

At the Golden Bear with St. Lawrence:

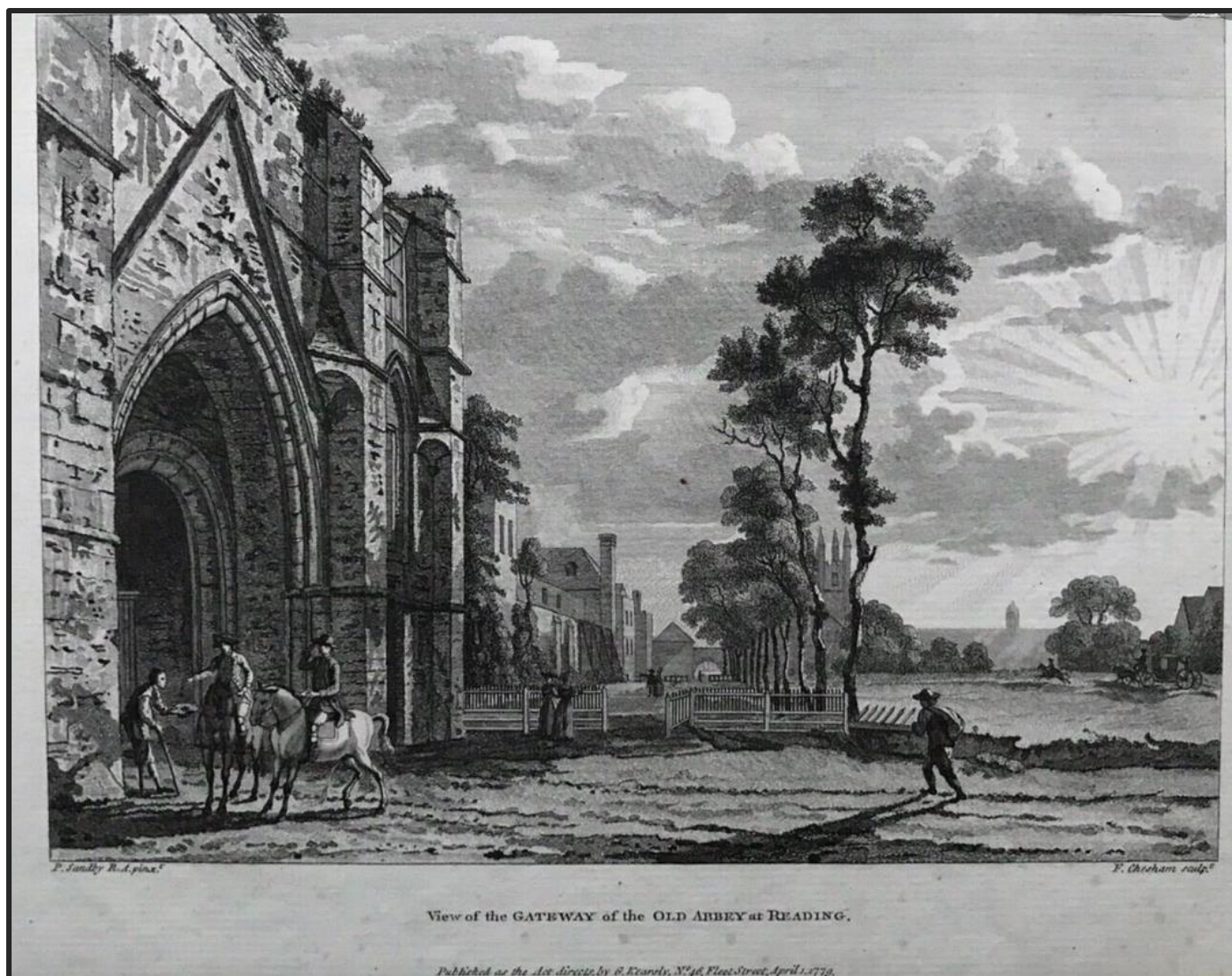
A study in the administration of poor relief in an eighteenth century corporation town.

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Law

Margaret Ounsley

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Reading, 1779: Begging at the Abbey Gateway.¹

For Madeline, Edith and Owen; none of whom were here when I started.

¹ Chesham, *View of the Gateway of the Old Abbey at Reading*, (London, Kearsley, 1779).

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Declaration of authorship

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Margaret Ounsley

Abstract

How far the provision of poor relief under the Old Poor Law was a product of local conditions, and the power balance between pauper, vestry and magistrate, is a live and much-debated area in the field of poor law studies. A relatively thinly-studied environment is that of corporation towns, predominantly located in the midlands and the south of England. The bulk of existing research focusses on rural parishes or London and the larger cities. An even more neglected focus is poor relief provision as part of the function of local politics and administration within a corporation environment. Focussing on the corporation town of Reading, with its rich record survival in the eighteenth century, set against contextual studies of other corporation towns, this thesis explores the relationships, powers, compromises and mutual agreements which allowed parishes and corporations to cooperate to ensure that poverty, and its attendant problems, were managed in the interests of the town.

This study explores who met with whom, where the power lay, what networks existed and what motivations there were for various parties to want to control poor relief provision. It measures the impact of these systems on both the pauper and the town. It demonstrates how the particular circumstances of a smaller urban environment generated a specific ecology of relief not replicated in rural areas, nor larger cities. In doing so it casts light on some of the current concerns about the impact of the relief system, and the pauper's role within it.

Abbreviations and style points.

BAJ	Berkshire Archaeological Journal
BEDS	Bedfordshire Record Office
BNA	British Newspaper Archive
BRO	Berkshire Record Office (from July 2023 The Royal Berkshire Archives, but referred to as the Berkshire Record Office throughout)
BRS	Berkshire Record Society
CJ	Commons Journal
CL	University of Cambridge Library
CUHB	Cambridge Urban History of Britain
Diary	Guilting's <i>Corporation Diary</i>
HC	House of Commons
HoP	History of Parliament Online
IHR	Institute of Historical Research
NA	National Archives
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
PROB	Probate
RM	Reading Mercury
SHC	Surrey History Centre
VCH	Victoria County History

The Oxford Style Guide has been used throughout, with the following important points:

- St. Lawrence parish can appear in records as St. Laurence or St. Lawrence; for the sake of uniformity I have used St. Lawrence throughout, unless directly quoting. Similarly Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM), Guildford, is sometimes referred to as 'St. Mary's', I have called it BVM throughout, to avoid confusion with St. Mary's Reading, unless directly quoting.
- The Webbs nine volume series *English Local Government* is referred to by the name of the individual book, Thus *The Parish and the County*, rather than *English Local Government Vol. 1*.

- Guilding's four volume Reading Corporation Diary is simply referred to as Guilding, followed by the volume number in footnotes, and as the *Diary* in main text.
- Parliamentary Reports and Acts of Parliament are given their long title initially, and from then on a short, familiar or abbreviated title. For a guide to the short titles for reports see the Bibliography: House of Commons and Command Papers. pp295-296.
- Parishes and other bodies are capitalised as follows: The Parish of St. Mary, but St. Mary's parish; the Overseers of St. Mary, but St. Mary's overseers, etc.
- New style dating is used throughout, unless directly quoting.

Chapter 1

Introduction to the research

1. What is the Poor Law and why is it important?

The Poor Law occupies a central position in the social, economic, and legal history of early and late modern Britain. A comprehensive, nationwide, system of statutory parish rating and payment for the support of the poor, its origins can plausibly be traced back to 1536 when the Act for the Punishment of Sturdy Vagabonds and Beggars placed a responsibility on parishes to maintain their poor.¹ Some older historians trace it further back, Eden to 1391 and the Webbs to 1531, and the 1536 legislation, albeit it put a responsibility on the parish, was a short-lived piece of legislation.² An Act of 1552 reinstated and enlarged its provisions.³ Its last vestiges were not abolished until the National Assistance Act, 1948 which provided that the 'existing poor law shall cease to have effect'.⁴ More narrowly most historians divide it into 'Old' and 'New'. The 'Old' is considered to have operated from the Act for the Relief of the Poor, 1601 through to its wholesale reform under the Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834.⁵ The 'New' from 1834 until 1948. It is the 'Old' Poor Law, 1601-1834 that this thesis will examine.⁶

¹ (27 Hen. VIII, c 25). A more detailed description of the evolution of the poor relief system to 1834 is given in Ch. 2. This view of the earliest incarnation of the later system was first taken by Kunze in 1971. N.L. Kunze, 'The Origins of Modern Social Legislation: The Henrician Poor Law of 1536', *Albion: A Quarterly journal concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 3/1 (Spring 1971), pp9-291. McIntosh reinforced this in 2011. M. McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England, 1350-1600* (Cambridge, 2011), p127.

² (15 Ric. II, c 3). Appropriation of Benefices Act, 1391, in F.M. Eden, *The State of the Poor; or an history of the labouring classes in England*, (3 Vols. London, Davis, 1797) i, p63. (22 Hen VIII, c12) How Aged Poor and Impotent Persons compelled to live by alms shall be ordered, 1531 in S. Webb and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History, Part 1: The Old Poor Law*, 2nd edn, (London, 1963), p44.

³ (5 and 6 Ed. VI, c 2). Act for the Provision and Relief of the Poor, 1552.

⁴ (11 and 12 Geo. VI, c 1). Deakin and Wilkinson note that the wording of the 1601 statute concerning the responsibility of parish officers to provide relief is repeated 'practically word for word' in the (20 and 21 Geo. VI, c 17). Poor Law Act, 1930. S. Deakin and E. Wilkinson, *The Law of the Labour Market: Industrialisation, Employment and Legal Evolution* (Oxford, 2005) p110.

⁵ (43 Eliz. I, c 2). Act for the Relief of the Poor, 1601 and (4 and 5 Will. IV, c 76). An Act for the Amendment and better Administration of the Laws relating to the Poor in England, 1834.

⁶ The Old Poor Law will generally be referred to simply as the Poor Law, for the purposes of this thesis, except where necessary to distinguish it from the New.

As a system it would be difficult to find a class, or even an individual, that was not touched by its operation in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The poor themselves, by the definition of those not actually paying into the poor rate, accounted for 25% of the population at the opening of the long eighteenth century.⁷ They would almost certainly be in receipt of relief at some time in their lives, have had it refused, or find recourse to some other form of charity which operated alongside the poor relief system. The rest of the population, as resident parishioners, would be liable to pay rates which were gathered with more or less efficiency over this period. As one of the authoritative guides of the time said, 'All persons, the Clergy not excepted, must contribute to the relief of the poor'.⁸ The middling sort, the small businessmen and tenant farmers, would fill the parish offices of overseers and vestrymen who administered the system on a day-to-day level. The clergy were *ex officio* attenders at the vestry, spiritual leaders, but also often wealthy social leaders.⁹ Employers would often be expected to find places for parish apprentices, as well as work for the seasonally unemployed. The gentry in the counties, and the more prominent businessmen in the boroughs, would fill the role of magistrates who were the court of appeal for paupers refused relief or threatened with removal, and arbitrate disputes between parishes.¹⁰ Barristers and attorneys would provide the counsels who represented parishes, ratepayers and sometimes paupers through the legal minefield that was the poor law system. Gentry and professional men made up the MPs who considered the 'problem' of poor relief consistently and energetically throughout its existence, passing major national reforms every twenty or so years through this time, as well as numerous private bills effecting change in individual cities, counties, and towns. Thomson has estimated, based on a system of classification developed by Hoppit and Innes, that 340 public and private acts relating to the poor law were passed in the 172 years between 1660 and 1832, averaging about two a year.¹¹ The landed gentry could manage the administration of the poor law on their estates to ensure good order and stability.¹² The costs of poor relief to the nation were substantial. In

⁷ For a full discussion of this judgement see T. Arkell, 'The incidence of poverty in England in the later seventeenth century', *Social History*, Vol. 12/1 (1987), pp23-47. For a definition of the long eighteenth century for the purposes of this thesis see below, p.13.

⁸ G. Jacob, *The Compleat Parish Officer* (London, 1734, facs edn, Devises, 1996), p.59.

⁹ Vestries could vary, depending on whether select or not. Broadly speaking they were 'middling sort', neither paupers nor gentry. Hindle attempts an analysis of the social and economic status of vestrymen in S. Hindle, 'Power, Poor Relief and Social Relations in Holland Fen', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 41/1 (1998), pp.67-96, p79. For a definition and further discussion of select and open vestries see Ch.5 p143.

¹⁰ In corporation towns the JPs were members of the corporation. For an extensive look at the social and economic status of corporations see Ch.2.

¹¹ C. Briggs, P.M. Kitson, S.J. Thompson (Eds), *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain, 1290-1834* (London, 2014) p.273. See Appendix 1 for an indicative list of major poor law legislation referred to in this thesis.

¹² See Broad's study of Middle Clayton in J. Broad, 'Parish Economies of Welfare', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 42/4 (1996), pp.985-1006.

Chapter 1

1788, for example, public expenditure on poor relief was over one and a half million pounds, just under half of the expenditure on all the armed forces put together.¹³

The impact of the Poor Law has been debated down the centuries. Malthus saw it as an encouragement to produce children, thus, perversely, worsening the lot of the labouring classes.¹⁴ As a system it has variously been credited with preventing wholesale revolution and starvation¹⁵ in England and Wales in the eighteenth century, as well as enabling sufficient movement of population to provide a workforce in the labour-hungry workshops of the developing industrial revolution.¹⁶ Others see in it the foundation of all subsequent labour law in the United Kingdom as well as influential in the establishment of labour law in the US.¹⁷ It was, of course, the antecedent of the modern welfare state system, which took much of its first foundations from lessons supposedly learnt from the previous system.¹⁸ It holds a central role in the development of local government, as the major responsibility of the emergent 'civil parish' of the seventeenth century, and subsequently the responsibility of unions of parishes. Ultimately its responsibilities split down in the latter half of the nineteenth century (by which time it had been substantially amended in 1834) to see responsibilities such as hospitals, old age care, unemployment benefit, education and training of the young handed over to counties and county boroughs.¹⁹

The English and Welsh system itself seems to have been a rare development.²⁰ Although many European cities initiated similar systems, no country, until the late eighteenth century, invested in a similar mandatory, nationwide system.²¹ One consequence of this huge, long-lasting bureaucracy is a massive collective archive of rate collections, relief payments, settlement,

¹³ A. Greif, and M. Iyigun, 'What Did the Old Poor Law Really Accomplish? A Redux', *Sustainability and Economics* (May 2013). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2261497> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2261497>: [accessed July 2020].

¹⁴ T. Malthus, *An essay on the principles of population and other writings* 1st edn, 1798 (London, 2015), p.40.

¹⁵ Greif and Iyigun 'Redux', p8; J. Healey, *The Blazing World: a new history of revolutionary England* (London, Bloomsbury, 2023) p.363.

¹⁶ P.M. Solar, 'Poor Relief and English Economic Development before the Industrial Revolution', *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 48/1 (1995) pp.1-22.

¹⁷ R. Cranston, *Legal Foundations of the Welfare State* (London, Nicolson, 1985) p29. S. Deakin and E. Wilkinson, *The Law of the Labour Market: Industrialisation, Employment and Legal Evolution* (Oxford, 2005) pp.110-200.

¹⁸ G.R. Boyer, *The Winding Road to the Welfare State* (Princeton, 2019).

¹⁹ H. Elcock, *Local Government* (London, Routledge, 1994) pp30-32, also S. Webb and B. Webb, *The Parish and the County* (London, 1906).

²⁰ The bulk of the legislation for this period refers only to England and Wales, although Scotland did develop a parallel, but very different, system. R. Mitchison, *The Old Poor Law in Scotland: The Experience of Poverty, 1574-1845* (Edinburgh, 2000).

²¹ Switzerland administered a model with some similarities, R. Rutte, *Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1994) p.110 and the Low Countries from the late 18c. A. Winter, T. Lambrecht, 'Migration, Poor Relief and Local Autonomy: Settlement Policies in England and the Southern Low Countries in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, Vol. 218, (Feb. 2013) pp.91-216, see also S. King, 'Welfare Regimes and Welfare Regions in Britain and Europe c1750s to 1860s', *Journal of Modern European History*, Vol. 9, (2011) pp.42-65.

removal and examination certificates, bastardy bonds, inquiries and reports, dispersed across the record offices and archives of the country.²²

It is not difficult to see why such a pervasive, long-lasting, and powerful system should have been the subject of intense historical, economic, and social interest for several hundred years. Questions as to how it operated, and what the actual consequences were for the better functioning of society as a whole, remain pertinent to this day. How far society has a responsibility to relieve poverty, how far the poor can be held responsible for their own plight, and the most efficient (and cost effective) ways of relieving poverty are questions that concern modern day policymakers as much as they did the vestries, magistrates, and MPs of Georgian England.²³ The study of the historical operation of this system remains crucial, as past experience is often (quite partially) used as a rationale for modern reform.²⁴ As recently as 2017 arguments against a basic income were built on a not necessarily accurate interpretation of the impact of the Speenhamland system.²⁵

The study of the Poor Law also holds an additional, methodological, attraction for recent historians. An assault on 'traditional' history came from both postmodernists and Marxist structuralists. Postmodernists questioned the 'knowability' of history at all. In particular, the 'meta-narrative' and 'emplotment' came under fire.²⁶ The more historians used collections of data to look at wide historical trends, and wider long-term narrative arcs over centuries, the more, the postmodernists argued, the history became distorted by interpretation and selective data. Meanwhile Marxists, such as EP Thompson, criticized a traditional preoccupation with a relatively small political and diplomatic class, ignoring the much wider and deeper social movements represented in the vast mass of ignored proletariat and minorities.²⁷ The Poor Law, with its wealth of granular detail and focus on poorer communities, provided a useful antidote.

²² No overall survey of the full documentation for the Poor Law in county record offices has been attempted. For illustration, the Berkshire Record Office has over 10,000 settlement, removal, examination and bastardy certificates in its collection alone. *The Berkshire Overseers Papers* (Berkshire Family History Society) CD, 2000.

²³ See S. Kennedy, and F. Hobson, 'Proposals to abolish the Work Capability Assessment' *Library Research Briefing* (HC, 2023) No. 9800 for a current debate on relief and how far those with disabilities should be put to work.

²⁴ See F. Block and M. Somers: 'In the Shadow of Speenhamland: Social Policy and the Old Poor Law', *Politics and Society* Vol. 3, (2003), pp.1-41, for a study of how one explanation of the workings of the Speenhamland system, M. D. Spiezman, 'Speenhamland: An Experiment in Guaranteed Income', *Social Service Review*, Vol. 40/1 (Mar. 1966), pp.44-55, effectively blocked the US Family Assistance Plan in the 1970s and Canadian anti-poverty measures in 2000.

²⁵ F.H. Pitts, L. Lombardozzi, N. Warner, 'Speenhamland, automation and the basic income: A warning from history?' *Renewal: A Journal of Social Democracy*, Vol. 25/3, (2017), pp.145-155, for an explanation of the Speenhamland system see Ch.7, p246.

²⁶ See Lyotard's 'incredulity to the meta-narrative', quoted in W. Thompson, *Postmodernism and History* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) p.107.

²⁷ E.P. Thompson, 'History from below', *Times Literary Supplement* (7 April 1966), pp.279-80 is often seen as the manifesto of this approach, although its roots are wider and deeper. See S. Bhattacharya, 'History from below' *Social Scientist*, Vol. 11/4 (April 1983), pp.3-20.

Detailed, data-driven studies of small areas, in line with the Annales, or total history movement from France, (sometimes called 'thick description' or 'micro-histories') were taken up as a push back to the post-modernists, while the study of the Poor Law provided a rich resource for the study of otherwise voiceless communities.²⁸ The most current work allows the pauper's voice to be centre stage through study of their own written words.²⁹

2. Historiography

Poor relief, and its administration, was the subject of comment and study almost from the outset of its operation. Notable seventeenth century commentators include prominent merchants and businessmen such as John Cary and Thomas Firmin considering how the poor could be occupied more profitably.³⁰ Legal historians, such as Matthew Hale, ex Lord Chief Justice, advocated more effectual regulation.³¹ By the eighteenth century a rich supply of pamphlets and studies abounded, some of which fuelled further reform.³²

In the eighteenth century the SPCK's *Account of Several Workhouses* of 1725 made the case for local workhouses based on the supposed success of existing ones.³³ The Rev Richard Burn attempted a *History of the Poor Laws* in 1764,³⁴ while Frederick Eden's mighty *State of the Poor* of 1797 attempted a sweeping history of poor relief 'from the conquest to the present period', building a narrative of occasional parochial fiscal responsibility compared to profligacy and inefficiency in other areas.³⁵ By this time the costs of poor relief had already prompted various parliamentary inquiries, Gilbert's in 1777 and a select committee in 1817 being among the most important.³⁶ These fed into a growing call for reform which culminated in the Poor Law

²⁸ J. Sharpe, 'History from below' in P. Burke, (ed) *New Perspectives in Historical Writing* 2nd edn, (Cambridge, 2001) pp.25-39.

²⁹ One of the more recent a joint National Archives and University of Leicester project, 2018-2021: In Their Own Write, <https://le.ac.uk/own-write/about>, [accessed June 2023].

³⁰ T. Firmin, *Some Proposals for the Employing of the Poor, especially in and about London and for the Prevention of Begging*. (London, 1678) J. Cary, *An Essay on the state of England in relation to its trade, its Poor and its Taxes for carrying on the Present War against France* (London, 1695).

³¹ M. Hale, *A discourse touching provision for the poor* (London, 1683).

³² For more detail on some seventeenth century commentary see Ch. 3.

³³ Anon, *An Account of Several Workhouses for Employing and Maintaining the Poor*, 2nd edn, (London, 1732).

³⁴ R. Burn, *The History of the Poor Laws: With Observations* (London, 1764).

³⁵ F. Eden, *The State of the Poor: or an history of the labouring classes of England, from the conquest to the present period: together with parochial reports*. (3 vols., London, Davis, 1797).

³⁶ Report from the Committee appointed to inspect and consider the Returns made by the Overseers of the Poor (HC, 1777) 9; Report from the Select Committee on the Poor Laws with minutes of evidence' (HC, 1817) No. 462.

Commission Report of 1834.³⁷ Predominantly authored by Edwin Chadwick and Nassau William, the one influenced by the work of Jeremy Bentham and the other a professor in the emerging discipline of political economy led by Adam Smith and David Ricardo, it told a tale of the profligacy of out-relief systems, creating a demoralized and idle labouring class and the inefficiency of small parochial workhouses, feeding into the wholesale reform of the system that year. Chadwick's antipathy to the old regime is underlined in a supplementary report to the Commission's main report, which painted an intensely negative picture of profligacy, incompetence, and corruption, in particular in Reading.³⁸ Sir George Nicholls' *History of the English Poor Law* of 1854 illuminated his own hard-line views that workhouses were the only effective form of poor relief.³⁹

For contemporary historians by far the most influential history of the Poor Law, casting a long shadow over the twentieth century, was the Webb's *English Poor Law History*, published in three volumes from 1927 to 1929 as part of their English Local Government series. The first volume dealt with the Old Poor Law, and the following two with the New Poor Law from 1834 onwards.⁴⁰ Thorough and detailed, the Webbs created a compelling narrative that the small-scale amateur delivery of relief by the local parish, piecemeal and ineffective legislation, and widespread corruption, created a system that failed to serve the needs of the poor. So extensively researched and authoritative was this work, that at the time it was considered that no more work on the Poor Law need be done, and it was not until the 1960s that this view was seriously questioned.⁴¹ Even into the twenty-first century Paz-Fuchs relied upon it heavily in the introduction to his work on the development of Welfare to Work programmes.⁴² Joanna Innes in her 2009 work on Parliament in the eighteenth century still felt able to assert that the field was only just beginning to come out from under the shadow of the Webbs.⁴³ The works were formative in the development of the new welfare state envisioned in the Beveridge Report of 1942.⁴⁴ The Webbs were leading Fabian Socialists who had already made clear their antipathy

³⁷ Royal Commission, 'Report Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws' (HC, 1834) No. 44.

³⁸ Royal Commission, *Extracts from the Information Received by His Majesty's Commissioners as to the Administration and Operation of the Poor Laws*, (London, 1837).

³⁹ G. Nicholls, *A History of the English Poor Law* (2 Vols., London, 1854). ODNB <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20110> [accessed July 2023].

⁴⁰ S. Webb, and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History; Part 1: The Old Poor Law* (London, 1927), *English Poor Law History, Part 2, The Last Hundred Years* (2 Vols., London, 1928-9).

⁴¹ A. Kidd, 'Historians or polemicists? How the Webbs wrote their history of the English Poor Laws', *Economic History Review*, Vol. 40/3, (1987), pp.400-417. Kidd quotes E.D. Simon's contemporary review in *The Nation* 'they have done the history of the poor law as well as it is in human capacity to do it.'

⁴² A. Paz-Fuchs, *Welfare to Work: Conditional Rights in Social Policy*, (Oxford, 2008) see for example pp.68 and 69.

⁴³ J. Innes, *Inferior Politics, Social Problems and Social Policies in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Oxford, 2009) p.22, although the comment was initially made at a 1990 lecture.

⁴⁴ Interdepartmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services, *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (London, 1942) Cmd.6404. The Webbs influence is rarely questioned, although in more recent years quite what that influence

to the existing system in their minority report to the Royal Commission on the Poor Law in 1909, which called for a wholesale reform based on a more sophisticated analysis of the causes of unemployment and poverty.⁴⁵ *English Poor Law History* was a systematic attempt to make their case.⁴⁶ To this day, with the appropriate caution as to the narrative, it remains a valuable resource of patient detail.

The rehabilitation of the Old Poor Law can be traced to Mark Blaug's 1963 article 'The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New', which showed how the reputation of the Old Poor Law seemed to have suffered from a pincer movement of the 1834 Parliamentary Commission arguing that it was demoralizing and expensive, and the Webb's that it was ineffective and inhumane.⁴⁷ Eastwood in a 1994 article identified it as a victim of an 'administrative' vein of history, which looked only at the bureaucratic processes and held the Old Poor Law up as 'the classic case study in the failure of administrative vision.'⁴⁸

New approaches to history, and fresh ways of analysing the data began to construct an alternative view of the Old Poor Law from the 1960s and 1970s onwards. Olwen Hufton's 1970s' work *The poor of eighteenth century France* had already established the idea of 'making shift', a concept imported into studies of British poverty, placing poor relief within a wider economy of gleaning, supplementary work, begging and charity.⁴⁹ Later the influence of Foucault⁵⁰ began to encourage a view of the Old Poor Law through the lens of the social discourses current at the time, analysis of where the power in the transactions lay and what Hindle called the 'micro-politics' of relief.⁵¹ The work of E.P. Thompson, rehabilitating the agency of labouring folk, and their own self-determination in the patrician culture of the eighteenth century fed into this debate.⁵² Alongside this, work done by Sheila Lambert and others in the 1970s began to reshape thought on the efficacy of the governance and bureaucracy

was has been recast. See J. Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870-1940: An Intellectual Framework for British Social Policy.' *Past and Present*, Vol. 135 (May 1992), pp.116-141.

⁴⁵ S. Webb, and B. Webb, *The Break-Up of the Poor Law: The Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission* (2 Vols., London, 1909).

⁴⁶ S. Webb, and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History, Part, The Old Poor Law*, 2nd Edn (Edinburgh, 1963) Introduction to the second edn by Frank Cass, p XI.

⁴⁷ M. Blaug, 'The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New,' *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 23/2 (June 1963) pp.151-184, p.152.

⁴⁸ D. Eastwood, 'Rethinking the Debates on the Poor Law in Early Nineteenth Century England,' *Utilitas*, Vol. 6/ 1 (May 1994) p.98.

⁴⁹ O. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth Century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford, 1973).

⁵⁰ M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Paris, 1969) among others.

⁵¹ S. Hindle, *On the Parish: The Micro-politics of poor relief in Rural England c1550-1750*. (Oxford, 2004).

⁵² E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963) most notably, also 'The moral economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century'; *Past and Present* Vol. 50 (Feb 1971) pp.76-136. 'Patrician Society, Plebian Culture' *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 7/4 (Summer, 1974) pp.382-405.

of the eighteenth century.⁵³ These differing approaches established a wider socio-economic and legislative framework for the poor law in the eighteenth century. Work moved away from views of it through a bureaucratic lens, operating as laid down in statute, and put it firmly within a context of negotiation, making shift and legislative efficacy. Narratives of expense, inefficiency and moral corruption were questioned.

A series of local and regional studies in the 1990s and 2000s increasingly focussed on the transactions necessary under the Old Poor Law. J.S. Taylor identified the complex trade-offs between rural and urban parishes which allowed the migration from one to the other in a series of works in the late eighties and early nineties.⁵⁴ Local studies exposed how the micro-politics of a parish could dictate the welfare regime.⁵⁵ Other studies identified the agency assumed by paupers using the system with insight and sophistication.⁵⁶ Closer attention has been paid in recent years to the letters of paupers themselves, their advocates, and the strategies used in their aid.⁵⁷ How far paupers had rights under the system, and knew how to use them, was crystallised as a debate in the work of Lorie Charlesworth which considered that the black-letter law right to relief written into the 1601 legislation had been hitherto ignored by historians, and gave paupers a very strong hand.⁵⁸ This is controversial. Hindle considers claims to entitlement are poorly defined and fudged, and that any such 'right' was 'negotiated in the course of local practice'.⁵⁹ Hitchcock, similarly, suggests that such a right was at the most an 'expectation' on the part of the pauper.⁶⁰ Steven King's response was that the 1601 legislation gave a right to apply only.⁶¹ These arguments were anticipated in Cranston's 1985 work when he stated

whatever arguments there might have been in theory about a person's rights to poor relief, these seem to have been seriously undermined by the administrative practices of poor law authorities.⁶²

⁵³ S. Lambert, *Bills and Acts: Legislative Procedure in Eighteenth Century England* (Cambridge, 1971).

⁵⁴ J.S. Taylor, *Poverty, Migration and Settlement in the Industrial Revolution, Sojourners' Narratives* (Palo Alto, Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship, 1989) and 'A different kind of Speenhamland: Non-resident relief in the Industrial Revolution' *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 30/2 (April, 1991) pp.183-208.

⁵⁵ In particular, J. Broad, 'Parish Economies of Welfare 1650-1834' *Historical Journal* Vol. 42/4 (Dec. 1999) pp.985-1006.

⁵⁶ J. Harley, 'Material lives of the poor and their strategic use of the workhouse in the final decades of English Old Poor Law' *Continuity and Change* Vol. 30/1 (2015) pp.71-103 and P. King, 'The Summary Courts and Social Relations in Eighteenth Century England.' *Past and Present*, Vol. 185, (May 2004) pp.125-172.

⁵⁷ T. Sokoll, (Ed), *Essex Pauper Letters, 1731-1837*, (Oxford, 2001) and S. King, T. Nutt, A. Tomkins, (Eds): *Narratives of the Poor in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Abingdon, 2006) S. King, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750-1830s* (Montreal, 2019).

⁵⁸ L. Charlesworth, *Welfare's Forgotten Past: A socio-legal history of the Poor Law*, (Abingdon, 2010).

⁵⁹ S. Hindle, *On the Parish*, pp402-403 and p446.

⁶⁰ T. Hitchcock, P. King, P. Sharpe, *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* (Basingstoke, 1997), p.11.

⁶¹ S. King, 'Review of *Welfare's Forgotten Past*' *Rural History* Vol.22/2 (2011), pp.271-278.

⁶² Cranston, *Legal Foundations*, p.30.

These studies moved the debate about the Old Poor Law away from a characterization of incompetence, inefficiency and impotence to that of a powerful and influential system. A new debate has polarised the work of the last three decades, and that is between those who see it as a harsh and repressive regime and those who argue for its flexibility, generosity, and humanity.⁶³ Steven King has called these the 'positive' and the 'pessimistic' views of the Old Poor Law.⁶⁴ What most of these studies explicitly or implicitly acknowledge is that the operation of the Old Poor Law was a product of the wider structures and social relations of the time. Narratives about the causes, and effects, of poverty, the resources available to vestries, the social allegiances of magistrate and overseer, the assertiveness and knowledge of the pauper, the understanding of the wider responsibilities of society all had a role to play in decisions about levels of relief for an individual applicant. Joanna Innes referred to this complexity, contextual importance and variation as 'the mixed economy of welfare'.⁶⁵

Most local studies have tended to focus, understandably enough, on the parish. The parish was the unit of delivery, and most records are organised on a parish basis. Those that have looked at a wider area, such as Healey's work in Lancashire, or Sokoll's in Essex, look through the lens of the poor relief hierarchy of decision-making, the county magistrate, the Quarter Sessions, and the King's Bench. Most tend to focus on rural areas, indeed Hindle's seminal *On the Parish* is completely based on the rural experience. Again this is understandable, only about 18% of the population lived in settlements over 5,000 at the opening of the eighteenth century.⁶⁶ Those that look at urban areas have tended to look at larger areas such as London, Bristol, York or Salisbury or burgeoning industrial towns such as Bolton.⁶⁷ Tomkins in her study of urban poverty looks at Shrewsbury, but this is largely through the lens of workhouse and medical provision.⁶⁸ Some pieces of work have been done on poverty in small and medium-sized corporation towns in the eighteenth century. Perhaps one of the earliest is Hampson's work on

⁶³For example: C. Lis, and H. Soly, 'Policing the Early Modern Proletariat,' D. Levine, (Ed) *Proletarianisation and Family History* (Orlando, 1984) pp.166-228 versus P. Solar, 'Poor relief, and English economic development before the Industrial Revolution' *The Economic History Review* Vol. 48/1 (Feb,1995) pp.1-22 for two contrasting views.

⁶⁴ S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000) p49.

⁶⁵ J. Innes, "'The mixed economy of welfare" in early modern England: assessments of the options from Hale to Malthus (c1683-1803)', in M. Daunton (Ed) *Charity, self-interest and welfare in the English past* (London, 1996) pp.139-80.

⁶⁶ P. Glennie and I. Whyte, 'Towns in the agrarian economy, 1540-1700,' in P. Clark, (Ed.) *CUHB* (Cambridge, 2000), ii, p384.

⁶⁷ There is an enormous body of work on London alone. For the most recent important works see D. R. Green, *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790-1870* (London, 2010) or the resources outlined on the *London Lives* website, <https://www.londonlives.org/static/PoorLawOverview.jsp>; [accessed June 2023]; M. E. Fissell, 'The "sick and drooping poor" in Eighteenth Century Bristol,' Vol.2/1, *The Society for the Social History of Medicine*, (1989). Slack focusses on York, Salisbury and Norwich. P. Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1988). J. Healey, 'Poverty in an industrializing town: deserving hardship in Bolton, 1674-99,' *Social History*, Vol. 35/2 (2010) pp125-147.

⁶⁸ A. Tomkins, *The Experience of Urban Poverty, 1723-1782: Parish Charity and Credit*. (Manchester, 2006).

Cambridge, as part of her larger work on Cambridgeshire.⁶⁹ Gauci makes references to poverty in his larger study of politics in Yarmouth at the turn of the eighteenth century.⁷⁰ Dyson has written on Oxford.⁷¹ Peter King looked at Colchester and Chelmsford in his work on Essex.⁷² Bond has written on Windsor.⁷³ Chivers on Bath.⁷⁴ Other pieces of work have been done on small market towns, such as Richard's thesis on Dorset, but these were not corporate boroughs, with JPs.⁷⁵ Mostly these are overviews, and latterly concentrate on the experience of the pauper. None of these focus on the ways that non-incorporated or non-unionised parishes worked together within the framework of a borough JP.

This focus has encouraged a narrative of parochial competition outside of the larger urban areas where corporations of the poor or other private acts of Parliament established formal cooperating structures. Hindle wrote about 'intense local variation'.⁷⁶ Dunkley, in 1979, characterised this era from the 1660s to the 1790s as

above all, the era of parish management, the overseers and vestries dealing with social and economic problems arising from the need to relieve, employ and discipline the poor.⁷⁷

The view that relations between these parishes were difficult, as they strove to offload their resident poor on others, and evade responsibility for their own elsewhere, has held sway through most of the history of its study. Coode's analysis from 1850, that the Poor Law 'isolated the interests of every parish and made inter-parochial war their normal state'⁷⁸ is reflected by Hindle in his 2004 work, with his judgement that the system led to

parochial xenophobia which created acute tensions between and within communities long into the eighteenth century,⁷⁹

⁶⁹ E. Hampson, *Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire, 1597-1834* (Cambridge, 1934).

⁷⁰ P. Gauci, *Politics and Society in Great Yarmouth 1660-1722* (Oxford, 1996).

⁷¹ R. Dyson, 'Welfare provision in Oxford during the latter stages of the old poor law, 1800-1834' *Historical Journal*, Vol. 52/4 (2009) pp.943-962.

⁷² P. King, 'The Summary Courts and Social Relations in Eighteenth Century England,' *Past and Present*, No. 183 (May 2004) pp.125-172.

⁷³ M.F. Bond, 'Windsor's Experiment in Poor-Relief, 1621-1829', Vol. 48, *BAJ*, (1944) pp.31-42.

⁷⁴ J.M. Chivers, "'A resonating void': Strategies and responses to poverty, Bath, 1770-1835' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Bath Spa University, 2006).

⁷⁵ J. Richards, 'Rethinking the makeshift economy: A case study of three market towns in Dorset in the later decades of the Old Poor Law' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Leicester, 2017).

⁷⁶ Hindle, *On the Parish*, p.294.

⁷⁷ P. Dunkley, 'Paternalism, the Magistracy and Poor Relief in England, 1795-1834.' *International Review of Social History* Vol. 24/3 (1979) pp.371-397.

⁷⁸ G. Coode, Report to the Poor Law Board on Settlement and Removal of the Poor: Supplement to 1850 Report (HC, 1851) No.675, p.188.

⁷⁹ Hindle, *On the Parish* p.332.

Chapter 1

or what Snell, in his 2006 work calls ‘a culture of local xenophobia.’⁸⁰ The language is one of mini-welfare republics, and a patchwork quilt of differing and competing regimes.⁸¹

The focus on the experience of the pauper, and the wider ‘ecology of relief’ of recent years led to a move away from study through the lens of bureaucracy and administration. King and Jones welcomed this in their 2015 work when they said,

An older historiography that focussed on questions of administration and organisation, acts of Parliament, institutions....has given way to more nuanced and expansive perspectives. Continuity as well as change and the essential flexibility of practice under the Old Poor Law (1601-1834) in particular have increasingly emerged from detailed micro-studies.⁸²

More recently there has been a call to re-engage with administrative work. In 2017 Shave stated

Although this experiential turn in poor law research has resulted in a much greater understanding of the impact of the poor law, administrative aspects of the poor laws have become neglected.⁸³

She calls for the legal instruments to be put back centre-stage, but within an analytical framework borrowed from the social sciences of ‘policy process’ which considers the extra-legal influences of local experience and implementation.⁸⁴

This call for deeper study of the functioning of the powers which organized poor relief can usefully be put alongside a wider call to analyse the relationship between corporate boroughs and parishes in general. Wrightson’s study of parish politics in 1996 concentrates only on the parish, but he acknowledges

There was a complex local politics in the administration of the Poor Laws which has not yet been fully explored.⁸⁵

Tittler commented in 1998

⁸⁰ K. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006) p.28.

⁸¹ While the expression ‘mini-republic of welfare’ is used widely, and normally credited to Hindle, when credited at all, and certainly accords with his views, I can find no use of this actual phrase in any of his works. The closest is Broad’s ‘Republic in a Village’.

⁸² S. King and P. Jones, (Eds), *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute: Navigating the English Poor Laws, 1600-1900* (Newcastle, 2015) p.1.

⁸³ S. Shave, *Pauper Policies; Poor Law Practice in England, 1780-1850* (Manchester, 2017) p.17.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.43.

⁸⁵ K. Wrightson, ‘The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England’ in P. Griffiths, et al, *The Experience of authority in Early Modern England*, (London, 1996) pp.11-37, p.22.

the complete picture of relations between parish and borough authorities which pertained in the wake of (the development of the civil parish) has yet to be drawn.⁸⁶

Speculation that 'something different' was going on in corporation towns in the administration of relief has been noted before. Peter King in his study of poor relief cases at the Essex Quarter Sessions found that cases brought in urban Colchester were very different from cases brought in rural Essex.⁸⁷ In the rural areas the cases tended to be appeals by the pauper against the parish, using the financial support known as *in forma pauperis*, whereas in urban Colchester they were by the parish officer against the pauper. He considers that

It is possible that the overlap between the magistracy and those who controlled the parish vestries was much greater in borough towns like Colchester, and that the rural poor, by contrast could more easily triangulate, playing distanced magistrates off against their local vestry.⁸⁸

But that

Until more research is done on patterns of authority in eighteenth century borough towns...the significance of the Colchester pattern remains unclear.⁸⁹

Yet despite these calls for a greater understanding of the dynamics of poverty management within the parish/corporation structure, and a fresh application of administrative research in general, very little work has been done on this in response.

This thesis will combine an administrative focus within a study of the wider socio-economic power structures to unravel those very 'patterns of authority' in an eighteenth century borough town. It will attempt to discover not just whether the delivery of poor relief was coordinated in any way, but how that coordination was managed and what its impact was both on the pauper and the town as a whole.

⁸⁶ R. Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England: Politics and Political Culture, c1540-1640* (Oxford, 1998) p.185.

⁸⁷ P. King, 'The Summary Courts and Social Relations in Eighteenth Century England,' *Past and Present*, Vol. 183 (May 2004) pp.125-172.

⁸⁸ Ibid p.183, *in forma pauperis* 'in the manner of a pauper', a system by which fees were waived to allow paupers to pursue cases in court. It was replaced in the UK by legal aid in 1949 but is still in use in the US. A. Prossnitz, 'A comprehensive procedural mechanism for the poor: reconceptualizing the right to *in forma pauperis* in early modern England'; *North Western University Law Review*, Vol. 114/6 (2020) pp.1673-1722.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.183.

3. The research questions

It may be matter of common sense that the delivery of poor relief in the corporation towns of England was different to that in the surrounding rural areas. Here parish administration did not have the independence to become the 'republic in the village' outlined in Eastwood's study of Bampton.⁹⁰ Established governing oligarchies wielded power both formally, as the JPs for the area, and often with generous charity money to dispense, but also as aldermen and informally through softer power structures.⁹¹ Parishes held an identity as part of a town, and not as individual units. Here the power structures of overseer and magistrate were complicated by layers of corporate government. Here parishes bordered closely against each other, with paupers able to move with ease from one to another. It is just that systematic study as to *how* this occurred has simply not been done.

This study will focus on one of the larger market and corporation towns of the Southeast, Reading, during the course of the long eighteenth century. It will attempt to focus on the processes by which poor relief and associated laws of settlement, removal and vagrancy were implemented across the town. In particular it will look at the channels of communication and coordination *between* borough parishes and with the Corporation.

The 'long eighteenth century' is here defined as the period between the Glorious Revolution in 1689 and the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. Outside of background work it will sometimes be necessary to refer further back to the period of the Civil War and look further forward to the great reforms of the 1830s, but the main focus will be 1689-1815 from which the bulk of the documentation survives.

Reading has been chosen as the focus of this study because of the extraordinary wealth of data surviving regarding the Poor Law and corporate management in the eighteenth century. Hundreds of settlement and removal certificates, examinations and bonds, usefully calendared, as well as overseers accounts, paybooks and corporation minutes, survive.⁹² Berkshire and Oxfordshire, the rural counties in which it sits, have been well studied.⁹³ In addition it holds

⁹⁰ D, Eastwood, 'The republic in the village: parish and poor at Bampton, 1780-1834' *Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, Vol.12 (1992) pp.18-28.

⁹¹ For further discussion of the power and responsibilities of corporations see Ch. 2.

⁹² *Berkshire Overseers Papers* [CD] (Berkshire Family History Society, 2005). All others at the BRO.

⁹³ In the eighteenth century Oxfordshire directly bordered Reading on the other side of the Thames, as Caversham was in Oxfordshire. Berkshire was a much larger county, extending to the edge of Oxford. See M. Nueman, *Speenhamland County, Poverty, and the Poor Laws in Berkshire, 1782-1834*; (New York, 1982); O. C. Jenks 'Parliamentary Enclosure in Berkshire and its effect on the poor', (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Reading,

similarities with many market towns around London, sat in the middle of poor agricultural areas, but with excellent communications to the Capital and the rest of the region. Much of what occurred in Reading should be applicable elsewhere. This is a study of parish and corporation administration, and how they functioned together. For that reason, the relief systems developed by some non-conformist communities in Reading have not been included.

It is poor methodology however to look at one place isolation. What occurs in one town could be commonplace in towns of that sort, or unique to the particular environment of the place. It is important to discriminate, since this will identify what is more widely applicable, and what not. While general national statistics can be used, a control group also needs to be identified, which has been studied sufficiently to allow for an understanding of the context of those places. To do this two further corporation towns, Guildford and Bedford, have been identified. While both smaller than Reading, they were both of similar status, being county towns, and socio-economic make-up being market towns in agricultural areas with important transport links to London.⁹⁴ They both have assizes, markets, fairs, and gaols. They are both, like Reading, of sufficient distance from London to be influenced by its economy, but not completely dominated by it. Where possible available data will be compared against Reading's to establish whether a more general pattern can be identified. When looking at costs in the later eighteenth century however they are not useful comparators, as they had both united in one form or another by then. For that exercise three further settlements around London, similar in size of population and rural/urban split were identified, Tottenham, Chiswick and Twickenham.

The main questions used to frame this analysis will be as follows:

1. *Is there evidence of different behaviour? Did the parishes of the town operate much as elsewhere, or is there evidence of cooperation?*
- 2.

Firstly, a robust definition of cooperation needs to be identified. What does cooperation between organisations, such as parishes and borough government, mean? What is the difference between cooperation, coordination, and coincidence? Or between concerted activity and coercion? Having established a definition, how is it to be identified? Many towns and cities legislated, or voted for, formal systems of cooperation, such as corporations of the poor, or

2005); R. Dyson, 'The extent and nature of pauperism in five Oxfordshire parishes, 1786-1832,' *Continuity and Change*, Vol.28/3 (2013) pp.421-449; R. Dyson, 'Welfare provision in Oxford during the latter stages of the Old Poor Law, 1800-1834', *Historical Journal*, Vol.53/4, (2009), pp.943-962. J. Langton, 'The Geography of Poor Relief in Rural Oxfordshire 1775-1832' in S. King, P. Jones, *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute* (Cambridge, 2015). E. G. Thomas, 'The Treatment of Poverty in Berkshire, Essex and Oxfordshire', (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1970).

⁹⁴ For more detail on the socio-economic framework of all three towns see Ch. 3.

unions. The focus of this study did neither. What evidence can reasonably be taken as showing cooperative behaviour in their absence?

3. How did it happen? What were the systems by which this cooperation functioned?

Given evidence that the behaviour across the town was being managed in some way, how far can the processes and channels of cooperation be identified? There are the obvious and formal structures, the corporation and the vestry, the JPs and the overseers; and there are some records which show their decisions. However for meetings *between* parishes, *between* overseers and JPs, *between* aldermen and vestrymen the study needs to rely on wider research and, often, inference. What were the motivations, the social networks, the business links and mutualities of interest which would drive cooperation?

4. What did it mean? What were the implications for the experience of the pauper and the wider population of the town?

If there is an extensive pattern of cooperation across the town, did this have an impact on the delivery and experience of poor relief? How did it impact the town and the pauper? This could have important implications for much current debate around the right to relief, and the significance of pauper appeals to the magistrate. Was there a consequence for rates and expenditure? How did the pauper navigate his or her place in the wider economy and social structures of the town to accommodate these consequences?

5. How long did this system last? How did it change over time, and under what forces was it dismantled?

No system such as this stays unchanged or lasts forever. Did the system of cooperation strengthen or weaken over time? Did periods of economic stress strengthen or weaken it? Under what forces did it disappear? Why did the parishes not vote for a more formal union? The 1830s saw watershed legislation on the Poor Law, the electoral system, municipal corporations and charity management.⁹⁵ Did this dismantle the system, or had it already begun to decay? The answers to these questions will go a long way towards establishing what forces drove the cooperative behaviour in the first place.

⁹⁵ (2 and 3 Will. IV, c 45) Representation of the People Act, 1832, (5 and 6 Will. IV, c 76) Municipal Corporations Act, 1835. Section 71 of the Municipal Corporations Act 'arms-lengthed' management of charities from corporations, albeit it was often the same personnel who ended up as trustees. Also, the Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834, ref. above.

4. Methodology

6. Context

To start answering these questions the context not just of the complex legislative and common law framework of the evolving poor law, but also of the evolution of the powers and economic position of corporation towns and their relationships with parishes, needs to be established. The operation of the poor laws, with their power balances between pauper, overseer, vestry, magistrate, quarter sessions and Kings Bench, needs to be firmly set against the operation of corporation towns with their wards, constables, aldermen, mayors, courts leet, electorate and politics. Studies of the operation of the poor laws rarely puts them into the context of the fierce local and national politics of the eighteenth century, yet poor rates and poor relief were two of the most enduring political issues of the day.⁹⁶ This thesis will start by analysing the evolving structure, politics and power of corporation towns, and their traditional responsibilities for poor relief within those systems. It will then outline the way that other towns and cities managed their poor. The political background and legacy of the religious differences of the seventeenth century will be an important context.

Having established the national legislative, administrative and political frameworks it will be necessary to focus on the particular landscapes that controlled the sample town, Reading, and its two comparators, Bedford and Guildford. In what shape was their political life at the opening of our period of study in the long eighteenth century? What were the socio-economic forces that were to drive their development up to 1830, and within which poor relief was being administered?

7. Analysis

The consideration of the questions outlined above, (did it happen? how did it happen? what did it mean? and how long did it last?) will be considered predominantly through analysis of the documentation and manuscript evidence of the time. Both corporation government and poor relief administration generated large amounts of bureaucratic paperwork. The poor laws required rate setting and collection, examinations, settlement and removal certificates, apprenticeship papers, bastardy bonds, payments to paupers, workhouse administration, vestry decisions and appeals to magistrates and quarter sessions. Corporation government generated

⁹⁶ See Appendix 1, Table of legislation for one indication of the constant political preoccupation with poor relief.

borough minutes, accounts, charity and electoral administration including pollbooks and dealings with local MPs. National concern around the issue of poor relief also produced contemporary studies, and, towards the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, comprehensive parliamentary surveys. Alongside this, diaries and correspondence of individuals and the early issues of local newspapers provide valuable insights.

Core analysis will be predominantly quantitative. For this to be reliable there needs to be some certainty that the sources are truly representative. In general the analysis of data based on historic material is fraught with difficulty. Survival rates, lacunae in the sources, the purposes for which the material was originally produced, the interpretation of the results, the representativeness of the sample, are all issues which need to be considered and will be more fully detailed as and when such material is introduced.

Quantitative analysis will look at such issues as settlement and removals, rates, costs, and appeals, generally judged against other similar samples, predominantly Bedford and Guildford, but others where appropriate, as well as regional and national trends, to identify idiosyncratic and indicative patterns of behaviour. Quantitative analysis will concentrate specifically on the poor relief and settlement system, rather than apprenticeship and bastardy papers, which survival in the core parishes is less complete. Against this, qualitative and other documentary material will be used to identify decisions made, discussions had, illustrative cases and indications of behaviours which cannot be identified by quantitative means. Wherever possible this will be put within the context of research done elsewhere whether locally or nationally to interrogate what these behaviours are demonstrating within the historical debate on the management of the poor law in the long eighteenth century.

5. Outcomes

Through this contextual study and analysis an attempt will be made to answer the four questions which frame this thesis. If it is the case that quite a distinctive regime can be indicated in Reading, and possibly more generally in the corporation towns of the south-east of England, then what are the implications for the current historical debates around the Poor Law? How far can a right to relief be demonstrated? How far did the pauper have agency within this framework? How far were the parishes autonomous 'mini-republics of welfare'? and what did the ecology of relief look like in these circumstances? Given that poor relief was one of the major responsibilities of both town and parish, the study of the politics and machinery driving

Chapter 1

relationships between parishes and with the corporation on the provision of relief should also provide insights into the wider issue of the relationships between these key local government building blocks in the eighteenth century.

The proportion of the population that lived in urban areas of over 5,000 at the beginning of the eighteenth century was about 18%, and most of those lived in London.⁹⁷ While representative of a relatively small proportion of the population, towns were highly influential as regional centres, and foci for migration.⁹⁸ Urban centres were the nurseries of political thought and experimentation, and the foundations of local government.⁹⁹ Understanding how they solved the problem of coordinating the most fundamental of their social services is key to understanding not just how the poor law worked, but how towns as a whole operated and evolved.

⁹⁷ Glennie and Whyte, 'Towns in the Agrarian Economy' *CUHB* ii, p384, the list of towns 5-7K in population does not include Reading, although Goose's estimation (see Ch.3) makes it 5.5K at this time, and I include it in this group; E.A. Wrigley, 'British population during the 'long' eighteenth century, 1680-1840' in R. Floud & P. Johnson (Eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2004) pp57-95, P. Clark and P. Slack, *English Towns in Transition, 1500-1700* (Oxford, 1976) p.83.

⁹⁸ J. Ellis, 'Regional and County Centres in 1700-1840,' in *CUHB* ii, p.673.

⁹⁹ For further discussion of this see Ch. 2 and 3.

Chapter 2

Corporations: development, politics, and responsibility for poor relief.

Introduction

In the last twenty or so years studies of the operation of the Poor Law have identified how context-dependent it was. The economies, cultures, and politics within which it operated had a formative influence on the delivery of relief and the framework regime of settlement and removal.¹ Consequently any study of the delivery of poor relief within a corporation town should start with a clear understanding of the nature of power and politics within that town, and the rights and responsibilities held by the various agents for the delivery of poor relief.

1. What was a 'borough corporate'?

A 'borough corporate', put simply, was one that had its right to operate as a single legal entity recognised by royal charter. In essence it was a legal fiction, which allowed the town to be treated as an individual who lives forever.² It had its origins, in England, in early medieval times.³

It is not the intention of this thesis to trace the development of the English towns from Anglo-Saxon times to medieval merchants' guilds. Suffice to say that prior to 1350 a number of urban

¹ K. Snell, *Parish and belonging, Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950*, (Cambridge, 2006); S. Hindle, *On the Parish: The Micro-politics of Poor Relief in Rural England* (Oxford, 2004); S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England: 1750-1850; A regional perspective*, (Manchester, 2000).

² S. Reynolds, 'The idea of incorporation in western Christendom before 1300,' in J. Guy and H. Beale, *Law and Social Change in British History* (London, 1984) pp. 27-33.

³ Many large monasteries and abbeys had developed similar rights, in particular 'mortmain' or the right to hand on land at the death of the abbot without reversion to the feudal lord. (See Reynolds, above).

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centres developed across the country. Historians generally work with a definition of a town along the lines of

a relatively dense and permanent concentration of residents engaged in a multiplicity of activities, a substantial proportion of which are non-agrarian.⁴

There is no threshold of population. Nonetheless to give a rough idea of the extent of urbanisation prior to the first phase of incorporations in the fifteenth century, the 1377 Poll Tax is a useful guide. It reveals 18 towns with a tax-paying population over two thousand, while a further 67 have such a population over 400.⁵ This was a diminution in urban size since both the Great Famine of 1315-1321 and the Black Death from 1348 onward had a marked effect on population.⁶ It is worth noting that London, throughout this period, completely dominated, with a tax-paying population of over 23, 000 in 1377. This was a significant factor in the development of urban identities; as where London blazed a trail, other towns could eventually follow.

The traditional defining rights of a corporate town were what became known as the 'five points'. These consisted of the right to perpetual succession, (the right to maintain ownership of land and goods despite the death of individuals); a common seal, (which placed the identity of the town into one single entity); the right to sue and be sued, to hold lands and to issue bye-laws.⁷ The first formal incorporation, that of Bristol in 1373 was simply a process of recognizing the city as a county, which already these rights. ⁸ Similar movement to county status then occurred for York (1396) Newcastle (1400), Norwich (1404) and Lincoln (1409).⁹

However, as Reynolds points out, many of these incorporations were mere recognitions of rights already won by urban areas. London, which had been operating as a corporation since the early twelfth century, was not actually formally incorporated until 1608. ¹⁰

⁴ J. Campbell, 'Power and Authority 600-1300', in D. M. Palliser, (Ed), *CUHB*, (3. Vols., Cambridge, 2000) i, pp.76-77.

⁵ A. Dyer, 'Ranking of Towns by Taxpaying Population: The 1377 Poll Tax.' *CUHB* i, p.758.

⁶ R. Holt, and G. Rosser, *The medieval town in England, 1200-1540* (London, 1990) p.6.

⁷ A.R. Myers, (Ed) *English Historical Documents, Vol. IV, 1327-1485* (Norwich, 1969) p.385.

⁸ S.H. Rigby and E. Ewan, 'Government and Power and Authority 1300-1540' in *CUHB*, i, p.298-99

⁹ *Ibid*, p.299

¹⁰ S. Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns*, (Oxford, 1977) p.114.

2. The legal development of corporations.

The evolution of a town to full incorporation often followed the adoption of other legal and economic rights. The thirteenth century had seen a flurry of charters granted to towns allowing them to be in charge of their fee-farm. The borough's fee farm, (or *firma burgi*) was a fixed amount of money that the town needed to supply to the Crown on an annual basis.¹¹ Originally the king's representative in the county, the sheriff, would have collected this. Allowing a town to collect its own was a recognition of the emerging status of a town and was sufficiently desired by towns for them to pay up to, and over, £100 for the privilege.¹²

At this time towns could be divided between those that were directly under the jurisdiction of the monarch (royal boroughs) and those that had a manorial lord (seigneurial or *mesne* boroughs). Seigneurial boroughs were slower to adopt status and independence and were often under the feudal control of an abbey or monastery. Chick counts forty-three such monastic boroughs in the fifteenth century.¹³ Royal boroughs began to appoint senior officials to represent the town, mayors and aldermen, often personnel from the merchants' guilds. Seigneurial boroughs followed suit, often bringing them into conflict with the lord of the manor, as in the case of Reading.¹⁴ Campbell considers that by 1300 'a mayor was the leading officer in most leading towns'.¹⁵

A key function of the county, developed in the fourteenth century, was administering the 'King's peace'. Royal Commissions of the Peace were established for each county over this period.¹⁶ Gradually, and normally in response to a riot or disorderly event, towns were given their own commissions. As time went on these became more routine. As a town received its own commission the county would be informed, and it was given that they should not interfere in the jurisdiction of the town.¹⁷ This process seems to have been relatively resistance-free and Kimball speculates that county JPs were more than happy to hand over responsibility for troublesome towns.¹⁸ The role of mayor and Justice of the Peace were often combined, and

¹¹ Reynolds, *Medieval Towns*, p.198

¹² Campbell, 'Power and Authority', *CUHB*, i, p.70.

¹³ J. Chick, 'Cloisters and Clothiers: The Social Impact of Reading's Transition from Monastic Lordship to Self-Governance, 1350-1600,' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2020) p.5.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp113-115.

¹⁵ Campbell, 'Power and authority', *CUHB*, i, p.70.

¹⁶ E. Kimball, 'Commissions of the Peace for Urban Jurisdictions in England, 1327-1485' Vol.121/6 *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, (1977) pp.448-474.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp.465-466: This could be done by writ, or a *non intramittent* clause in the town's commission.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.458.

subsequent incorporation charters normally specified this.¹⁹ This position was to be crucial in the development of corporations' responsibility for the poor.

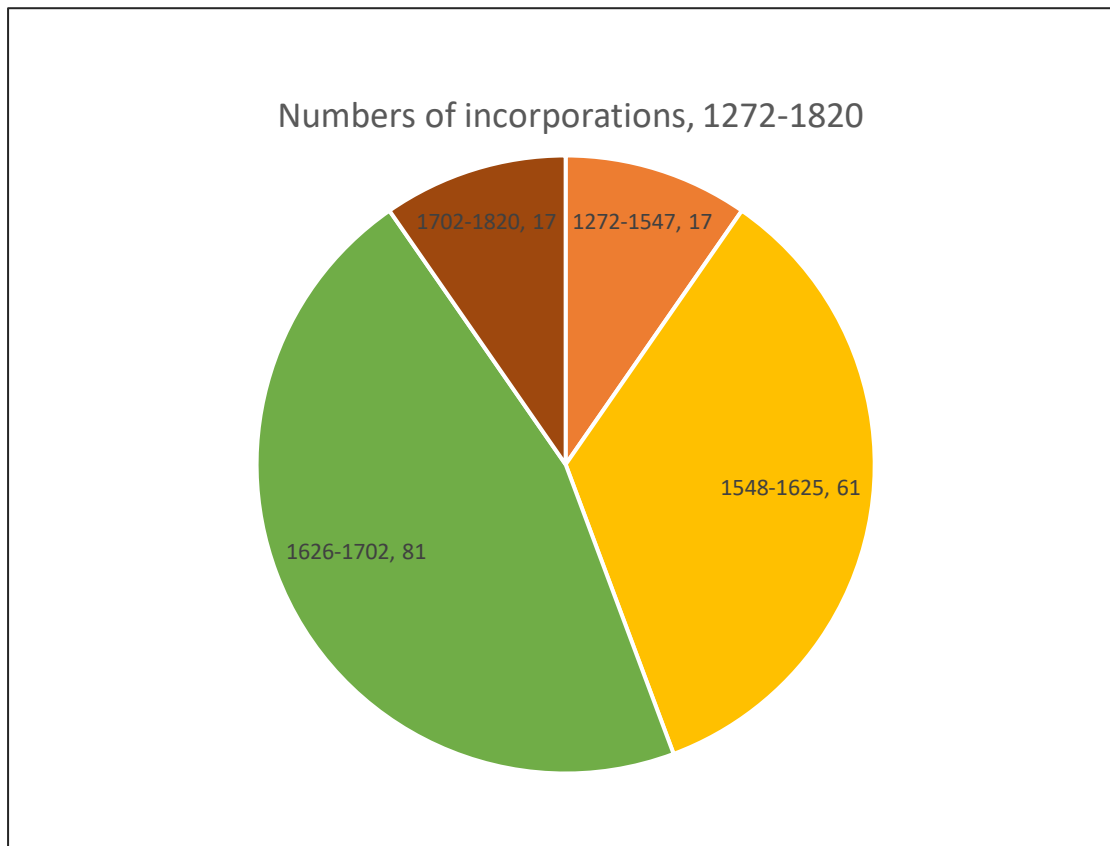


Fig 2- 1: Dates of incorporations from the Municipal Corporations Report, 1835

Most corporation towns were also parliamentary boroughs, that is they were able to send two burgesses to parliament when called. This, in origin, was a loose status with no such right resting in a charter.²⁰ The writ of summons came via the sheriff, and the decision as to which community should be represented was at his discretion. Initially the list of represented boroughs was quite fluid and did not really settle down until the fourteenth century.²¹ All three of the corporate boroughs in this study were represented consistently from the 'Model Parliament' of 1295. Parliamentary representation did not automatically come with incorporation, but it was normally associated with it.²²

¹⁹ Ibid, p.458.

²⁰ JS. Roskell, L. Clarke, C. Rawcliffe, (Eds); 'The Composition of the House of Commons 1386-1421' *The History of Parliament* (London, 1993) <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/Vol.ume/1386-1421/survey/v-composition-house-commons> [accessed June 2022].

²¹ Reynolds, *Medieval Towns* p.112.

²² Many of the smaller corporations lost representation in 1832. By the time of the Municipal Corporations Report of 1835 136 Corporations had MPs, and 91 did not. First Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Municipal Corporations of England and Wales (HC, 1835) 116. (MCR, 1835).

Most ‘incorporations’ occurred from the sixteenth century onwards (Fig. 2.1). After the Reformation the push for incorporation increased with towns that had previously been dominated by religious and monastic institutions seeking to replace religious governance and fraternities.²³ The process continued into seventeenth century when ‘even the smallest towns with any pretensions to local independence were being incorporated’.²⁴ By the time of the report by the Municipal Corporations Commission in 1835 there were 227 in England.²⁵ Most incorporations were in the (roughly) 150 years from the post-Reformation period to the beginning of the eighteenth century, 1548 to 1702.²⁶

Successive monarchs instructed towns to reapply for charters of incorporation, with a requirement to pay a fee for their renewal. Charles II was most comprehensive in this, as it allowed the restored monarchy to manage personnel and include oaths of allegiance in the charter.²⁷ Such renewals allowed for an evolution of town government over the early modern period.

By the opening of the eighteenth century the idea of a corporation town was clearly established as one which could manage its own affairs as a legal entity, with a governing council and mayor who was also the JP *ex officio* along with a nominated number from the rest of the council (often the ex-mayor).²⁸ Nonetheless within that understanding there were the inevitable complexities and disparities that came with a system that had evolved over time. When the Municipal Corporations Commission reported in 1835 they said that they

were unable to find any correct list of such Corporations extant...but from various sources of local information they have found...satisfactory reasons for believing that there are 246 Corporations in England and Wales.²⁹

To an extent the Commission had to establish their own boundaries as to what, and what was not, a municipal incorporation. The complexities and ambiguities however lay with medieval and early modern charters. By the time of the Report the forms and constitutions of most

²³ P. Withington, ‘Two renaissances: Urban Political Culture in Post-Reformation England reconsidered’ *Historical Journal*, Vol. 44/1 (2001) pp.239-267.

²⁴ Reynolds, *English Medieval Towns*, p.114

²⁵ MCR, 1835, p.5 and Appendix pp.53 and 54. The report itself has some internal contradictions. This number is arrived at by totalling the boroughs listed in the appendices covering parliamentary and non-parliamentary municipal corporations in England. The reports own data then goes on to list only 194 on a region by region basis.

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 61-90. These are the charters which corporations claimed to operate under, they could have superseded previous ones, 42 boroughs claimed to operate under several charters, or through custom, one had a charter with no date, and several claim to have charters granted by bishops and princes.

²⁷ J. Miller, *Cities Divided: Politics and Religion in English Provincial Towns 1660-1722* (Oxford, 2007), p.156.

²⁸ I.A. Archer, ‘Politics and Government 1540-1700’, P. Clark (Ed.), *CUHB* (Cambridge, CUP, 2000), ii, pp.260-262.

²⁹ MCR, 1835, p.5.

boroughs and their parliamentary representation had changed hardly at all for the previous 130 years.³⁰

3. Where were corporation towns?

The geographical spread of corporation towns reflects the topography of the medieval economy. They sat predominantly in the wool-rich areas of the south and west, as well as in cathedral cities and ports.

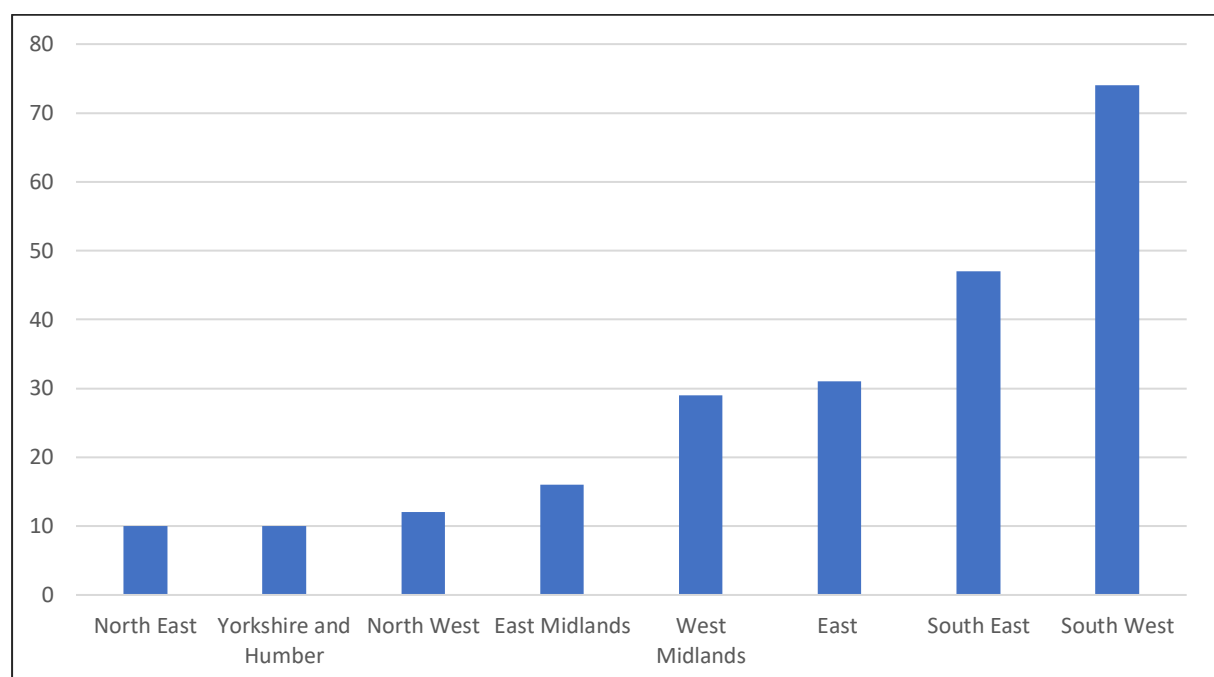


Fig 2- 2: Numbers of Corporations by region in 1835. Regions by modern government regions.³¹ Two thirds sit under a line between the Severn and the Wash.

Thus, quite tiny settlements such as Bossiney in Devon, or Castlerising in Norfolk were corporation towns, while what were already important and growing urban areas by the end of the seventeenth century, such as Manchester and Birmingham, were not. Generally speaking, they were towns such as Oxford, Portsmouth, Canterbury, or Doncaster, with old claims to importance, for instance as a county town, minster or flourishing seaport.

³⁰ J. Innes and N. Rogers, 'Politics and Government 1700-1840', *CUHB*, ii, p.529.

³¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/ukgeographies/administrativegeography/england#regions-former-gors> [accessed May 29, 2021]

4. Social and economic development of corporation towns and the 'rise of the oligarchy'.

In the period of the fourteenth and fifteenth century there were only a small number of royal boroughs, with majority of towns being seignorial.³² Even royal boroughs were much less autonomous than they were to become, and mayors and councils were seen as doing the King's bidding, administering minor criminal courts, and collecting rents for the Crown.³³ The importance of towns as generators of wealth and seats of influence, and potential dissent, was not lost on the Angevin and Plantagenet kings however, who taxed them frequently, but also, increasingly invited representation from them at their great councils or assemblies. Simon de Montfort is traditionally ascribed the role of first formally inviting towns to a Parliament in 1265. Edward I summoned them to fourteen assemblies. By the opening of the fourteenth century they had become so desirable a presence as to be 'almost indispensable'³⁴ Paramount in all these urban areas was London, in its obvious size, wealth and power, and medieval monarchs' need to placate it.³⁵

Tracing the emergence of town hierarchies much before about 1300 is complicated by patchy record survival.³⁶ In addition towns varied in size, region and industry producing their own unique structures.³⁷ Much of what we know about town hierarchies at this time is based on close network studies of individual towns.³⁸ The theory of the development of an oligarchy in medieval townships is by no means established, and particular studies of individual towns show differing experiences.³⁹ Even the very use of the term 'oligarchy' is questioned, since it can mean both, 'rule by a few' as well as rulers not only 'few in number, but (those that) placed their own interests before those of the community'.⁴⁰

³² Rigby and Ewan, *CUHB*, i, p.293.

³³ Reynolds, *Medieval Towns*, p.111.

³⁴ M. McKisack, *The Parliamentary Representation of the English Boroughs during the Middle Ages*, (London, 1932) p23.

³⁵ Campbell, 'Power and Authority 600-1300', *CUHB*, i, pp76-77.

³⁶ I will be using the term 'town hierarchies' to mean hierarchies *within* towns, as opposed to 'urban hierarchies' which is widely used to mean hierarchies *between* towns, see for example J. Laughton, E. Jones and C. Dyer, 'The urban hierarchy in the later Middle Ages: A study of the East Midlands' *Urban History* Vol. 28/3 (2001) pp331-357.

³⁷ D.G. Shaw, 'Social Networks and the foundations of oligarchy in medieval towns' *Urban History*, Vol. 32/2(2005) pp.200-222, p.205.

³⁸ For example, M. Kowelski, 'The commercial dominance of a medieval provincial oligarchy: Exeter in the fourteenth century'; in R. Holt and G. Rosser, *The Medieval Town in England 1200-1540*, (London, Routledge, 1990) pp.180-212 or C.I. Hammer, 'Anatomy of an oligarchy: the Oxford town council in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries'; *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 118 (1978-79), pp.1-27.

³⁹ Hammer, 'Anatomy' p.1.

⁴⁰ R. Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England: Politics and Political Culture, c1540-1640* (Oxford, 1998) p.183.

Nonetheless there is broad agreement that medieval towns were dominated politically by those who also dominated them economically. Mercantile elites were relatively small, the bulk of the population consisted of servants, labourers, apprentices, and small artisans such as shoemakers. Yet, through a system of craft guilds, elites could control access to the lucrative trades, and the terms and conditions of those who worked within them. This normally went 'hand in glove' with borough government, which either replaced or reinforced the edicts of the guilds and was often populated by the same people.⁴¹ Craft Guilds did not always agree with borough governments, and sometimes there were tensions between the two; but, in general, the overlap between commercial and political interests was almost complete.⁴²

While oligarchies of sorts, most were at least open in the sense that those who could purchase the position of freemen could become a member of the electorate, as opposed to French civic oligarchies which were dominated by hereditary or royal patronage principles.⁴³ Social network analyses of Wells and Reading in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, using such things as wills, court cases and correspondence, show considerable interaction between the governing 'elites' and the wider business community down to quite a humble level. They conclude that town governance was broadly supported, as sufficient of the wider community had the opportunity to move into it at some stage, and social bonds were extensive.⁴⁴ Some towns had much wider franchises, Leicester, for example had a meeting of the 'commonality' of the town from ancient custom, men of 'little substance and no discretion', who elected a rival mayor to that chosen by the mayor and a group of seventy-two leading men in 1489.⁴⁵

An observable trend towards the gradual closure of paths to civic responsibility can be plausibly documented from the fifteenth century onwards. Nottingham (1448), Stamford (1462) and Grantham (1463) all restricted their mayor to be chosen from the ranks of aldermen or nominated by aldermen. Hull, (1443). Bristol, (1499), Exeter (1504) and Lynn (1524) became completely closed corporations, with aldermen for life, being the only electorate for the mayor.⁴⁶ Tittler sees this trend consolidating itself in the 'middling' boroughs by the 1570s and 1580s, which he considers a response to the difficult years of the mid-sixteenth century, facing famine, disease and rocketing inflation. ⁴⁷ In addition, from the 1530s onwards, Tudor monarchs had to find substitutes for the institutions which had been dissolved in the Reformation, devolving

⁴¹ Reynolds, *Medieval Town*, p.125.

⁴² Kowaleski, 'Exeter' in Holt and Rosser, *English Medieval Towns*, p.185.

⁴³ Ibid, p.302.

⁴⁴ D. Shaw, 'Social networks and the foundations of oligarchy in medieval towns,' *Urban History* Vol. 32/2 (2005) pp200-222 and J. Chick, *Cloisters and Clothiers*, p.129.

⁴⁵ Rigby and Ewan, *CUHB*, i, p.307.

⁴⁶ Rigby and Ewan, *CUHB*, i, p.310.

⁴⁷ Tittler, *Reformation and Towns*, pp.170-172 and pp.182-183.

more status and power to both town and parish.⁴⁸ Tittler argues that the process of restriction of increased power to a smaller elite, which occurred in the sixteenth century at borough level was mirrored by a similar process at parish level, especially with arrival of select vestries.⁴⁹ New corporation charters of the post-Reformation era were drawn up with a deliberately limited electorate, Tittler's analysis of sixty-five charters from 1590 to 1640 shows that it was 'a particularly fertile patch for the incursion of oligarchic rule, a tendency encouraged by the Crown'.⁵⁰

However narrow the elite that governed a town, there seems generally to have been an accepted idea that this elite should govern in the interests of all. Oaths were sworn by town officials to look after the widows and orphans and to see peace and justice and

to do right to every person or persons, as well as to poor as to rich, having no reward of any manner of person.⁵¹

The oligarchies of early modern urban England were not seen as tools of the monarch in the way that medieval towns may have been.

The aldermen and mayors of the newly important, relatively autonomous corporation towns of the late sixteenth century were characteristically that phenomena of the early modern world, the 'middling sort'. Considerable academic study has focussed on when this social group developed but suffice to say that by this time it was an identified, and to an extent, self-conscious breed.⁵² Thomas Smith, writing in 1583 said 'we in England divide our men into four sorts, gentlemen, citizens and yeoman artificers and labourers'. His definition of 'citizens' then runs:

Next to gentlemen, be appointed citizens and burgesses, such as not only be free and received as officers within cities, but also be of some substance to bear the charges.⁵³

These were not exclusive categories however, and Wrightson's view is that the urban elites owed much of their status to marital and other ties to county gentry.⁵⁴ Withington considers that the late Elizabethan era saw an enthusiasm for these structures of local government, which

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.184.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.185.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.186.

⁵¹ Rigby and Ewan, *CUHB*, i, p.304.

⁵² For example: K. Wrightson, *English Society 1560-1680* (London, 1982). J. Barry and C. Brooke (Ed) *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England*, (Basingstoke, 1994). H.R. French, 'Social Status, Localism and the 'Middle Sort of People' in England 1620-1750', *Past and Present*, Vol.116.(2000), pp.66-99. J. Kent, 'The Rural 'Middling Sort' in Early Modern England, circa 1640-1740: Some Economic, Political and Socio-Cultural Characteristics', *Rural History* Vol.10/1,(1999) pp.19-54.

⁵³ T. Smith, *De republica anglorum* 1st Edn, 1583 (Cambridge, 1906) p.31.

⁵⁴ K. Wrightson, *English Society: 1580-1680* (London, 1982) p.37.

allowed for a wider strata of society to be involved in the management of the realm, down to quite a humble level, to fill parish and ward officers, such as constables or searchers.⁵⁵ He points to an enthusiasm for building town halls, which peaked in the second half of the sixteenth century, often accompanying the granting of a charter, as emblematic of a new found status and dignity for corporations.⁵⁶

The ideological debates of the late sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, around religion and the role of monarchy and society, what Archer calls the 'ideological passions unleashed by the Reformation' could not but involve, and in some instances be led by, these provincial civic leaders.⁵⁷ While the business of corporate government continued with surprising normality through the Henrician, Edwardian and Marian reforms, Archer notes a deepening and hardening of discord as the seventeenth century opens and progresses.⁵⁸

Predominant views of society as a 'body politic' using the metaphor of a human body, co-operating and working in harmony with the King as the head, automatically created suspicion of the 'mini kingdoms' that corporations had become. Thomas Hobbes, for example, in 1651 saw a problem in

the great number of Corporations, which are as it were many lesser Commonwealths in the bowels of a greater, like worms in the entrails of a natural man.⁵⁹

Discord *within* towns seems also to have grown apace during the course of the seventeenth century. One major symptom of this was franchise disputes. Typically a disenfranchised group in parliamentary elections agitated for the vote, often stirred up by an interested party looking to contest a seat.⁶⁰ Hirst lists 49 urban constituencies that saw at least one dispute between 1604-1641 and sees them as part of a wider power struggle in towns 'merely one more battleground on which to contest the hold of oligarchs on town affairs'.⁶¹ Issues were often complicated by local disputes, but recent historians such as Withington have challenged the notion that civic governance was characterised only by localised interests with no concern, or a studied neutrality, in national affairs.⁶²

⁵⁵ Withington, *Two Renaissances*, p.239.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.253.

⁵⁷ I. Archer, 'Politics and Government, 1540-1700', in *CUHB*, ii, p.235

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.248

⁵⁹ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* 1st Edn, 1651, ed. K. Schumann, and G.A.J. Rogers, (London, 2006) p.263.

⁶⁰ D. Hirst, *The representatives of the people? Voters and Voting in England under the early Stuarts* (Cambridge, 1975) p.44.

⁶¹ Hirst, *Representatives?* p.45.

⁶² Withington, *Two Renaissances*, p.243.

Hirst notes the propensity with which the first Stuarts, James and Charles, showed a hard-line support for oligarchy when dealing with petitions from towns over local disputes.⁶³ Royal Charters over these years became even more narrow in their delineation of the electorate. The Civil War saw a complex pattern of loyalties. A simplistic rule of thumb of 'rural=King, urban=parliament'; is inadequate. There were plenty of corporations that expressed loyalty to the King in the early years, and others where the population stood more royalist than their 'godly' leaders.⁶⁴ Archer notes the larger corporations with wider electorates, such as Norwich, were unequivocal in their support for Parliament, while cities such as Oxford were safe havens for the King's court. Those city and town governments which did support the King in the early years were much more susceptible to purges as the war continued; as were towns which saw successive occupations.⁶⁵ The Commonwealth often did see wholesale changes in the personnel in civic office, although Archer sees them as not necessarily any more democratic and egalitarian than the people they replaced.⁶⁶ Franchise disputes in the days of the Protectorate were much more likely to be resolved in favour of a wide parliamentary electorate. Reading, for example had its voting base settled on the 'inhabitants at large' in 1659, which seems to have even included those in receipt of relief.⁶⁷ While many towns took the opportunity to take land and control from previously dominating institutions such as universities (Oxford) or cathedrals.⁶⁸

Charles II was to inherit a landscape of urban areas disrupted, divided and often used to a kind of populist politics not previously known. It laid the foundations for the politics of towns for the next forty years.

5. Politics in Restoration Corporation Towns

The period from the Restoration in 1660 to the Glorious Revolution in 1689 saw purge and counter-purge in corporation politics. Moves taken to bolster the position of the monarch, but which did much to entrench local rivalries.

⁶³ Hirst, *Representatives?* p.48.

⁶⁴ Archer, *CUHB*, ii, p.252

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.253.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.253.

⁶⁷ Aspinall et al, *Parliament through Seven Centuries: Reading and its MPs* (London, 1962) p.46, has the electorate at over 1000, when the population was not much more than 6000 (men, women and children). The absolute prohibition of those receiving alms was not resolved until an appeal in 1708 (*CJ*, Vol.16, 23rd November 1708).

⁶⁸ Archer, *CUHB*, ii, p.254.

William Cavendish's 1659 letter of advice to the then Prince Charles on managing a restored kingdom, counselled the Prince to halve the number of scholars, cut back on lawyers, get rid of half the peerage and clamp down on corporations as 'Every City is a petty free state against the monarchy'.⁶⁹ It articulated his distrust of corporation personnel. His supporters in the Cavalier Parliament passed the Corporation Act in 1661.⁷⁰ All corporation officeholders were required to take the Anglican sacrament, disavow the Solemn League and Covenant and swear an oath of non-resistance to the King. While the impact varied from town to town, across the country about a third of the personnel on corporations felt unable to continue.⁷¹ A 'Corporation Council' was established to monitor and manage the loyalty of corporations.

Nonetheless many dissenters did remain, or drifted back, using the strategy of 'occasional conformity'.⁷² Local magistrates who were, in almost every case, the mayor, or another member of the corporation, were reluctant to move on colleagues and fellow members of their own social circle. What eventually became known as 'Whig' representation was strong from urban areas, particularly after the elections of 1679.⁷³ As was often the case, London was in the vanguard of resistance to the King. London was seen as such a nest of dissent and revolt during the Exclusion Crisis that Charles II refused to hold his Parliament at Westminster, and instead it met at Oxford where there was less fear of the population rising in support of the Commons.⁷⁴ In November 1681 a grand jury, handpicked by the Sherriff of the Corporation of London, found the Earl of Shaftsbury innocent of high treason for calling for the exclusion of Duke of York.⁷⁵ In December 1681 the Corporation Council issued a writ of *quo warranto* to investigate the validity of the London charter.⁷⁶

Prior to 1680 some corporations had volunteered their charters in the hope of getting some enhanced status and to show their loyalty to the Crown. Sometimes disaffected Tories, who had

⁶⁹ A.S. Turbervill, *A History of Welbeck Abbey and its Owners, 1539-1755* (2 Vols., London, 1938), i, pp.171-176 for a summary of the letter; Withington, *Two Renaissances*, p.240 for quote.

⁷⁰ (13 Car. II, c 1), An Act for the Well Governing and Regulation of Corporations, 1661. Normally referred to as the Corporation Act.

⁷¹ Archer, *CUHB*, ii, p.256.

⁷² 'Occasional Conformity' was a strategy of more moderate dissenters to take communion in an Anglican church once a year to qualify for office. B.S. Sirota, 'The occasional conformity controversy, moderation and the Anglican critique of modernity, 1700-1714' *Historical Journal*, Vol. 57/1, (2014) pp81-105, p.81.

⁷³ J. Miller, *Cities Divided: Politics and Religion in English Provincial Towns 1660-1722* (Oxford, Oxford Scholarship Online, 2010) p179. The terms 'Whig' and 'Tory' are disputed in their acceptance and usage at this time, some preferring 'Country' and 'Court'; but for simplicity I have generally adopted the former.

⁷⁴ The Exclusion Crisis was a series of attempts by Whig MPs and Peers, led by the Earl of Shaftsbury, to pass legislation to exclude the Duke of York from succession. *ODNB*, 'The First Earl of Shaftesbury,' <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-6208> [accessed 14th May 2021]; although Oxford was far from united in its support for the King.

⁷⁵ *ODNB*, 'The First Earl of Shaftesbury.'

⁷⁶ *Quo Warranto* (by what authority) was an inquiry, normally by the King's Bench, into the legal foundation of the authority of an individual or institution. It could be costly and time-consuming for a defendant, and if successful, result in the loss of power. J.H. Baker, *An introduction to English Legal History*, 4th Edn (Oxford, 2007) p.145.

been marginalised or were facing dispute with Whigs on their corporations began voluntarily surrendering their charters to the King, in order to bolster their position. The new charters gave the King the power to nominate, or at least veto, prominent officeholders, and to remove members who were not to his liking.⁷⁷

After 1680 and with the heightening of tension, corporations were 'invited' to surrender their charters, and often prominent local gentry used influence to make this happen. Those that refused to do so were threatened with *quo warranto* like London.⁷⁸ Many corporations had operated in ways under the Commonwealth that were now deemed illegal, and their charters were vulnerable, so a new charter might provide them with firmer legal territory.⁷⁹ Surrender at least left room for bargaining.

The rechartering process often went alongside restricting the powers of the urban magistracy. This could be done by 'commission of association' which nominated rural JPs to sit on a corporation bench or be nominated in the charter.⁸⁰ In Wells the Cathedral managed to get JPs on to the bench, and at Oxford the University similarly petitioned (unsuccessfully). Halliday's view is that the primary purpose of the whole process of regranting charters was to manage and reform urban justice.⁸¹ Corporation towns had, in the eyes of the restored monarch, been the seat of dissent and disturbance, and therefore their management of the 'King's peace' was suspect.

⁷⁷ Miller, *Cities Divided*, p.182.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.185.

⁷⁹ P. Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic; Partisan Politics in England's Towns 1650-1730*, (Cambridge, 1998) p.152.

⁸⁰ Miller, *Cities Divided* p.191.

⁸¹ Halliday, *Dismembering* pp.221-222.

In all 258 charters were issued between 1661 and 1688, most from 1680 onwards (Fig 2.3).⁸²

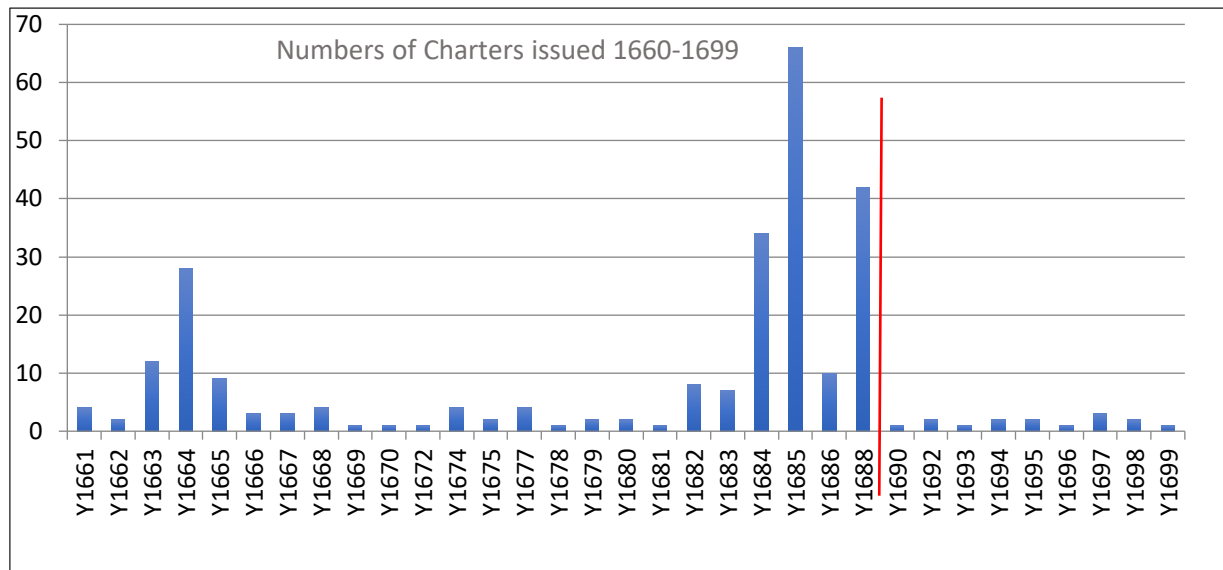


Fig 2- 3: Data from Halliday. Prior to 1680 corporations are likely to have voluntarily surrendered, post 1680 they were more likely to have been pressured. The red line shows the 1689 revolution.

