body of elected guardians comprised the board throughout the period studied'.<sup>861</sup>

In Wales, the administration of the New Poor Law continued to be dominated by a handful of individuals only. Moreover, there was often relatively little difference between the types of individuals who dominated the poor relief system under the Old Poor Law and those who dominated the New (see Chapter Two). For instance, in the more rural Unions in Wales the boards of guardians were often dominated by individuals from the country parishes, the vast majority of whom were farmers. Evidence of this can be seen in the 1844 Rebecca Report. For example, when asked whether or not the town guardians had anything like a prepondering influence at the board of guardians' meetings, Mr Hughes, the clerk for the Aberystwyth Union, replied 'No, it is the other way'.<sup>862</sup> Hughes also pointed out that the town guardians were significantly outnumbered by the country guardians.<sup>863</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Carmarthen board of guardians in 1849, the guardians decided to change the day of the weekly meetings from Monday to Saturday. It was reported that the change was opposed by the town guardians but that the 'country guardians overpowered them'.<sup>864</sup> In a similar vein, at a meeting of the Pembroke board of guardians in 1889, the Poor Law

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<sup>860</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery Express and Radnor Times*, 24 August, 1897, p.8.

<sup>861</sup> Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.300. He also stated that there was a 'committed core of local (male) farmers'.

<sup>862</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.275.

<sup>863</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.275. Hughes stated that there were only 4 or 5 town guardians altogether.

<sup>864</sup> *The Principality*, 26 January, 1849, p.6.

Inspector for Wales, Mr Bircham lamented that the town guardians, especially those representing the parish of Tenby, were 'usually absent' from the board meetings.<sup>865</sup>

Further evidence that the country rather than the town guardians dominated the board meetings in the more rural parts of Wales can be seen in the fact that, throughout the entire period under investigation here, the vast majority of the elected guardians in these regions were listed as being farmers. For example, in the Pembroke Union in 1848 a list of the elected guardians and their occupations was published in a local newspaper. This revealed that 19 of the 28 guardians elected in the Union in that year (68%) were farmers.<sup>866</sup> Likewise, in the Pwllheli Union in 1855, 30 of the 37 elected guardians (81%) were listed as being farmers.<sup>867</sup> In a similar vein, in Montgomeryshire in 1894, 60 out of the 79 individuals elected to the board of guardians in the county (75%) were recorded as being farmers.<sup>868</sup> The percentage of guardians who were occupied as farmers in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union in this year was slightly lower than the county average. However, even here, farmers were in the majority.<sup>869</sup>

Other historians have also argued that farmers dominated the board of guardians in the more rural parts of Wales. For instance, Alun Eirug Davies stated that in Cardiganshire, 'most boards of guardians were dominated by farmers and clergymen'.<sup>870</sup> Likewise, Hooker argued that in the Llandilofawr Union, 'nearly all' of the elected guardians were farmers.<sup>871</sup> Hooker demonstrated that one farmer in particular, John Lewis, dominated the board meetings for a considerable period of time.<sup>872</sup> More recently, Nicola Blacklaws claimed that in Montgomeryshire 'the most active guardians, who served for long periods and regularly

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<sup>865</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, *The Welshman*, 16 August, 1889, p.6.

<sup>866</sup> Pembroke Union, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 12 May, 1848, p.2. Note several parishes failed to elect a guardian in this year.

<sup>867</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 7 April, 1855, p.7. Note: several parishes failed to elect a guardian.

<sup>868</sup> Cited in Blacklaws, 'The Twentieth Century Poor Law in the Midlands and Wales', p.244.

<sup>869</sup> Blacklaws, 'The Twentieth Century Poor Law in the Midlands and Wales c.1900-1930', p.244.

<sup>870</sup> Eirug Davies, 'The Poor Law in a Rural Area', p.248.

<sup>871</sup> Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p. (i)

<sup>872</sup> Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.151.

attended meetings, were indeed farmers'.<sup>873</sup> Anne Digby has even claimed that in the more rural parts of Wales the boards of guardians were little more than 'farmers' associations'.<sup>874</sup>

In contrast, in the more industrialized Unions in Wales, the administration of the New Poor Law continued to be dominated by a handful of individuals from the town parishes. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the ratepayers from the Gower parishes of the Swansea Union in 1841. Here, the Reverend Samuel Philips lamented that at the Swansea board of guardians' meetings, 'the country guardians were generally mute' and that they 'frequently saw with dissatisfaction how the rates were expended'.<sup>875</sup> Philips also stated that whenever he attempted to ask something at a board meeting, he would be silenced by the 'scowling looks from his superiors'.<sup>876</sup> Further evidence that the town guardians dominated the administration of the New Poor Law in the Swansea Union can be seen in an incident that occurred at a board of guardians meeting in 1899. Here, a special meeting of guardians of the Union had been called to discuss the recent audit of the Union's accounts. It was reported that when one of the country guardians, Mr Griffith Davies, attempted to enter the meeting he was asked to retire and told that this was a meeting 'for the town guardians only'.<sup>877</sup>

Representatives from the town parishes in Wales often included wealthy industrialists and/or their agents as well as members from the emerging professional classes. For example, in 1843 the elected guardians in the Swansea Union included a coal owner, two druggists, two drapers, a surgeon and a merchant.<sup>878</sup> Another list of Swansea guardians from 1891 included a tinsmith manufacturer, a mining engineer, a merchant and an estate agent.<sup>879</sup> Likewise, in the Abergavenny Union in 1873 several grocers and other small businessmen, including a solicitor, were elected to sit alongside the farmer guardians

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<sup>873</sup> Blacklaws, 'The Twentieth Century Poor Law in the Midlands and Wales c.1900-1930', p.245.

<sup>874</sup> Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law', p.153.

<sup>875</sup> Public Meeting to Petition for a Separation of the Gower parishes from the Swansea Union, *The Cambrian*, 7 October, 1841, p.3.

<sup>876</sup> Public Meeting to Petition for a Separation of the Gower Parishes from the Swansea Union, *The Cambrian*, 7 October, 1841, p.3.

<sup>877</sup> Meeting of the Swansea Guardians, Pressmen and Country Guardians Excluded, *The South Wales Daily Post*, 29 June, 199, p.3

<sup>878</sup> *The Cambrian*, 1 April, 1843, p.3. In the same year (1843) John Henry Vivian and Daniels were also heavily involved at the meetings of the Swansea board of guardians.

<sup>879</sup> WGA Swansea, 1891, List of Elected Guardians, U/S 11/3.



from the country parishes.<sup>880</sup> In a similar vein, in the Holywell Union in 1898 the candidates for the guardianship of the town parishes included a brick manufacturer, a china and earthenware dealer, a publisher, a butcher and a hotel proprietor.<sup>881</sup> As is the case with the farmers in the more rural parts of the country, these individuals were often seen as the natural leaders of society.<sup>882</sup> They were also amongst the only individuals in these regions who were eligible to be elected as a guardian of the poor, or even to vote in the elections.<sup>883</sup> Other historians have also demonstrated that wealthy industrialists and/or members of the emerging middle classes dominated the administration of the New Poor Law in the more industrialized Unions in Wales. For example, Tydfil Jones stated that in the Merthyr Tydfil Union 'ironmasters and their agents, small businessmen and local landowners dominated the board of guardians'.<sup>884</sup> Julie Light has also argued that representatives from the town parishes in Wales could and did have a huge influence within their local areas. Light stated that, although many of the town parishes in Wales throughout much of the nineteenth century were relatively small, 'a town's diversity of trade and occupation, its institutions, functions and sphere of influence, could endow it with a significance beyond that indicated by the size of its population'.<sup>885</sup> The findings here support this line of thinking.

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<sup>880</sup> Abergavenny Board of Guardians, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 1 May, 1874, p.3.

<sup>881</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 17 March, 1898, p.5.

<sup>882</sup> Cited in Croll, *Civilizing the Urban, Popular Culture and Public Space in Merthyr 1870-1914*, (Cardiff, 2000), p.42. Croll stated up until the middle of the nineteenth century the town of Merthyr was dominated by the ironmasters but that by the end of the nineteenth century the small group of tradesmen and professionals in the town 'occupied a powerful position in society'. Croll also stated that 'the property qualifications kept lower social groups beyond the pale of local government until 1888 at least'. Julie Light has also stated that by the middle of the nineteenth century, 'the middle classes provided the personnel that formed urban elites who were active in the social, cultural, and political life of the towns' in Wales, in Julie Light, 'The Middle Class as Urban Elites in Nineteenth Century South Wales', *The Welsh History Review*, vol.24, no.3, (June, 2009), pp.29-55, [here p.30].

<sup>883</sup> Julie Light, 'Mere Seekers of Fame?' p.92. Light argued that in many Welsh towns 'the shopocracy' were able to dominate local administration as there was a distinct 'lack of competition'.

<sup>884</sup> Tydfil Davies Jones, p.41. Anne Crowther made the same point about the Merthyr Tydfil Union in her work. Crowther argued that the guardians here were 'mainly ironmasters and coal owners', in Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, p.244. Marian Williams has also argued that in the Cardiff Union the administration of the New Poor Law was controlled by a handful of men 'who already shouldered huge business and civic responsibilities', in Williams, 'Some Aspects of the History of Poor Law Provision in Cardiff', p.146.

<sup>885</sup> Light, 'Mere Seekers of Fame?', p.89. see also Croll, *Civilizing the Urban*; and Neil Evans, 'The Welsh Victorian City: The middle class, civic and national consciousness in Cardiff, 1850-1914', *Welsh History Review*, vol.85, no.1-4, (January, 1984), pp.350-387.

By the end of the nineteenth century, particularly after the passage of the 1894 Local Government Act, which abolished the property qualification, a small number of working-class guardians began to appear at the board meetings in Wales. For instance, listed amongst the individuals elected to the Swansea board of guardians in 1895 were two engineers, an artist and a maltster.<sup>886</sup> Further evidence that there was a shift in the types of individuals elected to the boards can be seen in the Holywell Union in 1900. Here, it was reported that the rector of Nannerch, who was described as 'a plain-speaking man' had been elected as a guardian for one of the town parishes of the Union.<sup>887</sup> It was also stated that since his arrival, the board meetings had become 'most quarrelsome'.<sup>888</sup> In the same year (1900) it was even reported that one of the newly elected guardians from the Swansea Union, Mr Collett, had been invited to speak at a socialist event.<sup>889</sup> This also suggests that the composition of the boards of guardians in Wales changed over time.

A number of female guardians also began to appear at the board of guardians' meetings in Wales by the end of the nineteenth century. For example, at a meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1895 it was reported that Mrs T. A. Keene had topped the polls to become guardian for the parish of Mold.<sup>890</sup> At another meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1895 Mr Bircham, the Poor Law Inspector for Wales congratulated the electors in the Holywell Union for 'having elected so many lady members'.<sup>891</sup> A report published in *The Western Mail* in 1895 also revealed that 88 female guardians had been elected in Wales in this year, whereas previously there had only been 8.<sup>892</sup>

Some of these 'new' guardians were even able to push through, or at least call for, some reforms in the administration of the New Poor Law. For example, at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1898, one of the female guardians, Miss Lloyd stated that at the next meeting she would move that the board consider 'the

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<sup>886</sup> Lewis, *Swansea and the Workhouse*, p.23.

<sup>887</sup> *The West Coast Pioneer and Review for North Cambria*, 25 May, 1900, p.12.

<sup>888</sup> *The West Coast Pioneer and Review for North Cambria*, 25 May, 1900, p.12.

<sup>889</sup> *The South Wales Daily Post*, 2 February, 1900, p.2. It was also stated that to the 'grey-haired' members of the Swansea board of guardians, his lecture would be 'exceedingly interesting'.

<sup>890</sup> *Wrexham and Denbighshire Advertiser and Cheshire and Shropshire and North Wales Register*, 9 February, 1895, p.7.

<sup>891</sup> *Holywell Board of Guardians, Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 28 February, 1895, p.8.

<sup>892</sup> Women as Poor Law Guardians, *The Western Mail*, 14 February, 1895, p.3.

desirability of appointing a suitable person to take charge of the children in the workhouse'.<sup>893</sup> Likewise, it was reported that in the Pwllheli Union in 1900, several of the 'new' guardians, who were described as being 'men of humane convictions', had managed to implement some significant changes including ending the practice of forcing the workhouse inmates to wear a distinctive uniform, as well as purchasing knives and forks for the pauper inmates; previously they had been forced to use their fingers to eat the meals provided in the workhouse.<sup>894</sup>

However, up until the end of the nineteenth century at least, the number of working class and/or female guardians elected to the boards of guardians in Wales remained relatively small, particularly in the more rural regions. For example, in the Pwllheli Union in 1901 there was only one female guardian sitting on the board.<sup>895</sup> Nicola Blacklaws has made similar observations about the lack of female guardians in the more rural parts of Wales in her work.<sup>896</sup> For instance, Blacklaws demonstrated that in 1894 there were no female guardians in the Llanfyllin Union and only one each in the Machynlleth and Newtown and Llanidloes Unions.<sup>897</sup> Moreover, even when they were elected to the boards, these individuals were often ignored or outvoted. For example, at a meeting of the Abergavenny guardians in 1878, the Chairman moved that a male wardsman should be employed to look after the sick paupers residing at the workhouse; this was seconded by the Reverend J. W. Osman. In response to this motion, Mrs Fielder, one of the town guardians argued that this would not amount to 'a good practical nurse' and that they should instead employ a trained female nurse to look after the paupers.<sup>898</sup> However, it was noted that her remarks were 'received with laughter from a selection of the members' and that all of the guardians present, aside from Mrs Fielder, voted in favor of the original motion.<sup>899</sup> At the same meeting Mrs Fielder complained that the Master of the workhouse had prevented her, on

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<sup>893</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery County Times and Shropshire and Mid-Wales Advertiser*, 22 January, 1898, p.3.

<sup>894</sup> The Dawn of Civilized Government in Workhouses, *The North Wales Express*, 22 June, 1900, p.3.

<sup>895</sup> *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Advertiser*, 30 August, 1901, p.6

<sup>896</sup> Blacklaws, 'The Twentieth Century Poor Law in the Midlands and Wales', p.250.

<sup>897</sup> Blacklaws, 'The Twentieth Century Poor Law in the Midlands and Wales', p.250.

<sup>898</sup> Abergavenny Board of Guardians, Charges Against Officials, *The Western Mail*, 14 June, 1878, p.3.

<sup>899</sup> Abergavenny Board of Guardians, Charges Against Officials, *The Western Mail*, 14 June, 1878, p.3

several occasions, from visiting the workhouse in order to check on the condition of the indoor poor. However, despite her remonstrations, the subject was simply dropped.

The evidence here suggests that, up until the end of the nineteenth century at least, the administration of the New Poor Law in Wales continued to be dominated by the social elites rather than by the working classes. Other historians have made similar observations in their work. For example, Croll stated that even after the 1894 act, 'factors such as the time at which meetings were held, the difficulty in travelling to the meetings, and the continued potency of the idea that a certain type of individual was "naturally" suited to positions of responsibility could all combine to maintain the older ways'.<sup>900</sup> The impact that these individuals had on the standard of the poor relief system in Wales after 1834 is discussed in detail in the section below.

### **The Standard of the Poor Relief System in Wales under the New Poor Law**

Throughout much of the period under investigation here, the standard of the poor relief system in Wales continued to be as lax and inefficient under the New Poor Law as it had been under the Old Poor Law; in some ways it was considerably worse. For example, up until the end of the nineteenth century at least, Unions in Wales routinely failed to collect and distribute the poor rates in a timely or economical fashion; this had been a perennial problem in Wales under the Old Poor Law (see Chapter Two). Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Pembroke board of guardians in 1849. Here, the clerk was instructed by the guardians to take out summonses against several of the overseers, 'in consequence of the Union being indebted to the treasurer to the tune of £180'.<sup>901</sup> In a similar vein, in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union in 1866, it was reported that seven parishes were in arrears with the poor rates, with the Llanllwchaiarn parish alone owing £263.<sup>902</sup> At another meeting

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<sup>900</sup> Croll, *Civilizing the Urban*, p.42. Hooker has also argued that the same sorts of individuals who dominated the vestries in Llandilofawr under the Old Poor Law also dominated the boards of guardians under the New Poor Law, Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.98.

<sup>901</sup> *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 18 May, 1849, p.2.

<sup>902</sup> Newtown and Llanidloes Union, *The Brecon County Times Neath Gazette and General Advertiser for the Counties of Brecon Carmarthen Radnor Monmouth Glamorgan Cardigan Montgomery Hereford*, 10 November, 1866, p.5;.

of the Newtown guardians in 1900 it was reported that several parishes were 4 calls behind with the rates.<sup>903</sup>

The failure of the Welsh Unions to collect and distribute the poor rates in a timely fashion often had devastating consequences for the paupers themselves. For example, in 1863 Inspector Doyle wrote a letter to the Pwllheli guardians informing them that during a recent visit to the Union he had found that the Relieving Officer had been left without funds for the relief of the poor, 'owing to the fact that the treasurer had no monies in his hands belonging to the guardians'.<sup>904</sup> Doyle further stated that he had been told by one of the Relieving Officers that the poor had been 'crowding about him in great distress, wondering how they were to subsist'.<sup>905</sup> He also lamented that the Poor Law Board 'frequently had occasion call the attention of the guardians to their omission to obtain from the overseers the monies necessary for the relief of the poor' and that they 'regretted to learn now that the financial affairs of the Union are again in an unsatisfactory state'.<sup>906</sup> At another meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1869 it was reported that the poor had not been paid a 'single farthing' for several weeks due to a 'want of funds'.<sup>907</sup> Brian Owen has also demonstrated that the Relieving Officers in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union were regularly left without sufficient funds with which to pay the paupers.<sup>908</sup>

The standard of record-keeping in Wales also continued to be lax and inefficient under the New Poor Law. For example, in 1846 the Pembroke board of guardians sent a letter to the Poor Law Commissioners in which they admitted that, whilst serving as the Relieving Officer for the Union, Joseph Lewis, who they had recently appointed as the Master of the workhouse, had 'been wrong in his books to a certain amount'.<sup>909</sup> However, they (the Pembroke guardians) also argued that the 'errors committed by Lewis during his

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<sup>903</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 20 January, 1900, p.6.

<sup>904</sup> Pwllheli Boards of Guardians, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 17 January, 1863, p.5.

<sup>905</sup> Pwllheli Boards of Guardians, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 17 January, 1863, p.5.

<sup>906</sup> Pwllheli Boards of Guardians, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 17 January, 1863, p.5.

<sup>907</sup> Pwllheli Petty Sessions, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 13 March, 1869, p.8.

<sup>908</sup> Brian Owen, p.133.

<sup>909</sup> *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 16 October, 1846, p.3.

time as Relieving Officer...should not stand forever against the employment of a servant in every other way respectable and desirable'.<sup>910</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1873, the chairman called the attention of the Board to the omission by the medical officers in their books of the proper description of the physical condition of the paupers. The chairman added that as a result of these omissions it was difficult for the board to decide how much relief to give to the paupers. At the same meeting, complaints were also made that some of the Medical Officers did not send in their books until the Board was about to rise, leaving the guardians precious little time to scrutinise their accounts.<sup>911</sup> At another meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1886, the chairman, Mr T. Ellis, lamented that although the law required all rate collectors and assistant overseers to supply each month full returns of all monies in their hands up to date, 'this provision has been ignored for a long time by officials in this Union'.<sup>912</sup> Ellis also claimed that some of the officials had 'made use of parish money to speculate in cattle'.<sup>913</sup>

Further evidence that the standard of book-keeping in Wales continued to be lax and inefficient under the New Poor Law can be seen in the fact that, throughout the period under investigation here, the District Auditors routinely surcharged the accounts of the guardians and their officers. For example, at a meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1869 it was reported that following a recent audit held by William Jones Esq, the auditor for North Wales, two of the overseers of the Union, Mr John Baugh Jarett, and Mr Hugh Hughes had been surcharged 15s 7d 'for an amount of poor rates not duly accounted for' and another £7 'for an amount of rent of a certain property that had not been duly accounted for'.<sup>914</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Swansea board of guardians in 1898 a copy of a report from the district auditor, Mr H. R. Williams, was read out by the clerk. Williams indicated that during his recent audit of the accounts of Mr J.C. Howell, one of the Relieving Officers of the Union, he had found that a significant amount of important information was missing

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<sup>910</sup> *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 16 October, 1846, p.3

<sup>911</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 28 July, 1876, p.8.

<sup>912</sup> Pwllheli, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 18 June, 1886, p.5.

<sup>913</sup> Pwllheli, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 18 June, 1886, p.5. At another meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1889 one of the collecting officers of the union complained that the Relieving Officer had failed to fill in his classification book, as required by Article 215 of the Consolidated Order, *The North Wales Express*, 20 September, 1889, p.5.

<sup>914</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 15 May, 1869, p.3.

from the books. For instance, Williams stated that in the application and report book, 'the Relieving Officer had not in all cases filled in the column titled "date of last visit"'; Williams pointed out that on the last page alone there were 12 cases where this important information was omitted.<sup>915</sup> Williams also stated that he had disallowed, in the Relieving Officers accounts, 7 items of relief (amounting to £1.18s.6d) for which 'no previous order of the guardians was produced'.<sup>916</sup>

As alluded to above, the type of jobbery and corruption that had prevailed under the Old Poor Law also continued to be practiced under the New Poor Law in Wales. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Pembroke board of guardians in 1847. Here, the Relieving Officers presented several accounts, amounting to £6.4s, for articles supplied to vagrants by Jenkins and Powell, grocers, which had been ordered by one of the overseers, Mr R. Jenkins. One of the guardians, the Reverend Mr Allen, inquired whether Jenkins, who supplied the articles, 'was not a sister to the overseer'. It was reported that 'the Reverend gentleman was answered in the affirmative, which caused a degree of sensation amongst the guardians'.<sup>917</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1867 the Master of the workhouse was accused of selling an amount of lead which turned out to be the property of the Union. At the same meeting the Matron of the workhouse admitted that she had 'retained in her hands, money belonging to the inmates of the Union'.<sup>918</sup> At another meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes guardians in 1900 it transpired that the sister of Mr F. Bishop, one of the guardians of the Union, had received 5s from the Relieving Officer for the services of a nurse as well as a further 1s 6d relief in kind.<sup>919</sup> Further evidence of corruption under the New Poor Law in Wales can be seen in the Swansea Union in 1898. Here, an angry ratepayer from Swansea, the Reverend M. D. McDonnell claimed that 'he knew of one house in the town where 10s a week went in

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<sup>915</sup> WGA, Swansea Union, Board of Guardians Minute Book, February 1898-October 1898, U/S 1/29. Williams also noted that the columns titled "Present Cause", "observations" and "names of relatives" were 'insufficiently observed'.

<sup>916</sup> WGA, Swansea Union, Board of Guardians Minute Book, February 1898-October 1898, U/S 1/29.

<sup>917</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 11 June, 1847, p.2. At another meeting of the Pembroke board of guardians in 1847 it transpired that one of the Relieving Officers, Mr Woodward, was also one of the contractors for the Union.

<sup>918</sup> Caersws Union, *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 13 December, 1867, p.7.

