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Pauperism and profit: Financial management, business practices and the new poor law in England in Wales

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**Pauperism and profit:
Financial management, business practices
and the new poor law in England and Wales**

Submitted by

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis adopts a supply-side approach to understanding poor law expenditure. It investigates the reasons for variations in relief spending by poor law unions, the local government organisations responsible for poor relief in England and Wales from 1834 to 1930, and makes important new contributions to the historiography of the new poor law in three key ways: First, it emphasises the significance of different types of places. As indoor relief grew, particularly in urban settings, the poor law was increasingly important in local economies as a buyer of goods and services. Second, it shows that these transactions were socially embedded, based as they were on relationships between administrators and suppliers. Third, it demonstrates that these social transactions could affect the local costs of buying goods, and thereby the relief policies and practices which shaped paupers' experiences. Using geographical information systems techniques, it develops a spatial understanding of relief and suggests new ways of measuring the costs and types of poor law practices. It queries the conception of a north-south divide in generosity of relief and suggests that paupers saw greater differences between rural and urban unions. Moreover, it argues that variations in relief practices need to be understood in the context of local financial management. It analyses the ways in which unions contracted for provisions, and relates relief expenditure to local costs of goods. By investigating the supply of goods to unions across England and Wales it demonstrates the social significance of the poor law for local economies, not just in terms of its impact on poverty, but also as a consumer of goods and a source of revenue for businesses.

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List of abbreviations

CGO	Consolidated General Order of the Poor Law Commission (1847)
CWA	City of Westminster Archives
GIS	Geographical Information Systems
LGB	Local Government Board
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
PLB	Poor Law Board
PLC	Poor Law Commission
PLU	Poor Law Union
PP	Parliamentary Papers
RV	Rateable Value
TNA	The National Archives

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1 Introduction

1.1 New geographies of the new poor law

In 1834 the destitute of England and Wales had a new environment of rights, responsibilities and hazards to navigate, in the form of the Poor Law Amendment Act.¹ Since the end of Elizabeth's reign, some 15,535 parishes had been responsible for the distribution of relief.² Each had its own practices and policies, and reformers pointed to the social and economic ills which resulted from this patchwork of administration. The new poor law, the framework for poor relief in England and Wales which persisted until the early twentieth century, brought this local administration of relief under unprecedented central government scrutiny. Parishes were now encouraged to come together as poor law unions run by elected guardians, with the object of easing the tax burden for ratepayers by reducing the number of paupers and by cutting costs.

The old law, argued the authors of the 1834 report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, was characterised by overly generous hand-outs and comfortable workhouse provision which did nothing to discourage idleness.³ In those rural areas where seasonal employment was especially important, local landowners were accused of supporting a welfare system in which ratepayers subsidised farm labour off-season by indiscriminately topping up the wages of able-bodied workers.⁴ Within a few months of the report's publication, Parliament under Earl Grey's Whig government passed the Poor Law Amendment Act, bringing reform to the system broadly along the lines proposed by the Commission. Parishes would be grouped into unions, so they could enjoy economies of scale and more efficient administration. The use of payments in cash or in kind ('outdoor' relief), for able-bodied males at least,

¹ 4 & 5 Will. IV, c. 76. An Act for the Amendment and Better Administration of the Laws relating to the Poor in England and Wales (1834).

² 43 Eliz., c. 2. An Acte for the Reliefe of the Poore (1601).

³ Parliamentary Papers (PP) 1834 XXVII 1 - XXXIX 1: Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws.

⁴ S.G. Checkland and E.O.A. Checkland (eds.), *The Poor Law Report of 1834* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 35.

was to be discouraged in favour of relief inside the workhouse ('indoor' relief). To encourage this class of person to find employment, rather than apply for relief, indoor relief was to be governed by the principle of 'less eligibility': that conditions in the workhouse should be no better than those enjoyed by the lowest-paid independent labourer. This, reformers believed, would reduce applications for relief and therefore overall expenditure. Little of the new poor law was entirely new, however, and some localities had adopted one or other of the policies embodied in the legislation well before 1834.⁵ Poor relief was to continue to be funded by a parish-based rate, and in the first three decades of its operation parishes still were responsible for the cost of relieving their respective paupers.⁶

The most visible change in central government as a result of the Poor Law Amendment Act was the institution of a new authority – initially the Poor Law Commission (PLC) – charged with imposing a degree of uniformity on unions by suppressing unlawful practices and encouraging the use of the principle of less eligibility. The PLC was replaced in 1847 by the Poor Law Board (PLB), which was incorporated into the Local Government Board (LGB) in 1871. The new poor law guardians, elected by ratepayers, had much less discretion over relief practices under the new law than the local officials who had formerly administered relief. However, it was not the purpose of the central authority to ensure every aspect of relief was identical across the country. Expenditure and types of relief varied widely between unions throughout the life of the new poor law.

The reasons for this variation are the subject of this thesis. Historians have so far explained differences primarily by local divergence in policy and by the uneven demand for poor relief. This thesis examines the extent to which these

⁵ At the local level, administrative units could be unions of parishes under the new poor law, unions under Gilbert's Act 1782 (22 Geo. III, c. 83. An Act for the better Relief and Employment of the Poor), incorporations under local acts, or single parishes either under the new poor law or 43 Eliz c. 2, depending on how and when they were formed. The term 'union' is used in this thesis to encompass all these types of unit, unless indicated otherwise.

⁶ Until the Union Chargeability Act: 28 & 29 Vict., c. 79. An Act to Provide for the Better Distribution of the Charge for the Relief of the Poor in Unions (1865). See M. Caplan, 'The new poor law and the struggle for union chargeability', *International Review of Social History* 23:2 (1978), pp. 267-300.

explanations are adequate, and seeks to add to our understanding by investigating how far variations in local relief expenditure and policy were linked to the local costs of goods and services. Boards of guardians made decisions about relieving paupers using a complex matrix of considerations including ideas about moral hazard, individual worth, local independence and expense. Yet expense has been understood primarily as a function of pauper numbers, and not in relation to the ability of unions to fund expenditure nor to the differing local prices suppliers charged them. In examining these costs, this study draws attention to the business practices and networks that developed to supply the local poor law.

The approaches taken in this study work towards a redrawing of the geographies of the new poor law. In particular, this thesis adopts a relational conception of the scales at which the poor law operated: Using statistical analysis and geographical information systems (GIS) techniques, it considers data for all unions in England and Wales, permitting a new understanding of changes in the national picture over time yet with an unprecedented level of local detail. It promotes a more nuanced appreciation of the regionality of relief, highlighting the flows between the national, regional and local. It does so by considering the practices of a number of case studies within their social, economic and political contexts, and suggests that poor law unions should be understood as integral parts of their local and wider communities through their interactions with business, as well as with paupers. The poor law must therefore be conceptualised as a dynamic network of relationships and flows, with different features emergent at different scales, and not simply as a static framework within which policy was created, implemented or resisted.

1.2 Historiographical approaches to the new poor law

This conceptualisation is in contrast to the approaches taken by many scholars of the new poor law, which broadly can be said to fall into two classes. One, the 'institutional' approach, emphasises the government and administration of poor relief. The other, with a 'demand-side' slant, seeks to understand who paupers were and the forms their relief took. Such categories are not mutually

exclusive, and within them can be found very different methodologies and findings. In focusing on the ways that the administration of poor relief was embedded in local economies through business relationships, this thesis takes a 'supply-side' approach, spanning the two.

1.2.1 Institutional histories

The traditional institutional narrative can be summarised thus: Before 1870 the central authority tried to abolish outdoor relief entirely but failed because of real economic conditions, especially cyclical unemployment in industrial areas and seasonal unemployment in agricultural areas. This disposed boards of guardians, composed of farmers, shopkeepers, gentry and other interested parties, to offer doles to the underemployed, in contravention of the 'principles of 1834' promoted by the central authority.⁷ After 1870, a policy drive by the Local Government Board, backed by social movements calling for greater individual responsibility on the part of paupers, resulted in a new emphasis on indoor relief. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, the workhouses built to deter the able-bodied had become unsuited to their increasingly elderly and infirm populations. The institutional approach is exemplified by the work of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, in whose long shadows so much of poor law history has been written. Attempts by the centre to end outdoor relief were core to their narrative, both as a critique of contemporary policy and as an historical account. For the Webbs, the persistence of outdoor relief was attributable to the piecemeal way in which the central authority imposed its will on unions.⁸ In other words, local practices were a function of national political will. For many historians since the Webbs, the key question has been the strength of local resistance to central policy.⁹

⁷ K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 62-3, 67.

⁸ S. Webb and B. Webb, *English Poor Law Policy* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1910), p. 90.

⁹ Crowther, for instance, describes the new poor law as 'a striking example of central policy contending against local independence' characterised by 'great differences of practice in the localities': M.A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929: The History of an English Social Institution* (London: Batsford Academic & Educational, 1981), p. 6.

Other investigations into the poor law have argued that this was a multilateral process and that the key to understanding how central government policy was implemented locally was the relationship between unions and central authority. It is not enough to know that the Poor Law Commissioners issued an order prohibiting outdoor relief, argues Dunkley, for instance; equally important were whether the guardians resisted it, and whether the local assistant commissioner pressed for strict adherence to the regulations.¹⁰ There were local political issues in adopting central government's agenda. For example, internal considerations regarding the 'crusade' against outdoor relief in the 1870s had a significant effect on relief expenditure, as Hurren shows.¹¹ Local government was used to continuing independence from central government, and the extent to which guardians were willing to adhere to the principles of the new poor law was an expression of this.¹² For Driver, a map of workhouse building expenditure serves as a map of the varying results of local-national power relations.¹³ Alternative approaches emphasise that the poor law can be seen as essentially an expression of local politics, with the central authority being of secondary importance.¹⁴

Local resistance to central power is a somewhat simplistic characterisation of the relationships in question, though. First, the reasons behind guardians' objections to central policy had much to do with the locally prevailing socio-economic conditions. As Boyer shows, for instance, industrial cities in the north-west of England persisted in granting outdoor relief to the able-bodied

¹⁰ P. Dunkley, 'The 'Hungry Forties' and the New Poor Law: A Case Study', *Historical Journal* 17:2 (1974), pp. 329-346.

¹¹ E.T. Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late-Victorian England, 1870-1900* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2007).

¹² See also J. Prest, *Liberty and Locality: Parliament, Permissive Legislation, and Ratepayers' Democracies in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 110-11.

¹³ F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: The Workhouse System, 1834-1884* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 165.

¹⁴ D. Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England: The Structure of Politics in Victorian Cities* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1976), p. 55; A.L. Brundage, 'The landed interest and the New Poor Law: A reappraisal of the revolution in government.', *English Historical Review* 87:342 (1972), pp. 28-30; P. Dunkley, 'The landed interest and the new Poor Law : a critical note.', *English Historical Review* 88:149 (1973), pp. 836-41.

into the 1860s, in defiance of the principles of the 1834 act.¹⁵ Even where the theories behind poor law amendment were considered sound, theory was put aside in times of economic distress when guardians were forced to cope with unemployed able-bodied men facing starvation. The persistence of allowances into the mid-nineteenth century was therefore a result of expedience.¹⁶ In rural unions whose boards were dominated by farmers, for instance, allowances as part of outdoor relief were used to manage the labour supply.¹⁷

A second criticism of the model of central-local antagonism is that dislike of the new regime, if and where it occurred, could co-exist with the adoption of its standards. The central authority did not attempt to impose its policies unilaterally on unions, and was fairly receptive to suggestions for change under certain circumstances, as Ogborn points out.¹⁸ Moreover, the exercise of local autonomy was not always a reactionary force and policy was the product of continual negotiation.¹⁹ Personal dealings were often key, as seen in the importance of relationships between assistant commissioners and guardians in putting key union officers in post.²⁰

A third factor complicating the central-local model is the assumption that either central or local government had full capacity to respond effectively to circumstances. London is a case in point. Local particularism helped define London's relief practices before and after 1834, with parishes often having their own individual constitutions created *ad hoc* by local acts concerning relief, rates and assessment. Popular radicalism, the defence of parochial rights and the significant advantages of patronage also found expression in London's vestries, making it difficult for the central authority to impose its

¹⁵ G.R. Boyer, *An Economic History of the English Poor Law, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 236-7.

¹⁶ D. Eastwood, *Governing rural England: Tradition and transformation in local government, 1780-1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 180.

¹⁷ A. Digby, 'The rural poor law', in D. Fraser (ed), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 157-8.

¹⁸ M. Ogborn, 'Local power and state regulation in nineteenth century Britain', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 17:2 (1992), pp. 215-226.

¹⁹ Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty*, p. 67.

²⁰ P. Harling, 'The Power of Persuasion: Central Authority, Local Bureaucracy and the New Poor Law', *English Historical Review* 107:422 (1992), pp. 30-53.

will. Nonetheless, conditions in London lent themselves to the proliferation of institutional relief. The capital's growth rate made outdoor relief difficult to administer and it had a greater proportion of casual poor in comparison to the rest of the country.²¹ Its poor law authorities also found it almost impossible to enforce the settlement laws which dictated which parish was responsible for relieving a pauper (which could entail the person's removal to another part of the country), a problem that most unions in the rest of the country did not have. Unions in the East End gained a reputation for running the harshest workhouse regimes as they fought to provide as little relief as possible given their small rate base, and expenditure fell in the West End and City as their populations declined.²²

1.2.2 Demand for relief

The example of London shows that the numbers and types of people applying for relief were just as significant as the institutional networks that developed in response to the demand. Different types of paupers required different institutional responses. Relief practices in urban places with high numbers of vagrants would therefore not be the same as those whose dealing largely with the elderly and infirm.²³ Immigrant paupers also cost more, judging from areas with relatively high populations of incomers, such as the Irish in Liverpool, Manchester, Bradford and East London.²⁴

Some studies have emphasised more fundamental aspects of demographic structure as the drivers for local relief practices. Before 1865, for example, settlement and rating laws were based on the parish unit.²⁵ Unions composed of predominantly rural parishes which also included a single parish with a

²¹ D.R. Green, *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790-1870* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 19-21.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 199-203.

²³ R. Vorspan, 'Vagrancy and the new poor law in late-Victorian and Edwardian England', *English Historical Review* 92:362 (1977), p. 63.

²⁴ D. Feldman, 'Migrants, Immigrants and Welfare from the Old Poor Law to the Welfare State', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13 (2003), pp. 79-104; L.H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 223.

²⁵ Union Chargeability Act (1865).

high-density population – for example, a market town with an agricultural hinterland – had a different tax-base and expenditure profile to those which were predominantly urban.²⁶ Agrarian migration also had a role, and there was possibly a relationship between enclosure and higher poor law expenditure.²⁷

The modern consensus is that socio-economic causes of poverty were behind much of the local variation in demand for relief. Central government believed that the number of indoor poor was connected to economic conditions, and that improvements in workhouse conditions only had a marginal effect on indoor pauperism, whereas the amount of outdoor relief was understood to be a result of local policy.²⁸ The Webbs, on the other hand, believed that economic conditions had ‘little or no effect on numbers relieved, either in or out of the workhouse’ but that the type of relief was important: denying outdoor relief deterred pauperism.²⁹ It is plausible that economic factors combined with political: Mackinnon suggests that changes in the trade cycle were responsible for short-term variations in indoor pauperism, but policy could have a ‘considerable’ effect on pauperism in the long term.³⁰

Pauperism itself was socially constructed, and not simply an economic fact independent of cultural meaning. There was, moreover, spatial and temporal variation in conceptualisations of paupers.³¹ Pauperism was not a measure of poverty but rather of local decisions about welfare entitlement connected to officials’ understandings of gender, age and ethnicity.³² This had a geographical dimension, with industrial urbanised areas showing far lower

²⁶ Caplan, ‘Union chargeability’.

²⁷ K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 194-209.

²⁸ M. MacKinnon, ‘Poor Law Policy, Unemployment and Pauperism’, *Explorations in Economic History* 23:3 (1986), p. 310.

²⁹ S. Webb and B. Webb, *English Local Government, vol. 9: English Poor Law History Part II: The last hundred years* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1929), p. 1043.

³⁰ MacKinnon, ‘Poor Law Policy, Unemployment and Pauperism,’ p. 316.

³¹ Lees, *Solidarities of Strangers*, p. 7.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 178; P. Thane, ‘Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England’, *History Workshop* 6 (1978), pp. 29-51.

levels of pauperism than the rural areas of the west, south, and east.³³ Highly urbanised counties had the lowest proportion of adult female pauperism, whereas agricultural areas saw the highest rates, and there was a correlation between high male wage levels and low female pauperism rates.³⁴ Poverty and pauperism were not only gendered but also related to life-cycle, with young mothers, widows and widowers with young children, and elderly women particularly at risk.³⁵ Poverty was also very often seasonal, with women increasingly unlikely to keep their employment during the harvest in the early to mid-nineteenth century.³⁶ Demand for relief in any locality must therefore be seen not only as a result of local economic conditions but also of local cultural expectations – on the part of both applicants and administrators.

Attempts to integrate analysis of relief practices with the broader economic, social and cultural contexts of poverty have yielded important results, especially at the regional scale. Some regional variation can be explained by levels of industrialisation, some by guardians' sentiment and some by differences in understandings of entitlement.³⁷ In many areas, poor law amendment in 1834 made little difference to the 'enduring regional patterns in welfare culture that we can see developing from at least 1600 onwards,' King suggests.³⁸ It is worth considering how long into the new poor law such regionalism persisted.

1.2.3 The supply side

Structural explanations for poor law outcomes account for a great deal at the regional level, but the high degree of union-level variation within these regions requires a finely grained approach. Historians have not found it easy

³³ Lees, *Solidarities of Strangers*, p. 182.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-99.

³⁵ S. Williams, *Poverty, gender and life-cycle under the English poor law, 1760-1834* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society/The Boydell Press, 2011), pp. 101 ff.

³⁶ Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 22.

³⁷ S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 259-60.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

to generalise the results of local studies to the regional or national scale.³⁹ This thesis suggests that poor law policy and practice was an emergent property of the interconnections between the economic, social, cultural and political at all scales. Local economies, representing one element of this, have been considered structurally as partial determinants of the demand for relief, but not as having any bearing on the supply of relief. This is an important omission. Prices of goods, for instance, had an impact on standards of living.⁴⁰ It is therefore reasonable to ask whether these prices had an effect on the buying power of poor law unions, and on the decisions guardians made about the extent and types of relief they made available.

This thesis argues that there were complex links between relief provision and the local supply of goods. High commodity prices could force many people to seek relief, or at least could arise from the same economic circumstances that caused destitution. In some unions, high prices for certain goods and services could increase relief costs significantly. However, relief expenditure and prices did not have a straightforward linear relationship across all unions, and this thesis does not argue that unions' spending or rate-raising can be explained entirely by commodity prices. Rather, commodity prices could have a bearing on relief policies, with high prices in some circumstances leading to stricter entitlement regimes. More important, however, were the relationships between unions and their suppliers. An institution like a workhouse could have had a significant impact on a local economy by creating demand that would otherwise not have existed. Suppliers might in some cases have owed their existence to the local workhouse consuming their goods. Furthermore, individual unions were dependent on markets with varying degrees of competition, flexibility, organisation and size. It is therefore critical to

³⁹ Notable exceptions focusing on the old poor law are King, *Poverty and Welfare* and Williams, *Poverty, gender and life-cycle*.

⁴⁰ N.F.R. Crafts, 'Regional Price Variations in England in 1843: An Aspect of the Standard-of-Living Debate', *Explorations in Economic History* 19:1 (1982), pp. 51-70; see also C.H. Feinstein, 'Pessimism Perpetuated: Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Britain during and after the Industrial Revolution', *Journal of Economic History* 58:3 (1998), pp. 625-658; P.H. Lindert and J.G. Williamson, 'English Workers' Living Standards During the Industrial Revolution: A New Look', *Economic History Review* 36:1 (1983), pp. 1-25; A.J. Taylor (ed.), *The Standard of Living in Britain in the Industrial Revolution*. (London: Methuen, 1975).

understand the business practices surrounding contracting by unions and the relationships between them and their suppliers.

Studies of contracting by poor law unions have so far been limited to investigating some important sectors, but not contracting as a whole, and the contracts themselves tend to have been treated tangentially. There is some discussion of the wider context of the desirability of market forces and private provision in public services.⁴¹ Medical arrangements made by unions have been the subject of a great deal of research, mostly concentrating on public health, the services available to paupers, vaccination and medical practitioners.⁴² Lunacy provision has received some attention too, focusing on the experiences of the paupers concerned.⁴³ These works focus on contracts for service provision with individuals or institutions in direct contact with paupers, however, and not on the basic provisioning of the institutions concerned. The types of suppliers of goods to workhouses and other poor law institutions covered a wide spectrum, from national companies providing coal, to local smallholders selling farm produce. The historiography of business, however, has tended towards industrial activity at the larger end of the scale. Some limited attention has also been paid to retail, much of which has focused

⁴¹ Such as M.R. Somers and F. Block, 'From poverty to perversity: Ideas, markets, and institutions over 200 years of welfare debate', *American Sociological Review* 70:2 (2005), pp. 260-287.

⁴² These include D. Brunton, *Vaccination: Practice and Policy in England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland 1800-1874* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2008); A. Digby, *Making a Medical Living: Doctors and Patients in the English Market for Medicine, 1720-1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); M.W. Flinn, 'Medical services under the New Poor Law', in D. Fraser (ed), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 45-66; D.R. Green, 'Medical Relief and the New Poor Law in London', in O.P. Grell, A. Cunningham and R. Jütte (ed), *Health Care and Poor Relief in 18th and 19th Century Northern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 220-245; R. Hodgkinson, *The Origins of the National Health Service: The Medical Services of the New Poor Law, 1834-1871* (London: The Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1967); S.J. Novak, 'Professionalism and Bureaucracy: English Doctors and the Victorian Public Health Administration', *Journal of Social History* 6:4 (1973), pp. 440-462; I. Waddington, *The Medical Profession in the Industrial Revolution* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1984).

⁴³ P. Bartlett, 'The asylum, the workhouse, and the voice of the insane poor in 19th-century England', *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 21:4 (1998), pp. 421-432; B. Forsythe, J. Melling and R. Adair, 'The New Poor Law and the County Pauper Lunatic Asylum: The Devon Experience 1834-1884', *Social History of Medicine* 9:3 (1996), pp. 335-355.

on the bigger high-street shops.⁴⁴ A study of the full range of suppliers to unions therefore adds to this discourse.

There is a clear opportunity for this thesis to add to the historiography of the new poor law by investigating the supply-side costs incurred by poor law unions and the business practices that surrounded them. Chapter 2 shows that a more complex understanding of the national geographies of expenditure is required before attempting explanations of local variation. It argues for a recasting of classifications of poor law unions by their expenditures, moving away from dualities of 'generosity' and 'parsimony' on the part of boards of guardians. It shows that there was a north-south divide in poor law practice when expenditure is measured in proportion to entire populations, but not when considered in relation to pauper numbers. It also demonstrates a relationship between distance from London and the use of outdoor relief.

Boards of guardians took decisions based on their local circumstances and these national and regional contexts. Guardians had little power in the face of economic cycles, regional trade depressions, local outbreaks of infectious diseases and the like. However, as Chapter 3 shows, they could exercise a certain amount of discretion when it came to contracting for the supply of goods and services to the union. Regulations issued by the central authority could circumscribe guardians' activities, but they could not bind the independent traders who sold goods to the unions. Rather, these interactions were subject to existing contract law. This gave boards of guardians flexibility in their financial management and thereby their local relationships, putting social structures and processes at the heart of poor law economies.

These relationships formed a significant part of poor law guardians' strategies for controlling costs, and Chapter 4 shows how the prices paid by unions for a selection of goods contributed to their overall expenditure. Increases in prices for some goods could, in certain cases, raise relief spend noticeably. Demand from unions was considerable as workhouses consumed very great quantities

⁴⁴ The predominant interests of retail historians are discussed in N. Alexander and G. Akehurst, 'Introduction: The Emergence of Modern Retailing, 1750-1950', *Business History* 40:4 (1998), pp. 1-15.

of food, fuel and clothing. Nonetheless, in many respects it was the large suppliers who had the advantage in dictating prices, and guardians' procurement practices were not always efficient. Workhouse inmates suffered the consequences of unions' efforts to save costs, with suppliers delivering poor quality and sometimes adulterated food.

The business of institutional supply was lucrative over long periods for a small number of large firms, as Chapter 5 shows by contrasting the supplier networks of unions in London, Wales, the Midlands and the north-east of England. Guardians had the dual priorities of keeping costs down, while wanting to spend the rates within their unions. They were also constrained by the number of potential suppliers. For reasons of availability and cost, therefore, relatively remote unions had to rely on cheap suppliers from major towns outside their unions. Yet there was also space in the market for more minor traders to gain business from poor law supply, and unions gave some trade to local businesses on an *ad hoc* basis. London was something of a special case, however, as the size and infrastructure of the capital enabled more suppliers to compete for poor law business, compared with elsewhere in England and Wales. Chapter 6 demonstrates the spatial reach of some of the businesses that supplied dozens of workhouses in London plus other institutions such as hospitals, schools and insane asylums.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by emphasising the opportunities for business which the poor law offered local firms and entrepreneurs. These opportunities were dependent not only on location, but on the sorts of places in which they occurred too. Business relationships must also be seen in the light of unions' different relief practices and spending priorities, which were themselves dependent on place-types and location. The variations in pauper experiences of relief across England and Wales and through time were therefore rooted in poor law unions' interconnections with their wider local and national socio-economic contexts.

In the process of creating this thesis, a number of analytical approaches were taken which did not ultimately advance our understanding of poor law

economies. In some cases, such as an attempt to create more complete time series for contract prices, data were unavailable. In others, some statistical analysis did not yield useful results. For example, the spatial variation in indoor relief expenditure would seem to be a good candidate for modelling through geographically weighted regression, taking into account variables including union rateable value and contract prices of certain goods.⁴⁵ No models which were tested proved convincing, however. Other GIS techniques, such as hotspot analysis for expenditure, pauper numbers and rateable value, simply provided statistics (in this case, the Getis-Ord G_i^* statistic, z -scores and associated p -values) which, when mapped, only duplicated the effects visible in the straightforward maps of original values which are included in this research. As the hotspot analysis would not have added meaningfully to the thesis, it too has been excluded.

⁴⁵ M. Charlton, S. Fotheringham and C. Brunsdon, 'Geographically Weighted Regression', White paper (National Centre for Geocomputation, National University of Ireland Maynooth: 2009).

2 National geographies of poor law expenditure

2.1 Introduction

At the heart of much poor law scholarship lies the question of why relief practices varied over time and place. But before that question can be approached, it is essential to understand *how* relief varied. This chapter addresses this seemingly straightforward issue, and argues that the particularly urban context for the growth of indoor relief over the period requires a new understanding of the ways poor law administrators organised their work within their local economies. In doing so, it demonstrates that the usual methods of measuring poor law expenditure tell an incomplete story. Two key reasons for the gaps in our understanding are, first, the choice of variables for measuring expenditure; and, second, the geographical scale at which analysis is performed. This chapter suggests some alternative measurements which, when investigated at an appropriate scale, point to important distinctions in the ways urban and rural unions in different regions and at different times relieved their poor.

Scale is one of the most important elements in this analysis. Historians have tended to aggregate poor law data by county or region, partly as a result of the necessity of making the data manageable. The assumption underlying this aggregation is that counties or regions contained little enough variation between their constituent poor law unions for that variation to be irrelevant. This is not necessarily the case. At the same time, historians have lamented that the sheer volume of material on the poor law makes it necessary to illustrate chiefly by example, and that it is impossible to know how representative any such example might be.¹ Little effort has been made to address Southall's 'tentative' suggestion, made in 1991, that 'the general neglect of the spatially disaggregated national statistics in existing studies of

¹ M.A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929: The History of an English Social Institution* (London: Batsford Academic & Educational, 1981), p. 6; S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 7.

the Poor Law is not altogether justified'.² The implication is that variations in relief practices should be considered with more granularity. This chapter therefore uses disaggregated data from all individual poor law unions for selected time periods. In so doing, it shows that it is possible to understand individual unions in the contexts of their wider regions and to assess unions or types of union over time. Such types need not be restricted by location: Unions can be grouped by size, population density, relief policies, expenditure levels and so on. Furthermore, union-level data enable a more thorough set of geographical information systems (GIS) techniques to be adopted than would be the case using county-level data. This chapter takes a new and overdue approach to the problem of poor law practices, therefore, by mapping several attributes of every individual union across England and Wales to determine the national picture of change over both time and space.

There are more good reasons to consider poor relief at the level of individual unions. One is that the data are available and accessible (though not for every year for some useful variables). The annual poor rate returns published by the Poor Law Commission (PLC) and its successors in their annual reports contain information on amounts spent on different types of relief and the incidental administrative running costs of poor law unions. Other union returns giving numbers of paupers are also available in the 'Poor rates and pauperism' series of central authority publications ordered annually by Parliament from 1857 onwards. Rateable value, the tax base on which poor rates were levied, was published nationally only infrequently before the Local Taxation Returns Act 1861, when it began to be issued annually, though it is available for certain years before then.³

A further reason to look to individual unions is that the poor law was a local institution and was treated as such by paupers, guardians, local officials, ratepayers, central government and policymakers. This is evident from the wide variation in poor law practice which will be discussed in this chapter.

² H.R. Southall, 'Poor law statistics and the geography of economic distress', in J. Foreman-Peck (ed), *New perspectives on the late Victorian economy* (1991), p. 212.

³ 23 & 24 Vict. c. 51.

Local relief did operate within a national and regional context, but the relevance of these contexts cannot be taken as a given for all these members of the poor-law domain. For example, central government grouped unions into regions or districts which were overseen by assistant commissioners or, after 1847, inspectors. The importance of these groupings is assessed below (Section 2.4), and in some ways they were indeed important to the administration of relief. However, they were an irrelevance to the vast majority of paupers in their daily interactions with the poor law. It will be shown that paupers were concerned with the local, not the regional, in this respect.

This chapter explores spatial and temporal variation in poor law practices by using data for all unions for two particular periods, the early 1850s and early 1870s. By 1850, the Poor Law Board (PLB) had been in place for three years and was operating what might be termed a 'mature' system of relief. Administrative processes such as statistical collection had been standardised, even if many unions resisted implementing the PLB's policies (such as the 1852 Outdoor Relief Prohibitory Order).⁴ The early 1850s were also an important demographic turning-point. The 1851 census revealed for the first time that more people in England lived in urban areas than in rural, as a result both of direct migration to towns and of those new urban dwellers increasing local birth rates.⁵ Furthermore, the irremovability of non-settled parish residents after a certain period was beginning to take effect: Legislation of 1846 granted irremovability after five years' continuous residence and there were subsequent reductions to this period.⁶ The early 1850s are therefore a vital period for understanding how urbanisation shaped relief practices. At the time of the second period of analysis, two decades later, the PLB was subsumed into the Local Government Board and the central authority began to

⁴ D. Ashforth, 'The urban Poor Law', in D. Fraser (ed), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 136-8.

⁵ J.G. Williamson, 'Migrant Selectivity, Urbanization, and Industrial Revolutions', *Population and Development Review* 14:2 (1988), pp. 289 ff.

⁶ 9 & 10 Vict., c. 66 and subsequent legislation. See K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and belonging: Community, identity and welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 116.

renew its efforts to promote the ‘principles of 1834’ with what became known as a ‘crusade’ against outdoor relief.⁷ The implementation of this policy was facilitated by social and economic conditions that were already in place by the 1870s, though, and this will be seen by exploring changes in the years before that date. The 1870s are also considered to be a turning-point in economic performance, social structure, and the political environment by many poor law historians and others.⁸

These two periods also have the advantage of data availability. 1850 is the earliest year for which a daily pauper count (held on 1 January) was published nationally for all unions.⁹ Earlier pauper counts had unsuccessfully attempted to construct measures of pauperism by counting numbers relieved over six-month periods, a method eventually rejected by the PLB’s statistical department (see Section 2.2.1).¹⁰ Population censuses were held in 1851 and 1871, permitting reasonably good demographic analysis; and rateable value was recorded for both periods. This double-snapshot approach is supplemented by further data for particular unions and the country as a whole where appropriate, and yields important and useful results that demonstrate the urban growth of indoor relief and associated costs at a new level of detail.

⁷ E.T. Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late-Victorian England, 1870-1900* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2007).

⁸ Some of the many studies taking c.1870 as a start or end point are: C. Bellamy, *Administering central-local relations, 1871-1919: the Local Government Board in its fiscal and cultural context* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); G. Crossick (ed.), *The lower middle classes in Britain 1870-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1977); D.R. Green, *From Artisans to Paupers: Economic Change and Poverty in London, 1790-1870* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995); J. Harris, ‘Political thought and the welfare state 1870-1940: an intellectual framework for British social policy’, *Past & Present* 135:1 (1992), pp. 116-141; Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism*; P. Johnson, ‘Social risk and social welfare in Britain, 1870-1939’, *London School of Economics Working Paper* 3/92 (1992); E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981).

⁹ PP 1876 LXIII 1: Paupers. Return for the years 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1874, of the number of paupers in receipt of relief in each union in England on 1 January of each year respectively, together with the cost of total relief to the poor; also, a general summary of the same particulars for the whole of England in each of the specified years.

¹⁰ PP 1850 XXVII Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Board. 1849. In Pursuance of the Statute 10 & 11 Vict. c. 109 s. 13, pp. 8-9.

2.2 Poor law data

The analysis in this chapter is based primarily on material in Parliamentary papers published by the Poor Law Commission, Poor Law Board or Local Government Board (Table 2.1). The central authority in all its forms was characterised by a focus on enumerating poor relief expenditure and on quantifying pauperism. The operation of the poor laws had been a subject of statistical inquiry well before their amendment in 1834, but a central government department with specific responsibility for poor relief administration had an unprecedented ability to gather, publish and analyse information on national and local practice.¹¹ In part, this activity was aimed at holding poor law unions to account. It also can be seen in the context of increasing interest in methodologically rigorous approaches to data collection, evident in the close connections between poor law personnel and the Statistical Society of London. Edwin Chadwick, for instance, was appointed auditor to the society in 1835, within months of its establishment, and fellows included Frederick Purdy, who became head of the PLB's statistical department, and William Golden Lumley, the PLC's assistant secretary.¹² The first article published in the society's journal proper was by assistant commissioner James Phillips Kay.¹³ The sheer bulk of information collected by the poor law authorities presented analytical difficulties, and indeed the 1834 *Report* began with a description of the problems the commissioners had encountered: The replies to their circulated queries were 'so numerous, that it became a question how they should be disposed of'.¹⁴ Modern scholarship has also found the volume of data to be a barrier to research.¹⁵ However, the

¹¹ For discussion of quantitative information gathered under the old system, see S. King, "In these you may trust': Numerical information, accounting practices and the Poor Law, c.1790 to 1840', in T. Crook and G. O'Hara (eds), *Statistics and the public sphere* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 51-66.

¹² *Proceedings of the Statistical Society of London* 1:2 (19 January 1835), pp. 9-11.

¹³ J. Phillips Kay, 'On the establishment of county or district schools, for the training of the pauper children maintained in union workhouses', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 1:1 (May 1838), pp. 14-27.

¹⁴ PP 1834 XXVII 1 - XXXIX Report from His Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the administration and practical operation of the Poor Laws, p. 2.

¹⁵ Southall, 'Poor law statistics,' p. 213.

quantity and detail of available information should be treated as an opportunity, rather than an obstacle.

Data type	Source
Population, 1851 and 1871. Indoor and outdoor paupers, 1 Jan 1850 and 1 Jan 1870.	PP 1876 LXIII 1. Paupers.
Area in acres, 1854. Rateable value of property assessed to the poor rate, 1852.	PP 1854 LVI 1. Poor rates, &c.
Relief expenditure, year to 25 Mar 1850.	PP 1851 XXVI 1. Third annual report of the Poor Law Board. 1850.
Relief expenditure, year to 25 Mar 1870.	PP 1871 XXVII 1. Twenty-third annual report of the Poor Law Board. 1870.
Rateable value of property assessed to the poor rate, 1870.	PP 1895 LXXXIV 507. Rateable Value of Lands, &c.
Area in acres, 1868.	PP 1868-69 LIII 5. Poor Law.

Table 2.1: Poor law union data sources.

2.2.1 Counting paupers

The central authority collected information on the numbers of paupers in different ways over time. In 1847 the Poor Law Commission decided that the way it had counted paupers until then – in six-month periods to Lady-day and Michaelmas – was unwieldy. The possibility existed that different unions would count their paupers by different methods. Furthermore, the figures for indoor and outdoor paupers might not be comparable as, for example, an individual entering the workhouse three times in six months could be counted three times, whereas an individual receiving outdoor relief every fortnight for the same six months could be counted once.¹⁶ The PLB from 1848 therefore asked unions to report their respective pauper numbers in and out of the workhouse on 1 January and 1 July.¹⁷ The relationship between these day-counts and total numbers of paupers relieved in the whole year is a difficult one to ascertain, given the flaws in the six-month counts, though some

¹⁶ C. Booth, 'Enumeration and classification of paupers, and state pensions for the aged', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 54:4 (1891), pp. 600-643; *Idem*, *Pauperism: A Picture; and the Endowment of Old Age: An Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1892), chapter 6.

¹⁷ PP 1850 XXVII 1, pp. 8-9.

historians have attempted to ‘correct’ the day-counts by multiplying their averages by certain constants.¹⁸

In this study, unless otherwise specified, only the 1 January count is used without any attempt at ‘correction’. 1 January is an arbitrary date for the collection of the figures – chosen for its administrative convenience by the Poor Law Board – and the numbers of paupers on that date do not represent the same proportion of paupers relieved for the whole year for every union. Figures for ‘expenditure per pauper’, for example, therefore should be read as expenditure *for the full year* divided by the number of paupers *on 1 January of that year*. This ensures that all the figures are comparable. Figures for expenditure per pauper should therefore be treated as indicative only, as they do not represent actual sums spent per individual pauper. They are not too far off, however: Dividing the full-year cost by the 1 January pauper count gives a figure which is on average 86.8 per cent of the mean annual costs of food and clothing per inmate per year for seventy unions, according to a Parliamentary return of 1858 (Figure 2.1).¹⁹

¹⁸ See, for example, L.H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 180-181; K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 158-162; S. Webb and B. Webb, *English Local Government, Vol. 9: English Poor Law History Part II: The Last Hundred Years* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1929), p. 1051.

¹⁹ Calculated from PP 1857-58 XLIX part 1 379: Workhouses. Return of the cost of building of workhouses in England and Wales erected since 1840; stating number of inmates intended for originally, and average annual expense of food and clothing, for the years 1854 to 1858, of the said workhouses; PP 1857 Session 2 XXXII pt. I Supplement 93: Poor rates and pauperism. Return (B.) Paupers relieved on 1st January 1858.

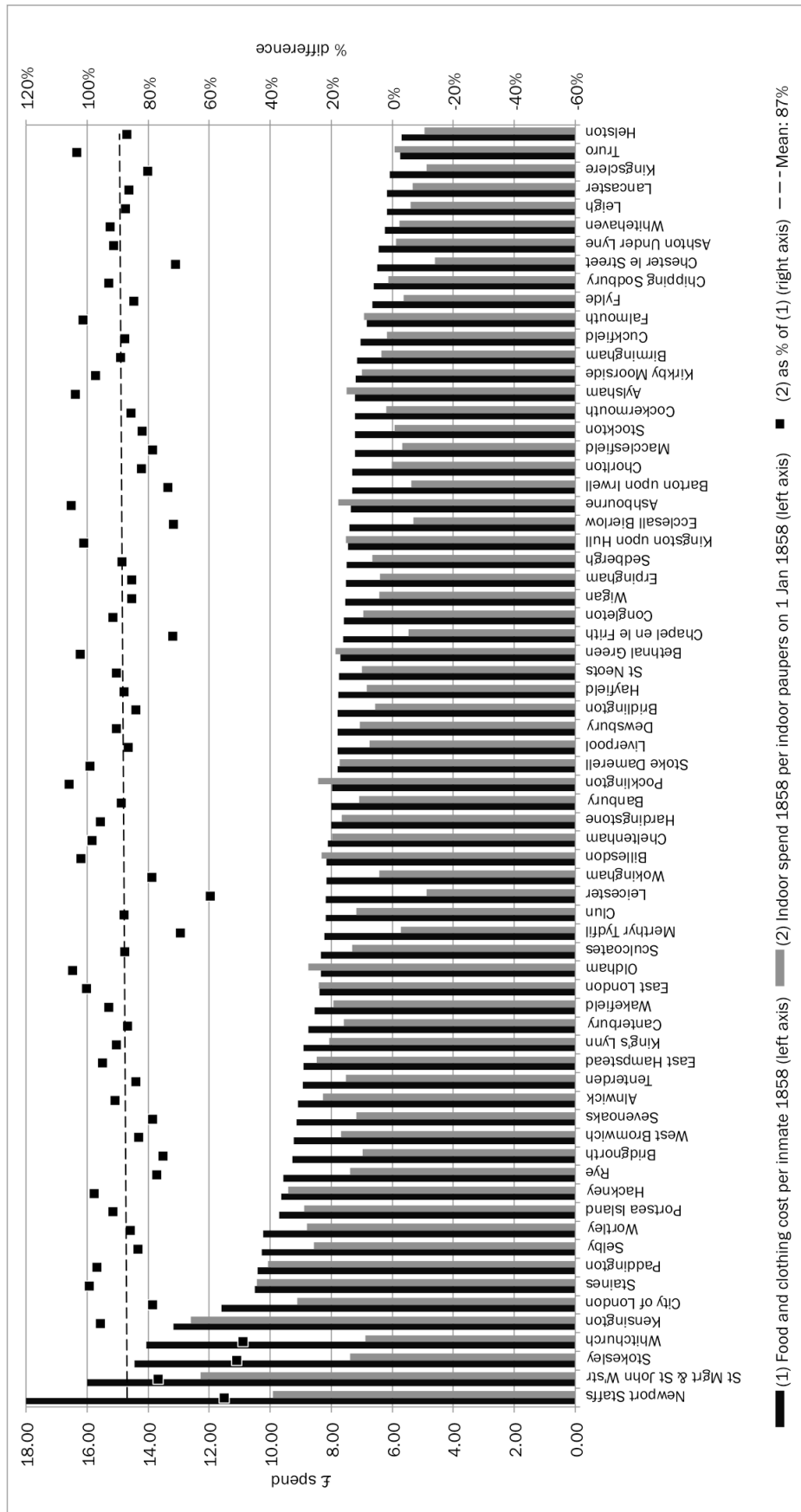


Figure 2.1: Comparison of two methods of calculating cost per inmate in 70 unions.
Source: PP 1857 XLIX part 1, 379; PP 1857 XXXII pt. I Supplement, 93.

A further complicating factor is that not all local poor law bodies returned figures on paupers to the central authority. Unions and parishes incorporated under the 1834 act were obliged to, but other entities such as Gilbert's unions and individual parishes under other legislation were not. Hence for 1850-51, 655 bodies returned data for population, area and rateable value; 646 gave numbers for expenditure; and only 585 provided pauper numbers. From these data, therefore, it is not possible to determine differences and similarities between the various types of poor law authority.

2.2.2 Rateable value

Rateable value (RV) was the tax base of each union and is used here, as it was at the time, as a measure of a union's relative wealth. Individual properties were assessed by district valuers and assigned values upon which the owners' or occupiers' liability for the poor rate and ability to elect guardians were determined. RV was calculated as the amount of rent a property could be expected to bring in, were it to be rented, not including rates, taxes, tithes and so on, and deducting the probable annual cost of repairs, insurance and other measures required to keep it to the current standard. From this value, a rate of a certain amount in the pound was levied.

The assessment of rates was notoriously erratic and it is impossible to gauge how rigorous any given area's assessment might have been. Frederick Purdy noted in 1860: 'From the capricious manner in which the rateable value is arrived at in different parishes, it is known to be worthless as a means of estimating the pressure of rates in one district as compared with another.'²⁰ However, it formed the basis of the poor rate even if it was not a true reflection of the annual value of the assessed property. As the figures were used contemporaneously to inform decisions about local spending, they can reasonably be used now to analyse this spending. It is assumed here that assessment remained consistently patchy enough across the country to give

²⁰ F. Purdy, 'The Pressure of Taxation on Real Property', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 32:3 (1869), pp. 291-292.

usable figures for comparing unions.²¹ By measuring, for example, expenditure relative to rateable value, the use a union made of its resources can be judged.

2.2.3 Expenditure on the poor

Figures for relief expenditure are primarily taken from the poor rate return sections of the PLB's annual reports. It is therefore necessary to examine what the return was in fact counting. The poor rate return tables for 1850, for example, show that the PLB classified expenditure under certain headings (Table 2.2). 'Amount expended for the Relief of the Poor' contains three categories: 'In-Maintenance', 'Out-Relief' and 'Other Expenses of, or Immediately connected with Relief'. There are ten further categories for other forms of expenditure such as legal costs, vaccination fees, parish repair bills and local rates. These last included the police, county, hundred and borough rates which were not raised by the poor law union as such but were 'assimilated to', i.e. collected through, the poor rate.²² The 'Total Expenditure' column therefore includes all expenditure from funds collected through the poor rates and connected sources, but this expenditure is not limited to poor relief under the control of the union. The poor rate return is thus best seen as the means for a ratepayer to discover how and where his rates were spent, not as an indication of what was spent specifically on the poor.

²¹ For more on the assessment of rateable value, see 6 & 7 Will. IV, c. 96. An Act to Regulate Parochial Assessments (1836); W.G. Lumley, *The Law of Parochial Assessments, explained in a Practical Commentary on the Statute 6 & 7 Will. 4, Cap. 96*, 3rd ed. (London: Shaw and Sons, 1856); M. Lopes, 'Report of the Local Taxation Committee on the Proposals of the Government with Reference to Local Taxation. With an Analysis of the Rating and Valuation Bills', *Chamber of Agriculture Journal and Farmers' Chronicle (Reprint)* (May 1873); T.F. Hedley, *Local Taxation: Rating Railways, Mines, Machinery, Mansion-Houses, Woodlands, Government Property, and Hospitals. Observations on the Right Honourable G.J. Goschen's Bill on Parochial Assessments* (London: Shaw & Sons, 1878); C.A. Webb, *The Law and Practice of Rating and Assessment: A Handbook for Overseers, Members of Assessment Committees, Surveyors, and Others Interested in Rating and Valuation* (London: Crosby Lockwood & Son, 1910); E. Cannan, *The History of Local Rates in England in Relation to the Proper Distribution of the Burden of Taxation*, 2nd ed. (London: P. S. King & Son, 1912).

²² G.C. Broderick, 'Local Government in England', in J.W. Probyn (ed), *Local Government and Taxation*, Cobden Club Essays (London: Cassell Petter & Galpin, 1875), p. 28; J.R. McCulloch, *A Treatise on the Principles and Practical Influence of Taxation and the Funding System*, 3rd ed., (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1863), pp. 492-498.

Item	Expenditure £	Expenditure %
<i>In-maintenance</i>	914,264	12.4
<i>Out-relief</i>	3,155,096	42.9
<i>Other expenses - relief</i>	1,325,660	18.0
Total expended for relief of the poor	5,393,031	73.3
Legal costs	77,581	1.1
Constables/Justices	65,120	0.9
Vaccination fees	23,641	0.3
Registration Act costs	58,636	0.8
Parochial Assessments Act costs	14,197	0.2
Local rates	1,321,034	17.9
Parliamentary expenses	28,773	0.4
Repairs	9,475	0.1
Nuisances removal costs	80,700	1.1
Other	286,037	3.9
Total	7,360,220	100.0

Table 2.2: Expenditure by poor law unions in England and Wales, 1850.
Source: PP 1851 XXVI 1: Third annual report of the Poor Law Board, p. 78.

The part of the poor rate return giving figures for relief of the poor (shown in the top section of Table 2.2) does not specify what is counted as indoor relief, outdoor relief or 'other' relief, an indeterminate class which is notably greater than indoor relief. This can instead be gleaned from the instructions on preparing the return issued by the Poor Law Board to union clerks.²³ These instructions show that in-maintenance was the amount spent on paupers in the workhouse including irremovable poor and vagrants. Outdoor relief was the cost of relief in money or in kind, including relief to non-resident poor, irremovable poor and vagrants, and of loans to paupers. It also appears to have included funeral expenses. Other relief expenses were the maintenance of lunatics in asylums or licensed houses; extra medical fees or payments charged to parishes; emigration expenses; emigration loans and interest repaid; workhouse loans and interest repaid; salaries of officers; and other relief costs where applicable.

A more detailed subdivision of the 'other' relief category can be made by examining the expenditure of individuals unions or incorporations.

²³ MH10/14, Circular 15/50, 15 March 1850: Example Form 17; Circular 28/50, 20 June 1850: An Example of the mode of preparing the Annual Poor Rate Return, by reference to certain Columns of the Yearly Abstract – Form 18, and of the two Half-Yearly Financial Statements – Form 17, whence the necessary particulars may be obtained.

Southampton Incorporation was unusual in publishing annual statements (though irregularly produced). Its expenditure may not necessarily be a guide to that of other unions, but can be used as an example (Table 2.3). This shows the relative importance to Southampton of the cost of maintenance of lunatics, staffing costs, servicing loans and office costs. Further costs, given in the ‘Other charges’ row of Table 2.3, include ‘Visiting Lunatics, Conveying Paupers, Subscriptions to Hospitals, Rent of Airing Ground, Water Rates, Furniture, Insurance, Carpenters’, Bricklayers’, and Masons’ Charges for Repairs, Gas Fittings, Ironmongery, Tinman, and Smiths’ Work, Painter, Plumber, And Cooper, Brushmaker, and other sums, chargeable to the Establishment.’

Item	Expenditure £	Expenditure %
In-maintenance	775	11.3
Out-relief	4,279	62.6
Maintenance of lunatics	349	5.1
<i>Officers' salaries</i>	496	7.3
<i>Maintenance of officers in the workhouse</i>	100	1.5
Total spent on officers	596	8.7
New buildings and schoolhouse loan and interest	133	1.9
Rate books, printing, stationery, and advertising	219	3.2
Other charges	485	7.1
Total	6,836	100.0

Table 2.3: Expenditure on the poor by Southampton Incorporation, half-year to Michaelmas 1850.

Source: TNA MH12/11000/19, folio 43, 4 April 1853: Expenditure of the Town.

The cost to a union of in-maintenance as enumerated in the poor rate return therefore would have included provisions (food, clothing, coal etc.) for paupers but excluded staffing costs, workhouse building and repair costs and other incidental expenditure. All this, however, was included in the ‘Total expended for the relief of the poor’.

2.3 Poor relief expenditure: The national context

Over the course of the nineteenth century, expenditure on poor relief for the whole of England and Wales fluctuated cyclically along with the wider economy. The five years following the introduction of the new poor law saw the continuation of a pre-1834 reduction in the amount spent per head of

population, but the decline was short-lived. 1839 was the low-water-mark for relief spending under the new system in real terms (Figure 2.2). As inflation rose and fell, so too did the annual change in spend on the poor (Figure 2.3).²⁴ During the 1830s, the rate of change of poor-relief was much lower than the consumer price inflation rate, reflecting the push to reduce relief costs. Relief spend increased at a higher rate than inflation during what later became known as the ‘hungry’ 1840s, but thereafter, the correlation between inflation and expenditure on the poor is very clear.²⁵ Some periods of divergence are notable, however: The drop in poor relief in the early 1870s during a time of relatively high inflation might be attributed to the ‘crusade’ against outdoor relief, and it was followed in the later part of the decade by an above-inflation increase in relief. Relief also increased above inflation in the 1890s – possibly as a consequence of the reduction of the property qualification for guardians of the poor bringing working-class guardians into union boardrooms.²⁶

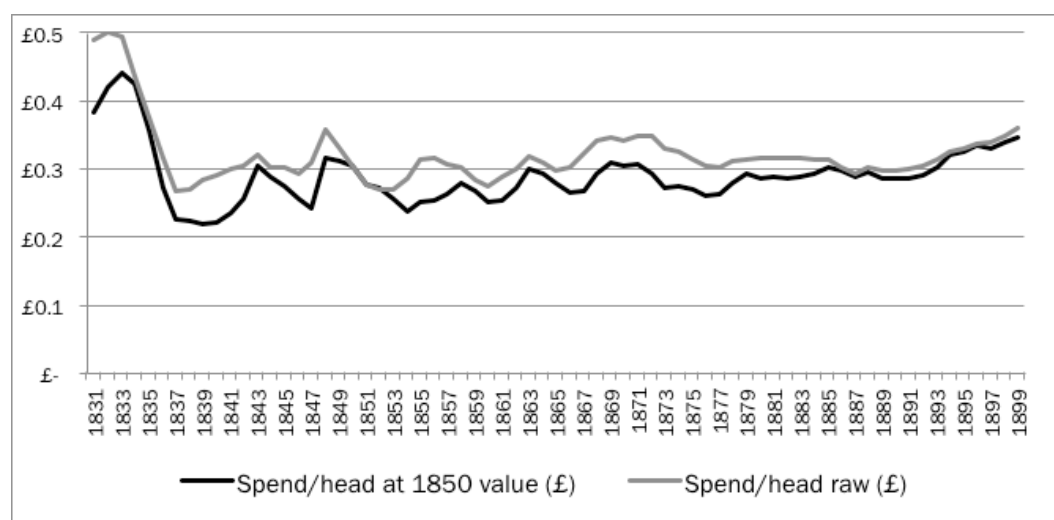


Figure 2.2: Spend on poor per head of population, 1834-1899.

Source: PLC/PLB/LGB annual reports and population interpolated from decennial censuses.

²⁴ J. O’Donoghue, L. Goulding and G. Allen, ‘Consumer price inflation since 1750’, *Economic Trends* 604 (2004), pp. 38-46.

²⁵ P. Dunkley, ‘The ‘Hungry Forties’ and the New Poor Law: A Case Study’, *Historical Journal* 17:2 (1974), pp. 329-346.

²⁶ A. Brundage, ‘Reform of the poor law electoral system, 1834-94’, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 7:3 (1975), p. 210.

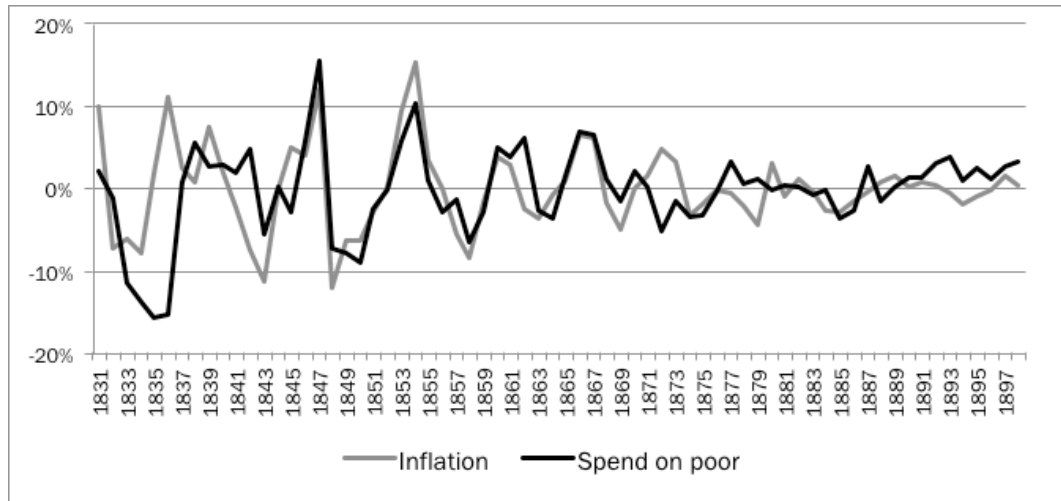


Figure 2.3: Annual percentage change in spend on poor and consumer price inflation rate, 1834-1898.

Source: PLC/PLB/LGB annual reports and O'Donoghue *et al.*, 'Inflation'.

A second important long-term trend was the increase in indoor relief and decline in outdoor relief from 1851, attributed by Snell to an expansion of institutional provision in urban settings combined with the 'crusade' of the 1870s.²⁷ Williams, too, points to the changing configurations of specialised institutions of the post-1870 period.²⁸ Outdoor relief was regarded by the authors of the 1834 Report and by the Charity Organisation Society in the 1870s onwards as wasteful and immoral, tending to increase the dependence of the poor on ratepayers, especially when given in aid of wages.²⁹ Opponents of the new system, on the other hand, characterised it as a pittance (Figure 2.4).

²⁷ Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p. 219.

²⁸ Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty*, pp. 107-128.

²⁹ This is a central theme of the Poor Law Report: S.G. Checkland and E.O.A. Checkland (eds.), *The Poor Law Report of 1834* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

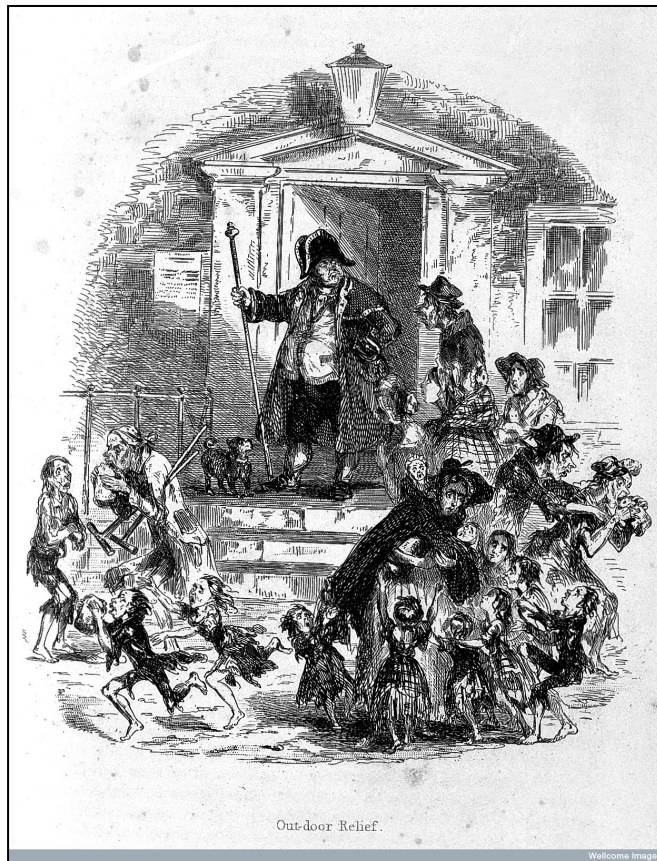


Figure 2.4: 'Phiz' (H.K. Browne), 'Out-door Relief', in J. Grant, *Sketches in London* (London: T. Tegg, 1840), p. 244. Wellcome Library, London.

The numbers of outdoor relief recipients fluctuated widely in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, and the 'crusade' period did see a significant reduction in absolute numbers of outdoor paupers, but an increase in indoor relief as a proportion of all relief can be identified from the early 1860s (Figure 2.5). 12.7 per cent of paupers were relieved in the workhouse in 1863 compared to 15.5 per cent in 1869, a rise in proportion of nearly a quarter in the six years before the 'Goschen minute' and the concomitant drive from central government to cut outdoor relief.³⁰ The 1870s saw an average annual increase in indoor pauperism of 3.5 per cent; over the two decades before 1870 the average increase was 1.3 per cent and over the two decades from 1880 it was 1.0 per cent.

³⁰ G.J. Goschen, *Letter of the Rt. Hon. G.J. Goschen, President of the Poor Law Board, on the Relief to the Poor in the Metropolis, dated 20th November, 1869* (London: Shaw & Sons, 1869). 1863 was a low point in indoor relief as a proportion of all relief because of the large increase in outdoor relief granted extraordinarily during the cotton famine.

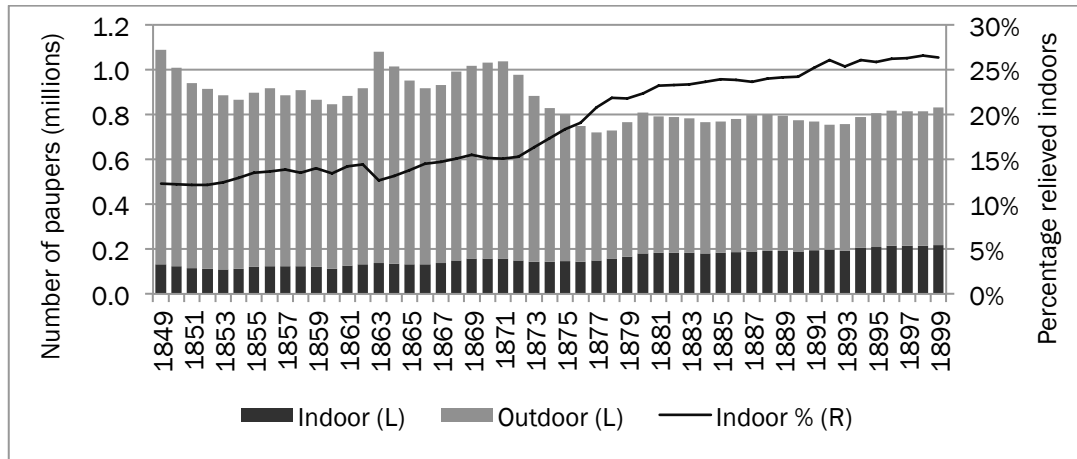


Figure 2.5: Pauper numbers by relief type, 1849-1899.
 Source: Annual reports of PLC and successors.