Some towns made several attempts, and unfortunate corporations such as Nottingham split by faction, and manipulated by gentry, had four goes at getting a satisfactory charter.⁸³

James II used the legacy of the new charters, and his powers to dismiss corporation members, to attempt to further purge the corporations, this time of the Tory Anglicans built up by his brother. Whigs, he considered, would be far more likely to support his moves towards religious toleration.⁸⁴ By March 1688 it was reported that ‘most corporations had been remodelled’. This was an attempt not just to manage civic governance, but also Parliament since many of the new charters limited the electorate to the corporation members. In all 103 towns were purged, 76% of their personnel removed.⁸⁵ The chaos that ensued, with his brother’s supporters alienated, and Whig dissenters being no more loyal to a Catholic monarch, was evident by the autumn. James then issued an edict reversing his purges, and dissolving all charters issued since 1679. By December he had fled the country in the wake of the arrival of William of Orange.

The legacy of these years of purges and surrendered and negated charters, was often bitter and partisan politics at local level, with constant legal battles about what was, and was not, the appropriate jurisdiction of the corporation. This was complicated by fractious elections through to 1702 which ‘kept the political pot at a constant boil’.⁸⁶ Halliday considers that historians have

⁸² Halliday, *Dismembering*, pp.350-351, p169.

⁸³ Ibid, p.224.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.19.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.248.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.277.

gone awry in attempting to trace the origins of party politics at national level. The corporation towns were the real breeding ground for the early 'party' allegiances. It was here that the aldermen sat permanently and attempted to govern. 'We must redirect our gaze from Parliament... to the incorporated towns' he states as 'the corporations provided the environment in which partisan groups could spawn and grow'.⁸⁷

Despite the political turmoil of these years, they were also ones that have been identified as the beginning of the 'urban renaissance' which was to gather pace in the eighteenth century. Two scourges of urban life, plague and fire, disappeared and diminished at this time. Towns became wealthier and more robust in their local economies and less inclined to crippling depressions.⁸⁸ Warfare overseas, improved communications, growing international trade and nascent industrial growth all fed into burgeoning commerce in towns. The populations of towns grew steadily. The arrival of William and Mary gave a new impetus to the idea of a respectable gentility, to be reflected in urbane, civilised, provincial towns, enthusiastic in their adoption of reformation of manners societies, driven by the 'urban commercial class'.⁸⁹

6. The traditional responsibility of towns for poor relief management

The major responsibilities of corporation towns included the management of law and order, economic health, and general well-being within its boundaries. It was these concerns, alongside the growing magistracy role, which were to ensure a direct involvement in poor law management well into the eighteenth century, and in some form up to the reforms of the 1830s.

A medieval town that had won itself a large degree of self-government effectively took on the responsibilities normally handled by the king's officer, the sherriff, in the counties. These included the levying and expenditure of the royal revenue, purveyance on the part of the king, particularly in times of war, mustering military forces and administering justice.⁹⁰ In addition the regulation of the urban economy was taken on by borough governance partly in response to their relationship with the merchants' guilds and increasingly through state legislation such as

⁸⁷ Halliday, *Dismembering*, pp.7-8.

⁸⁸ P. Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1991) pp.17-20.

⁸⁹ K. Sonnelitter, 'The Reformation of Manners Societies, the Monarchy and the English State, 1696-1714' *The Historian*, Vol. 72/3 (2010) pp.517-542, p.519. For more detail on the reformation of manners see p.47.

⁹⁰ Rigby and Ewan, *CUHB*, i, p.292.

the Statute of Labourers in 1351, and its successors, which required Justices of the Peace, and their officers, to enforce wage and price caps.⁹¹

Price and quality management of goods sold within the borough, particularly at the markets and fairs, was often the subject of energetic management by towns, at least from the fourteenth century onwards.⁹² Prices were regulated, and practices such as forestalling and engrossing discouraged. This was not just for the benefit of local burgesses, who may have been given favourable terms and stood to gain from a reputable market, but also to ensure that staple foods such as bread and ale were available at a reasonable price and quality for the wider community.⁹³ Towns such as Bristol (1522) and Canterbury (1552) can be seen intervening at times of dearth to ensure supplies of affordable corn to the general population.⁹⁴ Price management, particularly of bread, was a strategy of urban governance in response to times of distress, and riot, well through to the end of the eighteenth century, when economic theory about market intervention was beginning to change.⁹⁵ Certainly by the early modern era mayors and their councils had a clearly understood responsibility for the 'common wealth' and the 'common welfare' of their towns. Slack considers that the Reformation, with its requirement on corporations to pick up on lacunae left by dissolutions, reinforced and greatly enhanced this role.⁹⁶ Corporations such as Lincoln (1546) and Ipswich (1551) carried out general surveys of their poor,⁹⁷ as did Chester, Coventry, Oxford and King's Lynn in this period, in order to establish the extent of their responsibilities.⁹⁸

Corporations also administered a great deal of charity money. This was through bequests or wills left directly to the care of the mayor and aldermen, or, after the Reformation, their inheritance of chantry and other bequests from dissolved religious establishments. The calculation of the importance of charitable funds compared to poor rate collections is not an easy one. Charities were often incompetently managed, and rates not efficiently collected. For the purposes of this study, Slack's assessment of charitable income being about twice as much as poor rates at the beginning of the seventeenth century, about the same in the middle of the

⁹¹ L. R. Poos, 'The Social Context of Statute of Labourers Enforcement,' *Law and History Review, Journal of the American Society for Legal History* (Spring 1983) pp.27-52.

⁹² R.H. Britnell, 'Price-setting in English Borough Markets, 1349-1500' *Canadian Journal of History*, Vol. 31 (April 1996), pp.1-15.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p.3.

⁹⁴ E.M. Leonard, *Early History of English Poor Relief*, (Cambridge, 1900) pp.40-41.

⁹⁵ A. Charlesworth and A. Randall, 'Morals, Markets and the English Crowd in 1766,' *Past and Present*, Vol. 114 (Feb. 1987) pp.200-213, p.212.

⁹⁶ P. Slack, 'Great and Good Towns, 1540-1700,' *CUHB*, ii, p.364.

⁹⁷ Leonard, *Early History*, pp.42-43.

⁹⁸ M. K. McIntosh, *Poor relief in England, 1350-1600* (Cambridge, 2011) p.116.

century, and about one third by the end, seems a useful rule of thumb.⁹⁹ However that should be broken down, since urban areas were normally a lot better endowed with almshouses and hospitals than rural areas, and really needs an analysis on a place-by-place basis. Nonetheless it is safe to assume that corporations normally had quite large sums available to them for the relief of the poor and how they coordinated their decisions with parish relief was one of their levers of authority.

A profound intellectual shift regarding poor relief occurred in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, across Europe. It increasingly put the responsibility on civic authorities rather than individuals. Early Christian attitudes towards almsgiving were characterised as much by the good that it did for the almsgiver's soul as for the recipient's physical well-being. A popular text from the second century CE sums this attitude up

God desires thee to give to all.....They who take anything under an appearance of pretended need, will have to give account to God, but they who give will be blameless.¹⁰⁰

It was not the duty of the benefactor to inquire into the 'deservingness' of the recipient, as the donation was about spiritual good, rather than communal well-being. A shift can be detected around the fifteenth and sixteenth century among both Protestant and Catholic thinkers. This put the emphasis on collective responsibility and a consequent need to identify the 'genuine' poor. Martin Luther's *Address to the German Nobility* outlined what were to become the first principles of the English poor relief system;

each town should support its own poor and should not allow strange beggars to come in.....Every town should feed its own poor; and if it were too small, the people in the neighbouring villages should be called upon to contribute...they have to support many knaves and vagabonds under the name of beggars. If they did what I propose they would at least know who were really poor or not.¹⁰¹

While six years later the Catholic Juan Luis Vives was to repeat similar sentiments in his *On the relief of the poor and human need*, which argued that cities and towns should provide for the

⁹⁹ P. Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England*, (London, 1988) p.172.

¹⁰⁰ From the *Shepherd of Hermas*, second century AD, quoted in S. Webb and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History, Vol. 1 The Old Poor Law*, 1st Edn. 1927 (London, 1968) p.4.

¹⁰¹ M. Luther, *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation*, 1st Edn. 1520 (Project Wittenberg) p.44 <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/web/nblty-01.html>, [accessed 3rd July 2023].

genuinely poor and put able-bodied beggars to work.¹⁰² This shift was soon implemented in many of the cities of northern Europe, including Ypres and Lyon.¹⁰³

Slack, and later historians are much more inclined to consider that an early modern move toward civic responsibility for poor relief in England came not so much from intellectual shift as from the need to fill a void. The Dissolution had created

a real vacuum. It has been estimated that monasteries alone provided £6,500 a year in alms before 1537.¹⁰⁴

Whether intellectual shift or pragmatic vacuum-filling, from the 1530s onwards successive Tudor governments experimented, revised and reissued laws and policies around the relief of poverty which eventually settled on an uneasy relationship between parish and corporation in urban areas. This was not replicated in rural areas since counties did not have the same traditions and charters of incorporated towns. It is worth charting this development, as the role of the town in poor relief management evolves through this legislation.

The first, important, point to emphasise is that, in origin, the parish was an ecclesiastical, and not a secular unit. The secular units of a borough were the wards, and many parishes were, and are, not co-terminous with borough boundaries. In England the parishes had evolved from the earlier minster organisation of the Anglo-Saxon church; as communities grew and demanded local churches, largely through the tenth and eleventh century. Their size and shape could be dictated by a number of things, such as manorial ownership and population density; leading to an intense variety from small urban parishes of only a few streets, to sprawling northern upland territories of hundreds of square miles broken down into 'townships'. The traditional overlordship of a parish was the diocese, and a bishop, not the town and a mayor.¹⁰⁵

In reality ecclesiastical and secular authorities had consistently 'arm-wrestled' for jurisdictions in the years prior to the Reformation. An uneasy understanding of 'spiritual' matters being the

¹⁰² J. L. Vives, *De Subventionem Pauperum Sive De Humanis Necessitatibus*, C. Fantazzi, C. Mattheussen, J. Landsheer, J (Eds), 1st Edn, 1526 (2 Vols., Leiden, Brill, 2022) ii, p. xxiii.

¹⁰³ H.C.M. Michielse, and R. Van Krieken: 'Policing the Poor,' J.L. Vives and the Sixteenth Century Origins of Modern Social Administration,' *Social Service Review*, Vol. 64/1, (Mar 1990), pp.1-21.

¹⁰⁴ Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, p.13. The long-held view, from Burnet in the seventeenth century to the Webbs in the twentieth, was that the monasteries, with their indiscriminate almsgiving, created as much poverty and vagrancy as alleviated. Slack was one of the earliest to seriously question this and identify a genuine loss with the Dissolution. More recent work by N. Rushton, reexamining the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535, suggests that the contribution of monastic charity has been grossly underestimated, and even Slack's figure should be increased. N. Rushton, 'Monastic charitable provision in Tudor England: quantifying and qualifying poor relief in the early sixteenth century,' *Continuity and Change*, Vol. 16/1 (2001) pp.9-44.

¹⁰⁵ J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005) is a good overview of this process.

subject of church courts, including divorce, sexual behaviour, wills and moral deviancy and 'temporal' matters being the subject of the King's court, including property ownership, but also capital crimes had evolved. Where a conflict arose the King's court was supposed to have ascendancy. This meant that parishes were subject to ecclesiastical law where they dealt with the spiritual life of their parishioners, but temporal when dealing with the property of the church.¹⁰⁶ Parishes did take on the care of their poor through church collections and almsgiving in the pre-Reformation period, but this was very much considered part of its spiritual function.¹⁰⁷

The Reformation led to a significant curtailment of the ecclesiastical courts.¹⁰⁸ In addition, successive Tudor governments devolved responsibilities down to parish level, and to the 'middling sort' of people within them, which led to an emergent 'civil parish', a parish responsible not just for the good of men's souls, but for the good management of their secular existence.¹⁰⁹

Notably the first piece of Tudor legislation concerning poor relief in 1531 required JPs and Mayors to act to license begging for the impotent poor and punish able-bodied vagrants with whipping behind carts. No jurisdiction was given to parishes.¹¹⁰ Significantly, however, the Corporation of London acted in 1533 to organise *all parishes* to make a regular of collection of alms.¹¹¹ It was a Corporation in the City of London that was the first to impose a compulsory poor rate in 1547, and legislation enabling parishes to do this was passed five years later in 1553. Colchester and Ipswich set rates in 1557.¹¹²

A subtle, but significant, change in the authority of towns corporate over matters concerning poor relief within their boundaries can be traced through the sixteenth century legislation. The 1536 legislation concerning vagabonds and beggars is considered the earliest iteration of the idea that parishes should be responsible for collecting and providing alms, or work, to the poor who had a claim to belong there.¹¹³ However, the legislation actually lists a number of types

¹⁰⁶ Baker, *Legal History*, pp.129-130.

¹⁰⁷ C. Dyer, *Age of Transition? Economy and Society in England in Later Middle Ages*, (Oxford, 2005) argues that the transition from personal spiritual good to community improvement can be seen much earlier, after 1350.

¹⁰⁸ R.H. Helmholz, *The canon law and ecclesiastical jurisdiction from 597 to the 1640s* (Oxford, 2004) pp.237-241.

¹⁰⁹ Historiography of this process goes back at least to the Webbs, *The Parish and the County* (London, Longman, 1906), but a good recent overview is S. Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, 1550-1640*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002).

¹¹⁰ N.L. Kunze, 'The Origins of Modern Social Legislation: The Henrician Poor Law of 1536' *Albion: A Quarterly journal concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 3/1, (Spring 1971) pp.9-29 (22 Hen. VIII c 12).

¹¹¹ Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, p.118.

¹¹² McIntosh, *Poor Relief*, p.116.

¹¹³ See Kunze and McIntosh.

of authorities who should take responsibility for this; referencing various regional differences such as wapentakes and ridings, but also encompassing a rural/urban split by suggesting 'Cities, Shires, Townes' as being the units for delivery.¹¹⁴ Thus it is the chief officer of each of these units which has responsibility for delivery; these covering a variety of authorities and sources of authority. They are listed thus:

every Maier Alderman Shireffe Bailiffe Constable and all other hed officers and Ministers of every Countie Citie Towne and Parisshe within this Realme.¹¹⁵

Section 4 of the legislation allows for them to make collections under the following headings:

Maiers, Gov'nours and hede officers of evry Citie Borough and Town corporate, and the Church Wardens or two others of every Parisshe of this Realme.¹¹⁶

The Mayor and aldermen are given authority to collect and administer alms, and put the poor to work, through their position as 'hed officer' of the town. This is clearly a different set of authorities to the parish authorities elsewhere, where it is the churchwarden and two others. This statute seems not to have been enacted and was superseded, and restated, in the 1552 legislation. This allowed for collectors for the poor to be appointed by, and give account to the

Maier of the Citie, Bailef or hedd Officers of the Boroughe or Town corporate, and in everie Parishe of the Countreye to the Parson, Vicar or Curate and Churchwardens of the Paryshe.¹¹⁷

Again, the urban 'hedd officers' have authority in urban areas in a separate way to the Vicar and churchwardens of the parish. There is an obvious confusion here as to how parishes are supposed to operate in towns, did the city authorities replace them in this respect? Or direct them? This split is reiterated in 1563 when

in everie Citie Boroughe and Towne Corporate, the Mayor Bailiefes or other Head Officers for the tyme being, and in everie other Parishe of the Countrey the Parson Vycare or Curate and Churchwardens¹¹⁸

are instructed to prepare a book of inhabitants, and of the poor. The inhabitants were to be persuaded to give by the collectors, and those refusing to do so were to be sent to bishop. The bishop, if he could not persuade them could then send them to the local JP's outlined thus:

¹¹⁴ (27 Hen. VIII, c 25) Act for Punishment of Sturdy Vagabonds and Beggars.

¹¹⁵ (27 Hen. VIII, c 25, s1).

¹¹⁶ (27 Hen. VIII, c 25, s4).

¹¹⁷ (5 and 6 Ed. VI c 2, s4) Act for the Provisyon and Relief of the Poore.

¹¹⁸ (5 Eliz. I, c 3, s6) Act for the Relief of the Poor.

of the Countye where the same person shall then inhabyte and dwell, if it bee out of any Citie Borouge or Town Corporate, and yf it bee within any Cittie Borough or Town Corporate, then before the Mayours Bailefes or other Head Officers within every suche City, Borough or Towne Corporate.¹¹⁹

It may be implicit in this legislation that the reason why such wrongdoers are being sent to the Mayor or head officers, in the town is because they are also a JP (although not all of them were), but this is not stated, and something of the authority of the mayor being derived from his position as chief urban officer more strongly implied. Mayors were also exhorted to persuade a rich parish within its boundaries to support a poorer one.

In 1575 the Acte for setting the poore on worke fudged the issue, by mentioning JPs in a list

‘in every Cyttye and Towne Corporate wthn this Realme, (a stock of wool to be provided) by th’appointemente and Order of the Maior Bayliff Justis or other Head Officers having Rule in the said Cytyes or Townes Corporate’.¹²⁰

By the 1598 legislation there was an important shift in the wording, and the whole architecture of the legislation. The act talks only in terms of churchwardens and overseers in parishes and JPs until section 8, when it states

And be yt further enacted That the Maiors Bayliffes or other Head Officers of every Corporate Towne within this Realme **being Justice or Justice of Peace** shall have the same aucthority by virtue of this Acte within the lymitt and precynct of their Corporacons as well owte of Sessions as at there Sessions, as is herein limied prescribed and appointed to any of the Justice of Peace in the County for all the uses and purposes in this Act prescribed.¹²¹ (emphasis mine)

This is important. The mayor and corporation no longer have authority over poor relief *ex officio* as mayor and leading official of the town, but clearly as a JP, acting in the same way as the JP of the county. This makes the system much more coherent; with parishes within a town to operate in the same way as parishes in the county; and the same hierarchy of overseer and JP to operate in the town as in the country. This did, of course, cause a potential problem for those parishes which were not co-terminous with boroughs; which JP was to administer them? This is anticipated in the following section

if it shall happen anie Parishe.....to lye within the Libties of anie Citye or Town Corporate and party without, That then as well the Justice of the Peace of every County, as also the Heade Officers of such Citye or Towne Corporate, shall deale and intermeddle only in so muche of the saide Parishe as lyeth within there Liberty and not any further.¹²²

¹¹⁹ (5 Eliz. I, c 3, s7).

¹²⁰ (18 Eliz. I, c 3, s4) An Acte for the setting of the Poore on Worke, and for the avoiding of Ydlenes.

¹²¹ (39 Eliz. I, c 4, s8) Act for the Relief of the Poor.

¹²² (39 Eliz. I, c 4, s9).

Jurisdiction was to be shared. The role of the bishop had been dropped completely, and the JPs were to have total control. The 1601 legislation follows the same formula. The Act talks only in terms of parishes, churchwardens, overseers and JPs, and then adds sections exactly as above, even down to them being at the same section number within the Acts.¹²³ Thus the 1598 and 1601 legislation represent an important shift in relief administration in towns, with the unit of delivery clearly being the parish, and the mayor and corporation's role relegated to authorisation and appeal, as it was in the counties, through their role as JPs.

It is more complicated, of course, to establish how this shift operated on the ground. It is tempting to speculate that towns corporate became a lot more 'hands off' and allowed parishes the day-to-day administration of poor relief, confining themselves more to the supervisory role of the JP. However more work would need to be done on individual towns and the impact on the ground. Some were to push back and try to re-establish town-wide control.¹²⁴

The shift over the sixteenth century is clear; ecclesiastical authority, in the person of the bishop, disappeared and the parish emerged as a civil unit running the day-to-day administration of poor relief. Alongside this towns were no longer, almost, separate fiefdoms, where the mayor and aldermen managed all aspects of poor relief because they were the head officers in the town. They became part of a wider coherent system of parishes managed by JPs, where the mayor's authority came from him being a JP. Parishes gained more functions, in rate setting, collection and putting the poor to work across the piece. The 1598 legislation was the watershed in this respect, and it is understandable that Slack should single it out saying

The Poor Relief Act of 1598 gave power, as well as responsibility to the parishes.¹²⁵

The personal rule of Charles I saw an augmentation of the JP role with the insistence in the Book of Orders that JPs should meet monthly with Overseers of the Poor, among others

and there inquirie shall be made, and information taken by the Justices, how every of these officers in their several places have done their duties.¹²⁶

¹²³ (43 Eliz. I, c 2, s8 and 9) Act for the Relief of the Poor.

¹²⁴ See 'Corporations for the Poor' p.43, below.

¹²⁵ Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, p.128.

¹²⁶ Carolingian Book of Orders, 1630 as quoted in Eden, i, p156. Books of Orders were sets of instructions, predominantly on poor relief, issued to JPs across the country during the suspension of Parliament. See Ch. 4 for more detail.

The Justices were to report to the High Sherriff, the High Sherriff to the Assizes and the Assizes to the Lords Commissioner. JPs were reminded of their role in ensuring that poor rates were adequate, and weaker parishes were to be helped by stronger ones.¹²⁷ Early research into this period, and the Commonwealth, had considered that poor relief had collapsed, but work in the last fifty years or so has shown that in the personal rule, at least, poor relief was quite efficiently managed.¹²⁸ This regime lasted only ten years however, and there is considerable debate as to how far these innovations made any long-lasting difference. At least one commentator considers that this innovation established

An additional, ubiquitous and permanent tier in the organizational structure of local government.¹²⁹

Although this is not widely accepted, and the likelihood is that maintenance of this tier of responsibility altered considerably from place to place.¹³⁰

The period of the Civil War and subsequent Commonwealth (1642-1660), was to see a deal of experimentation and ideological debate about the administration of poor relief in districts, much of which took power and authority away from the Anglican parishes and toward governing corporations.¹³¹ The Restoration saw a drift back to the parish as the governing unit of poor relief, bolstered through legislation.¹³² The Act for the Better Relief of the Poor of this Kingdom, 1662 underscored a parish of legal settlement as the proper responsible unit for an individual claimant.¹³³ This provided that all JPs had the right to remove paupers likely to be chargeable to a parish to their latest parish of settlement, on appeal from the overseers. Legislation in 1685 and 1691 while tweaking the qualification for settlement, did little to change this JP role. It was the Act for Supplying Defects in 1697 which required the production of a certificate by people moving from one parish to another which augmented the JP role by making them responsible for signing off the newly-introduced settlement certificates.¹³⁴

¹²⁷ Ibid, p158.

¹²⁸ V. Pearl, 'The London Workhouse 1649-1660', in D. Pennington, and K. Thomas (Ed), *Puritans and Revolutionaries*, (Oxford, 1978) pp.206-232.

¹²⁹ H. Langeluddecke, Law and Order in seventeenth-century England: The organisation of local administration during the Personal Rule of Charles 1' *Law and History Review*, Vol. 15/1 (Spring 1997) pp.49-76, p.52.

¹³⁰ A. Fletcher, *Reform in the Provinces: The Government of Stuart England* (Yale, 1986) pp.186-7, although Sharpe thinks this 'goes too far'. K. Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles 1*, (Yale, 1995) p.447.

¹³¹ See 'Early Corporations of the Poor' below, p.43.

¹³² Although this was resisted in many towns, see 'Corporations of the Poor' below.

¹³³ (14 Car. II c 12), An Act for the better Reliefe of the Poore of this Kingdom, 1662. Also known as the Settlement and Removal Act, 1662.

¹³⁴ (8 and 9, Will III, c 30) An Act for supplying some defects in the Laws for the Relief of the Poor of this Kingdom, For more detail on the development of the laws of settlement see Ch.4, p84.

Thus, at the opening of the long eighteenth century the responsibility of 'boroughs corporate' for poor relief within the town was tightly legislatively bound. The parishes had the initiative, and would set the rate and collect it, while the overseer would make most of the decisions on a day-to-day basis as to who was to get relief, and who not. The JPs were the court of appeal, and had to approve settlements, removals and rates. They could also instruct one parish to support another. Mayors and aldermen, *as the corporation*, had lost what authority they may have had in the sixteenth century. Town authorities did not lose all their initiative however; they still had huge charity budgets, and control over the price-management machinery. The powerful oligarchies of the corporation were to prove reluctant to hand this powerful tool, not only in promoting the 'common weal' of the town, but also in the ideological warfare between Whig and Tory, over to the Anglican parishes. In many towns the deeply felt ideological differences of the time fed into a power struggle to wrestle their initiative over poor relief back from the vestries.

7. Legislating for cooperation: Corporations of the Poor and Unions of Parishes.

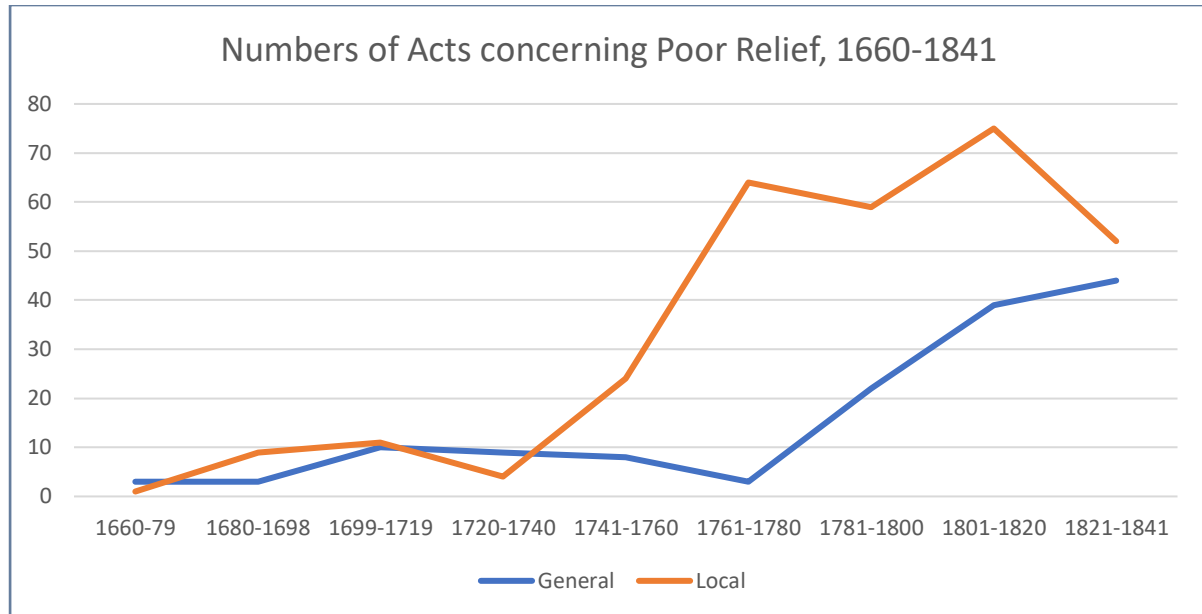
Corporation towns were, as has been shown, run by powerful urban elites from the 1580s on well into the eighteenth century. The restoration period had seen many of them newly-chartered but riven by the factional politics of Whig and Tory, dissenter and Anglican, court and country. The parochial nature of poor relief, as enshrined in the 1601 legislation and reinforced in 1662 with parish-based settlement, could present as a barrier to rational, town-wide governance. Corporation elites, which had in the past managed all aspects of relief and control of the poor from the centre had seen their *de facto* powers dwindle to that of a court of appeal, while the real day-to-day decisions were being made at overseer and vestry level. Quite quickly, in some urban environments, the competitive nature of poor relief provision between parishes led to costly litigation between parishes and prolonged disputes about which pauper belonged where.¹³⁵

The period from the second half of the seventeenth century through to the 1777 was to see nearly half of the corporations of England and Wales attempt to centralise and rationalise their poor relief provision, predominantly through the provision of one central workhouse.¹³⁶ This was mostly done by private, local Acts of Parliament; although after 1782 some towns used the

¹³⁵ E.E. Butcher, *Bristol Corporation of the Poor 1696-1834* (Bristol, 1932) p.3.

¹³⁶ Committee for Overseers Returns, 'Report from the Committee appointed to inspect and consider the Returns made by the Overseers of the Poor.' (HC, 1777) No. 9, (Gilbert's Report) shows 106 out of 232 corporation towns with single workhouses. See p.52.

mechanism provided in Gilbert's Act of simply voting for such provision. Analysis of legislation from 1660-1832 concerned with poor relief shows a general increase in private legislation in the second half of the eighteenth century, although this covers rural as well as urban areas.



*Fig 2- 4: Figures from Thompson (2014).*¹³⁷

Numbers of local acts, most of which created incorporations or unions of parishes, accelerated after the mid 1720s. Knatchbull's Act was to provide something of a watershed in this respect, and it is worth charting the philosophical progression that corporations and unions of parishes made over this time.¹³⁸

8. 1647-1723: Early Corporations of the Poor.

The radical thinking and social experimentation of the Revolutionary and early Commonwealth period is a well-documented phenomenon.¹³⁹ One of the most influential writers and thinkers of this period was Samuel Hartlib, around whom an illustrious circle of philosophers, scientists and social reformers gathered.¹⁴⁰ He published a series of pamphlets in the 1640s which

¹³⁷ S.J. Thompson, 'Population Growth and Corporations of the Poor, 1660-1841' in C. Briggs, P. M. Kitson, S.J. Thompson (Eds), *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain, 1290-1834* (Martlesham, 2014) p.273.

¹³⁸ (9 Geo. I c 7) An Act for amending the laws relating to the Settlement, Employment and Relief of the Poor.

¹³⁹ From C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London, 1972) to J. Healey, *The Blazing World* (London, 2023) pp.262-283.

¹⁴⁰ M. Greengrass, *Hartlib, Samuel (1600-1662)* ODNB <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12500> [accessed 27th May 2021]. Staunchly protestant, with a decidedly millenarian flavour, he was committed to the idea of setting up perfect, godly communities, through the medium of shared science, learning and education. Milton dedicated his 1644

outlined his vision for ideal communities which would provide education for poor children, and work and support for poor adults.¹⁴¹ London was an early adopter of his vision with an interregnum ordinance establishing 'The Corporation of the Poor of the City of London' in 1647.¹⁴² The establishment of this Corporation of the Poor fell under the radar for so long that the Royal Commission in 1843 could assert that no Corporation had actually been set up under this statute.¹⁴³ This is clearly not the case, as reports from this Corporation exist, one from 1655 stating that it took care of 100 children.¹⁴⁴ The Restoration saw its comprehensive reorganisation, abandoning much of the original model.¹⁴⁵ It was completely restructured in the Settlement and Removal Act 1662¹⁴⁶ and another Corporation was established in 1698 which many London parishes resisted and petitioned against in 1699.¹⁴⁷

Hartlib's work has been dismissed as an 'interregnum experiment'.¹⁴⁸ However an ideological thread can be seen of dissenting zeal and anti-court and anti-high Anglican sentiment in the establishment of most other Corporations of the Poor at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century.

The next, and much more formative, Corporation of the Poor was established in Bristol in 1696. This seems primarily to have been the work of a Bristol merchant, John Cary.¹⁴⁹ Cary was a radical Whig, who wrote extensively on a variety of topics, mostly concerning trade, and believed that the parish was not a rational unit upon which to base poor relief in a city or township. He believed that, through the mismanagement by parish authorities, poor children

treatise *On Education* to him and he was a tireless advocate for the parliamentary cause during the Civil War. He received a parliamentary pension in 1649. The Restoration saw him fall out of favour, and his pension removed, he died in reduced circumstances in 1662.

¹⁴¹ S. Hartlib, *Londons charitie stilling poor orphans cry, providing places and provision, by the care and indeavour of the Corporation appointed by Parliament* (London, 1649); *The Parliaments Reformation Or a worke for Presbyters, Elders and Deacons, to engage themselves for the education of all poore Children, and imployment of all sorts of poor, that no poore body of young or old may be enforced to beg within their classes in City or County* (London, 1646).

¹⁴² Ordinance for the relief and employment of the poor, and the punishment of vagrants and other disorderly persons. [L.], ix., 580–1.] Table of acts: 1647', in C. H. Firth, R.S. Rait, (Ed) *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, (London, 1911), pp. l-lix. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/l-lix> [accessed 6 July 2023].

¹⁴³ S. Webb and B. Webb, *Statutory Authorities for special purposes* (London, 1922) p.110.

¹⁴⁴ Anon, *The Report of the Governours of the Corporation for imploying and Releiving the Poor of this City of London and Liberties thereof* (London, Flesher, 1655).

¹⁴⁵ (14 Car. II, c12 s4-13) An Act for the better Releife of the Poore of this Kingdom.

¹⁴⁶ (14 Car. II, c12 s14) The Webbs say the Corporation 'continued in existence' through to the eighteenth century, merely being reorganised by this legislation (S. Webb and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History, Part 1. The Old Poor Law* 2nd Edition, (London, 1963) p.118, n1). Pearl talks of it as being a new establishment in 1698. V.Pearl, 'The London Workhouse', *Puritans and Revolutionaries* (Oxford, 1978) p.231. The section of the 1662 Act reads as a continuation of an existing Corporation, but with completely new governors and organisation.

¹⁴⁷ *CJ*. Vol.13, 12th Mar. 1699, p279. St. Sepulchre, St. Andrews Holborn, St. Brides, part of St. Martin's Ludgate presented a petition. Christchurch also objected.

¹⁴⁸ T. Hitchcock, 'The English Workhouse: A Study in Institutional Poor Relief in Selected Counties, 1696-1750' Unpublished PhD Thesis, Oxford, 1985, p11.

¹⁴⁹ Butcher, *Bristol Corporation*, p.1.

were left to be idle, and grew up of no value to the nation.¹⁵⁰ The legislation, passed in 1696, created a Corporation consisting of mayor and aldermen, and then representatives elected from the wards, not the parishes.¹⁵¹ The parishes had no representation, although they were still expected to collect the rate.¹⁵²

Hitchcock considers that the ideological underpinnings of Hartlib's experiment were different to that of Cary's; and it is certainly the case that Hartlib seems to have seen the schools and work communities as able deal with a range of problems.¹⁵³ The Bristol Corporation was for one hundred boys and one hundred girls respectively, who were fed, clothed and housed in two buildings and set to work. However in both cases their aim was the moral reform of the poor, and in both cases there was a firm belief that this approach was more rational and scientific than the small-scale and competitive complications of the parish-based Elizabethan poor law. In both cases these ideas came from 'learned' merchants, who applied scientific and mercantilist principles to economic and social reform, the one a Parliamentarian at the time of the Civil War, and the other a staunchly anti-Catholic Whig. Slack considers that the motivations behind the Corporations of 1647 and 1696 'are recognizably the same historical animal.'¹⁵⁴

The 'Whiggish' and dissenting sympathies of the legislation can be seen in a clause specifically designed to suspend the Test Act with relation to members of the Corporation of the Poor.¹⁵⁵

no..officer, who shall be elected..by Virtue of this Act..shall be liable, for any of the Penalties mentioned in an Act made the Twenty fifth year of the reign of King Charles the Second, for the preventing the Dangers which may happen from Popish Recusants.¹⁵⁶

Archer is clear on the impetus behind the Bristol Corporation,

proposals for the centralization of poor relief in corporations of the poor often originated, as at Bristol in 1696, among Whigs anxious to bypass Tory-controlled vestries.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁰ K. Morgan, *Cary, John (1649-1719)* ODNB (2004) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/4840> [accessed 27th May 2021].

¹⁵¹ (7 and 8, Will. III, c32) An Act for erecting of Hospitals and Work-houses within the Citty of Bristoll for the better imploying and maintaining the Poor thereof .

¹⁵² Butcher, *Bristol Corporation* p.2.

¹⁵³ Hitchcock, 'The English Workhouse', p.9.

¹⁵⁴ P. Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement, Public Welfare in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1998) p.103.

¹⁵⁵ (25 Car. II, c2) An Act for preventing dangers which may happen from Popish Recusants, 1673 (Test Act), extended the Corporation Act's requirements of the Oath of Supremacy to all civil and military offices.

¹⁵⁶ This clause appeared in eight acts, as referenced in Fig 2. 4, Hitchcock, *The English Workhouse*, p.21.

¹⁵⁷ Archer, 'Politics and Government 1540-1700,' *CUHB*, ii, p260.

The plans were controversial in Bristol. The purges and re-chartering of the previous years had led to bitter Tory and Whig feuding on the Corporation, and John Cary was an ascerbic character.¹⁵⁸ While the Whigs had domination of Bristol Corporation by the time the Corporation of the Poor was established, the Mayor, John Hine refused to set a rate; and it was only his retirement that removed this blockage.¹⁵⁹ The parishes were also reluctant to collect a rate that they were supposed to hand straight over to the City. Later legislation to establish a Corporation of the Poor in Tiverton was used to add a clause allowing distraint of goods in such circumstances, but it was only the inclusion of the churchwardens on the Corporation in 1714 which finally brought them onside with the system.¹⁶⁰

John Cary was an effective evangelist for the Bristol experiment; publishing pamphlets and lobbying Parliament on its operation.¹⁶¹ It was followed by thirteen further pieces of legislation, many for towns and cities in the West Country. Seven further pieces of legislation contained the clause suspending the application of the Test Act (Table 2-1).

Table 2- 1, Legislation for the Corporations for the Poor 1698-1712. Towns in italics had clauses suspending the Test Act.¹⁶²

Town	Year	Regnal Number
<i>Bristol</i>	1696	7-8 Will. III, c 32.
Crediton	1698	9 Will. III c 17.
<i>Tiverton</i>	1698	9 Will. III, c 18
Exeter	1698	9 Will. III, c 33.
<i>Hereford</i>	1698	9 Will. III, c 34.
<i>Colchester</i>	1698	9 Will. III, c 37.
<i>Hull</i>	1698	9 Will. III, c 47.
Shaftesbury	1698	9 Will. III, c 48

¹⁵⁸A. Hanham, 'Bristol Borough' in D. Hayton, E. Cruickshanks, S. Handley (Ed) *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1690-1715* (London, 2002), p200, <http://historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/constituencies/bristol> [accessed 9 September 2022].

¹⁵⁹ Butcher, *Bristol Corporation*, p4. Little is known about Mr. Hine, other than that he was a sugar-baker, it is not even clear that he was a Tory, and it may have been a personal antipathy. <http://www.davenapier.co.uk/mayors/mayors.htm> [accessed 7 July 2023].

¹⁶⁰ (13 Anne, c 13 s 4) 'An Act for making more effectual and Act passed (in 1696) intituled An Act for erecting of Hospitals and Workhouses within the City of Bristol for the better employing and maintaining the Poor thereof' Butcher, *Bristol Corporation*, p.5.

¹⁶¹ J. Cary, *Account of Proceedings of the Corporation of Bristol, in execution of the Act of Parliament for the better employing the poor of that City* (London, 1700) and *A proposal offered to the Committee of the Honourable House of Commons Appointed to Consider of Ways for the Better Providing for the Poor and Setting them on Work* (London, 1700).

¹⁶² Hitchcock, 'The English Workhouse', p.15.

<i>King's Lynn</i>	1700	12-13 Will 3 c6
<i>Sudbury</i>	1700	1 Anne c 32.
Gloucester	1702	1 Anne, (session 2) c 10.
Worcester	1704	2 and 3 Anne, c 8.
<i>Plymouth</i>	1708	6 Anne, c 46.
Norwich	1712	10 Anne, c 15.

Most also followed the Bristol plan for elections to the Corporation being from the wards, not the parishes. As Hitchcock says

the parish as an administrative unit for relief was almost completely circumvented.¹⁶³

These two hallmarks, the suspension of the Test Act, and the circumvention of the Anglican parish structures reflect the distinctly dissenting and 'country' party nature of this movement in its early years. 'Whiggish' politics were, however, soon to move more 'mainstream' and pro-Anglican. Slack notes that several of the later incorporations did not suspend the Test Act, notably Worcester and Norwich which were controlled by Anglican Tories. By this time they were 'not always potential Trojan horses of municipal dissent.'¹⁶⁴

The Glorious Revolution and the early years of William and Mary's reign were reliant on a complex balancing act among their supporters between support for monarchy and church, while having been responsible for the overthrow of a legitimate monarch. A narrative of illegitimacy on the part of James II was developed based not only on his Catholicism, but also on a supposed association between that and the corrupt and decadent behaviour of his court. Thus it became important for William and Mary to establish themselves as the champions of Godly behaviour and moral reformation, which was attractive not only to the dissenting movement, but also to a growing evangelical wing in the Anglican church.¹⁶⁵

There is considerable historical debate as to whether the 'reformation of manners' movement of the 1690s was centred around the Court reformation movement or was actually instigated by a more critical and rigorous dissenting group from the provinces.¹⁶⁶ The reform of the morals of the poor was central to this, and the correction of their idleness and godlessness was most

¹⁶³ Ibid, p.22

¹⁶⁴ P. Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement*, p.109.

¹⁶⁵ T. Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution* (Cambridge, 1996), p.91.

¹⁶⁶ See, for example, Claydon, *Godly Revolution*, v D. Hayton, 'Moral reform and country politics in the late seventeenth century House of Commons' *Past and Present*, Vol. 128, (1990) pp.48-91.

easily done through the provision of workhouses. The King, in various speeches to Parliament, exhorted the reform of the Poor Law to this end.¹⁶⁷ The support of the King helped to move the workhouse movement out of the world of dissenters and into a more mainstream Anglican world. Anglican bishops had initially been very cautious about Reformation of Manners societies, but by the end of the nineties they had become active supporters.¹⁶⁸ Slack sees a correlation between the establishment of Manners societies in urban areas, and the foundation of later Corporations, although the numbers are so small as to not rule out coincidence.¹⁶⁹

Efforts were made at a national level to make it easier for Corporations of the Poor to be founded without need for separate legislation; simply on the instigation of JPs, using existing structures of corporation towns or counties. A bill was introduced in the 1699-1700 session for a Corporation of the Poor in every 'City, Borough, Town Corporate and Market Town' as well as through combinations of rural parishes.¹⁷⁰ The bill failed to pass in this, and a subsequent session. Considering the royal support and the widespread recognition of the need to reform this failure seems surprising. Hitchcock puts this down to organized opposition which considered Corporations of the Poor too costly, and workhouses merely cheap undercutting for local industry, it would have 'taken the trade out of the Industrious hand and have put it into the Slothful and unwilling.'¹⁷¹ The legislation was picked up in essentials by Sir Humphrey Mackworth. It passed all stages in the Commons but was defeated in the Lords in 1704. The economic argument for corporation workhouses had run out of steam with the dissenting and trade intelligentsia. Defoe, quintessentially a mouthpiece for trade and individual enterprise, said that setting the poor to work on new enterprises might be profitable but

to set poor people at work, on the same thing which other poor people were employ'd on before, and at the same time not increase the consumption, is giving to one what is taken away from another; enriching one poor man to starve another.¹⁷²

The Webbs considered that Defoe's pamphlet was a deciding factor in the defeat of Mackworth's bill,¹⁷³ while Slack judges that the legislation simply fell foul of contemporary opinion against large, complex, nationwide bills.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁷ Hitchcock, 'The English Workhouse', p.24.

¹⁶⁸ Claydon, *William III*, p.116.

¹⁶⁹ Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement*, p.112.

¹⁷⁰ *CJ*. Vol. 13, 7th February 1699, p184, second reading 'A Bill for the more effectual Employing the Poor and Encouraging the Manufactures of this Kingdom'.

¹⁷¹ Cockes, 1700, quoted in Hitchcock, 'The English Workhouse', p.49.

¹⁷² D. Defoe, *Giving alms no Charity and Employing the poor a Grievance to the Nation* 1st Edn, 1704 (London, 2004) p.15.

¹⁷³ S. Webb and B. Webb, *The Old Poor Law*, 1st Edn 1927 (London, 1963) p.116.

¹⁷⁴ Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement*, p.118.

The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), of which Mackworth was a founding member, had been established in 1699 with a specific evangelical brief of providing missionaries for the American colonies, founding Christian libraries in England and overseas, and for educating the children of the poor in literacy and Christian knowledge.¹⁷⁵ Hitchcock, whose thesis draws on the SPCK archive, considered them to be the fundamental driving force behind the workhouse movement in the early eighteenth century.¹⁷⁶ Here the movement is qualitatively different from the experiments of the seventeenth century. The SPCK was a staunchly Anglican organisation, which not only held itself aloof from dissenters, but saw it as something of its mission to convert them to Anglicanism. Thus it was much more prepared to work through the structures of the Anglican church and base its measures on the parish. The workhouse movement of the eighteenth century is generally called the 'parochial workhouse' movement, because most of these were small and parish-run.

There were only three more pieces of legislation after 1702 and before 1727 for Corporations for the Poor, their place as grand engines of prosperity run by towns and cities having been weakened as an idea. The SPCK and their chief workhouse evangelist, Matthew Marryott concentrated more on the parish as the focus for work-based reform of the poor. The SPCK had experience of establishing charity schools in the opening decades of the eighteenth century and followed this with advice to parishes on establishing workhouses.¹⁷⁷ Hitchcock suggests that towns with charity schools were more likely to establish workhouses, pointing out that 40% of towns doing so already had schools.¹⁷⁸ Simon doubts whether many of these schools were even established.¹⁷⁹ Knatchbull's Act of 1723 made it much easier for parishes to establish workhouses, and to co-operate, although not combine, with other parishes for that purpose.¹⁸⁰ The perceived failure of this initiative in some towns led to a fresh move for private legislation to unionise parishes. The Webb's considered that the lack of provision in the Act for combination was the incentive for another wave of local acts.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ S. C. McCulloch, 'The Foundation and Early Work of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge' *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Vol.18, (1949) pp.3-22, p.5.

¹⁷⁶ Hitchcock, 'The English Workhouse', p3.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p.122.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p.108.

¹⁷⁹ J. Simon, 'From charity school to workhouse in the 1720s: The SPCK and Mr. Marriott's solution' *History of Education*, Vol.18 (1988), pp.113-129, p.119.

¹⁸⁰ (9 Geo. I, c 7), An Act for amending the Laws relating to the Settlement, Imployment and Relief of the Poor, 1723.

¹⁸¹ S. Webb and B. Webb, *The Old Poor Law*, p.121.

The great ideological experiments of the late seventeenth century, devoted to the idea of the improvement of the poor through collective and profitable work did not completely disappear. Hitchcock notes the establishment of Quaker workhouses at the beginning of the eighteenth century influenced by the writing of John Bellars, devoted to setting up 'colledge (s) of industry'.¹⁸² However these were very much the exception, and the eighteenth century movement to 'parochial workhouses' was to gather pace from the 1720s onwards.

9. 1723-1810: Parochial workhouses and unions of parishes.

The motivation for later models of incorporation tended less to the great ideological experiments of London, or Bristol, and more toward pragmatic associations of parishes combining to set up workhouses to be able to apply a 'workhouse test' to keep poor rates down, as well as to afford permanent paid officers. Thompson's analysis of 15 petitions preceding 15 of the 149 acts for incorporation or unionisation over the course of the eighteenth century show a clear shift in their stated purpose from performing the moral reform and education of poor children to a general reception of the poor and keeping costs down.¹⁸³ Shrewsbury was quite explicit that the workhouse sat as a simple disincentive for fraud

our experience has demonstrated...that it is not necessary to furnish the employment for the great body of the poor at large; it is sufficient that you have it to offer to such applicants as allege the want of work in justification of their demands upon the parochial fund...Out of 7000 poor we have never had occasion at one and the same time, to furnish employment for half seven hundred¹⁸⁴

and an opportunity to establish professional management, as parish overseers were

obliged to relieve, because they cannot employ. Unacquainted likewise with their poor when they enter upon their offices, they are the dupes of their fraud and artifice. And when they begin to acquire a knowledge of their characters and dispositions, they are superseded by others.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² T Hitchcock (Ed) *Richard Hutton's Complaints Book: The Notebook of the Steward of the Quaker Workhouse At Clerkenwell, 1711-1737* (London, 1987) pp. bii-xxiii.

¹⁸³ C. Briggs, P.M. Kitson, C.J. Thompson, *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain, 1290-1834* (London, 2014) p.285.

¹⁸⁴ I. Wood, *The Annals of Agriculture*, Vol. 25, (Bury St. Edmunds, 1800), p158 quoted in S. Webb and B. Webb, *Statutory Authorities for Special Purpose*, 2nd Edn (London, Cass and Co, 1963) pp.119-120.

¹⁸⁵ I. Wood, *Some Account of the Shrewsbury House of Industry, its establishment and regulations; with hints to those who may have similar institutions in view.* (Shrewsbury, 1791) p.6.

These models normally gave more power to the parishes within boroughs and were often called 'United Parishes'.

A typical example is Oxford. The Act for the better regulation of the Poor within the City of Oxford was passed in March 1771.¹⁸⁶ The impetus appears to have been the collapse of existing voluntary collaboration.¹⁸⁷ It combined eleven of the thirteen parishes of the city, with representatives on a Board of Guardians elected from each parish, by show of hands at the vestry; amounting to thirty-four in all.¹⁸⁸ In addition the Mayor, aldermen, assistants, recorder, town clerk and solicitor were also *ex officio* on the Board of Guardians. However, certainly by the time of the report of the Poor Law Commissioners in 1843, it was considered that the Corporation representatives

take but little part at present in the proceedings of the (United Parishes).¹⁸⁹

A workhouse was built, although does not seem to have housed much more than 240 paupers at any one time, and out relief numbers, those supported outside of the workhouse, were greater.¹⁹⁰

In Salisbury, after the wealthiest parish, St. Thomas' had opted out of a previous co-operative arrangement to mutually support each other's poor, an Act was passed in 1770 to effectively merge all three parishes into one for the sake of poor relief administration.¹⁹¹ The officers of the United Parish were elected by the three historical parishes, and there was no borough representation.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁶ (11 Geo. III, c72).

¹⁸⁷ E. Chance, C. Colvin, J. Cooper, C. J. Day, T. G. Hassall, M. Jessup and N. Selwyn, 'Parish Government and Poor-Relief', in *A History of the County of Oxford: Vol. 4, the City of Oxford*, ed. Alan Crossley and C R Elrington (London, 1979), pp. 342-350. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/oxon/Vol.4/pp342-350> [accessed 13 April 2021].

¹⁸⁸ Poor Law Commission 'Report on the Administration of Relief to the Poor in Oxford' in *The Ninth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales, 1843*, (C468), p.200.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid* p.200

¹⁹⁰ R. Dyson, 'Welfare provision in Oxford during the latter stages of the old poor law 1800-1834', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 52 (2009), pp.943-962. The workhouse was situated in Wellington Square, now the site of the central administration of the University.

¹⁹¹ (10 Geo. III, c 81) An Act for consolidating the Rates to be made for the relief of the Poor of the respective Parishes St. Thomas, St. Edmund and St Martin in the city of New Sarum.

¹⁹² E. Crittall, (Ed) 'Salisbury: City government, 1612-1835', in *A History of the County of Wiltshire: Vol.6*, (London, 1962), pp. 105-113. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/wilts/Vol.6/pp105-113> [accessed 1 June 2021].

In rural areas the move towards incorporation had been hindered by the unwieldy and poorly co-ordinated nature of rural parishes. Thus it was not until 1756 that such unions began to appear, and here they very much took the shape of the second phase of consolidation, in being more unions of rural parishes. The substantial landholders and JPs of the affected area were designated the Guardians of the Poor, and they would then in turn nominate Directors who would take the decisions.¹⁹³

Unification was by no means comprehensive. A survey of 1777 found that only 47% of corporation towns were operating a combined workhouse by that time (Table 2-2).

Unions of workhouses in corporations in England in 1777 ¹⁹⁴	
Corporation towns with workhouses	129
Corporation towns with single workhouses	106
Corporation workhouses of over 60 places	58

Table 2- 2: Workhouses established by 1777, the 1835 Municipal Corporations report estimated that there were 232 Corporation towns in England.¹⁹⁵

After 1782 Gilbert's Act provided further impetus for joint operation on the part of parishes, although some boroughs continued to pursue unification through private acts of Parliament. Indeed, Thompson has noted that 'just under half of all new local acts were passed after Gilbert's Act.'¹⁹⁶ A survey of 1844 found only 75 Gilbert Unions had been established, 61 of which were no longer in operation.¹⁹⁷

It is clear that most cities and towns in England had no Corporations of the Poor, United Parishes or Gilbert Unions. No fewer than ten counties have been identified where no unions of parishes or incorporations occurred at all.¹⁹⁸ Evidence from Salisbury and Oxford suggests that some only pursued legislation when existing voluntary working broke down. Consequently most urban areas operated by default on the existing relationships between JP and vestry.

¹⁹³ Webbs, *Statutory Authorities*, p.126.

¹⁹⁴ Committee for Overseers Returns, 'Report from the Committee appointed to inspect and consider the Returns made by the Overseers of the Poor.' (HC, 1777) No. 9, (Gilbert's Report).

¹⁹⁵ Royal Commission, 'Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Municipal Corporations in England and Wales', (HC, 1835) No. 116, pp.53-55.

¹⁹⁶ S. J. Thomson 'Population Growth and Corporations of the Poor, 1660-1841' in C. Briggs, P.M Kitson, (Ed) *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain, 1290-1834* (London, 2014) p276.

¹⁹⁷ 'A return of the data of the incorporation of all Gilbert Unions, whether dissolved or not' (HC, 1844) No. 578.

¹⁹⁸ Thomson "Population Growth", p.276. These were Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Cumberland, Monmouthshire, Northamptonshire, Rutland, Westmoreland, Yorkshire North Riding and Yorkshire West Riding.

10. The relationship between JP and vestry in eighteenth century boroughs.

Through the eighteenth century, broadly speaking, the Justices of the Peace maintained their strategic role; with their position generally strengthened by legislation in the mid-century.¹⁹⁹ There were some subtle differences between the powers of a JP in a borough and in a county. Firstly, in a borough, with only two or three JPs, appeals concerning settlement and removal had to go to a county session, under legislation from 1697 which stated that appeals would be heard

at the General or Quarter-Sessions of the Peace for the County, Division, or Riding, wherein the Parish, Township, or Place, from whence such poor Person shall be removed, doth lie.²⁰⁰

Typically two of the JPs would have signed off the removal or settlement in the first place, so were implicated in the initial decision.²⁰¹ A similar restriction on appeals against a rate was applied in 1743.²⁰² Here, crucially, it was at the appellant's discretion whether he or she wished to apply to the county rather than the borough.²⁰³ Such discretion specifically was only allowed in corporations which had less than four JPs. In the larger corporations rights of appeal were restricted to the borough, since the number of JPs were considered check and balance enough.²⁰⁴ Thus in most small urban areas while JPs could rule on levels of relief, since this decision was initially made by the overseers and vestry, they had less power than county magistrates as a court of appeal on settlement.

¹⁹⁹ (24 Geo. II, c 44) An Act for rendering Justices of the Peace more safe in the Execution of their Office and for indemnifying Constables and others acting in obedience to their warrants, 1750 and (26 Geo. II c 27) An Act to confirm certain Acts and orders made by Justices of the Peace being of the Quorum, notwithstanding any Defect in not expressing therein that such Justices of the Peace are of the Quorum, 1753. The Quorum had initially, in the mid 14c, been the JPs who were considered to be the most senior and learned in law who had to be present at Quarter Sessions. However by this time most JPs were members of the Quorum. E.Hasted, 'General history: Justices of the peace', in *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*: Vol. 1, (Canterbury, 1797), pp. 215-221. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-kent/Vol.1/pp215-221> [accessed 4 October 2022].

²⁰⁰ (8 and 9 Will. III, c 30) An Act for supplying some defects in the Laws for the Relief of the Poor of this Kingdom.

²⁰¹ Burn clarifies this with later case law: 'In the case of *Rex v Malden MII Ann Sett and Rem.*...., Where there is a town corporate that hath sessions of its own; and justices within that town make and order there, if the parties will appeal, they must appeal to the county sessions, and not to their own sessions, for then there would be an appeal *ab eodem ad eundem*, there being it maybe the same justices sitting who made the order, R. Burn, *The Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer*, Vol. 4 (London, 1830) p.836.

²⁰² (17 Geo. II c38 s4) An Act for remedying some defects in the Act made in the 43rd Year of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, intituled An Act for the Relief of the Poor.

²⁰³ (17 Geo. II c38 s5), 'Provided always that in all corporations...who have not four justices of the peace it shall and may be lawful for any person or persons....to appeal, **if he or they shall think fit**, to the next general or quarter session of the county' (my emphasis).

²⁰⁴ In 1819 a Bill to allow for appeals in Boroughs with 4 JPs or more was introduced but not successful.

In some urban areas parishes managed to bypass some of the roles of the local JP completely. Evidence given to the 1817 Select Committee on the operation of the poor laws referenced a 'friendly orders' scheme which had been developed between some of the inner London parishes.²⁰⁵ Mile End, Bethnal Green, Shoreditch, Bishopsgate and Whitechapel had developed a fast-track system between them whereby a certificate was issued signed only by the overseer, based on their examination of the pauper and cutting out the JP from the process. It is a strong possibility other parishes in urban areas developed similar shorthands and agreements, almost certainly with the agreement of the magistrates; but evidence for them is thin.

Conclusion

Boroughs corporate developed from small early medieval settlements through the economic activity of their merchants, and the need for successive monarchs to develop their fiscal and administrative infrastructures, devolving responsibility for tax collection and law enforcement. The upheavals of the sixteenth century accelerated a need for devolved governmental structures, whether parish or town, and created powerful corporation oligarchies, with narrow self-selecting governing groups. Suspicion of the politics and apparent independence of corporations in the seventeenth century led successive administrations to purge, reorganise and counter-purge these organisations. The outcome of this, against the background of the factional religious and political disputes of the nation, led to divided and intensely political corporations at the opening of our period.

Alongside this the need to develop a machinery for dealing with the apparent and visible problems of poverty and indigence, accompanied by concern about vagabonds and beggars, led to successive Tudor attempts to manage the situation by putting more responsibility on devolved structures. Initially towns were given responsibilities in a patchwork of systems, which relied on parishes where there were no towns; and still called in bishops and dioceses to oversee the system. The growing sophistication of the magistracy system through this time however led to an important and coherent shift in the 1598 legislation, placing responsibility on parishes throughout, with the mayoral layer of responsibility coming from their role as JPs, and with no place for waning ecclesiastical powers. This left a lot of the initiative for poor relief with individual parishes in the town.

²⁰⁵ Report from the Select Committee on the Poor Laws (HC, 1817) 462, p.32.

The factional politics, and religious divides, of the seventeenth century led to movements within towns to bypass the Anglican, and often Tory-controlled, vestry system all together, and put in place city, or town-wide, Corporations for the Poor. This movement lost energy in the early years of the eighteenth century, and unions were much more likely to be vestry-led and controlled organisations as the century progressed. Alongside this the complexity of compounded legislation through the eighteenth century led to opportunities for parishes to not only off-load their responsibilities onto other parishes, but also onto the JPs, who were the Mayor and other aldermen in the Boroughs.

Many towns organised themselves in the eighteenth century, through private legislation or using the powers given to them in legislation in 1723 and 1782, to overcome the obvious problems of competing parishes. Most towns and cities, however, did not have Corporations for the Poor, nor took the opportunity to unionise through the eighteenth century. Even some which did, only did so when other non-formal or cooperative models had broken down. Most urban areas in the eighteenth century operated their poor relief systems through informal means, consequent on their social and economic profile. These systems are poorly studied and will be the focus of the rest of this thesis.

Chapter 3

Political, social, and economic context of Reading and other sample boroughs.

Reading

1. Development of oligarchic rule, 1121-1650

Reading lies about 40 miles west of London, on the major routes west to Bath and Bristol, and north/south from Oxford to Southampton, it also straddles the River Kennet from the west and stretches up to the Thames, into which the Kennet falls, which flows down to London. These transport links have been the source of its prosperity since its foundations in the early Anglo-Saxon era.¹

Through the medieval period Reading was a seigniorial borough, controlled by a lord of the manor, the Abbot of Reading Abbey. Despite this, the Merchant Guild carried itself as a quasi-corporation, using the term 'mayor' for its chief officer, whom the Abbey studiously subordinated to Abbey officials, the steward and bailiff.² Admission to the Merchant Guild was by payment of an entry fee, which made a townsman a burgess and able to trade in the town. Rixon's work on the Guild membership in the fifteenth century shows that at no time were more than 13 per cent of burgesses the sons of burgesses.³ This implies a highly mobile and 'porous' structure, with many being 'foreigners' who had settled in the Borough. The most represented trades were mercers, drapers, weavers and 'royal servants'. More junior positions, in the wards, such as constable or collector seem to have, from time to time been held by non-burgesses.⁴ The

¹ C. Slade, 'Reading in Saxon and Danish Times' in M. Petyt, *The Growth of Reading* (Stroud, 1993) pp.1-30 is probably one of the best overviews of the early foundation of Reading.

² P. Rixon, 'The Town of Reading c1200-1542' (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1998) p.74.

³ Ibid, p.80.

⁴ J. Chick, 'Cloisters and Clothiers: The Social Impact of Reading's Transition from Monastic Lordship to Self-Governance, 1350-1600' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2020) p.87.

electorate was wider than just burgesses, both for MPs and mayor, with charters (after 1472) referring to the '*maior, conburgenses et communitas*', the mayor, community of burgesses and commonality.⁵ The commonality seem to have been householders.

The dissolution of the Abbey, and execution of the last Abbot, in 1539 was followed by a charter of incorporation in 1542.⁶ It gave the lands of the Abbey to the Crown, as well as income from Reading's fairs and markets. A town hall was found for the new Corporation in the dissolved Greyfriars' Friary on New Street.⁷ The guild became a corporation, and the mayor a JP. However, the lack of property and income made for an impoverished borough. The problem was assuaged eighteen years later, in 1560, when full control of the land and income of the town was handed to the Corporation, and the last vestiges of 'seigneurial' status abandoned.⁸ Reading still had a High Steward, but he was chosen by the burgesses.

The latter charter, reissued and regranted at various stages, was the effective blueprint for the governance of Reading until the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835. As with many charters of the Tudor period the ruling group became closed and self-selecting. Nine capital burgesses were named in the Charter one of whom was to be mayor. They would choose twelve secondary burgesses, who would themselves fill any vacancies in amongst the capital burgesses. Capital and secondary burgesses were in place for life.⁹ The wider burgess company and the commonality were excluded from elections for the mayor, capital and secondary burgesses.¹⁰ By 1578 the Corporation had moved to the rather grander surroundings of the old Abbey refectory.¹¹

While the total number of burgesses could be more than the nominated hierarchy set out in the 1560 Charter, Chick's analysis of named burgesses from the Corporation Diary shows that in practise the total number of burgesses declined over this period dwindling to about the number allowed to hold office (Fig3-1). This he puts down to the higher financial barriers put, mostly from 1554, in the way of becoming a burgess. It could also have been that the effective exclusion from voting for the position of Mayor or aldermen made the position less attractive to an

⁵ Chick, 'Cloisters', p.87.

⁶ J. Dils, *Reading, A History*, (Lancaster, 2019) p.68.

⁷ Modern Friar Street.

⁸ Dils, *Reading*, p.68; although much of the land had already gone into private hands (predominantly the Grays) by this time. See Ch.5, p150.

⁹ Ibid, p.76.

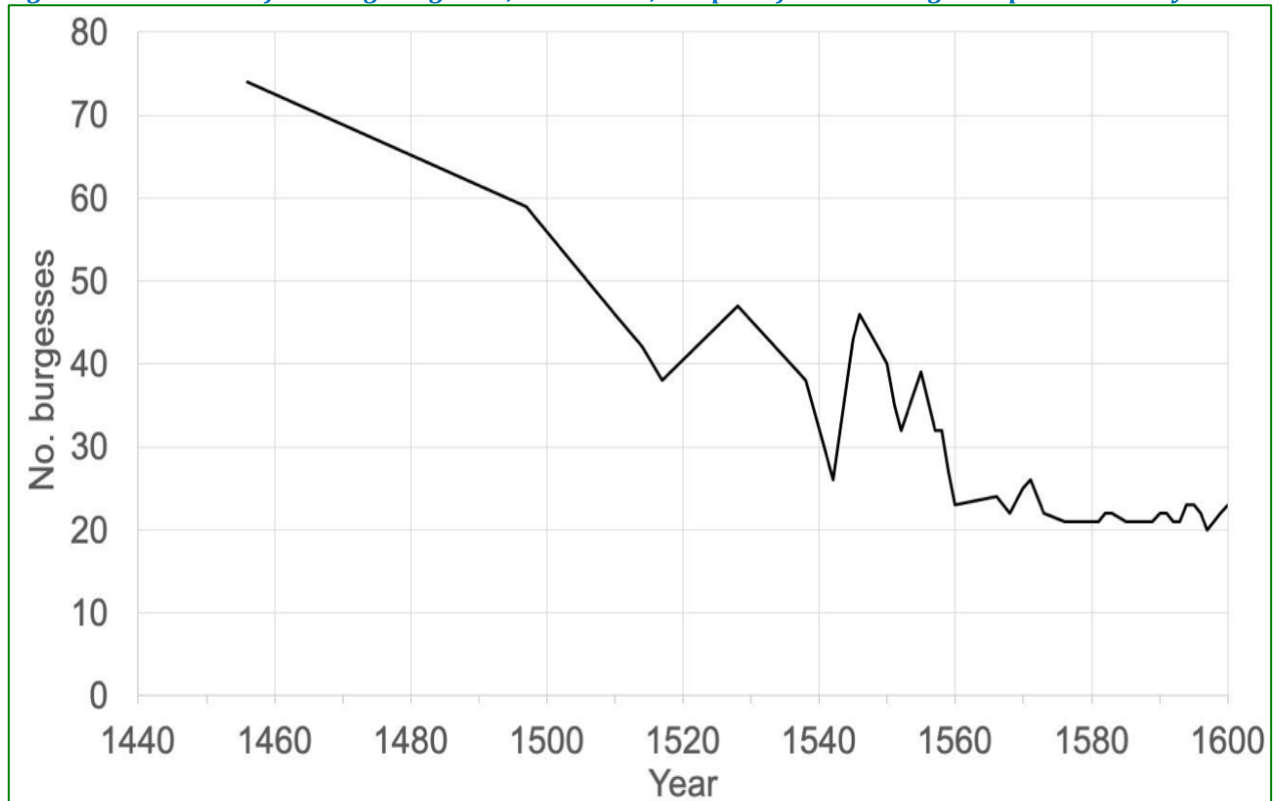
¹⁰ Custom developed to call the capital burgesses 'aldermen', while the secondary burgesses were known as 'burgesses'. Thus the governing body was the "Mayor, aldermen and burgesses".

¹¹ Dils, *Reading*, p.77. Although they did share the building with the boys' grammar school.

outsider. In addition, he notes the separating out of 'burgess-only' offices, such as MP and Mayor, and 'non-burgess' offices such as inspectors and wardens.¹²

The two MPs were now chosen by the burgesses although by custom the High Steward could nominate one. These were much more likely to be influential outsiders rather than Reading inhabitants as the sixteenth century wore on.¹³

Figure 3- 1: Number of Reading Burgesses, 1460-1600, compiled from Guilding's Corporation Diary¹⁴



¹² Chick, 'Cloisters', p.135.

¹³ Ibid, p.136.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.127.



Figure 3- 2: Wards and parishes of Reading in the eighteenth century

2. Reading in the seventeenth century.

In the middle of the seventeenth century Reading is estimated to have had a population of about 7,000.¹⁵ The town was divided between five civil wards and three ecclesiastical parishes (Fig. 3-2).¹⁶ The parishes consisted of St. Lawrence's, small and urban, covering the area around the marketplace and the old Abbey, and home to about 2,800 of the town's population, St. Mary's, the largest in area, but the least populated at this time with a population of 1,900, including as it did the estates of the Vachells, Blagraves and Knollys. Part of the manor of Southcote, with only 6 households, was in St. Mary's but sat outside of the Borough. The last was St. Giles' with about 2,500 population, stretching out along the Southampton and London roads and housing the poorest of the borough.¹⁷ Part of St. Giles, the hamlet of Whitley, lay outside the Borough of Reading until the late nineteenth century.

In 1638 the number of capital burgesses, called aldermen, was extended to 12.¹⁸ This was mainly because the longevity of existing aldermen was leading to a pronounced gerontocracy.¹⁹ Thus in the years leading up to the Civil War the Corporation was a small oligarchy of twenty-four aldermen and burgesses who had all the rights to replace themselves, choose a mayor and the MPs vested in them. In the first decades of the century familial names reappear, Harrison, Bateman, Turnour, Thorne, Knight, Bent and Kendricke.²⁰

The Civil War and the Commonwealth were to see intense religious and political divisions in the town, coupled with several economically, as well as socially, devastating occupations by Royalist and Parliamentary armies alike.²¹ The town was deeply riven by religious factions. The incumbency of St. Lawrence's church sat with John Pordage in 1645, a cult leader given to mysticism and prophecy, while that of St. Mary's sat with Christopher Fowler, a Scottish

¹⁵ N.R. Goose, 'Decay and Regeneration in Seventeenth Century Reading: A study in a changing economy,' *Southern History*, Vol. 6 (1984), pp.53-74. P.66. Goose uses baptismal records and assumes a rate of 33 baptisms per 1000, p.71.

¹⁶ <https://www.historictownstrust.uk/towns/reading> [accessed June 2022]

¹⁷ M. Brod, *The Case of Reading, Urban Governance in Troubled Times, 1640-1690* (Peterborough, 2006) p22. Brod based his calculations on Goose's formula, although his total is 7,200.

¹⁸ Brod, *Case of Reading*, p.6.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.7.

²⁰ Dils, *Reading*, p.77.

²¹ Brod, *Case of Reading*. C. Sampson, 'The Social and Economic Impact of the Civil War on the Population of Reading and its Surrounding Villages, 1642-1648', (Unpublished MSc Thesis, University of Oxford, 2015), J. Topazio, 'The Impact of the Civil War on Reading,' *Southern History*, Vol. 36, (2014) pp.1-28.

presbyterian who waged a long campaign against Pordage.²² In 1649 prominent Reading resident Christopher Cheeseman was imprisoned by Cromwell for his mystical and Leveller sympathies.²³

The nomination of MPs, once the straightforward choice of the aldermen, supported by the acclamation of the populace, became contested and bitter.²⁴ By the time of the Commonwealth the electorate had been declared by the radical republican Mayor, Joel Stephens, to sit with the 'commonality' an ill-defined group of well over a thousand. At the Restoration the governance of the town was staunchly republican, but purges under the Corporation Act, and later under James II, and then at the Glorious Revolution were to leave a weakened and broadly Anglican Corporation.²⁵ Dissension within the town had been brutally repressed by William Armorer, a JP forced onto the Reading bench.²⁶ It remained strong however with a significant dissenting population of 'hundreds' of 'severall sorts and conditions' reported in 1669, mostly in the Katesgrove area of St. Giles.²⁷ In 1679 the huge electorate was demonstrated when 1250 people turned out to vote overwhelmingly for the Whig candidate.²⁸ Large elements in the town celebrated the acquittal of Lord Shaftsbury in 1681, leading the Mayor to suppress the 'riotous and insolent' disorders.²⁹

Over the course of the century the economic profile of the town, like that of the country had also changed. In the first half of the century over 40% of the Reading workforce was employed in textiles.³⁰ In 1617 Reading was one of only twenty-three staple towns in the country. It was the great wealth produced by the wool industry which was to leave so many important charitable bequests to the town over this period. The textile industry (predominantly wool) was affected badly by shifts in fashion and cloth production in the 1620s, and unemployed textile workers were a continuing problem for the Corporation through the middle years of the century. By 1690 textiles employed under 28%. Food and drink meanwhile had gone from 12% to 20%.³¹

²² C. Fowler, *Daemonium Meridium*, (London, 1655) M. Brod, 'A radical network in the English Revolution: John Pordage and His Circle, 1646-54', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 119/484 (Nov 2004) pp.1230-1253. S. L. Green, 'Satan at Noon: John Pordage and the Politics of Heresy,' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Bristol, May 2021).

²³ Brod, 'Dissenters', p.147.

²⁴ In 1645, the election had to be rerun, with a count of the popular vote. Guilding, Vol. IV p167-168, In 1653 a similar dispute arose, with the regicide Daniel Blagrove returned. A. Aspinall et al, *Parliament through seven centuries, Reading and its MPs* (London, 1962) p.59.

²⁵ See Ch. 2 for the national background.

²⁶ Anon, *Persecution appearing with its own open face* (London, 1667), see Ch. 2 p.31.

²⁷ G.L. Turner, *Original Records of Early Nonconformity under persecution and indulgence* (London, 1911) p.112.

²⁸ Aspinall, *Parliament*, p.65. 1,893 to 810. Total derived from totaling all votes cast and dividing by 2.

²⁹ Brod, *Case of Reading*, p.87.

³⁰ Goose, 'Decay', p.60.

³¹ Ibid, p.60.

The depredations of the Civil War and the slow decline of the cloth industry had led to a decrease in population from 7000 in 1640 to 5,500 by the 1670s.³²

3. The responsibility of Reading Corporation for poor relief in the town up to 1700.

The Corporation Minutes from 1431 make no mention of a civic responsibility for the poor until 1544. Nor do the Guild Accounts from 1357-1516 make any mention of payments to the poor in their long lists of rents rolls and payments for building maintenance and administration.³³ The Abbey had extensive charitable functions in the town, from two hospitals, a school and complex arrangements for alms on feast days and other times, and clearly took the lead in charitable provision until its dissolution in 1539.³⁴ As in most towns non-monastic poor relief was a matter of voluntary donations, perhaps through a poor box in the parish church, or wills making provision for payments or doles on an anniversary.³⁵

Once the town received a proper incorporated charter, with the Mayor now a JP, in 1542 the situation rapidly changed. In 1544 the Corporation took on the management of John-a-Leche's almshouses.³⁶ In 1590 the Corporation moved from the old Greyfriars building, which it had been using as a town hall since the Reformation, and had it modified to a House of Correction and a workhouse to set the poor to work. It was agreed to provide stock and appoint officers and overseers 'convenient for that intent.....according to the fourme of the statute in that case provided'.³⁷ This was in response to the 1575 Act, and is a good example of the Mayor, and Corporation, taking responsibility for poor relief, since the decision is clearly made by the whole body of aldermen.³⁸ This is the 'head officers' of the town operating, not the magistrates.

Somewhere between 1602 and 1606 the accounts of the Corporation were divided between Charitable Uses and general Guildhall income.³⁹ Curiously we see in the general account the

³² Goose, 'Decay', p.66.

³³ C. Slade, *Reading Gild Accounts, 1357-1516*, (2 Vols., Reading, 2002).

³⁴ R. Baxter, *The Royal Abbey of Reading* (Woodbridge, 2016) pp.20-21 and B. Kemp, (Ed) *Reading Abbey Records, a new miscellany* (Hastings, 2018) pp.115-120. H. Mahmood, 'The Liminality of Care: Caring for the Sick and Needy on the Boundaries of Monasteries' *The Reading Medievalist*, Vol. 2 (Reading, 2015) pp. 50-70.

³⁵ J. Dils (Ed), *Reading St. Lawrence Churchwardens' Accounts 1498-1570* (Stevenage, 2013) p xli.

³⁶ Guilding, Vol. 1, p.189, also known as 'John a Larder'.

³⁷ Guilding, Vol. 1, p.403.

³⁸ (18 Eliz. I c 3). An Acte for the setting of the Poore on Worke and for the avoyding of ydlenes, 1575.

³⁹ There is a gap in the *Diary* from 1602 until 1622, from 1604 the record is taken up by an almost duplicate document called *The Register of the nomination, Election, Contynuaunce and Succession of the Mayor and Burgesses of the Boroughe of Readinge*, until 1622, when the *Diary* resumes. This makes the first mention of this separate account

sum of £5 that was a payment of 2/6d a week to the 'poore of St. Giles' for 40 weeks.⁴⁰ This would have been a useful addition to the rates for the time, compared to what the parish collected.⁴¹ A later entry says it is paid 'out of the tole' which may refer to a bridge toll from the nearby Seven Bridges.⁴² An indication of complexity of charitable funding at the time and difficulty to the historian of disentangling it from wider local government finance.

The early years of the seventeenth century saw a great deal of money bequeathed in one form or another to the Corporation of Reading, to be given out in charity. Much of this was at the discretion of the Mayor and Burgesses.⁴³ The power and influence such discretion could bring is fairly apparent. It was with this in mind that John Blagrove drew up his will of 1611. A nationally recognised mathematician he stipulated that a yearly award to 'one poore mayden' of twenty nobles (£6/13/4d) should be decided by lot 'the better to avoyde partiality in the choice of the saide maide'.⁴⁴ His suspicion of the probity of Corporation management of charitable bequests was well borne out in a bequest just thirteen years later.

John Kendrick was a wealthy London merchant who made his fortune dealing in cloth.⁴⁵ Having no children, he left his fortune predominantly to the town of his birth, Reading.⁴⁶ £7,600 was left for the establishment of a brick workhouse stocked with raw materials for the employment of the poor. From the beginning the administration of the workhouse seems to have been dogged by inefficiency and probable outright corruption. Slack considers that the corruption was so notorious that by 1631 the Carolingian Book of Orders' ordinance to establish a commission inquiring into local charities, was specifically established to investigate its running.⁴⁷

in 1606. It is quite possible it was established before this, but there is no mention in the Diary up to 1602. See Guilding, Vol. II, Preface.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.14.

⁴¹ In 1634-5, in the earliest surviving record of collection, St. Giles collected £70 from 129 ratepayers, for a 6 month period, amounting about £3 a week. J. Dils, *Redding 1540-1640* (Reading, 1980), p52.

⁴² Ibid, p.31.

⁴³ There were 46 bequests recorded between 1600-1650, including Kendrick's £8650 (£7600 of which was to go to the founding of a workhouse) Laud's £200 per annum, and Aldworth's £4000 for the founding of Bluecoat School. It is not feasible to calculate a straight total since some is in the form of yearly rents and housing, while others are just 'residue of estates'. In addition, there were one off 'gifts' to the Corporation, such as Mr. Packer's 10 quarters of corn for the poor of the town recorded in 1631. Guilding, Vol. III, p.85. Royal Commission, 'Report of the Charity Commissioners,' Vol. 32/1 (London, 1837), pp.15-56.

⁴⁴ NA/PROB/11/118/188, John Blagrove's Will, 1611.

⁴⁵ Kendrick was estimated to have made £12,000 in his life time. C. Jackson, 'Boomtime Freaks or Heroic Industrial Pioneers in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Berkshire,' *Textile History* Vol. 39/2, (2008) pp.145-171.

⁴⁶ NA/PROB/11/136/405, John Kendrick's Will, 1624, some money was also left to Newbury. C. Jackson, "The Kendrick Bequests: an Experiment in Municipal Enterprise in the Woollen Industry in Reading and Newbury in the Early Seventeenth Century.' *Southern History* Vol. 16, (1994) pp.44-66.

⁴⁷ P. Slack, 'Books of Orders: The Making of English Social Policy' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 30 (1980) pp.1-22, p.12. The commission seems only ever to have considered two issues, London Hospitals and the Kendrick bequest. When the Corporation were informed of the inquiry they held a meeting, the minute for which is simply 'Nihil factum suit sed multa verba', (nothing was done but much talking). Guilding, Vol. III, p85.

These problems were augmented by damage done to the fabric of the building during the various occupations of the Civil War, and the decline in the cloth trade from the 1630s onwards. By the end of the seventeenth century the building seems to have been mainly used by local tradespeople as extra workspace and warehousing. There is no parish record showing sending their poor there, although occasional names associated with parishes appear in the Corporation records as being placed there.⁴⁸ Stock and other items seem regularly to have gone missing, on quite an extensive scale.⁴⁹ In October 1689 the Corporation was issued with a subpoena by Christ's Hospital London, which stood to inherit the bequest should the Corporation be shown to be incompetent in its handling.⁵⁰ So lax was the governorship of the Workhouse that it took the subpoena to prompt the Mayor and aldermen to visit what had by now already garnered the name 'The Oracle' so that they 'could take the names of the inhabitantes there'.⁵¹

This seems to have prompted a fresh drive from the Corporation to reinvigorate the management of the facility. A collection of senior aldermen was nominated in 1695 to run the workhouse

to imploy twenty poor persons in (dyeing) who are upon the charge of the parishes here, having deposited into his hands two hundred pounds of Mr. John Kendrickes store of money upon his bond for repayment thereof, this is agreed on. Rooms in Mr Kendricks workhouse are to be assigned to by Mr. Francis Turrell, Mr. John Thorne, Mr Samuel Watlington, Mr. William Moore and Mr. Thomas Oades and Mr Francis Brown, or any four of them.⁵²

Within the minutes of the Corporation there are occasional nominees made to the Oracle from this point; yet neither of the sets of vestry minutes of both St. Lawrence's or St. Mary's for this time make any mention of nominating people for the workhouse in this period. Overseers' records for St. Mary's in the early eighteenth century show only payments for outdoor relief.⁵³ Arrangements could have been made verbally, or recorded in a now lost document of course, but the fact that the operation of the workhouse seems to make no impact whatsoever on the finances or administration of two of the vestries of the town would strongly imply that its functioning was sub-par at the opening of the eighteenth century.

The Corporation's relationship with the parishes regarding outdoor relief, however, seems to have been much more authoritative and functional. The Corporation minutes and petitions of

⁴⁸ Guilding, Vol. IV, p.534.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.527 'William Underwood declared that to his knowledge John Mihill had about 2 hundred-weight of lead in his custodie which did belong to Mr. Kendricke's workhouse'.

⁵⁰ BRO R/AC/1/1/18, Corporation Minutes, 21st October 1689.

⁵¹ BRO R/AC/1/1/18, 30th March 1691.

⁵² BRO R/AC/1/1/19, Corporation Minutes, 5th June 1695.

⁵³ BRO D/P 98 12/1-10.

the seventeenth century reflect an autocratic and quite didactic approach. Appeals directly to the mayor and consequent decisions instructing and overruling vestries are recorded occurring on average about once a year.⁵⁴ The nature of these interventions are in response to direct appeals from local people, whether as an initial application, or after a refusal or unsatisfactory decision from a parish. In the middle of the century poverty in the town was significant. Goose estimates that as many as two thirds of the population was exempt from Hearth Tax in 1664, and nearly 14% of the householders of St. Giles and St. Lawrence were on parish relief, with a great number more in receipt of private charity in the 1660s and 1670s. ⁵⁵

On the 15th May 1633 the Corporation ordered that the St. Giles overseers should support two children in the care of Widow Hobbes, even though she had moved to St. Lawrences.⁵⁶ In August 1637 the overseers of all three parishes are ordered to collectively support 'poore Butler', an order which was amended the following July to be simply St. Lawrences.⁵⁷ In August 1649 a petition from Widow Skinner resulted in an order to the St. Mary's overseers that she should receive an extra 5 shillings and a weekly allowance.⁵⁸ Many of the petitions strongly imply that the Corporation has been the first port of call for the petitioner. By the second half of the century the JPs simply send the appellants over to the overseers for their decision initially. In a series of decisions taken in December 1652 Charles Crowder's wife is advised to 'Repaire to the Overseers of the Poore of St. Maire's and make knowne her case'.⁵⁹ While Judith Johnson is dispatched to the Chamberlain of Charitable Uses for 3/4d towards her relief, Goody Brown has obviously a case against St. Giles and

Mr Mayor and Mr Burningham resolve to convent the Churchwardens and Overseers for the Poore there to shewe causes why they doe not relieve her. ⁶⁰

In October 1653 St. Mary's overseers were sent a warrant to provide for 'Skynner's child'.⁶¹ In addition wider instructions were made to the employers of the town to do more for the poor. In 1623 two clothiers per parish were appointed to work with the overseers and find work for

⁵⁴ BRO/R/AZ3/9/1-87 Calendar of petitions, Misc years. 29 applications for relief. 12 further in Guilding Vols. III and IV, both broadly covering 1620-1664. While many of the appeals are undated contextually they are clearly from the Civil War period.

⁵⁵ Goose, 'Decline', p.66.

⁵⁶ Guilding, Vol. III, p.176.

⁵⁷ Ibid pp. 384 and 425.

⁵⁸ Guilding, Vol. IV, p.331.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p.464.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.464.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.499.

unemployed 'spunners and carders'.⁶² In 1630 the clothiers are instructed to provide work for the Workhouse.⁶³

The tone of the decisions is very much of a senior partner convening and instructing the junior vestries. Despite the difficulties of the Civil War, and afterwards, the Corporation faithfully, if perhaps not very transparently, delivered and doled out its charitable money.⁶⁴ Overseers accounts were still inspected.⁶⁵ Their control over who should and should not trade in the town was also regularly asserted.⁶⁶ The Corporation behaved very much as the body that saw itself having primary responsibility for the care of the poor and the management of the economy of the town.

4. The Reading economy, 1680-1780

Several important infrastructure and socio-economic changes benefitted the town from the 1680s onwards, and these were to accelerate in the eighteenth century. Reading was already capitalizing on the shift away from smaller market centres to major towns in the late seventeenth century, the comparative ease for transporting goods which her waterways provided gave Reading an edge over smaller centres.⁶⁷ Rental for a wharf in Reading went from £6 per annum in 1638 to £150 by 1715.⁶⁸ In 1718 one commentator said of Reading

It contains about 900 houses, large streets but ordinary buildings, wherein is the greatest market for corn in England.⁶⁹

The Corporation opposed the Kennet Navigation as it feared the loss of this edge, but its opening in 1723 was to only enhance the trade through Reading.⁷⁰ In 1726 Defoe was able to say that Reading was

⁶² Guilding, Vol. II, p.153.

⁶³ Guilding, Vol. III, p.7.

⁶⁴ On Good Friday 31st March 1643, with the Kings encampment preparing to withdraw, and Essex's men due to occupy the town within weeks, the Corporation still duly met to cast lots for the Blagrove purse and distribute charity to the parishes. Brod, *Case of Reading*, p28-29 and Guilding, Vol. IV, pp80-81. One disruption can be found, poor men applying for a place in the Vachell almshouse were put off until Tanfield Vachell (fighting with the parliamentary army) should return home. p.150.

⁶⁵ May 1645, Guilding, Vol. IV, p.148

⁶⁶ Guilding, Vol. IV, Oct 1644, p125. March 1644, p.138. May 1645 p149. August 1645, p.158. in one year.

⁶⁷ Goose, 'Decay', p.62

⁶⁸ Ibid p.64

⁶⁹ Browne Willis, *A history of the mitred parliamentary abbies* (Bodleian MS) p226, quoted in C. F. Slade, 'Reading', from M. D. Lobel (Ed) *Historic Towns*, Vol. 1, (Baltimore, 1969) p.8.

⁷⁰ Dils, *Reading*, p.136

Chapter 3

A very large and wealthy town, handsomely built, the inhabitants rich and driving a very great trade. The town lies on the River Kennet, but so near the Thames, that the largest barges which they use, may come up to the town bridge, and there they have wharfs to load, and unload there. Their chief trade is by this water navigation to and from London.

They send from hence to London by these barges, very great quantities of malt and meal.....so large are those barges that some of them, as I was told, bring a thousand or twelve hundred quarters of malt at a time.⁷¹

In addition all the major roads through Reading were turnpiked in the first 30 years of the century.⁷² By now Reading was the undoubted regional centre, being larger and wealthier than any of its old rivals, Wallingford, Newbury and Abingdon, at this time.⁷³

Reading also supplied finished goods. An advert in the Reading Mercury in 1755 offered constant employment for 30 journeymen shoemakers as 'The work is for London shops'.⁷⁴ Clockmakers such as Richard Whitehear and John Hoddle were able to make good livings in the seventeenth century, while John Hocker and Luke Wise, both Mayors of Reading in the eighteenth century made their fortunes using parts from, and supplying clocks to, London.⁷⁵

While none of the merchants of the eighteenth century were to have quite the comparative wealth of clothiers such as Thomas White, Richard Aldworth or John Kendrick at the opening of the seventeenth, yet a good living was still to be made by malting, brewing, victuallers, grocers and mercers.⁷⁶ It was these trades which were to dominate the aldermanic lists for much of the century.⁷⁷

Reading, like many regional centres with good communication links, was to continue to be an attractive centre for immigration.⁷⁸ The main evidence for this is settlement certificates, which are a problematic source for gauging poorer immigration. Issue and survival rate, as well as doubt about when in an immigrant's life cycle they were actually issued, are all complicating factors.⁷⁹ However a decade by decade analysis of surviving certificates issued to people from

⁷¹ D. Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* 1st Edn, 1724 (St. Ives, 1971) p.269.

⁷² Dils, *Reading*, p.136.

⁷³ The VCH quotes J. Taylor, *Catalogue of tavernes in Tenne Shires about London*, (London, 1636) as saying that Reading was 'the prime and principal town in this county of Berkshire'. In 'The Borough of Reading: the Borough' 58 P. H. Ditchfield and W. Page (Eds) *The History of the County of Berkshire, Vol. 3* (London, St. Catherine Press, 1923) Published in British History Online: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/berks/vol3/pp342-364> [accessed February 2021]

⁷⁴ *RM*, November 17th, 1755.

⁷⁵ E. W. Dormer, 'Some Old Clockmakers of Reading and the Neighbourhood,' *BAJ* Vol. 24, (1918) pp.74-78.

⁷⁶ No eighteenth century will matched the extraordinary gifts of Aldworth and Kendrick.

⁷⁷ See Ch. 5 for more discussion of the socio-economic make-up of the Corporation.

⁷⁸ Dils estimates that even in the seventeenth century two out of every three townsfolk had not been born in the town. J. Dils, 'Reading in the sixteenth and seventeenth century,' in Petyt M, *The Growth of Reading*, (Stroud, 1993) p.63.