<sup>919</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 24 February, 1900, p.8.

outdoor relief'.<sup>920</sup> McDonnell also stated that the owner of the property is 'one connected with the guardians' and that 'he undoubtedly receives the rent of the house in that way'.<sup>921</sup>

It was also common in Wales for the guardians to be paid by the local vestries (often out of the church or highway rates) for the purpose of keeping the rates as low as possible. Evidence of this can be seen in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots. For example, the Commissioners of the Report themselves stated that 'in some Unions we have reason to think that persons are selected as guardians who are altogether indisposed to carry out the principles of the law' and that 'in Cardiganshire at least, some are actually paid salaries out of the Highway rate, or other available funds, for their attendance at the board'.<sup>922</sup> Likewise, Thomas Jones, the clerk of the Carmarthen board of guardians stated that many parishes in the region 'elect a poor sharp person and give him half a crown-taken out of the church rate-every time he attends the board'.<sup>923</sup> Jones also intimated that 'these paid guardians are the most fractious'.<sup>924</sup> Further evidence that guardians in Wales were often paid to attend the board meetings in order to carry out the wishes of the local vestry can be seen in a report from Mr Longley, the Poor Law Inspector for Wales, which was sent to the Conway board of guardians in 1871. In the report, Longley stated that in the Conway Union 'the practice of making payment to the guardians for their services has at some time or other prevailed in thirteen of the fifteen parishes that made up the Union'.<sup>925</sup> Longley also stated that 'this system of collusionary (sic) payment of guardians by secret means, (which he pointed out was illegal) existing as it does exclusively in Welsh Unions, places the guardians of those Unions in an inferior position to boards of guardians' in England.<sup>926</sup>

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<sup>920</sup> How Outdoor Relief is Given, *The South Wales Daily Post*, 30 March, 1898, p.3.

<sup>921</sup> How Outdoor Relief is Given, *The South Wales Daily Post*, 30 March, 1898, p.3. McDonnell also argued that 'when anyone applies for outdoor relief one of the first questions should be: Who is your landlord? And if it is found that the landlord is a guardian adjudicating in the case, the board should be very chary about giving relief'.

<sup>922</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.29.

<sup>923</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.281-282.

<sup>924</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, pp.281-282.

<sup>925</sup> The Payment of Guardians, *The Aberystwyth Observer*, 4 March, 1871, p.4

<sup>926</sup> The Payment of Guardians, *The Aberystwyth Observer*, 4 March, 1871, p.4.



A version of the Truck system also continued to be practiced under the New Poor Law in Wales. For example, in 1837 an angry ratepayer from Abergavenny, using the pseudonym 'An Enemy to the Truck System', wrote an article to the editor of the *Monmouthshire Merlin* complaining that 'instead of the being expelled from the iron works', the truck system had been 'introduced into the poor laws'.<sup>927</sup> They claimed that instead of being paid solely in money, paupers in the region were often given a ticket which they had to spend at a certain shop, where inevitably the prices had been ramped up.<sup>928</sup> Likewise, in 1868, the Poor Law Inspector for Wales, Mr Graves, stated that 'in some places the relief in money is paid at a public house or a certain shop' and that the proprietor 'expects that a little of the money should be spent at their establishment before the money is handed over'.<sup>929</sup> Graves also stated that it was common for the Relieving Officer to be connected in some way to the shops where they left the relief money.<sup>930</sup> In a similar vein, it was reported in *The Cambrian News* in 1878 that 'the objectionable practice of paying relief money to shopkeepers instead of the paupers themselves, prevails to a considerable extent in the Pwllheli Union'.<sup>931</sup> It was also claimed that paupers in the Pwllheli Union were afraid to complain against this system of relief, 'lest they should be punished for it'.<sup>932</sup>

It was also relatively common in Wales for the guardians and their officers to misappropriate the funds of the Union. For example, it was reported in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union in 1882 that the collector of the rates for the Llanllwchaiarn parish had absconded with a deficiency of £448 in his books.<sup>933</sup> Likewise, in the Pembroke Union in 1901, the auditor of the south-Wales district, Mr Hugh R. Williams, applied for a distress warrant against Thomas Belton, the assistant overseer of the parish of Rosemarket, for failing to pay a sum of £40.12s.10d, which he owed to the Pembroke board of guardians. At court, Belton admitted that he had been out of work for eight months prior to becoming

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<sup>927</sup> Correspondence, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 6 May, 1837, p.5.

<sup>928</sup> Correspondence, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 6 May, 1837, p.5.

<sup>929</sup> Carmarthen Board of Guardians, *The Welshman*, 10 July, 1868, p.3. Graves described this process as being 'something like the truck system'.

<sup>930</sup> Carmarthen Board of Guardians, *The Welshman*, 10 July, 1868, p.3. Graves also stated that in some parts of Wales it was common for elderly or infirm paupers, who were unable to travel to designated pay stations, to pay another poor person to collect the relief money for them. Graves described this as a 'hardship upon the poor'.

<sup>931</sup> *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 8 February, 1878, p.5.

<sup>932</sup> *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 8 February, 1878, p.5.

<sup>933</sup> *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 1 June, 1883, p.3.

overseer and that he had used parochial funds 'to prevent my wife and children from starving'.<sup>934</sup> Some of the boards of guardians in Wales were also accused of expending money from the poor rates on themselves. For example, in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union in 1881, the guardians were accused by the Local Government Board of 'dining at the workhouse at the expense of the ratepayers'.<sup>935</sup> It transpired that, for some time past, the guardians who attended the weekly board meetings had been provided with a meal, the cost of which was taken out of the poor rates. Upon the auditor discovering this 'irregularity' in the accounts, the guardians decided to increase the rations provided to the workhouse staff and to 'dine off the surplus'.<sup>936</sup> After discovering this clear act of subterfuge, the auditor surcharged the accounts and gave the guardians another warning. However, it was reported that the warning was 'not heeded' and that the guardians 'were determined not to pay for their meals'.<sup>937</sup> In 1895, the Holywell board of guardians were also accused of 'dining on the rates'; some of the guardians even threatened to go on strike unless their meals continued to be paid for by the Union.<sup>938</sup>

There are several reasons why the administration of the New Poor Law in Wales continued to be lax and inefficient. Firstly, as alluded to above, the inability of Unions in Wales to collect and distribute the poor rates in a timely fashion was due, at least in part, to the poverty of the ratepayers. Throughout much of the period under investigation here, the vast majority of the ratepayers in Wales, particularly in the more rural areas, were themselves on the verge of pauperism. Many were simply unable to contribute to the poor rates. Evidence of this can be seen in the Pembroke Union in 1844. Here, it was reported that a local ratepayer, Mary Batten, had been taken to court by the overseers of the Union

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<sup>934</sup> The Late Overseer at Rosemarket, *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter for the counties of Pembroke, Cardigan, Carmarthen, Glamorgan, and the rest of south-Wales*, 10 July, 1901, p.3. Belton also stated that 'when money is handling in a house and food is required for children it is a great temptation'.

<sup>935</sup> Newtown, the Guardians and their Xmas Dinner, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 18 February, 1881, p.7.

<sup>936</sup> Newtown, the Guardians and their Xmas Dinner, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 18 February, 1881, p.7.

<sup>937</sup> Newtown, the Guardians and their Xmas Dinner, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 18 February, 1881, p.7. It was also reported that the reporters who were invited to the board as guests had retired from the dinner about six months ago, after learning that their entertainments were charged to the rates.

<sup>938</sup> They Threaten A Strike, Holywell Guardians Want Lunch Provided, *Evening Express*, 25 March, 1895, p.3.

and charged with non-payment of the poor rates. However, the magistrates overseeing the case decided that Mary was 'too poor to pay' and the charges against her were subsequently dropped; she was also excused from making future payments.<sup>939</sup> Likewise, in 1850, the Poor Law Board sent a letter to the Pwllheli guardians asking them for an explanation of the circumstances under which some of the parishes in the Union were in arrears with their contributions. The guardians requested the clerk to reply to the Poor Law Board stating that 'the only explanation they could give was poverty, consequent, as they imagined, upon the repeal of the Corn Laws'.<sup>940</sup> The poverty of the ratepayers was often less of a problem in the more industrialized Unions in Wales, at least during times of economic prosperity. However, during periods of industrial depression, and the subsequent mass unemployment that often followed, many of the ratepayers in the more industrialized parts of the country could also find themselves suddenly unable to contribute towards the poor rates. For example, at a meeting of the Swansea board of guardians in 1879, a discussion arose as to whether the overseers of several parishes which were in arrears should be proceeded against. During this debate, the chairman urged the propriety of withholding prosecutions for as long as possible, as 'owing to the present depressed state of trade, there was great difficulty in getting payment for the rates'.<sup>941</sup> In Wales, the poverty of the ratepayers negated the development of an adequate system of poor relief. The fact that Unions in Wales struggled to finance a formal poor relief system also suggests that Wales had more in common with other 'welfare peripheries' in Europe, where funding a formal system of poor relief was also a major problem during the nineteenth century, than they did with other Unions in England.<sup>942</sup>

The general laxity found in the Welsh Unions was also due to the fact that, throughout much of the period under investigation here, many of the guardians were either unable or unwilling to carry out their poor law duties effectively. For instance, many of the farmers that dominated the board meetings in the more rural Unions in Wales were poorly educated and/or illiterate. Evidence of this can be seen in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca

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<sup>939</sup> *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 1 March, 1844, p.2.

<sup>940</sup> *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 2 April, 1850, p.3.

<sup>941</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, *South Wales Daily News*, 21 March, 1879, p.4.

<sup>942</sup> See work of King and Stewart, *Welfare Peripheries*.

Riots. For instance, when asked whether or not the guardians in west-Wales were educated men, Thomas Jones, the clerk of the Carmarthen Union replied that 'the majority of the guardians in this region of Wales could not read' and that as a result many of them 'knew nothing of the law which they administer'.<sup>943</sup> Others simply did not have enough time to devote to their poor law duties; this was particularly true of the farmer-guardians, many of whom were on the verge of pauperism themselves. At a meeting of the Cardigan board of guardians in 1844 the Chairman stated that 'the occupation of many of the elected guardians will not allow their attendance, except when on urgent occasions'.<sup>944</sup> This may help to explain why, as demonstrated above, attendances at the boards of guardians in Wales were so low. Several of the Assistant Commissioners also argued that many of the guardians in Wales were either unable or unwilling to carry out their duties effectively. For example, in 1838, Sir Edmund Head lamented that 'the zeal for business and the readiness to engage in the management of a Union is more lax in Wales than in England'.<sup>945</sup> Likewise, in 1850 Sir Edmund Hurst complained that many of the guardians in Wales were 'most illiterate and unpracticed in business'.<sup>946</sup>

Many of the Union Officers appointed in the more rural Unions in Wales were also either unable or unwilling to carry out their duties effectively. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes guardians in 1880. Here, the clerk stated that 'one of the parishes had appointed a man who could not write to collect the rates' and that as a result the rates were often collected in an 'irregular way'.<sup>947</sup> Some of the Officers in Wales were also prevented from carrying out their duties effectively due to the fact that they had other jobs, meaning that the time that they were able to devote to their poor law duties was severely limited. For example, at another meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1866 several of the guardians complained that one of the

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<sup>943</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.231-232. Jones also stated that 'instead of electing the most respectable farmers in the region, the ratepayers often elected the poorest farmers'.

<sup>944</sup> Cardigan Union, *The Pembrokehire Herald and General Advertiser*, 6 December, 1844, p.3.

<sup>945</sup> Cited in Hagen, 'Women and Poverty in South West Wales', p.22.

<sup>946</sup> Cited in Hagen, 'Women and Poverty in South West Wales', p.23

<sup>947</sup> Newtown and Llanidloes Union, *South Wales Daily News*, 24 December, 1880, p.3.

Relieving Officers 'followed another occupation, contrary to the law laid down by the central authorities'.<sup>948</sup>

Some of the guardians in the more industrial Unions in Wales were far more professional than their rural counterparts. As demonstrated above, many of the individuals who dominated the boards of guardians in the more industrialized regions were businessmen who had far more time on their hands to devote to their poor law duties; they were also typically more educated than the farmers who dominated the rural boards. Evidence that these individuals were far more fastidious than their rural counterparts can be seen in the fact that, even during periods of industrial recession and/or periods of industrial action, the number of paupers claiming poor relief in the more industrial Unions in Wales remained relatively low. For example, at a meeting of the Swansea board of guardians in 1892, Mr Edward Roberts referred to the report presented to them by Mr Bircham which revealed that there were only one or two towns in the whole of England and Wales with a lower cost per head of the population than in Swansea. This argued Roberts showed that 'great vigilance was exercised by the Swansea guardians in the administration of relief'.<sup>949</sup> The relatively low pauperism rates found in the more industrial regions of Wales were largely due to the fact that the guardians in these Unions often took preventative steps to keep the number of applicants as low as possible. For example, in 1879 the Abergavenny guardians met with the manager of the Nantyglo Works and members of the Blaenavon Local Board to 'discuss and devise some means of relieving the able-bodied men' who were about to become unemployed on account of the stoppage of Iron Works in Blaenavon.<sup>950</sup>

However, in the more industrial Unions in Wales, it was often the case that the guardians involved in making decisions that revolved around unemployment or strikes were in some way or another involved in the industry that was experiencing economic difficulties. In this way, they often had a vested interest in relieving as few unemployed applicants as possible, in order that they were not inadvertently prolonging any industrial action that was targeting their own business. For example, in the Swansea Union in 1843 one of the

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<sup>948</sup> Newtown and Llanidloes Union, *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 8 June, 1866, p.7.

<sup>949</sup> Swansea, *South Wales Daily News*, 13 September, 1892, p.7. Stephen Thompson has also noted that pauperism rates were generally much lower in the South Wales coalfield region than in other parts of Wales, in Thompson, 'The Mixed Economy of Care in the South Wales Coalfield', p.142.

<sup>950</sup> Probable Stoppage of Blaenavon Works, *South Wales Daily News*, 19 July, 1879, p.4.

guardians involved in making a decision over whether or not to relieve men affected by the strike in the region's copper industry (this included coal miners inadvertently affected by the strike) was a partner in the Swansea Coal Company.<sup>951</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Abergavenny guardians in 1875, during discussions about applications for relief received from men affected by a strike in the local iron industry, the Chairman argued against relieving such men, stating that 'every shilling they gave helped to prolong the strike'.<sup>952</sup> The low levels of pauperism in these Unions therefore did not necessarily mean that there was a lack of poverty in the region or that greater vigilance over the rates necessarily benefited the paupers themselves.

Moreover, although many of the guardians in the more industrial Unions in Wales were more professional than their rural counterparts, the Officers that they appointed were often just as lax and inefficient as those appointed in the more rural Unions. For example, at a meeting of the Abergavenny board of guardians in 1874, one of the overseers, Charles Griffiths, even claimed that he had been appointed as an overseer without his knowledge and that he 'knew nothing of the affairs of the parish'.<sup>953</sup> The guardians concluded that Griffiths 'had not the remotest notion of the duties of overseer'.<sup>954</sup> At another meeting of the Abergavenny guardians in 1878 it was reported that the Relieving Officer for the Blaenavon district was also employed as a local preacher. The Chairman complained that his religious duties 'took him away from his Union business'.<sup>955</sup>

The inefficiency of the poor relief system in Wales after 1834 was compounded by the sheer size of the Poor Law Unions. In comparison to the vast majority of Unions in England, the Unions in Wales, particularly in the more rural areas, were excessively large. Evidence of this can be seen in a Poor Law Report in 1898. Here, it was stated that the area

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<sup>951</sup> Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian*, 26 August, 1843, p.4

<sup>952</sup> Abergavenny Board of Guardians, *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser Abergavenny and Raglan Herald Usk and Pontypool Messenger and Chepstow Argus*, 17 April, 1875, p.4.

<sup>953</sup> Abergavenny Guardian Meeting, *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser Abergavenny and Raglan Herald Usk and Pontypool Messenger and Chepstow Argus*, 20 July, 1872, p.4. Griffiths also claimed that he had never seen the books of the assistant overseer and that he was unsure of how much of the previous rate had been collected.

<sup>954</sup> Abergavenny Guardian Meeting, *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser Abergavenny and Raglan Herald Usk and Pontypool Messenger and Chepstow Argus*, 20 July, 1872, p.4.

<sup>955</sup> More Serious Charges at Abergavenny, *South Wales Daily News*, 17 May, 1878, p.3. It was also pointed out that the Relieving Officer did not reside in the district over which he provided, which the chairman argued was a 'double hardship' for the paupers in this district.

of the Newtown and Llanidloes Union was 176,157 acres, compared to just 2,333 acres in the Poplar Union in London.<sup>956</sup> The more industrialized Unions in Wales were typically much smaller than those found in the more rural regions. Moreover, during the course of the nineteenth century some of the more populous Unions in Wales were carved up in an attempt to improve the efficiency of the poor relief system. For example, in 1857 the Gower Union was formed from a number of the more rural parishes in District One of the Swansea Union; in 1875 the Swansea Union was split again to form the Pontardawe Union.<sup>957</sup> However, even the more industrial Unions in Wales were excessively large. For example, despite being split twice, the Swansea Union in 1898 still composed an area covering 32,087 acres; the Abergavenny and Holywell Unions were even larger at 59,759 acres and 72,111 acres respectively.<sup>958</sup>

The size of Unions typically found in Wales caused considerable problems both for the guardians and their Officers, and for the paupers themselves. For example, in 1885 Mr Bircham argued that the Unions in South-West Wales were so large that 'it is almost impossible to properly supervise the pauperism of the district, or to make the enquiries and visits necessary to keep imposition in check'.<sup>959</sup> Bircham also maintained that 'the distances that the guardians in Wales have to travel to the workhouse are so great that it is impossible to expect a willing or habitual attendance on their part'.<sup>960</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1895 it was reported that an elderly pauper had starved to death as she was unable to walk the several miles to nearest pay-station in order to retrieve her relief.<sup>961</sup>

Linguistic issues in Wales also negated the establishment of an adequate system of poor relief after 1834. For example, in the Holywell Union in 1872, when discussing the appointment of the Medical Officer for the Whitford district, one guardian, Mr Alfred Parry, begged that Dr Davies should be selected for the role on account of his ability to speak Welsh. It transpired that 'some unpleasantness' had occurred in a neighbouring district as a

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<sup>956</sup> Statement of Name of Unions and Poor Law Parishes in England and Wales, PP, 1898.

<sup>957</sup> Lewis, *Swansea and the Workhouse*, p.22.

<sup>958</sup> Statement of Name of Unions and Poor Law Parishes in England and Wales, PP, 1898.

<sup>959</sup> Pembrokeshire, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 3 April, 1885, p.2.

<sup>960</sup> Pembrokeshire, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 3 April, 1885, p.2.

<sup>961</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery and County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 26 January, 1895, p.6.

result of the medical gentleman there being unable to speak Welsh to the pauper patients.<sup>962</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1888 a letter was read from the chairman explaining his absence at a previous meeting. It was claimed that as the letter was written (and read out) in English several of the guardians were unable to understand it as they spoke Welsh only. One of the guardians also complained that there was 'too much English' carried on at the board meetings.<sup>963</sup> It was also claimed that, following a vote taken later in the meeting, 'a large number of the guardians did not understand the questions placed before them as they did not vote the same way every time they were asked to vote'.<sup>964</sup>

The standard of the poor relief system in Wales did improve slightly over time, particularly in the more industrialized Unions. For example, it was reported in the Swansea Union in 1874 that the guardians appointed a pay-clerk at a salary of £100 a year. It was stated that the duties of the new official included 'paying the poor at the pay-station, visiting them at their home when they do not come for their pay, collecting money from relatives liable for the support of paupers, and keeping a general look-out all over the Union'.<sup>965</sup> It was also claimed that 'by this appointment, the Relieving Officer will have more time to devote to their duties' and that 'a large amount of arrears now uncontrolled will be secured'.<sup>966</sup> In 1898, the guardians of the Swansea Union also agreed to separate the parish of Llansamlet Higher from the number four medical district, and to form it into a separate medical district. The guardians also agreed to appoint a new Medical Officer for this district at a salary of £20 per annum.<sup>967</sup> This move would undoubtedly have improved the standard of medical relief provided within the Union.

However, up until the end of the nineteenth century at least, the standard of the poor relief system in Wales continued to lag considerably behind the standards achieved in some parts of England. For instance, whereas, by the 1870s, some Unions in England had

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<sup>962</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 2 March, 1872, p.7

<sup>963</sup> Pwllheli, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 1 June, 1888, p.5.

<sup>964</sup> Pwllheli, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 1 June, 1888, p.5.

<sup>965</sup> Swansea Guardians, *South Wales Daily News*, 9 October, 1874, p.2.

<sup>966</sup> Swansea Guardians, *South Wales Daily News*, 9 October, 1874, p.2.

<sup>967</sup> WGA Swansea Board of Guardians Minute book, October 1898-June 1899, U/S 1/30, [here extract dated 24 November, 1898].



begun to appoint trained nurses to take care of the sick poor (both inside and outside of the workhouse), throughout the entire period under investigation here, the vast majority of Unions in Wales continued to use untrained nurses, often other paupers, to tend to the sick. For example, in the Holywell Union in 1891 the guardians voted against subscribing to the Northern Workhouse Nursing Institute, even though there had been a recent outbreak of Fever in Flint, and despite the chairman concluding that the institution 'would be of great benefit' to the Union.<sup>968</sup> Here, one guardian, Mr William Thomas, proclaimed that 'we want some consideration of economy'.<sup>969</sup> He also argued that in his twenty years on the board of guardians he 'could not remember a single case in which it was necessary to obtain the services of a trained nurse'.<sup>970</sup> In a similar vein, it was reported that in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union in 1896 a communication from the Northern Nursing Association was 'allowed to lie on the table'.<sup>971</sup> In 1899, the Swansea guardians did vote in favour of subscribing to the Swansea and South-Wales Nursing Institute. At the meeting where the issue was debated, the chairman argued that 'by supporting a trained nurse, they would not only encourage the institution, but would supply the poor with a greater amount of skilled nursing than was possible in the past'.<sup>972</sup> However, even here, it was noted that up until this point in time, the outdoor sick had been attended by their 'unskilled neighbours', simply on account of the fact that it was cheaper to employ 'pauper nurses' than to pay for a full-time trained nurse.<sup>973</sup> Moreover, the decision to subscribe to the nursing institute only passed by a slim majority following an 'animated discussion' between the guardians.<sup>974</sup> This suggests that in Wales the wheels of change moved slowly and that right up until the end of the nineteenth century, even in the more industrial Unions, the boards of guardians regularly voted against making improvements in the poor relief system.

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<sup>968</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 9 July, 1891, p.8

<sup>969</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 9 July, 1891, p.8.

<sup>970</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 9 July, 1891, p.8.

<sup>971</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery County Times and Shropshire and Mid-Wales Advertiser*, 4 April, 1896, p.5.

<sup>972</sup> Nursing the Sick Poor of Swansea, *The South Wales Daily Post*, 16 February, 1899, p.3.

<sup>973</sup> Nursing the Sick Poor of Swansea, *The South Wales Daily Post*, 16 February, 1899, p.3

<sup>974</sup> Nursing the Sick Poor of Swansea, *The South Wales Daily Post*, 16 February, 1899, p.3.

## **Conclusion**

The evidence here suggests that in Wales the administration of the New Poor Law was, by and large, controlled by the individual boards of guardians rather than by the central authorities. Throughout most of the period under investigation here, the guardians in Wales were able to maintain a relatively high degree of control over the poor law system; this degree of control was simply not available in some parts of England.

The findings here also demonstrate that, up until the end of the nineteenth century at least, the boards of guardians in Wales were dominated by the elected rather than the ex-officio guardians. It has also been demonstrated here that there was relatively little difference between the types of individuals that controlled the vestries under the Old Poor Law in Wales and those that dominated the boards of guardians under the New. In the more rural parts of Wales the administration of the New Poor Law continued to be dominated by farmers; whereas in the more industrialized Unions in Wales the boards of guardians were often dominated by the middle classes and/or wealthy industrialists. Either way, the social elites rather than the working classes continued to dominate proceedings, at least up until the end of the nineteenth century.

