Pauper Narratives in the Welsh Borders: 1750-1840

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Leicester

by

Ben Richard Harvey, BA MA
Centre for Medical Humanities
University of Leicester

June 2016
Abstract

This thesis, Pauper Narratives in the Welsh Borders: 1750-1840, will make a substantial contribution to how narratives are used to understand the practice of relief distribution under the old poor law. It will expand investigations of poor law correspondence into the little-studied Welsh border region by advancing previous use of pauper letters, and incorporating new forms of correspondence. The thesis hopes to act as a stepping stone for future works to analyse welfare in Wales in greater detail. The nation is a potentially fruitful area for research given its ‘ peripheral’ position, according to spatial welfare theories, and indications that its approaches were quite different to those in areas of England that have received more historical attention. In order to cover such an extensive geographical region, and the large corpus collected from it and other counties, the thesis will make the first detailed quantitative analysis of pauper narratives. Such a methodology allows spatial and chronological comparisons, enables the representativeness of source material to be measured, and offers a framework for spatial studies of welfare. The approach also complements current trends in the use of pauper narratives, which have moved from small scale case studies that describe the context of the letters, to broader investigations that seek to draw geographical contrasts. Consequently this work represents the next step in using narratives to consider local welfare systems. In doing so, the thesis will argue much of the border region, and Wales in particular, should be considered to have been a ‘ peripheral’ welfare zone. This is based on the features identified by exploratory studies of peripheral areas, as well as more general comments on regionality from other historians. Furthermore it is argued that the significance and consistency of these characteristics were strong enough for us to reconsider how we look at poor law regionalism.
Acknowledgements

It seems only fitting that finishing my final piece of work as a student has involved me pulling one last all-nighter, following one final hack at the word count. Doing so has caused me to reflect on all the influences that have caused me to be sat here right now, attempting to complete my PhD. Consequently I’m aware of a wide variety of people that have in some way played a role in this, and who I could thank. However there are people more prominent or current in what I’m doing that must be named. The first is my girlfriend Imogen for her continued support and patience with something that takes so much of my attention. Another is Matt, for his friendship and unassuming ability to entertain. I also need to express my gratitude to Dan, Cat and Sarah. Their support during and often prior to this PhD has been more appreciated than they probably realise. I must thank my parents, whose support began well before this project, both academically and otherwise. I am grateful to Rob Colls, for sparking my academic interest, and to my supervisor Steve King, for allowing me to pursue it; I would not be where I am today without either of these people. Finally the ‘Mad Millers’ for their non-academic distractions, and continued interest in my ‘book’.

Ben Harvey
6.09 AM, 13th December 2014
4 Wheatsheaf Way, Leicester

Unfortunately I encountered many difficulties between completing my final draft and writing the above paragraph, and actually being awarded my degree. Changes to a supervision meeting and further tweaking meant I submitted my thesis 9th February 2015. Administrative issues in processing my work, and then the discovery that my examiners were unavailable for much of the summer, caused my examination to be pushed back until 19th August. Problems continued and I was not awarded my degree until 12th February 2016, a year and three days after I originally submitted. During this time I spent little more than two months working on my thesis and the rest of it waiting. Throughout the uncertainty of when the delays would end, the desire to respond quickly to my corrections, and the postponement of the awarding of a degree I had worked so hard for placed significant strain on me. It led to financial challenges, and left me feeling wholly removed from the work which, prior to submission, I had enjoyed doing.
The delays also appear to have cost me an academic post I was looking forward to taking up, and the chance to graduate with a very good friend. I am aware this is a negative manner in which to begin my thesis, but it is a period of my life I won’t forget and which deserves mention. My case is the result of various burdens placed on the higher education system, in which the student is increasingly being deprioritised.

The assistance of others, including those previously mentioned, became even more important to me through this year. In particular I would like to thank Imogen for her continued support and faith in me, my parents, including for the financial assistance they provided, and Matt, for his insightful and encouraging comments. I must also thank Steve for the help he gave me in tackling my corrections.

A chapter on bastardy under the old poor laws was removed from my original submission in order to meet new word limit restrictions. Many of the theories from the chapter can be found in my article in *Journal of Family History*, which is referenced within this thesis. However revealing work could still be done on the different regional attitudes towards illegitimacy, and those in the Welsh borders especially.

Ben Harvey
5.25 PM, 19th June 2016
David Wilson Library, University of Leicester
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List of abbreviations

Archives

Bristol Record Office – BRO
Carlisle Archive Centre – CAC
Cheshire County Archives – CA
Denbighshire County Archives – DA
Flintshire Record Office – FRO
Glamorgan County Archives – GlamA
Gloucestershire County Archives – GA
Gwent County Archives – GwA
Hampshire Record Office – HantsRO
Herefordshire Record Office – HRO
Lancashire Record Office – LRO
Manchester Record Office – MRO
Northamptonshire Record Office – NRO
Oxfordshire Record Office – ORO
Powys County Archives – PA
Shropshire County Archives – SA
Somerset Record Office – SomRO
Warrington Library – WL
Wiltshire and Swindon Archives – WSA

Primary sources

B.P.P., HC - British Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons
Chapter 1: The expansion of pauper narratives into a peripheral welfare region

Introduction
This thesis analyses the practice and sentiment of relief under the old poor laws in the little-studied region of the Welsh borders, considering counties on both the English and Welsh sides. The topic is approached through the use of both pauper letters and additional poor law correspondence, and consequently broadens our knowledge of narrative sources for investigating poverty. In order to build on the rich literature that exists for much of England, the border counties will be contrasted with a selection of English counties. The thesis is intended as a stepping stone in two respects; firstly by introducing more extensive studies of poor law behaviour into Wales. Secondly, by offering an approach that analyses large amounts of poor law correspondence across space and time. In doing so it moves on from smaller scale, heavily contextualised studies of narratives, as well as non-narrative works on regionality. The thesis will suggest that both our understandings of the Welsh poor laws, and welfare regionalism should be reframed in terms of the concept of peripherality, and will offer a quantitative framework to help foster further research. By applying characteristics identified in exploratory studies into a more encompassing model of peripheral relief, a peripheral welfare zone will be outlined that was strongest in Wales, but included the more northerly English border counties and north west England. Welfare practices in the southern border counties of Gloucestershire and Somerset bore more in common with others in southern England. Existing narrative studies are part of a historiographical process that has increasingly highlighted the wide variety of pauper experiences, and geographical difference in provision. This variation is best explored through the examination of pauper letters, sent by the poor to their settlement parishes requesting relief, which have revolutionised understanding of the old poor laws.

The amount of work dedicated to the old poor laws is vast and reflects the significance of the topic in modern British history. Discussing it comprehensively would warrant a work in itself. However there are key themes within the literature that are central to this thesis, and which could still be augmented through more detailed

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investigation, or different approaches. Due to the large geographical scope of the research undertaken here, the subject of poor law regionality is fundamental to the thesis. It provides both a little-studied thematic topic, and a framework for analysis. Therefore the key debates regarding it will be outlined in greater depth in chapter two. Spatial variety is commented upon on both a regional and county basis throughout the chapters, and some of the nuances concerning regional theories are considered in chapter six. Some important works by historians have contributed to our knowledge of more than one thematic area of poor law study and will appear repeatedly in the following literature review. These subjects have to some extent followed a chronological progression through styles of approach that has seen ever more interest in the behaviour of the individual, and how they were treated. Poor law histories from the 1960s and 1970s were quite different to more recent studies, including this one. There was particular focus on how the legislators intended the laws to be enacted and their legal framework.

**Law and administration**

Legal and administrative histories have long recognised the variability in practice between parishes, although were not concerned by explaining such diversity. Works from Burns and Nicholls were effectively contemporary to the period under question here. In terms of writings that have more currency for present-day studies, the 1905 history from the Webbs should be considered a valuable introduction, though their polemics must be borne in mind. Both they and Dorothy Marshall suggested that the poor received uniform treatment of a low standard, rather than having had a different experience according to their location and need, and ability for agency. These remain the prime administrative studies of the poor laws. Whilst Marshall in particular recognises the differing behaviour of individual parishes, she thinks this was caused by

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overseers pursuing their own interests, and does not consider paupers’ varying requirements. Both works saw the highly discretionary nature of parish officials as a weakness of a localised system that needed more state control. The different approaches of local poor law authorities and officials is a key interest throughout this thesis, and constitutes the main theme of chapter four.

There was a flowering of historical interest in welfare following the post-war creation of Britain’s welfare state, and many of these histories continued investigations of the administrative and legislative development of the poor law. Such works often adopted a Whiggish attitude of assuming the provision of support had continually progressed. For example Bruce talks of how ‘the decisive event in the evolution of the Welfare State was the Second World War, which, coming as it did after a long period of distress and puzzled endeavour at relief, challenged the British people to round off the system of social security that they had sketched.’ Other administrative histories at the time examined welfare institutions, such as Crowther’s portrayal of the workhouse, which also charted the development of the poor laws more generally. Additionally there was an interest in ‘great men’ thought central to the laws’ development; Roger Watson says of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act and the 1848 Health of Towns Act that ‘both these Acts were largely the result of the work of one man – Edwin Chadwick’. Though significant for establishing our understanding and increasing interest, such works now appear relatively simplistic in their interpretations.

With the flourishing of broad social and economic histories from the 1960s, interests in welfare moved from the political, theoretical and moral arenas to the economic. Marxists attacked the state for disciplining the working classes. Ideas laid out by Polanyi and E. P. Thompson, were followed by Ginsburg and Saville who

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continued to be highly critical of a system that demanded certain behaviours from citizens.\textsuperscript{12} Evolutionary, Whiggish theories of progress were undermined by sceptics such as Flora, who argued that continued expansion of European welfare states could not be maintained.\textsuperscript{13} The depiction of the poor as a vast, self-aware group with common interests continued to repress sensitivity to how individuals experienced poverty. Large scale works often took the form of demographic studies that employed statistical data to estimate trends in behaviour.\textsuperscript{14} The trend for economic histories also resulted in examination of the association of the laws with classical economics and the theorists that helped create an atmosphere of pressure for their reform.\textsuperscript{15} The manifestation of such attitudes in poor law correspondence has not been fully explored, but will be a major theme throughout the substantive chapters of this thesis.

Political histories that outlined the structure and agenda of the laws remained popular through the 1980s and 90s, though decreasingly so. Dunkley, Mandler and Brundage all wrote studies of the 1834 act that suggested it was a move by various interests amongst the ruling classes and local elites to consolidate their power.\textsuperscript{16} An adherence to this bi-polar image of social relations has ramifications for studying both the paternalistic features of the moral economy, and understanding the self-expression of individual paupers. These are themes that will be revisited in chapters three and five respectively. Widely respected textbooks by Oxley and Brundage maintained interest in the creation of the laws at a legislative level, and sought to introduce scholars to the

\textsuperscript{13} P. Flora ed., \textit{Growth to Limits: The Western European Welfare States Since World War II} (New York 1986).
subject. However both works recognised that much variance in practice existed at local level.\footnote{G. Oxley, \textit{Poor Relief in England and Wales, 1601-1834} (Newton Abbot 1974); A. Brundage, \textit{The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930} (Basingstoke 2002).}

More recent administrative histories have come in the form of brilliantly detailed monographs by Hindle and Hollen-Lees. However in contrast to the works by the Webbs and Marshall, both see the flexibility of local practice as having been a great strength of the poor laws, allowing overseers to adapt to individual paupers’ needs. This viewpoint is echoed in the opinions of recent poor law studies generally. Whilst considering the same features as other administrative histories, Hindle and Hollen-Lees also reflect on paupers exercising agency as part of a history-from-below approach.\footnote{S. Hindle, \textit{On the Parish?: The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c. 1550-1750} (Oxford 2004); L. Hollen Lees, \textit{The Solidarities of Strangers, The English Poor Laws and The People, 1700-1948} (Cambridge 1998).} They give more recognition than some administrative histories to the idea that the law written at a legislative level was not always followed in practice by individual parishes. Their books are representative of a broader historiographical trend, which started from the mid-1980s, against the idea that the poor were a uniform group. The belief that the poor behaved in widely varying manners contradicts aforementioned histories which overrode individual identity to present uniting class-based experiences of poverty.

The variable experience of the poor
The hugely variable treatment of the poor is testament to the multiplicity of ways legislation could be interpreted by autonomous parishes. This variability was a central concern in forming the methodology for this thesis, and is a key theme of chapter three in particular. Studies of the laws have shown that the rights of paupers changed according to a wide range of factors, including chronology. Such differing experiences have been revealed by detailed focus on many sub-groups of paupers, with historians often suggesting each group had some customary right to relief.

Welfare history in the early 1980s became more specialized on certain topics than it had been within previous survey works, with greater interest in different groups of paupers, such as the elderly, women, and the sick. A feminist approach emerged, that claimed provisions had been too patriarchal, organised around the ideal of a male breadwinner. For example Pat Thane has blamed the welfare state for this, saying it
increased restrictions on women within the family.\textsuperscript{19} The study of old age has perhaps been foremost within this historiographical trend, as society grew aware of the challenges caused by aging populations. Many studies of the elderly have sought to modify a long established image of helplessness, or display the variety of support that could bolster welfare; ‘old age studies have had to overcome the notion that the lives of older people were relatively uniform, homogenous, insignificant, and lacking in historical interest.’\textsuperscript{20} They have shown that the elderly often held a particularly strong claim to parish relief; an investigation by Ottaway of communities in Essex and Dorset shows long-term local commitments were made to providing for the aged poor.\textsuperscript{21} Smith’s consideration of pension provision suggests support of the elderly was systematic and fairly assured, and that this was particularly so prior to 1750.\textsuperscript{22} Historians also became more aware of the different ways a person may come to require welfare. Resultantly there was greater interest in care provided for the ill, and a realisation they too were treated dissimilarly to other paupers: Thomas tells us ‘the sick poor received sympathetic and humane consideration bearing in mind contemporary medical knowledge and the limited facilities available.’\textsuperscript{23} Tomkins also found that localities often differentiated their care for the sick poor compared to other paupers.\textsuperscript{24} The study of illness proved important due to the way sickness affected all age groups, and


\textsuperscript{21} S. Ottoway, \textit{The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth Century England} (Cambridge 2004); on the established rights of elderly widows see S. Cavallo & L. Warner eds, \textit{Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe} (Harlow 2000).


\textsuperscript{24} A. Tomkins, \textit{The Experience of Urban Poverty, 1723-82: Parish, Charity and Credit} (Manchester 2006), pp. 120-62.
because relief caused a dilemma for the parish authorities.\textsuperscript{25} Therefore although these case studies take specific interest in certain sub-categories of the poor, they are not self-contained and offer information about poor law practices more widely.

These portrayals of a person passing through different life-cycle phases of poverty have generated further interest in the range of pauper groups and their varied treatment by local authorities. The key work that tied the life-cycle with poor relief was Tim Wales’s investigation of parishes in Norfolk, though this field would not be advanced fully until the mid-1990s.\textsuperscript{26} More recently Wales has outlined how the young poor in East Anglia were prosecuted for not undertaking certain employment, and reveals different treatment according to gender.\textsuperscript{27} It was increasingly seen that the cause of poverty and the pauper’s situation were central factors in how local poor law authorities dealt with them. Consequently study of the poor became even more focused, with greater interest in how individuals reacted to their treatment. The British approach to poverty history has been particularly advanced in doing this compared to European studies.\textsuperscript{28} Research of the individual was combined with improved record linkage and information availability from the late 1980s to create well-rounded stories of personal lives and communities in the birth of ‘micro-history’, as outlined by Hitchcock.\textsuperscript{29} This amplified the on-going popularity of bottom-up methodology, as well as a sustained interest in the poor, that gave greater depth to exploration. These histories showed even more of the local variances involved in engaging with the poor laws.\textsuperscript{30} For example

Smith argues that community demographics and the living arrangements of individual families could shape welfare provision, rather than the opposite being true, as Malthusians opponents of the poor laws would have wanted. The organisation of pauper households in accordance with parish demands has also been highlighted by King and Williams.

Alternate sources of revenue existed for paupers to maximise their incomes besides poor relief. Survey works from the immediate post-war period had not acknowledged these other income networks, and had been more concerned with the investigating the provision of comprehensive relief. Historians such as Blaug produced positive interpretations arguing that the poor laws provided comprehensive support. These views were carried through the 1980s by some, for instance Slack, who consequently did not investigate or suggest the existence of welfare streams beyond the parish. This additional support would have ramifications for the variability of relief levels, and how sufficient provision was in different regions. Detailed comparison across localities showed that relief was supplemented from elsewhere, such as charities and other incomes. The ability of paupers to combine differing levels of provision and alternative sources of welfare has been outlined in full by King and Tomkins. Joanna Innes has charted shifting patterns of thought regarding relief outside of the parish. Her research shows that relying on state sponsored provision was increasingly condemned in

the public sphere by the early nineteenth century, as attitudes regarding welfare hardened.\textsuperscript{38}

Changing sentiment over time towards the poor was an important factor in shaping access to support, and will be discussed more extensively in chapter three. The 1820s and 1830s saw attacks on the relief process from legislators and commentators following a sustained rise in expenditure, and attempts were made to reduce it. The loss of pauper’s customary rights that was caused by this decrease in sentiment is the main subject of Hollen Lees’s monograph.\textsuperscript{39} The decline of rights affected individuals differently. For instance both Thane and Hollen Lees believe the elderly were treated better than other pauper groups.\textsuperscript{40} Given the huge range of possibilities in parochial behaviour outlined in this chapter, historians increasingly saw it as self-defeating to look at the legal framework of the law, and more rewarding to consider the actual practices of it. Steven King has called study of the administrative framework ‘old potato’ pointing out that significance lay in what the state ‘thought’ should happen.\textsuperscript{41}

Despite all the features discussed in this sub-section that shaped the pauper experience, some historians question the apparently varied complexion of the law and its effects. Charlesworth sees legislation as well unified, based around an absolute right to relief, and Innes believes uniform provision was enforced by the magistrates.\textsuperscript{42} The role of the magistrates in enforcing both legal and customary right will be revisited in chapter three. Knowledge of individual paupers and the choices they made was further heightened through study of the settlement laws and their associated source material.

**Settlement and belonging**

It was the settlement laws that necessitated both the sending of pauper letters and the arrangements made within them for provision. Such correspondence forms the main


\textsuperscript{39} Hollen Lees, *Solidarities*.

\textsuperscript{40} Thane, *Age in English History*, Ibid, pp. 58-60.


source material used in this thesis. In a pauper’s settlement parish they had a right to apply for relief, funded by parish ratepayers through a property tax. There were three ‘natural’ heads of settlement; wives gained their husband’s settlement, a child got their father’s, and an illegitimate child was settled where it was born. Settlement was also earned by renting property above £10 per annum, paying tax on property, through completing an apprenticeship, having contractual employment in the parish for a year, or by holding parish office. Paupers could appeal to justices against overseers’ decisions regarding relief or settlement. The 1662 Act of Settlement allowed host parishes to remove paupers within 40 days of arrival, and costs could be recuperated from the settlement parish. The pauper was supposed to be removed if considered ‘likely to become chargeable’, prior to 1795. Following changes to the law in 1795 the pauper should still have been returned to their settlement parish when they required relief from the host parish. The laws of settlement, although apparently oppressive for a person’s movements, gave solid rights to claim support in a certain place.

Similar to administrative studies of the law which had believed there was little variability in the behaviour of the poor, welfare historians writing prior to the 1980s treated the settlement laws as uniform. It was assumed they were practiced as written; ‘the Settlement Laws prevented an English worker from leaving the village where he was settled unless provided with a certificate that the parish accepted full responsibility for him should he become chargeable to the rates.’ Research on the variance of the poor laws showed this to be inaccurate and has recognised the flexibility of these economic and legal demarcations of belonging.

Study of the settlement laws has driven moves away from investigating the broad administrative set-up of the poor laws since the mid-1980s. Their use disclosed the potential of the individual voices of the poor. This started through the exploitation of related source material with the work of Keith Snell, and then James Taylor and Pamela Sharpe. Snell used settlement examinations to survey the lives of rural labourers at a time of agricultural enclosure and increasing instability of employment, arguing that

43 For an outline of settlement rules see Brundage, *English Poor Laws*, pp. 9-10; Oxley, *Poor Relief*, pp. 18-21.
they were treated well under the poor laws.\textsuperscript{46} Sharpe employed apprenticeship indentures alongside other sources to portray the lives of the young poor in Devon.\textsuperscript{47} For its part in the move towards narrative histories, Taylor’s work is described by Hitchcock as ‘perhaps the most significant development.’\textsuperscript{48} He actually employed pauper letters to enhance his case studies, though did not explore the out-parish relief system. Taylor considered the settlement laws to have been the most important laws in England, judged by the number of lives they affected, claiming succinctly, ‘The pre-1834 Poor Law was like a brick wall, each brick a separate parochial identity, all held in place by the mortar of the settlement laws.’\textsuperscript{49} Work related to settlement issues is plentiful, and is revisited in detail in the fifth chapter. More recently the topic has been considered for the notions of ‘home’ and belonging that it signified, and has been viewed in an emotive context as a part of the pauper’s identity.\textsuperscript{50} Additionally studies of England increasingly argue that the laws were highly negotiable and therefore enabling for the pauper;\textsuperscript{51} however engagement with the settlement laws has never been compared geographically.

**Regionality**

Regional welfare studies build on other research that has shown the varying behaviour of individual parishes. Despite this awareness of parish autonomy, the notion that parishes in one location may have behaved similarly to parishes around them, but differently to parishes elsewhere, in a form of welfare regionalism, would not be properly examined until the year 2000.\textsuperscript{52} Consequently there is a disjuncture between the limited amount of regional studies of welfare, and rich regional studies of other subject areas that exist for England. The growth of these other regional investigations, particularly since the early 1980s, has been profound. Additionally micro-studies have encouraged growth in this field, suggesting there may have been variance in practices between different areas of the country. The development of historical geography has

\textsuperscript{46} Snell, *Annals*, pp. 105-7.
\textsuperscript{47} Sharpe, ‘Poor Children as Apprentices’.
\textsuperscript{48} Hitchcock, [review], ‘Narratives’, p. 241.
\textsuperscript{49} Taylor, *Sojourners Narratives*, p. 169.
\textsuperscript{51} S. King & A. Winter eds, *Migration, Settlement and Belonging in Europe, 1500-1930s: Comparative Perspectives* (New York 2013).
\textsuperscript{52} King, *Poverty and Welfare*. 
also amplified this trend, increasing interest in spatial dynamics. Agricultural histories written by people such as Thirsk and Everitt had taken an interest in regional variation from the 1960s onwards. They explained the variations in practice they found by examining underlying topographies, though these initial advocates of spatial investigations still stressed the importance of intra-regionality. Agricultural apportioning served as a precursor for industrial histories that outlined different geographical processes of production. These works provided a corrective to wider studies that did not allow for the impact of detailed technological changes on certain areas, and had given emphasis to major industries over local ones. Similar studies have recently talked of regional landscapes given character by the development of their towns.

Regional history has also flourished in tandem with the growth of local history, and a desire to expand investigations beyond ‘the discrete parish’ to a slightly larger scale. Central to understanding regionality, especially culturally, is the work of local historian Charles Phythian-Adams. He believes it is logical that economic regions would have been inhabited by people with shared norms that can be more easily defined. Much of his work has considered how landscapes interacted with people and shaped their customs. Subject specific regions are now seen by some historians as a stronger approach to examining many topics, allowing the creation of more realistic

historical boundaries than administrative areas such as counties. However ultimately all regions remain constructs placed upon the past by historians and creating overarching ones is contentious; the boundaries can frequently be ambiguous and multi-faceted.\textsuperscript{61} The effectiveness of these different spatial approaches gives validity to their use for examining welfare. They have shown that there can be numerous different understandings of a subject based on its geographic variation. Regionality is a topic that will be returned to, most prominently in chapters two and six, but is also shown throughout this thesis in the practices portrayed by poor law correspondence.

Narrative sources and pauper letters
Use of pauper letters has changed understanding of how the old poor laws were practiced and what those involved in the relief system felt about it. Their role in an evolving historical literature is charted in this section, but their potential as a source and a framework for their analysis is detailed in chapter two. The letters are employed throughout this thesis, which offers new ways to apply them in historical study. They have already been used to research all of the preceding historiographical themes, though have mostly been employed to consider select pauper groups, and chart their experience as individuals. Two trends are evident in the way they have been utilised by historians. Firstly, many pauper letter works consist of detailed case studies, highly contextualised with other source material. However more recent investigations emphasise the large amount of individual letters that exist, and seek to make more direct contrasts between larger sets of narratives. Secondly, initial pauper letter studies used them for information about the subjects in question, such as the elderly or the sick, as well as portraying the mechanics of the out-parish relief system. Subsequent works analysed the linguistic construction of the letters. These still constitute the majority of approaches.

Study of out-parish relief and pauper letters only started properly from the mid-1990s. The growing number of micro-studies drew attention to the caches of letters that existed, and this was helped by the improved organisation of archives. Previously much parish history had been taken from sources with a higher survival rate, or that were easier to locate, such as parish registers;\textsuperscript{62} the formulaic data in such sources encouraged macro studies. Historical interest in the letters was partly generated from the


\textsuperscript{62} Laslett & Oosterveen, ‘Long-Term Trends’.
linguistic turn and heightened curiosity about the experiences of the poor, as well as wider engagement with how people lived everyday life. Though pauper letters are of the most interest here, they are not alone in the category of ‘pauper narratives’. They sit alongside emigrant letters, begging letters, bastardy letters, petitions, and apprenticeship papers, as well as other sources beyond the welfare system. However the only narratives existing in greater number are court records which do not generally include the verbatim transcript of paupers. Additionally the letters are the purest forms of narrative, not set to wider frameworks as related sources such as settlement and bastardy examinations are.

Poor law correspondence was produced by three factors. The first was the huge variance in the treatment of the poor, which meant that the terms of support could be negotiated. The acts of 1597 and 1601 relieved magistrates of the day-to-day administration of poor relief, moving responsibility to overseers of the poor. Local authorities were set a duty to care for their deserving poor, though crucially what qualified as ‘deserving’ and what measures were to be taken was left undefined. This set the pattern for the care of the poor for the next 230 years, though the laws were not monolithic and remained in a state of constant convection. Between 1601 and 1850 there were 264 general acts and over 100 local ones. They were typically not forced on the system and often just reflected local relief practices, amending rather than replacing laws; their employment was essentially optional. Some overseers sought printed guidelines, whereas others ignored them altogether. A lack of central direction across over 15,000 parishes resulted in highly autonomous, localised approaches. Consequently the laws were open to interpretation, and poor law correspondence embodies the resultant negotiations.


65 See King, Poverty and Welfare, pp. 18-47, for the high level of negotiability and variance to the poor laws.

The second factor was migration. For instance it would often have been necessary for paupers to relocate for work, and this grew more common with industrialisation and the centralisation of labour. In the event of unemployment, workers became chargeable within their new host parishes, though lack of work serves as only one example of how this may have occurred. The final factor was the manner in which paupers were required to request relief from their settlement parish. As described earlier in this chapter, this was the only authority immediately responsible for hearing their claim. Therefore, if paupers wanted relief whilst based in another parish, they often contacted the settlement parish to ask for relief. Doing so could take the form of a pauper letter written by themselves or someone else on their behalf. There were advantages to this out-parish relief system for all the parties concerned. The arrangement saved the host parish the immediate costs of removal, which could amount to over £8,\(^67\) and allowed ratepayers, as local employers, to keep a pool of cheap labour available. If the pauper returned home, it may have destroyed existing support networks in the host parish, therefore costing the settlement parish more in providing for them. Keeping the pauper in the host parish also transferred some responsibility for their well-being, and increased the chances that they may be able to eventually change their settlement, ridding the settlement parish of a potential burden. Non-resident paupers who came back and approached the vestry in person could have extracted more money, including expenses for the return journey. Additionally the pauper gained the benefit of remaining in the parish they had chosen to live in, often for economic reasons.

The potential benefits of out-parish relief for the wider economy were considerable. Examination of pauper letters has contradicted research that suggested the settlement laws were ill suited for the mass movement of people.\(^68\) Workers could now migrate to sites of expanding industry knowing that if they needed relief it might not necessitate return. This allowed industrial centres to grow faster than they would have through natural increase.\(^69\) Significant population movement facilitated Britain’s development into the first industrial nation and therefore the out-parish system was of


\(^{69}\) C. Pooley & J. Turnbull, *Migration and Mobility in Britain since the 18th Century* (Lancaster 1998), pp. 64-5; though not a study of the out-parish system, Solar has also noted the benefits of the poor law system for economic development, and their flexibility to local labour needs, P. Solar, ‘Poor Relief and English Economic Development before the Industrial Revolution’, *Economic History Review*, 48, no. 1 (1995), pp. 1-22.
considerable importance. The letters embody the behaviours that made it function. Consequently although many paupers were still removed in this time period, the need to do so was reduced by out-parish relief, and it is estimated that between only 2.3 and 5.3 per cent of poor relief funds were spent on removal. Sokoll believes about 15 per cent of paupers were supported through the system by 1802.

Despite the fact the central edicts of the poor laws were in place by the mid seventeenth century, most pauper letter collections postdate 1800, and the majority were sent from the 1820s onwards. There are numerous factors that could have contributed towards this. For instance growing urbanization would have meant methods of formal communication were used more, replacing the face-to-face interaction of informal rural communities. From the start of the nineteenth century there was greater use of paper based money, which could be posted more easily and there were better accounting and money exchange systems that allowed the transfer of finance. The Sturges Bourne Vestry Acts of 1818 and 1819 required more accurate recording of parish accounting practices, which possibly meant the letters were stored more effectively. Finally, the acceptance by overseers that the settlement laws could be treated as flexible and that the out-parish system meant the pauper did not have to be removed, may have increased overtime.

Initial letter studies by Sokoll and Taylor revealed large collections of general parish correspondence, numbering well in excess of 1,000 items in Essex and Westmoreland respectively. Since then other narrative projects have drawn attention to the potential extent of source material in both Britain and across Europe. This thesis was embedded within a venture that collated large amounts of narratives in the UK and Germany. We now know that although Sokoll’s and Taylor’s collections were sizeable, they were not exceptional, and that there are probably more than 20,000 pauper letters alone in archives across the country.

72 King, ‘‘You May Trust’’.
74 This project was funded in the UK by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.
How historians have used narratives

In 1997 Tim Hitchcock, Peter King, and Pamela Sharpe used first person pauper narratives to demonstrate a range of voices and attitudes in *Chronicling Poverty*, which has become a landmark work.⁷⁵ It included four chapters using pauper letters by Sokoll, Sharpe, Taylor and Smith, and came at the same time as other works engaging with narratives from Sharpe, Peter King, Lis and Soly, and Hitchcock and Black.⁷⁶ The earliest article to consider pauper letters in-depth was Taylor’s 1991 examination of the out-parish system, in which he explained its basic mechanics. Taylor suggested that it caused rural parishes to support industrial areas through periods of cyclical depression, because the unemployed workers still possessed their settlements in these parishes.⁷⁷ This was followed by a piece from Sokoll in 1995.⁷⁸

All of the contributions based on pauper letters to *Chronicling Poverty* continued to broadly introduce the source. Taylor’s chapter presented letters from a wide range of paupers and was interested in ‘the truth of the claim; the literacy of the paupers; family relationships; and the common causes of poverty.’⁷⁹ The chapters by Sokoll and Sharpe were less focused on the mechanics of the relief system, and displayed the richness of the source material and presented the experiences of their subjects, which were the elderly and a family respectively.⁸⁰ Smith’s work treated the pauper letters as secondary to other topics of enquiry. He utilised them to portray the pauper’s conceptualisation of the new poor law.⁸¹ All of these studies used relatively small amounts of the source, for instance Smith cites letters from four paupers. Though drawn from much larger collections, Taylor incorporates twenty letters regarding

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⁷⁵ Hitchcock, King & Sharpe eds, *Chronicling*.
⁷⁹ Taylor, ‘Voices’, p. 112.
thirteen paupers, and Sokoll also quotes from approximately twenty letters. In all cases they are heavily contextualised alongside other poor law sources.

Sokoll remarked in his totemic 2001 edited collection of pauper letters that their use was ‘in its infancy’, and to some extent this remains true; our employment of them could be further developed in new approaches. The significance of Sokoll’s approach to the correspondence will be explored in chapter two. Some pauper letter works continued to be exploratory in their nature, presenting a range of topics that familiarised the reader with the source. However they also increasingly showed that paupers were not passive in the face of poverty. For instance Sokoll has illustrated the poor’s ability to use rhetorical devices to obtain provision. The use of such agency to shape outcomes by paupers has become a crucial sub-topic; Peter Jones has displayed how paupers utilised shared standards of decency to negotiate with overseers regarding the quality of their clothing.

Similar to the consideration of particular sub-groups of the poor in previous histories, investigating pauper letters according to the pauper’s circumstances became popular. For instance Snell has considered how ideas of ‘community’ were displayed amongst paupers who lived distant to the parish and wrote letters showing notions of attachment, right, and local obligation. Studies have also been increasingly concerned with the way the message was conveyed. In further work on Essex letters, Sokoll has taken an especially acute interest in the construction of language and rhetorical devices. Work by King and Tomkins examines the linguistic construction of letters according to the paupers that wrote them. Tomkins surveyed letters from sick males in research on gender and ill health. She believes such men felt psychological distress at their situation, and took refuge in expressing anger. Similarly King says relief for the

85 Snell, ‘Belonging and Community’.
86 Sokoll ‘Writing for Relief’.
87 A. Tomkins, “Labouring on a Bed of Sickness”: The Material and Rhetorical Deployment of Ill-Health in Male Pauper Letters’, in Gestrich, Hurren & King, Poverty and Sickness, pp. 51-68
sick often required particularly complex justification from the poor. These and other pauper letter works have formed the basis of a historiography mostly concerned with pauper sub-groups or intricate rhetorical analysis. However the latter pieces by King and Tomkins contrast notably with most previous pauper letter investigations, because these more recent studies do not use other poor law material for contextualisation. This is largely a reflection of the greater respect that now exists for pauper letters as a source, and the value placed in studying them. Additionally studies of narratives generally have increasingly looked to make comparisons of large amounts of them to better understand both the source and the welfare system.

Since Chronicling Poverty, further major works on pauper narratives have emphasised the agency of the poor, their range of experiences, and the virtues of the source material. An edited collection by King, Tomkins and Nutt in 2006 celebrated the benefits of utilising the correspondence, as part of work that displayed the background of the material and suggested large numbers of individual letters were extant. A Europe wide study edited by Gestrich, King and Raphael called for frameworks to enable systematic and comparative investigation of narratives across the continent. More recently work edited by Gestrich, Hurren and King on European pauper narratives has offered a starting point for geographic contrasts of the source material; a ‘matrix’ with which to consider different types of narratives, and assess their suitability for comparison. There have also been studies of English poor law correspondence that have not contextualised letters with additional material, but have instead looked more widely at identifying regional contrasts in their make-up. Similarly King has analysed large amounts of letters from separate counties, without other source material, to portray how paupers negotiated using the law, and the common understandings of clothing standards. Such investigations are evidence of the growing appetite for systematic,

89 King, Nutt & Tomkins, Narratives.
91 Gestrich, Hurren, ‘Sources, Methods and Experiences’, pp. 17-20.
large scale evaluation of pauper letters, though comparative geographical analysis has yet to be fully undertaken. The letters have been thought difficult to quantify, and they were therefore suited to histories at a time when detailed micro-studies were popular. Some historians still employ them in highly contextualised, locally focused settings, such as Tomkins who uses one elderly pauper to draw broad lessons about family support. However the insights the material allows into welfare practice would be beneficial if taken further and applied as part of a methodology that discusses a large corpus of correspondence. Additionally the agency and flexibility the letters portray still needs to be introduced to studies of the Welsh border counties, and those in Wales especially.

**Welsh border work**

No works have yet approached the Welsh borders as one welfare region. More surprising, is the lack of research dedicated to these counties individually, and the dearth of investigation in Wales in particular. Studies claiming to cover England and Wales often do not examine Wales, such as those by Crowther, King and Oxley. The research by the Webbs is perhaps the best survey work for consideration of Welsh sources, but makes few remarks about differences with England. Frost has recently Welsh utilised sources, though her interest is the new poor laws and illegitimacy specifically.

Most comment on the old poor laws in Wales in post war histories, similar to English studies, was rurally focused and negative about the level of provision. However these remarks on the topic have typically been asides. Discussion has often come in the context of other subjects such as social upheaval, urban growth or class

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96 Webb & Webb, Poor Law; to a lesser extent see Snell, Annals.
Otherwise comprehensive and renowned Welsh works have rarely devoted more than a few pages to the welfare system. One of many reasons for this historical neglect is the view that until the mid-eighteenth century the poor laws were ‘a dead letter in most of Wales’, and that parishes were either too poor to support the relief system or simply refused.

The pioneering work on the Welsh poor laws was that by Dodd on North Wales. Whilst original it is quite descriptive, giving wide-ranging and brief summaries of multiple subject areas. Similar to other older works it paints the system in a harsh light, believing the poor to have acted in a uniform manner, and takes great interest in workhouses rather than out relief. It is the first in a number of local Welsh histories which constitute a literature potentially more detailed than their English equivalents. However many are also highly descriptive wide-ranging works that do not pursue specific arguments. There has also generally been a greater interest in the post 1834 system. The older articles in particular can be quite damning of a welfare system seen as ill-suited and imposed on Wales. Common negative themes emerge, for example that the settlement laws were enforced particularly strictly, and that relief was frugal. There is frequently complaint about absentee English landlords who neglected

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102 Dodd, ‘North Wales’.

103 Ibid., pp. 121-7.


their official duties.\textsuperscript{107} Some have described Welsh parishes as uninterested in the poor laws.\textsuperscript{108} Related to this it is accepted that Welsh parishes were rate poor, and that rural ones in particular did not levy poor rates until the late eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{109} Both these points suggest a Welsh relief system that was poorly established and garnered little traction locally. More positively, though less commonly, the studies talk about widespread charitable giving, rooted within highly autonomous communities.\textsuperscript{110} Additionally it is said that vestries in such places mirrored this proud independence.\textsuperscript{111}

The major work on the Welsh poor is David Howell’s \textit{The Rural Poor in Eighteenth-Century Wales}. His main interest is the labouring poor, and the work is focused on notions of social relations and conflict. Consequently the short section on the dependent poor is spread across a number of areas and quite descriptive, and there is very little comment on the poor laws. He maintains the rural focus and belief in a harsh system that dominates aforementioned histories on Welsh poverty.\textsuperscript{112} There is also very little reference to the historiography of the English poor. Although the integrity of an entirely Welsh approach should be respected, without comparisons to English provision it is impossible to know if Wales had a similar or radically different welfare system. In what may be considered a call for the use of narrative sources, Howell comments, ‘perhaps the nearest we come to an authentic voice is the deposition before a magistrate in a criminal case.’\textsuperscript{113} He goes on to say, ‘it is well-nigh impossible to get inside the minds of these poor people in order to gauge their attitude towards their hard fate, to discern if they harboured any strong feelings of resentment, to identify any particular grievances they had and to judge their attitudes to those many in control of their

\textsuperscript{107} Teale, ‘Battle’.
\textsuperscript{110} Howell, \textit{Rural Poor}, p. 68; Dodd, ‘North Wales’, p. 114.
\textsuperscript{111} Dodd, ‘North Wales’, p. 113; G. Owen, ‘Poor Law System’, pp. 84-6; Teale, ‘Battle’, p. 92.
\textsuperscript{112} Davies, ‘Rural Area’, p. 245; Jeffreys Jones, ‘Parochial Administration’.
\textsuperscript{113} Howell, \textit{Rural Poor}, pp. 81-2 & 93-115.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p. xiii.
lives."\textsuperscript{114} Quite rightly he claims a new source use for Welsh history, in utilising begging letters to estates, and he employs a very small handful of pauper letters, though the system which embodied them is not deliberated on.\textsuperscript{115} Consequently his claim that ‘Welsh rural dwellers remain largely hidden from posterity, a secret people who seldom recorded their own feelings,’\textsuperscript{116} remains true.

There have been few other attempts to develop a broad picture of Welsh paupers under the old poor laws, and none that address individual experiences. King and Stewart have called for historians to realise what could be gained from investigating the region, though this request has not been fulfilled.\textsuperscript{117} Neil Evans also remarks that ‘The poor law in Wales has not attracted much attention.’\textsuperscript{118} His investigation of Wales compared to the other ‘Celtic fringe’ countries in his work on urbanisation is quite brief. His research is more concerned with Scotland and Ireland, as well as the new poor laws, and the social conditions of developing industrial towns.\textsuperscript{119} More work on Welsh welfare could emerge as part of continued interest in international welfare comparisons.\textsuperscript{120} However large scale transnational attentions could supersede the rich detail unearthed in the local Welsh studies, which deserves to be investigated in a manner akin to features in England. A better approach would be to examine Wales in terms of regional peripherality. Analogous to their research on Wales, King and Stewart have also written exploratory work on peripheral welfare in which the authors asked, ‘what can we learn about welfare history from studies of smaller, ‘peripheral’ nations and societies, and what the notion of ‘peripherality’ of itself gives to welfare history’.\textsuperscript{121} They believe

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., pp. xiv & 93-4; on the use of similar begging letters in Scotland see R. Houston, \textit{Peasant Petitions: Social Relations and Economic Life on Landed Estates, 1600-1850} (Basingstoke 2014).
\textsuperscript{116} Howell, \textit{Rural Poor}, p. xiii.
\textsuperscript{118} Evans, ‘Urbanisation’, p. 185.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} King & Stewart, ‘Welfare Peripheries’, p. 38.
these regions were impaired by their remoteness from the centre, affecting the wealth and operation of relief systems. Their edited collection of essays examined nations and regions with unstable autonomy beside larger bodies from across Europe, making the topic highly relevant to Wales. This theory of welfare regionality will also be more fully expanded in chapter two, as King and Stewart’s ideas on peripherality form the foundation of the spatial theory employed here.

Welsh works have not analysed pauper letters. The negative views of many histories outlined reflect a lack of knowledge of the individual pauper experience, and their ability to navigate welfare that would be shown in their narratives. Incorporation of the letters would improve research, enabling comparison with the diverse system of relief acknowledged in England. The existence of an out-parish system has not yet been discussed in Wales either. Though Davies notes that not all paupers were removed in industrialised southern Welsh parishes, he believes this was due to emergency relief, rather than an out-parish system. Another article actually passes brief comment on the existence of Welsh out-parish relief, yet this was not, and has never been further investigated.

There has been a lack of dedicated studies of the old poor laws in the counties on the English side of the border as well, which means using the area as a stepping stone for Welsh research is difficult. No historians have examined the notion that a specific method of approaching welfare in the borderlands existed. Similar to some Welsh local studies, many of the English ones have been insular, more interested in the new poor law, and descriptive of different elements of provision rather than providing a central argument. The lack of a cohesive approach for the region frequently means research is focused on uniquely local features. Investigations of Bristol have been attracted to its well-known poor law corporation and other institutions. Interest is typically in civic duty and care, rather than the role of the parish.

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has shown the range of provision in the city, presenting the rise of voluntary action as a result of dissatisfaction with the city corporation.\textsuperscript{126} Investigation of Bristol has detracted from work on neighbouring Somerset and Gloucestershire, and studies of these counties are particularly sparse. The diversity of poor law administrations in Shropshire, along with its mix of rural and industrial areas, means it has attracted more research than other English border counties. Walsh outlines the development of these administrative units, and believes there was little change in conduct between the old and new poor laws.\textsuperscript{127} Alannah Tomkins has investigated paupers’ use of Shrewsbury hospital, and argues that although the parish funded this it was only as a last resort.\textsuperscript{128} Both she and Walsh draw attention to the fact Shropshire was open to cultural Welsh influences, though neither develops this in their work. Tomkins also provides letters from a family of Shropshire paupers in the edited collection, \textit{Narratives of the Poor}.\textsuperscript{129} The county has attracted further attention from the authors of poor law survey works, for instance Hollen-Lees utilises evidence from the poor law union of Atcham in \textit{Solidarities}. Additionally the Webbs drew on Shropshire for information, but Walsh complains they did not examine it beyond Shrewsbury.\textsuperscript{130} None of these latter investigations remark on the broader regional features of the borders. There have been regionality studies that make passing comment on welfare within these counties, though again they do not consider them as part of a wider borderland. These remarks will be outlined in chapter two as part of the discussion on welfare regionalism.\textsuperscript{131} Because of the lack of work in the borders, all chapter themes constitute new offerings to the literature in a geographical sense, as well as being original contributions in other ways.

\textbf{Thematic literature gaps}

As the review of existing literature has begun to hint, there are gaps in our current knowledge of how poverty was experienced, contested and treated, and some will be


\textsuperscript{126} M. Gorsky, \textit{Patterns of Philanthropy: Charity and Society in Nineteenth-Century Bristol} (Woodbridge 1999).


\textsuperscript{128} Tomkins, ‘Mid-Eighteenth-Century Shrewsbury’.


\textsuperscript{130} Walsh, ‘Poor Laws in Shropshire’, p. 232.

\textsuperscript{131} King, \textit{Poverty and Welfare}, pp. 264-5.
investigated in detail here. Firstly, now the poor laws have become widely accepted as hugely variable, changing in their application according to a multitude of factors, we need a way of measuring and comparing the resultant practices. Secondly, this variability of experience and multi-faceted interpretation of the law has rarely been charted in the overseers’ administration in the same way it has for the treatment of paupers. Thirdly the study of other individuals under the old poor law would benefit from the analysis of their correspondence, as the investigation of paupers has done.\textsuperscript{132} Fourthly, our consideration of a pauper’s sense of identity under the poor laws has so far largely been dictated by economic aspects of history, including the settlement laws, rather than more emotive concepts. Fifthly, our understanding of welfare regionalism is limited compared to other historical subjects that have been analysed regionally. Finally, there has been no study of the poor laws in Wales beyond highly localised examinations. Comments on behaviour in Wales that differed to that in England are made throughout the chapters, as identifying a Welsh system of welfare is the foremost concern of this thesis. Every chapter continues the central narrative themes of examining practice, experience and individuality. Collectively they illustrate core yardsticks of sentiment towards poverty and will share a regional focus. Due to the quantitative methods applied throughout, the chapters contribute to a new framework for reading peripherality, and Welshness especially. In addition to the above thematic areas, new ways are also shown for using the source material to interpret poor law practice across a large area and time span.

In the following chapter, the thesis continues with an explanation of the quantitative methodology that will be employed to measure features of peripherality within the border counties. The literature regarding welfare regionalism will also be discussed, in order to provide a suitable framework for investigations of spatial difference. Pauper letters have not been considered in a way that fully exploits their number, variation and geographic expanse. Existing research has often been highly localised and interested in the nature of certain poverty problems, or language use. Whilst such works provide valuable lessons regarding certain scenarios, and have shown differences in the operation of the poor laws in different locations, they do not make claims on the extent of regional variation. Their level of focus makes them

\textsuperscript{132} For an example of poor law correspondence being used to investigate individuals other than paupers see B. Harvey, ‘The putative fathers of Swinton, England: illegitimate behaviour under the old poor laws, 1797-1835’, \textit{Journal of Family History}, 40, no. 3 (2015), pp. 373-398.
different to the older, macro-approaches to studying the poor law. Consequently the individualism the letters present has not yet been used in a regional investigation that compares a lot of letters, despite suggestions in recent narrative studies that this is a desired approach. The letters need to be broadly combined in a fashion which describes and contrasts their collective purposes and expectations, to make representative findings on geographic and chronological differences.

The first substantive chapter concerns the moral economy. Though sentiment towards the poor and spending on them is universally accepted as having been in decline, its impact has yet to be charted across poor law narratives. Additionally there have been few concerted efforts to see the impact of its deterioration on the local processes of the poor laws. This chapter will also contrast rights that existed according to the differing circumstances of paupers. Letters sent by pauper sub-groups have rarely been evaluated alongside each other. Furthermore the use of the justices in enforcing what some historians see as a legal right has been little examined in practice, and not at the same parochial level that the variable treatment of paupers has been. The justices’ informal correspondence in particular represents a little-studied source. These methods of approaching the parish reveal the value systems paupers believed they participated in. By investigating such customs we can better understand the confidence paupers had in the ability of parishes to meet their needs, and the extent to which they made an impoverished peripheral welfare system benefit them. Outlining the ongoing decline in the moral economy in this first substantive chapter means it is possible to proceed with subsequent themes. The change of certain features across this time period is particularly important for investigating under-developed and anachronistic relief systems.

There are substantial gains to be made for our understanding of welfare by studying parish overseers, and the behaviour revealed in their correspondence is the subject of the second substantive chapter. Similar to the informal communications of justices, overseers’ letters have not yet received dedicated examination under the old poor law. The administrative histories detailed previously have more typically

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recognised the significance of the law as it was created at a legislative level, rather than its enactment within the parish. Work here follows a more recent trend in looking at how administration behaved and interacted with paupers locally. Additionally, although an important factor in the varied treatment paupers received was overseer discretion, their negotiations have not been examined. This lack of consideration in poor law historiography is surprising given the importance of the overseer’s role and the large amount of available source material they have provided. Poor law historians have considered the poor and left mention of the overseers to those concerned with examining the middling sort. Interpretation of overseer behaviour has been attempted by considering the care paupers received. Consequently there is also no knowledge of regional trends in overseer behaviour, other than awareness that parishes were highly autonomous. As well as bridging these important gaps, discussing the overseers means the differing financial constraints peripheral parish administrators faced can be outlined. The perception of overseers in also provides wider lessons on how well established parish relief was. Similarly the way they conducted business with other parishes shows how under-developed out-parish systems were mitigated.

