

## ABSTRACT

The English Workhouse: A Study in Institutional Poor Relief in Selected Counties, 1696-1750.

Timothy V. Hitchcock  
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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Oxford, Hilary Term, 1985.

This thesis charts the course of the eighteenth-century workhouse movement from the foundation of the Bristol Corporation of the Poor in 1696 to mid-century. It is divided roughly in two. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the attempted national and parliamentary reforms of the 1690s and 1700s and the collateral local moves towards the creation of Corporations of the Poor. Chapter 2 examines the activities of the Board of Trade and various individual parliamentarians, while chapter 3 looks at four examples of Corporations, those at Bristol, Exeter, London and Norwich.

The rest of the thesis deals exclusively with the parochial workhouse movement. Chapters 4 and 8 chart the spread of parochial houses from early centres of activity in the East Midlands and Essex. They also describe and assess the roles of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge and Matthew Marryott in providing services to early workhouses and in encouraging parishes to set up their own institutions. The role of the S.P.C.K. as a publishing house, political influence and advice centre are each discussed and that of Marryott as both expert and workhouse contractor examined. Chapter 4 also describes and analyses the content and importance of the Workhouse Test Act.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 look at the workhouse movement thematically, examining, in turn, the administration of workhouses, the conditions in these institutions, the make-up of workhouse populations and the reaction of the poor to these houses. In dealing with each of these subjects attention has been paid to the discrepancies which existed between the ideal workhouse conditions laid down by parish vestries and workhouse committees in sets of rules and regimen and the realities of workhouse administration and life exemplified by receipts, inventories and workhouse scandals.

Two appendixes have also been produced. The first lists all of the workhouses the location and date of foundation of which have been identified, and the second, all of the houses positively associated with Matthew Marryott either in the role of advisor or contractor.

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The aim of this thesis is to chart the course of the eighteenth-century workhouse movement from the foundation of the Bristol Corporation of the Poor in 1696 to the first decline of the workhouse movement in the 1740s. More than this, it describes the experience of the poor themselves, giving more space to the paupers incarcerated in the institutions established than to the reformers who put them there. The day-to-day administration of houses, the influences which encouraged their foundation, and the provisions allowed to those in receipt of relief have each been dealt with.

The employment of the poor was a favourite panacea of early eighteenth-century reformers. Through the regimentation of the poor in workhouses it was thought society as a whole could be reformed: that a population made up of idle and dissolute labourers could be replaced by one of tractable, morally upright and hard-working individuals. This was an unrealistic dream. However, approximately 600 institutions were established on the basis of models set out in the writings of the less extreme advocates of this type of reform. Among this number, fourteen early foundations - the Corporations of the Poor - were set up upon the authority of local Acts of Parliament, while most of the remainder were small parochial institutions established on local initiative. Together, these two distinct types of foundations, the Corporations and parochial houses, make up the first workhouse movement. Their existence ensured that the care of the poor in institutions would continue to be an alternative to pensions and doles. More than this, the fifty years covered by this thesis represent a watershed in the

history of the care of the poor.

The institutions founded before 1712 were part of a tradition in English poor relief stretching back to the sixteenth century. The establishment of the Corporations of the Poor between 1696 and 1712 was justified on the grounds that they would be self-supporting, that the poor they housed would pay for their keep with their labour. This justification was not used after 1712. From then on most of those who advocated and created workhouses intended that the poor should be deterred from applying for relief, not that they should finance it. The later parochial workhouses were to contribute to the economic running of the system of poor relief by affecting how the poor themselves viewed the relief they received. Where once workhouses had sought to recoup their cost, now they were designed to prevent the need for expenditure.

It has proved impossible to look at more than a small proportion of the houses established in the first half of the eighteenth century. The records of the parishes and towns involved in the movement, which provide the main source of information on these institutions, are patchy and extremely difficult to use. For this reason only a small number of areas have been examined in detail. So as to make sense of the limited number of houses that could be examined, research has been concentrated upon the houses in eight counties, the cities of London and Westminster and part of Lancashire. Some of the areas looked at, Cambridge, Essex and the West Derby Hundred of Lancashire for instance, have been chosen because printed material detailing their experience is available. As for the rest - Devon, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Middlesex, London and Westminster, and North Yorkshire, where manuscript sources have been examined in some depth - these have been selected as counties representing distinct areas. So, North Yorkshire was chosen to represent the experience of the North, and Devon that of the West Country. However, available secondary material makes it clear that the

greatest number of institutions were founded in the home counties, and that after the passage of the Workhouse Test Act in 1722, the cities of London and Westminster and the County of Middlesex played a leading role in founding houses. Each of these areas has therefore been looked at in detail. This sampling technique has not produced a precise statistical model of the experience of each part of the country; it is weighted towards the South-East and leaves whole areas largely unexamined. But, in conjunction with information from the archives of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, it has resulted in a better understanding of the experience of areas of particular significance for the workhouse movement, and at the same time has provided a gauge with which to measure the level of activity outside those areas.

Besides parochial records, the most important source of information on workhouses is the archive of the S.P.C.K. The Society was actively involved in the foundation of houses between about 1718 and 1740, and kept meticulous records. These records provide flesh for the information contained in parochial sources, and a national context to the local examples provided by vestry minute books and overseers' accounts.

There is also a body of secondary material available for the houses established in this period. Numerous local studies of poor relief and of specific institutions have been undertaken, and although there is no adequate source for the history of the movement as a whole, these studies provide a wealth of information on houses which would otherwise have gone unnoticed. F.G. Emmison's article on poor relief at Eaton Socon is merely one example of a whole historical genre, items of which, though occasionally difficult to locate, have been used to broaden our understanding of the workhouse movement.

The definition of an eighteenth-century workhouse adopted in this thesis is any house, operated by or through local government, with at

least one paid manager, wherein all types of paupers were housed and where some attempt was made to put them to work. Not all of the houses discussed in this thesis fit this definition, whether because their administration was completely independent of local government or because they catered solely for the needs of children. Similarly, there were some institutions extant in the period examined which have been excluded because of their provenance rather than the degree to which they fit the adopted definition. One of the most successful seventeenth-century establishments, that at Windsor, might conceivably be categorised as an eighteenth-century house, prior to the reformation of its organisation in 1731, but its earlier history has been excluded on the grounds that the institution's original organisation was the result of the activities of the reformers of the 1630s.

As well as restricting its attention to those institutions of a distinctly eighteenth-century character, this thesis also limits itself to certain aspects of workhouse development. Besides charting the expansion of the workhouse movement, it concentrates on two aspects of the process of institutionalising the poor. First, the direct political influences exercised at both national and local levels which encouraged the foundation of the 600 or so houses established in this period. And, second, the physical manifestations of these institutions; the conditions under which the inmates were forced to live and their reactions to those conditions, the character and actions of those responsible for administering the houses and the sources of the expertise necessary for their successful operation.

Lack of space has dictated that several questions have been ignored. The place of workhouses in local economies and their effect on particular industries has received little consideration; while the ideological and intellectual origins of the ideas expressed in workhouse literature have been dealt with only in passing. By eliminating these subject areas it has been possible to allow the space

necessary to deal with the poor themselves: their feelings about and reactions to the types of relief forced upon them. It has also made it possible to express more clearly the picture drawn by the spread of workhouses, and to discuss in detail the role of organisations like the S.P.C.K. and individuals such as Matthew Marryott.

A distinct line has been drawn between the Corporations of the Poor and the parochial workhouses which followed. Each type of institution has been dealt with separately and in a slightly different manner. Because the Corporations were the result of legislation and were founded coincidentally with several attempts at national reform, in dealing with them a great deal of space has been given to an analysis of their political significance both in the various cities affected and in terms of parliamentary politics. In contrast, the parochial workhouses of the 1720s received little attention from either national reformers or Parliament; hence the conditions in and administration of these houses have occupied the majority of the space dedicated to them. In dealing with both types of institution this thesis has been slanted towards the poor themselves, and the relationship between the poor and their betters exemplified by the types of relief provided. However, since the Corporations were in part created in response to purely political considerations it has proved necessary to give that aspect of their existence greater weight; while the non-political character of later houses has determined that the effects of these institutions on poor relief and the poor have been looked at more closely.

Chapter 2 examines the moves towards national reforms made in the 1690s and 1700s, and puts the Corporation Acts in a national context. In this chapter the Board of Trade and reformers like Anthony Hammond and Sir Humphrey Mackworth are discussed in detail, and the relationship between these and the local initiatives which resulted in the foundation of the Corporations is analysed.

Chapter 3 then goes on to discuss the Corporations themselves. By

taking four examples, the Corporations at Bristol, Exeter, London and Norwich, and describing their early histories and the influences which led to their foundation, an idea of the types of institutions established and range of conditions in these institutions is given. In this chapter as much space as is feasible is allocated to the conditions experienced by paupers in these institutions. These two early chapters deal exclusively with the Corporations of the Poor and collateral reforms, while the rest of the thesis is given over to a discussion of the much more numerous parochial houses of the second quarter of the century.

The course of the parochial workhouse movement, the influences which encouraged it and its legal basis are described in chapters 4 and 8. It is in these chapters that the roles of the S.P.C.K. and Matthew Marryott are discussed, and the Workhouse Test Act is described and analysed.

The rest of the thesis, chapters 5, 6 and 7, is taken up with an analysis of specific aspects of the parochial workhouse movement. The administration of houses, the conditions in these institutions and the reaction of paupers to them is each discussed in separate chapters. Chapter 5 looks at the administration of parochial houses. It analyses how they were organised, by whom they were administered and towards what end they were established. Chapter 6 examines both the conditions which vestries and overseers of the poor expected to create in these houses and the range of conditions that were actually experienced by paupers. Diet sheets and sets of workhouse rules are looked at and then compared to the receipts, inventories and single orders which more accurately reflect the physical conditions in these institutions.

Finally, chapter 7 looks at the poor themselves. It analyses who the poor were and how they used the relief provided. A statistical breakdown of a workhouse population is undertaken and distinctions in the way in which different types of paupers used workhouses is

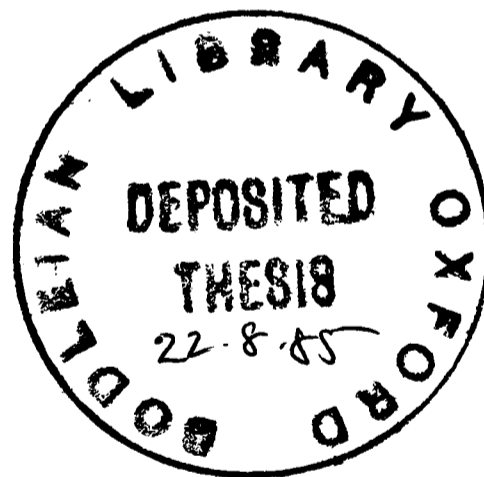
discussed. More than this, chapter 7 analysis the way in which paupers viewed these institutions, what preconceptions they had about them and why.

Overall, this thesis has attempted to provide a national context to the workhouse movement and at the same time to explicate the relationship between those forced to accept relief in the form of an offer of the house, and those who provided the house to offer.

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IN SELECTED COUNTIES, 1696-1750 ✓

A thesis submitted to the Faculty Board in Modern  
History in the University of Oxford, in Candidacy  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Hilary  
Term, 1985.<sup>15</sup>

by  
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## GUIDE TO ABBREVIATIONS

B.R.O.....	Berkshire Record Office
Bod. Lib.....	Bodleian Library
B.I.H.R.....	Bothwick Institute of Historical Research
Brit. Lib.....	British Library, Manuscript Department
Bucks. R.O.....	Buckinghamshire Record Office
C.P.L.....	Camden Public Libraries, Archives Department
C.L.R.O.....	Corporation of London Record Office
D.R.O.....	Devon Record Office
D.N.B.....	<u>Dictionary of National Biography</u>
F.S.S.W.A.....	Friend's School at Saffron Walden Archives
G.L.R.O.....	Greater London Record Office
G.L.....	Guildhall Library
H.L.S.....	Hackney Library Services
J.H.C.....	<u>Journal of the House of Commons</u>
J.H.L.....	<u>Journal of the House of Lords</u>
K.C.P.L.....	Kensington and Chelsea Public Library
L.P.L.....	Lambeth Palace Library
N.R.O.....	Norfolk Record Office

N.Y.R.O.....North Yorkshire Record Office

O.R.O.....Oxfordshire Record Office

P.R.O.....Public Record Office

S.P.C.K.....Archives of the Society for the Promotion  
of Christian Knowledge

    A.L.B.....Abstract Letter Book

    Minutes.....Minutes of the S.P.C.K.

    S.L.....Society Letters

    M.L.B.....Miscellaneous Letters Book

    Spec. L.....Special Letters

    S.C.M.B.....Standing Committee Minute Book

S.F.L.....Society of Friends Library

W.D.R.O.....West Devon Record Office

W.Y.R.O.....West Yorkshire Record Office

W.C.L.....Westminster City Library

Y.C.A.D.....York City Archives Department

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to chart the course of the eighteenth-century workhouse movement from the foundation of the Bristol Corporation of the Poor in 1696 to the first decline of the workhouse movement in the 1740s. More than this, it describes the experience of the poor themselves, giving more space to the paupers incarcerated in the institutions established than to the reformers who put them there. The day-to-day administration of houses, the influences which encouraged their foundation, and the provisions allowed to those in receipt of relief will each be dealt with.

The employment of the poor was a favourite panacea of early eighteenth-century reformers. Through the regimentation of the poor in workhouses it was thought society as a whole could be reformed; that a population made up of idle and dissolute labourers could be replaced by one of tractable, morally upright and hard-working individuals. This was an unrealistic dream. However, approximately 600 institutions were established on the basis of models set out in the writings of the less extreme advocates of this type of reform.<sup>1</sup> Among this number, fourteen early foundations were set up upon the authority of local Acts of Parliament,<sup>2</sup> while most of the remainder were small parochial institutions established on local initiative. Together, these two distinct types of foundations, the Corporations of the Poor and parochial houses, make up the first workhouse movement. Their existence ensured that the care of the poor in institutions would continue to be an alternative to pensions and doles. More than this, the fifty years covered by this thesis represent a watershed in the history of the care of the poor.

<sup>1</sup>See Chapter 8, p.218.

<sup>2</sup>See Chapter 2, p.14n.

The institutions founded before 1712 were part of a tradition in English poor relief stretching back to the sixteenth century. The establishment of the Corporations of the Poor between 1696 and 1712 was justified on the grounds that they would be self-supporting, that the poor they housed would pay for their keep with their labour.<sup>1</sup> This justification was not used after 1712. From then on most of those who advocated and created workhouses intended that the poor should be deterred from applying for relief, not that they should finance it. The later parochial workhouses were to contribute to the economic running of the system of poor relief by affecting how the poor themselves viewed the relief they received. Where once workhouses had sought to recoup their cost, now they were designed to prevent the need for expenditure.

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<sup>1</sup>For example see M.D., A Present Remedy for the Poor (London, 1700), pp.10-11, 16; even John Bellers thought a large annual profit could be raised by employing the poor in workhouses. John Bellers, Proposals for Raising a Colledge of Industry (London, 1695), pp.1,5.

<sup>2</sup>E.M. Hampson, The Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire (Cambridge, 1934); Michael J. Murphy, Poverty in Cambridgeshire (Cambridge, 1978); H.P. Stokes, 'Cambridge Parish Workhouses', Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, xv, n.s., ix, (1911); E.G. Thomas, 'The Parish Overseer in Essex, 1597-1834' (London Univ. M.A. thesis,

Berkshire, Middlesex, London and Westminster, and North Yorkshire - these have been selected as counties representing distinct areas. So, North Yorkshire was chosen to represent the experience of the North, and Devon that of the West Country. However, available secondary material makes it clear that the greatest number of institutions were founded in the home counties, and that after the passage of the Workhouse Test Act in 1722, the cities of London and Westminster and the County of Middlesex played a leading role in founding houses. Each of these areas has therefore been looked at in detail. This sampling technique does not give a precise statistical model of the experience of each part of the country; it is weighted towards the South-East and leaves whole areas largely unexamined. But, in conjunction with information from the archives of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, it has allowed me to concentrate on areas of particular significance for the workhouse movement, and at the same time to gauge the level of activity outside those areas.

Besides parochial records, the most important source of information on workhouses is the archive of the S.P.C.K. The Society was actively involved in the foundation of houses between about 1718 and 1740,<sup>1</sup> and kept meticulous records. These records have been used to flesh out the information contained in parochial sources, and to provide a national context to the local examples provided by vestry minute books and overseers' accounts.

1956); E.G. Thomas, 'The Treatment of Poverty in Berkshire, Essex and Oxfordshire' (London Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1971); G.W. Oxley, 'The Administration of the Old Poor Law in the West Derby Hundred of Lancashire, 1601-1837' (Liverpool Univ. M.A. thesis, 1966); G.W. Oxley, 'The Permanent Poor in South-West Lancashire under the Old Poor Law', J.R. Harris, ed., Liverpool and Merseyside (London, 1969).

<sup>1</sup>For accounts of the S.P.C.K.'s activities in this period see M.G. Jones, The Charity School Movement (Cambridge, 1938); Leonard W. Cowie, Henry Newman, An American in London, 1708-1743 (London, 1956); Mary Clement, The S.P.C.K. and Wales, 1699-1740 (London, 1954).

There is also a body of secondary material available for the houses established in this period. Numerous local studies of poor relief and of specific institutions have been undertaken, and although there is no adequate source for the history of the movement as a whole, these studies have provided a wealth of information on houses which would otherwise have gone unnoticed. F.G. Emmison's article on poor relief at Eaton Socon is merely one example of a whole historical genre,<sup>1</sup> items of which, though occasionally difficult to locate, have been extremely useful in understanding the workhouse movement.

Besides these local studies there are also some volumes relating the history of poor relief in England as a whole. The Webbs' volume on the Old Poor Law and Dorothy Marshall's administrative history of relief are the most authoritative of this literature.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, these works have proved of limited use. They are old and rely heavily upon printed and parliamentary records to the exclusion of more awkward and numerous local sources. In so far as these works detail the histories of poor relief legislation and pamphlet literature they have proved immensely valuable, but the thrust of this thesis is directed towards the experience of paupers incarcerated in these houses and the local background to their foundations. No secondary work has adequately dealt with the workhouse movement on this level.

Before looking at the institutions set up it is necessary to establish that there was an eighteenth-century workhouse movement, that the foundations of the 1700s and 1720s were not simply an undifferentiated continuation of the seventeenth century's attempts at

<sup>1</sup>F.G. Emmison, 'The Relief of the Poor at Eaton Socon, 1706-1834', The Publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, xv (1933), pp.1-98.

<sup>2</sup>Sidney and Beatrice Webb, English Local Government, English Poor Law History, Part I. The Old Poor Law (London, 1927); Dorothy Marshall, The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century, a Study in Social and Administrative History (London, 1926).

employing the poor, but rather that there was a qualitative as well as quantitative distinction between the institutions set up by seventeenth-century reformers like Samuel Hartlib and Thomas Firmin and those established by John Cary and Matthew Marryott.

Throughout the seventeenth century English cities set up what were described as workhouses. In York, Bristol and London projects to employ children and the able-bodied poor were begun.<sup>1</sup> Even in the sixteenth century what can be and, indeed, what were described as workhouses were established in houses of correction and at the Palace of Bridewell.<sup>2</sup> However, these institutions were significantly different from most of those established in parishes throughout the country in the early eighteenth century.

With one or two exceptions seventeenth-century institutions were non-residential. Housed in single rooms in extant civic buildings, they employed the poor on stock provided by the city or parish, paying wages in the form of relief from which the poor were expected to support themselves.<sup>3</sup> These institutions employed only children and the

<sup>1</sup> See Y.C.A.D., City of York, House Book, 1613-1625, xxxiv, B34, ff.194,198-199, 226; Y.C.A.D., City of York, House Book, 1625-1637, xxxv, B34, ff.37, 177, 304, 333; E.E. Butcher, Bristol Corporation of the Poor, Selected Records, 1696-1834 (Bristol Record Society's Publications, iii, 1932), pp.39-40; Valerie Pearl, 'Puritans and Poor Relief, The London Workhouse, 1649-1660', eds, D. Pennington and K. Thomas, Puritans and Revolutionaries (Oxford, 1978), pp.206-232.

<sup>2</sup> See E.G. O'Donoghue, Bridewell Hospital, Palace, Prison, Schools (London, 1923); E.M. Leonard, The Early History of English Poor Relief (London, 1900), pp.113-115.

<sup>3</sup> At York in 1636 the Corporation ordered that 'the Overseers of the poore take care to sett to workes such pore people within their parish as are able to worke and to furnish them with such work as they can doe and take an accompt of them for the same paying them such wages as may bee thought reasonable and for that purpose the said overseers to repaire to the maister of the house of Workes & furnish themselves with such materialls as may be needfull.' The house at York did little more than provide the raw materials needed to set the poor on work. Y.C.A.D., City of York, House Book, 1625-1637, xxxv, B34, f.304.

able-bodied. No provision was made for the elderly, nor could the sickly or lame apply to the house for relief. These types of paupers were relieved through the parish with pensions and doles. Moreover, the administrative districts served by these institutions contained large numbers of paupers for whom these workhouses did not cater. Parishes continued to support children and the able-bodied where the vestry decided it was appropriate to do so. Set up by City Chambers and separately constituted corporations whose role was in the first case originally supervisory and in the second legally restricted, seventeenth-century houses gave an unusual form of relief; the important day-to-day provision continued to be provided by the administrative district first given responsibility - the parish.

It is impossible in this short space to do more than generalise about the nature of seventeenth-century institutional relief. It is a subject of immense complexity made more difficult by the confusion between workhouses, almshouses, houses of correction and workshops. The functions normally associated with eighteenth-century workhouses were performed in the 1600s by a variety of different institutions. Thus, while there were hospitals for the care of the poor, houses of correction, workhouses for employment and almshouses for the support and care of the lame and elderly, no single institution undertook all these tasks. In contrast, most eighteenth-century houses did, or were at least designed to, fulfil each of these functions.

The definition of an eighteenth-century workhouse adopted in this thesis is any house, operated by or through local government, with at least one paid manager, wherein all types of paupers were housed and at least an attempt was made to put them to work. Not all of the houses discussed in this thesis fit this definition, whether because their administration was completely independent of local government or

because they catered solely for the needs of children.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, there were some institutions extant in the period examined which have been excluded because of their provenance rather than the degree to which they fit the adopted definition. One of the most successful seventeenth-century establishments, that at Windsor, might conceivably be categorised as an eighteenth-century house, prior to the reformation of its organisation in 1731, but its earlier history has been excluded on the grounds that the institution's original organisation was the result of the activities of the reformers of the 1630s.<sup>2</sup>

This policy of excluding earlier foundations can be justified by reference to the activities of eighteenth-century reformers themselves. At Exeter, for instance, a seventeenth-century foundation was replaced by one of a significantly different character with the establishment of a Corporation of the Poor in 1698, and at Windsor the reform of the still successful workhouse in 1731,<sup>3</sup> indicates that the managers of the house no longer considered its organisation appropriate.

This is not to say that eighteenth-century workhouses bore no resemblance to earlier institutions. The development of workhouses was a process of gradual evolution, not sudden change. The Corporations of the Poor, for example, owed much to the organisation of the institutions described in the Act of Settlement of 1662,<sup>4</sup> and when the

<sup>1</sup>For example, I have discussed both the Quaker workhouse at Clerkenwell and the London Corporation of the Poor at some length though the former was established and run by the Quaker community and the latter cared only for children and criminals. See Chapter 3, pp.70-82.

<sup>2</sup>M.F. Bond, 'Windsor's Experiment in Poor-Relief, 1621-1829', Berkshire Archeological Journal, 48 (1945), pp.31-32.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.33.

<sup>4</sup>The Corporation of the Poor of London was actually founded upon the authority of the Act of Settlement, while the others established at around the same time took the name 'Corporation of the Poor' and the title 'Guardian of the Poor' from Samuel Hartlib's interregnum experiment and the Act of Settlement which gave legal backing to that early attempt at employing the poor. See 13 & 14 Charles II c.12.

Board of Trade examined poor relief in the 1690s one of the witnesses called to give evidence was Thomas Firmin.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the Corporations themselves were in many ways characteristically seventeenth-century; their tendency to employ different types of paupers in different houses, as at Bristol and Norwich,<sup>2</sup> and the pomp and pretence associated with their administration, had more in common with their predecessors than with the small parochial institutions which followed. However, both in terms of size and means the Corporations and parochial workhouses can be differentiated from the houses which came before. They were designed to meet the needs of a wide range of different types of paupers.

As well as restricting its attention to those institutions of a distinctly eighteenth-century character, this thesis also limits itself to certain aspects of workhouse development. Besides charting the expansion of the workhouse movement, it concentrates on two aspects of the process of institutionalising the poor. First, the direct political influences exercised at both national and local levels which encouraged the foundation of the 600 or so houses established in this period. And, second, the physical manifestations of these institutions; the conditions under which the inmates were forced to live and their reactions to those conditions, the character and actions of those responsible for administering the houses and the sources of the expertise necessary for their successful operation.

Lack of space has dictated that several questions will be ignored. The place of workhouses in local economies and their effect on particular industries will receive little consideration; while the ideological and intellectual origins of the ideas expressed in workhouse literature will be dealt with only in passing. By elimi-

<sup>1</sup>See Macfarlane, 'Studies in Poverty and Poor Relief in London', p.264.

<sup>2</sup>See Chapter 3, pp.53-54, 85-86.

nating these subject areas it has been possible to allow the space necessary to deal with the poor themselves: their feelings about and reactions to the types of relief forced upon them. It has also been possible to express more clearly the picture drawn by the spread of workhouses, and to discuss in detail the role of organisations like the S.P.C.K. and individuals such as Matthew Marryott.

A distinct line has been drawn between the Corporations of the Poor and the parochial workhouses which followed. Each type of institution has been dealt with separately and in a slightly different manner. Because the Corporations were the result of legislation and were founded coincidentally with several attempts at national reform, in dealing with them a great deal of space has been given to an analysis of their political significance both in the various cities affected and in terms of parliamentary politics. In contrast, the parochial workhouses of the 1720s received little attention from either national reformers or parliament, hence the conditions in and administration of these houses have occupied the majority of the space dedicated to them. In dealing with both types of institution I have attempted to slant the analysis towards the poor themselves, and the relationship between the poor and their betters exemplified by the types of relief provided. However, since the Corporations were in part created in response to purely political considerations it has proved necessary to give that aspect of their existence greater weight; while the non-political character of later houses has allowed me to look more closely at how these institutions affected poor relief and the poor.

## CHAPTER 2: LOCAL LEGISLATION AND NATIONAL REFORM

The period between 1696 and 1712 saw a burst of activity on both local and national levels directed towards the reform of poor relief. In fifteen cities and towns Corporations of the Poor were founded, while at Westminster several attempts were made to have passed Acts of Parliament for the reform of poor relief nationwide. The Board of Trade spent much of its time in this period trying to formulate a workable scheme for the institutionalisation of the poor, and the King actively encouraged change in this direction in two of his speeches to Parliament. The early experiences of the Corporations of the Poor will be dealt with thoroughly in a later chapter; here I would like to outline the Acts upon which the Corporations were founded, the national influences which worked for their foundation, and the activities of central government directed towards a national change in the provision of poor relief.

At the end of the seventeenth century Bristol was the third largest city in England. It had a thriving international trade and a powerful merchant elite. Simply because of Bristol's size and economic importance the decision to create a Corporation of the Poor for the eighteen parishes of Bristol represented a precedent, which could be neither dismissed as provincial nor ignored as inappropriate for other large urban areas. Indeed, the founding of Bristol's Corporation must be seen as the beginning of the first substantive moves towards the institutionalisation of poor relief in England. It began a movement which resulted in both the creation of Corporations in fourteen other cities and towns<sup>1</sup> and the near success of several plans to change fundamentally the national system for relieving the poor.

<sup>1</sup>Local Corporation acts passed prior to 1712 were the following: Bristol, 7 & 8 William III c.32; Tiverton, 9 & 10 William III c.18; Crediton, 9 & 10 William III c.29; Hereford, 9 & 10 William III

The founding of Corporations of the Poor occurred in two main periods. The Parliamentary Session of 1697-8 saw the passage of seven local Corporation Acts, while the Sessions of 1701 and 1702 saw three more become law. There is no obvious link between the cities and towns in which these organisations were founded, though the South West, East Anglia and the West Midlands encompassed eleven of the fourteen Corporations.<sup>1</sup> They ranged in location from Plymouth in the South West to Kingston-upon-Hull in the North, and in size from the City of London to the small provincial town of King's Lynn. The timing of these foundations is explicable by reference to national politics, but their distribution is less easily accounted for. Neither can the Corporations be seen as a homogeneous set of institutions on any but the most superficial level. The Acts which founded them are all of a piece, with similar wording and provisions, but the motivations behind their establishment and the role they played in local administration differed markedly across the range of cities and towns affected. In Plymouth the Corporation set up in 1708 was merely a new administrative framework for a century old hospital for the poor of that town;<sup>2</sup> and although a house of correction was established, there

c.34; Exeter, 9 & 10 William III c.35; Colchester, 9 & 10 William III c.37; Kingston-upon-Hull, 9 & 10 William III c.47; Shaftsbury, 9 & 10 William III c.48; King's Lynn, 13 William III c.6; Gloucester, 1 Anne Sess.2 c.11; Sudbury, 1 Anne Sess.2 c.34; Worcester, 2 & 3 Anne c.8; Plymouth, 6 Anne c.6; Norwich, 10 Anne c.6.

In the same period the following failed attempts were made to have similar acts passed: The City of London, 1699, J.H.C., xiii, 121; 1701, J.H.C., xiii, 426; 1703, J.H.C., xiv, 274; St. James, Westminster, 1700, J.H.C., xiii, 281; Ashford, Kent, 1700, J.H.C., xiii, 413; Halifax, 1700, J.H.C., xiii, 401; Tower Hamlets, 1700, J.H.C., xiii, 415; Nottingham, 1701, J.H.C., xiii, 437; Dorchester, 1701, J.H.C., xiii, 793; Leicester, 1707, J.H.C., xv, 529; Westminster, 1708, J.H.C., xvi, 45.

<sup>1</sup> See Map 2:1

<sup>2</sup> R.N. Worth, History of Plymouth from the Earliest Period to the Present Time (Plymouth, 1890), pp.290-291, and Llewellyn Jewitt, A History of Plymouth (London, 1873), pp.611-612.

Map 2:1

Foundations and attempted foundations of Corporations of the Poor prior to 1712.



was no question of either setting up a general workhouse or applying any new standard to the traditional means of relieving the deserving poor. In Norwich, however, the Corporation served the end of reorganising the administration of the local house of correction and of setting poor children to work in a residential working school, no attempt being made to found a single institutional workhouse until ten years after its establishment.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, in Exeter a large general workhouse was built which took in most of the poor of that city, a primitive workhouse test was applied, and all the powers given in Exeter's Act were used to the full.<sup>2</sup>

These Corporations were diverse in character, but when seen from a national perspective seem similar as a result of the provisions of the Acts which founded them. They spoke to local, not national concerns and it is within a local context that their early histories will be examined.

#### Section A: The Corporation Acts

Exeter's Act was passed in 1698 and came into effect in June of that year. Its provisions are typical of the thirteen other Acts passed in this period.<sup>3</sup> Entitled 'An Act for Erecting Hospitals and Work-houses within the City and County of the City of Exon, and for the better Employing and Maintaining the Poor there', it provided for the setting up of a Corporation of the Poor on the grounds that:

<sup>1</sup>J. Edwards, 'Norwich in the Eighteenth Century' (unpublished typescript, 1972), p.64; deposited in the Local Studies Library, City Library, Norwich.

<sup>2</sup>The best account of the workhouse at Exeter can be found in W.G. Hoskins, Industry, Trade and People in Exeter, 1688-1800 (2nd edn, Exeter, 1968), pp.142-146.

<sup>3</sup>9 & 10 William III, c.35.

the Poor...do daily Multiply, and Idleness and Debauchery amongst the meaner sort doth greatly Increase, for want of Work-houses to set them to Work, and a sufficient Authority to Compel them thereto, as well to the Charge of the Inhabitants, and Grief of the Charitable and honest Citizens of the said City, as the great Distress of the Poor themselves...

To provide the 'sufficient Authority' to cure this perceived growth in 'Idleness and Debauchery' the members of the Corporation were given the powers of Justices of the Peace. The mayor and aldermen of Exeter and forty guardians of the poor elected by the four wards of the city were made a corporation in law with all the rights incumbent on that status: to sue and be sued and act as a corporation in the courts of Great Britain, to buy and lease property, and to incur debts and make loans. The Corporation was also empowered to elect from its members a governor, a deputy governor, a treasurer or treasurers and sixteen assistants, each to hold office for one year.

Exeter's Act provided for a mandatory meeting of the Corporation on the first Tuesday of every second month, while giving any twelve guardians of the poor the right to call a meeting whensoever they pleased, with a forfeiture of up to five shillings enjoined on the members for non-attendance. The powers wielded by any such meeting were extremely broad. Besides such rights as the ability to make a seal and appoint by-laws for the better running of the Corporation, the guardians were given almost total power over the lives of the poor. Anyone applying for relief, begging or seen to have no lawful employment fell within the purview of the Corporation, which was then empowered to compel them to work, dwell in an appointed workhouse, and, if under sixteen, be bound apprentice. Furthermore, the Corporation could inflict any 'reasonable Correction and Punishment' with no reference to any body outside itself on anyone it either set to work or maintained in a workhouse or house of correction. These powers were laid out in broad unqualified statements, which when submitted for opinion to legal council were found to offer absolutely no restrictions

on the power held over the poor.<sup>1</sup>

The Corporation's sway over the poor was only one side of its power - its independence from other local government bodies being the other. Though the mayor and aldermen were part of Exeter's Corporation it was still created as a separate institution and though the mayor was to have the right to approve the rates raised for the relief of the poor, in<sup>almost</sup> every Act after that for Bristol allowance was made for the Corporation to act independently in setting rates if the mayor and justices refused to approve the amounts proposed.

In raising money, as in controlling the poor, the Corporation was given wide leeway. Exeter's Act allowed it to raise up to £3,000 for building workhouses and houses of correction and, in order to satisfy developing needs, to raise any amount not exceeding what, on average, had been paid for the poor by the parishes in any one of the three years preceding 1698. The Corporation therefore had the right to issue warrants under its own authority for the collection of rates and to impound the goods of any person refusing to pay his rates, and if this was not enough, it could also imprison anyone refusing to pay his rates and not having goods of sufficient value to cover his rates bill when impounded and distressed.

Beyond the powers mentioned above, Exeter's Corporation could also receive charitable gifts, choose officers and servants and call its treasurers to account.

Although Exeter's was but one of fourteen Acts passed between 1696 and 1712, it was representative of the degree of power and independence given to each Corporation. Certainly, there were minor variations in

<sup>1</sup>In August 1704, a report from council submitted to the Corporation stated that it could 'Inflict such reasonable correction and punishment on any poore person or persones offending in the Hospitall or Workhouse as they in their Discretion shall think fitt.' D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book, ii, 21 June 1704, 1 August 1704.

the content of these Acts which, while not affecting their overall meaning, did allow for variations in local government practice. At Crediton the Corporation was to consist of the twelve governors of the Church of Crediton and ten guardians chosen by the governors; and, unlike Exeter's Act, Crediton's made no provision for the election of guardians. But beyond this concession to the local closed vestry there was no substantive difference between the two Acts.<sup>1</sup> Plymouth's Act, passed in 1708, provided that the Corporation should be made up of the mayor, the recorder, six of the town's magistrates and six of the common councilmen chosen by the magistracy and common council respectively, twenty guardians from St. Andrew's parish and eighteen from the parish of Charles, each to be elected by those in these parishes paying six pence per month for the support of the poor. Plymouth's Act is somewhat unusual as it takes special note of a long-established local charity, the 'Poor's Portion', but in other respects it holds true to the pattern established in the earlier Acts.<sup>2</sup> Each of the fourteen Acts passed in this period contained some individual clauses not found in the others, but usually these were restricted to those dealing with the numbers or categories of people who made up the Corporations, or their tenure of office. They did not affect the powers vested in these organisations.

There is one clause which is common to only eight of the fourteen Acts. Those creating Corporations in Bristol, Tiverton, Hereford, Kingston-upon-Hull, Colchester, King's Lynn, Plymouth, and Sudbury provided that:

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

<sup>1</sup>9 & 10 William III, c.29.

<sup>2</sup>6 Anne, c.6.

King Charles the Second, For the preventing the Dangers which may happen from Popish Recusants...

This clause, which refers to the Test Act, allowed for the participation of dissenters of all kinds in at least these eight Corporations of the Poor. Its inclusion reflects the low-church and Whiggish predisposition of those responsible for these Acts, and of the personnel of the organisations created by them. I will return to the subject of the political make-up of the Corporations later. Here it is merely necessary to note that the Acts themselves contained Whiggish elements.

Fourteen Corporation Acts were passed prior to 1712. However, fifteen institutions were founded. The London Corporation of the Poor, set up in 1698, was the only one founded without reference to Parliament. Instead of having a new Act passed, the City of London relied on the Act of Settlement of 1662 for the authority it needed to set up a Corporation. As a result London's institution was slightly different from those founded on the authority of the Corporation Acts.

The 1662 Act of Settlement allowed Corporations to be set up in the cities of London and Westminster, and the parts of Middlesex and Surrey within the Bills of Mortality.<sup>2</sup> The parts of the Act dealing with London were meant to confirm the powers of the Corporation set up under the leadership of Samuel Hartlib in 1647. However, in the event the common council of London had disbanded this early workhouse experi-

<sup>1</sup>See 7 & 8 William III, c.32; 9 & 10 William III, c.18; 9 & 10 William III, c.34; 9 & 10 William III, c.37; 9 & 10 William III, c.47; 13 William III, c.6; 1 Anne, Sess.2, c.34 and 6 Anne, c.6.

<sup>2</sup>13 & 14 Charles II, c.12.

ment before the Act of Settlement had been passed.<sup>1</sup> Thus, when in 1698 the City of London set up its Corporation it did so on the authority of an Act the provisions of which in relation to London had been completely ignored for over thirty years. Stephen Macfarlane has demonstrated that the City of London was acting on the assumption that greater powers would be made available to the London Corporation with the passage of national legislation for the reform of poor relief then being considered in Parliament; and that this was why London's Corporation was founded on the less sure basis of a thirty-six year old Act.<sup>2</sup>

The organisation of London's institution was similar to the others founded in this period. The mayor and fifty-two assistants chosen by the common council were in charge. The difference between the London and provincial Corporations was that those Corporations founded by local Acts were given complete power over all aspects of poor relief - the parish as an administrative unit for relief was almost completely circumvented - whereas in the case of London the Corporation cared for only a very small percentage of London's poor, leaving to the parishes the job of looking after most of the infant poor and all the adult poor.

#### Section B: National Reform

In the decade following 1696 moves to reform poor relief in England were not restricted to the towns and cities which founded

<sup>1</sup>See Margaret James, Social Problems and Policy during the Puritan Revolution, 1640-1660 (London, 1930), pp.295-302, and Valerie Pearl, 'Puritans and Poor Relief, The London Workhouse, 1649-1660', eds, D. Pennington and K. Thomas, Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth-Century History Presented to Christopher Hill (Oxford, 1978), pp.206-232.

<sup>2</sup>Stephen M. Macfarlane, 'Studies in Poverty and Poor Relief in London at the End of the Seventeenth Century' (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. thesis, 1982) p.280. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr Macfarlane for his kindness in allowing me to use his thesis.

Corporations of the Poor. Under the influence of William III, Parliament and the Board of Trade attempted to formulate a workable scheme to provide employment for all the poor and to reassert national control over the provision of relief. At the same time the Quaker communities of London and Bristol founded their own workhouses independent of any government authority, while the S.P.C.K. actively encouraged the foundation of private charity and working schools to help educate and employ the children of the poor. The foundation of the Corporations of the Poor remains the single most important reform in poor relief in this period - they had a significant affect on a large number of people<sup>1</sup> - but they were not the only form taken by the desire to employ the poor. This section will look at national moves towards finding 'some proper Methods for setting on Work and Imploying the Poor',<sup>2</sup> and the influence those attempts at national reform had on the foundation of Corporations.

On a national level there were three major attempts to reform the Poor Law, each of which failed. Anthony Hammond, Sir Rowland Gwynne and Sir Humphrey Mackworth each, in turn, headed Parliamentary

<sup>1</sup>The number of people housed and set on work by the Corporations of the Poor was approximately 3,000. This figure is derived from a number of sources. First, the Parliamentary poor rate returns of 1777, which lists seven of the Corporations as housing 1,570 paupers; and second, a variety of local sources including Workhouse Committee Minutes and pamphlet literature from which I have taken figures for five of the Corporations which at various periods in the first twenty years after their foundations housed between fifty and three hundred paupers each. The figure of 3,000 cannot be anything but a rough estimate, but it does reflect the order of magnitude of the population of Corporation workhouses. This figure does not include paupers simply receiving pensions from the Corporations - if it did it would be far higher. See H.L.R.O. Parchment Collection, Box 162; John Cary, An Account of the Proceedings of the Corporation of Bristol (London, 1700), p.20; John Fransham, An Exact Account of the Charge of Supporting the Poor of the City of Norwich (London, 1720), p.13; An Account of Several Workhouses for Employing and Maintaining the Poor (London, 1732), p.4; C.L.R.O., Courts of the President for the Poor of London, 1702-1705, 32B, f.31; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1708-1709, No.1890.

<sup>2</sup>P.R.O., CO388/5, Part 3, f.232.

committees to examine the Poor Law and bring in a bill for its reform. The King, in his speeches to Parliament and through the Board of Trade, encouraged these attempted reforms, directing the Board to produce its own schemes and examine the state of English poor relief. A concerted effort was made, the King encouraging Parliament to pass an Act and the Board of Trade providing the statistical information and expert advice needed by Parliament. This effort did not result in any significant poor-relief legislation becoming law; but in the attempt several things were achieved. The Corporations were bolstered and the idea of employing the poor given greater currency.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the failure of these reforms partially discredited the idea of a national provision for the poor and forced reformers to look to local government for change.

During this period private groups and the Quaker community were also actively working towards the same end, founding workhouses and charity schools. Two Quaker workhouses and numerous charity and working schools were founded to cater for the needs of the poor, each experiment deriving its impetus from the work of different writers and organisations. The Quakers of London were inspired by the activities of John Bellers, while the Quaker workhouse at Bristol owed its start to the example and competition of the Bristol Corporation. Likewise, the numerous charity and working schools founded in parishes with the help of private subscriptions owed much to the activities of the S.P.C.K.

<sup>1</sup>The London Corporation of the Poor attempted to use national legislation to strengthen its own position, while John Cary publicised Bristol's experience with its Corporation towards encouraging the passage of Sir Rowland Gwynne's bill. Indeed, several pamphlets were published relating to the proposed national legislation advocating the idea of employing the poor. See Macfarlane, 'Studies in Poverty and Poor Relief in London', p.341; Cary, An Account of the Proceedings of the Corporation of Bristol; John Cary, Reasons for Passing the Bill for Relieving and Employing the Poor of this Kingdom Humbly Offered (1700); John Cary, A Proposal Offered to the Committee of the Honourable House of Commons (1700); M.D., A Present Remedy for the Poor.

The period between 1696 and 1712 is delineated by the timing of the foundation of the Corporations of the Poor, but these foundations, albeit of the greatest importance, were just one type of reform actively sought in a period littered with failed and successful attempts to provide employment for, and to reform, the poor.

In 1696, when the King gave his commission for the foundation of the Board of Trade, that body was primarily envisaged as a board of experts organised to deal with colonial administration, questions of trade and the domestic economy.<sup>1</sup> However, as part of its brief it was directed to examine the question of poor relief and how the poor might be employed.<sup>2</sup> For the next four years the Board worked on that question, collecting material on the level of rates in England, discussing and formulating schemes for the employment of the poor, making recommendations to Parliamentary committees and commissioning the drawing up of bills for the consideration of those committees. In a sense, it attempted to formulate a national policy on relief which would have returned to national government ultimate control over the poor from the administrative structures of parish and Quarter Sessions.

The Board held its first meeting on 26 June 1696 and within three weeks turned its attention to the problem of reforming the Poor Law. On 17 July it determined that its first move must be to collect information on the level of expenditure on the poor, deciding that it would be extremely 'difficult to advance anything...unlesse we could first find out means to make an estimate (with some exactness) of what

<sup>1</sup>For published accounts of the early history of the Board of Trade see I.K. Steele, Politics of Colonial Policy: The Board of Trade in Colonial Administration, 1696-1720 (Oxford, 1968), pp.3-18; Peter Laslett, 'John Locke, the Great Recoinage, and the Origins of the Board of Trade: 1695-1698', William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd series, xiv (July 1957), 368-403.

<sup>2</sup>P.R.O., CO391/9, f.3.

the whole annual charge of Maintaining the Poor...do's ordinarily amount to.'<sup>1</sup> Towards this end the Board determined to ask the Archbishops to help circularise the ministers of the various parishes of England. This work was started and the subject of poor relief allowed to drop until the information could be collected and analysed. It was not until the autumn of 1697 that sufficient returns had been accumulated to make an estimate of the annual charge of relieving the poor.<sup>2</sup> But, before the Board went on to consider English poor relief, it first considered a scheme for founding workhouses in Ireland.

In April 1697 the Board received a request from Secretary Trumball asking it to consider a proposal made by John Collis to found workhouses in every county in Ireland in exchange for patent rights to several types of manufactures.<sup>3</sup> Four months were spent in considering Collis's proposal and it was not until mid-August, after a lengthy correspondence and numerous visits by Collis to the Board's meetings, that it was finally rejected as impractical.<sup>4</sup>

Having turned down Collis's workhouse proposal the Board was ready to consider English poor relief. 4,415 parishes had returned information on their rates and on the basis of these returns an estimate of the annual charge of relieving the poor was made at £400,000.<sup>5</sup> This information having been collected, the Board began interviewing people involved in poor relief. John Cary was called before it to give evidence on 20 September 1697 and later he presented to the Board a copy of the proposals upon which the Bristol Corporation

<sup>1</sup>P.R.O., CO389/14, p.26; P.R.O., CO391/9, f.11.

<sup>2</sup>P.R.O., CO391/10, ff.122, 125, 135.

<sup>3</sup>P.R.O., CO388/5, ff.186-187.

<sup>4</sup>P.R.O., CO391/10, f.95.

<sup>5</sup>P.R.O., CO389/14, p.128.

was founded and a copy of its Act of Parliament.<sup>1</sup> In the same week a Mr. Cawthorne and Mr. Howell, two overseers of the poor for the parish of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London, were called to give evidence on the administration of their parish,<sup>2</sup> and:

Their Lordships then entering upon the debate of what might be fit to be propounded by this Board for the Employment of the Poor generally throughout all England after several considerations upon that subject, agreed each of them to draw up a scheme of what they thought most practicable...That upon comparing those several Draughts such things may then be agreed upon as shall seem most proper.<sup>3</sup>

By 30 September the Board had received schemes from three of its members, John Locke, John Pollexfen and Abraham Hill;<sup>4</sup> and over the next three months these plans were debated and perfected. Abraham Hill's scheme dealt primarily with London and the Bills of Mortality, and suggested that twelve overseers general be appointed to look after London poor relief, and that they in 'Mr. Firmin's way teach and employ the Poor on Linnen, Woolen &c.' and that in other places Lord Chief Justice Hale's ideas be put into practice.<sup>5</sup> Hill's plan advocated the establishment of an organisation similar to that eventually developed in London under the Corporation of the Poor. But the Board rejected Hill's ideas, possibly on the grounds that they did not go far enough.<sup>6</sup>

John Locke's scheme, also considered, proposed the election of guardians of the poor in all the parishes and the creation in each Hundred and Cinque Port of corporations which would then be responsible for employing the poor and punishing vagrants either in houses of

<sup>1</sup>P.R.O., CO391/10, ff.132, 138.

<sup>2</sup>P.R.O., CO391/10, f.140.

<sup>3</sup>P.R.O., CO391/10, f.138.

<sup>4</sup>P.R.O., CO391/10, ff.141, 142.

<sup>5</sup>P.R.O., CO388/5, Part 3, ff.250-251.

<sup>6</sup>Hill's scheme took a much less bold approach than the other two submitted, proposing that a small-scale experiment be carried out in London before any national legislation was formulated.

correction or by sending them to sea in one of His Majesty's ships. Locke's project also included provisions for the erection of working schools for the employment of poor children as a way of allowing the mothers of those children to work outside the home. He did not suggest the creation of workhouses, relying rather on the implementation of a labour rate for the employment of the idle.<sup>1</sup>

The final proposal considered by the Board was that presented by John Pollexfen, which aimed primarily to simplify the laws already in force and to make them easier to understand for churchwardens and overseers by reducing them all into one piece of legislation. Beyond this, Pollexfen wanted to see the role of beadles and marshals strengthened, larger towns given the right to hire a professional manager to oversee the employment of the poor on a parish stock, and, most important of all, to make:

such parishes as do not keep all streets or places of their severall Parishes clear...liable<sup>2</sup> to an information in your Majesties Court of Kings Bench...

Three weeks after the King addressed Parliament and advocated a 'reform of Manners' the Board, on 23 December 1697, presented to him their scheme for the reform of the Poor Law.<sup>3</sup> It was a version of that drawn up by John Pollexfen.

The influence of the scheme presented by the Board is impossible to assess. It was not sought out by a Parliamentary committee until 1699 when it was presented to Sir Rowland Gwynne for the use of his

<sup>1</sup>Versions of Locke's report can be found at P.R.O., CO388/5, Part 3, ff.232-249 and in An Account of the Origin, Proceedings and Intentions of the Society for the Promotion of Industry in the Southern District of the Parts of Lindsey in the County of Lincoln (Louth, 1789), pp.101-126.

<sup>2</sup>No copy of John Pollexfen's original submission to the Board has survived. However, the Board's report is very closely modelled on Pollexfen's scheme and the statement quoted above can safely be assumed to be in Pollexfen's own words, though taken from the version submitted by the Board. P.R.O., CO389/14, pp.127-138.

<sup>3</sup>P.R.O., CO389/14, pp.127-138.

committee then considering a national reform of the Poor Law. But even then, the report Gwynne's committee finally produced seems to have owed more to the experience of the Corporations of the Poor than to the Board's report.

While the Board collected rate material and formulated its report, Parliamentary activity continued apace. During the Parliamentary Session of 1696-1697, 'An Act for supplying some Defects in the Laws for the relief of the Poor' became law,<sup>1</sup> requiring that each pauper in receipt of parish relief wear a badge exhibiting the initials of his place of settlement and a 'P' to indicate his or her status. In the following session an Act was passed to explain some anomalies in this first piece of legislation, and a proposal presented to Parliament to put the whole responsibility for the poor in the hands of a private corporation with £300,000 capital and the right to call on the help of churchwardens and overseers.<sup>2</sup> The explanatory Act, 9 & 10 William III c. 14, concerned the Laws of Settlement, while the proposal to put poor relief in the hands of a private corporation presented a radical change in the basis of English poor relief, and though little attention seems to have been paid to it in Parliament it did attract the curiosity of the Board of Trade. The Earl of Bridgewater presented the Board with a copy of this scheme on 17 January 1697/8, and an annotated version of the same proposal was produced a month later.<sup>3</sup> In the end the plan came to nothing, though it was considered seriously and was probably, in part, the result of the Board's own research into the level of the poor rates.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 8 & 9 William III c.30.

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O., CO388/5, Part 3, ff.250-251.

<sup>3</sup> P.R.O., CO388/5, Part 3, ff.261-262; P.R.O., CO391/10, f.216.

<sup>4</sup> The proposal to capitalise the scheme at £300,000 indicates an awareness on the part of those who drew it up of the estimate of English rates at £400,000 made by the Board in 1697.

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1698 neither the Board nor Parliament made any further attempt to reform poor relief on a national scale. The Board's minutes indicate that it did not even discuss the subject again until January 1698/9, and during the same period Parliament was out of session for much of the time. This lack of interest was probably the result of activity on the local level - 1698 saw the foundation of eight Corporations as well as the first moves towards the creation of the Quaker workhouse at Clerkenwell and the first meeting of the S.P.C.K. It may be that both Parliament and the Board were waiting to see how the Corporations fared before attempting to tamper with the laws themselves.

After this hiatus it was Parliament which made the first move. On 13 January 1698/9 Anthony Hammond wrote to the Board requesting an account of the rate returns it had collected the previous year for the use of his committee established early in the Parliamentary Session of 1698-1699.<sup>1</sup> During this session, and probably in direct response to the King's speech made on 17 December 1698 asking for reform of the Poor Law, permission was given for two bills to be brought in to the Commons.<sup>2</sup> The first was designed to combine all the laws relating to the poor into one piece of legislation and was not drawn up until the following year. The second resulted from a report presented to Parliament on 1 March 1698/9 by Anthony Hammond's committee.

Hammond's report suggested that it be made much easier to establish Corporations of the Poor. He wanted Justices of the Peace in the Quarter Sessions to be given the power to found and oversee Corporations organised around either towns corporate or whole

<sup>1</sup>P.R.O., CO389/16, p.158.

<sup>2</sup>J.H.C., xii, 493, 583.

counties.<sup>1</sup> Leave was given for Hammond to bring in a bill based on his report in the middle of March 1698/9, and on the 29th of that month it was submitted to a committee of the whole house.<sup>2</sup> When the bill came to be considered the Parliamentary Session was nearing its end, and after several amendments concerning the Corporations of the Poor had been added, time had run out and the bill was allowed to drop.<sup>3</sup>

Parliamentary activity was suspended until the next session, but the Board of Trade nonetheless began formulating a second report on poor relief. Robert Yard wrote to the Board on 6 June 1699 informing it that the Lord Justices in the King's absence had ordered it to draw up another plan for employing the poor. Just over a week later he wrote again asking that the plan 'be perfected with all Expedition', and informing the Board that the Lord Justices were acting on the King's explicit directions.<sup>4</sup> In response to these requests, letters were immediately dispatched to both John Cary at Bristol<sup>5</sup> and Robert Nettleton, a friend of the Board's secretary, Sir William Popple, at Hull, requesting information on the progress of the Corporations founded in these two cities. Likewise, the Board asked one of its members, John Pollexfen, to inquire at Tiverton into the state of the Corporation there.<sup>6</sup> By the first week of July answers had been

<sup>1</sup>J.H.C., xii, 534-535.

<sup>2</sup>J.H.C., xii, 621.

<sup>3</sup>The committee of the whole House to which the bill was committed was directed to consider three amendments; one to allow for the annual election of Corporation officers at Exeter, another to allow for the incorporation of individuals to found workhouses (possibly a response to a petition from London Quakers to enable them to set up a workhouse independent of local government submitted about this time) and a third to allow workhouse inmates to be employed on the highways. J.H.C., xii, 621.

<sup>4</sup>P.R.O., CO389/16, p.316.

<sup>5</sup>P.R.O., CO391/12, f.41.

<sup>6</sup>P.R.O., CO391/12, f.42.

received to the Board's enquiries and it was able to proceed to a discussion of various schemes. This discussion resulted in the adoption by the Board of Trade on 17 July 1699 of John Locke's proposal for the reform of poor relief first drawn up in the Autumn of 1697.<sup>1</sup>

On 20 July Locke's plan was put in the form of a representation to the King and sent to the Lord Justices, but again the success of the Board of Trade's report in determining national policy must be in doubt. Robert Yard wrote to the Board the following October claiming that he had never received its report and asking the Board to please deliver a copy with all dispatch.<sup>2</sup> Apparently it had been misplaced.

The next move came from Parliament. A reconstituted committee to bring in a bill for employing the poor was established by Parliament as soon as the 1699-1700 session was well under way, and Sir Rowland Gwynne was given the chair.<sup>3</sup> On 20 November 1699 Gwynne wrote to the Board requesting copies of its material on poor relief, including the representation presented to the Lord Justices the previous June; material which was laid before Gwynne's committee late in November.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of the 1699-1700 session of Parliament the King had again requested the House consider the reform of the Poor Law,<sup>5</sup> and the committee established to deal with this problem wasted no time in responding to the King's appeal. It brought in a bill on

<sup>1</sup>P.R.O., CO391/12, f.63; a copy of the report the Board produced can be found at P.R.O., CO389/16, pp.331-358.

<sup>2</sup>P.R.O., CO391/12, f.98.

<sup>3</sup>J.H.C., xiii, 4-5.

<sup>4</sup>P.R.O., CO391/12, f.128; P.R.O., CO388/7, f.340.

<sup>5</sup>J.H.L., xvi, 477.

