

Child Disability in Early Modern England (1550-1750)

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Summary

This research project examines the lives of poor impaired and/or disabled children in England in the period 1550 to 1750. By focusing predominantly on socio-historical sources such as petitions, apprenticeship bonds and terminations, criminal court records, and parish orders, it offers pivotal insights into the lived experiences of these children and those who cared for or simply lived alongside them. It addresses such topics as early modern beliefs and scientific knowledge surrounding congenital and acquired impairments, provision and absence (or lapses) of care for impaired and/or disabled children, the remarkable variety of people willing or made to look after these children and the central importance of community and parish support in the lives of these children and of their families.

Table of Contents

SUMMARY	I
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
0. INTRODUCTION	1
0.1. THESIS AND OUTLINE.....	1
0.2. HISTORIOGRAPHY	7
<i>Early Modern Childhood</i>	7
<i>Early Modern Child Disability</i>	13
<i>Pre-Modern Disability History</i>	19
<i>Early Modern English Poverty</i>	22
0.3. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES	24
<i>Social Model of Disability</i>	24
<i>Terminology</i>	29
<i>Sources</i>	34
1. ATTITUDES AND TREATMENTS.....	41
1.1. EARLY MODERN CONGENITAL IMPAIRMENTS: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES	43
<i>Historiographical Survey of Early Modern English Monstrous Births</i>	43
<i>Natural Philosophy: A Naturalised Approach to Congenital Impairments</i>	53
<i>Maternal Impressions</i>	56
<i>Matters of Bodily Function</i>	58
<i>Dissenting Voices</i>	62
1.2. ACQUIRED IMPAIRMENTS IN EARLY MODERN CHILDREN: CAUSES, CURES, & SOCIAL RESPONSE	67
<i>Causes of Acquired Impairments in Early Modern English Children</i>	68
<i>Social Response to Acquired Impairments</i>	74
<i>Curing Acquired Impairments</i>	81
1.3. CONCLUSION.....	85
2. PETITIONING	87
2.1. PETITIONS: WHAT ARE THEY? AND HOW DO THEY WORK?	91
<i>The Language of Petitions for Relief</i>	94
<i>Petitioners</i>	99
2.2. ‘DESERVING’ RELIEF	104
2.3. NEIGHBOURLY CHARITY: SUPPORTING AND SUPPLEMENTING.....	108
2.4. CONCLUSION.....	114
3. CARING FOR EARLY MODERN ENGLISH IMPAIRED CHILDREN.....	116
3.1. PRIMARY CARERS	119
<i>A Parent’s Duty of Care</i>	120

<i>Bonds of Kinship: Siblings and Grandparents as Primary Carers</i>	127
3.2. PROVIDING.....	133
<i>Petitioning as a Provision of Care</i>	136
<i>How to Petition: Emphasising Impairments as a Rhetorical Tactic</i>	141
3.3. CONCLUSION.....	147
4. ACCIDENTAL, INCIDENTAL, AND INTENTIONAL ABSENCE OF CARE....	149
4.1. MATTERS OF PERCEPTION, REJECTION, AND DEPENDENCY	152
<i>Printed Sources: Marianne Maillard and Henry Bushly</i>	154
<i>Examples from Petitions</i>	157
4.2. ABSENCE OF CARE	161
<i>Abandonment</i>	162
<i>Lack of Care as a Result of a Dearth of Resources</i>	164
<i>Contending with Impaired Children's Individual Needs</i>	169
4.3. PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE	173
<i>Active and Intentional Deprivation of Care</i>	174
<i>Abuse as a Cause of Impairments: Physical Violence and Rape</i>	178
4.4. CONCLUSION.....	184
5. COMMUNITY AND PARISH INVOLVEMENT IN THE LIVES OF EARLY MODERN DISABLED CHILDREN	187
5.1. WHEN PARISH AUTHORITIES STEP IN	189
<i>Parish Relief</i>	191
<i>Securing Apprenticeships on Behalf of the Community</i>	195
<i>Terminating Apprenticeships on Grounds of Disability</i>	199
5.2. COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS PRIMARY CARERS	203
<i>Widows</i>	204
<i>De Facto Carers</i>	208
<i>Indoor Relief as a Form of Parochial Care</i>	209
<i>It Takes a Village</i>	211
<i>Apprenticeships as an Extension of Primary Care</i>	214
5.3. CONCLUSION.....	218
6. CONCLUSION	220
BIBLIOGRAPHY	234
PRIMARY SOURCES	234
<i>Manuscripts</i>	234
<i>Print</i>	237
<i>Websites</i>	246
SECONDARY SOURCES	248
<i>Articles</i>	248
<i>Books</i>	257
<i>Book Chapters</i>	262

APPENDICES	268
<i>Bedfordshire Archives and Records Office</i>	<i>268</i>
<i>Carlisle Archives Centre</i>	<i>270</i>
<i>Devon Heritage Centre</i>	<i>271</i>
<i>East Riding Archives</i>	<i>275</i>
<i>Herefordshire Archive and Records Centre</i>	<i>278</i>
<i>Isle of Wight Record Office</i>	<i>279</i>
<i>Kent Archives</i>	<i>283</i>
<i>Lancashire Archives.....</i>	<i>285</i>
<i>National Archives.....</i>	<i>307</i>
<i>North East Wales Archives.....</i>	<i>315</i>
<i>Northamptonshire Archives Service.....</i>	<i>317</i>
<i>Northumberland Archives</i>	<i>318</i>
<i>Somerset Heritage Centre.....</i>	<i>319</i>
<i>Suffolk Archives.....</i>	<i>325</i>
<i>Surrey History Centre</i>	<i>326</i>
<i>West Yorkshire History Centre</i>	<i>327</i>

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0. Introduction

0.1. Thesis and Outline

In a petition for relief from c.1675 Lancashire, we are introduced to a boy named Henry Bare. Bare was ‘lame ... at the beginning’, in other words he was physically impaired from birth.¹ Apparently orphaned from a young age, he had been ‘manteyned & brought up’ by the inhabitants of Aintree, a small community in Lancashire, for ‘many years past’. How this arrangement worked is unclear, but we know that they ‘pa[id] unto him fourty shillings per annum by reason of his lameness’. When he became old enough, they secured him ‘a sittinge Trade’ with a shoemaker from the community. This case is fascinating and, to my knowledge, unique: it illustrates the deep involvement of a small community in looking after and providing for a congenitally ‘lame’ orphan – it did quite literally take a village to raise this child. It highlights the extent to which a community could help shape the life of a physically impaired person. It equally underlines that impaired children were not necessarily cared for by their parents and that other people could step in if and when required. I will analyse this case – which was not, in the end, representative of a happy or harmonious relationship – in more detail later in this dissertation.

Henry Bare’s petition is one of almost eighty I utilise in this dissertation in order to explore the lived experiences of impaired and/or disabled children in early modern England (1550-1750). The key questions with which I approached such documents are: what did it mean to be a poor impaired and/or disabled child in early modern England? Who cared for these children and how? And were there systems in place to support those who cared for these children?

¹ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.432.8.

The study of poor disabled children requires an amalgamation of several sub-fields of study, notably the histories of childhood, disability, and poverty. By paying close attention to poor impaired and/or disabled early modern English children, we can further our understanding of the realities of early modern life. As scholars of disability history and disability studies have shown, disability is a social construct and thus a product of its time; it is a representation of people's inner thoughts and principles, and it can tell us a great deal about early modern English people and their beliefs. By directing my attention onto poor impaired and/or disabled children, I throw fresh light on early modern childhood, disability, and poverty and inscribe myself at the crossroads of these three fields – I will give a proper survey of these fields later in this introduction.

This dissertation is an invaluable addition to the scholarship in that we know very little about impaired and/or disabled early modern English children. We know a great deal about their cultural association with monstrosity but virtually nothing about who these children really were and what their lives truly resembled. I initially build on this scholarship in Chapter 1 but eventually move past it and go where only a small handful of historians of early modern history have gone. Recent works by scholars have examined numerous aspects of childhood, childcare, and *expectations* of care in early modern England (I expand on this in the historiography section below), but they have indirectly excluded impaired and/or disabled children from their focus. They have instead built a narrative centred around a tacit and arbitrary physical, mental, emotional, and developmental norm. This dissertation corrects this imbalance and demonstrates that while expectations of care were at times more difficult and sometimes impossible to meet for impaired and/or disabled children, they were nevertheless similar to those of non-impaired, non-disabled children. And while this last assertion might

seem obvious, it is in fact an important and novel claim. In short, this dissertation undeniably shows that impaired and/or disabled early modern English children were and were *seen* as actual human children by their contemporaries. In order to elucidate this, I have divided this dissertation into five interconnected chapters.

Chapter One is concerned with the contemporaneous conceptualisation of physical impairments in children as well as their possible cures and fixes. This chapter is important in that it outlines the systems of understanding of physical impairments which were fundamental to the period. The competing ideas introduced in this chapter would have been held to varying degrees by people of all backgrounds, including parish officials, and thus will be relevant for Chapters Two to Four. Early modern English people had clear if somewhat conflicting theories as to the origins of congenital and acquired physical impairments. As is common for the early modern period, religion and natural philosophy both supported and contradicted each other at the same time. Religion claimed that impairments could be signs of divine displeasure towards an individual, a family, or even towards humanity as a whole. On the other hand, natural philosophy or medicine posited that impairments normally resulted either from an imbalance of the humours, from injury, or from the expecting mother's unbridled thoughts and cravings. This chapter therefore lays the foundation upon which the rest of this dissertation is built – we cannot aim to understand early modern English child disability without first considering contemporary attitudes towards it. Out of all five of my chapters, Chapter One relies the most heavily on literary primary sources such as natural philosophy and religious treatises, midwifery manuals, printed accounts of monstrous births, sermons, and lecture notes about human anatomy. The ideas shared in these sources, while more literary and intellectual in nature, still managed to trickle down to the lower rungs of early modern English society where they were eventually absorbed within the wider set of

beliefs of this social order. Similarly, tales of monstrosity circulated in published academic texts, in sensational pamphlets akin to our modern tabloids, in religious sermons, and occasionally in private correspondence – all of these are sources which historians have already extensively studied. It is worth mentioning, however, that the words ‘monster’ or ‘monstrous birth’ did not appear at all in any of the petitions, apprenticeship bonds and terminations, or legal proceedings I have come across in my research. The only source (aside from monstrous birth pamphlets) which contained outright mentions of ‘monsters’ or ‘monstrous births’ was a private letter sent to the physician Hans Sloane by his mother. While Chapter One surveys the discourse around impaired and/or disabled children rather than their lived experiences, it illuminates the intellectual and cultural landscape of child disability in early modern England. We cannot hope to comprehend people’s motives without first delving into how their minds worked and what they would have expected of both impairments and disability.

Chapter Two acts as a necessary bridge between Chapter One (in its inherent framing capacity) and the subsequent three chapters. Where Chapter One was primarily concerned with conceptualising early modern beliefs and knowledge surrounding impairment and disability, Chapter Two instead contextualises the principal source base for this dissertation. Petitions hold such import within the context of this dissertation that it is essential to fully understand their formats and language, and how these both reflect and illuminate the social conditions that produced them. As such, Chapter Two is quintessentially methodological. Therefore, in this chapter, I first give a clear and concise overview of what exactly petitions were (especially petitions for relief), and how they reflect the Poor Law system through which many impoverished carers of disabled early modern children sought support. I answer questions such as, who wrote these petitions? Who were the petitions directed at? Why did

early modern people file petitions in the first place? I then expand on the early modern poor-law category of ‘deserving’ poverty, to which most of my historical actors would have belonged and which in itself justifies the very existence of my petitions. And lastly, I concentrate on the omnipresence and reliability of neighbourly Christian charity and how it was an incredibly pivotal form of private relief in England in the period.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five are intimately connected to each other. Chapters Three and Four, in particular, examine two sides of the same coin – the provision of care for disabled children, or the lack thereof. Chapter Five continues some of the themes touched on in Chapter Three but widens its scope to involve the community at large and parish officials. All of these chapters are based on archival research with documents like petitions for relief, apprenticeship disputes, and so on. Drawing on methodological insights from historians of childhood (discussed further below), I carefully use these administrative records that are overwhelmingly *about* children, rather than *by* children to nevertheless understand the lived experiences of the children involved, and the many adults who took or neglected responsibility for them.

Chapter Three, then, centres on the concept of care, and more precisely on those early modern kinship carers who provided for disabled children. Primary carers were varied – biological and stepparents were not the only ones expected to look after their impaired and disabled children. Chapter Three illustrates the ways in which those primary carers could provide for their impaired and/or disabled charges. In this chapter, I mostly draw on early modern petitions for relief as well as on session papers from the proceedings of the Old Bailey criminal court in London. This breadth of sources provides the opportunity to

investigate the role of the local environment in determining the support and opportunities available to impaired and/or disabled children and their carers.

Next, whereas Chapter Three is concerned with reconstructing the care for impaired and/or disabled children, Chapter Four instead highlights that early modern parents, guardians, and other caregivers could sometimes fail in their duty of care, and in some cases be even directly abusive to their impaired and/or disabled charges. Chapter Four exists to counterbalance Chapter Three and vice-versa – pretending that impaired and/or disabled children were always cared for or that they were consistently being abused would be incorrect. Right from the start of Chapter Four, I make it abundantly clear that failures of care were not necessarily born out of malice but were often the product of some of the inescapable realities of being poor in early modern England. The act of petitioning itself can be construed as a form of care, and I shall argue that these documents outlining failures in care were at the same time also attempts to provide for their charges. Intentions aside, however, we cannot escape the fact that some of these impaired and/or disabled children suffered the inevitable consequences of this absence of care. Similarly to Chapter Three, Chapter Four is based on legal sources from the Old Bailey and petitions from ten county archives, as well as one pamphlet. This again allows for a qualitative survey of the various experiences of failure of care of impaired and/or disabled children and their carers. The qualitative nature of my source base makes it impossible to determine with certainty which experiences were more typical – a thorny methodological problem I will discuss later on in this introduction.

Finally, in Chapter Five I highlight the pivotal caregiving role played by the wider community, including members who were not kin to impaired and/or disabled children – for example, community widows (as opposed to family-member widows) who took on caring

responsibilities in return for financial help. Further to this, I posit that local support held great sway over the lives of early modern impaired children and could even essentially decide the extent to which these children would be disabled. Through parish-ordered apprenticeships or through the provision of relief, communities could help ensure impaired children did not become disabled by early modern English society. This chapter further reveals that legal and administrative measures could be taken to empower disabled children to become socially and financially independent. Compared to my previous four chapters, I pay closer attention to the ‘bigger picture’ here and consider the disabled child as part of a community. This chapter links back to Chapter Two: I explore sources which allow the community-level support and parish administration to shine. The bulk of the sources I use in this chapter are as ever Quarter Session documents and legal proceedings, most notably apprenticeship bonds, apprenticeship terminations, and petitions for relief.

0.2. Historiography

Early Modern Childhood

This dissertation informs and contributes to a number of sub-fields of historical study – notably medicine, religion, women, and poverty – yet clearly it inscribes itself above all within the histories of childhood, disability, and poverty. Regarding the first of these fields, one simply cannot discuss pre-modern childhood without first mentioning French medieval historian Philippe Ariès and his *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (*Centuries of Childhood* in English) published in 1960.² Ariès' monograph pioneered a new wave of historical research about medieval and early modern childhood in that many of his claims

² Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (Pimlico, 1960).

about children have been superseded. His three principal tenets were that the concept of childhood was foreign to pre-modern contemporaries; that, because of the high mortality rates of the period, parents did not love their children; and finally, that accessing the pre-modern child's voice/experience was impossible. All three of his main theses have now been thoroughly disproved.

We now know that childhood was considered a distinct life stage even back in the Middle Ages, that parents emphatically did love their children, and that accessing the child's voice is in fact possible. Evidently, accessing the child's voice still remains a difficult exercise which is based in careful attention to detail – sources by or about children are rarely objective or untarnished by external influence. We rarely get to the child's original voice, and this even in sources directly penned by children or by adults remembering their younger years. I myself have very few actual sources in the child's voice but rather by the people who existed alongside them. Likewise, Natalie Zemon Davis asserts that the inherent bias and censorship of some primary sources does not preclude historians from accessing the voices of early modern people but that we must always carefully consider authorship when handling such sources.³ Laura Sangha, Mark Hailwood, and Jonathan Willis have similarly warned us that historians must always consider who really wrote early modern documents: for example, letters (or petitions, as we will see in Chapter Two) were often dictated to a scribe and might have become approximations or retellings of the message the sender initially intended to convey.⁴ Hannah Newton suggests that authors of documents which were potentially intended for public viewing may have been concerned with the reader's reception, perception, and

³ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Polity, 1987).

⁴ Laura Sangha, 'Personal Documents', and Mark Hailwood, 'Popular Culture', in *Understanding Early Modern Primary Sources*, ed. by Laura Sangha and Jonathan Willis (Routledge, 2016), 114, 210-211.

interpretation of their words and thus chosen to self-censor or omit details.⁵ Nevertheless, the historiography about early modern children proves that by minutely handling different materials we can still access the child's experience. Newton, for instance, manages to access the child's experience by examining the emotional responses of sick children and their parents (e.g. pain, fear, grief), generally through written accounts in diaries, letters, and so on.⁶ Anna French has instead focused on printed tales of early modern demonic possession and prophecy involving children and shed some fresh light on the place of the early modern child within the religious discourses of the period.⁷ Similarly, Tara Hamling pieces together an image of the early modern English child by utilising, first, personal testimonies of accidents and injuries and, second, what she calls the 'built environment' such as the furnishings and decorations of domestic houses.⁸ As will be made evident throughout this dissertation, I personally mostly use petitions for relief as a way to access the lived experiences of poor early modern English children.

Continuing on with Ariès' claims, numerous historians have shown that parents did love their children. Margaret L. King, for example, firmly argued that high mortality rates in children did not at all discourage parents from investing emotionally in their children.⁹ She instead

⁵ Hannah Newton, *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580-1720* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 20.

⁶ *Ibid*, 1, 2, 5-6.

⁷ Anna French, *Children of Wrath: Possession, Prophecy, and the Young in Early Modern England* (Routledge, 2016); see also, Anna French, 'Locating the Early Modern Child', in *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction*, ed. by Anna French (Routledge, 2020), 3, 9.

⁸ Tara Hamling, 'The Household', in *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction*, ed. by Anna French (Routledge, 2020).

⁹ Margaret L. King, 'Concepts of Childhood: What We Know and Where We Might Go', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 60.2 (2007), 371–407. See further, French, *Children of Wrath*; Hannah Newton, 'The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580–1720', *Endeavour*, 38.2 (2014), 1–8; Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, 'Reciprocal Bonding: Parents and Their Offspring in Early Modern England', *Journal of Family History*, 25.3 (2000), 291–312.

underlines that parental affection varied depending on region, rural/urban settings, and class. This matches the conclusions of Loretta Dolan who has evidenced that early modern people had clear notions of what constituted either nurture or neglect.¹⁰ She also reminds historians to avoid anachronistic comparisons: what we consider abuse today, such as firm physical ‘discipline’, might have been seen as nurturing in the early modern period.¹¹ In similar fashion, Joseph Harley has shown that, while children from the age of seven would have been expected to contribute to the household economy, their parents would have also provided them with toys or with ways to amuse themselves and have some form of childhood – for example, bats and balls, wooden horses, or dolls.¹² He illustrates that poorer households were not excluded from this, and that poor parents would sometimes fashion dolls for their children out of wood, clothes pegs, shoes, or even bones which they then dressed up with scraps of fabric or rags.¹³ In a similar vein, Newton again has shown that early modern English parents loved and were actively involved in caring and providing for their children.¹⁴ She evidences this by centring on the experiences of sick children, their bodies, and medicine, but also on the legal responsibilities of carers, on community intervention, and on the financial repercussions of looking after a sick child. These are all concepts that I have taken on in my own research. Using disability (as opposed to sickness) as my prism, I show that many early modern English parents cared for their children on an ongoing basis rather than just in a short-term bout of illness and that they did their utmost to provide for them.

¹⁰ Loretta Dolan, ‘Notions of Nurture and Neglect in Adult-Child Relationships’, in *Nurture and Neglect: Childhood in Sixteenth-Century Northern England* (Routledge, 2017), 36–68.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 36.

¹² Joseph Harley, ‘Non-Essential Goods’, in *At Home with the Poor: Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in England, c.1650-1850* (Manchester University Press, 2024), 180–205.

¹³ *Ibid*, 197, 198.

¹⁴ Newton, *Sick Child*; see also, Hannah Newton, ‘The Dying Child in Seventeenth-Century England’, *Paediatrics*, 136.2 (2015), 218–20.

Anthony Fletcher and, more recently, Anna French *et al.* have provided us with indispensable insights into the many facets of early modern childhood.¹⁵ Katie Barclay's chapter on the early modern family in French's edited collection is central to my own conceptualisation of the early modern primary carer and how they did not necessarily have to be a parent or a close relative.¹⁶ Despite their brilliant contributions to the field, their core focus remains trained on a normative conception of childhood and thus implicitly excludes disabled children. This dissertation aims to partially rectify that. Disabled children are indeed children, but their experience of childhood was not always that of their non-disabled peers. The same can be said of impaired children: while they might not have been disabled, their impairments sometimes resulted in them experiencing childhood differently from non-impaired children. Likewise, as I explore in Chapter Three, parental care of disabled children went far beyond the 'normal' amount of involvement expected of early modern parents such as involvement in marriage choices or partial financial support in the early days of their child's married life. In some cases, parental care towards disabled children never fully lessened, and these children remained in a deeply dependent position for their entire life. In this, disability was sometimes very much infantilising.

My research also builds on scholarship on wider networks of care from community members such as widows and parish-appointed guardians. Several scholars have studied the economic and social contributions of unmarried women, and shown that widows were resilient pillars of their respective communities.¹⁷ Most importantly for my dissertation, Amy M. Froide has

¹⁵ Anthony Fletcher, *Growing Up in England: The Experience of Childhood 1600-1914* (Yale University Press, 2008); *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction*, ed. by Anna French (Routledge, 2020).

¹⁶ Katie Barclay, 'The Early Modern Family', in *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction*, ed. by Anna French (Routledge, 2020), 16-32.

¹⁷ Pamela Sharpe, 'Survival Strategies and Stories: Poor Widows and Widowers in Early Industrial England', in *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan

emphasised the central role widows and other single women had in the lives of orphans and how they disturbed the framework of the traditional nuclear family.¹⁸ I closely follow in her footsteps by establishing that single women and widows alike held equal pride of place in the lives of many disabled children. Taking additional inspiration from Froide, I also show that young disabled orphans further rearranged the foundations of the traditional early modern family.

Early modern parents were eager to secure opportunities for socio-economic independence for their children. Works by Patrick Wallis and Chris Minns have illustrated the high percentage of children who indentured themselves off to a master to learn a trade.¹⁹ More recently, Laura Gowing has explored the steady increase of the number of female apprentices in England between 1645 to the 1770s and what it meant for early modern English girls in terms of identity and agency: while female apprentices were never on par with their male counterparts in terms of freedom or political entitlement, apprenticeships eventually gave them a sense of identity which was separate from that of their husbands.²⁰ This socio-historical study marries itself well with Froide's book on never-married women in that they

Warner (Longman, 1999); Jane Whittle, 'Enterprising Widows and Active Wives: Women's Unpaid Work in the Household Economy of Early Modern England', *The History of the Family*, 19.3 (2014), 283–300; Sara Read, *Maids, Wives, Widows: Exploring Early Modern Women's Lives 1540-1714* (Pen & Sword History, 2015).

¹⁸ Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Patrick Wallis, Cliff Webb, and Chris Minns, 'Leaving Home and Entering Service: The Age of Apprenticeship in Early Modern London', *Continuity and Change*, 25.3 (2010), 377–404; Chris Minns and Patrick Wallis, 'Rules and Reality: Quantifying the Practice of Apprenticeship in Early Modern England: Quantifying Apprenticeship', *The Economic History Review*, 65.2 (2012), 556–79; Patrick Wallis, 'Labour, Law, and Training in Early Modern London: Apprenticeship and the City's Institutions', *The Journal of British Studies*, 51.4 (2012), 791–819; Patrick Wallis, 'Between Apprenticeship and Skill: Acquiring Knowledge Outside the Academy in Early Modern England', *Science in Context*, 32.2 (2019), 155–70.

²⁰ Laura Gowing, 'Girls on Forms: Apprenticing Young Women in Seventeenth-Century London', *Journal of British Studies*, 55.3 (2016), 447–73.

both explore the potential scope of early modern female agency. These works by Wallis, Minns, and Gowing are invaluable in broadening our understanding of early modern childhood: childhood was a pivotal life stage, one in which children would slowly begin their progressive transition towards socio-economic independence. However, once again, their focus has been on the life trajectories of non-disabled children and youths, therefore overlooking the hurdles that some disabled children had to go through to secure, or let alone maintain, training and/or work opportunities. Moreover, there is very limited scholarship on the possible apprenticeship and work accommodations made available to some disabled children. As such, there is a significant gap in the literature which this dissertation aims to fill.

Early Modern Child Disability

By zooming in on child disability, I situate my research at the nexus of two fields of scholarship. This in turn allows me to look both ways and reveal early modern assumptions about childhood and about impairment and disability. Apart from the aforementioned secondary scholarship on monstrous births, we hold very little knowledge of how parents and early modern people in general looked at disabled children pre-eighteenth century.

The field of pre-modern child disability, which itself is evidently still in its infancy, has concentrated mainly on the period directly after 1750. David M. Turner, for example, has written about impaired and disabled children in and after the first industrial revolution, notably how impaired children were prominent figures in the begging world of eighteenth-century England, encouraged to utilise their impairments to elicit pity and sympathy.²¹

²¹ David M. Turner, 'Impaired Children in Eighteenth-Century England', *Social History of Medicine*, 30 (2017), 788–806; David M. Turner, 'Birth Anomaly and Childhood Disability', in *The Secrets of*

Equally, historians such as Ashley Mathisen, Alysa Levene, and Claire Phillips have written at length about the Foundling Hospital, which officially opened its doors in 1741: they have shown, for example, that the Hospital willingly took in many impaired and/or disabled orphans and then diligently provided for them.²² Phillips in particular has predominantly researched the Ackworth branch of the Hospital, which was known for admitting foundlings with either congenital or acquired impairments.²³

Going beyond the pre-modern period and into the nineteenth century, Steve King has utilised digitised decennial census records and a database of more than 8,000 coronial court records from the Lincolnshire Coronal Court to reconstruct the lives and experiences of impaired and/or disabled English children between the years 1800 to 1860.²⁴ Among other things, he discusses the liminality of these children and how they were both inherently children yet also removed from so-called ‘perfect’ or ‘normal’ childhood. This, in fact, closely echoes my own findings regarding early modern impaired and/or disabled children – they were at the same time children in the eyes of their contemporaries but at the same time seen as deviating from ‘normal’ childhood. Anne Borsay and Pamela Dale have similarly edited a collection of twelve chapters on the lived experiences of disabled children from the United Kingdom, parts of Continental Europe, and Australia between the years 1850 to 1979. This collection has

Generation: Reproduction in the Long Eighteenth Century ed. by Raymond Stephanson and Darren Wagner (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 217-237.

²² Ashley Mathisen, “‘So That They May Be Usefull to Themselves and the Community’: Charting Childhood Disability in an Eighteenth-Century Institution”, *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 8.2 (2015), 191–210; Alysa Levene, ‘Childcare and Health in a Local Setting’, in *Childcare, Health, and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741-1800: ‘Left to the Mercy of the World’* (Manchester University Press, 2007), 145–74; Claire Phillips, “‘So They May Be Usefull to Themselves’: Work and Apprenticeship in the Ackworth Branch Foundling Hospital, 1757-1773”, *Family & Community History*, 25.3 (2022), 219–33.

²³ Phillips, ‘Work’.

²⁴ Steven King, ‘Constructing the Disabled Child in England, 1800-1860’, *Family & Community History*, 18.2 (2015), 105, 107.

shed light onto the impact of disability and impairments on impaired and/or disabled children and their primary carers – for instance, the control exerted by carers over their charges, but also the over-prevalence of institutionalised (as opposed to familial) forms of care paired with an apparent indifference towards the interests of these impaired and/or disabled children.²⁵

Scholars of modern European history have equally written about various aspects of childhood disability in the twentieth century in Cold-War Germany, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, and Britain.²⁶ For instance, Julie Anderson has analysed the perceived importance of motherhood in the period between 1918 and 1939, yet how institutional care for a group of blind babies eventually replaced their biological families.²⁷ She relies primarily on magazines as well as newspaper articles and reports which, she advances, served as positive propaganda for the Sunshine Homes for Blind Babies and which painted these Homes as a haven for blind babies. Similarly, Victoria Shmidt makes use of Czechoslovakian documentaries from the 1960s and 1970s to trace the divide between institutional and familial care and to get to the root of the socio-cultural ideal of normative child development.²⁸

As far as the early modern period is concerned, Leah Astbury has written about early modern impaired children as a way to illustrate that newborns were seen as physiologically distinct

²⁵ *Disabled Children: Contested Caring, 1850-1979*, ed. by Anne Borsay and Pamela Dale (Routledge, 2012).

²⁶ Christina von Hodenberg, Gräbelle Lingelback, and Raphael Rössel, 'Introduction: Disability and Family Care in Modern European History', *Journal of Modern European History*, 22.4 (2024), 475-480; Julie Anderson, 'From Darkness to Sunshine: Blind Babies, Families, and the Sunshine Homes, 1918-1939', *Journal of Modern European History*, 22.4 (2024), 499-516; Victoria Shmidt, 'Family Care for Children with Disabilities in Czechoslovak Documentaries in the 1960s and the 1970s', *Journal of Modern European History*, 22.4 (2024), 517-541; Raphael Rössel, 'Divided Care: Differences in the Agencies of Family Caregivers for Disabled Children in East and West Germany', *Journal of Modern European History*, 22.4 (2024), 542-558; Paul van Trigt, 'From Institutions to Families? The Changing Allocation of Responsibility for Cognitively Disabled Children in Dutch Postwar Long-Term Care Policies', *Journal of Modern European History*, 22.4 (2024), 559-574.

²⁷ Anderson, 'From Darkness'.

²⁸ Shmidt, 'Family Care'.

from adults and children.²⁹ She has, for example, investigated how the impaired infant body was sometimes used as a legal tool: a ‘healthy’ newborn baby had to look a certain way, and therefore an impaired newborn body could indicate that a mother had failed to care for her child in some way. Astbury broaches on the various birth routines employed to avoid ‘abnormalities’ in newborns such as bathing newborn infants to encourage digestion, or searching the baby for irregularities. Her research perfectly aligns with some of what I myself discuss in Chapter One, namely the various medical ideas as to what could possibly cause impairments in newborn infants and how to potentially prevent them. In similar fashion, Sarah Toulalan has delved into the ramifications of child rape in early modern England, and more precisely into its repercussions on the child’s health and development (i.e. syphilis, physical trauma). Her interests in this article lie mostly with the legal context surrounding child rape, but she still provides us with useful information about the disabling nature of some early modern socio-cultural norms – notably, that being ‘disfigured’ could have dire consequences on a child beyond the purely physiological. Toulalan indirectly and briefly illustrates how traditional early modern socio-cultural beliefs played a central role in turning physical differences into disabilities.³⁰

This new wave of scholarship on the early modern impaired and/or disabled child emerged as a response to the long focus on monstrosity which had dominated the literature up until then and which ironically had excluded ‘actual children’ from its framework. Apart from the few names and titles listed in the previous paragraph, the bulk of the literature has remained mainly trained on the sensational nature of children with particularly noticeable physical

²⁹ Leah Astbury, ‘Ordering the Infant: Caring for Newborns in Early Modern England’, in *Conserving Health in Early Modern Culture: Bodies and Environments in Italy and England*, ed. by Sandra Cavallo and Tessa Storey (Manchester University Press, 2017), 80–103.

³⁰ Sarah Toulalan, “‘Is He a Licentious Lewd Sort of a Person?’”: Constructing the Child Rapist in Early Modern England’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 23.1 (2014), 21–52.

impairments, namely ‘monsters’ and ‘monstrous births’. Kathryn Brammall, Surekha Davies, Edward Wheatley, Kaye McLelland, and many others for example have covered monstrous births in depth: how they were signs of divine anger, how they were representative of an individual’s sins but also sometimes of a country’s vices, and how they showcased God’s unrivalled power and influence over humans.³¹ I contend that historical scholarship has so far only explored the early modern interpretations of these sensational births and has not attempted to analyse the lived experiences of those ‘monstrous’ children: these ‘monsters’ were prodigies, only meant to teach early modern society a lesson. By utilising more extreme sources about possessed children, French has further expressed that some impairments – specifically in children – were thought to be telltale signs of demonic possession.³² While there is a definite degree of accuracy to all of this, monstrosity formed only a small, arguably theoretical or conceptual, part of the early modern English disabled child’s experience. As evidenced by early modern sources, there is a stark divide between tales of monstrous births

³¹ Kathryn M. Brammall, ‘Monstrous Metamorphosis: Nature, Morality, and the Rhetoric of Monstrosity in Tudor England’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 27.1 (1996), 3–21; Surekha Davies, ‘The Unlucky, the Bad and the Ugly: Categories of Monstrosity from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment’, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. by Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Routledge, 2016), 49–75; Kaye McLelland, ‘Halting Jacob in Early Modern Sermons’, *Renaissance Studies*, 0.0 (2021), 1–20; Alexandra Walsham, “‘Tongues of Heaven’”: Prodigies, Portents, and Prophets’, in *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2001); David Cressy, ‘Monstrous Births and Credible Reports: Portents, Texts, and Testimonies’, in *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England: Tales of Discord and Dissension* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 29–50; Alan W. Bates, ‘Birth Defects Described in Elizabethan Ballads’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 93 (2000), 202–7; Alan W. Bates, ‘Good, Common, Regular, and Orderly: Early Modern Classifications of Monstrous Births’, *Social History of Medicine*, 18.2 (2005), 141–58; Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (MIT Press, 1998); Julie Sievers, ‘Literatures of Wonder in Early Modern England and America’, *Literature Compass*, 4.3 (2007), 766–83; *Social History of Disability and Deformity*, ed. by David M. Turner and Kevin Stagg (Routledge, 2006); see further, Elizabeth B. Bearden, *Monstrous Kinds: Body, Space, and Narrative in Renaissance Representations of Disability* (University of Michigan, 2019); Godden and Mittman, *Monstrosity*; Jenny C. Mann, ‘How to Look at a Hermaphrodite in Early Modern England’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 46.1 (2006), 67–91; Robert Hole, ‘Incest, Consanguinity and a Monstrous Birth in Rural England, January 1600’, *Social History*, 25.2 (2000), 183–99.

³² French, *Children of Wrath*.

and the reality of being an impaired and/or disabled child in early modern England.

Monstrous births were exceptional cases and, while they should not be ignored, they have served to obscure the actual lived experiences of impaired and/or disabled children.

In similar fashion, Ian Stevenson, Philip Wilson, Margrit Shildrick, and others have dealt with the concept of maternal impressions, which has close ties to the existing literature on monstrous births.³³ They illustrated that early modern contemporaries indirectly demonised mothers and their ability to create life: they showed that early modern contemporaries believed that the unbridled cravings, thoughts, dreams of an expecting mother could influence her unborn child and turn them into a ‘monster’. I myself engage with maternal imagination further in Chapter One.

These have all been valid and valuable additions to the literature, yet they provide us with a limited view of the wider subject. Monstrous-birth accounts never go very far, and focusing solely on them risks warping our conception of child disability in early modern England. Scholarship on monstrous births never journeys beyond what we can find in these dramatic accounts. Moreover, tales of monstrous births were only concerned with monstrosity as a portent, making it impossible to get a sense of the child’s perspective or that of their parents. After all, not all ‘monsters’ died shortly after being born, and yet we know close to nothing about what their lives were like. Therefore, my dissertation goes beyond the narrow scope of

³³ Ian Stevenson, ‘A New Look at Maternal Impressions: An Analysis of 50 Published Cases and Reports of Two Recent Examples’, *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 6.4 (1992), 353–73; Philip K. Wilson, “‘Out of Sight, out of Mind?’: The Daniel Turner-James Blondel Dispute over the Power of the Maternal Imagination”, *Annals of Science*, 49.1 (1992), 63–85; Margrit Shildrick, ‘Maternal Imagination: Reconceiving First Impressions’, *Rethinking History*, 4.3 (2000), 243–60; *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*, ed. by Allison Hobgood and David H. Wood (Ohio State University Press, 2013).

‘monsters’ and their sensational births, and instead centres on what happened next – namely, what it meant to grow up disabled in early modern England.

Pre-Modern Disability History

As already established, my dissertation is also of course contributing to the lively and growing field of pre-modern disability studies. While this dissertation is only concerned with the period 1550 to 1750, I still want to acknowledge that Irina Metzler, Edward Wheatley, and others have produced groundbreaking works about disability in the Middle Ages.³⁴ Concerning the early modern period, Allison Hobgood and David Houston Wood have contributed greatly to the field of disability studies with their edited collection of essays on the myriad different perceptions of disability. They discuss how disability goes far beyond the purely medical (as it should) and how it provides crucial interdisciplinary insights into the concept and perception of the ‘normal’.³⁵ Turner has himself produced the first of its kind long-form study of disability in eighteenth-century England: he notably explores the experiences of physically impaired people, and how eighteenth-century culture and society disabled them.³⁶ By working with *ego* sources as well as legal records, he utilises disability as

³⁴ Irina Metzler, ‘Disability in the Middle Ages and Cultural History’, *WerkstattGeschichte*, 65 (2013), 55–65; Edward Wheatley, ‘Monsters, Saints, and Sinners: Disability in Medieval Literature’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability*, ed. by Clare Barker and Stuart Murray (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 17–31; Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Patricia Skinner, *Living with Disfigurement in Early Medieval Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Valentin Groebner, *Defaced: The Visual Culture of Violence in the Late Middle Ages* (New York: Zone, 2004).

³⁵ Hobgood and Wood, *Recovering*.

³⁶ David M. Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment* (Routledge, 2012); see further, David M. Turner, ‘Redefining Family Relationships: The Impact of Disability on Working-Class Families during the Industrial Revolution in Britain’, *Journal of Modern European History*, 22.4 (2024), 481–98; David M. Turner, “‘Not so Deformed in Body as Debauched in Behaviour’: Disability and “Marginality” in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England’, in *The Place of the Social Margins, 1350-1750*, ed. by Andrew Spicer and Jane L. Stevens Crawshaw (Routledge, 2017), 39–56.

a way to access overarching matters of class and gender. Jonathan Andrews has looked at the experiences of mentally impaired Londoners, specifically the terminology and various social distinctions surrounding different types of mental, emotional, behavioural, and learning impairments.³⁷ He addresses the differences of treatment (in the social sense of the word) for ‘idiots’, ‘fools’, or ‘lunatics’ and their families – for instance where they lodged, or what level of parish support they were entitled to.

Other historians of adult disability have studied the impact and perception of impairments of function. Elizabeth Bearden, Emily Cockayne, and Rosamund Oates have contributed greatly to our understanding of deafness in early modern England.³⁸ They have explored what life was like as a deaf person, John Bulwer’s theory of the senses, and how church sermons saw the emergence of a rudimentary form of sign language. Most importantly, Oates has countered previous historical claims made by Cockayne that deaf people in early modern England were thought not to be able to access the word of God. Oates highlights that Protestant clergymen aimed to make church gatherings accessible to their deaf parishioners and so used an array of signs to accompany their sermons. Most recently, Bernard Capp has sought to reconstruct the lived experiences of early modern blind people as opposed to writing solely about representations and conceptualisations of ‘blindness’ generally. Notably, he looks at their lives, emotions, familial relationships, but also their own individual

³⁷ Jonathan Andrews, ‘Identifying and Providing for the Mentally Disabled in Early Modern London’, in *Mental Deficiency: Historical Perspectives on People with Learning Disabilities*, ed. by Anne Digby and David Wright (Routledge, 1996), 65–92.

³⁸ Elizabeth B. Bearden, ‘Before Normal, There Was Natural: John Bulwer, Disability, and Natural Signing in Early Modern England and Beyond’, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 132.1 (2017), 33–50; Rosamund Oates, ‘Speaking in Hands: Early Modern Preaching and Signed Languages for the Deaf’, *Past & Present*, 256.1 (2022), 49–85; Emily Cockayne, ‘Experiences of the Deaf in Early Modern England’, *The Historical Journal*, 46.3 (2003), 493–510. See further, Bearden, *Monstrous Kinds*.

experiences of blindness.³⁹ Catherine Medici has investigated chronic impairments also in early modern England, and particularly in courtiers, and highlights the struggles which came with having a disabling ‘invisible’ impairment in that period.⁴⁰ By examining the lived experiences of Mary Sidney, Medici illustrates the inner plight of the courtier in dealing with severe chronic pain as a result of her contracting smallpox while attending to Elizabeth I. Sidney was, for instance, expected to carry out her normal duties without expecting any accommodations for her impairment and while still following the standards set out in the *Book of the Courtier*, which was deeply influential at the English court in that period.⁴¹

Emily Cock and Patricia Skinner have likewise contributed to our understanding of the face and of the social ramifications of being ‘disfigured’.⁴² They have shown for example how the face is often at the centre of most human interactions and how it can normally convey much about someone’s identity, approachability, mood, etc., and how distortion of the face can affect how someone is perceived by others.⁴³ This is important and further informs our understanding of early modern disability – namely that diverging from the bodily aesthetic norm could be disabling in early modern England. Likewise, Cock covers this further in her article about seventeenth-century Welsh prophet Arise Evans, in which she first looks at Evans’ reputation for being ‘mad’ but also considers the strong and powerful link between

³⁹ Bernard Capp, ‘Blind Lives: The Sightless and Society in Early Modern England’, *The Seventeenth Century*, 2024, 1–23.

⁴⁰ Catherine Medici, ‘The Extremity of Illness: Mary Sidney, Early Modern Women’s Chronic Illness, and Disability Studies’, *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 15.1 (2020), 107–18.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 113.

⁴² Emily Cock and Patricia Skinner, ‘(Dis)functional Faces: Signs of the Monstrous?’ in *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World*, ed. by Richard H. Godden and Asa Simon Mittman (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 85–105; *Approaching Facial Difference*, ed. by Emily Cock and Patricia Skinner (Bloomsbury, 2018); see also, Emily Cock, *Rhinoplasty and the Nose in Early Modern British Medicine and Culture* (Manchester University Press, 2019).

⁴³ Cock and Skinner, ‘(Dis)functional’.

Evans' physical and mental selves.⁴⁴ Michelle Webb engages with similar ideas in her chapter about female facial disfigurement.⁴⁵ She stresses how women with faces deemed 'disfigured' were construed as being both physically and socially 'ruined' or 'damaged' and that, for a woman to live as happy and successful life, she needed an unsullied face. Similarly, Alanna Skuse has centred her attention on cancer, as well as life-changing body modifications (castrati, mastectomy, amputation, prostheses, the face) and body reconstruction in death in early modern England.⁴⁶ She shows how modifying the body could, at the same time, transform someone's idea of their own self and sometimes lead to disability. My dissertation draws insight from these works by showing that disability was not always contingent on a child being impaired – social norms surrounding ideals of beauty and 'purity' could also be disabling.

Early Modern English Poverty

The nature of my source bases means that my dissertation also inscribes itself within a third field: the rich and ever-expanding field of early modern English poverty and parish and community support – compulsory indenture, relief, etc. Patricia Crawford has produced one of the most comprehensive guides on the lives of poor parents and their children in early modern England: she broaches on a wealth of topics including childcare, child abandonment, petitioning, parish relief, and more, and broadens our understanding of what it meant to care

⁴⁴ Emily Cock, 'Facial Disfigurement, Madness, and the Royal Touch in Early Modern Britain: Reconsidering Arise Evans', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 42.3–4 (2023).

⁴⁵ Michelle Webb, "'A Great Blemish to Her Beauty': Female Facial Disfigurement in Early Modern England", in *Approaching Facial Difference: Past and Present*, ed. by Patricia Skinner and Emily Cock (Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 26–43.

⁴⁶ Alanna Skuse, *Surgery and Selfhood in Early Modern England: Altered Bodies and Contexts of Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

for children when living in poverty.⁴⁷ She very briefly mentions disabled children in her chapter about bringing up children but otherwise excludes them from her analysis, thus leaving a gap in the literature which I aim to fill.⁴⁸ Joan Kent and Steve King have explored the categorisation of different types of poor people from ‘deserving’ to so-called ‘undeserving’, and what different people could do to survive (e.g. parish support, charity, begging, gleaning, compulsory work for children).⁴⁹ Steve Hindle delves deep into the inner workings of poor relief in early modern rural England: specifically, he investigates informal community support (i.e. neighbourly charity), more established and legitimate charitable organisations, and the progressive emergence of a formal system of parish relief.⁵⁰ Other historians, too, have greatly enriched our understanding of what it meant to be poor in early modern England. Jonathan Healey focuses predominantly on the county of Lancashire and examines how the steady increase in population, inflation, the development of fuel-based industries (e.g. coal), and rural and urban societal changes transformed the very concept of poverty for early modern contemporaries, and in particular in the eyes of sixteenth-century law makers.⁵¹ David Hitchcock instead brings the concept of vagrancy to the fore: how early modern people presumed that vagrants freely chose this lifestyle and thus went against good Christian values, and how this supposedly justified the way vagrants were treated – for

⁴⁷ Patricia Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children in England 1580-1800* (Oxford University Press, 2010); see further, Karen O’Brien, ‘Companions of Heart and Hearth: Hardship and the Changing Structure of the Family in Early Modern English Townships’, *Journal of Family History*, 39.3 (2014), 183–203.

⁴⁸ Crawford, *Parents*, 127, 128.

⁴⁹ Joan Kent and Steve King, ‘Changing Patterns of Poor Relief in Some English Rural Parishes circa 1650-1750’, *Rural History*, 14.2 (2003), 119–56.

⁵⁰ Steve Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, 1550-1640* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Steve Hindle, *On the Parish?: The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Clarendon, 2004); Steve Hindle, ‘Civility, Honesty and the Identification of the Deserving Poor in Seventeenth-Century England’, in *Identity and Agency in English Society, 1500-1800*, ed. by Henry French and Jonathan Barry (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 38–59.

⁵¹ Jonathan Healey, ‘The Development of Poor Relief in Lancashire, c.1598-1680’, *The Historical Journal*, 53.3 (2010), 551–72; Jonathan Healey, *The First Century of Welfare* (Boydell Press, 2014).

instance, whipping, jailing, transportation to the colonies, etc.⁵² More abstractly, Alexandra Shepard surveys the language of poverty and underscores that people used specific linguistic and cultural markers to denote how poor an individual was: for example, someone with twenty shillings (later forty) or under in terms of total possessions and not income was seen as living in relative poverty, while someone with ‘only the clothes on their back’ was seen as being abjectly destitute.⁵³ Examining the lives and experiences of poor impaired and/or disabled children and those who cared for them offers invaluable insights into the inner-workings of early modern English poverty. Child disability provides us with a new lens through which to consider the lives of poor people: it could act as an obstacle but, in some cases, it could also become a surprisingly advantageous boon. I delve into this further in Chapters Two and Four.

0.3. Methodology and Sources

Social Model of Disability

Throughout this dissertation, I use what disability scholars and activists call ‘the social model of disability’. Historians of different time periods have evidenced the utility of this model for historical understanding. It holds disability to be a socio-cultural construct in a constant state of change, whereby impairment and disability are two separate concepts.⁵⁴ An impairment is a physical, physiological, mental, and/or behavioural manifestation. Where impairment is a neutral biological fact, devoid of any form of cultural connotation, disability refers to the

⁵² David Hitchcock, *Vagrancy in English Culture and Society, 1650-1750* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

⁵³ Alexandra Shepard, ‘Poverty, Labour, and the Language of Social Description in Early Modern England’, *Past & Present*, 201 (2008), 51–95.

⁵⁴ Katherine Schaap Williams, *Unfixable Forms: Disability, Performance, and the Early Modern English Theatre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 3.

negative societal dynamics between a person (usually impaired but not always) and the world which surrounds them.⁵⁵ Disability is based in harmful stereotypes and is a failure on the part of society to accommodate physical and mental manifestations which deviate from arbitrary social and bodily norms. Historians such Katherine S. Williams, Metzler, Janine Owens, and Deborah Marks have advanced that this arbitrary norm is itself based on the ‘medical model’ of disability which combines both impairment and disability under the umbrella term ‘disability’. They also problematise the concept of ‘disability’ as a negative condition which can be, first and foremost, quantified and, second, cured or fixed.⁵⁶

The social model of disability originated in the United States in the 1960s as a by-product of the disability rights movement, which itself developed alongside the Civil Rights movement.⁵⁷ In the United Kingdom (UK), the social model of disability emerged in 1975, following discussions between the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) and the Disability Alliance.⁵⁸ Michael Rembis, Kudlick, and Kim E. Nielsen showed that social scientists in the UK were among the first to suggest that marginalisation of impaired people stemmed from social, political, cultural, and economic norms, which ultimately paved the way for what we now know as the ‘social model of disability’.⁵⁹ Victor Finkelstein posits that the steady evolution of the social model happened in three phases: Phase 1 saw impaired people congregating at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder alongside poor workers and the unemployed; in Phase 2, institutions dedicated to the

⁵⁵ Deborah Marks, *Disability: Controversial Debates and Psychological Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2001), 79, 85.

⁵⁶ Williams, *Unfixable Forms*, 5; Metzler, ‘Disability’, 56; Janine Owens, ‘Exploring the Critiques of the Social Model of Disability: The Transformative Possibility of Arendt’s Notion of Power’, *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 37.3 (2014), 391; Marks, *Disability*, 59, 60, 61.

⁵⁷ Owens, ‘Exploring’, 387.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 385.

⁵⁹ *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History*, ed. by Michael Rembis, Catherine J. Kudlick, and Kim E. Nielsen (Oxford University Press, 2018), 4.

impaired and/or disabled began to appear as a response to new industrial technologies geared more towards non-impaired people; finally, Phase 3 was pioneered by impaired and/or disabled people criticising the ironically disabling medical approach of so-called experts while also attempting to gain social independence over their own lives.⁶⁰

Early modern scholars have pointed out the utility of the social model for understanding the impacts of mental and bodily variability in this period. For instance, Oates has shown that people who were either congenitally or prelingually deaf had fewer rights than their hearing counterparts: they could not inherit property, get married, or even sign their own wills.⁶¹ The reasoning behind this was that congenital and prelingual deafness, as they occur before a child is able to learn how to communicate verbally, often result in mutism. This was used as a way to prove that deaf people were intellectually impaired, that they lacked understanding altogether, and thus that they also lacked the ability to express understanding and give legal consent.⁶² Similarly, a deaf person might have missed out on an employment opportunity simply because of the fact that they were deaf.⁶³ Deaf people were (or are) not at fault here; society was (is). These discriminatory views stemmed from flawed and specious reasoning – deafness is evidently not inherently synonymous with a lack of understanding. To bring this back to the social model of disability, deafness is the impairment, while the resulting legal inability to inherit property, get married, or sign one's own will is the disability. Deafness is a simple and neutral biological fact; unnecessary and discriminatory legal barriers are an inadequate social response to this biological variation. This also serves to show that disability

⁶⁰ Anne Borsay, 'Returning Patients to the Community: Disability, Medicine and Economic Rationality before the Industrial Revolution', *Disability & Society*, 13.5 (1998), 646-647; see also, Victor Finkelstein, *Attitudes and Disabled People: Issues for Discussion* (New York: World Rehabilitation Fund, 1980).

⁶¹ Oates, 'Speaking', 1-2.

⁶² *Ibid*, 1-4.

⁶³ Cockayne, 'Experiences', 500.

is contingent on contemporary socio-cultural norms and beliefs as deaf people in Britain, to give a very obvious example, are no longer barred from getting married or inheriting property.

Since disability is therefore dependent on society, as the latter changes so too does the former.⁶⁴ The social model is useful as far as historical research is concerned in that it allows scholars to understand the customs and mores of a given time and place more clearly.⁶⁵ There were societal as well as cultural reasons as to why something might have been disabling at some point in time, yet no longer is today.

The social model of disability is also useful in analysing how the language of disability has changed over the centuries. Essaka Joshua, for example, explains that writers from the Romantic period (roughly from the very tail end of the eighteenth century to the end of the 1830s) used the word ‘disability’ in ways that we would not and vice-versa: ‘disability’ meant ‘preventing something’, ‘inability’, or could refer to someone who had been discharged from military service as a result of impairment or old age.⁶⁶ Turner discusses this further in his monograph about disability in the eighteenth century: the word ‘disability’ to someone living in eighteenth-century England would have been primarily cognate with matters of property and inheritance laws and only vaguely with ideas surrounding impairments.⁶⁷ Simon Jarrett similarly recounts his time as a nursing assistant and how, over the span of a few decades, the same mentally impaired individuals were referred to as ‘subnormal, defectives, morons,

⁶⁴ Williams, *Unfixable Forms*, 3.

⁶⁵ Metzler, ‘Disability’, 56.

⁶⁶ Essaka Joshua, *Physical Disability in British Romantic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 9.

⁶⁷ David M. Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 17.

cretins, feeble-minded, mentally retarded, idiots’, then ‘people with mental handicaps’, ‘people with learning disabilities/difficulties’, and then as ‘intellectually disabled’.⁶⁸ Jarrett reflects on how this language went from accepted medical terminology to ‘street-level’ abusive and degrading language.⁶⁹

The same comparison can be drawn between the terms used in early modern England – which I have come across in my own research – and those we use today. Throughout my sources, I have found a number of recurring, if frustratingly vague, terms used to refer to physically impaired individuals such as ‘lame’, ‘cripple(d)’, ‘impotent’. These terms are offensive to our modern western sensibilities but would have been the accepted and appropriate terminology of the time. From what I gathered in my research, ‘lame’ could refer to a vast array of physical impairments ranging from missing limbs, paralysis, numbness, or general illness; ‘cripple(d)’ was seldom used for children and was mostly reserved for individuals who had acquired impairments while working or while fighting in a war; ‘impotent’ had no sexual connotation but instead meant that the individual could not work as a result of one or several undisclosed physical impairment(s). Interestingly enough, deaf and blind people were described with more precision (literally as ‘deaf’ or ‘deaf and dumb’ and ‘blind’) thus suggesting that impairments of function were perceived as belonging to a separate category altogether.

It does bear acknowledging, however, that the social model of disability is not perfect. It has often not accounted for chronic impairments for which the impairment itself is the core

⁶⁸ Simon Jarrett, *Those They Called Idiots: The Idea of the Disabled Mind from 1700 to the Present Day* (London: Reaktion Books, 2020), 8.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 7.

disabling factor (as opposed to societal barriers), for example chronic pain.⁷⁰ Equally, it does not always recognise the fluctuating nature of some impairments.⁷¹ The social model has also, at time, excluded people with mental impairments from its framework, concentrating more intently on physical impairments instead.⁷² Finally, there is not one disabled experience but rather myriad individual and personal experiences, which the social model tends to ignore in favour of sweeping generalisations.⁷³ Scholars of premodern cultures have proposed alternative frameworks for studying bodily and mental difference, such as Chris Mounsey's capacious framework of 'variability' for his work on the eighteenth-century.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, in my dissertation I demonstrate that the social model's focus on social structures and limitations provides the most productive framework for writing a social history of childhood disability.

Terminology

Following on from our discussion about the social model of disability, whenever I use the words 'disabled child', I am making a conscious commentary about that particular child's life – for instance, this disabled child might not have been afforded the same opportunities as one of their non-disabled peers, or society might have prevented them from being fully socially and/or financially independent. On the contrary, when I write 'impaired child', I am merely referring to a child who happens to have some kind of physical, mental, physiological impairment but who has not been made disabled by society. As such, I often write 'impaired

⁷⁰ Sara Goering, 'Rethinking Disability: The Social Model of Disability and Chronic Disease', 8.2 (2015), 136; Owens, 'Exploring', 388-389.

⁷¹ Owens, 'Exploring', 388-389.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 389; Marks, *Disability*, 89.

⁷⁴ *The Idea of Disability in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Chris Mounsey (Bucknell University Press, 2014); Chris Mounsey, *Sight Correction, Vision, and Blindness in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (University of Virginia Press, 2019).

and/or disabled children’ to better illustrate that what I am currently writing about pertains to disabled impaired children, non-disabled impaired children, and non-impaired disabled children.⁷⁵ Of course, my sources rarely allow me to determine whether a child was impaired, disabled, or both, let alone what they self-identified as. In any case, ‘disability’ as an identity is anachronistic when placed within the context of the early modern period.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, I find it useful to encompass the whole spectrum of possibilities when considering disability in the early modern period – e.g. some people were disabled by early modern society because they looked a certain way and not because they were physically/mentally impaired.

In terms of which identity language I use in this dissertation, I prefer to rely on a combination of person-first and identity-first language. Consequently, a child will be disabled as opposed to having a disability. ‘Having a disability’ is much too reminiscent of the medical model wherein disability and impairment are one and the same.⁷⁷ Using an adjective in this context is far more in line with the basic principles of the social model of disability – someone is *made* disabled by society. Moreover, disability is not tangible or countable; it is a singular socio-cultural concept. Within the confines of the social model, one simply cannot have *a* disability. As for impairments, I switch between person-first and identity-first language based solely on what I am trying to convey or what I am focusing on in a particular sentence. To me, the impairment is both part of the child’s identity and a manifest corporeal reality which can be isolated and observed. For instance, deafness forms part of a deaf child’s identity (impaired): the child is deaf; the child is impaired. But deafness itself can be regarded as a

⁷⁵ Turner and Stagg, *Social History*, 3.