The evidence here also demonstrates that, up until the end of the nineteenth century, the standard of the poor relief system in Wales continued to be lax and inefficient, particularly in the more rural Unions. Throughout much of the period under investigation here, the size of the Unions typically found in Wales, linguistic difficulties, and the poverty of the ratepayers all prevented the establishment of an adequate system of relief. By the end of the nineteenth century, the standard of the Poor Law system in Wales did slightly improve, especially in the more industrialized areas. However, the standard of the poor relief system in Wales continued to lag considerably behind the standards achieved in England.

# Chapter Six: Poor Relief and the Economy of

## Makeshifts under the New Poor Law in Wales

### Introduction

Under the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act able-bodied paupers in England and Wales, particularly able-bodied men, were to be offered the workhouse only.<sup>975</sup> The Poor Law Commissioners hoped that this would eradicate the allowance system, which they saw as the master evil of the Old Poor Law system. The practice of paying the rents of paupers was also meant to cease under the New Poor Law.<sup>976</sup> Non-resident relief was also meant to be abolished under the 1834 act.<sup>977</sup> From 1834 outdoor paupers in England and Wales were to be granted half of their relief in kind; this was meant to act as a deterrent.<sup>978</sup> By the 1870s the central authorities were also encouraging boards of guardians in England and Wales to stop relieving paupers permanently. For example, in 1871 H. Flemming, the Secretary of the Local Government Board, sent a circular to every Union in England and Wales, instructing the guardians that 'outdoor relief should be granted for a fixed period only, which in any case should not exceed three-months'.<sup>979</sup>

In some parts of England, the 1834 act significantly altered existing poor relief policies. For instance, Apfel and Dukley claimed that in Bedfordshire the number of able-bodied men receiving poor relief significantly decreased after 1834.<sup>980</sup> They also pointed out

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<sup>975</sup> Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, p.75. See also Keith Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.235. In his work Karel Williams argued that the 1834 act was only concerned with the abolition of outdoor relief to able-bodied men. However, other historians (such as Thomas Nutt) have demonstrated that the bastardy clause of the 1834 act also targeted some able-bodied women, particularly single mothers with illegitimate children.

<sup>976</sup> Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.242. Snell stated that 'after 1834, no rents were meant to be paid to the able-bodied, nor were rent arrears to be paid'.

<sup>977</sup> Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.238. Snell stated that although non-resident relief had been an important feature of the Old Poor Law, 'it was intended to be largely banned from 1834, with Edwin Chadwick and George Nicholls in particular making strictures against it'.

<sup>978</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn, Intractable Body', p.116. See also Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.226. Snell stated that the 1852 Order 'laid down that half of the weekly outdoor relief to the able-bodied should be given in kind' and that 'among the intentions here were to avert money payment in aid of wages, to deter applicants, and to allay suspicions that relief was being spent in morally undesirable ways'.

<sup>979</sup> A copy of this was printed in the First Annual Report of the Local Government Board in 1871, PP, p.67.

<sup>980</sup> Apfel and Dunkley, 'English Rural Society and the New Poor Law in Bedfordshire', pp.37-68;

that poor law expenditure in Bedfordshire significantly decreased under the New Poor Law. Samantha Williams has also argued that poor relief policies in Bedfordshire after 1834, particularly in the case of single mothers with illegitimate children, 'contrasted sharply with that prevailing under the Old Poor Law'.<sup>981</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees has also claimed that in London the New Poor Law 'changed the character of poor relief completely'.<sup>982</sup>

However, in other parts of England, the 1834 act appears to have had little or no impact on existing poor relief policies, at least initially. For example, Digby argued that in Norfolk 'continuity in rural relief administration pre and post 1834 was very strong'.<sup>983</sup> Digby pointed out that the allowance system in particular continued to be practised in this part of England long after 1834.<sup>984</sup> In a similar vein, David Ashforth has argued that in the West Riding, the vast majority of able-bodied paupers 'continued to receive outdoor relief' under the New Poor Law.<sup>985</sup> Rose has also argued that the practice of granting relief in aid of wages continued to be practised in Lancaster under the New Poor Law. He produced figures to show that in 1839, 78% of the able-bodied men on outdoor relief in Lancaster were being relieved on account of 'insufficient wages', as compared to just 21% in Suffolk.<sup>986</sup>

Several historians have also claimed that the passage of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act did little to alter poor relief policies in Wales. For example, Eirug Davies stated that in Cardiganshire, 'the central government failed to abolish many of the abuses of the Old Poor Law system such as the granting of outdoor relief to the able-bodied poor in kind and in money, the payment of rents, and the exemption of the rates'.<sup>987</sup> Anne Digby even went as far as to claim that the continuities between pre and post 1834 relief practices 'were most glaringly obvious in the Welsh countryside'.<sup>988</sup> Dewar has also argued that in South Glamorgan 'there was no immediate revolution in the treatment of the poor' after

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<sup>981</sup> Samantha Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life Cycle*, p.68.

<sup>982</sup> Lyn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers*.

<sup>983</sup> Digby, 'The Rural Poor', p.153

<sup>984</sup> Digby, 'The Rural Poor', p.158. Digby stated that as late as 1881 the central authorities were still complaining that in the more rural parts of the south east of England, 'the old abuse of relief in aid of wages prevailed in some form or another'.

<sup>985</sup> Ashforth, 'The Urban Poor', p.135.

<sup>986</sup> Rose, 'The Allowance System', p.615.

<sup>987</sup> Eirug Davies, 'The New Poor Law in a Rural area', p.245.

<sup>988</sup> Digby, 'The Rural Poor', p.158. See also David Williams, *The Rebecca Riots*, p.140. Williams stated that in west-Wales 'the old system and the old abuses continued' under the New Poor Law.

1834.<sup>989</sup> More recently, Peter Jones stated that ‘the emerging picture of Wales under the New Poor Law was one in which many local officials and boards of guardians ensured as far as possible that there was a high degree of continuity between the Old and New regimes’.<sup>990</sup>

Several historians have also argued that poor relief in Wales after 1834 was relatively generous and that Welsh boards of guardians were more humane than their English counterparts. For example, Grace Hagen argued that many of the guardians in Wales ‘were motivated by the plight of their fellow man’ and that they saw their role ‘as an extension of their philanthropic effort to ensure that the needy in their care were humanely treated’.<sup>991</sup> Hagen also claimed the narrower social divide in Wales (between the guardians and their poor), ‘resulted in less harsh treatment than was common elsewhere’.<sup>992</sup> Marian Williams has also argued that some paupers in the Cardiff Union were given money ‘for generous things’.<sup>993</sup> Williams pointed to the case of Samuel Thomas as evidence of this. In 1837, Thomas was allowed 3s a week for two months so that he could be sent out of the workhouse and into the country ‘for a change of air’.<sup>994</sup> Williams also argued that the Cardiff board of guardians ‘took their duties seriously and endeavoured to implement them economically and humanely’.<sup>995</sup> King and Stewart have also argued that doles in Wales after 1834 were relatively generous.<sup>996</sup> More recently, Evans and Jones have even claimed that the ratepayers in Wales were more generous than their English counterparts, at least in terms of the amount of relief provided in relation to the value of property assessed for the poor rates.<sup>997</sup>

However, far more studies that focus on the New Poor Law in Wales are needed in order to test these hypotheses. This chapter focuses on poor relief and the economy of

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<sup>989</sup> Dewar, ‘George Clive and the establishment of the New Poor Law in South-Glamorgan’, p.70.

<sup>990</sup> Peter Jones, ‘The New Poor Laws in Scotland, England and Wales: Comparative Perspectives’, *Local Population Studies*, 99:1, (2017), pp.31-41, [here p.36.] See also Hooker, ‘The Llandilofawr Poor Law Union’, p.3. Hooker stated that in the first fifty years after the implementation of the New Poor Law in the region, the Llandilofawr guardians ‘proceeded to provide relief in a manner as close to Old Poor Law ways as possible’.

<sup>991</sup> Hagen, ‘Women and Poverty in South-West Wales’, p.32.

<sup>992</sup> Hagen, ‘Women and Poverty in South-West Wales’, p.32,

<sup>993</sup> Marian Williams, ‘Some Aspects of the History of Poor Law Provision in Cardiff’, p.41.

<sup>994</sup> Williams, ‘Some Aspects of the History of Poor Law Provision in Cardiff’, p.41.

<sup>995</sup> Williams, ‘Some Aspects of the History of Poor Law Provision in Cardiff’, p.44.

<sup>996</sup> King and Stewart, ‘Death in Llantrisant’, p.79. They stated that one pauper, Henry Williams, was offered ‘quite generous monetary payments’ after being incapacitated following an accident at work.

<sup>997</sup> Evans and Jones, ‘A Stubborn, Intractable Body’, p.111.

makeshifts under the New Poor Law in each of our six sample Welsh regions. The first section assesses the impact that the 1834 act had on existing poor relief practices in Wales. The second section looks at the scope of poor relief in Wales under the New Poor Law. The final section explores the wider economy of makeshifts that paupers in Wales used under the New Poor Law.

### **Poor Relief Practices in Wales under the New Poor Law.**

The vast majority of paupers in Wales, including the able-bodied poor, continued to be relieved outside of the workhouse under the New Poor Law. Evidence of this can be seen in Tables 12 and 13, below, which show the percentage of paupers relieved indoors and outdoors in each of our sample regions in the period 1841-1901.

**Table 12: Percentage of Paupers Relieved Indoors in England and Wales, 1841-1901.**

Area	Quarter Ended Lady Day	January 1 <sup>st</sup>					
		1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891
<b>National</b>							
*Wales	5%	5%	5%	6%	10%	11%	14%
*England	16%	14%	16%	16%	25%	27%	34%
England and Wales	15%	13%	15%	15%	24%	25%	32%
<b>Sample English Counties</b>							
Kent	24%	21%	21%	22%	31%	32%	34%
Lancaster	10%	12%	19%	22%	32%	34%	43%
*Middlesex	24%	27%	31%	25%	53%	55%	63%
Chester	10%	9%	11%	16%	23%	23%	30%
Salop	20%	12%	14%	18%	33%	32%	36%
Gloucester	15%	14%	13%	14%	22%	20%	25%
Hereford	15%	10%	8%	13%	21%	15%	19%
<b>Sample Welsh Unions</b>							
Pembroke	11%	8%	7%	7%	11%	7%	16%
Swansea	12%	10%	6%	7%	12%	17%	16%
Abergavenny	15%	12%	12%	12%	14%	13%	16%
Newtown and Llanidloes	2%	6%	8%	10%	11%	9%	12%

Holywell	2%	11%	5%	8%	10%	9%	11%
Pwllheli	1%	6%	1%	3%	5%	5%	9%
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>							
Pembroke	7%	5%	6%		8%	7%	10%
Glamorgan	6%	5%	7%		11%	14%	16%
Monmouth	11%	8%	10%		14%	16%	17%
Montgomery	4%	4%	8%		13%	11%	16%
Flint	5%	5%	5%		10%	9%	13%
Caernarvon	0.4%	3%	3%		7%	6%	12%

**Table 13: Percentage of Paupers Relieved Outdoors in England and Wales, 1841-1901.**

Area	Quarter Ended Lady Day	January 1 <sup>st</sup>					
		1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891
<b>National</b>							
*Wales	95%	95%	95%	94%	90%	89%	86%
*England	84%	87%	84%	84%	75%	73%	66%
England and Wales	85%	87%	85%	85%	76%	75%	68%
<b>Sample English Regions</b>							
Kent	76%	79%	79%	78%	69%	68%	66%
Lancaster	90%	89%	81%	78%	68%	66%	57%
*Middlesex	76%	73%	69%	75%	47%	45%	37%
Chester	90%	91%	89%	84%	77%	77%	70%
Salop	80%	88%	86%	82%	67%	68%	64%
Gloucester	85%	86%	87%	86%	78%	80%	75%
Hereford	85%	90%	92%	87%	79%	85%	81%
<b>Sample Welsh Unions</b>							
Pembroke	89%	92%	93%	93%	89%	90%	84%
Swansea	88%	90%	94%	93%	88%	83%	84%
Abergavenny	98%	88%	88%	88%	86%	87%	84%
Newtown and Llanidloes	85%	94%	92%	90%	90%	91%	88%
Holywell	98%	89%	95%	92%	90%	91%	89%
Pwllheli	99%	94%	99%	97%	95%	95%	91%
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>							

Pembroke	93%	95%	94%	95%	92%	93%	90%
Glamorgan	94%	95%	93%	92%	89%	86%	84%
Monmouth	89%	92%	90%	90%	86%	84%	83%
Montgomery	96%	96%	92%	91%	88%	89%	84%
Flint	95%	95%	95%	93%	90%	91%	87%
Caernarvon	99.6%	97%	97%	96%	93%	94%	88%

**\*Note:** The figures for England and Wales have been adjusted to show the County of Monmouth as being in Wales.

**\*Note:** From 1891 the figures for Middlesex were included with the figures for the region of London as a whole.

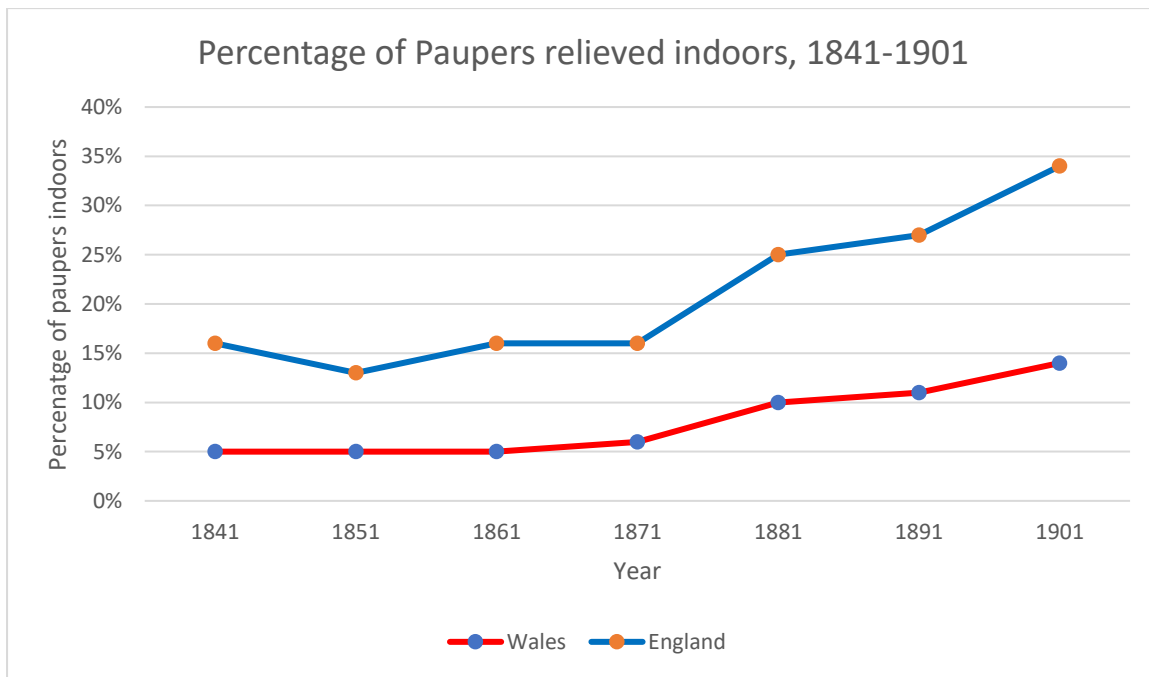
**Sources:** Poor Law Comms: Appendices (B) to eight annual report, PP, 1842; and Returns of sums expended for relief of poor in Unions in England and Wales, 1841-42, PP, 1842; **1851:** Poor Law Board: Fourth Annual Report, 1851, Appendix, PP, 1852; and Return of number of paupers receiving indoor and outdoor relief in Unions in England and Wales, 1849-51, PP, 1852; **1861:** Comparative Statement of number of paupers relieved, January, 1860 and 1861, PP, 1861; **1871:** Comparative Statement of number of paupers relieved January, 1870 and 1871, PP, 1871; **1881:** Comparative Statement of paupers relieved January, 1880 and 1881, PP, 1881; **1891:** Comparative Statement of number of paupers relieved, January, 1890 and 1891, PP, 1891; **1901:** Thirtieth Annual Report of the Local Government Board, 1900-1901, PP, 1901; and Pauperism (England and Wales), Half-Yearly Statements, PP, 1901,

These tables show that, outside of London, the vast majority of paupers in both England and Wales were relieved outdoors throughout the period 1841-1901. For example, at the national level, 95% of paupers in Wales were granted outdoor relief in the Year Ending Lady Day, 1841; 84% of paupers in England were relieved outdoors during the same period. Likewise, on 1 January, 1851, just 5% of paupers in Wales and 14% of paupers in England were relieved in a workhouse.

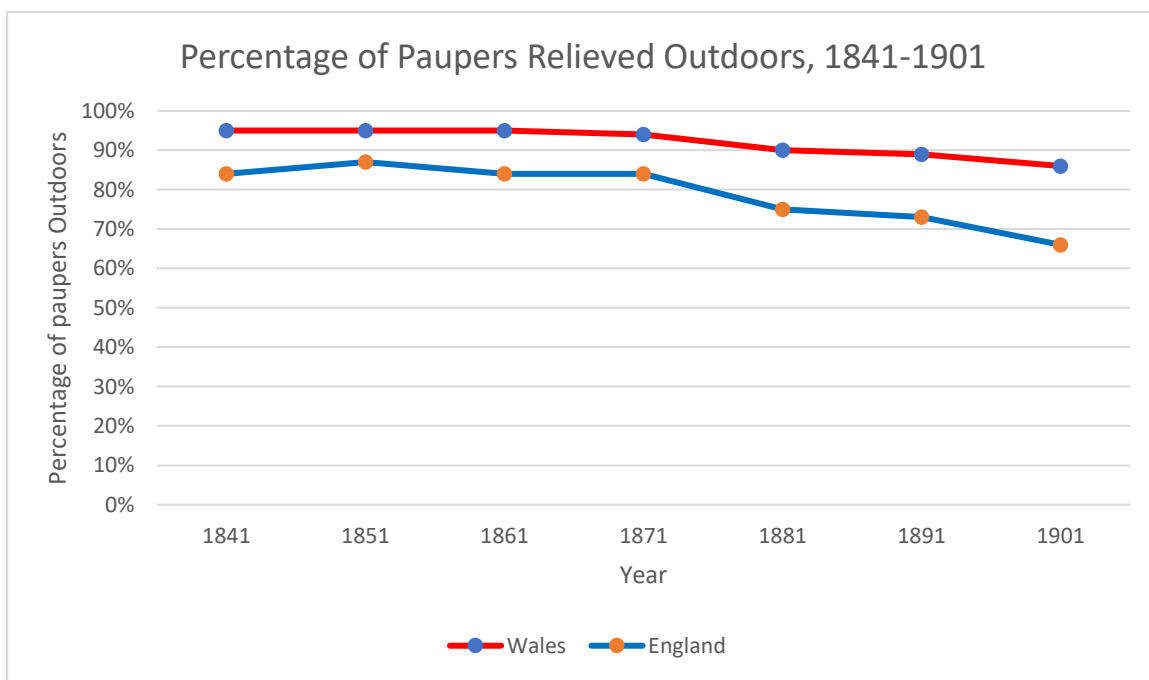
The proportion of paupers relieved indoors was generally much higher in England than in Wales throughout the period 1841-1901. For instance, in 1901, just 14% of paupers in Wales were relieved in a workhouse, compared to 34% in England. This can be seen more clearly in Figures 4 and 5 below which display the figures for Wales and England as line-graphs.



**Figure 4: The Percentage of Paupers Relieved Indoors in England and Wales, 1841-1901.**



**Figure 5: The Percentage of Paupers Relieved Outdoors in England and Wales, 1841-1901**



In some parts of England, the percentage of paupers relieved indoors even exceeded the percentage of paupers relieved outdoors during this period. For instance, in Middlesex in 1881, 53% of paupers were relieved in a workhouse, compared to 47% of paupers receiving outdoor relief. The percentage of indoor paupers in Middlesex increased to 63% in 1901.

There was some variation in the percentage of paupers relieved indoors (and outdoors) within Wales, with a higher percentage of indoor paupers typically found in the more industrial areas. For instance, in 1841, 15% of paupers in the Abergavenny Union were relieved in a workhouse, compared to just 1% in the Pwllheli Union. The percentage of paupers relieved indoors in the Pembroke Union was also comparatively high in this year; being 11% compared to the national average of just 5%. This was largely due to the fact that as discussed in Chapter Four, Unions in the south-west of Wales built their workhouses relatively quickly in comparison to other regions of Wales, such as the North-West.

The percentage of paupers relieved indoors in Wales also increased over time. For instance, at the national level, the percentage of paupers relieved indoors increased from 5% in 1841 to 14% in 1901. Likewise, in Caernarvonshire the percentage of paupers relieved indoors increased from 0.4% to 12% during the period 1841-1901. The findings here support the work of Andy Croll who also argued that the number and proportion of paupers relieved outdoors in Wales decreased during the nineteenth century, particularly during the crusade against outdoor relief in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>998</sup> The findings here also repudiate the claims of Hooker who argued that 'nothing near approaching a crusade against outdoor relief occurred in Wales'.<sup>999</sup>

However, as Croll also acknowledged, the percentage of paupers relieved indoors in Wales continued to lag considerably behind the proportion of indoor paupers typically found in England throughout the nineteenth century. Many contemporaries, including poor law officials, acknowledged that the proportion of paupers relieved outdoors was particularly high in Wales. For instance, in 1872, a ratepayer from the Swansea Union wrote a letter to *The Cambrian* criticizing the prevalence of outdoor relief in the region. Here it

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<sup>998</sup> Croll, 'Reconciled Gradually to the System of Indoor Relief'.

<sup>999</sup> Hooker, 'The Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.88

was argued that, although the Swansea guardians had generally been very diligent in their duties, there was one area to which they needed to pay greater attention, 'namely, the granting of outdoor relief'.<sup>1000</sup> The disgruntled ratepayer produced figures to show that outdoor relief in the Swansea Union was excessive, especially in comparison to a similarly sized English Union.<sup>1001</sup> Using figures provided by Mr Doyle, the Poor Law Inspector, he demonstrated that in the previous year, the Burslem Union had spent just £6,838 on their outdoor poor; whilst the Swansea guardians had expended £18,590. The ratepayer concluded that 'on this matter, the guardians have seriously neglected their duties' and that this had upset many of the local ratepayers such as himself.<sup>1002</sup> In a similar vein, at a meeting of the Pwllheli guardians in 1881, one guardian, Mr Dwyfor Jones, called the attention of the board to the 'excessive amount of outdoor relief administered in this Union as compared with other places'.<sup>1003</sup> Jones proposed that 'some measures should be enquired to look into the matter'.<sup>1004</sup> Likewise, in a letter to the Local Government Board in 1888, Mr Murray-Browne, the Poor Law Inspector for north-Wales and parts of England, lamented that 'the profuse outdoor relief which categorises the greater number of the north-Wales Unions still continues'.<sup>1005</sup>

Throughout much of the period under investigation here, the vast majority of paupers in Wales also continued to be relieved permanently with a regular cash dole, as opposed to being temporarily relieved in kind. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1877. Here, during a discussion over the system of relieving the outdoor poor, the Assistant Commissioner for Wales, Mr Murray-Browne, who was in attendance, stated that 'the idea of giving outdoor relief in kind as a sudden urgent

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<sup>1000</sup> Outdoor Relief, *The Cambrian*, 21 June, 1872, p.5

<sup>1001</sup> Outdoor Relief, *The Cambrian*, 21 June, 1872, p.5. Figures taken from Mr Doyle (the Poor Law Inspector for Wales) showed that in the previous year, the Burslem Union spent just £6,838 on their outdoor poor compared to £18,590 in Swansea.

