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**Poverty in Gloucester and its Alleviation 1690, 1740**

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## Poverty in Gloucester and its Alleviation 1690–1740

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The history of the Old Poor Law was first attempted in 1834 when Sir George Nicholls, an advocate of the workhouse as the new panacea, denigrated the system of outrelief as practised since the Tudor period.<sup>1</sup> It was natural that for most of the succeeding century, authors living in an age which believed in progress should have made institutions the focus of their attention. The Webbs' study, published in 1927, analyses the methods of relief applied in England and Wales and provides a classic example of administrative history.<sup>2</sup> During the years between the First and Second World Wars social and economic historians were drawn to the subject and the Hammonds' work on the village labourer reached a popular readership.<sup>3</sup> Up to this point the great majority of historians approached pauperism from the standpoint of central government and the knowledge of what happened in individual towns and villages remained the province of the amateur; while the academics concentrated on statute law and pamphlet literature, parsons combed through vestry minutes and overseers' accounts. The period since the Second World War has witnessed a revolution in historiography. Following R.H. Tawney's article on the gentry, a substantial number of historians were attracted to the early modern period and to the years 1540–1640 in particular.<sup>4</sup> As the collections in the Public Record Office had been explored for more than a century, the new wave of scholars began to quarry for materials in city libraries and county record offices. The local study became fashionable. The plight of the indigent had an appeal for historians who rejected the Victorian belief in the amelioration of man. Armed with a new methodology and the willingness to quantify, scholars began to measure the degree of poverty in local communities.

But the new research has paid more attention to the rural than the urban poor, and one purpose of the present article is to deal with a neglected area. The few works in print concentrate on 'Tawney's century' and the later part of the early modern period remains almost uncovered. J.F. Pound's thorough study is devoted to Elizabethan Norwich and Paul Slack has enabled us to understand the nature of pauperism in 17th-century Salisbury, but nothing comparable is devoted to a provincial town of the early 18th century.<sup>5</sup> When we turn to Gloucester, poverty and poor relief have received scanty treatment in secondary sources. Sir Robert Atkyns, the doyen of Gloucestershire antiquaries, included in his chapter on the city lists of parish charities and descriptions of the hospitals, and his successors monotonously used the same approach.<sup>6</sup> Among the few relevant modern works, W.B. Willcox has made brief references to the administration of relief in the city over the period 1540–1640, and Esther Moir has given an account of the activities of the J.P.s in the 18th-century county.<sup>7</sup> More valuable for our purpose is Peter Clark's essay on the city in the century before the Civil War in which he makes an estimate of the proportion of the poor in one of the more deprived parishes and describes the battery of measures designed to give relief in Gloucester as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

The initial aims of the present article are to estimate the number of the poor in Gloucester over the years 1690–1740 and to establish what the causes of poverty were. Subsequently attention is focused on the methods of alleviation employed in the city. At the turn of the 17th century, the West Country was leading the field with experiments over relief. A Corporation of the Poor was

founded in Bristol in 1696. Over the subsequent eighteen years the governors of Gloucester and seven other West Country towns put their faith in central mechanisms for channelling relief. Summarising the measures designed to overcome Gloucester's complex social problems on the eve of Civil War, Peter Clark concludes: 'At best they were palliatives.' Can the same be said of the means devised to cope with poverty in the 18th-century city?<sup>9</sup>

*Poverty in Gloucester, 1690–1740*

With a population of some 5000 in the early 18th century, Gloucester was one of 22 English towns of middling rank and was similar in size to shire towns such as Worcester, growing ports such as Chatham, and burgeoning industrial centres like Birmingham.<sup>10</sup> All these places were dwarfed by the regional capitals whose industry, commerce and services enabled them to dominate a wide area. Thus, in the south-west, Bristol, a community of some 20,000 inhabitants, had trading links with America and Europe, and possessed thriving glass works and sugar refineries.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, Gloucester's merchants confined themselves to the coasting trade; the majority of the city's craftsmen sold goods to customers drawn from a hinterland ten miles in radius and the pinmakers were the only tradesmen to supply consumers throughout England.<sup>12</sup> But insignificant though it was in comparison with Bristol, Gloucester was a major urban centre when compared with the small towns of the neighbourhood. None of these towns possessed more than 3000 inhabitants, nor did they enjoy the prestige of the city as an administrative, legal and ecclesiastical centre. Tewkesbury had a variety of services, Bisley, Stroud and Painswick drew strength from the woollen-cloth industry but Cheltenham and Newent were distinct from nearby villages only by reason of their greater size, their weekly markets and well-stocked chandlers' shops.<sup>13</sup>

The hearth tax returns yield valuable evidence about the social structure of Gloucester. This levy, which was introduced in 1662, imposed a charge of 2s. 6d. on each hearth and stove, the sum being payable on Lady Day and Michaelmas Day. Exemptions were allowed for industrial hearths but not bakers' ovens or smiths' forges. Further, and vital for our purpose, exemptions were made for householders not paying the church or poor rate, or not owning property valued at over 20s. a year.<sup>14</sup> In 1672, 279 out of 1028 households were excused from the tax in Gloucester.<sup>15</sup> The 27 per cent which the exemptions represent was identical with that in Leicester, a town of similar size.<sup>16</sup> It can be assumed therefore that at least one-quarter of Gloucester's population was living at subsistence level. This vulnerable element would have increased in times of bad weather, disappointing harvests or epidemic disease, and it is reasonable to suppose that the 401 households with only one hearth would have been impoverished during years of crisis.

Varied conditions were found in the towns of Gloucester's hinterland. In Cheltenham, 46 out of 210 households (22 per cent) were exempt from the hearth tax and conditions similar to those in Gloucester prevailed. By contrast, 185 out of 471 households in Tewkesbury and 114 out of 261 households in Newent were excused.<sup>17</sup> The proportions of exempt households were 39 per cent and 43 per cent respectively, approximating to those in two of England's regional capitals. In Exeter, 40 per cent were excused and 41 per cent in Newcastle-upon-Tyne; towns of this magnitude contained industries which attracted the migrant poor.<sup>18</sup> Tewkesbury's stocking trade was a magnet to the indigent and it is clear that the restriction of the town behind the Severn, the Avon and the Swilgate was a hazard to the health of the journeyman class, but the high proportion of exempt households in the market town of Newent defies explanation.