15 January 1699/1700,<sup>1</sup> based largely on the experience of the Corporations of the Poor and the report laid before Parliament the previous spring by Anthony Hammond's committee. Indeed, the bill in no way reflected the content of the Board's report based on Locke's scheme presented to the committee in November 1699.<sup>2</sup>

Gwynne's bill required the creation of Corporations of the Poor in every 'City, Borough, Town Corporate and Market Town', and would have made the governors, deputy governors and treasurers of each of these Corporations Justices of the Peace, while giving each institution the firm legal status of a corporation and complete power over the whole range of poor relief activities. For areas outside the towns and cities the bill provided that hundreds or combined parishes could establish Corporations under the auspices of the local Quarter Sessions, and that once in place these rural institutions would have the same powers as those whose foundation was required by the bill.<sup>3</sup>

Had Gwynne's bill become law it would have radically changed the face of English poor relief - combining the easing of the establishment of Corporations advocated by Anthony Hammond's report of the spring of 1699 with an element of coercion towards their creation which would have affected hundreds of towns and cities.

At the same time as Gwynne's committee was producing this radical view of English poor relief, it was also considering a less dramatic reform first mooted the previous year. On 2 December Gwynne wrote to the Board requesting that it lay before his committee 'a Scheme of all

<sup>1</sup>J.H.C., xiii, 123.

<sup>2</sup>Though both Locke's report and Gwynne's bill envisaged the establishment of Corporations, Locke totally rejected the idea of creating institutional workhouses, the founding of which lay at the very heart of Gwynne's scheme.

<sup>3</sup>Brit. Lib., Egerton MS 2979, ff.208-238.

the Laws relating to the Poor and how they may be reduced into one Law to be made more usefull for the maintaining and Imploying the Poor.'<sup>1</sup> By 2 January 1699/1700 the Board's commissioned report, for which it had paid a Mr. Ethrington thirty guineas,<sup>2</sup> was complete.<sup>3</sup> In the following two months the report was the subject of intense discussion by the Board of Trade and on 7 March 1699/1700 it was laid before the Parliamentary committee, a copy also being given to the Lord Chancellor.<sup>4</sup>

Like Gwynne's bill, the scheme of laws drawn up for the Board never became law, but expired with the end of the Parliamentary Session. Again, however, the subject was not allowed to die. Although the Board of Trade no longer concerned itself with the issue of poor relief after 1700, Parliament did, and in the Parliamentary Session of 1700-1701 Gwynne's committee was re-established and the whole process restarted. Gwynne's bill was put through the Parliamentary mangle, being read and reread, committed and engrossed. However, the session ended with no further legislation reaching the statute books.<sup>5</sup> Likewise in the session of 1701-1702 the bill was introduced and allowed to die.<sup>6</sup>

The effort expended in trying to get some reform of the Poor Law passed through Parliament between 1697 and 1701 was huge. Between the Board of Trade, the King, the Lord Justices and Parliament thousands of man hours were spent with no result. This failure is surprising given the encouragement the idea of reform received. In part the failure of

<sup>1</sup>P.R.O., CO391/11, p.394.

<sup>2</sup>P.R.O., CO391/12, f.201.

<sup>3</sup>P.R.O., CO391/12, f.154.

<sup>4</sup>P.R.O., CO391/12, ff.159, 405.

<sup>5</sup>J.H.C., xiii, 366, 398, 401.

<sup>6</sup>J.H.C., xiii, 655.

Gwynne's bill may be attributed to the sheer complexity of the subject with which it dealt: the abstract of the Poor Law presented to Parliament in March of 1699/1700 covered twenty-seven closely written folios.<sup>1</sup> A more potent factor than this, however, was active opposition. A pamphlet campaign in favour of the bill, which accurately reflects the degree of opposition it encountered, was waged throughout 1699/1700, the main contributor being John Cary. In broadsides and pamphlets such as Cary's Reasons for Passing the Bill for Relieving and Employing the Poor of the Kingdom Humbly Offered, published in 1700, and his Proposal Offered to the Committee of the Honourable House of Commons of the same year, arguments were put forward in favour of the bill and objections to it were specifically answered. Material presenting the opposing view never reached the composing rooms, but nonetheless the existence of half a dozen pamphlets in the bill's favour reflects a vocal opposition.<sup>2</sup> At least one person, Sir Richard Cokes, expressed his reasons for objecting to Gwynne's proposal in writing. He wrote in 1700 that:

it was long and impracticable: the design of it was: to build workhouses and in them to employ all the idle poor: this would have cost the nation a vast sum to have provided so many houses for them: neyther could they have found work to have employed them in any generall advantage: had they employed them in the woollen manufactures: they would have taken that trade out of the Industrious hand, and have put it into the Slothful and unwilling: so that they would have undone the careful honest Labourer in order to force the spendthrift to work: and then there would have been danger of

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., CO388/8, Part 1, ff.116-143.

<sup>2</sup> Pamphlets which can be identified as specifically relating to the bill before Parliament are as follows: M.D., A Present Remedy for the Poor; Cary, A Proposal Offered to the Committee of the Honourable House of Commons; Cary, Reasons for Passing the Bill; Cary, An Account of the Proceedings of the Corporation of Bristol; John Bellers, Essays About the Poor, Manufactures, Trade, Plantations & Immorality (London, 1699).

spoyling our commodities by unskillful and unwilling workmen,  
and of loosing our trade by bad manufactures...

Cocke's argument was a powerful one and was to be used later in relation to Mackworth's bill. In that case, as in 1700 and in relation to Gwynne's bill, it succeeded in convincing enough people to prevent the success of these attempts to employ the poor at a profit on a national scale.

Gwynne's bill died slowly, taking several Parliamentary Sessions to disappear completely; but even its eventual demise did not signal the end of interest in a change in the Poor Law. Indeed, the next move in the attempt at reform, that led by Sir Humphrey Mackworth, can be seen as a direct continuation of Gwynne's efforts - incorporating, as it did, many of the elements which had appeared in earlier Parliamentary proposals.

Sir Humphrey Mackworth, as chairman of a committee of the whole House of Commons, reported its findings on 9 November 1702, on which date a second committee was established 'to prepare, and bring in, a Bill for...the Relief, Employment, and Settlement of the Poor.'<sup>2</sup> A founding member of the S.P.C.K., Sir Humphrey Mackworth wrote prolifically,<sup>3</sup> and from 1701 until 1710, when he was expelled from Parliament as a result of financial impropriety in relation to a mining scheme, he served as Member of Parliament representing first Cardiganshire and then Totnes. Mackworth's strong links with both landed and monied interests and his involvement in the S.P.C.K. gave

<sup>1</sup>L.P.L., MS 640, f. 221. Quoted in Macfarlane, 'Studies in Poverty and Poor Relief in London', p.378.

<sup>2</sup>J.H.C., xiv, 21.

<sup>3</sup>Mary Ransome, 'The Parliamentary Career of Sir Humphrey Mackworth, 1701-1713', University of Birmingham Historical Journal, i, (1947-1948), 234-235.

him some influence over issues with which he chose to become involved, while his publishing activities, particularly in relation to the Act for Occasional Conformity, gave him a firm base from which to advocate the reform of the Poor Law.<sup>1</sup>

The committee established under Mackworth's leadership in late 1702 achieved very little. It did start to collect information on the Poor Law; in early November Mackworth wrote to the Board of Trade asking for a copy of its abstract of laws relating to the poor, which he received on 21 November.<sup>2</sup> But no bill was introduced that session. The production of a bill had to wait until December of 1703 when Mackworth, John Comyns and William Lowndes of the Treasury brought in the bill they had been appointed to draw up the previous month.<sup>3</sup> It was given its first reading on 4 January 1703/4 and its second four days later, and was then committed to a committee of the whole House, which discussed it under Mackworth's chairmanship on 22 February.<sup>4</sup>

The bill produced in the autumn of 1703 stipulated that parish factories be set up throughout the Kingdom to employ the poor, and gave Justices of the Peace greater power over the administration of relief by parishes. In its insistence on parish factories rather than workhouses the bill showed itself to be indebted to writers and projectors like Thomas Firmin, John Locke, Sir Josiah Child and Richard Dunning, rather than to the experience of the Corporations of the Poor - this despite the fact that Mackworth had served on two committees established to consider bills for the foundation of Corporations.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 237-238.

<sup>2</sup>P.R.O., CO388/8, Part 3, f.443; P.R.O., CO391/15, f.138.

<sup>3</sup>J.H.C., xiv, 231, 256.

<sup>4</sup>J.H.C., xiv, 270, 274.

<sup>5</sup>Ransome, 'The Parliamentary Career of Sir Humphrey Mackworth', 249, 250.

While the bill was being considered Parliament received several petitions for the insertion of clauses, and the extra work created determined that the bill was sent to a private committee to be dealt with in the session of 1704-1705.<sup>1</sup> Amendments concerning the employment of the poor in extra-parochial places, the incorporation of benefactors to charity schools and the reorganisation of at least one Corporation of the Poor were all brought to Mackworth's attention.<sup>2</sup> Having dealt with most of the proposed amendments during the summer of 1704 with the help and advice of the S.P.C.K., the bill was brought in early in the session and received its first reading on 2 November 1704. The bill made rapid progress through the House, being discussed by a committee of the whole House on 11 November and being read a third time and taken to the Lords on 15 February 1704/5.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the upper house did not match the speed of the lower, and finding itself with insufficient time to consider the bill properly in that session, the Lords determined on 6 March to leave consideration of the proposal until the next session, by which time the bill would be printed.<sup>4</sup>

In the Lords the subject seems to have aroused some enthusiasm. On 5 March 1704/5 the Board of Trade was ordered by the Lords to present the House with a copy of Locke's scheme, and when that House came to consider Mackworth's bill it did so in conjunction with that proposal.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it seems that the reason the Lords did not have the opportunity to pass Mackworth's bill in 1705 was that they were

<sup>1</sup>J.H.C., xiv, 284, 351, 354.

<sup>2</sup>Ransome, 'The Parliamentary Career of Sir Humphrey Mackworth', 245; S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1698-1706, p.305.

<sup>3</sup>J.H.C., xiv, 393, 415, 530.

<sup>4</sup>J.H.L., xvii, 691.

<sup>5</sup>P.R.O., CO391/17, p.299.

overly concerned to examine the subject in detail, concluding in March that they did not have the time to take the 'Care and Consideration which was necessary to a Bill of that Importance and universal Concern.'<sup>1</sup>

In the next two years Mackworth's bill was revived twice; once in the second session of Parliament of 1705, and again in December 1706. On the second occasion it passed through the House of Commons only to be held up again in the House of Lords.<sup>2</sup> The measure enjoyed a great deal of popular support and that it came as close as it did to reaching the statute book must be attributed to a widespread desire for reform. That it did not in fact become law was the result of a small but vocal opposition. Daniel Defoe, both in his Giving Alms no Charity and in the Review he edited in this period attacked the bill repeatedly in 1704 and 1705,<sup>3</sup> using a similar argument to that employed by Sir Richard Cocke - that the provision of state-run employment projects for the poor would take work away from the industrious and put it into the hands of the idle.

The failure of Mackworth's bill marked the end of concerted national moves to reform the Poor Law. Between 1706 and the passage of the Workhouse Test Act of 1723 only one further move was made in this direction, and that more as a means of suppressing the strongly Tory closed vestries of London than as a serious attempt to reform poor relief. In 1715 a Parliamentary committee examined parish provision of relief in the capital and proceeded to investigate the activities of

<sup>1</sup>J.H.L., xvii, 691.

<sup>2</sup>Ransome, 'The Parliamentary Career of Sir Humphrey Mackworth', 247.

<sup>3</sup>Daniel Defoe, Giving Alms no Charity (London, 1704), pp.17-20; Macfarlane, 'Studies in Poverty and Poor Relief in London', p.380.

the parish of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, finding numerous abuses, but in the end bringing in a bill to reform parish management rather than the system of poor relief.<sup>1</sup>

The attempts made in this period to reform poor relief nationally were strongly advocated and came very close to achieving their objectives. Indeed, it was this period which saw the most concerted efforts at reform made prior to the nineteenth century. However, these attempts failed and by that failure condemned the question of poor relief to the consideration of the local pundit rather than the national policy maker. The lack of success these attempted reforms met with ensured that it would be local experiments and experiences which would determine the nature of English poor relief for the rest of the eighteenth century.

#### Section C: The Corporations and National Reform

The relationship between the foundation of Corporations of the Poor and the attempted reform of the Poor Law is obscure. The coincidence of both local and national activity argues for a link, but evidence for a connection is purely circumstantial. One Parliamentary Session witnessed both the beginnings of national moves towards reform and the creation of over half the Corporations founded prior to 1712; but there is no proof that the two developments were conjoined. Nevertheless, three elements can be identified as contributing to the creation of an atmosphere conducive to reform. One, the Treaty of Ryswick, signed in 1697, which promised prosperity and gave Parliament time to consider the relief of the poor; two, the fact that the King was known to favour a reform in the Poor Law, and in his speeches to Parliament in 1697 and 1698 gave encouragement to a move in this

<sup>1</sup>J.H.C., xviii, 392-396.

direction;<sup>1</sup> and three, the efforts of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners and the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, directed towards a reform of society to which a reformed poor-relief system would have been an apt corollary. These factors predetermined neither the foundation of Corporations nor national reform, but they did help create an environment in which these reforms appeared more attractive.

The autumn of 1697 saw both the return of peace and the alleviation of the worst affects of the recoinage.<sup>2</sup> These two factors alone must have encouraged reform-minded people to turn their attention away from international politics and the war and towards the domestic scene, but more than this, they created the time necessary during the crowded Parliamentary Session to deal with a large amount of social legislation. Finance bills did not have to press quite so hard on the time of the Commons, hence giving cities the opportunity to have local Acts passed, and national reformers a chance to formulate and introduce new legislation.<sup>3</sup> However, this one factor would probably have had little affect if the King and his government had not given every encouragement to reform.

At the start of the 1697-1698 Parliamentary Session William III. addressed the Lords and Commons as follows:

I esteem it one of the greatest Advantages of Peace, that I shall now have Leisure to rectify such corruption or Abuses as may have crept into any Part of the Administration during the War; and affectually to discourage Profaneness and Immorality: And I shall Employ my Thoughts in promoting Trade, and advancing the Happiness, and flourishing Estate of the Kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J.H.L., xvi, 175 and J.H.L., xvi, 352.

<sup>2</sup>Henry Horwitz, Parliament, Policy and Politics in the Reign of William III (Manchester, 1977), p.206.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.234.

<sup>4</sup>J.H.C., xii, 1.

This was not an outright call for the reform of poor relief but it was designed to encourage concentration on domestic problems, of which poor relief was one. Moreover, while it is impossible to gauge the direct influence of this speech, it is clear from reactions to the next year's speech that views expressed by the King and his government received a great deal of attention. In a pamphlet by 'M.D.' published in 1700 and recommending the foundation of workhouses along the lines of those set up by the Corporations, the author says of the King:

No sooner was his Mind at liberty from the perplexing Thoughts and heavy Burden of a tedious War, but he applied it to the study of promoting the Peace of his People, by advising the redress of a known Evil, in these words: 'I think it would be happy if some effectual Expedient could be found for employing the Poor, which might tend to the great Increase of our Manufacture, as well as remove a heavy Burden for the People.' By this and many other Instances we may clearly see our Happiness in the enjoym<sup>1</sup>ent of so excellent, valiant, wise and publick-spirited a Prince...

The speech 'M.D.' quoted was that given to the Lords and Commons on 9 December 1698, after the majority of local Corporation Acts had been passed through Parliament, but the importance 'M.D.' ascribes to the King's views and the interest he takes in them does reflect the role they played in encouraging individuals to work towards the reform of the Poor Laws.

In terms of the influence national concerns had on reform the role of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners is the most difficult to assess. There is a large body of circumstantial evidence suggesting a connection between these societies, moves towards national reform and the foundation of Corporations; but no explicit information on the influence of one upon the other. Thomas Firmin, whose example helped encourage interest in setting up a Corporation in London and who gave evidence before the Board of Trade in

<sup>1</sup>M.D., A Present Remedy for the Poor, p.3.

1696<sup>1</sup> was, from an early date, a member of a group of gentlemen reformers,<sup>2</sup> and Sir John Duddlestone, among other important members of Bristol's Corporation, was also an early adherent of the Society for the Reformation of Manners founded there in 1700.<sup>3</sup> In Tower Hamlets the societies were stronger than anywhere else, and it was here that determined, though unsuccessful, moves were made in January 1698/9 to have a local act passed for the foundation of a Corporation.<sup>4</sup> Also, the founder of the first society, Sir Richard Buckeley, spent much of his energy in the late 1680s promoting workhouses and working schools.<sup>5</sup>

However, there remain no direct links between the societies for reformation and either the Corporations or Parliamentary attempts at reform, except in personnel. The societies' approach to reformation ignored poor relief and workhouses and concentrated on the encouragement of the efficient enforcement of laws against profanity and drunkenness. Still, some connection must be drawn if only because both the societies and those involved in reform of the Poor Law sought to inflict upon the poor a similar religious and industrial discipline.

The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge had a slightly more direct connection with both the foundation of Corporations and the Parliamentary reformers. Though not founded until after the majority of Corporation Acts had been navigated through Parliament, and the first moves towards a national reform of the Poor

<sup>1</sup>Macfarlane, 'Studies in Poverty and Poor Relief in London', p.264.

<sup>2</sup>A.G. Craig, 'The Movement for the Reformation of Manners, 1688-1715' (Edinburgh Univ. Ph.d. thesis, 1980), p.98.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.238.

<sup>4</sup>See G.L.R.O., P79/JN1/139 (St. John at Hackney Vestry Minutes, 1689-1719), f.6, and J.H.C., xiii, 415.

<sup>5</sup>Craig, 'The Movement for the Reformation of Manners, 1688-1715', p.10.

Law had been made, the S.P.C.K. was able to provide some direct assistance to cities seeking Acts and to those individuals working towards Parliamentary reform. In 1704 Maurice Wheeler wrote to the Society requesting help in having Gloucester's Corporation Act amended in order to allow the Corporation there to raise more money and to compel elected guardians to serve. The problem was referred to Sir Humphrey Mackworth who inserted the necessary clauses in his bill then before Parliament.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Mackworth amended his bill to allow for the purchase of lands by incorporated charity schools, for which service he received the thanks of the Society.<sup>2</sup> At this early date the Society was not very interested in the foundation of workhouses. Rather, it was concentrating on the promotion of charity schools and saw national reform and the Corporations only as a means of assisting the schools. However, its links with Sir Humphrey Mackworth ensured that it played an active part in all the moves towards reform with which he was involved.

It is only by reference to the factors discussed above that the timing of the foundation of the Corporations of the Poor and attempted Parliamentary reforms can be explained. Traditionally historians have drawn the connection between the Bristol experiment, the fourteen other Corporations founded in the next sixteen years and the attempted national reforms, without explaining why so much activity occurred between 1697 and 1698. By the end of 1697 the Bristol Corporation was still in its infancy, having been unable either to set the poor of Bristol to work or to raise sufficient money to start the project properly. Thus, it is most unlikely that the example of a hugely successful Corporation at Bristol was the primary motivation for the

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1698-1706, i, p.303.

<sup>2</sup>Ransome, 'The Parliamentary Career of Sir Humphrey Mackworth', 245.

early foundation of other Corporations or attempts at national reform.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the answer to why the Corporations were established when they were is most probably to be found in national conditions such as the end of the war and the easing of the coinage crisis, the attitude of the government and the influence of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners.

<sup>1</sup>E.E. Butcher, 'The Bristol Corporation of the Poor, 1696-1834' (Bristol Univ. M.A. thesis, 1930), pp.11-12.

## CHAPTER 3: THE CORPORATIONS OF THE POOR - FOUR EXAMPLES

At the national level the foundation of Corporations of the Poor and similar institutions was seen as part of a larger reform. The whole range of poor relief services provided by local government was to be modified through national legislation, with the Corporation Acts complementing that legislation. However, once the Corporation Acts had become law and while national legislation failed to materialise, the Corporations of the Poor remained local institutions dependent upon local initiative and responsible to local needs. Each of the fifteen institutions founded between 1696 and 1712 was different - each went about fulfilling the requirements of the Acts differently, and though in theory each Corporation had similar powers and responsibilities, in practice its role was determined in the local council chamber and not in the halls of Westminster.

Though the Corporations received a great deal of support at a national level they were less popular with the communities they were meant to serve. In instance after instance the foundation of a Corporation was received with anger by segments of local government. Indeed, it was only after the Acts were passed and attempts made to set up a working organisation on their authority that the real battles for the foundation of Corporations began. In part, the confrontations which marked the early history of most of these institutions were the result of a Whig/Tory split by which the Corporations received the support of the Whigs, while Tories tended to voice the grievances and represent the interests of local vestries, mayors and aldermen. However, a complete picture of the background to these battles must also include numerous factors peculiar to the towns and cities in which they took place. Personal vendetta, jealousy and iniquitous taxation for the support of the poor, as well as political divisions, must be taken into account in any attempt to determine the complexion of both

the support for and opposition to the Corporations. Examples of the problems encountered and institutions created in four cities will help illustrate the types of opposition and support that were likely to develop and the range of possible configurations that these institutions might take.

#### Section A: Bristol

Bristol's Corporation is probably the best known and most important. Founded in 1696, it was the first of its kind and its early history is similar to that of several other institutions. In 1711 a local Tory summed up the political complexion of Bristol's Corporation and the motives of those who founded it:

What then should be the Reasons of some of the Whiggs and the Dissenters in general to tugg and struggle so hard for it? Nay, as stiffly as if 'twas for a late Ministry. Some of them are men of good Sence, and have readily acknowledgd when closely put to them, the Mismanagement and Confusion, that has of late attended this Affair. What then, I say, should be their Reasons? It is certainly not the Good of the General Poor they aim at; their Charity does not use to be so extensive, but is commonly confined to those of their own Perswasion. Then it must be an Itch of Government and Dominion in Order to carry on their Factious Designs; which was certainly the Original and true Reason of erecting This, and all such New Corporations about the Kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

For at least the first fourteen years Bristol's was a whiggish and low-church insitution. It acted as a centre around which a group of strongly reform-minded people could congregate and gave to that group a means of exercising authority. But to gain the authority given in the Act a battle developed which lasted well into the eighteenth century.

The origins of the ideas behind the Bristol Corporation can be seen in both the writings of John Cary and the experience of the city

<sup>1</sup>Some Considerations Offer'd to the Citizens of Bristol Relating to the Corporation of the Poor in the said City (1711), pp.8-9.

in the last half of the seventeenth century. John Cary first published his ideas on poor relief in his Essay on the State of England in 1695, in which he broadly outlined a remedy for what he saw as the intolerable burden of maintaining the poor.<sup>1</sup> These ideas were fleshed out in Cary's Proposal for the better Maintaining...the Poor of the City of Bristol.<sup>2</sup> This second work was the result of a public meeting of Bristol citizens who were already drawing up the heads of what became Bristol's Corporation Act. Cary's ideas, although important in determining the character of the Corporation, were not the only influence at work among the reform-minded citizens of Bristol. An attempt had been made to employ the poor in spinning yarn and knitting stockings as early as 1653, when the city contracted with Robert Messinger, a hosier.<sup>3</sup> Though this early experiment does not seem to have met with great success, a renewed effort to find employment for the poor was made in 1679, when £2,000 was lent by the city to the managers of a scheme to employ five hundred poor people in spinning - which project lasted until at least 1683.<sup>4</sup> However, of greatest importance were the concerted efforts of the Bristol Quarter Sessions to equalise the poor rates throughout the city in the 1690s. The Justices regularly mulcted the rich commercial parishes of the centre of Bristol to support the poor of the less well off industrial parishes

<sup>1</sup> See John Cary, An Essay on the State of England in Relation to its Trade (Bristol, 1695), pp.150-159.

<sup>2</sup> John Cary, Proposal for the better Maintaining and Employing the Poor of the City of Bristol (Bristol, 1695). The origin of this pamphlet, no copy of which survives, is discussed in Butcher, 'The Bristol Corporation of the Poor', p.9.

<sup>3</sup> Butcher, 'The Bristol Corporation of the Poor', p.7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.8.

of the suburbs.<sup>1</sup> These precedents for both the employment of the poor on a city-wide basis and the equalisation of the burden of the rates must be seen as contributing factors in the decision to incorporate the parishes of Bristol for the purpose of relieving the poor. But, whether founded on precedent or the ideas of John Cary, Bristol's Corporation met with opposition from the first.

In writing to Sir Thomas Day and Major Yates, Bristol's two Members of Parliament, the main supporters of the idea of a Corporation recorded that they had already, in 1695, met with 'many oppositions...in this matter from those whose province it is to oppose everything that offers for the Publick good.'<sup>2</sup> Although Bristol's Act seems to have passed through Parliament quickly, encountering little opposition, it soon became apparent that those opposing it had no intention of allowing its implementation without a fight.

Bristol's Corporation held its first meeting on 19 May 1696 and the then mayor, Samuel Wallis, was elected its first governor.<sup>3</sup> However, the close links between Corporation and city government reflected in Wallis's election did not last, and a series of disputes between the Corporation and both the parishes and civic government soon followed. 1696 saw the election of John Hine, who was passionately opposed to the Corporation, as mayor of Bristol, through which position he was able to prevent the Corporation from doing anything until 1698.<sup>4</sup> John Hine forced the Corporation to attempt to raise loans from its own members by refusing to sign the warrants for levying the rates

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp.5-6.

<sup>2</sup>Brit. Lib., Addit. MS 5540, f.100.

<sup>3</sup>James Johnson, Transactions of the Corporation of the Poor in the City of Bristol, During a Period of 126 Years (Bristol, 1826), p.10.

<sup>4</sup>Butcher, 'Bristol Corporation of the Poor', pp.11-12, and Johnson, Transactions of the Corporation of the Poor in the City of Bristol, p.17.

necessary for it to set about employing the poor; thus ensuring that it started its life heavily in debt and quite impotent.<sup>1</sup>

This impediment was removed when the Corporation succeeded in having two clauses included in Tiverton's Act which gave it power to levy rates on its own authority if the mayor in his capacity as Justice refused to issue warrants for the distraint and sale of goods against churchwardens who failed to bring in the money levied on the parishes.<sup>2</sup> After the initial problem with Mayor Hine the Corporation seems to have developed a better relationship with the city government. A large number of common councilmen served as guardians of the poor and there were few governors of the Corporation who had not previously served as mayor.<sup>3</sup> In all, the problems encountered with the city government were relatively short-lived and easily overcome. This was not the case with the conflict that developed with the parishes.

Bristol's Act gave the Corporation power over both the money raised in the city by rates and that given as charitable bequests for the use of the poor, and up until 1696 in the hands of the churchwardens. In effect the creation of the Corporation stripped the churchwardens and overseers of the poor of a large part of their power, leaving them as glorified tax collectors. One of the Corporation's first projects was to take a census of the poor and determine the average amount spent by the parishes on poor relief in the three years preceding 1696. Even this relatively innocuous project met with obstruction from the parishes, and though the Corporation eventually had its demands met, this was only after resorting to the threat of legal action. This one incident was merely the first in a long series

<sup>1</sup>Butcher, 'Bristol Corporation of the Poor', pp.11-12.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.15.

<sup>3</sup>Bristol Corporation of the Poor, ed., Butcher, pp.36, 171-178.

of problems with the parishes. In all, fifteen of Bristol's eighteen parishes ignored the Corporation's rate demands.<sup>1</sup> The 'Tiverton Clause' supplied the power needed to deal with this situation, but the Corporation found itself having to take most of Bristol's churchwardens to court before it received the money due. This problem was never satisfactorily solved, though in the 1710s, when the city's high-church and Tory faction gained control over the Corporation, an attempt was made to placate the churchwardens by making them members of the Corporation.<sup>2</sup>

The difficulties faced were a reflection of the powerful role the Corporation had authority to play in local government. Its very existence made redundant and powerless a whole stratum of administrative machinery - the overseers of the poor - but more than this it threatened the supremacy of the city government itself, providing an alternative organisation through which power and patronage could be dispensed. Not surprisingly, the Corporation became another factor in the political divisions which characterised local government throughout this period. In Bristol the Corporation was a Whig stronghold, having been founded by Whigs and organised to further their political ambitions - though not necessarily in accordance with a Whig ideology. However, following an initial period of Whig dominance it fell into the hands of the Tories in the early 1710s, later losing much of its potential for political divisiveness as it became an accepted part of Bristol's civic government.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Butcher, 'Bristol Corporation of the Poor', p.12.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp.12-13.

<sup>3</sup>The statements of the author of the 1711 anonymous pamphlet, Some Considerations Offer'd to the Citizens of Bristol, adequately justify the conclusion that the Corporation was Whig dominated up until the early 1710s. It is more difficult to prove that it then became

To some extent the early history of the Corporation of the Poor of Bristol is explicable by reference to the political infighting of Bristol's elite, but at the same time an institution was created to care for the poor, and though the configuration of that institution was of little importance to those who founded and controlled it - one Whig being overheard to say 'D--n the Mint, if we can but Divide them [the Tories], it will in a great Measure answer the End'<sup>1</sup> - that institution radically affected the quality of life of a large number of Bristol's poorest and politically least significant inhabitants. The Corporation never institutionalised more than a small percentage of the poor. For the vast majority of those in receipt of pensions the only change they experienced was in the identity of the person to whom they applied for relief.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of national developments in poor relief the importance of Bristol's Corporation lay in the administrative structure it developed for the distribution of money to the poor - it was the first institution of its kind to completely supersede the parish as an administrative unit in this sphere - but equally it did create two workhouses which, although in the long term they were far from successful, for the first few years seemed to point the way for a complete revision of the poor relief system.

a Tory stronghold, though the passage of Bristol's amending Act, 12 Anne, st.2 c.15, through a Tory House of Commons and the inclusion in that Act of provisions preventing dissenters from acting as guardians and allowing the churchwardens of the parishes of Bristol to become members of the Corporation, which churchwardens had traditionally opposed the Corporation, does strongly suggest that some change in the political leadership of the Corporation took place. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the records of the Corporation of the Poor of Bristol were destroyed by enemy action in World War Two, making it necessary to base this section on printed pamphlet literature and secondary material produced prior to 1939.

<sup>1</sup>Some Considerations Offer'd to the Citizens of Bristol Relating to the Corporation for the Poor, p.9.

<sup>2</sup>Butcher, 'Bristol Corporation of the Poor', p.72.

It was not until the autumn of 1698 that the Corporation was able to take responsibility for all the poor of Bristol, and even then it was forced to raise six hundred pounds from among its own members in order to meet current expenses.<sup>1</sup> Its first action was to 'bring together the Poor on a certain Day in some convenient Place, where the Committee met, and without Partiality endeavoured to provide for every one according to their wants' and 'likewise took notice of all the young Girls...and such whose Parents took no due Care of them; and these we recommended to the Committee of the New Workhouse, to be taken in and employed...'<sup>2</sup> Having determined the extent of the problem in Bristol, the Corporation set about institutionalising certain categories of the poor. As mentioned above, young girls were the first to be taken in. In 1698 one hundred of them were admitted to the 'New Workhouse', a building granted to the Corporation by the City in 1696, during the mayoralty of Samuel Wallis.<sup>3</sup> The Corporation's original intention was to build a large workhouse for all the poor, and to this end plans were submitted and a site chosen. A 'U'-shaped building with a central courtyard built upon a marsh on the outskirts of the city was proposed, but - probably because of the expense and time that would have been involved in completing such a project - the simpler solution of converting an existing building to the purpose was chosen.<sup>4</sup> The 'Mint', an old sugar house, was purchased and, after some trouble convincing the sitting tenants to vacate, was converted into a workhouse and renamed St. Peter's Hospital. While the New Workhouse

<sup>1</sup>Cary, An Account of the Proceedings of the Corporation of Bristol, pp.5-6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp.6-7.

<sup>3</sup>Butcher, 'Bristol Corporation of the Poor', pp.26-27.

<sup>4</sup>Johnson, Transactions of the Corporation of the Poor in the City of Bristol, p.13.

housed young girls, the Mint accommodated all the other types of poor institutionalised by the Corporation - infants, young boys, the elderly and impotent.<sup>1</sup>

The regimen, diet and administration of Bristol's two workhouses were very similar. At both the children worked ten hours in the winter and eleven in the summer,<sup>2</sup> and had, on the advice of a doctor, as part of their diet 'Beef, Pease, Potatoes, Broath, Pease-porridge, Bread and Cheese, good Bear...Cabage, Carrots, Turnips &c.'<sup>3</sup> Some time each day was set aside for exercise when the children were given 'leave to walk on the Hills with their Tutresses, when their work was over, and the weather fair.'<sup>4</sup> New clothes were issued to each child on entry into the house - the boys being issued from 1699 with 'a blue Coat with Tin Buttons a blue waistcoat with Clasps, white Breetches blue stockens and blue Capps'.<sup>5</sup> James Johnson suggested in his Transactions of the Corporation of the Poor that the choice of blue for the children's uniforms reflected a high-church and Tory sympathy on the part of the guardians, but it is much more likely that they were simply following the example of Christ's Hospital in London which issued similar apparel.<sup>6</sup>

Each of Bristol's two workhouses was managed by a committee of the Corporation which was responsible for auditing the books, overseeing the ordering and purchase of goods and regularly visiting the

<sup>1</sup> Cary, An Account of the Proceedings of the Corporation of Bristol, p.16.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix: Chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup> Cary, An Account of the Proceedings of the Corporation of Bristol, p.12.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>5</sup> Bristol Corporation of the Poor, ed. Butcher, p.68.

<sup>6</sup> See Johnson, Transactions of the Corporation of the Poor in the City of Bristol, pp.62, 137-138. For a description of the uniform of Christ's Hospital see Ruth McClure, Coram's Children, The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1981), p.194.

houses.<sup>1</sup> Under these two committees each house had a pyramidal management structure. At the New Workhouse there was a mistress who had responsibility for the smooth running of the house, four tutresses or works mistresses, who saw to it that the children were kept properly employed, a schoolmistress, several servants employed in the kitchen and wash house, and a porter to guard the door and see that no one entered or left without permission.<sup>2</sup> More servants were required at the Mint to look after the elderly and infants, but the same basic categories of servants were maintained.

At first the children were kept employed in spinning,<sup>3</sup> but after 1705 the pauper industries of pin making and oakum picking were introduced.<sup>4</sup> The early history of Bristol's attempts to employ the poor profitably highlights the conflict of interest between merchants and those who by virtue of their position as managers of a workhouse were forced to champion the poor in their relationship with employers. In attempting to employ the poor at a profit in industries traditionally manned by children, women and the dispossessed the guardians admitted the impossibility of earning a living wage in these pauper manufactures, and hence the impossibility of supporting the poor from the profits of their labour in these industries. John Cary described the quandary in which the Corporation found itself in his Account of the Proceedings of the Corporation of Bristol:

after about Eight Months time, our Children could not get half so much as we expended in their Provisions. The manufacturers who employed us, were always complaining the Yarn was spun coarse, but would not advance above Eight pence per pound for spinning, and we must either take this, or have no work. On the other side, we were labouring to understand

<sup>1</sup>Butcher, 'Bristol Corporation of the Poor', p.23.

<sup>2</sup>Cary, An Account of the Proceedings of the Corporation of Bristol, p.10.

<sup>3</sup>Butcher, 'Bristol Corporation of the Poor', p.28.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp.30-31.

how we might distinguish, and put a value on our Work, according to its fineness. This we did by the Snap Reel, which when we were master of, the Committee made an Order, That the Master should buy in a Stock of Wool, and spin it up for our own Accounts, and then proceeded to set the Price of Spinning by the Snap Reel, wherein we endeavoured to discourage coarse work, and to encourage fine....We therefore sent to the Manufacturers, and shewed them what Experiments we had made; but finding them still unwilling to advance above the Old Rate, the Committee voted that they would give Employment to all the Poor of the City, who would make application to them, at the Rates we offered to work, and pay them ready Money for their Labour.

We soon found we had taken the right course, for in a few Weeks we had Sale for our fine Yarn as fast as we could make it, and they gave us from Eight pence to Two shillings per pound for spinning the same Goods for which a little before they paid but Eight pence, and were very well pleased with it, because they were now able to distinguish between the fine and coarse Yarn.<sup>1</sup>

What the Corporation had done was to force up the price of pauper labour by giving employment to all comers at a higher rate. The policy necessarily put other manufacturers at a disadvantage, and though extremely successful was not allowed to continue for long - spinning being replaced, as noted above, by the even less remunerative pauper manufactures of pin making and oakum picking.

At this point I do not want to spend much time discussing the administration of or conditions in any specific workhouse, as I will deal with these topics in separate chapters later in the thesis. Here it is only necessary to describe in the briefest possible way the rough outline of these, the earliest of eighteenth-century workhouses.

Thus far we have looked exclusively at local and national government attempts to reform poor relief and institutionalise its provision. In Bristol a wholly independent experiment in the care of the poor was undertaken by the Quaker community concurrently with the foundation of the Corporation of the Poor.

The Quakers had attempted to provide for their own poor,

<sup>1</sup>Cary, An Account of the Proceedings of the Corporation of Bristol, pp.13-15.

independently of the normal parish provision, from the beginning.<sup>1</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century the country-wide organisation of monthly meetings allowed for the systematic relief of all the Quaker poor.<sup>2</sup> A loose system of settlement was adhered to whereby paupers were relieved by the local meetings and screened for suitability according to their local reputations.<sup>3</sup> But the most important aspects of the Quaker poor relief system were the generosity with which the poor were treated and its emphasis on self-help.<sup>4</sup> The level of relief was always significantly higher than that provided by the parishes,<sup>5</sup> and from an early date, where practical, paid employment was supplied, the product of which was guaranteed a market among the members of the monthly meetings.<sup>6</sup>

The Quaker workhouse at Bristol was founded in 1696, probably in direct response to the early setbacks experienced by the Corporation of the Poor - in whose establishment Thomas Callowhill, among other Quakers, was actively involved<sup>7</sup> - and was originally organised to employ seven poor Quaker weavers.<sup>8</sup> But it also incorporated a school

<sup>1</sup>William C. Braithwaite, The Beginnings of Quakerism (2d edn, York, 1955), pp.141, 143.

<sup>2</sup>Arnold Lloyd, Quaker Social History, 1669-1738 (London, 1950), p.33.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.32.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.33; for further discussions of the nature of Quaker poor relief see William C. Braithwaite, The Second Period of Quakerism (2d edn, York, 1961), pp.565-568.

<sup>5</sup>Lloyd, Quaker Social History, p.34.

<sup>6</sup>In 1676 London Quakers set up a domestic flax spinning organisation along the lines of that being run by Thomas Firmin. Through it poor Quaker women were employed in spinning, the products of their labours being sold through the 'Box Meeting' after it had been valued by a draper. Lloyd, Quaker Social History, p.40.

<sup>7</sup>Minute Book of the Men's Meeting of the Society of Friends in Bristol, 1686-1704, ed. Russell Mortimer (Bristol Record Society's Publications, xxx, 1977), p.xxviii.

<sup>8</sup>Lloyd, Quaker Social History, p.40.

at which both fee-paying students and the children of the poor were educated, an almshouse and an orphanage.<sup>1</sup> With an original investment of £200, by 1737 the total value of its lands, utensils and outstanding orders amounted to almost £2,500,<sup>2</sup> and if anything it was having trouble in meeting the orders placed with its factor for cantaloons, the manufacture of which was the primary activity of the house.

The numbers in the house probably did not exceed forty-five, among whom were twenty-four paupers and ten apprentices. The diet was organised on a bi-weekly schedule and the older people in the house received two shillings per week for pocket money and were allowed tobacco.<sup>3</sup> Overall, the impression given by the house is one of unusual generosity, matched only by the provision established in London by the Quaker workhouse there. Certainly the amount of freedom enjoyed by the inmates and the quality of the food was unparalleled in any of the Corporation or parish workhouses. But of even greater significance was the treatment meted out to the weavers employed in the house, who, though they lived in the house, were given a proper wage for their trouble so that they might be allowed to earn a 'livelihood'.<sup>4</sup>

Responsibility for the success of the Quaker workhouse at Bristol lies with two factors - the ability of its managers to use the nationwide network of monthly meetings to dispose of the goods produced, and the ease with which a small community within a larger, hostile society could bring social pressure to bear on both the workhouse managers and paupers. Orders for the cantaloons produced in

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.41.

<sup>2</sup> A. Ruth Fry, John Bellers, 1654-1725, Quaker, Economist and Social Reformer (London, 1935), p.9; Lloyd, Quaker Social History, p.42.

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd, Quaker Social History, pp.41-42.

<sup>4</sup> Minute Book of the Men's Meeting of the Society of Friends in Bristol, 1686-1704, p.xxviii.

the house came from as far afield as Sunderland, London and Sussex,<sup>1</sup> and except during a short period in its early years when an overly large stock of unsold goods remained in the workhouse,<sup>2</sup> there seems to have been no slackening in demand - although it must be noted that those ordering cloth regularly asked for and presumably received an abatement in price.<sup>3</sup> The question of how the organisation of the Quaker community helped to bring pressure to bear on workhouse managers and inmates is more difficult to answer, but between weekly meetings held at the house and regular visits from both the men's and women's meetings the house managed to escape both the necessity of regularly disciplining the poor within its walls and the near universal habit of workhouse managers using their position for personal gain.

#### Section B: Exeter

Two years after Bristol's Corporation Act was passed, but before the Bristol Corporation had managed to provide an institution for its paupers, Exeter had passed a Corporation Act of its own, based on that for Bristol, but resulting in quite a different type of provision for the poor. As at Bristol, in Exeter the Corporation became a centre of local political dispute - providing a forum for the activities of local Whigs and reform-minded men. In Exeter outright opposition to the Corporation founded in 1698 did not surface until after the Act sanctioning its foundation had been passed. The civic government in Exeter was fervently opposed to the Corporation throughout this period and made a concerted effort to block it wherever possible. The Act was steered through Parliament by Sir Edward Seaward, and though the

<sup>1</sup>S.F.L., Case 110, Shelf 2 (James Dix's Manuscripts), Items B5B, B29B.

<sup>2</sup>Lloyd, Quaker Social History, p.41.

<sup>3</sup>S.F.L., Case 110, Shelf 2 (James Dix's Manuscripts), Items B5B, B29B.

chamber paid Seaward's expenses in obtaining the Act,<sup>1</sup> it was petitioning Parliament for its repeal or amendment within a year, claiming that the newly founded institution 'cast an envious eye upon the present Government by the Civill Magistrate of the Citty', and that it had been 'made contrary to our then Representatives in Parliament'.<sup>2</sup> The presentation of this petition was but the first in a series of conflicts which plagued Exeter's Corporation for the first four years of its existence.

Exeter's was the most powerful Corporation created by any of the Acts passed in this period. As with all the Acts passed after that for Tiverton, Exeter's included clauses giving it the power to levy rates on the parishes in the face of opposition from the mayor and chief magistrates of the city, but more than this, Exeter's was the only Act to allow the guardians to be elected for life, which provision gave the Corporation even greater independence from the city government and popular opinion than was enjoyed by similar institutions elsewhere.

Between 1698 and 1701 the Corporation experienced continual problems with the mayors and city chamber of Exeter. The first of these arose over the city's expectation that the Corporation would buy the workhouse founded there in 1676, which was still in successful operation in the late 1690s.<sup>3</sup> The Corporation decided that Exeter's current workhouse was unsuitable for its purposes, hence denying the city £400 revenue<sup>4</sup> and rejecting the role the chamber probably expected the Corporation to play - that of an organisation for rationalising the

<sup>1</sup>D.R.O., Auxilary Stack G1, Box 27.

<sup>2</sup>D.R.O., X1/60f, No.458.

<sup>3</sup>For material relating to the founding of a workhouse in Exeter in 1676 see D.R.O., ED/WH/2; D.R.O., ED/WH/5, item No.140, and D.R.O., D1/21/59.

<sup>4</sup>D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book, i, f.1.

already extant poor relief provisions. Following this affront to the city government's prestige, the mayor attempted to block the Corporation in the same way that John Hine of Bristol had successfully delayed the Corporation there. On two separate occasions the Corporation was forced to take the mayor to court at the King's Bench in order to force him to sign warrants for raising the rates necessary for it to carry out its mandate.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the chamber petitioned Parliament for the repeal or amendment of the Act upon which the Corporation was founded,<sup>2</sup> but to no avail. In Parliament the chamber received no sympathy and at law every decision went in favour of the Corporation. Unable to block the Corporation legally, the mayor and chamber turned to a policy of obstruction. In one dramatic incident the chamber attempted to block the election of a guardian. In October 1699 one of the guardians died, which, according to the Act, necessitated an immediate election to fill his place, the election to be overseen by the alderman whose ward the guardian represented. The clerk of the Corporation first approached the mayor to determine which alderman was responsible for the ward in question, only to be told that he would have to get the information from the Act Book, but that as a member of the Corporation the clerk could not see it. Eventually the information was obtained from the town clerk, and Alderman Bale, three times Member of Parliament for Exeter, was asked to oversee the election. At first Bale grudgingly admitted that 'he would pay all due Obedience to an Act of Parliament and would not be guilty of an Act of contempt therein, saying withall that he did not sit in Parliament seven yeares for nothing'. However, this initial compliance did not last very long, for when the election came to be

<sup>1</sup>See D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book, i, ff.17-18,40.

<sup>2</sup>D.R.O., X1/60f, No.450.

held Alderman Bale did not appear. Eventually when he was located he forthrightly refused to have anything to do with the election or the representatives of the Corporation, saying 'that while he was concerned' with the chamber 'he must do as they would have him, else they would hate him', and that the 'City Council were of Opinion that he ought not to proceed to the Election.' Unable to obtain Alderman Bale's cooperation the Corporation was forced to seek out his assistant, only to find he had conveniently left town, leaving the Corporation to elect its new guardian illegally upon its own authority.<sup>1</sup> This incident was one of several in which the chamber used any point of contact between itself and the Corporation as an opportunity to harass and obstruct that organisation.

Only after three years of ineffective opposition to the Corporation did the city council abandon its antagonistic position. The legal position of Exeter's new institution was unassailable, and eventually terms were agreed and a shaky peace inaugurated. In September 1701 an accommodation was finally reached over the rate assessments for that year, by which the Corporation moderated its demands and the mayor agreed to sign the necessary warrants without being taken to court.<sup>2</sup> However, this accommodation did not eliminate the animosity felt for the Corporation by many influential citizens; indeed it raised the anger of many who felt betrayed by the mayor. In 1702 William Barkett claimed that 'it was the Vogue of the Town that the Mayor had received 100 Guineas from the Corporation to act for them' and that he had thought the mayor to be a loyal and honest man, but that his actions in relation to the Corporation proved he was not,

<sup>1</sup>D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book, i, ff.36-37.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., ff.97-98.

and that for his action the mayor deserved to be hanged.<sup>1</sup> Nor, indeed did the Corporation's problems cease with the failure of the city council's policy of obstruction.

Having issued the necessary warrants levying the rates the Corporation was faced with the absolute refusal of several parishes to comply. This type of action on the part of the parishes was not as widespread as had been the similar action taken by fifteen of Bristol's parishes. But in Exeter opposition of this type was more geographically centralised, and more obviously political than it had been in Bristol. The central parishes of Exeter were extremely rich. Three of them had no inhabitants who could be considered poor, while most of the rest could count less than ten per cent of their population as poor according to the Hearth Tax returns of 1671/2.<sup>2</sup> It was these central parishes, such as St. Martin, St. Petrock, St. Stephen and Allhallows in Goldsmith Street, which refused to pay the amounts rated on them.<sup>3</sup> In one case, that of St. David's, which coincidentally was not in the central part of Exeter, the overseer of the poor complained in court that he was willing to collect the money but that he was 'affronted and Assaulted for his willingness soe to doe'.<sup>4</sup> This opposition was not the result of the equalisation of the burden of the poor over all the parishes of Exeter. Indeed, the Corporation set its rates according to the amounts paid by each parish in the three years preceding 1698, leaving to the Exeter Quarter Sessions the task of ensuring that the better-off parishes helped support the poor of the

<sup>1</sup>D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Minute Book of the Sessions of the Peace for Exeter, 61/68, f.136.

<sup>2</sup>Hoskins, Industry, Trade and People in Exeter, pp.112-113.

<sup>3</sup>For lists of Exeter parishes taken to court for refusing to meet the Corporation's rate demands see D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book, i, ff.122, 123.

<sup>4</sup>D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book, i, f.89.

industrial, suburban parishes. Instead, it was a reflection of the dislike of the Corporation so evident in its dealings with the mayor and city council. The Corporation took the parishes to court and in due course collected the money it needed, but opposition from this quarter continued in the same form for almost ten years, the parishes finally growing weary only after the Corporation had become extremely well established.

In Exeter as in Bristol opposition arose from both the city government and the parishes. Many of the same obstructive techniques were used in both cities, and for many of the same reasons. However, in Exeter the opposition from the city government was more vociferous than that indulged in by John Hine, while at the same time the opposition from the parishes was more important in Bristol than in Exeter, where it was restricted to the rich centre of the city. Still, the techniques of opposition were similar in both places - mayors, city councils and parishes all relied on obstruction where they could not legally object to the actions of the Corporations.

Although there are close similarities between the experience of opposition faced by the Corporations of both Exeter and Bristol, the institutions founded in these two cities were quite different. Where the Corporation at Bristol institutionalised only a small percentage of its poor, at Exeter a total institution was established and a single, purpose-built structure constructed to accommodate the whole range of paupers in receipt of relief. Plans for a new workhouse were approved in 1699 and at the same time the manufacture of bricks was begun.<sup>1</sup> The plans called for three main buildings - a central chapel with wings on either side. It was an impressive building, incorporating a large entry hall, which was to contain a heavily carved commemorative table and a portrait of Canon Bury, who twenty years earlier had left a large

<sup>1</sup>D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book, i, ff.5,11,22.

bequest to set the poor of Exeter to work.<sup>1</sup> The wings on either side of the main building were each to be ninety-three feet long by twenty-two feet wide and several stories high, with apartments for the master of works in one wing and for the master of the house in the other. There was also a brewhouse and infirmary built in the grounds as well as an enclosing brick wall.<sup>2</sup> The work on these buildings proceeded apace and they were ready to be occupied in the autumn of 1701.

In the spring of 1701 envoys were sent to Bristol to find out how the workhouse there was managed and it was eventually decided that the spinning of white oiled wool was an appropriate occupation for the inmates.<sup>3</sup> A master of works and master of the house were engaged, each at twenty pounds per year, and rules and a diet were laid out.<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of its history it was thought the duties of the Corporation extended beyond the provision of relief to the poor to include the punishment of minor offenders in a house of correction and the treatment of the ill in an infirmary. Immediately on the completion of the necessary facilities, rogues and vagabonds became at least one object of the guardian's attention. Over the first few years numerous people were condemned to hard labour and confinement by the Corporation, with no reference to the normal system of Justices and Quarter Sessions. In April 1702, for instance, James Dox was hauled before a committee of the Corporation, had over eight pounds worth of goods and money confiscated and was immediately sent to the house

<sup>1</sup>See D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Act Book of the Chamber, xi, pp.146,187; D.R.O. Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book, ii, 4 December 1705, 5 February 1705/6.

<sup>2</sup>D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book, i, ff.54,65,93.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., ff.73,100.

<sup>4</sup>See Appendix: Chapter 3.

of correction, on the charge of speaking 'reproachfully' of the Corporation.<sup>1</sup>

Up to about 1704 the Corporation seems to have been participating in an exercise designed to stretch its powers to their limit. The confiscation of goods, brutal physical punishment, responsibility for all types of poor person from rogues and lunatics to infants and control over an expanding financial base, both in the form of land and rates, gradually came within the grasp of the Corporation. However, the Corporation seems to have tired of these responsibilities: as the enthusiasm of the founders waned, so did the scope of the Corporation's activities. After about 1704 there are few cases of rogues and vagabonds being apprehended. Gradually the punishments inflicted on individuals were restricted to cases involving people already in the workhouse, while simple domestic and financial matters came to take up more of the Corporation's time. Unfortunately the records of the Corporation for the period between 1710 and 1747 have been lost, so we cannot say if the trends started in the 1700s continued, but it seems likely that, having set out to use all the power given it in its Act of Parliament, the Corporation soon restricted itself to the immediate concern of caring for the 'deserving poor'.

The conditions in the house were probably slightly better than those suffered by the inmates at Bristol, if only because at Exeter they were housed in a purpose-built structure. The workhouse was an extremely large institution; there were at least nine full time employees and probably about two hundred inmates.<sup>2</sup> As with all large

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., f.125.

<sup>2</sup> The staff included a master and mistress, a works master and mistress, a marshal, clerk, teacher and tailor. See D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book, i, ff.75,91,93,124, and ii, 4 May 1703, 21 June 1704, 3 October 1704, 5 June 1705, 1 October 1706. By the 1800s the house held over 250 inmates; for an estimate of the population of the house see Hoskins, Industry Trade and People, pp.145-146.

eighteenth-century workhouses, there was a strict work and diet regimen. The diet was probably good, with meat twice a week and fish once. Bread, beer and cheese were, of course, the main stays of the diet, but greens, carrots, fruit and the occasional pudding were also provided. The work regimen was almost precisely the same as that enforced at Bristol. Children were to rise at six in the morning and work till half past six in the evening during the winter months, and at five a.m. during the summer. Some time was allowed for play after each meal and, as at Bristol, the children were encouraged to go out walking with their instructors occasionally.<sup>1</sup>

The punishments enforced on the inmates were both immediate and brutal. Isolation cells and whipping were the most common punitive measures - usually being carried out immediately by the workhouse marshal after a transgression had been committed, and later being reported to the punishments committee of the Corporation for the approval of the committeemen.

Throughout the twelve year period for which we have records, violence and 'slander' against the Corporation were common. The inmates of the house regularly broke out, transgressed every rule the Corporation made, assaulted the employees of the workhouse and generally expressed a high level of dissatisfaction with their position in the house. The Corporation responded to these transgressions with zeal. A marshal to inflict punishments had been hired at eight pounds per year and given a livery, and was directed to 'make the Punishment of Offenders in the house as Exemplary as maybe.'<sup>2</sup> The most common punishment was whipping, though this does not seem to have deterred transgressors. One inmate, Roger Cann, was punished dozens of times for drinking, stealing and 'diverse disorders' with no apparent effect.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix: Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup> D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book, ii, 13 June 1705.

He was still being punished regularly years after he entered the house and had begun to be referred to as 'old Cann'.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the infractions punished arose from a simple desire to get drunk and have a good time, but not all were so innocent. In one of Roger Cann's numerous adventures he violently attacked the master workman of the house, and in another case one Hannah Powell verbally abused the committee of the Corporation in charge of punishing the poor in very strong terms to their faces.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most interesting case was that of George Moore, an inmate, who was heard to utter 'many disparaging, reproaching & villifying words against the Governours & Managers of the' workhouse, 'and did further say that he would bourn the house'. Here was a desperate man, though perhaps not as serious in his intent as his words indicate, for he threatened to burn down the workhouse within hearing of the apothecary employed by the Corporation.<sup>3</sup>

Though the workhouse itself was the most tangible symbol of the power of the Corporation, it was the Corporation marshal who was the most common object of violence. He was perhaps the most distasteful arm of the Corporation, being paid to inform on and punish the poor. The marshal was regularly beaten in the course of his duties, which included the apprehension of vagrants. But vagrants were not the only ones who felt the need to attack the man who filled this office. At one point in 1704 even the minister of the workhouse felt obliged to

<sup>1</sup>See D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book, i, ff.119,127; D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book, ii, 3 March 1701/2, 5 September 1704, 13 June 1705.

<sup>2</sup>D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book, i, f.127.

<sup>3</sup>D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Minute Book of the Sessions of the Peace for Exeter, 61/68, f.138.

physically attack the man.<sup>1</sup>

The Corporation of the Poor was disliked by a large portion of the population of Exeter. For the mayor and aldermen it represented a threat to their power, but for many more it was a direct affront to their parish loyalties, their concern for the poor and their fear of the growing power and demands of the centralised government of the city and county of Exeter. The Corporation was the first city-wide organisation capable of levying rates on the population. It dramatically shifted power away from the parishes, taking from the small shopkeepers, merchants and artisans the power they gained and patronage they controlled through parish office-holding and vesting that power in the merchant elite, in whose hands city government already lay.

For the poor themselves the Corporation must have been even more of an affront. It took from them their right to a parish pension and gave in its stead only the prospect of a regimented and institutionalised old age. The poor had few opportunities for positive action against the Corporation. By absconding, theft and the infraction of rules the poor both relieved the tedium of workhouse life and positively obstructed the Corporation.