The next chapter is interested in poor law identity, on an individual, parochial and national scale. Understanding identity and self-preservation helps us appreciate the base expectations of provision. Along with the work in the moral economy chapter, this is required to differentiate relief customs between regions. The attempts made to preserve identity display how paupers saw their parish support interacting with their personal needs. Much historical focus on pauper identity has been tied to economic necessity rather than more emotive interpretations. For instance when looking at a pauper’s attachment to their parish, many historians have done so through paupers’ settlement concerns. With regards to a higher level of belonging, there have been almost no investigations into nationalism within narratives. Any use of nationalism is highly relevant as study of the poor laws is progressed into a peripheral region.

Having displayed strong regional differences throughout the thesis, the final substantive chapter engages with literature regarding specific aspects of poor law

136 Hindle, Parish?; Hollen Lees, Solidarities.
regionalism, and how this existed in the Welsh borders. Similar to the study of justices and the overseers, the use of narratives in regional investigations has not been extensive enough to fully reveal different practices.\textsuperscript{140} Current studies on the geographic patterning of welfare are instead mostly based on financial statistics, such as the extent of poverty in parishes. Partly because such data does not transgress parish boundaries, it presents a great deal of inter-parochial variety. As a result the debate on regionality under the poor laws has stalled.\textsuperscript{141} Therefore firstly, the chapter uses cases studies of different parishes within the same counties to gauge the extent of intra-regional behaviour, a topic that will be more fully explained in chapter two. Additionally the interesting theories of King and Stewart on peripherality have yet to be applied in the ways the authors desired.\textsuperscript{142} Investigations throughout the thesis will expand on their ideas. This will show that many peripheral techniques of distributing relief reflected what would have been older styles of practice in some areas of England. Consequently secondly, a case study will compare the behaviour of English and Welsh parishes in the eighteenth century, to establish whether certain relief practices were the product of peripherality, or this earlier time period. The ensuing conclusion of the thesis takes the findings of all the previous chapters to draw a picture of Welshness and general peripherality based on the characteristics identified. It also offers a variety of original contributions to the literature, as well as a framework to advance how we use pauper narratives.

\textsuperscript{140} King, ‘Regional Patterns’.
\textsuperscript{141} Hindle, \textit{Parish?}, pp. 282-94; King, \textit{Poverty and Welfare}.
\textsuperscript{142} King & Stewart, ‘Welfare Peripheries’, p. 35.
Chapter 2: Methodological and spatial approaches

Introduction

Pauper letters and poor law correspondence more generally, are central to this thesis. Using them both collectively and as individual items creates challenges that need addressing, in addition to the more thematic gaps outlined in chapter one. This chapter will therefore first discuss the potential problems of pauper letters as a source, and how such issues should be either solved, ameliorated or accepted as inevitable difficulties. A quantitative framework is advocated to address some of these concerns. This will be illustrated in the second section, with a full discussion of the database and methods, the dimensions of the corpus involved, and the potential benefits and difficulties incurred. Use of the quantitative approach helps engage with methods of spatial study, which are outlined next. The thesis will expand on themes identified by other historians for regional study. Doing so enables both the advance of poor law research into Wales, and contrasts with suitable comparison counties to portray the different approaches to welfare there. These differences in attitudes and behaviours were partly shaped by the socio-economic and topographical circumstances of each county being investigated, which will be described at the end of the chapter. They had significance for all the topics discussed within the substantive chapters of this thesis.

Poor law correspondence as a source

The credibility of pauper letters as a source has been heavily debated. This has typically centred on their ‘authenticity’, depending on who wrote them, how trustworthy the paupers were, and whether the correspondence was representative of other appeals made within the parish. These deliberations do not need to be revisited in their entirety here.¹

Even if the letters are not thought of as representative of standard parish interactions, the out-parish system is of interest itself for its importance. However the letters have been deemed dependable sources that provide a valuable window into local welfare practice. The genuine circumstances of the pauper could easily be checked by the settlement parish, and this information was frequently sent to them. Additionally, comparison with vestry minutes reveals corresponding appeals, similar to those framed in poor law correspondence, suggesting letters were representative of requests within the parish. The letters therefore reveal the practice of parish relief through the need to exercise it at distance and leave a paper trail of interactions.

An issue that has not been queried in the literature, is how representative the letters quoted in studies are of other pauper letters, either from the same sample, or which were created elsewhere under different circumstances. Concern with the representativeness of pauper letters and a desire to truly measure their traits drives the methodology of this thesis. Historians must necessarily select letters that concern their poor law subject area, and will extract phrases that support their argument. However these letters were highly situational, and their writing was subject to an infinite combination of influences including what the pauper’s problem was, their social standing, their relief history, the sentiment of the vestry, parish finances, the time period, and regional relief customs, amongst many others. As King points out: ‘optimistic, neutral and negative interpretations of the poor law could simply refer to different periods, different areas, or different groups of paupers by age, sickness or marital status. The fact that poor law records show us so many faces and offer so many interpretations perpetuates division in the historiography.’ Such variances of experience were partly exemplified in chapter one. Therefore if a historian is basing an argument on a limited number of letters chosen from a huge range of possible circumstances, they should perhaps justify why these particular letters have been picked. This would show that the historian has not been selective with their evidence. It would also be favourable to have an indication of how prevalent the scenarios were that they present. This is all especially so now we have moved beyond initial inquiries into


using pauper letters, which informed us of the mechanics of the out-parish system and displayed pauper experiences.

On the variety of interactions in parish welfare Sharpe tells us, ‘Countless value judgements and the nods and winks of personal acquaintance must have affected the way in which relief was administered at a personal level.’3 Her study employed forty letters across a twenty year period from one family, contextualised with other sources. Other studies have used fewer letters, and without this contextualization.4 Because of the difficulties of garnering representative material, and many historians’ lack of consideration of the legal framework of the poor laws, Charlesworth accuses them of reconstructing these cases as they desire.5 To do so is unfair, as most pauper letter investigations are presented in controlled, contextualized settings. However they have not been analysed in widespread, comparative settings that properly ascertain their ‘normal’ features, and how they were most typically used, so that pauper appeals can stand independently as a reliable source.

As well as representatively showing the extensive dataset compiled here, the thesis also needs to utilise it fully. The project the thesis was embedded within facilitated collection of large amounts of poor law correspondence from across the country. To present all of the letters in a detailed contextualised setting would be impossible. These issues have been addressed by adopting a highly quantitative approach, the techniques of which are almost entirely new for pauper letters, and will be outlined shortly. As well as gauging how representative certain letter types were, the methodology reveals large scale changes across both the border region and a ninety year time span. Analysing poor law correspondence in this manner is a logical and necessary advancement of approaches to it. Doing so answers calls from historians to create a framework that can be applied to large geographic expanses, and the sizable amount of narratives we now know exist, in order to compare behaviour.6

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3 P. Sharpe, ‘‘The Bowels of Compation’’: A Labouring Family and the Law, c.1790-1834’, in Hitchcock, King & Sharpe, Chronicling, p. 87.
6 The project embedding this thesis which has collected letters from across Britain suggests at least 20,000 pauper letters may exist, for evidence of the extent of the material in published works see S. King & A. Stringer, ‘I have Once More Taken the Leberty to Say as You Well Know’: The Development of Rhetoric in the Letters of the English, Welsh and Scottish Sick and Poor 1780s-1830s’, in Gestrich,
A quantitative framework

The database used has involved the reading and compilation of the 3,938 items of correspondence collected into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, where information has been tabulated under 49 headings and subheadings. All pauper letter collections range from barely literate scraps of paper to well-formed requests. The magnitude of the collection used here increases that variety, revealing letter forms that differed markedly from those in studies focused wholly on England. The entire corpus includes 2,007 items sent to English border parishes, 1,094 to the English comparators and 837 to the Welsh border parishes. Though the chief interest of this thesis is in pursuing ‘Welshness’ and establishing these characteristics the majority of large scale calculations, for instance those appearing in graphs, are based on correspondence from all three regions unless otherwise stated. Doing so establishes wider, national trends, such as change over time, which then allows identification of how common a feature was regionally.

Other methods could have been utilised for the examination of a large letter collection; for example a corpus linguistic computer program. These programs seek out linguist traits in transcribed documents, and are part of a developing field of analysis. There were a large number of reasons this choice was made, but the main factor was that it was impossible to transcribe all the material within the timeframe. Additionally, though more consistent, letting the computer programme search the data reduces flexibility. Doing so also removes historical context and the ability to make informed interpretations on individual letters according to wider circumstances portrayed in other letters. Moreover the corpus linguistics classifications would not have been statistically rich enough to produce the detailed graphs and charts wanted to depict large scale trends. Furthermore, given the vast range of the corpus, it was not homogenous enough for corpus linguistics. Appeals were significantly different in Wales compared to southern England, not just in terms of language, but the general format of the letter as

Hurren & King, Poverty and Sickness, pp. 69-91; King, Nutt & Tomkins, Narratives; Taylor, ‘Voices’; Sokoll, Essex Pauper Letters.

7 The basic details of each letter were recorded in the database, such as the author or date, and then further information was extrapolated to fit relevant headings, and address predefined queries that advance both the existing historiography and new areas. These headings could be filtered, either individually or simultaneously, to investigate certain letter trends according to time and place. An additional database was created for 207 bastardy letters, consisting of 30 headings. Microsoft Access was also employed for counting non-numerical features.

well. Similarly corpus linguistics would have been ill suited to the spelling errors common to pauper letters, and would not have been wholly accurate for the subtleties of the letters translated from Welsh. The database allows much easier comparison between groups of letter writers, such as those from specific counties, as opposed to separating these subjects out into unconnected searchable texts.

Another more conventional approach to a regional study would have been to investigate parochial financial information instead, such as the variety of support within the parish, the capacity of the parish itself to spend, and the nature of the local poverty problem. This would have been an approach more similar to existing literature on regional variation.9 Geographically it would still have been a new consideration of many of these little-studied counties, especially within Wales. Such material could have provided information on its own, or been paired with pauper letters for the same area. Its omission means that the financial context of the letters is uncertain. Knowledge of the possible factors that may have impacted relief, such as the extent of local rate bases or the availability of alternative sources of income, has had to be drawn from the poor law research existing for the borders. However concentrated parochial case studies would not have properly portrayed the out-parish system in the region, which was significantly different from that seen in south east England.10 Additionally the paucity of Welsh sources would have made such case studies difficult. Furthermore collection of this extensive corpus presents a unique opportunity to fully engage with regionality in pauper letters. Intense focus on large amounts of correspondence as the sole source material has been the approach of some more recent pauper letter publications,11 and maintains attention on the language of request, as well as relief practices. Here it illustrates a picture of welfare identity by showing what paupers thought to their relief, seemingly in disregard for local financial restraints.

The quantitative approach means data can be gleaned from the whole corpus, and representativeness tested. It is possible to show numerically exactly how common certain letter characteristics were in comparison to others. Such data will be displayed in time series graphs and tables throughout the thesis. The results are illustrated with exemplar case letters. The database permits the creation of a revealing picture for

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10 Sokoll, Essex Pauper Letters.
innumerable factors, changing both spatially and chronologically, based on a large amount of letters. As with any investigation of historical data the methodology is prone to incur errors, and this risk is heightened here through examination of narrative material. Such problems must be allowed for in order to progress with the source use, and provide a framework for their large scale utilisation. They will be commented on both during and following discussion of the dimensions of the corpus.

The segments of the core letter collection of 3,938 that are being used, and the questions asked of it, will alter depending on the thematic areas of welfare history being investigated; such an approach would be normal in any quantitative study. Therefore it is important that seven features of the data and its treatment are understood for the chapters that follow. These features are of varying complexity and the amount of discussion devoted to each of them differs. However the reader must be aware of all of them to appreciate the processes leading to the conclusions of the thesis.

The first important feature of the dataset is that it has an extensive geographical distribution, and all the places that received letters evaluated in this inquiry are mapped in figure 2.1. The counties are identified in the thesis according to the modern day county archives their letters were collected from. For instance Gwent has been looked at in south Wales, as opposed to Monmouthshire which it largely now stands in place of. Similarly ‘Powys’ represents Breconshire, Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire. Although it does not share a land border with England, because of its industrial development and consequent anglicising influences, Glamorgan has been treated here as a border county. Equally, due to the large amount of trade between England and Wales across the Bristol Channel, so have Bristol, and northern and costal Somerset. Also shown are those counties outside of the border region used as comparison counties; Cumbria, Lancashire, Northamptonshire, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Hampshire. One of the reasons for their inclusion is that as chiefly southern and north-western areas, most have already been examined by other poor law works. This makes it easier to draw contrasts with the newly studied border counties. Additionally these comparison counties possessed topographical and economic likenesses with the border counties. For instance both south Wales and Lancashire were undergoing phenomenally rapid industrialisation, Wiltshire and Herefordshire were home to rich agricultural plains and

the mountainous uplands of Wales are mirrored in England only by Cumbria. Northamptonshire has been included as a midland control county, because its agriculture was largely arable, like many southern counties, yet it was home to rich proto-industrialisation. Also these comparison counties carry the advantage of forming continuous geographic blocks from the borders; Wiltshire shared a border with Somerset and Gloucestershire in the south, as did Lancashire with Cheshire in the north. Therefore opportunity is allowed to see how far peripheral behaviour penetrated

**Fig. 2.1: Location of letters analysed**
England from Wales. The county of Essex is mapped as well, due to the significance of Sokoll’s collection from there.

Table 2.1 displays the letter types that constitute the entire corpus according to location. It shows that when compared with previous pauper letter studies, the numbers used for each county are typically quite large. Additionally their analysis is sometimes strengthened with other correspondence from the same county, such as that from overseers. The main exception is Glamorgan, whose small corpus cannot be considered representative. However results for it and other counties will often be validated by similar findings from neighbouring counties. Consequently the findings they provide display distinct differences from counties in other regions. Counties marked with a ‘*’ indicate all correspondence found for the county has been analysed, making it as representative as possible. With others there has been a focus on using a number of letters comparable with the better represented border counties. Having identified wider regional trends in each chapter, such features will then be outlined by county, to consider more specific regional patterning. This will be done in tables that rank counties according to their ‘Welshness’ throughout the thesis to offer a cumulative score and an original measurement of welfare peripherality.

The second important feature of the corpus is that it must sometimes be used selectively. Different amounts of letters will be chosen according to who wrote them and the letter trait being calculated. Table 2.1 displays the corpuses used for these differing calculations. The most basic of the changes are switches between using pauper correspondence and overseer correspondence to gauge the behaviour of each. Occasionally corpuses are sorted further and combined with other letter sets. For instance on occasion it will be necessary to count how regularly certain types of correspondence were used, rather than the features within the letters. An example of such an occurrence would be establishing how often paupers requested epistolary advocates to write for them. To do so the letters written by advocates must be evaluated proportionately alongside those written by paupers. Making such a calculation is important because of the face-to-face relief culture of Wales, where many paupers could not write English. In other cases letters may be evaluated based on who received them, rather than who sent and authored them. This will be needed to interpret how parishes were perceived by others, and so comments on their behaviour in letters sent to these require measurement. Fluidity in the corpus is thus vital to fully explore the out-parish
system. All changes to the composition of the sample will be fully explained and justified.

Table 2.1: The number of letters in the corpus by county and letter type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standard pauper appeals sent to</th>
<th>Standard pauper appeals sent from</th>
<th>Higher advocate appeals sent to</th>
<th>Standard overseer correspondence sent from</th>
<th>Justice orders sent to</th>
<th>Total standard correspondence received</th>
<th>Total correspondence received, including miscellany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corpus as a whole</td>
<td>1043</td>
<td>1043</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>1484</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>3209</td>
<td>3938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English border counties</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>1556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison counties</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh border counties*</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent*</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire*</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern and costal Somerset*</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire*</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire*</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire*</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys*</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire*</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol*</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire*</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A large majority of the calculations made in chapters three and five use the 1,043 letters that in table 2.1 are termed ‘standard’ pauper appeals for relief. In chapter four most calculations use the 1,484 items of ‘standard’ overseer correspondence. Although
Sokoll understandably states there is no such thing as a ‘typical’ pauper letter, in this instance, a ‘standard’ appeal simplistically implies those from paupers, or advocates of their social level, who made a written application for poor relief. Similarly the standard correspondence of overseers to other overseers also made these applications, or dealt less emotively with accounts concerning the out-parish poor. These basic descriptions summarise correspondence that has great variety in format and language. Standard letters constitute almost all of the examples within the thesis, and their nature will become self-evident. Of the remaining items, the largest amount is that of justice orders, which also came in widely varying forms. Appeals from non-pauper level advocates such as vicars or employers total 244, and are termed ‘higher advocate appeals’. The letters termed ‘miscellaneous’ constitute valuable scaffolding, such as correspondence from institutions, including hospitals and workhouses, demands from landlords, certification from surgeons, or complaints about poor rates. The material differs from the majority of previous poor law studies which were focused on more ‘from above’ sources.

The third significant factor relating to use of the data is the inclusion of ‘external’ letters. They account for some apparent numerical discrepancies within table 2.1, and require explanation, as these letters will be used for the larger regional calculations. The total amount of overseer correspondence sent from the comparison and Welsh border counties does not equal that sent from their constituent counties. This is partly because 370 overseers’ letters were sent to these counties from external counties not specifically selected for study and therefore not listed in the table, such as Bedfordshire or Carmarthenshire. Because this study is concerned with first establishing broad, representative differences between English and Welsh behaviour that can then be considered on a county-by-county basis, these external letters have been included in the large scale, regional overseer calculations. Utilising the external letters is also beneficial because they are representative of the interactions with the counties selected here. All the external overseer letters from other Welsh counties went to Welsh border counties, and over half of the external English letters went to the English comparison counties, with the rest going to the border counties. The external Welsh letters have therefore

13 Sokoll, Essex Pauper Letters, p. 44.
been included with those of the Welsh border counties, increasing this corpus from 144 to 195, and the additional English letters have been paired with the English comparators, meaning the calculations now reflect 700 letters from England, an increase of 319. Overseers were more permanent in a location than paupers who had migrated and sent letters home. They represented the welfare attitudes of their parishes, and would have embodied some continuity of policy. Therefore the overseers’ letters are almost always analysed on the basis of where they were sent from, rather than to, as pauper letters are typically grouped. Evaluating pauper appeals based on where they were sent from is very rarely used as a tool of investigation in this thesis. However pauper letters from external counties have been listed as part of the ‘pauper appeals sent from’ column, and letters from external Welsh and English counties have been incorporated into the broader regional corpuses in the same manner as those from overseers. 

The amount of overseer correspondence ‘sent to’ the comparison and Welsh border counties does not equal that sent to the counties listed within them. Due to the fact overseers occasionally made copies of correspondence they sent, some have been collected that were sent from the counties examined here to external ones, 7 of which were sent to Welsh counties and 115 to English counties. There were 97 standard overseer letters sent from locations that could not be identified. These have been included in the overall calculations based on the 1,484 items of overseer correspondence, to show features such as general change over time, but have not been used at a regional or county level.

Where possible, contrasts will also be made with a sample corpus from Sokoll’s edited Essex collection to ascertain that the letter traits identified as peripheral were not also common here.\textsuperscript{15} Direct comparisons are not always possible due to Sokoll’s reliance on what he considers ‘true’ pauper letters, written in the voice of the pauper and evidently not penned by an epistolary advocate, which have been included in this thesis. He also omits other correspondence, such as that written by overseers, and calculations performed in this thesis cannot be reconstructed from his collection. His approach differs to that of some narrative historians. For instance King, Nutt and Tomkins’ collection included advocate letters in amongst ‘true’ pauper letters.\textsuperscript{16} The Essex sample consists of seventy-six items of pauper correspondence, a comparable

\textsuperscript{15} Sokoll, \textit{Essex Pauper Letters}.  
\textsuperscript{16} King, Nutt and Tomkins, \textit{Narratives}.  

40
amount to that sent to many counties used here, and approximately 10 per cent of Sokoll’s collection. To ensure a broader chronological spread more comparable to the Welsh material is relatively early, all the Essex letters dated between 1750 and 1800 have been included. To further ensure its representativeness over half has been taken from the three parishes that constituted the majority of Sokoll’s collection. All similarities with the peripheral counties will be highlighted, but otherwise Essex behaved much like the rest of southern England.

A fourth feature of the data is that as well as analysing it by geographical location, it will also be necessary to examine it chronologically. The number of letters from each time period is an important determinant of whether there are enough for related calculations to be considered reliable. All of the most frequently used forms of correspondence and their distribution by time period are displayed in table 2.2. The letters in the first three columns of table 2.2 are the only ones used in time series graphs through the corpus.

Table 2.2: The number of letters in the corpus by time period and letter type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Standard pauper correspondence</th>
<th>Standard overseer correspondence</th>
<th>Standard pauper and overseer correspondence combined</th>
<th>Higher advocate correspondence</th>
<th>Justice Correspondence</th>
<th>Total correspondence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1751-1760</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1761-1770</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1771-1780</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1781-1790</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1791-1800</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1791-1795)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1796-1800)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1801-1805</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1806-1810</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811-1815</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816-1820</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821-1825</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826-1830</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831-1835</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1836-1841</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17 The numbers of letters within table 2.2 do not equal those of the entire corpus presented in table 2.1, because some letters were undated and could not be included in the latter table.
Related to the spread of letters chronologically, a fifth characteristic of portraying the data is the precautions taken to ensure representative numbers of letters are sampled in specific calculations. Some of these measures may seem complex, but this is common to many quantitative studies. The letters are not easily quantifiable. Because they document paupers in distressing situations, their writing is sometimes erratic. Calculations could be distorted by letters from individuals who behaved in a comparatively extreme manner, especially when the amount of data is more limited, as it is prior to 1800. The timespans down the left hand side of table 2.2 represent those typically used on the x axis of time series graphs. They will be employed consistently, and not altered to create preferable results. However, using consistent time periods must be balanced with ensuring that they encapsulate enough representative data. Therefore, due to the small amount of correspondence, none of the time periods prior to 1781 have been used in any graphs. Also because of the smaller number of letters in the eighteenth century the timespan of years along the x-axis is increased to ten, rather than five. This ensures there is a more adequate and representative amount of data, though these wider timespans are less sensitive to changes that may have occurred. The time periods 1791-95 and 1796-1800 are only used for standard pauper and overseer correspondence combined, because the sample size is an adequate amount of 61 and 52 respectively.

The smallest amount of data that any graph point is based on are the 25 pauper letters in the 1781-1790 time period. These are the only times a sample size for national trends will be less than 40, and it will still incorporate more paupers than previous regionality studies that have not used other source material for context.\textsuperscript{18} However when such a small sample size is used, the validity of the data will be discussed. In addition to these precautions, for each data point presented the absolute number of letters it signifies is listed. Doing so allows the reader to determine how reliable the data is. If the absolute number seems too small to be representative, it must be remembered that frequently the aim of the data is to measure the trait in relative terms to see changes as a percentage across time periods, so the wider sample size from which it has been drawn is also significant.

The sixth characteristic of the data, as previously touched upon, is how early much of it is in comparison to other pauper letter collections. This is especially true of the Welsh material, 22 per cent of which predates 1800, compared to 11 per cent

\textsuperscript{18} King, ‘Regional Patterns’; King & Stringer, ‘Leberty’.
collected from the English borders and 8 per cent sent to the comparison counties. This contrasts with 3 per cent of Sokoll’s collection;\(^\text{19}\) hardly any of Taylor’s Kirkby Lonsdale collection predates 1809. Examining letters that may reflect eighteenth century practices is important for understanding more unestablished welfare systems and out-parish relief, in peripheral regions. In order to give some context to the dates used throughout the thesis, just over 50 per cent of the material used predates 1823. Therefore if most occurrences of a letter trait are cited as happening prior to 1820 for example, this means it was a feature of older, more residual welfare practices.

The seventh feature concerning use of the data is that on two occasions, the corpus presented in 2.1 will be broken down regionally, to present the letter tones of paupers and overseers in the Welsh or English border counties, or the comparison counties. The resultant amounts of letters can be seen in table 2.3;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Welsh border county paupers</th>
<th>English border county paupers</th>
<th>Comparison county paupers</th>
<th>Welsh border overseers</th>
<th>English border overseers</th>
<th>Comparison county overseers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1781-1790</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1791-1800</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1801-1810</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811-1820</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821-1830</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831-1840</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with 2.2, some of the points on these time series graphs will be drawn from relatively small sample sizes that consequently make their representativeness questionable. However having collated these letters from across the regions, it presents a unique opportunity to make estimations on the correspondents. The results presented by graphs that use a wider, national corpus can be used as a normative yardstick alongside which these regional trends can be judged for accuracy. The spatial variation in the corpus, and the quantitative methodology that incorporates every item into calculations, represents a new approach to portraying geographic differences in the practice of the old poor laws.

\(^{19}\) Sokoll, Essex Pauper Letters, p. 22.
The concerns of some pauper letter historians present other challenges for using the database. As touched upon in chapter one, Sokoll has driven a more meticulous respect for the language and context of individual letters. He argues ‘the rhetorical elements as encountered in any particular pauper letter, however topical and outworn they may be, are nevertheless the integral and most specific part of an individual narrative of a particular case. They need to be appreciated in that specific form, that is within the text of the individual letter and within the context of the particular case.’

It is only following this that the ‘rhetorical figures’ can be separated out and systematically compared. By Sokoll’s standards, the letters in this database have only been very loosely evaluated in their context, prior to being subjectively compartmentalised under constructed headings and compared. However due to the evaluations made between correspondence through the database, many separate individual circumstances, such as the pauper’s poverty problem or settlement concerns, are accumulated across many calculations. This means that often similar narratives are augmented into numerous results, providing proportionate evidence of their occurrence, rather than being overwhelmed by more basic direct comparison between contrasting letter styles. Furthermore multiple filters can be applied to trace very specific forms of appeal. Additionally Sokoll’s placing of letters in context frequently involves cross checking them with corresponding parish sources, which for many parishes here, especially the Welsh ones, are unavailable.

Similarly elsewhere Sokoll has claimed letters cannot be reduced to their strategic interests because in writing, wider narratives were released, supplying unintended asides that added to their story. However these strategic interests and purposes did exist, and can reveal more of the out-parish system as practiced. Moreover these documents were not highly emotional, chiefly serving an economic purpose. As such many were written mechanically, especially those sent by the overseers. Making more use of the large amount of formulaic writing in letters is therefore advocated here. This notion is similar to that put forward by Gestrich, Hurren and King. They suggest that because pauper letters were formed partly by linguistic traits shared with the

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., pp. 93-4.
23 Sokoll, ‘Old Age’, p. 146.
24 See chapter five for the importance of economic rather than emotional preservation for paupers.
authorities, they should not be considered ‘free-form ego documents’. A large scale project dedicated to establishing trends in rhetoric and structure, rather than the practice and attitudes of welfare systems would have been interesting. However as this study ventured into a new area geographically, it had first to be ascertained how the system operated so that linguistic subtleties could then be compared. This decision has been justified, with marked differences found in poor relief distribution. A study of nuanced rhetoric would have made misleading findings assuming the systems to be alike.

Historians in other fields have made more general objections to quantitative approaches. These are chiefly directed at the way quantification has been used for demographic study, and the historians cited here serve as examples of these criticisms. Judt has argued statistical data is often not rigorous enough for proper historical analysis. Consequently he worries unquantifiable aspects of history will be omitted. Similarly Tilly has commented on the danger of losing contact with people we study. Fears such as these encouraged moves away from statistical, demographic history for a more functional context. However the approach used here is not a demographic enquiry. The process is suited to narrative history as it does not overlook the individual. Any pauper can be extracted from the database in relation to a topic, and their record would display an individual’s behaviour, based on their letters: the primary purpose of this is analysis, not the categorisation of people. Cobb has derided the tendency for mass data to be too easily linked to obvious events, such as economic trends, and consequently misinterpreted. To make this link is obviously tempting, and the solution can only be to remain objective and reveal new trends. More specifically to poor laws history Lyle has stated that ‘The problem with establishing the degree of diversity within the Old Poor Law is locating data which is drawn from a large number of parishes whilst being simple enough to be gathered on consistent lines.’ The number of parishes that have been sampled here is large enough, at 363, although counting narratives is not simple. For instance when ascertaining whether a pauper was attempting to support a settlement

claim within a letter, some subjective judgment must be used to estimate their intentions. The input of letters into the database must be consistent and so the entry of each item has been checked twice to try and ensure this. The database also allows the contribution of other original techniques for analysing pauper letters.

**Letter classification**

Because the corpus examined is so diverse, and as the sentiment displayed within letters is central to depicting welfare culture across regions and time periods, a method has been adopted of broadly classifying letter tones. A five band scoring system is used for pauper and overseer letters which will be outlined in chapters three and four respectively. These scores can be combined together into illustrative averages, and the database allows their attachment to other measured letter traits. Classifying letter tone may allow us to find a way of contrasting pauper narratives internationally; the matrix devised by Hurren, King and Gestrich has shown the difficulties in achieving this. On a broader scale, King has attempted to formulate four ‘ideal’ types of welfare regime, and others have provided classifications for grouping relief systems. It is therefore important to establish a simplistic way of charting sentiment to enable comparison of poor law practice, even if it requires future improvements.

In this work the scoring system ranges from five, which represents the most confident letters of paupers or the friendliest correspondence from overseers, down to one. A letter scored with one means the overseer was particularly angry, or that a pauper had become wretched to the point of severe personal humiliation. This latter scenario can be seen in an otherwise ‘standard’ pauper appeal from George Lewis to his home parish, Kingswood in Gloucestershire;

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30 Investigating the expression of sentiment is also an emerging area in historical literature more generally, see L. Tabili, *Global migrants, local culture: natives and newcomers in provincial England, 1841-1939* (Basingstoke 2011).


‘my Distress is greater than i Can Express for the money as i recevd of you i Was oblight to pay it to the Shope for Victuals i am allmost intirely from my Worck With the familey which i am in a verrey Weacke State my self i have a verrey Soare throatt as i am afraide as i am getting the Same Disorder as my family we am harekening Every moment to be the Last of one [illegible] the Lords best to put is end to its Breath the biges boy was tacken ill Later day Last which i have five that is verry bad and the first is verry poorly which have not one to give aney assistance with the familey for there is great Danger is Catching the Disorder as i have no body as a friend to come to do aney thing for us Sir i Humbly haske the feavour of you to Concider my Distress and assiste the afflicted as soon as posible i Wrote to Mr Mercer Last Wick as i was in hopes to recvd a anser be for now for my familey will be lost for Whant of things as it is not in my power to gett for them’

Aside from the basic linguistic presentation of this letter, which was rambling and desperate, there were a number of degrading features conveyed. The first was Lewis’s own physical weakness; whilst not a rare complaint, it had prevented him from providing for his family. Secondly he made the claim his poverty was likely to cause their deaths. Finally their condition had caused them to be ostracized by their own community, lessening their emotional sense of belonging and chances of receiving more practical support.

Such methods of letter classification are ambitious and have numerous potential flaws. Though specific scoring criteria have been developed, it is still the most subjective form of measurement employed in the thesis. It requires personal judgement on the weighting of language and classifying letters that meet multiple criteria. Classifying letters also decontextualizes them, and assumes that only the poverty the pauper faced was responsible for their letter tone. Additionally the ever present problem of individual letters distorting the overall statistics of smaller samples is incurred. King and Tomkins have called similar grouping of pauper letters by Taylor, ‘unhelpfully

33 GA, Kingswood, P193 OV 7/1, Lewis to overseers, 18th July 1821.
restricting as a system of classification.\textsuperscript{34} However to try and advance from Taylor and others that have created systematic categories,\textsuperscript{35} the scoring system here operates as a continuous spectrum of language, akin to a sliding scale. This is partly because none of the correspondence was originally written according to this system, and so there is inevitably overlap across different scores. As well as answering the calls of historians who seek a framework for analysing large amounts of narrative sources, it could also be of value in more localised investigations. Poor law historians do presently refer to a letter’s representation of a wider dataset in terms of its tone. King for instance, in alluding to other letters says; ‘It is interesting against this backdrop that neither Keeling nor many other paupers in this underlying sample asserted any right to poor relief. What was more common was to imply rights.’\textsuperscript{36} Similarly we often assume that the confidence shown by paupers reflects how successful they expected to be, and therefore also the parish’s support for certain poverty problems. However this important tone has never been systematically recorded. All of the quantitative methods outlined in this chapter enable the evaluation of poor law correspondence geographically.

\textbf{A spatial framework}

Due to the large geographical scope of this thesis, the subject of poor law regionality is a fundamental theme within it, and spatial difference is commented upon throughout the chapters. Meanwhile, despite historians’ awareness of the extensive variance in local practice and the rich regional studies of other fields of British history, both highlighted in chapter one, there have been few regional studies of the poor laws. This is especially so regarding welfare customs and practices. Consequently historians are yet to agree on the nature of regionality, and we lack an understanding of geographic factors that may have shaped welfare behaviour. Understanding regional variation took would help us know to what extent we can discuss a single broad history of the poor laws, and the factors that shaped their application. Existing regional investigations have focused on southern and, to a lesser degree, north-west England. There has, as we have seen, only been a little consideration of spatial variety within the Welsh borders. The methodology used in this enquiry provides a way to make direct regional contrasts in the most extensive geographical study of poor law correspondence attempted so far.

\textsuperscript{34} S. King & A. Tomkins, ‘Introduction’, in King & Tomkins, \textit{Makeshifts} (Manchester 2003), p. 7.
\textsuperscript{36} King & Stringer, ‘Leberty’, p. 75.
It was remarked upon in chapter one, that although inter-parochial variation was well established in the poor law literature, it was not until 2000 that dedicated comparisons sought to discover if there was enough continuity in practice to discuss definite welfare regions. This literature on regionalism will now be more fully explored here. The breakthrough work on poor law spatiality was by King, *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective*, in which he divided England into eight regions, based on ‘entitlement, nominal relief levels and the sentiment of the relief giving’. He chiefly argued that behaviour was significantly different in the south-east to the north-west, split by a line running from the East Riding to Exeter. The north-west gave smaller amounts, under stricter criteria, intervened later in problems in a less flexible manner, and often only recognised absolute rather than relative poverty. However the south-east was the opposite; ‘the small, face-to-face parishes which characterised many of the counties in the south and east confronted a situation in which custom and a consensual decision-making process created a raft of ‘welfare junkies’ whose first response when faced with life-cycle stress was to turn to the poor law, and a raft of poor law administrators who perceived that they had no choice but to expand the supply of welfare.’ King has purported this south-east/north-west split in similar forms elsewhere. As well as differences between industrialising and rural areas, he recognises a lesser highland/lowland division, with highland areas distributing more. The highland communities he considered would have borne similarities with many areas of upland Wales.

King’s book continued the focus of previous poor law literature on the south and east, along with considering the north-west, and a smattering of midland parishes; the study makes very little investigation of the border counties. Of the English comparison counties used here, Lancashire and Cumbria sat within King’s north-west, whereas Hampshire, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire were in the ‘south’ and were highly generous, with minimal rhetoric of self-reliance. Northamptonshire was in the ‘east’, which King

41 Ibid., p. 9.
has not characterised. He accepts his classification is ambitious but considers it reliable, saying ‘the fact of substantial regional divisions is undeniable’, and asking if a national approach to the poor laws is really possible. There is also a need, as King appreciates, to give better balance to these regions across the time period. Importantly he accepts the existence of sub-divisions within the regions. The database approach used in this thesis is ambitious, but will enable more decisive measures of regionality.

Some historians have questioned King’s concept of regionalism, based on the great variance of detail shown by micro-histories and the individual experience, instead characterising the poor law as a series of distinct parochial republics. Consequently they believe the enormous variety of behaviour created differences within potential regions that were too great to realistically consider them as holistic comparable areas. The biggest challenger of King’s claims has been Hindle. He suggests, ‘variations in levels both of need and of relief within regions were at least as, if not more, significant than those between them;’ although he does believe regional variances existed between northern and southern England concerning pension levels. Hindle also appreciates the relief practices of certain regions may have been affected by a need to balance with local tax bases, but ultimately argues ‘the picture of regionally differentiated poor law administration is significantly over-drawn (not to say exaggerated), especially for the period before 1750.’ He supports his argument that intra-regionality was particularly strong by citing highly localised financial factors; hearth tax examinations, the varying numbers receiving relief in small parishes, the uneven distribution of ratepayers, the potential for informal welfare, the extent of charitable provision, and the availability of local resources. Finally he also mentions the great variability in local practice, which he considers harder to identify. It is significant that the majority of Hindle’s data originates before 1750, whereas King’s book runs up to 1850, which could account for some disagreements.

42 Ibid., p. 264.
43 Ibid., p. 4 & 227.
44 Ibid., p. 4.
46 Ibid., pp. 259-60.
47 Hindle, Parish?, Hollen Lees, Solidarities.
48 Hindle, Parish?, p. 283.
49 Ibid., pp. 279-283.
50 Ibid., p. 283.
51 Ibid., pp. 288-92.
52 Ibid., p. 294.
Other historians have substantiated or augmented the regions as described by King, though these studies have rarely been dedicated investigations of regionality. King’s patterning is largely supported by Kim Price and his examination of medical care in poor law unions. Lyle believes there was a similar regional variation to bastardy allowances; this geographically mirrored her findings for agricultural wages. However she has attacked King’s data as too limited, using 818 parishes in her quantitative study and, in comments that suggest intra-regionalism was stronger, declares that ‘the parish was still the key determinant.’ Williams and Hurren have reported analogous regional differences under the new poor law, with both commenting on the strains experienced by authorities in expanding urban areas that resulted in different behaviour compared to rural parishes.

King has recently modified his claims on the extent of regionalism, though still believes it is a valid interpretation of poor law behaviour. He now talks more of the differences within regions, and of the significance of local circumstances. In an article on regional differences between appeals from the sick, that utilises letters from only three paupers, King accepts they cannot be painted as entirely representative and calls for wider research; ‘Even if the differences are as real as I have presented them, the rhetoric, strategies and experiences of the sick poor would need to be compared to the wider group of pauper letter writers and set more firmly in the context of the life-cycle of the individual involved before more precise analysis and explanation could be offered.’ He still offers some cautious conclusions though, again suggesting there was tough treatment of the poor in the north-west in contrast with the south and east.

58 King, ‘Welfare Regimes’, p. 64.
60 King, ‘Regional Patterns’, p. 71.
61 Ibid., pp. 71-4; also see King, ‘Welfare Regimes’, p. 64.
King has also used these findings to make some tentative but original claims about regional variance in rhetoric. He essentially talks of a sliding scale of different language use from south to north. King believes southern paupers assumed their rights more; something that Sokoll also identifies in Essex letters. Further north King found specific details from paupers were only given when overseers requested them, with many points consequently underdeveloped. He believes this difference was due to greater comfort with addressing professionals in the south, and also the use of more medical rhetoric because of better access to medical practitioners. A lack of assumed rights in the north meant it was more important to prove you had good character. For this reason, northern paupers got advocates to write on their behalf, and invited face-to-face investigation of their circumstances. In other investigations King has also found they stressed their attempted reliance on other sources of support, and had less confidence to threaten the parish by returning. However he believes threats of public shame were more common in the north, which he relates to lessened self-respect due to a lack of power. Finally there was little mention of a pauper’s state of mind here, or emotive language concerning it. These valuable initial findings have not been further tested in the manner called for.

The debate of regionality versus intra regionality remains the largest outstanding deliberation in spatial welfare studies, though discussion of the topic has stalled. It remains to be properly decided whether the continuity of trends was robust enough across regions to consider them whole despite obvious inter-parochial variation within them. As seen, the criteria for judging such behaviour has often been financially based, for instance the availability of a local rate base. Investigating Welsh regionality in this way, rather than using poor law correspondence, would be particularly restrictive if the rate bases in Wales were as low as the literature suggests; it would be assumed that the

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62 King, ‘Regional Patterns’.
63 Ibid., pp. 67-9; Sokoll, ‘Old Age’, p. 147.
64 King, ‘Regional Patterns’, pp. 71-2.
65 Ibid., pp. 70-1; S. King, ‘Sickness and Old Age’, in King, Nutt & Tomkins, Narratives, p. 6.
66 King, ‘Negotiating the Law’, p. 252.
67 King, ‘Regional Patterns’, pp. 70-1.
68 Ibid., p. 71.
experience of poverty here was necessarily harsh. Taking such a debate forwards requires the consistency of welfare trends to be measured on an extensive geographic scale. The ability to do so is one of the primary benefits of using the database. This more localised regional welfare focus has recently been overridden to look at differences on a national or continental scale.

**Peripherality**

A different way of approaching spatial difference is to suggest that welfare could actually be shaped by geographic and economic peripherality to the centre, in this case London. This represents the main theoretical framework that will be engaged with throughout the chapters. Peripherality as a concept sits between literature concerning centre-local relations and their impact on government development, and international welfare regions, which have often placed England and Wales within wider North Sea regions.  

As with other regionalism theories, peripherality was first applied to separate fields, such as economic development; and has been employed in a poststructuralist sense by Crosskill to look at welfare.  

King and Stewart have produced the first tentative work that links peripheral theory to the history of welfare practice. Drawing on findings from contributions to their edited collection of essays, the authors identify common characteristics of welfare  


that may cumulatively have defined peripheral regions. A variety of traits are cited, including a limited number of regional and bureaucratic elites, paying for welfare in makeshift fashions to help sparse populations in what could be difficult terrain. These regions had unbalanced economic growth and strong local autonomy. King and Stewart believe peripheral, smaller states were in a better position to react to need, despite having often amateurish local control. Also mentioned were face-to-face societies that took part in commonly understood social rights based on historical custom. Additionally identified was the specialization of focus on some poor, and the important role of religion. Many of the austere and communal features identified by Welsh local histories are common to those recognised by King and Stewart, further suggesting the suitability of Wales to an investigation of peripherality.

Their work was intended ‘as a platform for a much broader research agenda’. Unfortunately such ideas have not been considered further. Additionally there have been no efforts to link peripherality to more orthodox regional studies, though it will be suggested that historians have cited some common features across the area being treated as a peripheral zone here. The peripheral features King and Stewart list represent much more practical ways to examine welfare systems than the more financial factors prominent in the debate of regionality versus intra-regionality. The characteristics therefore bear similarities with the welfare practices evident in the pauper letters collated here. They will appear in the portrayal of Welsh welfare throughout this thesis and will demarcate different behaviour to southern England in particular. The search for these peripheral features will be the first time King and Stewart’s theories have been applied in one study as they intended. Considering Welsh welfare as distinctly different would expand current discussions regarding welfare regionalism. Present peripherality studies of Wales have not given the nation extensive coverage, or been particularly focused on poor relief. Indeed the scant consideration of welfare regionality generally has been especially absent for the Welsh borders.

74 Ibid., pp. 23-39.
75 Ibid., pp. 25-30.
76 Ibid., pp. 25-28.
77 Ibid., pp. 30-1.
78 Ibid., pp. 23-31.
79 Ibid., p. 35.
80 Evans, ‘Urbanisation’.
The Welsh borders and regionality
Some of the general Welsh regionality works, and the small amount specifically interested in welfare, present differing practice within industrial south Wales. This can be contrasted with the slow pace of change in isolated, upland communities in much of the rest of Wales. However this difference has only been recognised to a limited extent. Regional division was enforced on Wales due to its internal geography and the difficulties of communication. It has been common to talk of the upland heartland and margins, or inner and outer Wales. Similar to wider literature on regional patterning, interpretations have become increasingly cultural. Phythian-Adams sees Wales as culturally distinct from England, with his only crossover region pairing Herefordshire with Monmouthshire. Within Wales he sees regions overlapping through north Wales and between northern Glamorgan and southern Brecknockshire, with much of the south of the country again depicted as different, though his subdivisions are not extensive.

Wales has not been mapped in welfare terms, though significant relief traits will be examined on a county-by-county basis in this thesis to measure regionalism within the border counties. Local historians have drawn attention to strong autonomy in rural areas within Wales, and the variety in the availability of poor rates locally. King and Stewart consider the negative opinions of Howell to set too ‘uniform’ a light on Welsh behaviour in comparison with the variance of regional practice in England. They estimate Wales had four or five sub-regions. In comments that substantiate the idea of

87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
a wider peripheral region stretching into north-west England, they have suggested harsh
Welsh border parishes behaved similarly to those in Lancashire. Correspondingly
Price cites inadequate levels of medical care under the new poor law in Wales as well as
the north-west. Both King and Stewart, and Howell provide circumstantial examples
of low payments and high rejection rates from Montgomeryshire in mid-Wales up into
Denbighshire in the north. This has prompted King to declare elsewhere that ‘Welsh
communities, particularly in the northern and middle belts of the country, might be
conceived as having more in common – in terms of the residualism of community
support, harsh attitudes towards deservingness and the centrality of private charity to the
economy of makeshifts – with communities in Scotland, Ireland or even Italy than with
those of England.’ However ultimately he decides Welsh approaches could be truly
mixed, with a difficult to discern set-up. Significantly King thinks places which
introduced the laws more patchily and their poor rates at a comparatively late date, as
many areas of both Wales and the north-west did, were more frugal. The Welsh
system changed during the nineteenth century in industrialising regions as significant
migration heightened the need for ad hoc relief, overwhelming previously voluntary and
personalised welfare.

King locates most of the English border counties within his ‘midwest’ region,
stretching from northern Gloucestershire to southern Cheshire and thinks there was a
relative improvement in relief through the early nineteenth century, though does not
believe provision was particularly generous. Consequently he declares the rhetoric of
self-reliance to have been ‘strong’ and calls entitlement, ‘fluid.’ His findings show
spending levels in the northern English border counties in 1801 were akin to northern
England, though not as low as Lancashire. Most of Cheshire fell within Kings
‘northwest’, which he describes as ‘ramshackle and ultimately parsimonious.’ His ‘far
west’ region incorporated much of Somerset and Gloucestershire, and was much like

91 Price, Medical Negligence, p. 83.
92 King and Stewart, ‘Under-Researched’, pp. 141-6; Howell, Rural Poor, p. 100.
94 Ibid, p. 64.
95 King, Poverty and Welfare, p. 268.
97 King, Poverty and Welfare, pp. 263-4.
98 Ibid., pp. 84-5.
99 Ibid., p. 262.
the northwest in its tough treatment of the poor.\textsuperscript{100} Because of the large variety of administrative poor law arrangements in Shropshire, the approach here was diverse in contrast to Herefordshire and Gloucestershire.\textsuperscript{101} Elsewhere he and Stewart estimated these harsh attitudes towards relief were shared with neighbouring Welsh border counties.\textsuperscript{102} The frugality of welfare that King identifies in many of the English border counties again makes them apparently similar to the north-west. This supports the idea that the whole region could be talked about as an impoverished peripheral zone. However this is based on numerous historians making passing comments, rather than dedicated investigations of regionalism.\textsuperscript{103} Within the English borders, Phythian-Adams sees major cultural similarities between Gloucestershire, Shropshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire, with the exception of the Cotswolds. Like King he places Cheshire with Lancashire, and Somerset stood alone, though overlapped with Gloucestershire in the Bristol region.\textsuperscript{104} These investigations are the most detailed regional analysis the borders have received.