⁷⁶ Owens, ‘Exploring’, 385-387. 389.

⁷⁷ *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History*, ed. by Michael Rembis, Catherine J. Kudlick, and Kim E. Nielsen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 3-4; Williams, *Unfixable Forms*, 5; Metzler, ‘Disability’, 56, 57.

separate biological fact, too, meaning that an individual cannot hear (impairment).⁷⁸ It is both part of who the child is and a separate entity altogether.

I choose deafness to illustrate this point because it is one of only two impairments (blindness being the other one) which were routinely named outright in petitions for relief, apprenticeship bonds and terminations, and legal proceedings. Otherwise, it is difficult to get any sense of certainty as to what impairment(s) a given child had or how different they were from their peers – they were ‘lame’, ‘crippled’, ‘impotent’. For example, Henry Bare, with whom I opened this dissertation, was simply ‘a Lame Boy’.⁷⁹ I can tell from the petition in which he was mentioned that he likely could not stand or at least not for very long – his guardians had secured him a ‘sitting Trade’. But aside from this, I have no way of knowing for certain what his ‘lameness’ entailed. I quote these terms from the documents when necessary rather than attempting to retrospectively diagnose or superimpose modern nosology onto the historical actors.

I must similarly clarify what I mean by ‘child’. The modern definition itself is fairly broad and somewhat dependent on one’s personal conception of what childhood is.⁸⁰ The Cambridge Dictionary does simply define ‘child’ as being ‘a boy or girl from the time of birth until he or she is an adult’, yet some people will argue that teenagers are not children and will see adolescence as a separate life-cycle stage altogether. Others will claim, for example, that

⁷⁸ Of course, deafness is, in and of itself, a deeply varied phenomenon. No two deaf people will experience deafness the same way. Deaf people have varying levels of hearing – some are able to make out faint noises, some have fluctuating hearing, some are able to hear low-pitched noises but not high-pitched ones, some cannot hear anything at all, and so on. Similarly, deafness occurs for different reasons – no nerve connection, pierced eardrum, etc. And still, deafness remains deafness.

⁷⁹ QSP.432.8.

⁸⁰ French, *Early Modern Childhood*, 3-4; Margaret Pelling, ‘Child Health as a Social Value in Early Modern England’, *Social History of Medicine*, 1.2 (1988), 138.

infancy *precedes* childhood as opposed to being part of it. Legally, too, the definition of ‘a child’ is rather vague: the *Oxford Dictionary of Law* defines a child as ‘a young person’ and qualifies that ‘there is no definitive definition of a child: the term has been used for persons under the age of 14, under the age of 16, and sometimes under the age of 18’.⁸¹ The age of majority differs also depending on legal country norms: for example, in the UK, someone becomes a legal adult at the age of eighteen, while in the US, depending on individual state legislations, they have to wait until they turn nineteen or twenty-one. Other countries like Yemen, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia place the age of majority at fifteen, while Myanmar, Cambodia, and Vietnam place it at sixteen.⁸² In early modern England, people became legal adults at the age of twenty-one.⁸³ Similarly, individuals are deemed grown and responsible enough to, for example, drive independently from the age of fourteen in parts of Canada, sixteen in the US, seventeen in the UK, eighteen in France, and twenty-three in Vanuatu, thus suggesting that different cultures have different ways of conceptualising the different stages of human life.⁸⁴ I, personally and implicitly, think of children as anyone above the age of three but below the age of thirteen, yet have sometimes referred to teenagers as being children anyway. Finally, although early modern people understood this period of life to be different and distinct from adulthood, they did not use the word ‘childhood’ to refer to it.⁸⁵

⁸¹ ‘Child’, in *A Dictionary of Law* (10 ed.), ed. by Jonathan Law (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

⁸² ‘Age of Majority by Country 2024’, *World Population Review* (2024), <<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/age-of-majority-by-country>> [accessed 9 December 2024].

⁸³ Maria Cannon, “‘The Most Constant and Settled Part of Our Life’?: Adulthood and the Ages of Man in Early Modern England”, in *Adulthood in Britain and the United States from 1350 to Generation Z*, ed. by Maria Cannon and Laura Tisdall (University of London Press, 2024), 48.

⁸⁴ ‘Minimum Driving Age by Country 2024’, *World Population Review* (2024), <<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/minimum-driving-age-by-country>> [accessed 9 December 2024].

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

Thus, I first use ‘child’ to refer to an individual who is going through the developmental life-cycle stage of ‘childhood’, meaning, to me, a young person who has not yet gone through adolescence. However, I am not working with just ‘children’ here but ‘impaired and/or disabled’ children. As I will showcase in the following chapters, disability has a tendency to blur traditional boundaries of age, dependency, and provision of care: disabled individuals could be infantilised by their contemporaries or by society as a whole and be referred to as children despite being past adolescence, or they could remain dependent on their carers for much longer than their non-disabled peers (sometimes well into their adult years or even for their entire lives). These disabled individuals were not children *per se*, but they embodied most of the essence of childhood: they were grown, yet they were heavily dependent on others for their existence.

Within this context, I sometimes use the term ‘child’ as referring to the traditional hierarchical power dynamics between a child and their parent (in the broadest sense of the term), meaning an individual who is dependent on another, older individual for their survival and owe them some form of obedience and, in some cases, mutual respect.⁸⁶ I have identified early modern sources in which disabled adults are actively referred to as children by their contemporaries. I will delve deeper into this in subsequent chapters, but as an example, Anne Partington of 1691 Manchester was described as a ‘woman Child’ twice in the span of a single sentence, and this despite the fact that she was twenty.⁸⁷ This was likely because she was ‘Dumbe’, had ‘Convulsion fits’, and was fully dependent on her brother, William Partington, for her survival.

⁸⁶ Maria Cannon, ‘Conceptualising Childhood as a Relational Status: Parenting Adult Children in Sixteenth-Century England’, *Continuity and Change*, 36.3 (2021), 310, 312, 313.

⁸⁷ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.703.26.

Sources

My manuscripts were drawn from nineteen English and Welsh county archives and public record offices, including the National Archives in London (see Table 1). The greater part of the research stage of my dissertation happened during the various 2021 Covid lockdowns, so I was forced to rely heavily on digital archival catalogues. I searched for specific pairs of keywords: I combined the following nouns, ‘boy’, ‘girl’, ‘child’, ‘infant’, ‘son’, ‘daughter’, ‘brother’, ‘sister’, or ‘cripple’, with the following adjectives, ‘lame’, ‘blind’, ‘deaf’, ‘dumb’, ‘crippled’ (or sometimes just ‘cripple’), ‘impotent’, ‘disabled’, ‘hurt’, or ‘injured’. As such, for example, a typical search query would have looked like this: ‘lame boy’. My findings therefore rest heavily on how thoroughly archives have been catalogued and described. While I was able to undertake research in person at the Somerset Heritage Centre in Taunton and in the British Library in London, I have benefitted from the ability to order scans of archival material from various county archives and record offices. By supplementing these resources with digital databases (especially Early English Books Online and Old Bailey Online), I have been able to efficiently gather sources from all across England and offer a sampling of experiences across different rural and urban settings.

Archives	Number of Sources
Bedfordshire Archives	1
Carlisle Archives Centre	1
Derbyshire Record Office	1
Devon Heritage Centre	3
East Riding Archives	4
Essex Record Office	1
Herefordshire Archive and Record Centre	1
Isle of Wight Records Office	2
Kent Archives	2
Lancashire Archives	28
National Archives	2
North East Wales Archives	1

Northamptonshire Archives	1
Northumberland Archives	1
Somerset Heritage Centre	10
Staffordshire Record Office	1
Suffolk Archives	1
Surrey History Centre	1
West Sussex Record Office	1
West Yorkshire Archive Service	4
Total	67
Table 1 – Number of Petitions per County Archive	

The bulk of my primary sources, then, consists of seventy-eight handwritten early modern Quarter Sessions petitions, parish records, and legal proceeding documents: petitions for relief (45), apprenticeship contracts (3), terminations (5), depositions (7), convictions (8), parish orders (7), removal orders (2), and one complaint. This justifies in part why I am writing almost entirely about poor children as opposed to disabled children from more well-off backgrounds. While a greater percentage of my handwritten sources (namely, petitions) were found in Lancashire Archives, this should not be taken as an indication that there were more disabled children living in Lancashire. While Healey has written extensively about historical Lancashire, and notably about how it was a particularly big county as well as a place of remarkable population growth but also unfortunate poverty between the years 1563 and 1750, this is not the reason why so many of my Quarter Sessions sources come from Lancashire.⁸⁸ As explained to me by Lancashire archivist Kathryn Newman in an email, the role of Clerk of the Court remained in the same Lancashire-based family for over two centuries, where it was inherited (as opposed to elected) and valued greatly as a matter of family pride.⁸⁹ As a result, the records were carefully kept, whereas many were lost in other counties. Lancashire Archives was also the site of a considerable and long-running volunteer

⁸⁸ Healey, *The First Century*, 39-41.

⁸⁹ Kathryn Newman, email to Theo Riviere, 5 December 2022.

project that aimed to catalogue their collection. As such, the Quarter Sessions collection held in Lancashire Archives is one of the most comprehensive in the whole of England, both in terms of date and subject range. Still, the sources I extracted from Lancashire Archives and those I found in other English county archives are similar enough to perhaps suggest that what happened in Lancashire also happened in other parts of England. While my data sample is not big enough to outrightly claim that the experiences of early modern English impaired and/or disabled children were uniform throughout, it still has some groundwork for showing that there were clear points of commonality between impaired and/or disabled children in rural areas.

The archival scans I obtained throughout this research project are under copyright law, so I cannot include them in this dissertation as they are. However, my own transcriptions of them (67) can be found in the appendix section situated at the end of this dissertation, after the bibliography. I have added the petitions which I do not use in the actual text of this dissertation, but which have still greatly contributed to my research. They offer further socio-historical context which, I believe, proves indispensable in conceptualising the lived experiences of impaired and/or disabled early modern English children. If accessing this dissertation digitally, simply look up the reference number of the desired petition preceded by ‘#’ (e.g. #ABC.1.234.56); otherwise, if somehow in possession of a physical copy of this dissertation, my transcriptions are sorted alphabetically by archive, and then chronologically.

I have included these transcriptions, first, for the simple sake of sharing and disseminating knowledge: the stories glimpsed in these sources are fascinating and deserved to be known more widely. Second, they will help to provide more context to this research project. I use *parts* of these transcriptions throughout the actual text of this dissertation as the base for a lot

of my arguments, but I obviously cannot quote them in their entirety. As such, readers can place these quotations back within their overarching context by simply visiting the appendix section. Third, all of my other primary sources are readily available online on such repositories as *Early English Books Online (EEBO)*, *The Old Bailey Online*, and *London Lives*, therefore it is only fair to make my transcriptions just as easily accessible.⁹⁰

Whereas I could have standardised the contents of the original scans sent to me by archival staff, I have instead decided to only lightly edit them – I believe it adds more authenticity to my transcriptions, while simultaneously making it easier to navigate them. All of my edits are visible and indicated by square brackets. I have likewise maintained the original early modern spelling, capitalisation, and punctuation (or sometimes lack thereof) of the original manuscripts. I liberally use '[sic]' in places where early modern spellings resemble common modern spelling mistakes (e.g. 'releif [sic]'). Where it looks like I have accidentally omitted or added a letter (e.g. 'ey [sic]' for 'eye'; 'gett [sic]' for 'get'; 'bee' for 'be') and the same word comes back again within the same petition and with the same spelling, I use '[sic]' only for the first instance of the word. Wherever I have been unable to transcribe a word because of either damage to the original manuscript (ink blot, torn paper, faded ink, etc.) or because of illegibility, I have either made use of square brackets to transcribe what I believe the text reads, followed by a question mark (e.g. [word?]), or have simply left it as '[illegible]', '[faded]', '[missing]', or '[missing – word?]'. This only happens rarely in my transcriptions and never takes away from the source's clear meaning and intent. Finally, I have resolved early modern abbreviations using square brackets to denote edits (e.g. 'wth' becomes 'w[i]th');

⁹⁰ EEBO is admittedly not fully free in the sense that one would need university login details to access its contents freely. Otherwise, the subscription price is very much prohibitive.

‘Maj^{tyes}’ becomes ‘Maj[es]tyes’; ‘yo’ becomes ‘yo[u]r’; and so on). I follow the same principles when using in-text quotations throughout my chapters.

The remainder of my sources are a mixture of personal correspondence, printed pamphlets, natural philosophy and/or political treatises, midwifery manuals, and monstrous birth accounts. An important example is the correspondence of the physician Hans Sloane with his patients, colleagues, and friends, held in the British Library, which as numerous scholars have shown are very useful for uncovering medical beliefs and practices across the country.⁹¹ These are mainly featured in Chapter One where I centre more intently on the beliefs, medical theories, and social customs surrounding congenital and acquired impairments in children.

In terms of the date range of this dissertation, my earliest primary source (a petition) dates back to c.1557, which is not too far off from the year 1550 – the nominal starting point of my dissertation. It even relates events from about half a decade before its publication. As for the chosen end point, 1750, it marks a turning point in English history with the advent of the first industrial revolution and is a logical and common historical cutting point.

The nature of my primary data sample does not allow for a survey of the emotions of early modern primary carers and their charges. Petitions in particular are deeply subjective sources – petitioners were essentially performing specific emotions in order to elicit predictable responses from the people in charge.⁹² Emphasising one’s love for one’s disabled charge was

⁹¹ Newton, *The Sick Child*; Wendy D. Churchill, *Female Patients in Early Modern Britain: Gender, Diagnosis, and Treatment* (Routledge, 2016); Peter Elmer, *Medicine in an Age of Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2023); Olivia Weissner, *Ill Composed: Sickness, Gender, and Belief in Early Modern England* (Yale University Press, 2015).

⁹² Bailey, ‘Presence’, 23, 24.

nowhere near as important as garnering sympathy by appearing weak and pathetic. While not impossible, it would still be difficult to claim that petitions for relief contained undeniable and outright evidence of parental love. However, petitions for relief about disabled charges are excellent at showcasing the various levels of care intimated by primary carers. Whether it was more of a practical step than one fuelled by genuine concern and emotional attachment for one's disabled charge, I argue that petitioning was in and of itself a provision of care.

Finally, my dataset does not fully permit me to carry out a quantitative analysis of the lives and experiences of impaired and/or disabled early modern English children either. Therefore, logically, my research is first and foremost qualitative. I am unable to draw definite conclusions as to the lived experiences of those children, but I can identify some patterns. For example, out of the seventy-eight petitions examined in this dissertation, forty-three were filed as a result of financial hardship – the remaining thirty-five were a miscellaneous mixture of legal depositions, testimonies, removal orders, and bonds and terminations of apprenticeships. Of these forty-three petitions, twenty-six were strictly about relief in the form of an allowance or some form of monetary compensation; twelve were about removal of a disabled dependant as a result of poverty; three requested *either* financial relief or removal of a disabled dependant; and two were about *both* financial relief and removal of a disabled dependant. I can also, most importantly, indisputably prove that impaired and/or disabled children were so much more than just 'monsters'. These petitions are undeniable evidence that many impaired children survived infancy and that they were seen as humans by their contemporaries.

Chapter One will now first delve into the preternatural and supernatural beliefs and medical theories of the period surrounding congenital impairments in children. These are a

prerequisite for understanding how early modern English people conceived of impairment and disability in the period and thus they will inform the rest of this dissertation.

1. Attitudes and Treatments

This chapter serves a number of purposes. First, it surveys and builds upon the existing literature on monstrous births which has dominated the understanding of the congenitally different child in early modern England. In doing so, I am engaging with the work of historians such as Kathryn Brammal, David M. Turner, David Cressy, Alan W. Bates, Julie Sievers, and Robert Hole, to name only a few.¹ By engaging with this scholarship, I acknowledge both its limited and *limiting* scope and thus justify why I am actively and intentionally moving away from it: tales of monstrosity were too fleeting, too scandalous, and only encompassed a small and dramatic portion of the diverse lived experiences of impaired and/or disabled children. Second, Chapter One situates childhood disability in a wider context of preter- and supernatural beliefs, contemporaneous medical knowledge, and the experiences

¹ Robert Hole, 'Incest, Consanguinity and a Monstrous Birth in Rural England, January 1600', *Social History*, 25.2 (2000), 183–99; Alan W. Bates, 'Good, Common, Regular, and Orderly: Early Modern Classifications of Monstrous Births', *Social History of Medicine*, 18.2 (2005), 141–58; Julie Sievers, 'Literatures of Wonder in Early Modern England and America', *Literature Compass*, 4.3 (2007), 766–83; Alan W. Bates, 'Birth Defects Described in Elizabethan Ballads', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 93 (2000), 202–7; David Cressy, 'Monstrous Births and Credible Reports: Portents, Texts, and Testimonies', in *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England: Tales of Discord and Dissension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Alexandra Walsham, "'Tongues of Heaven": Prodigies, Portents, and Prophets', in *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Philip K. Wilson, "'Out of Sight, out of Mind?': The Daniel Turner-James Blondel Dispute over the Power of the Maternal Imagination', *Annals of Science*, 49.1 (1992), 63–85; *Social History of Disability and Deformity*, ed. by David M. Turner and Kevin Stagg (Oxford: Routledge, 2006); Anna French, *Children of Wrath: Possession, Prophecy, and the Young in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016); Surekha Davies, 'The Unlucky, the Bad and the Ugly: Categories of Monstrosity from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. by Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Routledge, 2016); Kathryn M. Brammall, 'Monstrous Metamorphosis: Nature, Morality, and the Rhetoric of Monstrosity in Tudor England', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 27.1 (1996), 3–21; Katharine Romack, 'Monstrous Births and the Body Politic: Women's Political Writings and the Strange and Wonderful Travails of Mistris Parliament and Mrs. Rump', in *Debating Gender in Early Modern England*, ed. by Cristina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuki (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 209–30; Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998).

of early modern daily life. People's conceptions of and attitudes towards impairments would have been influenced by varying factors especially whether impairments were congenital (from birth) or acquired, or how visible and/or disabling they were. This also raised questions as to how these impairments had come to exist in the first place. Was God directly involved? Was something more nefarious at play? Were the child's parents responsible? Was it simply a wonder of nature?

This chapter is pivotal in that it identifies socio-cultural justifications for the treatment (both social and 'medical') of impaired children in early modern England. The attitudes of early modern people towards impaired children stemmed from their understanding of the supposed causes, meanings, and consequences of these impairments. Chapter One, therefore, provides context, informs, and lays the groundwork for the analysis carried out in my subsequent chapters. In turn, this helps to understand why early modern people acted the way they did towards impaired and disabled children. Chapter One is therefore concerned with contextualising the impaired and/or disabled early modern English child. By necessity, this means relying more heavily on existing knowledge surrounding childhood and disability. And yet this chapter is no less valuable than the subsequent four chapters in that, while it offers less in terms of new knowledge, it creates an invaluable framework of understanding of the beliefs and theories surrounding congenital and acquired impairments and early modern notions of disability upon which this dissertation entirely depends.

Chapter One is divided into two parts. I initially focus on early modern beliefs about the causes of congenital impairments and what could potentially cure them. This incorporates the historiography on monstrous births, as well as a series of natural philosophical theories as to

the probable causes of and potential cures for congenital impairments. In my second part, I move on to discuss the idea of causation as well as the medical and social treatment of early modern children with acquired impairments. I analyse the reactions and behaviours of early modern people towards disabling diseases and accidental injuries in children, with particular attention to their recourse to miracle cures.

1.1. Early Modern Congenital Impairments: Causes and Consequences

Religion spoke of monsters, divine punishments, and signs of God's displeasure with humankind; natural philosophers, while they posited that impairments were created naturally in the womb, did not exclude the 'just vengeance of the Almighty (which doubtlesse hath a great stroke in all these things) nor his Agents the Starres' and as such accounted for God working through natural causes.² This is an important point in helping to conceptualise the early modern mind.

Historiographical Survey of Early Modern English Monstrous Births

'Monster' comes from the Latin *monstrare* (to show), and early modern contemporaries were divided as to whether this meant that congenitally different children – so-called 'monsters' – were signs of divine wrath and testament to God's power or whether they were wonders of nature one should share with the rest of the world.³ Historians of early modern England have written about how monstrous birth accounts were used as sensational cautionary tales,

² Peter Chamberlain, *Dr. Chamberlain's Midwives Practice* (London, 1665), 93-95; see also, Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 310-312.

³ Daston and Park, *Wonders*, 200.

warning people to amend their ways and ‘from synfull lyfe to change’.⁴ To some, monstrosity was a clear sign that a community had been living in sin and needed to repent. Alexandra Walsham puts it best when she writes that,

The disposition to see prodigies sprang from a theocentric view of the universe, an intensely moralistic cosmology. It rested on the premise that the physical environment and human conduct were closely attuned: aberrations in the natural order literally incarnated the spiritual chaos and anarchy created by sin. ... Portents were the danger signals ... of a world in moral crisis and on the verge of mechanical collapse.⁵

Early modern people proclaimed that God had ‘shewed us his wonders, and marvelous works, to be a forewarning of the punishments whiche he hath prepared for sin’.⁶ They sometimes compared congenitally impaired children to natural disasters such as ‘blazing fires, earthquakes, dreadful signes in the ay[r]es, and fearfull stormes and tempests’.⁷ Bodily impairments in children were presented as either telltale signs of a societal or moral evil (e.g. reflecting either the wickedness of the parents or society as a whole) or as proof that God was displeased with humankind.⁸ Surekha Davies traces a tradition of such sermons and religious treatises going as far back as classical antiquity which routinely equated monstrous births to

⁴ John Barker, *The True Description of a Monsterous Chylde* (London: Wylliam Gryffith, 1564), 1; See also, Sievers ‘Literatures of Wonder’, 767, 770; Bates, ‘Birth Defects’, 203; Walsham, ‘Tongues of Heaven’, 169; Cressy, ‘Monstrous Births’, 30, 36-37;

⁵ Walsham, ‘Tongues of Heaven’, 169.

⁶ Anonymous, *A Most Certaine Report of a Monster Borne at Oteringham* (London: P. S., 1595), 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ French, *Children of Wrath*, 146, 152.

divine displeasure.⁹ Similarly, Brammall describes how many Tudor authors followed in the footsteps of their ancestors and carried over most if not all medieval definitions of and attitudes towards monstrosity: human (and animal) ‘misbirths’ were seen as ‘prodigious monsters’, warnings or punishments sent by God.¹⁰

Some preachers, however, moved beyond common tropes of monstrosity and extended the reach of the ‘monstrous’ to include impairments of function and not just of form: in 1611, Robert Cleaver, a Puritan preacher, identified demonic possession as the chief cause of deafness in children and told his congregation the tale of a man who ‘had a chile [sic] possessed by the diveell, which had made him dumbe and deaffe, and that from his childhood; in so much that he could never speake nor heare in all his life’.¹¹ Cleaver is particularly interesting here in that he pushes the boundaries of monstrosity by possibly linking deafness and muteness to the devil and demonic possession. This is loosely reminiscent of what Anna French has suggested about possessed and prophetic early modern English children: possession was seen to be responsible for an array of childhood illnesses and impairments.¹² A deaf child would not have normally been included in the traditional literature on monstrous births, whereby children with more obvious physical differences would have held centre stage instead. Monstrosity was predominantly a matter of shape and size – e.g. dwarfism was seen as monstrous, as were conjoined twins, children born with

⁹ Davies, ‘The Unlucky’, 52.

¹⁰ Brammall, ‘Monstrous Metamorphosis’, 3, 5.

¹¹ Robert Cleaver, *Three Sermons upon Marke, the Ninth Chapter, 22.23. Verses Containing Fifteene Doctrines, the Particulars Whereof Appeare in the next Pages Following* (London: T Creede, 1611), 1.

¹² French, *Children of Wrath*, 60, 67.

cleft palates, or intersex children.¹³ Monstrosity was about what could be seen with the naked eye in so far as it was usually seen as an outward expression of God's displeasure.

At the same time, existing alongside prodigies throughout most of the period, were those early modern contemporaries who advocated for the explanation of monsters by natural causes, or 'naturalisation'.¹⁴ Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston originally identified a shift throughout the sixteenth century from monsters to natural wonders, and then from wonders to 'objects of scientific inquiry', thus echoing early theories as to the supposed rationalising impact of the Protestant Reformation.¹⁵ However, they later qualified in a different publication that this was inaccurate and instead confirmed that some *medieval* authors were already rationalising the existence of monsters, while prodigies survived well into the late seventeenth century.¹⁶ Davies shows that monstrosity throughout history has always followed at least one of three traditions: monsters as errors of nature, monsters as portents of imminent calamity or divine wrath, and monsters as wonders of nature.¹⁷ Sometimes these traditions converged and thus further complicated and confused the various explanations given for monstrous births.¹⁸ In many ways, for all its possible explanations, monstrosity throughout the early modern period was marked by uncertainty. Was this monster a result of God's displeasure? If yes, what was God angry about? Or who was God angry with? Perhaps this monster was not a portent of God's wrath at all but instead a wonder of nature to be awed by.

¹³ Hole, 'Incest', 193; Jenny C. Mann, 'How to Look at a Hermaphrodite in Early Modern England', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 46.1 (2006), 70-71.

¹⁴ Daston and Park, *Wonders*, 176.

¹⁵ *Ibid*; See also, Hole, 'Incest', 195; Alexandra Walsham, 'The Reformation and 'The Disenchantment of the World' Reassessed', *The Historical Journal*, 51.2 (2008), 499, 501, 503-504, 508.; Bates, 'Good', 141.

¹⁶ Daston and Park, *Wonders*, 176.

¹⁷ Davies, 'The Unlucky', 50-52, 54.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 56.

Historians have equally established beyond any doubt the interpretive power of monstrous births, particularly in times of socio-political upheaval – for instance, at the cusp of the sixteenth century, following the advent of the Protestant Reformation, throughout the British Civil Wars, and later on during the turbulent Restoration period.¹⁹ Impaired bodies were utilised as visual metaphors for the kingdom and its enemies. Impaired children – real and imagined – were therefore means to socio-political and religious ends. For instance, Brammall writes about a ballad from 1566 which described a child born with excess wrinkled skin around her neck: the author of the ballad advanced that this was a sign of God’s disapproval of ruffs which were fashionable at the time.²⁰ Similarly, it was not unusual for English monstrous birth accounts to blame, for instance, local ‘Popish Priests and Fryars’ and ‘Papists’ for the bringing forth of monsters.²¹ While ignoring monstrous births that predated the Reformation, some English Protestants conveniently held newly born monsters to be undeniable proof that God stood alongside them in their fight against Roman Catholicism – the ‘papal ass’ and ‘monk calf’ are well-known examples of Anti-Catholicism Protestant propaganda.²² One anonymous seventeenth-century Protestant author used the birth of a congenitally impaired still-born child in the historical duchy of Lancashire as the backdrop for his condemnation of Roman Catholicism.²³ He described the dukedom as being rife with ‘wicked malice’, a place where ‘the people that live there, are a mixt Number; some precious godly people; but for the most part very bad’. According to him, ‘no parts in England hath

¹⁹ Brammall, ‘Monstrous Metamorphosis’, 12, 13, 15; Davies, ‘The Unlucky’, 55, 56; Bates, ‘Good’, 144; Cressy, ‘Monstrous Births’, 35, 36-37; Sievers, ‘Literatures of Wonder’, 770.

²⁰ Brammall, ‘Monstrous Metamorphosis’, 13.

²¹ Anonymous, *A Declaration of a Strange and Wonderfull Monster* (London: Jane Coe, 1646), 4.

²² Walsham, ‘Tongues of Heaven’, 197-198

²³ *Ibid.*

had so many witches, none fuller of Papists'. And so, it was no surprise to him that a 'Child (or rather Monster)' would be brought forth in a place like this.

Crucially, the petitions for relief for and/or about children with congenital and acquired impairments that form the basis for this dissertation did not speak of 'monsters' at all. This is remarkable because, as scholars like Sievers, Brammal, Bates, and Cressy have written extensively about, the discourse of monstrosity circulated in many formats across different social orders: ballads, public exhibitions, religious tracts, natural historical reports, pamphlets, midwifery manuals, broadsides, personal correspondence, and simple gossip.²⁴ Instead petitioners spoke of 'Lame Child[ren]', 'poore lame Cripple[s]', or simply of 'children'.²⁵ This was likely a way for petitioners to distance themselves from narratives of divine wrath and instead elicit feelings of pity from parish authorities as opposed to wonder, fear, and disgust. It might also possibly distinguish the impairments of these children from the much more 'impressive' impairments of the 'monstrous'. This creates a stark divide between the sensationalism of monstrous birth accounts and the perhaps unsurprisingly more subdued language of petitions. It also indicates that impaired children were not necessarily

²⁴ Sievers, 'Literatures of Wonder', 771, 776-777; Brammall, 'Monstrous Metamorphosis', 5-6, 7, 13; Bates, 'Birth Defects', 203, 204; Cressy, 'Monstrous Births', 30, 31, 34, 39. See also for example, Anonymous, *A Most Certain Report of a Monster Borne at Oteringham* (London: P.S., 1595); R. I., *A Most Straunge, and True Discourse, of the Wonderfull Judgement of God* (London: E. Allde, 1600); Johannes Schenk von Grafenberg, *Monstrorum Historia Memorabilis* (Frankfurt, 1609); Anonymous, *Signes and Wonders from Heaven* (London: I.H., 1645); Anonymous, *A Declaration of a Strange and Wonderfull Monster* (London: Jane Coe, 1646); Anonymous, *The Ranters Monster* (London: Geoge Horton, 1652); Anonymous, *The True Picture of a Female Monster Born Near Salisbury* (London: R.P., 1664); Anonymous, *The Strange Monster or, True News from Nottingham-Shire* (London: Peter Lillierap, 1668); Anonymous, *God's Wonderful Judgement in Lincoln-Shire* (London, 1679); V. G., *An Account of a Child Born at Furbick in Darbbyshire the 19th of January, 1694, with a Top-Knot and Rowle on Its Head, of Several Colours: With a Seasonable Caution against Pride* (London: T. Sowle, 1694); London, British Library, Sloane MS4049, folio 46-47.

²⁵ See for example, Northampton, Northampton Archives, QSR1.79.54; Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.175.72, QSP.1.269C.6, QSP.254.5; Beverley, East Riding Archives, QSF.23.D.2.

seen as monsters by their contemporaries. Equally, while the word ‘monster’ was commonly used in a non-pejorative way to refer to physically different children, it was clearly not the sole alternative.²⁶ If early modern culture – or historians’ interpretation of it – has reduced disabled children to monstrous omens, then this dissertation will show that, at an individual *human* level, early modern people were evidently able to see physically impaired children as actual children. It is important that we think through that contrast to explore why that might be.

The records of the Old Bailey suggest that court proceedings similarly avoided referring to impaired children as ‘monsters’, regardless of their physical appearance. For instance, in August 1725, Samuel Street was ‘indicted for Assaulting, Ravishing, and against her Will, carnally knowing Elizabeth Harvison, Spinster, aged 17 Years’.²⁷ In the published *Proceedings*, Elizabeth’s mother, Rebecca Harvison, deposed that her daughter, ‘The Child’, was ‘a Dwarf, and an Idiot; and what makes the Misfortune the greater, she wants the Use of her Limbs so much, that she is forced to be carried like an Infant’. This is especially pertinent in so far as, as Robert Hole shows, dwarfism was one of the main categories of the monstrous, yet here Elizabeth Harvison was not referred to as one.²⁸ Her name was mentioned once at the very beginning of the proceedings; she was called a ‘Spinster’ and a ‘Dwarf’ only once, too; a ‘Creature’ once by one of the witnesses; and finally, she was referred to as ‘the Child’ a total of seventeen times throughout the whole document. While the official age of majority in early modern England was twenty-one, it was also unusual for a seventeen-year-old to be referred to as ‘the child’. Clearly, these court proceedings indicate

²⁶ Hole, ‘Incest’, 184.

²⁷ Old Bailey Proceedings, *London Lives, 1690-1800*, t17250827-14 (www.londonlives.org, version 2.0, March 2018) August 1725, trial of Samuel Street.

²⁸ Hole, ‘Incest’, 193.

that early modern people were able to see congenitally different children (or young people, in Elizabeth's case) as simply children and not as monsters.

Historians have warned that one must always question the credibility of monstrous birth accounts.²⁹ I am not at all alluding here to a need to apply presentist scepticism to early modern accounts of monsters. Instead, I am referring to the very real possibility that some of these accounts were simply intentionally fabricated by their authors. While a common authorial trope was to claim that one's story was true and then to provide one's readers with details such as a time, a place, and illustrations, Walsham has stated that a portion of monstrous births 'were purely fictitious: hybrid creatures pieced together by crusading pamphleteers prepared to resort to artifice and pastiche to forward their cause'.³⁰ She evidences this with the use of the so-called 'papal ass' and 'monk calf' as anti-Catholic propaganda by Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon in 1523.³¹

To offer an example of a potentially fictitious monstrous birth story, in 1652 an anonymous author wrote a barely veiled anti-Catholic account about the 'Ranter' Mary Adams.³² She had named herself the Virgin Mary and claimed that she 'was conceived with child of the Holy Ghost'.³³ After being 'cast into prison' for an undisclosed reason, she 'lay in exceeding great misery and torment for the space of 8 dayes and nights; and upon the ninth day about 7 of the clock in the forenoon, she was delivered of the most ugliest ill-shapen Monster that ever eyes

²⁹ Walsham, 'Tongues of Heaven', 197-198; Cressy, 'Monstrous Births', 47; Bates, 'Good', 144; Wilson, 'Out of Sight', 64.

³⁰ Walsham, 'Tongues of Heaven', 197-198.

³¹ *Ibid*; See also, Wilson, 'Out of Sight', 64.

³² Anonymous, *The Ranters Monster* (London: George Horton, 1652).

³³ *Ibid*, 3.

beheld'.³⁴ Her child had no hands and no feet but 'claws like a Toad ... where the hands should have been, and every part was odious to behold'.³⁵ The veracity of this account is dubious at best for a couple of reasons. First, the anonymous author would have had no way of witnessing the birth itself since Mary Adams was in prison. Second, his account is hyperbolic: Mary Adams' labour was not only excruciating but also lasted eight days and nights only to result in a monstrous birth. This account is thus either simply untrue or at the very least greatly exaggerated. What remains however is its rhetorical value – God used this monstrous birth as a way to convey his wrath and judgment. This monster was evidence of religious deviance and further proof that God stood against Catholics. At the same time, a portion of these monstrous birth accounts were likely true and described congenitally different children using words and concepts which would have made contemporaneous sense to early modern people. Still, spending too much time sorting through these two categories – real or fabricated – would be a nigh-on impossible endeavour. Likewise, regardless of their truth, the focus on moral meanings in sources about the 'monstrous' inevitably means that the child's perspective and lived experience are sadly lost from view.

The uncertain credibility of monstrous birth accounts notwithstanding, it was believed that the birth of monstrous children could be prevented but the monsters themselves could never be cured. In his *Directory for Midwives* from 1651, famous herbalist and physician Nicholas Culpeper (1616-1654) claimed that 'though Doctors cannot cure Monsters, yet they are to admonish women with child not to look upon Monsters' and to 'strengthen their spirits and heat, and to keep the seed and blood right, and not to allow copulation in time of their terms,

³⁴ *Ibid*, 3, 4.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 4.

lest any monstrous Births' should occur from any of those configurations.³⁶ This is reinforced by the works of famous French barber surgeon Ambroise Paré (1510-1590), which Thomas Johnson translated into English.³⁷ This translated collection of Paré's works on surgery is more than a thousand pages long and contains professional advice by Paré about a great variety of bodily conditions – e.g. tongue-ties, cleft palate, deafness. Paré follows a consistent pattern throughout his chapters on bodily impairments and injuries, whereby he first states all the possible causes of a given condition and then moves on to its cure(s)—including, as will be discussed further below, potential interventions for some congenital differences. His section on monsters is therefore remarkable in that it does not feature a single cure for monstrosity. Paré gives eleven reasons as to why monstrous births happened in the first place: God manifesting his 'immense' power, God showing his disapproval, an abundance or a paucity of seed, maternal imagination, the 'straightnesse of the wombe', how the foetus was positioned, a fall or hit 'upon the belly of' a pregnant woman, hereditary diseases, the confusion of the seeds, and finally 'the craft and wickednesse' of the devil.³⁸ Paré spends eight pages describing various monstrous births, but never offers a cure or fix.³⁹ He remains purely descriptive, which is strangely at odds with his other chapters. This perhaps reflects that the 'monstrous' belonged to a separate category altogether, beyond the help of mortal physicians.

Monstrous births, then, held pride of place in the mind of early modern people and provided them with an uncertain framework of reference for congenital impairments. However, it

³⁶ Nicholas Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives* (London: Peter Cole, 1651), 153.

³⁷ Ambroise Paré, *The Workes of That Famous Chirurgion Ambrose Parey Translated out of Latine and Compared with the French* (London: Th. Cotes and R. Young, 1634).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 962-963

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 763-764, 964-970.

represented only one possible avenue of explanation as to the existence of impaired infants and was not necessarily espoused by everyone, or at least not to the same degree of intensity.

Natural Philosophy: A Naturalised Approach to Congenital Impairments

One reason why the monstrous did not categorically dominate early modern interpretations of childhood disability was because contemporaries were able to draw on alternate frameworks. Natural philosophy and early modern medical science provided alternative explanations as to the existence of congenital impairments. As mentioned previously, these explanations were not at all devoid of spirituality but were more akin to the concept of naturalisation, or the explanation of physical impairments by natural causes. Since nature was of God's design, he could still remain the prime impetus for anything resulting from 'natural causes'. These theories would have existed alongside monstrosity and would have occasionally crossed paths with it. While there was no general consensus regarding congenital impairments in early modern children, we can discern patterns and themes which contemporaries would have implicitly followed.

English physicians inferred causes and consequences from their direct observations of the human body. Influential medical writers like Culpeper wrote that the position of the foetus in the womb affected what nutrients it received and thus how it would eventually form; what the mother ate or what quality of air she breathed while she was pregnant could also determine how the foetus would gestate.⁴⁰ The time and place of conception as well as the position(s) employed (e.g. woman on top) were also seen as instrumental to shaping the foetus: if 'the act

⁴⁰ Culpeper, *Directory*, 139-140

of Copulation was done at the time when the woman had her Menstruis upon her', the child might be born 'imperfect, or mutilated or crook-backt, or with Issues or Leprosis, &c'.⁴¹

Others like physician Peter Chamberlain (1601-1683) proposed that 'all these aberrations of Nature, are to be referred unto the material and efficient causes of generation'.⁴²

Chamberlain's chief theory was that insufficient 'Spermaticall matter' would result in an unusually small child, or one with missing limbs, and that 'an overplus of Seed' would likely create 'double-headed' children 'with four armes' – i.e. conjoined twins.⁴³ This is interesting in itself in that fathers were rarely blamed.⁴⁴ Further to this, he posited that any other 'confused permixtion of the Seed' would generate 'Monsters ... of divers kinds' thus linking congenital physical impairments back to monstrosity.⁴⁵ He also hypothesised that congenital impairments could be determined by the 'heat, or the place of Conception', heat having a 'fiery mobility, or quick formeth sundry shapes of bodies, and worketh the motion, Matter into divers fashions'.⁴⁶ Medical theories surrounding congenital impairments were deeply pluralistic – Chamberlain himself was writing about a diversity of potential causes such as the quantity of 'Seed', any permeation of the humours, and even the place and circumstances of conception.

Medical authorities willingly subscribed to the theory that impairments could begin to manifest as early as during the gestation period. The Wellcome Collection in London holds a series of handwritten lecture notes on anatomy and midwifery from the mid-seventeenth

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 140; see also, Hole, 'Incest', 193.

⁴² Chamberlain, *Dr. Chamberlain*, 93.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 93-95.

⁴⁴ Davies, 'The Unlucky', 54; David M. Turner, 'Impaired Children in Eighteenth-Century England', *Social History of Medicine*, 30.4 (2017), 795.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 95.

century. Although these were penned by an anonymous author, they continued to be circulated until they were eventually owned by eighteenth-century surgeon John Bateman. These lecture notes evidence that medical students were being taught that if ‘y^e child cannot turne himself in y^e uterus’ it will ‘create a great many ill conveniencys’.⁴⁷ This in turn meant that the foetus would not ‘have its nourishment duely prepared, ... some partes which would be so pressed, would be in danger of mortification or Paralisis’ and ‘some Tendons would contract irrecoverably’. For the most part, these lecture notes underscore that congenital impairments in early modern England were seen as being mostly the result of chance and that ‘it is very difficult to give any generall rules’ on the subject. Gestation and delivery were influenced by the ‘different conformation of y^e Uterus, or y^e Bones of the Hips, or muscles of the Abdomen’. Sometimes even,

The excrements are stoped in y^e Guts and make an impression [on] y^e Uterus; sometimes producing inflamations, other times relaxations of y^e [pelvis]; such produce various misfortunes y^t affect y^e part, and sometimes in leaning (in lean people) more [on] one side then y^e other puts y^e Uterus into an irregular posture so it is difficult to prescribe rules for Midwifery.⁴⁸

Early modern medical science, then, did not have one general explanation for the existence of congenital impairments. They were linked to the shape of the uterus, pelvis, or abdomen, the close proximity of the bowels with the womb and the uterus, the foetus not being able to

⁴⁷ London, Wellcome Collection, MS.MSL.5/4, 150.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

move in the womb, and many other causes. This echoes the deep uncertainty of early modern monstrosity: people had many theories and interpretations as to the causes and consequences of congenital impairments, but no conclusive sense of certitude. One cannot speak of medical discrepancy in that most of these theories followed a similar understandable line of thought – congenital impairments happened in the womb, at some point between conception and birth.

Maternal Impressions

Historians have shown that many early modern people did believe that mothers could be held responsible for the appearance and health of their newborn child. Mothers could fall prey to their own ‘maternal imagination’. Margrit Shildrick explains that the concept of maternal imagination (or impressions) held that the unbridled thoughts, cravings, feelings, and overall sensations of a pregnant woman could be transferred to her foetus and transform it accordingly.⁴⁹ As mentioned previously, Culpeper likewise advised that pregnant women should also avoid looking at ‘monsters’ for fear that their own unborn child would be born ‘monstrous’, too. David E. Shuttleton describes the belief that deadly and disfiguring diseases like smallpox could be passed *in utero* by a pregnant woman who saw a smallpox victim and whose fear or impressions activated dormant smallpox particles passed to the foetus through her seed.⁵⁰ These maternal impressions meant anything from ‘the relatively common and insignificant incidence of scarlet birthmarks to the grossly disordered morphology of what were known as monstrous births’, which once again creates a bridge between the literature on

⁴⁹ Margrit Shildrick, ‘Maternal Imagination: Reconceiving First Impressions’, *Rethinking History*, 4.3 (2000), 243-244.

⁵⁰ David E. Shuttleton, “‘When a Disease It Selfe Doth Cromwel It’: The Rhetoric of Smallpox at the Restoration”, in *Social Histories of Disability and Deformity*, ed. by David M. Turner and Kevin Stagg (London: Routledge, 2006), 47.

monstrosity and that on early modern medical science.⁵¹ For example, a common belief for that period was that if a pregnant woman was suddenly startled by a hare or a rabbit or if she ‘[lost] her longing to eat a piece of such a Creature’, her maternal impressions would cause her to give birth to a child with ‘an Hare Lip’ (or a cleft palate or lip in modern parlance).⁵² Shildrick additionally emphasises that maternal imagination was featured among the mechanical or biological causes (as opposed to preternatural causes) of congenital impairments.⁵³

The idea of the maternal imagination persisted throughout the early modern period. Moreover, it was not at all exclusive to the period: Philip K. Wilson and Ian Stevenson have established that tales of maternal imagination can be found in both Ancient Greek and Roman texts and that beliefs in maternal imagination survived well into the twentieth century – some scholars even assert it is mentioned in the Bible.⁵⁴ Prominent early-eighteenth century scholars such as French physician James Blondel (1666-1734) and London-based physician Daniel Turner (1667-1741) had fiery debates over the power of maternal imagination.⁵⁵ Earlier, Culpeper wrote about maternal impressions at length in his *Directory for Midwives* (1651). He recounted that a woman in Egypt ‘brought forth a Blackmore’ after she had ‘[beheld] the Picture of a Blackmore hanging in her Chamber’.⁵⁶ Similarly, and with thinly veiled anti-Catholic sentiments, Culpeper wrote of ‘a woman at Pisa’ who ‘[had] brought

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Culpeper, *Directory*, 159.

⁵³ Shildrick, ‘Maternal Imagination’, 244.

⁵⁴ Wilson, ‘Out of Sight’, 64-65; Ian Stevenson, ‘A New Look at Maternal Impressions: An Analysis of 50 Published Cases and Reports of Two Recent Examples’, *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 6.4 (1992), 353.

⁵⁵ Karen Harvey, ‘Rabbits, Whigs and Hunters: Women and Protest in Mary Toft’s Monstrous Births of 1726*’, *Past & Present*, 238.1 (2018), 43.

⁵⁶ Culpeper, *Directory*, 139-140.

forth a Child ful [sic] of Hair like [that of] a Chamel, because she was so superstitiously wise to kneel every day to the Picture of John the Baptist cloathed in Chamels-Hair' – this again is in direct correlation with early modern accounts of monstrous births.⁵⁷

As maternal imagination was held as a potential cause for congenital impairments, it also simultaneously served as a way to take power and agency away from women. Shildrick explains that early modern women were perceived as not being able to differentiate between reality and abstract ideas, and that from this lack of critical judgment stemmed the danger of the female imagination.⁵⁸ Therefore, the power of maternal impressions to produce congenitally impaired or monstrous children was not a testament of strength but rather an indication of the inherent weakness of women. Both Shildrick and Davies likewise advance that congenital impairments spoke to deeply entrenched fears of 'paternal origins': they could bring to light a mother's deepest desires and secrets, but they could also be used to raise questions of marital fidelity and adultery – particularly if a child did not resemble their lawful father and instead shared similarities with another member of the community.⁵⁹

Matters of Bodily Function

The literature on congenital impairments did not concern itself solely with matters of bodily form. Medical treatises about the origins of deafness in children were just as pluralistic in their interpretations of congenital deafness as those focusing on visible physical impairments. Famous English physician and advocate for the rights of the deaf John Bulwer (1606-1656)

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Shildrick, 'Maternal Imagination', 244.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*; Davies, 'The Unlucky', 54.

surveyed a number of European authorities on the subject.⁶⁰ The body of scholarship on John Bulwer and his semiotic study of the human body is extensive.⁶¹ Historians have written about Bulwer's five books – *Chirologia* (1644), *Chironomia* (1644), *Philocophus* (1648), *Pathomyotamia* (1649), and *Anthropometamorphosis* (1650) – at length so that we now have a clear idea of his theories, intentions, and positions.⁶² Bulwer was acutely aware of the prospect of heredity in deciding whether a child would be born deaf or not. He advanced that deafness could originate in the souls of the parents— 'an imperfection *ex traduce*'.⁶³ Early modern people, he claimed, would have had a 'solicitous expectation' that a child born to a 'Deafe and Dumbe man' would prove 'Deafe and Dumbe', and since heredity 'springeth from the seede', that part of the child would resemble 'the Mother, another part the Father'.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ John Bulwer, *Philocophus* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1648).

⁶¹ John Wesley, 'Original Gesture: Hand Eloquence on the Early Modern Stage', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 35.1 (2017), 65–96; Thomas R. Geen and Louis G. Tassinary, 'The Mechanisation of Emotional Expression in John Bulwer's 'Pathomyotomia' (1649)', *The American Journal of Psychology*, 115.2 (2002), 275–99; Jeffrey Wollock, 'John Bulwer (1606-1656) and the Significance of Gesture in the 17th-Century Theories of Language and Cognition', *Gesture*, 2.2 (2002), 227–58; Erica Fudge, 'The Human Face of Early Modern England', *Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 16.1 (2011), 97–110; Justin E. H. Smith, "'A Corporall Philosophy": Language and 'Body-Making' in the Work of John Bulwer (1606-1656)", in *The Body as Object and Instrument of Knowledge: Embodied Empiricism in Early Modern Science*, ed. by Charles T. Wolfe and Ofer Gal (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2010), 169–83; Elizabeth B. Bearden, 'Before Normal, There Was Natural: John Bulwer, Disability, and Natural Signing in Early Modern England and Beyond', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 132.1 (2017), 33–50; Davies, 'The Unlucky', 70-71; Alanna Skuse, *Surgery and Selfhood in Early Modern England: Altered Bodies and Contexts of Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 46; Rosamund Oates, 'Speaking in Hands: Early Modern Preaching and Signed Languages for the Deaf', *Past & Present*, 256.1 (2022), 54-55, 64, 66, 68-69, 71, 75, 77-78, 83.

⁶² Wollock, 'John Bulwer', 227, 228; Smith, 'Language', 172-173; Geen and Tassinary, 'Mechanisation', 275, 276, 277, 284-285; Wesley, 'Original Gesture', 65, 68, 69; See also, John Bulwer, *Chirologia, or, The Naturall Language of the Hand Composed of the Speaking Motions, and Discouring Gestures Thereof: Whereunto Is Added, Chironomia, or, The Art of Manual Rhetoricke, ... Chyrograms, a Long-Wish'd for Illustration of This Argument* (London: Tho. Harper, 1644); John Bulwer, *Philocophus, or, The Deafe and Dumbe Mans* (London, 1648); John Bulwer, *Pathomyotamia, or, A Dissection of the Significative Muscles of the Affections of the Minde* (London: W. W., 1649); John Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis, Man Transform'd* (London, 1650).

⁶³ Bulwer, *Philocophus*, 78-79.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Should that ‘seede’ flow more abundantly from the parent who was deaf, then surely the child would be born deaf themselves – this doubly serves as an example of a congenital impairment arising outside of the womb. This was, however, not the only theory about congenital deafness and Bulwer’s *Philocophus* (1648) illustrates the diversity of those theories. For instance, Bulwer shared that Polish scholar and physician John Jonston (1603-1675) claimed that,

deafenesse happens through default of the braine, which either begets not animall spirits, or transmits them not, through some peculiar disease.

Secondly, in the auditory nerve which doth not carry them, or by a vitious conformation; whence deafe men are for the most part dumbe. Some indeede thinke that originall deafenesse may happen through a disclocation or ill disposeure of the little bones of hearing.⁶⁵

On the other hand, some believed that ‘defect of those three little bones [of hearing]’ could have little effect and that deafness happened ‘through an ill and unapt structure of the eares, and imperfect occlusion of the auditory Nerve, or by obstruction from a humour, or crasse winde’.⁶⁶ French physician Lazare Rivière (1589-1655) (who was not mentioned in Bulwer’s *Philocophus* as Rivière’s translated *Four Books* was published later in 1658) argued that ‘[Deafness and thick or dull Hearing] come from the distemper of the Brain or Ears’.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 93.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*.

⁶⁷ Lazare Rivière, *Four Books of That Learned and Renowned Doctor, Lazarus Riverius Containing Five Hundred and Thirteen Observations, or Histories, of Famous and Rare Cures: Unto Which Is Added a Fifth Book, Being Select Medicinal Counsels of John Fenelius*, trans. by Nicholas Culpeper (London: Peter Cole, 1658), 96.

According to him, ‘a cold distemper of the Brain, or repletion, or weakness, or some other hurt in that part, especially in which is the rise and progress of the Hearing Nerve’ would at the very least result in partial deafness.⁶⁸

Some physicians hypothesised that deafness begot mutism, while others posited the opposite, thus highlighting the interconnectedness of the senses and the potentially cumulative nature of congenital impairments.⁶⁹ Rosamund Oates has observed that deafness and mutism were understood as cognate and that since Galen held that speech and hearing came from the same area in the brain, deafness naturally resulted in a lack of speech – this was in turn used to infer that intellectual impairment stemmed from deafness, too.⁷⁰ In 1658, for example, Rivière theorised that congenital deafness was almost always a precursor for, as well as a cause of, congenital mutism. This was not only because ‘men learn to speak by Hearing’, but ‘by reason of the great consent that is between the Instruments of Hearing and Speaking by the Nerve of the fifth Conjugation’ whose ‘chief Branches are brought to the Ears’ but also ‘reach to the Tongue and Throat’.⁷¹ In other words, Rivière extrapolated a physiological link between the ears, the tongue, and the throat which would explain why so many deaf people were also mute, and therefore he concluded that congenital deafness was likely to result in congenital mutism.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 95; Bulwer, *Philocophus*, 93-97.

⁷⁰ Oates, ‘Speaking in Hands’, 55.

⁷¹ Rivière, *Four Books* 95.

Dissenting Voices

Whereas the majority of early modern physicians and medical authors believed in the inherently congenital nature of some impairments, it is possible to find dissenting voices which outrightly rejected this premise. Richard Seabrooke (c.1548-?), a self-described ‘practitioner in the art of the oculist’, was one such voice. In his *Caveat* from 1620, he admonished that ‘Ignorance presently gives out’ that children can be born blind, but that in truth ‘it is nothing so’.⁷² He stood firmly against ‘Ignorance and Negligence’ and instead chastised mothers and wetnurses ‘for [they] are the first caretakers of children’ and ‘from [them] ... doe proceede the greatest errors’. According to him, ‘suffering your child to take colde in any part, especially on their heads by sitting with them long bare-headed, whether by the fire, in the sunne, or in the open ayre ... in the tender time of their Infancie’ was a ‘negligence so offensive; that the defect of blindnesse coming therby [sic], the disease is hardly or never to be cured’. Seabrooke’s views on blindness in infants rested solely on the assertion that a blind child’s primary caregivers (i.e. mother and wetnurses) were at fault. This again echoes the literature on maternal imagination whereby mothers were primarily blamed for congenital impairments – it is easy to picture the unfair strife, anxiety, and most of all guilt felt by early modern mothers and/or by wetnurses.⁷³ Evidently, one must take whatever Seabrooke said with a grain of salt: his being an ‘oculist’ and thus being in the business of curing or fixing sight impairments means he would have had a vested interest in making parents feel guilty and desperate for a cure.

⁷² Richard Seabrooke, *Seabrookes Caveat: Or His Warning Piece to All His Loving Country-Men, to Beware How They Meddle with the Eye* (London: Edw. All-de, 1620).

⁷³ Davies, ‘The Unlucky’, 54; Shildrick, ‘Maternal Imagination’, 244.

Of course, this theory remained fairly marginal and, as established, the vast majority of physicians and other medical caregivers did believe in congenital impairments. And still it must be addressed for it forms part of the medical and disability landscape of the period. It is unclear whether Seabrooke's theory ever travelled beyond the page. The abundance of sources about the empirical existence of congenital impairments suggests that Seabrooke's influence remained very much minimal, as his theories were likely ignored by contemporaries. Regardless of its apparent lack of popularity, Seabrooke's theory nevertheless showcases the diversity of early modern medical opinions about congenital impairments. When coupled with contemporaneous preter- and supernatural beliefs, one is faced with a veritable feast of medical and lay opinions, theories, and positions about the causes and consequences of congenital impairments.

Cures and Fixes

Early modern medical scholars not only discussed the probable causes of congenital impairments but also concerned themselves with how to cure them – this interestingly goes against the supernatural belief that ‘monsters’ could not be cured. Some congenital impairments such as tongue-ties or cleft palates featured prominently in midwifery manuals and surgical treatises and generated much debate as to how to best cure them. On the subject of tongue-ties, for instance, medical practitioners disagreed over whether anything should be done, and, in cases where it was necessary, over who should perform the operation.⁷⁴ A ‘tongue-tie’ is when the frenulum (the ligament which connects the tongue) is either too short, or extends to the tip of the tongue, and thus prevents the tongue from moving freely

⁷⁴ Michael Obladen, ‘Much Ado about Nothing: Two Millenia of Controversy on Tongue-Tie’, *Neonatology*, 97.2 (2010), 84.

and can impair speech and suckling. The most common practice was for the midwife to ‘put her finger into the Mouth [of the infant] and cleanse it from filth, and see whether the child be Tongue-tied or not’.⁷⁵ If the child was tongue-tied then the midwife would use one of her nails (which she would have kept ‘of a great length’ for this very purpose) and cut the frenulum.⁷⁶ Some physicians advocated for the cutting of the frenulum by midwives.⁷⁷ For instance, English physician Andrew Boorde (c.1490-1549) stated that ‘if one be tongue tied, there is under the tongue a strong [ligament] y^e which must be cut, ... & wash then the mouth with white wine, or with a little secke & water of plantain’.⁷⁸ On the contrary, other physicians admonished midwives who practiced frenotomy, or the act of cutting the frenulum, for it carried with it a great many risks: for example, inflammation which caused the child not to be able to ‘take hold of the Nipple, nor get any Milk, and so it dies’, or severe haemorrhaging which would inevitably result in death, too.⁷⁹ In other words, they believed

⁷⁵ John Pechey, *A General Treatise of the Diseases of Infants and Children Collected from the Best Practical Authors* (London, 1697), 2.

⁷⁶ Anonymous, *Chirurgorum Comes, or, The Whole Practice of Chirurgery Begun by the Learned Dr. Read; Continued and Completed by a Member of the College of Physicians in London* (London: Edward Jones, 1687), 517.