At Exeter a well-organised and successful Corporation was created over the objections of a large portion of the local population. Indeed, Exeter's was the most powerful of the Corporations and it attracted both greater opposition and support as a result. In London a very different type of organisation was created and a different result ensued.

## Section C: London

As mentioned in the previous chapter London's Corporation was founded upon the authority of the 1662 Act of Settlement and therefore had less power than the institutions founded upon private Acts. In London cooperation with the parishes was necessary. The Corporation took to itself only a small sphere of influence while leaving to the parishes most of the work of relieving the poor. Founded in 1698, it was made up of fifty-two assistants, the aldermen and the Lord Mayor of London, though in practice, as in Exeter, it was the elected assistants who played the most active role in the day-to-day running of the Corporation. John Bellers, Sir Robert Clayton, Jonathan James and at least ten of the governors of Christ's Hospital were among the early assistants,<sup>1</sup> and the support it received in its early years both in terms of expertise and charitable bequests was extensive. Indeed, London's Corporation seems to have had more support both in the City and at Westminster than did any of the provincial foundations. However, approval of the Corporation was not universal. One Lord Mayor and several parishes actively opposed it and in 1713 the common council severely restricted its powers.

Opposition to London's Corporation came in two forms, first the sabotage of its earliest experiment in employing the poor by a Lord Mayor, Sir Francis Child, and second the refusal of several parishes to pay the rates levied upon them and the petitioning of Parliament by those same parishes.

Originally London's Corporation had no intention of setting up a workhouse; rather it planned to employ the poor while allowing them to live independently. Towards this end it contracted with two men,

<sup>1</sup> Macfarlane, 'Studies in Poverty and Poor Relief in London', p.285.

Thomas Smith and William Knowkly, in 1698 to employ one thousand able-bodied poor people in spinning wool for seven years.<sup>1</sup> To start the project over £5,000 was levied on one hundred and five parishes. Up to this point the Corporation had received the support of the common council and Lord Mayor, but in October 1698 Sir Francis Child succeeded the Whig Lord Mayor Sir Humphrey Edwin and soon thereafter the employment scheme failed. Sir Robert Clayton, an active London philanthropist and prime mover behind the scheme, claimed that Child was responsible for its failure, believing that Child had actively discouraged the parishes from collecting the rates assessed on them. And, indeed, it was the ward with which Child had the most active links which most vigorously opposed the project.<sup>2</sup> Thirteen parishes, most of which were within the bounds of Farringdon Ward Without, refused to pay the rates assessed on them,<sup>3</sup> but it was not this rate revolt which most fundamentally affected the Corporation.

In founding the London Corporation the originators assumed that national legislation giving it more power than was allowed by the 1662 Act of Settlement would be passed through Parliament very quickly. As planned, Sir Rowland Gwynne's bill was introduced in March 1699/1700 with provisions for strengthening the Corporation, but almost immediately several parishes expressed their opposition to it by petitioning Parliament against its passage. Within a week of its introduction the parishes of St. Sepulchre's, St. Andrew Holborn, St. Bride and the inhabitants of St. Martin Ludgate in the ward of Farringdon Without presented their petition and soon thereafter the

<sup>1</sup> C.L.R.O., Journal of the Common Council of the Corporation of London, 1694-1700, f.221.

<sup>2</sup> Macfarlane, 'Studies in Poverty and Poor Relief in London', p.299.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp.329-330; the Aldermen and Common Councilmen representing Farringdon Ward Without were finally taken to court in 1706 over their behaviour towards the Corporation; see C.L.R.O., The Repetories of the Court of Aldermen of the Corporation of London, 1706-1707, p.63.

bill was allowed to drop.<sup>1</sup> On at least two other occasions Sir Robert Clayton attempted to have the Corporation strengthened by Act of Parliament, but both these attempts failed. In 1703 he had a bill introduced for this purpose with no result, and in 1705 three of the Corporation's assistants were sent to consult with Sir Humphrey Mackworth to see if measures to strengthen the Corporation could be added to the bill Mackworth then had before Parliament. This last attempt failed with the bill.<sup>2</sup>

Opposition to the Corporation arose in part from an objection to its expense. Even after its foundation the parishes continued to relieve the vast majority of London's poor through traditional means, making the money rated for the use of the Corporation seem an extraordinary burden. But, more than this, in London as in Bristol the opposition to this experiment involved a Whig/Tory split. The vast majority of the assistants were Whigs and their number even included a couple of prominent dissenters, John Bellers, a Quaker, being the best known.<sup>3</sup> However, <sup>many of</sup> the vestries of London were dominated by Tories<sup>4</sup> and opposition from this quarter was clearly rooted in a broad political division, as was that which centred around Sir Francis Child. He was an ardent Tory and his opposition to the Corporation must be seen as being primarily the result of his political loyalties.

At Bristol the Corporation was largely successful in beating off the attacks of the predominantly Tory opposition; in London, where the Corporation's legal position was much less sure, the opposition successfully limited the Corporation's powers, denying it both the extension of its authority promised in Sir Rowland Gwynne's

<sup>1</sup> Macfarlane, 'Studies in Poverty and Poor Relief in London', p.336.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.341.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.325.

<sup>4</sup> Jones, The Charity School Movement, p.115.

bill, and later even some of the powers claimed by the Corporation under the authority of the Act of Settlement. In common council, the Corporation was stripped of much of its power,<sup>1</sup> being forced eventually to play a very minor role, perhaps equivalent to that of the ancient London hospitals, in the provision of relief to the poor. In May of 1713 Chancellor Lloyd wrote to the S.P.C.K. asking its advice and exclaiming that 'the present governors [of the Corporation of the Poor] being a sett of wiggs put in under the late Ministry, the Tory common Council men are for Dropping the Taxes on the wealthy part of the City that used to support it as the most effectual way to get the Wigs out of the government of it.'<sup>2</sup> The Tories were largely successful.

In London the history of the Corporation was tied much more closely to that of national legislation for the reform of the poor laws than was the history of those at either Bristol or Exeter. But at Bristol and London opposition was based on a similar political division, with the Corporations at least originally representing a low-church, dissenting and Whig point of view, while the opposition, whose animosity was fuelled by parish loyalties and the desire to retain control of the money distributed as poor relief in the hands of churchwardens and overseers, was dominated by Tories.

Whereas there are marked similarities between the political machinations of those both in control of and opposed to the Corporations at Bristol, Exeter and London, the histories of the actual institutions founded under the auspices of these Corporations are quite different. In London no attempt was made to care for anything but a very small portion of the poor. In Bristol, though only a few types of paupers were institutionalised, the whole range of people in receipt of

<sup>1</sup>See C.L.R.O., Journal of the Common Council of the Corporation of London, 1708-1713, f.366; C.L.R.O., Journal of the Common Council of the Corporation of London, 1713-1717, f.35; Macfarlane, 'Studies in Poverty and Poor Relief in London', p.356.

<sup>2</sup>S.P.C.K., S.L.B., iii, p.28.

relief formed the object of the Corporation's attention and in Exeter the Corporation sought to institutionalise all the poor. London's Corporation left the vast majority of the work associated with relieving the poor in the hands of the parishes, itself only taking care of children between the ages of about seven and fourteen and running at the same time a house of correction for the punishment of vagrants and petty offenders.

As already noted, the first attempt by London's Corporation to employ the poor failed. In 1698 Thomas Smith and William Knowkly were contracted to employ a thousand paupers spinning wool for seven years.<sup>1</sup> In the event the scheme was abandoned the following year and another scheme embarked upon almost immediately. In August 1699 the Corporation leased a house in Bishopsgate Street, which it fitted up as a workhouse - originally receiving into the house one hundred pauper children over the age of seven from the London parishes.<sup>2</sup> A little over a year later the 'keeper's side' of the workhouse was also opened wherein 'grown Vagrants, sturdy Beggars and other idle and Disorderly Persons' were confined.<sup>3</sup>

The building in Bishopsgate Street was extremely large, having thirty-two rooms in all,<sup>4</sup> and at its height housing approximately four hundred and fifty children and fifty vagrants.<sup>5</sup> The children confined in the workhouse found themselves there for one of two reasons

<sup>1</sup>C.L.R.O., Journal of the Common Council of the Corporation of London, 1694-1700, f.221.

<sup>2</sup>Account (1732), p.2; Macfarlane, 'Studies in Poverty and Poor Relief in London', p.290.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Macfarlane, 'Studies in Poverty and Poor Relief in London', p.290.

<sup>4</sup>For a list of the rooms in the Bishopsgate Street workhouse see C.L.R.O., An Inventory of the Goods Belonging to the President and Governors for the Poor of the City of London, 1718.

<sup>5</sup>For examples of the numbers of inmates in the house at its height around 1702 see C.L.R.O., Courts of the President and Governors for the Poor of London 1702-1705, i, ff.2,30,40.

- either they were placed there by the churchwardens of the parish where they had a settlement, the churchwardens paying a weekly sum for their maintenance, or, after October 1701, they were recommended by a benefactor of the house - any person donating £25 to the house being allowed to place one child in it. On the 'stewards' side' of the house - that part used for pauper children - a relatively generous allowance was maintained. A school was established, each child spending two hours a day learning to read and write,<sup>1</sup> and a weekly bill of fare adhered to by which meat was served twice a week, and plum dumplings once a week.<sup>2</sup> The children were employed in spinning wool or flax and were cared for by nurses for most of the day.

For the first fifteen years of its existence the workhouse probably made some impression on the problem of pauper children in London - but only at a very high price. Every year the Corporation had to go back to the parishes and raise several thousand pounds: this despite the fact that the Corporation was regularly receiving large bequests for the maintenance of poor children, and demanding a weekly sum from the parishes for the support of children the parishes placed in the house. The expense was not allowed to continue. After 1713 the activities of the Corporation were severely restricted and the number of children in the house dropped from about three hundred to one hundred and thirty;<sup>3</sup> and though the Corporation continued in existence well into the next century, its influence declined rapidly. Simply because of the size of the problem faced by the London Corporation and the restrictions under which it laboured, it never gained the

<sup>1</sup>Account (1732), p.4.

<sup>2</sup>See Appendix: Chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup>See C.L.R.O., Numbers of Children in the London Workhouse in 1712, MS. 22 44; Macfarlane, 'Studies in Poverty and Poor Relief in London', p.295; Account (1732), p.4.

importance enjoyed by many of the other Corporations of the Poor. It became just another of the numerous charitable and poor-relief foundations which populated the metropolis. But its existence and that of the Corporation at Bristol did help to encourage the foundation of a Quaker workhouse at London whose historical importance would be difficult to overestimate.

The Quaker workhouse at Bristol has already been discussed, but it was not the only such institution founded coincidentally with a Corporation of the Poor. At London John Bellers, who later served as an assistant to the Corporation, was encouraged to write his Proposals for Raising a Colledge of Industry.<sup>1</sup> The ideas embodied in this pamphlet served as the basis for the foundation of the Quaker workhouse at Clerkenwell.

John Bellers first became involved in poor relief in 1679 when he was appointed treasurer of a flax spinning scheme initiated by London Quakers.<sup>2</sup> He published in 1695 his Proposals wherein he advocated the foundation of a college or factory to house and employ three hundred people skilled in different trades. £18,000 was to be raised by voluntary subscription and Bellers expected a profit of £1,000 to arise from the college each year. The significance of the scheme lay in the approach Bellers brought to the whole problem of poverty - he strongly advocated the traditional Quaker belief in cooperative self-help. His proposal did not involve charity, rather it emphasised the ability of the poor to create enough wealth through their labour to maintain themselves comfortably. In a sense, what he advocated was a separate economic commonwealth in which collective self-interest would

<sup>1</sup> John Bellers, Proposals for Raising a Colledge of Industry (London, 1695).

<sup>2</sup> Fry, John Bellers, pp.6-7.

lead to the development of a cooperative economy. Karl Marx has described Bellers as a 'veritable phenomenon in the history of political economy',<sup>1</sup> and indeed his Proposals foreshadow the ideas of nineteenth-century radical economists and early cooperators. But whatever his influence on later thought, Bellers sought to work within the religious and governmental structures with which he was familiar.

The first version of Bellers' Proposals was addressed to Parliament, as was his Essay about the Poor published in 1699.<sup>2</sup> He received very little attention from this quarter, but continued to advocate his scheme to Parliament: making a final attempt to interest the legislature in his plan in 1723.<sup>3</sup> Having failed to gain national recognition, Bellers turned to the Quakers. In 1696 he submitted his scheme to various monthly meetings.<sup>4</sup> Even here he appeared to be heading for disappointment, until in 1697 he approached the yearly meeting which recommended his plan to the quarterly and monthly meetings throughout the country, saying:

We think fitt to Recommend the same to your farther consideration how farr it may answer the ends by him proposed and how much you may be willing to Incourage it by a Voluntary Contribution. For if one House or Colledge for a beginning were set on foote by a Joynt stock by Friends of Estates throughout the Kingdom (severall having subscribed considerably already) it might by Right Management be of Use to the Ends intended and of good Report and Example to the Nation...<sup>5</sup>

Having taken up Bellers' plan the yearly meeting considered it necessary to obtain an Act of Parliament similar to those on which the Corporations were founded. In 1699 John Bellers was one of four people

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Braithwaite, The Second Period of Quakerism, p.571.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.580.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.581.

<sup>4</sup>Fry, John Bellers, p.7.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Fry, John Bellers, pp.7-8.

appointed to petition Parliament for such an Act, but before the process was well under way it was decided, after consulting legal council, that an Act would be unnecessary and that a college could be set up under the authority of existing laws.<sup>1</sup>

The factors contributing to the yearly meeting's decision to adopt Bellers' proposal were not limited to the arguments contained in the pamphlet laid before it. Bellers was active in the London Corporation of the Poor from its start and undoubtedly brought many of the ideas prevalent among the founders of that institution to the organisation of the Quaker workhouse.<sup>2</sup> But, perhaps more importantly, the Quakers of London had the example of the Quaker workhouse at Bristol on which to rely. Three representatives from Bristol attended the yearly meeting in London which recommended the acceptance of Bellers' scheme in 1697, and would have been able to pass on the experience and advice of Bristol Quakers on the subject of employing the poor.<sup>3</sup>

It was not until 1701 that the Clerkenwell workhouse became a reality.<sup>4</sup> In that year a lease was taken out for a building previously used as a Corporation workhouse for Middlesex and later as a college of infants under the auspices of Sir Thomas Rowe.<sup>5</sup> It was built around three sides of a square shared with the local house of correction and

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp.8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Macfarlane, 'Studies in Poverty and Poor Relief in London', p.325.

<sup>3</sup> Minute Book of the Men's Meeting of the Society of Friends in Bristol, 1686-1704, p.xxviii.

<sup>4</sup> An Account of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the School and Workhouse Maintained by the People called Quakers at Clerkenwell, London (London, 1746).

<sup>5</sup> Friends' School at Saffron Walden Archive, 'Best Minutes of the Committee of the Quaker Workhouse at Clerkenwell, 1701-1708', f.12; for information on the early history of the Clerkenwell workhouse and College of Infants see E.G. Dowdell, 'The Economic Administration of Middlesex from the Accession of Charles II to the Death of George II' (bound typescript, 1928), pp.47-71, 84-96; deposited at the London County Hall History Library.

served as a Quaker workhouse until 1786.<sup>1</sup>

Under the management of a specially appointed committee, the workhouse originally accommodated about thirty paupers, children being taken in two years after the first foundation.<sup>2</sup> The conditions in the house were in themselves unusual. The diet sheet and rules indicate that the inmates received an extremely generous allowance.<sup>3</sup> But of greater significance in determining the character of this institution was the nature of the work in which the poor were employed. Most of the poor who had no skilled occupation wound silk in the early years. Those who knew a trade, however, were allowed to practise it: a butcher and shoemaker, for instance, were employed in meeting the needs of the house.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the amount of freedom given the inmates was unique. Up until 1718 no restrictions were placed on the activities of the poor. They were allowed to enter and leave when they wanted, and even after this policy was found to be untenable, due to the number of poor coming back to the house 'disordered with liquor' and hence bringing the house into disrepute, the counter measures determined upon were extremely mild: before leaving the house the poor were required to notify the steward.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond the freedom given the inmates and the humanity with which they were treated, the regimen of the house reflects the singularity of Bellers' scheme in other ways. The poor children and orphans brought into the house were given several holidays each year during which

<sup>1</sup>David W. Bolam, Unbroken Community, the Story of the Friends' School, Saffron Walden, 1702-1952 (Cambridge, 1952), pp.8,55.

<sup>2</sup>Braithwaite, The Second Period of Quakerism, pp.585-586.

<sup>3</sup>F.S.S.W.A., Standing Minute Book of the Committee of the Quaker Workhouse at Clerkenwell, 1701-1792, pp.56-57, 91-94.

<sup>4</sup>F.S.S.W.A., Best Minutes of the Committee of the Quaker Workhouse at Clerkenwell, 1701-1708, f.1.

<sup>5</sup>F.S.S.W.A., Rough Minutes of the Clerkenwell Workhouse Committee, 1731-1743, see minutes of the meetings of 9th 2d month, 1739, and 1st 1st month, 1739/40; F.S.S.W.A., Standing Minute Book of the Committee of the Quaker Workhouse at Clerkenwell, 1701-1792, p.92.

they were allowed to visit their parents or friends, and, for the first decade at least, parents and those concerned with the children's welfare were allowed to visit them regularly. Eventually this policy was found to interfere with the management of the house,<sup>1</sup> but even after it had been reconsidered, the children's experience at the house was more akin to that of a child at a boarding school than one at a workhouse. Indeed, the Clerkenwell institution eventually became a boarding school and survives as such.

Furthermore, starting in 1707 the house began to board elderly people of private means, giving them house room and diet for a weekly sum only slightly higher than that paid for the support of paupers by the monthly meetings.<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, those who came into the house as fee-paying residents demanded some luxuries not available to the paupers and eventually caused so much trouble in the house that they could no longer be accepted.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, their willingness to enter a workhouse in the first place indicates the quality of maintenance enjoyed by the inmates and the degree to which the Quaker workhouse reflected the high ideals of John Bellers rather than the sordid reality of most Corporation and parish workhouses.

The house did not form an independent economic unit. There was a large degree of paternalism in its management and it was always dependent upon the fiscal contributions of the monthly meetings for its survival. But it did create a humane institutional environment for the

<sup>1</sup>F.S.S.W.A., Best Minutes of the Committee for the Quaker Workhouse at Clerkenwell, 1714-1724, p.3; F.S.S.W.A., Rough Minutes of the Clerkenwell Workhouse Committee, 1721-1731, see minutes of meetings of 9th 10th month, 1723, and 20th 5th month, 1724.

<sup>2</sup>Isabel Grubb, Quakerism and Industry before 1800 (London, 1930), p.139.

<sup>3</sup>For examples of the types of troubles encountered with fee-paying boarders see F.S.S.W.A., Richard Hutton's Complaints Book, 1711-1732, pp.74-93; David Bolam, Unbroken Community, p.51.

poor, wherein paupers enjoyed a large degree of freedom and a singularly generous provision. And there is every evidence that the poor were suitably enthusiastic about both the house's goals and provision. In 1717 Richard Hutton, the steward, received a letter from Thomas Sands, a young pauper maintained in the house by his monthly meeting, who had recently left to be bound apprentice, in which Sands said:

my love to thee and thy Wife, also to all the friends of the Committee. and to my Master that taught me to Write my love to all the Antient ffriends and all the children of the Workhouse which were my school ffellows. and I should be very glad to heare of any of their welfare as well as for my own I thank thee and the Committee for all I have Received.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond the impression of friendliness given by the use of common Quaker expressions like 'love' and 'friend', the use of which in itself indicates little, Sands expresses a degree of concern for the inmates and staff of the workhouse wholly inconsistent with the feelings of parish paupers towards the institutions in which they were incarcerated.<sup>2</sup>

The Quaker workhouses at both Bristol and Clerkenwell were of a wholly different character from those founded by either parish or Corporation. Besides the humanity and concern with which the poor were treated, their management led to the development of a common purpose among both staff and inmates, and though there were numerous complaints from inmates about their treatment, there seems to have been an expectation that the complaints would be handled fairly. Indeed, the workhouse at Clerkenwell incorporated a large part of the idealistic

<sup>1</sup>F.S.S.W.A., Richard Hutton's Complaints Books, 1711-1732, p.52.

<sup>2</sup>This attitude will be dealt with thoroughly in a later chapter; here it is sufficient to note that the number of cases of embezzlement and destruction of workhouse property and incidents of escape from workhouses and the frequency of physical punishment in workhouses was many times higher in parish institutions than at the Quaker workhouse at Clerkenwell. See Chapter 7, pp.210-217.

vision set out in Bellers' pamphlets, giving life to an element found in many eighteenth-century workhouse schemes - that is, the emphasis of writers like Laurence Braddon and Caleb Parfect on the workhouse as a separate community in which the 'family', ordered from top to bottom with each person in his place, went about caring for its own.<sup>1</sup>

#### Section D: Norwich

The final example we will look at in this chapter is that of Norwich. Norwich was the last city to found a Corporation of the Poor prior to the start of the parochial workhouse movement. It was not until 1711 that Norwich's successful petition to Parliament was drawn up<sup>2</sup> - a full fifteen years<sup>2</sup> after Bristol's Act had been passed. But long before this the mayor and city chamber had made moves in this direction. In March 1700/1701 Norwich unsuccessfully petitioned Parliament for a Corporation Act, while in 1708 a committee was set up to 'consider whether it may not be proper to have a Workhouse erected in this City as in other Cittyes. And what method may be used for procureing the same.'<sup>3</sup> Neither of these attempts achieved anything, but their failure did not deter a third and successful attempt.

In Norwich, unlike most of the places we have looked at, it is

<sup>1</sup> Examples of this attitude expressed by eighteenth-century pamphlet writers can be found in Laurence Braddon, The Form of a Petition Submitted to the Consideration of those Noblemen and Gentlemen who desire to Subscribe (London, 1722), pp.3-32; Caleb Parfect, Proposals made in the year 1720 to the Parishioners of Stroud (London, 1725), p.4.

<sup>2</sup> N.R.O., Case 16, Shelf d, No.8, Assembly Minute Book, 1683-1714, Norwich, f.196.

<sup>3</sup> N.R.O., Case 16, Shelf d, No.8, Assembly Minute Book, 1683-1714, Norwich, ff.122,176; see also J. Edwards, 'Norwich in the Eighteenth Century' (Unpublished typescript, 1972), p.62b, deposited in the Norfolk County Council City Library, Local Studies Library; and Penelope Corfield, 'The Social and Economic History of Norwich, 1650-1850, a Study in Urban Growth' (Univ. of London Ph.D. thesis, 1976), p.254.

extremely difficult to identify the Corporation with a specific political group. Interest in founding a workhouse seems to have increased when Whigs or independents held the mayoralty,<sup>1</sup> but when Norwich's Act came to be passed the city's Members of Parliament were both Tories,<sup>2</sup> and its petition was presented to a predominantly Tory House of Commons. There is also reason to believe that the Corporation was purposely kept under the direct control of the city chamber - its political make-up being determined by that body. In November 1711 the chamber amended the Corporation bill so that the 'election of the...32 Guardians...be by the Mayor & Sheriff Aldermen & Common Councilmen of this City and not otherwise.'<sup>3</sup> This provision, and the large role Norwich's two Tory Members of Parliament played in having the Act passed indicates that it was probably not Whig inspired and that the role intended for it was much less important than that played by Corporations founded elsewhere. At the same time it cannot be clearly identified with the Tory interests in the city, being as it was a tool of the chamber, whose make-up vacillated regularly in this period.

Whatever the Corporation's political make-up or the origin of the ideas behind it, opposition arose very quickly. By February 1713/4 the chamber was appointing a committee to 'prepare a petition to the Parliament for Repealing the Act lately granted for erecting a

<sup>1</sup>In 1701 when the first petition was presented to Parliament John Hall, a Whig and twice mayor of Norwich, held the mayoralty; in 1708 the mayor was Thomas Havers, for whom no clear-cut political allegiance can be discerned; and in 1711 William Cockman, a Whig, was elected. In 1712 a Tory, John Goose, became mayor, which might go some way towards explaining the speedy reversal in support for the Corporation. Basil Cousins-Hardy and Earnest A. Kent, Mayors of Norwich, 1403-1835 (Norwich, 1938), pp.106,110,111.

<sup>2</sup>J.H. Plumb, Sir Robert Walpole (London, 1956), i, 164.

<sup>3</sup>N.R.O., Case 16, Shelf d, No.8, Assembly Minute Book, 1683-1714, Norwich, f.200.

workhouse in this Citty.'<sup>1</sup> No copy of this petition survives, and though it was committed under the common seal it was withdrawn in August 1714.<sup>2</sup> The oddest aspect of this incident is that the petition was drawn up by several aldermen who ostensibly supported the idea of a Corporation. At least four of the eight men appointed to draw up the petition were among the aldermen who regularly attended the Corporation's meetings in its early years.<sup>3</sup> The quick reversal in the opinions of these men probably reflects a disillusionment with the idea rather than an expression of their political beliefs, but even so the petition's existence must be seen as evidence of widespread opposition.

As at Bristol, Exeter and London opposition to the Corporation was also expressed through the refusal of parishes to pay the money rated upon them. The first year that rates were collected from the parishes saw the active opposition of a large number of Norwich's vestries and overseers. In August 1713 the Corporation was forced to fine the overseers of six parishes for not collecting the rates, while nineteen others were severely reprimanded.<sup>4</sup> By October warrants were being issued against the 'Body of such person as shall at any time refuse to pay what money is charged upon them...'<sup>5</sup> and at least one overseer,

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., f.219.

<sup>2</sup>N.R.O., Case 16, Shelf d, No.9, Proceedings of the Municipal Assembly, 1707-1745, Norwich, f.50.

<sup>3</sup>Of the seven men appointed as a committee to draw up a petition to Parliament for the repeal of the Corporation Act, four, Sir Peter Seamore, William Blyth, Matthew Nate and Alderman Richard Manby, regularly attended the meetings of the Corporation of the Poor in the year prior to the petition being drawn up. See N.R.O., Case 16, Shelf d, No.8, Assembly Minute Book, 1683-1714, Norwich, f.219; N.R.O., Case 20, Shelf d, Norwich Guardians of the Poor Minute Book, 1712-1714/5, f.1.

<sup>4</sup>N.R.O., Case 20, Shelf d, Norwich Guardians of the Poor Minute Book, 1712-1714/5, f.24.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., f.28.

William Sumers of St. Julian's parish, was individually prosecuted.<sup>1</sup> There is no evidence that this rate revolt lasted beyond the first two years of the Corporation's existence, but there are recurring complaints about the expense of the Corporation, and continuing trouble experienced by the Corporation in forcing the overseers of the various parishes to follow its instructions.

By 1720 the Corporation seems to have lost what support it originally had. In that year John Fransham wrote a pamphlet justifying the Corporation's work, claiming that:

The Intention of publishing...is, To convince almost the whole Town concerning the grand Mistake it is under in relation to the Poor; viz. That the Workhouse-Act has been so far from preventing the Increase of the Charge for their Support (to which End it was obtained), that it has been since vastly increased; so that it had been much better for the City, if it had never had a Being, but the Old Method pursued to this Time.<sup>2</sup>

In Norwich there was not quite the same infighting among the various arms of local government as we have seen elsewhere, nor is there much evidence for a party-political motivation behind the opposition which did arise, but it is obvious from the 1714 petition to Parliament, the parochial rate revolt and John Fransham's pamphlet that at no time after its first year did the Corporation have the wholehearted support of the city.

The poor-relief provision established by the Corporation was in some respects similar to that inaugurated at Bristol. For the first twelve years of its existence the Corporation refrained from institutionalising more than a small percentage of those in receipt of relief. The relief and punishment of children, the very old and vagrants was the first object of the Corporation's attention. In 1713

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., f.28.

<sup>2</sup>[John Fransham], An Exact Account of the Charge for Supporting the Poor of the City of Norwich (London, 1720), p.5.

three workhouses were established - one in St. Augustine's parish for the care of the aged and infirm, another for the employment of children and orphans above the age of seven and a third in the city's long established Bridewell for the punishment of 'all Loose & idle persons wandring this City begging or otherwise'.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of the paupers continued to receive their pensions as they had before the passage of Norwich's Act. Indeed, it was not until the mid-1720s that the provision of institutional relief was expanded, at which time the poor of one city ward after another were brought into a workhouse, until around 1730 all the poor of the city were accommodated.<sup>2</sup>

Disregarding the conditions in the Bridewell, the provision provided in the two other workhouses originally set up by the Corporation was similar to those in the workhouses at Bristol and Exeter. A rigid work schedule was enforced whereby the inmates started work at six in the morning during the summer months and ended at eight in the evening, with half an hour being allowed for breakfast and an hour for supper. The weekly diet provided only one meat dish a week, but made up for this lack with bread and cheese and meat broth. The children were taught to read and all the inmates taken to church both morning and afternoon each Sunday.<sup>3</sup> Clothing was provided where needed on entry into the houses and everyone was employed in one of three occupations - beating hemp, twistering thread on a specially purchased mill or spinning linen.<sup>4</sup>

The institutional provision in Norwich was originally intended for

<sup>1</sup>N.R.O., Case 20, Shelf d, Norwich Guardians of the Poor Minute Book, 1712-1714/5, f.8.

<sup>2</sup>See N.R.O., Case 20, Shelf c, Norwich Guardians of the Poor Minute Book, 1723-1731, pp.102-103,125,132.

<sup>3</sup>See Appendix: Chapter 3.

<sup>4</sup>N.R.O., Case 20, Shelf d, Norwich Guardians of the Poor Minute Book, 1712-1714/5, ff.11,26; N.R.O., Case 20, Shelf c, Norwich Guardians of the Poor Minute Book, 1723-1731, p.219.

only a small number of individuals and though the Corporation had overall responsibility for all the poor of Norwich, who numbered thousands, during its first ten years it probably housed no more than a hundred people at any one time - children making up the largest percentage of this group. However, provision of a workhouse did create opposition from the poor themselves. Elizabeth Scott, an inmate, was severely whipped for 'abusing Mr. Cook one of the Guardians by going to his house with a great number of persons in a Riotous Manner & using ill Language towards him as a Guardian.'<sup>1</sup> And in 1730 a letter was thrown into the house of a magistrate 'full of notorious falsitys reflecting upon the Conduct & Management of the Guardians of the poor in the Workhouses...and threatening to Burn his Colliers houses & also the Workhouses Unless something therein was speedily complied with'.<sup>2</sup> The mismanagements referred to in this letter are not divulged, but it is obvious that many of the poor inhabitants of Norwich were not happy with an institutional provision.

We have looked at only four of the fifteen Corporations founded in this period. Among those we have not examined was that at Crediton, where the Corporation of the Poor seems to have escaped internal conflict. The Corporation there was under the strict control of the closed vestry - the Crediton Governors - and besides two proposals for reforming the administration of the Corporation presented in 1707 and 1709, there is no hint of serious dissatisfaction.<sup>3</sup> Even Richard Dunning, who in 1695 had come down against the idea of institutional relief in a pamphlet published by the Devon Quarter Sessions, was

<sup>1</sup>N.R.O., Case 20, Shelf c, Norwich Guardians of the Poor Minute Book, 1723-1731, p.199.

<sup>2</sup>N.R.O., Case 16, Shelf d, Assembly Minute Book, 1714-1731, Norwich, f.312.

<sup>3</sup>D.R.O., Crediton Governors, 1660A/332B; D.R.O., Crediton Governors 1660A/333B.

persuaded to work with the Corporation.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, at Kingston-upon-Hull the Corporation flourished,<sup>2</sup> and although its rate demands were quite high - requiring an amending Act in 1710 allowing it to raise more money<sup>3</sup> - it was still able to work closely with city government and to set up and run a workhouse system.

Still, the overall impression which emerges from the early histories of these Corporations is one of conflict - conflict between traditional government institutions, in the form of both vestries and city chambers, the poor themselves and the new Corporations. But each of these fifteen Corporations experienced different degrees of opposition, according to the power they wielded. The more powerful Corporations faced the stiffest opposition, while those most firmly under the control of other governmental bodies, or which affected the least number of paupers, were generally left in peace. Where the Corporation and city chamber represented different political groupings conflict was almost inevitable, and likewise where, as in London, vestries were dominated by Tories while the Corporation was Whig conflict was equally likely - not necessarily because of the political divisions themselves, but because these political divisions represented long standing vested interests which were threatened by the appearance of these new forces within local government.

<sup>1</sup>The Devon Quarter Sessions paid £4 to have printed Richard Dunning's pamphlet, Bread for the Poor; or a Method Showing how the Poor may be Maintained (Exeter, 1698), in the preface of which Richard Dunning rejects the idea of institutionalising the poor. See D.R.O., Devon Quarter Sessions Records Q/51/14, Pasche 1698. Richard Dunning's involvement with Crediton's Corporation is discussed in T.W. Venn, 'Crediton als Critton als Kirton and Hereabouts' (Unpublished typescript, December 1960), ii, 80-81; deposited in the West Country Studies Library, Exeter.

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of the early history of Kingston-upon-Hull's Corporation see John Tickell, The History of the Town and County of Kingston upon Hull from its foundation to...the Present Time (1798), pp.772-774.

<sup>3</sup>8 Anne c.11.

What emerges from a study of these Corporations is a mixture of national and local influences. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the timing of their foundations was in part a product of national considerations. The ending of the war, the easing of the financial situation with the end of the coinage crisis, the encouragement given to reform by the King and his government both through the King's speeches and the activities of the Board of Trade, and the activities of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners all contributed to the creation of a situation in which following Bristol's example became easier. The passage of local Acts giving the necessary authority to found Corporations was but the first step in the journey towards creating working administrative systems. Following the passage of such an Act the Corporations had to find a niche within local government and a role which did not exasperate the resentments of the poor to too great an extent, and the early histories of the Corporations are in part the searches for these. But the foundation of the Corporations did not represent mere administrative reform. They were political moves which injected a new factor into an already volatile situation. Largely Whig-dominated, the Corporations helped to strengthen the oligarchies of places like Bristol, while elsewhere they presented a direct threat to entrenched vested interests, whether these were in parish vestries or city chambers. Whether they were meant to play this role is impossible to determine, but play it they did and very effectively, helping in some places to control Tory-dominated organisations like the vestries of London. These were extremely powerful organisations, and where there was no mishap in the wording of the Acts on which they were founded giving the opposition a lever with

which to weaken them,<sup>1</sup> they played an extremely large role in the quagmire of competing interests that made up local government.

<sup>1</sup>A correspondent of the S.P.C.K. from Gloucester believed in 1704 that the Corporation there was 'likely to fall for want of clauses in the Act of Parliament which established it'. The Tiverton clause, to which this correspondent refers, was normally included in all the Acts passed after 1698. S.P.C.K., Minutes of the Society, 1698-1706, i, p.305.

## APPENDIX: CHAPTER 3

## Section A: Bristol

Orders for the House<sup>1</sup>

## Clock

- 6 That from the first of October to the first of March The  
children shall rise at Six of the clock in the morning
- 7 That their faces and hands be washed and their heads Combed  
and that they go to work at seven.
- 9 That they continue Work till nine.
- 10 That they go to prayer and from thence to Breakfast and play  
till ten.
- 12 Then go to work and so continue till twelve.
- 1 Then go to Dinner and play till one.
- 7 Then go to work and so continue till seven.
- 8 Then go to Supper and after that have a recess till Eight  
9 at which time that they go to prayer and then to bed at nine.
- 5 That from the first of march to the first of October they  
rise at five of the Clock in the Morning.
- 6 Comb their heads and wash till Six.
- 8 Then go to work till Eight.
- 9 Then go to prayer and afterwards to Breakfast and play till  
nine.
- 12 Then work till Twelve.
- 1 Then go to Dinner and play till One.
- 7 Then work till Seven.
- 9 Then go to Supper and play till nine  
Then go to prayer and So to bed--

## Section B: Exeter

Rules of the Workhouse as of December 30th, 1701<sup>2</sup>

That from the first day of October to the first of March the  
Boys shall rise at six of the Clock in the Morning  
That their faces and hands be washed & their heads Combed & that they  
go to work at seven  
That they continue at Worke till Nine  
Then Sing go to prayer and to breakfast & play till tenn  
Then go to work and Continue so till Twelve

<sup>1</sup>Bristol Corporation of the Poor, ed. Butcher, p.71.

<sup>2</sup>D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book,  
i, f.110.

Then go to Dinner and play till one  
 Then go to worke & Continue till halfe an hour after Six  
 Then Sing go to prayer and so to Bed

That from the ffirst of March till the 1st of October they shall rise  
 at ffive of the Clock in the morning  
 Then Cob their heads wash their faces and hands and go to  
 Worke by Six and so continue till Eight  
 Then go to Prayer and to Breakfast and play till Nine  
 Then go to Worke till Twelve  
 Then go to Dinner and play till One  
 Then go to Work till halfe an hour past Six  
 Then go to Supper and play till Nine  
 Then Sing go to Prayer and so to Bed

The men and women who are Capable of Labour to rise within one hour of  
 the Boys and Girls

A forme of Prayer proper for that purpose to be read by one of the  
 Officers of the house or som other fitt person of the said house

Further Rules for the Workhouse enforced as of July 15, 1707<sup>1</sup>

Ordered

That no person go out of the House without leave of the Master  
 Housekeeper or Master Worker nor Stay out Longer than Allowed nor abuse  
 themselves with Liquor whilst they are out.

That no provisions Cloathes nor any other thing be Carryed or Conveyed  
 out of the House without the Consent or Knowledge of the master  
 Housekeeper or Master Worker.

That no man go into the Womens Apartment except on Extraordinary  
 occasion and then by the appointmt of the Master Housekeeper nor any  
 woman to go into the men's apartment except such as shall be ordered by  
 the Housekeeper to make the beds Cleanse the Roome and do what else may  
 be needful.

That no person do abuse another by blows or ill Language & that they  
 neither curse nor Swear.

That those that are absent from prayers in the morning have no  
 breakfast or in the evening that they have no Supper except a  
 reasonable excuse to be allowed by the Master Housekeeper.

That all persons behave themselves respectfully to the Master &  
 Mistress Housekeepers and Master & Mistress Overseers of the Workers  
 and whereas in former Orders of the house it was appointed that they  
 Should after leaving worke go to Supper & then performe the other  
 Dutyes mentioned therein. It is now resolved that all the other Dutyes  
 be first performed & then Supper.

<sup>1</sup>D.R.O., Exeter Borough Records, Corporation of the Poor Minute Book,  
 ii, 15 July 1707.

Weekly Diet for Exeter Workhouse as of 13 December, 1701<sup>1</sup>

Sunday.	Breakfast	3 ounces of Bread, one ounce of Chees half a pint of Beere
	Dinner	Eight ounces of Beeffe 4 ounces bread 1 pint of beere and Garden Stuff Sufficient
	Supper	4 ounces bread 1 ounce 1/2 Cheese or 1 ounce of Butter 1/2 a pint of beere
Monday.	Breakfast	The Beeffe Broath well thickned with oatmeale 6 ounces of Bread to 4 Children and 2 Quarts of Broath to 4 Children
	Dinner	A Pease Pudding, A Quart of Pease to 4 with 4 ounces of butter and 8 ounces of bread, and a pint of Beere to each
	Supper	4 ounces of bread one ounce and halfe of Cheese or one ounce of Butter 1/2 pint of Beere Each
Tuesday.	Breakfast	Milk poridge 1 pint each 2 ounces bread
	Dinner	Bak'd Pudding with or without fruit 1 pint beere each
	Supper	Bread and Cheese as Sunday Nights
Wednesday.	Breakfast	4 oz. bread 1 oz 1/2 Cheese or 1 oz butter 1/2 pint beere
	Dinner	Carrots Turnips or parsnips buttered with one ounce of butter to each 3 oz bread each 1 pint beere each
	Supper	Bread Cheese and beere as Sunday Nights
Thursday.	Breakfast	Grut meat 1 pint each
	Dinner	The same as Sunday dinner
	Supper	As Sunday Nights
ffriday.	Breakfast	As Monday breakfast
	Dinner	Pease as Mondays Dinner
	Supper	As Sunday Nights
Saturday.	Breakfast	Gruell
	Dinner	a plaine Suet Dumpling each
	Supper	Bread Chees and Drink as Sunday Night

When ffish maybe had Reasonably one Meale a week of ffishe

## Men and Womens Dyet

Bread and Chees the same Quantity with the Boys.  
Beere about one quarter more, their Spoon meat about one quarter more,  
their fflesh one Eighth more The Servants of the house 1lb of fflesh  
each fflesh day Spooone meat and bread Sufficient.

## Section C: London

Bishopsgate Street Workhouse Bill of Fare<sup>1</sup>

	Breakfast	Dinner	Supper
Sunday	Bread and Beer	Beef and Broth	Bread & Butter or Cheese
Monday	Beef Broth	Pease-Porridge	Ditto
Tuesday	Bread & Butter or Cheese	Rice-Milk	Ditto
Wednesday	Ditto	Plumb-Dumplings	Ditto
Thursday	Ditto	Beef and Broth	Ditto
Friday	Beef Broth	Barley Broth	Ditto
Saturday	Bread & Butter or Cheese	Milk Porridge	Ditto

In Summer time, Pease, Beans, Greens and Roots, are allowed, as the Season affords them.

## Section D: Norwich

Workhouse Orders as of 1 March 1725/6<sup>2</sup>

12. Ordered that the Poor doe begin to work in the Morning & leave work in the Evening in the Severall parts of the year at the hours following viz.:

	In the Morning	In the Evening
From the first of May to the First of August	At 6	At 8
first of August to the first of November	At 7	At 7
first of November to the second of ffeb.	At 8	At 7
Second of ffebruary to the first of May	At 7	At 7

13. Ordered that the Poor have their Breakfast at Nine a Clock in the Morning for getting which to be allowed half an hour. Their Dinner at one for getting which to be allowed one hour and their Supper after they leave work And such as cannot work to have their Supper at Six of the Clock in the Winter & at Seven in Summer That they go to bed at ten of the Clock from the first of May to the first of August And all the other part of the year at Nine. That the Master or Mistress see that all Candles be carefully put out.

<sup>1</sup> Account (1732), p.4.

<sup>2</sup> N.R.O., Case 20, Shelf c, Norwich Guardians of the Poor Minute Book, 1723-1731, pp.114-115.

14. Ordered that the Bill of ffare to be observed by the Master and Mistress be as follow viz.:

	Breakfast	Dinner	Supper
Sundays	Bread & Cheese or Butter	Boyled Beef & Broth	Bread & Chees or Butter
Mundays	Beef Broth	Suet Pudding	Ditto.
Tuesdays	as Sunday		
Wednesday	Beef Broth	Milk	Ditto.
Thursday	as Sunday.		
ffriday	Beef Broth	Pease Porridge	Ditto.
Saturday	Bread & Cheese or Butter	Milk or Milk Broth	Ditto.

To be allowed a pint of Beer at every Meel except when they have one spoon meat.

15. Ordered that Mr. Barlow doe teach the Children in the Workhouse to read and that they have a reasonable time allowed for the same.
16. Ordered that the Master go to Church on Sundays forenoon & afternoon, with so many of his ffamily as are able to go.
17. Ordered that the Poor doe not stroul about the Streets on Sundays after Sermon But that the Master Call them together in as convenient a Manner as may be and read or Cause to be read to them Some Chapters out of the Bible and other good Books And that the Poor be then taught their Catechisme and be instructed in the Principalls of Morality.

## CHAPTER 4: THE PAROCHIAL WORKHOUSE MOVEMENT: 1714-1723

Unlike the Corporations of the Poor, early parochial workhouses cannot be traced through national legislation. They were small institutions of interest primarily to the inhabitants of the parishes they served; hence no clear picture can be developed of the process by which the ideas and impetus necessary to the foundation of these institutions spread to the forty or so localities served by parochial workhouses prior to the passage of the Workhouse Test Act of 1723.<sup>1</sup> What can be done is to draw the outline of this picture and to identify the most important factors at work in encouraging vestrymen and churchwardens to take upon themselves the arduous task of employing the poor and running a workhouse. This chapter will attempt to describe the geographical and chronological pattern of these early foundations. It will also explain the roles of professional workhouse managers, the S.P.C.K. and the Charity Schools - the foundation of which preceded that of parochial workhouses - in encouraging small communities to take upon themselves responsibility for employing their own poor. Furthermore, it will describe both the content and influence of the Workhouse Test Act.

It has been generally accepted by writers on poor relief that the parochial workhouse movement started with the foundation in 1714 of a workhouse at Olney in Buckinghamshire, and that from that beginning the idea of setting up parochial workhouses spread quickly to the towns

<sup>1</sup>This figure represents the number of workhouses for which positive information indicating a date of foundation prior to 1723 is available. It is probably an underestimate of the actual number of institutions founded in this period, but it does give some idea of the extent of early foundations. For a list of houses with their dates of foundation and the source material for them see Appendix: Workhouse Foundations Listed by County.

and parishes of the East Midlands and Home Counties.<sup>1</sup> This conclusion, based almost entirely on views expressed in a suspect pamphlet printed in 1726,<sup>2</sup> is questionable. Certainly, there can be no doubt that the foundation at Olney played an important role in popularising the idea of founding parochial workhouses, but to conclude that its establishment, and that of early workhouses in the vicinity, constituted more than one aspect of the workhouse movement is unsatisfactory. Several small parochial workhouses were founded in the period immediately preceding the establishment at Olney, and at least four other workhouses were founded in the same year.

#### Section A: The Distribution of Workhouses, 1714-1723

Information on early workhouses is scanty. There is no central source from which to develop a realistic idea of how they spread; one must turn to the patchy records of the parishes involved. It is therefore extremely difficult to compile a complete list of institutions established prior to 1725, the date of the publication of the S.P.C.K.'s Account of Several Workhouses which, although it lists only selected institutions, can be used as a guide to institutions extant in the mid-1720s.<sup>3</sup> In order to circumvent this problem I have made extensive use, on the one hand, of secondary material, generally in the form of local studies on poor relief,<sup>4</sup> to supplement information

<sup>1</sup>See E.M. Hampson, The Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire, 1597-1834 (Cambridge, 1934), pp.72-73, and Webb, The Old Poor Law, pp.243-244.

<sup>2</sup>A Representation of Some Mismanagements By Parish-Officers (London, 1726).

<sup>3</sup>Account (1725), pp.110-112. See Chapter 8, pp.224-226, for a description of how the information in this pamphlet was compiled, and the Account's limitations.

<sup>4</sup>Local studies of poor relief I have made use of in this section include the following: Hampson, The Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire; G.W. Oxley, 'Aspects of Poor Law Administration in

gleaned from the parochial records of the seven counties I have had the opportunity to study, and, on the other, the archives of the S.P.C.K. I have been able to compile complete information for eight counties, the cities of London and Westminster, and part of Lancashire, and it is from information about these areas, supplemented by that derived from the archives of the S.P.C.K., that I have developed a model for the spread of workhouses prior to 1723.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to 1714 at least three parochial workhouses of a sort were established. Houses were founded at Theydon Garnon in Essex in 1704,<sup>2</sup> at Meldreth in Cambridgeshire in 1707<sup>3</sup> and at Thaxted in Essex in 1711.<sup>4</sup> These early foundations probably had little influence - there is no evidence, other than the geographical proximity of these very institutions, that their example encouraged other localities to follow suit - but their existence does cast doubt upon the notion that the origin of the workhouse movement can be easily pinpointed as to its date and location. Indeed, the foundation of two parochial institutions in Essex prior to the establishment at Olney suggests

Oxfordshire in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries' (Liverpool Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1964); G.W. Oxley, 'The Permanent Poor in South West Lancashire under the Old Poor Law', ed. J. R. Harris, Liverpool and Merseyside (Liverpool, 1969), pp.16-49; E.G. Thomas, 'The Parish Overseer in Essex, 1587-1834' (Univ. of London M.A. thesis, 1956); E. G. Thomas, 'The Treatment of Poverty in Berkshire, Essex and Oxfordshire, 1723-1834' (Univ. of London Ph.D. thesis, 1971); and H. P. Stokes, 'Cambridge Parish Workhouses', Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, n.s., ix, 82-137.

<sup>1</sup>See map 4:1 for areas for which complete information is available.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas, 'The Parish Overseer in Essex', p.191n.

<sup>3</sup>Hampson, The Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire, p.70.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas, 'The Parish Overseer in Essex', p.191n. There was also a workhouse erected at Salisbury in 1709, but more than the others mentioned it probably owed much to the experiences of the Corporations of the Poor. S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1708-1709, No.1797 and S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1709-1711, No.2044.

that Essex is a possible alternative centre for the early workhouse movement, and that Buckinghamshire is just one of at least two areas of early activity.

According to A Representation of Some Mismanagements by Parish-Officers published in 1726, the workhouse at Olney was established as a result of the endeavours of Matthew Marryott. In this pamphlet, normally ascribed to John Marryott, brother of Matthew Marryott,<sup>1</sup> a brief history of the workhouse movement is given and the role of Matthew Marryott in encouraging the foundation of workhouses is described. The pamphlet claims that the idea of founding a workhouse first arose in approximately 1706, when the parish of Olney, finding itself 'so much oppressed and over-burthened with the Poor Rates that the most substantial inhabitants were in danger of being ruined by the growing charge', solicited ideas from the parishioners on how best to reduce the expense of maintaining the poor. It is suggested that Matthew Marryott then proposed the founding of a workhouse and that between 1706 and 1714 discussions were held which eventually led to its establishment. The pamphlet goes on to suggest that the workhouse at Olney was so successful that neighbouring parishes soon took up the idea, applying to Marryott for advice and managerial assistance in setting up their own houses.<sup>2</sup> This explanation of the early history of the workhouse movement has been generally accepted by writers on poor relief, but an examination of the date and location of the foundation of early institutions casts some doubt upon its validity.

<sup>1</sup>In Webb, The Old Poor Law, p.292n., this pamphlet is ascribed to John Marryott. I have been unable to locate any substantiating evidence for this claim, and internal evidence in the pamphlet suggests that Matthew Marryott himself wrote it. Written in part as a petition for the grant of a government pension to Matthew Marryott, the author demonstrates a great deal of intimate knowledge about the workings of both parish government and the problems of supplying and controlling workhouses. It would have been both within Matthew Marryott's capability and in his interest to have written A Representation of Some Mismanagements.

<sup>2</sup>A Representation of Some Mismanagements, pp.13-16.

At least four communities, besides Olney, founded workhouses in 1714: Witham, Chelmsford and Good Easter in Essex and Abingdon in Berkshire.<sup>1</sup> In the next four years four more workhouses were established in Essex, while none were founded in either Buckinghamshire, Northants or Bedfordshire.<sup>2</sup> It is only after 1718 that communities in the East Midlands began to found workhouses in the same numbers as those in Essex.<sup>3</sup> This is not a conclusive argument for Essex having been the wellspring for the workhouse movement. The parochial records of Essex are comparatively complete, while those for Buckinghamshire are very patchy. These results could well be a product of the lack of survival of the parish records of the localities involved. Nevertheless, it is impossible to conclude that the workhouse movement spread in one series of concentric circles with Olney at its centre. And although I do not want to discount the role of Olney and the communities surrounding it in the early workhouse movement, it must be noted that the parishes of Essex played an important part in the early foundation of workhouses. Of course, a complete description of the pattern of early workhouse foundations cannot be given here, but it is possible to state with some assurance that the East Midlands was only one centre for workhouse development and that the period of its greatest importance did not come until after 1718, by which date much of Essex was already well served by workhouses.

1718 is the first year after 1714 in which workhouses were founded

<sup>1</sup>Thomas, 'The Parish Overseer in Essex', pp.187, 191, 191n.; Thomas, 'The Treatment of Poverty in Berkshire, Essex and Oxfordshire', p.126.

<sup>2</sup>See map 4:2.

<sup>3</sup>Prior to 1718 Olney is the only community I can identify to have founded a workhouse in the East Midlands. See Appendix: Workhouse Foundations Listed by County.

outside Essex. Hartist in Suffolk founded a workhouse in that year,<sup>1</sup> and it is from this date that foundations become commonplace. In each of the following years, up to 1740, at least three institutions were founded.<sup>2</sup> It is also after 1718 that particular counties, other than Essex, begin to emerge as centres of workhouse development. In 1719 Northants, Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire each saw the foundation of at least one workhouse,<sup>3</sup> and by 1723 the East Midlands had clearly taken its place as a centre of the workhouse movement. By that date Bedfordshire had at least six workhouses while Huntingdonshire, Hertfordshire and Leicestershire had at least three each.<sup>4</sup> Admittedly, Essex still stood out with thirteen workhouses, but the smaller counties of the East Midlands had about the same number in proportion to their size as did Essex. Whether this pattern was the result of the influence of Olney - an influence only coming into play after that workhouse was well established - is impossible to say, but it must be noted that few parochial workhouses were founded in the counties of Suffolk and Middlesex prior to 1723,<sup>5</sup> which suggests that the example of the workhouses of Essex was not exerting a strong influence on the parochial policies of the localities immediately

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1717-1718, No. 5564.

<sup>2</sup>See graph 8:1.

<sup>3</sup>Workhouses were founded in 1719 at Wellingborough, Oundle and Kettering in Northants; Kimbolton, St. Ives and St. Neots in Huntingdonshire and Eaton Socon in Bedfordshire. S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1718-1719, Nos.6010, 6022; Emmison, 'The Relief of the Poor in Eaton Socon, 1706-1834', p.20.

<sup>4</sup>There were workhouses at Eaton Socon, Turvey, Luton, and the three parishes of Bedford in Bedfordshire; Kimbolton, St. Ives, Peterborough, and St. Neots in Huntingdonshire; Hemel Hempstead, Hatfield and Berkhamsted in Hertfordshire and Lutterworth, Harborough and Leicester in Leicestershire. For source material for these houses see Appendix: Workhouse Foundations Listed by County.

<sup>5</sup>The workhouse founded at Hartist in Suffolk is the only one I can identify founded in either of these two counties prior to 1723. S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1717-1718, No. 5564.

surrounding that county. One is inclined, therefore, to accept that in this, as in so many other areas of historical interest, the experience of Essex was unique, and that although important, it can be put to one side while examining the experience of the rest of the country.

In the period immediately following 1718 the establishment of workhouses describes a local as well as a national pattern. In 1719, for instance, three workhouses were founded in Northamptonshire, at Wellingborough, Oundle and Kettering.<sup>1</sup> All three of these towns are in the north of that county. Likewise, in the same year, in Huntingdonshire, workhouses were founded at Kimbolton, St. Ives and St. Neots,<sup>2</sup> which are all in the same vicinity. In the vast majority of the counties in which workhouses were founded, they were restricted to particular parts of those counties, and to towns located on major thoroughfares. More than this, there were particular areas which cannot be defined by county boundaries, but which formed pockets of workhouse activity. Within twenty miles of St. Neots in Huntingdonshire twelve workhouses were founded between 1718 and 1723.<sup>3</sup> This local pattern of development argues for a gradual spread of information on workhouses by word of mouth - for a process by which the experience of one parish encouraged others in the area to take up the idea of employing the poor. Also, the pattern described by workhouse foundations after 1718 goes some way towards supporting the idea that the workhouse at Olney provided a model for later institutions. Certainly, many of the houses established in this period were within easy reach of north Buckinghamshire, and though it cannot be verified that Buckinghamshire itself was a centre of workhouse activity,

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1718-1719, Nos. 6010, 6022.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., No. 6010, 6022.

<sup>3</sup>See Map 4:3.

it is possible to conclude that the Olney experiment and activities of Matthew Marryott were influential in promoting the foundation of other institutions.

In the years following the passage of the Workhouse Test Act the pattern of foundations becomes blurred. With the development of national legislation, and a coherent pamphlet literature on workhouses, local experience became less significant: the existence of printed material freed vestries and churchwardens from the necessity of depending on their neighbours for a lead in founding these institutions. However, during the first nine years of the workhouse movement it was local experience and expertise which allowed workhouses to flourish. Whether in Essex or in the East Midlands communities must have supported and encouraged each other in founding these institutions. Prior to 1723 the workhouse movement was extremely local in its influence and appeal. Certainly, there seems to have been two centres for workhouse activity, one in Essex and another in the East Midlands, but beyond a short distance from these centres there was practically no interest in the foundation of parish institutions. Admittedly, Liverpool founded a workhouse in 1723,<sup>1</sup> and there were certainly some workhouses established in this period which have either not come to light, or whose date of foundation cannot be pinpointed,<sup>2</sup> but the information available clearly points to a pattern of development whereby eight counties, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire,

<sup>1</sup>W. Lyon Blease, 'The Poor Law in Liverpool, 1681-1834', Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, lxi, (1910), 105-106.