One reason for the persistent reluctance of many unions to comply with the ‘principles of 1834’ is suggested by the comparative costs of indoor and outdoor relief. Maintaining paupers in institutions was significantly more expensive than giving doles of outdoor relief, as measured per episode of pauperism (Figure 2.6). Moreover, the inflation-adjusted index cost of relief per outdoor pauper rose gradually and with relative stability by 31 per cent over the second half of the nineteenth century. This was not an insignificant rise by any means, but was well behind the 46 per cent increase in costs per indoor pauper.³¹

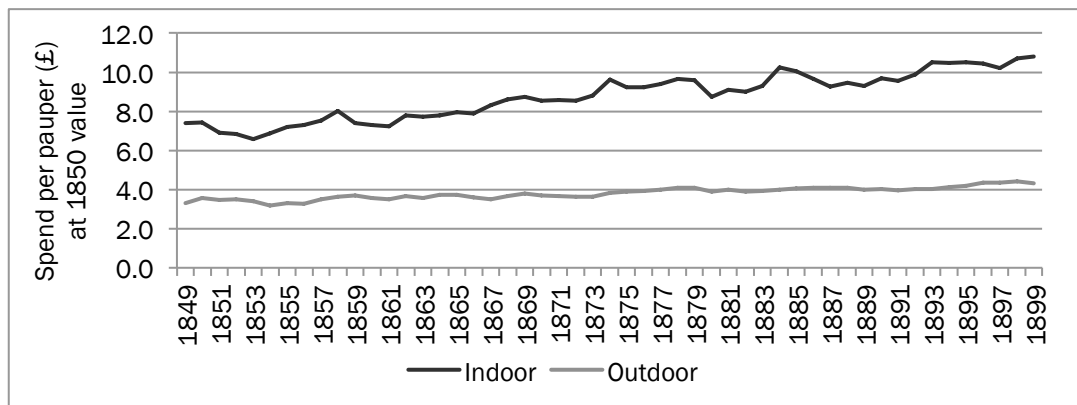


Figure 2.6: Average expenditure per indoor and outdoor pauper in England and Wales, 1849-1899, at 1850 values.
 Source: Annual reports of PLC and successors; O’Donoghue *et al.*, ‘Inflation’. See note 31 on pauper number calculations.

³¹ For consistency, owing to the number of ways pauper numbers were presented in PLB/LGB annual reports, this index cost is calculated using the means of paupers receiving indoor and outdoor relief respectively on 1 January and 1 July each year.

Historians have tended to neglect the cost to unions of relief per pauper. In part this may be because of the difficulties in determining total numbers of paupers, and in disaggregating types of paupers. It may also reflect a persistent historiographical interest in the role of the poor law as a local and national political institution – whether seen in contrast to, or as context for, the more recent emphasis on pauper experiences. The measurements of expense more commonly found in analysis of poor relief are the cost per head of population, and expenditure as a proportion of rateable value, though the latter was not published systematically for individual unions with any regularity.³² Both these measures represent the cost to a community of maintaining its paupers. They were also the most important criteria used by central government and poor law unions themselves. The poor law report of 1834, for instance, noted that the increase in the amount spent on the poor between 1818 and 1832 was at a greater rate than the increase in population.³³ The annual reports of the central authority, starting with the Poor Law Commission's first, included figures on expenditure per head. Unions would have compared their performance relative to their neighbours according to this calculation, as would politicians.³⁴ Unions which published annual accounts of their expenditure over the year tended to include population figures for comparison.³⁵ Despite this focus on expenditure per head of population and as a proportion of rateable value, unions also on occasion published figures for the cost per pauper. In its annual accounts Ashton-under-Lyne, for instance, calculated the average cost per indoor pauper per week alongside a reckoning of the collective number of days for all

³² Expenditure per pound of rateable value was not a standard component of the poor rate return, which gave expenditure, population and rateable value but not in relation to each other. Occasional Parliamentary returns gave nationally aggregated figures, e.g. PP 1870 LIX 1: Poor rates, &c. Return relating to local taxation, &c.

³³ *Poor Law Report*, p. 128.

³⁴ PP 1856 XLIX 343: Poor relief. Return showing the total amount expended for the relief of the poor during the years ended at Lady-Day 1854 and 1855 respectively; together with the cost per head on the population in fifty unions and parishes, having the largest population, in England and Wales.

³⁵ For example TNA MH12/1529, 6560/A/1845, Truro Union: An Abstract of the Union Expenditure for the year ending Lady-day, 1844.

indoor paupers per half-year.³⁶ But for the first fifty years of the new poor law, central government was only intermittently interested in costs per pauper. In 1871 the PLB asked unions for the average weekly cost per head of indoor paupers during the half-year ended Lady-day 1870.³⁷ However, the results appear to have been incorporated into the returns of some poor law inspectors on their districts, but not published in full with the exception of H.B. Farnall's report on the Eastern district.³⁸ The rest of the annual report contains the customary lengthy tables giving amounts spent and numbers of pauper in each class, but nowhere, it seems, has the one been divided by the other. The systematic reporting of costs per pauper by central government does not appear to begin until 1882, with the eleventh annual report of the LGB.³⁹ From this point, average costs per pauper were published annually but only on a national scale, and the figures for individual unions were not specified.

The LGB drew some interesting, but not entirely accurate, conclusions from its analysis of this expenditure. It noted that the mean cost per pauper (of all types) was, 'as a general rule, in inverse proportion' to the number of paupers, and blamed what it called 'indirect relief,' i.e. the administrative fixed costs such as staffing and servicing loans. 'These are charges of a comparatively permanent character, but little influenced by the mere numbers on the relief lists,' it reported.⁴⁰ The LGB was certainly right that expenditure in the 'other relief costs' column of the poor rate return (i.e. not indoor or outdoor relief) was on the increase (Figure 2.7). It continued to rise throughout the century – accounting for more than half the total relief costs from 1892 onwards (Figure 2.8). However, the LGB was wrong about the nature of the inverse relationship between expenditure per pauper and pauper numbers. This trend existed, but only because it was true specifically for outdoor relief, which predominated, and it held true even when the fixed costs were stripped out (Figure 2.9, *b* and

³⁶ *A Statement of the Accounts of the Ashton-under-Lyne Union, for the Half-Year ended March 25th, 1887* (Ashton-under-Lyne: Ashton-under-Lyne Poor Law Union, 1887).

³⁷ PP 1871 XXVII Twenty-third annual report of the Poor Law Board, Appendix A, no. 1, p. 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Appendix B, p. 154.

³⁹ PP 1882 XXX Eleventh annual report of the Local Government Board. 1881-82, pp. xix ff.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. xix-xx.

c). Furthermore, it was not true for indoor pauperism even when these fixed costs were removed (Figure 2.9, a). An alternative explanation is needed, therefore. It might be that over time, and as more paupers received indoor relief, more of those paupers required the more expensive forms of institutional care, for instance in infirmaries, asylums and schools. Meanwhile, those who were deemed eligible for outdoor relief in the last quarter of the nineteenth century were similar sorts of people: those requiring larger doles or pensions. The only difference was their location.

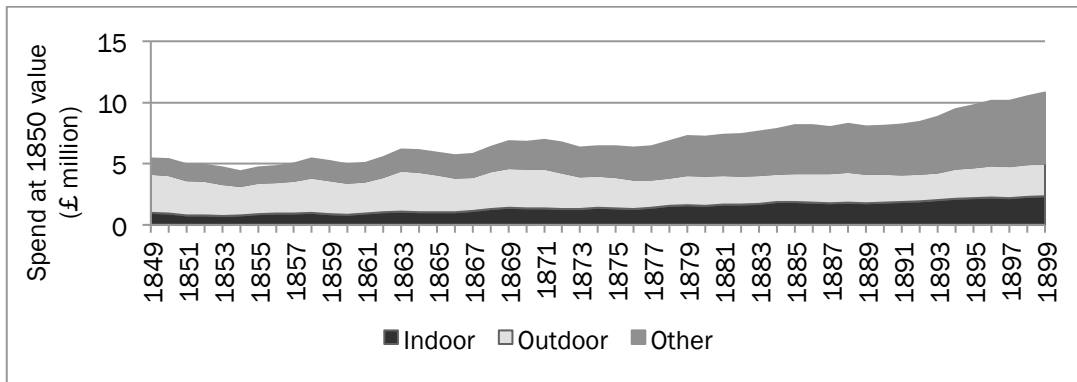


Figure 2.7: Costs (adjusted for inflation) of indoor and outdoor relief and other relief expenditure.

Source: Annual reports of PLC and successors.

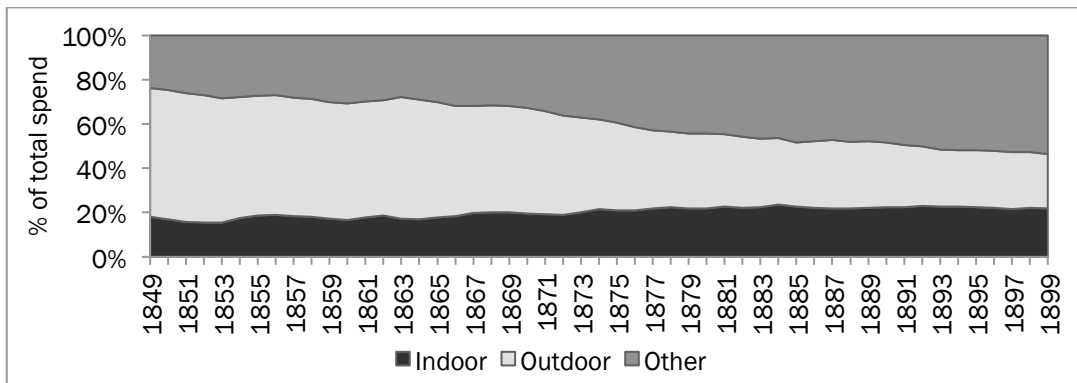


Figure 2.8: Proportions of total relief costs of indoor, outdoor and other expenditure.

Source: Annual reports of PLC and successors.

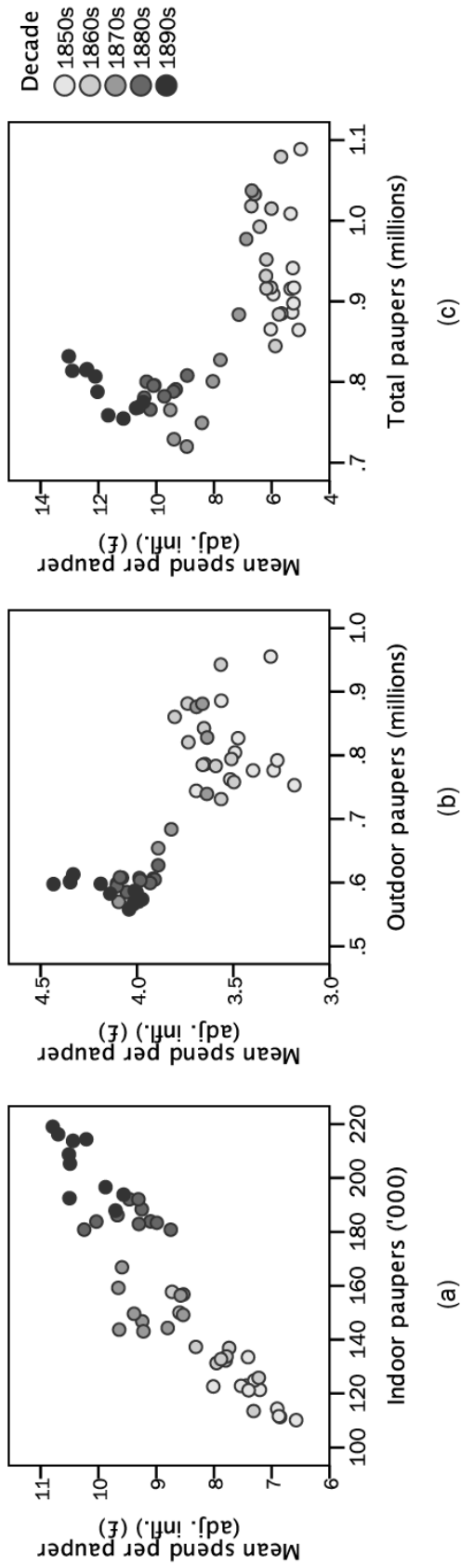


Figure 2.9: Indicative cost per pauper (at 1850 values) vs. pauper numbers by type and decade, 1849-99.
Source: Annual reports of PLC and successors.

2.4 Administrative geographies

Spatial variation in poor law practices was not lost on contemporaries. Helen Bosanquet noted in 1909:

This want of uniformity... may depend largely upon peculiarities of local administration whether or not the relief given will be by way of maintenance in an institution, or by way of an allowance in the home of the recipient. In some Unions it is almost entirely the former, in others almost entirely the latter.⁴¹

Yet one of the aims of the new poor law had been to engender a degree of uniformity in relief across the country. It was not intended that every union should do exactly the same, but the central authority felt that the local adoption of the principles of 1834 would naturally lead to a reduction in relief spending overall.

The central authority's key mechanisms for promoting 'correct' behaviour by unions were circular letters distributing policy edicts, and the persuasiveness of its regional administrators, the Assistant Commissioners, renamed as Inspectors in 1847. In 1849 there were twelve, each with a district of around fifty unions. It was their role, in part, to see that there was as little variation between similar unions within their districts as possible. The Poor Law Board attempted to ensure that each inspector promoted the same set of policies, by demanding regular returns of numbers of paupers and expenditure by the unions overseen by the inspectors.⁴² Between 1850 and 1870 it can be seen that in two key measurements the districts' performance improved by the PLB's standards (Figure 2.10). First, the districts displayed much less variation in expenditure per outdoor pauper in 1870 than they had in 1850. Second, the percentage of paupers relieved in the workhouse rose, with all but one of the twelve districts maintaining above eleven per cent of their paupers indoors in 1870. London and the south-east of England (districts 1 and 2) were the

⁴¹ H. Bosanquet, *The Poor Law Report of 1909: A summary explaining the defects of the present system and the principal recommendations of the Commission, so far as relates to England and Wales* (London: Macmillan, 1909), p. 45.

⁴² TNA MH32, correspondence of Poor Law Commission with Assistant Commissioners and Poor Law Board with Poor Law Inspectors.

greatest users of the workhouse, and south Wales (district 9) the least enthusiastic (Figure 2.11). Meanwhile expenditure per indoor pauper remained much more variable. Outdoor relief doles could be monitored and limited much more readily than indoor relief could be, as workhouse costs were more closely connected to the local prices of goods. This division into districts therefore suggests a persistence in regional policy and behaviour by poor law unions well into the 1870s, at least in some districts.

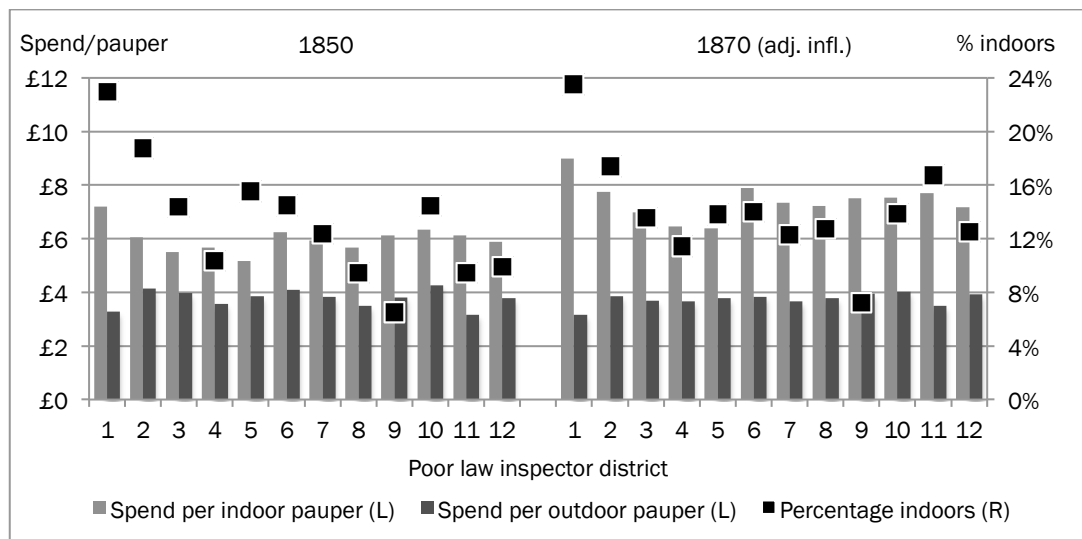


Figure 2.10: Mean spend per pauper by type of relief in poor law inspector districts, 1850 and 1870 (at 1850 values).

Source: PP 1851 XXVI 1; PP 1876 LXIII 1.

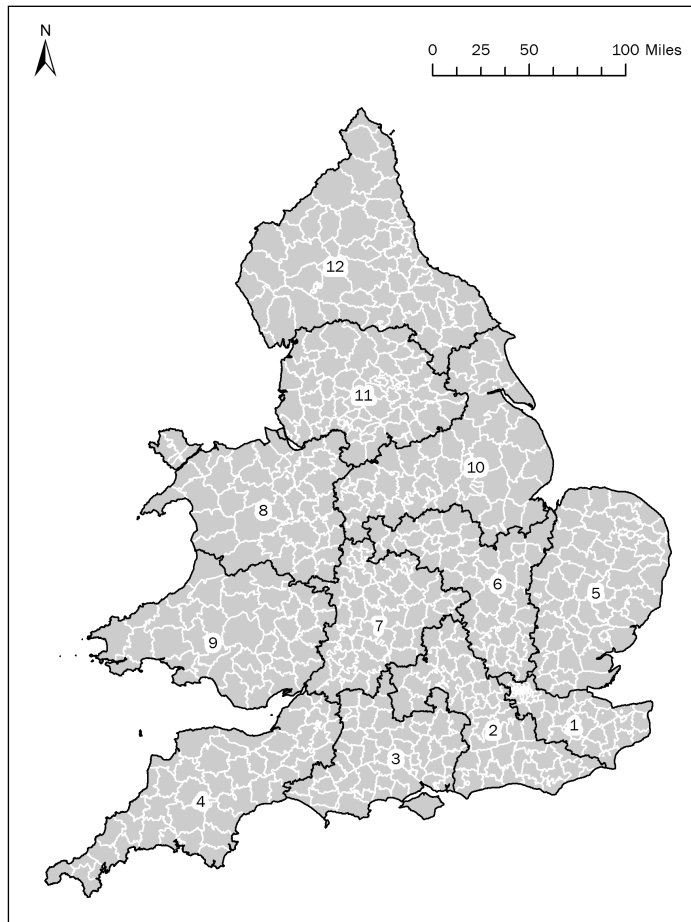


Figure 2.11: Poor law inspector districts, 1849.
 Source: PP 1849 XXV 1, Appendix, Table 16 p. 82.

This regional or district framework was useful for governance, but it was not the scale at which individual paupers interacted with poor law authorities. Labour was increasingly mobile in this period, and therefore so was poverty.⁴³ The 1851 census revealed for the first time that more people in England lived in urban areas than in rural, as a result both of direct migration to towns and of those new urban dwellers increasing local birth rates.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the irremovability of non-settled parish residents after a certain period was beginning to take effect: Legislation of 1846 granted irremovability after five years' continuous residence and there were subsequent reductions to this period.⁴⁵ The reductions in part stemmed from the fact that the period of actual residence was very difficult for poor law administrators to determine.

⁴³ G.R. Boyer, *An Economic History of the English Poor Law, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 232.

⁴⁴ Williamson, 'Migrant Selectivity,' pp. 289 ff.

⁴⁵ 9 & 10 Vict., c. 66 and subsequent legislation. See Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p. 116.

There were few checks that unions could make, and in many instances they simply had to take paupers at their word.⁴⁶ Irremovability also prompted rural landlords to 'clear their estates' by destroying or refusing to repair cottages, and towns had little option but to accommodate these forced migrants.⁴⁷ Unions immediately bore the cost of irremovability: In 1850 unions relieved 678,000 irremovable paupers at a total expense of £605,000, over 11 per cent of the £5.4 million spent on all paupers that year.⁴⁸ From the middle of the nineteenth century, therefore, labourers in the makeshift economy were increasingly thinking about where they should seek work on the basis not only of where work was available, but also of where they might find relief most readily.

This has important implications for our understanding of the geography of poor relief. That there were strong patterns visible in relief practices at a regional scale is not disputed. However, paupers were concerned with the local, rather than with the regional. Ravenstein's analysis shows that migrants at this period usually travelled only short distances from their places of birth, largely moving to urban centres from rural parts of the same or bordering counties, and tended only to travel longer distances to the 'great centres of commerce or industry'.⁴⁹ As Goose points out, unions within the same county could display 'significant contrasts' in relief practices, either as a matter of ideology or as a reflection of local economic structures.⁵⁰ Looking at the scale of the union is therefore a prerequisite for understanding the choices available to migrants who might have needed poor relief.

⁴⁶ PP 1860 XVII 1. Report from the Select Committee on Irremovable Poor; together with the proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence, appendix, and index, evidence of John Lambert, q. 50.

⁴⁷ A. Redford, *Labour migration in England, 1800-1850* 2nd ed., (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), p. 128.

⁴⁸ PP 1851 XXVI 1. Third annual report of the Poor Law Board. 1850. In pursuance of the statute 10 & 11 Vict. c. 109 s. 13, p. 1.

⁴⁹ E.G. Ravenstein, 'The laws of migration', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 48:2 (1885), pp. 198-199.

⁵⁰ N. Goose, 'Workhouse populations in the mid-nineteenth century: The case of Hertfordshire', *Local Population Studies* 62 (1999), p. 66.

2.5 Poor law expenditure at the local scale

National averages and aggregated figures are important for our understanding of poor relief policy and practice, but they hide a great deal of local variation, especially because of the wide disparities in demography between authorities. In 1851, for instance, the least populated union – with 296 inhabitants – was Brinton, Norfolk, which also had the lowest expenditure on its poor in 1850, at £164. It is probable that it had fewer paupers than the 77 reported by Welwyn, Hertfordshire – which also had the fewest outdoor poor – but as Brinton was a Gilbert’s union it was not required to return pauper numbers to the Poor Law Board. The biggest single authority in terms of inhabitants was Liverpool (258,236). The largest by acreage was Bellingham, Northumberland, while the smallest union was West London, Middlesex. Nineteen unions had no workhouses, and hence no indoor paupers to report, in 1850. These were mostly in Wales and the Midlands and south-west of England. The smallest reported workhouse populations, at ten each, were at Bala in Merioneth and Tetbury in Gloucestershire, and the greatest in Manchester, Lancashire, at 2,015. Liverpool’s might have been bigger, but as a local incorporation it did not return the figures. After the repeal of Gilbert’s Act in 1869, in comparison, there was somewhat less variation in population sizes. In 1871 the smallest union was Welwyn, Hertfordshire, with 2,272 inhabitants. Liverpool was by then the second-largest by population, having been overtaken by West Derby (257,039). Seven unions had no workhouse as late as 1870: six were in Wales and one, Todmorden, was in Lancashire.

Given these variations in absolute numbers, it is more helpful to compare expenditure by unions in proportion to their populations. A clear division between northern and southern unions is apparent in both 1850 and 1870 (Figure 2.12): Unions in the south of England and central Wales consistently spent more on poor relief per head of population than those in the north of England. Within these broad delineations, some regional differences are also clear: The north-east spent a little more per head than the north-west, for instance, and Devon’s and Cornwall’s unions spent a little less per head than their counterparts in the rest of the south. Furthermore, these patterns are

strikingly tenacious over the two decades. When ranked by expenditure per head of population for 1850 and 1870, unions showed a very strong tendency to remain in a similar position relative to others.⁵¹

⁵¹ Spearman's ρ , the correlation coefficient of their ranks, is 0.77.

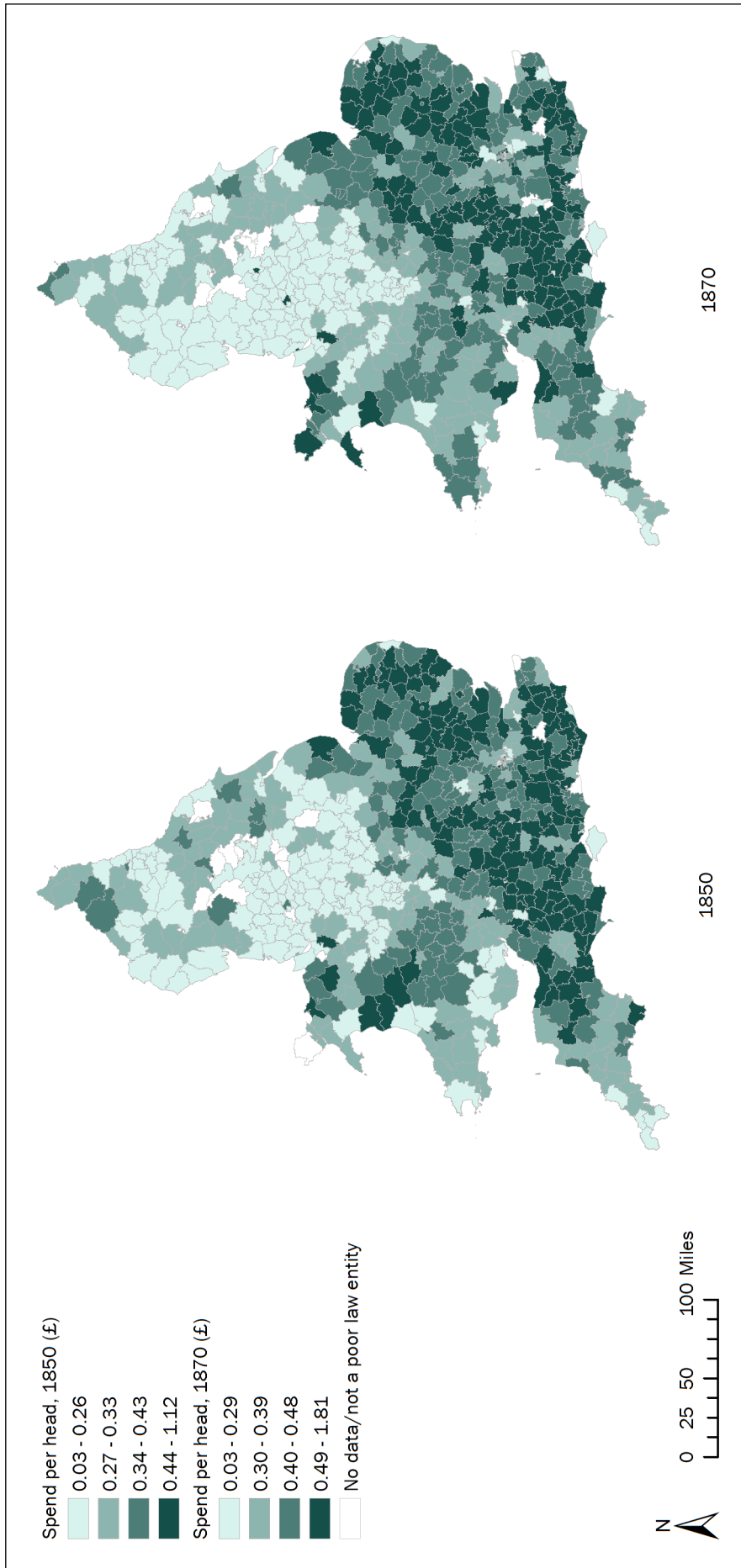


Figure 2.12: Expenditure on the poor per head of population by unions (classified by quarters), 1850 and 1870. Source: See Table 2.1.

The idea of the north-south divide was a familiar theme in the nineteenth century, Howell pointing to the persistent 'role of geographical differentiation in British economic, social and political development as a force in its own right'.⁵² The north was understood as industrialised, modern and prosperous, the south as bucolic but impoverished. Overlaid on this is the historiographical conception of attitudes to poor relief. King, for instance, identifies a 'gulf in poor law practice and generosity between northern and southern areas' under the old poor law, based on spend per head of population.⁵³ He stresses that the new poor law did not alter the 'enduring regional patterns in welfare culture that we can see developing from at least 1600 onwards.'⁵⁴

Whether the south's policies can be described as 'generous' and the north's as 'parsimonious' is open to question, however. Fundamentally, the south had more paupers per capita, and it is therefore unsurprising that it spent more per capita. The south of England and north of Wales contained almost all the unions with the greatest numbers of paupers in their populations in both 1850 and 1870 (Figure 2.13). Pauperism was not necessarily a direct proxy for poverty, as paupers were people the guardians and their officers *chose* to relieve, even though pauperism rates cannot be divorced from local poverty entirely. Low numbers of paupers, therefore, might not always indicate low levels of poverty in a given union, as the guardians might have been very keen to keep the poor rates down and thus declined many applications. It is possible that the north's pauperism rate was relatively low for this reason. However, it seems unlikely that had applications for relief been uniform in the north and south, the pressure of these applications could have been responded to with generosity in the south and parsimony in the north on such a great scale by so many unions and with such geographical consistency.

⁵² P. Howell, 'Industry and identity: the north-south divide and the geography of belonging, 1830-1918', in A.R.H. Baker and M. Billinge (eds), *Geographies of England: The North-South Divide, Material and Imagined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 65.

⁵³ S. King, 'Poor Relief and English Economic Development Reappraised', *Economic History Review* 50:2 (1997), p. 361.

⁵⁴ King, *Poverty and Welfare*, pp. 228-229.

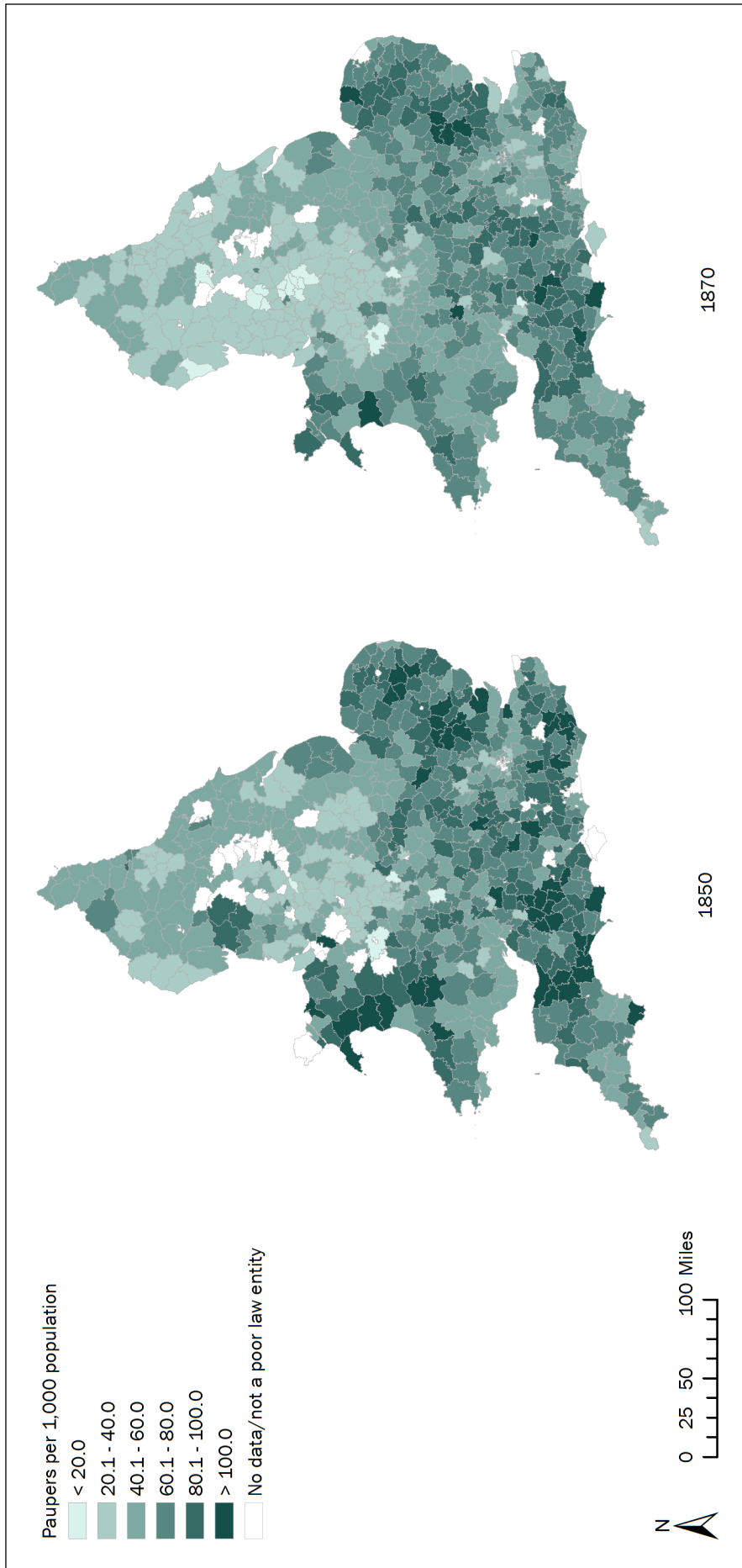


Figure 2.13: Pauperism rates by union, 1850 and 1870.
Source: See Table 2.1.

The relative generosity of poor law unions was, therefore, understood by contemporaries to be a function of expenditure in proportion to resources, i.e. per head or per pound of rateable value. (The geographic distribution of spend as a ratio of rateable value was almost identical to that of spend per head, and rateable value and expenditure were very highly correlated.⁵⁵) There were good reasons why this understanding prevailed, in particular the fact that the ratepayers were considered to have the principal stake in the poor law system. Yet generosity can only fully be assessed by an exploration of how it was understood by paupers. Two factors are central to this: the mode of relief, and the amount of relief likely to be given.

The amount of relief is the more straightforward factor. A crude measurement of mean relief expenditure per outdoor pauper gives a good idea of the unions where paupers might have judged guardians as parsimonious or generous compared to those in neighbouring unions (Figure 2.14). This measurement takes no account of the breadth of 'entitlement' to poor relief, however, and poor individuals and families denied any form of relief, even in a locality where pensions were relatively substantial, would no doubt have disputed the characterisation of the union as 'generous'. Nonetheless, some striking spatial features emerge in mapping indicative expenditure per outdoor pauper. In 1850, the largest concentrations of low spending were in Lancashire, West Yorkshire and North Wales, where outdoor paupers on average received relatively small allowances. In contrast, a significant band of region-wide high spending can be seen in Cumberland, Northumberland, Lincolnshire and the East Midlands. County Durham and North Yorkshire stand out as exceptions to this eastern band of larger allowances. There was also perhaps a degree of similarity in the mid-to-high spending unions of the central south and south Midlands. Aside from these groupings, though, it is not apparent that there was much regional uniformity in the rest of the country. There was certainly a high degree of intra-regional variation in the south-west, south-east, East Anglia and most of the Midlands.

⁵⁵ For spend 1850 v. RV 1852, Pearson's $r = 0.72$ and for 1870 $r = 0.77$.

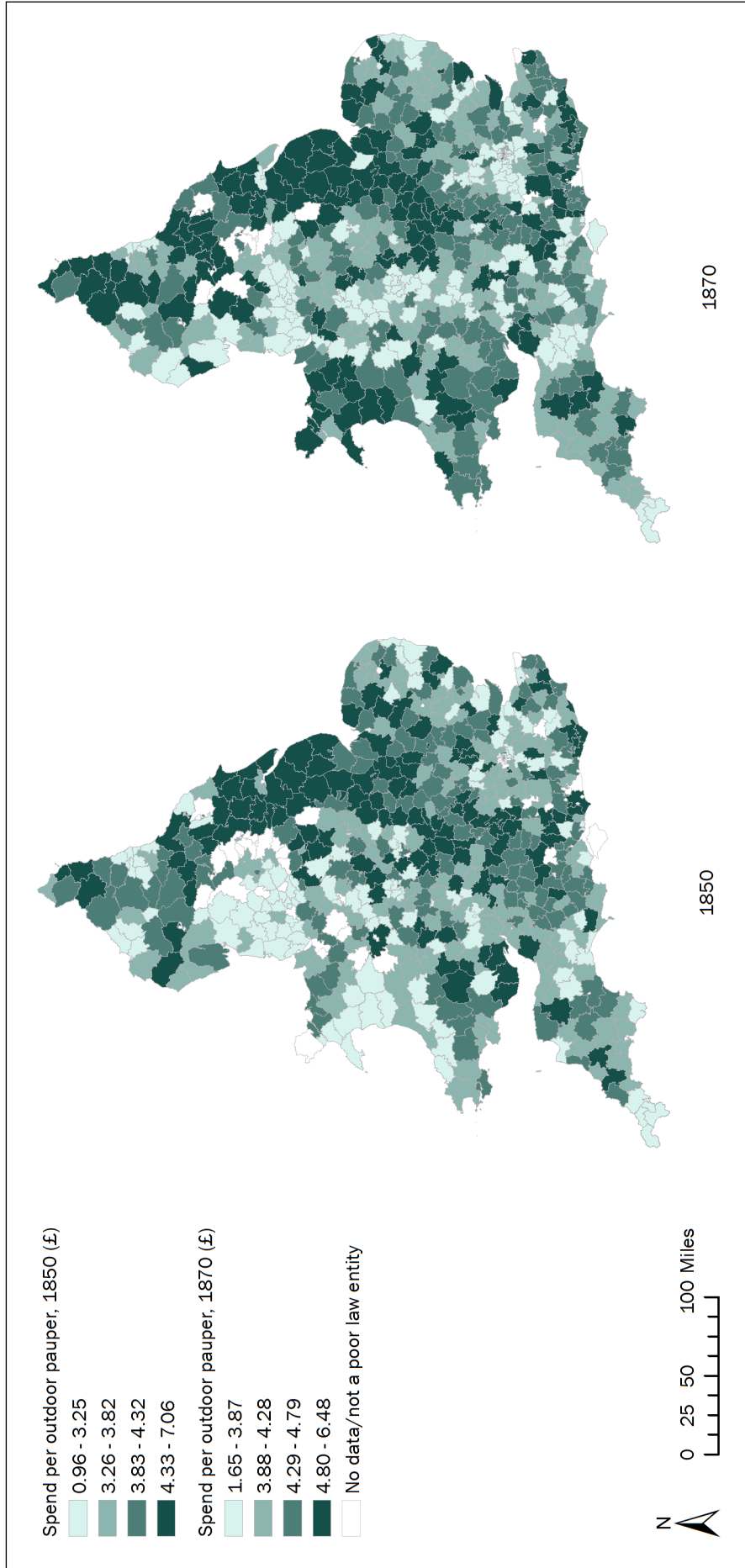


Figure 2.14: Expenditure per outdoor pauper by unions (quarters), 1850 and 1870.
Source: See Table 2.1.

These findings build on King's 'impressionistic' map of the welfare landscape in the early part of the nineteenth century, which is based on the amounts of outrelief given and the openness of entitlements under the old poor law.⁵⁶ The characterisation of relatively generous allowances in the north-east and a more restrictive north-west appears to have held true into the mid-nineteenth century. In the rest of the country, either the patterns tentatively delineated by King did not persist to 1850, or the high degree of intra-regional variation calls into question the suitability of regional demarcations along the lines suggested. It is certainly possible that the nature of regional patterns changed significantly over the first few decades of the century, given the conspicuous changes between 1850 and 1870 in some parts. North Wales, in particular, increased its outdoor allowances *en bloc*, as rateable value per head increased and pauper numbers declined. Some unions in Lancashire also increased their spend per outdoor pauper by 1870, while the central and east Midlands and north-east continued to give above-average payments. The rest of the country remained something of a patchwork in outdoor relief, though.

In contrast to mapping outdoor relief spend, the measurement of relief expenditure per indoor pauper does not give an adequate indication of relative generosity. Workhouses were more or less expensive to run depending on a number of variables unconnected to the comfort guardians wished to provide for the inmates, such as the prices of goods consumed by the institutions which are considered in subsequent chapters. Mapping expenditure per indoor pauper therefore only gives an idea of how costly workhouses were (Figure 2.15). London was consistently the most expensive place to run a workhouse, with some clusters of costly indoor relief in the east Midlands and south Wales. Meanwhile East Anglia, north Wales and the West Country spent the least on their indoor paupers.

⁵⁶ King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p. 262.

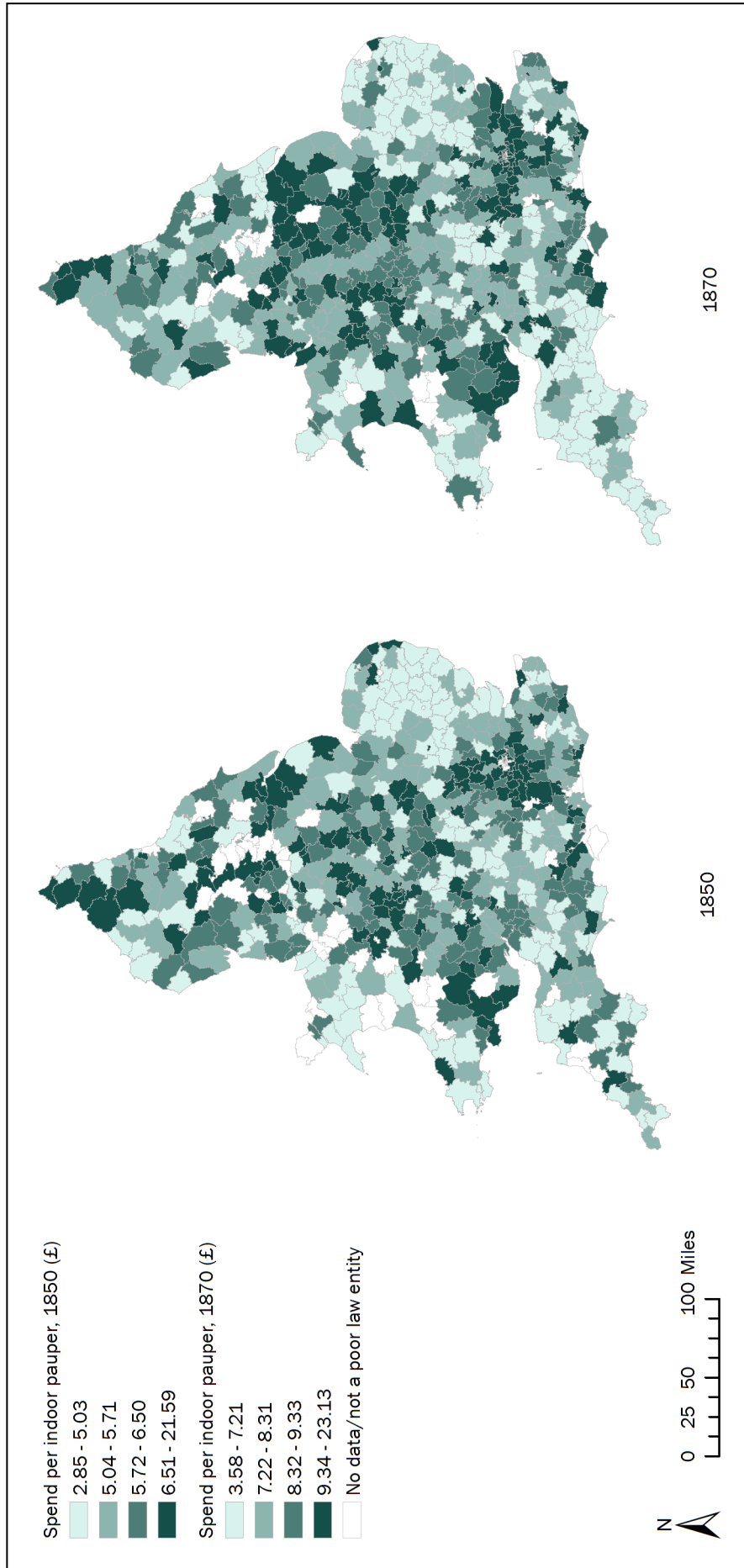


Figure 2.15: Expenditure per indoor pauper by unions (quarters), 1850 and 1870.
Source: See Table 2.1.

Given a choice between indoor and outdoor relief, the vast majority of paupers seem to have preferred outdoor. This was the presumption underpinning the principle of less eligibility – the very purpose of the workhouse was to be a deterrent – and its effectiveness can be inferred from the strength of opposition to the workhouse as a symbol of the new system.⁵⁷ A measurement of a harsh regime as it was perceived by paupers might therefore be the proportion of paupers relieved in the workhouse (Figure 2.16). The south-east had the greatest proportions of indoor poor in 1850, with the south and Midlands containing unions displaying a wider range of workhouse use. Wales and the north of England, with the exception of Cumbria, tended not to use indoor relief as much in comparison. As shown above, by 1870 indoor relief was much more common across England. Figure 2.16 shows this consolidation of workhouse use being particular significant in the Midlands and north of England, though Wales and the south-west of England continued to maintain fewer indoor paupers as a proportion than did the rest of the country.

⁵⁷ N.C. Edsall, *The anti-Poor Law movement, 1834-44* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971); J. Knott, *Popular opposition to the 1834 Poor Law* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

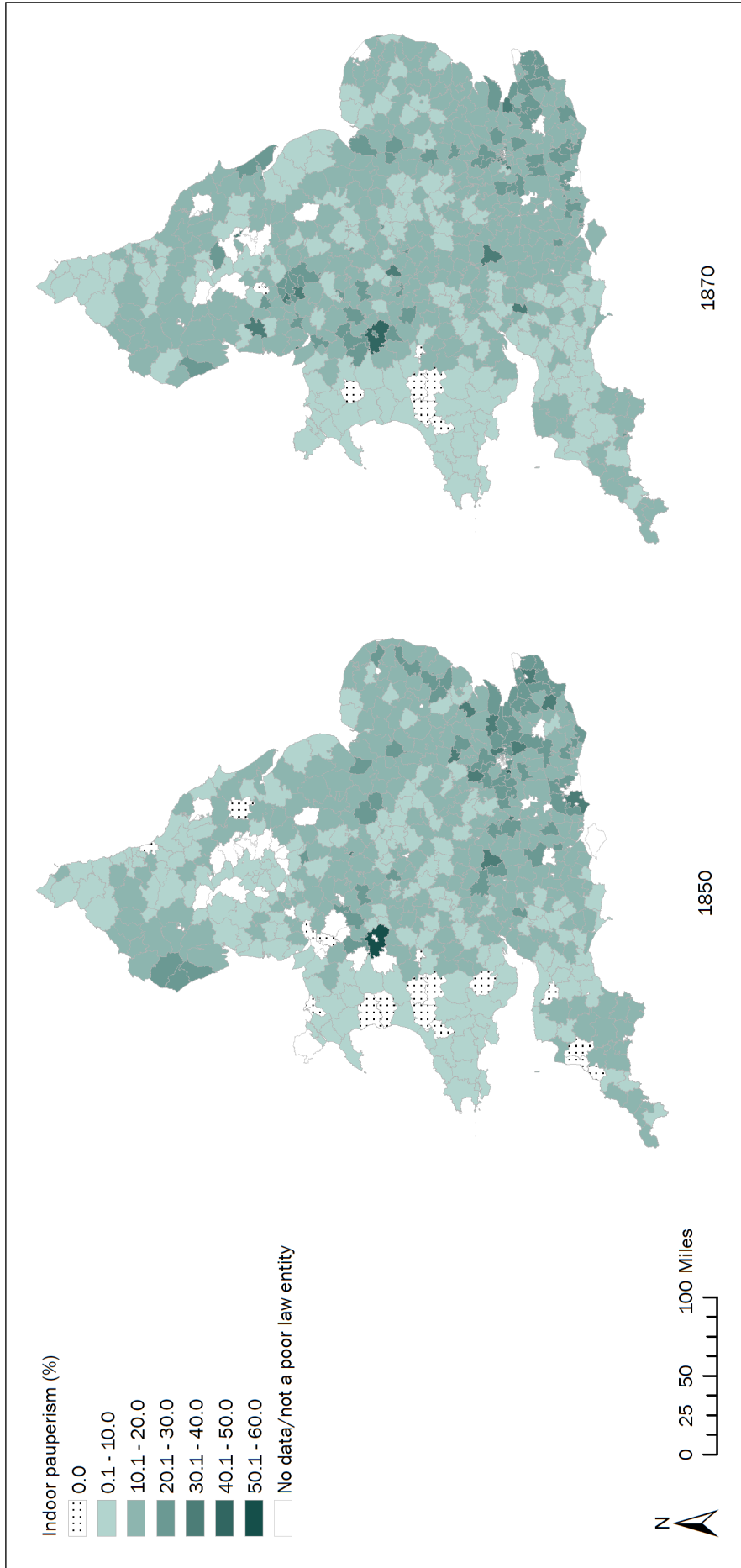


Figure 2.16: Percentage of paupers in the workhouse on 1 January 1850 and 1 January 1870.
Source: See Table 2.1.

The important spatial factor in the rate of indoor pauperism appears to be not a regional delineation, but instead distance from London. The further from London a union was, the less likely it was to relieve its poor in the workhouse. This was especially the case in 1850 and persisted over at least the next two decades (Figure 2.17). By 1870, the average percentage relieved indoors had risen almost everywhere but Wales. The south-east continued to have the highest indoor rates, but had been matched by several northern urban unions which embraced the use of the workhouse far more than they had in the 1850s. These are represented in the peak of indoor relief in the 251-300 kilometre band (Figure 2.17 and Table 2.4). An urban union is defined, for these purposes, as having a population density of one or more person per acre.⁵⁸

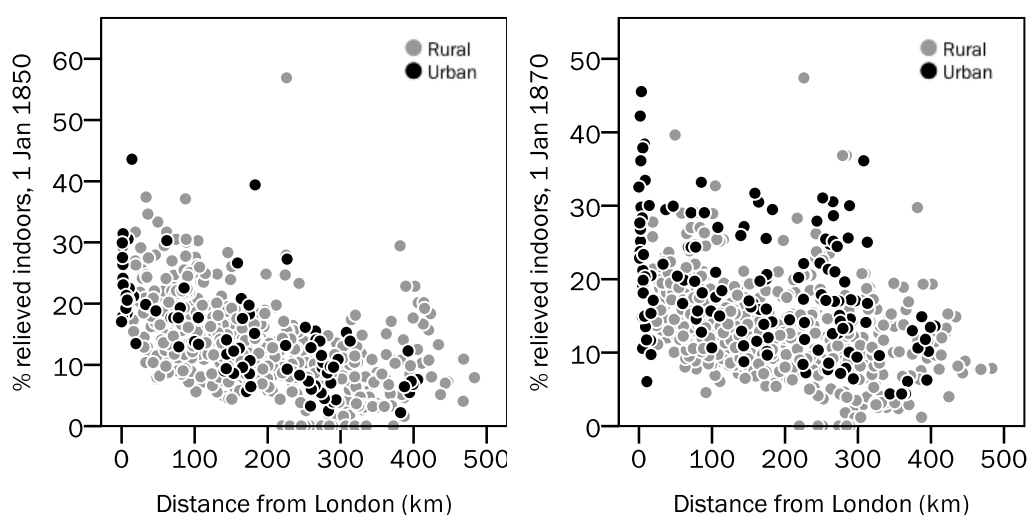


Figure 2.17: Percentage of paupers relieved in workhouse vs. distance in km from City of London (centroids), 1 January 1850 and 1 January 1870.
Source: See Table 2.1.

⁵⁸ This arbitrary definition is discussed in C.M. Law, 'The Growth of Urban Population in England and Wales, 1801-1911', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41 (1967), pp. 125-143.

Distance from London	Number of unions	Mean indoor %	
		1850	1870
< 50 km	84	16.4	18.4
51-100 km	102	15.7	15.5
101-150 km	99	13.6	13.6
151-200 km	102	12.5	12.3
201-250 km	73	10.3	13.7
251-300 km	85	6.3	11.8
> 300 km	98	8.1	10.9
Total	643	11.9	13.7

Table 2.4: Mean percentage of indoor pauperism on 1 Jan 1850 and 1870 by distance bands. Source: See Table 2.1.

2.6 Indoor and outdoor relief in urban and rural unions

Two questions must therefore be considered: First, why did so many unions in Wales and the rural north resist using the workhouse; and second, why did northern towns stop resisting? Wales, Lancashire and Yorkshire, which had the lowest indoor pauperism rates, were areas typified by resistance to the principles of the new poor law. The experiences of William Day, an assistant poor law commissioner from 1835 to 1843, suggest some characteristics of the unions in Wales under his superintendence which contributed to their low indoor pauperism rate. From his perspective, the area was rife with abuses and intractable opposition to investing in workhouses, stemming from a combination of misconceptions about the new system and the vested interests of landowners. The ratepayers and guardians of the poor in many unions were stubbornly opposed to adopting the policies advocated by Day and the PLC, such as replacing their old and (in Day's view) inadequate workhouses with expensive modern institutions. In 1839 he told the PLC: 'I cannot but feel that the question henceforth whether you or the Guardians are to be masters in Wales is now in peril. I have been repeatedly told by the Guardians that you dare not enforce your orders, & in the confidence of this it is that they dare to disobey them.'⁵⁹ He wrote to fellow assistant commissioner Sir John Walsham in 1840: 'You cannot know the miseries of thirty or forty Welsh Guardians who won't build a Workhouse, and consequently meet in the parlour of a pot house twelve feet by fourteen and keep all the windows shut and spit tobacco on your shoes – to say nothing of knowing not a word of what they are talking of

⁵⁹ TNA MH32/14, Day to PLC, 15 August 1839.

in an unknown tongue.⁶⁰ Day's confrontational style might have contributed to the guardians' resistance, and after his forced resignation in 1843 the PLC suggested he 'was wanting not in activity but in discretion'.⁶¹ Here was entrenched resistance to expensive central government policies seen to be designed for the south of England, reinforced by a personality clash.

Encouraging guardians to comply with central government policy was also a battle in the northern district overseen by assistant commissioner William H.T. Hawley. He described the management of ten of his fifty-five unions as 'ineffective' or 'unsatisfactory' in the quarter ended 31 December 1846; unions infringed PLC orders and workhouses in several unions awaited structural improvement.⁶² In a report on land ownership in the North Riding of Yorkshire in 1851 Hawley complained of the 'evil' of close parishes, i.e. those with a small number of landowners exercising a great deal of control over their tenants.⁶³ Rates levied in neighbouring open parishes exceeded by nearly a half those in the close parishes, and Hawley lamented the 'dissipation of the Parochial funds in expensive and useless litigation' between parishes arguing over paupers' rights to relief under the laws of settlement.⁶⁴ However, in contrast to earlier years of the new poor law, by 1851 boards of guardians seemed keen to administer the new system effectively. Hawley reported to the PLB:

At all the Boards I perceive a cordial desire on the part of the Guardians to carry out the law with justice towards the ratepayers, and humanity towards the poor: the orders of your Board are generally very cheerfully obeyed, and my own suggestions attended to. There appears to be a growing appreciation of the value and efficacy of the workhouse test as applied to destitution.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ National Library of Wales, Day MSS 3146 F, Day to Sir John Walsham, 9 August 1840, cited in R.A. Lewis, 'William Day and the Poor Law Commissioners', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* 9:1 (1963), p. 180.

⁶¹ TNA HO45/1611, PLC to Sir William Somerville, 5 October 1846.

⁶² TNA MH32/41, 142A/47, W.H.T. Hawley to PLC, 4 January 1847.

⁶³ TNA MH32/41, 3648/51, Hawley to PLB, 9 January 1851.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ TNA MH32/41, 6453/51, Hawley to PLB, 25 January 1851.

These unions might have appeared to Hawley to be increasingly compliant, but they were largely not subject to orders restricting or prohibiting their outdoor relief expenditure.⁶⁶ Without such regulation, their relief costs were kept down by maintaining only small numbers of paupers in their workhouses.

Such regional explanations can only go so far, though, as other parts of the country show mixtures of indoor pauperism rates in contrast to the uniformity of the rural Wales-Lancashire-Yorkshire band. It is possible that the further from London the central authority's representatives travelled, the more they encountered the attitude Day described: that 'that may do very well for England, but it won't do for Wales'.⁶⁷ For the majority of unions, however, individual circumstance had much to do with actual relief policy, and in few regions was there uniformity of circumstance.

By 1870 there was a clear division between rural and urban approaches to the adoption of indoor relief (Figure 2.18). Unions in Wales, none of which had population densities greater than one per acre, did not increase their indoor relief rates on average from 1850, though there were a few individual unions which did (or which built workhouses). Southern urban unions including London did not change their proportions of indoor pauperism greatly either, but they had started from higher rates in the first place. In the north, as shown above, urban unions began to adopt the workhouse to a far greater extent than they had done.

⁶⁶ F. Driver, 'The historical geography of the workhouse system in England and Wales, 1834-1883', *Journal of Historical Geography* 15:3 (1989), pp. 274-275.

⁶⁷National Library of Wales, Day MSS 3146 F, Day to Walsham, 9 August 1840, cited in Lewis, 'William Day,' p. 180.

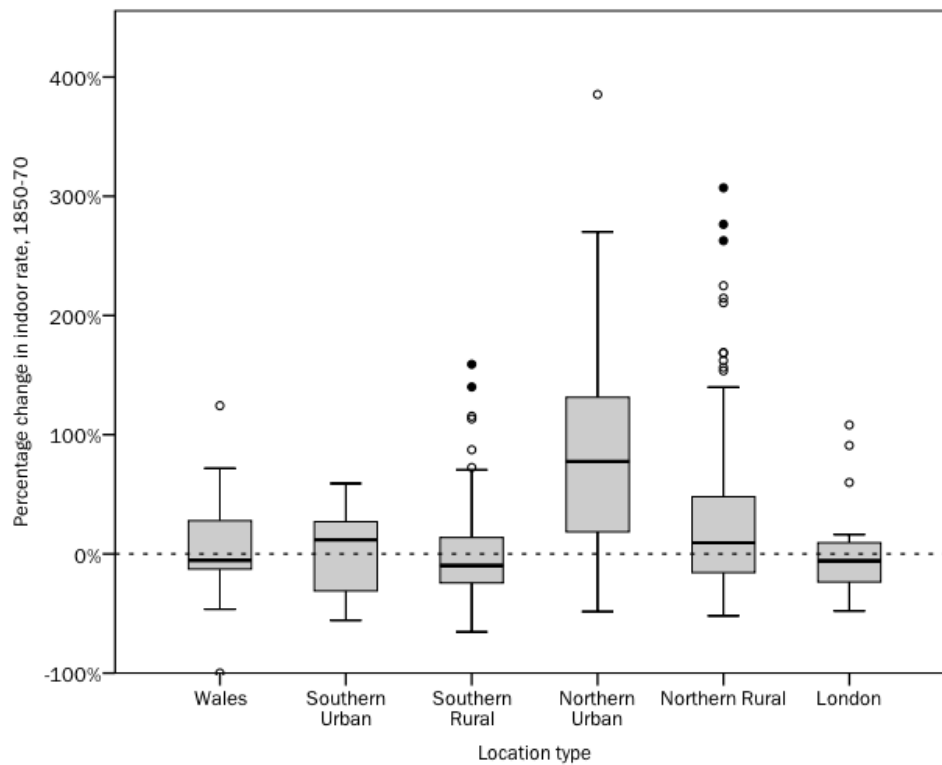


Figure 2.18: Percentage change in indoor relief rates, 1850-70, by union location-type.
Source: See Table 2.1.

The locations of increases and decreases in indoor pauperism compared to 1850 had clear regional and demographic features, therefore (Figure 2.19). Those unions in the lowest third for indoor rates in both 1850 and 1870 were mostly in Wales and the north of England. Those in the top third for both years were mostly in the south-east and west Midlands. But those in the lowest third in 1850 which increased their ranking by 1870 were predominantly in the north-west, along with some towns across the south. Some of the unions classified as ‘northern rural’ but which displayed a significant increase in indoor relief were sites of rapid urbanisation, such as Skipton, Leyburn and Stockton, or were already towns with large agricultural hinterlands, like York.

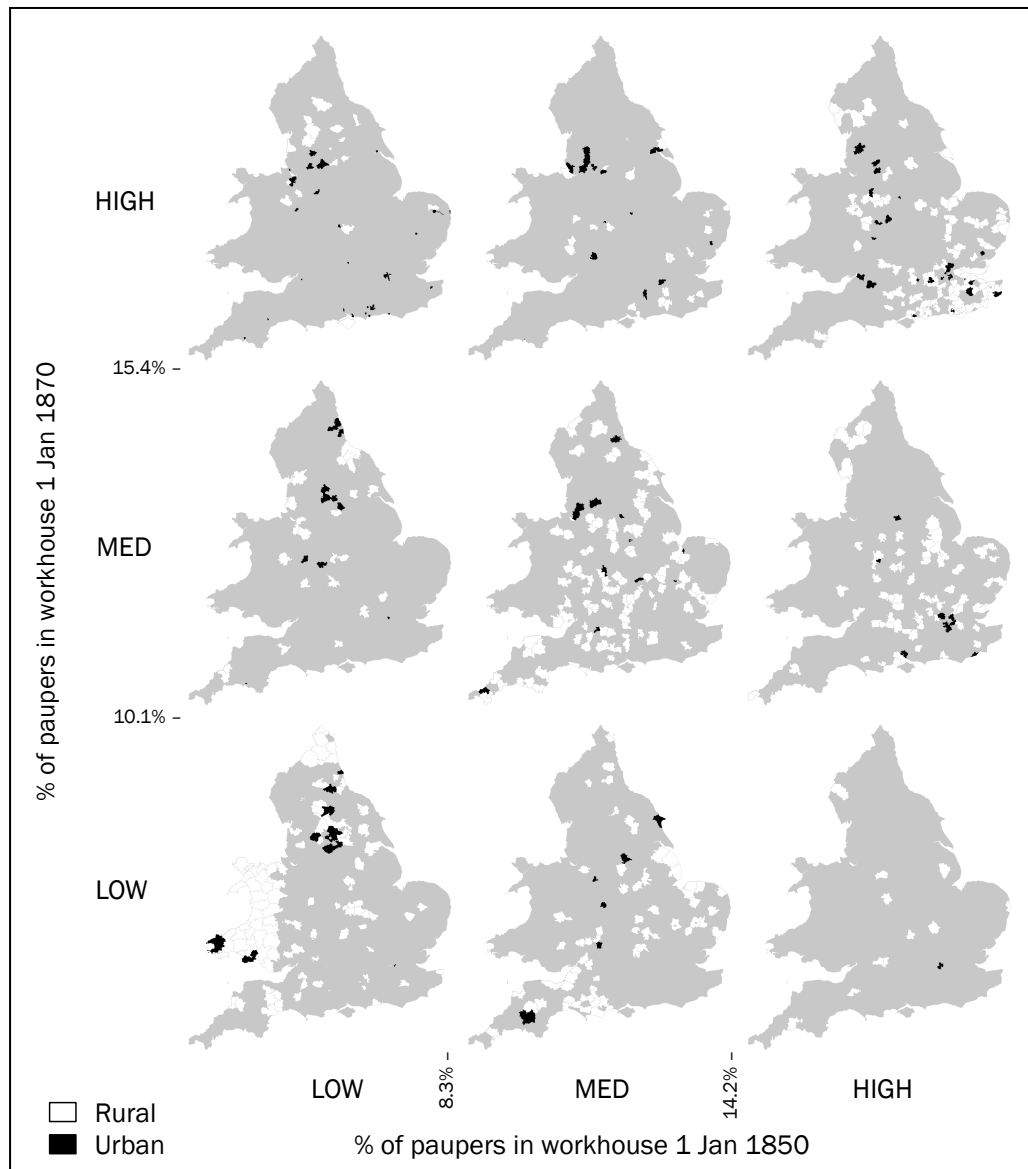


Figure 2.19: Locations of indoor relief rate changes, 1850-70.
Source: See Table 2.1.