Chirurgorum is technically not by Alexander Read, although it is often cited as such. It is at its core a collection of the works of Alexander Read by an anonymous physician, but it also contains material drawn from the works of various early modern scholars (Peter Chamberlain, André du Laurens, Balthazar Timæus, Louis De Bils, Fortunatus Fidelis, and Johannes Groenevelt) as well as the English translation of Bolognese surgeon Gaspare Tagliacozzi’s *De Curtorum Chirurgia per Insitionem Libri Duo* (1597). Although *Chirurgorum* was published in 1687, its contents are representative of medical knowledge which was already relevant at least thirty to forty years before its publication. For more detail, see Emily Cock, *Rhinoplasty and the Nose in Early Modern British Medicine and Culture* (Manchester University Press, 2019), 113, 114, 116; Emily Cock, “‘Lead[ing] 'Em by the Nose into Publick Shame and Derision’: Gaspare Tagliacozzi, Alexander Read and the Lost History of Plastic Surgery, 1600–1800”, *Social History of Medicine*, 28.1 (2014), 1-2.

⁷⁷ Obladen, ‘Much Ado’, 84.

⁷⁸ Andrew Boorde, *The Breuiarie of Health Vvherin Doth Folow, Remedies, for All Maner of Sicknesses & Diseases, the Which May Be in Man or Woman. Expressing the Obscure Termes of Greke, Araby, Latin, Barbary, and English, Concerning Phisick and Chirurgerie. Compyled by Andrew Boord, Doctor of Phisicke: An English-Man.* (London: Thomas East, 1587), 26.

⁷⁹ Anon., *Chirurgorum*, 517; Obladen, ‘Much Ado’, 86; N. H., *The Ladies Dictionary, Being a General Entertainment of the Fair-Sex a Work Never Attempted before in English* (1694), 234.

midwives were not competent enough, nor did they possess the required instruments to safely carry out the operation. There likewise is much evidence of medical practitioners operating on cleft palates and lips.⁸⁰ Mary Lewis writes that Bald's *Leechbook* from the mid-tenth century showcases that the procedure was already being carried out in the Early Middle Ages.⁸¹

Early modern surgery extricated 'deformities' from the body through mechanical repairs like bone setting or using metal corsets, splints, and a great deal of patience.⁸² For example, a child born with a 'Distorted' foot should keep the foot in a splint for a year or more, for it was 'Nature's work to correct such deformities', with assistance from a learned surgeon.⁸³ However, more aggressively, early modern surgeons likewise fixed bodies by cutting and amputating.⁸⁴ Works by early modern surgeons contain countless cures and fixes for a wide range of congenital impairments which involved much more invasive painful, and traumatic forms of surgical intervention such as excising flesh and skin or amputating limbs. For instance, Paré wrote about children born deaf because of 'a certaine fleshy or membranous substance growing in their' earholes and prescribed cutting out the substance or 'eating it away' with 'acrid and catheriticke medicines'.⁸⁵ Others spoke of fingers growing together, which was occasioned 'either by the error of forming Nature in the Mother's Womb, or by an ulcer on the inside of two fingers, negligently cured, or by burning', and suggested the 'Cure

⁸⁰ Cock, *Rhinoplasty*, 37.

⁸¹ Mary Lewis, 'Childcare in the Past: The Contribution of Paleopathology', in *Care in the Past: Archaeological and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Lindsay Powell, William Southwell-Wright, and Rebecca Gowland (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2017), 31.

⁸² Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 210-211.

⁸³ Anon., *Chirurgorum*, 531-533

⁸⁴ Wear, *Knowledge*, 210-211.

⁸⁵ Paré, *Workes*, 655.

may be performed by the Knife’ for ‘Dissection is the best way for fingers that are joined together’.⁸⁶ Doubtless, pain was an often inevitable part of ‘curing’ one’s impaired body.

In cases where an impairment (congenital or acquired) could not be cured, the job of the surgeon was to hide any visual signs of it. While writing about incurable sight loss, physician Robert Bayfield (c.1629-fl.1668-?) explained that ‘the Chirurgion shall have more care to maintain and preserve the beauty of the eye, then to endeavour the restoring of the sight which is utterly lost’.⁸⁷ Paré, in particular, is known for his work on prosthetics, and he advocated for the covering of ‘the deformity of the eye so lost (which is all you can doe in such a case)’.⁸⁸ He came up with two types of eye prosthetics: one made of gold or silver, ‘counterfeited and enamelled’, which fitted directly into the eye socket; and one which was held in front of the eye socket thanks to a wire wrapped around the head and tucked behind the opposite ear.⁸⁹ Finally, Bulwer did not seek to cure deaf children but instead preferred to find ways to play to the translatable nature of their senses –e.g. hearing with one’s eyes (lip-reading or sign language).⁹⁰ In any case, he contended that ‘Originall deafnesse’, or congenital deafness, ‘is not curable but by miracle, it having never been done by any other then [sic] the Divine Art of miracle-working faith’. To him, the only way to ‘palliate’ congenital deafness was to find suitable accommodations for it. Of course, Bulwer was highly utopian in his way of thinking and stood out for his positive views on deafness.

⁸⁶ Anon., *Chirurgorum*, 520

⁸⁷ Robert Bayfield, *Tes Iatrikes Kartos, or, A Treatise de Morborum Capitis Essentiis & Pronosticis Adorned with above Three Hundred Choice and Rare Observations* (London: D. Maxwel, 1663), 132.

⁸⁸ Paré, 869; see also, Skuse, *Surgery*, 90, 92, 95; Wear, *Knowledge*, 215; Turner, ‘Impaired Children’, 799.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 869-870.

⁹⁰ Bulwer, *Philocophus*, A4L, 55, 56, 57, 60, , 69, 77-78; Wollock, ‘John Bulwer’, 228, 230; Smith, ‘Language’, 173; Bearden, ‘Before Normal’, 36.

Nevertheless, he offered ways to circumvent and, in some way, hide the early modern disabling nature of congenital deafness.

Early modern people, then, relied on a very rich if somewhat uncertain framework of beliefs and medical theories to navigate congenital impairments. God, of course, was omnipotent and influenced the lives of all that lived on Earth. But early modern people also explained congenital impairments in more mundane (but still inherently spiritual) ways such as heredity, humoral conformations, and permeations of the seed. Likewise, they extrapolated various cures and fixes from their understanding of congenital impairments like mechanical repairs or painful surgical operations, some of which we still use to this day. Finally, in cases where congenital impairments could not be made rid of, people undertook to camouflage them as best as they could by using prosthetics or by finding alternative ways to exist in early modern English society.

1.2. Acquired Impairments in Early Modern Children: Causes, Cures, & Social Response

Children were, of course, not only born with impairments. My dataset of petitions for relief (analysed in subsequent chapters) and naturalist and religious treatises does suggest that acquired impairments generated much less (but definitely still some) interest from both religious and medical practitioners. Acquired impairments, just like congenital impairments, tended to concern parents greatly in that, in their eyes, it usually indicated that something had gone awry: perhaps God was angry with them and therefore had caused their child to become impaired in some way. Moreover, being impaired carried with it the possibility of

subsequently becoming disabled, too. Impairments in the early modern period were often a matter of both cause and consequence, regardless of whether they were congenital or acquired. What or who has brought about this impairment? Is it a purely mechanical or biological process showcasing the wonders of nature and therefore God's power and influence over humans? Is it a divine warning? But also, what does it mean for my child? How will it affect their life prospects? Will they be able to become financially independent, get married, and have children? Will they be able to support me when I am old and no longer able to work for my own subsistence? These were questions with which early modern parents would have been beset.

Causes of Acquired Impairments in Early Modern English Children

Acquired impairments in early modern English children could be the result of a great many factors. Accidents were of course at the top of the list as many early modern children suffered horrific injuries, some of which resulted in 'acquired' impairments, others in death. Nicholas Orme demonstrates that servicebooks used in the south of England used to warn both parents *and* godparents to keep their children and godchildren safe from fire and water until the age of at least seven.⁹¹ Current work by Steven Gunn and Tomasz Gromelski continues to investigate accidental deaths in sixteenth-century England: their principal aim is to document the everyday dangers of Tudor life to, first, help improve our understanding of the risks posed by early modern life and, second, compare them to those of our modern lives.⁹²

⁹¹ Loretta Dolan, 'Notions of Nurture and Neglect in Adult-Child Relationships', in *Nurture and Neglect: Childhood in Sixteenth-Century Northern England* (Routledge, 2017), 45.

⁹² Steven Gunn and Tomasz Gromelski, 'Project', *Everyday Life and Fatal Hazard in Sixteenth-Century England*, <https://tudoraccidents.history.ox.ac.uk/?page_id=17> [accessed 25 November 2024]; see further, Steven J. Gunn and Tomasz Gromelski, 'Sport and Recreation in Sixteenth-Century England: The Evidence of Accidental Deaths', in *Sports and Physical Exercise in Early*

Accidents happened when children were playing or when they were helping their parents or caregivers: they fell into wells or rivers and drowned; they were struck by falling objects or were attacked by wild and domesticated animals; infants fell out of windows, down the stairs, or out of beds; they could sustain severe burns by falling into hearths or cooking fires, or by knocking over lit candles.⁹³ Seabrook, for instance, warned his contemporaries that children's eyes were vulnerable to accidental hurts: 'Pricks with thornes, knives, needles, or any other sharpe-pointed instruments, strokes with the eares of cornes, stubble, bryers, or any other bruise or wipe in the eye', he asserted, could irrecoverably damage the eyes and cause permanent blindness.⁹⁴ In the same fashion, 'any man of what age or degree so ever' could accidentally 'rush upon the latches of dores, bolts, nailes, or the like', or 'have the eye-ball thrust out, so that it lye upon the cheeke' by 'thrusts with cudgels, foyles or blowes' with cats.⁹⁵

We can also find evidence of children suffering grievous accidental injuries in personal testimonies by adults about their younger years, by parents about their children, or even in more material evidence such as contemporary furnishings.⁹⁶ As Tara Hamling notes, domestic houses were often also places of work where heavy equipment was kept, and where children could therefore badly injure themselves.⁹⁷ Loretta Dolan similarly writes that late-medieval

Modern Culture: New Perspectives on the History of Sports and Motion, ed. by Angela Schattner and Rebekka von Mallinckrodt (Routledge, 2016), 49–63.

⁹³ Adriana Benzaquén, 'Illness and Death', in *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction*, ed. by Anna French (Routledge, 2020), 198–199; see also, Taunton, Somerset Heritage Centre, DD.WO.54.3.48.

⁹⁴ Seabrooke, *Seabrookes Caveoat*, 25.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Tara Hamling, 'The Household', in *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction*, ed. by Anna French (Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 33–35.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

and early modern babies could sometimes suffer grievous burning injuries, or even more terrifyingly would burn to death, while in their cradles.⁹⁸ Parents would swaddle their babies (both boys and girls) in linen or wool, and leave them in their cradles near an open hearth in order to keep them warm. Being so close to an open flame, these babies were then susceptible to being struck by leaping embers which would in turn light their swaddles on fire.⁹⁹ The smell of burning linen or wool would have hopefully attracted the attention of parents who would have then come to their baby's rescue; but in some cases, when these babies had been left unattended, the fire could eventually tragically consume them.¹⁰⁰ Those accidents that did not end in death had the potential to permanently impair children, which could later on affect future social and professional opportunities.

Examples of disabling accidental injuries can be found across most early modern source types, from letter to medical treatise. For example, a letter sent to Irish-born, London-based physician and naturalist Hans Sloane spoke of a young girl named Ann Pierrepont who, after suffering a fall from a horse, became bedbound for weeks, and remained sick and in tremendous pain for several months after that.¹⁰¹ Another letter, this time from a man named George Reid, described how Reid's five-year-old son 'hade lately a blow upon his right ey[e]' and how he subsequently became blind in the same eye.¹⁰² Likewise, physicians mentioned 'the Coalition, or growing together of the fingers or Toes' which could be 'occasioned ... by burning'.¹⁰³ Cataracts growing in the eyes following, among other things, a fall or a blow

⁹⁸ Dolan, 'Notions', 44.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ London, British Library, Sloane MS. 4041, folio 40-42.

¹⁰² London, British Library, Sloane MS. 4036, folio 100.

¹⁰³ Anon., *Chirurgorum*, 520.

were similarly commonly known to lay and professional people alike.¹⁰⁴ Physician Robert Bayfield (c.1629-fl.1668-?) further claimed that blindness could occur ‘when the sinew of sight is utterly broken asunder, and separated from the brain by a stroke or fall’.¹⁰⁵ Acquired impairments as a result of accidental injury therefore appear to have been fairly common.

Acquired impairments in children could also proceed from diseases and ailments, some of which were endemic to the period such as smallpox and scrofula. For instance, in addition to oozing neck, face, and head ulcers, abscesses, and fistulas, as well as ‘chills, fever, and weight loss’, scrofula (or the King’s Evil) could occasionally cause blindness.¹⁰⁶ Writing about English surgeon Richard Wiseman (1622-1676) and his *Severall Chirurgical Treatises* (1672), historians Adam S. Komorowski and Sang Ik Song observe that almost a quarter of the cases (21 out of 91) presented in Wiseman’s *Treatises* deal with sight loss caused by the King’s Evil; equally, ophthalmia, lippitudo, and Aegilops, which all affect the eyes, had dedicated chapters within these treatises where they were given special attention by Wiseman.¹⁰⁷ This seems to have been commonly accepted as fact by early modern English people. For example, in a private letter to her father from 1649, a woman named Ann Lennard recounted the story of a fourteen-year-old girl who had been ‘blind this 8 yeares of the kings evill’.¹⁰⁸ The phrasing of her letter made it plain that this was a commonly held fact about the king’s evil. Similarly, in 1634, Ralph Cocker pleaded to his parish that they would sponsor his journey down to London so he could get help for his son who was ‘blinde in both eies’ which had been caused, Cocker’s friends and neighbours believed, by his also being

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 525, 529.

¹⁰⁵ Bayfield, *Tes Iatrikes Kartos*, 132.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 121; Komorowski and Song, ‘Politics’, 293.

¹⁰⁷ Komorowski and Song, ‘Politics’, 293.

¹⁰⁸ Newport, Isle of Wight Record Office, OG.CC.77.

‘inflicted w[i]th’ the King’s Evil.¹⁰⁹ Other unnamed ailments could just as well impair and disable children, too. Children suffering from debilitating conditions can be found across most of Sloane’s professional correspondence. In c.1723, Sloane received a letter about ‘a girl of John Albi in Wales’ wherein he learned that the four- or five-year-old girl was suffering from a number of incurable and disabling ailments: she had swelling on her abdomen, extreme weakness (especially in the back), constipation, indigestion, tremendous pain (particularly in her thigh), fever, distension of the belly, and also had a tumour on her vertebra and all the way up to her diaphragm.¹¹⁰ A nameless thirteen-year-old patient from around the same period endured continuous pain in his stomach, lack of appetite, and a ‘continuall slow fever’ for a period of three years.¹¹¹ This boy was, according to his contemporaries, a ‘living skeleton’ and, much like John Albi’s daughter, unable to do anything. Cures were attempted in vain in both cases prior to contacting Sloane, and it is unclear whether Sloane himself found ways to alleviate their symptoms. What is made abundantly clear, however, is that their respective ailments/diseases were disabling.

Finally, acquired impairments could stem from direct or indirect wanton and/or criminal violence on the part of one’s contemporaries – this will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four. A removal order from 1726 in East Yorkshire recounted the tragedy that befell Robert Hall and his family, and how three of his six children became impaired as a result of it. The removal order described how eight robbers broke into the Hall family’s house and ‘bound and Gag’d them in A very barborous manner’.¹¹² Robert Hall tried to resist but was ‘most Barborously murdered’, after which the robbers ‘set fire to the Buildings which

¹⁰⁹ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.130.68.

¹¹⁰ London, British Library, Sloane MS. 4050, folio 43.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, folio 52.

¹¹² Beverley, East Riding Archives, QSF.74.E.2.

Consumed his wife and One Child'. As a result of the fire and/or as a consequence of their being brutalised by the eight robbers, three of Robert Hall's five surviving children became 'both sick and Lame' and thus dependent on and 'deserving of good Christian Charity'. Similarly, in 1650 in Purtington, Somerset, Thomas Parker, apprentice blacksmith to Richard Collyer, deposed that his master had beaten him until he became physically impaired and then in turn disabled. He recounted that Collyer had struck him down to the ground, and then kicked him four times 'upon the sides' which had rendered him first 'lame, but not much', and eventually 'soe lame; and impotent in his body, on all the parts of one of his sides, that he was not able to doe his mast[er] any service'. Because Parker was no longer able to assist him or 'stand to strike att the handvile', Collyer again struck him twice with his fist until he fell to the ground. The deposition ended with Parker claiming that he was 'cripled and not in a Condicon to helpe himself'. Both sources evidence acquiring impairments as a result of violence: Robert Hall's children became 'sick and lame' after robbers terrorised them and lit their house on fire, while Thomas Parker became 'lame' and 'cripled' after his master repeatedly beat him. Similarly, and this will be once again discussed further in Chapter Four, sexual violence could cause victims to become impaired and/or disabled as a result of it.

Notably, sources about acquired impairments and disabling ailments contrast greatly with contemporaneous sources about *congenital* impairments. Whereas medical treatises centring on congenital impairments consistently made casual reference to the influence of God over all things and particularly over the formation of impairments in the womb, sources about *acquired* impairments seem to have been much more concerned with the strictly mechanical causes and consequences of these impairments. Even in sources about acquired impairments where the author did mention God, they did so off-handedly, and the focus remained on the causes and consequences of the impairments and on the authors' desire to find or share a cure.

The language employed throughout most of these examples was staunchly clinical, too – even the published medical texts which I examined for this chapter remained relatively secular in their descriptions of *acquired* impairments, which was somewhat unusual for this type of source. This is not at all to say that these people were not devout Christians or that they did not believe in the omnipotence of God – one could reason that God is implied throughout in that whatever permeation of the body was a direct result of divine will – but the lack of outright mention of divine influence is striking, nonetheless.

Social Response to Acquired Impairments

The overall early modern medical trend appears to have been to endeavour to restore children with acquired impairments to so-called perfection of body and mind. Acquired impairments were perceived as abnormal and as needing to be addressed swiftly – this also shows that they were seen as something that could be cured. This is in keeping with what Elizabeth Bearden described as ‘the concept of the ideal’ whereby reaching said ideal was quite simply impossible, yet it was pervasive enough that it exerted a normative effect on the way early modern people ‘conceived of embodiment’.¹¹³ An impaired child was even further from this early modern concept of the ideal in the sense that they were not even of average body and/or mind. In 1670, medical scholar George Sibscota (n.d.) claimed that ‘defects’ (i.e. impairments) should not ‘be called by the name of a Disease’ in so far as people should be ‘reserving the name of Disease for the defects of that which was once perfect’ thereby implying that impaired bodies were imperfect.¹¹⁴ Early modern people endeavoured to return

¹¹³ Bearden, *Monstrous Kinds*, 34.

¹¹⁴ George Sibscota, *The Deaf and Dumb Man’s Discourse. Or A Treatise Concerning Those That Are Born Deaf and Dumb Containing a Discovery of Their Knowledge or Understanding; as Also the Method They Use, to Manifest the Sentiments of Their Mind. Together with an Additional Tract of the Reason and Speech of Inanimate Creatures* (London: H. Burges, 1670), 2.

children with acquired impairments to this cultural average as it was the best way to ensure these children would become valued and productive members of society.

Evidently, not all primary carers would have extended the same amounts of zeal and energy when attempting to help their children. The primary sources at our disposal simply create an inevitable bias in favour of those primary carers who sought help for their impaired charges. We logically have little if any evidence of those people who did not reach out to friends, neighbours, physicians, or local parish authorities. As usual, absence of evidence does not mean evidence of absence, therefore it is likely that some parents did not or could not seek help for their children (whether they would have actively wanted to or not). Still, petitions for relief from early modern England were brimming with anecdotes of people hoping to find suitable arrangements, solutions, or cures for impaired children. Their almost single-minded desire to treat or cure children speaks volumes about early modern English mentalities surrounding childhood disability. Hannah Newton has already written extensively about parental attitudes to sick children and how parents would fervently seek medical help for their children. She shows that parents were committed to caring for young patients, even though it was often costly and very much time-consuming.¹¹⁵ Most importantly, parents evidenced great love for their children by looking after them so tirelessly.¹¹⁶ Early modern English parents held the same attitude towards curing or treating *impairments* in children, albeit somewhat tainted with their contemporaneous conceptions of physical impairments.

¹¹⁵ Hannah Newton, *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 93; see also, Anthony Fletcher, *Growing Up in England: The Experience of Childhood 1600-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 59.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Sloane's professional correspondence, which I have already used to emphasise the extent of acquired impairments in early modern English children, is useful here as well in helping to illustrate the concerns (and sometimes disappointment) felt by parents of children with newly acquired impairments. His correspondence shows that acquired impairments could be seen as abnormal, and as such requests for cures and treatments were a recurring theme throughout. George Reid, who had written to Sloane about one of his children 'of about five years old' who had become blind in his right eye, was greatly concerned with finding a cure for his child. Reid's first response to his son becoming blind was to seek medical help. The fact that this sudden onset blindness was the result of a blow to the head probably motivated him further. There is no way of knowing for certain whether his son was ever returned to his original sight or whether he remained blind in his right eye. Reid did contact Sloane a little bit more than a year later, but he did not mention his son at all.¹¹⁷ Contacting Sloane again might imply that Reid still trusted in Sloane's skill and expertise as a medical practitioner regardless of the outcome of the treatment of his son. What his first letter evidences, however, is that the boy's sight impairment was seen as a deviation of bodily norm which needed medical attention.

More practically, parents were deeply concerned with ensuring that their children became both socially and financially independent, and they often feared that impairments might act as obstacles to their successfully doing so.¹¹⁸ Historians such as Patrick Wallis, Cliff Webb, and Chris Minns have written about how entering the workforce was a transitional stage in the life of an early modern child, from the family sphere towards financial, social, and legal

¹¹⁷ Sloane MS. 4036, folio 117.

¹¹⁸ Fletcher, *Growing Up*, 136-137, 144, 149, 173, 175, 220, 245, 247, 259, 267.

independence.¹¹⁹ Patricia Crawford has also revealed that, customarily, this shift happened much earlier for the children of the poor – between the age of seven years old and their late teens – and that failing to teach one’s children to work was tantamount to perpetuating poverty.¹²⁰ In many ways, failing to lead one’s child to independence was synonymous with neglect, regardless of whether it was wanton or an unfortunate consequence of living in poverty. This is particularly relevant for parents of impaired children: impairments in the early modern period could very easily disable children from working or learning a trade and could subsequently stand in the way of their ever-reaching independence. As I will discuss in Chapter Five, we do have evidence of there being more accessible forms of work available to those who, for example, could not stand. Nevertheless, petitions for relief from the period also do suggest that on many occasions primary carers had to fight hard to protect their impaired children’s future.

Impaired and disabled children disrupted early modern life-cycle conventions in that they could not always go from dependent to independent. There would have been a level of financial savviness to their carers’ petitions, as enabling a child to become independent meant that they would eventually no longer have to rely on their parents to support them, and that they would hopefully never become chargeable on the parish. Scholars such as Steve Hindle, Wallis, and Crawford have shown that the labouring poor (as opposed to the impotent poor, who could not work despite wanting to) depended on the willingness and more importantly

¹¹⁹ Patrick Wallis, Cliff Webb, and Chris Minns, ‘Leaving Home and Entering Service: The Age of Apprenticeship in Early Modern London’, *Continuity and Change*, 25.3 (2010), 377, 379; see also, Patricia Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children in England 1580-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 113, 135, 136; Katie Barclay, ‘The Early Modern Family’, in *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction*, ed. by Anna French (Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 24.

¹²⁰ Crawford, *Parents*, 113, 135.

the ability of all family members to contribute to the economic life of the household.¹²¹ This meant that children from the age of seven years old would have been expected to earn their keep – e.g. gathering and cutting wood, gleaning, simple agricultural work, etc.¹²² Often, in cases of dire poverty, parish authorities would swoop in to apprentice poor young children off, too.¹²³ However, this whole premise rests on the assumption that these children were not or did not become disabled. Margaret Pelling argues that *sick* children, in particular, posed a real threat to poor households in the sense that they represented a loss of labour, therefore a loss of money, and thus deeper poverty.¹²⁴ Therefore, in the case of permanently or long-term disabled children, this ran the additional risk of becoming a lifelong reality unless an adequate cure or form of treatment was found. As such, it meant that this ‘loss of labour’ could subsequently become, in some cases, permanent. I shall discuss this in more detail in Chapter Four, but this evidently speaks to matters of age, disability, and independence, too. We have evidence of adult children who, because they became disabled fairly early on in life (or because they were born impaired and quickly became disabled, too), had to remain dependent on their parents for their subsistence. Twenty-nine-year-old Margrett Kerbie from c.1659 Woodplumpton in Lancashire, for instance, was ‘deafe and dumbe’ and as she did no ‘worke att all whereby either to get or save’, she ‘hath beene hitherto maintained by the paines and industrie of her parents’, which eventually became a problem as, ‘age and Concomitants thereof being upon them’, they were no longer able to support her.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Steve Hindle, *On the Parish?: The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Clarendon, 2004), 24-25, 26; Crawford, *Parents*, 6; Wallis, Webb, and Minns, ‘Leaving Home’, 377, 378; see also, Jonathan Healey, *The First Century of Welfare* (Boydell Press, 2014), 41-42, 63-64, 101, 183.

¹²² Hindle, *On the Parish*, 24-25.

¹²³ Crawford, *Parents*, 155.

¹²⁴ Margaret Pelling, ‘Child Health as a Social Value in Early Modern England’, *Social History of Medicine*, 1.2 (1988), 142.

¹²⁵ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.178.17.

Even when impaired children successfully managed to reach culturally accepted life-cycle milestones (becoming independent, marrying, and having children), they were still seen as different by and from their peers, which was true for both acquired and congenital impairments. As we shall see in the next chapters, this is evidenced in petitions for relief and in legal proceedings from the Old Bailey, in which impaired individuals – whether they be adults or children – were consistently referred to by using their impairments. This is in keeping with what historians of early modern English poverty and the petitioning system such as Merridee Bailey, Jonathan Healey, and Hindle have found: petitioners would have sought to convince their local authorities that they were deserving of help, and they would have selected specific words that fitted their community's values to garnish their requests.¹²⁶ Chapter Five will explore this in more detail, but in the case of petitions for relief this was a conscious rhetorical decision to garner more sympathy and thus increase one's chances to receive help. For impairments, this whole rhetoric rested on the premise that these would be seen as different and culturally significant enough that they would in turn elicit responses of pity and commiseration from parish authorities. In 1639, when Mary Cisley from Croston in Lancashire and the scribe she likely hired mentioned that she had kept the 'poore *blynd* child of one Ralph Thomason', they did not do so innocently.¹²⁷ There would have been a cultural expectation on her part that parish authorities would be more likely to weigh in her favour than if she had just referred to the child as simply 'poore'. This cultural expectation would have been that impairments could somehow become obstacles in the child's journey towards adulthood and independence. Local authorities would have also expected those impairments

¹²⁶ Hindle, *On the Parish*, 338, 409; Healey, *The First Century*, 93, 95, 100, 107; Merridee L. Bailey, 'Most Hevyneesse and Sorowe': The Presence of Emotions in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Court of Chancery', *Law and History Review*, 37.1 (2019), 8, 23, 24, 25, 26.

¹²⁷ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.214.79. Emphasis my own.

to potentially become costly to the parish, for example if the child became disabled as a result of those impairments and could not support themselves later in life. Similarly, the petition of Anne Lollo (or Lello) from July 1716 showcases that Lollo used this rhetoric to try to secure the release of her daughter Rachael Lollo from Clerkenwell Bridewell.¹²⁸ Anne Lollo first explained that her ‘Lively hood [depended] on y^e maintainance of her said daughter’, and then mentioned almost casually (but certainly not randomly) that she also had ‘one other Child of 11 years of Age Stone blind’. She reiterated further down in her petition that she had a ‘blind child’. She utilised conventional early modern perceptions of impairments of function to garner sympathy on behalf of her daughter to, in turn, help her be released from prison – her blind child was *also* dependent on her daughter. This is made even more evident by the fact that, according to her petition, her ‘blind child’ was apparently not in need of anything. Yes, the child was ‘Stone blind’, but they were not in any direct need of help – they were not even the implied focal point of their mother’s petition and were only identified by their impairment.

Early modern people’s reactions to impaired children – whether they were congenital or acquired – was tainted with negative cultural expectations. These expectations motivated some of these parents to seek to treat these impairments of both form and function. This was justified by the silent belief that curing or treating an impaired child would eventually allow them to gain independence and have a living.

¹²⁸ Middlesex Sessions, *London Lives, 1690-1800*, LMSMPS501540019 (www.londonlives.org, version 2.0, March 2018) July 1716, Petition of Anne Lollo.

Curing Acquired Impairments

One of several avenues available to children with acquired impairments was miracle cures, of which there was a relative abundance in the early modern period. Tobias B. Hug has inferred that so-called ‘quacks’ roamed the country and that concern over some practitioners was exposed as early in the period as 1512.¹²⁹ He clarifies that many of these apparent impostors were nothing more than what Pelling refers to as ‘irregular practitioners’ – namely, unlicensed practitioners or those who had ‘infringed the monopoly of the Royal College of Physicians’.¹³⁰ For the most part, these practitioners had empirical knowledge of early modern medicine but, as they were not officially sanctioned by the College, they suffered routine efforts on the part of the College to discredit them. However, Hug clarifies that legitimate charlatans did exist and that they would essentially put up a performance to try and swindle people out of their money and possessions – he uses the example of the oculist John Chevalier Taylor who would instruct his patients to keep bandages over their eyes for several days by which time the treatment had failed and he was long gone.¹³¹

Some ‘quacks’ rested somewhere in the middle: it is rarely clear whether their intentions were pure, whether they themselves fully believed in what they peddled, or even whether their cures were legitimate.¹³² Some people advertised that they had a ‘Head-Pill which hath cured several Persons who have been Deaf many Years’.¹³³ Other more famous contemporaries like

¹²⁹ Tobias B. Hug, *Impostures in Early Modern England Representations and Perceptions of Fraudulent Identities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 48.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 49; see also, Margaret Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London: Patronage, Physicians, and Irregular Practitioners 1550-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹³¹ Hug, *Impostures*, 53, 54, 55.

¹³² *Ibid*, 57.

¹³³ Old Bailey Proceedings, *London Lives, 1690-1800*, OA170004190004190002 (www.londonlives.org, version 2.0, March 2018).

Valentine Greatrakes (1628-1682) claimed to possess divine powers. Greatrakes reportedly had healed ‘8 of the Dead Palsie or their Arms and Legs’ and had restored many deaf people ‘to their Hearing’ by simply laying his hands upon them.¹³⁴ Sarah Hutton observed that Greatrakes’ miracle ‘stroking’ begot much confusion from early modern theorists as well as raised legitimate contemporaneous fears about ‘diabolism’.¹³⁵ Hug adds that Greatrakes’ own motives were nigh-on impossible to decipher.¹³⁶ Similarly, John Peachi (n.d.), a London-based physician from Normandy, professed he was able to cure blindness thanks to the miraculous properties of an ‘American Specifick’ of which he had learned from an ‘Indian Doctor’.¹³⁷ He advanced that it could ‘dry up Rhumes in the Head and strengthen the Optick Nerves, cool Inflammations in the Eyes and comfort the Animal Spirits’ and also ‘disperse the cloudiness of the Brain, and clear the sight’.¹³⁸ The fact that this cure was from America added a level of displaced mysticism to its already advertised potent curative powers, and thus would have likely further convinced people to purchase it. Peachi recounted that,

A Child about four years old, whose eyes were extream bad, and lay under the hands of a Woman who pretended great skill, she pickt five pounds of the Parents pocket, upon a Promise of Cure, but never perform’d it. But at

¹³⁴ Valentine Greatrakes, *The Great Cures and Strange Miracles Performed by Mr. Valentine Gertrux Who Restoreth the Blind to Sight, the Deaf to Hearing, the Lame to Strength, and Cripples to Walk without Crutches* (London, 1666), 2, 3, 5.

¹³⁵ Sarah Hutton, ‘Making Sense of Pain: Valentine Greatrakes, Henry Stubbe and Anne Conway’, in *Testimonies: States of Mind and States of the Body in the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Gideon Manning, Archimedes (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 88; see also, Peter Elmer, *The Miraculous Conformist: Valentine Greatrakes, the Body Politic, and the Politics of Healing in Restoration Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2

¹³⁶ Hug, *Impostures*, 57, 58.

¹³⁷ John Peachi, *Some Observations Made upon the Angola Seed: Shewing Its Admirable Virtue in Curing All Distempers of the Eyes* (London, 1682), 4.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 5.

length one who had received Benefit by this Specifick, recommended it, and received thanks for so doing from the Childs Friends, and it hath been well ever since.¹³⁹

These anecdotes would have appealed to the hopes of desperate parents, especially those who had already spent great amounts of money trying to cure their children's impairments. It would have similarly resonated with those helpless people who, after thinking they had tried everything, believed they had finally found the right cure.

The early modern miracle-cure market easily attracted despairing parents: parents of children who had been deemed incurable could remain relentless in their attempts to treat them. In a petition from 1701, Henry Lewis stated that despite the fact that his 'poore lame son' had been deemed 'uncurable' after several unsuccessful treatments, Lewis remained hopeful that 'there is one that has him under cure' and that this 'will doe him goode alsoe cure him in gods good time'.¹⁴⁰ When a miracle cure did not work, it was virtually standard practice for peddlers to claim that another medical reason had interfered with their otherwise entirely potent cure. For instance, Peachi wrote about a 'young Child born blind' for whom his miracle cure had failed because the child's 'Distemper was an Opthalmy, but not a true Cataract', and this was not what the drops targeted.¹⁴¹ It is, as ever, difficult to say whether this was a convenient excuse on his part or what he genuinely believed.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Woking, Surrey History Centre, QS2.6.1701.59.

¹⁴¹ Peachi, *Observations*, 7.

Probably the most well-known miracle cure in early modern England has already been mentioned in passing: the royal touch, whereby the monarch would lay their hands upon those who had contracted the King's Evil (scrofula) and heal them.¹⁴² Stephen Brogan explains that people would have come from all over Britain and even as far as Russia or North America to receive this miracle cure, which speaks volumes about the suspected efficacy of this cure.¹⁴³ In his survey of healing in the pre-modern era, Larry Dossey further asserts that the royal touch would have enjoyed special status as a form of miraculous healing: power flowed directly from God, through the monarch (his agent on Earth), and into the afflicted.¹⁴⁴

More mundane and somewhat less spiritual cures and fixes for acquired impairments included invasive and non-invasive surgical interventions. Surgical and medical treatises are full of suggestions of cures and fixes for acquired (and congenital) impairments. For instance, Paré explains how he had reattached a child's tongue after it had been cut off: the three-year-old had fallen chin first onto a stone and so had 'cut off a large piece of the end of his tongue', which Paré had promptly sewn back together with a needle and some thread.¹⁴⁵ Paré wrote about removing superfluous fingers with a sharp razor or separating fingers and toes which had grown together either from the womb or as a result of burns or ulcers.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Adam S. Komorowski and Sang Ik Song, 'A Politics of the Senses: The Political Role of the King's-Evil in Richard Wiseman's *Severall Chirurgicall Treatises*', *Medical Humanities*, 45.3 (2019), 288-289, 290.

¹⁴³ Stephen Brogan, *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England: Politics, Medicine, and Sin* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2015), 11.

¹⁴⁴ Larry Dossey, 'The Royal Touch: A Look at Healing in Times Past', *Explore*, 9.3 (2013), 122; see also, Alexandra Walsham, 'The Reformation and 'The Disenchantment of the World' Reassessed', *The Historical Journal*, 51.2 (2008), 512.

¹⁴⁵ Paré, *Workes*, 272.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 417-418; see also, Anon., *Chirurgorum*, 520.

Chirurgorum Comes likewise gave instructions on how to ‘rectify’ or ‘[set] straight parts that are distorted’ either from a disease, from ‘some external violence’, from the rickets, or from ‘a hurt by a fall, blow, &c’.¹⁴⁷ Regarding non-congenital blindness, Bayfield mentioned that ‘some Practitioners do relate, that some by a wound in the forehead have been cured of blindness’ and therefore he suggested ‘to open the middle vein in the forehead, and let it bleed while it stop [sic] of it self’.¹⁴⁸ Those are but a few examples drawn from dozens upon dozens of other possible cures and fixes suggested by early modern medical practitioners. While physicians and surgeons were realistic that not everything could be cured (e.g. some types of sight or hearing loss), they did try their hardest to address those impairments they believed they could cure. The extent of their quests shows that some parents never lost hope.

1.3. Conclusion

The causes of and responses to impairments were thus manifold. Particularly for congenital impairments, God was the one common theme. He acted both directly and indirectly, either to forewarn humanity that they needed to repent and move away from sin, or to showcase his unfathomable power and influence over humans. He was also present in cases of acquired impairment, albeit much more tacitly.

I surveyed the existing literature on monstrous births which has thus far formed the bulk of our understanding of early modern childhood impairment and disability. It is an inherent part of early modern child disability and as such cannot be ignored. It additionally speaks greatly

¹⁴⁷ Anon., *Chirurgorum*, 525-526.

¹⁴⁸ Bayfield, *Tes*, 130.

to contemporaneous fears of divine retribution, good Christian behaviour and faith, and parental guilt. Similarly, the concept of naturalisation perfused most natural philosophical and medical explanations from the period: God acted mysteriously, and notably through natural ways. This led early modern people to come up with more mechanical explanations as to the causes of congenital impairments. This again resulted in much parental – in fact, mostly maternal – guilt, because of the view that pregnant mothers had the involuntary power to affect their foetuses with their unbridled imaginations.

Whereas congenital monstrosity could not be cured, it could at least be prevented. Non-monstrous congenital impairments, however, could potentially be cured depending on the type of impairment but also on its degree of ‘perfection’ (how long the impairment had been an inalienable part of the body). I addressed the cultural expectations surrounding impairments in children and how they implicitly elicited various but specific responses from people, and how poor early modern people could use them to their advantage. I will look at this in greater detail in subsequent chapters. On the matter of acquired impairments, I have established that cures and treatments for impaired children were consistently sought after. These impairments could prove greatly detrimental to poor households if they happened to be disabling, too. This led many parents to resort to so-called miracle and miraculous cures, such as those offered by ‘quacks’, but also to more famous and powerful ones like the royal touch.

Chapter Two will now contextualise my primary source base: petitions. It will first analyse the inner workings of the early modern English petitioning process. Then, it will expand upon the concept of ‘deserving’ poverty. And finally, it will examine the ever-significant reliance of the early modern English poor on neighbourly charity.

2. Petitioning

Chapter Two focuses on the primary source base for this dissertation, namely petitions, and is thus deeply methodological in nature. Moreover, within the context of this predominantly qualitative research project, this chapter is necessarily more quantitative than the rest of this dissertation. It contextualises not only my petitions but also the stories of the impaired and/or disabled children I have found within them. It additionally better supports my subsequent chapters in foregrounding the importance of community and parish involvement in the lives of poor impaired and/or disabled children and of their primary carers.

This chapter is divided into three overarching parts. First, I practically consider what a petition is. Petitions represent more than two thirds of my entire dataset and are present in all five of my chapters. It is thus important to understand not only their value but more importantly what and how they can teach us about the early modern disabled poor. As such, I answer the following questions: what is a petition? Who usually filed petitions? Who were these petitions directed at? What is a successful petition? My second part will provide much-needed socio-historical context for the existence of petitions. I expand on the fundamentals of the Elizabethan Poor Laws and insert my petitions within this social and legal context. Notably, I explain in detail the concepts of so-called ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poverty and relate them to matters of childhood and disability. My third part will finally address the pivotal role of neighbourly Christian charity in the lives of many early modern English poor people. Culturally, people would have been expected to rely on their networks of kin, friends, and neighbours to stave off destitution in place of or alongside petitioning their local officials for parochial relief. This chapter is based on my own analyses of the petitions I have collected for this research project, and which can be found in the appendix section of this dissertation,

as well as existing scholarship on petitioning and social welfare in England in the early modern period.

Early modern petitions form the backbone of this research project. In this, I join other scholars in utilising these diverse resources to illuminate the perspectives of early modern people and their negotiated relationships to authority.¹ These sources have been especially valuable for understanding the experiences of the poor. For example, Alexandra Shepard relies in part on petitions to ascertain linguistic and economic markers of poverty for the period: by looking at the frequency with which twenty shillings, and later forty shillings, was cited in petitions, she extrapolates that it was seen as the threshold between being simply poor and being utterly destitute.² Emily Rhodes has similarly utilised late seventeenth-century Quarter Sessions records from Lancashire to explore marriage trends in the period.³ She claims, for instance, that some married women illegally and informally separated from their husbands and subsequently turned to parish officials to finalise these separations. Jonathan Healey equally works primarily with petitions in his study of the emergence of organised poor relief in early modern Lancashire.⁴ He argues that poor relief in the 1620s was insufficient and did not reflect the socio-economic crisis of the time (e.g. the famine of the

¹ Brodie Waddell, 'The Popular Politics of Local Petitioning in Early Modern England', *Journal of British Studies*, 2024, 1–20; *The Power of Petitioning in Early Modern Britain*, ed. by Brodie Waddell and Jason Peacey (UCL Press, 2024); Sandra L. Dahlberg, "'Doe Not Forget Me': Richard Frethorne, Indentured Servitude, and the English Poor Law of 1601", *Early American Literature*, 47.1 (2012), 1–30; Jonathan Healey, *The First Century of Welfare* (Boydell Press, 2014); Merridee L. Bailey, "'Most Hevynesse and Sorowe": The Presence of Emotions in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Court of Chancery', *Law and History Review*, 37.1 (2019), 1–28; Steve Hindle, *On the Parish?: The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Clarendon, 2004).

² Alexandra Shepard, 'Poverty, Labour, and the Language of Social Description in Early Modern England', *Past & Present*, 201 (2008), 54, 67, 68.

³ Emily Rhodes, "'As Man and Wyfe Ought to Doe": Reconsidering Marital Separation in Early Modern England', *Cultural and Social History*, 2022, 1–18.

⁴ Jonathan Healey, 'The Development of Poor Relief in Lancashire, c.1598-1680', *The Historical Journal*, 53.3 (2010), 551–72.

first half of the decade). More importantly, he highlights that Quarter Sessions petitions slowly increased between the 1620s to the early 1640s and then again after the English Civil War.⁵

Some scholars have already demonstrated the utility of petitions for relief for understanding the lives of early modern disabled people. The petitions generated by former soldiers and injured civilians of the British Civil Wars, for example, have been productively examined by historians such as Geoffrey Hudson, Eric Gruber von Arni, and Ismini Pells to understand not only the medical treatment sought and available, but the dynamics of pleading disability and the options for relief and support wider society. Emily Cockayne also briefly uses petitions to highlight important contemporaneous concerns of care and dependency regarding disabled children and their ageing carers, which is a point that I myself explore in greater detail in subsequent chapters.⁶

I have taken great inspiration from these scholars in that I utilise my own petitions as a way to access the multitude of lived experiences of poor disabled early modern English children and those who interacted with them. This is, of course, not the purpose for which these sources were originally created, but they have nonetheless allowed historians to commune with the historical poor who otherwise left us very little *personal* written traces of their existence. Historians have stressed the utility of parish records, and in particular of petitions, in outlining the social-economic history of early modern England.⁷ Crucially, Rhodes has

⁵ *Ibid*, 563.

⁶ Emily Cockayne, 'Experiences of the Deaf in Early Modern England', *The Historical Journal*, 46.3 (2003), 493–510.

⁷ See for example, Faramerz Dabhoiwala, 'Writing Petitions in Early Modern England', in *Suffering and Happiness in England 1550-1850: Narratives and Representations*, ed. by Michael J. Braddick and Joanna Innes (Oxford University Press, 2017), 127; Robert F. W. Smith, 'Early Modern Petitions in the Norwich City Records: A Newly-Catalogued Collection at Norfolk Record Office', *Liverpool*

shown that, although some historians – in particular, Healey – have at times claimed that petitions were not an easy guide to the culture and mores of the poor of that period because they were usually scribed, they were written *in collaboration with* petitioners and thus related to actual facts of life.⁸ Moreover, she further contends that justices of the peace could easily corroborate these petitions by contacting local parish officials, and thus that petitions could not stray too far from the actual truth.⁹ This makes petitions tremendously useful and *relatively* reliable tools for historical research.

Current work by the *Power of Petitioning Project* continues to expand our knowledge of petitions in early modern England. The *Power of Petitioning Project* began in 2019 and investigates petitioning at all levels of government over the whole of early modern England. They have transcribed and digitised a corpus of more than 2,000 handwritten petitions from the period c.1570 to 1800, some of which I have used in my own research. Their main project team consists of three contributors: Brodie Waddell, as principal investigator; Jason Peacey, as co-investigator; and Sharon Howard, as postdoctoral research associate. Their efforts have made it possible to answer salient questions about the momentous socio-political changes of the early modern period. Notably, Waddell's 2024 article on the politics of petitioning in early modern England and Waddell and Peacey's recently published edited collection looks into the myriad ways in which early modern contemporaries could petition their local authorities and how it not only influenced politics but also reshaped the kingdom as a whole.¹⁰ I have taken great inspiration from their work, particularly of course their use of petitions as a way to access the lived experiences of early modern English people.

University Press Archives, 53.136 (2018), 12–26; *Understanding Early Modern Primary Sources*, ed. by Laura Sangha and Jonathan Willis (Routledge, 2016).

⁸ Rhodes, 'Reconsidering', 6.

⁹ *Ibid*, 6-7.

¹⁰ Waddell and Peacey, *Power*; Waddell, 'Popular Politics'.

2.1. Petitions: What Are They? And How Do They Work?

Simply put, petitions were semi-legal documents and were, for the most part, rarely longer than a page of text – some were even as short as a single paragraph. The vast majority of petitions were handwritten, although, as denoted by Waddell and Peacey, growing numbers eventually began to appear in print.¹¹ There existed different types of petitions such as royal petitions to the monarch or petitions for relief. For the most part, however, petitions were deeply fiscal in nature.¹² Petitions for relief, which form the bulk of my own data sample, described in varying levels of detail the reasons why petitioners had come to need relief.¹³

Petitions for relief were generated through the Poor Law system, particularly following the codification of the Poor Relief Act 1598 and 1601 and their subsequent amendments. While historians of social welfare have shown that this parliamentary act was the result of earlier social-economic experiments and that some parishes already occasionally provided for their poor members before the act was passed, they equally showed that it formalised and, to some extent, standardised poor relief in early modern England.¹⁴ This legislation is of special significance for this dissertation in that it clearly underpinned the importance and compulsory nature of social welfare for the most vulnerable members of early modern English society: the elderly, the ‘impotent’, the poor, the sick, the ‘maymed Souldiers and Marriners, and

¹¹ Waddell and Peacey, *Power*, 2.

¹² Waddell, ‘Popular Politics’, 4.

¹³ Jonathan Healey, ‘Social Discipline and the Refusal of Poor Relief under the English Old Poor Law, c.1650-1730’, *The Historical Journal*, 40.1 (2024), 9.

¹⁴ Marjorie K. McIntosh, ‘Poor Relief in Elizabethan English Communities: An Analysis of Collectors’ Accounts’, *The Economic History Review*, 67.2 (2014), 331, 332.

orphans.¹⁵ Historians have explored how this legislation allowed petitioners to strengthen their cases by mentioning that they belonged to one or several of these categories and thus to compel parishes to grant them relief.¹⁶ This is something that I study closely in my entire dissertation, but especially in Chapter Two, Three, and Five.

The general trend with petitions for relief was that justices of the peace would normally find in favour of the petitioners: for example, Healey shows that in his sample of 154 petitions from Lancashire, the justices of the peace presiding only refused relief in seven cases which represented a refusal rate of less than five per cent.¹⁷ This is, however, still important to mention in that it qualifies parish relief in the period: not every single request for relief was granted. There were also likely regional differences in this provision of relief in the sense that bigger urban centres would have almost certainly been able to provide more than smaller communities like villages and small townships.

Parish officials could be surprisingly generous and give petitioners exactly what they both wanted and needed. To illustrate this, I turn to the case of Margerie Cooper, a seventeenth-century lame orphan from Ormskirk in Lancashire, who was ‘lame not able to stand or goe to help her selfe’ and needed to be ‘p[ro]vyded for soe as shee may not perish & starve for want

¹⁵ ‘1601: 43 Elizabeth 1 c.4: An Acte to redresse the Misemployment of Landes Goodes and Stockes of Money heretofore given to Charitable Uses’, *The Statutes Project*, <<https://statutes.org.uk/site/the-statutes/seventeenth-century/1601-43-elizabeth-1-c-4-charitable-uses-act/>>, [accessed 9 December 2024].

¹⁶ *The Family in Early Modern England*, ed. by Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 130; Tim Hitchcock, Peter King, and Pamela Sharpe, ‘Introduction’, in *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640 - 1840*, ed. by Tim Hitchcock, Peter King, and Pamela Sharpe (Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 5; Peter Collinge, *Providing for the Poor: The Old Poor Law, 1750-1834* (University of London Press, 2022), 1; Joan Kent and Steve King, ‘Changing Patterns of Poor Relief in Some English Rural Parishes circa 1650-1750’, *Rural History*, 14.2 (2003), 121; Dahlberg, ‘Richard Frethorne’, 4.

¹⁷ Healey, *The First Century*, 95.

of help & sustenance'.¹⁸ The justices of the peace in charge of her case decided that 'the towne [should] sufficiently ... manteyne her' and that 'the Overssers of the poore [should] ... paye her in such case as they shall thinke fitt [sic]'. While the order was devoid of any specific amount, it still ensured that Cooper should be provided to the best of the town's ability.

Despite this high success rate, it is important to stress that 'success' was not always unmitigated, in the sense that petitioners did not always exactly receive what they had requested. Again, Healey highlights that pensions were sometimes of a lesser amount than had been solicited.¹⁹ Parish pensions were not generally intended to serve as a lone source of relief for the abjectly poor. They would have been expected to supplement parochial relief with additional sources of income such as, for example, neighbourly charity (which I explore later in this chapter), gleaning, more menial work, etc.²⁰ This is what Olwen Hufton, in 1974, initially coined as 'the economy of makeshifts', a phrase which perfectly summarised the disparate strategies of the poor to literally 'make shifts' or to secure their survival by drawing income or resources from various sources including, as previously mentioned, begging, charity, seasonal or itinerant work, gleaning, relief, etc.²¹ Petitioning should therefore not be understood as the ultimate form of welfare in the early modern period but rather as one part

¹⁸ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.432.6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Berry and Foyster, *The Family*, 150; Steve Hindle, 'Civility, Honesty and the Identification of the Deserving Poor in Seventeenth-Century England', in *Identity and Agency in English Society, 1500-1800*, ed. by Henry French and Jonathan Barry (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 42, 43; Steve Hindle, 'Dependency, Shame, and Belonging: Badging the Deserving Poor, c.1550-1750', *Cultural and Social History*, 1.1 (2004), 8.

²¹ *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts*, ed. by Alannah Tomkins and Steven King (Manchester University Press, 2003), 1; Healey, *The First Century*, 156; Joseph Harley, 'Pauper Inventories, Social Relations, and the Nature of Poor Relief under the Old Poor Law, England, c.1601-1834', *The Historical Journal*, 62.2 (2018), 376; Hindle, 'Civility', 43.

of a broader ecosystem of poor relief. For example, one of my petitions for relief shows that Anne Peach, a poor widow from Derbyshire, hoped the parish would ‘grant her a howse to lodge in, [and] such a competent somme weekly, as yow think fitt [sic]’.²² She was apparently ‘in above 5li. [pounds] in debt’, had ‘pawned all she hath’, had ‘exhausted her fortune’, and was responsible for a ‘young child that is lame, and altogether disabled to gett [sic] his liveing’. In response, the justices of the peace granted her request for relief but ordered that the parish should ‘repare her house’ and give her ‘1s weekly till they doe’. Her petition was successful in that the parish did not send her away with nothing, but also not so successful in the sense that the relief she received was paltry in respect to her level of destitution. She would have likely needed to supplement this income somehow by, for instance, begging or seeking charity from family, friends, and neighbours. Success within the confines of the petitioning process was therefore very much contingent.

The Language of Petitions for Relief

From the sixteenth-century onwards, petitions for relief followed somewhat predictable patterns. They normally began with a formulaic address to the justices of the peace and/or any officials presiding over the case.²³ For example, the petition of Edward Lucas of 1708 Lancashire began with ‘To the [Worshipfull] her Maj[es]ties Justices of the Peace’; Richard Kerby’s petition on behalf of his deaf-mute daughter opened with ‘To the right worshipfull the Justices of the peace & Quoru’; John Drable first addressed ‘ye hon[or]able his Maj[esties] Justices of ye peace’.²⁴ Likewise, petitions customarily but not always followed

²² Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, Q.SB.2.355.

²³ Edward Vallance, *Loyalty, Memory, and Public Opinion in England 1658-1727* (Manchester University Press, 2019), 24.

²⁴ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.983.12; QSP.178.17; Leeds, West Yorkshire Archive Service, QS1.27.6.

this with details about the location of the session: ‘at the quarter Sessions holden att [sic] Manchester’; ‘assembled at the generall Session of the peace holden at Taunton in the County of Somerset’; ‘att [sic] the quarter Sessions of the peace houlden att [sic] Ormskirk there assembled’.²⁵ Sixteenth-century petitions are slightly different: they might be noticeably longer and share more details about the petitioner’s plight. Equally, the petitioner might be referred as the ‘Oratour’.²⁶ Pre-seventeenth-century petitions also seemed to have preferred Roman numerals, while Arabic numerals are more often found in petitions from after the beginning of the seventeenth century. From a historical perspective, this is very useful in situating each petition within its socio-historical and geographical context.

The language used in early modern petitions was remarkably deferential, even grovelling at times. Disabled petitioners’ descriptions of themselves or their dependants as ‘poor cripples’, etc, must therefore be understood as part of this wider discursive context. Amanda Whiting has even suggested that petitions tended to use a ‘feminine speaking position’.²⁷ As I will shortly explain, this was not an indication of genuine or meaningful submissiveness. Each petition was entitled ‘The humble petition of’ followed by the name of the petitioner(s) and any potential identifiers (widow, tailor, shoemaker, etc). Some of the petitions I utilise in this dissertation also specified if a petition had been made on behalf of someone (usually, as it has turned out, a dependent disabled family member). For example, ‘the humble petition of Johane Wey of Bridport in the county of Dorset Widdowe for and on the behalf of William her son an apprentice unto Thomas Seaward of S[ain]t James in the said County of Dorset’; or ‘the humble peticon of Richard Kebry of Woodplumpton Taylor on the behalf of Margrett

²⁵ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.39.51, QSB.1.150.57; Taunton, Somerset Heritage Centre, Q.SPET.1.132.

²⁶ Richmond, National Archives, C1.1457.54.

²⁷ Vallance, *Loyalty*, 24.

Kerby his daughter'.²⁸ This was normally followed by a deferential hook – commonly 'humbly sheweth'. Waddell and Peacey note that petitioners could also outrightly beg, supplicate, or simply complain, thus reinforcing the similarities between petitions and legal texts.²⁹

Most of the petitions I have transcribed ended with a vehement and sometimes obsequious supplication – Edward Vallance calls this the *peroratio* or the 'appeal for the remedy'.³⁰ For instance, the 'humble' petition of Robert and Anne Godderd of Moston, Lancashire, ended with the following paragraph:

May it please yo[ur] wor[shi]pps therefore according to your accustomed
Care in the like Cases to appoint some way or meanes for the releife of the
said poore Cripple, according as shall seeme good to your wor[shi]pps,
Soe shall yo[ur] poore peticoners bee bound [with many others] to pray
for your wor[shi]pps present health & future happines [sic].³¹

Other petitioners 'humbly pray[ed]', referred to the justices' 'Favorable and pious Considerations', 'wise and mature Consideracon', or, like the Godderds, '[would] pray for your worshipps health and hapines longe to continewe'.³² This language, even if technically not all that sincere, accentuated the vulnerability of the poor who were essentially at the mercy of their social betters.

²⁸ Q.SPET.1.132; QSP.178.17. William Wey was 'lame' and reliant on his mother, while Margrett was 'deafe and dumbe' and likewise depended entirely on her parents.

²⁹ Waddell and Peacey, *Power*, 2.

³⁰ Vallance, *Loyalty*, 24.

³¹ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.175.72.

³² Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.254.5, QSP.235.22. Northampton, Northamptonshire Archives, QSR1.79.54; Stafford, Staffordshire Record Office, Q.SR.305.32.

Despite its overwhelming prevalence in petitions from the period, this language of grovelling deference was not one of genuine submissiveness to the justices of the peace or to authority. As Patricia Crawford puts it, ‘grovelling was strategic’.³³ And as Healey shows, grovelling and pity were the foundations upon which the entire petitioning system rested.³⁴ Someone asking for help had to not only show a deep sense of obeisance but equally prove that they deserved relief from the parish.³⁵ Within this context, merit was proportional to how pathetic a petitioner could make themselves out to be. Waddell and Peacey assert that petitions followed a script which aimed to underpin the worthiness of the petitioners as well as their need for relief from the parish.³⁶ Merridee L. Bailey also reiterates that petitioners chose emotions which would have resonated with their community’s sensibilities. As I will show in Chapter Three, this was especially important for impaired and/or disabled children and their primary carers.