<sup>2</sup>The Account (1725) lists 125 houses. Unfortunately, no precise date of foundation can be established for 49 of the houses. In areas where I have been able to examine the parochial records, or for which the supporting manuscript material produced by the S.P.C.K. has survived it has been possible to pinpoint a probable date of foundation, but in the case of twenty houses listed I have found no other material, and have eliminated them from this survey. The inclusion of these houses would not effect the pattern described above. See Appendix: Workhouse Foundations Listed by County.

Huntingdonshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Middlesex, Essex and Kent, played a disproportionately large role in workhouse development.

#### Section B: Early Influences on the Workhouse Movement

We have seen that prior to 1723 the workhouse movement was essentially a parochial affair. However, there were several preconditions and continuing influences which encouraged the parochial workhouse movement both to find expression in the localities it did and to take form in a particular type of institution. The active involvement of Matthew Marryott, the existence of the charity schools, and the S.P.C.K. each at different times and in different ways influenced the course of the development of workhouses.

Matthew Marryott was the most important individual involved in the early workhouse movement. It is questionable whether the movement would have flourished as it did without his enthusiasm and expertise. From the late 1710s he provided a comprehensive service to parishes setting up workhouses, giving them advice on the best building to use for their institution, consulting the parishes on questions of management, and taking upon himself the direction of specific houses. In many respects he was an unsavoury individual; nevertheless, he was an effective manager, and as such was able to run many institutions successfully for at least the first few years of their existence.

Marryott was born in Olney in Buckinghamshire and described himself as a yeoman. His was a large and relatively important family. In 1723 he had built a gallery in the parish church at Olney,<sup>1</sup> and seven members of his family were listed among the landholders taking the Oath of Allegance before the Buckinghamshire Sessions in 1723/4.<sup>2</sup> His will, proved in 1732, mentions several tenements both in

<sup>1</sup>Records of Buckinghamshire (Aylesbury, 1897), vii, 199.

<sup>2</sup>Bucks. R.O., 'Buckinghamshire Sessions Records', vi, (unpublished typescript) n.p.

Buckinghamshire and London.<sup>1</sup> Much of the wealth reflected in this evidence must have derived from his activities as a workhouse contractor, but he could not have been described as a poor man at the beginning of his life.

We have already seen how Marryott first became involved in promoting the foundation of workhouses. We have yet to examine the role he played in the establishment of the numerous institutions founded in the East Midlands in the years between 1718 and 1723. The claims made for Marryott in A Representation of Some Mismanagements by Parish-Officers must to some extent be discounted as a flagrant example of special pleading, but there is other evidence to suggest that both he and his wife did play a significant role in encouraging both workhouses and working charity schools.

Once the workhouse at Olney was well under way, Marryott turned his attention to other places and, at least at first, another type of institution: the working charity school. At Artleborough in Northants an extremely successful school was founded about 1712, and from 1715/6 Marryott seems to have become involved in its management.<sup>2</sup> The school taught and employed sixty children in a purpose-built house so arranged that the mistress of the school could oversee the activities of all the children, on both floors of the house, at the same time. Financially, the school was extremely successful and it was estimated in 1724 that the annual profits of the children's labours amounted to between five and six hundred pounds.<sup>3</sup> Marryott's connection with the school began as a result of the activities of the S.P.C.K.. In February 1715/6 the

<sup>1</sup>P.R.O., Probate 11, No.649, ff.142-144.

<sup>2</sup>S.P.C.K., S.C.M.B., 1713-1718, ii, p.125; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1717-1718, No. 5392.

<sup>3</sup>Account (1725), p.95.

Society asked Marryott his opinion of a pamphlet describing the school which it was then considering for publication.<sup>1</sup> From this beginning it seems that the mistress of the school, a Mrs. Warren, and Marryott's wife, Anne, began a correspondence, which gradually led to both Marryott and his wife becoming involved in the management and provisioning of the school. In January 1718/9 it was to the Marryotts that the S.P.C.K. applied when seeking the assistance of Mrs. Warren in training schoolmistresses.<sup>2</sup> The level of Matthew Marryott's involvement is impossible to assess with any accuracy, but it is clear that he was interested in the school, and that he was, from an early date, giving the school the benefit both of his advice and of his services as a factor.

There can be no doubt that at least from 1718 Marryott was actively involved in the management of other workhouses than that at Olney. He was referred to by the S.P.C.K. in relation to workhouses as early as 1715/6,<sup>3</sup> but the first firm evidence available for Marryott's involvement with a specific institution dates from 1720, when he entered a contract for the management of a house at Hemel Hempstead.<sup>4</sup> Here, as at all the houses outside of London which Marryott controlled, he created a specific type of administrative structure. At Olney the management of the house was supplied under a contract whereby the master received sixteen pounds a year and full room and board in the house in exchange for which he was 'to keep the Poor to their Work, to see to the buying in and dressing the Provision, to give an Account of the Work done, and what is expended'.<sup>5</sup> A very similar contract was used at Hemel Hempstead, which agreement was reproduced in

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., S.C.M.B., 1713-1718, ii, 125.

<sup>2</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1718-1719, No. 5908.

<sup>3</sup>S.P.C.K., S.C.M.B., 1713-1718, ii, 125.

<sup>4</sup>Account (1725), pp.72-73.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.74.

An Account of Several Workhouses and was typical. In it, Marryott agreed to 'undertake the Care of the Poor, or to put in some other proper Person, such as he shall think fit to name and send, with the Approbation of the Parishioners, to take Care to feed, lodge and cloath all the Poor of the said Parish, that shall be sent to the House of Maintenance'. In return Marryott was to receive forty pounds and a coat worth thirty shillings.<sup>1</sup> This type of contract was more than adequate for the management of the smaller workhouses common outside London: it allowed Marryott to place a surrogate master in charge of the house, while he maintained overall control.

In 1726 it was claimed that Marryott had had, in the previous twelve years, at least thirty institutions under his management.<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of these houses were in the East Midlands. Indeed, prior to 1723 Marryott seems to have completely restricted his activities to this area.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately there is very little detailed information on Marryott for this early period in his career, and so a proper analysis of his activities in relation to the foundation of workhouses will have to wait for a later chapter, and be expressed in terms of a later period; but for the period before 1723 it is possible to conclude that he did play a role in the encouragement of the foundation of workhouses. He was recognised as an authority on workhouses prior to 1723, and though he cannot be identified as the manager of many

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.72.

<sup>2</sup> A Representation of Some Mismanagements, p.14.

<sup>3</sup> Although Marryott seems to have maintained a house in Feters Lane in London from as early as 1716, no parochial workhouses were founded in the London area prior to 1723, and all the houses with which Marryott can be linked prior to that date were in the East Midlands - notably Olney, Luton, Hemel Hempstead and Peterborough; the first institution in the London area Marryott became involved with being that at Greenwich, founded in 1724. S.P.C.K., S.C.M.B., 1713-1718, ii, 125; A Representation of Some Mismanagements, p.13; Account (1725), pp.31, 72-73, 86, 91-92. See Appendix(A): Workhouses Administered by or Associated with Matthew Marryott.

specific institutions in this early period, the very fact that he was associated with more than one workhouse placed him in a unique position. He was the first workhouse contractor to take upon himself the management of more than one institution at a time. And whether or not the claims made for his influence in A Representation of Some Mismanagements of Parish-Officers can be credited, it must be concluded that he set a precedent for other contractors to follow, and provided a service which at least a few early workhouses found extremely helpful.

Marryott's success in founding the workhouse at Olney, as well as the success of the foundations in Essex at around the same time was possible because vestrymen and churchwardens felt confident in their own ability to run a parish institution. No parish, with or without the encouragement and advice of someone like Marryott, could have contemplated founding a workhouse if roughly comparable institutions had not existed prior to 1714. One might think that the obvious model from which to take the design of a parish workhouse would have been the Corporations of the Poor, but these earlier institutions were, to a large extent, irrelevant to the small communities which set up parochial workhouses, being too grand to provide a design to meet the simple needs of later workhouses. However, as the Corporations were being founded so was another sort of institution, one which provided a much more apt design upon which to model later parish workhouses. After approximately 1698, which date marks the foundation of the S.P.C.K., small charity schools appeared in numerous parishes throughout England. The later workhouse movement was to some extent predicated on the foundation of these schools.

It is unnecessary to give a detailed history of the charity school movement here.<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to note that by 1724 there were at

<sup>1</sup>For information on the charity school movement see Jones, The Charity School Movement; Rosemary O'Day, Education and Society, 1500-1800 (London, 1982), pp.252-255; Cowie, Henry Newman, pp.73-103;

least fourteen hundred charity schools in operation in England and that if a list of these schools is compared to one detailing workhouses founded by that date<sup>1</sup> it will be noticed that forty per cent of the workhouses listed were founded in towns already possessing a charity school. The existence of these schools provided an administrative framework upon which workhouses could be modelled. Many of the same problems were encountered by the founders of both the schools and the workhouses. Indeed, many of the houses established prior to 1723 were simply an enlargement of existing charity schools. At Stroud in Kent, for example, a charity school was founded in 1719 under the auspices of the incumbent, Caleb Parfect, and two years later was enlarged to include a workhouse.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, some charity school masters took up places as workhouse masters when the parish in which they worked established such institutions. In 1726 Henry Newman wrote to Henry Pacey suggesting that he send the 'Charity School-Master, if he can be spared in your Easter Holy days' to London to be trained as a workhouse master, for the institution then being set up at Boston.<sup>3</sup> The links between charity schools and workhouses were not as clear cut as these examples might suggest. Whereas workhouses were run directly by parish vestries, with perhaps the financial help and casual assistance of

Clement, The S.P.C.K. and Wales, pp.1-25; Joan Simon, 'Was There a Charity School Movement?', ed. Brian Simon, Education in Leicestershire: A Regional Study (Leicester, 1968), pp.55-100; and Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, Children in English Society (London, 1969), i, 288-297.

<sup>1</sup>A list of charity schools founded in England prior to 1724 can be found in Jones, The Charity School Movement, pp.364-371. See Appendix: Workhouse Foundations Listed by County for a list of houses established before 1724.

<sup>2</sup>S.P.C.K., Spec.L., 1708-1732, pp.183-184; S.P.C.K., S.C.M.B., 1718-1720, pp.55-56; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1718-1719, Nos.5825, 5858, 5885; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1721-1723, No.6776.

<sup>3</sup>S.P.C.K., S.L., 18 May 1725 - 23 April 1726, pp.66-7.

local philanthropists, the charity schools were independent of the normal system of parish government, often being set up by joint stock: having the approval of the local vestry but only occasionally being the product of that vestry's own endeavours. Nevertheless, the experience provided by a local charity school must be seen as contributing to the sense of administrative competence which permitted the foundation of workhouses.

The administrative organisation of the charity schools, though not completely analogous to that used for the running of workhouses, does suggest that it was the example of the schools which determined the nature of workhouse management. Each school was independent and if financed by endowment was run by trustees, who might or might not be burgesses or vestrymen. The choice of trustees was determined by the source of the money with which the individual school was founded. If a bequest was used to start a school, then the donor in his will normally stipulated the way in which trustees were chosen. Once appointed, the trustees had almost complete power over the administration of the school. It was the trustees who appointed the master of the school, selected the children and to a large extent dictated what was to be taught. Through this method of administration numerous individuals gained experience in the problems of both running a parish institution and administering a charity - experience which would be much in demand among those who had responsibility for later workhouses.

In the case of subscription charity schools financed by a joint stock, the schools were very seldom administered by a parish vestry. Rather, the petty craftsmen, tradesmen and landowners who subscribed to the schools controlled them through general meetings, wherein each contributor could express his views, and which maintained complete authority over the administration of the schools themselves. These meetings had the same powers as the trustees of the endowed schools, but extended the responsibility for the smooth operation of these

institutions to a larger number of people.<sup>1</sup> It was this very inclusion of petty craftsmen and merchants in their administration which de Mandeville so vehemently attacked in his essay On Charity and Charity Schools, and which makes them so important to the later workhouse movement. Bernard De Mandeville criticised the charity schools because they gave small shopkeepers and traders the 'satisfaction there is in ordering and directing', claiming that 'it is chiefly this which supports human nature in the tedious slavery of schoolmasters...if there be the least satisfaction in governing the children it must be ravishing to govern the schoolmaster'.<sup>2</sup> But by extending to this 'middling sort' the experience of administering an institution the foundations for later parish workhouses were laid. Mandeville claimed that most of the subscribers to these schools had no influence in the parish vestries,<sup>3</sup> and though this might have been largely true in London and the provincial capitals, it certainly was not true in many of the small towns and villages which first founded charity schools and later workhouses - the open vestry as a form of government was not so restrictive as to prevent the most humble landowner or shopkeeper from expressing his opinion at the vote if not before. Indeed, the importance of a given individual in determining parish policy was often defined by his attendance rather than by the wealth he commanded. In 1722, for instance, the incumbent at Stroud complained to Henry Newman that the man he had recommended could not be 'established in the government of the new Workhouse set up in that Parish most of the Inferior sort of People being for a Drunken sort of Man only because he is a Native of the Parish, in opposition to the Opinion of himself

<sup>1</sup>Jones, The Charity School Movement, p.43.

<sup>2</sup>Bernard de Mandeville, 'An Essay on Charity and Charity Schools', The Fable of the Bees (2nd edn, London, 1723), pp.318-319.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.314.

and all the Principal Benefactors to the...Workhouse.'<sup>1</sup> Above a certain social level each parishioner had a degree of influence in the vestry, which allowed for experience gained in the administration of the charity schools to be transferred to the running of workhouses even though these later institutions were under the control of local government. The influence of this transfer of experience can be seen in the administrative organisation of several early workhouses.

The administration of both the schools and the workhouses can be broken down into two discrete forms of activity. First, the establishment of ground rules - that is, rules of behaviour for both the masters and the objects of charity of the schools and houses; and second, the creation of a system for the day-to-day control of these institutions. The similarity between the administrative framework used in both the workhouses and schools can be seen by examining both of these activities in turn.

Lists of rules are available for numerous workhouses and charity schools, and were normally drawn up and hung on the wall in clear view of the children or inmates when the institution was originally established.<sup>2</sup> At Greenwich the rules for the girls' school established there in 1716 stipulated that the punishments meted out to the young women of the school should rely on shaming the offender rather than causing physical injury. Hence, 'for high Crimes, such as profaning God's Name, Lying or Pilfering, they are dressed up in a Fool's Cap and Coat, and made to sit in the middle of the School for an Hour or

<sup>1</sup> S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1721-1723, No.7082.

<sup>2</sup> For examples of rules treated in this manner see W.C.L., C869, pp.11, 15; W.C.L., K324, 24 March 1737; W.C.L., E2633, shelf 28, 2 May 1728, 23 May 1728; G.L., 4120/1, pp.77-78; G.L., 5048, 25 January 1733/4; G.L., 9083, p.4; G.L., 3137/1, p.160; N.R.O., Norwich Guardians of the Poor Minute Book, 1723-1731, p.15.

more'.<sup>1</sup> A similar provision for the punishment of inmates was adopted by several early workhouses. At Romford in Essex the workhouse rules stipulated 'That if any Person steals, or is heard to swear, or curse, for such Crimes the first Time to stand on a Stool at one Corner of the working Room, the whole Day, with the Crime pinned to their Breast', and 'That for the second Offence, he or she stand in the like Posture, and have half a Pound of Bread, and a Quart of Water for that day.'<sup>2</sup> In view of the general acceptance corporal punishment enjoyed in this period the similarity between the provision for the correction of both paupers in workhouses and the students in the schools is suggestive of some link between the two types of institutions. Certainly, the adoption of this type of punishment cannot be seen as the continuance of the practices of the Corporations of the Poor. These earlier institutions were heavily reliant upon whipping and confinement for the enforcement of discipline on their inmates.

As with the rules imposed upon inmates and masters, the administrative structures adopted for the management of early workhouses owed much to the experience of the charity schools. At Chelmsford the vestry placed the day-to-day management of the workhouse founded there in 1716 in the hands of twelve trustees, who saw to it that contracts were fulfilled and debts discharged.<sup>3</sup> This form of administrative organisation is reminiscent of that adopted by the endowed charity schools. Admittedly, the existence of the overseers of the poor changed the duties of the trustees, because direct control of a given institution was to some extent monopolised by the overseers.

<sup>1</sup>Account (1725), p.25.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.56.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.60; a similar type of management structure was used at South Mimms, Middlesex; St. Mary's, Lambeth, Surrey; and Limehouse Hamlet, Stepney, Middlesex see: G.L.R.O., DR05/C2/2a & b; L.A.D., St. Mary's Lambeth Vestry Minutes, 1704-1727, P3/3, ff.213-214; Account (1732), p.68.

Nevertheless, the adoption by parishes setting up workhouses of a system which incorporated trustees does suggest that the vestrymen concerned had experience with the administration of charities and charity schools.

Thus far we have discussed two influences on the workhouse movement in isolation - Matthew Marryott and the charity schools. However, there was some communication between those involved in the different localities in setting up workhouses. From about 1718 the S.P.C.K. actively encouraged the foundation of workhouses - dispensing advice to its correspondents in towns around the country, publishing information on successful workhouse experiments and providing a central exchange through which individuals interested in workhouses could both communicate with people of similar views in other localities and make known their own reservations about and experience with the employment of the poor. In a sense, the S.P.C.K. acted as an umbrella organisation sheltering Matthew Marryott, the charity schools and individual activists from the various localities.

For the period before 1724 the activities of the S.P.C.K. can be divided into three. First, the encouragement of the charity schools, which in turn helped establish a basis for the foundation of workhouses. Second, helping individuals involved in the foundation of early houses directly with timely advice, the provision of books and the recommendation of masters for specific institutions. Third, the publication of information on workhouses both in pamphlets and the yearly circular letters distributed by the Society.

The role of the Society in encouraging the foundation of charity schools is well known. It was as a means of encouraging charity schools that the Society was founded in 1698, and it was towards the end of providing schools throughout Britain that the Society worked most consistently. No other subject occupied the minds of the Society's members to the same extent, nor created as much controversy,

but towards the end of the 1710s and in response to requests for information about working schools, the Society began to accumulate a large body of information on the newly established parish workhouses. Until 1723 it was to working schools that the Society gave most of its attention. By publishing sermons, short books for the use of the children in the schools and descriptions of successful schools the Society gained support for these institutions and provided central direction for what would otherwise have been a local movement. However, once the idea of employing the poor had been put into the minds of corresponding members, the Society found that enthusiasm quickly developed for the idea in all its forms, which of course included that of a proper workhouse.

The Society received its first significant reports on workhouses in 1719. In May of that year Robert Watts wrote to say that there was a workhouse at Kettering and that 'some people of Oundle have been this spring to see it, in order to set up a Workhouse there upon the same foot, since which they have gone so far as to bid 105<sup>1</sup>l for a farmhouse & Barn for that Purpose.'<sup>1</sup> Watts also reported the existence of workhouses at Kimbolton and St. Ives in Huntingdonshire and suggested that some notice of them be put in the next circular letter.<sup>2</sup> A month later, in June 1719, Henry Newman, the Society's secretary, was dispatched to Hallingbury in Essex to examine a silk mill and workhouse there,<sup>3</sup> and in the circular letter for 1720 the Society offered a premium 'to such County Towns, as shall Encourage the setting up of Workhouses for the Charity Children.'<sup>4</sup> There is also some rather sketchy evidence for the Society having been responsible for the drafting of the Workhouse Test Act; one of its adherents was on the committee which drew up the bill.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in 1720 the Society

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1718-1719, No.6010.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., No.6022.

<sup>3</sup>S.P.C.K., S.C.M.B., 1718-1720, iii, 83-85.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 159.

<sup>5</sup>See Chapter 4, pp.127-128.

still saw workhouses as merely an appendage to the local charity schools, but following the lead of its own members it began to take them more seriously.

The extent of the Society's interest in and direct influence on the early workhouse movement cannot be accurately assessed. The confusion in the minds of the Society's own members about the difference between a workshop, working charity school, house of correction and workhouse makes it impossible to determine precisely when either the members or the Society began to be interested in workhouses as a specific type of institution. Rather, there is a gradual increase in interest in all types of institutions employing the poor, whether those institutions were run as schools, prisons, small businesses or parish workhouses. However, it can be determined that by the end of the 1710s the Society was actively involved in encouraging workhouses, and had at least begun to see these institutions as being distinct from those others with which it was involved and which employed the poor.

Caleb Parfect has been mentioned before.<sup>1</sup> His experience and that of the workhouse at Stroud provide perhaps the best example of how the Society encouraged workhouses in this early period. Parfect first made use of the Society's services in relation to a working charity school established at Stroud in 1719. Parfect had previously received both the Society's yearly circular letters describing successful working charity schools and its pamphlets, which he distributed amongst his friends. When he had amassed the finance necessary to start a school, he turned to the Society for help in locating a suitable master. In response to his request, the Society recommended a Mr. Good, whose wife, through the influence of Matthew Marryott, was then trained by Mrs. Warren at Artleborough in the art of employing children. Also

<sup>1</sup>See above Chapter 4, p.109.

through the Society, Parfect ordered an unusual type of spinning wheel on which to employ the children of the school, and several of the Society's published volumes for use in educating the children. In the years following the school's establishment he went to the Society on several occasions, asking for its advice on how best to manage the school and maintain his parishioners' enthusiasm for it. With the help of the Society the school was extremely successful.<sup>1</sup>

In 1721 Parfect decided to expand the school to include a parish workhouse. As he had done with the working charity school, he made every use of the Society's services in forwarding this project. The proposal for the workhouse he presented to the vestry in 1721 was later published by the Society, and in the years following the establishment of the house Parfect repeatedly returned to the Society in order both to publicise the institution he had helped set up, and to receive the Society's advice on specific problems. Parfect's original intention was to place Mr. Good, the master of the charity school, in the position of workhouse master. But it soon became obvious that a great many parishioners opposed this plan. In response to his difficulties, Parfect called upon the Society's help. In the first instance, the Society advised him 'to consult the Justices of Peace...who by the Act of 43d of Eliz. are Vested with a great Power as to what relates to employing the Poor, and directing the Overseers to take all due Care in distributing any fund appropriated to the use of the Poor to the best advantage'.<sup>2</sup> This tactic, once adopted by Parfect, seems to have calmed the situation somewhat, but had it failed, the Society also offered to find Mr. Good another post should it become absolutely necessary that he leave the parish. Throughout the 1720s

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., S.C.M.B., 1713-1718, ii, 262; S.P.C.K., S.C.M.B., 1718-1720, iii, 55-56, 58; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1718-1719, Nos.5825, 5858, 5885, 5899, 5908, 5911, 5969, 5981, 6001, 6005.

<sup>2</sup>S.P.C.K., Spec.L., 1708-1732, pp.183-184.

the Society also provided Parfect with educational material for use in the workhouse and pamphlets on other workhouses to be distributed among his friends who were not members of the Society.<sup>1</sup>

The way in which Parfect used the Society provides an extreme example of the relationship between the Society and the growing number of workhouses dotted throughout the South West and East Midlands. Most other workhouses were not nearly so dependent upon the Society's services as that at Stroud, but an increasing number of them did make use of the Society as an advice centre, as a source of information on other workhouses and as a means of obtaining cheap educational material. Marryott frequently applied to the Society for horn books and primers for the use of the houses he managed, and, of course, hundreds of charity schools were dependent upon the Society for their very existence. The S.P.C.K. did not start the workhouse movement, nor did it have any real control over it, but it did encourage both the actual foundation of houses, and the development of conditions in which the idea of employing the poor in a parish institution seemed more attractive to vestrymen and churchwardens.

#### Section C: The Workhouse Test Act

However widespread the workhouse movement had become by 1723, it was not until the passage of the Workhouse Test Act in that year that it can be spoken of as a national movement. It was this piece of legislation, 'An Act for amending the laws relating to the settlement, employment and relief of the poor',<sup>2</sup> which provided the positive legal framework for the foundation of parish workhouses and at the same time helped to popularise the idea of employing the poor in institutions.

Prior to 1723 the legal position of parishes founding workhouses

<sup>1</sup>For example see S.P.C.K., An Account of Packets sent to the Residing and Corresponding Members, 1719-1726, p.109.

<sup>2</sup>9 George I, c.7.

was, for the most part, secure. 43 Eliz. positively commanded that the poor be set to work and allowed parishes to purchase or rent houses for that purpose.<sup>1</sup> What the Workhouse Test Act did was to clarify the limits of the powers the parishes already possessed. Indeed, it is questionable whether this Act really changed anything at all - whether it did anything more than positively state what had been assumed in earlier legislation. However, the passage of the Act is a landmark recognised by later writers on poor relief. It provided national recognition for the workhouse movement and a governmental seal of approval for the parishes already served by workhouses.

As the title of the Act suggests, it was a hotch-potch of clauses, all dealing with poor relief, but for the most part lacking a central theme. One section of the Act clarified the powers of Justices to order relief, stipulating that no Justice could order relief if the pauper in question had not first applied to the parish, that an oath be given as to a 'reasonable cause' for granting relief and that actions taken by Justices while outside the county in which they had authority were valid. Another section cleared up a number of settlement problems. The Act made it more difficult to gain a settlement by purchasing an estate, making the minimum value of the estate purchased thirty pounds before a legal settlement was granted, and also making it impossible to gain a settlement by paying either the scavenger's rates or for repairs to the highways. It also cleared up a question of local Poor Law administration in Northhamptonshire, and laid down ground rules for the provision of reasonable notice for the hearing of

<sup>1</sup>43 Eliz., c.2.

settlement appeals. Historically, these clauses are of only minor importance. They are examples of the way in which the old Poor Law was gradually amended but never fundamentally altered. They neither affected the way in which the poor were relieved to any great extent, nor added significantly to the administrative machinery used to care for the poor. Indeed, that these clauses take up more than half of the Act emphasises its non-revolutionary intent.

The provisions included in the Act for the encouragement of workhouses were simple and straightforward. First, in clause four, churchwardens and overseers, with the consent of the parish vestry, were given the authority to:

purchase or hire any house or houses in the same parish, township or place, and to contract with any person or persons for the lodging, keeping, maintaining and employing any or all such poor in their respective parishes...as shall desire to receive relief or collection from the same...and there to keep, maintain and employ all such poor persons, and take the benefit of the work, labour and service of any such poor person or persons...

As has been mentioned above, these powers were probably already available to the parishes; the next section of the Act, however, did provide something new, namely, the authority for churchwardens and overseers to enforce a 'workhouse test': a system whereby the right of a pauper to relief from the parish in which he had a legal settlement was dependent upon the pauper's accepting that relief in the form of maintenance in a workhouse. It is from this clause that the Act draws its name, and although a workhouse test probably had been applied in several parishes already - Matthew Marryott enforced a test in the workhouses with which he was involved<sup>1</sup> - the inclusion of this provision in the Act in part determined the role of future workhouses

<sup>1</sup>For example, see Account (1725), pp.31-32.

in the provision of relief. It assumed that the primary importance of parochial workhouses lay in their value as a deterrent to paupers applying for relief, rather than as a means of defraying the charge of the poor from the profits of their labour. By including the idea of a workhouse as a deterrent in legislation the official view of the role of these institutions was dramatically altered. By 1723 it had been accepted by most pamphlet writers that pauper labour could not produce large profits;<sup>1</sup> that the idea of a self-supporting poor-relief system was unrealistic. By enshrining in legislation the role of the workhouse as a deterrent this type of institution was given a new justification.

Two more sections of the Act dealt with workhouses. The first allowed two or more parishes with the approbation of the local Justices to unite for poor relief purposes. This clause obviated some of the problems faced by small parishes with only a few paupers when trying to set up institutions. Throughout the eighteenth century the major criticism of parochial workhouses was that they were too small to allow for the provision of a properly regimented and institutional environment in which to discipline the poor.<sup>2</sup> This clause was an early attempt to answer this criticism, and to some extent it succeeded. In the City of London and in numerous provincial towns, Reading for instance,<sup>3</sup> this provision in the Act was used as the basis for

<sup>1</sup>Parfect, Proposals Made in the Year 1720, p.4; Francis Hutchinson, A Letter to a Member of Parliament Concerning Employing and Providing for the Poor (Dublin, 1723), p.2, 12-14; The Case of the Parish of St. Giles in the Fields as to their Poor (1722), p.3; Account (1725), p.53.

<sup>2</sup>The hundred houses of Norfolk and Suffolk, Henry Fielding's proposed workhouse and Gilbert's Act were all designed to allow for the creation of larger institutions than could be set up by a single parish. Henry Fielding, A Proposal for Making an Effectual Provision for the Poor (London, 1753); 22 George III, c.83.

<sup>3</sup>B.R.O., R/ACa21, p.48.

contracts between two or three parishes, and though it has been claimed that most important workhouses serving more than one parish were founded upon local Corporation Acts, even after 1723,<sup>1</sup> there were a large number of medium sized institutions which were founded upon the basis of simple contracts drawn up by the vestries concerned and approved by local Justices.

The final section of the Act of significance for the development of workhouses was that giving authority for parishes to contract 'with the church-wardens and overseers of the poor of any other parish...for the lodging, maintaining or employing, of any poor person...of such other parish...as to them shall seem meet' without affecting the settlement of the pauper concerned. As with the section of the Act allowing parishes to unite for poor-relief purposes, this clause was utilised primarily by the small parishes of the City of London.<sup>2</sup>

The Workhouse Test Act was the legal basis upon which most contracts for the employment of the poor were founded. It also enshrined in the statute book the idea of the workhouse as a deterrent. But as with all Old Poor Law legislation, it added nothing completely new to the diverse systems of relief used by the parishes. In Oxford, for example, both St. Martins and St. Peter le Bailey contracted with Robert Horlock in 1722 for the employment of their poor, in effect combining their resources for the purpose of providing relief.<sup>3</sup> At Eaton Socon the house founded there in 1719 accommodated all the poor of the parish from the beginning and had the effect of reducing

<sup>1</sup>Dorothy Marshall, The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1926), p.129.

<sup>2</sup>For examples see G.L., MS 4118/2, p.137; G.L., MS 4511/3, 2 February 1737/8; G.L., MS 6846/2, pp.124, 159, 160-162, 167; G.L., MS 9078/1, 1 July 1730; G.L., MS 9083, p.40 and G.L., MS 1336/3, 2 August 1732, 29 June 1739.

<sup>3</sup>Bod. Lib., MS D.D. Par. Oxford, St. Peter le Bailey B.b.13, 18 December 1722; Bod. Lib., MS D.D. Par. Oxford, St. Martins b26, f.161.

the parish pensions list dramatically. The house at Eaton Socon was being used as a deterrent long before the passage of the 9 George I c.7.<sup>1</sup> What the Workhouse Test Act did do was to bring together in one piece of legislation powers already enjoyed by the parishes but buried in earlier Acts.

It has been assumed by writers on poor relief that the Act started the workhouse movement: that it took what had been a geographically restricted series of foundations and turned them into a national movement.<sup>2</sup> But it is doubtful whether the Act deserves as much attention as it has been paid. A graph of workhouse foundations for this period indicates that the expansion of the provision of relief in workhouses did not immediately follow on the passage of the Act. Indeed, it was not until 1726, a full three years after the Act became law, that workhouse foundations for the 1720s reached their peak.<sup>3</sup> For the first half of the decade the incidence of workhouse foundations describes a gentle curve which suggests that the passage of the Act had only a limited short term effect. Admittedly, isolated examples of the the Act's influence can be found - in Liverpool, for instance, the vestry obtained a copy of the Act prior to setting up a workhouse there in 1723<sup>4</sup> - but throughout the 1720s the S.P.C.K. continued to receive requests for advice on the legal position of parishes either contracting out their poor relief services or combining in order to set up workhouses, which suggests that the provisions of the Act did not

<sup>1</sup> Emmison, 'The Relief of the Poor at Eaton Socon,', pp.21-22.

<sup>2</sup> Oxley, Poor Relief in England and Wales, pp.81-82 and Webb, The Old Poor Law, pp.244-245.

<sup>3</sup> See Graph 8:1.

<sup>4</sup> Blease, 'The Poor Law in Liverpool', pp.105-106; Oxley, 'The Permanent Poor in South-West Lancashire', p.32.

have the wide currency that has been claimed for them.<sup>1</sup> I do not want to discount the importance of the Workhouse Test Act - it did play a role both in determining the type of workhouse founded after 1723, and in encouraging the institutional care of the poor. However, it cannot be claimed that it did much more than provide extra impetus to an already well-established movement, which was growing in importance year by year.

While thus noting these reservations about the significance of the Workhouse Test Act, it remains important to understand why and how it became law. Unfortunately, there is very little evidence about the process which led to its passage through Parliament. It has been claimed that it was Matthew Marryott's influence and the example of the houses he administered that encouraged the drawing up and passage of the Act, and likewise there is some evidence to suggest that the influence of the S.P.C.K. was at work upon the legislators who brought in the bill. However, no clear picture of what led to the passage of the Act can be developed.

Leave was given for the bill to be brought in on 17 November 1722, and its preparation was entrusted to a committee of six men, including Sir Edward Knatchbull and John Comyns, Serjeant at Law.<sup>2</sup> On 13 December it was read a second time and sent to a committee empowered to receive amendments allowing the care of the poor to be contracted out, and preventing a poor person gaining a settlement by purchasing 'Cottages of small Value'.<sup>3</sup> From this point the bill's passage through Parliament was straightforward, and it became law on 25 March 1723.

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., S.L., 21 May 1726 - 4 February 1726/7, p.62; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No.9015.

<sup>2</sup>J.H.C., xx, 58.

<sup>3</sup>J.H.C., xx, 77.

In 1726 the author of A Representation of Some Mismanagements by Parish-Officers claimed that 'The great Burthen of the Poor Rates was, as it is well known, the grand Motive which induced the Parliament to pass the late Act for Maintaining and Employing the Poor' and that 'it was, in some measure owing to...[Matthew Marryott] that the Legislature passed the Act...'<sup>1</sup> And indeed, although there is no direct evidence of a connection between either rising rates or Marryott and the Act, it can be safely assumed that both were influential in stirring the legislature into action. Throughout the eighteenth century it was believed that the poor rates were rising dramatically. Pamphlet writers constantly stressed the need to reform the system of poor relief in order to bring them down,<sup>2</sup> and so, as a very general point, the perception of rising rates can be seen as a causal factor in the passage of the Act. Likewise, by 1722 Marryott had built for himself a substantial reputation, and although the period of his greatest significance was in the later half of the 1720s when pamphlet literature directly relating to his activities was being published, it must be admitted that the Act does reflect some aspects common to Marryott's system of workhouse administration.<sup>3</sup> But the bill was not written solely on the basis of the example of a few provincial experiments, and a general feeling of unease about the level of the rates; rather it seems more likely to have been partially the result of pressure from a very powerful source: the S.P.C.K.

<sup>1</sup> A Representation of Some Mismanagements, pp.7, 14.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see The Case of the Parish of St. Giles in the Fields as to their Poor, p.3; [Thomas Andrews], An Enquiry into the Causes of the Encrease and the Miseries of the Poor (London, 1738), p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Marryott used the workhouses under his administration in ways very similar to those recommended in the Act: he contracted for the care of the poor and enforced a workhouse test. See above, pp.106-107, 120. For information on the extent of and sources for Marryott's activities see Appendix(A): Workhouses Administered by or Associated with Matthew Marryott.

Sir Edward Knatchbull had overall responsibility for the Act. He headed both the committee which drew it up and that to which it was later sent for amendment. He entered Parliament in 1722, having previously served in the Tory interest.<sup>1</sup> His Parliamentary diary for this period contains only passing reference to the Act,<sup>2</sup> but in Knatchbull's own political views may be found some clues as to its genesis. He can be termed a 'soft' Tory; that is, he had a great deal of respect for Robert Walpole, and on several occasions in this period voted with the Whigs against the Tory opposition, but even so maintained his links with the Tory hierarchy.<sup>3</sup> It was not until 1727 that he had to turn to the Whigs for support, and up to that point he remained, at least nominally, a Tory. That Knatchbull was given responsibility for the Act suggests that it was not in essence a party political issue. At this point in his career it is doubtful if either Walpole or the Tories would have entrusted the care of any piece of legislation of particular importance to him. More than this, there is no reason why the Act should have been a party issue. Unlike the charity schools, parochial workhouses were under the direct control of local government. Whereas the schools attracted vociferous Whig opposition because they were seen as a tool of the Tories used to help inculcate Jacobean and anti-Whig ideas in the young,<sup>4</sup> this criticism could not be levelled at workhouses because of their wholly dependent place within local government. Through the Justices and Quarter

<sup>1</sup>The Parliamentary Diary of Sir Edward Knatchbull, 1722-1730, ed., A.N. Newman (Camden, 3rd Ser., xciv, 1963), p.vii.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp.7, 9, 10, 11.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.viii.

<sup>4</sup>Jones, The Charity School Movement, pp.115-130; Linda Colley, In Defiance of Oligarchy (Cambridge, 1982), pp.99-100.

Sessions, the national administration could to some extent control the excesses of local vestries and hence workhouse administrators. Charity schools, being largely independent, were seen as a threat - workhouses were not. More than this, on later occasions Whigs and Tories worked together in encouraging Poor Law reform - in the 1730s, for instance, William Hay gladly accepted the support of Tories for his proposed reforms<sup>1</sup> - suggesting that workhouse legislation, in this period at least, was not seen as inimical to the interests of either party. This is not to say, however, that the Workhouse Test Act was not a subject of interest for at least one group normally associated with a particular party line.

There is some evidence to suggest that the S.P.C.K. took an active interest in the passage of the Act. As has been mentioned above Serjeant John Comyns was a member of the committee which drew up the original bill. A brilliant lawyer,<sup>2</sup> he was undoubtedly the member to whom the responsibility for the actual drafting of the legislation fell. He strongly sympathised with the Society, and on several occasions gave it free legal advice.<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, there is only one contemporary reference to the Act in the S.P.C.K. archives. On 15 December 1722 John Chamberlayne wrote to the Society expressing the opinion that 'it must be a pleasure to you to observe...that at so promising a juncture the Parliament are meditating ways to set the poor to work'<sup>4</sup>, but there can be little doubt that, having an adherent actually drafting this piece of legislation, the Society would take the opportunity to influence its final form. In 1719 Comyns had defended

<sup>1</sup>Colley, In Defiance of Oligarchy, p.44.

<sup>2</sup>D.N.B., xi, 464-465.

<sup>3</sup>S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1724-1726, xi, 167.

<sup>4</sup>S.P.C.K., S.L.B., 28 February 1721/2 - 8 May 1723, p.51.

the students, master and trustees of a London charity school accused of vagrancy and riot, who were later found guilty, the judge intimating that the defendants had Jacobite sympathies.<sup>1</sup> Comyns' involvement in this case illustrates his commitment to the Society and its aims.

Needless to say very little evidence has survived relating to the Workhouse Test Act. To a large extent it remains an enigma. But it is still possible to say with some assurance that it was both supported by the S.P.C.K. and that it did not attract a great deal of partisan opposition. It cannot be described as a Tory measure, but neither can it be termed Whig. It was a largely bi-partisan bill. In retrospect its importance seems immense - the idea of a workhouse as a deterrent found its first legislative expression in the Act - but the little attention it received from contemporaries indicates that they saw it as only a slight amendment to the Poor Law.

<sup>1</sup>D.N.B., xi, 464-465. It might also be noted that Comyns served on the committee which drafted Mackworth's bill in December 1703. J.H.C., xiv, 231, 256.

## Appendix: Chapter 4

## Note on Sources

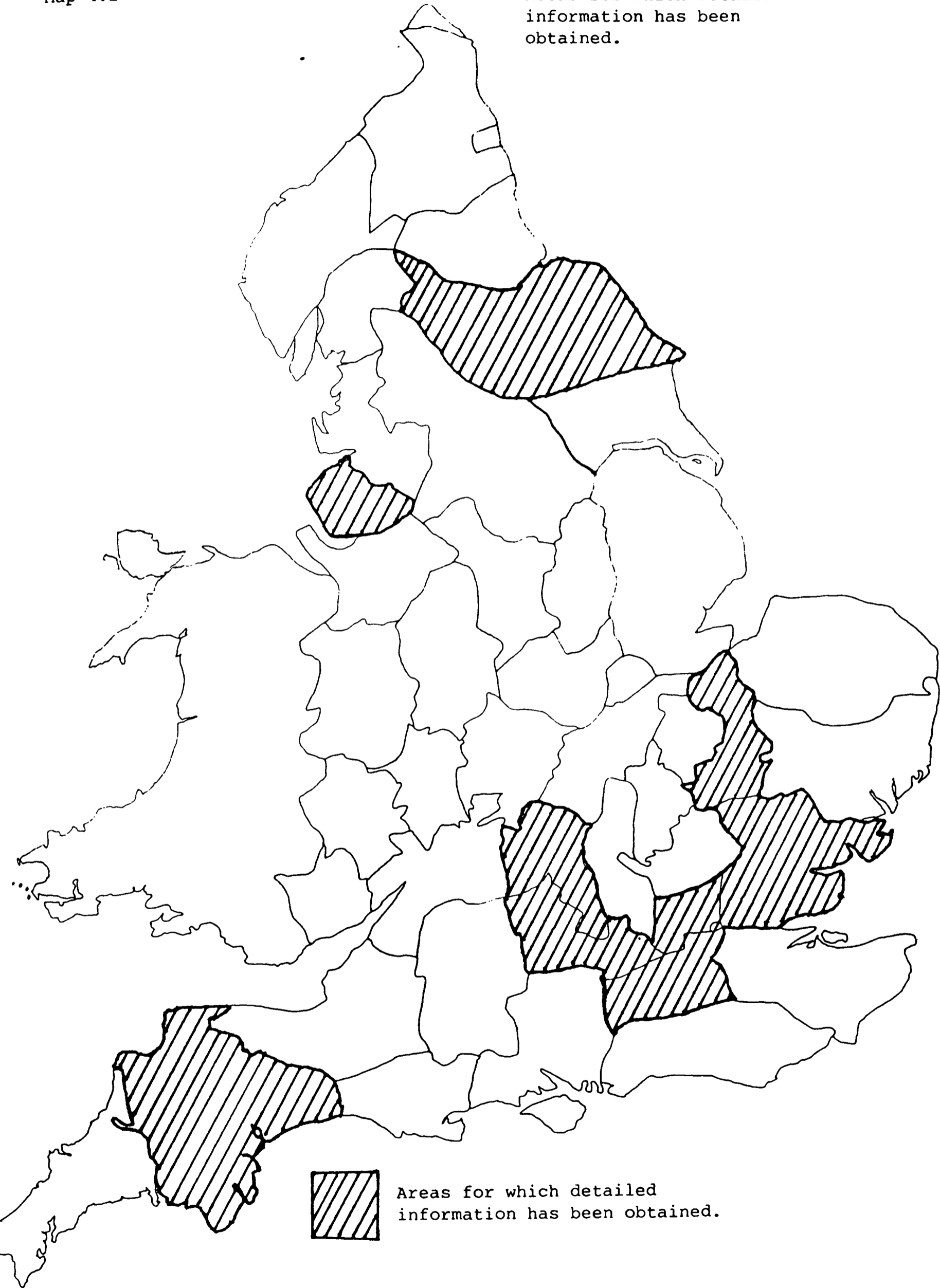
The information contained in the maps which follow has been derived from a number of sources. Of greatest importance have been the parish records of the five counties I have been able to examine: Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Middlesex, Devon and Surrey. Several local studies on poor relief have also been used. From these I have taken details for the foundation of workhouses in Essex, Cambridgeshire and parts of Lancashire.<sup>1</sup> I have also made extensive use of the archives of the S.P.C.K., which have provided a wealth of information on workhouses in areas which would otherwise have remained unexamined. The details provided by this material cannot be considered complete. For the purposes of this chapter I have been obliged to restrict my analysis to those houses whose precise date of foundation can be established. Some workhouses listed in the appendix to the first edition of An Account of Several Workhouses were undoubtedly established prior to 1723, but lack of material substantiating their actual date of foundation has forced me to eliminate them from this study. The number of houses excluded for this reason is small, and although knowledge of their date of foundation might have refined our picture of the workhouse movement it could not have substantially changed the broad outline of the movement given above.

Map 4:1 quite simply indicates those counties and parts of counties where information based on parochial records has been obtained. I have, for the purpose of this map, excluded areas covered by the archives of the S.P.C.K.

<sup>1</sup> See Hampson, The Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire; Oxley, 'The Permanent Poor in South West Lancashire'; Thomas, 'The Parish Overseer in Essex'; and Thomas, 'The Treatment of Poverty in Berkshire, Essex and Oxfordshire'.

Map 4:1

Areas for which detailed information has been obtained.



Map 4:2

Parochial workhouses  
founded prior to 1718.



○ Parochial workhouses known to have been  
in existence prior to 1718.

Map 4:3

Parochial workhouse  
foundations, 1718-1723.



## CHAPTER 5: THE ADMINISTRATION OF PAROCHIAL WORKHOUSES

Although the Workhouse Test Act provided a legal framework for the foundation of parish institutions, vestries and churchwardens were left to determine the type of management inaugurated in each locality. We have seen that the form of workhouse administration was based partly on the experiences of the charity schools, but even so there remain types and aspects of administration peculiar to workhouses. As befits institutions attempting to enforce a work discipline, workhouses were designed to run in a highly organised manner; each part of a given administrative structure was responsible to another, with the regular inspection of houses and auditing of accounts to control the excesses of the individuals involved. These systems did not work. Although workhouses were highly organised on paper, the reality of their administration was greatly different. Corruption among both suppliers to, and managers of, houses was rife. This chapter will examine both the systems of management as they were laid out by vestries in sets of rules and contracts, and the failure of those systems as exemplified by the corruption of workhouse managers.

The administration of parish workhouses can be divided into two forms of activity. First, the establishment and monitoring of the houses by parish vestries and officers; and second, the actual day-to-day running of workhouses by contractors and hired managers. No two parishes or contractors ran their houses in precisely the same way; nor were the problems faced by these institutions the same in any two localities. As with all forms of eighteenth-century poor relief, diversity was the hallmark of workhouse administration.

## Section A: Parish Administration

Local practice and tradition was the determining characteristic of parish government in this period. In some areas vestries were closed, new members being chosen by those already in place, hence eliminating a large element of popular participation, while in others decisions were made at open meetings whereat the vast majority of the parishioners could vote and speak. Some parishes were too large to be administered centrally, being made up of hamlets and townships. Several parishes, both at Westminster and in places like Leeds, had populations of upwards of ten thousand individuals, while small rural hamlets might be made up of only a few houses.<sup>1</sup> However, when setting up a workhouse each parish was forced to create an organisation for the direct management and inspection of these houses. The vestry, whether closed or open, was simply too unwieldy a body to take an effective hand in monitoring the minutiae of workhouse administration.

When a workhouse was established most parishes appointed a separate committee or group of trustees to look after its management. The committee was directly responsible to the vestry, reporting its activities to that body and submitting its decisions for verification. It was also to the vestry that the workhouse committee often turned for advice on long-term policy - for decisions on whether or not to enforce

<sup>1</sup>The parish of Leeds had a population of 12,000 in 1750, while Birmingham's population was over 23,000 in 1731. The population of St. James, Westminster was estimated at 22,000 in 1711. Kevin Grady, 'The Provision of Public Buildings in the West Riding of Yorkshire, c.1600-1840' (University of Leeds Ph.D. thesis, 1980), p.13; Mary McNaughty, 'Some Aspects of the Administration of the Poor Laws in Birmingham between 1730 and 1834' (Univ. of Birmingham, M.A. thesis, 1942), p.182; W.C.L., D1758, St. James Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1704-1712, p.317; Sidney and Beatrice Webb, English Local Government from the Revolution to the Municipal Corporations Act: The Parish and the County (London, 1906), p.11.

a severe workhouse test or to start contracting out the poor-relief services provided in the house. Nonetheless, the vast majority of decisions relating to these institutions were made in committee meetings: it was here that minor changes in diet and rules were made, where the plight of individuals was considered and where the punishments inflicted on the poor by the master were confirmed.

The role played by the committee in each parish was unique. The smaller the parish, the easier it was for the vestry to keep track of the activities of the committee. In the larger and wealthier parishes the workhouse committees took on a life and dignity of their own, becoming extremely influential through their ability to dispense contracts for the supply of the houses, and to control the expenditure of the money dedicated to poor relief. The workhouse committee in St. Sepulchre, London, was extremely concerned when, in 1727, the vestry attempted to make a decision on a new master for the workhouse. The committee claimed that it 'could not comply with the...order of Vestry without a Manifest prejudice to the parish', because 'it is a practice in all Companys or Corporations Especially in Workhouses In which we do not know one President against it that the Committee have the Liberty of choosing the servants who act under them.' In this instance the vestry was forced to back down, and the problem was settled amicably;<sup>1</sup> but this was not always the case. The power possessed by workhouse committees necessarily brought them into conflict with other arms of local government. overseers of the poor in particular, though they were almost invariably members of these committees, often felt resentful of the financial patronage wielded by these bodies. In 1740, the parish of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London, laid a case before the

<sup>1</sup>G.L., MS 3149/4, St. Sepulchre's London Division, Vestry Minutes, 1708-1728, pp.366-368.

Solicitor General against the parish's three overseers of the poor, who, without the permission of the workhouse committee, had discharged both the physician and apothecary who had previously served St. Martin's workhouse and replaced them with their own appointees.<sup>1</sup> Though the position of workhouse physician was unpaid, that of apothecary carried a substantial salary. The overseers of St. Martin were apparently seeking to create a precedent for the control of this and other lucrative workhouse positions.<sup>2</sup>

In part, the position of the workhouse committee, its power and independence, was determined by its organisation. In some places the committees were wholly independent; like miniature closed vestries they appointed their own members and set their own rules. In others, members were chosen annually, and strict rotas adhered to, each vestryman or ratepayer occupying the office in turn. Elsewhere, committee-men might be elected at open meetings, and a high degree of control over their actions maintained. Examples of several types of committees will help demonstrate the diversity of form these bodies took.

A workhouse was established in Hungerford in Berkshire in 1727. It was a small affair, probably housing no more than fifteen or twenty

<sup>1</sup>W.C.L., C767, St. George Hanover Square Westminster, 1735-1741, pp.285-291.

<sup>2</sup>Once the overseers of St. Martin's had broken with the closed vestry one of their first activities was to call a meeting of the 'ancient inhabitants' of the parish, ninety six of whom attended, and on the authority of that meeting to break all the contracts then in force for supplying the house. It was then ordered by this rogue vestry that the overseers and churchwardens 'shall and may contract with any person or persons for the lodging, keeping, maintaining & employing' of the poor. Forty-seven people, the majority of whom attended these rogue vestry meetings, were then given contracts for supplying the house. The master of the house was forcibly evicted from his place, and the books belonging to the workhouse committee set up by the legitimate vestry were stolen. See W.C.L., C877, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1740-1743, pp.1-2.; W.C.L., C767, pp.295, 301, 304, 308-309, 335.

individuals,<sup>1</sup> but it did require the constant oversight of fourteen annually chosen committee-men. At Hungerford the vestry decided that two people, chosen at Easter each year, should take complete responsibility for the workhouse for one day a week. So, in 1727, John Knowles and Joseph Mackrell were responsible for the smooth operation of the house on Fridays, while Daniel Pococke and Robert Holloway saw to its administration on Wednesdays.<sup>2</sup> In this instance the daily inspectors, or governors as they were called at Hungerford, were responsible for the buying in of provisions, and the inspection and approval of the master's accounts. They did not have quite the same power as the members of independent committees established elsewhere - they acted as individuals and so did not have the influence of a corporate body - but even so, there remained in their hands control over expenditure, which control formed the greatest perquisite for anyone involved in parish office holding.

The workhouse at St. Martin-cum-Gregory at York organised its workhouse in a similar way, but at St. Martin there was a set rota of twenty individuals who oversaw the management of the house for a month at a time, buying in provisions for the house during their month and being individually responsible for the accounts. At the end of each month the twenty people designated presidents of the house met and examined the accounts, made new rules for its management and turned over to the next president what money was available.<sup>3</sup>

The supply of goods to workhouses provided a golden opportunity for outright corruption. Also, it gave individuals the opportunity to

<sup>1</sup>In 1726 the parish was giving pensions to 31 people. This number would be expected to drop by half with the foundation of a workhouse. B.R.O., D/P71/12/1, 12 March 1726.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 4 April 1727.

<sup>3</sup>B.I.H.R., Y/MG 44, St. Martin cum Gregory, Micklegate, York. Papers re Workhouse, 1744-4'. See the rules of the workhouse dated 1747.

increase their standing among local traders by spending the parish's money selectively. A system of rotation had the advantage of preventing any one person from controlling the provisioning of a workhouse for any extended period, and in one form or another was quite popular - perhaps because it spread the profits of office holding among as many parishioners as possible. At Cullompton in Devon, a rota was set up whereby each committee-man bought in provisions and checked accounts for one month in the year, a second committee being appointed to draw up a report on the state of the house each summer. The right of individuals to provide supplies for the house led to a great deal of difficulty. In 1747, the yearly workhouse report mentioned that:

it was found that Several Gentlemen of the Parish...thought proper to Send in Corn, and Wood of their Own, and Supply the Workhouse therewith, during their Months without Sending the Same into the Publick Markett for Sale, and Charged their Own prices for the Same, And that Some few of those Gentlemen, had thought proper to Send in Milk of their Own, and in Proportions and Mixt in a very unfair Manner, and that Agreements, and Contracts had been made between Some particular Gentlemen in Order to Cover the Breach of the...Orders<sup>1</sup>

This sort of petty jobbing was common. Indeed, many parishioners seem to have considered it their right to charge the parish higher prices for the goods they supplied than normal. Even vestries anxious to keep down the rates recognised that in some instances parishioners had the right to supply their own goods to the local workhouse even though similar goods could be purchased less expensively elsewhere. When St. Margaret's, Westminster, set up a workhouse in 1725 it received proposals for furnishing the house from both Matthew Marryott and a Mr. Bromwell, the latter representing the interests of the upholsterers living in the parish. Marryott offered to furnish the house with beds and bedding for £1. 17. 9 per set, while the best offer Mr. Bromwell could make was to supply very similar sets of bedding at £2. 9. 0. Despite the discrepancy in price, the parish eventually bought all

<sup>1</sup>D.R.O., Cullompton 2404A/PV 1 V, f.134.

the beds it needed from the local upholsterers.<sup>1</sup>

While some parishes, particularly smaller ones, put their faith in rotation to control petty corruption, others worked towards the same end by going to the opposite extreme. It was hoped that by creating wholly separate, self-regulating committees gentlemen of good standing could be encouraged to participate in workhouse management. At St. Margaret's, Westminster, the management of the workhouse was put in the hands of 'the Gentlemen in the Commission of the Peace residing within the City of Westminster and the Gentlemen of the Vestry for the time being',<sup>2</sup> who were then to meet once a week in order to inspect the master's accounts and make the necessary orders for the house. In this instance the master, Matthew Marryott from 1726 to 1727,<sup>3</sup> was responsible for buying in necessary goods each day and seeing that the house was run economically, while the committee retained control over granting contracts. It was assumed that 'gentlemen' would be immune to the temptations to which traders and artisans so often succumbed.

The establishment of a standing, unchanging, committee had several advantages, the most important of which was continuity. This type of body had greater control over the master and servants of the house than did governors or trustees whose authority lasted for only a short period.<sup>4</sup> Attempts to combine both systems can also be found. At

<sup>1</sup>W.C.L., E2632 shelf 28, St. Margaret's, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1726-1727, 1 September 1726, 12 September 1726.

<sup>2</sup>W.C.L., E2419 shelf 38, St. Margaret's, Westminster, Vestry Minutes & Orders, 1724-1738, p.42.

<sup>3</sup>W.C.L., E2632 shelf 28, St. Margaret's, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1726-1727, 8 September 1726, 22 September 1726, 3 November 1726, 16 March 1727, 23 March 1727.

<sup>4</sup>The workhouse committee belonging to St. Sepulchre's, London, suggested in 1727 that but for their continuity of membership and independence of the vestry they could not 'oblige such master to do his duty in any kind but he would look upon himself as independent of the committee nor any ways under the direction or management of it.' G.L., MS 3149/4, pp.367-368.