⁷⁹ For more detail of the problems with analysing settlement certificates see Ch. 4.

outside Reading lodging in just two of three parishes shows about 6 or 7 certificates a year.⁸⁰ Thomas' study of migration in three southern counties at this time suggests an average of about 5 for a full county town.⁸¹ Like most urban centres, it was this, rather than diminishing death rate, or growing birth rate, which was to fuel the growth of Reading through the eighteenth-century.⁸²

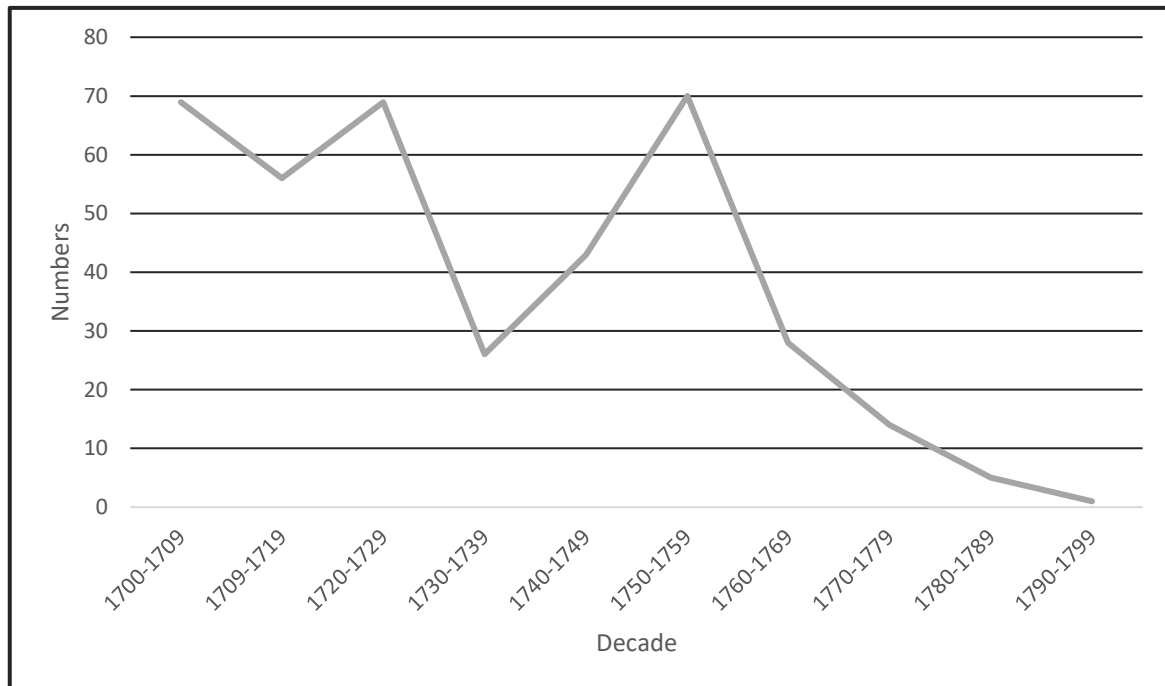


Figure 3- 3: Numbers of surviving certificates for non- Reading settlers from St. Mary's and St. Giles, by decade.

Conclusion

Reading was to emerge into the period of this study as a town governed by an Anglican hierarchy, but with a large and unruly electorate, many of whom were dissenters.⁸³ The Corporation had huge charitable resources at its disposal, but the largest of them was already tainted by mismanagement and corruption. While it had maintained an autocratic, command

⁸⁰ BRO D/P 96/13/1, St. Giles settlement certificates and BRO D/P98/13/1, St. Mary's settlement certificates. There are no surviving certificates for St. Lawrence. the low number at the end of the century is distorted by lack of survival of St. Mary's certificates, and legislative changes which made such certificates less common.

⁸¹ E.G. Thomas, 'The Treatment of Poverty in Berkshire, Essex and Oxfordshire' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 1970), p.219.

⁸² See parish burial and baptism records, Fig.4-4 p.105.

⁸³ Reading's electorate was not finally to be established as a scot and lot borough where those in receipt of alms could not vote until a parliamentary ruling of 1708, Aspinall, *Parliament*, p.69.

and control management of poor relief and poverty in the first half of the seventeenth century, we see by the second signs that it is beginning to defer to the parishes, at least in the first instance. The clothiers of the seventeenth century had given way to the brewers, maltsters and corn merchants of the eighteenth, and the town relied upon the itinerant, whether bargemen or traders at their fairs and markets to keep its economy buoyant. This economy was to grow and diverge as the century progressed. At the opening of the eighteenth century the population of Reading is estimated at 7,690 and was to grow to 9,742 by the 1801 census.⁸⁴ It was these conditions which were to frame the poor relief system of the long eighteenth century.

Comparator towns

5. Development of Guildford corporation, 1186-1700

Guildford lies about 28 miles southwest of London, on an important gap on the North Downs which allowed for early transport routes and the fording of the River Wey, upon which it sits. It became an important thoroughfare through from London to Winchester and further west to Somerset by early medieval times, this important route out of London to the south was known as the Kings Way, or *Via Regia*.⁸⁵ The River Wey was passable for smaller flat-bottomed boats from Guildford to the Thames at Weybridge, and after 1651 was made navigable for larger commercial vessels, through the Wey Navigation which connected to a region-wide network of rivers and canals.⁸⁶

The Domesday Book describes Guildford as a “vill” rather than a burh or civitas, which implies a less developed urban centre than the latter, still predominantly dependent on farming, and in this case mostly in possession of the King. It had 175 households.⁸⁷ only forty four years later in 1130 it was described as a ‘burgi’.⁸⁸ The County Court was meeting there by 1156 and it was formally designated the County Town of Surrey in a charter of 1256.⁸⁹ Its status was enhanced

⁸⁴ Aspinall, *Parliament*, p.101. 1801 Census, from Online Historical Population Reports (www.histpop.org).

⁸⁵ M.B. Alexander, ‘Aspects of the Early History of Guildford and its Castle’ (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Reading, 2004) p.14.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.31.

⁸⁷ A. Williams and G.H. Martin (Ed), *Domesday Book* (London, Penguin Classics, 2002,) p.71 and for a discussion of the meaning and implications of the term ‘vill’ in the Domesday book see: R. Hoyt, ‘Farm of the Manor and Community of the Vill in Domesday Book’ *Speculum*, Vol. 30/2, (Apr. 1955) pp. 147-169.

⁸⁸ H.E. Malden (Ed) ‘The borough of Guildford: Borough, manors, churches and charities’, in *A History of the County of Surrey*: Vol. 3, (London, 1911), pp. 560-570. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/surrey/Vol.3/pp560-570> [accessed 13 July 2021].

⁸⁹ Ibid.

by the establishment of a castle there from at least the twelfth century if not before, as well as a royal palace.⁹⁰ The 1256 charter recognised a corporate body of '*probi homines*' or honest men. It is likely that by this time the chief merchants and traders of the Borough were already running much of the affairs of the town, but a Guild Merchant was not recognised until 1367 when it was given the rights and freedoms 'according to the custom of Winchester'.⁹¹ This Guild Merchant continued as a key presence in the Borough well into the nineteenth century when it borrowed money to build a new wheat house.⁹² The same 1367 charter gave the '*probi homines*' the right to manage the fee farm.⁹³

By this time there were three parishes within the Borough of Guildford. Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM), the main urban parish, entirely within the Borough and consisting of 37 acres. Holy Trinity, which covered 137 acres, eighteen of which were in the borough, and St. Nicholas, an enormous rural parish of 2,693 acres which had seventeen acres within the Borough. BVM and Holy Trinity lay to the west of the Wey and St. Nicholas' to the east.⁹⁴ This may be part of the reason that BVM and Holy Trinity were combined for the sake of their livings and had one minister from the late seventeenth century onward.⁹⁵

The economic wealth of Guildford through the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries rested, as with Reading and so many southern towns, on the trading and processing of wool. Sheep grazed on the downs, there was abundant water to drive fulling mills, fullers' earth had been discovered in nearby Nutfield and Flemish weavers settled there in the reign of Edward III. 'Guildford Cloth' enjoyed a strong reputation through the country by 1391. ⁹⁶The Corporation included a woolsack into its borough arms in the time of Richard III.⁹⁷

The Guild Merchant and the Corporation seem to have consisted of the same personnel through this time. ⁹⁸ The Corporation was officially recognised in a charter of 1488 from Henry VII, which simultaneously limited the borough electorate for MPs down to 30. Rawcliffe assumes that

⁹⁰ Alexander, 'Aspects', p.42.

⁹¹ The Borough of Guildford, VCH, pp.560-570 [accessed June 2021].

⁹² R. Sykes, 'Politics and Electoral Behaviour in Guildford and West Surrey 1790-1886' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Surrey, 1977) p.63.

⁹³ The Borough of Guildford, VCH. Pp.560-570 [accessed June 2021].

⁹⁴ Alexander, 'Aspects,' p.36.

⁹⁵ For a further discussion of the merger of these two parishes see Ch.4, p.119.

⁹⁶ J.S. Roskell, L. Clark, C. Rawcliffe, (Eds.) 'Guildford constituency 1386-1421' *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1386-1421*, (1993) <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org>. (accessed June 2021)

⁹⁷ VCH pp560-570. [accessed July 2021]

⁹⁸ 'Guildford', *HoP 1386-1421*.

previous to this it may have consisted of the entire Guild Merchant.⁹⁹ Like the burgesses in Reading, by the end of the sixteenth century the Guild merchant itself had dwindled to no more than 21 at any one time.¹⁰⁰ Those returned for Parliament in the fourteenth and fifteenth century seem also to have come from the same class of local commercial men.¹⁰¹ The electorate for the mayor was those who paid scot and lot, and had served a term as the town's bailiff, these were known as the 'approved men' and numbered around 25 by the opening of the seventeenth century.¹⁰² The close association of the Guild Merchant and Corporation is demonstrated by the fact that the annual election of the mayor took place at a meeting of the Guild Merchant.¹⁰³ The right to have their own JPs though arrived relatively late on, in a 1603 charter from James I. The Corporation was awarded five JPs, the mayor, the ex-mayor, two other members of the corporation and a man 'skilled in law'.¹⁰⁴

A further charter from 1627 confirmed the accretion of these various rights, and while a further charter was issued in 1686 by James II this was annulled two years later.¹⁰⁵ Thus the governing charter for the Borough of Guildford until the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 was the 1627 charter.

6. Guildford economy

Like Reading through the seventeenth century the economic basis of the town's prosperity shifted away from wool and more towards its position as a communications hub, catering for trade and for travellers. By 1718 John Aubrey said about Guildford that it:

has always been most famous for its good Innes and excellent Accommodation for Passengers, the best perhaps in England; the Red Lion particularly can make fifty beds, the White Hart is not so big but has more noble rooms" ¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ Ibid. Roskell, Clarke and Rawcliffe do not say what the criteria for the electorate was. Certainly by the 1690s this was Freeholders and Freemen who lived within the borough paying scot and lot, and consisted of about 100. It is not clear whether the number qualifying simply went up over this time, or whether the criteria were changed in a succeeding charter.

¹⁰⁰ S.R., Johnson, Guildford', in S.T Bindoff (Ed) *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1509-1558*, (Cambridge, 1982) [accessed June 2021]

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ For a more detailed discussion of James II relationship with corporations, see Ch. 2. p32.

¹⁰⁶ J. Aubrey, *Natural History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey*, (5. Vols. London, 1718) iii. p.314.

It's trade by water did not grow as quickly as Reading's, nonetheless the improvements to the Wey Navigation meant that by 1776 17,000 tons of goods annually were passing through the town by water.¹⁰⁷

7. Guildford politics

Unlike Reading, Guildford came under the sway of powerful country gentry families from the sixteenth century onward. The More family of nearby Loseley had at least one of the seats from the 1570s through to the Commonwealth period.¹⁰⁸ In 1660 Richard Onslow was elected one of the MPs for Guildford, the beginning of an unbroken run of representation by the family until 1830.¹⁰⁹ Throughout these 190 years either one or both of the seats were filled by members of the Onslow family, or their nominees.

The Onslows were major local landowners who dominated the political world of Surrey and Guildford, as well as holding important offices at Westminster and Whitehall. That is not to say that there was not resistance to their control. The Corporation, like many after the Restoration, had lost several of their more experienced members. In 1662 the Mayor, the JPs and several of the 'common council' were dismissed by the commissioners. Sir Richard Onslow, one of the sitting members was himself of 'country' sympathies but took part in the purge apparently in order to ensure that his support on the Corporation was not entirely removed.¹¹⁰ Meanwhile the electorate for MPs after 1660 seems to have been a poorly defined constituency, with reference made to returns by the 'freemen, burgesses and commons' of the Town in 1664. Only 37 voted for Richard Onslow's return in 1660, and 16 in 1661. However later events imply a larger group entitled to vote.¹¹¹

As with Reading there was a significant dissenting group within the electorate. In 1679 140 promises from voters were garnered by Col. Algernon Sidney, a republican supported by William Penn. As had happened in Reading in 1685 the Mayor refused to grant him the freeman status necessary to qualify as a candidate. Nonetheless the Corporation's sympathies while not

¹⁰⁷ Sykes, 'Politics' p.33.

¹⁰⁸ M.A.P (sic), 'Guildford' in P.W. Hasler, (Ed), *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1558-1603* (Cambridge, 1981) and A. Davidson and B. Coates, 'Guildford', in A. Thrush and J. Ferris, (Eds) *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1604-1629* (Cambridge, 2010). <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org>. [accessed June 2021].

¹⁰⁹ J. S. Crossette, 'Guildford' in B. D. Henning (Ed), *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons, 1660-1690* (Cambridge, 1983) <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org>. [accessed June 2021].

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ A notable instance of the gap between electorate and 'voter'.

as radical as that of Sidney seems to have had an exclusionist bent, with the Whiggish Onslow and exclusionist Randyll returned in 1681.¹¹² Early on contribution to the poor rate was crucial to these matters. In 1685 however the JPs, who ruled on who was eligible to vote were accused of adjusting the electorate in favour of the Tory, and supporter of James II, Heneage Finch I, by insisting on the requirement that voters should have paid scot and lot. This is debatable however, and while Finch won by only a handful of votes, no petition was submitted to Parliament.¹¹³ March and April 1688 saw the purge from the Corporation of thirteen members, including the Mayor and two aldermen. In 1689 the Corporation was accused of deliberately disqualifying some voters in order to favour the return of Foot Onslow, in the end the House found for Onslow.¹¹⁴

8. Responsibility for the poor

From 1603 four of its 'approved men', one of whom being the sitting mayor, were also Justices of the Peace, with a further being a man 'skilled at law'.¹¹⁵ However despite having five JPs the town does not seem to have exercised the independence from the County sessions normally associated with that number and appeals routinely went to the County.¹¹⁶

The Corporation had nothing like the large bequests that Reading had. The largest, Poyle's Charity, gave over the rents from the Manor of Poyle in 1627.¹¹⁷ This generated sufficient money for it to be a substantial augmentation to the parish relief, and was administered at the mayor's discretion seemingly at the request of the parishes. In the rentbook of the charity for 1669 £10 is given to overseers for the poor of BVM 'by Mr. Mayor's order'.¹¹⁸ This is not for a named person or specific purpose, and suggests a general support of the poor rate. By 1786 it was sufficient to be generating just over £300 annually for the Borough to allocate.¹¹⁹ The articles of the Wey Navigation in 1670 also gave £30 a year of the profits of the navigation to the Corporation to disperse among the parishes.¹²⁰

¹¹² For an explanation of 'exclusionist' see p.30.

¹¹³ Guildford, *HoP, 1660-1690* [accessed June 2021].

¹¹⁴ *CJ*. Vol. 12, 18th December 1689 p.77.

¹¹⁵ MCR, 1835 p.2872.

¹¹⁶ D. G. Jenkins, 'County Administration in the reign of George II; The Example of Surrey' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1986) p.224.

¹¹⁷ H. E. Malden (Ed), 'The borough of Guildford: Borough, manors, churches and charities', in *A History of the County of Surrey*: Vol. 3, (London, 1911), pp. 560-570. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/surrey/Vol.3/pp560-570> [accessed 2 September 2023].

¹¹⁸ SHC 1802/3/1, Poyles Rent Book.

¹¹⁹ Abstract of returns of Charitable donations for the benefit of poor persons made by the ministers and churchwardens of the several parishes and townships in England and Wales, 1786-1788, (HC, 1816) 115, p.1248 and 'The Manor of Poyle,' in Malden, 'The Borough of Guildford' VCH. [accessed 12 August 2023].

¹²⁰ SHC G1/58/2, Copy of Articles of Agreement of the Wey Act, 1671.

At the opening of the eighteenth century Guildford showed many similarities to Reading, a town which had relied upon wool, and now on trade and communications. It was governed by a closed oligarchy, but its population was volatile electorally with a large dissenting minority. It was much smaller than Reading, being only 2,643 people by the time of the 1801 census, but the town had five JPs and a healthy discretionary amount in the hands of the Borough.

Bedford

9. Development of Bedford Corporation. 886-1700

Bedford is the furthest of the three towns from London at 55 miles. For a deal of its history it appears to have looked east as much as south. Perhaps significantly it currently sits in the government's Eastern Region, whereas Guildford and Reading both sit in the Southeast. Its ancient communication links were the Great North Road (the modern A1) which had its origins in Roman routes and went initially from London to York, and the River Ouse, which flows from Northampton into the Wash, significantly into King's Lynn. The Ouse was to provide some of the boundary for the Danelaw from 886, making Bedford a border town between Saxon and Dane.¹²¹ It reverted to Saxon in the reign of Edward the Elder in 915, who had the town fortified and who granted the town what was to become Royal Borough status.¹²² There was a small monastery there in the tenth century, which appears to have disappeared in Danish raids.

It had clearly obtained the status of primary town of the shire by 1011, when the word 'Bedfordshire' is first recorded.¹²³ Around this time a castle was also built north of the river, adjacent to the ancient church of St. Pauls.¹²⁴

There are five historical parishes. St. Pauls was the first, and by far the largest through to the period of this study, it had been the original foundation minster church from Saxon times and covered most of the town north of the Ouse.¹²⁵ St. Mary's was established in the twelfth century

¹²¹ J. Godber, *The Story of Bedford* (Luton, 1978) p.12.

¹²² Ibid, p.12.

¹²³ Ibid, p.13.

¹²⁴ W. Page (Ed), 'The borough of Bedford: Introduction', *A History of the County of Bedford: Volume 3*, (London, 1912), pp. 1-9. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/beds/Vol.3/pp1-9> [accessed 23 November 2021].

¹²⁵ There is some conjecture that it was founded by Offa, as a 'new minster' and Matthew Paris has Offa buried at Bedford. If so, St. Mary's may have been founded at the same time. See J. Haslam, 'The ecclesiastical topography of early medieval Bedford', *Bedfordshire Archaeology* Vol. 17 (1986), pp 41-50.

to accommodate the growing settlement south of the river, and well into the seventeenth century the north and south had separate rate assessments and appointed many of their own officers.^{126 127} St Peter's and St. Cuthbert's were added on the north side, later additions as the population grew, as was St. John's on the south. Through to the eighteenth century none of these later three parishes ever covered more than about twenty households. In the 1801 census St. Paul's was home to 2,150 people, while the largest second parish was St. Mary at 616.

The first recorded charter in 1166 granted Bedford the same civil and trading rights as Oxford.¹²⁸ The fee farm rights were granted twenty three years later in 1189.¹²⁹ The town's rights developed with successive charters, and in the thirteenth century there is the first mention of a 'mayor'. Despite the early importance of the town, it does not appear to have flourished from the wool trade to the same extent as Reading and Guildford. Its industries in a tax return of 1297 were very much those of a local market town and agricultural centre, tanners, carpenters and wheelwrights, with fewer of the weavers, drapers, dyers and spinners to be found elsewhere.¹³⁰ Although some limited wool trading developed in fourteenth century it was insufficient to stave off a steep decline after the catastrophes of that century, and the building of a new bridge at Great Barford which took away trade.¹³¹ The burgesses appealed for, and won, remission from their fee farm in 1440, which was made a permanent reduction in 1504.

A distinction grew up between those who could trade in the town because of birth, apprenticeship and purchase but could not vote for mayor or MPs (the freemen) and the smaller, and more prestigious group, from whom the mayor and MPs were chosen, and who had a vote in their selection (burgesses). This distinction seems first to have been codified in the 'Black Book' of 1562 which laid out the constitution of Bedford. Freemen could nominate three men to sit with nine aldermen and burgesses to calculate levies to be made on the town.¹³²

In 1647 with the Civil War reaching its close, and the parliamentary forces clearly in the ascendancy the freemen took the opportunity to improve their position in the town. They petitioned Parliament that they should be able to choose the mayor on an annual basis. A move

¹²⁶ Page, Bedford, *VCH* pp24-29. [accessed 23 November 2021].

¹²⁷ Ibid, pp.1-9 [accessed 23 November 2021].

¹²⁸ Godber, *Bedford*, p.21, although the burgesses of Bedford claimed earlier charters, stored in St. Paul's and destroyed in the Civil War. The rights included a merchants' guild, law court and quit of tolls out of the borough.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p.22.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p.96.

¹³¹ Page, Bedford, *VCH* pp.24-29. [accessed 23 November 2021].

¹³² Ibid, pp.15-21 [accessed 23 November 2021]. Aldermen in this instance were burgesses who had been mayor. (See T. Oldfield, *History of the Boroughs of Great Britain* (2 Vols., London, 1794) i. p.9.

counter-petitioned by the burgesses. In 1650 Parliament found for the freemen, and in addition an enlarged town council of eighteen was created with greater freemen representation. Almost immediately the new council took the opportunity to abolish the distinction between freemen and burgesses, giving both an equal say in the running of municipal affairs. This was a genuinely radical step which seems only to have been managed in one other borough, High Wycombe.¹³³ Representation on the enlarged council of the 'independent' religious, appeared, in particular the aldermen John Grew, John Eston and Anthony Harrington.

The strongest influence on dissenting practice in Bedford was a charismatic minister, John Gifford who acquired the living of St. Johns. Council members Edward Covington and Richard Spencely appear in the congregation, and family names such as Fenn, Norton, Edwards, Gibbs, Hawkins and Wells appear in both. A further convert in 1653 was John Bunyan. By March 1650 eight of the council were known 'independents'. Nonetheless there was clearly a larger group on the council hostile to their influence. When Gifford died in 1655 they refused to allow the 'independent' congregation, which had now colonized St. John's church to choose their own successor. The advowson was valuable town property. The congregation appealed directly to Cromwell, who found in their favour and the following month the mayor and four council men were removed by the local Major-General.¹³⁴ John Grew became Mayor and further 'independents' added to the council.

As in Reading the Restoration saw suppression of the dissenting congregation, they lost the church of St. John, and those, like Bunyan, who refused to conform were imprisoned, and those on the council removed. Almost immediately the council acted to limit its numbers to thirteen, who were to be chosen by the 'commonality' from a list drawn up by the Mayor. In 1661 the old distinction between burgess and freemen was reinstated. In 1663 it was decided that all nominees for the council should be burgesses. The Corporation was again purged in 1688, and prominent dissenters put in place.¹³⁵ The Tory interest in the Borough revived at the turn of the century, and politics within the Borough represented a broadly even split into the 1740s, albeit with the growing domination of the Russells, Dukes of Bedford.¹³⁶

¹³³ P. Clark, and P. Slack, *English Towns in Transition* (Oxford, 1976) p.137.

¹³⁴ Godber, *Bedford*, p.72.

¹³⁵ L. Naylor and G. Jaggard, 'Bedford' in 'HoP, 1660-1690' [accessed November 2022].

¹³⁶ R.S. Lea, 'Bedford Borough, 1715-54' in R. Sedgewick, *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1715-1754* (Cambridge, 1970) <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org> [accessed November 2022].

10. Bedford Economy

Bedford was larger than Guildford through the eighteenth century. The population based on the 1671 Hearth Tax, is estimated at 2,730, and it is reasonable to assume about 3000 at the opening of the eighteenth century. However it grew only slowly through the century and by 1801 it was 3,948.¹³⁷

The fortunes of Bedford, like many urban areas at the end of the seventeenth century, improved. Legislation for a navigation for the Ouse from Bedford to the Wash was finally passed in 1664, and the work completed in 1689.¹³⁸ This allowed for the development of an important trade in sea coal landed at King's Lynn from Newcastle and brought into Bedford to supply the surrounding area. An estimation made in 1729 suggests that 5000 wagonloads annually went from Bedford.¹³⁹ Other industries such as brewing and lacemaking also developed at this time. The town also enjoyed a 'renaissance' of its own. The grammar school, set up by the Harpur bequest, profited from its enrichment from developing lands in the Holborn area of London. A library was built in 1703, and the 'new aristocracy' of the surrounding county patronized balls and assemblies. Through the eighteenth century, like Reading, brewing was to be one of the major industries.

11. Responsibility for the poor

There is scarce documentation of Bedford Corporation taking as active an interest in the management of poverty in the town in the seventeenth century as Reading. Parsloe, editor of the Corporation Minutes from Commonwealth and Restoration period states laconically in his introduction,

of the relations between the Corporation and the vestries of the several parishes in the Town there is little evidence in the Minutes.¹⁴⁰

In 1648 the Corporation went to the lengths of appointing a Bedell of Beggars, whose role it was to whip and remove beggars as necessary. ¹⁴¹ Not so far however, as to actually pay him a

¹³⁷ 1801 Census. Histpop.

¹³⁸ Godber, *Bedford*, p.79-80.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p.85.

¹⁴⁰ G. Parsloe, (Ed), *The Minute Book of the Bedford Corporation 1647-1664* (Streatley, 1949) p xxiv.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p5.

salary, since he was to collect this himself, at a rate of a farthing a time, from the ratepayers of Bedford. It seems he soon gave up this position. Indeed the Corporation seems to have instructed the parishes to hand over a portion of their poor rates to pay for the cleansing of the town.¹⁴² Not surprisingly payment does not seem to have been generally forthcoming. In addition, outside of the huge Harpur bequest, which the Corporation were to become trustees of in the middle of the eighteenth century, charitable bequests to the town were not significant.¹⁴³

The governance and politics of the borough then, at the opening of the period was one, once again, of a tight, closed, oligarchy. The corporation was broadly conformist and supportive of the Whig ascendancy in the early years of the eighteenth century. However powerful forces, not least that of the Russells of Bedford, soon brought influence to bear on the Corporation, or rather the electorate of the town, and to exploit the differences and grudges left from fifty years of religious and social divisions. The Corporation does not, however, show the signs of intervention in response to petitioning, and other control of the parishes apparent in the Reading minutes. It is unlikely that this is just a neglect to mention it; and what mentions there are suggest only the most superficial approach to poor relief management.

Conclusion

Reading grew from a prosperous wool town in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, through a period of decline and turmoil in the Civil War, to a thriving communications hub in the eighteenth. It had considerable barge and wagon traffic, aided by navigable waterways and turnpiked roads. It had successful and important markets and all the passing business of a county town, particular one on the main thoroughfare west from London.

Its Corporation was a powerful and tight oligarchy, dominated still by the cloth industry at the opening of the eighteenth century, although that industry had long declined. The population enjoyed a wide franchise but was equally divided between what were to become the sentiments of trade and dissent, broadly identified with the Whigs, and the voices of agriculture and the Anglican church, broadly identified with the Tories. No county gentry emerged to dominate the

¹⁴² Ibid, p134.

¹⁴³ (4 Geo. III, c 21) 'Act for Enlarging the Charitable Uses, Extending the Objects and Regulating the Application of the rents and profits of the Estates given by Sir William Harpur Knt and Dame Alice his wife, for the benefit of the poor.' 1764. Abstract of returns of charitable donations for the benefit of poor persons, made by the ministers and churchwardens of the several parishes and townships in England and Wales, 1786-1788.(HC, 1816) 115, p12.

politics of the town, leaving it to swing from one loyalty to another as the century progressed. Surrounded by agricultural areas which fluctuated in fortune, the town was also to be a magnet for migration from surrounding areas.

The comparator towns, Guildford and Bedford, shared similar fortunes. Guildford, and to a lesser extent Bedford, built their initial prosperity on wool and were then to diversify with the arrival of improved waterways in the late seventeenth century. Both were county towns and attracted a large itinerant population. Both had strong dissenting populations and were to see bitter purge and counter purges of their Corporations in the Commonwealth and Restoration eras. Both had closed oligarchic corporations, and disputed electorates for their MPs going into the eighteenth century, with a potential strong reliance on poor relief status, whether through a scot and lot franchise or being resident. While both of them were to come under the sway of powerful local families, the Russells in Bedford and the Onslows in Guildford, neither was sufficiently dominated for there to be no resistance at all.

While Reading was much larger than both, nearly twice the size by the end of the eighteenth century, yet there were many similarities, which were indicative of many Southeastern corporate towns at the time. The example of Bedford indicates however that it would be too much of a generalisation to assume that all corporation towns took an active, interventionist role in poor relief management in the seventeenth century.

Chapter 4

Did cooperation occur?

Introduction

The Poor Law placed a series of responsibilities on both the vestry and magistrates through the long eighteenth century.¹ Settled and impotent poor were to be relieved, the young apprenticed, and the able-bodied put to work. Rates had to be levied and collected and the non-settled moved to their parish of settlement. It is through the analyses of these processes that evidence of cooperation between the parishes, or otherwise, can be demonstrated.

1. Did cooperation occur?

A simple definition of what is meant by cooperation in this context will be useful. The dictionary has it as working together for the same end.² What does it mean for an organisation or body to cooperate? In recent years work by political scientists such as Robert Axelrod has looked at the circumstances under which organisms as well as complicated organisations, including nation states and corporations, develop cooperative strategies.³ In these situations cooperation is seen as a situation where organisations, which have initially no motivation but their own best interests, move from competition to cooperation, suppressing their own immediate defensive behaviour in order to achieve a better outcome for themselves and other agents. Initial studies focused on situations where there is no co-ordinating central authority, and such strategies develop spontaneously through trial and error.⁴ Where there is a centralised authority, such as

¹ See Chapter 2.

² OED, Online <https://premium.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english> Cooperation: The action or process of working together to the same end (accessed 4/10/22).

³ R. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, 1st Edn 1984 (New York, 2006) and *The Complexity of Cooperation: Agent based models of Competition and Collaboration*, (Princeton, 1997)

⁴ Axelrod used computer simulations of the Prisoner's Dilemma in order to demonstrate that under the right circumstances reciprocity (TIT FOR TAT) will spontaneously occur. Axelrod, *Evolution*, pp.27-54.

in this case the corporation, this is more properly termed 'coordination' or 'coercion' whether benign or not. For the purposes of this study this useful distinction will be maintained. It is easier to examine this process in the parish context by first looking for cooperative behaviour and then examining whether this is genuine cooperation in the Axelrod sense, that is the parishes coming to the conclusion themselves that cooperation is a good idea or whether it has been achieved through 'coercion', ie the Corporation enforcing it. This will be a matter for Chapter 5. This chapter will focus on existing evidence of cooperative behaviour.

What does cooperative behaviour look like? For the purposes of this study two tests will be applied, first that the behaviour between borough parishes is different to that between borough parishes and non-borough parishes. Secondly that that behaviour can reasonably be seen to have a purpose and beneficial effect to those parishes and to the borough. Thus, if it could be seen that the three parishes within the borough of Anytown bought more worsted cloth between them than the parishes outside of the borough, this could not be seen as likely cooperation since there is no obvious reason why this should be beneficial to the town. It could simply be the case that conditions of the local market led to that outcome. This is not cooperation, but coincidence.

If however, it could be demonstrated that the three parishes had convened to buy worsted cloth together since they could get a better price that way, then that is cooperation. So, if the price they were able to get was less than surrounding parishes, if they were buying it all through one agent, or, even better, a minute of a meeting occurs where they agree to do it, then there is evidence of cooperation. If they have been instructed to do this by the corporation, then that is coordination, or coercion.

Within the framework of the Poor Law this means behaviours *between* the borough parishes regarding the management of poor relief (whether through settlement practice, payments, rating or workhouse provision) which are evidently different to those between borough parishes and non-borough parishes for which a clear benefit can be seen to the corporation, town or parish, (through efficiency, cost cutting, simple workforce management, or other prevailing interests), are strong evidence of cooperation.

2. Evidence from settlement and removal

One major feature of the Old Poor Law was the laws governing settlement and removal. Before looking more closely at what was going on in this respect in our sample towns, it will be necessary first to expand upon what this legislative regime consisted of.

8. What was the legal framework governing settlement and removal and how did it operate in practice through the eighteenth century?

Provision covering where a person should be relieved long predates the legislation normally assumed to have ushered in the eighteenth century practice; the Settlement and Removal Act, 1662.⁵ Debatable references as to who was deserving of support according to their length of stay in a community existed in Anglo-Saxon law.⁶ It is, however, the Statute of Cambridge, 1388 which is often cited as the origin of the early modern law of settlement.⁷ Burn states that this provided that ‘The poor were to repair, in order to be maintained, to the places where they were born.’⁸ Although the wording of the Act is slightly more ambiguous, stating:

beggars impotent to serve, shall abide in the cities and townes where they be dwelling at the time of the proclamation of this statute; and if the people of cities or other townes will not, or may not, suffice to find them, that then the said beggars shal draw them to other townes within the hundreds, rape or wapentake, or to the townes where they were borne, within xi dayes after the proclamation made, and there shall continually abide during their lives.⁹

The statute only covers impotent beggars, those unable to support themselves, and provides that they should return to their place of birth as a last resort. Later legislation added three years residence as an equal qualification.¹⁰

⁵ (13 and 14 Car 2 c 12) An Act for the better Relief of the Poor of this Kingdom, 1662 Normally referred to as the 1662 Settlement Act, or Settlement and Removal Act, in order to avoid confusion with other Acts of Settlement. I will use the latter.

⁶ J.S. Taylor, ‘The impact of Pauper Settlement 1691-1834,’ *Past and Present*, Vol. 73, (Nov 1976) pp.42-74, p.47

⁷ (12 Rich. II, c 7) Statute of Cambridge, This is also referred to as the Statute of Labourers, but to prevent confusion with the 1351 legislation, it is often given this title. As Taylor says it was ‘surely anticipated by practice’ Taylor, ‘Impact’ p.48.

⁸ R. Burn, *The Justice of the Peace and the Parish Officer*, 18th Edn (3 Vols. London, 1793) iii p.341.

⁹ (12 Rich. II c 7, s7).

¹⁰ (19 Hen. VII c 12 s 20) Act to repel sturdy beggars, 1503.

Such legislation was mainly intended as a means of limiting vagrancy, and the disorder considered attendant upon it. It was not until Elizabethan legislation made the parish responsible, and rated, for the maintenance of the poor, that *where* one was eligible for relief became a central poor law problem.

Legislation, up to and including the 1601 Act, provided that a parish should appoint overseers who were responsible for relieving the impotent poor, setting the able poor to work and rating the local parish accordingly.¹¹ It provided no clarity as to who precisely was settled in a parish, relying on the existing provision. Before the 1601 Parliament had even risen, this became a profound problem of interpretation for the JPs who were charged with deciding where a person's place of relief was in cases of dispute.¹²

By the early seventeenth century an accretion of judicial decisions and local practice had developed a settlement period of a month, or forty days, alongside a confused idea as to who should or should not be removed, subject it would seem to local interpretation and variation. Even the ruling of Chief Justice Heath in 1633 can hardly be said to be illuminating:

This is too generall a question to receive a perfect answer to every particular case which may happen. But generally this is to be observed, that the law unsetleth none who are lawfully settled.¹³

By the time of the Restoration in 1660 the issue of poor relief management had become a priority for many MPs. The Settlement and Removal Act itself, normally considered the foundation of the post 1601 settlement and removal regime, was an amalgam of four bills going through Parliament at the time, one dividing the larger, northern parishes into townships, one to establish a Corporation of the Poor in London, one for establishing such Corporations throughout England and Wales which also included the clauses on settlement and removal, and

¹¹ The first piece of legislation to mention overseers is in the (14 Eliz. I, c 5) Acte for the Punishment of Vagabonds and Relief of the Poore and Impotent, 1572. Section 16 provided that JPs should appoint the overseers at their discretion, and those refusing to serve would be fined 10 shillings. The wording strongly implies that overseers were already generally acting in parishes.

¹² On the last day of the Parliament which had passed the 1601 legislation, with MPs sitting waiting for the Queen to arrive 'one talking with another' a Mr. Wiseman stood up to address the House saying that since they were just sitting waiting "*I wilbe bould to put a case to the Howse upon one of our newe statutes on roagues, offerringe the resolution therof to your consideracions, the case beinge common and ffitt by every man here to be understood. It is thus. A woeman is begotten with child in one howse, and before she appears to be with childe, she goeth awaye and serveth in another howse in another cuntrye. My question is where this woeman shalbe relieved, and where the child shall lyve*" T. E. Hartley, (Ed) *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I*, (3 Vols., Leicester, 1995), iii, 1593-1601, p.489.

¹³ NA, SP16/255/46, printed in *Somerset Assize Orders 1629-40*, cited in Hindle, *On the Parish, The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England* (Clarendon, Oxford, 2004), p309.

one on settlement and removal which did not survive.¹⁴ In the process of hurrying legislation all four acts were amalgamated.¹⁵ The result was an Act of twenty-five clauses, only three of which covered the actual issue of settlement and removal. It could reasonably be said that the Act was a very poorly drafted piece of legislation which was to cause 150 years of legal wrangling and amendment.¹⁶

The three provisions were, firstly, that overseers could appeal to JPs to have removed, within forty days of their arrival, anybody inhabiting a property worth less than £10, back to their parish of settlement, whether as 'a native, householder, sojourner, apprentice, or servant, for the space of forty days at least' unless they could give sufficient security against being a cost to the parish.¹⁷ Secondly that a person had a right of appeal to the Quarter Sessions if they felt the removal unfair, and thirdly that a person could migrate for the purposes of seasonal work, as long as they carried a certificate from their parish of origin stating that they lived there and returned back to their parish of settlement at the end of the term of work.¹⁸

It is to be noted then that the certificate system set up in this Act was only a temporary pass, set up for seasonal workers, who had left a household behind in a home parish. Other than that, migrant workers were to provide a bond to the host parish that they would not be a cost to them, something largely beyond most would-be migrants. Surviving bonds show collections of 'middling sort' yeomen, skilled tradesmen and gentlemen guaranteeing ('saving harmless') up to £100 to the host parish. An example are the yeoman and clothiers guaranteeing William Pricklove in BVM Guildford.¹⁹ Or households of gentlemen guaranteeing particularly valuable servants such as John Coleman and Nicholas Stone who were guaranteed to the tune of £100 by Foot Onslow (local MP) because they were skilled in 'the art of distilling'.²⁰ The implications were draconian, effectively leaving most poorer migrants open to be legally sent back to where

¹⁴ *CJ*, Vol. 8, Bill for the Relief of the poor in the County of Lancaster and Other Northern Counties, introduced 17 Dec 1661, Bill for the regulating, Employing and Providing for the Poor, introduced 14 Jan 1662, A bill for the constituting Corporations in the Cities, Boroughs and Market Towns in the Kingdom of England etc, introduced 16 Jan 1662, A Bill for the better Relief and Employment of the Poor and the Punishment of Vagrants and other disorderly persons within the Cities of London and Westminster thereof, and the Bills of Mortality, Introduced 17th Jan 1662. The last two were sent to the same committee for scrutiny, and with instructions to merge on the 18th Jan. An 'ingrossed bill' emerged on the 14th Feb 1662. By the 19th May all four had simply become "The Bill concerning the Poor". through negotiation between committees of the Lords and the Commons 'in regard to the shortness of time'.

¹⁵ G. Coode, Report to the Poor Law Board on the Law of Settlement and Removal of the Poor, (HC, 1851) 675, p.18.

¹⁶ Burns, *Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer* of 1793 has 252 pages devoted simply to settlement (not removal) case law, some of it contradictory.

¹⁷ (13 and 14 Car. II, c 12, s. 1).

¹⁸ (13 and 14 Car. II, c 12, s. 2 and 3).

¹⁹ SHC/BR/MA/6/1/39.

²⁰ SHC/BR/MA/6/1/41.

they came within forty days of their arrival. Coode, writing in 1852, was astonished that such a measure was bundled through Parliament without a whisper of protest:

no pamphlet was written on it, and not one petition on the subject was presented to either house, and no member of either house, except those who brought in the several bills, gave any notice of any motion on the subject, and no member of the government, and no member of either house officially connected with it, took any part in these proceeding.²¹

So problematic did the implementation of this system become that it became necessary to continually amend it. In 1685, when the Act was renewed for a further seven years a further clause was added to say that the forty day period only started once a migrant had delivered notice to the churchwardens on their arrival, as the poor did 'commonly conceale themselves'.²² Those who hid were subject to immediate removal.

In 1691, with a further renewal, the notice was to be recorded by the churchwardens, and read out after divine service on the following Sunday. Further a person could gain settlement even without this notice if they held office or paid their rates for a year. Unmarried people without children could also gain settlement if they served the same master for a year.²³ In 1697 the system of certification that was to operate for the next 98 years was introduced to facilitate even greater labour mobility. People wishing to work could move without the costly bond as long as they provided a certificate from the parish from which they came guaranteeing their settlement; such people were not to be removed until they actually became chargeable.²⁴ In addition, to clarify who was chargeable those on relief were to be badged.²⁵ At least two versions of pre-printed forms were already available for overseers to order and use.²⁶ This then essentially framed the settlement and removal practice for the eighteenth century, until the passage of Rose's Act in 1795 when it became illegal to remove *any* person, certificated or not, unless they had become chargeable.²⁷ The exceptions to this were rogues and vagabonds, and unmarried pregnant women.²⁸ In addition the costs of removal were to sit firmly with the parish

²¹ Coode's Report, pp.21-22.

²² (1 Jam. II, c 17 s3), An Act for Reviveing and Continuance of severall Acts of Parlyament therein mentioned, 1685.

²³ (3 Will. and Mary, c11, s2, s5 and s6) Act for the better Explanation and supplying the Defects of the former Laws for the Settlement of the Poor, 1691.

²⁴ (8 and 9 Will. III, c 30, s1) An Act for supplying some defects in the Laws for the Relief of the Poor of this Kingdom, 1697.

²⁵ Ibid, s2. Bonds could still be provided after this time if a person was unable to get a certificate, for example one for Norman Edridge in 1755 in the Guildford collection. But these are rare. SHC/BR/MA/6/1/47.

²⁶ N. Tadmor, 'The settlement of the poor and the rise of the form in England', *Past and Present*, Vol. 236 (Aug 2017) pp.43-97, p.58.

²⁷ (35, Geo III c 101) An Act to prevent the Removal of Poor Persons, until they shall become actually chargeable. 1795, commonly called 'Rose's Act'.

²⁸ Ibid s 6.

removing. (This was further modified in 1809 when those too ill to be removed were also protected from removal).²⁹

The idea of the forty day settlement period, while never repealed, was effectively circumvented by the introduction of the certification system. Removals became confined to those without certificates or those who became chargeable. Existing removal examinations focussed on establishing *where* a person legally had settlement, occurring in the absence of a certificate. It was the ambiguities about where a person was legally settled which, 'conferred on the lawyers a field rich for judicial interpretation.'³⁰

How the settlement and removal regime affected parishes and the labouring classes over the eighteenth century continues to be a complex and continually reinterpreted phenomenon. Adam Smith saw it as an unacceptable barrier to the free movement of labour, stating that:

The very unequal price of labour which we frequently find in England.....is probably owing to the obstruction which the law of settlements gives to a poor man who would carry his industry from one parish to another without a certificate.³¹

Even he conceded that a single, fit man could normally settle where he pleased, with or without a certificate.³² Other contemporary commentators were more sanguine. Eden considered that the settlement regime had no impact on labour movement and wage levels at all, arguing:

the circulation of labour is as free, and the scarcity of hands in one place is amply supplied by their superabundance in another, on the South Side of the Tweed as on the (non-regulated) North.³³

Coode however, in his 1851 report, which recommended the abolition of the system, said that,

it has always impeded the labourer, and never afforded him an advantage, still less and equivalent, for the restraint on his liberty and prosperity.'³⁴

More recent assessments, such as Taylor's 'A different type of Speenhamland', suggest that the system developed a flexibility to allow rural parishes to subsidise migration to industrial areas, what he calls 'industrial Speenhamland'.³⁵ While Solar considered that a 'certificate-man',

²⁹ (49 Geo. III, c 124) Poor (Settlement and Removal) Act, 1809.

³⁰ Taylor, 'Impact' p55.

³¹ A. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 1st Edn London 1776, (Digireads, 2019) p.134.

³² Ibid. p134.

³³ F. Eden, *The State of the Poor*, i, p.181, parenthesis mine.

³⁴ Coode's Report, p.187.

³⁵ J.S. Taylor, 'A different kind of Speenhamland: Nonresident Relief in the Industrial Revolution,' *Journal of British Studies*. Vol. 30/ 2 (April 1991) pp.183-208.

confident in the 'insurance' of the Poor Law, was free to travel to centres of industry, in stark contrast to his continental brother, who was obliged to remain where people knew him in case of the need to call on their charity.³⁶ The weight of most contemporary scholarship seems to fall on the side of the settlement laws being little impediment to strong, young, single men. This is underscored by the data from the three study towns where, for example, in Bedford of the 393 men examined between 1743 and 1819, 321 were married men, and 154 of those were examined within a month of them being married.³⁷ The strong implication is that men were left largely unchallenged until they got married.³⁸ For the sick, the old, and young women, ready-made, or potential, burdens on the rates, the position could be quite different.

One largely uncontested view is that the settlement regime had the effect of pitting parish against parish. Overseers were in a continual war of attrition against neighbouring parishes to ensure that they did not become responsible for more poor than they considered they could afford. Youths were apprenticed to distant parishes, young women were paid to have their babies beyond the parish boundary, and servants hired only for periods which did not give them settlement. This is Hindle's 'parochial xenophobia.'³⁹ Even Coode, in his assessment of the workings of the Old Poor Law made 150 years before, came to the same conclusion, arguing, 'it has isolated the interests of every parish and made inter-parochial war their normal state.'⁴⁰

9. Evaluating settlement and removal in a locality: the data.

To assess how movement between parishes was happening in a locality it is necessary to look at the documentation surviving. This consists of four main categories of document, which can be listed in descending order of survival: settlement certificates, examinations, removals and Quarter Session appeals. If one is to look at how a borough managed removal and settlement within its borders by looking at this documentation one needs to be reasonably confident that there is a representative survival rate.

Taking the largest evidence base Table 4-1 shows the survival rate of settlement certificates in the sample parishes against other indicative parishes for whom these figures are known. The calculation relies on moderating for population size and years for which the certificates are

³⁶ P.M. Solar, 'Poor Relief and English Economic Development before the Industrial Revolution,' *Economic History Review*, Vol.48/1, (1995) pp.1-22, p.12.

³⁷ BEDS; P1/13/4 and PUBZ3/1/1.

³⁸ Hampson noted this phenomenon as long ago as 1928 in her study of Cambridgeshire; E.H. Hampson, 'Settlement and Removal in Cambridgeshire, 1662-1834' *Cambridge Historical Journal*, Vol. 2/3, (1928) pp.273-289, p.280.

³⁹ Hindle, *On the Parish*, p.332,

⁴⁰ Coode's Report, p.188

extant, so a certain amount of estimation is required. The table ranks the parishes in order of survival rate, by measuring numbers of certificates surviving for the years measured and against the mean of the estimated population from 1700-1801.

Table 4- 1: Comparison of sample parish settlement certificate survival rates up to 1800.

Parish	Surviving certificates and minute book entries	Years covered by the data	Average number of certificates per year	Estimated population, 1700-1801 ⁴¹	No of mean pop for each certificate ⁴²
<i>Coningsby, Lincs</i>	353	1700-1785	3.6	800-1301	291
<i>St. Mary's Reading</i>	487	1687-1786	4.9	2000-3156*	322
<i>BVM, Guildford</i>	130 ⁴³	1699-1710 and 1727-1759 (43 years)	2.6	710-1186	501
<i>SS Peter and Paul, Wantage</i>	137	1700-1785	2.5	1,500-2339	768
<i>St. Giles' Reading</i>	318	1697-1798	3	2,500-3416*	986

There are no settlement certificates for Bedford. The Wantage parish is an as examples of a similar urban parish on major routes, Coningsby as an example of a parish with a reputed very high survival rate.⁴⁴

This table does not factor in the type of parish which each was. Busy regional centres could expect more traffic than sleepy rural parishes. Thomas in his analysis of over 7,000 settlement certificates in Berkshire, Essex and Oxfordshire estimates that, a

rural Parish might receive one certificate every three or four years; a textile town three or four per year, a County town five a year.⁴⁵

Coningsby was a sizeable village, but not a borough, nor important enough to have an MP.⁴⁶ It has a survival rate nearly nine times that which Thomas would predict for a rural parish, suggesting his work is an underestimation, based more on surviving documents than on actual

⁴¹ The last figure is from the 1801 census, where no other figures are known the earlier figure is a back projection from that based on an average quinquennial growth over the century of 2% (Wrigley and Schofield have an average of 2.5% and this is adjusted to compensate for industrial north v rural south.) E. A. Wrigley, and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871* (Cambridge, 1989) pp208-209. The Reading figures*are from N. Goose, 'Decay and Regeneration in Seventeenth Century Reading: A study in a changing economy' *Southern History*, Vol. 6, (1984) pp.63-74 .

⁴² Population halfway between 1700-1801, as calculated above.

⁴³ Includes minute book entries, as do Wantage figures. These are legible entries.

⁴⁴ A. Cole, *Lincolnshire Settlement Certificates* (Scunthorpe, 2014).

⁴⁵ E.G. Thomas, *The Treatment of Poverty in Berkshire, Essex and Oxfordshire* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Oxford, 1970), p.219, clearly this statistic is somewhat self-fulfilling, as it includes Reading within the small dataset of 'county towns', which also includes Oxford, Colchester and Abingdon.

⁴⁶ Does not figure as a constituency (HoP online) nor in the MCR1835. Unfortunately there is no entry in the VCH.

issues at the time. This would indicate that St. Mary's while a good survival rate, is by no means complete. St. Giles while fewer, would have been far less a 'destination' parish, being the most rural of the three Borough parishes.

Reading removal certificates show a stronger survival rate (Table 4-2). This is not surprising since removals were much more likely to be contested than settlements. Thomas' study of settlement and removal certificates for the three counties shows roughly half the number of removal certificates to settlement. There are 568 removal orders for Reading parishes surviving for the period 1694-1799 in comparison to 805 settlement certificates for the same period. This is more like a 3 to 4 ratio, suggesting a stronger survival rate. It is clear that there has not been a 100% survival rate. A simple comparison, for instance, between certificates held by St. Mary's showing removals *in from* St. Giles, and those held by St. Giles showing removals *out to* St. Mary's for the eighteenth century, shows ten held by St. Mary's and thirteen issued by St. Giles, only six of which match. It is difficult to extrapolate from this figure, since it is so comparatively small. Nonetheless it is fair to assume that survival of removal orders for these two parishes may be only 30-50% of the number issued. This would make the survival level of the settlement certificates towards the lower end of that. However, even if we have a sample representing, say 25% of all settlement certificates, and 35% of all removals this is still a good sample size. In comparison to many other counties and towns it is a good representative number. Vialls found only 582 for all of Northamptonshire.⁴⁷ Jenkins' study of eight Surrey parishes found an average survival of 36 per parish.⁴⁸ Alongside this there are 276 examinations for the parishes of St. Giles and St. Mary.

The survival rate for Bedford and Guildford is much more thin (Table 4-2). Both towns have survivals from only one parish. Legislation establishing Bedford as a Union was passed in 1792. Prior to that time the only settlement information that survives is for the parish of St. Paul, starting from 1742, which consists of a set of 115 examinations by the JPs of Bedford, there are no settlement certificates. There are 176 removal certificates, 116 from St. Pauls and 58 into it, to cover the same period. The Guildford data is a mixture of bonds, a vestry list and settlement and removal certificates. Of the 149 settlement entries, only 130 have legible places of origin. All are from the parish of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM). Consequently the analysis that can be

⁴⁷ C.M. Vialls, 'The Laws of Settlement; their impact on the poor inhabitants of the Daventry area of Northamptonshire, 1750-1834' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Leicester, 1998) p23; E.H. Hampson's study of Cambridgeshire and Landau's of Kent both use appeals as proxies. E.H. Hampson, 'Settlement and Removal in Cambridgeshire', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, Vol. 2/3, 1928, pp.273-289, N. Landau, 'The laws of settlement and the surveillance of immigration in eighteenth-century Kent', *Continuity and Change*, Vol. 3/3, (1988) pp.391-420.

⁴⁸ D.G. Jenkins, 'County Administration' (1986) p.60.

done for the comparator towns is more limited and subject to a greater amount of interpretation than the Reading data.⁴⁹

Table 4- 2: Overall survival rate of settlement and removal documentation in all sample parishes.

Name of Parish	Settlement docs ⁵⁰	Removal docs
<i>St. Mary's, Reading</i>	487 certificates (1687-1786)	323 certificates (1704-1831)
<i>St. Giles, Reading</i>	320 certificates (1693-1821) ⁵¹	438 certificates (1694-1834)
<i>St. Lawrence's Reading</i>	None	None
<i>BVM, Guildford</i>	28 certificates, 6 bonds and 123 listed in vestry book. 88 examinations. 1680-1799	2 appeals
<i>Holy Trinity, Guildford</i>	None	None
<i>St. Nicholas, Guildford</i>	None	None
<i>St. Paul's, Bedford⁵²</i>	84 Examinations (1743-1792)	176 certificates, (1699-1797)
<i>St. Cuthbert</i>	None	None
<i>St. John</i>	None	None

⁴⁹ The Reading data is, apart from one or two exceptions which have been taken directly from manuscript, taken from a calendared index of overseers' papers *The Records of the Overseers of the Poor pre-1834* (Reading, Berks FHS, 2005). which records all the appropriate information (name, family, age, date etc). The Guildford data is also from a calendared index, J. Holland *Surrey Poor Law Index and Calendar* (Woking, 2001), supplemented by vestry lists, the Bedford data is taken from the catalogue details: <https://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/>. All relevant information (date, gender, marital status etc) was entered into a series of spreadsheets for analysis.

⁵⁰ Certificates from before 1697 are bonds, but included in this data, but not in table 4-1 which shows settlement certificate survival.

⁵¹ This is 2 more than shown on p.86, where certificates after 1799 are discounted.

⁵² From 1796 Bedford became a Union, following the 1794 Act for the Better Relief of the Poor of Bedford (34 Geo. III c 98). There is a lot more documentation after this date, including removal and bastardy information, which will be referred to elsewhere. Figures from the Bedford catalogue do not exactly match, as some are duplicates, which have been discounted in my analysis.

3. Interpretation of the settlement, removal and examination data.

The Reading data is, apart from one or two exceptions, taken from a calendared index of overseers' papers which records all the appropriate information (name, family, age, date etc), and these have been entered into a database.⁵³

1. Suppression of removal: Reading

The first obvious deduction from the Reading settlement data is that, as one would expect, by far the largest movements were within the Borough, from one Borough parish to the other.

Table 4- 3: Settlement certificates from within the Borough parishes, 1694-1799

To/From	St. Lawrence	St. Giles	St. Mary	Total/out of (%)
St. Mary	156	104		260
St. Giles	60		69	129
Total	216	104	69	389/805 (49%)

Just under half (49%) of all the settlements were from neighbouring borough parishes. Geographical proximity alone would lead one to expect this.



Figure 4- 1, Reading and surrounding parishes⁵⁴

⁵³ *Berkshire Overseers Papers: The records of the Overseers of the Poor pre-1834*, (Reading, 2005)

⁵⁴ Extract from Map *Berkshire Parishes in the 19th Century* (BFHS) This is the pre-1974 landscape and is also accurate for the 18th Century. Caversham was in Oxfordshire in the eighteenth century and became part of Berkshire in 1910. RL is Reading St. Lawrence.

A comparison with neighbouring non-borough parishes immediately shows that there was more than just geographical proximity driving this movement (Table 4-3). Despite similar geographical proximity, and there being 5 parishes, they account for only 7% of the total.

The population of these rural parishes may not have been quite that of the urban ones (although they were all large parishes), but nonetheless this is a significant difference.⁵⁵ It is clear that overseers, and JP, were willing to sign off settlement certificates for people wishing to move streets away within the Borough, but overseers and JPs of the surrounding areas seem less inclined to sign off settlement into Reading. The pull factor of a growing town that, by the 1730s, had a canal, a large number of inns, malting, brewing and significant markets must have been significant. It is unlikely that lack of demand was the reason for the small numbers appearing in settlement certificates coming from the surrounding parishes. Clark's 1979 study of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century migration, using not only settlement certificates, but apprenticeship, freeman records and church court deposition papers, concludes that most people moved at least once in their lives, and the poorer classes were most likely to move less than ten miles, although urban migrants were willing to move further to a neighbouring town.⁵⁶

Table 4- 4 Settlement certificates from neighbouring parishes outside of the borough, 1694-1799

To/From	Sonning	Tilehurst	Caversham	Shinfield	Burghfield	Total/out of (%)
St. Mary	11	8	7	2	5	32
St. Giles	11	2	1	9	2	25
Total	22	10	9	11	7	58/805 (7%)

It seems very likely that a lot of informal migration was occurring from the neighbouring rural parishes, simply not covered by settlement certificates. This is borne out when one looks at the comparable removal records within and without the borough.

⁵⁵ The combined population of the surrounding parishes in 1801 was 5107, compared to 9742 for the Borough, 52%. Source: 1801 Census, The percentage was likely higher at the beginning of the eighteenth century on the assumption that it largely saw migration into urban areas from surrounding rural areas.

⁵⁶ P. Clark; 'Migration in England during the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries', *Past and Present*, Vol.83 (May 1979) pp.57-90.

Table 4- 5: Removals within the Borough, 1694-1799

From/To	St. Giles	St. Mary	St. Lawrence ⁵⁷	Total/ out of (%)
St. Mary	9		16	25
St. Giles		6	23	29
St. Lawrence	13	8		21
Total	29	29	26	75/568⁵⁸ (13%)

Table 4- 6: Removals to neighbouring parishes outside of the Borough, 1674-1799

From/To	Sonning ⁵⁹	Tilehurst	Caversham	Shinfield	Burghfield	Total
St. Mary	6	11	3	1	1	22
St. Giles	7	4	5	5	1	22
Total	13	15	8	6	2	44/568 (7%)

It can be seen by the Tables 4-4 and 4-5 that while interborough settlements account for 48% of the eighteenth century settlement, they are only 13% of the removals; at a ratio of 389/75, more than 5 settlements for every one removal (5/1). The story for the surrounding parishes is quite different; accounting for 7% of the settlements, but also 7% of the removals, with a ratio of 58/44 or 1.3/1.⁶⁰

This pattern is repeated for wider Berkshire (Table 4-6), showing again a ratio of 136/108, or 1.3/1.

Table 4- 7: Comparison of settlement to removals in wider Berkshire, 1674-1799

	St Mary's	St. Giles	Total and percentage
Settlers from further Berks	60	76	136/802 (17%)
Removals to further Berks	50	58	108/568 (19%)

⁵⁷ Compiled from certificates of 'removals out' held by the other two parishes.

⁵⁸ 26 of the St. Mary certificates and 261 of the St. Giles are for 1800 and after and have been removed from this sample to make it directly comparable to the settlement stats.

⁵⁹ At this time Sonning was a huge parish straddling the Berkshire/Oxfordshire border, extending to 6773 acres in Berkshire alone. It included Earley and Woodley. VCH, 'Parishes, Sonning, Earley, Woodley and Sandford', *A History of the County of Berkshire, Vol. 3* (London, 1923) pp210-225.

⁶⁰ Burghfield is an interesting outlier here, with 7 settlers in, and only 2 removals. 3.5/1. Whether this is just a quirk of data survival, or a genuine difference of treatment is impossible to tell with such a small sample.

This suggests there was little difference between the policy of Reading parishes to neighbouring out-of-borough parishes, and the wider County. This was not a gradual breakdown of cooperation the further away a parish was, it was a dramatic reversal of policy at the Borough boundary. Reading parishes accepted five settlers for every one removed if they were from within the Borough, for surrounding parishes it is more like one for one.

This does not mean that people were not moving into the Borough from outside, it simply means that when they came to the notice of the parish authorities they were treated differently. It seems likely that people moved within, and from outside of the Borough, without settlement certificates, but applied for them when required. The whole issue of what the date on a settlement certificate means is a controversial one, and there may well have been differing practises in different parts of the Country. They could have been brought with the settler when they arrived, could have been issued at a key stage in their life, such as marriage, or could have been issued when the parish in which they were staying required it.⁶¹ In the case of the Reading parishes it seems that the majority of them were in response to the destination parish requiring them of settlers when the parish was facing a difficult period, although life events, such as marriage or the birth of child were also a factor.⁶²

What happened then was markedly different. An illustrative comparison can be drawn between two sets of cases within a couple of months in 1743. On the 4th August 1743 five certificates were issued by the Overseers of St. Lawrence for people living in St. Mary's; (three more were issued on the 24th January the following year).⁶³ All five were married men with children and named occupations. Such 'batch settlements' were common from the St. Lawrence overseers and occur on a regular basis through the course of the first half of the eighteenth century.⁶⁴ They can be correlated with periods of deprivation or difficulty for the Parish of St. Mary, rates had

⁶¹ See K. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor, Social Change and Agrarian England 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985) p.17. N. Landau, 'The laws of settlement and the surveillance of immigration in eighteenth century Kent' *Continuity and Change* 3 (1988, pp391-420) p407, K. Snell, 'Pauper settlement and the right to poor relief in England and Wales;' *Continuity and Change* Vol. 6/3 (1991), pp.375-415, N. Landau, 'The eighteenth-century context of the laws of settlement' *Continuity and Change* Vol. 6/3 (1991), pp.471-439, N. Landau, 'Who was subject to the Laws of Settlement? Procedure under the Settlement Laws in Eighteenth Century England,' Vol. 43/2 *Agricultural History Review*, (1995) pp.139-159, for the most well-known of these disagreements. Boulton writes recently that the "Landau-Snell debate" continues to cast a pall of uncertainty' J. Boulton, 'Double Deterrence, Settlement and Practice in London's West End, 1725-1824' from S. King and A. Winter, (Eds), *Migration, Settlement and Belonging in Europe, 1500-1930*, (New York, 2013) p.54.

⁶² M. Ounsley, 'Vestrymen and Paupers: the struggle to manage the poor in eighteenth century Reading' Vol.39 *Berkshire Old and New*, (2020) pp.3-9.

⁶³ BRO DP/98/13/1/110, 260,294,336, 392.

⁶⁴ Ounsley, 'Vestrymen' p.3.

been at a high 'five years' worth' since 1740, and relief payments were going up.⁶⁵ No such records exist for St. Lawrence, but it is reasonable to assume that times of difficulty for the one parish would also be times of difficulty for the other, surviving St. Giles figures from 1745 also show heightened rate levels.⁶⁶

Rather than evidence of collective movement from one parish to another they seem much more likely to be in response to a request from the St. Mary's overseers to the St. Lawrence's to provide certificates for people already resident within the Parish. It is possible that the arrangement was reciprocal, but the St. Lawrence records do not survive to verify this. Reading JPs John Abery and John Thorp sign off the batch; quite possibly from a list of names provided by St. Mary's.⁶⁷

In comparison just under three months later, on the 27th of October 1743 Joseph Clarke, his wife Elizabeth and children, James, 9, Thomas, 6 and Francis, 4 are removed to Caversham.⁶⁸ The removal is not appealed, as the Overseers note. He and his family soon return, with a certificate from the Caversham overseers and Oxfordshire JPs signed the 9th November.⁶⁹ Clearly the exercise has been one of getting Caversham to own their own, but rather than simply asking for a certificate to be signed off (although this conversation may have occurred, we do not know) the parish felt the need to remove the family in order to get the job done. This was obviously still the tactic in 1765 when exactly the same exercise occurred to the young son, Francis, now a grown man with his own family in tow, removed on the 23rd Feb and returned, with certificate, on the 11th March.⁷⁰ This demonstrates a systemic discrimination by the Reading overseers. Settlers originating from within the Borough boundary are signed off almost routinely, in batches of up to 27 families at a time.⁷¹ In contrast settlers from without the boundary are removed simply to get a certificate from their home parish overseers.

Why is such a suppression of removal numbers in the interest of both parish and Borough?

Removal was a potentially costly and disruptive practice for a parish. Not only had the removal

⁶⁵ St. Mary's rated by 'years' worth' until 1764. An assessment was taken as to how much the rate would raise, in comparison to how much the parish needed. If the rate would raise £100, but the parish needed £200, the rate was 'two years' worth'. BRO D/P 98 8/2-6, St. Mary's Vestry Minutes, 1725-1829. See a worked example on p.121.

⁶⁶ BRO DP 96/12/11/1 Rate book 1745.

⁶⁷ For more on how this process could have been negotiated see Ch. 5, p.164.

⁶⁸ BRO DP/98/13/2/49.

⁶⁹ BRO DP/98/13/1/109.

⁷⁰ BRO DP/98/13/2/57 and BRO DP/98/13/1/116: It is quite possible that the family were not even physically removed, a certificate simply signed off and waved under the noses of the Caversham overseers in order to get them to produce a settlement. However this is just speculation.

⁷¹ BRO D/P 98/13 Feb 1717.

to be processed, but it was also normal for an overseer to escort the removed to their destination, where they then needed to be handed over to an overseer for that parish. Quite frequently those removed simply returned, particularly when they had only been moved streets away, making the whole process quite futile and time-consuming.⁷² In addition it could be disruptive to the workforce of the town. It was in the interests of employers that the local workforce should be able to move around freely within the town. While the Corporation still attempted to manage the arrival of 'foreign' traders at least in the first half of the century, having servants and employees from within the Borough nearer to, or residing in, their place of work was desirable.⁷³ Thus we see cases such as John Webb, a 'quayman', and his family, getting a certificate from St. Giles to St. Mary's, where he works for a brewer 'for his better attendance upon his said employment', or Robert Webb, from St. Lawrence to St. Mary who gets his settlement 'by living with Mr. Blagrove the ironmonger'.⁷⁴ Where amicable agreements could be made between parishes to allow someone to settle nearer to their place of work, these were clearly in the wider interest.⁷⁵ An argument could be made that free movement of employees was not necessarily in the interests of employers if it allowed skilled tradesmen to be 'poached' by offering higher wages. It is probable however that, in a situation where 'foreign' traders were kept out, and the trade within the town is managed by a handful of powerful families, that an effective cartel of agreed wages operated.⁷⁶

2. Suppression of removal: Bedford and Guildford

Does the Bedford and Guildford data reflect similar disparities in movement within and without of these Boroughs?

As mentioned, the Bedford data is mostly examinations. These served a different purpose to certificates. As stated above certificates were issued by the 'settled' parish, either on the departure of a migrant, or at the request of host overseers or the settler at a later date. Examinations in contrast were prompted for a variety of reasons. Some seem to be at the request of a resident who wanted settled status from a parish. For example John Martin who

⁷² J.S. Taylor, 'A London Parish, St. Martin Vintry', in *Poverty, Migration and Settlement in the Industrial Revolution, Sojourners' Narratives*. (Palo Alto, California, 1989), pp.117-139. While illegal this seems to have been a common practice and can be noted in the Reading overseers papers.

⁷³ For example, BRO R/AC/1/22, June 1769, prosecution of a 'foreigner 'found trading linen'.

⁷⁴ BRO D/P98/13/1/430 and 457, William Pritchett is living and working with W.B. Simonds in 1801, BRO D/P96/13/4/80, John Lamborne lived and worked in the Gaol in 1753. BRO D/P98/13/4/58.

⁷⁵ Taylor, 'A different kind of Speenhamland', p.187.

⁷⁶ For the social and familial connections of the Reading business community see Ch. 5, pp.149-153.

owned a pub in St. Pauls, and had property in another parish, where he has paid poor rates, he is married with one child.⁷⁷ There does not look to be any financial hardship; and there is no related removal, nor has it been instigated by a marriage. It is quite plausible that he simply asked for settlement certificate. Ten of the examinations look to have been instigated by a marriage at St. Pauls, as they occur within a week of the marriage date, five of them on the day of the marriage.⁷⁸ Others look to be occasioned by genuine want, such as Edward Jackins in 1783, working as a servant in the Saracen's Head and with a wife and seven children to support.⁷⁹ Clearly Bedford had problems with the large numbers of soldiers garrisoned there at any one time. Twenty of the eight-four examinations, where occupations were given, were for soldiers who had moved into the town, either to marry, or because they were part of the 'part-time' militia. Only eight of the examinations can be mapped on to subsequent removals, which may be indicative of the fact that the examinations were done for more routine purposes, but the record survival rate cautions against being too certain about this.

The examinations do give us the place of birth of the person wishing to settle in the town in sixty-five of the cases.

Table 4- 8: Birthplace of examinees in St. Pauls, Bedford, 1742-1792

Place of birth of examinee	
Bedford	11
Bedfordshire	31
Northamptonshire	7
Buckinghamshire	3
Somerset	3
Lincolnshire	3
Ireland ⁸⁰	3
Northumbria	2
Staffordshire	2

⁷⁷ BEDSRO/ P1/13/4/109.

⁷⁸ BEDSRO
P1/13/4/125
P1/13/4/122
P1/13/4/144
P1/13/4/150
P1/13/4/16.

⁷⁹ BEDSRO P1/13/4/154.

⁸⁰ 'Far flung' places such as these come from soldiers.

At first glance, this looks to tell a completely different story to the Reading data, with three times as many people wishing to settle coming from outside the town as inside. This shows place of birth, however, not settlement. With such a low data sample it is difficult to draw firm conclusions, but it is quite possibly the case that it is predominantly people from outside the Borough who are more routinely examined than those within, who may well have just been given a certificate without examination. There is no reason to suppose that Bedford should perform in anyway differently in its population being more inclined to move around within the town than anywhere else.

The removals are more directly comparable and tell a more familiar story.

Table 4- 9: Destination of those removed from St. Pauls, Bedford, by county, 1699-1794

Destination		Percentage of 116
Bedford	16	14%
Beds	69	59%
Cambs	8	7%
Herts	4	3.5%
Bucks	3	3%
London	3	3%
Northants	3	3%

This shows a similar percentage of removals going to the wider Borough as in Reading, but a much higher percentage going to the County (the Reading stats show about 27%). This could be explained by Bedford not attracting migration from beyond the County in the first place, given its smaller size and further distance from London. Nonetheless it is quite clear that a much larger proportion of removals are going to outside of the Borough.

The Guildford data is a mixture of bonds, a vestry list and settlement and removal certificates. Of the 149 settlement entries, only 130 have extant or legible places of origin. All are from the parish of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM).

Parishes acknowledging settlement of migrants into BVM break down as follows by county:

Table 4- 10: Place of settlement for migrants in BVM, 1699-1792

Place of settlement	Number	Percentage of 130
Guildford parishes	51	39%
Surrey	53	41%
London	8	6%
Southampton	4	3%
Berkshire	2	1.5%
Middlesex	2	1.5%

Guildford accounts for a slightly smaller percentage of settlement data surviving, than Surrey. This can probably be explained by Guildford being much smaller compared to thickly-populated Surrey, with its outer London satellites than Reading was to Berkshire.⁸¹ Berkshire had ten times the population of Reading in 1801, while Surrey had sixty-six times that of Guildford. There are simply more people over the border to come in than native Guildfordians. Nevertheless it is clear that a disproportionately high level of the settlement and movement is occurring within the town.

Unfortunately, only two removal items survive, both being results of appeals, neither of which apply to other Guildford parishes. There are records of eighty-seven examinations, thirteen of which give their parish of origin as within the Borough, while twenty-one are from the County, 15% compared to 24%. It is problematic however, as previously discussed, to see examinations as comparable to either settlements or removals.

The data for the two comparator towns is problematic then. It can reasonably be said that Guildford shows enhanced movement within the Borough, and Bedford enhanced removal to the County, in support of the Reading pattern; but the gaps in the data do not allow for much more than that.

3. Removals of women, Reading.

The acceptance of high levels of settlement within the Borough, and low levels of removal is not the only evidence of cooperation between the three parishes. We can also see quite a

⁸¹ The 1801 census Guildford/ Surrey, 3948/267,000 and Reading/Berkshire 9742/104,000.

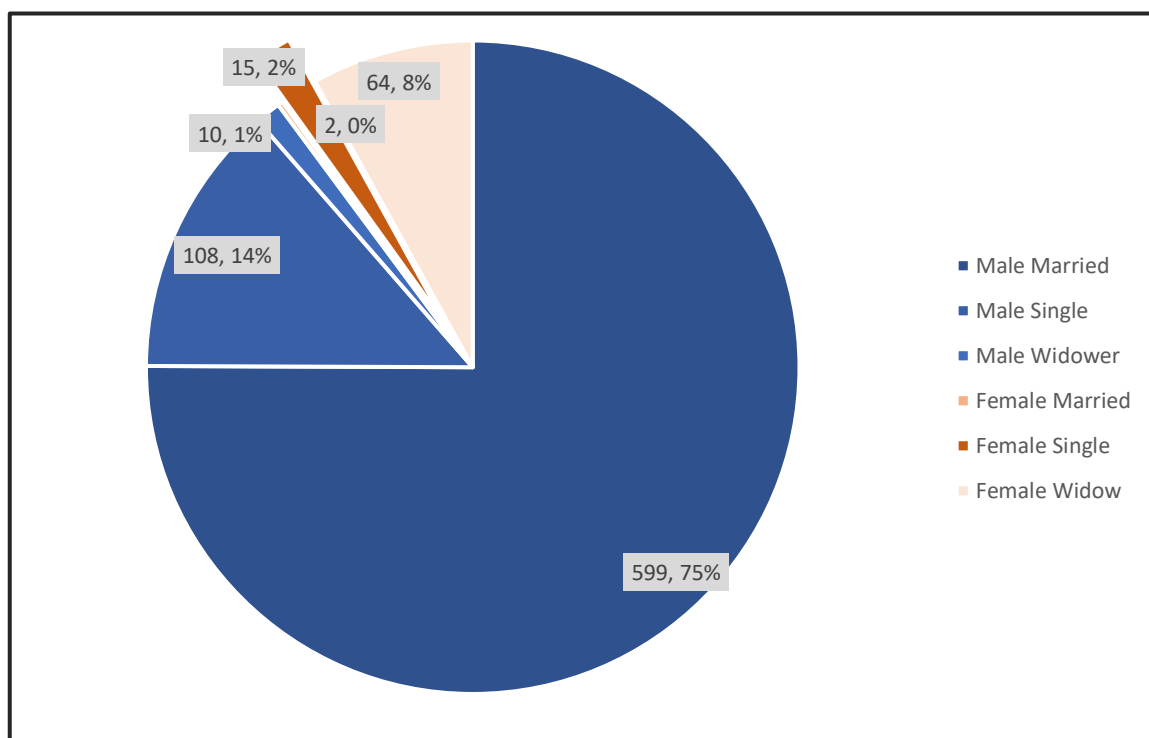
sophisticated targeting at work of who is removed, which simply would not have worked if all three parishes were not operating the same policy.

Most parishes carried out a policy of targeted removals. Some settlers were more welcome than others, as Taylor observes:

... industrial areas and under populated rural areas with labour needs were in a position to absorb the pick of the labourers who do come; less productive sojourners could be removed forthwith.⁸²

To this list could be included labour-hungry county towns, with inns, canals, breweries and textile processing. In order to see who was removed and who not in Reading, it is instructive first to look at who was getting settlement certificates in the first place.

Figure 4- 2: Numbers and percentage receiving settlement certificates in two Reading parishes, by gender and marital status, 1694-1799. Exploded segment is single women.



The vast majority (90%) of the certificates in the parishes are issued to men, and of those, mostly married men (whose wives and children were normally also named on the certificate).⁸³

⁸² J. S. Taylor, 'Impact of Pauper Settlement, 1691-1834,' *Past and Present* Vol.73 (Nov. 1976) pp.42-74, p.67.

⁸³ Although not always, see p. 106.

That is not to say that there was a preference for married men, it is more likely the case that married men were required to have a settlement certificate. Many of them had recently married, or had a child, and it is at this point they are required to become 'certificate-men'. It is noticeable that while the Kennet and Avon Navigation was being built in the early years of the eighteenth century, only three labourers and two 'bargemen' are named on certificates, yet there must have been a small army of migrant men working on the project.⁸⁴ It is probable that overseers simply turned a blind eye to young single men gainfully employed in the Town.

For women, married or single, the situation was completely different. Only 10% of the certificates are in the names of women, and the majority of those (8%) are widows. This number of widows broadly equates with what estimates there are of the numbers of widows in the general population at the time (between 6-8%).⁸⁵ Textual comments on many of the 'widow' certificates, such as 'Widow of Edward Kirby, deceased' or 'Widow of the late Joseph Wentworth' suggest they are widows of local men, who had probably lived in the town for many years and were recently bereaved.⁸⁶ Forty of the sixty-four 'widow' certificates have

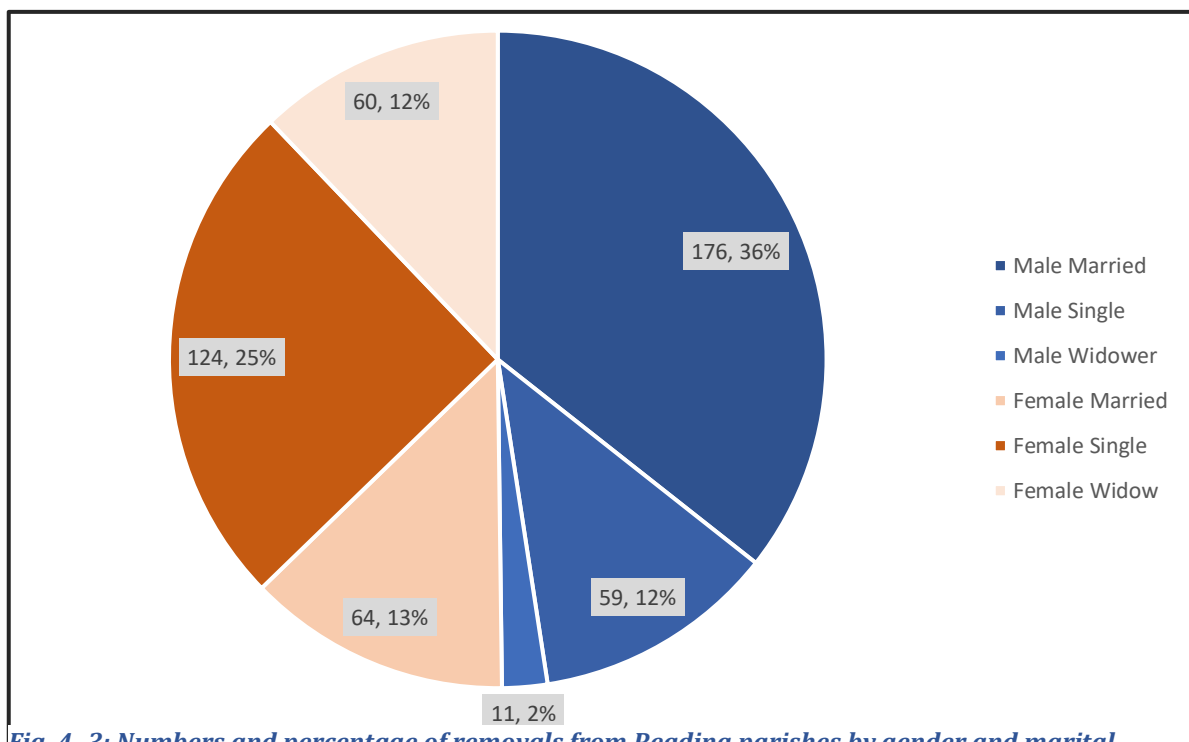


Fig. 4- 3: Numbers and percentage of removals from Reading parishes by gender and marital status, 1694-1799. Exploded segment is single women.

⁸⁴ The Canal was completed in 1723, see Dils, *Reading*, p.136.

⁸⁵ Olwen Hufton attempted an estimation based on nine household listings for the eighteenth century. This found 9-14% of households headed by non-married women, about 60% of which were widows. O.Hufton, 'Women without men: Widows and Spinners in Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century.' *Journal of Family History* Vol. 9/4 (1984) pp.310-424, p.358.

⁸⁶ BRO D/P98/13/1/451 and 248.

settlements from other parishes within the Borough. Single women coming from outside of the Borough and able to provide a settlement certificate to the overseers account for only 2%, and married women 0% (2). This is not specific to Reading. Vials in her study of Northamptonshire found only 35 of the 582 certificates for the County had been issued to women. She does not say how many of these were widows.⁸⁷ The comparison with removals is striking.

It is indeed the case that the largest group of removals is married men (Fig.4-3). This does not make them the group most likely to be removed. In this sample the ratio of married men with settlement certificates to removed is 5.5/1. By contrast the ratio of single female settlers to removed is 1.5/10. Women will also be represented in the married male group, as they were usually removed with their husbands. This is an uncompromising purgation of a particular group.

For young single women moving was a lottery. They would be very unlikely to be given a settlement certificate by their home parish, so would move without one; presumably in the hope that they subsisted unnoticed until they had managed to acquire settlement through service or marriage. If they lost their position, or became pregnant, they were removed whether they had claimed on the parish or not.⁸⁸ Clark's analysis of migration using (predominantly) court papers suggests that women were a more mobile group than men at this time. He puts this down to moving 'to neighbouring villages to get married'.⁸⁹ The large numbers of single women removed from Reading in this period suggests the possibility that, far from moving to marry, many simply moved opportunistically to find work, or a partner. This accords with Boulton's finding with regards to the gender profile of St. Martins in the Fields at this time, where he finds a bulge in females arriving to be domestic servants; which is reflected in a female-preponderance in parish burials.⁹⁰ The efficiency of the Reading removal regime is reflected in parish burial statistics, which show much more balance in the genders; women were simply not allowed to stay, and died elsewhere (Fig 4-4).⁹¹

Such a comprehensive and targeted policy would simply not have worked if only one parish was following it. If one parish had developed a reputation of being more lenient with young single women it would have been a relatively straightforward matter for women to have moved from

⁸⁷ Vials, *The Laws of Settlement*, p.231.

⁸⁸ (35 Geo. III, c 101) An Act to prevent the Removal of Poor Persons until they should become actually chargeable, 1795. (Roses Act) which protected settlers against removal if they made no claim on the parish, specifically excluded pregnant single women.

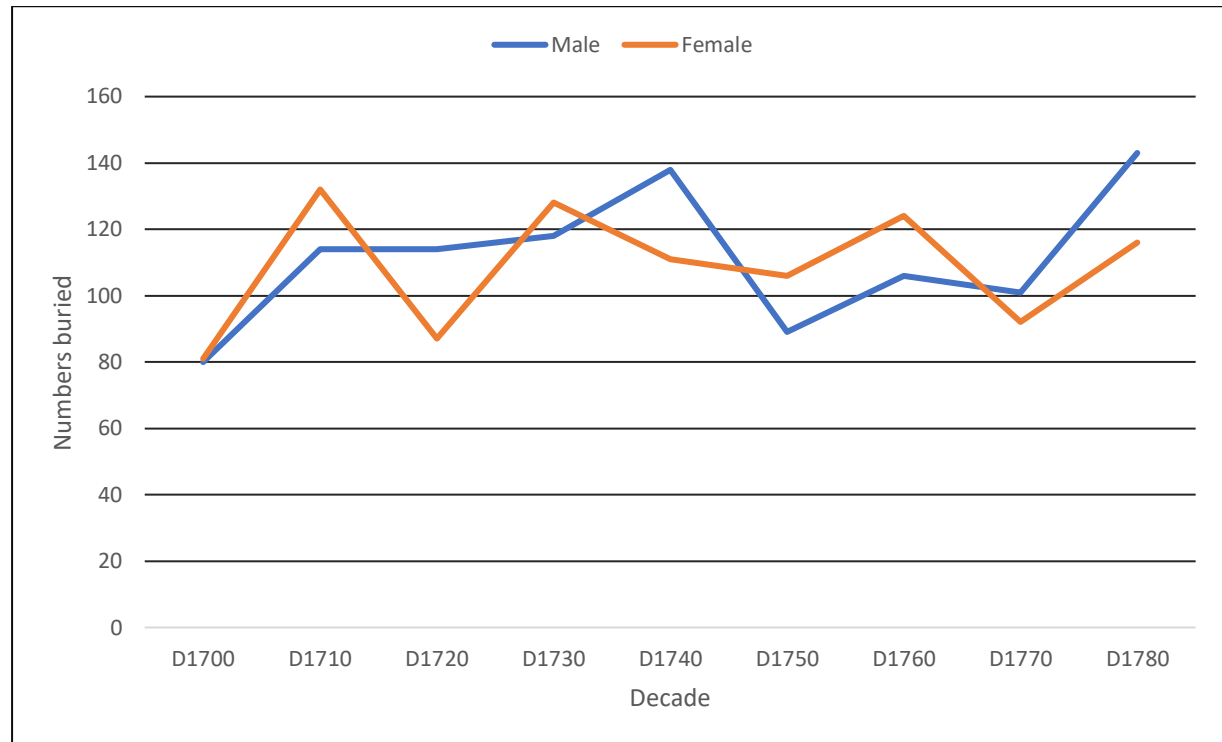
⁸⁹ Clarke, 'Migration', (1979) p.74.

⁹⁰ Boulton, 'Double Deterrence,' p.56, although he does say this is only 'preliminary work'.

⁹¹ Parish births and burials from <http://www.histpop.org>, Reading 1700-1780. 1811 Census, parish register abstract.

one rented room to another in a neighbouring parish in order to stay in the town.⁹² Instead, by ensuring that all three parishes acted in unison on this policy, young single women had nowhere to hide.

Figure 4- 3: Burials in the three parishes of Reading by gender, 1700-1780, by decade, from 1811 census parish abstract.



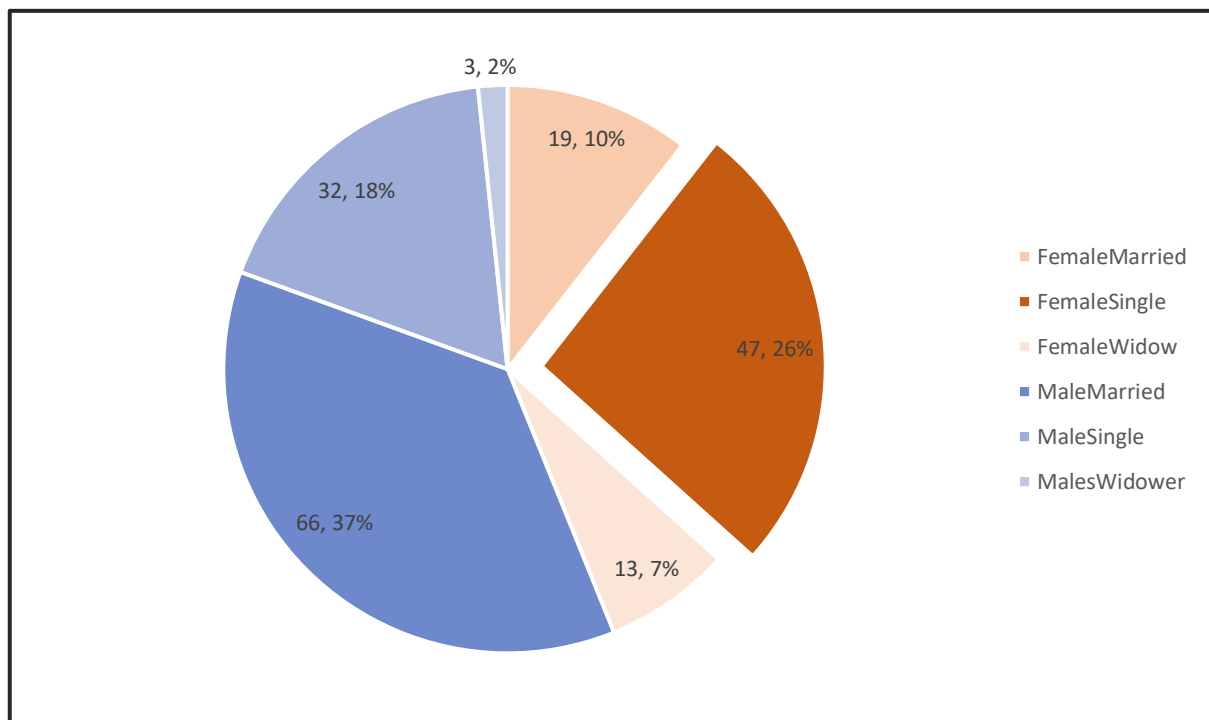
The reciprocity of the parishes is quite pragmatic. Of the 124 single women removed in this sample, only twelve (less than 10%) over the course of the century are removed to parishes within Reading, even though, as we have seen, the majority of movement would have been within the Borough. It is important *to the town* that single women are removed, there is no point in shuffling them around within the Borough. If they have settlement in the town anyway, then the particular parish is less important.

⁹² J. S. Taylor, *Poverty, Migration and Settlement*, p.130, for examples of such behaviour in London parishes.