The adoption of different policies towards the poor by urban and rural unions can also be seen in their expenditures per pauper (Figure 2.20). Relief per outdoor pauper shows clear divisions between urban and rural unions, with rural unions spending more. Snell has shown that there was a difference between the *proportions* of outdoor and indoor relief offered by rural versus urban unions in the 1870s.⁶⁸ Here it can be seen that there was also a similar rural-urban difference in the *values* of outdoor relief provided. But among the rural unions, there was very little difference between north and south. In all

⁶⁸ Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp. 228-234.

parts of England and Wales, rural unions spent fairly similar amounts per outdoor pauper. Meanwhile expenditure per indoor pauper was fairly close for all kinds of union by this typology, with the very clear exception of London, where workhouse costs were by far the highest. London also gave indoor relief to many more of its paupers than the rest of the country, though other urban unions in the south also had high indoor relief rates in 1850. By 1870, real spend per indoor pauper had risen for all types of union, but spend per outdoor pauper was static.

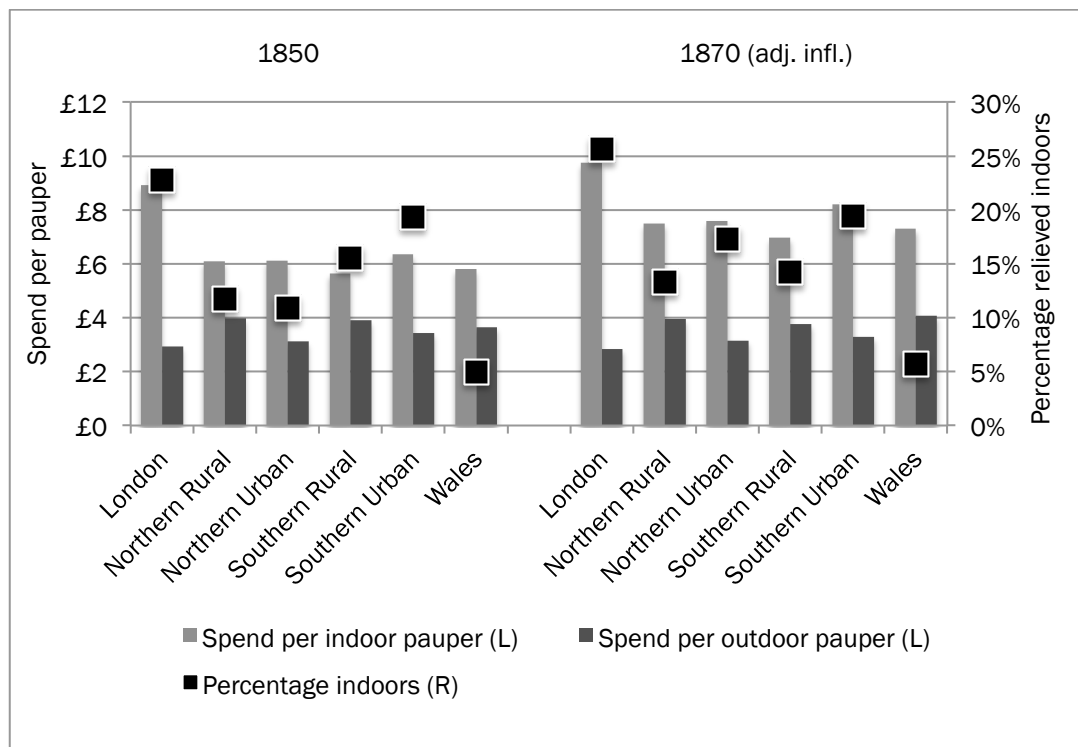


Figure 2.20: Mean spend per pauper by method of relief and location-type of union, 1850 and 1870 (at 1850 values).

Source: PP 1851 XXVI 1; PP 1876 LXIII 1.

From the point of view of a pauper seeking outdoor relief, therefore, whether the union was in the north or south made little difference *to the amount of relief*: The important factor was whether it was rural or urban. The *likelihood of getting outdoor relief* was more complex, though. There was a north-south divide in workhouse use, with the south being more likely to use the workhouse than the north in 1850. By 1870, urban northern unions were also adopting the workhouse to a greater extent, and rural northern unions were

not far behind. Unions in Wales continued to shun the workhouse, with only six per cent of their paupers given indoor relief in 1870 (Table 2.5).

Location type	Spend per indoor pauper			Spend per outdoor pauper			Indoor pauperism %		
	1850 (£)	1870 (£)	Change (%)	1850 (£)	1870 (£)	Change (%)	1850 (%)	1870 (%)	Change (%)
London	8.92	9.75	+9	2.94	2.85	-3	23	26	+13
Northern rural	6.10	7.50	+23	3.97	3.95	-1	12	13	+14
Northern urban	6.12	7.60	+24	3.12	3.16	+1	11	17	+59
Southern rural	5.65	6.97	+23	3.90	3.76	-4	16	14	-8
Southern urban	6.36	8.20	+29	3.44	3.29	-4	19	19	+1
Wales	5.80	7.31	+26	3.65	4.08	+12	5	6	+15

Table 2.5: Mean spend per pauper type by relief and location-type of union, 1850 and 1870 (at 1850 values). Source: PP 1851 XXVI 1; PP 1876 LXIII 1.

The preference for outdoor relief among northern industrial towns in the mid-nineteenth century has been well documented. Boyer notes that it was in the interests of manufacturers to promote outdoor relief as they could thereby use the poor law as a form of unemployment insurance.⁶⁹ In Lancashire and the West Riding, downturns in the textiles trade, such as in the early 1840s, were accompanied by big increases in the numbers of adult able-bodied men relieved on account of want of work or insufficiency of earnings. This was ‘almost uniformly’ outdoor relief.⁷⁰ It was cheaper than indoor relief not only because the value of relief per pauper was less, but also because it did not leave workhouses empty when trade was good. Attempts by the Poor Law Board to prohibit or regulate the giving of outrelief to able-bodied factory workers and casual labourers were regularly obstructed by boards of guardians in the north of England.⁷¹

The considerable rise in workhouse use by unions in northern towns by 1870 is significant, given the deep-seated resistance to ending outdoor relief in many of these places. On 1 January 1870 some 17 per cent of paupers in northern urban unions were relieved indoors, compared to 11 per cent on 1 January 1850. This was an increase of nearly 60 per cent, and brought

⁶⁹ Boyer, *English Poor Law*, p. 234.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 236-237.

⁷¹ M.E. Rose, ‘The allowance system under the New Poor Law’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 19:3 (1966), pp. 611-612.

northern urban unions into line with their southern counterparts whose indoor relief rates remained static at 19 per cent on average over the period (Table 2.5). This change in relief policy certainly set northern towns apart from northern rural areas, which decreased their use of the workhouse by 8 per cent over the period. This adds to Driver's identification of the north of England as the centre of workhouse building from the mid-1860s onwards; it was, in fact, specifically the unions with the highest population densities which increased their indoor pauperism rates the most.⁷² In Lancashire alone, Chorlton, Liverpool, Prestwich, West Derby, Chorley, Burnley, Preston and Toxteth all had debt of over £15,000 for workhouse building authorised by the PLB between 1863 and 1871.⁷³ Of these, only Chorley had a population density of under one person per acre.

In part, the increase in indoor relief by northern towns was made possible by changes in the rating system which funded poor relief. The Union Relief Aid Act 1862 was designed with the Lancashire cotton belt in mind, to enable poorer parishes to receive rates-in-aid from other parishes within their unions; and the Union Chargeability Act 1865 made entire unions the basis for rating, instead of their constituent parishes.⁷⁴ As MacKinnon describes, such changes increased the amounts available to unions, which were then able to expand workhouse provision, to begin to comply with central government policy and make possible the 'crusade' against outrelief.⁷⁵ The greatest beneficiaries of this rating change were indeed the northern urban unions, whose rateable value per head of population increased by 42 per cent on average between 1850 and 1870, well above the national average rise of 29 per cent. The Poor Law Board was, by 1870, in a position to complain that 'as regards expenditure, it appears certain that considerably more liberality is

⁷² F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: The Workhouse System, 1834-1884* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 81-7.

⁷³ P. Wood, 'Finance and the urban poor law: Sunderland Union, 1836-1914', in M.E. Rose (ed), *The Poor and the City: The English Poor Law in its Urban Context, 1834-1914* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1985), p. 49.

⁷⁴ 25 & 26 Vict., c. 110 and 28 & 29 Vict., c. 79. See Ashforth, 'The urban Poor Law', p. 143.

⁷⁵ M. MacKinnon, 'English Poor Law Policy and the Crusade Against Outrelief', *Journal of Economic History* 47:3 (1987), pp. 603-625.

now displayed than formerly'.⁷⁶ One Lancashire union was 'lately found to be erecting a green-house to supply the infirmary with flowers' and others were criticised for proposals to build premises with elaborate decorations, Portland stone and 'terracotta enrichments to the front elevation'.⁷⁷ The economic hardship which hit urban unions in the cotton district in the early 1860s could not have been alleviated by greater use of the workhouse, given the scale of distress, but the changes in rating which followed the cotton famine enabled these unions to invest in workhouse building to a greater degree.⁷⁸ Some of London's unions also borrowed large sums for institutional projects, but their indoor relief rates had been high for some decades, and in some cases since before 1834.⁷⁹

2.7 Conclusion

The use of disaggregated national data enables a new geography of poor law practice to be drawn. Some regions displayed clusters of similar behaviour, for example in the persistence of outdoor relief in Wales, the north of England, and central and East Midlands. However, most of the rest of England and Wales showed a high level of variation, especially among the unions of the south-west, south-east, East Anglia and the West Midlands. Indoor relief tended to decrease with distance from London, and by differentiating rural and urban unions it can be seen that the rise in the use of the workhouse by 1870 was most concentrated among urban unions in the industrial north of England. These were best placed to take advantage of the changes in rating in the 1860s which permitted an increase in capital expenditure. The workhouse, school and asylum capacity created by this infrastructure investment enabled these northern towns to respond to poverty among their rapidly growing populations with increasing emphasis on indoor relief. This form of

⁷⁶ PP 1870 XXXV Twenty-second annual report of the Poor Law Board. 1869-70, p. xvi.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xv.

⁷⁸ For responses to the cotton famine see Lees, *Solidarities of Strangers*, pp. 233-8.

⁷⁹ D.R. Green, 'Icons of the New System: Workhouse Construction and Relief Practices in London under the Old and New Poor Law', *London Journal* 34:3 (2009), pp. 264-284.

expenditure was reflected not only in the figures for workhouse relief, but also in those for officers' salaries, loan servicing and specialised institutional relief.

This chapter has argued that relief practices cannot be fully understood by exploration at the scale of the region, and that local conditions such as population density, pauper numbers and rating must be overlaid on regional analysis. That being so, it is essential to consider how guardians at the level of the union worked within the contexts of national policy and local conditions.

The rise of indoor relief in general, and in urban contexts in particular, requires that attention be paid to the ways unions managed not only the demand for relief but also its supply. Food prices on the whole declined over the course of the nineteenth century but poor law unions saw their costs per indoor pauper increase. This could perhaps be attributed to the higher running costs of urban workhouses and the different types of care that prevailed by the end of the century: The elderly and infirm might have consumed more expensive food, and longer average stays in poor law institutions would also have contributed to higher indicative costs per pauper. The costs of indoor relief therefore must be considered in more detail. When (and where) outdoor relief predominated, the principal considerations for guardians related to the amounts of relief to give and to whom, and whether to distribute cash or bread. Only occasionally did outdoor relief consist of other goods such as clothes, and these were rarely bulk purchases by unions. However, the greater emphasis on indoor relief shifted the business of boards of guardians towards contractual arrangements and institutional management. The following chapter suggests that it was in their relationships with their local economies, and especially with the firms and individuals that supplied goods to the workhouse, that guardians could fully exercise their patronage and powers of discretion. This sphere of local activity formed the operating framework within which guardians could make decisions about numbers of paupers and modes of relief.

3 Managing local poor law finance

3.1 Introduction

The wide range of relief practices and expenditure by poor law unions explored in Chapter 2 can usefully be understood as being a question of local financial management. Central government provided a set of parameters within which local guardians had to demonstrate their frugality and administrative competence. These parameters affected their behaviour through legal constraints and surveillance, but unions were also limited by local circumstances. Guardians could control different elements of their expenditure to different extents in different places. Thus neighbouring unions did not necessarily have the same control over the numbers of people they relieved, the salaries of their officers, capital expenditure and the costs of the goods and services required to relieve paupers, as discussed in the following section.

Within this context of variable control, the ways in which unions bought goods and services were key. This chapter therefore examines how far guardians could control their buying practices and the limits to their discretionary powers. Unions operated within a variety of legal constraints including pre- and post-1834 statute, case law and orders issued by the central authority. Nonetheless they had a certain amount of discretion, either explicitly allowed to them in law, or which they exercised by ignoring rarely enforced regulations, following unorthodox contracting practices, or exploiting legal loopholes. Central government had remarkable surveillance capabilities through district auditors, poor law inspectors and direct correspondence, but had limited powers to force a union to obey its will unless the union acted unlawfully.

This has a bearing on several aspects of the historiography. First, there have been some tentative efforts to describe the relative abilities and limitations of poor law guardians within the wider context of fiscal administration. MacKinnon outlined five 'equations' to describe the operation of the poor law

– admittedly a ‘simplification’ – based on ‘indoor expenditure per pauper, salaries per pauper, outdoor expenditure per pauper, workhouse capacity, tax base, economic conditions, [and] guardians’ attitudes’.¹ Guardians’ attitudes are unquantifiable and defy attempts at the sort of statistical analysis which would make these ‘equations’ solvable. This chapter adds another layer of complexity, suggesting that historians must take account not just of guardians’ attitudes but also of their abilities. To an extent, ‘abilities’ here means their capacity to work effectively within legal constraints of various sorts. It also, however, means their skills and talents. As Hennock points out, there were three principal ways for elected bodies to avoid ratepayer revolts: first, by ‘careful financial administration’; second, by ‘political skill and imagination’; and third, by ‘the possession of a substantial revenue independent of the rates’.² The majority of boards of guardians could not rely on the second and third of these, and for many even the first would have been beyond them. This chapter shows that contracting was one arena in which guardians had the opportunity to demonstrate their financial competence or lack thereof. It is likely that most boards of guardians went about buying provisions for their workhouses in an orderly and unexceptional way. Nonetheless the authors of the few contemporary accounts of union contracting did draw attention to a number of shortcomings.

Second, relations between the central authorities and local government have been a popular area of contention among historians. An important battleground has been the place of the poor law in what some have seen as a nineteenth-century ‘revolution in government’.³ Midwinter, for instance, describes the creation of a central authority as the new poor law’s ‘most important contribution... to British administrative history,’ despite its ‘lack of

¹ M. MacKinnon, ‘Poor Law Policy, Unemployment and Pauperism’, *Explorations in Economic History* 23:3 (1986), pp. 311-312, note 11.

² E.P. Hennock, ‘Finance and politics in urban local government in England, 1835-1900’, *Historical Journal* 6:2 (1963), pp. 218-222.

³ O. MacDonagh, ‘The nineteenth-century revolution in government: a reappraisal’, *Historical Journal* 1:1 (1958), pp. 52-67.

power'.⁴ Brundage, on the other hand, argues that the new poor law was emphatically not centralised.⁵ One strand of debate has focused on the Benthamite centralising tendency criticised by contemporary opponents of the 1834 and 1835 reforms.⁶ In this debate, historians have argued over the extent to which the Poor Law Commission presided over a retrenchment of local power.⁷ This fits into a wider historiography of central-local relations in which the 'coalition of the frugal,' as Harling puts it – i.e. the ratepayers in charge of local government – were, to a greater or lesser extent, in a constant tension with central government's increasing assumption of broader powers, especially in the arena of public health and municipal government.⁸ Studies of the friction between the centre and poor law unions have tended to have an administrative focus, for example Bellamy's study of the Local Government Board which explores partnership and agency in the context of late-nineteenth-century central-local relations.⁹ Bellamy argues:

A political-diplomatic approach to central-local relations [was] adopted by the officers of the Poor Law Board... I refer to a strategy directed by general guidelines which are not so much task objectives as parameters for the long term exploitation of influence and for the conduct of negotiations. Within those guidelines, agents seek movement rather than the technically correct solution. Their aim is to minimise error and avoid the breakdown of relations, rather than to maximise

⁴ E.C. Midwinter, 'State Intervention at the Local Level: The New Poor Law in Lancashire', *Historical Journal* 10:1 (1967), p. 110.

⁵ A.L. Brundage, 'The landed interest and the New Poor Law: A reappraisal of the revolution in government', *English Historical Review* 87:342 (1972), p. 27.

⁶ For contemporary opposition on this ground see, for example, J. Toulmin Smith, *Local self-government and centralization: The characteristics of each, and its practical tendencies, as affecting social, moral, and political welfare and progress. Including comprehensive outlines of the English constitution* (London: John Chapman, 1851).

⁷ P. Harling, 'The Power of Persuasion: Central Authority, Local Bureaucracy and the New Poor Law', *English Historical Review* 107:422 (1992), pp. 30-53; P. Mandler, 'The Making of the New Poor Law Redivivus', *Past & Present* 117 (1987), pp. 131-157, and Brundage, Eastwood and Mandler, *Past & Present*, 127:1 (1990), pp. 183-201.

⁸ P. Harling, 'The centrality of locality: the local state, local democracy, and local consciousness in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 9:2 (2004), p. 217. See also M.J. Daunton, *Trusting Leviathan: The politics of taxation in Britain, 1799-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); D. Fraser, *Power and authority in the Victorian city* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979); Hennock, 'Finance and politics'; J. Prest, *Liberty and Locality: Parliament, Permissive Legislation, and Ratepayers' Democracies in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

⁹ C. Bellamy, *Administering central-local relations, 1871-1919: the Local Government Board in its fiscal and cultural context* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

performance. A political-diplomatic approach is, therefore, characterised by flexibility, discretion and influence.¹⁰

Ogborn develops this argument with his discussion of the features of ‘strategic negotiation’ used by the Poor Law central authorities.¹¹ He warns against conceiving central-local relations as characterised by mutual antagonism, suggesting that not only are such models undermined by spatial differences, they also do not take account of the multiplicities of strategic government action. Instead, every instance of the exercise of power has its own ‘field of possibilities channelling negotiation and conflict’.¹²

This chapter provides an opportunity to assess the actions of the central authorities and poor law unions in this light. It does this first by examining the extent of guardians’ capabilities and discretion in controlling amounts of relief and numbers of paupers. It then analyses workhouse contracting practices specifically. Workhouse contracting has not yet been discussed by historians in any detail, despite being a key area of activity in which guardians and central authorities interacted. This chapter suggests that both sets of agents employed a wide variety of strategies to promote their perceived interests. Some individual relationships may have been characterised by mutual antagonism, but for the most part centre and locality shared the aim of the smooth operation of the poor laws.

3.2 What could guardians control?

Thomas Mackay declared that ‘within the discretion, allowed by the law and by the orders of the Local Government Board, there is room for such diversity of action that whole districts can be made or marred, in respect of dispauperisation, by the caprice of a local Board of Guardians.’¹³ This section

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹¹ M. Ogborn, ‘Local power and state regulation in nineteenth century Britain’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 17:2 (1992), pp. 215-226.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 223.

¹³ T. Mackay, *Public relief of the Poor: Six lectures* (London: John Murray, 1901), pp. 131-132. The context was an appeal for guardians to be trained in the principles advocated by the Charity Organisation Society, of which Mackay was a senior member.

examines how much discretion guardians really had. It argues that poor law unions had to deal with a number of systemic and structural factors over which they could not expect to have complete control. These factors included underlying economic conditions; local circumstances creating demand for poor law services; sickness in local populations; indirect relief expenditure; capital expenditure; and the costs of goods and services.

Individual boards of guardians could not expect to have any control over national economic conditions, but these conditions were strongly related to unions' total expenditure on poor relief. Those on the margins of a subsistence wage keenly felt the weakened purchasing power of the pound. Using a composite consumer price index, it can be seen that when inflation was high, so too was poor relief (Figure 3.1). (This shows in the following year, as inflation has been calculated by calendar year whereas poor law unions' financial year began and ended at Lady-day.)

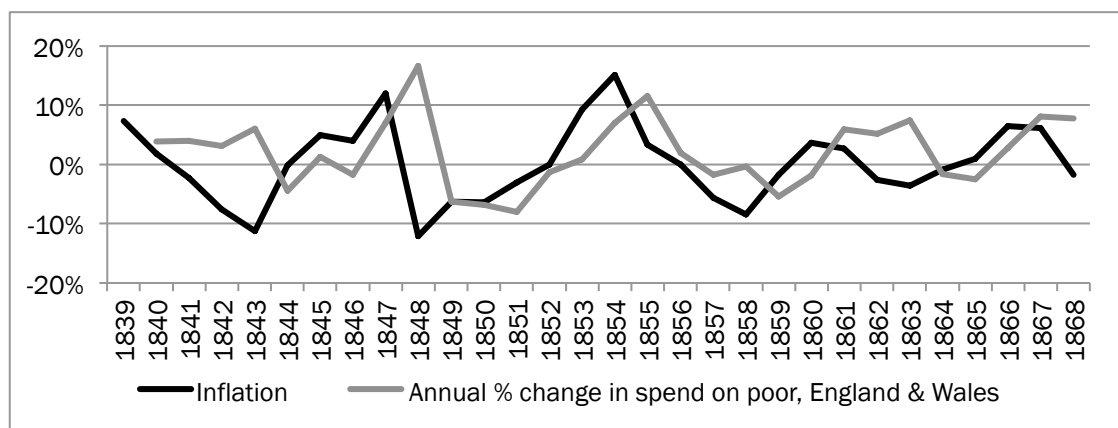


Figure 3.1: Annual consumer price inflation rate and change in spend on poor, England and Wales, 1839-1868.

Source: J. O'Donoghue, L. Goulding and G. Allen, 'Consumer Price Inflation Since 1750', *Economic Trends* 604 (2004), pp. 38-46; PP 1870 XXXV 1. Twenty-second Annual Report of the Poor Law Board. 1869-70, p. xvii.

Nor did guardians have much control over local economic conditions as a matter of course, though some individual guardians might have been better placed than others in this respect. Local employers who were guardians in certain rural areas were generally thought of as having a tendency to manipulate the use of seasonal poor relief; a case in point is the persistence of the 'allowance' system of topping up wages for the able-bodied from the poor

rates well after 1834.¹⁴ However, the sorts of major local shocks that could create large-scale poverty in a short period tended to be outside local control. Examples of such shocks include the Lancashire cotton famine from 1861 to 1865, during which the poor rates were inadequate to deal with the destitution resulting from the interruption of cotton imports by the American civil war.¹⁵ In May 1862, for instance, nearly a quarter of Ashton-under-Lyne union's population received poor relief.¹⁶ The guardians had no mechanism for reducing this level of demand for poor law services. During the crisis the guardians declined to insist on labour tests and attempted to supplement relief with charity and public works projects.¹⁷

Guardians therefore had to deal with a fundamental level of destitution caused by economic circumstances outside their control. However, they could usually choose, to a certain degree, whom they relieved. This could be achieved through denying relief altogether where they believed the applicant was not destitute, or by a rigorous application of the workhouse test. This did not necessarily have a major effect on the overall costs of relief, however. Reducing pauper numbers had some impact on in-maintenance and out-relief costs, but large numbers of poor had to be denied relief before ratepayers would see much difference, especially to the outdoor relief bill.¹⁸ Labour tests might have reduced the numbers of able-bodied applicants during hard times but they had a negligible effect on total relief expenditure. For instance, in 1855 St Olave union instituted a labour test to administer relief to unexpectedly unemployed labourers, relieving 263 men during a crisis lasting a fortnight; but the crisis cost the union no more than around £50, accounting

¹⁴ A. Digby, 'The labour market and the continuity of social policy after 1834: the case of the eastern counties', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 28:1 (1975), pp. 69-83.

¹⁵ W.O. Henderson, *The Lancashire cotton famine, 1861-1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), chapter 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁷ L.H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 235-37.

¹⁸ M. MacKinnon, 'English Poor Law Policy and the Crusade Against Outrelief', *Journal of Economic History* 47:3 (1987), pp. 603-625.

for little over one per cent of the £4,327 in total outdoor relief costs that year.¹⁹

Guardians also had a limited ability to reduce dietaries for indoor paupers, which were already minimal by national policy. The composition of meals varied to a degree between unions, but they were uniformly unappealing and cheap.²⁰ Nonetheless, guardians might have had opportunities to make better use of the supplies they bought. The Poor Law Board recommended to Great Yarmouth union in 1850 that it should cook its food more efficiently, for instance, by substituting meat dumplings for cooked meat and reusing the broth to make soup, and the district auditor believed these measures might save the union between £100 and £120 per annum.²¹ The auditor also noted that the union employed at least forty paupers as assistant cooks, washerwomen or nurses which entitled them to an extra daily allowance of six ounces of meat. The subtext of his note appears to be that the union sought ways to treat paupers as well as possible. The costs of relief therefore could be fairly loosely connected to the demand for relief: the ways relief was administered were also important.

Guardians had very little control over the levels of sickness within the populations of their unions. Medical expenditure did not lead to long-term reductions in the numbers of sick poor but instead dealt mostly with the elderly infirm and women in confinement.²² Meanwhile spending on sanitation may well have reduced the numbers and severity of, for instance, cholera epidemics, but it would have been a tiny saving for poor law unions.

¹⁹ TNA MH12/12532, 8155/55, G. Corner, clerk to St Olave guardians, to Poor Law Board, 10 March 1855.

²⁰ PP 1866 XXXV Dietaries for the inmates of workhouses. Report to the President of the Poor Law Board of Dr Edward Smith, FRS, medical officer of the Poor Law Board, and Poor Law Inspector, p. 19.

²¹ TNA MH12/8633 57110/50, Robert Aising, district auditor, to PLB, 10 December 1850.

²² M.A. Crowther, 'Paupers or patients? Obstacles to professionalization in the Poor Law medical service before 1914', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 39:1 (1984), pp. 33-54; L. Marks, 'Medical Care for Pauper Mothers and Their Infants: Poor Law Provision and Local Demand in East London, 1870-1929', *Economic History Review* 46:3 (1993), pp. 518-542; A. Negrine, 'Medicine and Poverty: A Study of the Poor Law Medical Services of the Leicester Union, 1867-1914' (Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Leicester, 2008).

Sanitation and other infrastructure expenditure was, however, a burden on the poor rates and therefore might be resisted by guardians where possible.

The most expensive items were the hardest to cut, for instance rent, rates and capital expenditure. These tended to be accounted for by unions in the 'other' column of relief costs, i.e. those costs that were not in-maintenance or out-relief. The items recorded as 'other' expenditure by St Olave union, London, demonstrate the range of costs which unions had to bear (Table 3.1). Some items, such as visiting the union's lunatics in external asylums, were not overly burdensome. Only a minority of unions were members of school districts, like St Olave, but those that were could see around a half of their 'other' costs relieving the children who were sent to the schools. District school expenses may well explain the concentration of high 'other' relief costs in urban centres, the south-east and north-west in 1850 and 1870 (Figure 3.2).

Item	Expenditure £	% of total	% not incl. district school
Contributions to district school	1,518	51.9	--
Rent, rates & gas	635	21.7	45.1
House*	327	11.2	23.2
Burial charges	139	4.8	9.9
Salaries: medical & school	133	4.5	9.4
Drugs	99	3.4	7.0
Removing Irish	34	1.2	2.4
Sundries	24	0.8	1.7
Election of guardians	12	0.4	0.8
Visiting lunatics	7	0.2	0.5
Total	2,926	100.0	100.0

**House includes costs of bedsteads, oilwares, brushes, baskets, iron and tinwork, printing and stationery, bricklayer, plumber and linendraper.*

Table 3.1: Expenditure on 'other' relief by St Olave union, 1858.

Source: TNA MH12/12532, 50522/58, St Olave clerk to PLB, 27 December 1858.

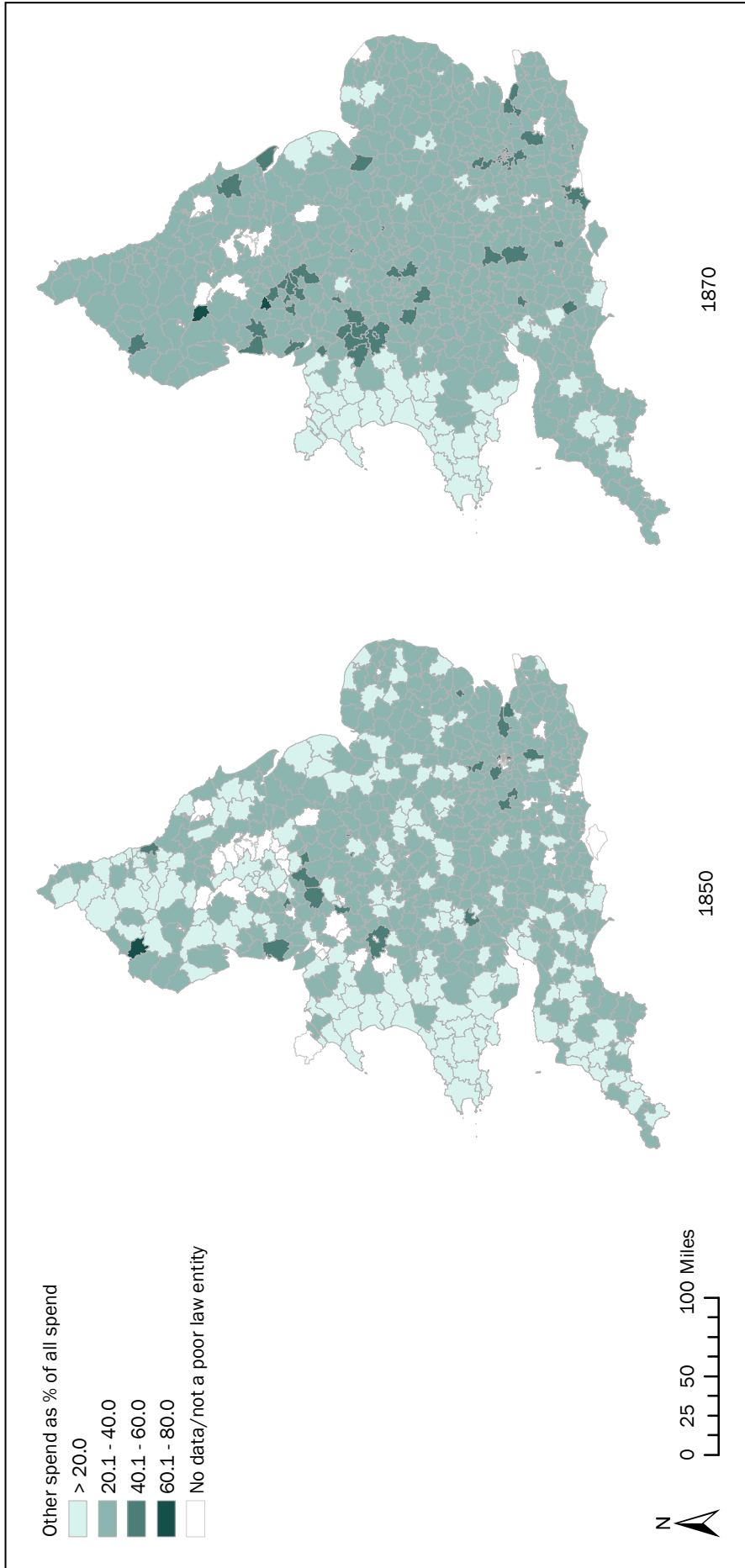


Figure 3.2: 'Other' relief as a percentage of all relief spend by poor law unions, 1850 and 1870.
 Source: PP 1851 XXVI 1; PP 1871 XXVII 1.

Urban and rural unions showed a marked difference in the costs which fell into their 'other' category. One contributory factor is that higher property values increased both rent and rates, so urban unions paid more on average. Rateable value per acre is convincingly correlated with the percentage of expenditure on 'other' costs.²³ Rural and urban unions had fairly similar proportions of 'other' relief spend in 1850 but diverged by 1871, when urban unions were spending much more in this category (Figure 3.3). This could be connected to a rise in property values in urban areas, but the membership of school districts by these unions is a more likely explanation given that about half a union's 'other' costs could be district school costs, as in the case of St Olave.

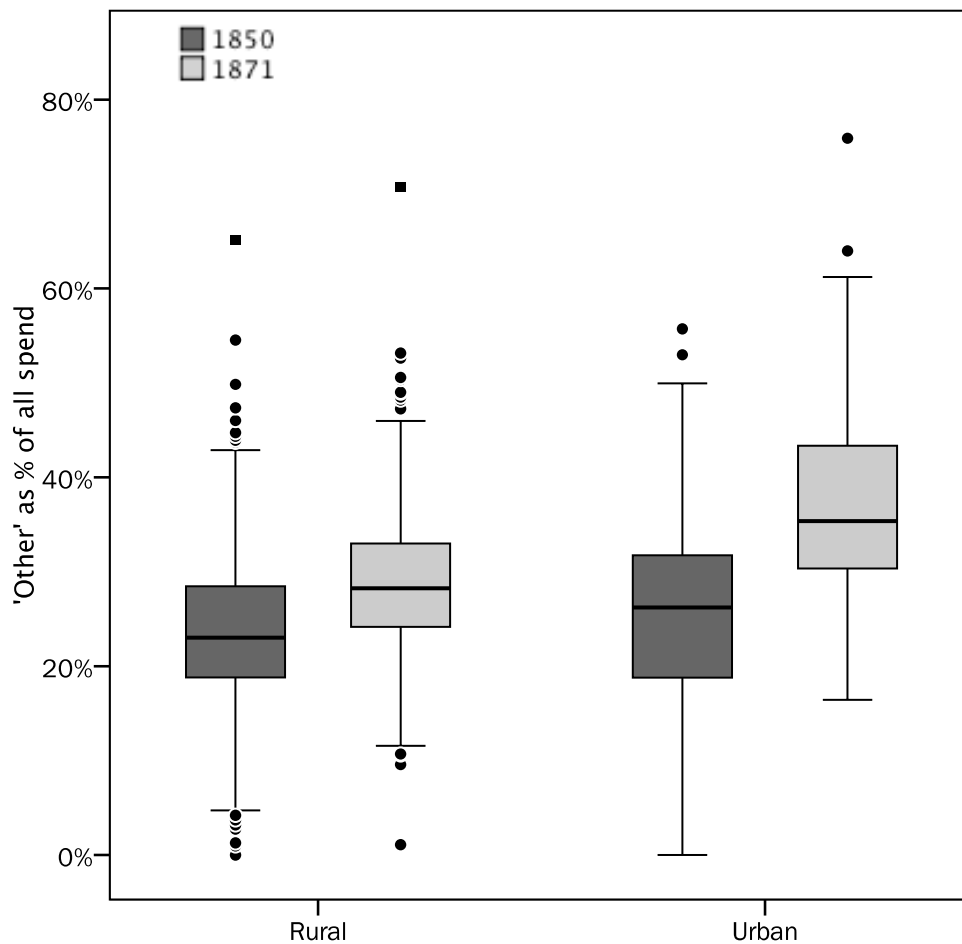


Figure 3.3: Expenditure on 'other' relief by rural and urban unions, 1850 and 1871. Source: PP 1851 XXVI 1; PP 1871 XXVII 1.

²³ 1850: Spearman's $\rho = 0.24$; 1871: 0.37.

The median value for 'other' spend, which was 24 per cent of the total relief in 1850, rose to 31 per cent in 1871. In other words, the proportion of these relatively fixed costs rose significantly over the period. This was a real increase in these costs, not a reduction in indoor and outdoor relief: The median amount spent on 'other' relief costs in 1850 was £2,021 and in 1871 (at 1850 prices) was £3,567. The highest proportion of relief costs falling into the 'other' class was 65 per cent in 1850 and 76 per cent in 1871.

Across England and Wales, 'other' spend increased as outdoor relief declined and institutional relief – whether in workhouse, asylum or school – increased. Between 1860 and 1895, as outdoor relief dropped from 52.5 per cent of total costs to 25.6 per cent, workhouse loan servicing more than doubled from 3.3 per cent to 7.1 per cent; salaries grew from 11.8 per cent to 16.9 per cent; and asylum contributions rose from 7.7 per cent to 15.2 per cent (Figure 3.4). The costs borne by unions that reduced their outdoor relief lists were therefore to be found not only in their indoor relief bills but also in their other expenses.

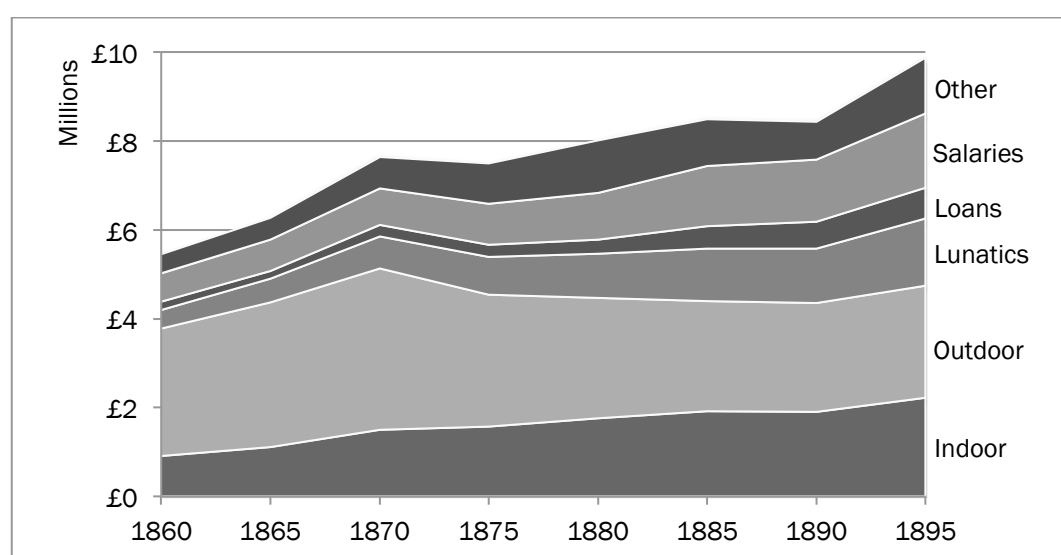


Figure 3.4: Components of relief costs, 1860-1895. The 'other' column of the poor rate return included lunatic asylum costs, workhouse loans, officers' salaries and rations and other costs. From 1875, school district costs moved from the 'other' column to 'indoor'.
 Source: PP 1900 XXXIII 1. Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Local Government Board, 1899-1900, Appendix F, table 93, p. 436.

Areas with higher costs of living – i.e. more urbanised unions – also required higher salaries for staff. Salaries were not a very large proportion of expenditure at the beginning of the period, accounting for just 6.1 per cent of

the £6.9 million total poor rate expenditure for 1844-45.²⁴ The rise in salaries during the second half of the century was a necessary part of increasing institutional relief, but the guardians were nonetheless keen to keep salaries low, partly perhaps because union officials directly and visibly benefited from the poor rate. By voting against higher salaries, guardians could signal to ratepayers that they had their interests at heart. Medical officers, it has been argued, often bore the brunt of this tendency, and the *Lancet* and others – as would be expected of the organs of the medical profession – frequently complained about their poor remuneration.²⁵ It may be true that the medical officers of poor law unions tended to be paid less than surgeons employed by other institutions or in private practice, but schoolmasters and mistresses, porters, nurses and other such employees were paid even less (Table 3.2). In any case, unions tended to employ several medical officers, each attending to their own district or workhouse. Medical salaries taken together were therefore a noticeably large bloc of expenditure for each union, even if the individual salaries were not themselves extraordinary.

Office	Number of officers (591 unions)	Total salaries (£)	Mean salary (£)	Mean officers per union	Mean spend per office per union £
Clerk	590	59,431	100.7	1.0	100.6
Chaplain	415	19,140	46.1	0.7	32.4
Medical officer	2,680	124,532	46.5	4.5	210.7
Relieving officer	1,257	103,881	82.6	2.1	175.8
Master/matron	1,238	44,369	35.8	2.1	75.1
Schoolmaster	284	7,423	26.1	0.5	12.6
Schoolmistress	423	7,009	16.6	0.7	11.9
Porter	347	6,340	18.3	0.6	10.7
Nurse	171	2,161	12.6	0.3	3.7
Taskmaster	20	936	46.8	<0.1	1.6
Collector/Asst. overseer	499	23,026	46.1	0.8	39.0
Treasurer	52	973	18.7	0.1	1.6
Other	264	7,747	29.3	0.4	13.1
District auditor	50	12,933	258.7	0.1	21.9
Total	8,290	419,901	50.7	14.0	710.5

Table 3.2: Union officers and their salaries, 1844-45.
Source: PP 1849 XLVII 83.

²⁴ PP 1849 XLVII 83: Poor Law. Return of the number of officers employed in 591 unions, with the amount of salaries, for the year 1844-5; and expense of Poor Law Commission for the year ended 31 March 1849, &c.

²⁵ Crowther, 'Paupers or patients,' pp. 37-40.

At the other end of the spectrum was capital expenditure. Guardians were often very reluctant to build new workhouses, infirmaries and district schools or to renovate existing premises. The costs were great: in 1840, for example, Greenwich's new workhouse for 1,000 paupers cost £22,700.²⁶ Ratepayers might be divided over the necessity for new premises, for instance in the case of St Pancras parish in the late 1860s. Following criticisms of their overcrowded workhouse infirmary in the *Lancet* in 1865, the guardians bought a plot of land on which to build a new facility in 1868.²⁷ It was not yet open by the time these guardians were largely replaced that year by a new cohort who stood on an anti-expense platform.²⁸ Work stopped, and despite public scandal over deaths in the old infirmary and the personal intervention of LGB president George Goschen, the new premises were not ready for patients until 1870, after some of the former guardians had been re-elected to the board.²⁹ In the meantime, *Fun* magazine lampooned the 'charming parochial den/ with its inquests and murderous medical men' and published provocative images comparing conditions in the infirmary to those in the Black Hole of Calcutta (Figure 3.5).³⁰ Guardians could, therefore, refrain from expensive projects in an effort to reduce the burden on the rates, but this would work only in the short term: eventually the need for renovation or new facilities would be unavoidable.

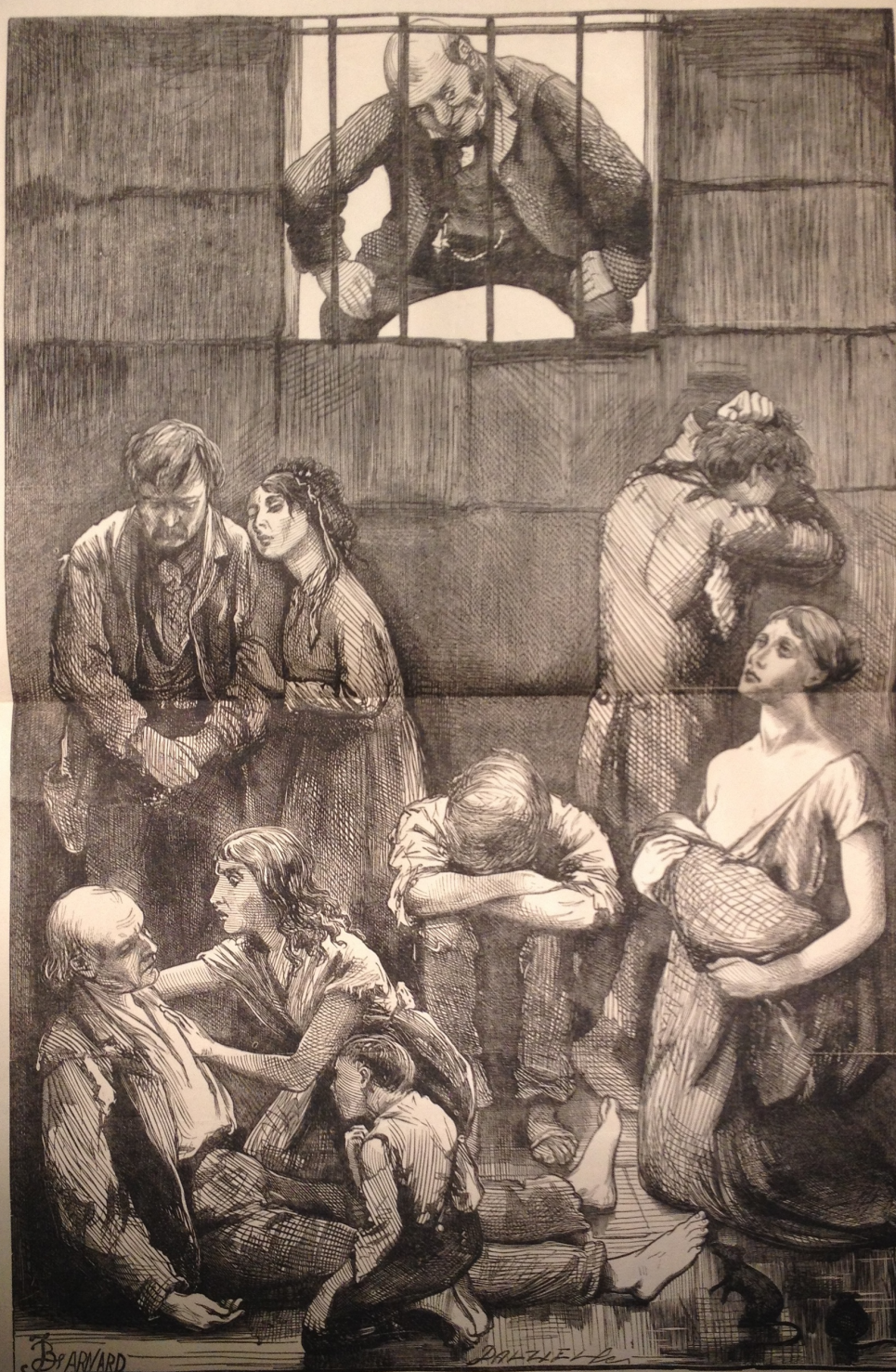
²⁶ D.R. Green, 'Icons of the New System: Workhouse Construction and Relief Practices in London under the Old and New Poor Law', *London Journal* 34:3 (2009), p. 272.

²⁷ 'The Lancet Sanitary Commission for Investigating the State of the Infirmaries of the Workhouses in London', *Lancet* 2 (1865), pp. 14.

²⁸ TNA MH12/7606 42730/68, reports of William Markham to PLB.

²⁹ 'The St. Pancras Workhouse Infirmary Again', *Daily News* (9 November 1869), p. 2; 'Disgraceful Proceedings at the St Pancras Board', *Daily News* (14 December 1869), p. 3.

³⁰ 'The Saint Pancras Pauper to his Love', *Fun* (18 December 1869), p. 151.



POOR-HOUSE OR PEST-HOUSE: OR, THE MODERN BLACK HOLE.

(Dedicated to the St. Pancras Board of Guardians.)

Figure 3.5: F. Barnard, 'Poor-house or Pest-house: or, the Modern Black Hole (Dedicated to the St. Pancras Board of Guardians.)', *Fun*, 27 November 1869, pp. 118-9. The image is similar to a well-known contemporary depiction of the 'Black Hole' of Calcutta by Louis Figuier.

3.3 How did unions contract for goods and services?

3.3.1 Context

The remaining area of expenditure over which guardians tried to exercise some control was the purchase of goods and services for the workhouse, in particular food and clothing for indoor paupers and bread for outdoor paupers. Taken together, poor law procurement represented one of the largest elements of state expenditure in the nineteenth century, behind only the army and navy (Table 3.3).

Department	Spend £
Army	3,601,000
Navy	2,008,000
Workhouses: Food, fuel, clothing and bedding (England)	1,524,700
India	1,400,000
Prisons	625,000
Workhouses: Food, fuel, clothing and bedding (Ireland and Scotland)	475,300
Police	435,000
Stationery, printing and binding	376,000
Trinity House (lighthouses)	150,000
Post Office	117,000
Inland Revenue	77,000
Total	10,789,000

Table 3.3: Estimated spending on stores and supplies by selected parts of government, 1872-73. Wales's unspecified workhouse expenditure was probably included in the figure for England.

Source: F.W. Rowsell, 'The Public Stores: Their Purchase and Administration', *Macmillan's Magazine* 26 (May - October 1872), pp. 478-485.

However, there was little consistency in the ways that workhouses went about buying supplies. In other areas of government spending, individual departments differed from each other but increasingly tended to have internally coherent procurement strategies or systems: Until the first half of the nineteenth century military institutions found their supplies locally but in 1855 the War Office introduced centralising reforms, and the Admiralty eventually followed suit in 1869.³¹ In contrast, poor law unions demonstrated an unusual degree of variation of practice throughout their existence. This was a result of several factors, which this section addresses: First, organisations

³¹ F.W. Rowsell, 'The Public Stores: their purchase and administration', *Macmillan's Magazine* 26 (May-October 1872), p. 479.

like the Army and Navy were now part of central government, whereas poor law unions were local government and responsible to local ratepayers (section 3.3.2). Second, the legal framework in which boards of guardians operated allowed them to exercise a good deal of discretion (section 3.3.3). Third, irregularities on the part of the guardians could in some circumstances be allowed by the central authority in retrospect, in the interests of equity or because it was too late to do anything about an infraction (section 3.3.4). Fourth, guardians could on occasion behave unlawfully – ranging from acting *ultra vires* to committing fraud – but might avoid discovery altogether (section 3.3.5). Despite these freedoms, flexibilities and discretionary powers, though, the ability of guardians to promote value for money or obtain a high standard of goods remains questionable (section 3.3.6).

3.3.2 Central-local relations

As discussed in section 3.1, historians have focused on the local implementation of central government policy, especially in the long-standing debates over the extent to which unions could exercise local discretion. The ways in which boards of guardians bought goods and services have, however, not received attention. This is an important omission, as items like workhouse supplies and bread for outdoor paupers made up a significant proportion of union expenditure: In metropolitan unions in 1908, provisions accounted for 61.1 per cent of maintenance costs per indoor pauper. Clothing took up 9.5 per cent and other ‘necessaries’ the remaining 29.4 per cent.³² Food allowances per pauper were not necessarily the same in 1908 as they had been in the mid-nineteenth century, but the proportions are unlikely to have been more than a few percentage points different.

Furthermore, the central authorities were renowned for the level of detail they controlled in so many other areas of activity. As a German observer commented in 1903: ‘By a multitude of rules that defy review, outdoor and indoor relief, schools and hospitals, and asylums for the poor, have been

³² PP 1910 LIII Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress. Appendix vol. XXV. Statistics relating to England and Wales, p. 728 ff.

regulated in such precise detail that the Poor Laws themselves sink into comparative insignificance before the Poor Law Orders, so far as the actual work of administration is concerned.³³ However, there were hardly any prescriptions from the PLC, PLB or LGB concerning contracts, tenders and the like: one short section of the general orders of 1842, one minor amendment to the form of cheques in 1857 and one slightly more substantial amendment to the form of contract in 1878. This may be contrasted with rest of the 1,500 or so pages of poor law orders on other subjects which were in force by 1898.³⁴ It is worth asking why so little of the central authorities' activities were concerned with such a large part of the unions' activities, once the regulations for contracting had been laid down in 1842. It would be wrong to suggest that the centre was not at all interested, however. Rather, guardians were subject to those regulations and could appeal against rulings of unlawful expenditure made by district auditors. The centre therefore did engage in a certain amount of correspondence regarding these rulings. For the most part, though, it would appear that the central authority saw little reason to interfere with the overarching regulations for contracting. The centre had set up a structure from the decentralised origins of poor relief administration, allowing guardians to work with local circumstances.

The PLB reviewed this *laissez faire* approach in 1871 when it noticed that London unions were paying different amounts for the same goods.³⁵ (See chapter 4.) The PLB commissioned the Admiralty's superintendent of contracts, Francis Rowsell, to inquire into whether unions were getting value for money and a suitable standard of goods under their existing arrangements.³⁶ Rowsell unsurprisingly drew attention to shortcomings in

³³ J. Redlich and F.W. Hirst, *Local Government in England* Vol. 2 (London: Macmillan & Co, 1903), p. 262.

³⁴ Glen, *Poor Law Orders*, 11th edition (London, 1898), in Redlich and Hirst, *Local Government*, p. 262.

³⁵ PP 1870 LVIII 563: Metropolitan Boards of Guardians (contracts). Return of the contracts made by the Metropolitan Boards of Guardians for the supply of certain articles for the six months ending Michaelmas 1870.

³⁶ PP 1872 LI 599: Workhouses, Metropolis (supply of provisions). Copy of report of Francis W. Rowsell, Esquire, superintendent of contracts, Admiralty, to the Right Honourable James Stansfeld, M.P., President of the Poor Law Board, dated the 20th day of July 1871, relative to the system of supply of provisions and stores for the workhouses of the Metropolis.

these arrangements and recommended in their place the sorts of processes the Admiralty had adopted, though he did not suggest fully centralising procurement for workhouses. Neither the PLB nor its successor the Local Government Board took any strong action to encourage unions to sharpen their tendering procedures, beyond distributing Rowsell's findings among the London boards of guardians.³⁷ Rowsell's report was the most wide-ranging and detailed survey of contracting practices commissioned by the central authority, which seemingly made no other formal examination of the topic until 1878. For some thirty years, therefore, unions saw no major changes in the rules for workhouse supplies.

This lends weight to Bellamy's description of the central authorities' aim as being to 'minimise error... rather than to maximise performance.'³⁸ The opportunity cost of centralising procurement among poor law unions would have been very high, even on a regional basis. Unions, after all, already represented centralised procurement among groups of parishes. The gains would have been uncertain; guardians might be expected to be the best sources of knowledge about local markets; and it was up to the ratepayers to decide whether they were happy with what guardians bought with their rates. It was for the guardians themselves to choose to adopt Rowsell's recommendations or to discard them. Guardians therefore had a great deal of discretion allowed by the fairly broad regulations on contracting and supplies.

3.3.3 Rules and regulations

Boards of guardians operated within a legal framework of case law, statute law and orders from the central authority. The centre also had the role of sanctioning unusual expenditure and remitting unlawful expenditure where it was in the interests of fairness. Statute law, in the form of the Elizabethan poor laws, the Poor Law Amendment Act and in some cases local acts, gave boards of guardians the right to spend the rates on maintaining the poor, and gave the PLC and its successors the right to make orders and regulations on

³⁷ TNA MH19/1, LGB to London unions, 5 January 1872.

³⁸ Bellamy, *Central-local relations*, p. 117.

guardians' behaviour. Case law provided explication by the courts on points of contention and, where necessary, the courts looked to pre-1834 cases for precedents concerning the expenditure of the poor rates. Poor law unions and the central authority were therefore governed by legislation and precedents specifically concerned with poor relief, and they were, of course, also constrained by the laws which applied to other areas of life, in particular those relating to contracts. But unions bought goods and services from suppliers who were not themselves subject to the poor laws (except as ratepayers). A supplier did not become obliged to conform to the orders of the central authority simply by selling to a union. This gave rise, therefore, to an area of limited or tempered control for the central authority: it could not exercise the same degree of management over workhouse supplies that it could over dietaries, for example, even though they were closely related parts of a union's business.

In the first year of the new poor law, the PLC explicitly allowed guardians to purchase bread, flour, meat and other workhouse supplies as they saw fit, 'in such manner as may appear to such guardians best calculated to prevent imposition, and to promote economical management'.³⁹ The only stipulation was that purchases should 'be made upon tenders after public advertisement in one county newspaper at least.' The PLC was keen to stress in its first annual report the price advantages of contracting for unions in contrast to the high costs faced by individual parishes. (This was just one of many claimed benefits of joining a union.) Uckfield union, the PLC reported, now paid 44s for a hundredweight of cheese, whereas its constituent parishes had paid 51s 4d. Tenders for flour had fallen by a couple of shillings per four-bushel bag to between 25s 4d and 27s 6d. Local tradesmen did not need to be concerned about losing business, though, as 'the purchases of the independent labourers

³⁹ PP 1835 XXXV 107: First annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales. p. 52, Appendix 6: Orders and regulations, article 26: Purchase of Provisions and other Articles.

have, to a considerable extent, made up for the diminished consumption of goods by the parish.’⁴⁰

Objections to the new system from traders were dismissed by the PLC. A group of Bermondsey master bakers presented a memorial in 1836 asking the Commissioners to approve a ticket system of outdoor relief in the parish.

Among the many evils of such a system, Chadwick wrote in reply, was:

[T]he interest which it is found to create on the part of many persons to obtain the management and control of the parochial rates, not for the public advantage, but for the sake of the patronage and influence acquired by the distribution of such supplies; which influence affords strong motives to the undue retention or extension of out-door relief, to the serious injury of the condition and morals of the labouring classes, amongst whom inducements to indolence, filth, and imposture, are thus maintained and diffused at the expense of the rate-payers.⁴¹

The bakers were labouring under the ‘common error’ that the new system would operate to their detriment; and the Commissioners knew better as they had ‘extensive experience beyond that of any single parish’. The PLC, therefore, responded to this memorial by traders in the same way as it dealt with many other objections to the new system: Opposition, they argued, resulted either from ignorance or from a vested interest in the old system.

To reduce the chances of such interests controlling workhouse supply, the PLC set out more detailed rules for tendering and entering contracts in a general order in 1842, and these were reissued in similar form in the 1847 Consolidated General Order (CGO).⁴² They provided that any contract worth £50 or more was to be put out to tender and advertised in a local newspaper

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

⁴¹ PP 1837 XXXI 127, 321: Third annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales; together with appendices (A.) (B.) & (C.), pp. 77-79, Appendix A: R. Reynolds, A. Baxter, J. Green, W.T. Gordon to PLC, 25 October 1836; reply 24 November 1836.

⁴² PP 1842 XIX 1: Eighth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners, with appendices., p. 84, appendix A, no. 7: General order on Proceedings of Boards of Guardians, articles 15-20; J.F. Archbold, *The Consolidated and Other Orders of the Poor Law Commissioners, and of the Poor Law Board, with Introduction, Explanatory Notes, and Index* (London: Shaw and Sons, 1859) ('CGO 1847'), pp. 37-140.

by the guardians.⁴³ Potential suppliers were to submit sealed bids to be opened on a given day at a meeting of the guardians, who would choose the most appropriate, though they were not bound to accept the cheapest. The guardians could – but did not have to – ask suppliers to provide sureties for the due performance of their contracts. The central authority would therefore contemplate procedural solutions to clear problems. A further example is that of fraud: For instance, payments to suppliers were to be made by orders – i.e. cheques – drawn upon the union treasurer.⁴⁴ In April 1857 the PLB amended the regulations to ensure these cheques were payable to named individuals rather than to the bearer.⁴⁵ In a circular accompanying the new regulation, the PLB ‘observed with much regret the frauds’ which union officers had committed and expressed their belief that the old style of cheque offered ‘undue facility for the commission of such frauds’.⁴⁶ They also reminded guardians of the regulation in the CGO requiring unions to pay suppliers within twenty-one days of the end of the quarter. If this article were ‘duly and punctually observed’ in all cases, they wrote, there would be greater security for guardians’ creditors and less risk of ‘improper dealing’.⁴⁷ The PLB was acting in response to two cases which took place in early 1857: In one, John Paul, assistant clerk to the City of London union, embezzled over £700 due to flour suppliers Kingsford & Co and to one of the union’s overseers.⁴⁸ In the other case, Thomas Robinson, assistant clerk to the North Bierley union, was found guilty of altering a series of cheques, for instance making one for £6 appear to be for £16, and appropriating the money.⁴⁹

The regulations therefore still allowed guardians a great deal of discretion in their choices of supplier and their methods of receiving supplies, as long as they followed the correct procedures for holding board meetings. It was not

⁴³ Archbold, *CGO 1847*, arts. 44-47.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, art. 84.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, ‘Payments to Guardians’, p. 260.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ ‘The frauds on the City of London union’, *Daily News*, 23 December 1856, p. 3; ‘Central Criminal Court: The City Union frauds’, *The Era*, 8 February 1857, p. 7.

⁴⁹ ‘Forgery and embezzlement’, *Bradford Observer*, 5 February 1857, p. 7.

for the central authority to ensure that unions received good value or resisted cartels and 'combinations' of traders, but it did show some concern for the good order of poor law supply. The centre acted to ensure contracts were enforceable, for example by insisting on proper advertising, tendering and contracting procedures such as contracting under seal. Any deviation from these rules might render a contract unenforceable. For example, where a contract was entered into by a union with a supplier but it was not under seal, if the supplier defaulted before the end of the term of the contract then the liability would only be for goods already supplied, rather than for the goods which would have been supplied for the remainder of the term. If a contract was made in conformity with general contractual law but not with the regulations of the PLB it was not void unless the PLB declared it void. The Braintree guardians, for instance, asked the PLB for its opinion on taking legal proceedings against a baker whose contract stipulated that bread should be delivered the day after it had been baked. He persisted in delivering it 'hot from the oven and consequently weighing much more than it would have done after the lapse of twelve or twenty four hours'.⁵⁰ Frequent complaints had not had the desired effect. The PLB, however, told the guardians that they must seek independent advice, noting that the contract was not termed according to official recommendations. Unions could, therefore, gain the protection of the central authority by adopting its protocols. Unions could lawfully ignore these protocols, but would be left unprotected if they did.