<sup>1002</sup> Outdoor Relief, *The Cambrian*, 21 June, 1872, p.5.

<sup>1003</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 23 July, 1881, p.5

<sup>1004</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 23 July, 1881, p.5

<sup>1005</sup> General Inspection: T. Lloyd Murray-Browne, correspondence and papers related to the south-eastern division and later north-Wales (including Anglesey, Caernarvonshire, Denbigh and Radnorshire), 1872-1900, MH 32/97. Accessed through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Poverty, Philanthropy and Social Conditions in Victorian Britain, <http://www.povertyinVictorianBritain.amdigital.co.uk.abc.cardiff.ac.uk> (accessed November, 2020).

necessity was strictly one that was legal'.<sup>1006</sup> However, the Chairman of the board of guardians argued that 'it would be better if they (the outdoor paupers) were put on the books regularly instead of being relieved in kind week after week'.<sup>1007</sup> In a similar vein, when it was proposed at the annual poor law conference for north-Wales in 1873 that one-third of all outdoor relief should be given in kind, the vast majority of the guardians in attendance decided not to accept the resolution.<sup>1008</sup>

Other historians have also pointed out that relatively little relief was provided in kind in Wales under the New Poor Law. For example, Tydfil Jones stated that the guardians of the Merthyr Tydfil Union 'stubbornly refused to give relief in kind' and that 'monetary relief remained the only form of relief given until 1853'.<sup>1009</sup> Likewise, Richardson demonstrated that in the year 1837-1838, only 7% of the of the total expenditure on outdoor relief in the Llanwrst Union was paid in kind.<sup>1010</sup> Keith Parker has also argued that the Assistant Commissioners were unable to persuade the boards of guardians in Radnorshire to supply the outdoor poor with temporary relief in kind.<sup>1011</sup> Evans and Jones have also demonstrated that Unions in Wales repeatedly ignored requests from the central authorities to provide at least a portion of outdoor relief in kind as a deterrent.<sup>1012</sup> It is possible that the sheer size of the Unions in Wales (see Chapter Four) made providing relief in kind extremely difficult.

The practice of paying the rents of paupers also continued in many parts of Wales under the New Poor Law, particularly in the more rural regions. Evidence of this can be seen in a letter sent by the Pwllheli board of guardians to the Poor Law Board in 1849. Here, the Pwllheli guardians stated that 'it was formerly the practice in this Union to make periodical donations to poor persons for payment of rent, or for enabling them to cultivate and seed their gardens or plant potatoes'.<sup>1013</sup> The guardians also stated that 'the beneficial effects of

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<sup>1006</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 19 May, 1877, p.8.

<sup>1007</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 19 May, 1877, p.8.

<sup>1008</sup> Poor Law Conference at Rhyl, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 23 May, 1873, p.9.

<sup>1009</sup> Tydfil Jones, 'Poor Law Administration in the Merthyr Tydfil Union', p.41.

<sup>1010</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.308.

<sup>1011</sup> Keith Parker, 'Radnorshire and the New Poor Law', p.184.

<sup>1012</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn Intractable Body', p.116.

<sup>1013</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 17 March, 1849, p.4

such donations would extend, in cases of rent for all the year round, and in cases of potatoes seed for a considerable portion of the year, while the names of the parties would only casually appear as receiving relief'.<sup>1014</sup> The guardians then asked the opinion of the Poor Law Board 'as to the deductions they should make in such cases, as well as in those of other donations or casual relief generally'.<sup>1015</sup> The Poor Law Board replied that they 'regret to find that the Pwllheli Union have in any case adopted a course of relief so irregular and illegal as that which is stated in their communication' and that they 'declined to answer any such general questions as those submitted in your letter'.<sup>1016</sup> At another meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1869 it was reported that the auditor for North Wales, Mr William Jones Esq, had surcharged the accounts of one of the overseers of the Union, Mr John Baugh Jarrett, to the tune of £7 for 'an amount of rent paid for a certain property' that had not been duly accounted for.<sup>1017</sup> Further evidence that the rents of paupers continued to be paid for under the New Poor Law in Wales can be seen at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1897. Here, Mr Bircham, the Assistant Poor Law Commissioner for Wales who was present at the meeting stated that the outdoor relief in the Union was often 'applied to purposes for which they were never intended'.<sup>1018</sup> Bircham went on to say that 'in hundreds of instances he had found that the greater portion of this relief was paid for the rent for poor old houses which were unfit for human habitation'.<sup>1019</sup>

The practice of paying non-resident relief also continued in Wales under the New Poor Law, at least up until the end of the 1860s. For example, at a meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1852, a cheque for £2.15s was granted towards the payment of the Union's non-resident poor i.e., paupers that were settled in Holywell but were residing elsewhere, while the treasurer received £6.10s from the Wirral Union for defraying the cost

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<sup>1014</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 17 March, 1849, p.4

<sup>1015</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 17 March, 1849, p.4

<sup>1016</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 17 March, 1849, p.4

<sup>1017</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 15 May, 1869, p.3.

<sup>1018</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery and County Times and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 27 November, 1897, p.2.

<sup>1019</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery and County Times and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 27 November, 1897, p.2.

of their non-resident poor i.e., paupers that were settled in the Wirral but currently living in Holywell.<sup>1020</sup> At another meeting of the Holywell guardians in 1863, the board agreed to grant non-resident relief to Elizabeth Davies, a widow who was had a settlement in the Union but was living in Stoke. Davies, a widow with three children, stated that she had a son working at Stoke with whom she lived, who paid her 10s a week for his board, but that this 'was not enough to support herself and her children'.<sup>1021</sup> The guardians decided that the clerk be requested to enquire if the Union at Stoke was willing to relieve the applicant on behalf of the parish of Northop and to inform them that if they consented a sum of 10s casual (temporary) relief and a regular weekly dole of 4s would be allowed.<sup>1022</sup> Nicholas Edsall has argued that the payment of non-resident relief was particularly important for Welsh Unions given that, throughout the nineteenth century, Wales was a net exporter of population.<sup>1023</sup>

Many Unions in Wales also continued to pay family allowances after 1834 i.e. relief to able bodied men with large families and low incomes. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Pembroke board of guardians in 1843. Here, an able-bodied pauper named John Philips applied for relief on behalf of himself, his wife and his eleven children, most of whom were under ten years of age. The Relieving Officer informed the guardians that Philips was a labourer in husbandry, currently in the employ of Mr John Thomas of Green Hill, and was receiving 4/ per week, the keep of a cow, and his house and garden at £2.10s per year. The board of guardians decided to grant Phillips 2s a week and directed the clerk to report the same to the Poor Law Commissioners.<sup>1024</sup>

Further evidence that family allowances continued to be paid in Wales after 1834 can be seen in Tables 14 and 15, below. Table 14 shows the total number of able-bodied men relieved outdoors in the year ending Lady Day 1841, as well as the number and percentage of these men who were married with children. Table 15 shows the number and percentage of these men who were relieved on account of 'want of work', those relieved for

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<sup>1020</sup> Holywell Union, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 25 March, 1852, p.2.

<sup>1021</sup> Holywell, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 23 May, 1863, p.8.

<sup>1022</sup> Holywell, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 23 May, 1863, p.8.

<sup>1023</sup> Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement*, p.129.

<sup>1024</sup> PRO, Pembroke Board of Guardians Minute book, 14 July, 1841- 20 October, 1844 8 February, 1843. SPU-PE/1/2.

‘Insufficient Earnings’ and those relieved for ‘Other Causes’. Note: the figures for the individual Unions were not available, so the county level figures will be used for comparison.

**Table 14: Percentage of Able-Bodied Men Relieved Outdoors in England and Wales, who were married with children, 1841.**

Area	Total Number of able-bodied men relieved outdoors	Number of able-bodied men relieved outdoors who were married with children	Percentage of able-bodied men relieved outdoors who were married with children
<b>National</b>			
*Wales	2,182	1,882	86%
*England	26,866	21,301	79%
England and Wales	29,048	23,183	80%
<b>Sample English Counties</b>			
Kent	1,041	891	86%
Lancaster	3,952	3,620	92%
Middlesex	5,755	4,393	76%
Chester	581	477	82%
Salop	65	43	66%
Gloucester	279	204	73%
Hereford	107	99	93%
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>			
Pembroke	40	39	98%
Glamorgan	151	127	84%
Monmouth	100	55	55%
Montgomery	549	510	93%
*Flint	195	178	91%
Caernarvon	233	176	76%

**\*Note:** The figures for Wales and England have been adjusted to show the county of Monmouth as being in Wales. Note also that the figures for Flint include the Holywell and St Asaph Unions.

**Source:** Poor Law Coms: Appendices (B) to (F). To Eighth Annual Report, PP, 1842.

**Table 15: The Reasons for granting outdoor relief to able-bodied men in the year ending  
Lady Day, 1841**

Area	Percentage of able-bodied men relieved outdoors on account of 'want of work'	Percentage of able-bodied men relieved outdoors on account of 'Insufficiency of Earnings'	Percentage of able-bodied men relieved outdoors on account of 'other causes'
<b>National</b>			
Wales	22%	68%	10%
England	58%	31%	11%
England and Wales	55%	34%	11%
<b>Sample English Counties</b>			
Kent	65%	16%	19%
Lancaster	25%	73%	2%
Middlesex	80%	16%	5%
Chester	65%	25%	10%
Salop	54%	23%	23%
Gloucester	29%	66%	5%
Hereford	65%	10%	25%
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>			
Pembroke	10%	68%	23%
Glamorgan	22%	46%	32%
Monmouth	71%	25%	4%
Montgomery	7%	83%	10%
Flint	77%	14%	9%
Caernarvon	32%	58%	10%

**\*Note:** The figures for Wales and England have been adjusted to show the county of Monmouth as being in Wales. Note also that the figures for Flint include the Holywell and St Asaph Unions.

**Source:** Poor Law Coms: Appendices (B) to (F). To Eighth Annual Report, PP, 1842.

Table 14 shows that the vast majority of able-bodied men in receipt of outdoor relief in England and Wales in 1841 were married with children. For example, at the national level, 86% of the able-bodied men relieved outdoors in Wales in this year were married with children; the corresponding figure for England in this year was 79%. The figure for the county of Monmouth was considerably lower than the national average at 55%. However, in every instance the majority of able-bodied men in receipt of outdoor relief in England and Wales in 1841 were married with children.



Moreover, Table 15 shows that of the able-bodied men receiving outdoor relief in Wales in 1841, 68% were relieved on account of 'Insufficient Earnings'; the corresponding figure for England was just 31%. There was some variation in the percentage of those being relieved on account of 'Insufficient Earnings' within Wales. For instance, in Flint only 14% of able-bodied men were being relieved for 'Insufficient Earnings'. This was probably due to the fact that periodic mass unemployment was more of an issue in some of the more industrialised regions in Wales, as opposed to low wages; in Flint 77% of able-bodied men in this year were relieved for 'want of work'. However, if we take the first two categories in this table ('Want of work' and Insufficient Earnings') it is clear that a significant number of able-bodied men in Wales, particularly those who were married with children, continued to receive relief for employment related reasons under the New Poor Law, in contravention of the 1834 act.

Other historians have also demonstrated that family allowances continued to be granted to able-bodied men in Wales after 1834, at least to those with large families and insufficient earnings. For instance, Eirug Davies stated that 'not only did the Commissioners fail to end the system of outdoor relief in Wales, but they failed to abolish the practice of granting allowances in aid of small wages'.<sup>1025</sup> Likewise, Richardson stated that in Nantconwy 'labourers with four or more children continued to be relieved outdoors under the New Poor Law'.<sup>1026</sup> Richardson also claimed that in many parts of North-Wales, the Assistant Commissioner, William Day, 'found himself unable to persuade boards to abolish payments to men with large families'.

The evidence here appears to confirm the claims of other historians such as Eirug Davies, Anne Digby, and Peter Jones, who all argued that the passage of the 1834 had little impact on existing relief policies in Wales. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, many of these Old Poor Law practices were gradually phased out or otherwise stopped. For instance, by the end of the 1860s, most Unions in Wales had stopped paying non-resident relief. As early as 1853, the guardians of the Pwllheli Union passed a resolution which stated

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<sup>1025</sup> Eirug Davies. 'The New Poor Law in a Rural area', p.267. Day used similar sets of figures to show that in 1840 44 men and 146 women in Cardiganshire were granted outdoor relief on account of 'Insufficient Earnings'.

<sup>1026</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.299.

that 'the relief allowed to all paupers belonging to the several parishes in this Union and residing in the Bangor and Beaumaris Union be discontinued from this day'.<sup>1027</sup> Further evidence that non-resident relief was stopped in Wales can be seen at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1864. Here, one of the guardians, Mr Edward Chapman proposed that the decision of the board to stop non-resident relief, which had been made at the previous meeting, should be rescinded. Chapman argued that the decision 'bore very harshly on paupers in some cases'.<sup>1028</sup> However, Mr E. Rees and Mr J. Jones opposed this resolution and proposed an amendment that it should not be rescinded on the grounds that 'it would put the Union to unnecessary expense without having an opportunity of exercising due supervision over outdoor paupers residing at a distance from the Union'.<sup>1029</sup> The Newtown and Llanidloes guardians voted overwhelmingly in favour of the amendment, that the original resolution of the guardians to end non-resident relief should stand.<sup>1030</sup> Likewise, in 1868, the Holywell board of guardians 'unanimously' resolved that: 'from the end of the current quarter the board of guardians cease to relieve any non-settled poor residing in the Holywell Union, and that all orders of the board authorizing the guardians of other Unions to administer non-resident relief to paupers belonging to Holywell Union, now in force, shall expire at the end of the present quarter'.<sup>1031</sup> At another meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1868 it was reported that the decision of the guardians to stop non-resident relief had caused 'great hardship' to the poor, particularly to the elderly.<sup>1032</sup>

The practice of granting family allowances was also gradually phased out in Wales. Evidence of this can be seen in the annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners in 1855. This report provided statistics on the type of relief afforded to able bodied men and the reasons for the relief. By this point in time the categories for receiving relief had slightly changed. There was no longer a specific category for those receiving relief on account of 'Insufficient Earnings'. However, there was still a category for those receiving relief on

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<sup>1027</sup> Pwllheli Union, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 29 April, 1853, p.3.

<sup>1028</sup> Caersws, Newtown and Llanidloes Union, *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 15 July, 1864, p.7.

<sup>1029</sup> Caersws, Newtown and Llanidloes Union, *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 15 July, 1864, p.7.

<sup>1030</sup> Caersws, Newtown and Llanidloes Union, *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 15 July, 1864, p.7.

<sup>1031</sup> Holywell, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 7 March, 1868, p.5.

<sup>1032</sup> Holywell, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 2 May, 1868, p.3.

account of 'Want of Work'. Karel Williams has argued that this category covered all relief provided to able-bodied men for employment-related reasons.<sup>1033</sup> Table 16 below shows the total number of able-bodied men relieved outdoors in England and Wales on January 1 1855, as well as the percentage of able-bodied men relieved in each category. Note: The figures for the individual Unions are unavailable so the county level figures will be used for comparison.

**Table 16: Total number of able-bodied men relieved outdoors on 1 January 1855, and the reasons for their relief.**

Area	Total Number of able-bodied men relieved outdoors	Percentage relieved on account of sudden or urgent necessity	Percentage relieved on account of their own sickness	Percentage relieved on account of sickness in their family	Percentage relieved on account of want of work
<b>National</b>					
*Wales	1,608	1%	77%	18%	4%
*England	28,121	0.35%	59%	26%	15%
England and Wales	29,729	0.39%	60%	26%	14%
<b>Sample English Counties</b>					
Kent	975	1%	67%	30%	2%
Lancaster	3,349	0.11%	38%	19%	42%
Middlesex	2,160	1%	43%	16%	41%
Chester	297	0%	65%	17%	18%
Salop	264	0%	83%	14%	3%
Gloucester	686	0%	67%	33%	0.29%
Hereford	253	0%	69%	26%	5%
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>					
Pembroke	58	0%	91%	5%	3%
Glamorgan	296	3%	88%	6%	3%
Monmouth	183	0%	83%	17%	0%
Montgomeryshire	222	1%	61%	37%	1%
*Flint	30	0%	60%	40%	0%
Caernarvon	240	1%	91%	8%	0%

<sup>1033</sup> Karel Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty*, p.70.

**\*Note:** The figures for Wales and England have been adjusted to show the county of Monmouth as being in Wales. Note also that the figures for Flint include the Holywell and St Asaph Unions.

**Source:** Poor Law Board: Eighth Annual Report, 1855, PP, 1856.

This table shows that by 1855, relatively few able-bodied men in Wales were now being relieved on account of employment-related reasons; the vast majority were now only relieved on account of sickness only, either their own or that of a family member. For instance, at the national level, only 4% of able-bodied men receiving outdoor relief in Wales in 1855 were relieved on account of 'Want of work'; 95% were relieved on account of sickness. This is in stark contrast to the situation only a few years earlier, where, as demonstrated above, the vast majority of able-bodied men in receipt of outdoor relief in Wales were relieved for employment-related reasons.

Further evidence that family allowances were gradually phased out or otherwise stopped in Wales can be seen at the annual Poor Law Conference for north-Wales in 1873. During the discussions a resolution was proposed that 'outdoor relief should not be granted to any able-bodied man'.<sup>1034</sup> After some debate, the resolution was adopted by a majority of three. One of the representatives at the meeting, Mr Williams asked the chairman to clarify whether or not they (the guardians) were still permitted to relieve able-bodied men outside of the workhouse in the case of sickness. The chairman confirmed that this was the case. In a similar vein, at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1875, the relief committee recommended that able-bodied paupers, particularly able-bodied men, should be offered the workhouse only.<sup>1035</sup> Likewise, in 1878 it was reported that in the Abergavenny Union an able-bodied man by the name of Sullivan, who had a large family and insufficient means, was offered the workhouse only when he applied to the guardians for relief. It was stated in the local newspaper report of the case that, after spending a solitary night in the workhouse, Sullivan absconded and went to Ropewalk Lane, where he

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<sup>1034</sup> Poor Law Administration in North Wales, Conference of Guardians, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 24 May, 1873, p.7.

<sup>1035</sup> Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 24 December, 1875, p.8.

committed suicide by hanging.<sup>1036</sup> Dot Jones has also demonstrated that, by 1870, able-bodied men in the Aberystwyth Union only received outdoor relief for sickness related reasons.<sup>1037</sup>

There is even some evidence that by the end of the nineteenth century, some Unions in Wales, particularly those in the more industrialised areas, had begun to grant temporary relief only, at least to able-bodied paupers. Moreover, in kind relief was increasingly being used as a deterrent in Wales. Evidence of this can be seen in the report of the local government inspector to the president of the Local Government Board, on the conditions of Unions in South Wales, and the measures taken by boards of guardians for dealing with applications for relief during a period of economic distress in 1878. Here, it was stated that in the Swansea Union there had been 4 applications from able-bodied men with families. It was reported that two of these men were sent to the workhouse and made to work in the garden. This could be seen as further evidence that family allowances were being phased out in Wales. However, it was also noted that the remaining two men were 'merely relieved in kind for one week'.<sup>1038</sup> At another meeting of the Swansea board of guardians in 1878 it was resolved that, in the case of able-bodied men, 'at least one half of the relief should be given in kind'.<sup>1039</sup> In a similar vein, at a meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1875 it was resolved 'no outdoor relief be given to any pauper for a longer period than three months' and that at the expiration of that time, 'every case requiring a continuance of relief should be reported on'.<sup>1040</sup> Likewise, in the Abergavenny Union in 1880 the guardians agreed that instead of meeting to revise the list of permanent outdoor relief

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<sup>1036</sup> Abergavenny, *Pontypool Free Press and Herald of the Hills*, 11 May, 1878, p.4. In a similar vein, when an able-bodied man, Samuel Harries, applied for outdoor relief in the Pembroke Union in 1888, the board refused his application and gave an Order for admission to the workhouse, Pembroke board of guardians, *The Tenby Observer Weekly List of Visitors and Directory*, 29 March, 1888, p.6.

<sup>1037</sup> Jones, 'Pauperism in the Aberystwyth Poor Law Union', pp.79-80. Jones stated that by this point in time, 'very few able-bodied paupers in the sense of "readily employable" appear in the relief lists' and that 'where returns were made on the basis of causes of relief, most able-bodied men are found to be receiving relief 'on account of their own sickness, accident or infirmity'.

<sup>1038</sup> Reports of Local Government Inspector to president of the Local Government Board, on condition of Unions in S. Wales, and measures taken by boards of guardians for dealing with applications for relief during pressure of distress, PP, 1878.

<sup>1039</sup> WGA, Swansea Board of Guardians Minute Book, May 1877-September 1878, U/S, 1/13 [here 30 May, 1878].

<sup>1040</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 8 October, 1875, p.4.

cases, they should instead adopt the plan suggested by Bircham 'to give such relief for stated periods only' and to 'have the cases brought before the board in rotation at each meeting'.<sup>1041</sup>

Some Unions in Wales even began to phase out the payment of pauper rents after 1834. Evidence of this can be seen in a letter sent by William Powell, the first chairman of the Abergavenny board of guardians to Assistant Commissioner George Clive in 1837. Here, Powell stated that the expenditure within the Union had reduced from £1,704 in the quarter ending 25 March 1835 to just £821 in the quarter ending 25 December 1836. Powell attributed this significant decrease in poor law expenditure to several factors including the decision of the Abergavenny guardians to stop paying the rents of paupers 'whether able-bodied or not'.<sup>1042</sup> Likewise, in 1836, George Clive, sent a letter to the Poor Law Commissioners in which he stated that Llantrisant (in the Cardiff union) had a relatively large workhouse 'which as in great measure relieved the parish from the payment of rents'.<sup>1043</sup> In a similar vein, at a meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1867, the chairman proposed that the practice of paying pauper rents should stop. During a heated discussion over whether or not the guardians should grant relief to a pauper who was paying £7 a year in rent, but was in 'want of food', the chairman stated that 'he was old enough to remember the rule at the old parish vestries before 1834 (of which he had been a member), and that the principal cause of the New act had been to knock out the allowance for rents'.<sup>1044</sup> The Relieving Officer also argued that 'if the auditor sees that the woman pays £7 a year in rent, he would surcharge the amount of relief granted'.<sup>1045</sup> Another guardian, Mr Dawson, then stated that as agent to Sir Pyers Mostyn, he would take the house off the applicant's hands, if the board would grant her relief. The board agreed to this proposal and asked the pauper to make another application for relief once the cottage had been taken from her. Further evidence that the practice of paying the rents of paupers had been largely phased out in Wales by the middle of the nineteenth century can be seen at a meeting of a

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<sup>1041</sup> Abergavenny Board of Guardians, *Pontypool Free Press and Herald of the Hill*, 5 June, 1880, p.4.

<sup>1042</sup> Cited in Poor Law Amendment Act, *The Cambrian*, 4 March, 1837, p.2.

<sup>1043</sup> Cited in King and Stewart, 'Death in Llantrisant', p.76.

<sup>1044</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 27 December, 1867, p.4.