4. Removals of women: Bedford and Guildford.

Did Bedford and Guildford operate a similarly draconian attitude towards removing women as Reading? Here, again, the data is incomplete. In St. Pauls, the only parish for which data survives, seventy-nine women are removed compared to 101 men. Again the majority of the women removed are single women. This data set is from later than the Reading figures, after the passage of Rose's Act, which made removal more difficult for all groups but pregnant single women, so one would expect to see an even further distortion in favour of single women. In fact it is only 1% greater than the Reading figures, and overall women represent slightly fewer of those removed (46% compared to 50%). Given the gaps in the data it would be wrong to put too much emphasis on these differences, which could easily fall within margins of error. While the apparent purgation of women is not quite so thorough as in Reading, there is clearly still a large number being removed, probably a lot more than are being settled. In order to make proper sense of the data we need settlement numbers for comparison, which do not exist. All we can say is that women were being removed in relation to men to a slightly lesser extent than Reading, but still, probably, disproportionately.

Figure 4-5: Numbers and percentages removed from St. Pauls, Bedford, by gender and marital status, 1797-1834, Exploded pie is single women.



The Guildford data contains only two removals, as explained. The settlement data, as far as can be interpreted shows a similar preponderance of male married men coming into the town with settlement certificates.

Table 4- 10: Settlement into BVM Guildford, surviving certificates.

	Male/married	Male single	Female single	Female/widow
Into BVM	22	4	1	1

The two towns, where they have data, underscore predominant male settlement and disproportionate female removal, but little more can be taken from them.

5. Language on settlement certificates: Reading

A further indication of the relative trust and cooperation between the parishes can be seen in the wording used on the settlement certificates. Of the 803 certificates surviving from the two parishes of St. Mary's and St. Giles' seventy-six of them use imprecise expressions such as 'his wife and children' or 'his family' instead of the far more normal practice of naming a settler's wife and family quite specifically and giving ages.⁹³

One authority on language used on settlement certificates has suggested that such imprecise terms are used on occasions when a man leaves a parish to look for work, unsure as to where he is to settle, and, as yet, without a family.

This short statement could cover many eventualities. Perhaps John Smith was a single man and the overseer was looking ahead to the time when he would marry and have children.⁹⁴

The imprecision acted as a 'future-proof' for the overseers, reducing the need for later expensive and lengthy correspondence as the man's circumstances changed. This is very unlikely, firstly the law was very clear that a man's wife and family were covered in his settlement anyway, without the need for them to be mentioned on the certificate. The most coherent explanation as to why most certificates are very precise about a man's wife and family, often giving ages as well as names, was a protection against fraud. As Landau states:

⁹³ For a more detailed exposition of this general point see M. Ounsley, 'Imagined wives and children' *Southern History* Vol. 43 (2023) pp104-120.

⁹⁴ A. Cole, *Poor Law Documents before 1834*, (Scunthorpe, 1994), p.9.

...parishes issuing certificates most probably received legal advice that, the more precisely a certificate identified those in the family it covered the less likely was it that the certificate would be interpreted as extending to those not precisely identified in the certificate.⁹⁵

A parish using such imprecise terms as ‘his wife and family’ was potentially writing a blank cheque which would lay it open for all sorts of claims upon it for decades into the future. In addition, such use as there was of this term declined rapidly after the 1740s when various legal cases concerning who was covered by a certificate meant that the practice of imprecise terms practically dies out.⁹⁶ This is confirmed in the Reading dataset, where only two of the certificates date after 1739, the last being in 1757.

The fact that the term ‘his wife and children’ is not being used to describe a fictitious family is further underlined by a close analysis of its actual use on those certificates. By sorting the database on parish of *origin*, rather than parish of *destination*, it is possible to group certificates together with ones which were all produced by the same vestry, ideally by the same people at the same time. One prolific user of the term ‘his wife and children’ or similar in the first half of the century is St. Lawrence’s parish. As previously mentioned St. Lawrence also had a tendency to produce their certificates in batches. This allows for a ‘goldilocks’ dataset, a vestry that did use imprecise terms, and the batches of certificates within which they used them.

Table 4- 11: Use of imprecise terms on St. Lawrence settlement certificates.

Batch Date	Numbers of certs	Of which men	Using ‘Wife and children’	Using ‘Wife and child’	Using ‘Wife’	No dependents
11th Feb 1717	27	21	15	2	3	1
7th Jan 1720	10	6	2	0	3	1
21st April 1720	16	15	7	2	4	2
28th June 1739	14	14	7	2	3	2
Totals	67	55	31	6	13	6

When comparing certificates which do use the term ‘his wife and children’ against others produced by the same people on the same day, (a type of analysis rarely, if ever, done) it is clear that the term ‘his wife and children’ is just one among several including ‘his wife and child’ and ‘wife’. This is not a generalized ‘future-proof’ term, describing non-existent families, but terms specific to actual families.

⁹⁵ N. Landau, ‘Who was subjected to the Laws of Settlement?’ p.152.

⁹⁶ Ibid p.152.

Given then that this term is referring to a real family, and careful naming of the family was a proof against fraud, why do we see it used at all in the Reading dataset? An analysis of the origins of these certificates is illuminating.

Figure 4- 6: Origins of all certificates in the Reading dataset.

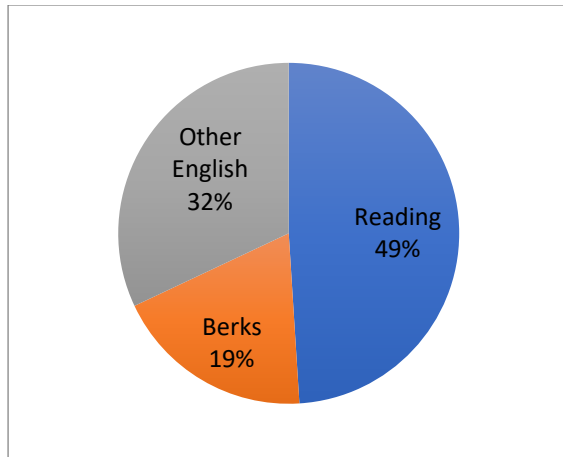
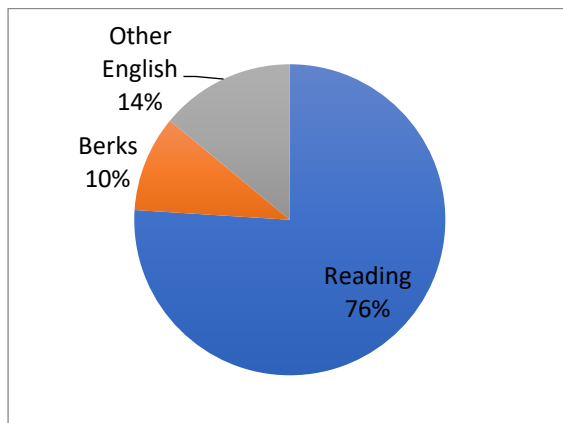


Figure 4- 7: Origins of certificates using 'wife and children' or similar.



It is clear from Figures 4-6 and 4-7 that while 49% of all the certificates come from within the Borough, 76% of those using the imprecise terms are from within the Borough. That is the term is much more likely to be used between neighbouring parishes within the Borough. While this makes little sense if one interprets the term as a future-proof; it makes complete sense when one considers specificity as a fraud prevention.

The families referred to are known not only to the overseers from the home parish, but also to the overseers in the settled parish, and both parishes are covered by the same JPs. It is a matter of a simple conversation or even visit for the settled parish to ensure that the claimant family are not passing off random extended family or friends as nuclear kin. The fact that this is a

political and judicial relationship, and not simple geography, is underlined by the fact that, like the suppression of removals, this use drops off dramatically at the Borough boundary.

Explanation for the use of the term is further underlined by the fact that many are produced in batches, often to one parish. As has been previously mentioned, certificates with the common wording already printed, and blanks for information particular to the sojourner had been available since the very first days of the requirement to have a certificate.⁹⁷ It is understandable that a set of overseers, asked by a neighbouring parish to provide them with a set of certificates, and quite possibly just provided with a list of perfunctory information, should have simply used a shorthand formula when they knew the chances of fraud were very slim.

This cooperation between Reading parishes can only be observed in the first half of the century as, as noted, the use of this term disappears altogether after 1757. This is almost certainly because developing case law underlined the need for parishes to specify families. As Landau states, more cases came to King's Bench from the 1740's onwards increasing legal advice to specify on certificates.⁹⁸

The Bedford data is from examinations, to which this analysis does not really apply. The Guildford data a mixture of bonds, settlement certificates and a vestry list. The bonds are all from the seventeenth century, and do not really use the same naming protocols as later settlement certificates. Of the settlement certificates only three are non-specific in their naming, one which is from St. Nicholas, and the other two from neighbouring (non-borough) Godalming. In the vestry list nine names have 'his wife and children' next to them, 5 of which are from the Borough. This is a small and sketchy dataset, yet even here we can see that half of the uses of the term come from within the Borough.

6. Appeals: Reading.

Quarter Session appeals between Reading parishes at this time show a similar story of cooperation.⁹⁹ There were ten appeals in the ten years between 1704 and 1713 and only six for the following eighty years until 1793.

⁹⁷ N. Tadmor, 'The settlement of the poor and the rise of the form in England', *Past and Present*, Vol. 236 (Aug 2017) pp.43-97 p.58.

⁹⁸ Landau, 'Who was the subjected to the laws of Settlement?' p.152.

⁹⁹ BRO Q/S/0/1 Berkshire Quarter Sessions, 1703-1790. There were Quarter Sessions for the Borough, from the charter of 1638. Most of the minutes for this do not exist for this time period. However removal appeals had to go to the County after 1697.

Figure 4- 8: Appeals against removal at Quarter Sessions involving Reading parishes showing inter and extra-Borough appeals, 1704-1793, by decade.

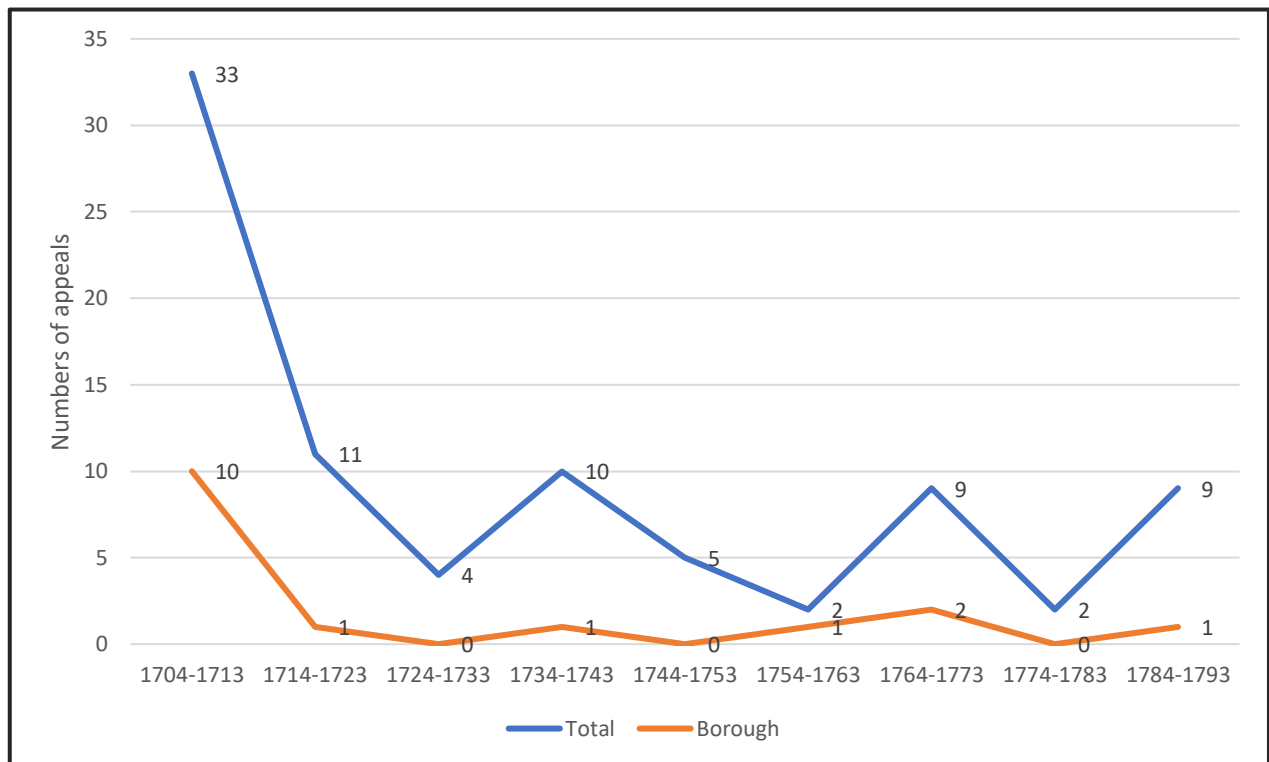


Figure 4-8 shows that there was a general fall in litigation from the early years of the eighteenth century, but that appeals involving parishes outside of the Borough still continued in reasonable numbers through the century, whereas the inter-Borough appeals almost flatline, even though movement, and removals in years of distress, in simple numbers were higher within the Reading parishes than between Borough and non-Borough parishes.¹⁰⁰

This is an understandable move on the part of the parishes. Taking cases to Quarter Sessions was an expensive and time-consuming business. Cases needed to be prepared by overseers, and often the sessions would be at some considerable distance. In Berkshire they were heard in Reading normally at the Epiphany sessions in January, but for the Easter, Thomas and Michael sessions in any one of Abingdon, Newbury, Wallingford, Wokingham or even Bracknell.¹⁰¹ Appeals were frequently deferred from one session to the next, meaning a wasted journey and quite probably accommodation for the parish officials. In one instance, where the St. Mary's officials failed to show in an appeal from St. Giles, the St. Mary's overseers were charged with the costs of travel and accommodation for St. Giles, and automatically lost the case.¹⁰² Such

¹⁰⁰ For data on the change in removals over time see Ch.6, p.264, Fig 7.3.

¹⁰¹ Berkshire seems to have been a bit of an outlier in calling its summer session 'Thomas', as opposed to the more usual 'Trinity' or 'Midsummer'.

¹⁰² BRO Q/SO/1 Easter Session, 1708.

costs, which could also be charged if the JPs thought the appeal frivolous, could be between 20-30 shillings. As the case law for deciding settlements became ever more complex and sophisticated decisions were going against parishes for 'insufficiencies' in their case or initial paperwork, they seem to have resorted more frequently to professional legal advice. In the early years of the century little or no mention is made of counsel representing parishes, by the middle years it had become the norm.¹⁰³ A counsel's costs for preparing the case and attending and representing the parish seems to have been about 40s, going on the costs awarded to winning parishes. This would have kept a widow going on relief for nine months. It seems the Reading parishes went to great lengths to avoid taking action against each other. In the St. Mary's paybooks for 1761 there is the entry

Expenses for preventing a lawsuit with the overseers of St. Lawrence.¹⁰⁴

It appears parishes decided to pick their battles more judiciously as the century wore on. By 1715 legal action between Reading parishes had all but disappeared, while they continued for parishes outside of the Borough.

7. Appeals: Bedford and Guildford

Intra-borough appeals were less of an issue for Bedford, since the vast majority of their poor was housed in one parish, St. Pauls, so the likelihood of litigation was limited. No cases occur in the first half of the century between parishes. Similarly, as discussed, in Guildford the parishes of Holy Trinity and the Blessed Virgin Mary merged in 1698, and, while the civil parishes stayed separate, one vicar managed them both. A sample of five years from 1757-1763 shows three cases concerning Guildford boroughs, but none between them. In stark contrast there are nineteen between Surrey parishes in the London periphery, such as St. Saviours and St. Olaves, Southwark and Bermondsey.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ This could just be a change in minuting protocols, but seems unlikely as little else changes. Edwin Chadwick in his contribution to the 1834 Royal Commission Report hears evidence from a Berks JP that 'in Berkshire the expense of parochial appeals is increased by an order of the bench requiring each parish to employ two counsel' but I have been unable to track down a date for this order. Royal Commission of Inquiry into administration and practical operation of poor laws, Appendix A p47.

¹⁰⁴ BRO D/P 98/12/50-55.

¹⁰⁵ SHC QS2/2/8 Minute Book 1757-1763. While Guildford had 5 JPs, its borough court seems to have had less responsibility and business than Reading's, its 1603 charter apparently had no 'non-intramittent' clause and the County heard most business including settlement appeals. D.G. Jenkins, 'County Administration in the Reign of George II' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, May 1986) p.215.

4. Other evidence of cooperation

1. Reading workhouses.

At the opening of the eighteenth century in Reading there were many facilities for housing the poor and some for putting them to work. The Oracle continued to function in a low-key way. In the Corporation minutes we see that Joseph Wigg had recently been given the contract for setting the poor to work within the facility and in 1703 there were two people nominated for rooms there, and an agreement that 'St. Giles shall have the next rooms that fall'.¹⁰⁶ The Corporation continued to have complete discretion over places in the Oracle.¹⁰⁷

Almshouses had been established as follows:

Table 4- 11: Reading almshouses in the 18th Century¹⁰⁸

Legatee	Year established	Nos of places named
John Leche, or "A'Larder"	1476/1477	8
Bernard Harrison	1617	8 'poor, but none with a wife under 50"
Richard Johnson	1630	
Griffin Jenkins	1624	5 for "honest poor people"/sold in 1724, replaced with 8
William Kendrick	1634	
Thomas Vachell	1634	6 aged men having no wives
Richard Jayes	1647	4 houses, for widows over 50
John Webb	1653	4 widows
John Hall	1696	7 houses, 5 for widows

It is difficult to tell precisely how many spaces these represent in the eighteenth century. A survey of the residents of the parish of St. Mary in 1783 shows twenty-five heads of households in almshouses.¹⁰⁹ Most almshouses were in St. Giles and St. Mary's there being more available land there. A figure of between forty-fifty places for the Borough, some of which would have been for couples, seems reasonable for the century. All of these were at the discretion of the

¹⁰⁶ BRO R/AC/1/1/19, Sept 13th 1700 and Sept 27th 1703.

¹⁰⁷ Corporation minutes for the end of the seventeenth century show aldermen voting as to who should be accepted into the Oracle, about two or three times a year. For example, BRO R/AC/1/1/19, 1697, 4th May and 20th July.

¹⁰⁸ Sources: W.E.M. Blandy, *A History of the Reading Municipal Charities* (Reading, 1962) pp.15 and 16, pp.27-31, and in italics, J. Man, *The History and Antiquities, Ancient and Modern, of the Borough of Reading in the County of Berks* (Reading, 1816) pp.400-417, in bold, J. Doran, *The History and Antiquities of the Town and Borough of Reading in Berkshire*, (Reading, 1835) p.251.

¹⁰⁹ BRO D/P98 28/19, Residents of St. Mary's Parish 1783.

Mayor and Corporation, with various subsequent bequests to pay for their upkeep. The condition they were in is another matter. John Watt, in his excoriating pamphlet of 1749 states that Harrison's and Webb's almshouses, 'are so meanly built, and in such decay, that they cannot stand long without new building'.¹¹⁰

Almshouses however were for the old and the weak and were never intended as places to set the poor to work. The Oracle, while apparently doing this, seems to have been operating at a very low rate, with very few names entered in the Corporation minutes as being admitted there. St. Mary's relief payments for the opening of the century are completely dominated by outdoor relief, and neither vestry minutes for St. Mary's nor St. Lawrence's show any signs of decisions being made to send people there. This could be because such decisions were made in unminuted conversations with the Corporation, but overall this seems symptomatic of a rather desultory and half-hearted system.

In the 1720s however there was a radical and clearly co-ordinated move by the Corporation and Vestries to establish a functioning town-wide workhouse. The Corporation minutes for March 18th, 1725, include a note on a recently convened meeting in the Town Hall which had been addressed by 'Mr. Merriott' almost certainly Matthew Marryott, the driving force behind the SPCK's campaign to establish workhouses.¹¹¹ The minute states:

At this meeting there was many of ye principal people of ye town who did all unanimously agree that the poor of ye 3 parishes should unite into one family and be under ye care of one person to be chosen as a master to keep ye poore that were able to work and that the sd poor should be lodged, clothed, fed and taught and that if the said house could be cleared by Lady day next that all possible speed should be used to get the House ready to receive the poor of ye 3 parishes and that each parish should contribute to ye maintenance in proportion to the Numbers of poor as shall be brought into ye House.¹¹²

This followed up by a meeting between the Mayor and Corporation and Matthew Marryott 'from London', who instruct three members from each parish to collectively visit the Oracle, followed

¹¹⁰ J. Watts, *A Black Scene Opened, being the true state of Mr. John Kendrick's Gifts to the Town of Reading*, 1st Edition, 1749 (Reading, 1791) p.33. For more on Watts and this pamphlet see Ch. 5.

¹¹¹ See Ch. 2 p.48, this is confirmed by a later minute. For more information on the motivations and mechanisms behind this decision see Ch. 5 p.165. The 'right' spelling of Mr. Marryott's name is difficult to establish. Dorothy Marshall has 'Marryot' (D. Marshall, *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century*, (London, Routledge, 1923) p.134), the VCH has 'Marriot' and 'Marriott', F. H. W. Sheppard, (Ed) 'The burial ground and workhouse', in *Survey of London: Volumes 31 and 32, St James Westminster, Part 2*, (London, 1963), pp. 209-218. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/Vol.s31-2/pt2/pp209-218> [accessed 16 July 2023]. The Webbs 'Marryott' (Webbs, *Old Poor Law*, p.216.). Hitchcock conforms to the Webb spelling, and I have gone with that. Hitchcock, ODNB: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/66535>.

¹¹² BRO R/AC/1/19.

by a meeting with Mr. Marryott, 'to agree with him in order for instructing the poor in working and to propose as was proper to be done in repairing ye said House'.¹¹³

A vestry minute from the 25th of March in St. Lawrence and the 17th April in St. Mary records the decision that:

It is hereby fully and unanimously agreed and consented unto that it shall and may be lawful to and for the churchwardens and overseers of the said two parishes (the other two parishes) in providing and taking an house to lodge maintaine and employ the poor of this parish.¹¹⁴

The description of the workhouse from October 1726, according to the SPCK, has the Oracle housing,

about 60 in family, from the Parishes of St. Lawrence and St. Mary, that of St. Giles having suspended, for the present, sending in their poor.¹¹⁵

Further 'a fit person was sent for from London and charged with care of the House.'¹¹⁶ Marryott did manage a number of workhouses across the home counties at this time.¹¹⁷ However the SPCK minutes indicate that a Mr. Carrick had been appointed by July 1726 and he reports that 'the new Workhouse there would be open'd about 14 days hence'.¹¹⁸ He also undertook to write a report on the Workhouse for the revised edition of the SPCK's *Account*.¹¹⁹ Mr. Carrick, soon started to receiving regular payments for 'maintaining the poor at the workhouse'.¹²⁰ Significant sums must have been spent on the refurbishment of the building. Archaeological evidence from the 1990s when the new shopping centre was built on the site, shows 'major structural alterations and repair' with 'new cobbled pathways and carriageways' dating from this time.¹²¹

Nonetheless, the SPCK's own *Account* shows that only a few months after the launch of the experiment St. Giles was no longer co-operating. The SPCK minutes talk vaguely of 'two or three' parishes cooperating.¹²² St. Mary's and St. Lawrence's had formed a committee

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ BRO D/P97 8/1 and D/P 98 8/2, words in brackets mine.

¹¹⁵ Anon; *An Account of several workhouses for employing and maintaining the Poor*. (London, 1732, 2nd Edn) pp.87-90.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ T. Hitchcock, 'The English Workhouse: A study in institutional poor relief in selected counties, 1696-1750' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Oxford) 1985 p.106, p.282. CL GBR/0012/MS/SPCK/A1/11, SPCK minutes, 26th May 1724.

¹¹⁸ CL GBR/0012/MS/SPCK/A1/12, SPCK minutes 19th July 1726.

¹¹⁹ This is almost certainly the Reading report dated Oct. 1726 in *An Account of Several Workhouses for 1732*, pp.86-90.

¹²⁰ BRO D/P 98/12/45-47, various entries in 1726.

¹²¹ M. Ford, et al, *Under the Oracle: Excavations at the Oracle Shopping Centre site 1996-8; the medieval and post medieval urban development of the Kennet floodplain in Reading* (Oxford, Thames Valley Landscapes, 2013) p104.

¹²² CL GBR/0012/MS/SPCK/A1/12, SPCK minutes, 19th July 1726.

of the best Gentlemen....to settle the Affairs of the Family, to hear Complaints, redress Grievances and whole proceedings are entred in a Minute Book and once a fortnight they pass the Accounts of the House, which, by the rule of Fellowship, are adjusted to each Parish their Quota of expense'¹²³

St. Giles did not attend. Whether this was concerns about the management of the project, or simple costs, it is impossible to know as the Giles vestry minutes are lost. The project appears to have been badly managed from the beginning. Payments to Carrick, and for establishing bedding and other equipment for the Oracle, allowed for precious little saving for the parishes. Within a year Carrick seems to have disappeared, and left debts for the parishes as there is a payment for £10/3/11 to a Mr. Cashin for 'housekeeping' at the workhouse and

'what Mr Carrick left the House in debt'¹²⁴

Payments continued for the support of people in the workhouse in the 1731 books with some payments to Mr. Carrick, which may be unpaid wages. In 1731 a decision seems to have been made to wind down the project, and all the goods and equipment from the workhouse are sold off. St. Mary's received £10 in total, a fraction of what it had laid out.¹²⁵

Nationally Matthew Marryott's reputation, and the interest of the SPCK in parish workhouses radically diminished by the end of the 1720s.¹²⁶ Within three years St. Mary's out-relief payments, radically shorn back initially, start to mount up again.¹²⁷ By 1749 John Watt, twice Mayor of Reading and one of the main instigators of the project was driven to complain that the Oracle:

... is gone much out of repair, and in a very ruinous condition, and not employed as it ought to be; the largest and best part of the building is converted to the use of two or three of the present Aldermen for storehouses, and workshops for strangers, contrary to the donors will and intention, nor any way beneficial to the town in general.¹²⁸

¹²³ Anon, *An Account*, p90.

¹²⁴ BRO D/P 98/12/45-47.

¹²⁵ BRO D/P 98/12/48-51, there are no books between 1726-1731.

¹²⁶ T. Hitchcock, 'The English Workhouse' p.235, p246.

¹²⁷ Numbers of people on regular relief in 1730, 40, compared to 17 at start of workhouse experiment. BRO D/P98/12/48, St. Mary's Paybook.

¹²⁸ J. Watts, *A Black Scene*, p.32.



Figure 4- 9: St. Giles workhouse. This photograph was probably taken shortly before demolition in the mid nineteenth century.

By the time he had written this St. Giles had already built their own parish workhouse. While the vestry minutes have disappeared, there remain detailed invoices for the building of the workhouse in 1746, suggesting a decision about 1745. A brick-built building, which looks to have had 15 separate

dwellings built around a central courtyard, each of the dwellings having two fireplaces (Fig 4-9).¹²⁹

The parishes seem to have gone very much their own way in building their workhouses. St. Mary's did not decide to build one until 1758, when a house in Pigney's Lane was bought and adapted for the purpose, followed by a decision to build a purpose built establishment which was opened in 1772.¹³⁰ A bond survives for the building of St. Lawrence workhouse in 1771.¹³¹ This was built opposite the old Greyfriars building on Friar St, on land that had once been St. Edmund's Chapel.¹³² Gilbert's report of 1777 shows three parish workhouses operating.¹³³ Tomkins map of 1802 shows all three workhouses were built around a central courtyard, but this was common building design, both the Vachell almshouses and the Oracle were as well, it would be a stretch to suggest that they had worked from the same template.¹³⁴

As far as workhouses were concerned a concerted attempt to get the parishes to co-operate in the first half of the century had fallen apart by the second, with each very much going their own way in this respect. The experience of the two other exemplar towns was quite different,

¹²⁹ BRO D/P9612/17, Image from L. Harman, *The Parish of St. Giles-in-Reading* (Reading, 1946) p.80.

¹³⁰ BRO D/P 98 8/3 Vestry minute from April 1758 and D/P 98 8/4, April 1772.

¹³¹ BRO D/P97/18/1.

¹³² Charity Commission Report, 1837, p.60.

¹³³ T. Gilbert, Report from the Committee appointed to inspect and consider the Returns made by the Overseers of the Poor in pursuance of Act (sic) of last Session, together with Abstracts of Returns. (HC, May 1777) No. 9, p303.

¹³⁴ C. Tomkins, *To the Worshipfull the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses*, in C. Coates *History and Antiquities of Reading*, (London, Nicols and Son, 1802).

suggesting that the comparative size of parishes may have played an important part in cooperation or otherwise in the establishment of workhouses in smaller boroughs.

8. Bedford workhouses.

In Bedford, as previously mentioned, St. Paul's was by far the largest parish, its population accounting for more than all the other four put together in the 1801 census.¹³⁵ Nonetheless, according to the *Account* from 1732 there were, alongside St. Paul's, workhouses operating in the early decades of the eighteenth century in tiny St. Mary's and St. Cuthbert's.¹³⁶ These must have been very small establishments, perhaps for less than 5 people. St. John's parish, of a similar size to St. Mary's and St. Cuthbert's, had only four people on its payment books in 1730.¹³⁷ The other four parishes seem to have been of such little account that in 1727 the JPs set a poor rate without even consulting the parishioners of St. John's. They apologise after a protest from the parishioners, but the rate still stands.¹³⁸ The *Account* dismisses the other two workhouses as 'inconsiderable' and talks only of that in St. Paul.¹³⁹ At this time it housed 21 people, eight elderly folk and thirteen children.

The *Account* suggests that the workhouse had been opened around 1720, and that it had been a direction of 'a meeting of the principal inhabitants' who then meet again to set up rules and appoint directors. This strongly suggests an influence by the SPCK, but it is before the enabling Workhouse Test Act of 1723.¹⁴⁰ It is ambiguous whether the meeting was the principal inhabitants of the town, or of the parish.

Either way it seems that the St. Paul's workhouse soon takes over duty for the rest of the town. According to Gilbert's 1777 report there is only one workhouse operating in the town, accommodating 60 people.¹⁴¹ The other workhouses may have continued to do duty as almshouses, as the petition to Parliament in February 1794 which led to the legislation uniting the parishes suggests that

A proper and suitable House (be) provided for the Reception of all the Poor within the said Parishes generally.¹⁴²

¹³⁵ See Ch. 2, p.38 and below p.33.

¹³⁶ Anon, *Account*, p.78.

¹³⁷ BEDS P88/12/2 St. John's Overseers Accounts, Payments, 1730.

¹³⁸ BEDS P88/12/2 St. John's Overseers Accounts, Payments, 1727.

¹³⁹ Anon, *Account*, p.78.

¹⁴⁰ BEDS P1/12/1.

¹⁴¹ T. Gilbert, Report from the Committee appointed to inspect and consider the Returns made by the Overseers of the Poor in pursuance of Act (sic) of last Session, together with Abstracts of Returns. (HC, May 1777) No. 9. p300.

¹⁴² *CJ*, Vol. 50, 21st Feb 1795, p.210.

St. Paul's accounts suggest that inmates were employed in lacemaking, a significant industry for the area.¹⁴³ The 1835 Municipal Corporation Report called it a 'House of Industry' and stated that the Mayor was one of the Directors.¹⁴⁴

9, Guildford Workhouse

Guildford came by cooperation through a slightly different route. Of the three parishes two, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Trinity had united for pastoral purposes in 1698.¹⁴⁵ The parishes had one parson, who preached in each parish '[e]very Lords Day one in the forenoon and one in the afternoon'. While this was not a union of the civil parishes, and the Act is explicit that poor relief is to operate separately, it must have led to some increased harmonization when one of the principal players in vestry politics influenced both parishes.

It is not clear when a workhouse was established in the town. The *Account* makes no mention of Guildford, and Surrey is overlooked altogether in Eden's *State of the Poor*. One does seem to have been operating, at least in St. Mary's from 1740, as we see payments for tobacco for the workhouse in the accounts, and payments to support inmates.¹⁴⁶ However there are still regular outdoor relief payments. It is clear that at least by 1767 all three parishes are using the same workhouse. A minute from the Quarter Sessions and in the Holy Trinity vestry minutes records a joint meeting between all three parishes concerning the employment of the workhouse governor and '[t]he state of the workhouse belonging to the town'.¹⁴⁷

The strategic decisions about the role of the workhouse are done by collective vestry meetings, as we see minuted in 1779 when the vestries get together to discuss establishing a house of industry there.¹⁴⁸ The financing of the workhouse however is done by the parishes separately, paying for their poor on a *pro rata* basis, rather than contributing to a central pot, as would be the case under the later, Gilbert Unions. This is reflected in a minute in the St. Nicholas Vestry book from 1790 when a joint meeting between the three parishes and the workhouse master, Harry Bayles, agrees a per capita charge of 2 shillings and a halfpenny for each pauper sent there, although the parishes baulk at the idea of having a limit put on the numbers each can

¹⁴³ BEDS P1/12/1 St. Paul's, Income sundries, 1770.

¹⁴⁴ MCR, 1835, p.2106.

¹⁴⁵ SHC GUHT/12/1 Act for uniting the benefices of Holy Trinity and Blessed Virgin Mary, Guildford. Private act of Parliament (10 Wm. III) A copy of this Act exists in the vestry minutes of Holy Trinity, 1698. I have not been able to track down a chapter number for it but have been assured by the archivists at the Surrey History Centre that it did pass.

¹⁴⁶ SHC BR/MA/3/1 BVM's Rate book, 1740.

¹⁴⁷ SHC BR/QS/4/2/2 Guildford Borough QS and GUHT/16/2 29th January 1767.

¹⁴⁸ SHC GUN/8/1, St. Nicholas Vestry Minutes April 5th 1779.

send.¹⁴⁹ Not only did the three parishes separately fund their inmates, it also looks to be the case that the Workhouse building itself was divided into three separate parts. A minute from St. Nicholas in 1792 refers to the 'part of the workhouse situate in the parish of the Holy Trinity in the said town, now belong to this parish'.¹⁵⁰ And goes on to suggest that they may sell their share.

This curious, trinitarian 'three workhouses in one' arrangement may explain misunderstandings as to the nature of workhouse provision in the town prior to 1834. Gilbert's 1777 report has the town with three separate workhouses, with twenty, twenty-four and twenty inmates respectively. This, presumably, is because individual parishes entered their own facility and responsibilities into the returns. It is probably based on this report that more recent histories talk of there being 'several' parish workhouses in the town in the eighteenth century.¹⁵¹

It can be seen from both these examples that the decision to manage one collective facility in these towns by the second half of the eighteenth century is very much a pragmatic response to the circumstances of the town. In Bedford it simply was not feasible for the tiny parishes to manage their own facilities and one dominant parish ended up providing for the rest of the town. In Guildford the three parishes managed separate facilities, but in one building and with one Master in order to limit costs. In Reading however, with three parishes of reasonable size, and no one parish predominating, each parish had their own workhouse by the last third of the century at the latest, despite an earlier concerted attempt by the Corporation to get them to operate collectively.

5. Rating

Rating records are patchy for the eighteenth century. No vestry minutes survive for St. Giles, so the minutes of the decision on the level of the rate have disappeared. However a set of rate collection books do survive from 1742 to 1772, which also give the amount at which the rate was set. St. Lawrence vestry minutes do survive for the beginning and the end of the century, but only one rate collection book from 1751, on microfiche and illegible. St. Mary's has an almost full set of both for most of the century.

¹⁴⁹ SHC GUHT/16/2, June 19th 1780.

¹⁵⁰ SHC GUN/8/1.

¹⁵¹ J. Redpath, *Grim days of the Guildford Union Workhouse*, (Guildford News, 17th Sept 2018).

St. Mary's had opted to become a select vestry in 1602, but neither of the others appear to have done so.¹⁵² This is apparent in St. Lawrence in minutes from meetings in the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century which can see more than forty people attending a single meeting, and elaborate rules for electing overseers by the wider parish.¹⁵³ In addition, its system of rating for the poor appears on the surface to be quite different from St. Mary's at the opening of the eighteenth century. Where St. Mary's has a 'year's worth' system until 1769, St. Lawrence expresses its assessment in weeks.

Rates were set twice a year in Reading.¹⁵⁴ This means that the parishes calculated their rates based on what it considered it was going to need for the next 6 months. A baseline calculation must have been made at some stage (although this does not survive) of what a rate on the parish would produce in one year, and instead of altering the base rate (ie a certain amount of pence in the pound), as was more normal later, the rate is deemed to be collected multiple times. All property was included in this system, whether a domestic house, a business or land. This looks to be unusual, Guildford had moved to the shillings in the pound system at least by 1740.¹⁵⁵

Worked example, 'year's worth' system in St. Mary's v 'weeks' worth' system in St. Lawrence.

- *Rate on property* 9d in the £1 (a property worth £200 would be rated for 7/6d)
- The whole rate in a typical year produces £250 for the parish
- The parish considers it will need £250 over the next 6 months.
- *St. Mary's*: Rate decided at 'two years' worth'
- *St. Lawrences*: There being 52 weeks in a year, then 'two years' worth' would be 104 weeks.
- *Individual with £200 property* pays 15/- for the six month period.

For the years 1690 to 1720 in St. Lawrence the rate oscillates from '70 weeks' Jan 1691 to '230' weeks in 1713. If the equivalent of St. Mary's 'years' worth' in this context would be 52 weeks, then 70 weeks would look to be about one and a half years' worth, and the 230 weeks a whopping nearly five years' worth. Over a similar timeframe St. Mary's parish rate does not go above three and a half years. Is it really the case that one parish is charging so much more than

¹⁵² F.N. Garry and A.G. Garry (Ed) *The Churchwardens' Accounts of the Parish of St. Mary's, Berks, 1550-1662* (Reading, 1893) p.90.

¹⁵³ BRO 96/1/1 St. Lawrence Vestry Minutes, 2nd April 1718 and 10th April 1694.

¹⁵⁴ Over the course of the century the date of rate setting changes, from an Easter/Michaelmas one to a June/December one.

¹⁵⁵ SHC/ BR/MA/3/1 BVM Vestry Minutes, 1740.

the other? A similar story can be seen from St. Giles. It, like St. Mary's, had a 'years' worth' system in the first surviving accounts. This seems to be set even more highly than St. Lawrence's, with *lowest* rate being four years' worth in 1755. While on the surface there seems to be discrepancy, a further look at what ratepayers were actually *paying* shows a far more harmonised system.

An analysis of the 1717 rate collection book in St. Mary's shows that one third of the ratepayers pay 10 shillings and 10d per half year, one third 5/5d and one sixth 16/3d, and one sixth over one pound. 10/10d sits solidly in the 'relatively prosperous' category, of small tradespeople. The most common rate paid by the select Vestry members (32%) is 10/10d.¹⁵⁶

Although 28 years later than the St. Mary's books an analysis of the payment profile in St. Giles 1745 rate book shows that by far the most common amount paid (82 payers out of 212, about 40%) is 10/10d.¹⁵⁷ That this should still be the majority amount paid in St. Mary at this time is not only plausible, but actually quite likely, given the flatlining of inflation in the first half of the eighteenth century, and the unpopularity of poor rates in general.¹⁵⁸ While rate collection books for St. Lawrence do not survive for this period, we do have the diary of one of its more solid tradespersons.

¹⁵⁶ BRO D/P 98/11/75, these proportions stay about the same for the first half of the century.

¹⁵⁷ BRO P/96/11/1, 1745 St. Giles Rate Book.

¹⁵⁸ Bank of England historical inflation rates has a slight deflationary curve in the first half of the century, and slight inflation only until 1781. £100 pounds worth of goods from 1700 could be bought with £103 in 1771. <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/statistics/research> accessed 5 May 2023. *A millennium of macro-economic data.*

Edward Belsen was a shopkeeper in St. Lawrence's in the first half of the eighteenth century, sufficiently prosperous to have a subscription to the *Reading Mercury* and have his bedroom wallpapered and a new looking glass installed in 1710.¹⁵⁹ He meticulously recorded his

The image shows a handwritten ledger from 1754. It lists several entries with names and amounts. Some entries are marked 'void' or 'poor'. The entries include:

Name	Amount	Notes
Thomas Dyer	10 10	
Item for Blissetts Garden	10	
Thomas Palmer att the Crown	10 10	
James Vickory	10 10	
Joseph Minell	10 10	
Henry Freeman	10 10	
Cap's Grove Lane		
Samuel Wheat for his House		
Item for his Panyard		void
Item for his Malt House	1 1 8	
Panyard Late Wheals		page (8)
M ^r Peter Belbon	10 10	
Will ^m Moss for Vaughans Garock	1 2 6	
Orchard Called Belchambers		page (9)
for the Orchard's Late Balls		page (10)
Widow Chapman for the Brick Keln	3 5	
Item for Vaughans Land & Land Pitt	10 10	

Figure 4-10: Extract from St. Giles paybook 1754, showing one collection void and another 'poor'

payments for things, and, in particular, resented the amount he was required to pay in poor rate. Between 1712 and 1716 he paid 10/8d to the overseers 'for ye poor' per half year. In 1717 the rate goes up to 11/8d, and he tersely records this as 'too much'.

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It is clear, then, that the amount paid in rates seems to be in step with St. Mary's. What is not the same is the rateable value

and unit of calculation. St. Mary's operated on a rate of 9d in the £1, and, in order to produce assessments of five years when St. Mary's was on three and a half the St. Lawrence's rate must have been about 6d in the pound. In St. Giles the rate must have been even less, about 4.5d in the pound. In addition, calculating in weeks gave the St. Lawrence vestry a finer calibration of amount than St. Mary's and St. Giles' blunter instrument of 'years' worth'. St. Mary's had its own calibration according to the circumstances of the payers, some being rated at 'one and half times' their rate, if they were doing well and some only being charged half their actual due if they had added liabilities.¹⁶¹ In St. Giles', while the account books show no sign of the calibration of St. Mary's, what is clear are occasions where people are let off their rate, or only pay a proportion of it with the comment 'void' or 'poor' next to their names (Figure 4-8).¹⁶² This, like

¹⁵⁹ BRO D/EZ/12/1, Edward Belsen's Diary.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, The 1717 rate also equates with the first 'batch' set of settlement papers signed off by St. Lawrence, see Ch4.p102.

¹⁶¹ For a more detailed explanation of the St. Mary rating system in the early eighteenth century see M. Ounsley, 'A shift for Goody Ireland, the operation of the old Poor Law in St. Mary's Parish, 1680-1834' (Unpublished MSc Dissertation, St. Catherine's College, University of Oxford, 2019).

¹⁶² BRO D/P 96/11/3. A letter survives in the St. Giles collection from 1835, from Edwin Chadwick, in response to a query from St. Giles about whether they could continue to do this. He says that those unable to pay must make an application, rather than use the overseer's discretion. BRO D/P 96/18/3/75.

the St. Mary's system seems to have been entirely at the discretion of the Vestry and the Overseer.

In 1751 St. Giles introduced a more calibrated system, with a differing assessment for houses, with the 'years' worth' system kept for the land.¹⁶³ In 1765 the parish moved away from the 'years' worth' system all together, and introduced a tripartite rating system, with houses and buildings, land and stock in trade rated on three separate values.¹⁶⁴ 'Stock in trade' is the equipment and supplies owned by a trader or craftsman. In St. Mary's decisions around the same time in 1764 and then 1769 moved them away from the 'year's worth' to a similar tripartite system.¹⁶⁵ Record gaps make it difficult to tell when St. Lawrence did the same, but by time the St. Lawrence minutes pick up again in 1778 they have also changed.¹⁶⁶

Stock-in-trade rates were quite unusual and seem to have been a particularly urban phenomenon. There is no challenge to them recorded in St. Mary's, but there is challenge to them in St. Giles' when a Mr. Newell of Whitley appealed against their use to the Berkshire Quarter Sessions in 1792.¹⁶⁷ Similarly in St. Lawrence we see from the Vestry minutes from Jan 1781 that an appeal against their December rate had been successful. This is followed by a vote as to whether 'stock-in-trade' should be charged.¹⁶⁸ The vestry votes overwhelmingly against stock-in-trade (15 to 3), this division is still apparent at the June vestry meeting. Nonetheless some decision that has not survived must have overturned this, as stock-in-trade continues for the rest of the century. It is charged at between 1/6d to 2/- per £100 of stock in St. Lawrence through this time, considerably lower than the St. Mary and St. Giles stock-in-trade rate of 2/6d which stayed at this rate throughout. This is almost certainly symptomatic of a vestry system dominated by small shopkeepers and businessmen in St. Lawrence, while the more rural St. Giles and St. Mary's may have had a greater influence of landowners.

Nonetheless the comparison of the rating systems shows that while the individual *systems* seem calibrated to the conditions of each parish, the actual average *amounts charged* to individuals in the 'solidly prosperous, small businessman' largest segment of the population was remarkably similar, sitting at around 10/10d for the half year for most of the first half of the century. In

¹⁶³ BRO D/P 96/11/10.

¹⁶⁴ BRO D/P 96/ 11/28.

¹⁶⁵ BRO D/P 98/8/3 and D/P98/8/4.

¹⁶⁶ BRO D/P97/8/2.

¹⁶⁷ BRO Q/10/1/1792 The fact that Newell was in Whitley may add a further significance, as, while in St. Giles, he was not part of the Borough. It was perfectly possible for the parish to set a different rate for Whitley, as it was for St. Mary's to rate separately for Southcote, but neither seem to have done so.

¹⁶⁸ BRO D/P97/8/2 Jan and 19th June 1781.

addition, all three parishes appear to have changed their ratings systems from a simple across the board system (or hybrid in the case of St. Giles) to a tripartite one involving stock-in-trade on or around the 1760s.

The advantage of this to both the parish and the Town are clear. Nothing is more unpopular than taxes, and a sense of unfair taxes is all the more likely to be resisted. If one parish were to be charging considerably more to people in the same income group the system would start to lose confidence, and collection would become much more difficult.¹⁶⁹ The parity of rates however appears to break down toward the end of the century.¹⁷⁰

Conclusion

At the opening of the chapter two tests for identifying cooperation were suggested, one a difference in behaviour between cooperating parishes, and other non-cooperating parishes, and secondly a clear indication that this behaviour is in the interests of those cooperating, or, even better, minutes which suggest collusion. I referred to Axelrod's definition of cooperation which suggested the suppression of an organisation's normal defensive behaviour to achieve a wider benefit.

A clear difference in behaviour can be seen operating within and without the Borough's boundaries. There is strong statistical evidence that the Reading parishes were accepting movement within the Borough and suppressing removal, the numbers of intra-borough removals being a lot lower than would be the case if they were simply related to numbers settling. The advantages of this to both Borough and parish were significant, saving money, time and distress as well as allowing for a work force more freely moving around the town. While neither the Guildford nor the Bedford data show such a complete picture, what there is would seem to reinforce this pattern.

¹⁶⁹ While a much more modern example, and not entirely comparable, the most notorious example of this collapse of trust and subsequent non-payment would be the Poll Tax of 1990, where nearly a third of the UK population refused to pay. More contemporaneous examples would have been the imposition of ship money under the personal rule of Charles I. See R. Bellamy, 'The Anti-Poll Tax Non-Payment Campaign and Liberal Concepts of Political Obligation' *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 29/1 (Winter 1994), pp22-41 and M. J. Braddick, 'Case of Ship-Money (R v Hampden) 1637; Prerogative Discretion in Emergency Conditions' in 1637, P.R. Cogan *Landmark Cases in Revenue Law* (London, 2019) on how perception of inequity undermined payment despite judicial support.

¹⁷⁰ See Ch. 6 p.266.

In addition we see an overwhelming bias towards removing women, and young single women in particular, a policy which simply would not work if the whole town were not doing it. Yet within that, removals of women within the town are rare. Women are shipped out completely or left where they are, a pattern repeated with widows. The advantage to the town and parish of not having to pay for potential children, while maximising the young male workforce are obvious. Again, what evidence there is for Bedford and Guildford would suggest a similar bias, although possibly less extreme.

Appeals to Quarter Sessions between Reading parishes look also to have been suppressed after the first decade of the century, while appeals against non-borough parishes continue. The advantages to the town in money and time saved in litigation are obvious. The cost of the professionalisation of the legal advice, and general costs of travelling to sessions made these an unattractive course if they could be avoided. This is not Hindle's 'parochial xenophobia', or Coode's 'inter-parochial war.'

The level of trust between the borough parishes is underscored by the abandonment of the normal 'defensive' behaviour of being very specific about names and ages of settled families, using vague, catch-all terms, in the knowledge that fraud would be easy to detect. The advantage to the Borough is less, but one can see from an individual overseer's perspective it was a considerable time saving device. What evidence there is from the one other Borough that has settlement certificates suggests that here too it was a practice favoured between familiar parishes.

On the matter of rates an interesting situation presents itself. On the surface each parish seems to have its own rating system, based on a different value for land and property, at least until 1765. The *outcome* of this however shows remarkable uniformity across the borough. In the two parishes where such data exists, the majority of small business folk, the 'petit bourgeoisie' who Barry characterises as being the most likely to involve itself in vestry work in one way or another, all pay the same, around 10/10d, albeit the data for one parish is later than the other.¹⁷¹ The third parish has circumstantial data that the situation was the same there. A clear requirement for across the board perception of fairness here would seem to be the motivation.

¹⁷¹ J. Barry J and C. Brooks, *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (London, 1994) p.84.

Chapter 4

Which was probably also the motivation for the coordinated shift in the rating system at around the same time.

In the arena of workhouses however, we see less evidence of cooperation. While both Bedford and Guildford end the century with one workhouse each for the town, it is clear that this arose from particular local sets of circumstances. In Reading an attempt to impose a central workhouse on the town in the second decade of the century ended in abject failure, with each parish setting up its own workhouse as the century progressed.

It is an apparent paradox that the very decision for which there had been most obvious collaboration, with town hall meetings, joint visits of overseers, and harmonised vestry decisions, was the very behaviour which did not succeed. Yet the suppression of removals, targeting of women, absence of appeals and synchronisation of rates are not supported anywhere by a single observed minute; yet demonstrably happened.

How this should come about, and the motivations and mechanisms which may be driving this behaviour will be the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 5

Motivations and Machinery of Cooperation

1. Introduction

Axelrod's work on the cooperation between individuals and institutions draws the distinction between cooperation which would arise spontaneously from the parishes themselves, and coordination, which would be another, senior, power managing the behaviour of the parishes. In this instance that senior power is the Corporation. Having identified in Chapter 4 evidence of concerted behaviour between the parishes in a suppressed level of removals, limited appeals, across the board removal of young single women, parity in rating, use of shorthand on settlement certificates, and collective workhouses in the comparator boroughs, this chapter will explore what the motivations and machinery for that cooperation was.

There were two potential engines for concerted behaviour within the Borough. One was the overseers and vestry of the parishes agreeing a consistent pattern of behaviour between them (cooperation), and the other was the Corporation convening and instructing the parishes (coordination). It is perfectly possible that a combination of the two was in play. In addition, as Axelrod identifies in his work on social influence, that cooperation across the Borough can be exerted through other, social and familial links.¹ It is not necessarily the case that the same mechanics are in play over the course of the century. It could well be that the parishes became more or less autonomous as time went on. Change over time will be explored further in Chapter 7.

Before establishing that either coordination or cooperation took place it will be important to establish what the motivations for either might be, among the Corporation and among the vestry. If it was not in the interests for either body to establish concerted behaviour, then it would be more difficult to say with any certainty that such concerted behaviour was anything

¹ R. Axelrod, *The complexity of cooperation*, (Princeton, 1997), pp.146-176.

other than coincidence; bodies responding to the same sets of circumstances in the same way, like grass in the wind, uncontrolled by an intelligent or managed system. This will operate as context for the analysis of observable systems of cooperation in Reading, as well as the two comparator towns.

2. Motivations for cooperation

10. *The Vestry*

Taylor's work on St. Martin's Vintry in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century highlights the vulnerability of London parishes to pauper's strategies to extract the highest levels of relief from the overseers; as well as the temptations to vestries in simple competing environments.² St. Martin's parish is a valuable dataset, being sufficiently small (a population of only 205 in 1821) for the overseers to spend their time recording and maintaining meticulous and detailed records of individual paupers. One example is of Mary Savage, who is the responsibility of St. Martin's, but is engaged to a John Rain from neighbouring St. Leonard's, Shoreditch.³ She suggests to the Vestry that they should pay for her marriage to Rain, and she would then move in with him in St. Leonard's, thus taking her off their books. They duly pay her £1, with a promise of further payment when she returns with the marriage certificate. This happens three weeks later. For Mary Savage the small size and cramped proximity of the London parishes, just streets apart, means it makes very little difference to her whether she lives in St. Martin's or St. Leonard's, and the likelihood of her meeting, and forming partnerships with, men from other parishes is high. As far as St. Martin's Vestry are concerned they have paid a few pounds to rid themselves of a woman who had already produced several illegitimate children. The 'loser' is St. Leonard's who now have an additional cost on their books. Elsewhere Taylor highlights Charlotte Stevenson, who is paid by the Vestry to have her baby in neighbouring St. Mary-Le-Bow, after which they withheld payment, giving her call to then appeal to the Overseers of St. Mary.⁴ In other instances Taylor notes the ease with which removed paupers could simply return to their original homes, since they have only been moved small distances away.⁵ Lees suggests that it is to prevent this behaviour 'to stop each city parish

² J.S. Taylor, 'A London Parish, St. Martin Vintry' in *Poverty, Migration and Settlement in the Industrial Revolution, Sojourners' Narratives*. (Palo Alto, California, 1989) pp.117-139.

³ Ibid, p.130.

⁴ Taylor, *Poverty and Migration*, p.133.

⁵ Ibid p.119.

from pushing its destitute across the street to another jurisdiction' that Bristol corporation intervened to establish its Corporation of the Poor.⁶

This is precisely the interparochial warfare referred to by Hindle. While he is talking about rural parishes, this was enhanced by the urban landscape. Communities readily straddle parish boundaries, facilitating movement, and accommodation in the form of cheap rented rooms is easily available. Paupers can play vestries off against each other, demanding payments, or just being paid, to move around. It is clear from Taylor's work that there was little reciprocity between these poor East End parishes at this time. As we have seen in the case of Reading single women were rarely moved *within* the Borough; where the Reading parishes could not get the women off their books collectively, they supported them wherever they happened to be. Similarly, for the whole of the century, there are only three surviving certificates for widows removed *within* the Borough, although they accounted for 12% of all removals.⁷ This uniformity of approach saved time and money in processing and removing individuals, and the women were also left with a 'take it or leave it' situation where there was nothing to be gained by offering to move to a neighbouring parish.

Vestries cooperating within an urban area had several advantages. Maintaining rates across the town at similar levels meant that payees bought in to the system more readily. Keeping their levels of relief at similar levels, so that one parish could not attempt to disincentivise relief claims within their parish by paying less than their neighbours also made sense in the long run, even if it was an attractive option in the short term.⁸ Similarly introducing punitive measures, such as badging or a workhouse test, would only make sense if all parishes were doing the same. Urban paupers could too easily boundary-hop.

If the benefits of cooperation were so obvious to urban vestries, why did not more move to make this more formal? The option of local legislation was open to them from the seventeenth century to establish Corporations of the Poor, and as we have seen many cities and large towns

⁶ H.L. Lees, *The Solidarity of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People 1700-1948* (Cambridge, 1998) p.69.

⁷ BRO D/P 98/13/2, Nos. 89 (Mary Exall, 1747), 199 (Jane Morley, 1748) and 202 (Elizabeth Moor, 1755) See Fig. 4.3 p.99.

⁸ While the simple answer to this would be that a person only had one place of settlement, the complexity of case law by the middle of the eighteenth century was such that litigation between parishes could go on for several months, if not years if it went to King's Bench, and be very expensive. A pauper could quite reasonably claim relief in a parish where he had been apprenticed, even if he had been born in the next-door parish, and it could be a matter of some expense to demonstrate that his apprenticeship, for example, was insufficient. Meanwhile, the parish of abode would be responsible for costs, only being able to claim them back from the other parish if they won their case.

did do this. From 1723 they could vote cooperate on taking in another parish's poor.⁹ From 1782 Gilbert's Act allowed for full unification of parishes.¹⁰ Both Gilbert's and Knatchbull's Act required a majority vote of parishioners for these actions to go ahead, and it could well be that parishes were simply reluctant to make themselves liable for another's poor, while the prospect of ceding even more agency to a borough-wide Corporation, which was implied in a Corporation of the Poor could be, as in the case of Bristol, unpopular with the parishes. By 1777 around half of corporations were operating with a single workhouse, which, while a significant amount, still means that half of corporations had resisted, for whatever reason, the push to fully cooperate in this way.¹¹

Vestries, by the end of the eighteenth century had become a general byword for inefficiency and corruption. Sufficient that the very preamble for Gilbert's Act talks of the 'incapacity, negligence, or misconduct of overseers'.¹² These concerns were to lead into the vestry reforms outlined in the Select Vestry Act of 1805 and the Sturges Bourne Acts of 1818 and 1819. For many there must have been an incentive to demonstrate efficiency without reform by informal cooperation with neighbouring parishes.

11. *The Corporation*

The incentives for Corporations to control and manage the distribution of poor relief within their boundaries were more complex, but in many ways more powerful.

On the surface the legislative balance of responsibilities between JPs (which in corporation towns were the mayor and other aldermen), and parish vestries was relatively settled by the end of the seventeenth century, with a clear delineation of responsibility. Rate collection and day-to-day administration being managed by the vestry, and the strategic and higher responsibilities, as well as appeals, sitting with the JPs.¹³

⁹ (9 Geo. I c 7 s. 4) An Act for amending the Laws relating to the Settlement, Employment and Relief of the Poor, 1723, normally referred to as the Workhouse Test Act, or 'Knatchbull's Act' also allowed parishes to unite, but only if one parish was, in the opinion of a JP, too small to provide their own workhouse.

¹⁰ (22 Geo III, c 83) An Act for the better Relief and Employment of the Poor, 1782.

¹¹ Gilbert's Report, 1777, see Ch. 2, Table 2-2.

¹² (22 Geo III, c 83, s1).

¹³ For a more detailed description of the background and evolution of poor relief responsibilities between vestry and corporation see Ch.3.

The original legislation of 1601 was clear that JPs could rate neighbouring parishes to raise money to support another if it was unable to support itself (as long as the parishes were within the same hundred).¹⁴ An example of this occurs in Bedford in 1690 when St. Cuthbert was required to cover St. Peter's rate, although this is the only example in the sample towns and was resisted on appeal.¹⁵ On the one hand it would be a reasonable assumption that the oligarchy of prosperous businessmen and lawyers that made up the corporation would be loathe to involve themselves with the day-to-day business of dealing with the poor. Rate collection was deeply unpopular, and the role of overseer very often fell to the lowest ranks of the vestry. Why shouldn't JPs in towns fulfill the role which many did in the large, rural counties; as gentlemen of higher social rank who distanced themselves from vestry action, only to overturn vestry decisions in large number, to maintain a paternalistic equilibrium, and, towards the end of the eighteenth century, to prevent growing social discontent.¹⁶

This analysis however ignores the dual role played by JPs in corporation towns. Not just as magistrates, but also as mayor and aldermen. Their social status was much more bound in with the prosperity of the town, than their rural equivalents, the county gentry, was with the county. Mayor and aldermen swore oaths to uphold the rights of all citizens, including the poor.¹⁷ Many corporations continued to maintain active interests in care of the poor long after successive statutes had handed this responsibility to the parish. In York in 1682 the Corporation established a cloth manufactory because of the 'necessity of the poore' in the city, and in Nottingham a similar Common Hall was established in 1693 so that the poor could get 'a livelihood by an honest labour and industry'.¹⁸

¹⁴ "the inhabitants of any parish are not able to levy among themselves sufficient sums of money for the purposes aforesaid, that then the said two Justices shall and may tax, rate and assess as aforesaid, any other of other parishes, or out of any other parish within the hundred where the parish is, to pay such sums of money...to the said poor parish for the said purpose" (43 Eliz. I, c 2, s 2) 1601.

¹⁵ BEDS P100/18/1, JPs order 30th October 1690.

¹⁶ P. Dunkley, 'Paternalism, The Magistracy and poor relief in England 1795-1834' *International Review of Social History* Vol. 24/3, (1979) pp.371-397. E.P. Thompson, 'Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture' *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 7/4 (Summer, 1974) pp.382-405 remain the classic studies of this. Local studies such as P. King, 'Decision makers and decision making in English Criminal Law', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 27/1 (1984) pp.25-58 in Essex and M. Nueman, *The Speenhamland County, Poverty and the Poor Laws in Berkshire, 1782-1834* (New York, 1982) reinforce this. S. King, in *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000) p.32 considers the impact may have been less marked in the north, but still led to self-denying strategies on the part of overseers.

¹⁷ See Ch. 2.

¹⁸ E. J. Dawson, 'Finance and the unreformed borough; a critical appraisal of corporate finance 1660-1835, with special reference to the boroughs of Nottingham, York and Boston.' (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Hull, 1978), pp.708-9

Slack, citing York and Exeter among the more energetic corporations in their efforts to combat poverty within their city confines in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century states

It was not simply that these towns had the resources and manpower to invest in efforts at crisis management and close social control: they also had the ambition to show themselves as up to date as London in the social welfare mechanisms which demonstrated civility.¹⁹

Mayor and aldermen were simply closer to the problems and more willing to actively manage them. Peter King's observation that the magistracy's relationship with the vestry in urban Colchester was likely different from that in rural Essex has already been noted.²⁰ Gray found a similar reluctance to counter the vestry in City of London parishes on the part of JPs

conflicts between parish officials and magistrates simply do not seem to be as relevant here as they were in the countryside'.²¹

He concludes that 'the triangulation that King has described would have been impossible in the square mile.' The difference between a place like the City of London and Reading is that the sheer scale of poor relief and vagrancy issues in London meant that many cases simply did not receive the attention of the JPs which they may more easily do in a smaller urban area such as Reading.²²

Many towns were the homes of large dissenting populations. Even if the corporations were not run by them, their influence in the cultural life of the town where many were prosperous and powerful merchants was normally significant. Quakers, Baptists and Methodists had far less invested in bolstering the power of Anglican parishes, and, where they were prosperous traders, were often wedded to more 'rational' and 'scientific' ways of organizing things. Their influence on the establishment of Corporations of the Poor has already been noted.²³

Mayor and aldermen had a historic responsibility for the welfare and 'common weal' of the town. This extended to law and order, the management of vagrancy, the control of disease and the cleanliness of the streets. It also extended to the prosperity of the town, who could trade and who could not, predominantly establishing conditions in which local trades could flourish. The

¹⁹ P. Slack, 'Great and Good Towns, 1460-1800', in Clark, P (Ed) *CUHB*, (Cambridge, 2000) ii, p366.

²⁰ See Ch.1, p12.

²¹ D.D Gray, *Crime Prosecution and Social Relations: The Summary Courts of the City of London in the late Eighteenth Century*. (London, 2009) p.153.

²² Ibid, p149.

²³ For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between dissenters, Whig politics and centralised poor relief administration see Ch. 2.

provision of an adequate and biddable workforce was part of this. On top of this a body of townsfolk could as much complain to the corporation as to the parish authorities about the high levels of poor rate.

A further significant impetus to 'micro-manage' poor relief within the town was the responsibility many corporations had for hefty charitable budgets. When this budget could be equal, or sometimes even greater than, the relief distributed by the parishes, it made sense to co-ordinate the distribution of the two. Often corporations were limited by conditions in the wills of donors. Some charities were for poor serving maids, some for widows of butchers, others for the education of the sons of weavers.²⁴ Corporations had every incentive to work closely with local vestries to ensure that money was distributed evenly. Most often those that qualified for charity money would approach those first, and parish relief was kept for those who had nowhere else to go. Often being on parish relief, or having claimed in the recent past, made you ineligible to apply for certain charities.²⁵

One of the major ineligibilities provided by being on parish relief was being barred from the voting.²⁶ This leads in to one of the more unexpected, yet surprisingly potent motivations for corporations to interfere with rate collection, settlement and relief payment; their role in franchise qualification.

The mayor, in addition to being a JP, was also normally the returning officer in the corporation towns. The national politics of the early eighteenth century were particularly passionate and factional.²⁷ The era up to the establishment of the Whig Supremacy, 1715, is often referred to as the 'rage of party'. The following decades saw a comfortable Whig ascendancy on a national level, where Walpole and his fellow Whigs dominated until 1742. However at a local level, particularly in the corporation towns of the South and East, the Tories still maintained a strong foothold,

²⁴ For example, Vachell's almshouses were for widowed men aged over 70, or Annesley's benefaction was for the maids who did not win the Blagrove lottery. The Blagrove lottery was held annually for girls from each of the parishes who were unmarried, of 'good name and fame' and had been with their master for 5 years to cast lots for a purse worth £6/13/4d. W.E.M Blandy, *Reading Municipal Charities*, (Reading, 1962) p.15, R. Munkhoff, "Hazarding for Marriage" John Blagrove's Lottery for Maidservants' *Early Modern Women*, Vol. 12/1 (Fall, 2017) pp.165-172.

²⁵ Mary Kendrick's Will stipulated 'to the poor not receiving parish relief.' 'Abstract of Returns of Charitable Donations', (HC, 1776) p.48, Although John Kendrick was quite clear that his charity should be a supplement to, not a replacement for, parish charity. MCR, 1835, p.31.

²⁶ See below, Ch.5 p.134.

²⁷ For the background to this, particularly in corporation towns, see Ch. 3.

Perhaps nowhere else is the survival of effective tory politics more evident in 1715 than in towns.²⁸

Many towns had unusual, and sometimes extensive franchises; not based on the simple property qualifications of the counties. These were a mixture of custom and interpretations of their various charters. During the Commonwealth decisions had been made on appeal that had left some towns with surprisingly broad franchises, both Bedford and Reading being examples of these.²⁹ One, still authoritative, analysis of the varying franchises in 196 urban constituencies, at the opening of our period breaks them down as follows:³⁰

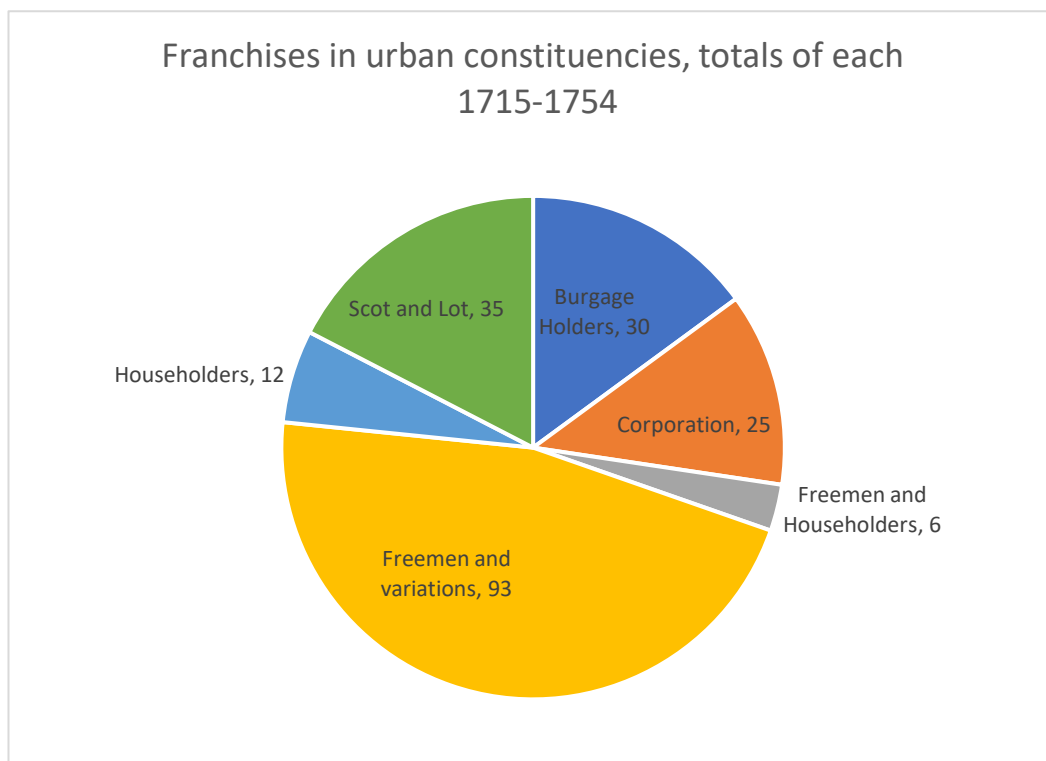


Figure 5- 1: Sedgewick's analysis of urban franchises.

The most common type of franchise was of freemen, that is those accepted as freemen of the borough by the corporation. This could vary but was generally those who had completed an apprenticeship within the borough and could pay the entrance fee. This gave them the right to trade in the town. This had little directly to do with poor relief policies. The next most common

²⁸ P. D. Holliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic: Partisan Politics in England's Towns* (Cambridge, 1998), p.322.

²⁹ See Ch. 3, p.59.

³⁰ From R. Sedgewick, (Ed) *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons, 1715-1754* (Cambridge, 1970) appendix 1. Accessed via <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/Volume/1715-1754/survey/appendix-i-constituencies-and-contested-elections>; [accessed 4 July 2023].

was those who paid 'scot and lot' in the town. Scot and lot were local taxes, which included poor rates.³¹ Most franchises also relied on a person being an inhabitant of the town, with appeals centring around whether someone was actually resident in the borough. Some boroughs, like Bedford, had the franchise sit with freemen, whether resident or not.³²

It was often the case that eighteenth century parliamentary seats were in the gift of wealthy patrons, and mostly uncontested.³³ This was not the case for our sample towns, in this period 'contested elections were especially common in urban boroughs and in the Southeast'.³⁴ Reading alone had *eighteen* contested elections from 1701 to 1747, an average of one every two and a half years.³⁵ Rogers calculates that through the eighteenth century, well over 50% of elections in the larger towns and cities were contested.³⁶ In addition 'Boroughs (were) significantly more likely to be classified as swing.'³⁷ Seats changing not only hands but political affiliation from one election to the next.³⁸ In the days before significant party identity or discipline in the Commons, alliances and groupings could be particularly volatile, with the small numbers of members returned from the Southeast corporation towns making significant differences,

contested elections affected the composition of the House of Commons. Voters and parties in the opposition could change the status quo if they invested the time and money contesting elections.³⁹

The corporate boroughs in the Southeast became the constant battlegrounds of party faction, throughout the eighteenth century, but especially in the years up to the fall of Walpole in 1742. Mayors, and corporations, were notoriously partial in their behaviour despite their role as returning officer and administrators of elections. Their willingness to allow gerrymandering, by enfranchising some and blocking others is well documented to risible levels. In Norwich in 1717 over 100, sympathetic, men were put into gaol in order to make their 'place of abode' a ward

³¹ See Ch. 5, p.

³² Borough of Bedford, in MCR 1835, p2100.

³³ 'The English Boroughs', D. Hayton, E. Cruickshanks, S. Handley (Eds), *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1690-1715*, (2002) <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/> [accessed May 2022].

³⁴ D. Bogart, 'Political Party Representation and Electoral Politics in England and Wales 1690-1747', *Social Science History*, Vol. 40/2 (Summer 2016) p300.

³⁵ Aspinall, *Parliament through seven centuries: Reading and its MPs* (London, 1962). Pp.110-111, including rerun elections.

³⁶ R. Rogers, 'The Middling Sort of People in Eighteenth Century Politics,' p.169 in J. Barry and C. Brooks, *The Middling Sort of People. Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (Basingstoke, 1994).

³⁷ Bogart 'Political Party', p.296.

³⁸ It is difficult to talk of straightforward political parties at this time, and the terms 'Whig' and 'Tory' are problematic, but for reasons of brevity and space I have used them as shorthand.

³⁹ Ibid, p.300.

that the Mayor wanted to win. They were let out after casting their votes accordingly.⁴⁰ Such interference in the electorate was the subject of huge numbers of appeals after elections throughout this period.⁴¹ The Municipal Corporation Report from 1835 is excoriating, in a great number of corporations

To maintain the political ascendancy of a party, or the political influence of a family, has been the one end and object for which....these bodies have been exercised.⁴²

Langford makes a rare reference to this possible read across from poor relief to electoral franchise in his 1994 work when he says:

What united many corporations, and incidentally influenced the single most important function of local government, the relief and management of the poor, was an obsessive preoccupation with parliamentary elections. The rocketing rise in the value of a seat in the Commons after 1688 overwhelmed the integrity of a class of municipal governors.....In a parliamentary borough party politics and personal interests were almost bound to take precedence over other considerations.⁴³

O’Gorman similarly notes, in passing, a possible read across to poor law administration

appointments to local offices of all kinds, the administration of the Poor Law, and, not least, the use made of local charitable institutions, bequests and funds were other spheres where favours to political friends might help.⁴⁴

Neither, sadly, goes into the detail as to how this could occur.

Often seats were won or lost on a handful of votes. If the franchise of a borough was based on scot and lot payment, then this would normally rest on whether a person had paid their poor rate. While ‘scot and lot’, in theory, referred to more generalized local taxes, including hearth and other rates, it was the poor rate that was most regularly collected (biannually or even quarterly in boroughs such as Bedford) and was paid by the widest number of people. It was poor rate payment which was examined when a case went to appeal.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Holliday, (1998) p.304.

⁴¹ The session after the death of Queen Anne in 1714 and subsequent election had at least 2/3rds of its business taken up with post-election appeals. (*CJ*, Vol.18).

⁴² MCR, (1835). P.34.

⁴³ P. Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman*, (Oxford, 1994) p.221.

⁴⁴ F. O’Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties: The unreformed electoral system of Hanoverian England, 1734-1832* (Oxford, 1989) p.42.

⁴⁵ See for example *CJ*, Vol. 24, 25th Jan 1740, p.619 or Vol. 14, 16th Dec 1699, Guildford Appeal.

Where franchises relied upon somebody being an inhabitant of the borough this was a matter of continued dispute. One of the most important objections to a person being an inhabitant was that he was a 'certificate-man'. This was a man who resided in a borough on a settlement certificate from a parish outside of the borough. It was the nature of settlement certificates that a person could live in a community on a certificate for years, even paying their poor rate there, and not become 'settled'. It became a matter of appeal within a few years of the 1697 Act requiring certificates. The first case appears after the 1705 General Election, at an appeal against the result in the Hertford constituency 'an objection to several petitioner's votes as certificate-men.'⁴⁶ The New Windsor Election in 1715 was overturned partly because 'certificate-men' had voted.⁴⁷

The issue of whether certificate-men had a right to vote or not was not settled until 1741 when an appeal from the Tamworth by-election tackled the issue head on. The agent representing the sitting member defended the right of certificate-men to vote:

that a Persons residing by Certificate, if they contribute to the publick Expenses of the Place where they reside, have a Right to be represented in that Place; otherwise it would be manifestly unjust as they can be only there represented at all, and this Right they had by Law before the Statute made in the 13 and 14th year of King Charles the Second (1662 Settlement and Removal Act). That the Provisions made by that Statute as well as subsequent Laws were in order to remedy particular Inconveniencies without any View or Tendency to what concerned the Right of voting in Elections.⁴⁸

He argued that the Settlement and Removal Act, 1662 had never been intended to extend to the franchise. This was almost certainly the case; this piece of legislation was an inelegant hybrid multiple bills collapsed together at the end of a session with no intention of dealing with voting.⁴⁹ The agent then called witnesses to show that certificate-men had habitually voted in previous elections. The decision of the appeal committee was that the House traditionally rejected certificate-men votes. From this point numerous appeals simply asked whether a person was a certificate-man or not. No legislation dealt with the issue until the wholesale reform of the franchise in 1832.

⁴⁶ *CJ* Vol.15, 6th December 1705 p.55.

⁴⁷ *CJ* Vol.18, 14th and 14th April 1715.

⁴⁸ *CJ* Vol.24, 22nd March 1741, p.139, This follows the convention that Charles II had been monarch since the death of his father in 1649.

⁴⁹ For further discussion of the passage of the Settlement and Removal Act see Ch.4.

Finally, it was almost universally the case that a person 'in receipt of alms' was ineligible to vote.⁵⁰ This disqualification continued until 1918.⁵¹ Again appeals often focused on whether or not a person was, or had been in the previous 12 months, in receipt of alms. While this would seem straightforward, 'receipt of alms' was a very loose concept. How far did it extend? Was a prosperous businessman whose son was attending a local school on a bursary paid by a charity 'in receipt of alms'? Were the inhabitants of towns or estates where ceremonial doles of bread or flour given once a year, such as the Tichborne Dole, in receipt of alms?⁵² The complexity of the interpretations, often made on a place-by-place basis can be seen in the Commons ruling on the Bedford election appeal of 1774. Oldfield paraphrases the judgement as follows:

The first question was, Whether persons having received a charity within a year before the election, were entitled to vote? The committee determined that persons receiving Sir William Harper's charity are not thereby disqualified...The counsel for the petitioners then endeavoured to support, and the counsel for the sitting members to oppose, on the same charge-

First- Persons having received a charity called Howe's Charity

Secondly, -Persons having received a charity called Welborn's Charity

Thirdly,- The masters and brethren of St. John's Hospital;

Fourthly, -Freemen who had received parish relief within a year before the election the committee determined that such as had received Howe's charity were not thereby disqualified-

That such as had received Welborn's charity were thereby disqualified-That the masters and brethren were not disqualified-That such as had received alms, meaning thereby parish relief, within the twelve months previous to election were disqualified- And lastly That they would not reject any person's vote for receiving alms with the said year preceding the election. ⁵³

For many of the decisions the balance was often struck that charity relief did not always disqualify you, but parish relief almost certainly did. For corporations with huge charity budgets to administer, and handfuls of votes to find, or block, the temptation to dole out charity accordingly was clearly there. This was underlined in the Municipal Corporation Report of 1835, which decried the fact that so many corporations 'have been preserved solely as political engines'⁵⁴ and this was manifest in many activities including 'the administration of charities entrusted to municipal authorities'⁵⁵

⁵⁰ There were some exceptions, as hangovers of rulings during the Commonwealth, such as in Reading, but these were normally overturned in the late 17th or early 18th century.

⁵¹ (7&8 Geo.VI c64 s9) Representation of the People Act, 1918, "A person shall not be disqualified...from voting....by reason that he has received poor relief or other alms'.

⁵² The Tichborne Dole is an annual distribution of flour to the villagers of Tichborne, near Winchester, dating back to the twelfth century. It continues to this day, there were many such local charities. Simpson and Roud *A Dictionary of English Folklore* <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780198607663.001.0001/acref-9780198607663-e-1046?rskey=J7plaX&result=1> [accessed 10 May 2022.]

⁵³ T. Oldfield, *An Entire and Complete History Political and Personal of the Boroughs of Great Britain*, 2nd Edn (2 Vols. London, 1794) i. p8, also *CJ*, Vol. 35, 6th December 1774, p.22, for the full case.

⁵⁴ MCR, 1835, p34, Item 73.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

In short, corporations, particularly the fraught, marginal constituencies of the south and east, had enormous reasons to micro-manage to an individual degree the administration of poor relief in the parishes, beyond the normal responsibilities of JPs. Not only as custodians of the common weal of the town, nor just as local traders and merchants, but as trustees of major charities, and partisan politicians doing their utmost to effect change in the Commons of the time.

3. Machinery for coordination and cooperation.

The legislative framework outlining the responsibilities of JP and Vestry has already been outlined.⁵⁶ Broadly speaking the JPs role was enhanced through the course of the century, however powers in statutes are not always the same as power exercised in localities. To understand that a much closer examination needs to be made of the political and socio-economic factors governing the relationship between parish and corporation.

1. Relations between vestry and corporation.

Most corporation towns at the opening of the eighteenth century were little more than 10,000 in population.⁵⁷ While burgeoning industrial centres grew to eight or nine times that by the end of the century, many smaller towns in the south and east had not reached 5,000 by the end of the century.⁵⁸ Reading, the largest of our sample towns, had a population of 9,742 in the 1801 census.

While population mobility was considerable, with the labouring poor, for example, expecting to move at least once in their lives for work or family reasons, the stability of the more prosperous families, the 'middling sort' and ruling oligarchy within the parish, was more marked.⁵⁹ In urban areas the opportunities for this social group to mix were much more numerous than in rural areas. Geographical proximity, as well as shared social, business, governmental and religious activities made the urban middling sort much more familiar with each other than their rural

⁵⁶ See Ch. 3 p.33.

⁵⁷ The Cambridge Urban History lists only four, Norwich, Bristol, York and Exeter over 10K in 1700. *CUHB*, ii, p.679.

⁵⁸ In fact the *CUHB* has 73% of smaller towns in the south east being under 3,000 by 1800. *CUHB*, ii, p.740

⁵⁹ H.R. French, 'Status, Localism and the Middle Sort of People in England 1620-1750' *Past and Present*, Vol. 116, (Feb 2000), pp.66-99, p.87.

counterparts.⁶⁰ That is not to say, of course, that as a group they were necessarily bound together by these associations, or homogenous in their views. As we have seen, particularly at the opening of the century, religious and political divisions were intense. Business interests clashed as often as coalesced.⁶¹ Barry argues the urban middle classes collectively were very active in a plethora of activities which attempted to solve the problems of urban life, poverty being one of the more pressing;

For most of our period the great majority of such people were involved automatically in some level of local government, in the parish church and often in an occupational guild.⁶²

A lot of the civic and charitable organisations could be partisan in non-partisan clothing, being, in reality, Tory or Non-conformist organisations for example, while purporting to be non-factional and only operating in the interests of the town. Whether overtly factional, or simply ostensibly, acting with disinterest, the majority of the middling sort were involved in some sort of organisation like this.⁶³

In small communities of around 5-6,000, the middling sort would probably be no more than about 50-100 families, with adult male members of these households, between the ages of 20-70, the ones likely to take positions in vestry and corporation amounting to about 100-150 people at any one time.⁶⁴ Some of these would have to be discounted due to ill-health, or inability to carry out duties because of other commitments. Assuming three parishes of 2,000 each, a select vestry would probably be about thirty members, and a corporation another twenty or so.⁶⁵ That is 110 positions. It is easy to see why Barry comes to his conclusion that most of the middling sort were involved in local government in some form or another, for some the corporation, and for many more the vestry.

There were through the eighteenth century two types of vestry, the open vestry, where all ratepayers had a say in the choice of parish officers and decisions about rating, and the select

⁶⁰ J. Barry, and C. Brooks, *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, (Basingstoke, 1994) p.84.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.89.

⁶² Ibid, p.84.

⁶³ Ibid, p.110.

⁶⁴ This estimation is based on 25% of the population being considered in poverty, with a further 15% only just above the poverty line (Calculated as those exempt from Poor Rates, and those exempt from Hearth Tax). 40% of population is the 'middling sort' with a further 20% being very wealthy citizens and scions of the gentry, or other non-definables such as the military. This also assumes an average household size of 5 at this time. See T. Arkell, 'The Incidence of Poverty in the late seventeenth century', *Social History*, Vol. 12/1 (May 1987) pp.23-47.

⁶⁵ St. Mary's Reading was set at 33 when established in 1603. F.N.A Garry, A.G. Garry, *The Churchwarden Accounts of the Parish of St. Mary's Reading, Berks, 1550-1662*, (Reading, 1893), p.90, this was fairly average.

vestry where a smaller number of the wealthier and oldest, most established, families were nominated to do this work.⁶⁶ These 'chief' or 'principal' members co-opted each other for life, filling places as they became available.⁶⁷ Old corporation towns were more likely to have select vestries.⁶⁸ Select vestries were often deemed more cautious and pliable. Where open vestries operated in larger urban parishes, such as Whitechapel in the 1730s, they could become riotous and unwieldy, with over 1,300 people turning up to the annual elections.⁶⁹ On the other hand, select vestries could be seen as corrupt and serving only the interests of the parish elites, as in the case of a sponsored bill in 1742 to open the select vestries of St. James, St. Georges, Hanover Square, St. Martins in the Field and St. Annes, Soho.⁷⁰

Membership of a vestry could often be seen as a necessary stepping-stone to higher office. The vestry, with its relatively humble positions of constable, keepers of the highways and overseers of the poor was the junior partner, with the borough the senior one. As one contemporary wit, in neither position, pointed out

Too low in life to be a Justice, I
And for a Constable, thank God, too high.⁷¹

Nonetheless, experience as a vestryman had traditionally stood a person in good stead when pressing to be an alderman 'many a member of the select vestry wore aldermanic robes'.⁷²

Not all vestrymen became aldermen, and not all aldermen, or vestrymen, were as active as others. French's work on parishes in both rural and urban Essex, Suffolk and Lancashire shows that select vestries were subject to something akin to a 30/70 rule, where 30% of the vestry were responsible for 70 % of attendance and work.⁷³ In Earls Colne, 26% of the vestry counted for 82% of the attendance. In reality the work of a vestry was done predominantly by an inner

⁶⁶ Most commentators (the *CUHB* for example) still take the Webbs authority that vestries evolved from manorial courts, and that they were largely ungoverned by legislation until the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Decision to move to a select vestry was taken by the majority at an open meeting. Membership of the open vestry was also subject to custom and practice, ratepayers in some parishes, and simple inhabitants in others. Webbs, Vol. 1, *The Parish and the County*, (London, 1906) pp.9-18. J. Innes and N. Rogers, 'Politics and Government, 1700-1840' *CUHB* ii. p.533.

⁶⁷ A survey of petitions to Essex sessions finds terms such as 'chief', 'substantial' 'ablest' and 'principal', H.R. French, 'Status, Localism' p.76.

⁶⁸ W. Tate, *The Parish Chest*, 1st Edn 1946 (Cambridge, CUP, 2011) p19.

⁶⁹ J. Innes and N. Rogers, 'Politics and Government, 1700-1840', in *CUHB*, ii, p533.

⁷⁰ G. Williamson, 'From behind the Counter: The 1742 Select Vestry Campaign', *The London Journal*, Vol. 42/3 (Nov 2017) pp218-237. The Bill did not get beyond first reading.

⁷¹ J. Branstons, *The Art of Politicks, In imitation of Horace's Art of Poetry* (London, 1731) p.32.

⁷² R. Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England: Politics and Political Culture, c1540-1640* (Oxford, 1998) p.185.

⁷³ French, 'Status', p.83.

cabal of, on average, about 8-11 people. The situation was not dissimilar in open vestries, where only particular, controversial issues would command a large attendance.⁷⁴ The cabal needed to be able to carry the confidence of the rest of the vestry and could be in difficulty if they did not. This was seen in the parish of Braintree and can also be seen in St. Mary's Reading.⁷⁵ Most of the time, however, a small number of select or open vestry members, working on behalf of the rest of the principal inhabitants of the parish, could command the strategy and shape of poor relief policy within the parish.

While the parish was not historically a civic division, the parishes and corporation were bound together through custom, charity and patronage. The senior parish church in a town often held specified pews for the mayor and aldermen and would hold ceremonies for the borough.⁷⁶ In many towns the advowsons for certain churches were in the gift of the corporation.⁷⁷ Familial names occur contemporaneously on corporation and vestry, with sons or younger brothers taking the place of the senior member on his admission to the corporation.⁷⁸ Given the relatively small pool of candidates, the even smaller pool of active members, and the overlap between vestry and corporation membership, it is easy to see how a tight group could effectively manage the affairs of a town.

Kent's work on parish government in England from 1640-1740 concludes that the high level of conformity displayed by parishes to the numerous requirements put upon them over this time came not so much from the strictures of fines and sequestration of personal property, as from social interaction and social cohesion. Much of the real decision making she states, occurred informally

The accounts of local officers and justices' notebooks both reveal how many trips parish officials made to a neighbouring justice and how much local administration and law enforcement were conducted in the magistrate's parlour.⁷⁹

It was not just close social networks which kept parish working with borough, but a homogeneity of interest across both vestry and corporation, she suggests. Parishes did not just

⁷⁴ St. Lawrence is a good example of this.

⁷⁵ French, 'Status' p.78, See Monck dispute, Ch.7 p.255.

⁷⁶ K. Wrightson, 'Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England,' in P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (Ed) *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke 1996) p.24.

⁷⁷ Tittler, *Reformation*, p.185.

⁷⁸ See examples in sample towns below.

⁷⁹ J. R. Kent, 'The Centre and the Localities: State Formation and Parish Government in England, 1640-1740', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 38/2 (1995) pp.363-404, p.386.

respond to requests, but took initiatives themselves, and here she cites the response to the 1723 Workhouse Test Act.⁸⁰ Barry goes so far as to call this a 'bourgeois collectivism', with the lesser bourgeois being most keen to get on to the *cursus honorum* as they had the most to gain from this involvement.⁸¹ Tensions did occur between parishes and corporation as has been noted in Bristol as it attempted to establish a Corporation of the Poor in the opening years of the eighteenth century; but evidence from smaller towns, and from later in the century suggests that this was not the most typical behaviour.

Precious little survives documenting meetings between vestry officials and magistrates. In the previous century the personal rule had seen regular, mandatory meetings between JPs and vestry.⁸² In the eighteenth, legislation underlined the *need* for those meetings nonetheless, signing settlement and removals, signing off accounts and examinations involved joint working. Clearly the line between meetings held to respond to requests for passes or permitting some relief could easily move into wider strategic and forward-looking decisions. The Webbs give the instance of St. Margaret's Westminster where petty sessions turned into detailed micro-management of the poor relief system in the Parish.⁸³ In St. Martin in the Fields, the vestry meetings even merged with petty session meetings creating a powerful body for the administration of poor relief.⁸⁴ The 1744 Vagrancy Act also required JPs to meet constables of parish at least four times a year to 'make a general privy search' for vagrants.⁸⁵ JPs and vestry members were often joint executors of charities and, later in the century, the vast numbers of subscription societies for hospitals, schools and general town improvement.⁸⁶ All of which would have involved opportunities for discussion of poor relief management in the town.