In comparison, parish orders – that is, the sentence(s) sometimes found at the bottom of a petition or the separate petition which indicated whether relief had been granted and to what extent – were short and exceptionally unadorned. The resulting juxtaposition between the two styles is deeply jarring. The petition of Ellioner Reeve of 1601 Worcestershire emphasises this contrast perfectly. Her petition began with the usual emphatic address ‘to the right reverend father in God the Lord Bishopp [sic] and others her majesties justices of the peace’.³⁷ Likewise, she was the ‘lordships humble peticoner’. And finally, her petition

³³ Patricia Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children in England 1580-1800* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 162.

³⁴ Healey, *The First Century*, 100, 101, 107, 173, 183.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 101, 173.

³⁶ Waddell and Peacey, *Power*, 36-37.

³⁷ Worcester, Worcestershire Archives and Archaeology Service, BA1.1.16.29.

concluded with a supplication: ‘your suppliant thus distressed humblye prayeth your lordships to take some order in her behalf’. Following this, at the bottom of her petition, we can see that the parish officials in charge of her case responded simply with ‘ordered that they provide etc or yf they complayne a precept to be made to bynde them etc’ – ‘they’ likely referred to the churchwardens Ellioner mentioned in her petition. They used no punctuation whatsoever and only used incomplete clauses to convey their order. Another similar petition from 1675 by Alice Yeomans followed the same contrasting pattern. It began by presenting Yeomans as deferent (‘humble’) and ended with a grovelling supplication:

May it therefore please this Honorable Court to take y^e Condicon of your poore and Misserable peticoner into your wise and mature Consideracon and to grant your oder to give some Releeife [sic] according as you shall think fitt [sic] & your peticoner as in duty bound shall ever pray.³⁸

As a response to her cry for help, the justices of the peace wrote ‘6d p[er] weeke till further order’. This was likely done for the sake of efficiency, and parish officials would not have needed to be held up to the same standards as petitioners – they were not the ones asking for help and as such did not need to be suppliant. I suggest that it is equally a reminder of who was in control and that it maintained a sense of hierarchy. This tracks with Faramerz Dabhoiwala’s claim that petitions were a written manifestation of a clear imbalance of power: although supplicants retained a level of agency over their desperate pleas for help, ultimately it was always the prerogative of those who were being petitioned to grant or deny relief.³⁹ In this, the latter held all the power.

³⁸ QSR1.79.54.

³⁹ Dabhoiwala, ‘Writing’, 147.

Therefore, petitions were short, formulaic, semi-legal documents used by early modern poor people to reach out to their parish officials for help. The language employed in petition was necessarily but not genuinely pathetic (as in, arousing pity) and grovelling. In contrast, the subsequent parish orders which might follow were short, simple, and to the point.

Petitioners

Scholars such as Waddell, Peacey, Rhodes, and Healey have shown that petitions were virtually all written collaboratively.⁴⁰ Litigation was inherent to early modern English society, yet building a petition was an arduous and standardised process which necessitated a solid grasp of social and petitioning norms.⁴¹ Therefore, litigating was often done in collaboration with a professional scribe (or scrivener) or with someone with decent scribal skills and a solid knowledge of the petitioning system: not all petitioners, in particular the more destitute ones, were able to employ the services of professional scribes. Professional scribes could charge prohibitive rates which disqualified most indigent litigants from hiring their services.⁴² Dabhoiwala demonstrates that some professional London scribes could charge up to six pence to compose a simple petition and that some more renowned scribes could even go as high as one and half shillings thus putting themselves far out of the price range of most destitute petitioners.⁴³ Poor petitioners, therefore, depended on the support of neighbours and

⁴⁰ Waddell, 'Popular Politics', 5-7; Rhodes, 'Reconsidering', 6-7; Waddell and Peacey, *Power*, 38, 64, 65; Healey, *The First Century*, 93, 94.

⁴¹ Waddell and Peacey, *Power*, 64, 65.

⁴² Dabhoiwala, 'Writing', 132, 135.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 135.

sponsors to craft compelling petitions.⁴⁴ Amateur scribes could range from a manor lord to a local churchwarden, a schoolmaster, or even a shopkeeper.⁴⁵

Who were these petitions by then? This is an important question which will inform our understanding and conception of the historical actors under scrutiny in this dissertation and especially in the subsequent three chapters. Realistically, an overwhelming majority of petitions were filed by commoners, from the most indigent pauper to the more comfortably off craftsman.⁴⁶ David Zaret has even shown that slaves could file petitions.⁴⁷ My own dataset (see Table 2 below) further illustrates that petitions were filed by a great miscellany of individuals. My petitions of course centre on impaired and/or disabled early modern English children and those contemporaries who shared lives and experiences with them, but they still appear to be following common early modern trends. Fifteen of my petitions for relief were done by widows: of these fifteen petitions, eleven were by widows who were directly related to their impaired and/or disabled children and were seeking relief on their behalf, too; two were by widows who were unrelated to their impaired and/or disabled charges; another two were simply by widows who were themselves disabled either by old age or by some kind of impairment, but who were either connected to a disabled child in some way or whose cases showed a long-term impact of childhood disability. Seven of my petitions were submitted by single women or ‘spinsters’.⁴⁸ Fourteen petitions were done by men: six were by fathers or brothers of impaired and/or disabled dependants, three by unrelated male primary carers, and

⁴⁴ Waddell and Peacey, *Power*, 65, 66.

⁴⁵ Dabhoiwala, ‘*Writing*’, 128.

⁴⁶ Waddell, ‘*Popular Politics*’, 6.

⁴⁷ Vallance, *Loyalty*, 23-24

⁴⁸ I am following Amy M. Froide’s framework of ‘never-married’ and ‘ever-married’ women here and therefore sort single women and widows into two clearly distinct categories. Widows and single women would have been treated very differently by their contemporaries based solely on their marital status. Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

five by male petitioners with a different link to the child. Two of my petitions were drafted jointly by parents. The rest consisted of petitions by masters (7), parish officials (4), townships (3), one apprentice, one child, and one petitioner acting on behalf of a child. Finally, twenty-three consisted of a mixture of parish orders and legal depositions/testimonies relating to impaired and/or disabled individuals.

Therefore, excluding miscellaneous parish records such as removal orders, legal testimonies, and depositions, the greatest percentage of my petitions were filed by widows, followed closely by men (the majority of whom were seeking help for the benefit of an impaired and/or disabled dependant), and single women (all of whom were disabled and seeking relief from the parish). This chimes with the findings of other historians who have argued that a considerable number of petitioners were widows and elderly people – Chapter Five will examine the role of widows in the lives of impaired and/or disabled children in much greater detail.⁴⁹

Ratio of Petitioners (Table 2)		
Petitioners	Number of Petitions	Percentage
Widows	15	19%
Widows (mothers)	11	
Widows (unrelated)	2	
Widows (lone)	2	
Men	14	18%
Men (fathers & brothers)	6	
Men (unrelated)	3	
Men (lone)	5	
Single Women	7	9%
Masters	7	9%
Parish Officials	4	5%

⁴⁹ *Ibid*; Healey, 'Social Discipline', 9; Waddell and Peacey, *Power*, 6.

Townships	3	4%
Parents (joint)	2	2.5%
Child (or on behalf of)	2	2.5%
Apprentice	1	1.5%
Miscellaneous	23	29.5%
Total	78	100%

I have used three different types of petitions for relief in my research: petitions which were filed by only one named individual, petitions by two or more named people, and petitions headed by a group acting as one hermetic entity. This is in keeping with the findings of Waddell and Peacey who have also identified three types of petitions: solo, group, and collective.⁵⁰ Solo petitions in my research were crafted by disabled widows, single women, or by people acting on behalf of a dependent disabled child: the ‘Humble Peticion of An Peach a poor disconsolate Widdow’ was filed by only one person on behalf of herself and of her ‘young child that is lame, and altogether disabled to gett [sic] his liveing’; Elianor Asmough, the ‘pore distressed Cripple’ from 1628 Wilmington, Lancashire, petitioned her justices of the peace on her own behalf and was the only one heading her own petition.⁵¹ Second, group petitions were very much similar to solo petitions, except that they were crafted by multiple named petitioners. For example, the 1642 Lancashire petition of the ‘poore old, blind, widowe’ Jane Woodburne, the ‘poore old infirme widow’ Elizabeth Shawe, and of Elizabeth Gawith, the orphan ‘Cripple’ whom they looked after, clearly named Woodburne, Shawe, and Gawith as three distinct petitioners with a mutual goal. They formed part of the same household – their aim was the same – but they acted as individuals as opposed to a compounded, collective whole. This allowed them to emphasise and coalesce their individual needs and impairments: the first two were old widows, respectively blind and ‘infirm’, and

⁵⁰ Waddell and Peacey, *Power*, 247.

⁵¹ Q.SB.2.355; QSB.1.39.51.

the last one was an orphan ‘Cripple’. As we will see in the next section, they were the ideal ‘deserving’ poor, which was emphasised by their petitioning together but as distinct idiosyncratic individuals.

Collective petitioning was a bit more complex, and historians have shed much light on the practice.⁵² Waddell, for instance, explains that collective claims aimed to emulate the voice of the community, and they presented a united and unified front as a way to strengthen the demands of the people.⁵³ Within this confine, he and Peacey have identified two kinds of ‘petition participants’: the petitioners and the subscribers.⁵⁴ The former headed the petitioning, while the latter added their signatures to the petition as a form of support.⁵⁵ Some of my own petitions, for example, were drafted by ‘the inhabitants of Aintree [Aintree] w[i]thin the p[ar]ish of Sefton’ in Lancashire, or by ‘the p[ar]ishon[ers] of the p[ar]ish of Westward’ in Cumberland.⁵⁶ Their petitions considered them a hermetic entity and consistently referred to them in the plural as ‘your sayd peticioners’, ‘the p[ar]ishon[ers] of the said p[ar]ish’, or simple ‘they’. The people of Aintree were also referred to in the singular by using the collective noun ‘Towne’, as in ‘the sayd Towne’, thus reinforcing the collaborative and single-minded nature of their approach. Naming an individual, identifiable representative head for the community would not have had the same impact as acting as a collective whole. In some cases, to further strengthen their claims, some of the participants added their names to their petitions.⁵⁷ In the case of the petition of the people of Aintree, I counted a total of twelve signatures: ‘Rich[ard] Lathom / Bryan Fleetwood / William Garston

⁵² Waddell and Peacey, *Power*, 247; Waddell, ‘Popular Politics’, 11.

⁵³ Waddell, ‘Popular Politics’, 2.

⁵⁴ Waddell and Peacey, *Power*, 247.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.432.8; Carlisle, Carlisle Archives Centre, Q.11.1.42.32.

⁵⁷ Waddell and Peacey, *Power*, 247, 249; Waddell, ‘Popular Politics’, 7, 8, 16, 17.

/ William Abye / Robert Richardson / William Winstandley / Antony Hey / Henery [sic]
Farrer / William [Forbrew?] / Thomas Johnson / Mathew Ascroft / Robert Wignall’.

Interestingly, all of these names were written in the same hand, suggesting that these subscribers had not signed their own names but had instead let the scrivener in charge of drafting their petition do so in their place.

As such, a great variety of individuals could file petitions, and in particular petitions for relief. The majority of them were commoners and, in my own research, a significant proportion of them were disabled widows, disabled single women, or single men acting on behalf of a dependent disabled child. The rest of them were a miscellaneous mixture of masters (disabled and non-disabled), impaired and/or disabled apprentices, and collective entities like a township or a group of unnamed parishioners.

2.2. ‘Deserving’ Relief

Historians such as Steve Hindle, Healey, and others have greatly enriched our understanding of what it meant to be poor in early modern England, in particular the different types of poor people as so-called ‘deserving’ and ‘underserving’ and what they could do to survive (parish support, charity, begging, gleaning, compulsory work for children).⁵⁸ Crawford in particular has written one of the most comprehensive texts on the lives of poor parents and their children in early modern England from which I have drawn heavily throughout this

⁵⁸ Hindle, *On the Parish*; Healey, *The First Century*; Kent and King, ‘Changing Pattern’; see also, Healey, ‘Development’, 551-572; David Hitchcock, *Vagrancy in English Culture and Society, 1650-1750* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016); Shepard, ‘Poverty’, 54, 63, 66-68; See further, Karen O’Brien, ‘Companions of Heart and Hearth: Hardship and the Changing Structure of the Family in Early Modern England Townships’, *Journal of Family History*, 39.3 (2014).

dissertation.⁵⁹ Most importantly, she has broadened our understanding of what it meant to care for children when living in poverty.

The academic scholarship on the ‘deserving’ (or ‘helpless’) and ‘undeserving’ early modern English poor is equally rich and varied with historians such as Healey, Hindle, Waddell, Joseph Harley, Andrew Wear and others having written at length about the subject.⁶⁰ Healey, Joan Kent and Steve King, and other historians in particular have written about the badges that ‘deserving’ paupers had to, *in theory*, wear to highlight the fact that they were receiving pensions from the parish.⁶¹ Hindle specifically advances that, for some early modern people, pauper badges were simultaneously worn as badges of honour. They supposedly indicated that whoever wore one of these badges would have been seen as a person of integrity (despite their financial hardships) and especially one who had passed the ‘stringent tests of eligibility on which magistrates and parish officers generally insisted’.⁶² According to Hindle still, pauper badges were an indication that the wearer was conforming to the social and moral standards which had been set out by the parish such as sobriety, piety, and the fear of God, but also that they underpinned the wearer’s industriousness and willingness to provide for

⁵⁹ Crawford, *Parents*.

⁶⁰ Hindle, ‘Dependency’; Harley, ‘Pauper Inventories’; Waddell, ‘Popular Politics’; Amy M. Froide, ‘Marital Status as a Category of Difference: Singlewomen and Widows in Early Modern England’, in *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800*, ed. by Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Jonathan Andrews, ‘Identifying and Providing for the Mentally Disabled in Early Modern London’, in *Mental Deficiency: Historical Perspectives on People with Learning Disabilities*, ed. by Anne Digby and David Wright (Routledge, 1996), 65–92; Healey, ‘Development’; Healey, *The First Century*; Hindle, *On the Parish*; Froide, *Never Married*; Katherine Schaap Williams, *Unfixable Forms: Disability, Performance, and the Early Modern English Theatre* (Cornell University Press, 2021); Alun Withey, *Physick and the Family: Health, Medicine, and Care in Wales, 1600-1750* (Manchester University Press, 2016); Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Irina Metzler, ‘Disability in the Middle Ages and Cultural History’, *WerkstattGeschichte*, 65 (2013), 55–65.

⁶¹ Hindle, ‘Dependency’, 8; Harley, ‘Pauper Inventories’, 394; Kent and King, ‘Changing Patterns’, 136, 138; Healey, *The First Century*, 80; Hindle, *On the Parish*, 434.

⁶² Hindle, ‘Civility’, 50.

themselves and their family.⁶³ Historians, however, have also shown that badging the early modern poor led to much polemic surrounding outdoor relief in the period and fostered feelings that relief encouraged dependency.⁶⁴

While my sources do not mention anything about pauper badges as such, they do evidence the remarkable efforts of petitioners in trying to justify their reasons for seeking relief in the first place. This is especially relevant to this research project in so far as most of my petitioners would have been ‘helpless’ or so-called ‘deserving’ poor – for instance, widows or (disabled) orphans. This meant that, in contrast to their ‘undeserving’ counterparts, they would have been legally entitled to outdoor relief. Other scholars have centred instead on the paternalistic nature of granting relief and of providing for the ‘deserving’ or ‘helpless’ poor.⁶⁵ Waddell, for example, argues that thinking of the country as an macrocosmic analogy to the household legitimated paternalistic regulation of that ‘household’.⁶⁶ In this, he shows that, among others, the petitioning poor were dependent on the benevolent sentiments of parish officials to survive. Hillary Taylor likewise underscores that the idea of paternalist duty kept the wealthier gentry from unabashedly litigating against the poor.⁶⁷

The distinction between deserving and undeserving is, in theory, fairly simple yet it is central to this dissertation. The ‘undeserving’ poor were those could work but supposedly chose not to.⁶⁸ The ‘deserving’ poor, on the other hand, were those who were seen as worthy recipients

⁶³ *Ibid*; Hindle, ‘Dependency’, 13.

⁶⁴ Harley, ‘Pauper Inventories’, 394; Hindle, ‘Dependency’, 8; 10.

⁶⁵ Berry and Foyster, *The Family*, 133.

⁶⁶ Brodie Waddell, *God, Duty, and Community in English Economic Life, 1660-1720* (Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 85, 87.

⁶⁷ Hillary Taylor, ‘The Price of the Poor’s Words: Social Relations and the Economics of Deposing for One’s “Bettors” in Early Modern England’, *Economic History Review*, 72.3 (2019), 828.

⁶⁸ Hindle, *On the Parish*, 100.

of parochial aid because they legitimately could not work towards their own maintenance. This group included orphans, elderly people, the sick, the ‘lame’, parishioners with many dependent children, and widows.⁶⁹ Amy M. Froide explains that widows featured in this category because they were often either elderly or with many children to their charge. For example, the petition of Elizabeth Atkinson of the small early eighteenth-century village of Eastrington in the East Riding of Yorkshire shows that Atkinson was not only a widow caring for two ‘Lame Children with her hand Labour’, but that she was herself ‘Lame and weak’.⁷⁰ Unsurprisingly then, widows were among the most common recipients of parish relief in the period, and I will delve deeper into this in the second half of Chapter Five.⁷¹

Similarly, the ‘deserving’ sick and ‘lame’ are at the very core of my own research. Virtually all of my sources were about or by impaired and/or disabled individuals (and especially children). This resonates with works by scholars who have shown that petitioners endeavoured to accentuate or at the very least bring close attention to their individual helplessness or worthiness.⁷² Most of my petitioners were at pains to emphasise their own deservingness on grounds of their being somehow disabled themselves (e.g. by impairment, by illness, by old age) or of being ‘burthened’ with disabled dependants.⁷³ The petition of Isabell Browne of Chorley in Lancashire, for instance, stressed right from the start that she was a ‘widdow’ and also ‘poore ould & very lame & Impotent’.⁷⁴ Moreover, she was responsible for ‘William Browne her sone’ who was himself ‘a very lame & decrepit boye’.

⁶⁹ Froide, ‘Marital Status’, 252.

⁷⁰ Beverley, East Riding Archives, QSF.23.D.2.

⁷¹ *Ibid*; Froide, *Never-Married*, 34, 36.

⁷² Olivia Weisser, *Ill Composed: Sickness, Gender, and Belief in Early Modern England* (Yale University Press, 2015), 160, 161, 162, 163, 165; Waddell, ‘Popular Politics’, 8; Healey, *The First Century*, 107; Smith, ‘Early Modern Petitions’, 15; see further, Berry and Foyster, *The Family*, 133, 147.

⁷³ Maidstone, Kent History and Library Centre, QM.SB.916.

⁷⁴ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.296.18.

The petition even reiterated further down that Isabell had been brought to ‘extreme poverty by reason of her [lameness] & disability of body’ and that her son could not help at all because he was ‘noe way able to labor for his liveinge by reason of his decrepitude & disability of body’. This ties in with my earlier section on the language of petitions: while petitioners were dutiful in showing proper deference to those in control of their financial future, they also made sure to properly underscore what specifically made them ‘deserving’ of parish relief. Chapter Three will explore how primary carers could make use of their charges’ impairments to bolster their claims to parochial aid. My petitioners never missed an opportunity to mention that they were themselves somehow disabled or that the children for whom they cared were ‘lame’, ‘blind’, ‘deaf and dumb’, or ‘impotent’ in some way. And as we will later see, this was obviously not innocent.

Thus, ‘deserving’ or ‘helpless’ poverty was an official and legal poor-law classification used commonly by early modern English society and particularly by parish officials. The ‘deserving’ or ‘helpless’ poor were those who wanted to work but genuinely could not. This category included the sick, the disabled, widows, orphans, and those with many children under their moral and financial responsibility. Understanding this denomination is essential for this dissertation in so far as virtually all my petitioners were ‘deserving’ poor.

2.3. Neighbourly Charity: Supporting and Supplementing

In this final section, I want to briefly investigate the pivotal import of neighbourly Christian charity in the lives of indigent early modern English people, and more particularly in the lives of my petitioners. Many of the people featured in my petitions referred to having received charity from friends and neighbours prior to reaching out to the parish. The academic

literature on charity is likewise extensive and a great many scholars have underscored that charitable giving was as central in the lives of poor early modern people as relief from the parish. Katherine Allen, in particular, has described this combination of charity and welfare as a ‘mixed economy of care’.⁷⁵ She was focusing on the sick poor, but her point still applies more widely to the generally poor. Similarly, Hindle has stated that charity often became a necessity in old age: retirement was not a concept as such, therefore people tended to work until they physically could not do so anymore.⁷⁶ For instance, widows sometimes re-entered domestic service (spinning wool, making lace, etc.) but had to eventually stop once their eyesight was too diminished or if they began to suffer from arthritis.⁷⁷ Hindle shows that, once fully incapacitated, poor elderly people often had to resort to seeking charity from friends and neighbours.⁷⁸

Other historians have equally expressed that Christian charity was not at all the prerogative of the elderly or of the sick. For example, Crawford indicates that poor early modern parents commonly taught their children basic survival skills such as how to beg, how to secure help from the parish, and how to obtain charity from one’s friends and neighbours.⁷⁹ Kent and King have also suggested that relief in northern England specifically was at times insufficient which almost inevitably resulted in more poor people becoming reliant and dependent on charity from kin, friends, and neighbours.⁸⁰ Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos has further shown that masters and apprentices could develop lasting bonds of friendship, which then allowed

⁷⁵ Katherine Allen, ‘Hobby and Craft: Distilling Household Medicine in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Early Modern Women*, 11.1 (2016), 96; see also, Healey, *The First Century*, 127.

⁷⁶ Hindle, *On the Parish*, 25.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 26; see further, Berry and Foyster, *The Family*, 133.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 25, 26.

⁷⁹ Crawford, *Parents*, 136.

⁸⁰ Kent and King, ‘Changing Patterns’, 127.

them to rely on each other long after the end of their contractual obligations.⁸¹ These life-long relationships further extended their networks of care and acted as a safety net: in this way, charity could flow in both directions.⁸² Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster have further reinforced this by showing that in the late seventeenth century, it was perfectly common for some justices of the peace to allow and even encourage mendicancy.⁸³ Charity was thus at the core of poor relief in early modern England.

This is further reflected in some of the petitions for relief I have extracted from county archives and upon which I rely throughout this dissertation. Petitioners sometimes mentioned that they had been able to rely on the charitable help of friends and neighbours for some time before having to present an appeal for formal relief. For example, the petition of Jane Rigbye, widow, from Lancashire emphasised that she had been able to support herself and her ‘3 Children of which it pleased Almightye [God] to stryke lame one of them’ by ‘her paynes & industrie’ but also, crucially, thanks to her ‘good neighbors’.⁸⁴ Similarly, in 1726, the petition of Robert Hall’s five surviving children showed that they were hoping to travel from East Yorkshire down to ‘South Britain’ to lodge with ‘Friends and Relations’.⁸⁵ Both their parents and one of their siblings had been tortured and subsequently murdered by ‘Eight Robbers’. These eight robbers had first ‘most barbarously murdered [their father]’ and then ‘set fire to [their home]’ which had rather horrifically ‘consumed [their mother] and One child’. If we follow the tenets of the notion of ‘deserving’ poverty which I established in the previous section, as young orphans they would have already been entitled to some form of parish relief

⁸¹ Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, ‘Gifts and Favors: Informal Support in Early Modern England’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 72.2 (2000), 311.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Berry and Foyster, *The Family*, 147.

⁸⁴ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.150.57.

⁸⁵ Beverley, East Riding Archives, QSF.74.E.2.

– three of them were additionally ‘both sick and lame’, too, which would have added yet another layer of ‘helplessness’ to their case. But they also clearly anticipated being able to depend upon the charity of these ‘Friends and Relations’ in their time of need. Their petition stated that they, the children, ‘*expect[ed]*’ [emphasis my own] some support in this their great distress’ from their ‘Friends and Relations’ in the south. This suggests that this was not just hopeful thinking on their part but a genuine social and moral expectation that their friends from ‘South Britain’ would prove to be charitable and thus that they would step in to help them.

Another example illustrates that Katherin Kitchine from c.1674 Woodplumpton, Lancashire, would supposedly not have survived to petition her local parish and would have ‘starved for want of maintenance’ if not for ‘the benevolence of some well disposed [sic] p[er]sons’.⁸⁶ A final example exemplifies that elderly widows Jane Woodburne and Elizabeth Shawe and their disabled orphan charge Elizabeth Gawith had been doing ‘prittie well’ by supplementing their small quarterly parish pension with ‘the helpe of our neighbours’.⁸⁷ They had apparently been relying heavily on neighbourly Christian charity. They did, however, qualify that, since sustaining ‘great pennurie’, they had become ‘verie birthensome to our next neighbours’ and could ‘noe longer subsist’ on what the neighbours could spare. Their petition underscores the life-saving significance of neighbourly charity in the life of the deserving early modern English poor. In a similar way, more generally, my petitions confirm that there existed a cultural and tacit expectation that one could rely on one’s neighbours and friends in times of penury or of extreme need.

⁸⁶ Preston, Lancashire Archives, Q.S.P.415.12.

⁸⁷ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.1.269C.6.

Some of my petitioners were comparably very eager to show that they were *unable* to rely on neighbours and friends. It served as a way to emphasise that they were isolated and thus even more deserving of help from the parish. If anything, this further confirms that neighbourly charity was regarded as central to the welfare of the early modern English poor and that it would have been construed as a legitimate source of socio-economic relief by most contemporaries. For example, the 1636 petition of Robert and Anne Godderd on behalf of Ralph Thorpe, Anne's 'poor lame Cripple' son, laboured to accentuate that Ralph was unable to depend on charity, be it from either kin, friends, or neighbours.⁸⁸ The petition elucidated that 'some of his frends [sic] which have formerly maynteyned him' were now dead, and that those who were still alive lived 'in such povertie as they are not able to releive him'. Robert and Anne Godderd were themselves just as destitute, and therefore 'the said Cripple is like to famish for lack of maynteynance, unles [sic] some other way bee appointed by your wor[shi]pps for his [sustenance]'. By emphasising that Ralph could not depend on charity, Robert and Anne furthered his chances of receiving relief from the parish. The same can be said of Isabell Browne, the widow from Chorley, and her 'very lame & decrepit' son whom I mentioned previously in this chapter.⁸⁹ Browne stated that her disabled son had no 'releiffe but from yo[ur] pet[itioner]'. Whether this was a rhetorical way to avoid mentioning any potential past receipt of neighbourly charity outright, or whether this showed that the Brownes had truly not received any help from their friends and neighbours at all is not clear from this petition. Nevertheless, the intention behind this statement was likely to emphasise their isolation by alluding to the fact that they had no one else upon whom to depend. Another similar petition about Anne Platte, a 'lame criple [sic]' from c.1640 Manchester, highlighted that she had 'no percon lefte her' and that she was 'destitute of habitacon friends &

⁸⁸ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.175.72.

⁸⁹ QSP.296.18.

meanes'.⁹⁰ The rhetoric behind these petitions was that, if these poor petitioners had no one who would willingly come to their rescue by offering them charity, then surely the parish, as a last resort, would step in and save them by providing adequate relief instead. It underpinned how dire their situation was and how very desperately they needed parochial aid.

While litigating financial matters, petitioners might have also wished to emphasise the strength of their hardship by foregrounding that the person against whom they were petitioning could more readily rely on neighbours, friends, and family. For example, in c.1557, William Nycholas raised a grievance regarding the dire situation in which he found himself. His petition was about three people: William Nycholas, the petitioner; Frances Skiff, the person against whom Nycholas was litigating; and Elizabeth Skrogge, a thirteen-year-old girl who was both 'lame' and 'impotente'.⁹¹ While it is not stated outright, the petition suggests that Elizabeth was Frances' younger sister: Frances was apparently also known as 'Skrogges of Alburye', 'Skrogge' being Elizabeth's surname; moreover, Frances had been looking after Elizabeth for 'a long tyme', which might imply that he had had to take on the role of primary carer once their parents had died.

The petition recounted that Frances, who wished to 'Rydde owt of his house the seid Elizabeth' had promised to pay William the yearly sum of six shillings in exchange for his taking in his sister. This sum was to go towards the provision of 'meate drynk & Apparell' for Elizabeth so caring for her would not cost William and his family anything. William was reportedly satisfied with this spoken agreement and welcomed Elizabeth into his household. However, Frances soon failed to make the agreed payments, which eventually led William to

⁹⁰ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.227.97.

⁹¹ Richmond, National Archives, C1.1457.54.

file this petition. He resorted to the usual petitioning tropes of claiming that he was a ‘very poore man’ and that he had a ‘wiff & many Small Chyldern [sic]’. But he also highlighted the fact that, while Frances had many ‘Frendes & Allyes’, he himself had ‘fewe or no Frends nor Any Acguayntences’. William was therefore very eager to point out that he and his household were deeply isolated and that they could not rely on neighbourly charity to help them out of their plight. He thus further reinforced this by contrasting his situation with that of Frances who was wealthier and had many friends and neighbours upon whom to rely in times of need.

Neighbourly charity was thus at the very core of poor relief in early modern England, arguably even to the same extent as outdoor parochial relief. The scholarship as well as my petitions have shown that the early modern English culture of communal poor relief meant that people would have tacitly reached out to their family, friends, and neighbours in times of strife to help keep utter poverty at bay. Petitioners were likewise anxious to emphasise any potential inability to access or rely on charity whenever asking for parish relief. It painted them as desperately isolated and boosted their chances of receiving that relief. For some disabled children and their families, neighbourly help may have been enough to get by in life: those children are not in these petitions, and therefore their stories are waiting to be told. For others, community and neighbourly care *are* visible in petitions for relief, which will be the subject of Chapter Five.

2.4. Conclusion

In Chapter Two, I have first given a thorough overview of early modern English petitions for relief, my main source base for uncovering the experiences of impoverished impaired and/or disabled children in early modern England. I have demonstrated the extraordinary historical

value of petitions, and answered questions that matter greatly for the subsequent three chapters of this dissertation: who normally filed petitions? How did they ask for help? Who were their petitions directed at? And what is a successful petition? Second, I centred my attention on the important poor-law concepts of ‘deserving’ (or ‘helpless’) and ‘undeserving’ poverty and evidenced that my petitioners all fell under the umbrella of ‘deserving’ poor. Finally, I analysed the central import of neighbourly charity in the lives of many an early modern English poor person. I showed that charity was often mentioned in petitions as a way to further measure how deserving of relief a given petitioner was.

This chapter has acted as a crucial methodological interlude between Chapter One and Three. It has served as a way to properly introduce petitions as a means of accessing the lived experiences of impaired and/or disabled children and those who existed alongside them. Furthermore, it has allowed me to somewhat distance my own research from what has been previous done on the subject of child disability (i.e. claims of monstrosity based on more intellectual and literary sources).

In Chapter Three, I will first direct my attention onto the kinship carers who looked after and provided for impaired and/or disabled early modern English children. I will then concentrate on some of the ways in which these carers managed to do so.

3. Caring for Early Modern English Impaired Children

By primarily utilising petitions for relief from across England from the period 1550 to 1750, I aim to illustrate that early modern English families took care of their disabled children. I first analyse the role and importance of kinship in relation to the care and upbringing of early modern English impaired and/or disabled children. Parents, whether biological or not, single or married, male or female, both practically and emotionally cared for their impaired offspring. Similarly, for reasons I will explore in this chapter, siblings and grandparents sometimes had to step in to take on the mantle of parenthood. I then showcase how primary carers could provide for their disabled charges – e.g. by utilising impairments as rhetorical tools when trying to secure relief from the parish.

As many scholars have shown, early modern children were deeply loved by their parents, thus disproving one of Aries' principal tenets. Back in 1988, Margaret Pelling inferred how deeply parents loved their children by looking at how much they were willing to pay when their children suffered life-threatening injuries or sickness.¹ Hannah Newton's research on the early modern sick child, while primarily concerned with presenting 'children's physic' as distinct from its adult counterpart, evidenced the deep emotional connection parents felt towards their children.² Similarly, Anna French has looked at parental and filial love from a more religious perspective: a parent's love for their child was seen as the 'most natural gift'

¹ Margaret Pelling, 'Child Health as a Social Value in Early Modern England', *Social History of Medicine*, 1.2 (1988), 138-139.

² Hannah Newton, 'The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580-1720', *Endeavour*, 38.2 (2014), 3-5; Hannah Newton, *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2, 142.

from God.³ Disability even appears in metaphors of parental love in early modern writing, with claims that losing a child to disease or injury was comparable to having one's teeth pulled out or having 'a Leg or an Arme ... sawd off from [one's] Body'.⁴ Indeed then, parents did more than just provide for their young charges' basic needs of food, water, shelter, and clothes. They aspired to keep their children out of harm's way as well as in relatively good health, which – as we noted in Chapter One – was no small task in the early modern period. Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos writes that there was a clear assumption on the part of most early modern contemporaries that parents of all financial and social backgrounds should and would try their hardest to provide for their children.⁵ Their ultimate goal was for their children to survive into adulthood and attain full social and financial independence – and possibly care for them in turn. In this chapter, I foreground that these expectations of care were no different for parents of impaired children.

In regard to terminology, the more general 'primary carers' is preferred here in that it more aptly and more realistically describes experiences of early modern parenthood and provision of care. It also perfectly serves our purpose in that one's primary carers were not necessarily one's biological parents. Katie Barclay has described the early modern family as an 'unstable institution' which 'expanded and contracted over time'.⁶ Servants would normally live with the people for whom they worked; relatives might come to stay for extended periods of time; apprentices would usually join their master's household for the duration of their

³ Anna French, *Children of Wrath: Possession, Prophecy, and the Young in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016), 37-38.

⁴ I. C., *A Handkercher for Parents Wet Eyes, Upon the Death of Children* (London: E. A., 1630), 1.

⁵ Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, 'Gifts and Favors: Informal Support in Early Modern England', *The Journal of Modern History*, 72.2 (2000), 301.

⁶ Katie Barclay, 'The Early Modern Family', in *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction*, ed. by Anna French (Oxford: Routledge, 2020), 16.

apprenticeship; children from wealthier families would eventually leave to go to boarding school or, for poorer children, to learn a trade by, for example, taking up an apprenticeship.⁷ Furthermore, while nuclear family units did exist, the high mortality rates of the period meant that many children grew up without one or both of their parents.⁸ Financial hardships and death meant that poor families were no strangers to remarriages, so much so in fact that, after several remarriages, some poor children could find themselves ‘biologically unrelated’ to their carers.⁹ As this chapter will illustrate, siblings and other relatives could also become *de facto* carers, thus further blurring ideas of parenthood in the early modern period. Bernard Capp has shown that households and networks of care varied greatly in early modern England.¹⁰ I extend this scholarship by looking at early modern primary carers and their provision of care through the lens of childhood disability.

Chapters Three and Four represent two sides of the same coin: where this chapter investigates the more affirming and nurturing aspects of disability and care, Chapter Four will be concerned with abuse and absences (or lapses) of care. Because my research is necessarily qualitative, therefore focused on valuable detail rather than quantification, discussing these issues across two chapters should not be construed as implying any form of mirror equivalence between the positive and negative aspects of early modern childhood disability. They rather qualify one another in the sense that Chapter Three should not be taken as

⁷ Anna French, ‘Introduction’, in *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction*, ed. by Anna French (Oxford: Routledge, 2020), 5; Barclay, ‘The Early Modern Family’, 16; Naomi Tadmor, ‘The Concept of the Household-Family in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Past & Present*, 151.1 (1996), 123.

⁸ Barclay, ‘The Early Modern Family’, 16-17.

⁹ Patricia Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children in England 1580-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 113.

¹⁰ Bernard Capp, *The Ties That Bind: Siblings, Family, and Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 30, 44, 58; see also, Barclay, ‘The Early Modern Family’, 16-17.

evidence that all primary carers unanimously cared for their impaired and/or disabled children, just like Chapter Four does not make any claims that early modern people inevitably behaved poorly towards impaired and/or disabled children.

3.1. Primary Carers

Petitions for relief from the pre-modern era are veritable treasure troves of information and paint a fascinating picture of the lives of early modern poor impaired children and their carers. Most especially, they illustrate the fact that impaired children were not always raised by their biological parents, nor even by people from within the common bonds of kinship. It is of course important to acknowledge that biological parents as well as stepparents did often play a crucial part in the lives and upbringing of their impaired children, and this is what this chapter first explores. Nevertheless, it would be remiss to ignore the singular importance of non-traditional parental figures in the lives of early modern impaired children. For instance, Capp underlines that in an average early modern English family, girls in particular were already expected to care for their younger siblings, and that many siblings remembered fondly how their older sister had cared for them.¹¹ Likewise, Steve Hindle has illustrated how grandparents sometimes had to become involved and provide for their grandchildren, even when parents were still alive.¹² This chapter adds to the literature on early modern networks of care by showing that this was equally the case for impaired children, and that siblings and grandparents, usually in the absence of the impaired child's parents, could quickly become permanent care providers. Chapter Three is only concerned with primary carers from direct

¹¹ Capp, *The Ties*, 30.

¹² Steve Hindle, *On the Parish?: The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 56.

horizontal and vertical bonds of kinship such as parents, grandparents, and siblings, but Chapter Five will go over primary carers from outside common bounds of kinship in much greater detail (e.g. widows, community members, and masters).

A Parent's Duty of Care

Providing one's child with a future was among an early modern parent's top priorities.¹³ Barclay has posited that fulfilling one's parental duties, as a social practice, was interpreted as an act of love by contemporaries.¹⁴ More practically, it involved making sure that children would not go hungry and that they had a roof over their head. Ultimately, parents hoped that their children would eventually be able to either take over their parents' household or build and run their own, and that they would be in a position to support their parents in their old age. In short, parents hoped their children would attain financial and social independence. This desire to provide could manifest itself in the form of securing work or training opportunities for one's child, or even in finding them somewhere to live.¹⁵ But providing was also a duty which had extensive repercussions not only for the child's family but also for the community in which they lived. A child without any food, drink, shelter, or skills or who could not find employment could eventually become chargeable to the parish and thus to the community – I will further elaborate on this in Chapter Five.

¹³ *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction*, ed. by Anna French (Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 25; Ben-Amos, 'Gifts', 301; See also, Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, 'Reciprocal Bonding: Parents and Their Offspring in Early Modern England', *Journal of Family History*, 25.3 (2000), 291; Anthony Fletcher, *Growing Up in England: The Experience of Childhood 1600-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 37, 81.

¹⁴ Barclay, 'The Early Modern Family', 25.

¹⁵ Fletcher, *Growing Up*, 38.

Particularly for poorer families, providing could be a difficult balancing exercise where parents oscillated between their desire to care and their actual financial capabilities – this is of remarkable importance since virtually all my historical actors were helplessly poor or, at the very least, greatly struggling. This tension was especially evident in cases where poor parents furiously tried to find a cure for their child’s impairment(s). Their ardent quest for a cure became a complicated amalgamation of duty and a strong need to survive. In 1701, Henry Lewis, an ‘Antient man’ from Surrey, stated that his efforts to find a cure for his ‘poor lame son’ was proving to be ‘very hard upon’ him.¹⁶ Lewis’ petition implied that he had been looking for a way to cure his son for a while before turning to the parish. While he did mention that his son had been deemed ‘uncureable’ after being turned out of a ‘hospytall’ seven months prior, he did not go over any of the cures the hospital or he himself had attempted. He further explained that his son was dependent on him for not only his cure but also ‘for dyet & lodgeinge’ and that the difficulties created by his son’s needs were affecting the entire family: Lewis’ wife and daughters also ‘[stood] in expectation for sum healpe from [him]’. Lewis therefore hoped the parish would provide his son with independent lodging in the ‘roome’ of the late ‘William Page of Llambeth’ in the meantime, while he (Lewis) kept looking for a way to cure his son. In this, Lewis’s unwavering desire to help his son underscored his compliance with early modern societal expectations of parental care. Lewis’ petition makes it abundantly clear that he also had a vested and practical interest in his son being cured. His own survival as well as that of his wife and daughters was, after all, at stake too. His decision to seek help from the parish was one of concerned practicality, but one also steeped in care and concern for his son’s future.

¹⁶ Woking, Surrey History Centre, QS2.6.1701.59.

Early modern parents could sometimes put their own lives in jeopardy for the sake of their impaired children. This was where their genuine love and concern for their children could shine through, where more practical petitions like that of Henry Lewis were instead interlaced with notes of financial pragmatism and parental duty – albeit still showcasing his unfeigned concern for his impaired child. In 1633/34, Raphe Cocker, a destitute man from Lancashire whom I mentioned briefly in Chapter One, was willing to undertake a perilous two-month journey to help cure his blind son.¹⁷ He explained that his unnamed son had contracted the King's Evil and had become blind as a result of it. As Cocker was a 'verie poore man', he chose to petition his local parish so that they would hopefully help fund his journey to London for his son to receive the royal touch. Cocker's petition makes it clear that his mind was set on travelling down to London and that he would be doing so with or without financial aid from the parish: he claimed he was 'now determined to Travell to London to his Ma[jes]tie trusting in god to get helpp'. As such, his petitioning his local parish was done primarily for his son's sake as an act of near desperation and thus it emphasises Raphe Cocker's love for him. This also confirms Newton's argument about caring for the sick child, wherein she avers that although caring for children was often very taxing both physically and mentally, it was also a task that parents were 'prepared to carry out with unstinting commitment' which in turn underscored their genuine love for their offspring.¹⁸

More strikingly, and as Henry Lewis' petition has already indirectly illustrated, parental care for impaired children could extend well into adulthood and even into old age – Lewis was still providing for his son despite the fact that his son was apparently old enough to live on

¹⁷ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.130.68.

¹⁸ Newton, *The Sick Child*, 93.

his own in the abode of the late William Page.¹⁹ Early modern sources about elderly parents and their impaired adult children occasionally blur the boundaries of age and provision of care. Petitions for relief show that impaired adults could sometimes remain with their parents in an infantilising prolonged childhood, or they could become reliant on their parents again, thus undergoing some sort of early second childhood.

Poor parents could work incredibly hard to maintain their adult children, often to the detriment of their own health and well-being. This was especially true for parents of impaired and/or disabled adult children. In c.1666, Katherin Hodgkinson, a widow from Lancashire, begged her parish for some 'charitable releife' for her twenty-six-year-old son, John Hodgkinson, who 'hath become lame & Impotent for the spane of five years bypast'.²⁰ Prior to petitioning her parish, she had been maintaining her son 'by her dayly labor & paines'. Unfortunately, 'she is not now able anie longer to keepe or relieve him without the charitable releife of well afforded people'. Her son was 'Impotent', which meant he was unable to work because of some form of physical impairment. Moreover, because she was a poor widow, Hodgkinson had to toil daily to ensure both she and her son would survive. It is important to note that, according to her petition, she did not desert her son but instead stayed with him and sought help. She was willing to endure significant levels of discomfort if it meant providing for herself and her son.

Disability in early modern England, especially if it translated to high support needs, could easily blur traditional boundaries of age and provision of care. A petition from c.1666 by

¹⁹ QS2.6.1701.59.

²⁰ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.294.8.

Isabell Browne, a widow from Lancashire, deals with a disabled boy who was ‘decrepit’ whose age is never specified. Browne reached out to her local parish authorities so they would help her provide for her son. She was ‘poore ould & very lame & Impotent’, while her son, William Browne, was a ‘very lame & decrepit boye’.²¹ The adjective ‘decrepit’ is particularly striking in that, out of all the petitions for relief I have looked at (seventy-eight petitions from eighteen English counties), Browne’s petition is the only one that describes an impaired and/or disabled child as being ‘decrepit’. Children were either ‘lame’, or ‘crippled’ (although even the latter term seems to have been mostly reserved for older children or even adults), or were described more precisely as blind, deaf, or ‘dumb’, or sometimes even ‘Senseless’. Moreover, the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s historical Thesaurus defines ‘decrepit’ as either relating to old age or to impairments *resulting from* old age – the earliest recorded use of the term being from before c.1500.²² In addition to this, William had no ‘releiffe but from [his mother], and is noe way able to labor for his liveinge by reason of his decrepitude & disability of body’. William was presented as a linguistic, bodily, and social anomaly: he was a child (a ‘boye’), but one whose impairments made him comparable to an elderly man who was past his working years and had to rely on charity and parish relief to survive. In short, this highlights that parental care for disabled children, if necessary, could be for life and transcend early modern notions of age and provision of care.

In early modern England, as some of my examples have already shown, parental care clearly did not fully end once one’s child became an adult. As Elizabeth Foyster has shown, marriage was not at all synonymous with the end of parental involvement in their children’s lives:

²¹ Preston Lancashire Archives, QSP.296.18.

²² ‘Decrepit’, in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*Historical Thesaurus*) [online], <https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=HistoricalThesaurus&q=decrepit> [accessed April 12, 2024].

newlyweds sometimes lived with one or both sets of parents shortly after being married, and parents could try to interfere if they did not approve of their child's spouse.²³ Likewise, couples could remain dependent on the wife's portion, which was of course paid by her parents.²⁴ Capp has equally shown that family involvement did not end at marriage, and particularly that siblings for instance could be called to intervene when relationships between spouses became tenuous, or stepparents could carry on supporting their stepchildren even when they had grown and even when their biological parents had died.²⁵ And finally, as Maria Cannon has stressed, in addition to chronological age, the status of child was also based on social and power dynamics between an individual and their parents: one was an adult but still owed relative obedience to one's parents, regardless of social and financial achievements.²⁶

In return, in early modern English society parents remained liable to financially support their adult children if necessary.²⁷ Henry Lewis' petition as well as those of Katherin Hodgkinson and Isabel Browne show that parental care for disabled adults went much further than that. In Hodgkinson's case, her son became fully dependent on her once more because he was 'lame & Impotent'.²⁸ As for Lewis and Browne, parental care never ceased or even shifted at all, whereas parental care for non-disabled children would have organically turned into something different once they became independent adults.²⁹ While other parents would have

²³ Elizabeth Foyster, 'Parenting Was for Life, Not Just for Childhood: The Role of Parents in the Married Lives of Their Children in Early Modern England', *History*, 86.283 (2001), 315, 318.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 319.

²⁵ Capp, *The Ties*, 44, 94.

²⁶ Maria Cannon, 'Conceptualising Childhood as a Relational Status: Parenting Adult Children in Sixteenth-Century England', *Continuity and Change*, 36.3 (2021), 310, 313, 315.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 317, 318.

²⁸ QSP.294.8.

²⁹ QS2.6.1701.59; QSP.296.18.

perhaps stopped actively caring for their non-disabled adult children, Lewis and Browne remained wholly responsible for their adult children's basic needs of food, drink, shelter, and clothing.

At the end of this section, I briefly want to turn away from petitions to show that early modern parents could also take immense pride in their impaired children, proving themselves to be their children's best supporters – the primary issue with petitions being that they often, by necessity, reflect negatively on impaired and/or disabled individuals. Early modern parents could speak very positively of their children and argue that impairments should not preclude people from living rich and fulfilling lives. For instance, in a short-lived London periodical, an anonymous author shares the story of Charles Leane, a wool merchant from late seventeenth-century London, who spoke very highly of his children and particularly of those who were born 'both Deaf and Dumb'. While the article focused predominantly on Leane and his children, it also emphasised the role of God in everything, and how Christians should praise him for a) the 'great mercy' of being able to hear and speak and b) creating such a 'difference' as being deaf. Leane's sixteen-year-old son was 'employ'd by [him] in his Trade' and knew 'the Goodness of each several sort of wool, and its Price' and he could 'communicate his Mind by writing'.³⁰ It is obvious from this article that Leane saw his son as being an asset to his wool business. He spoke rather favourably of his daughter, too: like her younger brother, she was deaf and communicated by writing, and it is explained that she also 'Writes, Dresses, and Dances very well, tho she can hear no Musick' and that she was additionally a 'very pretty and accomplish'd Gentlewoman'.³¹ The article did not hide the

³⁰ *The Post Angel; or, Universal Entertainment: Volume 1*, ed. by George Croom and John Dunton (London: A. Baldwin, 1701), 422.

³¹ *Ibid.*

fact that Leane's daughter was deaf but instead showed that it had very little, if truly any, bearing on her life and that she remained a young woman of exceptional talent and tremendous prospect – in other words, that she was not disabled, only impaired.

At the very least, petitions show us that parents were willing to provide for their impaired and disabled children and that they could go to great lengths in attempting to do so. More positive sources like newspaper articles such as that of Charles Leane additionally reveal that parents could be proud of their impaired children, too.

Bonds of Kinship: Siblings and Grandparents as Primary Carers

As stated previously, biological and stepparents were not the only ones taking care of impaired children. This was particularly common with children born within the poorer ranks of early modern society, where grandparents might have had to step in to provide for their grandchildren, or where siblings might have had to act *in loco parentis*.³² On occasion, individuals could become their sibling's primary carers shortly after their sibling was born.³³ This is not necessarily surprising: family, friends, and neighbours in the early modern period were normally the first port of call for many people seeking urgent help or charity.³⁴ Capp recounts that many early modern women found themselves thanking their older sister for taking on the role of primary carer after their parents had died.³⁵ More generally, and this was true for siblings of non-disabled and non-impaired children too, brothers could find suitors for their sisters or even intervene to help with a sibling's troubled relationship with their

³² Hindle, *On the Parish*, 56.

³³ Capp, *The Ties*, 53.

³⁴ Hindle, *On the Parish*, 49, 53, 56.

³⁵ Capp, *The Ties*, 30, 71.

spouse.³⁶ Similarly, and specifically for the early modern poor, siblings could act as an additional safety net for those who were either destitute, sick, or disabled.³⁷

A case from c.1664 Walton, Lancashire, highlights that sisters could act *in loco parentis* to their younger disabled brothers. Again, this is very much in line with common early modern English practices: single women would often band together to form their own households. Amy M. Froide shows that single sisters for example could often depend on one another both practically and emotionally and thus routinely lived, worked, and even worshipped together in the same way conjugal couples did.³⁸ Therefore, Anne, Elizabeth, and William Chornley made up their own alternative household and automatically assumed specific care roles: Anne and Elizabeth became primary carers, while their younger impaired brother became a dependant. After the death of their parents, Anne and Elizabeth Chornley began caring for their ‘poore young lame ... Brother’ who was ‘not yet Thirteene years of age’ and who had ‘beene Lame ever since hee was halfe a yeare old’.³⁹ Like most petitioners, Anne and Elizabeth were desperately poor and were struggling to support themselves and their younger brother. They hoped that the overseers of the poor would ‘take Care to put [their] said Brother William Chornley to some Easie Trade, ... That soe for the future hee may bee able to get his owne liveinge, and not bee Chargeable to any’. By combining their very real need to survive and their desire to provide for their younger sibling, Anne and Elizabeth were trying to fulfil their role as primary carers. While this was of course a very practical decision on their part, it was also a way to care and provide for their brother. By ensuring he learned an ‘Easie Trade’,

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 55, 56.

³⁹ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.254.5. See also, Capp, *The Ties*, 65.

they were simultaneously trying to secure his relative future independence and making sure they did not fall into abject poverty.

This level of care and involvement in the life of a dependent disabled sibling could continue on into adulthood. In c.1691, William Partington, a fustian weaver from Lancashire, was left alone to care for his twenty-year-old sister, Anne Partington, who was ‘Dumbe and hath Convulsion fits’ and, it is implied, could not support herself.⁴⁰ Despite the fact that he had ‘nothing but what hee got w[i]th his handy worke’, William Partington tried his best to look after his sister. He asked for some ‘weekly release to bee Allowed unto this poore distressed woman’, as he alone could not afford to support both himself and his sister. His petition indicates that he did not wish to be separated from his sister and that he instead would be glad to keep looking after her provided the parish stepped in to help them financially (‘weekly release’). As is sometimes the case with the petitions I examine, the parish order that hopefully followed is missing. Therefore, I cannot give any sense of closure as to this particular petition for relief.

In some cases, siblings had to face the reality of their situation and realise that they could no longer look after their disabled adult brother or sister. In 1610, John and William Cooper, along with their respective wives, explained that they had ‘a longe tyme beine ... keeping and mayneteyninge a poore impotente & lame sister of theirs’.⁴¹ Unlike William Partington, however, they felt ‘burthened and overcharged’ and were hoping to be ‘disburthened of their said charge and there [sic] said syster to be kepte & mayneteyned at y^e common charge of y^e

⁴⁰ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.703.26.

⁴¹ Maidstone, Kent Archives, QM.SB.916.

parishes of [Lyminge] & [Bredhurst, Kent]'. One could make the case that their desire to be disburdened of their sister still belied a certain sense of obligation in the sense that they were trying to find a suitable arrangement for all parties involved: they would not fall into destitution, and she would receive the care she needed (pension, almshouse, etc.) Again, the outcome of this petition is unknown as the parish order is seemingly missing. This aside, their petition still reveals that they had been looking after their sister for a long time since their parents' death, and that they had thus been acting *in loco parentis* this whole time.

The c.1557 case of Frances Skiff and his thirteen-year-old sister, Elizabeth Skrogge, who was both 'lame' and 'impotente' similarly illustrates this. I initially analysed this case briefly in Chapter Two and showed that Frances wanted to, and did in fact, 'Rydde owt of his house the seid Elizabeth'.⁴² However, I now wish to come back to this source and centre instead on the fact that he had also been caring for her for a great portion of their lives. This petition was originally by William Nycholas and consisted mainly in a dispute between William and Frances over who was financially and morally liable for the maintenance of Elizabeth. In describing his own situation, William – whose relationship to the siblings is unclear – mentioned that Frances had 'of a long tyme ... ben burdened w[ith] the kepyng & fyndyng in his house the seid Elizabeth'. Since Elizabeth is described as only 'xiii yeres or therabought', it is likely that Frances had been acting *in loco parentis* towards his sister after their parents died. She had therefore been under his care, and he would have more than likely been responsible for providing her with basic nurture such as food, drink, shelter, and clothes. And even once his sister had left his house to reside with William and his family, Frances had been, to all outward appearances, still willing to contribute financially towards her

⁴² Richmond, National Archives, C1.1457.54.

maintenance – although, admittedly, he paid William a lesser amount than he had originally ‘faythfully’ promised. As such, ignoring for now the fact that he eventually wanted her out of his house, he had still been caring for his disabled sister just as an early modern English parent would have.

In other instances, grandparents had to step in to look after their disabled grandchildren. Of course, as a general rule, many grandparents, particularly those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, were directly involved in the everyday lives and upbringing of their grandchildren, regardless of whether they were impaired or not.⁴³ As stated previously, the early modern household was one of constant permutations, and grandparents often found themselves living alongside their grandchildren.⁴⁴ It makes sense then that they would in turn intermittently care for their grandchildren or at least take part in their upbringing. On occasion, children could even inherit wealth from their grandparents, thus in a way being cared for one last time from beyond the grave.⁴⁵

But in the case of impaired and or disabled orphans, caregiving went beyond what was generally expected of grandparents – for example, nursing their sick grandchildren back to health when parents were unable to do so (e.g. they were working).⁴⁶ In Manchester, in 1638, Elizabeth Marcroft took in her physically impaired granddaughter after her own daughter, Ellen Marcroft, passed away. In addition to being ‘a Cripple’, the granddaughter was illegitimate, and Elizabeth seems to have agreed to adopt her only begrudgingly: her petition

⁴³ Hindle, *On the Parish*, 56.

⁴⁴ Barclay, ‘The Early Modern Family’, 16.

⁴⁵ Froide, *Never Married*, 120.

⁴⁶ Newton, *The Sick Chid*, 103.

for relief shows that she was willing to care for her granddaughter only on the condition that she be given a ‘Competent allowance out of the said Parish’. She said that she was ‘becomen aged and unable to laboure for her releef’ and was ‘destitute of anie habitacon to shelter her selfe in’.⁴⁷ Therefore, despite her complete and utter state of destitution, her own impairments as well as that of her potential new charge, Elizabeth agreed to look after her ‘bastard’ granddaughter. Of course, this petition is also representative of the typical tactics employed by petitioners to strengthen their chances of receiving relief. Simply put, Elizabeth was ticking all the right boxes: she was a widow, she was old, and her financial burden was great, perhaps even unsurmountable. She was the ‘perfect’ deserving poor. It is unlikely she would have lied about her situation, however. As Emily Rhodes has explained, justices of the peace could easily corroborate the facts laid out in petitions by querying local parish officials such as churchwardens or overseers of the poor.⁴⁸ Therefore, Elizabeth’s description of her situation could not have been too far from the truth.

All this is very much in keeping with more general early modern English family trends whereby non-impaired orphans often had to rely on financial and emotional support from vertical kin, siblings, and aunts and uncles.⁴⁹ Siblings and grandparents – and although I have not found concrete archival evidence of it in my search, it is fair to assume more distant relatives too – could look after impaired and/or disabled children. They cared for them to the

⁴⁷ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.203.69.

⁴⁸ Emily Rhodes, “‘As Man and Wyfe Ought to Doe’: Reconsidering Marital Separation in Early Modern England”, *Cultural and Social History*, 20.4 (2022), 7.

⁴⁹ Froide, *Never Married*, 7; Joan Kent and Steve King, ‘Changing Patterns of Poor Relief in Some English Rural Parishes circa 1650-1750’, *Rural History*, 14.2 (2003), 127; Jonathan Healey, *The First Century of Welfare* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014), 127; William Coster, “‘From Fire and Water’: The Responsibilities of Godparents in Early Modern England”, *Studies in Church History*, 31 (1994), 308.

best of their abilities. When their financial situation no longer permitted them to properly care for their impaired charges, they would seek alternative solutions that would ensure everyone survived.