**The topographical and economic differences of the Welsh borders**
The welfare regionalism that will be identified in this thesis presents different behaviour between the peripheral region’s upland pastoral areas, and lowland arable ones. Practices were further shaped by industrialisation and consequent migration, amongst other factors. Agriculturally most border counties had more in common with the north-west than with southern England. Although much of the nineteenth century was a time of progress for agriculture, profits were concentrated in the hands of the few, and the early part of the century actually saw severe economic recession in arable areas of southern England.\textsuperscript{105} These included the comparison counties of Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, and to a lesser extent Northamptonshire.\textsuperscript{106}

There were major technical advances in arable farming. The population of Britain in 1850, though three times that of 1750, was still fed almost entirely by home

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{100} Ibid., p. 264; King, ‘Welfare Regimes’, p. 64.
\bibitem{101} King & Stewart, ‘Under-Researched’, pp. 140-1.
\bibitem{102} Ibid., p. 141.
\bibitem{104} Phythian-Adams, ‘Introduction’, Figure I.3.
\end{thebibliography}
production.\footnote{\textsuperscript{107}} Much of this change came through parliamentary enclosure, a practice less common in the borders and north-west, except in Gloucestershire and to a lesser extent neighbouring Herefordshire.\footnote{\textsuperscript{108}} Enclosure often displaced small freeholders, creating larger farms, and decreasing contact between labourers and local farmers,\footnote{\textsuperscript{109}} which would have damaged paternalism. Farms were typically bigger in Shropshire and Herefordshire than in Wales and the north-west, slightly larger still further south in Gloucestershire and Somerset, and biggest of all in the southern counties and Northamptonshire.\footnote{\textsuperscript{110}} Social distance in arable areas would also have been amplified by the reduced custom of boarding labourers, and fewer payments in kind, exposing workers to price fluctuations.\footnote{\textsuperscript{111}} Snell identifies greater seasonality of work, with intense fluctuations in employment occurring in enclosed cereal growing areas compared to Wales and the north-west.\footnote{\textsuperscript{112}} This was exacerbated by modernising approaches that created more specialised agriculture. Additionally, in the south and east, structural changes such as the loss of cottage industry, as well as decreased earnings from common land, shrunk the potential for makeshift economies. Though corn prices fell following the end of the Napoleonic Wars they recovered, and by the 1830s employed arable labourers were better off than in any other period, however unemployment in these areas remained high.\footnote{\textsuperscript{113}}

Most English border counties supported grazing.\footnote{\textsuperscript{114}} Herefordshire and Gloucestershire were comparatively more arable though also saw dairying and cattle fattening, as to a lesser extent did Somerset.\footnote{\textsuperscript{115}} Similar to many northern counties,

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{\textsuperscript{107}} Ibid., p. 34.
\item \footnote{\textsuperscript{108}} Ibid., p. 45.
\item \footnote{\textsuperscript{111}} J. Dunbabin, \textit{Rural Discontent in Nineteenth-Century Britain} (London 1974), p. 18.
\item \footnote{\textsuperscript{112}} Snell, \textit{Annals}, pp. 46 & 144-59.
\item \footnote{\textsuperscript{113}} Gregg, \textit{Social and Economic}, p. 60.
\end{itemize}
Wales was increasingly pastoral; from 1745 to 1746, it was responsible for just 1.6% of British cereal exports.\textsuperscript{116} Pastoral farming was favoured in upland areas, and geographers refer loosely to a highland Britain split from a lowland south-east by a line running from the Exe to the Tees.\textsuperscript{117} This upland area therefore incorporates almost all the border counties, along with Cumbria and Lancashire. Within this, Wales, especially north and mid-Wales, and Cumbria were particularly mountainous, creating isolated communities. Areas of Lancashire were quite elevated, as were the Shropshire Hills.\textsuperscript{118} Settlements in these upland pastoral, peripheral counties were more dispersed, with the exception of those in Herefordshire.\textsuperscript{119}

Enclosure in upland areas was targeted more at the communal wastes that were common here, especially in north and mid-Wales and Cumbria.\textsuperscript{120} This would have hindered the effectiveness of makeshift economies but fortunately, much household economy in Wales and upland northern England was based on subsistence agriculture and these small farms were still viable. Many rural Welshmen would often produce almost enough to support themselves and their families.\textsuperscript{121} Additionally the technological advances that disrupted farm work were less common in pastoral areas, especially within Wales. Here the changes in land ownership that encouraged innovations in southern England, but damaged paternalism, were less frequent.\textsuperscript{122} The conservative open field farmers were often relatively uninterested in such technology, with improvements limited to wealthier land owners.\textsuperscript{123} Similarly developments struggled in the English border counties, ‘in 1750 the Herefordshire border and Clun Forest were remote outposts, far from the lively hub of industrial activity and agricultural improvement taking place in northern Worcestershire and Warwickshire.’\textsuperscript{124}

Partly because of the lack of enclosure, farms were smaller in Wales and the north-west.\textsuperscript{125} There was a lower ratio of labourers to farmers than in the English borders, and far less than in southern England.\textsuperscript{126} Because of the lack of upheaval many

\textsuperscript{116} Howell, \textit{Rural Poor}, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{120} Gregg, \textit{Social and Economic}, pp. 22-3; Overton, ‘Agriculture’, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{121} Howell, \textit{Rural Poor}, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{122} Overton, ‘Agriculture’, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{123} Howell, \textit{Rural Poor}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{124} Thirsk, ‘South-West Midlands’, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{125} Overton, ‘Agriculture’, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., p. 46.
farms in pastoral areas were able to consolidate. Consequently areas of Montgomeryshire and Radnorshire, along with Herefordshire were complaining of a shortage of agricultural labour by the 1790s.\textsuperscript{127} Farm labourers were also more likely to live in in Wales and the north-west, and to a lesser extent Herefordshire and Shropshire,\textsuperscript{128} increasing the closeness of community and availability of support. However farmworkers in these upland pastoral locations were not as well paid as in southern England.\textsuperscript{129}

In terms of the development of industry, by 1851 much of Wales was still highly agricultural, and 40 to 50 per cent of all the Welsh border counties were employed in agriculture. However in south Wales the figure was less than 20 per cent, as it was in Cheshire. Agriculture employed less than 10 per cent in Lancashire. Most of the English border counties, similar to their Welsh counterparts, had between 40 and 50 per cent of their populous employed in agriculture. So did the southern English comparison counties, other than Hampshire, though there was considerable service employment here rather than any large scale manufacturing.\textsuperscript{130} Shropshire was less agriculturally based than the southerly English border counties, and between 30 and 40 per cent of people here worked in agriculture. The amounts were the same in Cumbria and Northamptonshire.\textsuperscript{131}

The struggling agriculturally based economies of many southern parishes contrasted sharply with the expanding economies of larger, industrial northern ones, and those in south Wales. Urban growth brought higher wages for artisans, factory workers and servants.\textsuperscript{132} Economic problems in these industrial areas were less structural and more likely to come from the trade cycle. They were worsened by the centralisation of large factories, which could throw their unemployed on the rural parishes where paupers had previously established settlement.\textsuperscript{133} The increased employment opportunities in industrialised areas improved the availability of makeshift economies. Farms in

\textsuperscript{128} Overton, ‘Agriculture’, p. 45.  
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{132} King, Poverty and Welfare, p. 6.  
neighbouring pastoral regions had to compete with these factory towns for labour, and consequently continued to hire workers by the year, possibly increasing awareness of settlement.

Though most of the counties considered in this inquiry were agriculturally based, Lancashire and Gwent underwent phenomenal industrialisation. Prior to the start of the nineteenth century, industrial growth in Wales had been greatest in the north of the country, especially Flintshire, and included coal mining, lead smelting, brick manufacture, and other mineral exploitation.¹³⁴ Denbighshire had specialist craft industries, such as glove making.¹³⁵ However these industries did not grow as quickly as those in south Wales. In the 1750s, the coal production of south Wales had been 80,000 tons, a little less than in north Wales. This rocketed to 5,000,000 by the 1840s, with north Wales only producing 1,000,000 tons.¹³⁶ Iron production soared, with tonnage increasing from 34,000 in 1796 to 525,000 in 1840, by which point there were 200,000 people employed in the region’s furnaces and coal pits.¹³⁷ Workers were also drawn into south Wales by other metal industries, such as copper, lead, tin and zinc.¹³⁸ However there was an abundant labour force in industrial areas of Wales, despite the Napoleonic wars. Consequently wages for copper and brass were lower than in England, though pay was better than in rural Wales.¹³⁹

Of the English border counties, Cheshire experienced the greatest industrialisation. This happened first through its silk industry, and then from Britain’s cotton boom. Closer to the border there was coal mining on the Wirral, with production of almost 250,000 tons by the 1840s.¹⁴⁰ Shropshire’s iron industry had expanded during the Napoleonic Wars but then went into long term decline. There was also a drop in production in the coal and glass industries, increasing pauperism.¹⁴¹ Coal production had grown to 54,967 tons by 1806, though this was outstripped by output from both north and south Wales.¹⁴² Bristol, the communication centre of the south-west, was

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¹³⁶ Jenkins, 1536-1990, p. 224.
¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 221.
¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 228-230.
¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 249; Evans, 1660-1815, p. 148.
¹⁴² Ibid., p. 42.
often called England’s second city and remained prosperous until the 1840s.\textsuperscript{143} It had grown rich on metal and Atlantic trades, and its population continued to expand.\textsuperscript{144} Industry was far more minor elsewhere in the border counties. The woollen craft production of mid-Wales was faltering by the late eighteenth century as a result of the wool being exported to England, and war damaging the seaborne trade.\textsuperscript{145} Gloucestershire also possessed a failing woollen industry, amidst other ailing minor industries, and many woollen mills were instead transformed into corn mills to serve the county’s growing arable agriculture.\textsuperscript{146} Cottage industry was on the wane in Somerset and Wiltshire where workers sought to disrupt introduction of the gig mill between 1802 and 1809.\textsuperscript{147} Despite possessing small scale iron and craft industries in the eighteenth century, by the mid-nineteenth century, Herefordshire was still largely untouched by the industrial revolution.\textsuperscript{148}

All the counties considered here saw overall population growth; however it was strongest in industrialising areas. Much of south Wales and Lancashire grew by over 200 per cent through the first half of the nineteenth century; Cheshire more than doubled.\textsuperscript{149} The impact of economic development on population was magnified in individual towns; Manchester grew by 40 per cent between 1821 and 1831 and by the middle of the century, less than half of its inhabitants had been born there.\textsuperscript{150} Many rapidly expanding towns in south Wales have been described as ‘frontier towns’, due to their lack of organisation and municipal provisions. Merthyr Tydfil did not have a town council until 1835, and only had church accommodation for 2,500, despite having a population of 50,000.\textsuperscript{151} The established church in the region was out of touch,

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., p. 252-3.
\textsuperscript{145} Evans, ‘Regional Dynamics’, pp. 208-9.
\textsuperscript{147} Gregg, Social and Economic, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{148} J. West & M. West, A History of Herefordshire (Chichester 1985), Herefordshire, p. 106; B.P.P., HC, 1803-4, XIII; Abstract of Answers and Returns under Act for procuring Returns relative to Expense and Maintenance of Poor in England, p. 200.
operating through scattered properties owned by various trusts not greatly at its disposal. Conversely the positive decline of rural population in mid-Wales was the highest in both England and Wales. In Wales in 1801 only 14.1 per cent of the population lived in towns of over a thousand, and these often suffered from poor accessibility. Much of mid and to a lesser extent north Wales, along with Cumbria, would be the most sparsely populated areas of Britain by 1851. There was also very little growth in the first half of the nineteenth century in parts of Herefordshire and Shropshire. Most of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Hampshire and Oxfordshire saw less than 50 per cent growth. Population increase was only slightly higher in Somerset.

The aforementioned problems of arable areas brought by enclosure, changing technology and new employment patterns, amongst other things, were reflected in their levels of pauperism. Comparatively generous systemised allowances were common; in 1824, over 50 per cent of southern agricultural parishes supplemented pay. In Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Hampshire, the amount of the population receiving poor relief was 23, 20 and 15 per cent respectively; it was 16 in Northamptonshire. In 1803 15 per cent of Gloucestershire’s population received relief, contrasted with just 7 in Lancashire and Cumbria. In this way Gloucestershire had more in common with the southern comparison counties. The level was 12 per cent in Somerset, and it was similar in the rest of the English border counties, at 13 in Herefordshire, 10 in Shropshire and 12 in Cheshire. It was therefore in terms of rates of pauperism that the border counties appeared most dissimilar to the north-west. In the north Wales border counties of Flintshire and Denbighshire the poor rate quadrupled between 1780 and 1790. However this partly reflects the growing establishment of the relief system there, as more paupers gained access to local welfare, and also the chaotic nature of returns from Wales.

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152 Davies, *New History*, p. 47.
153 Evans, ‘Regional dynamics’, p. 218.
155 Ibid., p. 13.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid.
159 Hollen Lees, *Solidarities*, p. 66.
160 B.P.P., HC, 1803-4, XIII; *Abstract of Answers*, p. 84, 188 & 252.
161 Ibid., p. 444, 200, 424 & 60.
162 Evans, *1660-1815*, p. 192; the figures collected for poor relief in Welsh counties are considered too haphazard to be reproduced here.
Conclusion

The spatial and quantitative framework set out in this chapter provides a method for applying the source material across wide geographical and chronological spans, and will advance on work by other poor law historians. There has been extensive use of pauper letters in small scale case studies, and as shown in chapter one, they have contributed a great deal to our knowledge. However letters have always been a problematic source, and once removed from the contextualisation of further material, they need to be treated especially carefully to ensure the findings reported are truly representative. The quantitative approach advocated helps to measure this. Additionally we now know that these letters exist in large amounts across the country,^163^ and because of the insights they provide into practice, they deserve a technique for analysis that moves beyond smaller studies to describe broader trends of behaviour. This chapter has offered a methodology, as well as an ambitious system for scoring the narratives. Both have potential problems, but they also supply a way to measure variation across time and space, as has been requested by historians recently.^164^

As well as being extensive in terms of the amount of letters, the corpus is original because of the geographic areas it covers. Therefore as well as advancing the evaluation of poor law correspondence, the thesis will build on more preliminary regional investigations. A number of studies have suggested treatment of the poor on each side of the border may have been harsh, though none have made extensive regional contrasts.^165^ Parsimonious provision has been identified in more detailed studies of the north-west, and some exploratory works believe practices in Wales could have been similar to those in Lancashire and the English border counties.^166^ The work will provide a dedicated investigation of these suggestions. Also, by examining Wales in particular, research is moved into an area that King and Stewart believe could have been a peripheral welfare zone. This peripherality is the key theoretical framework applied in the thesis, and investigating the features King and Stewart have outlined utilises their

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^166^ On practice in the north-west see King, Poverty and Welfare; on potentially similar practice in Wales see King and Stewart, ‘Under-Researched’, pp. 141-6; Price, Medical Negligence, pp. 78-83.
theory in detail for the first time.\textsuperscript{167} Finally this work introduces narratives to large scale regional comparisons, as requested in King’s introductory work.\textsuperscript{168} Financial examinations of poverty such as relief levels have so far been the best gauge to regional differences. Using letters to consider how their writers felt and acted towards welfare and its customs can present different regions, more reflective of human behaviour.


\textsuperscript{168} King, ‘Regional Patterns’, p. 71.
Chapter 3: The moral economy

Introduction
Considering the moral economy of the Welsh borders reveals paupers’ relief expectations, which are central to this thesis. Furthermore their sentiment towards relief is a key part of the welfare identity that this large scale use of poor law correspondence aims to portray. The term ‘moral economy’ as historians understand it, was coined by Edward Thompson regarding food riots.¹ For him it “was grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community, which, taken together, can be said to constitute the moral economy of the poor.”² There had not been much prior work on the topic, and for Thompson existing studies had been too simplistic, painting the poor as impulsive in their demands for support.³ His writings depicted polarised social relations underpinned by large social conflicts between classes. As with similar work of the time, it was more interested in evidence of unitary class action than the agency of the individual.⁴ Such studies have typically been used as a starting point for work on land rights rather than the poor laws.⁵ Thompson’s piece fitted in well with other studies of the time that saw poor relief as part of methods of social control.⁶

As we saw in chapter one, studies in the 1980s began to suggest that pauper rights differed greatly according to their separate pauper sub-group.⁷ Additionally the

² E. Thompson, Customs in Common (London 1993), p. 188.
⁴ B. Bushaway, By Rite, Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700-1880 (London 1982).
polarised version of society became increasingly challenged by the study of the ‘middling sort’ who were neither part of the ruling or lower classes. Consequently it was increasingly recognised that the interests to be transcended in securing support were less straightforward than previously thought. Narrative history has taken examination of the relationships that affected a moral right to relief further, building on interest in the role of the individual. Due to the extensive variation involved in local relief processes, most poor law historians now suggest customary rights for relief were built on a mixture of precedent, negotiation and circumstance. Such varied treatment has also been shown to have differed according to region, and spatial comparisons of pauper rights are a major theme of this chapter. Despite the wide range of factors that shaped relief claims, there have not been many works dedicated solely to the moral economy under the old poor laws, and how changes over time affected customary rights.

This chapter will shortly consider works which discuss moral rights to relief and the old poor laws. Their stances will be evaluated using the large amount of poor law correspondence collated here, and the quantitative methodology. The approach includes the system of scoring letters according their tone, initially mentioned in chapter two. The criteria for scoring are extensive but can be summarised. An angry rating of five represents the highest level of confidence, and displays condemnation of the overseer’s behaviour by the pauper who believed they had acted improperly. Anger, even paired with more humiliating circumstances, suggested the pauper felt entitled to relief. A score of four was confident, and the pauper probably expected to get the relief asked for. The weight of language would have been more focused on asking for the relief than explaining why it was needed. Directions for delivery may have been included, without a qualification that accepted the support might not be sent. A score of three represents a

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10 For works that see P. Jones, ‘Swing, Speenhamland and Rural Social Relations: the ‘Moral Economy’ of the English Crowd in the Nineteenth Century’, Social History, 32, no. 3 (2007), pp. 271-90, and in particular Hollen Lees, Solidarities, pp. 73-92; Thompson thought consideration of the poor laws would have been too extensive, Thompson, ‘Moral’ p. 124.
letter that was more a statement of fact, and was most likely to have been sent by an epistolary advocate, detached from the situation with little emotional investment. Rating a letter with two means the pauper was pleading. The letter was weighted much more towards why the pauper needed relief, often stressed unfortunate circumstances, and claimed other welfare avenues had been explored. It was likely to finish with a promise not to bother the overseer again. A classification of one represented desperation, and is the most subjective scoring used. The main criteria are that the pauper described conditions that truly stood apart as degrading.

This scoring system will firstly be used to measure the confidence of appeals in the light of the declining moral economy, and a waning of confidence will be shown. Other statistics are garnered from the letters to supply further context, and exemplar letters are used to illustrate particular pauper experiences. Changing sentiment is a major theme in the chapter, and in the thesis as a whole, and there are a range of aspects that altered markedly. However unless change over time is mentioned, it should assumed that features remained consistent. The differing rights that paupers had under the Welsh relief system will also be commented on throughout the chapter. In the next section the confidence of pauper appeals according to their personal circumstances is examined. It is contended that while differences in treatment can be discerned according to the pauper’s poverty problem, experiences differed more significantly based on their existing situation in the relief process. The legal and rhetorical devices of paupers are then examined in relation to their management by the parish. In a more sequenced, less linguistically nuanced manner than in previous studies, the development of rhetoric by a pauper will be shown, and a simplistic model provided. The legal language used in appeals is considered in relation to historian’s current thoughts on customary and legal right. The final area of literature evaluated is that regarding the justices of the peace. It will be suggested that they were strongly paternalistic and that such behaviour was more prevalent in the Welsh borders.

The background of a changing moral economy

Access to customary rights rose and fell as poor relief expenditure did. Between 1783 and 1803 expenditure more than doubled from just under £2 million, which was five times the amount it had been in 1750.\textsuperscript{11} There was a reluctance to consider reforms

\textsuperscript{11} Hollen Lees, \textit{Solidarities}, p. 84.
during wartime and spending continued to rise, to £8.6 million by 1813 and almost £10 million by 1818. Peter Lindert has estimated that per capita relief grew from 1 per cent of national product in the mid-eighteenth century, to over 2.5 by the 1820s. Wales experienced a particularly sharp increase in the number claiming relief from the late eighteenth century, especially in its border counties. The Welsh poor law system was used to a world where change was relatively slow, and historians believe it struggled to cope with the rapidly growing amount of demands for support. Until the mid-eighteenth century, many rural Welsh parishes had not even levied a poor rate, though were forced to change to provide for the rising number of paupers, and Howell and others believe they reacted harshly as a result.

Quickening economic change was impacting the population through enclosure, the loss of cottage industry and industrialization. The end of the Napoleonic Wars brought the decommissioning of large amounts of soldiers and recession; the mood in much of the established classes was unsettled following Luddite attacks on industry. Farmers were increasingly governed by the free markets as opposed to any hierarchical paternalism. The Swing Riots persisted across south-east England from the summer of 1830 through to winter 1831, and represented an effort by the agricultural poor to save their moral economy.

As well as hardening social relations decreasing support, there were calls from political economists to reform welfare. The theories of utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham were arguably the most important, and there were other influential voices; Frederick Eden was typical in his concern about the ‘right’ he thought the poor felt they

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20 Jones, ‘Swing’. 
had to relief. Hollen Lees states that by the 1820s a range of people in positions of relative power were passing comment on the topic, in an atmosphere conducive to reducing provision; the claims of the poor were losing their legitimacy. By then major assaults on spending had taken place, and total expenditure dropped from £8 million in 1820, to £6.82 million by 1830, £6.3 million in 1834, and decreased further to £4.6 million in 1840, once more reaching a level of 1 per cent of national product. Walsh has found evidence of Shropshire parishes attempting to shed paupers from their relief lists from the mid-1820s onwards. The reform of poor relief would also be an important incendiary factor in the Rebecca Riots in Wales between 1842 and 1843. The figure of dependence in Wales had been 9 per cent of the population in 1802-3, compared to 11 per cent for England and Wales as a whole. So despite apparently widespread poverty, the amount receiving relief there was relatively low. This suggests paupers either had alternative welfare streams, or that they were less likely to get help from the parish.

The right to relief and its decline

As we saw in chapter one, the exact nature of a pauper’s customary right to poor relief remains a hotly debated topic. In pauper letter works it is regularly espoused that paupers used certain language, or cited a situation that suggested they believed they were entitled to relief. However the line between relief as a customary or legal right has become blurred, and it appears the two were heavily interrelated. For instance Hitchcock, King and Sharpe suggest customary rights grew to the point where they were seen as legally accepted. Hollen Lees has stated, ‘Citizens with parish settlements had a right to relief and they knew it’, and she explains that this was

21 Brundage, English Poor Laws, p. 32.
22 Hollen Lees, Solidarities, pp. 82-106.
23 King, Poverty and Welfare, p. 229; Lindert, Growing Public, p. 46.
25 Howell, Rural Poor, p. 97.
27 Hitchcock, King & Sharpe, ‘Introduction’.
28 Hollen Lees, Solidarities, p. 39.
because ‘common law rested on the basis of customary law.’

Surprisingly historians have supported the idea of customary rights existing in differing welfare regions. Both Sokoll and King, with their studies of Essex and the north-west respectively, found paupers thought the parish was obligated to relieve them. Despite these views that many paupers thought they had a customary right, many appeals were rejected, and some work suggests the right was far less established.

Other historians also support the idea customary rights existed though place more importance on the legal aspects of entitlement. Hindle urges caution on those who think custom dictated relief. He sees this as an overreaction by historians against the older belief that the welfare system was used for social control. Snell also talks about the importance of law in the process, and the extent of the poor’s knowledge of it. Slack emphasizes legal right in *The English Poor Law, 1531-1782*, though in *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* appears to suggest that a moral justification was more important in constituting right. Recently a debate has arisen between those who believe in a customary, moral economy, and those who argue that the poor had an absolute legal right to relief. As Hindle puts it, ‘The argument that the poor were legally entitled to relief is now so widespread in the historiography that it must be taken seriously.’ This argument is most forcefully put by Charlesworth, who tells us that ‘poor law was law’, and consequently welfare history has been misunderstood. In her opinion poor relief actually encompassed a more solid right than any customary right that required negotiation. Whilst Steven King is ultimately a believer that customary right was key, he has recently said that the law has become undervalued.

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29 Ibid., p. 74.
37 Ibid.
38 King, ‘Negotiating the Law’. 
not relief was based on a legal right, it is widely accepted paupers had a good understanding of the parochial processes involved in obtaining it. However the extent to which paupers sought legal means to protect customary rights under the poor law has not been fully examined.

There is consensus that these pauper rights and the paternalism that protected them were in decline, though opinions differ as to exactly when this occurred. Though the financial decrease in payment levels is well documented, it is harder to discern how it was experienced by individual paupers. Hollen Lees says the final decade of the old poor laws saw greater interest in reducing the costs for ratepayers as opposed to relieving poverty. Snell and Smith have both suggested that relative generosity was at its greatest in the early eighteenth century. Work by Tim Hitchcock, Peter King and Pamela Sharpe also says there was an attack on the moral economy from the later eighteenth century, as does Sharpe elsewhere, and also Slack. Both Charlesworth and Thompson think there was a loss of legal and moral rights leading up to and following 1834, with Thompson citing an end to the moral economy around the close of the Napoleonic Wars. Peter Jones believes a strong moral economy existed right up to the 1830s under the auspices of the Speenhamland provisions. Hindle sums up these viewpoints neatly, saying, ‘If there was ‘a right to relief’, therefore, most commentators seem to agree it was extinguished by the Whig reforms of the 1830s.’

Other than Jones’s aforementioned work, few examinations of changing customary rights have employed pauper letters. This is despite the fact that, ‘pauper letters reveal the attitudes of the poor to the poor law: for example, what they made of the ‘right to relief” and the duty of the overseers.’ Williams’ study of petitions to the London Foundling Hospital, which contrasts appeals from the late eighteenth century

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40 Hollen Lees, *Solidarities*, pp. 73-86.
43 Charlesworth, *Forgotten*, p. 110; Thompson, *Customs*, p. 258; Thompson, ‘Moral’.
44 Jones, ‘Swing’.
with the late nineteenth, represents the only concerted attempt to chart change in narrative tones chronologically. However the rhetoric she identified was linked to the changing rules of the hospital, rather than wider public attitudes and provision. There has been one observation, by Taylor, on the impact on pauper letters over time, ‘The most noteworthy change over time, at least in humanistic terms, is in fact in the voices of the poor. The letters become less clamorous and there is a trend towards greater servility in tone, although most of the letters to the end of the collection could be described as forthright, reasoned and politely insistent’.

There has been no dedicated research on the moral economy under the old poor laws in the Welsh border counties, though Howell has done extensive research on customary land rights. To construct a picture of relief ethics here, it is necessary to work from comments that allude to the framework in which any moral economy would have existed. As discussed in the previous chapter, King believes many of the English border parishes were tougher than average in their provision, and that these harsher attitudes stretched into Wales. In Welsh histories the descriptions of a local ethic of relief appear contradictory. Historians often seem caught between promoting a friendly local Welsh face of welfare, and criticising an increasingly invasive English one. Many think that settlement laws were enacted harshly, though possibly because Welsh poor law history has not yet developed beyond black letter law and recognised the negotiability of settlement in the way that historians of England have. Conversely some histories support the idea that charitable giving was widespread well into the nineteenth century. This is thought to have been especially so in Wales’s remote, rural

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48 J. Taylor, ‘Voices in the Crowd: The Kirkby Lonsdale Township Letters 1809-1836’, in Hitchcock, King & Sharpe, Chronicling, pp. 122-3; some historians reject the idea the moral economy declined, both R. Cowherd ‘The Humanitarian Reform of the English Poor Laws from 1782-1815’, Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 104, no. 3 (1960), pp. 328-42 and P. Dunkley, ‘Paternalism, the Magistracy and Poor Relief in England, 1795-1834’, International Review of Social History, 24, no. 3 (1979), pp. 371-97, believe there was increased paternity from the late eighteenth century, though the latter cites this as the result of local action.
49 Howell, Rural Poor, pp. 157-208.
upland areas, and was supported by a ‘face-to-face’ communal lifestyle.\(^{53}\) Similarly Snell identifies a positive system of rights in parts of Wales based on strongly held community values.\(^{54}\) The potential that Welsh paupers had to achieve an adequate level of support, was somewhat reflected in the writing of their letters.

The letter tone used by paupers and advocates on their social level from across the regions endorses the idea a moral economy had existed and was in decline, and this can be seen in figure 3.1. The confidence displayed in the letters deteriorated from the 1780s to the 1840s. Also incorporated into figure 3.1 is the difference in confidence between paupers making their first appeal for relief, and all appeals, including those that had achieved an agreement for relief. The first point on the graph comes from a sample of twenty-five letters, and within that number, fifteen that did not have a pre-existing arrangement to receive relief. This is a smaller than desirable amount of letters to gain a representative score, though it does exceed the number employed in some pauper letter studies that do not use other sources.\(^{55}\) Additionally, here these letters have been analysed with the variable factor of time removed, as all twenty-five are concentrated on one time period. They can also be judged in context with the other data points, which largely show a decline and therefore suggest the letters in the 1781-90 time period were likely to have been more confident.

There were only five pauper appeals that overtly demanded payment as their right, and most occurred prior to 1800. A more widespread language of rights did exist, but was couched in custom, circumstance and confidence. The findings are therefore similar to those of Hindle on appeals to magistrates, who found only one pauper directly claimed entitlement.\(^{56}\) Ann Pepper wrote to Chepstow in south Wales in 1774. She had been left by an abusive husband for another woman, and the man had taken some of her belongings, including her marriage certificate. Despite her tenuous settlement claim, she still talked about her ‘right’;

\(^{53}\) Parker, ‘Radnorshire’, pp. 139-149; Teale, ‘Battle’, p. 93.
Fig. 3.1: Change in pauper confidence over time

The numbers adjacent to each line give the absolute number of letters represented by the individual data points on that line.
‘For my Part my Right is to his Parish and no other woman can have a Right to it during my Life So Gentlemen I hope you will be so pleased as to let me Hear from you when you Receive what I have sent’

This letter was very assertive, and supports the idea of a moral economy that was stronger prior to 1800. However it has to be speculated if this language of rights was more focused on arguing her settlement, rather than her entitlement to relief. The writer was quite implicit in their legal right in this sense, showing the overlap that could have existed with belief in customary rights.

In April 1795, this letter was carried by the pauper, ‘the bearer’, William Fry, to Cricklade in Wiltshire, and embodies the ideals of a right to relief. It did not come from someone of his social level, but his employer, and shows the expectation and care of someone in the employer’s superior social position;

‘If I had given him no assistance last winter, he and his family would have been absolutely starved. He was nearly starved the winter before, his boy then died, & he came to Cricklade & got so small a matter that had I not asisted in burying him, he must have lay’d above ground, his house rent in this distress I do not think the Parish officers have ever thought it their duty upon his complaint to pay any regard to. I wish this affair be represented to the Gentlemen of credit of your parish & see whether they do not think with me, that it is high time that some magistrate in the neighbourhood should interfere.’

The author believed that the overseers should have shared this paternalism. He referred to their ‘duty’, and in language that alluded to a settled social order, called them ‘Gentlemen of credit’. Additionally he suggested that the local magistrate could be contacted to enforce relief.

Richard Brooks of Leicester wrote the following letter, the third of eight, to Appleby in Gloucestershire, in June 1832. It is symptomatic of declining confidence

\[^{57}\text{GwA, D/365/75, Pepper to overseers, 16}^{th}\text{ September 1774.}\]
and paternalism late in the time period, and of a welfare system that was seen to need reform. This is because the example shows one of many paupers in industrial towns, whose distant rural settlement parishes were keen to avoid overcommitting to their support:

‘I am under the necessity of requesting your kind assistance, I was in hopes of doing better but the time is not yet come, as in consequence of the Influenza, we have been all sick more or less and unable, though willing, to work; I beg Sir to state that our Doctors Bill amounts to upwards of 3S. of which I acquainted the Gentlemen who called on us, and he can vouch for the truth of my statement, when I reflect on his attention to us in sickness; I humbly solicit payment for him, as a Duty; what makes my care worse is that I am obliged to submit to a reduction of Wages my employer knowing I cannot extricate myself’.58

Brooks worked in Leicester’s troubled clothing industry in the early 1830s, and had received relief previously, but it was piecemeal as no long term commitment had been made by Appleby.

Figure 3.2 uses the same pauper appeals as figure 3.1, but split into those sent to each region. The numbers used for some data points, especially those prior to the start of the nineteenth century, are unsatisfactorily small. However investigations have been made irrespective of this, as they presented a unique opportunity to directly compare regional differences in letter tone. Because pauper confidence is thought to reflect how generous parishes were, which constitutes the foremost spatial concern of the literature,59 it is important such comparisons are attempted. The number of paupers sampled prior to 1800 is still larger than in existing work on the topic.60

The amount of letters sampled from the 1830s can be considered representative, and shows that confidence amongst Welsh letter writers was maintained at a higher level than in other regions, especially the comparison counties. It appears that the

58 GA, P112a OV 3/5/2, Brooks to overseers, 24th June, 1833.
59 King, Poverty and Welfare; Confidence has been the main subject addressed in regional letter comparisons, chiefly by King, ‘Regional Patterns’, pp. 67-9; Sokoll has also identified assumed rights in Essex letters based on pauper confidence, Sokoll ‘Old Age’, p. 147.
60 King, ‘Regional Patterns’.
Fig. 3.2: Change in pauper confidence over time by region

The numbers adjacent to each line give the absolute number of letters represented by the individual data points on that line.
welfare traits that protected the Welsh moral economy also had some affect in the English borders, suggesting some sharing of relief methods. There were disproportionately large amounts of ‘angry’ letters from Wales, scored as five, that clearly showed the author felt entitled to relief. Four pauper letters suggested the parish specifically had a ‘duty’ towards relieving them. For instance this angry one, sent from Monmouth to Gwent;

‘you have behave to me in a very ungenerous as well as a unjust mannor in keeping me out of my Money which is my Due Remember Sir my Agreement four shillings per week and have the same Remited me quarterly Two Pounds Twelve Shillings per quarter which I am I had regular send when sent for the while the Late Officers Mr Price Mr Wattkins & Mr Lewis was in office they acted like men that were of Duty thair Office they Clothe the Back of Orphan they did not let his feet go bare on the ground – but I only Request a Pare of Shoes of you – that was denied him and Even the poor widow right with held from her by you’

Rights were claimed on the basis that the pauper was a widow and that the overseers’ had a duty; it was suggested that the previous overseers had been better at fulfilling this. The letter was sent at the comparatively early date of 1814 and in this respect illustrates a stronger moral economy, and the more determined defence of it in Wales. It was also representative of other letters that invoked duties and rights. There were nine of these in total, with four sent to Welsh parishes. This is a sizable amount as Welsh letters comprise less than a fifth of those from paupers. Almost all of this duty invoking correspondence was sent prior to 1817.

The spatial features displayed in figure 3.2 can be broken down further to consider pauper confidence according to county, displayed in table 3.1. It shows that the similarities between neighbouring counties were rarely consistent. Consequently the evidence of regionalism in letter tone is slightly tenuous and the findings should not be overstated. The lack of consistency is largely due to the enormous variety of

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61 GwA, D.396.60, Watkins to overseers, 22nd February 1814.
Table 3.1: Pauper appeal confidence by county

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Pauper confidence</th>
<th>Number of appeals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Welsh border counties</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.32</strong></td>
<td><strong>181</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern and costal Somerset</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English border counties</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.07</strong></td>
<td><strong>485</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comparison counties</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.05</strong></td>
<td><strong>377</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corpus as a whole</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.07</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,043</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
circumstances that impacted a pauper’s approach, and which will be outlined throughout the chapter. The most important of these was probably the pauper’s individual will and we presently have no way of gauging this. Letter tone also only reflects one measureable aspect of the source material and attempting to quantify it has been ambitious. It can however be observed that confidence appeared slightly higher amongst the Welsh paupers. Looking purely at rate bases, the poverty of these parishes should have reduced the amount of relief payments, and consequently dented confidence. However an appeal from John Lewis to Powys justice highlights factors that made Welsh paupers confident;

‘I have wrote before to the overseer of the parish and have had No answer My Arm is still in a useless state and I have aplyed to All the Doctors in the Part for a cure and all to No purpose If I could have the favour of the Parish to Recomend me to the Shrewsbury Infirmary I should Know there whether there is anything to be done to it or Not As we have heard of cases of the sort Perfectly Cured There so if you Could Get the interest of one of the subscribers it would be No expense’ 62

The appeal was confident; the situation was explained to the justice without pleading language. This is despite the fact the pauper had already been ignored by his parish, perhaps because they could not afford relief. Such a problem is especially likely given the late date of the letter, 1835, when parish finances were typically under greater pressure. Therefore his confidence was operating unconstrained by the parish finances previous regional welfare studies have focused on. 63 It might also have helped that medical care was apparently available on a charitable basis. This was pursued over the border in Shropshire, showing the porousness of such a geographic divide. Additionally his self-assurance may have been spurred knowing he could approach a justice, a method that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Welsh confidence was possibly buoyed because minimal parochial relief was needed, as it could be supplemented by other incomes, especially given the stronger mixed economies of pastoral regions. Similar to Wales, paupers from the north-west

63 Hindle, Parish?, pp. 282-94; King, Poverty and Welfare.
pairing of Cheshire and Lancashire did not behave with the low confidence of those facing the parsimonious welfare systems identified by King.\textsuperscript{64} Their relatively high levels of confidence suggest a continuous region stretching into Wales that had similar attitudes to approaching the poor laws. Inconsistencies nonetheless exist. For instance Flintshire did not possess the high confidence seen in most Welsh counties, and neither did Cumbria compared to the other north-west counties. The low confidence levels of paupers from Hampshire despite its high relief levels, along with those from Somerset and Gloucestershire, which are treated as southern counties by this study, undermines King’s belief that southern English paupers were more self-assured.\textsuperscript{65} Neighbouring Oxfordshire and Wiltshire are rated more highly, as the southern county of Essex would be if it were included, with 3.16. However because Sokoll does not include items written by pauper advocates in his material, his letters are not wholly comparable with those used to create these scores. Such high confidence does support Sokoll’s thoughts that many Essex paupers believed a right to relief had been established.\textsuperscript{66}

Figures 3.1 and 3.2 portrayed the declining confidence of paupers almost everywhere, and complaints in the letters show that paupers increasingly felt their payments were threatened. This can be seen in Figure 3.3 which indicates the percentages of letters reporting a payment problem; a complaint that pay was late, less than expected, or that their request had been ignored. The figure also includes standard letters from overseers, as many embodied complaints from paupers. The numbers on each data point represent the amount of times each complaint was made, rather than the larger sample size. The percentage that this amount constitutes of the sample size is given on the y axis. Similar to most of the other time series graphs, the sample sizes analysed for each data point can be found in table 2.2. There were negligible increases to the amount of complaints that requests were ignored or payments were late. However there was unmistakable growth in complaints that payments had been decreased or stopped. This occurred as overseers attempted to reduce their poor rates, and figure 3.3 shows a particular increase from the 1820s. The number of occurrences attached to the data points prior to 1811 should not be seen as insufficient to provide representative figures, partly because they are drawn from a much larger sample size; in this instance, pauper and overseer correspondence combined. Additionally the line regarding

\textsuperscript{64} King, \textit{Poverty and welfare}, pp. 263-4.
\textsuperscript{65} King, ‘Regional Patterns’, pp. 67-9.
\textsuperscript{66} Sokoll, ‘Old Age’, p. 147.
Fig. 3.3: % of letters from paupers and overseers reporting a payment problem for the pauper

The numbers adjacent to each line give the absolute number of letters represented by the individual data points on that line.
complaints of ‘less’ pay, shows an obvious trend that can be linked to wider pressures on the relief system. The other lines are more representative of problems that were always commonplace in the out-parish system, as Sokoll has recognised.\textsuperscript{67} The subsequent letter was sent in 1829 to Earls Barton in Northamptonshire;

‘Sarah Robins a parishoner of yours living in the Parish of Werburgh in this town in very great distress in consequence of the parish officer for that Parish discontinuing to pay her her usual allowance of 2/- a week. I have been to the parish officer (Mr Moody) who states that he can’t get the money the parish has advanced for you and that he has wrote to you several times for it and has received no answer. I would beg if you have any mercy in you that you would send the money immediately and not suffer a poor old woman of 74 years of age to die of starvation she has no means of support but the small pittance you have allowed her and if the statement of Mr Moody’s is correct I think you are very much to blame in not remitting the money when due for I am quite sure the parish here are in a very bad state and not able to pay much money out of pocket. However if you do not think well to send the money the magistrates her shall be applied to and they will compell mr moody to do something’\textsuperscript{68}

Here is evidence paupers were aware parish finances were ‘in a very bad state’, and that this was affecting welfare payments. The author suggested that removal of these payments was having a severe impact on the pauper, and that it was down to the ‘mercy’ of the overseer to reverse the situation. The threat of using the magistrates was again cited to defend this pauper’s established right. It was fitting that the letter was sent to an English comparison county. As a proportion of pauper and overseer correspondence sent, 8.5 per cent that went to comparison parishes complained about a reduction of pay, contrasted with just 4 and 3.9 per cent in the Welsh and English


\textsuperscript{68} NRO, 110p/138, no name to overseers, 1\textsuperscript{st} December 1829.
border counties respectively. These results show the moral economy was more vulnerable to pressure in the established poor relief systems of England, than in the often makeshift arrangements of the peripheral border counties where dependency was less. This work offers a new way of seeing the decline of the moral economy from the late eighteenth century up to the reform of the poor laws. The quantitative approach allows the locating of multiple voices in similar circumstances, and can enhance existing debates regarding these individual paupers in particular situations.

Changes according to the pauper’s situation

The customary rights of paupers varied depending on their life circumstances and welfare histories. As we saw in chapter one literature on the treatment of certain pauper sub-groups has become extensive, and it has also become a topic of pauper letter histories. This makes a discussion of their various rights unavoidable here, though there is not the scope to be comprehensive. Despite the extent of the literature, a large scale comparison of the rights of different pauper sub-groups has not yet been undertaken. In pauper letter works there has been much focus on the rhetorical capital of the sick, the elderly, especially widows, and those with families to support. Given that most narrative historians believe customary rights to relief existed, it is unsurprising many feel the particular interest group they study had some established rights. For instance King suggests the sick were the most elaborate with their rhetoric, being seen as having the least validity;\(^\text{69}\) even so he thinks that they had a sense of ‘right’.\(^\text{70}\) He also thinks the old had a recognised moral right, though with a variable limit to how much they could claim.\(^\text{71}\) Sokoll considers the old poor laws to have acted as a safety net, and therefore some paupers had a right to claim relief in old age, but he suggests they were not necessarily generously treated.\(^\text{72}\) Indeed he cites challenges to the funding of elderly care in the homes of other family members.\(^\text{73}\) Other life circumstances were used to the benefit those appealing, for instance the need to support a large family, and maintain a

\(^{70}\) King & Stringer, ‘Leberty’.
\(^{71}\) King, ‘Negotiating the Law’, pp. 425-6; King, Poverty and Welfare, p. 56.
\(^{73}\) Sokoll, ‘London’, p. 41.
household.\textsuperscript{74} Sharpe’s study of letters from one family leads her to say, ‘What the letters do convey is a keen awareness by the poor of their own rights to poor relief.’\textsuperscript{75} Hurren has identified moral capital being used in the rhetoric of those who had lost a loved one in order to claim funeral costs.\textsuperscript{76} One of the few groups pauper letter historians believe had a more marginal claim on relief, are women, both respectable married women, and poorer, younger ones.\textsuperscript{77}

People at certain life cycle stages may have had particular rights, but there has not been much consideration in pauper letter studies of how rights were also affected by an individual’s welfare history. This is despite widespread recognition of the importance of custom in claiming relief; as King says, ‘Vestry minutes, magistrates’ orders and pauper letters show very keenly that those whose allowances were reduced periodically reapplied to drag them back up again, and that those ejected from relief lists invariably found their way back.’\textsuperscript{78} There would have been pressure on individuals to maintain ongoing support from the parish, and these letters often represented such pressure. However there has also not been a thorough analysis of the development of rhetoric in response to perceived rejection or the loss of relief. The intensive examinations of smaller amounts of letters invite sophisticated evaluation of nuanced language, but do not offer generalisations over time.\textsuperscript{79} In one article King refers to the percentage of his letters that followed preceding letters about the same pauper, sixty-five, but does not provide a measurable scale to track changes in their rhetoric.\textsuperscript{80} His piece, ‘The development of rhetoric in the letters of the English, Welsh and Scottish sick and poor’ has been perhaps the most concerted effort thus far to chart change in

\textsuperscript{75} Sharpe, ‘“Bowels”’, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{76} E. Hurren & S. King, ‘“Begging for a burial”: Form, Function and Conflict in Nineteenth Century Pauper Burial’, \textit{Social History}, 30, no. 3 (2005), pp. 321-41.
\textsuperscript{77} King, ‘Negotiating the Law’, p. 419.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., p. 413.
\textsuperscript{80} King, ‘Negotiating the Law’, p. 416.
tone, considering phrases and their rhetorical functions over time. Indeed pauper letter studies have increasingly moved to evaluations of how the message was conveyed.

There were countless combinations of circumstances that impacted the nature of appeals, and those highlighted here give both brief examples of some of the more overarching scenarios, and also portray their enormous variations. The most important factor was the belief that an agreement existed with the parish to receive provision. The average confidence of a pauper appeal throughout the dataset was 3.07, a number that sits almost at the centre of the range of pauper letter tones, and to some extent validates the accuracy of the scoring methods. However if the pauper had previously received relief, as revealed by the letter itself or subsequent correspondence, this number increased to 3.22. If the pauper thought that an on-going agreement was in place for payment, the score rose further to 3.66. The confidence rating of a first appeal pauper, who had not received relief previously and did not have a pre-existing agreement for it, was 2.75. Elinor Craddex sent a letter to Tetbury in Gloucestershire, and it provides an example of a pauper who was accustomed to receiving relief, and now considered themselves entitled to it:

‘I Expected to either see you or hear from you before now to pay me my money otherwise send it me you seed my situation when you was with me at Bath which the 1 of march is due to me I wonder how you could think that I could suport my self as is [illegible due to damage to document] to a crple for I am not able to stand to work if you do not send to me before the above date you may depend that I shall be at tedbury next week to Justise meeting and I do belive that they’r worships will see me righted.’

Her money was late, and she deserved it because she was disabled and could not work. If she did receive it soon, she would attempt to get her right enforced by the magistrates. The confidence scores outlined suggest that any research into pauper letters and their expression of rights should firstly consider the pauper’s relief history. There were letters

81 King & Stringer, ‘Leberty’.
82 A. Tomkins, ‘Labouring on a bed of sickness’: The Material and Rhetorical Deployment of Ill-Health in Male Pauper Letters’, in Gestrich, Hurren & King, Poverty and Sickness, pp. 51-68.
83 GA, P328a OV 7/3, Craddex to overseers, 25th February 1802.
sent that could be classed as ‘reminders’, where the pauper expected payment of their ongoing relief, and simply wrote to the parish in advance, to request their pay and supply directions. An example is correspondence to Bradford upon Avon in September 1834;

‘A daughter of John Harvys widow has requested the undersigned to inform you that the Said Widow is still living & in her 84th year & she hopes that you will as you have been accustomed to do to hand her by the Bearer what you may Judge proper to send her. We know that the Said Widow is incapable of doing any thing towards obtaining a livelihood.’

John Harvey’s widow simply wanted her relief as ‘accustomed’, and most of the letter informed the overseer accordingly, rather than justifying why the relief was needed. Under the scoring criteria these letters obviously appear confident, and their inclusion could distort the scoring system. However without these reminder letters, the confidence score for those expecting relief drops by only 0.05, to 3.61; confidence among writers where relief was expected remained high. This was despite the fact over two thirds of these paupers who were anticipating receiving payment had written to complain about payment problems, a factor which would be expected to have diminished confidence. Other historians have highlighted the significance of having a pre-existing agreement with the parish. Hindle found in appeals to justices that 23 per cent believed they were due relief;\(^\text{85}\) the amount in this corpus is 34 per cent. King discovered that 564 of his pauper letters, which equated to 20 per cent, referred to having had relief previously;\(^\text{86}\) the figure here is almost double that, at 37 per cent.

Despite this evidence, it should not be thought that awarding relief to a pauper created a costly precedent. When paupers were in receipt of relief but wanted the amount increased, confidence dropped to 2.73, slightly lower than a first appeal from a pauper who had not received relief before. Participation in the welfare system did not simply grant the pauper a generous right of provision. To the contrary, language became


\(^{85}\) Hindle, *Parish?*, p. 415.

\(^{86}\) King, ‘Negotiating the Law’, p. 424.
needier as the pauper attempted to justify why their existing relief was not adequate. A wretched appeal sent to Northrop in Flintshire in 1783 shows this;

‘your Poor Petitioner David Hughes of Llantraeth am very Poor; and exceedingly distressed on account of my Parish allowance being not a Sufficient assistant to come at the Common necessaries of Life. The distressed Situation I am in is in a great measure Owing to the bad State of Health which I and my wife have enjoyed for a Considerable time past: She being very much afflicted with an Epileptical and Hysterical Complaint: the effects of which very much gains upon her, from which I apprehend the most terrible Consequences. I most humbly pray for an addition to my Allowance, at least till the time I can get to a Work within my Capacity; which weak as I am I am very Willing to do at any time. When Blindness – Sickness, and Poverty pleads I humbly hope that you will be favourable’\(^8^7\)

Despite all the unpleasant circumstances the pauper described, he still did not have the courage to directly ask for an increase in relief, and prayed for it instead. The significance of a pauper’s relief history should not be understated. Despite works on pauper letters that argue the writers were keen to emphasise their previous good character and self-reliance, only ten paupers claimed to have never received relief. It was more important that a pauper established a history of dependence and therefore a customary right. In light of this, correspondence from pauper sub-groups should be judged based on appeals that had no prior agreement for relief, regardless of their geographic location.

Table 3.2 displays the proportion of poverty problems cited in all standard pauper appeals in the corpus, as displayed in table 2.1.\(^8^8\) It can be seen that the most confident appeals came from those who considered their children or the size of their

\(^{8^7}\) FRO, P/45/1/198, Hughes to overseer, 1783.

\(^{8^8}\) The poverty problem is what the pauper pointed to as a direct cause of their poverty, for instance they may have been incapable of work, and therefore unable to feed their family. Their family in this case would not have been the cause of poverty.
family to be the main cause of poverty. However relief was rarely justifiable on these grounds alone. A relatively large amount of people applying because of this found the overseers reluctant to give payment easily, as witnessed in the ‘response problems’ column, indicating their appeal had incurred one of the problems featured in figure 3.3.