St. Olave Hart Street, London, the order of vestry for founding a workhouse was passed in February 1727/8.<sup>1</sup> The committee set up by the vestry to oversee the house had about twenty members, of which five were replaced each Easter.<sup>2</sup> Thus, a revolving membership was established, which combined the advantages of both continuity and constant change. Another technique for reaching the same end was that used at Cullompton in Devon. There, two committees were established; one, the membership of which rotated regularly, to inspect the house and buy in provisions, and another, standing committee, which had a constant membership made up of some of the town's wealthier inhabitants, to make a yearly report on both the conditions in the house and the conduct of the committee in charge of its day to day administration.<sup>3</sup>

It would take up too much space to describe more than a small number of the different types of management established in the several hundred parishes served by workhouses in this period. The vast majority used systems involving standing committees of some kind, but the membership and power of these committees was at least slightly different in each parish. However, each workhouse faced similar problems, the most intransigent of which was that of corruption. In both the large workhouses of Westminster and the small establishments of rural areas, the managers of these institutions were hedged about with rules, the sole purpose of which was to ensure that committee-men and workhouse masters did not use their positions for personal gain. Many activities which would today be considered corrupt were completely acceptable in the eighteenth century, but the ways in which many

<sup>1</sup>G.L., MS 858/1, p.167.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.174.

<sup>3</sup>For an examples of the type of report submitted to the vestry each year see D.R.O., Cullompton, 2404A/PV 1, v, pp.96-107, 128-140, 158-174.

workhouse managers and parish officers went about earning some money from the parish were not. In using the word corrupt to describe the activities of parish employees it is not my purpose to apply modern standards to their behaviour; rather its use is restricted to those forms of misbehaviour recognised as such by contemporaries. Many workhouse managers and servants were discharged from their posts for theft, embezzlement and falsifying accounts. More subtle forms of cheating the parish were also considered unacceptable by vestries and Justices. The provision of goods at higher than market price was a common form of corruption and one which parishes went to great lengths to avoid. At Cheriton Fitzpaine in Devon the rules drawn up in 1740 for the workhouse stipulated:

That No Provisions shall be bought of any Overseer for the Time being or of any Inspector on Duty or for one Month before or after his Turn of Duty of Attendance (Milk excepted) but each sort shall be bought good and at the best hand, And that no sort either worse in kind for a greater price shall be taken in for Favour, or on <sup>1</sup>Account of Neighbourhood or any other view or Consideration.

The Cheriton Fitzpaine workhouse was administered by a standing committee of seven inspectors, who, with the overseers of the poor, were each in turn responsible for the house for one month at a time.<sup>2</sup> For the most part the day-to-day provisioning of the house was taken care of under contract by specific suppliers,<sup>3</sup> but it was also necessary to buy in provisions on an ad hoc basis, which requirement gave those involved with the house the opportunity to show favour to their friends. This was a problem faced not only by smaller workhouses run by petty tradesmen and artisans. Even where parishes attempted to ensure against such practices by involving Justices in the admini-

<sup>1</sup>D.R.O., Cheriton Fitzpaine, 1633 A add/PO6 B, p.2.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp.2, 3.

stration of these houses, problems could easily arise. At Stevenage in Hertfordshire a workhouse was founded in around 1726 because the local Justices were 'too favourable to those who make Poverty a Cloak for Idleness',<sup>1</sup> while at St. James's, Westminster, the parish workhouse fell into disarray in 1730 'by reason of the obstructions given by the proceedings of some of the Justices of the Peace'.<sup>2</sup> For the three months between 5 January and 3 April 1730, the committee normally entrusted with the care of the workhouse did not meet, 'Several of the Justices of the Peace having taken upon them to give Directions concerning the Management of the Workhouse without the participation of the rest of the Committee appointed for that Purpose & having refused to meet the said committee though daily Summoned thereto, the other Members of the Committee have also forborn their usual Meetings'.<sup>3</sup>

Thus far we have looked exclusively at the administration of workhouses run directly by the parishes they served. The vast majority of workhouses founded in the 1720s and 1730s were of this variety. Whether the house was managed by a contractor like Matthew Marryott, or administered by churchwardens, overseers and vestrymen, the parish retained a large element of responsibility for its smooth operation. However, particularly in the late 1730s and 1740s, independent workhouses began to appear which took in the poor for a set weekly fee. At the same time some parishes began to take in the poor of other

<sup>1</sup>Account (1732), p.120.

<sup>2</sup>W.C.L., D1759, St. James, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1712-1736, p.339.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.343.

localities or to allow the managers of their own workhouses to contract with other parishes.<sup>1</sup> In these circumstances the parishes involved were relieved of any involvement in or responsibility for the houses in which their poor were looked after. Overseers inspected the conditions in these institutions several times a year, but there was not the intimate connection between workhouse, parish officer and vestry necessary for the successful running of a parish institution. One important independent workhouse founded in this period was that at Paddington, which was established sometime around 1736.<sup>2</sup> In 1740 Christopher Stafford agreed to look after the poor of St. Katherine Coleman Street, London for £3.6.4 per year per head.<sup>3</sup> At the same time he was caring for the paupers of St. Ann Blackfriars and possibly Allhallows, Staining.<sup>4</sup> Stafford's workhouse was a large and wholly independent operation, but the same sort of thing was being done on a smaller scale in workhouses elsewhere. Edward Maynard,<sup>5</sup> Charles Stoke<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For example, Solomon Gardiner and his wife, master and mistress of the workhouse belonging to St. Andrew's Undershaft, London, asked and were given permission of the vestry to contract for the care of the poor of Allhallows, Staining in 1742. William Bide, master of the house belonging to St. Mary's Stoke Newington, made a similar request in 1737. Likewise, Woodstock in Oxfordshire contracted with Kidlington in 1735/6 for the care of its poor in the house administered by Kidlington; while in 1736, St. Helen's Bishopsgate, London contracted for the care of its poor with St. Sepulchre's at a rate of 4s. per week per head. G.L., MS 4118/2, p.137; H.L.S., P/M/1, St. Marys, Stoke Newington, Vestry Minutes, 1681-1743, pp.414, 422; Bod. Lib., MS D.D. Par. Woodstock c.12, 25 January 1736; G.L., MS 6846/2, pp.160-162.

<sup>2</sup>The first mention of an independent workhouse at Paddington can be found at G.L., MS 4957/3, f.62.

<sup>3</sup>G.L., MS 1124/3, see accounts for 1740, 1741 and 1742 for records of dispersements to Stafford.

<sup>4</sup>G.L., MS 4511/3, 8 May 1740, 18 June 1741; G.L., MS 4957/3, f.62.

<sup>5</sup>See G.L., MS 606/1, pp.25, 26-27.

<sup>6</sup>See G.L., MS 4072/2, p.264; G.L., MS 635/2, pp.343, 373; G.L., MS 613/1, f.13.

and Jonathan Throckston,<sup>1</sup> among several others, ran independent workhouses in the London area in the 1740s, the existence of which obviated any need for the parishes using their services to administer anything more complicated than the well established system for the collection of rates.

The organisations established by parishes for the administration of their workhouses were all designed with one end in view: the economic management of the relief of the poor. Wherever possible checks on the excesses of the individuals involved were built into the management structure. Sets of rules were drawn up and distributed; detailed procedural requirements were laid out and attempts made to attract the wealthiest and supposedly least corrupt individuals to workhouse posts. In several parishes some degree of success was achieved in developing a self-regulating management. But however successful these systems were, they all depended on the honesty and efficiency of one person, the master of the workhouse.

#### Section B: Managers, Contractors and Entrepreneurs

While committee-men, churchwardens, and overseers attempted to monitor the workhouses they founded it was managers, contractors and suppliers who had both the greatest interest in these institutions and upon whom their success most depended. They saw to it that the poor were fed, housed, clothed, set to work and punished. In 1726 Henry Newman described to Henry Pacey at Boston the duties of a workhouse master:

<sup>1</sup>See W.C.L., B1065, St. Clement Danes, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1733-1740, 2 October 1740; W.C.L., B1066, St. Clement Danes, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1740-1744, 17 October 1740; G.L., MS 4118/2, p.134; G.L., MS 6846/2, pp.135, 138, 139-140, 143; G.L., MS 4072/2, p.230; H.L.S., P/M/1, St. Mary's, Stoke Newington, Vestry Minutes, 1681-1743, p.422.

whoever you make Steward over the House they can't be supposed to have the immediate care of the Children, because their time will be taken up without Doors at the Market or within doors at the Compting House, or the Kitchen, or Store room, for his eye and his care must be everywhere, where the interest of the house is concerned.<sup>1</sup>

Parish officers were unremunerated; contractors and managers were the paid employees of the parish, and though desperate attempts were made to control these employees, they were left largely to their own devices, drawing up their own accounts and acting on their own authority.

The managers of workhouses can be roughly divided into two types: first, the servant, who received his wages every quarter, but who did not himself have any financial stake in the success of the house in which he worked; and second, the contractor, who, for a set yearly sum, took responsibility for all aspects of workhouse management, and benefited from the profits of the labour of the poor. The gap between the most humble manager, often a pensioner paid only a few shillings a week, and the largest of the contractors, through whose hands hundreds of pounds passed each year, was immense. Matthew Marrayott earned hundreds of pounds from his activities as a workhouse master.<sup>2</sup> At the other end of the spectrum were people like Abraham Rhodes and his wife who was employed in 1738 as the master and mistress of the workhouse in Mirfield in Yorkshire. They agreed 'to take that office upon them, the town Allowing them Victuals for their salary...if there be no more than six poor people in the...Workhouse and if there be more than six to be allowed as the Majority of the Committee Chosen for that purpose shall think Convenient'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> S.P.C.K., S.L., 18 May 1725 - 23 April 1726, pp.66-67.

<sup>2</sup> A Representations of Some Mismanagements, p.14; for each house Marrayott administered he was paid between forty and two hundred pounds a year.

<sup>3</sup> W.Y.R.O., D1/150, Parish Book, Mirfield, West Yorkshire, 1686-1829, 2 January 1737/8.

No matter how successful a workhouse manager was, his profession was not one in which huge profits could be made. At the upper limits a workhouse manager might be quite comfortable. Contractors and independent workhouse owners might earn a couple of hundred pounds a year, but the wages of salaried masters were low; they ranged between about five and fifty pounds per annum<sup>1</sup> - the wages of a good clerk or petty artisan. Many, like Abraham Rhodes, commanded resources only slightly greater than those of the paupers they controlled. Indeed, although the divide between salaried manager and contractor could be crossed,<sup>2</sup> there was a distinct difference between these two types of workhouse manager. The wage earning master was wholly dependent upon the good will of the vestry for which he worked; he had no interest in the profits of the labour of the inmates and was largely removed from the process by which the house was provisioned, and hence denied the perquisites so often taken by those through whose hands parish money passed.

The vast majority of workhouse managers were inexperienced and untrained. Some were petty craftsmen or merchants, others were teachers or clerks. When appointing a workhouse master the vestry did not make a decision solely on the basis of a person's direct experience

<sup>1</sup>At Thirsk the master of the workhouse received £10 per annum in 1737; at Chudleigh, Devon, in 1744 the wages of the master, John Daymond, were also £10 per year. St. Sepulchre's, London was paying the master of its house, Joseph Gale, £25 per annum in 1727, while St. Mary's, Harrow on the Hill, Middlesex, was paying John Robinson £15 12s. in 1738. The masters of the houses belonging to both St. James and St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, Westminster, received £40 per annum in 1736. N.Y.R.O., PR/TH 6/9/2, Thirsk Workhouse Papers 18th c. - 1837, see item dated 25 April 1737; D.R.O., DD.18957 PO3 V, ff.137-138; G.L.R.O., St. Sepulchre, P69/Sep/15/140; G.L.R.O., DRO, 3/61/1, f.183; W.C.L., D1759, pp.444-445; W.C.L., F2006, p.425.

<sup>2</sup>In 1737 William Bide was the paid employee of St. Peter's Cornhill, London; but he made at least one attempt to become a workhouse contractor. In October 1737 he proposed to the vestry of St. Mary's Stoke Newington, Middlesex, that the parish contract out the care of its poor to him. H.L.S., P/M/1, St. Mary's, Stoke Newington, Vestry Minutes, 1681-1743, pp.414, 422, 423.

with similar institutions. Rather, a good local reputation, the ability to keep accurate accounts, and the provision of someone of good standing to give bond were the factors which weighed most heavily. When a vestry or workhouse committee went about finding a suitable master it normally advertised. In 1750 the vestry of St. Mary's, Lambeth, determined that its master was incapable, and 'Ordered that an Advertisement be forthwith made in the Daily Advertiser for a Master and Matron for the Management of the Workhouse.'<sup>1</sup> Similarly, when St. Sepulchre, Middlesex Division, found itself in need of a master in 1747 the vestry ordered that a 'Notice be published by the Bell-Man throughout the Parish...to give Notice that the place of Master of the Workhouse...is declared Vacant and any Person (being a Singleman of a fair character)...may attend at the Workhouse on Thursday the fourth Day of June.'<sup>2</sup> The day on which to choose a master having been appointed, the candidates presented themselves and were examined. In September 1727 St. Sepulchre's examined four applicants for the post of master, each being required to give 'a Specimen of their Several writings and accounting'; a choice was made immediately.<sup>3</sup>

The people who gained these positions were often incompetent and of very low social standing. As has been mentioned before, the S.P.C.K. recommended that the head of the local charity school be appointed workhouse master, and that he be given the opportunity to examine the management techniques in use in the large workhouses of London and Westminster. However, few workhouse masters were so well qualified. Deliverance Jux was chosen master of the Putney workhouse in 1731. His family had received relief from the parish in the late

<sup>1</sup>L.A.D., P3/4, St. Mary's, Lambeth, Vestry Minutes, 1728-1779, p.146.

<sup>2</sup>G.L., MS 9078/1, 21 May 1747.

<sup>3</sup>G.L., MS 3137/1, p.73.

seventeenth century and he himself died an inmate of the Putney workhouse.<sup>1</sup> This is an extreme example of the low social standing of workhouse managers, and there were concerted efforts to find better qualified administrators for these houses, but the low wages associated with the position necessarily limited the choice available to the parish. When, in 1747, the parish of the St. Sepulchre's, Middlesex, advertised for a new master and mistress for its workhouse they offered only £12 a year.<sup>2</sup> The person eventually appointed lasted eight months, at the end of which he was discharged on the grounds that Geneva was being sold to the inmates by the staff and two dead bodies had been smuggled into the house for burial by the parish.<sup>3</sup> In response, when the parish came to look for a new master, it raised the salary to £20, but even so, it received applications from only three people.<sup>4</sup>

Even when a seemingly responsible individual was found to run a workhouse, there remained numerous pitfalls for the parish. St. James's, Westminster paid the master of its house £40 per year,<sup>5</sup> and when they appointed John Tucker in about 1736 they believed they had made a good choice. The rector confirmed in 1741 that Tucker 'was of good capacity as to accounts and would be esteemed if he were more compassionate'. However, the affairs of the workhouse still fell into disarray. In March 1741, when the house was examined, it was 'found in a very Nasty Condition, the Stench hardly supportable, poor creatures almost naked, and the living go to bed with the Dead.' A 'Scorbutick

<sup>1</sup>'A Charge on the Parish: The Treatment of Poverty in Putney, 1620-1834', Wandsworth Papers No.1 (1974), pp.55-56.

<sup>2</sup>G.L., MS 9078/1, 21 May 1747.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 15 December 1748, 27 December 1748.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 10 January 1748/9.

<sup>5</sup>W.C.L., D1759, St. James', Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1712-1736, pp.444-445.

distemper' was also found to infect most of the inmates: 'hardly any young fresh persons escape that go to the house'. These problems were traced, in part, to the master who would not even attend prayers at the house; 'his Objection was joining with such a rude illiterate Rabble'.<sup>1</sup>

Attempts were made to find experienced and responsible individuals to fill these posts, or failing that to train trusted individuals for them. Several provincial towns applied to the S.P.C.K. for the recommendation of masters, and at the same time Matthew Marryott was actively involved in directing experienced men towards provincial workhouse posts.<sup>2</sup> As early as the late 1690s the master of the workhouse set up by the Corporation of the Poor of Crediton was sent to Bristol to observe the management of the houses there.<sup>3</sup> But this type of training did not become common until the 1720s. The types of training available for workhouse masters are exemplified by the case of Humphrey Topping. In February 1726 Robert Daubries wrote to the S.P.C.K. to say:

That they have at last met with a proper person for Master for the Workhouse which they design to go forward with all expedition; and as Northampton Workhouse is reported to be the most complete and best regulated in the Kingdom, they design to send him there for his further information and in his return have order'd him to see the Improvements that are made in the Workhouses in London and the adjacent parts if any. He was bred under Mr. Marryott, but being invited by his countrymen in Lincolnshire, to assist and set up some workhouses in that County, he has left Mr. Marryott, and set up for master for himself.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>W.C.L., D1760, St. James', Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1736-1750, pp.149-150.

<sup>2</sup>For examples see S.P.C.K., S.L., 18 May 1725 - 23 April 1726, pp.66-67; S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1726-1728, xii, p.102; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, Nos.8947, 8973; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1727-1729, No.9419; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1734-1736, No.12776.

<sup>3</sup>Venn, 'Crediton als Critton als Kirton and Hereabouts', ii, 80.

<sup>4</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No.9135.

Humphrey Topping had an unusually large amount of experience of the administration of workhouses, but several other individuals can be found who came to these posts at least partially prepared. When Henry Holmes was appointed master of the house founded in Boston in 1727 he was immediately dispatched to London to observe the management of various houses there.<sup>1</sup> Armed with a letter of introduction from Henry Newman, secretary of the S.P.C.K., he presented himself to John Climer, master of the house at Shoreditch to be instructed:

- 1.As to buying in Provisions of all sorts at the best Hand.
- 2.The Method of Keeping...stores and Books, and distributing the Victuals and other necessaries to the Poor.
- 3.The Materials you employ the Poor in, where they are bought and what is done with the fruits of the labour?<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, Marryott occasionally instructed provincial masters in the art of running a workhouse as a favour to the Society.<sup>3</sup> However, Marryott more commonly trained his own nominees. At Leeds the decision to found a workhouse was made in 1726,<sup>4</sup> and from Marryott the parishioners sought the recommendation of a master. Marryott sent a Mr. Kent to Leeds in time for the opening of the house, who was duly appointed at a yearly salary of £20.<sup>5</sup> Kent had apparently been trained at one of the London workhouses under Marryott's control, but when he was recommended it was not because of his administrative skill. Marryott demanded a bond for twenty pounds payable by Kent if he received the position. Hence a full year's salary went to Marryott in

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1727-1729, No.9239.

<sup>2</sup>S.P.C.K., S.L., 7 Febuary 1726/7 - 15 November 1727, p.19.

<sup>3</sup>For example see S.P.C.K., S.L., 18 May 1725 - 23 April 1726, pp.66-67.

<sup>4</sup>Philip Anderson, 'The Leeds Workhouse Under the Old Poor Law: 1726-1834', Publications of the Thoresby Society Miscellany, xvii, part 2 (1980), p.78.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.80.

exchange for training.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of masters came to these posts with no experience whatsoever. They were clerks or craftsmen, whose main recommendation was their ability to manage those parts of workhouse administration concerned with either manufacturing or record-keeping. But not all were so unprepared, and as the 1720s progressed the pool of experienced masters increased. Thomas Jenkins began his career as a workhouse master in the 1730s when he accepted the post of master of the house belonging to the parish of St. Michael Cornhill.<sup>2</sup> By 1737 he was managing the house set up by Allhallows Lombard St.,<sup>3</sup> and by 1738, St. Alban's Wood Street. Similarly, Henry Walker, one-time employee of the Bishopsgate Workhouse, was employed in 1732 to instruct the inmates of the house belonging to St. Mary-le-Bow in carding and spinning; while in 1733 he became master of St. Andrew Undershafts' house.<sup>4</sup> Very few masters retained their positions for longer than a couple of years, and provided they were competent, they could easily find work in the houses of London.

The masters described thus far were all employed as servants of the parish. They worked for an annual wage, and had only a peripheral interest in the economic management of the houses. But gradually, over the course of the second quarter of the eighteenth century, more and more parishes began to contract out the care of their poor. Both in houses owned by the parishes and in private houses, contractors began to take upon themselves, for a fixed price per head or per year, the care of the poor for specific parishes. Matthew Marryott was both the best known and the most active of these contractors, having under his

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No.8973.

<sup>2</sup>G.L., MS 4049/4, 25 May 1737.

<sup>3</sup>G.L., MS 1264/1, p.52.

<sup>4</sup>G.L., MS 5048, f.5; G.L., MS 4120/1, p.15.

control at various times between 1714 and his death at least seventeen different workhouses,<sup>1</sup> but there were numerous other men contracting for the care of the poor. In December 1722 Robert Horlock contracted for the employment of the poor of both St. Peter le Bailey and St. Martins in Oxford.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, during the 1730s and early 1740s John Thruckston sought contracts with London parishes for both the care of paupers in his own workhouse at Tottenham High Cross, and for the management of several parish houses. By 1734 Thruckston had under his care the poor of St. Michael Cornhill<sup>3</sup> and St. Helen's Bishopgate. The contract entered into between Thruckston and St. Helen's Bishopgate in September 1734 is typical. In it Thruckston agreed:

To receive maintaine and provide for all the Poor of the said Parish who now do or att any time hereafter (during this agreement) shall Claime relief of the...Parish with all Convenient necessarys as good & wholesome Meate Drink and Victuals....And also Washing Lodging Cloths Physick and all other necessarys whatsoever-----

And that he will likewise att his own cost putt out Apprentices...and pay with such poor children such necessary sums of money as their Masters or Mistresses shall agree...

And that...[he] will keep indemnified the...Parish from all such Costs and Charges that may arise Concerning the legality or sufficiency of such Provision or concerning Settlement of the...Poor or other Matter in anywise relating to them occasioned by the said John Thruckstone.

And that the Churchwardens & Overseers Or any other of the Parishioners who shall be appointed by Order of Vestry shall att any time have liberty to go into & inspect the house...to see that the said Poore are well and sufficently provided for.

And the said Churchwardens & Overseers Covenant on behalfe of the...Parish to pay the said Thruckstone 180<sup>li</sup> per annum by quarterly payment...

And That he shall have all the profitts that shall arise from the lawfull labour of the said Poor...

And that he shall be att liberty to bury any of the said Poor in the Church Yard of the said Parish without paying any ffees for the same (except for digging the Graves and searching and bearing the Bodys of the said Poor)

And the said Thruckstone further Covenants that if any of the said Poor shall dye in the said house Then such of them

<sup>1</sup>For a list of houses with which Marryott can be positively associated see Appendix(A): Workhouses Administered by or Associated with Matthew Marryott.

<sup>2</sup>Bod. Lib., MS DD. Par. Oxford, St. Peter le Bailey B.b.13, 18 December 1722; Bod. Lib., MS DD. Par Oxford, St. Martins b.26, f.161.

<sup>3</sup>G.L., MS 4072/2, p.230.

so dying shall be decently buried at the Charges of the said Thruckstone...

And that att the expiration of this Agreement the Poor shall be att Liberty to depart out of the house of the said Thruckstone with all the wearing apparell they have been provided with and to keep the same for their own use.

And that in Case of any Difference betweene the said Thruckstone and the said Parish the same shall be left to the determination of the Lord Mayor of London for the time being who shall have power to heare & examine into the same and to make such Order thereon as he shall thinke fitt or to make void and putt an end to this Agreement...<sup>1</sup>

Thruckston was a particularly active, if not successful, contractor. In the eight years following 1734 he applied to three more parishes for the care of their poor. In 1737 he approached St. Leonard Shoreditch, describing himself as someone 'who keeps poor people for some parishes'.<sup>2</sup> St. Leonard's rejected his proposals. Likewise, in 1740 he made proposals to St. Clement Danes, and was again rebuffed.<sup>3</sup> In 1742, when St. Andrew Undershaft advertised for someone to care for their poor, and their first choice, Robert Horlock, was found to be unable to find two nominees of sufficient standing, Thruckston stepped in, made his own proposals, and was again rejected.<sup>4</sup> He lost his contracts with both St. Helen's Bishopsgate and St. Michael Cornhill in the mid-1730s,<sup>5</sup> and there is no evidence that he ever successfully competed for any others, but he remained active in London until the mid 1740s.

In London in the 1730s and 1740s there seems to have been a group of individuals each vying with the other for contracts for the care of

<sup>1</sup>G.L., MS 6846/2, pp.139-140.

<sup>2</sup>H.L.S., P/M/1, St. Mary's Stoke Newington, Vestry Minutes, 1681-1743, p.422.

<sup>3</sup>W.C.L., B1066, St. Clement Danes, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1740-1744, 17 October 1740.

<sup>4</sup>G.L., MS 4118/2, p.134.

<sup>5</sup>G.L., MS 6846/2, p.143.; G.L., MS 4072/2, p.230.

the poor. Among them were men like John Smith,<sup>1</sup> Christopher Stafford,<sup>2</sup> Samuell Tull,<sup>3</sup> Thomas Mico,<sup>4</sup> John Stoke,<sup>5</sup> and John Thruckston. Each of these men made proposals for contracting out the care of the poor to several different parishes. In 1727 Thomas Mico and Thomas Worrall contracted with St. Martin-in-the-Fields for the care of its poor; Thomas Mico and his wife, agreed to act as master and mistress of the house, and to see to the employment of the poor, while Thomas Worrall kept the accounts, paid a nurse to look after the sick poor, and managed the buying of provisions.<sup>6</sup> By 1739 Thomas Mico had long since left St. Martin and was contracting for the care of the poor of Enfield; agreeing 'to take the men, women and children at 2s. a head per week,....and...to find them in meat, drink, washing sope, and fireing, candles and all other nessesaryes'.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, John Smith can first be identified as master of the workhouse belonging to St.

<sup>1</sup>See G.L., MS 4118/2, pp.130-131; G.L., MS 606/1, p.22.

<sup>2</sup>See G.L., MS 4511/3, 8 May 1740, 18 June 1741; G.L., MS 8690, 24 June 1740; G.L., MS 1124, Payments to Stafford are dispersed throughout the overseers of the poor's accounts for 1742.

<sup>3</sup>See G.L., MS 613/1, ff.2-3, 11, 12, 13; Thomas, 'The Parish Overseer in Essex', p.201.

<sup>4</sup>See W.C.L., F2006, St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1716-1739, pp.293, 329; W.L. Gates, 'The Administration of the Poor Law in the Parish of Enfield, Middlesex, 1601-1834' (Borough Road College, thesis, 1960); deposited at the London County Hall History Library), pp.23-25.

<sup>5</sup>See G.L., MS 4072/2, p.264; G.L., MS 635/2, p.343-344; for information on Stokes' wife, who continued to take in paupers after the death of Charles Stokes in approximately 1745, see G.L., MS 635/2, p.373; G.L., MS 613/1, f.13.

<sup>6</sup>W.C.L., F2006, St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1716-1739, p.293.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted in Gates, 'The Administration of the Poor Law in the Parish of Enfield, Middlesex', p.24.

Andrew Undershaft in 1742,<sup>1</sup> when he unsuccessfully competed with five other people for the contract for the care of the poor of that parish.<sup>2</sup>

By 1747, he was running an independent workhouse at Tottenham High Cross, and was in that year contracting with St. Martin Vintry.<sup>3</sup> These men gradually took over the administration of a large number of London workhouses. Particularly in the City of London, parishes contracted with independent workhouse proprietors, saving themselves both the trouble of supporting a house of their own and regulating the expense of maintaining the poor. For between 1s. 6d. and 4s. per head per week depending on the type of paupers maintained, several entrepreneurs would take upon themselves responsibility for the relief of the poor.<sup>4</sup>

These independent workhouses probably catered primarily for the lame and infirm. Different types of paupers required varying amounts of attention and money, and it was to a parish's advantage to contract for the care of those requiring the greatest amount of both. It is very unlikely, for instance, that a large number of unemployed servants were sent to these independent houses under the terms of the contracts. This type of pauper, who required only temporary relief, could be more efficiently cared for by the overseer. Those contracts which stipulated a rate of below about 2s. 6d. probably assumed that all the poor of a given parish should be maintained by the contractor, but where rates were significantly higher than this the contractor was probably taking responsibility for only the most expensive paupers. Maintaining only a portion of its paupers in a workhouse had several

<sup>1</sup>G.L., MS 4118/2, p.134.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp.130-131.

<sup>3</sup>G.L., MS 606/1, p.22.

<sup>4</sup>For examples see B.R.O., MS D/P89 5/2, f.102; G.L.R.O., St. John at Hackney, P79/JN1/160, 11 July 1752; G.L., 4118/2, pp.130-131; G.L., MS 635/2, p.343; H.L.S., St. Mary's Stoke Newington, Vestry Minutes, 1681-1743, pp.442-443.

advantages for the parish. It allowed the overseers to apply a workhouse test without actually going to the expense of maintaining those in temporary need, and at the same time allowed the nursing and medical care provided by the parish to be centralised. The interests of the contractor were completely opposite to those of the parish. It was in his interest to have as many healthy paupers maintained in his house as possible. The fewer sick people, the less he had to spend on medicine, burial fees and nursing, and the greater his profits from the labour of the poor. Hence, he could charge as little as 1s. 6d. per week if the paupers he received could contribute to their own support, and likewise would be forced to charge as much as 4s. per week if he knew that the paupers would be sickly and expensive to maintain.

However, outside London, independent workhouses did not exist. Most provincial workhouses were either administered directly by the parish, or by a contractor who took over only a part of the responsibility for the care of the poor. The workhouses belonging to places like St. James's, Westminster and Cheriton Fitzpaine in Devon, were administered through a series of contracts, whereby everything from medical treatment, provisions, clothing and furniture as well as the services of the master was supplied by annual agreements.<sup>1</sup> The local physician and apothecary, butcher, baker and brewer were often under contract for the supply of services to the local workhouse. The use of contractors for the supply of basic provisions and services to houses was in part an attempt to minimise the scope for corruption. A written contract confined vestrymen, masters and suppliers of workhouses to a specific economic relationship, eliminating some of the power of each.

In much the same way as contracts for the care of the poor were put out to open competition, contracts for the supply of goods and

<sup>1</sup>See W.C.L., D1759, St. James's, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1712-1736, pp.306, 307, 308, 443, 444-445; D.R.O., Cheriton Fitzpaine, 1633A add/PO6 B.

services to workhouses were advertised, suppliers being allowed to come forward on specified days to make their proposals. When St. Mary Whitechapel, Lambeth opened its workhouse in 1724 the vestry 'gave Publick Notice to the Upholsterers and Salesmen of this and the neighbouring Parishes, to send in Proposals for furnishing them, at the cheapest Rates, with bedding etc. necessary for the House'.<sup>1</sup> The trustees of the house then went on to contract with 'a Brewer, for Beer, at 8s. a Barrel', 'A Baker, for Houshold Bread, at a penny a Pound. A Butcher, for Beef, at 7 Farthings a Pound. A Milk-Woman, for Milk, at 10 Quarts for a Shilling. A Cheese-Monger, for Cheese, at 3d. a Pound; and Butter at 5d. a Pound.'<sup>2</sup> Most workhouses run through a contractor, or directly by the parishes, had similar agreements with local suppliers. For the most part the contracts were given to those putting in the lowest bid. But, as has been mentioned before, the desirability of awarding these contracts to parishioners often figured largely in the minds of vestrymen. When St. Margaret's, Westminster and St. John the Evangelist decided to supply all the needs of their house under contract, in 1743, it was determined that the lowest proposal be accepted, with the one proviso, 'That those who have served offices in either of the...parishes shall have the preference, in case two or more persons shall make the same Offer.'<sup>3</sup>

The majority of contracts for the supply of workhouses were awarded to local men. Indeed, most items, such as foodstuffs, were necessarily provided by local tradesmen. But non-perishable goods - bedsteads, spinning wheels and clothing - were occasionally supplied

<sup>1</sup>Account (1725), p.9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp.9-10.

<sup>3</sup>W.C.L., E2420 shelf 38, St. Margaret's, Westminster, Orders of Vestry, 1738-1755, pp.123-124.

by men specialising in furnishing workhouses. Matthew Marryott gained several contracts for the furnishing of workhouses in the 1720s. He agreed to furnish the house belonging to St. James's, Westminster in 1727, and at the same time made proposals for clothing the poor under contract, and managing the house.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, at St. Margaret's, Westminster, Marryott unsuccessfully competed for a contract for furnishing the workhouse in 1726, and, having failed, went on to apply for contracts for supplying both the clothing for the poor and Russian linen for making sheets and shifts.<sup>2</sup> Marryott was certainly the most important individual contractor of this sort. But other men attempted to earn a living by supplying furniture and clothes to several different workhouses. When the Liberty of the Roles set up its house in 1737, a 'Mr. Willey Upholder in Chancery Lane (who furnished part of the Workhouse belonging to the Parish of St. Dunstan in the West With Bedding) was sent for to know upon what conditions he would furnish the...Intended Workhouse.'<sup>3</sup>

Besides the supply of furniture and provisions to workhouses one other service was normally contracted out: medical care. Small workhouses might be served by a single apothecary, but the larger houses had both a physician and an apothecary: the physician normally worked free of charge, while the apothecary was paid under contract by the year. The workhouse belonging to St. George's, Hanover Square, Westminster, was served by Dr. Hody. In 1741 the vestry 'Resolved that it be requested of Dr. Hody to take upon him (as he has done generously and without any gratuity for many years) the care of all

<sup>1</sup>W.C.L., D1759, St. James's, Westminster Vestry Minutes, 1712-1736, pp.306, 307.

<sup>2</sup>W.C.L., E2632 shelf 28, St. Margaret's, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1726-1727, 26 August 1726, 1 September 1726, 8 September 1726, 12 September 1726.

<sup>3</sup>W.C.L., K324, Precinct of the Savoy, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1737-1744, 9 March 1736/7.

such poor parishioners of this parish as shall happen to become sick or lame for this present year and that he do employ from time to time as he shall think proper any Surgeon or Surgeons, Apothecary or Apothecarys for that purpose'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly St. Olave, Hart St., London, employed the services of Dr. Thomas Adams, who 'Out of his Charitable Tenderness and Disposition to Assist the Poor, hath Constantly Visited and Assisted the Poor Sick persons in the...[workhouse] in the most Diligent manner, without ffee or Reward.'<sup>2</sup> Unlike many physicians, apothecaries normally charged large fees for their services. For the year 1742, Thomas Thornborrow charged St. Giles Cripplegate, London, £30 for his service as an Apothecary;<sup>3</sup> and in 1748 John Northorpe, the apothecary serving the workhouse belonging to St. Anne Westminster, charged £45.<sup>4</sup> The reason for the discrepancy between the behaviour of apothecaries and physicians lay primarily in the cost of drugs. The charge imposed by the former included the supply of medicines made up by the apothecary himself, while the seemingly unpaid position of workhouse physician allowed the latter to direct workhouse funds to selected suppliers. More than this, physicians could gain valuable experience by treating the poor, and by the illegal dissection of the occasional pauper corpse. It was claimed that at the workhouse belonging to St. Giles in the Fields, London, several corpses were 'made an Anatomy of, after...[the] Common Custom (for many are carried in Sacks by Night)' and that in 1729 one woman, having died in child-

<sup>1</sup>W.C.L., C877, St. George's Hanover Square, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1740-1743, p.69.

<sup>2</sup>G.L., MS 858/1, p.185.

<sup>3</sup>G.L., MS 6048/2, p.357.

<sup>4</sup>W.C.L., E2638 shelf 28, St. Margaret's, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1746-1749, pp.218-219.

birth, had 'her fingers cut off, her Eyes pulled out of her Head, and the Hallows stuffed with Sawdust.'<sup>1</sup>

### Section C: Corruption: The Failure of Workhouse Administration

The establishment of sophisticated administrative systems, the use of contracts for the supply of houses and the creation of rules for the management of these institutions reflected a concern with one problem: corruption. In practically every workhouse established before 1750 some example of cupidity amongst the staff or parish officers can be found. It was a ubiquitous problem, and one that parishes were almost powerless to combat. Though it was expected that some profit should accrue to individuals holding parish offices, vestrymen and churchwardens saw some types of behaviour as peculiarly corrupt, and deserving of punishment. Although it was allowed that some officers should spend parish money on entertainments for themselves and friends and should direct parish money towards specific individuals, overcharging the parish, embezzlement and the provision of shoddy goods were considered unacceptable.

The nature of workhouse corruption was determined by the services provided in these houses. Hence, the most common problem lay in controlling expenditure on provisions: foodstuffs, clothing, and furniture. More than this, other services provided by the parish - the burial of the pauper dead, and lodging for the parish poor - could form the object of unacceptable activity on the part of both masters and parish officers. The actual control of inmates exercised by masters could also provide a temptation. The only recourse most parishes had was to dismiss the individual involved. Certainly rules were made, but parishes had immense difficulty seeing that they were obeyed.

<sup>1</sup>The Workhouse Cruelty, Workhouses Turned Gaols, And Gaolers Executioners (?1731).

Typical of the problems experienced by parishes was that encountered by St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London, in 1740. The master of the house, William Warburton, was found to have 'neglected to give a true account of the numbers of Persons admitted and Maintained in the Workhouse, by means whereof he had provided for thirty persons and upwards more than actually were therein'.<sup>1</sup> Another common problem was the parish's inability to control the quality and quantity of provisions supplied under contract. In 1748 it was reported to the vestry of St. Luke's Chelsea that both the baker and coal merchant who supplied the workhouse under contract were sending in bread and cauldrons of coal under weight.<sup>2</sup>

One of the first pamphlets written specifically with the managers of workhouses in mind, A Representations of Some Mismanagements by Parish Officers,<sup>3</sup> offered advice on how to eliminate the problem of corruption on the part of parish officers and workhouse suppliers. In it, the author claims: 'It cannot be denied to be a great Hardship for any Parish, after having taken the pains, and been at the expence of Erecting a House of Maintenance, to have the gains which should accrue to the Publick by it, be conveyed into the Pockets of a few private Parishioners', and he expresses the hope that the publication of the pamphlet would help 'bring things to such a pass that it shall not be in the Power of a Tradesman who usually pays the least Share of the Taxes, to get more by being put into Office, than a Landholder.'<sup>4</sup> The author makes several suggestions on how to eliminate corruption among the suppliers to workhouses, in an attempt to eliminate the 'Mischief

<sup>1</sup>W.C.L., F2007, St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1739-1778, f.2.

<sup>2</sup>G.L.R.O., St. Luke's, Sidney Street, Chelsea, P74/Luk/3, 21 June 1748.

<sup>3</sup>A Representation of Some Mismanagements by Parish Officers (London, 1726).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.v.

...caused by the Artifice and Knavery of some designing men in the Parish, who being Tradesmen or Shopkeepers make interest to get into the Vestries or Offices of the Parish, and Particularly into such Offices as have the Disposal of the Parish-Money; then they get the Priviledge to supply the House of Maintenance with Eatables and Drinkables or other Necessaries which they charge at what price they please.<sup>1</sup> Specifically he identified the baker, butcher, brewer, cheesemonger, and apothecary. As a solution it was suggested, first, that on setting up a house no officer be allowed to supply it with provision; and second, that a substantial householder of the parish be chosen treasurer.<sup>2</sup>

Certainly, both of the recommendations put forward by the author of A Representations of Some Mismanagements were adopted by the parishes. As has been mentioned earlier, suppliers and masters of workhouses were hedged in with rules in the hope of containing the possibility of corruption; but no system could be put into operation which could do more than slightly curb the excesses of suppliers and masters. The correspondent of the S.P.C.K. at Maidstone complained in 1724 that the workhouse there was in a very bad state, and that despite the efforts of the vestry and sets of rules controlling the activities of the overseers of the poor, the house was being run for the personal gain of the overseers rather than for the good of the parish. He advised that the management of workhouses 'not be left to the Humour or Interest of annual Officers, to be changed and altered as they shall please; for different Overseers will have different Interests: and where the Direction is left to them, it will probably happen, as it has in Fact here at Maidstone, that the Poor shall be one Year employed in the Linnen, and another in the Woollen Manufactory; and this merely as

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p.8.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp.11-12.

it suits the Interest of the Managers.'<sup>1</sup>

No workhouses were large enough to provide scope for corruption on a large scale, the profits of cheating the parish being counted in shillings and pence rather than in hundreds of pounds. But its ubiquity constantly threatened the viability of these institutions. Whereas it was claimed by writers on workhouses that '200<sup>1</sup> per Annum of the Poor's Rates...after a House and necessary Accommodations are provided, shall go further in keeping comfortable one or more large Familles of Poor, than 3 or 400<sup>1</sup> per Annum, distributed to the like Number of Poor when they live dispers'd', it was admitted that these results were not the product of good management, but of the fear the poor had of workhouses: 'No Vagabond Poor dare come into, or stay long in a Parish, where such a House is erected.'<sup>2</sup> In some instances the parish simply ignored the cupidity of its officers. At Tonbridge in Kent it was suggested that 'though there may seem some Partiality [among parish officers] in serving the Workhouse themselves with Corn and Wood, yet as the Articles have been delivered at the Market Price, they could not be censured', even though strict rules forbidding such behaviour had been made when the house was first established.<sup>3</sup>

It was not only parish officers who attempted to obtain financial gain from their positions. Workhouse masters similarly put their own profit before that of the parish. At Tiverton in 1741, the master of the workhouse there was accused of 'having charged for 5 Bushels of Malt when he brewed but 4...and keeping a Horse in the Long Room which mortified & died there the Groans whereof & Nausious Smell was such

<sup>1</sup>Account (1732), pp.128-129.

<sup>2</sup>Account (1725), p.v.

<sup>3</sup>Account (1732), p.142.

nunsance to the Poor that some them were taken ill'.<sup>1</sup> The master in question was immediately discharged. Similarly, in 1729 the mistress of the workhouse belonging to St. Dunstan in the West, London, Mrs. Harding, was found to have defrauded the parish on three occasions. She had 'received three quarters Salary of the Collectors for the poor at the Rate of 10<sup>li.</sup> per Annum when at the same time she well knew that her Sallary was but 6<sup>li.</sup> per Annum...had received a Guinea of Mr. Churchwarden Sherwood which she pretended she had paid Doctor Douglas for laying a poor woman in the Workhouse when in ffact she paid the Doctor no more than two Crown pieces...and lastly...she had received 4s for the Doctor's Coachire of Mr. Sherwood when in fact she had only paid him 1s.'<sup>2</sup> She was quickly dismissed from her position. Examples such as these are common. But, as with irregularities perpetrated by parish officers, they involved very small sums. In 1748, the mistress of the house belonging to St. Andrew Undershaft, London, was discharged for having 'cutt off ffat and Suet from off the meat sent to the House for the use of the Poor and has sold the same'.<sup>3</sup>

That workhouses were an increasingly popular means of limiting a parish's expenditure on the poor does not reflect the effectiveness of these institutions in maintaining the poor cheaply. Rather, it was the fear in which the poor held workhouses that allowed the rates bill to be cut. Parish officers and workhouse managers commonly used their positions for personal gain, making a mockery of the concept of the workhouse as a more 'regular' means of relieving the poor. Although no individual could make a large profit from supplying these institutions, or embezzling parish property, the ubiquity of corrupt behaviour meant that the regulations - sets of rules and procedures - designed for

<sup>1</sup>D.R.O., Cruwys Morchard, 1092 add A/PO124.

<sup>2</sup>G.L., MS 3016/3, p.348.

<sup>3</sup>G.L., MS 4120/1, p.124.

workhouses seldom became the self regulating structures envisaged by those who drew them up.

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## CHAPTER 6: WORKHOUSE CONDITIONS

It appears at very first sight of this Accompt that all your expences the Past year have been much diminished: in particular the two great Articles of Provision and Clothing, at the very same time your Numbers ffed and Clothed never higher, fewer Complaints were hardly known amongst us, the very faces of the Poor (Within Doors) have pronounced uncommon Satisfaction, and to comfort those without, a Constant Relief has been administred from time to time.

St. Sepulchre's, London Division<sup>1</sup>

the Workhouse...they found in a very Nasty Condition, the Stench hardly supportable, poor creatures almost naked, and the living go to bed with the Dead.

St. James, Westminster<sup>2</sup>

The quality of the provision for the poor in parochial workhouses was not uniform. In some houses the inmates received quite adequate food and housing and were even allowed an occasional luxury, while in other houses the conditions shocked even the callous sensibilities of the eighteenth century. As each parish went about establishing its workhouse, chose a building or design, appointed a master, and drew up rules and diet sheets, it did so with the expectation that conditions in the houses established would reflect criteria adopted by the vestry or workhouse committee. The regimen and diets drawn up for these houses provided a sparse but supportable life for the inmates, but the implementation of these criteria was left to managers and contractors who were, as we have seen, often corrupt and inefficient.

The quality of the provision set out by vestries and workhouse committees varied. The size of the parish, nature of the building occupied by the workhouse, and the intended ends for which the house was founded, all influenced the magnanimity with which those in charge of workhouses viewed the needs of the poor. In larger parishes it was

<sup>1</sup>G.L., MS 3227, Easter 1733.

<sup>2</sup>W.C.L., D1760, St. James, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1736-1750, p.149.

impossible to cater for the requirements of individual paupers; the size of the administrative structure necessary to run a large workhouse militated for the adoption of a strict regimen and unbending rules of behaviour for both inmates and managers. Alternatively, in small parishes the limited number of staff employed made it extremely difficult to enforce any but the simplest of rules. Whether the building used for a workhouse was specially built, or adapted from some other purpose, affected a parish's ability to enforce divisions between men and women, children and adults, the deserving and undeserving poor. Finally, the perception of the problem of poverty and of the role of the workhouse as seen by parish vestries influenced the provisions made for the poor in these institutions. Where the very existence of a house was thought to be a deterrent for those contemplating applying for relief, workhouse life could be allowed to be less rigorous, while where workhouses were seen as an economic way of providing for the poor emphasis was laid on providing only the barest necessities.

#### Section A: Diet, Rules and Regimen

Each parish, when setting up its workhouse, laid out, in greater or lesser detail, a system for the management of the lives of the inmates. The hours of rising and going to bed, of work and religious devotion as well as the content of each day's meals were described in sets of rules to be obeyed and enforced by the master of the house.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Examples of sets of rules and regimen can be found at D.R.O., Crediton, R4/2/Z/P011 V; D.R.O., Cruwys Morchard Parish Records, PX1 V, ff.20-22; D.R.O., Ilfracombe Parish 3253 A/PV1 V, 30 March 1741; G.L.R.O., DRO5/D4/1, Workhouse Committee Book, 1727-1734, South Mimms, St. Giles, Middlesex, 3 October 1730; W.C.L., D1759, St. James's, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1712-1736, pp.331-333, 443-456; W.C.L., E573 shelf 30, St. Margarets, Westminster, Workhouse Rules, Orders & Correspondence, 1746-1766; G.L., 5048, 25 January 1733/4; G.L., 869A, f.1; C.P.L., 1A1, St. Andrew Holborn & St. George the Martyr, Overseers of the Poor, Minutes of Various Meetings, 1731-1735, 14 March 1732/3; At a Meeting of the Gentlemen of the Vestry at the Work-house on Tuesday the Fifteenth Day of March 1726, for the better Government and Management of the Work-house [1727];

Although these documents do not accurately reflect the experiences of the paupers incarcerated in these institutions, they do indicate what vestrymen expected workhouse life to be like.

St. James's, Westminster, drew up a new set of rules for its workhouse in 1736; these rules, though more detailed, are typical of those drawn up in this period.<sup>1</sup> They form a detailed picture of what the vestry hoped would be the reality of workhouse life. The building used for the workhouse was purpose-built in 1726, and was described five years later as a 'Spacious Brickhouse'.<sup>2</sup> It was built in the burial ground belonging to the parish<sup>3</sup> and in the early 1730s housed approximately 300 paupers, who were divided among '8 Wards, viz. 4 for women, 2 for Men, 1 for Boys, and 1 for Girls, containing 18 Beds in each Ward'. There was also a 'Ward for Lying-in-Women, into which many are brought out of the Streets to be delivered. [and] Another Ward for an Infirmary'.<sup>4</sup>

Rules and Orders to be Observed by the Officers and Servants in St. Giles's Workhouse and by the Poor Therein [n.d.]; Account (1725), pp.6-8, 43-47, 55-56, 75-77, 83-85; Account (1732), pp.17-20, 29-31, 32-43, 46-47, 74-75, 83-85, 95-96, 107-109, 137-139, 175-177; Kentish Sources, The Poor, ed., Elizabeth Melling, pp.89-92; John Kennedy, A History of the Parish of Leyton, Essex (Leyton, 1894), pp.226-228; R.V.H. Burne, 'The Treatment of the Poor in the Eighteenth Century in Chester', Journal of the Chester and North Wales Architechural, Archaeological and Historic Society, 52, (1965), pp.46-47.

<sup>1</sup> See footnote 1 on the previous page for further examples of workhouse rules.

<sup>2</sup> Account (1732), p.54.

<sup>3</sup> When the committee appointed to examine sites for the workhouse proposed the 'upper Burying Ground' it was objected 'That the Pitts usually sunk there for the reception of Dead Bodys might prove offensive and unwholesome to the poor people'. Little notice was taken of these objections and the building went ahead in 1726. See W.C.L., D1759, St. James, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1712-1736, pp.273-274.

<sup>4</sup> Account (London, 1732), p.54.

There were fourteen members of staff, each receiving wages of between £5 and £40 a year, plus board. Besides the governor, who was paid £40 per annum, there was also a clerk, matron, assistant matron, cook, workmaster, workmistress, bread cutter, assistant bread cutter, laundry maid, porter, schoolmistress, matron of the infirmary and a general maid servant. The highest paid of these posts was that of clerk, which earned a salary of £20 a year.<sup>1</sup> The employees of the house were 'allowed a Convenient joint of Meat every Day for their Dinners' and dined 'immediately after the rest of the Family'.<sup>2</sup> Their responsibilities were strictly divided between several spheres of activity. The porter, for instance, had responsibility for only three things. He ensured that all the male poor rose at the appointed hour in the morning, that meal times were indicated by the ringing of a bell, and that no one entered or left the house without the permission of the governor.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the bread cutter was responsible for allocating 'all the Allowances of Bread and Cheese' and 'such Quantities of Beer and of Coals every day...as the Governor shall direct'.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond these paid servants there were also numerous positions filled by the paupers themselves. Each ward was looked after by a 'nurse' recruited from among the inmates, who was ordered to 'thoroughly Clean their respective Wards and Air the Rooms if the Weather permitts'; 'every Morning sweep the passages and Stairs leading from the floors of the respective wards, and on every Wednesday and

<sup>1</sup>W.C.L., D1759, St. James, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1712-1736, p.444.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.450.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp.446, 450, 456.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.456.

Saturday Scour the said Passages and stairs and make clean the Wainscot and Balasters belonging to the same.' The nurses were also required 'every morning Immediately after Prayers [to] make the Beds and at other times of the day mend the Bedding Clothes and Linnen, And take care of them and all other things belonging to the persons under their particular charge.'<sup>1</sup> They looked after the sick, fetched their meals for them, and notified the governor or apothecary of any assistance that might be required, and, for childdren between the ages of four and six, 'dress wash and Comb them every Morning and bring them Clean to Morning Prayers take Care of them at their meals and at night...put them to bed.'<sup>2</sup> For these services the nurses received no wages or special allowances, but the vestry did promise to reward 'extraordinary diligence' with a small gratuity.

Below this large management structure were the paupers themselves, who were employed by the workmaster, or looked after in the infirmary or lying-in ward. Their days were regimented and controlled by both the paid and pauper staff. Every morning they were awoken by the ringing of a bell by the porter of the house, at seven in the winter and six in the summer months. Forty-five minutes was then allowed for the inmates to get up, wash and dress themselves, before they had to be in the main hall of the workhouse for prayers read by the master. The only persons allowed to absent themselves from prayers were children under four and the bedridden.<sup>3</sup> Having read prayers the master then counted the poor in the hall, taking note of their condition - whether children, aged, or infirm - while the mistress went to the various wards to list those unable to attend. The paupers were then divided into 'messes' for the purpose of determining the amount of food

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.447.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.446.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp.447-448.

necessary for the day. Once this account had been taken the paupers were dismissed into the hands of the workmaster and mistress or, if children between the ages of four and six, sent to the schoolmistress for instruction. Other inmates were appointed to work in the laundry, while the nurses were sent back to the wards to make the beds and clean out the rooms.

Every morning the workmaster and mistress assigned 'every Poor Person a reasonable Task to Perform for a days Work in proportion to the partys ability or...join[ed] two or three or four in a piece of work as shall be most convenient.'<sup>1</sup> Under the eye of the workmaster and mistress the poor then started their day's labour, children over the age of six being sent for short periods throughout the day to the schoolmistress to be taught to read.

At nine in the summer, and as soon as possible after prayers in the winter, breakfast was served. A bell was rung by the porter to summon the inmates, and the men and boys over six then proceeded to the 'mens hall' where they were 'regularly placed at tables'. Likewise, the women, girls and children under six went to the 'womens Hall', where they were 'served with their messes in a decent Manner'. The master was present throughout the meal, and saw to it that everyone was there and maintained good order: any pauper absenting himself without permission being denied one meal on the first occasion. Half an hour was allowed for breakfast, which conformed to one of three menus depending on the day of the week. On Sunday each person above six years old received five ounces of bread and a pint of beer; on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, a pint of beef broth and two and a half ounces of bread; and on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, a pint of milk porridge and two and a half ounces of bread.<sup>2</sup> While breakfast was in progress

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p.454.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp.448-449.

the mistress toured the house seeing to it that bedridden inmates received their meals and were attended to by the nurses.

After breakfast everyone returned to work until, at one in the afternoon, the dinner bell was rung. Once again the poor trooped into the halls and a meal was served under the direction of the master. This was the main meal of the day and was slightly more varied than was breakfast. On Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, the poor were served ten ounces of boiled beef, five ounces of bread and one pint of beer. On Mondays each adult pauper received a pint of pease pudding; on Wednesdays, a pint of rice milk; on Fridays, a pint of frumenty; and on Saturdays a pound of plum pudding and a pint of beer. An hour was allowed for dinner, after which the poor went back to work, until at least six during the winter months, and until supper was served at seven during the summer. During the winter an hour was allowed between the end of the working day and supper, during which time the inmates were left to their own devices.

Supper was the least substantial and most monotonous meal of the day. On Sundays each pauper received five ounces of bread, two ounces of cheese and a pint of beer, and, during the rest of the week, four ounces of bread, one and a half ounces of cheese and half a pint of beer. No particular time limit was set on the evening meal, though it had to be finished by approximately half past eight, when the master read evening prayers, sending the inmates to bed at nine o'clock.

The unvaried routine described above was put into effect on only five days a week. On Saturdays the paupers were allowed to cease work at five in the afternoon during the summer and at three in winter. On Sundays all work stopped and the day was partially filled with religious devotions. After breakfast on Sundays it was the governor's duty to see that 'the officers of the Workhouse and Likewise the poor not being Dissenters from the Church do attend constantly and Reverently on Divine Service'. After the morning service the governor

was allowed to 'suffer those who desire it to go abroad' as long as no one was discovered using this time and freedom in begging or in becoming 'disordered in Liquor'. The paupers had to return to the house by half past eight in the evening, and were liable to lose their right to go abroad on Sunday for up to three months for any breach of the governor's standards of behaviour. Eight days a year were reserved as holidays. 'Good Fridays Christmas Day and the two next Days after it and the Monday and Tuesday in Easter and Whitsun week' were set aside and no work was done.<sup>1</sup>

This monotonous, if not unkind, regimen was not in itself sufficient to cope with the vagaries of workhouse life. The treatment of the sick, the pregnant, the very old and very young required further rules. The master was also given some latitude in both the punishment and reward of individuals. The infirmary of St. James's workhouse was largely exempt from the orders enforced in the rest of the house, being under the authority of the surgeon, apothecary and mistress of the infirmary, and depending on the governor primarily for the supply of fresh linen and clothes, and of cooked meals. Similarly the hours of work for the inmates employed in the kitchen and laundry were determined by the members of staff directly responsible - the cook and laundry maid. There were simply too many people in the house, with too many differences in health and ability, to expect any set regimen to be applicable to all. But the workhouse committee believed the system described above could be used to regulate the lives of the majority of inmates.

The conditions described by the rules of St. James's workhouse were extremely good. The ability to go out of the house on Sundays, and the quality of the diet, created better conditions than were suffered in other early parochial houses. In particular, the meals

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp.454, 455-456.

provided were both varied and made up of extremely filling ingredients. The plum pudding served the inmates each Saturday was made according to the following recipe:

Plumb Pudding That to make sixteen plumb puddings there be put 15l. suet 15q. Raisins Eighteen quarts of Milk two Bushels and one peck of Flower three Qrs of a pound of Rice and one pound of salt each of which Puddings is to be divided for Men and Women into Sixteen parts.<sup>1</sup>

The distinguishing feature of the set of rules adopted by the workhouse committee of St. James's was the degree of regimentation it imposed on both the inmates and staff of the workhouse. The daily routine described above was not insupportably odious, nor could the ideal conditions presumed by the workhouse committee when drawing up the rules be seen as particularly bad. However, the design of the house and number of staff both required and allowed a degree of organisation impossible to achieve within smaller houses.