Many unions experienced the perils associated with such self-reliance. The guardians of St Olave, for example, discovered in 1854 that the acceptance by the union of a tender did not itself count as a binding contract. William Snelling, a baker, tendered to supply bread at 12s 11d per cwt and flour at 43s per cwt in September that year, but declined to sign the contract or bond. However, he did supply the goods until Friday 27 October, when he sent a letter to the union clerk saying he would not be able to make any more deliveries after the following day. 'If I do it will ruin me and get heavy into Debt,' he wrote. 'I have no Flour in and no one will send any... I sent a sack of

⁵⁰ TNA MH12/3381 29367/65, William Vallance, clerk to Braintree guardians, to PLB, 22 July 1865; reply 3 August 1865.

Flour in this week at a loss of 19s. that will ruin any one and quickly.'⁵¹ The union found another supplier, but tried to withhold the £106 it owed Snelling for the goods he had already supplied. However, the PLB told the union it was unlawful to withhold the sum, as there had not been a contract.⁵² Snelling was entitled to be paid for the goods he had delivered.

Once it had been agreed, a contract could not legally be altered. However, the central authority could sanction the guardians putting an end to it prematurely. This is what happened in 1858 when Mr Ewing of High Street Borough agreed in error to supply the St Saviour guardians with two hundred mattresses at 9s per cwt of flock, believing the goods to be of the same quality as that required by the adjoining parish of St George the Martyr. The new beds were in fact for St Saviour's new infirmary and were therefore to be of higher quality. Ewing asked the guardians to alter the contract by giving him 37s 6d per cwt, the next lowest price tendered by a competitor. The guardians were prepared to do so, as they believed Ewing had been led into the error by his assistant, and the PLB consented to the guardians ending the contract and entering into a new one.⁵³ The PLB also agreed to end a contract between the Whitechapel union and its milk supplier, Messrs Freeman, Sockett & Roberts, in 1849.⁵⁴ In this case the problem was not an administrative error but the poor quality of the milk. The supplier had entered into a six-month contract on 23 March, but the guardians decided to end it as early as 11 April. A supplier's inability to fulfil the terms of the contract was not unknown: Bedminster's guardians asked the PLB to end its contract for bread and flour with a supplier who was about to be declared bankrupt and had not supplied any goods for a week.⁵⁵ In some cases an agreement with a supplier could be ended if his contract was in the form of a salary, such as Narberth's coffin-maker dismissed in 1864 for being drunk while conveying an infant's body to the

⁵¹ TNA MH12/12531, 38295/54, Corner to PLB, 2 November 1854.

⁵² TNA MH12/12531, 38295/54, PLB to Corner, 8 November 1854.

⁵³ TNA MH12/12644, 25559/58, Blake to PLB, 17 June 1858; 28155/58, Blake to PLB, 5 July 1858; 28155/58, PLB to Blake, 13 July 1858.

⁵⁴ TNA MH12/7916, 11115/49, John Smith, clerk to Whitechapel guardians, to PLB, 11 April 1849; reply 18 April 1849.

⁵⁵ TNA MH12/10213 25537/55, Thomas Coles, clerk to Bedminster guardians, to PLB, 20 June 1855; 26239/55, 23 June 1855; reply 29 June 1855.

burial ground.⁵⁶ Thomas Williams won a contract to supply meat to Stepney union in 1849 but did not at first realise he was bound to deliver to four workhouses. The agreed price would, he discovered, entail a loss. Williams asked Thomas Fardell, another butcher, to take the contract and supply the meat on his own account at the same price, which the PLB sanctioned.⁵⁷ St Saviour union allowed grocer Nicholas Yarrow to amend his tender for arrowroot from $4\frac{1}{2}d$ to $9d$ per lb, as it was 'evidently a clerical error'.⁵⁸ The PLB told the Bridgewater guardians in 1867 they could allow a further £6 to a slate cistern supplier who had misunderstood the requirements.⁵⁹ And Hastings union contracted in 1882 with a butcher who meant to supply meat at $6s\ 10d$ per stone but accidentally wrote $5s\ 10d$. The LGB allowed the termination of the contract so the guardians could enter into a new one.⁶⁰

These examples show the involvement of the central authority in sanctioning (or otherwise) contract changes. However, the centre did not have a direct role in ensuring that unions complied with the regulations, because it did not exercise the same degree of surveillance over supply as it did over other areas. For something like the types of relief given to various classes of paupers, the PLB's or LGB's statistical department might notice departures from the rules. However, unions were not required to submit returns to the centre regarding tendering and supply. It was, though, one of the jobs of the district auditor to check that a union's tendering process complied with the regulations. For instance in 1859 the auditor noticed that St Saviour had paid £139 for gas fittings and £185 for stoves in the union's new infirmary without advertisement or tender, and £190 for bedsteads for which there were tenders but no advertisements.⁶¹ The clerk told the PLB that the guardians had not known these costs would exceed £50 as the works were done under the

⁵⁶ TNA MH12/16658 34534/64, John Miles, clerk to Narberth guardians, to PLB, 8 September 1864.

⁵⁷ LMA STBG/L/015, ff. 404-405, 27 December 1849; f. 416, 3 January 1850.

⁵⁸ LMA SOBG/039/010, f. 274, 24 July 1851.

⁵⁹ TNA MH12/10256, 43538/67, Paul Reed, clerk to Bridgewater guardians, to PLB, 18 November 1867; reply 3 December 1867.

⁶⁰ TNA MH12/12969 107790/82, A.R. Inskipp, clerk to Hastings guardians, to LGB, 10 November 1882; reply 1 December 1882.

⁶¹ TNA MH12/12644, 383/59, Meymott to PLB, 1 January 1859.

superintendence of the architects, who did not know what was required except as the work proceeded (and of course we now have no way of knowing if this was true).⁶² The PLB told the clerk that the explanation was satisfactory, but that the prior sanction of the PLB was required under article 49 of the Consolidated General Order.

District auditors were a key part of the centre's surveillance framework, but were not necessarily effective supervisors of contracting. They had a number of other functions, including checking that the various books of several union officers were correctly filled up and that ledgers and accounts were consistent. They had to certify that the rates were spent on items connected with poor relief as prescribed by law. But they had no power to ensure that, for instance, the goods delivered to workhouses were compared with the samples provided by suppliers when tendering; nor could they require boards of guardians to justify their choice of a particular supplier. Auditors might be strict about ruling certain expenditure unlawful, but they could not force unions to pay suppliers. It was for the suppliers themselves to chase unions for payment, through the courts if they had to. Although unions were supposed to delay payment to creditors for no longer than twenty-one days after the end of the quarter, payments made after this time were not generally ruled unlawful by the auditors. There was, after all, no fair way of recovering money from suppliers once they had been paid by the union. Furthermore delayed payments were such a common practice, and early payments were so inconvenient for unions, that it was difficult for the central authority to end them.

The district auditor was bound to disallow expenditure from the rates if it did not strictly fulfil the legal requirements, but on appeal by the party liable for the sum the central authority could overrule the disallowance or remit the amount in the interests of fairness. The Local Authorities (Expenses) Act 1887 enabled the LGB to sanction unlawful expenditure before the district auditor disallowed it if it had been made in good faith or inadvertently, whereas until

⁶² TNA MH12/12644, 5172/59, Blake to PLB, 1 February 1859.

this statute sanction could only be given afterwards.⁶³ This was designed to reduce the number of appeals, according to the LGB, though a Fabian critic of the audit system writing in 1925 suggested that district auditors had become too independent-minded for the department.⁶⁴

Guardians and their suppliers worked under an existing body of contract law that applied to all transactions, not just those between public authorities and their suppliers. But there were also laws predating the new poor law about poor law administrators and their relationships with suppliers. Guardians and similar managers or directors of the poor were not allowed to supply goods for the poor at a profit, nor to be business partners with anyone else who did.⁶⁵ This remained in force under the new system: In 1851, the Ross union clerk alerted the PLB to the fact that a farmer who supplied milk to the workhouse was nominated as a guardian and was likely to be elected. There had been no other tender and there was no other potential supplier of milk in the area. The PLB told the union that the farmer should 'carefully abstain from supplying the Union with milk so long as he continues in office'.⁶⁶ The nominated guardian was therefore expected to resign once elected.

Any guardian wishing to resign had to have his resignation accepted by the Poor Law Board, which did not treat this part of its responsibilities simply as a formality.⁶⁷ In January 1851 printer George Cannon submitted his resignation as a guardian of Wycombe union to the PLB on the grounds that it prevented him from being a contractor.⁶⁸ The PLB declined the resignation, but the Wycombe board of guardians contracted with Cannon nonetheless.⁶⁹ A few days later, in telling the union that the contract appeared to be legally invalid, the PLB said Cannon should have resigned in advance, seemingly not noticing

⁶³ 50 & 51 Vict., c. 72.

⁶⁴ PP 1888 XLIX 1: Seventeenth annual report of the Local Government Board. 1887-88; W.A. Robson, *The District Auditor: An old menace in a new guise*, Fabian Tract No. 214 (London: The Fabian Society, 1925), p. 6.

⁶⁵ 55 Geo. III c. 137. Poor Relief Act (1815).

⁶⁶ TNA MH12/4408, 14247/51, Thomas Edwards, clerk to Ross guardians, to PLB, 29 March 1851; reply 1 April 1851.

⁶⁷ 5 & 6 Vict. c. 57 s. 11. Poor Law Continuation Act 1842.

⁶⁸ TNA MH12/532, 932/51, G. Cannon to PLB, 4 January 1851.

⁶⁹ TNA MH12/532, 3686/51, Saunders Nash to PLB, 14 January 1851.

that he had tried to do just that.⁷⁰ The union clerk's response was to suggest a circumvention, accepted by the PLB, by which Cannon would be obliged to supply the union at a discounted rate and thereby not make a profit.⁷¹ Overseers and other persons with responsibility for the local poor were prohibited from providing the poor with goods 'for profit' by the 1815 act, but judgments handed down in two subsequent cases found the prohibition did not apply if the contractor made no profit from the contract.⁷² PLB assistant secretary Lumley noted his regret that the resignation had not been accepted, and he believed 'there was some misapprehension as to the rule of this Bd [Board] – by such rule as stated the Gns [Guardians] may be deprived of the best tradesman in the district.' Indeed, later that month, the PLB accepted the resignation of a guardian of the Oundle union on the same grounds as Cannon had used.⁷³ The circumvention adopted at Wycombe was not a newly invented trick, having as it did a long-standing legal basis, and Wycombe was not the only union to use this case law: For example one of Oxford's guardians, who was also editor of the *Oxford Herald* newspaper, was paid a nominal sum to print the names of paupers quarterly.⁷⁴

Guardians and the PLB were therefore both constrained and given some flexibility by the statute and case law which predated the new poor law. Unions were obliged to conduct their contracting in specific ways by the orders of the post-1834 central authorities, but they still had to behave within general contract law and according to the special nature of poor-law contracting which had developed under the old poor law. At the same time, guardians were given a certain degree of freedom by a body of law and systems of institutional behaviour that evolved to recognise the practicalities of arranging the supply of goods for the maintenance of the poor.

⁷⁰ TNA MH12/532, 6953/51, J. Harman, clerk to Wycombe union, to PLB, 28 January 1851; reply 7 February 1851.

⁷¹ TNA MH12/532, 8559/51, Harman to PLB, 10 February 1851 and PLB to Harman, 21 February 1851.

⁷² *Pope v. Backhouse*, 8 Taunt 239 SC; *Skinner v. Buckee*, 3 B. & C. 6.

⁷³ TNA MH12/8813, 10463/51, R. Richardson, clerk to Oundle union, to PLB, encl. resignation of J. Everest, guardian, 27 February 1851; reply 5 March 1851.

⁷⁴ TNA MH12/9707, 33770/51, H. Jacob, clerk to Oxford guardians, to PLB, 8 August 1851; reply 19 August 1851.

3.3.4 Guardian discretion and its limits

This freedom had a number of aspects. First, there were decisions guardians could take which were explicitly reserved for them by law. When receiving tenders, for example, they were not bound to accept the lowest bid, and might stipulate this in their newspaper advertisements (e.g. Figure 3.6). Thus they could avoid being obliged to buy poor quality goods or to contract with suppliers they knew were unreliable or unsuitable. Camberwell's clerk told the Admiralty's Francis Rowsell that decisions were made 'partly by prices, and partly by the repute of the parties tendering. The guardians do not accept a tender solely on account of price.'⁷⁵ The parish of St Luke's Chelsea generally did not take the lowest tender at all, and in 1871 their 'oatmeal was highest and meat second highest in price' of London unions.⁷⁶ In fact, of the twenty-six unions who answered Rowsell's query as to whether the lowest bid was always accepted, only two replied yes without qualification, the other twenty-four mostly saying that they took into account the quality of goods previously supplied and the character of the supplier.

POTATOES.—TENDERS are Wanted for the Supply of Potatoes to the Workhouse of the West Derby Union, either for three or six months from the 9th day of January, 1867. Tenders, marked "Potatoes," and specifying the kind, with samples where practicable, to be sent to the Workhouse, Mill-road, Everton, on or before the 8th day of January next. The probable quantities may be ascertained on application to the Master of the Workhouse, Mill-road, Everton. The Guardians do not pledge themselves to accept the lowest or any tender. **WILLIAM CLEAVE**, Union-clerk. 14, Clayton-square, Liverpool, Dec. 21, 1866. 1ja3

Figure 3.6. Advertisement for West Derby union potato contract. Source: *Liverpool Mercury*, 1 January 1867, p. 2.

Would-be suppliers who did not win contracts despite being the lowest bidder occasionally complained to the central authority. Builder Thomas Crook did so in 1849 when St George in the East union declined his tender for new workhouse buildings. He had submitted the lowest bid for the principal works but sealed a schedule of prices for extra works in an envelope marked 'Not to

⁷⁵ PP 1872 LI 599, p. 35.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

be opened unless the tender is accepted'. This was too risky for the guardians. They accepted the second-lowest bid, from Messrs Curtis & Co, telling the PLB that the winning firm were 'well known as most respectable builders having been engaged in many works similar to those tendered for but... Mr Crook was known to the Board [of Guardians] chiefly as having been engaged in the construction of sewers.'⁷⁷

It is therefore clear that guardians tended to have a fairly strong knowledge of local suppliers. In some cases, indeed, the line between a good working relationship and friendship could be blurred. Although guardians were very aware of their duty to ratepayers to minimise costs, they did not want to ruin local businesses by enforcing punitive terms. An unexpected rise in duty on tea and sugar announced in April 1855 was met with alarm by grocers who had contracted with unions at a lower price than they could afford after the increase. Brentford's guardians asked the PLB to allow them to pay their supplier more.⁷⁸ William Hull and John Craney, who supplied several metropolitan unions, wrote directly to the PLB asking if they were justified in adding the new duty to their existing contracts.⁷⁹ The answer was no, at first, but when Parliament enacted the new levels of duty a few months later a section was inserted allowing contractors to do just that.⁸⁰ The same legal provision was made in other duty increases, such as for spirits in 1885.⁸¹ In another case, Stepney's guardians in 1865 found that their milk supplier, Messrs Abbott, had lost cattle from disease and therefore wanted an increase in price from 8¾d per gallon to 1s. Abbotts were a long-standing supplier to the union and the guardians told the PLB they thought the rise justified under the circumstances. In the event, the PLB's sanction was unnecessary as the

⁷⁷ TNA MH12/7103 12209/1849, Thomas Stone, clerk to St George in the East guardians, to PLB, 21 April 1849.

⁷⁸ TNA MH12/6903 16512/55, William Ruston, clerk to Brentford guardians, to PLB, 4 May 1855.

⁷⁹ MH12/12469 25576/55, William Hull to PLB, 21 June 1855; MH25/11 16345/55, J.E Craney to PLB, 3 May 1855.

⁸⁰ 18 & 19 Vict. c. 21 s. 4; TNA MH12/6903 34060/55, PLB to Ruston, 11 September 1855.

⁸¹ TNA MH12/9479 48702/85, G.M. Howard, clerk to Nottingham guardians, to PLB, 11 May 1885; reply 2 June 1885; 48 & 49 Vict., c. 51. Customs and Inland Revenue Act 1885.

guardians had not executed a contract with the supplier: either party could withdraw from the supply at the price stipulated at any time.⁸²

Guardians and other officers clearly could work very closely with suppliers. A new district auditor discovered in 1855 that Uppingham union's relieving officer made his rounds with the baker who supplied bread to the union's outdoor paupers, on the baker's horse and cart. The auditor did not believe the practice was illegal, but he thought it 'likely to subject the Relieving Officer to suspicions regarding the integrity of the discharge of his duties, and to produce a tendency to destroy that independence of Tradesmen and Contractors which is so desirable to be observed by Union officers'.⁸³ Poor law inspector Robert Weale noted that he knew of the practice and thought it did no harm, and the clerk told the PLB that it gave the relieving officer an opportunity to observe the quality of the bread.⁸⁴ The PLB took no action.

The Lanchester guardians worked so closely with their butcher in 1864 that they voted to make him an extra payment of £10 when meat prices rose and he found his contract unsustainable.⁸⁵ The butcher was a 'young man just commencing business' and the guardians thought it would cost more than £10 to scrap the agreement and contract with another supplier. The auditor disallowed the payment but the PLB remitted the amount with a caution against repeating such expenditure.⁸⁶ One of the PLB's officials noted wryly on the correspondence: 'If the price had fallen, and the Contractor had made an unexpected profit, I suppose he would not have made the Gdns a present of £10.'⁸⁷

A second aspect of freedom for guardians in contracting practice arose because, as we have seen, the central authority could sanction certain activities. Guardians could take advantage of this, and the centre occasionally

⁸² TNA MH12/7809 36784/65, W.H. Swepstone, clerk to Stepney guardians, to PLB, 13 October 1865; reply 37848A/65, 28 October 1865.

⁸³ TNA MH12/9810 14853/55, John Bowring to PLB, 27 April 1855.

⁸⁴ TNA MH12/9810 17328/55, W. Shield, clerk to Uppingham guardians, to PLB, 8 May 1855.

⁸⁵ TNA MH12/3169 23709/64, J. Thompson, clerk to Lanchester guardians, to PLB, 8 June 1864.

⁸⁶ TNA MH12/3169 33640/64, PLB to Thompson, 22 October 1864.

⁸⁷ TNA MH12/3169 29337/64, Thompson to PLB, 16 July 1864.

found itself cornered into approving behaviour after the fact to which it would not have given prior sanction. If an irregular item of expenditure was large enough, for instance, it was likely to be remitted by the PLB after its disallowance by the auditor even if the PLB did not think it necessarily in the interests of justice and fairness. In 1866 the Stepney guardians had a contract with a coal merchant, Irving & Cooper, who sent the workhouse 20 or so tons at a time. The guardians appear to have decided that it would be cheaper to buy around 250 tons in one transaction but Irving & Cooper declined, as the contract was only to deliver the coals necessary for present consumption. The guardians then bought around 300 tons at once from Sargeant & Sons without ending the existing contract. Irving & Cooper complained to the PLB.⁸⁸ However, by the time the PLB was involved, the coal had already been delivered. The PLB was thus cornered into sanctioning the departure from the regulations requiring large purchases to be made through competitive tender.⁸⁹

Guardians sometimes had to report facts in a certain light to persuade the central authority to change its regulations. In 1850 Stepney union wanted to dispense with tendering for porter for the sick as there was a fixed price charged by the large metropolitan brewers of 33s per barrel with a five per cent discount. The competition was therefore between the small brewers whose product was inferior. Instead of accepting this argument immediately, the PLB asked the union how much porter was consumed. The union was forced to admit that 140 unpaid nurses, washerwomen, tradesmen, wardsmen, cooks and others, as well as 180 sick paupers, were allowed porter. The PLB reminded the union that these unpaid workers needed medical certificates before they could be allowed alcohol. The guardians resolved that the clerk should 'confer with the Medical Officers thereon and obtain their

⁸⁸ TNA MH12/7810 4965/66, W.H. Swepstone, clerk to Stepney guardians, to PLB, 2 February 1866; 7028/66, Irving & Cooper, to PLB, 19 February 1866.

⁸⁹ TNA MH12/7810 8351A/66, PLB to Swepstone, 21 March 1866.

recommendations in writing'.⁹⁰ The union thereby obtained the PLB's sanction.

3.3.5 Impropriety and fraud

Guardians in many cases had the opportunity to act on the margins of lawful behaviour without facing severe consequences. Union officers committing fraud could expect, if discovered, to be prosecuted as fully as anyone else. It was not unknown for poor-rate collectors, relieving officers, clerks, masters and other such officials to be charged, dismissed or required to resign because of some form of defalcation.⁹¹ The discovery of fraud by guardians or suppliers was uncommon, though, either because it was not easy to commit or because it was not easy to discover. However, there were, of course, many activities of dubious propriety which were not necessarily illegal.

As other rates were assimilated to the poor rate, including the highway, county or borough, police and hundred rates, guardians and parish officers had access to accounts that were not overseen by district auditors to the same standards as the poor rate. One anonymous ratepayer complained to the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* in 1863 that this gave rise to opportunities for moving expenditure between ledgers:

Ever since the Poor Law Amendment Act, with its elaborate system and strict surveillance of accounts, came into force, it is proverbial that the highway accounts are the common receptacle for all illegal and irregular parish payments. If a disallowance be made by the auditor in the overseer's accounts the rejected item is almost certain to find admission in the surveyor's, either in its proper form or converted into "broken stones." How many guardians of the poor, partial valuations,

⁹⁰ LMA STBG/L/015, ff. 439-440, 28 November 1850; STBG/L/016, f.9, 12 December 1850; ff. 33-34, 26 December 1850.

⁹¹ They might also flee to avoid prosecution, as did William Ward, master of Coventry workhouse, who was suspected of embezzlement. See R. Hall, 'The vanishing unemployed, hidden disabled, and embezzling master: researching Coventry Workhouse registers', *Local Historian* 38:2 (2008), pp. 111-21.

&c., are paid out of the highway rates, though known to be totally illegal, and a gross imposition upon the ratepayers.⁹²

The answer to the correspondent's question is unknowable, and he may have been nursing some private grievance, but the letter points to a strong contemporary impression that parish accounts potentially hid sharp practices.

There is certainly evidence for conveniently poor record-keeping in some instances. In 1843 Skipton union was in the midst of arguments between the guardians over whether they were all ratepayers and over the dismissal of a master and matron. Parliament asked the union for a 'copy of all contracts... which have been entered into by the said Board of Guardians since the formation of the Union, with any Member, or with any one in Partnership with any Member, of the said Board.'⁹³ Fortunately for the suspected guardians no written contracts had been signed but, the clerk replied, 'tenders were accepted and verbal contracts made with some members of the Board.'⁹⁴ Furthermore a former guardian of the union had also employed three young workhouse inmates at his factory for eleven hours a day, paying their wages to the governor of the workhouse; 'their employment in such factory was sanctioned by the Board of Guardians, but very much complained of and protested against by the Poor Law Commissioners, and their Assistant Commissioner, Mr Clements, when the same came under their observation.'⁹⁵

The Skipton example demonstrates the close connections between guardians and their predecessors, as well as the ways such behaviour might be covered up. Similar behaviour by guardians was discussed in 1928 by George Lansbury, himself a former Poplar guardian who had by then become chairman of the parliamentary Labour party. In his memoirs he described how he found the Poplar board when he was first elected to it in 1892:

⁹² 'Correspondence: The New Highway Act', *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 6 November 1863, p. 3.

⁹³ PP 1843 XLV 233: Skipton Union. Return of the names of persons who have been appointed governors of the Skipton Union Workhouse during the last two years; and copy of contracts for food, &c. since the formation of the union.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Most guardians were freemasons, and so were many of the officials and all the contractors. I do not think there was any real corruption except that people did look after their friends. You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours was the kind of policy where jobs and contracts were concerned.⁹⁶

Lansbury thus gave the impression of an all-too-comfortable local élite enjoying a long-standing *status quo* – to be contrasted, of course, with his own necessarily radical faction. Despite the clear disdain, Lansbury accused his former colleagues more of cosiness than of wrongdoing. Nonetheless, he found that other union officials were indeed corrupt:

We visited the workhouse early morning and late at night, discovering many gross irregularities such as calico in stock in place of linen the Board had paid for. Then we tried to discover where all the stores went to, and finally found our stores were short by thousands of yards. After weeks of toil we impeached the officers and proved gross negligence, if not worse, and applied to the President of the Local Government Board for an Inquiry.⁹⁷

An inquiry was held and the officers sacked, though the LGB was obstructive, Lansbury went on to complain. There was no interest from the LGB in pursuing claims of corruption, and 'as to finding out anything corrupt, auditors appear to think that is none of their business, and so find out only what they are told.'⁹⁸ This can be contrasted with the views of Fabian writer W.A. Robson who accused auditors of systematically overreaching their mandates. The quality of guardians and auditors alike was clearly a subjective experience.⁹⁹ Lansbury's criticisms of the old Poplar board must also be seen in the context of the allegations made about the union under his time in office there. Not only did the guardians give far more outdoor relief than the LGB and many ratepayers would have liked, but they were also 'rumblings' of corruption in

⁹⁶ G. Lansbury, *My Life* (London: Constable, 1928), p. 134.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁹⁹ Robson, *The District Auditor*.

their own contracting arrangements.¹⁰⁰ Lansbury's presence on the board does not appear to have had an effect on the practices of his colleagues: Beatrice Webb attended a meeting of the Poplar guardians in 1906, and noted in her diary that the procedure for allotting the contracts for the year was 'utterly reckless'. She wrote:

The tenders were opened at the meeting, the names and prices read out and then without any kind of report of a Committee or by officials straight away voted on. Usually the same person as heretofore was taken, nearly always a local man – it was not always the lowest tender and the prices were, in all cases, full, in some cases obviously excessive. Butter at 1/2 [1s 2d] a lb. when the contracts ran into thousands of £-worth was obviously ridiculous!... If there is no corruption in that Board English human nature must be more naively stupid than any other race would credit... Even Lansbury, by constitution a thoroughgoing sentimentalist and with no other experience of public affairs, protested, and was clearly ashamed of the procedure.¹⁰¹

George C.T. Bartley, another guardian-turned-M.P., noted that guardians defied the law prohibiting them from supplying goods to the workhouse 'with very little attempt at concealment'.¹⁰² On one occasion, he recounted in his 'handy-book' for new guardians, his union's board approved a large purchase of firewood at the end of a meeting, when few guardians were there. It emerged that one of the guardians was to cart the wood from the canal to the workhouse:

On drawing attention the Act of Parliament and the circumstance of a Guardian being a sub-contractor to cart the timber, which he openly acknowledged he was, the Clerk of the Board stated, as reported in the local paper, that "There was a doubt about the matter, and he was not in a position to say what construction would be put upon such an act in a court of law." The case was aggravated by this same Guardian acting on the Finance Committee, whose duty it was to see to the payments, and

¹⁰⁰ K.D. Brown, 'John Burns at the Local Government Board: a reassessment', *Journal of Social Policy* 6:2 (1977), p. 169.

¹⁰¹ B. Webb, 'Diary 21 January 1905 - 31 July 1906', <<http://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:nin225zok/>> (Accessed August 2012).

¹⁰² G.C.T. Bartley, *A Handy Book for Guardians of the Poor. Being a Complete Manual of the Duties of the Office, the Treatment of Typical Cases, with Practical Examples, Etc. Etc.* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1876), p. 209.

also on the House Committee, whose duty it was to see to the timber being measured.¹⁰³

This account suggests that the collusion of at least some other members of the board and of the clerk was necessary to engage in such behaviour successfully. This might have minimised the possibility of widespread financial impropriety. Nonetheless there were clearly opportunities to hide wrongdoing. As unions oversaw large movements of money, there were chances for poor law officers to commit outright frauds. However, evidence for dishonesty by suppliers themselves is necessarily rare in the records. F.W. Rowsell of the Admiralty had 'sure information' that price fixing, or 'combinations' of suppliers, took place, but could not give concrete evidence:

There is a regular class of dealers who lay themselves out for workhouse and other large contracts, and it is as easy for them to arrange, as it is certain they do arrange to a very large extent, in whose hands particular contracts shall be. The meat dealers, *i.e.*, the vendors of the largest item of consumption in the workhouses, are intimately associated for this purpose, and guard their ring fence with very strong trade sanctions.¹⁰⁴

Unions did little to combat the phenomenon, he added, beyond comparing prices, and 'the presence on the board of persons in the same line of business is not enough to detect such combinations; certainly not to defeat them.'

3.3.6 Value for money

Cartel behaviour by suppliers would not necessarily have resulted in unions paying significantly more for their goods than they would have paid in a free market, though it may well have limited the pool of suppliers from whom they might have bought.¹⁰⁵ This suggests that however much discretionary power poor law guardians could exercise, they had only a limited ability to make a

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹⁰⁴ PP 1872 LI 599, p. 12.

¹⁰⁵ This appears to be the case for cartels such as coal merchants under the Limitation of the Vend. See W.J. Hausman, 'Cheap Coals or Limitation of the Vend? The London Coal Trade, 1770-1845', *Journal of Economic History* 44:2 (1984), pp. 321-328.

difference to the quality of goods and to the value for money they could obtain for ratepayers.

The most common action that guardians took in promoting quality was complaining to suppliers if the goods were below standard. Bermondsey union told baker Matthew Gooderson to improve the quality of the bread he delivered to the workhouse in August 1850.¹⁰⁶ In January 1851 the union also complained to contracted butcher Henry Lee of the poor standard of his meat, warning him that if it did not improve the guardians would find an alternative supplier and charge Lee the difference in price.¹⁰⁷ The Lewisham guardians demanded the attendance of their contracted butcher William Waller at a board meeting to confer with him on the subject of his 'coarse and inferior quality' meat in November 1850.¹⁰⁸ In June 1850 St George the Martyr's guardians told their contractor for spirits, Job Spurgin, to replace the bad goods he supplied with another batch and to expect to be charged the difference in price if the union was forced to find another supplier.¹⁰⁹

Despite this, there tended not to be any systematic effort by guardians to ensure that they contracted with the most appropriate supplier in the first place. As shown above, guardians reserved the right not to accept the lowest bid for a contract; however, this approach depended on the guardians possessing a level of knowledge of both the goods and the suppliers which they might not necessarily have had. Even taking into account Francis Rowsell's interest in overstating the deficiencies of union procurement in comparison with the Admiralty, his observations are useful here. He quoted at length, for example, an anonymous guardian who vividly described his colleagues drinking several glasses of port with biscuits and cheese before voting on which to buy for the year.¹¹⁰ No doubt many boards of guardians took their responsibilities more seriously than this one, but there was nothing to stop every board acting like this if they wished.

¹⁰⁶ LMA BBG/006, 21 August 1850, f. 103.

¹⁰⁷ LMA BBG/006., 8 January 1851, f. 175.

¹⁰⁸ LMA LEBG/009, 28 November 1850.

¹⁰⁹ LMA SOBG/011, 19 June 1850, f. 224.

¹¹⁰ PP 1872 LI 599, p. 7.

Nor did guardians necessarily have the means to ensure that the goods they received under the contract were of the right standard. For instance coal from Wallsend had a high reputation, leading to many boards contracting for it by name. As Rowsell pointed out, however, there was not enough Wallsend coal in existence to fulfil all these contracts: “The result is “a make up” of various kinds of coal, which the trade are pleased to describe as Wallsend, with some qualifying prefix or other; though as a matter of fact, to quote [coal expert] Mr M’Culloch’s words, “not one coal of the mixture was ever within 200 miles of the county of Durham”.’¹¹¹ It would have been better, he suggested, simply to ask for coal for household or steam-engine purposes.

Guardians also had the incentive to keep to minimal standards of workhouse food entailed by the principle of less eligibility. Suppliers could take the opportunity to dispose of the worst of their produce or to adulterate their goods. Rowsell believed ‘a considerable proportion’ of workhouse butter consisted of horse fat, known in the trade as ‘bosh butter’. ‘On the whole, I am not surprised to find that some inmates of workhouses prefer dripping to butter upon their bread,’ he reported.¹¹² Workhouse milk, furthermore, had been adulterated or diluted so much that it was ‘utterly unreliable as a food for infants and aged persons.’¹¹³ This was not necessarily a problem specific to workhouses, though. Only ten per cent of the milk supplied to London workhouses was genuine, according to dairy chemist J.A. Wanklyn, and after examining a thousand or so samples of milk in London for the *Milk Journal* in 1871-72, he ‘arrived at a similar conclusion as to the general condition of the milk-trade in the metropolis’.¹¹⁴ Under these circumstances, guardians not only had an incentive to buy the worst produce, they also had very little choice in the matter.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ J.A. Wanklyn, *Milk-Analysis: A practical treatise on the examination of milk and its derivatives, cream, butter, and cheese* (London: Trübner & Co, 1874), p. 43.

3.4 Conclusion

As representatives of their ratepayer electorates, guardians were mindful of the need to keep costs down. This status also meant that they were members of their local communities first, and government administrators second. They would have known their local suppliers fairly well, especially in unions outside the densely populated cities, and even within urban areas they would have had long-standing working relationships with particular union suppliers. These sorts of relationships are apparent in the requests guardians made to the central authority to make extra payments to suppliers or to alter contracts advantageously towards them. Some of the practices of poor law unions throughout the period evoke George Lansbury's criticisms of the Poplar guardians' tendency to make unofficial reciprocal arrangements. Many such practices were not criminal, and there was a good chance that expenditure ruled unlawful by the district auditor might well be remitted on appeal by the central authority. From 1887 guardians could even ask for sanction before the auditor examined the books.

The central authority was concerned to eliminate clear abuses of ratepayer funds and to ensure that guardians did not act *ultra vires*. This is true of central government efforts to promote all sorts of policies, such as the ways certain classes of pauper were relieved. Such policies were intended to have an impact on the ratepayer burden through restricting the numbers of paupers relieved, or the amounts of relief they received. This chapter demonstrates that the same forces identified by historians as relating to policy transactions were also at work when it came to the ways guardians spent money on goods and services. For instance, Bellamy describes the central authority as working to 'minimise error and avoid the breakdown of relations'.¹¹⁵ This is apparent in the authority's willingness to sanction unlawful expenditure after the fact, and in the persistence of the legality of non-standard contracts between unions and suppliers. Such contracts were allowed because there was already a statute and case law framework for contracting. Enforcing a standard contract would have had an impact not just

¹¹⁵ Bellamy, *Central-local relations*, p. 117.

on unions, whose activities were also highly regulated, but also on ordinary tradesmen and women. The poor law in this respect operated as a set of social relationships which could not be co-opted into a purely administrative framework, even though these relationships were a necessary product of government process. To this extent, the poor law's operation at union level should not be seen as the expression of central-local tensions, but instead as the space in which public authorities and private enterprise (and, indeed, paupers) interacted and overlapped to different degrees at different scales. This interaction could, but did not always, generate friction.

This model of the poor law yields some 650 local geographies of institutional supply, each with its own unique features emerging from both national and local realities. These included operational or administrative aspects (tendering and contracting processes, supply chain logistics and so on), as well as the less tangible features such as social relations also discussed here. For guardians, suppliers, paupers and ratepayers, the consequences were felt in the amounts spent on goods and services. These patterns of pricing and supply are considered in the next chapter.

4 Price and policy: Geographies of supply

4.1 Introduction

The importance of geographical scale in understanding poor relief is underscored by the procurement practices adopted by boards of guardians. Guardians acted locally, but they bought goods and services that were subject to national, regional and local markets and supply networks. For some goods, this resulted in patchworks of prices across England and Wales; for others the picture was more uniform. These local variations in price were key to some of the differences visible in relief practices, not simply because prices affected relief costs but because they were a product of the relationships between unions and suppliers in local economies. Furthermore, because the main costs of indoor relief related to goods purchased to supply the workhouse, as this form of expenditure became more significant over the nineteenth century, these geographies of supply became increasingly important to poor law guardians. Understanding geographies of supply, therefore, is important in developing a clearer grasp of the factors that influenced the overall costs of poor relief.

Of these goods and services, food was the most significant item of expenditure for workhouses. Around half the costs of running a London workhouse in 1881 went on food for paupers, of which the greatest single item of expenditure – nearly 20 per cent of total workhouse costs – was meat (Table 4.1).¹ Flour and bread made up just under 10 per cent of total workhouse costs, but were also an important element in outdoor relief costs in many parts of England and Wales. Outdoor relief given in kind was worth 14.2 per cent of all outdoor relief in 1881 (nearly £380,000), but was as much as 43.1 per cent in the Eastern division, 28.6 per cent in the South-East, 26.3 per cent in the Metropolis and 19.4 per cent in the South Midlands.² In these districts, in particular, the cost of bread was likely to have been especially important. After

¹ PP 1882 XXX Pt. I. 1. Eleventh annual report of the Local Government Board. 1881-82, pp. Appendix D, no. 66. Similar figures for the rest of the country are not readily available, but it may be assumed that the proportions were not greatly dissimilar.

² *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

provisions, establishment costs were the next biggest bloc of workhouse expenditure, of which loan servicing and officers' salaries were the most significant items, together representing around 20 per cent of total costs. Relatively small sums were paid for items such as fuel and clothing. The emphasis in this chapter, therefore, is on the food supplied to poor law unions, though other goods and services were not unimportant.

Expenditure item	Amount (£)	Proportion of subtotal (%)	Proportion of total (%)
Provisions			
Meat	91,640	42.6	18.9
Grocery	42,856	19.9	8.8
Flour and bread	39,091	18.2	8.1
Vegetables	13,640	6.3	2.8
Milk	13,298	6.2	2.7
Beer	6,221	2.9	1.3
Other provisions	5,026	2.3	1.0
Wine and spirits	3,551	1.6	0.7
Total provisions	215,323	100.0	44.4
Establishment			
Loan servicing	56,552	29.3	11.7
Salaries, gratuities, fees	45,566	23.6	9.4
Furniture and repairs	23,290	12.1	4.8
Building and repairs	21,478	11.1	4.4
Rations	20,837	10.8	4.3
Rent, rates, taxes, tithes, insurance	13,466	7.0	2.8
Other establishment	4,051	2.1	0.8
Drugs, medical, surgical appliances	3,945	2.0	0.8
Funerals	2,579	1.3	0.5
Uniforms	1,072	0.6	0.2
Total establishment	192,836	100.0	39.7
Necessaries			
Warming	21,728	46.5	4.5
Lighting	10,691	22.9	2.2
Cleansing	7,644	16.3	1.6
Water	4,444	9.5	0.9
Other necessaries	2,261	4.8	0.5
Total necessaries	46,768	100.0	9.6
Clothing			
Linen, cotton, woollen, flannel, other	23,622	78.1	4.9
Boots and shoes	6,621	21.9	1.4
Total clothing	30,243	100.0	6.2
Total all	485,170		100.0

Table 4.1: Expenditure by type of goods and services in thirty-three London workhouses operated by thirty unions, year ended Lady-day 1881.
Source: PP 1882 XXX Pt. I 1. Eleventh Annual Report of the Local Government Board, 1881-82, Appendix D, no. 66.

Food was not only a sizable proportion of the workhouse budget, it was also one of the few areas of spending over which, as shown above, guardians had some degree of control. This was by design, as the food given to workhouse inmates was key to upholding the less-eligibility principle. In a circular letter in 1835, Edwin Chadwick 'offered' six possible dietary tables to boards of guardians so they could, he wrote, 'select from them that one which appears to be the best adapted for each particular Union. In making this selection, especial reference must be had to the usual mode of living of the independent labourers of the district in which the Union is situated'.³ Charles Mott, assistant poor law commissioner for London and the south-east in 1835, suggested to the PLC that 'uniformity of diet as to quality can hardly be attained, nor indeed is it absolutely necessary. Provincial habits are difficult to conquer.'⁴ Despite the PLC having set out these six dietary tables for unions, guardians tended to make adjustments to suit local circumstances which were then approved by the central authority, and therefore the majority of unions were subject to their own particular dietary orders.⁵ By 1866 divergent practices proliferated. Edward Smith, the Poor Law Board's medical officer, reported that year that 'of 65 workhouses, the returns of the dietaries of which have been forwarded to me, I find that there are 7 different arrangements of the breakfast, 44 of the dinner, and 29 of the supper.'⁶ Individual unions also had different proportions of the various classes of pauper, each with their own appropriate dietary, making it impossible for the central authority (or, indeed, historians) to compare quantities consumed or amounts spent.

Food in workhouses was not simply a matter of administration, but was a highly contentious and emotive subject. Accounts of workhouse life by former indoor paupers often emphasised the fact that the threat of starvation drove

³ PP 1836 XXIX Pt.I.1, Pt.II.1. Second annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales; together with appendices A. B. C. D, Appendix A, no. 7, p. 56.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Appendix B, no. 8, p. 313.

⁵ Order as to dietaries in union workhouses, W. Cunningham Glen, *The General Consolidated and other Orders of the Poor Law Commissioners and the Poor Law Board; with explanatory notes elucidating the orders, tables of statutes, cases, and index to the orders and notes*, 6th ed. (London: Butterworths, 1868), pp. 293-305.

⁶ PP 1866 XXXV 321. Dietaries for the inmates of workhouses. Report to the President of the Poor Law Board of Dr Edward Smith, FRS, medical officer of the Poor Law Board, and Poor Law Inspector, p. 6.

them to seek relief, and it is therefore unsurprising that food quality and quantity tended also to be described in some detail. Even with the passage of some decades, former inmates retained vivid impressions of mealtimes. Charles Shaw wrote in 1903 of his experiences as a child in Wolstanton & Burslem union's Chell workhouse in 1842. The food was unpleasant, but nonetheless highly valued by his fellow inmates:

I was hungry, but that bread ! that greasy water ! those few lumps of something which would have made a tiger's teeth ache to break the fibres of ! the strangeness, the repulsiveness, and the loneliness, made my heart turn over, and I turned over what I could not eat to those near me, who devoured voraciously all I could spare. I had heard of workhouse skilly but had never before seen it... By what rare culinary-making nausea and bottomless fatuousness it could be made so sickening I never could make out.⁷

Emaciated paupers were a staple of anti-poor-law literature (Figure 4.1). The *Times*, a staunch opponent of the new regime, published twenty-four real and imagined accounts of inadequate diets in the workhouse between 1837 and 1842.⁸ Moreover, one of the best-publicised workhouse scandals included the near-starvation of Andover's indoor paupers in 1845-6, an episode which contributed to the downfall of the Poor Law Commission.⁹ The central authority was therefore concerned not only to preserve less-eligibility but also to ensure that paupers received adequate nutrition. *Guardians*, meanwhile, did not want to starve their paupers, but they were obliged to keep expenses as low as possible.

⁷ 'An Old Potter' [Charles Shaw], 'When I Was a Child'. Online at <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Shaw>. Accessed May 2014.

⁸ D. Roberts, 'How Cruel Was the Victorian Poor Law?', *Historical Journal* 6:1 (1963), p. 98.

⁹ PP 1846 V Part 1.1, Part 2.1. Report from the Select Committee on Andover Union; together with the minutes of evidence, appendix and index, p. vi; A.L. Brundage, *The English poor laws, 1700-1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 87-89.

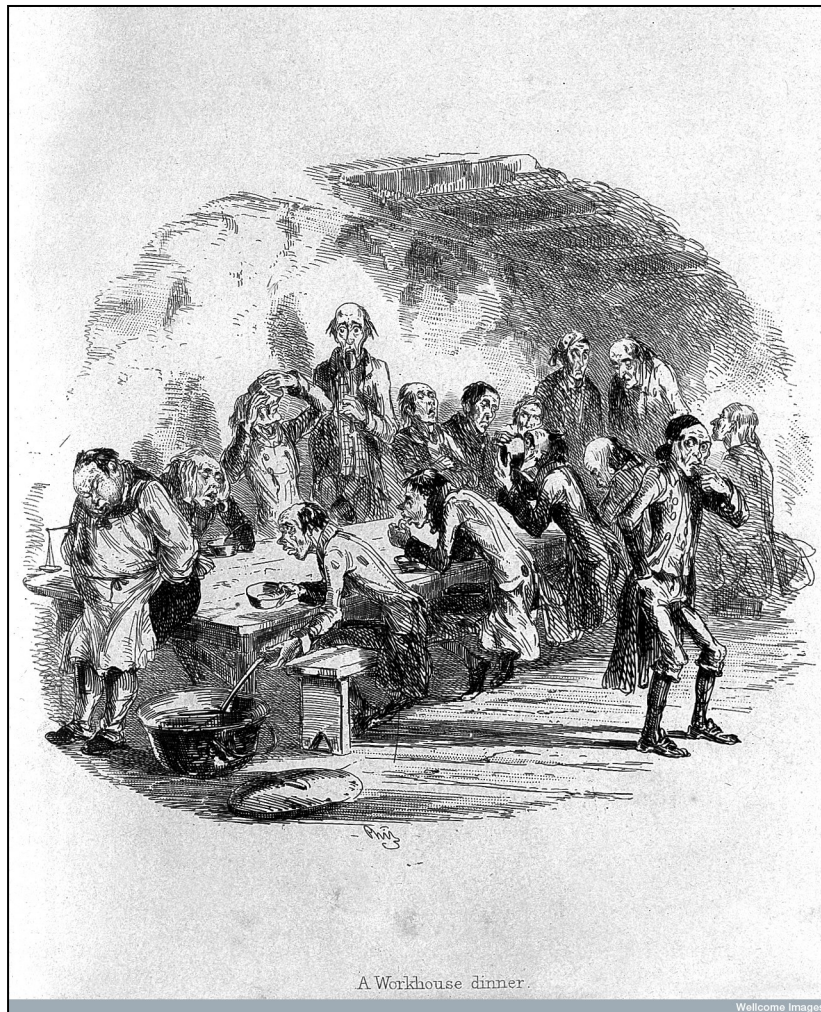


Figure 4.1: 'Phiz' (H.K. Browne), 'A Workhouse dinner', in J. Grant, *Sketches in London* (London: T. Tegg, 1840), p. 225.. Wellcome Library, London.

As shown in Chapter 3, keeping provisioning costs low was just one element of the effective management of a poor law union, and even this was not easily achieved in practice. Buying low quality goods in bulk usually meant that unions paid prices at the bottom end of the range. However, this chapter shows that unions' buying practices were also shaped by the nature of production costs, supply chains, local demand and competition – all of which varied by commodity and by location. Regions of low prices did not necessarily produce regions of low relief expenditure, but relief practices were strongly influenced by the nature of the wider markets for particular goods, whether local, regional or national. Workhouse supplies must therefore be seen as a field of poor law management that was subject not just to administrative activity but also to market forces. These together produced the

geographies of supply which are the focus of this chapter, and which were reflected in the differences in policy, practice and pauper experience across the country. This can be seen in the price geographies of the goods considered in this chapter: flour, bread, beef, butter, cheese and milk.

Records of the prices paid by individual unions for goods and services on a national scale are not readily found, as guardians were very rarely required to make returns of their contract prices. The most comprehensive aggregation of prices at union level was published in an 1852 parliamentary paper and gives data for two six-month periods ending 25 March 1850 and 1851 respectively.¹⁰ There were other similar reports published, such as in 1843, but the 1852 paper gives costs per standardised quantities for the greatest number of unions.¹¹ Detailed time series for union contract prices are lacking, though some exist for certain unions at certain times and for some goods. The figures provided in the 1852 paper seemingly also represent the most detailed data on local prices of any sort. Other contemporary contract price data records are either at a larger scale, such as the Army's county-level figures, or for individual institutions, such as naval yards, prisons, asylums and hospitals. By contrast, the poor law data show the contract prices of certain goods at union level across England and Wales. This chapter therefore uses these national figures to assess the nature of the markets in these goods. The 'snapshot' approach necessitated by the data in the 1852 paper is supplemented by further time series of prices for particular goods in certain unions, where available.

¹⁰ PP 1852 XLV 7: Poor relief. Return of the number of paupers receiving in and out-door relief in 607 unions and single parishes in England and Wales, during the half-years ended at Lady-Day 1850 and 1851 respectively; together with the average prices of provisions contracted for during the aforesaid respective periods by the boards of guardians for the different counties.

¹¹ Sixty-four unions returned no data at all on prices for the 1852 return as they had no indoor poor or were not obliged to under the Poor Law Amendment Act (i.e. they were unions or parishes under local acts). Two – Garstang in Lancashire and Sedbergh in the West Riding – were obliged to return the data but did not. Other papers include PP 1843 XLV 173: Poor Law unions. An account of the prices of articles of consumption at the Poor Law unions throughout England and Wales, in June 1842, and June 1843; and, for a much smaller sample of unions, PP 1847-48 LIII 185: Poor Law. Return of the comparative expenditure for relief of the poor, number of poor relieved, average prices of flour and potatoes per stone, and of bread per quarter loaf, in each period in the six months ending Lady-Day in 1846, 1847 and 1848, in Bradford, Bolton, &c.

Contract prices have been used in various ways to explore patterns of expenditure and prices.¹² Trainor, for example, considers local food prices important in his comparison of the expenditure of three unions in the Black Country, West Bromwich, Dudley and Wolverhampton.¹³ Economic circumstance combined with the disposition of guardians to produce different spending patterns visible principally in outdoor relief.¹⁴ Other historians have focused on the prices paid by poor law guardians to understand regional variations in the cost of living. Crafts, in particular, has explored this issue using contract prices for 1843 to examine the impact of regional price variations on standards of living.¹⁵ He does not explore the importance of prices in relief expenditure directly, but does suggest that bulk buying by unions had a minimal effect on prices, if any.¹⁶ Crafts's data are aggregated by region, though, whereas this chapter uses disaggregated union-level figures to highlight the local importance of prices in relief spending. Furthermore, his assessment of the regionality of prices in 1843 is supplemented here by the 1850 data, and differences between the two dates can be identified for the most significant items of expenditure. Crafts, for example, finds that flour was most expensive in London and the Home counties, whereas the 1850 figures suggest the North was also an expensive region (Section 4.2). In both 1843 and 1850 bread was most expensive in the northern industrial region, while meat was most expensive in the northern Midlands and eastern England (Section 4.3). Butter was cheap in the south of England, including London, the Home

¹² R. Edwards and R. Perren, 'A note on regional differences in British meat prices, 1828-1865', *Economy and History* 22:2 (1979), pp. 123-134; P.H. Lindert, 'English Population, Wages, and Prices: 1541-1913', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 15:4 (1985), pp. 609-634; E.H. Phelps Brown and S.V. Hopkins, 'Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables, Compared with Builders' Wage-Rates', *Economica* New Series, 23:92 (1956), pp. 296-314; T.L. Richardson, 'The Agricultural Labourer's Standard of Living in Kent, 1790-1840', in D.J. Oddy and D.S. Miller (eds), *The Making of the Modern British Diet* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), pp. 103-116; N.J. Silberling, 'British Prices and Business Cycles, 1779-1850', *Review of Economics and Statistics* 5: Supplement 2 (1923), pp. 223-247; P.M. Solar and J.T. Klovland, 'New series for agricultural prices in London, 1770-1914', *Economic History Review* 64:1 (2011), pp. 72-87. For a contemporary analysis see G.R. Porter, 'On a Comparative Statement of Prices and Wages During the Years from 1842 to 1849', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 13:3 (1850), pp. 210-218.

¹³ R.H. Trainor, *Black Country Élités: The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialised Area 1830-1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 297-8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

¹⁵ N.F.R. Crafts, 'Regional Price Variations in England in 1843: An Aspect of the Standard-of-Living Debate', *Explorations in Economic History* 19:1 (1982), pp. 51-70; based on PP 1843 XLV 173.

¹⁶ Crafts, 'Regional Price Variations,' pp. 52-3.

counties and the wider south-east, and expensive in the North and Midlands (Section 4.4). Cheese was cheapest in the west and south-east (Section 4.5). Milk does not appear in the price records for either year, but it is clear that competition and low prices had a detrimental effect on the quality of goods and therefore on paupers (Section 4.6). High prices did not necessarily produce high relief costs, but understanding these regional variations and how they changed over time is important as a way of understanding better the relationships between prices and decision making by boards of guardians.

4.2 Bread and flour

The purchasing of bread and flour by poor law unions clearly demonstrates the significance of price in guardians' procurement decisions. Unions had to supply bread to paupers and could choose between baking their own or buying from an external supplier (or a combination of both). In areas where high bread prices prevailed, unions tended to buy flour instead and bake their own loaves, as shown by the data in this section.

Bread was the staple food of the general population and of paupers in particular.¹⁷ When outdoor relief was given in kind, it tended to be wholly or partly in bread. It was also consumed in the workhouse, frequently with tea and butter for breakfast, as an accompaniment to soup or broth, as a substitute for potatoes with meat, or with cheese or butter for supper.¹⁸ Bread for paupers was renowned for its poor quality, leading *Punch* to parody the commercial prices columns in the likes of the *Economist* by reporting on 'mysterious transactions in sawdust by the baker who liberally deals with the workhouse.'¹⁹

The prices paid by poor law unions for bread were fairly uniform across the Midlands and the south of England, with some higher prices paid in the north and London (Figure 4.2). No particular location type of union enjoyed

¹⁷ D.J. Oddy, 'Working-Class Diets in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Economic History Review* New Series, 23:2 (1970), pp. 314-322, 318.

¹⁸ PP 1866 XXXV 321, pp. 6-13.

¹⁹ *Punch, or the London Charivari*, 3: 64 (1843), p. 141.

especially low prices compared to others, as can be seen by dividing unions into six categories: rural northern England, rural southern England, urban northern England, urban southern England excluding London, London itself, and Wales, which was almost entirely rural (Figure 4.3).²⁰ London unions appear to have paid prices at the higher end of the scale, however (Table 4.2). The bakers who supplied bread to unions used price points, and the mode price paid by unions for a 4lb loaf in 1850 was 4d, with 104 unions out of 464 (22.4 per cent) being charged that amount. The next most common price was 4½d, paid by 102 unions (22.0 per cent). There are gaps in the bread data, especially in parts of Wales, Cumberland, Yorkshire, Surrey and Sussex, and 127 unions gave no figures for bread expenditure despite returning prices for flour and other commodities. This suggests that these unions exclusively baked their own bread in the workhouse for consumption by both indoor and outdoor poor. This is confirmed by the account of the PLB's medical officer Edward Smith in 1866, who found that although some unions bought bread by contract, generally it was flour that was bought and either baked in the workhouse into bread or made into dough in the workhouse and sent out to a bakehouse.²¹ This varied geographically though: Unions in the rural south of England overwhelmingly tended to buy bread, whereas Welsh unions mostly made their own. Many unions bought bread but also made their own, some buying loaves for pauper consumption but also buying fine flour to make puddings and officers' bread. Greenwood, in his 1866 account of a night in Lambeth workhouse's casual ward, mentioned that bread was brought to the inmates by 'a baker's man'.²²

²⁰ Urban unions are defined as those with more than one person per acre (see chapter 2).

²¹ PP 1866 XXXV 321, p. 22.

²² J. Greenwood, *A Night in a Workhouse, from the Pall Mall Gazette* (London: F. Bowering, 1866), p. 14.



Figure 4.2: Prices paid by poor law unions for bread, 1850.
Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

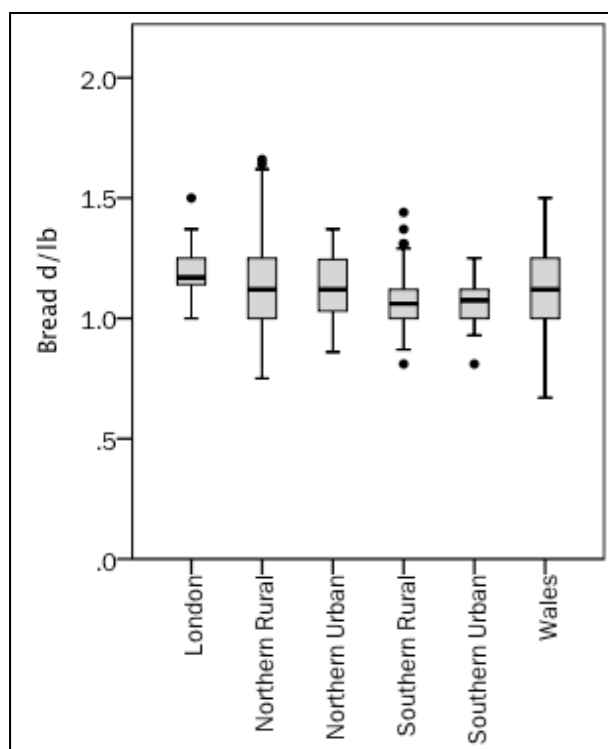


Figure 4.3: Prices paid by poor law unions for bread, 1850, by union location types. Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

	Mean price, d/lb	% returning prices*
London	1.19	92.6
Northern Rural	1.15	65.0
Northern Urban	1.13	66.0
Southern Rural	1.09	89.7
Southern Urban	1.06	96.0
Wales	1.11	59.5
All	1.11	78.5

Table 4.2: Mean prices paid for bread by unions, by location type.

Note: * = percentage of unions excluding those not returning price data for any goods.

Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

Baking was a common form of employment in the workhouse, with around eighty unions specifying the activity in an 1852 parliamentary return.²³ (More will have used it, but it would also have fallen into the return's category of general household work in many cases.) Some unions sold the bread they made, Ashton-under-Lyne making a profit of £35 19s 8d in its bakery account

²³ PP 1852-53 LXXXIV 299: Poor Law. Abstract of return, from each of the Poor Law unions in England, Wales, and Ireland, showing, what kinds of employment are carried on in the workhouses, or on land attached; the number of adult able-bodied persons on the books as recipients of relief on 1 July 1852, and the proportion engaged in handicraft and agricultural industry; &c.

in 1887, for instance.²⁴ Many workhouses also required paupers to grind corn in hand-mills, either for the bakehouse or for feed for livestock.²⁵ Bakehouses were standard elements in workhouse architecture under the new poor law, appearing in Sampson Kempthorne's model plans published in the PLC's first annual report (Figure 4.4). Most unions which bought bread also purchased flour, combining the use of the workhouse bakery with external bakers to feed the outdoor poor. However, twenty-three unions had workhouses without bakeries, and they therefore relied exclusively on external contractors. Unions without workhouses also had no choice but to buy bread externally for their outdoor poor.

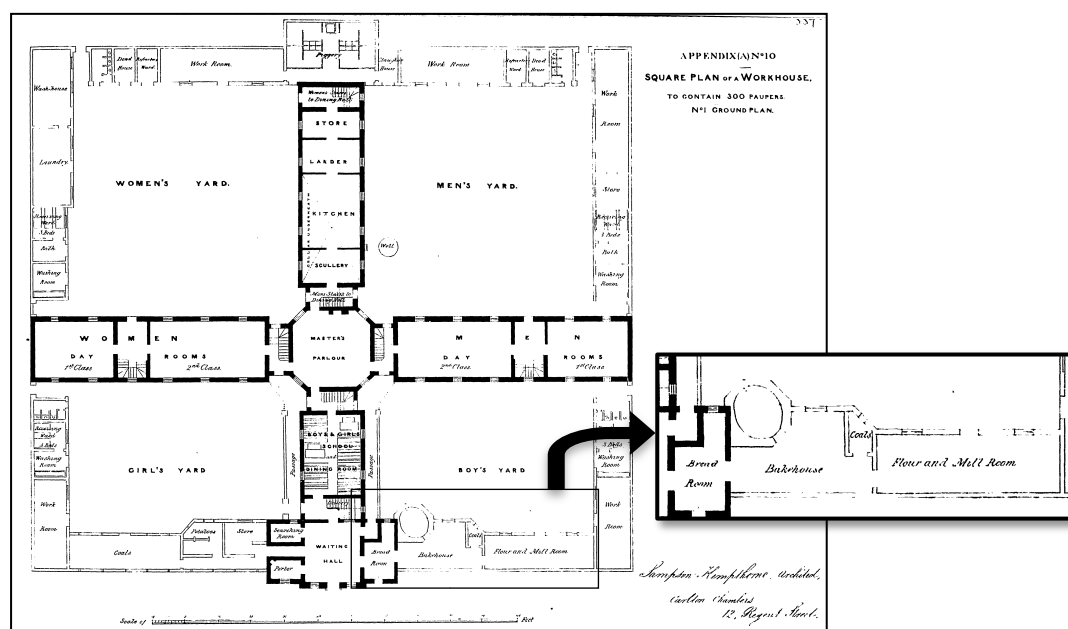


Figure 4.4: Kempthorne's 1835 model square-plan workhouse showing bakehouse, flour and mill room and bread room (inset).

Source: PP 1835 XXXV 107. First Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales, Appendix A, no. 10.

Unlike the purchase of bread, the vast majority of unions bought flour. Flour was most expensive for poor law unions in the north of England, the north Midlands and Wales, although there were unions across the country which paid high prices (Figure 4.5). The majority of unions bought flour, particularly those in the south, but northern towns had a slightly lower proportion of

²⁴ A Statement of the Accounts of the Ashton-under-Lyne Union, for the Half-Year ended March 25th, 1887 (Ashton-under-Lyne: Ashton-under-Lyne Poor Law Union, 1887).

²⁵ PP 1852-53 LXXXIV 299.

flour-buying unions among them than the rest of the country (Table 4.3). Flour prices tended to be cheapest in the south and east, with the exception of London, where prices were higher than in the rest of the country (Figure 4.6). This may account for the higher bread prices in London. It is notable that London's prices for both bread and flour were consistently higher than urban and rural unions in the rest of the south of England, possibly as a result of cartel behaviour by suppliers.