Actual, hard documentary evidence for such meetings in corporation towns remains thin however. The process of deducing how decisions were being made, and power wielded involves not only a review of the extant texts, but also a reconstruction of the legal, economic and social context within which those decisions were being made, and a level of deduction and interpretation.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.399.

⁸¹ Barry and Brooks, *The Middling Sort*, p.103. '*Cursus honorum*', sequential order of public office in increasing importance. A concept imported from Ancient Rome.

⁸² See Ch.2 p.40

⁸³ S. Webb and B. Webb, *The Parish and the County*, (London, 1922), p.405.

⁸⁴ London Lives. <https://www.londonlives.org/static/WestminsterLocalGovernment.jsp> [accessed June 2023]

⁸⁵ (17 Geo II, c5 s6) An Act to amend and make more effectual the laws relating to rogues, vagabonds and other idle and disorderly persons, and to houses of correction, 1744.

⁸⁶ Barry and Brooks, *The Middling Sort*, pp.96-97 The Harpur Trust included aldermen and vestry members. J. Godber, *The Harpur Trust, 1552-1973* (Luton, 1978), p.29.

4. Reading and comparator towns

1. Motivation for cooperation.

In Chapter 4 some of the more obvious motivations for cooperation are alluded to. The money saved through not prosecuting appeals, the conformity to payment by having similar rating levels across the parishes, the efficiency afforded by not routinely removing settlers from other borough parishes and the efficacy gained by pursuing draconian targeting across the board. Reading also provides a strong example of the Corporation managing poor relief systems to electoral advantage.

Reading was a particularly electorally volatile borough.⁸⁷ Without the control of one or two powerful landed families with deep pockets to manage elections, with a large electorate and close enough to London to attract candidates looking for a contestable seat, it had an abnormally high number of contested elections in the first half of the century, even amongst the politically energetic boroughs of the Southeast.⁸⁸ In addition these elections often saw the seat change hands from Whiggish, and pro-government, to anti-government, and Tory by a handful of votes.⁸⁹ Several elections had resulted in appeals to Parliament, in 1699, 1701, 1708 and a further one in 1716.⁹⁰ The issue of whether a person had been in receipt of charity and what the electorate consisted of exercised those appealing. The House ruled in 1716 that only inhabitants paying scot and lot had the right to vote.⁹¹ That election was disqualified and rerun.

Close run elections then relied upon potential voters being able to demonstrate that they had paid their poor rate for the previous year. While there were no appeals, or surviving accusations of wrongdoing after this until 1740, it is worth noting that the collection books of both St. Lawrence and St. Mary's from this time imply a high level of compliance with payment, there are very few records of refusal or resistance. This is not surprising when large amounts could be

⁸⁷ In modern times Reading has always been a "bellwether" borough, shifting according to prevailing political fortunes, although the factors at play have probably changed. <https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/bellwether-seats-meaning-uk-constituency-general-election-2019-result-prediction-373269> [accessed July 2023].

⁸⁸ Eighteen in the forty six years between 1701-1747. Roughly one every two and a half years.

⁸⁹ In 1740 it was 10, in 1754, 1. A. Aspinall, *Parliament*, pp.107-116.

⁹⁰ *CJ*, Vol. 12, 6th December 1699; *CJ*, Vol. 13, 21st February, 1701; *CJ*, Vol. 16, 11th November, 1708; *CJ*, Vol. 16, 30th May 1708; *CJ*, Vol. 17, 16th May 1716.

⁹¹ *CJ*, Vol. 17, 30th May, 1716.

paid for a person's vote. The 1716 appeal talks of five or six guineas a vote being paid.⁹²

Reportedly in the 1754 election votes were going for thirty to forty guineas at a time.⁹³ The 1740 election however resulted in a lengthy appeal which gives significant detail as to the potential lengths that the Corporation was prepared to go to manipulate the poor relief system to manage the electorate.

The election had been instigated by the long-anticipated death of one of the incumbents, Henry Grey, after a serious illness. At least one of the candidates, Dodd, a Whig and friend of the Walpole family, had been wooing the electorate for months before Grey's actual death.⁹⁴ The election was held in November 1740, and Dodd narrowly lost by 10 votes to the Tory, Stroud.⁹⁵ Dodd appealed, and the hearings continued, off and on in the Commons through January and February 1741.⁹⁶ Dodd's main complaint rested on the method by which people had been put on the poor rate, not only were people rejected at the poll by the Mayor who had paid their rates but also

several other persons who were proposed to the Overseers of the Poor to be put upon the Rates as fit to be rated but were rejected by them and who tendered their Votes for the Petitioner and were rejected by the Mayor.⁹⁷

And the following day the Committee heard

evidence in order to establish the Vote of another person who, as fit to be put upon the Rates, though not rated, tendered his Vote for the Petitioner, and was rejected by the Mayor.⁹⁸

The counsel for the petitioner then examined further witnesses,

in order to prove what numbers of persons were continually added to the Rates made in the several Parishes within the said Borough, for several years before the said Election and also to shew who have been Mayors of the said Borough for the Years 1738, 1739, and 1740. And who had been Overseers of the Poor in the several parishes within the said Borough, for the years 1739 and 1740 and for which of the candidates such Mayors and Overseers severally voted at the last Election.⁹⁹

And further

⁹² *CJ*, Vol. 17, 30th May, 1716.

⁹³ Aspinall, *Parliament*, p.80.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.76

⁹⁵ 285/275, Aspinall, *Parliament*, p.111.

⁹⁶ 1740 Old Style. *CJ*, Vol. 23, 20th January 1740, p.602.

⁹⁷ *CJ*, Vol. 23, 26th January 1740, p.616.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.619.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p.619.

examined several witnesses in order to prove the Usage of nominating Overseers of the Poor in the several parishes within the said Borough and the manner of appointing them at Easter last, before the said election.¹⁰⁰

The implication is clear. The Corporation, and the Mayor quite specifically, were Tory sympathisers who wished to block a Whig candidate. They had interfered in the elections of overseers to ensure pliable officers, and then managed those overseers in order to ensure that Whig sympathisers were left off the poor rate, and Tory sympathisers put on. The fact that this was happening must have been fairly apparent, as those not rated still turned up to the polls in order to confront the issue and have themselves rejected.

Of course this is just an accusation, and it is worth pursuing further evidence to see if this was happening, and not just a complaint thrown out in the wake of a close result. The difficulty of finding independent corroboration that gerrymandering is going on is obvious. Evidence of this behaviour would not only negate the election, it was also a deeply dishonourable course. It is not something that would be minuted or recorded anywhere for posterity. Indeed candidates of the time rarely even spoke in terms of 'Whig' and 'Tory', nor of party supporters. Party 'faction' was, in itself, dishonourable, and candidates spoke of their 'friends' and 'enemies' or 'opposition', this disdain of party was to continue well into the nineteenth century.¹⁰¹

Evidence for allegiances can be garnered from those pollbooks which survive. The only overseers from 1739 and 1740 that can be reliably established are James King and Ben Figgins from St. Lawrence, who signed off some settlement certificates and John Bird and Thomas Compton from St. Mary in the Vestry minutes from their handover meeting.¹⁰² King and Figgins from St Lawrence and Compton from St. Mary all appear in the 1754 Pollbook, when the same candidates stood. They are all recorded as voting for the Tory, Stroud, as well as the 'anti-government Whig', Fane.¹⁰³ The Mayors from 1738, 1739 and 1740 are Richard Richards, William Everett and Jeria Iremonger. Only Iremonger can be reliably matched up to a vote, and he is seen voting Tory in a 1727 County Election. The appeal makes reference to a Christopher Littleworth, who had been made overseer in St. Giles, despite himself not paying rates a few

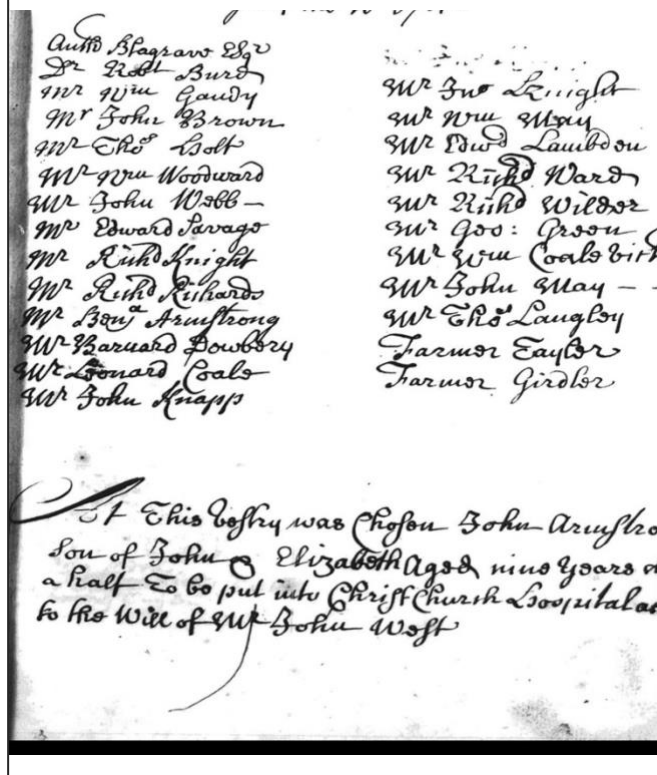
¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.619.

¹⁰¹ See N. Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth Century England* (Cambridge, 2001) pp.216-236 for an example of the language of 'friendship' for political supporters. As late as 1832 the *Reading Mercury* was reporting with contempt on candidates who canvassed for votes for another of a similar 'interest' rather than just relying on friends supporting an independent gentleman. *RM*, 17/12/1832.

¹⁰² BRO D/P98/13/1 388, 389 and D/P 98 8/2 Vestry minute, 30th March 1741.

¹⁰³ IHR/BC.228/Ber/Rea/1754.

Figure 5- 2: Attendance at St. Mary's Vestry July 1740



years before, pleading poverty. He votes for the Tory, Strode, in 1754 but also for the Whig, Dodd.

This is not complete, as we do not have the actual 1740 pollbook. Conceivably all these people could have changed their political allegiance in 14 years. The counsel for Dodd did have access to this pollbook however, and one assumes he would not have drawn attention to it if did not support his case.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence that 'something was up' are the Vestry minutes from St. Mary's in July 1740 (Fig.5-2).¹⁰⁴ This would have been the

meeting when the rate for the next half year was discussed. This is only the briefest of minutes, but the attendance is telling:

Anthony Blagrove is at the top of the list, a position normally reserved for the more senior Vestry members. He was not a member of the select Vestry, but does, on occasion turn up to the Vestry meeting. He was not a Corporation member, but he was three times Tory MP for Reading, and father to the sitting, Tory, incumbent, John Blagrove. He was himself a veteran of a previous appeal which had centred around the right, or not, of freemen to vote in 1716. He presumably knew his way round the issue.

As mentioned, party political identification is a hazardous business at this time. There were many 'Tory' MPs, particularly in the middle of the century, who were really just 'independent country gentlemen' who wished to oppose what was seen as the corruption of the Walpole

¹⁰⁴ BRO D/P98/8/2, Vestry Minutes.

regime.¹⁰⁵ Blagrove was not one of these. His old Tory sympathies were so strong that ‘His name was sent to the Pretender in 1721 as a probable supporter in the event of a rising’.¹⁰⁶

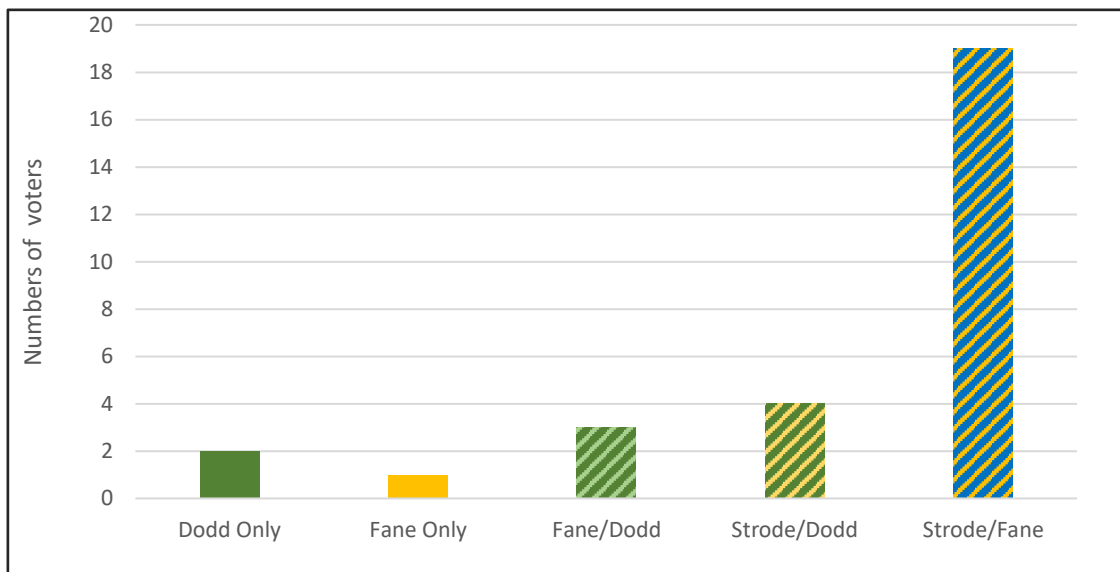


Figure 5- 3: Votes cast by St. Mary's Vestry, 1754. Dodd was the pro-government Whig, Fane was an opposition Whig and Strode a Tory, compared against the 1760 Vestry list.

By marriage his family had inherited the Gray property in Reading, which itself had once been the property of the Abbey. This included much of the grander housing in the town. Martin notes that when Gray took over the properties in the 1530s, overnight, out of 51 freemen, ‘46 were his tenants’.¹⁰⁷ Blagrove was by far the town’s biggest landlord, one whom the Corporation were regularly in negotiation with.¹⁰⁸ In addition he was former High Sherriff of the County, and owner of the imposing Southcote Estate. His presence at a vestry which consisted of small businessmen and farmers must have been powerful.

Alongside him was also William Gandy, his agent when he had been MP, and the person who appeared on his behalf at his appeal and was also accused of offering bribes on his behalf.¹⁰⁹ Gandy was a member of the select Vestry. Richard Richards, former mayor, cited by Dodd’s counsel as complicit, was also there. The historic sympathies of the St. Mary’s vestry can be seen by analyses of two mid-century pollbooks, in particular the 1754 elections when two

¹⁰⁵ See Bogart’s analysis of voting behaviour, D. Bogart, ‘Political Party’, pp.271-303.

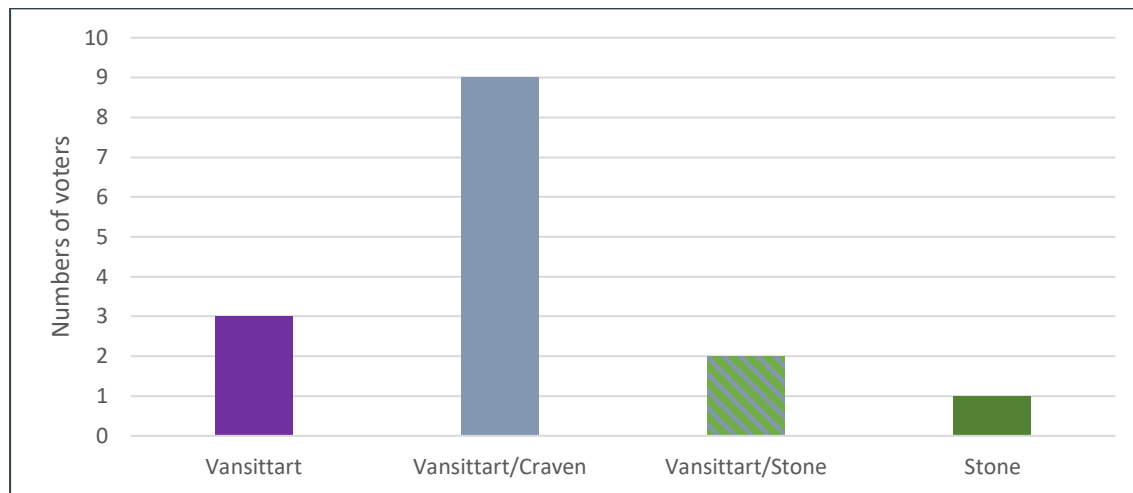
¹⁰⁶ <http://historyofparliamentonline.org/Volume/1715-1754/member/blagrove-anthony-1680-1744> taken from private Stuart papers.

¹⁰⁷ J. Martin, ‘Leadership and priorities in Reading during the Reformation’ P. Collinson and G. Craig (Ed) *The Reformation in English Towns* (London, 1998), p.121.

¹⁰⁸ BRO R/AC 1/1 21 Feb 1722 for example, Blagrove owned the lease for the Bluecoat School.

¹⁰⁹ *CJ*, 1716, p.454.

Figure 5- 3: St. Mary's Vestry votes in the 1768 County election. Craven and Vansittart were Tory, Stone a radical. Electorate was smaller as there was a £10 property qualification for county election



of the same candidates stood (Fig 5-3).¹¹⁰ There was also a rather curious, and rare 'joint meeting' of the St. Lawrence vestry and the Corporation at the main Easter meeting in 1740, where the Corporation agrees to give the church £50 for building work, with the election of overseers as an apparent minor piece of business.¹¹¹

The political affiliations of the Corporation are also clear from the 1754 pollbook (Fig. 5-5). Thirteen Corporation members were also eligible to vote in St. Lawrence's vestry meetings.¹¹²

None of this is conclusive of course, but, as mentioned, under the circumstances it would be very unlikely to find a minuted agreement to bar Whigs from voting by keeping them off the poor rate. What does seem clear is a Tory domination of both Corporation and Vestry at this time, clear Tory sympathies from the identifiable overseers and some uncharacteristic attendance at the vestries by interested parties.

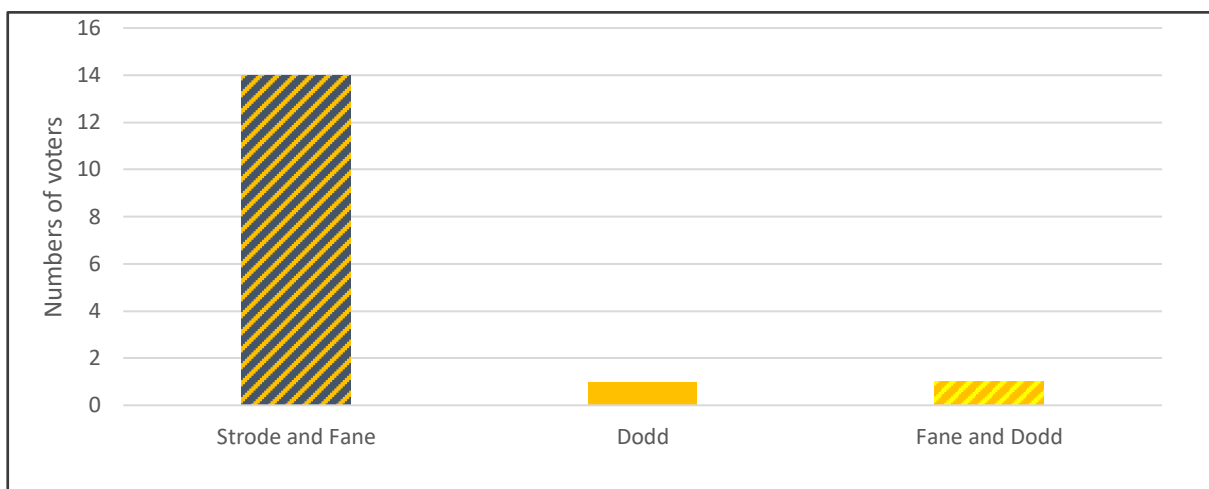
¹¹⁰ IHR/BC.228/Ber/Rea/1754 and BRO D/P 98/8/2 Vestry list 16/7/1740. Each voter had two votes, they could decide to only use one in order to strengthen their support for a particular candidate (a 'plumper') or vote for two.

¹¹¹ BRO R/AC/1/1/22, 29 March 1740.

¹¹² It is not possible to do a similar analysis of St. Lawrence vestry, since it was an open vestry, and no minutes for this period survive.

Figure 5- 4: Corporation Votes in the 1754 Election.

Alongside the complaint about partial rating Dodd also raised accusations about certificate-men voting, and those in receipt of alms being allowed to vote. A witness acting for Dodd produced a certificate for somebody who had voted for Strode, saying he had ‘found it’ in the parish chest. Dodd wanted the vote disallowed. The committee decided the certificate was a forgery. The power of overseers to lose or produce settlement certificates as needed is illustrated by this one incident. Ultimately the Elections Committee believed that the Corporation did interfere as they found for Dodd, and he was declared the elected member.



Both Guildford and Bedford were also to be the subject of complaints over gerrymandering of charity and relief by the corporations to influence the outcome of parliamentary elections. Guildford was a scot and lot borough, and in 1699 a complaint was made that non-poor rate payers had been allowed to vote. In the appeal the poor rate collection books were provided for the committee to examine. Bedford was not a scot and lot borough, but was charged with administering its charity money, among other things, to disqualify people from voting in 1774. This led to the complex judgement quoted above.¹¹³

The sense that the Reading Corporation was dealing fast and loose with the franchise did not go away. A minute from the Corporation minute book from 1761 shows the aldermen had to make the following declaration:

whereas a report has been industriously propagated that it was the intent of the body corporate to deprive the inhabitants paying scot and lot of their right of voting in the election of members

¹¹³ See p.140.

for the borough and to vest the same for the future in themselves. Each alderman declares that there never was any foundation for the Report. and the abovementioned declaration to be printed.¹¹⁴

Even without the desire to ensure poor relief was administered efficiently within their boundaries, corporations such as Reading had strong interests in who was rated, who was on a certificate and who was in receipt of alms. This case would imply they went to some lengths to control this.

2. Social networks

Reading was town of just over 7, 500 at the opening of the eighteenth century, and of just over 9,500 by the end.¹¹⁵ Estimations of the poor of Reading in the 1660s suggests nearly two thirds of the population was in poverty.¹¹⁶ This was mostly a consequence of the decline of the cloth industry and the disruptions of the Civil War. While the prosperity of the town had begun to improve by the beginning of the eighteenth century, it is still a reasonable assumption that at over half of the households in Reading were in poverty, by the definition of not paying rates, by the middle of the eighteenth century.¹¹⁷ At the beginning of the century it is feasible to say that about 300 males made up the 'middling sort' within the age group available for positions on vestry and corporation. Vestry size for St. Mary's was 33 and numbers of aldermen totalled 24, the other two vestries were open vestries, with St. Lawrence showing a regular attendance of between 10-15.¹¹⁸ Assuming St. Giles was similar then there were about 90 positions available at any one time, not including other, important paid positions, such as clerk, and his assistants, to the Corporation, the schoolmaster, the vicars, and, as the century wore on, paid overseers and surgeons for the parishes. A fortunate survival of a bond from St. Giles from 1779 lists 16 names

¹¹⁴ BRO R/AC/1/1/23 1761.

¹¹⁵ Aspinall, *Parliament*, p101 and 1801 Census, Histpop.

¹¹⁶ N. Goose, 'Decay and Regeneration in Seventeenth Century Reading' *Southern History*, Vol. 6 (1984) pp.63-74, p.67 based on exemption from 1664 Hearth Tax, and parish registers. Exemption from Hearth Tax is probably the 'highest' bar, and the average for the country was about 35-40%, see T. Arkell, 'The Incidence of Poverty in the late seventeenth century', *Social History*, Vol.12/1 (1987) pp.23-4.

¹¹⁷ Population in 1750, 8,885 (Aspinall, *Parliament*, p.99), assumption of average household size, 5 (based on assumption made by St. Mary's parish clerk in 1785). 8885/5 = no of households, 1777. Numbers paying the scot and lot who voted in 1754 election (voterate) and not in receipt of alms, 560 (1754 Pollbook). Although this is about one third of the households, those qualified to vote (electorate) would be higher, and there were households headed by women and 'certificate-men' barred from voting who would not have been in poverty. Those paying rates would not directly map on to the definition of 'middling sort'; although those actually engaging in voting possibly more so.

¹¹⁸ BRO D/P 97/8/1/1 and D/P97/8/1/2, based on attendance at non-Easter meetings, Easter meetings were much higher.

of, presumably, key vestry members, and their occupations. This gives a valuable insight into the social status of those running the vestries of Reading.¹¹⁹

Name	Occupation
Rev Cadogan	Vicar
Richard Knight, senior	Yeoman
William Baker	Yeoman
William Lynne	Tanner
Henry Willatts	Timber Merchant
Francis Tudor	Innholder
John Spratley	Innholder
Thomas Brookman	Glazier
John Alloway	Victualler
William Jennings	Whitesmith
Thomas Chamberlain	Timber Merchant
Stephen Butler	Bricklayer
James Quelch	Sailcloth Maker
James Hill	Stone mason
Thomas Perkins	Gingerbread maker
Thomas Hunt	Malster
Richard Knight, junior	Yeoman

Table 5- 1: Key St. Giles' Vestry members from 1779

In line with the findings of French regarding Essex parishes, even within that relatively small group of eligible males, some families dominated Reading affairs. Abraham Watlington was Mayor in 1734, 1743 and 1755, and his son, Abraham Watlington Junior an Alderman in 1761.

¹²⁰ Figure 5-6 is based on the will of one of Reading's mayor's Jeria Iremonger, from 1745, in order to illustrate the interconnectedness of Reading's leading families with the wider Reading community.¹²¹

Jeria Iremonger was a wealthy brewer and property owner in Reading, whose family had been at the forefront of civic life in Reading for over one hundred years, having married into the

¹¹⁹ BRO D/P96/18/6/550, those standing guarantors for a bond for the parish. Probably the more substantial vestry members in an open vestry.

¹²⁰ List of Mayors from C. Coates, *History and Antiquities of Reading* (London, 1802), Appendix 14.

¹²¹ NA PROB/11/745/301, Will of Jeria Iremonger.

aforesaid Watlington family. Jeria himself had been mayor in 1730 and 1740. His wife had predeceased him, as had his son, Jeria, leaving him with only one daughter, Anne, to inherit his extensive fortune. His long, complicated, will, left money and property to his extended family. The names outlined in blue have been left property by him, implying some level of good relations with him at the time of his death.

It is notable the social range of his connections. On the one hand one of the witnesses to his will was Harry Austin Deane, one of the powerful Deane family, who filled mayoral positions through the second half of the eighteenth century and his niece's marital connections with the Tirrells, or Terrells, who similarly had been mayors of Reading through the seventeenth and eighteenth century. On the other hand there is his brother-in-law, a baker, and his kinsman Richard Birch, a cheesemonger. That is not to say that both were not comfortable and prosperous tradesmen, but they make little other mark Reading's civic life. In addition we see the political spread of his connections, from Griffin Iremonger and William James, who were sufficiently committed in their support for the Government Whig faction in 1754 to withhold one of their votes to strengthen their support for the candidate Dodd; to Deane, Birch and Collier who voted for both the Tory and the anti-government Whig.¹²² Iremonger himself was implicated in the plot against Dodd by his counsel.¹²³

As a brewer he would have had business connections, and possibly tensions, with John Spicer, Mayor in 1736, 1744 and 1756, and Adam Smith, Mayor in 1767, who both owned maltings in the town.¹²⁴ It is also noticeable that he continued as a vestryman in St. Mary's, even acting as a overseer of the poor, after he had been accepted as an alderman. Jeria and his family were also tenants of the Blagrave family.¹²⁵

This accords with Chick's analysis of Reading civic society pre and post dissolution of the Abbey up to 1600.¹²⁶ He finds a narrowing of the numbers, and enhancement of the prestige, of those involved at the highest level of mayor or MP. However the social links did not shrink accordingly. The mayors, MPs and their families continue to have familial and social ties deep

¹²² IHR/BC.228/Ber/Rea/1754 Reading Pollbook, 1754,

¹²³ See above Ch. 5 p149.

¹²⁴ BRO D/P 98 11/92 St. Mary's Rate Collection Books.

¹²⁵ Property 'I hold by several leases...granted by Anthony Blagrave' NA PROB/11/745/301

¹²⁶ J. Chick, 'Urban Oligarchy and Dissolution Voters: The End of Monastic Rule in Reading, 1350-1600' *Cultural and Social History*, Vol 16/4 pp.387-411.

into the broader community into the early modern era. In fact, if anything those links become more extensive.¹²⁷

Chick concluded that Reading in 1600 was an oligarchy, but an open one 'with the majority of burgesses being drawn from new families'. That cannot be said with such confidence by 1700. Names such as Watlington, Spicer, Deane, Abery, Richards and Noake dominate the aldermanic and mayoral lists. In the hundred years from 1700 to 1800 there are only 44 differing surnames in the list of mayors, while there are 67 in the hundred years following the Municipal

¹²⁷Chick, 'Urban Oligarchy' p.406

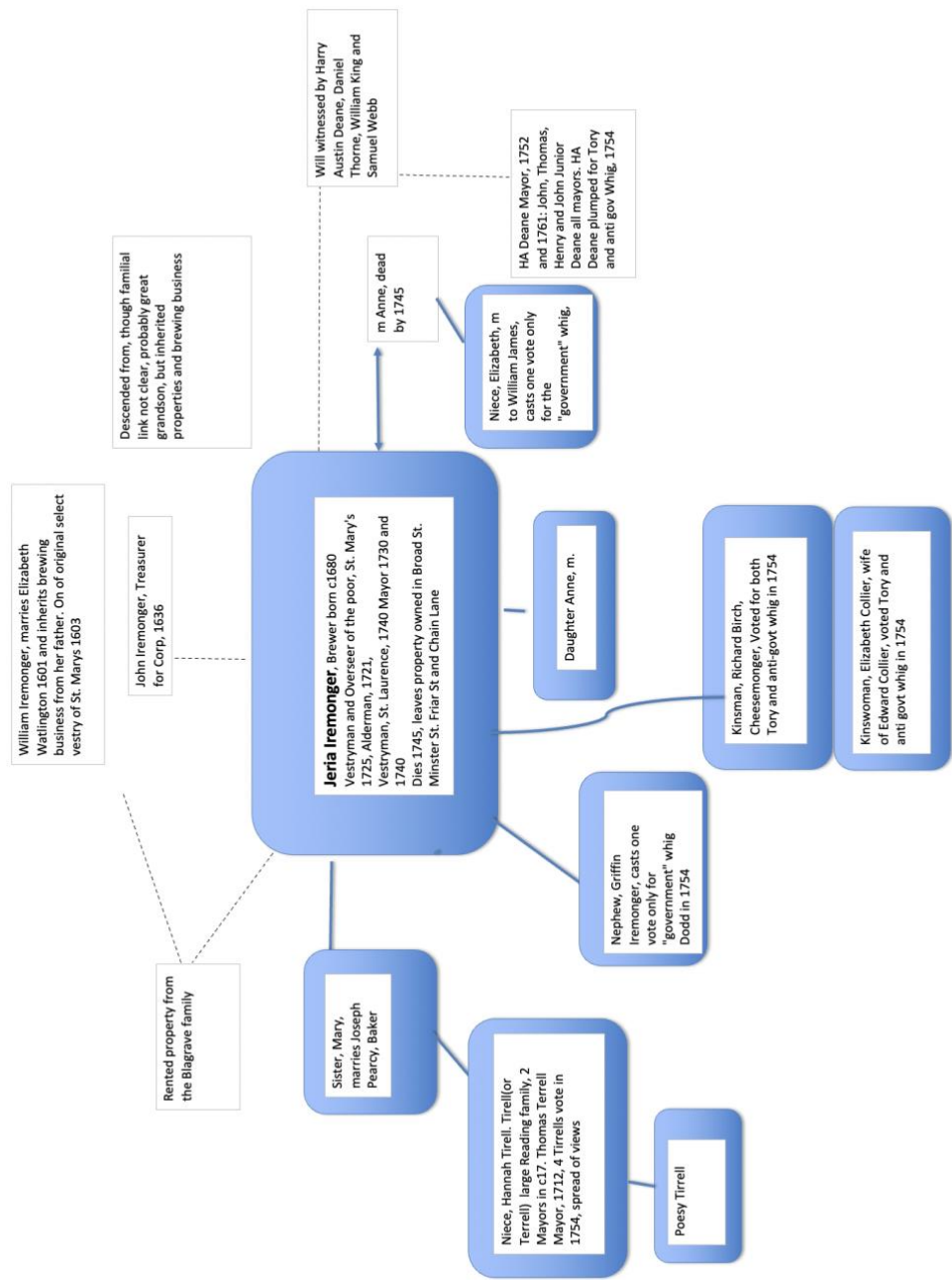


Figure 5- 5: Iremonger social network from will.

Corporation Act of 1835.¹²⁸ Even in the years 1500-1600, there were 46 different names, and that is mildly warped by one individual being mayor seven times.¹²⁹

Another way of representing this is by looking at a comparison of multiple terms served by mayors in the 16th century, characterised by an 'open oligarchy', as Chick describes it, the 18th century, which is more akin to a closed oligarchy and the hundred years after the Municipal Corporation Act, when much of the power had been stripped from the mayor, and elections to the Corporation were opened up. (Figure 5-7)¹³⁰

In the 16th century, while some individuals served for large amounts of time, still 45% (21) served only one term. There were powerful individuals, rather than families. In only fourteen years out of the whole century can we reliably say that the mayor was related to another mayor in that era. In the eighteenth century, by contrast, single term mayors represent only 32% of the whole, more common is schions of families serving two or three terms, thirty-four years of the century saw mayors reliably related to other mayors. Post 1835 single terms mayors had become much more the norm, in much the way they are today, and in only eight of the hundred years covering the time up to 1934 were mayors reliably related to other mayors (Figure 5-7).

¹²⁸ While this seems a crude analysis, since surnames could be shared by unrelated people, and related people need not share the same surname, research into the Reading Mayoral names on the 18th century list shows that, as far as can be ascertained with reasonable certainty, shared surnames *were* related. It is difficult to establish whether there are family ties between dissimilar surnames between 1835-1934, but the incidence of this phenomena would surely be no more than between 1700-1800, thus not statistically important. There are occasional names of important local businesses such as Palmer, Sutton and Heelas, and local gentry such as Monck, but they do not straddle the decades in the same way as in the eighteenth century. This does not mean, of course, that they were not important in local civic life, simply that the role of mayor, after the reforms of 1832 and 1835, was a less crucial one.

¹²⁹ Richard Turner was Mayor seven times from 1523 to 1543, over the difficult years of the Henrician reformation. Sufficient that he was given the rare privilege of being exempt from future duty, as his numerous terms in office had been to his "great detriment and expense" (*grave dampnum et expensam*). It is possible that few others wanted the position at this difficult time. Chick also conjectures that he had strong Catholic sympathies since he left money to the Jesus mass and the Our Lady mass at St. Lawrences, which had been kept going over this time. This sits interestingly with his close working relationship with Thomas Cromwell. Guilding, Vol. 1 p177 and Chick, 'Clothiers and Cloisters,' p.209, J. Martin, 'Leadership', pp.120-123.

¹³⁰ The 17c is excluded from this analysis, as the Civil War and post-Restoration period saw rapid turnover, thus distorting the findings.

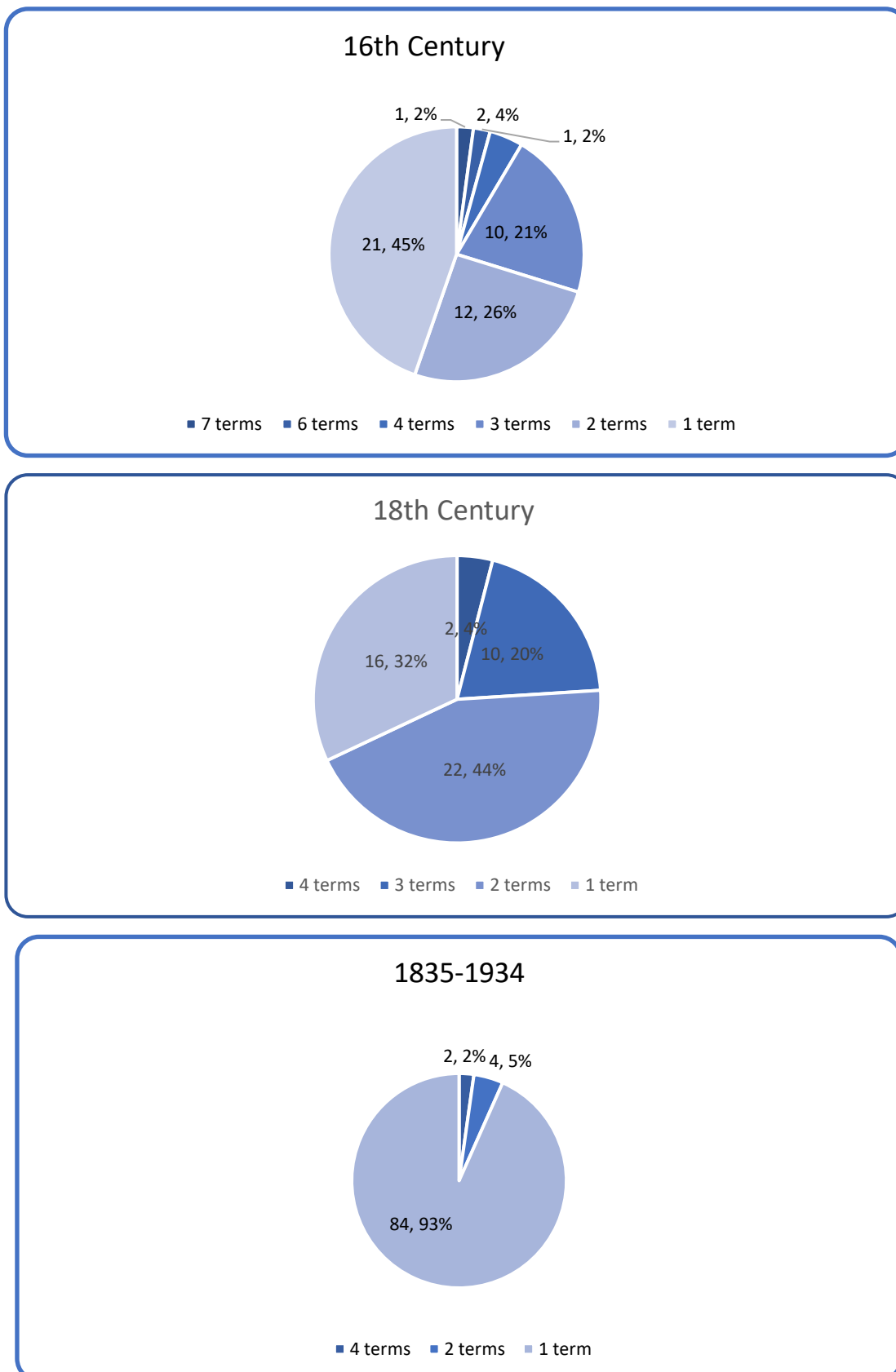
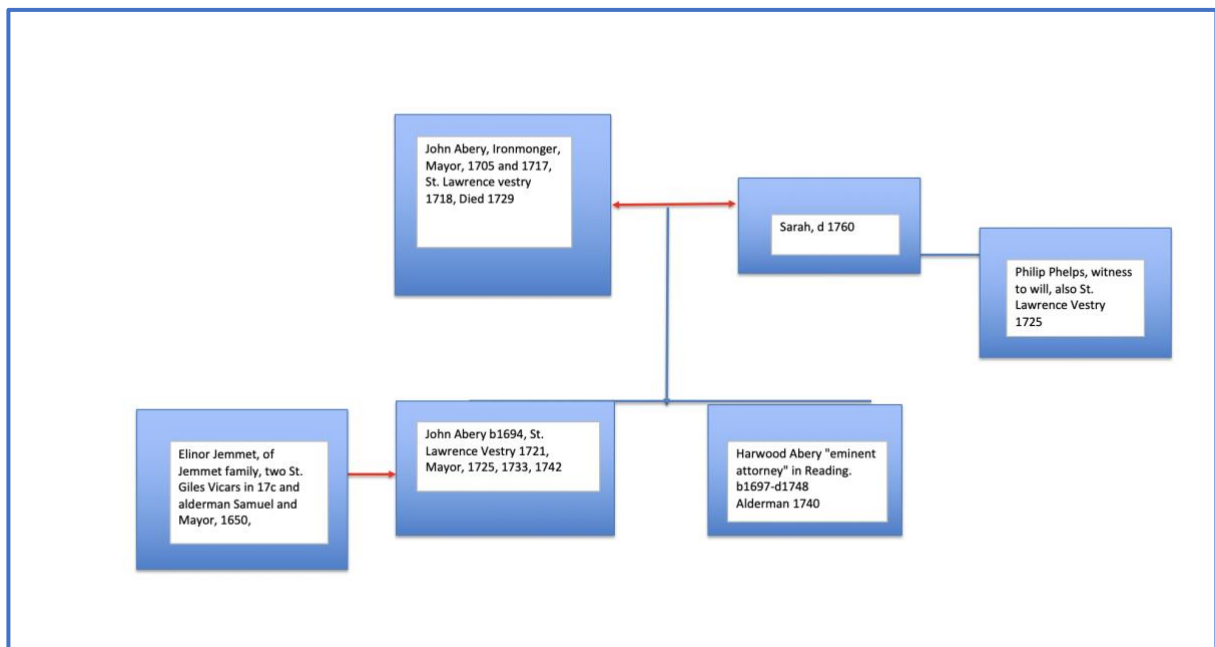


Figure 5- 6: Nos of terms served by mayors, Reading: 16-19th Century. Nos of Mayors and Percentage of total.

In Bedford and Guildford, the domination by a handful of borough families seems to have been less complete. Mayoral terms of office were not so monopolised, with only 2% of mayors serving more than 2 terms in Bedford, and 14% in Guildford over this century, compared to 64% of Reading mayors.¹³¹

Single families held multiple positions across the town over time. A simple, nuclear, family tree of the Abery family from the first half of the century illustrates this point.

Figure 5- 7: Abery family tree, 1700-1750



Those families, and the mayors had extensive links, deep into ordinary life. Of the forty mayors listed by Coates from 1700-1775, nineteen can be reliably traced back to vestry positions, and gaps in available data almost certainly accounts for more.¹³² In addition, as in the case of Jeria Iremonger, many continued in their vestry positions after having been appointed aldermen.

¹³¹ Godber, *Bedford*, p145-151 and Anon, *A Descriptive and Historical view of the County Town of Surrey* (Guildford, Russell, 1845) pp.107-108.

¹³² This is almost certainly an undercount of the links. Vestry minutes for St. Giles do not survive before 1752, so vestry positions are taken from churchwardens and overseers who sign settlement certificates.

12. *John Watts*

Another way of looking at the impact and power of social networks is to look at the instance of one mayor who had no such web of influence within the town. John Watts was, in the short term, enormously impactful on the politics and life of Reading, but was ultimately frozen out and his impact negated.

Watts was a freeman of the City of London, who moved to Reading in 1717. He was Mayor of Reading in 1722 and 1728, appearing as a vestryman in St. Lawrence in 1719, and an alderman in 1721.¹³³ He was also Chamberlain of Hall Revenues in many of the intervening years. He was one of the driving forces behind the move to revitalize the Oracle workhouse.¹³⁴ His notes on Corporation meetings log his initial impact on the Borough, and his consistent questioning as to where money was going and his reforming zeal. His constant inquiry into who was picking up lucrative contracts, seems to have alienated most of the other more clubbable aldermen. His 'outsider' status is shown by a minute from 1721 recording nominations by all of the aldermen for people to fill vacant positions. Aldermen Watlington, Noake, Richards and Parran successfully nominated close members of each other's families. Watts suggested a Thomas Ayliffe, who was unsuccessful, and not heard about again.¹³⁵

Watts was not a dissenter, as his active support of St. Lawrence's church and its improvement continues through his lifetime, he appears simply to have been a particularly fervent Anglican, and in tune with much of the work of the SPCK. A motion was passed by the Corporation while he was at his most influential which said that

no strolling stage players nor puppet showers who travel ye country to make shews or actings shall have ye use of the Town Hall.¹³⁶

In his memoirs he noted that when he was Mayor he worked rigorously for the suppression of vice and 'no unlicensed houses were suffered to sell ale and strong waters'.¹³⁷ He was not completely against alcohol, his mayoral dinners were supplied with wine and spirits.¹³⁸ He does, however, seem to have set himself up against the interests of the brewing aldermen, and their

¹³³ Coates, Appendix 14, BRO D/P97/8/1/1, 16th Jan 1719, BRO R/AC/1/1/21, 1st Oct 1721.

¹³⁴ See Ch.4 p.114.

¹³⁵ BRO R/AC/1/1/21, 1st October 1721.

¹³⁶ BRO R/AC/1/1/21 21st Dec 1726.

¹³⁷ Burton, K (Ed) *Memorandums of John Watts, Mayor of Reading* (Reading, 1950) p.61.

¹³⁸ Ibid p.24.

interests in the inns of the town. In 1721 he noted that Alderman Abraham Watlington was given the lease of the Elephant Inn, owned by the Corporation, and in 1723 'several sums of money' having been laid out on the Inn, he pushes for a raise in the rent.¹³⁹ In 1721 he also noted Assistant Parran, a brewer, paid £36 for the Blue Anchor in London St, which had been the gift of John Hall to the Corporation.¹⁴⁰ It may be significant that Parran refused to take his oath after the inauguration of Watts as Mayor.

Relations between Watts and the rest of the Corporation degenerated through to the 1730s as he continued to pursue unpaid amounts and unaccounted fellings of timber. The final straw seems to have come when he insisted on pursuing the widow of one of the aldermen, Thomas Terrell, for £600 which had been lent to Terrell when he was alive. Richard Richards, a previous mayor, and one who worked with Watts as a JP, acted as her advocate, saying that she could not find the money. 'Mr. Terrell's affair' dragged on from 1724 until at least 1729, when Richards reported that 'the poor woman was, he thought, out of her mind'.¹⁴¹

Watts stopped attending meetings about 1741, and in 1749 he took out a case in the Court of the Exchequer against the Corporation, probably with regard to the mismanagement of the Oracle funding, as this coincided with his pamphlet *A Black Scene opened*.¹⁴² The Corporation took a counter-claim against him a few weeks later.¹⁴³ John Watts died and was buried in St. Lawrence's church the following year.¹⁴⁴ The Corporation had notably reversed decisions from his tenure as his influence declined. In 1740, under the aegis of Jeria Iremonger, a long-standing principle initiated by Watts, that the Corporation would not pay for coals for soldiers in the guardhouse at the Oracle, was reversed.¹⁴⁵ Iremonger, as we have seen, was a brewer with marital links to the Watlington and Terrell families.¹⁴⁶ Familial and business links within the town were not absolutely necessary for gaining a foothold in parish and corporation affairs, as Watts shows, but being part of the fabric of the ruling group certainly made for longevity and legacy.

¹³⁹ BRO R/AC/1/21 10th April 1723.

¹⁴⁰ BRO R/AC/1/1/21, 9th June 1721.

¹⁴¹ BRO R/AC/1/1/21 25th August 1729.

¹⁴² J. Watts, *A Black Scene opened; being the true state of Mr. John Kendrick's Gifts to the Town of Reading*. (Reading, 1749).

¹⁴³ BRO R/AC/1/1/22, 10th April 1749.

¹⁴⁴ BRO D/P 97 1/4.

¹⁴⁵ BRO R/AC/1/22 2nd October 1740.

¹⁴⁶ NA PROB/11/745/301 Jeria Iremonger Will, Fig 5-4 Ch.5 p.151.

13. *Mechanisms: Informal meetings*

A combination of the motivation for coordination and the tight social networks lead to what was probably the main engine for poor law management in Reading through most of the eighteenth century, and that is informal social meetings, many of which were held in the inns of the town.

The committee of ‘the best gentleman of St. Lawrences and St. Mary’s’ which met every Friday while the Oracle experiment was running in the late 1720s has already been noted.¹⁴⁷ This looks to have been a formal replication of existing practice in Reading.

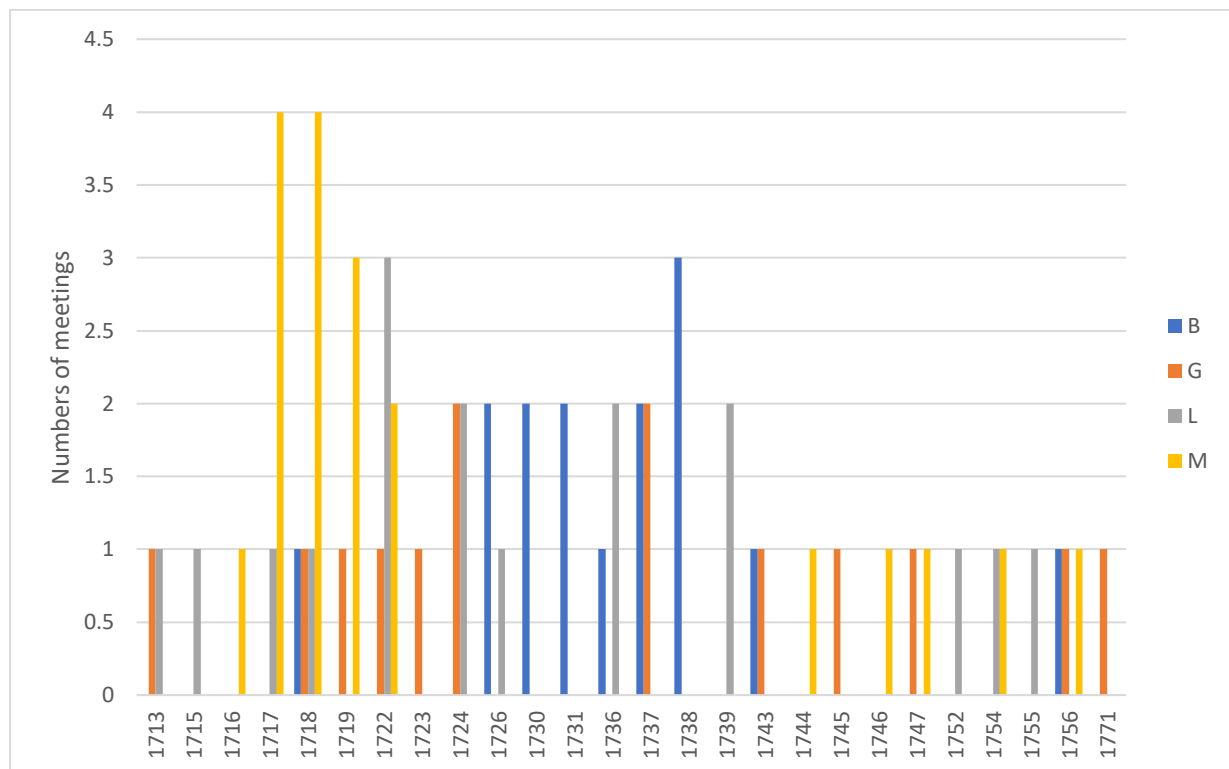


Figure 5- 8 Meetings of St. Mary's Overseers with Mayor, (M) and other parishes (G, L) or both (B) for which expenses are logged. 1713-1771.

The main evidence for these come from the set of St. Mary's paybooks. These are lists of payments made by the overseers, mostly for regulars and casualties, but other expenses arisen from their role are also recorded. There is a fortunately high survival of 187 payment and casualty books for St. Mary's, with an almost complete coverage from 1711-1771.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ See Ch. 4 p.110.

¹⁴⁸ Missing years are 1727-30, 1736, 1755 and 1763. In addition, months are not named, nor consecutive, thus it is impossible to date beyond the year in which payments were made, references are to the (normally) three books that cover a year thus, 1761 is D/P98/12/151-155. "Years" are Old Style, ie March 25th to March 24th up to 1752, since it is impossible to identify which months are Jan/Feb/Mar. Some years have 'paybooks' and 'casualty books' where the

A total of 65 expense claims are recorded for meetings between Reading parishes, or with the Mayor, along the lines of

Spent at the New Tavern with St. Lawrence Overseers about settling certificates¹⁴⁹

or

Spent with Mr. Mayor about certificates.¹⁵⁰

Figure 5-8 breaks them down by type. It is almost certain that these do not reflect the total numbers of such meetings. Firstly, they would have only been recorded in the paybook when expenses were incurred by the overseers; it is quite possible that some of these meetings were held in private houses, and no costs incurred by the attendees. In addition, it is possible that other entries, not included in this count, such as 'spent about parish business' could also cover these meetings.¹⁵¹ There is a certain reliance on the diligence of the overseers in accurately recording the nature of the meeting. Lastly it is quite possible the meetings simply recorded as 'overseers' meetings, could also be with neighbouring parishes. Those included in this analysis are only the ones which specify who they are meeting with.

Nonetheless it can be seen that overseers met regularly to discuss reciprocal arrangements. While the entry in the paybook can be quite perfunctory, it is possible to flesh out something of the business of these meetings by reading across to the other surviving parish records. Matching up the records in this way gives an insight into the extent of the reciprocal relationship between the overseers. One expense claim from 1771 is recorded as

Expenses changing a certificate Thos Ayres for Giles.¹⁵²

A settlement certificate for a Thos Ayres, from St. Mary's, survives from 1771 in the St. Giles collection.¹⁵³ Handwritten on the outside of the certificate is a note saying that it was done 'in

casualty books cover payments for casual relief, these years will have a larger range, for example 1764 is D/P98/12/140-162.

¹⁴⁹ BRO D/P98/12/32-35, 1722.

¹⁵⁰ BRO D/P 98/ 12/24, 1719.

¹⁵¹ Some of these meetings are quite specifically with the 'late overseers', implying close handover arrangements. For example in 1740, BRO D/P 98/12/73-74.

¹⁵² BRO D/P 98/12/182 and D/P96/13/3/275.

¹⁵³ BRO D/P 96/13/3/8.

exchange for 'Jno Gyles, weaver'. Without this certificate, it would have been easy enough to assume that 'for Giles' simply meant for the parish of St. Giles. With the certificate it is clear that the parishes have negotiated a straight 'tit for tat' swap. This also gives further clarity to the word 'changing' in the paybooks. When expenses are claimed 'about changing certificates' with another parish; this is not changing or modifying certificates in anyway but *exchanging* them; one for another.

Another entry gives a strong clue as to how the process could be carried out. In 1725 there is a claim of 9d for

six certificates fild up for St. Giles inhabitants spent with St. Giles overseers in changing certificates.¹⁵⁴

Six certificates from St. Giles all signed on the same day, by the same three overseers from St. Giles, do survive for that year.¹⁵⁵ The wording of this entry strongly suggests that St. Mary's on this occasion prepared the certificates, and presented them to St. Giles for signing. Sadly no certificates from St. Mary's to St. Giles survive for the same date. However other examples of matching dates in the two separate collections do survive. On the 14th of September 1710 two certificates from St. Giles survive in the St. Mary's collection.¹⁵⁶ Similarly two certificates from St. Mary's for the same date sit in the St. Giles's collection.¹⁵⁷ It may be no coincidence that all four are married men with wives and children, suggesting a 'like for like' agreement.¹⁵⁸ An analysis of the two collections from St. Mary's and St. Giles shows 14 different dates when multiple settlement certificates from at least two, if not three of the parishes, were signed off together. For these, three match with claims in the paybooks for joint meetings with the parishes about 'changing certificates'. For example, in 1737 4/9d is

spent with St. Giles overseers about changing certificates.¹⁵⁹

This can be matched with four certificates from St. Giles dated the 17th March 1737, and three certificates in the St. Giles collection from St. Mary for the same date. ¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ BRO D/P/98/12/39-41.

¹⁵⁵ BRO D/P98/13/3/125, 246, 247, 258, 286, 350.

¹⁵⁶ BRO D/P 98/13/1, 254, 345.

¹⁵⁷ BRO D/P 96/13/3, 16, 96.

¹⁵⁸ It is also notable that all four use the 'wife and family' formula. See Ch. 4, p.107.

¹⁵⁹ BRO D/P 98/12/ 64-66.

¹⁶⁰ BRO D/P 98/13/1/4, 49, 50, 425 and D/P 96/13/3/ 118, 125, 313.

In some years however meetings are recorded on different dates with each of the other parishes separately; while the certificates are all dated on the same day. This would suggest that the meetings with other overseers are to negotiate a deal and for their signatures, and then a separate meeting occurs with the JPs, who then sign them all together, and this is when they are dated.

The implication of this is that 'horse-trading' between the parishes is what occurs in the discussions in the pubs, and the JPs signature may be little more than a rubber-stamp after the fact. This is underlined by one entry in the pay book for 1739 which states

spent with St. Lawrences Churchwardens and overseers at two meetings about changing certificates.¹⁶¹

With a claim for the large sum of 12 shillings. This suggests a rather lengthy and involved negotiation; and there are indeed 18 certificates signed off from St. Lawrence from the 28th June 1739.¹⁶² It is also clear from this and other claims that the overseers seem not to have stinted on their spending. At that time a bottle of wine was about 2/- and a serving of 'beer' (no amount specified) about 2d.¹⁶³ Food would almost certainly have also been served. This was at a time when the saddlers of London considered that a family of four needed only 2/- to eat for a day.¹⁶⁴

Apart from the arrangements for certificates, the parishes would also meet to discuss issues of mutual interest, in particular complex individual cases. For example in 1745 there was a claim for 11/6d against the entry

spent with St. Giles overseers at several times on Account of Britan's wife and child and an (article?) drawn by an attorney and rec'd two certificates.¹⁶⁵

In the same year there is a payment of 10/6d

Expenses sent to Britain's wife to St. Giles.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ BRO D/P 98/12/70-72.

¹⁶² BRO D/P 98/13/1/51, 52, 103, 128, 129, 143, 233, 259, 291, 330, 332, 333, 387, 388. 389, 390, 420, 465.

¹⁶³ Payments in the Churchwarden 1740 and 1780 Accounts. BRO D/P 98/175/5/1.

¹⁶⁴ D.M. George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, 1st Edn 1925, (London, 1965) p.169.

¹⁶⁵ BRO D/P98/12/87-89.

¹⁶⁶ BRO D/P98/12/87-89. There are a number of spellings of 'Brittan', but, contextually clearly the same person.

Given the large amount this is probably a removal, rather than an out of parish payment, although no removal certificate survives. 'Britan's wife' in this instance is probably the woman who appears as 'Mary Britton, wife of Thos Britton' on a settlement certificate from St. Giles dated 30th Dec 1745.¹⁶⁷ In 1747 there is also a claim for £1/1/2d

paid for a bond and two surtivicutts and nursing two children of Thos Brittens and expenses metting ye Ofisers Belonging to St. Giles.¹⁶⁸

There is a settlement certificate from St. Giles for Thomas Britton 'the Elder' and his two sons Thomas aged 4 and John aged 4 months, from the 24th March 1747.¹⁶⁹ Assuming this to be Mary's husband and children presumably she was, unusually, given settlement ahead of her husband for some reason, but has disappeared, or died, by 1747. An examination also exists for a Thomas Britton from July 1745, stating that he had married a Mary Poole, from Newport on the Isle of Wight 6 years ago.¹⁷⁰ There is no other documentation than this, but it is sufficient to indicate that the case was involved and complex and required close working with St. Giles.

The parish also had joint meetings with the Mayor and second JP, some for examinations, such as

spent at the Plow with Mr Mayor and Mr Wise about examining strangers

in 1719.¹⁷¹ Other meetings with Mayor are to do with specific cases such as, from 1744,

Spent with Mr Mayor about taking up Wattkins.¹⁷²

It is clear from a bastardy examination of the same year that 'Wattkins' is probably Thomas Watkins, a bargeman from Newbury, who is the father of a boy born to a Mary Keswell of St. Mary's parish.¹⁷³ There are two further payments in 1745 to Mary

¹⁶⁷ BRO D/P98/13/1/62.

¹⁶⁸ BRO D/P98/12/93-95.

¹⁶⁹ BRO D/P98/13/1/64.

¹⁷⁰ BRO D/P98/13/3/338/13. This case is very unusual, since a wife could normally only have settlement where her husband was settled, and Mary appears to have been settled ahead of her husband. However it is perfectly possible that she is not the same Mary referred to in the examination, or her husband was settled, and this certificate is lost while a later certificate survives. The case illustrates the complexity that overseers of several parishes had to grapple with.

¹⁷¹ BRO D/P 98/12/18-20.

¹⁷² BRO D/P 98/12/84-86.

¹⁷³ BRO D/P98/13/3/337/12a.

for her bastard by Thos Watkins.¹⁷⁴

So they may not have been successful in tracking him down.

It is also clear from some of the entries that the parishes had an agreement among themselves for sharing the payment for the large number of travellers and non-settled casualties that claimed relief in the town. This arrangement seems to have dated from at least 1713 when there is a payment of 13/6d and the entry

Paid St. Laurence overseers, a seaman and his wife being sick at (Sopps?), our proportion coming to.¹⁷⁵

In 1718 the claim appears

Spent with St. Giles and St. Lawrences overseers about settling ye casualties for the three parishes¹⁷⁶

Or in 1731 'Expenses with the overseers of the other parishes to balance casualties'¹⁷⁷ Again in 1737 'spent at settling the casualties'.¹⁷⁸

Legislation from 1691 forbade parishes from relieving travellers without the order of the mayor.¹⁷⁹ However there is little sign in the earlier paybooks of payments being 'by order of the mayor'. It reads more like parishes agreeing among themselves to relieve strangers and travellers as they passed through as and when they were found, settling and 'balancing' the costs on a regular basis afterwards. In 1713 St. Mary's paid St. Lawrences 13/6 for a sick seaman and his wife as that is what 'our proportion come to'.¹⁸⁰ In 1718 there is a meeting with the two other parishes 'settling ye casualties for the three parishes'. This arrangement seems to have continued until at least 1747 when 'pay one third of a charge for a woman and a child' is minuted, and probably long after this.¹⁸¹ Overseers seem to have operated as though the order from the JP was assumed, and relieved, to settle with the other parishes at a later date. To have

¹⁷⁴ BRO D/P 98/12/87-89.

¹⁷⁵ BRO D/P 98/12/7-9.

¹⁷⁶ BRO D/P 98/12/21-23.

¹⁷⁷ BRO D/P 98 12/48-51.

¹⁷⁸ BRO D/P 98 12/64-66.

¹⁷⁹ (3 William and Mary c11 s29).

¹⁸⁰ BRO D/P 98/12/7-9.

¹⁸¹ BRO D/P98/12/93-95.

done otherwise in this town of so much travel to wait for a JPs order for each one , or simply allow each parish to relieve whoever was found in their patch, and bear all costs, would have led to either a potentially dangerous backlog of unrelieved travellers or a chaotic outcome of each parish ignoring a traveller or encouraging him or her into another parish. Later entries indicate that as the century wore on more of these decisions may have gone to the Mayor as JP.¹⁸² Eccles suggests that rural parishes would increasingly do this to allow the county to pick up the bill, rather than the parish.¹⁸³ In a corporation town like Reading, the town, identified as the three parishes or as the corporation, picked up the bill either way, there was no larger, wealthier body, such as a county, to turn to. Parishes in towns such as Reading likely had to develop more responsible strategies.

Where medical intervention was required, this was also shared as is seen in 1736 when £1/2/8d is

‘Rec’d of St. Giles and St. Lawrence’s overseers towards Doc Savages casualties bill’

Dr. Savage being St. Mary’s parish doctor. Other entries concerning the mayor’s instructions to relieve travellers imply that the mayor also facilitated this arrangement.¹⁸⁴ 1737 also sees a meeting between the three parishes ‘concerning taking up vagrants’.¹⁸⁵ It is soon after this meeting that St. Mary’s parish starts to pay for the services of Robert Bussell in taking up vagrants.¹⁸⁶

There is only one entry in the paybooks for a meeting with a set of non-Reading overseers. In 1754 there is

Expenses at ye George with the Streatley Overseers.¹⁸⁷

There is no other documentation, in settlement, removal, quarter sessions or payments to suggest what this meeting may be about. It could have been a general discussion as they

¹⁸² See Ch. 6 pp204-208 for further discussion of the mayor’s role.

¹⁸³ A. Eccles; *Vagrancy in Law and Practice under the Old Poor Law*, 1st Ed 2012, (London, 2017) p.118.

¹⁸⁴ See Ch.6, p.195.

¹⁸⁵ BRO D/P 98/12/64-66, see Ch6 p184 for a discussion of the legal situation.

¹⁸⁶ See Ch. 6 p.226 ‘Working for the parish, Robert Bussell’s coat’.

¹⁸⁷ BRO D/P 98/12/114-118.

happened to be in town with other business. It is significant nonetheless that of the 66 recorded instances of meetings to discuss business with other parishes, only one is outside of Reading.

There is also some evidence that the parishes met at churchwarden level to discuss wider, more strategic issues concerning poor relief. Although the St Mary Churchwarden Accounts do not survive in the same systematic and complete way that the Paybooks do, what is there indicates that the Overseer activity may have been mirrored at Churchwarden level.

In the 1743 accounts we see

‘spent at the upper shipp with ye other two pishes about Wests Gifts’.¹⁸⁸

West’s Gifts almost certainly refers to the charitable bequests left by John West and his widow Frances between 1718 and 1723 for a variety of named causes, such as ‘poor blind persons’ and ‘poor honest and ancient and men’ as well as sending boys to the Bluecoat School and Christ’s Hospital¹⁸⁹. A complicated set of bequests which it would be important for the parishes to coordinate.

Also included is

Spent at Mr Knapps with ye pish officers with making of the Rate.¹⁹⁰

This is ambiguous. It could be a sign that the poor rates across the town were discussed together, but the minute does not specify ‘other parish’ in the way other ones do, so it could equally just be a meeting of the St. Mary officers. This is the only year for which there is a clearly minuted meeting like this, however.

¹⁸⁸ BRO D/P98/5/1, 1743.

¹⁸⁹ Abstract of the Returns of Charitable Donations for the benefit of Poor Persons made by the Ministers and Churchwardens of the several parishes and townships in England and Wales (HC, 1816) 115.

¹⁹⁰ Mr Knapp would be the landlord of an inn, this usage occurs from time to time, as in ‘Wrights’ which can be identified as the Gun, probably in Gun Street (BRO D/P 98/13/ 285). A Thomas Knapp appears as a vestryman in 1725, rated £1/12/6d in 1741 and voting in both the 1754 Borough elections and 1768 county elections, He is St. Mary’s Churchwarden in 1758. All suggesting a substantial business man. BRO D/P 98/8/2, BRO D/P98/11/14, and BRO T/B56, BRO D/P98/5/1. A John Knapp, possibly a brother or son also appears at a 1741 vestry meeting.

There is one further conclusion to be drawn from this set of data. Meetings with the Mayor apparently disappear between 1720 and 1744. Could this mean that the parishes were meeting with the Mayor less frequently in this period? Obviously there was a statutory requirement to meet the JPs once a year to sign off accounts, and this must have continued; and clearly JPs were required to sign settlement and removal certificates. It must simply have been the case that for this period these meetings were not happening in inns and taverns, requiring expense payments. It may be significant that the years when these meetings were not happening in inns coincide with the years when John Watts, campaigner against the vested brewing interests of the town, was in his ascendancy. That does not mean that they did not occur.

How formal were these meetings? If the definition of a formal meeting is one which is held on a regular basis, with a regular agenda, attended by a set group of people and with formal minutes and decision-making, in the way that vestry meetings and corporation meetings were, then all the evidence would indicate that these were not. No minutes survive, but that could be just natural attrition. However the nature of the notes in the paybooks suggest strongly that many were in response to a specific case such as:

Spent at the Mitre Tavern with St. Laurences overserrrs about Susan Strouds settlement that lived at Goody Pharows,¹⁹¹

Or

Spent at the Golden Bear with St. Lawrence about settling Wid. Jenkins.¹⁹²

While some are more general and non-specific such as 'about changing certificates' or 'examining strangers' there is no evidence from the dates on surviving certificates or examinations that these were issued or held at regular intervals. On the contrary, as discussed these seem to occur in batches often in response to some financial crisis in the parish.¹⁹³ While there may have been an expectation that these meetings should be held regularly, they do not seem to have been arranged for proscribed and set times and occur when circumstances demanded. In that sense they were informal meetings.

14. *Mechanisms: Attendance at the vestry meetings*

¹⁹¹ BRO D/P/98/12/39-41, See Appendix 2 for the full list of these entries.

¹⁹² BRO D/P/98/12/59-63.

¹⁹³ Ch. 4. p.108, Table 4-11.

While meetings between the overseers, and occasionally the mayor, in the inns of the town may have been the machinery through which the day-to-day and collegiate business of the Reading parishes occurred, it is clear that a further mechanism was used for more controversial or confrontational business. When vestry votes were required to decide an important issue the aldermen would turn up in strength.

This practice had a long history. The vestries of Reading and the Corporation personnel developed a very close working relationship after the Dissolution of the Abbey.¹⁹⁴ Martin considers that all three had 'embryonic select vestries' in the mid sixteenth century, and that mayors, and ex-mayors, dominated parochial affairs, particularly in St. Lawrence, which was effectively run by a cabal of ex-mayors.¹⁹⁵ The disruptions of the seventeenth century, which saw a collection of colourful vicars pitted against or attempting to control, the affairs of the Corporation appears to have done little to diminish this.¹⁹⁶ The relationship was perhaps less formal and predominant by the eighteenth century, but is clearly still there.

In St. Lawrence's the minutes up to 1731 show regular attendance by the mayor and aldermen of the Corporation. Despite the 'embryonic select vestry' of the sixteenth century, this Vestry was an open one, so it could be that these had the right to attend as parishioners of St. Lawrence, or there may have been positions reserved *ex officio* for aldermen. What does seem to be the case is that they attend in strength when there are difficult or contentious points of business, or at the rate settings and elections.

In 1721 an unpopular fine was levied on the ratepayers of the Borough by the County JPs. The constables of the town refused to collect it. At a St. Lawrence Vestry meeting, attended by aldermen Robert Blake, Moses Gill, John Abery, John Spicer and John Watts a decision is made that the parish will help to pay towards the legal costs of the constables such sums 'as the other two Parishes shall respectively advance' and

if any suit shall be commenced or brought against the present overseers for or by reason of paying such moneys or by reason of their distraining goods...all such charges....shall be paid and borne by the common charge of the said parish.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ J, Martin, 'Leadership', pp.113-129.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid p.126.

¹⁹⁶ M, Brod, 'Dissent and Dissenters in Early Modern Berkshire' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Harris Manchester, Oxford, 2002) Ch. 6, Reading, pp.139-142.

¹⁹⁷ D/P 97/8/1/1 26th November 1721.

The decision is essentially a controversial one, and the aldermen had turned up to indicate that this is what they wished to see happen. One key meeting for St. Lawrence occurs in January 23rd 1725, when the Vestry makes a decision that

The poor of this parish be put into some House and be there provided for with Clothes and necessary provisions and with materials for employing them to work¹⁹⁸

This is the first mention of the drive which was to lead to a collective decision from the parishes concerning a central workhouse. The meeting with Matthew Marryott was not to be until March, and no mention of this had appeared in the Corporation minutes by this time. The meeting is attended by 31 people, larger than usual and aldermen present are John Watts and Robert Blake, also present were future mayors Jeria Iremonger and John Deane. A key personality here was John Watts. In his *Memorandum Book* he describes the reasoning behind the move

The poor of the three parishes of Reading growing very numerous and chargeable it was resolved to put them into a workhouse and to maintain them there according to the example of many other great Towns.¹⁹⁹

Actual relief payments for the years before do not reflect a sudden rise in pauper numbers or costs; indicating the actual motivation was more along the 'moral reform' lines. This is born out in the text in the *Account* about the re-establishment,

That the poorer sort of people have been less industrious and careful providing Means of subsisting themselves and Families, under an expectation of being maintained by the Relief of the Inhabitants of the Parishes to which they belong. That the Children of such People are brought up in Idleness.....and the poor themselves very insolent to those who maintain them²⁰⁰

This, as we have seen, was written by Carrick for the SPCK.²⁰¹ Carrick was a stranger to the town so must have received this narrative from the aldermen driving the initiative. This early decision by St. Lawrence's Vestry shows an interesting use of the vestry mechanism, rather than the Corporation, to get the issue of a workhouse on the agenda. John Watts was an alderman, as was Robert Blake, but they clearly use the St. Lawrence Vestry, not the Corporation, to get the ball rolling. Were they up against too much opposition at the Corporation? Both Luke Wise and John Aberly are named by Watts as complicit in the corruption attendant on the Oracle in his

¹⁹⁸ BRO D/P 98/8/2.

¹⁹⁹ Burton (Ed), *Memorandum Book*, p.42.

²⁰⁰ Anon, *An Account of Several Workhouses for employing and maintaining the poor*. 2nd Edition. (London, 1732) p.87.

²⁰¹ Ch.4, p.114.

later pamphlet *A Black Scene* and were still senior aldermen, indeed Abery was Mayor when this meeting was held.²⁰² By getting the support of the key St. Lawrence Vestry behind them the initiative would have made a much more powerful case at the Corporation.

St. Mary's Vestry was a select vestry, and two full lists exists of the members. The first from 1725 seems to extend to about 1740, with crosses against names where they cease to be members and new names added at the end.²⁰³ A second from 1760, operating in the same way, extends to 1772 when the select vestry was abolished.²⁰⁴ Of these Richard Richards was Mayor in 1721, 1727 and 1738, John Thorpe in 1741, William Armstrong in 1746 and Adam Smith in 1767.²⁰⁵ Like St. Lawrence there is regular attendance by these members, in particular at rate setting and other contentious meetings.

In 1758 a meeting established a committee to look into the building of a parish workhouse in St. Mary's.²⁰⁶ It is attended by aldermen William Armstrong, Adam Smith and a Mr Deane, probably John. The three aldermen's names are put at the top of the attendance list, implying that their status as aldermen is recognised at the meeting.

Sadly the St. Giles vestry minutes, where they occur, do not list attendance, apart from the Vicar, for much of its existence although it appears to be an open vestry. It may well be that it's control by the Corporation, given the fewer number of mayors and aldermen that come from this parish, its generally lower social status, and heavy preponderance of dissenters within the parish, was not so complete.²⁰⁷ This may partly explain St. Giles' apparent reluctance to fully involve itself in the 1725 Oracle experiment.

A similar process of attendance at the vestry meetings can be observed in Bedford. There the domination of the town by one parish meant that the aldermen need only to attend one parish, and this looks to have been the case. The rate book for October 1767 for St. Pauls shows all 13 of the burgesses attended a vestry meeting.²⁰⁸ Of the 38 names that appear in the rate book as serving on the Vestry between 1767 and 1772, seven were aldermen, of which five were to

²⁰² 'Lewis..says that Mr. Abery and Mr. Wise, about the year 1720, made a large fall of timber...and there was no order for the cutting' Watt, *A Black Scene* p.25.

²⁰³ BRO D/P98 8/2.

²⁰⁴ BRO D/P 98 8/3.

²⁰⁵ Coates, *History and Antiquities*, Appendix 14.

²⁰⁶ D/P 98/8/2, 23rd April 1758

²⁰⁷ In the 1754 Pollbook, of the 16 identifiable aldermen, 13 live in St. Lawrences, 2 in St. Mary's and 1 in St. Giles.

²⁰⁸ BEDSRO P1/12/1-4.

become mayors. Meanwhile, of the scattering of minute books surviving for the other parishes show no such attendance. Both Guildford (2634 in 1801) and Bedford (3908 in 1801) were a lot smaller than Reading, and management of their affairs by a small economically dominant group was probably more straightforward. In Bedford the huge Harpur bequest from 1764 required representatives from both the Corporation and the parishes on its board, in 1831 alone this paid out £18, 154 to the town's poor.²⁰⁹ The Corporation dominated this committee, which the Mayor chaired, and evidence to the 1835 Municipal Corporations Commission suggests they were quite partial in its administration.²¹⁰ Evidence to Poor Law Commission considered it completely dominated poor relief in the town.²¹¹ In Guildford the single workhouse was in existence from at least 1740, requiring regular joint meetings of the parish and corporation.

Conclusion

Towns like Reading had huge motivation to manage their poor relief in a more centralised way than simple quasi-autonomous parishes would have provided. Not only were there efficiencies in saving from expensive litigation, and shifting people around the Borough, the volatile politics, at least for the first half of the century meant corporations had a major interest in managing poor relief when possession of a settlement, being in receipt of alms, or paying a poor rate enfranchised or disenfranchised a resident accordingly. Evidence from the comparator boroughs, and other parliamentary appeals, suggests that such work on the part of corporations was a hallmark of this era.

At the beginning of the century Reading had a strong Corporation, dominated by a handful of predominantly brewing families at this time. While the Corporation control of poor relief was not the 'command and control' evident from the 17th century Corporation minutes, there was clearly control through the extensive social, familial and business networks of the dominant families of the Borough. On a day-to-day basis the overseers appear to have done most of their inter-parish negotiations in one of the many inns of Reading, swapping certificates and averaging out the casual and vagrant costs. When decisions became controversial aldermen turned up in numbers to the vestry meetings. Reading does not, through the eighteenth century, seem to have adopted the system of some London parishes where the JPs actually sat in the

²⁰⁹ MCR, 1835, p.2117.

²¹⁰ Ibid p.2118.

²¹¹ PLCR, 1835, p.28.

vestries and administered them as petty sessions.²¹² Nonetheless the Corporation, through the aldermen, and the magistracy through the mayor and ex-mayor, maintained close contact, and seemingly close control, at least until the 1770s.

Coordination by the Borough did not always work though, as the Oracle workhouse experiment of 1723 shows. Despite concerted decisions by two of the parish vestries, and regular meetings, the experiment fell apart before the decade was out. This may partly be due to the national eclipse of the reputation of Matthew Marryot; but also the relative ‘unclubbability’ of its chief local promoter, John Watt. Though he seems canny enough to have used St. Lawrence’s vestry when the Corporation looked unpromising, he seems not to have had the connections and social networks in Reading that his adversaries had. When his star waned, so did his projects. St. Giles seems never to have really been on board anyway; and it may well be that a town which had traditionally looked after its poor generously was simply not ready culturally for the sudden switch to workhouse provision.

The networking, influence and vestry attendance required in the relatively large parishes of Reading seem to have been less necessary in places such as Bedford and Guildford. Much smaller, and with less dominant corporations, in Bedford one parish simply managed the town, and in the other the small numbers of key personnel involved, and the fact of only one workhouse from at least the 1740s must have made the machinery of management more straightforward.

In Chapter 4 a distinction was drawn between ‘coordination’, the parishes agreeing among themselves to cooperate, and ‘coercion’, a higher authority enforcing that cooperation. Evidence from Reading for the period 1690-1780 suggests initial coercion on the part of the Corporation, with a higher level of JP intervention and less cooperation between the parishes signified by removals and appeals, settling into coordination among the parishes, with only the lightest touch from the JPs and Corporation through most of the eighteenth-century. It seems to have been the social networks, reinforced by mutual interests, which were the silent, but really potent forces of management and coordination in the town. Where the formal structures were tried, as in Watts’ experiment, going against the grain of traditional support, and without the reinforcement of social capital, then coordination falters.

²¹² T. Hitchcock and R. Shoemaker, *London Lives, Poverty, Crime, and the Making of a Modern City, 1690-1800* (Sheffield, 2015) <https://www.londonlives.org/book/chapter4.html>.

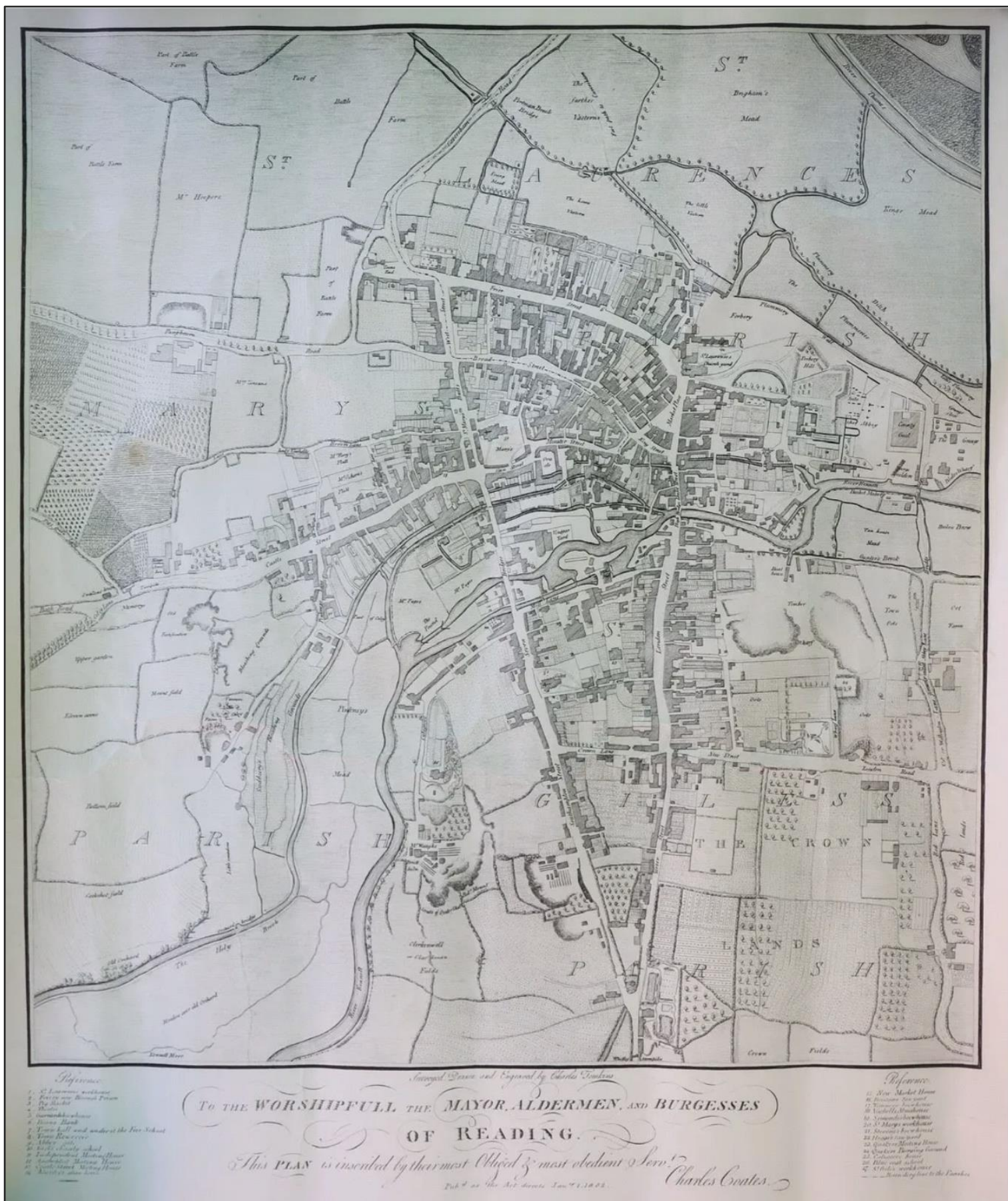


Figure 5- 9: Coates' Map of Reading, 1802, from C. Coates, History and Antiquities of Reading (London, Nicols and Sons, 1802)

Chapter 6

The impact of the system of cooperation

Introduction

As the previous chapters have shown, a system of regular informal meetings, with the mayor and other vestries, allowed the parishes of Reading to co-ordinate their approach to poor relief across the town. While more formal attempts at union had failed, this system was facilitated by tight social networks and supplemented by a strong Corporation presence on the vestry. Consequently, intra-borough removals were suppressed, as were appeals. Some casualty costs were shared, and a language of mutual trust used on settlement certificates. This situation seems to have developed around the 1710s and remained operative until at least the 1770s.¹

What is significant about this system is the impact which it had, both on the parish and the pauper. This chapter will focus on what can be deduced about those impacts from remaining evidence. Potentially the most straightforward question to answer is did cooperation such as this save the parishes money? This relies upon garnering reliable data about what the town was spending and comparing this against wider averages and control areas which had no such system of cooperation.

A much more complex question is 'how did this impact the pauper?' As mentioned, an extensive body of work has been produced in recent years, using first-person narratives, to understand the pauper's experience of poverty. Qualitative, first person descriptions of the experience of poverty for the hundreds of dependants on parish relief and charitable donations in Reading at any one time simply are not there for the eighteenth century.² Paupers have not left diaries, nor

¹ For more detail on the decay of the system see Ch. 7.

² There are 29 petitions surviving from the seventeenth century directly to the Corporation (see below p x) which seem to be in the first person, and a give a flavour of poor conditions, R/AZ3/9/1-87. There is one, undated letter in the St. Mary's collection D/P 98/18/3/, from a woman on behalf of her mother, possibly from the late eighteenth century. 83 in the St. Giles collection, D/P96/18/3/2-86 are the collection of one overseer, James Alloway, and are mostly from overseers from extra-borough parishes, but a few directly from paupers claiming from outside the town, or in the town claiming against external parishes, they are all from the nineteenth century.

were they asked, in any systematic way that has survived, what life was like for them.³ Deductions about the impact on the pauper can be derived from assessing such things as the chances of a pauper being able to appeal against vestry decisions, the parishes' generosity of provision per pauper and the extent to which paupers were resorting to other sources of income, or protest and criminality. This analysis needs to take into account that a 'pauper' covers a large and diverse group of people, and different types may well have experienced poverty in different ways.

1. Impact on the town, the costs of relief to Reading

One way of judging the efficacy of cooperation between the parishes is to compare the costs of relief within the Borough to the wider picture, and particularly to similar parishes which may not have been operating in a cooperating environment. Cost-efficiency may not have been the only reason for the Reading parishes to work together; but it was frequently lauded as the purpose for collective action among a group of parishes.⁴

There are major methodological problems with this sort of analysis, which need to be kept in mind when looking at these comparisons. Firstly, actually getting the data for the years before the regular parliamentary reports start (in 1777) is very difficult, and the parliamentary data itself represents only sample years. A recent work (2021) by Waddell attempts a national survey of poor relief payments from 1600-1800 and goes into great detail about the methodological difficulties.⁵ While overseers needed to get their accounts signed off on a yearly basis these sets of accounts often do not survive. Jenks in his study of the costs of enclosure in rural Berkshire parishes could find only 6 parishes which had whole sets of data for the years 1760-1828.⁶

³ Interviews with unemployed silk weavers for a parliamentary inquiry in Report from the Committee on Silk Ribbon Weavers Petitions, House of Commons, 1818 is one of the earliest first person descriptions by a poor Reading resident. See Ch.6. p.231.

⁴ The preamble to the 1782 'Act for the Better Relief and Employment of the Poor,' (22 Geo 3 c83) (Gilbert's Act) says that the purpose of uniting parishes is to 'introduce a prudent economy in the expenditure of parish money'.

⁵ D. Waddell, 'The Rise of the Parish Welfare State in England, c1600-1800,' *Past and Present*, Vol. 253 (Nov 2021) pp.163-169.

⁶ O.C. Jenks, 'Parliamentary Enclosure in Berkshire 1723-1883 and its effect on the Poor,' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Reading, 2005) p.149.

Thus comparator studies to compare the level of relief to pensioners and casualties in the early years are sparse. Slack's work on York and Salisbury's weekly payments to regular pensioners in the opening decades of the century show the following:

Table 6- 1: Average regular pension in the first three decades of the eighteenth century, St. Mary and two sample corporate towns⁷

Place	Year	Regular pension, average per week
York	1716	8.2d
Salisbury	1725	16.9d
<i>St. Mary's Reading</i>	<i>1731</i>	<i>15d</i>

While covering a 15 year period the figures are comparable, since prices stayed stable through the eighteenth century through to about 1770.⁸ The low figure given for York is reflective of the generally more depressed levels of expenditure on poor relief through the north and east through the eighteenth century, observable even in the 1783 figures.⁹ Relief figures in general through this period were higher in the south and the figure for St. Mary's Reading suggests that it may have been among the higher paying parishes even within that category. However the sparsity of the record makes it difficult to assess any further than that.

The work by Waddell and Jenks does, however, allow for comparisons against national and County expenditure from the middle of the century onwards. This is most useful when looking at trends. Jenks does not say what form the accounts he worked with in Berkshire are in, and experience from elsewhere would suggest that these returns can be quite difficult. There are three potential measures which can be used to assess costs of relief. The first is the amount of rate collected, since this will have a close connection with the amount of money the vestry considered would be necessary, the second is the total amount spent by overseers in any given year, and the third is the amount actually given to paupers. Rates can include costs for other things. Sometimes 'expenditure' can mean simple amounts paid out in relief to paupers directly, sometimes it can include capital costs such as maintenance of equipment, and sometimes it can include administration, such as letters sent and JP's expenses. These categories can vary from

⁷ P. Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England*, (London, Longmans, 1988) pp.176 and 177, and St. Mary's paybooks.

⁸ Goods worth £100 in 1700 could be bought for £103 in 1770. Bank of England, *A millennium of macro-economic data*. <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/statistics>

⁹ A. Tomkins, *The Experience of Urban Poverty, 1723-82: Parish, Charity and Credit* (Manchester, 2006) p.25.

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parish to parish and even from year to year within a parish. This all becomes further complicated when a parish runs a workhouse, as often out relief and indoor relief are separate accounts, not always counted in the same way, some of which survive, and some don't.

The Reading figures have further issues. No accounts have survived for St. Giles or St. Lawrence for this period; any analysis is reliant on St. Mary's, although this was by far the largest spender on poor relief of the three parishes, as the 1803 returns show (Table 6-2).