Table 3.2: Pauper appeals based on the cause of their poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>No. of letters</th>
<th>Response problems</th>
<th>Presented as sole cause of poverty</th>
<th>Appeal with no pre-existing agreement</th>
<th>No. of appeals with no pre-existing agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ill</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of work</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of relief</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>3.47 (no first appeals)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child/family</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injured</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prices</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive partner</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It may have been that family members were factored into letters in response to these problems to build a greater impression of need, as only 16 per cent of the ‘child/family’ letters requested relief entirely on the basis that their family was too extensive. In a comparable fashion, it was not enough for a pauper just to be ‘old’. Of the 67 paupers that explicitly stated their elderly condition, only 15 per cent tried to get relief based purely on this. Old age had to be combined with something else, such as an inability to work. A large number of paupers probably knew this and therefore did not state their age, resulting in a relatively low number of letters where the author declared themselves as elderly. However 40 per cent of these paupers described age related ailments, such as being either ill or infirm, and it is likely many of those who stated they were ‘ill’ were also old.
As seen in other welfare histories, illness was the biggest problem facing letter writers.\textsuperscript{89} Those historians who have argued it constituted a right to relief should feel justified.\textsuperscript{90} Illness carried a confidence rating of 2.8; less than a quarter of letters citing illness expressed a problem with their treatment by the overseers, and a relatively large proportion, a third, stated illness was their only problem. Letters from those who were out of work were statistically similar to those from ill paupers, in terms of their response problems and how often they cited it as the sole cause of poverty. This is unsurprising as 48 per cent of paupers who complained about being out of work blamed illness, and would have appeared in both sets of numbers. This shows the benefits of developing smaller case studies of certain pauper sub-groups, into larger investigations that can now make contrasts between these differing types of pauper and their treatment.

Being injured was disproportionately combined with other problems, probably because it showed personal negligence and was therefore a less valid reason for support. Of those injured, 58 per cent stated that they had a lack of work as well, and in many other complaints of a lack of work, injury was implied. Probably the number of paupers injured was higher than 49, but it is often hard to distinguish the exact nature of a pauper’s ailment from their letter. Of the pauper groups that requested assistance, it was those who were affected by the death of family that appeared the most assured in their applications. This substantiates the ideas of historians who say there was emotional capital in requesting funeral expenses.\textsuperscript{91} These appeals had the least difficulties garnering responses, and were a sufficient reason for requesting support in most cases. Such letters came across as highly confident;

‘I Received your letter on the day above wich did not so well please neather me nor my Wife I think think that I dide my Duty in the funeral of my Brother as I paid for the Coffin and the Church Dues and all the funeral Expenses and I Give my Father 2£ when they came and told me that my brother was Dead and I Paid Doctor Steil 10s-6 and I think that Would have paid for all the Ale at the house.’\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{89} Gestrich, Hurren & King, \textit{Poverty and Sickness}.
\textsuperscript{90} Gestrich, Hurren & King, ‘Sources, Methods and Experiences’, in ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{91} Hurren & King, ‘Begging for a burial’.
\textsuperscript{92} WL, MS 1113, Box 2, 5, Westby to overseers, 10\textsuperscript{th} February 1810.
The pauper felt the parish was obliged to pay towards his brother’s funeral, and that he had done what could be expected of him. Although the details on pauper appeals regarding deaths and funerals have been drawn from less than forty standard pauper letters, this is a comparable amount to existing studies on funeral provision under the old poor laws, and here the focus is concentrated on very specific aspects of these appeals. It should however be noted that the most confident and uncomplicated appeals came from those who felt they were being deprived of their relief. It was not the poverty problem of the pauper that was most important in determining their approach, but the existence of an established individual right. The difference between separate groups was comparatively not as great, and the quantifiable, large scale approach used in the present examination has allowed the comparisons that show this. Results highlight the endless complexities behind the construction of a pauper’s approach.

There were also a wide variety of techniques that were then used in the writing of the letter itself. When their perceived rights were threatened, broad, regional trends can be found in how paupers reacted. The way a pauper responded to a payment problem in appeals is best described as an escalation of tone. Figure 3.4, which is based on the 689 pauper appeals without an agreement for relief, shows that a problem in the receipt of payment had a tendency to polarise a pauper’s tone. A greater proportion of these letters became either wretched, which is rated with a score of one, or angry, achieving a score of five. Such polarisation can also be seen from the drop in the number of letters that can be scored at three, as this middle ground was increasingly distant from how a pauper felt about their perceived rejection. Only a very small percentage of appeals from paupers who did not have an arrangement for relief appeared angry, compared to a much larger amount of letters that were desperate. This fits existing thinking that angry pauper appeals were quite rare, due to their subservient position in power relations with the overseers. However King’s claim that only male writers were downright angry is not substantiated by the evidence here; of the 36 ‘angry’ letters in this corpus, 20 were written by females.

The model of a polarisation of letter tones is not a perfect fit. The majority still earned the more moderate scoring values of two and four. Additionally some pleading

93 Hurren & King, “Begging for a Burial”, in this piece there has been proportionately much more extensive use of bills and account extracts than of pauper letters.
94 King & Stringer, “Leberty”, p. 73; King, ‘Negotiating the Law’; Tomkins, “Labouring on a Bed”.
95 King, ‘Negotiating the Law’, p. 423.
authors became angry, whilst confident ones became wretched. Yet it can be seen when contrasting figure 3.4 with 3.5, which is drawn from the 354 paupers expecting relief, that a confident pauper was much more likely to become angry. Figure 3.4, concerning the paupers that did not have an agreement for relief, shows a higher proportion of pleading writers who consequently became wretched. Obviously, some paupers were more prone to becoming pathetic than others. John Medstone sent a communication, which was fairly needy, to Kingswood in Gloucestershire in 1823;

‘I have to ask the Gentlemen one favour more If they will take it in consideration to be so good as to pay my rent for me this winter as it is not In my power by any means to pay it and to mantain and cloath and pay House rent for such a family as thair is six of us to be supported out of my little gottens and a very expenses time drawing near and than I shall have 5 Children If it pleases God to mantain and I Cannot posibely Do it without the help of a parish If the gentelmen Do not thenn profuse to to pay my rent it will be 1£ “ 1s a quarter wether the gentelmen will be so kind as to allow us somthing for the Children wekly if not I shall be obliged to send the five elest boys home’\textsuperscript{96}

Medstone perceived that this previous letter had been ignored, and so wrote again, with a more desperate tone;

‘I Diricted A letter to the Oversears of the poor but have not received any Anser... I have to inform the Gentelman that I am know in the greatest Distress I ever was in before my Wief was taken ill for Chield on Tusday last and we thought she would have died the midwief was hear from Tusday to Thirsday and than we was oblidged to send for Docr. Wills and he was with her untill Saderday and thare my Wief was Dilivered of a ded born child and I had not a shiling in the House at the time’\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{96} GA, P193 OV 7/1, Medstone to overseers, 2\textsuperscript{nd} December 1823.
\textsuperscript{97} GA, P193 OV 7/1, Medstone to overseers, 18\textsuperscript{th} December 1823.
Fig. 3.4: Reaction of those not expecting relief to a payment problem

The numbers adjacent to each line give the absolute number of letters represented by the individual data points on that line.

Fig. 3.5: Reaction of those expecting relief to a payment problem

The numbers adjacent to each line give the absolute number of letters represented by the individual data points on that line.
There was a direct escalation in this letter, from pleading to wretched; his distress had become ‘the greatest... ever’. The situation was partly distressing due to coincidental events, such as the still born child, though Medstone emphasized that a lack of finance had made the situation worse. There was no anger in the initial letters of paupers who expected relief, as shown in figure 3.5, and there were no wretched appeals. A problem in the receipt of payment could dent confidence, however because the pauper expected relief the majority remained confident, and these paupers were much more likely to get angry than to paint a desperate picture. A request to Bromfield in Shropshire from Elizabeth Banner, presents the importance of this pre-established confidence well:

‘I therefore now desire you will write and let me know whether you mean to pay on as usual or have it tried at next Sessions whether you can lawfully stand by it or not, as I am now determined to make a clear end of it some way or other, therefore as the time is short I beg you’ll give me an immediate answer, informing me which way you mean to do, as I am quite agreeable to go to the Sessions, as I make not the least doubt of having justice done me’

The pre-existing relief agreement constituted a legal right to Banner that she believed the justices would support. Because of this she had the confidence to dictate terms to the overseers. Only 2 per cent of pauper appeals either threatened to go the magistrates or cited the law, though significantly three quarters of these were from the border counties. In all but five cases where the law or magistrates were invoked, there had been a payment problem. King thinks urban paupers were subject to better knowledge circulation and were therefore more likely to cite the law, and the paupers in this database that did so typically wrote from more developed areas. This communication sent from Worcester to Herefordshire is an example of such practices;

‘if you do not send me by the Bearer my Son my goods will be sold and I shall be under the necessity of throwing my Family upon the Parish wherein I reside and be sent home by an order

---

98 SA, P43/L/28/90, Banner to overseers, 1st April 1825.
and if I do you may depend upon it at Stoke we will stay and the Parish shall provide for us according to the provision made by Law.100

It is not clear what aspect of the law was being referred to, but this pauper obviously believed they had a legal right. Their threat to throw their family upon the parish in order to get them removed also shows an awareness of how settlement rules were used, and an ability to utilise them in negotiations. This research suggests that although the paupers may have shared a linguistic and legal platform with officials, direct legal challenges were rare. However the magistrates were much more prone to become involved than these few explicit mentions of them would suppose, especially in peripheral areas.

The justices

These rights could be upheld by local magistrates, and consideration of their role under the old poor laws has not been as extensive as in other areas. Interest in the justices and the poor has largely been concerned with how poverty influenced crime.101 Examining their role adds to our understanding of how entrenched legal or customary rights were. However currently, ‘The complex local triangles of negotiation between magistracy, vestry and labouring poor still await their historian,’ though more work is forthcoming from Peter King.102 The prominent piece concerning the role of the justices in upholding the moral economy remains Dunkley’s 1979 article.103 King believes knowledge of magistrate intervention into the poor laws would benefit from greater consideration of the highly informal summary courts which could occur almost anywhere.104 Work on the informal activities of magistrates has often focused on the petty sessions, or their personal notebooks which exist sporadically.105 Magistrates also made individual and informal orders to overseers, which have rarely been used in studies.106

100 HA, G53/24, Young to overseers, 20th March 1821.
104 King, ‘Summary Courts and Social Relations’; King, ‘Role of the Law’.
There is a general acceptance in the literature that justices often attempted to prevent the reduction of poor relief payments.\textsuperscript{107} Other evidence exists of times they could have been more paternal, but such instances appear largely as exceptions.\textsuperscript{108} Both Peter King and Dunkley cite an upturn in appeals to the magistrates from the 1790s, as the justices took a prominent role against attempts to cut provisions.\textsuperscript{109} However, whilst others believe justices had been paternalistic by nature, they question how effective they were in slowing the decline of the moral economy.\textsuperscript{110} Landau thinks the paternalism of the justices reduced in favour of imposing the interests of a national elite, whilst others also recognise an eighteenth century decline in their sentiment.\textsuperscript{111} Mandler believes the paternalism of the justices subsided from 1817 as market forces became a more influential factor.\textsuperscript{112} Significantly some historians comment on the decreasing face-to-face contact between magistrates and locals and its role in this reduction of care;\textsuperscript{113} a face-to-face culture was integral to relief in peripheral areas.

Recent thinking on the magistrates suggests they were incredibly autonomous, and that their role was ‘deeply discretionary’.\textsuperscript{114} This complements the idea that there was an extensive overlap between customary and legally enforced entitlement in poor relief, and indeed many historians of the law now talk of legislation being rewritten

\textsuperscript{107} For a small sample of their use see Humphreys, \textit{Crisis of Community}, pp. 95-6.
\textsuperscript{108} King, ‘Role of the Law’; Dunkley, ‘Paternalism’.
\textsuperscript{112} Mandler, ‘Redivivus’, p.137.

97
from the margins, based on local precedents. The justices have subsequently come to represent another negotiable area of the old poor laws. Existing work on the summary courts has shown the approachability of the justices within the local community. For example in some cases they could be called upon in their own homes. This informality was especially common in remote rural areas, detached from local overseers. These findings are echoed in work by Dunkley, ‘The early nineteenth century, then, saw an increased need to rehabilitate and glorify the kind of face-to-face relationships characteristic of a method of social control based on the obedience of the poor and the benevolent overlordship of the rulers.’ However not all work promotes this idea of paternal, flexible activity; Charlesworth states ‘such purposive law-making by judges is an ahistorical inaccuracy’.

The comments suggesting the existence of autonomous justices, active within the community, lend themselves to a consideration of the justices in the isolated localities of upland Wales. Though there have been no dedicated evaluations of Welsh justices and the poor laws, present studies often blame them for the declining paternalism in Wales. Many have been accused of being absentee landlords, who were often English, and cared little for the locals; Humphreys has been particularly damning of the impact of absent gentry on the justice system. Additionally, even though the number of justices expanded in this period, they had the reputation of idlers, and unfortunately quarter sessions appeals soared as poverty levels rose. Contrastingly there are also more recent Welsh historians who have been positive about the paternalism of the gentry, and the kindness of ratepayers. Furthermore the

118 King, ‘Summary Courts and Social Relations’, pp. 126-7 & 165; Hindle, Parish?, p. 424; Eastwood, Governing, pp. 82-5.
120 Thompson, ‘Moral’; Charlesworth, Forgotten, p. 81.
122 Humphreys, Crisis of Community, pp. 201-4.
minimum qualification to be a justice was relatively little by the late eighteenth century, and so the social spectrum recruited from could have become fairly broad, and would have been more representative of local communities.  

Findings here propose that the border county justices and the Welsh ones in particular were highly active in defending the moral economy. This claim is based on the informal hand written justice orders for relief, which paupers took to overseers to command payment. These items differed from other justice orders used in England and Wales, both in their volume, and because they followed no uniform framework. They comprised 7.8 per cent of all standard Welsh correspondence, 5.4 in the English borders, but only 1.6 sent to the English comparators. Most of this correspondence was very early, with half of it sent prior to 1814, so practice declined through the period, and was a method used to coerce an immature relief system in peripheral areas. This can also be seen in the residual prescriptions for relief, with almost a fifth instructing that relief in kind be given or a provision for work made, which were actions necessitated by the lack of a levied poor rate. An order on behalf of Ann Jones provides a typical example of the material:

‘Ann the wife of Humfry Jones complains/and has so done for sometime, her Husband now being sick in Bed/that they have six children unable to do anything towards thr. Support, and have but one shilling allow’d by Vestry – much too little indeed! Let her however on the receipt of this order five shillings until further consideration may be had herein.’

There was no intimation that the overseers had previously refused the paupers, indeed they were already in receipt of relief, and the justice appeared good natured in his request. No threat of a summons was made towards the overseer, and of the 205 handwritten items in total, only 25 made such a threat. This undated order, sent to the


125 King, Remaking Justice, p. 117; Jenkins, The Foundations, p. 87.
126 For a small sample of their use see Humphreys, Crisis of Community, pp. 95-6.
127 PA, M/EP/41/O/X/34, Pryce to overseers, 23rd July 1781.
The paternalistic nature of the justice is evident, as he warned the overseers about the welfare of other paupers, and suggested that this was the first time the overseers had come across this individual’s ‘condition’. Only nineteen orders mentioned that the pauper had previously been denied by the overseers, and in thirteen other orders, it was clear that the paupers were already receiving relief. What is hard to discern is, if the paupers had not already been rejected by the parish, exactly why they were approaching the justices. Peter King has recognised elsewhere that whilst this was not the expected process, the justices were occasionally appealed to by the pauper before they went to the overseers. In the more isolated, rural regions, doing so may have been a good way of maintaining local custom and established right. Additionally perhaps the out-parish system was not fully developed in peripheral Wales, and therefore some parishes were reluctant to participate in it. The right to appeal to a lone justice had existed since 1691 and it seems they were sought out on an individual basis. Nearly a quarter of the orders were notes requesting the overseer ‘relieve the bearer’, giving the impression they were scrawled out instantaneously for the pauper to take away. Given the short, informal format of many others, it is likely most of the orders were created and transported in this face-to-face fashion. It could have been that paupers in the Welsh borders were so used to being rejected that they went to the justices as a matter of course, seeking to get their right to relief legally endowed, with the justices almost being used as advocates. This was a popular approach more generally in Wales, where almost half of pauper appeals came from some form of epistolary advocate, and it would have strengthened their request. The subsequent appeal from 1765 sent to a magistrate is evidence of using justices as advocates. The date is symbolic of how this was a practice that was

128 PA, M/EP/41/O/X/32, Pryce to overseers, no date.
potentially once common across the entire country prior to relief systems becoming fully developed;

‘Mr Pryce I hope that your honour will be so kind as to help me after your promise. ands therefore the rule of the parish is five shillings for bering all sort. and likewise the coffin five shillings and also the shroud 5s and I hope that you will consider the case of this poor widow for she is weak’.

The appeal displays evidence that the pauper had been denied by the parish and not given the amount they requested, and also shows that the pauper had first approached the justice for the guarantee of his support before going to the overseers. As has been stated, rural justices were probably highly autonomous, and so we should be cautious about making generalisations based on the material evaluated here. However these magistrates were not just accessed by paupers purely to deal with particular parishes that were becoming frugal. Across the border counties there are an average of five parishes in each county that received such orders. This number is comparable with the amount of parishes that received the bulk of normal pauper letters.

Parishes in Wales especially are thought to have struggled to collect poor rates, and approaching a magistrate who was unaffected by this financial pressure would have been beneficial; overseers frequently complained of distant justices interfering in parish affairs;[131]

‘William Bayliss complains that he hath a wife & 6 children & that the earnings of the family do not exceed 13 shillings weekly at the distance of your parish I am very unwilling to interfere but am informed that Mr Boulton is from home & no magistrate nearer – in which case I beg to recommend that the earnings of the family be made up to 16 shillings weekly’.[132]

[132] GA, P52 OV 7/1/2, Cooper to overseers, 19th September.
The justice who authored this order was aware that his intervention could be problematic, but became involved anyway as the pauper needed him to. Justices in the borders appear to have been believers in a paternal duty, and it is likely that their care for the poor helped support the ethics of a moral economy a little longer. This belief in duty is evident in this instruction sent in 1808:

‘If, in the meantime, the paupers should want relief, the overseers must let them have something – If the acting overseer is unwell and unable to do his duty, it befalls the other to assist him.’

Aside from these informal orders, there were also more standard formal ones that followed more of a fixed framework, and which were again used in greater number in the Welsh borders. Of particular interest are the 202 sent to Chepstow in south Wales, a large number. All of them were dated between 1811 and 1820, suggesting that the use of the justices may have persisted longer in this area. From 1819 these orders were printed as standard, however they were regularly amended by the justices when they were filled out and ‘refused to grant’ was routinely removed, meaning that the pauper had not already been rejected by the overseers. This reinforces the idea paupers approached the justices as a matter of course in underdeveloped welfare systems. Moreover the part where the overseer was threatened with a summons was also regularly crossed through by the justices, indicating that obtaining relief had not been a point of contention.

These justices were well suited to an isolated rural world that was based around face-to-face contact, relief in kind and local customs. The argument that Welsh justices were inept absenteees, uninterested in defending pauper rights can be challenged based on the 402 justice orders collated here. Table 3.3 shows the extent justices were utilised in each county. Their correspondence has been measured as a percentage of all standard communications received, to reflect their use in proportion to other forms of appeal. The ‘ranking’ column denotes how counties can be ranked in comparison to each other based on this percentage, with (1) indicating the greatest occurrence and the

133 GwA, D.365.66, Lewis to overseers, 21st November 1808.
Table 3.3: % of standard correspondence from justices of the peace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter type occurs</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter type occurs</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(18)</td>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>English BC</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(1)</td>
<td>Hampshire</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Welsh BC</strong></td>
<td><strong>55.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>255</strong></td>
<td>(3)</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(10)</td>
<td><strong>Comparison</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.9</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td><strong>Corpus</strong></td>
<td><strong>12.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>402</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

highest ranking, and (21) the lowest. These rankings will feature more prominently in the next two chapters, and are central to the overall quantitative measurements of this thesis.

Because much of the correspondence sent to Oxfordshire is quite early, its letters are often reflective of pauper efforts to coerce an underdeveloped and underfunded out-parish relief system, which was still spreading into the peripheral zone in the 1820s and 1830s. The significance of this will be explored in chapter six. As a result its ranking is relatively high for a southern county. Sokoll remarks on the confident use of legal citations, suggesting this desire to force the system also existed in Essex, though makes no comment on the practical involvement of the justices in the relief process.^{135} Utilisation of the justices both supports and advances the theories of King and Stewart on relief in peripheral regions. As well as the need to provide makeshift relief in these

^{135} Sokoll, ‘London’, p. 44.
areas, as they identify, there were makeshift methods used in obtaining it.\textsuperscript{136} Interaction with the justices also embodies some other traits of peripheral welfare that will be presented across the thesis, for instance the importance of face-to-face communication with autonomous elites, set within tight knit communities.\textsuperscript{137} The agency displayed in using the law was also testament to paupers’ self-sufficiency, something King has identified in the north-west and the border counties.\textsuperscript{138}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Understanding how paupers envisaged their rights, as evidenced by their rhetorical and practical defence of them, helps establish regional welfare customs. Work in this chapter has furthered investigations of how the strength of the moral economy affected the distribution of poor relief,\textsuperscript{139} and examined the subject for the first time in the border counties. The research also offers an original approach due to the breadth of the source material, and the statistical analysis of it. Data shows sentiment towards the poor was in decline, as historians have supposed;\textsuperscript{140} this is portrayed in the increasing amount of complaints that relief had been reduced in figure 3.3. The evaluation of pauper narratives through quantitative methods also displays a change in the nature of their appeals. Such findings fit with the exploratory comments by Taylor about the declining confidence of pauper letter writers up to the end of the old poor laws.\textsuperscript{141} Knowing that letter features changed is important for making contrasts involving Welsh letters throughout the thesis, as the majority come from before 1820 and so may not have been as affected by these changes. As discussed in chapter one, the impact of evolving welfare sentiments on the variable treatment paupers received has not been considered as extensively as the influence of other factors.

The evaluation of appeals according to the pauper’s problem and circumstances has highlighted the complexities behind request. Doing so reveals the appeals more confident of receiving relief, such as those following the death of a loved one, substantiating Hurren’s research.\textsuperscript{142} This has been achieved by the large scale analysis of narratives, allowing the comparison of different pauper sub-groups that have already

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} King, Poverty and Welfare, pp. 263-4.
\textsuperscript{139} Jones, ‘Swing’; Hollen Lees, Solidarities, pp. 73-92.
\textsuperscript{140} Hindle, Parish?, p. 398; Hollen Lees, Solidarities, pp. 73-92.
\textsuperscript{141} Taylor, ‘Voices’, pp. 122-3.
\textsuperscript{142} Hurren & King, ‘‘Begging for a Burial’’.
been identified and contextualised by case studies. The quantitative methods offer a way to gauge the huge variability in the practice of the poor laws, shown in chapter one, and to assess the representativeness of the source material produced by these diverse circumstances. This work also illustrates that there are detectable trends within the language of the poor, for instance in the ‘escalation’ of pauper rhetoric. Doing so has been enabled by the ambitious ‘scoring’ of narratives. Such an approach may encourage greater comparison of the source in the future. Furthermore the method reveals the devices and purposes conveyed by pauper letters, rather than their information about specific pauper groups or the basics of the out-parish system. Therefore the study continues to develop our use of this illuminating source.

If the poor had a legal right to relief, they rarely claimed it explicitly; although it may have been couched in more discrete devices. In the border counties the justices did a great deal to uphold perceived rights. The actions they are shown to have taken complement recent literature on their autonomous, community based role, albeit in a new location. The material illustrating their behaviour is relatively underused, and examination of large amounts of it contributes to expanding our knowledge of different types of poor law correspondence. The findings challenge Welsh historians who are bullish about what the negative effects of Anglicisation; in this case the problems caused by absentee English landlords who were also magistrates. The justices helped paupers coerce parishes that were poor and used relief methods more common to the eighteenth century. These features are central to understanding how welfare systems operated both in peripheral areas, and in more residual welfare systems. No historians have traced the moral economy and the variable treatment of the poor through the actions of the overseers, a group that has been under-researched, and to which we now move.

143 King, ‘Sickness and Old Age’.
144 Gestrich, Hurren & King, ‘Sources, Methods and Experiences’, pp. 18-9; Gestrich, King & Raphael, ‘The Experience’, pp. 26-34.
145 For the use of pauper letters in presenting the experience of old age under poverty see Sokoll, ‘Old Age’; for detailed consideration of how the out-parish system was managed see King, ‘‘Torment’’.
146 Charlesworth, Forgotten.
147 King, ‘Summary Courts’.
Chapter 4: Overseers

Introduction
Analysing the little-studied role of the overseer is central to understanding how welfare was practiced differently in peripheral areas. Like much of the thesis this analysis involves new methods of approaching narratives, as overseer attitudes have not been properly examined. The historiography of the overseer more generally is somewhat disparate. The study of parish administration is almost as old as the study of the poor laws themselves. However, the most significant administrative history remains that by the Webbs, a wide-ranging survey work interested in implementation of poor law bodies. As we saw in chapter one, although there have been extensive descriptions of the varied treatment of the poor, there has not been much investigation of how the overseers prescribed the poor laws in such a manner. Because the early nineteenth century has often been depicted as an era of small government, historians have promoted the idea that authorities in Britain operated through a limited framework, rather than outlining this government at a parochial level. Discussion of the overseer’s role has typically been an aside within works more interested in paupers, the place of the overseer in the relief process, or the legislation supposed to control their actions, as opposed to showing their actual decision making. Passing comments are also sometimes made on who the backgrounds of overseers, to provide context for parish government. Other analysis has come as part of investigations into the ‘middling sort’,

though here the office has typically been considered according to its social position. These histories do not constitute dedicated research on the overseers of the poor, adding instead to their own fields of study. Growing realisation that a pauper’s relief claim was negotiable has increasingly revealed the lack of uniformity in overseer behaviour. Despite this there has only been very occasional use of overseer’s correspondence, often just to illustrate case studies. The position of the overseer awaits devoted holistic studies and the benefits brought by narrative history for greater understanding of their practice.

The absence of study of overseers’ behaviour, language and motivations is a surprising feature of poor law histories. It has been requested by historians; ‘keener appreciation of the operation of the out-parish relief network is thus a precursor to a more sensitive interpretation of the character and scope of the poor law system as a whole and its regional and intra-regional character;’ the locating of such spatial differences in practice is again a key theme of this chapter. Others have asked that the role of the middling sort in relief processes be disclosed, for more investigation into the management of distribution, and for greater understanding of how administration shaped welfare structures. Work here addresses all these areas, and builds on the varied literatures that overlap on the topic of the overseers.

Given the vast quantities of correspondence overseers generated, their narrative sources are particularly under-exploited. Quarter session records, diaries and minute books have been the main source material used to examine them. The need to discuss uses of the letters means this will be a longer introduction than in other chapters. Overseer correspondence offers a direct view of the interactions between parishes, and can be applied across England and Wales to a high level of detail. The most extensive incorporation has been in King’s 2005 article, although the work utilises less than thirty

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7 S. King, ‘‘It is Impossible for Our Vestry to Judge His Case into Perfection from Here’: Managing the Distance Dimensions of Poor Relief, 1800–40’, *Rural History*, 16, no. 2 (2005), p. 184.
9 French, *Middle Sort*, pp. 90-140.
letters to three Lancashire parishes.\textsuperscript{10} The piece includes letters from Welsh parishes, but draws few generalisations about the Welsh system other than that it was rate poor and under pressure financially.\textsuperscript{11} Other historians have also occasionally used overseer’s correspondence to provide context for their work.\textsuperscript{12} Sokoll employed items to fill gaps in his primary evidence.\textsuperscript{13} Taylor presents overseer Stephen Garnett as the main decision maker in his article on Kirkby Lonsdale, though does not quote Garnett’s voice.\textsuperscript{14} The potential drawbacks and benefits of overseer’s correspondence have yet to be analysed. They present the same risks as pauper letters, in that they may not be representative of relief transactions that took place within the parish. Taylor has said that for the overseers, ordinary cases required no letters, just billing forms.\textsuperscript{15} This is a bold claim as, exactly with pauper letters, some form of initial contact had to be made between the parishes. Additionally circumstances may have changed during the provision of relief, requiring further correspondence. Even the letters in cases where there was definitely a problem with payment (though these only represent 16 per cent of overseer’s communications) are hugely illuminating of the out-parish relief system. It could be argued overseer’s letters are more trustworthy than pauper letters, having been written under less desperate circumstances.

The complex web of scenarios that impacted all appeals made management of out-parish relief challenging, and makes understanding it even harder. Once more, use of quantitative analysis and a point scoring system represent useful ways to identify broadly representative behaviour. They allow a range of subjects to be addressed as an introduction to the subject of overseer practice. Similar to measuring the tone of pauper letters, doing so with overseer correspondence is ambitious. However due to the more restrained rhetoric often employed by overseers, there are fewer instances when contrasting styles of language, such as anger and friendliness, are found in the same letter. Even so, as with the scoring system concerning pauper correspondence the one used for the overseers should be seen as a sliding scale partly based on the weight of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{10} S. King, “It is Impossible”, p. 161.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 172.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
language employed. A score of five, indicating the friendliest relations between overseers, requires a complement passed on their behaviour, or talk of friendship beyond parish business. A score of four may have evidence of extensive mutual cooperation for the pauper’s benefit, or initial relief of the pauper without threatening removal. Three indicates a matter-of-fact or middling letter, often simply a request to fulfil an account. Two is unfriendly, incorporating a genuine threat of removal, or refusing to advance credit to a pauper, and one conveys explicit criticism of the other overseer’s conduct. Such quantitative techniques for exploring overseer conduct are utilised throughout the chapter.

First considered using the source material is literature concerning the social standing of the vestry. Language used by overseers and paupers regarding the relationship between officials and the local population will be tied to historians’ understandings of the changing accessibility of vestries. It is argued that overseers generally had a keen sense of position, but that Welsh vestries were seen to act on behalf of their parish. The responsibilities associated with this position, which are central to the rest of the chapter, shaped the way overseers interacted, and these responsibilities changed over time. Secondly the more practical aspects of conducting the out-parish relief system are considered. This concerns parishes’ willingness to cooperate. It is suggested that a language of co-operation was used in both friendly and forceful manners by overseers based around the mutual understanding that each represented and served their parishes. Analysis will also measure the threat of removal. Doing so further develops the notion paupers and overseers shared a common understanding of out-relief processes. Thirdly the sentiment of the overseers towards their role is outlined, and reveals the duties they associated with the job. These duties were based on their interpretation of the position, and moulded how they talked to other overseers. The pressures that caused the decline of customary relief rights seen in chapter three will be observed from the point of view of the overseer. This has also been called for by King, ‘there is a need to know more, for instance, about the relationship between the economic background of parishes and the related nature of their out-parish arrangements.’

The argument is offered that these pressures transformed the

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17 King, ‘“It is Impossible”’, p. 184.
overseer’s behaviour, including the amount of professionalism with which they approached their job.

Finally an attempt will be made to score the ‘Welshness’ of counties, according to overseer actions that were common to either Wales, or southern England, including the southern border counties of Gloucestershire and Somerset. This scoring will be based on statistics presented in tables throughout the chapter. The rankings of counties within these tables will determine how ‘Welsh’ their overseers were. The tables show the geographic patterning of letter traits and types by county. All the findings in the tables will be original, firstly because they consider overseer behaviour, and secondly because they contrast poor law correspondence across a range of counties. The tables are frequently presented in groups of two or three to show how certain features, such as those relating to settlement, correlated with each other. Displaying tables in groups also helps develop the picture of a peripheral region through the chapter, and prevents the presentation of a large amount of statistics becoming monotonous. The tables are typically comprised of the standard overseer correspondence sent from each county, unless stated.

Often tables contain counties that are anomalous in their behaviour, and deviate from similar counties that were typical of Wales or southern England. However as each table is only measuring one letter trait such instances are inevitable. Across the tables it will be shown that overall the counties typically share the traits of other counties within their wider regions. Some of the numbers of letter trait occurrences will be small, which makes their representativeness questionable. These small numbers will however often be validated by similar numbers in neighbouring counties, and they will frequently contrast with the amounts of the same feature in counties elsewhere, showing strong regional patterning. Additionally the results will still be generated by the most detailed study of poor law correspondence, across the widest number of letter traits and counties. Once again change over time is a major theme of this chapter, but if it is not referred to, change was not significant. That overseer behaviour did change is unsurprising given the alterations to their role.

The overseer during the crisis of the old poor laws
These men, and some women, lived within or near the parish they served and required a certain amount of wealth to take what was typically a volunteer post rotated amongst
ratepayers. Decisions were open to the self-interest of individual officials, though these decisions had to be justified to paupers, other ratepayers and magistrates. The work could be tedious and overseers may have paid fines, or forced the role onto smaller property holders to avoid it. Parliament had wanted monthly vestry meetings after Sunday services, though this was not enforced, and knowledge of the role was largely assumed. Legal guide books were available but the overseers were not forced to follow them; ‘without the guidance of the law, it is unsurprising that local officials developed their own practices, recording, accounting and payment mechanisms.’ Consequently there was an enormous variance in attitudes between individual parishes, and some paupers ‘encountered bewildering delays’ in the processing of their claims.

The overseers had to cope with the same pressures on parish finances that caused the decline of the moral economy. The period covered by this thesis saw increasing concentration of power within the vestry, which gave greater influence to the wealthier ratepayers; the Gilbert Act of 1782 began such a process, and was followed with the Sturges-Bourne Acts passed in 1818 and 1819, though both were permissive. The latter allowed one vote for everyone who possessed property above £50 in rateable value, and then another for each additional £25, up to a maximum of six votes. It also stopped the poor attending open vestry meetings. The acts encouraged the employment of more salaried overseers. Increased rigour was expected of such people, who found themselves under greater surveillance, decreasing their autonomy and the ability of the poor to negotiate with an individual. Also two justices were now required to overturn an overseer’s decision, diminishing the power of autonomous, individual justices to defend pauper rights. However the Sturges-Bourne Acts were not widely taken up, with just over a fifth of parishes opting to do so by 1834. Additionally due to the increasing permanence of the position, acquaintances between overseers and paupers would have

18 Gestrich et al argue urban areas moved quickly to appoint a permanent overseer, however the idea of the one year amateur is more popular in the literature, A. Gestrich, E. Hurren & S. King, ‘Narratives of Poverty and Sickness in Europe 1780-1938: Sources, Methods and Experiences’, in A. Gestrich, E. Hurren & S. King eds, Poverty and Sickness in Modern Europe: Narratives of the Sick Poor, 1780-1938 (London 2012), p. 9.
19 Hollen Lees, Solidarities, p. 25.
20 King, ‘‘It is Impossible’’, p. 165.
22 Hollen Lees, Solidarities, pp. 73-100; also see chapter three.
23 French, Middle Sort, pp. 122-3.
24 For the power concentration caused by the Gilbert Act see Webb & Webb, Poor Law, pp. 272-6.
been growing stronger. The 1832 Royal Commission criticised the practice of unpaid overseers and stated that ratepayers meetings were irresponsible. Consequently the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act saw even greater centralisation of power with the aim of improving professionalism. This professionalism will now be examined, and it was underpinned by the overseer’s understanding of their position.

The status of the vestry
The history of parish politics has been largely inseparable from the significance of social status within the community. Although these are relevant topics for the distribution of poor relief, works examining them have rarely considered the poor laws, and especially their practical operation. Taking a more abstract view of parochial procedure, Wrightson describes the parish thus; ‘a political forum- not simply as a unit of secular or ecclesiastical administration, nor even as a complex of institutions focusing social interaction intensely within a specific geographical area, but as a tangled, messy, skein of overlapping and intersecting social networks, most of which[...] were networks of power.’ He believes parish structures formed a repressive social oligarchy. There is an extensive overlap between work on the power relations involved in parish politics, and that concerning the social standing of the middling sort. French’s work is highly indicative of this; despite a fairly comprehensive approach to the importance of parish office, his interest is in ‘the threshold of entitlement to rule the parish, as opposed to the entitlement to poor relief.’ Other histories of the middling sort share this concern with the social importance of parish office. French recognises that officials acted as principal inhabitants on behalf of the parish, due to their status and length of residence, which is significant when considering their interactions with those in other parishes. In an investigation of parish politics, Hindle perceives the

33 French, *Middle Sort*, pp. 132-5.
emergence of the middling sort as vital, and gives prominence to notions of social stratification.  

Estimations have been made regarding what impact these abstract concepts had on relief distribution; ‘the paradoxical nature of the social developments of the period was enshrined in the institutions of the Poor Law – providing relief, enforcing discipline, an expression of communal responsibility, yet a potent reminder of social distance.’ Social relations would have had ramifications for how paupers approached the wealthier members of the vestry, who were increasingly powerful. Levine and Wrightson, who have written on the significance of social distance, have suggested physical interaction with the pauper at the vestry may have softened the overseer’s handling of the case, which carries implications for the more distanced communications of the out-parish system. These ideas on power dynamics are highly relevant here, and developing them to consider their effect on the practical operation of the poor laws represents a natural next step for such research.

Similar to general research regarding overseers, information on their behaviour in the Welsh borders is also limited. Within the work that has been written, there are contrasting viewpoints. Some historians say that well-established, egalitarian Welsh democracy existed in vestries, whilst others argue that poor law authorities represented an English system enforced on parishes that neither wanted nor could afford it. Presently we do not know enough about Welsh overseers to compare them to the tightly-knit group of amateurish individuals King and Stewart believe were in charge in peripheral regions. Some research suggests vestry members would not have been too socially removed from their Welsh communities. Because of the small size of farms and low ratio of labourers to the relatively poor farmers, they probably had a common interest in the well-being of community members; ‘[the] niceties of class distinction were also observed between the farming and labouring population who shared not

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only the same language but, in some cases, a similar economic background. Their holding of a lower social position should have made parish officials more accessible, and the smaller middle class would have reduced the opportunity for a concentration of power amongst the wealthier members of the vestry. Jeffreys Jones says vestry democracy was supported by the attendance of a large percentage of the parish at meetings.

However Welsh parishes have also been painted as disinterested in the poor laws, with low attendance of vestries in remote areas. Many vestries did not meet often, and evidence from Lancashire suggests that this may have been common in non-conformist areas. Understandably in these poorer, often disorganised parishes, the position of overseer was ‘not coveted’ and sometimes the position was filled with someone who lacked the means to do the job. Such unorganised vestries were not the norm across the border region. By the end of the period being considered here, of the 103 parishes in Shropshire, 13 had select vestries, and 40 had paid overseers.

The language used in letters to overseers suggests there was greater democracy and equality in parish politics in the borders than in the comparison counties. The most prominent linguistic evidence of this was the use of the term ‘parishioners’, either in applications to the overseer, or responses from them. It indicated they acted at the direction of the parishioners, and were sanctioned by the wider community. It occurred on 56 occasions, 32 of which were in the 218 Welsh letters, including from higher advocates, sent to, or 195 items of overseer correspondence sent from, these parishes.

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43 French, Middle Sort, p. 124; Jeffreys Jones, ‘Parochial Administration’.
This contrasts with 17 times out of 1,130 letters concerning the English border counties, and only 7 in 1,131 for the comparison counties. Sokoll has recognised the term ‘parishioner’ to have represented greater confidence when employed as a valediction by a pauper. Their use of the word to address the overseers could therefore be symbolic of a belief they were not dissimilar socially. The fact that use of the word spans most counties in the borders, and can be found across the time period, suggests it is not the result of dialect. Additionally these differences between the regions exist in other language use; notions of acting on behalf of a wider population in the form of the ‘inhabitants’, ‘town’ or ‘parish’ total thirteen instances. Nine of these were in the border counties, and only four in the comparison counties. French that ‘inhabitants’ was most likely just a reference to the ratepayers. Presumably this was also the same of appeals to the ‘parishioners’, and it is unlikely all parish members were literally consulted. However the idea it was symbolic of more representative and accessible overseers is supported by literature that suggests approachable vestries were commonplace in Wales. These letters suggest that the term was applied to those of higher social status within the parish;

‘I Do Desire that you will speake to the Parishoners at the Vestrey upon the account of David Williams that liv’d with Mr John Sehen and how he Refused him of his cloathes which had Been more Need for to given him New’

The parishioners here were those who attended vestry meetings. The letter acknowledged that they should all be consulted. Correspondence sent to Merthyr Mawr in Glamorgan concerning Bridget Morris suggests a similar role;

‘Mr Rees late of Rhyd y-Cesis is dead – I hope you will be advised to advance some money and send them with the bearer – or send some one of your parishioners to see her’

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47 French, Middle Sort, p. 99.
48 Davies, ‘Rural Area’, p. 258.
49 PA, Meifod M/EP/41/O/X/29, Williams to overseers, 27th June 1799.
50 GlamA, P/99/CW/1-11, Evans to overseers, 16th July 1835.
It is highly probable that the parishioner sent would have been a vestry member, and not someone simply associated with the parish. Coincidently the border counties also saw the only two appeals to ‘the ratepayers’.

An awareness of acting on behalf of, or applying to the vestry was slightly more common in the comparison counties, though was also popular in the English border counties. Analysis has excluded use of the trait by overseer Henry Roper of Oundle in Wiltshire, who wrote 79 of the letters in the corpus, and who had clearly made writing the vestry’s behalf part of his idiolect.51 A position within a more established English vestry carried social credit within those communities, and consequently could be a contentious subject;

‘As I was not honord by being among the Elect for your Select Vestry I do not choose, by appearing there, to subject myself to be told, or even Considered an Intruder. I have understood that the Poors Rate on my property has been raised. Not by a meeting fairly convened for that purpose; not by the same Persons or in the same way in which, with the whole Parish, it was formerly approved nore was even the slightest information officially given either to me, or my Tenant, Willaim Austy of such an intention, but smuggled up with other business (by a few good Friends of mine & Austys I suppose) in a way which I think was illegal & therefore protest against it.’52

The author of was annoyed about being overlooked for membership of the vestry, and felt that he had been further victimised when decisions on poor rates were made. This is symbolic of the personal conflicts exercised through status, and displays a method of repression that could be used against members of the middling orders. The communication represents one of only eleven refusals to pay poor rates outside of Wales.

A trait more common in the comparison counties than the borders was to write to the ‘gentlemen of the parish’, a more elitist term that suggested although they acted

51 WSA, 249p/216/1-120, Roper to overseers, 13th April 1833-7th May 1836.
52 BRO, A, P/FC OP/9/15, Pusreer to overseers, no date.
for the parish, there was some separation from the rest of the population. Such terminology was never used in Wales;

‘Sir, I trust you will Excuse my Recomendin Thos Blackmore to your notice And to the Gents of the Vestry his Wife has been Ill and Confind to hur bed Ever sins Crismas Last’

The language in this letter to the ‘Gents of the Vestry’ was subordinate, asking to be excused. The author went on to detail family arrangements and income. Providing additional information to justify support was of growing importance by the time of the letter, in 1833. He then said any relief would be a ‘Great Deed of Charity’, which was an appeal to a waning sense of paternalism. The scribe of Benjamin Sparks also used a respectful manner when he wrote from Wiltshire to Gloucestershire regarding ownership of a house used by the parish;

‘I should be extremely sorry to pursue any legal measures against such respectable Gentlemen as you are and the use of this application is now to him to you know that mr Sparks is serious in this business and has requested us to give you this formal notice of his intentions to enforce payment if it is not immediately settled’

Though the letter was demanding, it embodied an air of deference to the overseers that was uncommon in Wales. These vestry members were seen as occupying a higher social position and the request was directed solely at them. Such a situation would have occurred more with the spread of select vestries which were less accessible to the poor. The letter supports Sokoll in saying deferential rhetoric and offensive gestures did not necessarily come independently. English comparison counties were also the only ones

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53 The more common salutation of simply ‘gentlemen’ has been omitted here, to only show where the term was associated with parish representation.
55 GA, P328/OV7/2, Sparks to overseers, 14th June 1800.
where overseers wrote to their ‘brother overseer’. This term appears six times, and typically quite late in the period, with four instances in the 1830s. It was employed in this message from Bradford in West Yorkshire down to Gloucestershire;

‘I am unwilling to take a Step against my Brother Officers which may be unpleasant, but my duty to this parish will Compel me to apply for a Distress loan and against you unless the Sum due 4.7.0 be immediately sent me’

57

The term carried notions of the overseers operating on a mutually understood social level. It was thought that the responsibilities of being overseer would be appreciated by the recipient. By the time of writing, in 1834, this duty was increasingly seen as the need to cut expenditure rather than relieve paupers. ‘Duty’ was used to threaten Uley, and though it was not always used so directly, it invoked a common standard amongst overseers to be aspired to. Parochial correspondence used this language to encourage other overseers to act, and co-operate within the out-parish system.

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 display how overseers were addressed in each county, which impacted the way they interpreted their duties. As well as analysing the overseer letters sent from each county, they also incorporate the pauper letters sent to them, to fully gauge the language used to recognise overseers in their communities. Most overseers in peripheral counties, but specifically those in Wales, occupied a more accessible position. However it was less socially important, and subsequently they were not as moulded by ideas of duty. As a result more democratic language to address the vestry was common here, as it was in Oxfordshire. This county behaved anomalously on a number of overseer traits, possibly due to its small corpus size. Overseers in peripheral counties going through industrial transition such as Lancashire and Cheshire saw their position differently to those in other peripheral counties. It is notable that Wiltshire, Somerset and Gloucestershire have relatively similar language use in both tables, representing a south-west region that appears in many subsequent overseer traits. Contrastingly the term ‘gentlemen of the parish’, or ‘of the vestry’ was more than three times as common in English areas, including the borders, than in Wales. The wider use of it in Shropshire is unsurprising, given the mix of poor law administrations. This

57 GA, P345/OV3/5/1, Mundy to overseers, 2nd June 1834.
Table 4.1: Overseers and paupers using representative language to refer to the overseer’s role

<table>
<thead>
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<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English BC</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus</td>
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<td>51</td>
<td>(9)</td>
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Table 4.2: Overseers and paupers using elitist language to refer to the overseer’s role

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Denbighshire</td>
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<td>(20)</td>
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<td>Flintshire</td>
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<td>(12)</td>
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<td>Glamorgan</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
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<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
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<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</table>
language was particularly common in Essex, and even more so the basic salutation ‘gentlemen’, which has not been measured across all the counties. If the trait was just measured in pauper letters, because overseer correspondence is not included within Sokoll’s edited collection, Essex would have ranked second in frequency of use, indicating similar behaviour to other southern English counties. Comparably, only once was the more peripheral term ‘parishioners’ used to address appeals in the Essex sample. Because the position of overseer was more established in English communities, there was an understanding between overseers that the position carried certain duties, and this helped the practice of out-parish relief through mutually understood methods of co-operation.

**Practice**

As we saw in chapter one, many works on parish administration, though valuable, did not make concerted comments on the decision making of overseers. The Webbs focused mostly on the practical behaviour of the institutions that conducted welfare. Marshall, whilst more concerned with the impact on the poor, was also interested in the effect of administering the laws. Literature on overseers’ actions remains sparse despite their importance. The only dedicated consideration of their role in out-parish relief has been King’s 2005 article, which focuses on outlining the mechanics of the system. King stresses the importance of the establishment of trust between parishes, and tells us that they had to cope with reputation in a similar fashion to paupers. In work on book keeping practices, he has also talked of the importance of accurate accounting in fostering trust. King believes few overseers were uncooperative and that ultimately the out-parish system persisted because it was too important to fail. Similarly Sokoll has commented that despite the system’s apparently delicate nature, relationships took time to degrade. Due to the many variables that affected parochial business, historians have

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60 King, ‘‘It is Impossible,’’ pp. 171-80.  
61 Ibid.  
63 King, ‘‘It is Impossible’’, pp. 180-4.  
accepted that it is equally hard to generalise about parish officials as about paupers; the extra-legal out-parish relief system was a complex and evolving entity. It forged connections between parishes, townships and unions with very different topographical, locational and socio-economic characteristics. Its rules were largely unwritten and the integrity of the system depended on trust between parishes and between parishes and paupers. However large scale quantitative methods allow us to produce generalisations on social standing, language and practices amidst the variation in the system uncovered by other historians.

The subject of the removal of paupers by their host parishes has remained an ever important issue, though its role in poor law correspondence deserves greater focus in its own right. While its significance in pauper letters has been increasingly recognised, its use in the language of overseers has yet to be explored. Comment was made by James Taylor, who talked about the pauper threatening their settlement parish that they would be removed to the parish at a cost, but not the pauper’s threat of returning of their own accord. It was further developed by Sokoll in 1997, with greater focus on how both removal and return were exploited by the pauper. By 2000 Sokoll went as far as to declare ‘The disadvantage of their “coming home” was indeed the key strategic argument in the negotiations with the overseers,’ and this understanding has underpinned much work since. However, though Sokoll recognises both the threat by the paupers to get themselves removed, and to return of their own accord, he does not fully expand on their significant differences, which had consequences for negotiations, and also had evolving regional dynamics. King has recently argued that the threat of removal was not as prominent from the late eighteenth century onwards, due to the ever

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66 King, “It is Impossible”, p. 183.
68 Taylor, ‘Speenhamland’.
69 Sokoll, ‘Old Age’, pp. 139-143.
increasing ability of a pauper to negotiate the settlements laws.\textsuperscript{72} Furthermore statistical analysis of pauper letters by King leads him to believe more paupers returned through their own efforts than were removed.\textsuperscript{73} Research here will add quantified information, and evidence of change over time to this important sub-topic.