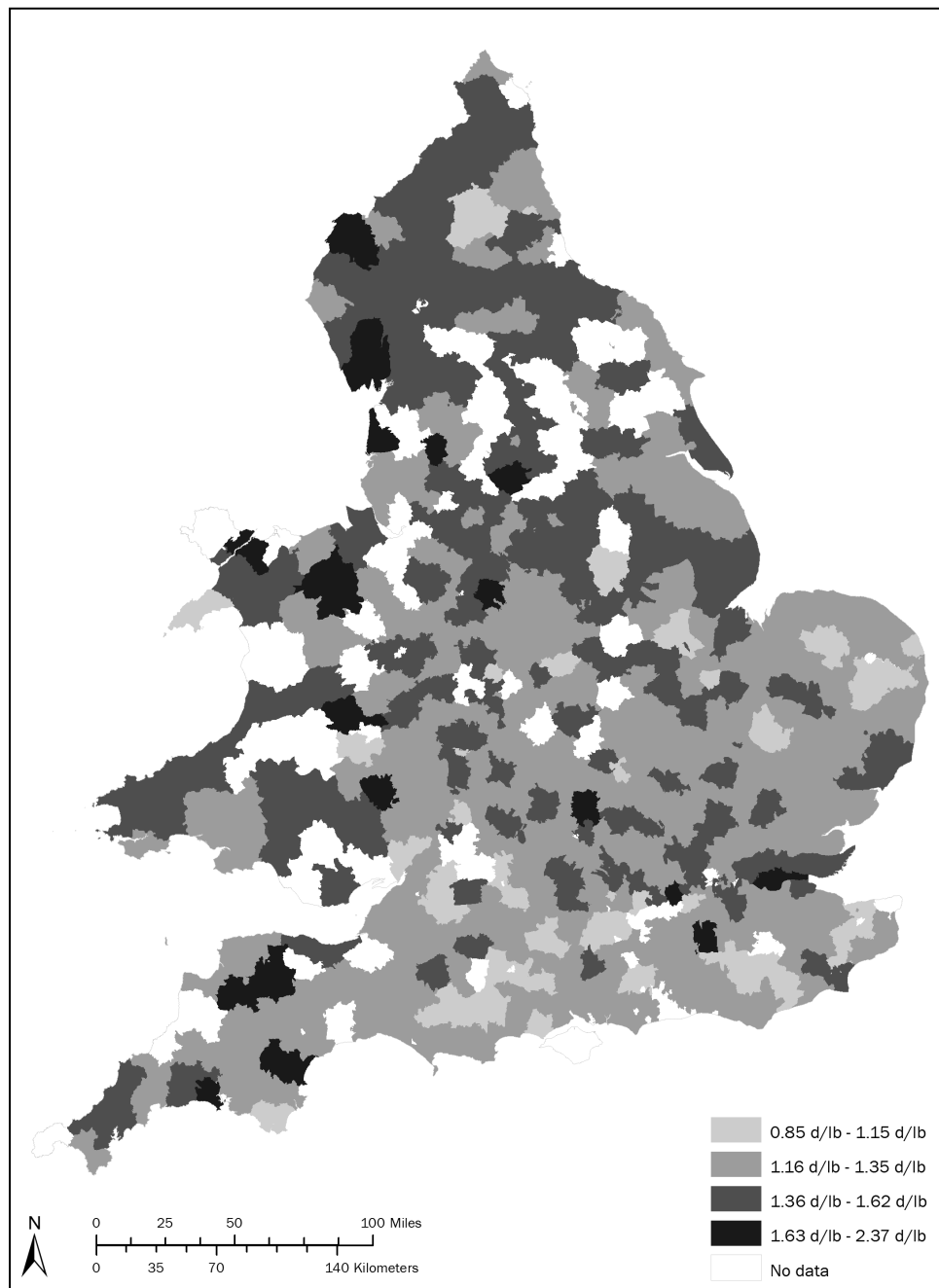


Figure 4.5: Prices paid by poor law unions for flour, 1850.
Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

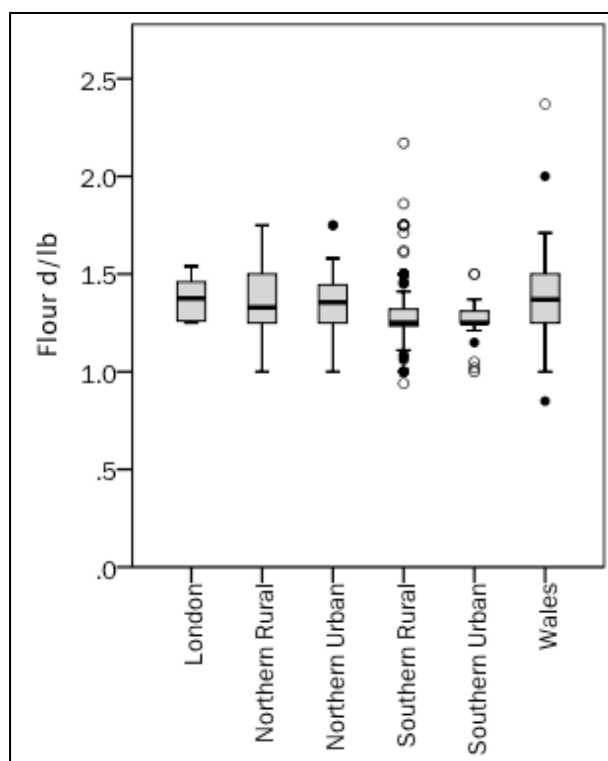


Figure 4.6: Prices paid by poor law unions for flour, 1850, by union location type. Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

	Mean price, d/lb	% returning prices*
London	1.38	96.3
Northern Rural	1.36	94.4
Northern Urban	1.36	90.6
Southern Rural	1.28	96.2
Southern Urban	1.26	100.0
Wales	1.42	94.6
All	1.32	95.2

Table 4.3: Mean prices paid for flour by unions, by location type.

Note: * = percentage of unions excluding those not returning price data for any goods.

Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

All unions served bread to their paupers, but guardians tended not to buy bread as much in areas where bread prices were higher, instead choosing to bake their own. This can be seen in the proportion of unions in each of the twelve poor law inspectors' districts which bought bread and flour respectively, plotted against the prices of those goods (Figure 4.7).²⁶ Unions effectively had the choice not to buy bread, and more unions exercised that choice in districts where bread prices were high (i.e. in Wales and the north of England). However, unions could do little in response to high flour prices.

²⁶ See Figure 2.11 for inspector districts.

Where flour prices were high, so too were bread prices. The districts with fewer bread-buyers were therefore those districts with high flour prices too – and the unions within them had little option but to buy flour. Furthermore, flour prices varied much more within districts than bread prices did. These factors account for the absence of a relationship between flour prices and the proportion of unions which bought flour.

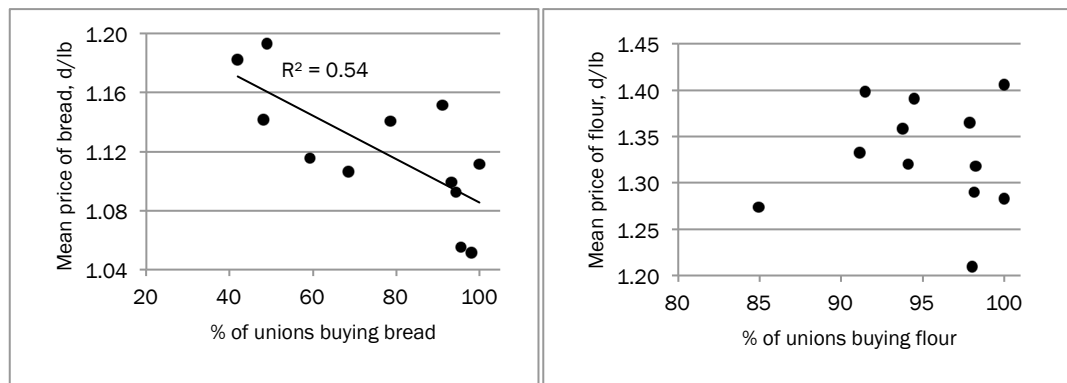


Figure 4.7: Percentage of unions in poor law inspector districts buying bread and flour versus price, 1850.

Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

The role of the production process was critical in generating geographical variation in flour prices, particularly in the period following the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. Flour was mostly made from foreign wheat, especially in the south of England.²⁷ It did not take long after repeal for the UK to become part of an integrated international wheat market. Imported wheat overtook domestic sales for the first time in the mid 1850s and consistently outsold the domestic product from 1861; and by 1900 the UK took in over half the world's wheat imports.²⁸ Historians have yet to assess the extent of the UK's intra-national wheat market integration in detail, but Jacks suggests that the

²⁷ A. Velkar, *Markets and measurements in nineteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 181.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 176.; D.S. Jacks, 'Intra- and international commodity market integration in the Atlantic economy, 1800-1913', *Explorations in Economic History* 42:3 (2005), p. 398. See also J.T. Klovland, 'Commodity market integration 1850-1913: Evidence from Britain and Germany', *European Review of Economic History* 9 (2005), pp. 163-197; M. Olson, 'The United Kingdom and the world market in wheat and other primary products, 1885-1914', *Explorations in Economic History* 11:2 (1974), pp. 325-355; K.G. Persson, 'Mind the gap! Transport costs and price convergence in the mid nineteenth century Atlantic economy', *European Review of Economic History* 8 (2004), pp. 125-147.

emerging picture is one of a 'highly integrated economy' with wheat prices varying little across the UK.

Given the spatial consistency in wheat prices across the country, the variation in flour prices within districts may therefore be attributed to differences in the combinations of types of wheat millers used. Farmers and importing merchants sold wheat to millers through mealmen and factors who conducted business through London's markets. The millers then sold the flour they produced to bakers, though some unions purchased directly from the mealmen.²⁹ Millers each had personal preferences, borne of experience and the relative costs of available wheat, for making up grist from which to create flour. Velkar quotes a number of millers' suggestions for the 'ideal' grist, all using different quantities of various sorts of domestic and imported grain.³⁰ Furthermore, there was no standardised product for a given name of flour. Poor law unions frequently contracted for 'best' or 'seconds household' or 'fine middlings' but these were not exact terms; rather, they were comparative grades for the produce of the individual miller, even if their meanings were broadly understood. Millers tendering for cheaper markets were also prone to adulterating flour, often with alum.³¹ The cost of producing a sack of seconds household flour would therefore vary from miller to miller, and it is thus unsurprising that the purchase price varied from union to union. Furthermore, wheat could travel but flour could not survive transportation for any great length of time, especially given its combustibility. This leads Perren to suggest that around 1850 there was not a national market for flour but instead 'a series of interrelated local ones, each led by the largest firm in its area'.³² Even large urban mills would probably not have found customers more than thirty miles away.

²⁹ Velkar, *Markets and measurements*, p. 180.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-199.

³¹ E.J.T. Collins, 'Food adulteration and food safety in Britain in the 19th and early 20th centuries', *Food Policy* 18:2 (1993), p. 97.

³² R. Perren, 'Structural change and market growth in the food industry: Flour milling in Britain, Europe, and America, 1850-1914', *Economic History Review*, New Series, 43:3 (1990), p. 423.

Despite these factors influencing wheat, flour and bread prices at the local scale, bread prices were clearly related to those of wheat. The closeness with which bread prices followed wheat prices can be seen over time using data recorded by the central authority for three London unions and eight other unions for 1867 to 1887 (Figure 4.8). The prices paid by unions for bread followed national wheat price trends fairly closely with the exception of the early 1880s. It is notable that the three London unions tended to pay less on average than the selected non-London unions. This is in contrast to the 1850 data, which showed London on average paying more overall than other unions. Therefore either the unions selected in the 1888 return were unrepresentative of the rest, or the prices in London and elsewhere had reversed situations in the intervening period.

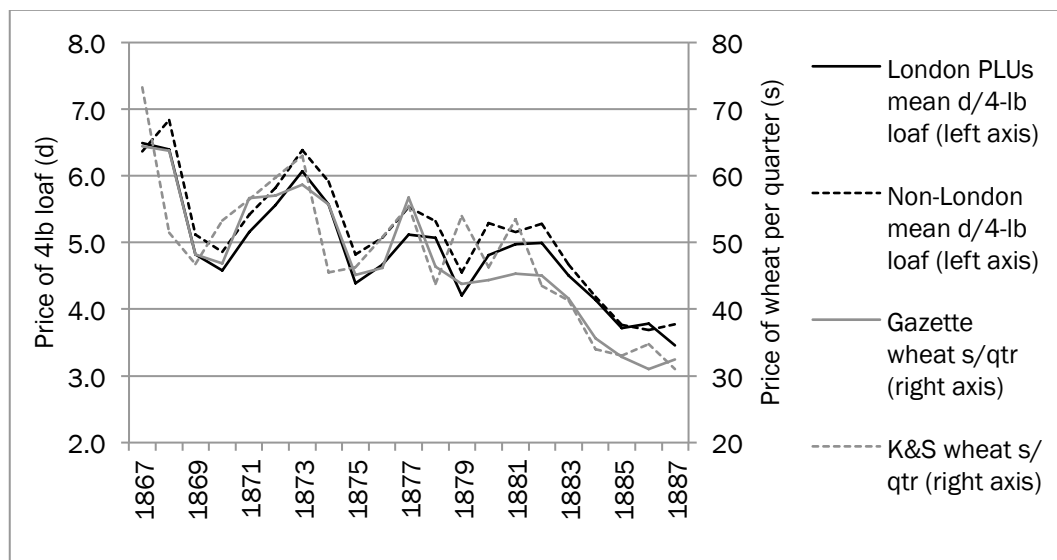


Figure 4.8: Prices of 4-lb loaf paid by selected unions and national wheat prices, 1867-87. London unions: St George in the East, Lambeth, St Pancras. Non-London unions: Croydon, Wellingborough, West Ham, Newton Abbot, Birmingham, Stamford, Manchester, Auckland. 'Gazette' = London Gazette prices. Source: PP 1888 LXXXI 603. Wheat and Bread; Klovland-Solar index ('K&S') in Solar and Klovland, 'New Series'.

When compared to bread procurement by other London institutions and retail prices, the selected poor law unions seem to have been getting the best deal (Figure 4.9). They consistently spent less on bread than the Royal Hospital Greenwich, Bethlem Royal Hospital and retail according to figures calculated by the Board of Trade. This may be a result of the quality of goods supplied. It is likely, for example, that the hospitals insisted on better quality bread than

did the unions. This would fit the description by Andrews *et al.* of Bethlem as having from the 1860s a 'growing reputation as a hospital for the middle classes'.³³ The naval hospital at Greenwich may also have been keen to feed its in-pensioners to a better-than-minimal standard. It is also likely that most retailed bread was better than workhouse bread, in conformity with the principle of less eligibility, and the retailers cited by the Board of Trade were probably more towards the middle of the price range than those selling to the worst-off labourers. One would expect retail prices to be higher than institutional contract prices in any case, although in many years both Bethlem's and Greenwich's bread seem to have cost more than retail.

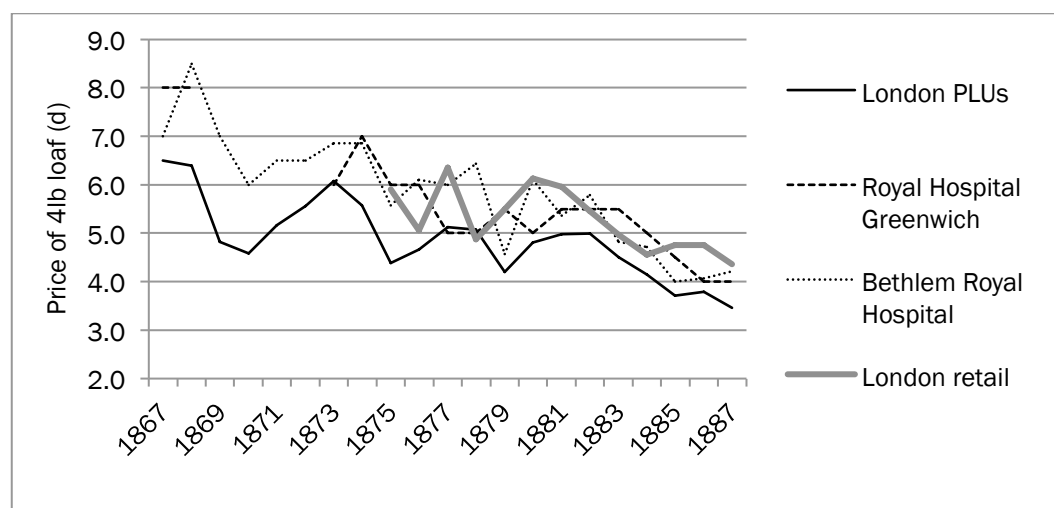


Figure 4.9: Prices of 4-lb loaf paid by selected London unions, institutions and retail, 1867-87. Source: PP 1888 LXXXI 603; PP 1903 LXVIII 1.

The quality of the bread distributed to paupers was accordingly poor. Edward Smith noted:

There is a tendency... in the contractor to reduce the quality of his goods below that of the samples upon which the contract was made... I have frequently detected rye-meal in the bread and oatmeal, and sharps in so-called seconds flour. The kind of flour which is called thirds, and is in use in some workhouses, consists largely of sharps and rye-meal, both of which are in nutritive value and digestibility very inferior to the farina of wheat.³⁴

³³ J. Andrews *et al.*, *The History of Bedlam* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 506.

³⁴ PP 1866 XXXV 321, p. 21.

Guardians might therefore have chosen according to the quality of the food, its price, the reliability of the supplier and other local factors. Where prices were low and reliability good, it is unlikely that quality remained high.

4.3 Beef

Meat prices, as shown above, were a substantial element in workhouse costs. Prices were also strongly regionally dependent and had a significant effect on guardians' spending power. Large quantities of meat were consumed in the workhouse, and it was served in a wide variety of ways. Workhouse meat was usually beef, though it was also sometimes mutton and occasionally pork. A meat dinner, consisting of between four and six ounces of beef plus vegetables, was served to adults two or three times a week in most workhouses, and beef was also used to make meat hash, pudding, stew, soup or broth served at other meals.³⁵ Smith noted that the quality of meat was 'generally good, and in some workhouses... excellent; but in workhouses, as in all public institutions, meat of inferior quality is likely to be substituted in the absence of constant watchfulness on the part of the officers'.³⁶ Meat was mostly delivered once a week, sometimes twice, and in one or two cases three or more times. The meat not used on the day of delivery was 'almost universally' salted and pickled.³⁷ In the 1870s, following the lead of the Admiralty and with the sanction of the Local Government Board, some poor law unions began buying tinned beef produced in Australia.³⁸ This had a longer shelf-life than domestic beef and, although it was often more expensive per pound, there was less wastage as the entire contents of the tin could be eaten.³⁹ Frozen meat was also bought from South America, among other places, but occasionally paupers suffered from meat which arrived in a poor condition: In 1906 the medical officer of

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁸ S. Webb and B. Webb, *English Poor Law Policy* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1910), p. 249.

³⁹ For example in 1887 Ashton-under-Lyne spent 4.125 d/lb on Australian tinned beef and 3.8 d/lb fresh: *Accounts of the Ashton-under-Lyne Union*.

Sculcoates union blamed frozen Argentine meat for thirty-five cases of sickness in the workhouse including six deaths.⁴⁰

Beef was most expensive in the Midlands, with unions in Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire paying especially high prices (Figure 4.10). It was cheapest in Wales and in some parts of the north and south-east of England (Figure 4.11). Almost all unions recorded having bought beef, as it was a staple part of the working class diet (Table 4.4); the price therefore had no discernable impact on the number of unions willing to buy it (Figure 4.12).⁴¹ Those unions who bought no beef tended to buy mutton instead, and this was particularly the case in the Welsh uplands where sheep farming was more common than cattle farming.⁴²

⁴⁰ *Sydney Mail*, 20 June 1906, p. 5.

⁴¹ PP 1867 LX 57, p. 29.

⁴² R.J. Moore-Colyer, 'Farming regions: Wales', in E.J.T. Collins (ed), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: Volume VII: 1850 - 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 445-446.

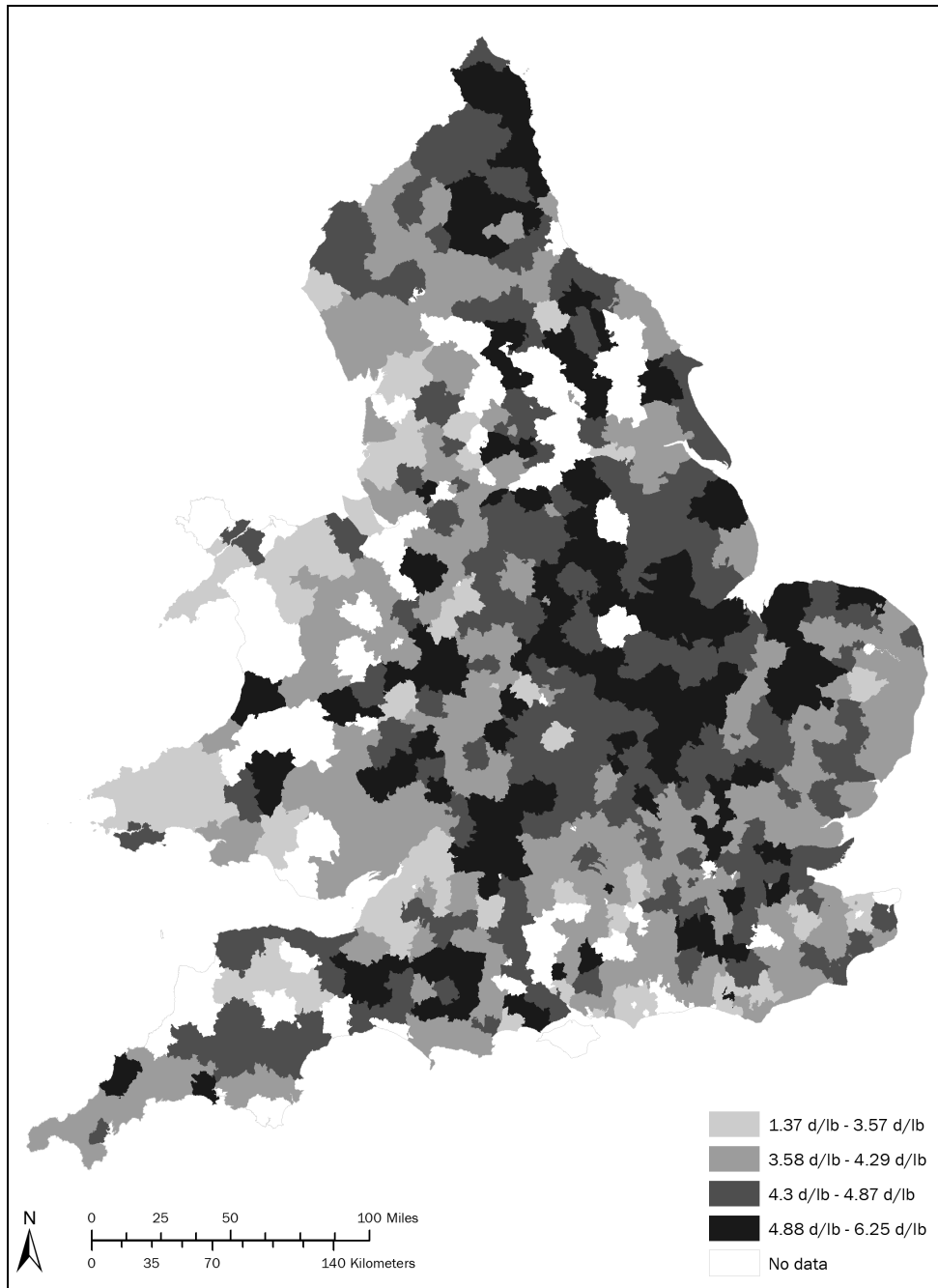


Figure 4.10: Prices paid by poor law unions for beef, 1850.
Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

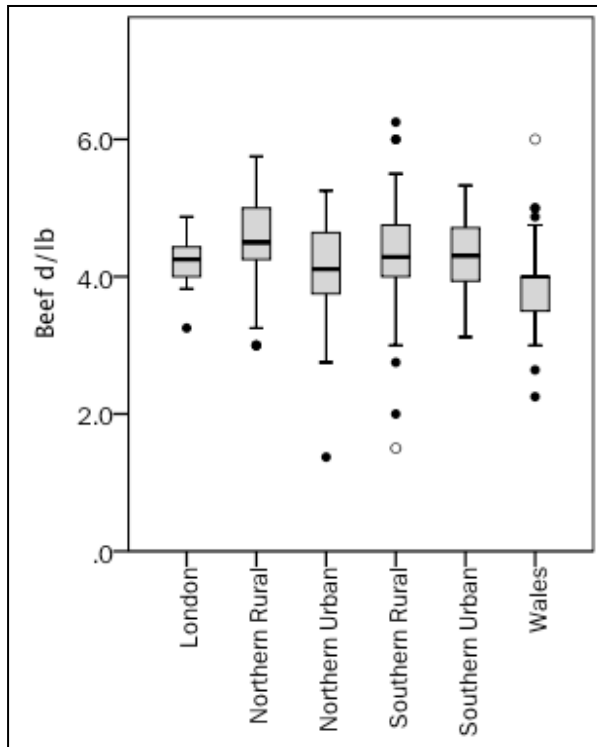


Figure 4.11: Prices paid by poor law unions for beef, 1850, by union location type.
Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

	Mean price, d/lb	% returning prices*
London	4.23	96.3
Northern Rural	4.54	98.9
Northern Urban	4.15	100.0
Southern Rural	4.32	95.4
Southern Urban	4.27	96.0
Wales	3.88	94.6
All	4.34	96.9

Table 4.4: Mean prices paid for beef by unions by location type.

Note: * = percentage of unions excluding those not returning price data for any goods.

Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

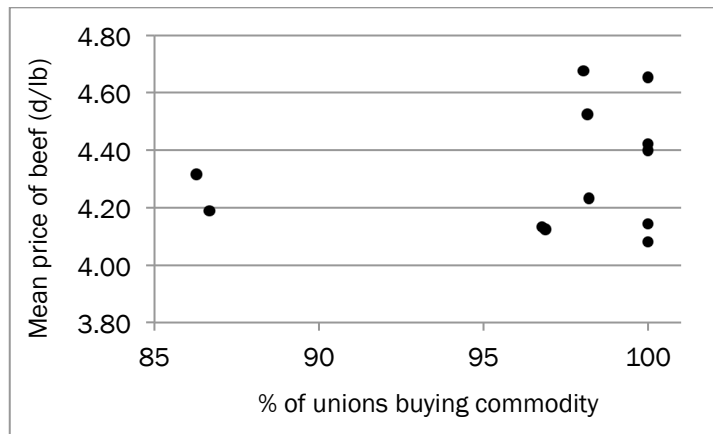


Figure 4.12: Percentage of unions in poor law inspector districts buying beef versus price, 1850.

Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

Nonetheless, areas that produced cattle appear to have had lower prices than those which did not. Wales, where unions spent the least per pound of beef, provided a great deal of the meat consumed in England, with drovers traditionally bringing cattle to pasture in the Midlands for fattening.⁴³ (Scotland, too, supplied England.) The cattle were then sold in local fairs or driven on to London and other parts of the south-east which had the demand.⁴⁴ South of London and parts of East Anglia were also livestock-fattening regions.⁴⁵ Prices in the Midlands may have been relatively high because the data used here were reported for the winter months, when cattle were not at pasture in the region. Droving seems to have remained the chief method of transport for the meat industry until the late nineteenth century, and the transport and sale of dead meat was almost entirely for London, according to Hawke.⁴⁶ An outbreak of cattle plague in the 1860s was thought to have prompted the significant rise of rail transport for beef, but Perren has argued that this began earlier in the nineteenth century.⁴⁷ The national picture for beef prices is therefore a product of the dominance of the London market. Within regions, larger towns and cities such as Leeds, Northampton, Norwich, Lincoln, Derby and Leicester also served as centres of distribution for meat products.⁴⁸ For much of the country, however, the supply of meat was a highly localised industry. Around Manchester, for example, many farms were too small to permit the sort of cattle-fattening that only larger farms could manage.⁴⁹ Accordingly, a great deal of Manchester's beef came from Ireland via Liverpool, or from Newcastle, the biggest market in the north.⁵⁰

⁴³ R. Colyer, 'Welsh cattle drovers in the nineteenth century: II', *National Library of Wales Journal* 18:3 (1974), p. 326.

⁴⁴ *Idem*, 'Welsh cattle drovers in the nineteenth century: I', *National Library of Wales Journal* 17:4 (1972), pp. 396-397.

⁴⁵ R.S. Metcalfe, *Meat, Commerce and the City: The London food market, 1800-1855* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), p. 19.

⁴⁶ G.R. Hawke, *Railways and economic growth in England and Wales 1840-1870* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), pp. 148-151.

⁴⁷ R. Perren, 'The meat and livestock trade in Britain, 1850-70', *Economic History Review New Series*, 28:3 (1975), pp. 385-400

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

⁴⁹ R. Scola, *Feeding the Victorian city: The food supply of Manchester, 1770-1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 43.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

These local geographies of supply for beef, in combination with the importance of the food in workhouse operational costs, meant that fluctuations in beef prices could produce noticeable changes in the costs of indoor relief. In London, as shown above, nearly 20 per cent of workhouse costs went on meat in 1881. The trend in expenditure per indoor pauper followed beef prices fairly closely (Figure 4.13), and between 1849 and 1883, beef prices were a very good predictor of expenditure per indoor pauper ($R^2 = 0.67$; Figure 4.14).⁵¹ Guardians therefore acted within an environment that was as much driven by the market as by policy.

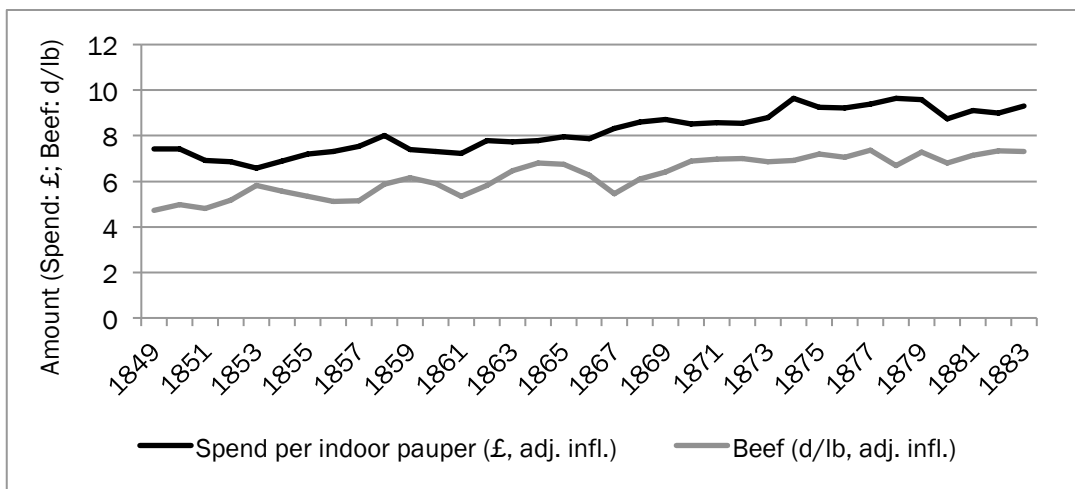


Figure 4.13: Spend per indoor pauper and beef prices at 1850 values, England and Wales, 1849-83.

Source: PLB/LGB annual reports; Solar and Klovland, 'Agricultural prices'.

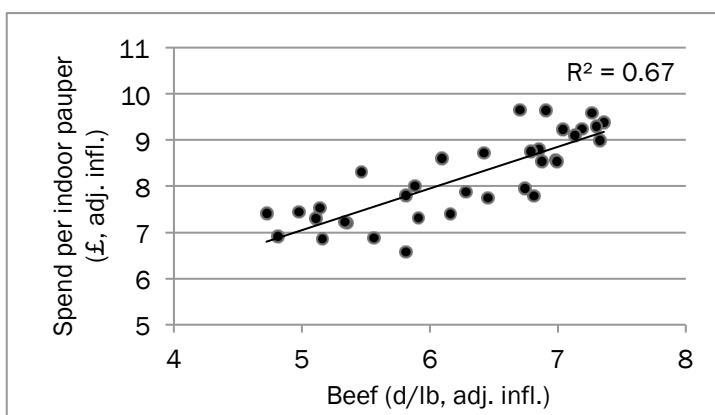


Figure 4.14: Spend per indoor pauper versus beef prices, England and Wales, 1849-1883.

Source: PLB/LGB annual reports; Solar and Klovland, 'Agricultural prices'.

⁵¹ The trends diverge in the 1880s, probably because of the increasing use of Argentinian and tinned Australian meat rather than the domestic product.

4.4 Butter

In the workhouse butter was almost invariably provided with bread (though not vice-versa), with or without cheese. An idea of the quality of the butter can be gained from its price: The mean in 1850 paid by poor law unions was 8.85 d/lb, compared to the 13 d/lb contract price for best-quality Surrey butter supplied to 'one of the first hotels in Brighton and to another in London,' according to agriculturalist and writer James Caird.⁵² Butter was notoriously variable in standard anyway, with poor cattle feed and badly ventilated housing giving it a 'cowhouse flavour'.⁵³ As late as 1901, a government investigation found that 35 per cent of samples of butter (in the general markets) contained colouring.⁵⁴ Admiralty inspector F.W. Rowsell was especially damning of workhouse butter in his 1871 report on London workhouses for the PLB, suggesting that a 'considerable proportion' was horse fat.⁵⁵

The prices paid by poor law unions for butter show some stark regional differences (Figure 4.15 and Figure 4.16). Wales, for example, was a centre for butter production and unions paid relatively low prices there (though many Welsh unions did not return price data). The Midland region was not a butter-intensive region, with its dairies instead tending to supply liquid milk to local towns, and butter was therefore somewhat more expensive.⁵⁶ In the south-west, meanwhile, Caird found dairy farmers 'who despair of producing a marketable article' of butter because of the conditions in which cattle were

⁵² J. Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850-51*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1852), p. 123.

⁵³ G.E. Fussell, *The English dairy farmer 1500-1900* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966), p. 287.

⁵⁴ Collins, 'Food adulteration', p. 98.

⁵⁵ PP 1872 LI Workhouses, Metropolis (supply of provisions). Copy of report of Francis W. Rowsell, Esquire, superintendent of contracts, Admiralty, to the Right Honourable James Stansfeld, M.P., President of the Poor Law Board, dated the 20th day of July 1871, relative to the system of supply of provisions and stores for the workhouses of the Metropolis, p. 5.

⁵⁶ J.R. Walton, 'Farming regions: The Midlands', in E.J.T. Collins (ed), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: Volume VII: 1850 - 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 399.

kept.⁵⁷ This could account for the high prices in that region. Northern unions, especially in predominantly rural areas, spent the most on butter.

High butter prices had the same effect on guardians' willingness to buy the product as had high bread prices. There is a noticeable trend for districts where butter prices were higher to contain fewer unions who bought the commodity (Figure 4.17). It was unions in these high-cost areas that were least likely to buy butter at all (Table 4.5). The higher prices in the north might reflect the fact that butter was somewhat less common in the diets of the poor (and hence in the workhouse dietaries) in that part of the country. However, it may be that northern unions bought less butter because it was more expensive there. In contrast southern urban unions including London, where prices were lower, were more likely to buy the product.

⁵⁷ Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850-51*, p. 123.

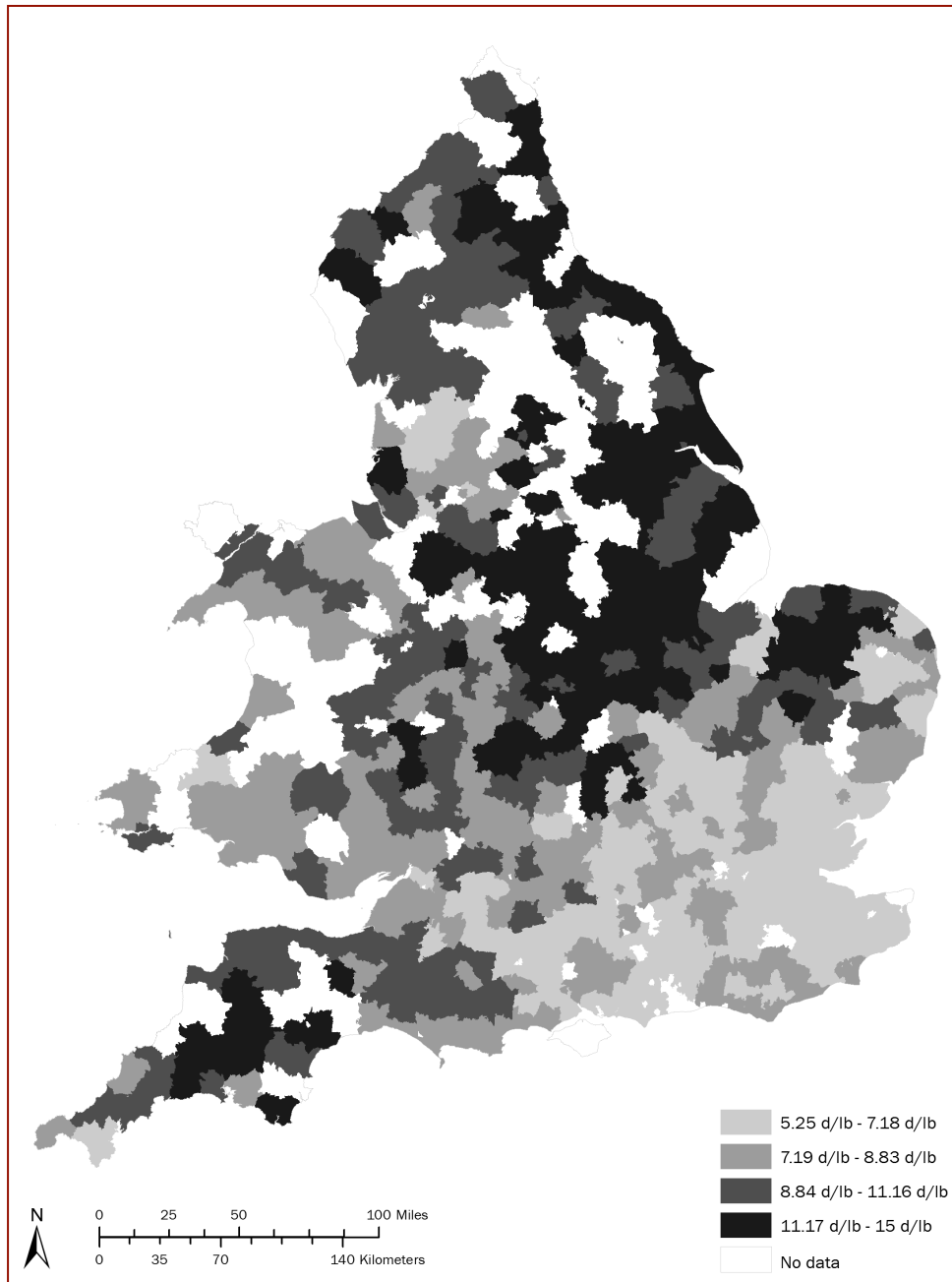


Figure 4.15: Prices paid by poor law unions for butter, 1850.
Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

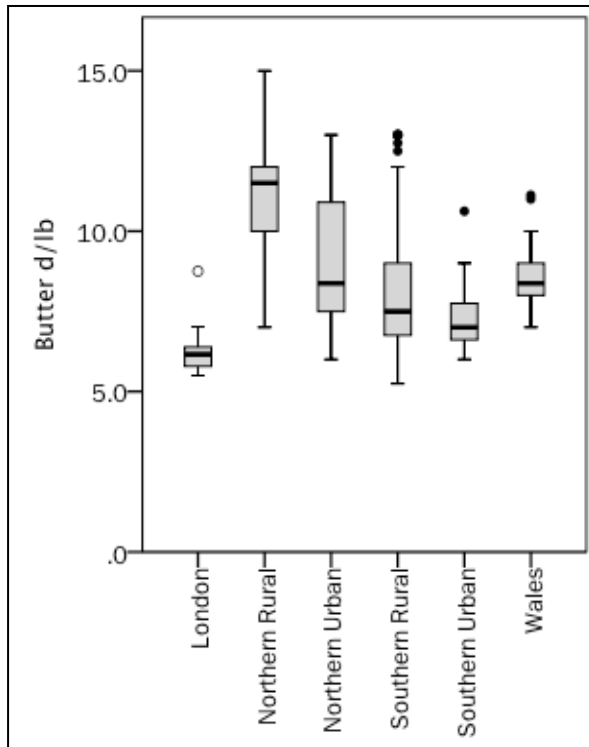


Figure 4.16: Prices paid by poor law unions for butter, 1850, by union location types. Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

	Mean price, d/lb	% returning prices*
London	6.23	96.3
Northern Rural	11.00	83.1
Northern Urban	9.12	83.0
Southern Rural	8.01	96.2
Southern Urban	7.34	100.0
Wales	8.51	91.9
All	8.85	90.9

Table 4.5: Mean prices paid for butter by unions by location type. Note: * = percentage of unions excluding those not returning price data for any goods. Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

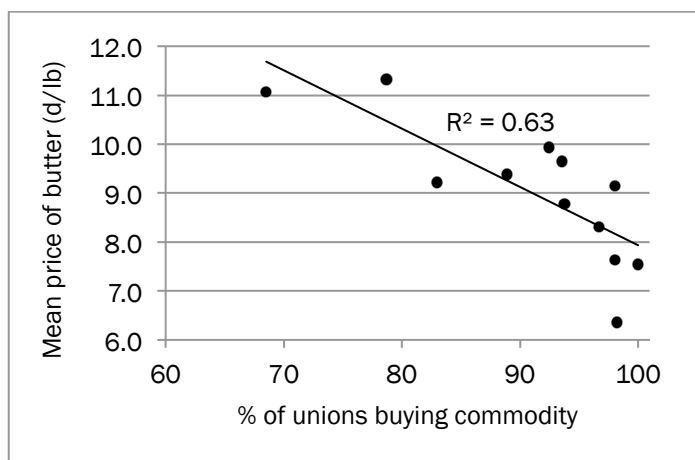


Figure 4.17: Percentage of unions in poor law inspector districts buying butter versus price, 1850. Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

The south-east of England was not an area especially renowned for butter manufacturing, but it is possible that it benefitted from the relatively easy transport of butter from the rest of the country to London, and from cheap imports of the commodity from Europe as well. As Peet argues, urban growth and tariff changes in the UK during the period combined with improvements in transport technology to fuel changes in European agricultural exports of various sorts.⁵⁸ French and Dutch producers of semi-perishables such as butter, cheese or eggs increasingly found the London market accessible via steamer and railway, with Danish butter making gains from the 1870s.⁵⁹ London provisions dealer George Penson, who supplied many of London's unions – 16 in 1850 – sourced much of his butter from Normandy, in particular from the Lepelletier buttery (see Chapter 6).⁶⁰ By the 1840s steamers were carrying butter and cheese over the Channel, having begun taking post and passengers in the 1820s.⁶¹ One food supply expert, commenting in the 1880s, noted that 'French butter can be sent here in twenty-four hours, and very frequently Normandy butter made on a Monday morning is sent into consumption in London on the Wednesday following.'⁶² By 1888 Lepelletier and another company, Bretel Frères, had 'almost monopolised the trade, each firm sending to the English markets from eighty to one hundred tons a week,' he claimed.⁶³ It is very possible that some of this butter found its way to the workhouses of the south-east of England. Even if Penson did not directly supply poor law unions all across the south-east of England and beyond, he was certainly supplying retailers across a wide region who themselves could have supplied unions. Among his company's debtors listed in legal papers in the 1870s were grocers in places such as Diss, Norfolk (Aldrich & Bryant),

⁵⁸ R. Peet, 'Influences of the British market on agriculture and related economic development in Europe before 1860', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 56 (1972), pp. 1-20.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11; I. Henriksen, M. Lampe and P. Sharp, 'The strange birth of liberal Denmark: Danish trade protection and the growth of the dairy industry since the mid-nineteenth century', *Economic History Review* 65:2 (2012), p. 770.

⁶⁰ TNA C16/884/P30. *Penson & Company Ltd v. Penson*, 1873.

⁶¹ J.H. Clapham, *The economic development of France and Germany, 1815-1914* 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), pp. 110-111.

⁶² R. Bannister, 'Our milk, butter and cheese supply', *Journal of the Society of Arts* 36:1865 (17 August 1888), p. 991.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Hythe, Kent (Ashford & Tite), and West Bromwich (William Cooksey).⁶⁴ Penson also did business with the Great Eastern Railway, which served Essex, Cambridgeshire and East Anglia, and the London & South Western Railway, which reached Plymouth.

Butter from France was significantly cheaper than the UK's domestic produce until the 1860s, and it continued to be competitively priced even after the markets converged (Figure 4.18). French butter imports grew from virtually nil in the 1820s to half a million hundredweight in the 1860s.⁶⁵ From 1855 to 1860 the estimated average value of imported French butter was 3 d/lb cheaper than the averages of Wales, Dorset and Ireland butter.⁶⁶ It is also notable that the prices paid by three unions for which data are available were in some cases well below reported wholesale prices (Figure 4.19). It may be that unions such as Lambeth bought butter from sources other than those reported; or that their suppliers adulterated the product, as suspected by Rowsell.

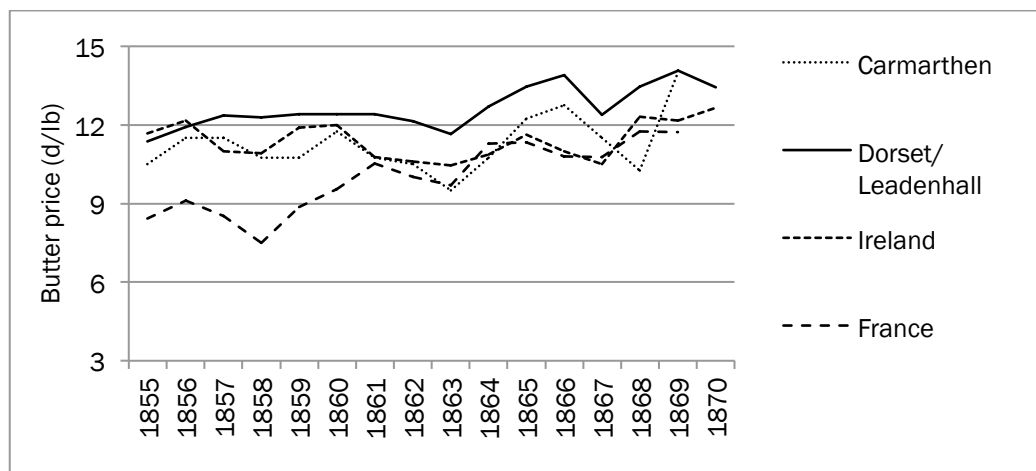


Figure 4.18: Wholesale market prices for butter, 1855-1870. 'Dorset/Leadenhall' is assumed to be Dorset butter sold at Leadenhall Market, London.
Source: Afton and Turner, 'Prices'; PPs for annual statements of trade and navigation; PP 1881 XCII 521.

⁶⁴ TNA C16/884/P30; *London Gazette*, 1 December 1868, p. 6,545; Dudley Archives DSCAM/4/1/18, articles of co-partnership, William Cooksey & Son, 8 January 1838.

⁶⁵ Fussell, *English dairy farmer*, p. 286.

⁶⁶ Prices derived from B. Afton and M. Turner, 'Prices', in E.J.T. Collins (ed), *The agrarian history of England and Wales, vol. VII, 1850-1914, part II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 2038-2105; PP 1881 XCII 521: Trade (United Kingdom and France). Return showing the trade between the United Kingdom and France, in each of the years from 1861 to 1879, inclusive, according to the respective official statistics of the two countries, with an explanatory memorandum thereon.

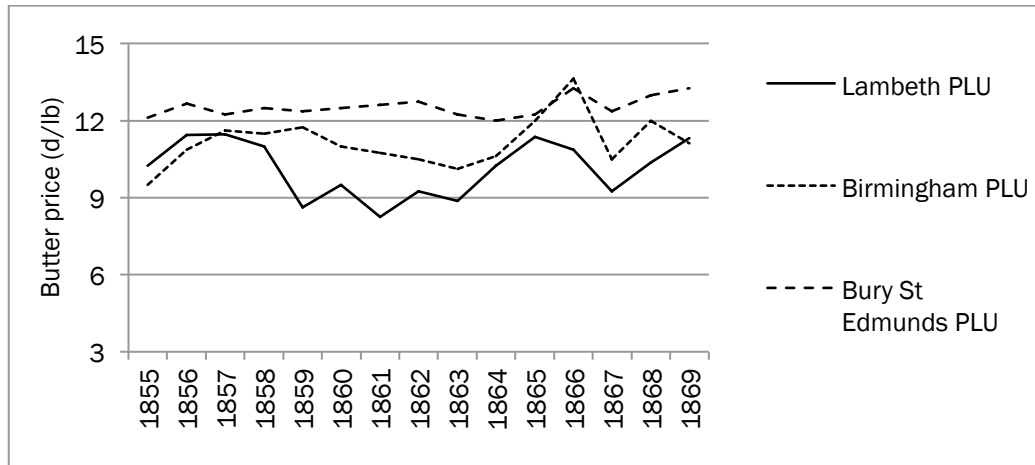


Figure 4.19: Prices paid for butter by three unions, 1855-1869.
Source: PLB annual reports and Returns 'C'.

4.5 Cheese

Cheese was a common accompaniment to workhouse bread, usually provided for one or two days' dinner or supper each week.⁶⁷ In their tender advertisements guardians frequently requested Gouda or Edam, both plain and cheap cheeses imported from Holland.⁶⁸ These names might also have represented generic types produced domestically. Mostly, though, unions did not specify named cheeses, instead relying on potential contractors simply to provide the cheapest possible. In many cases this was imported cheese, but unions in some dairying regions could benefit from locally produced goods.

There were fairly strong regional patterns to prices paid by unions for cheese (Figure 4.20). Unions in the Midlands, and especially the East Midlands, appear to have paid the most on the whole. However, there were many more individual unions across the country that were also at the higher end of the scale, especially in rural areas (Figure 4.21). The south-east, especially London, enjoyed relatively low prices, but the unions paying the least were in Somerset, Dorset and much of Wales.

⁶⁷ PP 1866 XXXV 321, pp. 7-9.

⁶⁸ For example Guiltcross union, *Bury and Norwich Post, and East Anglian*, 26 February 1840, p. 1; Mutford & Lothingland incorporation, *Ipswich Journal*, 22 December 1855, p. 2; Ipswich union, *Ipswich Journal*, 25 June 1870, p. 7.

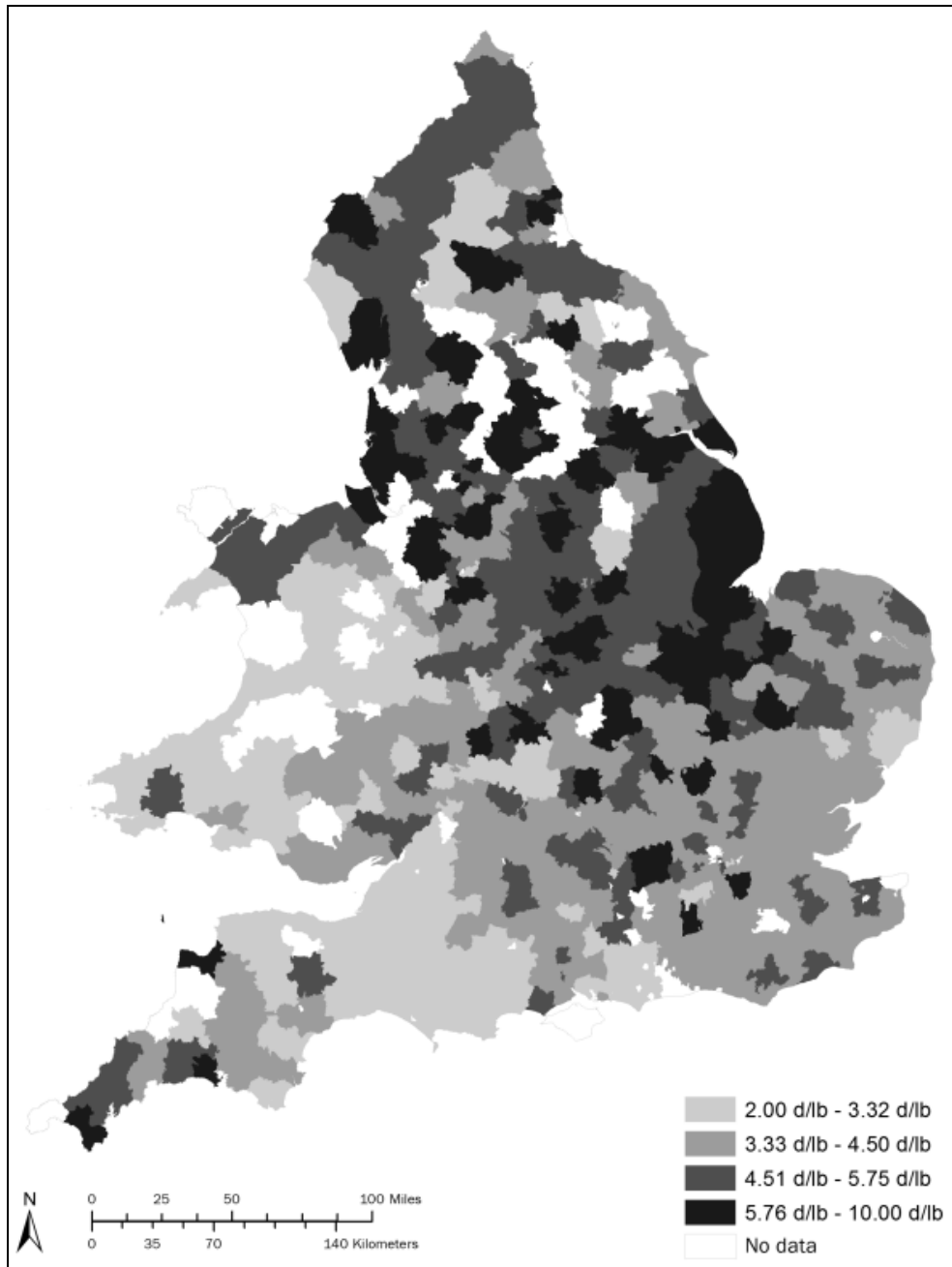


Figure 4.20: Prices paid by poor law unions for cheese, 1850.
 Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

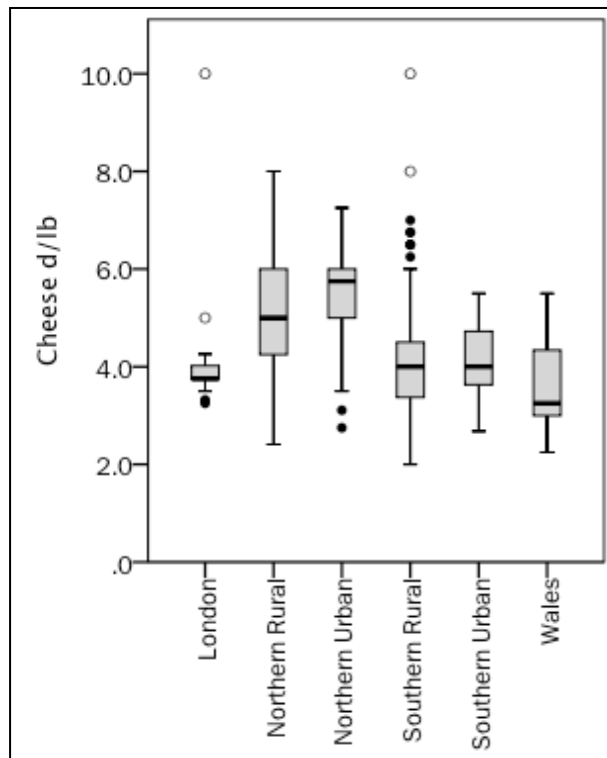


Figure 4.21: Prices paid by poor law unions for cheese, 1850, by union location type. Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

Cheese was not standard in every workhouse, though, with only 86 per cent of unions (i.e. of those who returned prices for any goods in the 1852 parliamentary return) giving a price (Table 4.6). Northern unions, where cheese was most expensive, were least likely to buy the product. As with butter, the higher prices might reflect the fact that cheese was not a prominent part of the diet of the poor; or unions might have declined to buy cheese because it was relatively expensive. Neither butter nor cheese were essential parts of the pauper dietary, unlike bread or beef, and could therefore be dispensed with if guardians decided they were either too dear or too unusual for the locality. Higher prices are associated with districts in which fewer unions bought cheese, and there were also some districts – such as in the north of England – where prices were not especially high compared to the rest of the country but where cheese was not regarded as a staple (Figure 4.21). This was the case, for instance, in Yorkshire, where according to Edward Smith cheese was not usually consumed in labourers’ families.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ PP 1867 LX 57, p. 29.

	Mean price, d/lb	% returning prices*
London	4.09	92.6
Northern Rural	5.00	70.6
Northern Urban	5.44	77.4
Southern Rural	4.07	95.8
Southern Urban	4.13	92.0
Wales	3.54	86.5
All	4.39	85.5

Table 4.6: Mean prices paid for cheese by unions by location type, 1850.

Note: * = percentage of unions excluding those not returning price data for any goods.

Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

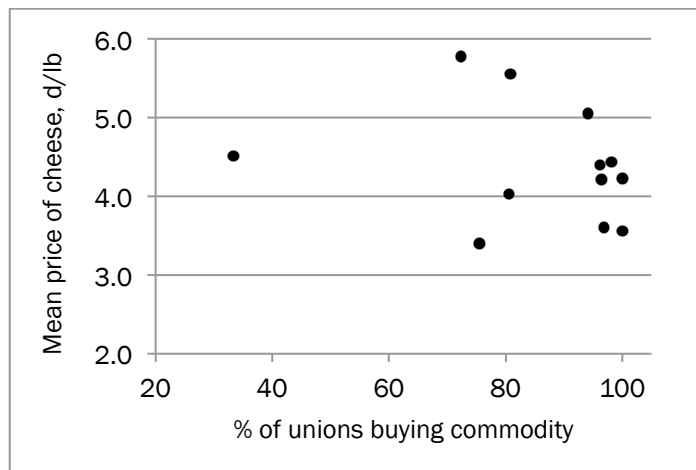


Figure 4.22: Percentage of unions in poor law inspector districts buying cheese versus price, 1850.

Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

Cheese was produced in small-scale enterprises, but it was fairly easily transported. Factory production of cheese was a relatively new industrial niche in the mid-century, with much of the cheese produced in England and Wales being artisanal and locally marketed.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century London’s cheesemongers employed factors in major cheese-producing districts such as the Midlands, Cumberland, Westmorland, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and East Anglia and in markets including Manchester and Stockport.⁷¹ Cheese travelled from these to London by inland and coastal waters or by road. But for poor law unions and other consumers outside these districts or London, imports or local produce would

⁷⁰ R. Blundel and A. Tregear, ‘From Artisans to “Factories”: The Interpenetration of Craft and Industry in English Cheese-Making, 1650-1950’, *Enterprise and Society* 7:4 (2006), pp. 705-739.

⁷¹ Fussell, *English dairy farmer*, p. 274; A. Henstock, ‘Cheese manufacture and marketing in Derbyshire and North Staffordshire, 1670-1870’, *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal* 89 (1969), p. 39.

most likely have been cheaper. The first phase of large-scale cheese-factory creation was in the 1870s but even by 1890, Holderness estimates, factory output was no more than 1,300 cwt out of over half a million cwt made in England in total.⁷² There was no national market in English cheese, only in foreign imports: the *Economist's* 'Commercial Times' column did not consistently give prices for domestically produced cheese until 1895, when it added 'Derby Gouda' to its list of Dutch, Canadian, American and New Zealand prices.⁷³ Suppliers to poor law unions had limited opportunities to buy in bulk, therefore, and would have been reliant either on a number of local producers or on goods transported some distance.

4.6 Milk

Most of the milk consumed in workhouses appears to have been given to infants and the elderly and infirm, though gruel and other dishes for the able-bodied were also made from milk.⁷⁴ Price data are not readily available for milk but there is nonetheless a certain amount of useful evidence relating to its supply – mostly for London, but in some cases for elsewhere. The evidence suggests that the highly competitive market for milk in London led to paupers being supplied with a poor and adulterated product. Cows were kept for local milk supply in some urban centres, such as London and Liverpool, much more than in others such as Manchester (Figure 4.23).⁷⁵ Despite London's significant dairy cow population, at least until the rinderpest outbreak in 1865, it relied heavily on milk brought in from outside.⁷⁶ Those places without a tradition of 'town milk' relied entirely on the surrounding countryside. Manchester was supplied by milk transported by canal.⁷⁷ Bedford, a town of 15,000 people in

⁷² B.A. Holderness, 'Farming systems: Dairying', in E.J.T. Collins (ed), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: Volume VII: 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 474.

⁷³ *Economist*, 31 August 1895, p. 1,161.

⁷⁴ PP 1866 XXXV 321, p. 8 ff.

⁷⁵ Scola, *Feeding the Victorian city*, pp. 72-73.

⁷⁶ E.H. Whetham, 'The London milk trade, 1860-1900', *Economic History Review*, New Series, 17:2 (1964), pp. 369-380; D. Taylor, 'London's milk supply, 1850-1900: A reinterpretation', *Agricultural History* 45:1 (1971), pp. 33-38; Fussell, *The English dairy farmer 1500-1900*, p. 307.

⁷⁷ Scola, *Feeding the Victorian city*, p. 74.