3.2. Providing

Especially for poorer households, providing care for a disabled child often meant relying on charity and/or parish relief. Petitions for relief from the period demonstrate that the lives of poor primary carers could be ones of constant struggles and poverty. They worked hard to ensure that their impaired charges would be able to navigate early modern society as safely and successfully as possible and thus had to manoeuvre the petitioning system carefully in order to do so. As financial precarity was a constant for those living within the poorer ranks of early modern society, it was thus central to one's survival to know how to use the system to one's benefit. This is of course reminiscent of Olwen Hufton's 'economy of makeshifts' from back in 1974 which described the way poor people pieced together livelihoods in early modern Europe.⁵⁰ While this subheading's focus remains trained on provision of care by parents and members of kin, Chapter Five will concentrate more intently on support from the community and direct parish involvement in the provision of care and upbringing of impaired and/or disabled children. As we will see in Chapter Five, while families could rely on neighbourly charity to stay alive, this could only go so far, especially if one's neighbours were themselves going through significant financial hardships.⁵¹ Some carers were able to bequeath properties and whatever money they could to their disabled charges – it was, after

⁵⁰ *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts*, ed. by Alannah Tomkins and Steven King (Manchester University Press, 2003), 1, 77.

⁵¹ Crawford, *Parents*, 179.

all, a contemporaneous social expectation that parents should direct most of their resources towards their children.⁵² For instance, Richard Asmough, a seventeenth-century clothier, was able to leave his ‘messuage and [tenements]’ to his daughter Elianor, a ‘pore distressed Cripple’, whom he knew could not ‘releife herself by her own Industrie’.⁵³ But evidently, the majority of poor care givers would not have had much to provide for their children, even less to leave them with once they had died, and therefore had to find suitable alternatives.

Being poor was, as we have already seen on several occasions, a driving factor in striving to secure necessities and future opportunities for one’s children. Furthermore, as historians of poverty have shown, indigent households were heavily dependent on the active labour or financial participation of all their members, and this of course included children. Capp explains that, for poor families, sheltering a relative for instance was only viable if that relative provided something to the household in return – for example, spinning or knitting, or some form of labour or financial contribution.⁵⁴ Likewise, Hindle shows that early modern English children were expected to contribute to the household as much as possible too: they could glean, spin wool, fetch and cut wood, tend to animals, gather stones, or do some light seasonal agricultural work.⁵⁵ Patricia Crawford has shown that, before the age of seven, children from poor families were able to beg so as to provide some modicum of support for themselves and their household.⁵⁶

⁵² Barclay, ‘The Early Modern Family’, 19-20.

⁵³ QSB.1.39.51.

⁵⁴ Capp, *The Ties*, 60.

⁵⁵ Hindle, *On the Parish*, 24-25.

⁵⁶ Crawford, *Parents*, 134.

But active participation was not always possible. In a lot of cases, and as is shown in petitions for relief from the period, disabled children unfortunately were not able to contribute to their household at all and, in addition to this, often required constant care. Impaired children were also not always able to train (or be trained), which severely impeded their ability to reach financial and social independence. Petitioners often lamented that their disabled charges were ‘maintained by the paines and industrie of [their] parents’ or that they were dependent upon their ‘charge for [their] cure & alsoe for dyet & lodgeinge’.⁵⁷ This could quickly become problematic not only for themselves but also more broadly for the household to which they belonged. Pelling already explores this eventuality with poor households and their early modern sick children: a sick child who could not participate in the life of the household was equivalent to a loss of labour, which in turn meant a loss of money, and therefore increased poverty.⁵⁸ Oftentimes, this also meant that primary carers had to take time away from their own labour to look after a sick child, which led to an even greater loss of money and to even greater financial strife. To make matters worse, there also was a clear social expectation in early modern England that poor primary carers should attempt to stave off generational poverty by teaching their charges to work.⁵⁹ Failing to do so was tantamount to perpetuating poverty, which was unacceptable and could lead to magistrates becoming involved and reshuffling households. Asking for help was a primary skill for the early modern English poor, and knowing *how* to ask for help, particularly from one’s local authorities, was therefore of paramount importance.

⁵⁷ QSP.178.17; QS2.6.1701.59.

⁵⁸ Pelling, ‘Child Health’, 142.

⁵⁹ Crawford, *Parents*, 135.

Petitioning as a Provision of Care

While the act of petitioning one's parish was not necessarily evidence of love, it was still in and of itself a provision of care. Whether it was borne out of duty, personal concerns for one's survival, genuine consideration for a disabled charge, or any combination of the three, the end result remained the same: attempts were made to provide adequate care for early modern English impaired and/or disabled children. And we could still somewhat reason that providing care for a disabled child, despite being comparably motivated by both social expectations and a need to survive, was an act of love in itself, too. As scholars such as Barclay, Newton, and Anthony Fletcher have argued, fulfilling one's duty of care was seen, generally speaking, by early modern contemporaries as a form of love.⁶⁰ And petitioners were concerned with providing food, drink, and shelter for their impaired and/or disabled charges, and were also ensuring they had decent future prospects ahead of them.

Those caring for disabled children had to contend with the very real possibility that their charges would be forever dependent upon them, which likely raised questions and concerns about their own longevity. Evidently, a disabled child who could not fend for themselves, who could not contribute to the life of the household, and who could not be taught to work was likely to either remain fully dependent on their primary carers or on the parish. While some carers were able to secure more accessible training opportunities for their impaired charges (e.g. a 'sitting' or 'Easie' trade), others simply were not. The nature of their charges' impairment(s) might have meant that they were not suited for the early modern workforce. For example, Elianor Asmough, the seventeenth-century 'crippled' orphan of clothier Richard

⁶⁰ Barclay, 'The Early Modern Family', 25; Newton, *The Sick Child*, 93; Fletcher, *Growing Up*, 38, 136-137.

Asmough, was ‘not anie waies able to releife’ herself by her ‘Industrie’; likewise, Henry Lewis’ son depended on his parents’ support for his survival because he could not work.⁶¹ As a result of this, they had to rely wholly on their parents or guardians for their daily maintenance (sustenance, lodging, clothes, and healthcare), sometimes well into their adult years, and sometimes even for the remainder of their lives – for instance, William Browne, the ‘decrepit boye’ of Isabell Browne, depended on his mother entirely for his survival.⁶²

Primary carers of disabled children who could not train or work were incredibly anxious about their charges’ prospects, and rightly so.⁶³ Their fear comes to life in those petitions for relief from the period which testify to the struggles of the impotent poor, and particularly to those who were on their own. For example, in 1747, John Plyer of Chardstock in Dorset was arrested for vagrancy. His father, Benjamin Plyer, had initially indentured him to John Norman a ‘Sergemaster’.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, after little more than a year, John was ‘taken lame and could not be of much service to his said Master’, as a consequence of which both John Plyer and his master agreed to dissolve the apprenticeship. The petition is not fully clear as to what happened to John’s father, but it is fair to assume that he likely passed away which in turn led his son to struggle to fend for himself. John Plyer was forced into vagrancy and became an itinerant ‘Woolcomber’ and ‘work’d about at several places at Combing wool by the piece in no other manner’ which was a precarious business at best and offered little to no financial security. John Plyer was one of the fortunate ones in that he was still able to earn a modicum of money.

⁶¹ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.39.51; QS2.6.1701.59.

⁶² QSP.296.18.

⁶³ Emily Cockayne, ‘Experiences of the Deaf in Early Modern England’, *The Historical Journal*, 46.3 (2003), 510.

⁶⁴ Q.SR.315.314.

Others were not so 'lucky': in 1601, Ellioner Reeve, a 'lame crepple', was forced to petition her parish after she had been turned out of the 'out howse of Thomas Sales in Odingley whereby she had byn almost three yeres' and was now 'diverse nights enforced to lye there in the streetes'.⁶⁵ Her petition is an example of a disabled adult who had been able to somewhat manage on her own for a while, but who was suddenly faced with homelessness and had no one left to help her. The petition suggests that she was 'lame' from birth but does not clearly state it. She was a 'lame crepple and one whoe was borne and hath byn always dwelling in Odingley': 'one' in this context refers back to 'lame crepple' thus implying that she had been like this her whole life. She had 'no maintenance or frindes to relieve her'. After being asked to leave Thomas Sales' 'out howse', Ellioner found herself 'destitute of anye place of abode' and was 'diverse nights enforced to lye there in the streetes'. As she did not have any one to (help) maintain her, she was forced to turn to the parish as a last resort. In the same fashion, the petition of Anne Platte, a 'lame crippe', illustrates what could potentially happen if a dependent disabled person's carer passed away.⁶⁶ After her father, Edmund Platte, died, Anne had 'no percon lefte her'. She was 'destitute of habitacon friends & meanes', and was pleading with the parish for some relief. These sources shine a bright light on the very real fears of parents of dependent disabled children.

Therefore, by using the relief and charity systems of the early modern period, those caring for impaired children could more effectively provide for their young and adult charges. In c.1659, Richard Kerby of Woodplumpton near Preston in Lancashire sought parish relief on

⁶⁵ Worcester, Worcestershire Archives and Archaeology Service, 110 BA1.1.16.29.

⁶⁶ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.227.97.

behalf of his twenty-nine-year-old daughter. His petition implies that he and his wife had been diligently looking after their daughter but that, ‘age and the Concomitants thereof being upon them’ they were no longer able to do so on their own.⁶⁷ They chose to reach out to their local parish authorities as a way to provide for themselves and, hopefully, for their daughter, too. Their supposed desire to provide for their daughter is of course undercut by their own personal need to stave off destitution, but it nonetheless suggests that they cared about their daughter’s wellbeing and survival. In the same way, the petition of Anne Peach, a ‘poor disconsolate Widdow of Ripley’, underscores the strong resolve evidenced by some early modern primary carers.⁶⁸ She mentioned that she had a ‘young child that is lame and altogether disabled to get his living’ and went on to explain that she had ‘frequently importuned the overseer, and the officers and principall inhabitants of Rypley ... to find her an howse’. Furthermore, she added that, ‘[she] is far remote from all relations’ and that,

for above 7 yeares [she] hath by her own industry, maintained herselfe,
and her lame child, th[at] she hath sould, and pawned all she hath,
exhausted her fortune, is in above 5li [short for *libra* meaning pound (£)]
in debt, and hath sould the very cloathes on her back, and the gloves of ...
her hands, to support her impotent child, that she can gett no work, hath
neither money, credit, nor harbor.⁶⁹

Bearing in mind that this is a petition for relief and therefore that this enumeration might have been for dramatic effect, Anne Peach’s desperate plea for help still emphasises the time and

⁶⁷ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.178.17.

⁶⁸ Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, Q.SB.2.355.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

energy she had spent in trying to provide for her impaired child – her reaching out to the parish was an extension of this provision of care.

While most of the sources used so far have been about both married and single parents, it is important to understand that brothers and sisters acting *in loco parentis* were equally making full use of the petitioning system to maintain their disabled siblings, as obviously were other members of kin. Some of these petitioners were perhaps a bit more financially minded than others, but they were still aiming to provide for their disabled charges to the best of their abilities. As we have already seen, the petition of John and William Cooper from 1610 Kent and their respective wives is a perfect example of this. Their main concern throughout their petition was essentially being ‘disburthened’ of their ‘poore Impotent & lame’ unnamed sister after caring for her for many years. But in doing so, they also still cared for her by ensuring she was not left to fend for herself and was instead maintained by the parish. In similar fashion, Anne and Elizabeth Chornley petitioned their parish so they would be able to secure an accessible training opportunity (an ‘Easie trade’) for their physically impaired younger brother. In doing so, they hoped to secure their brother’s future so he could become – if not independent – at least a contributing member of their household. Likewise, Elizabeth Marcroft was pleading for the parish to ‘provide a habitcon’ and a ‘Competent allowance’ so she and her illegitimate ‘Cripple’ granddaughter could survive. There, again, she exemplified the dual nature of a poor primary carer trying to provide not only for their disabled dependant but also for themselves.

As petitioning was a form of care provision, all of these petitioners had to play by the rules. They followed similar patterns and tactics while trying to obtain relief from their respective

parish authorities. Rather adroitly manipulating the early modern petitioning system, they were able to secure relief and training opportunities for their disabled charges.

How to Petition: Emphasising Impairments as a Rhetorical Tactic

As explained in Chapter Two, petitioning was a dance whose steps early modern English poor people had to master quickly. Careless missteps would have easily cost someone their chance to provide not only for themselves but also for their dependants. Jonathan Healey has shown that grovelling and pity were the foundations upon which the entire petitioning system rested.⁷⁰ Someone asking for help had to not only show a deep sense of deference but equally demonstrate that they deserved relief from the parish.⁷¹ Within this context, merit was proportional to how pathetic a petitioner could make themselves out to be. Olivia Weisser has shown that narratives of illness by the poor, contrary to people from wealthier social orders, were consistently at pains to emphasise that their illness had been caused by misfortunes outside of their control and that they were thus ‘deserving’ (in the early modern legal sense of the term) of relief from the parish.⁷² This is exactly how poor disabled children and their families stood to benefit from and offset their impairments. David M. Turner has written about how children were ‘conspicuous figures in the begging underworld’ of eighteenth-century England and how they became ‘targets for sympathy’ and compassion by ‘flaunting’ their impairments’.⁷³ Short of begging, by ‘flaunting’ their children’s impairments then, parents could go one step further and increase their chances of securing relief for themselves

⁷⁰ Healey, *The First Century*, 100, 101, 107, 173, 183.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 101, 173.

⁷² Olivia Weisser, *Ill Composed: Sickness, Gender, and Belief in Early Modern England* (Yale University Press, 2015), 160.

⁷³ David M. Turner, ‘Impaired Children in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Social History of Medicine*, 2017, 788-789.

and their impaired charges, and thus ensure they would receive reasonable and adequate care. For instance, at a parish meeting held in Herefordshire, Humphrey Paifrer was granted an ‘additional’ piece of land explicitly because he had a disabled child. He was allowed,

An additional piece of ground to his House & Land he already has upon the Speermarsh Waste & that some of y^e freeholders do inspect & appoint the same; the s[ai]d [additional] ground being allowed him for the support of his son Thomas being a lame disabled child.⁷⁴

This item does not mention anything about Humphrey Paifrer’s financial situation, just that his son was ‘lame’ and could not work. It is possible that he had had earlier help, in which case a discussion of his finances would have been held at a different time. However, as for this particular source, his son’s being disabled was enough proof that they needed support from the Herefordshire parish authorities. The petition is clear that the additional portion of land was ‘allowed him for the support of his son’ who was a ‘lame disabled’ child and only for that reason. Therefore, Humphrey’s careful navigation of the early modern English petitioning and relief system allowed him (at least in theory) better to care for his disabled child.

Papers from the Middlesex Sessions similarly illustrate that petitioning primary carers with more than one charge tended to emphasise those who were impaired. In 1717, Anne Humphrys, widow, asked the churchwardens of Tottenham to grant an order that ‘she may be

⁷⁴ Hereford, Herefordshire Archive and Records Centre, G73.1.

Settled in St Andrews Holborn' and used one of her children's impairments to strengthen her case.⁷⁵ She begged the churchwardens to 'take care of her and her children', from which we can gather that she had at least two children. Yet she went on to explain that, should the churchwardens not help her, 'she and her poor son that is blind deaf and Senseless, and utterly incapable of relieving himself in any manner must undoubtably perish'. It is as though her other child(ren) suddenly disappeared, and only her physically and mentally impaired child mattered. This is of course not an indication that she preferred one child over the others but rather shows that she chose to put her best 'asset' forward. She wanted to show that she was not just any struggling poor widowed mother but rather a struggling poor widowed mother who *also* had a 'blind deaf and Senseless' child. In a similar way, Anne Lollo, another eighteenth-century widow and mother of two, petitioned her local authorities on behalf of her daughter Rachael and, like Anne Humphrys, chose to use her other child's impairment in order to bolster her request.⁷⁶ Her daughter was 'committed to Clerkenwell Bridewell', a north-London correctional facility for vagrants and sex workers, which was deeply problematic in that she was the primary breadwinner of the family. Both her mother and her sibling depended entirely on her for their maintenance. Anne Lollo mentioned that her other child 'of 11 years of Age' was 'Stone blind' and reiterated a few lines later that unless 'your Wor[ships] ... be pleased to Order her said Daughters Remittance ... she and her other blind Child must inevitably perish for want'. Her claiming that she and her blind child would likely starve is not particularly remarkable – this was a fairly common claim by poor

⁷⁵ London Lives, *Middlesex Sessions: Sessions Papers – Justices' Working Documents July 1717* (March 2018), <<https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?div=LMSMPS501630012>>, [accessed November 17, 2022].

⁷⁶ London Lives, *Middlesex Sessions: Sessions Papers – Justices' Working Documents July 1716* (March 2018), <<https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?div=LMSMPS501540019>>, [accessed November 17, 2022].

petitioners. However, her mentioning twice that her other child was blind comes across as carefully calculated.

Neither Anne Humphrys nor Anne Lollo needed to mention that their children were impaired. Humphry's son being 'blind deaf and Senseless' was not ultimately all that pertinent to her case; Lollo did not need to bring up that her other child was blind – it was not particularly or directly relevant to the charges levied against her daughter. But, in doing so, they stuck to the silent rules of petitioning in early modern England and increased their chances of obtaining what they wanted – financial relief and freeing a daughter from prison, respectively.

This tactic was not at all the sole prerogative of parents, and people from outside the child's household could make use of their impairment(s) too. In 1654 Lancashire, the parishioners of Whitstable requested that Abraham Upton be given a parish license to use his house as a place of lodging for travellers. They seem to have thought very highly of Upton but seemingly casually added that he 'hath besides a daughter which is taken lame [and] cannot to helpe her selfe'.⁷⁷ His daughter being physically impaired was altogether irrelevant to her father's character or that of the parishioners or even to the soundness of their claim, but it ultimately would have weighed in their favour.

Most apparent with this rhetorical use of impaired children is that their sense of individuality was of very little importance or relevance. Unless a petition was clearly or directly about them, these children commonly remained unnamed and were reduced to and only identifiable

⁷⁷ Preston, Lancashire Archives, Q.SB.5.79.

by their impairments and familial ties. Both Anne Humphrys and Anne Lollo's petitions evidence this. In Lollo's petition, her blind child is mentioned almost as often as her incarcerated daughter, yet we never learn their name or even gender; similarly, Anne Humphrys' eleven-year-old 'blind deaf and Senseless' son stays relatively anonymous throughout his mother's petition. Likewise, in 1635, widow Jane Rigbye from Ormskirk, Lancashire, sought relief for herself and her 'pore Cripple' and 'impotent' child who is 'no way able to helpe itself'.⁷⁸ Her petition remains utterly vague as to the name, age, or gender of the child whose only identifiable characteristic is their being impaired – the child is not even a 'he' or a 'she' but an 'it'. In like fashion, the people of Whitstable did not name Abraham Upton's daughter in their petition, nor did they give us an idea of how old she was. She was only identifiable and ultimately relevant because she 'is taken lame' and depended on her father for her maintenance. This is not necessarily an indication that petitioners were using their impaired and/or disabled charges for their own benefit. Ultimately, their aim was to secure relief for themselves, yes, but also for their children. Maximising their chances of obtaining aid from the parish was paramount and so utilising their children, even in a dehumanising way, was still better than starving or falling into abject poverty.

Practically speaking, emphasising these children's impairments was a means to an arguably honourable end – namely, providing care and keeping destitution at bay. Destitution then and most likely desperation led these primary carers to use their children's impairments to ensure they would still be able to care and provide for them. At the same time, poor impaired children were made to take a both passive and active role in their own provision of care. They were unnamed participants, even perhaps unwitting, yet were essential to their parents or

⁷⁸ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.150.57.

guardians' petitioning efforts. For instance, William Langrigg from Cumbria and his family used to receive '12d per weeke' on account 'of his having a Lane and deformed child'.⁷⁹ This was admittedly a paltry sum of money, equivalent to less than a day's wages for a skilled worker for a whole week or two days' wages for four weeks, but it was still money that could be used towards the child.⁸⁰ The petition makes it plain that the only reason the Langrigg family was given this weekly allowance was because of their unnamed child's impairment: upon the child's death, a petition was quickly put together by the parishioners of Westward to stop payment of this allowance.

These children and their impairments were what set their carers' petitions apart from the rest: their carers were not like all these other poor petitioners with starving children; their charges were 'lame', 'cripple', 'Senseless', and so on, which better justified why they should be further pitied by the parish and therefore relieved. Their disabled and dependent children turned them into 'deserving poor' as no amount of work could enable them to stave off poverty. These petitioners were at the same time dependable providers of care, but in a rather fascinating twist they also strongly depended on their dependants to secure help from the parish. Without their impaired and/or disabled charges, their cases would not have been as strong, and they would have simply been like any other poor petitioners with non-impaired, non-disabled charges.

⁷⁹ Carlisle, Carlisle Archive Centre, Q.11.1.42.32.

⁸⁰ National Archives, *Currency Converter: 1270-2017*, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result> [accessed April 18, 2024].

3.3. Conclusion

In this chapter I have first addressed the fact that family members such as biological and non-biological parents, siblings, and grandparents cared and provided for impaired and/or disabled children. First and foremost, I looked at biological and stepparents and their fierce desire to protect and provide for their impaired and/or disabled children. Especially for poorer parents, providing for an impaired child was a gargantuan task which involved balancing one's expectations and financial capabilities and early modern society as a whole. Early modern parents worked incredibly hard to support their impaired and/or disabled children and would at times put their lives in jeopardy to continue providing for them. I then moved on to consider more extended bonds of kinship such as that between siblings or between grandparents and grandchildren. These people would have stepped in in the absence of biological and stepparents and acted *in loco parentis*. Just like parents, they would have tried to secure training and/or work for their impaired charges and kept on looking after them even if those charges were or became disabled. Occasionally, they would have had to reach out to their local parish authorities for help. It is also worth reflecting on the fact that carers who did not reach out to the parish for relief inevitably do not appear in my sources. This means that my source base is skewed in favour of those who were either willing or able to seek help. More practically, primary carers had to contend with the realities of poverty and disability: a child (or anyone) who could not work or could not contribute to the household to which they belonged might quickly become a danger to themselves and to the household. Carers thus had to find ways to provide for them despite this.

The second part of this chapter illustrated the ways in which primary carers could provide for their impaired and/or disabled charges. Impaired children were not always able to train or work and thus carers had to find alternative ways to secure their future. Navigating the early modern English petitioning and relief system was an important skill which relied on using one's perceived misfortunes as a way to elicit pity and sympathy from one's parish authorities. Those poor or even destitute petitioners who cared and provided for impaired and/or disabled children were able to utilise their charges' impairments as rhetorical tools to bolster their chances of obtaining aid from the parish. Impaired children therefore became directly if still passively, involved in their own provision of care in the sense that carers depended strongly on their impairments to strengthen their own claims for financial relief with the parish.

Chapter Four will now explore how primary carers could also fail in their duty of care towards their impaired and/or disabled dependants, and in some cases be intentionally abusive towards them. It will also act to counterbalance and qualify Chapter Three in showing that the lived experiences of poor impaired and/or disabled early modern English children were just as nuanced and varied as those of their non-impaired, non-disabled peers.

4. Accidental, Incidental, and Intentional Absence of Care

This chapter qualifies the findings of Chapter Three by showing that provision of care for impaired and/or disabled children in the pre-modern era, especially among the poorer ranks of early modern English society, was never a certainty. It further engages with and contributes to the wider literature about early modern English children by bringing to the fore the fact that impaired and/or disabled children in early modern England could become the unfortunate victims of intentional and non-intentional failures of care or even physical, emotional, and even sexual abuse. Simply because early modern people *could* care for disabled children did not mean that they necessarily did. I wish to give a quick trigger-warning that this chapter will both be engaging with and adding to the scholarship on sexual assault and rape, particularly in Part 4.3.

Therefore, in this present chapter, I first focus on issues of rejection as a result of the negative perception of physical and mental impairments. As before, most of the sources available are petitions for relief. To stress that the findings revealed by this type of source hold a more general relevance, I will first examine the story of Marianne Maillard – reported in a pamphlet from 1693 – a physically impaired French immigrant to England, and how her impairments have been interpreted both an allegory for religious persecution and as a first-hand example of what it meant to be impaired and/or disabled in early modern England.

Returning to petitions, I then go on to argue that long-term dependency was a matter of great concern for many a poor primary carer. It often resulted in the disabled dependant eventually suffering from an absence of care once their carers had grown old or had passed away – for

example, through experiencing homelessness or isolation. Petitions are paradoxical in this way, in that they are often both examples of care and of an absence of it. Petitions themselves are a form of caregiving, regardless of the intent behind them, and their contents similarly sometimes suggest that primary carers had been trying to provide for their dependants. But they are, at the same time, written proof that these same carers had eventually failed to provide adequate or sufficient care to their dependent charges.

In the second part of this chapter, I analyse the various experiences of accidental or incidental failures of care and what it meant for early modern English impaired and/or disabled children. In doing so, I illustrate that failing to care could take on various forms: for example, abandonment, the withholding of food or shelter, or not catering to an impaired child's individual needs. I equally show that failing to care was not wanton by default and that it was itself dependent on a number of concomitant factors, including poverty.

Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I go one step further and consider examples of both physical and emotional violence inflicted upon impaired and/or disabled English children throughout the early modern period. I assert that impaired and/or disabled children could at times become the unfortunate targets of abuse, but also in some cases that abuse was the actual cause of their being impaired and/or disabled – for instance, physical abuse which resulted in physical impairments and subsequently in the child becoming disabled.

As we have already seen, current scholarly literature about the early modern child has mainly been concerned with showing that pre-modern children (*pace* Ariès) were loved and looked

after by their parents.¹ That is, however, of course not to say that historians have not written about child neglect or abuse in early modern England at all. Laura Gowing has shown that neglect was an unfortunate feature of poverty in early modern England: for instance, she stated that infanticide was sometimes not a crime of intentional violence but rather a result of either passive care or of maternal despair.² More recently, Katie Barclay has demonstrated first that child abuse and cruelty were an acknowledged but frowned upon part of life in early modern England, and second that begging street children were proof that not all children were well cared for.³ Likewise, Bernard Capp has shown that ‘harsh or neglectful’ stepparents were very much a reality, too.⁴ They would cheat their stepchildren out of their inheritance or, more plainly, physically abuse them.⁵ More poignantly, on the subject of physical abuse, Sarah Toulalan has written about the relative prevalence of child rape in early modern England and about its dire physical, emotional, and social repercussions on the raped child – for example, disabling sexually transmitted infections such as syphilis.⁶ Historians of early modern women and of motherhood such as Angela J. Muir and Gowing have equally shown

¹ Hannah Newton, *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction*, ed. by Anna French (Oxon: Routledge, 2020); Anthony Fletcher, *Growing Up in England: The Experience of Childhood 1600-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Margaret Pelling, ‘Child Health as a Social Value in Early Modern England’, *Social History of Medicine*, 1.2 (1988), 135–64.

² Laura Gowing, ‘Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England’, *Past & Present*, 156.1 (1997), 106, 107.

³ Katie Barclay, ‘The Early Modern Family’, in *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction*, ed. by Anna French (Oxford: Routledge, 2020), 24–25.

⁴ Bernard Capp, *The Ties That Bind: Siblings, Family, and Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 97.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 97, 98.

⁶ Sarah Toulalan, ‘“Is He a Licentious Lewd Sort of a Person?”: Constructing the Child Rapist in Early Modern England’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 23.1 (2014), 30–31, 33; Sarah Toulalan, ‘“Unripe” Bodies: Children and Sex in Early Modern England’, in *Bodies, Sex, and Desire from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. by Sarah Toulalan and Kate Fisher (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 140, 141.

that abandonment and, more grimly, infanticide were two of the most desperate and drastic measures undertaken by those early mothers who did not have any maternity support.⁷

Still, very little has been written about the absence of care or abuse experienced by impaired and/or disabled early modern English children. David M. Turner has pointed at the fact that impaired children could become targets of abuse – particularly those belonging to the begging underworld of eighteenth-century England – but he mainly writes about the period following the first industrial revolution in England.⁸ Therefore, this chapter addresses this by looking at children who suffered from a lack of adequate care and those who were abused from the angle of early modern English childhood disability.

4.1. Matters of Perception, Rejection, and Dependency

Rejection speaks greatly to the early modern outsider or theoretical perception (as opposed to practical application) of disability as being burdensome. For instance, Emily Cockayne contends that blindness and deafness were seen as serious problems which would inevitably prove burdensome to the community.⁹ In addition, she spotlights that disabled parishioners (and not necessarily children only) could be forced out of their parish of residence to alleviate the perceived financial threat they posed to their community – for example, if they were isolated from their families and risked becoming chargeable to the parish for an extended

⁷ Gowing, 'Secret Births,' 109; Angela J. Muir, 'Midwifery and Maternity Care for Single Mothers in Eighteenth-Century Wales', *Social History of Medicine*, 33.2 (2020), 410-411.

⁸ David M. Turner, 'Impaired Children in Eighteenth-Century England', *Social History of Medicine*, 30.4 (2017), 788, 789.

⁹ Emily Cockayne, 'Experiences of the Deaf in Early Modern England', *The Historical Journal*, 46.3 (2003), 501.

period of time.¹⁰ Evidently, claiming that a dependant was burdensome was also a rhetorical practice for petitioners asking for parish relief.

Rejection as a result of this negative preconception of bodily impairments in early modern England could not only be disabling for some children, but it could also stand as an immovable obstacle which prevented them from receiving adequate care and opportunities. As an example, in 1749, the people of Halghton, Flintshire, banded together to bar Joseph Tagg ‘son of Mary Tagg Widdow’ from settling in their township. This, in itself, is not that unusual: historians, notably Steve Hindle, Patricia Crawford, and Muir have written about how there existed strict laws preventing people from freely settling in a parish other than that of their birth and/or permanent residence.¹¹ Hindle and Muir have further exemplified that these laws were so strict that people were not even supposed to harbour pregnant women from out of town for fear that they would give birth in and thus become chargeable to a parish which was not their own. If this was a common occurrence, then what makes Joseph Tagg’s case stand out? Joseph Tagg was a ‘blind infant’, and I will illustrate how his impairment was used against him to diminish his chances at receiving care.¹² His being impaired is established as soon as his name is first mentioned: his name was Joseph Tagg, he was the son of widow Mary Tagg, and he was blind. Just like impairments could be used to bolster one’s ability to successfully claim relief from the parish (see Chapter Three), so too could impairments be used against them. The people of Halghton mentioning that Tagg was blind was not innocent: it implies that Tagg was perceived as being likely to become burdensome to

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 506.

¹¹ Muir, ‘Midwifery’, 409, 410-411; Steve Hindle, *On the Parish?: The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Clarendon, 2004), 300-301, 305, 306; Patricia Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children in England 1580-1800* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 11, 12.

¹² Deeside, North East Wales Archives, D.LK.123.

the community. By opposing his settling into their community, the people of Halghton decreased Tagg's chances at receiving adequate care.

Printed Sources: Marianne Maillard and Henry Bushly

In order to offer a more general picture of the impact of physical and mental impairments on early modern children, I briefly wish to move away from petitions and instead turn my attention towards two printed sources from the second half of the seventeenth century. This will help inform our understanding of how impairment and disability could impact the lives of early modern children – for example, rejection and abuse, but also partial legal protection (one might even say legal ‘loopholes’). The first one is entitled *A Plain and True Relation* from 1693 and is about a young girl named Marianne Maillard (or Mariane, Marie, Mary, or even Marie-Anne in some versions). Nicholas Junkerman has written at length about how Marianne's story has sometimes been interpreted as an allegory for religious persecution in which disability stood in place of the marginalization of various sub-denominations of Christianity.¹³ Likewise, the description of Marianne throughout the story has been linked to a ‘broader set of Protestant anxieties’, most notably the fact that her physical impairments were met with ‘painful ostracism, abuse, and a hail of dirt’.¹⁴ However, Junkerman also acknowledges that Marianne's story is an apt example of what it could mean to be impaired and/or disabled in the early modern period.¹⁵ Therefore this text provides much insight into the experience of a physically impaired young girl with bullying and harassment in early modern England and into the way she was perceived by some of her peers.

¹³ Nicholas Junkerman, “‘Confined unto a Low Chair’: Reading the Particulars of Disability in Cotton Mather's Miracle Narratives”, *Early American Literature*, 52.1 (2017), 55.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 55-56.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 57, 59.

Marianne's story highlights how impaired and/or disabled early modern English children could become the targets of bullying and harassment by their peers and also by adults.

Marianne Maillard was the eldest daughter of John Maillard, a French Huguenot. When she was six months old,

she became Lame by an accidental Fall out of her Fathers Arms, who being very fond of her, would be frequently playing with her, tossing her up, and catching her again, till at last he very unhappily let her fall to the Ground, where she received ... a very considerably hurt in her left side.¹⁶

Her hip was now permanently 'out', which eventually caused her to walk in a 'very distorted motion'. As attempting to fix her hip would have apparently caused her 'most exquisite Pain and Torture' – at least according to eminent surgeons from both Switzerland and London – her parents decided against it. And thus, Marianne 'continued Lame, growing still more and more crooked and deformed ... being always ready to fall as she went along'.¹⁷ The family eventually left France when Marianne was six or seven and, only travelling by night, they finally reached England. Marianne soon became the target of bullying and suffered from 'the scoffing persecution which she daily met with from the Boys in the Streets; who seeing her distorted manner of going (which was indeed very unusual) were wont to follow her, and pull her with great Rudeness, calling her Crooked Monster, &c'.¹⁸ She also received abuse from

¹⁶ H. E., *A Plain and True Relation of a Very Extraordinary Cure of Marianne Maillard in a Letter to a Friend* (London, 1693), 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 7.

grown adults: one day, as she was heading home, ‘she was much concern’d to see a Man ... about Forty Years of Age, joyn with the Boys in abusing and tormenting of her’.¹⁹ This usefully exemplifies the possibly unkind attitudes of those who did not belong to an impaired and/or disabled child’s supportive and accepting sphere of carers. Clearly, a supportive network of friends, neighbours, and family did not exclude the possibility of an impaired and/or disabled child encountering people who would wish and cause them harm. Of course, being the victims of bullying and harassment was not the unfortunate privilege of the disabled, and Anthony Fletcher has shown that it was a fairly widespread phenomenon, especially in English boarding schools from 1600 to 1914.²⁰ And yet, it evidences that visibly impaired children could easily become the target of abuse by their peers and those who were older.

Such behaviours were also not limited to the poor sections of society. In an account taken from *The Resolutions of the Judges Upon the Several Statutes of Bankrupts* from 1670, we find the case of Henry Bushly the son. The account does not reveal his exact age but, seeing as his case was overseen by the Court of Wards, we at least know he was either not an adult or was not *seen* as an adult. Henry Bushly was ‘an Ideot, a Nativitate’, so somehow congenitally mentally and/or learning impaired, and ‘became a deformed Cripple’ later in life.²¹ Because of an outstanding ‘Fine of his Lands to one Bothome’, Henry Bushly was first kidnapped and ‘carried upon mens shoulders to an unknowne place, and there kept in secret’.²² In the end, the court ruled that although the fine was still outstanding and binding,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁰ Fletcher, *Growing Up*, 351-352.

²¹ Thomas Blount, *The Resolutions of the Judges upon the Several Statutes of Bankrupts as Also, the like Resolutions upon 13 Eliz. and 27 Eliz. Touching Fraudulent Conveyances*. (London, 1670), 130.

²² *Ibid.*

Henry Bushly would not be made to honour it as he was a ‘Deformed ideot’.²³ The court justified their ruling by claiming that ‘the same is the Law of an Infant, and Feme-Court’. In other words, Henry Bushly was not forced to pay the fine because the court saw him as an infant because of his being mentally and/or learning impaired.²⁴ Therefore, in a short amount of time, Henry Bushly was kidnapped, carried away by strange men, kept against his will at an undisclosed location, and finally, in a more positive twist, released from his financial obligations thanks to his impairments.

Examples from Petitions

The petitions for relief which form the basis for this chapter as well as Marianne Maillard’s and Henry Bushly’s stories highlight that the negative perception of impairment and disability could result in rejection, exclusion, or even harassment. But they also speak greatly to matters of traditional life-cycle transitions, age (or the perception of it), dependency, and support. Going back to petitions, it also echoes what we saw in Chapter Three, wherein disability often blurred notions of age and provision of care. In a way, at least for accidental lapses of care or those which resulted from a lack of resources, disability (and therefore by extension a lack of social support to manage impairments) appears to have been the real culprit. Most of the petitioning primary carers mentioned in this chapter said that they were willing to care and provide for their disabled charges but simply could not or were struggling to because of a lack of support on the part of early modern English society. This had lasting repercussions on the lives of both disabled children and their carers.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Petitions for relief by and/or about disabled children *and* disabled adults also raise important questions of long-term dependency and what it meant in regard to receiving care once a child's carers were gone or could not afford to support their disabled charges. In c.1659, the petition of tailor Richard Kerby of Woodplumpton, Lancashire, delves into the reality of being the elderly parent of a fully dependent disabled adult child, and into the anxiety and fears that this brought along with it – notably, fears about future provision of care or lack thereof and the dwindling ability to provide care in the present. His and his wife's twenty-nine-year-old daughter, Margaret, was 'both deafe and dumbe', had been 'hitherto maintained by the paines and industrie of her parents, and 'never did anie worke att all whereby to get or save'.²⁵ In other words, she was entirely dependent on her elderly parents for her survival. And of course, because of 'age and the Concomitants thereof', Richard and his wife were less and less able to look after their daughter or even themselves, which resulted in inevitable lapses of care. This evidently did not bode well for any of them but especially not for Margaret who would eventually be left to her own devices once her parents had passed. The Kerby family was lucky in that their plea was answered, and the churchwardens were 'bound' to offer them relief, but this was not always the case.

This appears to have been a pivotal concern with disabled children becoming disabled adults but continuing to require high levels of care. While Chapter Three has established that primary carers could plan ahead and ensure their children would be adequately cared for later in life (either once they themselves had passed away or once they had ceased to be able to support them), some disabled adults eventually found themselves alone and utterly unable to fend for themselves. To illustrate this, I want to turn to the petition for relief of Anne and

²⁵ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.178.17.

Robert Godderd on behalf of Anne's son Ralph Thorpe, a 'poore lame Cripple'.²⁶ It considers future life stages and illustrates what life could be like for an adult who had been impaired and disabled from birth or from a young age, who had been relying on his carers and friends fully, and who had now lost or was not able to rely on this support network. As he could not work and did not have anyone upon whom to fall back, Ralph's life was very much precarious and was likely to take a turn for the worst at any given moment.

In 1636, then, we find Ralph Thorpe, the 'poore lame Cripple' son of Anne Godderd. Both Anne and Robert Godderd, her husband and Ralph's stepfather, were still alive at the time of this petition but were apparently unable to support Ralph financially – the petition states that they were experiencing 'such povertie' that they were absolutely incapable of caring for him. Ralph himself was 'destitute of all meanes for his maynteynance' and 'some of his frends which have formerly maynteyned him being dead, and others of them ... beinge in such povertie as they are not able to releive [sic] him' either. What this petition suggests is that disabled early modern children who could not work and/or who did not have any form of support network were likely to struggle later in life. Ralph's petition focused on a disabled adult whose parents were still alive but in such a state of destitution as to not even be able to support themselves much less their disabled charge.

This petition also highlights the fact that friends, neighbours, and families were not or would not always be able to help, particularly if one was from one of the poorer echelons of early modern English society. Parents could also be struggling financially and, either way would eventually grow old and die. Friends and neighbours, especially if they were poor themselves,

²⁶ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.175.72.

would likewise not have been expected to permanently support impaired and/or disabled people: they would have had their own financial struggles with which to contend. While Christian charity, as explained in Chapter Two, was important in the early modern period, it was very much finite and would have rested on the financial capabilities of those living alongside impaired and/or disabled people. Scholars such as Capp, Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, Alexandra Shepard, or Hindle, to name a few, have indicated that friends, relatives, and neighbours could potentially help indigent adults survive using their own resources.²⁷ However, chances were that if a person was poor, their friends, neighbours, and families were likely to be just as equally destitute. For instance, some of Ralph Thorpe's friends were still alive – as were his parents – but they simply could not come to his rescue by reason of their own financial struggles. Ralph was not technically 'alone' but he was definitely on his own and suffering as a direct consequence of it – at least, according to his mother's petition.

Failing to meet the needs of early modern English children, then, seems to have gone hand in hand with either poverty or inadequate societal support – of course, my source base creates an inevitable imbalance in perception in that those early modern carers who did not need help or who actively provided for their impaired and/or disabled children logically did not have to seek help in the first place. Still, this could be the stark reality of growing up poor and

²⁷ Capp, *The Ties*, 43, 44, 65; Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, 'Gifts and Favours: Informal Support in Early Modern England', *The Journal of Modern History*, 72.2 (2000), 297, 302, 303; Alexandra Shepard, 'Poverty, Labour, and the Language of Social Description in Early Modern England', *Past & Present*, 201 (2008), 54; Hindle, *On the Parish*, 26, 56, 57; see also, Crawford, *Parents*, 11-12; Mary Lewis, 'Childcare in the Past: The Contribution of Paleopathology', in *Care in the Past: Archaeological and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Lindsay Powell, William Southwell-Wright, and Rebecca Gowland (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2017), 26; Maria Cannon, 'Conceptualising Childhood as a Relational Status: Parenting Adult Children in Sixteenth-Century England', *Continuity and Change*, 36.3 (2021), 317, 320; Jonathan Healey, *The First Century of Welfare* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014), 127.

disabled in the early modern period and some inevitably became vulnerable indigent disabled adults. They would eventually lose their carers, while their support network of friends and neighbours could at some point fail. Parish relief would sometimes prove to be a slow and unreliable solution, which ultimately meant that they would suffer from a lack of satisfactory care. In any case, parish relief was never meant to be used independently from other potential sources of income.²⁸ In the most extreme of cases (which are of course made all the more dramatic by the subjective and performative nature of petitions), the future of some disabled children could turn out to be incredibly bleak and foreboding, consisting of penury, homelessness, starvation, and isolation.

4.2. Absence of Care

Petitions for relief show many ways in which impaired and/or disabled children from poorer backgrounds could experience both accidental and incidental lapses of care. This does not necessarily mean that their primary carers were *actively* trying to hurt them, but through a number of factors such as poverty or abandonment, these children were left with little to survive on. We also must contend with the inherent imbalance in perception created by petitions for relief. The main issue with petitions is that they exist only when something has gone awry – for instance, when carers are struggling and need parish support. Therefore, as previously established, the sources surveyed in this chapter (and more widely, in this dissertation) create an inevitable imbalance in so far as the more comfortably well-off children are removed from the equation.

²⁸ Steve Hindle, 'Civility, Honesty and the Identification of the Deserving Poor in Seventeenth-Century England', in *Identity and Agency in English Society, 1500-1800*, ed. by Henry French and Jonathan Barry (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 43.

Petitions for relief from the period show that poor disabled children often had to deal with the fact that they could not train or work – some of them were entirely dependent on their primary carers for food, drink, and shelter, and some could not even beg. This, therefore, added a layer of difficulty to their experiencing failures of care and further set them apart from their non-disabled peers. Chapter Five will more intently address the pivotal role of the parish in the lives of poor impaired and/or disabled children, but it is important to understand that parish relief was not always a possibility and that many impaired and/or disabled children continued to suffer from an absence of care as a result of it. Abandonment was one of the ways through which impaired and/or disabled children could experience this absence of care.

Abandonment

Abandonment is not necessarily an absence of care in itself, and it also does not mean that the child's primary carer(s) did not try to care for their charge(s). Sometimes, abandoning one's child was the only way a guardian could hope to provide for them. Crawford shows that leaving one's child somewhere public was a fairly common way in early modern England to ensure that the child would be taken in by another household, either by parish appointment or through informal adoption.²⁹ She also notes, however, that grandparents would occasionally help their daughters to find suitable new parents for their children, thus relieving them of having to abandon their children outright.³⁰

²⁹ Crawford, *Parents*, 47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Petitions for relief render caregivers' intent difficult to truly discern. For instance, in c.1649 Lancashire, in a petition for relief made by local constable Thomas Spenser, we learn the story of Jane Ireland, a 'Creeple about 8 or 9 years of age' whom he had taken in after she had been abandoned by her parents and left with nothing with which to subsist.³¹ Jane's parents, Robert and Elizabeth Ireland, had reportedly 'departed went & run away from their then dwelling in Skelmersdale, and now live, or [sojourn] in place unknowne'. When they 'departed', they not only left their daughter 'without meanes or maintenance of meate drinke lodgeing or apparrell', but also with nothing upon which to build a future – Robert Ireland apparently had 'neither reall or p[er]sonall estate'. The petition being by Thomas Spenser and thus from his point of view means that it is not quite clear, nor will it ever truly be possible to know why Robert and Elizabeth Ireland left their daughter behind: the petition did not expand on whether they saw her and her impairments as burdensome, or if they left her behind for her own safety or well-being, or whether this was their only option. All we know is that Jane Ireland was left on her own, temporarily without victuals, shelter, or clothes. In addition to being left with nothing, she was also 'lame and not able to beg', therefore not able to work for her own subsistence. Had it not been for Thomas Spenser who took her in, she would have likely not survived.

Whether wanton or incidental, the act of leaving a disabled child behind could have pernicious repercussions on that child's life and in turn could result in contingent displacement. For example, Jane Ireland's situation was precarious and made her future all the more uncertain: her parents were long gone and had left her with nothing; she could not

³¹ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.23.34.

support herself as she could not work or even beg; and her temporary guardian did not seem particularly thrilled at the prospect of keeping her under his care. In short, she did not fully belong anywhere. A similar case from 1649 echoes this idea of impermanence. This petition's main protagonists are Richard Bennet of Ashbourne in Derbyshire and Elizabeth Sheepee, the 'poore lame child' he had been keeping.³² Bennet was promised a weekly allowance for looking after the child, which was the only reason why he agreed to do it in the first place. Elizabeth was 'fatherles & motherles' and had only Bennet to look after her. After facing intermittent financial difficulties, Bennet eventually requested that Elizabeth be removed from his care – this came after Elizabeth had been living with him for 'the space of seven years'. While Bennet was arguably thinking about his disabled charge too and about her well-being (at least on paper), Elizabeth was still threatened with displacement once again. This reinforces the idea that abandoned disabled children could struggle to find a place where they would fully belong.

Lack of Care as a Result of a Dearth of Resources

Poverty or a lack of resources is the one point of commonality between nearly all petitions for relief about disabled children. A paucity of resources logically resulted in an inability to provide satisfactory sustenance or shelter for one's disabled charge. Those same petitions for relief suggest that depriving impaired and/or disabled children of care was oftentimes a matter of unfortunate circumstances, particularly within impoverished and struggling households. Evidently, this was also true for carers of non-disabled children – an absence of care as an incidental consequence of poverty was not at all the prerogative of those who cared for disabled children. Crawford has written about how, at first, childcare often prevented

³² Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, Q.SB.2.107.

mothers from working and how infants initially could not contribute to the household because of how young they were.³³ This meant that the whole household temporarily became dependent on the labour or wages of the father, therefore of only one person, which could be particularly risky for poor households.³⁴ Healey also argues that the cost of caring for sick people who could not look after themselves in early modern England was frequently prohibitive and could be a major concern for those living in poverty – for example, parents might have to stop working to look after an ailing child, while some might need to provide around-the-clock care for a sick spouse.³⁵ In the case of people who cared for *disabled* children, this financial precariousness was also sometimes coupled with the disabled child's permanent 'impotence' (in the early modern sense of the word) if they could not help with chores or with bringing in money through work or begging and this even when they had left infancy. This rendered them permanently and often entirely dependent on their guardians, which could in turn become a real obstacle in their receiving satisfactory levels of care.

This was distinctly problematic for impoverished households which consisted of a struggling single carer and a disabled child. For example, in 1639, widow Mary Cisley from the small village of Croston in Lancashire decided that she was no longer able to care for Isabel Thomason, 'a poor blynd' orphan.³⁶ Her petition states that she looked after Isabel for four and half years without ever receiving 'anye allowance for the [Child]' which ultimately caused her to exhaust all her resources 'soe that now shee is not able to keepe herself much less the child'. This implies that Mary Cisley was no longer able to provide Isabel Thomason with basic necessities such as food, drink, or clothes. It is unclear from this petition why Mary

³³ Crawford, *Parents*, 7-8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Healey, *The First Century*, 185; see also, Pelling, 'Child Health', 139.

³⁶ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.214.79.

Cisley elected to look after Isabel in the first place – perhaps she had been appointed as guardian by the parish or had decided to do so of her own accord as a charitable act; she might also have been a friend or relative of the child’s late parents. In any case, Isabel was (or was at risk of) suffering from a poverty-induced lack of care. Furthermore, whereas it was ordered that ‘the Churchwardens & overseers of the poore ... shall forthw[i]th upon notice hereof make p[ro]vision for the manteynance & subsistence of Isabell Thomason’, this order only came a year later, in 1640.³⁷ In the meantime, Mary Cisley would have likely had to scour desperately for food and money for a whole year, potentially depriving Isabel Thomason of adequate care.

Another example would be the petition of William Nycholas from c.1557 Hertfordshire about his legal dispute with Frances Skiff over the maintenance of Elizabeth Skrogge, the latter’s impaired and disabled sister. The issue of care, or rather of a seeming absence of it, in this petition is a bit more complex. I expanded on this case first in Chapter Two as a way to illustrate the inability of William and his family to rely on neighbourly charity, and then in Chapter Three to illustrate that despite eventually wanting to be rid of his sister, Frances had been looking after her for many years. I now want to show that his desire to ‘Rydde owt of his house the seid Elizabeth’ had negative consequences on her ability to receive adequate or sufficient care.³⁸ Elizabeth was utterly dependent on whoever cared for her: she was ‘lame’, ‘impotente’, ‘decrepite of her lymes’, and ‘not hable [sic] in body to get by her labour’. Whoever cared for her then, whether it be Frances or William, would have had to contend with her individual needs. While Frances was apparently ‘very welthy [sic]’, he still ultimately decided to move his sister into a different household – his reasons for doing so are

³⁷ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.230.46.

³⁸ Richmond, National Archives, C1.1457.54.

not made clear to the reader, so whether this was for her safety, as a matter of convenience to Frances, or even something else still will remain unknown. The petition suggests that this would arguably not have been a problem if Frances had kept to his spoken promise to William. Again, whereas Frances had ‘faythfully p[ro]mysed your sayde Oratour that he wold [sic] paye hym yerely xi s[hillings] of lawfull money’, he unfortunately failed to make the required payments for his sister to be properly maintained. And this eventually became a problem for William and his family. As he mentioned in his petition, he and his family – his ‘wiff and many Small Chyldern [sic]’ – were destitute and relied on Frances’ allowance to maintain Elizabeth without resorting to spending their own meagre funds. Therefore, while William was, as a necessity, only emphasising his own plight and that of his family, his petition still indirectly shed light upon the fact that Elizabeth was not being sufficiently maintained and that she was therefore suffering from an unfortunate lapse of care.

Petitions for relief from the period show that poverty was still the main obstacle in preventing these carers from truly providing for their disabled charges. A case from 1675 Northamptonshire emphasises the difficulties encountered by single carers (especially single *women*) who looked after disabled children. The anonymous petitioner was a ‘very poore widow’ whose ‘Lame Child’ had ‘Reduced her to such penury and want that shee is noe way able to subsist any Longer but must of Nessesity perish together with her fatherless Child unless Timely prevented’.³⁹ This petition suggests that this anonymous widow was apparently more than willing to provide for her disabled offspring, but that her state of destitution was unfortunately responsible for her inability to provide care for her child.

³⁹ Northampton, Northamptonshire Archives, QSR1.79.54.

Lapses of care as a result of poverty were also more likely to occur if the carer themselves was 'Lame' too. In 1713, widow Elizabeth Atkinson pleaded that she and her two 'Lame Children' be granted relief by their parish.⁴⁰ She explained that she was 'also Lame and weak' and that maintaining herself and her children was proving incredibly difficult – this was a reality for most ageing parents of dependent disabled children. Her being alone, poor, disabled, and responsible for two 'Lame' children meant that she was unable to deliver adequate care and that, despite her best efforts, her children were suffering from this absence of care. She was clearly willing to provide for them as she attempted to work despite being 'Lame and weak', but it was clearly not enough. Of course, being a widow meant that she would have been much more likely to receive aid from the parish. As Amy M. Froide shows, along with the aged, the sick, and the disabled, widows were included within the 'deserving poor' category. This meant that they were entitled to parish relief when they found themselves going through financial hardships because they were seen as being vulnerable.⁴¹ Chapter Five will address this in much more detail.

Of course, being part of an indigent single-parent household was not the only way through which an early modern English disabled child could experience lapses of care, accidental or otherwise. As established in Chapter One, parents could spend significant amounts of money while trying to cure their children's various ailments and impairments and, particularly for poorer people, this also routinely went hand in hand with the fast dwindling of a household's resources. As for those who cared for impaired and/or disabled children, finding a so-called 'cure' could be synonymous with a slow descent into destitution and thus towards incidental

⁴⁰ Beverley, East Riding Archives, QSF.23.D.2.

⁴¹ Amy M. Froide, 'Marital Status as a Category of Difference: Singlewomen and Widows in Early Modern England', in *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800*, ed. by Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 252.

lapses of care. The petition of Henry Lewis, the father of seven from 1701 Surrey whom we met in Chapter Three, perfectly evidences that: Lewis' disabled son lived 'upon [his] charge both for his cure & alsoe for dyet & lodgeinge', which was proving 'very hard upon [Henry Lewis]' and his wife as they were both 'Antient' and past their labouring years.⁴² Their looking for a cure in addition to supporting their disabled son was slowly pushing them towards poverty and, in this case, involuntarily towards failing to meet their children's needs.

Contending with Impaired Children's Individual Needs

Early modern English primary carers were sometimes simply not able to deal with impaired and/or disabled children. Particularly for masters, they were trying to keep their own households afloat and were not necessarily able to keep on apprentices who could not learn their respective trades and thus who could not help them. This could at times lead to a child being left to their own devices and/or potentially to the child putting their own life at risk. Equally, a lack of understanding of bodily impairments could lead to a lack of care and compassion towards a disabled child, and therefore to failing to cater to their idiosyncratic limitations. For some of these guardians, it was not so much that they did not care but rather that they were not able to care (sometimes despite apparently trying). Ultimately, this translated into their young and impaired charges suffering from an absence of adequate care.

Some cases equally show that some masters tried but ultimately still failed to accommodate the individual needs of sick and disabled apprentices. Although some of these cases began as examples *of* care, they inevitably turned into examples of an *absence* of care. Masters

⁴² Ipswich, Suffolk Archives, QS2.6.1701.59.

terminating apprenticeships led to their former apprentices' suffering. This chapter is only concerned with matters of absences of care, but I will discuss the bigger impact of terminating apprenticeships for impaired and/or disabled children in Chapter Five. For example, in seventeenth-century West Yorkshire, William Windle had to file a petition to request that his '*non compos mentis*' apprentice be removed from under his care.⁴³ The unnamed boy was 'about 9 in years old' and was not 'capable of saying the Lords prayer nor numbering to twentie nor name the days in the weeke although he hath beene ... gentlie taught ... the same'. Windle claimed that, despite he and his family 'gentlie' teaching him, never chastising or '[giving] anie bad language to the said boy', and despite their constant '[cherishing] and [encouraging] him in hopes to have brought him to some knowledge and witte', the boy could not learn. Moreover, he would

Upon a sudden get out and goe into some place or other in feilds [sic] or moore, and hide and absent himself for two or three daies, and nights together till he be readie to starve for [want of] foode soe that [Windle] lives in verie greate feare least at sometime or other by reason of his lack of understanding and witt, he shold [sic] come to some Untimelie end.⁴⁴

According to this petition, the Windle family did their best to care for the boy and were, at least on paper, exceedingly kind and gentle towards him. Yet it was evidently not enough. The boy needed more specialised care, which the Windles could not provide. This petition suggests that he was somehow mentally and/or learning impaired: he could not count or name

⁴³ Wakefield, West Yorkshire Archive Service, QS1.14.5.6.4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

the days of the week. As Patrick Wallis demonstrates, apprentices would have been expected to have learnt the letters of the alphabet and to count.⁴⁵ More strikingly still, the boy was referred to as a *non compos mentis*, or ‘of unsound mind’. The fact that he was already indentured at the age of nine also implies that he was from a poor family, or that he was an orphan – historians such as Wallis, Cliff Webb, Chris Minns, and Hindle have established that children from poor struggling families were regularly indentured off around the age of eight or nine to lessen their charge on the parish and their families.⁴⁶ Therefore, acquiring skills that would have helped him to become more or less independent would have been of paramount importance. Indirectly failing to care for his limitations or even terminating his apprenticeship likely had harmful repercussions on his future.

Especially with some early modern masters, apprentices were either expected to somehow overcome their disability or risk losing their chance at learning a trade. For example, some apprentices saw their apprenticeships abruptly end after being afflicted by the King’s Evil: Thomas Mercer and Thomas Bullock from early eighteenth-century Lancashire were discharged from their respective indentures because they had been ‘visited’ by the disease.⁴⁷ Others like John Plyer from 1747 Somerset, or Sarah Tasker and John Rank from 1728 and 1725 East Yorkshire respectively were let go by their masters ‘by reason of their Infirmitys’, in other words because they were physically impaired or debilitatingly ill.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Patrick Wallis, ‘Between Apprenticeship and Skill: Acquiring Knowledge Outside the Academy in Early Modern England’, *Science in Context*, 32.2 (2019), 160.

⁴⁶ Patrick Wallis, Cliff Webb, and Chris Minns, ‘Leaving Home and Entering Service: The Age of Apprenticeship in Early Modern London’, *Continuity and Change*, 25.3 (2010), 379, 390; Hindle, *On the Parish*, 25.