<sup>1045</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 27 December, 1867, p.4.

relief committee in the Swansea Union in 1879. Here, one of the members of the committee stated that he had visited the houses of many paupers in the district in order to ascertain the extent of the poverty. When asked how the paupers paid their rent he replied: 'They do not pay rent. In some cases, they owe it with the hope of paying when better time arrive, and in others they remove from one house to another not paying it at all'.<sup>1046</sup> Francesca Richardson has also demonstrated that by 1860, the Llanrwst Union had begun to phase out the rents of paupers.<sup>1047</sup> Richardson stated that Assistant Commissioner Neave managed to convince the Llanrwst board of guardians that it was now illegal to pay rents directly to the landlord.<sup>1048</sup>

Moreover, as alluded to in Chapter Four, the bastardy clause of the 1834 act was implemented almost immediately in Wales, at least in the regions where workhouses were established very early on. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Abergavenny board of guardians in 1837. Here, the chairman, William Powell informed Mr Clive, the Assistant Commissioner that since the formation of the Union, single mothers with illegitimate children, upon applying for relief, were offered the workhouse only. Powell also claimed that only two women had accepted the offer of the workhouse, the remainder forgoing poor relief altogether.<sup>1049</sup> Further evidence that the bastardy clause was implemented relatively quickly in Wales can be seen in the Pembroke Union in 1844. Here, it was reported in a local newspaper that in the last year, the number of bastards supported by the Union decreased from 274 to 129. This decrease was attributed specifically to the 'beneficial' workings of the bastardy clause in the region.<sup>1050</sup> Unions in Wales without a workhouse had no choice but to keep relieving single mothers outdoors. However, in every case, as soon as a workhouse opened, the number of single mothers with illegitimate children relieved outdoors decreased significantly. For instance, in Flintshire, the number of unmarried mothers relieved outdoors dropped from 95 in 1840 to just 25 in 1841 following

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<sup>1046</sup> The Distress in Swansea, a visit to the homes of the destitute, painful scenes, *Weekly Mail*, 1 February, 1879, p.3.

<sup>1047</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', pp.297-298.

<sup>1048</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', pp.297-298.

<sup>1049</sup> Poor Law Amendment Act, *The Cambrian*, 4 March, 1837, p.2. Powell also claimed that as a result of this change, improvident marriages in the Union had decreased and that cases of bastardy had become much rarer.

<sup>1050</sup> The Pembroke Herald and General Advertiser, 26 January, 1844, p.3.

the opening of the Holywell workhouse in 1840. The number decreased again in 1842 when only one unmarried mother in the entire county was listed as being relieved outdoors.<sup>1051</sup> Likewise, when the Merthyr Tydfil workhouse opened in 1853 the number of single mothers with illegitimate children in receipt of outdoor relief significantly decreased from 63 to just 14.<sup>1052</sup>

The findings here challenge or at least nuance the assertions of other historians such as Anne Digby, Ian Dewar and Eirug Davies, who all claimed that Old Poor Law practices simply continued in Wales. Many Old Poor Law practices including the payment of pauper rents, non-resident relief and family allowances did continue in Wales for some time after 1834. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, many of these practices had, by and large, been phased out or otherwise stopped. Moreover, in some parts of Wales, such as the South-West, the bastardy clause of the 1834 act was implemented relatively quickly. This further complicates the idea that Old Poor Law practices simply continued in Wales.

### **The Scope of the New Poor Law in Wales.**

Although, as demonstrated above, the vast majority of paupers in Wales under the New Poor Law continued to be relieved outside of a workhouse, the doles they received were often as low and inadequate as they had been under the Old Poor Law. Evidence of this can be seen in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots. For instance, when asked whether or not the indigent poor were adequately relieved, Mr John Jones, the chairman of the Rhayader board of guardians replied in the negative stating that ‘to the necessitous poor we give as little as we can; just a sufficiency and no more, to sustain life’.<sup>1053</sup> Another witness, Mr Hughes, a farmer, claimed that since 1834 the poor rates in his parish had increased significantly but that ‘the poor do not get so much relief as they did under the Old system’.<sup>1054</sup> Hughes also stated that there were eighteen paupers in his parish who were

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<sup>1051</sup> Figures taken from Poor Law Commission Annual Reports 1840-1842, PP, 1840, 1841, 1842

<sup>1052</sup> Figures taken from Poor Law Board Annual Reports 1853 and 1854, PP, 1853 and 1854

<sup>1053</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.291.

<sup>1054</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p262.



receiving outdoor relief but that these individuals were now 'actually half-starving'.<sup>1055</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Swansea board of guardians in 1899, the chairman, Dr Gomer Lewis stated declared that 'the Swansea guardians did not give adequate relief' and that he 'was ashamed to sit on the board'.<sup>1056</sup> Lewis also stated that he had recently met the chairmen of other boards all over the country and that he 'knew of no board which treated their poor as bad' as the Swansea guardians.<sup>1057</sup> Lewis further asserted that 'primarily they (the guardians) ought to be there to relieve the poor and not the ratepayers; but he was sorry to say that the Swansea board was there for the ratepayers and not the poor'.<sup>1058</sup> At another meeting of the Swansea board of guardians in 1900, the clerk read a letter from the Cardiff board of guardians following their recent visit to the Swansea Union. In this letter the Cardiff guardians stated that they were 'astonished at the small amount that they in Swansea granted in out-relief cases'.<sup>1059</sup> Further evidence that the doles given to the outdoor paupers in Wales under the New Poor Law were grossly inadequate can be seen at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1896. Here, one of the guardians, Mr Morgan stated that the guardians were often charged with allowing too much outdoor relief but that 'he had seldom or ever found the guardians granting more outdoor relief than was sufficient to keep body and soul together' and that the amounts typically granted by the Union were 'not even enough to afford comforts or even necessaries in old age'.<sup>1060</sup>

The small sums typically granted in Wales were particularly problematic given that the vast majority of the outdoor paupers, particularly in the more rural areas, were elderly and/or infirm; many of whom had no other means of support. Evidence of this can be seen at the annual Poor Law Conference for South Wales in 1873. Here, Mr Roch, the representative for the Pembroke Union stated that 'upwards of one-third of the outdoor

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<sup>1055</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.262.

<sup>1056</sup> The Chairman ashamed to sit on the Board, *The Cambrian*, 13 October, 1899, p.5.

<sup>1057</sup> The Chairman ashamed to sit on the Board, *The Cambrian*, 13 October, 1899, p.5.

<sup>1058</sup> The Chairman ashamed to sit on the Board, *The Cambrian*, 13 October, 1899, p.5.

<sup>1059</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, *Evening Express*, 6 July, 1900, p.3. The Cardiff guardians also stated that 'in cases where 8s was granted at Swansea, 12s would be granted in Cardiff'.

<sup>1060</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 11 July, 1896, p.2.

paupers in his Union were children and upwards of one-half were old and infirm'.<sup>1061</sup> In a similar vein, at a meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1881, Mr Dwyfor Jones claimed that the high levels of outdoor relief in the Union could be attributed, at least in part to the 'longevity of the paupers'.<sup>1062</sup> Jones maintained that in his parish, Llaniestyn, 'the average age of the paupers exceeds eighty' and that it would be 'pitiful to offer the workhouse to such aged paupers'.<sup>1063</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes Union in 1899 Mr Bircham stated that 'the largest item in the board's outrelief list was under the head of those who were old and infirm, and who had no-one to help them'.<sup>1064</sup> Even in the more industrialised areas of Wales, elderly paupers made up a significant portion of the outdoor host. For instance, in the parish of Clase (in the Swansea Union) in 1872, 44% of the outdoor paupers were aged 60 and above.<sup>1065</sup> Likewise, in the Holywell Union in 1888 it was reported that amongst 17 applications for renewals of relief in the Ysceifiog parish, 'the average age of the parties was seventy-five-and-a-half', whilst in another parish, among the eighteen paupers in receipt of relief, 'the average age was seventy-seven years'.<sup>1066</sup> It is hard to see how such small doles benefited these aged paupers.

As under the Old Poor Law, the guardians in Wales often used the threat of the workhouse in order to keep the sums provided to the outdoor poor as low as possible. For instance, in the 1844 Report into the Rebecca Riots, Mr R. B. Jones, a guardian from the Narberth Union, stated that he had been 'instrumental in beginning the system that we have practised of contriving to keep them (the paupers) out of the workhouse for a smaller

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<sup>1061</sup> Conference of Guardians at Swansea, *The Welshman*, 18 April, 1873, p.2. Roch also stated that the 'remainder were able-bodied in the sense that they had met with accident or sickness or were widows who received relief not on their own account but on account of their children'.

<sup>1062</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 23 July, 1881, p.5.

<sup>1063</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 23 July, 1881, p.5.

<sup>1064</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomeryshire County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 10 June, 1899, p.2.

<sup>1065</sup> WGA, U/S 11/1: Swansea Union, List of Paupers and Abstract of Accounts, 1872-1879. Bernard Lewis also demonstrated that 67% of outdoor paupers in Morriston were 'either too young or too old to support themselves adequately'. Lewis, *Swansea and the workhouse*, pp.120-121.

<sup>1066</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 14 June, 1888, p.8.

sum'.<sup>1067</sup> Likewise, as part of his evidence to the Welsh Land Commission in 1893, Mr David Davies, a farmer from Llangyby (Llangybi) in Gwynedd, stated that 'aged labourers did not care to go into the workhouse' and that most of them were willing to accept 'small pensions instead'.<sup>1068</sup> Similarly, it was reported in the Pembroke Union in 1895 that 'many poor women threaten to starve outside with their children rather than enter the House'.<sup>1069</sup> Evans and Jones have also argued that the boards of guardians in Wales routinely used the threat of the workhouse in order to keep doles as low as possible.<sup>1070</sup>

Some of the guardians in Wales also claimed that the paupers in their Unions did not need large sums of relief in order to survive. For example, at the annual Poor Law Conference for south-Wales in Swansea in 1873, the Reverend R. B. Jones, who, it was noted, had been a guardian for the Narberth Union since 1842, marvelled 'on what little amount life could be supported, especially amongst the Welsh peasantry, who lived on the mountains'.<sup>1071</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1876, Mr Jenkins maintained that 'this is a rural Union and that the old and infirm people can do wonders by being occupied in some trifling service, with the addition of the small relief we give them out of the rates'.<sup>1072</sup> In a similar vein, at a meeting of the Pembroke board of guardians in 1887, the chairman stated that 'Tenby was a place where there was a great deal of charity and therefore a small amount of relief was sufficient'.<sup>1073</sup>

However, paupers in Wales frequently complained that the sums that they were provided with were not enough to provide even the barest modicum of comfort. For example, at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1900, an elderly pauper named Thomas Evans, aged 82, appeared before the board asking for some additional help towards maintaining himself, his wife aged 74, and his granddaughter. It was reported that Evans was receiving just 1s a week from the guardians, on top of the 4s a

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<sup>1067</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.102.

<sup>1068</sup> The Welsh Land Commission, Sitting in North Wales, *South Wales Daily News*, 20 September, 1893, p.6.

<sup>1069</sup> *The Welshman*, 4 January, 1895, p.3.

<sup>1070</sup> Evans and Jones, 'A Stubborn Intractable Body', p.113. They pointed to a quote from Thomas Williams a blacksmith from Carmarthen in 1843 as evidence of this. Williams stated that 'the people would rather live on 1s out of the workhouse than 3s 6d in it'.

<sup>1071</sup> Conference of Guardians at Swansea, *The Welshman*, 18 April, 1873, p.2.

<sup>1072</sup> Newtown, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 21 January, 1876, p.6.

<sup>1073</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, *The Tenby Observer Weekly List of Visitors and Directory*, 7 July, 1887, p.4.

week that he received in support from his two sons; this equated to just 5s a week in total, out of which he had to pay 3 guineas a year for his rent alone. The guardians decided to allow Evans 2s a week extra, thus bringing his yearly income to £18.4s. On being informed of the decision of the guardians Evans exclaimed 'I was thinking that you would have given me more than that. How am I and mine to live, and find fire, clothing and rent out of 7s a week?'<sup>1074</sup>

On occasion, the central authorities themselves complained that the amount of relief provided to paupers in Wales was wholly inadequate. For example, at a meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1895, Mr Bircham stated that 'Welsh guardians pride themselves that they would not order people into a workhouse'.<sup>1075</sup> However, he questioned whether 'for people suffering from great illness and with only the small dole of out-relief, was very humane treatment after all'.<sup>1076</sup> At a meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1901 Mr Bircham also spoke of 'the evils of a policy of granting small doles in outdoor relief'.<sup>1077</sup> Bircham argued that 'it would be better to grant adequate relief to a few than inadequate relief to a large number'.<sup>1078</sup> At another meeting of the Pwllheli guardians in 1901 Bircham lamented that having looked over the accounts of the Union he had concluded that 'the sums paid to the poor were small, especially in comparison with other sums in the expenses'.<sup>1079</sup>

Other historians have also argued that the amount of poor relief allowed to paupers in Wales under the New Poor Law continued to be woefully inadequate. For instance, Richardson stated that in Nantconwy 'the level of regular allowances remained low after 1834- the median level for both men and women being between 1s 6d and 2s per week'.<sup>1080</sup>

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<sup>1074</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 20 January, 1900, p.6.

<sup>1075</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, Mr Bircham on the duties of the guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 28 February, 1895, p.8

<sup>1076</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, Mr Bircham on the duties of the guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 28 February, 1895, p.8

<sup>1077</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 25 January, 1901, p.7.

<sup>1078</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 25 January, 1901, p.7.

<sup>1079</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 31 May, 1901, p.4. At a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1899 Bircham also said that 'he often thought that the dole given in deserving cases was not large enough', cited in Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 10 June, 1899, p.2.

<sup>1080</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.293.

Richardson also claimed that the pensions provided in Nantconwy under the New Poor Law 'were lower than in any English region'.<sup>1081</sup> Hulonce has also argued that paupers in the Swansea Union were often forced to rely on 'alternative sources' in order to survive on account of the inadequacy of the doles that they were provided with.<sup>1082</sup> Hooker has even claimed that the size of the doles allowed to paupers in the Llandilofawr Union decreased after 1834. Hooker stated that 'post 1836, payments were significantly less than previous'.<sup>1083</sup>

Boards of guardians in Wales also regularly refused to allow 'extra' payments to their outdoor paupers, even when urged to so by the central authorities. For example, at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes paupers in 1897, the clerk read circulars from other Unions intimating that they were paying an extra sum to the outdoor paupers of the Caersws Union, on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee, in their district, and asking the Newtown and Llanidloes guardians to do the same. The chairman also stated that he had received a circular from the Local Government Board authorizing them to advance to the outdoor paupers 'any extra relief they might think fit'.<sup>1084</sup> Mr D. Hamer proposed that the board grant the money. He calculated that there were 729 outdoor paupers in the Union and that the cost of providing a sixpence to every child and one shilling to every adult would be around £31. 10s. Mr W. Francis seconded the motion. However, another guardian, Mr John Lewis, argued that 'the outdoor poor were not so thrifty as they should be' and that any money given to them 'would end up in the taverns'.<sup>1085</sup> He proposed an amendment not to grant the extra relief. This was seconded by Mr. T. Mills. Another guardian, Mr E. Morris also claimed that 'there were scores of ratepayers in this Union more in need of the extra grant'.<sup>1086</sup> Mr Hamer, the proposer of the original motion to grant the relief, insisted that the Local Government Board would not have extended them the privilege to offer the extra

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<sup>1081</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.295.

<sup>1082</sup> Lesley Hulonce, *Pauper Children*, p.73. Dot Jones has also argued that elderly paupers in the Aberystwyth Union 'typically received small doles', Jones, 'Pauperism in the Aberystwyth Poor Law Union', p.83.

<sup>1083</sup> Hooker, 'Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.104.

<sup>1084</sup> Nothing extra for the paupers at the Jubilee, Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery and County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 12 June, 1897, p.2.

<sup>1085</sup> Nothing extra for the paupers at the Jubilee, Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery and County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 12 June, 1897, p.2.

<sup>1086</sup> Nothing extra for the paupers at the Jubilee, Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery and County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 12 June, 1897, p.2.

payment if they did not think it was advisable. Mr J. Lewis curtly replied, 'but they (the Local Government Board) have not sent the money'.<sup>1087</sup> This was met with laughter from the board. On the amendment (not to grant the extra relief) being put to a vote, only two guardians voted against it, and it was declared carried. At the same meeting the guardians decided to allow themselves a 'good dinner' at the next board meeting to mark the week of the Jubilee; this was to be paid for out of the rates.<sup>1088</sup> In 1887, the Ffestiniog board of guardians also voted against allowing the inmates of the workhouse a roast beef dinner to mark the Golden Jubilee of the reign of Queen Victoria. Here, one of the guardians, Mr. C. Roberts, wanted to know 'what the Royal Family had done for Wales?'.<sup>1089</sup> Roberts also pointed out the Prince of Wales 'never accepted an invitation to attend any of their national institutions' and that he had 'withdrawn his name as a patron of the Eisteddfod'.<sup>1090</sup> Another guardian, Mr Jones also objected to the ratepayers money being spent to mark the Jubilee, stating that 'the country did not want these celebrations'.<sup>1091</sup> The indifference or even hostility of the Welsh boards of guardians towards the Royal celebrations challenges or at least nuances the work of Nadja Durbach, who has claimed that the provision of a treat (often in the form of a roast beef dinner) to paupers in England and Wales to mark a day of national celebration (such as Christmas Day or a Royal occasion) demonstrated that paupers were still considered to be an important part of British society.<sup>1092</sup> By Durbach's own yardstick, the denial of this 'culturally significant meal' meant that paupers in Wales were regularly denied their full rights and sense of national identity.

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<sup>1087</sup> Nothing extra for the paupers at the Jubilee, Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery and County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 12 June, 1897, p.2. The guardians even agreed to provide hay for the horses of several of the guardians in order for them to attend.

<sup>1088</sup> Nothing extra for the paupers at the Jubilee, Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery and County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 12 June, 1897, p.2.

<sup>1089</sup> Welsh Poor Law Guardians and the Jubilee, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 18 June, 1887, p.7.

<sup>1090</sup> Welsh Poor Law Guardians and the Jubilee, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 18 June, 1887, p.7. Roberts also stated that 'the quarrymen of Ffestiniog would not take notice of the day and would work as usual'.

<sup>1091</sup> Welsh Poor Law Guardians and the Jubilee, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 18 June, 1887, p.7.

<sup>1092</sup> Durbach, 'Roast Beef and the New Poor Law', pp.988-989. Durbach stated that 'the ritual provision of old English fare to the poor on festive occasions was a practice that many felt was worthy of upholding precisely because it promoted a sense of unity, loyalty and national belonging among all members of society at a time when class distinctions had become ever more firmly entrenched'.

Further evidence that the prevalence of outdoor relief in Wales under the New Poor Law was not necessarily generous or humane can be seen in the fact that the low sums typically afforded to the paupers often kept them trapped in substandard housing, as it had done before 1834. For example, at a meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1869, the Reverend J.W. Ellis called the attention of the board to the 'heart-rendering condition of a poor family living in a house which was not larger than a pigsty, and which was altogether unfit for human habitation'.<sup>1093</sup> Ellis also argued that the family would be far better off living in the Union workhouse, where conditions although far from perfect were superior to those found outside.<sup>1094</sup> Likewise, it was reported in 1896 that 'in every Poor Law Union in Wales there are dilapidated houses occupied by one generation of paupers after another' and that these houses 'were often owned by the guardians themselves who take the out-relief for rent and also obtain cheap occasional labour'.<sup>1095</sup> It was also claimed that 'these pauper hovels are centres of disease and are often indescribably filthy'.<sup>1096</sup> Even some of the paupers themselves acknowledged that they would have been better off living inside the workhouse. For instance, at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1899, the chairman suggested to one applicant, a widow that had been deserted by her husband, that 'the House would be a more salubrious place of residence'.<sup>1097</sup> The applicant replied 'Yes, I admit that the workhouse is cleaner and better than the Lot, but I don't like the confinement'.<sup>1098</sup>

Moreover, by the 1870s some paupers in Wales, particularly those claiming medical relief, were relieved by means of a loan only, which they were expected to pay back. The use of loans was used as a deterrent by Unions in England and Wales during the crusade against outdoor relief. For example, at a meeting of the Abergavenny board of guardians in 1874, the Relieving Officer asked the guardians for advice as to a case in which relief was applied for on behalf of a family of six, who had a total income of just 22s per week. Upon

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<sup>1093</sup> Pwllheli, *The Aberystwyth Times Cardiganshire Chronicle and Merionethshire News*, 9 January, 1869, p.4.

<sup>1094</sup> Pwllheli, *The Aberystwyth Times Cardiganshire Chronicle and Merionethshire News*, 9 January, 1869, p.4.

<sup>1095</sup> Poverty and Pauperism, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 27 November, 1896, p.5

<sup>1096</sup> Poverty and Pauperism, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 27 November, 1896, p.5.

<sup>1097</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 5 August, 1899, p.2

<sup>1098</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 5 August, 1899, p.2

learning that a medical order had been issued in the case, on account of the fact that one of the children was suffering from a dislocated arm, the guardians resolved that any relief granted 'should be treated as a loan'.<sup>1099</sup> Likewise, in 1876 the Swansea board of guardians resolved that 'all outdoor relief to able-bodied men in cases of temporary sickness of self or family be given by way of loan'.<sup>1100</sup> Similarly, in the Pwllheli Union in 1900, a pauper named Henry Jenkins, who had been stabbed during a recent affray, applied for relief on account of his debilitating injuries. It was noted that Jenkins had a wife and child who depended upon him for support. The chairman proposed that 'relief should be given in the form of a loan' and that the duration should be for one month only. This was agreed to by the majority of the board.<sup>1101</sup> There is also evidence that the guardians in Wales chased down and recuperated at least some of the money that had been provided as a loan. For example, in 1874 the Swansea board of guardians decided to appoint a pay-clerk at a salary of £100 per annum, whose duties included 'collecting money from relatives liable for the support of paupers and money lent by way of loan'.<sup>1102</sup> Likewise, in 1897, an application was made by Mr. P Harding Roberts, the clerk of the Holywell board of guardians, for an order against Joseph Martin, a pauper in the Union, for the payment of 16s which had been advanced to him by way of a loan, to cover the costs of the funeral of his child. It was reported that Martin had repaid 2s 6d but that he did not understand that the original payment was a loan. In the end, the Bench granted the order and Martin was ordered to repay 1s a week until the full amount was recovered.<sup>1103</sup>

On occasion, the guardians in Wales even attempted to recover money that they had given to paupers that had subsequently died. For example, at a meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1864, the attention of the board was drawn to the case of Charlotte Prichard, a pauper from the town of Holywell who had 'been in receipt of outdoor relief for many years' and who had recently died. One of the guardians questioned whether the

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<sup>1099</sup> *The Western Mail*, 15 August, 1874, p.4.

<sup>1100</sup> WGA, U/S 11/1: Swansea Union, List of Paupers and Abstract of Accounts, 1872-1879

<sup>1101</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 2 November, 1900, p.5.

<sup>1102</sup> Swansea Guardians, *South Wales Daily News*, 9 October, 1874, p.2.

<sup>1103</sup> Holywell, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 5 August, 1897, p.8. Tydfil Jones has also demonstrated that in 1875 the guardians of the Merthyr Tydfil Union resolved that 'in future, all relief to able-bodied men should be deemed to be a loan', in Tydfil Jones, 'Poor Law Administration in the Merthyr Tydfil Union', p.44.