1865, was home to a hundred cows but the produce of around fifty more – some 123 gallons – was brought in daily by rail.⁷⁸

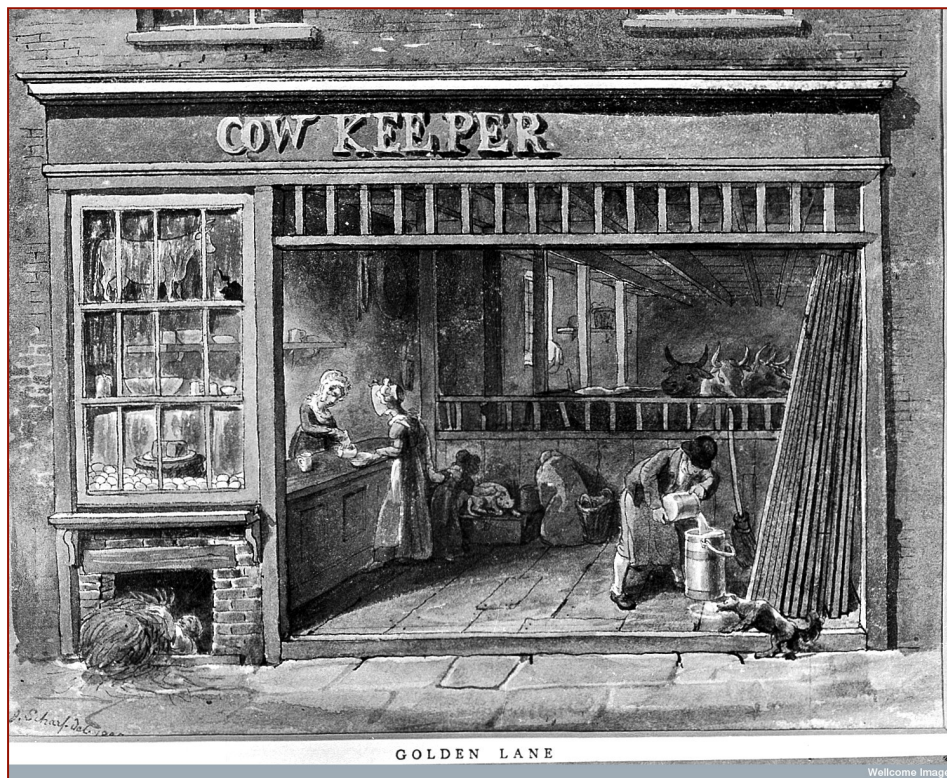


Figure 4.23: G.J. Scharf, 'Cow Keeper's Shop', London (1825). Wellcome Library, London.

The further the distance travelled, particularly by rail, the worse the condition of the product on arrival, and this fact shaped the retail market for milk. However, for poor law unions it was usually the price that was paramount. This led not only to spoiled milk being given to paupers but also adulterated milk. A former chairman of Bermondsey union told a Parliamentary select committee on food adulteration in 1856 that the guardians had accepted a tender from a milk supplier for 5½d per gallon, when the next lowest was 1s per gallon: 'All the milk was adulterated; it turned sour, and was altogether bad milk... It was found that there was a great sediment.'⁷⁹ It had taken the master a month to report the problem, whereupon the supply was discontinued. Adulteration – either by watering down or through the addition of foreign minerals – was something of an open secret in the industry.

⁷⁸ J.C. Morton, 'On London milk', *Journal of the Society of Arts* 14:682 (15 December 1865), p. 74.

⁷⁹ PP 1856 VIII 1: Report from the Select Committee on Adulteration of Food, &c., together with the proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence, appendix and index.

Agricultural writer John Chalmers Morton reported the account of a correspondent 'recently in the trade' regarding workhouse supply:

[I]f you go below the labouring class to paupers: they are treated worst of all. We have tendered for five or six workhouses at a price which would have given us a profit of less than one farthing a quart, and yet we have not been accepted. Tenders of 1s 4d a barn gallon (8 quarts) have been accepted, or 4d a barn gallon less than our milk now costs us at our shop; and we are only paying the market value of pure milk in large quantities. We have had men in attendance at the opening of the tenders, and it was evident that it was all settled beforehand who was to have the contracts, as the outsiders knew well before it was announced. The fact that a dealer offered to buy a large quantity of our 'skim,' avowedly to supply a workhouse contract for 'new,' shows what the paupers really get.⁸⁰

Guardians were, if not complicit, at least fostering the conditions for watered-down milk by accepting the lowest tenders regardless of quality, some alleged. The milk sub-committee of the food committee of the Society of Arts met on 29 March 1867 and heard from W. Hope, a partner in the Dairy Reform Company whose stated aim was to sell unadulterated milk in London. He told the meeting about the attempted bribery and intimidation his competitors had employed to try to close the business:

One of the principal – he believed the largest milk dealer at the West-end, came to the company in a very friendly spirit, and, with many professions of desire to put a stop to the “tricks of the trade,” made various offers to buy milk... Among other offers was one to take 12 to 15 barn gallons of skim milk per day, stating that he had a contract to supply a workhouse with that quantity of new milk, and that the price at which the contracts for these establishments were let precluded the possibility of new milk being supplied unless it was well watered. The company had been applied to for tenders for various places, but on ascertaining the prices usually paid they refused, as it was impossible to supply pure milk on such terms. The prices varied from 1s 4d to 1s 6d and 1s 8d per “barn” gallon delivered... [A dealer in the East End] stated

⁸⁰ J.C. Morton, 'Town milk', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, 2nd ser., 4 (1868), p. 72.

he had a contract for a workhouse at 1s 6d per gallon, or 2d less than he paid for it.⁸¹

The adulteration of milk was a significant problem across the country until government efforts to improve its quality began to take effect in the 1870s and '80s. Even then, London's milk was worse for longer compared to the rest of England and Wales: The average percentage of water added to milk fell to the low teens by 1885 outside London, but it did not achieve this level in London until after 1900.⁸² Milk destined for workhouses probably did not improve faster than the milk supplied to anyone else.

Even milk which reached the workhouse uncontaminated might not always have been given to the paupers in its optimal state, either because it was left too long or because of interference from union staff. An anonymous correspondent told readers of the *British Medical Journal* in 1895:

For many years, nothing but skimmed milk has been supplied to the inmates of our workhouse infirmary. The cream is taken off and used by the officers of the house, either as cream or after being converted into butter. As a member of the Board, I am anxious to have this state of things altered, but I am at once told that skimmed milk furnishes all the nutriment required. Further, I may say that the milk is sometimes twenty-four hours old when used in the infirmary and is at times sour, but the inmates must either consume it or have nothing.⁸³

Workhouse milk seems, therefore, to have been generally worse than the already poor product usually retailed, especially in London. This was a direct result of the drive for low prices by guardians and the highly competitive market.

⁸¹ 'Food committee', *Journal of the Society of Arts* 15:753 (26 April 1867), pp. 355-358.

⁸² P.J. Atkins, 'Sophistication detected: or, the adulteration of the milk supply, 1850-1914', *Social History* 16:3 (1991), p. 326.

⁸³ 'Skimmed milk in workhouse infirmaries', *British Medical Journal* 2:1805 (3 August 1895), pp. 323.

4.7 Conclusion

The evidence discussed in this chapter shows that food prices affected the purchasing behaviour of poor law guardians, though the relationship between price and purchasing was complex. Expensive commodities did not simply increase relief expenditure: Rather, high prices meant that to some extent guardians would be less disposed to buy the foodstuff in question on the grounds of cost. However, it could also indicate that the foodstuff was not as common in the region as it was elsewhere. The less common the food, the less likely guardians would be to provide it to paupers. Variations in prices arose from local differences in the costs of goods to suppliers which were passed on to poor law union customers, but must also be understood as products of the social relationships between supplier and customer within the wider economy.

The data for 1850 shed new light on the operation of the markets in the goods bought by poor law unions. Bread and flour prices were closely linked, as one might expect, but bread prices were much more uniform across England and Wales than flour prices. This appears to have been a result of variations in local production methods and marketing arrangements. Butter prices in England and Wales were seemingly dependent on import prices, in particular French and Irish, and on the domestic supply chain, especially in the south-east. Meanwhile there was a national market in foreign cheese imports, but not in the domestic product until perhaps the beginning of the twentieth century. The geography of beef prices was heavily influenced by the London market, which drew in large quantities of live cattle and dead meat from other parts of the country, as well as by other regional centres. Although we do not have good price data for milk purchases by poor law unions, it appears that the ease of adulteration forced both prices and quality down, especially in London and perhaps other urban settings. This is an important qualification to Perren's findings that 'prices in London and the conurbations seem to have been rather higher than in other areas which may have been a reflection of

higher income levels'.⁸⁴ London was indeed a distinct market in many respects, but it was a low-price zone for butter, cheese and, perhaps, milk.

Milk was especially likely to spoil quickly, but paupers were given the worst of any kind of product as a matter of routine. The nature of institutional contracting also meant that boards of guardians could obtain false economies by buying cheap but unsuitable goods. Butchers, for instance, made up the required weight of meat by supplementing beef with bones. As Edward Smith pointed out, the butcher 'naturally prefers to send those parts which contain the most bone, and even, as I have seen, to add additional bones'.⁸⁵ Suppliers may, in fact, have found poor law unions to be ready customers for products which might otherwise not have easily sold.

Poor law unions were thus integral parts of their local economies through their relationships with suppliers, and the nature of supply for particular goods had an effect on the ways poor relief was delivered. Local prices had a greater impact on relief expenditure for some goods and some unions than for others, with beef prices contributing most to workhouse costs, and bread prices were also important, especially for outdoor relief costs. The effects of price variations can also be seen in the decisions guardians made, such as choosing whether to buy bread or flour, or whether to buy cheese at all. In turn, unions bought in significant quantities, thereby distributing the rates to local businesses on a large scale. There were few institutions buying in such magnitude, especially outside towns, and suppliers would have regarded poor law contracts as important sources of income. The following chapter therefore examines the geographies of contractual relationships in a sample of rural and urban poor law unions.

⁸⁴ R. Perren, 'The marketing of agricultural products: farm gate to retail store', in *The agrarian history of England and Wales, vol. VII, 1850-1914, part II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 955.

⁸⁵ PP 1867 LX 57, p. 22.

5 Local geographies of supply in rural and urban contexts

5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have demonstrated that the geography of the supply of goods to poor law unions was of fundamental importance to boards of guardians, to paupers and to the suppliers themselves. For guardians, knowledge of potential contracting partners was essential for achieving a suitable balance of cost and quality for ratepayers and paupers, and for maintaining good terms with those ratepayers who sold to unions. For suppliers, institutions such as workhouses, schools, infirmaries and asylums could be vital sources of income, and it was in suppliers' interests to form connections with the officials responsible for allocating contracts. Poor law supply was therefore constituted socially, in the relationships between guardians and local business.

These relationships potentially diminished with distance, however.¹ Guardians were more likely to know businesses well if they were in their own unions – and especially in the same town – compared to those further away. Small traders were most likely to supply only the unions in which they were located, first because the ability to send goods cheaply over any greater distance was a function of scale, and second because the opportunities to form essential selling relationships were more present locally. Larger enterprises were therefore better able to supply distant unions.

This chapter shows how, over the second half of the nineteenth century, these larger businesses took on a greater role in poor law supply. By examining the locations of suppliers in 1850 and 1880 for a selection of unions in different parts of England and Wales, we can see that business was increasingly given to suppliers further from the workhouse – including some based in London – and that more partnerships and limited companies gained custom from unions

¹ As per the 'first law of geography' articulated by Waldo Tobler: 'Everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things'. W.R. Tobler, 'A computer movie simulating urban growth in the Detroit region', *Economic Geography* 46:2 (1970), p. 236.

over time. In c.1880 unions bought more from larger businesses which supplied a wider variety of goods, compared to c.1850 when smaller local specialised traders had more poor law business. Nonetheless there were still, in 1880, opportunities for the smaller traders to supply unions, and the poor law remained a key source of revenue for these small businesses. It is also apparent that poor law unions could represent very stable and long-lasting sources of business for local suppliers who were capable of meeting their requirements. (The high density of suppliers and customers in London made the capital something of a special case, and its features are examined in more detail in Chapter 6.) This broad trend is clear, but in individual locations the details varied by unions' demographics, sizes, infrastructure and industrial profiles. Poor law supply can be seen, therefore, as an example of the continuing embeddedness of social relations in local economies to varying degrees, in different places and at different scales, *pace* Polanyi's suggestion that the market became disembedded from social relationships following the reforms of 1834.²

The evidence considered in this chapter also contributes to the history of the distribution of goods which, over the last fifty or so years, has largely focused on retailing. This is especially true in the case of food, tending to take as a starting point Jefferys's argument that food distribution in Britain did not develop from its pre-industrial form until late in the nineteenth century.³ More recent work has argued that changes occurred much earlier than this, using the evidence of growing shop numbers and of structural changes in consumer demand.⁴ The shops which have garnered most attention from historians have been grocers and, in parallel, the consumers that have been

² K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of our Time*, 2nd pbk ed. (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 2001), pp. 60, 87.

³ J.B. Jefferys, *Retail trading in Britain 1850-1950: A study of trends in retailing with special reference to the development of Co-operative, multiple shop and department store methods of trading* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954).

⁴ J. Blackman, 'The development of the retail grocery trade in the nineteenth century', *Business History* 9:2 (1967), pp. 110-117; D.G. Alexander, *Retailing in England during the Industrial Revolution* (London: Athlone Press, 1970); G. Shaw, 'Changes in consumer demand and food supply in nineteenth-century British cities', *Journal of Historical Geography* 11:3 (1985), pp. 280-296. See N. Alexander and G. Akehurst, 'Introduction: The Emergence of Modern Retailing, 1750-1950', *Business History* 40:4 (1998), pp. 1-15 for a survey of the historiography.

discussed have mostly been individuals and families. Those larger businesses which have been considered by historians have been either industrial producers or multiple retailers and department stores.⁵

The wholesalers who themselves supplied the retailers have been somewhat neglected, despite a plea by Shaw for the whole distribution chain to be scrutinised.⁶ This is an important gap in the historiography because, as this chapter argues, the distinction between wholesalers and retailers was an unclear one, not least when it came to institutional provision. In the 1840s and 1850s, some small local retailers could get a significant amount of trade from institutional provision, as exemplified by the workhouse. In the following decades, these institutions continued to give their custom to such retailers, but increasingly the larger traders won contracts for supply. These traders could be both large-scale retailers and wholesalers to smaller shops, and they supplied a wider range of goods than the smaller retailers could. They were also, in some cases, further from their customers than their earlier counterparts. Nonetheless, smaller traders were not entirely eclipsed.

Retailers have been understood in relation to the poor law as being either ratepayers, guardians or opponents of the new system.⁷ They are thus seen as concerned primarily with keeping rates down, as electing from among their ranks, and as promoters and beneficiaries of ticket systems of outdoor relief, stemming from their drive for 'economy and self-interest'.⁸ But this chapter shows that many were beneficiaries of the poor law system because unions were among their customers; and small traders in particular might have been dependent on union custom where there were few other buyers on the same scale.

⁵ For example Jefferys, *Retail trading in Britain*; G. Shaw *et al.*, 'Structural and spatial trends in British retailing: the importance of firm-level studies', *Business History* 40:4 (1998), pp. 79-93.

⁶ Shaw, 'Food supply', p. 295.

⁷ M. Winstanley, *The shopkeeper's world, 1830-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp. 26, 79, 103, 163.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

5.2 Case study unions

Given the importance of the social economy in patterns of poor law supply, an understanding of the spatial relations between unions and suppliers is vital. The records of the guardians of six case-study unions were used alongside street directories to determine as far as possible, therefore, where their suppliers were located. The six unions are Southwell (Nottinghamshire), Llanfyllin (Montgomeryshire), St Saviour Southwark (Surrey), Chester le Street, Houghton le Spring and Durham (County Durham).⁹ These represent a range of union types with varying workhouse use in different parts of England and Wales. To assess the changes in poor law supply in the second half of the nineteenth century, records for two periods were used: c.1849-51 (with the exception of Llanfyllin, for which c.1843-44 was used owing to gaps in the records) and c.1879-81. This is supplemented by full series for Llanfyllin and St Saviour for the whole period. All the suppliers noted in the unions' records for these periods formed a preliminary database which was then compared with address data in street directories and newspapers. The analysis at the core of this chapter uses only those suppliers whose locations could be determined with some degree of accuracy. Owing to the nature of the records

⁹ Sources for suppliers are guardians' minutes and general ledgers: Durham County Record Office: U/CS 3; U/CS 70; U/DU 2; U/DU 8; U/DU 9; U/HO 2; U/HO 9. Powys County Archives Office: M/G/B/8/1, M/G/B/8/13; Nottinghamshire Archives: PU S 1/1/8; PU S 1/1/9. London Metropolitan Archives: SOBG/039/009 to 035. Southwell data also from *Nottinghamshire Guardian*. Addresses and other data from *Pigot & Co's Royal National and Commercial Directory and Topography of the counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cornwall, Devonshire, Dorsetshire, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Oxfordshire, Somersetshire, Wiltshire, and North and South Wales* (London & Manchester: Isaac Slater, 1844); *The Small Edition of the Post Office London Directory, 1852. Comprising, amongst other information, official directory; commercial directory; court directory; parliamentary directory; postal directory; banking directory; &c.* (London: Kelly & Co, 1852); *The Durham Directory and Almanack* (Durham: George Walker, 1854); *Post Office Directory of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire with maps engraved expressly for the work* (London: Kelly & Co, 1855); *Royal National Commercial Directory of the Northern Counties, vol. I, comprises the counties of Durham, Northumberland and Yorkshire* (Manchester: Isaac Slater, 1855); *Post Office Directory of Essex, Herts, Kent, Middlesex, Surrey and Sussex.* (London: Kelly & Co, 1855); *Post Office Directory of Nottinghamshire* (London: Kelly & Co, 1876); *Post Office Directory of Durham and Northumberland* (London: Kelly & Co., 1879); *Royal National Commercial Directory of North and South Wales* (Manchester: Isaac Slater, 1880); *The Durham Directory and Almanack* (Durham: George Walker, 1880); *Kelly's Directory of Nottinghamshire* (London: Kelly & Co, 1881); *The Post Office London Directory for 1882, Comprising, amongst other information, official, street, commercial, trades, law, court, Parliamentary, postal, city & clerical conveyance & banking directories* (London: Kelly & Co, 1882); *History, gazetteer and directory of Nottinghamshire* (Sheffield: William White, 1885-6).

it is not possible to guarantee that the correct individual has been identified in every case, but all those presenting significant doubt have been excluded. Traders at the smaller end of the scale are slightly less likely to be included in the analysis than larger, as they were less easy to trace. However, the locations of smaller traders frequently appear in guardians' minutes alongside those of larger traders.

Some indication of the shifting environment in which these unions and their suppliers operated can be gained from the changes in their populations, pauper numbers and spend per pauper (Table 5.1; Figure 5.1). Southwell was a predominantly rural union named for the town of Southwell, which was connected by rail to nearby Nottingham and Mansfield. It was the only union of the six case studies whose population declined over the period, and its pauperism rate was in 1880 fairly close to what it had been in 1850. The other unions showed a tendency for decreased pauperism over the period.

Southwell also saw its cost per indoor pauper rise more than the other case studies. Llanfyllin was a large and mountainous union with a fairly small population, with Llanfyllin town connected by road and a branch rail line to the market towns of Oswestry and Shrewsbury. These two unions were selected for their potential to shed light on the distribution of goods to towns at some distance from 'hub' cities. St Saviour Southwark, in contrast, was a densely populated union in the centre of London. Three parishes were added to its original two in 1869, accounting for its high rate of population change. The three unions in County Durham, meanwhile, were neighbours in a region experiencing urbanisation and industrial growth focused on coal mining. The populations of all three grew rapidly between 1851 and 1881, with Chester le Street more than doubling to over 43,000 over the period. Durham was already a sizeable city and regional administrative centre. These three County Durham case studies can provide insight as to the range of approaches to procurement adopted by neighbouring unions in fairly similar circumstances. Houghton le Spring is notable for having increased its use of the workhouse drastically, from fewer than twenty indoor paupers in 1850 to well over 100 by the 1880s. Its total expenditure on the poor rose with this increase in

indoor poor, but its spend per indoor pauper remained stable (adjusted for inflation). There was a wide variation in rates of spend per indoor pauper between the unions in both periods – far more than the variation in spend per outdoor pauper. In 1850 spend per indoor and per outdoor pauper by all the case study unions was below the national mean. In 1880 only Southwell was above the national mean for spend per indoor pauper, and only Chester le Street and Durham were below the national mean for spend per outdoor pauper.

	Population (1851 & 1881)	Spend on poor (£)*	Indoor paupers, 1 Jan	Outdoor paupers, 1 Jan	Total paupers, 1 Jan	Indoor as % of total	Paupers as % of population	Spend per indoor pauper (£)*	Spend per outdoor pauper (£)*
Chester le Street	20,907	3,978	48	979	1,027	4.7	4.9	6.33	3.18
Durham	35,737	5,557	119	992	1,111	10.7	3.1	5.54	3.77
Houghton le Spring	19,564	3,159	17	759	776	2.2	4.0	6.71	3.37
Llanfyllin	19,472	7,420	133	1,543	1,676	7.9	8.6	5.48	3.25
Southwell	25,596	5,614	125	774	899	13.9	3.5	5.61	3.73
St Saviour Southwark	35,371	10,575	10,575	450	1,053	1,503	29.9	4.2%	9.09
England & Wales	17,922,368	5,395,022	110,282	766,652	876,934	12.6	4.9	8.29	4.12
Chester le Street	43,329	5,038	102	712	814	12.5	1.9	7.76	3.74
Durham	64,564	10,161	210	1,304	1,514	13.9	2.3	4.40	3.75
Houghton le Spring	33,927	8,166	147	936	1,083	13.6	3.2	6.43	4.15
Llanfyllin	19,955	6,237	83	826	909	9.1	4.6	6.30	4.43
Southwell	20,351	5,750	129	639	768	16.8	3.8	8.99	4.59
St Saviour Southwark	195,111	101,065	90,312	3,555	3,640	7,195	49.4	3.7%	9.76
England & Wales	25,974,439	7,162,373	194,651	619,203	813,854	23.9	3.1	8.07	3.91

Table 5.1: Spend on poor by case-study unions, 1850 and 1880. Note: * = 1880 spend at 1850 values.
Source: PLB/LGB annual reports.

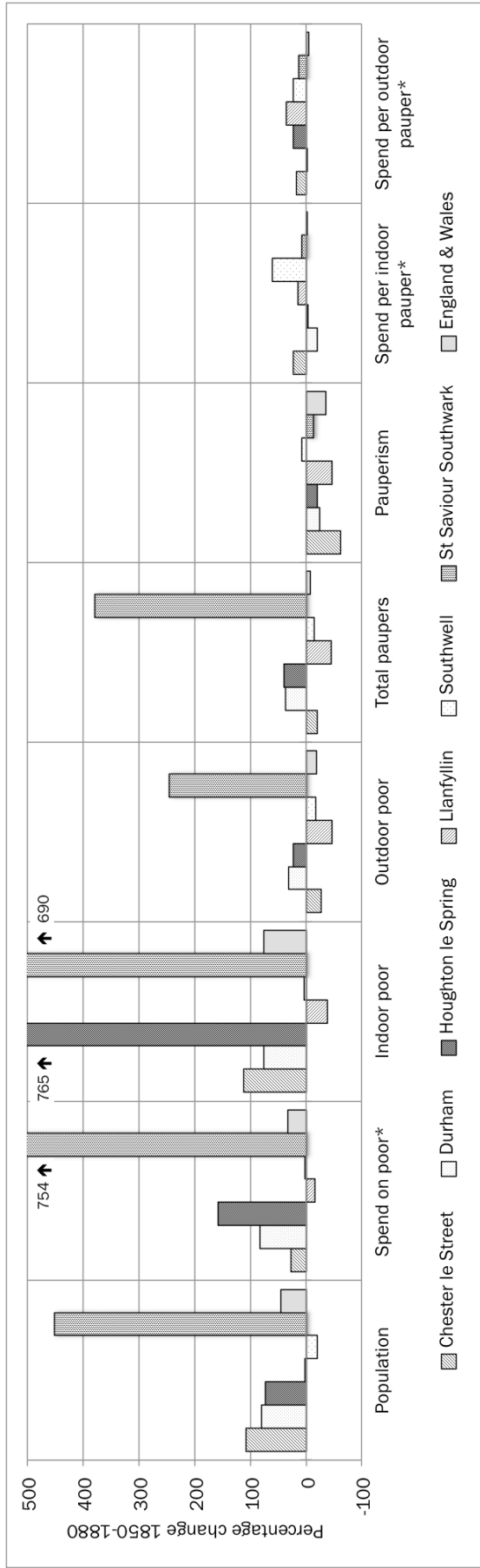


Figure 5.1: Changing circumstances of case-study unions, 1850-1880. Note: * = 1880 spend at 1850 values. Source: PLB/LGB annual reports.

5.3 Local suppliers

Outside London, unions were most likely to buy from suppliers within their boundaries, though by the 1880s an increasing amount of business tended to be given to suppliers from outside the union (Table 5.2). Furthermore, three of the five case study unions outside London bought ledgers and forms from London printers in 1880. For the most part, the external suppliers were fairly close to their poor law customers and, aside from the London printers, were rarely more than one union away. The exception was St Saviour Southwark, which bought from businesses across London and, from the late 1860s, from a milk seller in Essex. Food in particular tended to be bought from local suppliers except when the union was remote (e.g. Llanfyllin) or in decline (e.g. Southwell), as in these cases there were fewer such local suppliers.

Urbanisation boosted the provisions sectors in the growing case study unions, but it also enabled the development of inter-urban networks of supply which saw non-food suppliers (e.g. furniture, ironmongery) sell to neighbouring unions. Not only could Houghton le Spring's local businesses increase their ability to supply the Houghton union over time, therefore, but the growth of the union as a potential customer (by virtue of its new workhouse built in 1864) made it interesting to businesses in Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland and Durham. Such businesses already supplied the Chester le Street union in 1850, which was similar in population and growth to Houghton, but whose workhouse was bigger. As Chester le Street grew in population, a higher proportion of its workhouse supplies came from businesses inside the union, but it continued to buy from traders further afield.

Union	Suppliers identified	Suppliers in union		<10 miles from WH		Furthest (miles)	
		N	%	N	%		
1850	Chester le Street	38	26	68.4	36	94.7	10.4
	Durham	33	33	100.0	33	100.0	1.3
	Houghton le Spring	21	20	95.2	21	100.0	4.9
	Llanfyllin	53	32	60.4	33	62.3	159.3
	Southwell	37	31	83.8	32	86.5	13.5
	St Saviour Southwark	87	42	48.3	87	100.0	3.7
1880	Chester le Street	43	35	81.4	42	97.7	22.6
	Durham	67	58	86.6	59	88.1	233.7
	Houghton le Spring	35	26	74.3	30	85.7	237.2
	Llanfyllin	34	23	67.6	24	70.6	159.3
	Southwell	73	61	83.6	64	87.7	16.3
	St Saviour Southwark	27	11	40.7	26	96.3	18.7

Table 5.2: Distances between workhouses and their suppliers, 1850 and 1880. N.B. Suppliers are only those with identifiable addresses.

Source: Guardians' minutes and general ledgers; commercial directories.

5.3.1 Chester le Street

The locations and types of suppliers reflected the varied economic contexts of the case study unions. Chester le Street's suppliers in 1850 were mostly in the town itself, with a few from elsewhere in the union including the Birtley Iron Company, a significant ironworks and colliery owner with an output of over 8,000 tons of iron per year in 1848 (Figure 5.2).¹⁰ This was the only supplier which was not named as an individual in the guardians' minutes. Those from outside the union were a grocer, an ironmonger and a dressmaker from Newcastle; a baker from Sunderland; a stationer and a draper from Gateshead; and a stationer and a salt merchant from South Shields. In 1880 fewer businesses outside Chester le Street union supplied its workhouse, but those that did tended to be large wholesalers or specialist suppliers, named usually as non-family partnerships or companies, including municipal utilities. Examples of these larger suppliers are Gateshead mealman Robert Dowson, Durham stationers Proctor & Son, Middleton quarry owners Ord & Maddison, London stationers Knight & Co and Shaw & Sons, and four Sunderland concerns: brewers Fenwick & Co, the Sunderland Gas Company, Sunderland Eye Infirmary and aggregates firm J.T. French & Co. This change in types of

¹⁰ PP 1849 XXII 395. Report of the commissioner appointed, under the provisions of the act 5 & 6 Vict., c. 99, to inquire into the operation of that act, and into the state of the population of the mining districts, p. 26.

external suppliers reflects an increasing number of businesses within Chester le Street which were able to provide the union with high volumes of goods, though there were still some gaps in provision which needed to be filled by companies from further afield. In particular, mealman Robert Dowson was able to take the place of the several suppliers who had previously sold the union groceries and flour.

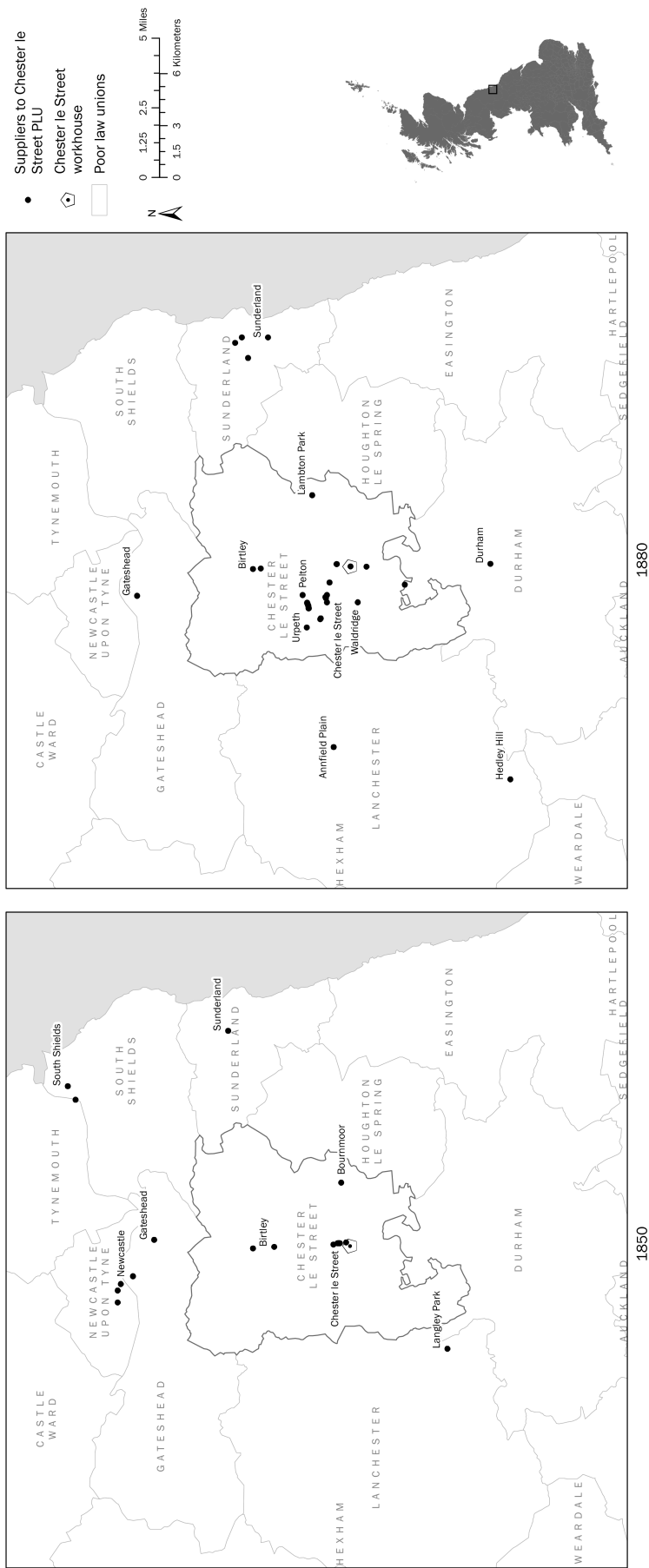


Figure 5.2: Suppliers to Chester le Street union, 1850 and 1880.
Source: Minutes of board of guardians.

5.3.2 Houghton le Spring

In 1850 all but one of Houghton le Spring's suppliers were located inside the union, the exception being a butcher in Sherburn village, in neighbouring Durham union (Figure 5.3). All were named as individuals rather than partnerships or companies. At this time, though, the union did not need a large number of suppliers as it did not favour indoor relief: only 17 of its 776 paupers were relieved indoors on 1 January 1850 (Table 5.1), and it had capacity for no more than 46.¹¹ It is remarkable that it required more suppliers than it had indoor paupers. The town was growing in importance, though, and it was one of several mining communities emerging as 'local centres of shopping and services, catering for their own little planetary systems of smaller pit villages'.¹² The workhouse was enlarged in 1864, so by 1880 a much higher proportion of paupers were indoor.¹³ As the workhouse consumed more, more of its goods were bought from outside the union. All its food continued to come from businesses inside the union, but hardware and other material came from Sunderland (for iron work, plumbing and glasses), Gateshead (glasses), Newcastle (furniture), Durham (printing by George Proctor & Son, who also supplied Durham and Chester le Street), and London (three stationers: Knight & Co, Shaw & Sons and Haddon Best & Co). Suppliers now included four non-family partnerships and another four incorporated firms, most of which were outside the union.

¹¹ PP 1854-55 XLVI 13. Population &c. Returns of the population of every union, and of every parish not in a union, in England and Wales, showing the amount of workhouse accommodation in each, for the year ending 31st December 1854; similar return for every parish in Scotland, for the same period; and similar return for every union in Ireland, for the same period, p. 3.

¹² N. McCord, 'Some aspects of change in the nineteenth-century North East', *Northern History* 31 (1995), p. 261.

¹³ PP 1867-68 LXI 171. Poor law (workhouse inspection). Return to an order of the Honourable the House of Commons, dated 2 December 1867 for, a return of copies of a letter dated the 16th day of October 1866, and addressed by direction of the President of the Poor Law Board to Mr. Gulson, Mr. Hawley, Mr. Weale, Sir John Walsham, Mr. Graves, Mr. Doyle, Mr. Farnall, Mr. Hurst, Mr. Cane, and Dr. Edward Smith, poor law inspectors, instructing them to report specially on the workhouses in their respective districts; of the reports made by the said Poor Law inspectors in pursuance of the above-mentioned instructions; and, of any statements of Poor Law inspectors formerly in charge of unions reported upon in the above-mentioned reports, p. 303.



Figure 5.3: Suppliers to Houghton le Spring poor law union, 1850 and 1880. Source: Minutes of board of guardians.

5.3.3 Durham

All of Durham's workhouse provisions in 1850 came from businesses within the union but by 1880 the guardians bought from a few suppliers from elsewhere (Figure 5.4). Rope was sourced from South Shields; furniture or school books from the North of England School Furnishing Company in Darlington; water from Weardale and Shildon District Water Works Company's reservoir in Wolsingham; and stationery from the three London firms which also supplied Houghton. All the suppliers to Durham in 1850 were named as individuals except Seawin & Monks (seed merchants) and Elvet Colliery. In 1880 there were many more partnerships. Some were between family members, such as W.H. & J. Ferens (drapers); G. & A. Cooke (drapers); George Procter & Son (printers); George Gradon & Son (builders); Hauxwell & Son (ironfounders); and Heron Brothers (plumbers). Non-family partnerships and companies included Johnston & Coxon (drapers); Scawin & Burn (chemist); and several coal, gas, iron and water companies in and around the county.¹⁴

¹⁴ These included Framwellgate Coal Company, Durham Water Company, Durham Gas Company, Weardale Iron & Coal Company, Consett Water Works Company and Weardale & Shildon District Water Company.

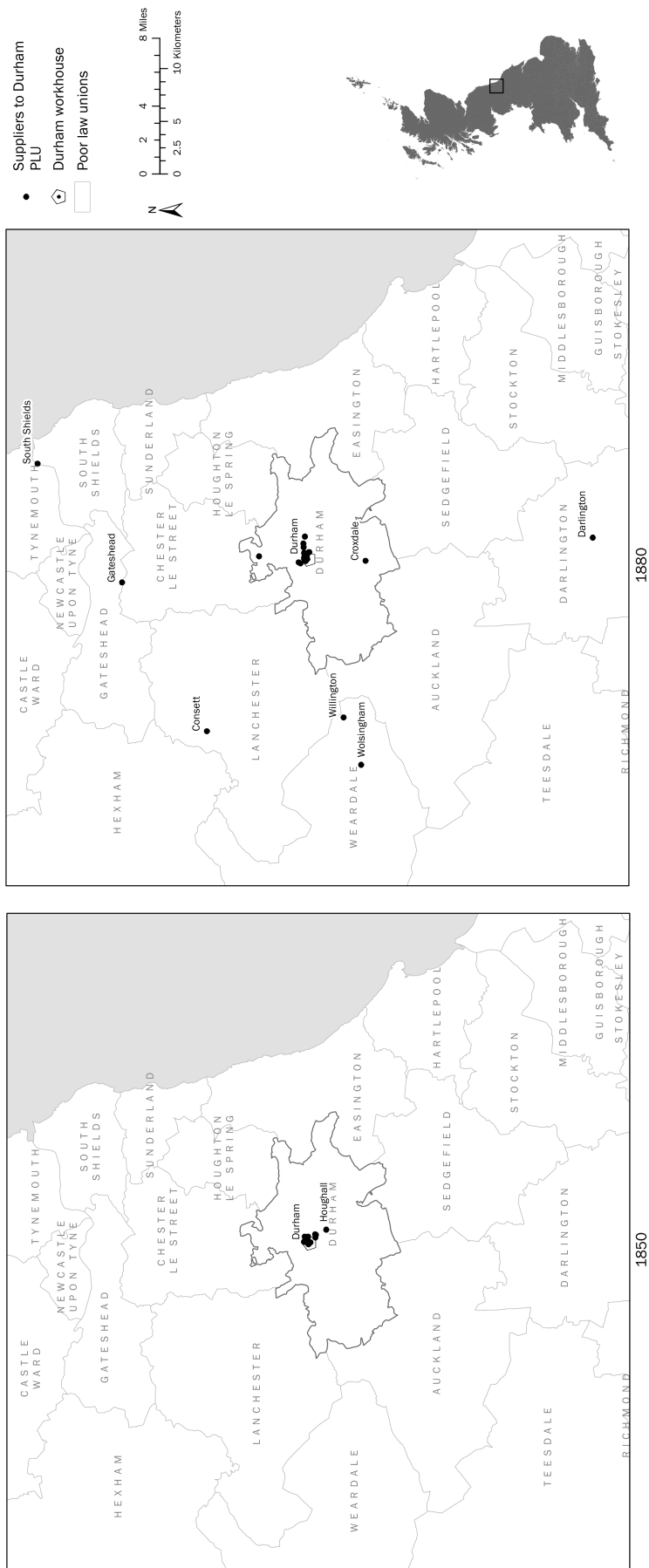


Figure 5.4: Suppliers to Durham poor law union, 1850 and 1880.
Source: Minutes of board of guardians.

5.3.4 Southwell

All but a handful of Southwell's suppliers in 1850 were inside the union, mostly in Southwell town itself, and they were all recorded as individuals (Figure 5.5). Those outside the union included a grocer in Mansfield, another in Nottingham, a shoemaker also in Nottingham, a draper in Sneinton and a farmer near Balderton who supplied milk. In 1880, the locations of suppliers to Southwell reveal the relative rise in importance of Newark and Mansfield as centres of distribution. Ten of Southwell's suppliers came from these towns, five from each. As these towns grew, therefore, their local businesses began to look further afield to find customers. The Mansfield businesses were all food suppliers: two butchers, a farmer, a publican and a potato dealer. Those in Newark were a flour factor, butcher, ironmonger, currier and chimney sweep. There were a further two from Nottingham (both drapers) and two from Retford (one brewer and one draper). Suppliers in 1880 included nine family partnerships, one non-family partnership – Bates & Co, grocers and mealmen – and Southwell Gas Company. It also included one John Garratt, the district surveyor of highways and union sanitary inspector, from whom the union bought stone. It seems likely that he was selling stone from highway maintenance on behalf of the county.

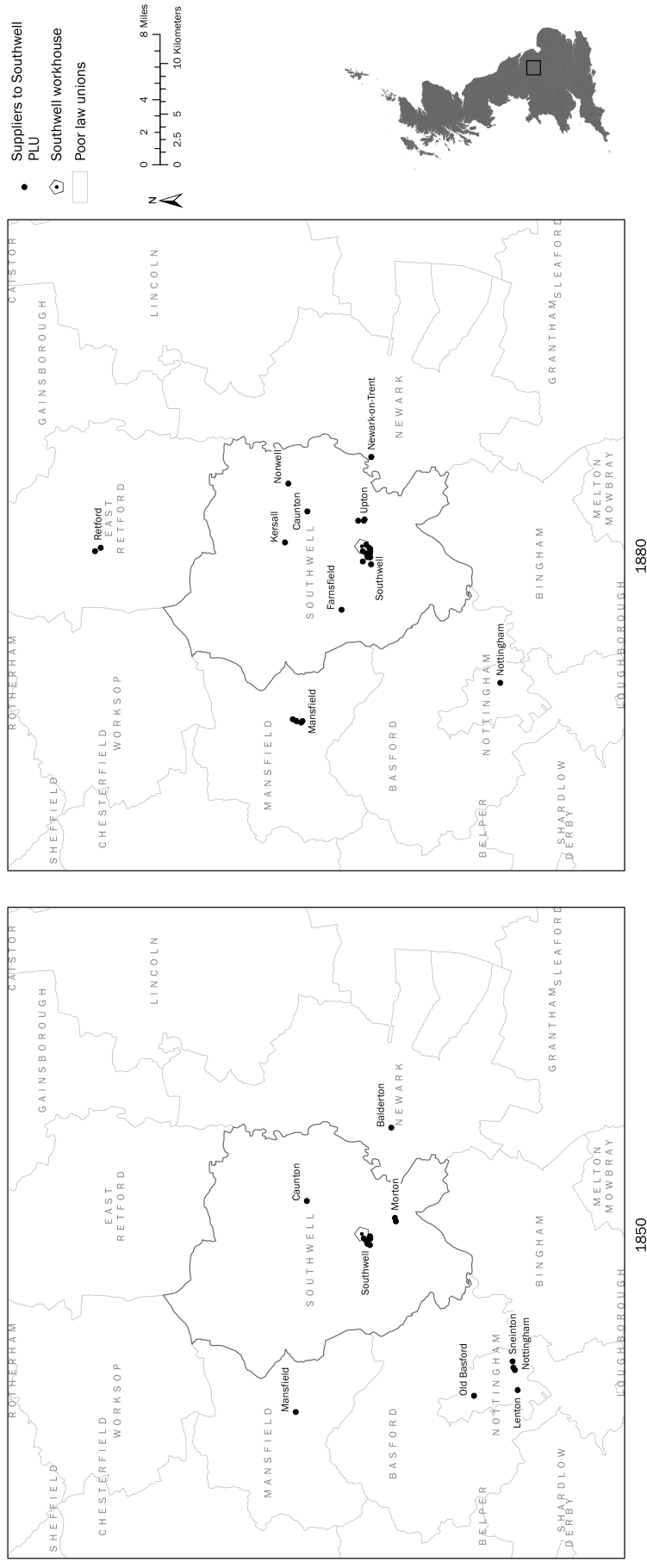


Figure 5.5: Suppliers to Southwell poor law union, 1850 and 1880. Source: Minutes of board of guardians.

5.3.5 Llanfyllin

A smaller proportion (but still the majority) of Llanfyllin workhouse's suppliers in the 1840s were inside the union, compared to other unions (Figure 5.6). However, several suppliers from outside the town itself provided goods such as straw, shoes, dairy produce, brushes and some groceries. The workhouse was supplied by a wide range of businesses from outside the union, including grocers, chandlers and potato merchants in Oswestry, stationers and shoemakers in Shrewsbury, and two dairy farmers in Llandidloes. Some goods had to be bought from suppliers at a greater distance: glass from Birmingham, drapery from Manchester, stationery from London and slate from Pontrhydyfen, near Port Talbot. Five of the union's fifty-three suppliers in 1844 were partnerships and one was a company, all of which were outside the union. Paradoxically, therefore, it appears that a more remote and less populated union like Llanfyllin was obliged to source provisions from suppliers outside the union at an earlier period than those with better communications: Llanfyllin's traders did not have access to goods on the scale that the workhouse required, whereas those in Oswestry and Shrewsbury did. By 1880 there was a similar number and variety of suppliers from within the union as in 1844, but patterns of distribution from outside the union had changed somewhat. Five companies supplied the union in 1880, four of which were outside the union, the other being the Llanfyllin Coal Company. As well as a few specialist suppliers (such as a shoemaker and cheesemonger in Shrewsbury, and a clock repairer in Corwen), there were now some larger enterprises supplying a greater range of goods. Joseph Evans of Oswestry, for instance, sold the union oatmeal, split peas, coffee, sugar, candles, soap and soda. This business was therefore performing the functions which thirty years earlier may well have been carried out by individual mealmen, grocers, chandlers and oilmen.

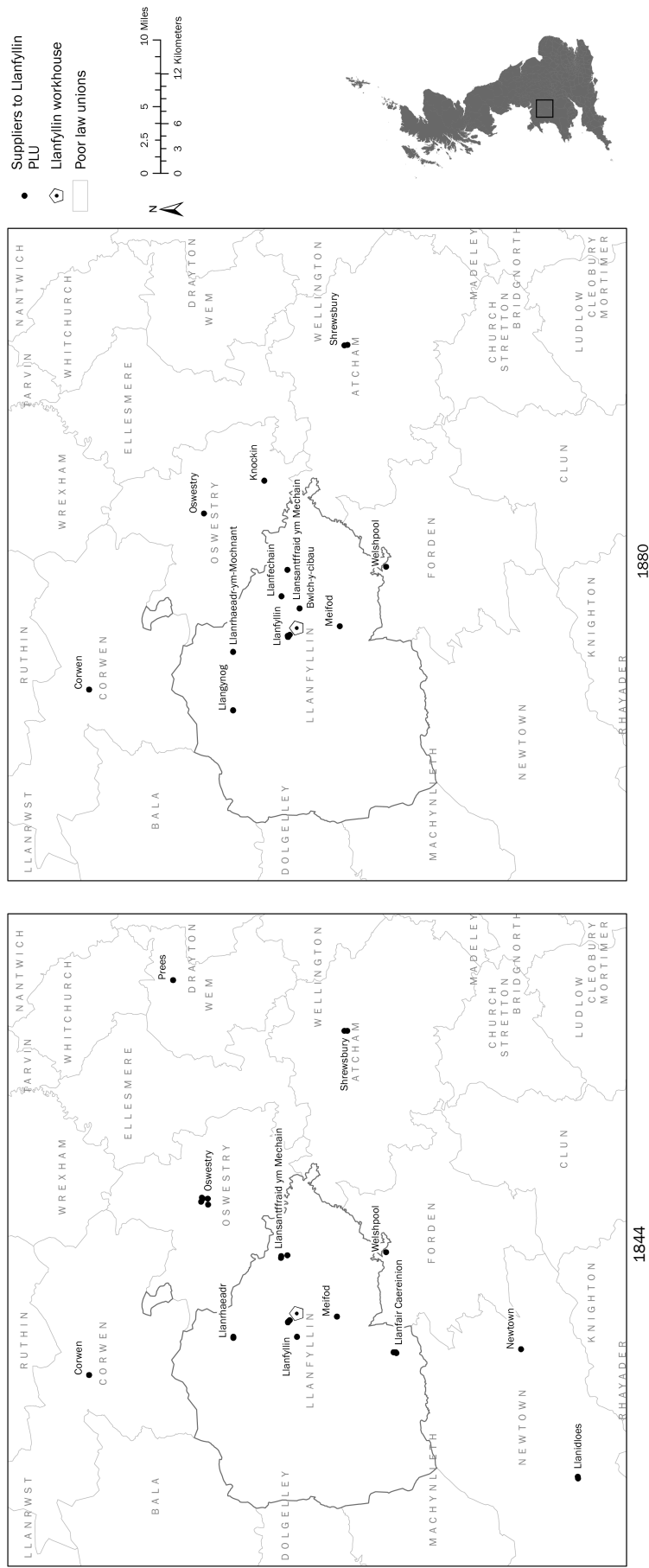


Figure 5.6: Suppliers to Llanfyllin union, 1844 and 1880.
Source: Minutes of board of guardians.

5.3.6 St Saviour Southwark

St Saviour Southwark's suppliers reflected a broader London picture in which businesses from all over the capital – though concentrated in the centre – sold to many poor law unions at one time (see Chapter 6). Nonetheless, London unions were keen to buy from suppliers within their boundaries, and St Saviour was fortunate in having in it a number of large suppliers capable of meeting the demand generated by many unions. The comparative geographies of St Saviour's suppliers in 1850 and 1880 are shown in Figure 5.7 and further consideration is given to the London context in the following chapter. St Saviour continued to buy from London-wide big suppliers between 1850 and 1880, supplemented by smaller local businesses, but the number of local businesses winning contracts was somewhat diminished by 1880 as much of London's institutional provisioning became consolidated among a few large enterprises.

5.3.7 Summary

In all the case studies, supplier types and locations depended on the changing circumstances of the unions. Within Chester le Street, where the population was growing, increasing numbers of businesses were able to supply the required volumes of goods, though the union still needed to contract with suppliers from further afield. In neighbouring Houghton le Spring, where the workhouse was enlarged, there were enough food suppliers but more goods of other sorts needed to be brought from outside the union. Durham's connections to other nearby towns enabled it to expand its geographical importance by becoming a potential customer to more distant businesses over time. In declining Southwell, the union was less and less able to rely on local traders, and its suppliers' locations reveal the increasing importance of neighbouring Nottingham, Newark and Mansfield. Remote Llanfyllin continued to rely on external suppliers, whereas St Saviour Southwark benefitted from a dense concentration of local businesses able to take advantage of the high number of institutional customers in London.

5.4 Business organisation

The types of organisations supplying unions also changed over time, reflecting to some extent larger amounts of capital in the businesses. In all the non-London unions, the vast majority of suppliers in 1850 were named as individuals in the records (Figure 5.8). A third of St Saviour's suppliers were partnerships, however. Over time, the nature of suppliers outside London increasingly resembled their metropolitan counterparts as there was a shift from named individual suppliers to a higher proportion of partnerships. Many of these partnerships were between people with the same surname (assumed here to be family members) or described as 'and Son(s)', 'Brothers' etc. This was not universal, though, with Houghton having just two and Llanfyllin only one such partnership listed (Table 5.3). Less common than family partnerships in 1880, but more so than in 1850, were partnerships between people with different surnames. This 'non-family partnership' category excludes incorporations of various sorts, which fall into the 'company' category. This latter group expanded greatly between 1850 and 1880. Companies here include businesses described not merely as 'and Company', which could have been used as a shorthand for a partnership, but those also with some indication of their incorporated status. Examples include industrial enterprises or local utility firms formed by act of Parliament (such as Southwell Gas Company or Consett Water Works Company) and those registered at Companies House (such as Fields Mercantile Company or Hadden, Best & Co Ltd).

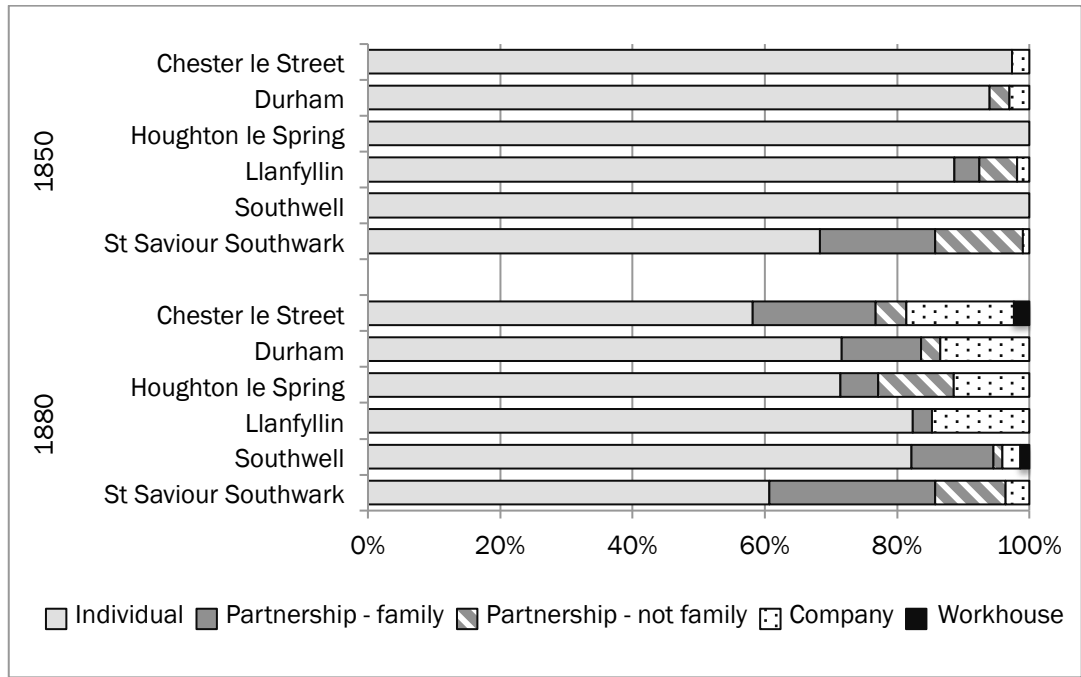


Figure 5.8: Business type of suppliers to case-study unions, c.1850 and c.1880.
Source: Guardians' minutes and general ledgers; commercial directories.

	Individual		Family partnership		Non-family partnership		Company		Workhouse		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1885	37	97.4	-	-	-	-	1	2.6	-	-	-	38
	31	93.9	-	-	1	3	1	3	-	-	-	33
	21	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	21
1885	47	88.7	2	3.8	3	5.7	1	1.9	-	-	-	53
	37	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	37
	67	68.4	17	17.3	13	13.3	1	1.0	-	-	-	98
1885	25	58.1	8	18.6	2	4.7	7	16.3	1	2.3	-	43
	48	71.6	8	11.9	2	3	9	13.4	-	-	-	67
1885	25	71.4	2	5.7	4	11.4	4	11.4	-	-	-	35
	28	82.4	1	2.9	-	-	5	14.7	-	-	-	34
	60	82.2	9	12.3	1	1.4	2	2.7	1	1.4	-	73
	17	60.7	7	25	3	10.7	1	3.6	-	-	-	28

Table 5.3: Business type of suppliers to case-study unions, c.1850 and c.1880.
Source: Guardians' minutes and general ledgers; commercial directories.

One reason for the growing importance of partnerships as workhouse suppliers was the change in the way that individuals could combine their interests in a business. From the mid 1850s, Parliament enacted a series of measures that enabled groups of seven or more people to pool their capital by signing memoranda of association, and thereby those individuals were not liable for the company's debts beyond the value of their shares.¹⁵ As Poovey puts it, limited liability 'severed the link between business failure and personal ruin.'¹⁶ It therefore in theory opened the commercial landscape to a wider range of entrepreneurs. But even by 1885 no more than around ten per cent of 'important' businesses were limited companies.¹⁷ Instead, personal partnerships remained a key organisational form well into the 1880s at least.¹⁸ Family partnerships were especially suited to this form, as unlimited liability required a high degree of trust. This restricted the size of businesses, though, as family firms did not like to expand their operations to such a degree that the individuals responsible could no longer personally control them.¹⁹ This is borne out by the types of suppliers to the case study unions in 1880: There were among them many more family partnerships and companies than there were non-family partnerships (Table 5.3).

A potential limitation to this typology is that the poor law records cannot be relied upon to differentiate between suppliers along these lines in every case. There were very probably several instances of partnerships being listed under one partner's name, or incorporations described as partnerships, for example. There may well also have been partnerships between people with different

¹⁵ 18 & 19 Vict., c. 133. Limited Liability Act (1855); 19 & 20 Vict., c.47. Joint Stock Companies Act (1856); 25 & 26 Vict., c. 89. Companies Act (1862); D. Loftus, 'Capital and Community: Limited Liability and Attempts to Democratize the Market in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England', *Victorian Studies* 45:1 (2002), p. 93.

¹⁶ M. Poovey, *Making a social body: British cultural formation, 1830-1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 23.

¹⁷ P.L. Payne, 'The Emergence of the Large-scale Company in Great Britain, 1870-1914', *Economic History Review* New series, 20:3 (1967), p. 520.

¹⁸ M.B. Rose, 'The family firm in British business', in M.W. Kirby and M.B. Rose (eds), *Business Enterprise in Modern Britain from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 68.

¹⁹ M. Winstanley, 'Concentration and competition in the retail sector, c.1800-1990', in M.W. Kirby and M.B. Rose (eds), *Business enterprise in modern Britain* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 248.

surnames who were in fact family members by marriage. Nonetheless, there was a noticeable trend for more suppliers to be partnerships or companies of any sort in 1880 than there had been in 1850, and as such the changes that took place were likely to have reflected a real shift in the scale of suppliers. A second limitation of the typology is that it does not comprehensively describe business sizes. Businesses did not have to be partnerships or companies in 1880 to be significant traders, although clearly partnerships had greater growth potential than businesses that relied on an individual for their capital requirements. Judging business size is itself problematic, however, especially in the absence of full sets of accounts. Insurance records are of limited use even where they exist because, as Hosgood points out, trades in perishable goods had a much quicker turnover of stock than other forms of retailing, leading to relatively small insured values.²⁰ Moreover, many firms in all sorts of sectors organised the distribution of goods without ever having the stock on their premises.²¹

There are, however, some ways of illustrating the ranges of sizes of businesses which supplied poor law unions. Thomas Raine, a linen and woollen draper, supplied Durham union in 1850. He advertised in 1849 for 'two active assistants and two apprentices', suggesting that trade was successful enough to employ at least that many.²² Liverpool poor law parish employed tailors from within the workhouse to make clothes from raw materials bought in, but when there were not enough skilled indoor paupers to meet supply, as in October 1879 and September 1882, the parish had to buy suits urgently from Messrs Coop of Wigan. Coop was a significant business, employing some 500 people in its factory.²³

²⁰ C.P. Hosgood, 'A 'Brave and Daring Folk'? Shopkeepers and Trade Associational Life in Victorian and Edwardian England', *Journal of Social History* 26:2 (1992), pp. 287-289.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

²² *Newcastle Courant*, 9 March 1849, p. 1.

²³ A. Brogden, 'Clothing provision by the Liverpool workhouse', *Costume* 36 (2002), p. 53. Coop & Marsden was 'established to employ girls redundant as a result of the Cotton Famine of the 1860s': English Heritage, Coops Factory list entry. Online at <http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/resultsingle.aspx?uid=1384464>. Accessed May 2014.

Ad hoc purchasing, especially through workhouse officials, could be made from suppliers of all sizes, but this form of buying could represent a valuable opportunity for smaller local businesses. Durham's guardians' minutes record frequent small payments to the workhouse master and matron for funerals, carting, butter, wine and so on. Such purchases would probably have been from small high-street retailers, as payments to the firms who were contracted with for the quarter would not have been recorded in this way. Traders who gained custom from poor law unions would therefore have been spread across the spectrum of business sizes.

5.5 Transporting goods

The distances between workhouses and their suppliers, and the types of suppliers, therefore show some relationship to unions' changing circumstances. For both Durham and Houghton le Spring, more suppliers were located outside the unions in 1880 than in 1850. Durham was historically a significant hub city, self-sufficient in terms of local suppliers in 1850. As communications improved, the workhouse was supplied by businesses at greater distances. Houghton was increasing in importance locally and was also better connected to surrounding towns: The workhouse was supplied with food by businesses inside the union which had access to these nearby markets, and with more specialist goods from further afield. Meanwhile, both Chester le Street and Llanfyllin had fewer suppliers from outside the union in 1880 than they had in 1850. As Chester grew in importance, more suppliers were themselves better connected to external markets. Llanfyllin had fewer suppliers in total, and much of its provisions came from a single, out-of-union supplier. Southwell showed little change in the proportion of external to internal suppliers, but their changing locations reveal the relative rise of neighbouring towns.

One of the key differences between 1850 and 1880 was communications infrastructure, especially in the growth and consolidation of railway networks

through the 1840s, '50s and '60s.²⁴ New rail links enabled industrial suppliers to gain access to more distant markets, and it is possible that poor law unions benefitted from this. Chester le Street, for example, gained a railway connection in 1868, perhaps explaining the increase in bulky goods brought in from further afield by bigger businesses in 1880 compared with 1850.²⁵ This may be an example of the dual phenomenon suggested by Jefferys, of there having been two opposing trends in distribution in the period between 1850 and 1914: On the one hand, there were improvements in transport systems which enabled producers to reach their customers directly and bypass wholesalers altogether. On the other hand, 'the concentration of production in factories, the growth of towns and the switch to imported foodstuffs... tended to increase the part played by intermediaries.'²⁶

It was not simply a question of connection, however. Some places already had a rail link before 1850, some had no link by 1880, and some were served by other means. Of more significance was the ability of rail – or any other transport technology – to bring down the costs of reaching customers, whether those customers were the unions themselves or their suppliers.²⁷ Southwell, for instance, was on a branch of the Midland railway from 1847. Durham had a railway connection from 1839. Meanwhile there was no passenger or general freight rail at Houghton le Spring at all, though there were several colliery lines. Perhaps of more importance were the road and waterway connections: Houghton was on a main road linking Durham and Sunderland; and the river Wear was navigable from Durham through Chester le Street to Sunderland.²⁸

Llanfyllin is especially interesting in this regard, as its workhouse was already a substantial consumer of goods from outside the union in 1850, despite not

²⁴ R. Schwartz, I.N. Gregory and T. Thévenin, 'Spatial History: Railways, Uneven Development, and Population Change in France and Great Britain, 1850–1914', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 42:1 (2011), p. 59.

²⁵ C.J. Allen, *The North Eastern Railway* (London: I. Allen, 1964), p. 137.

²⁶ Jefferys, *Retail trading in Britain*, pp. 10–11.

²⁷ Alexander, *Retailing*, p. 18.

²⁸ E. Paget-Tomlinson, *Illustrated history of canal and river navigations* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), map 5.

getting a rail link until 1863. In this respect, Llanfyllin resembled other Welsh unions that were hampered by poor communications. Merthyr Tydfil, for example, imported flour from Ireland to avoid high internal transport costs.²⁹ Furthermore, mid and north Wales did not have an effective internal market, and farmers tended to export to the Midlands and northern counties of England rather than finding buyers closer to home.³⁰ This trade, and presumably the trade that brought goods into Llanfyllin, was frequently conducted on waterways.³¹ Nearby Newtown and Welshpool were on a branch of the Ellesmere canal which linked to the navigable Severn at Llanymynech, not far from Oswestry.³² Both the Severn and the Montgomeryshire Canal were used for freight transport.³³ Those businesses which supplied Llanfyllin with goods from further afield would have used waterways such as these.