The hearth tax assessment for Gloucester is of limited value for revealing where within the city limits members of the various social classes lived. The document refers to the wards and provides an analysis for only two parishes. Fortunately, evidence about the social structure of eight of

Gloucester's ten parishes can be found if use is made of a vital source, the probate inventories. These documents describe the personal wealth of the deceased – money, credits, stock-in-trade, agricultural stock, and leases – and their main deficiency is the omission of particulars about freehold and copyhold property.<sup>19</sup> However, used parish by parish they allow the enquirer to determine the *relative* wealth of communities, and considered together with the hearth tax assessment and estimates of the housing stock they enable a picture of the various quarters to be built up.<sup>20</sup>

The parishes of 59 men who died over the years 1690–1740 and for whom there are inventories can be identified. While many of the deceased were merely content to describe themselves in their wills as residents of the city, a substantial minority referred to parish communities, or can be related to parishes through the location of the houses in which they lived and charitable gifts made. Median personal wealth in the eight parishes and the suburb of Barton Street was £71. Three parishes with substantially higher medians lay in the east. St Michael and St Mary de Crypt contained tradesmen specialising in the food and clothing trades whose shops gave onto busy streets adjoining the High Cross. Market gardeners and tanners were established in the outlying parts of St John, while residents of Upper Northgate Street shared in wholesale and retail trade. Together with the three parishes, the extra-parochial cathedral precinct formed an enclave containing more prosperous inmates than other parts of Gloucester. The hearth tax assessment reveals that fourteen of the prebendaries and gentlemen-*rentiers* of the precinct were heads of households with six or more hearths. In Hare Lane within St John's all eighteen households paid tax. St John was the Gloucester parish which witnessed the most spectacular increase in its housing stock between *c.* 1710 and *c.* 1740; Atkyns' informants noted 103 houses for the earlier date and Rudder later recorded 172 houses – a growth of some 40 per cent. The increase in St Michael's and St Mary's was close to the mean of 22 per cent for the city as a whole.

With a median inventory value slightly lower than the city as a whole, the parish of St Nicholas represents the middle stratum of Gloucester society. Shopkeepers were less prosperous than those in the wealthy central parishes but there was a greater variety of craftsmen in the building trades. Workers supplying labour for the glass-kilns and the quay lived in the parish, and innkeepers profited from managing houses on the main road to South Wales. The hearth tax assessment for the Island, the lozenge between Foreign Bridge and Westgate Bridge, illustrates the varying standards affecting families living in the parish; 45 out of 70 households had one or two hearths, but a substantial minority of 25 households possessed three or more hearths. With 196 houses within its limits *c.* 1710, St Nicholas was by far the largest of the city parishes. The housing stock rose by 86 dwellings in the early 1740s, an above-average increase which may well have been caused in part by the attraction of riverside housing to wholesale tradesmen such as grocers and cheesemongers.

A depressed population of petty craftsmen and farm workers lived in four parishes adjacent to the boundaries and in the suburb of Barton Street. The workshops of pinmakers, members of the city's leading craft of the period but one which yielded few profits, were to be found in each of the communities. Journeymen working for the substantial tradesmen of the central parishes lived in the low-lying parishes of St Katherine and St Mary de Lode. In addition to their craftsmen, St Aldate, St Owen and Barton Street contained day labourers working for yeomen farmers outside the gates. The hearth tax assessment reveals that the inhabitants of St Katherine were packed into tiny hovels and probably lived at subsistence level, for 60 out of 81 households had only one hearth, and 46 households were exempted from the levy. Life appears to have been equally harsh in St Mary de Lode where 101 out of 128 cramped households possessed only one hearth, and 98 were excused from paying tax. The rate of growth in the housing stock of both parishes was lower than for the city as a whole over the period *c.* 1710 – *c.* 1740. St Aldate's had a rate

marginally above average, but there is no firm evidence for St Owen's and Barton Street.

Having established that at least one-quarter of the city's population was impoverished and that a high proportion of this vulnerable element lived in communities close to the boundaries, it is now necessary to determine how hardship affected Gloucester over each of the five decades from 1690 to 1740. In contrast with the previous and succeeding periods, the late 17th and early 18th centuries formed a period of stagnation. Whereas the city contained about 4000 inhabitants in 1563, population increased to about 5000 in 1672. From 1672 population remained stationary until 1743, but thereafter decades of rapid increase followed with the result that 7265 people were counted during the first national census of 1801. As immigration into the city by families and individuals wanting to improve their lot was taking place over the three centuries from 1500 to 1800, the plateau of 1672–1743 is in itself evidence of deprivation; even with an infusion of new blood from outside the city was merely able to sustain its numbers.<sup>21</sup>

Parish registers throw light on the causes of population immobility for the years 1690–1740, but some understanding both of ecclesiastical organisation and the nature of the sources is necessary before conclusions can be reached.<sup>22</sup> Only five parishes – St John, St Mary de Crypt, St Mary de Lode, St Michael, and St Nicholas – had churches in a good state of repair throughout the period. The nave of Trinity church was dismantled in 1699 and the tower remained as a landmark in Westgate Street. The churches of St Aldate and St Mary de Grace had been pulled down before 1690, and the churches of St Katherine and St Owen had been destroyed under bombardment during the siege of 1643.<sup>23</sup> The incumbent of St Katherine frequently held services in the church of St Mary de Lode over the years 1690–1740. The inmates of other parishes lacking sound buildings joined the congregations of parishes with churches. In general, the inhabitants of St Mary de Grace attended services in St Michael's church, inhabitants of St Owen services at St Mary de Crypt, and inhabitants of Trinity services at St Nicholas. In the late 17th century parishioners of St Aldate tended to favour St Michael's and in the early 18th century St John's. Thus the registers of the five parishes of St John, St Mary de Crypt, St Mary de Lode, St Michael and St Nicholas were swollen by entries recording the baptisms, marriages and burials of people in neighbouring communities.