The workhouse belonging to the parish of Ilfracombe in Devon is a good example of a smaller institution. Between 1742 and 1750 the highest number of paupers ever lodged in the house was 22, and more typically there were between 10 and 16 inmates.<sup>2</sup> The master, or after 1746 the mistress, was the only paid employee of the house, earning at various times, depending on the condition of the paupers maintained, between £6 6s. and £8 a year.<sup>3</sup>

The rules laid out by Ilfracombe's vestry for the use of the master were simple and direct, and reflect some of the problems faced by vestries attempting to create an institutional environment for the poor on this minute scale. No particular weekly diet was recommended,

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.449.

<sup>2</sup> D.R.O., Ilfracombe Parish, 3253 A/PV1 V; see monthly accounts for numbers in the workhouse, 25 December 1742, 3 April 1743.

<sup>3</sup> In 1741 John Somers was elected master of the workhouse. He was allowed a salary of £8 per annum during the life of George Manley, an inmate, and £7 per annum after Manley's death. D.R.O., Ilfracombe Parish, 3253 A/PV1 V, 30 November 1741.

nor was it expected that the poor maintained in the house would work to a regular schedule. Indeed, the house seems to have been viewed as a general parish institution on to which many of the duties of parish government not normally associated with workhouses could be loaded. It served as a gaol, the constable being directed, upon 'apprehending any person or persons that shall be deemed guilty of having committed any felonious Actions [to] take 'em to the Workhouse till such Time as they can conveniently carry 'em before a Justice of Peace as will ease the Parish Considerably of the Charges it has hitherto been at by carrying such persons to Publick houses.' Similarly, it was directed that 'all persons that take or kill such vermin as there's a reward allowed by the Parish for Destroying of in the Parish, to bring such Vermin to the Workhouse and deliver in dead or alive to the Governour, and the Governour to take down in writing the Persons name that brought such Vermin to the Workhouse...'<sup>1</sup>

The rules laid out for the use of the master were primarily concerned with the buying in of provisions and the control of the numbers being relieved from the house. It was assumed that the inmates would be adequately looked after and kept at work without a set regimen. Indeed, the main concern of the vestry in drawing up the rules seems to have been to prevent parish officers imposing on the parish in the supply of provisions to the house. In 1741 the vestry ordered that when the master bought in 'extraordinary necessaries such as Clothes', he should 'apply without favour and affection to such persons as can and will supply him best & cheapest...' Similarly, the vestry complained that 'it has been known that Officers have been imposed on by persons that have applyed to 'em for relief...' and suggested that for the future officers 'direct or Order 'em to the Workhouse and the Governour set 'em to work...and the Sunday following

<sup>1</sup>D.R.O., Ilfracombe Parish, 3253 A/PV1 V, 30 March 1741.

the officer to give notice for a Call', so that the vestry could review the right of the pauper involved to relief from the parish.<sup>1</sup>

The expectations of the vestries of St. James's and Ilfracombe were at wide variance. Ilfracombe could not impose a set of rules of the type used at St. James's, simply because of the size of the houses involved and the role of each, and hence the conditions the vestries hoped to create in these institutions were widely different.

Between these two extremes were numerous houses the rules of which expressed an intermediate degree of control: the rules were as detailed as possible, but could not impose the kind of organisation possible in the large workhouses of Westminster.

The house belonging to the parish of Cullompton in Devon housed between seventy and eighty paupers.<sup>2</sup> The house was founded in 1739, and a set of rules was drawn up in February 1746/7. These rules reflect the conditions the vestry expected to prevail in the house. However, they also indicate the level of control this medium-sized parish could expect to have over the daily lives of the poor. A regimen similar to that imposed at St. James's, Westminster, was sketched out in the rules. At Cullompton the inmates were to 'Rise in the Summer at 5 o'Clock in the Morning and to go to Bed at 9 o'Clock, at Night from Lady Day to Michaelmas, and in the Winter to Rise By 8 o'Clock...and to go to Bed by 7 or 8 o'Clock at the Farthest to Save ffire and Candles'. The hours of work were determined by the master; each inmate was ordered to 'work orderly at Such Business, and So many Hours as the Governor Shall Appoint to Each of them respectively.'<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the twenty-two rules which made up the orders for Cullompton's house, the master and mistress - the two paid employees -

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 30 March 1741.

<sup>2</sup>D.R.O., Cullompton, 2404 A/PV1 V, pp.109-110, 172.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp.114, 116.

were given directions which allowed a large degree of leeway. For instance, the rules directed that 'the Master or Mistress do Teach or Cause to be Taught the Children their Books', but no hours were set for this activity, nor were instructions on who or what should be taught included in the directions. Similarly, it was ordered 'that in the day time' the mistress see that the children 'make and mend their Linnen and Cloaths to keep themselves decent & Clean'.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the rules are more explicit. For instance, it was ordered that 'all the able Poor shall go to the Parish Church...twice every Sunday or Lords Day and Come directly home to the House...' But the degree of regimentation which could be imposed by the vestry was severely limited. The highly organised system of wards in use at St. James's could not be imposed at Cullompton, and while nurses were appointed from among the inmates to look after the sick and children, they were not given responsibility for a specific number of paupers.

Each set of workhouse rules was slightly different. Each reflected both the conditions the vestries hoped would prevail in the houses, and the degree of regimentation which it was felt could be imposed upon both staff and inmates. The regimen and diets drawn up for workhouses were only ideals, which went only a short way towards determining the experience of the inmates. They were a product of the world of pamphlet writers and social theorists, and were of limited relevance when ordering the lives of workhouse masters and inmates.

#### Section B: Extremes in Workhouse Conditions

Beneath the generally well-organised surface of workhouse administration was a suppurating mass of confused humanity. The old, the weak and very young were thrown together in a confusion of communicable diseases and volatile personalities. It was literally

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp.115, 116.

impossible to impose the kind of order envisioned by the founders of St. James's workhouse upon the variety of inmates the house was meant to hold. Hence to determine more precisely the type of life experienced by workhouse inmates we have to turn away from the systems of administration laid out by vestries to the more awkward, but detailed, evidence provided by inventories, receipts and medical reports.

Whereas the differences in workhouse provision reflected in sets of rules and regimen fall within a narrow band of possible conditions, the reality of workhouse life reflected in other sources was much more varied. In some houses the lives of the inmates were practically insupportable. In at least one London house, St. Margaret's, Westminster, infant mortality rates were so high the parish was obliged to send all the infant inmates to nurses in the country. Out of 106 children either born in the house or admitted before the age of twenty months between 1746 and 1750, seven were alive and still in the workhouse in 1750, sixteen had been discharged, and the remaining 83 were dead.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, workhouse life could be much easier and healthier than indicated by the self-conscious rules drawn up by vestries. Small luxuries such as tobacco and various summer fruits were often supplied to the inmates, although tobacco was normally proscribed by workhouse rules, and fruit never appeared as an item on the weekly diet sheets. The actual conditions in these houses depended far more on the humanity and effectiveness of masters and staff than they did on the views of vestrymen and overseers.

In badly managed houses conditions could be intolerable. Vermin, disease and squalor flourished when houses were allowed to run down. In 1733 the workhouse belonging to St. Mary's, Whitechapel, was described in a report to the House of Commons:

<sup>1</sup>W.C.L., E2420 shelf 38, St. Margarets, Westminster, Orders of Vestry, 1738-1755, pp.249-252.

There is a Workhouse in the Parish, which will contain 200 Poor; but is situated in a Back Street adjoining to the White-lead House, and is a dirty Place, there being no Yard, or any Room to erect a Warehouse to put Goods in....at present, there are about 30 Poor therein, who are not Kept to Work, but go<sup>1</sup> and come as they please, get drunk, and are disorderly...

At St. Mary's, Whitechapel, the house was simply allowed to fall into disarray. Elsewhere bad conditions could be traced directly to workhouse masters and managers. The house belonging to St. Giles-in-the-Fields, London, was the subject of a pamphlet and a broadside as well as an enquiry by local Justices in 1731. The pamphlet, The Workhouse Cruelty, Workhouses turned Gaols, and Gaolers Executioners printed for the 'Christian love-poor', described in detail the conditions then prevalent in the house and the immense cruelty of the staff and in particular the master, Matthew Marryott. Among several examples of such treatment given in the pamphlet were the following:

One Sarah Jones, who once kept a good House in the Parish of St. Gile's, but being reduced was obliged to go into the Workhouse: This Woman happen'd to disoblige M---th and was thereupon ordered into the Dark Hold where she lay upwards of three Weeks, and then Died (as several say) starved to Death she having been dead some days before Discovered...Her head was as soft as Pap, and one of her Ears stript off...

About the same time another Woman jumped out of the Window for Hunger, she being locked close in a room without Victuals.

About the same time they got another woman in the Workhouse and took away her money, upwards of three Pounds, and good Cloaths, all which they took from her, and she died next Day with Grief...

A little after Nurse Tabb found another Woman which lay dead, supposed to be starved to Death.

About that time Nurse R-d-g understanding that a Child was to have been made an Anatomy of, after their Common Custom...Nurse R-d-g aforesaid said she'd acquaint Justice Milner of it, upon which she was sent for by M---th, who Kicked her for it, and ordered the Doors to be Shut, and threatened her with the Hold, but finding she had friends, M---th gave her a Crown to hold her tongue, and turned her out.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J.H.C., xxii, 270; quoted in Marshall, The English Poor, p.143.

<sup>2</sup> The Workhouse Cruelty, Workhouses turn'd Gaols, And Gaolers Executioners. Though this pamphlet states that 'Christian love-poor' produced it I have been unable to trace this group.

The truth of the claims made in this pamphlet are suspect. An autopsy was performed in September 1731 on the corpse of one woman, Mary Whistle, whom the pamphlet claimed died in the dark hold of St. Giles's house from a combination of starvation and being eaten alive by vermin. The two doctors, two surgeons and apothecary who performed the autopsy described the body thus:

The Body as to its external appearance was in a Natural full state and not in the least Emaciated. The Body Cutting at least two Inches of fatt the Contents of the Belly in a very good State, the Breast in a Healthy condition likewise.

The autopsy committee concluded that Mary Whistle had died as a result of several small tumours lodged in the base of her brain, and that she had not been the object of any maltreatment whatsoever. The committee also examined the house:

We then viewed the Apothecaries shop which was furnished with good medicines both druggs & compounds. We then went into the pantry and observed the Bread & Cheese to be very good & great plenty. We likewise viewed the hole (as they call it) where she Lay & think it a Clean place being free from Damps or any Offensive Smell.<sup>1</sup>

The reality of St. Giles's house was probably somewhere between the reports made in The Workhouse Cruelty and by the autopsy committee. It is certainly unlikely that anyone was allowed literally to starve to death. But medical reports from other houses indicate how easily the cramped conditions in many houses could lead to the accumulation of filth and spread of disease. St. James's workhouse, despite the high degree of regimentation recommended by the rules, became, in the early 1740s, a breeding ground for an unidentified 'scorbutic distemper'. One of the overseers of the poor decribed the illness in 1741:

there is one great misfortune attends the house and Occasions much expence, to remedy which Endeavours have been used though with very little Success, that is a Scorbutick distemper which hardly any young fresh persons escape that go to the house: It is not allowed to be the Itch, though more shocking to look at and what makes the misery the greater is, that great Numbers of persons servants out of place, who go in ill of Fevers &c. that might be cured soon were they

<sup>1</sup>Brit. Lib., Sloane MS 4078, f.259.

not to catch this distemper, are prevented by it from being Discharged for some time, and when they are discharged it frequently happens they are not quite well, the Distemper being so inveterate and then nobody will Employ them; so that they pine and Starve about the Streets, till they are almost eaten up of it, and frequently die a lingering Miserable death...<sup>1</sup>

Scabies, vermin of various kinds, and smallpox could ravage a workhouse population. During the month of January, 1741 nearly a quarter of the inmates of Leeds workhouse died.<sup>2</sup> The ubiquity of lice and fleas was a particular problem for the managers of these houses. Washing down the house with hot lime or aquafortis, shaving the heads of inmates, and baking infested clothes in specially built ovens were among the techniques used to control these insects.<sup>3</sup> These techniques were not completely effective. In 1727 the overseers of St. Sepulchre, London Division, reported that the problem of lice was 'a growing evil' for the workhouse, and recommended that a separate infirmary be built in which to isolate inmates with either lice or the itch.<sup>4</sup> Three years later the problem was still sufficiently serious for an oven to be built within the workhouse compound for baking the clothes of infected inmates,<sup>5</sup> and in 1738 complaint was made to the Lord Mayor of London that 'Lice prevails much among the poor people in this house'.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the techniques used to control lice seem to have been so

<sup>1</sup>W.C.L., D1760, St. James, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1736-1750, pp.149-150.

<sup>2</sup>Philip W. Anderson, 'The Leeds Workhouse Under the Old Poor Law, 1726-1844' (Univ. of Leeds, M.A. thesis, 1977), p.48.

<sup>3</sup>for examples see G.L.R.O., St. John at Hackney, P79/JN1/160, 6 June 1751; W.C.L., C869, St. George Hanover Square, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1726-1729, p.65; W.C.L., C871, St. George Hanover Square, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1731-1732, p.67; W.C.L., E2634 shelf 28, St. Margarets, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1730-1736, pp.164, 304; G.L., MS 8690, 8 January 1735/6.

<sup>4</sup>G.L., MS 3137/1, p..29-30.

<sup>5</sup>G.L., MS 3137/3, p.15.

<sup>6</sup>G.L., MS 3137/5, p.82.

ineffective that in 1731 the parish had to hire a baker to disinfect the oven used to bake lousy clothes.<sup>1</sup>

The itch or scabies was probably the most common infectious disease afflicting workhouse inmates. In 1734 152 sick paupers passed through the infirmary belonging to St. Margaret's, Westminster's workhouse, of whom 59 were diagnosed as suffering from the itch, 56 of fevers, 8 of rheumatism, 6 of agues, 6 of broken bones, 6 of wounds, 6 of the pox, and 3 of dropsy.<sup>2</sup> Summer was a particularly bad time for the itch, while in the winter undifferentiated fevers became more common. The only means available to workhouse managers for the control of the itch was the isolation of those suffering from it. But as most small houses did not have a separate infirmary, and even the largest houses had no isolation ward, this particular disease was never adequately dealt with.

The constant threat of infectious diseases and infestation by vermin were only two of the problems faced by paupers. Of perhaps greater danger to the inmates' well-being was the possibility of being punished for infractions of workhouse rules. The masters of parish workhouses were not authorised to inflict corporal punishment upon the inmates. Unlike the Corporations of the Poor, vestries and workhouse committees did not have any responsibility for the administration of the law. So as to circumvent this lack of authority several forms of punishment were devised which depended upon confinement and deprivation for their effectiveness, the most common of which was the 'dark hole'. Usually a small room, just too small either to stand or lie in, was constructed in which inmates were confined for hours or days at a time, being fed bread and water through the grate. In 1739 the vestry of St.

<sup>1</sup>G.L., MS 3220/1, p.19.

<sup>2</sup>W.C.L., E2634 shelf 28, St. Margarets Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1730-1736, pp.242-243.

Olave's Hart Street, London, ordered that 'a small place be forthwith erected, in some convenient part of the Yard, as well for a Repository for the Dead, as for a convenient place, for the better security and confinement of such persons as may be so unfortunate to lose their senses, and...Also for confining disorderly & Unruly Persons, who shall be Guilty of Riots & disturb the Peace of this House, by Cursing & Swearing.'<sup>1</sup> The length of time an inmate spent in a dark hole was left entirely to the discretion of the master. The Workhouse Cruelty claimed that Mary Whistle was incarcerated for eleven weeks, but the longest stay that can be positively identified was three days. In 1735 an inmate of the house belonging to St. George's, Hanover Square, Westminster, Anne Gray, was sentenced to 'be confined to the Dark Hole for the Space of Three Days at least & be kept upon Bread & Water.'<sup>2</sup> In smaller houses the provision of a dark hole was impractical, and other, cheaper forms of punishment were devised. At the workhouse belonging to the combined parishes of St. Mary le Bow, St. Pancras Soper Lane and All Hallows Honey Lane, London, inmates were punished by being forced to wear a large 'clog' which restricted movement, while in 1733 the workhouse committee ordered 'that the Churchwarden be directed to buy a Logg Chain & Lock' for the same purpose.<sup>3</sup>

The punishments described above were generally reserved for offences such as refusing to work, swearing and becoming intoxicated. For lesser offences one might lose a meal or the privilege of going out on Sundays; while for more serious crimes, such as embezzlement, inmates were sent to the house of correction. However, there were seldom any checks on how these punishments were inflicted or for what crimes. The master was invariably allowed to carry out punishments

<sup>1</sup>G.L., MS 869A, f.16.

<sup>2</sup>W.C.L., C873, St. George Hanover Square, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1734-1736, p.237.

<sup>3</sup>G.L., MS 5048, 26 December 1733, 22 February 1733/4.

immediately - the workhouse committee sometimes being asked to confirm the master's judgement at its next meeting, but seldom initiating punishments itself.

The power of the master to mete out punishments as well as over the day-to-day lives of inmates made it very difficult for paupers to complain about conditions in the house. If a complaint was brought to the workhouse committee and was rejected, the pauper involved was likely to find himself severely punished. Vestries and workhouse committees often made pious announcements about the sympathy with which complaints would be heard, but more often than not the evidence of inmates was discounted as being unreliable. At the house belonging to St. Sepulchre's, London Division, 'a paper writ by Mr. John Stratton...[was] hung up in the Hall that those People who have any complaint to make against either Master or Mistress that they do it the next Committee if possible and that they shall always be admitted without any Repulse.'<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the house belonging to St. Olave Hart Street, London, was regularly inspected by the workhouse committee. In 1745 the committee visited to 'enquire into the conduct & behaviour of the master & mistress relating to the poor, to know of any complaints'; the master and mistress were ordered to withdraw, and 'all the poor called in & Examined'.<sup>2</sup> These seemingly fair-minded attempts to allow paupers to complain about bad conditions concealed the pitfalls faced by inmates attempting to make their views known. At St. Sepulchre's, Mary Matron complained that 'the old women were killed in this house by dozens & ...she was starved for want'. The response of the committee to these complaints did not reflect the sympathy to which it pretended. 'She was called in and Reprimanded &...she was ordered to be put into the cell till tomorrow noon & then to be

<sup>1</sup>G.L., MS 3137/3, p.509.

<sup>2</sup>G.L., MS 869A, f.60.

discharged the house.'<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in 1732 Sarah Biby came to St. Sepulchre's workhouse committee to report:

that on the Tuesday before Whitsuntide she came down in the Dusk of the Evening in the kitchen to heat some tea for her child she satt down by the fire side & was there some time before she was perceived to be there by Mrs. Clements & Mrs. King & the said Biby Saith she is ready to make oath that she...did then see Mrs. Clement put into a Bag in Order to carry out of the house the following provisions viz. a piece of Beef a Loaf a third part of a Cheese and a pan with about two pound of Butter in it.<sup>2</sup>

For her trouble Sarah Biby was discharged from the house on the grounds that she had a bad character and her testimony could not be trusted.

At the house belonging to St. John at Hackney the word of an inmate was set against that of the mistress. Elizabeth Chandles complained 'that the Bread is Stale and the Butter and cheese provided by [the mistress]...for the people in this house is bad and not fit to be eaten.' The mistress was examined 'and produced a Sample of Each of them: By which it appeared to the Committee...that the said Bread Butter and Cheese were all of them good in the several kinds'. The committee then decided that Elizabeth Chandles had been 'behaving to the Committee and the...[mistress] in a very insolent Manner', for which behaviour she was, 'forthwith discharged out of the House.'<sup>3</sup>

The rather sordid underside of workhouse life was not reflected in the rules and administrative systems drawn up by vestries and workhouse committees. It was the result of the variety of types of paupers for whom it was hoped workhouses would cater. Communicable diseases and vermin naturally flourished in the cramped conditions which characterised many workhouses, while the close proximity of mothers, children, the aged, infirm and lunatic almost necessarily led to conflict and disorder. The designers of workhouse systems - the parish

<sup>1</sup>G.L., MS 3137/2, p.18.

<sup>2</sup>G.L., MS 3137/3, p.340.

<sup>3</sup>G.L.R.O., St. John at Hackney, P79/JN1/160, 12 January 1754.

worthies who drew up the rules - had to leave the implementation of those rules to the master and his staff, who, as we have seen, were often untrained and incompetent, and therefore, at one extreme, there existed workhouses in which the conditions were practically insupportable, where mortality rates were alarmingly high, and wherein paupers were subject to the whims and caprices of cruel masters and malicious mistresses. However, workhouses cannot be judged solely on the basis of the worst examples. There were other houses in which the experience of the inmates was, if anything, better than that depicted in the regimen, where the ideal beloved of pamphlet writers, of workhouse populations becoming a 'family' in which the members helped one another, was a possibility if not a reality.

The weekly diets, harsh divisions between men and women and the regimented hours of work and labour were, in some houses, modified and liberalised to meet the needs and desires of individual inmates. Tobacco, fresh fruit, tea, and chambers for married couples were all provided in some houses. The provision of these luxuries was rare. Indeed, their provision represents as much of an extreme in workhouse care as the brutality exercised at St. Giles's and described in The Workhouse Cruelty, but they were common enough in some houses to make life for the inmates in them as good, if not better, than that experienced by the out-poor.

If the master was amenable, workhouse regimen could be extremely flexible. In some localities inmates were allowed to take their meals in the house while continuing to live independently, or encouraged to work for their own profit in casual labour. Elsewhere, some paupers were allowed to keep their own clothes and goods and given individual apartments in the house.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the diet of the house was

<sup>1</sup>For example see G.L., MS 3137/3, p.115; G.L., MS 3149/5, p.39; W.C.L., E573 shelf 30, St. Margarets Westminster, Workhouse Rules, Orders & Correspondence, 1746-1766, see item 2 of the rules; G.L., MS 8690, 4 August 1738; H.L.S., P/M/1, St. Marys, Stoke Newington, Vestry Minutes, 1681-1743, p.384.

occasionally changed at the request of the inmates, and tobacco distributed on a weekly basis. These small freedoms and allowances never appeared among the prohibitions and orders which made up workhouse rules. However, they could be obtained in some houses run by sympathetic masters.

The supplies ordered for the use of the house belonging to St. Mary High Street, Putney, reflect an extremely varied diet. Meat of some kind was ordered every other day, along with raisins, rice and sugar. A regular supply of ginger and nutmeg also came into the house and bushels of turnips, plums and unidentified seasonal fruit. 1s. 1/4d. worth of tobacco was ordered for the use of the inmates every week. The inclusion in the receipts for this house of ginger, nutmeg and plums is of particular interest as none of the recipes available for workhouse meals mention any of these ingredients.<sup>1</sup>

The diet at St. Mary's was unusual, but special dietary provisions were made in several houses, particularly as treats for holidays. The inmates of the house belonging to St. Mary le Bow were served roast beef and plum pudding each Christmas,<sup>2</sup> while for dinner on Easter Sunday the paupers of St. Sepulchre's, London Division, had 'a Calf of 13 or 14 Stone...and Plumb Pudding'; hasty pudding being served on the following Saturday.<sup>3</sup> Bequests were also occasionally dedicated to varying the diet of workhouse inmates. The inmates of St. Andrew Holborn and St. George the Martyr were feted by Stephen Beckingham who gave 40s. 'to the poor of the House to be spent in Roast Beef baked

<sup>1</sup>See G.L.R.O., P95/MRY1/253/1-73, Workhouse Receipts, 1735-1736, St. Mary Highstreet, Putney, Wandsworth; G.L.R.O., P95/MRY1/254/1-89, Workhouse Receipts, 1737-1738, St. Mary Highstreet, Putney, Wandsworth.

<sup>2</sup>G.L., MS 5048, 21 December 1733.

<sup>3</sup>G.L., MS 3137/4, 22 April 1736.

Plumb pudding & Ale on Wednesday the 20th day of August.'<sup>1</sup> Similarly, paupers were occasionally allowed to request specific changes in diet. At the house belonging to the Liberty of the Roles the workhouse committee had no qualms about complying with the desire of several inmates for substituting 'Puddings instead of Dumplings & Bread Butter &c instead of Peas Porridge'.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, at St. Sepulchre's, London Division, in 1745, 'The Poor...apply'd that they might have Beans and Bacon for Dinner once more this Season' to which request the committee complied.<sup>3</sup>

Diet was only one area in which a degree of latitude can be found. Of greater importance to both inmates and managers was the provision of tobacco. In most houses smoking was strictly forbidden. At St. Margaret's, Westminster, the workhouse committee decided in 1728 that:

Whereas Complaint hath been now made to the Board That several of the poor people belonging to the house made it a Custome to Smoke Tobacco...to the great Endangering the house & family by Fire, Therefore for the preventing the dangerous consequences which may arise from such evil & bad practices, It is now Ordered That from Henceforward if any person shall be found offending by Smoking Tobacco...such person shall for every such Offence be Comitted to the House of Correction thereto to be kept to hard Labour and every other person...privy thereunto & not discovering the same shall be punished in such sort as this Board shall think fit...<sup>4</sup>

Similarly at St. Ann's Blackfriars in 1734 the workhouse committee determined 'That no person...be Suffer'd to Smoak Tobacco or other herbs in any Room within the Workhouse and upon such Offence the Offenders be debarred his or her Meals for that Day.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>C.P.L., 1A1, St. Andrew Holborn & St. George the Martyr, Overseers of the Poor, Minutes of Various Meetings, 1731-1735, 4 June 1735 (special sessions).

<sup>2</sup>W.C.L., K324, Precinct of the Savoy, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1737-1744, 2 June 1740.

<sup>3</sup>G.L., MS 3137/7, p.131.

<sup>4</sup>W.C.L., E2633 shelf 28, St. Margarets, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1727-1730, 2 May 1728.

<sup>5</sup>G.L., MS 8690, 25 July 1734.

Other houses tolerated or even encouraged smoking. At St. Sepulchre's, London Division, a pragmatic view was taken. 'Elizabeth Elks having quitted the house ever since the 15th Instant because she could not be allowed to Smoke Tobacco appeared & desired to be admitted in again & Indulged in Smoking Tobacco. She was admitted and ordered to Smoke in an Evening only.'<sup>1</sup> By 1731 St. Sepulchre's was actually giving out an allowance of tobacco which the committee the threatened to withdraw from anyone found in possession of gin.<sup>2</sup> Occasionally even the most sympathetic workhouse master or committee found smoking getting out of hand. At the house belonging to South Mimms, Middlesex:

The trustees looking into the Working Rome & finding there a great disorder by the people Smoaking to backo And the wheles standing all still the while which apone consideration of the ill conveniency of it the Trustees order that there shold be no more tobacko smokt in the Working Rome apone no pretence what ever but to encourage them in their work thay have ordered them one shilling worth of to backo every month to be delivered to the Master & he to give them a pipe every night...after they have left work.<sup>3</sup>

Smoking was a small luxury which made workhouse life marginally more tolerable. However, it did not mark the extent of latitude allowed by some committees and masters. There was one other luxury allowed in some parishes which more fundamentally affected the inmates experience of the workhouse: the freedom to come and go with the minimum of constraint.

Almost every set of rules drawn up for a workhouse included provisions designed to prevent inmates absenting themselves from the house without permission. Indeed, control over the free movement of paupers into and out of the house comprised one of the most powerful constraints available to workhouse administrators. Denial of the privilege to leave the house was often used as a punishment. At St.

<sup>1</sup>G.L., MS 3137/1, p.40.

<sup>2</sup>G.L., MS 3137/3, p.283.

<sup>3</sup>G.L.R.O., DR05/D4/1, Workhouse Committee Book, 1727-1734, South Mimms, St. Giles, Middlesex, 7 July 1731.

Sepulchre's, London Division, 'W<sup>m</sup> Leveridge was accused of coming home drunk, and abus[ing]...the Mistress'. The punishment enforced on him by the workhouse committee entailed him being denied permission to leave the house for twelve months.<sup>1</sup> The orders for these houses did not generally enforce a complete ban on all freedom of movement. Paupers were regularly conducted to church on Sundays, and in approximately half the houses were allowed to spend Sunday afternoon out of the house; but in every instance paupers were denied free movement for the rest of the week. These bans and provisions were seldom effective, and only occasionally reflected the degree of repression and control exercised over workhouse inmates. Particularly in the breach of these rules, we can see the extent of freedom some inmates were allowed.

Seven years after William Leveridge was punished, the workhouse committee of St. Sepulchre's was forced to reprimand Mr. Treasurer Drinkwater, and order that for the future he, 'not...give a General Leave to all the People of the House to go out on any Publick Holiday, but only so many as he shall think proper to Insert in a List for that Purpose.'<sup>2</sup> Workhouse committees were regularly forced to reprimand masters for the freedom of movement they allowed inmates. At Collumpton in Devon, the workhouse committee complained in 1748 that:

We find that notwithstanding the Severall Orders of Vestry to the Contrary the Poor People in the Workhouse have been permitted to go out of the House and idle about the Streets, and by that means have been guilty of Several irregularitys - We are of Opinion that this should be effectually prevented and for that purpose, that the Governor or his Wife should keep the Key of the Gate, and that the Gate should not be Open'd on any pretence whatsoever without their Permission.<sup>3</sup>

Allowing inmates freedom to leave the workhouse was felt both to bring

<sup>1</sup>G.L., MS 3220/1, 4 September 1739.

<sup>2</sup>G.L., MS 3137/7, p.264.

<sup>3</sup>D.R.O., 2404 A/PV1 V, Cullompton, Devon, Vestry Minutes, 1732-1756, p.164.

the workhouse into disrepute and to encourage the poor to beg and drink. In 1728 John Pearl was denied the right to leave the house without the written permission of three trustees, when it was reported to the workhouse board that Pearl 'Rasd a Report & tells the pepell that the Master of the hows Misuse the Children',<sup>1</sup> while at St. Olave Hart Street, London, the workhouse committee complained in 1748:

That the Poor People in this House, make it a Frequent Practice of Petitioning the Committee...for Leave to go Out to seek after Places, in Order for there Discharge; and very often make a Bad use, and Abuse of the Lenity shew'd them, by Staying out all Day, and frequently coming home very Drunk and Abusive, being a bad precedent and example to others.<sup>2</sup>

The frequency of complaints about how workhouse inmates spent their time abroad reflects the level of freedom allowed to them. Coming back to the house drunk or spending whole nights away, begging and idling in the streets, were frequently complained of in some localities. These complaints reflect only a small proportion of both the incidents of misbehaviour by inmates while abroad, and the amount of time outside the house that must have been allowed to paupers. Indeed, the strict prohibition on leaving the houses incorporated in most sets of rules seems rarely to have been translated into practice. Moreover, while numerous inmates were punished for leaving the houses without permission, there must have been an even larger number who succeeded in avoiding the consequences of these prohibitions.

It is impossible to identify with any certainty which houses were more lenient or severe in this area. Each had rules which prohibited inmates from leaving the house without permission, and at each, incidents involving the misbehaviour of inmates while abroad can be identified. In the last resort it was the humanity of the master which determined who would be punished for this type of offence, and it must

<sup>1</sup>G.L.R.O., DR05/D4/1, Workhouse Committee Book, 1727-1734, South Mimms, St. Giles, Middlesex, 30 November 1728.

<sup>2</sup>G.L., MS 869A, f.89.

be assumed that where other types of luxuries were allowed greater leniency in this sphere might also be expected.

Across the whole range of possible workhouse conditions, from the foul and brutal to the pleasant, it was primarily the master who determined the pattern of the lives of the inmates. Workhouse committees drew up rules and occasionally enforced them upon individuals. But these committees were dependent upon the master and his staff for knowledge of what occurred in the house, and it was to the master that committees turned when attempting to create specific conditions in these houses.

## CHAPTER 7: THE POOR

That about 14 dayes agoe they open'd their House of Maintenance for the poor of that Town [Leeds], and...it was with great reluctance the poor came into it, few of them without Tears.<sup>1</sup>

The poor detested workhouses. Even when conditions in these houses were relatively good they made every endeavour to avoid becoming inmates. In every case the number of people receiving relief from the parish dropped dramatically on the opening of a workhouse. However, these institutions were a necessary resource for the poor. They provided a maintenance when the demands created by accident, unemployment or illness outstripped the ability of neighbours and friends to support the individual involved. The parish pension performed a similar function, but the flexibility of the pension and the ability of the poor to put together a living from several different sources, the pension being only one, allowed paupers to use out-relief more frequently and imaginatively than they could use a workhouse provision. The difference between a parish pension and a workhouse was that the former could be taken up at any of several points in the downward spiral of poverty, while the uses of the latter were largely restricted to the support of those who had already reached bottom: the indigent, terminally ill and socially unacceptable. In localities where the workhouse was used only as a way of supplementing out-pensions the establishment of a house actually increased the number of ways paupers could use parish relief, but where a workhouse test was imposed these choices were severely restricted. Inmates did use workhouses selectively, resorting to them when other means of maintaining themselves were also available; but the provision of a workhouse and workhouse test severely restricted the possibilities open to paupers.

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No.8894.

This chapter will examine what sorts of people became workhouse inmates, and why. It will also explain the role workhouses played in the lives of the poor: at what point during their lives the poor resorted to workhouses, and what function these institutions played in the economic lives of the poor. And finally, it will look at the attitudes of the poor towards workhouses: what preconditions created the instant detestation felt by the poor for workhouses.

#### Section A: Orphans, Lunatics and the Infirm

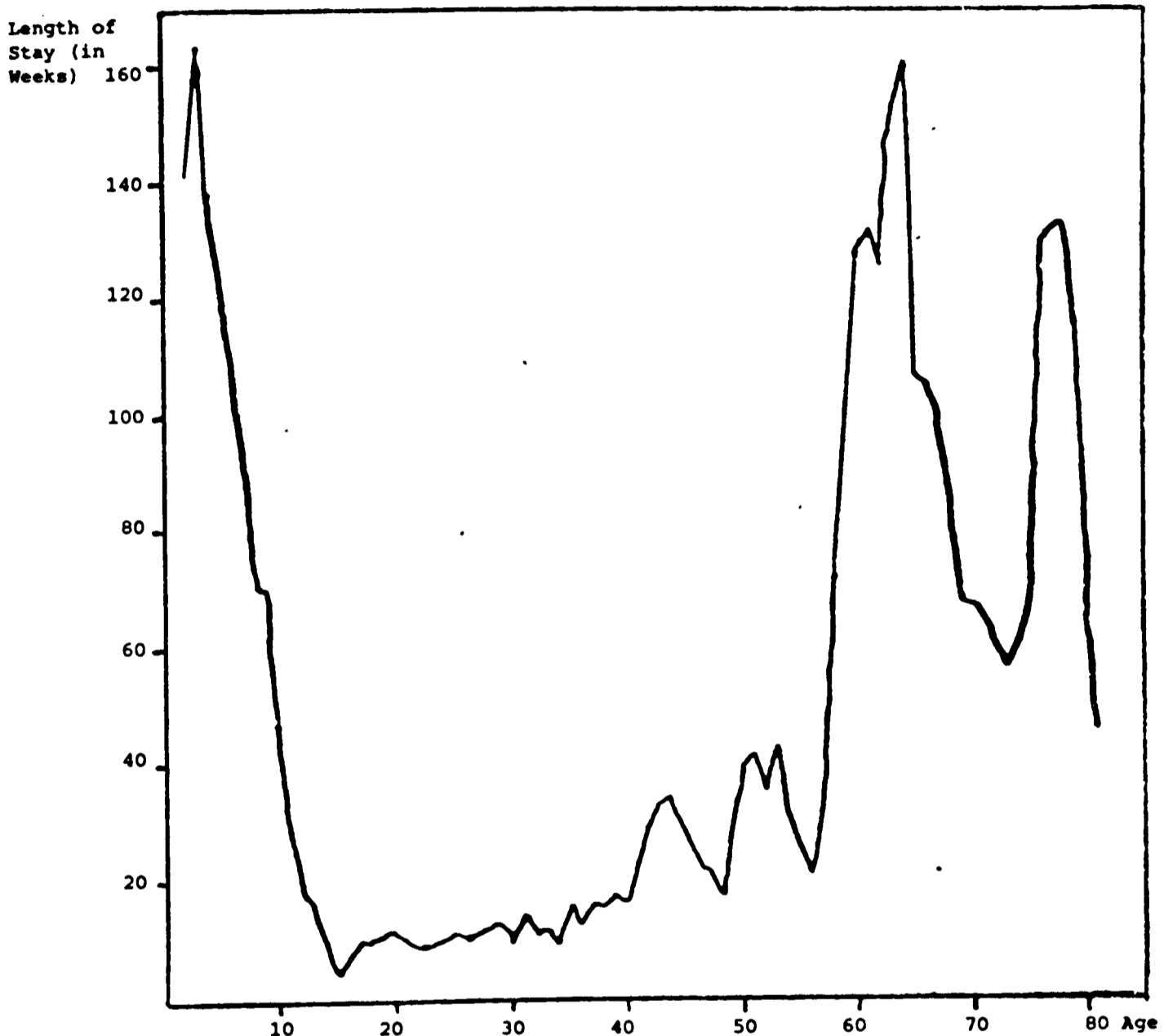
Out of a sample of 1,742 inmates maintained in the houses belonging to the parishes of St. Luke, Chelsea, St. Giles-in-the-Fields, London, and Cullompton, Devon (three parishes for which clear records exist and which imposed a workhouse test), 50.75 per cent were adult women, 34.04 per cent children under the age of 16 and 15.21 per cent adult men. Women and children dominated workhouse populations, they remained inmates for longer periods of time than did men, and they were more likely to enter a house while healthy.<sup>1</sup> Women sought relief after desertion by their husbands, and during pregnancy; men entered workhouses almost invariably in response to serious physical illness. More than this, the inmates of workhouses were the old and the young. 49.52 per cent of the adult population of these houses were over 55 years old: 52 per cent of adult men, and 48 per cent of adult women being above that age. When inmates below the age of 16 are added to those over 55, then 83.56 per cent of the workhouse population is seen to be made up of the old and the young.

Some of the reasons for the poor entering workhouses can be deduced from the workhouse register belonging to St. Luke, Chelsea. Between 1743 and 1750 reasons for the entry of 446 inmates were

<sup>1</sup>See Graphs 7:1, 7:2 and 7:7.

recorded by the clerk of the house. Of this sample, 54.3 per cent were women, 29.6 per cent children and 16.1 per cent men. The most common reason for entry into the house was illness. 35.9 per cent of the sample were sick when they entered, while 15.5 per cent were 'infirm'.

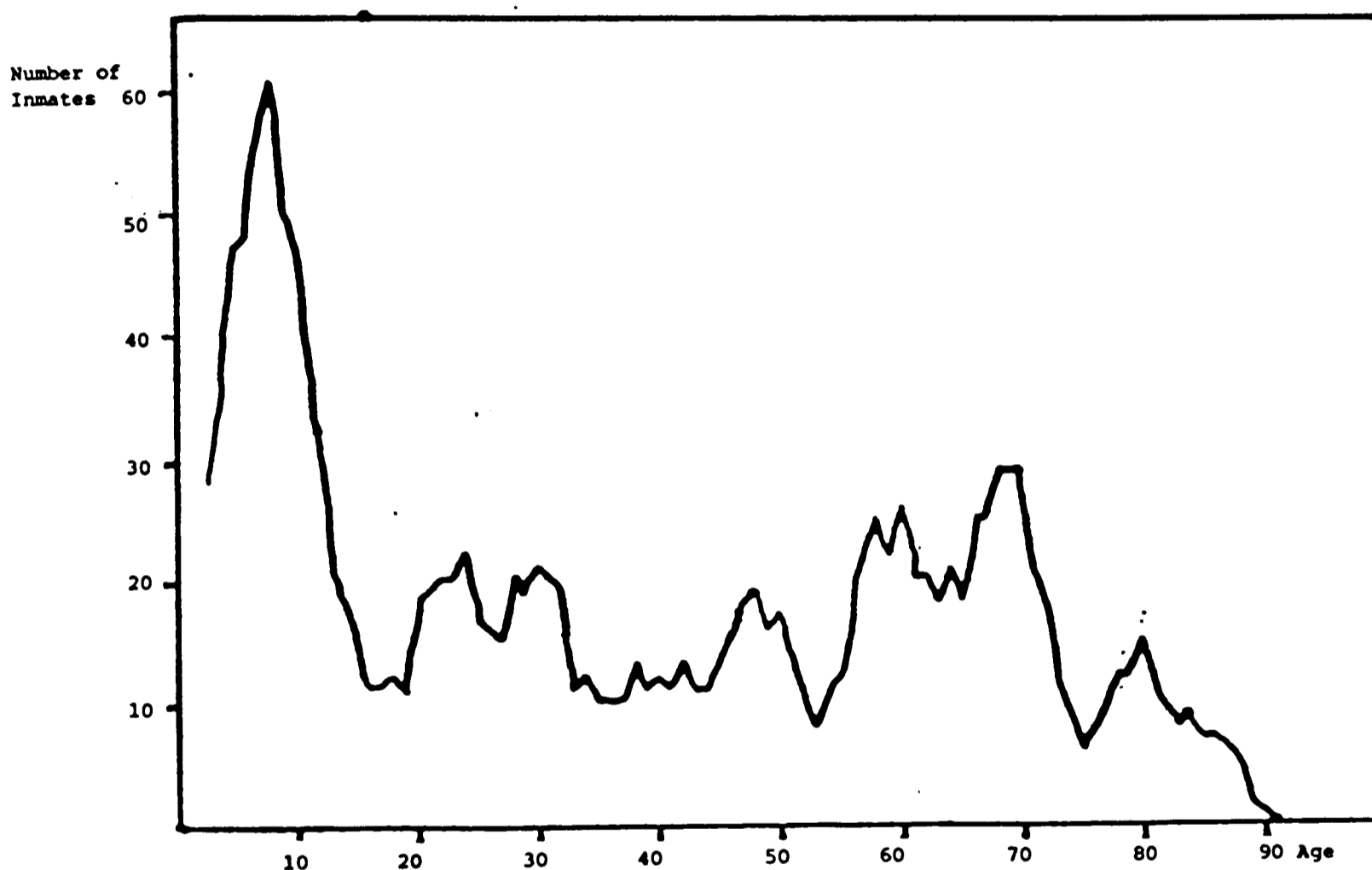
Graph 7:1: Average Length of Stay of the Population of St. Luke, Chelsea's Workhouse.  
(Presented as a Five-Year Moving Average)



<sup>1</sup>Graph 7:1 has been compiled from a sample of 441 inmates of the house belonging to St. Luke, Chelsea. There is an anomalous jump in this graph for inmates between the ages of 72 and 80 caused by one inmate, Ann Mann, who entered the house in October 1747 at the age of 72, and who finally died at the age of 94 in February 1769. See G.L.R.O., St. Luke Chelsea, Microfilm, X/15/37, listings for 1743 to 1 January 1750/1. This and the graphs which follow have been presented as five-year moving averages, using the age of the inmates to replace the normal time scale. That is, in this case the length of stay of the members of each year-long age group, for instance inmates listed as being age 47, were added together to give a single total. The totals arrived at were then dealt with normally; the first five totals being added together and then divided by five to give a single average; the first year's total then being subtracted and the sixth added to give a second average, and so on.

10.8 per cent had been passed from other parishes, 10.1 per cent were orphans or foundlings, 7.2 per cent were described as being 'poor' or out of work, 4.3 per cent were either born in the house or there as a result of pregnancy, 2.7 per cent were lunatics, 2.5 per cent were suffering from a venereal disease, 2.5 per cent were vagrants, and 1.1 per cent had suffered some kind of injury.<sup>1</sup>

Graph 7:2: The Distribution of Inmates by Age in Three Workhouses. (Presented as a Five-Year Moving Average)<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>See Table 7:3.

<sup>2</sup>Graph 7:2 has been compiled from the workhouse registers belonging to St. Luke, Chelsea, St. Giles-in-the-Fields, Middlesex, and Cullompton, Devon. The sample is made up of 1,742 listings. It should be noted that many individual inmates are counted more than once, since this graph is compiled from monthly or weekly lists of inmates, many of whom remained in the house throughout the period from which the figures are taken. G.L.R.O., St. Luke Chelsea, Microfilm, X/15/37, see listings for the period 1743 to 1 January 1750/1; G.L.R.O., St. Giles in the Field, Microfilm X/20/54.55, 6 February 1727/8, 1 January 1727/8, 20 February 1727/8, 27 February 1727/8, 5 March 1727/8; D.R.O., MS 2404A/PV1 V, Cullompton, Devon, Vestry Minutes, 1732-1756, pp.139-140, 173.

When these figures are compared with those for specific groups of inmates different ways in which paupers used the workhouse provision can be deduced. Of the sample of inmates, 242 were women. Between them they spent 9,461 weeks in the workhouse. Of this subgroup 44.2 per cent were described as sick and 18.6 per cent as infirm. 13.2 per cent had been passed from another parish, 5.4 per cent were there as a

Table 7:3: Reasons Assigned for Entry, St. Luke, Chelsea<sup>1</sup>

	TOTAL 446	CHILDREN 132 29.6%	MEN 72 16.1%	WOMEN 242 54.3%	% of TOTAL
Born/ Pregnant	19	6(4.5%)		13(5.4%)	4.3%
Orphan/ Foundling/	45	44(33.3%)	1(1.4%)		10.1%
Sick	160	18(13.6%)	35(48.6%)	104(44.2%)	35.9%
Passed	48	11(8.3%)	5(6.9%)	32(13.2%)	10.8%
Bastard	8	8(6.1%)			1.8%
Poor/ Unemployed	32	19(14.4%)	4(5.6%)	9(3.7%)	7.2%
Widowed/ Deserted	7	2(1.5%)		5(2.1%)	1.6%
Casual/ Vagrant	11	3(2.3%)		8(3.3%)	2.5%
Returned from 'Liking'	19	18(13.6%)	1(1.4%)		4.3%
Infirm/ Lame	69	2(1.5%)	22(30.6%)	45(18.6%)	15.5%
Lunatic	12	1(0.8%)	1(1.4%)	10(4.1%)	2.7%
Accidents/ Injuries	5		2(2.8%)	3(1.2%)	1.1%
'Foul'	11		1(1.4%)	10(4.1%)	2.5%

<sup>1</sup>Table 7:3 has been compiled from the workhouse register belonging to St. Luke, Chelsea. The register is a unique source. Covering the entire period from 1743 to the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act, it gives the name, age, date of entry, reason for entry, date of discharge and reason for discharge of each inmate entering the house - a new entry being made for each readmission. I have only used the material for the first seven years covered by the registers - approximately 500 entries. Table 7:3 is compiled from a sample of 446 inmates on whom complete information is available. G.L.R.O., St. Luke Chelsea, Microfilm, X/15/37, see listings for 1743 to 1 January 1750/1.

result of pregnancy, 4.1 per cent were lunatics, 4.1 per cent were suffering from a venereal disease, 3.7% were unemployed, 3.3 per cent were vagrants, and 2.1 per cent were widows.

If we divide this group of women at age 45 a more refined picture of the causes of pauperism emerges. 135 women between the ages of 16 and 45 entered St. Luke's workhouse, of whom 45.9 per cent gave illness as their reason for entry, 13.3 per cent were passed from other parishes, 11.1 per cent were 'infirm' and 8.9 per cent were there as a result of pregnancy. 5.9 per cent were lunatics, 5.9 per cent were suffering from venereal diseases, and 3.7 per cent were described as 'casual poor' or vagrants.

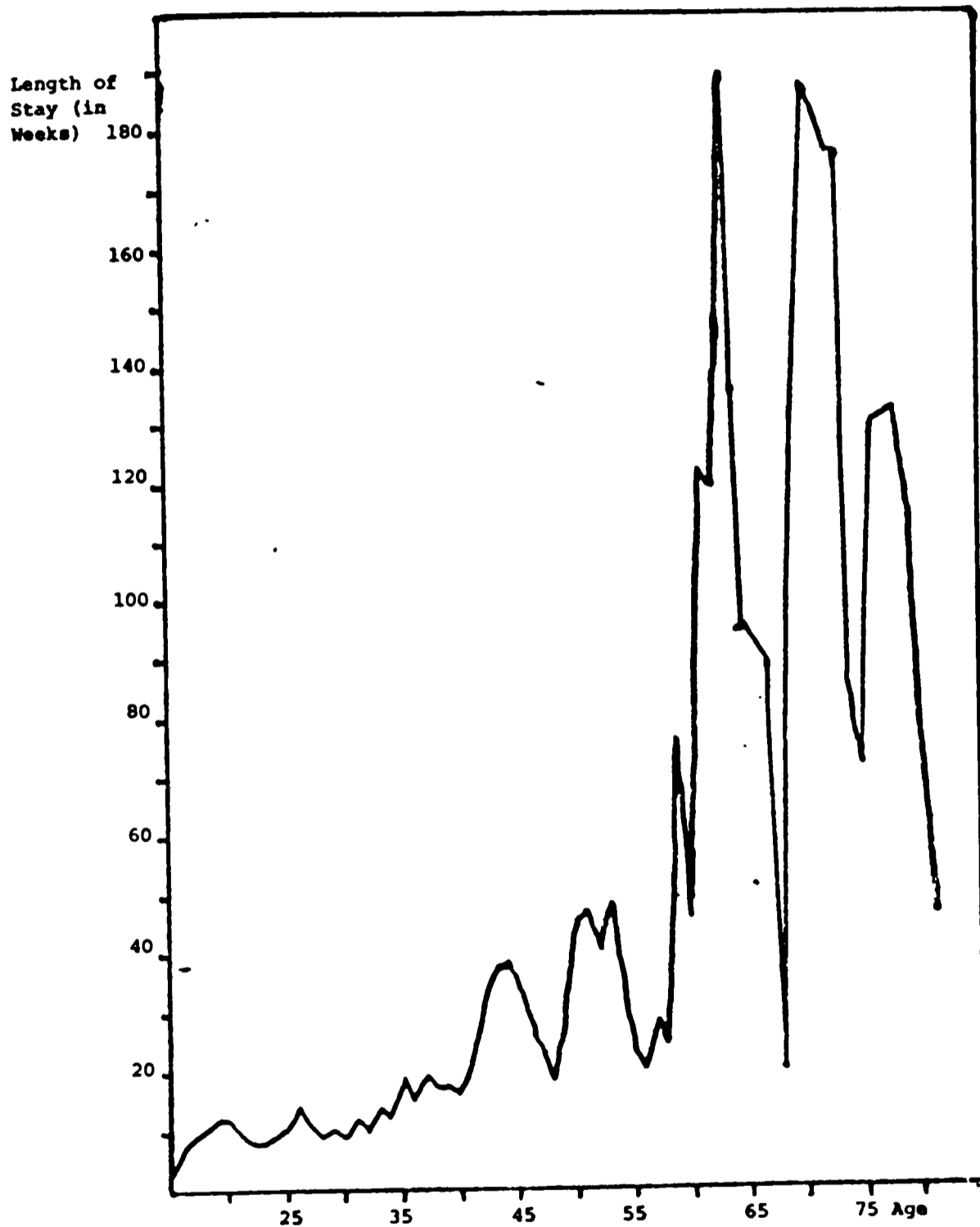
Of the women over 45, 42.1 per cent were sick, 28 per cent infirm, and 13.1 per cent had been passed from other parishes. 5.6 per cent were 'poor' or unemployed, while vagrants, lunatics and those suffering from injuries or venereal diseases made up 1.9 per cent of the sample respectively.

Some differences between these two groups of women are to be expected. That pregnancy accounted for 8.9 per cent of entries into the house among women under 45 and only 0.9 per cent of those over that age is hardly remarkable. Indeed, it is surprising that anyone over 45 should give birth at all. Likewise, one would anticipate that a larger percentage of those over 45 would be described as 'infirm'. But beyond these differences there are some discrepancies which require a more detailed explanation. The 3.4 per cent difference between the number of these two age groups described as 'poor' or unemployed is significant, as is the 4 per cent difference in the numbers suffering from venereal diseases, and the 4 per cent separating those described as lunatics.

Some of these discrepancies can be attributed to the attitudes of those assigning causes to the needs of inmates. Although at least casual workhouse relief was available to the vast majority of paupers,

the concept of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor almost certainly affected the way in which workhouse managers described specific groups of inmates. Age in itself conferred an element of respectability. Hence, there was less need to attribute a specific cause to the difficulties of paupers of advanced years than was the case when

Graph 7:4: Average Length of Stay of the Adult Female Population of St. Luke, Chelsea's Workhouse. (Presented as a Five-Year Moving Average)<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Graph 7:4 has been compiled from a sample of 233 adult female inmates of the house belonging to St. Luke, Chelsea. These women stayed in the house for a total of 22,606.65 weeks making the average length of stay for women approximately 97 weeks. See G.L.R.O., St. Luke Chelsea, Microfilm, X/15/37, listings for 1743 to 1 January 1750/1.

dealing with younger people. The larger number of the 'infirm' and 'poor' among the elderly probably hides a number of vagrants, lunatics and paupers suffering from venereal diseases.

However, there are some discrepancies which cannot be explained in this way. For instance, while 13.2 per cent of women were passed from other parishes, only 10.8 per cent of all inmates came to the workhouse in this way. Women in almost all age groups remained in the workhouse for longer periods of time than did men.<sup>1</sup> They were also more likely to have dependants with them, both of which factors made them much more expensive for the parish to maintain. As a result, the economic balance was in favour of undertaking the expense of going to law in order to rid the parish of these paupers, while male inmates, of whom only 6.9 per cent entered the workhouse after having been passed from another parish, were more likely to be maintained in the workhouse on the assumption that their stay would be short and thus inexpensive.

Similarly, that 4.1 per cent of women were described as suffering from venereal disease compared to 2.5 per cent of the total requires some explanation. Only one man was described as 'foul' in the entire seven-year period between 1743 and 1750. However, it is extremely unlikely that a larger percentage of the female population suffered from these diseases, and so any explanation of why more women entered the workhouse for this reason must be based on the economic effect these diseases had on the individual. It is probable that the women involved were prostitutes and that the disease materially affected their livelihoods.

Women entered the workhouse for a greater variety of reasons than did either men or children. They entered because they were widowed, pregnant, lunatic, 'foul': for reasons that either did not apply to, or were not used by other segments of the workhouse population. As a

<sup>1</sup>See Graphs 7:4 and 7:6.

result they made use of workhouses more effectively than could either men or children. Moreover, female workhouse inmates were healthier than men; pregnancy might be awkward, but it was not debilitating in the same way as the itch or a severe fever.

The reasons given when women left the house further supports the idea that they used workhouses in a quite different way from either men or children. 26.6 per cent were forcibly discharged from the house for being 'no object of relief'. 24.5 per cent died in the house, 18.6 per cent left voluntarily, 5 per cent were sent into service, and 5 per cent escaped from the house, over the wall or after church on Sunday. 10 per cent fewer women than men ended their stay in the house with death, while over 13 per cent more women than men were discharged from the house because they were deemed not to deserve relief from the parish. More women than men escaped and left voluntarily, while fewer were sent into service.<sup>1</sup>

The figure of 26.6 per cent for those discharged from the house for being 'no object of relief' is particularly significant. It indicates that women normally considered beyond the scope of parish relief - prostitutes, vagrants and the mothers of illegitimate children - were applying to St. Luke. Admittedly, the length of time these women were tolerated in the house was relatively short, but they did receive some kind of relief. Similarly, the larger number of women both escaping from the house and leaving voluntarily indicates that they exercised a greater degree of control over their own predicaments. Men seldom escaped or left of their own accord; female inmates were both more able, because they were in better physical condition than the men, and more likely to use the workhouse as an interim measure to see them through a short period of indigence, rather than, as men used them, as a source of relief only in the last resort.

<sup>1</sup>See Table 7:2.