Union could be re-imbursed by taking possession of her property. Mr Thomas Owens 'strongly urged that the board could take possession and re-imburse the Union for her maintenance'.<sup>1104</sup> Captain Mostyn stated that he was 'not satisfied that such a course of action could be legally taken'.<sup>1105</sup> However, another guardian, Mr Owens, argued that 'they had done so in other cases'.<sup>1106</sup> In the event, the Relieving Officer was instructed to 'adopt such means as the law provided for the recovery of the property'.<sup>1107</sup> In a similar vein, in 1879 the Pwllheli board of guardians sold the furniture of a deceased pauper in order to recover some of the money that they had expended on their maintenance.<sup>1108</sup> Further evidence of this practice can be seen in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union in 1897. Here, the board were informed that a pauper named Betsy Williams, who had recently died, had a sum of money in the North and South Wales Bank. The clerk was instructed to write to the manager of the Llanidloes branch of the bank 'to obtain the money for twelve months' maintenance and cost of burial'.<sup>1109</sup>

The guardians in Wales also continued to judge the morals of the applicants, rather than basing their decisions solely on the needs of the paupers, as the law dictated. In Wales those deemed to be of good moral character were often granted relief. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1892. Here, the wife of Methusalem Roberts, a convict, applied to the board for a pair of shoes for her little girl. Several guardians stated that 'whatever about her husband, she (the wife) was a very good, active, clean woman'.<sup>1110</sup> The Board unanimously agreed to grant relief in kind. However, those deemed to be of immoral character were often denied assistance, regardless of their circumstances. For example, at another meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1893, Mr J.T. Rees drew the attention of the guardians to the case of a widow at Llanaelhaiarn.

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<sup>1104</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 26 February, 1864, p.4.

<sup>1105</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 26 February, 1864, p.4.

<sup>1106</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 26 February, 1864, p.4.

<sup>1107</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 26 February, 1864, p.4.

<sup>1108</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 14 March, 1879, p.5.

<sup>1109</sup> Board of Guardians, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 28 March, 1879, p.2.

<sup>1110</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 13 May, 1892, p.6.

Several of the guardians argued that the woman was in genuine need of poor relief. For instance, Mr R. J. Evans stated that ‘the woman had been with him saying she could not possibly live on what she received from one cow’.<sup>1111</sup> However, another guardian, Mr E. T. Griffiths informed the board that the widow had a daughter ‘who is a mother to two illegitimate children’.<sup>1112</sup> It was then reported that ‘the matter was dropped at once’.<sup>1113</sup>

Although many Unions in Wales had been exempted (at least initially) from the various Outdoor Relief Prohibitory Orders, some of the boards of guardians in Wales, particularly those in the south-Wales coalfield region, did insist on applying an Outdoor Labour Test to able-bodied men.<sup>1114</sup> This meant that any able-bodied man who applied to the Union for assistance, was forced to work for his relief. It was hoped that this would act as a deterrent and would serve to reduce the number of applicant and recipients. These Tests of Labour were often used during periods of economic downturn when large numbers of men were suddenly thrown out of work. For example, at a meeting of the Abergavenny board of guardians in 1879, the Relieving Officer, Mr Lewis reported that due to the stoppage of the Blaenavon ironworks he had ‘36 Blaenavon workmen breaking stones in the Labour Yard’ and that ‘relief to the extent of £27 had been given to them during the past fortnight’.<sup>1115</sup> Likewise, during the coal strikes that blighted south-Wales in 1898, the Swansea board of guardians resolved that ‘the Local Government Board be applied to, to put in force in this Union, the Outdoor Labour Test Order’.<sup>1116</sup> The fact that able-bodied men were often forced to work for their relief also suggests that poor relief in Wales wasn’t particularly generous or humane.

Elderly paupers in Wales were also made to work for much longer than their English counterparts before they were considered to be eligible for a poor law ‘pension’. Evidence

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<sup>1111</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 21 July, 1893, p.3.

<sup>1112</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 21 July, 1893, p.3.

<sup>1113</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 21 July, 1893, p.3.

<sup>1114</sup> Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.240.

<sup>1115</sup> Abergavenny, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 24 October, 1879, p.8.

<sup>1116</sup> WGA, Swansea Board of Guardian Minute Book, February 1898-October 1898, U/S, 1/29 [here 12 May 1898]. It was also resolved that guardians ‘do form a committee to consider the steps to be taken to provide Task Work for able-bodied men relieved out of the workhouse in consequence of want of work’.

of this can be seen at a meeting of the Pembroke board of guardians in 1847. Here, the case of an elderly pauper, Stephen Mathias, aged eighty-two, was discussed by the guardians. One of the guardians, Mr Ormond, objected to the pauper being believed as he deemed him to be 'able to work and thereby get his own living'.<sup>1117</sup> Ormond also claimed that upon visiting the pauper he had found him 'thatching for his son-in law'.<sup>1118</sup> The Medical Officer, Mr Jones, also argued that, despite his age, he was fit enough to work and therefore should be considered to be 'an able-bodied man'.<sup>1119</sup> Another guardian, the common serjeant, then proposed that the man's relief should be stopped and that he be offered the workhouse only. This was unanimously agreed to by the board.<sup>1120</sup> In a similar vein, at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1899, a discussion arose as to an application for extra outdoor relief in respect of a boarded-out child who lived with her grandparents. Mr L. P. Marshall argued that the money already granted to the grandparents was sufficient. Marshall also stated that 'he felt that the old grandfather was not acting to the board as he should' and that 'although the old man was seventy-five, he was quite able to work...he was simply too lazy'.<sup>1121</sup> Rose has also claimed that paupers in Caernarvonshire were expected to work and support themselves well into old age.<sup>1122</sup> Francesca Richardson has also argued that in the Llanwrst Union, 'men were expected to work for as long as possible, often to an advanced age' and that 'even when poor relief was granted for old age, it was rarely adequate for total maintenance'.<sup>1123</sup> This is in stark contrast to England, where paupers were often considered to be 'elderly and infirm', and thus in need of poor relief, by the age of sixty to sixty-five.<sup>1124</sup>

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<sup>1117</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 17 September, 1847, p.2.

<sup>1118</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 17 September, 1847, p.2.

<sup>1119</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 17 September, 1847, p.2.

<sup>1120</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 17 September, 1847, p.2.

<sup>1121</sup> A Curious Case, Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 16 September, 1899, p.6.

<sup>1122</sup> Rose, 'The Allowance System under the New Poor Law', p.618. Rose stated that in the Caernarvon Union in the 1890s the guardians reckoned that 'one old person, if given 2s.6d a week in relief, could earn 2s. 6d for himself, together with an occasional shilling from charity, in order to keep himself in an area where the cost of living for an old person was reckoned to be 4s. 6d a week'.

<sup>1123</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.343.

<sup>1124</sup> Cited in Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.296.

The boards of guardians in Wales also expected the family of paupers to help maintain them. The guardians in Wales regularly took family members to court for failing to maintain a pauper relative. For example, in the Abergavenny Union in 1879, John Shaw was charged by the Union authorities with refusing to support his four grandchildren who had become 'chargeable to the Union'.<sup>1125</sup> Likewise, in 1887, Mr Samuel Jones was taken to court by the Pwllheli board of guardians and ordered to contribute 2s a week towards the relief of his mother, Laura Jones.<sup>1126</sup> In the Pembroke Union in 1877, one pauper, George Henton, a farm labourer from Castlemartin, was even summoned to show cause why an order should not be made on him to maintain his wife's illegitimate child, which had been born before their marriage, and which had become chargeable to the funds of the Union. The defendant who had four children in total as well as his wife to maintain and was only earning 8s a week, was eventually ordered to pay 2s 6d a week towards the child's maintenance.<sup>1127</sup> Indeed, some Unions in Wales spent considerable sums of money on enforcing payments from the relatives of paupers. For example, at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1899, it was reported that £20 had been expended by the guardians in finding husbands who had deserted their wives. Mr L. P. Marshall, a local magistrate even argued that in attempt to reduce these costs, 'an attempt should be made to settle these sorts of cases out of court'.<sup>1128</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1878 it was reported that the board had spent £26. 13s. 6d in 'compelling persons to support their relatives'.<sup>1129</sup> However, it was also claimed that this expenditure had equated to a saving in the rates to the tune of £314. 17s. 11d.<sup>1130</sup> Sometimes the guardians and their Officers in Wales went to extraordinary lengths to enforce payments from family members. For example, in the Pembroke Union in 1846, George Thomas, a pauper from the parish of St Mary, Pembroke, was brought before the magistrates and charged for 'unlawfully roaming away from the parish of St Mary and leaving his wife and four children, who had become chargeable to the said parish'.<sup>1131</sup> It was

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<sup>1125</sup> Abergavenny, *The Cardiff Times*, 3 May, 1879, p.2.

<sup>1126</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *The North Wales Express*, 28 January, 1887, p.8.

<sup>1127</sup> Pembroke, *South Wales Daily News*, 2 July, 1877, p.4.

<sup>1128</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 1 April, 1899, p.3.

<sup>1129</sup> Local and District News, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 19 April, 1878, p.5.

<sup>1130</sup> Local and District News, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 19 April, 1878, p.5.

<sup>1131</sup> *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 4 December, 1846, p.4.

reported that ‘following a laborious search’ Thomas had been apprehended at Plymouth by James Pantar, of Pembroke, who had been ‘specially appointed for the purpose’.<sup>1132</sup> In 1871 another pauper from the Pembroke Union, James Phillips, was also charged with deserting his wife and children. It was reported that Phillips was apprehended by P.C. George Evans at Bath. Philips was convicted and sentenced to three months hard labour at the county prison.<sup>1133</sup> In comparison to Wales there was far less of an expectation in English Unions for family members to support their poor relatives.<sup>1134</sup>

The proportion of the population able to claim poor relief in Wales also significantly reduced under the New Poor Law. Evidence of this can be seen in Table 17 (below) which shows the pauperism rate in each of our sample regions in the period 1841-1901.

**Table 17: Pauperism Rates in England and Wales, 1841-1901.**

	<b>1841</b>	<b>1851</b>	<b>1861</b>	<b>1871</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>1891</b>	<b>1901</b>
<b>National</b>							
*Wales	7.78%	6.61%	5.81%	5.96%	4.30%	3.30%	2.72%
*England	7.65%	4.5%	4.41%	4.70%	3.04%	2.65%	2.23%
England and Wales	7.66%	4.63%	4.50%	4.78%	3.11%	2.69%	2.26%
<b>Sample English Counties</b>							
Kent	8.94%	5.30%	4.93%	4.97%	2.93%	2.70%	2.18%
Lancaster	3.53%	3.34%	2.78%	3.17%	2.23%	1.82%	1.67%
*Middlesex	8.77%	2.11%	3.49%	5.09%	2.77%	2.67%	2.38%
Chester	5.71%	3.03%	3.48%	3.04%	2.33%	2.09%	1.83%
Salop	5.68%	4.44%	3.80%	4.04%	2.43%	2.05%	1.95%
Gloucester	7.86%	4.67%	5.59%	5.69%	4.24%	3.57%	2.79%
Hereford	8.70%	7.34%	5.82%	5.51%	4.27%	4.17%	3.70%
<b>Sample Welsh Unions</b>							
Pembroke	6.21%	8.30%	4.55%	5.59%	3.49%	2.59%	2.47%
Swansea	4.21%	7.15%	5.30%	5.88%	3.80%	2.59%	3.17%
Abergavenny	2.12%	6.59%	5.35%	4.01%	4.16%	2.96%	2.98%
Newtown and Llanidloes	14.6%	17.19%	7.60%	7.07%	5.73%	4.91%	3.50%
Holywell	5.05%	11.42%	8.20%	6.59%	4.58%	4.99%	4.33%

<sup>1132</sup> *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 4 December, 1846, p.4.

<sup>1133</sup> Chargeable to the Parish, *The Tenby Observer Weekly List of Visitors and Directory*, 23 November, 1871, p.4

<sup>1134</sup> Richardson, ‘Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy’, p.305. Richardson stated that ‘in England action was rarely taken to enforce family support’.

Pwllheli	8.65%	12.72%	10.78%	8.27%	5.55%	5.10%	3.79%
<b>Sample Welsh Counties</b>							
Pembroke	7.54%	5.79%	5.94%	6.72%	5.29%	4.35%	3.42%
Glamorgan	4.85%	4.99%	3.95%	4.89%	3.57%	2.47%	2.34%
Monmouth	4.76%	5.54%	4.71%	5.23%	4.45%	3.11%	2.88%
Montgomery	12.59%	8.79%	6.52%	6.36%	4.62%	4.60%	3.00%
Flint	8.72%	7.75%	7.40%	6.80%	4.60%	4.96%	3.83%
Caernarvon	8.65%	12.72%	10.78%	8.27%	5.55%	5.10%	3.79%

**\*Note:** The figures for England and Wales have been adjusted to show the County of Monmouth as being in Wales.

**\*Note:** From 1891 the figures for Middlesex were included with the figures for the region of London as a whole.

**Sources:** The population figures used for these calculations were taken from the census data taken from the histpop website (<http://www.histpop.org>). The total number of paupers was taken from the annual Poor Law Reports published by the central authorities.

This table shows that in each of our sample regions bar one (the Abergavenny Union), the proportion of the population receiving poor relief decreased significantly under the New Poor Law. For instance, at the national level, the pauperism rate in Wales dropped from 7.78% in 1841 to just 2.72% in 1901; whilst in England the proportion of the population receiving relief decreased from 7.65% to 2.23% over the same period. Some of the reductions in Wales were substantial. For instance, the pauperism rate in Caernarvon decreased from 9.24% in 1841 to just 2.83% by the end of the nineteenth century. The table also shows that there were significant variations in the pauperism rate within Wales. Broadly speaking pauperism rates were typically much higher in the more rural regions. In 1841 the proportion of the population receiving poor relief in Montgomery was 12.59% compared to just 4.76% in Monmouth. However, there were also significant inter-regional differences in the rates of pauperism in Wales. For instance, in 1851 the proportion of the population receiving relief in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union was a whopping 17.19%. This was significantly higher than the pauperism rate for Montgomery as a whole in this year which sat at just 8.79%. The evidence here suggests that local, Union-level factors had a significant impact on the administration of the New Poor Law, at least in Wales. This finding may have important implications for our understanding of the nature of the New Poor Law in England and Wales more generally. Nonetheless, even in the Newtown and

Llanidloes Union, the pauperism rate decreased substantially by the end of the nineteenth century; by 1901 it had dropped to just 3.50%, bringing it much more in line with national averages. The fact that pauperism rates decreased dramatically in virtually all of our sample regions during the period under investigation here can also be seen as evidence that poor relief in Wales became far more restricted under the New Poor Law.

The limited scope of poor relief in Wales after 1834 reflected the fact that many of the Welsh boards of guardians were dominated by individuals who held derisory, Malthusian attitudes towards the paupers under their care. For example, at the annual Poor Law conference for South Wales in 1873, Mr Fowler the representative for the Pembroke Union stated that 'the greater number of our outdoor paupers are worthless people'.<sup>1135</sup> Fowler also claimed that £30 of every £100 given to paupers in his Union was spent in 'well-known gin shops'.<sup>1136</sup> In a similar vein, at a meeting of the Swansea board of guardians in 1876, Mr Davies argued that 'the great majority' of paupers in the Union had fallen into poverty 'from their own improvidence, intemperance and carelessness'.<sup>1137</sup> At another meeting of the Swansea board of guardians in 1878 another guardian, Mr T. Powell described the paupers as a 'swarm of bees'.<sup>1138</sup> Likewise, in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union in 1875, the Relief Committee claimed that 'there are many now receiving outdoor relief who have brought themselves to destitution by drunkenness and other faults of their own'.<sup>1139</sup> It was also common in Wales under the New Poor Law for the recipients of outdoor relief to have their names hung up on the doors of the local places of worship. This was a clear attempt by the guardians to shame the paupers into forgoing relief. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1872. Here, the guardians agreed to print a list of all the outdoor paupers within the Union. The Reverend Mr Davies then suggested that a rider should be added to the proposition, 'to the effect that the lists should be put on the church and chapel doors'.<sup>1140</sup> Another guardian, Mr Bowdage,

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<sup>1135</sup> Conference of Guardians at Swansea, *The Welshman*, 18 April, 1873, p.2.

<sup>1136</sup> Conference of Guardians at Swansea, *The Welshman*, 18 April, 1873, p.2.

<sup>1137</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, cost of intoxicating drinks in the Union, *The Cambrian*, 24 March, 1876, p.8.

<sup>1138</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, increase in out-relief, *South Wales Daily News*, 6 December, 1878, p.2.

<sup>1139</sup> *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 24 December, 1875, p.8

<sup>1140</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 10 May, 1872, p.4.

agreed that ‘this would check a great amount of imposition’.<sup>1141</sup> Mr Howell then seconded the motion, which was unanimously agreed to, and it was resolved that the lists should contain ‘the names and amounts received by each pauper, and that the lists be posted up at all the places of public worship’.<sup>1142</sup> Such acts can also be seen as evidence of the Malthusian tendencies of the Welsh boards of guardians.

In Wales, the desire to help the poor was further tempered by religious beliefs. Many of the elected guardians who dominated the board meetings in Wales were Nonconformist in religion. Evidence of this can be seen in the Pwllheli Union in 1888. Here, it was reported that at an upcoming county council election there was every prospect of a sharp fight between Mr Ellis Nanner, who was described as being ‘a respected landlord, Conservative in politics and Episcopalian in religion’, and Mr J. H. Davies, who described as being ‘a pronounced Radical and Nonconformist’ and an ‘influential member of the Pwllheli board of guardians’ who was ‘highly esteemed by the local farmers’.<sup>1143</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Swansea board of guardians in 1898 it was reported that there was a ‘Nonconformist majority’ on the board who were unwilling to ‘hear anything against their views’.<sup>1144</sup> Although more work needs to be done to decipher the intricate differences between the various denominations, there is some evidence that many Nonconformists operated on the understanding that the poor would be taken care of in the afterlife. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of Congregationalists in Swansea in 1894. Here, the Reverend G. S. Barrett argued that it was ‘not the aim and work of religion to secure good wages, equal rights and the temporal good of man’.<sup>1145</sup> Barrett maintained that ‘our great work is not to save the body from suffering, but to deliver the soul from sin’.<sup>1146</sup> Further evidence of the Nonconformist attitude towards poverty can be seen at a meeting of the Swansea board of guardians in 1897. Here, the guardians discussed whether or not

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<sup>1141</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 10 May, 1872, p.4.

<sup>1142</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 10 May, 1872, p.4.

<sup>1143</sup> County Council Elections, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 30 November, 1888, p.3.

<sup>1144</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, *The South Wales Daily Post*, 13 May, 1898, p.2

<sup>1145</sup> The Congregational Union, *The Cambrian*, 11 May, 1894, p.2. Barrett also stated that it was ‘not for ministers to make these things the topic of their ministry in the pulpit’.

<sup>1146</sup> The Congregational Union, *The Cambrian*, 11 May, 1894, p.2.



they should take the children of the workhouse to the local theatre as treat. The Reverend John Davies, a nonconformist minister, protested against the proposal 'in an excited manner'.<sup>1147</sup> Davies questioned 'what was to become of them if they took children to such places as theatres'.<sup>1148</sup> He also argued that there was 'another world and that they (the guardians) would have to give an account as well as the poor children'.<sup>1149</sup> Andy Croll has also argued that Liberalism, as it existed in nineteenth century Wales, also negated the establishment of a generous and humane response to poverty. Croll stated that by the middle of the nineteenth century, 'Wales was a stronghold of Nonconformity and popular Liberalism' and that 'both chapel goers and Liberals placed a strong emphasis on good character, sobriety and respectability'.<sup>1150</sup>

### **The Economy of Makeshifts under the New Poor Law in Wales**

The miserly doles received by the outdoor poor in Wales under the New Poor Law meant that many paupers were forced to rely on alternative welfare streams in order to survive. For instance, charity continued to play a large role in the lives of paupers in Wales after 1834. Evidence of this can be seen in the Swansea Union in 1844. Here, it was reported that a relief fund had been set up on account of the 'distress of the labouring population', which had been caused by 'want of employment, the severity of the weather, and other circumstances'.<sup>1151</sup> It was noted that the call for funds had been 'readily responded to by the public' and that donations had come from some esteemed figures including the Mayor, J.H. Vivian, MP, and J. Dillwyn Llewelyn.<sup>1152</sup> It was also claimed that the voluntary subscriptions had helped to alleviate the 'wretchedness and destitution present existing...which parochial relief is utterly inadequate to meet'.<sup>1153</sup> The importance of charity in the lives of the paupers in Wales can also be seen at a meeting of the Holywell board of

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<sup>1147</sup> The Pulpit and the Stage, *The South Wales Daily Post*, 21 January, 1897, p.3

<sup>1148</sup> The Pulpit and the Stage, *The South Wales Daily Post*, 21 January, 1897, p.3.

<sup>1149</sup> The Pulpit and the Stage, *The South Wales Daily Post*, 21 January, 1897, p.3.

<sup>1150</sup> Croll, 'Reconciled Gradually to the System of Indoor Relief', p.13. Croll also stated that Liberals 'tended to be particularly severe towards the voluntary pauper, a figure who was characterised as being morally weak and thoroughly vicious', p.13.

<sup>1151</sup> The Distressed Poor, *The Cambrian*, 28 December, 1844, p.3.

<sup>1152</sup> The Distressed Poor, *The Cambrian*, 28 December, 1844, p.3.

<sup>1153</sup> The Distressed Poor, *The Cambrian*, 28 December, 1844, p.3.

guardians in 1867. During a discussion over the application for relief of a widow with four children one of the guardians, Mr Dawson, argued that 'the poor woman would have been in want but for some charity given to her by Lady Mostyn'.<sup>1154</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Pembroke board of guardians in 1888, it was reported that a pauper who had been recently denied relief by the guardians 'was left destitute, until relieved by private charity'.<sup>1155</sup> The significance of charity in the lives of the paupers in Wales under the New Poor Law was even acknowledged by the central authorities themselves. For instance, in 1895 Mr Bircham stated that the recent distress in the Holywell Union, which had been caused by the closure of several mines in the region had been 'met by charity and voluntary subscriptions' and that 'no increase in poor relief resulted'.<sup>1156</sup>

However, although charity continued to play a significant role in the lives of paupers in Wales under the New Poor Law, the amount of relief provided by charitable donations was not always enough to fully support all of those in need of assistance. Evidence of this can be seen in the town of Monmouth in 1841. Here it was reported that although the townspeople had raised nearly £1000 by subscriptions to help alleviate the distress of many of the able-bodied labourers affected by an economic downturn in the region's iron industry, 'so great is the number of families suffering from want of employment, that the relief committee has full occasion to call for a much larger sum'.<sup>1157</sup> Likewise, in Montgomeryshire in 1842 an economic downturn in the region's textile industry had caused a large number of operatives in the towns of Newtown and Llanidloes to be thrown out of employ. It was stated in a local newspaper report of the events that 'generous individuals have done what they could in both places to alleviate the distress, but that the cases are too numerous to administer adequate relief'.<sup>1158</sup> Similarly, at the meeting of a relief committee in Swansea in 1879, one of the members stated that 'the funds of the relief committee are, sorry to say, totally inadequate to supply food in most of the cases'.<sup>1159</sup> Further evidence

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<sup>1154</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 13 December, 1867, p.4.

<sup>1155</sup> *The Tenby Observer Weekly List of Visitors and Directory*, 6 December, 1888, p.6.