Many remarks on the practices of overseers in Wales are highly negative, and often come from Welsh historians who consider the poor laws to have been a system enforced on a country ill-suited for them. Dodd believes select vestries were unpopular, and that the amateur overseers serving in them were often incompetent and corrupt, whereas Howell talks of a ‘lax and inefficient administration.’\textsuperscript{74} As previously mentioned, Welsh overseers were thought notoriously tough in enacting the settlement laws.\textsuperscript{75} Much historiography of these parishes has been characterised by low levels of rate collection, and King tells us Welsh parishes either could not afford to work with the out-parish system or would not;\textsuperscript{76} a lack of coinage also meant that traditional credit systems were more relied on.\textsuperscript{77} The payment of rates in kind is thought to have remained common in some areas into the early nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{78} Consequently there were large amounts of relief in kind; ‘such a significant level of unrecorded payments in kind constitutes just one of the problems encountered in attempting to assess income levels of the labouring poor in cash terms in this period.’\textsuperscript{79} More positively, King and Stewart think the way parishes were organised in peripheral regions may have made officials particularly reactive to need;\textsuperscript{80} though as with other aspects of their peripheral study, the characteristics they have identified await a dedicated investigation. It has also

\textsuperscript{73} King, ‘Settlement and Belonging’, p. 85.
\textsuperscript{74} A. Dodd, ‘The Old Poor Law in North Wales’, Archaeologia Cambrensia, 81 (1926), pp. 131-2; D. Howell, The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales (Cardiff 2000), p. 114.
\textsuperscript{76} Dodd, ‘North Wales’, p. 112; M. Humphreys, The Crisis of Community: Montgomeryshire, 1680-1815 (Cardiff 1996), pp. 56-7; King, ‘Settlement and Belonging’, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{77} Howell, Rural Poor, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{79} Howell, Rural Poor, p. 68; Dodd, ‘North Wales’, p. 114.
often been claimed that local officials were particularly autonomous.\textsuperscript{81} The use of the letters and the actions they portray enable us to examine such notions in practice.

The language used by overseers displayed an awareness of parity of position with other overseers, and this strengthened co-operation whilst running the out-parish system. These exchanges could be used implore others to act appropriately, but the majority of interactions were initially respectful, and showed willingness to co-operate. There was also a language of common understanding when the obligation to remove or relieve was mentioned. This postscript accompanied a payment from the overseers of Chippenham to Tetbury, both in Gloucestershire;

\begin{quote}
‘I am much oblige to you for the trouble you taken in Paying the widow Paskett. and if at any time I can Broker you any assistance I shall be Happy to do it.’\textsuperscript{82}
\end{quote}

Displayed here are the benefits of a co-operative nature that could be developed in the future, and the understanding that each pauper constituted a common value in the trading of inter-parish relations. However, in the same manner that helping another parish’s pauper was part of an understood exchange of favours, the occurrence of problems created a reverse scenario;

\begin{quote}
‘I wrote to you some weeks ago for a renewal of your order to continue the pay of the Richards and not having heard from you I hope you will excuse me for renewing the application for Instruction this to you may seem unnecessary but having been a loser of ---- from a Parish in Staffordshire in consequence of continuing with pauper pay without the order of newly elected officers it has of course put me on my guard to prevent the occurance of such a transaction.\textsuperscript{83}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{82} GA, P328/OV7/9, Bradbury to overseers, 31\textsuperscript{st} October 1826.  
\textsuperscript{83} NRO, 194/72, Gibbert to overseers, 19\textsuperscript{th} May 1827.
An unrelated party had caused the problem, but the experience activated a commonly understood sense of mistrust. This exchange of suspicion could be much more direct though, as a letter from Avening to Tetbury in 1832 shows;

‘If Mr Rose is unable to pay Poor Rates without Parochial assistance – Hope the Parish officers of Tetbury are not so unneighbourly as to force the payment – Knowing that many of their Parishoners are residing at avening who are not compelled to do so but if that be the practice at Tetbury of course it will at avening.’

The threat to charge poor rates to Tetbury’s paupers in retaliation is a good example of the exchange of negative feeling between parishes. Short of legal action this retaliatory bargaining represented the best way to exercise power in inter-parochial relations.

Overseers were more prone to use flattery than paupers. This was partly because they were considerably less desperate, but was more due to the importance some parishes placed on their reputation, and fulfilling the duty that came with the position. A message sent to Chepstow in July 1815 is representative of many;

‘The overseers of the Parish of Monmouth would recommend to your Kind notice and interance – Andrew Watkins and his 6 Children – as proper objects to revise weekly pay, the mans labour not being a sufficient proportion for their support, their case has already been laid before you and by that – you will be perfectly capable of ascertaining the relief they require and no doubt will act with that humanity that already characterizes your conduct’

The Monmouth overseers sought to complement Chepstow’s by suggesting that they were well known for taking care of paupers. However this may have been insincere and manipulative as the host parish, Chepstow, were already familiar with the pauper’s situation and had not fully relieved them, so were not being particularly hospitable. The

84 GA, P328a/OV7/15, Whitley to overseers, 16th March 1832.
85 GwA, D.365.79, Thomas Tyler to overseers, 28th July 1815.
letter also represented a challenge, to fulfil expectations of a reputation thought worth aspiring to, and can be seen specifically on 21 occasions in the 1,484 standard letters sent by overseers. A letter sent to Tetbury encapsulates it perfectly:

‘you was very rong Informed concerning Hales Family for I do not see which way he is to suport them for there is 4 small ones which Do earn nothing and 2 which do earn but very tribling preaps you may think I do speak in favour of them but I do not I have told you when I have seen you I would do the same for your Parish as I would do for our own I should think I did not do Justice for the Parish if I did not’

The host parish were challenging Tetbury to adhere to a rightful level of support. The overseer claimed their parish would provide better care, and that parishes had a duty to do so; a common standard of care was expected. Also exhibited was another key difference between letters from parishes and paupers, which is that overseers appealed to the whole parish to behave according to certain principles, whereas paupers tended to plead more emotively with an individual.

Transport of out-parish payments gradually improved across the period, shown by the fact more than half of the sixteen complaints about difficulties doing so came prior to the 1820s. They were much more common with Welsh parishes, and also the English border counties, echoing King and Stewart’s identification of the importance of terrain in shaping peripheral welfare. This was not the only way terrain affected peripherality however. The complaints were most prevalent in the winter, as a letter sent in December 1817 shows;

‘Mary Caswell Having now due – on Friday next Due 19th Two Pounds & 2s for her Two children which amount is allow by you said Parish( - the weather and Roads being so bad( - she will take it was a particular favour( - if you will allow your next pay day remit the above amount by post’

86 GA, P328a OV 7/20, Leech to overseers, no date.
88 SA, P81/L/1/18/12/158, Mathews to overseer, 16th December 1817.
Also demonstrated here is that it was not uncommon for paupers to return home to collect payment, something which happened most in the Welsh border counties, despite the difficult terrain. Many features of peripherality were incorporated into the following communication from Llangadock in Carmarthenshire;

‘as to the overseers journey they say it was not made on Harry Davids auth and they think they should not pay- Yet if you say they are liable they will pay eight Shillings a week is a large sum with us altho not so with you’

The overseers objected to the expense of the journey, which would presumably have been to inspect the pauper. They complained the expenditure was not felt as heavily by Chepstow as by their parish deeper within Wales, and perhaps much poorer. As alluded to here, some overseers would meet one another, even if it was just at the quarter sessions. From the 1,484 overseers’ letters there were 53 references to meeting for parish business, though this practice was probably much more frequent. A meeting was more likely in the Welsh border counties, presenting further evidence of the face-to-face culture in the region used to mediate a less advanced out-parish system, and seen previously in the approaching of local justices. Consequently many meetings related to parish business were early, with 38 made prior to 1820, indicating that they were probably decreasing as the system developed. In contrast there were 23 references to meetings due to personal friendships amongst overseers, seemingly unrelated to parish affairs. These were more common in the English counties, including in the borders. Such friendships were formed between well-established overseers, from a more socially conscious background. They were used to dealing with one another and were mindful of an overseer’s duties.

Tables 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 show these physical interactions that shaped local behaviour in each of the counties considered here. They display overseers’ desire to make face-to-face contact with one another, and highlight differences between references to personal friendships in table 4.3, and meetings directly concerned with parish business, portrayed in 4.4. The third table shows to what extent face-to-face

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89 Gwa, D.314.0016, Yeomans to overseers, 8th June 1832.
Table 4.3: References to personal friendships with other overseers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
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Table 4.4: References to business meetings with other overseers

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Contact was tempered by difficult terrain. All of the tables are based on the standard overseer correspondence sent from these counties. When the information in tables 4.3 and 4.4 is combined with that of tables 4.1 and 4.2, they show that the mutual
The recognition of duties associated with the role of overseer in England stretched right up to the border with Wales itself.

**Table 4.5: References by overseers to difficult journeys to or from their parish**

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The areas that complained of difficult journeys predictably often had to negotiate upland terrain, with most complaints coming from Wales and Cumbria, and also the border counties. Difficult journeys reduced personal friendships between overseers, but necessitated the certainty of personal contact for business. Despite its terrain, Cumbrian overseers frequently met as friends, and less often for parish business, suggesting a well-developed out-parish network. Consequently it has some parallels with rural southern England, despite the differences in relief levels. Although King and Stewart were right to say harsh terrain was indicative of peripheral areas,\(^\text{90}\) other features were also important.

The face-to-face culture in Wales extended to dealings with the poor. Despite the fact the majority of pauper appeals came from different counties, most ‘first appeals’, which were outlined in the last chapter, came from within the same county. This is because, as has been mentioned, many paupers nearby chose to return home to

collect regular relief once their entitlement had been established. The propensity of paupers to do so was recognised by Sokoll, though never quantified. In Wales, 7 per cent stated that they would normally come and collect relief but had to make alternative arrangements, compared to 3 per cent in the English border counties and comparison counties. There may have been a large amount of out-parishioners who regularly returned to collect payment who have left little trace in the source material. This is especially so in Wales where, aside from a high proportion of paupers coming home, only a quarter of their letters were sent from within the same county, signifying many more paupers who lived relatively close to their settlement parishes were also returning. The amount of letters sent from within the same county rises to just over a third in the English border counties, and two thirds for the English comparators, where nearby paupers routinely sent letters to their settlement parishes. These figures underline the face-to-face nature of peripheral relief, and could have been caused by parishes being too poor to support an out-parish system, or the fact it had not become as widely used, and so the poor returned home to negotiate support.

As there was a large amount of paupers habitually visiting the vestry of their settlement parish, the threat of one returning and appearing at a vestry meeting to cause problems was perhaps not hugely significant. This threat was sometimes a bluff by paupers, and subsequent letters reveal that it was often not carried out. The statistics support this as throughout the corpus, paupers in the same county who could have returned more easily, only threatened return in 11 per cent of letters. Those in different counties made this threat in 20 per cent. Figure 4.1 embodies pauper letters from all three regions and shows threats of returning generally grew over time, especially towards the end of the period. There were more threats to return following changes to the settlement laws in 1795, which stated that a pauper should be removed if they became chargeable to the host parish. This may have increased awareness in the laws, and the act will be shown as highly significant on a number of graphs. If this accounts for more paupers threatening return around the start of the century, then the seven occurrences representing the first data point appear as the only anomaly, producing a higher percentage of threats than the period between 1806 and 1826. When assessing the data used for figure 4.2, the first data point, though drawn from a small amount of letters, complements the wider trend depicted by the line. This graph combines overseer

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Fig. 4.1: % of pauper letters threatening some form of return

The numbers adjacent to the line give the absolute number of letters represented by its individual data points.

Fig. 4.2: % of letters from overseers threatening removal

The numbers adjacent to the line give the absolute number of letters represented by its individual data points.
correspondence from all the regions. It reveals threats of removal from overseers mostly increased from the early nineteenth century, though the surge of interest in settlement in the 1790s can also be seen. The threat of removal was a tool of intensifying importance as financial pressure mounted over time, and when figure 4.2 is contrasted with figure 4.1, it shows that threats of return from paupers largely increased as threats of removal from overseers did. The thinking that poor Welsh parishes threatened removal a disproportionate amount is substantiated here to a small extent. A total of 26 per cent of Welsh overseer’s letters threatened removal, contrasted with 24 in the comparison counties, and 20 in the English border counties.

Figure 4.3 is compiled from standard pauper letters. Within it can be seen the number of paupers who threatened a more typical return. This is contrasted with those who suggested they may be officially removed, either due to approaching their host parish for relief, thus becoming chargeable to it, or saying their host overseers had threatened removing them. Although the number of occurrences highlighted is small for the 1780s, and only drawn from twenty-five pauper letters, the data points still fit the consistent trends shown across the rest of the graph, and are therefore possibly quite reliable. Sokoll has drawn attention to the differences between these two threats, but has not developed this any further.92

Use of the threat of being removed is more evidence of paupers understanding trends in the relief process, increasingly using it as the overseers threatened removal more, and making basic threats of return less. In Wales paupers were not as aware of these trends, and settlement had not developed into a flexible tool of negotiation as it had in much of England. Only 27 per cent of all threats to come home in Wales involved being removed there by the host parish. This figure was 42 per cent in the English comparison counties, and 34 in the English border counties. Conversely Welsh paupers threatened to simply return in 21 per cent of letters, compared to 20 in the English borders and seventeen in the comparison counties. Figure 4.3 shows the threat of return was an older device. Someone wrote this appeal for Ann Brooks to Bedminster in November 1832;

‘Her general Health is in a bad State. She requires both Dressing and internal Medicine. She declares that if some steps are not

Fig. 4.3: % threat of return and removal from paupers over time

The numbers adjacent to each line give the absolute number of letters represented by the individual data points on that line.
taken, to forward her recovery, She Shall be oblig’d to throw herself & family wholly on the Parish.'

The ambiguity displayed here is important, as it is not clear what parish the pauper threatened to ‘throw’ themselves upon. It could have been her host parish to encourage them to remove her, or her settlement parish following a return of her own accord.

The way paupers and overseers worked with threats of return and removal in each county can be seen in tables 4.6, 4.7 and 4.8. Table 4.6 represents all overseer correspondence sent from each county, and the final two tables are taken from all standard pauper correspondence sent to each county.

**Table 4.6: Amount of overseer letters threatening removal**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>English BC</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
<td><strong>26.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>51</strong></td>
<td><strong>(8)</strong></td>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(21)</td>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershires</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>Comparison Counties</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>Corpus</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The treatment of removal by overseers, and how paupers reacted to it, shows the most notable split in the peripheral counties; between Wales, and those of the mid-border

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region and the north-west, specifically the more industrial counties. Cumulatively all three tables yield important lessons regarding how paupers interacted with the overseer’s rules, and the spread of peripheral attitudes. In areas less familiar with out-parish relief, settlement was important. As the basis of the out-parish system, settlement

Table 4.7: Threats of return from paupers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English BC</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Counties</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8: Claims that removal had been threatened, or threats by pauper to get self removed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English BC</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Counties</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
could be guarded strongly by the overseers, and if they did not choose to alter their stance on it, as in much of Wales, then paupers had to adjust accordingly. This occasional inflexibility of the overseers will be presented in other aspects of their behaviour. It contrasts with some pauper welfare customs that could move into peripheral areas from more southern English ones, according to broad migratory movements, for instance into industrialising areas.

However overseers could stop upholding some local habits if they thought they stood to gain, as they sometimes did in industrialising regions such as the north-west. In these places, due to the extensive population movements, settlement laws were more selectively applied. As a result Cheshire and Lancashire behaved quite similarly to the counties of southern England on all three tables. These English areas support the idea from historians such as King and Winter that the negotiability of settlement was ever increasing. However their research would be enriched by the consideration of peripheral counties where settlement was comparatively inflexible. Table 4.7 also shows Welsh paupers did indeed have the confidence to threaten return that King attributes to southern England. When it came to more flexible uses of settlement, one of which is illustrated in table 4.8, all English paupers showed their experience of the law’s negotiability, and used these methods more than Welsh paupers.

In many instances in which removal was threatened, relations were quite strained, and this is evident in an appeal from Llanbeblig in Carnarvon to Henllan in Denbighshire;

‘It is well known that Gwen Bassett and the Children are often in want, and in great distress – though Gwen Bassett does her utmost for their support – And further assure you that it is a shame to the Parishioners of Henllan (whom is reconed to be respectable) to leave the little creatures in such a miserable condition – and as for the Parish of Llanbeblig to Remove them again that only further shews the meanness of the Parishioners of Henllan, when they must be aware that the Children were regularly removed and that they were suffered to return on the understanding that they were in

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94 King & Winter, Settlement.
95 King, ‘Sickness and Old Age’, p. 6.
future to remain here at the total expense of the Parish of Henllan.\footnote{DA, PD/38/1/179, Evans to overseers, 13th August 1835.}

The threat of removal was still relatively veiled, and it was implied that it did not have to happen. The negative comment regarding the parish’s reputation evidences some of the chapter’s main themes, and suggests the overseers had failed their duty of care. The direct attack on the settlement parish’s ‘meanness’ is also interesting. It constitutes a much more forthright insult than would have been common between English overseers who occupied more well-established social positions. A letter from Lyndhurst in Hampshire to Brighton provides a good example of this;

‘a document has been received here from Brighthelmstone purporting to be a copy order for the removal of Charles Wild, his Wife and son to this Parish which very much surprised the Parish Officers to find that an able man with so little incumbrance as Wild has should at this season of the year apply for relief, and they conceive it very uncivil on the part of Brighton Parish for not apprising them of the circumstances before they entered upon a removal of such wanderers who have already put this Parish to enormous expence by similar imposition, however as it is you are at liberty to treat the case as you think proper.\footnote{HantsRO, 25M84/PO71/23/10, Smith to overseers, 11th May 1830.}'

Sent at the late date of 1830, it responded to an abrupt removal threat that the host parish had not made previously. This action was seen by Lyndhurst as ‘uncivil’ and other condemnations were made. Despite this, the criticism was still delivered in gentlemanly language, respectful of the other overseer’s position. Lyndhurst invited the host parish to treat the case as they thought ‘proper’, suggesting that they trusted Brighton to know what was appropriate.

The methods of payment and removal exhibited through this section were set in a language of common understanding. Such understanding did not just involve knowing the out-parish system, but also the duties towards one’s parish that were part of being an
overseer. These relationships were not always wholly positive though. Strong associations between parishes could develop, but most were not long term and parishes were always wary. Equally in tough economic times this duty was paired with protectionism towards one’s own parish, and could increasingly be seen in the sentiments overseers expressed.

**Sentiment**

Similar to many of the topic areas surveyed in this chapter, discussion of overseers’ attitudes towards their jobs does not form a unified literature. Additionally, attempting to accurately measure sentiment is a contentious concept, which the methodology outlined in chapter two is designed to address. To establish how overseer sentiment has been perceived by historians, it is necessary to consider the customary relief rights of paupers outlined in the last chapter. The idea that paupers possessed certain rights according to their region, life cycle situation or welfare background is a reflection of how autonomous overseers treated these customary rights. Similarly the way paupers’ customary rights changed was a result of the growing pressures on the overseers; ‘by the later 1820s the scale of these responsibilities was overwhelming local government.’

Considered in this manner the literature on overseer attitudes towards paupers is vast. However it has developed through a long established interest in the poor, and consequently been framed in different terminology.

Recent research on the out-parish system has suggested administrative paperwork, in the form of reports, examinations, and letters between overseers and from advocates, increased in this period. Such administrative change has partly been attributed to greater centralisation of the relief system and growth of the information state more generally. King says improved numerical records and organisation generally, strengthened commitment to the poor laws in their final years. More numerical information and better bookkeeping was required from vestries following the Sturges-Bourne Acts. It remains to be seen if this increase in bureaucracy equated to a decrease in emotional sentiment towards the poor.

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101 King, “‘You May Trust’”.
102 Ibid., p. 51.
Related to sentiment, evidence on the competence of overseers has frequently been limited to interesting anecdotes. Consequently we do not have a rounded picture of their professionalism. The Webbs declared authorities ‘calamitously unequal to their task,’ in what was a damming indictment, blamed on a lack of central government control.\textsuperscript{103} However these old style polemics have generally faded, especially as the individuality of behaviour has been brought to the fore with narrative histories. Of course this brings examples of individuals who acted inappropriately.\textsuperscript{104} Hindle argues that vestry meetings could be chaotic affairs with drinking commonplace, and Brundage claims overseers often tried to avoid attending meetings where they might incur the poor’s wrath.\textsuperscript{105} Ultimately though it is typically accepted that evidence of poor practice can easily be found, but should not be considered widespread.\textsuperscript{106} Using narratives to assess negligence and other features of the relief system has yet to occur in Welsh poor law history, although the practices the sources reveal mean they would be the best approach to use.

Evidence in the material collated here suggests overseers felt a sense of duty towards their position. Originally this involved providing for the poor. However as financial pressures mounted, their alignment of duty changed, and overseers became more interested in reducing expenditure. Figure 4.4 uses the scoring system for letter tone, and illustrates overseer friendliness from all the regions. It shows a sustained deterioration in their language used towards one another. The figure is comparable to the decline of pauper confidence shown in figure 3.1, though the line in 4.4 shows fewer fluctuations. The average scores will have been partly shaped by threats of removal, and increased concern with enforcing settlement rules from the mid-1790s can be seen with a drop in friendliness. Figure 4.5 divides the overseer correspondence between the regions. Similar to figure 3.2, the amount of letters sampled for each region prior to the start of the nineteenth century may be deemed insufficient. However again the collection of source material used in this examination presented a unique opportunity to compare overseer sentiment between regions and over time. The decline in sentiment was more consistent across the regions than in 3.2, which suggests the slightly larger

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item Webb \& Webb, \textit{Poor Law}, pp. 424-7; also see Marshall, \textit{Eighteenth Century}, pp. 57-76.
  \item Eastwood, \textit{Governing}, pp. 174-6; King, ‘‘It is Impossible’’, pp. 177-182; Taylor, ‘Voices’, p. 123.
\end{itemize}
Fig. 4.4: Change in overseer friendliness over time

The numbers adjacent to the line give the absolute number of letters represented by its individual data points.

Fig. 4.5: Change in overseer friendliness over time between regions

The numbers adjacent to each line give the absolute number of letters represented by the individual data points on that line.
sample sizes used in 4.5 are more dependable. Friendlier attitudes that existed prior to the decline of the moral economy were exhibited in this 1766 correspondence between two parishes in the Bristol area, when a pauper from the parish of Wick wanted employment in Bitton:

‘his settlement is undoubtedly in this parish, but for the reasons you and I yesterday talked he will have no certificate; however I give you assurance if any unforeseen accident brings him in want of parish relief he and his family shall be attended at our cost, the same as tho he was in the parish. And he has told me he shal never attempt to take any apprentice or yearly servant; which thing indeed his master champion stricktly obliges him to observe in my opinion such a neighbourly confidence might be beneficial to our parishes, and good for the poorer inhabitants’.

The settlement parish, Wick, was keen to promise the host parish, Bitton that the employment of their pauper would not alter his settlement and place him on Bitton’s relief rolls. This shows a willingness to negotiate settlement before the strain on parish finances started to harden overseer attitudes. Interestingly it also seems the basic principle of an embryonic out-parish relief was being explained.

On the same premise as table 3.1 concerning pauper confidence, counties can be rated according to the friendliness of their overseer correspondence. Table 4.9 shows fewer consecutive geographic pairings than in table 3.1, yet overall presents much logical regional patterning. The table supports older though unproven ideas that Welsh overseers could be harsher in their treatment of the poor. To a lesser extent these findings also support King’s theories regarding southern overseers behaving more generously. However this can be seen most obviously in the southern border counties and the theory is undermined by the anomalous behaviour of Oxfordshire’s overseers.

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107 BRO, P/B/OP/10/r, Megalds to overseer, 18th March 1766.
109 King, Poverty and Welfare.
What table 4.9 illustrates more strongly is the different behaviour of overseers in rural counties, and those experiencing industrialisation. Rural counties were the most friendly and account for five of the six highest rated, whilst more industrial ones constitute seven of the lowest ten. Table 4.9 therefore shows that overseers acted relatively contingently with the economic concerns of their area, for instance the increasing pressure of pauperism on poor rates in industrialising locations. This contrasts with paupers who were more likely to behave according to their regional welfare customs.

Table 4.9: Overseer friendliness by county

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Friendliness rating</th>
<th>No. of letters analysed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh border counties</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>148</td>
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<td>3.1</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English border counties</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>492</td>
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Overseer behaviour was developed through continued experience of the out-parish system, as opposed to paupers who may have just used it when desperate. The pressures on industrialising Oldham were evident in a request sent to Somerset regarding pauper George Challinor;

‘the man has a numerous Family of Children and much in want and I again repeat that unless you allow him what he has had beforetime that is 2s Pr. Wk. I shall certainly get him remov’d to where he belongs, har own town has poor enough without paying others’.

Possibly Challinor had worked in Somerset’s failed woollen mills and had moved to Lancashire for employment in its textile industry. His migration to an industrialising area would have been mirrored by thousands of others, and consequently when recession hit these towns many were placed on relief rolls, overwhelming some parish finances.

As discussed, partly in reference to tables 4.1 - 4.4, there was a strong mutual understanding of duty between overseers. This was heightened where the role of overseer was a more established position in communities, and underpinned a common awareness of how to co-operate in the out-parish system. A phrase frequently used was the request that other parishes cared for their poor ‘as if they were your own’. This phrase, or a similar guise of it, was invoked on 54 occasions within overseer correspondence, as they exploited a presumed sense of responsibility amongst their counterparts to care for their poor. It existed as part of a wider language of duty that was employed almost twice as much in the comparison counties. The phrase was utilised with a double meaning by the overseer of Chorlton in Manchester, to Greystoke in Cumbria;

‘I am happy to inform you that Whitlock came back in a most forlorn condition to his family the latter end of last February, I should have sent him in Prison for leaving his Family but he beg that I would forgive him and gave them a little money to take

---

110 SomRO, D/P/baton/13/7/2, Pivenlow to overseers, 12th December 1801.
them down to Liverpool and he thought he could get work so I
got them all off and sent them down in the Packet I [find] in
relief and down is five pounds, if you will have the kindness to
remit we shall feel obligd as we think we managed the family
very well, we acted for you as if they had been our own poor.*111

The overseer wanted credit not just for the care they had provided, which was as good
as their own paupers received, but also for their effective fiscal management. They had
kept costs down, and also made a provision to support the pauper’s work for the future.
Chorlton assumed the other parish would have wanted these things done.
Correspondence sent to Llandogo in Gwent, at the earlier date of 1819, appeared more
wholly focused on the pauper’s welfare;

‘Our Overseers are very much obliged to you for your kindness
in giving them a statement of Joseph Elliott’s Family – your
letter was laid before the Vestry on Thursday last but they did
not determine what should be done for them till yesterday, they
will be obliged to your overseers to look to the Family the same
as if they where their own Poor […] Our Parish Officers wish
every possible care to be taken of the Mann that is necessary and
will thank you to let the Family have the above sum weekly
which shall be paid your Overseers at any time they think
proper’112

Though the parish of Tetbury were thankful for the care provided, it was on the
understanding the paupers would have received treatment equal with that of Llandogo’s
own poor. The letter was written by overseers who genuinely cared. Although Tetbury
were probably relieved that the Welsh parish were not removing the family, they still
requested that their care was above a basic level. This was a very appreciative letter,
filled with thankful language.

The word ‘duty’ itself was used eight times by overseers, including six times in
the English comparison counties where belief in such responsibilities was more

*111 CAC, A, PR/5/67/27a.b.c, Scott to overseers, 5th May 1831.
112 GA, P328/OV7/5, Cook to overseers, 21st April 1819.
common. However this duty was not necessarily an obligation to care for the pauper’s best interests. It changed over time as poor rates became pressured. Parishes came to be protectionist and prioritised their own poor, as can be witnessed in an appeal sent to Condover in Shropshire in 1817;

‘James Williams says he is Parishoner of your parish & this is to certify that he is in distress & has been under the necessity of Pledging & Selling his Wearing apparel and his household Furniture to procure a Subsistance he has been out of employ nine months, and he has not at this time any thing to procure a Morsel of Bread If you can put him into work to earn a little Bread he will be very glad to embrace it The parishes around this part of the Country are very full of poor and cannot give Labour to any but their own parishoners’\[113\]

There was still a duty here, and it was understood, in the same way it was implicit when overseers asked others to care for their poor ‘as your own’, that a parish’s own paupers were of greater importance as costs increased. Table 4.11 displays all uses of this language of duty in standard overseer correspondence. This includes citations of the word itself, the request that parishes care for the poor ‘as if they were your own’, or reference to a ‘brother overseer’. Table 4.11 must be viewed alongside table 4.10 on the employment of a language of co-operation in standard overseer correspondence. For example that concerned with the exchange of favours, as such action assumed a common understanding implicit in the position. For this reason, tables 4.1 and 4.2 on the overseer’s position within the community are also of significance when considering these tables. Linking the duty associated with the overseer’s role, to their social status as identified by works on parish politics and the middling sort,\[114\] develops these more abstract investigations for the purpose of studying out-parish relief. Because peripheral, and Welsh overseers especially, occupied more accessible positions within a less developed out-parish network, they were not as aware of the duties that were conventional English overseers. Peripheral counties going through industrial transition, such as Lancashire, behaved differently to those in Wales, with the pressure of

\[113\] SA, P81/L/1/18/12/59, Granger to overseers, 30\textsuperscript{th} April 1817.

\[114\] French, Middle Sort, p. 108.
<table>
<thead>
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Increased pauperism requiring more co-operation with other overseers. Consequently they had a better understanding of how to work within the out-parish network. Welsh overseers had less experience of this system and enforced stricter obedience of settlement rules. Table 4.10 shows that some southern rural counties saw extensive co-
operation between overseers, though notably not those with particularly high relief costs, such as Hampshire and Oxfordshire, which may have been becoming protectionist.

An overseer’s duty was directly cited as a reason for action in this communication from Gloucester to Uley, in the same county;

‘Mr. Parrott has done every thing in his power for their relief since Ricketts has been ill, but having a family of his own he cannot do any thing more for them-

Under these circumstances I think you had better allow them a few shillings per week, otherwise the overseers of St. Mary De Lode must in the execution of their duty, remove them to Uley so soon as Ricketts is able to undergo the journey’\(^{115}\)

In this instance, at the later date of 1834, the ‘duty’ felt by the overseer was to cut expenditure, which would have involved removing the pauper. It was used as an excuse to place the expense of their care upon Uley. Related to these concerns regarding expenditure, there were twenty-five letters from parishes complaining that they no longer had enough money to support the poor. Seventeen came from the comparison counties, six from the English borders, and only two from the Welsh borders. This disparity is because, despite the fact Welsh parishes lacked financial income from poor rates, they had alternate sources of relief they could distribute and the paupers probably had relatively wide support networks beyond the parish. The following dispatch from Boarhunt in Hampshire is a good indicator of overseer letters complaining about financial pressures in English counties;

‘Above you’ll meet amount of cash paid the Widow Gosney, as per your order as is the season we make up our accts., and from the increase of applicants for Parochial aid our Finances are nearly exhausted, will thank you for an early remittance’\(^{116}\)

\(^{115}\) GA, P345/OV3/5/1, George to overseers, 21\(^{st}\) January 1834.

\(^{116}\) HantsRO, 4M81/PO40/44, Chapman to overseers, 19\(^{th}\) March 1817.
The number of applicants for parish relief had increased and almost bankrupted the parish. The last chapter, on the moral economy, showed how such pressures had a negative impact on the dispersal of poor relief. Figure 4.6 demonstrates the resultant reductions or cessations of relief payments through the period. The red line is the same used in figure 3.3 regarding pauper complaints on the subject. The blue line is just from overseer correspondence, and relates to decreases in repayments from other parishes. The marked increase of percentages from the 1820s is evidence of a tightening of welfare availability. Complaints were considerably more frequent from paupers, and 40 per cent were actually made through their host overseer. This was because, as King puts it, it was a ‘thorny problem’ to turn down a recommendation of relief from another parish.\footnote{S. King, ‘‘Stop this Overwhelming Torment of Destiny’: Negotiating Financial Aid at Times of Sickness Under the English Old Poor Law, 1800-1840’, \textit{Bulletin of the History of Medicine}, 79, no. 2 (2005), p. 256.} Additionally paupers were more likely to mention problems generally, as they did in 30 per cent of letters.

This pressure on parish rates can be seen in other source material. There were eighteen ‘snitching’ letters that claimed to inform overseers about fraudulent recipients of relief, a dozen of which were sent in the 1830s. That they were sent so late is reflective of this mounting pressure. Ten went to parishes in the comparison counties, where the financial strain was felt hardest, seven to the English borders, and the remaining one to a Welsh parish, signed by ‘a payer of rate’\footnote{GwA, D/365/65, ‘a payer of rate’ to overseers, no date.}.\footnote{GwA, D/365/65, ‘a payer of rate’ to overseers, no date.} They typically told the overseer that the pauper had other sources of income or a bad character, and the author believed such details rendered them unfit for relief. Such was the wide awareness of this pressure amongst the public that six, evidently fraudulent snitching offers were received by five different parishes between July 1832 and November 1833. Five came from the same author and all followed this format;

‘The undersigned is able to inform you of something considerably to your advantage Yearly and for ever belonging to your Parish and lost sight of for years on receipt of Twenty Shillings by Post office order or otherwise.

Respectfully
Joseph Ady
Fig. 4.6: % of letters complaining that relief had been decreased or stopped

The numbers adjacent to each line give the absolute number of letters represented by the individual data points on that line.
Forty years resident in same Parish And known to each of the 26 Aldermen of London, Particularly Wm. Taylor Copeland Esq. M.D. Lincolns Inn Fields.

Aug 16th 1832

No letters received unless post paid.¹¹¹⁹

All of the letters akin to this one that sought to deceitfully capitalise on the financial burden felt by parishes, asked for money in advance in return for unspecified information, which probably did not exist.

Tables 4.12 and 4.13 show that parishes in some regions operated under particularly restrictive financial conditions, which influenced their relief distribution. Table 4.12 is comprised of the overseer and pauper letters sent to each county, as figures 3.3 and 4.6 are, rather than the overseer correspondence sent from them. This is because the letters sent to the counties embody complaints concerning how they treated their paupers based elsewhere, thus illustrating the sentiment of the area. The key point made across both tables is that Welsh counties did not feel growing financial pressures as much as English counties did. Consequently they made fewer payment reductions, even as the moral economy declined. Most parishes that complained about financial strains due to growing numbers of relief applicants were in the comparison counties. These counties were often those that subsequently reduced pauper’s pay. In Lancashire overseers attempted to reduce pay almost twice as much as in any other county, confirming King’s thoughts on the harshness of relief practices here.¹²⁰ The rapid industrialisation that demanded flexibility of settlement had also overwhelmed parish finances.

Many Welsh parishes had financial problems other than an excess number of claimants. Eighteen letters were sent to Welsh parishes concerning either a refusal or a failure to pay poor rates, with only eight sent to comparison counties, and another three sent to the English borders. This appeal from Gwent is illustrative of the rest;

¹¹¹⁹ LRO, PR2391/39, Ady to overseers, 16th August 1832.
¹²⁰ King, Poverty and Welfare.
### Table 4.12: Complaints from overseers and paupers that relief had been cut

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### Table 4.13: Complaints from overseers that their parish finances were under pressure

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‘in this new Rate I am charged £21 which I think is to much as
my Rent is £13 which I was Rated at before this for I hope you
will Consider it to much & Reduce it.’

The most common complaint made against paying was that the rates calculated
according to property ownership were inaccurate and charged too much.

However Welsh parishes adapted to the problems of having rate payers either
unable or unwilling to pay; 9.4 per cent of Welsh pauper appeals asked for relief in
kind, contrasted with 3.3 and 7.4 in the English borders and comparison counties
respectively. The percentage for Wales would have been higher had justice
correspondence been included in the calculation, as across the corpus justices made an
eighth of all requests for relief in kind. Similarly 7 per cent of Welsh appeals asked for
some provision to enable work, compared to 4 per cent in both the English border and
comparison counties. Justices, aware of the shortage of money, used relief in kind to
either force or enable payments. An exemplar item portrays such a demand, and other
significant features;

‘The Bearer has 3 Sons now chargeable to the Parish as she can
get a place for at Mrs. Sandfords in Service for a year, if it
merits your [illegible] would advise the parish of him is a Pair of
Shoes & a Smock frock & he is much in Need of’

The bearer of the justice’s order, which would have been obtained and delivered in a
face-to-face manner, required relief in kind to procure employment; traits which all
appeared disproportionately in Wales. Clothes were the most frequently requested item,
often to obtain a service job.

Tables 4.14 and 4.15 provide lessons on how peripheral paupers made their cash
poor welfare systems work for them. Table 4.15 is based on all correspondence to each
county, because the amount of rate refusals needs to be counted proportionately, and
they are not a form of standard correspondence. The number of rate refusals is
particularly small compared to the amount of material in other tables, and evaluating
them as a proportion of all correspondence, as such material is unlikely to be have been

121 GwA, D.369.60, Reynolds to overseers, 1st April 1816.
122 GwA, D.365.86, Wallington to overseers, 27th April 1818.
Table 4.14: Pauper appeals that requested relief in kind

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English BC</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Counties</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.15: Amount of times in all correspondence that a refusal to pay rates was made

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter type occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English BC</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison counties</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

kept uniformly by either overseers or archivists. However, given the description in the literature of Welsh parishes as rate poor,\textsuperscript{123} and the effect that this would have had on

the development of their relief systems, it is important we attempt to measure it. Analysis appears to show obvious trends, as Welsh counties were three of the six most likely to have rate refusals in table 4.15. Counties from the peripheral zone outlined achieve high rankings on both tables. Additionally the southern English counties with the lower rankings are from the southern border region, which frequently behaved like the rest of southern England. Wiltshire also ranks relatively lowly, again forming more of a south-west region with the southern border counties than we will see in the geographic patterning of pauper letter traits.

The need to use relief in kind was perhaps the biggest tell-tale sign of a peripheral region; it was a makeshift measure to coerce underfunded vestries.\(^{124}\) However correspondence from these regions also reveals other coping mechanisms, such as the utilisation of local justices, and high levels self-dependency. These counties were more stable in terms of population, had alternate sources of income, and their levels of poor relief were too small to be affected by the wider decline of the moral economy. This explains the apparent confidence of many Welsh paupers in table 3.1, and shows that approaches to regionalism should consider a wide range of source material to construct a fuller picture of both parish finance and practice. The extent to which relief systems in certain counties relied on relief in kind bears some similarities with table 4.13 regarding the areas that complained of excessive financial pressures, and so relief in kind may also have been used in these situations as well. The welfare behaviours presented in other tables in this chapter and the next, often occurred in spite of the economic factors presented in the last four tables. A response from Hulme in Manchester to an appeal from Leeds in 1836 shows the problems felt by rate poor parishes;

‘We have considered the application for an advance of relief and are of opinion we cannot consistently with our duty either to receivers or payers increase this allowance. Our township is one almost entirely of cottages and we are at times as much pained at compelling payment of rates as we are in withholding in cases like this.’\(^{125}\)

\(^{125}\) MRO, M10/808 Howarth to overseers, 24\(^{th}\) May 1836.
Hulme’s overseers wanted the applicant to know that it was often difficult, because of the make-up of their parish, to command rates, and therefore they had to be more discerning about who they relieved. The pauper had received less than they had hoped for, which was a common occurrence in the 1830s. As discussed however, the trend of decreasing pay was typically more common in areas under pressure from growing relief bills, rather than ones that struggled to collect poor rates.

The informal world of face-to-face welfare with makeshift provisions that existed in the borders was being replaced by one of paperwork and bureaucracy. Such a change would suggest a decline in sentiment towards the poor, with a greater concern for financial issues instead. Overseers were becoming more cautious in dispensing welfare, requiring greater confirmation of the pauper’s condition in the form of verifications. This short letter from a surgeon is an example of these associated notes;

‘Peter Foulkes has been under my care – the sight of his right eye is totally lost – that of his left is less & in all probability will wholly dissappear
William Gill’126

Authorities increasingly asked each other for information on paupers, or asked the paupers themselves about their circumstances. This was one of the contributory factors to a growth in the amount of paperwork alongside appeals. Figure 4.7, which for reasons of consistency only displays data collected from the borders, shows a gradual percentage increase in superfluous correspondence compared to more standard appeals and requests. The amount of such additional material doubled between 1810 and the end of the period. Also of note is the slight decline in the amount of pauper letters compared to those of the overseers, who began writing more requests for information. The fact that their correspondence proportionately increased through the period may partially account for why Sokoll found a much bigger ratio of overseer material compared to pauper material in his Essex collection, as most of Sokoll’s material was sent at later dates than much of this corpus.127 Additionally he uses a narrower interpretation of what constitutes pauper correspondence. The numbers indicating the absolute amounts of material considered for some of the points on the graph may seem small, especially for

126 DA, PD/38/1/179, Gill to overseers, 12th June 1835.
Fig. 4.7: % of standard correspondence from overseers and paupers compared to additional correspondence

The numbers adjacent to each line give the absolute number of letters represented by the individual data points on that line.
the 1780s. However it must be remembered that on this graph, all amounts are considered in proportion to others for the same time period, so none are particularly small.

Correspondence also embodied a growing interest in accounts; almost 60 per cent of overseer’s letters that primarily focused on this topic came from 1823 onwards. These account concerned letters constituted 37 per cent of Welsh correspondence, 31 per cent in the English borders, and 29 in the comparison counties. Such material is well illustrated by this letter sent to Holywell in Flintshire;

‘we Beg that you will be so good as to inform the Overseers of the poor of your parish that we will repay them any reasonable expence they may have been at, in relieveing Rice Evans’s family, that we are liable to, as Soon as we can have an Opportunity’

The main interest in this letter was settling the account. No reference was made to the pauper’s condition or the cause of their poverty, nor did the author appeal for additional relief. There was also a suggestion it would take considerable effort by Welsh parish Llangollen to repay Holywell, though it is not clear if this was due to difficulties with transporting the funds, or raising the money from the poor rates. Table 4.16 illustrates the extent of account focused overseer correspondence according to county. The table shows that the population movements associated with industrialisation that altered the settlement policies of the north-west may consequently also have decreased their bookkeeping focus. Contrastingly, areas with less experience of dealing with migratory paupers were the most concerned with bookkeeping, again overlooking the potential for flexibility in practice as they did with settlement rules. These parishes were not as familiar with the out-parish system and were consequently more cautious with bureaucracy.

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128 FRO, P/30/1/235 (56a), Edwards to overseers, 14th February 1796.
Table 4.16: Overseer correspondence that was account focused

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter type occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>English BC</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>(21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>(17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(17)</td>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>(14)</td>
<td>Comparison counties</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>Corpus</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The increased bureaucracy of parish administration may have improved the quality of care. Figure 4.8, based on standard overseer correspondence, shows a decrease in references to unintended payment problems in the second half of the graph. This would include negligent practice, accounting mishaps, or unforeseen problems transferring the pay. However the early part of the line is quite inconsistent, possibly due to a small number of letters used. The biggest fall in negligence depicted actually occurs prior to the Sturges-Bourne Acts of 1818 and 1819, which introduced measures for better vestry practices and would have been a logical point for improved behaviours to begin. Therefore although the graph fluctuates minimally from 1811 onwards, its overall accuracy is questionable. It is hard to explain its behaviour based on historical context. The graph most likely just reflects the errors of individuals, which did not follow a particular pattern and were largely unaffected by wider measures. A drunken vestry clerk at Clwyd parish in Denbighshire in 1833 was one of the more extreme concerns expressed;
Fig. 4.8: % of letters referring to negligence from overseers

The numbers adjacent to the line give the absolute number of letters represented by its individual data points.
‘I have very strong experience with regard to misbehaving Parish Clerks, thinking that they are an untold drawback to a Clergyman in his Parish, & in these cases which have come before me, I have been able, as is most advisable, to persuade two to resign, & discharged the other from his situation.’

The author talked of other negligence he had experienced, though these cases were not numerous and were highly disapproved of. It is challenging to uncover the extent of misbehaviour, but the suggestion that these cases were rare and unacceptable, reflects the findings as measured within this corpus.

**Scoring ‘Welshness’ for overseers**

Poor law history requires an approach that allows us to systematically explore regionality and peripherality using this extensive collection of material. Doing so would help answer questions about how we should consider welfare history on a national scale. It is possible, using the rankings within each table, to create a comparative score for ‘Welshness’, combining all the letter features in this chapter. Scoring here has been based on the fact that counties in the peripheral zone and southern England behaved very differently to each other. Because this thesis represents a search for ‘Welshness’ in the practices of distributing poor relief, the use of peripheral ‘Welsh’ features has been scored highly and ‘English’ features lowly. In order to do this, firstly it is decided if the tables represent particularly English or Welsh traits. For example, complaints that parish finances were under pressure were more common in southern England, whilst removal was threatened more frequently in Wales.

Secondly a score is allocated to each county according to its ranking in the tables. Because features of Englishness are scored lowly, the ranking of each county in tables that represent English traits are simply added to a cumulative total. For example, Gloucestershire may well rank 1st, 4th and 2nd on some English habits, and would therefore receive low scores of 1, 4 and 2 for behaving in an English manner. This would be different for Powys, which would likely rank 18th, 20th and 21st on the same

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129 DA, PD/20/1/48-54, Clough to overseers, 21st March 1833.

130 Tables 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.14, 4.15 and 4.16 have been treated as Welsh, whilst tables 4.3, 4.8, 4.10, 4.11, 4.12 and 4.13 have been treated as English.
English traits, and would receive high scores of 18, 20 and 21 for lacking these English characteristics, and behaving in a Welsh manner.

Contrastingly, when the tables concern Welsh rather than English traits, the scoring is inverted, so that counties are not given low, ‘English’ scores for ranking highly on Welsh features. Therefore the county’s ranking in the table is deducted from 22. For instance, because Glamorgan is top of the table for relief in kind, 1 is deducted from 22 and it receives a high score of 21. Bristol is ranked lowest in this table, so its ranking of 21 is subtracted from 22, and it gets a low score of 1 for English behaviour in this Welsh trait. The totals of all these scores are provided in table 4.17.

This method is complex and has various flaws, one of the biggest of which is the polarisation of scoring between Welsh and English characteristics. It probably ignores many subtleties of behaviour specific to the English border counties. They could have been identified had the search been motivated by isolating the features of this region, though these border counties often represented a half-way point between England and Wales in terms of welfare practice. It should not be argued that the scoring process has allowed the handpicking of certain features to suit regionalism theories. Welsh and southern English counties were consistently ranked at the opposite ends of many tables. Where any county behaved anomalously, this has still been accredited to its score. Ultimately, although they are ambitious and consider only one source, these cumulative scores represent an original offering to the investigation of welfare. They provide a method to measure many aspects across a wide area and in a systematic manner, as some historians have called for.\(^{131}\) Doing so allows us to get to the heart of what peripherality was, and see where it shaped welfare. Previous historians have only estimated peripheral behaviour.\(^{132}\) Research here has taken their ideas and applied them, and shows the importance of peripherality for shaping welfare in particular regions. Furthermore these scores project people’s attitudes and actions, rather than estimating them according to localised financial factors, which is how previous historians have measured regionalism.\(^{133}\)


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Table 4.17 presents many adjacent counties with similar scores, based on fifteen separate letters traits, and often drawn from all the correspondence available. The way these continuous geographical areas can be witnessed despite the wide range of traits that constitute their scores, suggests that regionality was stronger than any intra-regional habits within pauper letters. The findings oppose Hindle’s argument that intra-regionality was more significant, based on his analysis of individual parishes’ behaviour.\textsuperscript{134} Table 4.17 represents overseer actions and letter features, and the factors that shaped the mechanics of their systems, such as rate refusal. It also shows their welfare practices which dictated pauper approaches; for instance the amount of pauper letters that threatened self-removal.

The table shows very different approaches by Welsh border overseers and English border ones. The unchangeable stances of local welfare authorities on certain issues in Wales meant these counties often behaved similarly to other Welsh ones, and so we can see continuous geographic patterning here. Gwent behaved more like the rest of Wales than will be seen when considering the pauper traits. However because of how some poor law authorities were overwhelmed by modernisation and economic development in the north-west, especially regarding settlement practice, rural Cumbria appears more peripheral in table 4.17 than Cheshire and Lancashire. Subsequent analysis will show that these latter two counties should be considered peripheral, and such regional patterning is supported by other literature that has likened the north-west to Wales.\textsuperscript{135} Oxfordshire probably recorded a high score because the small size of its overseer corpus distorted results. Additionally half its pauper letters, which were required in some calculations, predate 1800, and therefore displayed features of an underdeveloped welfare system, making it appear more peripheral. With the exception of Oxfordshire, the Welsh counties appear consecutively at the top of the table.

\textsuperscript{134} Hindle, \textit{Parish?}, pp. 282-94.

\begin{table}
\begin{center}
\caption{Overseer ‘Welshness’ by county}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|}
\hline
County       & Score of ‘Welshness’ \\
\hline
Gwent        & 243 \\
Powys        & 231 \\
Flintshire   & 216 \\
Glamorgan    & 197 \\
Oxfordshire  & 180 \\
Denbighshire & 162 \\
Hampshire    & 161 \\
Herefordshire& 158 \\
Shropshire   & 153 \\
Bristol      & 147 \\
Cumbria      & 145 \\
Wiltshire    & 141 \\
Cheshire     & 134 \\
Somerset     & 131 \\
Gloucestershire& 129 \\
Lancashire   & 129 \\
Northamptonshire& 128 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}
\end{table}
consistently showing the same letter traits and welfare practices in their correspondence. Below them, Herefordshire and Shropshire produce similar scores. Towards the bottom of the table can be seen close scores for a fairly geographically continuous south-west region, which included Bristol.

Overall the table shows that overseers could be forced to alter habits customary to their region, but generally they behaved as nearby overseers did. They continued local practices despite the behaviours and expectations that could be brought in by migratory paupers. These are displayed in greater detail in the next chapter. The overseers’ habits suggest some of these welfare practices were simply innate to the area. However the overseers’ actions are more easily linked to theories regarding local financial conditions than those of paupers, which were shaped more by wider welfare identities. The strong regional patterning justifies the analysis of small numbers of letter traits that may otherwise be considered insufficient.