There are carefully maintained registers for St John, St Mary de Crypt, St Michael and St Nicholas.<sup>24</sup> The first register for St Mary de Lode begins only in 1695 and has no entries from August 1712 to June 1716.<sup>25</sup> St Katherine's register starts with a baptism in August 1684 but the registration of baptisms, marriages and burials was imperfectly carried out until 1693. From 1693 to 1706 the incumbent kept a careful record, but over the years 1706–1718 there were no entries except for a few scattered baptisms. Full records were kept after the latter date.<sup>26</sup> As has been seen above, residents of Trinity normally attended St Nicholas church and the few entries in the Trinity register refer to families which felt a particularly close tie to a neglected parish.<sup>27</sup> A further defect in the registers is that three parishes contained inhabitants living outside the city boundaries. Parts of the hamlets of Twigworth, Longford, Kingsholm, Wotton and Tuffley, and the suburb of Barton Street, were in St Mary de Lode parish. St Katherine's embraced areas of Twigworth, Longford, Wotton, and Kingsholm. The tiny enclave of Barton St Michael formed a small part of St Michael's parish.

For the purpose of the systematic study of urban population, registers should contain no gaps and should cover catchment areas within town boundaries. In the case of Gloucester, the books for St John, St Mary de Crypt and St Michael meet both criteria, and as St Michael's was almost completely within the city limits its register is acceptable. Because it is not possible to distinguish between the country-dwellers and inhabitants of Gloucester who lived in the parishes of St Katherine and St Mary de Lode, their registers have not been used. One is therefore deprived of information about impoverished sections of city society but there is evidence about the

parishioners of St Aldate and St Owen who attended services in St John, St Michael and St Mary de Crypt. As St Nicholas was a community embracing all the social classes the registers are particularly valuable as a means of tracing the main demographic changes.

*Table 1* Baptisms and Burials for the Parishes of St John, St Mary de Crypt, St Michael and St Nicholas by decades 1690–1739

<i>Decade</i>	<i>Baptisms</i>	<i>Burials</i>	<i>Difference between baptisms &amp; burials</i>
1690–9	962	975	– 13
1700–9	1194	1170	+ 24
1710–9	1153	1172	– 19
1720–9	1402	1850	–448
1730–9	1537	1619	– 82
	—————	—————	—————
	6248	6786	–538

*Table 1* demonstrates that the four enlarged parishes of St John, St Mary de Crypt, St Michael and St Nicholas possessed fertile inhabitants, for apart from the decade 1710–19, the number of baptisms climbed steadily from 1690 to 1740. But a constantly mounting growth in burials over the four decades from 1690 to 1730 and an above-average number of burials in the final decade prevented population rise through reproduction among the city's inhabitants from being achieved. In only one decade was there an excess of baptisms over burials and altogether over 50 years the four parishes recorded a net loss of 538 people. In St Nicholas' parish alone the position was more grave with burials surpassing baptisms in each of the five decades and with a net loss of 481 inmates over the half-century.

What were the main causes of mortality in Gloucester during the period 1690–1740? During the post-war period historians have advanced two hypotheses to explain national demographic changes. One school favours the Malthusian argument that there was a tendency in the pre-industrial age for population to be limited by the availability of food supplies. For instance, Y.S. Brenner asserts, 'Whenever, in relation to population, land was abundant, birthrates rose in excess of the deathrates and people became more numerous. But when the accretion of people reached the limit of "the nourishment prepared for it" (at the prevailing level of technology) and poorer land was put to use diminishing returns from land set in. Sooner or later the population growth abated and the trend reversed.'<sup>28</sup> J.D. Chambers is unimpressed by this argument, and points out that from the late 17th century, England enjoyed an agriculture regularly producing a surplus over the needs of its inhabitants. He has asserted that disease was the main check in the 17th and 18th centuries: 'There can be no doubt, in view of the gathering strength of the economy, especially on the agricultural side, that the biological factor – even in the absence of plague – was the most important single factor in holding back the rate of population growth at the time when all the economic signals were set fair for speedy advance.'<sup>29</sup>

If these rival theories are to be tested in the context of Gloucester, it is necessary to single out periods of crisis. Two criteria for deciding when there was extreme hardship can be postulated: that there should have been an excess of burials over baptisms for two years or more; and that during these years the number of burials should have been above the average of 136 per annum for the period 1690–1740. If one bears these criteria in mind and looks at *Table 2*, based on baptisms and burials for the parishes of St John, St Mary de Crypt, St Michael and St Nicholas, one can detect five periods during which there were crisis conditions in Gloucester: 1710–1, 1720–1, 1726–1731, 1733–4, and 1737–8. There was particularly heavy loss of life over the years

1726–9 and 1737. Three hundred and seven were buried in 1726, 235 in 1727, 231 in 1728, 252 in 1729, and 245 in 1737.

Table 2 Baptisms and Burials in the Parishes of St John, St Mary de Crypt, St Michael and St Nicholas, 1690–1740

	<i>Baptisms</i>	<i>Burials</i>		<i>Baptisms</i>	<i>Burials</i>
1690	96	97	1716	107	81
1691	82	95	1717	148	131
1692	76	55	1718	138	94
1693	72	84	1719	132	115
1694	78	87	1720	114	179
1695	112	114	1721	110	138
1696	112	101	1722	148	120
1697	111	96	1723	158	122
1698	121	111	1724	148	135
1699	102	135	1725	171	131
1700	121	89	1726	151	307
1701	131	132	1727	150	235
1702	115	136	1728	130	231
1703	121	95	1729	122	252
1704	116	112	1730	147	191
1705	116	115	1731	144	170
1706	122	176	1732	137	136
1707	112	111	1733	150	151
1708	114	101	1734	159	145
1709	126	103	1735	155	124
1710	119	162	1736	157	155
1711	103	188	1737	173	245
1712	103	114	1738	145	163
1713	101	81	1739	170	139
1714	99	109	1740	135	154
1715	103	97			