Parish	Amount
St. Lawrence	£1266/2/0
St. Giles	£1450/15/8.5
St. Mary	£2172/2/10.25
Reading total	4889/0/0.25

Table 6- 2: Total annual expenditure on relief by parish in Reading, 1803¹⁰

Figures for 1740-1779 come from the parish payment books and accounts.¹¹ The payment books contain some accounts and totals over the years, and with some adjustment these have been used to build a picture of parish expenditure. From 1779 account books, Eden and parliamentary reports are used to assess expenditure.

In order to make comparisons against wider local and national trends it is important to establish that the inflationary pressures within Reading, and nationally were broadly the same. National figures for inflation in the eighteenth century have been estimated over the years, although they have been modified noticeably over the last seventy years.¹² Consumer Price Index is the normal indicator of inflation, based on the cost of a representative 'basket' of purchases. Assessments of this in the eighteenth century tend to rely upon contemporary studies of labourers' household budgets, particularly work done by Eden and Davies.¹³ The

¹⁰ Abstract of the Answers and Returns (HC, 1803) 175.

¹¹ Figures for 1711-1771 are calculated from overseers totals at the back of the paybooks. Not all paybooks exist, and not all contained accounts; these statistics show trajectory only. Standardisation of totals was done by excluding payments for debt and administration but including payments for clothing and rents as well as payments to casuals and regulars. From 1771 there are more regular accounts.

¹² E. H. Phelps-Brown and S. Hopkins, 'Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables compared with Builders' Wage - rates', *Economica* (November 1956) pp. 296-314, was particularly influential and was used as recently as 2002 as the basis HC Research Paper 03/82 (November, 2003) 'Inflation: the value of the pound 1750-2002.'

¹³ D. Davies, *The case of Labourers in Husbandry stated and considered*, (London, 1795). F. Eden, *The State of the Poor, or an History of the Labouring Classes in England* (3 Vols) (London, 1797).

most recent of these is from 2017 and produced by the Bank of England.¹⁴ While levels of inflation in Reading have not been estimated and would be difficult to establish with any degree of accuracy, a reliable proxy can be taken.

Wheat prices show a strong correlation with levels of inflation in the eighteenth century.

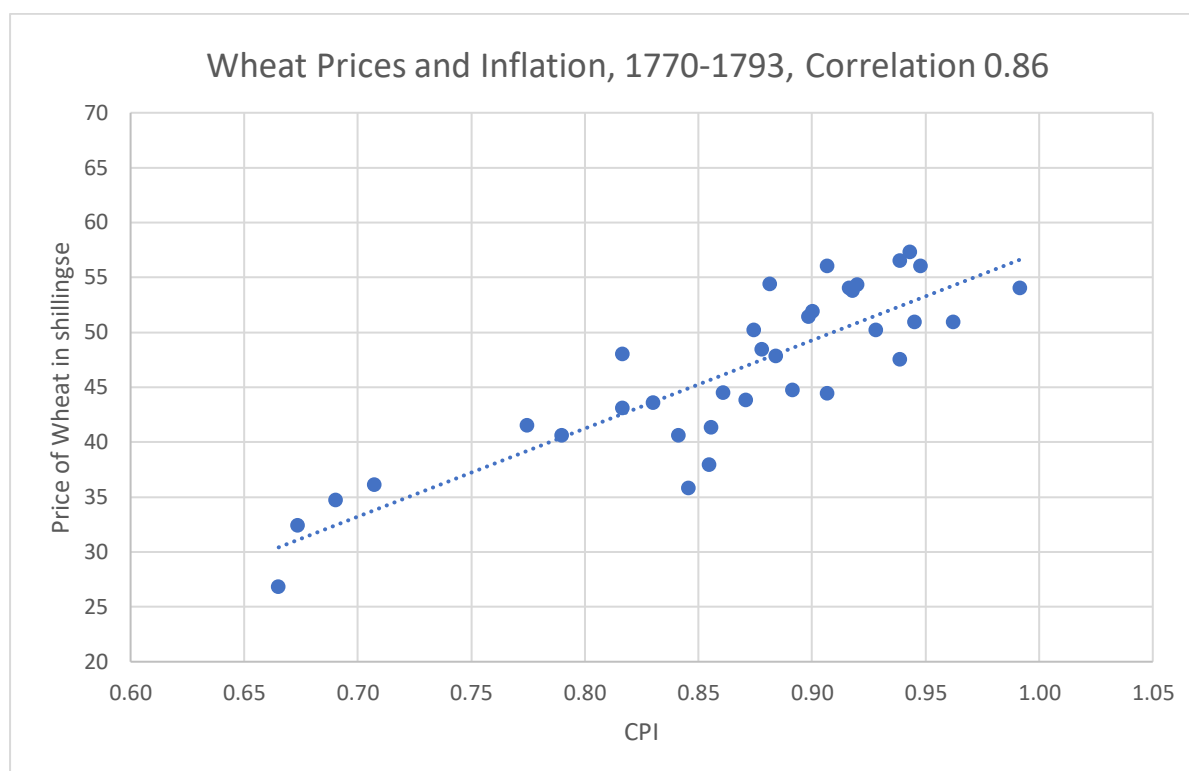


Figure 6- 1: Wheat prices from Usher and inflation from the Bank of England.¹⁵

This is not surprising, since food accounted for a high proportion of the average labourer's expenditure in the second half of the century, Feinstein estimates 69%, and bread and wheat accounted for 47% of that.¹⁶ Thus if the price of wheat in Reading can be seen to be broadly similar to the national price of wheat, then it is with a degree of confidence that it can be assumed that the levels of inflation were in step. Wheat prices in Reading are only recorded

¹⁴ The Bank of England, *A millennium of macroeconomic data* (2017) A47, Consumer Price Index, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/statistics/research-datasets> (accessed February 2024). The figures for 1770-1882 are based on C. H. Feinstein, 'Pessimism Perpetuated: Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Britain during and after the Industrial Revolution,' *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 58/3 (1999) pp625-658. In turn this is heavily based on Eden and Davies, p.635.

¹⁵ A.P Usher: 'Prices of Wheat and Commodity Price Indexes for England, 1259-1930,' *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, Vol. 13/3 (1931) pp.103-113. Bank of England, *A millennium*. Complete correlation =1, no correlation =0.

¹⁶ Feinstein, 'Pessimism' p.635.

from 1793 onward, however it is reasonable to assume that their relationship with wheat prices nationally would not have changed significantly from the previous twenty years.

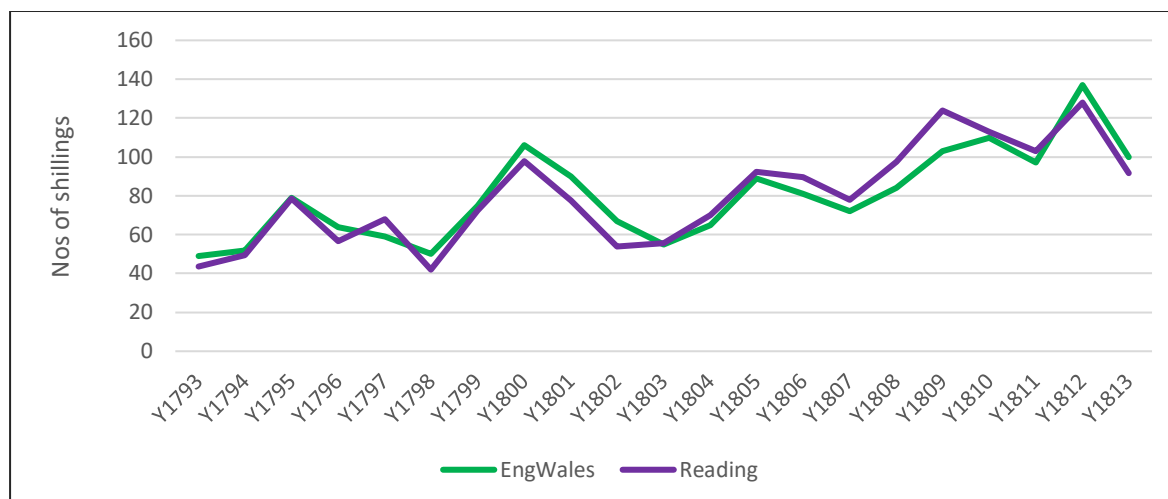


Figure 6- 2: Price of a quarter of wheat, Reading and national yearly average in shillings, 1793-1813.¹⁷

Fig. 6-2 demonstrates that wheat prices in Reading map closely national trends in wheat prices, and it is therefore appropriate to assume that inflation levels in Reading broadly reflected the national averages. Having established this it is appropriate to look at the relationship between local, regional and national expenditure without having to adjust any one figure to correlate with another; the pressures were the same across the board.

It can be seen from Fig. 6.3 that St. Mary's relief figures declined as a proportion of national figures over this period. Put another way, national figures went up more steeply than the St. Mary's figures. St. Mary's sees only a 60% rise from £610 to £1013, from 1760-1792, while nationally the figure is more like 300%, from £860,000 to £2, 737, 951.

¹⁷ From M. Nueman, *Speenhamland County, Poverty and the Poor Laws in Berkshire, 1782-1834*. (New York, 1982) pp.225-227. Neumann compiled these from the *Reading Mercury*, and (p233) from T. Tooke, *The History of Prices and the State of Circulation* (6 Vols, London, 1838).

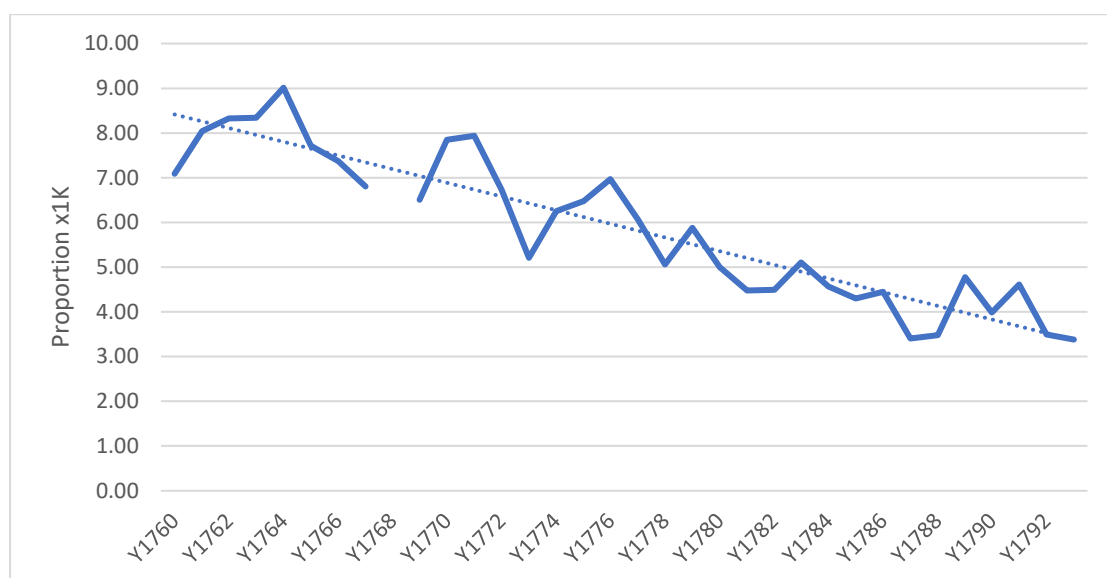


Figure 6- 3: St. Mary's relief as a proportion of national relief, 1760-1793¹⁸

A similar relationship can be seen between the St. Mary's figures and the local, rural parishes of Berkshire and Oxfordshire. Jenks establishes poor relief costs for those years in 13 parishes, and Fig 6.4 shows this total mapped against the St. Mary's figures.

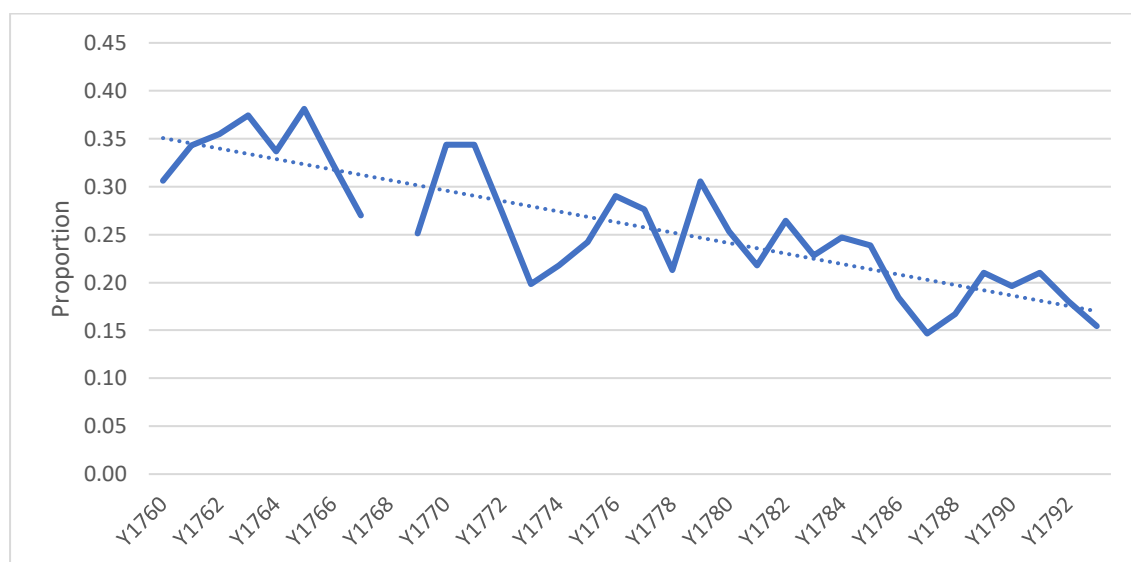


Figure 6- 4: St. Mary's relief as a proportion of Berks and Oxon relief, 1760-1793¹⁹

¹⁸ National relief figures from Waddell 'The rise of the parish welfare state', St. Mary's relief from paybooks, accounts, Eden and Overseers Returns. Data for 1768 not available.

¹⁹ Figures from Jenks, 'Parliamentary Enclosure'. pp.156-157.

Again, St. Mary's demonstrably holds its relief payments to a much less steep increase than the sample surrounding parishes. These see a rise of about 350% from £1992 in 1760 to £6,560 in 1792.

Of course, correlation is not causation. While it is tempting to apportion the restraint of St. Mary's parish payments to closer cooperation between parishes in Reading at the time, there is also another perfectly plausible explanation. Boyer suggests that the rise in rural relief payments in the second half of the eighteenth century was caused not by Speenhamland-type systems, which was often considered at the time, but more on a shift towards certain types of grain farming occasioned by the rise in the cost of grain. This in turn led to much more seasonal unemployment, particularly among men; and patterns of relief in themselves became more seasonal, with a heavy claim on winter payments, supported by the large land-holding farmers who had considerable political power in the vestries in rural areas and had a strong interest in keeping the labour force from migrating.²⁰

Boyer's hypothesis would explain the apparent disparity between the correlation of Reading parish data with inflation, which, as we have seen was closely linked to wheat prices, and the national and local rural prices.

²⁰ G.R. Boyer, *An Economic History of the English Poor Law, 1750-1850*, (Cambridge, 1990), pp.142-149.

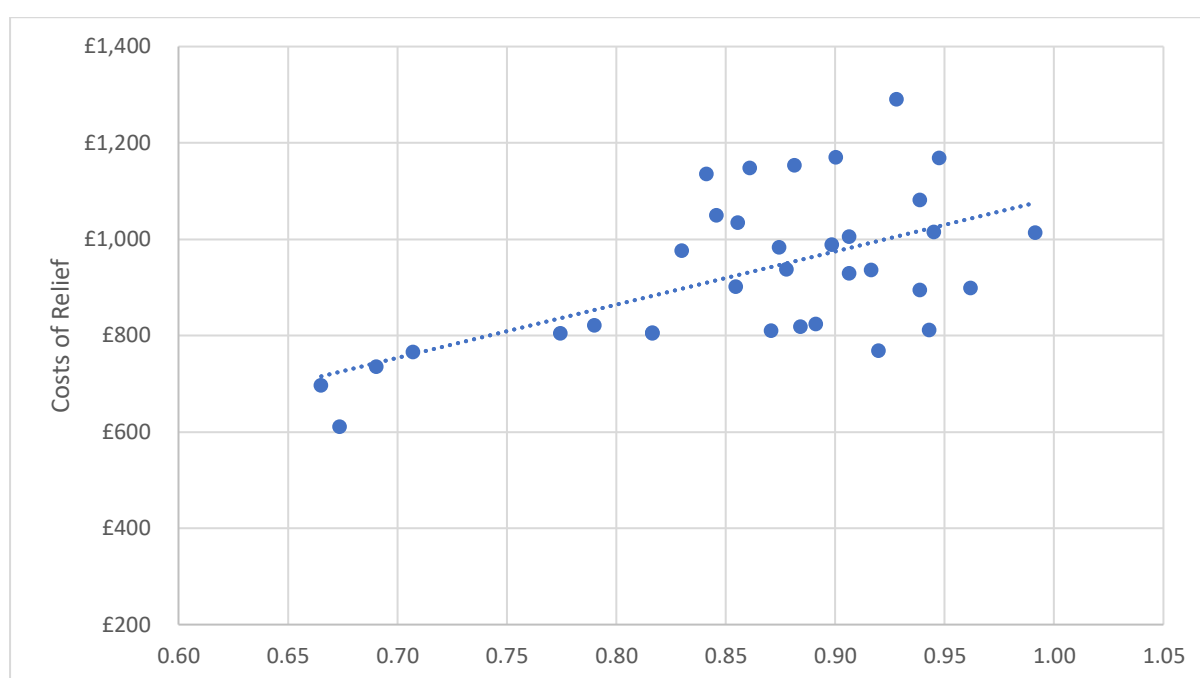


Figure 6- 5: St. Mary's relief costs and inflation 1760-1793: Correlation 0.57²¹

The correlation between inflation and costs in the urban parish of St. Mary, is a relatively weak one of only .57. In comparison the national relief costs which have a stronger relationship with inflation, of .67 (Fig. 6.6). This relationship becomes even stronger when the local, rural parishes are correlated with inflation (Fig. 6.7).

²¹ Interestingly there is a much higher correlation between St. Mary's figures and inflation in the 1760s, and quite possibly for earlier decades for which there is insufficient data, than in later decades. This may reflect the introduction of the workhouse over the 1760s, with its full introduction in 1772. This may have meant the parish was less susceptible to being simply responsive to demands for relief. However much more work would need to be done on this.

Chapter 6

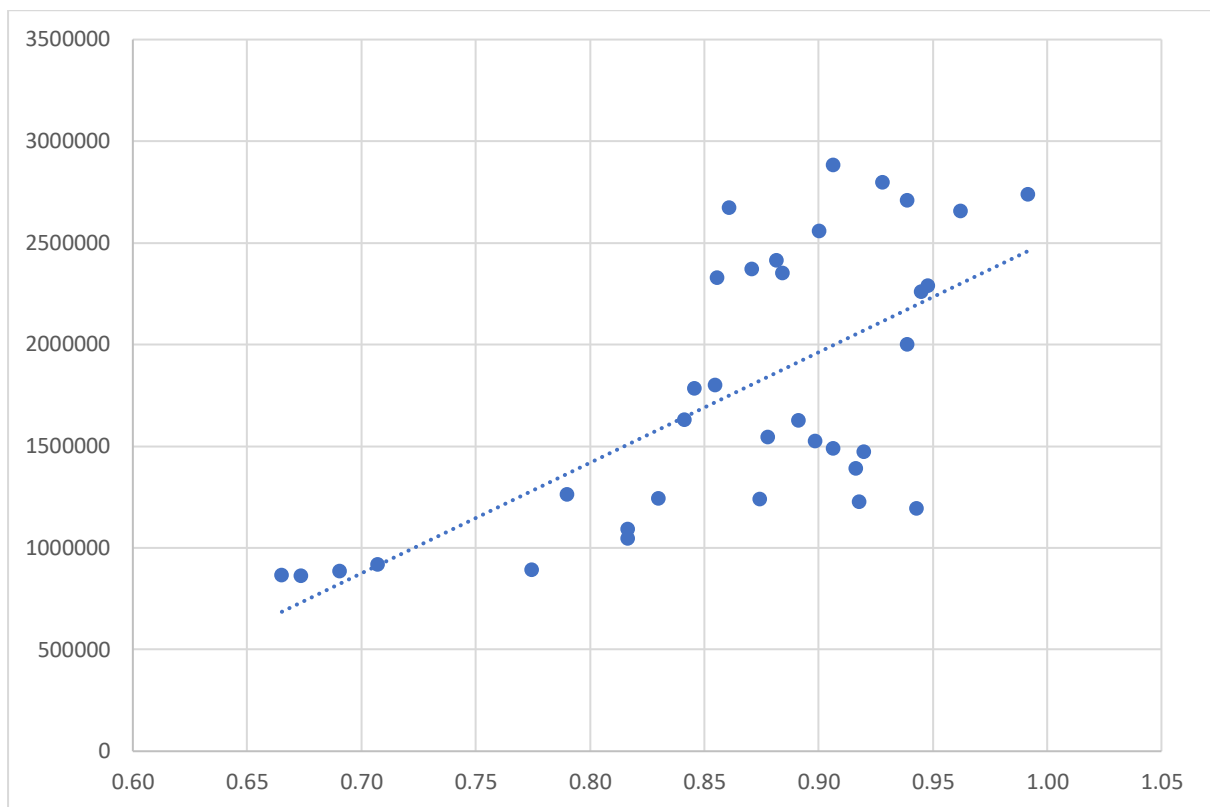


Figure 6- 6: National relief figures and inflation, 1760-1793: Correlation 0.67

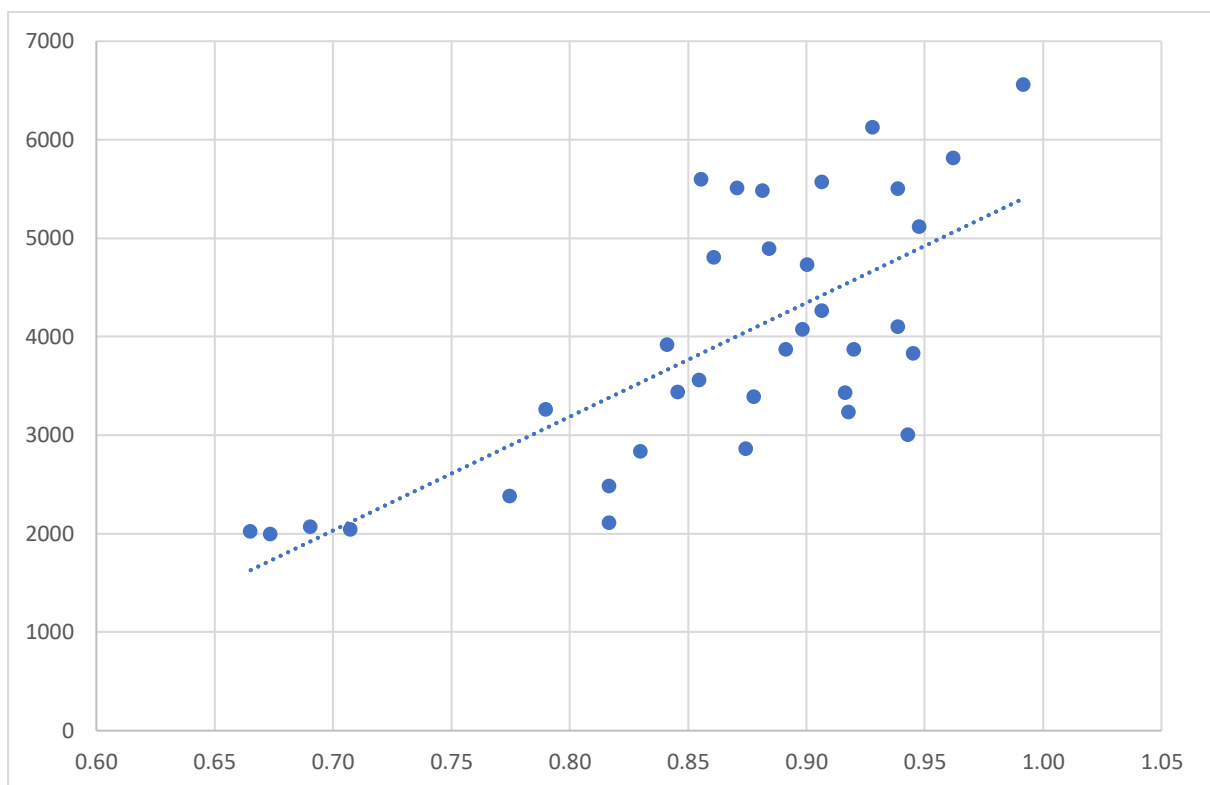


Figure 6- 7: Berks and Oxon parishes and inflation, 1760-1793: Correlation. 0.71

If the costs of relief were being driven only by the price of bread (and by the second half of the century wheaten bread was the predominant form even for labourers), then one would expect to see the St. Mary's relief prices to be as strongly correlated as the surrounding rural parishes.²² Bread formed as much part of the town labourers' diet, as the rural labourers, and extra interventions at time of difficulty in Reading, as in most urban areas, were almost always in the form of management of the price of bread, or distributions of cheap bread.²³ The disparity in correlation however can be explained in Boyer's hypothesis, where the cost of relief is not driven by the cost of grain, but by the seasonal unemployment delivered by the grain farming which developed as a consequence of the cost of grain.

The fact that seasonal unemployment was less of a factor in Reading can be shown by a monthly analysis of nine complete years where the months can be reliably apportioned.

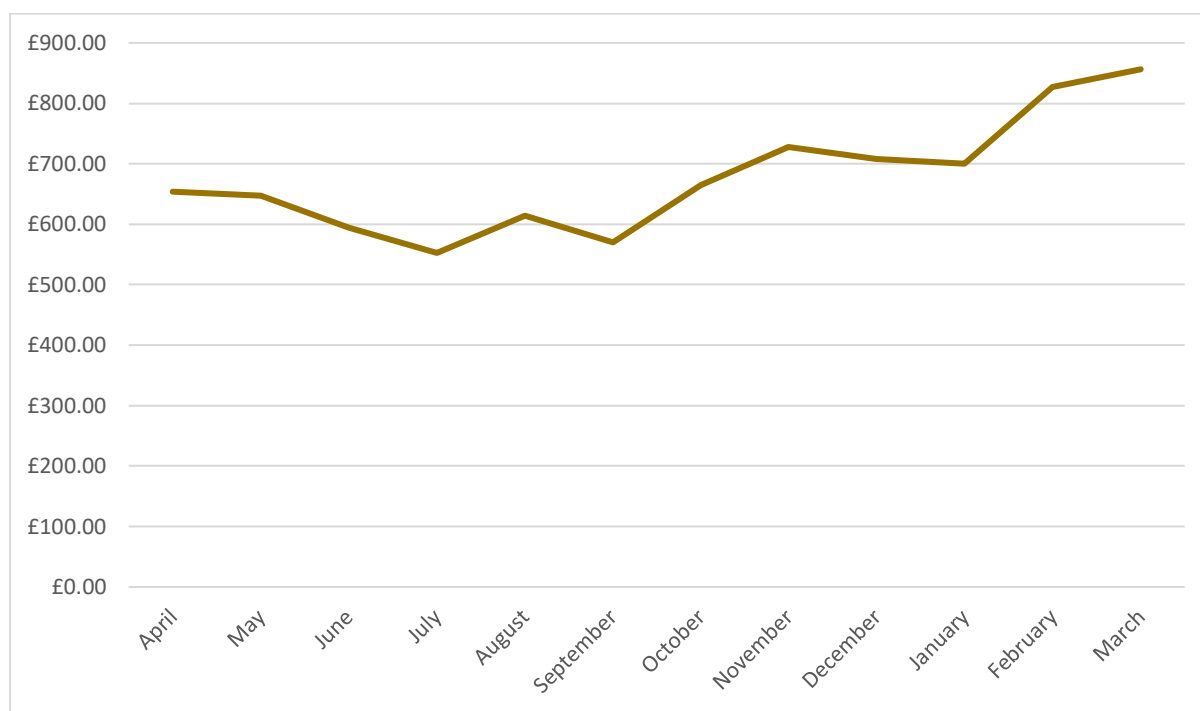


Figure 6- 8: Monthly payments for Reading, St. Mary, selected years 1770-1787.

²² The consumption of wheaten bread by the poor was a consistent complaint for commentators of the day. See D. Davies, *The Case of Labourers in Husbandry stated and considered* 1st Edition, 1795 (Cambridge, 2010) p.31.

²³ See Ch. 6, p.233.

While there is a slight rise in January and February, this is not a huge, less than the March figures, and this hides curious peaks of payment, such as £126 in the August of 1777.²⁴ As an urban area it is likely that demands on relief, while partly fuelled by migration and rural poverty, were also complicated by the fortunes of local industries such as brewing and sailcloth making. While there was agriculture occurring in the rural parts of the parishes of St. Giles and St. Mary's this was predominantly market gardening; fruit, dairy and vegetables for the town's domestic market.²⁵

Does this then disallow the idea that cooperation was managing to keep costs down? Not necessarily, cooperation could certainly have been a factor in restraining the growth in costs in the second half of the century. To test this, it is necessary to compare Reading to other urban areas, similar in size and socio-economic structure which had no history of such cooperation.

2. Comparison with other urban areas

1. Criteria for comparator parishes

To make a meaningful comparison it is necessary to identify urban parishes of similar size populations to the three Reading parishes with an equivalent urban/rural split of population. The first dataset which gives this information parish by parish in a properly comparable way is the 1801 census. This is towards the end of the period of analysis, but still provides a useful benchmark.

To properly identify any effect of cooperation they should also be areas where no similar cooperation may be occurring with neighbouring parishes. This rules out other corporation towns of the Southeast, as the same factors which allow cooperation in Reading would apply there, or other urban areas such as Bristol or Oxford, or indeed Guildford and Bedford, that had already been united as a union in one form or other by this time.

London and its surrounding villages present a huge dataset. In addition, as has already discussed, studies of some London parishes have shown high levels of competition, apart from

²⁴ BRO D/P98/12/198.

²⁵ See Coates 1802 Map (p176) and M.R. Mitford, *Belford Regis, or sketches of a country town* (London, 1846) pp.1-2, pp.21-22, p.108.

some in the City itself.²⁶ The magistracy for London outside of the City, that is the areas of London in Middlesex, Westminster and the Tower Liberty were governed by three separate commissions.²⁷ Two, Middlesex and Westminster covered very large numbers of parishes and large populations. While some of the more inner urban parishes did develop close working with their JPs for the outer, more 'rural' parishes this seems to have led to precisely the distancing from vestries which occurred in large rural areas. The Royal Commission report stated about these areas

we believe that parish officers are very often improperly summonsed, much misrepresented by the public press and that the interference of magistrates is productive of more evil than good.²⁸

William Payne, giving evidence to the Royal Commission on behalf of the Guildhall Police Court said

for as each magistrate had his own views of the law and commonly acts upon a different system we be said to have 26 different systems for poor law administered with in our district.²⁹

While many parishes in Middlesex were large parishes dominated by the London economy, they did not at this stage have any other governance than the parish and county model familiar in rural areas.³⁰ The outer parishes were governed by manorial courts and the parish vestry into the nineteenth century.³¹ There was no corporation body to cohere, nor collective identity beyond the rather weak 'hundred' model. The Middlesex parishes in the very centre, such as Shoreditch and Bethnal Green, were already ghettos of poverty by the end of the eighteenth century, with the comfortable gentry having long since moved west.³² Many were very small, consisting of only a few streets with none of the population employed in agriculture or related business. Some of these, such as Mile End, Bethnal Green, Shoreditch, Bishopsgate and Whitechapel, had, anyway, already developed some cooperation through a 'friendly pass' scheme which effectively cut out the JP all together.³³ They diminished the costs of expensive settlement examinations.³⁴

²⁶ The definition of 'London' for this section is that area governed by the Bills of Mortality. See Company of Parish Clerks; *New Remarks of London or a Survey of the Cities London and Westminster of Southwark and party of Middlesex and Surrey within the circumference of the Bills of Mortality*. (London, 1732).

²⁷ D. R. Green, *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790-1870* (London, 2010), p.47.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p.166.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.171.

³⁰ The outer Middlesex parishes did not come under the contemporary definition of London.

³¹ For an overview of the local government of all three sample parishes in the eighteenth century, see the VCH for Middlesex, Volumes 3, 5 and 7. See footnote 37 below.

³² Green, *Pauper Capital* p55.

³³ Select Committee, 'Report from the select committee on the Poor Laws' (HC, 4th July 1817) No. 462, p32.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.46.

In order to find parishes comparable to Reading the search needs to go far enough out to allow for some physical size and rural work, while staying within the commissions of the Middlesex or Westminster magistracies.³⁵ Three parishes can be identified from the 1801 census which meet these criteria, all are in Middlesex. All parishes have a population of between 3000 and 3500 in 1801 and have less than 10% of its population working in agriculture.³⁶ The agriculture in these parishes seems, much like that of Reading, to have been market gardening.³⁷

Table 6- 3: Comparison sample Middlesex and Reading parishes

	Population, 1801	Persons employed in agriculture in 1801	As percentage
St Giles	3416	300	9.51
St. Lawrence	3170	22	0.69
St. Mary	3156	119	3.48
Twickenham	3138	129	4.11
Chiswick	3235	195	6.03
Tottenham	3629	169	4.66

It is also important to establish that these Middlesex parishes were subject to similar inflationary pressures in the years analysed as Reading. While average prices, at any one time, in the London area may well have been slightly higher than Reading, and that needs to be borne in mind when looking at straight amounts spend on the pauper, the important question is did prices go up at the same rate? ³⁸

³⁵ The urban Middlesex parishes came within the jurisdiction of the Middlesex Justices Act after 1792, using stipendiary magistrates. All the sample parishes are 'rural' parishes however and this did not apply.

³⁶ The 1811 census changed this methodology and included 'families working in agriculture' which produces a much higher percentage of the population working in agriculture.

³⁷ VCH, **Twickenham**, 'Twickenham: Economic and social history', in *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 3, Shepperton, Staines, Stanwell, Sunbury, Teddington, Heston and Isleworth, Twickenham, Cowley, Cranford, West Drayton, Greenford, Hanwell, Harefield and Harlington*, ed. Susan Reynolds (London, 1962), pp. 151-155. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/Vol.3/pp151-155> [accessed 26 June 2023].

Chiswick, T Diane K Bolton, Patricia E C Croot and M A Hicks, 'Chiswick: Economic history', in *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 7, Acton, Chiswick, Ealing and Brentford, West Twyford, Willesden*, ed. T F T Baker and C R Elrington (London, 1982), pp. 78-86. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/Vol.7/pp78-86> [accessed 26 June 2023].

Tottenham A P Baggs, Diane K Bolton, Eileen P Scarff and G C Tyack, 'Tottenham: Economic history', in *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 5, Hendon, Kingsbury, Great Stanmore, Little Stanmore, Edmonton Enfield, Monken Hadley, South Mimms, Tottenham*, ed. T F T Baker and R B Pugh (London, 1976), pp. 333-339. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/Vol.5/pp333-339> [accessed 26 June 2023].

³⁸ See p.200 for Green's CPI calculations for London.

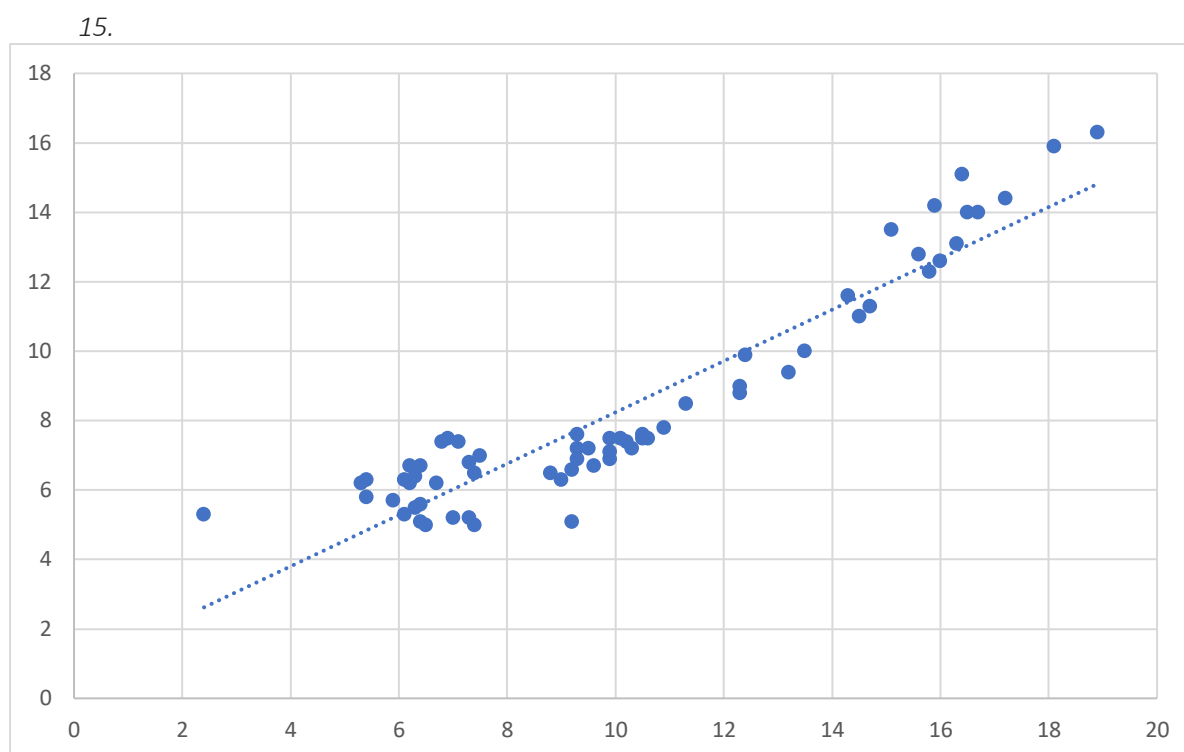
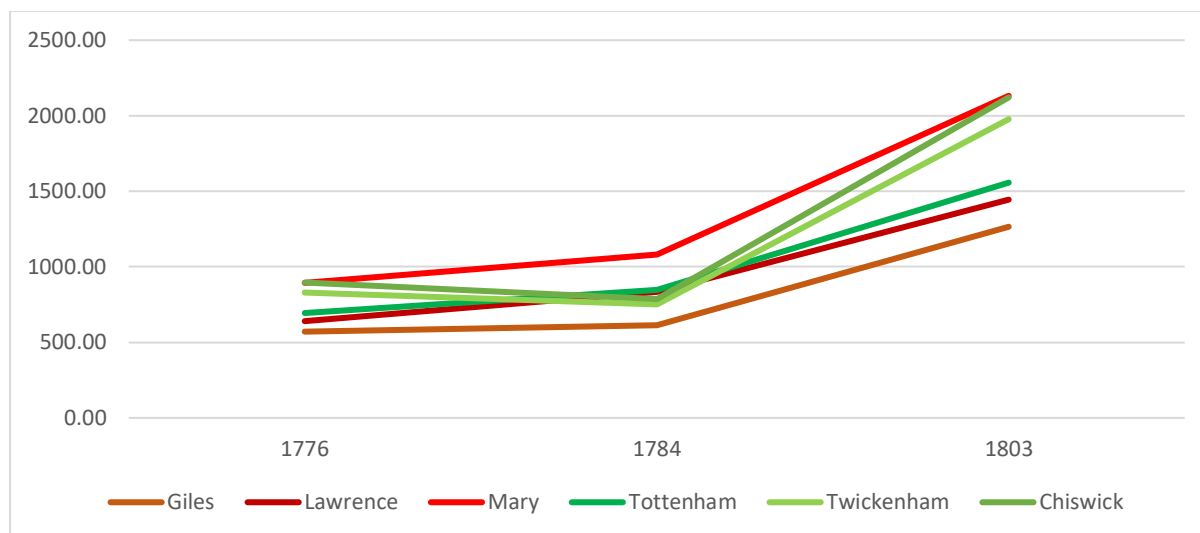


Figure 6- 9: London CPI in relation to Bank of England CPI, 1770-1814, Correlation 0.93.

One useful study of the cost of living in London is Turvey's 2010 analysis of the accounts of Christ's Hospital over a near hundred year period from 1740-1834.³⁹ Here a near constant set of commodities were bought for the residents over this time, providing a useful 'basket' of goods from which to calculate a London-based CPI. When mapped against the Bank of England national CPI it can be seen that there is an almost total correlation of 0.93. While Christ's Hospital was in Newgate at this time, and the furthest of the sample parishes was 12 miles away, it is reasonable to assume that these parishes, whose economies were so dependent on London, would have mirrored this index. Thus when we compare trajectories of spending it is with a degree of confidence that we can assume both Reading and the Middlesex parishes were subject to similar inflationary pressures.

³⁹ R. Turvey, *The Cost of Living in London, 1740-1834* (London, 2010) WP. 147/10, pp.13-14.

2. Trajectories of spending

Figure 6- 10: Expenditure on relief in pounds sterling, Reading and Middlesex parishes 1776-1803⁴⁰

By comparing the amount spent on relief in the parliamentary survey years across the 6 parishes it can be seen that they stay broadly the same, within the £600 to £1000 pa figure, from 1776-1786 (Fig 6-9).⁴¹ Indeed two of the outer Middlesex parishes apparently decrease their expenditure from 1776-1784. This cannot be put down to the introduction of a workhouse, as all six parishes had functioning workhouses before 1776, and anyway workhouses had a tendency to be more expensive. Without closer study of these two parishes it is difficult to say why. Nonetheless it is obvious that the costs did not go up by any great extent. This is to be expected if Boyer's thesis is correct, since the pressure raising prices in rural areas is not operating in these parishes where the only agriculture is market gardening. These non-cooperating parishes were managing to keep their costs from rising as successfully as Reading.

⁴⁰ Gilbert's Report, 1777, and OPR, 1803, these include legal costs as earlier returns did not separate these out but excludes other costs.

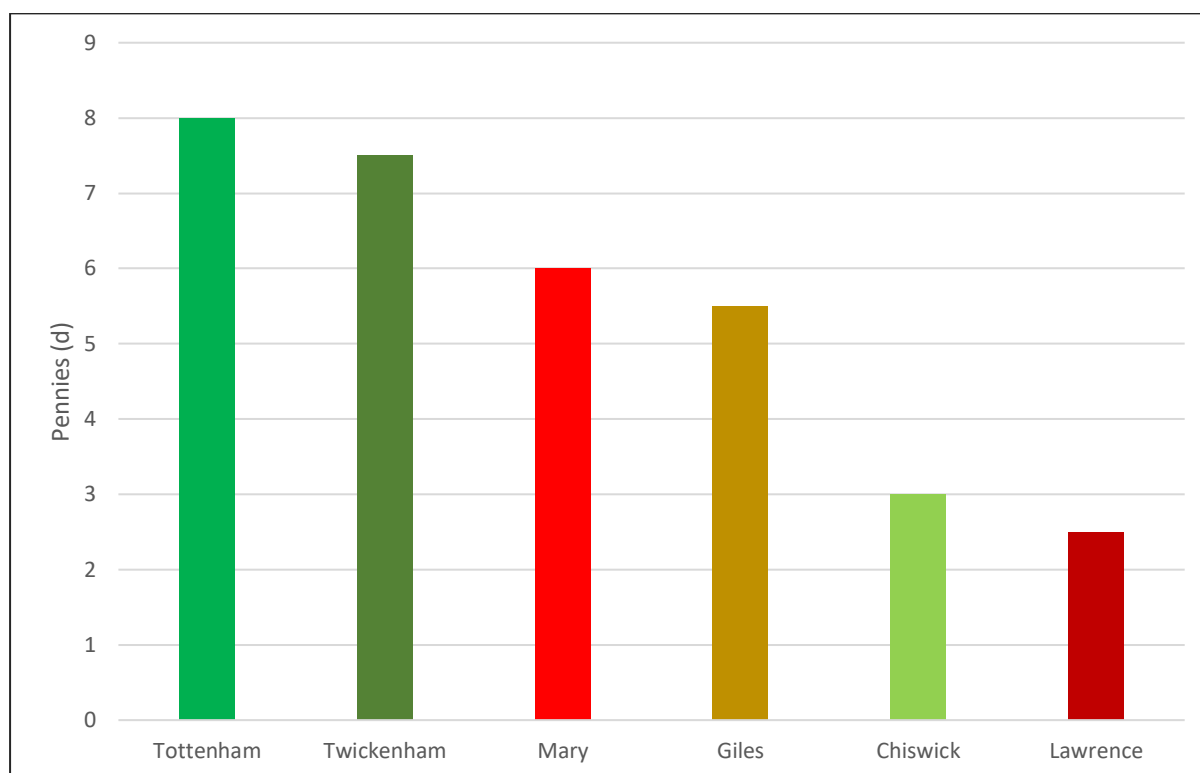
⁴¹ I have used money spent on relief, rather than rate collected, as rate collected could include a variety of costs since some parishes included other headings in their collections. The 1803 report bemoans the fact that some parishes include a variety of collections within their poor rate. OPR, 1803, p2. For a more detailed discussion of the problems with these returns see D. A. Baugh, *The Costs of Poor Relief in South-East England, 1790-1834*; *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 28/1 (Feb 1975), pp. 50-68.

Chapter 6

3. Legal costs

If the Reading parishes were to be getting anything from their cooperation one would expect to lower legal and removal costs than in non-cooperating parishes.

Figure 6- 11: Legal costs per capita, Middlesex and Reading parishes, 1803.⁴²



It can be seen from Figure 6-10 that the legal costs in both Tottenham and Twickenham are much higher than in the Reading parishes; while Chiswick manages quite a low level of costs. The legal costs for the Middlesex parishes exceed the per capita costs for that county, which were 5.3d.⁴³ One would expect legal costs to be higher for centres of migration, yet Berkshire per capita costs were considerably more than Reading's, at 7.9d.⁴⁴ It should also be borne in mind that settlement and removal was less of an issue in London parishes since higher rents meant a far higher proportion of the population gained settlement through rental value alone.⁴⁵ It is probable that Chiswick is an outlier here, but it is difficult to say without doing a much larger analysis of London parishes and per capita legal costs.

⁴² Legal and removal costs (OPR, 1803)/population (Census, 1801).

⁴³ Ibid, Middlesex.

⁴⁴ Ibid, Berks.

⁴⁵ Report from the Select Committee on the Poor Laws, (1817) 462, p.51, Evidence re St. Mary's Islington, but probably broadly applicable.

A variant which could affect the result is that the Middlesex parishes are simply dealing with more vagrancy and migrants than the Reading parishes. However, vagrancy costs did not sit with the parish. The costs of managing these went to the County, in the case of the London parishes, and the Borough in the case of Reading. From 1700 constables, and all members of the public, were responsible for apprehending beggars and vagrants and bringing them in front of JP, who would decide what to do with them.⁴⁶ All charges went up to the Quarter Sessions, so would not show up in overseers accounts. Even if there were residual costs which could not be straightforwardly offloaded onto the borough or county, there is no reason to assume that Reading, on two major thoroughfares, and two important rivers, with fairs, markets and assizes should have been any less vulnerable to this problem than the manorial villages which the Middlesex parishes were at this time. Even the nature of the vagrancy to which the parishes were vulnerable looks to have been similar. Rogers states in his 1991 article on London vagrancy that far from the catalogue of exotics which legislation and popular imagination would have vagrants be, the majority were normally women turned out of their positions or abandoned wives or widows.⁴⁷ Many were soldiers' wives. An analysis of examinations of 'rogues and vagabonds' from 1751 to 1783 in St. Mary's parish, Reading shows a similar pattern.⁴⁸

Were these Middlesex parishes simply subject to more inward migration than Reading? Wrigley's study of population growth in London suggests that it was largely fuelled by migration rather than a growth in birth rate or decrease in the death rate.⁴⁹ Abstracts from parish registers showing baptisms and burials from the eighteenth century bear this out. There is little difference between the birth and death rate across the eighteenth century in any of the sample parishes. (Table 6-4).⁵⁰

⁴⁶ (11 William III c 18) An Act for the effectual Punishment of Vagrants and sending them whither by Law they ought to be sent, 1700. This legislation was reinforced in 1714 and 1744.

⁴⁷ N. Rogers, 'Policing the Poor in Eighteenth-Century London: The Vagrancy Laws and Their Administration' *Histoire Social-Social History* Vol. 24, (May 1991) pp.127-147. T. Hitchcock, T. A. Crymble and L. Falcini, 'Loose, idle and disorderly: vagrant removal in later eighteenth-century Middlesex,' *Social History* Vol. 39/4 (2014) pp.509-527 found 62% of adult vagrants outside of the City were female, most sacked domestic servants. Within the City women also predominated until 1783 when demobilised soldiers skewed the figures to men.

⁴⁸ See Appendix 4. 'Status of Rogues and Vagabonds, St. Mary's Parish, 1751-1783'.

⁴⁹ E. A. Wrigley, 'A simple model of London's importance in changing English Society and Economy 1650-1750', *Past and Present* Vol. 37 (1967) pp.44-70, although for a slightly earlier period.

⁵⁰ Parish register abstracts, 1700-1800, from HistPop:

[http://www.histpop.org/ohpr/servlet/TOC?path=Browse/Census%20\(by%20date\)&active=yes&mno=3&toystate=expandnew&display=sections&display=tables&display=pagetitles](http://www.histpop.org/ohpr/servlet/TOC?path=Browse/Census%20(by%20date)&active=yes&mno=3&toystate=expandnew&display=sections&display=tables&display=pagetitles)

Taken from 1801 Census. Abstracts only available at Hundred level for Middlesex.

Table 6- 4: Comparison of baptisms and burials, 1700-1800: Sample parishes

	Baptisms	Burials
Reading	7273	7072
Edmonton (Twickenham)	10026	11233
Isleworth (Tottenham)	7261	7129
Kensington (Chiswick)	24496	29803

Two of the hundreds show a slightly greater death rate, but itemised across a geographical hundred and through the eighteenth century these would only amount to a handful every year. Consequently, if the London parishes were subject to much larger levels of inward migration than Reading then one would expect to see a much higher rate of population growth. Again reliable, comparable, population figures are not available until the 1801 census, but it is reasonable to assume that migration patterns from the end of the eighteenth century into the beginning of the nineteenth century did not reverse or distort in any extreme way.

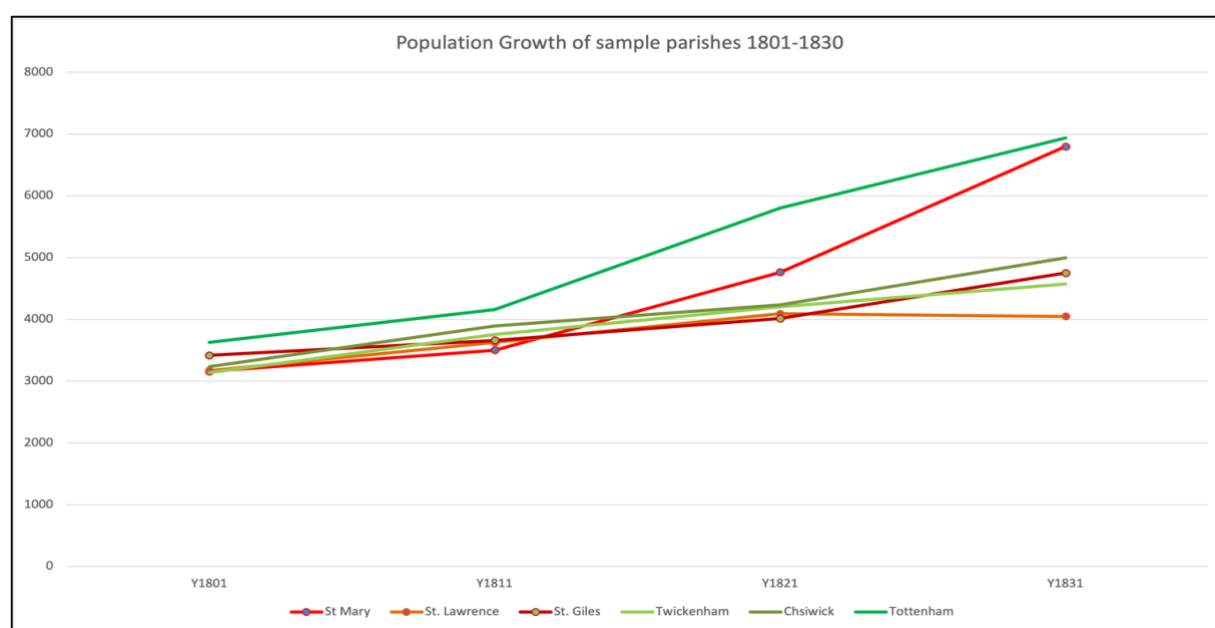
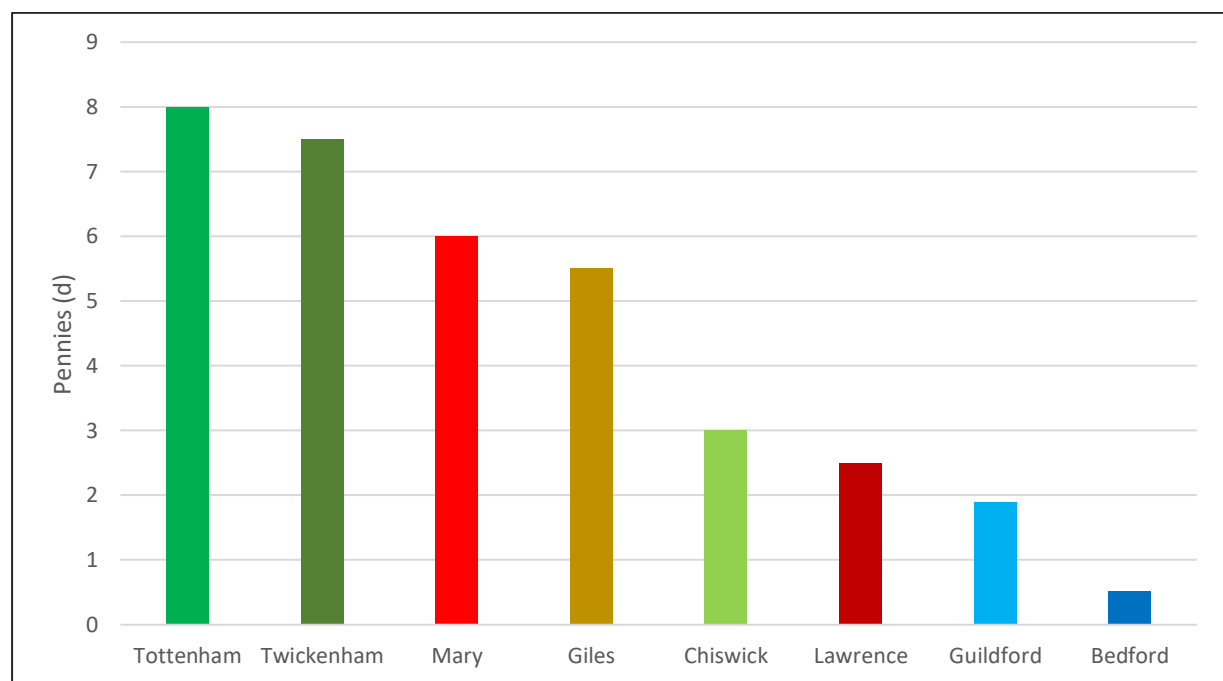
*Figure 6- 12: Population growth, sample parishes, 1801-1831*

Figure 6-11 shows the trajectory of population growth for all six parishes at the opening of the nineteenth century. Both St. Mary's Reading and Tottenham experience quite rapid expansion, while the other four experience slower growth. This would imply that the exposure of Reading generally to inward migration was similar to these Middlesex parishes. This is to be expected,

since, while Reading was not as geographically close to the huge economic magnet that was London, it did sit in the heart of a poor agricultural area, from which most of its migrants seem to have come.⁵¹

The correlation between legal costs per capita and levels of cooperation is reinforced when the figures for the two completely cooperating boroughs are included. It is clear that in this instance both boroughs have a much lower level of litigation costs in general. While a small sample, with one outlier, these stats from otherwise similar places would strongly suggest that higher levels of cooperation did indeed repress legal costs.

Figure 6- 13: Legal costs per capita, all sample parishes, 1803. Figures by pennies (d).⁵²



4. Costs of relief per capita

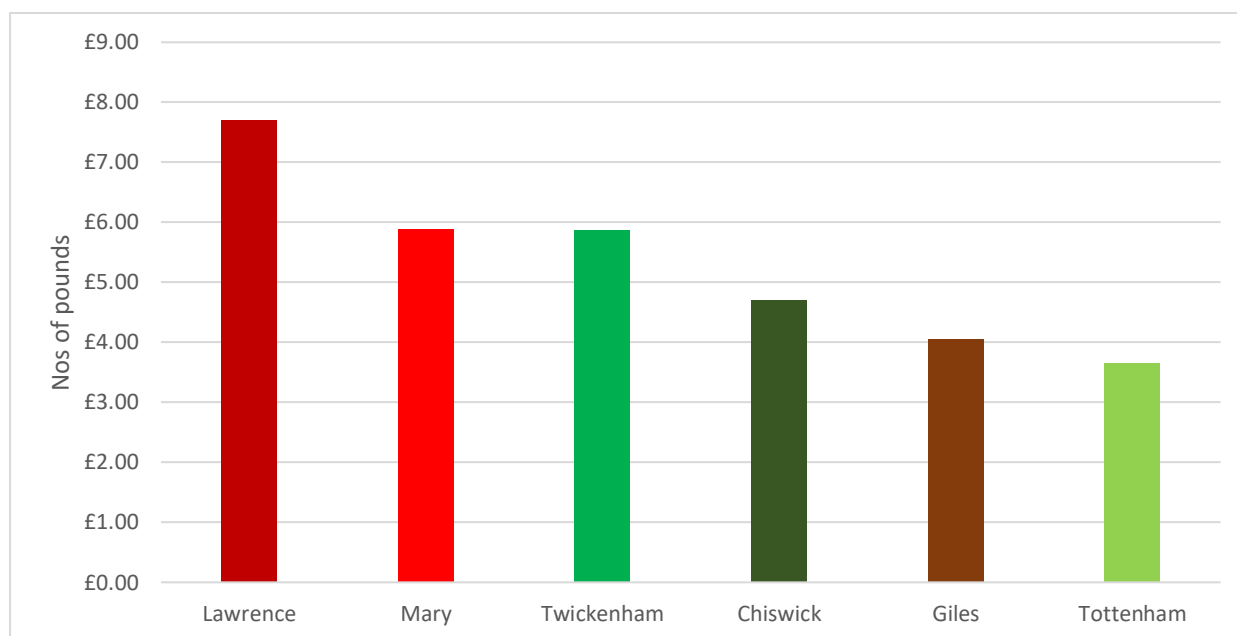
The numbers of the poor that all six parishes look to be relieving in 1803 show the rural Middlesex parishes relieving slightly more, both regular and casual.

⁵¹ See Appendix 2, County of origin of settlers into St. Mary's and St. Giles, 1678-1798.

⁵² Bedford and Guildford results also 1803 Returns/1801 Census population.

Table 6- 5 Numbers of paupers relieved in sample parishes in 1803 returns.⁵³

	<i>A: Numbers relieved out of workhouse, not including children</i>	<i>B: Numbers relieved in workhouse</i>	<i>C: Numbers of children under 5 relieved out of workhouse</i>	<i>D: Numbers of children from 5-14 relieved out of workhouse</i>	<i>E: Number of persons relieved occasionally</i>	<i>F: Number of persons above 60 or disabled</i>	Total A-E
Reading							
Giles	53	53	58	93	37	47	294
Lawrence	46	40	27	27	42	15	182
Mary	71	65	25	66	122	36	349
Middlesex							
Tottenham	97	60	30	55	150	60	392
Twickenham	67	81	29	51	91	19	319
Chiswick	72	96	42	84	145	73	439

Figure 6- 14: Per pauper relief, pounds per head per annum, 1803 returns.⁵⁴

⁵³ Thomas' study of poverty in Berkshire has the numbers of paupers in St. Mary's in 1803 as only 259, giving a proportion on relief as only 8%. He seems to have overlooked the 'children relieved out of the workhouse' figures completely. E. G. Thomas, 'The treatment of poverty in Berkshire, Essex and Oxfordshire' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 1970) p.324.

⁵⁴ Indoor relief costs + Outdoor relief/nos of paupers- non-parishioners relieved. All data from the OPR 1803.

Studies of London parishes show that, while some of the smaller, poorer, inner city parishes developed streamlined processes for settlement and removal by the end of the eighteenth century, not only did most parishes compete against each other quite aggressively, the magistrates frequently interfered with vestry decisions, and the London pauper could be comparatively assertive in their negotiation of relief.⁵⁵

Nonetheless the average Reading pauper, for all his or her lack of access to magistrates' appeal, looks to have been paid as well if not better than the average outer London pauper, in the sample parishes (Fig 6-13). Adjusted for consumer price index, the provision for the Reading parishes would have been even higher. This accords with Green's figures, which are adjusted by CPI, which show a higher per pauper provision in the Southeast compared to London in 1813; although this soon disappears.⁵⁶

Chadwick in his report which excoriated Reading for its wasteful and extravagant relief system also suggested that the vestries, dominated as they were by small businessmen, were abusing the relief system to get themselves contracts to supply the workhouses and paupers at extortionate costs.⁵⁷ Thus the higher per pauper payments may not have led to better treatment of the pauper. Certainly, as we have seen, the Reading parish vestries were predominantly peopled by the small businessmen of the town (see Chapter 5). However so were the vestries of London; any such problem in Reading would have been potentially the same in London.⁵⁸

When compared to the other Southeast boroughs of Bedford and Guildford, both now operating with one workhouse, it can be seen that contrary to the understanding at the time, uniting parishes and providing a workhouse did not necessarily bring down costs, far from it. The Bedford and Guildford provision is clearly more expensive, even without provision for CPI.⁵⁹

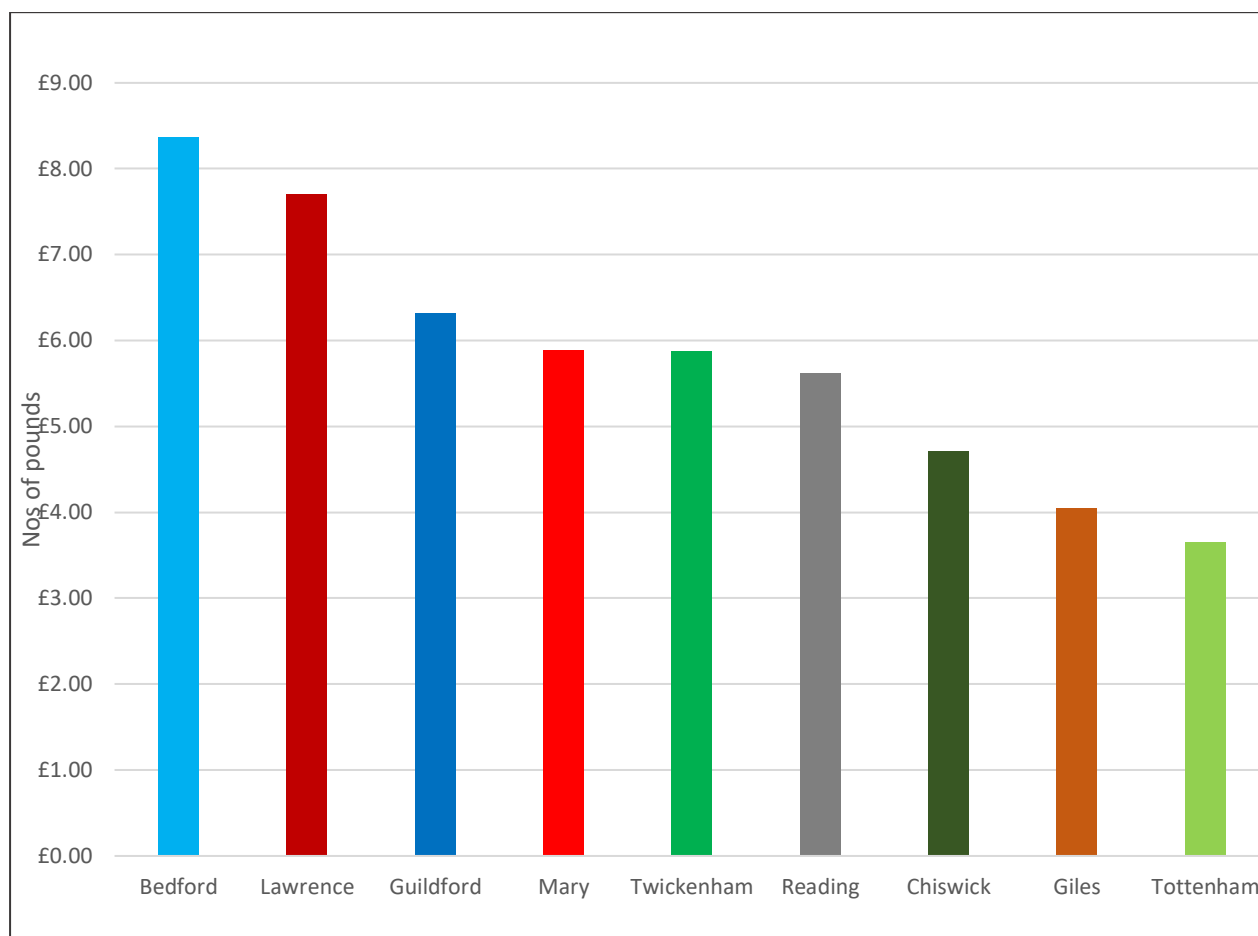
⁵⁵ See: J.S. Taylor, 'A London Parish, St. Martin Vintry' in *Poverty, Migration and Settlement in the Industrial Revolution, Sojourners' Narratives*. (Palo Alto, California, 1989) pp.117-139. D. Green, 'Negotiating Relief: Pauper Encounters with the Poor Law' in *Pauper Capital*, (London, 2010) pp.157-187; D. Green, 'Pauper protests: power and resistance in early nineteenth-century London workhouses' *Social History*, Vol. 31/2 pp.137-159; Report from the select Committee on the Poor Laws (HC, 1817) 462, p.40, Shoreditch, Mile End, Bethnal Green and Whitechapel developed a 'friendly pass' scheme.

⁵⁶ Green, *Pauper Capital*, p.35.

⁵⁷ E. Chadwick, *Extracts from the Information Received by His Majesty's Commissioners as to the Administration and Operation of the Poor Laws: Berkshire* (London, 1837) p201 and p219. For problems with this study see Ch. 1 p.6.

⁵⁸ J. Miller, 'Patricians, plebeians and parishioners: parish elections and social conflict in eighteenth century Chelsea', *Social History*, Vol. 47, (2022) pp372-394, G. Williamson, 'From behind the Counter'; The 1742 Select Vestry Campaign, *The London Journal*, Vol. 42/3 (2017) pp.218-237.

⁵⁹ It is not possible to do these comparisons on a parish basis, as Bedford only returned figures as a town by this time.

Figure 6- 15: Annual relief per pauper after legal costs, 1803: all sample parishes.

Expenditure per pauper could be a misleading metric if it was the case that overseers were simply accepting a much smaller number of people on to their books. King's work on regional differences in relief concludes that this was very much the case across the country, with poor areas simply accepting fewer people to be relieved.⁶⁰ Apparent generosity of provision would only be masking smaller numbers accepted. In order to see how similar the criteria for acceptance is across our sample areas, we would need to see numbers relieved (r) by the wealth of the area (w) against the size of the population (p) (rw/p). Areas of similar size and wealth should be accepting broadly the same numbers if they are operating similar criteria.

Assessing the wealth of the separate parishes and towns at this time is difficult, as figures such as per capita income were simply not collected and would be problematic anyway for a time

⁶⁰ S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England: A regional perspective: 1700-1850* (Manchester, 2000) p.103. He found a marked difference between the Southeastern and more austere Northwestern parishes "Being old, frail or sick did not guarantee help from the poor law in these communities."

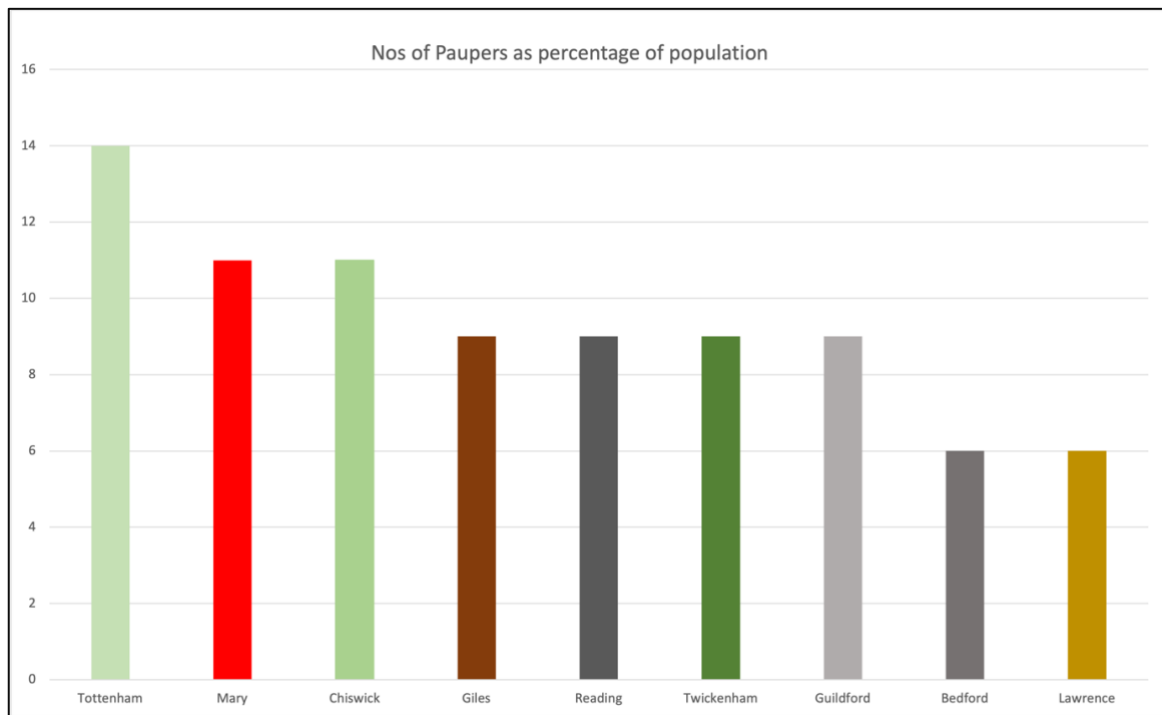
when wealth was not necessarily reflected in income. We can only make informed assumptions. Study of the individual towns and parishes has already shown that they were similar in economic and employment make up. The three boroughs all sat within grain producing areas, which made them subject to the slumps and climactic variations which affected this production. The regions they sat in were poor through the second half of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth.⁶¹ However all three were flourishing market towns, with good communications with London and economies reliant on servicing travellers and importing to London. The Middlesex parishes were reliant also largely on providing market produce for the London market, and none had yet succumbed to the ghettoization of poverty which was already affecting poorer parishes within central London.

While the sample London parishes, particularly Chiswick, may have had the edge in terms of wealth, certainly at the upper end, it is fair to assume that all of our sample areas were broadly within the same band of wealth, with insufficient variation to be particularly statistically significant, as opposed to the large differences between, say, Oxford and an upland hill country township in Yorkshire discussed by King. This cancels the 'w' aspect of the equation leaving only numbers relieved as a proportion of the population.

Figure 6-15 shows that the percentages of paupers vary from 14% for Tottenham to 6% for Bedford and St. Lawrence.⁶² Most of our parishes and towns sit firmly between 9 and 11%. This would probably explain the exceptionally high per pauper relief costs for Lawrence and Bedford, they simply had fewer poor on their books. The correlation is not complete however, St. Mary's pays more in relief than Chiswick, even though they have same percentage of paupers, and the same relief as Twickenham, despite having more paupers.

⁶¹ Green, *Pauper Capital*, p.32: Percentages of Paupers in England and Wales.

⁶² Population 1801 Census/OPR, 1803 Returns x100. Samantha Williams particularly notes the availability of straw-plaiting work in Bedfordshire in keeping poor relief applications down. S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Lifecycle under the English Poor Law, 1760-1834*, p134. Percentage represents claimants only; inclusion of dependents would likely increase this number to more like 30-50%. King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p.141.

Figure 6- 16: Nos of paupers as a percentage of population, 1803

Conclusion

The figures show that Reading, in comparison to surrounding rural areas and the national picture in the years from 1760-1793, managed to prevent its relief amounts from rising as steeply as rural Berkshire and national figures. However it is clearly also the case that other urban areas which did not benefit from the close coordination apparent in the Reading area also managed to keep their costs from rising in this period. In fact two of the London parishes managed, seemingly, to reduce their costs over this period. Even allowing for inflation this relationship holds.

It is then unlikely that the cooperative system was the primary factor in effective cost restraint. Correlation with inflation both nationally and locally shows that Boyer's thesis about seasonal unemployment is more likely to have been the main factor in driving up costs at this time, from which urban areas were relatively insulated. This is underscored by the fact that the two areas which had become completely united and operated with one workhouse in this period, Guildford and Bedford, also have amongst the most expensive provision. A further correlation is clear with the numbers of paupers per population. The places with the most generous provision are also the ones with the fewest paupers. This correlation is not complete however; with St. Mary's clearly more generous in its provision despite a high proportion of paupers. St. Mary's,

and by extension the Reading average, looks to have been on the high side from the beginning of the century, but with a relatively tight restraint on growth. Payments remained high, but did not escalate in a dramatic manner until the last decade of the century.

Legal costs do show a link with cooperation. The most completely cooperating boroughs, Guildford and Bedford have the lowest legal costs, and the least the highest. Cooperation cannot be said though to have kept down the costs of relief per pauper. This runs counter to the contemporary idea that closer cooperation saved money.

3. The impact on the pauper, appeals and interventions

1. Appeal to the magistrate

The 1834 Poor Law Report was excoriating about the role of magistrates interfering in overseers' decisions and allowing more generous relief to paupers than the vestry had originally awarded. While it afforded the magistrates the best intentions, the system, it suggested, was fundamentally flawed;

A pauper claims 3s on the ground that his family consists of five persons, and that he has earned the last week only 7s. The overseers believe that he has, in fact, earned more, or that he might have earned more if he thought fit to exert himself, or that the lowness of his acknowledged earnings is the result of a collusion between him and his employer, in order to throw part of his wages on the parish. The vestry agrees in opinion with the overseer, and the pauper appeals to the magistrate. If questions like these.....are to be decided, it must be a tribunal acquainted with the habits and character of the applicant and of his employees....Can it be expected that it will be performed...by the magistrates who give a few hours a week to the affairs of twenty parishes, who live a distance from the scene of the dispute and know little more than the name of the parties to it?⁶³

While the partiality of the 1834 Report has been discussed, the interference of magistrates and their importance to pauper agency, was widely acknowledged through the eighteenth century and is supported by contemporary study. Peter King in his 2004 work quotes a Somerset parson from 1800

⁶³ Royal Commission: 'Report for inquiring into the administration and practical operation of the poor laws' (HC, 1834) No. 44, p76.

the justices attend to every complaint right or wrong and every scoundrel in the parish crowd to make their complaint.⁶⁴

From Williams' study of two rural Bedfordshire parishes, to Green's extensive study of London, modern studies reinforce this analysis of the magistracy being an important intercessor for the poor, and one fully understood by paupers.⁶⁵ Local Berkshire magistrate, Robert Lee, records three such interventions to provide relief to individuals in one year 1736/7.⁶⁶ Peter King's analysis of Samuel Whitbread's journal, covering appeals from rural Bedfordshire, shows 53% of appeals resulted in an increase of relief for the pauper.⁶⁷ As noted, his work in Essex reinforces this, but he notes that this pattern does not seem to follow within the small borough of Colchester. He does not explore this; simply stating 'this Colchester pattern remains unclear' and goes on to speculate that geographical distance in rural areas made it easier for the pauper to 'triangulate' the system.

2. Reading appeal system: Settlement and removal

In a corporation town such as Reading appeals relating to settlement and removal had to go to the County Bench. Corporate towns with only two or three JPs, who had themselves signed off the rates or approved the removal were deemed to have a strong conflict of interest. This is implicit in the legislation of 1697 and was confirmed in several rulings from the King's Bench subsequently.⁶⁸ We have already seen how inter-borough appeals concerning settlement and removal, (one Reading parish appealing against another), were virtually non-existent from about 1714 onwards. While it was possible for a pauper to take an appeal to a Quarter Session, this was much more typically done by the parish, and the parishes in Reading seem to have agreed not to do this. While removals between Reading parishes were suppressed, they did occur. In the majority of cases a pauper could only fight removal if the destination parish chose to take a case in their own interest. When the parishes had agreed not to do this, then they could only appeal by themselves. King suggests that paupers could access the legal system using the *in*

⁶⁴ From J. Ayres, (Ed) *Paupers and Pig Killers: The Diary of William Holland, a Somerset Parson 1799-1818*, quoted in P. King, 'The Summary Courts and Social Relations in Eighteenth-Century England.' *Past and Present* No 183, (May 2004), pp.125-172.

⁶⁵ Williams, 'Poverty, Gender and Lifecycle' p.162 and Green, *Pauper Capital*, p.157.

⁶⁶ H. Leonard, *Diaries and Correspondence of Robert Lee of Binfield, 1736-44*, (Reading, 2012) pp.16, 56 and 75.

⁶⁷ P. King, 'The Rights of the Poor and the Role of the Law: The Impact of Pauper Appeals to the Summary Courts, 1750-1834' in S. King and P. Jones (Ed) *Obligation, entitlement and dispute under the English Poor Laws*. (Cambridge, CUP, 2015) p.245.

forma pauperis process.⁶⁹ This may have been the case in Essex, but the Berkshire Quarter Sessions show no evidence of this happening.

3. *Relief payments*

Appeals concerning relief however would go to the Reading JPs, as the initial decision was made by the vestry. Peter King argues that most of these appeals occurred at summary courts, informal hearings with often only one justice present.⁷⁰ While JPs were strongly advised to keep notes of these sessions, these do not survive systematically, and work that has been done on them often rely on diaries or other private papers.⁷¹ Unfortunately there do not seem to be any diaries extant which reflect the practices of Reading magistrates. To establish the extent to which such appeals were occurring we need to look at other circumstantial evidence, such as payment books, corporation minutes and vestry minutes.

The Corporation minutes and petitions of the seventeenth century reflect a qualitatively different practice than that which was to develop in the eighteenth. Appeals directly to the mayor and consequent decisions instructing and overruling vestries are recorded occurring on average about once a year.⁷² The nature of these interventions are responses to direct appeals from local people, whether as an initial application, or after a refusal or unsatisfactory decision from a parish.

On the 15th May 1633 the Corporation orders that the St. Giles overseers should support two children in the care of Widow Hobbes, even though she has now moved to St. Lawrences.⁷³ In August 1637 the overseers of all three parishes are ordered to collectively support 'poore Butler', an order which was amended the following July to be simply St. Lawrences.⁷⁴ In August 1649 a petition from Widow Skinner results in an order to the St. Mary's overseers that she should receive an extra 5 shillings and a weekly allowance.⁷⁵ Many of the petitions strongly imply that the Corporation has been the first port of call for the petitioner. By the second half of

⁶⁹ King 'Summary Courts' p. 146, although he simply refers to it, rather anachronistically, as 'legal aid'.

⁷⁰ King, 'Summary Courts' p.126

⁷¹ H. Leonard, *Robert Lee of Binfield*, for example. A.J. Schmidt, *The Country Attorney in the Late Eighteenth-Century: Benjamin Smith of Horbling* *Law and History Review* Vol. 8/2 (1990) pp237-271 is a good example of this genre.

⁷² BRO/R/AZ3/9/1-87 Calendar of petitions, Misc years. 29 applications for relief. 12 further in the Corporation minutes, both broadly covering 1620-1664. While many of the appeals are undated contextually they are clearly from the Civil War period.

⁷³ Guilding, Vol. III p.176.

⁷⁴ Ibid pp.384 and 425.

⁷⁵ Guilding Vol. IV p.331.

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the century the JPs simply send the appellants over to the overseers for their decision initially. In a series of decisions taken in December 1652 Charles Crowder's wife is advised to

Repaire to the Overseers of the Poore of St. Maire's and make knowne her case.⁷⁶

While Judith Johnson is dispatched to the Chamberlain of Charitable uses for 3/4d towards her relief, Goody Brown has obviously a case against St. Giles and

Mr Mayor and Mr Burningham resolve to convent the Churchwardens and Overseers for the Poore there to shewe causes why they doe not relieve her ⁷⁷

In October 1653 St. Mary's Overseers are sent a warrant to provide for 'Skynner's child'.⁷⁸ In line with the findings in Chapter 4, the Corporation is very much the senior partner at this stage, although increasingly applicants are sent to the vestries for initial decisions.

By the eighteenth century the corporation minutes become much more perfunctory. The Quarter Session minute books for Reading in the eighteenth century have not survived, and no payment books survive for St. Giles or St. Lawrences. There is, however, an extensive collection of overseers paybooks from St. Mary's.

4. St. Mary's Paybooks

In the books for 1711-1771 payments can be found which are 'by order of the Mayor'; strongly suggesting that they are not vestry decisions. An analysis of these relies on a degree of confidence that all such decisions should be so minuted in the Paybooks. As has been noted, alongside the annual audit of accounts, the overseers met with the Mayor on a regular basis, certainly in the first half of the century. It seems likely that, informally, the Mayor may have come to agreements with vestries about support for various paupers which may not have been minuted as such. The wording 'by order of the Mayor' would strongly suggest that these are a result of a petty session or summary court decision, and not an informal agreement in discussion with the Mayor. It was in the interests of the overseers to reflect when these had occurred in their accounts, since the annual audit would see them needing to defend

⁷⁶ Ibid p464.

⁷⁷ Guilding, Vol. IV, p.464.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.499.

expenditure and decisions; where decisions had been taken out of their hands it was important to show it.

It is with a degree of confidence then that one can analyse these entries as representative of all such formal orders to the overseers in the Parish of St. Mary at least for the years covered by the books. These show 34 such interventions from 1711 to 1771 (Fig 6-16).⁷⁹ These average about one every 22 months, just under half the frequency of the 1620-64 data. When one looks more closely at the actual orders the 'light touch' becomes even lighter.

Four of the cases are removals, unlikely to have been the result of pauper appeal. One is a rate refund, which does not involve a pauper anyway. Of the remaining 29 cases, 17, over 50%, are for unnamed strangers. Many of these are described as being 'with a pass'; which, while the legality of this is somewhat obscure, was accepted by most magistrates as obliging a parish to relieve the bearer, as long as they continued on their way.⁸⁰ Berkshire did not employ a vagrant contractor such as that employed by Middlesex or other surrounding counties.⁸¹ Consequently walking passes were a common way for the removed to arrive at their destination in this county. It is clear from the expense claims for inter-borough meetings that the three parishes seem to have had an informal agreement amongst themselves that these claimants would be shared among them equally.⁸² It seems likely in the 'Mayor's order' cases that the travellers had appealed directly to the Mayor in the first instance, and he sent them to one of the three parishes to be relieved in a balanced manner.

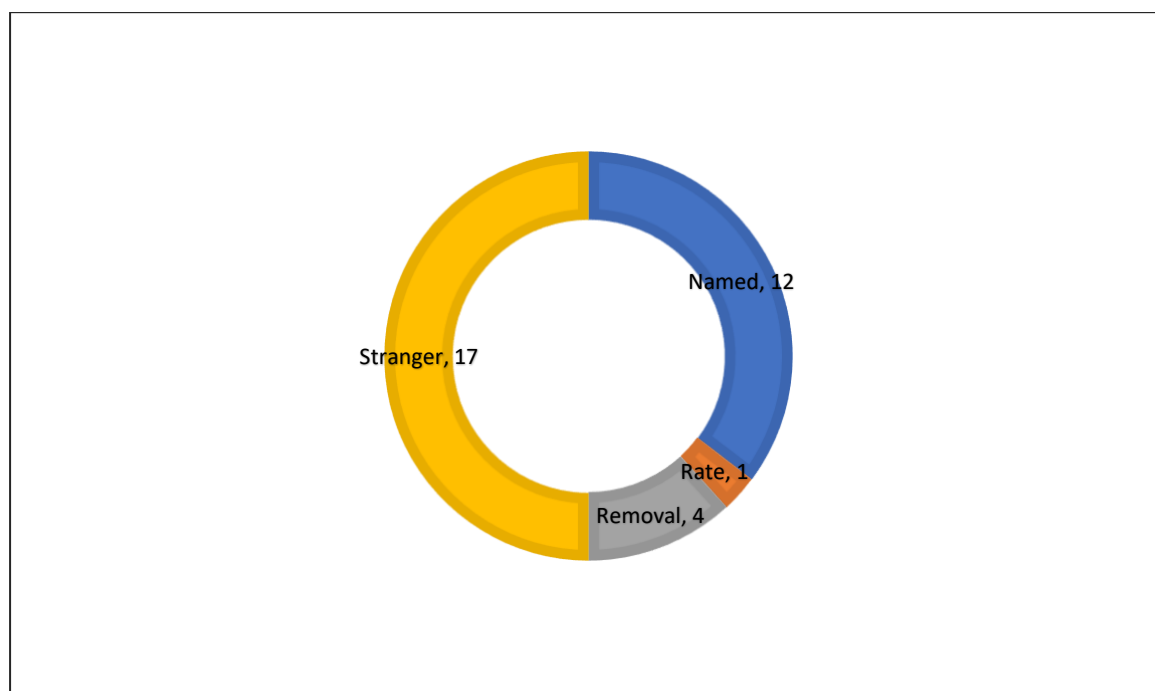
⁷⁹ BRO D/P 98/12/1-184, St. Mary's Paybooks, 1711-1771.

⁸⁰ M. Nueman, *The Speenhamland County, Poverty, and the Poor Laws in Berkshire, 1782-1834*, (New York, 1982), p.112. Gilbert had described this as 'a common practice' used to 'beg or rather extort money from parish officers', Gilbert's Report 1777, quoted in D. M. George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, 1st Edition 1925 (London, Penguin, 1965) p.359. A pass from 1771 is quite explicit that the carrier should not stay 'above 14 hours in any one place' BRO D/P98/13/4/37.

⁸¹ T. Hitchcock, A. Crymble and L. Falcini, 'Loose, idle and disorderly: vagrant removal in late eighteenth-century Middlesex.' *Social History*, Vol. 39/4 (2014) pp.509-527.

⁸² See Ch. 5.

Figure 6- 17: Types of Mayoral intervention, from St. Mary's Paybooks, 1711-1771.



The fact that travellers did approach the Mayor, or his office, directly is underscored at several places in the Corporation minutes. Most notably on the 30th August 1765, when the Chamberlain of Charitable Uses is ordered to reimburse Mr. Abery, the deputy mayor, one guinea, which he had given to a Sergeant Penn. He was, supposedly, in the town to pick up deserters. Embarrassingly it transpires that Penn was himself a deserter, and ‘subsisted himself by such kind of frauds and pretences’. ⁸³ The minutes record that in future no money should be given to soldiers by magistrates, or if they did, they would not be reimbursed.

Precisely twelve decisions are to named individuals, suggesting that they are known to the parish, and may have already approached the Vestry. One is to John White who is ‘of Denham’. Cross referencing with removal certificates shows that he had recently been removed into St. Mary’s parish and had a wife and five children of twelve and under.⁸⁴ The likelihood is that St. Mary’s were reluctant to start paying relief until the legality of his removal had been established, leaving the Mayor to intervene. Two of the others are for the same person (Jane Prescott) and a further one quite probably for a dependent of hers.

⁸³ BRO R/AC/1/22 30th August 1765.

⁸⁴BRO D/P98/13/2/311.

Jane Prescott was the subject of a bastardy appeal to the County sessions in 1731.⁸⁵ The putative father of her daughter is a William Abery, although it is his father, Michael, who appealed against the order. The court decided against Abery, and he was ordered to pay the costs of her lying in and maintenance of the child until she is 12, when he was ordered to pay a further £5. The orders for maintaining her by the Mayor seem to have preceded the successful outcome of the appeal, and lasted only for a couple of months, covering her lying in. The parish carefully itemised the costs and presented Abery with a bill for £13/19/0.⁸⁶ As mentioned above there was an Abery family in Reading which was influential in corporation affairs (Mr. Abery being the gullible deputy mayor), but there is no way of telling whether this William Abery was a relative. Of the seven remaining decisions, to Mrs Sherfield, Margaret Fletcher, Matt Follows, William Justice, William Wheeler, Mary Randle, and Mary Povel these are largely one off payments. Of these only Sherfield stays on the books for any length of time, and she never becomes a 'regular'.⁸⁷

In the Churchwarden Accounts of 1742, there are also 3 references to

relieving a poor passenger upon the Mayor's order⁸⁸

or similar, all for unnamed travellers. This only occurs for the one year however for September, October and November, suggesting some sort of temporary arrangement.⁸⁹

Thus in the 60 year period from 1711 to 1771 only eleven individuals can reasonably be identified as having made use of the agency of appealing to the JPs over the heads of the vestry. There is no guarantee that this was the case even for these eleven, it is simply more likely. Even for these cases, their relief by the parish was generally short-lived and cheap.