⁴⁷ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.1240.9, QSP.1159.14.

⁴⁸ Taunton, Somerset Heritage Centre, Q.SR.315.314; Beverley, East Riding Archives, QSF.69.E.13, QSF.81.G.6.

Failing to take an impaired child's congenital or acquired limitations into account could also actively hurt them and their chances at a socio-economically independent life. In one petition for relief from 1656, William Wey, who was apprenticed to Thomas Seaward, became impaired as a result of a workplace injury but was kept on nonetheless despite growing weaker by the day. William's mother, Johane Wey, explained that after working for Seaward for the span of two and half years 'in health', her son eventually 'fell lame' as he was 'traveling about his masters busness [sic]'.⁴⁹ Still, his master did not give him much respite and insisted he should keep on working anyway. There finally came a point when William was no longer 'able (in regard of his lameness) to doe his masters business' and Seaward agreed to let his apprentice *temporarily* go back to live with his mother for treatment. William 'somewhat recovered to strength', and while he was still apparently in no way fit enough to work, was forced by his master to return to his apprenticeship. Therefore, William's mother hoped that her local parish officials would be 'favorably pleased to release her sonne from his master or to cause him to pay for her sonnes cure'. The outcome of the petition is, as is sometime the case, unfortunately missing. Nevertheless, we can infer from this petition that by ignoring William's physical limitations, Thomas Seaward both caused his apprentice to suffer greatly physically and also indirectly negatively impacted his future work opportunities, too.

Absences or lapses of care could therefore take on various forms. Impaired and/or disabled children could be abandoned by their parents for a variety of reasons. Likewise, a dearth of resources could quickly translate to an inadequate and unsatisfactory provision of care on the

⁴⁹ Taunton, Somerset Heritage Centre, Q.SPET.1.132

part of early modern primary carers. Finally, struggling or failing to contend with an impaired and/or disabled child's individual needs could similarly result in the child experiencing an absence of care.

4.3. Physical and Emotional Violence

Chapter Four has thus far only focused on *accidental* or *incidental* lapses of care, but I now want to turn to much more intentional and sometimes violent ways of withholding or actively taking away care from early modern English impaired and/or disabled children. These children could become the unfortunate victims of terrible physical and emotional violence in the forms of beatings, rape, and wanton deprivation of their basic needs of food, drink, and shelter. Of course, occasional 'disciplinary' violence towards one's child was not unheard of in the pre-modern period. Crawford and Barclay have discussed how physical chastisement was somewhat tolerated throughout the period as a way to instil morals, obedience, and respect into children and youths.⁵⁰ Loretta Dolan has likewise warned historians against anachronistic comparisons between early modern notions of discipline and our modern sensibilities towards nurture and neglect: some parents threatened or even struck their children as a way to nurture them and ensure they would become 'civilised' members of early modern English society.⁵¹ Fletcher has even summarised that early modern people believed that a child's behind was created by God so that they might the more easily receive correction without serious harm.⁵² Yet, while cruelty and abuse were evidently disapproved of, it did not

⁵⁰ Crawford, *Parents*, 146; Barclay, 'The Early Modern Family', 24-25.

⁵¹ Loretta Dolan, 'Notions of Nurture and Neglect in Adult-Child Relationships', in *Nurture and Neglect: Childhood in Sixteenth-Century Northern England* (Routledge, 2017), 36.

⁵² Fletcher, *Growing Up*, 3.

stop some early modern contemporaries from resorting to it anyway, and not necessarily for the sake of inculcating young individuals with obedience and respect.⁵³ Looking at this through the lens of early modern disability adds useful layers of understanding to our knowledge of child abuse in the pre-modern era – for example, abuse was not always directed at disabled children but also sometimes at vulnerable disabled adults too; equally, abuse could be the prime impetus in a child acquiring an impairment.

Active and Intentional Deprivation of Care

Sometimes abuse came from within the disabled child's household in the sense that carers would actively withhold food and shelter from their young charges. Clearly, this went directly against what early modern English society expected of primary carers. We know thanks to scholars like Crawford, Hindle, or Margaret Pelling that parishes endeavoured – with various levels of success – to keep children from either suffering from lapses of care or, for 'impotent' children, from their draining their families' and their community's resources.⁵⁴ While these measures were obviously not without flaws, they still in theory aimed to keep children from being denied food, drink, and shelter. In a way, they were representative of broader societal expectations of care and compassion.

Unlike the petitions above, in which primary carers presented themselves as unable to provide sufficient care despite their best efforts, others provide evidence of carers going against these expectations of basic care and actively depriving their impaired and/or disabled children of, for example, a home. In 1708 Pleasington, Lancashire, a 'poor lame boy' named

⁵³ Barclay, 'The Early Modern Family', 24-25.

⁵⁴ Crawford, *Parents*, 127; Hindle, *On the Parish*, 49, 56, 204; Pelling, 'Child Health', 140, 141, 146.

Edward Lucas had to file a petition for relief despite being only twelve years old.⁵⁵ It is unlikely that he wrote the petition itself, but he probably enlisted the help of a local scribe or of someone (but not his parents) with knowledge of the petitioning system. Edward was not only ‘lame’ but also ‘not fit for trade or work’ therefore theoretically should have been provided for by his carers – in this case, his parents. His parents were apparently ‘very poor people’ and had ‘nothing wherewith to support themselves’. This is reminiscent of the petitions for relief examined previously, wherein carers hoped to avoid failing to meet their disabled children’s needs by seeking help from the parish. However, in this case, Edward’s parents were intentionally and, according to the petition, ‘unkindly’ refusing to even shelter their son. Edward was ‘forced to beg abroad & lodge where he can and sometimes near Starving’. Even more glaringly, and unlike disabled children who suffered from *accidental* lapse of care and for whom parents chose to reach out to the parish, Edward had to seek help from his local parish officials by himself despite being only twelve years old – he would have admittedly received help from a scrivener or scribe to write the petition. Simply, by deliberately refusing to care for their son who they knew could not support himself, Edward’s parents were consciously causing him to suffer.

More perversely, some early modern contemporaries willingly chose to deprive disabled individuals from whatever support they had managed to obtain. Chapter Three has already demonstrated how primary carers often planned ahead to ensure those disabled charges who could not work would still be provided for once their carers were no longer there to support them: any skills, money, and/or property a disabled individual inherited from their carers could quite literally save their lives. Therefore, deliberately cheating a disabled individual out

⁵⁵ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.983.12.

of their support system was tantamount to threatening their lives. In 1628, Elianor Asmough, a 'pore distressed Cripel' from Pilkington in Lancashire, was defrauded out of her home and of her inheritance by her brother, John Asmough.⁵⁶ The Asmoughs were likely slightly higher up on the social ladder than other petitioners mentioned in this dissertation and thus had more resources than the average petitioner. Around four years prior to this petition, Richard Asmough, their father, had bequeathed both his children the entirety of his estate consisting of 'a messuage and [tenements] in Pilkington ... conteyninge five acres of lande or thereabouts'. In doing this, he hoped that his daughter who was 'not anie waies able to releave her selfe by her Industrie' would benefit from the 'yerely proffitt of the moytie of the said Messuage and [tenements]' to support herself. Dependent on the money, Elianor inevitably found herself desperate for help when her brother suddenly began to withhold paying her her half of the money. In addition to denying her the money their father had intended for her to receive, John Asmough was also refusing to 'keepe susteyne and manteyne [Elianor]'. He had 'allsoe taken a bed and other Clothes belonging to the same [Elianor], and turned her forth of the house and [denied] to gyve this petitioner either house rounge or lodgeine'. Finally,

[John Asmough] hath allsoe gotten the grand lease wh[i]ch this petitioners father had from [the right honorable William Earle of Darbie] into his hands out of the possession and custodie of M[aste]r Foxe to whome the said lease was delivered in trust to bee kept for the use of this pore petitioner, and the said John Asmough, and nowe gyves out in

⁵⁶ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.39.51.

speches that because this peticion[e]r hath not writeinge to show her right therefore shee shall have not releife nor manteyneance out of the same.⁵⁷

From what Elianor claimed, her brother was not going through any particular financial hardships. In the same fashion, and unlike other petitions, John's refusal to care for his sister was not borne out of extreme necessity or abject destitution. The contrast between this case and, for example, that of William and John Cooper from 1610 Kent which Chapter Three briefly reviewed is blatant and further reinforces the differences between incidental failures of care and deliberate abuse. William and John Cooper wanted to stop caring for their sister because they could no longer cope with the financial and logistical requirements of it, and they petitioned their local parish to hopefully ensure she would be looked after.⁵⁸ John Asmough appears to have been driven by greed and intentionally put his sister's life in danger. William, John, and their sister were victims of their circumstances, whereas John was a willing agent of his sister's suffering and seems to have been eager to take as much from her as possible.

Simon Jarrett's research on mentally impaired people shows that this was not an isolated incident. He recounts an anecdote from the late eighteenth century in which an 'idiot' woman with an inheritance of approximately £1,000 per annum was manipulated, taken advantage of, and cheated of her inheritance: a family somehow managed to trap this woman into a marriage with their eldest son (thus securing her inheritance for themselves), who then went on to take a mistress who came to live with him in his house while his actual wife was given

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Maidstone, Kent History and Library Centre, QM.SB.916.

a separate room in the same house.⁵⁹ They treated her like a child and made full use of her inheritance.

In many ways, an absence of care, when it became deliberate, quickly crossed into the realm of intentional abuse. Edward Lucas' parents or John Asmough did not accidentally fail to support their child or sister. They willingly elected to abuse their disabled child/sibling, knowing full well that their decision would have dire consequences on their ability to survive.

Abuse as a Cause of Impairments: Physical Violence and Rape

Throughout this chapter I have evidenced how impairments could lead to failures of care and in some cases abuse. However, inflicting bodily harm upon a child could also be the reason why the child became impaired and subsequently disabled in the first place. Petitions and criminal depositions and testimonies underline that different forms of abuse could result in a child becoming disabled. First and foremost, petitions revolving around disputes between a master or mistress and their apprentice reveal that excessive or unwarranted discipline could lead apprentices to becoming impaired and then disabled. We already know thanks to the works of Wallis and Chris Minns that apprenticeships were precarious arrangements which sometimes ended prematurely.⁶⁰ This premature end either came at the behest of the master, the apprentice, or both.⁶¹ In some instances, termination was precipitated by a master or

⁵⁹ Simon Jarrett, *Those They Called Idiots: The Idea of the Disabled Mind from 1700 to the Present Day* (London: Reaktion Books, 2020), 95.

⁶⁰ Patrick Wallis, 'Labour, Law, and Training in Early Modern London: Apprenticeship and the City's Institutions', *The Journal of British Studies*, 51.4 (2012), 783, 794, 795; Wallis, 'Between Apprenticeship', 160; Chris Minns and Patrick Wallis, 'Rules and Reality: Quantifying the Practice of Apprenticeship in Early Modern England: Quantifying Apprenticeship', *The Economic History Review*, 65.2 (2012), 558, 561, 568.

⁶¹ Wallis, 'Labour', 794, 796, 802, 806.

mistress inflicting unrestrained bodily harm upon their apprentice.⁶² Likewise, and although I have not found any examples in my petitions to this effect, it is fair to assume that unbridled physical discipline on the part of a child's primary carer could also lead to similar impairments. Crawford has already shown that parents could be so violent when disciplining their children that it led to the latter's deaths.⁶³ Therefore, it would not be too much of a stretch of the imagination to claim that some early modern English parents found themselves impairing their children while immoderately disciplining them.

Exceptional acts of violence could result in the apprentice becoming physically impaired in some way. For instance, in 1650, in Purtington, Somerset, Thomas Parker testified that his master, Richard Collyer had beaten him repeatedly, to the point that he was now permanently 'lame'.⁶⁴ Parker explains that 'about St Pauls Faire', his master 'stroke [him] downe upon the ground w[i]th his fist, and also then stroke him 3; or 4; times with his Feete upon the sides' because Parker had forgotten to put 'straw in the stable for [Collyer's] horse'. At first, Parker was relatively fine: he 'grew lame, but not so much; and was able to worke'. However, he later 'grew soe lame; and impotent in his body, on all the parts of one of his sides, that he was not able to doe his mast[er] any service'. Collyer therefore decided to strike 'him downe againe w[i]th his fist, att two blowes: by w[hi]ch meanes, [Parker] is cripled and not in a Condicion to helpe himself'. The intent behind such a display of violence is unclear: Collyer might have just been punishing his apprentice for his mistake and insufficiency as a way to spur him on; or he might have wanted to hurt him enough to make him leave. As Wallis has shown, some masters entered into apprenticeship contracts with the sole intention of

⁶² *Ibid*, 805-806.

⁶³ Crawford, *Parents*, 146.

⁶⁴ Taunton, Somerset Heritage Centre, Q.SR.82.134.

eventually forcing their apprentices to quit – for instance, so as to keep the premium paid by those same apprentices.⁶⁵ Collyer might have therefore thought that, by incapacitating Parker, the latter would have had no choice but to quit. Regardless of Collyer's reasons, the end result remains the same: Collyer impaired and thus concomitantly disabled his apprentice.

Abusing one's apprentices into disability was not reserved to masters, and we do have evidence of mistresses inflicting such ruthless punishments on their apprentices that they eventually became impaired and disabled. In 1733, Lydia Davis was disabled from work as a direct result of her mistress' treatment of her. Davis was indentured to Elizabeth Lambrecht, a seamstress, for the duration of five years. For the whole time she was in Lambrecht's service, Davis was 'beaten and abused ... in so barbarous a manner that her flesh hath been so much discoloured and bruised thereby, that she was obliged to apply herself to a surgeon, under whose care she remained for a long time'.⁶⁶ It is also likely that she had to pay the surgeon herself. The surgeon's assessment of her injuries was that she would 'have been attended with worse consequence had not much care been taken about the same'. In other words, she could have either died or been permanently impaired and disabled as a result of the harm committed by her mistress. It is also likely that such trauma left Davis with lasting physical and emotional wounds.

More indirectly, poor treatment of one's apprentice could lead them to run away and put themselves in perilous situations. John Drable's daughter from 1688 Yorkshire was used 'soe hardly' by Henry Worrall her master that she either 'run away or was sold away'.⁶⁷ She was

⁶⁵ Wallis, 'Labour', 805-806.

⁶⁶ London, London Metropolitan Archives, WJ.SP.1735.04.003.

⁶⁷ Wakefield, West Yorkshire Archive Service, QS1.27.6.

brought ‘from Constable to Constable’ until she eventually found herself in a situation where ‘her Tongue was cut out’, to her parents’ great horror, and charged ‘to y^e vallue of abov Forty Shillings’. As such her parents were hoping that ‘it would please this Honorable Court to allow yo[u]r petitioner all or p[ar]t of his Charges to be paid by y^e said Worrall for y^e Reasons before mentioned’. To them, Worrall was responsible for what had happened to their daughter: he had not only caused their daughter to become physically impaired by making her run away but had also technically cost them forty shillings in ‘Charges’.

The second way through which a child could be made disabled as a result of abuse was rape. In particular, girls from the lower social orders were at greater risk of assault by adults with whom they came into contact in their regular day-to-day lives.⁶⁸ Toulalan and Garthine Walker point out that while there were no laws specifically against *child* sexual abuse in England until the nineteenth century, rape and attempted rape could still be prosecuted (albeit with great difficulty).⁶⁹ The Old Bailey Online, an online database with sources ranging from 1674 to 1913, shows that the risk of prosecution did not deter sexual assault of children. The database contains numerous cases of lone adult men raping children, and/or of adult women aiding and abetting their male partners in committing sexual assault on children. While the act of rape in itself was abhorrent even to early modern sensibilities – the child was sometimes said to have been ‘shamefully abused’ – the physically disabling nature of the venereal diseases which sometimes resulted from it was even more worrisome.⁷⁰ Toulalan explains that a child’s health could be forever damaged by sexually transmitted diseases like the pox and gonorrhoea. Some of the aggravated symptoms of those diseases were invasive

⁶⁸ Toulalan, ‘Constructing the Child Rapist’, 30.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 25; Garthine Walker, ‘Everyman or a Monster? The Rapist in Early Modern England, c.1600-1750’, *History Workshop Journal*, 76 (2013), 11.

⁷⁰ Toulalan, ‘Constructing the Child Rapist’, 45-46.

enough to permanently impair and subsequently disable infected children: for example, chronic bone pain, painful skin lesions, buboes, and ulcers.⁷¹ And the cure was often worse than the disease itself in that it mostly consisted in ingesting mercury in its various forms, which is poisonous and potentially lethal in high doses – some of the symptoms of mercury poisoning include inflammation of the mouth and throat, loosening of the teeth, nausea, weakness, and extreme fatigue.⁷² As such, a raped child who then contracted a venereal disease was likely to become physically debilitated, which would in turn affect their chances at finding work or more generally negatively impact their life prospects.

Some of these raped children were already impaired and disabled. Elizabeth Harvison a seventeen-year-old ‘Dwarf’ and ‘Idiot’ from mid-1720s London suffered just such a fate.⁷³ Bringing up the fact that she was an ‘Idiot’ was likely also done to emphasise her vulnerability and inability to encourage her rapist and similarly to make her more child-like than other seventeen-year-old girls. Although Elizabeth was seventeen at the time she was raped, she was treated like an infant throughout the whole deposition: she was a ‘Dwarf and an Idiot’ and she was ‘forced to be carried like an Infant. She was also often referred to as ‘the Child’. Her mother explained that she and Elizabeth were at a neighbours’ house, where Samuel Street, the rapist, also lodged. Her mother and their neighbours shortly went out to go to the local alehouse during which time Samuel Street took Elizabeth outside and raped her behind a well. When her mother and their neighbours came back to the house, the ‘Child cried, and told [them] the Man had hurt her’. That same evening, as her mother was undressing her to put her to bed, she ‘found [Elizabeth] was ruin’d, bloody, in a frightful

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 45.

⁷² *Ibid*.

⁷³ Old Bailey Proceedings, London Lives, 1690-1800, t17250827-14 (www.londonlives.org, version 2.0, March 2018), 27 August 1725. [Accessed 3 May 2024]

Condition, and, by all Circumstances, had been ravish'd'. In addition to this, a midwife deposed that 'upon Searching the Child, she found that a Man had entred her Body about three Inches'. Samuel Street eventually confessed to having raped Elizabeth. To add further injury to this unfortunate affair, Elizabeth contracted 'the Foul disease' – in other words the pox, a venereal disease. Therefore, in addition to being utterly dependent on her mother for her very subsistence, she was further disabled by the disease she contracted as a consequence of being raped by Samuel Street.

Venereal diseases were also greatly *socially* disabling, especially for girls. As Michelle Webb has shown, early modern English people ascribed great importance to their physical appearance, and specifically to the appearance of their face.⁷⁴ The marital prospects of a woman whose face had been irreparably damaged, for instance, were lesser than those of a woman with an unmarred face. Furthermore, one of the commonly perceived symptoms of sexual promiscuity in early modern England was a missing or collapsed nose (as a result of being infected by the pox, generally understood as syphilis). A child who, as a consequence of rape, had contracted the pox and had subsequently lost their nose to the disease was likely to be seen later in life as someone of loose morals by their contemporaries.⁷⁵ Thus, by raping a child and infecting them with a potentially disfiguring sexually transmitted disease, rapists were likely to further disable their victims.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Michelle Webb, "'A Great Blemish to Her Beauty': Female Facial Disfigurement in Early Modern England', in *Approaching Facial Difference: Past and Present*, ed. by Patricia Skinner and Emily Cock (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 26.

⁷⁵ Emily Cock, *Rhinoplasty and the Nose in Early Modern British Medicine and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 27.

Intentional abuse of impaired and/or disabled early modern English children was thus multifaceted. Impaired and/or disabled children could suffer from terrible physical and emotional violence such as bullying or harassment, so-called ‘disciplinary’ beatings, or deliberate deprivation of their basic needs of food, drink, and shelter. In some cases, children acquired impairments and subsequently became disabled as a result of intentional violence on the part of their carers (masters, mistresses, or parents), or as a result of being raped and contracting an invasive venereal disease.

4.4. Conclusion

Chapter Four has focused on impaired and/or disabled early modern English children who suffered from a dearth of care and compassion on the part of their contemporaries. First and foremost, in Part One I examined the link between the contemporaneous perception of physical and mental impairments and the experience of rejection by one’s peers. To do so, I analysed two printed sources from the seventeenth century which evidenced that this perception could quickly result in harassment or bullying. Within this same part, I also concentrated on accidental and intentional lapses of care and established that they were tightly connected to matters of dependency, age, and support. Long-term dependency of a disabled individual was a central issue in the lives of many an indigent household: carers eventually became too old to provide any semblance of care and ultimately died, while their disabled dependants were left with the unfortunate inability to fend for themselves. This could translate to extreme destitution, homelessness, and even vagrancy.

In Part Two I surveyed instances of accidental or incidental failures of care. These were not necessarily deliberate and could stem from abandonment, from poverty, or from a lack of understanding of an impaired child's limitations. Abandoning one's impaired and/or disabled child was not always an absence of care in itself, but the direct consequences of it might have resulted in the child nevertheless experiencing an absence of care. Similarly, wishing to abandon a child often implied that the child had been suffering from absence of care too up until that point. Poverty was one of the main culprits which caused impaired and/or disabled children to experience these lapses of care at the unfortunate hands of their primary carers. Caring for a child who could not work or train, and thus who struggled to actively participate in the financial life of the household often translated into that child experiencing an absence of care as an incidental consequence of poverty. Likewise, carers could fail to cater to their impaired and/or disabled charges' individual limitations, which in turn resulted in the child being faced with this same absence of care.

In Part Three, I instead addressed issues of deliberate physical and/or emotional violence inflicted upon impaired and/or disabled early modern English children. I first considered active and, more importantly, intentional deprivation of care on the part of some primary carers. These so-called carers went against the tacit expectations of care of the period and deliberately chose to hurt their impaired and/or disabled charges. Finally, I demonstrated that, in some cases, abuse could cause non-impaired, non-disabled children to suddenly acquire impairments at the hands of those supposed to be caring for them and subsequently to become disabled: for example, beatings or rape.

The next and final chapter, Chapter Five will look at what happened when families failed to care for their impaired and/or disabled charges. It will centre first on parish involvement; then on relief from the community, notably how community members could step in to look after and care for impaired and/or disabled children; and finally on primary carers from outside common bounds of kinship such as single women (in particular widows), masters and mistresses as extensions of parental love, and *de facto* community carers.

5. Community and Parish Involvement in the Lives of Early Modern Disabled

Children

This final chapter sheds some fresh light onto parish and community involvement in the lives of early modern English impaired and/or disabled children. Previous chapters have alluded to the influence of local parishes over the lives of the early modern poor. The main source base for this entire dissertation (petitions) is evidence of the indispensable nature of parish and community relief in the lives of the abjectly poor in early modern England. Therefore, in Chapter Five I first consider direct parish involvement in the lives of impaired and/or disabled children: parish relief was absolutely central to so many early modern poor households, and particularly to those in which disabled children depended fully on their carers for survival. Parish authorities could actively change the course of an impaired and/or disabled child's life: they could positively influence it by, for instance, providing financial relief or securing work or training opportunities on their behalf; on the other hand, parishes could worsen impaired and/or disabled children's prospects by denying them these opportunities. I then go on to reveal that community members could often take on the role of primary carers, usually at the parish's request and expense: single women, and especially widows, would form their own households and would receive impaired and/or disabled orphans into them. Other community members sometimes became *de facto* carers because of their profession or because the parish had picked them to foster a disabled orphan. Finally, masters and mistresses would act as primary carers by proxy. As such, the source base for this chapter consists chiefly of petitions for relief, official parish orders, bonds of indenture, and apprenticeship terminations from the early-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth centuries.

The scholarly literature on early modern English poverty and parish involvement – compulsory indenture, relief, etc. – is extensive. As previously discussed, many of the disabled children in this dissertation appear in the historical record through their interactions with the early modern poor laws. Particularly salient for this chapter, Joan Kent and Steve King have argued that, according to some of the main tenets of Poor Law policies, finding employment for the poor, even the ‘most disabled members of society’, was of the foremost importance.¹ This chapter provides further empirical evidence of this.

In regard to apprenticeships, Patrick Wallis, Cliff Webb, and Chris Minns have dominated the stage with a number of publications from the mid-2000s to the late 2010s: they have illustrated that early modern apprenticeships were highly itinerant by nature and that they relied on the flexibility of both masters and apprentices to function accordingly.² They have also underscored the prevalence and significance of compulsory parish-ordered apprenticeships for pauper children. More symbolically, they indicated that apprenticeships represented a first step towards independence in that it was a transition from the family sphere to the work sphere. Laura Gowing has added to this literature by concentrating chiefly on female apprentices and how their lives during and post-apprenticeships differed from

¹ Joan Kent and Steve King, ‘Changing Pattern of Poor Relief in some English Rural Parishes c.1650-1750’, *Rural History*, 14.2 (2003), 139.

² Patrick Wallis, Cliff Webb, and Chris Minns, ‘Leaving Home and Entering Service: The Age of Apprenticeship in Early Modern London’, *Continuity and Change*, 25.3 (2010), 377–404; Chris Minns and Patrick Wallis, ‘Rules and Reality: Quantifying the Practice of Apprenticeship in Early Modern England’, *The Economic History Review*, 65.2 (2012), 556–79; Patrick Wallis, ‘Labour, Law, and Training in Early Modern London: Apprenticeship and the City’s Institutions’, *The Journal of British Studies*, 51.4 (2012), 791–819; Patrick Wallis, ‘Between Apprenticeship and Skill: Acquiring Knowledge Outside the Academy in Early Modern England’, *Science in Context*, 32.2 (2019), 155–70.

those of their male counterparts.³ She notably remarks on the typically gendered nature of their indenture: in seventeenth-century London, for example, sewing was a prominently female trade (mending, embroidery, making small objects like gloves or caps), as were nursing, selling food, and textile manufacturing.⁴

While all of these scholars have valuably expanded our grasp of early modern English poverty and parish relief, they have for the most part not offered an analysis of the impact of impairment or disability on children's experiences of these systems. Similarly, secondary historical works on the subject of apprenticeships have generally avoided discussing the experiences of those disabled children. This chapter thus fills this gap in the literature by providing much needed insight into the lives of those impaired and/or disabled children whose lives were directly influenced by parish authorities and communities. Chapter Five therefore avers that the lives of impaired and/or disabled children were very much impacted (both positively and negatively) by, first, the direct involvement of the parish and, second, by members of their community.

5.1. When Parish Authorities Step In

Parish influence on the lives of poor impaired and/or disabled early modern English children and their families was considerable. Poor people in early modern England had a number of options available to them to try and stave off destitution. As scholars like Ilana Krausman

³ Laura Gowing, 'Girls on Forms: Apprenticing Young Women in Seventeenth-Century London', *Journal of British Studies*, 55.3 (2016), 447–73; see also, Laura Gowing, *Ingenious Trade: Women and Work in Seventeenth-Century London* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021).

⁴ *Ibid*, 451.

Ben-Amos, Patricia Crawford, Jonathan Healey, Steve Hindle, and David M. Turner have shown, they could beg.⁵ In addition, some of these scholars and others like Kent, King, and Katherine Allen have illustrated that poor people could evidently count on neighbourly Christian charity for food, shelter, and medical care.⁶ Finally and most importantly, Healey, Ben-Amos, Alexandra Shepard, and Hindle have stressed that poor people could also reach out to their local parish authorities for help (justices of the peace, overseers of the poor, and churchwardens feature prominently in petitions for relief).⁷ Parish authorities also held significant sway over the *future* of poor disabled children. They had the power to terminate apprenticeships on grounds of disability and thus could interfere with a disabled child's ability to receive training in a given trade, but they were likewise able to secure apprenticeships on behalf of poor children and their families, too.

⁵ Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, 'Gifts and Favors: Informal Support in Early Modern England', *The Journal of Modern History*, 72.2 (2000), 326; Patricia Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children in England 1580-1800* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 179; Jonathan Healey, *The First Century of Welfare* (Boydell Press, 2014), 60, 161, 163; Steve Hindle, *On the Parish?: The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Clarendon, 2004), 67, 72; David M. Turner, 'Impaired Children in Eighteenth-Century England', *Social History of Medicine*, 30.4 (2017), 788.

⁶ Kent and King, 'Changing Patterns', 127; Katherine Allen, 'Hobby and Craft: Distilling Household Medicine in Eighteenth-Century England', *Early Modern Women*, 11.1 (2016), 96; Crawford, *Parents*, 136, 155, 179; Healey, *The First Century*, 100, 127, 156; Hindle, *On the Parish*, 20, 24, 25.

⁷ Jonathan Healey, 'The Development of Poor Relief in Lancashire, c.1598-1680', *The Historical Journal*, 53.3 (2010), 557, 558, 561; Ben-Amos, 'Gifts', 320-32, 326; Alexandra Shepard, 'Poverty, Labor, and the Language of Social Description in Early Modern England', *Past & Present*, 201.1 (2008), 54; Hindle, *On the Parish*, 23, 24, 140; see also, Annie Prossnitz, 'A Comprehensive Procedural Mechanism for the Poor: Reconceptualising the Right to In Forma Pauperis in Early Modern England', *Northwestern University Law Review*, 114.6 (2020), 1675-1677; Margaret Pelling, 'Child Health as a Social Value in Early Modern England', *Social History of Medicine*, 1.2 (1988), 144.

Parish Relief

The ability to seek help from the parish was essential to most indigent households, and especially to those with disabled children who depended entirely on their carers to survive. As Chapter Four evidences, petitions for relief from the period emphasise that many poor primary carers could not provide sufficient or adequate care for their young disabled charges. They usually lacked the necessary funds to support themselves, let alone a dependant who could not participate in the financial life of the household. As established, they could partially rely on Christian charity, but it was rarely enough to fully stave off destitution. The ability to lean on the parish for relief (financial or otherwise) was therefore crucial.

Petitions show that early modern people could become dependent on parish relief for a plethora of reasons including illness, accidents, or vulnerability as a result of old age, parenthood, or widowhood.⁸ Healey has highlighted that the demand for parish relief in Lancashire increased continuously between the late 1620s to early 1640s.⁹ Parish authorities would thus help petitioners by granting them money, reorganising households, and helping to find so-called ‘cures’ for various impairments and disabling diseases. By providing relief for those who cared for impaired and/or disabled children, parish authorities indirectly became tertiary providers of care to those children.

Financial aid was at the core of parish relief for disabled early modern English children and their carers. For instance, in 1675 Northamptonshire, parish officers granted ‘poore widdow’

⁸ Olivia Weisser, *Ill Composed: Sickness, Gender, and Belief in Early Modern England* (Yale University Press, 2015), 162.

⁹ Healey, ‘Development’, 563.

Alice Yeomans and her 'Lame Child' about '6d p[er] weeke till further order' because she and her child had been reduced to 'such penury and want' that they were 'noe way able to subsist any Longer but must of Nessesity perish'.¹⁰ In 1713, 'Lame and weak' Yorkshire widow Elizabeth Atkinson and her 'two Lame Children' were given '8s weekly till cause be shewne to the Contrary' in that they had 'nothing wherewith to support themselves'.¹¹ An anonymous seventeenth-century petitioner reached out to their parish on behalf of Margerie Cooper, a 'poore distressed Orphan ... who is lame not able to stand or goe to help her selfe' so she 'may be provyded for' so 'shee may not perish & starve for want of help & sustenance'.¹² The parish went on to order that the town should 'sufficiently ... manteyne her' and that 'the Overseers of the poor ... paye her in such case they shall thinke fitt'. These, then, suggest that what poor disabled children and their carers needed the most from the parish was financial support. It likewise underscores that parishes played a salient tertiary care role in the lives of poor disabled early modern English children.

Parishes could indirectly provide care for poor disabled children by reorganising households. Works by O'Brien, Crawford, and especially Hindle have evidenced that parish authorities routinely removed children from poor and struggling households sometimes against the parents' wishes, and conversely, as my examples show, that they subsidised temporary and permanent carers in order for them to take in poor disabled children.¹³ Hindle mentions in particular a late sixteenth-century scheme in Cornwall through which one hundred and ten poor children were portioned out across parishioners and were to remain in their care until

¹⁰ Northampton, Northamptonshire Archives, QSR1.79.54.

¹¹ Beverley, East Riding Archives, QSF.23.D.2.

¹² Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.432.6.

¹³ O'Brien, 'Companions', 193; Crawford, *Parents*, 157; Steve Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, 1550-1640* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 220-221.

they turned twenty-four.¹⁴ Parishioners were expected to provide for their young charges or, if they were too old to do so, would have been supported by the parish.¹⁵ This also happened to disabled children: in 1698, ‘in the parish of St. Peter’s, Cornhill’, a ‘poor, lame, impotent child’ named Thomas Scott was placed into the care of Joanna Brandon, and ‘the said Joanna Brandon [was] paid 5s a week’ for maintaining Scott.¹⁶ Moving poor disabled children from a struggling household to a more stable one or one which was itself supported by the parish appears to have been done so as to ensure that these children would be taken care of and to allow the parents to work more freely. It was equally done in the hopes that these children would be able to grow up into socially and financially independent members of society.

In some cases, it was the petitioners themselves who requested that their disabled charges be removed from their care. They were straining under the weight of poverty and could not provide for a dependent child. They either asked to be discharged or, if it was not possible, to be given an allowance to carry on looking after the child. For instance, in 1649, Richard Bennet of Ashbourne in Derbyshire requested that he ‘may be discharged of the keepeing’ of the ‘poore lame child’ he had been fostering for seven years.¹⁷ He had been promised an allowance for looking after the child, upon which he fully depended. When the money stopped coming, he had no choice but to ask for the child to be taken from his care.

¹⁴ Hindle, *The State*, 220-221.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ ‘Sessions Books: 1698’, in *Middlesex County Records: Calendar of Sessions Books 1689-1709*, ed. W. J. Hardy (London: Middlesex County Record Society, 1905), 179-193. *British History Online*. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-county-records/session-bks-1689-1709/pp179-193>. [accessed May 22, 2024]

¹⁷ Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, Q.SB.2.107.

Petitions for relief show that, in addition to requests for money or for the removal of a dependent disabled charge, primary carers sometimes relied on their parish to finance or support their efforts to find a cure for their impaired and/or disabled children. Some, like Henry Lewis from 1701 Surrey, had exhausted most if not all of their resources in trying to cure their disabled charges and needed financial help so they could continue searching for a cure and not starve at the same time.¹⁸ Others needed monetary assistance so they could journey out of their parish of residence and look for a cure elsewhere – for instance, in 1633/34 Raphe Cocker, ‘a verie poore man’, petitioned his local parish for help in travelling down from Lancashire to London so his blind son who had contracted scrofula could receive the royal touch.¹⁹ Financial intervention by the parish was central to their ability to seek a cure for their disabled children. And as evidenced by Hannah Newton, Kent and King, and Margaret Pelling, it was even common for parish authorities to ensure that poor children were provided with medical care whenever necessary.²⁰ Kent and King underline that overseers of the poor sometimes acquired medicine or food for the sick, even sometimes alcohol, and that they would pay other parishioners to nurse sick people back to health.²¹ Their motivations to do so were obviously primarily financial because children who were not cured were bound to become more reliant on local poor rates.²² Nevertheless, intervention by the parish – even if it was for financial and logistical reasons only – played a key role in providing care for disabled early modern English children.

¹⁸ Woking, Surrey History Centre, QS2.6.1701.59.

¹⁹ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.130.68.

²⁰ Hannah Newton, *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580-1720* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 98; Pelling, ‘Child Health’, 140-141; Kent and King, ‘Changing Patterns’, 129.

²¹ Kent and King, ‘Changing Patterns’, 129-130.

²² Newton, *The Sick Child*, 98.

Securing Apprenticeships on Behalf of the Community

Securing an apprenticeship was a task normally reserved for a child's primary carers. However, in cases where a child's guardians were either dead or too poor to afford to pay for someone to train their young charge, parish authorities could step in and offer to finance the apprenticeship. This was the case for both impaired and non-impaired children and those who were either disabled or not disabled. Particular evidence provided by Wallis, Hindle, Crawford, and Healey shows that parishes would apprentice off poor children between the ages of eight and ten as a way to offer relief to indigent households.²³ This was not necessarily an act of kindness but rather a very pragmatic move on the part of the parish.²⁴ Intense efforts to indenture poor children in the early seventeenth century highlight that parishes were eager to remove them and their families from their charge.²⁵ This happened while England was experiencing high unemployment rates and a persisting financial crisis which caused parish funds quickly to run desperately low.²⁶ By apprenticing pauper children and removing them from their families' care, parishes allowed these struggling families to distribute their meagre resources more adequately. Parishes equally hoped that, with foresight, these children would acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to become socially and financially independent, and thus not to become chargeable to the parish for their maintenance later in life.

²³ Wallis, 'Leaving', 379; Hindle, *On the Parish*, 25; Hindle, *The State*, 221; Crawford, *Parents*, 12, 135; Healey, 'Development', 563; Healey, *The First Century*, 63-64; see also, O'Brien, 'Companions', 193.

²⁴ See for example, Eleanor Hubbard, *City Women: Money, Sex, and the Social Order in Early Modern London* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁵ Healey, 'Development', 563.

²⁶ Sandra L. Dahlberg, "'Doe Not Forget Me': Richard Frethorne, Indentured Servitude, and the English Poor Law of 1601", *Early American Literature*, 47.1 (2012), 4.

It is important not to overstate the practical impact of pauper apprenticeships. Pauper apprenticeships often provided little actual training and skills and were closer to harsh servitude.²⁷ Sandra Dahlberg states that parish-indentured children were often bound as basic textile labourers or servants.²⁸ These assignments were not at all a way out of poverty and Crawford states that many poor parents were strongly reluctant to seeing their children become parish apprentices.²⁹ But since pauper apprenticeships were a way for parishes to avert poverty and begging, indigent families were not allowed to refuse their children's parish assignments.³⁰ According to Hindle, families who refused to bind their children to a master despite struggling financially were normally refused relief by the parish.³¹ Moreover, as masters were usually forced to accept parish apprentices, parents were worried that they would mistreat and injure their children (and some masters most definitely did).³² Crawford further demonstrates that parish authorities did not usually compromise and, unlike primary carers, did not at all consult poor children before indenturing them.³³

And still, by its very existence, this system of parish-mandated pauper apprenticeships allowed some impaired pauper children to secure training opportunities. For example, in 1733, the churchwardens and overseers of the poor of the county of Somerset 'by their Indenture of Apprenticeship ... have put and placed' Isaac Richards 'a poor Cripple Child of their said Parish Apprentice unto ... Samuel Roe', a local tailor.³⁴ Richards was expected to

²⁷ Crawford, *Parents*, 157.

²⁸ Dahlberg, 'Richard', 6.

²⁹ Crawford, *Parents*, 157, 160.

³⁰ Hindle, *On the Parish*, 195, 197.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Crawford, *Parents*, 159.

³³ *Ibid.*, 157.

³⁴ Taunton, Somerset Heritage Centre, D.P.stapg.13.6.2.

‘dwell and serve’ until he had ‘accomplish[ed] his full age of Four and Twenty Years’. The petition does not state how old Richards was but, since he was poor and apprenticed by the parish, it is very likely that he was around eight to ten years old. More remarkably, the petition shows that Richards’ impairment was a known factor, therefore one which would have been carefully taken into consideration by the parish when choosing an apprenticeship for him. This suggests that what mattered most to the churchwardens and overseers of the poor was that Richards would not be ‘any way acharge to the said parish of Staplegrove or parishioners thereof’. Securing an apprenticeship for Richards and subsequently financing it was an economically savvy move on the part of the parish: they were likely hoping that by using parish resources while Richards was young, they would not have to do it later when he was grown.

Newly appointed masters would normally receive a parish allowance to help with the maintenance of their new charges – Hindle indicates that some parishes even had local charities in place whose sole purpose was providing reluctant masters with generous premiums to incentivise them to take in a pauper apprentice (sometimes three times the sum provided by parish authorities).³⁵ Peter Bayley, a ropemaker from 1641 Devon, was given a lump sum of six pounds to take in, look after, and ‘teach and instruct in the art and mastery of a Ropemaster’ Nicholas Drake, a ‘dumbe boy’ who was ‘not able to maynteyne or lyve of himselfe’.³⁶ With this money, Bayley was to ‘find unto his said Covenant Servant Sufficient meate drinke wollen linnen hose shooes and all other things needfull or meete for such a servant’. Parish officers also expected him to provide Drake with ‘one suite of apparell for

³⁵ Hindle, *On the Parish*, 204

³⁶ Exeter, Devon Heritage Centre, 1579A.24.60.54.

holy days and another for working days'. Finally, using his allowance, Bayley was to pay his apprentice ten shillings.

On occasion, parish authorities could likewise receive generous posthumous donations from which they could draw to use towards providing for poor parishioners. For example, in the seventeenth century Thomas Bruce Earl of Elgin gave upon his death 'the sum of one hundred pounds of lawfull monye of England' onto the town of Maulden, Bedfordshire.³⁷ This donation was to be used towards providing 'A Stock for the Setting of pore people of the Sayd Towne on Worke' as well as for 'the putting forth of pore Children of the Sayd Towne Apprentisses'. And in 1672, the parish authorities of Maulden drew from this fund the sum of six pounds to apprentice Abell Child, a 'pore lame yong man', to John Linfoard, a 'Cordwinder'.³⁸ Like William Bayley, Linfoard was to use this money to provide Child with 'meate drinck and lodging' for the duration of his indenture, and also 'Teach and instruct or informe or cause to bee Taught instructed or Informed in the Sayd Artt Craft of Occupation of A Cordwinder in the best mannor that hee now Can'. Remarkably, the money given to masters to provide for their apprentices still legally belonged to the parish, or at least until successful completion of the apprenticeship. Nicholas Drake's indenture contract clearly states that if either Drake or Bayley happened to die within the first three years of the apprenticeship 'that then the said Peter Bayley his executors or assignes shall repay unto the Churchwardens and Overssers and their Successors ... the somme of three pounds p[ar]cell of the said somme of six pounds'. This support from the parish and some wealthy parishioners allowed poor impaired and/or disabled children to undertake apprenticeships which they might not have been able to secure otherwise. As the indenture bonds both state, it

³⁷ Bedford, Bedfordshire Archives, P31.14.11b.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

would also hopefully allow them to ‘lyve and mayntyne [themselves] and bee noe farther chargeble unto’ their local parishes upon completion of their respective apprenticeships.

Terminating Apprenticeships on Grounds of Disability

On the other hand, parishes and community members also had the power to negatively impact the lives of impaired and/or disabled children by terminating their apprenticeships on grounds of disability. Of course, apprenticeships could be terminated at any time for a variety of reasons and by a number of ways – this went hand in hand with the flexible nature of early modern English apprenticeships. And while records suggest that a large number of apprentices left before the legal end of their indenture, it is still important to stress the role of parishes in terminating some of those apprenticeships. The decision to end an apprenticeship could be either unilateral – therefore, originating from either the master or the apprentice – or it could be the result of a joint agreement by all parties involved. For example, Wallis showcases that those who left early and of their own volition often did so because they and their contemporaries considered that they had acquired adequate knowledge and skills in their trade in fewer years than expected.³⁹ At the same time, he shows that masters could quite simply refuse to teach their apprentices (and this despite a theoretical obligation to provide for them) and that apprentices who had been summarily dismissed usually only had one recourse: suing for legal discharge.⁴⁰ In a small number of exceptionally dramatic and drastic cases, apprentices resorted to suicide to escape and shame their masters – for instance, hanging themselves in their master’s barn.⁴¹ Wallis is however focusing on non-impaired, non-disabled apprentices when he argues those particular points. The sources examined in

³⁹ Wallis, ‘Rules’, 561.

⁴⁰ Wallis, ‘Labour’, 806.

⁴¹ Murphy, ‘Suicide’, 269.

this chapter indicate that parishes were much more involved in litigations by and about disabled apprentices and their masters. Whereas the process did originate with the master and/or his apprentice, it could only be legally finalised by parish. And as regards apprenticeships and disability, indenture contracts could be terminated if an apprentice became disabled.

The decision to end an apprenticeship on grounds of disability could have pernicious repercussions on the lives of disabled individuals, as was the case for Sarah Tasker from 1728 Yorkshire. Tasker was initially apprenticed to William Hood, a butcher residing in the village of Kilpin in the East Riding of Yorkshire. After some time, when she was judged ‘not fit or proper to serve an Apprenticeship’ by ‘reason of her Infirmitys’, Tasker was let go by her master.⁴² The justices of the peace presiding over the case reached their decision to terminate Tasker’s apprenticeship after ‘having heard and examined the matter in Difference between’ Tasker and Hood. The fact that it was a matter ‘in Difference’ indicates that Tasker and Hood disagreed over whether she should be dismissed. The impact of prematurely ending an indenture contract was significant and could further limit a disabled individual’s prospects in life. Tasker was not only deemed unfit to undertake an apprenticeship under William Hood but was even judged ‘not fit or proper to serve an Apprenticeship’ at all. Therefore, the parish authorities involved in this case essentially barred Tasker from securing another apprenticeship. Rather frustratingly, while we know that Tasker was barred from being apprenticed again, we do not know what other alternatives were given to her. She might have been able to go into service, but again without knowing specifically why her ‘Infirmitys’ made her ‘not fit or proper to serve an Apprenticeship’ we cannot tell for certain. Another

⁴² Beverley, East Riding Archives, QSF.81.G.6.

case from 1747 Somerset shows that poor and isolated terminated apprentices could even be forced to turn to vagrancy. After agreeing with his master to end his contract because he had been ‘taken lame’, John Plyer intermittently worked ‘about at several places at Combing wool by the piece in no other manner’.⁴³ He finally found himself back in the small parish village of Chardstock where he was born, where he ‘wandered, begged’ and was eventually ‘taken up as a vagrant’. Simply put, being disabled, losing his apprenticeship, and becoming socially isolated led him straight down the path of vagrancy.

While the source material examined for this dissertation does not allow me to claim that termination on the grounds of disability was a common occurrence, Tasker and Plyer’s stories were by no means isolated cases. Those who contracted disabling diseases like the King’s Evil could also lose their place as apprentices, like Thomas Mercer and Thomas Bullock did in 1725 and 1717. Mercer was apprenticed by the justices of the peace to James Clayton to ‘serve him seaven years to learn the Trade of a Lynenweaver’ but became infected shortly after with ‘the Kings Evill in a very severe manner soe that hee is very incapable of doeing [James Clayton] any Service’.⁴⁴ Bullock similarly contracted the disease ‘in his thigh so that it has rendred him altogether useless to his ... Master and uncappable of doing any thing tow[ar]ds his living’.⁴⁵ Both were dismissed because the King’s Evil had incapacitated them from labour.

Community members were also sometimes directly involved in matters of termination, which emphasises that community involvement was not always in itself beneficial to impaired

⁴³ Taunton, Somerset Heritage Centre, Q.SR.315.314.

⁴⁴ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.1240.9.

⁴⁵ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.1159.14.

and/or disabled children. In order to formerly dismiss an apprentice on the basis of disability or to prove that they had become ‘unserviceable’, some masters appear to have had to secure testimonies by members of their community. In 1725, Master Wormington requested that John Rank, a ‘poor Boy of Kilnsea’, be permanently removed from his charge because ‘the boy [was] since become so lame and infirme that he [was] altogether incapable of service’.⁴⁶ To prove that the boy was truly ‘lame and infirme’, Wormington secured the testimonies (in the form of signatures) of two members of his community: ‘1 William Lambert’ and ‘1 Samuel Daviell’. This clearly sufficed for parish authorities in that the petition further states that ‘the Overseer himself’ could not ‘but own the boy is unserviceable’ and had to be dismissed.

This case also usefully highlights the constant presence of the parish in the lives of some poor apprentices, and particularly those who were impaired and/or disabled. Before working for Wormington, John Rank was indentured to William Garbut by ‘Parish Officers’ – likely when he was between eight or ten as he was a ‘poor boy’ and was given a parish-mandated pauper apprenticeship. When Garbut died, parish officers ‘administered’ Rank into the care of Wormington. Once Rank had become ‘lame and infirme’, parish officers deemed him incapable of undertaking training and discharged him from his apprenticeship. In a matter of about three years, Rank was given an apprenticeship, a different apprenticeship, and then no apprenticeship at all by the same parish.

Remarkably for the early modern period, petitions for discharge of disabled apprentices rarely reveal any obvious gender bias. This is worth noting in the sense that apprenticeships still

⁴⁶ Beverley, East Riding Archives, QSF.69.E.13.

remained deeply gendered in the period: early modern female apprentices were treated differently from their male counterparts. For one, the world of labour of early modern England was predominantly male – according to Gowing, the registers of the clothworkers from the first half of the seventeenth century totalled only eleven girl apprentices against more than nine and a half thousand boy apprentices, and after that girl apprentices still remained exceptional.⁴⁷ Moreover, the freedom granted to male apprentices upon completion of their indenture differed markedly from that bestowed upon female apprentices: once married, the freedom a female apprentice had gained as a result of her training became subsumed by that of her husband.⁴⁸ Interestingly, out of all the petitions for relief, bonds of indenture, and apprenticeship terminations examined for this dissertation, only one was explicitly about a disabled child being lesser than her male peers because she was a girl: John Taylor from 1673 West Yorkshire requested that he might be discharged of Susan Barley, his now ‘infirm and diseased’ girl apprentice, and instead be given a boy apprentice. In the majority of cases, disability appears to have trumped most other relevant criteria; in Taylor’s case, he did not just ask for a non-disabled apprentice, he asked for a non-disabled *boy* apprentice. Conversely, Sarah Tasker, for instance, was dismissed by her master because she was disabled and not because she was female. She was ‘an Apprentice’, not a *girl* apprentice, and was let go ‘by reason of her Infirmitys’ only.⁴⁹

5.2. Community Members as Primary Carers

⁴⁷ Gowing, ‘Girls’, 450.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 449.

⁴⁹ Beverley, East Riding Archives, QSF.81.G.6.

As demonstrated in Chapters Three and Four, community support was pivotal in the early modern period, especially for those living on the lower rungs of pre-modern English society. Early modern life was difficult, and sometimes even perilous, and for reasons such as extreme poverty, abandonment, or the death of their parents, early modern impaired and/or disabled children could easily become partially or fully dependent on their siblings, grandparents, extended relatives, or the parish. But, going beyond common bonds of kinship, we can see that unrelated community members were also forced to step in to provide for impaired and/or disabled children. Hindle has already shown that neighbourly charity was a strong catalyst for relief in early modern England: he advances that the settlement laws of 1662 amplified notions of belonging to one's community of residence while at the same time subverting the importance of kin in matters of support.⁵⁰ As a result of this, he advances that poor people were invariably more likely to seek support from neighbours and friends than from their own families.⁵¹ Furthermore, my successful petitions from Lancashire in particular are a real mark of successful self-advocacy in that people living in northern England were much more likely to rely on charity from kin and neighbours because of the miserly provision of relief by northern parishes.⁵² With reference to impaired and/or disabled children, community care could take various forms such as temporary fostering, permanent adoption by an individual or a whole community, or acting as an extension of parental care.

Widows

Early modern English sources illustrate that widows were ubiquitous figures in the lives of many a disabled early modern English orphan. They emphasise the collaborative ethos of

⁵⁰ Hindle, *On the Parish*, 56-57.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Kent and King, 'Changing Patterns', 127.

community and parish care in early modern England. Widows held a unique position in early modern society: upon her husband's death, a widow became head of her late husband's household, thus assuming authority over not only his house and servants, but also his business and any apprentices under his care at the time of his death.⁵³ More importantly, she could choose to welcome anyone she pleased into her household – for example, servants, extended family members, friends, single women (including other widows), and orphans.⁵⁴ And while orphans were not necessarily as prevalent as we might think, they still remained a relatively common occurrence throughout the period.⁵⁵

It is therefore possible to find households in which several unrelated widows looked after one or several impaired and/or disabled orphans. Their petitions for relief suggest that they sometimes had to rely on neighbourly charity to provide for themselves and their dependants. Amy M. Froide likewise evidences that, in addition to benefitting from more economic opportunities than the average early modern woman, widows also tended to receive preferential treatment from parish officials: poor widows were usually either elderly or young but with children whom only they were supporting, therefore they normally formed part of the 'deserving poor' along with the sick, the elderly, children, and those who were 'lame' and/or 'impotent'.⁵⁶ This made them much more likely to receive poor relief from parish officials and/or from the community.⁵⁷ This level of support from both neighbours and parish

⁵³ Froide, *Never-Married*, 17-18.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ William Coster, "'From Fire and Water': The Responsibilities of Godparents in Early Modern England", *Studies in Church History*, 31 (1994), 308.

⁵⁶ Amy M. Froide, 'Marital Status as a Category of Difference: Singlewomen and Widows in Early Modern England', in *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800*, ed. by Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 252.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 252, 256.

officials allowed them and their impaired and/or disabled charges to exist as small non-traditional households. For instance, in 1642/43, Elizabeth Shawe (80, widow) and Jane Woodburne (84, widow), who lived together in the small village of Croston in Lancashire, were looking after Elizabeth Gawith (orphan, 'Crippe').⁵⁸ Both Shawe and Woodburne were physically impaired themselves ('infirme' and blind, respectively) and were 'noe way able to worke'. They were able to care for Gawith thanks to a quarterly payment of eight shillings 'a peece' from their local parish and 'with the helpe of [their] neighbours'. Their petition for help highlights that their neighbours had been rather charitable (also perhaps cost effective) and allowed the two widows and their young charge temporarily to rely on them for their maintenance. This also underscores that provision of care in this instance was clearly compounded. Whereas Woodburne and Shawe were evidently the primary caregivers in this equation, the ones from whom care directly flowed, they depended on the additional support of their community and of the parish to sustain themselves and their dependent disabled charge. It additionally highlights the salient place of widows in the lives of impaired and/or disabled orphans and how they were able to care for them despite being sometimes disabled and poor themselves.

At times, a single woman alone would take it upon herself to shelter and care for an unrelated impaired orphan. Serendipitously living in the same seventeenth-century village of Croston in Lancashire were another poor old widow named Mary Cisley and her young blind charge Isabell Thomason. In her petition for relief from 1639, Cisley 'most humbly sheweth ... that shee hath kept a poor blynd child ... this foure years & a half ... the mother of it being dead & the father [Ralph Thomason] out of the Cuntree'.⁵⁹ Whether this meant that Ralph

⁵⁸ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.1.269C.6.

⁵⁹ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.214.79.

Thomason was a soldier, travelling, or had run away is not made obvious by the petition. Despite being poor, old, and a single woman, Cisley never received any allowance from her parish of residence until she was no longer able to look after herself, much less the child. Based on this petition and its subsequent order of relief alone, it looks like Mary Cisley and the Thomasons were not related at all. There is no mention anywhere that she was the child's grandmother, aunt, or even godmother.⁶⁰ It is likely she and the Thomasons were neighbours or at the very least belonged to the same parish. When the child's mother died and her father left the country, and in the absence of any extended family members, Mary Cisley had to either step forward and offer to look after the child or was ordered by the parish to do so – the fact that she was not initially given a parish allowance suggests that it was probably the former. Early modern Christian charity doctrine also dictates that she would have likely appealed to her friends and neighbours for help first, but the surviving records suggest that she essentially spent four and half years raising a child who was not her own and this even when her finances did not fully allow it. Cisley's request for relief was seemingly granted a year later: an order for relief from 1640 states that provision was made for the 'manteynance & sustinance of Isabell Thomason a poor blind child' so she 'shall not begg under the penilty of the statute in that case made & provided'.⁶¹ Unfortunately, what the provision exactly entailed is not stated in the petition.

Provision of care by widows therefore really brings to light the collaborative realities behind community and parish care in the lives of impaired and/or disabled early modern children. Without help from friends, neighbours and, more formally, from parish officers, and despite being socially remarkable carers, these poor widows would not have been able to continue to

⁶⁰ Froide, *Never-Married*, 68; Coster, 'From Fire', 308.

⁶¹ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSB.1.230.46.

care for their disabled charges. They depended on additional help from people external to their households. And yet, they were still primary care givers in that they were the ones literally providing care and seeking help from friends, neighbours, and parish authorities, as was expected of parental figures in the early modern period.

De Facto Carers

On occasion, community members could become *de facto* temporary carers, not as an expression of their charitable conscience but as part of their duties to their community. For example, Andrews has drawn our attention towards parish nurses who would routinely take in disabled children as well as the sick and the orphaned. This parish position consisted in not only feeding and cleaning the child, but also on occasion in providing health care to those children who needed it.⁶² Andrews further showcases that parishes had systems in place thanks to which nurses were either able to be paid in advance of their providing medical treatment or were allowed to send an invoice to the parish to be reimbursed for the costs incurred.⁶³

Similarly, the role of parish constable seems, at times, to have included fostering orphans as part of its duties. In c.1649, when Robert and Elizabeth Ireland (whom I mentioned in Chapter Four) left the country, they abandoned their daughter Jane Ireland ‘a Creeple about 8 or 9 years of age, without meanes or maintenance of meate drincke lodgeing or apparel’.⁶⁴ Since she could also not beg or work by reason of her ‘being lame’, Thomas Spenser, the

⁶² Andrews, *Identifying*, 82.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 83.