In Gloucester there was no constant link between food shortage and high mortality. The years 1691–3, 1696–7, 1708–10, 1726–9 and 1740 are considered to have been periods of scarcity in England, and while there are no cereal prices for Gloucester until the 1720s the city cannot have been unaffected by national trends.<sup>30</sup> The high grain prices recorded nationally over 1691–3 and 1696–7 occurred in what was not too disastrous a decade for the city. Again, the years 1708–10 were generally years of food shortage in England as a whole, but Gloucester escaped relatively unscathed; burials for the four parishes in 1708–10 were 101, 103 and 162 respectively, but the much higher figure of 188 for 1711 suggests the populace may have been suffering from the cumulative effects of privation. For the periods of poor harvests which stretched from 1726 to 1729 and from 1739 to 1740 the *Gloucester Journal* published local cereal prices. The bushel of wheat fetched 4s. 5d. in Gloucester market in March 1725, and in the same month over the following years: 8s. 2d. in 1726, 5s. 8d. in 1727, 8s. 3d. in 1728, and 7s. 9d. in 1729.<sup>31</sup> 1727 excepted, there was as bad a series of high prices in Gloucester during 1726–9 as was general throughout England. There were also dramatically high totals of burials in St John, St Mary de Crypt, St Michael and St Nicholas. But during 1739–1740, Gloucester prices were low. During March 1739, 3s. 7d. was paid for the bushel of wheat, and 5s. 5d. was paid in March 1740. Although burials for the four parishes in 1740 were above-average the mortality figures cannot be attributed to a subsistence crisis.<sup>32</sup>

To sum up so far, Gloucester experienced above-average mortality in two out of five periods of possible subsistence crisis: in 1711 following the dearth of 1708–10, and from 1726 to 1731

during and following the dearth of 1726–9. But before the check in population growth can be attributed to high wheat prices and consequently a rise in the cost of living, the incidence of disease must first be considered.

Only one of Gloucester's incumbents recorded the causes of death from disease when making burial entries in a register – and he restricted his comments to a single year. However, there are random references to disease by parish overseers of the poor, and for a few months in the 1720s the *Gloucester Journal* published bills of mortality. For St Nicholas parish, there are tantalising references to fever in 1690 and 1712.<sup>33</sup> In the same parish, a boy was treated for smallpox in 1702, and a man was suffering from smallpox in 1711.<sup>34</sup> Thirteen deaths in 1713 were attributed to smallpox.<sup>35</sup> In St Mary de Crypt parish the authorities were alarmed in 1712 by the arrival from Worcestershire of a smallpox-carrier. Two families were treated for the same ailment, one in 1720 and the other in 1726.<sup>36</sup> The bills of mortality published from 3 June to 8 October 1726 reveal that 95 out of the 157 who died were smallpox victims. While smallpox was the deadliest agent during the summer and early autumn of 1726, consumption was responsible for nineteen deaths.<sup>37</sup> The sources throw no light on the nature of disease later in the 1720s or during the following decade.

It would appear that there was a closer link between high mortality and disease than between high mortality and food shortage. During four months of 1726, 63 per cent of those who died in Gloucester were smallpox-sufferers. Although the causes of death for the rest of 1726 and for the following years during the same decade are not known, it is highly likely that the city continued to be troubled by epidemics. There is documentary evidence of smallpox in Gloucester in 1711, a year after the only other remaining period when there might have been a subsistence crisis. It has already been seen that Gloucester experienced demographic crises on five occasions and it is striking that smallpox was present in the city on four of these occasions. J.D. Chambers has shown that Nottingham passed through 'an age of massacre by epidemic' between 1720 and 1742.<sup>38</sup> Although there are gaps in our knowledge about Gloucester, the early 18th-century city probably suffered a similar harsh experience. But harsh as conditions were they failed to approximate to those commonly encountered on the continent where harvest failures left populations decimated by starvation and governments were forced to resort to the device of importing grain from the Baltic. Poverty was a permanent problem for the governors of Gloucester over the years 1690–1740 but they did not face the predicament of the ruling class of French towns battling to cope with repeated subsistence crises.<sup>39</sup>

#### *The Alleviation of Poverty in Gloucester, 1690–1740*

The alleviation of poverty in Gloucester was for the greater part of the half-century 1690–1740 the responsibility of a variety of agencies, but for seventeen years the Corporation of the Poor administered funds collected under the poor rate. It is proposed to survey relief carried out under the parishes, the place of charity at large and the work of the hospitals before the origins and effectiveness of the Corporation are considered. The available sources have both strengths and limitations. Overseers' accounts for three of Gloucester's parishes have survived for much of the period and allow the enquirer to determine how much money was collected under the poor rate and how funds were spent. Although the accounts are clear about the main heads of expenditure, they do not show how many men, women and children received money decade by decade – the scribes differed in their methods of making entries within parishes and between parishes. A more serious handicap is encountered when the Corporation of the Poor becomes the focus of attention. The only surviving record for the period is the minute book of the court, invaluable for describing policy decisions but with a few exceptions of little use for establishing information

about the way in which funds were spent. Thus it is not possible to make well-substantiated comparisons between all the activities of the parishes and the Corporation. The sources differ in the way in which insights into motives are provided. Donors of charities made their intentions clear in wills, and the preambles to parliamentary bills throw some light on the thinking behind the Corporation of the Poor. However, the discussions which led the parishes to change their approaches in coping with poverty are unrecorded in vestry minutes, and although there are records of the city quarter sessions we lack any account of the debates about poor relief which must have taken place before and after the sittings. All too often inferences about policy changes have to be made from what is known about motives in England as a whole.

For the greater part of the period 1690–1740 the administration of relief for the population of Gloucester as a whole was in the hands of the parish overseers supervised by the city magistrates. Records for three parishes enable us to evaluate this work. Overseers' accounts have survived for the parish of St Mary de Crypt and except for the years 1709–10 and 1733–4 provide a complete record; the accounts for St Michael's parish end in 1700, the accounts for the parish of St Nicholas cover the years 1690–1702 and 1710–40.<sup>40</sup> During the periods 1690–1703 and 1707–27 the overseers made decisions about the nature of relief needed in their parishes, collected the rates, and met the expenses incurred. The Gloucester Guardians of the Poor, who functioned from 1703 to 1707 and from 1727 to 1740, received the rates from the parishes and administered relief to paupers throughout the city.