5. Other evidence of intervention

Evidence of intervention in other parishes can be picked up from other surviving records. In June 1709 the St. Lawrence's Vestry record that

⁸⁵ BRO Q/SMG/1.

⁸⁶ D/P98/12/48-51, although the book calls him "Avery".

⁸⁷ A 'Wheeler and family' had been removed from St. Mary's in 1751, as a result of a disputed case against 'Grays' parish, which went to the Quarter Sessions. There is no way of telling whether this is the same family.

⁸⁸ BRO D/P 98/12/5/1.

⁸⁹ BRO D/P 98/12/5/1 One seems to be for 'relieving two Turks'.

the parish will stand by the overseers in refusing any order from the Justices for payment of money to any poore out of sessions if the present overseers think it unreasonable.⁹⁰

This was at a time of apparent heightened tensions between this Vestry and the Corporation. The previous Easter the JPs had refused to accept their choice of overseers, the following January it is recorded that they had been admonished by the JPs for distraint of goods in support of rate collection, but that the Vestry would support their overseers.⁹¹ This does reflect an apparent assertiveness on behalf of this Vestry at least against the Corporation at this point.

One long running dispute from this time between St. Giles and St. Lawrence, reflected in both County and parish records, shows the role that local JPs would play. At the Epiphany session of 1706 St. Lawrence appealed against the removal of Anne Messenger and her two infant boys from St. Giles to St. Lawrence. The court confirmed the order.⁹² At some point Anne and her family seem to have moved back to St. Giles, who refused to relieve her. Reading magistrates intervened on the 25th March 1707 and ordered St. Giles to relieve the family, the boys are identified as Thomas aged 5 and John aged 4 and being

very poore impotent, young and not able to worke or maintayne themselves and are in very great want of necessary maintenance.⁹³

By April 1709 Anne was dead and buried at St. Lawrence's church. ⁹⁴ The two boys were removed by St. Giles again to St. Lawrence. Again St. Lawrence appealed to the County sessions.⁹⁵ Here the order was quashed, not because of the merits of the case, but because the removal order had been signed by County JPs, under the misapprehension that the boys were living in Whitley; when they had been living in the Borough part of the parish. At this point (October 1709) the Reading JPs stepped in and signed a removal certificate again for the boys to be removed to St. Lawrence's.⁹⁶ The St. Lawrence vestry agreed to appeal the removal at their meeting in December.⁹⁷ The appeal was heard at the 1709 Epiphany session.⁹⁸ Both parishes had appointed counsel and there was a 'long debate'. In the end the removal to St. Lawrence was confirmed.

⁹⁰ BRO/D/P97 8/1/1 28th June 1709.

⁹¹ BRO/D/P97/8/1/1 7th Jan 1709.

⁹² BRO/QS/01/01 Epiphany 1706.

⁹³ BRO/D/P 96/18/5.

⁹⁴ BRO/D/P 97/1/3.

⁹⁵ BRO/Q/S/01/01 Thomas 1709.

⁹⁶ BRO/D/P96/13/2/5.

⁹⁷ BRO/D/P97/8/1.

⁹⁸ BRO/Q/S/01/01 Epiphany 1709.

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Here the magistrates intervene only when the case has hit an emergency; forcing St. Giles to relieve the family, even though their clear agreed settlement was elsewhere; and producing a duplicate, properly signed, certificate when St. Giles' case fell apart.

A similar intervention can be found in an order to St. Mary's from December 1717 recorded on a later removal certificate. John Godwin an infant

poor, impotent and utterly disabled and likely to perish for want of relief,⁹⁹

whose father, Nat, a tailor of St. Mary's had just been gaoled for debt, was to be relieved by St. Mary's overseers

or show cause why they refuse to do so.¹⁰⁰

St. Mary's picked him up; but located the child's grandparents in Swallowfield, and the child was duly removed there in January 1717.¹⁰¹

In both the cases of the Messenger boys and John Godwin the interventions are on behalf of infants who are in dire and urgent need of support. As infants it is highly unlikely that they are cannily 'gaming the system'; although it is likely that in both cases there were advocates working on the children's behalf. Both these cases are in the opening decades of the century, when cooperation between the parishes was less developed. As mentioned JPs seem to have intervened quite readily in the seventeenth century, but this begins to recede as a noticeable pattern of behaviour into the eighteenth century. The St. Mary's paybooks show that half of the interventions are in the seven years from 1759-66. This period is linked with a deep economic slump, exacerbated by the end of the Seven Years War in 1763 and which was eventually to lead to the widespread riots of 1766.¹⁰² After 1766 there are no more recorded payments 'by order of the Mayor' until the books stop in 1771.

What is minuted in the Corporation records are donations of money to the parishes. For example in 1767 a

⁹⁹BRO/ D/P98 13/12/107.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² See p. 215.

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payment by the chamberlain of charitable uses to the Overseers of St. Giles £7 to apprentice Thomas Roberts.¹⁰³

Or payments directly to paupers themselves

ordered that Willatts the cutter, a poor man of the parish of St. Lawrence be elected to receive 12d a week part of the gift of Pocock and Deane.¹⁰⁴

Or acceptance of paupers into Corporation almshouses

Jones, a poor man of the parish of St. Giles be admitted into one of Wm Kendricks almshouses.¹⁰⁵

Or one off payments to those who have suffered calamities. In August 1764 an order is made that the Chamberlain of Hall Revenue (not charitable income) pay

into Mr. Simeon's hand twenty five guineas as a benefaction towards the support and relief of the poor unhappy sufferers and their families by the late Dreadful Hailstorm.¹⁰⁶

The financial relationship between parish and town was close, with one apparently picking up closely where the other left off. The aldermen had a deal of charity money available to them; and seem increasingly, as the century wore on, to have preferred to augment with this rather than antagonise the parishes by overruling their judgements.

While the St. Mary paybooks are only a third of the potential evidence base there is no reason to think that the JPs would have acted any differently to St. Mary's than the other two parishes. They may not be complete, but they are representative. They, and the small amount of other supplementary evidence suggest that when the mayor did intervene in any major way it was in urgent and severe cases, or when parishes could not agree among themselves. That even these tailed off as the century wore on, except in one period of serious economic distress, and that later interventions were largely requiring parishes to pick up the passing costs of travellers, an

¹⁰³ BRO/R/AC/1/22 17th April 1767.

¹⁰⁴ BRO/R/AC/1/20 11th May 1730.

¹⁰⁵ BRO/R/AC/1/20 23rd Mar 1721.

¹⁰⁶ BRO/R/AC/1/22 27th August 1764.

arrangement seemingly already agreed with the parishes; rather than overturning their decisions.¹⁰⁷

There seems to have been little room for the Reading pauper to appeal decisions against them. The parishes would not take up their case to the Berkshire bench against another Reading parish, leaving them to appeal a removal appeal alone; which the records show did not occur. Appeals to the Reading bench on relief payments seem to have been either sparse, or fruitless, as very few survive. The magistrates were simply too close, financially and socially, to the vestries for this to be a reasonable route. The magistrates characterised in the 1834 report, who had twenty parishes to administer and lived a way distant from them, in the case of Reading had only three, and lived closely among them. For the pauper a far more promising avenue looks to have been to apply for charitable money outside of the parish route. There was agency for the pauper, but not the traditionally stipulated levers alleged in so many of the poor relief reports of the time and subsequent studies.

4. How well supported was the Reading pauper?

Using paybooks as evidence for how the poor were treated is not without problems. Firstly they represent only those who successfully managed to be accepted by the parish as being entitled to relief and ignores the unknowable numbers who approached the vestry and were turned down. Some flavour of those who the parish rejected can be got from removal certificates; but clearly these only cover those that the parish was legally entitled to remove. There must have been many who were unremovable, but not given relief. They presumably could resort to other charities, to petty crime or begging. An illustration of the Abbey gateway in Reading from 1779 clearly shows a beggar receiving alms from a passerby.¹⁰⁸ Robert Lee gives 'a Poor Man 1s' on a visit to Reading in 1739.¹⁰⁹

In addition bald payments of 6d or 1/- tell us little about the impact this money was having on an individual's life. It could have been a valuable augmentation to a person's household budget, or a barely adequate main source of income. Orphaned parish children farmed out to local

¹⁰⁷ See Ch.5 p.155, 'Informal meetings'

¹⁰⁸ Chesham: *View of the Gateway of the Old Abbey at Reading* (Kearsley, 1779). Frontispiece.

¹⁰⁹ H. Leonard (Ed) *Robert Lee of Binfield*, p.174.

widows could have received warm and nurturing care or have been ruthlessly exploited for the amount that the parish was providing for them. Parish women provided to attend births could have been wise, experienced and careful attendants, or more akin to Mrs Gamp from Dickens.¹¹⁰

Nonetheless the exercise of tracing individuals and types through the paybooks can give qualitative insights into the level and extent of support that a Reading pauper could expect, and the differentiation between types of applicant.

1.Regular Pensioners

The gold standard of support from the parish was to be a regular pensioner, paid a fortnightly amount as a matter of routine. Here a 'dead man's shoes' policy seems to have been applied by the Parish of St. Mary. Numbers of regular pensioners change little from 1712, when there were forty-one to fifty-five, in 1762.¹¹¹ In 1738 two names are crossed through from the regular list with the word 'now' next to two new names to be added to the list alongside them. Either two regulars had ceased to qualify, left the parish, or, most likely, died. The wording suggests that the parish sees them as leaving a vacancy, which can then be filled, in this instance by Widow Laycock and Cheeseman's children, all of whom had been on the casualty list for some time.¹¹² This was almost certainly a factor in the parish being able to keep its relief costs down. Stephen King refers to what he calls 'administrative inertia' in the regular pensioners system. Once on it was very difficult to remove them, except through mortal attrition.¹¹³ Thus taking on new pensioners without vacancies would simply see a ballooning of regular responsibilities for a parish over time.

Once accepted as a regular pensioner then the Parish would provide generously. Typically, rents were paid by the Parish, a substantial part of the relief payments. In 1743 'Parish rents' amounted to just under £107, when the total paid for the poor was £635.¹¹⁴ Medical care was provided by the Parish doctor, houses repaired and clothes supplied or mended.¹¹⁵ Shoes and

¹¹⁰ Sarah Gamp, a drunk and incompetent midwife and nurse in C. Dickens, *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*, (London, 2000). First serialised in 1843. See London Lives:

<https://www.londonlives.org/static/ParishNurses.jsp#toc3> for a discussion of their reputation.

¹¹¹ BRO D/P 98/12/1-186, The maximum number was 63 in 1746.

¹¹² BRO D/P98/12/67-69

¹¹³ S. King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p.94.

¹¹⁴ BRO D/P98/12/81-83.

¹¹⁵ Eg Widow Aldridge, broken leg BRO D/P98/12/75-77 Widow Carpenter's windows BRO D/P98/12/70-72 Clothes for Coles boy BRO D/P98/12/105-107.

furniture were bought and tobacco supplied.¹¹⁶ When such pensioners did die the Parish would provide their funeral. This seems to have been far from the bleak ‘pauper’s funeral’ of popular imagination. When Widow Plumer died in 1755 the Parish paid for laying out, a coffin, a bell to toll, ‘cloth’ (presumably to go over the coffin) and a shroud, as well as beer for the bearers.¹¹⁷ The whole came to 11/1d, equivalent to five days wages for a skilled workman.¹¹⁸ This was not an atypical funeral, the following month sees the burial of Widow Ayres at 10/11d. John Thorne’s funeral in 1724 had cost 12/4d and Cornelius May, a particularly long-standing pensioner had a funeral worth £1/2/6 in 1736.¹¹⁹ Both May and Ayres had been pensioners for over 20 years. Tomkins finds similarly generous funeral provision in her studies of the parishes of Holy Cross, Shrewbury and St. Peter le Bailey in Oxford, in contrast to two York parishes where the stark ‘funeral only’ is the most common entry against pauper burials.¹²⁰

About half of the pensioners on the regular list were widows, the rest were largely elderly, disabled or children. This reflects Ottaway’s findings concerning the status of widows as being considered amongst the most deserving poor.¹²¹ Widows would frequently be apportioned jobs within the parish, taking in orphaned children and nursing the sick. Widow Abery becomes Nurse Abery in 1734.¹²² Widow Perry was paid 3/- the same year for ‘examining a straining woman about her being with child’.¹²³ Jane Marks is employed as a midwife, called in to attend strangers at their ‘groaning’ in 1735 and 1736 and also taking in those on casual relief.¹²⁴ This ‘paying the poor to look after the poor’ is a feature of poor relief noted elsewhere.¹²⁵ Williams notes the propensity of some Bedfordshire parishes to pay pensioners to foster orphan children.¹²⁶ Mabel Hughes’ confession before being hung at Newgate tells how she was employed looking after boys in the Aldgate Workhouse after being admitted as an elderly widow in 1739, where she beat one boy to death.¹²⁷ Murphy suggests that this type of local provision was

¹¹⁶ BRO D/98/105-107, Coales ‘tobackin’ is a regular payment. BRO D/98/12/18-20 Bed and furnishings for Thomas Slaughter. BRO D/98/12 111-113, 12 pairs of shoes bought in one fortnight.

¹¹⁷ BRO D/P98/12/114-118.

¹¹⁸ NA Currency converter. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter>, [accessed 5th June 2022].

¹¹⁹ BRO D/P98/12/114-118, BRO D/P98/12/34-41, BRO D/P98/12/60-63.

¹²⁰ A. Tomkins, *The Experience of Urban Poverty, 1723-82*, (Manchester, 2006), p.130.

¹²¹ S. Ottaway, *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Cambridge, 2004), p.180.

¹²² BRO D/P98/12/56-58.

¹²³ BRO D/P98/12/56-58.

¹²⁴ BRO D/P98/12/61-63.

¹²⁵ This looks to have been a general strategy. An 1832 letter in the St. Giles collection from All Saints, Lewes, Sussex suggests that they may give settlement to a St. Giles parishioner in Lewes as his wife is a strong woman and ‘would be very useful in our poorhouse’. DP 98/18/3/28.

¹²⁶ S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and life-cycle under the English Poor Law, 1760-1834* (London, 2011), p.105.

¹²⁷ Ordinary of Newgate Prison: Biographies of Executed Convicts, 12th November 1755. From London Lives: https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?id=OA17551112_n19-1&div=OA175511125511120004#highlight (accessed March 2024).

common in London at the beginning of the eighteenth century, but was eventually replaced, as the century progressed, by private contractors running 'pauper farms'.¹²⁸ Hindle suggests a three tier system for many parishes applied, care by full time parish employees, such as a doctor or nurse, care by relatives and neighbours, applicable to a particular individual, and care by 'irregular' employees of the parish. Evidence from St. Mary's suggests a heavy reliance on the latter.¹²⁹

While being a regular pensioner did not imply a life of luxury, it certainly ensured that you were cared for and did not go without until the end of your life. In 1726, St. Mary's, along, presumably with St. Lawrence and possibly St. Giles, radically reduced their regular pensioners in order to force most into the workhouse. A list of names drawn up at the Easter meeting agrees on only 17 entitled to regular relief down from 45.¹³⁰ Most of these were abandoned orphans, or the very elderly. There are no payments for regulars on the books from that point until 1731, when the regular pensioners go back to 40.¹³¹ The Parish workhouse after 1758 seems to have been intended more for casual claimants, with that list seeing a change after this time rather than regular pensioners.¹³²

2. *Parish children*

Children who were the responsibility of the Parish seem, as far as the bald entries of a paybook can show, to have been a serious commitment. From 1735 we start to see the Parish paying for christening costs as well as laying in, a midwife and 'necessities' for mothers and babies who could not be moved on. Frequent casual payments are made for clothes and medical care for parish children. One example is the Boot children. The father, William Boot (or Boate), ran off to London in 1724, leaving a wife and five children on the Parish.¹³³ The Parish made an effort to track him down to bring him back from London, but he disappeared again. Meanwhile the children were the subject of continual support, with food, clothes and medical care through until 1742, although it is possible that 'Boots wife and family' in later years is the older son grown up and with a family of his own. Either way the family had regular support from the parish, with the oldest educated at the Bluecoat School, the total cost to the parish being well over £12.

¹²⁸ E. Murphy, 'The Metropolitan Pauper Farms,' *The London Journal*, Vol. 27/1 (2002), pp1-18.

¹²⁹ Hindle references a study from Kent. S. Hindle, *On the Parish, The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c1550-1750* (Oxford, 2004) p.266.

¹³⁰ BRO D/P 98 8/2 Vestry Minutes. Apr 1726.

¹³¹ BRO D/P 98/12/48-51.

¹³² BRO D/P 98/12/136-138.

¹³³ BRO D/P 98/12/39-41.

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When a parish child was put out to be apprenticed they could expect a suit of clothes, as well as the cost of the apprenticeship:

Will Aldridge A coat and wastcoate a pare of breeches and shoes a hatt and two shirts and binding him apprentice to Will Loach of Wokingham £7/0/11¹³⁴

James Leggat gets his working tools provided as well in 1724.¹³⁵ However the Parish could take a dim view of parish children who absconded from their apprenticeships; as we see with Beth Sumpter's boy, who had been apprenticed to Robert Littleford in Mapledurham for £7/7/7 in 1723, but runs away in 1726 and returns to his mother.

Sending Bess Sumpters boy to Bridewell and having him whipt and sending him home to his Master at Mapledurham¹³⁶

Costs the Parish 4/-.

The children of vagrants in the Bridewell, or prisoners, were also picked up by the Parish.¹³⁷

3. *Casual poor*

Even for the casual poor, if the settlement was clear, then support could be extensive. Those taken ill were often treated expensively. Several parishioners were sent to St. Thomas' or Guy's Hospital in London for treatment. This could also mean a new suit of clothes, as for Hannah Cooper who was sent in 1744, with

2 shifts, 2 aprons, 2 caps a paire of shoes a paire of stockings, a paire of Pattins, a handkerchief, a gown, 2 pettycoats, a paire of stayes, a hat¹³⁸

with other items at, at a cost to the Parish of £5/7/06. The extravagance of this is indicated when placed against King's analysis of the costs of clothing female paupers in the eighteenth century, looking at a sample of 5 parishes, which finds no mean cost above 40s.¹³⁹ In general

¹³⁴ BRO D/P98/12/39-41. The provision of apparel was discretionary, and overseers could contract the master to do this. Most apprenticeships in Reading appear to have been accompanied with provision of apparel by the overseers.

¹³⁵ BRO D/P98/12/39-41.

¹³⁶ BRO D/P98/12/45-47.

¹³⁷ BRO D/P98/12/73-74.

¹³⁸ BRO D/P98/12/84-86.

¹³⁹ S. King, 'Reclothing the English Poor, 1750-1840,' *Textile History*, Vol.33/1 (2002), pp.37-47, p.43.

payments for clothing seem generous, and while occasional reference is made for buying bolts of cloth for the suits of clothes to be made up by the Parish¹⁴⁰, as Spencer noted in Cumberland and Staffordshire, in general clothing seems to have been bought from retailers.¹⁴¹ In addition to suits of clothes for those going to hospital, relatives were paid to attend, and lodgings would also be paid, as were travel expenses there and back.¹⁴²

When Matthew Justice was sent to St. Thomas' in 1759 his wife was also supported by the Parish in his absence.¹⁴³ William Brittain was admitted to the Bridewell in 1759, but his wife, Anne is sent to St. Thomas' with payments to the Hospital of £1/9/5 and a further 12/6 for her travel and lodging.¹⁴⁴ One of the more generous was for 'Harry' Howses' Boy' (Robert) who was sent to St. Thomas' Hospital in 1720 to be 'cutt for the stone'.¹⁴⁵ He received a new set of clothes worth £1/6/10 and a further £2/4/6 was paid to a Mrs Smith in London to look after him while he was there.¹⁴⁶

Efforts also seem to have been made to concern themselves with those with mental health problems. Those deemed 'lunatick' such as Widow Ward in 1742, Sarah Holmes in 1764 or Sarah Gale in 1719, were kept by the Parish. Gale was eventually sent to the Bethlehem Hospital, at great expense for £8/3/10.¹⁴⁷ Holmes was sent to Richmond to be cared for by a Samuel Alexander.¹⁴⁸

Eventually in 1771 the Parish made a decision to take out a subscription for £2/2/- with the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford to send its seriously ill paupers there.¹⁴⁹ The Royal Berkshire Hospital was not opened until 1839, and even then only severe cases were sent there. As the local workhouses developed they became 'hospitals' for the long term sick and poor.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁰ BRO D/P 98/87-89, 1745.

¹⁴¹ E. Spenser 'Clothing the Poor' in P. Collinge and L. Falcini (Ed) *Providing for the Poor: The Old Poor Law, 1750-1834* (University of London, London, 2022)p.59

¹⁴² E.g BRO D/P98/12/73-74.

¹⁴³ BRO D/P98/12/139-141.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ BRO D/P98/12/27-29.

¹⁴⁶ BRO D/P98/12/140-162, It seems Robert Howse remained the responsibility of the parish for many years. One of the few pauper letters is from a Robert Howse in 1753, in Southwark, asking for relief as 'my children is naked' and if he does not get any 'I and my children must come down'. D/P 98/12/1/216 St. Mary's Overseers Misc papers.

¹⁴⁷ BRO D/P98/12/78-80, D/P98/12/40-44, D/P98/12/24-26. This policy clearly extended into the nineteenth century. A letter dated 25 March 1833 in the St. Giles collection is a bill from Bethnal Green Lunatic Asylum charging £15 for half-years board for one William Jeffries. BRO D/P 96/8/13/51.

¹⁴⁸ The rather ambiguous "*Madgick for Garrett's Girl*" is recorded twice in 1752, opening rather intriguing possibilities for parish resources in dealing with ill health, but is not worth exploring here.

¹⁴⁹ BRO D/98/8/4 April 1, 1771. The Radcliffe Infirmary had opened in 1770.

<https://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/doctors/infirmary/index.html> [accessed June 2023].

¹⁵⁰ RM 5th Sept. 1840.

Even though the initial incarnation of the Poor Law was quite clear that able-bodied men should be put to work, and not supported on relief, this Parish at least seems to have come to the conclusion that it was cheaper for the Parish to tide some families over than send them all to a workhouse. The first instance of a man supported for being unemployed comes in 1760, for George Howard, who has 'no work'.¹⁵¹ In 1764 Joseph May's family are supported because he is 'out of work'.¹⁵² It may be significant that these entries appear at a time of severe economic distress for the country, associated with significant civil disorder.¹⁵³

Care is taken that individuals should continue to have access to means for making a living. Mary Spicer is bought a spinning wheel in 1721, three spinning wheels are bought by the Parish for the Workhouse for 10/6 in 1726, and more bought again in 1741 and 1742.¹⁵⁴ Sarah Cooke has her wheel redeemed by the Parish in the same year.

Redeeming items from the pawnbroker, and debt collectors, was deployed not just for necessities, such as clothes (1723) and work tools (1742), but also for what look to be items which had nothing but sentimental value for the owner such as 'Widow Lemon's clock out of pawn' in 1771.¹⁵⁵ Widow Lemon and her three children are removed shortly after this, so she is not even the responsibility of the parish.¹⁵⁶ This looks simply to be a humane act. A similar act can be seen when Thos Parlour is removed to London and the parish provides

Meate for Thos Parlours Piggs and a woman to look after his house.¹⁵⁷

4. *Unsettled poor*

For the unsettled poor the situation could be very different; but even here a hierarchy of care seemed to apply, with some 'strangers' being dealt with at surprising expense.

¹⁵¹ BRO D/P98/12/145-149. There does look to be an earlier entry along these lines in 1743, but unfortunately the microfilm was illegible at this point.

¹⁵² BRO D/P98/12/140-144.

¹⁵³ See 1766 Food riots below.

¹⁵⁴ BRO D/P98/12/30-32, D/P98/12/45-47, D/P/12/75-77, D/P98/12/78-80.

¹⁵⁵ BRO D/P98/12/36-38, D/P98/12/78-80, D/P98/12/82-86.

¹⁵⁶ BRO D/P98/13/2/184.

¹⁵⁷ BRO D/P98/12/18-20.

5i. Non-vagrant strangers.

In this busy market town, the thoroughfare for many travellers, there were often strangers taken ill at one of the many inns of the town. The Parish picked up the expenses for their care, and that of their families, with surprising regularity, at least in the first half of the century. The reappearance of some inns, most particularly the Welsh Harp in Castle Street, suggests that these inns were even used as a proto 'accident and emergency', with women who had just given birth, or other sick and injured, moved there until they recovered, or died, with the Parish then moving them on or burying them.¹⁵⁸ Sometimes these appear to be picked up from the street. A 'stranger in Castle Street' receives a total of £2/3/0 from the parish in 1735, for nursing and maintenance, before disappearing altogether.¹⁵⁹

The most striking case is that of the person who is simply described as the 'broken legg man'. At some time in 1740 a man broke his leg, either at, or near, the Horse and Jockey in Castle St.¹⁶⁰ He is cared for at the inn for some time, and eventually it was clear that his leg had to be amputated. The vestry decided to pay the Parish doctor to do this. He was then moved to the house of Sarah Gray who nursed him until he could be moved on. In all the cost to Parish was £12/12/0. A huge sum, more than kept the whole Boot family going for eighteen years.

Eccles in her study of sick travellers and their treatment notes that it was actually illegal for parishes to help sick travellers or women in labour, without the authority of the JP from 1691.¹⁶¹ Yet clearly St. Mary's were picking up strangers and paying for them from quite early in the century such as 'Moses Snowke, a stranger being sick at the Welsh Harpe' in 1719, at a cost of £3/10/8d.¹⁶² Or, in the same year, Ann Thompson 'sick at the Welsh Harpe' who is sent on to Bristol ('Bristow') when she recovers.¹⁶³ These do not look to be situations where the authority of the JP was taken and then they were paid for (it would likely have been logged as such) but it seems more like an understanding that the JP would sign off retroactively, probably at one of their regular tavern meetings. Alice Turner's costs for when she was 'brought to bed in Knott's Barn, moved to the Welsh Harpe' also in 1719 seem to be very much responding quickly to a situation. King, in his analysis of medical payments in different types of parishes found that

¹⁵⁸ Thirteen payments between 1717 and 1733 for invalids at the Welsh Harp.

¹⁵⁹ BRO D/P98/12/59-63.

¹⁶⁰ Now known as the Castle Tap.

¹⁶¹ A. Eccles, *Vagrancy in Law and Practice under the Old Poor Law*, 1st Ed 2012, (London, 2017) p.115 (3 William and Mary, c11 s29).

¹⁶² BRO D/P98/12/24-26.

¹⁶³ Eccles, *Vagrancy*, p115.

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medical expenditure, as a proportion of the whole, was much higher in transport hubs and waterside communities; Reading, with its major highways to London and Southampton, and heavy barge traffic along the Kennet and Thames, was both of these, and its medical expenditure reflects this.¹⁶⁴

Eccles also notes that after 1744 many parishes used the provisions of the Vagrancy Act to offload the costs of dealing with a sick traveller onto the county.¹⁶⁵ It is clear from the paybooks that St. Mary's continues to regularly pick up sick strangers costs, at least until 1771. In 1753 there are the 'week's pay stranger at Ratchwells' and a 'stranger ill and nursing' in the same year, or 'paid a blackamoor taken ill' in 1759.¹⁶⁶ As noted the evidence points to an agreement between the parishes in this town to accept, and pay for, travelling casualties, and then share the cost, with the agreement of the JP at a later date.¹⁶⁷

It is probably also significant that brewers, inn-keepers and victuallers formed a number not only of the vestry personnel, but also of the Corporation.¹⁶⁸ Thomas Knapp, at whose hostelry the St. Mary's vestry frequently met, was a vestryman from 1721 and Churchwarden in 1758. The pollbook of 1826 had the largest single occupational group in the electorate as being 'victuallers', exceeded only by 'gentleman'. They were a potent political force in the town.¹⁶⁹ This looks to have been a long-standing situation in Reading. Chick notes that even in the sixteenth century

Of the 76 known innkeepers in the period of study, 32 held civic office, four of which became mayors and two, William Catour and Thomas Aldworth, represented the town in Parliament.¹⁷⁰

Paying an innkeeper to provide food, drink and accommodation for a sick traveller may well have been in many people's interests.

¹⁶⁴ S. King, *Sickness, Medical Welfare and the English Poor, 1750-1834*. (Manchester, 2018), p.125.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid* p.118.

¹⁶⁶ BRO D/P 98/12/ 105-107, 111-113, 139-141.

¹⁶⁷ See Ch. 5.

¹⁶⁸ See St. Giles vestry Table 5-1 p149 and Ch. 4 p.156.

¹⁶⁹ IHR/BC.228/Ber/Rea/1826.

¹⁷⁰ Chick, 'Cloisters and Clothiers: The Social Impact of Reading's transition from Monastic Lordship to Self-Governance, 1350-1600' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2020) p.288.

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6. Rogues and vagabonds

For the less respectable, or conveniently located, poor, relief could be less generous. As has already been discussed 'strangers with passes' were normally given 6d or a 1shilling and then moved on, sometimes by order of the mayor. Vagrancy was a problem for the town, although broadly comparable to other county towns on major routes to London. Although a later dataset the 1824 returns probably bear similarities with latter end of the eighteenth century in Reading. Reading had confined 141 vagrants in its Gaol and House of Correction at the time of the return, while Bedford had 82 and Guildford 199.¹⁷¹

If a person was deemed to be a nuisance to the town, either through not moving on, or begging, the punishment could be severe. Vagrancy was the responsibility of the magistrates, and every so often it appears that the Corporation decided to have a crackdown on vagrancy in the Borough, as in 1774 when 1000 handbills are produced stating that no stranger should be inoculated against smallpox in the town and

The magistrates also will proceed with the utmost rigour against all vagrants against all persons harboring vagrants.....and such vagrants to be publicly whipped or committed to Bridewell¹⁷²

An item from the *Reading Mercury* from 1746 states that an individual who had been caught begging in the town, going from house to house was to be 'whipped on four successive Sundays at the whipping post in the market place.'¹⁷³

In 1738, 1739 and 1745 St. Mary's paid 1/- for a beggar to be whipped.¹⁷⁴ These look to be unfortunate examples; since those vagrants who were not moved on were normally committed to the Bridewell.¹⁷⁵

7. Vagrant and pregnant women.

149 examinations survive from St. Mary's parish. Most of these do not give a reason for the examination, which, contextually, looks to be mostly on marriage, an application for relief; or

¹⁷¹ Vagrant Laws, Returns of Persons and Sums (HC, 1824) No. 357, pp4, 3 and 93.

¹⁷² BRO R/AC/1/22, 21st December 1774. Possibly in response to a Royal declaration.

¹⁷³ RM April 21, 1746.

¹⁷⁴ BRO D/P98/12/67-69; D/P98/12/70-72; D/P98/12/87-89.

¹⁷⁵ For example (all BRO), Robert Eustace, 1726, D/P 98/12/45-47: Mary Carpenter, 1740, D/P98/12/73-74: 3 strangers, 1741 D/P98/12/75-77: stranger at the Red Lyon, 1742 D/P98/12/78-80.

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simply related to a round-up of strangers in the parish. 26 examinations are directly described as 'wandering and begging' or 'rogue and vagabond'.¹⁷⁶ Of these 14 are women and 12 men. Of the women eleven of the examinations are explicit about marital status, and eight of the women are either married or widowed, several of them being soldier's widows or wives. This ratio, considerably scaled up, is reflected in the figures for Middlesex from 1777-1786 which show a breakdown of around 12/15 male to female.¹⁷⁷

This preponderance of indigent women is reflected in the Paybooks. Consistent payments are made simply to remove women from the Parish, from 1713 when a sick woman is moved back to London to 1764 when four women are paid and moved on by order of the Mayor.¹⁷⁸ Fourteen payments, normally of 6d, are for 'great bellyed' or 'breeding women' to move on. Even a family where the woman was pregnant would be moved on as in 'Joseph Bell belonging to Plimouth his wife being big with child gave him to goe away' in 1719.¹⁷⁹ Obviously if a woman had undisputed settlement in a parish, then she and her child were supported, as we in entries in 1745 with

Mary Keswell for her bastard by Thos Watkins¹⁸⁰

Or

For ye expenses of the bastard child of Mary Wright¹⁸¹

in 1738. However the sense that large numbers of single women and their children are being supported, as Williams found in Shefford, is simply not there.¹⁸² There are more entries for people paid to get married, even three at a time, as can be seen in 1746.¹⁸³

If a stranger went into labour in the Parish they were normally taken to an inn or a house to give birth, and then paid to move on, as in 'Mary Stephens a strainger being brought a bed at Robert Sayers and she had in money to go away' in 1726.¹⁸⁴ Or, 1739

¹⁷⁶ The two categories of vagrant outlined in the (17 Geo II c5), Vagrancy Act 1744. S4 and S7

¹⁷⁷ A. Crymble, A. Dennett and T. Hitchcock, 'Modelling regional imbalances in English plebian migration to late eighteenth-century London,' *The Economic History Review*, Vol.71/3 (2018) pp. 747-771.

¹⁷⁸ BRO D/P98/12/7-9, D/P98/12/140-144.

¹⁷⁹ BRO D/P98/12/24-26.

¹⁸⁰ BRO D/P/12/87-89

¹⁸¹ BRO D/P/12/67-69.

¹⁸² S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle*, p.107.

¹⁸³ BRO D/P/12/90-92

¹⁸⁴ BRO D/P98/12/45-47.

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Sarah Applebee, a soldiers wife being delivered of a child at Sarah Miles and ye expenses in her lying and other necessities.¹⁸⁵

One entry implies the labour occurred on the street

Widow Baker, a strainger being delivered of a child in Castle St and keeping of her and the burying of her child and money when she went away in all.¹⁸⁶

It has already been shown how women, and in particular young women, were the most likely to be removed from the town. The St. Mary's paybook reflects a similarly hard line in paying to move women on. Even Cornelius May's daughter, despite him being a regular pensioner and perhaps even reliant upon her for care and company, is moved on in 1726

Cornelius Mayes daughter Ann that marryed a soldier had in money to goe to (Jesstoke?) in Somersetshire being the place of her husband's settlement.¹⁸⁷

'Cox's wife and children' are given 10/- in 1754 to move on and a soldier's wife and children are moved on after being 'left behind on their march' in 1737.¹⁸⁸ Ed Murrell's wife and family are sent on their way after he is sick and dies at the Boot in 1724.¹⁸⁹ Perhaps one of the most tragic, albeit with a fair conclusion is of Mary Sinclere in 1774, recorded in the Berkshire Quarter Sessions as a matter of complex appeal.¹⁹⁰ George Sinclere, was a silkweaver from Glasgow (a number seem to have come and settled in Reading around this time), and Mary from Reading. He disappeared about a year into the marriage leaving her with their own young baby as well as a child of his from a previous marriage. Obviously unable to access the relief system she is picked up 'wandering and begging' in the town and St. Mary's send her away with a 'scotch pass' to Glasgow.¹⁹¹ At Berwick upon Tweed she is encouraged to return to Reading. She is picked up as a vagrant in Yorkshire with the two young children, taken back to Reading where they attempt again to send her back to Glasgow. An appeal is brought on her behalf, and the final legal judgement was that, since her husband had no legal settlement in England, and was anyway now disappeared, her settlement reverted to that of her birth, and St. Lawrence's (where she had been born) was forced to relieve her.

¹⁸⁵ BRO D/P98/12/70-72.

¹⁸⁶ BRO D/P98/12/39-41.

¹⁸⁷ BRO D/P98/12/45-47.

¹⁸⁸ BRO D/P98/12/64-66; D/P98/12/114-118.

¹⁸⁹ BRO D/P98/12/39-41.

¹⁹⁰ BRO Q/S Mg/5 and R/JQ8/2 and D/P96/16/3/2.

¹⁹¹ A 'scotch pass', was a 'walking pass' which allowed unmolested travel to Scotland, rather than the usual punishment for vagrants. It was custom for many years before it became law in 1819. Eccles, *Vagrancy*, p.63.

This system, of either moving women on as vagrants, or paying them to move on, could explain the relatively small number of women examined overall. Of the 126 examinations in the St. Mary archive, 95 are of men, and only 31 of women (about three men to every one woman). This contrasts dramatically with Boulton's findings in St. Martins in the Fields, where, in the period from 1725-1794 6,217 men were examined to 18,852 women, (about three women to every one man).¹⁹² Boulton also finds the parish issuing 90 settlement certificates to women, and 196 to men (31%) , which contrasts sharply with the mere 10% of women in Reading on settlement certificates.¹⁹³ Of course the decisions to issue these latter certificates were not the Reading parishes necessarily, but they were predominantly from parishes around Reading, suggesting a wider culture of not accepting women in Berks and Oxon in comparison with London. Their position also stands in contrast to the way that women may be treated in rural parishes. While an old study, Ashby's work on the rural parish of Tysoe suggests that getting pregnant was a major strategy for women wishing to get support from a parish, or to get married.¹⁹⁴

In the urban parishes of London, women were in demand as domestic servants in the many middling sort and grander houses, while in the rural parishes of Warwickshire, women were more likely to be settled, or have a partner who was settled. In a relatively small corporation towns such as Reading, women were more likely migrants, or partnered to migrants than in rural parishes, but less in demand as domestic servants than in London. This left them peculiarly vulnerable. Women were highly unlikely to get settlement certificates and it seems hardly worth the overseers and JPs time to examine them for that purpose, largely speaking they were paid to move on, particularly if they were pregnant. If the parish had to take responsibility the they would pay them to marry if they could.

8. *Working for the parish: Robert Bussell's coat*

There are some individuals for whom the parish could be almost inexplicably extravagant. By taking on positions in the parish they could avail themselves of seemingly unlimited support. One such example is Robert Bussell.

¹⁹² J. Boulton, 'Double Deterrence, Settlement and Practice in London's West End', in S. King and A. Winter (Ed) *Migration, Settlement and Belonging in Europe, 1500-1900* (Oxford, 2013) p.63.

¹⁹³ Ibid, p 65.

¹⁹⁴ A. W. Ashby, *One Hundred Years of Poor law Administration in a Warwickshire Village*, (Oxford, 1912) p.31.

He first appears on the Parish books in 1724, when regular payments for 'Robert Bussell's quarteridge' appear.¹⁹⁵ The parish pays 5 shillings a quarter for his rent. In 1737 the three parishes meet to discuss their joint policy regarding vagrants.¹⁹⁶ In the same year we start to see Bussell being paid 3 shillings a quarter to take up vagrants. Five of the 12 examinations of vagrants from 1750 to 1770 state that they were 'taken up' by Robert Bussell.¹⁹⁷ The Parish provided him with a coat and a hat. While nowhere in the Paybook or the Vestry minutes is he ever referred to as such, he was clearly operating as the Parish beadle. This title is not used until he leaves many years later.

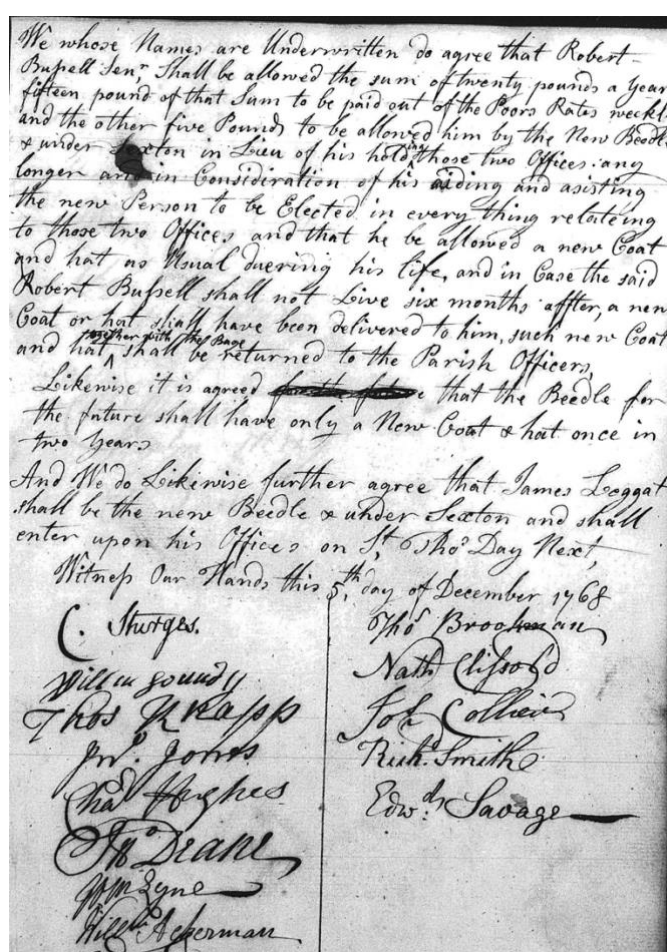


Figure 6- 18: Vestry Minute, March 6th 1767, appointment of new beadle.

In 1739 he is paid 1 shilling for whipping a man.¹⁹⁸ The same year he is paid for a taking a man out of town.¹⁹⁹ It is clear that he has a growing role of enforcement and management of vagrants and beggars in the town. By 1742 he is paid for the bell and grave at a pauper's funeral.²⁰⁰ He also appears in the churchwarden accounts; in 1743 for 'for fetching ye Gift money from Chase Farme'.²⁰¹

In 1742 his coat and hat start to become a rather grander affair, with 'cloth and trimming' for Robert Bussell's coat coming to £4/3/8. About £500 in today's money. In 1745 we get a fully itemised break down of the expenses for his new coat;

3 yards of cloth

2 yards of scarlet plush

¹⁹⁵ BRO D/P98/39-41.

¹⁹⁶ BRO D/P98/64-66.

¹⁹⁷ BRO D/P98 13/4/ 1-13.

¹⁹⁸ BRO D/P98/12/70-72.

¹⁹⁹ BRO D/P98/12/70-72.

²⁰⁰ BRO D/P98/12/78-80.

²⁰¹ BRO D/P 98/5/1.

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2 nails of velvet

2 yards of gold lace

3 dozen coat buttons

Silk twist

1 gold button and loop.

This all comes to £4/17/10, with a further 10 shillings for a new hat, and 8/- for making up the coat.²⁰² A total cost of £5/16/4, nearly £800 in today's money. In 1753 we see £6/6/0 for another coat with lace and hat for him.²⁰³ At the same time his family started to receive money from the Parish, in 1754 3/11d for his son to go to London, and linen for him, and in the same month more gold lace and money for making his coat.²⁰⁴ A John Bussell gets a nurse for his children, who may or may not be a relative.²⁰⁵ His wife is paid a shilling for making three shifts in 1755.²⁰⁶ In 1758 she is paid 5 shillings for 'washing the Table linning'.²⁰⁷ A further 18/- is spent on Bussell's coat in 1756.²⁰⁸ In 1758 3/6d is paid to his granddaughter.²⁰⁹ From about 1764 he does not seem to perform any more duties, and his name last appears as a witness on a settlement certificate in this year.²¹⁰ His quarteridge and 'attendance' fee continued to be paid, and there are payments for his hat in 1766.²¹¹ In 1767 the Vestry minutes record that a new Beadle is to be elected, but that Bussell is to continue with £20 a year until he dies, and a £5 salary to aid the new Beadle (Fig. 6-14).²¹² Crucially, it would seem, he is to continue to get a new coat, and the new Beadle is only to have a new coat and hat once every two years.

It has all the appearances of a person who, along with his family, has made himself indispensable to the parish for a while, (some entries just refer to him as 'Robert'), and then has so established himself that it becomes difficult to refuse him. While the extravagance of the coat could say more about Parish pretensions than his demand, there is no denying that in the years from 1724 to 1768, and beyond, he and his family, must have cost the parish hundreds of pounds in rent, 'attendance' and clothing, well beyond what would normally be expected in

²⁰² BRO D/P98/12/87-89.

²⁰³ BRO D/P98/12/111-113.

²⁰⁴ BRO D/P98/12/114-118.

²⁰⁵ BRO D/P98/12/114-118.

²⁰⁶ BRO D/P98/12/114-118.

²⁰⁷ BRO D/P98/12/1, 1758.

²⁰⁸ BRO D/P98/12/122-127.

²⁰⁹ BRO D/P98/12/134-138.

²¹⁰ BRO D/P98/13/220.

²¹¹ BRO D/P98/12/69-71.

²¹² BRO D/P98/8/4, 5th Dec 1768.

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remuneration for a parish position, and considerably more than his successor, James Leggatt cost.

9. *Criminal behaviour, resistance, and alternatives.*

As mentioned, the Quarter Session books for Reading have not survived. There are a few miscellaneous documents which do survive from the 1770s-1780s. One is a calendar of prisoners in the Bridewell.²¹³ It consists of 16 names, with their crimes and verdicts. Most of the crimes are from one year (1778) but not all of them. The crimes are predominantly petty larceny with force of arms, a couple of serious assaults and one for receiving stolen goods. It is clearly an official document and is bundled in with other Quarter Sessions documents. What is striking about the list is that out of the sixteen cases, eight are women.

In contemporary society it is so accepted that crime is predominantly masculine that gender is often seen as the strongest single predictor of criminal involvement.²¹⁴ Most particularly violent crime and crimes involving weapons. Yet four of the seven thefts involving 'force of arms' on this list, are perpetrated by women. 'Force of arms' probably covered a wide range of behaviour however and could simply be a push or a shove, nonetheless it implies a confrontational crime.

Alongside this is a set of seven bonds for transportation, or notes from Quarter Sessions handing down transportation verdicts, all to North America.²¹⁵ Of these, two are for women, one for obtaining goods by false pretences, and the other for petty larceny. Analysis of the characteristics of 18th century transportees to America shows that typically they were male (around 80%), young and had committed petty larceny through economic necessity.²¹⁶

Lists of defendants for the Berkshire Quarter Sessions and Assizes show no such feminised breakdown.²¹⁷ MacKay's study of thefts tried at the Old Bailey from 1779-1789 found a 2:1 preponderance for men.²¹⁸ Beattie's study of women's crime in Surrey and Sussex found a

²¹³ BRO R/JQ/1/10.

²¹⁴ Messerschmidt and Tomsen, 'Masculinities, Crime and Criminal Justice,' in the *Oxford Handbook of Criminality and Criminal Justice* (Oxford, 2012).

²¹⁵ BRO R/JQ/1/2/1-11.

²¹⁶ R. A. Ekirch, *Bound for America: The Transportation of British Convicts to the Colonies, 1718-1775* (Oxford, 1987) p.50.

²¹⁷ RM March 3, 1745; March 1, 1756.

²¹⁸ L. Mackay, 'Why they stole: Women in the Old Bailey 1779-1789,' *The Journal of Social History*, Vol. 32/3 (1999) pp. 623-639.p.624.

similar masculine predominance.²¹⁹ Beattie does find women criminals more prevalent in urban Southwark, however, and more likely to take part in such urban crimes as shoplifting and pickpocketing.²²⁰ The crimes listed for the Reading women, stealing linen and a gown, and even one leather shoe, suggesting a level of opportunism. One woman looks to have had more of a career, Hannah MacNeal 'being a person of evil name and dishonest conversation' is charged with receiving stolen goods.²²¹

This tiny surviving sample suggests the intriguing possibility that crime, including violent crime, in Reading at this time was not only more feminised than modern patterns of criminality, but also than contemporary patterns.²²² If that were to be the case, and a lot more evidence would need to be gathered to reinforce this, the ruthless poor relief system that made it almost impossible for a young single woman to arrive and establish herself without fear of removal must form part of the fabric which would foster this.

With so many women marginalised and unable to access the relief system one would expect to see very high levels of prostitution in the town. The evidence base as available is remarkably silent on this, prostitution was not a crime, and we would need to look for evidence of it, or coerced sexual behaviour in other ways. Clearly many women end up the wrong end of a bastardy investigation; but, generally if the examinations are anything to go by, these were largely the outcome of steady relationships and promises of marriage. Occasional payments are suggestive. Two shillings was paid to 'Tim White's Harlott being sick' in 1712.²²³ In 1717 the parish overseers are in Newbury for sessions 'about John Trudall Standley's mistress and children'²²⁴ It is almost certain that prostitution did exist in Reading, as everywhere, in a variety of forms. A sense of women living on the borderline of poverty resorting to sex for payment or favours, or coerced through other means, comes through in the bastardy and vagrancy examinations. Some of the bastardy conceptions are in the inns of the town or servants

²¹⁹ J.M. Beattie, 'The Criminality of Women in Eighteenth-Century England' *The Journal of Social History* Vol. 8/4 (1975) pp.80-116.

²²⁰ Beattie, 'Criminality', pp.93-94, Beattie puts the higher criminality of women in urban settings down to the relative freedom that women enjoyed, and the uncertain nature of employment. She does not look at poor relief provision, but as Boulton's study of St. Martin in the Fields suggests, it may be that women were less frozen out of the relief system in London. J. Boulton, 'Double deterrence'.

²²¹ BRO R/JQ/1/16.

²²² J. Hurl-Eamon, 'Female Criminality in the British Courts from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 21, No 3 (2009), pp161-169 Reviews of studies of female criminality, two of the eighteenth century, suggests that women were less likely to appear for violent crimes. p162.

²²³ BRO D/P98/12/5-6.

²²⁴ BRO D/P98/12/18-20.

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‘seduced’ by masters.²²⁵ Hendersen’s study of prostitution in poorer parishes of London certainly found a relationship between women refused relief and turning to prostitution, although there the implication is that the parishes refused relief because they considered the women could support themselves by prostitution.²²⁶

The only real evidence for this as a state of affairs comes early in the nineteenth century, when a parliamentary inquiry into the conditions of silk weavers, prompted by petitions from Coventry, Macclesfield and Reading, heard from William Shaw, a silk weaver from Reading.²²⁷ He had been a silk weaver since 1780, and implied that the situation for silk weavers had always been bad. When there was no work he had been forced on the parish, when he was given relief and work on the roads and at a gravel pit. He was a parishioner in St. Lawrence. In his evidence he states that many young people are taken on under a ‘half apprenticeship’ scheme, whereby they work on apprentice rates for a set number of years and are then let go unless they can buy their way into the concern. Of course, most cannot. John Berkeley Monck, owner of Coley Park Mansion, but also a parish officer at this time, had warned local parents against letting their children take this work on.²²⁸ He

WS:forewarned the people not to put their children to it, because it produced their destruction, and brought the children on the parish, or if they were girls, drove them on the town as prostitutes.....

Chairman: Do you know, or have you heard, of many of those apprentice girls out of their time, and not getting other relief, resorting to prostitution on the street?

WS: It is the common rumour of the town.²²⁹

The complicity of the parishes is compounded by the fact that they were putting parish children into apprenticeship with these ‘ribbon engine weavers’ for years before.²³⁰

²²⁵ BRO D/P98/15/1/5 and 14, D/P98/15/2.

²²⁶ T. Hendersen, *Disorderly women in eighteenth-century London: prostitution and control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830* (Taylor and Francis, London, 1999) p.18.

²²⁷ Select Committee ‘Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee appointed to consider of the several petitions relating to Ribbon Weavers,’ (HC, 18 March 1818) No. 134.

²²⁸ For more on Monck, see Ch. 7 p240.

²²⁹ Select Committee, ‘Minutes of Evidence’, (HC, 1818), p156.

²³⁰ BRO D/P98/14/1/16 (1800).

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10. The 1766 riots

1766 saw some of the most serious and widespread rioting of the eighteenth century. The riots have been the subject of some study for at least 60 years.²³¹

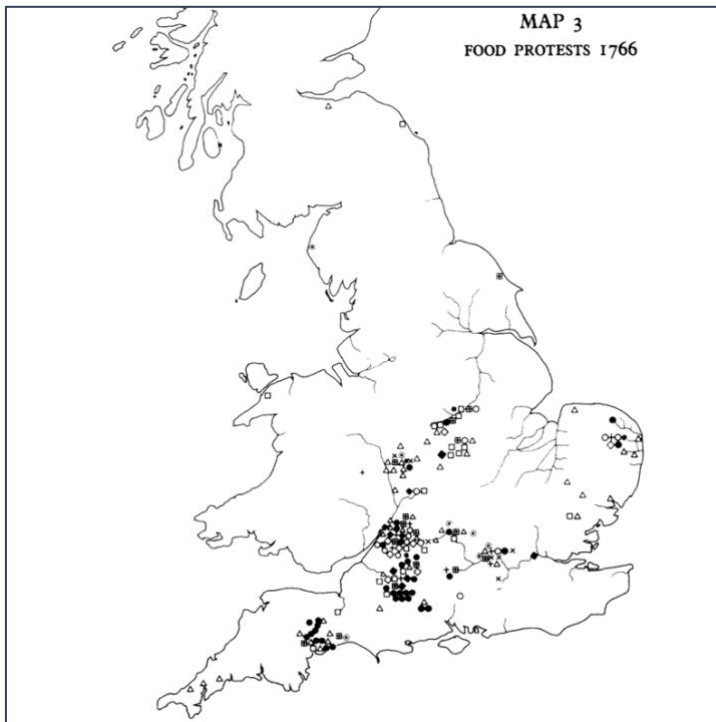


Figure 6- 19: Incidence of food riots in 1766, from *The Atlas of Rural Protest*.

The riots were in response to an already worsening economic situation exacerbated by the end of the Seven Years War. Building pressure on St. Mary's relief system can be seen from the early 1760s. In 1764 the whole Vestry had to help the Overseers distribute relief, so great were the numbers in need.²³² Particularly poor harvests in the south and midlands in 1766, combined with a government decision to encourage the export of wheat overseas, created serious food shortages. In response to wagonloads of wheat being taken from markets and farms to ports, crowds intervened forcing the sale at a 'fair' price, while threatening carriers and 'middle-men'. The riots broadly affected the Midlands, South, and West country, as

well as Berkshire and the area around Reading (Fig 5-11).²³³ The Corporation minutes for September 2, 1766, record the decision

that the Town Clerk do immediately wait on Colonel Dodd one of the Members in Parliament for the borough to beg his interposition with his Majesty's secretary at war that either a Troop of Horse or a company of foot may be sent hither to assist the magistrates in keeping the peace of the borough and protecting the inhabitants and their properties against the riotous mobs daily assembling and committing outrages in their neighbourhood.²³⁴

²³¹ See for example: G. Rudé, *The Crowd in History, 1730-1828* (New York 1964) pp33-46, E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, Vol. 50 (Feb 1971) pp76-136, D. E. Williams; 'Moral Markets and the English Crowd in 1766', *Past and Present*, Vol. 104 (Aug 1984) pp56-73, p72. A. Charlesworth and A. Randall, 'Morals, Markets and the English Crowd in 1766', *Past and Present* Vol. 114 (Feb 1987) pp200-213, C. J. Griffin, *The Politics of Hunger: Protest, Poverty and Policy in England c1750-c1840* (Manchester, 2020).

²³² BRO D/P98 8/3 Vestry Minutes 10th May 1764.

²³³ A. Charlesworth (Ed), *An Atlas of Rural Protest in Britain, 1548-1900* (London, 1983) p.91.

²³⁴ BRO R/AC/1/22, September 2nd, 1766.

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Clearly the food riots had spread well into the Borough and had become the responsibility of the Corporation and Magistrates. Man, writing fifty years later, records that disturbances in Reading were 'happily prevented' by the arrival of a troop of horse; although the minute suggests rioting had already broken out; and Williams' research would also suggest otherwise.²³⁵ Sadly editions of the *Reading Mercury* for that month have not survived.

Man also says

Anonymous letters were sent to the magistrates and principal farmers, threatening with the most horrid imprecations to burn them and their houses, if the prices of grain were not reduced.²³⁶

Thompson notes that surveillance and management of the price of grain in Reading had actually remained fairly consistent and vigilant through the first half of the eighteenth century through the operation of the Court Leet.²³⁷ The Corporation had instigated a subscription for cheap bread to be circulated to the poor in 1757.²³⁸ The response to this rioting was both 'carrot and stick' on behalf of the Town. A special commission was held to sentence convicted rioters. Man has it that this was held in the December, although the *Reading Mercury* of 1767 reports it as occurring in the following March.²³⁹ Both agree that of the three men sentenced to death for rioting, two were reprieved. Man then tells a rather romantic story concerning the one condemned to hang, that no tradesperson in Reading would provide the rope, so the hangman had to find his own, old, piece of rope to do the deed.

Responses to ameliorate the hardship seems to have been left to the parishes. In September 1766 the problem was so acute that St. Mary's parish had to borrow £200 to 'pay ye poor of the parish'.²⁴⁰

In January 1767 the *Mercury* records:

On Tuesday last Rev. Mr. Sturges and the churchwardens of St. Mary's parish in this town collected a subscription from the inhabitants of that parish for the relief of the poor; whose distresses at this time call aloud for Redress. So truly laudable an example was followed by the parishes of St. Lawrence and St. Giles and, we hear, that the whole subscription of the three parishes amounted to £150.²⁴¹

²³⁵ J. Man, *The History and Antiquities, Ancient and Modern, of the Borough of Reading in the County of Berks* (Reading, 1816) p.70.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Thompson, 'The English Crowd', p.106.

²³⁸ BRO R/AC/1/21, 24 Jan 1757.

²³⁹ *RM*, 7 Mar 1767.

²⁴⁰ BRO D/P98/8/4 September 1766.

²⁴¹ *RM*, Jan 17, 1767.

The rioting in and around Reading seems to have been no worse; and if anything less severe than that which occurred in the west of the Country, and even in other parts of the County such as Newbury. It is difficult to associate the rioting in Reading with the nature of the relief system; it was a general response to a specific government policy. What is clear is that the crisis did put pressure on the relief system, and the underlying economic problems from around 1757 had been doing so for some time. It is probably no coincidence that it was about this time that St. Mary's moved to provide a workhouse, and all three parishes decided to reform their rating systems.²⁴²

11. Resistance to the workhouses and authority figures

It is quite probable that the paupers of Reading did not welcome the arrival of the parish workhouses. Resistance to the Oracle experiment of 1726 is hinted at in the SPCK's account.²⁴³ Again evidence is sparse, but one or two details are telling. Detailed accounts survive for the building of St. Giles' Workhouse in 1746. Included in the items is one for 'Taking ye Bricks out that ye People throwed in ye well'.²⁴⁴ No workhouse accounts survive for this period; although, as noted Eden described St. Mary's as clean and airy; while, again, as noted Chadwick had them as palaces of indulgence.²⁴⁵ Other than this there is no real record of dislike or resistance to the workhouses once they were running until the distressed years of the early nineteenth century. Tomkins' findings about the Oxford and Shrewsbury workhouses similarly finds them more tolerated than their post 1834 counterparts

Workhouse inmates may not have been actively pleased with their lot, but neither were they entirely dispossessed.²⁴⁶

Payment books occasionally will give hints at violence targeted at St. Mary's Parish. One overseer in St. Mary's in 1722 has a payment of 1/6 to 'Francis Chamberlin for crying about my windows and George Walker for mending them'.²⁴⁷ 'Crying' in this context almost certainly meaning 'alerting', which would imply a deliberate shattering; and the fact that the Parish is picking up the tab suggests that it may have been related to his official capacity.

²⁴² See Ch. 4, p.117, St. Mary's parish seem to have experimented with the idea of using the workhouse as a cotton manufactory at this time, to employ children, appointing a William Shepherd to oversee the work. This initiative however seems short-lived. BRO D/P 98/8/3, various decisions over the summer of 1767.

²⁴³ Anon, *An Account of several workhouses for employing and maintaining the poor* 1st Ed. 1725, (London, 1732), pp.89-90.

²⁴⁴ BRO D/P 97/12/17.

²⁴⁵ Chadwick, *Extracts*, pp.215-226.

²⁴⁶ Tomkins, *Experience*, p.72.

²⁴⁷ BRO D/P98/12/33-35.

The mayor also could be the target of threats and intimidation, as in 1753 when threatening letters were sent to Harry Austin Deane; but this was often to do with wider economic issues. Evidence from early in the nineteenth century would suggest that the workhouses were often scenes of violence and disorder; but by this time indoor relief had become the more usual recourse of the parishes.²⁴⁸

12. *Stealing*

The existing records of crime in Reading at this time suggests that it was predominantly petty theft which dominated the case load of the quarter sessions. It is almost impossible to make sensible comparisons against modern patterns of offending, since many behaviours, relating to drugs, weapons, sexual offences and public order are criminalised and policed now in ways in which they were not in the eighteenth century. Most of the theft appears to have been opportunistic, items taken from stalls or shops or when hung out for washing, and many of the offenders young and as has been mentioned, female.²⁴⁹ This suggests strong economic imperative, with an underclass frozen out of the traditional support systems of parish relief and charity.

Poaching sees fewer offenders brought up before the magistrate; although the pages of the *Reading Mercury* are peppered with adverts from local landowners providing rewards for stolen stock, or warning against it. This would suggest that it did occur at an endemic level, but it was difficult to catch the perpetrators, while being taken very seriously by the landed gentry of the surrounding area.²⁵⁰ On the evidence available however it is impossible to say whether it was any more prevalent than other areas in the surrounding countryside. Long Wittenham in Oxfordshire is described as 'infested' with poachers in the *Mercury*, and a letter to the *Mercury* in 1754 signed by local gentry concerned the preserving of game and fish

within their several Manors, Parishes and Districts in the Counties of Berks and Oxford.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ See Ch. 7.

²⁴⁹ BRO R/SQ1/14, R/JQ/1/16.

²⁵⁰ For more on the socio-politics of anti-poaching laws E.P. Thompson's *Whigs and Hunters: The origin of the Black Act* (London, 1975) remains an influential study.

²⁵¹ RM Sept 23, 1754.

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Poaching was a problem in the areas surrounding Reading, and probably provided a useful augmentation to the poorer families, but there is nothing to suggest it was any worse than in the surrounding rural areas.

Something of the resort to theft because of difficulties accessing poor relief comes through in the St. Giles' letters from the early nineteenth century. Charles Hill, living in Gloucester but claiming from St. Giles says that he may 'have to go robbing' if he cannot get relief from them.²⁵² Or, perhaps more worrying for the overseers, return with his family to Reading and the workhouse.

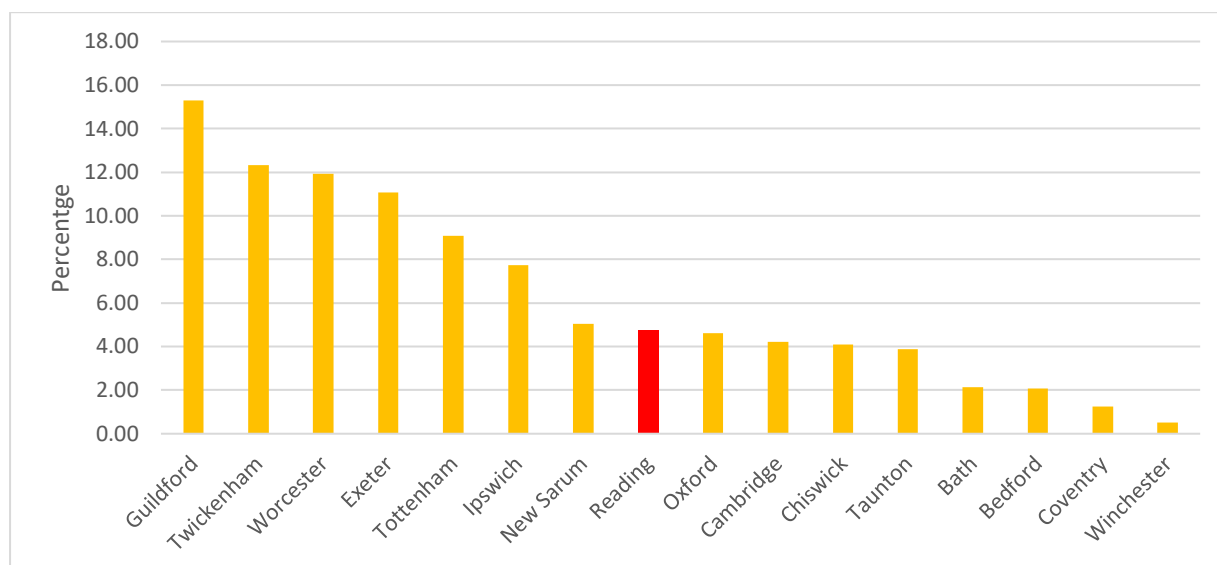
13. Friendly Societies

Friendly societies started to develop in earnest in the second half of the eighteenth century. Broadly speaking they were local associations of working men or women, which were normally located in public houses. Members agreed to pay in a certain amount in order to be able to claim a certain amount out if they were unable support themselves for any reason. They were supposed to be a better alternative to parish relief. Their numbers grew after Roses Act of 1795 which allowed for their better regulation; and also associated membership with settlement.²⁵³

The 1803 Overseers Returns asked for numbers of friendly societies and membership numbers, allowing for a comparison, at least for the end of the century, for Reading, its comparator boroughs, other towns and cities, and the national average.

²⁵² BRO D/P 96/18/3/14, 24 Mar 1812.

²⁵³ E. K. Wallace, 'The Needs of Strangers: Friendly Societies and Insurance Societies in Late Eighteenth Century England.' *Eighteenth-Century Life*, Vol. 24/3, (2000) pp.53-72.

Figure 6- 20: Percentage of population members of Friendly Societies in selected boroughs, 1803.²⁵⁴

Friendly society membership in Reading sits broadly below average; although within the medium range. There is little correlation between membership of friendly societies and relief per pauper. Bedford and Guildford both had very high relief per pauper, yet sit at the opposite ends of the Friendly Society membership spectrum. Friendly Society membership could rely upon a variety of factors, quite possibly as much to do with energetic advocacy and prevailing fashion within the town as anything else.

These could be precarious institutions for working people; their very small size and localisation made them vulnerable to local economic factors. Many came and went fairly quickly, leaving their members exposed. King's analysis of cases brought to the eighteenth century Essex courts found a 'growing number' were from friendly society members left out of pocket by collapsed organisations.²⁵⁵ A judgement from the Berkshire Quarter Sessions in 1823 gives a legal opinion that a society set up in the Castle in Castle St. had never been legally constituted, thus a man who made an application to the parish on the basis that he had been expelled from the society, had no call on the parish.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ 1803 *Overseers Returns* and 1801 *Census*.

²⁵⁵ P. King, 'Summary Courts' (2012) p 144.

²⁵⁶ BRO D/P96/18/5: 1823.

14. Pawnbroking

The Paybooks show evidence of the Parish paying to redeem items from pawnbrokers from as early as 1723, when Margaret Butler had her clothes redeemed before being removed from the town.²⁵⁷ Occasional payments like this are seen throughout the century, suggesting that pawnbrokers could be the resort of some poor even before they applied for relief. Tomkins study of the books of one York pawnbroker shows that, while poor women were frequent customers, actual paupers rarely used the shops, quite probably because pawnbrokers saw them as too much of a risk.²⁵⁸ In her study of pawnbroking in the eighteenth century she refers to the paucity of material from the first half of the century, and outside London especially.²⁵⁹ This could be some suggestion that Reading may have been in the vanguard of the practice in provincial towns. By 1785 pawnbrokers in Reading can be named, such as Slade and Ofborn of Butcher Row in a *Mercury* advert as the place where a watch should be taken to receive a reward, of half a guinea.²⁶⁰ The association between pawnbrokers and stolen goods was much remarked at the time, and can be seen also in Reading.²⁶¹ In 1786 Robert Crumplin, a servant from Southcote, was seized and searched in the Broad Face Inn on suspicion of robbery and had 'nine duplicates of pawnbrokers tickets' in his pockets.²⁶² A letter written to the *Mercury* after a burglary in 1770 with lists of stolen goods is addressed to 'all pawnbrokers.....that they would be so kind as to give..information thereof'.²⁶³ The pollbook of 1826 shows two pawnbrokers voting, James Bourne of Mill Lane and Jacob Wright of Fisher Row.²⁶⁴ While it is difficult to tell whether these pawnbrokers were a useful resort in hard times, or a ruthless exploitation of the poor, they were clearly a settled part of Reading life probably from the early years of the eighteenth century, and the apparent regular resort of the poor.

15. Making shift

Many recent studies have concentrated on the strategies used by the poor to augment their income when their support by the parish was inadequate. Much as above a study of this is only relevant to this thesis if it can be demonstrated that more recourse to supplemental strategies

²⁵⁷ BRO DP98/12/36-38.

²⁵⁸ A. Tomkins, Pawnbroking and survival strategies of the urban poor in 1770s York, in S. King and A. Tomkins (Ed) *The Poor in England, An economy of makeshifts*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2003) p183.

²⁵⁹ A. Tomkins, *The Experience of Urban Poverty, 1723-82: Parish Charity and Credit* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2006), p204.

²⁶⁰ RM 4th July 1785.

²⁶¹ Tomkins, *Urban Poverty*, p.206.

²⁶² RM 4th September 1786.

²⁶³ RM 17th September 1770.

²⁶⁴ IHR/BC.228/Ber/Rea/1826: 1826 Pollbook.

was happening than in other non-cooperating boroughs. This is almost impossible to demonstrate. A brief overview of the opportunities to do so in the town, and a garnering of evidence that the poor were taking advantage of it, is all that can be provided.

The traditional, rural, ways of supplementing income, such as gleaning and use of common land and woods, were of course not open to the majority of the population of the Town, although, presumably the orchards and vegetable gardens on the outskirts would provide opportunity. There is evidence that the parishes encouraged some enterprise. The St. Mary's churchwarden accounts of 1807 show payments for '33 Hedgehogs. Sparrows, polecats and a stoat'.²⁶⁵ This strongly suggests that the practise, noted historically elsewhere in Berkshire, of paying per animal for catching and killing creatures considered nuisances continued in this urban parish. The hedgehogs look to be 3d each, and a stoat 6d.

One of the most common set of opportunities for those looking for supplementary income in a town like Reading would have been picking up tips from travellers coming through the town. This would have been anything from portering to attending to horses. Edward Newbury's examination in 1757 shows that he had worked at the Horse and Jockey

in the service of Mr. Thomas Platt as hosler.....without any hiring or wages except the usual gratuity given by customers.²⁶⁶

In an economy such as Reading's at this time there is a narrow distinction between 'making shift' and 'casual labour'. The wharves, malthouses, inns and barges would have provided plenty of opportunity for bits of work to have been picked up from time to time. Richard Hartwell came to Reading and 'did day work for several years'.²⁶⁷ Semi-skilled workers could turn their hand opportunistically to whatever was available; John Baker came to Reading 'working as a pipe maker and sometimes as a barber'.²⁶⁸

The last resort for many males would be to join the armed forces. Examinations are peppered with men who, having a broken apprenticeship, or not having gainful employment, join the

²⁶⁵ BRO D/P98/5/4, Joan Dils found similar instances across Berkshire. *'Politics, poverty and polecats: parish life from Tudors to Victorians in some churchwarden accounts from Berkshire and Beyond'*, a talk given on behalf of the Berkshire Record Society, 24/4/23.

²⁶⁶ BRO D/P98 13/3/494, St. Giles Examinations this seems to have been a common practice for ostlers, Henry Crumplin worked at the Swan Inn, Hartford Bridge, Hamps, as head ostler for 12 years 'but never was hired'. BRO D/P96/13/4/39, although William Bartlett earned 4/- a week as an ostler at the Crown in 1781, BRO D/P96/13/4/39.

²⁶⁷ BRO D/P96/13/4/11, St. Giles' Examinations.

²⁶⁸ BRO D/P96/13/4/96, St. Giles' Examinations.

army or navy.²⁶⁹ Although the press gang was in operation, a pressed man seems normally to have been identified as such.²⁷⁰ For women, the example of the parish, employing women to nurse, clean and launder, gives an indication of the casual labour available to them.

While it is impossible to say that the tight and restrictive poor relief policy of the town forced more people to operate in a grey economy of casual work than would otherwise have been the case, it clearly was the case that there was a lot of this work available, and many subsisted on it for years.

Conclusion

The Reading parishes, while not fully unified, and operating separate workhouses, still cooperated closely. For the town as whole this may have had the effect of cutting down on legal costs, but it certainly does not seem to have saved money on pauper provision. Reading, like more unified boroughs such as Bedford and Guildford, saw high per capita pauper costs through to 1803.

For the pauper, while they could be well treated if they fitted the right categories, their opportunities for negotiating their way through the system were limited. The system operated very much on the terms of the gentry and businesses of the town through most of the eighteenth century. The agreement not to take action amongst Borough parishes effectively locked paupers out of appeals against removal within the town. Reading magistrates were loath to overturn vestry decisions much beyond 1720, except in the period of acute economic distress from 1759-66. While support for the settled poor, and for travellers at inns, was comprehensive and generous for the period up to 1771, and seemingly afterwards if the costs are anything to go by, if the decision went against you, you had nowhere to turn. In particular this seems to have affected young women, who all three parishes look to get off their books and moved on at the earliest opportunity.

What evidence there is suggests that this left little recourse for many women than begging, petty crime and prostitution, a situation which may have been worse in Reading than elsewhere,

²⁶⁹ All BRO: Alexander (1781) D/P98/13/4/39, Holliwell, (1751) D/P98/13/4/8 Hutt (1756) D/P98/13/4/7, Gill, (1767) D/P98/13/4/5, Avery (1743) D/P98/13/4/328b Chandler, (1715) D/P98/13/4/345 Hicks (1727) D/P98/13/4/363.

²⁷⁰ Davis (1768) D/P98/13/4/3.

but needs much more data and research to substantiate. Certainly, stealing, poaching and rioting were as prevalent in Reading as anywhere, but there is no suggestion that it is any worse than in the country at large.

The control of the poor relief in Reading shows every sign of retaining a paternalistic approach, where the gentry and 'middling sort' felt an obligation to their 'own' to look after them, and provide in difficult times, well towards the end of the century. What 'agency' paupers may have had would have been to navigate the complex and extensive charitable provision within the town. By its nature however this was a discretionary system; reliant upon a pauper impressing the benefactor that he or she is worthy of the dole. Alternative use of agency can be seen in the likes of Robert Bussell, or Jane Marks, who by providing services to the parish embed themselves in its network of relief. These routes of ingratiating are a long way from the idea of a 'right to relief' however.

Such tight cooperation should not be seen as all bad for the pauper. In the case of the Messenger boys it is obvious that stand-offs between parishes could leave vulnerable people in a dangerous limbo. Largely speaking decisions as to who would pick up and support a pauper, or otherwise, seem to have been settled swiftly by overseers in their regular meetings in the inns of the town. Judgements, however brutal, seem largely not delayed.

Chapter 7

Vestry change and the collapse of Corporation influence.

Introduction

By the end of the eighteenth century the size and socio-economic structure of Reading was markedly different to the town at the end of the seventeenth. Alongside this national economic difficulties, and philosophical changes in the perceived role of corporations, moving away from the protectionist control of local economies, were to challenge the Corporation's position as instigator and coordinator of relief policy across the town. The vestries, along with parishes nationally, were to face challenges in their delivery of relief which were to lead ultimately to the wholesale reform of the system.

1. The national situation, 1793-1815.

The period from 1793 to 1815, covering both the French Revolutionary and the Napoleonic Wars, was one of economic difficulty for the majority of the population of England. Inflation, which had broadly not been a problem for most of the eighteenth century, hit hard in the last decade. Wholesale prices rose at an annual rate of 3% in every of the twenty years following 1793.¹

The causes of this were several. Firstly, a series of unusually poor harvests in the early 1790s led to a shortage of grain and a rise in the price of bread. The interruptions to foreign trade caused by the war made it difficult for traders to export but also lead to a shortage of foreign staples, including grain. A high level of taxation on consumer goods, introduced to provide much needed income to the government to pay the interest on the huge loans it had taken out to pay for the war, hit even those on quite reduced incomes since the taxes involved items which had become staples for many, such as beer and tea. Meanwhile alongside the restriction on resources the population continued to grow at the same accelerated rate seen through the second half of the eighteenth century, intensifying the demand for provisions. The pound itself was taken off the gold standard of the time, the agreement to pay the worth of the pound in gold, to help finance the wars. This further weakened it in the face of the shortage of goods.²

¹ P. K. O' Brien, 'The impact of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars 1793-1815 on the Long-run Growth of the British Economy'. *Review* (Research Foundation of the State of New York) Vol. 12/3 (Summer 1989), pp.335-395.

² Ibid, p347.

The impact of the prolonged period of high prices and shortages on the poorer classes was prolonged and severe. Wells considers that food shortages were severe enough to qualify as a famine.³ The distresses of the time did not affect the whole population equally. Those in a position to buy government bonds, or loan money in other ways, did very well, as did those who supplied goods and properties which inflated in price, such as farmers. This was noticed at the time, and has been corroborated by later study:

contemporary opinion that wartime inflation redistributed income from wage earners to farmers, employers and property owners receives support from contemporary statistics.⁴

The difficulties of the times fed into obvious social tensions, partly fuelled by immediate economic distress. Griffin has explored how far plain hunger led to the riots and disorder of the 1790s.⁵ There were also deeper changes in economic and political philosophy engendered not just by the works of Malthus and Smith, but also by the international upheavals of the American War of Independence and the French Revolution.⁶ In addition, a newly resurgent evangelical movement outside the Anglican community fuelled a reappraisal of traditional social hierarchies.⁷

Thus, food riots, and fears of Jacobinism spilling over into Britain, fuelling reactions from the Government such as the suspension of *Habeas Corpus* in 1795 and again in 1817 and the passage of the Combination Acts in 1799 and 1800. While the extent to which this repression was effective or extreme is still debated, there can be little doubt that they reflected an anxiety about social order among the governing classes.⁸ Outbreaks of disorder, from the Priestley Riots in Birmingham in 1791, to the Luddite machine smashing of 1811, and proliferation of pro-reform, indeed some pro-revolutionary organisations such as the early Society for Constitutional Information and later London Corresponding Society, and its sister organisations in other cities, led to a sense of unrest and disquiet.⁹

³ R. Wells, *Wretched Faces, Famine in Wartime England, 1793-1801* (London, 2011) p.3.

⁴ O'Brien, 'Impact', p.353.

⁵ C. Griffin, *The politics of hunger; protest, poverty and policy in England, 1750-1840* (Manchester, 2020).

⁶ A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, (London, 1776), T. Malthus; *Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society*, (London, 1798). Also T. Paine, *The Rights of Man* (London, 1791). See J. Mee, 'Popular Radical Culture,' *Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s*. (Cambridge, 2011).

⁷ D. Hempton, *Methodism and politics in British society* (Stanford, 1984) pp.56-80.

⁸ J. Batt, 'United to support but combined to injure: Public order, Trade Unions and the Repeal of the Combination Acts of 1799-1800,' *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 31/2 (1986) pp.187.

⁹ A much discussed phenomena, from R. Birley, *The English Jacobins from 1789-1802* (London, 1924), P. J. Marshall 'J.R. Dinwiddy, Radicalism and Reform, 1780-1850' *5/2 Utilitas*, (1992) pp xxi-452. B. Weinstein, 'Popular Constitutionalism and the London Corresponding Society,' *Albion* (North American Conference on British Studies, 2002) Spring pp.37-57.

2. Local situation.

Reading was deeply affected by these changes. The simple metric of the rise in wheat costs in Reading market over these years shows the dramatic increase in prices. In September 1793 the average price for a quarter of wheat was 44/-.¹⁰ In 1795 it leapt to 92/-, five years later in 1800 it leapt again to 116/- and while it fell temporarily after this, it climbed inexorably from 1808 to reach 155/- in 1812. A comparison against national average prices shows Reading mirrored a national problem; with prices in its market becoming even higher than the national average after 1800 (Fig 6-2)¹¹.

Of course, wheat was not the only commodity to see a rise in price in Reading. Davies noted that a cheese of 112lbs would have cost 17 shillings at Reading Fair in the middle of the century, and was 46 shillings by 1794.¹² In addition, the rise in the population of Reading in the first three decades of the nineteenth century was 60%, slightly higher than the national average of 56%, and certainly higher than the comparator market towns.¹³

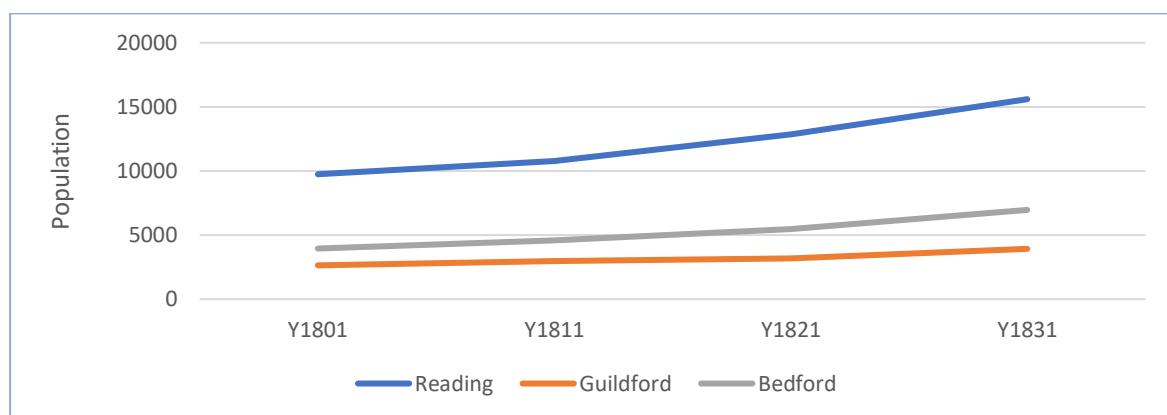


Fig7- 1: Population growth, sample boroughs, 1801-1831

The opening decades of the nineteenth century saw large numbers of small, cheap tenements developed by small, speculative builders, particularly in and around Silver Street, Hosier Street and Coley in the parishes of St. Marys and St. Giles.¹⁴ In-migration was fuelled by a combination

¹⁰ A quarter of wheat in Reading at this time was the Winchester measure, which was 8 bushels, or 640lbs.

¹¹ See p.185

¹² D. Davies, *The Case of Labourers in Husbandry considered* (London, 1795) p.65.

¹³ Census returns, 1801-1831. Histpop.org.

¹⁴ S. T. Blake, *The Physical Expansion of the Borough of Reading 1800-1862* (Unpublished PhD, University of Reading, 1976).

of available work, particularly in industries such as sailcloth making, which boomed during the war years and depressed economies and enclosure in the surrounding agricultural areas. One detailed study estimates that between 1723 and 1885 Berkshire went from 24% enclosed land to 59%.¹⁵ In addition, there is some evidence that in the 1810s and 1820s landlords and farmers were deliberately pulling down cottages in the surrounding rural parishes, forcing labourers to move to Reading. The Revd Milman, Vicar of St. Mary's, gave evidence to the Poor Law Commissioners in 1831

I have now between ten and twenty families residing together...and though working for the farmer of their own parish are obliged to reside in mine, at the distance of two, three or four miles from their work, and whose cottages have been almost literally pulled down over their heads. Even when cottages are not destroyed none are built where the population increases. Many again are bribed by presents in actual money, or by promises of advantage to seek their fortunes in the town. There are always plenty of speculative builders ready to run up cottages, which spring up around us like mushrooms. More than one has told me, that when they made a request for a cottage the answer was 'there are plenty in Reading'.¹⁶

Relief costs rocketed. In St. Mary's they more than doubled in 15 years, from under £1000 at the opening of the 1790s to over £2000 by 1803.¹⁷ Both the parishes of St. Lawrence and St. Mary's were forced to take out loans to cover their relief costs in 1800.¹⁸

¹⁵ R. Wordie, (Ed) *Enclosure in Berkshire, 1485-1885*, (Kempston, 2000) p. xxvii.

¹⁶ Royal Commission, 'Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws' (HC, 1834) No. 44, p.88. Milman is probably talking about Tilehurst.

¹⁷ See Fig.6-10, Ch.6, p.194.

¹⁸ BRO D/P98/8/6 14th April 1800, St. Mary's Vestry minutes, which reference the St. Lawrence decision.

The parishes still looked to the Corporation, and magistrates, for some sort of leadership in the crisis, as this minute from St. Mary's in January 1796 shows:

At a parish meeting held this day pursuant for that Purpose given it is agreed that this Parish will be ready to cooperate with the other two Parishes of this Town on whatever mode may be judged most advisable towards reducing the consumption of wheaten Bread and wheaten Flour agreeably to any Recommendation that may be received from the Mayor and Corporation of this Borough.²⁵

Minutes can be cryptic; concealing as much as they reveal. Standing 'ready to cooperate' on an issue, can often be as much about highlighting the inaction of others, as well as your own position. No such recommendation from the Corporation is forthcoming. Direct Corporation activity was limited to a £30 distribution, in July 1795, for the poor of the three parishes 'towards reducing the present high price of bread'.²⁶ The numbers of poor receiving relief in Reading in 1803, eight years later, in the workhouse or outside, was 835.²⁷ Assuming a number around 800 for 1795, this would amount to less than a shilling per person, when the cost of a gallon loaf of wheaten bread was fixed in the area at 1/8d, and a household would need about three or four of these a week. It is easy to see this would not have gone very far.²⁸

The only other direct contribution to the crisis that is recorded is fourteen years later in 1809, when loyal celebrations for the King's Jubilee were to be confined to a ball because of 'the distresses of many of his faithful and good subjects'.²⁹ Instead any wider celebrations should be confined to

a general subscription... for raising a sum of money to be distributed...among the Benefit Societies and Charity Children as for such other beneficent purposes as may be thought...for the poor inhabitants of this town by the Mayor, the Vicars, the Churchwardens and Overseers of the respective parishes.³⁰

Even this recognition had been forced on the Mayor and Aldermen by outside pressure.³¹ The Corporation donated £50. The Corporation did however set up a committee in 1796 to look into establishing a further market in the town,

It being the wish of several gentlemen of the Town and Corporation that a public market should be built in some convenient place as near as possibly to the present, thinking that the same might

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ BRO R/AC1/1/24, 12 July 1795.

²⁷ Abstract of the Answers and Returns, (HC) 1803, pp18-19.

²⁸ The price in Reading was probably slightly higher than this. The *Mercury* does not start giving regular bread prices until 1811, when it had risen to 2/7d, compared to 2/5d in Newbury (Nuemann, *Speenhamland*, p.226).

²⁹ BRO R/AC1/1/24. 26 Sept 1809.

³⁰ BRO R/AC1/1/24 12th July 1795.

³¹ See John Berkeley Monck p. 257 below.

be means of lowering the extravagant price of provisions and be otherwise beneficial to the town.
³²

This distinctly free market approach, in contrast to mercantilist attempts to control the price of bread, or fix the poor rates like the Berkshire JPs, may suggest an intelligentsia among the ‘gentlemen of the Town and Corporation’ influenced by the ideas of Smith. The New Market House was opened in 1800.³³

4. The status of the corporation

The Corporation by 1800 and the early years of the nineteenth century was a much diminished body in terms of its influence in the Town, compared to the government of the opening of the eighteenth. Aspinall, in his analysis of Reading parliamentary representation is quite clear that, by this time ‘the Corporation had long since lost its control of elections’.³⁴ Noting that as early as 1774 the election of Francis Annesley ‘was recognised as a serious blow to the Corporation interest’.³⁵

Correspondence between John Simeon, MP for Reading in 1806 and a potential voter, John Hooper of London Street illustrates a growing intellectual argument that the interests of the Corporation and those of an MP should be separate, and the Recorder should not also be MP, something considered quite acceptable eighty years before.³⁶ The reasons for the decline of Corporation power from a body that considered it should be able to nominate MPs in 1705 to one which fought losing battles for its nominees by the end are potentially various.

The first difficulty for the Corporation was its parlous financial position. As has been seen the expenditure on poor relief from St. Mary’s parish alone in 1786 was around £1000, rising to more than £2000 by 1803. In contrast the balance of Hall revenues was £788 in 1795, with a small rise to £932 in 1796.³⁷ Like many corporations at this time the Borough made most of its income from rental income, with some income from fairs and markets; and much of their expenditure came in maintaining properties in their care.³⁸ Even by 1835 their total income was

³² BRO R/AC1/1/24 8 Aug 1796. This almost certainly refers to the building now referred to as Market House.

³³ RM 17th September 1800.

³⁴ A. Aspinall, *Parliament through Seven Centuries, Reading and its MPs*. (London, 1962) p.91.

³⁵ Ibid, p91.

³⁶ BRO D/ES1/2/2/3/2a and 2b, August 1806. Simeon Correspondence.

³⁷ BRO R/AC/1/1/14

³⁸ Innes and Rogers, ‘Politics’, *CUHB*, ii, p.548,

only £1,137.³⁹ Years of patching up properties, and lack of long term investment led to many of these properties being in very poor condition, with constant need for remedial work recorded in the minutes. Chamberlains of Hall Revenues were elected for only a year and took a very narrow view of investment. Watts identified and criticised this short termism in the 1720s;

It was a maxim with some Chamberlains, to avoid all expense, would advise the workmen to patch up the repairs as it may last their time saying, let the next Chamberlain do it better.⁴⁰

In 1796 the Bernard Harrison almshouses had to be rebuilt, the Corporation was insistent that 'the lowest (tender) to be accepted' with the more recent proviso that 'proper security be given for the proper execution of the work.'⁴¹ Clearly the work was shoddily done, as only 17 years later in 1813 they had to be taken down again and rebuilt.⁴² In 1809, yet another inquiry into the state of the Oracle found the 'dilapidated state of the great part of the buildings'.⁴³ It was resolved that the individual tenants be charged for the repair thereof. It is not clear that this money was ever forthcoming, since it was remembered by Darter that in 1812 'the whole mass of building was going to ruin.'⁴⁴ Certainly, archaeological work on the Oracle found evidence only of patching up after the refurbishments of 1726.⁴⁵ The trustees for Griff Jenkins almshouses in Earley Place wrote complaining about the buildings' condition in 1797.⁴⁶ The Old Compter had fallen into such disrepair that it had to be completely rebuilt in 1799.⁴⁷

In 1798 the aldermen were required to loan 20 guineas each to the Corporation, so that it could have a sinking fund. The Corporation was forced to sell off a few of its assets such as its Sulhampstead Estate in 1799 for £1854 and engage in various clearances of wood to be sold on.⁴⁸ The situation did not improve, and in 1808 the Corporation had only £32 in its balances, and the Finance Committee recommended the 'utmost economy'.⁴⁹ It is not surprising that they left the care and management of the poor to the parishes, who, after all, had the revenue from poor rates coming to them.