Long distance trade was far from unusual in England and Wales at this time. Commercial travelling was a very well-established mode of marketing by the early nineteenth century, with salesmen making journeys of some hundreds of miles to visit prospective customers.³⁴ The itineraries of commercial travellers demonstrate the distances that suppliers could reach. In 1835, for example, the representative of an Oxfordshire worsted manufacturer visited drapers in twenty-six towns and cities in northern and eastern England, including York, Hull and Leeds.³⁵ A Somerset rug and woollens firm supplied customers 'as far afield as the Home Counties, East Midlands, South Wales, Lancashire and

²⁹ D.W. Howell, *Land and people in nineteenth-century Wales* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 120.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

³² Paget-Tomlinson, *Canal and river navigations*, map 10.

³³ A.S. Davies, 'The river trade of Montgomeryshire and its borders', *Collections Historical and Archaeological relating to Montgomeryshire and its Borders* 43:1 (1934), p. 35.

³⁴ A. Popp, 'Building the market: John Shaw of Wolverhampton and commercial travelling in early nineteenth-century England', *Business History* 49:3 (2007), pp. 321-347; S.R.H. Jones, 'The Country Trade and the Marketing and Distribution of Birmingham Hardware, 1750-1810', *Business History* 26:1 (1984), pp. 24-42.

³⁵ M. French, 'On the road: Travelling salesmen and experiences of mobility in Britain before 1939', *Journal of Transport History* 31:2 (2010), p. 136.

Ireland,' according to Sutton.³⁶ Usually long-distance selling required intermediaries such as brokers, merchants or agents.³⁷ However, the most distant suppliers to provincial poor law unions tended to be stationery firms based in London. As shown in the following chapter, these were firms which between them had control of a virtually closed market and exclusive access to the poor law central authority, enabling them to produce the books and forms all unions required. The products were easily transported to the unions by post. Aside from these goods London does not seem to have been very important to the case study unions, especially as they were better connected to centres of enterprise in the north.³⁸

5.6 Marketing and wholesaling

Changing transport networks altered the business environment whether or not individual poor law unions were connected to particular firms. Improvements in transport and manufacturing fragmented the distribution system into 'distinct producers, wholesalers and retailers', according to Shaw and Bucklin.³⁹ Specialist wholesalers grew in number and scope, alongside a reduction in businesses combining retail with wholesale or 'pre-distributive processes'.⁴⁰ In the meat trade, for instance, the first half of the nineteenth century saw the dominance of butchers who dealt cattle, slaughtered, retailed and wholesaled to smaller retailers.⁴¹ Later in the century, specialist wholesalers emerged and a similar pattern is discernable for the grocery trade.⁴²

³⁶ G.B. Sutton, 'The Marketing of Ready Made Footwear in the Nineteenth Century', *Business History* 6:2 (1964), p. 98.

³⁷ J.F. Wilson, *British business history, 1720-1994* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 60.

³⁸ S. Chapman, *Merchant enterprise in Britain: From the Industrial Revolution to World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 55.

³⁹ L. Bucklin, *Competition and evolution in the distributive trades* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972), cited in G. Shaw, 'The Role of Retailing in the Urban Economy', in J.H. Johnson and C.G. Pooley (eds), *The Structure of Nineteenth-Century Cities* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 172.

⁴⁰ Jefferys, *Retail trading in Britain*, p. 11.

⁴¹ Shaw, 'Food supply', p. 288.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 289, 291.

Poor law unions bought from suppliers who described themselves – or can be considered as – retailers, wholesalers, factors, dealers, merchants or producers. This suggests that distribution and marketing networks operated flexibly, responding to demand from institutions like poor law unions, which had the ability to buy at the appropriate scale. Institutional customers like poor law unions were bigger consumers than provincial high-street retailers in many cases. As Winstanley notes, small retailers relied ‘on the dealers to be found in nearby town centres who doubled as wholesalers and retailers’ well into the twentieth century.⁴³ Only in cities were there enough small retailers to make wholesale-only business worthwhile.⁴⁴

The grocery/provisions trade in particular appears to have undergone the greatest alteration between 1850 and 1880, judging by the changing suppliers to the poor law union case studies. Across the unions can be seen examples of specialised dealers in particular grocery products giving way to businesses trading in a wider range of goods, though the unions did continue to buy some goods from what might be termed high-street grocers. Chester le Street, for instance, bought from separate grocers and bakers in 1850. In 1880, it bought from two suppliers of both grocery and flour, as well as from a mealman. Llanfyllin bought flour, rice, tea, treacle and potatoes from Edward Lewis of Llanfyllin High Street, and oatmeal, split peas, coffee, sugar, candles, soap and soda from Joseph Evans of Oswestry. In Durham in 1878-80 a grocer, George Greenwell, won tenders to supply ‘certain provisions and necessaries’ to the workhouse, and as no specialist flour or bread supplier was contracted with, it seems those goods were included in Greenwell’s contracts. Buying from a single supplier for many goods was very convenient for the customer, though unions might have to be wary of the quality of goods in some cases. Durham’s guardians, for example, resolved to accept the tender of Messrs Chapman & Son for ‘certain provisions and necessaries’ from 2 October to 24 December 1880 ‘upon condition that Messrs. Chapman and Son supply Sugar to the satisfaction of the Master of the Workhouse at the price named in their tender

⁴³ Winstanley, *Shopkeeper’s world*, p. 44.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

and that if they decline to do this the tender of Mr. George Greenwell to supply all the provisions and necessaries be accepted.’⁴⁵

In contrast to the other case study unions, Southwell continued to buy its flour from a firm of millers, F. & E. Caudwell, whose premises were the local water mill, and from a baker, William Marriott of Newark-upon-Trent. Alongside these was one Thomas Bates of Southwell who sold groceries and oatmeal. Rather than clear instances of large consolidated traders supplying Southwell union, therefore, there can be seen many specialist small traders. The union had the largest number of suppliers in total (seventy-three whose identities could be ascertained, and another eleven who could not), the vast majority of which do not appear from the records to have sold more than one type of goods. Exceptions include one Walter Chadburn who sold the workhouse wine and drapery; and farmer Joseph Templeman who sold straw and wood and kids for the workhouse garden. The garden farm itself supplied the workhouse with bacon and vegetables.

5.7 Supplier networks

Businesses did not simply interact with their customers: they also existed in relation to their competitors and colleagues and in the context of wider society. These relations constituted, and were a product of, the business environment. As discussed above, contractual arrangements made by poor law unions were characterised by a reliance on reputation and reliability, as well as on price. Rose points to the ‘informal networks of mutual trust and interest’ in local business communities: ‘Shared values and attitudes were reinforced by an impressive array of institutions as well as more informal arrangements. This meant that transaction costs were usually comparatively low.’⁴⁶ This is borne out by poor law contracting, which was indeed a combination of formal and informal networks and arrangements, enabling well-placed small local businesses to participate. There were low barriers to entry for traders, as seen by the numbers of suppliers to the unions, but the

⁴⁵ Durham CRO, U/DU 8, ff. 629-630, 18 September 1880.

⁴⁶ Rose, ‘Family firm,’ pp. 75-76.

ability to supply on a large scale was still restricted to those who had the required capital. This is applicable to the evidence of the 1850s and yet more so in the 1880s.

Furthermore, large businesses had the ability to dominate the market in more than one way. Westall notes the 'three usual strategic options' faced by entrepreneurs in the late nineteenth century: 'competition, collusion or integration.'⁴⁷ Collusion is not easily visible in the records, though it is to be expected in small markets, especially outside London, according to Westall.⁴⁸ Customers relied on experience for knowledge about reliability, but this was imperfect information, and they were therefore at a disadvantage. The case study unions tended to record only the winners of contracts, and not the losing bidders, so it is not possible to construct models of competition.

As we have seen, integration was constrained by limits on the scale of the firm.⁴⁹ Large businesses would thus be expected to squeeze smaller competitors out of business, especially where economies of scale were important – such as in the flour, meal and grocery trades, as evident from the case study examples. This was a slow process, though, and was dependent on local and regional conditions. Areas with strong rail connections and with high levels of urbanisation would be first to see these features.⁵⁰ These factors could explain the persistence of higher numbers of individual producers in Llanfyllin and Southwell in 1880 than in the north-eastern unions. Meanwhile in the well-networked north-east, businesses could take advantage of their connections more readily. In 1878 Chester le Street's grocery supplier, George Simpson of Birtley, had as sureties for the performance of his contract Robert Johnson, a wholesale grocer, and John Temperley, a wholesale provision merchant, both of Newcastle upon Tyne.⁵¹ Temperley was one of around a dozen Newcastle firms which are known to have supplied co-operative

⁴⁷ O.M. Westall, 'The Competitive Environment of British Business, 1850-1914', in M.W. Kirby and M.B. Rose (eds), *Business Enterprise in Modern Britain from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 207.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

⁴⁹ Rose, 'Family firm,' p. 76.

⁵⁰ Westall, 'The competitive environment,' pp. 214-215.

⁵¹ Durham CRO, U/CS 7 f. 372, 28 March 1878.

retailers with dairy and pork.⁵² This can be seen as an instance of what McCord identifies as the decline of the 'purely local' and its displacement by 'patterns of "distant" rather than intimate local inter-dependence'.⁵³ Comprehensive data on the sureties and other facets of business community networks are lacking, however, making a comparison of the geographies of these networks over time unviable.

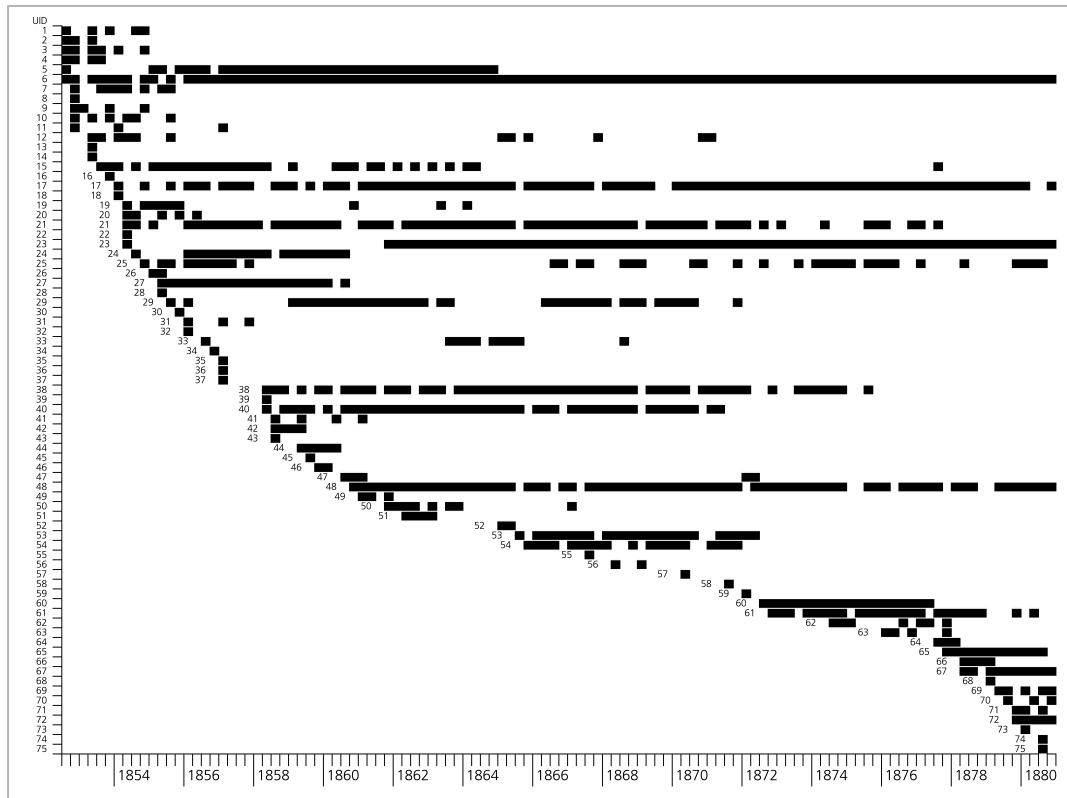
5.8 Duration of supply

Gaining a contract to supply a poor law union could be highly lucrative over the long term, though it was not easy to maintain a working relationship over many years when contracts were re-advertised every three or six months. This is clear from examining the longevity of supply relationships over the period 1850 to 1880 for two of the case-study unions, Llanfyllin and St Saviour. According to the guardians' minutes, Llanfyllin bought from 75 individually named suppliers in that period, 24 of whom only held a contract for a single quarter. St Saviour had 152 suppliers and usually contracted in six-month slots; 43 of its suppliers only ever held one such contract. But the remaining two-thirds of suppliers did gain subsequent business, a fact suggesting that boards of guardians took notice of those proving their ability to deliver consistently and at the right price. A relationship, once formed, could be fruitful for many years, again underscoring the importance of social processes in the market economy. Many suppliers won poor-law business frequently, if not continuously, and a few suppliers held contracts for very long periods: In Llanfyllin, James Fox supplied milk and butter, and occasionally shoes, for nearly the full 30 years (110 quarters). Charles Jones supplied the workhouse with shoes for 90 quarters. The longest-lasting suppliers in St Saviour were butchers John and James Beale (67 quarters), coffin-makers James and Susannah Darby (65 quarters), mealmen Edwards Brothers (64 quarters) and oilman James Percival (62 quarters).

⁵² M. Purvis, 'Stocking the Store: Co-operative Retailers in North-East England and Systems of Wholesale Supply 1860-77', *Business History* 40:4 (1998), pp. 63-64.

⁵³ McCord, 'Nineteenth century North East,' p. 266.

In Figure 5.9 (Llanfyllin) and Figure 5.10 (St Saviour), each supplier is represented by a single row, with a contract lasting one quarter being represented by a block along the row. In both cases, the pattern is one of regular new entrants to workhouse supply, some of whom secured continued business. In Llanfyllin, the 1860s and 1870s saw relative stability, with fewer new suppliers than there had been in the 1850s, but with a group of first-time suppliers appearing in the late 1870s. In St Saviour, there was a somewhat higher turnover of suppliers in the 1850s and 1860s, though the rate of change was fairly stable until 1869. In that year the parishes of St George the Martyr, St Mary Newington and Southwark were joined to St Saviour union. This brought new competition which disrupted the existing supplier stability. The new parishes had their own institutions and the organisation of the union was changed, with the St Saviour workhouse in Marlborough Street used for the infirm, Southwark workhouse used for the male able-bodied, and Newington for female able-bodied. The existing suppliers to those workhouses now competed for bigger contracts covering more than one institution at a time. Several of the long-standing suppliers to the old St Saviour workhouse lost their contracts, and the new suppliers visible in Figure 5.10 in 1869 were largely the existing trusted suppliers to the newly added parishes.



**Figure 5.9: Longevity of Llanfyllin union suppliers, 1852-1880. Each row represents one supplier, with horizontal blocks indicating lengths of contracts. See Appendix A for names of suppliers and goods supplied.
Source: Minutes of board of guardians.**



Figure 5.10: Longevity of St Saviour Southwark union suppliers, 1852-1880. Each row represents one supplier, with horizontal blocks indicating lengths of contracts. See Appendix A for names of suppliers and goods supplied. Source: Minutes of board of guardians.

In both Llanfyllin and St Saviour, but especially so in Llanfyllin, businesses attempting to gain the custom of the guardians may well have found it very hard to gain a contract in the first place, but easier to maintain it once won. In Llanfyllin, there were six periods of more than a year when no new suppliers were given any business (Figure 5.11). In any given quarter from the 1860s to the late 1870s, suppliers on average had held contracts in six or more of the preceding eight quarters (Figure 5.12). In St Saviour, there was only one period of over a year with no new suppliers, but six periods of three consecutive quarters (Figure 5.13). The average number of preceding quarters in which St Saviour's suppliers had had contracts dropped sharply with the addition of parishes in 1869, interrupting some 15 years of relative stability (Figure 5.14) Furthermore, Llanfyllin's guardians tended to award only one new supplier with a contract in any given period. St Saviour's guardians were a little less risk-averse, and two or three new suppliers at a time might win contracts in those periods when new contracts were awarded, especially after the union merger when there was more than one institution to supply. St Saviour also bought from more suppliers in total compared to Llanfyllin, averaging 16.3 suppliers per quarter to Llanfyllin's 8.7. This reflects both the relative sizes of the unions and the strength of competition in London.

A highly competitive market was only to be expected, given the dense concentration of businesses in the centre of London and the lucrative nature of poor law contracts over the medium to long term. The advantages to suppliers were clear: Income was not just relatively secure over the course of one contract but also very likely to be repeated in future contracts. This was dependent on the supplier proving his or her reliability by meeting the expectations of the union. Winning the initial contract was the more difficult task, therefore, as the competition was between the known suppliers who potentially dominated the tendering process and the newcomers who relied on reputations built elsewhere and on lower bids. Guardians were wary of the ability of a low-bidding newcomer to deliver reliably, yet they could not afford to ignore low bidders because of their responsibility to their ratepayer electorates.

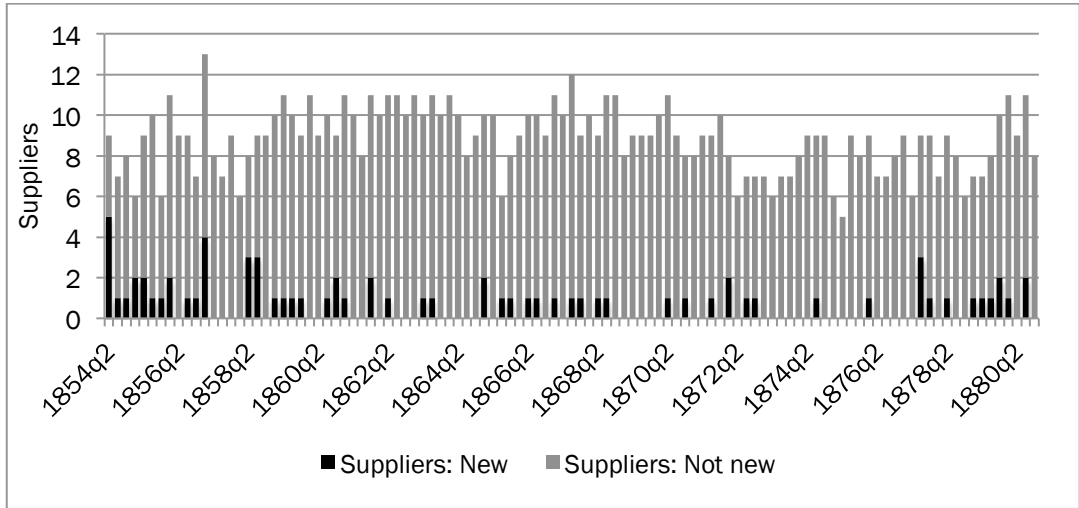


Figure 5.11: Number of new and not new suppliers to Llanfyllin union, 1854-80.
 Source: Minutes of board of guardians.

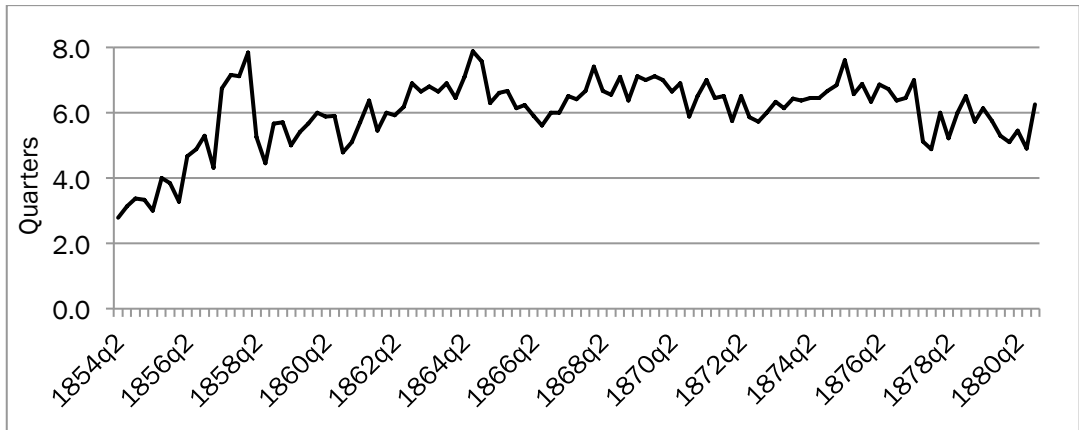


Figure 5.12: Mean number of quarters in previous two years in which suppliers held contracts with Llanfyllin union, 1854-80.
 Source: Minutes of board of guardians.

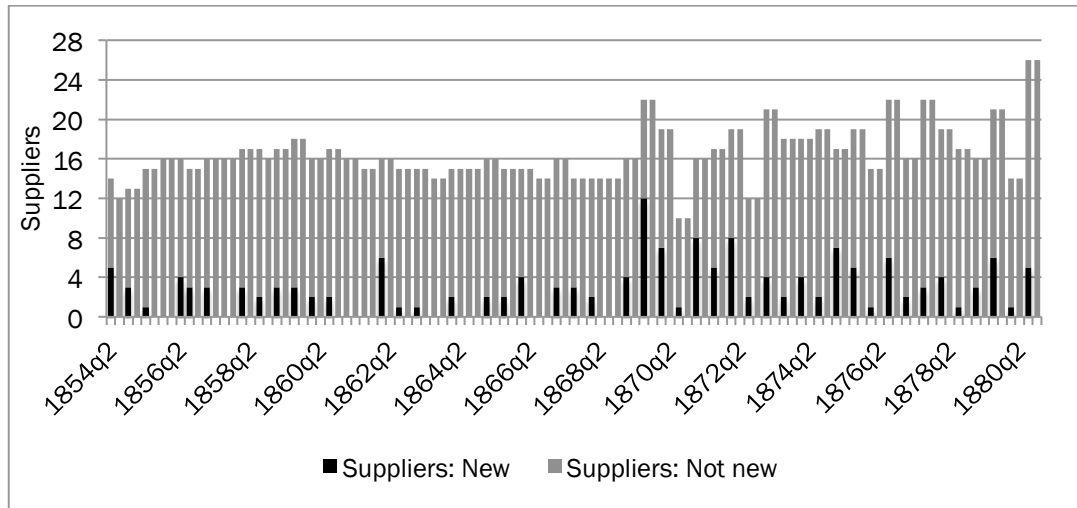


Figure 5.13: Number of new and not new suppliers to St Saviour Southwark union, 1854-80. Source: Minutes of board of guardians.

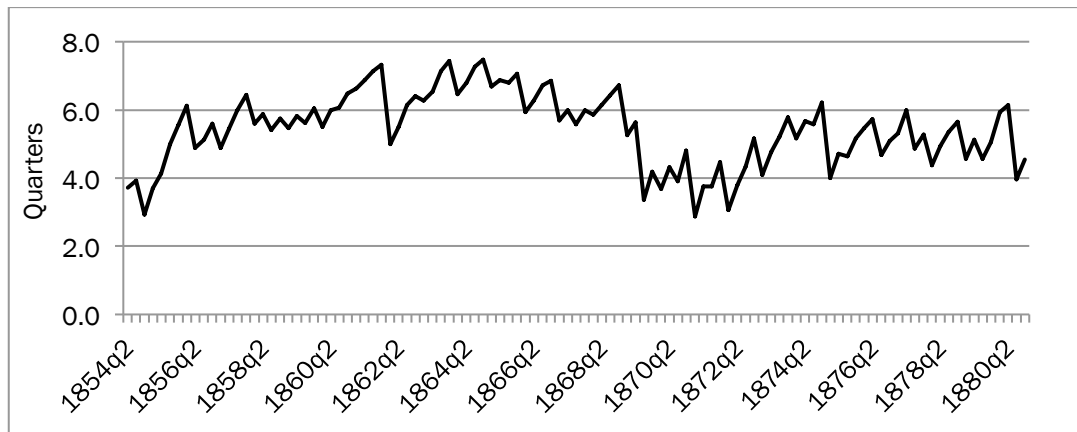


Figure 5.14: Mean number of quarters in previous two years in which suppliers held contracts with St Saviour Southwark union, 1854-80. Source: Minutes of board of guardians.

5.9 Conclusion

Poor law supply must be seen as something akin to the exercise of patronage by union boards at those times and places where guardians knew their local pool of suppliers. Guardians relied on information about price and reliability which, in an open market and with all else being equal, would enable them to make the most appropriate decision for their ratepayers. Yet all else could not be equal as long as guardians had the discretion to choose arbitrarily: The evidence considered in this chapter demonstrates that trust – a social feature – was an integral part of poor law supply. This was true throughout the period

considered in this chapter, but can be seen operating in different ways as bigger firms with a longer reach entered the market between c.1850 and c.1880. Boards of guardians formed business relationships with these bigger and more distant suppliers, but continued to work with smaller local suppliers too. For example, London's specialist local-government printing firms increasingly supplied very distant unions. Remote unions generally had to buy from further afield than less remote unions: their local businesses were comparatively poorly connected to wider markets, so they were obliged to buy from more distant firms higher up the supply chain. Unions frequently bought from bigger suppliers in 1880, external to the union if need be, but internal if available, and unions encompassing smaller centres of population often bought from nearby towns.

Business organisation types also changed to reflect greater capital invested in suppliers. In 1880, compared to 1850, there were more partnerships, both between family members and others, and there were more companies, both municipal and commercial. Non-family partnerships also increased, but not as much as family partnerships or companies. Across the union case studies, the 1850s were characterised by individual suppliers selling specific goods, but in contrast, the consolidation of the grocery trade into bigger firms covering wider ranges of products is visible in the 1880s. This fits with the more recent historiography of business organisation fairly well. However, specialised grocers continued to exist on high streets at this time and they continued to number poor law unions among their customers.

Comparing the poor law unions sheds some light on Scola's question of how far retail developments at this time were 'distinctively urban'.⁵⁴ Fixed retailing, in his analysis, had been a rural as well as urban feature for many centuries after all. The evidence of the case studies suggests that scale was a highly significant factor here. Local retailers in small towns had multiple roles: they were also wholesalers, and could also be distributors to local customers

⁵⁴ R. Scola, 'Retailing in the nineteenth-century town: some problems and possibilities', in J.H. Johnson and C.G. Pooley (eds), *The structure of nineteenth century cities* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 155.

of goods at larger scales without themselves holding the stock. There were plenty of opportunities for small local firms to gain at least some business from the poor law. It is unlikely that many could have been entirely dependent on poor law business, though.

Suppliers to workhouses thus rarely appear to be ‘penny capitalists’ in the sense of those living precariously within the framework of the ‘economy of makeshifts’.⁵⁵ Contractors were ratepayers wherever possible, and guardians relied on continuity and reliability. Suppliers therefore ranged from individual shopkeepers and dealers to large industrial enterprises. However, *ad hoc* purchases may have been made in small quantities from local traders who were not ratepayers and who might have had incomes at the smaller end of the scale. It seems that unions bought from these ‘smaller’ traders far less in the 1880s than they had in the 1850s, and that much more business was done with bigger industrial enterprises in the later period. Not all of that business was on a large scale, though: unions bought firewood from gas companies, for instance, firewood being a by-product of the industrial process. In this sense the workhouse can be seen as a peer of the municipal institution within the industrial landscape.

The changes between the 1850s and 1880s can be attributed to a number of factors. Railway communications were important in reducing the cost of transporting goods, though existing infrastructure such as waterways were vital for relatively remote places earlier in the period. On a wider scale, developments such as telegraphy and cheaper steel allowed information and goods to be distributed in greater quantities and at longer distances.⁵⁶ Direct evidence for these changes is not obvious from the poor law data, but the changes in business typologies which resulted from these factors can be seen readily. These organisational changes followed from alterations in the laws concerning limited liability in the 1850s and 1860s.

⁵⁵ J. Benson, *The Penny Capitalists: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Entrepreneurs* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1983); S. King and A. Tomkins (eds.), *The Poor In England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

⁵⁶ Westall, ‘The Competitive Environment,’ p. 213; D.S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological change and industrial development in Western Europe from 1750 to the present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

The unions considered in this chapter tended to buy from local businesses, whether inside their boundaries or in neighbouring unions. By 1880 some bought from London, but these suppliers were specifically stationers who could send *pro forma* ledgers readily by post. Poor law supply was therefore, for the most part, characterised by local knowledge networks and relationships, and this persisted even with the gradual introduction of bigger enterprises capable of supplying on a greater scale. However, the example of St Saviour Southwark shows that the geography of poor law supply was very different in the capital. There were more potential suppliers within reach, owing to London's density and transport infrastructure, and suppliers could take advantage of a high concentration of potential customers. Many London suppliers sold to numerous poor law unions at a time, and this may be contrasted with the case of Durham, Houghton le Spring and Chester le Street: They were each supplied by Durham printers George Proctor & Son, but this was the only business to sell to more than one union despite Durham's status as a distribution hub and the proximity of the three unions. The next chapter therefore shows how London's unique market for institutional provision affected the running of the metropolitan poor law. Rather than removing the social context of poor law supply, London's concentration of suppliers and customers meant that local knowledge was just as important, if not more so, compared to unions elsewhere in England and Wales.

6 Poor law supply in London

6.1 Introduction

London had a very dense concentration of workhouses compared to the rest of England and Wales, some of which were exceptionally large, and their capacities increased dramatically over the second half of the nineteenth century. On average, London unions in 1850 maintained 3.4 times as many indoor paupers as non-London unions maintained, rising to 6.2 times by 1871.¹ This network of institutions across the capital provided a ready opportunity for potential suppliers. Take, for example, Wandsworth & Clapham union's workhouse, which accommodated around 450 people: it held in its store on 22 March 1851 some 443 lb of cheese, 280 lb of oatmeal, 956 pints of porter, 351 pints of ale, 70 tons of coal, 1,680 lb of potatoes and over a mile of cloth (see Appendix B).² The amount of beef used by the union, which was not kept in the store and presumably therefore delivered daily, can only be guessed at.

The scale of goods consumed by workhouses raises a series of important questions which this chapter addresses. It examines how large suppliers of poor law unions had to be in order to provide them with the required goods, and shows that several large suppliers dominated the markets for certain goods, in particular those required in bulk. These large businesses were themselves supplied by local and national producers, and they were suppliers not only to poor law unions but to other large institutions such as hospitals, barracks and prisons. However, unions also bought where possible from smaller local suppliers, including minor producers and high-street retailers. This is supported by the evidence of provision for a central metropolitan union (St Saviour Southwark) and a peripheral one (St John Hampstead). It was in the interests of the guardians not only to keep rates low by buying from large dealers, but also to keep the poor rates circulating within the union

¹ Indoor pauper means: London: 1 January 1850: 593; 1 January 1871: 1,225. Rest of England and Wales: 1 January 1850: 176; 1 January 1871: 198. Source: PLB and LGB annual reports.

² LMA WABG/010, 22 March 1851.

economy. In looking at the different prices unions paid for their goods, it can be seen that there were not significant geographical differences in pricing across London, but that the same suppliers charged different amounts to different unions at the same time. Potential reasons for these disparities include transport costs, sizes of orders and, potentially, collaboration between suppliers. Together, the evidence presented here helps us to understand better the way in which the supply of goods was organised within the metropolitan poor law system.

6.2 Competition in markets for poor-law supply

A striking feature of many of the businesses which supplied workhouses is their size. Some trades were dominated by large businesses more than others, though in every trade there were very many smaller businesses, or suppliers who held contracts with only one union at a time. Some of these structural differences between various trades can be seen by comparing the numbers of unions on the books of the three suppliers for each trade who supplied the most London unions in 1849-51 (Figure 6.1) and the numbers of businesses who supplied different numbers of unions for each trade (Table 6.1). For example, meat and groceries were often provided by large suppliers with contracts with several unions, whereas items such as ironmongery or wine and spirits – purchased in much smaller quantities – were usually provided by smaller businesses with contracts with only one union. Twenty-six unions have surviving records of their suppliers.³ Many unions bought a particular type of goods from more than one supplier over the period. Some were consecutive contracts, but in almost every case unions bought a certain

³ Given mostly in minutes of boards of guardians: Camden Local Studies and Archive Centre (CLS): St Pancras: UTAH 663 (microfilm). London Metropolitan Archives (LMA): Camberwell: CABG/007, CABG/008; City of London: CBG/013; East London: CBG/005; Fulham: FBG/004, 005; Greenwich: GBG/012, GBG/013; Kensington: KBG/012, KBG/013; Lambeth: LABG/006; Lewisham: LEBG/009; Paddington: PABG/003; Poplar: X090/005 (microfilm); St Luke Chelsea: CHBG/008; St Mary Bermondsey: BBG/006; Stepney: STBG/L/014, STBG/L/015, STBG/L/016; St George the Martyr: SOBG/011; St John Hampstead: HPBG/002; St Martin in the Fields: WEBG/SM/015, WEBG/SM/016; St Olave: BBG/028, 029; Strand: WEBG/ST/011, WEBG/ST/012, WEBG/ST/013; St Saviour Southwark: SOBG/039/010; Wandsworth and Clapham: WABG/010, WABG/011; West London: CBG/016; Whitechapel: STBG/WH/011. City of Westminster Archives (CWA): St George Hanover Square: MF 601, MF 602; St James Piccadilly: MF 2117, MF 2118; St Margaret & St John Westminster: MF 2139.

amount from their contractor and additionally bought from other suppliers; for example a union might have had a contract for vegetables with one supplier but would also buy smaller quantities from a local farmer. These data encompass all the traders listed as having supplied a union either by fixed-term contract or by *ad hoc* arrangement, or who bid for a contract but were not necessarily successful. This reflects the relative ability of traders to supply unions, i.e. the number of unions a given trader was prepared to supply simultaneously. The vast majority of traders did in fact supply that number of unions, though.

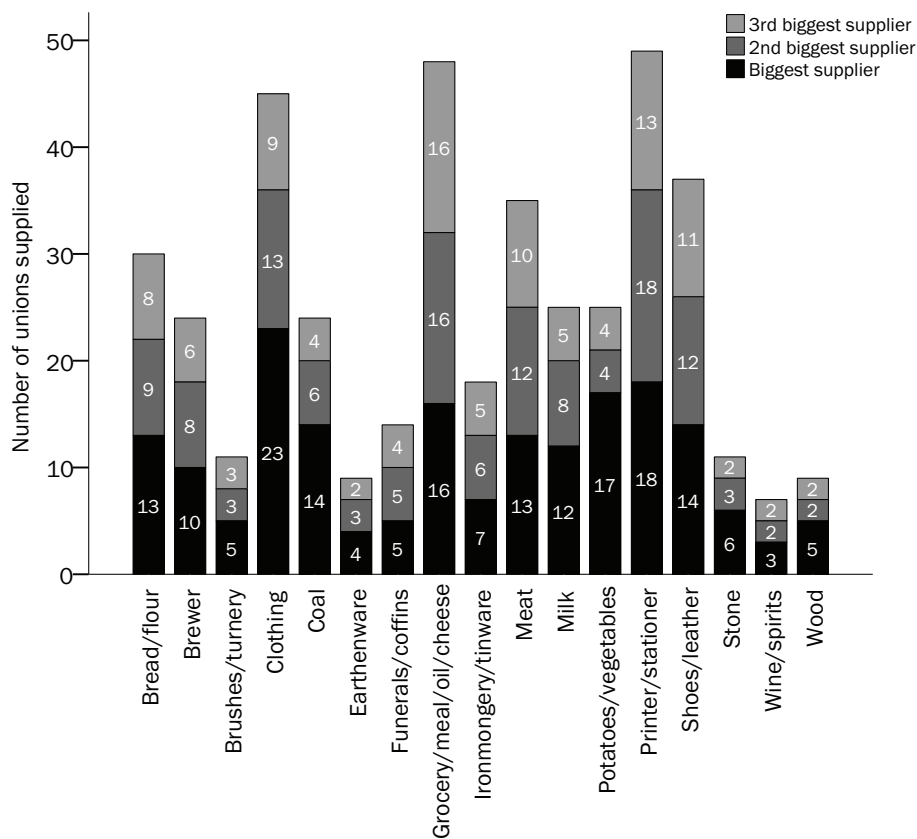


Figure 6.1. London unions supplied by top three suppliers by type, 1849-51.
 Source: Minutes of boards of guardians.

Occupation/goods	Number of business supplying:		
	5+ unions	2-4 unions	1 union
Bedding	0	8	8
Bread/flour	7	17	116
Beer	4	15	38
Brushes/turnery	1	7	20
Clothing	5	10	90
Coal	2	18	70
Earthenware	0	5	26
Funerals/coffins	2	11	59
Grocery, meal, oilman's goods, cheese	18	23	129
Ironmongery, tinware etc.	5	17	133
Meat	11	8	46
Milk	3	17	63
Potatoes and other vegetables	1	16	63
Printing/stationery	3	19	88
Shoes/leather	7	9	38
Stone	1	3	14
Wine/spirits	0	5	66
Wood	1	5	42

Table 6.1. Suppliers of multiple unions.
Source: Minutes of boards of guardians.

Certain types of supply were dominated by a small number of large businesses. In the clothing trade (excluding shoemakers), from 1849 to 1851 twenty-three unions had contracts with William Smith & Son of Pimlico. Thirteen contracted with Charles Roope of Sloane Street, Chelsea, and nine with William Lunn of St Mary at Hill, City of London. Twelve traders supplied between two and five unions, and another eighty-nine traders supplied only one union during the period. Among grocers and general provision merchants, three businesses each had sixteen unions on their books: Ambridge & Andrews and George Penson (both with offices in the City of London) and Pinchin & Johnson (based in New Road, St George in the East). James Percival of Blackfriars supplied fifteen unions and another six traders supplied between ten and twelve. A further thirty supplied between two and nine unions, and another 128 just one union. The large-scale provision of potatoes and other vegetables was almost entirely in the hands of Charles Evans of Hampstead Road, who had seventeen London unions among his customers during the period. The two next biggest suppliers had just four unions apiece. Fourteen supplied two or three unions, and sixty-two supplied one.

These trades have in common the sheer bulk of goods to be supplied by individual contractors. It is unsurprising that only a handful of suppliers comprised the markets for goods which were capital- and labour-intensive, requiring large warehouse facilities, complex transport arrangements and extensive networks of supply. Drapers like William Smith & Son had the resources to supply unions in all parts of London (Figure 6.2). They are likely to have passed parts of their contracts with poor law unions to subcontractors who in turn divided up the work among members of London's enormous pool of outworkers. Given the necessity for low prices demanded by the guardians, it is also likely that these workers were paid very little and performed what could be described as 'sweated' labour.⁴ Henry Mayhew described – somewhat sensationally – the conditions in which such labourers worked in his reports for the *Morning Chronicle* in 1849-50.⁵ He did not specifically discuss the manufacture of workhouse uniforms, but did examine the pay and conditions of those making clothes for the 'army, navy, police, railway, customs and post-office servants, convicts, and other such articles of wearing apparel as are made either by contract or in large quantities'.⁶ The people responsible for purchasing clothes for the army were keen to keep workers' conditions humane, Mayhew reported, and pointed out that army clothier William Shaw in 1845 told his contractors to pay their workers a living wage. Shaw wrote to the Committee on Army, Navy and Ordnance Estimates in 1848 urging the abandonment of the contract system of supply as it stood 'as being one of false economy, as a system most oppressive to the poor, and being most injurious, in every way, to the best interests of the country'.⁷ Nonetheless, neither the army nor any other of the institutions examined by the *Morning Chronicle* bought their clothing in a way that appropriately paid the piece-workers who made the goods, Mayhew reported.

⁴ For subcontracting in sweated industries, see J.A. Schmeichen, *Sweated industries and sweated labor: The London clothing trades 1860-1914* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1984), chapter 3.

⁵ Collected in H. Mayhew, *The Morning Chronicle survey of labour and the poor: the metropolitan districts* (Firle: Caliban Books, 1980-1982), in particular volumes 1 and 2.

⁶ Mayhew, Letter VII, *Morning Chronicle* 9 November 1849.

⁷ *Ibid.*

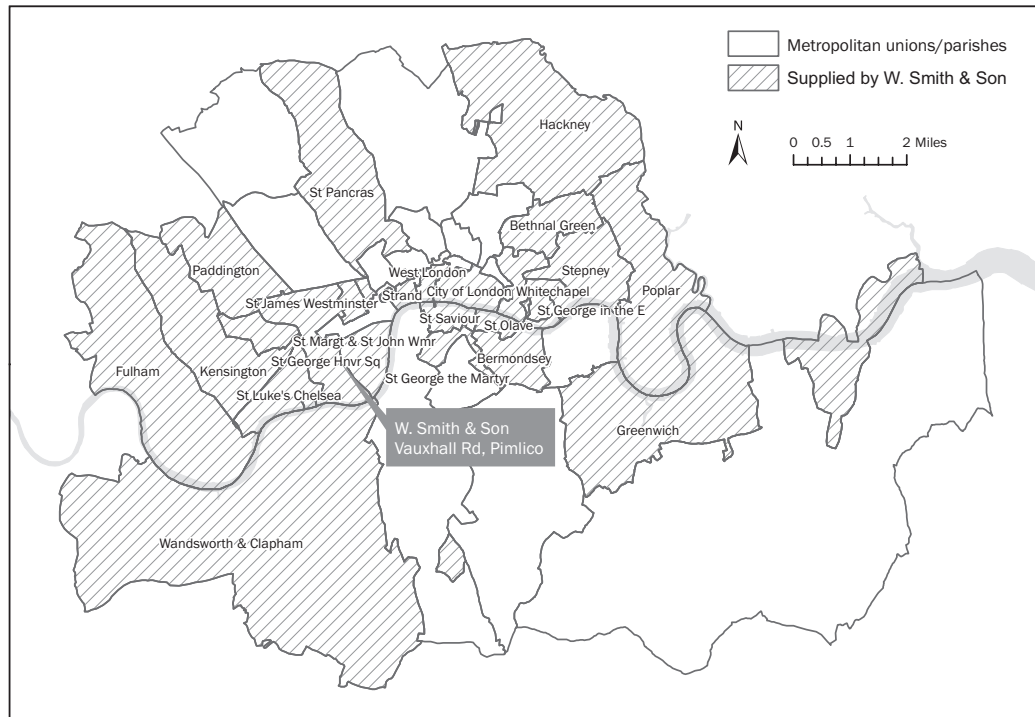


Figure 6.2. London unions supplied by William Smith & Son, drapers, 1849-51.
Source: Minutes of boards of guardians.

The grocery trade was unusual in that there were several businesses supplying a large number of unions each. Eighteen such businesses had contracts with five or more unions in 1849-51. This high number is partly because of the general provisions merchants in this sector, who described themselves as, for instance, cheesemongers, grocers or mealmen but in fact dealt in a much wider range of goods than these terms traditionally signified. Ambridge & Andrews, George Penson, Pinchin & Johnson, James Percival, John Clause and John Winsland, the six businesses with the most union contracts at the time, all supplied oatmeal, cheese, butter, oilmen's goods, cornchandlery, tea, sugar and other groceries – though not necessarily all to the same unions. These were big businesses: George Penson, one of the largest, worked as a warehouse-man for Yeates & Acocks wholesale cheesemongers in Old Fish Street, City of London, in the 1830s, before starting his own businesses as a wholesale cheesemonger at 43 Newgate Street in the City. He was soon

describing himself as a 'general provision merchant'.⁸ Like Smith & Son, Penson supplied unions in all parts of London (Figure 6.3). He was also wholesale dealer to grocers across the south-east of England.⁹ He was so successful in business that he was able to invest heavily in property in Kensington in the 1840s.¹⁰ In 1866 he incorporated his business as Penson & Company with share capital of £120,000, one of the shareholders being a flour dealer named Robert Salter Thornhill, who supplied the St George in the East workhouse.¹¹ On Penson's death, his estate was valued at £120,000.¹²

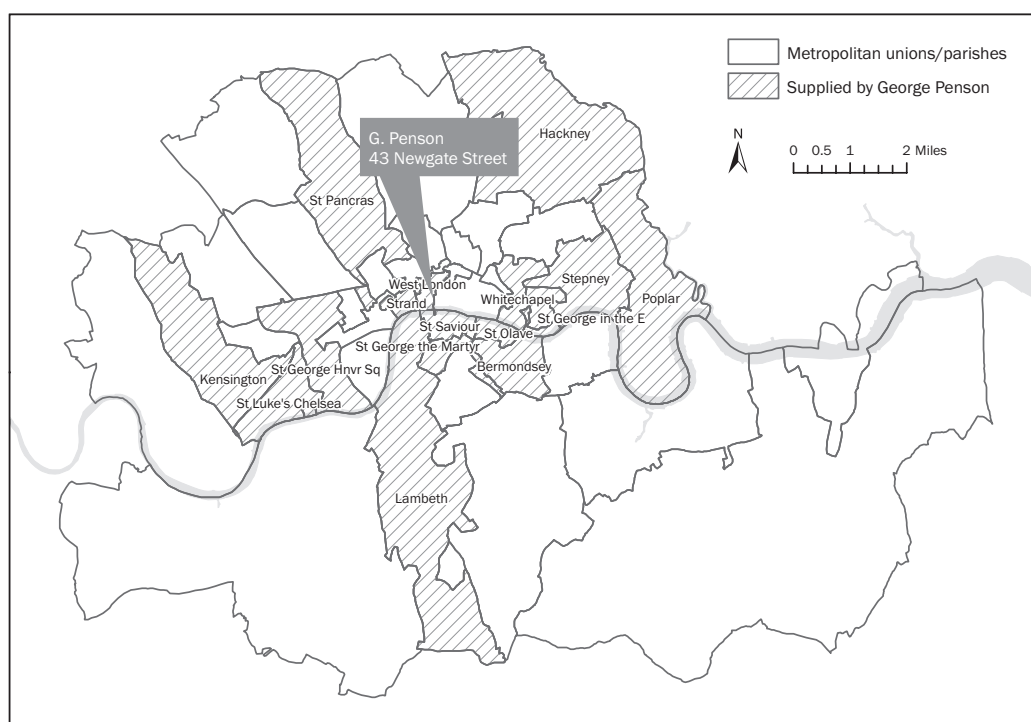


Figure 6.3. London unions supplied by George Penson, provisions merchant, 1849-51.
Source: Minutes of boards of guardians.

⁸ Penson's evidence to Old Bailey, 30 June 1831, case ref. t18310630-156. Online at <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=t18310630-156&div=t18310630-156>. Accessed September 2012.

⁹ The National Archives (TNA) C16/884/P30.

¹⁰ *The Small Edition of the Post Office London Directory, 1852. Comprising, amongst other information, official directory; commercial directory; court directory; parliamentary directory; postal directory; banking directory; &c.* (London: Kelly & Co, 1852), p. 922.; 'The Ladbroke estate: The 1860s onwards', in F.H.W. Sheppard (ed.), *Survey of London: volume 37: Northern Kensington* (1973), pp. 235-251. Online at: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=49877>. Accessed August 2012.

¹¹ TNA BT31/1205/2727C.

¹² *Morning Post*, 25 April 1879, p. 8.

Printing and stationery was another trade dominated by a few large enterprises, but this was something of a special case. From its earliest years, the Poor Law Commission insisted on unions' books being kept in a uniform manner, with information recorded and presented in the same way by all local authorities.¹³ The majority of unions bought books and forms from Charles Knight & Co of Ludgate Street, who from September 1835 were publisher 'by authority' to the Poor Law Commission (Figure 6.4).¹⁴ John Shaw & Sons of Fetter Lane and James Truscott of Blackfriars Road also specialised in government printing, pro-formas and ledgers. No other printers supplied nearly as many unions: nineteen served between two and four unions, and eighty-seven had only single customers. Knight's official status was a point of contention: the central authority had not granted Knight a monopoly, and told unions in 1835 that they were welcome to buy their books and forms from any supplier who could match Knight's price. Nonetheless Shaw & Sons complained to the Home Office in 1847 about the PLC's imprimatur, and although Knight maintained he derived no particular financial benefit from it, he complained in turn that Shaw faithfully copied his publications and prices. Knight had prepared his forms and account books in collaboration with PLC officials but Shaw, he alleged, 'copied [them] in every particular... but of course without incurring any of the labour necessary to carry through such a large operation in its first steps of economical combinations'.¹⁵ In 1835 Knight had predicted gross margins of 7.5 per cent on union books and forms, and although in 1847 he told the PLC that this prediction had been over-optimistic, we cannot be too sure, as he also published the monthly PLC official circulars on which he made 15 per cent margin. All the unions in London were supplied with their forms and books either by Knight, Shaw or Truscott, but the unions also had many small printing and stationery requirements, such as notepaper, letter-heads, cheque books, bills and notices and so on. For these, they could use London's many small printing businesses. There were 423 printing offices

¹³ The PLC's first annual report contained an order for keeping accounts with *pro formas*: PP 1835 XXXV 107. First annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales, Appendix A, no. 11.

¹⁴ TNA HO45/2049.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

of various sizes according to the London Society of Compositors' 1855 guide, many of which occupied very small premises such as sheds and backyards.¹⁶

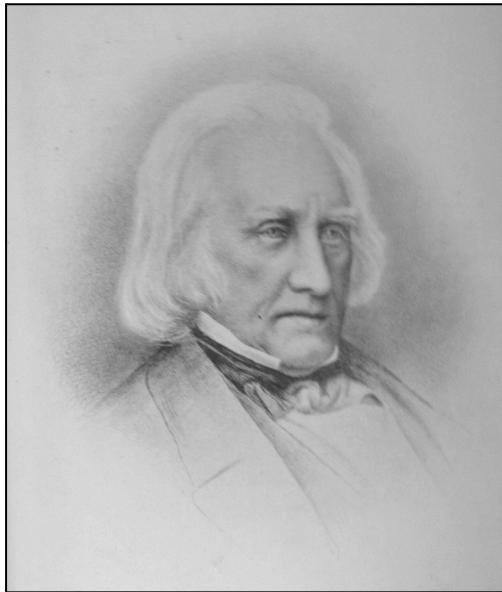


Figure 6.4. Publisher Charles Knight, n.d. (?1865).

Source: A.A. Clowes, *Charles Knight: A Sketch* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1892).

Other trades characterised by a large number of small businesses were those in wine and spirits, earthenware and turnery. Unions did not need very large quantities of these goods, but all unions required some. Fortified wine and gin or brandy were usually provided to sick paupers, but not as a matter of course to the elderly or infirm, who would generally be given half-pints of porter. These sorts of quantities in many cases could be provided by local public houses. The brushes, baskets and other such materials used by paupers to clean the workhouse could easily be bought by the dozen from local small businesses. Earthenware was used in larger quantities by workhouses, which needed stock of several hundred plates for meals, but unions tended to buy from London's earthenware dealers who themselves bought from the manufacturers elsewhere, especially in the Midlands.¹⁷ Unions could therefore easily obtain the goods from a local supplier who would not have to keep the stock in a warehouse but simply arrange for its delivery.

¹⁶ P.G. Hall, *The industries of London since 1861* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1962), p. 102.

¹⁷ There were relatively few manufacturers of earthenware in London: J.P. Cushion, *Handbook of pottery and porcelain marks* (London: Faber, 1980), pp. 108-110.

By the 1850s a great deal of milk was brought to London by rail, and many unions bought milk that had been produced outside the capital.¹⁸ Collinson Hall of Bowers Farm, Havering, Essex, supplied four unions in 1849-51 and had premises in Finsbury, the City and Shoreditch (Figure 6.5). He also supplied the Foundling Hospital in Bloomsbury with milk in 1846 and was credited by contemporaries as ‘the first to introduce the supply of country milk to London’.¹⁹ William Jones, who sold to five unions at the time, was described as a ‘cowkeeper and grazier’ of Ham Park, Upton, Essex, as well as a ‘dairyman, and dealer in eggs and bread’ from his premises at 3 New Road, Whitechapel.²⁰ Richard Sockett and John Roberts, who in partnership ran Cranbrook Farm, Dagenham, Essex, supplied twelve unions with milk. They had premises at 3 Mitre Square, Aldgate. James Tilling had a farm in Hendon, Middlesex and premises at 80 Earl Street, Lisson Grove, from which he supplied Strand union and the parish of St James Westminster.



Figure 6.5. Dairy farmer Collinson Hall.

Source: *Illustrated Dramatic and Sporting News*, 9 July 1881, p. 400.

¹⁸ There is not consensus over the quantities and timing of the growth of the railway milk trade: See P.J. Atkins, ‘London’s Intra-Urban Milk Supply, circa 1790-1914’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 2:3 (1977), pp. 383-399; D. Taylor, ‘London’s milk supply, 1850-1900: A reinterpretation’, *Agricultural History* 45:1 (1971), pp. 33-38.

¹⁹ Essex Record Office, D/DQ 14/88; ‘Mr. Collinson Hall’, *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 31 March 1880, p. 3.

²⁰ ‘Bankruptcies’, *Edinburgh Gazette*, 3 February 1860, p. 163.

The direct sale to unions by dairy farmers somewhat qualifies historians' common conception of milk distribution. Fussell suggests that dairy farmers outside London consigned their milk to wholesalers in the capital:

The business was completely in the hands of the wholesalers. There was no competition between them... Each salesman had his regular customers every day. There were about ten dealers, and on arrival about thirty or forty retailer's carts were waiting to take the milk away.²¹

That is not to say that unions exclusively bought directly from farmers, and there is in fact some evidence of metropolitan unions being supplied by these milk wholesalers. James Allen, junior, of 18 Paradise Street, Lambeth, does not appear to have been associated with a particular farm and it may be that he bought from farmers whose milk arrived in London at nearby Spa Road railway station. James Allen, senior, supplied two unions; he had premises in Paris Street, Lambeth, very near Waterloo station. Three unions bought milk from Edward Jutsum, listed in the Post Office directory only as a 'carcase butcher'.²² His premises at 65 Aldgate High Street were close to Fenchurch Street station. However, many unions – especially those on the fringes of the metropolis – also bought directly from local farms, with no need for rail transport. St John Hampstead bought milk from nearby farmer William Collins, for example, and Kensington was supplied by Henry Holmden of Turnham Green.

The concentration of poor law business among small numbers of suppliers changed somewhat for different trades between 1850 and 1870, judging by the numbers of contracts held by certain suppliers in 1870 (Table 6.2). These data show only the contracts between unions and suppliers, and not other types of provision (e.g. *ad hoc* small purchases). In 1850 there were several butchers supplying a large number of unions but by 1870 the trade appears to have become more competitive, with many unions buying from suppliers who had only one or two other contracts and none with more than three. For the supply of flour, most of the poor law contracts were held by Messrs Kingsford or by

²¹ G.E. Fussell, *The English dairy farmer 1500-1900* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966), p. 311.

²² *Kelly's London 1852*, p. 829.

John Gillett & Sons (described as an ‘army contractor’ in the Post Office directory, and supplying both flour and meat), continuing the dominance of a few large suppliers.²³ Grocery and meal are divided in these data, as the supply of meal was increasingly controlled by Neill & Waugh and was less in the hands of general provision merchants as it had been in the 1850s. Several of the traders who supplied poor law unions in 1849-51 were still doing business with them in 1870. These long-standing suppliers include John Gillett, the Kingsford family, grocer John Eddison Craney, butchers Henry Lee and William Masters, mealmen Edwards Brothers and butcher Charles Baker and his son Benjamin Bloomfield Baker.

Meat	Contracts held	Flour	Contracts held
Morris & Oakes	3	Messrs Kingsford	9
James Blofeld	3	John Gillett	6
Henry Lee	3	S. Kidd & Co	3
John Gillett	2	Henry Ward	2
George Barth	2	Thomas Hadden	2
Joseph Cockrill	2	4 others	1
B.B. Baker	2		
11 others	1		
		Meal	
		Neill & Waugh	12
		Edwards Brothers	3
Grocery		S. Hebbardine	2
George T. Cox	6	13 others	1
William Topley	2		
16 others	1		

Table 6.2. Poor-law contracts held by suppliers, six months to Michaelmas 1870.
Source: PP 1870 LVIII 563: Metropolitan Boards of Guardians (contracts). Return of the contracts made by the Metropolitan Boards of Guardians for the supply of certain articles for the six months ending Michaelmas 1870.

Meat, clothing and groceries tended therefore to be provided by large suppliers with contracts with several unions, as bulky goods required greater capital and labour. Local purchases, on the other hand, could be made when goods were less bulky or came in smaller quantities, or when they were required less frequently, as in the cases of turnery or wine and spirits. Changes are apparent in the organisation of some markets over time, and meat supply became more competitive whereas larger suppliers increasingly dominated the flour market. By the 1870s, meal supplies emerged as distinct from grocery. It is possible that the nature and meaning of grocery developed

²³ *Kelly's London 1852*, p. 752.

over the period to emphasise retail, and that mealmen came to represent the wholesale part of the market by this point. The retail market was increasingly dominated by multiples such as Lipton's, squeezing out more modest high-street traders even in relatively small towns.²⁴ These single high-street traders may in earlier decades have been capable of supplying goods to workhouses, distributing from their own wholesalers, but the multiples who replaced them were organised differently and focused on retail.

6.3 The importance of poor law unions as local customers

The great quantities of goods supplied to poor law unions, the large sums spent on buying them and the longevity of some of the suppliers suggest that workhouse provisioning could be a lucrative type of commerce. However, the number of suppliers in the various trades for different unions indicates that poor law work did not necessarily bring large revenues for individual businesses. In other words, some unions spread their spending on certain items more thinly than others (Table 6.3). The table explores this geographical diversity for the period 1849-51 by listing the number of contractors supplying each union. Six unions, for instance, bought their bread and flour from just one supplier each – in most cases a supplier who also contracted with many other unions. On the other hand most unions bought bread and flour from a few more suppliers, and in some cases from very many – such as the unusually high number (53) who did business with St Pancras. It is unclear from the records, but it is possible that St Pancras, at that time a parish under a local act, ran a ticket system of relief by which outdoor paupers could buy bread from any local baker, and the bakers would then present their invoices to the guardians. Meanwhile some unions were well-placed to choose between large numbers of suppliers for certain goods, such as St Olave's nineteen coal suppliers between 1849 and 1851. The multitude of coal wharves on the south bank of the Thames enabled the union to buy small quantities directly from the wholesalers more readily than other unions could.

²⁴ F.G. Pennance and B.S. Yamey, 'Competition in the Retail Grocery Trade 1850-1939', *Economica* 22:88 (1955), p. 309.

	Bread/flour	Clothing	Coal	Grocery	Meat	Milk	Potatoes	Printing	Shoes	Wine/spirits
Bermondsey	3	4	6	19	3	2	3	4	4	1
Bethnal Green	3	4	2	9	3	2	2	8	1	1
Camberwell	1	1	4	4	3	1	2	1	3	0
City of London	12	5	15	15	8	6	2	7	3	0
East London	6	5	1	10	5	6	5	9	5	0
Fulham	2	8	5	11	8	2	2	3	2	4
Greenwich	14	8	5	19	16	4	11	9	11	12
Hackney	8	6	8	10	2	2	3	3	1	1
Kensington	13	7	3	16	6	8	7	8	9	4
Lambeth	2	4	2	10	1	4	6	6	2	3
Lewisham	1	2	2	5	2	2	2	2	3	2
Paddington	1	2	1	8	4	5	1	4	2	3
Poplar	5	6	3	7	5	4	5	6	6	3
St George Hanover Sq	1	5	0	9	3	2	2	0	0	2
St George in the East	19	12	9	21	12	13	9	15	12	10
St George the Martyr	1	5	2	9	2	2	5	7	4	2
St James Westminster	4	3	0	11	3	6	2	3	1	0
St John Hampstead	3	7	4	6	6	3	3	3	2	2
St Luke's Chelsea	5	5	5	20	10	6	3	8	3	4
St Margaret & St John	7	2	5	22	8	5	5	7	5	3
St Martin in the Fields	1	4	1	8	3	4	2	5	0	3
St Olave	7	11	19	21	8	8	6	2	9	3
St Pancras	53	11	10	24	9	9	6	9	6	4
St Saviour Southwark	3	11	5	14	3	3	3	9	6	2
Stepney	8	6	2	10	4	4	5	10	6	7
Strand	8	11	2	11	6	4	4	4	3	2
Wandsworth & Clapham	7	2	2	8	3	3	8	7	2	2
West London	3	7	3	7	1	3	1	13	3	4
Whitechapel	10	8	8	17	8	10	4	11	9	1
Mean	7.3	5.9	4.6	12.4	5.3	4.6	4.1	6.3	4.2	2.9
Trimmed mean*	5.8	5.9	4.3	12.3	5.1	4.4	4.0	6.2	4.1	2.7
Median	5	5	3	10	4	4	3	7	3	2

* Trimmed mean excludes greatest and smallest value.

Table 6.3. Number of suppliers per union by trade-type, 1849-51.
Source: Minutes of boards of guardians.

By examining the locations of suppliers to a single union in London, St Saviour Southwark, we can not only gain an understanding of the importance of poor law custom to local economies, but also see the effects of the concentration of certain markets among a small number of big suppliers. In the year to 25 March 1850 St Saviour spent £4,966 on workhouse supplies of various sorts, including bread and flour, meat, groceries, soap, candles, cloth and clothing,

coal, milk, beer, vegetables, ironmongery, stationery, cleaning chemicals, coffins and other items (out of a total spend that year of £10,575). Seventy-three suppliers are listed in the guardians' minutes as having received cheques for these goods.²⁵ Of those, forty-seven – some sixty-four percent – had premises within the union, with the other twenty-six almost entirely within a couple of miles of the union's boundaries (Figure 6.6). St Saviour spent £3,621 on goods from businesses based in the union, though £1,509 of this was paid to a single supplier, baker Thomas Field of Blackfriars Road. Field ran a very large enterprise, holding contracts with six other London unions or parishes at the time: City of London, Fulham, Hackney, St James Westminster, St Margaret & St John Westminster and St Olave. The number and geographical spread of these unions indicates that he was not simply a small-scale local baker, and it therefore seems likely that he was selected by St Saviour not just because he was based in the union but rather because he was capable of fulfilling the contract.