In the course of their work, the two overseers for each of the parishes of St Mary de Crypt, St Michael and St Nicholas made a distinction between ordinary and extraordinary payments; the first were used to describe the weekly allowances paid to the aged, the sick, the unemployed, and orphans; under the heading 'extraordinary payments', the overseers habitually referred to payments for rent, for medical treatment, and for a multiplicity of occasional expenses. Over the years 1690–1703 the overseers in St Mary de Crypt paid £646 13s. 10d. (82 per cent of the total) in allowances, and enabled an average of seventeen paupers a week to enjoy relief. £146 10s. 0d. was devoted to extraordinary expenses, and from this sum an average of three rents were paid. During the period 1690–1700 St Michael's parish allocated £417 6s. 4d. (84 per cent of the rates) to weekly allowances, and an average of eighteen paupers benefited. Out of the £278 13s. 2d. for extraordinary expenses an average of three rents a year were paid. In St Nicholas parish from 1690 to 1702, 64 per cent of the rates, a sum amounting to £820 14s. 9d., enabled an average of twenty poor men, women and children to enjoy weekly allowances. The overseers devoted £50 16s. 9d. of the total of £146 10s. 0d. for extraordinary expenses to rents; and an average of seventeen rents a year were paid.

As can be seen from the amounts paid and the overseers' distinction between ordinary and extraordinary payments, the parish authorities gave priority to the distribution of allowances to paupers needing relief for periods of up to a year or more. The rates were insufficient for allowances to all the temporarily unemployed, for regular treatment of the sick during epidemics, or for assisting all the parish orphans, and the overseers resorted to the device of channelling funds to a few deserving needy. For instance, in St Nicholas parish 'Hartland's boy' was given copy books and 1s. 3d. on his entry into Sir Thomas Rich's Hospital in 1700. In 1702, 19s. 6d. was spent on medicine and food for a boy lying sick in a trow, and a further 7s. on clothes and bedding when he left the parish.<sup>41</sup> The overseers were acting with both concern and a degree of calculation. The boy receiving schooling at Sir Thomas Rich's was almost certainly the son of a burgess, for the corporation normally limited admissions to members of the freeman élite, and after being given aid the boy on a vessel in the river was not invited to remain in the parish where he would have become a liability to the rate-payers.

From 1703 to 1707 the Guardians of the Poor administered relief in place of the overseers,

whose main responsibility was the collection of the rates. It is possible to obtain information about the record of the overseers in only two of Gloucester's parishes from 1707 to 1727, after which the Guardians again took over from the overseers. St Mary de Crypt parish devoted £1175 7s. 6d. (69 per cent of the rates) to weekly allowances, and was thus able to support an average of twenty paupers. From the £527 18s. 6d. for extraordinary payments, an average of eight rents a year were paid. The St Nicholas accounts resume in 1710, and from that year to 1727 the overseers paid 65 per cent of the rates, £1698 5s. 10d., to help an average of 35 poor. An average of twelve rents a year were paid out of £901 12s. 7d. expended for extraordinary charges.

Charitable bequests were an invaluable supplement to the sums raised under the poor rate. Because of the loss of almost all the charity papers owned by the parishes and the unreliability of the 19th-century Charity Commissioners' reports relating to 17th-century Gloucester it is not possible to make anything more than an informed guess about the sums received by the parishes in 1690.<sup>42</sup> It seems that the poor of St Michael were in receipt of £52 per annum and the poor of St Mary de Crypt £23; the sums applied to all the other parishes were paltry – St Nicholas received £13, Trinity £9, St Aldate £4, and St John £3. The impression given by these figures is that the few paupers of the élite parishes received considerably more relief than the numerous paupers living in the poor parishes. Testators making bequests and who died over the half-century 1690–1740 showed discrimination and compassion in identifying worthy causes. Well-connected women left £810, clergymen £400, gentlemen £240, and tradesmen £335. St Mary de Lode received £600, St Mary de Crypt £450, St Nicholas £385, St John £120, and St Michael £70. The Poor School and the city poor as a whole received £400 and £130 respectively.<sup>43</sup> In general the bequests realised 5 per cent per annum, and it can be suggested that by the year 1740 the sums being paid out in the parishes were as follows: St Michael £55, St Mary de Crypt £45, St Nicholas £32, St Mary de Lode £30, St John £9, Trinity £9, and St Aldate £4. The significance of the charities can be understood by reference to the parish of St Nicholas. In 1740 the poor rate realised £106 and was augmented by approximately one-third in the form of the various charities.

Further sums were left by testators who directed their executors to arrange for payments to be made immediately to the poor in contrast with bequests to realise interest year by year.<sup>44</sup> By this device the poor of the élite parishes of St John, St Mary de Crypt and St Michael received £40 19s. 8d.; the poor of St Nicholas and Trinity received £58 5s. 0d.; the poor of St Aldate, St Katherine, St Mary de Lode and St Owen received a modest £5 10s. 0d., and the poor of the city as a whole received £211. Nathaniel Hodges, clerk, was responsible for giving £200 (all to the city paupers),<sup>45</sup> women £56 7s. 4d., tradesmen £40 10s. 0d., and gentlemen £18 7s. 4d.

Additional charity money was reserved for the freeman class of the city, who were treated as a privileged class of poor. The sons of poor burgesses were entitled to receive charity money to pay apprenticeship premiums, while during their old age, places in the city almshouses were reserved for them. Senior members of the corporation were responsible for the supervision of the hospitals of St Bartholomew, St Margaret and St Mary Magdalene. Elections were held annually on the first Monday after All Saints' Day to select a president, a treasurer, and six other governors.<sup>46</sup> The mayor and common council appointed a minister, a physician, a surgeon, a rentgatherer, and an Overseer of the Manners of the Poor to take charge of the day-to-day running of the three institutions.<sup>47</sup> By the rules of admission the freemen had a virtual monopoly of places in the hospitals. An ordinance reserved places first for freemen, their wives and children; only when burgesses over 52 years old had been given places could other paupers be considered.<sup>48</sup>

With accommodation for 24 men and 30 women, St Bartholomew's was the largest almshouse for the freeman class. St Margaret's housed eight men, and St Mary's ten men and nine women. The inmates of St Bartholomew's received better care than those in the two other hospitals, for they were entitled to 2s. 6d. in weekly pay as against 2s. issued in St Margaret's and 1s. 6d. in St

Mary's.<sup>49</sup> As the minister, physician and other officials were bound by the terms of their appointments to be resident in St Bartholomew's, the almsmen and almswomen in the smaller hospitals could not expect the same degree of attention.<sup>50</sup>

The governors and officials aimed to maintain a high standard of behaviour in the hospitals. An ordinance encouraged the almsmen and almswomen to be 'of Good, Honest and Godly Behaviour'. Senior inmates were chosen to enforce the rules, and absence for more than eight days, drunkenness, scolding, slander, swearing, petty felony, fornication and adultery could lead to expulsion.<sup>51</sup> On entry, the men and women were required to bring with them a bed and bedding, a pot, a platter, a porringer, a saucer, a table cloth and a napkin 'whereby their Lodging may be sweet'.<sup>52</sup> The burgesses and their relatives in the three hospitals were assured of a secure old age with their basic needs attended to.