Table 7:5: Reasons Assigned for Leaving, St. Luke Chelsea<sup>1</sup>

	TOTAL 446	CHILDREN 135 30.3%	MEN 74 16.6%	WOMEN 237 53.1%	% of TOTAL
Death	101	17(12.6%)	26(35.1%)	58(24.5%)	22.7%
Apprenticed	56	55(40.7%)	1(1.4%)		12.6%
To Service/ Work	18	1(0.7%)	5(6.8%)	12(5%)	4%
Passed	29	5(3.7%)	4(5.4%)	20(8.4%)	6.5%
'Left Voluntarily'	78	25(18.5%)	9(12.2%)	44(18.6%)	17.5%
Escaped	20	7(5.2%)	1(1.4%)	12(5%)	4.5%
Sent to Hospital	23	4(3%)	7(9.5%)	12(5%)	5.2%
Healthy/ Recovered	30	3(2.2%)	11(14.9%)	16(6.8%)	6.7%
Discharged/ 'No Object of Relief'	91	18(13.3%)	10(13.5%)	63(26.6%)	20.1%

The way in which women used workhouses can be illustrated by the case of Widow Brown, who applied to enter the house belonging to the parish of Dartford in Kent in 1733. She was visited by a governor of the house, who reported that he:

was called upon to visit the Widow Brown as being extraordinarily ill and between 3 and 4 this afternoon I visited her and surprized her and her daughter at dinner upon eels and I understand about noon she and her son, James and her daughter and the Widow Preston were at dinner upon hot mutton. When I came she attempted to throw herself in her clothes upon the bed, but I got in before she could be covered. She spoke very heartily to me and did not seem near

<sup>1</sup>Table 7:5 has been compiled from the Workhouse register belonging to St. Luke Chelsea. See G.L.R.O., St. Luke, Chelsea, Microfilm, X/15/37, listings for 1743 to 1 January 1750/1.

so ill as I expected. Her daughter desired me to take her into the workhouse for she had nothing to support her, nor any friends able to do it for her....I understand she has sold her bed and goods but to whom and for what money it is proper for the parish officers to inquire. I believe it is a mock sale to prevent the parish having them towards her support, if any fraud can be discovered the parish will have them nevertheless, and she has goods worth having, especially her bed. I hear she has sold her new stock of coals, so that she is resolved to come here soon.<sup>1</sup>

Children formed the second largest group within the workhouse population. Over 30 per cent of inmates were under sixteen, but unlike women, children had very little control over their circumstances. The vast majority of children in the workhouse were there as a result of the actions of their parents. And although children did have a large degree of control over some decisions affecting their future, they were largely at the mercy of workhouse masters and administrators.

39.4 per cent of children entered the house because they were orphans, foundlings or bastards. Only 4.5 per cent of children were born in the house, while 14.4 per cent entered because their parents were 'poor', 13.6 per cent because they were ill; 8.3 per cent had been passed from another parish, and 2.3 per cent were vagrants. Children stayed in the house as long or longer than any other age group; fewer of them died in the house, and more of them ended their stay with a position to go to than did the members of any other group.<sup>2</sup>

To some degree the use of the category 'children' hides the true level of infant mortality among workhouse inmates. The small number of children born in the house makes it difficult to deal with their experience statistically, but the few instances of workhouse births available indicate that there was very little chance that an infant would live beyond the age six months, let alone reach adulthood. Of twelve infants either born in the house or who entered before the age

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Kentish Sources, The Poor, ed., Melling, p.104.

<sup>2</sup>See Tables 7:3 and 7:5.

of six months, between 1743 and 1750, seven died, all within three months, while the remaining five were taken away by their mothers within a year. For those who entered above the age of six months the likelihood of survival increased dramatically. The mortality rate for children was the lowest of any group in the house; only 12.6 per cent of children died, compared to 27 per cent of the adult inmates.

Jonas Hanway's statistics compiled in the 1750s and 1760s suggest that most children who entered London workhouses before the age of four were likely to die in the house. His figures for St. Luke for the period 1750-1755 state that all 53 children either born or received into the house in this period died there, while the figures he compiled for the 1760s suggest that 65 per cent of children admitted under the age of twelve months or born in St. Luke's workhouse and 31 per cent of those admitted between the ages of one and four were dead within a year.<sup>1</sup> The level of mortality indicated by Hanway's figures is not

borne out by the workhouse register for St. Luke. The register suggests that the child population of the house was much healthier than any other group, and that after the age of six months a child admitted to the house was likely to live long enough to be apprenticed. Out of 125 children admitted above the age of six months only eleven died in the house, while 55 were apprenticed and the rest simply discharged.

Children had relatively little control over their entry into the house. They were unable to maintain themselves independent of the adult world, and so they were the pawns of that world. However, by the time they came to be apprenticed they had begun to take an extremely active role in determining their own fate. When St. Luke apprenticed a workhouse child it did so 'on liking', that is, the child was sent to its new master for an initial period of probation, after which the master could refuse the child, sending him back to the house. Almost

<sup>1</sup>Hanway's statistics are reproduced in George, London Life in the Eighteenth Century, pp.401-404.

33 per cent of children apprenticed from the house were returned in this way, suggesting that in many cases children actively rejected the choice of apprenticeship chosen for them. By behaving in a recalcitrant and difficult manner the children could encourage the master to whom they were sent to reject them. Admittedly, there was a time limit. The parish first apprenticed a child when he reached the age of eleven or twelve. Between the date of a child's first apprenticeship and the time when the parish finally gave up and simply discharged him there were approximately four years during which the child might be sent to four or possibly five different masters. The large percentage of children returned from 'liking' indicates that many of these children deliberately discouraged masters to whom they did not want to be bound from accepting them. Typical of the children in the house was Elizabeth Leverage, who entered in 1745, being an orphan, aged 10. On 30 March 1746 she was bound on 'liking' and was returned to the house on the 26 of April. She was apprenticed again the following spring and was returned six days later, having become ill. She finally found a permanent position under a Widow Brown in May 1747.<sup>1</sup> Edward Jeffreys had a similar experience. He was sent to sea at age 13 and was returned six days later. He then ran away from the house with a new suit of clothes, only to return two years later to be bound again.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the age of apprenticeship workhouse children could do very little. Some ran away, Charles Rossey, aged 9, escaped under the gate of the house in 1746 and was not seen again;<sup>3</sup> but for the most part young children remained in the house until their parents or relatives could look after them, or they were apprenticed. However,

<sup>1</sup>G.L.R.O., St. Luke Chelsea, Microfilm X/15/37. See entries dated 18 May 1745, 26 April 1746, 1 April 1747.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 22 May 1744, 25 June 1744, 25 October 1746.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 15 August 1746.

once the age of apprenticeship had been reached they were much freer to make their own decisions. Apprenticeship demanded the compliance of the child, and as a result the child, within certain limits, had a veto. The children in St. Luke's house seem to have used this veto to their advantage.

The smallest group in the workhouse were adult men. They formed only 16.1 per cent of the total population: only 72 men entered St. Luke's between 1743 and 1750. Men simply did not enter workhouses in the same numbers as women, but more than this, they did not use them in the same way or for the same reasons as women. 35.1 per cent of men entering the workhouse died there. The percentage of men who left voluntarily, were discharged or escaped was far lower than that of women or children. Men stayed in the house for shorter periods than women, and went into the house at different periods in their lives.<sup>1</sup>

The reasons assigned by parish officers for giving relief to men indicate the way men used workhouses. 48.6 per cent entered because they were 'sick', 30.6 per cent because of an infirmity, 6.9 per cent were passed from another parish, 5.6 per cent because they were 'poor', 2.8 per cent because of accident or injury, 1.4 per cent because they were lunatic and 1.4 per cent because they were 'foul'. 84.8 per cent of men entered the house for medical reasons, while not one male vagrant entered the house during the whole period.

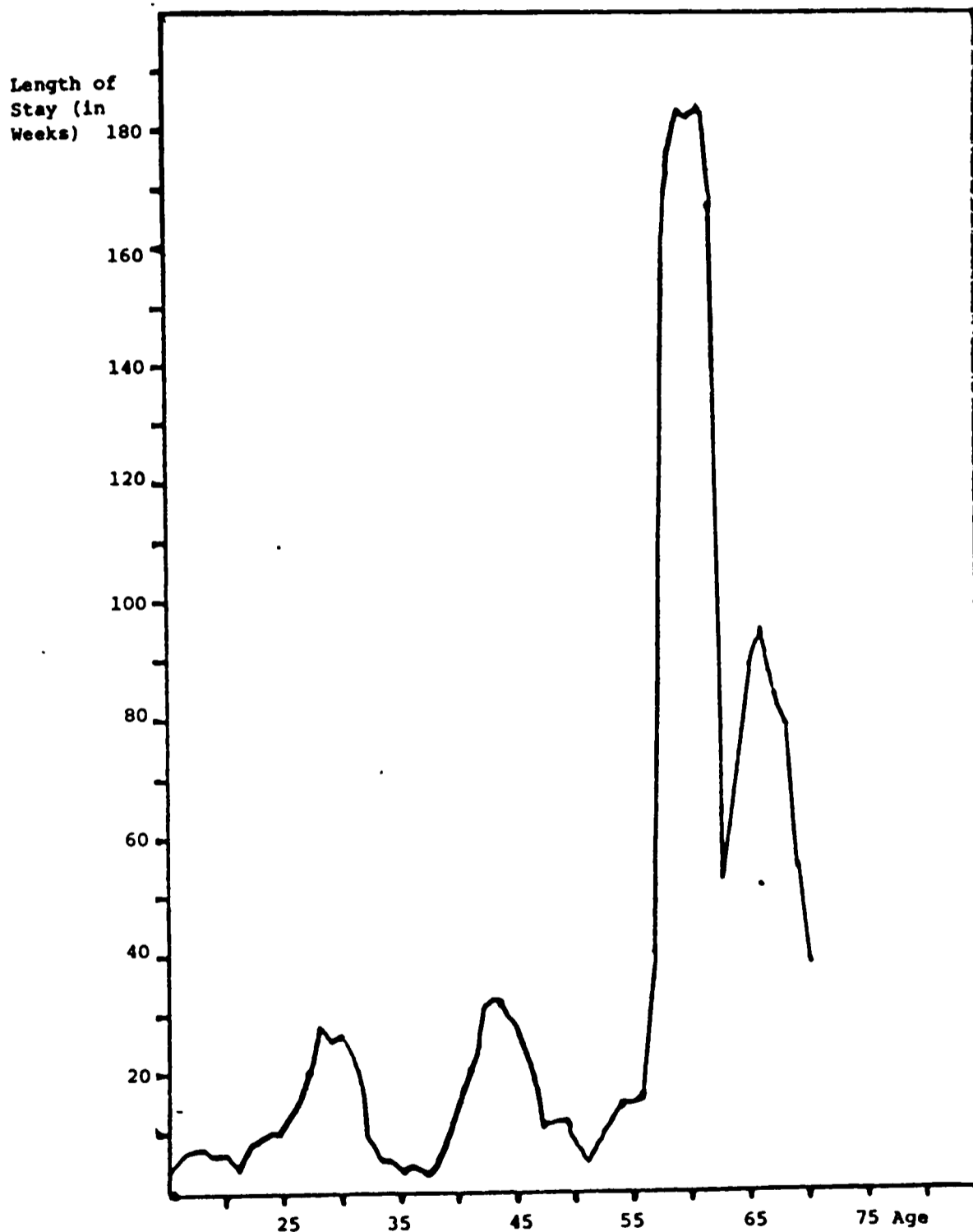
The most important distinction between the way in which men and women used the workhouse is exemplified by the fact that while 26.6 per cent of women were discharged for being 'no object of relief', only 13.5 per cent of men were discharged for this reason, and that while 35.1 per cent of men died in the house, only 24.5 per cent of women ended their workhouse careers in this manner. Male workhouse inmates were more pliable; they were almost invariably there for only one

<sup>1</sup>See Tables 7:3 and 7:5.

reason, illness, and were less willing or able to use the services provided by the house to their fullest advantage.

Men only resorted to workhouses in extreme circumstances; when they were terminally ill or completely incapable of earning a livelihood. In part, the manner in which men used the workhouse reflects the assumptions of those who ran these institutions. Men prior to old age were not, under most circumstances, considered fit

Graph 7:6: Average Length of Stay of the Adult Male Population of St. Luke, Chelsea's Workhouse. (Presented as a Five-Year Moving Average)<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Graph 7:6 has been compiled from the same source as 7:5, the register belonging to St. Luke, Chelsea. The sample of adult men is 74. Their average length of stay was 44 weeks. See G.L.R.O., St. Luke Chelsea, Microfilm, X/15/37; listings for 1743 to 1 January 1750/1.

objects of relief. They were the 'lusty vagrants' so often described and abhorred by pamphlet writers, whom it was felt could support themselves if they were willing to make an effort. So men were less well represented because whatever their circumstances, their needs were seen to be less. However, the attitudes of workhouse administrators cannot completely explain the huge disparity in numbers between men and women, or the high percentage of male inmates relieved on the grounds of serious illness or infirmity.

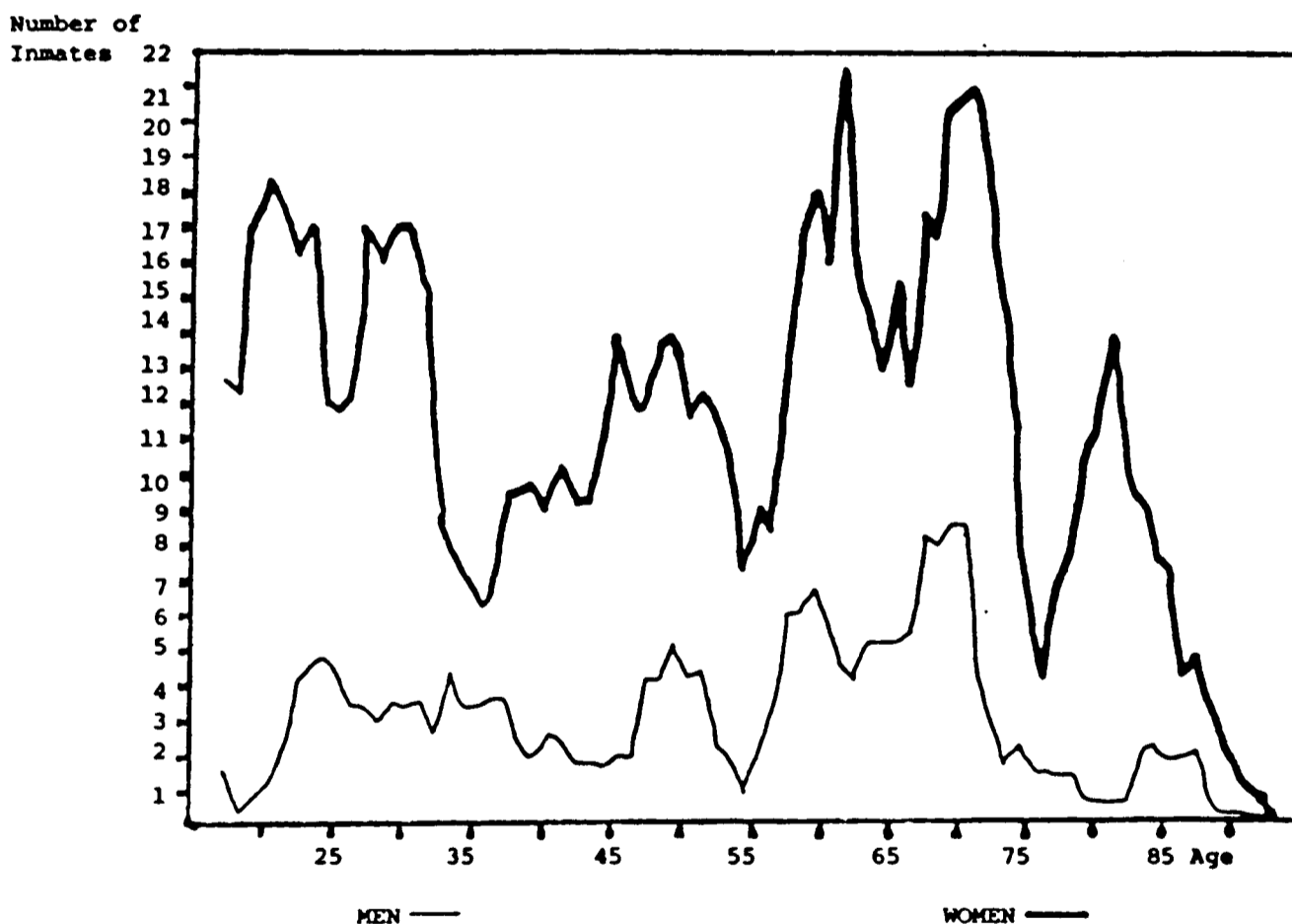
More important than the attitudes of workhouse masters was the greater economic power exercised by men than women. Men were better paid and more capable of earning a livelihood, and could more easily escape the responsibilities of a family. 1.5 per cent of children entered the workhouse because their mothers had been deserted by their fathers. Men could run off to sea or simply leave town, abandoning their children and wife to the parish. For women it was much less easy to escape responsibility. As a result men were less likely than were other groups to find themselves in real need. They could in the last resort simply leave. The one reason for indigence which could not so easily be avoided by men was illness. With one stroke, illness could both limit a man's mobility and eliminate the advantages of the higher wages paid to men. And, as we have seen, it was for this reason that men entered workhouses.

The distinctions between men and women became less significant as age and infirmity took their toll. Elderly men, like women, were considered natural objects of relief, and similarly, the economic position of the elderly began to equalise - both men and women becoming physically unable to earn a livelihood. Indeed, the way in which elderly women used workhouses had more in common with that of men of all ages, than it did with younger women. While 30.6 per cent of men entered the workhouse because of infirmity, 28 per cent of women over the age of 45 entered for that reason, compared to only 11.1 per cent

of women under that age.

The very nature of workhouses discouraged the imaginative use of parish relief. There were no gradations between those in need of casual relief and the totally indigent; one was forced either to make do, or to depend completely on the parish. As a result, men, children and to some extent elderly women were forced to use the workhouse as a haven of last resort - to enter the house only when ill or infirm, abandoned by friends and family, or incapable, because of age, of earning a living wage. However, younger women still managed to make use of a workhouse provision in a more flexible manner. By using the

Graph 7:7: The Distribution of Adult Inmates by Age in Three Workhouses. (Presented as a Five-Year Moving Average)<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Graph 7:7 has been compiled from the workhouse registers belonging to St. Luke, Chelsea, St. Giles-in-the-Fields, Middlesex and Cullompton, Devon. The sample is made up of 1,477 entries. It should be noted that many individual inmates are counted more than once, since this graph is compiled from monthly or weekly lists of inmates many of whom remained in the house throughout the period from which the figures are taken. G.L.R.O., St. Luke Chelsea, Microfilm, X/15/37, see listings for the period 1743 to 1 January 1750/1; G.L.R.O., St. Giles in the Fields, Microfilm X/20/54.55, 6 February 1727/8, 1 January 1727/8, 20 February 1727/8, 27 February 1727/8, 5 March 1727/8; D.R.O., MS 2404A/PV1 V, Cullompton, Devon, Vestry Minutes, 1732-1756, pp.139-140, 173.

workhouse as a lying-in hospital, 'foul' ward and temporary refuge between jobs - situations the parish was unlikely to consider adequate justifications for giving relief - women used workhouses as a source of casual relief in a way unintended by workhouse founders or administrators.

#### Section B: Prison or Refuge

Workhouse masters and administrators did not seek to frighten the poor. In many houses masters attempted to create a humane and caring environment, but the poor did not and could not see workhouses in this light. For the poor the very name 'workhouse' evoked images of imprisonment and deprivation. The existence of these institutions denied to the poor many of the opportunities for using parish relief available prior to their creation. Moreover, the poor actively rejected a workhouse provision, refusing to take up opportunities for relief provided by the parish, and disrupting the organisation of workhouse life from within. The attitudes of the poor, their reaction to these institutions, whether as inmates or parish pensioners, can be seen in the records of individual parishes.

Instances of violent, concerted opposition by the poor to the establishment of a workhouse do not exist. There were no workhouse riots, and although rate revolts and crowd action designed to prevent the opening of a workhouse can be identified, these represent the actions of rate payers and the 'middling sort' rather than the response of the poor themselves. For the most part, the poor simply voted with their feet. They refused to enter workhouses, choosing deprivation and an independent life over the rigours of the house.

Typical of the types of concerted opposition to workhouses was that fomented at Scarborough in North Yorkshire, where 243 rate payers refused to pay the amounts levied upon them. The individuals refusing

to pay their rates were the shopkeepers and artisans of the area: men who paid up to seven shillings per quarter for the support of the local workhouse. These were not the people likely to find themselves actually in the house.<sup>1</sup> Paupers could not and did not take action of this type.

The most convincing evidence of the reaction of the poor to the creation of workhouses was the proportion of the out-poor, those in receipt of parish pensions, who took up the offer of the house when it was first presented to them. At St. Margaret's, Westminster, 108 people were listed as receiving collection from the parish in 1726, all of whom were offered the house when it opened. Only forty-one people eventually entered, the rest refusing to go into the house, choosing instead to give up their parish relief.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, at Tavistock, in Devon, 31 people were listed in 1747 as being in receipt of a parish pension. When the workhouse opened 17 out of those 31 refused to enter and were struck from the parish book.<sup>3</sup> Widow Fogg applied to Allhallows, Lombard Street, London in 1740 for help with her rent, 'the Vestry did not think to comply...And she being told That if she would submit to the Parish Workhouse she might be very well provided for there....But she seem'd to apprehend it to be so much a Hardship she retired and Withdrew.'<sup>4</sup>

Workhouse masters and administrators recognised the abhorrence the poor felt for workhouses. Indeed, they considered this fear the most beneficial result of workhouse relief. At Beverley, in Yorkshire,

<sup>1</sup>N.Y.R.O., MS DC/SCB I10, Scarborough Poor Rate Arrears Warrant, 1752.

<sup>2</sup>W.C.L., MS E2632 shelf 28, St. Margaret's, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1726-1727, 10 November 1726, 14 November 1726, 16 November 1746.

<sup>3</sup>D.R.O., Tavistock, MS 428A/PO15, 6 January 1747.

<sup>4</sup>G.L., MS 4049/5, f.33.

the workhouse was actually designed on the assumption that many of the poor would be unwilling to enter. Samuel Johnston wrote to the S.P.C.K.: 'That they shall make Conveniencies for about 70 persons, which are as many as they think will go in, though their present poor be about 120.'<sup>1</sup> Likewise, at Greenwich the correspondent of the Society reported that the house had 'proved an effectual Means to drive Beggars out of the Town, notwithstanding the People in this House are lodged and dieted in so commodious a Manner as they are.'<sup>2</sup>

Pamphlet writers claimed that it was only the idle and improvident who were discouraged by the provision of a workhouse; that those in real need would enter the house and be looked after in a kindly and generous manner. Indeed, there can be no question that a workhouse provision was exclusively suited to the needs of the completely indigent - that, unlike a parish pension, it could not be used in conjunction with other forms of support. However, commentators also recognised that the provision of relief in the form of a workhouse was forcing the 'deserving' poor to forgo the benefits of parish relief - that the fear generated by the house prevented the parish from relieving real need. Many parishes attempted to allay the fears of pensioners by using names other than 'workhouse' for the institutions they created. Workhouses were called 'houses of maintenance' or 'houses of industry', in an attempt to circumvent the pejorative denotations and connotations of the term 'workhouse'. At Luton the workhouse was 'called a House of Maintenance for the Poor, to soften the Appellation of a Work-house, against which the Poor in the House might be prejudiced.'<sup>3</sup> John Bellers in his Proposals for Raising a Colledge of Industry rejected the idea of calling his institution a

<sup>1</sup> S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1725, No.8783.

<sup>2</sup> Account (1725), p.32.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp.85-86.

workhouse on the grounds that 'A workhouse bespeaks too much of servitude for the people of estates to send their children for education; and too much of Bridewell, for honest tradesmen to like it.'<sup>1</sup>

The poor themselves had very clear views about what a workhouse was. The S.P.C.K. correspondent from Maidstone suggested that:

A Work-House is a Name that carries along with it an Idea of Correction and Punishment: and many of our Poor have taken such an Aversion to living in it upon that Account, as all the Reason and Argument in the World can never overcome. Therefore it will be a Means of preventing a great deal of Trouble, and avoiding a greater Expence than you can imagine, to have the Work-House called by a softer and more inoffensive Name. This, Sir, I mention to you, as a Matter of more Consequence than can well be imagined by any body at a Distance; for we have many here who would choose to starve, rather than be maintained in Plenty and Cleanliness in the Bridewell, or House of Correction as they call it.<sup>2</sup>

To the poor the term 'workhouse' meant one thing: a house of correction. The Corporations of the Poor had included houses of correction within their workhouses, but even before this official bodies like the Devon Quarter Sessions, which was responsible for the administration of the local bridewells, had termed these institutions 'workhouses'.<sup>3</sup>

Among the poor there was a natural aversion to these institutions resulting from the association of the name with imprisonment and correction. Underlying this distaste was something else: a distrust of the parish. On entering a workhouse any inmate lost whatever he or she had. It was very difficult, without the active support of friends or relatives, to leave the workhouse once one had entered it. A person's furniture was automatically confiscated, as well as his or her clothes, which, although usually put aside for the pauper in expectation that he

<sup>1</sup> Bellers, Proposals for Raising a Colledge of Industry, p.15.

<sup>2</sup> Account (1725), p.35.

<sup>3</sup> For example see D.R.O., Devon Quarter Session Records, Q/51/14, Baptist 1701, Epiptic 1703.

would eventually leave, were immediately replaced by a workhouse uniform, marking the individual as an inmate.<sup>1</sup> Besides the distress caused by the loss of belongings, the confiscation of goods made the pauper dependent upon the parish for all his physical needs. For a workhouse inmate there could be no turning back, nor hope of regaining solvency.

However, workhouses were not able to cow the poor completely, nor could they force moral standards upon them. Once inside a workhouse, inmates actively sought small freedoms. They by-passed the rules where they could, and made life as difficult as possible for the master and administrators of the house. The ways in which inmates flouted workhouse discipline were legion, but they fall into two main categories. First, the procurement of illicit luxuries, such as gin, and the theft or embezzlement necessary to buy these luxuries; and second, the straightforward abuse of workhouse staff and destruction of property, as an expression of mere frustration.

In part, the activities of the poor reflect the failure of workhouse administration: the failure to impose the regimen and rules drawn up by vestries and workhouse committees. However, they were also an expression of the desires and frustrations of the inmates themselves. Gin, tobacco where it was not allowed, and the freedom to leave and enter the house at will were luxuries the poor could obtain only by flouting the rules of the house. In 1732 complaint was made to the workhouse committee belonging to St. George's, Hanover Square, Westminster. It was alleged that:

<sup>1</sup>For example see G.L., MS 869A, f.24; W.C.L., MS E573 shelf 30, St. Margarets, Westminster, Workhouse Rules, Orders & Correspondence, 1746-1766, item entitled 'Rules and Orders for the Good Government of the Workhouse belonging to the City of Westminster', rule no.7; G.L.R.O., St. John at Hackney, MS P79/JN1/160, 30 March 1751.

Whereas Application has ben made to this Board by several of the Patients for an Allowance of encouragement money for their Assisting in making the Linnen...in the house & it apearing that upon the Credit of the said Encouragements money they have run an Ale house Score & a Chandlers Score which to this Board seem a very Scandalous & Improper practice.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, at St. Ann's, Blackfriars, London, it was reported in 1738 that some inmates 'got Drunk by selling the old Cloth of the Workhouse',<sup>2</sup> while others 'sold their allowance of Victuals in order to Purchase Tobacco &c.'<sup>3</sup> These were relatively small crimes, but they do indicate that inmates did not take workhouse rules too seriously, or at least that they were willing to risk the consequences of breaking them.

Of greater significance for the attitudes of the poor towards these institutions were the acts of deliberate destruction of workhouse property and the abuse of staff by inmates. In 1728 an inmate belonging to the Corporation of the Poor of Norwich was publicly whipped 'for abusing Mr. Cook one of the Guardians by going to his house with a great number of persons in a Riotous Manner & using ill Language towards him as a Guardian.'<sup>4</sup> In 1738 Elizabeth Whitney, an inmate at St. Giles, Cripplegate, London, was brought before the Lord Mayor for 'abusing the Mistress & saying she would break all the Windows in the Workhouse & Swearing & Cursing in a Vile manner.'<sup>5</sup>

In any group of individuals forced to live together some resentment naturally arises. However, in workhouses that resentment was often specifically directed against the administrators of these institutions. In 1750 it was reported to the vestry at St. John's

<sup>1</sup>W.C.L., MS C871, St. George Hanover Square, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1731-1732, p.62.

<sup>2</sup>G.L., MS 8690, 30 November 1738.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 4 August 1738.

<sup>4</sup>N.R.O., Case 20 Shelf C, Norwich Guardians of the Poor Minute Book, 1723-1731, p.199.

<sup>5</sup>G.L., MS 6051/1, p.3.

Hampstead that 'the rules & Orders formerly made for regulating the poor in the workhouse belonging to this Parish & which had been hung up at the Workhouse were so much defaced that they were not legible.'<sup>1</sup> The inmates of the house had vented some of their anger at the written expression of the vestry's policies. As we have seen, a large portion of the population of any workhouse was sick or infirm. These inmates could not and did not create any serious problems for workhouse administrators. Rather, it was left to the small number of inmates physically able to challenge the workhouse authorities to create the space within workhouse rules: to flout the rules in such a way as to allow the small freedoms and luxuries desired by the inmates.

Considering the large number of workhouse inmates committed to these institutions the instances of opposition to workhouse authority are few in number. Most inmates did not actively object to workhouse relief. But the majority of inmates were in no condition to object: they were physically incapable of doing much more than stay alive, and so the instances of active opposition to workhouse authority which can be found take on greater significance. They were the actions of the small percentage of inmates physically capable of concerted opposition.

The typical workhouse inmate was an old, infirm woman who died approximately two years after she first came to the house. She entered because she was ill and incapable of supporting herself. She was a passive workhouse inmate, and a natural object for parish relief. However, not all inmates were of this type. Younger women in particular used workhouses as pensions had been used; they objected to the constraints placed upon them by workhouse life, and to some extent forced parish policy to work in their favour. Rather than simply

<sup>1</sup>C.P.L., MS F25, i, St. John Hamstead Vestry Minutes, 1746-1779, p.29.

allowing themselves to be the recipient of the vestry's charity, or to conform to the expectations inherent in workhouse rules about how they should behave, they made imaginative use of the restricted resources supplied in workhouses. They were women like Mary Willson, who entered the workhouse belonging to St. Andrew Holborn and St. George the Martyr because she had been told 'that she should have cloathes & other things'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>C.P.L., MS 1A1, St. Andrew Holborn & St. George the Martyr, Overseers of the Poor, Minutes of Various Meetings, 1731-1735, 12 June 1734 (at a Special Sessions).

## CHAPTER 8: THE PAROCHIAL WORKHOUSE MOVEMENT: 1724-1750

The period between 1723, the year in which the Workhouse Test Act became law, and 1733 defines the first workhouse movement. Before 1723, the institutions established numbered around forty, they were geographically restricted to the East Midlands and Essex, and could claim no descriptive literature as their own. After 1732, the number of pamphlets relating to workhouses declined sharply, while at the same time active opposition to the foundation of these houses began to emerge. 1732 saw the last publication by the S.P.C.K. of a pamphlet directly relating to the establishment of workhouses. It also witnessed the final illness of the workhouse movement's most active supporter and propagandist, Matthew Marryott.<sup>1</sup> One year later the number of workhouses founded in England started a decline which lasted until the revival of the movement in the 1750s.

A conservative estimate of the number of houses founded in England during the period covered by this thesis is 600.<sup>2</sup> Of this number approximately 300 were established between 1723 and 1732. This chapter

<sup>1</sup>See Marryot's will, proved 26 January 1731/2. P.R.O., Probate 11, No.649, ff.142-144.

<sup>2</sup>This figure is based on a comparison of the number of houses founded in eight counties and the City of Westminster by 1750 with the totals for the same areas and for the whole of England produced for a Parliamentary committee in 1777. The counties used for this purpose were Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Devon, Middlesex, Surrey, Cambridgeshire, North Yorkshire and Essex, which together with the City of Westminster had a total of at least 146 houses in 1750. The total number of houses in these counties was compared to the total for 1777; in all, 490 houses were listed in the Parliamentary returns for these counties. 146 is 30 per cent of 490. 600 is about 30 per cent of the 1,916 houses listed for all England in 1777. This technique gives a minimum figure only as the Parliamentary returns list houses whose actual purpose and definition is unclear, and because the absence of parish records has ensured that at least a few institutions extant in the counties sampled have not come to light. Thus the ratio of just over 1 in 3 is really a comparison of a minimum with a maximum number of workhouses. See Appendix: Workhouse Foundations Listed by County, and H.L.R.O., Parchment Collection, Box 162.

will examine both the extent and distribution of the establishment of workhouses in this most important decade and look at the influences then at work. It will also describe the decline of the movement after 1733, and the influences producing that decline.

#### Section A: The Distribution of Parochial Workhouses, 1723-1750

The foundation of workhouses forms a specific chronological and geographical pattern. We have seen in chapter 4 that prior to 1723 it was the East Midlands and Essex which formed the centres for the early workhouse movement.<sup>1</sup> After that date, with the passage of national legislation and the publication of descriptive pamphlets distributed throughout the country, these centres lost much of their significance. Instead, it was in the South-east and much of the Midlands that the most rapid increase in the number of workhouses occurred.

A sample of the houses founded in eight counties, the cities of London and Westminster and part of Lancashire, areas for which complete information based either on local secondary studies or research into parochial records is available, reflects the national pattern described by the workhouse movement in these years. In these areas not one workhouse was established in 1722.<sup>2</sup> In the following year three houses were founded, and from then until 1726 an increasing number of houses were set up each year, 13 workhouses being opened in 1726. From this point the increase stabilises at about nine a year until 1732 when a total of 13 institutions was established. Following this peak the number falls to approximately five a year until 1741, after which it falls again to about two. There are two distinctive peaks in the

<sup>1</sup>See Chapter 4, pp.97-103.

<sup>2</sup>The areas referred to are Devon, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Middlesex, Surrey, North Yorkshire, the West Derby Hundred of Lancashire and the cities of London and Westminster. See Appendix: Workhouse Foundations Listed by County.

number of foundations for the areas examined; the first in 1726 and the second in 1732.<sup>1</sup>

More than this, there is a geographical pattern in the foundation of houses. Certain counties saw the creation of a large number of institutions in particular short periods. For instance, at least eight houses were established in Hertfordshire in 1724, but only one more between then and 1750. Similarly, in Devon the first parochial workhouses were not founded until the late 1730s: ten being set up between 1737 and 1750. In Middlesex, the centre of the workhouse movement after 1723, the average yearly number of foundations remained steady between 1723 and 1730 at about four per year, dropping thereafter to less than one.<sup>2</sup>

The overall picture described by workhouse foundations up to 1750 has its centre squarely in Middlesex, London and Westminster, which between them accounted for at least 75 institutions. Beyond this, Essex formed a subsidiary centre with over thirty houses, while Lancashire had over twenty. Kent, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire each encompassed between 16 and 20 houses, while Devon, Surrey and Berkshire had between 11 and 15 houses each.<sup>3</sup> The predominance of Essex, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire was the result of foundations made prior to 1723, but the concentration of workhouses in other counties was almost entirely the result of later foundations, the popularity of workhouses spreading from Middlesex and London to Surrey, Berkshire, Hampshire and Oxfordshire in the late 1720s and early 1730s. In the mid to late 1730s the beginnings of a more truly provincial workhouse movement can be seen with the establishment of institutions in the West Country and the North.

<sup>1</sup>See Graph 8:1.

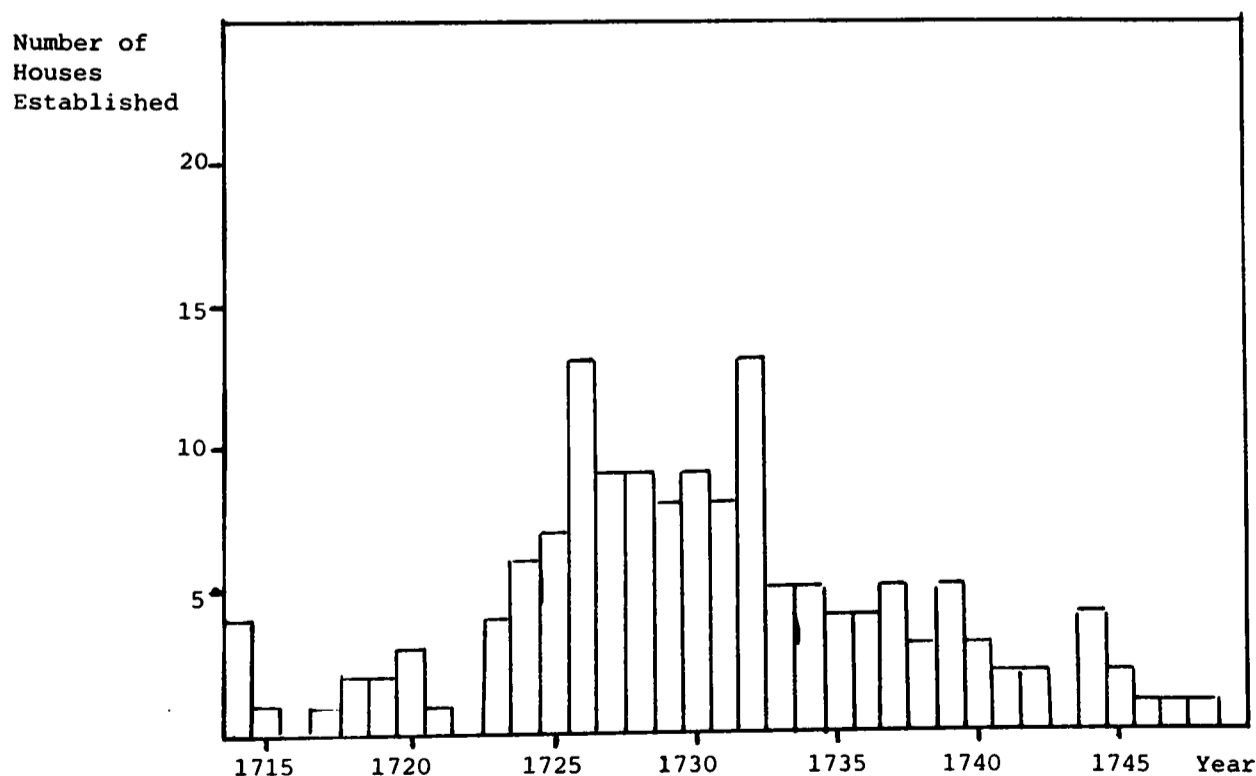
<sup>2</sup>See Appendix: Workhouse Foundations Listed by County.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

The houses listed in the Parliamentary returns for 1777 indicate centres of activity in the South-east and Home Counties. This pattern holds largely true for the period before 1750,<sup>1</sup> the only exception being the returns for Suffolk, which suggest that almost all the county was served by workhouses in 1777. The predominance of institutional care for the poor in Suffolk was the result of the foundation of the Hundred Houses of Norfolk and Suffolk in the late 1750s and 1760s, and can therefore be discounted when discussing the period before mid-century.

The returns indicate that both as a percentage of parishes served by workhouses, and by the number of workhouse places available per 1000 of the population, the relative centres of concentration were in the South-east and Home Counties; that there was a broad swathe of houses stretching from Sussex and Kent up through London to Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, and that beyond this, significant numbers of houses were to be found in Devon and parts of the North.<sup>2</sup>

Graph 8:1: Workhouse Foundations in Eight Counties, the Cities of London and Westminster and the West Derby Hundred of Lancashire, 1714-1750.



<sup>1</sup>H.L.R.O., Parchment Collection, Box 162.

<sup>2</sup>See Map 8:2.

Map 8:2

Parishes Served by  
Workhouses in 1777  
(Presented as a Percentage  
of Parishes in each County)



A detailed analysis of workhouse distribution is unnecessary here. There were few counties that did not have at least one house by 1750. Workhouses had become a nationally accepted form of poor relief, and although there were certainly areas in which the popularity of this type of institution was greater than in others, any argument attempting to relate these geographical distinctions to the justifications for and influences on the workhouse movement would be extremely tenuous. One can say with assurance that workhouses were founded in areas with the largest rate burdens, the nine counties with the largest percentage of parishes served by workhouses paid, on average, £15,000 a year more for the support of the poor than did a county with an average rates bill.<sup>1</sup> More than this, there are certain geographical anomalies which suggest how the idea of founding workhouses might have spread. The concentration of houses in the South-east indicates that word of mouth must have played some role in encouraging these foundations, while the large number of houses in Devon, which was also a centre for the foundation of Corporations of the Poor, is suggestive, if not particularly illuminating. Certainly, the existence of centres of workhouse activity indicates that the example of a local workhouse encouraged nearby parishes to found institutions of their own. However, this brings us no closer to understanding the mechanism by which the idea of incarcerating the poor in these institutions was disseminated to the first isolated experiments, or where the expertise necessary for the foundation of these houses came from. A more promising area for analysis is the origin of the large body of pamphlet literature relating to workhouses printed in the 1720s and 1730s.

<sup>1</sup>See Map 8:2 and H.L.R.O., Parchment Collection, Box 162. Suffolk has been excluded from this calculation because of its insignificance for the period before 1750.

## Section B: Pamphlets, Models and Advice

The driving force behind the publication of material relating to workhouses was the S.P.C.K. The Society published the majority of the material printed between 1723 and 1732. There were other groups and individuals actively involved in producing pamphlets about workhouses. Matthew Marryott was responsible for two pamphlets, while various vestries including St. Giles-in-the-Fields, London, published accounts of their own success in institutionalising their poor-relief services. However, the most important contributions were all made by or through the Society.

The S.P.C.K.'s first and most significant publication relating to workhouses was its Account of Several Workhouses printed in 1725.<sup>1</sup> A piece in the traditions of the Society's Account of the Charity Schools, it concentrated on describing the conditions in and success of various individual institutions.

The idea of publishing the Account was first raised at a meeting on 26 November 1723.<sup>2</sup> Caleb Parfect had sent in a great deal of material on the workhouse founded at Stroud, Kent in 1721 as well as several other houses in Kent and Essex, which the Society determined to publish.<sup>3</sup> Originally a very short pamphlet specifically on the workhouse at Stroud was planned, but the project grew, Parfect's contributions later being published separately.<sup>4</sup> The first additions to the Stroud material were descriptions of the workhouses at

<sup>1</sup>An Account of Several Workhouses for Employing and Maintaining the Poor; Setting forth the rules by which they are Governed, Their Great Usefulness to the Publick, And in Particular to the Parishes where they are Erected (London, 1725).

<sup>2</sup>S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1722-1724, x, p.216.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp.205, 213, 216.

<sup>4</sup>See Parfect, Proposals made in the Year 1720.

Bishopsgate and the Grey Coat Hospital in Westminster, followed closely by 'several Contracts between different Parishes and Mr. Matthew Marryott about several Houses of Maintenance for the Poor which he has erected, and also Certificates of the Success of those Contracts...'<sup>1</sup>

On 20 October it was decided that an account of all the houses on which the Society could get information should be produced, and steps were taken to gather material.<sup>2</sup> Letters were sent to several corresponding members asking them to obtain and send in descriptions of specific workhouses. Robert Witham, for instance, was asked to describe twelve houses in Essex, while Alexander Leith was asked to send in details on ten houses in Bedfordshire.<sup>3</sup> In all, eight people were approached, and detailed descriptions of forty-five houses forwarded to the Society.<sup>4</sup>

The questions asked by the Society of its members indicate the role the Account was meant to play. They all related to the precise nature of workhouse administration, not why these institutions were established.<sup>5</sup> What the Society was attempting to produce was a guide for vestrymen and churchwardens who, without it, might have felt the running of a house beyond them. Diet sheets, lists of rules, accounts of manufacturing and running costs all found a place in the Account. However, the Society did not include any arguments about the usefulness of workhouses to the common weal. Even the introduction, probably

<sup>1</sup> S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1724-1726, xi, p.46.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.76.

<sup>3</sup> See S.P.C.K., S.L., 1723-1724, pp.52-53; S.P.C.K., S.L., 4 September 1724 - 15 May 1725, pp.5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Other than Alexander Leith and Robert Witham, the people from whom the Society requested accounts were William Fenwick at Carlton, Leicestershire, the Lord Bishop of Peterborough, Maurice Wheeler at Warpenham, Northamptonshire, Richard Wilson at Leeds, Yorkshire, Joseph Harrison at Cirencester, Gloucestershire and Caleb Parfect at Stroud, Kent. See S.P.C.K., S.L., 4 September 1724 - 15 May 1725, pp.7, 16, 20, 30, 31.

<sup>5</sup> For example see *ibid.*, pp.5-6.

written for the Society by Sir John Phillipps and approved by William Tillard,<sup>1</sup> simply argued that workhouses reduced the cost of and made more efficient and regular the care of the poor by the parish.

A proof of the Account was delivered on 20 April 1725 and on 18 May the Society ordered fifteen hundred copies to be printed, which were ready for distribution in early August.<sup>2</sup>

As important as the publication of this volume was the Society's role in its distribution. Each of the Society's five hundred corresponding members received a copy, and Robert Hales was given several to distribute to the Privy Council at Richmond Court on Coronation Day.<sup>3</sup> It came into the hands both of powerful local men throughout the country and of those responsible for moulding the opinions of government. There is no direct evidence on how the Society's members used the information contained in the Account, but the year following its publication saw the first peak in workhouse foundations,<sup>4</sup> and it may be assumed that the publication of the pamphlet was to some extent responsible for it.

Following the first edition of the Account, the Society published, in quick succession, a pamphlet by Caleb Parfect, two plans of model workhouses, two sermons - one by Thomas Trougher and another by Samuel Johnston - a pamphlet on Dutch Workhouses and two more editions of the Account - the first, a reprint of the 1725 edition to be distributed in Ireland, and the second, a new English edition. Together, these publications made up a large percentage of all the material printed on workhouses between 1725 and 1732, and formed the basis of a coherent

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., S.L., 4 September 1724 - 15 May 1725, p.55; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, Nos. 8369, 8370.

<sup>2</sup>S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1724-1726, xi, p.142.

<sup>3</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No. 8488.

<sup>4</sup>See Graph 8:1.

literature.<sup>1</sup>

Besides the second edition of the Account the most important publications produced by the Society in the period following 1725 were the plans, the pamphlet on Dutch workhouses and Samuel Johnston's sermon. In each of these one aspect of a programme for establishing parochial houses was considered.

The idea of publishing plans of model workhouses arose during discussions on the Account. In February 1724/5 a plan of the workhouse at Stroud was presented to the Society and from there sent to Nicholas Hawksmoor for his opinion.<sup>2</sup> However, Hawksmoor was not merely expected to pass judgement on the plan; he was also asked to modify it so that the building 'may be contracted or enlarged, according to the wants of the Places where it is to be made use of, and to allow an apartment for a reading school where there is one...' The plan was not eventually included in the Account because Hawksmoor was ill and unable to respond to the Society's request in time.<sup>3</sup> But in March 1725/6 the Society was forced to take up the project again in response to enquiries from

<sup>1</sup>The Society's publications in this period included, Account (1725); Parfect, Proposals made in the Year 1720; Hutchinson, A Letter to a Member of Parliament, Concerning the Employing and Providing for the Poor; Sir William Fownes, Methods Proposed for Regulating the Poor, Supporting of some and Employing Others (Dublin, 1725); Andrea Guevara, Ways and Means for Suppressing Beggary and Relieving the Poor by Erecting General Hospitals...Translated from the Italian (London, 1726); Samuel Johnston, The Advantage of Employing the Poor in Useful Labour (London, 1726); Regulations which were Agreed Upon and Established the Twelfth day of July 1726 by the Gentlemen of the Vestry then Present, for the Better Government and Management of the Workhouse Belonging to the Parish of St. Giles in the Fields (Dublin, 1727); Some few Letters Selected from an Account of Workhouses...with a Preface to excite some such Application of our Charity in Ireland (Dublin, 1728); Rules and Orders to be Observed by the Officers and Servants in St. Giles's Workhouse and by the Poor Therein (London, n.d.); Thomas Trougher, The Best Way of Making our Charity Truly Beneficial to the Poor; or the Excellency of Workhouses in Country Parishes (London, 1730); and Account (1732).

<sup>2</sup>S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1724-1726, xi, p.121.

<sup>3</sup>S.P.C.K., S.L., 4 September 1724 - 15 May 1725, p.55.

corresponding members.<sup>1</sup> In that month Henry Newman wrote to John Moyser at Beverley describing the plans the Society could make available and the advantages of each. The design he recommended most strongly was that of the workhouse belonging to St. George's, Hanover Square, Westminster, of which he said:

[It] is contrived to lodge and dyet above 250 Men Women and Children 2 in a Bed. There are in each Wing 4 Rooms on a floor provided with 3 lights so as to draw fresh air whenever wanted. Each room has a fire place and can receive 6 Beds, which by curtains may be all private as Occasion requires....The Plan of the Building is so contrived, that by extending each Wing it may be made to receive Double the Number. On the Contrary they that want a house for only half the Number may build only half of each Wing till they want to enlarge them. Any part of the Kingdom that affords Brick or Stone or Timber may copy after this model. The Party Walls in this House ar Brick from the Foundation to the Top of the House to prevent the Old people from being surprized in the Beds by fire, but those that don't care to go into that expence may spare it.<sup>2</sup>

The design of the Hanover Square workhouse recommended itself because it was versatile, cheap and, in the words of Henry Newman, 'plain, strong and very commodius'.

The design of the workhouse at St. George's, Hanover Square, provided for a symmetrical 'H'-shaped building which showed the influence of neo-classical architectural ideas. The design also allowed for a strict division to be made between different types of paupers. Women and children could be housed in one wing, while men and the elderly could occupy the other. By providing an architectural division between different types of inmates the design foreshadows many of the ideas and features normally associated with the institutions developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1724-1726, xi, p.233; S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1726-1728, xii, p.4.

<sup>2</sup>S.P.C.K., S.L., 18 May 1725 - 23 April 1726, pp.54-55.

the care of the insane.<sup>1</sup>

In April 1726 the Society decided to go ahead with the publication of the plans of two workhouses, those at Stroud and St. George's, Hanover Square, and a Mr. Sturt was engaged to engrave them.<sup>2</sup> The Stroud workhouse plan was chosen to meet the needs of a small town, while that taken from the workhouse at Hanover Square was meant for a populous urban parish. The number of houses built according to the Society's plans cannot be determined with any precision. The Hanover Square design was used as the basis for the institution founded at Beverley in late 1726, and was also approved of and recommended by Matthew Marryott,<sup>3</sup> but most houses established in this period were accommodated in older buildings not specifically designed as workhouses, and so the direct influence of these plans cannot be determined.

At this same time the Society took up the idea of publishing a description of Dutch workhouses. As early as 1717 Maurice Wheeler had suggested that it might be 'of advantage to procure from some correspondents in Holland an Account of the several Manufactures and diverse Methods whereby that Industrious people find business for all persons that have either hands or feet...'<sup>4</sup> Wheeler's suggestion was ignored, but in May 1726 Henry Newman wrote to Dr. De Lafaye at Utrecht requesting that he send to the Society 'an Account of the Methods used in Holland or any of the seven provinces...for Employing the Poor...

<sup>1</sup>For an account of the development of hospital and asylum design see Andrew Scull, 'A Convenient Place to Get Rid of Inconvenient People: The Victorian Lunatic Asylum', Anthony D. King ed., Buildings and Society (London, 1980) pp.37-61 and John D. Thompson and Grace Goldin, The Hospital: A Social and Architectural History (New Haven, 1975), pp.79-118.

<sup>2</sup>S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1726-1728, xii, p.4.

<sup>3</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No.8783; S.P.C.K., S.L., 18 May 1725 - 23 April 1726, p.70.

<sup>4</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1717-1718, No.5443.

because they are informed that many of their Institutions are very exemplary and worthy the Imitation of this or any other Kingdom.'<sup>1</sup>

The Netherlands had the most extensive and successful workhouse system in Europe, but the amount of material available in English on the Dutch experience was limited. Thus when the Society published Dr. De Lafaye's account, which concentrated on the industrial aspect of workhouses, in 1728, it helped to fill a large gap in the literature on poor relief.

Heretofore we have looked at three of the Society's publications which addressed only the practical problems of running and founding workhouses. The Society also published works like Samuel Johnston's The Advantage of Employing the Poor in Useful Labour,<sup>2</sup> which advanced a precise argument based on scriptural evidence for the necessity of founding workhouses and employing the poor. The sermon was originally published privately and two hundred copies were sent to the Society by the corresponding member for Beverley, John Moyser. The Society was sufficiently impressed to have a new edition printed, a copy of which was sent to each of the corresponding members in 1726.<sup>3</sup>

The importance of Johnston's sermon lay in the fact that it was in a form easily exploited by the Society's members, most of whom were clergy. With the help of sermons like Johnston's the weight of scriptural authority could be added to the more prosaic arguments put forward in favour of workhouses in the Society's other publications.

An analysis of each of the pamphlets put out by the S.P.C.K. would take too long to be practical here, but a clear pattern emerges from those we have looked at. The Society produced rules and plans which

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., S.L., 18 May 1725 - 23 April 1726, p.61.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel Johnston, The Advantage of Employing the Poor in Useful Labour (London, 1726).

<sup>3</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, Nos. 8637, 8674, 8716, 8764, 8783; S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1726-1728, xii, pp.5-6.

could be put to practical use in the day-to-day running of a parish workhouse, while also publishing examples of more general arguments designed to encourage the establishment of houses by appealing to the sense of civic and religious duty in those who controlled local government.

The Society had originally become interested in the idea of promoting the employment of the poor as a result of the criticism levelled against it and the charity schools. Accusations of Jacobitism in the 1710s, and later, De Mandeville's searing indictment of the schools in his Essay on Charity Schools encouraged the Society to look for less controversial spheres of activity.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the 1720s the Society continued to promote the establishment of workhouses. Besides publishing pamphlets it gave advice to members involved with workhouses, arranged to train provincial masters in the workhouses of London, and provided cheap educational material for workhouse schools.<sup>2</sup>

These activities have been largely dealt with in previous chapters, here it is only necessary to note that the Society continued to provide these services until the early 1730s, when its interest in the foundation of Georgia and the problem of Protestant refugees from Europe began to take up more and more of its time to the exclusion of workhouses.<sup>3</sup>

The Society never refused to give advice on workhouses, but gradually over the 1730s and 1740s its attitude towards these institutions became less sympathetic. Several scandals came out during

<sup>1</sup>See Jones, The Charity School Movement, pp.43-44, 52, 86, 111-130; Cowie, Henry Newman, pp.86-99, for an account of attacks on the Society.

<sup>2</sup>See Chapter 4, pp.114-118.

<sup>3</sup>See Cowie, Henry Newman, pp.223-249, for an account of the Society's role in the foundation of Georgia and relief of the Salzburg refugees.

the 1730s involving workhouses and gradually the enthusiasm which accompanied the movement in the 1720s was replaced by a more realistic attitude. By 1743 infirmaries and charitable foundations had replaced workhouses as the main object of the Society's interest. In that year Henry Newman wrote to the Bishop of Oxford informing him that 'The New Institution of Infirmaries are so very Beneficial to the Publick especially in this great City & have carried one branch of relief to the labouring poor so far beyond the Workhouses that the society have resolved to take all proper occasions of recommending 'em.'<sup>1</sup> After this the Society's involvement with workhouses was minimal, and though it did reprint the 1732 edition of the Account in 1786, its significance for the movement declined sharply after 1732.<sup>2</sup>

Although the S.P.C.K. was the most significant publisher of workhouse pamphlets in the 1720s, overseeing the printing and distribution of over half the material advocating their foundation produced in this period, it did not monopolise this field. Both Matthew Marryott and a couple of individual parishes published descriptive pamphlets. Marryott was most probably responsible for the writing of A Representation of Some Mis-managements by Parish-Officers published in 1726, while the vestry of St. Giles-in-the-Fields published two pamphlets, the first, The Case of the Parish of St. Giles in the Fields, As to their Poor printed in 1725, and the second, written with Marryott's help, Rules and Orders To be Observed by the Officers and Servants in St. Giles's Workhouse printed in 1726.

Like much of the S.P.C.K. material, these pamphlets were descriptive. They detailed the organisation of successful workhouses,

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., M.L.B., 1735-1743, ix, p.75.

<sup>2</sup>An Account of the Workhouses in Great Britain in the Year M,DCC,XXXII (London, 1786).

and gave advice on how parishes could most effectively deal with specific types of problems in workhouse administration.

There is very little evidence tying specific pamphlets to the formation of parish policy. It is impossible to say if any individual parish established a workhouse because of the information contained in any one pamphlet, although it may be noted that at Boston, Lincolnshire the local corresponding member of the S.P.C.K. 'received the Dozen Account of Workhouses and dispersed 'em among their parishioners, who at a Publick notice of a Vestry, agreed unanimously to build a Workhouse for the poor'.<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to demonstrate the influence of this or other pamphlets from this sort of material, though it is possible to relate the numbers of houses established to the date of publication of specific pieces. It has already been noted that the number of foundations in the eight counties and the cities of London and Westminster rose sharply in 1726 and 1732, and that there was a plateau between these two dates during which period approximately nine houses were founded each year.