Conclusion

The overseers were the preeminent figures in the dispersal of poor relief, yet our knowledge of their views and conduct has been lacking. Consideration in this chapter reveals the methods that underpinned out-parish relief and how relationships between parishes worked. The research also displays strong regional dynamics, with Welsh overseers behaving very differently to many in England. The mid-border region of Herefordshire and Shropshire was the most similar to Wales. This first concerted examination of overseers’ letters has explored a range of areas, and expands the ways we can use poor law correspondence, a key theme of this thesis. Similarly the statistical analysis employed has been an original approach, providing representative features of overseer behaviour for future studies to investigate. The social dynamics central to much recent work on parishes have been applied more practically to the distribution of relief, and were pivotal in overseers’ behaviour. The prevalence of status and duty in the language and actions of overseers portrays the different levels of respect for the job between England and Wales, according to how established their relief systems were.

There was also a language of mutual understanding based around the status of the role and its responsibilities, that both smoothed and forced the mechanics of out-parish relief. The basic willingness that overseers had to initially co-operate, as already

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suggested by King, has been substantiated.\textsuperscript{137} It was embedded in rhetoric of exchanging favours between equals. Looking at such practices adds to the findings of recent works that have based administrative histories around local behaviour, rather than examinations of legislation, as seen in chapter one.\textsuperscript{138} The practice of the overseers in the border counties has been outlined for the first time, something particularly important for the thesis, and many features meet the peripheral criteria described by King and Stewart.\textsuperscript{139} These included face-to-face payments and meetings, amateurish control, and coping with difficult terrain and a low rate base. The idea that settlement laws were increasingly flexible in the final decades of the old poor law, which is prominent in the wider literature, must be questioned.\textsuperscript{140} Industrialising areas seem to have treated settlement this way, however study of Wales displays a cautious obedience of the rules by overseers. This was a feature of an immature system that was less familiar with out-parish relief, and had a stronger interest in bookkeeping generally.\textsuperscript{141}

Investigation of overseer sentiment has inverted previous readings of the moral economy and the poor, to consider those who conducted it instead. The chapter has again shown customary right as in decline through these years. This has been presented most obviously in figures 4.4 and 4.6. The overseer’s sense of duty changed. Paupers became prioritised less, and overseers were increasingly concerned with limiting expenditure; these findings echo Hollen Lees’s comments on the changing priorities of the parish.\textsuperscript{142} Regional differences can again be seen in this changing sentiment, and it has been suggested that the peripheral parishes of the border counties did not feel financial pressures as much as those closer to the centre. Ultimately the majority of overseers showed dedication towards whatever they perceived to be their priority. Such apparent behaviour contradicts historians who were keen to paint an image of a negligent, localised system.\textsuperscript{143} The overseer’s role was part of their identity, and poor law historians have not considered the implications of this. Similarly some paupers were particularly conscious of their own identity, which we will now investigate.

\textsuperscript{137} King, “It is Impossible”.
\textsuperscript{138} Hindle, Parish?, Hollen Lees, Solidarities.
\textsuperscript{140} King, ‘Settlement and Belonging’.
\textsuperscript{141} Gestrich, Hurren & King, Poverty and Sickness, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{142} Hollen Lees, Solidarities, pp. 73-92.
\textsuperscript{143} Webb & Webb, Poor Law, pp. 424-7; Marshall, Eighteenth Century, pp. 57-76.
Chapter 5: Identity

Introduction
The consideration of identity continues a main theme of this thesis, seeking out the personalised interactions paupers had with their welfare systems. It also evidences extensive community support within the border counties that helped provide relief outside of the parish. As was partly discussed in chapter one, in the 1960s and 1970s identity history was that of a Marxist search for class consciousness.\(^1\) Despite the emergence of micro-history, consideration of identities within the parish has remained influenced by economic social stratification, akin to that highlighted in work on parish politics.\(^2\) French and Barry have been at the forefront of challenging these monolithic ideas of identity as part of the recent trend towards considering individual agency; a trend that has also seen more interest in an abstract history of the self.\(^3\) However this history has still maintained a distinctly economic flavour. Much discussion has focused on the middling sort, and debates have continued about whether self-image or belonging to wider structures and groups was more important.\(^4\) This is symbolic of a vast, often theory based literature concerned with the self that has been more interested in abstract notions of power relations, than individual custom and self-prescribed identity. It ranges from Foucauldian models of social relations to more socio-economic interests in immigration, integration and employment. Full examination of identity in accordance with such literature warrants extensive work. Here investigations form one strand of more exploratory notions considering identity and custom under the poor law.

The linking of welfare and individual identity in this chapter is almost entirely new and the levels that have been drawn together of the individual, the parish and the nation, are accompanied by sizable and disparate literatures. The consideration of these works is necessarily extensive, although the original source material analysis that

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follows a new level of depth to each subject in the light of the poor laws. The main interest in uniting these areas of study is to discover to what extent welfare authorities respected a pauper’s sense of self enough to bargain with it. Many recent identity histories recognise a more poignant and modern understanding of belonging than histories that currently address identity at a parochial level. As we saw in chapter one these latter works often instead define identity according to legal or economic determinism, with the settlement laws a central factor. This chapter seeks to readdress this balance and understand how a more emotive sense of identity interacted with welfare demands. We also saw that there was a great deal of variance to poor law interpretations by authorities. However this has not yet been taken into account when considering the ways the pauper used overt notions of self to request support. Making such investigations includes examining diverse features within pauper letters, and many findings portrayed will be small scale in terms of their occurrence. However although they happened comparatively infrequently, they still show definite geographical differences, and peripherality will again be a major theme of the chapter.

Firstly examined is nationalism in poor law correspondence, which will include the comments of those who worked in national service, and also paupers who wrote appeals in the Welsh language. Though neither device was widely employed, they contained an obvious strategy. The Welsh language letters will also show a conscious though minimal nationalism, directed at an administration that was legally and culturally English. Secondly local level attachment will be examined, both in terms of ‘belonging’ to a parish, and the existence of community support. Using the letters to identify support from community members requires wariness, as contrasting them across the database reveals widespread manipulation of circumstances by the authors. However it will be contended that assistance in the peripheral zone was stronger than that in southern England. The ethic of practical, face-to-face support can also be traced by looking at personal contact between paupers and relieving overseers. Consideration of community support is then expanded to consider attachment to community. Here the main interest lies in drawing the line between economic and emotional belonging. Ultimately a love of place did exist, but it was dwarfed by the importance of economic settlement, which was probably growing in importance. Additionally the different ways

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to negotiate settlement will be outlined. Change over time regarding settlement is one of comparatively few within this chapter, partly because the focus has been spread widely on a variety of unique traits. Therefore features should be seen as consistent over time unless otherwise stated.

Thirdly the projection of self-identity will be considered. There existed a definite base level in self-preservation that paupers expected to be met by overseers, and this too showed strong regional differences. However to be assisted beyond such a basic level constituted an indulgent request: paupers who did so considered the parish indebted to them, as others who claimed an emotional bond in belonging to the parish, or those who had served their country did. Therefore the perceived importance of personal capital in bargaining can be observed throughout. Finally, similar to the scoring of letter traits seen in chapter four, the tables used throughout this chapter to comment on different practices between counties will be used to rank these counties according to ‘Welshness’. The tables will again show distinctive spatial trends, as well as caveats that shaped peripherality.

The self, the community and the nation in context
Many in the eighteenth century had enjoyed the liberties and self-realisation of the Enlightenment, which Porter identifies as having made the world ‘safe for egoism’.6 In his opinion, England had embodied these personal freedoms since 1688, possessing Habeas Corpus and lacking censorship and economic regulation compared to the continent.7 Porter and others describe increased personal enquiry and realisation of social place;8 with consumerist society growing, mounting possibilities existed to pursue self-interest.9 This opportunity for personal gain amongst the upper classes would lead to the abandonment of the moral economy, whilst Porter describes ‘assertive claims for freedom echoing down the social order’.10 There was a broad inclusivity to this new found self-interest, which extended beyond the upper classes and invited economic mobility more widely, and it was the belief of Smith that such opportunity

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7 Ibid., p. 8.
10 Ibid., p. 11.
enabled the ambitions of even the poorest in society.\textsuperscript{11} For the population as a whole, these conditions culminated in increased self-confidence in dealing with the authorities; ‘the new selves […] blazoning themselves forth in first person epistles and fictions were often defiantly unconventional, decentered from canonical structures, self-absorbed and drunk on their own singularity.’\textsuperscript{12}

The high degree of population movement throughout this period could have lessened paupers’ attachment to place; Pooley and Turnbull have shown people moved particularly frequently from the 1820s.\textsuperscript{13} Additionally short distance migration became more commonplace and only a minority stayed in a parish their entire lives;\textsuperscript{14} this proportion was smaller for the poor and especially the urban poor. Urban population increases were too significant for natural increase alone, showing that settlement laws must have been negotiable enough to allow the migration necessary to enable such growth. With only about a tenth of parishes having over 800 residents,\textsuperscript{15} local attachment and support should have been established quickly in most areas. However due to growing difficulties in gaining settlement through employment, paupers were increasingly resident where they were not settled and more people took their paternal settlement, fostering elongated senses of economic belonging elsewhere.\textsuperscript{16} There had been no particularly large scale movements of the Welsh population prior to the nineteenth century,\textsuperscript{17} but with industrialisation, one third of Wales’s population lived in Monmouthshire and Glamorgan by 1851; much of this growth was achieved with English immigrants.\textsuperscript{18} Outside of its southern counties, the Welsh were more prone to longer residence than their English counterparts.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{11} Porter, Enlightenment: Britain, pp. 392-6.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 278.
\textsuperscript{13} C. Pooley & J. Turnbull, Migration and Mobility in Britain since the 18th Century (Lancaster 1998), pp. 59-63.
\textsuperscript{15} S. King, Poverty and Welfare in England 1700-1850, A Regional Perspective (Manchester 2000), p. 7; Pooley & Turnbull, Migration and Mobility, pp. 64-5.
\textsuperscript{19} Pooley & Turnbull, Migration and Mobility, p. 87.
The ongoing war with France had an impact on the British national psyche and those involved. Both Colley and Newman argue English and British nationalism was redefining itself at this time, against the French and Catholicism.\textsuperscript{20} The British army expanded from 40,000 to around 250,000, and the navy from 16,000 to more than 140,000.\textsuperscript{21} The draft was extensive, and at points up to a sixth of adult males were answerable to fight, many of whom had families requiring support. Despite having cost £1,500 million, the war had little in the way of a lasting effect; 210,000 men died but this did not suppress population growth.\textsuperscript{22}

The early nineteenth century has been seen as particularly transitional and defeatist for Welsh national identity; ‘integration between England and Wales reached its political apogee in this period.’\textsuperscript{23} Morgan and others consider it to have been a necessary period of Welsh reinvention, romanticising whilst being ‘drawn into the maelstrom of British social, political and industrial life’.\textsuperscript{24} It represented a brief time of balance, between industrialising Wales and an older rural Wales.\textsuperscript{25} There was extensive Anglicisation of Welsh communities and institutions;\textsuperscript{26} between 1716 and 1870, Wales had no Welsh speaking bishop.\textsuperscript{27} Any outward angst from Welsh nationalists was typically exercised against an increasingly concentrated internal English landowning class, rather than England itself.\textsuperscript{28} Welsh nationalism has never been overtly

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Colley, \textit{Forging}, p. 301.
\item \textsuperscript{27} E. Evans, \textit{A History of Wales, 1660-1815} (Cardiff 1993), p. 71.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Day & Suggett, ‘Conceptions of Wales’.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
confrontational or separatist; as O’Leary tells us, ‘rarely was the voice of a more assertive nationalism heard’. Separatism has seldom been on the agenda of a nationalism more concerned with cultural and language preservation. The historiography has generally depicted a populist nationalism amongst subordinate groups, opposing English interests within Wales as opposed to England itself. This would suggest laws written in England, and handled through the intrusive established church would have been resented. Additionally, if nationalism is created to retain hegemony and gain consent to rule as Gray tells us, then the attitudes of paupers, failed by their rulers, is of interest.

**Nationalism and language**

Most comment regarding nationalistic traits within welfare has come in King and Stewart’s edited collection that identifies developments specific to peripheral nations. These observations referred to how the physical and social makeup of such countries shaped relief, which has been of great significance for this study of Wales and its upland areas. Looking at paupers’ narratives allows us to introduce pauper agency to this subject. Lin has looked at provision for soldiers’ families, though has mostly focused on welfare streams beyond poor relief, considering it inadequate for the support of such families. Lin argues these people lost their rights under the relief system because a sense of deservingness was established reliant upon family members in national service. She uses a large amount of formulaic data such as payment levels to display how welfare was distributed. The narratives employed here will display how it was justified by paupers, and how agency could be expressed without the presence of

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31 Day & Suggett, ‘Conceptions of Wales’.
34 King & Stewart, *Welfare Peripheries*.
36 Lin, ‘Military Families’.
37 Ibid.
male family members. In somewhat exploratory work concerned with pauper letters and nationalism, as well as gender, Tomkins has highlighted the angry desperation of those who had served in the military and were later reduced to pauperism.38

Understandably for a nation often perceived as subordinate to a larger neighbour, the identities of Wales outlined by historians are plentiful;39 prior to the increase in the amount of identity histories in the early 1990s, Dodd surveyed a range of historical interpretations of Welsh nationalism.40 The dawn of Welsh consciousness has often been placed in medieval times.41 It is seen to have originated earlier than English consciousness, and to have been galvanised by the repression of its native tongue. The subject of Welsh identity has typically been defined both against and alongside England, rather than considered in its own right. Consequently there exists a ‘rigorous current of historiography’ emphasising the damaging cultural impact of England on Wales.42 More recent works have realigned this stance though, attacking the effect of England less, and reconstructing Welshness or suggesting elements of it were ‘imagined’.43 In contrast the study of English national identity is a smaller, more recent affair, and even some widely respected identity studies lack a central argument about when Englishness may have emerged.44 One common theme is that it was probably a modern occurrence, typically coming later in the nineteenth century; English nationalism is seen as a new phenomenon.45 Kumar states, ‘The idea of English nationalism in the eighteenth century is anachronistic. This is not because the idea of the

41 Ibid., pp. 34-40.
44 Colls, Identity.
national did not exist then; it was, as everyone agrees, actively in the process of formation at this time. It is simply that it was an irrelevance.\textsuperscript{46}

The Welsh language was widespread at the end of the eighteenth century, and was the primary language for around 80 per cent of the population. In the nineteenth century its use went into a gradual decline, starting from the border and industrialising areas;\textsuperscript{47} ‘local dialects, rich in peasant lore, continued to thrive and the encroachment of English speech was so heavily confined to the urban towns and border counties that it seldom provoked comment.’\textsuperscript{48} As late as 1851, Welsh speakers were only in the minority in Monmouthshire, Montgomeryshire, Pembrokeshire and Radnorshire;\textsuperscript{49} the language remained prominent longer in rural areas.\textsuperscript{50} There has been much interest in the Welsh language across many facets of study, which have recently been drawn together by the 11 volume collection \textit{A Social History of the Welsh Language} edited by Geraint Jones. Despite the extensive use of the language, the way the poor laws interacted with Welsh has barely been documented, although Snell proposes that linguistic pride slowed adaption to the new poor law.\textsuperscript{51}

Existing works suggest that although English was the language of poor law administration, it was probably not resented, and did not create integration barriers.\textsuperscript{52} The farmers that ran the semblance of the poor law in Wales probably spoke Welsh the same as their tenants and the local paupers did.\textsuperscript{53} However officially English was the language that dominated, ‘in no domain were the people of Wales more acutely aware of the sheer weight and pressure of the English language than in the administrative and legal sphere.’\textsuperscript{54} In other areas of life though Moore-Colyer says, ‘Welsh had always been, and would continue to be, the language of the barn, byre and kitchen fireside.’\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{46} Kumar, \textit{National Identity}, p. 178.
\textsuperscript{50} W. Pryce, ‘Language Areas in North-East Wales c.1800-1911’, in ibid., pp. 21-61.
\textsuperscript{51} Snell, \textit{Parish and Belonging}, pp. 258-60.
\textsuperscript{52} S. Clarke, ‘Visions of Community: Elizabeth Baker and Late Eighteenth-Century Merioneth’, in Roberts & Clarke, \textit{Women and Gender}, p. 253.
\textsuperscript{54} Jenkins, ‘Wales, the Welsh’, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{55} Moore-Colyer, ‘Farmers and Language’, p. 105.
Similarly most historians believe the language was not central to any assertive Welshness. However, considering the importance of English in administrative practices, if Welsh was used in interaction with it, this would have represented an act of conscious, though small scale resistance. Howell states ‘It is still legitimate, nevertheless, to argue that at the core of Welsh ethnic consciousness in the nineteenth century was the existence of the Welsh language,’ though does not believe its use should be overstated as being provocative. Moore-Colyer thinks employment of the language was more challenging to authority; ‘Poor Law administrators were confronted by Welsh-speaking communities adamant to protect what they perceived as their ancient rights… this secret language was thus the verbal expression of frustration and resentment.’ Older histories are keener still to emphasise the existence of a confrontational Welshness embodied in the language. Ultimately though a more concerted language based nationalism came in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Nationalistic references in pauper letters were not common and this included expressions of Welshness. However examination of them is necessary as part of investigations into a peripheral region with a history of uncertain autonomy, and nationalistic comments in Welsh letters did appear disproportionately frequently. There were eighteen citations of nationalistic belonging in the 2,771 standard items of correspondence from paupers, higher advocates and overseers across the corpus. Most did not express passionately overt nationalism. Eight were sent to English parishes, with five to both Welsh and English border parishes. Fourteen of the eighteen letters came from paupers, and these were quite confident, achieving a confidence rating of 3.22. Three times Englishness was cited, Britishness twice, and Welshness was employed once. Their writing often seemed to be that of a more intelligent pauper, constructing an appeal to the law of the land or its perceived spirit, as can be seen from an request by James Lock to Blockley in Gloucestershire, May 1831;

‘I wrote a Letter to you, about a Month since, & am surpris’d that, you was not Condescending, enoug’h to send me any answer thereto, it was relative, to my poor distressed mother in Law, mary Jeffs, who, poor dear soul is now, bed ridden, or totally/ as we may say/ confind to her bed, without hopes of recovery, & in the greatest distress & want, thr’o, a paraletic stroke, which is an awful thing tho’ it pleased the divine disposer, of all things to inflict so severe a Calamity on her, but I alway’s thought, untill the present time, that we was living in a land of humanity, & to extend charity, where it is needful, & more especially where the Law, of this land doth order it,’ 61

The language of this appeal was more complex than that of most pauper appeals, and was almost poetic in parts, ‘mary Jeffs, who, poor dear soul is now, bed ridden’. Lock argued that the abstract ‘land’ was charitable by nature, but also possessed a law which served his needs, and he challenged Blockley’s overseers to fulfil these innate national values. Additionally Lock invoked religion which was common amongst paupers who used nationalism as a rhetorical device, appearing in over a quarter of appeals, compared to 10 per cent of others. Another pauper, John Stewart, behaved similarly. He appealed to both the ‘British Carichture’ and on other occasions, ‘the law of the land,’ as well as religious right again. 62 Citation of religion here is testament to paupers who placed worth in rights guarded by a higher entity. Nationalism was appealed to in a relatively positive manner eight times, however on six occasions paupers wrote letters suggesting they were victims of it, and that it had placed matters beyond their control;

‘I humbly entreat you will be pleased to take my destitute state into your kind consideration and forgive the way my daughter wrote to you as I cannot write English myself but I have had a great deal of cruel usage to bear with which has rendered me quite incapable to ask for myself these truths sir can be verrified by respectable people who have been verry charitable to me and which will give me a character if you require it and who has got

61 GA, OV 7/1/1, Lock to overseers, 5th May 1831.
62 LRO, PR 1349, Stewart to overseers, 3rd April 1822, 24th July 1822 & 15th October 1822.
respectable people relations living at old Sarum who they will write to if you require it I beg Sir you will please to send my money more regular as people knowing me to be a foreigner don’t like to trust me.63

The author, Sophia Cuss, did not cite nationalism to justify relief, but to explain why she had been forced to request it, as racism had left her excluded from community support. This letter was more pleading and simple than the examples given previously, without any attachment to higher ideals regarding rights. Welshness was cited in a somewhat patronising letter sent from Birmingham workhouse;

‘the poor man is now got Work and gets about 16s/Pwk hath a Wife & Children Viz. Eleanor 8 years old Wm. 5 years & Thomas 2 years & John 16 months old. the Sum they have from us is £2-2-6 was you not the greatest enemy’s to your own interest as a parish you would most certainly chearfully and thankfully pay the above Sum especially when you consider that this poor man will not be able to get half the Money in your Country’.64

It was sent to Leintwardine which, whilst in Herefordshire, was only four miles from Wales, and could be indicative of attitudes about the blurred nature of this border as the overseer addresses Leintwardine about their ‘Country’. The author’s jibe that this area could not provide for its poor as well as Birmingham was probably due to the bad relations between the parishes concerning payments, and may have been addressing the lack of work opportunities. However, especially because the letter came in 1788, it could have been insulting the problems weakly established Welsh parishes had in supporting their poor.

64 HRO, G65/36/8, Harrison to overseers, 25th November 1788.
Fig. 5.1: Welsh language zones, 1807-1811

Beyond these references to national belonging, twenty letters from throughout the entire corpus of 3,938 cited national service. However only thirteen were standard appeals and the rest largely consisted of letters to family and friends, and directives from the military. Once more this constitutes a relatively small amount of letters using this device compared to others such as sickness, which is cited over 1,000 times. These appeals that made reference to national service were again typically quite confident, with an average rating of 2.9. However their expression still conflicts with the opinions of Tomkins, who considers ex-servicemen to have taken refuge in anger out of desperation;66 these letters were often more measured than that. Once more there was disproportionate use of nationalistic devices within the border counties. Four letters expressing them came from the English border counties, and three from each of Wales and the comparison counties. Combined with the uses of nationalism shown earlier in this chapter, and considering its smaller corpus size, this shows some distinct Welsh national awareness. The correspondence considered omits that related to men serving in the militia, which was common and highly uniform in its format. A plea from Robert Pestor to his family in Barrington, Somerset reflects a common attitude to national service;

‘I am obliged to go on Board a man of war and Leave my wife and Four Children Dear Brother and sister I should be for ever obliged to you as you know my Parrish if you will be so kind as to go to Barrington and speak to the overseers of the Parrish and I hope you will Do all is possible you Can for them in Regard of trying to Gett them a settlement from the Parrish as they cannot do without it and the parrish will be oblige to alow them pay as I am sorry to inform you of my unfortunate fate I happened to get very much intoxicated in beer and happened to go in the house where the press gang wher and being hazy in liquor I enterd and in the morning I did not know wher I was but I was oblige to go and am Now sailing for Plymouth’.67

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67 SomRO, D/P/barr/13/7/1, Pester to brother and sister, 16th February 1806.
The pauper had no desire to serve his nation, and whilst this is more obvious than in other letters, as he had been pressganged into service, no letters displayed any pride at military participation; the tone of this one was self-pitying. Similar to the victims of oppressive nationalism, such as the targets of racism, military service created their need for relief, rather than an additional justification for it. This was one of eleven letters that referred to ongoing service; the other nine were generated by paupers that had served previously;

‘I write to you on behalf of James Gibbons – who belong to your parish – he was in the Life Guards, fell wounded at Waterloo, and now an inpensioner at Chelsea Hospital. he has a wife a Cripple confined to her Bed. and two Children – all he asks is a trifle for his poor Wife’

A more assertive use of service was employed here and it was felt that the claim carried more validity because the pauper had fought at Waterloo twenty-five years earlier. However the request was still negative about nationalism and there was no reference to militaristic pride. Because of his service Gibbons’s wife needed support, and the nation was indebted to give it. Of the ten standard pauper appeals mentioning national service, another three stated their belonging, and in more developed terms than Gibbons used. This constituted 40 per cent of these appeals, contrasted with 18 per cent of the rest of the corpus that made a claim for belonging; these were appeals that sought to explain why they had a right to relief.

An especially angry letter that mentioned both service and a more general Welsh nationalism was sent by Gwen Basset from Carnarvon to Henllan in Denbighshire 1835. The letter conveyed a series of interesting features, and deserves to be quoted at length;

‘you mentioned in your lines that the children must be moved to Henllan like sheep without a shepherd to be put in another place unless (but how on earth can) you imagine that children from seven years old to thirteen would be able to look after themselves in such a place, but you know that Henllan parish

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68 BRO, P/Abs/OP/9 (b), letter from Thompson, July 1840.
must care for the deprived and this through English law and if you do not provide that which is reasonable in time before the poor begin to starve, for want of the sustenance that they have been in need of for months, that the world will know that the Parishioners of Henllan have no concern for the blood of these poor creatures, but it is likely that no-one is poor, or underprivileged, or widowed, or pious in Henllan, since so much hard-heartedness has filled the land. Consider this before the day of judgement comes and you have enslaved and so much oppressed these small children as no one else could have done. Prostitution and drunkenness would have over-run your parish so that I daresay these would get more from you than the children of an old soldier who suffered greatly in the service of his King.  

Basset’s husband had died, and it is revealed in another letter that she was bringing up his children from a previous marriage. It is not clear if he was killed in combat but he had ‘suffered greatly’ and for Basset his children consequently deserved respectful treatment. In this instance, though the right to relief was created by a male, the right itself was possessed by a woman, and half of the appeals regarding national service were written by women. The way narratives allow us to see agency expression by individual paupers, means the opinions of Lin, who thinks families lost control of their relief without a male representative, can be questioned. Similar to the other nationalistic appeals discussed, Basset cites both ‘English law’ and the more intangible notion of ‘the land’ to establish an implicit duty, in an appeal that attacked both the nation and the state. She also invoked religious pressure. However what is most interesting is that the letter was written in Welsh. Twelve Welsh language letters were sent, and show a conscious decision to display minor disobedience against a system operated through the parish and in English. Doing so fits with the low levels of Welsh nationalism remarked on in the historiography, directed at invasive English

69 DA, PD/38/1/179, Basset to overseers, 7th August 1835.
70 DA, PD/38/1/179, Evans to overseers, 13th August 1835.
71 Lin, ‘Military Families’.
institutions. All of the letters were sent surprisingly late, in the 1830s, despite the declining use of the Welsh language through the nineteenth century, and could again exhibit a conscious choice to employ it. They were also typically angry, with a remarkably high average rating of 4.2, often condemning the handling of relief, and demanding their right to claim it. This may partly have been because eight letters were responding to a payment problem. Basset put her name to eight written in Welsh, but also three in English. She had either decided to write in Welsh or someone who objected to the system had written them for her, which is more likely considering their complexity. Communications involving Basset were not the only brash requests written in Welsh:

‘consider my case as I set it out to you before my pay is not sufficient by a long way to maintain me. Once I have purchased the coal and sixpence a week for care - a little help for looking after me – for I can scarcely move from the bed to the fire and I cannot open the door on my own and were it not for the help of my neighbours it would be far harder for me; I do not have enough sustenance for my job as bailiff and I do not get anything from it for the servants take it all, therefore I am giving it up.’

Though adopting a more pleading tone the author, Humphrey Davies, was still confident enough to abandon his job and openly burden the parish. He also accused the parish of having worsened the situation, not intervening early enough to provide him with ‘sustenance’ to maintain his position. These Welsh language letters show an awareness of nationhood that existed in some minds, often buttressed by anger. However they also show that Welsh nationalism was not strongly expressed through the language; 329 handwritten letters were sent to Welsh parishes from within Wales, yet written in English, even though the majority of the country was still Welsh speaking, showing widespread subservience to English as the administrative language.

72 Bogdanor, Devolution, pp. 144-50.
73 DA, PD/38/1/178, Davies to overseers, April 1834.
74 This would complement the findings of most historians, see Jenkins, ‘Introduction’, in Jenkins, Industrial Revolution, p. 1.
The use of all nationalistic comments, including the use of the Welsh language, has been detailed according to county in table 5.1. It is shown as a percentage of all standard correspondence to each county. This is necessary as many nationalistic comments existed in letters from higher advocates and overseers, reflecting a general national awareness surrounding the systems being dealt with. Nationalism, when used within Wales, represented the self-conscious expression of a region that felt both peripheral and Welsh. It was rarely used in reference to many of the English border counties. The occurrences of its use are generally low, and therefore the Welsh counties that have smaller collections of letters, such as Powys and Glamorgan were unlikely to feature examples. Despite a relatively large number of occurrences Gwent has a low overall percentage because of the large amount of justice correspondence sent to the county, which constituted almost half of its standard correspondence, but rarely included nationalistic comments. Denbighshire, which had not been anglicised as greatly as the other border counties, sharing a very small border with England and not industrialising to the same extent as Gwent, saw the greatest use of Welsh nationalism.

Table 5.1: Nationalistic comments and language use in all standard correspondence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>(18)</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>(14)</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(18)</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>Corpus</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(17)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Studies of counties further within Wales may reveal similar behaviour. The rights invoked by some nationalistic Welsh appeals bore similarities to their claims of more tangible rights under the settlement laws.

**Settlement and belonging**

Identity has typically been explored within parochial welfare literature as part of writings on settlement and ‘belonging’. The historiography of the settlement laws and their implications is considerable in scale, as we saw in chapter one. Historians had seen the laws as a rigid barrier to movement, enforcing an economically determined location on paupers. Works in the later 1980s delved more deeply into settlement sources, and revealed a greater flexibility to this definition of home, based around a person’s history and family. Pauper letters have shown just how negotiable belonging was, and that a sense of place could be both constructed and rejected in accordance with the desires of the poor or the overseers; recent work by King and Winter emphasises the negotiability of settlement even more than previous studies.

The key understanding of this notion of belonging to a place according to these rules is economic. Even recent works focused on the negotiability of settlement have set the end goal of these negotiations to be the right to claim relief, rather than a desire based on emotional attachment to a place. The term used in popular historical parlance is ‘belonging’, and indeed to ‘belong’ to a place was the pauper’s most common way of stating their settlement. However when invoked by historians in the modern era, to ‘belong’ conjures up images of more deeply held feelings of connection, and so it gives an initial impression of emotive content beyond that which their work discusses.

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75 For major works concerning both practice and historiographical development, see Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp. 83-6.
Snell’s work has been foremost in pairing economic belonging with a more sentimental sense of place. He follows historians such as Tadmor, who rooted her investigation of similarly emotive terms in contextual linguistics, and discovered their meanings to be wider than ours today. It is an entirely apt approach when specifically searching for understandings as Snell has done, and he gives rigid definitions. Whilst his approach is the most thorough concerning parish identity, it passes over more abstract notions of affection that must have existed, with overwhelming focus on law and finances. ‘Home’ for him was a term of attachment, but also ‘a notion of legal entitlement, a welfare security, a concept that people carried in their minds when they left; elsewhere he states ‘Belonging’ and ‘home’ were everyday administrative terms. Undoubtedly these terms existed as he finds, and legal and economic concerns would have affected a pauper, particularly as local custom blurred economic belonging. However such notions of ‘belonging’ can be too easily overemphasized in other investigations. It is part of a grey area historians less precise than Snell have not fully addressed, and has also meant that emotive attachment, of interest to many historians, has been overlooked. Moreover it confuses the importance of paupers’ attachment to place in overseers’ decision making, obscuring the potential for the pauper to use emotional capital in negotiations.

Similar work has been done on ‘belonging’ by King using pauper letters. Both he and particularly Snell, identify the term ‘friends’ and its implications for support and a right to place. For Snell, friends ‘were often those who could open up avenues to assistance’, and therefore the poor frequently lacked ‘friends’. As with ‘belonging’, Snell proves this was a contemporary term concerned with finances, but it further confuses an area between happiness with place, and economic reasoning. King focuses

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83 Snell, Parish and Belonging, pp. 81-161.
84 Ibid., p. 88.
85 Ibid., p. 84.
86 S. King, ‘I Must Quit This Place was it not for Mye Goode Freynds and Neibours’: Friendship, Kinship and Belonging in the Letters of Urban Paupers 1800-1840’, Historical Research, 33, no. 3 (2008), pp. 249-77.
87 Ibid; Snell, ‘Belonging and Community’, pp. 4-5.
more literally on the support of friends, though more so the pauper’s use of this as a device for remaining in a parish, thus reducing costs.89

Many authors have considered welfare’s interaction with community on the grounds that welfare was distributed within a community consensus. For example King believes due to paupers’ exposure to the authorities, the paupers were unlikely to be seen as outsiders.90 Hindle has a similar belief, stating, ‘access to both systems of relief presupposed membership of a community.’91 Gestrich et al also talk of a communal language of inclusion, as do Daunton, Hollen-Lees, Rushton and Snell.92 This is another topic that now suggests a more personal attachment to place, rather than the social stratification of parishes actually more akin to the writings of Wrightson; ‘the system identified and isolated the poor as a group: stressing their otherness; markedly reinforcing the moral differentiation of the deserving and the underserving; defining the boundaries of the community by the recognition of settlement and entitlement.’93 Continued consideration of belonging based around welfare economics is in danger of reducing paupers to economic beings.

If economic administration was the most important factor in outlining and creating a place for the people that lived there during the crisis of the old poor laws, it would support thinking from regional identity historians who suggest emotional belonging is actually a more recent occurrence.94 The idea the limits of the administrative parish unit formed the edge of a territory cared for personally by people is no more unlikely than the constructed boundaries of a nation doing the same. Snell has shown such attachment in work that investigates a culture of xenophobia based around parishes, prevalent to an extent that blunted working class consciousness.95 He

89 King, ‘Friendship, Kinship’.
90 King, Poverty and Welfare, p. 53.
has charted the decline of this attachment through the twentieth century by looking at burial rituals.\textsuperscript{96} Hollen-Lees has suggested belonging implied a cultural conformity as well.\textsuperscript{97} Crucially Humphries warns us not to overstate settlement in the mental world of paupers, as it was little mentioned in their autobiographies.\textsuperscript{98} These parochial studies are different to those investigating more cultural geographical identities,\textsuperscript{99} but the language used by some poor law historians invites comparisons with them, whilst not fully exploring individual emotions.

Outside of investigating a national identity, there has been limited discussion on the identities of belonging in Welsh history under the poor laws. As has been discussed, Welsh authorities are thought to have been particularly tough with enforcing settlement laws but recent literature that emphasises the flexibility of settlement has yet to be applied to these weakly formed parishes.\textsuperscript{100} The huge parish of Llandrillo in Denbighshire covered 28,200 acres, though further into Wales parishes could be twice this size.\textsuperscript{101} Bedwelty, Mynyddislywn and Ystradyfodwg typify unwieldy southern parishes in industrial areas, with acreage between 15,000 and 25,000. They were often served by old medieval churches on the hill tops, whereas non-conformists set-up chapels amidst the local population in the valley bottoms, integrating themselves better.\textsuperscript{102} These parish boundaries needed rearrangement but alteration required parliamentary intervention. The cumbersomeness of oversized administrative areas in Wales would continue under the new poor law.\textsuperscript{103}

Regarding parochial xenophobia, Snell suggests ‘such Wesleyan openness may have been more pronounced in England than in the heartlands of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism.’\textsuperscript{104} Davies tells us local pride in remote Welsh parishes slowed the implication of the new poor law.\textsuperscript{105} Howell also talks of strong loyalties which could

\textsuperscript{97} Hollen Lees, \textit{Solidarities}, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{99} Phythian-Adams, ‘Introduction’; Colls, \textit{Identity}; Williams, \textit{When Was Wales?}
\textsuperscript{100} King, ‘Settlement and Belonging’, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{101} E. Davies, \textit{A New History of Wales, Religion and Society in the Nineteenth Century} (Dyfed 1981), p. 49.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., pp. 49-50.
\textsuperscript{104} Snell, \textit{Parish and Belonging}, p. 75.
take the form of inter-parochial rivalry over encroachments in poorly enclosed Wales. These loyalties were reportedly carried by migrants into the new communities. A Commissioners report into education in Wales in 1847 describes Merthyr Tydfil; ‘The workmen who are perpetually immigrating, live together very much in clans, e.g. the Pembrokeshire men in one quarter, the Carmarthenshire men in another and so on...’ Indeed this sense of community was found amongst Welsh immigrants to north-east England. Work by Neil Evans has examined English migration into north-east Wales and sees consequent clashes with local language and identity, though considers English integration generally to have been easier in most of Wales. He has also suggested that due to the religious diversity, industrial decline, and highly anglicised make-up of Radnorshire, cultural identity was especially weak here. Importantly for the production of letters, Howell has outlined a lack of both literacy and individuality amongst the Welsh poor.

Settlement, even though it was often not the main subject of letters, appears in almost 700 of them across all standard correspondence, in addition to associated content such as removal or return. When contrasted with the other letter features discussed in this chapter, this is a very large amount, and the database has been vital in displaying this difference. It is likely that the growth in discussing settlement prior to 1800 seen in figure 5.2, which is formed from all standard pauper letters, was caused by the 1795 act creating increased consciousness of settlement. The trends are similar to those see in figure 4.1 concerning pauper’s threats of return, as concern with settlement declined following this, but then grew again as the financial pressure on the system did. Considering the significance of the 1795 act shown in graphs regarding both settlement and the sentiment expressed in letters, a short lived increase of pressure on the relief system in the 1790s could possibly be recognised. The occurrence of settlement mentions and the sample size used for the first data point is small, though compared to the rest of the graph, its positioning is not much different to the first point on figure 4.1.

110 Ibid., p. 218.
111 Howell, *Rural Poor*, p. xiii.
Fig. 5.2: % of paupers mentioning settlement in appeals

The numbers adjacent to the line give the absolute number of letters represented by its individual data points.
and therefore be representative of wider trends. Paupers were more likely to develop their case for economically and legally belonging to parish, than to make a simplistic claim for it unsupported by a personal history. For example Anne Williams from Llanwrst described her case for belonging in writing to Holywell in Flintshire in 1793;

‘I am the widow of the Late Edward Williams Flaxdresser who Died about 2 Months Ago in Hollywell and Left me and 5 Small Children Chargeable upon the said Parish – And that Sir Roger Mostyn Bart and M' Mostyn &c ordered me to have 4/ Pd Week which accordinly was entered down in the Parish Book for me to have them weekly at Llanrwit But since that time I only Received 8/ in the whole which If I Received Weekly and Regular wd be too scanty allowance to keep me and my 5 Children’¹¹²

She established her right to settlement through her late husband, stating his profession, which would have earned him his settlement. However her language was not entirely direct in staking her claim for belonging to the parish. It was implied that her settlement was of significance as she had become ‘Chargeable upon the said Parish’. This was still understood by the overseers and would have been their first consideration in deciding upon a pauper’s appeal. As with other paupers who developed their settlement claim in appeals using a personal history, Williams was relatively confident, though partly because she had a perceived agreement with the Welsh justices that she would be supported.

Claiming settlement was more important for border county paupers, with 20.4 per cent of Welsh letters doing so, declining to 19.6 per cent on the English side and only 14 in the comparison counties. As seen with the importance of removal, analysed in chapter four, settlement law had not reached the same flexibility in the borders and remained more important. English comparison paupers were fractionally more likely to develop their case in the manner seen in Williams’s letter, and it is a common theme of this chapter that their letters were more developed generally. However the border county paupers were much more likely to make a ‘simple’ claim;

¹¹² FRO, P/30/1/235 (18a), Williams to overseers, 28th September 1793.
'Being informed by the Overseers of this Parish that you have made an order to them to reduce the money I receive (as from the Parish to which I belong & your own) from seven Shillings to five per week on account of my older Boy I take the liberty to lay my case before you'\textsuperscript{113}

Elizabeth Whittle wrote this to Poulton-with-Fearnehead in Cheshire in March 1829, and did not explain why she belonged to the parish, but the fact she did was bound with the idea the overseers controlled its running, and therefore laid responsibility upon them. The importance of settlement in each region was mirrored by the overseers, with Welsh overseers the most likely to pass comment on it, at 22 per cent; 21 per cent did so in the comparison counties and 15 in the English border counties. Again the comparison county letters written by overseers were more likely to fully develop their claim, whilst Welsh overseers stated it in ‘simple’ terms. These percentages are much higher than the percentages of paupers commenting on settlement, downplaying the idea that economic belonging was of particular significance in the pauper’s mind. The paupers appreciated the prominence of settlement as an issue for the overseers, and consequently some letters attempted to negotiate with and permanently change a pauper’s parish of settlement, as opposed to more widely analysed negotiations that simply sought to stave off removal through gaining out-parish relief. John Sharp’s appeal to Shipton-under-Wychwood in Oxfordshire was one of these letters, which typically appeared ambitious in their requests;

‘I have gained a Settlement in two ways in the first place by having the Farm in my own possession more than Twenty years back & secondly by servitude to my Mother Now I must inform you that I am very much distressed at this time and it is quite out of my power to remain in Brighton without assistance provided I was help’d with the sum of Fifeteen pounds I make no doubt but I should get my Parish here as I have taken the House I am now in for a Twelvemonth for it is my wish & determination to

\textsuperscript{113} WL, MS 1116, Box 3, 7a, Whittle to overseers, 17\textsuperscript{th} March 1829.
do every thing to gain a settlement here, if I am not helped it will be utterly out of my power to remain here or gain a settlement.\textsuperscript{114}

Sharp wanted a large sum from the overseers, but an amount he thought they would consider worthwhile as a long term cost control measure. This was because it would enable him to change his parish of settlement through the residency qualification, and remove himself permanently from their relief rolls, whilst he would have gained a generous rental payment. His confidence was reflected in similar appeals, with a high average rating of 3.7. Twelve of these appeals were sent by English comparison paupers, compared to only three in the English border counties and one in Wales, showing again that although settlement laws were more important in the borders, they were not seen with such negotiable flexibility. Attempts by paupers to have parishes help change their settlement show the insincerity of measuring ‘belonging’ according to settlement, and how it was governed by economic desire.

Tables 5.2 and 5.3 show how paupers handled the supposedly concrete issues of belonging to a parish in each county. They contrast the use of ‘hard’ settlement claims in table 5.2, with the more negotiable settlement in table 5.3, and bear strong similarities with tables 4.7 and 4.8 that considered basic threats of return from paupers, and more flexible threats of being removed. Tables 5.2 and 5.3 are comparable both in terms of addressing the topic of settlement, and the regional variations they present. These tables again show a notable split in the peripheral counties, in this instance between Wales and those of the mid-border region, and the industrial counties of the north-west. The importance of movement in industrialising locations had caused the settlement laws to decrease in force in the north-west, becoming more negotiable. It is also notable that Gwent often behaves in a more ‘English’ manner than many of the other Welsh counties on both tables. Attempts to negotiate settlement shown in table 5.3 were small in terms of absolute numbers, but they consistently did not occur in the border counties and in Wales in particular. Many southern English counties rank highly in table 5.2, which appears to show where settlement was important, and similar rankings could be seen in table 4.7. It may be that due to the greater development of letters in southern England, traits that were ubiquitous, such as references to settlement, were likely to appear in

\textsuperscript{114} ORO, PAR 236/5/A13/2/1, Sharp to overseers, 5th March 1832.
these appeals. Tables 5.2 and 5.3 support the findings displayed in 4.7 and 4.8 that obeying the letter of the settlement laws was important in peripheral regions and in

**Table 5.2: Economic Settlement claims in pauper correspondence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
<td><strong>20.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English BC</strong></td>
<td><strong>19.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>95</strong></td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comparison Counties</strong></td>
<td><strong>13.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corpus</strong></td>
<td><strong>17.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>184</strong></td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.3: Attempts to trade settlement for additional relief in pauper correspondence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
<td><strong>0.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English BC</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comparison Counties</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corpus</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wales especially. These were regions less experienced and less confident in using the out relief system, though this attitude faded as a consequence of industrialisation. Historians have often extrapolated the comments on settlement constituting these tables to construct ideas of homeliness; however more emotive claims exist in poor law material.

**Emotional belonging**

There is a small amount of evidence within the letters that suggests some paupers had genuine attachment to these legally created parish units, and that this could be used as emotional capital to negotiate belonging with overseers, who may therefore have effectively subsidised this life choice of the pauper. Of the 2,527 standard letters from overseers and paupers, there were forty-three claiming that the pauper had an emotional desire to stay, including twenty-nine from paupers. This is a minor figure compared to those that stated their economic belonging, and historians who consider it alongside these claims are perhaps exaggerating the emotional importance of settlement for parish officials.115 Additionally these emotive appeals were sometimes integrated with more economic factors, for instance ten had had their location threatened by removal, and four threatened return; five were concerned about maintaining their economic contacts. Seventeen of the emotional appeals were sent to English border parishes, ten to English comparison ones, and only two to Wales. Using the database has presented this relative difference in numerical terms, and the utilization of parish correspondence has helped display emotive perceptions of the parish. There were no obvious changes over time in the expression of this attachment, which would point to its sincere nature, as it did not alter despite shifts in welfare sentiment. Sarah Parker wanted to remain where she felt at home;

> ‘I wish to know of you, whether I can Claim this parish or if they can put me away as they threaten to do altho I have not hither to applied to them for releif, if Sir you think I belong to your parish I must beg the favour of a Certificate from you to

indemnify me to this parish as I am willing to strive for a bit of bread and as this is my native place’.

She had formed an emotional attachment to her ‘native place’, and it suited her to stay there if the settlement laws allowed it. They were founded on top of her sense of place and were secondary for the pauper. Attachment to place carried some genuine negotiating capital in the relief system, as is witnessed in communications from the overseers of Farnham in Hampshire to Bishopstoke in the same county;

‘on Behalf of the Widow Brumham that is to say the I Have got an order of Removall – under the Hands of Geo Porter and Go Parris Esquires – Dated the 12th instant – But as the old Woman is So verry much attached to this Place after Living in it So may years – We are Verry unwilling to Remove her’.

The overseers did not want to remove Brumham because she was ‘verry much attached to this Place after Living in it So may years’. Brumham was old, as were a disproportionately large number of six of those making emotive appeals. Old age could validate remaining in a place beyond economic necessity; Sokoll recognises that the elderly were most likely to use a moral argument against removal and Hindle has observed the importance of residency length in bargaining. As other paupers and overseers also made arguments for relief based on presence and the length of residence in a parish, it is clear emotional capital must have carried some weight, although occasionally discussing residence may have been relevant towards determining settlement qualifications.

Not all paupers who relied on emotive reasoning in appeals were poor throughout their lives. Emotional attachment to a place necessarily requires reflection of self and the localities’ position within one’s own life, and consequently many applicants had a keen awareness of their position within the parish;

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116 ORO, PAR MSS/ D/D/c.25 Parker to overseers, 29th June 1809.
117 HantsRO, 145M49/PO79/9/1,2, Billis to overseers, 14th August 1818.
‘Mr Cook a Freeman of Glocester and a Parishoner of the Parish of St Nicholas there, who is very much reduced, and is now dependent on a Daughter who keeps the Pike at Lidney at the low Wages of 6 s p Week I am in – duced Gentlemen to solicit of you, some little allowance towards his support – The wants of the Poor so eloquently described in the holy Scripture, the reflection of the fluc – tuation of human Prosperity, forcibly striking every Quarter and your own Situations constantly hearing the Caces of the distress’d must excite a considerable degree Sympathy in your Breasts But as the same weight of Misery falls heavier on some than others – think not Gentlemen I heighten the Colouring when I ask you revert to his Situation when he kept the Old Bear in your Parish and paid 23 L for his Freedom and contrast the Portrait and now behold him

Cook was both a freeman, and a former publican within his parish, and four other emotional applicants incorporated such a sense of positional importance, which will be returned to within this chapter. His role implied he had provided a service to the parish, and consequently possessed a personal honour and an outstanding debt. Although this was emotion used somewhat manipulatively, it could be appreciated that the pauper cared for his parish and its role in his past, and it remained a factor of self-definition. The same was true of Anthony Harris;

‘he became deranged in his Intellect some months ago, & it is now no longer safe to himself & others that he should be permitted to roam at large.

It is not, Gentlemen, for any weekly allowance that I now solicit, for I understand you already have granted 4 shillings p week for their subsistence –

\[119\] GA, P154/15 OV 7/1, Gardiner to overseer, 10\textsuperscript{th} September 1809.
A few weeks ago he left his Home, & after wandering about several Days was brought home by the Beadle of Kensington Parish, where he had wandered –
On Thursday morning he left his Home again, & has not since been heard of – His poor Wife is half distracted, & after walking yesterday 30 Miles, & making every Inquiry where there was a chance of any Intelligence, is very ill from Anxiety, Fatigue & Distress – It has occurred to her that he has probably gone down to his own Parish, & it is for the purpose of ascertaining whether you have seen or heard any thing of him that I am induced to trouble you.\footnote{ORO, PAR MSS/D/D/c.11/1, Mitchel to overseers, 18\textsuperscript{th} February 1812.}

Whilst being of unsound mind, the pauper still had a notion of home. Removed from economic expectations in his ill state, he returned to his parish. Ultimately almost all pauper letters exist because the pauper wanted to stay where they were. It may be that most applications were framed within economic terms because this was what the overseers dealt with, though attachment was actually of greater significance for the pauper. The sources examined in this inquiry were economically orientated; as Sokoll states, they are official items of writing.\footnote{Sokoll, ‘Old Age’, p. 131.} It was likely the host parish attempting to remove the pauper heard the greatest personal appeals to stay.