A fourth hospital containing a man and five women, who were required to be of freeman status, was also supervised by the corporation. The aldermen and councillors filled vacancies in St Kyneburgh's Hospital close to the South Gate. The name of this institution had been corrupted by the 17th century and it was generally known as Kimbrose Hospital or Mr Hill's Hospital, after an alderman and benefactor.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to their role as governors of the hospitals, members of the corporation exercised control over limited funds devoted to paupers throughout the city. Throughout the period 1690–1740 the aldermen and common council paid 1s. to 40 paupers under the will of Leonard Tarne; the interest from £70 was used for the distribution of wood and coal during the cold months; a stock of £27 was available for setting beggars confined in the Bridewell to work.<sup>54</sup> The aldermen as magistrates performed a general function as supervisors of poor relief. In the surviving quarter session records they can be seen hearing petitions from individuals, issuing removal orders, appointing overseers, and requiring putative fathers to support bastards.<sup>55</sup> When the magistrates considered the option of diverting a proportion of the rates collected in the richer parishes to needier communities St Aldate was the sole beneficiary. St Nicholas parish was obliged to give St Aldate's aid in 1693–9, and St Michael helped in the same way in 1698–1708, 1713–5, 1717–21, and 1723–6.

While these experiences may have made thoughtful members of the corporation aware of the advantages of a concerted strategy in tackling the problems of poverty, the main initiative for creating a Corporation of the Poor was taken by a wider circle. Under the will of Timothy Nourse, who died in 1699, £200 was reserved for the purchase of lands to fund a workhouse or other charitable purposes that might be decided by the trustees.<sup>56</sup> Nourse was a forceful preacher, the author of books on religion, philosophy and farming, and a numismatist. He lost his fellowship at University College, Oxford, after subscribing to the Roman Catholic faith, and retired to Newent where his family had long held estates.<sup>57</sup> The trustees of his will included the bishop of Gloucester, members of the county gentry, Thomas Browne, an alderman of Gloucester and a worshipper at the presbyterian church in Barton Street, and Sir John Powell, previously town clerk for the city and a compassionate judge in the Court of Common Pleas.<sup>58</sup> In deciding on 'regular Methods of Diligence and Industry' as a cure for 'the Execrable Practice of Beggary' the trustees were almost certainly influenced by John Cary, the chief promoter of the Bristol scheme, who had advocated identical methods in his *Essay on the State of England in Relation to its Trade, the Poor and Taxes*.<sup>59</sup>

The Act of 1702 created 'Guardians of the Poor of Gloucester'. These were to be the mayor and aldermen, 24 of the 'ablest and discreetest inhabitants' from the four wards, the trustees of Nourse's charity, and such other benefactors as might contribute £20 outright or £3 for ten years. The main functions of the Guardians were to make assessments for the poor rate, and when contributions had been received from the parish officers, to apply these for the benefit of the city

as a whole. The Guardians were empowered to create hospitals, workhouses and houses of correction, and to compel those seeking relief to reside in such institutions. 'Rogues Vagrants Beggars or Idle and Disorderly Persons' might be detained for periods of up to three years and set to work.<sup>60</sup> The new scheme was shortlived, and by 1707 the parishes had re-assumed the responsibility for relieving paupers. One reason for failure was the inadequacy of the endowment under Nourse's will for the purchase of buildings. Further, the arrangements for the election of Guardians were over-elaborate: the ministers and payers of rates of 3*d.* and over were directed to assemble at the Booth Hall and to choose Guardians separately for each ward; the electors were required to write candidates' names on slips and to place these in boxes; scrutineers then emptied the boxes, calling over the names in the hearing of the assembly. This democratic but long-drawn-out process was expected to take place at yearly intervals when twelve of the Guardians were to be replaced. The sole institution to survive at the end of 1707 was the poor school, which continued to teach children reading and writing, and to place them out as apprentices.<sup>61</sup>

From 1707 to 1727 the surviving Guardians of the Poor together with the trustees of Timothy Nourse's will restricted their functions to supervising the poor school. But in 1723 a debate in the common council revealed once again the perennial problem of the poorer parishes being unable to cope with deep-seated social problems.<sup>62</sup> This and the influx of a further £200 under charitable bequests led the city governors to back a bill to revive the Corporation of the Poor in 1727. The amending Act of Parliament identified the Guardians: for the corporation the mayor and five aldermen; for the diocese the bishop, the dean, the archdeacon, the sub-dean, and the treasurer; the trustees of Nourse's will and other persons who might make substantial gifts. Ministers, £5 freeholders and £10 leaseholders meeting in parish assemblies were directed to elect 31 Guardians at six-year intervals. Day-to-day administration was to be supervised by the Guardians at a monthly court, but in practice the main responsibility devolved upon the Governor, the Deputy Governor and six Special Assistants.<sup>63</sup>

The Guardians acquired the 'New Bear' in Westgate Street, and by the winter of 1727 the children of the poor school and the paupers from the various city parishes were installed in the building. The time of the children was divided between instruction in reading and long hours in the manufactory.<sup>64</sup> Following an advertisement placed in the *Gloucester Journal* asking for tenders to set the poor to work, George Worrall reached agreement with the Guardians to direct a scheme whereby the paupers were to place heads on pins and to insert them into paper mounts.<sup>65</sup> While the female and juvenile inmates of the 'New Bear' concentrated on pinning, heavier work was found when possible for the men and Cotswold tiles were made on the premises.<sup>66</sup> The Guardians took care to place boys discharged from the workhouse with skilled tradesmen; two each were apprenticed to pinmakers and weavers, and one each to a cutler, a cooper, a tailor, a papermaker, a pipemaker, and a bagmaker.