The existence of this plateau and these peaks argues convincingly for the direct influence of the Society's Account of Several Workhouses, the first edition of which was distributed in the year preceding the first peak, while the second was published just before the foundation of workhouses reached their high point in 1732. More than this, the period of greatest activity in workhouse foundations coincides precisely with that during which the most pamphlets were published. Between 1723 and 1732 about twenty pamphlets advocating the establishment of houses and giving advice on the best way to go

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No.8739.

about that establishment, were published.<sup>1</sup> That peaks can be identified in the years following the publication of specific works argues that it was the foundations which followed the pamphlets rather than the publications which followed the example of the parishes.

However, the publication of the pamphlets cannot be seen as the only influence working on the minds of vestrymen. This period in the 1720s also coincides with that of the S.P.C.K.'s greatest activity. The way in which the Society encouraged individual members to promote the foundation of houses has already been described. But the Society maintained a high level of activity for only a short period. Beginning as early as 1727 a subtle shift can be discerned in the S.P.C.K.'s attitude. At first, as a result of the gradual discrediting of Matthew Marryott, and later because of the increased pressure placed on the Society by its other activities, the Society's interest in the promotion of houses declined. This decline, when combined with the well-publicised workhouse scandals that came to light in the early 1730s can be seen as the reverse side to the encouragement and propaganda of the 1720s.

<sup>1</sup>Besides those pamphlets published by the S.P.C.K. and listed at Chapter 8, p.227n., the following pamphlets were published in this period: Laurence Braddon, To Pay Old Debts Without New Taxes (London, 1723); John Bellers, An Essay for Employing the Poor to Profit (London, 1723); Thomas Thwaites, A Proposal Humbly Dedicated to the King, Lords and Commons...Setting for the Manner how we may Profitably Employ our Now Idle (n.d., ?1725); The Case of the Parish of St. Giles in the Fields, As to their Poor (n.d., ?1725); A Representation of Some Mismanagements; At a Meeting of the Gentlemen of the Vestry at the Work-house on Tuesday the fifteenth Day of March 1726, for the Better Government and Management of the Workhouse (n.d., ?1727); A Letter from a Citizen of London, to a Member of Parliament, Proposing a Method for the Employment of the Vagrant Poor (n.d., ?1731); An Answer to the Case of the Petitioners Against Bringing in a Bill for Erecting a New Workhouse in the Town of Manchester (n.d., ?1731); and Rules and Orders for the Government of the Work-house Erected for the Use of the Poor of the Several Parishes of St. Andrews, Holborn...and St. George the Martyr (London, 1733).

## Section C: Scandal, Argument and Disillusion

In August 1726 the S.P.C.K. received a letter from its correspondent at Leeds describing Marryott's approach to the provision of trained masters to provincial houses. In it, Richard Wilson described how Marryott demanded bribes from masters he recommended.<sup>1</sup> From the date of this letter the Society began to distance itself from Marryott. Up to 1726 the Society had willingly provided him with the cheap educational material it specialised in. Horn books, Primers and Testaments were regularly dispatched to the houses at Luton, St. Giles-in-the-Fields, St. Martin-in-the-Field and St. George's, Hanover Square, at Marryott's request,<sup>2</sup> while the Society also ensured that he had copies of the Account of Several Workhouses to distribute as he saw fit.<sup>3</sup>

The S.P.C.K. had made liberal use of Marryott's services in the early 1720s. Several meetings between the Society and Marryott were arranged for the S.P.C.K.'s benefit. In February 1724/5 Henry Newman recorded that:

Mr. Marryott attending in the Coffee house was call'd in, and the Committee desired him to acquaint them with the Progress he had made in setting up several Work-houses in the Country; which he did, and also answer'd several Objections lately<sup>4</sup> made by Mr. Allen of Kettering to the Design of Workhouses.

Similarly when, in 1726, the Society was deciding on which plans to publish it was to Marryott the Society appealed.<sup>5</sup> The course of the

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No. 8973.

<sup>2</sup>S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1724-1726, xi, p.126; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, No.8174; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, Nos.8905, 9025; S.P.C.K., An Account of the Packets Sent to the Residing and Corresponding Members, 1719-1726, pp.132, 137, 143, 164.

<sup>3</sup>S.P.C.K., An Account of the Packets Sent to the Residing and Corresponding Members, 1719-1726, p.146.

<sup>4</sup>S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1724-1726, xi, pp.125-126.

<sup>5</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No.8739.

S.P.C.K.'s disillusionment with Marryott's methods is reflected in its increasing reticence to supply him with educational material. In April 1727 Marryott requested a packet of books for the use of the workhouse at St. Giles-in-the-Fields, which the Society granted him with the proviso that 'for the Future he must not expect such a Favour, unless he shall prevail with some Gent. of the Society to ask it for him.'<sup>1</sup> two years later, when he made a similar request, he received the answer: 'If Mr. Marryott can get any Member to move for what he desires his Application will be complied with.'<sup>2</sup> The attitude of the Society was remarkably cool considering the cooperation Marryott had previously shown.

The decline of the Society's interest in Marryott's activities was mirrored by a gradual diminution of his role in managing the workhouses of London. By 1727 Marryott held contracts for the majority of the workhouses in the City of Westminster, but in a very short period he lost all of these, and at the same time found himself at loggerheads with two parishes over his use of local government money.<sup>3</sup> In 1727 Marryott had contracts for the care of the poor of four houses in Westminster; those belonging to St. George's, Hanover Square, St. James's, St. Martin-in-the-Fields, and St. Margaret's. By the end of 1728 he had been thrown out of the management of all of these houses. The first parish to discharge Marryott from its service was St. George's, Hanover Square, followed closely by St. Martin-in-the-

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., No.11459; in abstracts of letters sent to correspondents.

<sup>2</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1729-1731, No.10246

<sup>3</sup>See W.C.L., MS D1759, St. James's, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1712-1736, pp.319-321; W.C.L., MS E2632 shelf 28, St. Margarets, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1726-1727, 23 March 1727/8.

Fields, then St. Margaret's and finally St. James's.<sup>1</sup> The specific reasons why Marryott was discharged are unclear, but at St. Martin-in-the-Fields it was noted by the Vestry:

that Mr. Mathew Marriot Governour of the Workhouse of this Parish having under his care and Management other Workhouses That he did not nor could not give such Attendance at and take such care of the Workhouse of this Parish as was and is necessary and Requisite And this Board having inquired into the same and heard Mr. Matthew Marriot in relation thereto Are of Opinion that the said Mr. Matthew Marriot has not taken that Care of the Workhouse of this Parish as he ought to have done.<sup>2</sup>

As early as 1726 the Society had complained that Marryott's 'Age and Glutt of Business near London' would not allow him to pay due attention to enquiries made by the S.P.C.K.'s corresponding members.<sup>3</sup> It seems that Marryott's very success held the seeds of his initial downfall. It would be unfair to attach too great an importance to these early failures. Marryott continued master of several workhouses, particularly that at St. Giles-in-the-Fields, until his death in 1732. But a distinct disillusionment with his management can be seen to have set in long before he disappeared from the scene.

Marryott's eventual failure and the increasing lack of interest of the Society in the foundation of workhouses removed some of the impetus from the workhouse movement. This was a gradual process. Marryott continued to advise parishes and contract for the furnishing of their houses up until his death, and the Society never, even in the 1740s, refused to answer enquiries about workhouses from its provincial members. Indeed, the 1732 peak in workhouse foundations might be seen

<sup>1</sup>See W.C.L., MS C869, St. George Hanover Square, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1726-1729, p.26; W.C.L., MS F2006, St. Martins in the Fields, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1716-1739, p.289; W.C.L., MS E2632, St. Margarets, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1726-1727, 16 March 1727/8; and W.C.L., MS D1759, St. James, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1712-1736, p.318.

<sup>2</sup>W.C.L., MS F2006, St. Martins in the Fields, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1716-1739, p.289.

<sup>3</sup>S.P.C.K., S.L., 18 May 1725 - 23 April 1726, pp.66-67.

to argue against the idea that the popularity of workhouses was declining before this date. However, what seems to have happened was that the Society, in a last burst of activity, published the second edition of the Account of Several Workhouses, and that there followed from this a short revival of enthusiasm in the parishes; that revival was, though, quickly dampened by the increasing lack of interest of the Society, and the memory of one workhouse scandal and the publicising of a particularly acrimonious political argument centred on the founding of a house at Manchester.

The first well-publicised workhouse scandal arose as a result of Marryott's management of the house belonging to the parish of St. Giles-in-the-Fields. In 1731 two broadsides entitled The Workhouse Cruelty were published by the 'Christian love-poor'.<sup>1</sup> They contained numerous instances of excessive cruelty to workhouse inmates and laid the blame squarely on Matthew Marryott. The provenance of these broadsides is unclear. I can find no information on who or what the 'Christian love-poor' were, but the extremely poor quality of the presentation of the material - the pamphlets contain a large number of typographical errors - suggests a poorly organised or unsophisticated group. However, there is evidence to indicate that the accusations made in these broadsides were taken very seriously, and were brought to the attention of the Justices of the Peace of Middlesex, to one of whom one of the broadsides appealed personally.<sup>2</sup> Two years earlier, in November 1729, Justice Milner had complained to the Vestry of St. Giles that 'the Apothecary at the Work-house had caused the Arm & Breast Bone of a poor Woman who dyed there to be cutt off & carryed away to a

<sup>1</sup>See The Workhouse Cruelty, Workhouses Turn'd Gaols, And Gaolers Executioners and The Workhouse Cruelty. Being a Full and True Account of One Mrs. Whistle.

<sup>2</sup>At the end of The Workhouse Cruelty; Workhouses Turn'd Gaols, And Gaolers Executioners it is noted that Mr. Justice Milner and two other Justices were looking into the complaints made in the pamphlets.

person who finishes skeletons':<sup>1</sup> it was to Milnor the broadside appealed. As a direct result of these broadsides a report was produced on conditions in the house at St. Giles discrediting the claims of abuse.<sup>2</sup>

There is no way of determining how widely these broadsides were distributed, but the speedy reaction of the Middlesex Quarter Sessions indicates that they had an immediate effect on many of those in a position to promote the foundation of houses in the capital. In Middlesex and the cities of London and Westminster the number of houses established dropped from eight in 1730 to four in 1731, going up to at most five in 1732,<sup>3</sup> suggesting that the idea of institutionalising the poor received at least a temporary blow from the claims made in these broadsides.

These two items constitute the sole example of published material relating to the failure of a specific workhouse. However, other material equally damaging to the idea of founding workhouses started to appear at about the same time.

At Manchester a dispute arose over the founding of a workhouse which resulted in the publication of two pamphlets and the mounting of an enquiry by a Parliamentary committee. The idea of institutionalising the poor of Manchester was first mooted in 1729, when, at a 'Meeting of several of the chief and substantial Inhabitants of the Town, at which Meeting the Churchwardens and other Officers of the Town, were present...Two thousand Pounds, and upwards...[was] subscribed' towards the building of a house.<sup>4</sup> There is some

<sup>1</sup>C.P.L., MS St. Giles in the Fields, Vestry Minutes, 1673-1771, f.531.

<sup>2</sup>See Brit. Lib., Sloane MS 4078, f.159; A Report on the Autopsy of Margaret Whistle, 10 Sept. 1731.

<sup>3</sup>See Appendix: Workhouse Foundations Listed by County.

<sup>4</sup>J.H.C., xxi, 644.

evidence to suggest that the dispute which later developed was strictly defined by a landowner/merchant, Tory/Whig split,<sup>1</sup> but beyond this some of the material which appeared expressed powerful arguments against the institutionalisation of the poor. The opposition described the motives of those seeking to found the workhouse as being:

to gain and establish in themselves and Famillies a power of raising Contributions on the Land-Owners and Inhabitants, for the relief of the Poor; and disposing thereof; and thereby to Ingross the Labour of the Poor, and employ them in their own work, and at their own rates.<sup>2</sup>

It was also claimed that:

as many Industrious people employed in the Manufactory of the place, through Sickness and Misfortunes, frequently become necessitous for a time, and want relief, it was easy to foresee, that these projectors could accomplish their designs and secure A perpetual Succession of Guardians of the Poor in their own Families and Friends, no other trader would be able to procure any other hands to Work for him, but such as the Guardians should refuse to employ.<sup>3</sup>

This dispute might have been confined to Manchester except that the committee first proposing the establishment of a house applied to Parliament for an Act setting up a Corporation of the Poor, thereby broadening the argument and ensuring it received wide publicity. A petition to submit a bill was laid before Parliament in late January 1730/31, and was duly referred to a committee, and in February two petitions opposing the bill were received.<sup>4</sup> In the meantime the Parliamentary Committee called in several witnesses to give evidence on the state of the poor of Manchester, and the relative wealth of the signatories of the various petitions. It turned out that those opposing the workhouse paid slightly more to the maintenance of the

<sup>1</sup> See Elizabeth M. M. Zucker, 'A History of the Work-house System to the End of the Eighteenth Century, with Special Reference to the period from 1722 to 1732, and the Industrial Aspect' (Univ. of Manchester M.A. thesis, 1925), p.9.

<sup>2</sup> The Case of the Petitioners Against Bringing in a Bill for Erecting a New Work-house in the town of Manchester (n.d., ?1731), p.1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>4</sup> J.H.C., xxi, 594, 604, 697.

poor than did the petitioners for the bill. Further evidence was given to the effect that 'there [were]...many Clauses in the said Bill, which will prejudice the Trade and Interest of the said Town, and also render the Rights and Properties of the Inhabitants and Land-owners therein precarious and uncertain.'<sup>1</sup>

The bill was eventually allowed to die in committee in April 1731,<sup>2</sup> but not before it had received a large degree of attention from Parliament and been the subject of two pamphlets.<sup>3</sup> The opposition to the creation of a Corporation of the Poor in Manchester, and the pamphlet expressing the views of those opposed to it, represents the first instance since the beginning of the parochial workhouse movement of serious disagreement among ruling elites about the usefulness of workhouses and their effectiveness in maintaining the poor cheaply. As such, along with the Workhouse Cruelty, this opposition represents the beginning of a substantial disillusionment with the idea of employing the poor in institutions. In the 1720s there had been no dissenting voices, at least in print, in the chorus of praise heaped on these parochial institutions.

That a high point in workhouse foundations was reached in 1732, a year after the publication of these critical documents, indicates that these early statements were voices in the wilderness. But they represent a turning point in attitudes towards workhouses, which allowed the defeat of William Hay's workhouse bill in 1736 and the gradual decline in the number of houses founded each year until the 1750s. The amount of material published opposing the foundation

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 697.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 720.

<sup>3</sup>See The Case of the Petitioners Against and An Answer to the Case of the Petitioners Against Bringing in a Bill for Erecting a New Work-house in the Town of Manchester.

of parochial workhouses was small in comparison to the literature supporting the idea of employing the poor, but it is much easier to convince someone to forgo a difficult task than to undertake it. Hence, the influence of arguments against the foundation of houses must be given disproportionate weight.

#### Section D: A Bill for the Better Relief and Employment of the Poor

Although the history of the workhouse movement in the late 1730s and 1740s is largely one of gradual decline and growing lack of interest, there was one substantial move towards the creation of a national system of institutional poor relief: William Hay's 'Bill for the Better Relief and Employment of the Poor' which was laid before Parliament in March 1735/6.<sup>1</sup> In Hay's proposed legislation it was suggested that 'Publick Workhouse[s]...Hospitals...or Houses of Correction be established in proper places and under proper Regulations in each county'. More than this, the bill would have required:

That, in such...Workhouses, all poor Persons, able to labour, be set to Work, who shall either be sent thither, or come voluntarily for Employment...

That, in such Hospital[s]...Foundlings, and other poor Children, not having Parents able to provide for them, be taken care of, as also all poor Persons that are impotent or infirm....

That, in such...Houses of Correction, all idle and disorderly Persons, Vagrants and such other Criminals, as shall be thought proper, be confined to hard Labour...

That, towards the Charge of such Workhouses, Hospitals and Houses of Correction, each Parish be assessed or rated; and that proper Persons be empowered to receive the Money, so to be assessed or rated, when collected, and also all voluntary Contribution, or Collections, either given or made for such Purposes...

That such Workhouses...be under the Management of proper Persons, Regard being had to such as shall be Benefactors to so good a Work...

That such Persons, as shall be appointed to the Management of such Workhouses...be one Body Politick in Law, capable to sue and be sued, and of taking and receiving charitable Contributions and Benefactions for the Use of the same.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J.H.C., xxii, 607.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 483-484.

The report of the committee which eventually brought in the bill also recommended that all the laws relating to vagrants and settlement be redrafted into one piece of legislation.

The provisions laid out by Hay show the influence of earlier attempts at legislative reform. The idea of combining settlement legislation into one act was a reform often discussed in the late 1690s and 1700s, while the creation of corporations in law for the management of the proposed workhouses, and indeed the combination of workhouses, hospitals and houses of correction under one authority, is extremely reminiscent of both the Corporations of the Poor and the proposed national reforms laid before the Board of Trade by both John Pollexfen and John Locke.<sup>1</sup>

Hay's bill never became law. It was first introduced into the Commons on 3 March 1735/6, and, not gaining passage in that Session, was reintroduced in February 1736/7, again failing.<sup>2</sup> The bill's failure is surprising. William Hay was a Whig and a government supporter. He was an effective politician and publicist, willing to accept support from all quarters for his proposed reforms,<sup>3</sup> and while he seems to have received a degree of initial support, this soon evaporated with the development of vociferous opposition to the measure.

Two pamphlets describing and supporting the bill were published in 1735 and 1736. The first, Remarks on the Laws Relating to the Poor criticised smaller parishes for their seeming inability to combine for poor relief purposes, while lauding the idea of founding large workhouses. In it, William Hay argued that where workhouses had been

<sup>1</sup>See Chapter 2, pp.17-19, 27-28.

<sup>2</sup>J.H.C., xxii, 746-747.

<sup>3</sup>See Colley, In Defiance of Oligarchy, p.44.

erected and 'made Use of, the Poor Rates have Abated, and the Poor have been better provided for: but this has been chiefly in large and rich Places for the lesser Parishes are never like to agree together. So the Remedy is far from being complete...'<sup>1</sup> The pamphlet also complained that numerous paupers were unable to gain relief from the parishes because they had no settlement, and that the laws themselves were oppressive, preventing the free movement of the poor. The pamphlet suggested that:

the most melancholy Consideration is the Oppression of the poor Persons themselves. A poor man is no sooner got into a Neighborhood, Habitation, and Employment that he likes, But upon Humour or Caprice of the Parish, he is sent to another Place, where he can find none of these conveniences: not certain long to remain there; for, perhaps after Appeal he is sent back again.<sup>2</sup>

The bill was printed in 1736, the same year that saw the publication of another pamphlet, A New Scheme for Reducing the laws Relating to the Poor into one Act of Parliament. These pamphlets and the bill received some attention from the S.P.C.K. and were initially viewed with some enthusiasm; in May of 1736 the Society was distributing copies of the bill to its corresponding members.<sup>3</sup> However, a problem with the bill soon emerged which radically affected the attitude of the Society. It became apparent that the clause giving the proposed poor-relief authorities power over charitable bequests included 'collections at Sacrament', which had hitherto been used for the support of charity schools. George Miller, at Box in Wiltshire, complained in March 1736/7 that the clause 'will much prejudice their

<sup>1</sup> [William Hay], Remarks on the Laws Relating to the Poor (n.d., 1735), p.16.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>3</sup> S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1734-1736, No.13662.

Charity School',<sup>1</sup> to which the Society's secretary could only reply that the bill had not 'yet had the Sanction of Parliament and I hope never will, because it will greatly affect many Charity schools besides yours'.<sup>2</sup>

Opposition to Hay's proposed measure took published form in at least one pamphlet, Thomas Andrews' An Enquiry into the Causes of the Encrease and Misery of the Poor of England...Occasioned by the late Workhouse Scheme. In it, Andrews complained of the inequitable rate burden which he saw as falling on the landed interest, and claimed that the recent increase in the number of workhouses reflected 'the Complaints of a nation, filled with vicious, idle, dissolute poor.'<sup>3</sup>

In Andrews' opinion:

an industrious person as he labours more chearfully, so will labour harder, when he is at liberty, than confined. And an Old, impotent, or Sick person, or a child, wants no more Cloathing, Victuals, or Attendance, when left to the Care of that Poor Family in which God and Nature have placed him, than if snatched away from their arms, and put to the care of Those, who, as they have no ties of Natural Affection, may sometimes want, even Humanity towards them.<sup>4</sup>

An Enquiry into the Causes of the Encrease and Misery of the Poor incorporated arguments first used in the 1700s in response to Anthony Hammond's and Humphrey Mackworth's attempts at poor-relief reform.<sup>5</sup> Andrews argued, among other things, that workhouses took employment from virtuous labourers and put it into the hands of the idle and dissolute,<sup>6</sup> but more than this he developed a line of argument based on ideas of social contract and traditional paternalism. He added an

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1736-1738, No.14014.

<sup>2</sup>S.P.C.K., M.L.B., 1735-1743, v, pp.29-30.

<sup>3</sup>[Thomas Andrews], An Enquiry into the Causes of the Encrease and Miseries of the Poor of England (1738), p.6.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.9.

<sup>5</sup>See Chapter 2, pp.35-36, 39.

<sup>6</sup>[Thomas Andrews], An Enquiry, p.7.

element of humanity to the more strictly economic condemnation of workhouses developed by Defoe in his Giving Alms, No Charity. Andrews suggested that:

Every Civil Society pre-supposes an original contract, or reciprocal Agreement between all its particular Members, Rich and Poor; not only that they shall contribute their joint Powers towards their common Defence; for then the Rich only would be Gainers by Society; but also that they shall support each other with the common Comforts of Life, the solidest and most valuable of which are, the Assistance and Conversation in a reasonable way, of Parents, Children, Relations and Friends, who are a little society, established by divine wisdom and Providence, in every great One of the Commonwealth; with those rights, mutual enjoyments and Duties, the confinement of a work house seems inconsistent.<sup>1</sup>

The pamphlet also makes clear the author's sympathy for the poor:

To be taken from our Home, from our nearest and dearest Relations and friends, carried, it may be, to several miles distance, and there confined to a Work-house, as in a Prison; let it be called what soft name it will, is really a punishment; nay next to Death and transportation, the greatest punishment that is normally inflicted on criminals. This Punishment being Indiscriminately inflicted on all, for no crime, but only the misfortune of being poor, seems agreeable with neither charity nor justice.<sup>2</sup>

Andrews' opinions represent an increasing body of thought opposed to workhouses on moral grounds. Particularly in the second half of the eighteenth century, arguments against the foundation of workhouses centred not on their economic influence, but the abrogation of the duty of the rich to care for the poor and the inability of workhouses to be run efficiently.<sup>3</sup> The development of these arguments reflect increasing experience with the problems of workhouse administration,

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp.6-7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>3</sup> For examples of this type of argument presented in later pamphlets see Populousness with Oeconomy, the Wealth and Strength of a Kingdom (1759); Observations on the Number and Misery of the Poor (1765); Jonas Hanway, Virtue in Humble Life (1774); Reasons Humbly Submitted to the Honourable Members of both Houses of Parliament for Introducing a Law to Prevent Unnecessary and Vexatious Removals (1774) and Henry Zouch, Remarks upon the late Resolutions of the House of Commons, Respecting the Proposed Change of the Poor Laws (?1776).

with the insupportable conditions often found in parochial houses.

It is impossible to demonstrate that Andrews' pamphlet materially contributed to the failure of Hay's bill. But that legislation designed by an adherent of the government in a Whig-dominated Parliament should fail reflects the growing doubts of many about the usefulness and appropriateness of institutions for the care of the poor.

The prospect of the passage of reforming legislation might be expected to have raised the rate at which workhouses were founded, but this did not happen. Rather, the number of workhouses established declined steadily throughout the 1730s, reaching a low point at the beginning of the next decade, possibly as a result of the disastrous harvests of 1739 and 1740, which allowed the parishes no room for the capital investment in the buildings and furniture necessary to establish a house. The workhouse movement never really ended, some houses continued to be founded each year. Instead, it simply petered out. And despite some moves towards minor poor-relief reforms in the 1740s,<sup>1</sup> it did not regain the enthusiasm and currency enjoyed by the movement in the 1720s until the 1750s, when an increasing number of pamphlets began to emerge, and the foundation of houses again became an attractive alternative.

<sup>1</sup>See J.H.C., xxiv, 246, 494.

## CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

Following the decline in interest in the foundation of workhouses in the 1740s, there was a revival in the 1750s. In 1749 the town council of Edinburgh petitioned Parliament for an Act unifying the parishes of the city for poor relief purposes and proposing the establishment of a general workhouse,<sup>1</sup> and in 1751 a Parliamentary enquiry surveyed the number of houses then operating in England.<sup>2</sup> There followed the publication of a series of pamphlets arguing for and against the foundation of large purpose-built workhouses.<sup>3</sup> However, this debate concentrated on a type of institution different from either the Corporation workhouses or those founded by parishes in the 1720s and 1730s, and it was not until the 1760s that the views of the contributors to this argument achieved practical application, when the first hundred-houses were established in Norfolk and Suffolk.

<sup>1</sup> See James Craig, Report of the General Kirk-Sessions of Edinburgh, anent the Establishment by Law of a Fund for the Maintenance and Employment of the Poor (1749); State of the Present Funds of the Charity Work-house of the City of Edinburgh; and Proposals for Applying to the Legislature for an Act of Parliament (1748); Alarm to the Householders and Heritors of the City of Edinburgh (1749); Memorial Containing Reasons for Opposing (by all lawful means) the Imposition, at this time, of a Poor-Rate on the City of Edinburgh (n.p., 1749); R.A. Cage, The Scottish Poor Law, 1745-1845 (Edinburgh, 1981), p.52.

<sup>2</sup> Though the actual report has been lost an abstract of its findings on the level of poor rates can be found at House of Commons, Sessional Papers. Poor Law, First Report, with Appendix, 107, (1818) v, 1-14.

<sup>3</sup> See Henry Fielding, An Enquiry into the Causes of the late Increase of Robbers (London, 1751); [Charles Gray], Considerations on Several Proposals lately made for the Better Maintenance of the Poor (London, 1751); [James Creed], An Impartial Examination of a pamphlet intituled, Considerations on Several Proposals (London, 1752); Thomas Alcock, Observations on the Defects on the Poor Laws (London, 1752); A Letter to the Author of Considerations on Several Proposals for the Better Maintenance of the Poor (London, 1752); Henry Fielding, A Proposal for Making an Effectual Provision for the Poor (London, 1753).

The reformers of the 1750s largely rejected the small parochial institutions in favour of larger institutions where a greater degree of regimentation could be exercised over the lives of the inmates. Several critiques of parish workhouses were published, pointing out the singular failure of earlier foundations to reform the idle and blaming the small size of the institutions established for this failure.<sup>1</sup> It was not that writers rejected the idea of reforming the poor by incarcerating them in institutions, but rather that they felt a greater degree of control was required over the poor for the policy to be effective.

The efforts of the reformers of the 1750s are outside the scope of this thesis, but it is necessary to note that they advocated a different type of institution to those founded by either the Corporations of the Poor or the parishes. There were distinct, early eighteenth-century workhouses, characterised in the case of the Corporations by an insistence upon the ability of the poor to maintain themselves through their own labour, and, in the case of the parish workhouses, by the small size of the institutions founded. In the pamphlets published in the 1750s, in works like Henry Fielding's Proposal for Making an Effectual Provision for the Poor, and in the foundation of the Hundred houses in East Anglia, a shift in the types of institutions envisioned can be seen.<sup>2</sup>

Small parochial workhouses continued to be established throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century, and most of the institutions set up in the 1720s and 1730s continued unchanged until the nineteenth century. But this type of house was the object of increasingly

<sup>1</sup>For example see Some Considerations on the Present Methods Used for the Relief and Employment of the Poor (London, 1759).

<sup>2</sup>See M.F. Lloyd Pritchard, 'Early Days of the Wangford Hundred Workhouse', Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology, 30, No.2 (1965), 175-182.

vociferous criticism, while reformers and projectors looked to huge, purpose-built, foundations for a general reform of society.

The workhouse movement had passed beyond the stage where the more easily established parochial houses could satisfy the grandiose visions of reformers. By 1750 the existence of perhaps 600 houses had radically altered the nature and quantity of the resources available to reformers, making possible a vision of the institutional care of the poor which thirty years earlier would have seemed largely unobtainable. In the 1720s the only person who felt self-confident enough to advocate the creation of large workhouses throughout the country was Laurence Braddon, whose pamphlets present an utopian vision of a completely reformed society.<sup>1</sup> In 1753, as practical a man as Henry Fielding could envision a society transformed by the institutional care of the poor.<sup>2</sup>

The first workhouse movement had set the stage for later reforms. It had established what was feasible, where the problems lay, and at the same time had contributed to solving some of those problems by giving a number of individuals experience in the running of institutions. It had also implanted the idea and ideal of reforming the poor through the inculcation of virtuous habits. Seventeenth-century workhouses, and the Corporations of the Poor, had sought to rely upon the ability of paupers to create wealth through their labour; by 1750, deterrence and the inculcation of habit had

<sup>1</sup>For examples of Braddon's views on poor relief see Laurence Braddon, The Regular-Government, and Judicious Employment of the Poor (London, 1721); Laurence Braddon, Particular Answers to the Most Material Objections made to the Proposal...for Relieving and Reforming and Employing all the Poor (London, 1722); Laurence Braddon, The Form of a Petition Submitted to the Consideration and Correction of those Noblemen and Gentlemen who Desire to Subscribe what Sums shall be Necessary for Relieving, Reforming and Employing the Poor (London, 1722).

<sup>2</sup>See Fielding, A Proposal for Making an Effectual Provision for the Poor.

become the grand justifications for workhouses, and would remain so for the next century. The dual ideas of deterrence and habit had been disseminated in the 1690s by the Societies for the Reformation of Manners and the charity schools. The parochial workhouse movement spread these ideas even further, making them applicable to one more group in society, and taking a further step towards making them the dominant ideology behind English social policy. The workhouse movement was part of a larger movement which influenced the provision of free education, as a way of raising pauper children in habits of virtue and industry, and which encouraged the S.P.C.K. to produce short moralistic pamphlets to be distributed free among the poor.

It has not been the purpose of this thesis to do more than sketch the outline of the workhouse movement. The constraints of time and space have necessitated a sharp restriction on the material discussed to that relating to how workhouses were founded and run, and how the poor experienced them. But within these constraints several things have been established, both about the reality of workhouse life and administration, and the broader influence they exercised over social policy in general.

In some ways the Corporations of the Poor were a historical backwater. They were the last expression of distinctly seventeenth-century attitudes to poor relief. More than this, the reforms they inaugurated were made at the level of the borough, and while they did have a pronounced influence on the attempts made at national level to reform the Old Poor Law around the turn of the century, their organisation and the ideas upon which they were established had relatively little influence upon the parish worthies who were responsible for the foundation of the vast majority of later workhouses. Indeed, the institutionalisation of all the poor at

Norwich in the late 1720s and 1730s,<sup>1</sup> for instance, indicates that far from having set the pattern for later workhouses, the Corporations followed the lead of the parochial reformers, once parish institutions had begun to be established.

It remains necessary to understand the influences which went to encourage the foundation of the Corporations, if only because these were the backdrop against which parochial houses were established. Their long-term influence on English social policy must, however, be discounted; they were more important to the history of urban administration than to that of poor relief.

It is to the establishment of parochial workhouses more than to any other source that much of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century policy can be traced. It is here and among the ideas promulgated by the religious societies that the origin of deterrence and reform through habituation can be seen. It has been demonstrated that much of the administrative organisation and expertise used by parish vestries in running their institutions was derived from the charity schools encouraged by the S.P.C.K. The influence of the schools can be seen in the use of trustees and standing committees, and in the detail of workhouse rules, as well as in the frequency with which charity school masters took over the administration of workhouses. Moreover, the active involvement of the S.P.C.K. in the foundation of workhouses, compared with its almost complete indifference to the foundation of Corporations, provides a concrete link between the schools and houses, which in turn suggests a strong connection between the ideological justifications for both. The Society's early involvement with prison reform and the foundation of Georgia<sup>2</sup> further supports the idea that the concept of reforming society's misfits through the inculcation of

<sup>1</sup>See above, Chapter 3, p.86.

<sup>2</sup>Cowie Henry Newman, pp.223-228.

habits of virtue can be traced to the rise of the religious societies, and that the S.P.C.K. itself provides a clear link between the influence of this idea in all its manifestations.

As much space as possible has been devoted to the conditions and individuals incarcerated in the houses established in the 1720s. Of course, no more than a small sample of the parochial material available on these houses has been examined. It would be an onerous task indeed to look at all the pertinent records that have survived, but from the material I have been able to examine the range of possible conditions and administrative organisations can be determined, as well as the reaction of the poor to those conditions and organisations.

The greater part of this work is meant simply to set the stage for future analysis. Though eighteenth-century social policy has been the subject of several large volumes, these have concentrated on legal and parliamentary changes to the exclusion of the more awkward parochial developments. Hence, it has been necessary to examine the administrative and social background to the foundation of workhouses afresh and from the perspective of a different range of sources. This exercise has led to some new conclusions. The dual development of workhouses in both Essex and the East Midlands has been stressed, and the relatively late foundation of workhouses in the London area pointed out. Moreover, the disparity between the ideals expressed in sets of rules and administrative systems and the altogether more varied conditions actually experienced in parish workhouses has been demonstrated. Although parishes drew up elegant and balanced rules with provision for the kindly treatment of deserving paupers, the houses themselves have been seen to have been often disorganised and dirty, and paupers frequently treated in a manner which, even by eighteenth-century standards, was unacceptable. Conversely, workhouses occasionally provided a more generous and pleasant environment than was ever envisaged by their founders.

Perhaps the greatest problem with previous work on this subject is that because it is largely based on material produced by pamphleteers and parliamentarians it encourages the view that the poor themselves were the passive recipients of parish relief, that the poor gratefully accepted the provision thought best for them by their betters. Chapter 7 is an attempt to balance the argument: to give the inmates at least a portion of the attention generally afforded their more powerful and literate keepers. By looking at one workhouse population in detail it has been shown that inmates took a large measure of control over their own predicaments; that women, in particular, used workhouses in ways that parish vestries and workhouse masters would and did consider inappropriate; also, that even parish apprentices, the objects of so much sentimental literature, had some control over their own lives, even if that control was severely limited. Chapter 7 also analyses why the poor detested workhouses. In many instances conditions in workhouses were much better than those suffered by the out poor on inadequate pensions. What then made paupers give up their parish relief rather than enter the house? In answering this question account has been taken of both the pre-existing cultural associations attached to the name 'workhouse', and the unenviable economic position an offer of the house presented to anyone not completely destitute.

Each of these subjects has been dealt with from the perspective of parochial records and the results which have been presented reflect this source to the exclusion of some other helpful, but well used, material. Though some attention has been paid to Parliamentary reforms, particularly in relation to the Corporations of the Poor, and the Workhouse Test Act, less significant reforms and collateral legislation has been largely ignored. There was not simply a set of Poor Law Acts, but a whole sheaf of bills and Acts which, although primarily concerned with other questions of social policy - vagrancy, transportation, petty theft - had a tangential affect on poor relief.

Lack of space and interest has determined that these subjects have been jettisoned in favour of less accessible material. However, while to some extent rejecting a legalistic approach and parliamentary context to the material presented, I have put the reforms of the 1720s and 1730s into the context of a national movement. Earlier writers on poor relief, Dorothy George for instance, have recognised that the S.P.C.K. was responsible for the publication of much of the pamphlet literature produced on workhouses.<sup>1</sup> But by going directly to the archives of the Society, the extremely important role it played in the exceedingly quick spread of the ideas and expertise associated with workhouses has been explicated. I have chosen not to devote any single chapter to the role of the Society - though chapters 4 and 8 contain a larger proportion of material from the Society's archives than do any of the others - but to discuss the Society's activities in relation to each of the subjects dealt with.

We have seen that the Society was responsible for training masters for provincial houses; that it supplied educational material to houses throughout the country, and provided a link between the isolated reformers in the parishes. The Society's role as a publishing house has been described, and its active role in the development of legislation suggested. In each of these ways the S.P.C.K. worked towards the encouragement of the foundation of workhouses, and with these techniques managed to exercise a degree of control over the direction of the workhouse movement. Its advice to the parishes, encouragement of the Workhouse Test Act and its pamphlets, pieces like the Account of Several Workhouses, were all directed towards encouraging a specific type of house, in which the poor were 'regularly' provided for and set to work. The Society freely admitted

<sup>1</sup>George, London Life in the Eighteenth Century, p.218.

that the labour of the poor could not realistically be expected to create large profits, rather it stressed the importance of workhouses as a deterrent and consistently advocated the necessity of inculcating workhouse inmates with the habits of virtue by exposing them to religious devotion. Among its publications the Society numbered prayers to be read aloud to the inmates every day, while its educational material included short pamphlets to be distributed among the poor, which argued that the reader should give up drinking and swearing. The influence of these tactics on inmates was almost certainly minimal - at Plymouth a correspondent complained that 'some of the Societies little Tracts, against Swearing &c. would be more used if Bound up with some others...for he has heard that some of them which he distributed among the Seamen in the Hospital, served them to light their pipes with.'<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the ideas promulgated by the Society received a sympathetic hearing from parish administrators, and it was with the goal of reforming the poor that most parishes started their own houses.

The idea of reforming the poor in workhouses was not the invention of the Society: John Cary thought the kind treatment of pauper children by the Corporation at Bristol had changed those children from loutish ragamuffins to well-behaved insipient labourers.<sup>2</sup> However, it was only when the idea of deterrence was added to that of reform that the foundation of a large number of houses became attractive. The use of a workhouse as a deterrent did not require the strict control over the administration of houses necessary to successfully make money from the labour of the poor. Deterrence allowed parishes to save money on the

<sup>1</sup>S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1698-1706, i, p.419.

<sup>2</sup>Cary, An Account of the Proceedings of the Corporation of Bristol, pp.19-20.

rates with the minimum of effort, while at the same time giving those interested in the reform of the poor a forum in which to set about their task.

The number of questions left unanswered by this thesis are legion, but it has managed to throw new light on a dark corner of the eighteenth century, to explain one of the several movements which transformed eighteenth-century local government. The seventeenth-century abrogation by central government of so much of its control over local government left a power vacuum. In the eighteenth century this vacuum was partially filled by organisations like the S.P.C.K. which could monitor and influence local government practice. In part, this thesis has been an exercise in explaining the mechanisms through which change occurred; but, more than this, it has delved below the surface of local administration and depicted workhouses from the point of view of those who occupied, rather than administered them.

## Appendix: Workhouse Foundations Listed by County

Location or Administrative District Served - Date of Foundation or of First Mention - Sources Consulted.<sup>1</sup>

## Bedfordshire

- Amphill - 1724? - S.P.C.K., S.L., 4 September 1724 - 15 May 1725, pp.5-6; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, No.8053; Account (1725).
- St. Cuthbert, Bedford - 1724? - Account (1725).
- St. Mary, Bedford - 1724? - Account (1725).
- St. Paul, Bedford - 1721 - S.P.C.K., S.L., 4 September 1724 - 15 May 1725, pp.5-6; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, No.8020; Account (1725); Account (1732).
- Biggleswade - 1724? - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, No.8053; Account (1725).
- Caddington - 1725 - Emmison, 'The Relief of the Poor at Eaton Socon', p.24.
- Cranfield - 1700? - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1699-1701, No.80; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, No.8020; Account (1725).
- Eaton Socon - 1719 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1736-1738, No.14060; Emmison, 'The Relief of the Poor at Eaton Socon', pp.20-40.
- Kempston - 1724? - S.P.C.K., S.L., 4 September 1724 - 15 May 1725, pp.5-6; Account (1725).
- Leighton Buzzard - 1724? - S.P.C.K., S.L., 4 September 1724 - 15 May 1725, pp.5-6; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, No.8020; Account (1725).

<sup>1</sup>The information contained in this appendix can be considered complete for only eight counties, the cities of London and Westminster and part of Lancashire. The listings for Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Devon, Essex, the West Derby Hundred of Lancashire, the City of London, Middlesex, the City of Westminster, Oxfordshire, Surrey, and North Yorkshire are based either on my own research into the parish records of these areas, or on detailed secondary studies of local poor relief. It is hoped that this appendix will provide a useful starting point for future local research.

The date of foundation given for the houses listed is that of the actual opening of the institution. Where this date has been unavailable I have substituted that of the vestry resolution confirming the intention of the parish to found a house. Some of the dates listed are followed by a '?'. This indicates that no precise date of foundation can be established, and that the date given is that of the first mention of the existence of the house. In some instances, as at Windsor, the date given is that of the eighteenth century reorganisation of a seventeenth century foundation.

Lidlington - 1724? - S.P.C.K., S.L., 4 September 1724 - 15 May 1725, pp.5-6; Account (1725).

Luton - 1723? - S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1724-1726', xi, 126; S.P.C.K., S.L., 4 September 1724 - 15 May 1725, pp.5-6; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, Nos.8053, 8174; S.P.C.K., An Account of Packets Sent, 1719-1726, p.132; Account (1725); The Case of the Parish of St. Giles in the Fields. As to their Poor (1725?).

Roxton - 1739 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1738-1740, Nos.15132.

Shefford - 1724? - S.P.C.K., S.L., 4 September 1724 - 15 May 1725, pp.5-6; Account (1725).

Shillington - 1724? - Emmison, 'The Relief of the Poor at Eaton Socon', p.24.

Stevington - 1725? - Account (1725).

Turvey - 1722 - S.P.C.K., S.L., 4 September 1724 - 15 May 1725, pp.5-6; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, No.8020; Account (1725); Emmison, 'The Relief of the Poor at Eaton Socon', pp.23, 24.

#### Berkshire

Abingdon - 1714 - Thomas, 'The Treatment of Poverty in Berkshire, Essex and Oxfordshire', p.126.

Buckland - 1739 - Thomas, 'The Treatment of Poverty in Berkshire, Essex and Oxfordshire', pp.114-115.

Great Faringdon - 1725 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1727-1729, No.9310; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No.8436.

West Hanney - 1739 - B.R.O., MS D/P63/18.

Hungerford - 1729 - B.R.O., MS D/P71/12/1.

Newbury - 1726 - B.R.O., MS D/P89 5/2; B.R.O., MS N/ACal; B.R.O., MS N/Aca2; B.R.O., MS N/AQ1; B.R.O., MS N/AT2; B.R.O., Borough of Newbury, Common Council Book; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1729-1731, No.11008; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1734-1736, No.13759; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1742-1746, Nos.17033, 17096, 17115; Account (1732).

Reading - 1726 - B.R.O., MS R/Aca21; B.R.O., MS D/P97 8/1/1; B.R.O., MS D/P98 8/2; B.R.O., MS D/P98 5/1; B.R.O., MS D/P98 12/10-139; S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1726-1728, xii, pp.32, 58, 61; S.P.C.K., S.L., 21 May 1726 - 4 February 1726/7, p.62; S.P.C.K., M.L.B., 1735-1743, ii, p.6; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, Nos.8891, 9015, 9093; Account (1732); Zucker, 'A History of the Work-house System', p.10; Thomas, 'The Treatment of Poverty in Berkshire, Essex and Oxfordshire', p.107.

St. Giles, Reading - 1746 - B.R.O., MS D/P96 12/17.

Wantage - 1741 - B.R.O., MS D/P143 8/2; B.R.O., MS D/P143/12/2; B.R.O., MS D/P143/8/3; B.R.O., MS D/P143/12/3.

Windsor - 1731 - Bond, 'Windsor's Experiment in Poor-Relief'.

#### Buckinghamshire

Amersham - 1724? - Account (1725).

Aston Clinton - 1724? - Account (1725).

Aylesbury - 1724? - S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1709-1712, iii, pp.274-275; Account (1725).

North Crawley - 1724? - Account (1725).

Hanslope - 1724? - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, Nos.8001, 8112; Account (1725).

Lavendon - 1724? - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, No.8001; Account (1725).

Newport Pagnell - 1724? - Bucks. R.O., MS PR/153/16/1; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, Nos.8001, 8112; Account (1725).

Olney - 1714 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, Nos.8001, 8053, 8112; Account (1725); A Representation of Some Mis-Managements; Records of Buckinghamshire vii. (1897), p.199.

Wingrave - 1724? - Account (1725).

Winslow - 1732 - Account (1732).

#### Cambridgeshire

Burwell - 1736 - Hampson, The Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire, p.96.

St. Benedict, Cambridge - 1736 - Stokes, 'Cambridge Parish Workhouses', p.102; Murphy, Poverty in Cambridgeshire, p.18.

St. Botolph, Cambridge - 1733 - Hampson, Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire, pp.79-82; Stokes, 'Cambridge Parish Workhouses', pp.105, 134-137; Murphy, Poverty in Cambridgeshire, p.19.

St. Edward, Cambridge - 1735 - Hampson, Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire, pp.78, 83; Stokes, 'Cambridge Parish Workhouses', pp.107-8.

St. Mary the Great, Cambridge - 1734 - Stokes, 'Cambridge Parish Workhouses', p.108.

Chatteris - 1724? - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, No.8019; Account (1725); Hampson, Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire, p.76; Murphy, Poverty in Cambridgeshire, p.18.

Ely - 1724? - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, Nos.7987, 8019; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1727-1729, No. 9995; Account (1725); Murphy, Poverty in Cambridgeshire, p.18.

Linton - 1724? - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, No.8019; Account (1725); Hampson, Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire, pp.71-72, 93-95; Murphy, Poverty in Cambridgeshire, p.20.

Meldreth - 1707 - Hampson, Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire, p.70.

March - 1724? - Account (1725).

Royston - 1735 - Hampson, Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire, p.88.

Whittlesey - 1724? - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, No.8043; Account (1725).

Wisbech - 1720 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, Nos.7987, 8019, 8043; S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1724-1726, xi, p.224; Account (1725); Hampson, Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire, pp.59, 61-62, 73-76, 93; Murphy, Poverty in Cambridgeshire, p.18.

#### Cheshire

Ashton-Underline - 1729 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1729-1731, No.10572.

St. John the Baptist, Chester - 1724 - Samuel Cooper Scott Lectures on the History of St. John Baptist Church and Parish in the City of Chester (Chester, 1892), pp.130, 148; R.V.H. Burne 'The Treatment of the Poor in the Eighteenth Century in Chester', Journal of the Chester and North Wales Archetechural, Archaeological and Historic Society, lii, (1965), pp.44-48.

Grappenhall - 1745 - Oxley 'The Administration of the Old Poor Law in the West Derby Hundred of Lancashire' (Univ. of Liverpool M.A. thesis, 1966), p.448.

Knutsford - 1729 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1727-1729, Nos.9650, 10099; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1738-1740, No.15132; Account (1732).

Rosthem - 1739 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1738-1740, No.15132.

Stockport - 1730 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1731-1733, Nos.11565, 11784; Account (1732).

#### Derbyshire

Ashby - 1726 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No.8732.

Burton on Trent - 1728 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1727-1729, No.9802.

Derby - 1729? - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1729-1731, No.10511.

Uttoxeter - 1728 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1727-1729, No.9802.

#### Devon

Bampton - 1732 - D.R.O., MS 1269 A/PW1 V; D.R.O., MS 1269 A/PO1 V; D.R.O., MS 1269 A/PO8 V; D.R.O., MS 1269 A/PO6.

Chudleigh - 1744 - D.R.O., MS DD.18957 PO3 V; D.R.O., MS Chudleigh, DD.18957 PO30 B; D.R.O., MS Chudleigh, PW2 V.

Crediton - 1698 - 8 & 9 William III, c.29; D.R.O., MS Crediton, R4/2/Z/PO11 V; D.R.O., MS Crediton Governors, 1660A/257 B; D.R.O., MS Crediton, R4/2/Z/PO3 V; D.R.O., MS Crediton Governors, 1660A/314 B; D.R.O., MS Crediton Governors, 1660A/315 B; D.R.O., MS Crediton Governors, 1660A/336 B; D.R.O., MS Crediton Governors, 1660A/333 B, Miscellaneous Governour's Courts Minutes, 1621-1722; D.R.O., MS Crediton Governors, 1660A/A18 V; D.R.O., MS Crediton Governors, 1660A/338 B; D.R.O., MS Crediton Governors, 1660A/332 B; D.R.O., MS Crediton Governors, 1660A/340 B; D.R.O., MS Crediton Governors, A Method for Making the Workhouse More usefull & Less Chargeable, 1660A/333 B; D.R.O., MS Crediton Governors, 1660A/A13 V; D.R.O., MS Crediton Governors, 1660A/A44 B; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1699-1701, No.303; Venn 'Crediton als Critton als Kirton and Hereabouts', pp.213-214; J.H.C., xii, pp.63, 96, 118, 153, 162, 191; J.H.C. xiii, pp.384, 409.

Cruwys Morchard - 1738 - D.R.O., MS Cheriton Fitzpaine, 1633A add/PO6 B; D.R.O., MS Cruwys Morchard Parish Records, PX1 V; D.R.O., MS Cruwys Morchard, 1092 add A/PO124; D.R.O., MS Cruwys Morchard, 1092 add A/PO25 B.

Cullompton - 1738 - D.R.O., MS Cullompton, 2404 A/PO1 V; D.R.O., MS Cullompton, 2404 A/PV1 V; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1736-1738, No.15016.

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Brixton, Isle of Wight - 1729 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1729-1731, No.10507.

Newport, Isle of Wight - 1729 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1729-1731, Nos.10396, 10507; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1734-1736, No.13210; Account (1732).

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Leominster - 1729 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1729-1731, No.10440.

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- Great Paxton - 1729 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1729-1731, No.10548.
- St. Ives - 1719 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1718-1719, No.6022.
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#### Leicestershire

Ashby de la Zouche - 1726? - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No.8565.

Harborough - 1722 - S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1724-1726, xi, p.224; S.P.C.K.,  
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NDON

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Allhallows Honey Lane - 1731 - G.L., MS 5006/1; G.L., MS 5009/1; G.L., MS 5048.

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St. Augustine Watling St. - 1732 - G.L., MS 635/1; G.L., MS 635/2.

St. Bartholomew the Great - 1737 - G.L., MS 3990/3; G.L., MS 4024.

- St. Botolphs without Bishopsgate - 1730 - G.L., MS 8690; Account (1732).
- St. Bride - 1727 - G.L., MS 6554/4; G.L., MS 6554/5; G.L., MS 6570/2; Account (1732).
- St. Dunstan in the East - 1730 - Account (1732).
- St. Dunstan in the West - 1728 - W.C.L., MS Precinct of the Savoy, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1737-1744, K324; G.L., MS 3016/3; S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1726-1728, xii, p.43; S.P.C.K., S.L., 1723-1724, p.65; Account (1732).
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- St. Katherine Coleman - 1728 - G.L., MS 1124/3.
- St. Lawrence Jewry - 1728 - Account (1732).
- St. Martin Ludgate - 1731 - G.L., MS 4511/3; G.L., MS 1311/2; G.L., MS 1336/3; Account (1732).
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- St. Mary Aldermanbury - 1730 - G.L., MS 9078/1; G.L., MS 9083.
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- St. Michael Cornhill - 1732? - G.L., MS 4049/4; G.L., MS 1264/1; G.L., MS 4072/2.
- St. Olave Hart St. - 1737 - G.L., MS 6846/2; G.L., MS 4957/3; G.L., MS 858/1; G.L., MS 869A.
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St. George the Martyr - 1732 - C.P.L., St. Andrew Holborn & St. George the Martyr, Overseers of the Poor, Minutes of Various Meetings, 1731-1735, 1A1; C.P.L., St. Andrew Holborn & St. George the Martyr, Workhouse Minutes, 1737-1738, 2B1; S.P.C.K., M.L.B., 1735-1743, i, pp.74-75; S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1734-1736, xvi, p.213; S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1736-1738, xvii, p.39.

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Christ Church Spitalfields - 1728 - Account (1732).

Limehouse Hamlet Stepney - 1724 - Account (1725); Account (1732).  
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Ratcliffe Hamlet, Stepney - 1727 - Account (1732).

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Daventry - 1724? - Account (1725).

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Grundon - 1724? - Account (1725).

Kettering - 1719 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1718-1719, No.6010; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, No.8129; S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1724-1726, xi, pp.109, 125-126; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1727-1729, Nos.9283, 9895; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1732/3-1734, No.12390; Account (1725).

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St. Peter, Northampton - 1724? - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No.9135; Account (1725).

Oundle - 1719 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1718-1719, Nos.6010, 6022, 6092; Account (1725).

Peterborough - 1722? - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, No.8043; Account (1725).

Rowell - 1724? - Account (1725).

Stanford - 1724? - Account (1725).

Towcester - 1724? - Account (1725).

Wellingborough - 1719? - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1718-1719, No.6022; Account (1725).

Yarley Hastings - 1724? - Account (1725).

#### Nottinghamshire

Newark on Trent - 1729? - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1729-1731, No.10511.

Nottingham - 1725 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No.8580; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1729-1731, No.10511.

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Adderbury - 1750? - Bod. Lib., Overseers Book for Adderbury, Oxfordshire, D.D. Par Adderbury C.2.

Kidlington - 1730 - O.R.O., Kidlington parish, Oxfordshire, Parish Overseers Account Book, 1684-1741, Kidlington K/II/a-1; Bod. Lib., Account Book for Woodstock Parish, Oxfordshire, D.D. Par. Woodstock C.12.

All Saints Oxford - 1726 - Bod. Lib., Overseers Account Book, 1722-1729, for the Parish of St. Peter le Bailey, Oxford, Oxfordshire, D.D. Par Oxford, St. Peter le Bailey B.b.13; Bod. Lib., Overseers Book for St. Martins, Oxford, Oxfordshire, 1728-1741, D.D. Par Oxford St. Martins, (B) b.17; Bod. Lib., Vestry Minutes for All Saints, Oxford, Oxfordshire, D.D. Par Oxford All Saints (B) e.1; Bod. Lib., Churchwarden's Book for the Parish of All Saints, Oxford, Oxfordshire, 1721-1752, D.D. Par Oxford All Saints (C) c.4.

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Appendix(A): Workhouses Administered<sup>1</sup> by or Associated with Matthew Marryott

Location or Administrative District Served - Dates of Association - Sources Consulted.

Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire - ?-?1725 - The Case of the Parish of St. Giles in the Fields, p.2.

Beverley, Yorkshire\* - 1726 - S.P.C.K., S.L., 18 May 1725 - 23 April 1726, pp.67-68.

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Greenwich, Kent - 1724-? - Account (1725), pp.31-32.

Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire - 1720-?1724 - Account (1725), pp.72-73.

Leeds, Yorkshire\* - 1726 - S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No.8973.

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Olney, Buckinghamshire - 1714-? - A Representation of Some Mis-managements, pp.13-14; Account (1725), p.31.

Peterborough, Northants - 1722-? - Account (1725), pp.91-92.

Putney, Surrey - 1724/5-? - S.P.C.K., S.L., 4 September 1724 - 15 May 1725, pp.44-45; S.P.C.K., S.L., 18 May 1725 - 23 April 1726, p.70.

Reading, Berkshire\* - 1725 - B.R.O., R/ACa21, pp.47-48; B.R.O., D/P97 8/1/1, 6 February 1725.

\* Indicates workhouses which benefited from Marryott's advice or services as a trainer of provincial masters, rather than as a managerial contractor.

<sup>1</sup> For further information on Marryott's career see S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1724-1726, xi, pp.46, 106, 125-126; S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1726-1728, xii, p.16; S.P.C.K., S.L., 1723-1724, p.65; S.P.C.K., S.C.M.B., 1713-1718, ii, p.125; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1717-1718, No.5392; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1723-1725, No.8189; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, Nos.8270, 9135; Bucks. R.O., MS D/A/X/9, ff.15-16; P.R.O., MS Probate 11, No.649, ff.142-144, proved, 26 January 1731/2. Also see above pp.99, 104-108, 116, 118, 120, 125, 138-139, 145, 149, 150-152, 158, 179, 218, 225, 229, 232, 234, 235-237.

St. George, Hanover Square, Westminster - 1726-1727 - W.C.L., C869, St. George, Hanover Square, Westminster, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1726-1729, pp.9, 26; W.C.L., C766a, St. George, Hanover Square, Westminster, Vestry Minutes, 1725-1735, Fair Copy, p.63; S.P.C.K., A.L.B., 1725-1727, No.9025; S.P.C.K., Minutes, 1726-1728, xii, p.56.

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