⁶⁴ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.23.34.

local constable, was ‘constrained’ to look after her. The phrasing of the petition makes it clear that his profession itself is what volunteered him into acting as Jane Ireland’s carer – ‘your petitioner was constrained (being Constable) to keepe the said Child’. This arrangement was intended to be temporary and, while the petition is unclear as to how long he had to foster Jane Ireland, it does mention that Spenser had to do so using his own resources – this is in fact the whole premise of Spenser’s petition for relief. Whereas ‘dutie nevertheless ever byndeth’, he hoped the parish would reimburse him and finally find a more suitable and permanent home for Jane Ireland. As Bernard Capp has exemplified, relying on local officials in such a way was a worst-case scenario, and it was much preferred and also more common for close kin or even friends to step in.⁶⁵

Indoor Relief as a Form of Parochial Care

In some cases, impaired and/or disabled children were provided for through indoor relief (as opposed to outdoor relief, which consisted of charity, financial aid, food, clothes, etc.) and were admitted into orphanages, poor houses, workhouses, almshouses, and hospitals, where they would hopefully have received care. Crawford has shown that, as an alternative way to provide for their children, some early modern parents would abandon their children in a public place so they would be taken in, offered alternative parents, and hopefully be provided for.⁶⁶ Historians have additionally shown that, for example, the Foundling Hospital, which opened its doors in London in March 1741, and regional branches in subsequent years, sometimes welcomed impaired and/or disabled children in their midst.⁶⁷ The Hospital

⁶⁵ Bernard Capp, *The Ties That Bind: Siblings, Family, and Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 44.

⁶⁶ Crawford, *Parents*, 47.

⁶⁷ Claire Phillips, ““So They May Be Usefull to Themselves”: Work and Apprenticeship in the Ackworth Branch Foundling Hospital, 1757-1773’, *Family & Community History*, 25.3 (2022), 221;

provided them with prostheses and additional physical and learning aids, and, on occasion, these impaired and/or disabled foundlings were placed out into the care of other members of the parish or were provided with apprenticeships.⁶⁸ However, many of them instead remained in and at the charge of the Hospital until they reached adulthood because, as explained previously, they were not seen as fit to become apprentices.⁶⁹ Therefore, in return for their labour (tending the garden, doing the laundry, etc.) they were then allowed to stay on at the Hospital – some were even paid.⁷⁰

One of the sources I examine in this dissertation illustrates the role of indoor relief in the lives of some impaired and/or disabled children, long before the establishment of the Foundling Hospitals. In 1624 Norwich, Norfolk, Joshua Atkinso, ‘being [master] & Guyder of the pore house & hospital w[ithout] St. Stevens Gattes’, with the ‘consent and assent of the pore Brethren and Systers of the same sort’ agreed to ‘admit & receive into the company & fellowship of the same pore house or hospitall’ Thomas Smyth, a ‘pore lame boy’.⁷¹ While this petition only offers a fleeting glimpse into the life of Thomas Smyth, it also underpins that Smyth was provided with a roof over his head, as well as food and drink thanks to indoor relief from a charitable institution.

Alysa Levene, ‘Childcare and Health in a Local Setting’, in *Childcare, Health, and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741-1800: ‘Left to the Mercy of the World’* (Manchester University Press, 2007), 166, 167, 168; Ashley Mathisen, “‘So That They May Be Usefull to Themselves and the Community’”: Charting Childhood Disability in an Eighteenth-Century Institution’, *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 8.2 (2015), 194, 195, 196.

⁶⁸ ‘Disability at the Foundling Hospital’, in *Coram Story: Foundling Hospital*, <<https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/article/disability-at-the-foundling-hospital/>> [accessed 28 November 2024]; Mathisen, ‘Charting’, 196, 198.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Phillips, ‘Work’, 221, 224.

⁷¹ Ipswich, Suffolk Archives, FC90.G.1.1.

It Takes a Village...

Thus far, this chapter has focused on one or two individuals caring for a disabled child, or on an institution providing for a great number of impaired and/or disabled and non-impaired and non-disabled children. However, in a rather unique case from seventeenth-century Lancashire, a whole community became responsible for a single impaired child. This case, while exceptional, underscores the plurality and variety of those who looked after impaired and/or disabled English children. In c.1675, the inhabitants of the small village of Aintree petitioned their local officials regarding Henry Bare, a ‘Lame Boy’ who was refusing the trade assignment offered to him.⁷² It is likely from context that they were petitioning itinerant justices of the peace and, as was common in the period, they added twelve signatures at the bottom of their petition to strengthen their case and emphasise that this was a community request (as opposed to an isolated, individual one).⁷³ Brodie Waddell explains that while virtually all petitions involved at least two people (the petitioner and a scribe), an increasing number of people began to file petitions collectively under Elizabeth I; by the end of the sixteenth century, the practice had become commonplace.⁷⁴ For many years, then, the people of Aintree had been responsible for a congenitally impaired individual: they had ‘manteyned & brought up one Henry Bare a Lame Boy at the beginning’. For years, they paid ‘unto him fourty shilling [sic] per annum by reason of his lamenesse’, or about two pounds a year, which was a decent enough sum of money – approximately the equivalent of a skilled

⁷² Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.432.8.

⁷³ Brodie Waddell, ‘The Popular Politics of Local Petitioning in Early Modern England’, *Journal of British Studies*, 2024, 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 5, 7, 8.

tradesman's wages for a period of twenty-eight days.⁷⁵ Once Bare was 'growne unto mans estate & well able to undergoe A sittinge Trade', the people of Aintree 'putt him to A shoemaker an able workeman of that calling & where the sayd Bare might have beene well used'. Bare, however, did not only 'refuse to Learne the same Trade' but was apparently 'dayly challegeinge & threatening the sayd Towne that hee will marry & bringe A wife amonst them & is very urgent' that they should build him a house.

This case is fascinating for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it illustrates the deep involvement of a small community in looking after and providing for a 'Lame' orphan – it did quite literally take a village to raise a child. The petition remains frustratingly vague as to the precise way the community went about caring for Henry Bare – did they elect one or several community members to act as official guardians? Was it some sort of rotation system? Second, this petition also highlights the extent to which a community could influence the life of a physically impaired person. Third, it emphasises the level of agency and, apparently, the expectation/entitlement Henry Bare retained over his life despite being 'lame'. Fourth, it shows that once a community became involved in raising a physically impaired child, they would remain duty bound even after the child had become 'growne' or if the child refused to become independent. Finally, it emphasises that this particular form of caregiving was not unconditional and that the people of Aintree expected gratitude and obedience from Bare but most importantly some kind of return on their practical and emotional investment – namely his striving to become independent.

⁷⁵ National Archives, *Currency Converter: 1270-2017*, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result> [accessed May 14, 2024].

Their securing an apprenticeship for Bare is likewise significant in and of itself insofar as this was a duty normally carried out by a child's primary carers.⁷⁶ It thus indicates that the people of Aintree were fulfilling that particular parental role in Henry Bare's life. The second half of the petition does qualify that it was also a sound financial decision on the part of the community: making sure Bare became skilled in a specific trade would have in turn ensured he did not remain forever financially dependent on the community. Remarkably, they made sure to find him a trade which they considered suitable for his individual abilities, namely a 'sitting Trade'. This is very much in keeping with what Kent and King have argued regarding Poor Law policies and the provision of work for even the 'most disabled members of society'.⁷⁷

Further to this, this petition indicates that the people of Aintree were bound to Henry Bare for life, much like parents would be to their offspring. When explaining that he was refusing his assignment, they complained that his finding a wife and building them a house would 'Increase their Charge'. This implies that, should he fail to become independent, Henry Bare would remain under the financial care of and chargeable to the people of Aintree. The petitioners made it plain that if their request were not granted, they would have no other recourse but to continue to support Henry Bare and any of his dependants. Again, this is supported by early modern Poor Law regulations: Jonathan Andrews shows that, if at all possible, poor early modern English people were supposed to be supported by kin.⁷⁸ In Bare's case, in the absence of kin, this responsibility fell back onto the community which had raised him. It really foregrounds that community care for a disabled early modern English child did

⁷⁶ Ben-Amos, 'Gifts', 301; Anthony Fletcher, *Growing Up in England: The Experience of Childhood 1600-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 136.

⁷⁷ Kent and King, 'Changing Patterns', 139.

⁷⁸ Andrews, 'Identifying', 74.

not take only one form but was instead very much plural in all its possible iterations.

Unfortunately, however, the outcome of this petition is not recorded.

Apprenticeships as an Extension of Primary Care

Primary care could be delivered by proxy, too. In exchange for money, care-giving responsibilities could be temporarily and partially transferred onto a third party: masters. Historians like Capp, Wallis, Terence Murphy, and Gowing have shown and reiterated that leaving the family home to undergo training or to join a trade was one of the most important events in the life of an early modern child.⁷⁹ Hindle further describes it as a child's first venture towards transitioning into 'independent employment' and thus towards financial and social independence.⁸⁰ Wallis rightly emphasises that apprenticeships gave young early modern people an opportunity to not only observe and practice, but also gain access to trade-related tools and materials.⁸¹ However, claims that masters were acting *in loco parentis* have perhaps been slightly overblown – Ben-Amos underscores that the master/apprentice relationship was not only contractual but also very much transactional.⁸² In the words of William Atherton, an eighteenth-century shoemaker from Lancaster who was seeking to terminate his apprentice's indenture, masters were not 'housekeepers' and they did not look after their young apprentices out of kindness or out of sense of duty, but because it was a simple exchange of goods and services.⁸³ They expected their apprentices to pay and/or work for their own maintenance – despite often living with their masters, apprentices (or rather,

⁷⁹ Capp, *The Ties*, 13; Terence R. Murphy, "'Woful Childe of Parents Rage': Suicide of Children and Adolescents in Early Modern England, 1507-1710', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 17.3 (1986), 268; Gowing, 'Girls', 449, 454; Wallis, 'Rules', 574; Wallis, 'Leaving', 377, 379.

⁸⁰ Hindle, *On the Parish*, 25.

⁸¹ Wallis, 'Between Apprenticeship', 160.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.1159.14.

their parents) often had to pay for their own food, drink, lodging, clothes, and health-related expenditures.⁸⁴ As I have shown, apprentices who were no longer physically capable of working to an expected level could be dismissed. Moreover, for those who managed to reach the end of their indenture, completion led to a firm, immediate, and contractual break.⁸⁵ Simply put, the end of an apprenticeship (either premature or upon full completion) almost always coincided with the end of a master providing care.

Of course, while it was ultimately a financial relationship, it did still partially emulate that between a parent and their child. After all, masters did welcome their apprentices into their households; they provided them with the food and drink for which their primary carers had already paid; and they also gifted them with more immaterial boons like knowledge and advice useful to become socially and financially independent. As a matter of fact, we do have evidence of friendships as well as lifelong mutual reliance forming between masters and apprentices – and in some cases, fathers and uncles even acted as masters to their own children/niblings.⁸⁶ But we must bear in mind that the relationship still remained strongly monetary. All of this resulted in a rather hybrid form of caregiving which combined both parental (in the broadest sense of the term, as seen in Chapter Three) and community care. Apprenticeships did not represent an end to primary care duties, and primary carers were still very much invested in their charges' future and kept looking after them, albeit by proxy. Ben-Amos illustrates that carers continued to assist their charges by sending them money or food, or by keeping a close watch on their child's master.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Ben-Amos 'Gifts', 301; Wallis, 'Labour', 792; Fletcher, *Growing Up*, 136-137.

⁸⁵ Mins and Wallis, 'Rules', 567.

⁸⁶ Ben-Amos, 'Gifts', 311.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 301.

In regard to impaired and/or disabled children, petitions show that care would generally revert back to the primary carer whenever an apprentice became disabled *during* the course of their apprenticeship, which added a definite level of precariousness to this hybrid form of care. For example, if an apprentice fell ‘lame’, there was a certain expectation that their primary carer should intervene and attempt to return them to health quickly and at their own cost. This placed them and their newly disabled child into a precarious limbo state in which the child was still technically indentured and their master still legally in charge, but where the brunt of care fell back onto the primary carer. This did not necessarily happen immediately as poor masters might have been relying on their apprentices for their own livelihood and might not have been able to dispense with them. This is where the contractual and financial nature of the relationship took precedent over notions of care and compassion. This was exactly the case for Johane and William Wey of Bridport, in Dorset, whom I mentioned in Chapter Four. In c.1652, William Wey was apprenticed to Thomas Seaward by his mother, Johane Wey. She paid Seward ‘twenty shillings in mony’ and gave him ‘three suits of apparrell’ in exchange for training and looking after her son.⁸⁸ After two and a half years, William ‘fell lame and continued lame by the space of a yeare or thereabouts’. When he eventually stopped being able to ‘doe his masters business’, his master temporarily sent him back to his mother so she would try to cure him. Equally, cases about apprentices who had contracted the King’s Evil and had become disabled as result of it underscore the fragility of this composite form of caregiving. When William Atherton submitted that masters were not ‘housekeepers’, it was in the context of trying to dismiss his apprentice, Thomas Bullock. Bullock, was suffering from ‘the Kings Evil [in] his thigh’ which Atherton claimed ‘has rendred him altogether useless to

⁸⁸ Taunton, Somerset Heritage Centre, Q.SPET.1.132.

his Said Master and uncapable of doing any thing tow[ard] getting his living'; Thomas Mercer from Westby was similarly dismissed after being afflicted with the King's Evil 'in a very severe manner' so that he was no longer able to work for his master.⁸⁹ Cases like this clearly show that apprentices could be dismissed or removed from the care of their masters as soon as they stopped being useful to them. This reinforces the contractual nature of these arrangements. Masters were not performing volunteer community service and expected some form of return on their investment.

Impairments or disability themselves do not appear to have automatically disqualified apprentices from being instructed and cared for by a master. Congenital impairments or impairments acquired *prior* to entering into an apprenticeship appear to have been carefully considered by all parties involved. This is made particularly evident by bonds of indenture wherein an apprentice's impairment(s) were clearly disclosed in writing. Therefore, a primary carer might have preferred to find a 'sitting Trade' if their charge's impairment(s) meant that they could not remain standing for extended periods of time or at all – this is likely what the people of Aintree likely had in mind when they provided Henry Bare with an apprenticeship with a local shoemaker.⁹⁰ Likewise, some primary carers attempted to secure an 'Easie Trade' for their physically impaired charges, just like sisters Anne and Elizabeth Chornley from Walton, Lancashire, did for their 'poor young lame' thirteen-year-old brother. Other evidence, such as Charles Leane's newspaper article on his deaf children discussed in Chapter Three, suggests that parents might take on a master role themselves in order to ensure adequate

⁸⁹ Preston, Lancashire Archives, QSP.1159.14, QSP.1240.9; Taunton, Somerset Heritage Centre, Q.SR.315.314.

⁹⁰ QSP.432.8.

training of their impaired children.⁹¹ This somewhat ensured that the transition of caring responsibilities from primary carer to master would be as smooth as possible and that the hybrid provision of care which ensued would hopefully remain undisturbed and uninterrupted.

Therefore, although primary carers were still involved in their children's development, albeit from a distance, they had to trust their child's master to act in their apprentices' best interest. For better or for worse, and only for a time, they had to treat masters as surrogate parents and hope that they would look after their children to the best of their abilities. And while acquiring an impairment in the middle of one's indenture could precipitate its premature end, impairments themselves did not automatically preclude children from securing apprenticeships.

5.3. Conclusion

In this final chapter I have focused on the involvement of the parish and the community in the lives of poor impaired and/or disabled early modern English children. In my first part, I argued that parishes were directly involved in the lives of poor impaired and/or disabled early modern English children (whether positively or negatively). More precisely, I showed that parish relief was absolutely crucial in supporting those who cared for those children – i.e. parents, siblings, grandparents, unrelated community members, and, to some extent, masters. Many a poor primary carer could become entirely dependent on relief from their local

⁹¹ *The Post Angel; or, Universal Entertainment: Volume I*, ed. by George Croom and John Dunton (A. Baldwin, 1701).

authorities to provide for their impaired and/or disabled dependants. I finally demonstrated that parishes could provide impaired and/or disabled children with or deprive them of opportunities and prospects for a socially and financially independent life by either securing or terminating apprenticeships on their behalf.

In my second part, I emphasised the role of the community in providing care for those children. Notably, how widows were central figures in the lives of impaired and/or disabled children and how they could welcome them into their non-traditional households. I similarly showed that provision of care by poor widows was usually composite as they often depended on Christian charity and parish relief to fulfil their role of primary care givers. I then indicated that some community members could become *de facto* primary carers as a result of their profession (for instance, parish nurse or constable), and that in one unusual case a whole village became responsible for and raised a single physically impaired boy. I finally showed that masters and mistresses often acted as proxies for primary caregiving and thus allowed primary carers to provide for their impaired and/or disabled charges by proxy. Similarly, while the master/apprentice relationship was deeply contractual and transactional, it still sometimes emulated that between a parent and their child. As such, there were a great many ways to deliver care to impaired and/or disabled early modern English children, even in cases where primary carers themselves were struggling to do so.

6. Conclusion

I started my research frustrated with the existing literature on impairment and disability in early modern English children, which focused almost exclusively on monsters and monstrous births. While it was an undeniable facet of early modern childhood disability (and a fascinating one, too), surely – or so I reasoned – monstrosity and its concomitants could not have been all there was to it. Tales of monstrosity were very sensational in nature, and I did not think they could possibly be representative of the full spectrum of attitudes towards childhood impairment and disability. Moreover, monstrous births were only concerned with congenitally and physically different children of a particularly striking nature – what of those children with acquired impairments? What about mentally impaired children? What about children with non-visible impairments? Equally, while most children featured in tales of monstrous births often died shortly after birth, having fulfilled their portentous purpose, some most definitely survived. People would have had to look after them. Therefore, I set out to prove that there was so much more to the lives and experiences of impaired and/or disabled early modern English children, and most importantly that people could and indeed did care for them.

My research has provided indispensable insight into the lives and experiences of impaired and/or disabled early modern English children. My main contribution to the literature is that I have shown that, in early modern England, a large and disparate group of people either attempted to or managed to provide for impaired and/or disabled children. I have likewise offered a much more nuanced view of impaired and/or disabled children and their experiences of early modern life: they were not all ‘monsters’. Existing scholarship –

especially that on monstrosity – has drawn almost entirely on printed texts, which have provided only a limited and narrow view of impairment and disability in children in the period. I tailored my research around more socio-historical manuscript sources (i.e. petitions, letters, apprenticeship contracts) which were inevitably closer to the actual lived experiences of early modern people and allowed me to uncover the real stories of impaired and/or disabled children and their carers. In doing this, I intentionally moved beyond the monstrous child as a portent to be decoded. This logically led me to ask more socio-historical questions, too.

Within this research I examined seventy-eight legal records of these kinds, of which fifty appeared in this dissertation. The number and breadth of sources with which I worked did not allow me to produce a quantitative study of impaired and/or disabled children in early modern England; nevertheless, I have been able to draw out obvious patterns and clear similarities between the lives of impaired and/or disabled children from all across early modern England. I have underscored the utility of these sources for investigating the lived experiences of impaired and/or disabled English children, and thus the opportunities available for further research across British archives and beyond.

While I have been unable to make big, sweeping generalisations about these children's experiences, I have shown irrefutably that their stories were not simply reducible to tales of monstrosity. I have evidenced that many impaired and/or disabled children had families, friends, and neighbours who cared for them. I have essentially offered a much more nuanced and, more importantly, realistic view of the lives and experiences of impaired and/or disabled early modern English children. This is central to our ability to better comprehend not only

disability as it existed in the early modern period but also simply life as experienced by early modern people.

Chapter One offered much needed framing, which was pivotal to the rest of this dissertation and elucidated some of the ways (legal, medical, religious) early modern people thought about impaired and/or disabled children and why they treated them the way they did. The actions which were traced in my subsequent chapters were likewise indicative of additional ways people thought about impaired and/or disabled children. In Chapter One, I first focused on the contemporaneous preternatural and supernatural beliefs surrounding congenital impairments, including the familiar literature on monstrous births: they were sensational cautionary tales, used to forewarn people of God's displeasure or even anger at humankind. They were similarly used politically, again as portents of divine wrath, to indicate for example that God disapproved of the state of the kingdom. These accounts reduced congenitally impaired children to terrifying missives of the heavens – they were not children but instead monstrous messengers, existing only to warn people to repent from their sinful lives. By first engaging with the existing scholarship on impaired and/or disabled children, I acknowledged its limited and *limiting* scope and thus why I was intentionally moving away from it. The sources used were too brief, too sensational, too subjective, and only encompassed a tiny (and almost certainly exaggerated) portion of the varied lived experiences of impaired and/or disabled children, whose existence may in some instances have been a work of fiction.

I then considered the most important early modern natural philosophical ('scientific') explanations as to the causes and consequences of congenital impairments. These existed

alongside preter- and supernatural beliefs and were in no way devoid of religious sentiments – God was everywhere and in everything, including nature, thus ‘natural causes’ were still of his design. Although there was no consensus between medical scholars per se, they still followed generally similar patterns of thought: for example, congenital impairments were attributed to conditions inside the womb and only very rarely to factors outside of it (hereditary deafness, for instance, occurred when one of the parents was deaf themselves, therefore the deafness stemmed from them and so happened outside of the womb). Within this framework, congenital impairments could be caused by the position of the foetus in the womb, by how much nourishment it received throughout the pregnancy, by the unbridled thoughts and cravings of a pregnant woman (maternal impressions), by how much ‘spermatical matter’ was used during conception, etc.

In the second half of Chapter One, I turned to acquired impairments, their causes, potential cures, and the social response they elicited. I highlighted that there was a clear shift of interest between congenital and acquired impairments whereby the latter generated much less attention from both religious and medical practitioners, in part because their moral significance was less immediately obvious. They could be the result of accidents (open fires, wells, animals, falling objects, and so on), diseases (e.g. smallpox and scrofula), or violence. Further to this, I also showed that while as a rule *congenital* impairments were deemed incurable, medical authorities insisted that children with *acquired* impairments could and should be returned to perfection of body and mind (in other words, cured). Potential cures were many and varied. Some of the most prominent ones on the market were miracle cures (for instance, the royal touch) and surgical interventions, both routine and much more invasive. This second half laid the ground for some of the forms of care examined in subsequent chapters, for instance how seeking medical intervention was seen as an inherent

part of good parenting. This explained in part why carers of impaired and/or disabled children tried so hard to find cures for their young charges.

Whereas Chapter One was predominantly concerned with contextualising children with congenital and acquired impairments, Chapter Two centred instead on conceptualising my main source base, namely petitions. In this, I engaged with the existing literature on poverty and poor relief, but also showed that the historical scope of petitions goes beyond matters of financial hardship and litigation, and that they can be used to better understand the lived experiences of impaired and/or disabled early modern English children and of those who cared for or lived alongside them.

I first gave an overview of the mechanics of the early modern English petitioning process and answered a series of pivotal questions. Why did petitions exist in the first place? To litigate, to seek parish relief. Who wrote petitions (in particular, petitions for relief)? For the most part commoners, including (disabled) poor widows, (disabled) single women, (disabled) poor people in general, merchants, masters, and (disabled) apprentices. Who were these petitions directed at? Parish officials such as overseers of the poor, churchwardens, and, especially in the context of petitions for relief, justices of the peace. Finally, what exactly was a successful petition? I showed that ‘success’ was a multidimensional thing: even when relief was granted, petitioners did not necessarily get what they wanted or even more problematically what they thought they needed.

These questions offered crucial socio-historical context for the historical actors encountered in my subsequent chapters. I then moved on to explore the all-important poor-law concept of

‘deserving’ or ‘helpless’ poverty which has been central to this dissertation: virtually all my petitioners belonged to the category of ‘deserving’ or ‘helpless’ poor (e.g. impaired and/or disabled children, widows, carers with dependent children), it was therefore essential to better comprehend their motives and intentions. Lastly, I shed some fresh light on the remarkable significance of neighbourly Christian charity and how it could be used to supplement outdoor parochial relief in England in the early modern period.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five fully stepped beyond the printed sources more familiar to scholars of early modern childhood disability to delve into new archival evidence. They share a central concern with evidence for the levels and forms of care and support available to early modern impaired children: Chapters Three and Four in particular were two sides of the same coin – namely provision and absence of care, respectively – while Chapter Five, by focusing on communal mechanisms of support, formed a necessary continuation and widening of the themes broached in Chapter Three.

In Chapter Three I shed light onto who cared for impaired and/or disabled children and how. I established that the expectations of care of primary carers of kin such as parents, siblings, and grandparents of impaired and/or disabled children were the same as for those who cared for non-impaired, non-disabled children. Primary carers strove to provide their charges with the basic necessities of food, drink, shelter, and clothes, but also fought hard in some cases to secure work and training opportunities as a way to guarantee their charges’ future socio-economic independence. In this chapter, I confirmed that some early modern people really did care for impaired and/or disabled early modern English children, and that they were willing to go the extra mile to ensure they could provide for them. This was an important

contribution to our emerging understanding of early modern impaired and/or disabled children in that it showed that, clearly, they were not all ‘monsters’. Chapter Three demonstrated that the existing scholarship was too minimal to paint an accurate picture of the lives of impaired and/or disabled children in early modern England.

I likewise looked at some of the ways through which early modern English carers could provide for their impaired and/or disabled charges. Because I used petitions for parish relief, I concentrated almost entirely on people from the poorer echelons of early modern English society; therefore, it follows that money was often scarce and that these people had to find alternative ways to provide for their charges. It was especially important as some disabled children could not make a financial contribution to their households. Charity and parish relief were thus often centre stage in the lives of these poor people and allowed many a poor primary carer to secure modicums of help to look after their impaired and/or disabled charges.

Where Chapter Three focused on positive evidence of care, Chapter Four explored what I called ‘lapses of care’. Not all early modern people could care, and those who could care did not necessarily do it well or at all. I initially addressed issues of rejection as a result of the negative perception of impairments in children. I studied the story of Marianne Maillard and highlighted how her impairments were both an allegory for religious persecution and a first-hand example of harassment as an unfortunate consequence of one’s visible impairments. Similarly, her life was an amalgamation of both support and abuse from the different people with whom she crossed paths: some of them were kind to her and supported her; others were abusive, made fun of her, and simply hurt her. By scrutinising this account, my research first

shed more light on possible instances of abuse and harassment inflicted upon visibly impaired children. But at the same time, it has also enriched our understanding of the rich and varied lives and experiences of impaired and/or disabled children. These children experienced life to the same extent as their non-impaired, non-disabled counterparts and their stories were just as complex and varied as those of their contemporaries: some of it was good; some of it was bad; some of it was somewhere in between.

In the second part of this chapter, I analysed experiences of accidental or incidental failures of care and what that translated into for early modern English impaired and/or disabled children. Most of these examples came from petitions for relief, and in some cases from some of the same petitions examined in Chapter Three: some of my petitions, by their very existence, symbolised both a desire and an inability to care. They also served to show that wanting to care was not always enough: dependent impaired and/or disabled children could still suffer from an absence of care despite their guardians wishing to provide for them. I first showed that abandonment, regardless of the reasons behind it, could sometimes result in displacement for the child and therefore in the child's struggling to find a place where they fully belong. Similarly, I also stressed that poverty and a paucity of resources commonly turned into an incidental lack of care. My research has thus revealed that, in the case of dependent disabled children in particular, poverty and an absence of care often went hand in hand. Destitute carers were at times unable to provide their impaired and/or disabled charges with sufficient sustenance or even more dramatically with shelter. This inability to care was sometimes accentuated by carers being disabled themselves. In this, and in examples of disabled children growing into disabled adults and non-disabled children becoming disabled in their adulthood, my research has also contributed to our growing understanding of the lives of disabled adults and their social and economic networks in early modern England.

Finally, I engaged with examples of intentional physical and emotional violence and active withholding of care directed at impaired and/or disabled children. These examples of abuse ranged from active deprivation of basic necessities and support to unabashed physical violence and rape. Bodily harm inflicted upon a child was sometimes the reason why a child became impaired and then subsequently disabled (or further so) in the first place. In this, I contributed to wider conversations about early modern childhood and disability and have once again added much more nuance to the field. This is central to our ability to conceive of impaired and/or disabled early modern English children as more than just ‘monsters’. By looking at impaired and/or disabled children as first and foremost children (as opposed to objects of sensational awe), my research has shown that their experiences were plural and diverse, and this to the same extent as those of their non-impaired, non-disabled peers. Equally, it has highlighted that early modern people were just as ready and capable to help and support these children as they were to abuse and hurt them. Studying a society through the ways it supports or fails its most vulnerable is also a valuable exercise in its own right.

In my fifth and final chapter, I returned to the all-important matter of who cared for impaired and/or disabled children, but this time I went beyond relations of kin and instead appraised the role and involvement of the parish and of the community in the lives of early modern impaired and/or disabled children. As such, I contributed important new information to historians’ understanding of the socio-economic arrangements of communities in early modern England, including through administration of the poor laws. Sometimes, carers did not have the resources to properly look after their charges and had to take steps to ensure they and the impaired and/or disabled children they looked after did not suffer or perish. This is

where the community and/or the parish had to become involved. The influence of the parish on the lives of those children in particular cannot be overstated. Parish relief was central to most indigent households, particularly to those with disabled children who depended entirely on their destitute carers for their survival. The main source base for this entire dissertation (i.e. petitions) truly gets to shine for what it is in Chapter Five: formal pleas for parish and community assistance. By examining these requests for aid, I emphasised that parishes had the power to change the lives of impaired and/or disabled children (and not always for the best). They could provide financial relief, reorganise households, secure (or, sadly, terminate) apprenticeships, finance or support efforts to find cures for impaired and/or ill children, set up schemes to ensure children from indigent households were placed in less struggling households, etc.

I likewise emphasised the crucial caregiving role played by various members of an impaired and/or disabled child's community. Particularly, I determined that widows, thanks to their unique social place in the community, were ubiquitous figures in the lives of impaired and/or disabled *orphans*. In doing so, I similarly underscored the collaborative nature of community care in early modern England. Community carers sometimes needed to rely on either charity or parish relief, and sometimes both at the same time. I equally presented the fact that parishes had the power to volunteer members of a child's community to act as *de facto* carers (temporary or permanent). In doing so, I expanded on the topic of caregiving in early modern England and further brought to light the sheer variety of ways through which children, in particular impaired and/or disabled children, could be looked after and provided for throughout the period. Finally, I suggested that the master/apprentice relationship, while remaining very much contractual and transactional, first emulated that between a parent and their child and second showed that primary care and compassion could be delivered by proxy.

Taking these chapters together, one key insight of this dissertation was how disability often blurred traditional boundaries of age, provision of care, and dependency. As such, incorporating disability as a ‘key defining social category on a par with race, class, and gender’ significantly nuances our understanding of areas such as early modern childhood, labour, and family relations.¹ Several of the petitions I examined throughout this dissertation have highlighted that parental care in some cases did not cease or shift at all, and that dependent disabled children eventually turned into dependent disabled adults, thus undergoing what I called an infantilising prolonged (sometimes indefinite) childhood. In other cases, independent adults could become disabled and subsequently reliant on their parents once more, therefore undergoing, in this instance, some sort of early second childhood. Some of my petitions, notably those about disabled *adults*, raised important questions of long-term dependency: most carers eventually reached an age when they could no longer afford to or were physically unable to provide for their disabled charges. More dramatically yet unavoidably, carers would also ultimately die and in some cases leave their dependent disabled charges without the caregiver they still desperately needed. On occasion, this led disabled adults to become isolated, homeless, and utterly unable to fend for themselves.

This dissertation has brought to light the potential but most importantly the need for further research. Historians must move away from monstrosity as the only feature of childhood disability in the early modern period. For example, the fusion of disability, age, and

¹ Catherine J. Kudlick, ‘Disability History: Why We Need Another “Other”’, *The American Historical Review*, 108.3 (2003), 764.

dependency touches on so many aspects of not only childhood but also adult disability, caregiving, independence, labour, familial structures, networks of support, poverty, and community and parish involvement. While I did not initially set out to stress this particular strand of research, it permeated my entire dissertation. More targeted scholarly attention equally ought to be given to the link between disabled children and disabled adults: many disabled children eventually became disabled adults. It would be of great historical value to first treat them as one evolving entity (as opposed to two separate and hermetic life stages) and second to focus more intently on this shift from disabled childhood to disabled adulthood. What changed? Or most interestingly, what did not change? To what extent did disabled adulthood resemble and at the same time differ from disabled childhood?

In similar fashion, I purposefully decided to consider different types of sources (i.e. socio-historical sources such as petitions as opposed to printed literary sources). But these were only one possible access point. What of personal correspondence between friends, families, neighbours, etc.? What about diaries, journals, wills? There still exist myriad different ways of accessing the lived experiences of impaired and/or disabled children, some of which may open up yet new avenues of research and expand our budding knowledge of childhood disability in early modern England and beyond.

As a final point, I want to revisit the questions with which I started this dissertation and show that I have answered them. Who cared for impaired and/or disabled early modern English children? A great many different people. Parents of impaired and/or disabled children featured prominently in petitions for relief, but they were not the only ones. In some cases, siblings or even grandparents acted *in loco parentis*. Petitions also evidenced that people

from outside common bounds of kinship also stepped in to provide for impaired and/or disabled children. For example, several unrelated community widows petitioned their local parish officials on behalf of themselves and the impaired and/or disabled children they had welcomed into their households. The case of Henry Bare of Aintree with which I opened this dissertation likewise showed that an entire community of people could raise and therefore provide for a physically impaired child.

How did all these primary carers provide for their impaired and/or disabled charges? If we take the example of Henry Bare once again, although their relationship was not harmonious, the people of Aintree came together to supply him with food, drink, clothes, shelter. They also secured him an accessible apprenticeship with a local shoemaker which was supposedly catered to his individual needs. Other carers could request relief from the parish in the form of monetary aid, shelter, or even a reshuffling of their household, following which their disabled charge was taken away and placed into a different household. I also argued that the very act of petitioning one's local parish on behalf of oneself and one's disabled child was an act of caregiving in itself, regardless of the intention behind it.

Were there systems in place to support these children and the people who cared for them? Those who cared for impaired and/or disabled children and struggled financially could petition their local officials to try and secure relief. This system of petitions rested on perceived merit. Therefore, by flaunting their charges' impairments, carers could bolster their chances of receiving aid from the parish. Before resorting to this or even alongside it, they could also rely on their family, friends, and neighbours, or more generally on their community. Christian charity was a system in itself which was just as important as parish

relief. Some primary carers (for example, poor widows) sometimes made use of both at the same time. Parish relief and charity supplemented each other and allowed carers to keep on providing for their impaired and/or disabled dependants. Parishes also had the ability to reshape indigent households by removing young children and apprenticing them to local masters. In doing this, they hoped to ensure that these households did not fall into complete and utter destitution, that they did not become further dependent on community resources, and that their impaired and/or disabled children did not become chargeable to the parish (at the time or later, as dependent disabled adults). These systems were obviously not without fault and of course did not work for everyone.

The field of early modern child disability, while itself still in its infancy, is rich and fascinating. Most importantly, it is deserving of so much more academic attention. I hope this dissertation will have provided valuable insights into the lives of poor impaired and/or disabled early modern English children and those who existed alongside them.

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Appendices

Bedfordshire Archives and Records Office

#P31.14.11b (1672)

This Indenture made the nynth day of October in the Fowere and Twentieth Yeare of the Raigne of our Sovereigne Lord Charles the Second by the grace of god of England Scotland France and Ireland Kinge defender of the faith and in the yeare of our lord god 1642 Where as the Right Honorable Thomas Earle of Elgin decased did in and by his last will and Teastament Amongst other things give and devise unto the Towne of Maulden in the Countie of Bedfoard the Sum of one hundred pounds of lawfull monye of England for the providinge of A Stock for the Settinge of pore people of the Sayd Towne on Worke and the use and Intrust thereof untill Such Stock ware provided was to bee [sic] disposed for the putting forth of pore Children of the Sayd Towne Apprentisses as by the Sayd will may appear Now This Indenture witneseth that Ralph Child Son Churchwarden of Maulden afore sayd and Ambros Lee and Edmund Bonnor Overseeres of the pore thare, have by thes [sic] presente put placed and bound, Abell Child a pore lame yong [sic] man of the for Sayd parrish Apprentice and Covenant S[e]rvant unto John Linfoard of the same Towne and Countie of Beddfoard affore sayd Cordwinder, and hath given with the sayd Abell Child the sum of Sixe pounds of lawfull monye of England beeing parte of the Sayd use of the Sayd hundred pounds above mentioned, and after the Mannor of an Apprentis with him to dwell from the Twelfe day of June last past beefore the day of the date of thee presente for and during the full end and tearme of one yeare from then next Insumge [insume], and fullie to bee Compleat and Ended by all which Tearme of one yeare the sayd Abell Child Apprentis unto the sayd John Linfoard as his master well and faythfullie shall serve, his Secrets keepe, his Commands lawfull [sic] and honest Every way doe, Fornication in the hous of his Master or with out hee shall not

Committ, hurt to his Sayd master hee [sic] shall not doe, nor consent to bee donne, but to his powre shall lett [sic] and give warninge to his sayd master of the Same Tavarne Ires Alehowsses or other Suspected places Commonly haunt nor frequent Except it bee about his masters bussones there to bee done, at Cards dise or any other unlawfull games hee [sic] shall not playe, the goods of his Sayd master hee shall not Inordmately wast nor spend, nor them to any parson or parssones lend without the Consent of his Master, matrimony with any woman duringe the sayd Tearme hee shall not contract nor from his masteres Sarvice, neyther by day nor night hee shall not absent him Selfe, but as A faithfull Sarvant, Every Whare beehave him Selfe as well in words as in deedes, and The Sayd John Linfoard promyseth and Covenanteth by thes presente unto the sayd Abell Child his Apprentice to lerne Teach and instruct or informe or cause to bee Taught instructed or Informed in the Sayd Artt Craft or Occupation of A Cordwinder in the best mannor that hee now Can or heare after may in the sayd Tearme of one yeare, and Allso shall finde him his sayd sarvant and Apprentice meate drinck and lodging meet good and sufficent for one of that occupation and Calling, duringe all the Sayd Tearme of one yeare according to the True Intent and meaninge of thes present Indentures where unto thay Interchangably have sett [sic] thare hands and sayles the day and yeare first Above wrighten

Seaylled and delivered in the presence of

the marke of

Henery Staple John Stuart

the marke of

John Linfoard

Carlisle Archives Centre

#Q.11.1.42.32 (1697)

To the worshipfull his ma[jes]ties Justices of the peace for the County of Cumberland.

The humble peticon of the p[ar]ishon[ers] of the p[ar]ish of Westward in the said County.

Sheweth.

That the p[ar]ishon[ers] of the said p[ar]ish are by ord[er] of the Gen[er]all Sessions to pay, weakly for & towards the maintenance of William Langrigg & his family 12d p[er] weeke w[hi]ch ord[er] was obtained upon the Account & under pretence of his haveing a Lame and deformed child, who long since died That notwithstandinge his death & y^t the s[ai]d ord[er] was first had for y^t cause yet [sic] is the s[ai]d 12d p[er] weeke demanded by the s[ai]d Langingg & his wife who now are in a very good capacity of liveinge and has a very good stock of sheep & both of them very well able to worke for their maintenance & livelyhood [illegible] which they obstinatly refuse or in any wise to be serviceable to the said p[ar]ish for reasonable wages but depends of their owne abillity and weekly allowance by the said order in oppossion of the said p[ar]ish.

May it therefore please your Worshippes to grant your peticon[er] such releife herein as your wo[shi]pps shall seem meet and convenient.

And they will ever pray

Devon Heritage Centre**#1579A.24.60.54 (1641)**

This Indenture made the Nyneteenth day of July the Seaventeenth yeare of the Raigne of our Sovereigne Lord Charles by the Grace of God Kinge of England Scotland France and Ireland Defender of the Faith Between John Wise and Lawrence Adams the younger Churchwardens of the p[ar]ish Church of Totnes in the County of Devon, And Henry James Richard Martin Jmd William French and Richard Short Overseers of the poore there for this present yeare of the one parte And Peter Bayley of Totnes aforesaid Ropemaker of the other parte Whereas one Nicholas Drake borne within the Towne aforesaid beinge a dumbe boy and not able to maynteyne or lyve of himselfe and hath bin chargable [sic] ever since his birth unto the said Towne and hath ben brought upp [sic] wholly [sic] without any vocacon or trade and soe likely to contynue very chargable unto the said Towne unles [sic] some other course bee taken therein, which the said Churchwardens and Overseers takinge into consideracon have by the advise of Richard Wise now maior of the said Towne and his Brethren agreed And by these presents doe agree putt [sic] and place the said Nicholas Drake with the said Peter Bayley with him to contynue as a Covenant servant for the space of eight yeares from the date hereof and have to keepe as a Covenant Servant ought to bee kept and him carefully to teach and instruct in the art and mastery of a Ropemaster whereby the said Nicholas Drake after the expiracon of the terme aforesaid may lyve and mayntyne himselfe and bee noe farther chargeble unto the said Towne And in Consideracon aforesaid the said Churchwardens and Overseers have paid and Delyvered unto the said Peter Bayley the Somme of six pounds the receipt whereof the said Peter Bayley doth hereby acknowledge Provided [alioayes?] that if the said Nicholas Drake or the said Peter Bayley do happen to dye within the space of three yeares next ens[u]rinng that then the said Peter Bayley his executors or assignes shall repay unto the said Churchwardens and Overseers and their Successors for the tyme beinge the

somme of three pounds p[ar]cell of the said somme of six pounds And the said Peter Bayley doth hereby covenant p[ro]mise and grant to and with the said Churchwardens and Overseers and their Successors that hee [sic] will duringe the said terme find unto his said Covenant Servant Sufficent meate drinke wollen lynnenn hose shooes [sic] and all other things needfull or meete for such a servant And in thereof the said terme shall double apparell his said servant [with?] one suite of apparell for holy dayes and another for workinge dayes fitt and convenient for such a servant And for and in consideracon of six pounds by him rec[eive]d of the said Churchwardens and Overseers as aforesaid with the said Nicholas Drake doth hereby covenant p[ro]mise and agree to and with the said Churchwardens and Overseers and their Successors in [thend?] of the said terme to pay unto his said servant the somme of Tenn shillings of lawfull money of England In witness whereof the p[ar]ties aforesaid to thes [sic] p[re]sent Indentures there hands and [missing] Interceamingably [sic] have p[re]sentt dated the day and yeare first above written 1641.

Sealed and delivered

in the presence of

John Wise

1641

C[ouncil]l[o]r Thomas

x – x – x

Hugh Gouldinge

The signe of Peter Bayley --- X

.....

#1579A.0.24.60.54 (1641)

Richard Drake, a dumb boy to Peter Bayley, ropemaker

.....

#3210A.PO.5.24 (1698)

Wee the Churchwardens and Overseers of the poor of Winkley [Winkleigh] in the county of Devon doe hereby owne and acknowledge that J[missing – John?] Handcock a lame boy is an inhabitant of our said p[ar]ish and therein legally settled and is to be received back againe into our said p[ar]ish from the towne and p[ar]ish of Oakhampton as a late act of parlam[en]t made in the 8th & 9th yeares of our p[re]sent Sovereigne King William th[e 3rd].

Signed and sealed by the said Churchwardens & Overseers in the presence of

Edward Langbridge

Phillip Yeoland

John Dunning

Churchwardens

Ric[hard] Dunning

Arthur Reywoods

Overseers of the Poor

John Heywoods

Ric[hard] Dunning

Walter Heywood

.....

#3009A.99.PO.11.349 (1704)

Devon ss:

To the Churchwardens & overseers of the poore of the parish of Chudleigh & their successors in the County aforesaid These

Wee the Minister Churchwardens & overseers of the poor of the parish of Combentinhedd [Combeinteignhead] in the said County of Devon doe hereby certifie that William Groze a poor lame boy is an Inhabitant & parishion[er] legally settled in our said parish of Combentinhedd aforesaid And being desirous for his better livelyhood to worke for some time in yo[ur] said parish of Chudleigh wee doe hereby p[ro]mise agree & oblige our Selves & our successors to receive & p[ro]vide for the said William Groze as our parishioner whenever hee shall happen to become chargeable to yo[ur] said parish of Chudleigh or sooner if thereunto requested In [witness?] whereof wee have hereunto sett our hands & seales the seventh day of July in the third year of the raigne of our Sovereigne Lady Queen Anne over England Scotland and Ireland. 1704

Signed Sealed & delivered in the presence of

Nicholas Thorne

John Willing Ju[nior]

Josiah Richards

The signe of John J Willkinge overseer

Allowed by us

Tho. Lear

R. Reynell

East Riding Archives**#QSF.23.D.2 (1713)**

The humble Petition of Elizabeth Atkinson of Eastrington Widow

Sheweth that your Pet[iti]o[n][er] having two Lame Children to maintain with her hand Labour and her self being also Lame and weak and nothing wherewith to support themselves unless releivd by the Assistance of this hono[rable] Court

Your Pet[iti]o[n][er] therefore humbly pray Your Hono[urs] to grant her such releife as to your Hon[ours] shall ever meet.

And your pet[iti]o[n][er] shall ever prayer

Eliz. Atkinson her marke -- X

Ordered the peticoner have 7s weekly till cause be shewne to the Contrary.

.....

#QSF.69.E.13 (1725)

Ab[ou]t 3 years ago John Rank a poor boy of Kilnsea was by the Parish Officers bound Apprentice to W[illia]m Garbut now dead to whom M[aste]r Wormington is Adm[inistere]d The b[o]y is since become so lame and infirme that he is altogether incapable of service And M[aste]r Wormington haveing fully administered hopes the bench will discharge him.

To prove the boy lame and infirme 1 William Lambert | 1 Sam[ue]l Daviell

Now the Overseer himselfe cannot but own the boy is unserviceable.

Ordered J. Rank be discharged by Justices

.....

#QSF.74.E.2 (1726)

Whereas the Bearers hereof Robert Hall and his family having Lived for divers Years In the Parish and County aforesaid In A very Plentifull Manner keeping a house of Entertainment and shop unfill by Misfortune. Eight Robbers in the Night time broke into the Robert Hall's House and Robbed him of his Substante to the value Five Hundred and Fifty Pounds and upwards in money plate and Goods. And bound and Gag'd them in A very barborous manner; The Father seing his Children soe Crewely used Endeavoured all he could to resist them, they most Barborously murdered him and set fire to the Buildings which Consumed his wife and One Child; Five still yet Living who are the bearers hereof.

These are therefore to desire all in Authority to permitt [sic] and suffer the said Bearers peaceably and Quietly to pass into South Britain they having Friends and Relations there Resident from whom they expect some support in this their great distress; they behaving themselves civilly and according to Law in their said Journey; Recommending them to all proper parish officers for reliefe in their said Journy as to alsou shall seem most meet; Three of them being both sick and Lane; whereby theyre become reall objects deserving of good Christians Charity Given under our hands and Seals being Two of his Majesty's Justices of the peace for they [sic] said County the Tenth day of September ... 1746.

To all his Majesty's Justices of the peace May[ers] Sherriffs Bayliffs Constables Overssers Churchwardens and to all other his Majesty's officers to whom these may Come to Concern.

County Northumberland Sept 13th

Allow'd to pass this County by Mr Robert Rogers

Comitat Dunelin ss Seen and allowed to pass this county by me. William Williamsons. 20th
Sept 1726.

.....
#QSF.81.G.6 (1728)

Wee Francis Boynton William Osbaldeston Richard Osbaldeston & Joseph Stern Esquire
Sour of his Majestys Justices of the Peace (one whereof is of the Duorum) for the Rideing
aforesaid haveing heard and examined the matter in Difference between Sarah Tasker an
Apprentice to William Hood of Kilpin in the County aforesaid Butcher and it appearing to us
that the said Sarah Tasker is not fit or proper to serve an Apprenticeship by reason of her
Infirmitys We do therefore for the Cause aforesaid discharge the said Sarah Tasker from her
said Apprenticeship; and do hereby under our respectives hands and seals pronounce and
declare That the said Sarah Tasker is discharged from being any longer an Apprentice to her
said Master Witness our Hands and Seals at the Guildhall in Beverley the Sixteenth Day of
July in the second year of the Reigne of our Sovereigne Lord King George II. Anno Dui 1728

Herefordshire Archive and Records Centre**#G73.1 (1734)**

Item That Humphry Paifrer be allowed an additional piece of ground to his House & Land he already has upon the Speermarsh Waste & that some of ye freeholders do inspect & appoint the same; the s[ai]d [additional] ground being allowed him for the support of his son Thomas being a lame disabled child.

Isle of Wight Record Office**#OG.CC.77 (1649)**

August 3th 1649

Deare father

At the reading of your Loving Letter Joy and Sorry (of which my hart was fully possest) strived in me for Supreority; Joy for the great Love which you are pleased upon all occasions to exprese to your unworthy Daughter, especially upon the occasion of my death; and Sorry that it should bring to you any greufe, for whome my prayars are to god for more comfort and happynes then for my selfe: but sence you are frede from that mistake, and that you remayne in health and happynes, Joy has gained the opar [upper] hand and sorry Cannot find pleace in me, espetially because I hope to be an eye witnes of it before a month be over. Sir I beleve you have hard of the great [miracle?] that has been wrought nere us heere at dedford it was one a girle of 14th years ould which has been blind this 8 yeares of the kinges evill & could not gaine any healpe allthought her frindes sought it of many phisitions; but with using a Clothe that was diped in y^e late kings blood 2 or 3 time in a day at the end of 8th daye she was parsittly cured; and can see as well as any one liveing this is very trew my hisband and I have had it from gentell men & women y^t has knowen her from her cradel & will tak thers ouths of it: not to truble you any further, I present my humble Duty unto you and remayne Dear father your Dutyfull daughter ambytious of your Commqnd

Ann Lennard

.....

#OG.CC.79 (1649)

Most Deare Father

I am So Confound with Greufe and Shame that I cannot wa[missing] you according to my promise, that I am hardly my selfe, nether can I now right unto you of it wuthout terees, which I allmost Continually shede for it for I cannot perswade my selfe but I am forced to forsacke the best and Dearest father that ever any one had; for which hard fortune I shall allways morne for. Sir when I last right you I did beleve I should have waited one you this month I had a promyse of my husband that I should and he mayd be beleve that he was in preparation for my Jorny in getting a Couchman and other things; but I undarstand by your Letter and other things since that he did not intend it, but onely to give me sattisfaction for the time; for now he teles me he is very unwilling. I should goe and he cannot possible goe himselge for many reasons the first is because he intends to goe to London as Soune as his [harvist?] is in to take phisick & have an Issue mayd in his legge for a humor that he has ben verry much trubled with this summer in his Lege & his eyes & the other is he is upon sume sayle of lands for to paye his daughters porsion, & the other is he is very much threatened to be sequestered by one Floyde who sayth he can prove that my husband did furnish Sr Harry Manaring with many porpos to goe to the king to fight against the parliment and had in consideration of it a [pattnine?] for a baranett but my husband doth not consider that for he knows he cannon doe him any harm onely he may playe the knave & truble him & therefore he will not be from home ; my husbands keeps his busines very pryvetly therefore I intrest you not to specke of it, or to take any notice of it for he would be angry if he should know yt I should specke of it: he saith that nothing shall hender him form waiting one until the spring: Sir I am very sorry that you are not yet assured of the Truth of the miracle I right you of it is Cleare seene to be trew as the Sun in the firnamet; and were you heere to examin it you would say to me of it as the Samaritans did to the woman that tolde them of our Saviour: I

confes I was afrayd to beleve it a great while althought I sent 3 times to know the truth of it; but now I have had the relation of it from then that knew her and many others that has examine it yt I cannot doute of it the round heads them selves confes the truth of it: Sir the woman whose Child was cured was a stricke presbyterian & did not beleve yt the king could cure the evill & therfore never carried her to him: her Child was 8th yeares blind sum times in one eye and sum times in ye other but ye last yeare she was quit blind with both her eyes & in very graet misary yt her mother did often pray to god to take her out of the world for she did disspeare of cure for she had ben with many phisitions & with Mr Steptcen the great Oculis & he could he tould her there was noe Cure she being that day that ye king was murdered; one ye echange there Come a great independant with a handkerchif dipt in his blood & in a Chornfull manar shoud it & torre it in peeces & gave it his acquaintance which she being declared him to g[missing – give?] her a pece & as she was going home by [missing].

[overleaf]

She was convected and beleve him to be a Saint, & thereupon the 19th Chapter of the acts came into her mind how that from St Paul were brought handkerchiefs & aprone to the sicke & thay were cured (& now she did beleve yt he did cuer ye evill in his life time) she thought with her selfge why this cloth might not doe her faughter sum good therefore as sounne as she came home she wipe her Child eys & in less then 3 weekes she was parfictly well & no body can parseve yt ever she was ill: this woman for peace of ye souldiers conseild it; althought many wondered at ye the Sudan cure; & gentelman whose Child was ill of yt disease being earnest of her to know what cure she had she tould him upon dision he would not specke of it: which when he knew he tould her how ill she had don in the confessing of it; & mayd her revele it so that she will never conseile it more althought thay doe often Threaten her life:

there has ben many great parsones to see her & her daughter & have offared her mony but she tells them she will never doe the Cause so much renegeas to take a penny she is a soficient woman and is able to give her Daughter 200 pound: I heere for sartaine that she has Cuired in ye same parrish with that Cloth a woman & a Childe: Sr I hope you will pardon the tegious of my lines thay being upon so good a subject: so presenting my Duty to you & my love to Brothers & Sisters I ever am

Deare Father

your Dutyfull Daughter ambitious of your Commande

Ann Lennard

Kent Archives**#QM.SB.916 (1610)**

The humble petition of John and William Cooper

In most humble wise shewing unto ye good worshipes that wheareas yo[ur] poore orator hath a longe tyme beine burthened and ov[er]charged in keepinge and mayneteyninge a poore Impotente & lame sister of theires, they havinge noe meanes to maynetayne them selves there wives and childrene but only their hand about. May it therefore please yo[ur] good worshipes consideringe the poor estate of yo[ur] said poore orators to take some such order yt yo[ur] said poor orators may be disburthened of their said charge and there said systre to be kepte & mayneteyned at ye common charge of ye p[ar]ishes of Lyeginge [Lyminge] & Breadheaste [Bredhurst] upon w[here]fore she was bound and brought upp and in soe doinge yo[ur] said orators w[i]th their wives and childrene shall ev[er] bound to pray for yo[ur] worshipes long p[ro]speritie & [safe?] lives

This is referred by the Court to be [illegible] to R[ight] W[orshipful] Radley Knight & George Wyatt Esquire Justices.

#Q.SB.5.79 (1654)

.....

Wee [sic] the p[ar]ishoners of Whitstable would intreat of your worships that the bearrer Abraham Upton may be hirente for to sell beere and alle [sic] he liveing in a house which hath formerly bine hirente and he haveing lodging for those which travell [sic] very good to lodg [sic] them in and liveing in the house to besides which is very convenyent in that Regard we would intreat ye worships fortohirente him standing as it doeth and he hath besides a daughter which is taken lame cannot to helpe her selfe soe if ye worships may be pleased for

to licence him we thinke his house and him very fitting in which we have sett [sic] our hands
unto it for to give ye worships satisfaction

Churchwardens

[Illegible]

Richard Joans

Patrick Gouldson

Edward Wimarke by his mark

Overseers

Edward Hayard

Henry Winkfield by his mark

Lancashire Archives**#QSB.1.39.51 (1628)**

To the right Ho[nou]r[a]bl[e] S[i]r Cecill Trafford Knight Edward Holland Esq[ui]r[e] and the rest of the Justices of the peace att the quarter Sessions holden att Manchester.

The humble peticon of Elianor Asmough of Wilkington a pore distressed Crippe Sheweth unto yo[u]r good wor[shi]ppes that whereas Richard Asmough of Pilkington clothier and father to this petitioner did in his liffe tyme take alease of a messuage and [tenements] in Pilkington aforesaid conteyneinge five acres of lande or thereabouts from the right ho[nora]ble Willi[a]m Earle of Darbie for the terme of the ov[e]rall liffe of this petitioner and John Asmough her brother, and this petitioners father att his death in respect this petition[e]r was then a Crippe and not anie waies able to releise her selfe by her Industrie, gave the said [tenements] to this petition[e]r and the said John Asmough dureinge the said terme intendinge thereby that this petition[e]r might have the yerely proffitt of the moytie [half] of the said Messuage and [tenements] at the least, to manteyne her selfe w[i]thall, w[i]th this petitioner hath Enjoyed for this xx yeres or thereabouts untill about the feast daie of St John Babtist 1624 about which tyme the said John Asmough haveinge holde his interest in another messuage and [tenements] in Pilkington aforesaid, and ever since hath wrongfully held the possession of the whole, and hath and doth not onely denye to yeelde and paye anie rent or some for the said Moytie, or otherwaies to keepe susteyne and manteyne this petioc[i]oner w[i]th meate drinke and other necessities: but hath allsoe taken a bedd and other Clothes belonging to the same from this petition[e]r, and turned her forth of the house and denyeth to gyve this petitioner either house rouse or lodgeinge, and by some Indirect meanes hath allsoe gotten the grand lease w[i]th this petitioners father had from the said Earle into his handes out of the possession and custodie of M[aste]r Foxe to whome the said lease was

delivered in trust to bee kept for the use of this pore petitioner, and the said John Asmough ,
and nowe gyves out in speches that because this peticion[e]r hath not writeinge to showe her
right therefore shee shall have not releife nor manteyneance out of the same Soe that this
petitioner beinge impotent and Infirme and not anie waies able to helpe her selfe is likely to
bee starved and Famisht for want of Foode and other necessities unles yo[u]r wor[shi]ppe wil
bee pleased favourably to Comiserate this pore peticon[e]rs distressed case.

.....