'The family', as the poor residents in the 'New Bear' were called, were not allowed to leave the building without permission. No particulars of their diet are available, but in other respects the Guardians made sensible arrangements for the welfare of the paupers. A doctor was appointed to administer physic, and clothes were distributed at regular intervals. But the Guardians were not vigilant enough to prevent mismanagement of the workhouse by John and Mary Hawkins, the first Master and Mistress, who were dismissed at a court held on 19 February 1730.<sup>67</sup> The misdemeanours of the Hawkineses are revealed in acts of the same year, one punishing drunkenness on the part of any officers and the second prohibiting officers from giving away property.<sup>68</sup> The Guardians reacted to this crisis over their credibility by subjecting the paupers to a regime of coercion, and the inmates of the 'New Bear' suffered corporal punishment to ensure that they should remain under tight control – a characteristic instance of the failings of the early

modern institution resulting in suffering among its inmates; shortly after the appointment of a new Master, John Mowtlow, fourteen workers in the pinshop were whipped, and until 1740 an authoritarian regime was imposed.<sup>69</sup>

While the Corporation insisted that the majority of the paupers were resident in the workhouse, out-relief was paid to the infirm. Orders were made for the payment of weekly pensions to six men, a man and his family, and thirteen women from October 1727 to September 1728, and pensions were paid to twelve men and eight women in 1737.<sup>70</sup> The Guardians and the officers helped to maintain discipline by using the Bridewell at the East Gate, which continued to act as the house of correction. For instance, an early order directed that a man should be detained in the Bridewell and his children sent to the 'New Bear'.<sup>71</sup> The Corporation implemented government policy in distinguishing between the able-bodied and impotent poor: on 17 October 1727 an order was passed authorising payments to strangers 'in Calamitous and distressed circumstances'; three years later the beadle was instructed to search for vagrants and set them to work.<sup>72</sup> However, the sketchy records do not allow us to see in detail how paupers in these categories were treated.

As one of the main preoccupations of the Guardians was that the number of bastards chargeable to the city should be reduced, the courts spent more time discussing the case of women than of men. Corporal punishment was used as a deterrent, and during the period 1727–1740 eleven whippings of women are recorded as having been carried out. Following an act of 1732 that lewd women should be detained for three years, a further measure of the same year ruled that the mothers of bastard children were to eat apart from the family and be given left-over food.<sup>73</sup> Women were frequently detained in the Bridewell so that they should not corrupt the community at the 'New Bear.' The Guardians also carried out the standard policy of sending women back to their place of legal settlement, and obliging the fathers of bastards to support their children.

The preceding survey of alleviation will have supplied further insights into motives. It will also have suggested that there were agencies of a conservative nature and agencies of reform in Gloucester. The parish overseers and the justices of the peace together with the town corporation were primarily concerned with ensuring that existing systems of relief were preserved. The donors of new charities and the Corporation of the Poor applied new approaches.

As has been seen, the main task of the overseers and the J.P.s was to implement a code of Tudor origin – distinguishing between the able-bodied and impotent poor, and applying the standard remedies defined in statute law. As money was scarce there was an inclination to apply the law of settlement by sending families and individuals back to their towns and villages of origin; office-holders in Gloucester agreed that funds should be applied first and foremost to the native population. In the case of the corporation, the requirements of the privileged class of freemen was its main concern. As the custodian of valuable charities, aldermen and councillors had a vested interest in the *status quo* and it was natural that they devoted much of their time to the management of the country estates which supplied the funds necessary for the maintenance of the hospitals – a bankrupt city governor might need a hospital place in his old age. Over the period 1690–1740 the city charities were the subject of discussion on 271 occasions and the city poor as a whole received attention on a mere 25 occasions.<sup>74</sup> Only in 1709, when a subscription was raised because of the high price of corn, did the common council take a new initiative.<sup>75</sup>

Such reform as was evident over the half-century was prompted by an informal network which comprised wealthy non-freemen residents of the city, the clergy and the country gentry. The influence of Sir John Powell was crucial in setting up the Corporation of the Poor. Early in September 1702 the aldermen consulted Powell on one of his visits to the city and later in the month he was entrusted with the management of the parliamentary bill. Characteristically, the

civic élite asked that a clause should be inserted in the draft to ensure that no industry established for the poor should compete with the freemen's trades.<sup>76</sup> In their selection of St Mary de Lode as the recipient of new charities, donors of gentry status displayed an appreciation of the problem of poverty untainted by a desire to reserve gifts for the burgesses.