Family caused a great deal of attachment to a place; 41 per cent of all standard pauper applications stated that they had family to provide for, but this increased to 65 amongst paupers claiming emotional belonging. The attachment of paupers to a parish where family lived would have been genuine for most of them. It could also have been adequate reason for overseers to support a lifestyle if it kept families together, financially supporting each other, and six letters made an appeal to stay somewhere on these grounds.

Other letters display the emotional ties of having family resident in a different parish. Twenty-nine appeals included enquiry regarding, or love sent to, distant family members. However eleven of these were appeals to other family members, where the topic came more naturally. The family members would then approach the overseers on their relative’s behalf. Of the remaining eighteen, ten were sent to English border
counties, eight to comparison counties and none to Welsh border parishes. Contrastingly friends were almost never enquired about, with only one letter passing on wishes to old neighbours, and perhaps this sense of belonging was not deemed worthy of parish support and therefore not employed by paupers. Enquiry about the wellbeing of family does not appear to have been any sort of device for negotiating relief though, showing little change over time according to wider sentiment. Additionally only on three occasions did these eighteen letters that asked about family also present an interest in economic belonging. Richard Jones’s appeal to Eardisland in Herefordshire from Carmarthen represents this;

‘I have not got a Sixpence since I left Eardisland I have got a Room and ham to Pay fore Shilings a weke and find our hown fire i ham oblicht to kepe fire night and day tall the Little Children dos got better i am in a Strange Place and have no friend to give us a Bit of Brad [...following the closing of the letter...] Please to Lat know how is my Daughter’

The enquiry concerning his Daughter was an afterthought, not considered relevant to the rest of the appeal. Jones sincerely missed her, and this was probably made worse by his presence in ‘a Strange Place’ in Wales. The overseers were his best outlet for information on his old parish. Use of attachment was always open to manipulation though;

‘Moses Wallis 1 Guinea Street Who, has been a housekeeper in the house in which he now lives upwards of 50 years and who was enrolled a Member of the Church of England in the parish Church of Saint Mary Redcliffe as appears by the Register more than 70 years since - born in the parish in which he has always lived and respected in whose Cemetry the ashes of his ancestors as well as those of his children and children’s children are

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122 HRO, AJ32/91, Jones to overseers, 26th December.
deposited and to which sacred spot he often looks with reverential awe.¹²³

Wallis was amongst a dozen paupers all applying for a gift available for householders in Redcliffe, Bristol in 1843, distributed by the local overseers. Because it was only available for householders, Wallis’s advocate was required to make extravagant claims about his feelings towards the area, showing how emotional attachment to a place could be fabricated. However the rules of the charitable gift also show that the source of it placed enormous importance on personal attachment to the parish unit.

The ways a pauper claimed attachment in their correspondence beyond economic belonging have been sorted by instance and ranked in tables 5.4 and 5.5. Both tables portray the softer elements of identity, and the peripheral region is strongly evident within each of them. Although these more emotive claims of belonging appear relatively common overall in the English border counties, in both tables this has been caused by numerous occurrences in Somerset and Gloucestershire, the southern border counties. The tables show that southern paupers generally were far more likely than their peripheral counterparts to claim emotional connections to both their host and settlement parishes, and the characteristics of table 5.4 and 5.5 are partly in evidence because these paupers developed the content of their appeals more. Because emotional capital was more widely used by southern English paupers, this could have caused historians who have studied the area to overlap emotive attachment and settlement belonging. The absolute numbers of occurrences in each table are quite small, though consistently spread geographically. Compared to existing studies, the numbers seem adequate. As previously mentioned, Sokoll cites old age as an important moral argument against removal; however in the sample of seventy-eight letters taken from Essex, this occurs once.¹²⁵ The validity of emotional appeals would have been consistent with a relief system where the pauper often expressed familiarity with the overseer.

The significance of paupers returning to their home parish to collect relief was highlighted in the last chapter, and forty pauper letters refer to such face-to-face meetings as part of the relief process. However there were also other expressions of

¹²³ BRO, P/St/MR/ChW/14/R, Harris to overseers, 16th December 1843.
¹²⁵ Sokoll, ‘Old Age’, p. 139; Sokoll, Essex Pauper Letters, p. 70.
Table 5.4: References to family attachment in settlement parish by paupers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
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<td>(11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Shropshire</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Somerset</td>
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<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
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<td>English BC</td>
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<td>(1)</td>
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Table 5.5: Claims of emotional attachment to host parish by paupers

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<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
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<td>Gwent</td>
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<td>Powys</td>
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<td>(10)</td>
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<td>(3)</td>
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familiarity with overseers from paupers. Seventeen letters mention having met the overseer in some context other than the relief process and thirty-five comment on personal friendship or familiarity with the overseer, or display goodwill towards the overseer’s family. Additionally eleven remark on their concern regarding the changing
of the overseer, and the effect of this change on their relief. An H Henning, who wrote to Lyndhurst in Hampshire, felt a personal relationship had developed between himself and the overseer;

I will Take no more of Yr time than saying I was sorry you was offended sending P Part but was foolish to think at time I would Cost you nothing

Accept my thanks
Ps I for Your Trouble
Expect a salt fish I am Yr Huble
for Good Friday H Henning Sn
am promist a Present & will send one to you126

This symbolises the importance relief could have in building familiarity and belonging for the pauper. Perceived acquaintance with the overseers meant paupers were keen to know the tenure of the overseer accustomed to their case, and in four of the eleven times it was discussed, the pauper mentioned a recent payment problem. However this was not done in an angry manner, as six of these letters came with apologies from the paupers.

Many of these feelings of connection with the overseer were more common in the border counties, as were requests to relieve ‘the bearer’ of the letter who had appeared at the vestry.127 These requests were similar to the personalised orders written out instantaneously by justices described in chapter three. All of these features show the remnants of a face-to-face system of relief that was still favoured in the borders. Such contact was used to handle an underdeveloped and untrusted out-parish system, establishing a key feature of peripheral welfare regions, and can be seen in tables 5.6 and 5.7. Because table 5.7 reflects the proportions of certain correspondence types that were often not written by paupers, it is calculated as a percentage of all standard correspondence for each county. Personal relationships with overseers were particularly

126 HantsRO, Lyndhurst, 25M84 – PO71/22/1/1.2, Henning to overseers, no date.
127 This is different from paying a third party bearer who would then return with money requested by the pauper or parish, which was a more common practice.
important to both Welsh paupers, and those in the north-west, which is interesting as they were unlikely to develop emotive relationships within letters in order to gain welfare, as has been seen. However there was a felt need to develop a personal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.6: Pauper correspondence expressing familiarity with, or meeting, overseers</th>
<th>Table 5.7: Requests to overseers to ‘relieve the bearer’ in all standard correspondence</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Corpus</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
relationship with the overseer because this was how such communities operated, despite the unestablished nature of the overseer’s position in many of these areas. Paupers in the other peripheral counties of Shropshire and Herefordshire also frequently took part in the behaviours shown by each table. Use of ‘relieve the bearer’ letters could to some extent account for the underdevelopment of written appeals in the border counties, as in these cases the pauper’s request would have been partly delivered in person. Table 5.7 shows that the compactness of city communities could provide easily accessible epistolary advocates, and consequently Bristol has the highest ranking in it. This behaviour will be seen in other instances of assistance in letter writing. However Bristol’s ranking is also evidence of the anomalous results that can be created by focus on a single city, and such results occur for Bristol regarding other traits. Sokoll found three short letters he believes were handed over in person in Essex, although whether this was by the pauper themselves, constituting a ‘relieve the bearer’ request, is not clear.128 Three would be a small amount compared to the peripheral counties, considering the size of his corpus. The community ties represented in these two tables had other ramifications for the support of paupers.

**Community support**

As seen in chapter one, understanding that paupers accessed relief beyond the parish has become a central part of interpreting the poor laws. It has shown how so much variance could occur in the treatment of the poor. In some instances parish welfare was only part of their experience. Support of paupers within communities, especially financially, formed part of the well documented ‘economy of makeshifts’.129 Though literature concerning supplementary earnings is extensive, it has only recently been specifically tied to the poor laws in an edited volume by King and Tomkins.130 An area particularly lacking in research has been how assistance from local community members was mixed with poor relief. Pauper letter studies have addressed the creation of additional income,

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130 King & Tomkins, *Makeshifts*. 
but chiefly in terms of family arrangements, or integration into labour markets; Sokoll has looked at strategic household and employment decisions. Similarly there have been no dedicated investigations of letters specifically from epistolary advocates, and the role these advocates played in community provision. King has declared that the sick used advocates more, though offers no supporting evidence.

Welsh histories often talk of communities where extensive support was provided for those in need, especially in remote parishes where face-to-face relationships pervaded; ‘what made compulsory poor rates unnecessary was simply the fact that population was still small enough for all men to be neighbours.’ This collectivism would have been bolstered by the weak social barriers between ratepayers and paupers, and the small middle class. Howell thinks additional sustenance away from the parish must have been given because the poor rates taken were too low to support the poor and tells us, ‘down to mid-century the relatively limited overall population compared with the later decades renders it feasible that the myriad local communities coped with their poor through traditional ways like kindred and neighbour help, gentry charity and church gatherings or collections.’ Though concerned with England, Hindle has also shown us that similar small communities took greater responsibility for their poor.

The evidence in the letters initially suggests there was stronger community support in English counties than in Welsh ones. However on closer inspection of the data, community support was probably strongest in the Welsh border counties. To gauge if communities offered paupers regionally different levels of help, it is necessary to base calculations on where letters were sent from, rather than to, as would normally be done. Thirty eight items of standard pauper correspondence mentioned that they had received relief from community members. This happened in 3.9 per cent of letters from

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133 A. Gestrich, E. Hurren & S. King, ‘Narratives of Poverty and Sickness in Europe 1780-1938: Sources, Methods and Experiences’, in Gestrich, Hurren & King, Poverty and Sickness, p. 17.
136 Moore-Colyer, ‘Farmers and Language’, p. 102; also see comments on Welsh vestries in chapter four.
137 Howell, Rural Poor, p. 95.
138 Hindle, Parish?, p. 287.
English comparison counties, 4.2 per cent from English border counties, and only 3.2 from those in Wales.

Paupers were almost as likely to declare a lack of communal support as they were to say that they received support, and did so in thirty-three standard pauper appeals. Furthermore, English paupers were also the most likely to comment on not receiving community support, with reference made in 4.2 per cent of English border appeals, 3.7 per cent from the comparison counties, and 3.2 from the Welsh ones. Realistically these English communities cannot have been both generous and miserly, and intra-regional differences do not explain this discrepancy, as in England the majority who stated they either received support or did not, wrote from Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire in both cases. Similarly no intra-regional differences explain the higher level of remarks in the English border counties compared to the Welsh ones; most letters talking about either receiving or not receiving additional provision were sent from Bristol, Somerset and peripheral Herefordshire in both instances. Furthermore, there are no changes over time in remarks on the amount of community support given. Geographically, the same paupers that stated they received support, were also the most likely to say that they did not get any. This potentially displays two aspects of letter construction. Firstly paupers may have been untrustworthy in declaring the level of their communal support. These appeals could be manipulative and show the importance of recognising the silences of what was left out of pauper letters. It is the reason Hindle found that when community support was mentioned in petitions, it was often regarding the fact that such support was no longer available; paupers could be reluctant to disclose additional income that may hinder their claim for relief. Secondly therefore, the reason references to both receiving and not receiving relief were more frequent in the non-peripheral ‘English’ counties, was because these paupers developed their letters more extensively, and thoughtfully. Many of the paupers writing letters from counties, almost exactly a third, would have been writing them to that same county. Many more would have written from neighbouring counties. What these percentages reflect are regional letter writing traits from paupers who had largely remained within the same area.

139 On the importance of recognising what is not included in speech see B. Poland & A Pederson, ‘Reading Between the Lines: Interpreting Silences in Qualitative Research’, Qualitative Inquiry, 4, no 2 (1998), pp. 293-312.
140 Hindle, Parish?, p. 410.
An appeal from Thomas Earl to Bradford-on-Avon in Wiltshire displays many traits common to declaring community support;

‘i have Neither Shoos nor shorts neither of it is worth six pence for I am at my wits end allways before I Send to you for help as you know we have not troubeled you since last Spring but you know there is nothing here in the winter and what is Still worse On Saterday last I went to help to make Ready for to bury Mr Dryer and Carrying Som Lumps of wood i fell Down a Cross 5 Bricks and hurt my Right Side So that we cant tel where the Ribs is broke or not but I am Quite disabled to travel but i must try my friends to get me in to the Despencery if they will be So kind therefore Gentlemen if you do not Send a Speedy Releaf you will have us all brought home to you’.141

This letter had a pleading manner, stressing that the pauper had caused minimal problems for the parish, and describing the humiliation of being disabled and lacking clothing. Such a tone was common to letters that appealed despite having community support, which had a low average first appeal rating of 2.48; it was important to justify relief despite also receiving community assistance. Over 40 per cent of these appeals threatened some form of return, compared to 26 per cent of other pauper appeals. Doing so allowed the pauper to reveal their additional support, because returning meant losing it and increasing relief costs, and highlights the manipulation involved in these letters. This statistically confirms previous thoughts on the topic of threatening return from Sokoll.142 Earl commented on the support of his ‘friends’, a term which was used as explained by Snell, and to have no friends meant to have no support.143 A pauper could not be without ‘neighbours’ in the same way; if neighbours were mentioned they offered support.

Due to the unreliable nature of how community support was revealed in letters, and to display that it was indeed a trait determined by regional approaches to letter

142 Sokoll, ‘London’, p. 44.
143 Snell, ‘Belonging and Community’.
writing, the data for table 5.8 is based on where pauper letters were sent to, as the other tables using pauper correspondence are. The table shows that commenting on either receiving or not receiving support from members of the community, was highly common in the non-peripheral counties, with Denbighshire the sole anomaly in this trend.

Because table 5.8 displays the development and manipulation of letter content, it should be considered in comparison to tables 5.4 and 5.5, regarding claims of emotive attachment to the host parish, and references to family attachment in the settlement parish. All three tables illustrate that peripheral areas showed little concern for emotive attachments. Two factors were formative in this. Firstly in more industrialised areas

Table 5.8: Community support references by paupers sent to counties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
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<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

such as Lancashire, Gwent, Shropshire and Flintshire, the demands of freely moving labour meant claims of belonging, including settlement, declined in value. Secondly, restrictive levels of available finance in peripheral areas meant these aspects of communal identity were somewhat luxurious, and were less valued by peripheral
overseers. An appeal on behalf of Widow Park features a number of characteristics common to non-peripheral areas, in this case Gloucestershire;

‘concerning Old Dame Park her son have done all he can for her he is out of work at present and is not able to support her she is living at the same place as usual she is behind in her rent about ten weeks and he is not able to pay it as he have a wife [illegible] for support the old woman would have been starved if I had not have gave her Something she keeps in the same Hous as she ased she wi[ll] sooner starve than come home’.

Park wanted to stay in her house; she had an emotional attachment to where she was and hoped the parish would support that, to the extent that it removed her ability to threaten return in negotiations. Presumably the attachment also extended to remaining near the son that was mentioned. Additionally there was reference to the community support she had received from the author himself, though this presents less of a manipulative device than in other letters, as the community member providing it also confirmed it. Considering the assistance of the community in writing appeals presents a more reliable guide to assessing the levels of local support for a pauper

The use of epistolary advocates is evidence of how paupers utilised new communities practically to continue their own cultural habits in making appeals. Therefore tables 5.9 - 5.11 do not simply reflect communal support, but also pauper agency in satisfying their settlement parishes’ desire for community endorsement. The data in each table has been measured based on where letters were sent to, and this is how community support should be considered. Table 5.9 includes correspondence from higher advocates such as employers or clergy, and measures its use numerically against the appeals written by paupers, to illicit how often this type of appeal was employed proportionately. Table 5.11 quantifies the amount of verifications and supporting statements that accompanied pauper appeals, or came as separate documents, and considers them as a percentage of pauper correspondence. Analysing these letters in the ways described presents strong regional trends, and evidences practical help with

144 GA, P328a OV 7/18, Nicholls to overseers, 24th November 1834.
appeals that was more quantifiable than that concerning material support from within the community.

Table 5.9: % of pauper and higher advocate appeals written by a higher advocate or unidentified other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English BC</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison counties</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.10: % of pauper correspondence written by an identifiable pauper advocate, such as a family member

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English BC</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison counties</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>(17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first two tables again portray a desire for face-to-face contact and support to handle an underdeveloped and untrusted out-parish system. There was a much higher rate of appeals in the border counties signed by the pauper but evidently transcribed by another individual, for instance those written in the third person, or signed by the pauper with an ‘x’, and these are incorporated into table 5.10. The need for such appeals could partly be attributed to low levels of English literacy in Wales,\footnote{Howell, \textit{Rural Poor}, p. xiii.} though the desire to have assistance in writing appeals was a common feature of all peripheral areas.

Findings here again echo the concepts of King, this time on the importance of advocates in the north-west, although this was not just to garner greater validity for an appeal, as he thinks, but also due to a face-to-face culture.\footnote{S. King, ‘Regional Patterns in the Experiences and Treatment of the Sick Poor, 1800-1840: Rights, Obligations and Duties in the Rhetoric of Paupers’, \textit{Family and Community History}, 10, no. 1 (2007), pp. 70-1.} Sokoll’s belief that writing was a social activity, based on his work in Essex, appears particularly well grounded in

\footnote{Table 5.11: Supporting comments and certifications as a $\%$ of standard pauper appeals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>$%$ of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter type occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>$%$ of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter type occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(17)</td>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>English BC</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(18)</td>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(18)</td>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>Comparison counties</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(14)</td>
<td>Corpus</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the peripheries. As discussed in chapter two in relation to Sokoll’s research, using correspondence specifically from advocates is a different approach to his, and it is impossible to know exactly how much was penned by advocates. However in relative terms these figures are probably accurate and their use was more popular in the border counties. These peripheral areas where help was requested in the writing of appeals were not the same as more southern English areas that required the justification of a written verification either on or with applications, seen in table 5.11. This partly reflects a squeeze on residual support in the late 1820s and 1830s in these southern counties; of the 43 surgeon’s certifications and signatures which are incorporated into this table, over two thirds were sent from 1823 onwards. Their use is also indicative of the comparatively low level of access to, and position of, medical professionals in the peripheral areas, as identified by King.149

The assistance with writing seen in tables 5.9 and 5.10, and the need to familiarise with others involved in the relief process bears similarities with the acquaintances shown between paupers and overseers, and the delivery of ‘relieve the bearer’ requests depicted in tables 5.6 and 5.7, which were also common traits in the peripheral zone. Similar to the table on the ‘relieve the bearer requests’, Bristol has a high ranking in table 5.10, due to greater accessibility of epistolary advocates within densely populated city communities. One such request sent to the upland village of Clyro in Powys is exemplary of this face-to-face world:

‘The Bearer Paul Smith, you may take my Word is a Substantiall man and a good Husbandman and I wish it had been my Chance to have had him for my Tennant at Hangoide, respects to your family’150

Aside from being a ‘relieve the bearer’ request from a higher advocate, both typical peripheral features, the very short note also wished the best to the overseer’s family. The fact this note was taken to the vestry by the pauper, that the Welshman Paul Smith required someone to write it for him, and the felt need of the advocate to personalise his

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149 King, ‘Regional Patterns’, pp. 71-2.
150 PA, RC/E/CLY/2/168, Stevens to overseers, 13th February 1774.
message to the overseer all display a desire for more control over an out-parish system in an area still getting to grips with it. This was especially so in the year of 1774, when the letter was written. The author also chose to give a specific trade for the pauper, in line with the self-dependent mind-set of the region.

**Individual**

To an extent, because they portray the expressions of the poor, every pauper letter study is one of identity that displays how the writers sought to sustain their existence. However the source has rarely been used in concentrated studies of individuals specifying a preference for the lifestyle or position they wanted, which was an expression of a more overt identity. The issue of maintaining ‘self’ is important when we look at the pauper’s approach. For instance Tomkins has remarked on the implications of poverty for masculine identity, whilst King says that feelings of individual humiliation underpinned the process of applying for relief; ¹⁵¹ both historians displayed the consequences of this degradation for the more discrete construction of rhetoric. The most well examined area related to self-presentation and awareness discusses clothing. Sokoll has shown the acceptable standards of attire set out by paupers in their letters; ‘among the basic necessaries, shoes (and perhaps, by implication, stockings) stand out most clearly. Bare feet, especially bare feet of children in winter, signify a state of absolute deprivation, which was regarded as unbearable and utterly unjustifiable’.¹⁵² He, Peter Jones and King all believe there was a commonly understood level of appearance that was thought socially unacceptable, and paupers exploited this in negotiations; if paupers were clothed below such a standard, it was deemed the parish’s fault.¹⁵³ Hindle has reversed the negative stigmatisation attached by historians to the pauper’s badge, also revealing the potential for dialogue for the paupers.

¹⁵¹ King, Nutt & Tomkins, *Narratives*, p. ix; Tomkins, ‘‘Labouring on a Bed’’; S. King, ‘Sickness and Old Age’, in King, Nutt & Tomkins, *Narratives*, pp. 1-125; S. King & A. Stringer, ‘‘I have Once More Taken the Leberty to Say as You Well Know’: The Development of Rhetoric in the Letters of the English, Welsh and Scottish Sick and Poor 1780s-1830s’, in Gestrich, Hurren & King, *Poverty and Sickness*, p. 78.


wearing it.\textsuperscript{154} There would have been analogous shame caused by other degrading circumstances portrayed in letters that have yet to be compared with the humiliation brought about by the ‘nakedness’ of insufficient clothing.\textsuperscript{155} Interestingly in his study of pauper self-perception, Jones comments on the importance of face-to-face interaction in negotiation, and calls for exploration of this;\textsuperscript{156} the border counties present a good location in which to do so.

Similarly clothing could form an important part of identity due to its association with certain jobs, and was sometimes used as a bargaining tool as provision of clothing could help gain employment. Despite this Sokoll found many writers were unspecific about their labour; ‘it is all the more surprising how little the record of pauper letters provides in this respect. For it is not so much the few passages explicitly concerned with work which are most striking: it is, rather, the general lack of detail in this respect.’\textsuperscript{157} He puts this down to the fact casual labourers often pursued varying forms of employment, and the idea such an everyday topic was unworthy of mention.\textsuperscript{158} Sokoll was the first to use the letters to show how individual lifestyles could be altered to gain relief.\textsuperscript{159} He also thinks work was referred to as a problem faced by the individual, not in a wider, circumstantial context.\textsuperscript{160} The ways in which paupers deflected personal responsibility for their poverty by talking about recessions and other circumstances will be explored here.

Investigating the appeals of ratepayers reveals a great deal about the attitudes of the authors towards poverty and the self. Presently a brief reference by Sokoll regarding the confidence of one former ratepayer represents the sole consideration of such letters.\textsuperscript{161} Hollen Lees has suggested former ratepayers may have been reluctant to claim relief, whilst Boulton believes previous rate paying was important in applications, though cites no examples.\textsuperscript{162} As Hindle has pointed out, because paupers were not necessarily those who received relief but those who could not pay rates, the difference

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{154} S. Hindle, ‘Dependency, Shame and Belonging: Badging the Deserving Poor 1550–1750’, \textit{Cultural and Social History}, 1, no. 1 (2004), pp. 6-35.
\item \textsuperscript{155} King, ‘The Clothing’.
\item \textsuperscript{156} Jones, ‘Parish Clothing’, p. 31.
\item \textsuperscript{157} Sokoll, ‘London’, p. 31.
\item \textsuperscript{158} Ibid, p. 32.
\item \textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{160} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{161} Sokoll, ‘Old Age’, p. 140.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
between being a pauper and a ratepayer may not have been great. Therefore understanding a ratepayer’s feelings about poverty can tell us a lot about social attitudes in parishes.

Other parish studies of personal identity that do not use pauper letters, emphasise the restrictions placed on the self by surrounding circumstances and formative factors. For instance Hindle has looked at how identity was shaped by the value system which identified the deserving poor. This identity was therefore formed externally by those in control of welfare. Work by Peter King has considered the pauper’s viewpoint more, and is based around their personal awareness of poor socio-economic standing, although his analysis is still moulded by formative forces and social repression. Muldrew has taken a particularly interesting route into exploring identity that considers the ability of welfare institutions to assist in maintaining self. Though his investigations follow economically determined ideas of social structure, Muldrew’s approach is similar to that attempted here, which seeks to understand the extent paupers looked to the parish to protect or regain their personal identities. Incorporating pauper letters into investigations of pauper identity at a local level enables us to see the agency used in self-preservation.

The enlightenment was influential in creating individual consciousness. However the closest inspection of its ramifications for poor relief has come from King, who considers how the expansion of the state and welfare, affected family living arrangements. What the enlightenment meant for individual pauper letter writers has not been investigated; many studies of the self are more interested in the middle classes. However for Gestrich et al, ‘it is unthinkable that the conditions making for a

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166 King, ‘Identity’.
167 Muldrew, ‘Social Identity’.
169 King, ‘The State’.
re-evaluation of the self – of a new interiority – did not also percolate down to the very poorest and shaped both whether they wrote but also the standards by which they judged their conditions."\(^{171}\) These thoughts on individual aspiration have yet to be applied to the Welsh border counties, which often appeared more collectively minded.

Although discernible identity traits displayed by individual paupers were not always common numerically, similar to those which exhibited evidence of national identity, they can still be presented as part of cohesive regional trends. Paupers wanted overseers to help maintain them at, or restore them to, a certain manner of lifestyle, though this was typically a base level of poverty. Expectations of more generous assistance came only from those who had known a higher social rank. There were twelve letters from ratepayers and former ratepayers who were reduced to pauperism. Their previous position within society undoubtedly gave them confidence, and they have a confidence rating of 3.2 for first appeals. John Fullbrook, a former ratepayer who wrote to Blockley in Gloucestershire, was painfully aware of his social position:

‘I have borrowed A Pound of A friend in Oxford to buy her A few things this Sir I cannot make a Practis of and if you can so arange Matters to asist me till I can turn myself a little round I will endeavour to keep my situation and get clear from you but if that is not the case I must give it up and submit to my chances at Blockley for it will be useless for me to hold my place if the income will not pay the way. I do not wish Sir to be troublesome, I am not A stranger to the weight of Poor Rates, neither Am I a stranger to Poverty for before I submitted to become troublesom to you me and my family suffred much and No family in aston suffered as we have since we have been there but if I am obliged to come to blockley again I shall act quite different’\(^{172}\)

Fullbrook did not consider it right to habitually borrow money, and therefore was not participating in the communal makeshift economies that would have been expected of other paupers. He attempted to negate his poverty and need for relief with the fact that

\(^{171}\) Gestrich, Hurren & King, ‘Sources, Methods and Experiences’, p. 14.
\(^{172}\) GA, OV 7/1/1, Fullbrook to overseers, 30\(^{th}\) January 1839.
he had paid rates previously, and introduced both subjects alongside each other. He considered pauperism and its associated behaviour below him, ‘I shall act quite different’. In an extensive letter he developed his right to settlement, as did half the other ratepayers, reflecting their pride in their previous financial position within the parish.

In addition to letters from rate payers and former rate payers, a further fifteen paupers wrote letters that overtly showed self-awareness of their social position. This totals twenty-seven letters that attempted to use a higher social position to engineer relief, of which three were sent to Welsh border parishes, thirteen to English ones and eleven to English border parishes. These appeals from those of higher social standing are almost entirely new additions to the historiography. The authors did not identify as poor, providing wider lessons on the rigidity of social stratification in parishes. William Bartlett, writing to Walcot in Somerset in 1823, demanded that the parish would help reinstate his former life style;

‘I am reduced to very humiliating circumstances entirely by my connection with the Parish and in an endeavour to be of service to the Poor of it – that my friends here and at Gloucester are endeavouring to repair the injury by clubbing their five and ten pounds each to enable me to resume my former avocations as a Manufacturer of Pins on a small and contracted scale in this neighbourhood and that all I ask or Look for from the Select Vestry of Walcot is that in consideration of the great and ruinous losses I sustained by their late acting Overseer, Percival, they would award me twenty or thirty Pounds’

It is unclear what the parish of Walcot had done to increase Bartlett’s impoverishment, but he believed it had been impacted in some way by his service to the poor, so it may have been undue rate demands. Bartlett had been a manufacturer and confidently requested the parish match the assistance of his wealthy friends. The claim he made about his service to the parish is analogous to that made by both Fullbrook, and the aforementioned pub landlord earlier in this chapter; these authors of a higher social

173 Sokoll, ‘Old Age’, p. 140.
174 SomRO, D/F/wal sw/13/2/2, Bartlett to overseers, 27th October 1823.
position suggested the parish was indebted to them. Over a fifth of paupers referring to their perceived social position identified as ‘old’, again showing that social capital developed with age. However it also illustrates the danger ratepayers had of becoming paupers in old age.

The distribution by county of pauper references to their social position is presented in table 5.12. The numbers of letter trait occurrences are small, however they display a consistent regional split between the peripheral region and the counties of southern England. To refer to social position was more than twice as common in the comparison counties compared to the Welsh ones, and even more common in Hampshire, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire. Comments were also more frequent in the southern border counties of Somerset and Gloucestershire than in the peripheral ones of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire.

Table 5.12: % of pauper appeals that referred to their social position within the parish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>English BC</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>Comparison Counties</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>Corpus</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(14)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Letters that appealed to the overseers on the grounds of employment show some concern with the preservation of self-identity, but mostly the focus of such letters was on the pauper’s need for relief and explaining their employment problems. There were 267 references in all correspondence to the specific type of job that the pauper or advocate associated themselves with. It appeared in 3.4 per cent of justices’ correspondence, 8.3 per cent from the overseers and 13.1 per cent of pauper correspondence, 78 per cent of which came from males. Paupers therefore placed some self-importance in their specific job beyond that demanded by the relief system. Specific employment was mentioned in 15.5 per cent of Welsh pauper letters, compared to 12.9 and 12.8 per cent in the comparison and English border counties respectively. These regional percentages were similar to the references made by overseers, with remarks on specific employment appearing in 10.3 per cent of Welsh overseer correspondence, and 8.7 and 7.1 per cent of comparison county and English border correspondence. Lower relief levels could have demanded greater self-reliance in peripheral welfare zones, and encouraged paupers to have a self-defined personal role; Howell’s work has suggested individuals were highly self-sufficient in remote Welsh communities. Of the 297 paupers that complained about a lack of work, only 10 per cent of these were specific about their trade. Comments on employment were largely made in passing, with little more than a pauper’s trade or their reason for unemployment mentioned. However on sixteen occasions remarks on employment were developed further and the pauper stated that they attached personal or emotional significance to it, and again this happened disproportionately in Wales. John Davies was a prime example of someone whose line of work shaped personal identity:

‘five years agoe I was Ceasd with a Violent Cold which terminated on a Paraletic Effection and in my left wrist and renderd me incapable of follow-ing Employ [...] I have Travelled the County 30 Miles round seeking work but often returning to my family without a shilling which is very Cutting to the feelings of a Husband and father to hear the Cries of a wife and Children for Common necessities when it is not in my power to answer their wants – The way that my family were

supported when I was at the Hospital without troubling the Parish My Son in law was at home and Conducts Busi-ness as well as having a Stock of goods to Sell which turnd in money dayly but now we have nothing to Sell. I trust the inhabitants will take it in Considera-tion to encourage me with what they have occation to have done in my line or even if I had a little wrighting to do I should be very thankfull as it would assist me much in my present Situation with the few Jobbs that may come from the Country people
I am Gentn your distressd Hble Servt
John Davies
Watchmaker¹⁷⁶

Davies had tried more than once to resume his trade, and still signed his letters as a ‘watchmaker’. He wanted the parish to support him in this work with anything that may have become available, even though it appeared watchmaking was beyond him. His inability to support his family because he could not follow his old employment was causing him mental distress, ‘Cutting’ to his feelings. Davies’s role as a watchmaker was fairly skilled, and he had perhaps occupied a social position that gave him additional confidence. Such an application to support a specific factor of identity was relatively rare, and there were only 67 cases of provisions for work such as tools being requested or given, other than in justice orders, from 2,771 items of standard correspondence.

Table 5.13 shows border county paupers, and those on the Welsh side especially, were far less likely to blame employment problems on external factors, again suggesting a strong language of self-reliance. Though Sokoll was right to say most paupers suffering from a lack of work did not frequently blame external issues, doing so was more common in English counties such as the one he examined.¹⁷⁷ Paupers who blamed ‘seasonal’ unemployment were most likely to threaten to return to the parish, as they did in almost half of cases. In certain areas this was a demand to support employment in a seasonal trade, tiding the pauper over in-between regular spells of work.

¹⁷⁶ GwA, D.396.61, Davies to overseers, no date.
Table 5.13: The percentage of paupers blaming external reasons for their lack of work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Comparison counties</th>
<th>English border counties</th>
<th>Welsh border counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paupers that blamed ‘locality’</td>
<td>4.2% 16</td>
<td>2.5% 12</td>
<td>0.6% 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Times’</td>
<td>1% 4</td>
<td>0.2% 1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Trade’</td>
<td>5% 19</td>
<td>2.7% 13</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Seasonal’</td>
<td>4% 15</td>
<td>2.1% 11</td>
<td>0.6% 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total blaming external reasons</td>
<td>10.8% 41</td>
<td>6.8% 33</td>
<td>1.1% 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The extent to which paupers mentioned a specific trade in each county, and how much they blamed external reasons for their own employment problems are shown in tables 5.14 and 5.15. Both tables show that peripheral welfare set-ups expected paupers to demonstrate they were self-reliant, and therefore most peripheral counties have high percentages in the first table, and low ones in the second. These findings confirm King’s theories on the language of self-sufficiency in many border counties and the north-west. Additionally blaming external causes for unemployment in southern counties could be due to the greater seasonality of employment in enclosed, arable areas identified by Snell. It is unsurprising that Sokoll believes specific trades were rarely mentioned, as the Essex sample used in the present examination would rank second from bottom in this table, above only Glamorgan, whose inadequately small dataset often produces polarised results.

On 375 occasions, letters commented on states of particularly excessive humiliation for the pauper. These complaints were most common from the paupers themselves, appearing in 22.1 per cent of appeals. Such a level of degradation was presented in 6.5 per cent of overseers’ letters and in 5.4 from justices. Interestingly paupers were described as being in a state of excessive humiliation in 16.6 per cent of

179 Snell, Annals, pp. 144-59.
applications from higher advocates, such as clergymen or landlords, signifying that their distress was externally notable.

### Table 5.14: % of pauper letters mentioning a specific trade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English BC</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Counties</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5.15: % of pauper letters blaming employment issues on external problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh BC</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English BC</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Counties</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Applications regarding degrading poverty constitute the most widespread appeals to overseers to specifically improve a pauper’s circumstances and reinstate a previous lifestyle. They denote a minimum acceptable standard of living that was understood by both paupers and overseers. Paupers essentially tried to shame the overseer and the parish that they were living below this minimum standard, playing on their conscience. The letters used as examples here are exceptional cases of degradation, but it should be remembered every letter requesting relief was a form of humiliation. A particularly wretched appeal came from Shropshire pauper William Bromley;

‘it is to inform you of the Deplorable state we are in for i have been these Six weeks past with out imploy and during that time we have been forced to Pledge Every Nessary artical but what we now stand in Even the sheets of our bed to support us be side debt and not been able to pay the have put me in the court and besides we have been three parts famished for want of vituals being Seven in family and my Children have took the peelings out of the pigs wash and Eate them for Hunger’  

Bromley revealed numerous humiliating aspects about his living conditions to move the overseers to relieve him. He could not feed his children and so they were stealing food from the pigs, they were naked, had no bed sheets, and additionally the law was against him.

It can be witnessed in table 5.16 that the device of self-humiliation was employed most in the comparison counties and least in the borders, by both paupers and overseers. This continues the theme that paupers in the borders were less manipulative and less self-pitying, established when considering the extent of communal and emotive attachment, and self-reliance in employment respectively. Paupers from the comparison counties complained much more about a lack of clothing, and were also comparatively likely to complain about their poverty causing them mental distress, showing personal concern with how their poverty was perceived. The absolute numbers displayed alongside these features show that Tomkins is right to describe examples of

---

181 SA, P81/L/1/18/12/51, Bromley to overseers, 20th April 1817.
psychological distress as ‘rare’. Overall, border county paupers were more concerned by physical degradation, poor living conditions and starvation, though still not typically as much as the comparison county paupers were.

Table 5.16: Paupers and overseers who complained of excessive humiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Comparison counties</th>
<th>English border counties</th>
<th>Welsh border counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paupers who cited a lack of clothes</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseers who cited a lack of clothes</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paupers who cited physical degradation</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paupers who claimed they may die</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseers who cited paupers may die</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paupers who cited poor living conditions</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paupers who claimed to be starving</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paupers who cited mental distress</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paupers who cited external shame</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total paupers citing humiliating circumstances</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total overseers citing humiliating circumstances</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This complaint from Mary Horwood to her parish of Newnham in Gloucestershire is a perfect example of using personal degradation as a device;

‘I have not Receivd any answer from the too Last Letters wich I sent you I have Been hill this five months & now I am not able to get out of my Bed I never Truble the Parrish for any thing But when I am hill as any of my famally Sir I hask your advice what I am to do for a support if my own Parrish will not Relive me if I Perrish for whant I lay my Death to the Carg of the parrish’.

182 Tomkins, ‘‘Labouring on a Bed’’, p. 57.
183 GA, P228 OV 3/5/3, Horwood to overseers, 2nd September 1808.
Horwood was demanding relief on the basis that an early payment would prevent further physical decline, but had already been ignored. She therefore made the ultimate charge that her own death would be the parish’s fault. Further letters show that both her settlement and host parish were united in their anger at this, and that she also failed to gain charity from the Society for the Suppression of Beggars.

The citation of humiliation as a device to try and get relief, and the concern paupers felt that their humiliation was visible to others, is listed by county in tables 5.17 and 5.18 respectively. The first table shows that the language of humiliation was employed more in southern English counties. The second table shows that the difference in behaviour between the peripheral zone and southern English counties, including the southern border counties, increased when the humiliation was related to perception within the community. Many of the English comparison paupers who complained about physical degradation, for instance by telling the overseers they might die, were often in the north-western counties of Lancashire and Cumbria, and in making such statements they shared the worries of many border paupers. These peripheral paupers were therefore much more concerned with physicality than in southern England, which could be related again to a culture of work and self-sufficiency, and Sokoll has previously made the same link.\textsuperscript{184} It may also be that a more generous welfare system in southern English areas allowed more of an indulgent sense of identity.

Findings here complement those of King, who believes there was greater reference to clothing in pauper letters sent to places in the south-east, though the figures regarding clothing in 5.16 are much lower than his claim that 31 per cent of paupers directly commented on textiles.\textsuperscript{185} The numbers in the tables also confirm King’s theories that paupers in southern England were more likely to mention their state of mind.\textsuperscript{186} However the findings run counter to his view that humiliation was a device more commonly used in relief negotiations in the north-west.\textsuperscript{187}

The sample Essex corpus would rank 17\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} for humiliation and externally sensitive humiliation respectively, despite the fact Sokoll cites humiliation as a formative factor in the writing of pauper letters in Essex.\textsuperscript{188} These are the only two

\textsuperscript{184} Sokoll, ‘Old Age’, p. 145.
\textsuperscript{186} King, ‘Regional Patterns’, pp. 70-1.
\textsuperscript{187} King, ‘Negotiating the Law’, p. 252.
\textsuperscript{188} Sokoll, ‘London’, p. 36.
instances in which the Essex paupers behaved like those of the peripheries; otherwise
the sample corpus suggests Essex was highly comparable to other southern English

Table 5.17: Paupers citing particularly humiliating circumstances in appeals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>% of wider sample</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Welsh BC</strong></td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English BC</strong></td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comparison Counties</strong></td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corpus</strong></td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.18: Paupers citing concerns that their humiliation was visible to others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>External humiliation, related to appearance or mental well being</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Welsh BC</strong></td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English BC</strong></td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comparison Counties</strong></td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corpus</strong></td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
counties. The evaluation of these historical viewpoints has been made possible through use of the database and the contrasting of findings geographically, showing that pauper traits thought common based on studies of a certain region, were in comparative terms, not actually that common.

All of the tables in this section on the identity of individual paupers present a key lesson about peripheral welfare, which was the importance of physical practicality in pauper attitudes towards support. The less generous parishes constituting this region did not afford paupers the luxury of supporting self-perception, and so peripheral paupers were less likely to remark on their social standing, or use humiliation as a device, especially humiliation relating to their appearance. These peripheral paupers were more likely to comment on their physical condition, and accepted more responsibility for their role in finding work. The prominence of expediency in the peripheries can also be seen in paupers’ practical use of community ties for assistance in letter writing, or the approaching of justices highlighted in chapter three.

Contrastingly the extensive, manipulative rhetoric of some pauper letters, and the expressions of emotive attachment to place seen elsewhere in this chapter, display the more intangible ways in which southern English paupers approached relief systems. Many of the peripheral characteristics highlighted throughout the section on individual identity are encapsulated in an appeal to Bromfield parish in Shropshire:

‘I ham willing to do everything that is in my power if the Parish will help me to I ham sorrey to hear the poor Children criring for Bread I wish to work at my trad as i cannot have any work at home i must go where i can’\(^{189}\)

The opening words were testament to the pauper’s acknowledgement of self-reliance, as he stated he would do everything he could. However the fact he had a trade perceived as his own was important to him, and he did not seek to blame other circumstances, such as seasonality of work. Furthermore the humiliation affecting his children was of a

\(^{189}\) SA, P43/L/28/8, no name to overseers, no date.
physical, rather than appearance related nature. They were short of food, and the author probably would have been as well, impairing his ability to work.

**Scoring ‘Welshness’ for paupers**

In a similar way to table 4.17 regarding overseer ‘Welshness’, scores can be constructed for pauper behaviour that portray how paupers in different regions approached their welfare systems. Once again doing so involves cumulative scoring based on counties’ rankings in tables regarding letter features and relief practices, and Welsh characteristics have been scored highly here as well. Sixteen of the seventeen traits comprising table 5.19 are drawn from the tables in this chapter. The data available on justice utilisation from chapter three, a key feature of these makeshift relief systems, has also been incorporated.\(^{190}\) As many of the investigations in chapter three focused on change over time, or regional traits that were further developed in chapter four, there is little from the chapter than can be scored by county and used here.

**Table 5.19: Pauper ‘Welshness’ by county**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Score of ‘Welshness’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwent</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.19 again presents many adjacent counties with similar scores, based on seventeen separate welfare traits, and often drawn from all the pauper letters available for that county. The way these geographical entities can be witnessed despite the wide range of cumulative factors that shaped appeals, again adds weight to the argument that regionality was stronger than intra-regional habits within pauper letters. The wider trends of welfare culture that spanned these counties contradict Hindle’s purporting of intra-regionality, based on his analysis of parish finances.\(^{191}\)

The peripheral counties of the Welsh borders, the north-west, and Herefordshire and Shropshire rank above all the southern English counties, with the exception of Bristol. However the Welsh counties behaved in a more diverse manner than was portrayed in table 4.17

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\(^{190}\) The tables identified as portraying Welsh traits are 3.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.6, 5.7, 5.9, 5.10 and 5.14; the English traits are 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.8, 5.11, 5.12, 5.15, 5.17 and 5.18.

concerning overseers; table 5.19 shows less geographical continuity. Gwent, due to the anglicising effects of industrialisation, recorded a low score when contrasted with north and mid-Wales. The areas differed particularly on personal identity and the use of community, which reflects in-migration into Gwent. Industrialisation also caused more fluid attitudes towards settlement and belonging in England, as seen in table 4.17. Consequently Lancashire appears lowly on the table in comparison to its peripheral neighbour counties in the northern borders. The numerous eighteenth century letters in the Oxfordshire corpus caused it to record a higher score than most southern counties, because the features they convey are indicative of an under established out-parish system.

On an index constructed from the eleven features that can be compared with the Essex sample, for instance those which do not incorporate correspondence from overseers or justices, Essex would appear third from bottom, above Northamptonshire and Gloucestershire. Such a ranking indicates the non-peripheral nature of its welfare system, and also further validates the geographic consistency of the letter traits shown here. However none of these tables were directly comparable with the Essex material because it does not include letters written by pauper advocates, which have here been included as part of standard pauper correspondence. Paupers writing their own letters may have behaved quite differently to such advocates.

Bristol obtains a high score because it records an excessive amount of top rankings for some features, often the result of circumstances peculiar to cities. There were not enough letters recovered for Glamorgan for it to be considered representative, but they undoubtedly carried many Welsh features. One of its few appeals was innately ‘Welsh’;

‘Please Give the Bearer Mrs. Dee Three Shillings to buy
Potatoes for Planting in the garden’
you will oblige
your friend
M. Thomas

\[\text{192 GlamA, P/99/CW/71/2, Thomas to overseers, 16th May 1816.}\]
The note is incredibly brief, but was ‘Welsh’ in a number of other ways as well. It was a ‘relieve the bearer’ request. It could have come from a justice, though does not seem quite direct enough; the appeal was from some form of advocate. The request was for potatoes, a form of relief in kind and possibly a provision for work. Finally the author personalised the request to the overseer, describing themselves as a friend.

**Conclusion**

The identities interacting with local welfare networks were as would be expected from paupers. Although those requesting relief possessed identities, their requests were unambitious. Some appeals were different, especially from former ratepayers, who suggested the parish owed them was emotively indebted to them. Though these appeals stood out for their rarity, perhaps the enlightenment accounts for the self-confidence of their approaches.\(^{193}\) The only appeal based on parish ‘identity’ made on a large scale was that of economic and legal belonging, rather than emotional. Aside from these findings on identity, because of the scope of this chapter, there is much information throughout it regarding peripheral features.

The quantitative approach has employed enough letters to show how common nationalistic features were in appeals, thus advancing Tomkins’s work.\(^{194}\) Those who had served in the military were not as unbalanced as she assumes, though carried a calculated resentment, and often displayed themselves as victims. The letters also support findings on Welsh nationalism,\(^{195}\) showing how these low-key anti-administrative feelings revealed themselves. Such an investigation was made possible by the first analysis of Welsh language pauper letters. A consideration of nationalism is important for a peripheral region with a history of unstable autonomy.

A large-scale evaluation of community support in pauper letters has discovered regional trends in style and linguistic ambition, building on the estimations of previous historians.\(^{196}\) Establishing the extent of communal support is necessary for understanding how paupers subsisted in rate poor peripheral parishes, where poor relief itself would have been particularly inadequate. Such support was utilised differently according to where the pauper was from, and the first dedicated study of how advocates

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196 King, ‘Regional Patterns’, pp. 70-2.
were involved in appeals has substantiated findings on the strong community assistance of the Welsh borders;\(^{197}\) as has quantifying the personal contact between paupers and overseers. Such features show the face-to-face relationships and physical contact that underpinned more fledgling out-parish systems.

This investigation has provided another way of engaging with the history of the settlement laws, which as chapter one discussed, have been central to defining knowledge of the poor laws. Consideration of how personal attachment interacted with welfare has been taken forwards by attempting to add clarity to the historiography of ‘belonging’.\(^{198}\) There was an overlap between emotional and economic belonging. However ultimately, economic belonging was central to appeals, and, with the exception of industrialising areas, was becoming more important. In Wales the under established nature of the relief system meant settlement laws had not been allowed by overseers to advance to a flexible stage. Parishes were also less likely to support the indulgence of emotional belonging, and the self-reliance that was encouraged in paupers also shaped their individual identity.

The search for a well-rounded identity of the self under the poor laws has built on existing historiographical ideas of a common understanding of acceptable welfare levels.\(^{199}\) Though paupers exercised agency and formed their own identities, this was often in accordance with standards shared with the overseers. Peripheral paupers demanded little, yet had a keen sense of identity based around work and self-reliance. They did not look to the parish to help maintain outward perceptions of them. Their desire for basic, residual support, as opposed to the more intangible devices and requests of southern paupers, is perhaps the central theme of this chapter. It adds to the spatial trends revealed in other chapters, but there are still nuances to regional theories that require deeper investigation.

\(^{197}\) Dodd, ‘North Wales’, p. 113; Howell, Rural Poor, p. 95; Teale, ‘Battle’.
Chapter 6: Regionalism

Introduction
Chapters one and two illustrated the extensive regional variability in the practice of the old poor laws, and outlined the nascent study of spatial differences in welfare. An important subtopic within this has been the debate regarding whether regionality or intra-regionality is a more accurate way of understanding inter-parochial variations; this deliberation is presently unfinished. Additionally the theory of peripheral welfare was detailed, and has been applied in all chapters. It represents an emerging topic area, and certain chronological aspects of how peripheral welfare systems developed need to be better understood. This is a short chapter because it only examines these two outstanding issues relating to the two theories; however to produce a thesis in which broad comments on regional behaviour are central, these factors must be clarified. They can only be measured at such a late stage in the thesis because regional traits and the main benchmarks of peripherality had to be established cumulatively. Such features will be recapped within the chapter so that these investigations are simpler to understand.