#QSB.1.130.68 (1633)

The Right wo[rshi]pp[ful]l his Ma[jes]ties Justicis of peace att the Sessions houlden att
Wigane The humble petitions of Ralph Cocker

Humbly shewing unto yo[ur] good wor[shi]pps that whereas as yo[ur] petitioner beinge a
verie poore man hath a boye w[hi]ch is blinde of bothe eies, This is inflicted w[i]th the
Kinges evill, and it is thought by some of Wigin it maye bee y^e Cause of his blindnes And
wheras I am now determined to Travell to London to his Ma[jes]tie trustinge in god to get
help May it therfore [sic] please yo[ur] good wor[shi]pps to graunt mee [sic] youre passe to
gett some releefe by the waies for my boye is not able to Travell alone six Miles a Daie and
therfore it wille Longe in gettinge upp and god knowes except [sic] yo[ur] good wor[shi]pps
have Commisseracionne uppon my Child hee is like to bee lost And wee shalle bounde in all
humble dewtie to praye for yo[ur] wor[shi]pps health ... amen.

.....

#QSB.1.150.57 (1635)

To the righte wor[ship]full his ma[jes]ties Justices of the Peace and quoru att [sic] the quarter
Sessions of the peace houlden att Ormskirk there assembled.

Humbly

Sheweth That whereas yo[ur] pore peti[tione]r and her Late husbände Ralfe Rigbie were bredd and borne in this towne of Ormskirk & hadd in the tyme of their [marriage] 3 Children of which it pleased Almightye [God] to stryke lame one of them insomuch it is no waye able to helpe itselfe as all the towne will knoweth

In Regard whereof and forasmuche as your pore pet[itione]rs husband dyed in his younge Years and was a shoemaker by his trade and lyved therby in good desente sorte but your pore petitioners sithence late desolate and havinge nothings to supporte and maynteyne the pore Cripple one other Child and her selfe, but what shee by her paynes & industrie and good neighbors hath avayled then

Maye it therefore please your good wo[rshi]pps the promise considered to take such order for the relieffe of your petitioner pore impotent Childe as in your good wisdom shall seeme moste meete

.....

#QSB.1.175.72 (1636)

To the Right Wor[shipfull] Raph Whiton and William Radcliffe Esq[uire] and other his Ma[jesty's] Justices of the Peace at this qu[ar]t[er] Sessions.

The humble petition of Robert Godderd of Moston and Anne his wife.

Humbly sheweth

That whereas Ralph Thorpe (sonne of the said Anne Godderd) beinge a poore lame Cripple, and not anie wayes able to helpe or move himselfe) is nowe destitute of all meanes for his maynteynance, some of his frends which have formerly maynteyned him beinge dead, and others of them (together with yo[ur] poore Peticoners) beinge in such povertie as they are not able to releive him, in soe much as the said Cripple is like to famish for lack of maynteynance, unles some other way bee appointed by your wor[shi]pps for his [sustentation]

May it please yo[ur] wor[shi]pps therefore accordinge to your accustomed Care in the like Cases to appoynt some way or meanes for the releife of the said poore Cripple, accordinge as shالل seeme good to your wor[shi]pps, Soe shall yo[ur] poore peticoners bee bound [with many others] to pray for your wor[shi]ps present health & future happines.

.....

#QSB.1.203.69 (1638)

To the right wor[shipfu]ll his Maj[esty's] Justices of the peace att [sic] the Sessions now holden att Manchester.

The humble peticon of Elizabeth Marcroft a poore widowe.

Humbly sheweth to yo[ur] good wor[shi]ps that whereas yo[ur] [supplicant] is becomen aged and unable to laboure for her releef and is destitute of anie habitacon to shelter her selfe in, And Besides yo[ur] peticoner hath left upon her handes a bastard daughter, which was [begotten?] upon the Body of Ellen Marcrofte yo[ur] Supp[licant's] daughter deceased, w[hi]ch Bastard is a Cripple, can neather goe or stande.

Yo[ur] supp[lican]t humbly therefore praieth yo[ur] Wor[shi]pp to give oerder to the churchwardens and overseers of the poor w[i]thin the Parishe of Midleton, where yo[ur] peticoner hath lived for the space of allmost forty yeares last past; To provide a habitacon for yo[ur] supp[lican]t and that the said Crippe (her grandchild) may have a Competent allowance out of the said Parish for her future releese and sustentacon and shee Will ever pray for yo[ur] Worr[shi]ps good health and happines.

.....

#QSB.1.214.79 (1639)

The humble peticion of Marie Cisley of Croston a poore aged woman.

Most humbly sheweth to yo[u]r good wor[shi]pe that shee hath kept a poore blynd child of one Ralph Thomason borne in Scasbriske this foure yeares & a half the the Child borne in Croston the Mother of it beinge dead & the father out of the Cuntree & yett nev[er] had anye allowance for the same soe that now shee is not able to keepe herself much less the child.

The premisses Considered shee humbly requesteth that yo[u]r good wore[shi]pps would order that the Child may bee taken from her or shee have a compitent allowance out of the parishe for the keepinge of it.

.....

#QSB.1.227.97 (1639)

To the Righte wor[shipfu]ll the Kings Ma[jes]t[ies] Justice of peace and [Overseers] at the gen[er]all quarter Sessions of the peace houlden at Manchester the fifth daie of Januarie 1639.

Righte wor[shipfu]ll maye it please you to understand that whereas yo[ur] peticoner Anne Platte daughter of Edmund Platte of Platte deceased, beinge bredd and borne at Platte with one Raphe Worsley, now [enjoyeth] her father selling the same a great deale under worthe and yo[ur] peticoner haveinge no percon lefte her

Moste humbly besecheth yo[ur] wor[shi]pps to take into yo[ur] grave [Consideration] that shee yo[ur] peticoner beinge a lame crible & [illegible] & destitute of habitacon friends & meanes, that yo[ur] wor[shipps] would bee pleased to allott for some meanes & habitacon where shee was borne & shee shallee [sic] ever dailie to prayer

.....

#QSB.1.230 (1640)

Yt is ordered by this Cort [sic] that the Churchwardens & overseers of the poore within the p[ar]ish of Croston shall forthw[i]th upon notice hereof make p[ro]vision for the manteynance & sustinance of Isabell Thomason a poor blind child borne and I[n]habiting in the same p[ar]ish soe as ytt shall not begg under the penilty of the statue in that case made & p[ro]vided.

.....

#QSP.1.269C.6 (1642)

Right wor[shipful] Janewoodburne a poore old, blind, widowe aged 84 years or thereabouts, Elizabeth Shawe a poore old infirme widow about 80 years of age & Eliza[beth] Gawith a Crible fatherlesse & motherlesse humbly complayneing sheweth that

Whereas the right wor[shipful] in Croston did quarterly give unto 2 of us [6?]'s a peece w[hi]ch did prittie well (w[i]th the helpe of our neighbours) releife our destrissed estate, but his wor[ship] (upon Daltoners detaineing his tythes) hath ev[er] sence w[i]thholden the same

from us & the rest of the impotent poore of this p[ar]ishe whereby we have sustayned great pennurie, & have bene sence verie burthensome to our next neighbours & can noe longer subsist, we therefore humbly desire your wor[ship] to enjoynt the ov[er]see[rs] of the poore & p[ar]ishon[ers] of Dalton to contribute to our lamentable & great necessities bie way of assesm[en]t we beinge noe way able to worke to goe abroad for releefe or to supporte our selves w[i]thout the assistance of dayly servants as these honest men whose manners are subscribed can certifie for we and our auncestors were borne and brought upp in Dalton p[ar]ish) and we shall dayly praye for your wor[ship's] saftie health & prosperitie longe to contiew.

.....

#QSP.23.34 (1649)

To the right wor[shipfu]ll his ma[jes]t[ies] Justices of peace & quoru assembled at this p[re]sent Sessions of peace

The humble petition of Thomas Spenser Constable of Skelmersdale.

Sheweth that one Robert Ireland and Elizabeth his wife late of Skelmersdale through his wastfull co[m]merse, about the viith or viiith of May last, unknowne to yo[ur] petitioner, or his neighbours (as yo[ur] petitioner beleeveth) departed went & run away from their then dwelling in Skelmersdale, and nove live, or seiorne [sojourn] in place unknowne to yo[ur] petitioner, and at their soe unexpected departure left their daughter Jane Ireland a Creeple about 8 or 9 years of age, without meanes or maintenance of meate drinke lodging or apparrell, the said Ireland him selfe haveing neither reall or p[er]sonall estate by meanes & occasion whereof yo[ur] petitioner was constrained (being Constable) to keepe the said Child being lame, and not able to begg, with meate drinke lodging and other necessities since the

said 7th or 8th of may last upon yo[ur] petitioners owne charges. The p[re]misses considered may it please yo[ur] good wor[shi]pps aswell to order paiement for this petitioner for such disbursments & charges aforesaid; as also to order there the said Child orphan Creeple , may be kept and maintained for the future, & further to order and direct as to yo[ur] wor[shipps] shall seeme to stand with right & equitie, and yo[ur] petitioner as dutie nevertheless ever byndeth, shall dayly praie for yo[ur] good wor[shi]ps.

Ch[urchwardens] & Ov[er]seers to allow for [illegible] & to p[ro]mise

.....

#QSP.165.13 (1658)

To the Justices of Peace at ye gen[eral] Sessions houlden at Lanca[ster]. The humble Petition and Certificat of the inhabitants of Tatham

Sheweth

that whereas one Sarah Nelson spinster a criples daughter to Gilbert Nelson late Parson of Tatham haveing lived out of our p[ar]ish seaven yeares or upwards was brought into ye same by Nicholas Smyth our Parson and paced with one Rob[er]t Robinson and hath mentained her there for three yeares last past; who at her cominge in being questioned by some of us why he did bring her into ye p[ar]ish with a purpose to have provided it; he p[ro]mised, the p[ar]ish should never be troubled with her and may be made appeare yet not w[i]thstandinge now of late he denyes it, and hath p[ro]cured an Order from yo[urs] to charge her on ye p[ar]ish refuseinge to mentaine her as formerly contrary to oequity & his p[ro]mise; whereby the p[ar]ish shall come to be burthened with an Additionall pressure if not tymely p[re]vented. And for as much as yo[ur] [missing] entrusted within this liberty to be serviceable in yo[ur]

generation in ye due execution of Justice & the p[re]vention of the contrary according to yo[ur] place; we appeale unto yo[urs].

Humbly desireinge yo[ur] Loveing Magistrates all private informations set apart & that ye cause may be deliberatly debated before yo[ur] and every p[ar]ticuler concerninge the same with ye circumstances exammined publicuely and according as yo[ur] in agitation by yo[ur] be ordered for her future mentainance yt justice may retaine her auncient [viger?] and we shall (as formerly) remaine yo[ur] servants

Inhabitants of Tatham

.....

#QSP.178.17 (1659)

To the right worshipfull the Justices of the peace & Quoru att the Sessions holden att Preston.

The humble peticon of Richard Kerby of woodplumton Taylor on the behalfe of Margrett Kerby his daughter

Sheweth

That the said Margrett Kerbie was borne within the said Townshipp of Woodplumpton is both deafe and dumbe and twenty nyne yeares of age never did anie worke att all whereby either to gett or save, hath beene hitherto maintained by the paines and industrie of her parents but age and the Concomitants thereof beinge upon them they are scarce able to mainetaine themselves

Therefore humblie pray your order to the Churchwardens and Overseers for the poore within Woodplumpton to make such provision for the said Margrett Kerby as her necessitie requireth And they shall pray.

Ch[urchwardens] to p[rovide] or shew cause next privy or bee bound

.....

#QSP.235.22 (1662)

To the right wor[shipfu]ll his ma[jes]ties Justices of the peace and Quoru at a generall sessions houlden at Wigan Ja[nuary] the 19th 1662

The humble petition of MARY Ratcliffe of Burscough Daughter to Mullineux Ratcliffe deceased; Capt[ain]

Sheweth

Whereas your petitioner beinge a blind woman, and not haveinge any meanes, nether can shee [sic] doe any worke at all towards her Liveing makes bould, craveinge pardon to p[re]sent her said Condicon to this hon[orable] being her late father being verie well knowne by those we are acquainted with that princely house of Sathom, where and in his majesties Service there lost both his liffe and all his estate to the utter undoeing of all his Children for ever and your petitioner being thus by gods p[ro]vidence deprived of the glory and conforth of this morttall Light and left comfortlesse

Therefore for Christ his sake, good yo[ur] wor[shi]pps be pleased to take the promisses unto your Favorable and pious Considerations, soe, that if it would please this honorable Lenth To

alowe this poore blind woman some p[ar]te of reliffe, where, and howe yo[ur] wor[shi]pps
shall best determine, and yo[ur] poore petitioner will as in dutie no otherwise ever blund
praye

This way certified That wee the Inhabitants of Burscough know your petitioner & her petition
to bee very just.

[missing - signatures]

.....

#QSP.254.5 (1664)

To the right worshipfull his majesties Justices of the Peace att the Quarter Sessions of the
Peace att Preston upon Thursday the xxith of Aprill [sic] 1664

The humble peticon of Anne Chornley and Elizabeth Chornley sisters of Walton in the dale
Spinsters.

Humbly show yo[ur] wor[shi]ppes That whereas your peticoners have a poore young lame
youth to their Brother not yet Thirteene yeares of age, haveinge beene Lame ever since hee
was halfe a yeare old and Fatherles and Motherles, and hath beene for severall yeares
together now last past mayntened and brought up by your poore peticoners, haveinge had litle
allowance out of our Towneshipp of Walton from the overseers, yo[ur] peticoners haveinge
noe meanes but what they get with their hard Labour; are not able to subsist with the
Continuance of the maynteynance of him, And nowe humbly Contend him fitt to bee sett [sic]
to some Easie Trade.

Yo[ur] peticoners humbly pray therefore that yo[ur] wor[shi]pps will bee pleased to take their sad Condicon into yo[ur] serious Consideracon and to give order that the overseers of the poore of our Townshippe of Walton aforesaide forthwith take Care to put yo[ur] peticoners said Brother William Chornley to some Easie Trade that hee may bee Capable of, That soe for the future hee may bee able to get his owne liveinge, and not bee Chargeable to any and yo[ur] peticoner will ever pray.

[Overseers] to take Care to bind.

.....

#QSP.294.8 (1666)

To the right wor[shipfu]ll his Ma[jesties] Justice of peace and Quoru att the generall Sessions of peace holden att Preston for the hundreds of Amounderness & Blackboerne [Blackburne]

The humble pe[ti]tion of Katherin Hodgkinson of Hollowforth widow.

Sheweth to yo[ur] good wor[shi]pps that yo[ur] pe[ti]tioner being vere poore and hath one some John Hodgkinson being of the age of 26. yeares, who hath become lame & Impotent for the spane of five yeares bypast during w[hi]ch tyme yo[ur] peticon[er] hath by her dayly labor & paines kept for said some, But soe it is that shee is not now able anie longer to keepe or releive him without the charitable releife of well afforded people

The promises considered

Yo[ur] pe[ti]tion[er] humbly prayeth the [illegible] of this Courte whereby the overseers for the poore of [illegible] may bee compelled to cause provision made for the said John

Hogkinson affording to his necessitie. And yo[ur] pe[ti]tion[er] as now there shee is in dutie bound shall dayly pray.

.....

#QSP.296.18 (1666)

To the right wor[shipfu]ll his ma[jesties] Justices of peace & Quo[ru] att their Sessions of peace holden att Wigan 22d of Oct[ober] 1666.

The Humble Peticon of Isabell Browne of Chorley widdowe for & in behalfe of her self beinge poore ould & very lane & Impotent and William Browne her sone a very lame & decrepit boye sheweth

That shee beinge brought into extreme poverty by reason of her lamnce & disability of body. And the said William Browne her sonne haveinge noe succor nor releiffe but from yo[ur] pet[itioner], and is noe way able to labor for his liveinge by reason of his decrepitude & disability of body

They humbly praie yo[ur] wor[shi]ps that by Order of this Courte they may bee allowed some Competent releiffe to bee distributed to them from the Ov[er]seers of the poore of Chorley to susteine them alive in this their distressed estate and Condicon, And yo[ur] pet[itioner] shall daily pray for yo[ur] wor[shi]ps.

.....

#QSP.322.14 (1668)

To the right worshipfull his Ma[jes]ties Justices of the Peace at their Generall Sessions of peace houlden at Preston in Amonuderness in the County of Lanc[ast]er the 6th day of July in the Twentieth yeare of o[ur] Gracious soveraigne Lord Charles the second

The Humble peticon of Robert Simpson of Wharles a Lane child of John Simpson deceased

Humbly sheweth

That whereas by an ord[er] made at the gen[er]all Sessions of peace houlden at Preston
aforesaid the sixteenth day of January in the nynteenth yeare of the kinge It was ord[er]ed
then that the overseers of Treales Rossacre and Wharles shoud upon notice of the said order
pay unto Alice Chaeneley mother of yo[ur] peticoner Robert Simpson the weekly sume of
twelve pence till the next sessions then Followinge and longer if they did not shew cause to
the contrary But the ould overseers have not obeyed the said ord[er] but refused to obey
yo[ur] worships order and said they did not care for it, for they have but paid yo[ur]
peticoners mother 5d instead of 1d weekly for a Full Quarter of a yeare, And further the said
overseers did p[ro]mise the last privie Sessions before Mr Parker y^t if yo[ur] peticoner did not
Recover [illegible] or dependenge between him & one Richard Styth they would pay her 10d
nowe but their promise they have not kept not w[i]thstanding yo[ur] peticoner nev[er] did
receive the said [accon?] ag[ains]t the s[ai]d Styth

Wherefore may it therefore please yo[ur] good wor[shi]pps to grant yo[ur] further ord[er] that
eath [easily] the ould ov[er]seers may pay the s[ai]d 10d they promised (they having gathered
the same of the P[ari]shon[ers] for the peticoners) or that the now overseers may pay it, and
yo[ur] peticon[er] will ever pray

Ov[er]seer] to pay it. M.

.....

#QSP.410.4 (1673)

To the worshipp[ful]l his Ma[jes]ties Justices of peace and Quoru att this Gen[er]all sessions
of peace holden att Lancaster for the County Palatine of Lancaster

The humble peticon of William Braithwait of Gressingham a poore old blind man

Humbly sheweth

That yo[ur] peticon[er] was att a meetinge att Warton of his Ma[jes]ties Justices of peace &
Quor held then the 29th of July 72 charged w[ith] the keepeing and bringing up of one litle
Girdle as apprentice Accordinge to this statute in that case made & provided and by the said
order was to have out of the said towneshipp twentie shillings a yeare the same for the last
yeare was paied but for this yeare have not received any thinge att all not withstandinge
yo[ur] peticon[er] is Old and blind that hee is not able to maintaine the said Apprentice
therefore humbly begges shee may be removed to some other p[er]son able to teach her other
wyse yo[ur] peticon[er] wilbe forced to send her out a begginge for hee hath nothing
wherewith to maintaine himself & wife

May it therefore please yo[ur] good worships to seriously Consider of the p[ro]mises
whereby yo[ur] peticon[er] may be releived [sic] & he in duty bound will ever pray

.....

#QSP.415.12 (1674)

To the worshipfull his Maj[es]ties Justices of the peace & Quoru at the Generall Quarter of
the peace held at Preston for the Hundred of Amounderness

The humble petticon [sic] of Katherin Kitchine of Woodplumpton a poore old woman & both blind and lame.

Sheweth

That the Towne[shi]pp of Plumpton disagree to Allow the said Katherin six pennies a week for her present maintenance & the Fewer & Twenty of that Towne gave order to Thomas Newsham to pay the said weekly Allowance who accordingly and till about halfe a yeare agoe dureinge all w[hi]ch tyme yo[ur] poore petti[coner] might have starved for want of maintenance But for the benevolence of some well disposed p[er]sons the Overseer deinging to pay yo[ur] petti[coner] her said Allowance

Therefore humbly pray of yo[ur] worshippes order to the said Overseer to Compell him to pay yo[ur] petti[coner] her arreares by past & to Allow her a better maintenance for the future And yo[ur] pett[iconer] shall ever pray

To pay the arreares

M.

.....

#QSP.432.6 (1675)

To the right Wor[shi]p[fu]ll the Justices, at [Ormskirk] Sessions

It is most humbly desired on the behalfe of Margerie Cooper a poore distressed Orphan in the Township of Kirkdale, who is lame not able to stand or goe to help her selfe, that shee may be

p[ro]vyded for soe as shee may not perish & starve for want of help & sustenance, as in
yo[ur] wor[shi]ps discrecion yo[u]r shall thank for

Richard Abram

The towne sufficiently to manteyne her & the Overseers of the poore to paye her in such case
as they shall thinke fitt

.....

#QSP.432.8 (1675)

To the right wor[shipful] his Maj[esties] Justice of the peace and quoru Att the generall
quarterly sessions of the poore this day holden att Orm[skirk] in the County of Lanc[ashire]:
The humble peticon of the inhabitants of Aintrie w[i]thin the p[ar]ish of Sefton in the above
sayd County, sheweth

That your sayd petitioners for many years past have manteyned & brought up one Henry
Bare a Lane Boy at the beginninge, & still doth pay unto him fourty shillings p[er] annum by
reason of his lamenesse; but now the sayd Bare beinge growne unto mans estate & well able
to undergoe A sittinge Trade your peticoners putt him to A shoemaker an able workeman of
that callinge & where the sayd Bare might have beene well used, And hee doth not onely
refuse to Learne the same Trade but is dayly Challengeinge & threateninge the sayd Towne
that hee will marry & bringe A wyfe amongst them, & is very urgent upon that Amount to
have them to build him a house, and soe probably may Increase their Charge

The p[ar]ishioners Considered May Itt please your good Worships to order Appoynt in this behalfe as to your worships good discrecon shall seeme most fitt & sutable And bear as in duty bound shall ever pray.

Attested under the hands of

Rich[ard] Lathom

Bryan Fleetwood

William Garston

William Abye

Robert Richardson

William Winstanley

Antony Hey

Henery Farrer

William Forbrew

Thomas Johnson

Mathew Ascraft

Robert Wignall

Referred to privy. M.

.....

#QSP.631.3 (1687)

To ye wo[rshi]ppfull [scribbled off] his Ma[jes]ties Justices of the peace att ye gen[er]all quarter sessions of y^e peace for the Countie of Lanc[ashire]. The humble peticon of [scribbled out] Thomas Rigg an Ideott of Hornby in the County of Lanc[ashire] afforesaid

Sheweth that whereas yo[ur] Petitioner being a Poor Impotent Blinde and Lane Ideott nott able to worke or undertake any imployment whereby hee may gett his liveing and haveing onely the small allowance of four penie a week, yo[ur] poor Petitioner hopes to have the Rigour of his Lamentable Condition Repressed.

May itt therefore Please yo[ur] good Wo[rshi]pps the p[ro]misses considered to grant unto yo[ur] poor Petitioner a larger allowance weekly to bee paid by ye Overseers of the Towne of Horby afforesaid and yo[ur] petitioner shall humbly pray.

.....

#QSP.703.26 (1691)

To the Right Wor[shi]pp[ful]l theire Ma[jesties] Justices of the peace & quoru at A generall q[uarte]r sessions held at Manchester 23th July 1691.

The peticon of William Partington of Booths within Worsley fustian wever.

sheweth that [J.] Partington, yo[ur] petitioners father Lately dyed & Left a woman Child; Anne, his daughter, & yo[ur] petitioners sister, w[i]th said woman, Child is 20 yeares of Age & is Dumbe and hath Convulsion fits so y^t shee had one to Looke to her & yo[ur] petitioner her Brother hath nothing but what hee got w[i]th his handy worke.

The p[ro]misses considered yo[ur] petitioner prayes yo[ur] order for some weekly release to bee Allowed unto this poore distressed woman what yo[ur] wor[shi]pps thinkes fit & yo[ur] petitioner will every prayer.

.....

#QSP.983.12 (1708)

To the Wor[shi]p[ful]l her Maj[es]ties Justices of the Peace

The humble Peticon of Edward Lucas, son of James of Pleasington in the County of Lanc[ashire].

sheweth

That your Peticoner is a poor lame boy about Twelve years old. his father and mother [are] very poor people and have nothing wherewith to support themselves but what they get by charitable Alms, and they being very unkind to your Peticoner he is forced to beg abroad & lodge where he can and sometimes near Starving. And your Peticoner being lame & not fit for trade or work is very desirous to get a little learning and for that end now begs his learning at a school in Preston but wants both meat clothes & other necessaryes. Whe[r]efore yo[ur] Petitioner humbly prays your Wor[shi]pps order for such allowance & releif ouf ye s[aid] Town of Preasington as you in your goodness shall see fitting for his releige & encouragement And your Petitioner will ever pray.

8d a weeke

.....

#QSP.1159.14 (1720)

The humble petition of William Wherton of Bold in the County of Lancaster shoemaker

sheweth

That your petitioner In June 1717 tooke to him one Thomas Bullock as an apprentice for Seven years, And that after the s[ai]d Apprentice had served the s[ai]d William Atherton ab[ou]t nine months it please God to afflict the apprentice with the Kings Evil in his thigh so that it has rendred him altogether useless to his Said Master and incapable of doing any thing tow[ar]ds getting his liveing, And therefore Humbly desires that the Said Apprentice may be discharged your petitioner not being a housekeeper And not able to maintaine & Support his Said Apprentice under the infirmity he labours under.

.....

#QSP.1240.9 (1725)

The Humble petition of James Cayton of Fulwood.

Sheweth.

That yore petitioner ab[ou]t halfe a yeare ago Thomas Mercer of Westby [with] Plumpton was bound by the Peace an apprentice to your petitioner to serve him seaven yeares to learn the Trade of a Lynenweaver but it has pleased to vissit his S[ai]d Apprentice with the Kings Evill in a very severe manner soe that hee is very incapable of doeing him any Service haveing but gotten him since Whi[t]suntyed last [nether?] is there any hopes of any inn & your petitioner being poor himselfe is not att all qualified to suffer any damages [illegible] this makes therefore humbly hopes for the reasons aforesaid for [illegible] to discharge him from his s[ai]d apprenticeshipp & your petitioner shall ever pray

to be discharged

.....

#QSP.1297.1 (1729)

Lanc[ashire] 15 April 1729

I have seen Sarah Wilson & examined her mother. I think shes very unsound & unfitt for a
Parish Apprentice.

James Rigmaiden

National Archives**#C1.1457.54 (1557)**

There is a significant tear on the left side of this petition as well two small holes in the middle of it. As a consequence, the first few words of thirteen lines as well as two words in the middle of the petition are missing. Context has sometimes allowed me to guess the missing words, but not always.

In most humble wyse compleynenge shewyth unto your grace your dayly Oratour William Nycholas of Swaffham Bulbek in the Countie of Cambridge That where ther was a certeyne commycacon bytwene your seid Oratour And one Frannces Skiff alias Skrogges of Alburye in the Countie of Hertford Gentilman convenynge the Fyndynge & bryngyng up of one Elizaberth Skrogge later of the seid Frannces the seid Elizabeth then being of thage [the age] of xiii yeres or therabought & also then & yet beyng lame impotent & decrepite of her lymes & not hable [sic] in body to get by her labour wherw[ith] to Fynde her selff And for so moche as the seid Frannces of a long tyme then had ben burdened w[ith] the kepyng & fyndyng in his house the seid Elizabeth And the seid Frannces stodyeng w[ith] hym selff howe to Rydde owt of his house the seid Elizabeth At Barley in the seid Countie of Hertford abought the xxth day of December in the XXXiith yere of the reigne of the late kyng of famous memory king Henry the viiith The seid Frannces faythfully p[ro]mysed your sayde Oratour that he wold paye hym yerely xi s of lawfull money [faded] towards the fyndyng meate drynk & Apparell uhnto the seid Elizabeth during at suche tyme as the seid Elizabeth [missing] be in house w[ith] your seid Oratour Wheruppon your seid Oratour trustyng the fathfull p[ro]myse of the seid Frannces very [missing - muchly?] ask the seid Agrement did receyve into his [missing - house?] the seid Elizabeth And contynually [illegible] that tyme hitherto [missing] unto her meate drynk & Apparell necessary by the Space of xv yeres &

more By Reason wherof ther is [missing] & growen unto your seid Oratour xxx sh[illings] of lawfull money to Regnyre & have of the said Frannces for the [missing] of the seid Elizabeth in maner abovesaid And Aft[er]ward the seid Frannces paide your seid Oratour fowere [four] pounds [missing - of lawfull] money of the seid Some of Thyrtie pounds Accordyng to the seid Agrement for the fyndyng of y^e seid Elizabeth [missing] of the seid xv yeres And so ther is [missing] paid & due unto your seid Oratour xxvi sh[illings] for the fyndyng of the [missing - seid Elizabeth] xiii yeres of y^e seid xv yeres And so it is Right honorable lorde that [illegible] your seid Oratour [missing] & Sundry tymes [regnyred?] the seid Frannces payment of the seid xxvi sh[illings] Accordyng to the seid Agrement wiche [missing] the seid Frannces At All tymes hytherto hathe refused & yet dothe contrary to tAll ryght & consyent And Where also your [missing - petitioner?] is A very poore man & not of habyltye to fynde the seid Elizabeth meate drynke apparell as in tymes past he [missing] your seid Oratour hathe nowe of late dyverse & Sondry tymes Regnyred the seid Frannces to take Ageyne the seid Elizabeth [missing] & owt of the custody & governement of your seid Oratour withe thyng to do y^e seid Frannces at all tymes hitherto hathe Refused & yet dothe contrary to All Ryght & consyent to the great impoverysshyng & in maner utter undoyng o your seid Oratour unles your graces Ayde & helpe herin be to hym Shewed And for so moche Also as your seid ORatour is A very poore man & hathe A wiff & many Small Chyldern [sic] & hath no Especyalle nor Wrytng Sealed by the seid Frannces of the seid p[ro]myse & your seid Oratour hathe fewe or no Frennds nor Any Acguayntences in the seid Countrie of Hertford And the seid Frannces is very welthy & Ryche greatly greatly Frenndes & Allyes in the seid Countrie of Hertford And your seid Oratour Also nether remedy or meane by the comen lawes of this Realme Ageynst y^e seid Frannces for his Reconery of the seid xxvi sh[illings] Now yet Remedy to be dysburdened of the fyndyng & Kepyng hereafter of the seid Elizabeth In Consyderacon wherof may it please your grace to awarde A Sub pena to be

diverted to the seid Frannces Comanndyng hym by the saame p[er]sonally to appere before your grace at a certeyn day & place & under A Certeyn payne therin to be lymtyed to Answer unto the p[ro]mysses & funder to Abyde [illegible] Order & [duraon?] herin as unto your grace shall Seme to stond with egnytie & consyent And your seid Oratour shall dayly pray to god for your grace in honour long to contynewe.

.....

#C.78.24.7 (1564)

Where as Walter Powell gentleman exhibited a bill of Complente unto the Quenes Majesties most honorable heighe Court of Chauncerie agaynst Thomas William Walter Johnes and William Morgayne alleginge by the same That whereas one Thomas Powell brother unto the said Complenant was seased in his demeane as of Fee or of Fee taile of and in one mesuage and about a hundred acres of land meadowes Woodde and pasture sew lyinge and beinge in Llanhennock and Llantrissent in the Countie of Monmouthshire and soo beinge seased thereof of suche estate died thereof seased after whoes dethe the P[ro]misses with th[e] app[ur]tenaunced distended and came and of right ought to distende and come to Elizabeth Powell as daughter qand heire of the said Thomas Powell by force whereof she entred into the same and was thereof seased in her demeane as of Fee or Fee taile and so beinge seased thereof tooke to husbannes ones Thomas William by force whereof the said Thomas William and Elizabeth his Wiffe were seased thereof in there demeane as of Fee or Fee taile as in the right of the said Elizabeth and so beinge thereof seased the said Elizabeth beinge a naturall foole and Ideott from her natyvitie and voide of all intelligence or knowlege and havinge noe yssue of her boddie lawfullie begotten the said Thomas Willian her husbände hathe practysed to gett the said P[ro]misses assured to himselfe and his heires and the bringinge the same to passe he the said Thomas William did about the Fourth day of Julie in the seconde yere of the reigne of the Quenes most excellent majesties Quene Elizabeth that nowe ys at Monmouth in

the Countie of Monmouthshire came before sir Edward Taunders knighte nowe Lord cheefe baron of the eschequer ... then one of Justices of Assises in the said Countie and brought the said Eliabeth his Wiffe before the said Justices also and then and there offered that he and his wiffe shoulde knowlege afyne of the said p[ro]misses to Leonarde James at which tyme the said Justices at the motion of your said orton havihnge thereof an informacone the said Justices of the symplicitie and lacke of intelligence in the said Elizabeth did examyne the said Elizabeth of certen matters that any p[er]sons havinge any knowlege might easelie answer unto tht is to daye howe manye pence were in a grote and howe many fingers she had in one hande or howe many grotes in a shillinge or the like in effect to whiche questions the said Elizabeth coulde not manke anye p[er]fecte or directe answer but said there was sixtene pence in a grote by reason whereof the Justies woulde not tak the said fyne but utt[er]lie reverted the same yet Nevertheless the said Thomas William Mindinge to compas his said enterprice at one other tyme did bringe his said Wiffe before sir Edward Taynders and Thomas Carons Justices of Assise at Monworthe afforsaid the said Fourth daye of Julie ... nowe ys and then thinckinge the said Justices had forgotten the said Elizabeth did come with the said Eliaxbeth before the said Lord cheefe baron and Thomas Carons at the Citie of Hereforde at whiche tyme the said Lord cheefe baron not remembringe the said Elizabeth did receave the knowlege of the said fyne and after and before the testificate thereof at Whiche tyme the said lord cheefe baron havinge intelligence agayne that yt was knowleged by the said Elizabeth and remembringe her former examynacone did likewise saye and coulde not testifie the said fyne att whiche matters the said Thomas William Notwithstanding stille practised to fynishe his said intent^{3e} about the xxiith daye of Januarie last past in the fourthe yere of the reigne [of queen Elizabeth] came and repayred to the Citie of London with the said Elizabeth his Wiffe and came to Nicholas Powtrell servante at lawe with a note of a fyne reddie drawene and findinge the said Elizabeth coulde speke noe Englishe brought one Walter

HJones an Attorney at the comon place which tooke uppon him to ent[er]prete and declare in Englishe suche answere as the said Eliabeth made to suche questions as the said Master Powtrell examined the said Elizabeth of touchinge the knowlege of the said fyne whereas the said Elizabeth could speke Englisshe [sic] verye well as the sid Lord cheefe Baron and master carus cane reporte and by that crafte nthe said master servante Powtrell did receave the said fyne whyche fyne in hillarie terme nexte followinge was in all hast possible and with speede sued forthe before the Quenes Justices of her comon plees at Westminster by whiche fyne the said Thomas William and Eliabeth have gyven and granted the p[ro]misses to Renalde William and Elizabeth and theres of there too boddies lawfullie begotten with remender over to the said Thomas William and his heires for ever as by the said bill og Complente remeaninge of recorde in the said Courte of Chancerie more at large doeathe and may appeare Wherunto the said William Morgayne and Walter hones too of the defendantes made direct3e answere and the Complente replid and soo proceded unto a full and perfecte issue and witnesses examined on boeth parties and publicacone therof graunted accordinge to the laudable usage and auncient custome of the said Couort of Chauncerie and a day certene prefixed for the hearinge and determininge of the same matter at which day the said parties made there personall apparante with there counsellers and attorneis and the same matter beinge selibatlye redde harde and understande in the said coute of chauncerie hit did manifestlie appeare that the said William Morgayne one fo the defendantes had approved unto him selfe a good and lawfull tytle unto the p[ro]misses And for that that the said William Morgayne in open Courte did declare uppon his other that he was not privey to the levieinge of a fyne by the said Thomas William and Elizaveth his wiffe of the promisses in variance at or before suche tyme as the said Thomas William had procured the same to be levied to his owen use and that he bought the same landed to those of himselfe his heires and assigned And for that also that the said Walter Jones one other of the defendantes did depose in open

Courte that at suche tyme as the said fyne was to be levied by the said Thomas William and Elizabeth his wiffe before master servante Pontrell the said Thomas William declared unto him the said Walter Jones that his said wiffe coulde speke noe Englishe wherby the said master Powtrell might pereave her sainges [sayings] or meaninges in the behalfe therfore the said Thomas William desired the said Walter Jones to enterpret and declare her sayinges unto the master servante Powtrell who did the same accordingle hit is therfore and for diversse other good consideracons the said Court of Chauncerie movinge this presente terme of the holie Trinitie that is to day the xiith daye of June in the sixte yere of the [reign of Queen E.] Ordered adinged and decreede by the right honorable sir Nicholas Tacon knight lord keper of the greate seale of Englande and by the said Court of Chauncerie that the said defendantes and either of them are and shalbe from hensforth From the bill of Complente of the said Complenante and From everie clauses and sentenfces therin conteaned absolutlie and diffynyvelie dismissed out of this Courte without anye daye.

.....
#SP.35.76.7 (1724)

To the Kings most Excellent Majestie

The humble petition of John Thornycroft Esquire only Son and heir of Sir John Thornycroft
 Barrister

Sheweth

That your petitioner from his Infancy has had a great defect of Eyesight approaching almost to totall blindness which rendred him incapable of receiving an Education Suitable to his rank and fortune

That your petitioner unhappily fell into the Conversation of one William Gulston and others his acquaintance all persons of the lowest Rank, who takeing advantage of your petitioners infirmities and knowing him to be heir to a considerable estate, drew your petitioner in to give notes under his hand for money, under pretence of raising money by discounting such notes or takeing up goods at Extravagant prices and then pawning or selling such goods for a fourth of the reall vallue thereof, and by such and the like methods drew your petitioner in to Convey without any valuable consideration the reversion of his Fathers estate and into other Conveyances Securities and contracts to the amount of near Eighty thousand pounds.

That the said Gulston and his Companions most frequently and almost constantly in Conversation called your petitioner Sir John Thornycroft (your petitioners Fathers name and title) and your petitioner without any Evill intent or design at Such times answered to that name, But the said Gulston and his Companions to the great abuse of your petitioner haveing lent 400 pounds to one Mr Sydenham as Agent or Attorney for Sr James Thornhill or Six hundred pounds South Sea Stock; drew in your petitioner who they had prepared to doe any thing they pleased to give a defeazance for reassigning such Stick on payment of 400 pounds with interest, which said Stock being transferred to the said Gulston hee immediately sold the same

That the said Sir James Thornhill or Mr Sydenham have lately procured the said Gulston to be Indicted for Affirming your petitioner to be Sr John Thornycroft and your petitioner with him as his Confederate

That your petitioner hath been alsoe unhappily drawn in by the said Gulston and his wicked Companions to bee concerned in Usurious contracts and other matters and offences inditeable, the particulars whereof your petitioner has now remembrance of;

Wherefore in regard your petitioner did permitt himselgfe to bee soe called by his Fathers name and tytle without any manner of Evill intent or design, and if any prejudices has happened thereby to the said Sr James Thornill or any other persons it was without the privity or any contrivances of your petitioner who is not capable of manageing any Artfull matters, and haveing been so unhappily otherwise drawn in by the said Gulston and others his Confederates as aforesaid.

Your Petitioner humbly implores your most Excellent Majesties Gracious and free pardon

And your petitioner (as in duty bound) shall ever pray &c.

Whitehall May the 20th 1724

His Majesty is graciously pleased to referr this Petition to Sr Philip York His Majesty's Attorney General to consider thereof and report his opinion what may be fitly done therein whereupon His Majesty will declare his further Pleasure.

North East Wales Archives**#D.LK.123 (1749)**

This petition is a printed form with blanks intentionally left for parish officials to write details pertaining to individual cases. I have italicised these handwritten parts.

To the Overseers of the Poor of the Township of Halghton in the Parish of Hanmer in the County of Flint and to the Overseers of the Poor of the Township of Perley in the said County.

Whereas you *the Overseers of the Poor of the Township of Halghton* have made Complaint unto Us whose Names are Subscribed *two* of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace and Quorum for the said County *of Flint That Joseph son of Mary Tagg Widdow a blind infant is* lately come into your said *Township* endeavouring to settle *himself* as an Inhabitant thereof and doth not Rent to the value of Ten Pounds a Year there nor *hath* given or delivered Notice to you in Writing of the Place of *His* Abode or the Number of *his* Family but *that he is* and We do adjudge *Him* likely to become Chargeable to your said *Township* contrary to the form of the Statute in such Case made and provided. And Whereas it appears unto Us upon the Oath of *Mary Tagg* that the Place of the lasst legal Settlement of *Him the said Joseph Tagg is in the said Township of Penley in the said County of Flint.*

These are therefore in his Majesty's Name to Authorize Require and Command *you the said Overseers of the Poor of the said Township of Halghton in the said County of Flint* upon receipt hereof to remove and convey the said *Joseph Tagg* forthwith out of your said *Township* the next and directest way to the *Township of Penley* aforesaid in the *said County of Flint* which we adjudge to be the Place of his last legal Settlement, and to leave him there together with this Warrant or a true Copy thereof with the Overseers of the Poor of the said

Township of Penley who are hereby required to receive and provide for him according to Law. Hereof fail not at your Perils. Given under our Hands and Seals the *third* Day of *July* in the Year of our Lord 1749

Northamptonshire Archives Service**#QSR1.79.54 (1675)**

To the Right Hon[orable] y^e Court of Sessions now Assembled The humble peticon of Alice
Yeomans of the towne of Harleston in this County

Sheweth

That yo[ur] peticoner is a very poore widdow having a Lame Child the which hath Reduced
her to such penury and want that shee is noe way able to subsist any Longer but must of
Nessesity perish together with her fatherless Child unless Timely prevented

May it therefore please this Honorable Court to take y^e Condicon of yo[ur] poore and
Misserable peticonr into yo[ur] wise and mature Consideracon and to grant yo[ur] order to
give some Releeife according as you shall think fitt & yo[ur] peticoner as in duty bound shall
ever pray

.....

[Scribbled out] 6d p[er] weeke till further order

Northumberland Archives**#ZSW.7.57 (1645)**

To the right wor[shipfu]ll the Standeing Com[m]ittee for the County of Northumberland,

The humble peticone of William Swinburne of Nafferton in the above said County Esquire

Humbly sheweth, that whereas yo[ur] peticoner is conceived to bee a delinquent, by Sum
misinformation as he Supposeth, and that hee is not Consious to himselfe that hee hath
merited any such senseure, and hoping that his deportement and actions, will appeare to bee
such, as at the due Examinations of the same, will free him of his said delinquensie,

Therefor humbly prayeth, that you will be pleased to Certifie to the right hon[oura]ble, the
Committee of lords and Commons at Westminster, the nature or Cause of his delinquensie,
his age, and his beaviour [sic] in these distracted tymes, and to graunt him a pass to goe to
London, for the Solissitacone of the same, and hee shall humbly pray.

Somerset Heritage Centre**#Q.SR.63.1 (1630)**

To the right Ho[no]r[a]bl[e] his Ma[jes]t[ie]s Justice of the peace at this p[re]sent Sessions assembled.

The humble peticon of Anstice Pyle of Halse in the said County widdow.

Whereas One Christopher Harris a poore childe at Halse aforesaid was heretofore by the Churchwardens and overseers for the poore there bound Apprentice in husbandry unto the said Anstice Pyle according to the Statue in whose service the said Harris hath sithence didst tymes misdemeaned himselfe and is now in prison and to appeare at this sessions in cause of suspicion of felony for conveying away of Mault of yo[u]r petic[i]oners to didst p[er]sons, as by evidence will more plainely appeare. And forasmuch as yo[u]r said petic[i]oner is a woman of Fower score yeares of age and dwelleth farre from nieghbo[re]s and dareth not to trust the said Harris in her house hereafter partly for that hee lame and diseased and not well able to doe service and especially because shee is distrustfull of his trewth, and standeth in bodily feare of her life of him, having soe oftentimes heretofore misbehaved himselfe.

May it therefore please yo[ur] good wor[shi]pps that yo[ur] said peticoner may be from henceforth freed and disregarded of for lewed and wicked a p[er]son by such lawfull order as unto yo[ur] wor[shi]pps shall seeme expedient, and shalbe [shall be] bound to pray for yo[ur] health and prosperity long to continew.

.....

#Q.SR.82.134 (1650)

Somerset

The Informac[i]on of Thomas Parker an Apprentice unto Richard Collyer of Purtington
Blacksmith, taken upon oath before John Pyne Esq[ui]re; Justice of the Peace; the 6th day of
Julye [1650]

Who beinge sworne sth; that about St Paulls Faire att Birstoll last his master beinge come
thence; and because there was no straw in the stable for his horse, he strooke this [Inform]ant
downe upon the ground w[i]th his fist, and also then strooke him 3; or 4; times with his Feete
upon the sides, and about three weekes after he grew lame, but not much ; and was able to
worke, and of late w[i]thin this fortnight, he grew soe lame; and impotent in his body, on all
the parts of one of his sides, that he was not able to doe his mast[er] any service; and because
this [inform]ant was not able to stand to strike att the handvile, the s[ai]d Richard Collyer his
master strooke him downe againe w[i]th his fist, att two blowes; by w[hi]ch meanes, he is
cripled and not in a Condic[i]on to helpe himself

John Pyne

.....

#Q.SPET.1.132 (1656)

To the right Ho[nora]ble the Justice of the peace nowe assembled at the generall Session of
the peace holden at Taunton in the County of Somerset.

The humble petition of Johane Wey of Bridport in the county of Dorset Widdowe for and on
the behalf of William Wey her son an apprentice unto Thomas Seaward of S[ain]t James in
the said County of Dorset.

Worstedcomber

That about fouer yeares gon your petic[ioner] bound her said sonne app[re]ntice unto the said Thomas Seaward For seaven yeares and gave w[i]th him twenty shillings in mony and three suits of apparrell: and her said sone contynued w[i]th his said Master by the space of about two yeares & half of the said terms in health: and about a year & half gon her sonne traveling about his masters busness fell lame & contynued lame by the space of a yeare or thereabouts, and in all tyme her sonne was not cured neather did his Master gyve him much respitt from his usuall imploym[en]t: And further shewth that about half a yeare gon her sonne beinge not able (in regard of his lameness) to doe his masters business, his master was contented that he should come to yo[u]r petic[ione]r for recovery thereof, where he hath contynued untill about ten dayes gone And yo[u]r petic[ione]r all the tyme he was w[i]th her did mayntayne him meate drinck Lodgeinge & other necessaryes at her owne costs & charges and used all the possible meanes she could for recovery of his lameness & hath paid towards his cure twenty shillings already & is to pay forty shillings more and hath undertaken to make it upp fyve pounds if he be thoroughly cured. / And also shewth that her sonne beinge somewhat recovered to strength, his master about two months gon came to yo[u]r petic[ione]rs house for her sonne and thretned yo[u]r petic[ione]r to sue her at the lawe if she would not let him goe and at that tyme he[r] sonne was sick & not able to travell but about Ten dayes gon her sonne (though not very stronge) returned to his master; And also shewth that his master is growne poore & not able to keep her sonne on Worke, but putt [sic] him forth to work w[i]th another man & doth not afford him clothes & other necessaryes fit for app[re]ntice & refuseth to pay any [pt?] of that yo[u]r petic[ione]r hath laid out & is to pay for his recovery.

Wherefore and for that yo[u]r petic[i]one]rs sonne is weak & not throughly cured and for that his master hath not wherew[i]thall to keepe him on Worken or to fynde him necessaryes and refuseth to pay for his cure.

Yo[u]r petic[i]on]er doth humbly beseech yo[u]r wo[rshi]pps to be favorably pleased to release her sonne from his master or to cause him to pay for her sonnes cure. And she shall pray.

.....

#D.P.stapg.13.6.2 (1733)

Know all Men by those presents That We Samnell Roe of Norton Sir Warren in the County of Somerset Taylor Edward Roe of Kingston in the said County Taylor ... are held and firmly bound to Thomas Wornall John Gale and John Pumroy Churchwardens and Overseers of the poor of the parish of Staplegrove in the said County in Twenty pounds of good and lawfull money of Great Britain to be paid to them the said Thomas Wornall John Gale and John Pumroy or to any of then or their Certaine Attorney their Executors Administrators Successors or Assignes to which payment well and truly to be made We bind ourselves and each of us by himself for the whole Intirely our heires Executors & Administrators and the Heires Executors and Adm[inistrators] of each of firmly by those presents sealed with our seales dated the Twenty Fourth day of November in the Seventh Year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Second by the Grace of God of Great Britaine France and Ireland Kinge Defender of the Faith and so forth and in the Year 1733.

The Condition of this Obligation is such that Whereas the above named Churchwardens and Overseers of the poor by and with the Consent of two of his Majesties Justices of the peace for the said County by their Indenture of Apprentiship bearing even date with those presents

have put and placed Isaac Rinchards a poor Cripple Child of their said parish Apprentice unto and with the above bounder Samuell Roe with him to dwell and serve untill he the said Isaac Richards shall accomplish his full age of Four and Twenty Years according to the statue in that case made and provided And that the said Isaac Richards may be brought upp and Instructed in a Trade Whereby he may be Inabled to support & Maintaine himself hereafter they the said Churchwardens & Overseers have Advanced and paid to the above bounder Samuell Roe the sum of Ten pounds of Lawfull Money in order that he do Instruct the said Isaac Richards in the trade of Taylor If therefore the above bounder Samuell Roe do and shall use his best endeavours to Instruct & bring upp the said Isaac Richards in the Trade of a Taylor which he now useth and that he the above bounder Samuell Roe & Edward Roe their Heires Executors and Adm[inistrators]shall and will dureing all the Terme aforesaid and untill the said Isaac Richards shall accomplish his full age of four and Twenty Years Find provide and Allow unto the said Isaac Richards meet Competent and Sufficient Meat dring and Apparrell Lodging Washing and all other things necessary and fit for an apprentice And shall and will so provide for the said Isaac Richards that he be not any way acharge to the said parish of Staplegrove or parishioners thereof but of and from all Charges Shall and Will save the said P[ar]ish and P[ar]issioners of Staplegrove harmless and Indemnished dureing the time and Terme aforesaid Then this obligationto be voyd or Else to stand infore.

.....

#Q.SR.315.314 (1747)

The Examination of John Plyer Woolcomber a vagrant taken upon Oath this 18th November 1747 Before James Marwood. He was born in Chardstock in the County of Dorset and was by his father Benjamin Plyer bound an apprentice by Indenture to John Norman of the Parish of Taunton St Mary Magdalen in the said County for the term of seven years to learn the Business of a Sergemaster, that when this Examinant had lived with this [said] Master little

more than a year in Taunton St Mary Magdalen afore[said] he was taken lame and could not be of much service to his said Master on which his said Master and this Examinant agreed to dissolve [the] apprenticeship. Since which time this Examinant hath work'd about at several places at Combingwool by the piece in no other manner till he came to Chard, wandered, begged and was there taken up as a vagrant this 18 No[vember] 1747

Suffolk Archives**#FC90.G.1.1 (1624)**

To all faythfull people in Christ to reason these presentes said [cum?] Joshua Atkinson of the Cyttye of Norwich Glover send grea[t]ing in our Lord God Everlasting Knoweye that I the said Joshua Atkinson being [master] & Guyder of the pore house & hospitall w[ithout] St. Stevens Gattes belonging to o[ur] Soveraygne Lord the king together w[ith] the consent & assent of the pore Bretheren & Systers of the same sort have admitted & receyved & by these presentes do admit & receyve into the company & fellowshipp of the same pore house or hospitall Thomas Smyth a pore lame boy borne in the towne of Fressingfield w[ithin] the countye of Suffolk to be one of the pore brethren of the same sort In witness [whereas?] I the said Joshua Atkinson have hereunto set the [illegible] seales belonging to the same hospital the xxviiiith day of June in the xxvith yeare of the raygne of o[ur] Sov[er]aygne Lord Jeames [sic] by the grace of God King of England France & Ireland defender of the Faith. 1624

Surrey History Centre**#QS2.6.1701.59 (1701)**

M[aste]r Gorbett

S[i]r After my kinde respects & my sones with oure servise both heerein presented unto you & youre desireinge that when thease lines in oure Absence shall com to youre hands that you will be pleased to doe what you can to healpe my poore lame sonn into William page of Llabeth his roome for he dyed the thirteenth of September last & he did belonge to the West division soe pray Sr. doe what can for me sonn & alsoe for my easement for he lives upon my charge both for his cure & alsoe for dyet & lodgeinge for he has beene turned out of the hospytall this seven months uncureable as they say but I hope there is one that has him under cure will doe him goode alsoe cure him in gods good time but all this while it lies very hard upon me for I am an Antient man & past my laboure & my wife is Antienter then [sic] my self besides I have six daughters besides him that that [sic] stands in expectation to for sum healpe from me for A woman kind can not soe well helpe her self as A man can soe this craveinge youre pardon I rest & shall remaine

From the Ancore Skill in Shadthames [sic] London, the 6 of [Septem]ber 1701

S[i]r your most humble servant Henry Lewis.

West Yorkshire History Centre**#QS1.12.2.6.1 (1673)**

To the Right Wor[shi]ppfull His Majesties Justices of the Peace for the West Riding of the County of York.

The humble peti[tion] of John Taylor of the Parish of Barwick in Elmett

Most Humbly Sheweth

That Whereas the Churchwardens and overseers of the poor of the parish of Barwick in Elmet aforesaid did place out Susan Barley as an Apprentice Child to your petitioner by Indenture confirmed by William Lorothe and William Ellis Esq[uire] Tree of his Majesties Justices of the Peace the Said Child being infirmd and diseased, and so not fitt for any employment. your petitioner Most humbly requesteth that he may be discharged of the said Apprentice he being wiling (to which the parishoners consent) instead of the said Girle, to accept of a Boy about Seaven yeares old (at present very Chargeable to the Parish) as this Apprentice according to Law in that Case, and desires this Honourable Bench to Confirme the exchange accordingly

And your Petitioner shall Ever Pray

We the officers of the Parish aforesaid do give our full assent to the Contents of the Petition above written, and Humbly desire that this exchange of Apprentices may be Confirmed by order of Court.

Churchwardens:

Jo Taylor

Jo Taylor iun [junior]

Henry Shan

Overseers:

Tho[mas] Patter

William Briggs

Henry Bright

.....

#QS1.14.5.6.4 (1675)

To the Right worshippfull his Ma[jesties] Justices of the Peace at the General Quarter

Sessions holden at Skipton xiii July 1675

The Humble Peticon of William Windle of Cracoe

Sheweth

That yo[ur] Peticoner of late had a boy about 9 in yeares old putt to him as A parish
Apprentice w[i]th said boy he hath hansomlie, and well maintained yett neverthesse yo[ur]
doth find the said boy to be a non compos mentis not being capable of sayinge the Lords
prayer nor numberinge to twentie nor name the dayes in the weeke although he hath beene
faivelie and gentlie taught to the gaininge the same As well by yo[ur] Peticoner as also by the
rest of the familie. And although yo[ur] Peticoner, nor anie of his familie did ever chastise or
give anie bade language to the said boy but have alwaies cherished and encouraged him in
hopes to have brought him to some knowledge and witte, notw[i]thstandinge all w[i]th, he

will upon a sudden gett out and goe into some place or other in the feilds or moore, and hide and absent himselfe for two or three daies, and nights together till he be readie to starve for foode soe that yo[ur] Petitioner lives in verie greate feare least at sometime or other by reason of his want of understandinge and witt, he shold come to some Untimelie end.

Yo[ur] Petitioner therefore humblie prayes ye good worshipps will be gratiouslie pleased to grant ye Order that he may be discharged of this his said Apprentice, w[hi]ch he p[ro]misses by yo[ur] good worshipps beinge considered he hopes will be granted

And yo[ur] Petitioner as in dutie bound shall ever pray.

.....

#QS1.15.8.6.1 (1676)

To ye honorable Benche his majesties Justices of ye peace att ye Sessions In Knaresbrough

The humble petition of Mary Farnam sheweth that your petitioner putt her Son Richard Farnam an Apprentice beinge ye age of 11 yeares to her brother Peeter Farnam of this towne of Knaresbrough Pauer who by reason of his maisters hard usage & many stripes is gone away some waies conveyd without any knowledge or privietye of his mother & hath been awaitinge this 9 or 10 weeks & cannot be heard of to ther greate greife & sorrowe

Your honors petitioner humbly Craveth y^t you would be pleased to Cause to be Called y^e above named Peeter before you to give an account Concerneinge her Childe & shee will ever pray.

.....

#QS1.27.6 (1688)

To y^e Hon[or]able his Ma[jesties] Justices of y^e peace Assembled in Sessions at Rotherham ye
17th of July 1688

The petition of John Drable of Stanington in y^e p[ar]ish of Bradfields Laborer;

Humbly sheweth

That yo[ur] petitioner being a poore man haveing a wife & elleven [sic] children was unable to mentaine them It was y^e pleasure of y^e Town of Bradfields to put One forth a p[ar]ish Apprentice unto Henrey Worrall of y^e same p[ar]ish who using his Said Appretnice soe hardlly y^t whether she run away or was sold away I cannot tell but she was wanting & could not be heard of though yo[ur] poore petitioner bestowed many a day in seeking for Her; both at Pontefrast & several other places & heareing ther y^t she was brought from Constable to Constable & y^t her Tongue was cut out; to y^e great greefe of yo[ur] Humble petitioner & Her Mother & Looss & Charges to y^e vallue of above Forty Shillings

Therefore yo[ur] poore petitioner humbly prays that it would please this Honorable Court to allow yo[ur] petitioner all or p[ar]t of his Charges to be paid by y^e said Worrall for y^e Reasons before mentioned;

And yo[ur] petitioner shall ever pray