<sup>1156</sup> Pauperism in Wales, Mr Bircham's Annual Report, *Wrexham and Denbighshire Advertiser and Cheshire Shropshire and North Wales Register*, 23 February, 1895, p.3.

<sup>1157</sup> *The Suffering Poor, Monmouthshire Merlin*, 30 January, 1841, p.2.

<sup>1158</sup> *Wales, Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 25 February, 1842, p.3.

<sup>1159</sup> The Distress in Swansea, a visit to the homes of the destitute, painful scenes, *Weekly Mail*, 1 February, 1879, p.3

that the funds raised by charitable means were not always enough to support all of those in need can be seen in the Swansea Union in 1893. Following a downturn in the region's copper industry, and the subsequent mass unemployment that ensued, a relief committee had been appointed in order to raise money for those affected. However, one of the committee members lamented that 'the number of applicants is as great now as ever' and that 'the funds have almost run out'.<sup>1160</sup>

Moreover, as other historians have pointed out, in comparison to England, there were relatively few endowed charities in Wales in the nineteenth century. For example, Steven Thompson stated that in the south-Wales coalfield region 'the absence of a large elite or a sizeable or self-confident middle class meant that there were too few resources and too little desire in these communities to sustain significant philanthropic activity'.<sup>1161</sup> In a similar vein Richardson pointed out that 'although many of the endowed charities which had supported the poor of Nantconwy in the eighteenth century continued to do so, by 1834 some had lapsed no new charities for the poor were established after 1800'.<sup>1162</sup> Neil Evans has also argued that many Welsh urban centres such as Cardiff 'grew too quickly' during the nineteenth century and that as a result, 'there was not a wide range of well-established charities (backed up and supported by a large pool of middle class patrons) as was the case in London, Coventry or York'.<sup>1163</sup> The lack of organised charity in Wales during the nineteenth century was also acknowledged by the central Poor Law authorities themselves. For example, in their annual report in 1890, the Local Government Board noted the 'absence of the better-off classes from coalfield communities and the consequent lack of charitable activity'.<sup>1164</sup>

Furthermore, during the course of the nineteenth century the nature of charity in England and Wales changed dramatically, becoming far more restricted and conditional. For

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<sup>1160</sup> The Unemployed Poor of Swansea, *The Cambrian*, 20 January, 1893, p.6.

<sup>1161</sup> Thompson, 'The Mixed Economy of Care in the South Wales coalfield', pp.147-148. Thompson also pointed out that in Merthyr Tydfil in 1851, which was the largest town in south-Wales at the time with a population of 50,000, 'there were no alms-houses, endowed charities or hospitals despite the massive fortunes that had been accumulated in the town'.

<sup>1162</sup> Richardson, 'Poverty and Welfare in Nantconwy', p.323. See also the work of Hooker, 'The Llandilofawr Poor Law Union', p.242. Hooker argued that there were relatively few charities in Llandilofawr during the New poor Law, although he also claimed that there was a considerable amount of communal support.

<sup>1163</sup> Neil Evans, 'Urbanisation, Elite Attitudes and Philanthropy: Cardiff, 1850-1914', pp.291-292. Evans also pointed out that many of the wealthier members of society often lived outside of the 'problem areas', p.294.

<sup>1164</sup> Local Government Board Twentieth Annual Report, 1890-1891, PP, 1891, p.257.

instance, Evans states that, by the end of the nineteenth century, charitable bodies such as the Charity Organization Society (hereafter referred to as COS) made receiving charity conditional, such as ensuring that recipients were of good moral character (or 'deserving of relief'), which restricted the number of recipients.<sup>1165</sup> He also argued that the inducement to give charity freely had weakened by the end of the nineteenth century and that philanthropists began to seek expedients to raise funds such as hosting a concert or fund-raising dinner, which meant that less money was raised (due to the saturation of these events) or else that some of the money raised also went on hosting such events rather than being spent directly on the poor.<sup>1166</sup> Evidence that charity became more restricted and conditional can be seen at a meeting of the Tenby COS in the Pembroke Union in 1880. Here, it was reported that of the 409 applications received for charity, 34 had been denied as their application did not 'come within their rules', whilst another 24 were granted loans only.<sup>1167</sup> At another meeting of the Tenby COS in 1882 it was stated that every care is taken that the loans provided by the charity are 'sanctioned only to poor persons of good character'.<sup>1168</sup> Evidence that the subscribers to charity expected something in return for their donations and that the poor were not always front and centre of such expedients can be seen at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1897. At this meeting the Porter of the workhouse came before the guardians and made several serious allegations against the Master of the workhouse including a charge that he (the Master) had thrown a lavish dinner at the workhouse at the expense of the paupers. The Porter claimed that following a concert that had been held at the workhouse for the inmates over the Christmas period, and which had been paid for by charity, 'the inmates were cleared off to bed with empty stomachs' (the entertainment taking place at the time that the inmates usually sat down to eat their evening meal), and that 'the Master then provided a sumptuous meat supper to about thirty or forty persons'.<sup>1169</sup> One of the guardians, Mr Lewis, in questioning the Master exclaimed that 'he had no idea that hospitality was shown

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<sup>1165</sup> Neil Evans, 'Urbanisation, Elite Attitudes and Philanthropy: Cardiff, 1850-1914', pp.314-316.

<sup>1166</sup> Neil Evans, 'Urbanisation, Elite Attitudes and Philanthropy: Cardiff, 1850-1914', p.308.

<sup>1167</sup> Tenby COS, *The Tenby Observer Weekly List of Visitors and Directory*, 19 February, 1880, p.2.

<sup>1168</sup> Tenby COS, *The Tenby Observer Weekly List of Visitors and Directory*, 6 July, 1882, p.3.

<sup>1169</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery and County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 20 February 1897, p.2

to parties giving entertainment'.<sup>1170</sup> The Master replied that 'it has always been so'.<sup>1171</sup> In the end, following a heated debate, the matter was simply allowed to lie on the table.

The boards of guardians in Wales also worked closely with local charity organizations, including the COS, to ensure that poor relief and charity did not overlap. For instance, at a meeting of the subscribers to a charity fund in Pembroke in 1847 it was resolved that 'only mechanics, labourers and widows, and only those of these groups not in receipt of poor relief' would be eligible to receive a charitable donation.<sup>1172</sup> Likewise, at the meeting of the Tenby COS in 1880 referred to above it was reported that eight individuals who had applied for charity had been 'referred to the local Poor Law authorities'.<sup>1173</sup> At another meeting of the Tenby COS in 1882 it was stated that 'this society has no desire whatever, as has been often stated, to interfere with private charity, as in cases well known to the persons applied to, no intervention is needed'.<sup>1174</sup> However, it was also stated that 'in cases where the applicants are not known, information may be sought for, to prevent overlapping relief, or the bestowing of doles on unworthy persons, that are demoralising and hurtful to the deserving poor'.<sup>1175</sup>

Some paupers in Wales were fortunate enough to belong to a local Friendly Society or other benefit club; such establishments also provided a vital source of income for paupers in Wales under the New Poor Law. Members were asked to pay a weekly or monthly membership fee out of their income, and in return were able to make a claim for relief when sick or in financial distress.<sup>1176</sup> Some of these clubs were relatively successful, at least initially. For instance, it was reported in 1850 that the St Florence Friendly Society (in the Pembroke Union) was celebrating its eighteenth year with a meal for its members. It was also claimed that there was 'sufficient cause for mutual congratulation on account of

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<sup>1170</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery and County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 20 February 1897, p.2

<sup>1171</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomery and County Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 20 February 1897, p.2

<sup>1172</sup> *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 19 February, 1847, p.2.

<sup>1173</sup> Tenby COS, *The Tenby Observer Weekly List of Visitors and Directory*, 19 February, 1880, p.2.

<sup>1174</sup> Tenby COS, *The Tenby Observer Weekly List of Visitors and Directory*, 30 November, 1882, p.3.

<sup>1175</sup> Tenby COS, *The Tenby Observer Weekly List of Visitors and Directory*, 30 November, 1882, p.3.

<sup>1176</sup> Cited in D. Gareth Evans, *A History of Wales*, p.60. Evans stated that 'the regulations for these societies varied but, as a rule, members were allowed to claim benefit after paying an admission fee of up to £1 and weekly contributions of 6d for a period of one year'. Evans went on to state 'there were also other kinds of benefit, such as assistance for members in distressed circumstances or for travelling expenses incurred in search of employment'.

the progressive increase of both their funds, and in the number of members'.<sup>1177</sup> Gareth Evans has also revealed that in Glamorgan 'the number of people joining friendly societies increased until the last quarter of the nineteenth century'.<sup>1178</sup> Evidence of the importance of these institutions can be seen in a report of the funds of the Herefordshire House Friendly Society in the county of Monmouth in 1859. Here it was stated that within the last year, £249 had been expended in sick relief to its members, as well as another £17 in the way of loans.<sup>1179</sup> In a similar vein, in a speech reminiscing about his time as a guardian (and ex-chairman) of the Swansea Union in 1893, Sir John J. D. Llewelyn urged the greater use of Friendly and Temperance Societies. Llewelyn claimed that in Swansea 'a very large number of men who had been temporarily out of employment had been able to stave off the evil (of applying for poor relief) by withdrawing their small savings'.<sup>1180</sup> Thompson has also noted the importance of voluntary working-class self-help organizations in the south-Wales coalfield region during the nineteenth century.<sup>1181</sup>

However, by the end of the nineteenth century many of these societies had fallen through largely on account of financial problems. For instance, at a meeting of the Abergavenny board of guardians in 1879, the chairman, Mr Williams, stated that 'the relief list from Blaenavon was very heavy, and has been greatly increasing owing to the medical fund belonging to the workers there having fallen through for want of funds'.<sup>1182</sup> Further evidence that many of these benefit clubs had collapsed in Wales by the end of the nineteenth century can be seen in the evidence given to the Welsh Land Commission in 1893. Here, it was reported that one of the witnesses, Mr David Davies, from the parish of Llanybi in the Pwllheli Union, went into some gruesome details as to the accommodation and diet of the agricultural labourers in the region. Davies claimed that one of the main reasons for their plight was that there were 'no benefit clubs in the district'.<sup>1183</sup> Gareth Evans has also argued that 'solvency was a perennial problem for the societies, particularly

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<sup>1177</sup> *The Pembrokehire Herald and General Advertiser*, 12 April, 1850, p.2.

<sup>1178</sup> D. Gareth Evans, *A History of Wales*, p.59

<sup>1179</sup> *Monmouth, Monmouthshire Merlin*, 18 June, 1859, p.2

<sup>1180</sup> *Reminiscences of a Poor Law Guardian*, Lecture by Sir John J. D. Llewelyn, *The Cambrian*, 20 January, 1893, p.6.

<sup>1181</sup> Thompson, 'From Paternalism to Industrial Partnership', p.108.

<sup>1182</sup> Abergavenny, *South Wales Daily News*, 10 February 1879, p.3.

<sup>1183</sup> The Welsh Land Commission, *Sittings in North Wales*, *South Wales Daily News*, 20 September, 1893, p.6.

in those areas where there were constant demands on the funds', such as in industrial Glamorgan.<sup>1184</sup> Moreover, Welsh boards of guardians often refused to grant poor relief to members of such clubs, even if the sums they were receiving were relatively small. For instance, at a meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1865, a sick pauper was denied relief because he was the member of a club to which a surgeon was attached.<sup>1185</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Pwllheli board of guardians in 1897, the relief of a pauper was stopped due to the fact that he was in receipt of a few shillings a week from a Friendly Society.<sup>1186</sup> Some of the benefit clubs themselves also refused to pay out money to its members if they were in employment, even if the wages they received were insufficient to maintain themselves and their families. For instance, it was reported at a meeting of the Holywell board of guardians in 1901 that a pauper who had been in receipt of 1s a week from a local Friendly Society had had his money stopped after he had been employed (part-time) to light the lamps of a chapel. The chairman exclaimed that 'the clubs in these cases are a farce'.<sup>1187</sup>

Those who were unable to secure charity or afford the membership fees of Friendly Societies and other benefit clubs, were forced to rely on the support of family and friends. Evidence of this can be seen in the case of Griffith Griffiths who had been removed to the Pwllheli Union in 1846. It was reported that Griffiths, who was blind, had not been visited by either the Medical Officer or the Relieving Officer since his arrival fourteen weeks ago and that 'he had no clothes to change...his shirts and draws were actually in rags'.<sup>1188</sup> It was further stated that with no help coming from the Union, 'the good people of Mur Melyn (where Griffith had previously resided) made him a pair of clogs'.<sup>1189</sup> Likewise, at a meeting of the Pembroke board of guardians in 1847, Mr W. Thomas drew the attention of the board to the case of a poor woman by the name of Thomas who had recently died. It transpired that despite being 'ill and in a starving state' the pauper had been refused admittance into

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<sup>1184</sup> Gareth Evans, *A History of Wales*, pp.60-61.

<sup>1185</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 29 December, 1865, p.4.

<sup>1186</sup> Pwllheli Board of Guardians, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 23 April, 1897, p.6.

<sup>1187</sup> *The North Wales Express*, 4 October, 1901, p.3.

<sup>1188</sup> The New Poor Law and the Erection of Union Workhouse, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 12 December, 1846, p.3.

<sup>1189</sup> The New Poor Law and the Erection of Union Workhouse, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 12 December, 1846, p.3.

the workhouse by Mr Woodward, the Relieving Officer. Woodward argued that he had refused the woman relief on the grounds that both her husband and daughter, with whom she lived, were in constant employment. During the following discussion of the case Mr Thomas stated that the pauper had told him the day before she died that she was starving and would have starved to death 'if not for the assistance afforded her by Captain Harrison'.<sup>1190</sup> Further evidence of the importance of a support network of family and friends can be seen in a report made by the relief committee of the Pembroke board of guardians in 1875. The committee had been appointed to investigate the death of Ann Philips, whose relief had been stopped despite the fact that she had been suffering from 'a most dangerous internal tumour'.<sup>1191</sup> In their report the committee acknowledged that in the week prior to her death, Ann's neighbours had been 'very kind to her' and that one of them, Mr Jones had sent her some brandy and wine, articles which they (the committee) deemed to be 'especially necessary' given her condition.<sup>1192</sup> In a similar vein, in 1895, W. H. Mill, a guardian from the Swansea Union, wrote a letter to the editor of *The South Wales Daily Post* recalling the case of an old man aged seventy-five and his wife, aged seventy-three, who were receiving 2s a week from the Swansea board of guardians. The old man had appealed to the guardians for an extra sixpence a week which was refused following an accusation that he was a drunkard. Mill claimed that he asked the old man about his drinking habits to which he responded that he was a 'teetotaller' and that he only received 2s a week from the guardians and that out of that he had to pay 2s 6d a week in rent i.e., he had no money to spend on drink. When Mill asked the old man how he paid the 2s 6d for his rent out of just 2s the old man replied that he had a boy, not of his own, who he had 'reared up' and who was 'very kind to me and my wife' and that 'but for him we would starve'.<sup>1193</sup>

However, once again, the amount of help received from family and friends was often not enough. Evidence of this can be seen in the Swansea Union in 1891. Here, a meeting of the guardians had been called to investigate the deaths of two paupers living in the Union, Jerry Russell, who was described as 'a well-known Swansea Imbecile' and his mother. There had been accusations in the local press that both the paupers had starved to death and that

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<sup>1190</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 9 July, 1847, p.2.

<sup>1191</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, *The Welshman*, 28 May, 1875, p.2.

<sup>1192</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, *The Welshman*, 28 May, 1875, p.2.

<sup>1193</sup> Bitter cry of the destitute, plea for the poor, *The South Wales Daily News*, 16 April, 1895, p.2.



the guardians were partly to blame for this on account of the inadequate relief that they allowed the paupers. It was reported at the meeting that in the weeks leading up to her death, Mrs Russell, who was suffering from illness had been 'dying on her legs' but that she refused to see a doctor.<sup>1194</sup> At the inquest, Eunice Lambert, the landlady of the room where Jerry and his mother lived, informed the guardians that she had lent Mrs Russell some money and had supplied her with 'many a bit' in an attempt to help alleviate their situation.<sup>1195</sup> Lambert also stated that Mrs Russell had been in receipt of 2s a week from the guardians but that lately she had been too ill to fetch it herself. The Relieving Officer argued that the Swansea guardians had 'done their duty in the case' and that the deaths were caused by the drunken habits of the mother; he claimed that she 'squandered all that she and Jerry gathered' and that she often neglected her son.<sup>1196</sup> However, the doctor who made the post-mortem on the body of Mrs Russell stated in his report that 'the stomach was empty and the body somewhat emaciated'. He also stated that there were 'no signs of over-indulgence in intoxicants and no marks of violence'. The doctor concluded that 'judging from the state of the body, the woman did not have proper food'.<sup>1197</sup> Despite this evidence, the Jury, after just five minutes of deliberation, returned a verdict of 'death from natural causes', effectively exonerating the Swansea guardians. Whether the Swansea guardians were really guilty or not in this case, the evidence here demonstrates that despite the best efforts of family and friends, some paupers were still able to slip through the safety net. Moreover, as alluded to earlier in the thesis, the rural to urban shift that occurred in Wales during the second half of the nineteenth century, severely disrupted support networks, as able-bodied paupers moved to the more industrial areas in search of employment. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Newtown and Llanidloes board of guardians in 1899. Here, Mr Edward Powell stated that the Union 'lost year by year the best of the young men and women through emigration' and that in consequence 'they would always have more

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<sup>1194</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, the sad death of "Jerry" Russell and his mother, *The Cambrian*, 11 September, 1891, p.3

<sup>1195</sup> Sad death of a well-known Swansea Imbecile and his mother, drunkenness and neglect, but not actual poverty the cause, *The Cambrian*, 11 September, 1891, p.3. The Coroner in the case also praised the efforts of the landlady, stating that 'she had been exceedingly kind to the deceased'.

<sup>1196</sup> Sad death of a well-known Swansea Imbecile and his mother, drunkenness and neglect, but not actual poverty the cause, *The Cambrian*, 11 September, 1891, p.3.

<sup>1197</sup> Sad death of a well-known Swansea Imbecile and his mother, drunkenness and neglect, but not actual poverty the cause, *The Cambrian*, 11 September, 1891, p.3.

than an average ratio of pauperism' on account of the elderly paupers that were left behind.<sup>1198</sup>

Many paupers in Wales under the New Poor Law were thus forced into taking desperate measures in an attempt to survive. Some resorted to begging for help. For example, at a meeting of the Pembroke board of guardians in 1847, the Reverend Mr Leach complained that a pauper by the name of John Davies, who was in receipt of poor relief, was in the habit of 'going around the houses of the inhabitants in the neighbourhood in which he (Mr Leach) lived, begging for assistance, upon the plea of his being in great distress'.<sup>1199</sup> Similarly, it was reported in the Swansea Union in 1895 that two boys had been seen begging in Rhondda street. A local police officer, P.C. Fielder had been asked to make inquiries into the allegations. He stated that upon visiting Wheatfield Terrace at the upper part of the town he saw Ann Hughes, the mother of the two boys. She admitted having sent her boys out begging 'in order that she might have food to give her other little ones'.<sup>1200</sup> At another meeting of the Swansea board of guardians in 1897 it was even claimed, by a representative of the Swansea COS, that the inmates of the workhouse had been using their leave-of-absence ticket 'for the purpose of begging from house to house'.<sup>1201</sup> If true, this could be seen as further evidence of pauper agency in Wales. As noted in Chapter Three, begging had been a common tactic used by paupers in Wales under the Old Poor Law. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, paupers in Wales were increasingly being charged for begging on the streets, as Victorian sensibilities to such practices changed over time. For example, in the Pwllheli Union in 1879, an able-bodied man named William Turner was charged by P.C. Watkin Owen with begging at Llanaelhaiarn. At court, Turner pleaded guilty and was sentenced to fourteen days hard labour.<sup>1202</sup> Likewise, in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union in 1896, a young man from Liverpool was charged by P.C. Tudor with begging in Hafren Terrace and Smithsfield Street. In this case, the defendant, who said he was going to Cardiff to look for work, was acquitted on promising to leave town.<sup>1203</sup>

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<sup>1198</sup> Caersws Board of Guardians, *The Montgomeryshire Times and Shropshire and Mid Wales Advertiser*, 29 April, 1899, p.2.

<sup>1199</sup> Pembroke Board of Guardians, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 9 April, 1847, p.2.

<sup>1200</sup> *South Wales Daily Post*, 26 January, 1895.

<sup>1201</sup> Swansea Board of Guardians, *The South Wales Daily Post*, 1 April, 1897, p.3.

<sup>1202</sup> County Magistrate Court, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent*, 9 August, 1879, p.6.

<sup>1203</sup> Llanidloes Borough Sessions, *The Montgomeryshire Express and Radnor Times*, 18 August, 1896, p.7.

Furthermore, some paupers were too embarrassed to beg for relief. Evidence of this can be seen in the Pembroke Union in 1887. Here, a local ratepayer Henry Burton wrote a letter to the editor of a local newspaper claiming that an inhabitant from Tenby overheard two able-bodied men talking in Welsh, and not supposing they were understood they spoke aloud and that one of them said to the other, with tears running down his cheeks, 'It's no use John, I can't beg, I can't do it'.<sup>1204</sup>

Some paupers resorted to a life of petty crime, stealing essentials such as food, clothing, or fuel when times were tough. For example, in the Abergavenny Union in 1875 Martha Morgan was brought into custody and charged by the police for stealing some wood and coal, the property of Mr White, a local contractor. It transpired that a local police officer, P.C. Price, met the prisoner coming from the direction of the asylum carrying a bag, the contents of which Price suspected were stolen; Martha was then taken into custody. Mr White later identified the wood as belonging to him. The prisoner pleaded guilty but as White declined to press charges, she was sentenced to one day hard labour only.<sup>1205</sup> Likewise, in Glamorgan in 1897, Annie Hope, aged twenty-four, pleaded guilty to stealing a quantity of wearing apparel valued at 11s 6d, the property of another pauper, Mary Ann Goodman. During the court case, Hope argued that 'it was through poverty and not through drink that she had stolen the clothes'.<sup>1206</sup> Upon the understanding that the whole of the goods were returned, the magistrates decided to bind the prisoner over in the sum of £5 to be of good behaviour for the next twelve months, but they also warned her that if she committed a similar offence, she would be severely dealt with.<sup>1207</sup> The leniency with which these two paupers were dealt with shows that there was some sympathy for paupers in Wales under the New Poor Law, at least amongst the magistrates. Both Gareth Evans and DJV Jones have also demonstrated that the number of petty crimes committed in Wales increased significantly during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>1208</sup>

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<sup>1204</sup> A Plea for Vagrants, *The Tenby Observer Weekly List of Visitors and Directory*, 19 May, 1887, p.5.

<sup>1205</sup> *County Observer and Monmouthshire Central Advertiser Abergavenny and Raglan Herald Usk and Pontypool Messenger and Chepstow Argus*, 27 February, 1875, p.4.

<sup>1206</sup> A Theft through Poverty, *South Wales Daily News*, 12 July, 1897, p.6. Hope also stated that her husband, a painter had injured his hand and that it had been difficult for him to obtain employment.

<sup>1207</sup> A Theft through Poverty, *South Wales Daily News*, 12 July, 1897, p.6.

<sup>1208</sup> Evans, *A History of Wales*, pp.69-70. See also D. J. V. Jones, *Crime in Nineteenth Century Wales*, pp.1-3.