³⁹ Royal Commission, Report from the Commissioners on the Municipal Corporations of England and Wales (HC, 1835) No. 116, p115, Reading.

⁴⁰ K. Burton (Ed), *Memorandums of John Watts Esq Mayor of Reading 1722-3 and 1728-9* (Reading, 1950) p.34.

⁴¹ BRO R/AC/1/1/24.

⁴² BRO R/AC 1/1/25 30th August 1813.

⁴³ BRO R/AC 1/1/25 16th Feb 1809.

⁴⁴ W. S. Darter, *Reminiscences of an Octogenarian* (Reading, 1888) p.89.

⁴⁵ M. Ford, et al, *Under the Oracle: Excavations at the Oracle Shopping Centre Site 1996-8* (Oxford, 2003) p.109.

⁴⁶ BRO R/AC 1/1/24 25th Feb 1797.

⁴⁷ BRO R/AC 1/1/24 18th Sept 1799.

⁴⁸ BRO R/AC/1/1/24 18th Sept 1799.

⁴⁹ BRO R/AC/1/1/24 18th Dec 1808.

Probably the most important reason for the Corporation's declined status by the end of the eighteenth century was that the aldermen no longer represented the economic interests of the town in the way that they had done a hundred years before. Reading's population in 1740 was around 7500, and in 1801 was 9742.⁵⁰ While the economy at the opening of the eighteenth century had been dominated by a few important trades, cloth making, brewing and malting, by the opening of the nineteenth the improvements in the roads and canals as well as the growth of London, had led to a much wider variety of trade of regional importance. Brewing and malting were still important, indeed the 1760 excise records has the area as the most important in the country for malting.⁵¹ This it would continue to be, but the town provided important services to the regional gentry and travellers, victuallers, hairdressers, grocers, horse traders, seed merchants, theatres, surgeons, book shops, printers and perfumiers are all evident in the notices and adverts of the *Reading Mercury*. Jennings of London Street advertised his patent oven and furnace; Hobbs of Butcher Row makes umbrellas and gun boxes.⁵² Post coaches, four daily to London, stopped at the major inns.⁵³

There were key business people represented on the Corporation, but brewing tended to predominate. William Blackall Simonds, who had built a large brewery on a site at Seven Bridges in the early 1790s, was an assistant to the Borough by 1795 and became Mayor in 1816.⁵⁴ His family were non-conformists, and he had himself been baptised at the non-conformist chapel in Broad St in 1761, but he still felt able to take the oath of an alderman.⁵⁵ It may be significant however that he became mayor upon retirement, rather than the mayors earlier in the century who had dominated civic life while dominating its businesses.⁵⁶ Henry Deane, also a brewer and co-founder of the first Reading bank, Deane, Marsh and Co in 1788, was Mayor of Reading three times between 1782 and 1794, having, again, handed over the reins of business to concentrate on civic life.⁵⁷ The bank itself was demonstration that something of the old networks still operated; Lancelot Austwick, assistant in 1795 and Mayor in 1813, and cousin of Richard Westbrook also an alderman and later partner, lent £6,200 to the bank.⁵⁸ Ralph Deane, relation of aldermen and cousins Henry, Thomas, Robert and John Deane, lent £2,000. Sir

⁵⁰ J. Man, *The History and Antiquities, Ancient and Modern, of the Borough of Reading in the County of Berks* (Reading, 1816), p.124. 1740 based on parish registers and 1801 Census.

⁵¹ T.A.B. Corley, 'Simonds Brewery at Reading 1760-1960,' *BAJ*, Vol. 68, (1974) p.77.

⁵² *RM* 1st February 1790.

⁵³ J. Dils, *Reading: A History*, (Lancaster, 2019) p.161.

⁵⁴ Corley, 'Simonds' Brewery', p78. BRO R/AC/1/24, 1795 List of Aldermen, 1816 Mayor making.

⁵⁵ Simonds Family, *ODNB*; <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/96984> [accessed April 2023].

⁵⁶ See Ch. 5 p149.

⁵⁷ T.A.B Corley, 'The earliest Reading Bank, Marsh, Deane and Co, 1788-1815.' *BAJ*, Vol. 66, (1972) p.122.

⁵⁸ BRO R/AC/1/1/24. C. Coates, *Notable Events in the Municipal History of Reading with A List of the Mayors*, (Reading, 1894) p.10.

Charles Marsh was an ex-army officer who had made his fortune in India.⁵⁹ The collapse of the bank in 1814, came at great financial loss to the traders and other residents of the town; and the ruin of its founders.⁶⁰ The two other Reading banks founded around this time, Stephens, Blandy and Co and J and C Simonds, were also founded by aldermen, or relations of aldermen; they managed to weather the financial storms of the Napoleonic Wars. Cowslade, local printer and producer of the *Reading Mercury* was admitted as an assistant in 1794.⁶¹

However, industries, and businesses, which were to prove important, were not represented. Two such were Perry's Iron Works, established at the turn of the century, and Musgrave Lamb's sailcloth factory at Katesgrove, which had 140 looms. So important was Lamb's works that they were popularly supposed to have won the Battle of Trafalgar. Eden says of it in 1795 that it 'is the only manufacture that is brisk at present'⁶² Yet neither were represented among the corporation worthies at this time.⁶³

The Perrys and the Lambs were nonconformists, as were many of the other successful traders of the town, which excluded the more devout among them from a Corporation where the oaths of loyalty and conformity were taken upon accession to the position of alderman.⁶⁴ ⁶⁵This had always been the case of course, but over time the Quakers and other Dissenters had moved from a persecuted sect in Reading in 1668, to a respectable and prosperous group. Eden states that nonconformists made up one third of the population of Reading in 1795.⁶⁶

The congregation that built St. Mary's Independent Chapel in Castle St had been able to buy a plot and build a grand and impressive building in a few short years in the 1790s.⁶⁷ Childs calls them 'numerous and wealthy'.⁶⁸ Darter lists some of the prominent members of this

⁵⁹ Corley, 'The earliest Reading Bank'. P.122.

⁶⁰ Ibid p.127.

⁶¹ BRO R/AC/1/24, List of Aldermen Nov. 1795; A. T. Watts, 'The Newspaper Press in the Town of Reading. 1855-1980' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Stirling, 1990) p.8.

⁶² F. Eden, *State of the Poor*, (3 Vols. London, Davis, 1797) ii. p.11.

⁶³ T.A.B Corley, 'Barrett; Exall and Andrewes Iron Works, Partnership Era 1818-1864' *BAJ*, Vol. 67 (1973) p80. This was established about 1810. D. Phillips, *The Story of Reading* (Newbury, Countryside Books, 1980) p.85. This claim for Lamb's works is often quoted, although Philips is the earliest reference I can find. Lamb did eventually become an alderman in the 1820s and was Mayor in 1828. http://www.berkshirehistory.com/bios/mayors_reading.html [accessed May 13, 2023].

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.80; Lamb's children were baptised at the Broad St. Independent Chapel, NA/ RG4/489.

⁶⁵ Belsen, and the later Palmers, were all Quakers.

⁶⁶ Eden, *State of the Poor*, ii p.11

⁶⁷ A split from the St. Giles Church after the death of the 'enthusiastic' Rev. Cadogan, they seem to have been part of the Countess of Huntingdon's Methodist sect at this time. See J. Dearing, *The Church That Would Not Die* (London, 1993) p.27.

⁶⁸ W.M. Childs; *The Town of Reading during the Early Part of the Nineteenth Century*, (Reading, 1910).

congregation, they include a local brewer, a doctor, and Mr. Billing, who, with his son, was responsible for the design and construction of much of central Reading.⁶⁹ He lived in a grand house on Castle Street next to Henry Deane.⁷⁰ While he took on many contracts for the Corporation he never became an alderman. It was to be a long time before a mayor even set foot in a dissenter's place of worship.⁷¹ What is also significant is that nonconformists could be active members of the vestry, which many of them were. The Tanners, Jonathan and Charles, and Charles Truss who were leading members of St. Mary's at this time, Dr. Ring, who was prominent on the St. Lawrence Vestry, and Mr. Billing who was an important force on St. Giles Vestry, had all contributed to the building of St. Mary's Chapel in Castle St.⁷² The vestries in Reading, after 1772 were all open, and became influenced by non-conformists. The separating 'cultures' of vestry and Corporation in Reading is perhaps reflected in a 1799 minute from St. Giles objecting strongly to the granting of a licence to yet another public house in the parish. They complain of

'the great mischief which have been produced in the said parish by having so many public houses in the same, ...having encouraged idle and profligate people to resort to them.' They consider that 'you, the magistrates of this borough, must have been misled by false representations'.⁷³

The once cosy relationship of victuallers and brewers on both vestry and Corporation seems to be breaking down. This could begin to explain the growing distance between the aldermen and vestrymen.

Religion appears not to have been the only barrier to entry. James Cocks, the fishmonger who started marketing the famed Reading Sauce in 1802 and opened his Kings Road factory in 1821, had a hugely successful business. Evidence in a copyright case in 1814 claimed that his sauce was sold in Dublin and the great cities of Europe, yet he never became an alderman.⁷⁴ He died in 1827 'highly respected by his fellow-townsmen'.⁷⁵ He was Anglican and attended the St. Lawrence vestry, the church where he was buried.⁷⁶ Perhaps a fishmonger married to a woman whose parents had both had paupers' funerals in Caversham, was simply not grand enough. Or perhaps, even more tellingly, he saw no value in being one.⁷⁷

⁶⁹ W.S. Darter, *Reminiscences of an octogenarian*, (Reading, 1888) p1.1. Billing's son did become Mayor in 1837.

⁷⁰ BRO R/AC/1/1/24, permission for palisade in front of his house. 1st November 1798

⁷¹ Childs, *Reading*, p.53 suggests 1869.

⁷² BRO D/P 175/5/1.

⁷³ BRO D/P 96/8/3, 1799.

⁷⁴ T.A.B Corley, 'The celebrated Reading Sauce, Charles Cocks and Co 1789-1962' Vol. 70, *BAJ*, (1976) pp98.

⁷⁵ *Berkshire Chronicle*, 5 May 1827.

⁷⁶ BRO D/P97/8/4.

⁷⁷ Corley, 'The celebrated Reading Sauce', p.97.

The Corporation was no longer a representation of all the successful merchants and businessmen of the town. Admissions to the position of freemen, regularly twenty and thirty a year in the 1700s, had declined to a handful by the end. This reflected a national trend, as corporations found their ability to control access to the town's commerce declined.⁷⁸ This is reflected in the Corporation's difficulty in recruiting and retaining members. Occasionally aldermen had refused to serve or take positions in the past, or resigned when unable to carry on, but the opening decade of the nineteenth century saw an almost farcical difficulty in recruitment and retention.⁷⁹

In February 1812 Alderman Richards resigned from the Corporation, giving no reason, and his resignation was not accepted by the aldermen.⁸⁰ On the same day the Recorder also resigned, although was given a piece of plate, and thanked.⁸¹ Clearly Richards was retained on the books, as in September 1813 he provided a letter from a surgeon certifying that he was not fit to carry on. In August 1814 Alderman Stephens was too unwell to carry on.⁸² The following year Alderman Garrard was elected Mayor but refused to accept the position. He was at pains to say that it was because of deafness and ill health and that 'I am not influenced by interested motives in declining the mayoralty'.⁸³ Despite three doctors' certificates and repeated assertions that he did not want to be Mayor, on mayor-making day the aldermen solemnly processed to his house and left a message that they were 'waiting at the Town Hall for you to be sworn in as Mayor'.⁸⁴ He did not turn up.

At a meeting in October 1815 John Blandy was elected as Mayor and it was proposed that Garrard should be fined £100. The doctors who signed his certificates were called and interrogated. They insisted that he was in poor health.⁸⁵ The proposal for the fine was not

⁷⁸ Innes and Rogers, *CUHB*, ii p546

⁷⁹ In 1689 John Fermatt refused to take the position of Chamberlain of Charitable Uses, BRO R/AC/1/18, and in 1722, possibly as an objection to John Watts, John Parran refused the position of assistant. BRO R/AC/1/21. Occasional resignations due to ill health occur through the century and are generally accepted with a vote of thanks.

⁸⁰ BRO R/AC/1/1/25 14th Feb 1812.

⁸¹ This was John Simeon, who was also MP, and this could well have been in response to growing disquiet as to a 'conflict of interest' see Hooper correspondence above.

⁸² BRO R/AC/1/1/25, 28th August 1814.

⁸³ BRO R/AC/1/1/25, 8th September 1815.

⁸⁴ BRO R/AC/1/1/25, 2nd October 1815.

⁸⁵ BRO R/AC/1/1/25, 16th October 1815. It may be significant that one, at least, of these three was a nonconformist. Dr Thomas Ring (1761-1840) was a trustee and subscriber of £50 to St. Mary's Castle St. See Dearing, *The Church*, p.115. He was partner to a Dr. Bulley who was joined by a Mr John Bulley, who was Mayor in 1787 and 1795, in a practice in the Market Place. John seems to have been the father of Mr. John Bulley Jr. who was elected assistant in 1797, and attempted to resign in 1814. *RM* 31 July 1797.

seconded. On the 20th December 1815, the Corporation finally voted to accept the resignations of Richards from 1812, and Garrard's refusal from 1814.

On the 11th February 1816, Mr Bulley, who had been voted in as alderman at the October 1815 meeting, did not turn up to be sworn in as alderman. A sarjeant-at-arms was sent to his house to bring him to the Hall. His reply was 'My compliments I am not coming, they know my mind'.⁸⁶ The Corporation pressured Bulley to accept the oath in July 1816, and he was told if he did not, he would be fined. This prompted a letter from Bulley, which appears in the September minutes from 1816. In it he said that he had tried to resign from the Corporation as an assistant in February 1814, and he could give no better reason than he gave then, (what that is is not recorded). He argued that nobody had been fined for a century and a half, despite several resignations from the body in that time, and he expected justice at their hands. The Corporation decided not to accept his resignation, but removed him anyway, and fined him 3/4d.⁸⁷

In July 1816 Martin Annesley resigned from the position of deputy mayor and was replaced by Richard Maul. In January 1817 Richard Westbrook resigned as an assistant, and in the following March the Recorder, who has been in place only 5 years, also resigned.⁸⁸ The ill-will rankling from whatever caused this spate of resignations is still apparent in 1819 when a motion to have Bulley's fine struck from the record, is rejected.⁸⁹ It is also probably significant that at many of the meetings attendance is very sparse. Only 7 aldermen and 4 assistants out of the potential 12 of each for the Oct 1815 meeting when a decision is made to call and fine Garrard, and 7 aldermen and 2 assistants at the July 1816 meeting when Annesley resigns. Some idea of what could have caused these resignations is suggested below, it could be that some are unrelated and genuine; but the responses, at least to Richards, Garrard and Bulley, suggest a dysfunctional body at this stage.

Reading Corporation was not alone in this malaise. Bedford Corporation had similar difficulties at this time, when the Duke of Bedford had to persuade 12 people to stand for the Corporation to raise its social status.⁹⁰

The failure to act on price of bread and the spiralling costs of poor relief was one of only several indicators of the Corporations growing impotence over this period. One of the last dynamic acts

⁸⁶ BRO R/AC/1/1/25, 11th February 1816.

⁸⁷ BRO R/AC/1/1/25, 12th September 1816.

⁸⁸ BRO R/AC/1/1/25, 27th Jan 1817, 10th March 1817.

⁸⁹ BRO R/AC/1/1/25, 5th February, 1819.

⁹⁰ Borough of Bedford, MCR (1835), p.2109.

of the Corporation for the next forty years was to support and sponsor the Reading Improvement Act of 1785.⁹¹ The proposal was deeply controversial however, with at least half of the residents objecting to having to pay a rate for the luxury of paving. So split was the town that one of the two MPs felt obliged to vote against it at its second reading, despite having introduced the bill in the first place.⁹² The establishment of the Paving Commission, which had the power to levy a rate to begin the process of repaving the town, was one of several 'farming out' of responsibilities for the maintenance of the town which occurred at this time; whether a statutory body by Act of Parliament, as in 1785 and 1825, or a private company, such as the Reading Gas Company, established in 1818 and lighting the town centre by 1819.⁹³ The Reading Water Company, also with rate setting powers, was established in 1826, although some provision of water by private enterprise had occurred before then. While aldermen were often trustees on these bodies, it was still a major resignation of one of the traditional core responsibilities of the Corporation. Perhaps the bitter rows around the Improvement Act, fought in public meetings and through the pages of the *Mercury* gave the aldermen less taste for radical measures.

Even the simplest of initiatives seemed to paralyse the Corporation. On the 5th March 1817 the Jury of the County Assizes, who used the Town Hall, wrote to the Corporation requesting that an extra door be put into the Chamber so that it would be easier for the jury to get in and out. The decision is deferred from one meeting to the next, for five meetings, until September 1817, when the Corporation said no, and suggested they come up with another idea.⁹⁴ The only initiative which shows any sort of leadership on the part of the Corporation over the period 1790-1816, and saw any success, was the decision to synchronise the three parish church clocks in 1805, and even that was only to be done for a trial period.⁹⁵

5. Breakdown of relationship between the Vestries and Corporation.

The diminishing influence and authority of the Corporation, the souring of its relationship with the Vestries, and the decay of the old routes of influence is most amply demonstrated in one

⁹¹ (25 Geo. III, c85) 'An Act for repairing the Footways in the Borough of Reading in the County of Berks for better repairing, cleansing, lighting and watching the streets lanes and passages and places in the said Borough and for removing encroachments, obstructions and annoyances therefrom and preventing the like for the future, 1785'.

⁹² *CJ*. Vol. 25, 4th May 1785, p.933, Annesley voted No, Neville Yea. For examples of the debate see *RM*, 3rd October, 17th January, 7th February, 1785.

⁹³ Childs, *Reading*, p.32.

⁹⁴ In fact the problem of the inconvenient lay out for the Assizes was never solved and in 1849 one of the judges refused to sit at Reading at all, and the assizes were moved to Abingdon temporarily. Childs, *Reading*, p.42.

⁹⁵ BRO D/P 98/8/6 17th June 1805.

complex confrontation which was drawn out over several years from 1809 to 1812. The implications and symbolism of this dispute are significant enough to warrant a detailed account.

The object of the dispute was one that had been simmering for years; the administration of charity money by the Corporation. As has already been shown John Watt, ex-mayor, and something of a Corporation outsider had raised this issue in the 1740s, with little long term impact. He looks to have alienated what allies he had, and the issue seemed to have died with him.⁹⁶ The extensive connections and influences of the Corporation had ensured that sufficient of the great and the good of the town were trustees or bound into social networks, so as not to aggressively question what was happening to the considerable charity money available to the town. It may just be coincidence that the accounts for the Chamberlain of Charitable Uses are missing for most of the century, despite being complete for the seventeenth. However those that are there look orderly and regular.⁹⁷

As has been shown, the costs of poor relief in the town in the second half of the century, until the 1790s, did not rise dramatically, and what evidence there is suggest a consistent cooperation between the agencies at work, at least until the mid 1780s. However, into the 1790s, as the cost of wheat rose, so did the cost of relief, and other pressures on the parish, such as fines for not raising sufficient men for the army, were crippling parish finances.⁹⁸

The first obvious sign of discontent in the town, was the republication of the Watts pamphlet *A Black Scene Opened* by the Cowslade printers, advertised in the *Reading Mercury* in March 1791 'by desire of many inhabitants of Reading.'⁹⁹ It sold for one shilling a copy, and the demand for it was such that a further run was done the following month 'to accommodate the public'.¹⁰⁰

In 1796 the St. Giles' vestry decided to investigate

means by which to recover to the poor of this parish Mr. Knapp's legacy.....we will concur with the other parishes concerned on any means which it may be necessary to use in order to recover Mr. Knapp's legacy.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ See Ch. 5. p154.

⁹⁷ BRO R/FA 5/30/-35 covering 1714-1718 then 1792-1818.

⁹⁸ BRO D/P/97/8/2, 18th March 1805.

⁹⁹ RM 28th March 1791.

¹⁰⁰ RM 25th April 1791.

¹⁰¹ BRO D/P 96/8/3 St. Giles' Vestry Minutes 25th Jan 1796. Augustine Knapp's legacy had been left to the parish in 1602, but to be administered by the Corporation. BRO D/P 96/5/1.

However little seems to come of this, and there is no mention of such an approach in the minutes of the other vestries. It may have been that the concerns about the handling of bequest money by the Corporation would have stayed as a general, ineffectual, muttering if it were not for the arrival in the town of a radical barrister, John Berkeley Monck in 1796. He seems initially to have lived in St. Lawrence's parish, and practised law until inheriting a fortune from his father in 1809 and buying the Coley Park Estate in 1810, moving to St. Mary's.¹⁰² He socialised with an educated and influential elite, including the MP Charles Lefevre, and Mary Russell Mitford.¹⁰³ He was a leader in the intellectual life of the town, and had some verses welcoming the establishment of the Reading Literary Society in 1808 published in the *Reading Mercury*.¹⁰⁴ In 1810 he married Mary Stephens, sister of Alderman John Stephens. Like many radical and public-spirited men of his time he was interested in the Poor Laws and had written an article on them in 1807.¹⁰⁵ In it he shows the influence of both Malthus and Smith in considering the laws an inducement for the poor to reproduce beyond the natural means of support, and as a restraint on trade and the movement of labour. Unusually for a man of his rank, he became an overseer for the poor in St. Mary's in 1813.¹⁰⁶ He stood for Parliament, at first unsuccessfully in 1812, and then, successfully in 1820. He represented Reading until 1830 as a radical whig, in particular working on Parliamentary reform and the repeal of the Corn Laws.¹⁰⁷

On the 27th November 1809 at St. Mary's vestry the following decision was made:

At this meeting it was unanimously agreed that Mr Jn Tanner and Mr. Jn Adams shall have the power to confer with the other two gentleman appointed by each of the other two parishes and take such means as they shall think advisable by employing an attorney to enquire into the state of the Lawrence Waltham Estate.¹⁰⁸

Four days later on the 1st December, St. Lawrence's appointed Monck and Henry Marsh to represent them in the matter.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² Obituary for John Berkeley Monck, *Gentlemen's Magazine* (April 1835), p.429, BRO D/P97/8/2, Dec 1809.

¹⁰³ Rev. Estrange, (Ed) *The Friendships of Mary Russell Mitford as recorded in letters from her literary correspondents* (Harper, 1882) pp.17 and 18.

¹⁰⁴ *Gentleman's Magazine*, (April 1835) p.432.

¹⁰⁵ J. Monck, 'General Reflections on the System of the Poor Laws with a short view of Mr. Whitbread's Bill and a Comment on it,' *Gentleman's Magazine*, (May 1807) p.435.

¹⁰⁶ BRO D/P98/8/6, Easter 1813.

¹⁰⁷ J.B. Monck. <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/Vol.ume/1820-1832/member/monck-john-1769-1834> [accessed May 29 2023].

¹⁰⁸ BRO D/P98/8/6 27th Nov 1809. Jonathan Tanner was a brewer on Castle St (Darter, *Reminiscences*, p.54). John Adams was a distiller (BRO D/P 98/8/6, 11th April 1811). They were both regular vestry attenders.

¹⁰⁹ BRO D/P97/8/5 1st Dec 1809 Henry Marsh was the son of Charles Marsh who had co-founded the Reading Bank. His attempts at a political career were blighted by the collapse of the bank, and he went on to help found the Association for the Purity of Elections in support of Monck. Corley, 'The Earliest Reading Bank', p.127 and Aspinall, *Parliament*, p80.

Monck and Marsh had already cut their teeth in opposing the Corporation. In September of 1809 they had, along with Dr. Valpy, Headmaster of the Grammar School, opposed the Corporation's plans for celebrating the 50th Jubilee of George III.¹¹⁰ They argued that it was inappropriate to spend large sums on 'illuminations' (probably fireworks) when so many in the town were in such distress. The Corporation modified their plans to include a collection for charities, but resisted Monck's call for a public meeting on the matter. The Aldermen, clearly irritated by the pressure, record their thanks to the Mayor in resisting this and for his 'manly and decided conduct therein'.¹¹¹

The joint minutes of the St. Lawrence and St. Mary's vestry suggest a level of collusion prior to the meetings to the November 1809. It may well have been at Monck and Marsh's instigation, simply that St. Mary's happened to have had their meeting first. There is no equivalent minute from St. Giles, but later minutes show that they too got involved, appointing a Mr Lander and Mr Champion.¹¹²

The Lawrence Waltham Estate concerned a bequest by Mary Kendrick in a will of 1714 that land should be bought and a rental of £50 a year to be generated which would be divided among the three parishes.¹¹³ Eight acres had been bought in Lawrence Waltham to this effect. In April 1810, the respective representatives reported back to the three Vestries. The report is the same in all three and states that the Trustees of the said Charity appeared to be illegally constituted, that the Vestries should appoint the trustees, and for the time being these should be the Vicar and Churchwardens of each parish. They further resolved that if the 'Gentlemen now assuming to be Trustees' refused to hand over the estate then

this parish do unite with the two other Parishes in such legal and equitable ways and means as shall or may be thought necessary to compel them so to do.¹¹⁴

Jonathan Tanner and John Adams are renominated in St. Mary's to work with the others, and the decision is made that any costs of such a case will come out of the parish poor rates. Some detailed research was clearly done over the next few months and a solicitor, Edward Vines,

¹¹⁰ BRO R/AC/1/1/24, 26th September 1806 and BRO R/AC/1/1/25 29th September 1809.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² BRO D/P 96/8/3 23 April 1810, Lander is likely Thomas Lander, who was overseer for the poor of St. Giles in 1807 (BRO D/P 96/15/1/347) and probably a brickmaker (*RM*, 13 April 1795), Champion is more elusive, although may be the Benjamin Champion who appears as overseer in 1821 (BRO D/P 96/15/1/393).

¹¹³ Copy of Will in St. Mary's Churchwarden Accounts BRO D/P98/5. Curiously there seems to be no sign of this Will through the normal National Archives Probate route.

¹¹⁴ Ibid BRO D/P98/8/6, 10/4/1810. See also BRO D/P96/8/2 27/4/1810 and BRO D/P97/8/5 /4/1810.

appointed by the Vestries. Vines wrote to the existing trustees sometime before August 1810.¹¹⁵ These were John and Henry Deane, Thomas Sowden and Richard Maul. All of these were aldermen and either previous or future mayors. He had ascertained that the original deeds, which required that the trustees should be four nominees from each of the parishes, had been reissued in 1784, giving the property to twelve others, including the Deanes, mostly aldermen. Crucially the property was conveyed to these trustees 'their heirs and assigns'; essentially taking the land out of the management and ownership of the parishes. Inquiry into the state of the land found that Thomas Deane had lived there, on a peppercorn rent, for many years, and had allowed the outbuildings to fall into decay. He had died in Michaelmas 1810, and the property had now passed to his son John. The number of trustees appears to have declined to just four at this point.¹¹⁶

The trustees did not respond to the letter from Vines. Instead they started approaching people in the Town in August 1810 to become trustees of the property based on a new trust deed. Significantly, they approached the Vicars of the three Parishes who all agreed to become new trustees to the property. Vines was presented with a new set of deeds with a list of trustees as follows:

Rev Joseph Eyre, Vicar of St. Giles, Rev Rob't Nare, Vicar of St. Mary and Rev John Green, Vicar of St. Lawrence and Richard Maul, John Stephens, William Watlington, Martin Annesley, Thomas Sowden, William and John Blandy and Henry Deane.¹¹⁷

By taking the name of the occupier off the list of trustees and including the three Vicars, and perhaps significantly, adding Monck's brother-in-law, it was clearly their intention that the issue would appear to be solved. However, to the Vestries it does not solve the problem of the improper rewriting of the deeds in 1784 which had turned the estate into one inheritable by the 'heirs and assigns' of the Trustees. If anything, it added legitimacy to the 1784 arrangement.

The Vestries, and committee men, were clearly furious at this action on the part of the Vicars, who had been party to the original decisions to pursue the case. This is reflected in the report which is read to all three Vestries in February 1811.

In the month of August last we were surprised to hear that a new Trust Deed had been prepared and applications made to several inhabitants of this Borough to accept of an assignment of said Trusts and after much Trouble we have procured copies of the original and new trust deeds.....such Trustees ought to be different and other persons than the Ministers and

¹¹⁵ BRO D/P98/8/6th February 1811 Report to vestry.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ BRO D/P 98/8/6 6th February 1811.

Churchwardens....(the conveyance) lately made to the three Vicars of the said three parishes...is improper and ought to be corrected....the Ministers and Churchwardens of each Parish sho'd be directed by a Vestry of such Parish¹¹⁸

This censoring of the Vicars behaviour is perhaps further indication of the extent to which non-conformists were influencing the vestries. In what seems like a humiliating climbdown the Vicars and churchwardens are the first to sign these resolutions.

The February report also notes that no money had ever been paid over to the Parishes from this estate; although the Corporation said that the money had come to them, and had been distributed directly to the poor. It is certainly the case that, where the records exist, a regular entry of £50 from Mrs Kendrick's Charity, paid over to the poor of the three parishes appears in the Accounts for the Chamberlain of Charitable Uses each year.¹¹⁹ The Vestry report however insists they have no knowledge of this;

on the contrary they have so managed the estate....that the Trust Estate and Charity were hardly known to any of the Inhabitants of the said several parishes.¹²⁰

At the Easter Vestry of 1811 it was reported that Edward Vines had again written to the Corporation asking for more information. This may have been forthcoming, as the report back to the St. Mary's vestry by Monck (who was now resident in this Parish) in July 1811 was conciliatory stating that there had been no wilful fraud, only gross ignorance and neglect. ¹²¹ It could be that John Stephens had allowed for some familial and marital pressure to be applied. Nonetheless, it was still Monck's belief that the Trustees should stand down. The Corporation were to be disappointed if they thought this would be an end to the matter. Instead the Vestries decide to reframe their inquiry even more widely and look into all bequests, but most specifically the big one, the John Kendrick bequest.¹²²

In September of that year St. Mary's vestry wrote to the Corporation asking for the accounts of the John Kendrick charity. The Mayor, William Blandy, decided to have a private conversation with John Monck, where he attempted to reassure him that the money was going to the poor.¹²³ Monck reported this conversation to the Vestry, who decided that they wanted a proper, written response and wrote again to the Corporation. This time the Corporation did write back, saying

¹¹⁸ BRO D/P 98/8/6 6th February 1811.

¹¹⁹ BRO R/FA 5/35 Charitable Uses Accounts 1792-1818.

¹²⁰ BRO D/P98/8/6 6th Feb 1811.

¹²¹ BRO D/P98/8/6 July 22nd 1811.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ BRO D/P98/8/6 Report to the St. Mary's Vestry 27th Jan 1812.

that they would have no further communication on the matter. Reporting this business to the January vestry in 1812 a further decision is made to approach Sir Samuel Romilly to take legal proceedings against the Corporation and to approach the other two vestries to work with them and share the costs. This approach is recorded in the St. Giles' minutes, where it was unanimously supported.¹²⁴

Sir Samuel Romilly was a significant choice of legal representation. He was also an MP and known for his radical and campaigning work.¹²⁵ It could be that Monck knew him through his legal contacts, or his friend Lefevre, also a lawyer, as an MP. What is most important is that Romilly was about to introduce a bill, along with the Oxford MP John Lockhart, into Parliament on the compulsory registration of charities to prevent abuses.¹²⁶ Having him simultaneously working on a case against the Corporation of Reading would potentially have given a national platform to Reading's problems. At this point the Vicar and churchwardens of St. Mary's attempted a pushback at the radical and powerful forces that seem to have taken over the Vestry. They tabled a motion ahead of the February 1812 meeting that the decision to pursue legal action should be rescinded, mostly because the meetings were only attended by 'few of the inhabitants (and the chief of them having little at stake in the parish)'.¹²⁷ This is disingenuous of course, since the meetings at which these decisions were made were better attended than many, and Monck was the highest rate payer in the Parish. It is also worth noting that at the previous Easter one of the churchwardens appointed was Alderman Thomas Sowden; one of the Trustees of Mrs Kendrick's Charity, clearly in an attempt to reassert Corporation influence at the Vestry. The motion to rescind was only signed by him and the Vicar.

The motion was an embarrassing failure. Monck's supporters turned out in strength, and far from adopting the Vicar's motion the Vestry confirmed the January decision and went on to decide that

the several powers and authorities given to the several committees and to the Vicar and Churchwardens concerning the same be transferred and given to John Berkeley Monck Esquire, Mr John Adams Mr James Drover and Mr Robert Snare.¹²⁸

In June of that year the Corporation reported that they have received a letter from St. Mary's Vestry asking for the Kendrick accounts, but that they were not going to reply as they saw little

¹²⁴ BRO D/P96/8/3 Feb 12 1812.

¹²⁵ HoP Online. Samuel Romilly, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/Vol.ume/1790-1820/member/romilly-sir-samuel-1757-1818> [accessed June 1, 2023].

¹²⁶ (52 Geo. III, c 102) Act for the Registry of Charitable Donations and Providing a more summary Remedy for the correction of Abuses therein, 1812. Sometimes known as Lockhart's Act.

¹²⁷ BRO D/P98/8/6 18th Feb 1812.

¹²⁸ BRO D/P98/8/6 18th Feb 1812.

point.¹²⁹ From that point on legal proceedings get swallowed up in Chancery, and do not seem to have actually come to a hearing until 1819, with a final report in 1821.¹³⁰ Monck's energies soon to transferred to his parliamentary ambitions.

The case is worth breaking down in such detail because it exemplifies so much about the Corporation's loss of status and influence. Tactics which would have worked seventy, or even fifty, years before had no impact now. Placing aldermen within the vestry, using family ties, having off-the-record social conversations, appealing to the Anglican powers all failed to stem what seems to have been a strongly supported campaign across the town.

It is an example of a sort of vestry radicalism which has been noted in larger metropolitan areas from this time, in particular in London and Manchester.¹³¹ The Sturges Bourne Acts of 1818 and 1819 were in part an attempt to address this. The vestry could provide a forum for popular issues, which stood in stark contrast to the narrow and moribund Corporation. Attendance at Reading vestry meetings over this period, for popular or contentious items of business could attract scores of attendees.¹³² One St. Giles meeting was so large it had to be reconvened in the main body of the Church.¹³³ St. Lawrence's would poll in figures in the hundreds, men and women, for disputed places, such as the boys chosen for Christ's Hospital.¹³⁴ One challenge for the position of churchwarden attracted 324 voters in 1827.¹³⁵ In November 1812, St. Mary's vestry agreed that meetings could be held in the Chancel, as the existing facilities were too small.¹³⁶

Whether cause or symptom of a declining authority, the pattern continued after the disappearance of the Kendrick issues. The Corporation minutes reflect an authority fighting fires on all sides, in particular on the issue of their charitable management. In 1810 they discuss knocking down all the almshouses and rebuilding them through an Act of Parliament; but this is not forthcoming.¹³⁷ In September 1811, weeks after the decision by St. Mary's to look into all bequests, they call a meeting of the tenants of the Oracle to discuss 'the state of several rooms'.

¹²⁹ BRO R/AC/1/1/25 17th June 1812.

¹³⁰ Charity Commissioners' Report, 1837, No. 32i, p35. The conclusion was that the income for the poor had risen from £60 pa to £159 pa by this time and should be paid to the overseers of Reading.

¹³¹ Innes and Rogers, *CUHB* ii. p534.

¹³² BRO D/P98/8/6, 19th April 1813 or Feb 12th 1813.

¹³³ BRO D/P97/8/3, 3rd June 1810.

¹³⁴ BRO D/P 97/8/3, 30th June 1818.

¹³⁵ BRO D/P 97/8/3, 5th April 1827, although there is a suggestion in the minutes that the 'book be left open' for some hours after the meeting, suggesting not all those polling were actually at the meeting. Nonetheless a healthy participatory culture is implied.

¹³⁶ BRO D/P 98/8/6, 16th Nov 1812.

¹³⁷ BRO R/AC/1/25, 14th Feb 1810.

¹³⁸ In December 1812 they order the Town Clerk to look into the management of all their charities in response to Lockhart's Act. ¹³⁹

It is probably no coincidence that it is this time that was marked by the unusually high number of resignations and refusals among the aldermen; Richards in 1812, Stephens in 1814, Garrard's refusal to be Mayor in 1815 and Bulley's attempt at resignation in 1816. ¹⁴⁰As mentioned, 1815 attendance at meetings was often little more than 9 out of the 24 places.

The Corporation faced a fresh problem in December 1812 when the

Gentlemen, Freeholders, Tradesmen, Housekeepers and Shopkeepers residing in the Borough of Reading¹⁴¹

petitioned the MPs Lefevre and Simeon to present a bill to Parliament on the recovery of small debts. This was presented and introduced by them, and certainly seems to have got to at least its second reading. Whatever the content of it, and it appears not to have completed its passage, the Corporation were strongly opposed and petitioned against it. As Aspinall noted, the Corporation no longer worked hand in glove with the MPs, even their own ex-Recorder.

6. Cooperation among the vestries.

The Monck case, while exemplifying the breakdown of the relationship with the Corporation, does show continued close working among the Vestries. Joint committees of the Vestries were established for the purposes of pursuing the issues, and resolutions were passed and reports read in a clearly coordinated way.

Despite the lack of leadership from the Corporation the Vestries continued to work together. As previously discussed, they had joint interests in several charities, and needed to work together to manage them. In 1787 Mrs. Pocock attempted to wrest the properties and income of Griffin Jenkins Charity from the parishes of St. Lawrence and St. Mary, and they were forced to take joint action to defend themselves.¹⁴² Even though the actual bequest went to the Corporation, for the benefit of these two parishes, the Corporation took a back seat on the matter, giving the

¹³⁸ BRO R/AC/1/25, 6th Sept 1811.

¹³⁹ BRO R/AC/1/25, 3rd Dec 1812.

¹⁴⁰ See above, p.238.

¹⁴¹ *CJ* Vol. 68, 17th Dec 1812.

¹⁴² BRO D/P 98 8/5, 18th June 1787.

parishes permission to act on its behalf.¹⁴³ The case was won but in 1800 the Parish of St. Mary agreed to sell these houses, on the condition that St. Lawrence did, and they were to get equal share.¹⁴⁴ The sale appears not to have gone ahead, as in 1814, the lathe and plaster buildings were

in so ruinous and dilapidated a state that, there being no fund provided for repair, the mayor and aldermen refused to accept and act in the trust, and left the same to the management of the officers if the two parishes.¹⁴⁵

The early financial crisis shows the Vestries operating in their customary 'in step' way. The loans have already been mentioned. All three parishes pursued similar practices for putting the poor to work at this time, in buying and working gravel pits.¹⁴⁶

What settlement and removal data there is for the opening decades of the nineteenth century is confined to St. Giles. These show a clear upswing in the numbers of removals in the early decades of the nineteenth century, in response to the deepening crisis in the town. Nonetheless, the proportion of these which are within the Borough are still depressed, and remains smaller in number than those to the County or the Country at large, despite numbers moving within the Town being much larger. The cooperation between the Vestries stays firm.

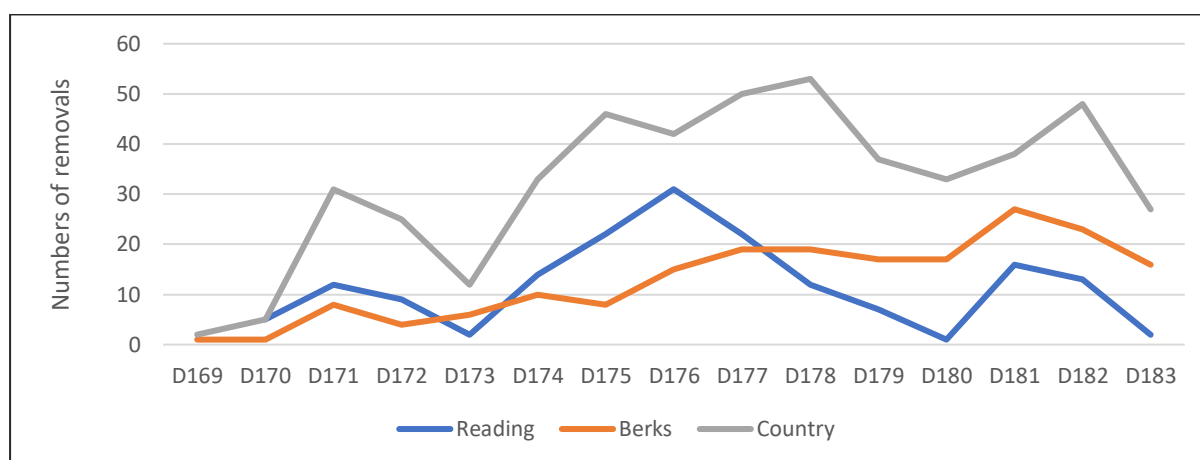


Fig7- 3: Removals from St. Giles' by decade, 1690-1830

The question then is, why did the Vestries not unite completely over this period for the delivery of poor relief? Similar boroughs were united by this time. Newbury, fellow beneficiary of the Kendrick money, operated as one area through the simple expediency of only being one parish.

¹⁴³ BRO R/AC 1/1/24, 23rd April 1787, and NA PROB 11/604/194.

¹⁴⁴ BRO D/P 98/8/5 14th April 1800.

¹⁴⁵ Charity Commissioners, (HC, 1837) No.32i, p61.

¹⁴⁶ BRO J/P 98/8/6 12 April 1803, D/P 98/8/4 16 July 1820, D/P 97/8/3 20 May 1817.

Bedford had a private act of Parliament in 1794 uniting the parishes under Guardians of the Poor.¹⁴⁷ Guildford, while not technically united had one workhouse, and had operated collectively since the 1740s.¹⁴⁸ Oxford had united through a private act of Parliament in 1771.¹⁴⁹ While it was the case that Berkshire was one of only ten counties in England which did not see any local acts of incorporation, and it is therefore tempting to speculate that there was no local 'culture' of incorporation, this looks unconvincing when noting that Bedford was alone in uniting in Bedfordshire.¹⁵⁰ Boroughs seem much more to have compared themselves with other boroughs than with their rural neighbours.

Lack of unification was not through want of trying on the part of some members of the various Vestries. The early attempts instigated by Watts to get the three parishes to use one workhouse have already been discussed, and ended in failure. The issue seems to have gone away from the 1740s through to the 1790s. However the pressure on parish finances again raised the issue.

At the Easter Vestry of 1797 four members are deputed from St. Mary's to

confer with a committee of each of the other parishes on the practicability of a Junction of the three parishes in this Town, or any other mode of reducing the present expenses and report the result to a future vestry¹⁵¹

The wording strongly implies that committees of the other parishes were due to be established. However no mention appears in the other parishes, and the initiative is not heard from again.

In 1808 a much more serious attempt was made. On the 11th of April 1808 a meeting of the combined officers of the three vestries was held in the Upper Ship to discuss taking forward a Union.¹⁵² The outcome of this seems to have been that this should be taken back for a vestry decision to properly establish committees to take this business forward. Consequently a resolution is passed at the St. Lawrence vestry on the 4th May to establish a committee

for the purpose of consulting on the expediency of applying to Parliament for a Bill to consolidate the three parishes of this Borough for the supposed benefit of ameliorating the condition of the Poor and lowering the expenses of maintaining them, then lay the result of such consultation before a General Meeting.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ J. Godber, *The Story of Bedford*, (Luton, 1978) p.108.

¹⁴⁸ MCR, (1835) p2876.

¹⁴⁹ (10 Geo. III c14) An Act for the better regulating the poor in the City of Oxford, 1771.

¹⁵⁰ S. J. Thomson 'Population Growth and Corporations of the Poor, 1660-1841' in C. Briggs, P.M. Kitson, S.J. Thomson (Eds), *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain, 1290-1834*, (London, 2014), p.276.

¹⁵¹ BRO D/P 98/8/5 5th April 1797.

¹⁵² BRO D/P 96/8/3 16th April 1808.

¹⁵³ BRO D/P 97/8/2 4th May 1808.

The Vestry seems well attended with 36 people present, two of them aldermen. The motion was 'unanimously agreed' and a committee nominated. There is no such minute from the St. Mary vestry of the time, but later minutes do refer to such a committee having been established, so this may have been done by a simple nomination by the Vicar and churchwardens.¹⁵⁴ The minute from St. Giles is most revealing. On the 16th April a meeting is held to discuss the issue. Unusually the statutory notice for the meeting had said 'a full attendance is earnestly requested'.¹⁵⁵

The meeting was so packed that it had to be reconvened in the main body of the church. The following motion was passed, with only one dissenting voice, (as the minutes record with this underlined).

That from the General good management of the affairs relating to the Poor in this Parish for some time past it was resolved that no alteration should be made in such management and the more particularly as it relates to a consolidation with other parishes. ¹⁵⁶

This puts an end to the discussion. St. Mary's minutes record on June 4th

Report was made that no Committee having been appointed by the Parish of St. Giles the Committee appointed by a former vestry had not been able to make any progress in the object of their appointment.¹⁵⁷

Some influential force at St. Giles seems to have effectively stopped the initiative in its tracks by the simple expedient of leap-frogging a process which nominated committees to discuss and present collectively to the wider public in good time, to go straight to a mass meeting, which, quite possibly predictably enough, decided to stick with what they knew. It is clear from the several minutes of St. Lawrence's and St. Mary's that they were expecting a small committee to arrive from each parish, rather than that an immediate public consultation be held.

It is not difficult to imagine what arguments would have been presented at the St. Giles' meeting. Rather than the harmonised rate level which operated for most of the previous century the rate levels between the three parishes had begun to diverge in the 1790s.¹⁵⁸ In the year of the vote, the rate in St. Giles was 2/6d on both houses and land (going down to 2/- the following year). In St. Mary's it was 2/6 on houses and 3/9d on land, in St. Lawrence's it was 3/9d on both houses

¹⁵⁴ See June 4th below.

¹⁵⁵ BRO D/P 96/8/3 16th April 1808.

¹⁵⁶ BRO D/P 96/8/3 16th April 1808, it may be significant that the one dissenting voice was Mr. Billing, the wealthy nonconformist.

¹⁵⁷ D/P 98/8/3 4th June 1808.

¹⁵⁸ Eden states that St. Mary's rate is higher than the others in 1795. Eden, *State of the Poor*, ii p14.

and land. The inhabitants of the Hamlet of Whitley did not even wish to be part of St. Giles' parish, and had appealed to be separately rated in 1783, let alone paying for the support for the whole of Reading.¹⁵⁹

The 1808 consultation seems to have effectively put the idea of a more formal union between the parishes away until the 1830s. Unlike places such as Oxford, with its numerous small parishes, or Bedford with its unequal ones, the three parishes of Reading were large enough, and self-sufficient enough for the issue not to be a pressing one. The situation was still the same over twenty years later when the Vicar of St. Mary's gave evidence to the Poor Law

Commissioners:

The town of Reading consists of three parishes; in some respects it might be advantageous to consolidate them under one system, but I should doubt whether the parishes could be easily induced to consent to such a scheme, nor could the arrangement be without counterbalancing objections.¹⁶⁰

William Winkworth, overseer from St. Mary's also gave evidence, cooperation, he says

is prevented by petty jealousies and dissensions, and the want of able officers to direct the work of the paupers.....nothing can be done with the separate parishes governed by open vestries, no cordial cooperation can be got.

7. The road to Reform.

The Select Vestries Acts of 1818 and 1819 were not adopted by the Reading parishes, despite a relatively enthusiastic response within the County.¹⁶¹ St. Mary's had only voted to become an open vestry in 1772.¹⁶² The minutes of both St. Lawrence's and St. Giles even record the intention of opposing the bills in their passage through Parliament.¹⁶³ Ultimately the open vestry needed to vote for a select vestry, and the wider body of rate payers look to have had no appetite to hand over the ultimate decisions on poor relief to a select few.¹⁶⁴ The penalty for vestries for not adopting a select model was that they should run decisions on relief through the

¹⁵⁹ BRO D/P96/18/3 Letter 15th September 1757, The inhabitants of Whitley refuse to pay for any other than their own poor. BRO R/AC/1/22: 15th January 1765 Reading Corporation attempt an Act of Parliament to incorporate Southcote and Whitley. BRO R/JQ1/14 Appeal against the poor rate.

¹⁶⁰ 1834, PLCR, p5f.

¹⁶¹ Neuman, *Speenhamland*, p181, 22 parishes adopted select vestries within a year of the passage of the Act.

¹⁶² BRO D/P 98/8/3, 11th May 1772. Significantly this move was led by William Soundy, nonconformist owner of Battle Farm.

¹⁶³ BRO D/P96/8/4: 30th April 1818, D/P 97/8/3, 28 April 1818.

¹⁶⁴ (59 Geo. III c 12 s1) Act to amend the Laws for the Relief of the Poor, 1819 'it shall be lawful for the Inhabitants of any Parish in Vestry assembled...to establish a select vestry'.

JPs. This does not appear to have been a problem for the vestries. As discussed, the Reading JPs did not habitually disagree with the vestries and no obvious overturning of a vestry decision appears in the paperwork for these years.

This 1819 piece of legislation did however add a further burden on the rate payers of the Reading parishes. The act attempted to address a problem with the rating system whereby landlords who did not live in the parish where their properties were could evade paying poor rate within the parish, as could their tenants. By the second and third decades of the nineteenth century this applied to many properties in St. Marys and St. Giles. However a further clause, designed, presumably, to prevent the gerrymandering of the electorate by access to the poor rates, disbarred this remedial clause from having affect where

the right of voting for the election of Members to serve in Parliament shall depend upon the Assessment of the voter to the Poor Rate.¹⁶⁵

The Municipal Corporation Report is clear on the deleterious impact this had on the parishes of Reading.

This exemption has proved a great injustice to the ratepayers of the town of Reading. One of the most profitable investments of money in that town at present is the erection of small tenements; and while those who enjoy this profit contribute nothing to the rates they are instrumental in increasing their amount and pressure by the facilities they afford of gaining settlements and the consequent introduction of pauper tenants. We are informed, upon credible testimony, that there are at present within the borough nearly 2000 tenements which bear no part of the local burdens, and which would, if fairly rated, produce upwards of £3,500 per annum in aid of the poor's rates. ¹⁶⁶

All three parishes already had paid, assistant or standing overseers in the first decades of the century, although these seem to have disappeared by the time of the Poor Law Commission.¹⁶⁷ All three parishes had, by the end of the century moved to a tougher, indoor relief regime. Eden was able to say in 1795 that the poor of St. Mary's were, by this time, 'chiefly maintained in a workhouse'¹⁶⁸ This is underscored by the 1803 Abstract of Returns which shows all parishes spending more on indoor relief than outdoor.¹⁶⁹ Evidence to the Commission from the parishes of St. Lawrence and St. Mary suggests that by this time the only paid officers for any of the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, s.37.

¹⁶⁶ MCR, 1835, p.116.

¹⁶⁷ Eden states St. Mary's had a standing overseer in 1795, Eden, *State of the Poor*, ii. p14 and a decision was made to appoint one in St. Mary's on 8th April 1751, BRO D/P 98/8/2.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p.2.

¹⁶⁹ 1803 OPR, p.18.

parishes were the governors of the workhouses, much of the administration, and initiative, on poor relief policy was left to them. The

three Overseers, generally tradesmen...serve the office with reluctance, get through the year in the easiest manner possible; often bad accountants, and consequently dependent on the Master of the Workhouse.¹⁷⁰

It is quite probable that any cooperation manifest among the parishes in the lead up to the reforms of 1830, was a more professional set of meetings between the governors of the workhouses than the inn-based discussions of the overseers from previous century. Sadly the minutes and accounts for the workhouses for this period, where any such records may have been, do not survive.

Conclusion

The final years of the eighteenth century, and the opening decades of the nineteenth, saw major adjustments to the nexus of control which operated for much of the eighteenth century. Economic pressures raised the cost of relief considerably, causing the vestries to combine to challenge the Corporation. The Corporation was much diminished by financial problems, and an increasingly unrepresentative membership which could no longer claim to speak for the wider economic and social structures of the town. Traditional means of authority and control, such as the Court Leet's price management had long been abandoned. At the same time the much needed improvements to the town were being outsourced to commissions or private companies, and the Corporation was no longer in official control of these, although there was considerable overlap of personnel.¹⁷¹

The Vestries, while still willing to work together on individual initiatives, had rejected the idea of union in 1808, or at least one of the parishes had. While the parish officers may have wanted union, as they all testify in 1834, the smaller ratepayers did not.

Delivery of relief in general in the three parishes became more about the workhouses, the masters or governors of which seem, by 1834, to be the real driving forces in the parish relief system. It was still necessary for the parish officers to meet with the magistrates, to sign off the

¹⁷⁰ 1834, PLCR, Appendix B2, p8f.

¹⁷¹ A. Alexander, *Borough Government and Politics, Reading 1835-1985* (London, 1984) p.3.

odd settlement or removal, or decision on outdoor relief when this occurred, but these were nowhere near the driving forces of the system which they had been a hundred years before. In addition, a chunk of the powers, and responsibilities which had traditionally sat with the parish, such as dealing with vagrants and some aspects of maintenance and cleansing, were

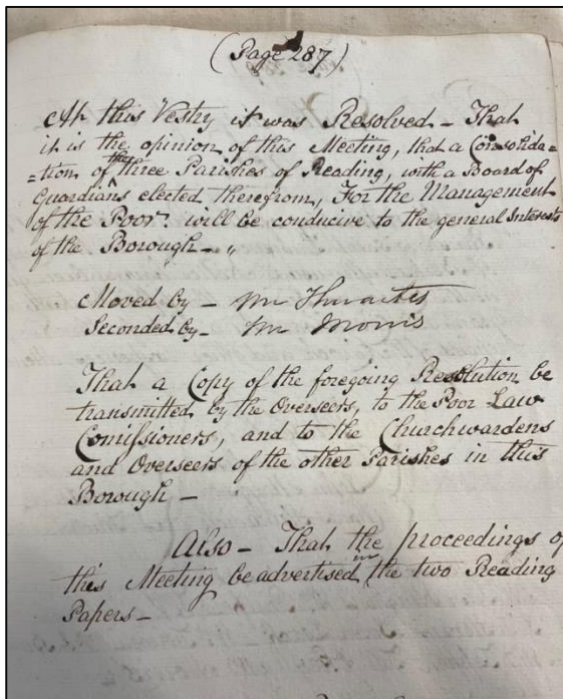


Fig7- 1: St. Lawrence Vestry welcome the union of parishes after the 1834 Act.

handed over to the Commissioners after the passage of the 1826 Reading Improvement Act, and a separate rate levied for their delivery.¹⁷²

The close relationship of combined interests and collective Anglican interests which had coalesced the Corporation and vestries through much of the eighteenth century seems have come under pressure probably from the 1772 vote to open St. Mary's vestry. A non-conformist and radical air had taken over the parish politics of the town.

While the forthcoming reforms were to fully dismantle the whole scaffolding of the system, the cooperation between Corporation and vestry which had kept the system going for nearly two hundred

years, based on social networks, business interests and Corporation control of the vestry, had long gone into decay.

Postscript: Reform

Three important pieces of legislation were to dismantle the apparatus, and motivations, for the Corporation and vestries to work so closely together to manage poor relief within the town. The 1832 Reform Act abolished the scot and lot franchise for towns like Reading, replacing it with a simple property qualification. The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act combined the parishes to operate as the Reading Union. The separate parish workhouses did operate for another thirty years, but were ultimately replaced with the Union workhouse on the Oxford Road.¹⁷³ The 1835 Municipal Corporations Act removed much of the powers of patronage away from the Mayor

¹⁷² Alexander, *The Borough of Reading*, p.3.

¹⁷³ The new workhouse was opened in August 1867. M. Railton and M. Barr, *Battle Workhouse and Hospital 1867-2005* (Reading, Berkshire Medical Heritage Centre, 2005) pp20-22.

and senior aldermen, and widened the electorate so that the self-selection could no longer continue. In addition, the power to administrate charities was 'arms-lengthed' into a separate body.¹⁷⁴

Leading families, such as the Palmers, Suttons, Blandy's and Heelas' were to continue to have a formative influence on civic affairs and the formation of the town, as the names of streets, parks and buildings in the town will testify, but parish and corporation affairs were not their main or only route.

¹⁷⁴ W.E.M. Blandy, *History of the Reading Municipal Charities* (Reading, Greenslade, 1962) Forward.
(5&6 Will. IV c 76 s71), An Act to provide for the Regulation of Municipal Corporations in England and Wales, 1835.

Conclusion

In his 1984 work *The Evolution of Cooperation* Axelrod extrapolated from the study of organisms to look at communities and organisations and laid down conditions under which cooperation was most likely to develop. He suggested that several conditions needed to be established to encourage cooperation. Both sides needed to be confident that, in their interactions with the other, the long term benefits of cooperation were better than the short term gains of non-cooperation, or 'defection'. For this they needed to be sure that the other organisation was going to be around in the long term, and that they would need to have frequent interactions with them, 'hence the next move looms larger than it otherwise would'.¹ In addition both sides needed to be clear that a 'defection' on the part of the other could hurt them as much as their own 'defection' would hurt the other.

This situation was enhanced when there were only a few bodies with which to interact, one or two 'others' rather than ten or twenty. 'This is one reason why cooperation emerges more readily in small towns than in large cities' he says. Specialisation and hierarchies help as these can mean that the same people interact with each other, and an organisational memory, which allows previous 'learnings' to be assimilated. In addition a 'government' or coordinating body of some sort, can 'enhance payoffs' by encouraging interactions, and stepping in with punitive measures when cooperation has broken down.² Cooperation was further encouraged where there were close familial or other social ties, and 'nice strategies' that is an atmosphere of mutuality and geniality, rather than aggression and revenge, are more likely to develop under these circumstances.³

The corporation towns of the eighteenth century provided an ideal framework for such cooperation to develop. Generally small communities of less than 10,000 in the eighteenth century, divided, normally into a handful of organisations in the form of parishes, their interactions necessary on a daily basis and their ability to harm each other equal. Short term 'defections', such as parish A removing parish B's poor back to parish A on a regular basis, would only be met with a similar strategy from parish A to parish B.

¹ R. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, 1st Edn 1984 (Cambridge, MA, 2006), p.129.

² Ibid p.124.

³ Ibid p.138.

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Alongside this, as Chapter 2 shows, corporation towns had developed a set of general powers, and specific responsibilities which allowed for a particular environment which fostered this cooperation. Governing bodies at least at the opening of this period were powerful, but obliged to act with the parishes that raised the money and made the day-to-day decisions. Chapter 3 shows that in all the sample towns the legacy of the seventeenth century, with its political and religious divisions still played out in the politics of Whig and Tory, Dissenter and Anglican. Ideological and political motives gave corporations strong incentives to interfere and control. The structure of the corporation with tight business and familial links, supported formal powers with informal persuasion.

Specifically in Reading there were only three parishes of roughly the same size; all capable of doing equal harm to the others. Specialisation in the case of overseers of the poor existed, regularly interacting in the mutual and genial surroundings of the town's inns. One criticism of the old poor relief system was that overseers were only in for one year, and thus all their experience went each Easter. Yet an 'organisational memory' did exist, in that overseers 'handed over' to their successors, and the vestry itself consisted of the same individuals, allowing a 'memory' of the relations between the parishes. Lastly the close familial and social ties of the 'middling' sort within the town allowed for positive and benign strategies rather than punitive and aggressive measures.

It is not surprising then that such clear evidence of cooperation between the three parishes of Reading should exist. Analysis of settlement and removal between the three parishes shows high mobility between them, but very low removal as a proportion of this. This sits in stark contrast with the ratio of settlements-to-removal for non-borough parishes, no matter how near those parishes were to the borough boundary. Even when removals did occur, they were far less likely to lead to an appeal than removals to and from non-borough parishes. The very language on settlement certificates implies a close and trusted relationship with the term 'his wife and family' much more likely to occur between Reading parishes than when dealing with external parishes. Such a close working relationship allowed for the implementation of quite targeted strategies, such as the persistent, and consistent, removal of young single women. The parishes, for the first seventy years of the century at least, also managed to keep their rates at a similar level.

The St. Mary paybooks, when cross-referenced with other bureaucratic paperwork, give a rich and detailed insight into precisely the day-to-day mechanisms by which this would occur.

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Regular meetings between parish overseers; whether all together or one to one, normally in the inns of the town, facilitated sophisticated, mutually cooperative strategies. Settlements were accepted on a 'like for like' basis, with equal numbers, and what look to be similar cases, exchanged by mutual agreement. Parishes were presented with lists of names to provide certificates for, filling out large numbers at one time, probably one of the reasons for the 'shorthand' terms. Complicated cases, which could have led to removals and appeals in more competitive environments, were negotiated in detail, sometimes requiring more than one meeting. Long standing agreements to share the costs on cases that had no obvious responsible parish but needed attention are clearly evidenced, with 'casualties' and sick travellers dealt with on a town-wide basis.

The 'governmental' body, the Corporation, obviously facilitated cooperation on several levels. They joined in meetings, in the inns, in the person of the Mayor and ex-mayor and had their own separate meetings, on a regular basis. The only time when this apparently does not occur was in the twenty years when the Corporation seems to have been in the grip of a particularly puritanical and reformist zeal, which also facilitated the push to administer a central workhouse. It is almost certain that these meetings would have continued but in other places through this time.

This seems to have been very much a matter of influence rather than control however. The straightforward instruments of control which the mayor had at his disposal; not agreeing a rate, or overturning a vestry decision seems to have occurred rarely, certainly much less than in rural parishes. Payments 'by order of the Mayor' are rare, and seem mostly to be for travellers with passes who applied directly to him, and would have been part of the general consolidated plan for their treatment. It looks likely also that the mayor, or ex-mayor, could be relied upon to sign off the treatment of vagrants retrospectively, since the large numbers dealt with simply could not have been practically managed otherwise. On the rare occasions in which we do see intervention, such as in the case of the Messenger boys and John Godwin, mutual agreement between the parishes had broken down, and both cases are toward the beginning of the century. Where anything like persuasion or coercion were required, aldermen would use the vestry, turning up to convince and cajole rather than issue edicts from on high. This appears to be an evolution from the practice of the seventeenth century which was considerably more autocratic on the part of the Corporation.

Close familial and business ties across the vestries and the Corporation are apparent, with influential families such as the Watlingtons, Iremongers and Aberys being closely related and

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dominating the clothier and brewing industries which were so important to Reading. The influence of the brewing and innkeeping industries on vestry politics can almost certainly be detected in the enormously generous and flexible policy the parishes seem to have had towards putting up the long term sick and travellers in the inns of the town and paying all their expenses.

The Corporation also had a strong motivation for staying close to the individual decisions made with regard to settlement, rating and relief. Their political affiliations and role in managing elections, which were lost and won on a regular basis on a handful of votes, almost certainly led to some politically motivated decisions as to who was rated and who not, and who was appointed overseer. The 1740 election, as a consequence of an appeal, shows this most clearly, but it almost certainly influenced behaviour through most of the century. What can be deduced about the political affiliations of the vestries of Reading, at least St. Mary and St. Lawrence, is that they were of a similar make up, and seem, through most of the century, quite happy collaborators in the operation.

The impact on the town and on the paupers of Reading of this system of collaboration is a more subtle conclusion to draw; since what is direct impact is difficult to separate from what the consequences of wider socio-economic events would have been. One clear impact however is the 'shutting down' to the average pauper of the normal routes of appeal. Removed paupers could only normally object to their removal if their home parish was willing to raise an appeal in their own interests. In essence the pauper 'piggy-backed' on the self-interest of the home parish. Where the parish was suppressing its self-interest, as in the case of the Reading parishes; and not appealing decisions, then a pauper could only take a case themselves. There was a mechanism for this in the use of *in forma pauperis*, something noted by King in Essex, but not a process apparent in Berkshire. Removals were appealed to the county, but relief decisions appealed to the borough JPs. While records of these decisions do not exist, the evidence from parish records suggest these were rare, and where they did occur were part of a wider agreed strategy.

The effect on the relief costs of the town were more marginal however. While the parishes look to have kept control of the levels of relief through most of the century, seeing only slow increases in costs in comparison to the rise on a national scale; yet the levels of relief were in general quite high. Legal costs as a proportion of levels of relief were lower than in non-cooperating environments, but in general costs of relief were higher than average. Any success which the Reading parishes may have had in preventing the rise of these costs over the second

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half of the century in comparison to national and local, rural costs, could be as much apportioned to its urban nature in general, being less vulnerable to seasonal unemployment. Other, urban parishes which did not have such levels of cooperation show similar restraint.

The general high costs reflect a remarkably generous and broad system of relief for those who were accepted as the 'settled' poor of a particular parish, from the cradle, with lying-in packages and a midwife and christening paid for, through life; care for the house, support to work, suits of clothes when apprenticed, in sickness with hospital fees and nursing, to the grave through to funerals with bells and funeral cloths and clothes. Individuals could get themselves remarkably enhanced packages of support by working for the parish, as we see in the case of Robert Bussell and his family, but also in the cases of women such as Jane Marks. The flipside of this was a ruthless and uncompromising attitude towards groups seen as unhelpful to the town, in particular young single women, but also widows and large families.

The culmination of this for the pauper was little room for negotiation beyond ingratiating themselves to the parish and vestry. There was scant opportunity for appealing to magistrates, and both sides would have known this. Supplementary charity money was available, but this was completely at the discretion of the vestry and aldermen, and required being seen as deserving, as well as fulfilling the criteria of the charity. Generous provision could be accessed if the overseers saw you as useful to the parish. Deals concerning being settled or removed, as well as picking up relief costs, were all thrashed out between overseers at their meetings. Their view of the pauper's case was crucial.

The cooperative system was not all completely negative for the pauper however. Situations of competition between parishes, as we see at the beginning of the century in the case of the Messenger boys and John Godwin, could lead to extended 'stand offs' leaving the pauper in an unsupported limbo of indecision, which it took the Borough JP's intervention to resolve. Decisions, while uncompromising and one-sided, were generally quick and consistent.

The wider consequences are even more difficult to extrapolate; there is the intriguing possibility that crime within Reading was more 'feminised' than was general, as a consequence of a whole group frozen out of the relief system, and some evidence of a push toward prostitution for this group. The evidence is too thin for anything like certainty here though. References to resorts to pawnbrokers also seems to be uncharacteristically early for a community outside of London, and certainly they were well established in Reading by the end of the century. Friendly societies, though, the more legitimate and respectable means of

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supplementing income, were no more popular in Reading than anywhere else. There are some suggestions of popular resistance to the workhouses and the relief system, but again these are only passing references, and difficult to definitively apportion to this. Rioting, poaching and petty larceny certainly occurred in the town, but again, apparently, no more than anywhere else.

The case of Reading looks to be applicable to other, similar, corporation towns, as far as the evidence exists. Guildford shows enhanced movement within the town, and Bedford enhanced removal out of it, although both sources lack the data to complete the ratio calculation. Bedford shows strong aldermanic-vestry influence in the one parish that 'counts' in the town. Both towns had appeals made against them for using the relief and charity systems to influence elections. Both towns seem to have arrived at cooperation through slightly dissimilar routes however. Bedford was dominated by one parish and had a huge town-wide charity in the instance of the Harpur bequest to administer. Eventually legislation provided for complete unification. Guildford was effectively only two parishes after the unification of Blessed Virgin Mary and Holy Trinity in the 1690s and operated a joint workhouse with St. Nicholas from at least 1740 onwards. Other towns, such as Oxford legislated for union when systems of cooperation broke down, while towns such as Newbury were only one parish anyway. The push for cooperation seems to be a general factor, but local conditions would have prescribed different ways for this to happen.

The fact that Reading never arrived at a complete union before 1835 is explicable in a variety of ways. Firstly the very efficacy of the existing cooperative system allowed for many of the advantages which union would have provided. As the cases of Oxford and Salisbury show, unionisation became a desirable option when existing structures were deemed not to be working. This was probably facilitated by a situation in which all three parishes were of a good size, around 2000 each at the opening of our period of study, and no one parish dominated the others by size or wealth. Secondly the system was robust in that there seems to have been general cooperation with rate collection. This was facilitated by calibrations, at the discretion of the overseer, which allowed for a nuanced touch concerning individuals, a broad equity of rate level across the town, certainly among the most active in vestry politics. Lastly, and probably most importantly, being a 'scot and lot' borough meant that paying one's poor rate meant getting a vote. This could be both lucrative, and politically important, as the Corporation's attempts to exclude people from rating shows. Such cooperation with rate collection meant, in

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general, a good resource base through most of the century to provide a generous package of support to the settled poor as well as wayfarers and travellers.

This may also begin to explain the apparent paradox of a cooperative and coordinated borough unable to maintain a town-wide workhouse when the initiative is proposed in the 1720s. The motivation, despite the assertions of John Watt that they were prompted by a rise in costs, seems to have been more about moral reform, and not from any dysfunction on the part of the system. The initiative came from the Corporation, instigated by one parish, and one at least of the other parishes seems to have been reluctant to sign up. The dramatic shift in culture from a generous out-relief for the poor of the parish to one where all were to go to the workhouse does not seem to have sat well with the overseers, at least of St. Giles and St. Mary's. The outsourced management seems to have been incompetent. Outdoor relief payments build back up. The actual experiment was mismanaged, and costs were not reduced. Matthew Marryott's star fell nationally, and the project imploded locally, as it proved to be less effective than the system it had intended to replace.

Pressure for full unionisation only occurred when the economic crisis at the end of the century meant a genuine pressure on the rates and relief payments of the parishes. This also seems to have led to a collapse in the broad equity of the rate levels, with St. Lawrence charging the highest rate, and St. Giles the lowest. It was this very disparity which seems to have led St. Giles to have vetoed moves towards full unity.

By the end of the century the influence and status of the Corporation seems also to have collapsed. The body that could command and control in the seventeenth century and influence and cajole in the eighteenth, seems to have been unable to even manage its own business, let alone the vestries at the opening of the nineteenth. A combination of bankruptcy, ideological objection to intervention, waning representativeness of business and powerful individuals and ceding of key responsibilities to separate bodies meant that the Corporation had almost no influence by this time. The case of the Monck-led vestries' rebellion against the Corporation's management of charities at the opening of the nineteenth century illustrates this very clearly. All the old routes of control were gone. Strategies of using familial connections, social, unminuted meetings, the influence of the community leaders in the shape of vicars and placement of aldermen at vestry meetings all failed. The very culture of the vestries seems to have diverged from that of the Corporation, the one influenced by a radical, non-conformist and even growing temperance strain, while the other was dominated by Anglicans and brewers. The

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vestries did continue to cooperate with each other, for at least the opening decades of the century, suggesting that Axelrod's imperatives for cooperation were still sufficiently in place to incentivise this behaviour. However, the evidence of the parliamentary commission in the 1830s would suggest that even this system had decayed by this time, and most of the routine management was being handled by the workhouse governors.

Historiography of the poor law in recent years has pointed towards a picture of 'intense local variation'.⁴ Provision of poor relief could be decided by a variety of factors. Steven King highlights the amount of resource available in the first place, and the local culture of dependency.⁵ The nature of patterns of migration and local economic needs could establish specific solutions to problems.⁶ The social gap between vestry and magistracy in rural areas could lead to a lever of opportunity for the pauper.⁷ While the very proximity of small parishes in crowded urban spaces led to windows to 'game the system'.⁸

The nature of corporation towns led to a very specific ecology of relief. The balance of powers and responsibilities between corporation and vestry, the very small number of parishes, the tight social networks and coherence of interests across the town led to an impetus to cooperate beyond the traditional parish boundaries of relief administration. This impetus is not replicated in rural areas, where large numbers of parishes were administered by distant JPs. Even large urban areas did not replicate the same type of cooperation. Parishes could have very large populations, and operate as mini-corporations themselves, with JPs becoming part of the vestry. Some parishes would group together and operate informal specific practices, such as the 'friendly pass' scheme. Overall the sheer number of parishes (97 'within the walls' alone for London) could not allow for a complete, corporation-wide, harmonisation of practice.

Even in some corporation towns the impetus for cooperation could be subverted by the troubled politics and disruptions that were the legacies of the seventeenth century and so marked the opening of the eighteenth. In places such as Bristol forced cooperation, in the shape of the Corporation of the Poor, could ride rough-shod over the interests of the vestry, and suffer from significant resistance as a consequence. In Reading, despite an attempt to impose

⁴ S. Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c1550-1750* (Oxford, 2004), p.294.

⁵ S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England: 1700-1850, A regional perspective* (Manchester, 2000).

⁶ J.S. Taylor, 'A different type of Speenhamland: Non-resident relief in the Industrial Revolution' *Journal of British Studies*, Vol.30/2,(1991) pp.183-208 and J. Boulton 'Double deterrence, Settlement and Practice in London's West End, 1725-1824' From S. King and A. Winter (Eds), *Migration, Settlement and Belonging in Europe, 1500-1900s* (Oxford, 2013).

⁷ P. King, 'Summary courts and social relations in Eighteenth-Century England' *Past and Present* Vol. 183 (2004) pp.125-172.

⁸ J.S. Taylor, *Poverty, Migration and Settlement in the Industrial Revolution, Sojourners' Narratives* (Palo Alto, 1989).

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something similar in the 1720s, the lack of advantage of this system compared to the informal cooperative structures, seems to have seen its demise. Not all corporation towns were the same; numbers and sizes of parishes being one of the more important factors which may lead one parish taking over, or an eventual collapse which could then lead toward more formal coordination through legislation.

In Reading the relative balance in size and wealth, plus a high compliance of rate payment based on a scot and lot franchise, led to a system of town-wide cooperation, influenced, but not completely controlled by the Corporation. This system can be seen to be evolving from around 1710 and operating through the eighteenth century. The financial crisis of the 1790s was to put pressure on it, and the diminution of the Corporation was to leave it to a vestry-led process, which continued in some form until the 1820s. Legislation in the 1820s and the reforms of the 1830s were to dismantle it all together, negating the very need for it.

The example of Reading shows that under the right circumstances the ostensible autonomy of the parish, the 'mini-republic of welfare' would be voluntarily suppressed by its own officers to allow for a more coherent system of relief. It is also clear that this behaviour could be maintained over decades, despite a noted tendency in the framework of the poor law system to pit parish against parish, in a struggle of 'parochial xenophobia'.

Further study of other corporation towns is needed to understand how frequently these informal, but functioning ecologies of relief developed. Evidence from elsewhere suggests that they often did flourish, with all the implications this has on the welfare and agency of the pauper, even if not for the century-long period that it did in Reading.

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Appendix 1: List of main poor relief legislation referred to, 1536-1834

Year	Long title	Regnal number
1388	<i>Statute of Cambridge</i>	12 Rich. II c 7
1503	<i>Act to repel sturdy beggars</i>	19 Hen VII c 12
1531	<i>An Acte directing how aged, poor and impotent Persons, compelled to live by alms shall be ordered; and how Vagabonds and Beggars shall be punished.</i>	22 Hen.VIII c 12
1536	<i>An Acte for the Punishment of Sturdy Vagabonds and Beggars.</i>	27 Hen. VIII c 25
1547	<i>An Acte for the punishment of Vagabonds and for the Relief of the poor and impotent persons.</i>	1 Ed. VI c 3
1552	<i>An Act for the Provisyon and Relief of the Poore.</i>	5&6 Ed. VI c2
1563	<i>An Act for the Relief of the Poor.</i>	5 Eliz. I c 3
1572	<i>Acte for the Punishment of Vacabonds and Relief of the Poore and Impotent</i>	14 Eliz 1 c 5
1575	<i>An Acte for the setting of the Poore on Worke and for the avoyding of ydlenes.</i>	18 Eliz. I c 3
1598	<i>An Acte for the Reliefe of the Poore.</i>	39 Eliz. I c 4
1601	<i>An Acte for the Relief of the Poore.</i>	43 Eliz. I c 2
1647	<i>Ordinance for the relief and employment of the poor, and the punishment of vagrants and other disorderly persons.</i>	(L.J. ix., 580-1)
1662	<i>An Act for the better relief of the poor of this Kingdom.</i>	13&14 Car. II c 12
1685	<i>An Act for reviving and continuance of several acts of Parliament.</i>	1 Jam. II c 17
1691	<i>An Act for the better Explanation and supplying the Defects of the former Laws for the Settlement of the Poor.</i>	3 Will and Mary c 7
1691		3 Will and Mary c11
1696	<i>An Act for erecting of Hospitals and Work-houses within the City of Bristoll for the better imploying and maintaining the Poor thereof.</i>	7&8 Will. III c 32
1697	<i>An Act for supplying some defects in the Laws for the Relief of the Poor of this Kingdom.</i>	8&9 Will. III c 30
1698	<i>An Act for erecting Hospitals Workhouses and Houses of Correction within the Towne and Parish of Crediton in the County of Devon and for the better Reliefe of the Poor there.</i>	9 Will. III c 17
1698	<i>An Act for erecting Hospitals and Workhouses within the Towne and Parish of Tiverton in the County of devon for the better imploying and maintaining the Poor thereof.</i>	9 Will. III c 18
1698	<i>An Act for erecting Hospitals and Workhouses within the City and County of the City of Exon for the better imploying and maintaining the Poor there.</i>	9 Will. III c 33
1698	<i>An Act for erecting hospitals and Workhouses within the City of Hereford for the better imploying and maintaining the Poor there.</i>	9 Will. III c 34

1698	<i>An Act for erecting Hospotals and Workhouses within the Towne of Colchester in the County of Essex for the better imploying and maintaining the Poor thereof.</i>	9 Will. III c 37
1698	<i>An Act for erecting Workhiouses and Houses of Correction in the Towne of Kingston upon Hull for the Imployment and Maintenance of the Poor there.</i>	9 Will. III c 47
1698	<i>An Act for erecting Workhouses and Houses of Correction in the Towne of Shaftesbury and doe the better Imployment and Maintenance of the Poor.</i>	9 Will. III c 48
1698	<i>An Act for the more effectuall imploying the Poor by encourageing the Manufactures of this Kingdom.</i>	11 Will. III c 10
1700	<i>An Act for the effectual Punishment of Vagrants and sending them whither by Law they ought to be sent.</i>	11 Will. III c 18
1700	<i>An Act for erecting Hospitals and Workhouses within the Borough of Kings Lynn in the County of Norfolke for the better imploying and maintinaing the Poor there.</i>	12-13 Will. III c 6
1702	<i>An Act for erecting Hospitals and Workhouses within the Town of Sudbury in the County of Suffolk for the better imploying and mainatianing the Poor thereof.</i>	1 Anne c 32
1702	<i>An Act for incorporating certain Persons for the better providing for and setting at work the Poor in the City of Gloucester.</i>	1&2 Anne c 10
1703	<i>An Act for erecting a Workhouse in the City of Worcester and setting the poor on Worke there.</i>	2&3 Anne c 8
1707	<i>An Act for erecting a Workhouse in the Town and Borough of Plymouth in the County of Devon and for setting the Poor on Work and maintaining them there.</i>	6 Anne c 46
1709	<i>An Act for the more effectual Provision for the Porr in the Town of Kingston upon Hull.</i>	8 Anne c 26
1712	<i>An Act for erecting a Workhouse in the City and County of the City of Norwich for the better Imployments and maintainiing the Poor there.</i>	10 Anne c 15
1714	<i>An Act for making more effectual an Act passed (in 1696) intituled An Act for erecting of Hospitals and Workhouses within the City of Bristol for the better imploying and maintaining the Poor thereof.'</i>	13 Anne c 32
1714	<i>An Act for reducing the Laws relating to Rogues, Vagabonds sturdy Beggars and Vagrants into one Act of Parliament.</i>	13 Anne c 26
1722	<i>An Act for amending the laws relating to the Settlement, Employment and Relief of the Poor.</i>	9 Geo. I c 7
1743	<i>An Act for remedying some defects in the Act made in the 43rd year of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth.</i>	17 Geo. II c 38
1744	<i>An Act to amend and make more effectual the Laws relating to Rogues, Vagabonds and other idle and disorderly persons.</i>	17 Geo. II c 5
1764	<i>Act for Enlarging the Charitable Uses, Extending the Objects and Regulating the Application of the rents and profits of the Estates given by Sir William Harpur Knt and Dame Alice his wife, for the benefit of the poor.</i>	4 Geo. III c 21
1770	<i>An Act for consolidation the rates to be made for the relief of the Poor of the respective Parishes St. Thomas, St. Edmund and St. Martin in the city of New Sarum.</i>	10 Geo. III c 81

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1771	<i>An Act for the better regulation of the poor within the City of Oxford.</i>	11 Geo. III c 14
1782	<i>An Act for the Better Relief and Employment of the Poor.</i>	22 Geo. III c 83
1794	<i>An Act for the Better Relief, Regulation and Employment of the Poor within the Town of Bedford in the County of Bedford.</i>	34 Geo. III c 98
1795	<i>An Act to prevent the Removal of Poor Persons until they shall become actually chargeable.</i>	35 Geo. III c 101
1809	<i>Poor Settlement and Removal Act.</i>	49 Geo. III c 124
1812	<i>Act for the Registry of Charitable Donations and Providing a more summary Remedy for the correction of Abuses therein.</i>	52 Geo. III c 102
1814	<i>An Act to repeal certain provisions in local acts, for the maintenance and regulation of the poor and to make other provisions in relation thereon.</i>	54 Geo. III c 42
1818	<i>An Act for the regulation of parish vestries.</i>	58 Geo. III c 69
1819	<i>An Act to Amend the law for the relief of the poor.</i>	59 Geo. III c 12
1834	<i>An Act for the Amendment and better Administration of the Laws relating to the Poor in England and Wales.</i>	4 & 5 Will. IV c 76

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**Appendix 2: County of origin of settlers into Reading (St. Giles and St. Mary)
1687-1786**

Reading	395	Worcs	2
Berks	153	Northants	2
Oxon	75	Beds	1
Southampton	28	Bristol	1
Mddx	23	Cheshire	1
Wilts	19	Cornwall	1
Bucks	17	Cumberland	1
City of London	16	Essex	1
Surrey	14	IoW	1
Hants	11	Lancs	1
Herts	9	Lincs	1
Gloucs	8	Northumbria	1
Kent	6	Notts	1
Westminster	3	Suffolk	1
Montgomeryshire	2	Worcester	1
Norfolk	2	Yorks	1
Somerset	2		
Warks	2		

Appendix 3: Entries in St. Mary's Paybooks re joint meetings, as transcribed.

1713	Spent with St. Laurences overseers about (?)
1713	Spent at Wrights with St. Giles Overseers
1715	Spent with Laurences overseers
1716	"Spent at Charles Paines with Mr Mayor and Mr Clinton and Mr Broadridge about Bess Coleman and Moll Gibbins. Gibbins to St. Lawrence's Parish by order of Justices sending a letter to Hungerford about Bess Coleman
1717	Spent with Mr. Mayor examining people about there settlements
1717	Spent with Mr. Mayor examining people about there settlements
1717	Spent with St. Laurences overseers when (?) signed the certificate
1717	Spent at Dolls with Mr Wise about Clemens
1717	Spent at the Counter with Mr. Mayor about examining Mr. lears Maid and Hoppers daughters
1718	Spent with Mr. Wise and the churchwardens about Bayleys son and James Knott's Prentice
1718	Spent Yorkshiers with St. Laurences overseers about certificates
1718	Spent with Mr. mayor and Mr Wise about strangers certificates
1718	Spent with Mr. Wise examining strangers
1718	Spent at the Plow with Mr Mayor and Mr Wise about examining strangers
1718	Spent with St. Giles overseers about certificates
1718	Spent with St. Giles and St. Laurences overseers about settling ye casualties for the three parishes
1719	Spent with Mr Mayor about examining strangers
1719	Spent with St. Giles at the signing Rich Wolf certificate
1719	Spent with Mr. Mayor and Mr. Wise about Spencer's maid and Ann Furze and others
1719	Spent with Mr Mayor about certificates
1722	Spent at the Counter with Mr. Mayor.
1722	Spent with St. Laurence overseers
1722	Spent at the New Tavern with St. Laurences Overseers about settling certificates
1722	Spent with St. Giles overseers about certificates
1722	Spent at Thomas Holts with Mr. Mayor about examining Strangers
1722	Spent with St. Lawrence Overseers at signing certificates
1723	Spent with St. Giles overseers about James Harrison's family
1724	Spent at the Mitre Tavern with St. Laurences overserrs about Susan Strouds settlement that lived at Goody Pharows
1724	Six certificates fild up for St. Giles inhabitants spent with St. Giles overseers in exchanging certificates
1724	Spent with St. Giles overseers about certificates

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1724	Spent with St. Lawrence Overseers at signing certificates
1726	Spent with St. laurence overseers
1726	Spent at ye Tunnes with St. Lawrence and St. Giles overseers about signing ye articles for ye workhouse
1726	Paid at ye Tunns about settling the Accounts between the three Parishes
1730	Expenses with the overseers of the other parishes
1730	Expenses with the overseers of the other parishes to balance casualties
1731	Spent about parish business with all the overseers at Thomas Blackman
1731	Spent at meeting of all the churchwardens and overseers
1736	Spent at the Lower Ship with St. Lawrence and St. Giles Overseers about changing certificates
1736	Spent at the Golden Bear with St. Lawrence about settling Wid. Jenkins
1736	Spent at ye Mitre with St. laurence overseers
1737	Spent with St. Laurence overseers and St. Giles overseers concerning taking up vagrants
1737	Spent with St. Giles overseers about certificates
1737	Spent at settling the casualties
1737	Spent with St. Giles overseers about changing certificates
1738	Spent with St. Lawrences and St. Giles overseers about certificates
1738	Spent with St. Lawrences and St. Giles overseers
1738	Spent with "Sent Larens and Sent Giles" overseers
1739	Spent with St. Lawrences Churchwardens and overseers at two meetings about charging certificates
1739	Paid for 9 certificates and fill them up
1743	Expenses with ye overseers of St. Giles about managing certificates
1743	Expenses in changing certificates with St. Laurences and St. Giles overseers
1744	Spent with Mr Mayor about taking up Watkins
1745	Spent with St. Giles overseers at severall times on Account of Britans wife and child and an (article?) drawn by an attorney his fee and Rec'd 2 certificates
1746	Expenses with Mr. Mayor on parish business
1747	Paid for a bond and 2 "surtivicutts" and nursing 2 children of Thos Brittens and expenses metting ye Ofisers Belonging to St. Giles
1747	Expenses at ye (?) time with ye Mayor
1752	(hidden) with St. Larrances
1754	Expenses attending ye overseers of St. Lawrence about changing certificates
1754	Expenses at the Mayors
1755	Meeting ye Overseers at St. Lawrence at ye Crown concerning a women with child being a casualty
1756	Expenses in meeting the other two parish overseers at ye Gote
1756	Expenses on parish meeting ye Mayor and Town Clerk

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1739	Spent with St. Lawrences Churchwardens and overseers at two meetings about changing certificates
1743	Expenses with ye overseers of St. Giles about managing certificates
1744	Spent with Mr Mayor about taking up Wattkins
1745	Spent with St. Giles overseers at severall times on Account of Britans wife and child and an (article?) drawn by an attorney his fee and Rec'd 2 certificates
1746	Expenses with Mr. Mayor on parish business
1747	Paid for a bond and 2 "surtivicutts" and nursing 2 children of Thos Brittens and expenses metting ye Ofisers Belonging to St. Giles
1747	Expenses at ye (?) time with ye Mayor
1752	(hidden) with St. Larrances
1754	Expenses attending ye overseers of St. Lawrence about changing certificates
1754	Expenses at the Mayors
1756	Expenses at a meeting with St. Giles on ditto (Ann Lyne)
1771	Expenses changing a certificate Thos Ayres for Giles

Appendix 4: Status of Rogues and Vagabonds interviewed for St. Mary's Parish, 1751-1783

1.	1751	Margaret	Holliwell	f	Soldier's widow
2.	1756	Alice	Hutt	f	Soldier's Wife, 29
3.	1757	William	Kingham	m	
4.	1757	Mary	Nash	f	Singlewoman
5.	1757	Benjamin	Mills	m	
6.	1761	Edward	Hart	m	
7.	1764	William	Mason	m	
8.	1765	Ann	Dobbins	f	Wife
9.	1765	Mary	Nelson	f	Wife
10.	1765	Mary	Nash	f	Spinster
11.	1765	Elizabeth	Nash	f	
12.	1766	Emanuel	Francis	m	hatmaker
13.	1767	Mary	Gill	f	Soldier's Wife
14.	1768	Richard	Davis	m	aged 75
15.	1773	Thomas	Harvey	m	
16.	1775	William	Hudson	m	
17.	1776	John	Martin	m	
18.	1779	Mary	Green	f	Widow
19.	1779	William	Worrall	m	
20.	1782	Mary	Smith	f	Wife
21.	1783	Elizabeth	Cox	f	Abandoned Wife
22.	1783	Martha	Large	f	Abandoned Wife
23.	1783	Elizabeth	Maselin	f	
24.	1783	Mary	Pound	f	Singlewoman
25.	1790	Benj	Moore	m	
26.	1783	John	Killingly	m	
				Total	Female=14 Male=12

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