At no time did the various agencies responsible for alleviation admit a responsibility to provide aid for all the needy inhabitants of the city. The performance of the corporation suggests that under-provision was regarded as tolerable in normal years and that when a crisis posed extraordinary problems, *ad hoc* solutions might be attempted. The effectiveness of alleviation under the poor rate was limited. The overseers' accounts for the largest of Gloucester's parishes, St Nicholas, show that during the years 1710–1727 an average of 35 paupers (4 per cent of the 880 inhabitants) were receiving allowances. Thus, in a crisis year, at least 20 per cent of the community was vulnerable. Extending this hypothesis to the city as a whole, it can be argued that funds from the poor rate and charities for non-freemen provided relief for 5 per cent of the population; the likely consequence was that in crisis years some 250 people received help and a further 1000 were deprived of assistance. Conditions in the 18th-century city are paralleled today by the towns of Africa, Asia and South America. Yet it is too simplistic to apply 20th-century criteria to measure the effectiveness of alleviation in 18th-century Gloucester. For the community, in spite of the widespread tolerance of extensive pauperism, displayed the capacity to increase the yield under the rates. Two years apart, payments of the rates in St Mary de Crypt over the years 1696–1704 and 1710–1740 exceeded payments made in 1690–5. In the case of the parish of St Nicholas the rate yield between 1696 and 1710 frequently fell below the level of 1695, but throughout the decades of 1710–9 and 1720–9 rates close to and above £100 were regularly collected. The general increase in the rates over the years 1690–1740 is all the more remarkable in that it took place at a time when the city economy was in decline. The mean value of probate inventory wealth was lower over the years 1700–1739 than over the years 1660–1699. During the first half of the 18th century the presence of smallpox deterred residents of the Vale and the Cotswolds from visiting Gloucester's shops and markets. The depression in the textile industry in 1726–8 had repercussions on the hinterland with clothiers and weavers having less money to spend in the city.<sup>77</sup> Further, the improvement in the rate yield in Gloucester was achieved during a period of relatively stable wages and prices. Labourers digging for stone near the South Gate in 1672 were paid 1s. a day, and identical payments were made during the building of the dissenters' chapel in the same neighbourhood in 1734–5.<sup>78</sup> Although there are no Gloucester food prices which allow comparisons to be made throughout the years under discussion, the work of E.H. Phelps Brown and S.V. Hopkins demonstrates that in England as a whole the years 1640–1750 witnessed stability of prices, as compared with the inflationary years 1500–1640 and 1750–1820.<sup>79</sup> Compared with other towns, Gloucester possessed a worthwhile record. When the Guardians of the Poor made their assessment for the city in 1727 they used as a basis the rates paid by the parishes over the period 1719–1723 and decided on a charge of £858; this figure of 3s. 6d. per head was higher than the national average of 2s. per head at the end of the 17th century.<sup>80</sup>

The response of the decision-makers in Gloucester and its hinterland to the problem of poverty in the city was creditable. Although the agencies were unable to cover all the areas of need, the community was displaying an increased sensitivity about the nature of poverty and an improved capacity to provide remedies.

#### Notes

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10. D.V. Glass, 'Gregory King's Estimate of the Population of England and Wales, 1695', *Population Studies* 3 (1950), 354. P. Clark and P. Slack, *English Towns in Transition, 1500–1700* (1976), 8–10 supplies a picture of the hierarchy of English towns.
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20. Diocese of Gloucester probate inventories are housed in the Gloucestershire Record Office and Prerogative Court of Canterbury probate inventories at the Public Record Office. R. Atkyns and S. Rudder, *op.cit.*, contain details of housing stock.
21. P. Ripley, 'Parish Register Evidence for the Population of Gloucester, 1562–1641', *TBGAS* 91 (1972), 199–206.
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23. S. Rudder, *op.cit.*, 181, 195, 203.
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42. *Sixteenth Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities* (1826–7).
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44. The distinction is made in W.K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England, 1480–1660* (1959), 242. Because of the short period studied it is not possible to discuss changes in the attitudes of Gloucester donors.
  45. Glos R.O., Diocese of Gloucester will, 1701/184.
  46. Glos R.O., D 3269, Gloucester Charity Trustees MSS, No. i, Ordinances . . . made in 1653 . . . for the good government of the several hospitals, c.1.
  47. *Ibid.*, c.10.
  48. *Ibid.*, c.21.
  49. *Ibid.*, c.19.
  50. *Ibid.*, cc. 11–15.
  51. *Ibid.*, c.33.
  52. *Ibid.*, c.34.
  53. Arrangements to fill vacancies are described in the common council minute books, Glos R.O., GBR B 3/7–9.
  54. Glos R.O., GBR B 3/8, p.132, entry for 9 Mar 1704; GBR F 4/7–9, F 5/34–78.
  55. Glos R.O., GBR No. 1448/1570, Quarter sessions book, 1664–1701; uncatalogued rolls, 1690–1735.
  56. Glos R.O., Diocese of Gloucester will, 1700/57.
  57. *Dictionary of National Biography*.
  58. Gloucester City Library, Gloucestershire collection No. 3793, copy of indenture of 28 Apr 1710; *Dictionary of National Biography*, article on John Powell.
  59. E.E. Butcher (ed), *The Bristol Corporation of the Poor, 1696–1834*. (Bristol Record Society Publications 3, Bristol 1932), 1.
  60. I Anne c.35.
  61. The preamble to the Act of Parliament authorising the Corporation of the Poor shows that the poor school was in existence before 1702. There are no records for the Corporation during the years 1703–7, but there is fragmentary evidence for the causes of failure: the amending Act of Parliament, 13 George I c.19 states that the last annual election was held in 1705 and that elections by wards provoked disputes.
  62. Glos R.O., GBR 3/9, f.142v., entry for 9 Apr 1723.
  63. 13 George I, c.19.
  64. Glos R.O., GBR No. US 19712, Court book of the Guardians of the Poor, 1727–1750, entry for 23 Oct 1729.
  65. *Ibid.*, 32,207, entries for 2 Oct 1727 and 29 Oct 1733; *Glos Journal* 29 Aug 1727.
  66. Glos R.O., GBR No. US 19712, 130, entry for 20 Feb 1730; *Glos Journal* 16 June 1730.
  67. Glos R.O., GBR No. US 19712, 129, entry for 19 Feb 1730.
  68. *Ibid.*, 127, 136, entries for 22 Jan and 21 May 1730.
  69. *Ibid.*, 136–153.
  70. The court book does not show for any time during the period 1727–1740 the number either of recipients of weekly allowances or of the inmates of the workhouse.
  71. *Ibid.*, 129, entry for 19 Feb 1730.
  72. *Ibid.*, 38, 47, 140, entries for 17 Oct 1727, 14 Nov 1727 and 18 June 1730.
  73. *Ibid.*, 173–4, 176, entries for 6 Jan and 3 Feb 1732.
  74. Glos R.O., GBR 3/7–9, *passim*.
  75. Glos R.O., GBR 3/8, 333, entry for 16 Nov 1709.
  76. *Ibid.*, 75, entry for 25 Sept 1702.
  77. P. Ripley, 'The Economy of the City of Gloucester, 1660–1740', *TBGAS* 98 (1980), 148–150.
  78. Glos R.O., GBR F 4/7; Southgate Street Independent Church, Gloucester, Builders' invoices, 1734–5.
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  80. Glos. R.O., GBR No. US 18712, 8–9; S. and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History: Part 1, The Old Poor Law* (1927), 153.

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