Pawn shops also appear to have been increasingly used by paupers in Wales under the New Poor Law, although the selling of their goods for money often left them without basic amenities. Evidence of this can be seen in the Swansea Union in 1879. Here, a relief committee had been set up in order to raise funds for able-bodied men who had been thrown out of employ due to an economic downturn in the district. One of the members of the relief committee wrote an article which was published in a local newspaper calling for more funds to given to those in need. In this article, the committee member claimed that paupers in Swansea commonly used pawn shops and that there were hundreds of houses in the region that were 'almost empty of every article of furniture'.<sup>1209</sup> He also stated that during a visit to the houses of the recipients of relief he came across a family of seven living in a dirty room in which 'the only furniture was a box and two small tables...with the mother sitting on a block of wood'.<sup>1210</sup> During the meeting of another relief committee in Swansea in 1892 it was stated that 'the committee are shown handfuls of pawntickets to explain how the furniture and bedding have been disposed of' and that 'the latest date of the tickets shown in many cases shows that the best of the children's clothing has been thus disposed of to obtain food for the little ones, leaving them with nothing but what they are wearing'.<sup>1211</sup>

The implementation of the bastardy clause under the New Poor Law appears to have left single mothers with illegitimate children particularly vulnerable in Wales. Many of the relief committees and Friendly Societies that sprang up in Wales during the nineteenth century were largely aimed at able-bodied men. Moreover, the sudden withdrawal of outdoor relief meant that single mothers in Wales were often unable to nurse out their children and enter domestic service as they had done under the Old Poor Law (see Chapter Three). Unmarried mothers in Wales after 1834 were sometimes forced into taking drastic action in order to support themselves and their bastard offspring. Some fell into prostitution. Evidence of this can be seen at a meeting of the Holywell boards of guardians in 1864. Here, the Relieving Officer stated that a complaint had been made to him against

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<sup>1209</sup> The Distress in Swansea, a visit to the homes of the destitute, painful scenes, *Weekly Mail*, 1 February, 1879, p.3

<sup>1210</sup> The Distress in Swansea, a visit to the homes of the destitute, painful scenes, *Weekly Mail*, 1 February, 1879, p.3.

<sup>1211</sup> The Distress in Swansea, Is it what it is alleged to be? A diversity of opinion amongst those who ought to know, *The Cambrian*, 30 December, 1892, p.6.

Mary Buckley, a pauper residing in the parish of Halkyn who was receiving 3s a week from the Union 'that she kept a disreputable house'.<sup>1212</sup> The Relieving Officer also informed the guardians that a young woman, who was described as being 'the mother of a bastard child' resided at the house, along with her daughter.<sup>1213</sup> The Reverend Mr Evans claimed that the house was a 'harbour for thieves and prostitutes'.<sup>1214</sup> Another guardian, Mr Keates argued that 'the sooner the "nest" is broken up the better'.<sup>1215</sup> The guardians unanimously agreed with these remarks and immediately stopped the relief of 3s a week.<sup>1216</sup> Likewise, in the Abergavenny Union in 1875 it was reported that three single mothers, Harriet Scott, Louisa Clark, and Lily Clarke, who were described as 'travelling prostitutes' were charged by P.C. Dare with vagrancy. It was also stated that Dare had found the three young women living in a barn near the Pandy.<sup>1217</sup> In a similar vein, in Monmouth in 1875, Selina Wiltshire, who was described as 'a young woman with a child in arms', was charged with being a vagrant and a prostitute. She pleaded guilty to the charges but claimed that 'she was forced into prostitution in order to get a livelihood for herself and her child' after being refused relief from the parish.<sup>1218</sup> Despite her pleas, Wiltshire was sent to gaol with one month's hard labour.

It was also common in Wales under the New Poor Law for single mothers with illegitimate children to abandon their children in an attempt to enter domestic service. Many of these positions required the applicant to live-in with their employer; this would have been extremely difficult with a child or children in tow. Evidence of this practice can be seen in the Pembroke Union in 1858. Here, it was reported that Mary Vaughan, who had been residing at the Union workhouse with her three-week-old daughter, left the establishment, placed her infant at the gate of a nearby lodge and 'went away'.<sup>1219</sup> It was

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<sup>1212</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 20 May, 1864, p.4.

<sup>1213</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 20 May, 1864, p.4.

<sup>1214</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 20 May, 1864, p.4.

<sup>1215</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 20 May, 1864, p.4.

<sup>1216</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 20 May, 1864, p.4.

<sup>1217</sup> Abergavenny Police, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 18 June, 1875, p.3

<sup>1218</sup> Pontypool, Forced into Prostitution, *South Wales Daily News*, 17 February, 1875, p.3.

<sup>1219</sup> Child Desertion, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 26 March, 1858, p.3.

also stated that the ‘inhumane mother’ was subsequently apprehended and brought before the magistrates, where she was sent to gaol for one month’s hard labour.<sup>1220</sup> At another meeting of the Pembroke board of guardians in 1873, Esther Perkins and Martha Llewelyn were charged with deserting their illegitimate children at the gate of the workhouse. Both were sentenced to two months hard labour.<sup>1221</sup>

As alluded to in Chapter Four, Infanticide also became relatively common in Wales under the New Poor Law. Evidence of this horrendous act can be seen in the Report into the Rebecca disturbances in 1844. For example, one of the witnesses, Mr Cuthbertson, stated that ‘the bastardy law is the most terrible law that ever was’ and that ‘we now have a great many bastard children in this Union that have been left at doors.’<sup>1222</sup> Cuthbertson also stated that ‘one child has been murdered; the mother took the child to Glamorganshire Canal and drowned it’.<sup>1223</sup> Further evidence of Infanticide can be seen in the Holywell Union in 1869. Here, two women, Elizabeth Ellis and Mary Jones, were brought before the guardians and charged with causing the death of their illegitimate children whilst resident at the Union workhouse. Lord Mostyn severely reprimanded the women, stating that ‘it was the most shameful and heartless conduct he had ever heard of’.<sup>1224</sup> Both women denied the allegations, but it transpired that one of the women had previously killed one of her own children, having concealed its birth and hidden the body in a drawer.<sup>1225</sup>

Other paupers in Wales, being unable to see any way out of their precarious situations decided to take their own lives. For example, it was reported in the Pembroke Union in 1849 that a pauper named William Jones committed suicide by ‘blowing out his brains’.<sup>1226</sup> It was also stated that Jones had been suffering from a disease in the face and that this illness ‘coupled with great poverty, led him to commit this fearful act’.<sup>1227</sup> Likewise,

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<sup>1220</sup> Child Desertion, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 26 March, 1858, p.3.

<sup>1221</sup> Pembroke, *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 9 May, 1873, p.2.

<sup>1222</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.436.

<sup>1223</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry for South Wales on Riots, and Turnpike Roads, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, PP, 1844, p.436.

<sup>1224</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 5 February, 1869, p.3.

<sup>1225</sup> Holywell Board of Guardians, *Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh*, 5 February, 1869, p.3.

<sup>1226</sup> *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 15 June, 1849, p.3.

<sup>1227</sup> *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 15 June, 1849, p.3.

it was reported that in the Newtown and Llanidloes Union in 1876 another pauper named David Morgan committed suicide by hanging. At the inquest into his death the deceased's wife, Jane Morgan, stated that her husband, a miner, had been out of work for some time due to illness and that as a result he had been very 'low spirited'.<sup>1228</sup> Jane also stated that during the last two months she had not been able to get enough food for her husband, on account of insufficient funds. The Jury returned a verdict of 'temporary insanity' but added that 'we are further of opinion that the mental depression of the deceased was aggravated, if not caused, through want of suitable nourishment'.<sup>1229</sup>

### **Conclusion**

It has been demonstrated here that, although many Old Poor Law practices, such as the payment of the rents of paupers and the payment of non-resident relief, initially continued in Wales after 1834, by the end of the nineteenth century, many of these practices had been phased out or otherwise stopped. In some cases, the opening of the Union workhouse had a significant impact on poor relief policies in Wales; the opening of the workhouse meant that Unions in Wales no longer had to pay the rents of paupers or relief to non-residents. The threat of being surcharged by the District Auditors also appears to have influenced the guardians in Wales in their decision to cease Old Poor Law practices. The work of the Assistant Commissioners in Wales also appears to have been extremely important in this regard. By the 1860s they had convinced many Unions in Wales to put an end to such practices. The passage of the 1846 Irremovability act also seems to have contributed towards the decisions of the guardians in Wales to stop Old Poor Law practices, particularly in the case of non-resident relief.

It has also been demonstrated here that, despite the claims of other historians, poor relief in Wales after 1834 was not particularly generous and Welsh boards of guardians were not more humane than their English counterparts. Poor relief in Wales under the New Poor Law continued to be largely inadequate and subsidiary only. Regular doles in Wales after 1834 continued to be relatively small, especially in comparison to some of the doles provided in some parts of England. Moreover, the guardians in Wales expected paupers in

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<sup>1228</sup> Llanidloes, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 12 May, 1876, p.2.

<sup>1229</sup> Llanidloes, *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 12 May, 1876, p.2

Wales to work for longer into old age and to support poorer family members rather than relying solely on poor relief. The harshness with which paupers in Wales were treated under the New Poor Law can be attributed, at least in part, to the attitudes of the Welsh board of guardians. Many guardians in Wales held derisory attitudes towards the paupers under the care and blamed them for their own poverty.

The inadequacy of the relief provided in Wales meant that paupers here had to rely on a much wider Economy of Makeshifts than their English counterparts. Charity continued to play a significant role in the lives of paupers in Wales under the New Poor Law. Many were fortunate enough to enjoy the benefits of belonging to a Friendly Society or benefit club. Some were also helped by a support network of family and friends. However, the nature of charity changed significantly during the course of the nineteenth century, becoming far more restricted and conditional. Moreover, by the end of the period under investigation here, many Friendly Societies and other benefit clubs in Wales had folded due to financial problems. Furthermore, support networks in Wales were severely disrupted by the rural to urban shift; in any case the amount of relief provided by family and friends was rarely enough to keep paupers above the poverty line. Many paupers in Wales after 1834 were forced to take drastic measures in order to survive. Some begged for help, others resorted to the use of pawn shops or petty crime. Those who could see no alternative decided to take their own lives or that of their own children.



# Conclusion

## Summary of main findings

The main aim of this thesis was to assess the impact the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act had in Wales. It has been demonstrated here that the New Poor Law had a far greater impact in Wales than previous Poor Law historians have allowed. Firstly, the administrative framework of the New Poor Law was implemented almost immediately in Wales. Unlike in some parts of England, such as London and the industrial north-west, there was relatively little resistance in Wales to the formation of the Poor Law Unions or the appointment of the new Union officers. The level of opposition to the workhouse system in Wales has also been grossly over-exaggerated. Many Unions in Wales, particularly those in the north and south-east and in the south-west of the country, established workhouses relatively quickly under the New Poor Law. Some Welsh Unions, particularly those in mid and north-west Wales, did resist building a workhouse for a considerable period of time. However, by the end of the 1870s every single Union in Wales had built a new Union workhouse. This was a marked change from the period before 1834. Further evidence that the poor relief system in Wales changed dramatically in the period after 1834 can be seen in the fact that, across Wales, but particularly in the rural south-west, the implementation of the New Poor Law precipitated violent outbursts of sheer anger from the working classes, as well as from the paupers themselves. Indeed, the Rebecca Rioters listed changes that had occurred under the New Poor Law system (especially the workings of the new 'bastardy clause') as being one of their main grievances.

The relationship between the central and local Poor Law authorities in Wales also changed considerably under the New Poor Law. For example, from the outset, many Welsh boards of guardians routinely ignored Orders and recommendations from the central authorities, sometimes using covert methods to do so. However, from the 1870s, guardians from Wales began attending annual Poor Law conferences, where they sometimes agreed to recommendations made by the central authorities. On occasion, Unions in Wales even began asking the central authorities for advice on certain matters of relief, particularly in relation to the type of relief provided to unemployed able-bodied men. Throughout much of

the period under investigation here the balance of power in Wales continued to rest, by and large, with the local boards of guardians, rather than with the central authorities. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, Unions in Wales were far more compliant than they had been at the outset.

The composition of the Welsh boards of guardians also changed considerably over time. For instance, by the end of the nineteenth century, working class and female guardians began appearing at the board meetings in Wales; some were even able to push through reforms or at least to question the perceived wisdom of the 'older' guardians. By and large, down to the end of the nineteenth century at least, the board meetings in Wales continued to be dominated by the same sorts of individuals who had dominated the administration of the poor relief system before 1834. In the more rural Unions in Wales, farmers continued to dominate the board meetings, whilst wealthy industrialists and/or the emerging professional classes continued to dominate the boards in the more industrialised Unions. However, the evidence here demonstrates that even this 'monopoly' was being steadily eroded by the end of the nineteenth century.

There was even some improvement in the standard of the poor relief system in Wales after 1834, particularly in the more industrialised Unions. The standard of the poor relief system in Wales continued to lag considerably behind the standard achieved in some parts of England. Up until the end of the nineteenth century at least, many issues, some unique to Wales, continued to prevent the establishment of an adequate system of poor relief. These issues are discussed in more detail below. Nonetheless, the evidence here demonstrates that in some ways the standard of the New Poor Law in Wales did change over time.

Poor relief practices also changed drastically in Wales under the New Poor Law. For example, throughout the nineteenth century, the workhouse test was increasingly applied to paupers in Wales; this was particularly true in the period from 1870 when many Unions in Wales became involved in the crusade against outdoor relief. By the end of the nineteenth century the number and proportion of paupers relieved indoors in Wales had significantly increased. The percentage of paupers relieved indoors in Wales continued to lag behind the percentage in England. However, there was still a marked shift in the use of the workhouse

system in Wales under the New Poor Law. Moreover, by 1870, many Old Poor Law practices such as the payment of pauper rents, non-resident relief, and family allowances were all either phased out or otherwise stopped altogether in Wales.

The work here also assessed how cruel the New Poor Law in Wales was. Of course, the level of cruelty is somewhat subjective, and we must also be careful not to impose today's ideas about cruelty onto the New Poor Law system. However, several assertions can be made. Firstly, as alluded to above, in comparison to the amount of relief available under the Old Poor Law, the scope of poor relief in Wales significantly reduced after 1834. Moreover, whereas relief doles in some parts of England made up a significant portion of a pauper's income under the New Poor Law, in Wales relief doles remained low and subsidiary only. As in England, some paupers in Wales, particularly in the more industrialised Unions, were also forced to work for their relief under the New Poor Law, both inside and outside of the workhouse. There was a degree of pauper agency in Wales under the New Poor Law. However, like their counterparts in England, recalcitrant paupers in Wales were often severely punished.

Much in the same way that the book *A Tolerant Nation? Revisiting ethnic diversity in a devolved Wales* challenges the myth that nineteenth century Wales was more tolerant of immigrants than many other European countries (including England), the work here also pokes holes in the assumption that guardians in Wales were somehow inherently more humane than their English counterparts. Many guardians in Wales, particularly the handful of individuals who dominated the board meetings, held derisory, Malthusian attitudes towards the paupers under their care. In Wales, as in England, paupers were often blamed for their own poverty and Welsh boards of guardians routinely made relief decisions based on the moral character of the pauper (perceived or otherwise) rather than on actual need as the law demanded. The relative poverty of many of the farmer guardians in the more rural Unions in Wales meant that they were either unwilling or unable to provide adequate levels of poor relief; whilst the individuals who dominated the boards in the more industrialised Unions often had a vested interest in restricting poor relief to as few people as possible.

This thesis also touches upon the question of whether or not the power of the landed elites increased or decreased in England and Wales under the New Poor Law. The

evidence here suggests that in Wales, the influence of the landed elites over the poor relief system significantly decreased after 1834. Although the landed elites in Wales had rarely involved themselves in the day-to-day administration of poor relief under the Old Poor Law, they did on occasion, in their capacity as magistrates, overturn the decision of the vestry in particular relief cases. However, under the New Poor Law, this 'appeals' system was effectively removed. From 1834, paupers in England and Wales could no longer simply apply to the magistrates to overturn unfavourable decisions. This also marked a significant change in the history of poor relief.

This does not mean that the landed elites in Wales were entirely removed from the administration of poor relief after 1834. For much of the nineteenth century, the landed elites, as ex-officio guardians, were often elected as the chairmen of the newly created boards of guardians. As other historians have pointed out, this was a pivotal position. There is also some evidence that the landed elites who sat on the boards could and sometimes did exert influence over the elected guardians, many of whom, particularly in the more rural Unions, were tenant farmers living and working on their estate. On occasion, the ex-officio guardians, some of whom were drawn from the landed elites, turned up to the board meetings en masse, swamping the vote of the elected guardians.

However, under the New Poor Law, as under the Old, the day-to-day administration was, by and large, left to the elected guardians, those lower down the social scale. The attendance record of the ex-officio guardians in Wales was extremely poor; typically, the ex-officio guardians (including the landed elites) turned up only when some form of patronage was up for grabs. The low attendance rates of the ex-officio guardians in Wales were due, at least in part, to the fact that, by 1834, the pool of resident gentry in Wales was relatively small. Moreover, of the landed elites who did reside in Wales, many became increasingly less and less interested in poor relief matters. Likewise, although the landed elites continued to be elected as the chairmen of the boards of guardians in Wales throughout the nineteenth century, they rarely attended the meetings, often leaving the position to be filled by other dominant individuals. There is also evidence that, even when they did attend, the landed elites did not always get their own way at the board meetings.

The work here also offers at least an initial assessment about the nature of the New Poor Law in Wales. Here, findings from six Unions from six different 'regions' of Wales were compared in order to determine whether or not there were significant differences in the administration of the New Poor Law between England and Wales, or if, as in England, there were significant regional or inter-regional (localised) differences. At first glance, it appears as if Wales had its own distinctive New Poor Law system. There were certainly some broad national trends that marked Wales out as being distinct from England. For instance, as noted above, throughout the entire period under investigation here the proportion of paupers relieved outdoors was significantly higher in Welsh Unions than in English ones. Unions in Wales, particularly in the more rural regions, were also excessively large and unwieldy; whilst linguistic issues, unique to Wales, also negated the establishment of an adequate system of poor relief in the period both before and after 1834. Up until the end of the nineteenth century at least, many Unions in Wales also continued to have difficulty in funding a formal poor relief system. In this way, Unions in Wales had more in common with other welfare peripheries across Europe than they did with Unions in England.

However, as in England, there were also significant differences within Wales. For instance, although the proportion of paupers relieved outdoors was considerably higher in Wales than in England, the percentage of paupers relieved outdoors was often much higher in the more rural regions. As noted above, there were also differences in the types of individuals who dominated the board of guardians in Wales, which in turn caused variations in the standard of the administrative system between Unions in Wales. As other historians, such as Keith Snell have also pointed out, there were also differences in the tactics used by Unions in Wales to keep the cost of poor relief as low as possible. For instance, Unions in the more industrialised south-east coalfield region more readily made use of Outdoor Labour Tests in order to dissuade able-bodied male applicants; these measures were rarely used in other parts of Wales.

The evidence here suggests that at the very least, there were strong regional differences in the administration of the New Poor Law in Wales, although there is some evidence that there were also considerable inter-regional differences within Wales. Pauperism rates, for instance, could and did vary considerably between neighbouring

Unions in Wales. This suggests that each Union in Wales was operating as a welfare state in miniature, reacting to the unique set of socio-economic circumstances within it. This finding has significant implications for our understanding of the administration of the New Poor Law in England and Wales more generally.

Another one of the main aims of the thesis was to assess how far attitudes to welfare claimants and conceptualisations of poverty have changed since the nineteenth century. Some of the language used by those in control of today's modern welfare state is eerily similar to the language used by the Welsh boards of guardians. For example, just after becoming Prime Minister in 2010 David Cameron (now Lord Cameron) justified the wide ranging impact of spending cuts implemented by his government by arguing that you cannot cut the budget deficit 'by just hitting either the rich or the welfare scrounger'.<sup>1230</sup> In a similar vein, in 2015 the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, claimed that people are poor and unemployed due to 'the damaging culture of welfare dependency'.<sup>1231</sup> Likewise, in 2023 Conservative MP Lee Anderson, who briefly served as the of the Deputy Chairman of the Tory Party, stated that it is 'nonsense' to claim that anybody in the UK was living in poverty, and that people just needed to 'get off their arse'.<sup>1232</sup> It appears that in some corners of the UK at least, attitudes towards welfare claimants has changed little since the era of the New Poor Law.

### **Future Areas of Research**

Although this thesis covers a lot of ground and has greatly improved our understanding of the New Poor Law in Wales, the findings here have also generated some possible future areas of research. To begin with, the suggestion that there were regional as well as inter-regional differences in the administration of the New Poor Law within Wales means that it is highly likely that further research of other Unions in Wales will reveal even more variations. Although the Swansea Union was impacted greatly by the coal industry, other Unions in the

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<sup>1230</sup> [www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jan/08/strivers-shirkers-language-welfare](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jan/08/strivers-shirkers-language-welfare).

<sup>1231</sup> [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/23/skivers-strivers-200year-old-myth-wont-die](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/23/skivers-strivers-200year-old-myth-wont-die).

<sup>1232</sup> [www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/tory-deputy-chairman-lee-anderson-says-nonsense-to-claim-there-is-poverty-uk\\_651c1bbe40c3956253adef](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/tory-deputy-chairman-lee-anderson-says-nonsense-to-claim-there-is-poverty-uk_651c1bbe40c3956253adef)

south-Wales coalfield region, such as Merthyr Tydfil, were even more heavily dependent on the fortunes of this vital industry and it is likely that an analysis of one of these Unions may offer some fresh and interesting perspectives. An analysis of one of the more recalcitrant Unions in mid-Wales such as Rhayader or Presteigne, who held out on building a new Union workhouse for decades, would almost certainly offer some interesting variations in the administration of the New Poor Law.

Another avenue for future research would be to assess the treatment of individual groups of paupers in Wales under the New Poor Law. It is now well-established that, in England at least, certain groups of paupers were treated differently under the 1834 act; much has been written for instance about how able-bodied men and unmarried mothers were hardest hit by the strictures of the New Poor Law. It would be interesting to see if this is the case in Wales. The work here suggests that these groups of paupers were even worse off in Wales after 1834 than they were in England. The work here also suggests that the standard of medical relief provided to sick paupers in Wales under the New Poor Law lagged considerably behind the standard achieved in England. However, far more work is needed to test these hypotheses.

It would also be interesting to see what happened to paupers in Wales during the twentieth century as a host of Liberal welfare reforms began to replace the jurisdiction of the Poor Laws. The impact of the First World War on the administration of the New Poor Law has also been a neglected area of Poor Law history. The vast majority of Poor Law studies (present company included) focus predominantly on the period before 1900. Extending the timeframe of Poor Law studies into the twentieth century may reveal further trends in the administration of the New Poor Law in England and Wales.

The use of other types of sources may also improve our understanding of the New Poor Law in Wales. A good starting point would be the utilization of Welsh-language sources. These may be particularly useful given that, as demonstrated here, linguistic issues prevented the establishment of an adequate system of poor relief in Wales. The duplicitous use of the Welsh language by the guardians in Wales also suggests that these sources would give this topic an extra dimension. The fact that the Assistant Poor Law Commissioners appear to have had such a big influence in the administration of the New Poor Law in Wales

also suggests that making use of any records or papers left by these individuals would also greatly improve our understanding of the nature of the New Poor Law in Wales.

Finally, more comparative work is needed in order to enrich our understanding of the subject. This could include more comparisons of Unions within Wales, as well as further comparisons between the administration of the New Poor Law in Wales and the New Poor Law in England and other countries in the UK and across Europe. Such studies would help to further locate Welsh and British history into a much larger context.



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