Figure 6.6. Suppliers to St Saviour Southwark, 1849-51.
 Source: Minutes of board of guardians, LMA SOBG/039/009; *Kelly's London 1852*; *Post Office Directory of Essex, Herts, Kent, Middlesex, Surrey and Sussex*. (London: Kelly & Co, 1855).

²⁵ LMA SOBG/039/009.

Did the union prefer to do business with local traders? It was indeed prepared to contract with large bakers outside the union: in March 1850 Joseph Goldsworthy of St Luke's Middlesex won the tender, though he did not execute the contract; instead the bread contract was awarded to Thomas Hunt (either of Cheapside or of Bermondsey, but in either case outside the union) and the flour contract given to Thomas Bowditch of Deptford. The following September James Murray of Fleet Street took over the supply of both bread and flour. For 1849-51 there were ten bakers capable of holding contracts with three or more London unions at a time (i.e. who held or bid for contracts). This may have been a large enough number of suppliers to represent a competitive market, though, and furthermore St Saviour was relatively fortunate in having two of these ten with premises within its boundaries.²⁶ This suggests that the choice of Thomas Field was incidental to his being within the union.

On the other hand, a business could be large without having many poor law unions among its customers. St Saviour, for example, bought goods on a large scale from other suppliers who did not have contracts with other unions. For meat, groceries and oilman's goods (i.e. soap, candles and so on), St Saviour spent large amounts on suppliers from within the union, despite much bigger businesses dominating these markets (Figure 6.1). Of the top ten suppliers to St Saviour, only half were based in the union, though the guardians did buy from competing suppliers, such as groceries from both John Parr and Nicholas Yarrow, and meat from both John Beale and Henry Attfield (Table 6.4). Thus it would appear that the St Saviour guardians were willing to buy from large suppliers outside the union, but not without also giving some business to local suppliers too. The guardians' minutes for 18 July 1850 record that

The attention of the Board having been called to several Tradesmen having had the orders from the Union continuously for a long period, It was Resolved, That in future where this has been the case the orders be periodically given to other Tradesmen residing in the Union.²⁷

²⁶ The other was Thomas Hadden who had premises at 37 High Street, Poplar, and 15 Bridge Street, Southwark.

²⁷ LMA SOBG/039/010, f. 57, 18 July 1850.

This resolution had no effect in practical terms, however: within two months the bread contract was awarded to James Murray of Fleet Street; clothing to William Smith & Sons of Pimlico and Charles Roope of Chelsea; meat to John Williams of Walworth Road; leather to Alfred Rymer of Soho; and milk to James Allen Jr. of Lambeth.

Supplier	Goods	Amount (£)	In St Saviour union?	Total unions supplied
Thomas Field	Bread and flour	1,509	Yes	7
John Beale	Meat	721	Yes	1
John Parr	Groceries	301	Yes	1
George Penson	Butter	282	No	16
Henry Attfield	Meat	234	No	13
W.W. & R. Brook	Soap, candles etc.	174	Yes	1
William Smith & Son	Clothing	169	No	23
Rusby, Brown & Co.	Granite	157	Yes	1
Charles Roope	Blankets etc.	102	No	13
Nicholas Yarrow	Groceries	97	No	11
Other suppliers		1,220		

Table 6.4. St Saviour Southwark union's biggest suppliers, 1849-51.
Source: Minutes of board of guardians, LMA SOBG/039/009.

For large items, therefore, guardians were to some degree restricted in choice to a few major enterprises who had the resources to fulfil big contracts. This was not true of the smaller businesses, who in many cases did not win tenders for contracts but nonetheless had opportunities to supply workhouses. Only purchases of over £50 were required by law to be put out to tender and advertised widely (see Chapter 3). We have seen that around half of St Saviour's large-scale suppliers were from within the union, but a much higher proportion of the smaller suppliers came from inside the union. Of the fifty-four suppliers who received *less* than £50-worth of business from St Saviour in 1849-50, thirty-seven (i.e. sixty-nine per cent) were local. These sub-£50 deals amounted to £614, of which £413 (i.e. sixty-seven per cent) was spent on local businesses.

There were a number of advantages to any union in buying from local businesses, and St Saviour was not the only authority which explicitly preferred them: St James Westminster, a parish under a local act, asked for

tenders from 'Rated Inhabitants' in April 1849.²⁸ This stipulation would have been unlawful for a union or parish under the Poor Law Amendment Act. Many types of small, cheap items could quickly and easily be found locally, with messengers having to travel only a short distance to order them. Local supply was very practical, as most goods were delivered to workhouses by horse-drawn carts. As discussed in the preceding chapters, union officials were likely to know local suppliers well, and could judge their reputations for quality and reliability. Guardians were also keen to keep the rates circulating within the union, to a large part because such a policy would help their re-election. In a letter to the LGB, two guardians of the City of London union pointed out that when it came to contracting, boards often had 'strong local interests to serve'.²⁹ As Snell argues, there was also a strong sense of local attachment to parish, even to some degree in dense urban areas of central London – and by extension, perhaps, to unions, especially in those like St Saviour composed of just two parishes.³⁰

St Saviour therefore bought in bulk from large suppliers from across London, and in smaller quantities from local suppliers; but it also bought in small quantities from some businesses outside the union. These purchases tended to be for specialised items, from traders with good reputations and where there was no local alternative. For instance on 29 March 1849 the guardians spent £4 14s on hammers for use by casual paupers breaking stone.³¹ They were bought from Richard Levett of 10 Museum Street, Bloomsbury, whose entry in the 1852 Post Office directory described him as 'stone hammer maker to the Metropolitan unions, & general smith.'³² Levett supplied seven unions in London from 1849 to 1851, and this reference was clearly meant to advertise to other potential customers the fitness of his tools for constant heavy use. There were few other products which could be sold on the basis of their suitability for paupers.

²⁸ CWA D2148, microfilm 2117, p. 46.

²⁹ TNA MH19/1, 27360/72, City of London poor law union to LGB, 14 May 1872.

³⁰ K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and belonging: Community, identity and welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 49, 57.

³¹ LMA SOBG/039/009, f. 176.

³² *Kelly's London 1852*, p. 850.

It could be argued that St Saviour was an unusual union in respect of its suppliers, as it was centrally located with excellent communications. Goods could cross the river via Blackfriars road and rail bridges and Southwark bridge; Blackfriars Road was a major thoroughfare housing several large enterprises; and the south bank of the Thames, which formed the union's northern border, was lined with busy wharves. It is therefore worth comparing St Saviour's suppliers with those of a less central poor law authority, such as the parish of St John Hampstead. At 2,252 acres, the parish was nearly ten times the area of St Saviour, which covered 250 acres; however, it had less than a third of the population (11,986 for St John Hampstead, 35,371 for St Saviour in 1851). Most of its inhabitants lived in Hampstead village. A goods railway ran nearby and a major road connected it to London, but despite being a 'metropolitan' union it was separated from the new housing developments of north-central London by a belt of fields. The parish's guardians' minutes for 1849-51 list seventy-one traders who supplied the workhouse or outdoor poor, the addresses of forty-nine of which can be readily ascertained.³³ Of these forty-nine, twenty-six had premises in Hampstead and twenty-three did not (Figure 6.7).

³³ LMA HPBG/002; *Kelly's London 1852*; *Kelly's Essex 1855*.



Figure 6.7. Suppliers to St John Hampstead, 1849-51.
Source: Minutes of Board of Guardians, LMA HPBG/002; *Kelly's London 1852*; *Kelly's Essex 1855*.

Like St Saviour's suppliers, those who were outside St John's parish fell into two categories. First, the sellers of specialist goods such as tool-maker Richard Levett of Bloomsbury, mangle-manufacturers Baker & Co of the City, engraver W.V. Wingrove of Smithfield and scale-makers T. Burchfield & Son, also of Smithfield. Second, the large enterprises capable of supplying in bulk who supplied unions across London, such as draper William Lunn of the City, butcher Henry Rogers of Islington, potato-dealer Charles Evans of Camden, flour-factor/baker John Gillett of Bloomsbury, and coal-merchant Coles Child & Co and brewers Goding & Co, both of Lambeth. St John Hampstead, like St Saviour, occasionally also bought the sorts of goods sold by these large suppliers from smaller local traders, like brewer Thomas Buckland, draper William Brett and baker Ebenezer Jobbins. As it was surrounded by farmland, Hampstead could also benefit from local milk, buying only from farmers and dairy-keepers John Culverhouse, William Collins and Lucy Roach, all of whom lived in the parish. There was one important difference between St Saviour and St John Hampstead, however: Because of its location, St Saviour had the

advantage of a higher number of potential suppliers than St John for more types of goods. St Saviour had an above-average number of suppliers for five out of the ten goods shown in Table 6.3: clothing, coal, grocery, printing and shoes/leather. St John Hampstead, in contrast, had an above-average number of suppliers only for clothing and meat. But of the thirty-six suppliers within the parish of St John Hampstead, only one supplied any other workhouses at all.

Nonetheless, most of the same characteristics of supply are apparent for both St Saviour and St John Hampstead. For the goods they required in bulk, metropolitan unions had a choice of a small number of large businesses based across the capital. These large businesses were not to be found in every union, limiting the ability of guardians to spend the poor rates only on local traders. Where possible, guardians took the opportunity to spend locally when smaller quantities of goods were required or if there were no suitable large supplier, but when unions needed certain specialist goods, they had a much more restricted choice.

6.4 Supplying other institutions

Some of the traders who supplied multiple poor law unions were also in a position to contract with other large institutions, suggesting that institutional provision was likely to have been their main source of business. William Smith & Son, the Pimlico linen-drapers who supplied or bid for contracts with twenty-three metropolitan unions in 1850, also had a contract to supply shirts for the Royal Marines quartered at Deptford.³⁴ When troops were encamped at Chobham Common, near Chertsey, in 1853 before their departure for the Crimea, the contract to supply bread and 50 sacks of flour a day was won by John Gillett of Silver Street Bloomsbury, who had contracted with thirteen poor law unions in 1850.³⁵ He also provided 600 sacks of corn, eighty loads of hay and sixty loads of straw for the cavalry horses. The contract to provide the camp with 6,000 lb of fresh meat per day was won by Charles Baker & Son of

³⁴ TNA J117/32, contract bond 25 April 1850.

³⁵ 'The military camp at Chobham', *Morning Post*, 23 May 1853, p. 4.

Newgate market, who also supplied seven unions in 1850. Commissary-General Sir Randolph Routh, according to the *Morning Post*, first offered the contracts to local tradesmen but they had not generally taken up the proposal.

Poor law suppliers who also won contracts with the army included William Jackson & Co and William Lunn, who both supplied clothing to troops going to Crimea in 1854.³⁶ St Saviour union bought buttons from Philip Firmin & Sons, described as '[wholesale] army & navy button, military & naval ornament manufacturers & sword cutlers to the Queen & royal family, 153 Strand, & 13 Conduit Street Bond Street', although it seems likely that the buttons bought by St Saviour were for the uniform of an official such as the master, rather than for paupers.³⁷ Irrespective of this, it is clear that many large workhouse suppliers relied on institutional business for their financial survival.

Insane asylums had much in common with workhouses in terms of size and contracting arrangements, and it is unsurprising that they shared suppliers. Chelsea linendrapers Charles Roope & Son, for example, frequently advertised in the *Asylum Journal*, offering to tender for contracts 'from a single item to the furnishing of an Establishment throughout', and claiming to have supplied the Hanwell and Colney Hatch asylums since they were founded (Figure 6.8).

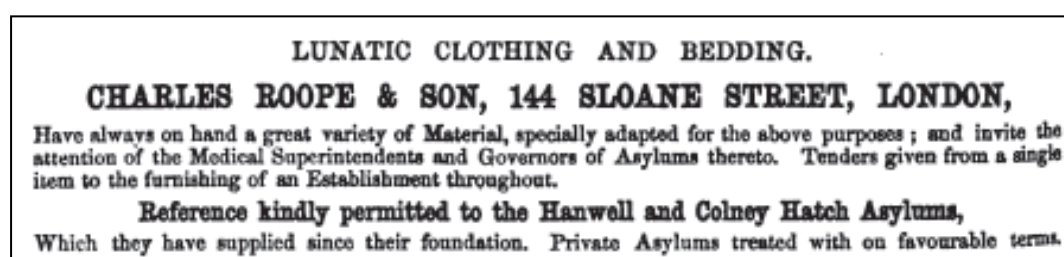


Figure 6.8. Charles Roope & Son, advertisement, *Asylum Journal*, 15 May 1855, p. 208.

Prisons were also a good source of business for workhouse suppliers. A sample of contracts entered into by Middlesex prisons in 1862 were won by workhouse suppliers James Percival of Blackfriars for oilman's goods, Mary Evans of Bloomsbury for potatoes, Thomas Warne of Covent Garden for

³⁶ PP 1854-55 XXXII 307: Army clothing (Crimea). Return showing the number and description of articles of clothing supplied from this country by the government since the 1st day of October 1854, for the troops serving in the Crimea; &c.

³⁷ *Kelly's London 1852*, p. 731.

leather, Benjamin Bloomfield Baker of the City of London for meat and Neill & Waugh of the City of London for oatmeal, barley and split peas.³⁸ Benjamin Bloomfield Baker told the Old Bailey in 1849 that he and his father Charles supplied the 'Model Prison' (i.e. Pentonville) with 800 to 1,000 stone of meat a day.³⁹ Nine years later he was running the business and, as his agent James Green told the same court, was also a contractor for the troops at Woolwich.⁴⁰

These arrangements often ran in parallel with workhouse contracts, which serves to emphasise the extent to which some poor law contractors operated very large businesses that supplied a range of bulk purchasers. Their business practices, therefore, were likely to have been adapted to serving a demand for considerable volumes of goods – a trait that was a vital for succeeding in a marketplace full of large institutional customers.

6.5 Prices

Given that unions throughout London often bought their goods from the same suppliers, it is unsurprising that there were no significant geographical differences in prices across the city for most goods. Central unions paid neither more nor less than peripheral unions, and nor were there north-south or east-west divisions, with the single exception of beef (Figure 6.9). In 1850-51 beef appears to have been consistently cheaper south of the river than north, but the differences in price were of the order of a halfpenny or so per pound and this pattern should be treated with caution.

However, suppliers often contracted with different unions at different prices for the same goods and this introduced some spatial variation in costs. This can be seen, for example, in the prices paid by London unions in the six

³⁸ Percival: LMA MA/DG/056/12, 20 June 1862; Evans: MA/D/G/056/16, 20 June 1862; Warne: MA/D/G/056/17, 12 December 1862; Baker: MA/D/G/056/31, 12 December 1862; Neill & Waugh: MA/D/G/056/6, 20 June 1862.

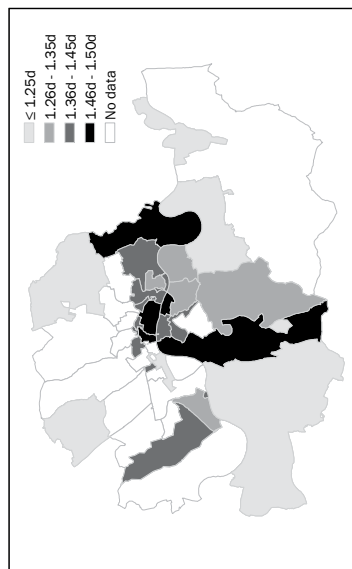
³⁹ Benjamin Bloomfield Baker's evidence in prosecution of William Wildgoose, 18 September 1849. Online at <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?path=sessionsPapers%2F18490917.xml>. Accessed September 2012.

⁴⁰ James Green's evidence in prosecution of Thomas Forsdick, 22 November 1858. Online at <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=t18581122-65&div=t18581122-65>. Accessed September 2012.

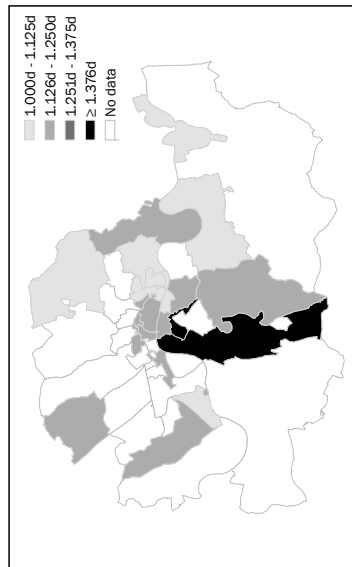
months to Michaelmas 1870 (Table 6.5).⁴¹ Messrs Kingsford contracted with nine London unions for flour in this period. Their prices per 280-lb sack of best seconds wheaten flour ranged from 27s 6d (St Pancras) to 33s 6d (Strand), and only two unions even paid the same price (St Marylebone and St Giles & St George both paid 30s 6d). Gillett & Sons contracted with seven unions for flour for the same period. Each paid a slightly different price, ranging from 29s 9d (St Olave) to 32s (Fulham). S. Kidd & Co supplied three unions with flour, two of which (City of London and St Leonard's Shoreditch) paid 30s and one of which paid 32s (Mile End Old Town).

A similar disparity is evident for meat. Morris & Oakes and Henry Lee each supplied three unions with meat in the six months to Michaelmas 1870, and each union paid a different amount. The prices paid by Morris & Oakes's customers were a little lower than Lee's: the highest from Morris & Oakes was lower than the lowest from Lee, and the mean price per pound of beef from Morris & Oakes was 6.1d and from Lee was 6.5d.

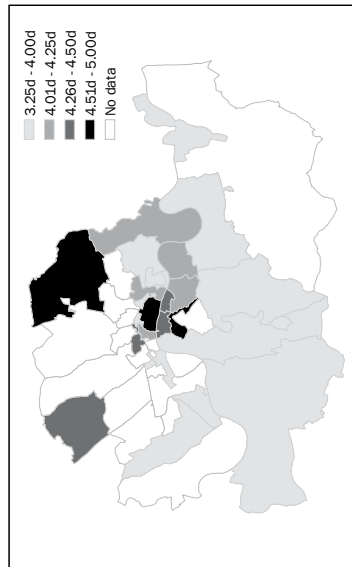
⁴¹ PP 1870 LVIII 563.



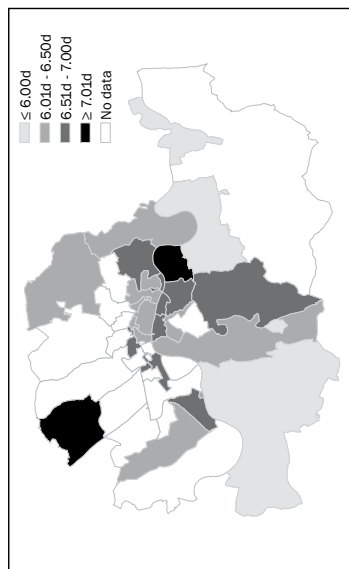
(a) Flour per lb



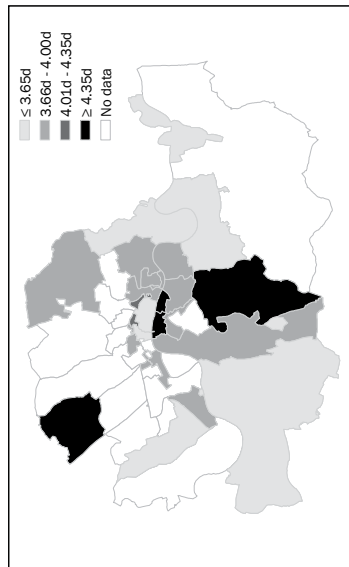
(b) Bread per lb



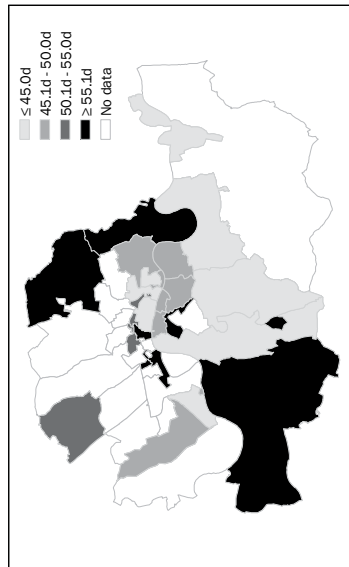
(c) Beef per lb



(d) Butter per lb



(e) Cheese per lb



(f) Potatoes per cwt

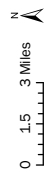


Figure 6.9. Prices paid by poor law unions for goods, mean 1850-51.
Source: PP 1852 XLV 7.

Union	Flour supplier	Price per 280lb of best seconds wheaten flour (<i>shillings</i>) from:		
		Gillett	Kingsford	Other
Bethnal Green	Henry Ward			29.25
Camberwell	Gillett & Sons	30.00		
St Luke Chelsea	Gillett & Sons	30.83		
Fulham	Gillett & Sons	32.00		
St George's Middlesex	Kingsford		30.50	
St George in the East	Henry Ward			29.25
St Giles & St George	Kingsford		32.50	
Greenwich	Kingsford		29.83	
Hackney	Kingsford		30.00	
St John Hampstead	Gillett & Sons	30.63		
Holborn	Kingsford		30.75	
St Mary Islington	Gillett & Sons	30.50		
Kensington	Kingsford		31.00	
St Mary Lambeth	Simmonds & Morten			31.50
Lewisham	James Roffey			30.42
City of London	S. Kidd & Co.			30.00
St Marylebone	Kingsford		30.50	
Mile End Old Town	S. Kidd & Co.			32.00
St Olave	Gillett & Sons	29.75		
Paddington	Gillett & Sons	31.00		
St Pancras	Kingsford		27.50	
Poplar	Thomas Hadden			33.50
St Saviour	Donald Scott			32.00
St Leonard Shoreditch	S. Kidd & Co.			30.00
Stepney	W.E. Westrup			27.00
Strand	Kingsford		33.50	
Wandsworth & Clapham	Not named			32.00
Westminster	Kingsford		31.75	
Whitechapel	Thomas Hadden			30.00
Mean		30.67	30.78	30.63

Table 6.5. Prices charged to London unions by flour suppliers, 1870. Prices are given in decimal fractions as a result of calculation to standardise price per quantity, as not all unions bought flour in 280lb sacks. Source: PP 1870 LVIII 563.

There was less variation in the contract prices paid by customers of Neill & Waugh for oatmeal, but there was by no means a fixed price. The partnership supplied twelve unions in the same period, five of which paid 13s 6d for a hundredweight of best Scotch oatmeal. Four unions paid 14s, two paid 14s 6d and one paid 15s. Meanwhile Edwards Brothers contracted with four unions for oatmeal, all at different prices, the lowest being 13s 3d and the highest 16s 9d.

These inconsistencies in price suggest that the largest suppliers did not necessarily charge lower prices than the smaller. The cheapest flour bought by

a union for the half-year came from W.E. Westrup, who supplied only Stepney during the period. The sixteen unions who bought their flour from either Gillett or Kingsford paid on average two-thirds of a penny more per sack than the customers of the rest of the suppliers. This is only a small difference, which would have had very little impact on a union's total relief costs, but one which shows that large businesses did not automatically supply at lower prices. As shown in chapter 3, unions were prepared to buy from a supplier who was not the lowest bidder where they had, for instance, a reputation for a reliable standard of goods or for punctual deliveries. The larger suppliers might be expected to achieve these more effectively than smaller traders. Larger businesses may also have had the ability to absorb the costs associated with late payments, for which poor law unions were notorious.

Why might prices be different for different unions? One reason might have been the expected quantities to be bought. A supplier would be contracted with for a price per item or weight, but the quantity actually needed by the union would not be specified: it would simply order as required, and the supplier would send in the goods and invoice the union for the contracted price at the end of the period of the contract. A flour dealer might be more willing to tender at a lower price for a contract with a workhouse he expected to supply with a large amount of flour, than with another whose orders tended to be smaller. This would have been a judgment made by the dealer on a case-by-case basis, and it is not easy to see this from the available evidence. In 1850, for example, there was a very weak positive relationship between London unions' pauper numbers and flour costs, i.e. unions in London with higher pauper numbers tended to pay slightly more than those with fewer paupers. In 1870 this pattern was reversed, though again it was a very weak relationship (Figure 6.10). Quantities purchased alone, therefore, were no guarantee of lower prices.

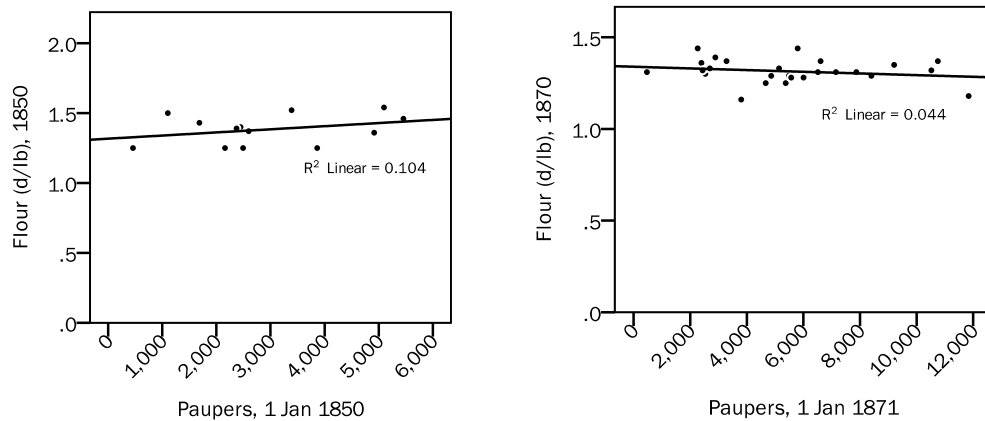


Figure 6.10. Flour prices and pauper numbers, 1850 and 1871.

Source: PP 1852 XLV 7: Poor relief. Return of the number of paupers receiving in and out-door relief in 607 unions and single parishes in England and Wales, during the half-years ended at Lady-Day 1850 and 1851 respectively; together with the average prices of provisions contracted for during the aforesaid respective periods by the boards of guardians for the different counties; PP 1870 LVIII 563.

Another possible explanation is that a supplier might have bid at relatively high prices where he believed a union was likely to change its contractor at regular intervals as a matter of policy. He might also have offered prices depending on how likely he felt the unions were to accept: the knowledge that he had few competitors might prompt him to bid at a slightly higher level, for instance. This, too, is not easy to discern in the data, and it is possible that dealers colluded with each other to organise price levels – an illegal practice which would be highly unlikely to leave evidence. It is also possible that the larger enterprises ran some contracts at a small loss in order to retain orders from poor law customers and push other potential suppliers out of consideration. Aside from the subtle judgments suppliers might have to make about their customers and competitors, dealers of course also had to adjust their prices to accommodate transport costs. Some unions were easier to reach than others but all would have had deliveries by horse-drawn carts. Some were near railways, wharves and canals. A coal-merchant whose goods never needed to come off the canal to reach a workhouse might therefore be expected to charge less than he would for a workhouse at the top of a hill which could only be reached by road.

6.6 Conclusion

The poor law offered significant opportunities in London both for large contractors and for local suppliers. London's workhouses were unusual in being amid commercial, industrial and residential activity, unlike in many rural and other urban or semi-urban unions where the institutions tended to be located away from built-up areas. The spatial proximity of workhouses therefore engendered close working relationships between buyers and sellers. It also meant that some contractors could benefit from economies of scale, and they could also supply other large institutional purchasers such as the army. The concentration of such institutional markets no doubt helped some contractors expand their businesses in ways that would have been more difficult to achieve in other parts of the country. However, at the same time, the local basis of the poor law meant that guardians had a vested interest in keeping rates circulating within their union, and this also presented opportunities for local businesses to take on the job of supplying the workhouse.

The balance of supplier sizes depended, in part, on the kinds of goods that were supplied. Trades such as clothing, grocery, shoes and meat were dominated by a relatively small number of very large enterprises who had the resources to supply workhouses, hospitals, prisons and barracks. The goods they supplied were required in bulk by workhouse and other institutions, and smaller traders could not readily procure and provide the quantities needed. Although for most of these trades there were several big suppliers, guardians had a fairly limited choice in practice.

Unions were also important customers to businesses in their localities. It was in the interests of the guardians to keep expenditure of the poor rate within the union as far as possible: This was good for their relations with the ratepayers whom they represented, and was facilitated by their knowledge of local businesses. Moreover giving work to local traders ultimately kept people in employment and off the relief lists. Guardians bought not only from large suppliers of bulk goods and small-scale local businesses, but also from traders who could provide specialist goods. Makers of scales, cooking apparatus and

the like were not to be found in every union, and for these specialist suppliers poor law unions were no doubt an important source of business.

The prices paid by unions for their supplies differed across London, but in most cases without a discernable geographical pattern. Prices also often differed between unions who had the same supplier. The causes for this are not easy to judge from the available evidence, but might well include transport costs and the gamesmanship involved in the submission of sealed bids.

Poor-law contracting is therefore again shown to have been a social practice – a matter not concerned only with the lowest tender but rather with the most appropriate. Judging the appropriateness of bidders was in the hands of a few guardians, based on personal knowledge and taking into consideration social relationships between them. London differed from the rest of the country in this respect, because of the denser concentration of both suppliers and customers. The urbanising parts of the rest of the country began, over time, to take on London's characteristics in respect of the increasing distances travelled by goods and the consolidation of certain markets. Nonetheless, the underlying requirements for reliable and fairly cheap supply were constant over space and time and these factors, perhaps more than mere cost, helped shape the geography of poor law provision.

7 Conclusion: Redrawing poor law geographies

This thesis demonstrates that the administration of relief under the new poor law can and should be understood afresh through a reconsideration of its supply-side geographies. While demand-side approaches have done much to illustrate from the pauper's perspective how the poor law operated on a day-to-day basis, there has been very little research hitherto on the decisions that had to be made by guardians about the supply of relief, particularly inside the workhouse. This research has therefore focused on an area of work about which we know relatively little and has sought to locate this in the wider historiography of the poor law.

Existing scholarship has variously explored national, regional and local expressions of policy and pauper experience and, in some cases, integrated these scales of analysis. This thesis overlays on these approaches three further interlinked geographical themes of significance: The importance of types of place in understanding relief practices; a more nuanced assessment of the relationship between the central and the local; and the implications of a supply-side approach for helping to understand the costs of relief. Taken together, these themes show that the operation of the poor laws was socially embedded even where the social might be expected to be most thoroughly embedded in the economic: in the purchase of goods and services.

7.1 Types of place

Variation in relief practices can be seen both in the levels of expenditure poor law unions were willing to make, and in the policies they adopted concerning the treatment of particular classes of paupers. Some unions gave large outdoor relief allowances, but granted that relief to relatively few paupers. Others with longer relief lists, composed of a wider range of paupers, gave smaller amounts. There were unions keen to enforce the workhouse test in order to reduce pauper numbers, but which borrowed heavily to build their workhouses and burdened their ratepayers accordingly. Such variation has long been understood in terms of the locations of the unions or parishes in

question, and patterns in these practices can be seen at different scales and for different phenomena. For instance, this thesis has shown that historians have been right to suspect the existence of a north-south divide in expenditure per head of population, with a sharp contour delineating a northern zone of relatively low spending and a concomitantly high-spending southern zone. However, this north-south divide in expenditure per head was not reflected in outdoor relief allowances. Instead there were certain regions displaying a degree of uniformity in their average outdoor doles, but also large sections of the country where neighbouring unions operated very differently from each other. At a regional scale this diversity is masked, and it is only at the level of the poor law union that the variations can be truly appreciated.

Nor does the regional approach to poor law history, while important for assessing large-scale patterns, reflect the smaller scale at which individuals understood their local corner of the system. For paupers, the region or even the county was too large a unit to be helpful. People may have been increasingly mobile during the nineteenth century, but with the exception of London they were rarely long-distance migrants and the rapid urbanisation which characterised the period was largely a product of people moving from rural areas to their nearest large towns. Local information networks among paupers were strong, and the knowledge of poor relief practices which passed between paupers is likely to have influenced their destinations and negotiating strategies.

The rural or urban nature of unions was just as important a factor as regional location for indoor relief policies, if not more so. There was a great deal of variation within regions, but far less between types of places. Rural unions not only tended to give more outdoor relief, but they also allowed greater sums per outdoor pauper than did urban unions. Conversely, the cost per indoor pauper to urban unions was greater than for rural unions. Board of guardians in particular types of places, however, operated within broad regional contexts, and this can be seen especially when considering changes over time. This is to be expected, given that knowledge of poor law practice is likely to have been shared between guardians who belonged to the same social strata

in particular regions. Shared geographies of poor law practice were also likely to arise as a response to a set of shared circumstances. Northern urban unions, for example, increased their proportions of paupers relieved indoors between 1850 and 1870 to a degree that brought them in line with London's unions. These northern towns, which in 1850 had relatively low indoor pauperism rates, therefore had more in common with southern urban unions by 1870 than they did with their northern agricultural counterparts. In that sense, at least, it is possible to talk of greater spatial uniformity in relief practices as the century progressed – a trend driven largely by the spread and growth of urbanisation. By the end of the century, therefore, it was the characteristics of a place rather than its location in the country that arguably defined the kinds of relief practices that prevailed.

7.2 Central and local perspectives

If the new poor law can be seen as a London solution to a problem inherent in the labour market of south-eastern England, it is hardly surprising that unions further from the capital were less likely, at least initially, to use the workhouse. Culturally entrenched resistance to central government might also have played a part in some regions, such as Wales, Lancashire and Yorkshire, where distance from London can be understood as a figurative as well as literal consideration. Cultural geographies of poor law policy, therefore, also had a role in helping to explain local patterns of relief. In the normal course of business, however, the central authority and unions appear to have been responsive to each other's views, and a good deal of policy was a product of negotiation between guardians, poor law inspectors and the central commissioners, rather than unilaterally imposed from London. Having said that, the geographies of poor law administration as understood by the PLC and its successors indicate a significant emphasis on the importance of the capital. This emphasis was expressed, for example, through the numbering system for unions used by the PLB, which started with metropolitan authorities and increased with distance, and through the divisions and districts into which England and Wales was separated. The central authority thus inscribed for

itself a strongly regional and London-centric view of the poor law landscape. From such a perspective, the districts that objected most strongly to curtailing outdoor relief seemed to the assistant commissioners peripheral by virtue of both their location and their resistance.

Despite the relatively high degree of surveillance over unions from the central authority in the matter of relief policy, boards of guardians enjoyed a great deal of discretionary power over relationships within their immediate localities. Indeed, at the heart of the tensions between unions and the centre was the very local nature of the union. Guardians were elected representatives of the ratepayers, in office to defend their interests, and with the role came a form of patronage through which contracts to supply the union were awarded. This was one of the most important functions of the board of guardians, yet one which was given only the lightest of regulatory treatment. The ability which guardians had to control their costs was in large part dependent on the competitiveness and openness of the tendering process and as long as they followed this basic approach, the centre did little to interfere. As indoor relief became an increasingly important feature of the poor law landscape, this factor took on ever-greater significance.

7.3 Local geographies of supply

The relative independence of guardians in their contracting practices means that the local geography of supply must be a vital consideration for poor law historians, just as it was for union boards. Unions did not have to form contracts based on the lowest tender, and a supplier could be chosen on the basis of a reputation for reliability, a personal relationship, or even a bribe. Poor law economies were thus emphatically embedded in social structures rather than adhering rigidly to the dictates of market prices.

Boards of guardians had two potentially competing priorities: one, to keep the burden on the rates as low as possible; and the other, to keep the money spent by the union circulating within it. In places such as London, where large numbers of businesses from outside a given union could compete for

contracts, the temptation for guardians to spend money on low-bidding 'strangers' was great. For the first few years of the new poor law's operation, it was only in London that external firms could compete in this way. In the later years of the nineteenth century, as supply chains improved and markets in some goods became consolidated, urban centres outside London also exhibited this feature. Larger firms came to dominate the supply of certain goods to unions, in particular foodstuffs such as meal and milk which were easily transported by rail. Large firms were certainly present in the first half of the nineteenth century, but in less densely populated unions – where guardians contracted more with local businesses – these firms were further up the distribution chain. In other words, they were wholesalers to the union contractors. Over time, these wholesalers increasingly came to supply unions directly.

The poor law offered significant opportunities to local firms and entrepreneurs, though the scale of opportunity differed between places. London offered a dense concentration of customers, but outside the capital suppliers faced greater difficulty in reaching more than one union. London's unions and parishes were administrative divisions of a continuous conurbation; however, in the north of England, even the rapidly growing towns and cities were still surrounded by a good deal of agricultural land. The densely populated unions in Lancashire, for example, were still composed of towns with largely rural hinterlands. In the north-east, the population of Chester le Street union, County Durham, for example, grew by two-thirds from 1851 to 1871 but its overall population density remained below one person per acre. There were few continuous built-up areas outside London which were divided into more than one union and for that reason, beyond the capital the spatial reach of suppliers was more restricted.

The openings for small businesses to supply poor law unions therefore took different forms in London and in the rest of England and Wales. London's unions appear to have given much of their business to the large contractors who were capable of reliably delivering the requisite quantities of goods, and this element of reliability had to be prioritised over the supplier being local to

the union. Nonetheless, London's unions bought the same goods from smaller businesses within their boundaries in lesser quantities on an *ad hoc* basis alongside purchases of certain items from specialist suppliers. In the provincial case studies analysed here, there were more opportunities for businesses whose only poor-law customer was the local workhouse. Regional and local differences in relief practices cannot be explained directly by price differences, but rather reflect social geographies of supply – a fact especially visible in the differences between urban and rural unions.

Over the thirty years from 1850, the poor law supply market displayed many signs of the development of economies of scale, both internally and externally.¹ Individual firms specialised and grew, becoming increasingly dominant in the supply of goods such as fabric, shoes, meal, milk or butter and cheese. Poor law supply in London was also part of a wider institutional provision sector, with many union contractors also winning tenders with the likes of hospitals, prisons, schools, asylums and the military. These opportunities were far more prevalent in London, enabling a market characterised by very large firms to develop to a much greater extent than elsewhere.

Evidence for anti-competitive practices is thin, though there are occasional intimations in the records of price manipulation, adulteration of goods and cosy relationships between contractors and poor law officials. There are, for example, hints of the existence of cartels in meat wholesaling and of milk contamination, and questions are raised by the predominance of single suppliers for goods such as potatoes in London. The only type of goods for which the central authority can be said to have intervened, though, was printing and stationery. Although unions were not bound by the poor law regulations to buy from specific suppliers, only a handful of firms produced the ledgers and forms which the central authority required unions to use. One such firm, Charles Knight & Co, worked closely with the Poor Law Commission in drafting the forms in the first place and advertised on the basis of its semi-official status. In all other respects, there is little evidence that anti-

¹ A. Marshall, *Principles of Economics* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1890).

competitive pricing practices characterised the supply of workhouses. Indeed, although relationships between particular suppliers and unions could become entrenched over time, the merging of unions brought disruptive new competition between the long-term suppliers of the amalgamated bodies. Therefore, suppliers could and did change for several reasons, and this alone would have militated against the development of anti-competitive practices.

The local and national elements which went towards local prices of goods were highly significant for the poor law unions buying them. Local variations in prices in certain cases go some way towards explaining differences in indoor relief expenditure and, indeed, the readiness of unions to use the workhouse. Prices did not usually have a linear relationship with relief expenditure, but could affect purchasing decisions and therefore the experiences of paupers. Large fluctuations in prices made financial management difficult, but the central authority was more concerned with fluctuations in pauper numbers than with the costs of goods and services. District auditors, for example, were charged only with seeking out unlawful expenditure, whereas it was the responsibility of the ratepayers to decide whether or not the guardians had struck a good deal on their behalf.

The historiographical conception of local poor law economies has tended to be composed of boards of guardians, ratepayers, paupers and the central authority. Variations in policy and in expenditure, over time and over space, have largely been explained in terms of these elements. This thesis has shown that the suppliers of goods and services to poor law unions must also form part of our understanding of poor law practice and expenditure. Poor law unions were important within their local and wider economies for their roles as consumers of goods and as sources of revenue for businesses of all sizes, and not only as the agencies through which the poor were relieved.

By paying attention to the supply side, the geographies of poor relief policy and practice can be drawn more effectively. Different types of place exhibited distinct characteristics, with the dense concentrations of paupers, unions and suppliers found in urban areas configuring themselves in different ways to

rural economies. Regions, similarly, can be understood not just as generalised zones of similar relief approaches, but also as functional spaces of economic activity, delineated by price contours or the reach of a supplier. At different scales, therefore, poor law geographies can look quite contradictory: What can appear to be areas of similar practice can be, in fact, the products of dissimilar processes. The flows of money, goods, information and indeed people, which are visible at these different scales, suggest that the poor law must therefore be understood not as a 'system' but rather as an interweaving set of local and national social economies.

Appendix A. Case study suppliers, 1852-80

A.1. Llanfyllin Poor Law Union

UID	Surname	First name	Prefix/ Suffix	Goods	Place if stated	Date of first contract	Total quarters
1	Jones	Mary		Coal, dairy		1852 q3	5
2	Davies	David		Bread, flour		1852 q3	3
3	Jones	David		Oatmeal, coal, treacle, candles, soda		1852 q3	6
4	Morris & Hughes			Grocery, clothing		1852 q3	4
5	Lewis	David		Meat	Llanfechan	1852 q3	39
6	Fox	James		Milk, shoes, butter		1852 q3	110
7	Bynner	Thomas		Clothing, grocery		1852 q4	8
8	Weaver			Peas	Oswestry	1852 q4	1
9	Ross	David		Meat		1852 q4	4
10	Pugh	J.H. & O.	Messrs	Grocery	Llanymynech	1852 q4	6
11	Evans	Rowland		Coffins		1852 q4	3
12	Poole	Richard		Meat	Oswestry	1853 q2	12
13	Phillips	J.		Grocery, clothing	Oswestry	1853 q2	1
14	Mills	Roger		Milk		1853 q2	1
15	Davies	Thomas & David		Peas, candles, coal, American flour		1853 q3	31
16	Morris & Savin			Grocery, clothing		1853 q4	1
17	Jones	Charles		Shoes		1854 q1	91
18	Humphreys	William		Coffins		1854 q1	1
19	Evans	John		Flour, peas, sugar, soap	Oswestry	1854 q2	9
20	Jones		Brothers	Grocery		1854 q2	5
21	Edwards	David		Clothing, soap, grocery	Llanfyllin	1854 q2	70
22	Evans	Richard		Oatmeal, sugar		1854 q2	1
23	Lewis	Edward		Coffee, flour, meal, peas	Llansaintfraid	1854 q2	78
24	Evans	John & Joseph		Flour, meal	Oswestry	1854 q3	19
25	Jones	Maurice Lewis		Rice, clothing		1854 q4	37
26	Thomas	Evan		Shoes		1855 q1	2

UID	Surname	First name	Prefix/ Suffix	Goods	Place if stated	Date of first contract	Total quarters
27	Edwards	William		Milk, soap, grocery, clothing, shoes	Llansaintffraid	1855 q2	21
28	Davies	David		Coal		1855 q2	1
29	Evans	David		Clothing, soap, grocery		1855 q3	37
30	Evans	Thomas		Soap		1855 q4	1
31	Jones	Richard		Coal	Oswestry	1856 q1	3
32	Jones	Richard		Printing/stationery		1856 q1	1
33	Montgomeryshire Coal & Lime Company			Coal		1856 q3	10
34	Davies	Edward		Coal	Welshpool	1856 q4	1
35	Evans	John		Funerals		1857 q1	1
36	Morris	Edward		Funerals		1857 q1	1
37	Watkins	Watkin		Funerals		1857 q1	1
38	Davies	Joseph		Flour		1858 q2	1
39	Owen	John		Yarn		1858 q2	46
40	Mills	Roger		Flour		1858 q3	4
41	Jones	Thomas		Coal	Llanfyllin	1858 q3	4
42	Turner	William		Shoes	Newtown	1858 q3	1
43	Jones	Robert		Treacle, soap ['druggist']	Llanfyllin	1859 q2	5
44	Davies	Thomas		Flour, coal		1859 q3	1
45	Ledwick	Thomas		Coal	Llanfyllin	1859 q4	2
46	Evans	David Holmes		Clothing, grocery		1858 q2	56
47	Evans	Richard		Flour, coffee	Llanfyllin	1860 q3	5
48	Evans	Joseph		Oatmeal, groceries		1860 q4	71
49	Roberts	Thomas		Coal		1861 q1	3
50	Lewis	Richard		Glazing, tin		1861 q4	8
51	Jones	John		Coal		1862 q2	4
52	Ward & Thomas		Messrs	Flour		1865 q1	2
53	Rees	Thomas		Meat		1865 q3	24
54	North & South Wales Coal Company			Coal		1865 q4	19
55	Jones & Son	John		Drapery		1867 q3	1
56	North Wales Coal Company			Coal		1868 q2	2
57	Edmunds	John		Candles		1870 q2	1

UID	Surname	First name	Prefix/ Suffix	Goods	Place if stated	Date of first contract	Total quarters
58	Edwards	William		Clothing		1871 q3	1
59	Phillips		Messrs	Rice, tea, clothing		1872 q1	1
60	Rees	William		Meat		1872 q3	20
61	Llanfyllin Coal & Lime Company			Coal		1872 q4	24
62	Miles	Thomas		Flour		1874 q3	7
63	Davies	Thomas		Oatmeal		1876 q1	4
64	Griffiths	Thomas		Meat		1877 q3	3
65	Jones	David		Salt		1877 q4	12
66	Edwards	James		Beef		1878 q2	4
67	Jones	John		Clothing		1877 q3	12
68	Fields Mercantile Company			Coal		1879 q1	1
69	Jones	William		Coal		1879 q2	5
70	Fawkes	James		Meat		1879 q3	3
71	Roberts	Richard		Meat		1879 q4	3
72	Jones	Evan		Butter		1879 q4	5
73	Morgan	Richard		Cheese		1880 q1	1
74	Jones	John			Welshpool	1880 q3	1
75	Lister	John		Shoes		1880 q3	1

A.2. St Saviour Southwark Poor Law Union

UID	Surname	Firstname	Prefix/ Suffix	Goods	Place if stated	Date of first contract	Total quarters
1	Field	George Lyon/ Jane		Bread/flour	Blackfriars Road	1852 q3	7
2	Whitley	Elizabeth		Bonnets		1852 q3	2
3	Allsop	John/George		Brushes	174 Union Street Borough	1852 q3	52
4	Beale	John/James		Meat	173/63 Union Street Borough	1852 q3	67
5	Penson	George		Butter/cheese		1852 q3	16
6	Morris	Francis		Coals		1852 q3	4
7	Darby	James/Susannah		Coffins	Green Walk Blackfriars	1852 q3	65

UID	Surname	Firstname	Prefix/ Suffix	Goods	Place if stated	Date of first contract	Total quarters
8	Yarrow	Nicholas		Groceries		1852 q3	4
9	Smith	William		Clothing, hats, linen, woollen drapery		1852 q3	6
10	Jones	Alfred		Leather		1852 q3	23
11	Ambridge & Andrews		Messrs	Mealmen		1852 q3	4
12	Smith	Samuel		Milk	Romford Essex & 11 Herbert Street New North Road Hoxton	1852 q3	54
13	Percival	James/Charles		Oilman, brushes, butter, cheese	Valentine Place Blackfriars Road	1852 q3	62
14	Beeson	George		Potatoes		1852 q3	10
15	Truscott	James		Printing/stationery	Nelson Square Blackfriars Road	1852 q3	20
16	Roope	Charles		Bonnets/drapery	Chelsea	1853 q1	59
17	Williams	Thomas		Meat		1853 q1	5
18	Wilson	Alexander		Leather/shoes		1853 q1	4
19	Tilt	Joseph		Milk		1853 q1	9
20	Scarborough	Thomas		Coals		1853 q3	7
21	Craney	John Eddison		Groceries		1853 q3	3
22	Ambridge	R.H.		Mealmen		1853 q3	2
23	Nicholls	Julia		Milk		1853 q3	2
24	Gordon	Henry		Shoes/leather	84 High Holborn/13 Blackfriars Road	1853 q3	38
25	Caldicott	John		Drapery, hats, hosiery		1854 q1	1
26	Edwards	Joseph/George Beeching	Brothers	Mealman	Albion Mills/Holland Street Blackfriars	1854 q1	64
27	Lloyd		Mr	Shoes		1854 q1	1
28	Sampson	John		Bread/flour	Tooley Street	1854 q2	17
29	Wilkinson	Elizabeth/Josiah		Drapery, hats, hosiery		1854 q2	8
30	Parr	Joseph		Groceries		1854 q2	2
31	Margerison	George		Oilman's goods		1854 q2	8
32	Laughton	James		Shoes	33 Leadenhall Street/26 Bishopsgate Street City	1854 q2	27
33	Rowton			Coals		1854 q4	4
34	Fincham	Zachariah		Groceries	Charing Cross	1854 q4	15
35	White	William		Potatoes	Borough Market	1854 q4	10

UID	Surname	Firstname	Prefix/ Suffix	Goods	Place if stated	Date of first contract	Total quarters
36	Bowering	Frederick		Printing/stationery		1855 q2	2
37	Sheppard	Thomas		Cheesemonger	88 High Street Borough	1856 q2	17
38	Atkinson		Messrs	Clothing	69 & 75 Westminster Bridge Road	1856 q2	39
39	Rymer	Alfred		Leather		1856 q2	1
40	Dickins	Frederick Owen/John Thanet		Coals	Upper Ground/Jamaica Wharf	1856 q3	32
41	Warne			Leather		1856 q3	2
42	Wagstaff	Robert		Potatoes	Spitalfields Market	1856 q3	22
43	Chamberlain			Brushes		1857 q1	4
44	Livitt Frank			Oilman's goods		1857 q1	4
45	Milns	Edward		Clothing/hats	33 Parliament Street/Broadway Westminster	1857 q1	48
46	Greenwell		Messrs	Hats, woollen drapery	Blackfriars Road	1858 q1	4
47	Smith	Joseph		Leather	186 Bethnal Green Road	1858 q1	6
48	Ewin	Edward		Linen draper	Union Street Borough/218-219 High Street	1858 q1	6
49	Granger			Bread/flour		1858 q3	2
50	White	Joseph		Groceries	107 High Street Borough	1858 q3	34
51	Panter	Henry		Bread/flour	46 Blackfriars Road	1859 q1	2
52	Smith	John	Alfred Tilt at	Printing/stationery	52 Long Acre	1859 q1	18
53	Grove	Edward		Tailor	38-41 Lower Marsh Lambeth	1859 q1	32
54	Scott	Donald		Bread/flour	9 Elham Place Dover Road	1859 q3	42
55	Truscott	Francis Wyatt		Printing/stationery	Suffolk Lane City	1859 q3	26
56	Hall	Collinson	& C.H. Jnr	Milk	Princes Gate Farms Navestock Romford Essex	1860 q1	32
57	Brickhill	William		Printing/stationery	4 Cumberland Place Newington Butts	1860 q3	2
58	Green	Edward		Tailor	38 Lower Marsh Lambeth	1860 q3	2
59	Blackmur	William Benjamin		Cheesemonger	13 Church Street Greenwich	1862 q1	32
60	Waugh	William/James/Neill & Waugh		Mealman	48 East Cheap	1862 q1	26
61	Ford	Thomas		Oilman	16 Hatton Wall	1862 q1	28
62	Ford	Francis	& Tilt	Printing/stationery	52 Long Acre	1862 q3	4

UID	Surname	Firstname	Prefix/ Suffix	Goods	Place if stated	Date of first contract	Total quarters
63	Cooper	William		Cheesemonger	Stones End	1864 q1	2
64	Sutton	Thomas		Potatoes	West Sandwich Street Ash Kent	1864 q1	10
65	Gamman	Robert		Coals	Ratcliff E.	1865 q1	2
66	Charrington		& Co	Coals	King's Cross	1865 q3	12
67	Harrison	J.C.		Brushes	West Croydon	1866 q1	2
68	Irving & Cooper			Coals	Limehouse	1866 q1	6
69	Rideal	Thomas/John	& Sons	Wine	117 Union Street Borough	1866 q1	12
70	Irving	John		Coals	Regent's Canal	1867 q1	4
71	Parrett/Parritt	Edward		Groceries	50 Blackfriars Road	1867 q1	10
72	Arnold	Robert		Potatoes	Spitalfields Market	1867 q1	2
73	Baker	Benjamin Bloomfield		Bread/flour	Newgate Market	1867 q3	16
74	Roberts & Jeffrey			Mealmen	Harrow Bridge Stratford	1867 q3	2
75	Weller	George		Brushes	54 Southwark Bridge Road/60 Newington Causeway	1868 q1	6
76	Davis	John		Coals	Wapping	1869 q1	2
77	Morgan	Robert		Oilman	213 Blackfriars Road	1869 q1	6
78	Ward	Joseph Mash		Potatoes	10 Russell Street Covent Garden	1869 q1	4
79	Kingsford	Thomas & Charles		Bread/flour	Side Mill Deptford/35 Seething Lane Tower Street	1869 q3	10
80	Hubbard	Joseph		Meat	17 Charterhouse S EC	1869 q3	2
81	Morris	Joseph	& Oakes	Meat	Leadenhall Market	1869 q3	4
82	Davey	Arthur Stevens		Coals	Old Barge House Wharf Blackfriars	1869 q3	4
83	Burridge	Edward		Coffins	104 East Street Walworth SE	1869 q3	2
84	Maker	Edmund Roderick		Coffins	82 & 84 Newington Butts	1869 q3	2
85	Rockley	Joseph		Groceries	113 High Street Borough	1869 q3	32
86	Hopkins	John		Milk	10 Renfrew Road Lower Kennington Lane	1869 q3	16
87	Adams	William		Milk	3 Little Lant Street Southwark	1869 q3	2
88	Reed	Theophilus Haythorne		Wine	Elephant & Castle	1869 q3	2
89	Game	Charles		Butcher		1870 q1	2
90	Masters		& Sons	Butcher	51 Metropolitan Meat Market	1870 q1	32
91	Times Wine Company			Wine	79 Great Tower Street	1870 q1	2

UID	Surname	Firstname	Prefix/ Suffix	Goods	Place if stated	Date of first contract	Total quarters
92	Green	George		Brushes		1870 q1	12
93	Pocock		Brothers	Leather		1870 q1	26
94	Phillips	George		Wine	69 High Holborn	1870 q3	8
95	Gillett	Thomas		Bread/flour	Faversham Mills Kent	1871 q1	4
96	Hudson	James		Cheesemonger	Osborne House Ludgate Hill	1871 q1	12
97	Smith	Rickett	& Co	Coals	Stanton Wharf Tooley Street	1871 q1	2
98	Brittian	Isaac		Wine	57 Stones Street Borough	1871 q1	10
99	Kent	George		Brushes	136 Kent Street Borough	1871 q1	4
100	Rutt	Charles		Coffins	220 Blackfriars Road	1871 q1	4
101	Wilson	Edward		Coals	St Pancras Coal Depot Kings Cross	1871 q3	2
102	Hudson	Francis M	& Co	Cheesemonger	5 Newington Causeway	1871 q3	12
103	Morrison	John		Potatoes	45 & 125 Lower Marsh Street	1871 q3	6
104	Innis	George M		Spirits	69 Strand	1871 q3	2
105	Moorman	James		Wine	Denmark Hill Camberwell	1871 q3	4
106	Sergeant		& Co			1872 q1	8
107	Ward					1872 q1	4
108	White	J	& Son	Bread?		1872 q1	34
109	Barclay					1872 q1	36
110	Brett	A				1872 q1	2
111	Clark					1872 q1	2
112	Nettlefold					1872 q3	24
113	Shepperd		& Co			1872 q1	34
114	Horne					1873 q1	12
115	Ayer			Bread?		1873 q1	4
116	Kidd			Bread?		1873 q1	20
117	Smithers					1873 q1	6
118	Jenkins					1873 q3	2
119	Prudence					1873 q3	26
120	Benn					1874 q1	24
121	Cox					1874 q1	14
122	Courage		& Co	Beer		1875 q1	10

UID	Surname	Firstname	Prefix/ Suffix	Goods	Place if stated	Date of first contract	Total quarters
123	Hadley					1875 q1	2
124	Lye			Bread		1875 q1	8
125	Hanson					1875 q1	2
126	Moorcroft			Bread		1875 q1	18
127	Locket		& Co			1875 q1	2
128	Davey					1875 q3	2
129	Higgs					1875 q3	4
130	Temple					1876 q1	2
131	Kitching					1876 q3	4
132	Cohen					1876 q3	8
133	Ivison					1876 q3	8
134	Lewis					1876 q3	4
135	Irving					1877 q1	6
136	Hubbert					1877 q1	2
137	Aldridge					1877 q3	4
138	French			Bread		1877 q3	4
139	Thornicroft					1877 q3	4
140	Brown					1878 q1	12
141	Moore					1878 q3	2
142	Topley					1879 q1	2
143	Judkins					1879 q1	2
144	Bell					1879 q3	4
145	Simmonds					1879 q3	4
146	Cartwright					1879 q3	4
147	Champion					1879 q3	4
148	Symons					1879 q3	2
149	Stone					1880 q1	4
150	Dowding					1880 q3	2
151	South					1880 q3	2
152	Curnick					1880 q3	2
153	Slater					1880 q3	2

Appendix B. Stock in Wandsworth & Clapham workhouse, 22 March 1851

Provision store

Bread	191 loaves
Flour	215 lbs
Cheese	443 lbs
Peas	64 qts
Oatmeal	280 lbs
Butter	170 lbs
Rice	21 lbs
Tea	77 lbs
Sugar	280 lbs
Officer's cheese	16 lbs
Coffee	1 lbs
Candles	35 lbs
Salt	56 lbs
Soda	728 lbs
Scotch Barley	70 lbs

Cellar

Porter	956 pints
Ale	351 pints
Wine	236 oz
Brandy	163 oz
Gin	130 oz
Treacle	28 lbs
Pork	170 lbs
Coals	1400 cwt
Chaplain's Wine	4 pints
Potatoes	1680 lbs
Marsala	308 oz

Tailor's Shop

Grey Army Cloth	123 $\frac{1}{4}$ yds
Cotton Cord	86 yds
Jean	64 yds
Grey Calico	54 yds

Shoemaker's Shop

Crop Butts	108 lbs
Tanner's Bellies	91 lbs
Wax Kip	89 lbs
Grain Shoulders	30 lbs
Welt Shoulders	21 lbs
Calf Rounding	29 $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs

Men's Store

Jackets	86
Waistcoats	23
Trowsers	45
Shoes (Men's) Leather	67
Shoes (Men's) Webb	40
Stockings	251
Caps	15
Shoes (Women's)	58

Women's Store

Gowns	54
Under Petticoats	112
Upper Petticoats	92
Shifts	190
Aprons	199
Handkerchiefs (Men's)	79
Stockings (Women's)	125
Caps	45
Bonnets	38
Shawls	42
Bedgowns	98
Shirts (Men's and boys')	148
Handkerchiefs (Women's)	72
Stays	8
Sheets	162
Blankets	22
Rugs	21
Bolster Cases	8
Towels	44

Clothing Materials

Forfar Sheeting	828 $\frac{1}{2}$ yds
Irish Linen	9 $\frac{1}{4}$ yds
Huckaback	134 $\frac{1}{2}$ yds
Union Check	206 $\frac{1}{2}$ yds
Grey Calico	136 yds
Wigan Calico	5 $\frac{1}{2}$ yds
Flannel	128 $\frac{1}{2}$ yds
Petworth Stripe	281 $\frac{1}{2}$ yds
Jaconet Muslin	14 $\frac{3}{4}$ yds
Blue Stripe for Gowns	150 yds
Bed Tick	111 yds
Forfar Canvass	135 $\frac{1}{2}$ yds
$\frac{1}{4}$ inch Stripe Cotton	255 $\frac{1}{2}$ yds

In the Mill

Wheat	18 quarters
Flour	13 sacks 2 bush.
Fine Middlings	8 bushels
Sharps Fine Pollard, Cs	104 bushels
Pollard and Bran	

In the Bakehouse

Flour	85 sacks 3 pecks
Coals	15 cwt
Salt	1 cwt
Potatoes	3 cwt

Excludes goods in mill sent in by parties to be ground.

Source: LMA WABG/010, 22 March 1851.

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1888 XLIX 1. Seventeenth Annual Report of the Local Government Board.
1887-88.

1910 LIII 1. Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress.
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C16/884/P30. Penson & Company Ltd v. Penson (1873).

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William Smith, the elder, and William Smith, the younger, linen drapers at Pimlico, to supply shirts to Deptford for the Royal Marines (1850).

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MH10/14. Circular letters from the Poor Law Board (1850).

MH12. Local Government Board and predecessors: Correspondence with poor law unions and other local authorities.

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1529. Truro (1843-46).

3169. Lanchester (1864-66).

3381. Braintree (1863-68).

4408. Ross (1851-53).

6903. Brentford (1851-55).

7103. St George in the East (1846-52).

7606. St Pancras (1869).
- 7809-10. Stepney (1864-66).
7916. Whitechapel (1847-49).
8633. Great Yarmouth (1847-50).
8813. Oundle (1851-54).
9479. Nottingham (1855).
9707. Oxford (1846-51).
9801. Uppingham (1854-59).
10213. Bedminster (1855).
10256. Bridgewater (1867-69).
11000. Southampton (1853-55).
12469. Lambeth (1855).
- 12531-2. St Olave (1851-58).
12644. St Saviour Southwark (1858-61).
12969. Hastings (1882).
16658. Narberth (1863-66).
- MH19/1. Correspondence with Admiralty (1838-92).
- MH25/11. Miscellaneous correspondence and papers (1855).
- MH32. Correspondence with Assistant Commissioners and Poor Law
Inspectors.
14. William Day (1835-37).
41. William H. Toovey Hawley (1847-52).

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CBG/005. East London (1849-52).

CBG/013. City of London (1842-44)

CBG/016. West London (1849-51).

CHBG/008. St Luke Chelsea (1849-50).

FBG/004-005. Fulham (1849-53).

GBG/012-013. Greenwich (1849-51).

HPBG/002. St John Hampstead (1848-1852).

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LEBG/009. Lewisham (1849-51).

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