Therefore the first issue that will be addressed in this chapter is the debate of regionality versus intra-regionality, which has been referred to throughout the thesis. The tables that rank counties according to their ‘Welshness’ have shown, despite the occasional anomaly, consistent regional patterning. The features of overseers’ correspondence geographically mirror those of paupers, but show even firmer regional divides. However this regionality has only been measured on a county wide basis that combines all the parishes within these counties together. It does not account for the possibility some localities may have behaved quite differently to others in their county. Therefore a case study of four parishes, consisting of two from each of Herefordshire and Gloucestershire, will be used to measure differences between appeals sent to two different locations in the same county. It is argued that intra-regionalism undoubtedly existed within the border counties, but was not extensive enough to supersede regional differences. Despite the debate over intra-regionality historians have not made such

contrasts with any form of poor law source. Therefore this study is a new approach and utilises traits that have been identified as peripheral. The case study makes exploratory links between letter characteristics, and parishes’ locations within their counties. Doing so also continues a main argument of the thesis, which is that welfare identities could be changed by migration.

The second issue considered is not an outstanding theme of poor law studies, but has become apparent as this thesis has progressed, and concerns the newer theory of peripherality. Because many welfare behaviours seen in the peripheral zone appear to have been relatively residual, we need to understand if the features identified as ‘peripheral’, were actually a reflection of the fact that much of the source material embodying them came from earlier in the time period; over half of the Welsh material predates 1820. This material is particularly early compared to that sent to the comparison counties, with which the Welsh letters show the sharpest contrasts. It must be ascertained if these variations are because of the difference in years rather than geographic location. Understanding this will also help us see which Welsh characteristics were a product of underdeveloped welfare systems and therefore shaped by chronology, and which were innately peripheral, and more permanent factors in local relief processes. The importance of chronology for shaping behaviour has been emphasized throughout this thesis; it was the main subject of chapter three. For example it has been suggested that relief in kind was an older method of distributing welfare, used in areas that were not yet as well organised in collecting monetary rate payments. Additionally chapter four based its interpretation of overseer behaviour on the idea that overseers in peripheral regions did not occupy such an established and respected position in the parish as in some English areas. However a more intricate examination is required to establish to what extent this lack of traction for the poor laws in local communities was an innate feature of peripheral welfare, or a result of development over time. Consequently a comparison of letters from the same time period but different regions is necessary. Poor law correspondence sent to Flintshire and Powys in the eighteenth century will be contrasted with material sent to the southern English county of Oxfordshire in the eighteenth century. The results will show that though some features of under established relief systems were reflective of their time period, there were also many definite regional differences in welfare behaviour.
Intra-regionalism case studies

Chapters one and two showed that poor law historians mostly accept practice varied geographically. However the form of such variation is yet to be agreed upon. Because investigating regional welfare differences has been central to this research, it was necessary to discuss the relevant theories in chapter two, but the basic principles will again be covered here so that the case studies can be better located. There are four areas of literature that help explain the significance of intra-regionalism in poor law history. Firstly regional investigations of poor law provision have not been as extensive as regional studies of other subjects in British history, such as those concerning industrial or agricultural development; significantly, some of these studies also recognise that intra-regional variation could disrupt the consistency of wider regions. Secondly, the lack of regional investigation of welfare is despite recognition by historians of the variance of behaviour between parishes in the scope, scale and intent of welfare provision. Such discrepancies were widely understood even in works where the authors did not necessarily consider the laws to have been negotiable. As awareness grew that the poor received different treatment according to their locality, historians wrote more about the range of policies that could alter between poor law authorities.

Thirdly some historians have traced this variation in a broader fashion, to contend that parishes in a certain area behaved in a similar manner to one another, which was discernibly different to those elsewhere, in a form of welfare regionalism. As we have already seen, the first work wholly dedicated to investigating regionality


under the old poor laws was by King, who suggests approaches in the south-east of England contrasted with those in the north-west.\(^8\) His spatial theories have been supported to differing extents by other welfare historians.\(^9\) However, fourthly, Steve Hindle and Lynn Hollen Lees have taken readings of inter-parochial difference to their fullest extent, and consider the highly independent parishes to have effectively behaved like 15,000 distinct welfare republics.\(^10\) Because of the diverse financial backgrounds that appeared to change abruptly between neighbouring parishes, Hindle in particular has rejected King’s claims that holistic regions with common methods of practice existed. He argues instead that the variation within such regions was actually greater than the differences between regions.\(^11\) Presently the debate has not been fully resolved, and therefore it is unclear to what extent large scale investigations can discuss one national poor law. This important area of modern British history has not received the rich regional examinations of other subjects.

Two parishes were selected from each of Herefordshire and Gloucestershire for these case studies. Though this is a small amount compared to the number analysed elsewhere in the thesis, it is similar to the quantity evaluated in more detailed ways in other poor law works.\(^12\) All four were chosen as they had similar amounts of correspondence, and were not too close together geographically. Additionally it is preferable to focus on a county that was quite ‘English’ (Gloucestershire) and one that was fairly ‘Welsh’ (Herefordshire), so that broader comparisons between the counties were possible. The contrasts have been made based on the preponderance of peripheral

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\(^12\) For a particularly detailed analysis that considers just two parishes see S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and the Life-Cycle Under the English Poor Law, 1760-1834* (Woodbridge 2011).
features in the letters sent to these parishes. The peripheral features outlined in this thesis must be used because no other pauper letter traits have been proven to exist in such consistent geographical patterning. Because they were established earlier in the thesis it will be necessary to remark again upon which traits should be seen as peripheral, and which ones were common to southern England. Overseer’s correspondence has not been sampled because it has proven difficult to locate items sent from the parishes used. Each one is represented by a relatively small number of letters, and these exact amounts will be outlined. However, because there has been no previous attempt to measure intra-regionality, this study only seeks to make basic exploratory findings for augmentation in the future.

Though there were definitely strong regional trends affecting the writing of letters, tentative assessment shows the parish’s location within a county also impacted the content of the letters sent to it. Other more intricate factors would have shaped how appeals were made as well. The parish of Eardisland in northern Herefordshire, eight miles from the Welsh border, received twelve letters from seven paupers, as well as one from a higher advocate, a surgeon. Eardisland got one pauper appeal from each of Worcestershire, Staffordshire and Carmarthenshire, and the remainder came from within Herefordshire itself. Despite the peripheral features of Eardisland’s immediate surroundings, and the peripheral locations that most of its letters came from, its paupers commented relatively extensively on the level of their community support, and made cases for emotional and family attachment to their settlement parish. These were features more common in appeals from southern English paupers. Claims of economic belonging and requests for relief in kind, which were more ‘Welsh’, were minimal. A letter sent to Eardisland from Leintwardine in the same county carried a number of English traits;

‘you may judge the indignancy of my feelings when I realised we under the necessity of seeing my poor Old Uncle sent to a Workhouse after we had kept him so long without expense to his Parish, and all through the Appearance of my poor Afflicted Sister which was no other than even any invalid might have
appeared, but I dont doubt but many in that Neighbourhood are very well acquainted with our situation.\textsuperscript{13}

The references to the pauper's feelings, in particular regarding how they were perceived in their community, were not typical in Welsh letters. The pauper expressed concern at being separated from their uncle, and much of the rest of the appeal argued for his return. Though this was probably a sincere use of family capital to try and gain relief, such a level of attachment was also displayed less in the counties which have been ascertained as peripheral. The letter was a personal one, and all the letters cited in this section concern the specific circumstances of the pauper concerned. However they are all indicative of broader trends within their respective counties.

The letters to Eardisland can be contrasted with those to another Herefordshire Parish, Holmer, which at eighteen miles from the border, was further from Wales. However it was less than two miles from the centre of Hereford. Holmer received sixteen letters from four paupers all based in either Breconshire or Worcestershire, and there were also five appeals from higher advocates. These letters were much less developed than those sent to Eardisland. This was partly because twelve were ‘reminders’, as described in chapter three, though it could also be reflective of peripheral trends in letter writing that were identified in earlier chapters. Despite their brevity, they display requests for relief in kind and the desire to meet the relieving overseer in person. Advocates also wrote 30 per cent of the appeals to Holmer, compared to 23 per cent to Eardisland. These traits indicate that although further from the border, the paupers of Holmer were more Welsh in their habits than those of Eardisland. The fact the majority of Homer’s letters came from Breconshire does not explain this, as Eardisland also received letters from Wales, and most of its correspondence came from within Herefordshire, where appeals were typically almost as Welsh. It is possible Holmer’s position close to Hereford exposed the locals to Welsh influences due to commerce coming into the town, for instance through the cattle trade.\textsuperscript{14} Susan Williams wrote an appeal to Holmer that embodied a large amount of Welsh characteristics;

\textsuperscript{13} HRO, AJ32/93, Bird to overseers, 28\textsuperscript{th} July 1834.
\textsuperscript{14} D. Howell, \textit{The Rural Poor in Eighteenth Century Wales} (Cardiff 2000), p. 2; E. Evans, \textit{A History of Wales, 1660-1815} (Cardiff 1993), p. 125.
‘I am sorry that I am oblige to send to you to ask for relief as I am drove to the last extremity my husband have been out of work since before Christmas and as not got anything as he has gon from me last monday week to look for work and as soon as he shall get some I shall here from him and then I hope not to trouble you any longer I hope you will pleas to send releif for myself and my little boys back by the bearer as I have got the Rumatick in my head and neck and not able to come’

Though the letter made no references to a specific form of employment, the language of self-sufficiency was still strong, and Williams made it clear her husband was doing all he could towards regaining work. The pauper was not fully accustomed to the nature of out-parish relief, and would have gone to the vestry to see the overseer face-to-face had she not been ill. Instead she sent a short note which was transported by a friend. Although this would not be classed as a ‘relieve the bearer’ appeal, as the bearer was not the pauper herself, she had still utilised practical community assistance in transporting her plea.

The influence of being close to a major trading centre can also be seen in the different appeals sent to the parishes of Blockley and Bitton in Gloucestershire. Blockley sat in the Cotswolds, eleven miles to the south-east of Evesham in Worcestershire and close to Oxfordshire. The parish received eight pauper letters regarding five paupers, from Warwickshire, Worcestershire, the West Midlands and Oxfordshire. Three were written by pauper advocates, two carried threats to return, one made an economic settlement claim, and one came with additional signatories, all of which were Welsh traits. However a lot of English traits were conveyed: one pauper stated their emotional attachment to Blockley, two passed comment on the level of community support they had received, one referred to a previous social position they had occupied, and another addressed the letter to ‘the gentlemen of the parish’. A further letter blamed unemployment problems on their locality, and none of the appeals asked for relief in kind. There was also one use of humiliation as a device in negotiations. This much truncated section of a lengthy appeal was sent on behalf of John Budding from Foleshill in Warwickshire;

15 HRO, CG81/117, Williams to overseer, no date.
'Geor is a near neighbour & is old and Infirm. his wife takes in washing but she is now almost incapable of doing any thing & were it not for myself & another neighbour they must long ago have gone to their Parish, what I say to you here you may affirm to be Truth for I have no interest whatever in the Business. I have not known them more than 20 Months but thinking it very Hard that 2 old people should be Drove from a place they have lived at many years & where perhaps they could continue many more with Proper assisstance, I do assure you it is nothing but a Feeling for the wants of these Poor People that induces me to do what I do in their Behalf. they did not solicit me but employing the old man to do a few jobs for me he said he must Go to his parish for his wife & him Could not maintain themselves here & in the Present State of things the Farmers all give Preference to their own Parishioners [...] I will thank you to do all you can in this Business or certainly may Com

The advocate believed emotional attachment to the parish created by the pauper’s longevity of residence, justified them receiving relief there. He used this emotional capital in the appeal, and displayed other emotive language, ‘I do assure you it is nothing but a Feeling for the wants of these Poor People that induces me to do what I do’. He and another had been providing communal support to the pair, and mentioning such assistance was quite an English trait. The author did combine this with threatening their return to the parish, to emphasise the potential costs to the settlement parish if the communal support was disrupted. Additionally elsewhere in the letter he explained how Budding earned his settlement. These economic and legal concerns regarding belonging to a place were more ‘Welsh’, and this letter carried features from both regions, as the majority of letters did. Though few letters embodied traits exclusively from one region, this did not constitute intra-regionality to an extent that significantly disrupted broader

16 GA, OV 7/1/1, Cooper to overseers, 17th January 1816.
regionalism. At the end of the letter, the advocate blamed the couple’s employment problems on external issues in the local area. Furthermore he also referred to the way the overseers practiced in Foleshill, commenting on their perceived duty ‘to their own parishioners’; the overseers had chosen to be protectionist, and consequently excluded outsiders from relief. The idea that overseers should act with such a sense of established duty was more common in southern England.

The devices used in the letters sent to Bitton were overall much less English. This parish was five miles to the east of Bristol, and received twenty-four letters about fourteen paupers. Correspondence concerning Robert Jay embodied many of its differences from Blockley:

‘I take the liberty of applying to you on behalf of Robert Jay for some time past residing in this Town, who claims to belong to your Parish – He has for several months past been in a state of the greatest possible distress – and having ineffectively struggled against his difficulties, he is at length compelled to apply to you for relief that his wife and family may not starve […] & I have to state in his behalf that for three months past he has been compelled to relinquish following his employment (that of a coal porter) from ill health & extreme weakness […] He requests me to say that unless relief is afforded him, he will be compelled to apply to the Magistrates for a removal home – this he is very unwilling to do – for he hopes to regain his health, & pursue his employment’ 17

Jay had specific employment he wished to pursue, but his humiliating physical state of ‘extreme weakness’ had prevented this, and resulted in the family being threatened by starvation; all of these were concerns quite common in Wales. Additionally he used an advocate to write, who expressed a simple economic claim of settlement, though also used the more flexible approach to settlement of threatening that Jay would get himself removed. Bitton received a very high number of eleven appeals from higher advocates, and thirteen other letters to the parish were written by pauper advocates. Three more

17 BRO, P/B/OP/6h.1, Macaulay to overseers, 19th February 1829.
letters made economic claims and three commented on personal interactions with the overseers; all of these were peripheral habits. There was one more threat of the flexible approach to settlement of getting removed, but three others of simply returning to the parish, and three paupers requested relief in kind. In two instances paupers did blame external circumstances for their employment problems and there were five more uses of humiliation, which were English traits. As with Holmer in Herefordshire, it may have been that Bitton’s proximity to a major trading location, in this instance Bristol, caused the development of traits which were geographically more common elsewhere. The city has been cited as a major centre of trade for south Wales.\(^{18}\) Bitton’s closeness to Bristol could explain the extensive use of advocates in appeals; this was a feature common to the city and highlighted in tables 5.7 and 5.10. If the mapping of regional traits were to be honed further, culturally Bitton should perhaps be treated as an area of Bristol rather than Gloucestershire. The parish received letters from Monmouthshire, as well as from Somerset, Bristol, London, Devon and the West Midlands.

The enquiries made into intra-regionality in this chapter are simplistic. Additionally the importance of human movement in shaping these intra-regional attitudes has possibly been overemphasized due to the nature of the source material, which was sent from people who had relocated. However, unmistakeably these paupers writing to separate parts of the same county used different methods. Most importantly though, proportionately the Herefordshire letters saw more economic claims of settlement, more requests for relief in kind, and additionally almost a quarter of this correspondence came from justices; all of these were peripheral traits. Whilst the Gloucestershire letters used more advocates, this could partly be explained by the proximity of one of the parishes to Bristol and overall, these intra-regional traits did not undermine the fact Herefordshire was more ‘Welsh’. The idea that broad regionalism existed to an extent which could not be disrupted by inter-parochial variation within these regions, is also supported by the consistent spatial patterning shown in tables throughout the thesis. Despite the debate on intra-regionality and regionalism, no historians have made intra-regional case studies similar to this one.\(^{19}\) The results show that searching for broad regional trends, despite the highly variable nature of poor law


sources, can be justified. Letter traits also altered according to the point in time when they were written.

**Eighteenth century letter case study: Flintshire, Powys and Oxfordshire**

There has been no written anything on peripheral welfare’s development over time and how this might have caused practice to differ to central areas. Although King and Stewart highlighted comparatively primitive features of relief in their initial investigation, they did not discuss the chronological stages of establishing provision, or the earlier dates of source material as potential reasons for their findings. Similarly there have been no comparisons made of pauper letters based on the time they were written.

Thomas Ertman has produced work akin to that concerning how practices in marginal localities shaped state building processes at the centre, which is a related field to peripheral studies. He talks about the importance of ‘timing and sequencing in the European state-building process.’ Ertman believes that when regional powers strengthened their internal organisation earlier than central authorities, rulers felt less need to control such areas, and central bodies were therefore more weakly developed. Other work applicable to this discussion is that of sociologist James Scott. Though focused primarily on south-east Asia, he suggests that tribespeople have migrated to upland, wilderness areas on the peripheries of their nations to avoid becoming part of modern states. He thinks that the Welsh once did the same. Both these studies contrast with each other, as Ertman sees a strong state building process on the margins of nations, whilst Scott describes a desire to avoid such a thing. They also conflict with this work, as they assume that conscious decision making was central to creating peripheral societies. Whilst this study has shown that people in these areas developed their own customary habits, it is suggested that such practices were necessary due to neglect by the centre.

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Results here will show that chronology was important in shaping the features of letters, and that regional differences are reduced when one area’s letters are compared to another’s of a similar time. Nevertheless some letter features were innately Welsh, even when this chronological contrast is made. This investigation is necessary, because it could be argued that a large number of eighteenth century letters sent to Welsh border parishes account for the predominance of ‘Welsh’ features, but actually reflected an earlier time period and consequently less established system. Yet it can be seen through comparison with a cache of letters sent to Oxfordshire that often predate even these Welsh letters, that this was not the case. Again, the letter features being considered were identified previously in this thesis. Therefore each table will be accompanied by a recap of what characteristics we would expect to see more commonly in Oxfordshire, or in Powys and Flintshire. There were twenty-seven items of standard correspondence sent to Oxfordshire before 1800, including twenty-six between 1754 and 1771; Flintshire received thirty-seven prior to 1800, and Powys twenty-seven. They are detailed in table 6.1.

**Table 6.1: Eighteenth century letters by county and type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standard overseer correspondence received</th>
<th>Standard pauper correspondence received</th>
<th>Higher advocate correspondence received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flintshire</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Powys</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oxfordshire</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of letters being examined is small, but this is the first study of its kind and is necessarily speculative. Using smaller corpuses was unavoidable; it is well recognised that far fewer pauper letters exist prior to the nineteenth century. Fortunately certain traits have already been proven to be common to these regions, using much bigger sets of letters, which provides a guide of what we would expect to see. Additionally because the aim of the case study is ultimately to compare Welsh traits with those of southern England, the letters for Flintshire and Powys should not be
viewed separately, but as a collective demonstration of Welsh behaviour; therefore their number is more representative. The features of these letters have again been collated in tables. Table 6.2 concerns regional overseer traits. The first three characteristics outlined, threatening removal, meeting another overseer for parish business and writing letters that were particularly concerned with accounts, were traits that have been identified as more common in Welsh letters. The last two features presented, using a language of duty related to the position of being overseer, and meeting fellow overseers due to friendship or other personal reasons, were more likely to appear in southern English correspondence;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.2: Overseers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats of removal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of times letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trait occurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of times letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trait occurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correspondence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of times letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trait occurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language of duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of times letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trait occurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of times letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trait occurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The expected regional traits of overseers’ correspondence were only fulfilled here in two of the five fields. The Oxfordshire overseers chose to meet one another for business more than their Welsh counterparts, but friendships were less established than in Powys. Both these factors are reverses of the traits witnessed in the nineteenth century. They indicate the newness of this inter-parochial system, and a consequent lack of status commanded by the position of overseer across both regions; however Welsh overseers were already tough in enforcing the laws of settlement, which can been seen in the higher rates of removal threats there. The obedience to these rules should be seen as a particularly Welsh trait of the old poor laws, despite the disorganised nature of parish

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24 An adequate amount of overseers’ correspondence sent from the counties featured could not be recovered. Therefore letters have been used that were sent to these counties. This was not thought problematic as all overseers’ letters to Powys and Flintshire came from the peripheral zone. Similarly all of Oxfordshire’s correspondence came from other chiefly rural counties with a lot of arable farming in southern or eastern England.
boundaries here. Chapter four showed that concern with appropriate bookkeeping methods increased through the period, and was not necessarily a trait of an underdeveloped welfare system. It also illustrated that it was an issue of greater interest in Wales. So although Oxfordshire’s overseers appear to have been more observant of it in the eighteenth century, across the whole period it probably reflected a Welsh habit that was similar to the keenness to obey the settlement laws.

Table 6.3 moves on to how the paupers approached the system. It incorporates the amount of times paupers threatened return and requested relief in kind, as described in chapter four, and how often economic settlement was claimed in a parish, rather than a more emotional appeal for belonging, as seen in chapter five; all of these are traits we would expect to see more commonly in Welsh letters. The amount of occasions a pauper used religious language within an appeal have also been included, because of the dramatic change in this over time;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.3: Paupers’ approach to their system</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Threat to return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Oxfordshire paupers were highly comparable to those of the Welsh counties in their desire for relief in kind, which we should perhaps view as a method of makeshift welfare central to an under-established system. However, as with table 6.2 the importance of the settlement laws in Wales was strong, as can be seen from the occurrence of the first two traits; the obedience of settlement laws was something valued by Welsh overseers. The invocation of religion was more common in these communications, standing at only 10.3 per cent across the wider collection after 1800; its use by region varied little. Religious language is therefore another hallmark of an
immature system, as alluded to by King and Stewart, though not necessarily an indicator of a peripheral area.  

All of the contents of table 6.4 have been drawn from chapter five on identity. The first trait listed, the instances when the pauper identified themselves as following a specific trade, is the only Welsh one. However the third trait, of citing circumstances that were humiliating due to their level of physical degradation, was the most common way in which Welsh paupers used the device of humiliation in negotiations. The fourth characteristic relates to paupers blaming situational reasons for their unemployment, such as a local or seasonal recession, rather than themselves. The final one refers to the amount of times paupers remarked on the level of financial or material assistance they received from other community members;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.4: Paupers’ personal identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific trades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.4 shows reasonable geographic consistency with what we would expect to find in each region. This is despite the table being comprised of the ‘softer’ forms of regionality, rather than the treatment of settlement law for example, or the methods required to coerce makeshift welfare systems. Letter traits relating to identity, such as those in 7.4, were more prone to movement between regions, and especially into industrialising areas. They were part of the habits of migratory paupers, who often retained such ideals despite the fact they were not supported by local overseers in their new parishes. Although the use of humiliation was actually more widespread in Wales in the eighteenth century, much of this was physical humiliation, rather than the more English trait of concern with how the community perceived the pauper. A separate and

innate Welsh pauper identity can therefore be clearly discerned from table 6.4. The following confident demand was sent to Holywell in Flintshire in 1792;

‘I have a Lad with me one Rob:’ Hughes. Says he belongs to Holywell parish and you are overseer and if you will Cloath him I shall keep him or Else I must have him back you know he is Nacked and you Cou’d Expect any body to take him in and he promis’s me to be a Good Lad and if he will if he has his health he’l not Need to Truble you any more S’r’

There were numerous Welsh features in this request, the first of which was its brevity. The author stated the pauper’s economic belonging and that he would only keep the pauper if his demands were met, otherwise it appears he would have been returned. However this threat was not made by the parish, but the boy’s master in this case, showing how entrenched ideas regarding settlement laws were in the community. The overseer was not well established, and the author felt the need to check he was addressing the right person. The pauper was naked, and though this visual humiliation was much more English, it created the need to request relief in kind, highly common to underdeveloped welfare regimes. Such a request also constituted a provision for work in a specific trade, both common Welsh features, as the letter appears to have concerned an apprentice.

The features of table 6.5 are also taken from chapter five, but all show the way the community was utilised in appeals in a practical sense, as opposed to the more abstract reflections of it in table 6.4. Each feature was common to Welsh appeals. The first column calculates the proportion of all appeals written by advocates, and so also includes those written by higher advocates. The next characteristic is the amount of references made by paupers to meeting with the overseer in charge of their relief, for instance through returning to the parish for payment. The final one displays the instances where the pauper carried the appeal with them to the vestry, once it had been written by someone else; it includes appeals written by overseers;

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26 FRO, P/30/1/235 (16a), Green to overseers, 22nd August 1793.
Table 6.5: Paupers’ practical use of community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Use of advocates</th>
<th>No. of times letter type occurred</th>
<th>Face-to-face business, or personal interaction with overseer</th>
<th>No. of times letter trait occurred</th>
<th>‘Relieve the bearer’</th>
<th>No. of times letter type occurred</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What table 6.5 shows is the importance of face-to-face contact in the early stages of out-parish relief, as all of the individuals sampled employed this technique in appeals more than nineteenth century paupers did. However, frequent, practical use of community assistance in making requests, in the form of advocates, was innately Welsh, and could again be linked to a lower level of literacy in English. As well as the use of advocates, more broadly the contents of all the tables show that some of the characteristics with the strongest regional differences prior to 1800 were those handled and enforced by the overseers; chiefly the letter traits relating to settlement. This supports the idea outlined earlier in the thesis that the habits of the overseers were less movable than those of the paupers. Differences in paupers’ conception and use of their own identity also existed between the regions, though these were less evident and were prone to change.

There was a notable lack of regional difference in the eighteenth century in personal contact between different overseers, and between paupers and overseers. Moreover there were similarities in the makeshift ways paupers applied to the system, for instance by requesting relief in kind. Many of these factors were necessitated by an underdeveloped out-parish system and consequently some of the Welsh letters in the corpus portray features of underdevelopment, rather than elements that were uniquely Welsh. That this was a fledgling system is witnessed in a letter to Meifod in Powys in 1790;

‘Mary Sarjeant who belongs to your parish is now resident in this Town and very ill of the Dipsy, and not capable of being
removed and that he has been obliged to relieve her she being destitute of getting anything towards her support, I therefore hope one of you will come down and see the poor woman and agree about an allowance for her support, by that late Act of Parliament your parish is obliged to reimburse what sums the overseers pay for her support.\textsuperscript{27}

Removal was the obvious course of action for the host overseers, rather than requesting out-parish relief. However removing the pauper was not practical, and consequently the author felt it was necessary to explain to Meifod that she could be maintained by them in the host parish, possibly under a suspended order. The suggestion was supported by citation of the law, and some face-to-face interaction was also encouraged to decide the arrangement, because that was how these parishes were used to operating. Focusing on pauper letters from England in the nineteenth century has allowed historians to outline the normal functioning of the out-parish system.\textsuperscript{28} Now we can consider the importance of chronology in the development of out-parish relief practices. Poor law historians have yet to examine when this system possibly emerged, and the process in which it did so.

\textbf{Conclusion}

This chapter has addressed two contentious issues concerning the main spatial theories of welfare. These frameworks were outlined in the first two chapters, and it has been suggested throughout the thesis that each could contribute more to our investigations of the poor laws. The existence of spatial differences in the enacting of the laws has been perhaps the most important debate on the subject in the last twenty years. Appreciating regionality is fundamental to understanding how we can evaluate them. For instance, it is central to knowing if there was a generalised crisis of the old poor laws, to gauging the amount of traction the laws had nationally, and how we can judge broad sentiments of relief giving. The theories regarding the extent of spatial variation affect how we read issues such as these. Firstly, if Hindle’s intra-regionality model is accurate and there

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{27} PA, M/EP/41/O/X/53, Bayley to overseers, 7\textsuperscript{th} March 1790.
\end{itemize}
was a complete lack of uniformity in practice, then the legal implications of the laws decrease even further in significance for historians. Secondly, if definite regional patterning can be seen, then we should not talk about the operation of one poor law, but of at least several different approaches. Thirdly, the written law itself could have been the most important factor in determining practice, as historians such as Charlesworth claim, and therefore any additional local variation is inconsequential.

It has been important to the thesis to consider spatial theories in greater detail here, because the existence of a holistic region shaped by its distance from the centre forms the basic theoretical framework for analysis. The case studies used to do so have been based upon small amounts of source material, and are quite speculative. However both the amount of letters employed and the number of parishes compared, are analogous to those in other poor law case studies. Findings in the chapter argue firstly, that we can talk about welfare regions that were identifiable through their common practices and sentiments, and which broadly behaved in a different manner to other regions. Secondly, the research suggests that many features found in peripheral welfare regions were inherent to such areas, which further validates peripherality as a method of evaluation. However both of these arguments come with caveats.

The cautious comparison of parishes within the same counties is the first intra-regional study in old poor law history. It directly addresses the major argument between King and Hindle, chiefly supporting King. Overall though the comparison both questions and agrees with elements of each theory. Whilst this study shows that intra-regionality existed, parishes still typically portrayed the wider traits common to them by county, supporting the research of Lyle who stresses strong variance but recognises definite regions. It may be that because of the highly variable nature of poor law sources, and the different historical methods of approaching the poor laws, a cohesive spatial understanding of behaviour will always be difficult. Findings here are just one contribution to the debate regarding the extent of intra-regionality, and it remains a vibrant point of interest. Only one form of source material has been employed, and

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29 For examples of pauper letter studies that do not use other source material and analyse similar amounts of letters to make spatial observations see S. King & A. Stringer, ‘I Have Once More Taken the Leberty to Say as You Well Know’: The Development of Rhetoric in the Letters of the English, Welsh and Scottish Sick and Poor 1780s-1830s’, in Gestrich, Hurren & King, Poverty and Sickness, pp. 69-91; King, ‘Regional Patterns’. For poor law studies that have limited their focus to more detailed investigation of a few parishes see Ottoway, Decline of Life; Williams, Poverty, Gender.
30 Hindle, Parish?, pp. 282-294; King, Poverty and Welfare.
31 Lyle, ‘Regionality’.
intra-regionality could have been stronger when other, more financially based sources are considered. The comparison of individual parishes allows for a level of subtlety possibly omitted by use of the database across the rest of the thesis. However, calculations made through the database provided the appropriate peripheral benchmarks to measure spatial variance in the case studies. Ideally, a future study of poor law correspondence would recover enough overseer letters from these counties to measure the behaviour of parish officials as well. Their traits have been shown as more geographically fixed, and would probably be subject to less intra-regional variation, instead forming part of welfare processes understood across their counties.

The eighteenth century case study represents the first comparison of localities under the old poor laws based on their similar positions in time. It tells us that some peripheral features may be partly related to time period, but theories of peripherality still hold merit. Because welfare peripherality is a little-studied topic area, this is the first investigation of such nuances in its behaviour. However, even though many Welsh practices were not simply a reflection of the earlier time period they are from, the actions are still evidence of a need to use more simplistic methods of welfare distribution. The same practices are present in the letters from Denbighshire, most of which were sent in the 1830s. In particular the Welsh letters display unease with using the out-parish system. Future regional investigations would be enriched by understanding what barriers were present in Wales that slowed the spread of poor law practices from England. Quicker change would probably have required a more developed economy that could provide an affluent rate base, and perhaps better acceptance of the established church as well. These are potential investigations for furthering these specific topics. The thesis as a whole seeks to offer more broad possibilities for advancing poor law research.
Chapter 7: Pauper narratives in the Welsh borders, 1750-1840: where are we now?

Introduction
This thesis began by indicating emergent themes within poor law literature that required further development, as well as some disagreements between historians. Investigations in the substantive chapters have attempted to work within this forum. They included three key subject areas which have been crucial for this thesis and can be outlined here. However there are others related to methodology, regionalism and the investigation of Wales which represent more significant contributions to the literature and receive greater attention later in this chapter. Firstly this work has continued the recent historiographical trend of displaying flexible administrative practices at a parochial level.\(^1\) However it has sought to invert the dominant approach of considering the varied treatment received by paupers, by instead investigating the widely discretionary nature of overseers, from their perspective. Secondly the research has engaged with broadening historiographical interpretations of settlement that have increasingly seen this notion of belonging as both flexible, and loaded with emotion.\(^2\) Thirdly it has continued to embrace the benefits of using narrative sources by introducing forms of narrative evidence into different topic areas.\(^3\) This has been particularly useful for revealing the behaviours of the overseers, which has been an integral part of the thesis. All the chapters have acted as broad indicators of how welfare was practiced, and cumulatively display a Welsh system of poor relief that was informal, austere and rich in local custom. Findings on these subjects can underpin future studies of welfare, because the framework has helped show how they differed across space and time.

The two aspects of this framework are the foremost methodological contributions of the thesis. One is the quantitative analysis of poor law correspondence and the suitability of such an approach will be the first subject addressed as this chapter proceeds. It has assisted with measuring variances within the key themes of the

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\(^3\) For an example of the use of poor law correspondence to study subjects other than paupers see B. Harvey, “The putative fathers of Swinton, England: illegitimate behaviour under the old poor laws, 1797-1835”, *Journal of Family History*, 40, no. 3 (2015), pp. 373-398.
literature identified in chapter one. The methodology has offered a technique for counting letter traits that reveals regional differences in welfare behaviour. It is used again in this chapter to present the culmination of findings from tables throughout the thesis in one summary table of ‘Welshness’. This ability to contrast correspondence geographically is the second main benefit of the framework. Historiographical comments on regional differences, firstly concerning certain counties and pauper letters traits, will be considered using the evidence of regional variation shown in the summary table. Discussion of the results in the table then widens to an outlining of peripheral welfare characteristics as this inquiry has found them. The next section extends analysis further to consider the impact of the thesis on broader spatial welfare theories; in this instance regarding Wales, regionalism and peripherality in particular. Finally, lessons that can be taken from the research to both extend and refine it for future poor law studies are listed. This includes the virtues of using a quantitative framework for narrative source material.

**A quantitative measurement of ‘Welshness’**

The quantitative model offered for evaluating poor law correspondence has involved four main techniques of analysis that have led to the conclusions of this thesis. Firstly it allows the measurement of broad regional trends in the writing of the letters; secondly it enables the tracing of these trends across time; thirdly an attempt could be made to analyse letter tone. Finally contrasting traits by county helps describe the regional patterning of behaviour that this thesis has sought to portray. The measurement of letter traits has also helped address outstanding issues within the poor law literature; for instance the problem of gaining representative source material in a subject as highly variable as the old poor laws. Quantitative methods can assess the relative significance of the circumstances historians are discussing and define how representative exemplar letters are of others in the corpus.

Other historians have expressed interest in using frameworks for evaluating large amounts of poor law correspondence. By implementing this call the thesis has

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4 This problem has been cited in L. Charlesworth, *Welfare’s Forgotten Past: A Socio-Legal History of the Poor Law* (Abingdon 2010), pp. 77-8; on the extensive variety in the treatment of the poor, see the discussion in chapter one.

engaged with another historiographical theme identified in chapter one. This is the change in pauper letter studies from small scale, contextualised investigations, to ones that use large amounts of the letters in more comparative settings. Pauper letters were introduced into investigations of the poor laws from the mid-1990s, when micro-studies and detailed evaluations of pauper sub-groups were the main methods of approaching the topic. Studies of the material were often concerned with outlining the basic mechanics of the out-parish system, and using the correspondence to help describe the experiences of certain paupers. These sources had not been considered for large scale analysis. The present examination of the letters has also examined in more detail the devices paupers used to negotiate welfare, though it has only established broad trends of these aspects. For instance the pauper’s threat of returning to their host parish has been contrasted with the threat that they may be removed, showing both a change over time, and regional differences.

The creation of overall county scores based on the tables used throughout the thesis is ambitious, but they are at the heart of attempts to measure welfare practice and gestric, S. King & L. Raphael eds, Being Poor in Modern Europe: Historical Perspectives, 1800-1940 (Bern 2006), pp. 26-34.


peripherality. The reliability of the current findings is supported by corresponding evidence from the partial Essex corpus, which suggested it behaved very similarly to other southern counties. The methodology is also validated by the fact the regional rankings have often been very similar for overseers and paupers on the same features, such as the use of settlement law, or face-to-face processes. The database has meant every item of correspondence collected could be fully engaged with as it was all drawn on to make the different calculations. This was the most suitable way to present such an extensive collection.

Eighteen counties, including the city of Bristol, have been contrasted, and one major geographically continuous region. The ability to contrast practices both spatially and chronologically has meant the more residual habits of peripheral welfare setups could be discerned. Overall findings were displayed in tables 4.17 and 5.19 on the habits of overseers and paupers respectively, and their scores can be combined to produce a table of the overall ‘Welshness’ that this thesis set out to locate.

Table 7.1 is the product of almost 4,000 items of correspondence, analysed according to 32 letter traits. These narratives have never been employed in such a large number, across an area of this scale in the analysis of so many interlinked topics. The table displays strong continuity in practice between neighbouring counties. The Welsh counties behaved similarly, and the rankings show all five of them practiced certain welfare traits quite differently from many English counties. Therefore the characteristics identified are Welsh features, and this thesis has helped reveal them. However because of the continuity of practice across the border region, and the traits previously suggested by

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Score for paupers and overseers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>426</td>
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<tr>
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<td>421</td>
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<tr>
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<td>374</td>
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<td>370</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

King and Stewart, the Welsh counties and some English ones should also been seen as peripheral.

The features shared by these Welsh counties were shaped by their rural, upland, pastoral setting, as described in chapter two. The presence of Glamorgan at the top of the table is a slight anomaly, caused by unrepresentative scores from its small amount of letters. The correspondence collected from Denbighshire is representative of a later era of the old poor laws than that from other Welsh counties. All but three of its letters postdate 1830 and its relief system had perhaps matured more. Consequently Denbighshire’s correspondence embodied fewer underdeveloped peripheral traits and it ranks relatively lowly in table 7.1. However despite this Denbighshire was still more ‘Welsh’ than any English county. This shows, as we saw in chapter six, that the peripheral characteristics of the Welsh counties were not just a result of the majority of their letters predating 1820. The fact that many letters sent to Oxfordshire were from the eighteenth century may partly explain why it is ranked above some of the peripheral counties. However the small letter set used to investigate its overseers has also caused some anomalous results.

The regional patterning seen in table 7.1 can be used to consider the exploratory theories of historians regarding welfare practices in Wales and the English border counties. For instance the south of the country often behaved differently though not wholly dissimilarly to the rest of Wales, as various Welsh local historians have suggested.\(^\text{10}\) The welfare ideals of the large amount of people that migrated into Gwent often separated its score from much of the rest of Wales. It was slightly Anglicised by paupers from a neighbouring south-west region that consisted of Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire. This south-west region had more in common with southern England than it did with the other border counties, and appears very dissimilar to the parsimonious ‘far-west’ proposed by King.\(^\text{11}\) There was analogous behaviour to that in Wales in the mid-border region of Herefordshire and Shropshire, which matches King’s hypothesised ‘mid-west’ region.\(^\text{12}\) This also furthers his suggestions elsewhere that


\(^{11}\) King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p. 264.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.
Welsh counties may have acted similarly to those in the English borders. In addition to building on such tentative ideas, the thesis has investigated and substantiated many early theorisations of letter traits, such as those of King. The depiction of geographic difference in table 7.1 also supports his more detailed theory that welfare practices in the north-west differed markedly to those in southern England.

**Observations on peripherality**

Peripheral welfare practices were not the result of a conscious effort to approach welfare in a particular manner. The behaviour of paupers and officials was necessitated by their finance and physical remoteness from the centre. This notion further develops the idea that paupers and overseers shared in commonly understood local welfare customs. Industrialisation was the main factor that altered peripheral behaviour. As well as causing in-migration from non-peripheral areas, it necessitated greater use of the out-parish system because more paupers came to be living outside of their settlement parishes. This created financial strains on parishes, overwhelming pre-existing measures of relief. Such pressures were partly coped with through increasingly flexible treatment of the settlement laws, but also by reducing provision when necessary. However industrialisation did not just decrease the peripheral features of places, resulting in them ranking more lowly on table 7.1. For example it also created communities of close personal contacts, increasing the use of advocates in urbanized Bristol. Additionally other factors shaped peripherality, such as the remoteness of upland communities, and innate national traits like language. Partial Anglicisation of some behaviour shows that the welfare identity we can see in letters was occasionally fluid in its geographical movement. However some practices could be rigidly enforced by poor law authorities.

The residual nature of their local welfare systems was what peripheral counties had most in common. These systems used makeshift measures to pay for and obtain relief, including the accessing of local bureaucratic elites in the form of justices. They operated through face-to-face interactions, despite the fact many parishes were surrounded by difficult terrain, and were more likely to use older, inflexible approaches

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15 King, *Poverty and Welfare*.
to administrative rules. Paupers appealed to these parishes with a distinct rhetoric of self-reliance, in shorter, less developed letters, and often had assistance in making applications. Officials employed representative language and held positions that were not socially elite within the community. These features and their occurrence in Wales confirm many exploratory suggestions on peripheral behaviour from King and Stewart, and also provide new indicators of it. Furthermore their belief that these regions were home to unbalanced industrial growth can be seen in the differing behaviour of south Wales compared to the rest of the country. A letter from Newport on behalf of John James incorporated many peripheral features, and sheds more light on the maturity of Welsh out-parish relief in the early nineteenth century:

‘The bearer hereof, John James has been for the last 10 weeks past afflicted with an ague and has for the past month been unable to do anything for the support of himself and Family, he has been reliev’d by the orders of the magistrates here in hopes of his getting better, but continues ill, he has this day applied for a sum to assist him in his journey to his Parish, we therefore wish you to send an order by him that we may pay him a weekly sum during his Illness he has 2 small Children & his wife duly Expecting her time On a third by your compliance the above will prevent the necessary steps for Removing himself’

The appeal was transported in a face-to-face manner by James himself, and he had already been relieved because he had gone to the magistrates first. The author mentioned ‘his parish’, which represented a simple reference to economic belonging. All of these were features more common in Welsh letters, as was the closing threat from the parish that they might remove him. However, what is of more interest is that the pauper had requested money to return home to the small village of Merthyr Mawr, apparently assuming that this was where he must go as he could not be supported in his host parish. This parish, Newport, instead requested that they might receive money to support him there and prevent his removal. This is an example of the adoption of more

18 Ibid.
19 GlamA, P/99/CW/10, Jones to overseer, 4th November 1808.
flexible settlement arrangements in rapidly industrialising areas that required labour; Newport’s population increased more than four fold in the first half of the nineteenth century. These suggestions of what constituted peripheral behaviour and what changed it offer contributions to wider readings of regionalism.

**Impact on spatial theories of welfare**

As well as historians’ thoughts on more discrete regional features regarding counties and pauper letters, findings here also engage with broader spatial theories, specifically peripherality, regionalism and Welsh welfare. King and Stewart had introduced welfare peripheries as an idea, but had not fully investigated it and called for more research. Other historians had also suggested there were similarities between Wales and the English border counties, and Wales and the north-west. Such comments would therefore support the existence of the peripheral region shown here, though these works were not dedicated spatial examinations of the area. The outlining of some practices, such as the use of advocates or the transportation of appeals by the pauper, expands King and Stewart’s ideas by showing what form their peripheral features took; in this instance how face-to-face contact manifested itself. Estimations made in this thesis on factors that altered the prevalence of peripheral behaviour also offer new interpretations of their theories.

Analysis of poor law regionality has not been extensive enough for a welfare system that had enormous variance in parochial practice. Research here has attempted to reignite a valuable debate on its spatial features, by addressing the problematic issue of regionality versus intra-regionality. The letter traits presented in tables throughout the thesis draw very consistent welfare regions, suggesting that although there was occasional intra-regional variation with some features, it was not strong enough to disrupt these trends. Therefore these tables, and also the exploratory intra-regionalism case study in chapter six, substantiate King’s regional theories. Additionally, this

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20 King & Stewart, ‘Welfare Peripheries’, p. 35.
24 King, *Poverty and Welfare*. 

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thesis has used an alternative model for investigating spatial welfare. Because it has exclusively utilised poor law correspondence, the regionalism portrayed is based around the culture and sentiment of welfare regimes conveyed by the letters. This is a different approach to estimating how practice may have been shaped by more quantifiable poor law finances, as previous regionality studies have done. Reliance on poor law correspondence alone allows the envisagement of broader regional trends that overrode administrative boundaries and their financial circumstances, reducing intra-regional variance. Use of letters has also helped to portray the regional differences in practice that Hindle thought much harder to identify.

The most important contribution of this thesis to spatial studies has been in providing a stepping stone for more detailed investigations of the Welsh dependent poor. Relying on poor law correspondence to make a first major investigation of the borders enables basic relief processes to be outlined. Using the letters to understand behaviour has been useful in other ways. For instance historians had assumed Welsh paupers struggled to gain support due to the poverty of their parishes. However such an idea can be challenged by showing how they could engage with relief processes. The depiction of regional variety is also important for understanding welfare here, because Welsh histories had been influenced by the same uniform historiography. The relief systems of much of the borderlands and Wales especially present markedly different practices to those in southern England, which has received more interest from poor law historians. The scope of welfare payments in Wales appears limited when contrasted with those illustrated by historians such as Dunkley, Eastwood, King and Williams. However Wales was not as affected by the changes to practice over time that they portray.

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features identified by King and Stewart invited a broader study based on peripherality. Inclusion of the English border counties as part of such a study means that relief practices here have also been detailed more thoroughly. Previous histories of the area had often been very local in focus, and more interested in the new poor laws. However these existing works, especially the richly detailed Welsh local studies, have been useful in providing a broader contextual base. The findings concerning the Welsh borders, that previous works have helped to discern, can now be developed in the future.

Future studies
This study has shown thematic and methodological considerations that could change how we investigate the poor laws. Additionally some of the research in this inquiry could have been improved. Therefore, six suggestions are offered that should be taken into account by similar studies in the future. The first and most significant contribution has been the quantitative methodology, which was outlined in chapter two. Greater uptake of such methods could prolong the use of poor law correspondence and lead to the assessment of more characteristics within the letters. There is considerable scope to use the framework to make international comparisons, which have been called for by some historians. Welfare practice and sentiment would be easier to compare internationally than financial issues, and could unearth common innate ethics that surpassed international divisions. The letters collected by this project in the UK and Germany would provide an excellent base on which to make such contrasts. Additionally quantitative analysis could be better suited to examining larger areas, as occasionally this study has been limited by the relatively small amount of correspondence available for Wales.


32 Gestrich, Hurren & King, ‘Sources, Methods and Experiences’, pp. 18-9; Gestrich, King & Raphael, ‘The Experience’, pp. 26-34.
Its second major offering is as a stepping stone for future investigations of Wales as an entirety, beyond the border counties, by identifying the basic processes of relief distribution. The unique Welsh arrangements for provision offer wider lessons on community, government and nationalism. If behaviour elsewhere in Wales is found to be equally or more diverse to that in England, it would suggest that the practice of the old poor laws should be reconsidered. This is enough to justify a history dedicated to the Welsh poor laws.

Thirdly, exploration of the English border counties has been useful in revealing Welsh behaviour; some, such as Herefordshire and Shropshire, often acted similarly. Therefore, because such welfare conduct overlapped the borders, this research advances the idea of basic regionality. It could be necessary to reframe our thinking of regionality according to peripherality. Examining certain additional counties would bolster such research. Wider investigation of welfare practices across northern England should illustrate to what extent peripherality stretched across the north, or if it was mitigated by proximity to Wales. Similarly, topographical features of Devon and Cornwall, such as isolated communities, pastoral farming methods and their distance from the centre, suggest welfare in these counties could have been peripheral. Due to the extensive variance in parochial practice, as King has previously claimed, it is indeed questionable to talk about one national poor law system.\(^{33}\) Forthcoming countrywide studies must make reference to the significance of regionality generally for their findings, and accept that numerous different approaches to welfare existed.

Fourthly, as chapters three and six showed, future studies should also account for change over time. This sometimes had a greater impact on behaviour than geographic location, and historians are well aware of the declining sentiment towards the poor that shaped relief distribution.\(^{34}\) However there needs to be greater examination of how the out-parish network in particular developed over time in different places. Additionally the messages sources convey were highly sensitive to these changing circumstances, and historians should be aware of this when they select material.

Fifthly, although analysing only poor law correspondence has helped depict broad regional patterning, this study would have been better if other source material had been included. Case studies of individual Welsh localities could have shown the

\(^{33}\) King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p. 4.

\(^{34}\) On the social and political pressure for reform see Hollen Lees, *Solidarities*, pp. 73-100; on changes to spending levels see P. Lindert, *Growing Public*, vol. 1, *Social Spending and Economic Growth Since the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge 2004), p. 46.
interaction of paupers with other elements of their relief systems. It has been proposed here that many Welsh parishes were uneasy with using the out-parish system. As a result it is possible that table 7.1 only displays regional differences in the management of out-parish relief, and that investigation of other source material would show different regional patterning. To ascertain if peripheral features can be seen in other sources, certain investigations would be especially useful. Future research should examine the ability of Welsh parishes to collect rates, and the attitudes of the ratepayers towards paying them. These parishes have been widely identified as rate poor, though there have been no dedicated studies. Additionally, in theory peripheral paupers had communal support networks that both tempered their reliance on local ratepayers, and assisted with applications. Consequently, study is also required of the extent of makeshift economies in these places. Furthermore, to understand if settlement was indeed treated inflexibly, some measurement of the proportion of settlement examinations that lead to removal would be valuable. Lastly, as we still know very little about Welsh overseers, dedicated research of their backgrounds would address ideas regarding their accessibility to local paupers.

Finally, this thesis has benefitted from the employment of little-studied sources which should be used more. The most important of these is overseers’ correspondence. They played a practical part in everything that has been discussed, and this thesis has examined more letters from them than paupers. Another under-exploited source are justice orders, and the personalised hand written ones in particular. The involvement of justices in the day-to-day running of the laws at a communal level needs further investigation in other geographic locations, as has been started by Peter King, and Morgan and Rushton. These are some of the more prominent features that could relevant for future works, out of many in the thesis. Much of the work here is ambitious.


However it is original in its offerings regarding the use of correspondence, quantitative methods and the construction of broad welfare identities. Additionally a substantial number of original findings have been made concerning poor relief in the largely peripheral Welsh border counties.
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